Level 2 Softball

• This training is to certify coaches as Level 2 coaches for Softball.

• Certification (or recertification) is good for 3 years from date completed.
Level 2 Softball

This training will cover the following sections:

- Events
- Rules
- Registration and the divisioning process
- Softball resources.

Included is the Coaching Athletes training that will prepare you to use your sport-specific knowledge in coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities.
Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

• For veteran Special Olympics coaches, this course serves as a reminder of the essentials of coaching.

• For new Special Olympics coaches, this course will help prepare you for your first role in coaching Special Olympics athletes.
Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

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

*Above:* A Special Olympics coach talking with a tennis athlete
*Left:* Special Olympics coach giving high fives on the sideline
Course Overview

This course will cover specific topics related to:

1 - The Athlete
2 - Teaching & Training
3 - Preparing for & Coaching During Competition
4 - Managing the Program
Unit 1 - The Athlete

Important Considerations concerning Special Olympics Athletes

Psychological Considerations

*(Learning)*

Medical Considerations

Social Considerations
Unit 1 - Psychological Considerations

**Motivation** – helping athletes maintain interest
- May have shorter attention span; harder to keep “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.
Unit 1 - Psychological Considerations

Comprehension – helping athletes remember and perform the skill they have learned

• May find it difficult to understand verbal explanations of skills.
• May find it easier to learn through visual demonstrations.
• May have difficulty in understanding complex explanations.
• May take a longer time between learning multiple pieces of information.
• May have difficulty generalizing skills learned in one situation to a different situation.
• Written instructions may be more helpful than verbal, depending on the situation.
# Unit 1 - Psychological Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Item</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Easily distracted by noise</td>
<td>Control surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Easily discouraged, or having a feeling of failure</td>
<td>Focus on positive communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Difficulty learning from verbal explanation or long instructions</td>
<td>Add demonstrations of skills, keeping instructions clear and concise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unit 1 - Psychological Challenges

Motivation
• Challenge – Easily discouraged, or having feeling of failure
• Action – Point out positive things when the athlete is doing well

Comprehension
• Challenge – Learning from verbal explanation or long instructions
• Action – Add demonstrations, hands-on walkthroughs of skills, keeping instructions clear and concise

Perception
• Challenge – Easily distracted by noise
• Action – Control surroundings

Right: Athlete running by a crowd at track and field.
Down Syndrome

• Approximately 10% of individuals with Down Syndrome have a condition called Atlanto-axial instability.
• 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 swimming, high jump, alpine/snowboarding, squat (powerlifting) and soccer.

Right: Two athletes celebrate at swimming.
Medications

- Understand that athletes may be taking medications that have physical side effects.
- Consult with head coach or head of delegation if concerns arise.

Seizures

- The number of Special Olympics athletes with seizure disorders is higher than traditional athletes.
- Tasks to remember when assisting an athlete having a seizure:
  - Assist to a safe space around them;
  - Protect their head and neck; and
  - Lay on their side.
Physical Disabilities

- Some athletes also have physical disabilities which may affect the sports they can participate in.
- Special Olympics has events for individuals who use wheelchairs, walkers or other assistance.
- Muscle strength may be needed for a sport and some athletes may not have the strength for that sport.
  - This might be due to lack of use or a permanent disability.
  - This will change how you as a coach approaches helping this athlete.
Unit 1 - Medical Considerations

**Autism**

- Approximately 20% of athletes have an autism diagnosis
- Approximately 50% of people with autism are non-verbal

**Fetal Alcohol Syndrome**

- These athletes may consistently function better on performance tasks compared with verbal tasks. The more concrete the task, the better the performance.
- These athletes may tend to have attention and memory deficits and often display poor judgment in identifying right from wrong.
# Unit 1 – Medical Considerations Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Consideration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>Family should ensure the athlete is screened for Atlanto-axial instability (see medical if necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seizure Disorder</td>
<td>Be prepared to protect and observe the athlete should a seizure occur and minimize adverse affects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism spectrum disorder</td>
<td>Understand that athletes will engage in self-stimulatory behavior (hand-flapping, jumping, etc.), and that it is not necessarily a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention deficit/hyperactivity (ADHD)</td>
<td>Shorten drills and provide one-to-one assistance when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetal alcohol syndrome</td>
<td>Demonstrate clear performance tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unit 1 - Social Considerations

Economic Status

• May lack financial means to participate.
• May not have access to independent transportation.

Social Skills

• May lack basic interactive skills.
• May lack language interpretation.

Recreation at Home

• May lack physical activity.
• May lack encouragement/motivation.

**Right:** Basketball team huddles up for a breakdown
All the following social considerations may impact an athlete’s participation in Special Olympics:

- Inappropriate responses to social situations
- Extreme lack of endurance
- Lack of access to transportation

Our challenge as coaches is to develop a full understanding of our athletes and what they bring with them to a Special Olympics program.

*Left:* Caddie congratulates an athlete at a golf competition.
Unit 2 – Teaching & Training the Athlete

Top Left: Basketball coach talking to team on sidelines

Bottom Left: Coach discussing strategy with an athlete

Top Right: Athlete getting prepared for powerlifting competition

Bottom Right: Coach getting athlete ready before track race
Unit 2 - Organizing a Training Session

There are many ways to organize a training session for Special Olympics athletes.

There is considerable value in developing a consistent training routine that provides familiarity.

1. Warm-Up and Stretching
   - Specific to the sport
   - Similar in every practice session
   - Involve athletes in leading activity
2. **Skills Instruction**
   - Break skills into smaller tasks
   - Involve as many athletes at a time as possible
   - Practice skills directly related to competition

3. **Competition Experience**
   - Simulating game situations
   - Work towards what the competition will look like

4. **Cool-Down, Stretch, and Reward**
   - Play a game related to the sport
   - End each training with a cool-down activity and stretching
Unit 2 - Training Sequence

1. Break down skills into small tasks or steps.
2. Put together tasks to form skills.
3. Use drills and activities that always involve many athletes.
4. Practice skills in situations that are related to the game or event.

Above: Athlete and trainer working on alpine skiing.
## Unit 2 - Training Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Consideration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>Performing important parts of competition</td>
<td>Break down into individual parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Performing series of tasks effectively that are necessary to perform a sport</td>
<td>Focus on the most important tasks for the sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Repeatedly demonstrate sport tasks in different situations</td>
<td>Provide game-like drills in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Putting essential sport skills into practice</td>
<td>Provide scrimmage opportunities in practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

Left: Coach and athlete share a high-five at first base
Below: Coach and athlete having a conversation while at alpine skiing
## Unit 2 – Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sport Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Use word that are easy to understand</td>
<td>“Swing the bat” Softball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Connect words to something defined</td>
<td>“Jump forward” Long Jump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concise</td>
<td>Use a few key words that cue a desired action</td>
<td>“Go to the free throw line” Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
<td>Use the same word or phrase for the same action</td>
<td>“Breathe” Swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command-Oriented</td>
<td>Use words that reinforce a desired action</td>
<td>“On your mark. Set. Go.” Track and Field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each athlete needs to be met where he or she is.

It is important to use the appropriate level of instruction and assistance.

• Athletes with lower abilities may need more assistance
• Verbal assistance should always be paired with a demonstration
• Physical assistance may be needed to help an athlete get positioned

Above: Coach demonstrating the grip of a golf club to an athlete
## Unit 2 - Levels of Assistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Assistance</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sport Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Tell the athlete what to do</td>
<td>Footwork: “run forward to the line; then stop”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td>Show the athlete the what to do</td>
<td>Basketball: have athlete watch while someone else shoots a free throw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Physical Assistance</td>
<td>Place the athlete in the proper position</td>
<td>Golf: coach adjusts the athlete's hands on the golf club with the correct grip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Physical Assistance</td>
<td>Help the athlete through the entire motion of the skill</td>
<td>Bowling: coach moves the athlete’s arm through the entire bowling movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 shows inappropriate behavior, it may not be defiance, acting out or silliness.

These behaviors may simply reflect the person and/or what is operating in the moment.
## Unit 2 - Managing Athlete Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athlete Behavior</th>
<th>Strategies to Improve Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swimmer has a short attention span</td>
<td>1. Focus on a stroke for short periods of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Provide multiple activities focusing on same task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball athlete yells if they miss a shot</td>
<td>1. Emphasize the other parts of the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Work on shooting drills without a hoop, then evolve to shooting at a hoop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowler doesn’t wait their turn</td>
<td>1. Have a coach at the lane help with the order of bowlers, explain whose turn it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Emphasize that the bowler will always follow the same person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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, but nothing 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.
Registration

- Provide accurate team roster information, qualifying times, and skills assessment scores.

Official competition rules

- Make sure that you know the Official Special Olympics Rules.
- 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!)

Right: A poly hockey official calls ‘no goal’
Supervision

- Why are non-coaching support members important? There is a lot going on outside of the actual competition, including:
  - Transportation
  - Lodging (need for same-sex supervision)
  - Social activities
  - Multiple events to supervise
  - Awards ceremonies

- Create a supervision document that has athletes covered in every part of the competition
Travel and overnight

- Discuss overnight concerns with parents or group-home supervisors.
- Distribute a simple checklist of items to bring for athletes.
- Make sure that all special medication needs are understood.
  - Coaches may have to assist with handling medications, so be sure to always have all medical forms and information readily available.
- Arrange an effective rooming situation that limits possible clashes between athletes.
Guidelines for success

• Teach responsibility & independence

• Help athletes understand what to wear and what to expect on competition day

• Teach athletes how to maintain appropriate behavior at a competition

• Arrive early to allow time for putting on uniforms, a warm-up and stretching routine and focusing on the competition.

• Encourage maximum effort in practice and competition
Unit 3 - Competition-Day Coaching

Guidelines for success

• Let athletes compete without direct supervision
  • Allow athletes to make mistakes and help them learn from them
• Make any official protests calmly
  • If you think there is a valid reason to protest the outcome, do so in a calm manner, and **not involving athletes in disputes**.
• Help athletes deal appropriately with winning and losing.
• Focus on effort made, recognize accomplishments and new skills that were performed and taking something positive away from **every** experience.
The successful Special Olympics coach is:

- Knowledgeable about the sport and coaching
  - Knowledge of the sport and how to teach it is essential if coaches are to help athletes and truly benefit from their Special Olympics experience.
  - Successful coaches are constantly looking for opportunities to learn more about the sport.
- Knowledgeable about Special Olympics
  - Special Olympics has a clear mission, philosophy, and rules that have been developed through years of worldwide experience.
  - A better understanding of the mission will benefit your athletes.
The successful Special Olympics coach:

- Recruits and trains assistant coaches
  - Assistant coaches can be recruited to provide one-to-one attention
  - Assistant coaches are the most useful when they are trained and are a part of the planning process at practice
- Recruits and trains athletes
  - A coach is also a promoter and recruiter, hopefully trying to expand their team to more possible athletes
- Assists with appropriate sport selection
  - Picking a sport that is both age and ability appropriate for their team
Unit 4 – Managing the Program

The successful Special Olympics coach:

- Offers activities for all ability levels
- Puts a priority on safety
- Involves families and providers
  - This includes educating families and providers about the benefits of Special Olympics, as well as appropriate nutrition and training at home
- Assists with community inclusion
  - Improves social skills and creates opportunities to spread information about Special Olympics
Unit 4 – Preparation

1. Assessment
2. Goal Setting
3. Season Plan
4. Training and Competition
5. Final Competition
6. Review
Right: Softball team meeting at the mound.
Coach Ratio – Individual Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athletes</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
<th>Athletes</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33-36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37-40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41-44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45-48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49-52</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>53-56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>57-60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>61-64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

• For each team, here are the coaching requirements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athletes</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• All Coaches and Unified partners must complete the Level 1 training prior to participating with a team.

• Level 1 certification requires a Volunteer Application and Level 1 online training and both items are found here.
Events

Special Olympics Minnesota offers four different events to compete in for softball:

- Traditional Softball Team
- Coach Pitch
- Unified Softball Team
- Individual Skills
Traditional Softball Rules

Equipment

• Batters and runners must always wear helmets.

• Athletes who remove their helmet during play will be declared out.

• Catchers must wear a helmet, face mask and chest protector.

• No wood bats, metal cleats or jewelry allowed during competition.
Traditional Softball Rules

Game Length

• Games will be either 7 innings or a maximum of 70 minutes.

• No new inning will begin after 60 minutes.

• If a team has a 10-run lead or more after the completion of five innings, the game will be over.

• Extra innings will be played with a maximum of two extra innings.
Traditional Softball Rules

Roster

• Minimum of 11 athletes, and a maximum of 20.

• Teams can bat all athletes if the opposing team agrees to it.

• An extra 11th player can be used in the game as an extra hitter.
  • The extra hitter must play the entire game and must bat in the same batting order.
  • You may substitute for the extra hitter and place them in any defensive position, but the substitute will bat in the same position.
Traditional Softball Rules

Gameplay

• There will be three outs per inning, or a maximum of 10 batters.

• After reaching two strikes, one courtesy foul will be allowed, but a foul ball after that will be the third strike and batter is out.

• While running the bases, athletes cannot be physically pulled or pushed to run in a certain direction by a coach.

• When there is a close play at a base, the runner should attempt to avoid unnecessary contact.
Traditional Softball Rules

Gameplay

• Players cannot lead off at any base and must stay on the base until the ball is hit.

• Intentional walks are not allowed.

• Balls thrown out of the playing area are considered dead balls and play stops immediately.

• Protests are not allowed on judgement calls, only on rule interpretations.
Coach Pitch Rules

Gameplay

• A 6-pitch and 3-swing rule will be enforced.
  • After either occurs, the batter will be out.
  • Players cannot be walked.

• Coaches from the team batting will do the pitching and must stand on the rubber.
  • The defensive team will still field an athlete in the pitcher position, as the coach pitching does not field at all.
Gameplay

- Athletes in coach pitch may use a tee when they are batting.

- When registering, athletes using a tee must be noted.
  - Teams may only register half their roster for tee assistance.

- 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 still moving.
Unified Softball Rules

Roster/Gameplay

- Teams must be a minimum of 11 participants, with a maximum of 20.

- There should always be an equal number of athletes and Unified partners, as they alternate in the batting order.

- There is a limit of two over-the-fence homeruns per team.
  - If an additional homerun is hit, the ball is dead, the batter is out, and no runners can advance bases.
Unified Softball Rules

Gameplay

- Fielding positions must be balanced between athletes and Unified partners.

- Infield and outfield should each have two of each member, and the pitcher and catcher should have one of each member.

- Players at first base, third base, and pitcher are required to wear a helmet and facemask.
Individual Skills Rules

• Provided for athletes who cannot play a full game of softball.

• Four events:
  • Throwing
  • Fielding
  • Base Running
  • Hitting

• Descriptions for these stations can be found in the Special Olympics Minnesota handbook on pages 7-9.
Registration

Registration is done online by head coaches or head of delegations.

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

• Assessment score for each athlete.
• Coaches on the team.
• Updated paperwork for those that need it.
• Team Information Sheet
Divisioning

Assessment scores are based on a ranking from the coach. Assessment sheets can be found here.

Divisioning is based on many factors, including:

• Assessment scores.
• Results from previous regional and state competitions.
• Coach’s notes.

Divisioning for team sports can be more difficult, so the more information that the state office can have, the better teams will be divisioned for competition.
Practice, Skill Development & Resources

• Special Olympics Minnesota wants to make sure that you have confidence in your knowledge of the softball rules.

• On the next slide, you will find links to many resources that can help with the training and skill development for athletes.

Above: Athlete rounding third base.
Practice, Skill Development & Resources

Special Olympics Softball Resources

Special Olympics, Inc Softball Resources

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

• **Improve** access to health care for athletes at event-based health screenings.
• Make **referrals** to local health practitioners.
• **Train** and **educate** health care professionals, providers and students.
• Healthy Athletes events are often held with sports competitions.
• Athletes receive 2-4 hours of screenings, education and care.
• Athletes with follow-up needs receive referrals to local providers.
• All services are provided by volunteer health professionals and students.

• Contact Jeff Prendergast| Health Programs Coordinator [jeff.prendergast@somn.org](mailto:jeff.prendergast@somn.org)
SOMN Health Programs

Fit5

• Plan for physical activity, nutrition and hydration
  • 5 fruits and vegetables a day
  • 5 bottles of water a day
  • 5 days of physical activity a week
• Fitness cards offer exercises to challenge abilities. These can be done at practice, the gym and home.
• Seasonal pledge challenges for teams offer incentives and resources.

Start now! Fit5 Guide and Training Cards

• Contact Lindsey Swanson | Health Programs Coordinator
  Lindsey.Swanson@somn.org
SOMN Health Programs

SOFit

- Comprehensive health and wellness program focusing on four pillars of wellness: emotional, physical, nutrition, and social.
- Resources and funds provided to delegation or organization
- Check out more info here: Fitness - Special Olympics Minnesota
- Contact Lindsey Swanson | Health Programs Coordinator Lindsey.Swanson@somn.org

Above: Athlete working on her squatting.
Coach Recognition Item

• Each coach that becomes Level 2 certified or recertified in a sport can 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.
Level 2 Softball Quiz

To take the Level 2 Softball quiz please click here.

Thank you for volunteering your time, and best of luck with your upcoming season!