

SOPA Defines Continuing Education Program

Special Olympics Incorporated (SOI) has introduced a new program of continuing education with the Special Olympics coaches education system. The rationale for the additional requirements is that coaching methods and techniques are continuously changing. SOPA has adopted this program, recognizing that continuing education is the key to helping coaches develop the expertise they need in order to best work with and train Special Olympics athletes.

As part of this program, all certified Special Olympics coaches are required to receive continuing education every four years for the sports in which they are certified. **Coaches that received their initial sport certification in 2000 or earlier must complete a continuing education course by the end of 2004 in order to maintain their coaching certification.** Coaches certified in or after 2000 and in subsequent years are required to obtain continuing education within four years of receiving their certification.

General and Sport-Specific Courses Offered

SOPA will offer general non-sport-specific courses as well as sport-specific courses and workshops that coaches can take to fulfill their continuing education requirement. In addition, local programs and other sport organizations may provide sport-specific training.

SOPA will conduct general non-sport-specific courses at different sites throughout the state during the year. These courses include Principles of Coaching, Unified Sports™ certification and Coaching Special Olympics Athletes. In addition, SOPA and other sport organizations approved by SOPA may offer sport-specific continuing education courses. These courses and workshops include:

- Sports tactics courses offered by SOPA
- Workshops offered by SOPA
- Workshops offered by local Special Olympics Pennsylvania programs
- Courses offered by the national governing body of a sport
- Courses offered by local sports organizations

Many local programs may find that the most convenient way to provide continuing education for their coaches is to conduct their own sport-specific workshops. The workshops should run at least one hour. SOPA will work with local programs to assist them in developing these workshops. However, the workshops (including the individual serving as the clinician and the content of the workshop) must be approved in advance by the SOPA sports training director.

SOI has a new ten-hour practicum requirement for continuing education courses that SOPA will be implementing in the future. **After completing the courses or workshops, coaches are required to complete 10 hours of practical training with Special Olympics athletes, document these hours on the Special Olympics Application for Sports Training Certification, sign it, have their local training coordinator or head coach also sign the certification to verify that the information provided is correct, and send it to the SOPA office in Camp Hill. This ten-hour practicum is required after any certification course is taken and continuing education courses are no exception.**

Four-Year Continuing Education Requirement

SOPA is offering its coaches two ways to meet their continuing education requirement. Coaches can either take sport-specific workshops every four years for each sport in which they are certified, or they can take one general non-sport-specific course that will satisfy the certification requirements for all the sports in which they are certified. Either way, the coach is required to complete the courses within four years after first receiving their certification.

Any coaches or volunteers who have questions about the SOPA continuing education policy should contact Bill Leavens at (800) 288-7276 or <mailto:bleavens@specialolympicspa.org>.