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**GLEN ESTE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE OHIO 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 Michelle Thomas of Glen Este High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Thomas is the first Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Glen Este 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 Thomas as Ohio'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, Thomas 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-3 senior captured third place and was the fastest Ohio runner at the 2010 Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional championships this past season, crossing the line in 17:52.9. The 2010 Fort Ancient Valley Conference Athlete of the Year, Thomas raced to the Division I individual state championship, breaking the tape with a time of 17:41.5. She also qualified for the 2010 Nike Cross Nationals Final, where she finished 33rd out of 199 competitors in 19:47.8.

Thomas has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. A member of the National Honor Society and a devoted parishioner at her church, she is an accomplished dancer and has volunteered locally on behalf of food and clothing drives for area homeless.

"Michelle Thomas is a very self-driven athlete and an incredibly smart runner," said Pam Taylor, head coach at Bethel High. "She knows her opponents and understands what she has to do to beat them. More importantly, anyone who knows her will attest to what a great kid she really is."

Thomas has verbally committed to an athletic scholarship at The Ohio State University beginning 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.

Thomas joins Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Madeline Chambers (2009-10, Magnificat), Stephanie Morgan (2008-09, Barnesville), and Claire Durkin (2007-08, Worthington Kilbourne) 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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