



Special Olympics Georgia College Unified Sports Intramurals Guide



Special Olympics
College Clubs

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction to Special Olympics College and Special Olympics Unified Sports

3

- Purpose of Special Olympics Unified Sports Intramurals Guide & Additional Resources **4**
- Models for Special Olympics Unified Sports on Campus **5**

Section 2: Elements of Unified Sports Intramurals

6

- Planning **7**
 - League Rules **7**
 - Competitive **8**
 - Player Development **8**
 - Uniforms and Equipment **8**
 - Facilities & Risk Management **9**
- Players **10**
 - Athlete & Partner Recruitment **10**
 - Unified Sports Orientation **11**
 - Assessment Day **11**
 - Team Assignment **12**
- Performance **13**
 - Coaching **13**
 - Officiating **14**
 - Medical **14**
 - Game Day Registration **15**
 - Regular Season Play **15**
 - Championship Night **16**

Section 3: Conclusion

17

- Why Unified Sports? **18**
- Special Olympics and NIRSA **19**



SECTION 1:

Introduction to Special Olympics College and Special Olympics Unified Sports



Special Olympics
College Clubs

Section 1: Introduction to Special Olympics College and Unified Sports

Purpose of Special Olympics Unified Sports Intramurals Guide & Additional Resources

The Unified Sports Intramurals Guide can help college students and administrators create and implement effective, quality Special Olympics sports leagues on campus. This resource serves a specific component of the whole Special Olympics College experience. It should be used with other Special Olympics College resources to meet the complete needs of the college as it moves towards meaningful inclusion. The following resources can be used in conjunction with the Unified Sports Intramurals Guide.

Find out about other ways to get involved with Special Olympics at the college level and connect with other clubs from across the country.

[Special Olympics College Resources](#)

Find out about starting a college club and how to bring inclusion events to a college campus.

Resources include:

- Special Olympics College Club Starter Guide
- Logos and Branding
- Special Olympics Event Guide

[Special Olympic College Club Map](#)

Find out where there are existing College Clubs and Unified Sports Intramurals across the United States

[Generation Unified](#)

Stay up to date on the latest stories of youth and students leading the Special Olympics movement towards a world of meaningful inclusion.

For questions regarding the Special Olympics College Intramurals Guide, or any other related Special Olympics College inquiries, please contact socollege@specialolympics.org.

Models for Special Olympics Unified Sports on Campus



The term *college* is used in this resource to reference all postsecondary education institutions including colleges, universities, junior colleges and community colleges. Special Olympics Unified Sports can take place at any of these types of schools.

Unified Sports at college is ideally delivered through the department that is responsible for intramurals or recreational sports. This resource will refer to this department as *campus recreation*. Unified Sports can be delivered through other entities as well such as intercollegiate athletics, club sports, or Special Olympics College Club.

Each state in the United States has a program responsible for all Special Olympics events and activities. The terms *State Program* will be used in reference for this organization in this resource. Through collaboration between campus recreation and state programs, the following are the types of Unified Sports models that can be delivered on a campus:

Unified Sports Experiences:

Special Olympics Unified Sports Experiences bring together athletes and partners for participation in an informal competitive environment. The purpose of this event is to showcase the talents and abilities of athletes and allow the students to experience the fun of Unified Sports in a one-day setting. The hope is that their participation will inspire them and others to support Unified Sports within their communities on an ongoing basis.

Unified Sports Single Games:

A Unified Sports single game experience or exhibition is a good option for campus recreation to introduce Unified Sports to a campus and to potential student partners. This should be an organized event with rules and officials and could include awards. This could also be an opportunity to showcase Unified Sports in a place with high exposure. Consider teaming up with intercollegiate athletics to set up a joint event with the college's varsity sports teams. For example, there could be a Unified game during prior to a varsity basketball game or at halftime, and could be a part of a larger 'Unified Sports Night'. This game could be a shortened scrimmage to fit time restrictions.

Unified Sports Tournaments:

Host a Unified Sports tournament experience with multiple games that take place in a single day or weekend. Many colleges offer tournaments as a part of its intramural program and this could be part of that. Consider collaboration with other club sports or varsity sports at a college to introduce Unified Sports. For example, if the college already offers Unified soccer and basketball, connect with the men's and women's club volleyball team to host a one-day Unified volleyball tournament.

Unified Sports Intramurals:

Most colleges have some type of intramural or recreational league available to students. Unified Sports Intramural leagues function like any other intramural sport league, with the addition of Special Olympics athletes. Unified Sports offered in intramurals should match what is being offered to other leagues and divisions. These leagues should receive the same amount of games, level of officiating, types of facilities and equipment, and awards at the end of the season.



SECTION 2:

Elements of Unified Sports Intramural Leagues



Special Olympics
College Clubs

Planning

League Rules

There will likely be differences between campus intramural rules and official [Special Olympics Unified Sports rules](#). Prior to the season starting, campus recreation and the State Program (and the college club, if appropriate) should meet to discuss the rules of play, and specifically where current campus rules and Special Olympics rules differ. The final decision for the Unified Sports Intramural league rules might be to adopt campus rules, Special Olympics rules, or to have a hybrid model that combines aspects of both.

Consider the following when discussing how to select or combine rules to come up with the best option:

- What is the intent/purpose of the rule?
- Will rules differences between Unified and other intramural leagues cause confusion for officials?
- If collegiate intramural teams would like to advance to state program competition, it will be played under official Special Olympics rules.

The final thing to consider is the model of play of your league. In Special Olympics College, there are two styles of Unified Sports – competitive and player development.



Planning (cont.)

Competitive

Competitive means that athletes and partners are of similar ability levels, can play within the standard rules of the game, and the purpose of the league is competition. Results and awards are based on place of finish in the league. There should be no modifications of official rules for the league and all infractions/violations of the rules should be called by the officials. There should be no restrictions placed on any player's ability to contribute to the team, including limitations on scoring. Both partners and athletes are expected to give their maximum effort in this model of play. All national level Unified Sports competitions are played in the competitive model.

Player Development

Player Development means that athletes and partners do not have to be of similar ability and there is a focus on skill development. While there is a score and rules to follow, there are some rule modifications that are allowed. Results and awards can be based on place of finish or participation. In this model, teammates of higher ability take on the role of assisting and facilitating play for teammates of lower ability.

Uniforms and Equipment

Regarding uniforms and equipment, campus recreation should have the same expectations and provide the same options to the Unified leagues as any other intramural league. It is recommended that leagues require teams to wear uniforms that are the same or similar color and have unique numbers on the back and/or front. Many campus recreation or State Programs will supply uniforms to the players. These uniforms would be turned in either at the end of each competition or at the end of the season.

Here are more resources that will help one learn and understand creating quality [Unified Sports rules](#).

TOP TIP



When examining rule differences between campus intramurals and Special Olympics rules, think about why the rule is in place and that might let you know where it is best to compromise. Some examples:

- **Timing, Field and Equipment Rules:** This might be restricted based on the facility space and time allotted for games, so it probably would make sense to adopt the campus standard for these types of rules
- **Gameplay Rules:** There might be Special Olympics rules that are more aware of physical limitations and will promote gameplay for all (i.e. in soccer, players can "kick-in" a ball that has gone out of bounds because there might be physical limitations that prevent a legal "throw-in")

Planning (cont.)

Facilities and Risk Management

Unified Sports Intramural league competitions should take place on the same fields and courts as any other intramural league. It is beneficial to the program, the students and the campus when Unified Sports games are being played next to, immediately prior to, and/or immediately after games from other divisions.

Create a plan for any athletes from the community (non-students) to be able to enter any access-controlled facility that would serve as a competition site. There is also a likelihood that a Unified Sports Intramural league will attract more interest from friends, family and community members to watch the games, so be sure to determine a plan for how spectators can access the games.

When bringing any community members to an on-campus activity like intramurals, a college may require particular risk management and liability documentation. Work with the college's risk management office to determine what would be required to make a league happen. Involve the State Program in these conversations.



Players

Athlete & Partner Recruitment

In Unified Sports Intramurals, athletes and partners should be of similar age and have similar ability levels. If there is a limited number of athletes or partners available, then the age and ability range can be widened. Keep this in mind when recruiting athletes and partners for the leagues.

Special Olympics athlete (referred to as athlete in this guide): A person, either a student or from the campus community, with intellectual disability that competes in Unified Sports on campus. ThinkCollege.net provides a list of colleges with inclusive education programs. The students in these programs would be ideal candidates to join Unified Sports as athletes.

Work with the State Program to see how to best connect with athletes from the community. The State Program might involve a local area coordinator to connect with athletes or may directly provide a list of athlete contacts.

At the college level, athletes should be adults with the ideal age range being 18-34 years old.

Unified partner (referred to as partner in this guide): A student without intellectual disability that competes in Unified Sports on campus. Partners should all be currently enrolled and in good standing with the college. Unified Sports Intramural leagues should be promoted with the intramural sports schedule so all students can see and feel free to join.

Some great groups for campus recreation to find potential partners include:

- Special Olympics College Club
- Campus Recreation student staff
- Greek organizations (especially those with partnerships with or the chosen philanthropy of Special Olympics, like Sigma Tau Gamma or Alpha Phi Omega)
- Varsity/Club Sport athletes from a different sport
- Academic programs and groups like sports management and special education

Utilize any online registration/tracking tool for intramurals for Unified Sports leagues as well. Whether it is IMLeagues or another program, this will make the experience feel normative and a part of the larger intramural programs at the school.

Most Unified Sports Intramural leagues require people to sign up as individuals and then they are placed in teams. This makes Unified Sports leagues an ideal opportunity to direct “Free Agents” to as well.



TOP TIP

While it is great to reach out to current intramural participants or students involved in the above groups, studies show that Unified Sports are successful entry points to campus engagement for students that are not currently involved in any other groups or teams. Unified Sports leagues will expand the reach of the intramural program.

Players (cont.)

Unified Sports Orientation

A week or two prior to the first game, new athletes and partners should go through a Unified Sports Orientation. Each league can determine if returning partners and athletes are required to go through this orientation as well. The following should be conducted during the orientation:

- Athlete/partner training covering the concept, history, and philosophy of Unified Sports on campus, statewide, and nationally
- Expectations of partners and athletes during and outside of competition
- An overview of league rules
- Required paperwork by the State Program for partners and athletes should be filled out, if not previously turned in with office
- Required paperwork by campus recreation for partners and athletes should be filled out, if not previously turned in with office

BEST PRACTICE: State Programs and Special Olympics College Clubs should be invited to help lead the orientations as they will have expertise and knowledge of interacting with people with intellectual disabilities that might be new to campus recreation staff.



Assessment Day

The week prior to the first games, participants should go through an assessment day to test their sport-specific skills in order to determine the most competitively balanced team rosters. In an assessment, participants are divided into small Unified groups of partners and athletes. The groups then go through a series of drills/stations that test individual sport-specific skills. Participants receive a score at each drill/station based on their performance. In addition to the drill/station score, observation notes that help assess their skill level are taken. Examples of drills/stations can be found within the [Special Olympics official sports rules](#).

If time permits after the assessments are completed, scrimmages should take place with league administrators observing and taking notes on the participants.

Players (cont.)

Team Assignment

After assessment day, league administrators/coaches/captains should meet with assessment scores and notes to create league rosters that will lead to the most competitively balanced teams. Some Programs even allow for the team's captains or coaches to draft their teams. Prior to the first week of play, partners and athletes will be notified of their team. On the first night of league play, participants are required to arrive 20-30 minutes before the game time so teams can be introduced to each other, a team name can be determined, and team uniforms can be distributed.



TOP TIP

Work with the State Program to see if team uniforms can be purchased for the league. These uniforms can be distributed to players during week one and then collected on championship night following the teams' final games.

Performance

Coaching

Most intramural teams do not have coaches, but it might be in the best interest of the Unified Sports leagues to have select partners or athletes serve in a non-playing coaching/captain role for the teams. Consider adjusting rules to allow for coaches to call time-outs if current rules do not allow for this.

These coaches can be found during the recruitment process and run through an initial sport-specific training by the State Program and/or campus recreation. Coaches should attend the assessment day.



The role of the coaches should be as follows:

- Make sure that team strategy keeps all players meaningfully involved
- Help players understand how each unique role is important to team success
- Manage substitutions and lineups to ensure that all players get an appropriate amount of playing time and that the required partner-to-athlete ratio is maintained during games



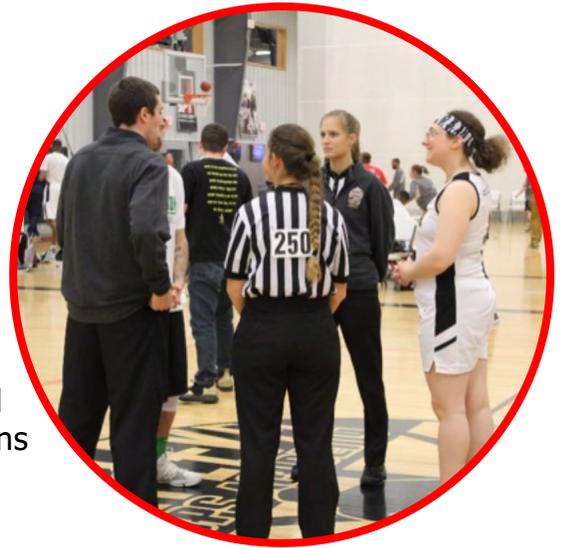
TOP TIP

As Unified Sports Intramural leagues grow, more and more students and athletes will want to participate. Using opportunities like coaching is great for moving experienced players into a mentorship role or for allowing people who might not enjoy playing the sport a way to be involved.

Performance (cont.)

Officiating

The officials should be trained Intramural Officials that are used in all the other intramural leagues. Each official should go through the campus recreation intramural sports trainings and be made aware of the specific Special Olympics rule changes. State Program staff can be incorporated into this training to answer questions relating to the game management for the league and how to interact with players with intellectual disabilities. Check with a State Program if any forms/certifications are required for the officials who officiate these leagues (i.e. Class A volunteering or Protective Behaviors).



With Officials training, the following two models are most common:

- Unified Sports rules modifications are included throughout the training and are provided to all officials so anyone on the staff can officiate
- A select group of officials are chosen to officiate the Unified Sports league. This group stays for an extended amount of time to get training on Unified specific rules.



TOP TIP

Have consistent officials for the Unified Sports leagues from week to week. Much like playing sports, officiating gets better with experience. Officials will get more comfortable and familiar with the players and rules in the Unified divisions as the season progresses – leading to high level officiating for the playoffs and championships.

Medical

Medical response should be discussed between campus recreation and State Program prior to the start of season and make sure that all risk management requirements are met. Emergency action plans should be discussed as well. In case of a major injury or emergency, it is always recommended that emergency services are called to the scene. Staff should have up-to-date medical information and waivers for all athletes participating at the site of the competition. This medical information will include medications and allergies as well as any type of medical conditions that a first-responder or athletic trainer would need to know.



TOP TIP

Having a person trained in CPR and First Aid and the appropriate medical kits on site makes the competitions a much safer experience.

Performance (cont.)

Game Day Registration

Players should check-in with campus recreation staff prior to each intramural game to verify that they are on the roster, eligible, and have all required forms turned in. Student participants should be required to present identification consistent with the requirements for any other intramural league. If athletes are from the community, league administration can determine how check-in is handled.

Team rosters and player eligibility should be maintained throughout the season. All required documentation can be kept electronically or by hard copy and housed in the league offices. If using an online system like IMLeagues.com, accounts for partners and athletes can be created so they can be added to score sheets and online tracking.

Regular Season Play

The length of the regular season should match that of the other intramural leagues at the college. The most common season length is one game per week for three to six weeks, depending on the amount of teams. In an ideal league, all teams should play each other at least once during the regular season. Regular season play should fall under the same timing rules as all other intramural leagues in that sport. The regular season results will determine seeding for postseason play.



Performance (cont.)

Championship Night

Just like any other intramural on campus, campus recreation should put on a Championship Night for the Unified Sports division. The championship team should receive what teams typically get for winning an intramural championship (i.e. Championship T-Shirt). Teams should also be recognized with all other league champions, whether that is on a poster or on social media.

Championship Night for the Unified Sports division is a great opportunity to promote the intramural program with a unique experience that media will want to cover and groups will want to be a part of. Consider the following to add entertainment and provide a big event feel:

- Invite other campus departments to attend, like intercollegiate athletics and academic programs
- Invite student organizations such as club sports and Greek groups
- Invite university administration and high profile figureheads such as the President, Board of Directors, Athletics Director, and coaches as VIP guests
- Invite campus and community media outlets
- Secure a sound system for music and announcing prior to, during, and after the game
- Promote the Unified program utilizing scoreboards and graphics



TOP TIP

Explore options, whether with the State Program or NIRSA, for Unified Sports league champions to be able to advance to state, regional, national or international competition.



SECTION 3:

Conclusion



Special Olympics
College Clubs

Why Unified Sports?

Unified Sports on campus are fun for partners, athletes, volunteers, spectators, and anyone else involved!

Unified Sports presents many positive experiences, such as:

- Providing a new social and sports outlet that promotes positive sportsmanship and participation. A Unified Sports opportunity provides even the most competitive students with a fun way to play the game they love.
- Professional development and personal growth opportunities, as well as introducing potential career opportunities for participants interested in special education, sports management, or a similar field.
- Connecting students to local area Special Olympics and State Programs, thus increasing the pool of potential partners and athletes, volunteers, and future donors.
- Opening the doors of campus recreation and its programs to participants who may not otherwise participate in intramural or club competition.
- Bringing in campus partners to experience the power of inclusion.
- Creating lasting friendships on and off the field, and connecting students to the community.
- Showcasing campus as an inclusive and accepting place for all people.



Special Olympics and NIRSA Partnership



Special Olympics
Unified Sports

The Special Olympics and NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation partnership is dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences. Special Olympics Unified Sports® joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team.

It is inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. At the college level, it focuses on building relationships between college students - with and without intellectual disabilities - and local Special Olympics athletes of similar age.

This document will highlight the different ways in which Special Olympics Programs and campus recreation departments can team up to create Unified Sports Intramural opportunities on campus.



**Thanks for reading through the Unified Sports Intramurals Resource!
Best of luck in your future endeavors. Should you have any questions,
reach out to your local Special Olympics office. For additional help,
email Logan.Gross@SpecialOlympicsGA.org**



Special Olympics
Unified Sports[®]