

Introduction

What are Unified Sports?

Unified Sports is meant to join people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team to train and compete. This program is dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences. Unified Sport looks to develop **Meaningful Competition**, where coaches work together to create a balanced competitive environment. **Coaches are responsible for ensuring meaningful involvement of all players in the game.**

Unified Sport is integrated into all our qualifying sports: Soccer, Basketball, Bocce, Floorball, Track & Field and at our School Championships.

Benefits of Unified Sport

- Helps remove barriers and improve accessibility.
- Allows for increased capacity and participation.
- Coach, volunteer development and leadership opportunities.
- Creates greater awareness for people with ID and better integration with their classmates.
- Enhance outreach and engagement with communities.
- Improved quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Develop higher-level sports skills and have new competition experience.
- Participation in their communities and exposure to choices outside Special Olympics.
- Experience meaningful inclusion as each athlete is ensured of playing a valued role on the team.
- Develop mutually rewarding relationships, are recognized as contributors, and are received with acceptance and respect.
- Develop physical, cognitive, and social skills, while enhancing confidence and self-esteem.

Additional Unified Sport Components

- Unified Sport Consists of two kinds of Athletes:
 - Special Olympics Athlete – an athlete with an intellectual disability.
 - Unified Sports Partner – an athlete without an intellectual disability.
- Forced line changes (substitutions are required to ensure equal play time for all).
- Unified Partners are **intended to score points, impact the game in a meaningful way** and compete. This includes passing, shooting/scoring and defence. Unified partners should be tasked with defending the opposing unified partner where possible. **Note: Unified athletes are not permitted to take over games but are expected to contribute to winning.**

Unified Soccer

- Each Unified Team will enter a roster with a mix of athletes with and without athletes with intellectual disabilities.
- Throughout the 20-minute game, teams are expected to change their person line every 2 minutes or as time allows.
- Divisioning, games, fouls and penalties, points of emphasis, and tournament format are all unchanged for Unified Soccer.
- The only difference between Unified and Traditional Soccer competition is mandated line changes and an extra player slot.
- Unified Partners and SO athletes are expected to contribute meaningfully to the game.

Team and Players

- Each Unified team will enter a roster of ten athletes: six Special Olympics Athletes and four Unified Partners (five starters and five substitutes).
- 5 5 soccer includes four field players plus one goalie. Each team must start the game with five players with **at least three SO athletes** or forfeit the game.

Unified Sports: School Championships

SOCCER

- If a team falls below five players and the minimum number of SO athletes once the game has started due to injury, the team will be permitted to continue with four players on the field. If a team falls below the minimum number of SO athletes due to ejection, the team will forfeit that game.

Divisioning

- All teams are divisioned to play teams of similar ability.
 - Coaches will fill out a team ranking assessment at registration and can use our [Skill Assessments](#) as a guide.
- Team rankings and selected classifications are used to establish division.
- Schools are asked to select the level of play of their team to indicate whether their unified partners are played in a more competitive role for their high skilled athletes or facilitatory role athletes learning the sport

The Game

- Games are played outdoors on a modified soccer field approximately (60' by 30').
- The game will be played for 20 minutes, with two 10-minute halves, or until one team scores 7 goals. A two-minute 'halftime' break will occur between halves.
- There will be a running clock applied for the full 20 minutes. The clock may stop at the referee's discretion (e.g. if the ball needs to be retrieved from another field.)
- **Note:** All other rules of the game will abide by those of traditional Special Olympics School Championship Soccer. This includes scoring, free kicks, penalty kicks, fouls, kick-ins, goal kicks, timeouts, etc.

RESOURCES

Principal of Meaningful Involvement: [SO Unified Sports Principle of Meaningful Involvement](#)

Unified Sports Coach Guidelines - [Unified Sports Coach Guidelines](#)

Unified Coaching Course - [Unified Coaching Course](#)

Please Note: All other rules of the game will abide by those of traditional Special Olympics School Championship Soccer. This includes out-of-bounds, fouls and penalties, free throws, timeouts, jump balls, etc.

Note: For qualification to Provincial School Champions, teams are competing against teams in their conference, which may extend beyond those they compete against at their qualifier. To learn more about the qualifying process, please visit our resources page: [School Programs Resources](#)