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**GRISWOLD HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE IOWA 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 Rebekah Topham of Griswold High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Iowa Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Topham is the first Gatorade Iowa Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Griswold 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 Topham as Iowa'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, Topham 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-7 freshman raced to the Class 1A individual state championship this past season with a time of 13:59 over the 4-kilometer course, breaking the tape 32 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Tigers to third place as a team. It was the fastest time ever by a freshman at the state meet. Topham won all 10 of her races against in-state competition and placed eighth at the 2011 Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championship, clocking an 18:30.2.

A home-schooled student, Topham has maintained a 3.26 GPA. She has volunteered locally as part of multiple community service initiatives in association with her church youth group.

"Rebekah is an incredible runner. Her running mechanics are near perfect, making her efficient and fun to watch," said Jane Hall Chaille, Griswold head coach. "Besides her individual pursuit of excellence, she is a super team player, too."

Topham will begin her sophomore 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.

Topham joins Gatorade Iowa Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Shelby Houlihan (2010-11, East High School), Katie Flood (2009-10, Dowling Catholic), Ashlie Decker (2008-09, Dowling Catholic), and Katie Flood (2007-08, Dowling Catholic) 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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