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**NORTHERN HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 Blake Williams of Northern High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade North Carolina Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Williams is the first Gatorade North Carolina Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Northern 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 Williams as North Carolina'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, Williams 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 4A individual state championship this past season with a course-record time of 15:29.38. Ranked No. 18 nationally by ESPN RISE/DyeStat, Williams placed second at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 14:55.00 and finished 15th at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships in 15:35.00, earning All-American status in the process. He also captured first place at the Jungle Run, the Wendy's Invitational and the Class 4A Mideast Regional this past fall. Williams took eighth place at the 2009 Class 4A state meet as a junior, 23rd at the 2008 Class 4A state meet as a sophomore and 20th at the 2007 Class 4A state meet as a freshman. He placed sixth last season at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in addition to finishing 20th at the 2009 national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships.

Also a track and swimming standout, Williams has maintained a 4.12 weighted GPA in the classroom and serves as the senior class president. A member of the National Honor Society, he has donated his time as a swimming and running instructor.

"Blake is by far the hardest working student-athlete at Northern High," said Northern High head coach Blake Rahn. "He strives for the same excellence in the classroom that he does in his cross country and track events. He is a self-motivated young man who is determined to push himself to become the very best. He also strives to make his peers better individually and to motivate his teammates to be the best. He is a remarkable athlete, but an even better individual."

Williams has verbally committed to an athletic scholarship at the University of North Carolina 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.

Williams joins Gatorade North Carolina Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Jake Hurysz (2009-10, Eastern Alamance), Taylor Gilland (2008-09, Chapel Hill), and Ryan Hill (2007-08, Hickory) 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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