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**NONNEWAUG HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 13, 2011) — In its 26th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Jackie Nicholas of Nonnewaug High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Nicholas is the first Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Nonnewaug High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the racecourse, distinguishes Nicholas as Connecticut's best high school girls cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Nicholas joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-00, 2000-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Kevin Garnett (1992-93, Maudlin HS, S.C.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-6 senior raced to her second consecutive State Open individual championship this past season in a course-record time of 18:12. Nicholas also won her third straight Class M state title in addition to breaking the tape at the Nonnewaug Invitational, the Windham Invitational and the Berkshire League Championships. Nicholas took third at the New England Cross Country Championships and was 9th at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships to become the only Connecticut qualifier for the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships, where she finished 35th overall.

Nicholas has maintained an A-plus average in the classroom. A Spanish tutor at an area elementary school, she has volunteered locally on behalf of blood-donation drives, community recycling initiatives and the American Legion Auxiliary.

"Jackie is the hardest worker that I've ever coached, on and off the racecourse," said Nonnewaug head coach Arleigh Duff Jr. "She has earned every bit of her success because of her work ethic, and because she's a knowledgeable student of her sport."

Nicholas remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

The Gatorade Player of the Year program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by ESPN RISE and the Gatorade high school sports leadership team, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Nicholas joins Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Lauren Sara (2009-10, Frank Scott Bunnell), Moira Kenny (2008-09, Immaculate), and Heather Stephens (2007-08, Ridgefield) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners, and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit playeroftheyear.gatorade.com.

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