



## Unified Sports

Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

Competition is the final step. The most crucial part of Unified Sports is the journey of students with and without disabilities working together to build a team and respect for each other.

### **The Foundation of Unified Sports: The Principle of Meaningful Involvement**

This is the most important concept of Unified Sports that the coach and all players must understand and implement. Fundamentally, the principle of meaningful involvement ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and qualities.

#### **Indicators of Meaningful Involvement:**

- Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- Teammates participate according to the rules of the competition.
- Teammates have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.

#### **Meaningful involvement is not achieved when certain team members:**

- Display superior sports skills without involving their teammates.
- Serve predominantly as on-field coaches rather than teammates or mentors, except on more developmental teams
- Control most aspects of the game, especially during the most critical periods.
- Do not train or practice regularly and only show up on the day of competition.

#### **Unified Sport Core Principles:**

- a) Unified Sports looks to develop **meaningful competition** where coaches and students work together to create a balanced competitive environment which ensures that each player has the opportunity to contribute to their team's success and has equal opportunity to be involved.
- b) Teams should be composed of players who are of similar age and ability levels. **Coaches are responsible for their players' understanding of meaningful involvement, education, and training of ALL players in the game.** This is not the responsibility of the officials.
- c) Unified Partners are there to compete alongside SO Athletes. Unified Partners are **intended to score points, impact the game in a meaningful way** and compete in this category. This includes passing, shooting/scoring and defence.
- d) **Unified Partners are not permitted to take over games but are expected to contribute.**

#### **Special Olympics Ontario**

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Web [www1.specialolympicsontario.com/schools](http://www1.specialolympicsontario.com/schools)

Facebook/Instagram/X @SOOSchoolChamps

Registered Charitable Number - 11906 8435 RR0001

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## To Follow

1. Complete the Special Olympics Unified Coaching course and Conduct a Unified Sport training session for all coaches before they become involved with SOO
2. Ensure ALL participants fully understand the philosophy & principles of Unified Sports notably, player dominance and meaningful involvement.
3. Conduct an orientation for all team members before they become involved with the team.
4. Review Unified Sport rules, the principle of meaningful involvement, and our coaching resources.
5. Prior to each competition discuss your team's ability level and your coaching philosophies with the opposing coach.

## To Participate

- 1) SOO defines dominance as:
  - a) An individual(s) controlling the game (dominating possession of the ball), particularly during critical moments, such as scoring plays in the last few minutes of competition, diminishing their teammates' role and involvement in the game.
  - b) A player(s) consistently has very limited opportunities to handle, pass, shoot, and dribble the ball while their is team control.
  - c) Teams changing the way they play; in particular how individual players are engaged, particularly if players' roles change in important games.
  - d) Clear division among team members during warm up, break times, and cheering after scoring. Clear separation between partners and athletes.
  - e) Coaches' substitution policy that involves certain players remaining on the playing surface while others are mostly on the bench.
- 2) Each player on the team should have a role
- 3) SOO recommends equal playing time for all players

## To Report

In the event of a concern arising from player dominance/meaningful involvement please do the following:

- 1) Ensure you have completed step 4 in the "to follow" section)
- 2) Address your concerns politely with the opposing coach during a stoppage in play (half-time, timeout, end of game)
- 3) If no changes are observed, please bring your concerns to the Special Olympics Ontario Staff member at the event. If none are present, please inform the lead host teacher and contact your local SOO representative immediately
  - Any concerns about teams/players violating meaningful involvement must be brought to the attention of someone present at the event & SOO within 24 hours for the complaint to be considered.

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## To Action

1. Schools observed violating the principle of meaningful involvement will be given a warning and educated on the key foundations of Unified Sport.
2. If no change occurs, Special Olympics Ontario reserves the right to remove or disqualify any player we deem has violated the principle of meaningful involvement in any given game or season.
3. Schools/teams who have two incidences of violating the principle of meaningful involvement in one school year will be stripped of Unified Champion School status and eligibility for School Championships that given year.

## Provincial School Championships

The following protocol has been established to assess all Unified Sports teams and ensure the Principle of Meaningful Involvement is being followed. The process focuses on educating and communicating with coaches and schools, as well as acting when Unified Sports rules and policies are not followed.

### **On-site unified sports competition protocol points of emphasis:**

- Player dominance and meaningful involvement violations may include partners athletes, teams and coaches.
- Sport officials on the field of play do not monitor or determine meaningful involvement. However, they may be asked for input. Unified Sports Observers (USOs) who will be present at each venue are responsible for monitoring Unified Play.

**Unified Sports Evaluation Committee (USEC)** will be composed of Unified Sports observers and two SOO staff members. The members of this committee are qualified individuals knowledgeable in Unified Sports who help observe, guide, monitor, and enforce compliance.

- Each sport is assigned a USO. This member works with the SOO sport lead to oversee a process of observing all Unified Sports teams to ensure they are incorporating the principle of meaningful involvement.
- The Unified Sports observers apply sport-specific observation criteria to determine if a team is not following the Principle of Meaningful Involvement or if player dominance is occurring. The Unified Sports observers report observations to the SOO sport lead who is ultimately empowered to enforce the Principle of Meaningful Involvement
- Teams will be observed regarding Meaningful Involvement in all rounds of competition, including divisioning and medal rounds.

*SOO reserves the right to disqualify or remove any player or team that is observed violating our core principles. In all circumstances, schools will first be issued a warning and educated on the proper application of the principle. If SOO deems no change in the involvement of players further action will be taken.*

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