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**BLUE SPRINGS SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE MISSOURI 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 Samantha Nightingale of Blue Springs South High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Nightingale is the first Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Blue Springs South 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 Nightingale as Missouri'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, Nightingale 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-2 senior raced to a second consecutive Class 4 individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:05.51. Also the All-Metro Runner of the Year as named by the Kansas City Star, Nightingale placed second at the Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional championships in 18:09.90 in addition to finishing eighth at the Nike Cross Nationals Final in 17:59. She finished fourth at the 2008 and 2009 Class 4 state meets as a freshman and sophomore.

Nightingale has maintained a B average in the classroom. She has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics and as an elementary school tutor in addition to promoting healthy lifestyle choices in association with Girls on the Run and the Blue Springs Schools backpack snack program.

"Samantha completed one of the most decorated careers in Missouri state history this season," said Blue Springs South High head coach Ryan Unruh. "She has been a model of consistency and excellence on and off the cross country course throughout her career. After two fourth-place finishes at state as a freshman and sophomore, she made herself into a dominant runner during her junior and senior years. She can easily be considered one of the greatest cross country runners the state of Missouri has ever produced."

Nightingale remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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.

Nightingale joins Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Colleen Quigley (2010-11, Nerinx Hall), Emily Sisson (2009-10 & 2008-09, Parkway Central), and Diane Robison (2007-08, Parkway Central) 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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