

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Ashley Ginascol (312-729-3622)

**JACKSON PREPARATORY SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI GIRLS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 12, 2011) — In its 26th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Laura Lee Smith of Jackson Preparatory School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Mississippi Girls Soccer Player of the Year. Smith is the second Gatorade Mississippi Girls Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Jackson Preparatory 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 field, distinguishes Smith as Mississippi's best high school girls soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Smith joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook HS, Mich.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02, East Brunswick HS, N.J.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-7 senior midfielder recorded 33 goals and 25 assists this past season, leading the Patriots (17-4-2) to the semifinals of the Mississippi Association of Independent Schools tournament. The state's returning Gatorade Girls Soccer Player of the Year, Smith is a two-time *Clarion-Ledger* First Team All-State selection.

Smith has maintained a 4.0 average in the classroom and represents one of the state's top academic candidates in meeting the Gatorade Award's broad criteria. Also a track and field standout, she has volunteered locally on behalf of the Salvation Army, Ronald McDonald House Charities, youth sports camps and an area nursing home.

"Smith is a wonderful athlete and a great soccer player," said Nic Henderson, head coach of rival Jackson Academy. "She's very strong, very versatile and has a great knowledge of the game."

Smith has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at the University of Alabama 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.

Two-time winner Smith joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Girls Soccer Players of the Year Tricia Tillman (2008-09, Madison Central), and Kelsey Myrick (2007-08, Gulfport) 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.

###