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**BIGFORK HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE MONTANA 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 Makena Morley of Bigfork High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Montana Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Morley is the first Gatorade Montana Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Bigfork 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 Morley as Montana'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, Morley 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 freshman raced to the Class B individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:44.32. Ranked No. 22 on the ESPNHS DyeStat Cross Country Top 25 series, Morley placed third at the Foot Locker West Regional championships in 18:07 in addition to finishing ninth at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships in 17:39.1, capturing Second Team All-American honors. She also won the Flathead Invitational, Mountain West Classic and Capital City 7 on 7 this past fall.

Morley has maintained a 4.00 GPA in the classroom. In addition to volunteering as part of multiple community-service initiatives as part of a leadership class, she has donated her time to her team's annual summer fun run and as a youth athletic instructor.

"She has a great work ethic, mental and physical toughness, and an unbelievable mindset for each race," said Bigfork High head coach Susan Loeffler. "She runs to win every race, so she knows she has competed the best she can when the race is over, and she's confident in her ability."

Morley 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.

Morley joins Gatorade Montana Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Caroline Hardin (2010-11, Bozeman High School), and Heidi Turner (2009-10, 2008-09 & 2007-08, Bozeman), 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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