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**HIGHLAND PARK HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE TEXAS 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 Natalie Rathjen of Highland Park High School as its 2013-14 Gatorade Texas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Rathjen is the first Gatorade Texas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Highland Park 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 Rathjen as Texas'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, Rathjen 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-5 senior raced to the Class 4A individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:41.78, leading the Scots to second place as a team. Rathjen finished third at the Nike Cross Nationals South Regional championships in 17:54.25 and captured 18th at the NXN Final in 17:57. She also finished third at the Foot Locker South Regional championships with a time of 17:06 and earned victories at the Marcus I Invitational and the McNeil Invitational.

Rathjen has maintained a 4.51 GPA in the classroom. A devoted member of her church community, Rathjen has volunteered locally on behalf of the Boys and Girls Club of Dallas and the Special Olympics.

"Natalie worked very hard, did everything that was asked of her and didn't let the past influence her goals," said Highland Park coach Susan Bailey. "She's always been a team-first competitor. Her attitude is 'just follow me and we will get this done.'"

Rathjen will attend Princeton University, where she will compete in cross country and track and field 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.

Rathjen joins Gatorade Texas Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Karis Jochen (2012-13 & 2011-12, A&M Consolidated High School), Rachel Johnson (2010-11, Plano Senior High School), and Chelsey Sveinsson (2009-10, 2008-09 & 2007-08, Greenhill School) 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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