

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lauren Rollins (312-729-3607)

**LAKWOOD RANCH HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE FLORIDA 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 Olivia Ortiz of Lakewood Ranch High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Ortiz is the first Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Lakewood Ranch 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 Ortiz as Florida'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, Ortiz 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-8 junior raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:39.35, leading the Mustangs to third place as a team. Ortiz also won the Little Everglades Pre-State Invitational, the flrunners.com Invitational, the Disney Cross Country Classic, the District 11 Championships and the Region 3 Championships. She captured fifth at the Foot Locker South Regional championships and was 19th nationally at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships.

Ortiz has maintained a 3.63 GPA in the classroom. A member of the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter, she has volunteered on behalf of blood-donation drives and has raised funds for pediatric brain cancer research.

"Olivia is a true champion on and off the field," said Lakewood Ranch track & field coach Mark Napier. "Her strong leadership, humble demeanor and athletic drive place her in a class of her own."

Ortiz will begin her senior 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.

Ortiz joins Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Kathryn Fluehr (2010-11 & 2009-10, The Community School of Naples), and Ashley Brasovan (2008-09 & 2007-08, Wellington) 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.

###