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**SIMI VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE CALIFORNIA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 12, 2012) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN HS, today announced Sarah Baxter of Simi Valley High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Baxter is the first Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Simi Valley 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 racecourse, distinguishes Baxter as California's best high school girls cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Baxter joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-00, 2000-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-4 sophomore raced to the Nike Cross Nationals championship this past season with a time of 17:38. The state's returning Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, Baxter was unbeaten on the season and captured the Division 2 state championship in 17:08. She also won titles at the Mt. SAC Invitational, the Ventura County Championships, the Marmonte League Championships and the Southern Section Championships.

Baxter has maintained a 3.30 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally at a charity thrift store and on behalf of the Junior American Legion Auxiliary.

"At Nike Cross Nationals, Sarah Baxter beat the best female field we've seen since the turn of the century," said ESPNHS/Dyestat Editor Rich Gonzalez. "She's taken down multiple course records previously set by Jordan Hasay on benchmark courses. As a sophomore she's still unbeaten in two years of high school running. I honestly felt she was tremendous last year, but this year she went out and proved her worth again."

Baxter will begin her junior year of high school 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 HS 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.

Baxter joins Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Molly Grabill (2009-10, Rancho Bernardo) and Jordan Hasay (2008-09 & 2007-08, Mission College Prep.) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

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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