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## **SIMI VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE CALIFORNIA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 8, 2014) — In its 29<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 Sarah Baxter of Simi Valley High School as its 2013-14 Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Baxter is the first Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Simi Valley 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 Baxter as California's best high school girls cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Baxter 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.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-7 senior raced to her fourth consecutive state championship this past season, winning the Division 2 state crown with a time of 16:43 and leading the Pioneers to second place as a team. The 2012-13 Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year and the state's three-time returning Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, Baxter won the Mt. SAC Invitational, the Woodbridge Invitational, the Clovis Invitational, the Marmonte League Championships, the Ventura County Championships and the Southern Section Championships. She finished third at the Nike Cross Nationals Final in 16:57.8. Nationally, Baxter is one of only four prep runners in history to win Gatorade State Cross Country Runner of the Year honors in all four years of high school.

Baxter has maintained a 3.22 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally as a member of the Junior American Legion Auxiliary and the Simi Valley High recycling club. She has also donated her time on behalf of a senior citizen thrift store and as a youth running club coach.

"I don't know of anyone who has had a better high school career than Sarah," said Simi Valley head coach Roger Evans. "She ran at such a high level, year in and year out. A lot of times she was only running against her internal clock, but she never had a bad race. Never."

Baxter has verbally committed to an athletic scholarship at the University of Oregon beginning in the fall of 2014.

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.

Four-time winner Baxter joins Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runners of the Molly Grabill (2009-10, Rancho Bernardo), and Jordan Hasay (2008-09 & 2007-08, Mission College Prep.) 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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