

APPROPRIATE SPORTS AND EVENTS SELECTION FOR ATHLETES

One of the most important factors that influence an athlete's motivation in sports is having a choice in selecting the sport in which he/she wants to take part. A Special Olympics athlete is no different. The problem is that there are many people who play a role in the selection process and that may, in fact, create more obstacles to overcome. It is important for coaches to recognize these obstacles and to do everything possible to allow their athletes to compete in sports in which they will learn and develop skills, and most important of all, have fun.

VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE THE SELECTION OF SPORTS

1. AGE APPROPRIATENESS - While physical developmental needs may be a primary concern, athletes may need some guidance in selecting a sport appropriate for their age.
2. READINESS LEVEL - An athlete needs to be ready for competition both mentally and physically.
 - a. Mental Readiness - Athletes must want to play and understand the rules. There should be a desire to participate and a level of confidence to experience success.
 - b. Physical Readiness - Athletes must be physically fit. Athletes must develop fitness levels required for successful participation in the sport selected.
3. ABILITY LEVEL - Coaches know that there is a minimal skill level required for participation in competition for each and every sport offered in Special Olympics. Athletes must demonstrate these skill levels in order to compete according to the rules and ensure safe participation. Athletes may also develop high enough skills that they are no longer appropriate for an event; such as, the softball throw or the 25m walk and can move up to an event more appropriate to their skills.
4. ATHLETE PREFERENCE - An athlete should be offered every opportunity to select the sport in which he/she will participate (with coach supervision, as necessary).
5. PEER INFLUENCE - Athletes may select a sport because a friend is participating in it. The element of socialization is a goal of athletes who train and compete in Special Olympics. Guidance should be provided to athletes who are participating for socialization, but may not meet the physical requirements demanded by a sport.

OTHER FACTORS:

1. Budget: How much money will facilities, equipment, uniforms, etc. cost?
2. Trained Coaches: Do you have enough volunteer coaches who know the sport? How about the athlete who selects aquatics and none of your coaches swim?
3. Facilities: While a gymnasium may fit the budget, can you get access to tennis courts? A pool?
4. Equipment: Do you have the necessary equipment? Is it safe to use?
5. Administrative Support: Will your administration support your efforts to develop a team? Do they encourage athletes to take full advantage of all opportunities?
6. Family Support: At-home training, transportation to practices and competitions, and moral support from family members are all necessary for successful participation in Special Olympics. Are your athletes' families involved in Special Olympics?
7. Time: How much time do you have? Can you compromise selections of sports and the time available to volunteer? Who selects the sport for an athlete? Knowing that all of these variables exist will allow you to help your athletes select the sport in which they will experience the most success and enjoyment.