

# Special Olympics Divisioning

## Divisioning

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. Divisions are based on gender, age, and skill level.

## Individual Sports

### Gender

Divide athletes into two groups based on gender: female and male.

Athletes shall normally compete against other athletes of the same gender, unless the International Federation (IF) / National Governing Body (NGB) rules specifically allow mixed-gender events (e.g. bowling, tennis, etc.)

### Age

Divide male and female athletes into the following age groups:

- Ages 8-11
- Ages 12-15
- Ages 16-21
- Ages 22-29
- Ages 30 and over

An athlete's age group shall be determined by the athlete's age on the date of the opening of the competition.

### Ability

To complete the divisioning process, the following guidelines shall be applied according to the event being divisioned.

### Timed or point scored events

In events that are measured in time, distance, or points:

- For both genders and all age groups, rank athletes in descending order based upon submitted entry scores or divisioning events.
- Group these ranked athletes so that the highest and lowest scores are as close as possible to the 15% guideline and the number of competitors is not less than 3 or more than 8.

## **Team Sports**

The divisioning process for team sports is much different, and much harder, than individual sports. Unlike most individual sports, team sports do not have concrete distances, times or scores that can be used, although we do have teams submit assessment scores for individual players. Then the day before or day of competition they play a screening game. Once a game starts, however, the information contained in the assessments often takes a back seat to the dynamics at play minute-by-minute, play-by-play on the court or field.

The challenge with divisioning team sports is that there are many factors that affect how a team performs on any given day – illness, behavior, coaching, who's hot and who's not, individual match-ups, etc. With divisioning in team sports, much more emphasis is put on game results, common opponents, coach rankings and coach notes. There is not a perfect science to ensure that all divisions will have close games, which is why we have developed a process for team sports that includes a games management team. The GMT's allow for better team evaluation and improved divisioning and no bias opinions. We recognize there may be some games during a competition that are not competitive, but we hope that the team sports divisioning process creates the most equal divisions as possible.

Our goal is always that teams within a division are as competitive as they can be with each other, but the dynamics of team sports don't always play out that way. And even if games within a division are all competitive, a team still has to win the division and a team still has to lose the division.