

**The 2011 Summer World Games
Experience for Special Olympics
Athletes and Coaches:
A longitudinal study in four countries**



**Sandra Dowling, David Hassan and
Roy McConkey**

The study was carried out in partnership with:

Country	Persons involved	Affiliation
Costa Rica	Ronald Soto Calderon Maria de los Angeles Monge Alvarado	University of Costa Rica
Greece	Emmanouil Skordilis Eirini Grammatopoulou Irene Spanaki Foteini Kyriaki Michalis Nikopoulos	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Special Olympics Hellas
India	Anirban Bandyopadhyay Souvik Naha	Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Dehli
South Africa	Dean Allen Ernst Kruger Engela van der Klashorst	Stellenbosch University University of Pretoria

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Chapter 1: Special Olympics and the World Games	6
Chapter 2: A selected literature review of coaching	16
Chapter 3: The methods used in the evaluation	29
Chapter 4: Participation in the World Games	39
Chapter 5: Preparation for the World Games	51
Chapter 6: Competition and beyond	69
Chapter 7: Towards a model of coaching for the World Games	81
References	100

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted with funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through Cooperative Agreement #5U01DD000302 awarded to Special Olympics International, Washington DC, USA.

Our thanks to the Advisory Board Janelle Nanavati (SOI), Amy Harris (SOI), Lee Todd (SOI), Sabine Menke (SOEE), Shayke Hutzler (IFAPA), Gary Siperstein (UMASS Boston).

Photos were supplied by Special Olympics International and the authors.

Disclaimer

The views contained in this report are those of the authors and should not be taken to represent those of Special Olympics International.

Further Information

Correspondence regarding this report should be sent to Dr David Hassan:
d.hassan@ulster.ac.uk

© Special Olympics International, 2012

Executive Summary

The 13th Summer World Games of Special Olympics took place in Athens in 2011. Since 1968, the Summer World Games have been held every four years and will return to the United States in 2015. The 2011 Games was the world's largest sporting event for athletes with intellectual disabilities with over 7,000 competitors from nearly 170 countries under the guidance of 2,500 coaches and supported by 25,000 volunteers and 3,000 technical officials.



However Special Olympics is more than one event. It is a growing global movement embracing an estimated 3.7 million athletes who usually train weekly and regularly compete in local, national and regional competitions. Only a very small proportion of athletes are selected to attend the World Games. This study aimed to obtain a better understanding of the preparations and training undertaken by coaches and

To define a model of coaching typical of, or most advantageous to, SO coaches when preparing athletes for high level competitions.

athletes in the run-up to the World Games and of the impact and insights they gained from their participation. The goal was to define a model of coaching suited to high level competition.

With assistance from university colleagues in the four participating countries – Costa Rica, Greece, India and South Africa – we collected detailed information from 21 coaches, 56 athletes and various family members, across seven different sports at four time points during 2011: before, during and after the World Games. This trans-national, longitudinal study of coaching is the first of its kind in Special Olympics. Data was gathered about training goals, coaching styles and priorities, athlete achievements and personal and social impact on the athletes. A mix of rating scales, pro formas and individual interviews were used to triangulate the insights provided by athletes, coaches and other informants such as family members. The findings were collated within the three dominant themes that



emerged from the World Games experience (see Figure below). For each one we were able to pinpoint significant dimensions that combined to produce a complex interplay of issues and processes stimulated by the World Games. These held irrespective of the particular sports with little variation across the four countries.

However divergent perceptions as to the function of the World Games influenced the salience and expression of themes within the three domains. We identified three broad viewpoints within our sample of informants. For some, participation was the pre-eminent purpose of the World Games: a unique and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity rarely given to persons with intellectual disabilities. Athletes however viewed the competitions as the essence of the World Games and the responsibility this placed on them as their country's representatives to succeed. Coaches steered a middle path as they sought to prepare athletes to reap the personal and social benefits of their participation in the World Games while also coaching them to produce a credible performance in the competitions.

These different narratives around the World Games make it difficult to propose a model of coaching that is either typical or advantageous to athletes and coaches. In order to advance this debate, we offer a model of coaching that foregrounds high level competition as a central aspect of the World Games but roots it within the varied participatory events of this unique and valued experience.



The explicit emphasis on competition will place increased demands on coaches to adapt their training regimes and coaching styles while still seeking to promote the wider personal and social development of their athletes. This model is in keeping with the aspirations of the new Strategic Plan for Special Olympics but it does require some adjustment to existing procedures around various recommendations that are made for consideration including the selection of athletes for the World Games with a greater emphasis on their training and progress; improved liaison between National and local coaches, and greater access to training resources. Suggestions are made for future research.



Chapter 1: Special Olympics and the World Games

The Special Olympics Summer World Games is a flagship event in the Special Olympics calendar. It provides a platform for the promotion of inclusion and respect, which are cornerstones of the Special Olympics movement. It is a showcase for Special Olympics activities and an opportunity to raise the profile of competing athletes as they participate in this major global sporting event. However, in contrast to this, the World Games constitute but a small slice of the regular endeavors of Special Olympics athletes and their coaches. This chapter will provide an overview of the Special Olympics World Games but this should be seen in the context of the typical and routine activities of a much wider organisation.



The Summer World Games in Context

Special Olympics (SO) seeks to provide year round sports training activities and competition events to people with intellectual disabilities. It has twin aims. As a sports organisation, SO encourages the development of sporting skills and fitness amongst its athletes. As a movement for social change, SO aims to use the power of sport to promote the personal and social development of participating individuals and to challenge negative stereotypes and social marginalization of people with intellectual disabilities. Founded in the USA in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics has experienced exponential global expansion and is now operational in almost 180 countries, and as of 2010, 3.7 million people with intellectual disabilities in regular training activities and competition events across 32 Olympic type sports (Special Olympics Reach Report, 2010).

Sporting activities are usually organized around Special Olympics sports clubs, with members meeting to train in their chosen sport, typically, on a weekly basis. In addition participants take part in competitions arranged at a local, state/county or national level, albeit on a more periodic basis.

As well as these traditional sports Programmes, Special Olympics also offer a range of discrete initiatives including *Unified Sports* – a team based Programme where players with and without intellectual disabilities play together on the same sports team; *SO Get Into It*, a schools based education Programme; *the Motor Activity Training Programme*, which enables people with more complex disabilities to take part in sports as well as *Young*

Athletes which involves children with intellectual disabilities as young as six years of age in sports based activities. *Project Unify* is a strategy, which delivers a combination of sports and education Programmes to young people, with the aim of empowering a youth movement for the wider inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. In the USA this is a school based Programme, whilst it's current pilot implementation, in parts of the SO Europe-Eurasia and SO Asia-Pacific regions, will likely focus around SO clubs as well as in schools. Further details of all these Programmes is available at:

<http://www.specialolympics.org/>

Special Olympic Competitions



Special Olympics provide various opportunities for competition. In 2010 nearly 50,000 competitions were organized throughout the world. These range from small-scale local events to countrywide games organized by SO National Programmes in some 170 countries. Moreover, a series of large-scale International events are staged in a cyclical manner such as the Europe/Eurasia Games held in Warsaw in

2009. These are typically seminal moments for the SO movement in a specific world region and normally happen every four years. At a global level, World Games are held every two years, alternating between summer games and winter games.

The first international Special Olympics Games was held in the summer of 1968. It brought together 1000 people with intellectual disabilities from 26 USA states and Canada. The Summer World Games now takes place every four years with the most recent Games being held in Athens in the summer of 2011. These World Games brought together 7000 athletes from nearly 170 countries under the guidance of 2,500 coaches and supported by 25,000 volunteers and 3,000 technical officials. Athletes competed in the various Olympic venues around Athens, in 22 Olympic style sports, over a period of ten days.

Special Olympics regards the World Games as an opportunity for athletes to demonstrate their sports skills in competition and to strive to achieve their personal best, recognizing the variability of each individual's talents. SO applauds its' athletes on their courage on the sports field and their good sportsmanship in supporting fellow athletes. The impact of the Games is considered as going beyond the event itself with the Games standing '*as a symbol of hope for a more just and unified world*' as athletes, coaches and fans return home '*to spread their message of unity*'. For further details see:

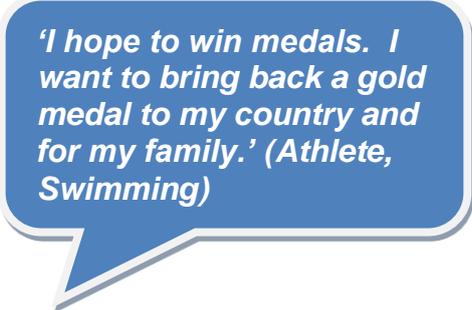
http://www.specialolympics.org/world_games.aspx#.

The World Games make headlines both within the organisation and beyond, however, like any international sporting event, the activities associated with the World Games are not typical of the daily routines of most SO athletes. Their primary sporting focus revolves

around the regular weekly activities, and indeed only a very small percentage of athletes who take part at a club level will ever compete at the major international SO tournaments. Nevertheless, the Special Olympics World Games do offer athletes the opportunity to train for and compete on the world stage. Athletes who are selected to attend will be part of an exciting and memorable event and they are likely to engage in additional training in their sport as well as supplementary preparations as they focus their attention on the World Games. The present study is specifically attuned to those coaches and athletes who were selected to take part in the 2011 World Games. The findings, discussions and recommendations presented in this report are of specific relevance to this World Games experience albeit they may well have salience at all levels of the organisation.

SO Athletes and the World Games

Being part of a National Team delegation travelling to compete at an international sporting event is an exciting experience for any athlete. The experience is heightened for many SO athletes as often this will be the first time they have travelled abroad and for some, who live in their family home, it will be their first taste of independence away from their parents. Moreover, competing at an international level and in what are frequently large venues with accompanying media interest is a new, perhaps daunting, certainly challenging and often enjoyable experience for athletes. As this report documents, athletes who are selected for participation, value the opportunity to compete in their sport at an international level, and relish the wider experiences that this opportunity affords them.



'I hope to win medals. I want to bring back a gold medal to my country and for my family.' (Athlete, Swimming)

Uniqueness of the experience for athletes

The numbers of competitors and the range of sports and events staged means that the World Games is a unique event in the SO sporting calendar. The National Team will travel to the World Games together and in addition to the duration of the World Games themselves - almost two weeks - there is also a week in advance of the tournament when each National Team will stay at a Host Town within the country. Typically the hosts will offer a range of events for the athletes and will endeavor to show them the best of their area, hoping to provide them with an enjoyable time. This gives athletes the opportunity to acclimatize, to bond with their teammates, and to absorb the new sights and sounds of the country they are visiting. However opportunities for final training and preparation for competitions may be limited.

Following time in the host town the team will then travel on to the city hosting the Games where a grand opening ceremony modeled on the Olympic Games takes place.

Entertainment from world famous stars follows the parade of National Teams, the lighting of the Olympic flame and the taking of the Athlete Oath.

“Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be strong in the attempt”.

Then the competitions begin; mostly held in large sporting venues with medal ceremonies to mark the winners of gold, silver and bronze medals.

For anyone involved in sports, competing in an event of this scale is likely to be a landmark in their sporting career. For people with intellectual disabilities there are additional resonances. It is a truism that people with ID often experience social exclusion, marginalization alongside the often dismissive or at worst abusive attitude from others. However, in the context of the Special Olympics World Games, and in contrast to the foregoing perceptions, they are told that they the World Games’ stars. The contrast is clear. Moreover, these competitions are the apex of their training and preparations throughout the preceding months and provide them with a valued opportunity for competition. Beyond the sporting focus, athletes also enjoy the opportunity to make friends and to take part in the myriad of social events offered by the World Games and their National Teams. There is little doubt that in an overall sense the World Games’ experience for athletes can be a life-changing one: an event they are unlikely to forget for some considerable time.

Selection of athletes

However, few athletes within Special Olympics have the opportunity to take part in World Games events. Each country is allowed a quota of athletes who can take part and each National SO program has a process through which athletes are selected for participation. The challenge for National bodies is to conceive of a system that is considered to be defensible and ultimately ‘fair’ by all concerned. However, the selection process is not uniform across countries.

The countries who took part in the present study each had a different method of selecting athletes for the World Games, and these are likely to be representative of processes used in other nations, although there are also likely to be yet more alternative methods. The selection processes included a random draw of athletes from those who had achieved a gold medal in the most recent National Games; coaches recommending athletes to the National Sports Director who would make the ultimate decision based on predefined criteria drawn up in consultation with coaches in that country; or the Head Coach in each sport selecting athletes based on their performance at regional camps. Whatever the method used, selection typically happened between five and nine months prior to the World Games. This short time between selection and competition allows for a tight schedule in terms of preparing athletes for competition as well as for the wider experience of participating in the World Games.

Divisioning

At all SO competitions including the World Games, a process known as divisioning is used to ensure that athletes are banded so that individuals compete with other athletes of similar ability in equitable divisions; also taking into account their age and gender. Historically, Special Olympics has suggested that all divisions be created so that the variance between the highest and lowest scores within that division does not differ by more than 10 percent. This 10 percent statement is not a rule but it is a guideline for establishing equitable divisions when the number of athletes competing is appropriate. Divisioning is based on preliminary heats held at the Games. Around three to eight athletes will compete within one division but this process means that any one competition event – such as 100 metres run, can have many divisions with the top three competitors in any one division awarded a medal.

Rules

SO have provided detailed rules for all the competitions and any infringement of the rules can result in disqualification. In addition, disqualifications can also result if an athlete exceeds by 15% their performance in the competition over that recorded when they were selected for the Games or during the divisioning process at the Games. Although this rule is intended to ensure equity in performance within divisions, it can negate genuine improvements in athlete's performance.

Special Olympics Coaches

Special Olympics coaches are vital to the success of the organisation both in the ongoing delivery of regular activities as well as in promoting the wider social mission of SO, that of encouraging the personal development and social acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities. The organisation places significant value on its' coaches and provides an online training programme, which addresses both global matters in coaching – philosophy, style, communication – as well as examining particular strategies relating to specific sports and detailed guidance on the rules of those sports delivered within Special Olympics.

For further details see: <http://www.specialolympics.org/sports.aspx>

In 2010, an estimated 275,000 coaches were involved internationally; the great majority of Special Olympics coaches are volunteers. Studies of national Special Olympics Programmes in the USA, China and Latin American undertaken to date (Siperstein et al. 2005, Harada et al, 2008ab, 2010) reveal the diverse range of sporting and educational experiences that coaches bring to the organisation. Although the trend is towards a well-qualified and committed voluntary workforce, the background of coaches varies from having been engaged in competitive sports as an athlete or coaching mainstream sports, to being a teacher of adapted physical education in a special school. Motivation to be a Special Olympics coach varies and can arise from having a family member with an

intellectual disability or that the SO club is incorporated into a coach's working environment – for example in special schools. Nevertheless, whatever the initial motivation to become involved with Special Olympics the organisation appears to provoke loyalty amongst coaches, with many staying in post for an extended period of time.

The ratio of coaches to athletes is around 1:13 but it varies by SO region. It is lowest in North America with one coach involved on average with around six athletes to a higher ratio of 27 athletes per coach in East Asia.

Coaches and the World Games



There are two key coaching roles in preparing athletes for participation in the World Games; that of the local coach and that of the Head Coach. The *local coaches* are those who operate at club level and work on a regular basis with the athletes who are members of their club. These coaches are likely to have a long-standing relationship with athletes, to know them well, to understand their sporting strengths and weaknesses as well as their

personal and social challenges and abilities.

The *Head Coach* role is a temporary appointment for the duration of the Games, albeit they are likely to be in post for a period of six-nine months prior to the actual tournament. Typically local coaches apply for the role of Head Coach in a particular sport and are appointed based on pre-determined criteria at national level. This is centered around the qualifications and experience of the coach as well as social markers, including equal representation of male and female coaches and, where relevant, equality of appointments across ethnicity and religion. One anomaly is that for some athletes the local and Head Coach will be the same person because their local (club) coach will have applied for, and been successful in their appointment to the post of Head Coach. For other athletes the Head Coach will be someone new, with whom they might have had intermittent contact in advance of the World Games, and it would be their local coach with whom they trained and prepared for the World Games on a regular basis.

National Programmes variously establish protocols to facilitate the joint working of local and Head Coaches with individual athletes; however even in our study of four countries, there was wide variation in the degree of joint working, two-way communication and shared goals between local and Head Coaches as they prepared athletes for the World Games. Some Programmes have established detailed communication strategies and protocol for joint working and monitoring, whilst at the other extreme there was simply no communication between Head Coaches and local coaches. It is, however, clear that the mechanism through which local and Head Coaches intersect is one of the key processes to be negotiated by both parties and the National organization. At the very least it is

common sense for there to be sustained and regular contact between Head Coaches for the sport and those local coaches who work regularly with athletes selected for the National team. Ideally there should exist a process in which the local coach is able to enact a training programme established by Head Coaches on an ongoing basis, thereby developing the athletes to the best of their ability in between the times when the National team may meet with Head Coaches to fine tune their preparation for the World Games.

The Role of the Head Coach

A Head Coach's role is diverse, multi-faceted and far-reaching. In brief, Head Coaches will be responsible for overseeing the preparation of athletes for that particular sport such as the development of their skills, fitness and stamina. In addition they will guide the preparation of athletes for the experience of being away from home and in many instances residing in a strange climate, experiencing an unfamiliar culture with new food experiences, different language and customs. The Head Coach will typically be involved in ensuring that athletes have the correct documentation for travel – e.g. passports and visas - and in many instances assisting athletes to prepare for their first experience of air travel. Many athletes will be away from their families for the first time during the World Games and this period may extend for up to three weeks. The Head Coaches for the various sports travel with the National team during the World Games and will be responsible for the wellbeing of athletes throughout this time. They may be called upon to support athletes with medication, routines in the morning or at bedtime, and to provide an emotional ballast for anyone missing their family or experiencing other sensitivities.

The uniqueness of the relationship that develops between athletes and coaches as they prepare for and take part in the World Games will be explored in later chapters of this report. Moreover, strategies used in preparing athletes and coaching adaptations that are reported as beneficial will also be discussed in detail. Suffice to say at this juncture that the coach – athlete relationship forms a crucial platform for athletes' participation in an event with the scope and scale of the Special Olympics World Games.

Special Olympics Strategic Plan 2011-2015

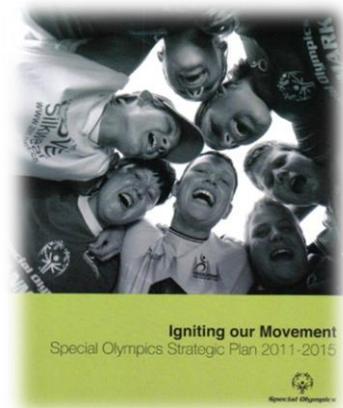
The recently published Strategic plan is a visionary document intended to guide the global Special Olympics Movement over the next five years. It re-affirmed its mission and identified five pillars to its achievement, one of which is to advance quality in sports and competitions.

The Mission of Special Olympics

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympics-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills, friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

The vision is to provide “excellence in coaching, training and competition management at all levels”. SO challenges athletes: *“to develop their personal best through the activation of enhanced athlete and coach models, including training techniques, interactive coaching, fitness and optimal nutrition guides.”* Furthermore: *“Special Olympics athletes strive to be their best in competition and training and to make physical fitness a way of life.”*

Four strategic initiatives are proposed for advancing quality in sports and competitions. Of particular relevance to this study are the twin targets under the initiative to ‘enhance games and competition model and management’.



1. All Special Olympics athletes have the opportunity to participate in more than one game/and/or competition every three months.
2. Quality competitive opportunities enhance the athlete and community experience by emphasizing the professionalism of our events and the seriousness of our approach to sports. Quality competition and Games experience will enhance athlete development.

In this respect, the World Games could be considered the epitome of Special Olympics Competitions.

The aims and rationale of the evaluation

We collected data about coaches, athletes and family members, across five different sports, in four different countries and at four time points during 2011. This trans-national, longitudinal study of coaching is the first of its kind in Special Olympics.

This study was commissioned by Special Olympics International as part of their ongoing research and evaluation program. The overarching aim was:

to define a model of coaching typical of, or most advantageous to, SO coaches when preparing athletes for high level competitions and that enhances the sporting achievements and the uniqueness of this experience for SO athletes.

Specifically the study aimed to address a number of research questions:

- What are athletes’ and coaches’ experiences of preparing for and taking part in the SO World Games? What is the nature of the relationships that develop among coaches and peers arising from this process?
- Are there pertinent characteristics of coaches and athletes which influence their approach to training and competing on the world stage?

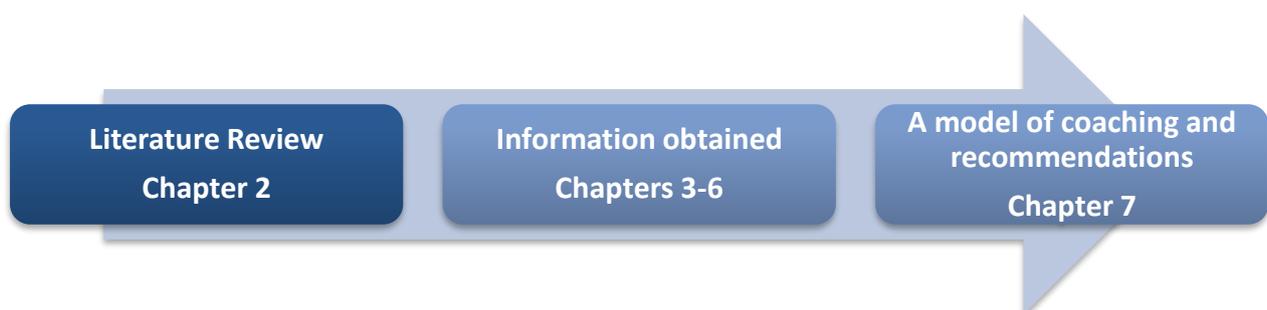
- What are the impacts – sporting and otherwise - on coaches, athletes and family members of participating in the World Games? What aspects of the Games contribute particularly to this?

Rationale for the study

We propose that the information gained from this study can serve three main purposes.

- 1. Description of the athletes' and coaches' experiences.** Although previous studies have explored the SO experience at a local level, this information has not been available for the World Games. Given the scale of the World Games this is an ambitious undertaking, but we were able to gather data across seven sports and in four countries. Moreover, we documented experiences leading up to and after the Games and included sporting as well as non-sporting preparations. These findings are nonetheless only a small sample of the World Games experiences but they can provide a framework against which coaches and SO personnel can judge their experiences of international competitions organized by SO.
- 2. Guidance for coaches and athletes.** Inherent in our data are possible lessons as to how coaches and athletes could better work together to achieve the best possible level of preparation for competition. Compared to mainstream sports, coaches fulfill a more complex role within SO, with various inherent tensions, which become heightened in relation to preparations for competitions. One theme that emerges from our data is the ambiguity around SO competitions for athletes that may need to be addressed with greater attention paid to their aspirations.
- 3. Critical reflection on the role of World Games within Special Olympics.** Although this is a small-scale study, we suspect that it challenges SO to think more critically around the concepts of 'sporting achievement' and 'high level' competition which are presumed to underlie the World Games and mentioned in the aims of this study. Although modeled on the modern day Olympics, there are significant differences in how SO athletes are selected for the National teams, the extent of training that is expected of them and the nature and duration of the specific coaching they receive. A fundamental question addressed in the context of this theme is - what is the role of the World Games in the broader aspirations of SO?

The Report



The next chapter of the report provides a selected review of the literature relating to sports coaching with particular reference to athletes with special needs. This is followed by four chapters that describe how information was gathered and the main findings obtained. The final chapter outlines differing perceptions of the coaching process and proposes a model that is suited to international competitions. The assumptions underpinning this model are identified and recommendations are proposed regarding its implementation.

Chapter 2: A selected literature review of coaching

In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of current understanding of the coaching process with mainstream sports and then summarise key issues that have been studied in relation to coaching athletes with special needs. Our aim is to provide a backdrop against which coaches' preparations of athletes for the World Games can be understood.

The Coaching Process

According to Gordan (2009) coaching is “*a complex model of overlapping scenarios, ranging from training supervision to liaison with fellow coaches and peers*” (p.3). In addition the coach acts not only as a traditional sports-based supervisor but also as a mentor and pillar of support for athletes. Whilst accepting the interplay of many different aspects of the coaching role, equally it is possible to discern a series of discrete functions performed by most coaches.

The position of team trainer – the person who supervises the training sessions and physical development of the athletes – is a role most commonly understood by those studying the coaching process. Beyond this the coach must also demonstrate analytical capacity in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of his/her team's play, the contribution of individual team members and the capacity of the opposition. Retaining team discipline is an important aspect of the coach's work yet, paradoxically, so too is performing the role of a mentor or a trusted confidant for some athletes. In accepting these two apparently contradictory responsibilities one is also appreciating the need for individual coaches to know and understand the particular characters and backgrounds of each of their athletes and their capacity to respond to otherwise quite different behavioural patterns demonstrated by the coach. Amid all of this, the coach's ultimate purpose is to motivate and exact improved performances from their athletes to ensure they achieve the very best athletic success their skills allow and develop other non-sporting outcomes, such as character building and independence, as part of this experience.

Thus the coaching process is a complex relationship between team preparation, organisation and performance that is suggestive of a linear transition between the coaching environment and competition. Central to the success of this process is the individual ability and credentials of the coach in question. On the specific question of knowledge it is clear that coaches can acquire this in an educational setting – what might be referred to as ‘professional knowledge’ – or can develop it in response to actual practical incidences of coaching – again better understood as ‘on the job’ or ‘experiential’ learning. The latter is significant as it implies the important role of ‘reflective practice’ on the part of the coach. In the opinion of Gordan (2009), “*Reflective practice is the process*

whereby the coach examines issues that have occurred during the process of actually coaching and conceptualises them and so helps to bridge the gap between theoretical and the on the job experience” (p.8). It is self evident that where coaches perform their duties in a voluntary capacity and/or do not have any formal coach education that this process of reflection may take considerably longer to hone and the risk is that it may fall short of what is required for particular athletes preparing for specific competitions.

Modelling the Coaching Process

At present “*There are no all-embracing models of the coaching process that have received consensual agreement*” (Lyle, 2002, 79). More to the point there are very few coaching models that have been derived from rigorous research, with the notable exception of Cote *et al.* (1995). One of the difficulties in agreeing upon a convincing model is that the coaching process is an ongoing construction, overlaid by very complex phenomena, the reduction of which to modular form only serves to highlight their innate inadequacy in properly capturing the full extent of the coaching process. Thus a model of coaching that is built around discrete modular functions highlights many more problems than it offers solutions to and should only be used for broad indicative purposes rather than an exposition of the coaching role in all or even many settings. As Lyle (2002) identified, the coaching process is not an inert structured system and difficulties remain in establishing the degree of interrelation between a host of typically independent actions and properly reflecting a cognitive process.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings a number of coaching models do exist in the academic literature. These include the work of Franks *et al* (1986), Fairs (1987), Cote *et al* (1995) and Sherman *et al* (1997). Each has its own particular strengths and weaknesses and as a result none has achieved widespread acceptance amongst the coaching fraternity. Rather the debate has shifted towards the rationale for having a model of coaching. Ultimately there remain three overarching uses for models – education and training, research and analysis, and increased understanding (Lyle, 2002). Of course all coaching practice is idiosyncratic and unique, designed to be adapted by individuals, each with their own characteristics and preferences. Moreover models ‘of ’ usually involve aggregation and thus rarely capture the precise and nuanced nature of coaching, especially that involving special populations. Nonetheless an argument does exist for the creation of a sport specific model of coaching, one that does not seek necessarily emulate existing models but which reflects the unique characteristics of the sporting culture in question and the shared characteristics of athletes, such as Special Olympics.

Coaching Effectiveness

This line of argument in turn highlights the particular effectiveness of the coaching process, an issue dealt with at length by Cross (1999). It is clear from his analysis that no single objective measure of coaching effectiveness can be identified, which is appropriate to all

coaching situations. Indeed Cross (1999) is clear that the overemphasis on episodic coach education (e.g. communication) retains the potential to actually undermine the overall effectiveness of coaching. Rather an holistic approach designed to realise a series of defined and incremental outcomes is needed in order to increase the likelihood of positive change being secured (Gordan, 2009). In simple terms in order that the coach can be effective s/he must 'add value' to the environment (and obviously the team) in which they are employed. In this case the 'value added' to any coaching setting is the *relationship* between input and output. The emphasis here on relationship is suggestive of a process in which the work of the coach is measured against the abilities of the athletes with whom they are working, relative to their ultimate successes. In a holistic sense a number of characteristics have emerged from a range of studies designed to identify the key components associated with effective coaches (Dodge and Hastie, 1993). In brief these include: the frequent provision of feedback; the provision of high levels of correction and refined instruction; the use of questioning/seeking clarification from athletes regarding their actions; the primary use of instruction in their engagement with athletes; and, the management of the training environment in order to retain structure and purpose to specific training sessions. Of course the use or even presence of these characteristics may be correlated to the individual coach's leadership qualities, which in turn are likely to remain relative to the culture or sporting abilities of the athletes with whom they are working.

Coaching Styles

The style that coaches adopt is discussed at length by Martens (2004) who refines his analysis of differential coaching styles down to three key behavioural approaches: Command, Submissive and Cooperative coaching methods. "*In the command style of coaching, the coach makes all of the decisions. The role of the athlete is to respond to the coach's commands*" claims Martens (2004, p. 30). This approach, again conditional upon the context in which the coach is working, implies that s/he is the only adequate source of knowledge and that by following the coach's lead the athletes will improve and with this the overall prospect of success for the team will be enhanced. In contrast coaches who choose to adopt a more submissive stance make comparatively few decisions and show only limited leadership traits. It is self-evident that this approach is largely unsatisfactory and offers minimal guidance to athletes, who ironically can create disciplinary problems for the coach as the frustrations and apathy of some athletes results in a rise of disruptive behaviour (Gordan, 2009). Perhaps what is needed is an approach that lies somewhere in between these two positions and indeed this essentially describes the coach who adopts a cooperative style when dealing with their athletes. In this case coaches actively share the decision making process with their athletes who in turn benefit from being afforded added responsibility. However Martens (2004) suggests that "the challenge of the cooperative style is providing the right balance between directing athletes and letting them direct themselves" (p. 31). In effect this cooperative style is akin to the role of a teacher, which in

turn highlights, the degree of similarity that seemingly exists between teaching and coaching within the pedagogical realm.

In fact Jones (2006) examines the ways in which educational concepts may inform sports coaching. He concludes that the distinction between teaching and coaching is somewhat false, even unnecessary, and that *“both instruction and facilitation loomed large even in the practice of top-level coaches”* (p.7). In other words the pedagogic role, including that of providing a mentoring/ advisory function for athletes, remains an important element of the coaching process. Acceptance of this carries the implication of the athlete as a learner, rather than a mere mechanistic performer. Learning is at the core of coaching practice which further suggests that being a good coach requires much more than merely understanding the acquisition of skill or sporting methodology. In essence the coach is engaged in the development of the holistic athlete, and notwithstanding the need for effectiveness (as highlighted earlier by Cross 1999), high level coaches in particular appear to place specific emphasis on genuinely caring for their athletes and creating an environment in which they felt safe and appreciated.

As highlighted previously, and again to emphasise the link between coaching and teaching, Jones (2006) suggests that by engaging in a process of structured reflection coaches are involved in a process *“akin to that of pedagogical reasoning, which involves a progressive spiral of comprehension, adaptation, evaluation, reflection and new comprehension”* (p.9). It should quickly be said that learning to coach is not a straightforward or sequential process in the way this form of action learning would suggest it to be. Instead it is a multifaceted activity, fluid and personally constructed – coaches are ultimately individuals pursuing a satisfactory fit between their own characteristics, those of the athletes with whom they are engaged and the culture in which both entities co-exist (Gordan, 2009).

It is clear that over recent years the call to adopt a more holistic approach to coaching has gained credence borne out of an appreciation of the social role of the profession and sport’s wider function in developing fully rounded individuals. In effect what is taking place is the gradual shift of emphasis in the development of young people away from the process of structured learning in a particular sport towards one that is much more culturally responsive and which recognises the important role of sport in creating physically and emotionally intelligent young people, that sits alongside the intellectual development they achieve through the process of formal education (Gordan, 2009).

Understanding the Learner

In any sports environment there exists both the coach and the athlete. The need to understand how athletes learn is evidently central in producing better coaches. Bruner (1999) argues that what is required is a fuller understanding of what might be referred to as *‘folk pedagogies’* that underpin the instructional and learning processes. According to

Jones, Armour and Potrac (2004) “A *‘folk pedagogy’* is a set of beliefs about the best way for people to learn; in effect, what is ‘good’ for them to learn and, in particular, how and why they ‘ought’ to be able to learn it” (p.99). Dealing specifically with the process of pedagogy in a school setting, van Manen (1991) pointedly observed that, “*strangely, this question of how the young people we teach experience their relationship with teachers is seldom asked*” (p.19).

The central argument being advanced here in the context of coaching, is that by tracking more closely the actual experiences of the learners (athletes), coaches may find themselves surprised at what they have to say, and prove more effective as a result. “*Perhaps the key point to take from all of this is the imperative to place learners and learning at the heart of the coaching process, rather than coaches and coaching*” (Jones et al, 2004). Thus examining and tracking the exact nature of the coach-athlete relationship, and specifically how the latter views and engages with the former, is a self-evidently critical aspect of the coaching process.

Of course beyond this very important appreciation there is no avoiding the importance of the coach having the required knowledge and understanding, and perhaps more specifically the selection of appropriate learning tasks for the athlete during the coaching process. The key here, as identified by Shulman (1999), “*lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of the teacher (coach) to transform the content knowledge he/she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive*” (p.91). Central to effective coaching therefore is being able to transform and adapt content knowledge held by the individual coach (their pedagogical content knowledge) for the positive benefit of the athlete.

How (and how much of) knowledge is imparted is clearly conditional upon the talents of the coach and the abilities of the athletes, but so too is a proper appreciation of the learning environment in which this interaction unfolds. Underpinning the notion of a pedagogic setting is the work of Lave and Wenger (1998) who argue that learning is ‘situated’ in specific *‘communities of practice’*. This in turn implies the existence of a specific ‘culture of practice’ relevant to a particular setting, which should be learned and understood by those wishing to be legitimately accepted within such ‘communities of practice’. Typically this takes place through of process of mentoring or by holding credentials that clearly identify an individual as being knowledgeable about the wider coaching environment in which they are working, such as occurs with a school teacher and children or a special needs assistant with young people with intellectual disabilities. Ultimately what Jones et al (2004), Lave and Wenger (1999) and others, including Morgan (2008), are arguing in favour of is “*the re-conceptualisation of coaching as teaching and to further inform coach education and practice*” (p.15).

Where the increasingly convincing dialogue concerning the convergence of teaching and coaching may break down is that many coaches, particularly those working with special

populations, are volunteers. A survey conducted in 2004 in the UK indicated that more than 8 in every 10 coaches undertook their duties in a voluntary capacity (SportsCoachUK, 2004). Voluntary coaching plays an important role in the professional development of a coach, both in terms of gaining invaluable experience and working with a range of abilities and sports. However by definition such volunteers neither have the time nor, in a lot of cases, the expertise to develop their knowledge and skills base sufficiently to further their coaching careers. This can have an effect should they wish to work in a part time or full time capacity as a coach and also should they desire to work with different populations or groups of athletes (Gordan, 2009). Proper account needs to be afforded the way in which the literature around coaching and expectations associated with coaching as a profession has relevancy to the overwhelming number of coaches who execute their responsibilities in a voluntary capacity.

Athlete Identity

A further level of understanding, hinted at already but fully elucidated here, coheres around an appreciation of athletes' identities. Broad swathes of academic and practitioner literature in the field of coaching present sport performers largely as a homogenous group. The 'bio-scientific' view of athletes' bodies suggests that they exist merely to be 'serviced' by coaches, some of whom elicit better performance and others less so. Yet this simplistic notion belittles the role of coaches as discussed above but equally it is also important to examine how athletes' identities may exercise an influence on the coaching process. This is especially pertinent with respect to athletes with disabilities. Such individuals have traditionally been subject to disenfranchisement and exclusion in society. Society focuses on the medical implications of individuals' disabilities and with this highlights the apparent limitations they have in respect to full physical movement and athletic performance. The dominance of this medical discourse has been so prevalent that it is often accepted uncritically as the only way to properly conceive of, or define, disability within sports. In contrast De Pauw and Gavron (1995) argue that the performance of elite athletes with disabilities leave no question marks regarding their sporting ability. Indeed in certain timed sports, such as swimming or downhill skiing, the difference between athletes with physical disabilities and their mainstream counterparts, and indeed the subsequent difference between athletes with physical and those with intellectual disabilities, are minimal and constitute only a matter of seconds in real time. Consequently for coaches coming to work with special populations for the first time, and who may up until that point have only worked with mainstream athletes, there is *"benefit from critically interrogating their beliefs and practices (around people with disabilities)"* (Robinson, 2010, p.98).

Coaching special populations

The foregoing discussion is just as applicable to athletes who have special needs but further considerations also arise which are reviewed in this section.

Athletes competing in sport may have one of a wide range of disabilities, which require coaches to adjust for their individual needs. For instance athletes with Spinal Cord Injuries (SCIs) or those with a limb amputation may require prostheses or indeed specially adapted wheelchairs in order to compete in their chosen sport, whilst athletes with an intellectual disability will compete (and learn the rules of a game, for example) at a slower pace than might be considered typical but may otherwise have no underlying physical conditions that would hinder their ability to train or compete. Whilst these disabilities may alter the range of sports that an athlete can compete in, or indeed their method of learning and training, it is vital for coaches to recognize that first and foremost, these are competitive athletes and therefore must be treated as such.



Stereotyping

Martin (2010) highlights the importance of an awareness of pitfalls of stereotyping when working with athletes with disabilities. He describes two polar perspectives that can negatively influence athlete identity and impede the development of a positive coaching relationship. Firstly, the commonly held social view that an individual is equated to their disability – that is that sporting skills, social skills, even a sense of humour are minimized or ignored – resulting in a reduced understanding of the person.

The other common perception is what Martin describes as the *'supercrip'*. Someone who is congratulated on even mundane achievements, is celebrated as a hero for sporting participation. Hardin and Hardin (2004) point to an ambiguity in the notion of the *'supercrip'*, as one which can both inspire and dis-empower athletes with disabilities; Berger (2008) agrees, reporting on one elite athlete who felt he was simultaneously portrayed as both helpless and a hero. From a coaching perspective Martin (2010, p. 433) contends that to *'unrealistically minimize or glorify athletes with disabilities'* is an unhelpful point of departure. Indeed avoiding making assumptions about sporting ability based on perceived disability is a key tenet of guides to coaching athletes with disabilities (e.g. Coaching Association of Canada 2005).

Coaching competence

As identified already, the process of coaching and more specifically, the process of coaching special populations has proved to be a relatively understudied area of research. The emphasis of research to date has typically been on the work of the coach in relation to

their leadership and coaching styles (Solomon *et al.* 1996), amid a focus which many researchers believe to be over simplistic and based upon little empirical evidence (Jones *et al.* 1997; Cushion 2007; Cassidy and Kidman 2010). The shortcomings in this respect are exacerbated through the argument that in most cases coaching theory has lacked 'an underpinning conceptual basis' (Lyle 1986, cited in Cross and Lyle 1999). This lack of a conceptual basis still exists in the current literature (Cushion, Armour and Jones 2006) and as a consequence, coaches are left without an agreed model to relate to both for mainstream as well specialist populations.

However, within the last few years a succinct pedagogical shift has become apparent in the literature and indeed within the practical coaching environment with more of an emphasis being placed upon coach education and qualification frameworks (e.g. United Kingdom Coaching Certificate) and Head Coaching Strategies (Coaching Strategy for Ireland) (Cassidy 2008). Such strategies provide National Governing Bodies (NGBs) with a more formalised framework to follow in order to advance the overall level of coaching. It is not only government departments that are developing such frameworks, independent organisations and often multinational organisations have implemented strategies in order to develop their coaches, and through them their athletes. An example of this is contained with the Special Olympics Ireland 2012-2015 strategic plan (www.specialolympics.ie). This plan outlines how Special Olympics Ireland has incorporated the framework developed by Special Olympics International (see Chapter 1), which highlights five core pillars in order to implement the overall goal of providing an "holistic, consistent and quality experience for Special Olympics athletes" (Special Olympics Ireland 2011, pg.10).

It is also imperative that coaches have a strong knowledge base of the rules and laws of the sport they are coaching - and specifically the rules of adapted forms of that sport - in order to ensure the athletes receive appropriate guidance and advice (Abdullah, Ampofo-Boateng and Zawi, 2008). However, due to a lack of available coaches for such athletes, this need is not always met. Indeed Crawford and Stodolska (2008) gave examples of some elite level athletes competing at the Paralympics Games did so without the support of dedicated coaches. One obvious shortcoming with this situation is that many athletes prove then to be ill prepared for competition due to a pattern of inconsistent training and a lack of rest periods at the appropriate times (e.g. a lack of tapering before competition) and the risk of disqualification if they are not familiar with the competition rules (Liow and Hopkins, 1996).

Abdullah, 2008 underlines the need for coaches working with athletes with physical or intellectual disabilities to be able to think laterally and possess a knowledge of bodily movement and where range of movement is restricted. As young children, these athletes may not have had the same opportunities as their able-bodied peers to develop the fundamental movement skills required to complete many sporting activities (Australian Coaching Council 1989, cited in DePauw and Gavron, 1995). A further key issue, of which

coaches of athletes with disabilities must be aware, are the psychological obstacles that athletes may face when competing, particularly those with an intellectual disability. These athletes may have had limited past exposure to sport and physical activity generally and therefore they may conceive of participation in quite different ways to their mainstream counterparts.

When coaching athletes with physical disabilities there may be specific needs to be addressed and particular adaptive equipment required. Sport science research has led to major enhancements in the equipment required by athletes with physical disabilities; developments in wheelchair design and prostheses and the specific technologies and materials used in their manufacturing (Burkett and Mellifont 2008).

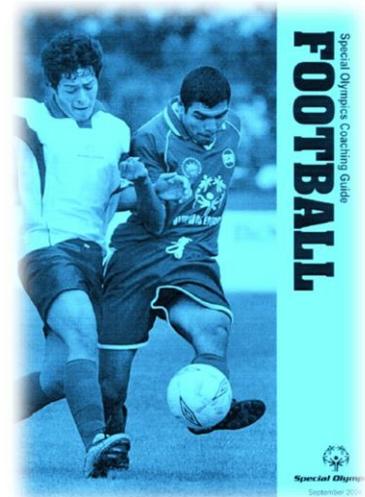
Coaching persons with an intellectual disability

The most widely available organized sporting opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities are provided by the Special Olympics organisation, which offers year round training activities and competition in Olympic-type sports. In addition, INAS is an International Sports Federation and a full member of the International Paralympic Committee representing Intellectual Disability. It provides competitions for elite athletes with intellectual disabilities. Both this organization and Special Olympics work in a complimentary fashion in various countries: athletes may participate in events in either, and both have a broader aim of improving social acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities through sport. The two organizations are highly dependent on volunteer coaches.

A series of studies, focused on National Special Olympics Programmes, have been carried out by the Global Research Collaborating Centre for Special Olympics, at UMASS Boston. These revealed contrasts in coach demography between nations. For instance in the USA, 74% of coaches were female, with a mean age of 48, whereas in China the majority (58%) were male and an average age of 37. Whilst almost half of the US coaches had a family member with a disability, this was the case for only 2% of Chinese coaches. Motivation for involvement in Special Olympics was for many in the US prompted by their personal connection to people with intellectual disabilities, however in China, where 75% of coaches were teachers, and 65% of these teachers in special schools, taking part in Special Olympics was part of the requirements of their job. In China, by contrast to coaches in the US, 24% had played sports professionally, this compared with only 3% in the US and in Europe 4% (Harada et al, 2008; Siperstein et al. 2005). Interesting inter-cultural comparisons regarding coach characteristics and backgrounds can be drawn from these studies, which also point to the adaptability of SO in relation to the particular cultural conditions of participating nations.

Coach education

No matter what their background or motivation the critical role, which coaches play within the Special Olympics movement, is well recognized and understood by the organisation. In particular, coach education is perceived to be an important aspect of developing and advancing the quality of sports and competitions and hence the necessity of having a strong base on which this aspect of coaching is developed. Significant efforts have been made to support the continuing professional development of coaches through the production of detailed guidance, available online, which can be delivered in the form of a coaching course. Four main principles of coaching are highlighted, namely: developing an individual's coaching philosophy, understanding and utilizing sport psychology, coaching and teaching basic sports skills, and coaching and the community (Special Olympics, 2003). This course includes a significant proportion of work on self reflection, asking coaches to question their coaching style, their philosophy in working with athletes with intellectual disabilities and the effectiveness of their approaches to communication (Special Olympics: retrieved December 2010).



Nonetheless, their approach to coach education is based on the widely accepted premise that regardless of the population being coached, the basics of coaching remain the same; although these must be adapted to fit the needs of the athletes. “*The core element in coaching is to determine where people are, assess where they need to get to, and find a path down that road. The basic issues are much the same with persons with a disability.*” (Higgs 2005, cited in Coaching Association of Canada 2005, p.4). In particular, the disability of each athlete must be considered to be unique and his or her training programme adapted according to that disability in order to optimize its effectiveness for that athlete.

A specific aspect of coaching philosophy that is explored is coaches' approach to the question of winning. The training cautions against too strong an emphasis being placed on winning and suggests that coaching should concentrate more on the process of training and striving to win rather than focusing solely on winning, for example the training states ‘*winning is never more important than your athletes well being.*’ (Special Olympics: retrieved December 2010).

The wider role of coaches within Special Olympics

Gordan's (2009) complex and multi-faceted model of overlapping scenarios described above, which constitute the coaches role, is further expanded in coaching situations with people with intellectual disabilities. Beyond the obvious role of sports instructor, coaches of persons with intellectual disabilities have been described as the motivating force for

people becoming involved and maintaining their involvement in sports (Weiss, 2008 Farrell et al 2004). This aspect of coaching has been described as an important factor in parents' decisions to support their children with intellectual disabilities becoming involved in sport; where *'thoughtful instruction'* is cited as a factor in their decision making (Goodwin et al. 2006, Fung and Tsai, 2009). Maintaining athletes' involvement in sports has in part been attributed to coaches in that *'the coach quit'* being reported as a factor leading to athletes' withdrawal from a sports programme (Harada and Siperstein 2009:12). Moreover, coaches have been reported to take on a wide ranging organizational role; being required to adopt the role of carer and have been additionally been described as an important role model, leader and on occasion a friend and confidant (Dowling et al, 2010).

Three aspects of coaching are worthy of particular note with athletes who have intellectual disabilities: that of communication, athlete autonomy and the promotion of social inclusion.

Communication

Effective communication, tailored to the particular communication style of athletes is essential for successful coaching in working with people with intellectual disabilities. It is important to know each individual athlete's preferred communication style and their receptive language ability. This comes with experience and through taking time to get to know the athletes. Coaches need to adopt creative approaches to communication and be prepared to adopt a range of strategies (Gregg 2010, Martin 2010), for instance, visual prompts, demonstrations as well as verbal reinforcement and experiential learning (Special Olympics, retrieved Sept 2011). Matikka & Vesala (1997) have noted a tendency amongst people with intellectual disabilities to give answers they think are expected of them. This can be circumvented through the use of a combination of approaches, e.g. avoiding using questions that require yes/no responses (Mactavish, Lutifyya & Mahon 2000) or by asking athletes to repeat instructions back to practitioners (Travis & Sachs 1991).

Building good communication strategies will lead to better rapport with athletes. This is recognized as a core skill of coaches working with people with intellectual disabilities and takes an important place in training developed in this area (e.g. Special Olympics Coaching Guide which states: *'There are many aspects of sport psychology, however none will be more important to coaching than learning how to communicate with your athletes and understanding what motivates them to train and compete in sports. By default, successful coaches are good sport psychologists — skillful communicators and motivators.'* (Special Olympics retrieved, Sept 2010).

Autonomy of athletes

Gregg (2010) discusses the notion of autonomy in the context of ethical approaches to coaching with athletes with intellectual disabilities. She emphasizes the need to ensure that athletes are consenting to their participation in sports activities and are aware of their right to withdraw at any time. This is in line with ethical principles, which guide sports

psychologists and practitioners (e.g. American Psychological Association). Dluzewska-Martyniec (2002) report on work undertaken in Special Olympics in Poland, described the potential for the development of autonomy in decision-making through sports activities. Unfortunately, they found that the extent of autonomy offered to athletes was not always adjusted to their needs, and in some instances coaches blocked autonomous decision-making. Athletes have been found to indicate that they want input into their training and for their coaches to be open to their ideas (Farrell et al 2004). Gregg (2010) recommends involving important others, in particular family members, as they may act as advocates for athletes and in turn encourage self-advocacy. Hanrahan (2004) notes that effective practitioners will focus on ability rather than disability and construct programmes that will positively develop competencies (Travis and Sachs 1991), thus encouraging autonomy (Gregg, 2010).

Promoting social inclusion through sport

Keeping pace with the current emphasis on social exclusion and debates around inclusive education and shared activities for people with intellectual disabilities, a Programme of inclusive sports, namely Unified Sports was instituted by Special Olympics in 1989. This is a Programme through which people with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete on the same sports teams. Research has shown the critical role played by coaches within this Programme, not solely in terms of participants' sporting development, but as a leader and role model in promoting the wider goals of the Programme, namely to encourage the development of friendships and social acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities (Kersh and Siperstein 2007, Norins et al 2007, Dowling et al. 2010). Indeed it has been contended that the coach plays a critical role in supporting the potential of Unified Sports Programmes to achieve the goals of promoting inclusion within a framework of the development of social capital amongst athletes with intellectual disabilities (Dowling et al. 2010).

Special Olympics Athletes



Although we come to athletes last, in reality they are of central concern throughout this review. People with intellectual disabilities are known to take part in fewer sporting activities than their non-disabled peers (Hogg & Dattillo 1995). However, those who become members of their local Special Clubs are reported to experience benefits which extend beyond the sporting, in particular growth of self-esteem and confidence, positive self

perception and developments in overall social competence (Dykens & Cohen, 1996; Klein, Gilman, & Zigler, 1993).

Klein (1993) also reports the belief of parents of SO athletes, that their sons/daughters benefit through participation in Special Olympics in terms of their quality of life and social adjustment. Families felt that they received increased social support and that SO fulfilled its remit of increasing public understanding of people with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics athletes tend to stay in the organisation for an extended period, Farrell et al (2004) conclude that descriptive studies have shown that people with intellectual disabilities share similar motivation to non-disabled peers in participating in sports: that is to improve their sports skills, enjoy competition, be part of a team, receive recognition for their sporting achievement, increase their fitness and health and spend time with family and friends, (e.g. Shapiro, 1995; Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992; cited in Farrell 2004). In a further study of motivation amongst Special Olympics athletes, Farrell et al (2004) report that athlete motivation with SO is supported by both intrinsic factors – having fun, playing the game, building confidence, as well as building friendships and relationships with coaches and volunteers, and in addition extrinsic factors such as winning medals and trophies, having opportunities to travel and attend special events. Thus coaches have to balance many expectations and aspirations among the athletes they train, which may be heightened and extended in preparation for the World Games.

Conclusions

Coaching within Special Olympics, and more broadly within sport with people with disabilities is a specialism within the wider field of sports coaching. Hence this review has highlighted current perspectives in mainstream sports coaching – namely coaching processes, effectiveness, models of coaching and the complex inter-play of goals and challenges with which coaches are faced. Arguably it is the scope and emphasis of coaching that changes for athletes with special needs. That these coaches typically merge the roles of sports coach, mentor and role model, as well as taking a keen interest in the ‘whole’ athlete with whom they are engaged, provides important insight into the complexities inherent in being a Special Olympics coach. That said there is a paucity of even descriptive research with these coaches, which makes it harder to develop an evidence-based model of coaching in relation to World Games. Thus the present study has increased significance albeit because it is one of the first to examine the training and preparation of athletes with intellectual disabilities for major international competition.

Chapter 3: The Methods used in the evaluation

This chapter details the information we collected about coaches, athletes and family members, across five different sports, in four different countries and at four time points during 2011. More detailed technical information about the research methods will be given in a series of journal articles available from the authors. This trans-national, longitudinal study of coaching is the first of its kind in Special Olympics.



As noted in Chapter 1, around 7,000 athletes from some 170 countries competed in 21 different sports in the Summer World Games 2011 in Athens. Given our limited resources, we had to decide on the sports and countries we would focus on for this study.

We selected the most popular sports in SO programs world-wide. These are athletics, football, aquatics, basketball, bocce/bowling and table tennis (SO Reach Report 2010). This listing includes a mix of individual and team sports as well as those in which Unified Teams take part (such as Football) and also athletes with more severe impairments such as Bocce. Hence they provide a good cross-section of sports and coaching. Nevertheless there may be features of coaching in relation to other sports that we have not captured.

Next we checked to see which countries would be competing in at least four of the most popular sports listed. We grouped the countries into the seven Special Olympics Regions so that we could ensure that four different regions were included in the study. We also wanted to include countries of varying size and income levels (i.e. high income to low income countries.) In consultation with the Regional Coordinators for Special Olympics and our Advisory Board, six nations were invited to participate in the study and four accepted as shown on the Map. Table 3.1 gives further details of the chosen countries.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of the four participating countries in the study

Country	Total Population	Income level	SO Region	Number SO athletes*	Number of SO Coaches*
Costa Rica	4.6 million	Upper Middle	Latin America	27,019	1,316
Greece	10.8 million	High	Europe/Eurasia	6,558	1,050
India	1.210 million	Developing	Asia Pacific	707,346	44,304
South Africa	50.6 million	Upper Middle	Africa	25,752	1,652

* Reach report, 2010

The Coaches

In each of the four countries, the Regional Co-coordinators for Special Olympics confirmed the five different types of sports in which athletes would compete at the World Games and nominated one coach for each sport who would also accompany them to Athens. We aimed to recruit a range of coaches, for example those who were experienced SO coaches to those who were recent recruits. Table 3.2 lists the coaches by sport and country who took part – 21 in all (including an assistant football coach in South Africa).

Table 3.2 The chosen sports by country and number of coaches and athletes in the study

Costa Rica	Greece	India	South Africa	Total Coaches	Total athletes
Athletics	Athletics	Athletics	Athletics	5	12
Aquatics	Aquatics	Aquatics	Aquatics	4	10
Bocce	Bocce	Bocce	Bocce	4	10
Football	Volleyball	Handball	Football	4	14
	Table Tennis	Badminton		2	4
Gymnastics				1	3
			Golf	1	3
Totals				21	56

Within the group of 21 coaches, 13 were male (62%) and 8 female (38%). They had been coaching on average for six years (range 1 to 16 years) and three-quarters had previously coached at international games. Typically they would have coached for around 8 hours per week (range 4 to 40 hours) with all but one having experience of coaching at National level. Over sixty percent of coaches were educated to degree level and all had coaching qualifications recognized by their local authorities or extensive experience of coaching with this population.

The Athletes

Each coach was asked to identify up to three athletes they were coaching for the World Games. This would include those who were considered to be strong, medium and weak. For team sports a similar selection was made from the squad. Table 3.2 summarises the number of athletes in the study across the countries for each sport.

Slightly more athletes were male than female (54% v 46%). Their average age was 22 years (range 11 to 43 years). Most had been involved with SO for three or more years (64%) although 7 (13%) had joined within the past year. Around one third had been with their coach for one year; a further third for two years and the remainder for three or more years. All but two athletes had previously competed in national, regional or international games – nearly one quarter at the latter.

All but three athletes lived at home with families. Coaches rated 41% of these as low-income families; a further 52% as middle-income and just 7% as high income.

Most athletes had attended special (83%) rather than mainstream schools (17%). Just over one quarter were able to communicate verbally, read simple text and travel independently. By contrast fewer than 20% had only simple verbal communication could not read and could not travel independently. The majority fell between these two groupings and were either not able to communicate fluently or to read or to travel independently.

Athletes in the sample all had experience of competing at a National level, and some had attended regional games – which provide experience of international competition, however few had attending World Games previously – only 2/56 had done so.

We used two indicators of athlete fitness that could easily be obtained during our data collection visits and which could be applied across all sports: namely measures of height and weight so that a Body Mass Index (BMI) could be computed and a timed 50 metre run or walk. These measures were taken at Time 2 when the athletes were in the final three months of training and again at Time 4 after the Games. The mean and range of scores were as follows:

Fitness Indicator	In Training	After the Games
BMI (Body mass index)	22.8 (15-37)	23.1 (15-36)
Timed 50 metre run/walk	12.5 secs (5-52)	12.4 secs (6-26)

There was wide variation in the athletes' BMI with around 30% being considered overweight or even obese. Their speed of running also varied greatly. There appeared to be generally no lasting gain after the Games although some individual athletes did show improvements. It is possible that some transient gains had been attained by the time of the Games but logistical reasons meant it was not possible for this to be checked during the data collection at the Games.

Of course this data should be read with the 'health warning' that BMI measures, whilst useful, may not necessarily be the most reliable indicator of an individual's overall level of physical fitness. It is feasible that an individual's increased BMI measure may result from a significant increase in muscle mass, brought about by training adaptations. Conversely some athletes may simply not have started training early enough in the pre-Games' cycle to address a lack of fitness and hence little improvement and possible declines could occur in an indicator such as BMI. Whilst coaches prioritised building their athlete's fitness and stamina action to address the potentially low levels of fitness amongst World Games athletes may need to commence much earlier than in the period immediately after athlete selection.

Information gathered

As the Figure shows, we gathered information from the same coaches and athletes at four time points during 2011 so that we could chart changes over time. Hence we met with the coaches and athletes at their local venues on two occasions before the World Games and once after they had returned home. We also met with them at the World Games.



We wanted to build up a detailed picture of the experience of the coaches and of the athletes as they prepared for the World Games. Equally we wanted to examine how their experiences changed over time and compared across sports and countries. Hence we opted to use a variety of means for gathering the information both qualitative and quantitative. These were developed from past studies in coaching and through pilot testing

with coaches and athletes from Special Olympics Ulster in Northern Ireland. A copy of all the rating scales and interview schedules are available on request from the authors.



Qualitative information came from the one-to-one interviews that were conducted with each athlete and coach. We used structured questions to ensure that all the relevant topics were covered across all the four countries. Examples of the questions used are given later. However, we tried to keep the interviews as conversational as possible and assured the

participants that there were no right or wrong answers. It was their opinion that counted. In addition we provided ready-made pro formas for athletes and coaches to complete so that we had a record of the individual training goals for each athlete and the strategies for attaining them.

Quantitative information took the form mainly of rating scales and sorting tasks. These enable comparisons to be made across groups and over time. Examples of the measures used are given below.

Four types of information were gathered over the course of the study using a range of approaches and measures. During the year, these were adapted and developed in light of the information gathered at a previous time point.

1. Coaching styles and priorities.

We used published scales of coaching efficacy and a sorting task to obtain information as to how coaches' perceived their key role and focus of their coaching. For example, the sorting task had 12 items identified from rating scales and interviews at Time 1. Coaches were asked first to select those that applied to the particular athlete and their sport and then secondly to rank them in order of importance. This task was also completed by a further 18 Head Coaches at the World Games (Time 3). This data helped to confirm the validity of the findings beyond our sample of coaches and athletes.



2. Training goals and plans

We asked each coach-athlete pair to identify the three main training goals they were working towards using a common pro forma. Their progress was then reviewed three

months later as well as identifying new goals that had been set. An example of the pro forma used with athletes is shown below.

These are the goals you and your coach identified last time.	Have you improved in relation to this goal YES/NO	Is there still room for more improvement YES/NO <i>Please comment</i>	What has your coach done to help you to work on this goal?	What have you done yourself to work on this goal?
<i>Goal 1</i>				
<i>Goal 2</i>				
<i>Goal 3</i>				

3. Indicators of athlete achievements

We obtained indicators of the athlete's fitness alongside their perceptions of what sporting achievement meant to them. We asked coaches to complete a similar task. For example at Time 4 they were asked to rate the items shown in the Table from 1 to 8 as to what sporting achievement meant for the athletes they had trained. These items were drawn from the interviews that had been conducted at earlier time points and represented the most commonly mentioned outcomes of participating in the World Games as perceived by the athletes, their coaches and also their parents. Hence this same rating task was used across these three groupings so that we could compare whether they held similar perceptions around the main outcomes from competing at the World Games

Achievement and success in Special Olympics means	Rating
Athletes will achieve their best sporting performance.	
Athletes will make new friends and develop new social skills.	
Athletes will grow in confidence and their self-esteem will improve.	
Athletes will win a gold medal in the competitions	
Athletes will enjoy the experience of the major competitions.	
Athletes will gain greater independence in life skills.	
Athletes will be more valued in their home community because of the prestige associated with taking part in the major competitions.	
Athletes will develop awareness of the need to be fit and healthy	

4. Impact of the World Games

We used the one-to-one interviews to gain an insight into what participation in the World Games meant to the athletes and the impact it had on them. Coaches and family members were also interviewed around this theme. Here are examples of the questions asked of the athletes at Time 4:

What do you remember most about being at the games? What is your strongest/best memory?

What competitions did you perform best in?

- *what do you think helped you to perform so well in your competition?*
- *What role did your coach have in helping you to give a good performance*

Were there any competitions in which you did not perform as well in as you had hoped?

- *Why do you think you didn't perform so well?*
- *Is there anything you would like your coach to have done to help you to give your best performance?*

The table below summarizes the information that was gathered at each of the four time points in the course of the study.

Table 3.3 Summary of the information gathered at each of four time points

Time 1 (January 2011)	Time 2 (April 2011)	Time 3 World Games (June 2011)	Time 4 (October 2011)
Athlete and coach descriptions			
Athlete's rating of coach			Athlete's ratings of coach
Coaching efficacy scale	Coaching priorities sorting task	Coaching priorities sorting task	Coaching priorities sorting task
Athlete goal setting and training plan	Athlete goal setting and training plan		
Interview with athletes	Interview with athletes	Interview with athletes	Interview with athletes
Interview with coaches	Interview with coaches	Interview with coaches/Head Coaches	Interview with coaches
Interviews with relatives		Interviews with relatives	Interviews with relatives
	Athlete health and fitness indicators		Athlete health and fitness indicators
			Coach's review of athlete readiness
			Athlete review of readiness
			Measuring achievement – coach's perspectives
			Measuring achievement – athlete's perspectives

Who gathered the information?

With help from SO colleagues and through personal contacts, we recruited university partners in each country who had experience of research in sports and/or intellectual disability and who were fluent English speakers. Following telephone interviews, we contracted with them to undertake the following tasks.

- To translate the information gathering tools into local languages.
- To attend an in-country briefing session with a member of project team to induct them into how the tools would be used.
- To undertake data gathering with athletes, coaches and family members in the locations where training took place at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 4.
- To translate completed pro formas and scoring sheets into English as necessary and enter data into Excel spreadsheets.
- To translate and transcribe interviews into English.
- To submit all the information to the project manager by agreed deadlines.
- To repeat the data gathering at the three time points (Time 1, Time 2 and Time 4).



In each country, the main contractor was accompanied by one or more research assistants (usually Masters students); this made the data gathering more efficient as different informants could be interviewed concurrently. Agreements were made as to the total number of days required over the course of the year and to the daily rate of pay

that was appropriate to that country. All in-country expenses were re-imbursed.

To ensure consistency in approach across countries, a member of the Project Team visited each country to provide an overview of the ethos and approach being used in the evaluation and to induct the partners in the use of the information gathering tools. They were also present for the information gathering at Time 1 and could observe the partners in action and facilitate de-briefing sessions.

Fortunately all our partners were available at the necessary times during 2011 and we are very grateful to them for the prompt and efficient way they undertook their duties.

At the World Games (Time 3), data gathering was undertaken by the project team from the University of Ulster assisted by our partners in Greece. Interpreters were provided by the organizers of the Games. Information gathering was mostly conducted at the competition venues for the various sports when divisioning was taking place.

Ethical considerations

The evaluation received formal ethical approval from the University of Ulster in September 2010 (ref 10/0147).

An information sheet about the evaluation was prepared in local languages and circulated in advance to participating coaches with an accessible version prepared for athletes. Prior to interviewing the informants, they were reminded as to the reasons for gathering the information; that it would be kept confidential and no one would be identified in any reports. Signed consent forms were obtained from all participants.

Analysing the information

Given the extensive amount of information that was available across countries and time points, we had to set priorities in relation to data analysis.

First we wanted to identify the common themes across sports and countries in relation to the overall aims of the evaluation and four types of information that we had gathered. Hence variations by sports or by countries was then a secondary consideration, mainly because our samples of athletes and coaches were small and could not be presumed to be representative of either the particular sport or their country.

Second we wanted to compare and contrast the perceptions and experiences of coaches and of athletes. This was possible as we had devised the information gathering tools to do so. But in addition the views of family carers and of Head Coaches were sought to validate the conclusions emerging from the data.

Third, we wanted to focus on the implications for future coaching practice in relation to preparing SO athletes for high level competitions such as the World Games. Thus we were more interested in practical rather than statistical significance.

Data analysis was undertaken as follows. The information from the individual interviews was transcribed verbatim in English. The main themes were identified using thematic content analysis and these were verified by two or more members of the Project Team.

Data from rating scales and sorting tasks along with demographic information on coaches and athletes were entered into SPSS Vers. 18 for summary analysis. Information on training goals and training was entered into an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate grouping by type of goals and plans and the tracking of these over time. The groupings were cross-checked by the project team.

Initial findings were discussed with Advisory Board for the Project. Our university partners in each country plus the Regional Coordinators for SO were also invited to comment on the main findings as a further validation.

Conclusions

This study has a number of strengths. It examined coaching across different sports and in four countries drawn from different SO regions. It followed the same coaches and athletes at four time points; before, during and after the World Games. It used a mix of methods to document experiences and outcomes.

Equally its limitations should be noted. The participants – both coaches and athletes – cannot be considered representative of either their sports or their countries. But we would contend that the experiences of our sample is broadly reflective of the wider SO community of athletes and coaches competing in World Games although future research is needed to confirm this and to identify the variations that may be present across other sports and other countries. Also our focus was on coaching in the context of preparing for the World Games and hence our findings may not reflect the coaching that typically occurs – or should occur - in local SO groups. Once again further investigations could be undertaken on this topic based on the approaches developed in this study.

The findings¹

The information gathered is presented in the following three chapters around the themes of participation, preparation and competition. The initial theme of participation should be seen as the one constant, in that it both underpins and permeates the other two main themes. The relevance of the themes labeled 'preparation' and competition', expands and contracts in relation to the time relative to the World Games and the context of activities.



¹ Some of the findings presented in the forthcoming chapters are illustrated with quotations from participants, namely – athletes, coaches and parents. Where a quotation from an athlete or coach is used this will be referenced by (athlete/coach – sport), where a quotation from a parent/family member is used this is referenced as (parent/country). We do not identify athletes and coaches by country for reasons of confidentiality.

Chapter 4: Participation in the Summer World Games

A recurring theme throughout all the information gathered was the formative influence on athletes and coaches of their participation of Special Olympics locally. This is not surprising as for many it is a regular and recurring experience and may have been so for many years. The relationships athletes build with local coaches and with fellow athletes is the bedrock for their preparation for competition. However these influences may colour the type and extent of the training and preparation that coaches and athletes undertake. Seen positively, they provide a grounding in which the athletes' sporting skills can be further developed in the build up to the Games. Against that, the usual routines associated with local clubs can be hard to break. Coaches and athletes may find it difficult to establish new training regimes, especially as the time available from selection to competition can be short.

More broadly the World Games presents the athletes with new opportunities for participation and these are described in detail from the perspectives of participants' expectations and well as their reflections on the actual experiences during and after the Games.

Participation in SO locally

Athletes selected to take part in the Games are all members of Special Olympics clubs in their local areas. These clubs may operate out of the schools that younger athletes attend, or they can be independent sports clubs perhaps located in a local community centre or sports facility. Typically athletes attend on a weekly basis for training and club activities in their chosen sport. The athletes who are selected for the World Games are likely to be those who are committed members of their club, who attend regularly and train intently. They are likely to be involved in one particular sport though some may also be members of Unified Teams. People we interviewed told us of the important place the club activities have in the lives of athletes, which bear out the findings of various previous studies (see Chapter 2). For example, one parent said:

'My son is mad about sport, he is running and playing ball all the time outside and the club [Special Olympics] gives him the chance to train and to be in tournaments. He always looks forward to going to train; he likes to see his friends there too. (Mother, Greece).

Coaches are also aware of how important the weekly club activities are to athletes:

'They are here every week, there is hardly a night when one of them misses a training session, they are very committed to the team and to each other and they love the game. (Coach, Football)

Through attendance in weekly club activities athletes develop a strong bond with their coaches. They get to know them over a long period of time and look to coaches not just for sports training, although that is central, but also for support as mentors, role models and, on occasion, in assisting athletes with practical or personal support needs. One coach described his sense of responsibility to athletes, which extends beyond their sports training:



Because here, you're everything for them – you're the brother, you're the father, you're the doctor, everything. You're the counselor, everything. It's not just training. It's different with Special Olympics athletes. You can't just say it's their responsibility. It's your responsibility as coach. And there is their health as well. Yes, when you are away at competitions, before they sleep, before they eat, you must make sure that they take their medication that they've taken it. And that you've seen it with your own eyes. Sometimes they will tell you that they have taken their medication and you find out that they didn't. There is always so much to consider for each athlete, that is the Special Olympics coach. (Coach, Football).

The close relationship between athletes and coaches is therefore built and established through regular and long-term contact. For athletes, adjusting to a different training regime in preparation for the World Games and either working in conjunction with the local or Head Coach, or local coaches shifting into the role of a Head Coach – these kinds of changes pose challenges to both athletes and coaches as they negotiate the new territory of preparing for participation in the World Games.

Participation in the World Games

Although recognizing the wider context of regular participation of athletes at club level, the information gathering in the course of this evaluation concentrated on athletes' and coaches' perceptions about participating in the World Games. A number of distinct themes emerged from the interviews conducted at all phases of the data gathering and they are summarised in the Figure below.

Participation

- A member of Special Olympics
- Athlete's excitement and anticipation of competition
 - The Big Experience
- Personal and Social Development of Athletes
 - The team as family – coach as parent
 - The role of the coach
 - Coach participation
 - Family Participation

Athletes' excitement at selection and anticipation of competition

The experience of being selected for the world games brought great excitement and expectation to athletes; they reported being delighted to have been chosen:

'I cried from happiness. I went crazy when I knew it.' (Athlete - Bocce)

Moreover, the thought that they will be representing their country at the World Games was accompanied by a sense of pride:

'I will be representing my country, my club and my school, I am proud to be the person chosen for this task.' (Athlete - Athletics)

And of course the opportunity to take part in competition on this scale brought great expectations, one athlete predicted the challenges that lay ahead:

'I have heard that the competition will be really tough.' (Athlete - Swimming)

Whilst another stated their intention to rise to the challenge:

'I hope to win medals. I want to bring back a gold medal to my country and for my family.' (Athlete - Swimming)

And in response to the possibility of winning another athlete said:

'If I win I would be the happiest girl in the world.' (Athlete - Athletics)

At the Games, athletes' competitive spirit was even more apparent, as they were caught up in the maelstrom of emotion and the excitement of the event:

'I cannot wait for my match, I am going to give it my all, my team are the best, we are going to take the Gold.' (Athlete - Footballer)

The Big Experience

Whilst athletes were aiming high in terms of their competition, they were also excited by the wider experience of taking part in the Games. Athletes described their anticipation at the many diverse elements of the Games – traveling to another country with the associated new experiences of a different culture – climate, food, and language. As one athlete said:

'You can learn how do the people live, how do they speak you can learn languages like in Greece you can learn about Greek languages, how do they eat its very lacker [nice/good] to have more experience of food and stuff like that', (Athlete – Football)

One athlete fondly remembered the days spent on a Greek Island where his team were hosted before going to Athens for the Games:

'I have a great memory of spending 3 to 4 days on a beautiful island called Zakynthos Island, the people were wonderful, we were treated well, there were 2 museums and beautiful beaches and just the experience on the Island was awesome. (Athlete - Athletics)

Another talked of the thrill of attending the opening ceremony:

'The opening ceremony was great. Was like a lot of people, cameras flashing, we were walking in and they were like SOUTH AFRICA, people were screaming and it was like WOW!' (Athlete - Athletics)

Some athletes expressed concerns about spending time away from family as they travelled away from home, often for the first time. One athlete remarked that she would, *'hold my mother and father in my heart until I return home.'* (Athlete - Gymnastics). However, the camaraderie amongst team-mates and the support of the coach was reported by athletes to assist them in coping with the anxiety of being away from home and relatives.

'Being away from my family is fine because I have my coach and I can always talk to him.' (Athlete - Athletics)

Data strongly highlighted the importance of the Big Experience of taking part in the World Games for athletes; as one parent remarked it is likely to be a truly memorable event:

'Participating in the Olympic Games is one experience that he will keep for the rest of his life.' (Mother, New Zealand).

Personal and Social Outcomes for Athletes

One of the key elements of athlete's enjoyment is bound up in the relationships that they form and the friendships that are made both in the course of preparations for the Games and whilst in Athens. The value of relationships with peers is apparent and the pleasure taken in making new friends and sharing the grand experience of being part of the World Games is clear, both amongst athletes, their parents and their coaches, as one athlete told us:

I went there with my friends on the team and we made new friends with the guys from Egypt, India, Greece and all those places that had people there in Athens.’ (Athlete - Football)

Another said:

‘In the hotel it was fun, we stayed up late talking and laughing, it was great. (Athlete – Racket Sport)

Parents too commented athletes’ enjoyment of the social aspect of the Games:

‘The fun these guys have is brilliant, up dancing, doing interesting things. Up dancing at two in the morning, it’s lovely, fantastic.’ (Mother, Greece)

The social aspects of the Games are an important part of the experience. The development of friendships and social bonds is evident from when athletes are selected, through the preparation period and in particular at training camps and then most fully at the Games. Coaches remarked on the importance of this aspect of the experience for athletes:

‘They form strong friendships and they rely on each other and are supportive. These friendships are immensely valuable for our athletes; some of them have not had the chance before to make friends away from their family networks’. (Coach - Gymnastics)

Indeed the importance of the social aspect of the games is not trivial. Parents and coaches recognized the growth of the social and communication skills of athletes as well as the development of confidence and self-esteem to be of considerable consequence. Coaches were found to emphasise the social and communication skills of athletes for two reasons. Firstly, in relation to the broader personal development of athletes, which is integral to their participation in Special Olympics, as one coach stated:

‘SO [in our country] was established with the objective of bringing marginalized children [sic] to the mainstream. Our priority is overall personal development, and sport is the means to achieve this end. It is a therapy for general wellbeing. To ensure good sporting performance we need to work on endurance, strength and assorted factors. Yet, it is secondary to the task of improving their social and communicating skills’. (Coach - Athletics)

Secondly, priority was given to the development of confidence and good communication as it was identified as an asset in sports performance, in particular amongst athletes engaged in team sports.

Parents easily recognized the link between socializing and the growth of confidence and self-esteem, as one such individual remarked:

‘The best thing for him is mingling with people. He has had more confidence and his self-esteem is fantastic. He knows all the guys on his team. They talk on Facebook and

sometimes they go out together and things like that, which I mean – before he was a very shy person. So that has brought him out, going out together’. (Mother, Ireland)

Indeed the wider benefits of participation in SO were highlighted by parents,

They don’t have a lot of things to do, so the SO gives them pleasure to compete, make friends, leaving home and parents, which is a very important thing to do. (Mother, Costa Rica).

Another was glad that SO provides a distraction and a focus, which over-ride the risks around in the local community:

‘When he plays sports he is away from the streets, because there are other boys his age – they are roaming the streets. Some will start smoking dagga and smoothing that and that. So, I’m happy when he’s concentrating on sport. (Father, South Africa).

Participation in the World Games is therefore reported to derive a range of additional benefits to those more directly associated with sport. It is coaches and parents who more readily recognise these benefits and their wider implications. Athletes talked through a more experiential perspective – enjoying the friendships and new networks, which evolved through their participation in the Games. However, critically, for athletes central to the big experience was their involvement in sports and their identification of themselves as athletes.

The Team as family – coach as parent

Familial metaphors are used to characterize stakeholders’ constructions of the National Team. Athletes are found to talk about their fellow team-mates as family:

We feel like sisters’ (Athlete - Gymnastics)

‘I will be playing with my family.’ (Athlete - Football)

Whilst fellow-athletes are often characterized as siblings, coaches are commonly described by athletes as fulfilling something akin to a parental role:

‘My coach is my mother and my father when I am with my team. He helps me with everything.’ (Athlete - Swimming)

Parents of athletes too recognize the pseudo-parental role that coaches play:

‘They are like parents to them. They know how parental is, that is why I trust them.’ (Mother, Greece)

Indeed coaches were also found to describe their role in terms of parenting:

‘They are not just coaches who train athletes on the ground, but parents who take care of everything starting from brushing their teeth to choosing clothes for them.’ (Coach - Athletics)

The role of the coach

The familial metaphors are helpful in providing further understanding of the role that coaches undertake in the course of their preparing athletes for the World Games.

Although this work specifically focuses on the preparations for major competition, there are resonances with the range of tasks that SO coaches adopt in their typical club activities.

Firstly, there are roles that you would typically expect of a sports coach – instructor, trainer; and furthering this role the coach is understood as a motivator and sports mentor. But in addition to this coaches report that they expect to support athletes with the emotional pressures of participation in major competition, to ensure that athletes feel safe and confident whilst away from home, to offer practical support with the details of personal care, to make sure any medications are given according to specified routines, to assist athletes with interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, encourage friendships and be a friend and confidant to athletes.

It is clear from the data that athletes variously expect a combination of this range of roles from their coaches. As one athlete stated:

'My coach has helped me in every way – to control my nerves, to be brave, to have better physical fitness, to feel good being away from home and to understand the rules [of sport]. (Athlete - Swimming)

Another said:

'My coach has helped me a lot, he has protected me and guided me; he is very good to me.' (Athlete - Athletics)

It is clear that for all athletes the coach is a central figure of considerable importance in whom trust is invested and through whom the experience of the games is mediated.

Parents too recognize the important role played by the coach who will be accompanying their son or daughter to the World Games:

[The coaches] look after them. Making sure they don't lose things. Getting to places on time. Generally looking after the guys. Make sure they enjoy the experience on and off the course. (Mother, Greece)

Parents also recognize the investment made by coaches in their athletes, that they are more than solely motivated by their role as sports coaches:

'The coaches are like parents to them [the athletes], they look after them in every way, that is why I am happy for her to go. (Mother, Greece)

In order to examine the athlete's perceptions of coaches more thoroughly, we asked them to rate on a three point visual scale, a range of characteristics of coaches derived from a leadership measure for sport (Chelladural & Saleh, 1980). Table 4.1 below shows the four characteristics which athletes rated highest and those they rated lowest.

Table 4.1 Percentage of athletes rating characteristics of coaches (N=45)

Item	Always	Some times	Never
I feel safe with my coach	96%	4%	0%
My coachtells me when I have done well in my sport	91%	9%	0%
...shows me what I should and should not do in my training	87%	13%	0%
...lets me train at my own speed	87%	7%	7%
...helps me with my personal problems	41%	46%	13%
...asks for my opinion about training	39%	41%	20%
...telephones me to see how I am getting on	37%	46%	17%
...is someone that I can tell things to that I wouldn't tell to other people	36%	34%	30%

Most athletes valued most the person-centred way in which their coaches trained them but they place less emphasis on some of the wider roles of coaches in relation to the athlete's personal issues. Also the athletes are perhaps not as involved in planning their training as they might wish to be and only a minority report telephone contact between training sessions, although not all would have access to phones. Hence there may be some mismatch between coaches' and athletes' perceptions; a point to which we will return in the next chapter.

Coach participation

There are common routes into Special Olympics coaching, some coaches have a family member with an intellectual disability and were introduced to SO through this, others are educators in Special Schools and some come through mainstream sports coaching or are themselves sportsmen or women. Commonly coaches express a high degree of commitment to their work, which is typically voluntary, within Special Olympics, many involved several days each week:

'We train three times per week with table tennis and two more times I am coaching swimming so I am personally involved with Special Olympic five times per week. (Coach – Table Tennis)

Some note the pressures associated with such a high level of commitment:

'...a large commitment, which puts a strain on family life.'(Coach – Football)

However, there is a common notion that once you begin to work with Special Olympics there is little chance of leaving:

'Once you start working with SO it is not something you can give up.' (Coach - Football)

Indeed, coaches recognized the additional commitment involved in becoming a Head Coach for the World Games, and the time and degree of the personal involvement had been something that they had talked with families about:

'I did speak to my family about becoming a coach with the National Team, as it is sometimes tough – but I decided I have my job to do.' (Coach - Football)

It is apparent therefore that working as a volunteer coach within Special Olympics requires a high level of personal commitment on the part of individuals; however, it is also clear that this is freely given and that there is a common longevity of service amongst SO coaches. What then is it about their participation that encourages this? Commonly coaches talk about the personal satisfaction they get from working with Special Olympics athletes,

'It is difficult but I am passionate about it, I love to see these athletes succeeding and so I make the time.' (Coach - Bocce)

Another remarked on the personal gain received from the role:

'when you help others you also gain something spiritual.' (Coach – Golf)

Another highlight their perceptions of the wider benefits of their participation in Special Olympics:

'Special Olympics is a new way of life and we here learn many things and the most important is that we enjoy even the most little thing that sometimes we think is not important.' (Coach - Football)

Family Participation

Families describe taking a supporting role in athletes' training. They are involved in making sure that the athletes are at training on time and that they have their sports kit with them.

'I know their days of practice [...] I look that he wakes up early, prepare all his stuff.' (Parent, South Africa).

Some parents volunteer at their son or daughter's sports club:

'I think I am the only parent [in particular club] who goes to help them out at training. Other parents do help in charity work, we do a lot of charity work and they do all help with that.' (Parent, New Zealand)

When it comes to participating in the World Games parents again seem to primarily take the role of supporter. However, this often involves considerable fund raising to be able to attend the Games both for themselves and their athletes' sons/daughters:

'We had to raise the money to get over here. For nine weeks I did sausage sizzles, straight, by myself. It cost us seven grand for players to get over here [to Athens].' (Parent, New Zealand)

Family support for athletes at the Games was a priority and where possible families attended. It is likely to be more common for families from more economically developed nations to attend the Games; with far fewer instances of family members being able to come to the Games from developing nations; this was backed up by our observations and conversations with participants from a range of participating nations. However, such was the motivation to attend and support athletes' participation that one family staged an international reunion:

'I've flown from South Africa, they've come from England, Jeff lives in Switzerland, my other son is in Ireland – Dublin and my daughter is in Canada. So we have all met here, this has been a family gathering.' (Father, South Africa).

Ambiguities in framing the Special Olympics World Games

The data obtained from athletes, coaches and family members over the course of the year reveals a divergent contextual narrative of the World Games. The 'story' of the Games differs depending on who is telling it. The emphasis given to varying aspects of the Games ebbs and flows in differing directions and this provides important insight into the key themes that emerge in later chapters. Of course, these variations are most keenly felt by those athletes and coaches who were selected for the Games and it is their story we tell. But possibly there are other perceptions of the Games among those persons who did not attend and the SO personnel around the world with responsibility for organising and fund raising for the Games.

For athletes the World Games equate with the Olympics – that is the highest level of international sporting competition. The over-riding narrative amongst athletes is that they are going to represent their countries in their sports and the story that they tell is of having been chosen for this endeavour because they are the 'best', that is to say that they are the elite athletes from their countries. They are the National team, representing their country and hoping to honour their selection by bringing back gold medals. One athlete stated:



'I would like to improve more [in sport] to make my country proud and make my centre proud because we are the chosen people to represent our country.' (Athlete - Football)

Another said;

'I am going to win a gold medal for my country, I am the best and I will show this at the Games' (Athlete - Athletics)

Athletes' participation, bearing in mind that they are not selected because they are the elite athletes in their club, has been constructed in relation to a narrative of excellence.

Athletes have been told that they are exceptional, and that in representing their countries their efforts may inspire national pride. The reality of the World Games as an important event, which will be special and in many ways extra-ordinary has, for some, been overwritten by a narrative infused with notions of elitism, pressured competition and national pride. This narrative also features in how some relatives construct the Games, for instance one parent stated:

'Massively proud of him. Incredible achievement. We've got a good sportsman in the family – no-one has ever been to the Olympics.' (Parent, South Africa)

Another said:

'I was thrilled [when athlete was selected] because obviously he deserves it. He trained very hard. I think I was more thrilled that him in a way, because it is very important and I am a proud father. He is going to represent his country you know.' (Parent – South Africa)

However, other relatives take a more circumspect view expressing some cautions:

'I want the best for him; I don't care about the medals and all these. I don't want to make him feel stressed or anxious.' (Parent - Ireland)

Coaches however, are found to take a more measured view of the Games. They recognize that the experience of taking part in the World Games is likely to make a deep impression on athletes, that they will encounter new sights and sounds and meet athletes from all over the world. Coaches emphasise the opportunities that lie within athletes' participation, the chance to make new friends, develop independence as well as to enjoy competing on an international stage, as one coach stated:

'Competing for your country brings a lot of pride and I think they gain a massive development from being able to [take part] – I think they come back more experienced in their sport, but also they come back more developed as people.' (Coach - Golf)

Whilst some coaches do place emphasis on high achievement in competition, many more highlight the value of participation and the importance of effort over one's final placing.

'The most important thing for athletes is to learn the lifestyles and realize there is more to life than the life at home.' (Coach - Football).

The selection process for athletes is well understood by coaches and the idea of an elite group of athletes representing the National team is commonly dissipated by the recognition that a random process or one based on a range of criteria (many of which are not about sporting ability) is unlikely to bring together an elite group. Indeed for coaches, elitism is neither sought, nor within the context of Special Olympics, valued. As well as sporting outcomes coaches place emphasis on participation and the wider benefits of taking part in the World Games:

'It is wonderful to experience with these athletes the competitions and to see these other cultures and just kind of soaking it in. Our athletes are learning about other cultures and for me wow – the experience – I think it is a real joy to see them so happy.'(Coach - Handball).

This dichotomous narrative around participation and competition resonates in the workings of the Special Olympics World Games. The large and impressive opening and closing ceremonies provide an Olympic style back-drop to competition events. Further the centrality of competition as the focus of daily activities and the flag flying medal ceremonies offer a representation of the Games where competition and indeed athletic performance are of prime importance. This is also how athletes have told us that they see the Games.

However, activities which convey a message of valued competition and which emphasise winning as the central goal of athletes, go hand in hand with structures and procedures that are designed to maximize equity and participation. For example the process of selection of athletes to take a place in the National Team is often one that underlines participation rather than elitism. Moreover, the honest effort rule coupled with divisioning procedures, are broadly speaking, anti-competitive and in some cases counter-intuitive. Participation is valued too for the additional opportunities which open up to athletes through taking part in such an event. These tend to revolve around the wider social development of athletes achieved through their involvement in sport.

The following two chapters will further consider the inherent ambiguities within the World Games and how this split personality impacts on coaches' work with athletes as they prepare for the event.

Chapter 5: Preparation for the World Games

This chapter will draw on a range of qualitative and quantitative data collected in the course of this study, which falls under the theme of preparation for the World Games. This theme represents a discrete part of the athlete-coach interaction with a focus on training but it falls within the wider goal of preparing athletes for participation in the Games. The Figure below summarises the various themes that arose under 'preparation' across the sports and countries we visited. Their salience will vary for individual athletes, teams and coaches but we suspect that Head Coaches whose responsibilities span many athletes and coaches need to be alert to these in preparation for future International Competitions.



Speculations and plans

Athletes and coaches brought differing levels of experience of international competition to their preparations. Of the 21 coaches in the study, 13 had previously coached athletes for participation in SO World Games. However, of the 56 athletes only 2 had prior experience of competing at World Games level, 13 had experience of international competition through taking part in regional games and 49 had competed at National games in their own countries.

Coaches described their preparations in terms of both preparing them for competition as well as the wider experience of taking part in the Games, such as the challenges involved in being away from home for an extended period, living closely with team mates, coping

with nerves and building confidence, as well as developing social and communication skills.

To some extent, the coaches' plans were based on their prior experience and shared knowledge of international games. However, unlike other international sporting competitions involving elite athletes, the coaches had to devise training regimes and preparations for competition without any knowledge as to who their athletes would be competing against or indeed the overall standard of sporting competence amongst those taking part. This stands in contrast to the IOC-led Olympics or the Paralympics where league tables and records of personal bests posted by opponents are published and available to all athletes as they train and prepare for competition. It is difficult for athletes and coaches to ascertain the standards one would be expected to achieve if there is no standard qualifying time for one's chosen event (e.g. the lead division) or even the times being achieved by one's opponents. Thus much of the training and preparation had to be based around athletes' current performance leaving them and coaches to speculate about the required or desired improvements in athletes' performances. Nonetheless the athletes typically speculated that competition at the World Games would be pitched at a high level:

'I heard that the athletes who will be taking part will be very good players, world class.' (Athlete - Football)

Together with the desire to do well on the sports field, to make their country and their families proud as discussed previously, the assumption that they would face stiff competition was drawn on as a motivating factor for athletes' training and practice. Moreover, the focus of athletes' preparations as they reported it, was more attuned to their performance on the sports field whereas coaches tended to identify a greater breadth of areas as a focus for their training. Therefore, whilst it seemed to athletes that their preparations were primarily sports focused, coaches' plans had a dual purpose - prepare athletes for competition hand in hand with the broader experience of participation in an event on the scale of the World Games with all its attendant challenges.

The coach – athlete relationship in preparing for the Games

It is apparent throughout the data that a strong relationship developed between athletes and coaches in the course of preparing for competition at the World Games. The relationship is reported to have developed on a number of levels; in terms of training and sports preparation – as one athlete reported:

'He is the best, he shares time with me to be better and he gives me more practice.' (Athlete - Athletics).

Another talked of how she was motivated through the praise she received from her coach;

'I like it when he tells me that I am doing well and getting better, I try hard to get better all the time.' (Athlete - Swimming)

A third talked about the trust he had in training with his coach:

I am always listening to my coach, I have trust and confidence in my coach and if I listen to what he tells me then I will improve.’ (Athlete - Badminton)

Another athlete talked of the support she gets from her coach and of the trust she had in their relationship on a more personal level:

‘It’s good, he supports me and I trust him.’ (Athlete, Volleyball).

And finally, depending on the coach whilst away from home was central to athletes having confidence in the plans they were making:

‘I will miss my family when I am in Greece, but I will have my coach there and she is a second mother to me.’ (Athlete Swimming)

Parents too endorsed the strong relationship between athletes and their coaches:

She’s just down to earth, she loves the children [sic] and you can see it – she’s very, very good with them.’ (Parent, Ireland)

The strong bond which developed during training and preparations for the Games was apparently a vital platform on which athletes build confidence both for taking part in competition and for being away from home with their team. Coaches understood the importance of building a strong relationship with athletes and report having made time for this as well as for working on sports training when they are with the athletes.

‘This is a major part of my life and I will always find time for these athletes.’ (Coach - Swimming)

In our data we had no instances of a breakdown in the coach-athlete relationship. This may be indicative of the SO spirit but it cannot be taken for granted and if it were to happen, action would need to be taken. The strong bond, which develops during training and preparations for the Games, is apparently a vital platform on which athletes build confidence both for taking part in competition and the wider experiences the World Games affords.

Coaching priorities

At Time 1 we asked coaches to self-rate themselves on a coaching efficacy scale (Feltz et al., 1999) that aimed to profile their approach to training. Each item was scored from 0 to 10 depending on how the coach perceived their efficacy in relation to each item. Table 5.1 identifies the four highest rated items and the three lowest rated items, although overall there was little difference among the ratings across the total scale as coaches varied little in their rating of each item. Nonetheless this data did demonstrate the priority that coaches gave to the developing the demeanour of athletes with seemingly less emphasis on

competition. As we explain later, at subsequent data collection time points we investigated the issue of caching priorities in greater detail.

Table 5.1 Mean score on Coach Self-efficacy Rating Scale* Time 1 (N=21)

Item	Mean	Lowest score
Instill an attitude of fair play	8.86	8
Instill an attitude of respect for others	8.81	8
Build the self esteem of your athletes	8.81	8
Promote good sportsmanship	8.76	8
Recognise competitors' strengths during competition	7.86	2
Prepare athletes for the possibility that they will not win	7.71	0
Make extra time to work effectively with athletes	7.67	2

* (Scale from 0-10 with 10 indicating the highest level of perceived self-efficacy)

Goal focused training

We asked athletes and coaches, individually, to tell us about the goals that were the focus of their training activities. This activity was carried out at Time 1 (six month prior to the start of the Games) and at Time 2 (around three months later). At Time 1 we asked athletes and coaches to identify their goals and the strategies they had for working towards each goal. At Time 2, for each athlete we compiled a bespoke form reflecting back a combination of the goals that they and that their coach had identified as being appropriate for them at Time 1. We then asked athletes to comment on the strategies they had in relation to these goals and their views on the progress they were making in relation to each. Coaches were asked to rank a synthesis of the goals, they had identified at Time 1, in relation to each athlete and to comment on athlete's progress and their predicted further improvement.

Goals identified by Athletes at Time 1

Predominantly athletes identified goals that were focused on improving their sporting performance. In some instances these were general sporting goals such as *'to improve my strength' (Athlete - Athletics)*. Whilst others were more sports specific, for example *'improve my posture around the table' (Athlete – Table Tennis)* or *'improve my start in free-style' (Athlete - Swimmer)*.

For these goals athletes identified strategies to address them, at least in a theoretical manner. So for the athlete who aimed to improve their strength, the strategy identified was *'Strength training exercises, push ups, sit ups' (Athlete - Athletics)*. For more sport specific goals, the swimmer who had aimed to improve his start reported on a strategy of *'many*

trials of starts during practice,' (Athlete - Swimmer); whilst the table tennis player identified work that would be done with their coach to address the goal of improved posture; *'my coach sends the ball left and right and gives me instructions.'* (Athlete – Table Tennis). These examples are typical of the range of general as well as more specific goals identified by athletes in relation to their sports preparation, and to the practice-based and coach-led strategies adopted to reach their goals. The majority of goals identified by the 56 athletes in the study were directly appropriate to their sports in terms of stamina, endurance, speed and technique.

However, there are also examples of athletes identifying goals, which have a broader remit than direct improvement in their sport, although these goals do impact on sporting performance. For instance, one athlete aimed to *'manage anxiety during the game'* (Athlete – Handball); with an identified strategy of *'preparation and visit to the stadium before the games.'* (Athlete - Athletics). Another stated their goal was to have a *'healthy lifestyle and diet and to concentrate on the World Games'*, which was partnered with an identified strategy of *'trying to eat well as an athlete living on my own.'* (Athlete - Athletics).

This data illustrates that athletes are focused on the development of their sporting skills and can identify areas that need improvement and further training. As we shall see, there is a degree of convergence between athletes' goals and coaches' goals for individual athletes, certainly in relation to the sports specific goals that are identified, suggesting good communication between athletes and coaches in relation to their training and areas that require specific attention.

Goals Identified by Coaches at Time 1

The data shows that coaches were more likely than athletes to take a broad view of preparations and in doing so to identify more 'non-sporting' goals: that is goals, which relate to improving sports performance through addressing matters which may be obstacles to athletes. For instance one coach highlighted the need to *'help this athlete to control her emotions, and to focus in competition'*; the identified strategy was; *'to offer emotional support, she is very (almost too) competitive, coach needs to offer some perspective.'* (Coach - Swimming). Further in response to this goal the coach stated that he is *'Investigating the use of a psychologist to help her to cope with her emotions in the lead up to the big competition'* (Coach - Swimming). Another recognized the need to enable an athlete to use appropriate facilities for training: *'Give this athlete the opportunity to train for at least two weeks in a proper installation (not the river)'* and to enable this goal the coach planned to *'Search for financial resources or grants so that this athlete can travel from his home to the place for training'* (Coach - Swimming). Another example of a goal held by a coach for their athletes was reported as *'To win the trophy for the nation,'* and for this a strategy of developing a *'disciplined athlete'* (Coach – Football) was identified.

Other goals reported by coaches had a more direct sports focus with a range of strategies described to address them. For example; *to improve the synchronization of music with movement* with a strategy of *'a lot of repetition to music.'* (Coach - Gymnastics). Indeed repetition, together with demonstration and practice were the most common strategies identified by coaches to tackle skill / tactic specific goals.

It is apparent from the coach reports at Time 1 that they were developing a bespoke approach for each athlete based on a clear awareness of athletes' strengths and challenges both sporting and personal. Moreover, they were aware of athletes' family circumstances, financial and resource challenges which may impact on athletes' ability to train in a properly resourced manner, or to receive the appropriate nutrition to maintain their training regime and develop as athletes. Beyond specific information on goals, this data also revealed the depth of knowledge that coaches have about the athletes they train and hence the key role played by local coaches in preparing athletes for the World Games.

Athletes' goals at Time 2

At Time 2 after three months of preparation, athletes were asked to give us an update on the synthesis of goals they and their coaches had identified at Time 1 and the training they had done with their coach or alone in relation to each goal. The responses given by one footballer, to a range of goals are provided in the table below.

Goal selected Time 1	Training with coach	Training alone
<i>Work on technique – dribbling and shooting</i>	<i>He has explained us how to do it better, and if we do not understand he explain more to us.</i>	<i>I had practice by myself at home</i>
<i>Become physically fitter</i>	<i>He is a support for us and he gives us the opportunities to take part in games.</i>	<i>I run all the other days that we do not train.</i>
Play as a team	He makes different groups and trains us.	We give each other support during the training time and the games we play.
Work on personal safety – develop activities for trust	He asks us how do we feel and become a support for us.	I had made mental activities to feel safety and trust in what we do.
Develop sense of responsibility to represent my country	He said us that we have to do the best during the event.	I think about that and I make reflections about.

These responses provide a good example of an athlete who has insight into their training in relation to a range of goals. Interestingly, some of these goals (those in italics) were specifically identified by the athlete at the first data collection; the latter three goals were identified by this athlete's coach. However, the athlete appears just as engaged with the

coach-led goals at time point 2 and indeed this was typically the case for other athletes. The final two goals relate to non-sporting outcomes, which as discussed, were much more likely to be identified by coaches than by athletes. However, this footballer appeared to engage with these goals to the same degree that they did with the sporting goals. Indeed most athletes accepted the coaches' non-sporting goals, even though their personal aspirations remained overwhelmingly sporting in nature.

Some athletes revealed a disparity between the work they did with their coaches and what they did in their own time. For example, in relation to a goal of improving diet and nutrition one athlete stated that she had taken on board her coaches' advice as to a healthy diet; *'I know to drink juice, eat brown bread and vegetables and not too much fatty meats and stuff like that'*. In response to work with her coach in respect of her diet this athlete stated: *'My coach asks me do I still follow a diet and things like that and I say yes.'* However, responding to questions of what she does in her own time in relation to this goal, the athlete stated: *'Sometimes I have a treat, sometimes I choose the right things.'* (Athlete - Athletics).

A further factor evident in the data at Time 2 was the growth of self-motivation amongst athletes in their preparations for the Games. Athletes highlight the training that they do in their own time, one said, *'At the weekend I put in a few long runs'*, (Athlete - Athletics) another talked about their mental preparations, *'Keep my race preparations to a minimum and say 'Now you are running a race tomorrow. You are going to get up and you are going to do well.'* (Athlete – Athletics) Whilst amongst the majority of athletes we found strong self-motivation and preparations in their own time, others reported that they *'don't do much about that really.'* (Athlete - Football), whilst another said, *'I train twice a week with my coach and that is all that I can do.'* (Athlete - Swimming). Therefore, the motivation to be successful in competition was sometimes, though not universally, matched by training effort both during scheduled practice and in their own time.

Coaching Priorities

A sorting task was devised to ascertain the overall priorities that coaches held in relation to preparing athletes for the World Games. In all, 12 different coaching and broad preparation goals were identified and the coaches were first asked to highlight those that were not applicable to the particular athlete. Secondly, for those items that they felt were applicable, they were asked to rank them in order, from 1 (being the top priority) through to the item to which they gave least priority. Table 5.2 summarises the number and percentage of their athletes for whom they had chosen each goal at Time 2 in preparation for the World Games.

Generally the coaching goals selected for most athletes focused around their sporting techniques and skills followed by enhancing their motivation to training, building their stamina and increasing their overall sporting performance. However, there were sizeable

numbers of athletes for whom the other goals were also relevant, which reflects their individual needs and present levels of performance.

Table 5.2 The number and percentage of athletes for whom each coaching goal had been selected at Time 2 (N=56).

Coaching Goals	N	%
Sporting technique / skill	43	77%
Motivation and commitment to training	33	59%
Building stamina / strength and endurance	33	59%
Overall sporting performance (<i>as measured by outcome e.g. Personal best or medal</i>)	32	57%
Teaching the rules of the sport	28	50%
Preparing athletes to cope with nerves and anxiety	21	37%
Social and communication skills	19	34%
Diet and nutrition	19	34%
Preparing athletes to be away from home	13	23%
Preparing athletes to compete in large stadia, before large crowds	13	23%
Being part of a team	12	21%
Gaining support of families	11	20%

In addition the coaches were asked to indicate for each goal whether there had been improvement over the previous three months; whether further improvement was needed and the amount of progress that was likely expressed as a percentage improvement. For all goals, nearly all athletes had improved (range 85% to 100%) and likewise nearly all were thought to be capable of further improvement (range 81% to 95%). However the likely percentage improvement was modest (range 20% to 27.5%).

Also participating coaches were asked to re-rate the coaching priorities after they had returned from the World Games (Time 4). Table 5.3 gives the percentages of coaches who had placed each coaching goal within their top three priorities both at the Games and at the 4th data uplift after the Games. Although the pattern of responses was broadly similar, there were two notable shifts. More focus might have been placed on preparing the athletes to cope with nerves and anxiety with less focus on teaching the rules of the sport.

It's clear that coaches recognise, albeit during or after their athletes compete in large-scale competitions, that the experience is an anxious one for them. Understandably they may be nervous about acquitting themselves well and having experienced the magnitude of the World Games, coaches realize that the some athletes' become affected by nerves and do not achieve their very best performance. There is also a significant re-appraisal of the need

to increase the overall endurance of the World Games' athletes. The event is a demanding one and requires athletes to compete on consecutive days, sometimes in unusual environments and climates, and some coaches came to appreciate that their athletes began to suffer fatigue, their performances declined and had they been stronger and fitter they might have achieved better, sustained results over the course of the tournament.

Table 5.3 The percentage of coaches who rated each goal within the top three priorities at the start of the World Games and after the Games (N=17)

Item	At the World Games	After the World Games
Sporting technique / skill	47%	44%
Social and communication skills	35%	44%
Preparing athletes to cope with nerves and anxiety	18%	39%
Building stamina / strength and endurance	24%	35%
Overall sporting performance (as measured by outcome e.g. Personal best or medal)	24%	25%
Being part of a team	33%	23%
Preparing athletes to compete in large stadia, before large crowds	24%	22%
Motivation and commitment to training	30%	21%
Teaching the rules of the sport	30%	13%
Gaining support of families	18%	13%
Preparing athletes to be away from home	12%	11%
Diet and nutrition	18%	10%

More generally though, the coaches' responses to the goals that they set for their athletes at Time 2, 3 and 4 demonstrate both the range of goals which coaches hold for athletes and the varying priority placed on the different goals. At Time 1 coaches were more likely to balance sporting goals with broader non-sporting aspirations, however at Time 2 the emphasis was placed more on goals with a direct sporting outcome, although the broader social goals were still rated albeit at a lower priority. At the final data uplift greater emphasis had returned to social and emotional goals (social and communication skills and coping with nerves) in combination with those of a specifically sporting nature.

Coaching Pedagogy

The principles of coaching athletes within Special Olympics and in particular methods of instruction or adaptation are a strong theme evident in the data. This section will focus on what we have learnt about the substantive work of coaches in striving for goals, and importantly the adaptations they use when working with this group of athletes.

Coaches reported that athletes are expected to train at least twice a week for up to 90 minutes. In addition coaches encouraged athletes to train by themselves (e.g. running) or to work on the skills they have acquired in the course of their training. This level of commitment was expected of athletes, as one coach stated: *She needs a lot of repetition of routines, she cannot miss workouts.* (Coach - Gymnastics). Weekly training is commonly undertaken by the local coach with the Head Coach working at more of a distance with less regular contact (see Chapter 1). Some Head Coaches maintain regular telephone contact with the athletes that they will accompany to the World Games. This is in order to build the relationship between coach and athlete as well as to encourage and monitor training being undertaken.

An holistic and individualized approach

Coaches stress the importance of gearing their approach towards each individual athlete. This means being sensitive to the whole athlete and to what works for them in their training regime and how the coach relates to them. For example, one coach reported this difficulty in working with an athlete:

'Sometimes the athlete refuses to listen to instructions.' (Coach – Badminton)

And in dealing with this the coach stated:

'This needs to be handled with care and compassion.' (Coach - Badminton).

In terms of working with the needs of individual athletes the coaches' close knowledge of each athlete played a vital part in these bespoke interactions. For instance one coach reported that they encouraged positive self-talk for an athlete who lacked confidence. Another reported that they are monitoring an athlete's diet as:

'The regular intake of nutritious meals is needed for improved health'. (Coach – Football)

And a third the coach recommends that the athlete they train must focus on;

'self-confidence and communication skills.' (Coach - Athletics).

Data shows therefore that coaching pedagogy is scaled to the individual athlete as they prepare for the World Games. This stands in contrast to mainstream coaching, where coaches tend to adopt a unified approach when coaching a particular sport and across a group of athletes. Moreover, the pedagogy of SO coaches extends well beyond what would typically be the case in mainstream coaching, to encompass social skills, communication skills, confidence building and ensuring athletes have an adequate diet. In preparing athletes for the World Games it is clear that SO coaches are more than sports coaches; they are involved in the individual detail of all of the factors which not only have the potential to impact on athletes sporting performance, but also on their overall experience of the World Games on a social and emotional level.

Coaching adaptations

Coaches deployed a range of adaptations in preparing athletes for competition. These included, demonstration of skills and techniques as well as repetition in practice time; experiential learning e.g. reviewing performance in training or competition and learning from both positive and negative aspects; adapting communication strategies to the specific needs of individuals and their preferred communication strategy; drawing on athletes strengths to build confidence; the use of visual materials such as drawing diagrams and using still as well as moving images. Visuals could either be of other sports people – that is reviewing the techniques and skill of accomplished athletes - or it might be through video recording and then reviewing the performance of athletes in training. This latter technique was popular in the training of gymnasts and mirrors coaching pedagogy in a range of other sports settings.

Coaches used different adaptations in training for different athletes, that is they varied their approach depending of the skills, learning pace, abilities and even personality of the range of athletes with whom they worked. This meant that for best training outcomes, coaches should know their athletes well, so as to be familiar with their communication strategies, the most effective approach to learning as well as their sensitivities, strengths and vulnerabilities. This reinforces the importance of communication between local and Head Coaches in the approach to the World Games, so that the local coaches' knowledge of the individual can be added to the Head Coaches ability and experience in training athletes for the competition.

Coaching competencies

Coaches highlight some of the challenges that athletes face in their training:

'The unification of the four elements of the long-jump is technically very difficult.' (Coach - Athletics)

'To promote the athletes speed he needs to work on his abdominal muscles.' (Coach - Athletics)

'This athlete needs to do exercises to learn the rules of the game.' (Coach - Bocce)

However, coaches provided very limited information about the coaching competencies they would need to demonstrate in order to address these and other specific sporting challenges which athletes face. This may have been the result of a combination of factors necessarily impinging upon the coaches' practice.

The first is clearly the amount of contact the coach has with the athletes. It appears some coaches were adept at highlighting the shortcomings certain athletes displayed but simply did not have sufficient time with the athlete to satisfactorily address these issues. This must surely have been frustrating for the coaches concerned as it is akin to a doctor diagnosing a patient's illness only to find they have an inadequate period of time to cure them.

Alongside this, many coaches may have experienced frustration when conveying to the athlete the exact nature of their weakness, either because they are not experienced enough to explain it in a manner that would be easily understood or because the athletes found it challenging to process the coaches' instructions. It takes a very skilled coach indeed to identify a weakness in the sporting skills of any athlete, to explain this to the athlete in question and to lay in train a programme of activities to adequately address these problems. More commonly, coaches can identify the issue but find it difficult to affect a suitable intervention to overcome it so that the athlete reveals visibly improved practice.

Coach record-keeping

The maintenance of records and the style of record keeping amongst the coaches in our sample varied. Some coaches preferred to keep minimal written records of athletes training regimes, goals and progress, which were simply used as an aide memoir for training. By contrast, others were systematic in maintaining regular detailed records of athletes training programmes, training goals and progress. In the latter instance these provided a tool for shared working between local and Head Coaches, and offered the Head Coach a vehicle for monitoring athlete training between their face-to-face meetings with athletes.

Are coaches under-used?

A final reflection on the coach – athlete relationship during training is worthy of highlighting at this juncture. It's clear that coaches are very determined and eager to exact the maximum sporting outcomes from their athletes. They identify a series of aims and objectives for their athletes and are committed to seeing these through to fruition. The issue however is that the coaches may be 'under-employed' when working with athletes of limited sporting talent, so that their coaching capacity is rarely tested and they remain an underdeveloped resource. Whilst coaches are very adept at recognizing this and are more than prepared to adapt their coaching practice to suit the athletes with whom they are working, nevertheless there is a sense in which they could be capable of offering significantly more refined instruction if they were to work with those athletes who are better placed to avail of their expert tutelage. Our intention here is merely to highlight the possible under utilization of certain coaches and their talents, and not to imply any criticism of the athletes who are, without exception, wholly committed to achieving the very best sporting outcomes that they possibly can.

Structural influences on preparations

The experiences of athletes and coaches in their preparation for the World Games are influenced by some of the structures established by National Programmes. These include the process used for selecting athletes to be part of the National Team, the protocol for communication and joint training between National and local coaches and the use of National training camps as an element of athlete preparation.

Selection of athletes for the World Games

A small percentage of athletes involved in SO within any country will have the opportunity to compete at World Games. Each country has a process through which athletes are selected. There is not single process; rather as part of a federal structure National Programmes' are at liberty to institute their own procedures. Some countries opt for a random selection of athletes, frequently drawn from those who have been gold medalists at the most recent National competitions. Others select athletes through the coaches' recommendations to a central committee, where decisions are made based on pre-defined criteria, and others adopt a complex process which brings promising athletes together in National camps during which further training, trials and ultimately selection is undertaken.

Whatever the process of selecting athletes, the outcome is often contentious and liable to provoke high emotion. There are sometimes questions raised as to the fairness of the process amongst those who are not selected to participate, and we were given reports of athletes who were not chosen for the National Team deciding to leave SO altogether and no longer being involved in weekly activities.

The degree to which all athletes understand the processes by which selection is made are questioned and the sense of simply being left out is one that is sometimes read from the situation by athletes. Coaches respond variously to the selection process. Some were unhappy that as a result of random selection they are not taking the 'best' athletes to the Games and they question the value of a competition where the highest achieving athletes are not participating. Moreover, coaches pointed out that failure to be selected is a dispiriting experience for athletes who have pinned their hopes on the World Games and had trained hard and achieved success in National competitions. This is a complicated process that is unlikely to satisfy everyone involved; however, the nature of a selection process is one that emphasises participation in the World Games over competition, although the idea of competition is one which athletes themselves emphasise.

Strategies for joint working between local and Head Coaches

Recognition of the complexity of the interplay between local coaches and Head Coaches in relation to the preparation of athletes for competition led to our enquiry into the degree of convergence in training protocol or indeed the level of communication between the Head Coach and the local coach. It was found that there is significant variation between nations as to the development of a communication strategy between these individuals and the expectations relating to the shared work of preparing athletes for competition. In some instances there was an established protocol for regular communication. This involved maintaining training records and keeping an account of regular reports on athlete's training and progress in relation to identified training goals. Communication would likely be in the form of a written record, but also may be supplemented by telephone contact between local and Head Coaches. Regular contact and shared approaches to training were viewed

as immensely valuable in helping with athletes' preparations. However, in some instances there was limited or indeed no contact at all between local and Head Coaches. Local coaches regarded this as a significant gap in the preparation of athletes, but felt unable to themselves initiate contact and address this logjam. Head Coaches reported that they felt they often had insufficient time to work with athletes in preparation for the Games, as one reported:

'I think there is missed work to do, and it is necessary to find ways for athletes who travel to represent their country to have a longer process for their preparation. One of my athletes lacked a lot of preparation to give better results. I am of the idea that it is required more technical work, and lots of coordination. I think it's necessary to have more time to be in direct contact with her, and thus able to verify the work she performs'.
(Coach - Athletics).

Within participating nations opportunities for athletes to train with as well as get to know their Head Coach happened within differing timescales and with varying degree of regularity (in instances where the Head Coach was not also the local coach). Where countries used a training camp approach to preparations (discussed in detail below), athletes would typically meet their Head Coach at the camp. Here there would be an opportunity for training as well as the building of a relationship between coach and athlete. Where there were successive camps then these opportunities were further developed. In instances where National teams first came together just in advance of the Games, this may have been the first chance for athletes to meet and train with their Head Coach. There are clear and significant challenges to this latter situation.

The Use of Training Camps

Residential training camps are used to varying degrees by some of the countries participating in this study, although not all countries adopted camps as a training strategy. Training camps tend to bring together those athletes selected to be part of the National team for a period of around a week, although depending on the actual number of camps planned this period could be as little as one or two nights. The focus of such camps will typically be around both sports training and social activities. The aims of camps are manifold. In addition to a period of intense training the camps also offer athletes the opportunity to experience being away from home, developing self-reliance and a stronger relationship with their coaches, to get to know their team mates and, if not already known to them the Head Coach for their sport.

The benefits of the camp system was widely reported by coaches, one stated:

'I think the value of them is immense, because I think that suddenly they are not part of a team, they know who they're going to be with, and it's a time for bonding, and for trying to understand each other, and for bringing up any kind of problems, that we deal

with them before we go away. I think it is vitally important to have a training camp before you go away.'(Coach - Bocce)

Athletes report on the specific benefits of attending training camps:

I have practiced brushing my teeth alone, eating different types of food, packing my luggage and keeping all my things together in the camp.' (Athlete - Gymnastics)

Challenges and obstacles to preparations

Common challenges identified by coaches fall into two broad areas, firstly the limited resources available to them and secondly issues pertaining to individual athletes.

Resource challenges

The resources available to coaches and athletes for their training and preparations vary considerably between participating nations as well as between different regions within countries. Some coaches report having no challenges with resources required for training and supporting athletes with preparations, others identify either minor limits to their activities resulting from lack of resources or at times major challenges imposed by a lack of the same. At the extremes we were told of two athletes who lacked basic needs for their sport, one runner who trained in a field as there was no track available in their area and a swimmer who trained in a river for the lack of a pool. Both of these athletes resided in rural areas and their attendance at National training camps in urban locations gave them the opportunity to train in the appropriate facilities. Further resource challenges were reported in the lack of any indoor training facility, so in all weathers athletes were compelled to train outside or when the weather was very bad training had to be cancelled. Some footballers lacked shoes or shin pads and were compelled to practice barefoot, which is clearly hazardous to their wellbeing. There were also reports of gymnasts that trained in halls without mirrors so there was no opportunity for them to visually check their performance during practice. Resource challenges were testing for coaches and athletes and are a source of inequity in preparation for the World Games, with some athletes clearly able to be better prepared than others because of access to adequate resources. In contrast to the resource challenges faced, many coaches reported that Special Olympics in their countries were able to supply the equipment and access to the facilities needed for their training and preparations to proceed.

Individual issues

Many coaches pointed to challenges they faced in coaching individual athletes. These ranged from an athlete who was described as hyperactive and therefore it was difficult to get them to concentrate; an athlete who was said to be so shy that they rarely spoke at all, making communication very challenging, another athlete who was said to have a dependency even an addiction to the internet and who refused to train because of being unwilling to leave the computer, another was described to be in regular poor physical

health and therefore this interrupted training, whilst another athlete had an ineffective hearing aid and this presented difficulties in communication between athlete and coach.

Coaches were creative and stoic in coping with the range of challenges presented to them, however, their altruism was sometimes tested by the frustrations of having to deal with challenges, which disadvantaged their athletes.

Assessment of readiness

Finally, we asked athletes and coaches at Time 1 to separately rate their readiness for participation in the World Games. This exercise was repeated after the Games at Time 4 so as to obtain their retrospective reflection on how well athletes were prepared for the Games. Figure 5.1 charts the percentage of athletes who rated themselves as being 'well prepared' before (Dark Blue) and after the Games (Light blue). Similar ratings were made by the coaches and their results are given in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.1 The percentage of ATHLETES who considered themselves 'well prepared' before and after the Games (N=56)

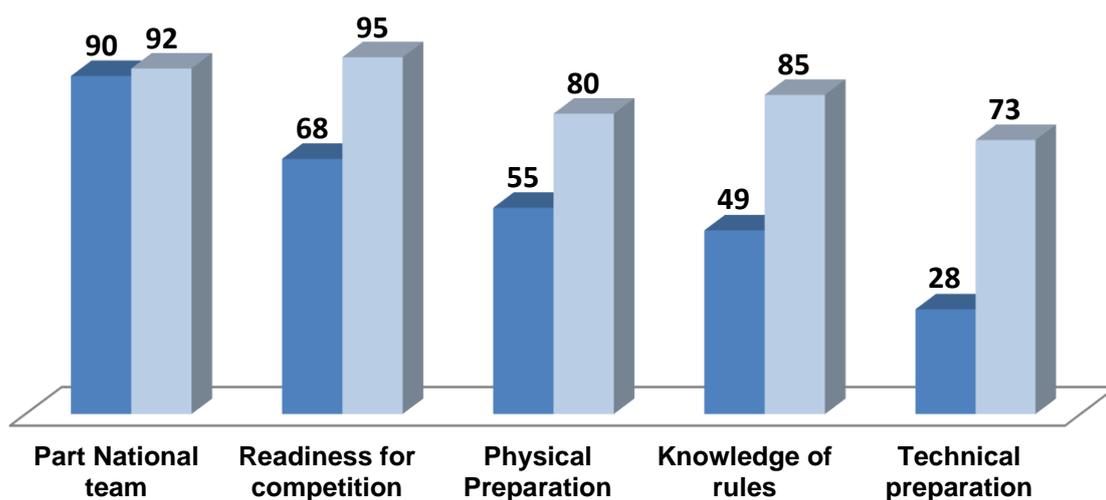
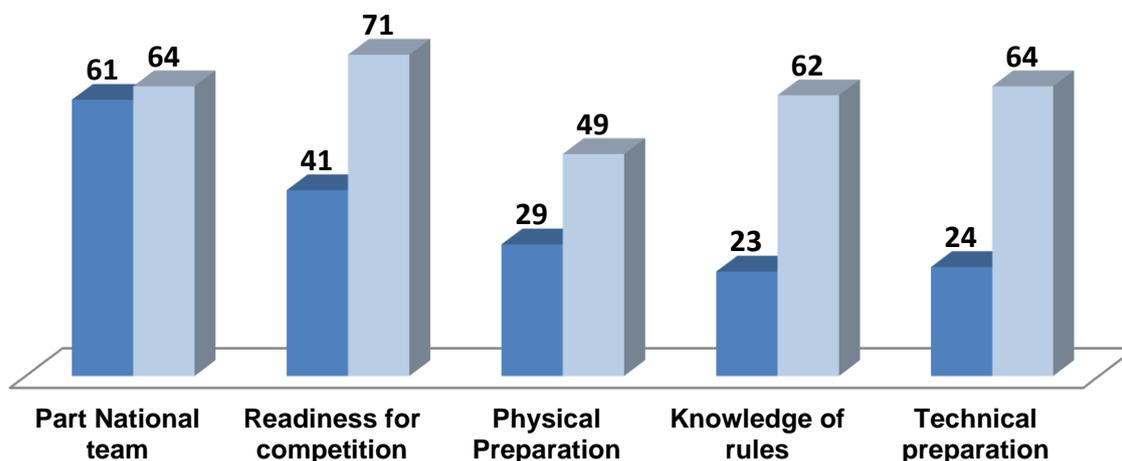


Figure 5.2 The percentage of COACHES who considered their athletes as 'well prepared' before and after the Games (N=56)



At Time 1, a higher proportion of the athletes rated themselves as being 'well prepared' for the Games than did their coaches. Although the pattern of responses was similar across the five items on which ratings were given, the coaches and athletes were agreed in one respect: that in terms of technical preparation, only around one quarter of the athletes were rated as well prepared. Moreover the coaches rated a similar percentage of athletes as requiring more preparation in knowing the rules of the competition for which they were entered.

After the Games the athletes gave higher ratings in terms of their preparedness and nearly all considered themselves to have been 'well prepared' for the Games although this proportion was lowest in terms of technical readiness for their competition. The coaches also reported improved ratings for readiness particularly in terms of technical preparation and knowledge of rules. However they considered that physical preparation to be the aspect in which the majority of athletes were not well prepared.

In summary, athletes and coaches were agreed that technical preparation for their sport; knowledge of the rules and physical preparation were the areas that most athletes tended to be less well prepared as they commenced training for the Games and indeed, after the Games, it was acknowledged that significant proportions ranging from one-third to half, had not been as well prepared for the Games as they might have been.

Comparison with other coaches at the World Games

We also explored the theme of readiness through the priorities that coaches identified for athletes once they were present at the World Games. We recruited 18 Head Coaches from a range of different sports and countries to those in our sample and asked them to select and rank their priorities in preparing athletes for the World Games. We also had the coaches in our sample repeat this exercise when they were present in Athens. Table 5.4 (overleaf) summarises the percentage of coaches in the two groupings who had rated each item within their top three choices, ordered by the overall percentages across all coaches.

Although there were broad similarities across the two sets of coaches with respect to the items they considered to have the highest priorities, that is the first four listed, even within this, there were some notable variations with Head Coaches recruited at the World Games giving greater priority, than the coaches in our sample, to being part of a team and the athlete's motivation and commitment to training. They also differed in terms of the goals they felt were of lesser importance: with sample Coaches inclined to favour the athletes' sporting performance and preparations towards competing in large stadia whereas coaches recruited at the Games focused on preparing the athletes for being away from home.

Table 5.4 The percentage of coaches who included the item among their top three priorities

Item	Sample (N=17)	World Games (N=18)	Total (N=35)
Being part of a team	33%	59%	54%
Motivation and commitment to training	30%	50%	40%
Sporting technique / skill	47%	28%	37%
Social and communication skills	35%	39%	36%
Teaching the rules of the sport	30%	22%	26%
Preparing athletes to cope with nerves and anxiety	18%	28%	23%
Building stamina / strength and endurance	24%	17%	20%
Preparing athletes to be away from home	12%	28%	20%
Diet and nutrition	18%	17%	17%
Preparing athletes to compete in large stadia, before large crowds	24%	11%	17%
Overall sporting performance (as measured by outcome e.g. Personal best or medal)	24%	11%	15%
Gaining support of families	18%	11%	14%

Although some caution needs to be exercised in interpreting this data due to variations in size of delegations represented at the Games, it could be that the wider sample of coaches were reflecting the areas for which the athletes need preparation when they are faced with the reality of the Games. It could then be surmised that our sample of coaches underestimated the importance of team membership and commitment to training both of which became more obvious when the athletes arrived at the Games.

Conclusions

Although the task of preparing athletes for competition in Special Olympics is one that is undertaken by many coaches, its complexity should not be underestimated. When it comes to World Games, there are extra pressures on athletes and coaches which build into an intricate and complex undertaking as this chapter has illustrated. The training task is further compounded by resource issues. It is a tribute to the athletes and coaches that all persevered through the challenges they faced although the opportunity to attend the World Games is likely to have been a strong motivating factor.

Chapter 6: Competition and Beyond

In this chapter we bring together the various themes contained in the information we gathered at the four time points around the issue of competition. Not alone is competition inherent in most sports and an integral part of Special Olympics, it is also the prime rationale for the World Games. Athletes were very well aware of this. Moreover, the athletes placed great store on winning although coaches were more inclined to stress the value of taking part. This dichotomy was one of the two main themes to emerge from our analysis of the data. The second is linked and relates to what is meant by 'sporting achievement' for SO athletes. The Figure below summarises the sub-themes described in this chapter.



Anticipation and Anxiety

Many of the athletes who took part in this study were filled with anticipation at the thought of competing at the World Games. This was most heightened when we spoke with athletes whilst they were in Athens attending the Games. As one athlete told us:

'I have been practicing for the moment when I am on the starting line, I am very much excited and looking forward to running.' (Athlete - athletics)

Another said:

'There are great sportsmen here and I want to try my best to see how I play against them, this is the greatest challenge of my career.' (Athlete - Handball)

For some athletes the anticipation of competing was accompanied by nerves at the prospect of performing in a large venue:

'This track is huge, I have never seen this kind of big running track before, I hope I can run there and not fail.' (Athlete - Athletics)

For others the excitement of competing seemed to offset any nerves they may have felt:

[It is]... 'a great honour to be here, we are all so happy to be in this place and we are all excited.' (Athlete - Swimming)

Previous experience of competition

For some athletes having previous experience of large scale national or international competition was helpful in informing how they might approach their competition in Athens.

'I have been to three big international competitions and you must always be well prepared and don't give a lot of information about yourself to other athletes.' (Athlete - Athletics)

Coaches also reported that those athletes who had prior experience of competing at larger, national or international events, were at some advantage compared with those who were less experienced:

'He has been to the National Games and to Shanghai, he is an experienced athlete and knows what to expect, so I do not worry about how he will react.' (Coach - Athletics)

By contrast, coaches acknowledged that limited prior experience of large scale competition made it more difficult for them to predict how athletes would adapt to the situation and what impact this might have on their performance.

'She is from a quiet country place and has not so much experience of cities or crowds, she has not so much knowledge of this kind of event, so it may have a good effect or a bad effect on her performance, we will know when we see.' (Coach - Volleyball)

Concerns and worries

Some athletes told us of the concerns they had about competing in Athens as well as attending the Games, for some these centered on competition and the prospect of not meeting the expectations that they supposed others had of them. For instance one athlete said:

'If I do not win I will let people down, I would like to make my classmates proud, this makes me try hard in my training.' (Athlete – Table Tennis)

More often athletes were concerned about the experience of travel:

'I have not been in an airplane before, we have to travel for many hours, I am nervous about that.' (Athlete - Bocce).

Others were worried about details of the experience of being away from home:

'When I went to (another country) to play in the Regional Games I did not like the food and I was hungry all the time, and the place we stayed was dirty and we could not relax there. I am worried that it will be the same at the World Games.' (Athlete - Swimming)

However, coaches had addressed some of these concerns:

'We tried some Greek food at our camp, we thought it was very nice, and my coach said that things will be very nice in Athens so I am not so worried now.' (Athlete - Swimming)

Others were concerned about spending an extended time away from their families:

'I will miss my mum, I will carry her with me in my heart.' (Athlete - Athletics).

Worries about being away from home and family were often alleviated by comfort taken in being part of a team, the closeness of their friendships and the parental role often attributed to their coaches.

Philosophy on winning and taking part

The data revealed different emphasis amongst coaches in relation to the value of taking part in an event such as the World Games, as opposed to the importance of winning. For some coaches winning was not a priority:

'Winning is low on the list of goals for athletes.' (Coach - Football).

Another says:

'Little focus is placed on winning.' (Coach - Swimming).

However, not all coaches share this view:

'Winning is important in order to make parents and officials proud. It is important because we have started to train and we want to make our parents happy and our president.' (Coach - Golf).

The difference in opinions is further evident where coaches explain their emphasis if winning is not the primary goal:

'Personal growth – absolutely top priority, because for most of them it is possibly the first time away from home.' (Coach - Athletics)

And another concurred:

'The most important thing is that athletes learn the lifestyles and realize that there is more to life than at home.' (Coach - Bocce).

Whatever the attitude of coaches, there is less disagreement amongst athletes as to their motivation in taking part in the World Games; one athlete told us her intentions in going to the World Games:

'To win Gold Medals, to be the best' (Athlete - Swimming)

Another told us:

'If I win I would be the happiest girl in the world.' (Athlete - Athletics)

Other athletes expressed how the importance of winning appeared to supersede other aspects of the Games:

'I feel if I win at least I didn't go there for nothing, I went for something good for my coach and my school' (Athlete - Football)

'I am going to compete and take part and that is also important, but I cannot get out of my head the idea of winning.' (Athlete - Gymnastics)

The goal of winning as one of the primary motivations of competing in the World Games is much more consistent amongst athletes than coaches. However, this is not unexpected, the wider benefits of making friends or experiencing a new culture are also mentioned by athletes as important, however, their competitive spirit is not eclipsed by wider social or personal benefits. This raises important questions relating to the meaning of sporting achievement in the context of SO.

Coach-Athlete perceptions of achievement

Throughout our conversations with athletes and coaches from Time 1 to Time 3, the tension between the notions of 'winning' or of 'taking part' continually recurred. At Time 4 we were able to test this further by exploring directly with athletes and coaches, their perceptions of what for them constituted achievement and success in the context of the World Games. Each person was asked to rank eight possible indicators of sporting achievement and success that had emerged from interviews in the early data uplifts (see Table 6.1.) The percentage of athletes and of coaches that selected each item is presented below in two ways: first the proportion of respondents who ranked the item first and secondly, the proportion who ranked the item among the top three items selected from a total of eight available options.

As the table below shows there were some significant differences between the coaches and athletes around their concepts of sporting achievement in the context of the World Games event.

Coaches tended to focus on the personal development of the athletes – such as their growth in confidence and greater independence in life skills - whereas athletes put greater store on winning medals and the sporting experience of major competitions. However both athletes and coaches valued viewed the attainment of best sporting achievement and in making friends as important indicators of success.

Table 6.1 The percentage of coaches and athletes ranking eight indicators of sporting achievement and success for Special Olympics' Athletes (Time 4).

Indicators of sporting achievement and success	Coaches (N=20)		Athletes (N=33)	
	% Rated item 1st	% Rated item in top 3	% Rated item 1st	% Rated item in top 3
Athletes will grow in confidence and their self-esteem will improve.	40%	70%	3%	39%
Athletes will achieve their best sporting performance.	25%	50%	27%	55%
Athletes will make new friends and develop new social skills.	20%	55%	15%	36%
Athletes will gain greater independence in life skills.	20%	45%	3%	36%
Athletes will win a gold medal in the competitions	10%	20%	24%	52%
Athletes will develop awareness of the need to be fit and healthy	5%	30%	9%	36%
Athletes will be more valued in their home community because of the prestige associated with taking part in the major competitions.	5%	25%	6%	24%
Athletes will enjoy the experience of the major competitions.	5%	20%	12%	51%

Conversely both coaches and athletes gave little priority to athlete's becoming fitter and healthier or to them being more valued in their home community through participation in major international competitions.

Unpacking these responses in a little more detail is a worthwhile exercise in getting to the core of an apparent divergence between coaches and athletes in terms of their understanding of sporting achievement or success ahead of the World Games. Whilst a clear objective for coaches remains the personal development of their athletes, this was ranked as a joint lowest priority by the competitors themselves. This suggests that if this is indeed a key objective for coaches then it is reasonable to conclude that defined strategies, practices, pedagogical processes and explicit acts would form the basis of their engagement with the athletes around these sorts of achievements. Whilst there were undoubtedly some of these practices evident in the work of coaches, especially at the pre-event training camps, for the most part it was not entirely clear how coaches sought to realize these specific outcomes. This seems to indicate to a practitioner gap in that coaches express a willingness to do one thing (e.g. expand the social and personal capacity of athletes) while athletes seem unaware or unappreciative of this aspiration. Rather the coaches seem to take their lead from the athletes who want to get better at their chosen sport and who enjoy playing and competing in their preferred sport, and although

the coaches are only too willing to facilitate this, they place less emphasis on the idea of winning.

Rules

Athletes and coaches reported spending time in their preparations becoming familiar with the rules, not just of their sport, but also those prescribed for the World Games event. One rule which proved contentious was that known as the 'honest effort rule'. The intention of this is to reduce the possibility of cheating or, perhaps less harshly (as instances of deliberate cheating are rare) making sure that the competition remains broadly equitable by drawing a close parallel between the performance of a given athlete at the divisioning stage versus their actual achievement in competition. This rule, which is used in timed sports, is conceived of with the very best of intentions and is certainly not intended to be deployed in a pejorative or punitive manner. Athletes' times over the defined distance is recorded at divisioning trials, which take place before competition. Should an athlete's final time be 15% better than that recorded at the divisioning event then the athlete will be disqualified. The assumption being that the athlete 'held back' at divisioning so as to be placed in a lower division, thus increasing their chance of a medal when competition begins. A problem with this arises when no divisioning takes place in a particular event since there are only enough athletes to constitute one division. This means that the time which is established as the 'qualifying' or 'base line' is the one which was entered after selection, several months before the Games are to take place. Since the athlete is training during this period, improvement would be expected, not least if the coach were exercising the desired effect upon their athlete. During the Games we were aware of three occasions when athletes were disqualified because their final time was more than 15 % faster than their entered time. On each of these occasions the athlete was denied the award of a Gold medal, which they understandably believed they had won. These athletes were confused and angry and their families were extremely upset at this outcome. This rule acknowledges the degree of competitiveness which athletes have but again highlights a degree of ambiguity with the notion that taking part is the most important thing. It is self-evident that any stipulation that inherently discourages athletes from achieving improvement in the period leading up to major events like the World Games or that appear to discourage coaches from pushing their athletes towards further enhancement are not only unusual in a sporting context but apparently negate the important role of the coach (certainly in a sporting sense) after selection.

Athletes' reflections on their World Games experience

We met with the athletes who had taken part in the evaluation a fourth time – three months after the World Games - and amongst the questions we asked them were those concerning reflections they may have had on their experiences of the Games. Of course these experiences varied widely; however, there were also common themes which resonated with findings drawn out from earlier data uplifts. Athletes remained largely focused on their sport and the outcome of their competition, both factually – in terms of what they achieved and speculatively – in terms of what they learnt from going to the World Games; that is they related their learning to sport and training.

In recalling the outcome of their competition some athletes achieved highly and were delighted to tell us of their success:

'I won a gold in the 400 free (style) my first time I went under 5 minutes for my 400 (metres) and then a gold for my 100 free also a PB I went under 1.01 for the first time also. (Athlete - Swimming)

Others did not do as well as they expected, however for some this was motivation for further improvement in the future:

'I want to train harder cause I got a silver medal not a gold medal and I need to acquire new skills to get gold next time. (Athlete – Table Tennis).

For others it prompted them to make changes:

'I think I can do better for my country in another sport, I am changing from running to weightlifting, I will be stronger in this.' (Athlete - Athletics)

And for one competitor the outcome was less positive:

'I will leave Special Olympics, I had a row with my coach after the competition and now I do not want to train any more'. (Athlete - Football).

Athletes also told us of the feedback they received from coaches when they returned home. One recalled receiving praise from their coach:

'The coach was pleased with how I played and he told me that I did very well. Well we got the Gold medal so I knew already that we were great.' (Athlete - Football)

Another spoke of the feedback she received on her performance as she continues to work with the coach with whom she trained for the World Games:

'She told me that she wants me to be careful at the game, to keep my mind at the game, not to turn my head around without reason, to be concentrated on my game and not laugh or do things without meaning and to listen my coach's advice because she knows more than me about my sport. (Athlete - Bocce)

The process of reviewing athletes' performances varied between coaches and sports. For instance in team sports where athletes were playing a series of games, a review of the match and advice around tactics and further improvement happened after each game:

'We sit together after the game and everyone says what went well or what they have to say about the game from what they saw and then we listen to what the coach has to tell us and we try to improve for next time.' (Athlete - Football).

Some athletes drew on the experience of previous, large scale competitions to help them in their strategy for Athens:

'I have been to 3 big international competitions and you must always be well prepared and don't give a lot of information about yourself to other athletes.' (Athlete - Athletics)

For others experiencing this scale of competition for the first time brought its own challenges:

'What I remember about the Games is that I was nervous as an athlete, everyone get nervous. That thing I still remember'. (Athlete - Badminton)

There was much to reflect on in terms of what athletes said they had learnt through taking part in the World Games; often athletes said that they had learnt more about their sport through watching the skills of other players.

'One guy had a great technique and I try to learn and copy him.' (Athlete - Badminton)

Another athlete said:

'When I am not playing I like to sit and watch the other athletes in their matches and I see what I can learn from them.' (Athlete - Handball)

A third athlete was impressed at what he observed about how some athletes approached their competition:

'Mm, what I did learn about the other athletes is that they concentrate and they respect their coaches and they always believe in what they do, and they say if you believe, you can make it, so'. (Athlete – Table Tennis)

There were very few criticisms of the Games, athletes were generally very positive about their experience, from the actual competition, to visiting Greece – the food, the people etc; however in terms of the Games one athlete made a point which resonated with the thoughts of some coaches:

'And, what I didn't like about the Games is that I think there were not enough people to watch the Games'. (Athlete - Swimming)

Coaches told us of their perceptions of the lasting impact that the Games had on many athletes; athletes too reflected on the impact the experience has had on their lives, one told us:

'I have learnt about other people and food and languages, I understand about other places more.' (Athlete Swimming)

Another athlete's self-reflection revealed the depth of the impression that attending the World Games can have:

'It did change my life so much, because I'm not the same person that I was when I left the country. I'm changed, I know how does it feel to be at World Games competitions, and I respect some other athletes like me.' (Athlete -Football)

A third, simply said:

'I want to do more' (Athlete - Bocce)

Coaches' reflections on athletes in competition

Coaches' reflections on athletes' performances varied widely. Some reported that they had been pleased and even surprised at how well their athletes had done at the Games:

'He played extremely well despite of tough competition. He lost a singles match but came back strongly. He played nearly as good as any normal player would have. He exceeded our expectation by far. Had he been guided better by the local coach, his technique would have been more complete. His fitness level made up for the lack in technique. He was become devoted to sport.' (Coach - Badminton).

Others identified challenges that athletes found difficult to overcome:

'She could have done better had she been familiar with the conditions. She practices in natural turfs while she had to perform on synthetic surface at the Games. She took time to adjust; after playing 3-4 times she overcame the technical difficulties.' (Coach - Bocce)

Whilst others adapted to the conditions with ease:

'He lifted his game far more than we thought possible. He adjusted to the conditions quickly.' (Coach - Bocce)

In terms of working with the local conditions one coach reflected on how greater knowledge of what they would face in Athens would have helped in preparations:

'We did not know much about the actual conditions in Athens. Any knowledge would have made us prepare better.' (Coach - Athletics)

Indeed lack of prior experience of the conditions or sporting environment was reported to have had a devastating impact on one athlete's performance:

'She froze, she forgot everything we had practiced, she did not even start her race. The whole experience just overwhelmed her.' (Coach - Athletics)

Another reported on how the wider experience of the Games – the unfamiliar environment and unusual food impacted on one athlete:

'He was very well prepared but his performance did not reflect his calibre. Home sickness and tension affected his game. His friends tried to 'nurse' his spirit back. He could not adjust to the food and new environment. His morale improved as soon as the Games were about to end and he was to return home.'(Coach - Badminton)

Coaches told us that they considered their athletes to have learnt more about their sport and developed their skills by being in competition with athletes from other parts of the world, one football coach reflected:

'...when they played against Brazil – their striker, oh my gosh! But there was magic. He realized, that hey, I thought I was good, but look at this guy. Then after that same game he went to that guy and shook his hand, and said you know what, just show me some of the tricks you were doing in there. You know so that they can do the same thing, yes he learnt a lot.' (Coach - Football)

Another stated:

In general she was more mature in sport. The results were excellent for her; she managed to stay calm in difficult times. After the games I can see is that she has more desire to succeed. (Coach - Bocce)

At the World Games and afterwards, coaches recorded and recounted athletes' sporting performance in terms of the final place they achieved, any medals that were won, and whether athletes had attained a personal best time. Indeed National Programmes reflected on the achievements of athletes at the Games through the reporting of the numbers of medals the National Team had returned home with. However, at an individual level, the coaches' reflections on athletes' performance emphasized more to the individual's personal achievements and was contextualized in terms of their prior expectations of that particular athlete. In these reflections on the outcome of the competition, we again see something of the ambiguity around the Games that has featured in this report. That is the contrast between the emphasis on individual effort and achievement in relation to taking part in parallel with representations of success based on the amount of medals and the superficial glory associated with the bronze, silver or gold.

Coaches' reflections on the wider benefits to athletes

As intimated earlier in this report, in terms of outcomes of the World Games' experience the focus of many coaches is on the benefits, which athletes may attain through sporting participation. This is captured in the words of one coach who said:

'The local coach takes as much care as possible to see to the athletes' welfare. Personality develops as fitness increases. Satisfaction gained from performing well helps to increase confidence and acquire life skills. Our goal is to ultimately integrate the athlete to the mainstream, and teach them to lead happy, independent lives. Building their personality is of utmost importance, and we seek to do that through sport. In a way improving one's personal best gives more confidence. But enjoying oneself and giving one's best without regard for the outcome are enough.' (Coach - Athletics).

And echoed in the sentiment of another:

'We aim to develop the social and communication skills among our athletes through sports, but we should not forget that sporting performances are important since these are the bricks by which we expect them to build their lives'. (Coach - Swimming)

In reflecting on the social and personal outcomes for athletes who attended the Games, we were told of some positive perceptions of the benefits that were observed:

'His social communication has improved. He now stays in a group instead of roaming alone'. (Coach - Football)

Another stated:

'His confidence is high, he has self-belief.' (Coach - Bocce)

Whilst from a third we heard:

'He has matured through this experience.' (Coach - Golf)

Often positive social outcomes were linked to sporting performance:

'He got a medal. He is a hero to his neighbours. He is nearly normal in speaking and thinking, so had little problem communicating with people who feted him after return, including the chief minister and the district magistrate'. (Coach - Badminton)

Whilst the development of maturity and responsibility was linked to the expectations placed on athletes during their time at the Games, as one coach told us:

Even whilst we were there, there was a guy who was only responsible for the kit; there was one guy who was responsible for the soccer balls and the cones. Because we used to do warm-ups before every game. So each one knows I must carry the cones, I'm responsible for water, so each one had his, and we rotated the roles. Each one of them got a turn to do something. (Coach - Football)

The growth of independence was also identified as an outcome of traveling away from home to take part in the Games, as one coach reported:

It was good because they could have independence from their families and also be more autonomous. (Coach - Swimming)

Conclusion

Overall, coaches were positive about the experience of their athletes at the World Games, identifying a range of benefits both sporting as well as of a more personal or social nature. None reported any untoward after effects or any major crises that had arisen during their time in Greece. In fact, coaches found a common voice in saying how much the athletes enjoyed the experience of the World Games as a whole:

My athletes had a wonderful experience being at the World Games. They enjoyed it thoroughly, because it was their first time and on such a big stage, it was very wonderful for them, they really enjoyed it. (Coach - Football)

Chapter 7: Towards a Model of Coaching for the World Games

The findings of this study are based on a data set that is extensive in terms of its breadth and depth albeit limited in terms of the countries and sports included. The numbers of interviews completed, the rating scales and questionnaires collected, and the longitudinal nature of the research process over a period of nine months provided insight into the issues impacting upon coach-athlete relations ahead of the Special Olympics World Games.



Whilst there were some variations between countries in terms of the nuances across main themes, there were largely consistent messages within the data across the four countries that constituted the sample group. In fact, greater variations existed amongst different groups of stakeholders within the four countries, than did the cultural differences between participating nations. This suggests that the nurturing of a 'micro-culture' for Special Olympics as an organisation largely transcends national differences and produces relative consistent perspectives amongst coaches and separately amongst athletes. This echoes the inter-cultural similarities found in a previous study of Unified Sports in Special Olympics Europe Eurasia (Dowling et al. 2010). Together these findings suggest a common response internationally to the experience of preparing for and taking part in the Special Olympics World Games, albeit with some subtle cultural and situational variations. Hence our findings may well have wider applicability beyond the four participating countries although this needs to be tested both through the dissemination of this report and in future research.

SO athletes' experience of the World Games

The 56 Special Olympics athletes who took part in this study had all been selected for participation in the 2011 World Games. All were regular members of SO clubs within their localities and most had been involved in their sport for more than three years, although there were a small number (7) who had been involved in the chosen sport for less than a year. The vast majority of athletes (53/56) lived at home with their families and 83% were educated in special schools.

Given the typical lives of people with intellectual disabilities, the opportunity to travel to Athens and take part in a major sporting event was an immense and unique opportunity for them. It included many 'firsts'; the first time away from their families for an extended period, their first experience the Greek culture through being welcomed in host towns around the mainland and islands. For most it was their first participation in a spectacular

opening ceremony and in subsequent days to compete in what were often large venues against individuals and teams from around the world. All these experiences are magnified for the participating athletes whose typical daily opportunities are often very limited.

The achievements of the athletes taking part in the World Games, be they on the sports field, or more in the realm of personal accomplishments or social advances, should be appreciated in the context of the 'Big Experience' that is the SO World Games.



Their very selection is a leap of faith. A lot is asked of athletes who take part in the World Games. They are out of their 'comfort zone' and potentially challenged not just on the sports field but also with the newness of the situation and the emotional pressures which may accompany their stay away from home. The range of challenges they face perhaps explains the extent to which athletes depend on their coaches (a point we shall return to). But experiencing and surmounting these challenges is an essential part of the World Games experience and all the athletes in our study – and probably thousands like them – surpassed the expectations others had previously held of them. In this respect, the World Games are a unique opportunity for persons with intellectual disabilities from around the world; no other comparison even comes close.

The athletes seemed to thrive on the challenges they faced. All reported fairly consistently, on how great the experience of attending the World Games had been for them. Athletes told us that their focus on sport was central to their experience, as has been reported in the findings; however this does not obscure their enjoyment of the wider experience. A growth of independence skills through time away from the security of their family home was a valuable outcome, building confidence and a 'can do' approach. Likewise athletes valued the opportunity to make connections with others from around the world, who share their interest in sport and who join together with them in the spirit of competition.

Taking part in the SO World Games is a considerable achievement in itself, a fact perhaps more recognized by coaches and athletes' parents, than by athletes themselves. It is testament to coaches' preparatory work with athletes that they are in most instances able to take to the Big Experience of being part of the World Games event with an open, happy outlook, rather than being overwhelmed by the scale or newness of experience. This illuminates something of the contrasting focus taken by coaches whose preparations embraced the wider experience of participation, in addition to the sporting and competitive aspect of the Games whereas the athletes tended to focus solely on their sports training and performance.

Likewise, coaches and indeed athletes' parents, reflected on the wider achievements of athletes on, as well as off, the sports field while athletes themselves told us that they conceived of achievement at the World Games more specifically within the realm of

sporting success; namely delivering the best sporting performance or indeed as winning and earning a 'gold medal'. Whilst additional benefits of making new friends or enjoying the overall experience were thought to be important too, the central motivation and objective for athletes was to do well in their competition. Athletes drew on the narrative of national representation, of making people at home proud and of the event bringing together athletes from around the world to take part in high-level competition. Our data reveals athletes' strong identification with the idea that they had been selected on the basis of sporting excellence and that they were the best from their country. These motivational messages around which the Games had been framed were absorbed by athletes and relayed among the National team. SO athletes taking part in the 2011 World Games identified first and foremost as sports people and competitors. That there was a wider narrative of the Games drawn around the importance of participation, the broader sense of achievement which the Games can embody did not feature in athletes' representation of their part in the event.

Moreover most seemed oblivious to the importance of the Games as a flagship event for SO and the intricate organisation, not to say, expense that the Games involved. But to bolster the image and arguably the success of the Games, the participating athletes are variously portrayed as 'national representatives', 'elite performers' or simply 'exceptional'. Implicitly, if not explicitly, athletes are encouraged to conceive of themselves solely as sports performers to the detriment of other forms of identity construction associated with the Games. That is their identities are entirely consumed with sport to the exclusion of other ways in which their self-efficacy may be established or refined. This emphasis becomes problematical when attempting to negotiate the after-effects of athletes' involvement in seminal tournaments, such as the 2011 Special Olympics World Games in Athens.

At best such athletes may feel disappointed that the event is over and that the enjoyment and anticipation associated with it has ended. On the other hand they may find it difficult to come to terms with their non-involvement in similar events, and under current stipulations in some nations, the prospect of any future participation in World Games. Thus despite the very genuine contribution of coaches, officials, parents and the SO organisation as a whole, all involved need to remain conscious of the contradiction there can be between their perceptions of the Games and those held by athletes.

SO Coaches involved in preparing athletes for the 2011 World Games

All but one of the 21 coaches who took part in this evaluation had been appointed as the Head coach for their particular sport and hence they would accompany athletes to the World Games. These were a group of seasoned coaches who had on average six years coaching experience in SO; additionally three-quarters of them had prior experience of preparing athletes for international competitions.



Special Olympics coaches are broadly a dedicated and skilled group of people as has been reported in the literature previously (e.g. Dowling et al. 2010). The evidence gathered over the course of this evaluation again testifies to this. As described in preceding chapters the range of roles and responsibilities undertaken by coaches is very diverse. Moreover, the tasks undertaken by coaches extend far beyond what would be commonly thought of as 'coaching'. Their contribution to SO - typically done on a voluntary basis -

is mammoth. The term 'coach' seems to be an inadequate description for what is contained within the actual role. What is more remarkable is the apparent ease with which coaches carry out their role, the willingness they appear to have to accept an unrestricted amount of functions and tasks, how they move between the different roles required of them and the altruism they demonstrate in their engagement with Special Olympics and with athletes. The success of the World Games, not necessarily on an individual level for athletes, but as an event owes much to the visible as well as the more discrete work of SO coaches.

Equally they face resource challenges in terms of training facilities and access to suitable equipment. They may have had little say in the selection of the athletes for whom they are responsible and a minimal amount of contact with them. The time available for training and preparation is limited. They have limited awareness of the standard of the competition their athletes may face. At the Games the sporting performance of the athletes may be the least of their concerns as they supervise their daily routines; transportation to/from venues and ensuring their safety. That said, most will have previous experience of SO Games and many have acquired their own ways of coping. In sum, then for coaches the World Games is much more than a sports competition.

Multi-dimensional use of sport in preparing athletes for the World Games experience.

Sport is the central focus of coaches' engagement with athletes as they prepare for the World Games. However, in a SO context participation in sport is about more than the athlete's performance in competition. This study gave valuable insights as to how coaches conceptualized sport as a vehicle for preparation of athletes across a range of domains some of which are sports related but many of which address goals relating to the social skills and personal development of athletes.

We have reported that coaches plan their engagement with individual athletes in relation to particular goals designed to meet the identified needs of the individual. Whilst coaches highlighted sporting goals for athletes that constituted some of their training focus, they

also pinpointed goals which were orientated to athletes' personal and social growth. However, it is apparent that coaches use what they know best to approach almost any goals set for athletes; namely sports training. Coaches use sports coaching not only to approach specific sports related goals but also those that are not sports related. Therefore, for example we see coaches using a team game exercise with the intention of promoting social interaction amongst players. This approach may well also impact on sports outcomes – particularly if athletes are involved in team sports - however in such examples the focused outcome described by coaches is in the non-sporting realm. We encountered numerous examples of coaches using sporting exercises as a vehicle for non-sporting outcomes. In part, this demonstrates the breadth of the role which coaches are aiming to fulfill, using the circumscribed methods of sport and sports coaching as their primary tool. That coaches are inventive and ambitious is clear: they are stretching their sports skills in a multitude of directions to achieve a variety of outcomes, is also apparent. But in so doing they risk diluting the impact these approaches can have in developing athlete's sporting competence, or at least making it more difficult for athletes to appreciate the improvements the coach expects from them. Also for non-sporting goals, there may be other activities that would provide more effective learning experiences for the athletes. These distinctions may become more vital in preparing athletes for higher level competitions such as World Games when improved sporting performance is a desired goal – not least from the athletes themselves as noted above.

Relationship building

Coaches recognize the central importance of developing a strong relationship with the athletes that they will train and who they will accompany to the World Games. The relationship described by coaches has many dimensions. First and foremost the coach is a trainer and sports coach who needs to command the attention and respect of athletes whom they train. Coaches also need to inspire trust in their athletes as they need to be able to manage the athlete's practical support needs, sometimes their personal support needs, to be a friend and confidant and to safeguard athletes' emotional well being as they traverse through the range of experiences which arise during the World Games. Because of the particularities of the World Games experience in terms of the extended period athletes are away from home, the need for them to have someone who they feel they can rely on is crucial.



The relationship between coaches and athletes is also one that is important to athletes' parents as it inspires confidence in them in the support their son or daughter will receive in their journey through the World Games experience. Our data demonstrates how important this is to parents, particularly since for many athletes it will be their first time away from

home. The recurring metaphor used to describe the relationship between athletes and coaches is familial and often places coaches in a pseudo-parental role.

Although these attributes of the coach-athlete relationship are present in all sports coaching, the intimacy of the relationship may well differ in SO with associated greater emotional involvement by coaches. This in turn could lead to coaches adopting a more sympathetic approach to the performance they expect from their athletes.

An additional challenge that coaches' face in relation to the development of a close relationship with athletes comes when the Head Coach appointed to a sport does not know all of the athletes who have been selected to travel to the World Games. In this instance the athletes' local coach will likely have a close relationship with them and will know them well. However, the opportunity for Head Coaches to build a similar relationship over a limited time span and possibly with minimal contact can be difficult to establish. This emphasizes the importance of the development of a strong working relationship between Head Coaches and local coaches. Whilst our data show that such a relationship is critical in terms of sharing athletes' preparations in the lead up to the Games (a point to which we shall return), it is also vital that the in-depth knowledge which local coaches have about athletes – their likes and dislikes, their preferred mode of communication, what is important to them – is shared with Head Coaches when they do not previously know the athletes.

Critical Engagement

Our data suggests that there are times of critical engagement with athletes in their preparations. Where National Programmes institute a training camp as part of their preparations, a range of opportunities for preparatory activities arise. For instance camps provide an ideal forum for athletes to get to know their Head Coach and vice versa. Because training camps are residential, coaches will also have the opportunity to really get to personally know the athlete: their personalities, their particular support needs and their hoped for experience at the World Games. Equally athletes get the chance to build a relationship with their Head Coach. Training camps also offer opportunities for the growth of friendships between selected athletes who make up the National Team, as well as the development of a sense of being a team, of the links between individuals from differing sporting backgrounds coming together under the national banner to travel to and compete at the World Games.

In addition to making friends, developing relationships and building a sense of a team, training camps provide an important sports training opportunity for athletes. They are also a chance for coaches to assess the progress which athletes are making in relation to their sports training and wider preparations. The timing of camps is important. The period of 3-4 months immediately prior to the Games are a time when athletes appear to develop a particular focus and are highly motivated in their training. The immanency of competition appears to attune athletes to the preparations they are making and they seem to have a

keener sense of their goals and the effort required to reach them. In this period athletes become increasingly self-motivated and this is therefore an important time in coach engagement with athletes in relation, in particular to their sports training. Thus coaches should be alert to the timing and pacing of training regimes, although in our study we had limited evidence that this happened outside of the Training Camps.

Towards a Model of Coaching: Aligning different Perspectives on the World Games experience

In essence, this study aimed to define a model of coaching athletes for the World Games. As we have endeavored to illustrate throughout this report this is a more complex undertaking than might be imagined. Nor do we have a definitive model of what typically constitutes coaching within SO clubs and in preparing athletes for local or national competitions, against which comparisons might be drawn. The one certainty though is that the Summer World Games are a unique event in SO. Indeed as the study unfolded during 2011, it became apparent to us that any model describing the nature of the coach-athlete relationship could only be fully understood within the varying perspectives that existed around the nature and function of World Games. In this section we identify three perspectives that emerge from an analysis of the data gathered. Finally we propose a synthesized model with the aim of encouraging reflection and debate among SO personnel, coaches and athletes.

The World Games as an extension of Participation in Special Olympics.

As a major event on the international sporting calendar, the SO Summer World Games is for all who take part, likely to be a time of fun, excitement, new experiences, making new friends and forging memories that can last a lifetime. The World Games conceived of in the figure below highlights an emphasis on participation as central to the experience.



In this conceptualization the preparation for participation provides an element of the overall experience, likewise competition rather than being the central focus is but a small portion of the whole, subsumed by the overall emphasis on participation. What happens within this conceptualization of the World Games is that there is a minimizing of the importance of competition, which becomes a small part of the experience. Preparations led by coaches using the medium of sport, are geared to preparing athletes for fully participating and benefiting from the social and emotional aspects of the Games albeit using training and competition as a means for doing this. However, competition is not here the most important aspect of the Games, rather taking part and getting the most from the experience, on a personal as well as sporting level, are key. This conceptualization of the SO World Games is one that prioritizes the value of participation and enjoyment over competition.

There are other broader considerations in terms of the World Games. As recent experiences demonstrated from when the World Games were held Ireland (McConkey et al., 2010), they can be a potent means of challenging negative stereotypes towards people with intellectual disabilities through the media coverage generated and promoting their social inclusion. Although this can be true of many SO competitions, the World Games because of their scale and format appears to further magnify these objectives. However, such considerations were not the concern of the athletes and coaches at the grassroots. For them, the Games were an opportunity to participate in a prestigious event: to have fun through participation in sports.

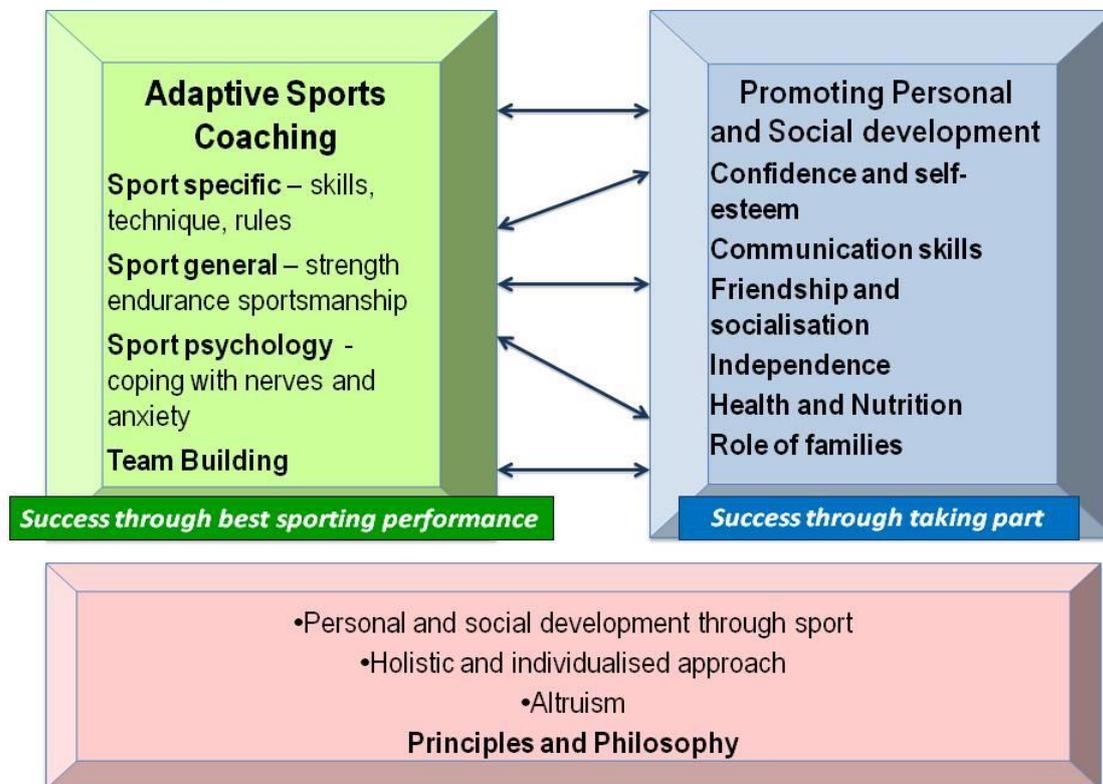
Whilst we recognize that even amid the most serious of sporting contests it is possible to have fun and enjoy oneself – our argument here however concerns one of emphasis. Where are the lines drawn between SO World Games as a fantastic experience, a celebration of sporting agency, and a demonstration of sporting excellence? This, we would argue, is by no means clear.

However, this perspective sets the World Games within the wider context of participation in Special Olympics weekly club activities. It is important to note that the proportion of athletes participating in the World Games at best represents less than 0.25% of all SO athletes. Participation in the weekly club activities within SO provides the grassroots of the organisation and for most, the World Games is a remote and occasional event. Thus the above Figure can be interpreted as representing the extent of athlete's engagement with SO while also illustrating the dominant influences on the thinking of coaches and organizers in relation to World Games.

One of the challenges posed by this analysis is the extent to which World Games intersect with the experiences of local SO clubs and how they help realize their aspirations and ambitions. More particularly, the link between those athletes and coaches who have the opportunity to participate in the World Games and those who do not have the chance to take part, is a pertinent question for the wider organisation to consider.

The World Games as a balance between Participation and Competition

The coaches drawn from the four participating countries plus the others we interviewed at the World Games, presented another perspective on how they viewed the World Games, as summarised in the second Figure.



Here we see coaching as a delicate balance between sports coaching and coaching athletes in skills related to their personal and social development. This figure acknowledges the complex role which coaches accept and points to the fact that coaches' work with athletes is designed around each athlete's assessed individual needs – the assessment being carried out by the coach.

As the above figure shows, coaches have the dual role of being the designated coach for the particular sports - with responsibilities to train the athletes for competition - while balancing the requirements for their successful participation in the wider experience of the Games. These two aspects of the coaches' role are in constant inter-play with one another. Each area impacts on the other. For example, coaches' report that developments in an athlete's confidence will not only be of personal benefit, but is also likely to impact on their sporting performance; whilst in turn, success in sport is likely to build self-esteem. There is an ongoing articulation between both of these focus areas, which are mutually impactful.

This perspective on the coach's role offers insight in two particular areas. Firstly, we see the notion that athletes' participation in the World Games is not simply about sport, but that

there are wider arena through which success or achievement within the context of the World Games, can be judged. Secondly, that coaches' approach to preparing athletes for their participation in the World Games appears to be an extension of what Special Olympics coaches regularly do in their club activities with athletes, where sport is the focus of activities which are geared towards improving athletes sporting skills as well as offering opportunities for personal growth and social connectedness. The World Games does not appear to engender a different approach to working with athletes, rather it might be seen as a magnification of the work that is already in progress in clubs on a week-to-week basis. We are reminded in this figure that coaches work on a voluntary basis, and that the extent of this role demands a high degree of personal altruism. Moreover, the notion of achievement is balanced between successes in the sporting and non-sporting domains, that athlete engagement, goals and achievements are viewed through a prism of the range of athlete's needs and abilities rather than simply in terms of sport, and finally that whatever the goal, sport is a SO coaches' tool for addressing it.

The World Games as high-level competition

This third perspective on coaching and preparation for the World Games is derived mainly from athlete's views.



For athletes, sport and competition were reported as their central motivation for taking part. The key elements of this focus for athletes was on their training, with a focus on the particularities of their sport, consideration of how to cope with nerves in competition and learning the rules of their sport. Athletes said they were motivated by their coaches to train and improve in their sport; however they also expressed a high degree of personal motivation in relation to the prospect of competition which they supposed would be of a

high level. They were also motivated by the desire to make others proud of them and their achievements, and to do justice to the role of representing their country at such a prestigious international competition. In relation to performance, simply taking part was not on most of the athletes' horizon, rather they expressed a desire to achieve their best performance in their sport and they placed considerable value on winning. The overall context within which their participation was located was the National Team of which they were part. Athletes identified strongly with their team as a substitute family; a strong friendship group and a steady support for them during their time at the competitions in Athens. Athletes commonly regarded their coach to be the head of the team/family.

As has been reported in preceding chapters, athletes were attuned to the wider benefits of their participation in the World Games: the Big experience engendered by the opportunity to travel to a new country, observe cultural differences and have the chance to taste independence by staying with peers away from the security of the family home. Athletes relied on the support of coaches for much of their emotional and personal care needs whilst temporarily resident in the host town and at the Games, and they comfortably moved between the different aspects of their relationship with coaches. Athletes also reported how they enjoyed meeting people and making new friends in particular developing connections with peers from around the globe. Many also recognized that their participation in the Games and the whole experience had brought personal benefits with a growth in their independence skill and levels of confidence. However, whilst these non-sporting areas were acknowledged by athletes they were not prioritized as are shown more peripherally.

What is revealed by this figure is that athletes' perspectives are largely congruent with coaches' perspectives; however, crucial differences between perspectives are a matter of emphasis. Athletes' central focus is on sport in relation to competition and performance and although they recognize the wider social benefits of their participation in the Games, they do not see these as central. Athletes do not talk about the Games as a focus of their social development, in fact they do not report a need to effect personal change. Rather this emerges from coaches' assessment of potential gain to individual athletes through taking part, in tandem with their sporting engagement. Sport may be central to athletes and coaches perspectives, however values which underpin the use of sport are divergent; with athletes identifying as sportsmen and women and valuing sporting achievement, with the opportunity to compete at the World Level one that they are keen to embrace: whilst coaches focus on sport as a means through which athletes can advance across a range of indicators, some sporting, some not.

The World Games as a Celebration of Sport

A synthesis of the perspective of coaches and athletes discussed in the foregoing two figures is presented in this emergent Model of Coaching for the World Games, which we have entitled Celebrating Sport.



This model draws together the various features, which athletes and coaches reported that they valued, in terms of preparation and participation in the World Games. However, through listening to the voices of athletes, this model places competition at the centre of the Games. In order to reflect the importance placed on the competitive aspect of the Games, which athletes value, this model suggests processes that allow for an elevation of competition over participation.

A key finding of this work, and one which fundamentally influences this model, is that athlete motivation for participation in the World Games takes on a particular emphasis, one which contrasts with what is reported in the literature around the motivation that athletes have for participating Special Olympics on a regular basis. Athletes are reported to be motivated towards typical, weekly participation by a balance of intrinsic factors – fun, friendship, sport, relationship with their coach - and extrinsic factors such as competition, winning medals or trophies. What the present work suggests is that in the context of the World Games, for athletes, the emphasis shifts to a greater motivation through extrinsic factors. This shift in emphasis is not entirely mirrored by the perspectives of coaches where the balance between sports participation and social development, as outcomes of taking part in the World Games is a more dominant outlook. The model we are advancing here takes into account coaches' views, but as the principle players in the SO movement, this model centralizes the celebration of sport which athletes prize.

Celebrating Sport

In order to realize athletes' sporting potential on the world stage, we suggest, through this model that there are a series of factors which require specific attention.

Early identification of athletes. The first step might be the early identification of athletes who show promise or indeed ambition in their sport. This would foster the idea of the athletes getting onto a pathway, which could ultimately lead to their participation at World Games level. The 'pathway' is likely to include participation in national and regional competition (as happens at present) plus application to a training regime designed to encourage progress in sporting ability. Equally it should be recognized that not all athletes who take part in SO will aspire to high-level competition and that as the literature suggests, for a proportion –maybe even the majority - the intrinsic elements of friendship and fun are more important than competition or measurable sporting achievement.

Process for selecting athletes. The process of selecting athletes to compete at the World Games is important as it defines the core foundation for the Games. If athletes are being selected with the central purpose of high-level competition then this is likely to influence the manner in which selection takes place; central to which is the athlete's sporting potential. However if selection is simply to gather a group of athletes who will participate in the Games, then the role of sporting potential loses its salience at the time of selection. Special Olympics provides competitive opportunities to athletes of all abilities through the process of divisioning, and this is a valuable feature of SO competition events. This principle could be continued in a selection process that centralizes competition, simply through estimated divisioning, at an earlier stage, based on qualifying times/ performance standards at the immediate past international event.

Sustained training. Early identification and selection of athletes would allow for a longer and potentially more focused period of training as athletes prepare for high-level competition. Key aspects of training regimes – the development of fitness, stamina, endurance as well as technique and knowledge of the rules of the particular sport - can, over time, all receive adequate attention and with time coaches can adapt their approaches to training and monitoring outcomes more effectively.

Progress: This model places greater emphasis on athlete's developing their sporting skills with defined progress being both expected and planned for. Equally coaches should also be expected to progress in their competencies and in this respect, joint training between local and Head Coaches would be valuable, both to the athletes themselves, as well as to local coaches who can potentially learn from the experience of Head Coaches. The goal is for training to ensure progress for athletes in their preparations for competition and we know that such progress is in itself a motivating factor towards continued training and success.

Success in competition: The notion of success was a recurring theme throughout this evaluation, as has been reported in previous chapters. Athletes are more likely to measure success in relation to their performance on the sports field and in some instances the tangible rewards for achievement in the shape of medals. Other indicators of success, whilst important, such as a growth in levels of confidence, were not rated so highly by athletes. Therefore in this model of celebrating sport we propose that, in the context of International competition, success is primarily measured by performance on the sports field. This does not undermine the undoubted value of the fringe benefits generated through participation, but it does recognize and amplify athletes' perspectives of the Games and underline their priorities in this context.

The dual role of coaches

Whilst we have placed an emphasis on competition as central to our model of celebrating sport, we also acknowledge within this model the two key themes emergent in our findings: that of the important role of coaches in preparing athletes in their sport as well as their role in working to promote the personal and social skills of athletes. Indeed these two roles are ones which mainstream coaches are also familiar with negotiating as noted in Chapter 2. However in the context and culture of Special Olympics there may well be a bias towards coaches adopting the wider personal development role at the expense of their sporting functions; particularly in designing adaptive training regimes for their individual athletes. In a model that puts a greater focus on preparing for competition, the question arises whether one individual - a Head Coach for instance - can adequately balance these two worthy ambitions.

Coaches involved with mainstream athletes at the elite level, will focus almost exclusively upon the sporting outcomes for the athlete. This is where their expertise lies and where they can make the most profound contribution. However they are supported in their work by an array of support staff, foremost amongst these being a 'Lifestyle Manager'. The role of this individual is to attend to the 'non-sporting' demands of the athlete, which could include paying bills on their behalf, arranging transport, securing accommodation and so forth. In essence such an individual removes the often mundane demands upon elite athletes and allows them to concentrate solely upon achieving their very best sporting outcomes. Whilst we are not suggesting that SO should seek to specifically recruit 'Lifestyle Managers' or even to use this term, we are pointing out a distinct role for certain personnel to work alongside the sports coach, with the specific remit to advance the non-sporting ambitions of coaches and supporters (e.g. relatives) for the athlete(s) in question. This separation of functions should help to focus the efforts of each and avoid the ambiguity that presently exists. That said, we appreciate the difficulties in recruiting and sponsoring additional volunteer personnel and we recognise that many coaches cope well with the tensions that arise from these dual functions, albeit at the cost of much extra effort on their part.

Participation

It is clear from the data we have reported that there are benefits to athletes beyond the realm of their sport and even the World Games. Thus this Model is rooted in the benefits accrued from participation in Special Olympics at all levels and captures the vision of coaches and of SO as an organisation that sport can open doors, broaden outlooks and challenge the status quo. Sport within SO is not just about competition and it is not our intention to change this basic premise, rather it is a question of emphasis when it comes to World Games.

However, there is one aspect of participation that requires particular attention: namely what happens for World Games athletes after the competition? Some athletes may feel disorientated when attempting to evolve from the period of excitement leading up to the Games and the reality of life after them or they may even feel a sense of neglect on account of their perceived centrality prior to the Games compared to their apparent isolation following them. How can they further advance their sporting ambitions?

It is our assertion that it behooves SO centrally or perhaps regionally, to consider the most beneficial way of negotiating the 'post-event' experience of athletes and coaches alike. It seems necessary for there to be a clear pathway out of 'high level' competition for those involved. This would serve two functions. It would define how athlete's sporting ambitions can be further realised. It would also ensure that the experience they have gained and the insights they have secured can be harnessed for their further personal participation in SO locally and possibly for the overall benefit of those new athletes who will commence the process of looking forward to the next World Games some four years hence (or two years for the Winter Games). The pathway might simply outline arrangements in which athletes and coaches offer their services as 'transitional mentors' for a period of time, suggesting advice and providing the benefit of their experiences to their peers. This could address the comments from coaches and athletes that they had failed to properly conceive of the magnitude and intensity of the World Games' experience.

Celebrating Sport

In essence this Model is first and foremost a celebration of sport for people with intellectual disability. Moreover it is one that remains true to SO basic values and mission. It is in line with the current Strategic Plan for the organisation. Nonetheless in the context of the World Games, the model does introduce some challenges to the culture and practices that presently surround this global event. These are summarised in a series of recommendations but we leave it to others to determine how best they might be implemented and indeed, whether other considerations make it impractical to progress particular proposals.

Recommendations

Here we summarise the key recommendations that emerge from this evaluation, the rationale for which having been given earlier. Most are directly related to the practical processes of preparing athletes for international competitions but we end with more philosophical questions regarding the further evolution of the World Games as an event.

Selection of athletes

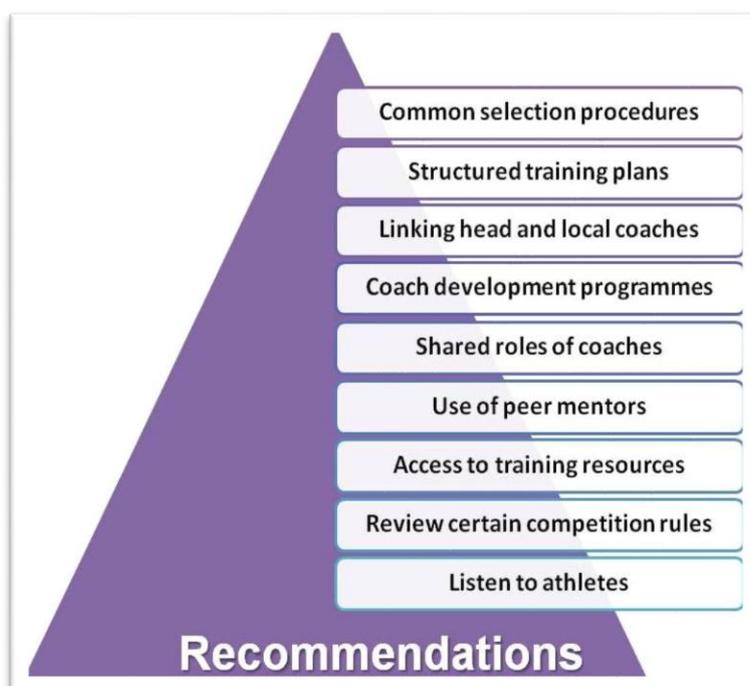
The process for selecting athletes for participation in World Games events is currently devolved to decision-making at national level. Guidance from SOI as to an optimal procedure for selection would be useful. In order that the value of competition is recognised, a competitive selection process is recommended. However athletes of all ability levels would still be included through the divisioning process but that this would be based on athlete's average times/scores/levels of ability at the most recent international event thereby providing standard indicators of expected performance for each division. Athletes selected would be those who achieved most highly within their division while still ensuring that all athletes who wanted to would be able to strive for a place at the World Games. National teams can decide the sports and divisions in which they want their athletes to compete. However, the random system of selection used by some countries would be removed and a system that recognizes competition and sporting achievement would replace it.

Preparation of athletes

This evaluation recommends that a longer period is available for the preparation of athletes for the World Games. Without being prescriptive we suggest that this should be of at least one year. Although this could be conceived as 'pre-selection' training it might be better if athletes were selected earlier for participation in the World Games as this would remove any ambiguity or disappointment. Additionally a structured, achievable and measurable training plan should be devised for each athlete and this should be delivered through well maintained records and regular training reviews.

Co-ordination between Head Coaches and local coaches

National Programmes should devise structured systems for communication between coaches working regularly with athletes at a local level and Head Coaches who are



coordinating the overall preparation of athletes for the World Games. Communication should be regular, open and focused. It is crucial that local coaches and Head Coaches are working together in the preparation of any particular athlete in terms of their sport and as local coaches, know athletes well, they can provide Head Coaches with relevant knowledge about athletes – their likes and dislikes, concerns and strengths.

Coach education and development

Further resources for coach education and development around international competitions could be developed, possibly drawing on the recent experience of Head Coaches at the Athens World Games. As with athletes, we anticipate that not all coaches will want to be involved in preparing for high level competitions but SO should consider this as one development pathway they can offer to coaches.

Sharing the coaching role

The role of the coach, in the context of preparing athletes for Special Olympics World Games, covers a broad terrain. We suggest that to increase the effectiveness of the coach that there is a role for an individual to work in partnership with the sports coach and to focus on the personal and social development of athletes. This role is potentially one that could be undertaken by a mentor who would work in alliance with both coach and athlete in response to specific identified individual goals. It should be acknowledged that the SO sports coach would continue to have a part to play in the personal and social aspects of athlete growth, and although the apparent inter-play between sports coaching and social gain would remain, the focus could be less diffuse and more attentive to specific sporting goals or social goals.

Peer Mentors

Our data shows that athletes draw on their past experience of international competition in their preparations for forthcoming games. We suggest that a peer-mentoring scheme would benefit athletes who are currently preparing for competition and would enable those who have been to World Games to share their knowledge and understanding of the Big Experience. This would provide an additional post-Games learning path for athletes and a valued role for those who have relevant experience.

Access to training resources

National Programmes may need additional financial support to ensure that athletes selected to take part in the Games have adequate resources for their training and preparations. This may be in the form of sports equipment such as football boots or badminton rackets, or it may be in relation to access to adequate training facilities. Certain families struggle to provide money for transport for their son or daughter to attend training and this could be alleviated through further investment. It may be that some of the costs of the Games could be re-directed into National Programmes to ensure that they have the

resources to train their athletes who will attend the Games. Indeed this would feed into the longer-term legacy of international competition at a national level and go some way to creating a stronger link between local clubs and large-scale international competition.

Guiding Rules

Some of the rules in place for the World Games may need to be revisited in light of the proposed new emphasis on competition. For example, we would recommend re-visiting the Honest Effort Rule, which is currently fraught with difficulties and appears to unfairly disadvantage some athletes.

Listening to athletes

Athletes are at the centre of Special Olympics. The importance of listening to athletes' perspectives cannot be overstated, even when such perspectives may challenge the received wisdom of the organisation. That SO athletes identify as sportsmen and women and that they value their sporting achievement in competition is a clear message from those athletes who took part in this evaluation. We recommend that the fantastic event that is the World Games evolves in such a way as to incorporate athletes' perspectives so that the organisation continues to represent the views of its key constituents whilst at the same time challenging the negative and promoting all that is positive in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities.

Future Research

This study has been a modest attempt to address a complex issue. Much remains to be learnt. Here we identify three areas in which further research and evaluation would be especially informative.

Observational studies of coaching

It became increasingly clear during the course of this research study that there were various examples of high quality instructional coaching taking place. Systematic observational analysis of these practices via video footage would provide more detailed insights into the adaptations coaches make and their impact with athletes. Comparisons might also be drawn with mainstream coaches preparing athletes for similar competitions. This data could usefully inform the development of resources for coach education.

Athlete's sporting development

The holistic development of athletes in terms of preparation for the World Games is worth documenting further using larger, representative samples. This would embrace growth in physical fitness, sporting competence as well as indicators of personal and social development. A core set of measures could be identified and records kept across a range of athletes, sports and countries over a set period of time of say 12 months. If training data was also available, then the predictors of better sporting achievement could be identified.

Post-games experience

The present evaluation had focused on the World Games in terms of preparation, participation and reflection. However, we suggest that there is a rich seam of research in a qualitative exploration of the post games experiences of athletes, coaches and the wider communities where Games were hosted and the home communities of athletes. This work would offer insight into the impact of the Games on athletes and on coaches, as well as in the Host city, host towns and sending communities within athletes' villages, towns and cities. The impact of the World Games in relation to the wider mission of SO could be explored.

Pathways and progression into mainstream sports competition

Preparing and competing in the World Games could be conceived of as a step towards ongoing sporting achievement. But what form would this take? There is an obligation on SO to explore pathways beyond the World Games for its most talented athletes. One avenue is their involvement in mainstream sports completion and future research could explore how this has happened (or failed to happen) for athletes, and the impacts - both positive and negative - it has had on them. Unified Sports provides an obvious starting point although it would be valuable to do this across a range of sports. Such research should help SO extend its reach beyond its traditional boundaries.

Final reflections

The Special Olympics World Games is a unique international event that portrays the talents of people with intellectual disabilities. It harnesses the efforts and enthusiasm of huge numbers of people around the globe over a period of years and culminates in a memorable celebration that merges people of various cultures and classes in such a way that it makes their usual labels irrelevant. It is an important celebration of the power of sport to unite people. We are confident that the ingenuity and determination that has underpinned the development of the World Games over the past 40 years will ensure that they will be continue to evolve to meet the sporting aspirations of its athletes.



References

- Abdullah, N.M. Ampofo-Boateng, K. and Zawi, M.K. (2008) Coaching Athletes with Disabilities: General Principles for Appropriate Training Methodology. In *National Sports Institute of Malaysia Bulletin*; 2(1): 51-58.
- Berger, R.J. (2008) Disability and the dedicated wheelchair athlete: Beyond the Supercrip critique. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 37:647-678.
- Burkett, B.J. & Mellifont, R.B. (2008) Sports Science and Coaching in Paralympic Cycling. In *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*; 3(1): 95-103.
- Bruner, J. (1999) 'Folk Pedagogies', in Leach, J. and B. Moon (Eds.) (1999) *Learners and Pedagogy* London: Chapman Pbls.
- Cassidy, T. Jones, R. and Potrac, P. (2004) *Understanding Sports Coaching* (London: Routledge).
- Cassidy, T. (2008) Coach education or coach development: A paradigm shift or more of the same? Proceedings of Korean Coaching Development Center 10th Anniversary Global conference and International Council for Coach Education Asian Regional Coach conference, 69–72. Asan, South Korea: Hoseo University.
- Cassidy, T. and Kidman, L. (2010) Initiating a Head Coaching curriculum: a paradigmatic shift? In *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 15(3): 307-322.
- Chelladurai, P. and Saleh, S.D. (1980) Dimensions of leader behaviour in sports: Development of a leadership scale. *Journal for Sport Psychology*, 2, 34-45.
- Coaching Association of Canada (2005). *Coaching Athletes with a Disability*. Coaching Association of Canada.
- Cote, J. Salmela, J. Trudel, P. Baria, A. and Russell, S. (1995) 'The Coaching Model: A Grounded Assessment of Expert Gymnastic Coaches' Knowledge'. In *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17 (1): 1-17.
- Crawford, J.L. and Stodolska, M. (2008) Constraints experienced by elite athletes with disabilities in Kenya, with implications for the development of a new hierarchical model of constraints at the societal level. *Journal of Leisure Research*; 25: 128-155.
- Cross, N. (1999) Coaching Effectiveness. In Cross, N. and Lyle, J. (1999) *The Coaching Process* Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann. pp. 47-64.
- Cushion, C.J. (2007) Modelling the complexity of the coaching process. In *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*; 2(4): 395-401.
- Cushion, C.J. Armour, K.M. and Jones, R.L. (2006) Locating the coaching process in practice: models 'for' and 'of' coaching. In *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*; 11(1): 83-99.
- DePauw, K. and Gavron, S. (1995) *Disability and Sport* Illinois: Human Kinetic Publishers.
- Douge, B. and Hastie, P. (1993) Coaching Effectiveness. *Sport Science Review*, 2(2), 14-29.
- Dowling, S. McConkey, R. & Hassan, D. (2010) Unified Gives Us a Chance. An Evaluation of Youth Unified Sports in Europe Eurasia. Report to Special Olympics International.
- Dykens, E.M. & Cohen, D.J. (1996) Effects of Special Olympics International on social competence in persons with mental retardation. *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 35, 223–229.
- Fairs, J. (1987) 'The Coaching Process: the Essence of Coaching', In *Sports Coach*, 11 (1): 17-20.
- Farrell, R.J, Peter R.E. Crocker, M, McDonough, H, and Sedgwick, W.A (2004) The Driving Force: Motivation in Special Olympians. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly* 21, 153-166
- Feltz, D.L. Chase, M.A. Moritz, S.E. and Sullivan, P. J. (1999) A conceptual model of coaching efficacy: Preliminary investigation and instrument development. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(4), 765-767.

- Franks, I. Sinclair, G. Thomson, W. and Goodman, D. (1986) 'Analysis of the Coaching Process', In *Science Periodical on Research and Technology in Sport*, January.
- Fung, L. & Tsai, E. (2009) Motives for participation in the Law Enforcement Torch Run. *International Journal of Sports Health and Sports*.
- Goodwin, D. L. Fitzpatrick, D. A. Thurmeier, R. and Hall, C. (2006) The Decision to Join Special Olympics: Parents' Perspectives. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 23, 163-183.
- Gordan, D. (2009) *Coaching Science*. Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Gregg, M. (2010) Working with Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. In Hanrahan, S.J and Anderson, M.M (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Applied Sport Psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Harada, C.M, and Siperstein, G.N. (2009) The Sport Experience of Athletes With Intellectual Disabilities: A National Survey of Special Olympics Athletes and Their Families *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 26, 68-85.
- Harada, C M. Parker, R.C, and Siperstein, G.N. (2008a) Comprehensive National Study of Special Olympics Programs in China.' Final Report for Special Olympics, Inc. Boston: University of Massachusetts, Center for Social Development and Education.
- Harada, C M. Parker, R.C, and Siperstein, G.N. (2008b) A Comprehensive Study of Special Olympics Programs in Latin America: Findings from Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. Final Report for Special Olympics, Inc. Boston: University of Massachusetts, Center for Social Development and Education.
- Harada, C.M. Siperstein, G.N, Parker, R.C. and Lenox, D. (2011) Promoting social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities through sport: Special Olympics International, global sport initiatives and strategies, *Sport in Society*, 14:9, 1131-1148.
- Hardin, M.M, and Hardin, B, (2004) The 'Supercrip' in sport media: Wheelchair athletes discuss hegemony's' disabled hero. *Sociology of Sport Online*. Retrieved from: <http://physcd.ontago.ac.nz/sosol/v7il/v7il /.html>
- Hoge, G. & Dattilo, J. (1995). Recreation participation patterns of adults with and without mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 30, 283-298.
- Jones, R. (2006) How can educational concepts inform sports coaching? In Jones, R.L. (Ed.) (2006) *The Sports Coach as Educator* (Oxford: Routledge), pp. 3 – 13.
- Jones, D.F. Housner, L.D. & Kornspan, A.S. (1997) Interactive decision making and behaviour of experienced and inexperienced basketball coaches during practice. In *Journal of Teaching Physical Education*; 16: 454-468.
- Jones, R. Armour, K. and Potrac, P. (2004) *Sports coaching cultures: From practice to theory* London: Routledge.
- Kersh, J and Siperstein, G. (2007) The Positive Contributions of Special Olympics to the Family. UMASS Boston; Report to Special Olympics International.
- Klein, T. Gilman, E. & Zigler, E. (1993). Special Olympics: An evaluation by professionals and parents. *Mental Retardation*, 31 1, 15-23.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1998) 'Legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice', In McCormick, R. and Paechter, C. (Eds.) (1998) *Learning and knowledge*. London: Chapman Pbls.
- Liow, D.K. and Hopkins, W.B., (1996). Training practices of athletes with disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 13: 372-381
- Lyle, J. (2002) *Sports Coaching Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Lyle, J. (1986). Coach education: preparation for a profession. In Cross, N. and Lyle, J., (1999) *The Coaching Process: Principles and practice for sport*. Oxford:Butterworth Heinemann.

- McConkey, R. Dunne, J. and Blitz, N. (2009) *Shared Lives: Building relationships and community with people who have intellectual disabilities*. (Amsterdam: Sense Publishers)
- Mactavish, J.B, Lutfiyya, Z.M, and Mahon, M.J (2000) 'I can speak for myself' Involving Adults with intellectual disabilities as research participants. *Mental Retardation* 35; 75-82.
- Matikka, L.M, and Vesala, H.T (1997) Acquiescence in quality-of-life interviews with adults who have mental retardation. *Mental Retardation*, 35-75-82
- Martens, R. (2004) *Successful Coaching*. Illinois: Human Kinetic Publishers.
- Martin, J.J (2010) Athletes with Physical Disabilities. In Hanrahan, S.J and Anderson, M.M (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Applied Sport Psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Robinson, P. (2010) *Foundations of Sports Coaching*. London: Routledge.
- Sherman, C. Crassini, B. Maschette, W. and Sands, R. (1997) 'Instructional Sport Psychology: A Reconceptualisation of Sports Coaching as Sport Instruction', In *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 28(2): 103-25.
- Shulman, L. (1999) 'Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform', In Leach, J. and B. Moon (Eds) (1999) *Learners and Pedagogy* (London: Chapman).
- Siperstein, G.N. Harada, C.M. Parker, R.C. Hardman, M.L and McGuire, J. (2005) 'Comprehensive National Study of Special Olympics Programs in the United States. A Special Report.' University of Massachusetts Boston
- Solomon, G.B. Striegel, D.A. Eliot, J.F. et al. (1996). The self-fulfilling prophecy in college basketball: implications for effective coaching. In *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 8: 44-59
- Special Olympics International (2003). Coaching Guide: Principles of coaching. Accessed online on 3rd October 2011 www.specialolympics.org
- Special Olympics Ireland (2011). Special Olympics Ireland Strategy 2012-2015. Accessed online on 3rd October 2011 www.specialolympics.ie
- Sports Coach UK (2004) *UK Coaching certificate monitoring study: learning from the early stages of implementation: Phase 2 report*. Leeds: Sports Coach UK.
- Shapiro, D.B (2003) Participation motives of Special Olympics Athletes. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*. 20 150-165.
- Shapiro, D.R. (1995). *Perceived physical competence among adolescent males with mild mental retardation*. Unpublished master's thesis, Michigan State University, East Lansing.
- Travis, C.A. & Sachs, M.L. (1991). Applied sports psychology and persons with mental retardation. *The Sports Psychologist*, 5, 382-391.
- Van Manen, M. (1991) 'Reflectivity and the pedagogical moment: The normativity of pedagogical thinking and acting' In *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 23: 507 – 536.
- Weiss, J. (2008). Role of Special Olympics for mothers of adult athletes with intellectual disability. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*. 113, 4, 241-253.
- Weiss, M.R., & Chaumeton, N. (1992). Motivational orientations in sport. In T.S. Horn (Ed.), *Advances in sport psychology* (pp. 61-99). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Wiesława, Dłużewska-Martyniec. (2002) The Need Of Autonomy In Special Olympics Athletes And Its Satisfying Through Sports Activity *Gymnica*, vol. 32, 1, 53