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Contact: Matt Schiffman (312-729-3672)

**STAPLES HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 8, 2014) — In its 29th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Hannah DeBalsi of Staples High School as its 2013-14 Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. DeBalsi is the first Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Staples 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 DeBalsi as Connecticut'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, DeBalsi 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-2 sophomore raced to second place nationally at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships this past season with a time of 17:26. DeBalsi won the State Open championship by breaking the tape in 17:44 and captured the Class LL state title with a course-record 17:41. She also won the New England Cross Country Championships in a course-record time of 17:15.8 and was third at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships.

DeBalsi has maintained a 4.14 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally on behalf of the Fairfield Public Library and various road races.

"Hannah's determination, energy and passion are contagious," said Staples High head coach Amanda Parrish. "Although she's only a sophomore, I frequently find myself counting on her as a leader, not just in the results, but at practice on a daily basis."

DeBalsi will begin her junior 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.

DeBalsi joins Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Brianna Lenehan (2012-13, Norwich Free Academy), Reid Watson (2011-12, Glastonbury High School), Jackie Nicholas (2010-11, Nonnewaug High School), Lauren Sara (2009-10, Frank Scott Bunnell), Moira Kenny (2008-09, Immaculate), and Heather Stephens (2007-08, Ridgefield) 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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