

# 2026 Unified Soccer World Cup: School Information & Application Guide

## Overview

In **July 2026**, France will host the **Special Olympics Unified Football World Cup** for the first time in **Paris**. This will be the **third edition** of the event and will run from **July 5–11, 2026**, across major venues in the heart of the city.

The World Cup will feature **24 teams** (12 women's teams and 12 men's teams) made up of:

- **Special Olympics athletes** (athletes with intellectual disabilities), and
- **Unified partners** (athletes without intellectual disabilities).

These teams will compete in a **7v7 Unified Football format** for the World Cup title.

Ontario has been granted **one spot to represent the Canadian women's team**, and your school(s) are eligible to apply.

## Eligibility Requirements

To be considered, all teams and participants must meet the following:

### ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY

- All athletes must be **between 16 and 23 years old** as of **July 5th, 2026**.
- All athletes and Unified partners must be **current or past participants** in the *Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools* (UCS) program.
- Because Canada is sending ONLY a **women's team, only female athletes are eligible**.
- Note: *Athletes who have participated in previous international events, e.g. 2025 Unified Basketball World Cup will NOT be considered for this event.*

### COMPETITION LEVEL

This event remains a **Special Olympics competition**. Teams will be divisioned based on ability, but the level of play will be **competitive**, similar to the Provincial School Championships.

#### Special Olympics Ontario

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*Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation for the benefit of persons with intellectual disabilities.*



## ROSTER REQUIREMENTS (TENTATIVE)

### EACH TEAM MUST INCLUDE:

- **12 Athletes Total**
  - 7 Special Olympics athletes (athletes with an intellectual disability)
  - 5 Unified partners (students without an intellectual disability)
- **3 Coaches**

## How to Apply

Schools may apply in one of the following three ways using the [Expression of Interest Form](#):

1. **Apply as a complete team**
  - The full roster and coaching staff are made up of **individuals from your school only**.
2. **Apply as a combined team**
  - Schools within **100 km** of each other may **partner to form one team and submit one joint application**.
3. **Apply as a partial team**
  - If your school has a coach and some eligible athletes but **not enough for a full roster**, you may still apply. SOO will review all partial applications and determine if local schools can be combined to make a full team.

**Deadline to submit interest: March 6th, 2026**

## Requirements to Submit an Expression of Interest

1. Each applying school or school group must have a designated **Head Coach / main point of contact** who will:
  - a) Communicate and coordinate with Special Olympics Ontario before and during the event
  - b) Recruit and build the full roster (12 athletes + 2 assistant coaches)
  - c) Communicate regularly with parents/guardians
  - d) Lead fundraising efforts using SOO-provided tools
  - e) Organize and run team practices
  - f) Help establish and maintain a strong **Unified team culture**
  - g) Attend and supervise the team at the World Cup in France (Paris)

### **Additional Requirements:**



1. Schools must be **active participants** in Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools programming.
2. **Fundraising Requirement:**  
All costs are covered once the team arrives in Paris (accommodation, food, transportation). Special Olympics Ontario will also pay for uniforms. However, **teams must fundraise for flights to Paris**, estimated at **approximately \$1,000 per person**.
3. Teams must be able to recruit **at least 10 players** (minimum 4 Unified partners and 6 Special Olympics athletes) plus **3 coaches**.

## Selection Process

After the March 6th deadline, a panel of three Special Olympics Ontario staff will review all applications. Selection will be based on:

- Commitment to the Unified movement (UCS engagement level, history of Unified programming)
- Ability to successfully fundraise
- Ability to field a complete and balanced team
- Previous major games experience **(such as School Champs)**
- Experience with Special Olympics and Unified Sports