



# Special Olympics Unified Sports® *Principle of Meaningful Involvement*

The principle of **meaningful involvement** is an effort to optimize participation by all players (athletes – with intellectual disabilities (ID) and Unified partners – without ID) in Unified Sports competition. Fundamentally, the principle of meaningful involvement ensures that every player is given the opportunity to contribute to the success of their team through their unique skills and qualities. This means that every teammate will:

- ✓ Demonstrate sufficient sport-specific skills and game understanding
- ✓ Play a valued role on the team that emphasizes their personal talents
- ✓ Have the opportunity to play without a heightened risk of injury

## **INDICATORS OF MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT**

***Coaches are responsible for insuring meaningful involvement of all players in the game.***

- Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- Teammates participate according to the rules of competition.
- All players have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.
- Teammates may adjust their skills accordingly to those of other players, resulting in a competitive style of play for the entire team.



## **INDICATORS OF PLAYER DOMINANCE**

***Player dominance is a consistent pattern of behavior by a teammate that restricts meaningful involvement for other players.***

- Display of superior sports skills without involving teammates in the flow of the game.
- Limiting potential scoring opportunities as a result of designed or called plays to only higher ability teammates.
- Player controls most aspects of the game, especially during the most critical time of the game (i.e. last few minutes of competition).
- Teammates do not practice together on a regular basis with higher skilled players only needing to show up for competition.
- Coach fails to engage tactics and strategies to eliminate player dominance or develop methods for meaningful involvement.

## **IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT THE PRINCIPLE OF MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT**

- It is not the responsibility of the officials on the field/court to monitor and determine meaningful involvement – it's the responsibility of the coach to do so.
- Player dominance and meaningful involvement may include or exclude both Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners.
- It is NOT player dominance when both athletes and partners score and defend – all players should have the opportunity to display their individual skills

For more information on the Principle of Meaningful Involvement take the free online course, *Coaching Unified Sports*, available through NFHS Learn at <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/coaching-unified-sports>