

Special Olympics Through the Years

June 1963

Eunice Kennedy Shriver begins a summer day camp at her home in Maryland for children with intellectual disabilities to realize their capabilities in sports and physical activities.

July 1968

The first International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. A thousand individuals with intellectual disabilities from 26 states and Canada compete in track and field and swimming.

December 1971

The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval to use the name "Olympics" in the United States.

February 1977

Steamboat Springs, Colorado, hosts the first International Special Olympics Winter Games, with more than 500 athletes competing in skiing and skating events. U.S. television networks CBS, ABC and NBC cover the Games.

June 1981

The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is launched in Wichita, Kansas, USA, after Police Chief Richard LaMunyon saw an urgent need to raise awareness for Special Olympics. The Torch Run is now the Movement's largest grassroots fundraiser, raising nearly \$40 million annually.

September 1986

The United Nations in New York City launches the International Year of Special Olympics under the banner "Special Olympics—Uniting the World."

October 1987

"A Very Special Christmas," a benefit album featuring holiday music by top performers is released worldwide. Produced by Jimmy and Vicki Iovine of A&M Records and Bobby Shriver, all proceeds benefit Special Olympics. More than two million records, compact discs and cassette tapes are sold.

February 1988

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) signs an historic agreement with Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, in which the IOC officially endorses and recognizes Special Olympics.

July 1988

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is launched at the annual Special Olympics Conference in Reno, Nevada, and Lake Tahoe, California. Athletes with and without intellectual disabilities compete side-by-side in bowling, volleyball and softball.

March 1993

The Fifth Special Olympics World Winter Games are hosted in the Austrian cities of Salzburg and Schladming, the first World Winter Games held outside North America.

July 1995

A number of new initiatives make their debut at the Ninth Special Olympics World Summer Games in New Haven, Connecticut, including the Host Town Program, Healthy Athletes® and Research and Policy Symposia. For the first time, individuals with intellectual disabilities serve as certified sports officials.

July 1997

Healthy Athletes® becomes an official Special Olympics initiative, providing health care services to Special Olympics athletes worldwide. The program includes free vision, hearing and dental screenings; injury prevention clinics and nutrition education.

July 1998

Special Olympics celebrates its 30th anniversary with the introduction of the Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers, 12 athletes who travel the world as spokespeople for the Movement.

December 1998

U.S. President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton host “A Very Special Christmas from Washington D.C.”—marking the first time that the White House hosts a Special Olympics gala and the first time that artists from the “A Very Special Christmas” album series gather together to perform. In 2000, President and Mrs. Clinton host “A Very Special Christmas” for the second time.

May 2000

The “Campaign for Special Olympics” sets unprecedented goals to increase athlete participation by 1 million and to raise more than \$120 million over the course of the next five years, changing the face of the Movement.

May 2000

As part of the “Campaign for Special Olympics,” the Special Olympics China Millennium March is launched; the Movement’s most ambitious growth campaign in history. China pledges to increase its current number of athletes from 50,000 to 500,000 by 2005.

July 2001

The South African cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Sun City host Special Olympics African Hope. President Nelson Mandela returns to Robben Island with Special Olympics athletes to light the “*Flame of Hope*” and kick off the Law Enforcement Torch Run® through the streets of Cape Town. The event generates awareness of the Movement throughout the continent and launches a major growth initiative to reach 100,000 new athletes in Africa by 2005.

May 2002

Special Olympics develops and distributes the SO Get Into It™ curriculum for students with and without disabilities to schools and teachers worldwide at no cost. The curriculum teaches young people about intellectual disabilities while empowering them to “be the difference” by learning values of inclusion, acceptance and respect.

July 2002

The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund partners with Special Olympics to host an annual birthday celebration for its founder and chairperson, President of South Africa Nelson Mandela, and helps Special Olympics launch its Unified Sports® program in South Africa.

June 2003

Ireland hosts the first Special Olympics World Summer Games held outside the United States. With 5,500 athletes participating, it is Ireland’s largest sporting event of the year, capturing the hearts and imaginations of an entire nation.

June 2003

Special Olympics releases “The Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities,” a report on how people across the world view the roles and capabilities of persons with intellectual disabilities in the workplace, classroom and in daily life. The study is the most comprehensive ever conducted on this subject.

October 2004

U.S. President George W. Bush signs the “Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act,” which authorizes \$15 million per year over five years to fund the growth of Special Olympics and support initiatives that foster greater respect and understanding for people with intellectual disabilities. The signing of the bill marks the first time that Special Olympics secures support through legislation.

December 2005

“The Ringer,” a Farrelly Brothers film starring Johnny Knoxville, opens in theaters throughout Canada and the United States. The film includes appearances from more than 150 Special Olympics athletes. Its producers collaborated with Special Olympics to challenge destructive stereotypes and negative thinking about people with intellectual disabilities.

IMAGE CREDITS: **Cover** © Richard Corman; Mission © Special Olympics; Special Olympics **Throughout the Years** (all images) © Special Olympics; **Page 2** © Special Olympics; **Page 4** © Special Olympics; **Page 6** © Richard Corman; **Page 8**; © Special Olympics; **Page 10** © Special Olympics; **Page 12** © Special Olympics; **Page 14** © Special Olympics; **Page 16** © Special Olympics; **Page 18** © Special Olympics; **Page 20** © Special Olympics; **Page 22** © Special Olympics; **Page 24** © Richard Corman; **Back** © Richard Corman.

A person wearing a swimming cap and goggles is flexing their arms in a pool. The image is overlaid with a red tint.

Let me win. But if I cannot win,
let me be brave in the attempt.

Special Olympics athlete oath



Special Olympics

Be a fan.®



Our story



Special Olympics

Be a fan.



The Mission of Special Olympics

is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.