

MARK LIGGINS



AGE: 36

HOMETOWN: Albany, North Shore City

COUNTRY: New Zealand POSITION: Center Forward



STORY: Mark Liggins is a 36 year-old center forward who has been playing football intensely for the last five years. He is a great example of how being involved in Special Olympics can change a person's life. Due to Mark's intellectual disability, he has difficulty reading and writing. As a young person in school he faced many challenges until he discovered his athletic skills. Participating in sports through Special Olympics has provided Mark with an environment of acceptance that has helped him to build up his self-confidence.

Mark's two brothers also played football, and he looked to follow in their footsteps on the sports' field. While he has been playing football on and off for most of his life, Mark has really honed his skills in the past few years by playing with Special Olympics New Zealand. Most recently, Mark traveled to the 2009 Special Olympics New Zealand National Summer Games and won medals in football.

Playing football has given Mark a confidence that has lead him to become a fierce competitor on the field and a good friend and teammate, both on and off the pitch. His time with Special Olympics has strengthened his courage to try new things—he even traveled to London by himself recently to visit his brother. He is now looking forward to traveling to South Africa to play in the Unity Cup.

Mark also has a full-time job cutting and splitting firewood. When he is not working or playing football he enjoys spending time with his family and his dog, Reba, walking along the beach. Mark also participates in basketball. His coaches describe him as a mature, fit and talented player who consistently encourages the youth who surround him. Special Olympics has provided Mark the opportunity to develop his sports skills and has helped him realize that he does have ability, potential and talent to open up a whole new world of possibility.