

## Volunteer Now to Learn Secrets of Motivation from Special Olympic Athletes

Our family attended the Illinois Special Olympics State meet a few weekends ago and I learned more about motivation and positive mental attitudes than I did in over five decades of racing. You'll arrive wanting to support their endeavors and leave wanting to adopt their unique approach to sport and life.

If you want to experience how motivated athletes are with the deck of physical athletic cards stacked against them, then attend a Special Olympics Championship. The athletes participate because they can, want to, and excel in multitude of different sports.



Ask any competitor, "Who won?"  
They'll respond, "We won."  
"Who had their best time?"  
"We did."  
"Who's going to win next time?"  
"We will."

Your rational mind's inclination is to correct them and tell them otherwise but you would be wrong.

Every athlete at any Special Olympics event not only think they won, they know they won.

And they're all right. They won qualifying to get there. Everyone wins in the experience because the Special Olympics organization, volunteers, and donors gave them the opportunity. Athletes arrived brave enough to run on the field, jump in the water, or balance on a beam. They competed with confidence, competence, and concentration to do their best among a few hundred of the best athletes in the state. They displayed class and sportsmanship beyond perceived normal comprehension of what is accepted and even encouraged on a professional big league field, court, or track where championships are broadcasted all over the globe.

The perfect sporting event occurred when the best, bravest and most positive attitude athletes at a Special Olympics Championship competed. Realize there are similarities between the Olympics and Special Olympics. Competitors arrive amped up, with extra equipment, and more coaches and team managers than weekend warriors. The differences are the Special Olympians leave behind their labeled handicaps of

predisposed limitations and other public prejudices to put forth their best effort on the line.

In the Olympics, athletes tend to bring their limitations to the forefront when not living up to their own hype.

One swimmer, 10 year-old Hayes, was disqualified in the 25 yard breaststroke event. She changed strokes after falling behind two 18 year-old competitors. Hayes was on the verge of crying because she thought her dad was angry with her for the DQ. She also didn't want to swim in her next race. I told her the most important thing was to participate and have fun. She smiled in relief and went on to her next race and tried her best to win.

These participants and coaches get to experience the same feelings as "normal" athletes who engage in sports through schools, clubs, and other athletic associations. This includes the discipline of learning new skills, training, teamwork, and the actual emotions of a competitively measured contest. We all learn that the most important measurements of the event are not the time or distances or heights achieved but the number of smiles displayed, pumped fists in the air, hugs awarded, and sighs of relief that the special athlete achieved something they were unsure of at the start of the event. All participants are winners for their involvement.

Volunteer at a local special recreation event. Donate time, money, and most of all the love of sport for all to enjoy.