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Contact: Lauren Rollins (312-729-3607)

KENNEBUNK HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE MAINE 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 Abbey Leonardi of Kennebunk High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Maine Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Leonardi is the first Gatorade Maine Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Kennebunk 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 Leonardi as Maine'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, Leonardi 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-1 junior raced to a third consecutive Class A individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:49.01. The state's two-time returning Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, Leonardi placed second at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships in 18:02.3, then finished 16th at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships in 17:57. Also the three-time Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year as named by the Maine Sunday Telegram, she captured first place at the Southwest Classic, Maine Cross Country Festival of Champions and Western Maine Class A Regional Cross Country Championship Meet this past fall.

Also a track and field standout, Leonardi has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has donated her time to fundraising efforts on behalf of displaced civilians in Sudan's western region of Darfur.

"Abbey is focused on health and nutrition," said Kennebunk High head coach Mike Dinehart. "Her work ethic is outstanding. Her training habits are responsible in that she does not over-train, maintains a proper diet and balances all of this with academics and family. She is also first to credit her successes in part to those around her. Through all of this, she remains humble and respectful of her coaches, her teammates and competitors."

Leonardi will begin her senior year of high school this fall.

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.

Three-time winner Leonardi joins Gatorade Maine Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Anna Makaretz (2007-08, Yarmouth) 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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