

Contact: Lauren Rollins (312-729-3607)

**PEABODY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE MASSACHUSETTS 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 Catarina Rocha of Peabody High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Massachusetts Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Rocha is the first Gatorade Massachusetts Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Peabody 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 Rocha as Massachusetts'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, Rocha 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 junior captured third place at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships this past season with a time of 18:19.9. Rocha also qualified for the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships where she finished in seventh place, crossing the line in 17:38. The 2011-12 Boston Globe All-Scholastic co-Runner of the Year, she won the Division I individual state championship with a time of 18:12.

Rocha has maintained an A average in the classroom. An officer in her school's student council, she has volunteered locally as a peer tutor on behalf of Challenger Sports, an area physical activity program for children with special needs.

"Catarina Rocha is a leader on her team and in the classroom," said Peabody athletic director Phil Sheridan. "I have had the opportunity to watch her in all facets of life and she is very serious about her training, her studies and her commitment to helping others."

Rocha 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.

Rocha joins Gatorade Massachusetts Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Ariel Beauregard-Breton (2010-11, Deerfield Academy), Andrea Keklak (2009-10, Lincoln-Sudbury Regional), and Emily Jones (2008-09 & 2007-08, The Bromfield School), 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.

###