

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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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