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Contact: Lauren Rollins (312-729-3607)

**WATAUGA HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 Darby Middlebrook of Watauga High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Middlebrook is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Watauga 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 Middlebrook as North Carolina'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, Middlebrook 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-7 sophomore raced to the Class 4A individual state championship this past season with a course-record time of 17:49.70, leading the Pioneers to second place as a team. A DyeStat Cross Country Top 25 series Honorable Mention selection, Middlebrook placed 13th at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 17:48. Middlebrook captured first place at the High Country Classic, the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Championships and the Class 4A West Regional.

Middlebrook has maintained a 4.36 weighted GPA in the classroom. In addition to donating her time as a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, she has volunteered on behalf of the Watauga Women's Fund to benefit area women in need.

"I have never seen a runner get the confidence she did so quickly," said Watauga head coach Randy McDonough. "She likes to sit back for the first part of the race, and then take off. She doesn't go out slow, but she doesn't lead. Once she gets the lead, she is not giving it back."

Middlebrook will begin her junior 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.

Middlebrook joins Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Wesley Frazier (2009-10, Ravenscroft School) and two-time winner Adrienne Soo (2007-08 & 2008-09, Durham Academy) 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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