12 September 2012

Unified Sports Coach Guidelines

Guidelines for being an effective Special Olympics Unified Sports coach include the following:

Have the Necessary Knowledge

Sports – Coaches must possess a strong knowledge of the sport and the rules. In addition, coaches must be able to apply that knowledge in practice and competition settings. Coaches should take part in approved coaches' education to upgrade knowledge of the sport, new practice activities and game strategies, and to share ideas with other coaches.

Special Olympics – Special Olympics Programs may offer Unified Sports training as a standalone session or a part of sport-specific coaches' training school. **All Unified Sports coaches should complete the Unified Sports training session, as well as the Coaching Special Olympics Athletes course.** Take advantage of available training courses and develop a network with other Special Olympics coaches.

Select the Right Team Members – All teammates should be selected based on appropriate age and ability matching as specifically defined by the sport. Additionally, they must understand and accept their roles as teammates, adhere to the philosophy of Unified Sports and commit to full participation in a sportsmanlike manner.

Don't Play – Team sports (for example, basketball, softball, football (soccer), volleyball, floor hockey, team handball and flag football) require a non-playing head coach. In these sports, it is a priority for the coach to manage the interaction between team members. Having a non-playing coach prevents the coach from losing this all-important perspective.

Commit to Practice – Each coach must encourage regular attendance at training sessions for all teammates. This leads to improved sports skills, increased teamwork and camaraderie, and refined performance during games and competitions. A coach should develop a practice plan that includes warm-up, stretching, sports skills development, strategies, a competition experience and cool-down components. Every player should receive a minimum of one and one-half hours of team practice per week under the direction of a qualified coach. It is more beneficial, of course, to practice more often than once a week. Minimum standards for the number of practices that each team member must attend in order to participate in competition should be developed.

Coach Everyone on the Team and Adjust Your Style to Meet Individual Player Learning Needs – Every member of the squad (athletes and partners) needs to receive coaching and will benefit from the direction of a qualified coach. One of the biggest mistakes a coach can make is only working with lower ability players or only working with higher ability players. When this happens, some members of the team feel superior and other members feel neglected. Every player on the team deserves to be coached. Additionally, players learn differently so while it is important for a coach to coach everyone, he or she also needs to be able to adjust his or her teaching style to meet individual needs, as well as find ways to involve each team member in conditioning, skill development and teamwork.

Demand Teamwork – To promote meaningful involvement by all team members, no one should dominate competition; this violates the philosophy of Unified Sports. A solid teamwork approach should be present from the first practice to the final competition. The coach should identify roles for every player that allows him or her to contribute meaningfully to the team.

Value More than Practice and Competition – Support the efforts of your team to e*xtend* its relationships beyond the competition arena. The Unified Sports motto is, "On the field we are teammates; off the field we are friends."

Copyright ©2012 Special Olympics, Inc. All rights reserved.
All materials provided in this training are the copyright of Special Olympics, Inc. and may only be used for the purposes for which they are intended.
In no event shall these materials be copied, reproduced, distributed or displayed for commercial purposes without the express written permission of Special Olympics, Inc.