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**LINCOLN-WAY EAST HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® ILLINOIS FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 1, 2011) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Blake Winkler of Lincoln-Way East High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Illinois Football Player of the Year. Winkler is the first Gatorade Illinois Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Lincoln-Way East 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 field, distinguishes Winkler as Illinois's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award announced in December, Winkler joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.), Wes Welker (1999-00, Heritage Hall HS, Okla.), Terrell Suggs (1999-00, Hamilton HS, Ariz.), Anquan Boldin (1998-99, Pahokee HS, Fla.) and Jerome Bettis (1989-90, Mackenzie HS, Mich.).

The 6-foot, 180-pound senior quarterback completed 131-of-213 pass attempts for 2,369 yards and 30 touchdowns against just five interceptions this past season, leading the Griffins (10-1) to the second round of the Class 7A postseason. A returning Honorable Mention All-State selection as named by the Chicago Tribune, Winkler rushed for 94 yards and one touchdown on 45 carries. He concluded his career as Lincoln Way-East's leading passer, throwing for 4,297 yards and 51 touchdowns while leading his team to a 19-3 record over the past two seasons.

Winkler has maintained a 4.11 weighted GPA in the classroom. A member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, National Honor Society, Pi Sigma Pi history honor society and Mu Alpha Theta mathematics society, he has volunteered locally on behalf of a homeless shelter and his church in addition to donating his time as a tutor and football instructor to area youth.

"His accuracy and precision are unmatched in the state of Illinois," said Mike Maloney, head coach of rival Joliet High. "He was a gracious winner, which is a testament to his sportsmanship and character. His leadership capability can be measured by the success of the offensive unit at Lincoln-Way East with him at the helm. Blake did what a great player does—made his teammates better."

Winkler remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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 ESPNHS 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.

Winkler joins recent Gatorade Illinois Football Players of the Year Reilly O'Toole (2010-11, Wheaton Warrenville South High School) Christian Lombard (2009-10, William Fremd), Chris Watt (2008-09, Glenbard West High School) and Steve Filer (2007-08, Mount Carmel) 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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