FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Matt Schiffman (312-729-3672)

BIGFORK HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE MONTANA 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 Makena Morley of Bigfork High School as its 2013-14 Gatorade Montana Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Morley is the first Gatorade Montana Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Bigfork 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 Morley as Montana'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, Morley 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-4 junior distance runner captured eighth place at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships with a time of 17:43 this past season, earning All-American honors. The state's two-time returning Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, Morley won the Foot Locker West Regional championships in 18:05.7 in addition to placing second at the Nike Cross Nationals Northwest Regional in 17:36. She also won a third consecutive Class B individual state championship with a meet-record time of 16:35.31.

Morley has maintained a 4.00 GPA in the classroom and ranks No. 1 in her graduating class. In addition to volunteering as part of multiple community-service initiatives on behalf of a leadership course, she has donated her time to her team's annual summer fun run and as a youth athletic instructor.

"She is the best female runner in Montana," said Paul Jorgensen, head coach of rival Flathead High. "She set course records on most courses she ran on in Montana. Morley also made it to the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships again and did well. Plus, she is a great kid who always has a smile on her face."

Morley will begin her 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.

Three-time winner Morley joins Gatorade Montana Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Caroline Hardin (2010-11, Bozeman High School), and Heidi Turner (2009-10, 2008-09 & 2007-08, Bozeman), 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.

###