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**NICEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE FLORIDA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 17, 2013) — In its 28th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Thomas Howell of Niceville High School as its 2012-13 Gatorade Florida Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Howell is the first Gatorade Florida Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Niceville 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 Howell as Florida'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, Howell 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 junior raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:19.6. Howell also won the District 1 Championships, the Region 1 Championships, the Gulf Coast Stampede and the Pace Patriot Invitational.

Howell has maintained a 3.94 GPA in the classroom. A member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, he has volunteered locally on behalf of church service-mission retreats.

"Thomas is not only our most accomplished runner, but he is also our hardest working and most team-spirited," said Niceville coach Tom Durrenberger. "After completing his workouts, he always turns back around and encourages his teammates to work harder."

Howell 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 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.

Howell joins Gatorade Florida Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Andres Arroyo (2011-12, Colonial High School), Jimmy Clark (2010-11, Creekside High School), Matt Mizereck (2009-10, Leon), and Brian Atkinson (2008-09 & 2007-08, Melbourne), 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.

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