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**HIGHLAND REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NEW JERSEY 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 Megan Venables of Highland Regional High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Venables is the first Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Highland Regional 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 Venables as New Jersey'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, Venables 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-8 senior raced to the state Meet of Champions individual title this past season with a time of 17:46. Venables also won the Group 3 state title with a course record time of 17:28, took fourth at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships (in 18:11) and finished fifth at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships in 17:35, earning All-American status.

Venables has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. Also a talented artist, she has volunteered locally on behalf of the school's Interact Club by participating in food drives, blood-donation drives, and toy drives.

"Megan is by far the most dedicated, passionate and hardest-working individual that I have ever been associated with," said Highland Regional head coach Ed Casey. "She is a winner in all that she does."

Venables 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.

Venables joins Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Chelsea Ley (2009-10, Kingsway Regional) and two-time winner Melanie Thompson (2007-08 & 2008-09, Voorhees) 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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