



Athletes depend on their coach to ensure that they know what to expect at a competition. Here are some of the elements of competition you should understand in order to help prepare your athletes. If you are unsure about any of these areas, you should contact your local programme.

Rules	Head Coaches Meeting	Final Declaration
Divisioning	Athlete Flow	Competition Areas
Competition Format	Disqualification	Protests & Appeals
Sportsmanship	Attire	Interpreting Results

Rules

Coaches should know both Official Special Olympics Sport Rules and their own Sport Federation rules*. The version of these rules will depend on the level of competition. If you do not know these rules, make it a priority to learn them before you continue to coach. Special Olympics Sports Rules Article 1 is also very important. Every Special Olympics Coach should know Article 1 very well.

This is YOUR responsibility. If you are wrong or poorly informed, you may be the reason your athlete loses out.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you know your sports rules?
- Have you prepared your athletes as best as possible?
- Are they able to complete their event, according to the rules?
- Can they complete their event without prompting or coaching from you?

If your athlete does not yet know the rules well enough to allow them to do this, then they are not ready for competition. Remember, that this is ok! Athletes have a more positive competition experience when they are well prepared and know the rules. Imagine you are an athlete. Would you like to enter into a competition when you do not know what you need to do? Would you be happy if you cannot follow what is happening? or to be disqualified and not understand why?



Head Coaches Meeting

ALL HEAD COACHES MUST ATTEND ALL HEAD COACHES MEETINGS (HCM). They are **NOT** optional. There is at least one HCM at every SO competition. During the HCM, the competition team gives coaches vital information about the event, for example, how rules will be applied. Missing out on this information could mean you cannot pass important instructions to your athletes. This may even result in your athlete's disqualification. If you make a protest based on incorrect information because you missed your HCM, your protest may be given less consideration.

Final Declaration

At your first HCM, you may be asked to review all entries from your club or programme. You must check the following:

Athlete Names	Age groups	Entry scores
Athlete Genders	Sport	Team Rosters
Dates of birth	Events/Levels	Other Sports information

Inform competition management immediately of any errors. It is important that you bring your own record of entry scores and performances of your athletes with you. This can help you to identify any errors in the competition paperwork. It can also support you if you must make a protest related to your athlete's performance.

Divisioning

- Do you know what divisioning is?
- Do you know how divisioning is done in your sport?
- What do you need to do as a coach to support divisioning in your sport?

For example, in team sports, you must play all your players. In Basketball you must declare your 5 strongest players.

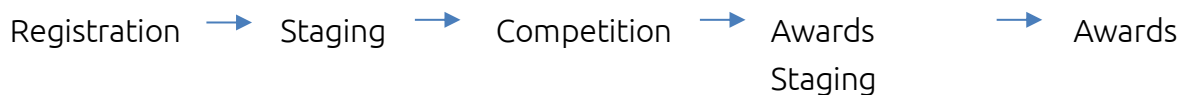
You should consult the SO Sports Rules to make sure you fully understand the process for your sport. You can also check out some of the following resources for more information on divisioning:



- Quick Guide to Special Olympics competition
- Divisioning VIDEO

Athlete Flow at Competition

Coaches are responsible for ensuring athletes are where they need to be at all times. This means you must ensure that they are present at Registration (sometimes called Check in) at the correct time. You must ensure that they are present at the Staging area before their event. You must know if your athlete's event is a preliminary or final. This will dictate whether they will continue to awards staging or return to their team.



Competition Areas

Staging

Staging is the area where your athletes will wait before they go to the field of play for their event. When they arrive, they are checked in. They will wait here until their event is called. In some sports, your athletes may be waiting in staging for up to 30 minutes. Coaches may or may not be permitted to enter the staging area. Make sure that your athletes have completed a warm up and are hydrated. You should also ensure they have had a healthy snack or meal within the last 2 hours prior to entering the staging area. Your athletes should be prepared to wait in this area, with other athletes and competition volunteers.

Remember, **the Coach** must know when his/her athlete(s) need(s) to be at staging.

Have you ensured they know what to do?

Do they have a plan for their time there? Some athlete like to listen to music, visualize their race or talk to volunteers or teammates. Athletes can use this time before

competition to practice some of the skills that they learn during the Strong Minds Healthy Athletes program. Strong Minds resources can be found here:

<http://resources.specialolympics.org/health/> .



Field of Play

Every sport has its own rules about coach access to the field of play. Ensure you are familiar with SO Sports Rules and your IF or NGB sport rules. Know where you can and cannot go. Know if you can coach/advise your athlete while they are on the field of play. Remember: If you coach when you should not, your athlete(s) may be disqualified. ***If your athlete cannot complete the event without your help – they are not ready for competition.*** After the event, athletes will either move to awards staging (in the case of finals) or meet their coach (after preliminaries). If you are meeting your athletes as they are coming off the field of play, make sure to find a location to do a quick cool down and ensure your athletes are rehydrating.

Awards Staging and Awards

Awards will take place after the final rounds of competition. Athletes are brought from the field of play to awards staging. Volunteers seat athletes in the correct order for their presentations. They will move from here to the awards presentation area for the award ceremony. When they have received their award, their coach will meet them at the exit area. At this time they are free to re-join their team to celebrate their achievement. If the athlete has not yet done a cool-down, this is a great time! The coach can do a quick cool down and ensure the athletes are rehydrating.

Competition Format

Do you understand the competition format that will be used at the event?

If you have any questions you should speak with your local programme office or your competition team. Remember, you are the person who will help your athletes understand how competition will work. It is vital that you know what will happen, when and why.

Do your athletes know what to expect?

Will the competition use Double elimination? If so, do they understand a defeat does not mean their event is over? Will it be a knock-out format? Does this one defeat mean their competition is over? Will it be a league? Consistency becomes vitally important in a league. As coach, you will help to set the tone for how your athletes approach and prepare for their event.



Improved performance scores

Remember the *Maximum Effort Rule (MER)*.^{*} If your athlete under performs in divisioning, you should submit an improved performance score, as soon as possible after the divisioning round. Each competition sets out the exact time requirements to submit improved performance scores. The score you submit should reflect how the athlete performs at their normal level. If you do not do this, they may be subject to disqualification under the MER.

Disqualification (DQ)

Athletes can be subject to disqualification in any competition. It is a rare occurrence, but it is important that both you and your athletes understand the reasons a DQ may happen. Here are some of the more common examples:

Type of DQ	Example	Award
A technical rule violation	Swimming: Stroke infringement Athletics: False start	Participation Ribbon
Maximum Effort Rule violation [*]	Athletics: 100m Divisioning Time 16.30, Final Time 12.50 >15% improvement – MER DQ	Presented on the last place of the podium
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Abusive language or treatment of an official.	No award given

^{} Maximum Effort Rule violation is when an athlete's final time/score is more than 15% better than their entry/divisioning score. Find out more about the MER by reading our Quick Guide to Special Olympics Competition.*

Protests and Appeals

Protest

Special Olympics Sports Rules Article 1 says that a Head coach may make a protest for these reasons:

- A sport rule is not interpreted correctly.
- A sport official fails to apply the correct rule.
- Failure to impose the correct penalty for a violation.



A coach may not protest a result because they do not like it. A coach cannot protest the following:

- Fact-specific judgement calls of sport officials.
- Decisions about divisioning and meaningful involvement.

A protest must be filed on the official protest form and within the required timeframe of an event, which is typically 15 minutes after the end of the event in question. It must identify the specific section or rule number of the Official SO Sport Rules or IF/NGB rules and how this rule has been violated. Only a head coach or his/her designee may file a protest.

When a protest has been filed, the Jury of Sport will rule on it. If they uphold the protest, they will inform the head official who will take the appropriate action. If the protest is denied, the head coach or his/her designee will have a right of appeal.

Appeal

If a Head Coach is not satisfied with the decision of the Jury of Sport on a protest, they may appeal. An appeal is filed for the same reasons as a protest. An appeal may not be filed simply because the coach dislikes the decision. An appeal must be filed in writing on the same official protest form within 60 minutes after the decision of the Sport Specific Jury. An appeal will be heard and ruled on by the Jury of Appeals. In some events, it may take up to 24 hours for a final decision to be made. The competition team will be able to give you accurate timelines for this decision.

If an appeal is filed, the competition awards will usually proceed. If the ruling changes the outcome of the awards, the awards will be re-presented, where possible, in the correct finish positions. Athletes will usually not be asked to return incorrectly awarded medals. Final Official Results, will however, be changed.



Other Useful things to remember at competition

Sportsmanship

Remember you are a role model for your athletes and need to demonstrate proper behaviour on and off the playing field. Be familiar with the Special Olympics Coaches Code of Conduct. (Sports Rules Article 1 Addendum D). It explains what is expected of every SO coach. Here are some simple suggestions for showing good sportsmanship.

- Shake hands with opposing coaches after the event. If it is appropriate, you could also shake hands with opposing athletes.
- Applaud both your athletes and other athletes for their performances.
- Stay calm and in control on the field of play.
- Praise and celebrate your athletes' performances in a dignified manner.

Winning and Losing

How you behave when your athletes win or lose sets the tone of their behaviour. Of course you should celebrate when your athletes win or perform well. However, your celebrations should be dignified and appropriate. Show your athletes that no celebrations should aim to belittle or upset opponents.

When your athletes perform poorly or lose, keep perspective. A coach should never shout, belittle or abuse an athlete due to their performance. Sport should be fun. It is important and useful discuss what went wrong. This is part of a coach's role. Remember though, this is rarely immediately after the event. Be gracious both in victory and defeat.

Refusal to compete

Special Olympics General Rules say all athletes and coaches must participate in a spirit of respect and sportsmanship. An athlete or team may not refuse to compete against another because of:

- Ethnic origin
- Gender
- Religion
- Political affiliation

Any athletes, teams or coaches who break this rule will be disqualified. They will not be eligible to receive any award.



Attire

As a sports coach, you should wear suitable clothing. This is clothing which is in line with the accepted norm or rules of your sport. At minimum, you should wear suitable clothes and shoes for your sport. For example:

- Golf – golf shoes, slacks, collared shirt.
- Basketball – Sports shoes and t-shirt with shorts/trousers.
- Swimming –shorts, collared polo shirt and pool deck shoes.

Coaches who are not suitably dressed may be refused access to certain areas in the competition venue.

Interpreting competition results

Only one athlete or team can win a competition. It is part of the beauty and the challenge of sport. How you react to the results of your athletes' competitions has a major impact on how they will react.

Coaches who emphasise winning and medals above all else will find that athletes who fail to win or medal may view themselves as failures. In a world where only one person can win, this can mean sport seems to have a lot of failures.

Of course, this could not be farther from the truth. Every athlete who trains hard and is committed to their sport experiences some kind of victory each time they compete. This might be:

- The achievement of a personal best performance
- An MVP (Most Valuable Player) or player of the match award
- Reaching a goal of completing 3 technically correct and legal jumps in Long Jump
- Keeping a clean sheet as a goal keeper

With good coaching and hard work, athletes will improve throughout the season. Coaches should watch for and record these improvements. Coaches and athletes should recognise and celebrate improvements, new personal best performances and other achievements, throughout the season. Setting performance goals can help you to do this.



Setting goals for performance

It is important to work with your athletes throughout the season to set some specific performance goals. No athlete can ever control whether or not they win a race (outcome goals) because they cannot control or predict what their opponents will do. This means that goals you and your athletes set for the season and for competitions should ALWAYS relate to things your athlete can control (process goals). Some examples are:

Athletics	Execute a clean baton transfer to my teammate in the relay
Basketball	70% of my passes will be successfully delivered to a teammate
Bocce	100% of pallina deliveries are legal
Gymnastics	Execute the correct sequence of moves in my floor routine
Football	Play in a higher division due to better fitness/endurance and improved kicking skills.

Consider setting goals around fitness and wellness. For example:

- Drink 5 bottles of water a day.
 - Coaches should arrange to have water available for athletes or remind athletes to bring water bottles to practice and competition.
- If athlete drinks sugar-sweetened beverage, replace sugar-sweetened beverages with water or low-fat milk, at least X times per day.
- Eat 5 total fruits and vegetables per day.
- Completing a home training session, set by their coach, twice a week. Consider using the [Fit Five Guide](#).
- Practice sun safety when training or competing in the sun – wear sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses, or seek shade, when possible.
 - Have sunscreen available for athletes to use.
 - Use the Choose to Change Cards for friendly reminders. Cards are available here: http://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Catalog_of_Health_Promotion.aspx

Work with your athletes to track progress on their goal throughout the season. Celebrate improvements along the way. Show your athlete how much they have improved throughout the season. This can help them to feel successful no matter what the outcome of the competition.