



# **Coach Guide for Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

## **Creating a Unified Sports Team - Volleyball**

2014



This document was developed for people, mostly PE teachers and coaches, who want to start a Special Olympics Unified Volleyball Team. It includes general information about the Unified Sports® Program and also instructions how to build a Unified Volleyball team. The purpose of this document is to give an idea on how a Unified team works, how it is set up, what special rules exist and how to encourage people to be part of the Unified Volleyball community in Europe as well as to give some examples for a training session.

**1. About Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

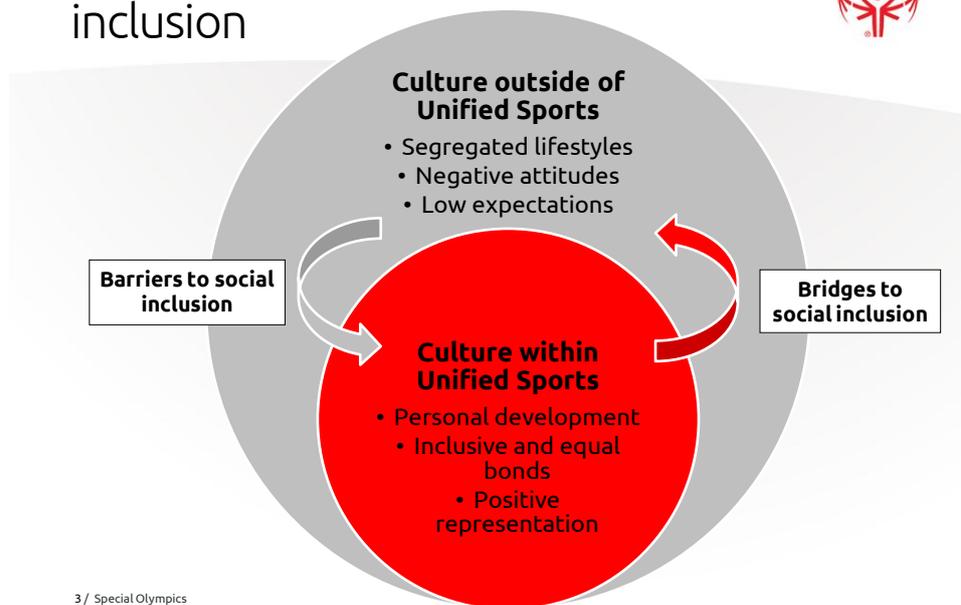
The concept behind Special Olympics Unified Sports is simple yet powerful: people with and without intellectual disabilities playing together on the same team is a quick path to friendship and social inclusion. Driven by fun, development of new skills and talents supported by positive attitudes, community activation and engagement.

We call the teammates with intellectual disabilities “athletes”, the players without intellectual disabilities “partners”.

**2. Results**

Various studies conducted by Universities across Europe lead by the Special Olympics Regional Research collaboration Centre at the University of Ulster/Northern Ireland show the impact of Unified Sports on social inclusion. It serves as a bridge to social inclusion transferring the positive and inclusive culture within the Unified setting into the community, into the environment, into society which typically presents a rather negative culture for people with intellectual disabilities.

Unified Sports as a bridge to social inclusion



3 / Special Olympics

**3. The “menu”: Three Options**

Unified Sports is structured around three different models:

**The Unified Sports Competitive Model.**

**The Unified Sports Player Development Model.**

**The Unified Sports Recreation Model.**

All three models have social inclusion as the core outcome; however, the structure and function of each model varies.

In the **Unified Sports Competitive Model** equal numbers of players with and without intellectual disabilities are on the same sport teams for regular training and competition. Players should be of similar age and ability and should have the necessary sport skills and tactics to compete without modification of the official Special Olympics Sports Rules. There should be a minimum of 8 weeks training period before the first competition of a new team. Teams that participate in this model are eligible for advancement to international competition at Regional and World Games.

In the **Player Development model** we should have equal numbers of players with and without intellectual disabilities on the same sport teams. They should be of similar age. Opposed to the Competitive model teammates are not required to be of similar abilities. Teammates of higher abilities are in the role of mentors assisting teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics. It is important that mentors should not be coaches but peers. Rules modifications are allowed and designed to ensure meaningful involvement of all teammates. Similar to the Competitive model there should be a minimum of 8 weeks training period before the first competition of a new team. Teams that participate in this model are eligible to compete up to national Program level.

**The Unified Sports Recreation model** is different from the other two models as it does not follow any specific training, competition and team composition requirements. Competition can only be run on local level. The focus is on having fun together in inclusive sport teams and activities of any type. A typical event could be a sport demonstration event, a sports day or a series of inclusive sport courses or classes in a school or local sport club.

Unified Sports Competitive Model	Unified Sports Development Model	Unified Sports Recreation Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- similar age and ability</li> <li>- necessary sport skills and tactics</li> <li>- compete without modification of Rules</li> <li>- 8 weeks training period before competition</li> <li>- eligible for advancement to Regional and World Games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- similar age not ability</li> <li>- players of higher abilities as mentors</li> <li>- Modification of Rules</li> <li>- 8 weeks training period before competition</li> <li>- Competition up to national Program level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No specific training, competition and team composition requirements</li> <li>- The focus is on having fun together</li> <li>- Inclusive sport teams and activities of any type</li> <li>- Competition on local level</li> </ul>

**4. How to choose the right model?**

There is no rule which model to choose, it’s an individual decision of the coach and the team: To be able to adjust and adapt to the local situation, to the people involved, to their motivation, interest and availability. To allow a positive experience for everyone who participates, which can be achieved through “meaningful involvement” of all players.

**5. Meaningful involvement**

The “Principle of Meaningful Involvement” ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and abilities.

For all three models it is important that every teammate

- Plays a valued role on the team that emphasizes his or her personal talents and skills.
- Has an opportunity to play without a heightened risk of injury.

<b>The Principle of Meaningful Involvement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Valued role for each team member</li> <li>- Emphasis on talents and skills</li> <li>- Play without risk of injury</li> </ul>

Only a positive climate in the team can lead to true social inclusion.

It is recommended to begin with the Recreation or the Player Development model when a new team is starting to guarantee that the team can shape without the higher requirements and expectations of the Competitive Model. You can build on that for the development of each individual player and the entire team.

**8 The role of the coach**

A Unified Coach has a key role in the Unified team. She or he has the responsibility to form the team and ensure that it’s working as a team as well as to facilitate social inclusion and meaningful involvement in the team. The coach needs to demonstrate and support this philosophy during training and competition. He or she has the same role and authority to all players with and without intellectual disabilities and cannot be a player on the team.

The coaches’ main focus in the different models:

Competitive model	Development model	Recreation model
<p>The coach needs to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-be familiar with the federation rules as well as Special Olympics Unified rules</li> <li>-ensure that the competition challenges are appropriate to the ability and level of playing of each individual player as well as for the overall team</li> <li>- ensure that every player in the team has a meaningful role in the team and the game</li> <li>- offer opportunities for players who are ready to move to a development team or want to engage rather in recreational activities</li> </ul>	<p>The coach needs to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-motivate all players to engage in the game</li> <li>-motivate players of higher skill level to assist and mentor players of lower skill level</li> <li>- offer opportunities for players who are ready to move to a competitive team or want to engage rather in recreational activities</li> </ul>	<p>The coach needs to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-organize inclusive sport activities of any kind</li> <li>-motivate all players to engage in the activities</li> <li>- offer opportunities to develop skills and talents further</li> <li>- offer opportunities for players who are ready to move to a development or competitive team</li> </ul>

## 9 How to start

**9.1 Network creation:** it is recommended to get different stakeholders (e.g. special, mainstream or inclusive schools, community sports clubs and federations) involved and start cooperation for recruiting players and to develop Unified Sports further. Looking at the value of the competition experience it would be best to establish several Unified teams in a particular city or region if possible to have the chance to compete against each other. Players in existing teams report that competition is a great incentive to be on a Unified team and to stay. Winning and losing together makes teamwork and social inclusion even stronger.

Networking with federations and clubs is also essential for the engagement and education of referees. While this task is primarily with the local Special Olympics Program rather than with the coach, the coach often is the first point of contact for referees in his/her community. Referees for Special Olympics Unified Sports competitions should be licensed by the respective governing body. Training for Unified Sports usually needs to take place in partnership with the governing body. Materials for this training can be based on this guide and focus specifically on the rules section below.

**9.2 Team and player recruitment:** it is recommended to cooperate with the stakeholders from the network the coach is building up that is mentioned. Recreational come-and-try events as mentioned above can be a gateway to finding interested players for your team. Coaches should use a targeted approach when recruiting teammates to match the local situation. For example, a good match could be a group of interested persons from a workshop for people with intellectual disabilities (“athletes”)

who are beyond school age and adult players from local sport clubs (“partners”). Community youth sport programs or schools would more adequately serve the needs of youth-aged athletes. For example, a coach or teacher at a special school who wants to start a Unified Sports team could contact a mainstream school for cooperation.

If you start a new Unified team there should at least an eight-week training phase before the first competition. Generally training should be regular, at least once a week.

### **9.3 Team building**

There is no limit to activities that drive team building during the training session for example through specific exercises, tactics and team play instructions. Inclusion and team building also can be developed through socializing activities off the court such as barbecues, weekend trips, watching movies together.

Remember that all activities on and off the court should be fun and should satisfy every player. The quality time players get to spend together will lead to a real team which is built on friendship, respect and positive common experience.

### **9.4 Which sports?**

Unified Sports can be played in any sport for training and/or competition ranging from team sports such as basketball, football and handball to racket sports like badminton or table-tennis to individual sports where teams of athletes and partners are pairing up as e.g. Bowling, Bocce and Golf.

In the section below this guides focuses on Unified Volleyball. Unified Volleyball offers great opportunities for the Unified experience and can be applied in all three models. We will highlight some rules and regulations for competition as well as guidelines for training.

**10. Rules**

**10.1 FIVB Volleyball Rules**

The rules are applied with some exceptions. Please see appendix 2.

**10.2 Special Olympics Unified Volleyball Rules**

**10.2.1 Roster and Substitution**

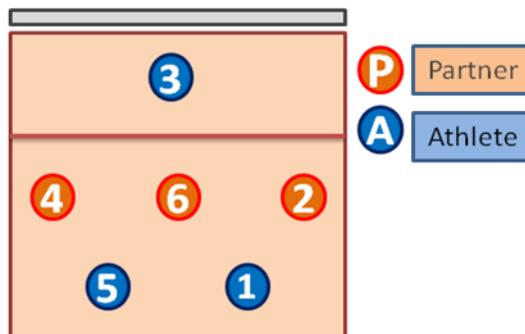
The roster shall contain approximately equal number of athletes and partners. In one match (max. three sets, two up to 25 points and the third set up to 15 points) every athlete and partner has to stand on the court to play at least one point.

Each team is allowed twelve substitutions per set. An unlimited number of players may substitute into a single position. The change will be indicated by the substitute which has a number plate in the hand.

**10.2.2 Lineup of athletes and partners on the volleyball field**

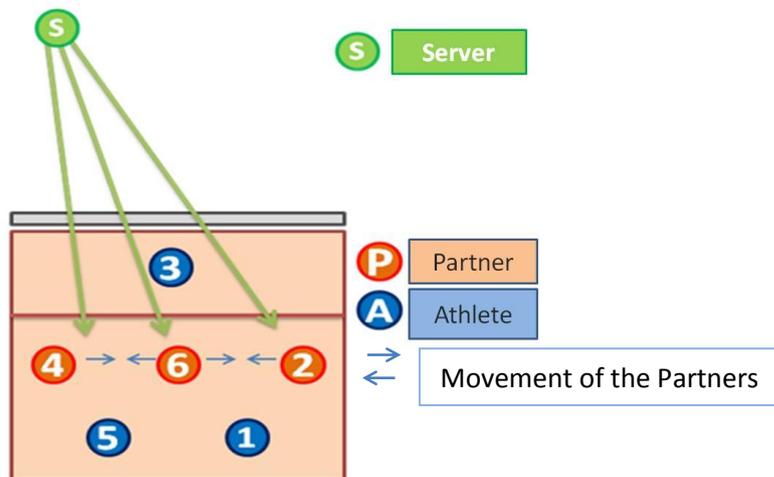
During competition, the lineup shall never exceed three athletes and three partners at any time. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.

In competitions three athletes and three partners play together. The lineup of athletes and partners alternates (see graphic below). All substitutes have to stand in the marked zone beside the court.



In this special lineup coaches and players have to pay attention to avoid “Player Dominance”. “Player Dominance” can happen when players of higher ability “jump” in front of a player with lower ability or “steal” the ball from players with lower abilities many times during a rally or during a set or in general during the entire match.

The next graphic is a common example of “Player Dominance”.



Athlete 5 and 1 are shadowed by the partner 4 – 6 – 2 when the partners move toward the center. In this case the athletes don’t have a chance to play the ball.

### 10.2.3 Coach

Each team shall have an adult, non-playing coach responsible for the lineup and conduct of the team during competition.

### 10.2.4 Service Rule

Once a server has scored three consecutive points, the team must rotate to the next server.

The serving order and positions on the court, at service, must alternate between athletes and partners.

## 11. What is Unified Beach Volleyball

Unified Beach Volleyball is a new but growing sport in Special Olympics. Beach Volleyball is attractive as it's a less formal game than traditional volleyball, usually it's a relaxed setting outdoors and it is very fun oriented. It can be played with less players (4x4), which means efforts to get enough team players on the court are not as high as for Unified Volleyball. It can be a good opportunity to motivate people to look into the sport of volleyball for the first time, e.g. through recreational activities for youth in summer camps. Beach Volleyball can also support the team-building process of a regular Unified Volleyball team. One approach could be to offer it as summer fun activity outside the usual season when gym halls are closed during vacation time.

Special Olympics Unified Beach Volleyball is played as follows:

- a) Unified Sports teams must be composed of two athletes and two partners. In some circumstances, a Tournament Director may allow more athletes than partners if he/she deems that it is still in the spirit of Unified Sports.
- b) The net may not be lower than 2.24 meters (7 feet, 4 1/8 inches).
- c) A lighter weight, leather, modified volleyball may be used. The size of the ball should be no larger than 81 centimeters (32 inches) in circumference and weight no more than 226 gram (8 ounces).
- d) Once a server has scored three consecutive points, his/her team should rotate to the next server and continue to serve.

## 12. Set-up of training session for Unified Volleyball

In this chapter you will find an example of the structure of a training session for a Unified Volleyball team. For further reading it is recommended to check the “Special Olympics Volleyball Coaching Guides”

In general we can divide a training session into three parts: Warm-Up, Main-Part and Cool-Down. It is essential that each training session needs to contain those parts. It depends on the training session duration (e.g. one hour or 90 minutes) how long each part lasts.

It is very important that all players with and without intellectual disabilities engage in the training sessions and that they engage with each other at all parts of the session (no separate athlete or partner sessions!).

### 12.1 The Warm Up

A warm up period is the first part of every training session or preparation for competition. The warm up starts slowly and gradually involves all muscles and body parts.

The warm up raises the body temperature and prepares the muscles and nervous system for the exercise session. The total warm up period takes at least 15 minutes. The table shows an example of how to structure the warm-up.

Activity	Purpose	Time one hour session	Time one-half hour session
<b>Slow aerobic walk</b> (while doing arm circles, walking backward etc.)	Warm muscles	2 minutes	5 minutes
<b>Fast Walk</b>	Warm muscles	2 minutes	5 minutes
<b>Stretching</b>	Increase range of movement	6 minutes	8 minutes
<b>Event specific Drills</b>	Coordination preparation for training/competition	5 minutes	7 minutes

#### 12.1.1 Walk and Fast Walk

Players begin warming the muscles by walking together in one group slowly 2-5 minutes and then continue gradually increasing the speed for another 2-5 minutes.

After a few minutes the players can take a ball to get used to it by bouncing on the ground or throwing it in the air. Another option would be to walk split into several smaller groups and throw or play the ball to each other by walking or standing in circle.

### 12.1.2 Stretching

Stretching is one of the most critical parts of the Warm Up and player's performance. It helps to prevent injury and increase flexibility of the players.

It is recommended to do the stretching together as a group by standing in a big circle. After a couple of weeks it is recommended to ask all players to lead one stretching exercise in front of the group.



Important facts concerning stretching:

Some athletes, like those with Down Syndrome, may have low muscle tone that makes them appear more flexible. Be careful to not allow these athletes to stretch beyond a normal, safe range.

Unsafe stretches include the following

- Neck Backward Bending
- Trunk Backward Bending
- Spinal Roll

Examples for Stretching:

Begin with an easy stretch to the point of tension, and hold this position for 15-30 seconds until the pull lessens. When the tension eases, slowly move further into the stretch until tension is again felt. Hold this new position for an additional 15 seconds. Repeat it 4-5 times on each side of the body.

**Upper Body:**

Triceps Stretch	Shoulder Triceps Stretch
	
<p>Raise both arms over head, bend right arm, bring hand to back, grasp elbow of bent arm and pull gently toward the middle of the back. Repeat with other arm.</p>	<p>Take elbow into hand. Pull to opposite shoulder. Arm may be straight or bent.</p>

**Lower Back & Glutes**

Groin Stretch		
		
<p>Sit, bottoms of feet touching. Hold feet/ankles. Bend forward from hips. Pulling up in lower back.</p>	<p>Here, the back and shoulders are rounded. The athlete is <b>not</b> bending from his hips and <b>not</b> getting the maximum benefit of the stretch</p>	<p>Here, the athlete is correctly bringing his chest to his feet and not pulling his toes towards his body.</p>

Lower Body

Calf Stretch	Seated Straddle Stretch
	
<p>Stand at two arm's length away from each other. Place your right foot behind your left foot. With your hands against the hands of your partner for support, slowly bend your left knee forward, keeping your right knee straight, your right heel on the floor, and your left knee above your left foot. Switch legs and repeat.</p>	<p>Legs straddled, bend at hips. Reach out toward the middle. Keep the back straight.</p>

**12.1.3 Event specific drills**

In this part of the session every player should take a volleyball and make himself/herself familiar with it individually (throwing it high and catching, play overhead, play against wall...). Players should then group as pairs and pass the ball to each other, overhead or with one bounce on the ground. Further the coach can organize some small games within small groups- e.g. while moving around in the gym hall one group is trying to play the ball to each other as often as possible without interruption and the other group is trying to take the ball and start with the same procedure.

The coach has to mind that everyone is engaged. Players with and without intellectual disabilities should play together, there should not be any “partner groups” or “athlete groups”.

**12.2 Main Part**

By conducting the main part you have to consider that the progression through the session allows for a gradual build up of physical activity.

1. Easy to difficult
2. Slow to fast
3. Known to unknown
4. General to specific
5. Start to finish

By developing the training sessions keep in mind that good and positive experience comes through team work and playing together on the field. Try to have a lot of team work exercises in your session.

For Unified Volleyball you can divide the main part in three sections.

The following table shows a framework for a training session. With skills we mean for example: set, forearm pass, serving, blocking, tactics and moves on the field etc.

Section	Activities	Time
		<b>1 h (1,5 hour) training session</b>
Recap from last session	Here you repeat shortly the exercises you did in the previous training session	5 (10) minutes
New Skills	Add a new exercise at every session. It can be an addition to the last session or a complete new exercise for a specific skill.  Please keep this in mind for meaningful involvement: It is important for the coach to support the different abilities of each player and to motivate them to improve their skills through appropriate specific skill exercises.	15 (20) minutes
Playing experience	Give the players the opportunities to exercise the learned skills on the field during a training match.	20 (25) minutes

### 12.3 Cool Down

The cool down is as important as the warm up, however it is often ignored. It reduces the body temperature and heart rate and speeds up the recovery process before the next training session or competitive experience. The whole team should come together and do the exercises as one group. Any new tactics or moves practiced in the main part can be reflected and discussed. Any open issues may be discussed.

Activity	Purpose	Time one hour session	Time one-half hour session
<b>Slow aerobic jog</b>	Lowers body temperature Gradually lowers heart rate	2 minutes	4 minutes
<b>Light stretching in team circle (can be combined with wrap up)</b>	Eases tension from muscles	2 minutes	4minutes
<b>Wrap up in team circle</b>	Brief reflection and recap, outlook to next session	1 minute	2minutes

Remember the cool-down phase is not only meant for cooling down the body. It should also be used for a recap of the session and to compliment players for their training achievements. So everyone is going home with positive emotions and motivation to come to the next training session.



This guide was made possible through the support of the European Union

Special Olympics Europe Eurasia 2014

We would like to thank Tobias Stähler from Germany for leading the work on this guide! Tobias is a long-time Unified Volleyball partner and coach with strong enthusiasm and support of the Unified Sports idea! We would also like to thank all the volunteers in Special Olympics Programs and in Volleyball clubs and federations across Europe who contributed to this guide.