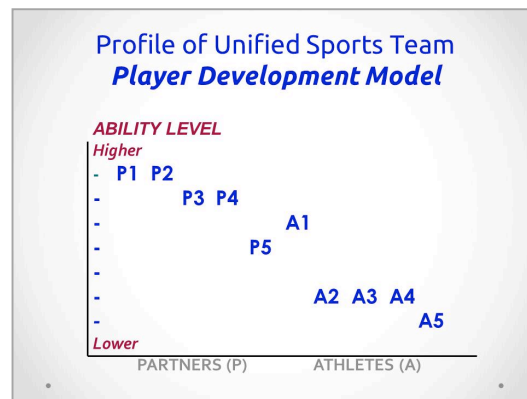




Unified Sports Player Development Guidelines

Special Olympics Unified Sports® promotes social inclusion through shared sport experiences for individuals with and without intellectual disabilities. What differentiates Unified Sports Player Development from competitive Unified Sports and Unified Sports Recreation is: 1) teammates are not required to be of similar abilities, and 2) teammates of higher abilities serve as mentors to assist teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics, as well as in successfully participating in a cooperative team environment.

Athletes and partners should be of similar age; however, a greater variance in age is allowed in specific sports (Refer to Article 1 of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for more details regarding age matching by sport.) Because of differences in abilities, rules modifications are necessary and designed to both ensure meaningful involvement of all teammates as well as define the roles of higher ability players as mentors so that they do not dominate play. Each Program establishes rules modifications that fulfill these outcomes.



Unified Sports Player Development ...

- Is an inclusive sports model.
- Has an approximately equal number of athletes and partners of similar age.
- Has higher ability players mentoring lower ability players.
- Develops players' sport-specific skills and tactics to successfully participate in a team environment.
- Provides a competitive team sports experience that emphasizes cooperative play.
- Has modified training and competition rules which define higher ability players' roles as mentors, ensure meaningful involvement of all teammates and prevent player domination.
- Offers teams either Participation awards or place-of-finish awards at competitions on a Program-by-Program basis.

How do we identify who is appropriate for the Unified Sports Player Development model?

The Unified Sports Player Development model is designed for teams that are depicted in the following examples.

- 1) Teammates' skill levels vary so greatly that rules modifications are utilized to ensure a safe sport training and competition environment.
- 2) In order for a game to be played by the rules and at the same time allow for the safe and meaningful involvement of all team members, teammates of higher ability must adjust their level of play to serve as mentors and facilitators.
- 3) Nearly half the players on the team do not have sufficient sport-specific skills or an understanding of the rules necessary to train and compete on their own; however, they can successfully train and compete when they receive significant assistance from their higher ability teammate mentors.
- 4) A sparsely populated area does not have a sufficient number of teammates who meet the similar ability requirement of the competitive Unified Sports model.

These teams are appropriate for Special Olympics Unified Sports Player Development according to:

- Health and safety mandate.
- "Meaningful Involvement" directive.
- Level of sport-specific skills and game awareness.
- Article 1, Section M of the Special Olympics Official Sport Rules.
- Rules modifications as defined on a Program-by-Program basis.