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**ELKO HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NEVADA 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 Mary Jo Wright of Elko High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Nevada Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Jo Wright is the first Gatorade Nevada Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Elko 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 Wright as Nevada'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, Wright 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 senior raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a time of 19:17, leading the Indians to the state title as a team. Wright also won the Northern Region Championships, the Elko Invitational and the Lowry Invitational, and finished second in the Div. I race at the Bob Firman Invitational.

A home-schooled student, Wright has maintained a 4.0 GPA, accredited by Bridgeway Academy. An officer with the county 4-H Club and a recent participant in a medical mission trip to Mexico, she has volunteered locally with a program that serves developmentally disabled children via horseback rides.

"Many athletes have the ambition to be a top athlete and many have the skills," said Elko High head coach Cody Krenka. "Mary Jo is one of the few student-athletes that I have known to have both."

Wright 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.

Wright joins Gatorade Nevada Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Katie Gorczyca (2010-11, Palo Verde High School), and Kelsey Smith (2009-10, 2008-09 & 2007-08, South Tahoe), 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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