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**WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH DAKOTA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 20, 2012) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Kari Heck of Washington High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade South Dakota Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Heck is the first Gatorade South Dakota Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Washington 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 track, distinguishes Heck as South Dakota's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Heck joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Allyson Felix (2001-02, Los Angeles Baptist, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.), Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt HS, Ia.) and Bianca Knight (2006-07, Ridgeland HS, Miss.).

The 5-foot-4 senior sprinter/jumper won three individual state championships this spring and led the Warriors to the Class AA state title as a team. Heck won the 100-meter dash with a time of 12.52 seconds, the 200-meter dash in 25.19, the 400-meter dash in 55.91 and earned second place in the long jump with a leap of 18 feet, six and one quarter inches. The 2010-11 Gatorade South Dakota Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year, she competed at the prestigious Arcadia Invitational in California where she earned 19th place in the 100 with a time of 12.39, tenth place in the 200 in 25.07 and third in the long jump (18 feet, eight inches). Heck also competed at June's New Balance Outdoor National championships, where her third-place leap of 19 feet, three and one quarter inches ranked as the nation's No. 22 long jump by a prep competitor at the time of her selection.

Heck has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. A devoted member of her church community, she has volunteered locally on behalf of an area nursing home. She also organized a track and field fundraiser called "Jump for Joy" to benefit and increase awareness of Alzheimer's disease.

"Kari Heck is possibly the finest track and field athlete in the history of South Dakota," said Jim Jarovski, head coach at Lincoln High. "Her performances speak for themselves. She is passionate about the sport and she is an exceptionally hard worker. She is such a technician and she is fun to watch compete."

Heck has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in track and field on an athletic scholarship at the University of Nebraska 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.

Two-time winner Heck joins recent Gatorade South Dakota Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Jasmyne King (2007-08, 2008-09 & 2009-10, Rapid City Central), 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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