

Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is a program that combines Special Olympic Athletes and athletes without intellectual disabilities (partners) on sports teams for training and competition. Age and ability matching are on a sport-by-sport basis. Unified Sports® is an important program because it expands sports opportunities for athletes seeking new challenges and dramatically increases inclusion in the community. Unified Sports® is now a global program and sports include basketball, bowling, distance running, football (soccer), softball and volleyball.

Why is Unified Sports® important?

- Integrates athletes with and without intellectual disabilities in a setting where all athletes are challenged to improve skills
- Provides a valuable sports opportunity to individuals with intellectual disabilities who are not presently involved with SO
- Prepares athletes with high level skills for participating in school or community sports
- Increases public awareness of the spirit and skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities
- Enables Special Olympic athletes families to participate as team members or coaches on Unified Sports® teams
- Enables athletes to develop friendships and an understanding of each other's capabilities through a spirit of equality and team unity

Who can be a Unified Partner?

The desired objectives of a Unified Sports® experiences are best fulfilled when partners on a team are individuals without disabilities. Special Olympics Unified Sports® teams should never be composed solely of people with disabilities. Age and ability matching of athletes and partners is specifically defined on a sport by sport basis. Special Olympics Unified Sports® is a program that combines approximately an equal number of Special Olympics athletes and athletes without disabilities.