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**C.M. RUSSELL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE MONTANA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 22, 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 Nick Downs of C.M. Russell High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Montana Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Downs is the second Gatorade Montana Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from C.M. Russell 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 Downs as Montana'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, Downs 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-8, 140-pound junior forward scored 14 goals and passed for eight assists this past season, leading the Rustlers (6-8-1) to the Class AA state quarterfinals. A two-time All-State selection and a two-time Montana Coaches Association Academic All-State honoree, Downs is a member of the 1994 U.S. Youth Soccer Region IV Olympic Development Program team. Through his junior year, he has recorded 32 goals and 13 assists in his prep career.

Downs has maintained a B-plus average in the classroom. He has volunteered locally as a youth mentor and on behalf of the Kick for Nick charitable campaign by donating his time as a soccer coach in exchange for soccer balls sent to children in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Nick Downs is fast, he's quick, he's good with the ball at his feet and he can finish," said Paul Zazenski, Downs' club coach with Montana United. "His speed allows him to do what he wants on the pitch."

Downs will begin his 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.

Downs joins recent Gatorade Montana Boys Soccer Players of the Year Anthony Keene (2010 - 11, Billings West High School), Zach Moyers, (2009-10, Billings West High School), Jack Pueringer (2008-09 Billings West), Garion Holian (2007-08, Hellgate) and Adam Clinch (2006-2007, Capital) 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com).

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