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**CLASSICAL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE RHODE ISLAND BOYS TRACK & FIELD ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 21, 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 Joe Velez of Classical High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Rhode Island Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Velez is the second Gatorade Rhode Island Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Classical 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 Velez as Rhode Island's best high school boys track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Velez joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Meb Keflezighi (1993-94, San Diego HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.) and Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt HS, Ia.).

The 6-foot-2, 185-pound senior won the hammer throw with a mark of 219 feet, 11 inches at the All-State Meet this spring, leading the Purple to a fifth-place finish as a team. Velez also placed second in the shot put (55-7) and the discus (151-7). He launched the hammer 207-3 to win the event at this month's New Balance Nationals Outdoor championships, while his season-best of 224-1 in the event ranked as the No. 2 performance by prep competitors in 2012 at the time of his selection.

Velez has maintained a B average in the classroom. A member of Classical High's student senate, he has volunteered locally as a peer tutor and youth basketball and track coach.

"I got to watch Joe in practice every day this season. He is a hard-worker and really dedicated to his craft," said Nick Palazzo, assistant coach at Hope High. "He is always working with the different weights to make himself a better thrower. And his numbers, including winning the national championship, just speak for themselves."

Velez has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in track and field on scholarship at Ohio State University 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.

Velez joins recent Gatorade Rhode Island Boys Track & Field Athletes of the Year Jarell Forbes (2010-11, Classical High School), Kadeem Kushimo (2009-10, La Salle Academy), and Andrew Springer (2007-08 & 2008-09, Westerly) 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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