



Guidelines for a Successful Unified Sports Competition

We train in order to compete, and it is competition that is a measure of our success. Thus coaches need to be aware of the importance of frequent competitions, the quality of which they must be conducted and their part in the process.

- 1) Conduct a Unified Sports training session for all coaches before they become involved with their Unified Sports teams.** Most importantly, emphasize “meaningful Involvement” and “Team Selection.” Emphasize the need for their team’s members to fully understand the philosophy and principles of Unified Sports by conducting an orientation for all team members before they become involved with the team. This information emphasizes their role of being teammates and participating to the best of their ability in both training and competition.
- 2) Conduct sports-specific training for coaches.** Coaches must understand the fundamentals and basic skills of the sport. All coaches should seek Special Olympics coaching certification in the sport they are going to direct. Providing athletes and partners with the best technical instruction will go a long way toward promoting meaningful participation by all.
- 3) Make sure all participants are registered with Special Olympics.** All Special Olympics rules and regulations apply equally to athletes and partners with the following exception: Partners are required to complete a “Unified Sports Partner Application” which includes an applicant’s contact information, release from liability and background information. Partners are not required to have a medical form, though some programs make this a local requirement.
- 4) Require coaches to submit information on the ability level of their Unified Sports teams.** The information includes Special Olympics Sports Skills Assessment Test scores for all team sport members and performance scores for all individual sport team members. It also includes a team’s previous experience (if the team has participated together for more than one year). The information is placed on the Team Roster and Ability Assessment Form and submitted with the Unified Sports team’s entry to the competition.
- 5) Consider having the coach and the head of delegation sign an assurance statement.** The following page contains a sample assurance form where Program leaders verify that their team(s) has been organized according to the standards outlined in this handbook. The form clarifies that teams may be disqualified for failure to respect the philosophy of Special Olympics Unified Sports.
- 6) Before the competition, fully prepare your Sports Rules Committee and Officials.** This will enable the Committee to effectively respond to situations and rules violations. Also, the Sports Rules Committee’s method of responding to these situations and protests should be carefully explained to the head coaches at the first coaches’ meeting.
- 7) Conduct on-site divisioning.** Special Olympics rules require teams to compete against other teams of similar age and ability. In order to group teams appropriately in their proper ability division, it is important to conduct a divisioning round prior to the start of any event. Officials viewing the divisioning rounds will be able to accurately assess each team’s ability level and place teams in divisions with others of a similar level. The divisioning round consists of short scrimmages between various teams so accurate evaluations can be made.