

## Athlete Ben Collins Celebrates **30 Years** Working at Special Olympics

*Ben Collins, Special Olympics athlete and employee.*



Ben Collins is a true legend at Special Olympics.

He began competing with Special Olympics in swimming and track and field when he was 13 and now competes in powerlifting and bocce. He shares that his favorite Special Olympics memory was competing in the 2018 USA National Games in Seattle, Washington, where he participated in bocce and won two silver medals as well as a bronze medal.

In addition to competing as an athlete for the last 41 years, Ben recently celebrated 30 years of working at the Special Olympics International headquarters in Washington, D.C. He was the very first athlete with a disability hired at our offices—and we can't imagine working without him. As Special Olympics' Operations Specialist, he keeps our office running smoothly!

"People need to hire people with intellectual disabilities to give them an opportunity," Ben says. "We need to have the opportunity and the chance to do the work. Don't be tossed aside, or be put aside, on the sidelines."

In addition to sorting and delivering the daily mail and providing office tours to visitors and new employees, he loves to make thank-you calls to our donors to share his gratitude on behalf of all Special Olympics athletes!

Ben also recently created a presentation for Special Olympics staff, volunteers and ambassadors, in which he explains how he is

able to type and read emails, how he advocated for an audible street crossing signal close to our office and how the chat feature in Zoom can be disruptive. "I now do a presentation called 'Welcome to my world,' and I teach people to be like me, in my shadow or footsteps, being visually impaired," Ben said. "We are simply trying to be included like everyone else."

His job and responsibilities have given him confidence beyond the athletic field. "It made me feel really great and good inside, advocating for myself and other people who have intellectual disabilities." His mentor, Meghan Hussey, says, "Ben has really taken it upon himself to help people understand what accessibility means for him, the ways that he experiences the world, all the ways that he's able to be independent when he has the right environment and the right accessibility in place." She adds, "I think he really has surpassed any goals that people would have originally set for him."

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## USA GAMES ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT:

# Christopher Dyke, Unified Flag Football

Christopher Dyke has a knack for knowing where to be at any given time on the flag football field. Playing a variety of positions, the 21-year-old says he enjoys wide receiver the most, but he also shines on the defensive side of the ball. Using hand signals, he communicates with his Special Olympics Arizona coaches on the sidelines, and they say his football IQ is second to none. Dyke just happens to be hearing impaired and oftentimes uses his mom as an interpreter.

Debra Dyke, Dyke's mother, was told he might never walk when he was young. He defied that prediction. That makes the ability to play the sport he loves the most and doing it at the USA Games something that he cherishes. From his first years playing until now, he has become one of Special Olympics Arizona's most intelligent players on the gridiron. Competing at the USA Games was a full-circle moment for Dyke: It was his turn to show others what is possible.

"Over the last 10 months, Chris has elevated his level of play more so than anyone on the team. He has improved with every single practice and has become



*Chris Dyke (right) has an exceptionally high football IQ and has emerged as a leader on his Unified flag football team.*

an irreplaceable member of the team," said Lucas Parker, a Special Olympics Arizona coach. "And even with all of that, the most important thing Chris brings to the team is his love of the game and his positive attitude. It's infectious, and it has an effect on every member of our team. And I can't ask for anything more than that."

Playing in a round robin-style bracket, Arizona won the gold medal. It was a moment that they had envisioned for months. Their new mantra is "everywhere we go, we go together," and because of the USA Games, they are now closer than ever.

## Helping Athletes in Ukraine

Ionut, 25, and Edi, 30, have joined hundreds of volunteers who help Ukrainian refugees transiting through Romania to other countries in Europe. The two men, who live in a Motivation Foundation Romania group home in Buda, Ifov County, help unload and reload vehicles full of donated supplies for the Ukrainians. Recently, they prepared backpacks filled with essential items and loaded a van destined for Piatra-Neamt, in northeast Romania, where Ukrainian children staying at a municipal sports camp took part in a Special Olympics fun sports day. The event was supported by Citizens of our Planet—A Chili Piper Foundation through the Special Olympics Unified with Refugees initiative.

Ionut and Edi had a rough start growing up in a state-run institution for children with disabilities until they were brought to the Motivation group home. "I know why it is important to help other people because I was helped when Motivation took me out of the institution. Now, I have a home and I have a job," he said. "For this reason, I want to help others

as I was helped," he said. His friend Edi, who works at McDonald's and is a Special Olympics skier, added: "It is a good thing to help others. It gives us satisfaction."



*Edi (left, in blue bib) and Ionut (right, in pink bib) of Special Olympics Romania are volunteering to support Ukrainian refugees in Romania.*

It's All About

Skills,

Fellowship

and Understanding



by  
*Richard  
Wolf*

The oath that Special Olympics athletes recite at competitions large and small is brief and sincere: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." But for three decades, while coaching, volunteering and cheering for my son, Jonathan, and his fellow athletes, I could relate to the first part more than the second.

So when Jonathan and I were randomly selected to join Team Virginia playing alternate-shot golf for the Special Olympics USA Games this spring, my focus turned to practicing, improving—and winning. We would settle, I told myself, for nothing less than gold medals.

What I learned from spending a week in the blazing Florida heat with thousands of Special Olympics athletes was something very different. Winning isn't the only thing; it's not even the most important thing. What matters more, these special athletes showed me, are positive attitudes, selfless sportsmanship and equal treatment for everyone, regardless of athletic ability—or disability.

While motivated by competition, what was most visible was camaraderie. While their sports talents were impressive, what set them apart was their sportsmanship. And the effort they exhibited was worthy of celebration, regardless of the end result.



*Jonathan, Special Olympics athlete, with his father, Richard Wolf.*

When a player wound up on the ground, the first hand of assistance usually came from the other side. When the athletes had free time together, fellowship was on full display. Gender, race, ethnicity and, of course, disability became almost invisible amid the smiles, hugs and laughter.

There was a purity to the enjoyment of athletics on display on the courts and courses that is in short supply in the wider world of sports. What motivated these athletes was simple pride. You could see it in their eyes, and you could hear it from the sound of clinking medals around their necks.

That is how I learned to be a good sport rather than a gold medalist. In the end, Jonathan and I managed to win silver medals in 9-hole, alternate-shot golf, within a division of similarly skilled athletes and partners. The hardware was nice, but the real reward for me was in learning what the athletes already knew: how to be "brave in the attempt."

## A Win-Win:

# Gifts That Benefit You **AND** Special Olympics

*Are you looking to supplement your income in retirement? Have you found that your required minimum distribution is more than you need this year? You may want to consider either creating a charitable gift annuity or making a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA.*



### Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA)

If you are 65 or older, you make a gift of \$10,000 or more to Special Olympics. In return, you will receive guaranteed payments for life for you and/or a loved one. Your payment rate is based on your age and will never change. Payment rates increased in July 2022 and may be higher than what you will find with a standard bank certificate of deposit. To request a personalized illustration of the payments you will receive, simply return the attached reply form or reach out to Connie Grandmason directly at [plannedgiving@specialolympics.org](mailto:plannedgiving@specialolympics.org). To learn more, visit [solegacy.org/giftannuity](http://solegacy.org/giftannuity).

### Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from Your IRA

If you are 70 ½ or older, you can make a QCD to Special Olympics. The gift must be transferred directly from your IRA to Special Olympics to qualify. The amount you transfer does not count as income for the year, which may help to keep you in a lower tax bracket, and can count toward your required minimum distribution. Simply contact your IRA administrator directly to request the transfer to Special Olympics and reference our **federal tax ID number: 52-0889518**.

## What You Need to Complete Your Gift

When creating a gift to Special Olympics in your will, trust or via beneficiary designation, please use the following information:

**Legal name:** Special Olympics, Inc.

**Address:** 1133 19th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036

**Federal Tax ID Number:** 52-0889518

To include a gift to your local Special Olympics chapter affiliate, you will need their legal name and tax ID number. Please contact Connie Grandmason toll free at **(866) 690-3951** or [plannedgiving@specialolympics.org](mailto:plannedgiving@specialolympics.org). Connie will be happy to provide your chapter's legal name and tax ID number.



**At Your  
Service**

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