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**PRINCETON HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE OHIO 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 Claudia Saunders of Princeton High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Saunders is the first Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Princeton 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 Saunders as Ohio'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, Saunders 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 Division I individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:04.50. The 2011 Greater Miami Conference Female Cross Country Athlete of the Year, Saunders also earned fifth place at the 2011 Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional championships in 18:39.6 and qualified for the 2011 Nike Cross Nationals Final, crossing the line in 19:02.

Saunders has maintained a 4.7 weighted GPA in the classroom. A member of her school's Spanish Honor Society and co-president of its National Honor Society, she has volunteered locally on behalf of the National Children's Leukemia Foundation and the American Red Cross.

"I can't imagine many other girls in Ohio worked as hard as Claudia Saunders to become a state champion," said Adam Thomas, head coach of rival Lakota East High. "After she finished sixth at the state meet in 2010, she set out to do whatever it took to win in 2011."

Saunders 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.

Saunders joins Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Michelle Thomas (2010-11, Glen Este High School), Madeline Chambers (2009-10, Magnificat), Stephanie Morgan (2008-09, Barnesville), and Claire Durkin (2007-08, Worthington Kilbourne) 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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