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**HOPE CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO GIRLS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 9, 2012) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Erika Nelson of Hope Christian High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade New Mexico Girls Soccer Player of the Year. Nelson is the first Gatorade New Mexico Girls Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Hope Christian 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 Nelson as New Mexico's best high school girls soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Nelson 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 senior midfielder scored 15 goals and passed for 22 assists this past season, leading the Huskies (17-5) to the Class A-AAA state semifinals. The 2011 Class A-AAA State Player of the Year, Nelson is a two-time Class A-AAA District 4 Player of the Year. In her final two years of prep soccer, she recorded 30 goals and 40 assists.

Nelson has maintained a 4.23 unweighted GPA in the classroom. A member of the Hope Christian School student council, she has volunteered locally at an animal shelter and as part of multiple community service initiatives in association with her church youth group.

"Erika Nelson is a complete package," said Chris Brennan, Nelson's coach with the Rio Vista club team. "She's the best athlete I've ever coached. She's quick and can run further than anyone else on the team. She's got a little bit of everything."

Nelson has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on an athletic scholarship at the University of Maryland beginning 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.

Nelson joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Girls Soccer Players of the Year Victoria Barba (2010-11 & 2008-09, Sandia High School), Jenni White, (2009-10, Albuquerque Academy), Courtney Tinnin (2007-08, St. Pius X High School), and Alexis Ball (2006-07, La Cueva) 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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