Special Olympics

Short Track Speed Skating Coaching Guide 2021

Acknowledgements

Special Olympics wishes to thank the professionals, volunteers, coaches and athletes who helped in the production of the *Short Track Speed Skating Coaching Guide*. They have helped fulfil the mission of Special Olympics: to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for people eight years of age and older with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

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Special Olympics welcomes your ideas and comments for future revisions of this guide. We apologize if, for any reason, an acknowledgement has been inadvertently omitted.

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Welcome

Welcome to the Special Olympics Short Track Speed Skating Coaching Guide 2021

This guide will aim to provide coaches with valuable information to improve their knowledge and skills, or to get them started as coaches within Special Olympics (SO) Short Track Speed Skating. Throughout this guide you will find a variety of other information relating to coaching the sport, such as safety, preparation and sportsmanship.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Special Olympics Short Track Speed Skating Sport Rules document and the Special Olympics Sports Rules Article 1.

Keep in mind, that this guide is just one resource which may be useful to you as you progress through your career as a coach. As you develop your own style of coaching, you will find other books, websites, magazines and coaches, which will help to shape your approach to coaching. Always be curious! Always be open to new ideas! Always keep your athletes at the heart of your coaching!

What is Short Track Speed Skating

Speed Skating today is a lifetime fitness sport for individuals of all ages. Speed Skating provides both cardiovascular and aerobic benefits as well as improving muscle strength, balance, and coordination. Today, the sport can be enjoyed year round with indoor skating facilities found throughout the world. As a recreational and competition sport, Ice Speed Skating offers the potential for social integration for both training and competition experiences within multi-level Special Olympics competition experiences as well as training and competition experiences through this sport's National Governing Body.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

The range of events is intended to offer competition opportunities for athletes of all abilities. Programs may determine the events offered and, if required, guidelines for the management of those events.

Coaches are responsible for providing training and event selection appropriate to each athlete's skill and interest.

The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics practices and local competitions.

For use on 111M oval:

- 25 Meter Straightaway
- 55 Meter Half Lap Race
- 111 Meter Race
- 222 Meter Race
- 333 Meter Race
- 500 Meter Race
- 777 Meter Race
- 1000 Meter Race
- 1500 Meter Race
- 1500 Meter Relay
- 3000 Meter Relay
- 3000 Meter Unified Sports® relay

The following is a list of categories for Special Olympics World Games competition. If an Athlete is pre-registered for a category that they do not fit the requirements, the TD reserves the right to move them to a skill appropriate category for the remainder of the competition.

For use on 111M oval:

- Category I: Skaters with an average lap time of 40 to 54 seconds: 111 M, 222 M, 333 M
- Category II: Skaters with an average lap time of 30 to 39 seconds: 222 M, 333 M, 500 M
- Category III: Skaters with an average lap time of 25 to 29 seconds: 333 M, 500 M, 777 M
- Category IV: Skaters with an average lap time of 19 to 24 seconds: 500 M, 777 M, 1000 M
- Category V: Skaters with and average lap time of 15 seconds or faster (and they prefer sprint distances): 500 M, 777 M, 1000 M
- Category VI: Skaters with and average lap time of 15 seconds or faster (and they prefer longer distances): 777 M, 1000 M, 1500 M
- Category VII: Skaters with an average lap time of 25 to 39 seconds would be appropriate for a 1500 M Team Relay
- Category VIII: Skaters with an average lap time of 24 seconds or faster would be appropriate for a: 3000 M Team Relay

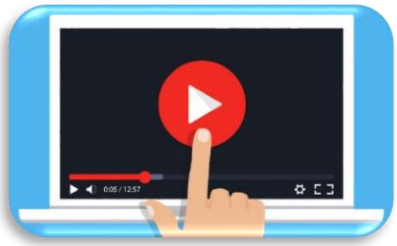
All events will be conducted in 'short track' format.

Equipment and Attire

Helmets

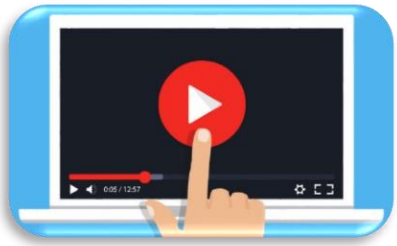
Neck Protection

Skin suit



Gloves

Elbow guards



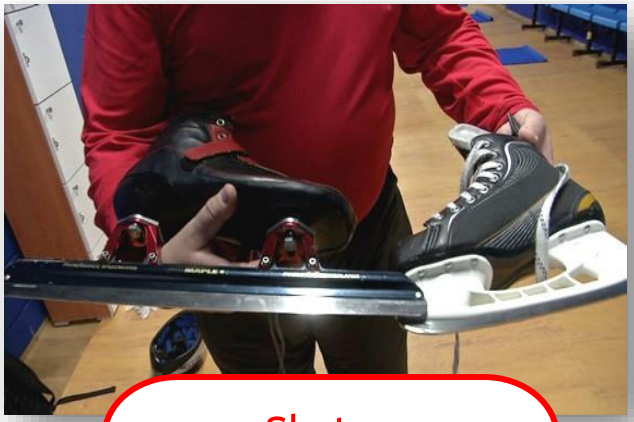
Skates

Shin Guards (must be cut proof- Hard plastic or Kevlar fabric)

Knee Protection – Must be cut proof and should have some padding

Cut proof under garments are available to wear under skin suits and some skin suits have the cut proof fabric (Kevlar) built in). Currently these are suggested but not required for competition.

Gloves



Skates

Neck Protection

Basic Short Track Speed Skating Skills

Balance on Ice Skates for Beginners

Before taking the ice, make sure athletes have well-fitting tightly laced skates.

- Do not use figure skates if possible, as the athletes will learn to push off the toe picks instead skating.
  - Figure Skates are not allowed in competition with toe picks. If there are no other skate options available, the toe picks must be ground smooth.
- Hockey skates have short blades with a lot of rock and may be difficult to stand on due to the rock.

Speed skates are the best to learn on, but may be the most difficult to obtain.

Have the athletes stand on the skates off ice and test all the drills before trying them on the ice. For those athletes with fear issues, an option (to keep them from clinging onto the walls) is to let them push chairs out onto the ice. Let them play and explore getting acclimated to the ice before starting the drills the first time.

Stand unassisted for 5 seconds

- Walk onto ice (support may be required)
- Position shoulders directly over the hips
- Keep feet parallel, maintaining center of balance directly over center of skate
- Keep head up and eyes forward
- Keep knees slightly bent and relaxed

Coaching Tip

Allow to hold on to wall at first, and then move away from wall so they cannot reach the wall. As coach, you may elect to use a chair on the ice to get them away from the wall.

Fall and stand up unassisted

Teach this skill off ice before they get on the ice the first time. Then repeat after they have their skates on and they are on the ice.

- Bend knees in a squatting position, lowering hips to ice.
- Continue squatting until sitting on the ice, skates in front.
- Roll onto one hip. Bend knees and pull feet behind and swivel around to hands and knees with hands flat on ice.
- Bring one knee up toward chest, firmly setting blade flat on the ice.
- Raise body up high enough to bring the other skate next to the first skate.
- Keep body in crouch position, maintaining balance.
- Rise up slowly, straightening the knees and keeping balance over the skate.
- Assume the standing position.

Coaching Tip

Demonstrate and practice this off the ice before first time on ice.

Practice Drill: Fall down/get up race

Have skaters line up with 2 body lengths between the skaters. Instruct that you will blow the whistle once and everyone should sit down as fast as they can on the ice. Then on 2 whistle blasts everyone races to get up to standing position. They are not permitted to use a wall, chair or another skater to pull themselves up.

Base position, standing still and maintain, unassisted

- In standing position on the ice.
- Ankles straight, skates shoulder width apart
- Blades parallel and pointing straight ahead
- Knees over toes
- Legs bent near 90 degrees
- Elbows on knees with hands in front together in a prayer type manner.
- Keep the back relaxed and angled forward at hip to maintain balance.

Coaching Tip

Tell athletes to pretend they are sitting on an invisible chair.

March forward 10 steps assisted

- Maintain center of balance directly over skates.
- Stand with skates in a parallel position.
- March in standing position; march forward 10 small steps.
- Let the skate down with the blade flat on the ice.
- March forward with the other skate in the same manner.
- Repeat sequence several times until a smooth marching motion is achieved.

Coaching Tip

Reinforce that they are not walking on the skates but “marching”. No pushing off the toes.

Moving on Skates

"Fishies" forward (3 repetitions):

- From a standing position with knees slightly bent.
- Position feet parallel to each other.
- Point toes outward and heels together, with blades flat on the ice.
- Push out to the side and let skates push apart.
- Point toes inward and heels out, with blade flat on the ice and pull toes together.
- Repeat this sequence several times.

Coaching Tip:

Reinforce leaning forward and pointing the toes in before legs are extended beyond shoulder width.

Backward "fishies" supported:

- Standing at the boards, face the boards with hands on the top of the rail for support.
- Position blades flat on ice with skates parallel and touching each other.
- Push out to the side and move weight backwards with toes pointing in (heels out).
- When skates are at shoulder width, point heels in and toes out and pull heels together
- When heels come together, reverse direction and go forward with toes out then toes in and together.

Coaching Tip

Let the athlete look down at their feet at first and see that they are making curves on the ice that look like "C's". They Should Go Backward And Then Forward (Back To The Wall).

Two-foot glide forward for distance of at least length of body:

- From a standing position, skate forward taking marching steps.
- Stop marching when forward motion has been achieved with feet upright and parallel a little less than shoulder width apart.
- Glide forward on both feet.
- Knees bent slightly, and arms extended to the side and slightly forward.
- Glide for length of body.

Practice Drill: Fishy Blocks

- Place 3-5 blocks in a straight line, 2 feet apart on the ice.
- Skaters start at the first block and move the skates out to the side when they reach the block.
- Skaters bring the skates together to touch each other between the blocks.
- Remind them the skates should never loose contact with the ice throughout this drill.
- As they progress in ability, have them move into base position while doing the drill.
- As they get better, add putting a block on top of their helmets for balance.

Skating and Balance

Alternate balancing on each blade for 5 seconds each.

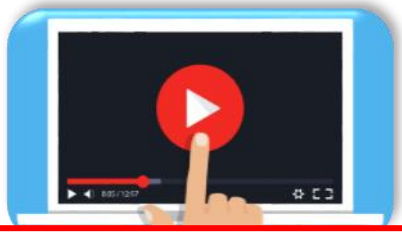
- Stand with both feet parallel on the ice, skates close together. Hold arms to sides for balance.
- Shift weight to standing leg. Remove the weight from the foot to be picked up.
- Pick up foot so that skate is mid-calf height and hold.
- Return skate to ice.
- Shift weight to other leg and repeat by picking up the other skate and holding it.

Nose, Knees, Toes alignment alternating over leg while in base position

- Base position with skates parallel and a slightly outside shoulder width
- Move body over knee of one leg. Line up the nose over the knee and the knee over the toes of that same foot.
- Keep hips and shoulders square and level to the ice.
- Hold and note alignment
- Move to the other leg and repeat alignment.

Coaching Tip

Make sure the athlete is not twisting their body and the hip is over the leg as well. Bellybutton on thigh may help with alignment.



Nose, Knees, Toes and Alignment

Five forward fishies covering at least 10 feet:

- From standing position.
- Position feet parallel to each other.
- Bend knees to create more pressure and more glide.
- Lean forward and push toes out in a “V”.
- Just before feet reach shoulder width, change direction of toes to pointing in.
- Turn toes in toward each other pulling feet together, knees rising slightly.
- Pull feet together and point toes out.
- Repeat sequence for at least 10 feet.

Half Fishies

Full Fishies

Forward skating across the rink:

- Assume a standing position.
- Begin marching with both knees bent.
- Extend arms to the side and slightly forward.
- Balance weight on both skates evenly.
- Continue across rink.

Coaching Tip

Instruct skaters to shift weight from one skate to the other.

Forward gliding in base position covering at least length of body:

- Assume base position.
- Begin skating forward and establish forward momentum.
- Glide on two feet, head up and facing forward.
- Gliding forward, bend knees to lower the hips until hips are slightly higher than knees.

Practice Drills: Fishy Block Relay

- Have half of the skaters at each end of the blocks.
- First skater places block on top of helmet and does fishies through blocks till they reach the other end / skater.
- They give the block to the other skater who in turn places the block on top of their helmet and skates fishies back through the blocks to the other side, where they exchange blocks with next skater.
- If someone drops a block they must stop and pick it up and replace it on their helmet.
- For more advanced skaters, if they drop the block they have to return to their start and begin again.
- As skill levels increase two teams can compete against each other with 2 lines of blocks.

Fishy team races:

- Line beginner skaters up on the start line and partner each skater with a more experienced skater standing behind them.
- Instruct front line skaters to get into base position and hold it, while the skaters behind them will place their hands on the sides of the other skaters hips and at the starting command, the skater in the back will push the skater in front (in base position and not moving their skates at all) all the way around the track for 1 lap.
- At the conclusion of the lap, the 2 skaters will trade places and the new skater will become the skater pushing and the former pushing skater will become the base position skater in front.
- Reinforce that the hands should not push down on the skater in front of them; hands go on the sides of the hips and push forward, not down.
- If one pushes down, the skater in front could fall.

Weight Transfer During the Push

Balance on one blade with non-weight bearing leg extended to the side

- Base position
- Move all weight centering over the support leg
- Check alignment (nose, knees, and toes)
- Extend non-support leg straight to the side
- After reaching the position and holding it, switch weight over the other leg and repeat

Coaching tip

Demonstrate and have athlete shadow movements and hold position. Correct and give feedback.

Balance on one blade with non-weight bearing leg extended to the side hovering above the ice by no more than one inch

- Base position with skates parallel
- Move all weight centering over the support leg
- Check alignment (nose, knees, and toes)
- Extend non-support leg straight to the side
- After reaching the position hold it
- Pick up extended leg slightly, no more than an inch from the ice
- Hold in position, then return skate to the ice
- Move weight over to the extended leg and repeat drill on the other leg

Coaching Tip

Make sure the athlete is not twisting their body and the hip is over the leg as well. Bellybutton on thigh may help with alignment. If their weight is not totally committed to the support leg they will not be able to pick up the extended leg.

Balance on one blade with non-weight bearing leg extended to the side touching the ice while gliding forward

- Skate forward to gather forward momentum
- Assume base position
- Move all weight centering over the support leg
- Check alignment (nose, knees, toes)
- Extend non-support leg straight to the side and push into the ice
- After reaching the position and holding it, switch weight over the other leg and repeat

Coaching Tip

Demonstrate and have athlete shadow movements and hold position. Correct and give feedback.

Balance on one blade with non-weight bearing leg extended to the side hovering above the ice by no more than one inch while gliding forward

- Skate forward to gather forward momentum
- Base position with skates parallel
- Move all weight centering over the support leg
- Check alignment (nose, knees, and toes)
- Extend non-support leg straight to the side and push into the ice
- Pick up extended leg slightly, no more than an inch from the ice ◆ Hold in position
- Return skate to the ice and pull skate toward other skate under center of gravity
- Touch skates together and transfer weight to the other leg (formerly extended is now the support leg)
- Repeat drill on the other leg

Coaching Tip

Do not allow skater to lift extend leg too high. This will force them to compensate by changing their position to counterbalance.

Straightaway Push

- All weight centered over the glide leg
- The push leg extends straight out to the side
- Skates still pointed in the same direction, pushing down into the ice and out to the side
- At finish of the push (extension) lift the skate slightly off the ice and move it to the back and around and forward (this is the recovery phase of the stroke)
- Lift the toes of the recovery leg skate and bring it forward to meet the skate of the glide leg.

Balance on one blade with non-weight bearing leg extended to the side

- Base position
- Move all weight centering over the support leg
- Check alignment (nose, knees, and toes)
- Extend non-support leg straight to the side
- After reaching the position and holding it, switch weight over the other leg and repeat

Coaching Tip

Demonstrate and have athlete shadow movements and hold position. Correct and give feedback.

Push – Recovery Leg

Balance on one blade with non-weight bearing leg extended to the side

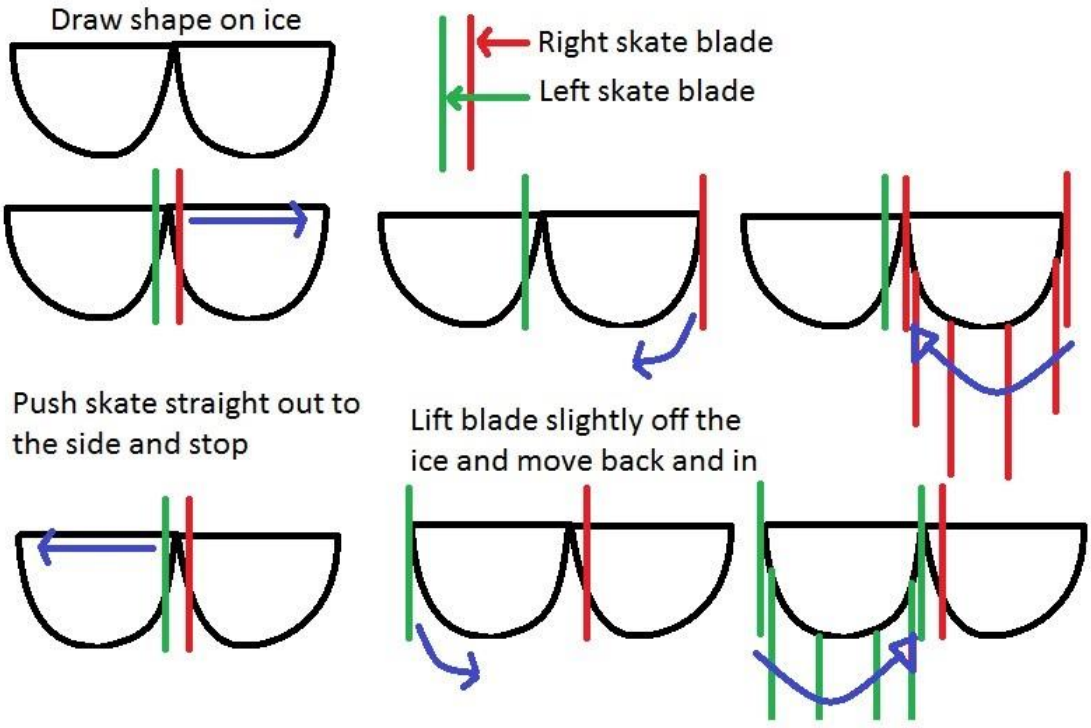
- Glide leg in base position
- Lift skate on extended leg slightly off the ice
- Check alignment (nose, knees, and toes) of glide leg
- Swing non-support leg in an arc behind the skater toward the glide leg
- Hold the resting leg behind the glide foot in preparation to transfer weight and push off the glide foot

Coaching Tip

Demonstrate and have athlete shadow movements and hold position. Correct and give feedback.

Practice Drill

Take skaters to the wall where they can hold on. Have them face the wall. With a marker, or etch with your blade the shape of a "B" with the straight back of the "B" parallel with the wall. Have skaters place their blades in the middle of the shape.



Skating the B

Snow Plow Stop

Balance on one blade with non-weight bearing leg extended to the side

- Base position
- Move all weight centering over the support leg
- Check alignment (nose, knees, and toes)
- Extend non-support leg straight to the side
- After reaching the position and holding it, switch weight over the other leg and repeat

Coaching Tip

Demonstrate and have athlete shadow movements and hold position. Correct and give feedback.

Corners – Base Position

1. Glide around a circle with the weight on the outside edges of the left skate and the inside edge of the right skate.
2. Glide around a circle with the left hip pressed to the inside of the circle.
3. Glide around a circle with shoulders square to the hips.

After gaining some momentum:

- Base position
- Move all weight over the outside of the left leg
- Both skates should be angled so that they are gliding on the Left edge of the blade. Not the flats of the blades
- Left hip should be to the left of the left skate, not over it

Coaching Tip

Getting on the left outside edge is critical for corners. It takes a lot of skill and trust. You can use a five gallon bucket, turned upside down to help stabilize the skater while they practice getting on their outside edges.

Practice Drills

"Hula" Glide: Bring the skaters to the circle in the center of the ice. Have everyone place their left skate on the line around the circle and then push and glide, moving the left hip into the circle and keeping the skate outside the circle. Then move both hands to the right, as if to dance a hula dance to keep the shoulders square.

Base Position Bucket Drill: Using a 5 gallon bucket, have the skater bend down in base position and get on the left edges of both skates while leaning in the direction of the bucket. They place their left hands on the bucket for support and skate around the circle feeling how to get low and on the outside left edge of their left skate.

Corners – Push to Side

1. Push with the right skate straight out to the side
2. Glide on the left outside edge of the left skate
3. Keep left hip on the side of the left skate
4. Shoulders kept square to the hips, not twisted

Base position, left leg glide, right leg push

- Base position glide on left skate
- Move all weight over outside of the support leg
- Right skate is pushed down, straight out across the ice
- Without picking either skate up, the right skate returns to base position and repeats motion
- The left leg continues to glide, the right leg pumps in and out, like a "fishie", but with only one leg.

Coaching Tip

Demonstrate and have athlete shadow movements and hold position. Correct and give feedback.

Practice Drill

Corners Bucket Drill: With a 5 gallon bucket turned upside down on the ice, have the skater place their left skate on the line around the circle. Place their left hand on the bucket with the bucket positioned just to the side of their hip. (Not in front of them.) Have them pump their right skate in and out to gain momentum.

Corners – Cross Over Walk

1. Walk to the side with the right skate lifting over the left along the wall
2. Walk 8 steps to the side, lifting right over left without the wall

Walk to the side, stepping the right skate over the left.

- Facing the wall, pick up the right foot and put it down on the other side of the left foot.
- Step to the left side with the left foot and repeat with the right foot.
- After confidence, understanding and balance are achieved, repeat drill without the wall
- The right skate should stay close to the other skate as it is lifted.

Coaching Tip

Remind skaters to keep their knees bent. The more the left knee is bent, the easier it will be to clear the left skate and blade.

Practice Drill

While facing the wall and holding on, have the athletes cross the right foot over the left and then, without lifting the left foot, move the right foot back over to the right.

Corners – Right Leg Cross Over

1. Cross the Right skate over the left, keeping the Right skate low to ice yet clear the blade of the left skate
2. Keep the lifted blade parallel to the surface of the ice
3. Keep both blades pointing forward

Lift right skate forward around the blade of the left skate.

- Place the left skate on the line around the circle in the middle of the ice.
- Have the skater get down in a deep base position with the left knee bent
- Place all weight over the left skate
- Lift the right skate off the ice (only a few inches off the ice)
- Move the right skate up and forward, around the front of the left skate
- Place the right skate down on the left side of the left foot
- Keep the right knee bent in a base position

Coaching Tip

Check the angle of the right skate. It should be straight ahead and pointed slightly to the left. It should not be angled out to the right. Also check to see if they are picking the skate up to high as well as point the toe up and the heel down. Practicing the

stepping over on the carpet in front of a mirror or reflective glass helps them get immediate feedback.

Practice Drill

Have the skaters place their left skates on the line around the circle in the middle of the ice. Place all weight on the left skate. With the right skate, push straight out to the side to propel the skate and then kick the right skate forward, ahead of the left skate. In order to get more distance forward, bend the left knee deeper and compress the left ankle.

Corner Step – Left Leg

1. Step to the left with the left skate after the crossover of the right skate
2. Keep the left leg under their center of gravity
3. Place the left blade on the outside edge
4. Push through to the right with the left skate, with all the weight on the right skate

Push to the right with the left skate

- Place all the weight on the right skate in the crossover position
- Push the left skate to the right till the left leg is straight out to the side in the crossed position.
- Right knee bent in base position with both skates parallel, pointing in the same direction
- Shoulders remain square to the hips
- Left hip is balanced to the left of the center of gravity
- The right skate is on the inside edge
- The left skate keeps the blade on the ice and does not allow the ankle to bend to the side and have the boot of the skate touch the ice

Step with left foot after completion of right crossover step.

- Place all the weight on the right skate, with the right skate crossed over the left.
- The left leg is fully extended to the right at the completion of the push.
- Pick up the left skate and move it to the left.
- Place the left skate under the skater's center of gravity, to the left of the right skate.
- Shift weight from the right skate to the left skate.

Coaching Tip

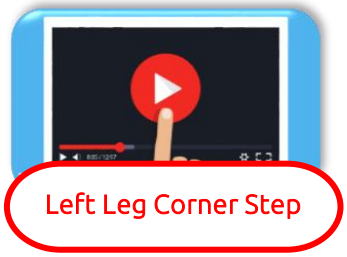
Make sure the athlete is not twisting their body and the hip is balanced to the left. Instruct skaters to keep the left skate ankle from bending to the side to prevent them from "booting out". This could cause them to fall if the blade of the left skate came off the ice during the push.

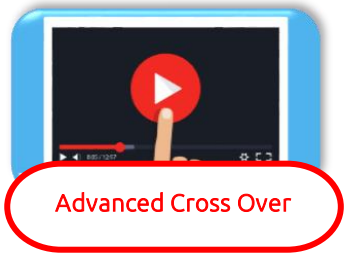
Practice Drills

Pumping with the Under Leg: Have skaters on the circle cross over and hold the position. With all weight on the right leg as the glide leg, move the left skate back and forth to the side to gain momentum.

Catch Yourself: Recovering from the crossover position is a recovery step to the left with the left foot. Have the skaters in the crossover position (weight on the right leg), pull the left leg from the push and place it down under their center of gravity. To emphasize that they are not to "over step", have them only take little steps to the side, leading with their left hip.

Alignment Check: Before moving the left leg from the extended position to the right, have the skaters check their position. Down in the base position with the right knee bent, check to see if the extended thigh of the left leg is touching the calf of the right leg. If not, have them glide in the crossed over position and move the left leg forward till it touches.


Left Leg Corner Step


Advanced Cross Over


Tips for Cross Overs

Starting Commands

The starting official, known as the "Starter" will have a starter's pistol and may orange sleeve on their arm. They stand on the outside of the ice rink next to the starting line.

The skaters will report to the starting area and collect about one meter from the starting line. The starter will then invite the skaters to the line with the command "Go to the start."

At that point, all the skaters glide up to the starting line and establish their pre-assigned starting order on the line. Each skater will be given an order (1-4 for example) to stand on the line. The number one skater will stand furthest to the left, away from the wall on the line.

After assuming their order on the line the skaters will place their feet in position for their start. Both blades must be flat on the ice. There are no 'Toe Starts' allowed. No blade may cross or touch the line until the starting pistol is fired.

The starter will then give the command, "Ready". On ready, the skaters will assume the position that they will start from and not move for 1-2 seconds. The starter will hold the skaters till everyone stops moving and then fire the pistol, initiating the race.

If there is a false start, the starter will fire two quick shots. The skaters are to immediately return to the start and prepare for a restart. If there is another false start, the skater who commits the second false start will be disqualified in a competition.

Starting Position – Body on the Line

Following the command "Go to the Start":

- Glide up to the starting line without touching or crossing the starting line.
- Stand with hips square to the line.
- Place front skate just behind the line. The tip of the blade can be placed down to secure the skater grip to prevent movement or drifting.
- The rear skate should be placed at a 45degree angle somewhere between 18 inches to 2 feet behind and to the side of the front skate.
- The rear skate blade should be on its inside edge to bite into the ice to create a stable, nonmoving stance.
- Arms remain relaxed at the side and the skater stays standing, waiting for the next command.

Following the command "Ready":

- Sink down into a gradual base position stance without moving skates from their previous position.
- Make sure that 70% of the body weight is over the front leg.
- Arms move into ready position. Front arm is bent forward at the elbow, not the shoulder, in the direction of the straightaway. The rear arm is relaxed and extended to the rear.

Coaching Tip

Make sure the athlete is not twisting their body. To start with the chest and hips not facing the start line will force them to twist to straighten up at the start. Try not to put too much emphasis on making holes with their skates on the line. They only need to press into the ice with the toe of the skate, they don't need a hole.

Practice Drill

"Freeze play" – Call the skaters to the line. Give the command "Ready," and then hold them until one by one they are spotted moving. The winner is the last skater left on the line.

Starting – Foot Placement and Arm Swing

From the ready position:

- Pick up weighted front skate from the ice while snapping the rear arm forward and pushing off the rear skate
- Move body weight forward
- Place the front skate down at a 45 degree angle on the ice under the body weight, but in front of the starting line.
- Driving forward with the rear leg, leading with the knee, move the rear leg past the other leg.
    - Place the skate of the leg that was formerly the rear leg, down at an outward 45 degree angle
    - Arms should swing in quick, short side to side movements.
- Strides should be short and skates angled out.

Transition from starting to skating:

- After the first 5 strides off the line, the strokes should become longer and the angle of the blades should become more parallel.
- After the first 5 arm swings, the swing should transition from side to side to front to back.

Coaching Tip

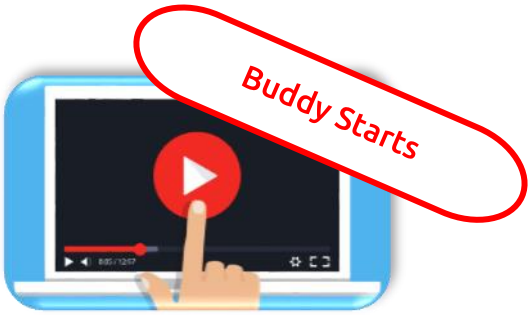
Practice these starts off- ice extensively before trying them on the ice.

Practice Drills

"Duck Walking": In tennis shoes, off the ice practice walking with toes pointed out at 45 degree angles. Make sure that there is not a wide distance between the two feet.

Chair Starts: With tennis shoes on a carpeted surface, practice pushing chairs with smooth feet across the carpet. Give the start commands and the skaters simulate the start as if they had skates on. Two hands placed on the seat of the chair, with the back of the chair facing forward.

Buddy Starts: On the ice, one partner gets down in base position and does not skate. The starting partner stands behind the skater in base position and places their hands on the outside of each hip and stabilizes their feet in the ready stance. On "Go" the starting skater pushes the skater in base position down the straight away. This drill is best when it is performed from one end of the ice rink so that the skaters get a longer distance to practice the start.



Modifications and Adaptations

The focus of the Short Track Speed Skating Coaching Guide is to assist coaches in instructing all athletes to function at their maximum performance level. Realistic goals and objectives should be developed that present a challenge but do not force athletes into experiences loaded with failure. To provide positive experiences means that many athletes will require instructional activities that are adapted to their particular needs. Some examples of activity adaptations include:

Modifications of Activities

Special Olympics athletes are often denied the chance to learn new skills or activities because they are not physically able to perform the skills exactly according to the direction of the instructor or the instructional guide. The instructor may modify the skills involved in an activity so all athletes are able to participate.

Accommodating the Athletes

In competition, it is important that rules not be changed to suit several athletes' special needs. However, there are other ways to accommodate athletes' special needs. For example, the sound of the coach's voice can be used to assist visually impaired athletes.

Encouraging Activity

Teachers can structure lessons so that athletes respond to challenging questions. Such an approach permits athletes with various levels of ability to respond in ways that allow for success. Obviously, variations in response to these questions would be apparent from athlete to athlete depending on the level of ability and severity of impairment.

Modifying Your Communication Method

Athletes sometimes require communications systems that are suited to their needs. For example, verbally explaining a task may not match up well with some athletes' information processing systems. Information that is more specific might be provided in other ways. For example, the instructor could simply demonstrate the sport skill. Some athletes may need not only to hear or see a skill but also to read a description of the skill. This need can be met for poor or non-readers through the use of a poster board to which stick figures are attached to show the task sequence for a skill.

Modifying Equipment

Successful participation in Special Olympics may sometimes require equipment that has been modified to suit the athlete's particular needs. Fortunately, special equipment may be available.

Adaptations

More specific adaptations are listed below.

Orthopaedic Impairments

- Give physical support/assistance
- Use ankle stabilizer
- Use Skate Aid

Visual Impairments

- Use guide markers around rink.
- Use markers to show which direction to skate.
- Attach a bell system to entrance and exit from ice surface area.
- Skate with partner.
- Use a Skate Aid.
- Assist blind skater in determining skating area size.
- Instructor may let the skaters' hands "feel" a swizzle, snow plow stop, one-foot glide, etc.

Auditory Impairments

- Teacher learns and uses sign language.
- When available and possible an interpreter should always be provided for the athlete.
- Universal visual ques should be developed for all auditory signs i.e. starting gun
- Use visual cues for commands. For a start command, use a flag combined with the raising and dropping of the arm holding the flag to indicate "Go".
- Get the attention of all the skaters to return to the center ice by Raising your arm. Teach all the skaters on the ice that once they see the coach raise their arm to indicate everyone stop and come to center ice, they too should raise their arm to help communicate that command to everyone on the ice. Including the hearing impaired skater.

Fitness

Fit 5 + Other Special Olympics Resources

Special Olympics provides a range of fantastic fitness resources that coaches and athletes can use to educate themselves on best practice around physical activity, nutrition and hydration.

There are many health-related and performance-related benefits of fitness for Special Olympics athletes.

Benefits of Fitness for Athletes

- Enhanced sport performance through improved
  - Endurance/stamina.
  - Speed and agility.
  - Strength and power.
  - Flexibility.
  - Healthy weight.
- Increased energy level, improved focus, and better recovery after practices & games.
- Reduced risk for sport-related injuries.
- Decreased risk for illnesses and chronic diseases.
- Improved quality of life.

Physical Activity Outside of Special Olympics

It is vital that Special Olympics programs are not the only source of physical activity and exercise for athletes. As a coach, you should be encouraging your athletes to exercise every day and educate them on ways to stay active outside of organized sport practice.

There are numerous ways that athletes can exercise to stay healthy when they are at home. Walking, running, and biking are simple ways an athlete can exercise on their

own and work on their cardiovascular fitness. Fitness classes like yoga, core strength, HIIT and many others are great ways for athlete to work on their fitness and physical health outside of organized sports practice.

Special Olympics offers the Fit 5 Guide for athletes and coaches to use. As a coach it is a great resource to use when educating your athletes on the benefits of physical activity to their overall health and to their sports performance.

Fit 5

The Fit 5 Guide is a plan for physical activity, nutrition and hydration that can help to improve athletes' health and fitness and make them the best athlete they can be. The Fit 5 Guide and accompanying Fitness Cards provide a fantastic collection of exercises that athletes should do to assist them to improve the skills needed for their sport. The exercises included focus on Endurance, Strength, Flexibility and Balance.

Figure 1: Fit 5 Fitness Cards

In addition to these resources, there are a number of videos available here for athletes and coaches to view and use when performing these exercises as part of their training plans.

Nutrition

Eating right is important to your health and your sports performance. Nutrition and hydration are key points of athlete preparation and recovery for all forms of exercise. However, most athletes don't understand the connection between nutrition/hydration and sports performance. As a coach, it is important that you emphasize this connection and educate your athletes on correct habits. This is

especially important for Special Olympics athletes, as they are at a higher risk for obesity.

It is vital to educate speed skaters about the importance of timing their meals or snacks prior to training or competition. Inform your athletes of the risk of eating too close to the time they are to train or compete, and educate them on the best times and foods to eat to ensure they are efficiently fuelled to perform.

It is recommended to have your last meal or snack at least 90 minutes before completing any exercise. This ensures the athlete can digest the food and it will be available as a fuel source for them when training or competing.

You can utilize the nutrition and hydration section in the Fit 5 Guide to educate your athletes on basic principles. The nutrition, hydration and exercise tracker can help your athletes to pay more attention to these elements at home.

Task: Consider taking 5 minutes at the end of practice to cover nutrition and hydration tips. Educate parents and carers on the information that's shared with athletes so they can help athletes eat healthy at home.

Figure 2: Nutrition Section - Fit 5 Guide

Hydration

Water is another important fuel for sports and for life. Drinking the right amount of water is important for your health and can also help your athletic performance. Coaches should be educating their athletes about the benefits of drinking enough water every day.

The Fit 5 Guide has a hydration section which provides information for coaches about quantities of water that athletes should be consuming, signs of dehydration in athletes, and the best choice athletes can make when looking for a drink.

As a speed skating coach it is important to help your athletes keep on track with their hydration. Coaches should encourage athletes to take responsibility for their own hydration before, during and after training.

Speed skating is a fast moving sport that requires quick decision-making. Dehydration can negatively impact speed, agility, concentration and coordination. The body's thirst signals may be a bit delayed given the colder environment at the ice rink, but athletes will still be losing water through sweating and open mouth breathing.

Encourage athletes to drink one bottle of water (16-20oz/500-600ml) an hour or two before practice so they show up fully hydrated. Remember to pause for drinks breaks during a training session. We would recommend pausing every 15-20 minutes to give your athletes the chance to rehydrate as they are losing water while exercising. Encourage your athletes to drink one bottle of water (16-20oz/500-600ml) during a training session to make sure they do not get dehydrated. When drinking, athletes should take many small sips of water instead of gulping it down as this can sit in their stomachs and cause discomfort when exercising! Encourage athletes to drink water after practice to help them recover from their workout.

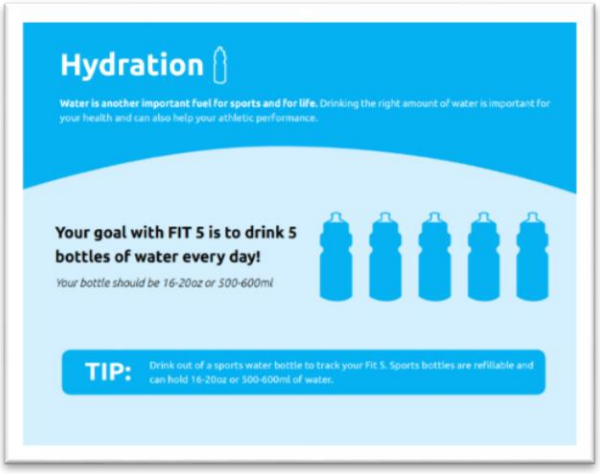


Figure 3: Hydration Section - Fit 5 Guide

Speed Skating Warm-Ups and Cool-Downs

Warm-Up

Before beginning any form of physical activity you should always carry out a warm-up. A warm-up should be designed to prepare the body and mind for physical activity and reduces the risk of injuries occurring.

Purpose of a warm-up

- Gradual increase in body temperature.
- Gradual increase in heart rate.
- Gradual increase in breathing rate.
- Increase in blood flow to working muscles.
- Increase in range of motion of primary muscle groups for their sport.
- Mental preparation.

As you can see, warm-ups are extremely important for athletes' preparation for physical activity. Increasing body temperature and blood flow to working muscles is key for athletes to prevent them from sustaining injuries while exercising. A gradual increase in body temperature reduces the chance of an athlete sustaining muscle and tendon injuries while an increase in blood flow to working muscles ensures a delivery of import fuels that are required for energy production. In addition to this, warming up helps athletes increase the range of motion they have in their muscles. This adequately prepares athletes' working muscles for the movements they will be performing (stretching, generating power, stabilizing the body, etc.). Finally, an adequate warm-up will mentally prepare the athlete for exercise, this includes increased focus at practice or in competition, positive self-talk, or improved motivation knowing they are physically prepared to exercise.

It is recommended to carry out a **comprehensive**, **sport specific** warm-up for **at-least 15 minutes** prior to starting training activities or competition.

Comprehensive: Warming up all parts of the body. Focus especially on the main muscle groups involved in speed skating, including the legs, hip flexors and arms.

Sport Specific: Performing movements your athlete will carry out during practice. For speed skating, you might include accelerations and progressively more intense sprints.

Warm-ups should include three specific components:

1. Aerobic activity to raise heart rate
    - This can be walking, jogging, jumping or skipping.
2. Dynamic Stretching
    - Dynamic stretching involves active, controlled movements that take body parts through a full range of motion.
3. Sport Specific Movements
    - Skills or movements which are core to your sport.
    - Movements that the athlete will complete in training or competition.

See our Warm-Up and Cool-Down Supplement to learn more information on the components of a warm-up. The Dynamic Stretches Guide also provides a collection of exercises can be included in your warm-up.

For speed skating, aerobic activity and dynamic stretching should be performed off-ice, prior to the athlete putting on their skates.

Sample Warm-Up 1: 20mx25m area	
Aerobic Activity: 5-7 minutes	○ Light jog around the rink ○ Butt Kicks ○ Skipping
Dynamic Stretching: 15-20 repetitions of each	○ Walking High Kicks ○ Lateral Lunges ○ Single Leg Line Hops ○ Jumping Jack Squats ○ Arm Swings ○ Windmill Toe Touches
Sport Specific Movements: 5-10 minutes	○ Free skate – low and slow ○ Power Accelerations

Sample Warm-Up 2: 25mx30m area	
Aerobic Activity: 5-7 minutes	○ Fast walk – 3-5 minutes ○ High Knees ○ Side-to-Side Bouncing
Dynamic Stretching: 15-20 repetitions of each	○ Forward and Lateral Leg Swings ○ Toe Walks ○ Lateral Lunges ○ Jumping Jack Squats ○ Arm Swings ○ Hip Circles
Sport Specific Movements: 5-10 minutes	○ Free skate – low and slow ○ Quick feet accelerations

Warm-Up Drill Videos:

Competition Warm-Ups:

Before any athletic competition, an effective warm-up needs to be completed. Warm-ups are essential to preparing the athletes' bodies and minds for physical activity, which will improve their performance and reduce the risk of injury. Here are some tips for competition warm-ups:

- Have athletes do the same warm-up routine that they do during training sessions.
    - Athletes with intellectual disabilities do best when they follow consistent routines. Routines help athletes to build their confidence, skills and time on-task.
- If space is limited, encourage athletes to do aerobic activities in place, or go back and forth between the allotted space.
- Keep athletes active and moving during staging. If they are sedentary during this time, they will lose the benefits of their warm-ups, such as an increased body temperature and blood flow to working muscles.

Cool-Down

When your training, practice or sport session is complete, you should always cool-down. It is just as important to have a good cool-down as it is to have a good warm-up. A good cool-down allows the body to gradually return to a state of rest.

Purpose of a cool-down:

- Decrease heart rate.
- Decrease breathing rate.
- Decrease body and muscle temperature.
- Returns rate of blood flow from the active muscles to resting level.
- Decrease muscle soreness.
- Improve flexibility.
- Increases the rate of recovery from exercise.
- Promote relaxation.

A typical cool-down includes light aerobic activity followed by stretching. The aerobic activity should gradually decrease in intensity/difficulty. It could be a short jog/walk at 50% intensity with some stretches, led by the athletes, at the end.

Cool-downs are perfect opportunities for coaches to carry-out a debrief session with their athletes and review the session they have just had. Ask your athletes some open, informative questions that will make them think about the session and what they would have learned. In addition to the athletes reinforcing the coaching points you have given them, it also gives you, as a coach, the opportunity to see what works for each athlete as an individual.

Coaches should also use this time at the end of practice to encourage healthy habits. Educate athletes on the importance of staying active and eating healthy outside of practice.

Open Questions – Questions that cannot be answered with 'Yes' or 'No', for example:

"What part of the training session did you find challenging today?"

Informative Questions – Questions that provide useful information for you, as a coach, and for the athlete.

"What part (if any) of the training session did you enjoy most today?"

Sample Cool-Downs:

Sample Cool-Down 1:	
Low Intensity:	○ On ice, slow recovery skating ○ Walk around the rink 2-3 laps
Stretching: (30 seconds each)	○ Standing Quadriceps Stretch ○ Butterfly Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards) ○ Kneeling Hamstring Stretch (Flexibility Level 4 – Fitness Cards) ○ Seated Rotation Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards) ○ Crossed Leg Hip Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards) ○ Shoulder Rotation Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards)

Sample Cool-Down 2:	
Low Intensity:	○ On ice, slow recovery skating ○ Walk around the rink 2-3 laps
Stretching: (30 seconds each)	○ Side Stretch (Flexibility Level 4 – Fitness Cards) ○ Triceps Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards) ○ Modified Hurdler's Stretch (Flexibility Level 2 – Fitness Cards) ○ Crossed Leg Hip Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards) ○ Quadriceps Stretch (Flexibility Level 2 – Fitness Cards) ○ Calf Stretch (Flexibility Level 1 – Fitness Cards)
Coaches' Notes: ○ Think about the stretches that might be easier to do in your particular setting. There are modifications to most stretches in order to do them standing, seated or laying down. ○ Develop a standard routine for your cool-down. Not only will it provide an opportunity for you to review the session or provide suggestions leading into the next practice, it will also create a routine you can suggest your athletes to do at home. ○ Observe how your athletes are stretching. Ballistic or 'bouncing' movements while stretching can cause injury. Stretching may feel a bit uncomfortable but should not be painful. ○ Use the time at the end of practice to encourage healthy habits at home.	

Possible Injuries in Speed Skating

Injuries are problems for athletes in all sports, at all levels. It is beneficial for coaches to be aware of common injuries that athletes could experience in their sport.

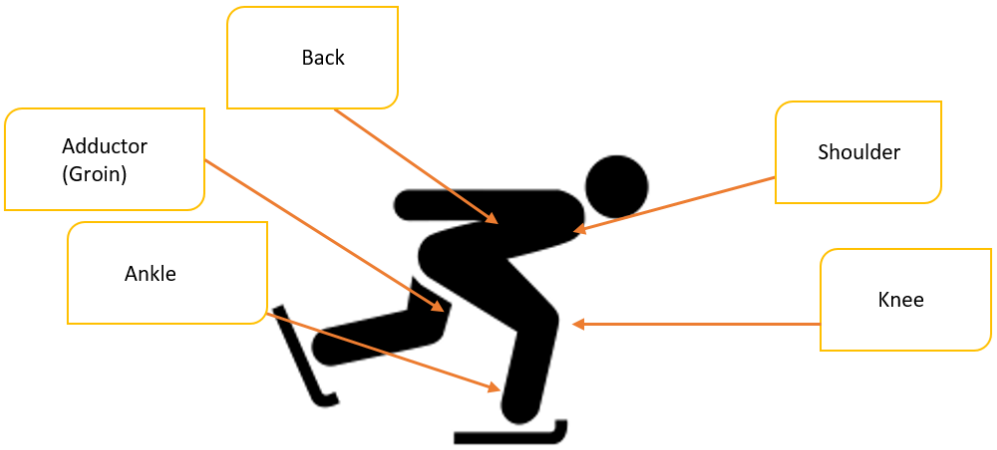


Figure 4: Common Sped Skating Injuries

The graphic above highlights five of the most common injury sites for speed skaters. Of these injury sites, back strains are the most common injury to occur, usually caused by being hunched over for long periods of time. It is important to note that speed skating is a sport where falls, particularly from a high speed, may cause injuries. Fall risks may also be higher when athletes are learning the sport and gaining balance. **Any injuries that athletes happen to obtain during SO training should be immediately tended to by a healthcare professional** (doctor, nurse, and physiotherapist). If an athlete reports to you with signs or symptoms of any form of injury it is recommended to send them to a healthcare professional.

Appropriate warm-ups and cool-downs can help to reduce the risk of both acute and overuse injuries specific to speed skating. Additionally, strength and flexibility training either in practice or at home can further prevent injuries and improve performance. Specifically, quadriceps, glutes and hamstring strength and flexibility should be a main focus when trying to prevent injuries.

Balance and agility exercises should also be a priority in any speed skater's training plan. Increased balance levels will allow athletes to be more comfortable and

confident, and maintain the correct form even as they get fatigued. This may reduce fall risks and the injuries associated with falls. Similarly, improved agility will improve the athlete's ability to react to the high speed nature of the sport.

Speed Skating Specific Physical Conditioning

Physical conditioning is the improvement of physical health through programmed exercises. Speed skating specific conditioning is the use of exercises specifically related to the movements used by players to develop speed skating specific fitness. The main components of physical conditioning are cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and skill development. A successful conditioning program can be accomplished with very little equipment through bodyweight exercises, jumping drills, etc. Some teams may also like to incorporate equipment like resistance bands, weights, stretching straps.

In speed skating, these components can be developed on-ice or dry-land through various exercises, activities and drills. A combination of *on-ice* and *off-ice* conditioning is optimal for a speed skater's performance.

On-Ice Conditioning

On-ice conditioning is one conditioning option for coaches for their athletes as replicates what they will do while speed skating. Examples of *On-Ice* conditioning are:

- Relay Races
- Squats
- Power and Quick Feet Accelerations

Dry-Land Conditioning:

Off-Ice conditioning involves building up strength, endurance and flexibility in the muscles that will be used the most while speed skating. This can be done through a variety of methods using bodyweight exercises, those with added resistance, or sport-specific movement patterns. Examples of *Off-Ice* conditioning are:

- Core strength exercise
    - Plank Hold/Side Planks
    - Leg Raises
    - Curl Ups
- Bodyweight strength exercises
    - Squats
    - Lunges – Forward and Lateral
    - Calf Raises
    - Hip Bridges
- Sport-specific actions
    - Short, reactive, sprints
    - Balance
        - Single Leg Stance
        - Tandem Stance
        - Narrow Base Torso Twists
    - Power
        - Broad jumps
        - Squat jumps
    - Agility
        - Side-to-Side Bouncing
        - Single Leg Line Hops

Fitness Resources

Fitness for coaches link.

In addition to the Fit 5 Guide and other resources available online, Special Olympics also offers online Fitness specific courses where coaches can learn more about Fitness, SO athletes, and how the two work together!

The courses include:

- Fitness for the Sport Coach
  - This module is designed to provide Sport Coaches with information that will help them to introduce fitness into their ongoing sport program.
- Fitness Coach Online Training
  - This module is designed to provide volunteer Fitness Coaches with information that will help them to be effective at engaging our athletes in fitness.

Head coaches could consider bringing in a coach to work specifically on fitness relevant to their sport (fitness coach), or they could utilize their assistant coach and have them trained up on the online courses to gain a greater knowledge of fitness and take the lead on fitness training for their athletes. Either way, we would encourage head coaches to use the online learning modules as a way of improving their knowledge and understanding of fitness.

Check out learn.specialolympics.org to find these courses, along with many other available courses, and get learning today!

The Role of the Coach

For more information on your role as a coach, read our Special Olympics supplement available here:

Sports Psychology

What is Sports Psychology?

Sports Psychology is a name given to a topic that includes many different areas related to sports performance. These include (Association, American Psychological, 2021):

- Goal setting;
- Imagery and performance planning;
- Athlete motivation
- Handling disappointment and poor performance.

Ultimately, Sports Psychology relates to how an athlete's mindset assists or hinders their athletic performance, be that training, competition, or recreationally.

As a coach, your role is to assist an athlete to perform at their best – this includes psychologically as well as physically. This section will briefly discuss a number of Sports Psychology concepts that will assist you in your coaching of Special Olympics Athletes.

For further information on the topic, it is recommended that you explore expert research on the topic such as academic articles, online learning courses, podcasts, and books.

Key Areas of Sports Psychology:

Motivation:

What is motivation?

Often we consider motivation to be making that last lift in the gym, doing that last run up the hill, and going out to win in the final of a competition. However, these are only a select few examples. Most of the time motivation can be; going to training, sticking to your exercise routine, or drinking all of your water for the day.

Motivation is goal-dependent. This means that each person will have different motivation because each person will have different goals.

According to Burton and Raedeke in *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (2008), great coaches know that they don't give athletes motivation. Rather, they create the conditions or team climate in which athletes motivate themselves. Coaches do this by recognizing the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsically Motivated Athletes participate for the love of the sport. They enjoy the process of learning and mastering difficult sport skills and play for the pride they feel when working hard toward accomplishing a challenging goal.

Extrinsically Motivated Athletes participate in sport in order to receive praise, to win, or to avoid punishment. The process is often not as enjoyable, they don't enjoy completing difficult tasks and often results in sport drop-out down the line.

Extrinsic motivation can also be useful in assisting athletes to learn a skill or try a new task. Using praise as a motivator can help to encourage athletes to explore or complete a task they normally would not attempt. However, extrinsic motivation should not be used long-term, and should be phased out over time if it is being used to help motivate athletes to complete tasks.

For example, a golfer does not like hitting the ball out of long grass and is willing to take a shot penalty to move the ball. Encourage the athlete attempt the shot out of the long grass and praise them for their effort. Over time, as the athlete becomes more comfortable performing the shot and continues to hit the ball out of the long grass, praise should be reduced.

Special Olympics carried out an Athlete Satisfaction Survey. This survey aimed to find out why athletes participated in Special Olympics sports and their motivation to do so. The results can be seen in the pie chart below.

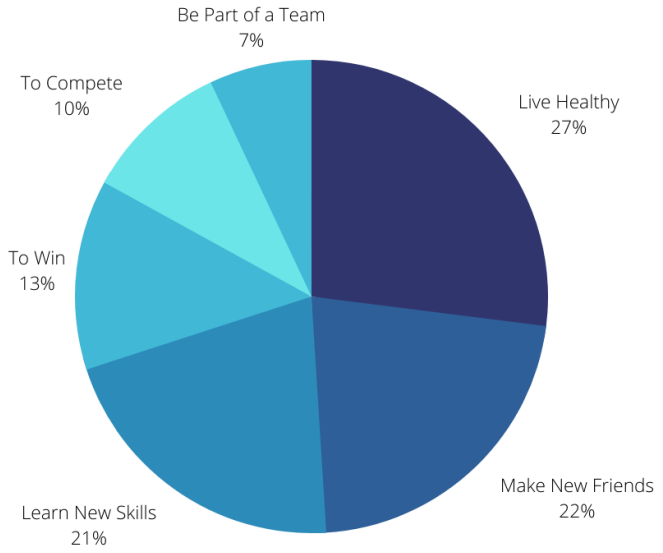


Figure vi: Athlete Satisfaction Survey Results - Why athletes participate in Special Olympics Sport. These can be considered to be sources of motivation for athletes and should be considered in your decision making as a coach

Motivation Myths:

Motivation Myth 1: Athletes are either motivated or not motivated

Some coaches believe that motivation is simply a personality trait, a static internal characteristic. They believe that an athlete either has motivation or doesn't. They don't believe motivation is something coaches can develop. For these coaches, the key to having a motivated team is to find and recruit athletes who have the right personality. However, while some athletes are, in fact, more motivated than others, this view does not provide any direction or guidance on how coaches can help develop and sustain athletes' motivation. The fact is, coaches can help athletes develop motivation.

Motivation Myth 2: Coaches give athletes motivation

Other coaches view motivation as something they can inject into their athletes on demand, like a flu shot, by means of inspirational pep talks or gimmicks. They may use slogans, posters, and bulletin board quotes from upcoming opponents. These strategies may be helpful, but they are only a small piece of the motivation puzzle. There is much more to the story—motivation is not something coaches can simply give their athletes.

Motivation Myth 3: Motivation means sticks and carrots

Some experts suggest that effective motivation means using carrots (rewards) and sticks (punishments) to drive athletes to do things they would not do on their own. This may seem innocuous, but think about it on a deeper level. It assumes that athletes don't want to do something, so the coach will provide motivation to make them do it through punishments or rewards. Coaches who emphasize the stick, in the form of chastising, criticizing, yelling, coercing, and creating guilt, often find themselves swimming upstream. No matter what they try, they meet resistance and negative attitudes. Not only is this approach ineffective, it saps the enjoyment out of sport. Coaches must understand athletes' needs in order to create a team culture that naturally motivates them.

Confidence (through Goal Setting)

Sports confidence is the belief in yourself to execute or complete a task or skill relevant to the sport or activity you are participating in. Sport confidence should be gained through consistent execution of the skill or task in a controlled environment (training session). This can then be applied in a more chaotic environment (competition). For example; Maureen is confident she can complete the 100m breast stroke in her local competition because she has completed this particular stroke many times in her training.

An athlete with lack of self-confidence doubts whether they are good enough, whether they have the qualities necessary for success (Plakona, Parčina, Ludvig, & Tuzović, 2014).

1. Developing sport confidence in athletes helps to make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation.
2. A considerable amount of anxiety is eliminated when athletes know what is expected of them and when they have to be prepared.
3. Mental preparation is just as important as skills training.
4. Progressing to more difficult skills increases the challenge.
5. Dropping back into easier skills increases one's confidence.

Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting

Realistic yet challenging goals for each athlete are important for the motivation of the athlete, during both training and competition. Accomplishing goals at practice through repetition in settings that replicate the competition environment instill confidence. Sport confidence in athletes helps make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Setting goals is a joint effort between athletes and coaches.

Goal setting must be a collaborative effort. At the end of the day, the goals are set for the athlete for what they want to accomplish, not what their coach, parents, friends, or family want them to accomplish. A coaches' role is to assist the athlete is creating the goals that align to their desires, and to keep the athlete on track to achieve those goals.

Goals should be:

1. Structured as short-term, intermediate and long-term.
2. Viewed as stepping stones to success.
3. Created and accepted by the athlete.
4. Used to establish the athlete's training and competition plan.
5. Flexible
6. Written down
7. Identified as either performance goals or practice goals
8. Achievable - Sometimes athletes will need to seek support to accomplish their goals

Following the SMART Goals model is a simple way to set goals for your athlete in a collaborative and logical way.

Handling Disappointment (performance/success oriented/injuries)

Disappointment can present itself in many different ways for an athlete. This can be:

- Poor/Below expected performance (in training or competition)
- Good performance without the desired outcome (winning/scoring/placing)
- Disappointment for others (teammates/friends)
- Acquiring an injury (meaning inability to compete/perform)
- Not receiving praise (from coach/friend/family)

And many more reasons!

As a coach, it is essential that you assist your athletes in handling disappointment. Not only is this beneficial to them in sport, it is a life skill that can be applied in almost any other context (such as job applications, studying for school/college, acquiring an illness, etc.).

How disappointment can be seen in athlete behaviour:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Going within themselves
- Feeling overwhelmed (tears)
- Loss of focus
- Loss of motivation to train/compete
- Loss of interest in the sport

Disappointment often presents itself as stress in athletes. Special Olympics offers the Strong Minds program to assist athletes in learning how to cope with stress. This can be stress from competition or the stress that comes from daily tasks.

Check out the Strong Minds page for all resources required.

A useful tool for coaches working with athletes showing signs of stress would be the Strong Minds Coach's Playbook. These strategies can help athletes with the stresses of life and sport, and promote healthy thoughts and coping mechanisms.

Strong Minds Tips for Stress

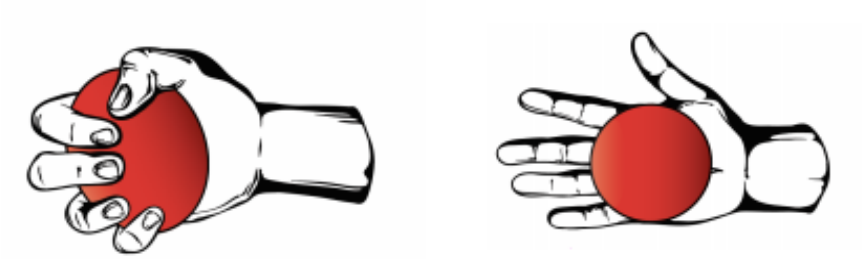
Coach's Playbook

Special Olympics
Strong Minds

Strong Minds is an interactive learning activity focused on developing adaptive coping skills. Competition provides a natural opportunity to develop active strategies for maintaining emotional wellness under stress, such as: thinking positive thoughts, releasing stress and connecting with others. During Strong Minds, your athletes will learn the following strategies and will benefit greatly if you can incorporate these strategies into practice and games.

Station 1

1. Squeeze the ball for 3 seconds.
2. Release the ball and any tension.



Coach Recommendations

- On the way to a game or competition
- During a pre-game team talk
- After the game during a team talk
- For an athlete sitting on the bench or in between turns/games

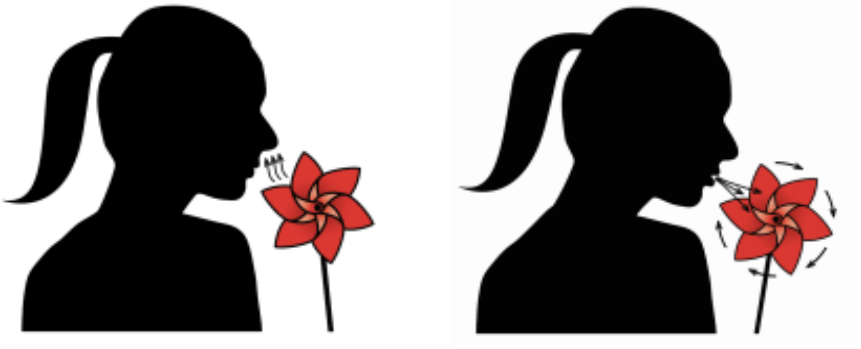
Station 2

1. Think a good thought.
2.

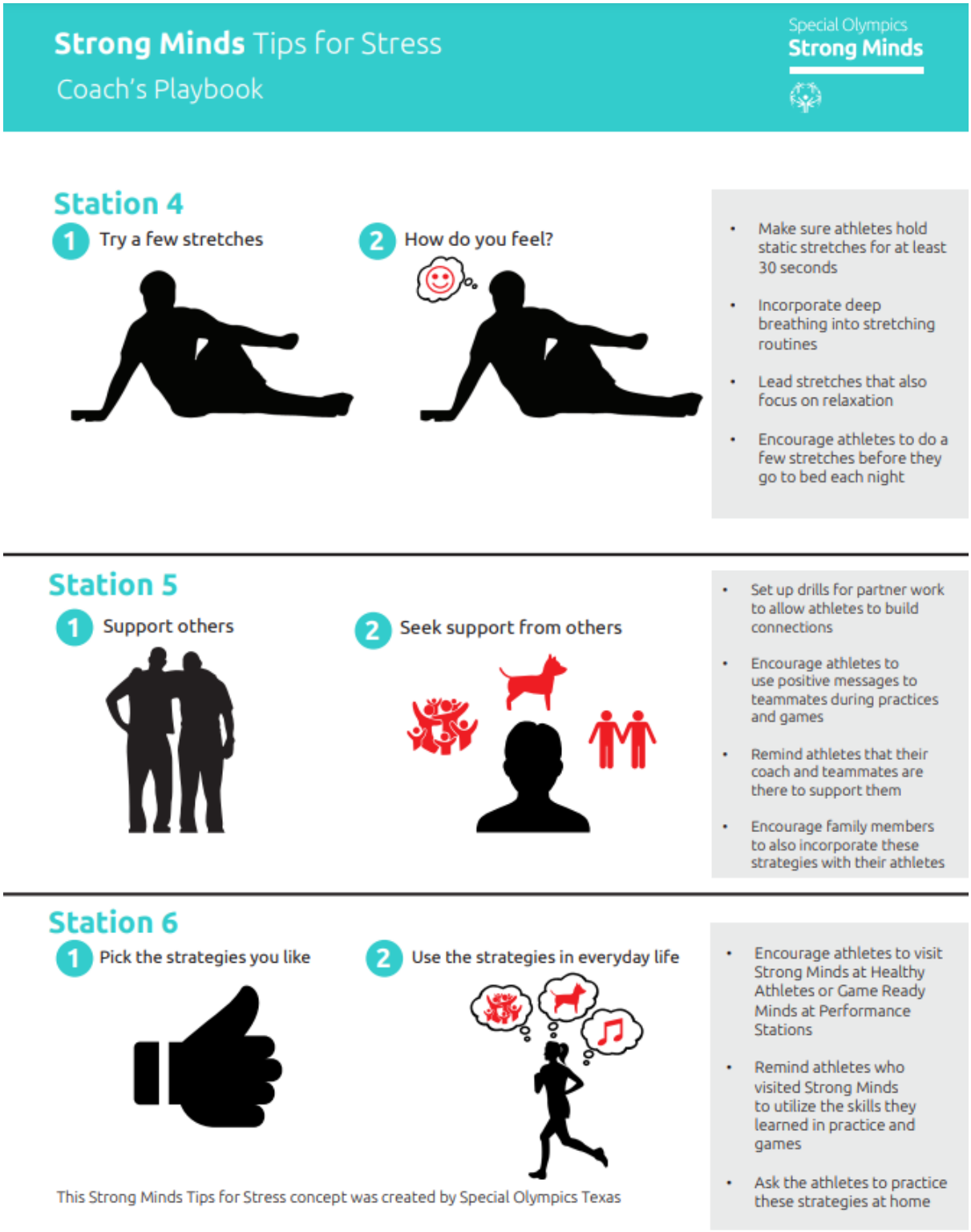
- During practice and games, state positive statements to athletes
- Start practices with a song with a positive message
- Ask an athlete to start each practice with a positive statement to the team
- After the game, ask the athletes what went well

Station 3

1. Smell the flower [pinwheel].
2. Blow the flower [pinwheel].



- Encourage deep breathing during stretching
- Teach the athletes to use deep breathing during a stressful situation in a game (ie. Before shooting a foul shot).
- Before a game, do a few rounds of deep breathing as a team



Communication strategies by the coach, fellow athletes, families and friends will help an athlete handle disappointment. Listen to what the athlete says and why they may be disappointed. Offer positive switches – positive comment – correction – positive comment to take the athlete's attention away from their disappointment. The athlete's effort, attitude and preparation should be emphasized, not the result of the competition.

Athletes in Training

Self-Talk & Imagery

Self-talk represents the things you say in your head about yourself.

Self-talk can sometimes be negative e.g., "that team is much better than ours".

Positive self-talk involves repeating a helpful and positive word or phrase such as "I am fit and ready to play".

Imagery or visualization is a mental process. It allows you to simulate (imagine) experiences in your mind. Often these experiences have the desired outcome e.g. scoring a penalty kick in football.

Imagery also involves using your senses (smell, sound, taste, touch, and feeling) to create an accurate experience in your mind.

Positive self-talk and imagery promotes confidence and success. Coaches should help educate their athletes on the value of positive self-talk and imagery.

One thing coaches can do is help athletes establish a pre-performance routine. At the start of a competition athletes can very briefly (10-15 seconds) do 4 helpful steps:

1. Close your eyes
2. Take a few deep calming breathes
3. Repeat a positive phrase "I am ready"
4. Picture yourself successfully making a perfect start, or finishing strongly.

This routine can be created and modified at training. Find what works best for the athletes. Take this pre-performance routine into a competition to help athletes best prepare mentally.

Athletes at Competition

Psychological Preparation

Just as you train your athletes physically and tactically for competition, you equally need to prepare them psychologically.

Physical Readiness + Psychological Readiness = Competition Readiness

Readiness of the athlete means being focused and prepared for competition.

- Psychological Readiness: Being a participant in the sport, showing confidence and an understanding strategy.
- Physical Readiness: Being physically conditioned and trained in the skills required for competition.

How to Psychologically Prepare for Competition:

1. Create and Set Competition Goals
2. Prepare for competition setting
    a. Tell your athletes what to expect
    b. Use videos of previous competitions
    c. Have experienced athletes speak with inexperienced athletes
    d. Have all equipment ready and available before time
3. Train as you plan to compete
    a. Make sure training is properly preparing your athletes for competition
    b. This will give athletes confidence going into competition performance
4. Practice Strong Minds Stations

Anxiety or stress is normal before a competition. Athletes who do not suffer from some sort of anxiety or stress before performance would be in the minority.

Competition anxiety occurs when an athlete perceives a competitive situation as potentially threatening, resulting in an aversive emotional response (Schaefer, Vella,

Allen, & Magee, 2016). Although some level of competition anxiety is considered to be normal, when competition anxiety exceeds a threshold level it can become detrimental to performance, motivation, and enjoyment (Schaefer, Vella, Allen, & Magee, 2016).

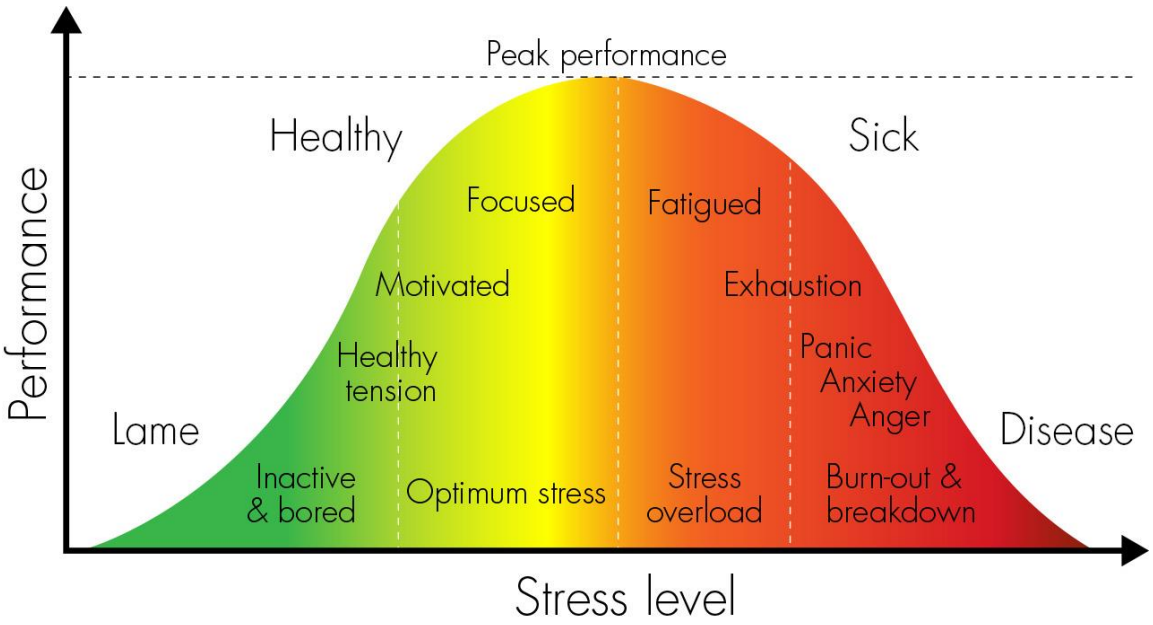


Figure vi: The relationship between stress level and performance. This graph shows where peak performance can be achieved with a moderate stress level. It also shows the dangers of high stress and anxiety. Credit cescasdestinationhealthy.wordpress.com for image.

As a coach, it is your role to assist your athlete in not exceeding this anxiety threshold.

Simple measures such as:

1. Pre-Performance Routine
2. Strong Minds Stations
3. Alternative tasks to take their mind off of the competition/performance

These measures can be beneficial in the psychological preparation for athletes before competition.

There can be times when anxiety becomes too much for an athlete. They may not want to train or compete. The idea of competition or performing will cause them serious stress. If this is noticeable for an athlete within sport and outside of sport (social life, education, family life, etc.), it is recommended that the athlete talk to a professional. This can be a family doctor, a counsellor, or a psychologist.

Post-Performance Psychology

What is success – individual to the athlete

Many athletes will equate winning and losing with success and failure. This is often a self-defeating perspective as athletes only partly control the outcome of competition and often winning is unrealistic.

Coaches should focus on individual effort, self-improvement and learning as barometers of success.

Each athlete will have their own take on what success is to them.

If an athlete feels they are unsuccessful at a competition:

- ✓ Reassure them that winning isn't everything
- ✓ Refer back to the athlete's goals
- ✓ Identify where they have achieved or progressed towards their goals
- ✓ Praise their effort, not performance
- ✓ Remember the Special Olympics athlete oath;
  "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

How to win & lose – code of conduct

All athletes should follow the Sportsmanship section of the Special Olympics Athlete's Code of Conduct.

- I will practice good sportsmanship.
- I will act in ways that bring respect to me, my coaches, my team and Special Olympics.
- I will not use bad language.
- I will not swear or insult other persons.
- I will not fight with other athletes, coaches, volunteers or staff.

As a coach, your role is to remind the athletes of their conduct and how to manage themselves win, lose, or draw. The important thing to do when educating athletes on their code of conduct is to explain 'why'.

Explain that athletes should act in the same manner they would want others to act if they were in the same position. If an athlete is successful, congratulate them. If an athlete is unsuccessful, encourage them for next time.

Your role as a coach is to be a role model to your athletes. You should always demonstrate good sportsmanship throughout competition, training, or events. Athlete's often 'feed' off of their coach's energy and enthusiasm – make sure yours is always positive and following good etiquette.

Figure vii: Some roles a coach may take on in addition to being a role model.

Athletes in a heightened state of anxiety post-performance

Can be after achieving success (over-excitement) or not achieving desired outcome (disappointment).

If an athlete is excited and celebrating, do not discourage this! This is the feeling we all long for as athletes, coaches, and fans! Help the athlete to celebrate in a positive and safe manner.

It is important to not discount feelings of disappointment. It is appropriate to be disappointed when we lose a game or match. The challenge for the coach is to redirect that disappointment into a renewed commitment to training for the next competition or season. Becoming obsessed with losing is not a healthy or natural reaction for anyone.

Here are some strategies for athletes experiencing heightened states of anxiety:

1. Use Strong Minds stations
    a. Positive Messaging
    b. Deep Breathing
    c. Stretching
2. Offer support – through hi-fives, knuckle touches, other forms of comfort that the athlete is accepting of and comfortable with
3. Have a consistent post-performance routine (win, lose, or draw)
    a. Stretching
    b. Debrief
    c. Praise for effort

All athletes are different and will have different ways of coping. Work with your athlete what their best post-performance routine should be and when to carry it out.

For some, shortly or immediately afterward is appropriate. If you leave it too long, it becomes forgotten.

For others, they may need more time to decompress – there is no one size fits all.

The athlete's effort, attitude and personal skills attainment should be rewarded and positively reinforced.

Educating Athletes

Each athlete is different. Simple guidelines and strategies on how to educate athletes will not be universally applicable to athletes. However, having a knowledge of the foundations as listed above will help you to best prepare your athletes for training and competitions.

Some simple tips for educating athletes about sports psychology are:

1. Introduce elements bit by bit
    a. Start with goal setting
    b. Strong Minds stations
    c. Introduce pre-performance routines
2. Use sporting examples to explain elements of psychology
    a. Confidence
    b. Disappointment
3. Work in groups
    a. Have open discussions about elements before, during, and after training and competition

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Plakona, E., Parčina, I., Ludvig, A., & Tuzović, A. (2014). Self-Confidence in Sport. *Sport Science*, 47-54.

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Rules & Regulation

Teaching the Rules of Short Track Speed Skating

The best time to teach the rules of short track speed skating is during practice. Please refer to The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for the complete listing of short track speed skating rules. As coach, it is your responsibility to know and understand the rules of the game. It is equally important to teach your athletes the rules and to make them play within the spirit of the game.

Maintain current copies of The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules and your national and/or international federation short track speed skating rulebooks. Know the differences and carry these rulebooks to every competition.

Divisioning

It is important that you as a coach learn and understand the rules and procedures of divisioning before attending competitions. Understanding the divisioning process will have a direct impact on your athletes' performance. The fundamental difference between Special Olympics competitions and those of other sports organizations is that athletes of all ability levels are encouraged to participate, and every athlete is recognized for his/her performance. Competitions are structured so that athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability in equitable divisions.

Special Olympics has suggested that all divisions be created so that the variance between the highest and lowest scores within that division does not differ by more than 15 percent. This 15 percent statement is not a rule but should be used as a guideline for establishing equitable divisions when the number of athletes competing is appropriate.

Coaches are critical in helping competition management teams make divisioning work. Divisioning works best when coaches submit preliminary scores. This helps athletes get into the proper division as well as gain additional competition experience.

Special Olympics

Special Olympics

Special Olympics **Divisioning**

Like all athletes, Special Olympics athletes love **the thrill of competition** and pushing their limits to achieve a new personal best.

Special Olympics uses a unique system called **'divisioning'** to give athletes of all abilities the chance for exciting competition.

Stage 1 usually happens ahead of World Games competition

Coaches **submit a time** or distance for each athlete in individual sports

For team and judged sports, coaches submit **athlete or team ratings** and/or skills assessments

Stage 2 usually happens in the opening days of World Games

Divisioning races, judged events or short team matches are held to assess the athletes' or teams' **ability levels** in competition

Athletes or teams are grouped into competitive divisions according to **three** criteria

HOW MANY ATHLETES OR TEAMS ARE IN A DIVISION?

minimum of **3**

maximum of **8**

HOW ARE DIVISIONS SET?

There should be no more than a **15%** difference between the most highly skilled athlete or team and the lowest skilled athlete or team in each division

WHY DIVISIONING?

Divisioning makes Special Olympics competitions fair, empowering and exciting

An evenly matched competition makes athletes and teams try harder -- and push farther. It's about athletes rising to a challenge – and giving it their all!

All they need to do ... is THEIR very best.

See our video at specialolympics.org/divisioning

Unified Sports® Rules

There are few differences in the rules for Special Olympics Unified Sports® competition as the rules are mentioned in The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules and modifications are outlined in the rules book. The additions are highlighted below.

1. A roster consists of a proportionate numbers of athletes and partners.
2. For short track speed skating, a Unified Sports team consists of two athletes and two partners of equal ability competing in the 3000m relay event.