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**KENNEBUNK HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE MAINE 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 Abbey Leonardi of Kennebunk High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Maine Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Leonardi is the first Gatorade Maine Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Kennebunk 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 Leonardi as Maine'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, Leonardi 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-1 senior raced to a fourth consecutive Class A individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:27.19. The state's three-time returning Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, Leonardi placed second at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships in 18:05.7 in addition to finishing fourth at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships in 17:35.3. Also the four-time Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year as named by the Maine Sunday Telegram, she captured first place at the Maine Cross Country Festival of Champions and Western Maine Class A Regional Cross Country Championship Meet this past fall. With her three Gatorade State Track & Field Athlete of the Year trophies, Leonardi becomes the first athlete from any state to win Gatorade honors seven times in the award program's 27-year history.

Leonardi has maintained an A average in the classroom. In addition to donating her time as a member of her school's Captain's Club to promote healthy lifestyle choices among her peers and area youth student-athletes, she has volunteered as part of fundraising efforts on behalf of displaced civilians in Sudan's western region of Darfur.

"Abbey is the most focused athlete I have seen through my many years in this profession," said Kennebunk High head coach Mike Dinehart. "Her practice regimen is a model for any athlete who wants to succeed. Not only does she challenge herself to garner the requisite hours to perform at such a high level, she is also able to apply that same work ethic to academics."

Leonardi has verbally committed to an athletic scholarship at the University of Oregon beginning 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.

Leonardi joins Gatorade Maine Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year Anna Makaretz (2007-08, Yarmouth) 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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