



When getting ready for competition, your athletes' performance may improve. These changes can be even greater when training is more specific and intense. As a coach you have many duties towards your athletes. One of the most important is to give them the best chance to succeed. Success does not need to mean a gold medal. Success is a chance to perform to the best of their ability. Final places will take care of themselves.

Complete Entry forms (paper/online)

A coach's role at competition starts long before the event begins. As Coach, you have a duty to complete competition entries for all your athletes. Some programmes use online entry systems. Others use paper forms. You should talk to your local programme and ask what entry process you must follow.

When you do the competition entries, ensure you fill in all of information that is asked for. This might include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Athlete Name• Date of Birth• Club/School• Sport• Event• Level• Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entry Time/Score/Distance• Field Position• Sport Specific Information (e.g. Equestrian Rider Profile Form, Judo Weight Class)• Competition Aids required	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific Medical information (Note: You should include whether or not the athlete self-medicates)
---	---	---

Before you submit your entry forms complete one final check of all details. Athletes' names, gender, ages, dates of birth, entry scores, events and sports. Submit your entries to the correct person/office/online system by the required date.

Do not expect late entries to be accepted.

Accurate Times/Scores/Distances

Competition entry forms often ask for an entry score for each athlete. It may be a time, distance, height or competition score. It is best to submit your athlete's personal best (PB) score. Sometime an athlete's health status has changed since they performed their PB. In this case, you may need to submit a more recent, accurate performance score. It is



your duty as a coach, to submit the most accurate entry score. This will help ensure that your athletes do not become disqualified based on the maximum effort rule (explained below).

How can you ensure you have accurate scores for competition entries?

You should record athlete performances at competition. Ensure your athletes have several opportunities to compete in their event. This could include:

- Leagues,
- Invitational competitions,
- Challenge competitions with another local club,
- Challenge competitions with another local club.

Athletes gain experience each time they compete. Regular competition helps them to achieve more consistent performances. You should also take regular and accurate scores in training. Again these may be times, distances, heights or scores. These records will track your athletes' improvements. This can be very motivating for them and for you.

If you find it difficult to take accurate measurements, you should contact your local programme office. They may be able to help. Some way they can help are to:

- Lend equipment to you.
- Introduce you to other coaches who have the equipment you need.
- Share tips with you on how to gather accurate entry scores.

If you are having challenges, it is much best to contact your local programme office before you send in entry scores. **The scores you send in will be assumed accurate.**

Practice in a Competition Situation

Train your athletes in a comparable venue or situation as their competition. For example, if you usually train outdoors for basketball and your competition will be indoors, try to have at least one practice session (or more if you can) on an indoor court. You can do this once or twice ahead of competition, if it is not possible for every training session. You will begin to see patterns in how each athlete performs. Some athletes perform better on warmer or cooler days. Some will excel when family are present supporting them. Some may find a new venue makes them nervous, others more excited and focused.



Educate yourself and your athletes about the Maximum Effort Rule

Maximum Effort Rule

Special Olympics developed the maximum effort rule in the 1990's. The rule aims to stop athletes cheating in competition. In the past, some athletes deliberately performed with less effort in divisioning rounds of competition. They did this to get placed in a division with athletes of lower ability. They thought that this would help them to win a medal in their final round. This rule says that athletes must compete to the best of their ability in all rounds of competition. It helps to provide a fair competition for all athletes. All coaches should be familiar with the Maximum Effort Rule. You can find this in Sports Rules Article 1, Section 11. Maximum Effort Rule.

This rule applies for all athletes in all sports. However, in sports where an athlete's score is a time, distance, score or height, this rule is applied in two ways. We use either "The Percentage Rule" or "Jury Review". When the athletes score in finals is 15% or more better than in the divisioning round the athlete may be disqualified (DQd).

Percentage Rule: 15% or greater difference means the athlete is DQd.

Jury Review: If a 15% or greater difference is found a sport jury will review the result. They will decide if the athlete should be DQd.

Improved Performance Forms

Entry forms and scores must be filled in before a competition. This may be many weeks or even months before an event. With good training, an athlete's performance will improve.

In many competitions you will have a chance to submit improved entry scores before the competition. Your competition team will tell you exactly how this should be done. Make sure you find out if this option is available. It is the coach's responsibility to submit an improved entry score.

What should you do if your athlete has underperformed in a divisioning round? If you think they will perform better in finals, you **MUST** submit an improved performance score. This should be done in the required time after the divisioning round. You will not be able to protest a DQ under the MER if you have not submitted an improved performance score.



You will usually have to fill in an Improved Performance Form within 30 minutes after divisioning results are published. Sometimes this time might be shorter. You should ALWAYS check with your competition team. This information is usually given at the first Head Coaches meeting. However, if it is not, you should always make sure to ask the competition team.

TOP TIPS

The best way to avoid problems with the Maximum Effort rule are:

Keep Records!!!!

And

Make sure your entry scores are accurate!

Keeping Performance Records

- Record your athlete's performances! You can do this during training sessions and competitions. Write them down in a notebook. Note the time, date and location of the training session.
- Bring this training record with you to every competition.
 - It can help to support any discussions you have with the competition team.
 - It can also help you make a decision on whether or not to submit an improved performance form or protest a disqualification.

Ensuring Accurate Entry Scores

One of the most common errors made by coaches is to submit inaccurate entry scores. Most often this happens because a coach:

- **Uses an old competition score.** With good training athletes improve. Over time, old scores may not be accurate. They may not reflect the athlete's ability level.
- **Measures scores inaccurately.** Use an accurate measuring device. This might be a stopwatch, electronic timing system or measuring tape.
- **Enters the same score for all athletes.** Coaches can be under time pressure to complete entry forms. It may be tempting to enter the same score for a group of athletes of similar ability. This is a bad idea. It puts all athletes at risk of DQ. It is also an example of lazy coaching.



- **Estimate times for some athletes based on other athletes' accurate times.** Taking accurate times/scores/distances is time consuming. However, it is the best way to protect your athletes from DQ and ALSO to measure their progress. You should never estimate one athlete's score based on another athlete's performance. This is lazy coaching. Every athlete deserves your best effort.

COMPETITION PRACTICE

Help to prepare your athletes for competition. Train them on sport specific skills and rules. Include activities and tips focused on fitness, conditioning, nutrition and hydration. Give them a chance to practice in a competition environment. It is crucial that athletes experience a competitive environment prior to true competition as it allows them to properly prepare. Here are some ways you can do this!

- Enter a local "friendly" competition.
- Invite a local team to your training night and run a small competition.
- Invite families and friends to your session. They can cheer along as if it were a competition.
- Build scrimmages into your sessions. They allow your athletes to perform their skills in a competition context.
- Ensure athletes experience true officiating. (For example: Include Officials in uniform. They should use whistles or other signals or directions that the athletes will experience in competition).

Note how each athlete performs in competition. Who is focused and performs better? Who is distracted and anxious? Who is overwhelmed? Who is more motivated? Use your observations to identify what you should work on with each athlete.

Before Competition – Athlete Readiness for Competition

Before entering your athletes, you should be sure they are ready for competition.

- **Can your athlete perform the skills required?**
- **Can your athlete safely complete their event?** (e.g. if your athlete trains in a 10m pool, but the competition is in a 25m pool – can they swim 25m without stopping?)
- **Does your athlete know the rules of the event?** Your job is to give your athletes knowledge of the rules they must understand.



- **Is your athlete ready to follow the officials' directions?** You must ensure they understand the instructions, signals, or signs an official or referee in their sport may give.
- **Can your athlete perform their event without relying on you or someone else for direction?** Remember that in many sports, coaching from the field of play or beside the field of play is not permitted. If you coach your athlete, they may be disqualified.
- **Does your athlete have all of the required clothing, sport and personal safety equipment?** You must ensure your athletes are properly attired and equipped to train and to compete.
- **Is your athlete prepared psychologically?** Does your athlete know what to expect? There will be lots of people - Officials, opponents, volunteers and fans. They will mostly be unfamiliar. The venue may be new to them. There may be new noises - cheering fans, a starting pistol, loud announcements.
- **Is your athlete prepared physically?** Has your athlete been properly training/conditioning? Have they been eating and hydrating well? Does your athlete have any health or medical concerns? The temperatures, travel and new environment may be different. All athletes must be healthy and fit for competition.
- **Is your athlete prepared to wait in competition and awards staging without you?**
- **Does the competition involve travel?** Will your athlete need to stay overnight? Will they have to take a long flight or bus ride? Are they prepared to be away from family?
- **Does your athlete understand what might cause them to be disqualified?** Have you helped to ensure that this will not happen, but prepared them for if it does. Use this as a teaching moment.

NOTE: Special Olympics competitions may take place over a number of days. Coaches who attend these kinds of competitions with their athletes may also have a role as a carer of their athletes out of competition time. Note that these responsibilities are very important, but they will not be addressed within this guide. Please refer to your local Special Olympics programme for further guidance.