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**STAR VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE WYOMING 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 Hailey Ricks of Star Valley High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Wyoming Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Ricks is the first Gatorade Wyoming Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Star Valley 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 Ricks as Wyoming'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, Ricks 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 raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a time of 19:54.36, leading the Braves to second place as a team. A 2011 Class 3A First Team All-State selection and a former two-time Class 4A First Team All-State honoree, Ricks earned 25th place at the 2011 Nike Cross Nationals Northwest Regional championships, crossing the line in 19:22.6.

Ricks has maintained a 3.38 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally on behalf of multiple community service initiatives in association with her church youth group and recently completed a service mission trip to Peru.

"I have had the pleasure of watching Hailey Ricks grow as an athlete and a student," said Star Valley head coach Ty Draney. "I've seen her mature greatly and watched as her experiences have taught her the importance of hard work and discipline."

Ricks 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.

Ricks joins Gatorade Wyoming Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Jessica Lemaster (2010-11, Cheyenne Central High School), Dana Morin (2009-10, Sheridan), Nicole Peterson (2008-09, Rock Springs), and Jessica Lemaster (2007-08, Cheyenne 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.

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