



## **Assessing Players, Forming Unified Sports Teams and Determining the Best Unified Sports Model**

### **Introduction**

It is important to find out **where athletes and partners fit** in a Special Olympics Unified Sports® program and which model is the most appropriate. Before any player is placed on a Unified Sports team, it is critical to utilize a procedure for screening, conducting basic skills testing and evaluating game play for all players. Obtaining these results ensures that athletes and partners are appropriate and reasonably well matched for the particular Unified Sports program. In addition, the coach can make preliminary decisions as to the role each player can perform.

Some Programs may require that the following assessment tests and player evaluations be made **mandatory** for all prospective and current Unified Sports team players. However, if the Program decides to utilize the options of Unified Sports Player Development or Unified Sports Recreation, a more informal assessment may be done.

### **Assessing Players – Two Components**

Player assessment is made up of two components: **objective** sports-specific skills assessment tests and a **subjective** game-play assessment.

While it might be said that it is performance in a game that is the only meaningful assessment criteria, use of additional objective skills tests help improve the process in a number of ways:

- a) Objective tests are useful to verify subjective assessments.
- b) Objective tests provide a measurable indicator for Special Olympics athletes who wish to move from traditional Special Olympics to Unified Sports.
- c) Objective tests also serve to provide data for pre-classifying teams for Unified Sports competitions.

### **Recommended Testing Procedure**

**Step 1:** *Form an Assessment Team* which includes individuals who are experienced in or with Special Olympics and/or individuals who are specialists in the sport of basketball.

**Step 2:** *Put all participants through the Skills Assessment Tests (SATs).* These tests can be found on the Special Olympics website ([www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)) under Sport Rules and *the name of the sport* in the section for the Sports Skills Assessment Tests. Carefully read and consistently follow the instructions for administering the SATs. Demonstrate how to perform the test, and allow everyone a practice opportunity before administering it. Instruct them to perform each test to the best of their abilities so the most accurate measurements can be gained. Allow a re-start if the athlete or partner is confused.

Observe everyone as he/she goes through the SATs so that you can also determine his/her knowledge of the game, his/her sport-specific skills, and how he/she responds to coaching. Following completion of the tests, indicate each participant's score on the score sheet.

**Step 3:** *Create composite scores of SATs and rank athletes and partners separately*

After all of the athletes and partners have completed the SATs, add their SATs scores to obtain a total score for each individual. On a flip chart or large sheet of paper, write the names of all of the Special Olympics athletes and their corresponding individual composite skills scores on the top half. On the bottom half, write the names of all of the partners and their corresponding individual composite skills scores.

Rank the scores in the group of Special Olympics athletes, from highest to lowest, by placing the appropriate rank order number next to the individual. For example, athlete # 1 has a score of 60, athlete # 2 has a score of 56, athlete # 3 has a score of 48, etc. Do the same ranking procedure for the group of partners.

**Step 4: Form teams based on Sport-Specific Skills Assessment Test Scores.**

Create evenly balanced *preliminary teams* by ranking each athlete and partner based on their skill and ability. Start with the best players (athletes and partners) and systematically position players from there. The Special Olympics athlete with the highest total score is placed on Team # 1, the athlete with the second highest score is placed on Team # 2 and so on. Use the exact same approach when ranking the partners, except start with the team that was last in the athlete round first, and go in reverse order. The sample chart below shows to placement procedure to follow when creating balanced, mixed ability teams. You can use this system for any number of teams.

	<u>Team 1</u>	<u>Team 2</u>	<u>Team 3</u>	<u>Team 4</u>
<i>Athletes:</i>		<i>a</i>		
1 (highest score)		2	3	4
8		7	6	5
9		10	11	12
16		15	14	13
17		18	19	20
24		23	22	21
<i>Partners:</i>				
4	3	2	1 (highest score)	
5	6	7	8	
12	11	10	9	
13	14	15	16	

**Step 5: Play 10-15 minute assessment games.**

Use the **Unified Sports Game-Play Evaluation Checklist**, and make notes on each player. Pay particular attention to athletes who have scored extremely low on the skills tests (more than 25% below the average partner score) and partners who scored extremely high (more than 25% above the average athlete score). How will those players play in a competitive environment?

**Step 6: Meet with the Assessment Team to discuss players' appropriateness for this group.**

- (1) Make a preliminary decision about appropriate versus inappropriate athletes and partners.
- (2) Based upon observations and in the game skills and tactics assessments of players, move athletes and or partners to teams, if needed, to create balance. When creating balanced teams, make sure the necessary roles are represented on each team.

**Step 7: Determine the most appropriate Unified Sports model for the team.**

- (1) The Unified Sports competitive model requires that teammates be of similar age and ability. Unified Sports Player Development model is comprised of players with higher ability who will serve as mentors to teammates of lower ability levels. Rules modifications will be employed.
- (2) Inform all participants about the decision of the Assessment Team. Invite appropriate participants to the next practice. Discuss alternative participation options for participants who have been assessed as "inappropriate". Such options may include becoming a coach or training partner. Options may also include joining a different Unified Sports team of more comparable skill, joining a traditional Special Olympics team or trying out for a different Unified sport.



## Game-Play Evaluation Checklist

This is helpful tool regarding the appropriateness of all team members for a particular Unified Sports team and/or a particular Unified Sports model.

- 1) Is there a player(s) on the team who, when competing to his/her highest ability level, would place other players on the team or on an opposing team at risk of injury?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Is the composition of the team such that **ALL** players without an intellectual disability are higher skilled than players with an intellectual disability?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) In order for a game to be played by the rules and at the same time allow for safe and meaningful involvement of all team members, must certain teammates **significantly lower** their level of play and not compete as hard as they are capable?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Are there players on the team who are so highly skilled that no other member of the team could defend him or her in a competitive situation? (Specifically, this person could score at any time or control the game whenever he or she chooses.)  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Are there players on the team who do not have the sport-specific skills or understanding of the rules necessary to compete according to the rules in a competitive situation? Do they need significant assistance from teammates? Must the rules be significantly modified above and beyond Special Olympics Sports Rules adaptations?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Are there players on the team who in a competitive situation rarely touch the ball or participate in competition because of their low ability level?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Are there players on the team who may not attend more than 50% of the practices during a season?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If the answer to any of the above questions is “**yes**”, the team is inappropriate for entry into official Special Olympics Unified Sports competition. It does not meet the Meaningful Involvement criteria for the Unified Sports competitive model. However, this team or the lower-ability players may be appropriate for the Unified Sports Player Development or Unified Sports Recreation options.