



**Special Olympics**  
Great Britain

*Providing year-round sports training and competition to people with a learning disability*

## What is **Special** about Special Olympics?

***“Special Olympics seeks to uphold the spirit of sportsmanship and love of participation for their own sakes. Special Olympics also believes that every athlete should participate to his or her fullest potential”.***

Special Olympics is founded on the belief that people with a learning disability can, with proper instruction and encouragement, learn, enjoy and benefit from participation in individual and team sports, adapted as necessary to meet their individual needs.

Special Olympics believes that regular training, under the guidance of appropriately qualified coaches is essential to the development of sports skills. Competition among those of equal abilities is the most appropriate means of testing those skills, measuring progress and providing incentive for personal growth.

Special Olympics believes that through sports training and competition, people with a learning disability benefit physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Families are strengthened and the community at large, both through participation and observation, is united with people with a learning disability in an environment of equality, respect and acceptance.

All Special Olympics competition is ‘banded’ with no more than eight athletes on teams competing against one another. This allows all athletes the opportunity for achievement based on their own level of ability.

This philosophy is carried right through to the selection of teams for international events where all athletes and not just the elite have the chance to be chosen to represent the GB.

Special Olympics therefore gives opportunities for athletes with a learning disability of all ability levels.

Special Olympics also offers Unified Sports® to promote the inclusion of athletes with a learning disability into mainstream sport and the Motor Activities Training Programme for people with profound or multiple disabilities.

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# Definition and Structure of Special Olympics

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Olympic-type sports for persons who are classified as having a learning disability (\*USA and some Special Olympics programmes may use the term - Intellectual disability)

Some athletes may also have a physical disability, but first classification = ID

Athletes of all ages are catered for: Minimum age for entering competition = 8 yrs

NO upper limit – in 1987 there was a 70+ yr old Swedish Level I artistic gymnast

All ability groups are included in the sports competition

Year-Round Training and Competition

Every athlete receives recognition for all events

Some events have been adapted to meet ability levels of athletes

Summer and Winter World Games every 4 years –

First International Summer Games in 1968, Chicago, USA;  
First International Winter Games in 1977, Colorado, USA

Independent organisation and structure

Competition Levels:  
School- Local, Area/District

State/Province, National

Regional, International

### OLYMPICS

Olympic sports for elite sports people

Age of athletes vary according to sport, but few very young or old athletes

Elite athletes only – entry standards

Year-Round Training and Competition

Only first three are recognised

Regular standardised competition

Summer and Winter Olympic Games every 4 years –  
First Modern Olympics held in 1896, in Athens, Greece;  
Winter Olympic Games in Chamonix, France in 1924

Government supported

International Only

### PARALYMPICS

Elite sports for persons with a disability – principally a physical or sensory disability

Impairment Classifications =  
Athletes with Cerebral Palsy (CP-ISRA), Athletes with Spinal Cord Lesion, Spina Bifida and Polio (ISMWSF), Athletes with Blindness (IBSA) and Athletes with Les Autres or Amputations (ISOD)

Age of athletes vary according to sport but few young or older athletes

Elite athletes only – entry standards

Centralized training prior to competition

Only first three are recognised

Some events have been adapted to meet ability levels of athletes

Summer Paralympic Games one month after Olympic Games – begun in 1988 after Seoul Olympic Games

Government supported

State, National, Regional and International

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