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**METAIRIE PARK COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE LOUISIANA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 24, 2010) — In its 25th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Merritt Van Meter of Metairie Park Country Day School as its 2009-10 Gatorade Louisiana Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Van Meter is the first Gatorade Louisiana Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Metairie Park Country Day 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 track, distinguishes Van Meter as Louisiana's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Van Meter joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Allyson Felix (2001-02, Los Angeles Baptist, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.), Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt HS, Iowa) and Bianca Knight (2006-07, Ridgeland HS, Miss.).

The 5-foot-9 senior recorded the No. 1 pole vault in the country this spring, winning the event at the Class 1A state meet with a clearance of 13 feet, 8.25 inches. Van Meter also captured second in the 200-meter dash and the long jump at the state meet as the Cajuns finished fourth as a team. She holds school records in five different events.

Van Meter has maintained a weighted 3.76 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally on behalf of a fundraising campaign to build schools in Uganda, and she helped found a student organization dedicated to increasing awareness of prejudice.

"Everyone knows her as a pole vaulter, but she's a great athlete who can do just about anything," said Metairie Park Country Day head coach Brendan Minihan. "She's been a great leader for our team, and she was always willing to help out by doing more events, even if it might hurt her in the pole vault."

Van Meter has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete on 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.

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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