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**RUNNELS HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE LOUISIANA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 20, 2011) — In its 26th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Matthew Rice of Runnels High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Rice is the first Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Runnels 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 Rice as Louisiana's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Rice 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 6-foot junior raced to a second consecutive Class 2A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:33.50, leading the Raiders to third place as a team. An ESPN RISE/DyeStat Cross Country Top 25 series Honorable Mention selection, Rice placed 24th at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 15:24. He captured first place at the Saint Joseph Invitational, the Walker Shootout, the ASICS Invitational and the Baton Rouge Metro Championships this past fall. Rice also placed second at the Texas' Nike South Invitational, clocking the state's fastest time at the event. He placed fifth at the 2008 Class 5A state meet as a freshman.

Rice has maintained a 3.32 GPA in the classroom. In addition to donating his time as a youth basketball, cross country and track instructor, he has volunteered at his church and his former elementary school in addition to participating in a fundraising run on behalf of the Foundation Fighting Blindness.

"Matthew is a leader in all aspects of life," said Runnels High head coach Julie Fink. "Through Matthew's personal dedication to his chosen sport and the numerous hours spent in preparation for running competitions, he has inspired his teammates and coaches to achieve more than they ever believed possible."

Rice will begin his 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.

Rice joins Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year two-time winner Philip Primeaux (2009-10 & 2008-09, Catholic), and Philipp Goettert (2007-08, Baton Rouge Magnet) 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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