



Comparison between Unified Sports Competitive and Player Development Models

Competitive and Player Development Unified Sports Teams

Special Olympics, Inc. published new guidelines for Unified Sports®, defining and differentiating between competitive and player development level teams. Competitive Unified Sports® teams are higher-ability teams comprised of athletes and partners of approximately equal ability levels. All players play to their highest ability level at all times. Player development teams are low to medium ability level teams that generally have partners who are higher skilled than the athletes. The partners serve as player mentors during competition and modify their play to accommodate the ability levels of the athletes. Below is further clarification of the two models:

Understanding Player Development Teams:

- 1) Teammates are not required to be of similar ability.
- 2) Teammates of higher ability may serve as mentors to players of lower abilities.
- 3) Rules modifications define players' roles.
- 4) Rules modifications can be used to promote meaningful involvement and prevent player dominance.
- 5) Teams cannot advancement beyond the state level.
- 6) Teams receive Unified Sports® ribbons or medals rather than place ribbons or medals.

Awarding a Unified Sports® participation ribbon/medal removes the incentive for partners to change the outcome of games by elevating their playing level at critical moments. Even though players will still understand the final score of the game, partners will be less compelled to assist their team in 'winning the gold.' Using Special Olympics Unified Sports® medals for state competitions and ribbons for area/region competitions encourages players to adjust their play to promote meaningful involvement of players on all teams.

SOVA staff will provide training for coaches and partners this winter and spring. These trainings will include discussions about competition philosophy, meaningful involvement, player dominance, differentiating between competitive and player development teams, and rule modifications for player development teams.



Unified Sports Competitive	Unified Sports Player Development
Inclusive sports program	Inclusive sports program
Approximately equal number of athletes and partners train and compete	Approximately equal number of athletes and partners train and compete
Similar ability and age of athletes and partners	Similar age
Differentiation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Have attained sufficient & necessary sport-specific skills and tactics 2) No modifications of Official Special Olympics Sports Rules 3) Eligible to advance to higher levels of play beyond the Program level (such as Regional and World Games) 	Differentiation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Not <i>required</i> to be of similar ability 2) Teammates of higher ability may as mentors to players of lower abilities 3) Rules modifications can be used to define players' roles, promote meaningful involvement and prevent player dominance 4) No advancement beyond the Program/State level
Never comprised solely of individuals with disabilities	Never comprised solely of individuals with disabilities
Awards based on place of finish within divisions	SOVA will provide awards based on participation (same award for all)
Sample Team <p>The graph shows a diagonal distribution of ability levels. Partners (P1-P5) are on the left, and Athletes (A1-A5) are on the right. P1 and P2 are at the highest ability level, while P4 and P5 are at the lowest. A1 is at a high ability level, and A2-A5 are at lower levels.</p>	Sample Team <p>The graph shows a more horizontal distribution of ability levels. Partners (P1-P5) are on the left, and Athletes (A1-A5) are on the right. P1 and P2 are at the highest ability level, while P4 and P5 are at the lowest. A1 is at a high ability level, and A2-A5 are at lower levels.</p>