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Contact: Ashley Ginascol (312-729-3622)

**SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® OREGON GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 8, 2012) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Mercedes Russell of Springfield High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Oregon Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Russell is the first Gatorade Oregon Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Springfield 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 court, distinguishes Russell as Oregon's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award announced in March, Russell joins an elite alumni association of past state girls basketball award-winners, including Candace Parker (2003-04, 2002-03, & 2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Diana Taurasi (1998-99 & 1999-00, Don Antonio Lugo HS, Calif.), Maya Moore (2005-06 Collins Hill HS, Ga.), Rashanda McCants (2004-05, Asheville HS, N.C.), Shyra Ely (1999-00, Ben Davis HS, Ind.) and Lisa Leslie (1988-89, Morningside HS, Calif.).

The 6-foot-5 junior center has led the Millers to a 23-3 record and a berth in the Class 5A state quarterfinals against Wilsonville High, scheduled for March 7. Russell averaged 25.9 points, 15.4 rebounds, 6.6 blocks, 4.7 assists and 2.0 steals through 26 games while shooting 66.8 percent from the floor and 80.7 percent from the free throw line. A member of the USA Basketball U16 National Team that won the gold medal at the FIBA Americas Championships in July, 2011, Russell was the 2011 Class 5A State Player of the Year and the 2011 Midwestern League MVP.

Russell has maintained a 3.17 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally at a food bank and as a youth basketball coach.

"Mercedes Russell moves well for a young player still growing in her body," said Steve Eastburn, head coach at South Eugene High. "In addition she has great hands and catches anything thrown to her. She has a high basketball IQ that allows her to be a great passer, help defender and shot blocker."

Russell 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 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.

Russell joins recent Gatorade Oregon Girls Basketball Players of the Year Jen Reese (2010-11, Clackamas High School), Jen Reese (2009-10, Clackamas), Kate Lanz (2008-09 & 2007-08, Central Catholic), Michelle Jenkins (2006 - 07, Southridge), Kristen Forristall (2003-04, Oregon City), and Ashley Gonnerman (2002-03, Oregon City) among the state's list of former award winners.

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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