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**Contact: Lauren Rollins (312-729-3607)**

**CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE LOUISIANA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 23, 2012) — In its 27<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Cole Stafford of Catholic HS as its 2011-12 Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Stafford is the second Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Catholic HS.

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 Stafford as Louisiana's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Stafford 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.), Kevin Garnett (1992-93, Maudlin HS, S.C.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-8 senior raced to the Class 5A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:22.75, leading the Bears to first place as a team. A two-time All-State selection as named by the Louisiana Track & Field Coaches Association, Stafford also won the St. Michael's Bayou Boogie, Episcopal Round Table Invitational, Walker Shootout and Baton Rouge Metro Invitational. He finished as the runner-up at the 2010 Class 5A state meet as a junior and placed fifth in 2009 as a sophomore.

Also a track standout, Stafford has maintained a B average in the classroom. In addition to donating his time as a youth running instructor, he has volunteered on behalf of Habitat for Humanity and as part of a service-mission trip to Labadieville.

"Cole is a fierce, fierce competitor," said Catholic head coach Pete Boudreaux. "He loves to compete and loves to run fast in all of his races. Needless to say, he has an incredible work ethic."

Stafford 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 ESPNHS 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.

Stafford joins Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Matthew Rice (2010-11, Runnels High School), Philip Primeaux (2009-10, 2008-09, Catholic) and Philipp Goettert (2007-08, Baton Rouge Magnet) 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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