

Level 2 Softball

The Level 2 Softball training is designed for Special Olympics Minnesota coaches who would like to become a Level 2 softball coach and/or for volunteers who would like information about Special Olympics Minnesota softball. This training counts as Level 2 certification and/or recertification for three years from the date this training is completed.

This training will cover Special Olympics Minnesota's softball events, rules, competitions, the divisioning process, registration and softball resources.

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Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

Coaching Special Olympics Athletes prepares Special Olympics coaches to use their sport-specific knowledge in coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities. This course meets the Special Olympics standards and competencies for coach certification. For veteran Special Olympics coaches, this course serves as a reminder of the essentials sometimes forgotten after years of coaching. For new Special Olympics coaches, this course will help prepare you for your first role in coaching Special Olympics athletes.

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Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

*The better the **coach** ...
the better the **experiences** ...
the better the **athlete!***



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Course Overview

This course will cover specific topics related to:

1 - The Athlete

3 - Preparing for
& Coaching During
Competition



2 - Teaching &
Training

4 - Managing the Program



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Unit 1 - The Athlete

Important Considerations concerning Special Olympics Athletes

Psychological Issues (*Learning*)

Medical
Issues



Social
Issues

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Unit 1 - Psychological Considerations

Motivation – helping athletes maintain interest

- May have shorter attention span; harder to keep independently “on task”.
- May be motivated more by short-term rather than long-term goals.
- May learn better with more frequent positive reinforcement.

Perception – helping athletes understand the sport in which they are participating

- May have impairments in sight or hearing.
- May have difficulty focusing attention on the appropriate object or task.



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Unit 1 - Psychological Considerations

Comprehension – helping athletes remember and perform the skill they have learned
(*Understanding*)

- May find it difficult to understand purely verbal explanations of new skills. Often find it easier to learn through visual demonstrations and physical prompts.
- May have difficulty in understanding complex, multi-part actions or explanations.
- Often take a longer time between learning one piece of information and the next (learning plateau)
- Less able to generalize skills learned in one situation to a different situation.

Memory

- May need frequent repetition and reminders in order to remember concept or skill

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Unit 1 - Psychological Challenges

Each psychological item has it's challenge and action:

Psychological Item	Challenge	Action
Perception	Easily distracted by noise	Control surroundings
Motivation	History of neglect & negative reinforcement, feeling of failure	Focus on positive, appropriate reinforcement, catch the athlete doing well
Memory	Difficulty applying skills in different environments	Practice in different settings
Comprehension	Difficulty learning through verbal explanation only	Add demonstrations and/or physical manipulation

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Unit 1 - Medical Considerations

Down Syndrome

- Approximately 10% of individuals with Down Syndrome have a condition called atlanto-axial instability, which is a mal-alignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and C-2 in the neck. This condition may cause possible injury if they participate in activities that hyper-extend or radically flex the neck or upper spine.
- Prohibited sports – equestrian, gymnastics, diving, pentathlon, butterfly and dive starts in aquatics, high jump, alpine/snowboarding, squat lift and soccer.

Medications

- Understand the physical side effects of an athlete's medication
- Very important to know the medications athletes are taking



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Unit 1 - Medical Considerations

Seizures

- Incidence tends to be higher with Special Olympics athletes
- Athlete safety to minimize the adverse effects of a seizure



Physical Disabilities

- Some athletes also have physical disabilities which may affect the sports they can participate in or the methods of teaching a coach must use. Special Olympics has events for individuals who use wheelchairs, walkers or other assistance.
- Muscle strength may be needed for particular sports and some athletes may not have the strength for those sports. This is often due to lack of use rather than a permanent disability.

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Unit 1 - Medical Considerations

Autism

- 20% of athletes exhibit one or more of the autism spectrum disorders
- Over arousal

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

- These athletes consistently function better on performance tasks compared with verbal tasks. The more concrete the task, the better the performance.
- Tend to have poor verbal comprehension skills, despite being comfortable and chatty around people. These athletes will also tend to have attention and memory deficits and often display poor judgment in distinguishing right from wrong.



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Unit 1 – Medical Consideration for Each Action

Action	See the challenge that correlates with the appropriate action.
1 Down Syndrome	Ensure the athlete is screened for atlanto-axial instability
2 Seizures	Be prepared to protect the athlete and minimize adverse affects
3 Autism spectrum disorders	Control and/or block self-stimulatory behavior and set up a behavior support plan
4 Attention deficit/hyperactivity	Shorten drills and provide one-to-one assistance when needed
5 Fetal alcohol syndrome	Provide concrete performance tasks

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Unit 1 - Social Considerations

Social Skills

- May lack basic social/adaptive skills due to a lack of opportunity or training
- Lacking communication and positive interaction with others

Recreation at Home

- Lack of physical activity
- Lack of encouragement

Economic Status

- May lack financial means
- May not have access to independent transportation



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Unit 1 - Social Considerations

All of the following social consideration(s) may impact an athlete's participation in Special Olympics:

- Inappropriate responses to social situations
- Physical inactivity being modeled
- Lack of endurance
- Lack of access to transportation

Our challenge as coaches is to develop a full understanding of our athletes and the strengths and weaknesses they bring with them to a Special Olympics program. By doing so we can begin to develop a training and competition program that they will benefit from and enjoy.

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Unit 2 – Teaching & Training the Athlete



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Unit 2 - Teaching & Training the Athlete

There are many ways to organize a training session for Special Olympics athletes. Because of some of the things previously identified concerning comprehension and memory, there is considerable value in developing a consistent training routine that provides familiarity, stability, and comfort.

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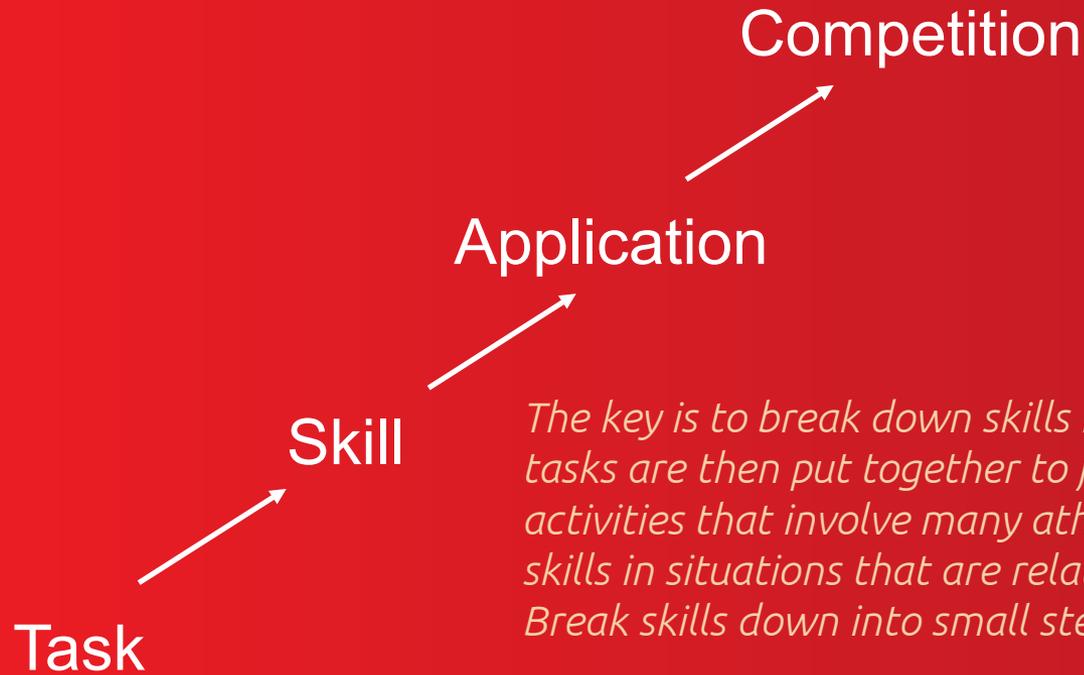
Unit 2 - Organizing a Training Session

Component and Details	Layout of Drill or Activity
Warm-Up & Stretching	Specific to the sport, repetitive and involve athletes in leading activity
Skills Instruction	Break skills into smaller tasks, involve many athletes at a time and practice skills related to event situations
Competition Experience	Scrimmage, simulate event/game situations and work towards what the competition will look like
Cool-Down, Stretch, & Reward	Playing a game related to that sport and ending each training with a cool down activity and stretch

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Unit 2 - Training Sequence



The key is to break down skills into small tasks or steps; tasks are then put together to form skills. Use drills and activities that involve many athletes at all times. Practice skills in situations that are related to the game or event. Break skills down into small steps.



Unit 2 - Training Sequence

What's the challenge and how to fix it?

Training Sequence Element	Challenge	Action
Application	Acquire ability to repeatedly demonstrate sport competencies in different situations & environments	Provide gamelike drills or situations
Skills	Acquire ability to perform series of sport competencies effectively and necessary to perform a sport	Work on essential sport competencies to perform the sport
Competition	Acquire ability to put essential sport competencies into practice	Provide scrimmage opportunities in practice
Tasks	Acquire ability to perform essential sport competencies	Break essential sport competencies down into individual parts

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Unit 2 - Communication

Communication is key to immediately reinforcing desired behavior; there are several key words that begin with a "C", which address what a coach should say.

- Clear
- Concrete
- Concise
- Consistent
- Command-oriented



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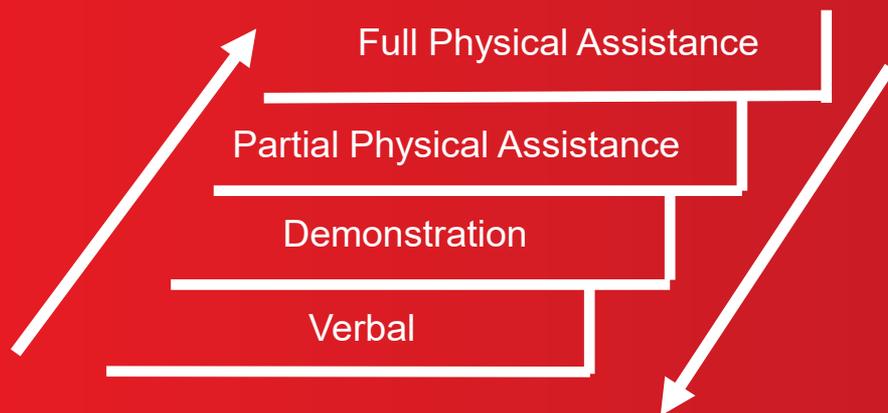
Unit 2 - Communication

Communication Criteria	Description	Sport Example
Concise	Use a few key words that cue a desired action	"Go to the free throw line" Showing an athlete where to stand on defense
Consistent	Use the same word or phrase for the same action	Coach constantly say "Breathe" – teaching an athlete when to take a breath in aquatics
Clear	Use easy to understand words that have one meaning	"Swing the bat" teaching how/when to swing.
Command-Oriented	Use words that elicit or reinforce a desired action	"On your mark. Set. Go." Using this phrase for starts in athletics.
Concrete	Connect words to something defined or tangible	"Jump forward" when coaching an athlete in the long jump.

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Unit 2 - Levels of Assistance



Each athlete needs to be met where he or she is and with what each individual is ready to do. It is important to use the appropriate level of instruction and assistance.

- The lower the ability athlete, the more assistance may be required
- Verbal should always be accompanied by demonstration
- Partial physical assistance may be needed to help the athlete get positioned properly
- When all else fails, take the athlete through the complete motion

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Unit 2 - Level of Instruction or Assistance

Level of Instruction or Assistance	Description	Sport Example
Full Physical Assistance	Help the athlete through the entire motion of the skill	Volleyball: coach makes an adjustment to the athlete's arm swing by moving the athlete's arm through the entire spiking movement
Verbal	Tell the athlete what to do	Footwork: "run forward to the line; then return, running backward"
Demonstration	Show the athlete the proper technique	Soccer: one athlete shoots on goal while another watches
Partial Physical Assistance	Place the athlete's hands in the proper position	Golf: coach physically adjusts the athlete's hands on the golf club with the correct grip

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Unit 2 - Managing Athlete Behavior

The goal is for coaches to meet each athlete where he/she is and treat him/her accordingly. However, a coach may often have certain expectations of an athlete that may not be realistic ... not because the coach does not care, but because the coach does not understand or appreciate the differences that may exist.

When an athlete exhibits what is generally perceived as inappropriate behavior, the inappropriate behavior may not be defiance, acting out or silliness. These behaviors may simply be a reflection or part of the person and/or what is operating in the moment.

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Unit 2 - Managing Athlete Behavior

Athlete Behavior Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning
Swimmer has a short attention span	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Dwell on a stroke or activity for short periods of time; provide numerous activities focusing on same task2. Provide different opportunities for repetition and review, which is the key to gaining new skill.3. Work one-on-one to gain full attention.
Basketball athlete yells if he/she misses a shot	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Emphasize the other aspects of the game besides shooting2. Work on shooting drills without a hoop3. Begin to shoot at a hoop but in a non-game setting with a one-on-one coach
Bowler doesn't wait their turn	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Have a coach at the lane help with the order of bowlers, explain whose turn it is2. Have the bowler wait with a coach behind the bowling area until their turn is up3. Emphasize the order and that the bowler will always follow the same individual



Unit 3 - Preparing & Coaching for Competition

- A key goal of Special Olympics is to provide an opportunity for all athletes to experience success in competitions.
- A Special Olympics athlete can benefit from many aspects of a competition (including meeting new people, participating in the festivities of Opening Ceremonies and other social events, the excitement of traveling to new places and staying away from home, etc.). None of these things, however, should be as important to the coach as the focus on the participation in the competition itself.

This section highlights ways to improve the quality of an athlete's competition experience.

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Unit 3 - Preparing for Competition

Registration

- Provide accurate entry and team roster information, qualifying times, and skills assessment scores.
- Help the Competition Committee prepare a successful competition for your athletes by meeting their registration deadlines.

Official competition rules

- A good Competition Committee will instruct its officials/referees to enforce the Official Special Olympics Rules. Make sure you know them.
- Teach your athletes the rules and, during training, phase out your verbal reminders about rules. At competition, coaches may have little or no opportunity to assist athletes when they are not following the rules.
(A coach cannot be on the track with them!)



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Unit 3 - Preparing for Competition

Supervision

- Discuss the challenges associated with participating in competition away from home, and why adequate, non-coaching support personnel are needed.
 - Transportation
 - Lodging (need for same-sex supervision)
 - Social activities
 - Coaches meetings (who will supervise athletes during these?)
 - Multiple events to supervise, awards ceremonies, etc.
- Design a supervision worksheet with the essential elements covered.



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Unit 3 - Preparing for Competition

Travel and Overnight

- Discuss overnight concerns with parents or group-home supervisors.
- Write up a simple checklist of items to bring and distribute to athletes and parents
- Make sure that all special medication needs are understood. Coaches may have to assist with handling medications. Have all medical forms and information readily available at all times.
- Work out the most effective rooming arrangements, taking into account athlete choice, behavioral and personality clashes, etc.

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Unit 3 - Competition-Day Coaching

Guidelines for success:

Teach responsibility & independence

- Assist athletes in dressing appropriately, understanding what is happening at the competition site, maintaining a focused attitude and appropriate behavior.

Arrive early

- Allow time for putting on uniforms, warm-up and stretching routine and focusing on the competition.

Encourage maximum effort in divisioning & competition

- Applying the “honest-effort” rule from the Special Olympics Rule book

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Unit 3 - Competition-Day Coaching

Guidelines for success:

Let athletes compete without direct supervision

- Not running down the side of the track shouting instructions, allowing the competition officials to conduct the competition and allowing athletes to make mistakes and helping them learn from their mistakes.

Make any official protests calmly

- If you think there is a valid reason to protest the outcome, do so in a calm manner, following the competition guidelines and not involving athletes in disputes with officials.

Help athletes learn from winning & losing

- Deal graciously and realistically with winning and losing. Focus on effort made, recognize accomplishments and new skills that were performed and taking something positive away from the experience.

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Unit 3 - Competition-Day Coaching

The coach can be the key person who makes any competition experience a good one.

Taking time to adequately prepare for competition and plan for on-site supervision and that coaching is time well spent.

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Unit 4 – Managing the Program

The successful Special Olympics coach:

Is sports and coaching knowledgeable

- Special Olympics is a sport organization
- Technical knowledge of the sport and how to teach it is essential if coaches are to effectively help athletes improve their sport skills and truly benefit from Special Olympics.
- Successful coaches are constantly looking for opportunities to learn more about the sport.

Is Special Olympics knowledgeable

- Special Olympics has a clearly defined mission, philosophy, and rules that have been developed through years of worldwide experience with athletes with intellectual disabilities.
- A better understanding of these will benefit your athletes.

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Unit 4 – Managing the Program

The successful Special Olympics coach:

Recruits and trains assistant coaches

- Individualized coach-athlete teaching is key to successful training in Special Olympics.
- Assistant coaches can be recruited to help provide individualized attention.
- Assistant coaches are useful only if they are trained and coordinated at practice.

Recruits and trains athletes

- A coach is also a promoter and recruiter; always tries to expand participation

Assists with appropriate sport selection

- Age appropriate, is the athlete able to participate safely and successfully and does the athlete have a choice of participating in a different sport or event.

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Unit 4 – the Successful Special Olympics coach:

Offers activities for all abilities

- In order to accommodate a range of abilities

Puts a priority on safety

- This is the coach's number one priority

Conducts high-quality training and competition

- Appropriate training, activities such as training days or camps, helps develop pride in being an athlete and organizes competition opportunities if none exist

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Unit 4 – the Successful Special Olympics coach:

Involves families

- Educates families and group-home providers about the benefits of Special Olympics, appropriate nutrition and food choices and training at home.

Assists with community inclusion

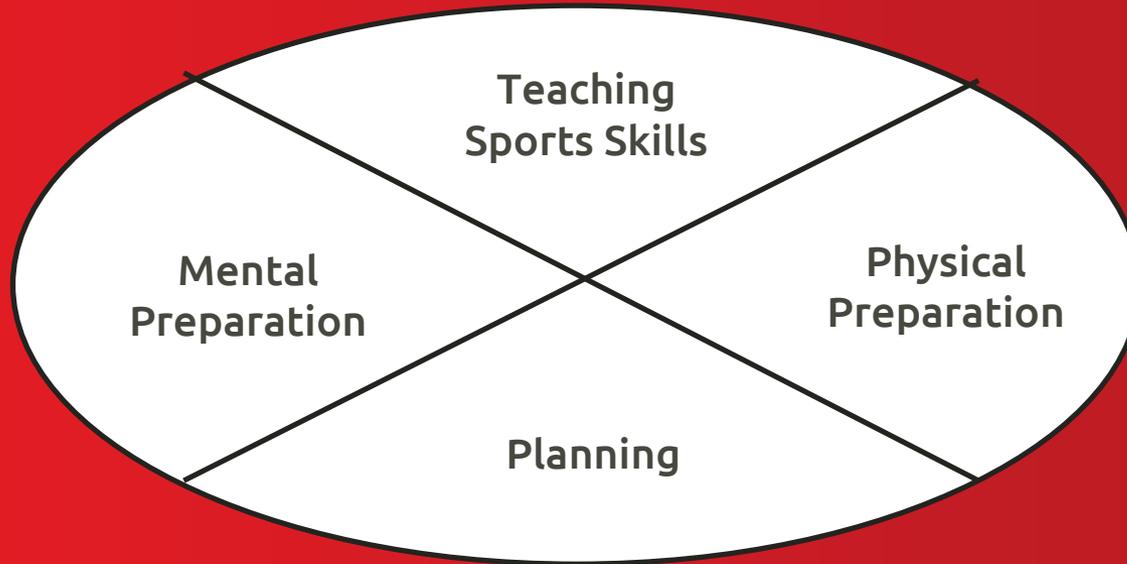
- Improves social and communication skills, opportunities to talk about Special Olympics at civic functions and assistance in joining non-Special Olympics sports opportunities

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Unit 4 – Area of Focus

Athlete Safety



Coaching Philosophy

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Unit 4 – Preparation

Assessment



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Improved Performance & Well-Being

- TRAINING ⇒ the key
- COMPETITION ⇒ the means
- OUTCOMES ⇒ skill, confidence, courage, & joy
- GOAL ⇒ better preparation for life
- RESULTS ⇒ lifelong skills, acceptance & increased independence



Let's Get After It and Get It Done!

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SOMN Health Programs

SOMN offers health programs to integrate into your sports season to enhance your athletes performance, health, nutritional knowledge and overall wellbeing.

- SOFit- unified approach to improving and protecting health and wellness for people with and without intellectual disabilities. Comprehensive, 360 degree look at wellness and human spirit.
 - 8 weeks, unified pairs
 - Coaches lead educational topics including: cooking, healthy grocery shopping, importance of varying workouts, healthy beverage choices.
 - Customizable to groups interest
 - Four pillars of wellness: physical, nutrition, emotional and social.
 - Coaches Manual includes all lessons and activities. Athlete Playbook allows athletes to track lessons and activities.

Questions? Want materials?

Contact Kelsey Sparks | Health Programs Coordinator Kelsey.sparks@somn.org

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SOMN Health Programs

SOMN offers health programs to integrate into your sports season to enhance your athletes performance, health, nutritional knowledge and overall wellbeing.

- Fit5
 - Plan for physical activity, nutrition and hydration
 - Recommending 5 days of physical activity, 5 fruits and vegetables and 5 bottles of water
 - Fitness cards offer exercises to challenge abilities. These can be done at practice, the gym and home.
 - Build your practice using fitness cards to focus on endurance, flexibility, and strength
 - Athlete handbook to track progress and follow program at home

[Start now! Fit5 Guide and Training Cards](#)

Questions? Want materials?

Contact Kelsey Sparks | Health Programs Coordinator Kelsey.sparks@somn.org

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Level 2 Softball

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Level 2 Softball

Coach ratio per team:

Athletes	Level II	Level I
3-4	1	0
5-8	1	1
9-12	1	2
13-16	1	3
17-20	1	4

Roster size: (traditional, coach pitch and Unified)
11-20 athletes

All Coaches and Unified Partners must complete the Level 1 certification prior to their participation with a team. Level 1 certification requires a Volunteer Application and Level 1 online training and both items are found [here](#).



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SOMN Softball Events

Special Olympics Minnesota softball events

Individual Skills - athletes compete in skill stations in base running, hitting, throwing and fielding

Coach Pitch - athletes compete in slow pitch softball with a coach pitching to them. Athletes that need a tee should register for coach pitch and note they need tee assistance.

Traditional Softball - slow pitch softball (11-20 athletes per team)

Unified Softball - individuals with and without intellectual disabilities compete on the same team in slow pitch softball (11-20 athletes/Unified partners - minimum of 5 Unified partners)

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SOMN Softball Events

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Individual Skills

Individual Skills Competition is not for athletes who can compete in traditional or coach pitch softball.

Individual Skills Events: Base Race, Throwing, Fielding and Hitting.

Area competition - offered at Area

State competition - if an athlete wants to attend State they must compete at Area first

Individual Skills athletes may also compete in Unified Softball during the same season and competition. But Individual Skills athletes may not compete on a traditional or coach pitch team because schedules may conflict.

Skill Stations

Athletes that compete in Individual Skills must participate in Individual Skills at practice and record their score on the registration form. Each athlete must complete each skill station at practice.

Practice - please click the links below for help in running Individual Skills at practice.

At practice you may use this [Individual Skills score sheet](#) to record an athlete's score. The [Special Olympics, Inc. Softball Rules](#) list the dimensions for each skill station.

(dimensions are found on page 14-17)



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Individual Skills

Base Running - Speed on the bases

Bases are positioned 65 feet apart. The athlete is instructed to start on home plate, and run around the bases as fast as possible, touching each base in route.

Scoring: The time starts when the athlete leaves home plate and stops when the athlete returns to home plate. A penalty of five seconds for each base missed shall be assessed. The best score of two trials is recorded.

Base Running Score = 60 seconds - (athlete's time)

Example: 60-48.5= Base Running Score 11.5

Throwing – distance and accuracy

The athlete throws behind the restraining line (athlete may take one or two steps to approach the line to throw). An athlete has two attempts to throw the softball as far and as straight as possible down the throwing line, without stepping over the restraining line. The better of the two throws is measured and recorded as the player's score. If a player steps on or over the restraining line before releasing the ball, the trial must be repeated. There will be a maximum of two repeats.

Scoring: The throwing score equals the throwing distance minus the error distance. Scores and distance are measured to the nearest meter.

Throwing Score = If a ball lands at 50.3 meters but is 6.8 meters off to one side, the player's score is 43 points (score rounded down).

Example: 50.3 meters distance – 6.8 side error = 43.5 = Throwing Score 43

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Individual Skills

Fielding – fielding ability

The athlete will stand between and behind two cones. The official must throw the ball on the ground to the athlete, between the cones. The throw to the athlete must hit the ground before the 20 feet chalk mark, the thrower should be 65 feet from the athlete. The athlete may move aggressively toward the ball. If the thrown ball is outside of the cones, the throw must be repeated. Each athlete gets five fielding attempts per trial. Each athlete receives two trials.

Scoring: The athlete receives five points for a clearly fielded ball (either caught in glove or trapped against the body, but off the ground); two points for a ball that is blocked; zero points for a missed attempt.

Example:

Trial 1

- 1st attempt – 5 points (clearly fielded)
- 2nd attempt – 5 points (clearly fielded)
- 3rd attempt – 2 points (ball blocked, not fielded)
- 4th attempt – 0 points (missed)
- 5th attempt – 5 points (clearly fielded)

Fielding Score = 33 (Trial 1 + Trial 2)

Trial 2

- 1st attempt – 5 points (clearly fielded)
- 2nd attempt – 2 points (ball blocked, not fielded)
- 3rd attempt – 2 points (ball blocked, not fielded)
- 4th attempt – 2 points (ball blocked, not fielded)
- 5th attempt – 5 points (clearly fielded)

Hitting – ability to hit for distance off a batting tee

Standing in a batter's box, the athlete hits the ball off the tee. The athlete receives three attempts.

Scoring: The distance of the longest hit shall determine the athlete's final score. The distance of a hit is measured from the batting tee to the point where the ball first touches the ground. If the distance falls between meters, distance should be rounded down; for example, 46.75 meters equals 46 points.

Hitting Score: Furthest distance was 46.75 meters = Hitting Score = 46

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Traditional Softball

Traditional softball teams must have 11-20 athletes on their team roster.

Traditional softball events offered at:

Area competition

Regional competition - no game fees, additional competition experience for teams

State competition - if an athlete wants to attend State they must compete at Area first

Traditional softball athletes may also compete in Unified Softball during the same season and competition.



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Traditional Softball Rules

Rules of competition for Amateur Softball Association and Special Olympics International will be used for all events conducted by Special Olympics Minnesota. The rules listed below are highlights of the rules of competition along with any exceptions.

Equipment

Ball- 52 core or less, 300 compression, 12-inch stitch.

Helmets – Batters/Runners must wear at all times while in live ball territory. Athletes coaching from coach box must have a helmet on as well. (Athletes who remove their helmet during play shall be declared out.)

Catcher – must wear a helmet, face mask and chest protector. Shin guards are optional.

No jewelry allowed. No metal cleats including metal tips. No wood bats.

Game Length and Field

Length of Game – Seven innings or a 70-minute maximum time limit. NO new inning will begin after 60 minutes (Exception to go over 70 minutes is that teams must have equal batting opportunities)

Mercy Rule - If a team has a 10-run lead after the completion of five innings the game will be over.

Tie Game – Extra innings will be played with a maximum of two extra innings. If the game remains tied after the completion of both extra innings, the result will be determined by going back to the last inning when a team had the lead.

Pitching Rubber – 40–50 feet from home plate.

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Traditional Softball Rules

Roster

- **Roster Size** – 11 minimum, 20 maximum. Team must start the game with at least 10 athletes; if one is lost to injury, a team may continue to play, but anytime that athlete is due up an out will be declared. If a team loses another player and go down to 8 or less players the game is forfeited. The teams may finish out the game/time limit but the game will be recorded as a forfeit.
- **Batting Order** – Teams are allowed to bat all athletes only if the opposing team agrees to it. Should the opposing team not agree to it, then a maximum of 11 athletes may bat. Batting order must remain the same.
- **Extra Hitter (EH)** – An extra eleventh player can be used in the game. The EH must play the entire game and must bat in the same batting order. You may substitute for the EH and place them in any defensive position, but the sub will bat in the same position. The original EH may re-enter the game. A sub for the EH can be anybody who has not already played in the game. If the EH leaves the game without a sub, an out will be called. You must inform the umpire and opposing team if you choose to use an EH.
- **Substitutions** – A position player removed from the game due to substitution (not injury) may return to the game one time as a substitute but will not be allowed to re-enter the game if substituted for a second time. Players who bat in a position in the batting order other than the one previously occupied by the player they are replacing will be declared out.
- **Ejections** – Players who are ejected can be replaced with a substitute. Ejected players will be done playing for the day.

Game-play Rules

- **Batting** – Three outs per inning or a maximum of 10 batters per inning.
- **Pitching** – The ball must be pitched in an underhand motion and should travel in an arc no less than 6 feet and no more than 12 feet.
- **Balls and Strikes** – Each batter will begin with a one ball and one strike count. After reaching two strikes, one courtesy foul will be allowed, but a foul ball after one courtesy foul will constitute the third strike and the batter is out.

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Game-play Rules (continued)

- **Infield Fly Rule** – Will be used when there is less than two outs and a force out at third or home-plate. Any ball hit up in the infield which can be caught with ordinary effort (by either an infielder/outfielder) will be called an infield fly and the batter will be out. The runners may advance at their own risk. If the ball is caught they must tag up. If the ball is not caught, they do not need to tag up. This call is considered an umpire's judgment and cannot be protested.
- **Balls Out of Play** – Balls leaving the playing area are considered dead balls and play stops immediately. The runner(s) will be awarded two bases, the base they are running to at the time of the throw and the following base.
- **Batter/Runner** – While running the bases athletes cannot be touched and encouraged to run in a certain direction by a coach. If a coach touches or encourages a player with physical actions, the batter/runner will be declared out. If incidental conduct occurs, there will be no action taken against the batter/runner.
- **Intentional Walks** – due to the limited amount of batters per inning, intentional walks are not allowed. If a batter is intentionally walked the offensive team is given another maximum batter.
- **Sliding** – When there is a close play at a base, the runner should make all attempts to avoid unnecessary contact. Sliding is encouraged during plays but not required. If a runner runs over a defensive player the runner will be called out.
- **Protests** – Not allowed on judgment calls – only on rule interpretations
- **Appeals** – Are defined as a play in which an umpire is unable to make a decision unless he/she is requested to do so by a coach or player. Appeals are allowed when there is a question about a player leaving a base too soon, missing a base, or a check swing. If time has been called, the defensive team must set itself and request judgment from the umpire on the play in question.

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Game-play Rules (continued)

- **Courtesy Runner** – must be a rostered player. The last player to be called out will be the only player allowed to be used for a courtesy runner. Only one runner per inning
- **Base Coaching** – Athletes, Unified Partners and coaches will be allowed to be base coaches on first and third base. They must wear a helmet at all times and cannot come into physical contact with runners, contest calls from the umpire or interfere with defensive players. Athletes/Unified partners are allowed to be in the batting order and can be replaced as a coach by another athlete/Unified Partner for their plate appearance.
- **Defensive Obstruction-** defensive players cannot hinder the progress of a runner by blocking the base or base path without possession of the ball.
- **Leading off-** players cannot lead off, must stay on the base until the ball is hit.
- **Delay of Game-** at the umpire's discretion, teams will first receive a warning for delaying progression of game during switching innings, batting players, or other notable instances. If continues after first warning, teams will receive an out for that offensive player. If occurring on defense, team will begin their following at bat with one out.
- **Team forfeit-** if teams forfeit 50% or more of their games at a competition, they will receive a participation ribbon. Forfeited games will be marked as a 0-10 loss on schedule.
- **Tie breaker-** Two teams: places will be determined by head to head competition. Three or more teams: places will be determined based on runs scored against. Teams with the fewest runs scored against will be ranked number one and so forth for second, third and other remaining places.

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Coach Pitch

Coach Pitch (with T-Ball Assistance)

- **Pitches** - A six-pitch, three-swing rule will be enforced in coach pitch softball. After six pitches or three swings, whichever comes first, the batter will be declared out. Players cannot be walked.
- **Pitcher** - A coach from the team batting will do the pitching, but the defensive team will still field an athlete in the pitcher position. The coach pitching does not field at all, but they can defend themselves. A dead ball will be declared if the ball contacts the coach, and the batter/runners will be awarded one base. It's the umpire's discretion on awarding the base if deemed the coach could not get out of the way.
- **Gameplay Rules** - All other rules in coach pitch softball are the same as traditional softball.



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Coach Pitch

•**T-Ball Assistance** – Athletes in Coach Pitch that need a tee may use a tee when they are batting. T-Ball assistance is meant for athletes that are unable to hit a pitch.

•**Registration** – Athletes using a tee must be noted that they need a tee when a team is registered. Only athletes that have been properly registered as needing T-Ball assistance are allowed to use a tee during competition. Athletes may not switch between coach pitch and tee during same at bat. Athletes may switch between at bats. Teams may only register up to half the roster for T-Ball assistance.

If an Athlete is planning on registering for T-Ball assistance, please see the additional T-Ball assistance rules:

•**Neutral Zone** – A 45-foot arc is marked from the first base line to the third base line. If a ball does not cross the arc, it is considered a foul ball. Players can rush the ball, if it is moving, but if the ball stops forward movement prior to the arc, it is a foul ball.

•**Strike Out** – Three strikes or if the batter has two strikes and fouls off the third attempt.



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Unified Softball

Unified Softball uses the traditional softball rules. Unified Softball rules are highlighted below.

Unified Softball Rules

- **Roster** - minimum 11, maximum 20. Equal number of athletes and Unified Partners.
- **Line Up** - 5 athletes and 5 Unified Partners. Teams must start the game with 10 players.
 - A team must start with at least 10 players; if one is lost to injury, a team may continue to play, but anytime that player is due up to bat, an out will be declared. If a team loses another player and go to 8 or less the game is forfeited. Teams may finish out the game/time limit, but the game will be recorded as a forfeit.
 - If a team has less than 10 players, then there must be an equal number of athletes and Unified Partners in the field or more athletes than Unified Partners in the field.
 - Starting line-up will be 10 players, no extra hitter (EH). Team do not have the option of batting their entire line-up
- **Batting Order**- athletes and Unified Partners must alternate. Order remains the same.
- **Defensive Positions**
 - Infield – two athletes and two Unified Partners
 - Outfield – two athletes and two Unified Partners
 - Pitch/Catcher – one athlete and one Unified Partner
- **Home Run Rule** - limit of two over-the-fence home runs in Unified games per team. Athletes and Unified Partner over-the-fence home runs count towards the two. If an additional over-the-fence home run is hit, the ball is dead, the batter is out and no runners can advance.

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Unified Softball

- **Courtesy Runner** – must be a rostered player. The last player to be called out will be the only player allowed to be used for a courtesy runner. Only one runner per inning. Unified player can only sub for another Unified partner and athlete for athlete.
- **Gameplay Rules** - All of Special Olympics Minnesota softball rules are used.

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Unified Softball Safety

Unified Softball Safety Rules

1st, 3rd and Pitcher- helmet and face mask required

Catcher- helmet, face mask and chest protector required

Helmet Face Masks - are encouraged for batters and players in the infield

- **Unified Divisioning Requirements** - Please note which Unified Divisioning you prefer (divisioning is not a guarantee, it is a helpful tool to place teams in a division that is appropriate and safe)
 - **Competitive Divisioning** - majority of athletes and Unified Partners are adults and/ or have softball experience.
 - **Player Development Divisioning** - majority of athletes and Unified Partners are youth and/or have little softball experience. Player development is more of a learning and mentoring experience for athletes.

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Unified Softball

Unified Partners

Minimum age 8, no maximum age

Must complete the Level 1 training and volunteer application

Unified Partners can only compete on one Unified Basketball team during a competition

School Participation in Unified Sports

School districts that support Unified Sports are eligible for a Unified Sports kit including equipment and t-shirts at no cost.

Special Olympics Minnesota is interested in partnering with any school district that is interested in supporting inclusive sports opportunities.

Unified Sports is a great way for student leadership groups to get involved, we encourage National Honor Society, Student Council, Key Club and other service clubs to start Unified Sports and/or to partner with existing delegations.

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Divisioning and Registration

Softball Divisioning

Divisioning is based on age, athlete skill assessment scores and team information from coaches. Each team is required to submit an assessment score for each athlete as well as a team information page.

Assessment Score - Skill assessment scores are based on a coach rankings in hitting, fielding, running, game awareness, throwing, pitching and catching. Please click [here](#) for a blank copy of the assessment score sheet.

Team Information - Information is provided based on any recent scrimmages, changes in roster from previous years or whether or not a team is stronger or weaker than previous years. Please click [here](#) for a blank copy of the team information page

State Softball Divisioning Committee

State Softball - divisioning is based on assessment scores and the results from Area and Regional competitions. When divisioning for State much more emphasis is put on tournament results and common opponents, coach notes, previous game results, and competitions.

Committee - divisioning is done by SOMN staff, coach feedback, and a divisioning committee consisting of coaches from all Areas. The committee meets for one hour in person two weeks before Fall Games. If you or someone from your delegation is interested in being a part of the State softball divisioning committee, please contact sports@somn.org

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Divisioning and Registration

Registration

Registration is done [online](#) by Heads of Delegation or Head Coaches. In order to register online the coach must have a username and password. If you need help with registration, please contact your [Program Manager](#).

When a coach registers a team they must submit the following:

- Assessment score for each athlete/Unified partner (see above)
 - Coaches on each team
 - Athletes/Unified partners must have appropriate paperwork submitted in order to register
- Players attending the State tournament must attend Area first.*



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Team Sport Divisioning Philosophy

The divisioning process for team sports is much different, and much harder, than individual sports. Unlike most individual sports, team sports do not have concrete distances or times that can be used, although we do have teams submit assessment scores for individual players. Once a game starts, however, the information contained in the assessments often takes a back seat to the dynamics at play minute-by-minute, play-by-play on the court or field.

The challenge with divisioning team sports is that there are many factors that affect how a team performs on any given day — missing players, illness, penalties, behavior, coaching, who's hot and who's not, individual match ups, etc. With divisioning in team sports, much more emphasis is put on game results, common opponents, coach rankings and coach notes. There is not a perfect science to ensure that all divisions will have close games, which is why we have developed a process for team sports that includes divisioning committees. The divisioning committees allow for more coach involvement, better team evaluation and improved divisioning. We recognize there may be some games during a competition that are not competitive, but we hope that the team sports divisioning process creates the most equal divisions possible.



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Practice, Skill Development & Resources

Special Olympics Minnesota wants to make sure that you have confidence in your knowledge of softball rules, skills and practice ideas. Listed below are Special Olympics softball resources that can help with the training and skill development for athletes.

[Special Olympics Minnesota Softball Resources](#)

[Special Olympics, Inc Softball Resources](#)

For any questions regarding Special Olympics Minnesota softball please contact sports@somn.org

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Coach Recognition Item

Each coach that becomes Level 2 certified or recertified in a sport is able to order one coach item per calendar year. Information can be found [HERE](#).

Please note that if you have not completed a Level 2 training or recertification course, or you have already received an item for the year, you will not be shipped an item.

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Level 2 Softball Quiz

Level 2 certification is not processed until you have completed the Level 2 quiz.

To take the Level 2 Softball quiz please [click here](#).

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