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**MERRILL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® WISCONSIN 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 Paul Jesperson of Merrill High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Jesperson is the first Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Merrill 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 Jesperson as Wisconsin'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, Jesperson 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-7, 185-pound senior forward led the Blue Jays to a 15-11 record and a berth in the Division 2 state semifinals, scheduled for March 18. Entering the state final four, Jesperson is averaging 21.7 points, 7.5 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game. A returning Division 1 First Team All-State selection as named by the Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association, he's shooting 47 percent from the field, 36 percent from 3-point range and 83 percent from the free-throw line through 26 games. Also a 2009 First Team All-Conference selection, Jesperson produced 20.5 points and 10.1 rebounds per contest as a junior. He has broken Merrill's career records for scoring, 3-point field goals made and free-throw percentage.

Jesperson has maintained a 3.12 GPA in the classroom. In addition to donating his time as a youth basketball counselor, he has volunteered as part of community cleanup efforts and with his school's peer-mentoring initiative.

"He's a great representative of what's good in high school athletics," said Merrill High Head Coach Kurt Soderberg. "He's the complete package. His impact on our program cannot be measured—in all areas. He's 6-foot-7, and he has point guard skills. He's an exceptional passer, an outstanding rebounder with a nose for the ball and an excellent shooter. On the floor, he's a five-star player at all of the skills."

Jesperson has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at the University of Virginia 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.

Jesperson joins recent Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Basketball Players of the Year Josh Gasser (2009-10, Port Washington), Ben Averkamp (2008-09, Germantown), and Kwamain Mitchell (2007-08, Dominican), 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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