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Contact: Ashley Ginascol (312-729-3622)

**BUNNELL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 22, 2012) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Zach Zurita of Bunnell High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Connecticut Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Zurita is the first Gatorade Connecticut Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Bunnell 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 field, distinguishes Zurita as Connecticut's best high school boys soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Zurita joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook HS, Mich.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02, East Brunswick HS, N.J.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-9, 155-pound senior forward led the Bulldogs to a 20-2-2 record and the Class L state championship this past season. Zurita scored 43 goals and passed for 14 assists, including 11 goals and three assists in the state tournament. The 2011 Connecticut Soccer Coaches Association Player of the Year and an All-American selection by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America, Zurita had a goal and two assists in Bunnell's 3-0 win over Avon High for the state title. He concluded his prep soccer career with 96 goals and 42 assists.

Zurita has maintained a B-plus average in the classroom. He has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach and has worked at Soccer & Rugby Imports in Southport.

"Zach Zurita has got real savvy," said Brian Quinn, Zurita's club coach with South Central Premier. "He's very, very skillful, he's got great instincts in front of the goal and his work rate is very good. He's one of the best players the state has produced in a long time."

Zurita has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on an athletic scholarship at Monmouth University in New Jersey 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.

Zurita joins recent Gatorade Connecticut Boys Soccer Players of the Year Kevin Michalak (2010 - 11, Farmington High School), Kofi Agyapong, (2009-10, St. Luke's School), Colin Bradley (2008-09 Avon Old Farms School), Pat Boucher (2007-08, Cromwell), and Ryan Kinne (2006-2007, Naugatuck) 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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