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**SHAKOPEE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE MINNESOTA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 12, 2012) — In its 27<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN HS, today announced Maria Hauger of Shakopee High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Minnesota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Hauger is the first Gatorade Minnesota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Shakopee 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 Hauger as Minnesota'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, Hauger 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 won the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships this past season with a time of 17:52.7, qualifying for the 2011 Nike Cross Nationals Final, where she finished 24th. A three-time First Team All-State selection, Hauger also placed fifth at the Foot Locker Midwest Regional championships with a time of 17:40, earning a spot in the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships where she finished 21st in 18:07. Hauger was the only female competitor in the nation to crack the top 25 at both Foot Locker Nationals and the NXN Final. The 2009-10 and 2010-11 Gatorade Minnesota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year also won her third straight Class AA individual state championship, breaking the tape in 14:04.1 and leading the Sabers to fourth place as a team.

Hauger has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. An active member of her church community and her school's student council, she has volunteered locally on behalf of the American Cancer Society, Toys for Tots and the National Honor Society.

"Maria Hauger is the hardest-working athlete I have ever coached," said Shakopee High head coach Mark Neu. "She is as humble as can be, a class act and she had another outstanding season."

Hauger 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.

Hauger joins Gatorade Minnesota Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Cassy Opitz (2008-09, Eden Prairie), and Laura Hughes (2007-08, Mankato West) 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com).

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