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## **KNOXVILLE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE TENNESSEE GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 13, 2011) — In its 26<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Joanna Thompson of Knoxville Catholic High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Tennessee Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Thompson is the second Gatorade Tennessee Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Knoxville Catholic 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 Thompson as Tennessee'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, Thompson 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 senior raced to the Class AAA individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:51.10, breaking the tape more than a minute ahead of her next-closest competitor. The 2010 Knoxville News Sentinel PrepXtra Runner of the Year, Thompson was also the fastest Tennessee runner at the Foot Locker South Regional championships, finishing fourth in 17:20 to qualify for nationals. She later earned 10<sup>th</sup> place out of 40 competitors at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships, crossing the line in 17:46 to garner All-American status.

Thompson has maintained a 3.83 GPA in the classroom. An accomplished alto saxophonist and a member of her school's Book Club, she has volunteered locally on behalf of the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the Knoxville Zoo.

"Joanna Thompson was the best runner in Tennessee this year without any doubt," said Allen Etheridge, head coach of rival Oak Ridge High. "Not only was she undefeated in the state, she is also a terrific kid who is intelligent, funny and well-balanced."

Thompson has verbally committed to an athletic scholarship at North Carolina 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.

Thompson joins Gatorade Tennessee Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Megan Ferowich (2009-10, Knoxville Catholic) and two-time winner Kathy Kroeger (2007-08 & 2008-09, Independence) 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com).

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