

November 2011

To: All Unified Coaches and Team
From: Matt Ruxton Assistant Vice President of Sports Management
CC: George Kent, Terry Keilty, Jon Scully, Meg Hoffman, Sean Canty
RE: Unified Basketball

Special Olympics Massachusetts would like to take this opportunity to review Unified Sports© and how it affects your basketball team. The majority of these changes were implemented for the 2011 season and will continue moving forward. Attached is an overview of the Unified Sports© levels (*and new terminology*) offered here at Special Olympics Massachusetts but here are the highlights:

We offer two level of Unified play for which your team can register for:

- Unified
- Unified Player Development

Unified Player Development

The purpose of the **SOMA Unified Sports© Player Development Level** is to promote the growth of Special Olympics athletes particularly in the skills of the game (*shooting, passing, dribbling, rebounding, etc.*). The Partners' role is to be a mentor/coach/educator on the court in the spirit of Special Olympics Massachusetts and in the spirit of sportsmanship.

The Player Development Level is for lower skilled &/or younger athletes. It is intended for developmental teams in which the **emphasis** is to develop skill level and learn the basics of team play. At the Player Development Level skills of the game, game flow, game situations, and game expectations are to be taught to the athletes so they can eventually be ready for Unified play.

Unified

The emphasis for the **SOMA Unified Sports® Level** is to provide opportunities for training and competition at an ability level providing alternatives to and possible gateways into community based competitions. The Unified Sports® Level provides opportunities to increase understanding of positional and team play and further continue to develop the skills needed to play. The higher athletic ability Special Olympics athletes benefit from the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of sports competitions.

What is the difference between these two levels?

The difference comes down to the ability level of the athletes and the intended purpose of the teams. In the **Unified Level** the partners and athletes on the team are viewed as equals and both have the same responsibilities on the field. The partners and athletes play the game as it is intended to be played. Teams are divisioned based on ability with higher more competitive teams in the upper divisions (*heavy partner and athlete involvement and high skill set*) and the lower less competitive teams in the lower divisions (*less partner involvement, more athlete driven, lower skill sets*). In the Unified level you will see a vast range of teams and involvement of the partners from division to division.

In the **Player Development Level**, the partners serve as on field coaches and mentors to the athletes. The player development level is for lower skilled &/or younger athletes. **It is intended for developmental teams in which the athletes are learning the flow of the game, skills needed to be successful and the expectations of the game.** All teams regardless of place receive the same award.

Final Thoughts

Just because your team philosophy is that you do not allow partners to shoot or steal the ball from an athlete this **DOES NOT** make your team a Player Development team. The rules surrounding player development are in place to help teach the lower skilled &/or younger the game **not to determine your team's level.**

If you play by these rules, yet your teams have a grasp on the flow of the game and how to play the game without help from a partner then you are a medium to low division Unified team and **not** a player development team. Another way to view the difference between the levels is if your athletes can play the game as a med to high traditional team but your program chooses Unified Sports© for the social impact benefits then they are not suited for player development level.