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**MOUNTAIN BROOK HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE ALABAMA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 17, 2013) — In its 28<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Payton Ballard of Mountain Brook High School as its 2012-13 Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Ballard is the first Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Mountain Brook 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 racecourse, distinguishes Ballard as Alabama's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Ballard joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-00, 2000-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Kevin Garnett (1992-93, Maudlin HS, S.C.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-10 senior raced to a runner-up finish at the Class 6A state meet this past season with a time of 15:44.98, leading the Spartans to second place as a team. Ballard finished unbeaten against Alabama competition in eight regular-season meets, winning his races by an average of 14.5 seconds, including victories at the Chickasaw Trails Invitational and Walt Disney World Classic. He captured third place at the 2011 Class 6A state meet as a junior.

Also a track standout, Ballard has maintained a 4.06 weighted GPA in the classroom. In addition to serving as senior class treasurer, he has performed as a member of both Mountain Brook's chamber choir and the all-male a cappella group, "A Bunch of Guys."

"He has the ability to push himself in practice to levels most kids cannot," said Mountain Brook head coach Greg Echols. "He is driven and focused—at meets on weekends, holidays, whatever is needed to excel. He always comes to practice with a positive attitude. He obviously races well, but his work ethic at practice is what sets him apart."

Ballard remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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 the Gatorade high school sports leadership team in partnership with [USA TODAY High School Sports](#), 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.

Ballard joins Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Griffin Lee (2011-12, John Carroll Catholic High School), Brandon Hazouri (2010-11, Spain Park High School), Nathan Lewis (2009-10, Cold Springs), and Patrick McGregor (2008-09 & 2007-08, Hoover) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

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 [www.gatorade.com/poy](http://www.gatorade.com/poy).

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