

# GENERAL ORIENTATION ONLINE COURSE

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***Special  
Olympics***  
*Georgia*

# Objectives and Competencies

- Describe Special Olympics mission and philosophy.
- Briefly describe the history of Special Olympics.
- Summarize the basic organizational structure of Special Olympics – grassroots to headquarters.
- Identify eligibility requirements and access into Special Olympics.
- Describe what opportunities in Special Olympics are available to volunteers.

# Objectives and Competencies

- Identify Special Olympics sports and events.
- Identify how Special Olympics is unique from other sports organizations.
- Describe Special Olympics rules, ability grouping, honest effort, and divisioning.
- Describe available Special Olympics program offerings, challenges, and benefits to athletes.
- List the steps taken if suspect an athlete is being abused or neglected.

# I. Overview of the Organization

## A. Special Olympics Mission & Philosophy; Vision; Athlete's Oath; Coaches Oath

**Mission:** To Provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Why is following the mission important?

- We are sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and must follow their guidelines (they are our NGB)
- Only 3 groups were sanctioned to use "Olympics"
  - Jr. Olympics
  - Paralympics
  - Special Olympics

Senior Games tried but was denied

# I. Overview of the Organization

## A. Special Olympics Mission & Philosophy; Vision; Athlete's Oath; Coaches Oath

### **Philosophy:**

- Special Olympics is founded on the belief that people with intellectual disabilities can, with proper instruction and encouragement, learn, enjoy and benefit from participation in individual and team sports.
- Special Olympics believes that consistent training is essential to the development of sports skills, and that competition among those of equal abilities is the most appropriate means of testing these skills, measuring progress and providing incentives for personal growth.
- Special Olympics believes that through sports training and competition, people with intellectual disabilities benefit physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually; families are strengthened; and the community at large, both through participation and observation, is united in understanding people with intellectual disabilities in an environment of equality, respect and acceptance.

# I. Overview of the Organization

## A. Special Olympics Mission & Philosophy; Vision; Athlete's Oath; Coaches Oath

### **Vision:**

The vision of Special Olympics is to help bring Special Olympics athletes into the larger society under conditions whereby they are accepted, respected and given the chance to become useful and productive citizens.

### **Athlete's Oath:**

"Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

### **Coaches Oath:**

"In the name of all coaches, we shall follow written and verbal instructions of Special Olympics officials at all times, have our athletes at the appropriate events and activities at the proper time and abide by the rules and policies, in the spirit of sportsmanship."

# I. Overview of the Organization

## B. History

- Created by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968
- First International (now called World) Games held in July 1968 at Soldier Field in Chicago with 1000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from 26 U.S. states and Canada competing in Athletics, Floor Hockey, and Aquatics.
- In 1971, the U.S. Olympic Committee gave Special Olympics official approval to use the name “Olympics”, one of only three global organizations. (Junior Olympics, Paralympics, and Special Olympics).
- In June 2011, World Games were held in Athens, Greece with 7500 athletes with intellectual disabilities from 185 countries competing in 21 sports.

# I. Overview of the Organization

## B. History

- Special Olympics Georgia (SOGA) was chartered in 1970.
- Special Olympics Georgia is:
  - One of the largest volunteer driven sports organizations in the state
  - One of the largest Special Olympics program in North America –
    - 26,000 + Volunteers
    - 26,702
    - Offers 25 Olympic – type sports year round
    - Offers 5 Statewide Competitions throughout the year with over 500 local and area competitions offered.
      - Indoor Winter Games – January
      - Summer Games – May
      - Masters Bowling – August
      - Horse Show – October
      - Fall Games - October

# I. Overview of the Organization

## C. Structure

### **Special Olympics, Inc. (SOI)**

- The World governing body of Special Olympics
- Based in Washington, DC – staffed by approximately 100 individuals
- Responsible for accrediting Programs worldwide

### **Special Olympics North America (SONA)**

- Oversees the management of all National Games and Coaching Education
- Provides support and collaboration in the development of materials, conferences, and regional instructor training seminars

### **Special Olympics Georgia (SOGA)**

- Oversees the management of all Georgia programs

# SOGA Map of Georgia Counties and Assigned Areas

## Sports and Program Managers:

Alex Schwartz: Area 4

Brady Brantley: Area 8

Jenna Wilson: Area 3, 5

Liz McMurray: Areas 7, 13, 16, 17

Shawn Berglund: Areas 10, 11, 12, 14

Charles Clark: Areas 1, 6, 9, 18

David Crawford: Areas 15

Kelli Britt: Area 2



# I. Overview of the Organization

## D. Roles for the Special Olympics Volunteer

- Special Olympics would not exist today – and could not have been created – without the time, energy, commitment and enthusiasm of the more than 500,000 Special Olympics volunteers.
- Volunteers ensure that every athlete is offered a quality sports training and competition experience.
- Our volunteer pool is dedicated and diverse. Volunteers include: civic and fraternal groups, high school and college students, amateur and professional athletes, sports officials, coaches, teachers, retirees, parents, and corporate employees.
- There are a variety of important volunteer roles, from a chaperone at an event to an Area / Local Management Team member, to a Games Organizing Committee member, to a member of the Board of Directors.

# I. Overview of the Organization

## D. Roles for the Special Olympics Volunteer

- Volunteers serve as coaches, officials, games directors, Local Coordinators, local training directors, rules committees, medical personnel during games, Unified Sports partners, fundraisers, publicists or office support.
- Family members of Special Olympics athletes play a key role:
  - Over 25% of certified Special Olympics coaches are family members.
  - Family members provide day-to-day support through transportation, reinforcement of coach's instructions, service on local program committees and in many other ways.
  - Family members recruit family members of new athletes to participate and support the program.

# I. Overview of the Organization

## D. Roles for the Special Olympics Volunteer

•Athletes can also volunteer for a wide variety of things within the local and state structure. SOGA has athletes serving:

- On the State Board of Directors
- On teams as assistant coaches
- As Global Messengers
- On Area / Local Management Teams

# II. Special Olympics Participants

## A. Traditional Eligibility

- Athletes must be 8 years old or older
- Athletes must be identified as having intellectual disabilities by an agency or professional
- Athletes must have a closely related developmental disability
- Athletes must have an Athlete Participation Form on file with the state office

# II. Special Olympics Participants

## A. Traditional Eligibility

- Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person who:
  1. Has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities, or
  2. Has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures, or
  3. Has a closely related developmental disability, which means having functional limitations in both general learning and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care).
  
- Persons whose functional limitations are based solely on physical, behavioral, or emotional disability or a specific learning or sensory disability are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes. However, these individuals may be eligible to be Special Olympics *Unified Sports*<sup>®</sup> Partners.

# II. Special Olympics Participants

## A. Traditional Eligibility

- Training and competition is open to all persons with intellectual disability, a cognitive delay or a closely related developmental disability who meet the age requirements regardless of how mild or severe the person's disability, and whether or not that person also has other mental or physical disabilities.
- No maximum age limitation for participation.
  - Children 2-7 years of age may participate in the Young Athletes Program but may not participate in Special Olympics competition or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition. Such children may be recognized for their participation through certificates of participation.
- All persons who are eligible to participate in Special Olympics training and / or competition programs must register to participate with their local Accredited Program.

# II. Special Olympics Participants

## B. Participation of Individuals with Special Considerations

### Down Syndrome and Atlanto-Axial Instability

- 10% of individuals with Down Syndrome have a misalignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and C-2 in the neck. This condition called *atlanto-axial instability* exposes individuals with Down Syndrome to the possibility of injury if they participate in activities that hyperextend or radically flex the neck or upper spine.
- There are temporary restrictions of athletes with Down Syndrome who have *atlanto-axial instability*.
  - Prohibited activities include: butterfly stroke and diving starts in swimming, diving, pentathlon, high jump, squat lifts, equestrian sports, artistic gymnastics, soccer, alpine skiing, and any warm-up exercise placing undue stress on the head and neck.

# II. Special Olympics Participants

## B. Participation of Individuals with Special Considerations

### Down Syndrome and Atlanto-Axial Instability

- An athlete with Down Syndrome who has been diagnosed by a physician as having an atlanto-axial instability condition may nevertheless participate in the sports identified if:
  - The athlete (or the parent if the athlete is a minor) confirms in writing his or her decision to proceed with these activities notwithstanding the risks created by the *atlanto-axial instability*;
  - Two licensed medical professionals certify in writing that they have explained these risks to the athlete and his / her parent or guardian and that the athlete's condition does not, in their judgment, preclude the athlete from participating in Special Olympics;
  - The statements and certifications are documented and provided to Accredited Programs using the standardized form approved by Special Olympics headquarters entitled "Special Release for Athletes with *Atlanto-axial Instability*" and any revisions of that form, approved by Special Olympics headquarters ("Special Release Concerning Atlanto-axial Instability").

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## A. Uniqueness from Other Sports Organizations

Special Olympics is more similar than different from other sports organizations. However, it is important to identify the five areas that make Special Olympics unique. Per official Special Olympics General Rules:

- A variety of sports opportunities are provided for all ability levels.
- Ability groupings are created through a process called divisioning to provide equitable competition (evenness) for all athletes within each ability grouping (division).
- Awards are provided to all participants who compete.
- The established criteria for athlete advancement to higher levels of competition is based on order of finish for each division and random draw.
- Special Olympics does not charge a fee to athletes (or their families) to train or compete.

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## B. Competition Opportunities for All Levels

- Special Olympics provides a variety of competition opportunities for athletes of all abilities by offering official events or various degrees of difficulty and challenge.
- The lowest ability athletes can participate in specially modified events such as:
  - The 25m Assisted Walk (Athletics) or the 15m Flotation Race (Aquatics)
  - Events for athletes who use wheelchairs
  - The Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) provides participation for those requiring the greatest assistance and support
- In team sports, lower-ability athletes who are not yet ready for team play, can participate in Individual Skills Contests. For example, in soccer, athletes can earn medals for performing the skills of Dribbling, Shooting, and Run-and-Kick event. Lower ability athletes may also participate in modified team events such as 3-on-3 basketball or modified softball team play.
- Most Special Olympics events have few differences from the sport played by individuals without disabilities. Higher ability athletes are now participating in events like the marathon, or in *Unified Sports*® events alongside athletes without disabilities.

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## C. Unified Sports®

- An initiative that combines approximately equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes and athletes without intellectual disabilities (called Unified Partners) with like abilities on sports teams for training and competition.
- Age and ability matching of athletes and partners is defined on a sport-by-sport basis.
- Unified Sports*® athletes improve their physical fitness, sharpen their skills, challenge the competition and have fun, too.



# III. Sports Training and Competition

## C. Unified Sports®

*Unified Sports®* enables athletes to:

- learn new sports; develop higher-level sports skills
- have new competition experiences
- experience meaningful inclusion as each athlete is ensured of playing a valued role on the team
- socialize with peers and form friendships (the initiative provides a forum for positive social interaction between teammates and often leads to long-lasting friendships)
- participate in their communities and have choices outside of Special Olympics

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## D. Official Sports

### **Georgia offers 25 sports**

- Alpine Skiing / Snowboarding
- Aquatics
- Artistic Gymnastics
- Athletics
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Bocce
- Bowling
- Cycling
- Equestrian
- Flag Football
- Floor Hockey
- Golf
- Ice Skating
- Kayaking
- Long Distance Running / Walking
- Powerlifting
- Rhythmic Gymnastics
- Roller Skating
- Sailing
- Soccer
- Softball
- Table Tennis
- Tennis
- Volleyball

### **SOI offers these 9 additional sports**

- Cricket
- Cross Country Skiing
- Floorball
- Handball
- Judo
- Team Handball
- Netball
- Snowshoeing

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## E. Divisioning

- Divisions provide all competitors a chance to excel.
- Competition is organized so that, whenever possible, athletes compete against others of similar ability.
- Athletes or teams are divisioned using the following basic procedure:
  - Divide by ability
  - Divide by gender: Male, Female or Combined (Under some circumstances)
  - Divide by age:

	<u>Individual Sports</u>	<u>Team Sports</u>
	8-11	15 and under (Junior)
	12-15	16-21 (Senior)
	16-21	22 and over (Masters)
	22 and over	
- No less than 3 and no more than 8 athletes or teams per division.

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## E. Divisioning

### For Individual Competition –

- Athletes compete in preliminary competition and then are grouped for final competition following the 15% guideline. *In essence, the variance between the best qualifying and worst qualifying score in a division should not differ by more than 15%.*
- Since preliminary grouping is an important first step, accurate recording and reporting of times / scores is essential.
- If a coach reports an inaccurate score, an athlete may be inappropriately placed in a division to the benefit of no one.
- Remember: Special Olympics is for the athletes. Athletes benefit the most when competing against athletes of similar ability and by being prepared to compete according to the rules.

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## E. Divisioning

### **For Team Competition –**

- Skills Assessment Tests
- Team Rating Form submitted by coach
- State Invitationals

In many Accredited Programs, the numbers of participants are low and divisioning becomes a tremendous challenge. In all instances, competition management personnel are charged with providing competition among those of similar abilities. Thus, ability is the overriding factor as long as there is no health or safety risk to athletes.

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## F. Honest Effort Rule

- Just as important as accurate scores is the “honest” and maximum effort put forth by the athletes in preliminaries and in finals.
  - The goal is to ensure competition among athletes of similar ability
- According to the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules, athletes are to participate honestly and with maximum effort in all preliminary trials and / or finals.

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## G. Athlete Advancement to Higher Level Competition

- Training and competition experience must be in the same sport in which the athlete will be competing.
- If quotas are limited, priority is given to medal winners that have not competed on the National or World Games level and based on eligibility requirements. If the number of nominees exceeds the quota, athletes are selected to advance by random draw.
- If there are not enough eligible nominees to meet the quota, individuals that have competed on the National or World Games level will be selected in order to fill the quota.
- Accredited Programs may establish additional criteria for advancement to higher-level competition based on behavior, medical, or judicial considerations.

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## H. Athlete Training Considerations

Important training considerations include:

- Frequent repetition and reinforcement
- Consistent use of few key words
- Appropriate instruction (method and rate are determined by individual abilities)
- Continuous evaluation of each athlete's abilities
- Athletes / teams should train a minimum of 8 weeks prior to competition
- The coach to athlete ratio is 1:4. Your program / sport should have 1 coach for every 4 athletes.
- Increase the number of competition opportunities
  - The more athletes compete, the more polished their sports and competition skills and the greater their confidence
  - The coach can increase competition opportunities by:
    - Setting up scrimmages during training sessions
    - Arranging for competition with other Special Olympics programs, schools, or community groups

# III. Sports Training and Competition

## I. Proven Benefits

- Improved strength, stamina and motor skills
- Improved self-esteem and self-confidence that apply to school, work, home, and social life.
- Leadership opportunities
- Overall greater participation in life
- A richer, more rewarding life

These are the reasons why Special Olympics puts so much emphasis on *consistent training, fair competition, and the importance of the coach.*

# IV. Volunteer Code of Conduct

As a Special Olympics volunteer, I agree that while serving as a volunteer, I will:

- Provide for the general welfare, health and safety of all Special Olympics athletes and volunteers.
- Dress and act in an appropriate manner at all times.
- Follow the established rules and guidelines of the Special Olympics Program, Special Olympics, Inc. and / or any agency involved with the Special Olympics Program.
- Report any emergencies to the appropriate authorities after first taking immediate action to ensure the health and safety of the participants.
- Abstain from the consumption or use of all alcohol, tobacco products and illegal substances while involved in ANY Special Olympics Program event, competition or training school.
- Not engage in any inappropriate contact or relationship with athletes, volunteers or other participants of the Special Olympics Program.

# Putting It All Together

- ***TRAINING*** is the key
- ***COMPETITION*** is the means
- Skill, confidence, courage and joy are the ***OUTCOMES***
- Better preparation for life is the ***GOAL***
- Lifelong skills and increased independence are the ***RESULTS***

# THANKS!

- For taking the training today! You are making a difference in the lives of some great athletes!
- To find out more information on coaches education, go to our website [www.specialolympicsga.org](http://www.specialolympicsga.org)
- If you have questions or need more information on coaches education, please contact:

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