

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Julie Mason (412-561-1014)

**SHAKOPEE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® MINNESOTA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 14, 2010) — In its 25th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Maria Hauger of Shakopee High School as its 2009-10 Gatorade Minnesota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Hauger is the first Gatorade Minnesota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Shakopee 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 Hauger as Minnesota'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, Hauger joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, MI), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, IL), Kevin Garnett (1992-93, Maudlin HS, SC), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, NY) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-5 freshman completed an undefeated season and raced to the Class AA individual state title with a time of 14:40, leading the Sabers to eighth place as a team. Hauger was also the fastest Minnesota runner at both the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships where she finished in fifth place in 18:16 and the Foot Locker Midwest Regional championships where she placed 15th in 18:47. The Minnesota Association of USA Track & Field Girls Athlete of the Month for November, Hauger also took 48th place at the Nike Cross Nationals Finals in 18:42.

Hauger has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally as part of a fundraising campaign to benefit the American Cancer Society and is active in her church community.

"Hauger is the hardest working athlete I have ever coached," said Shakopee High Head Coach Mark Neu. "She's still only a ninth grader, but she really had an outstanding cross country season. She's a great student, as humble as can be and a real class act."

Hauger will begin her sophomore 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 ESPN RISE and the Gatorade high school sports leadership team, 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.

Hauger joins Gatorade Minnesota Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Cassy Opitz (2008-09, Eden Prairie) and Laura Hughes (2007-08, Mankato West) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

To celebrate the award's 25th anniversary, Gatorade wants you to vote for the All-Time Greatest Players of the Year at gatorade.com/POY25. 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 playeroftheyear.gatorade.com.

###