

UNIFIED SPORTS®

Player Development vs Unified Guidelines

What is Unified Sports®?

A program that combines approximately equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes and peers without intellectual disabilities (designated as “partners”) on sports teams for training and competition against other Unified Sports® teams. Unified Sports® teams are organized to provide meaningful involvement for all participants. Every teammate should play a role and have the opportunity to contribute to the team. Meaningful involvement also refers to the quality of interaction and competition within a Unified Sports® team. Achieving meaningful involvement by all participants on the team ensures a positive and rewarding experience for everyone.

Unified Sports® are designed to be competitive and also to create friendships on and off the field amongst SOMI Athletes and Unified Partners. Teams should be comprised of both athletes and partners with similar ability levels.

Uniforms

When ordering Unified team uniforms Athletes should have even numbers and Unified Partners should have odd numbers. This assists with further distinguishing athletes and partners.

Also see page 45 for the uniform guidelines that apply to all sports (i.e., no denim, jewelry, etc.). All other uniform guidelines should be followed per sport.

SOMI Unified Sports®

The following sports have Unified rules and are hosted at the state level competitions.

- * Alpine & Cross Country Skiing
- * Basketball
- * Bocce
- * Bowling
- * Cycling
- * Flag Football
- * Golf
- * Kayaking
- * Poly Hockey
- * Snowboarding
- * Snowshoeing
- * Soccer
- * Softball
- * Speed Skating
- * Volleyball

All SOMI rules are to be followed unless otherwise noted on that sport’s particular rule page within the program guide. Teams should register as Unified Teams when they are attending a state level competition.

Partner/Athlete Selection

Unified Sports® should be comprised of athletes and partners of similar ability levels and ages. When forming a team, each player (partner or athlete) should have a meaningful role on that team.

It is important to select partners and athletes of similar abilities and ages to create the highest level of meaningful involvement for all players on a team.

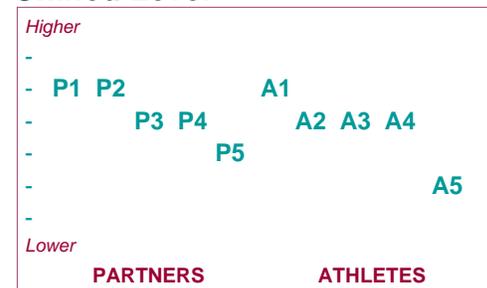
There are no rules differences between Unified Sports® and Player Development.

When selecting a team, it may be difficult to select partners and athletes of the same age or ability, if such is the case, the Player Development model should be utilized.

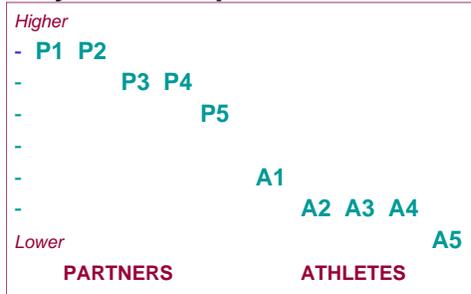
The Player Development level is comprised of partners of a higher ability level paired with athletes of lower ability level. Player Development level is designed to develop lower ability players skill level.

Both Unified Sports® and Player Development levels receive awards based on their games played. The graphics below show the differences in ability level. Note a Unified Level team can be comprised of athletes and partners that are both of a lower ability level.

Unified Level



Player Development Level



How to start Unified Sports®

Unified Sports® are beneficial to both SOMI Athletes and Unified Partners and introduce both parties to a social atmosphere that creates inclusion and acceptance. There are various ways to start a Unified program in your area.

- Proper sport selection – It is important to select a sport that is fitting for your athletes and partners. Not all participants may be able or have a meaningful role in a sport such as flag football, however a sport such as golf, bocce or bowling may be more appropriate.
- Recruiting partners – Partners can be recruited from many places. When recruiting partners think of organizations in your area that may have interest in participating in sports.
 - Colleges & universities
 - Unified Champion Schools
 - Community rec leagues
 - Church youth groups
 - Local volunteer organizations
 - Sponsors or civic organizations
 - Volunteer databases
- Practice & Scheduling – Once you've recruited your team, you can reach out to the SOMI State office to find other Unified teams to schedule games against. Partners and athletes should practice and compete together regularly.
- Principle of meaningful involvement – Every player (partner or athlete) must have a meaningful role on each team. In order to ensure fair play and fun it is important that each player have a role they can fill. It isn't expected that everyone on a team scores 3 goals, but a role such as defensive specialist or

shooter can ensure all players have a role.

Unified Sports® General Rules

* All Unified Partners must be registered as part of the team and must participate in practice and team activities. They must play with that team only

* All teams must have a non-playing head coach. Unified Partners cannot serve in both roles for the same team.

* Unified Partners over the age of 18 can serve as a chaperone for events. However, they must be registered as a chaperone.

* All Unified Partners must have the Unified Partner form filled out and on file with the SOMI State office. Background checks will be completed on all registered Unified Partners. All athletes participating in Unified Sports must have the SOMI athlete participation form up to date.

* All Unified Champion Schools and SO College Unified Partners and athletes must have a valid form on file with the state office.

* Partners should never dominate or take over a game. If this does occur, partner domination will be called accordingly. Partners are allowed to score.

Unified Champion Schools and Unified Sports®

All Unified Champion Schools are required to host at least one Unified Sport® during their school year. This is a great way to grow Unified participation for school aged athletes. Unified Champion Schools can participate within their own schools, against other schools or at a Special Olympics sanctioned tournament.

Unified Champion Schools Unified Sports® follow the same rules as community based Unified programs.

SO College and Unified Sports®

You can start a Unified Sports® program on a campus near you! Many colleges offer intramurals or recreation programs that can offer

Unified programming with the athletes in your area!

For more information regarding Unified Champion Schools, SO College or how to start Unified Sports® in schools, please contact SOMI at (989)774-3911.

Training

Special Olympics North America partnered with the National Federation of High Schools to offer a FREE online Unified Sports training. To take the training, log on to

<http://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000>

If you would like a face to face training course or webinar hosted in your area, please contact the Coordinator of Sports and Volunteers at 989-774-3911.

State Event Information

For questions regarding state events rules or how to start a Unified Sports® team, contact the Sports and Training Director at 989-774-3911.