



***Special Olympics***

**COACHING GUIDE**

The Coaching Team

# The Coaching Team

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## The Coaching Team

### Special Olympics Coach Description

<b>Position:</b>	Coach
<b>Description:</b>	The Special Olympics coach is responsible for providing athletes with comprehensive sport training and preparation for multilevel sport competition.
<b>Responsibilities:</b>	<i>See below</i>

1. To select, assess and train Special Olympics athletes for sport competition.
  - **Athlete Selection:** The Special Olympics coach will recruit athletes and properly complete and submit all required medical and registration material by established deadlines.
  - **Assessment:** The Special Olympics coach will assess each athlete to determine the individual and/or team skill level for training and competition in selected sports.
  - **Training:** The Special Olympics coach will develop an individualized training program for each athlete. The program shall include instruction in fundamental skills, conditioning and competition rules. The training and competition program will be a minimum of eight (8) weeks.
2. To know, understand and abide by the Official Special Olympics Rules.
3. To know and understand the sport being coached.
4. To execute the moral and ethical responsibilities and duties of a coach.
  - Provide proper planning for each step of training and competition
  - Provide and maintain a safe and secure physical environment
  - Use acceptable and safe equipment
  - Ensure appropriate sport skills instruction and safe competition
  - Match athletes according to ability, size and strength
  - Continually assess each athlete for participation in appropriate activities within, not challenged beyond, his or her capabilities
  - Inform athletes of inherent risks associated with a specific sport
  - Ensure acceptable supervision and maintain an adequate assistant coach-to-athlete ratio
  - Provide appropriate medical support at all times
  - Maintain accurate records

## The Coaching Team

### Special Olympics Coach Description

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#### **Role of the Special Olympics Head Coach**

The head coach is ultimately responsible for the total practice environment of the athlete. The following responsibilities should be used as a checklist to ensure your athletes are being instructed in a safe and competent manner:

Know, understand and abide by the Special Olympics Sports Rules, the rules of the sport you are coaching and any modifications set forth by the international governing body of that sport. For more information on rules and the governing body for your sport, see the Special Olympics Official Sports Rules.

Know and understand the sport being coached, and develop a training program for each athlete that includes:

- conditioning
- instruction on competition and rules
- a minimum of eight weeks of training prior to any competition

Execute the legal duties of a coach:

- provide a safe environment
- properly plan the activity
- supervise the activity closely
- oversee and evaluate all assistant coaches for the sport

Coaches have a legal responsibility to be sure athletes know, understand and appreciate the risks of any sport in which they participate. You must repeatedly warn athletes of the potential for injury or harm, and teach them to recite back to you the safety precautions and the injuries that can occur if these procedures are not followed. Effective group teaching and safety depend on learning the rules of safety and etiquette for each sport.

The head coach may also be responsible for creating and managing the Special Olympics budget for your sport or team. Check with the local Special Olympics Coordinator to see if this is the case. Below is a simple template that can help determine the cost of your program.

Special Olympics [Insert Program Name] Training Budget Plan

Facility usage fees	X	# athletes, coaches	# days	=	
Equipment expenses	X	# athletes		=	
Transportation costs	X	# athletes, coaches, chaperones	# days	=	
Competition fees	X	# athletes	# events	=	
Housing	X	# rooms	# days	=	
Food/Beverage	X	# athletes, coaches, chaperones	# days	=	
Uniforms	X	# athletes, coaches, volunteers		=	
Training costs (clinics, orientations)	X			=	
Fundraising	X			=	
Printing				=	
Phone				=	
Misc. (sponsor, volunteer, gifts)					
<b>Total</b>					

If you are hosting a competition, you must also establish costs for the competition. Your expenses would include all of the above as well as:

- Opening/Closing Ceremonies
- Entertainment
- Rental equipment (tents, podium, public address system, etc.)
- Sponsor signs and banners
- Family, volunteer hospitality
- Equipment storage

**Coaching Tip**

- Seek in-kind donations from the community and sponsors whenever possible.

## Recruiting Coaches

### Special Olympics volunteers play a crucial role in running a Special Olympics Program

Any community sports program clearly depends on dedicated volunteers to develop a successful program that offers frequent, high-quality competition opportunities supported by fundamental instruction on the skills, rules and etiquette of the game. While it is helpful that coaches are sport knowledgeable, family members, athletes, teachers, neighbors and friends of Special Olympics athletes can be taught to coach the basic sports skills progression.

Programs can develop a network for recruitment of volunteers by following a three-step approach.

1. Solicit interest in the community

- Sport Specific Golf example

Look For...	Golf Example	List Your Sport
Who is the best at this sport?	Golf professional (LPGA/PGA)	
Who has access to facilities?	Golf course management	
Who enjoys and knows the sport?	Golf club members	
Who knows who ALL the people are that know and enjoy the sport?	Local, state, national golf associations	
Who has access to public relations to help recruit coaches?	Golf sports writers	
Who do you enjoy playing this sport with?	Your golfing buddies	

- Non Sport Specific

Look For...	Example	List Your Sport
Where do people who like sports congregate?	Parks and recreation department	
Where might you find energetic sports volunteers?	High schools, colleges	
Who has the most invested in having a team?	Athletes and families	
Where might you find people who have coached Special Olympics before?	Existing Special Olympics Program	
Who might be a help with special populations sport?	Physical/recreational therapists	
Where do you find large numbers of volunteer-minded people?	Fraternal and civic organizations	
Where do you find people who are interested in coaching?	Sport community in general	
Who is motivated to volunteer?	Church groups	
Who might need to do community service?	High school students	
Who do you enjoy working with?	Your own family and friends	

2. Link with those who have shared an interest in your Program
  - The greatest success has come when a local Program has been able to link with sports professionals or teams in their geographic area.
3. Work with the sport community to create a realistic and workable plan, providing competition as the focal point.

### **Athletes as Coaches**

Special Olympics athletes are the leaders of the movement. Through Special Olympics Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPs), athletes explore opportunities in roles previously considered “nontraditional.” A program or initiative could be considered ALPs if it:

- Allows athletes to choose how they might participate (i.e., selecting their sport or deciding to become a coach)
- Encourages an athlete to serve in meaningful leadership roles other than or in addition to that of “competitor”
- Provides training for existing leadership as they welcome and encourage athletes in new roles

### **Athlete coaching responsibilities might include**

- Assist in skills demonstrations and training
- Serve as a rules or tournament official
- Representation on a tournament subcommittee
- Manage equipment for trainings and competitions
- Confirm practice times with fellow athletes, coaches, families and volunteers
- Maintain coaches and athlete statistics and attendance records
- Complete various data entry
- Prepare and break down of practice areas

If you have athletes who express an interest in coaching, you might show them the following handout and assist them with following through on the points covered there.

Special Olympics also offers Athletes as Coaches workshops at state and local levels. Contact your local Special Olympics Program to see when the next one will be offered.

### **From Competing to Coaching: Special Olympics Athletes Taking Leadership Roles**

1. Are you ready for a new challenge in Special Olympics?
2. Do you know how to talk with other athletes so that they understand what you mean?
3. Do you like helping the coach?

If the answer to any of those questions is yes, then it may be time for you to think about becoming a coach or coach’s assistant.

To become a certified Special Olympics coach you will need to attend a Coaches Training School. You can ask your local coordinator when and where the next one will be held for the sport you want to coach. Whether you want to be a

## The Coaching Team Recruiting Coaches

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head coach or a coach's assistant, it is a good idea to attend the Training School. You'll learn a lot about your sport and what the coach is supposed to do. And the coaches there will learn a lot from you about how to talk with athletes.

You may want to ask someone to help you go through the process of registering for the Training School, getting to class and then finding a coaching assignment. We call this your "support person." A support person might be a parent of brother or sister; it might be a coach you have now; or it might just be a friend. You will need to talk with your support person about what you need.

### **What does a coach do?**

Coaching is made up three different jobs

The first job is to plan the practices. This means that you have to think about your players and what they need to learn to improve at their sport. The coach works to plan each practice session before the players arrive so that the athletes learn a new skill or improve on one they already know. The coach has to make sure the athletes don't get frustrated. This takes practice and knowing what skills are needed, how to teach those skills and how to work with each athlete.

The second job is to conduct the practice. This job requires that you be able to get and keep the players' attention and to set up the workout so that everyone is doing something most of the time. Knowing how to talk with athletes is very important. A coach's assistant is someone who helps conduct the practice but is not in charge of planning the practice.

The third job is to make sure the athletes get to competition. Part of this job is to fill out registration forms, procure transportation to the competition, make sure the team gets to the gym or field on time and get them through the competition. Some coaches have an assistant that just does the paperwork so the coach can work to ensure athletes are ready to compete.

Some people find that they are ready to do some of these jobs, but not all of them. They become coach's assistants. They still go through Coaches Training School, but they ask to be assigned to a head coach who will be in charge.

### **How do I know I'm ready to be a coach?**

Nobody knows for sure until they try it! Many people volunteer to be Special Olympics coaches and then find it just wasn't for them. You may find same thing once you go through the Coaches Training School. The best way to determine if you are ready to be a coach is to watch a coach and ask yourself if that is what you want to do. If you really want to do it, you are probably ready!

Another way to see if you are ready is to ask your coach if you can be an assistant. Ask him/her to show you how to plan the workouts, set up the practice and get ready for competition. Ask if you can help with one or more of those jobs. If you like doing that job(s) and you want to learn more, you can ask about going to a Coaches Training School in that sport.

### **What should I do if I think I am ready to be a coach?**

First, talk to your coach to get his/her ideas. He/she needs to know that you are ready to move on to coaching and may be able to give you some practice being a coach's assistant while you are waiting to go to a Coaches Training School. Your coach can also help you decide whether you need a support person to help you through the certification process.

Second, talk to your local Special Olympics coordinator and ask when and where the next Coaches Training School will be held for your sport. You can also talk to him/her about a possible coaching assignment once you get certified. Most people start as a coach's assistant for at least one year before assuming more responsibility. By letting the coordinator know that you are going through this training, you are letting them know that you are their newest volunteer.

Third, study the Sport Skill Guide for the sport you want to coach. Your coach or coordinator should be able to give you a copy. It will tell you how Special Olympics recommends that you teach the athletes the skills they will need. If you need help understanding the Sport Skill Guide, you can call on your support person to help.

## Developing Your Team

The key to developing your team is to surround yourself with a staff of people who understand the mission of the Special Olympics Program, the sport you are coaching, your coaching philosophy and are committed to helping you, as a head coach, accomplish more by doing less. Delegation of roles and responsibilities will provide organization, structure and assistance so that high quality training and competition experiences can be provided to athletes, volunteers and families. Below are a few helpful ways to demonstrate what might be involved when identifying volunteers for your team.

1. Identify the positions necessary to run a successful Special Olympics program in your sport. Before you invest too much time, check with the local Special Olympics coordinator to see if they have done something similar. Find out what you are responsible for and then write brief job descriptions for each position.
  - Assistant Coaches
  - Transportation Coordinator(s)
  - Competition Manager(s)
  - Fundraising Coordinator(s)
  - Public Relations Coordinator(s)
  - Equipment and Facility Coordinator(s)
2. Recruit a balanced staff of volunteers that:
  - have skills and schedules that complement each other
  - will make the time commitment you specify
  - are willing to be trained to work with the athletes and fulfill their roles
  - will accept delegation and enjoy the role selected
  - add resources and experience to the program
3. Hold orientation for coaches, families and volunteers to:
  - understand the mission and philosophy of Special Olympics
  - clarify roles and responsibilities
  - foster clear communication of all goals and objectives
  - continually motivate and encourage athlete participation
  - understand resource, facility, fundraising, transportation and equipment needs

### **Securing a Facility**

With the help of the local Special Olympics coordinator or sport association in your area (i.e. PGA Section Office for golf), identify potential sites in the geographic area and approach the facilities director about starting a program.

#### **Important issues to discuss with representatives of potential sites**

1. Use of available practice facilities, what is available and what will be off limits
2. Access to more sophisticated facilities when athletes demonstrate appropriate level of competence
3. Potential for reduced fees or donation of facility
4. Willingness of resident professional and/or staff to serve as a resource to volunteers on technical aspects of teaching fundamentals of the game
5. Willingness of resident professional and/or staff to assist in recruitment of coaches and partners by displaying fliers in the pro shop or at the front desk and discussing Special Olympics with people they identify as potential volunteers

#### **Gain the confidence of the professional by conveying your sensitivity to the demands of their job**

- Express your understanding of the need to create a schedule that is respectful of typical peak demands on the facility; for example, do not ask for golf tee times at 9 a.m. on a Saturday or access to a weight room at 5 p.m.
- Assure them of your commitment to provide Special Olympics athletes with the appropriate introduction to the game with respect to the rules, etiquette and pace of play.
- Communicate your commitment to providing a safe environment with appropriate supervision.

### **Athlete Recruitment and Registration**

Inform Special Olympics athletes of the opportunity to participate on your team, through the Special Olympics newsletter, fliers, announcements and include information about recruitment on meeting agendas, etc. Have athletes sign up through a formalized registration process as a group or individually.

### **Securing Equipment**

In order to introduce athletes to the game, a variety of equipment is necessary. The equipment should be sufficient to allow maximum participation from the outset and accommodate men, women, and youth.

### **Volunteer Recruitment and Registration**

It is difficult to determine how many volunteers should be recruited. The best way to handle this is to estimate the number of athletes you will have and derive an appropriate number of volunteers using a ratio of volunteers to athletes of 10-to-1.

The best place to recruit volunteers is through the facility where you will practice and play. Use the facility newsletter and strategically placed fliers. Have volunteers register through a formalized process.

### **Volunteer Orientation and Training**

Schedule a volunteer orientation and training session at the facility to be used for the program. If that is not possible, choose an appropriate venue such as a school. Schedule time to go to the facility to review what will happen on site during practice sessions.

### **Season Plan**

Athletes and volunteers have been identified. Create a season plan that covers 8-12 weeks of practice and play, culminating in a season-ending competition/tournament. Set a goal for one practice and one competition per week.

### **Athlete Orientation and Introduction to Volunteers**

Once athletes and volunteers have been identified, conduct a preliminary meeting to make introductions, outline the season plan and explain roles.

### **Special Olympics Families can play an important role in helping athletes learn sport skills.**

- The athletes' family members and friends are usually the most important influences in their lives.
- Family members can lend tremendous support by giving love and encouragement to the Special Olympics athletes' efforts in reaching their personal goals.
- Research has shown that when families participate in Special Olympics activities with their athletes they develop an increased sense of pride and respect for athletes' abilities and potential.

### **Coaches should involve the families of Special Olympics athletes in their athletes' training for several reasons**

1. Encourage families to help their athlete perform the skill at home.
  - Set aside time after the session to instruct the family member on how to assist the athlete in rehearsing the skill at home.
  - Give family members copies of home training plans, training schedules and competition dates and ask them to encourage proper preparation.
2. Have families help motivate their athlete in training and competition: establish small goals and reward the athlete when possible.
3. Help families understand their athlete's sport goals. Families' involvement and understanding of goals will result in more open and positive attitudes toward their athletes when they succeed in realizing their goals or when they fall short.
  - Encourage family members to attend a Special Olympics Coaches Training School to better prepare themselves to help their athletes. Host a family orientation before the start of the season
4. Foster quality family participation, encouraging family members to:
  - Practice and play the game as a family
  - Provide their athlete with transportation to and from practices and competition
  - Become a volunteer
  - Assist in providing equipment and securing venues
  - Participate in fundraising
  - Chaperone

Most sports can be enjoyed by the entire family regardless of the skill level. Coaches should work hard to involve the athlete's family and close friends.

## The Coaching Team Management Checklist

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### Management Checklist

1. Training facility secured
2. Volunteer needs are addressed and fulfilled
3. Coaches recruited and trained
4. Family Orientation
5. Equipment needs assessed and secured
6. Budget determined and managed
7. Potential sponsor contact list created and delegated to fundraising chair
8. Training, competition and transportation schedules established and confirmed
9. Athletes, families and volunteers distributed copies of season start dates, trainings and competition dates and confirmation of transportation arrangements
10. Athletes, coaches and volunteers have completed proper registration materials
11. Medical forms, release forms and accident/incident forms are available at all sessions
12. Goals and objectives of the season have been clarified with all coaches and volunteers
13. Regularly scheduled management and coaching team meeting are confirmed
14. Distribution, filing and updating of Individual Skills Tests, Daily Performance Records, Home Training Plans, Athlete Assessments, Special Olympics Golf Rules, Golf Resources, etc., will ensure proper record keeping
15. Notify media prior, during and after season about Special Olympics events
16. Acknowledge appreciation to all volunteers, sponsors and athletes

## Retaining Athletes and Coaches

The strategic plan for Special Olympics states that frequent and high quality competition opportunities must be provided to stimulate and sustain athlete participation. Developing appropriate, meaningful training and competition will increase the Program's ability to recruit and retain athletes and coaches.

The coach-to-athlete ratio has a major impact. It is important to provide 1-to-1 instruction to all athletes, regardless of ability. Use of peer coaches to provide 1-to-1 training has been effective in improving skill levels and in fostering inclusion.

Having several assistant coaches allows the head coach to delegate his responsibilities and authority. This reduces the burden on the coach, gives each volunteer a very important and meaningful role and ensures a long-term commitment by all.

Reports from the field state that a critical time in the retention of athletes is the period when they graduate from school move into community work programs. Separation from family and friends and familiar programs often creates a time of transition. A coordinated effort among the Special Olympics program, family, and school is important to ensure that Special Olympics is part of the athlete's transition plan. In that way, athletes can both make appropriate and timely transitions into community-based sports programs as well as continue a meaningful part of their life.

### **Our goal is to introduce athletes to a lifetime of sport.**

Athletes can be encouraged to train and compete in sports at any age. As physical skills diminish or the demands of training become too difficult in one sport, another sport can be found that would allow continued participation. The opportunity to compete, experience success and gain respect of peers will keep athletes, coaches and volunteers motivated.

### **Will Mann, Past President, PGA of America:**

"Special Olympics offers a wonderful opportunity for boys and girls, men and women, to share in the fulfillment that golf provides. The infectious enthusiasm of Special Olympics athletes demonstrates that golf is more than a game; it is a purpose for living."

That is the sort of inclusive attitude we seek for our athletes. Our duty as coaches is to prepare our athletes to take up the invitations of Mr. Mann and his peers in other sports.