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**MERIDIAN HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 17, 2011) — In its 26th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Rodney Hood of Meridian High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Hood is the first Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Meridian 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 court, distinguishes Hood as Mississippi's best high school boys basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in March, Hood joins an elite alumni association of past state boys basketball award winners, including Dwight Howard (2003-04, SW Atlanta Christian Academy, Ga.), Chauncey Billups (1993-94 & 1994-95, George Washington HS, Colo.), Jason Kidd (1991-92, St. Joseph Notre Dame HS, Calif.), Paul Pierce (1994-95, Inglewood HS, Calif.) and Chris Bosh (2001-02, Lincoln HS, Texas).

The 6-foot-8 senior guard/forward led the Wildcats to a 29-2 record and the Class 6A state championship this past season. Hood averaged 24.8 points, 8.6 rebounds, 6.4 assists, 3.1 steals and 2.0 blocks per game. A two-time member of the Clarion-Ledger Dandy Dozen, he was a First Team All-State selection as a junior and was named MVP of this season's state title game.

Hood has maintained a 3.45 GPA in the classroom. He has volunteered locally on behalf of youth basketball programs and a neighborhood cleanup initiative.

"You can't press him, because he has such poise and he can see over the top," said Stanford Speech, head coach of Jim Hill High. "You can't play zone, because he'll shoot it. He gets other guys involved and he makes a lot of big plays."

Hood has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at Mississippi State University 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.

Hood joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Players of the Year Jake Stringer (2009-10, Forest Hill), Andre Stringer (2008-09, Forest Hill), and Scottie Haralson (2007-08, Provine), among the state's list of former award winners.

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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