

COACH EDUCATION PROGRAM

The key to improving athlete performance and well-being is based on the quality of sport training and experiences provided by the local Special Olympics coach. “Coach” refers to an individual who assumes responsibility for athletes, actively trains athletes, and coaches them in competitions.

The SOIN Coach Education Program adheres to the basic standards and competencies necessary and essential for being a Special Olympics coach, as defined by Special Olympics North America. Standardization of essential knowledge and coaching proficiency adds credibility and consistency to the entire program. In addition, coaches will gain new and/or improved competencies and skills, which will provide better opportunities for their athletes. After all, the better the coach ... the better the athlete.

The Coach Education Program is based on:

- Athlete safety is the coach’s top priority.
- As outlined in the Special Olympics Founding Principles: “Consistent training under the guidance of qualified coaches, with emphasis on physical conditioning, is essential to the development of sports skills, and competition among those of equal abilities is the most appropriate means of testing these skills, measuring progress and providing incentives for personal growth.”
- Also from the Special Olympics Founding Principles: “Special Olympics celebrates and strives to promote the spirit of sportsmanship and a love of participation in sports for its own sake.”
- Special Olympics coaches not only provide skills training for athletes, but are also role models and character builders. Coaches give SO athletes the most immediate awareness of their own worth, ability, courage and capacity to grow and improve.
- An effective coaches’ education program, which advances both coach and athlete, must include subjects beyond sport-specific material. It must include topics of safety, health, injury prevention, nutrition, general physical fitness, sportsmanship, character development and coaching philosophy.
- Special Olympics coaches are eager to learn about coaching and the sport, especially when knowing their athletes and County Program will benefit. The SOIN Coach Education Program provides rewards to County Programs who have coaches registered in the program and those coaches complete online courses.
- Other sports organizations have excellent coach education courses. SOIN should utilize these learning opportunities. Though many of these courses focus on interscholastic sports, principles are applicable to Special Olympics.
- Online courses are the preferred method of learning. Standardization of content is insured through online courses. Necessary competencies are reviewed through these online courses. Coaches have limited time and are already donating many hours to their athletes. Online courses are more “user-friendly”, allowing coaches to take courses when their time allows. Online courses allow users to stop and resume learning without losing progress.



SOIN requires that all coaches for equestrian, flag football, and powerlifting complete a sport—specific training. In-person sport specific trainings for equestrian, flag football, and powerlifting are offered annually.

In 2026, all SOIN head coaches for equestrian, flag football, and powerlifting must be a Level 3 certified coach.

Please contact Katie Hilt at khilt@soindiana.org for a complete list of coaches training for this year.

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COACH EDUCATION LEVELS & REQUIREMENTS

The following section lists the required coaching courses to achieve each level. All requirements for Sport Assistant must be met before a coach may work with Special Olympics athletes.

SPORT ASSISTANT	
ENTRY LEVEL REQUIREMENTS	
All SOIN coaches must achieve Sport Assistant, which is simply the requirements to become a Class A Volunteer.	
LEVEL 1 - CERTIFIED COACH	
CORE COACHING KNOWLEDGE	
For coaches to achieve Level 1 certification, they must be a Class A Volunteer/Sport Assistant and complete the following online courses:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Sport Assistant requirements • Coaching Special Olympics Athletes — FREE • Coaching Unified Sports® (from the NFHS Learning Center) — FREE 	
LEVEL 2 - CERTIFIED COACH*	
INTRO SPORTS SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE	
For coaches to achieve Level 2 certification, they must have a Level 1 certification and complete the following courses:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Level 1 requirements • Online or in-person classroom Sport Specific Introduction Course - Required Annually 	
LEVEL 3 - CERTIFIED COACH **	
ADVANCED COACHING KNOWLEDGE	
For coaches to achieve Level 3 certification, they must have Level 2 certification and complete the following courses:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Level 2 requirements • In Person training conducted by a SOIN approved trainer (minimum 2 hours) 	
** NOTE: Level required of Head Coaches attending USA Games	
WORLD GAMES CERTIFIED COACH	
For coaches to be eligible to attend a World Games, they must have Level 3 certification and complete the following course:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Level 3 requirements • Principles of Coaching Course—FREE • Online courses as determined by Special Olympics International leading up to the event • National Governing Body Certification—varies per sport 	
** NOTE: Level required of Head Coaches attending World Games	
Contact Katie Hilt khilt@soindiana.org with questions or if you are interested in joining the Coach Education Program	