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**ST. FRANCIS HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® NEW YORK 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 Akeel Lynch of St. Francis High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade New York Football Player of the Year. Lynch is the first Gatorade New York Football Player of the Year to be chosen from St. Francis 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 Lynch as New York's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award announced in December, Lynch 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, 195-pound senior running back and defensive back led the Red Raiders to an 8-3 record and the Monsignor Martin Association championship this past season. Lynch rushed for 2,131 yards and 25 touchdowns on 213 carries. A First Team All-Conference selection, he was MVP of the 2011 Kickoff Classic and a Second Team All-Western New York pick in 2010.

Lynch has maintained an A-minus average at St. Francis. He has volunteered on behalf of senior citizens and underprivileged residents at a low-income housing development.

"Lynch is one of the smoothest high school athletes I have ever seen," said Charlie Comerford, head coach of rival Bishop Timon-St. Jude. "He makes unbelievable plays almost effortlessly. He hits holes quicker than any back I have seen, and once he gets daylight, he is gone."

Lynch has verbally committed to play football on an athletic scholarship at Boston College beginning in the fall of 2012.

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.

Lynch joins recent Gatorade New York Football Players of the Year Ishaq Williams (2010-11, Abraham Lincoln High School) Dan Scalo (2009-10, Monroe-Woodbury), Miguel Maysonet (2008-09, Riverheard High School) and Latavius Murray (2007-08, Onondaga) 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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