

# THE STORIES

## **SPECIAL GAMES A GOOD START IN CHANGING MIND-SETS**

**Go Kojima, Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer**

The 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games, an eight-day sporting competition for people with intellectual disabilities, ended in Nagano on Saturday. While the full value of the event has yet to be assessed, its greatest significance is changing society's attitude toward mentally disabled people through allowing many people to come in contact with them.

A total of 1,829 athletes from 84 countries and territories participated in the games, which attracted about 150,000 spectators.

At Saturday's closing ceremony, Hideaki Yasukawa, chairman of the organizing committee, said the event was a great success. "It may help accelerate the general understanding of the Special Olympics," he said.

Problems concerning intellectually disabled people also were highlighted at various symposiums and in studies held in parallel with the event.

It was found, for example, that 20 percent of 1,590 athletes who underwent medical checkups during the games had never taken an eye test before, and 45 percent of them needed to have their vision corrected by wearing glasses or other means.

A female Ugandan athlete who had a speech impediment, was found to actually have a hearing problem that if treated, could allow her to hold a conversation.

Mark Wagner, director of Special Olympics Health and Research Initiatives, said mentally disabled people had difficulty gaining the appropriate medical treatment.

He said they had problems in describing their symptoms, while few doctors treated them properly.

The medical problems of mentally disabled people are just one example of how hard it is for them to be accepted in society.

Gary Siperstein of Massachusetts University, who studies how mentally handicapped people participate in society, surveyed 10,000 middle school students in the United States and Japan last autumn about their ideas of mentally disabled people.

Seventy-two percent of U.S. students said they thought mentally handicapped people could act with consideration for other people, but only 36 percent of Japanese students supported this view.

Asked whether they would be willing to talk to mentally handicapped people during their school lunchtime, 61 percent of U.S. students and 40 percent of Japanese students said yes.

The survey reveals Japanese students rate the abilities of mentally handicapped people lower than their U.S. counterparts. Japanese students also are more negative toward interacting with handicapped people.

Siperstein, 62, said this may be because Japanese students have less opportunities to interact with mentally disabled people compared with their U.S. counterparts.

In Japan, mentally handicapped people are enrolled in special classes or schools when they reach school age, receiving a separate education from those of students with no disabilities.

But the June revision of the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities encourages exchanges and collaborative learning between the two groups of students at schools.

However, Ryo Matsutomo, director of Inclusion Japan, an association of parents of children with intellectual disabilities, said the Education, Science and Technology Ministry still believed handicapped children should be separated from other children.

"It's only fitting that children with various abilities learn together at the same classroom, using different kinds of textbooks. But society's opposition to nonconforming elements may prevent such a change," he said.

It is important to continue efforts to promote exchanges between people who are handicapped and those who are not to foster the acceptance of disabled people as members of a diverse society.

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**Special Olympics**  
**SO Get Info It**  
2005 Global Youth Summit

# SPECIAL OLYMPICS GET INTO IT®

## Special Olympics Get Into It®

A service-learning curriculum developed to introduce Special Olympics and explain intellectual disabilities to youth and encourage them to become involved in the movement.

### SO Get Into It Goals

The overall goal of SO Get Into It is to increase the participation of children and youth with and without intellectual disabilities in Special Olympics by establishing school-based Special Olympics Programs and activities. This encompasses several related goals:

- To develop new constituencies and leaders for the Special Olympics movement;
- To promote greater understanding and acceptance of similarities and differences in others among school-age youth; and
- To involve school-age youth in a variety of activities centered on Special Olympics, including participation in Special Olympics sports and events that will enable them to play a positive role in their schools and communities.

**SO Get Into It** is made up of four lesson plans compatible with curriculum standards in the areas of language arts, social studies, history, health and physical education and other areas:

- **Awareness:** Learning how stereotypes are formed and can be hurtful;
- **Understanding:** Overcoming unfair treatment, adversity and discrimination;
- **Inspiration:** Goal setting with Special Olympics athletes as role models; and
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Included with the lessons are videotapes, local contact information and other supplemental resources for the teacher and students.

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# SPECIAL OLYMPICS MISSION

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympics-type sports for individuals 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.

# SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETE OATH

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



**Special Olympics**  
**SO Go & Info It®**  
2005 Global Youth Summit

Editors of the Global Youth Summit Proceedings



**George Srour** (far right with GYS team from Bahrain)

2001, 2003 & 2005 Global Youth Summit Youth Leader



**Rosuke Niwa** (on left) with friend Ron Vederman

2003 Global Youth Summit Participants; 2005 Global Youth Summit Youth Leader



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