



SOSC Divisioning Policy

Special Olympics
Southern California



Updated 7/14/2016



Overview

Insuring fair divisioning of athletes for competition is one of the primary duties of the Competition Manager. The following criteria shall determine how Special Olympics athletes are assigned to competition divisions. Where exceptions to these criteria are necessary, the Competition Manager will review proposed modifications to these criteria and make a final decision based on the goal of providing the most dignified and challenging competition experience for each athlete. The Competition Manager has final authority concerning divisions and any variation from these criteria. Protests based on divisioning are not allowed.

FOUNDATIONS OF DIVISIONING

- Organized to highlight the athlete
- Equitable divisions
- Consistent competition
- 15% guideline
- 3-8 Competitors per division
- The Athlete is paramount

General Requirements

AGES

Athletes must be at least eight years of age to participate in Special Olympics competition. Certain sports and events may further restrict athlete participation based on age. If pertinent, additional age requirements are indicated in the specific rules for each sport.

ABILITY AND DETERMINING CRITERIA FOR DIVISIONING

As outlined in Article I of the SOI Sports Rules, an athlete's ability is the primary factor in divisioning Special Olympics competition. The ability of an athlete or team is determined by an entry score from a prior competition, team assessment forms completed prior to competition or is the result of a seeding round or preliminary event at the competition itself. The team Head Coach is responsible for ensuring that the athlete score utilized for divisioning most accurately reflects the true ability of the athlete. Forms should be provided to allow coaches to amend qualifying or preliminary scores that will be utilized in the divisioning process. Other factors that are significant in establishing competitive divisions are age and gender.

MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM COMPETITORS

Within each division the minimum number of competitors or teams is three and the maximum number is eight. In some cases, however, the number of athletes or teams within a competition will be insufficient to achieve this goal. The following procedures describe the sequential process for creating equitable divisions and also provide guidance for managing athlete participation when factors preclude ideal divisioning.



SOSC DIVISIONING

Step One

Gender

GENDER GROUPINGS

Individual Sports:

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.).

Team Sports:

Teams will be divided into two groups based upon gender.

- Female teams shall compete against other female teams
- Male teams shall compete against other male teams.
- Mixed gender teams shall be divisioned with male teams unless there are sufficient mixed gender teams of similar ability to make a separate division.



Step Two

Age

AGE GROUPINGS

Individual Sports:

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

Additional age groups may be established if there are a sufficient number of competitors in the –30 and over age group. An athlete's age group shall be determined by the athlete's age on the date of the opening of the competition.

Team Sports:

Divide male and female teams into the following age groups

- Ages 15 and under
- Ages 16-21
- Ages 22 and over

Additional age groups may be established if there are a sufficient number of teams in the 22 and over age group. Teams should compete against other teams within the same age group. The age group of a team is determined by the age of the oldest athlete on that team on the opening date of the competition.

COMBINING AGE GROUPS

Age groups may be combined under the following circumstances:

- In individual sports, if there are less than three competitors within an age group, the athletes shall compete in the next oldest age group. That age group shall then be renamed to accurately reflect the entire range of competitors within that age group. Age groups may also be combined to reduce the variance between the highest and lowest scores within a division.
- In team sports: within each ability group, an age group may be competing against a team of a different age group. If there is only one team within an age or ability group, that team must compete against teams of other age and ability groups.
- An athlete's age group shall be determined by the athlete's age on the date of the start of the competition.



Step Three

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 three or more than eight.

Judged events

In events that are judged and where divisioning events will not be conducted during the competition:

- The nature of judging precludes the use of scores from prior competitions(s) in divisioning. Without scores from preliminary competition, performance level remains as the only criterion of athlete ability.
- For both genders and all age groups, identify athletes within each performance level.
- If more than eight athletes are in the same gender and age group of a performance level, group athletes into divisions of no less than three and no more than eight competitors.

SKILLS ASSESMENT TOOLS

- All Special Olympics team sport competitions shall utilize sport specific skills assessment tools and a divisioning round to assess the level of ability of the participating teams.
- Refer to the SOSC Sports Rules for each team sport for a description of the skills assessment tool. Additional information regarding the assessment of team sports for divisioning purposes can be found in the Special Olympics Sports Management Team Guide.
- Group teams according to ability based upon the skills assessment tool and results from the divisioning round.
- Create divisions of no less than three and no more than eight teams by applying age groups to the teams within each ability group.



Resolving Divisioning Issues

When the above process has been completed there will be instances where there will still be less than three competitors or teams in each division. In such cases the following method should be used:

1. **Modify Age Groups:** Age groups may be broadened to achieve an equitable division of no less than three athletes or teams. The age group should then be re-named to accurately reflect the age range of the competitors. However any IF/NGB rules that preclude competition between athletes of different ages (e.g. between children and adults) must be adhered to.
2. **Modify Ability Range:** The ability range may be broadened beyond the 15% guideline. Maximum should be 25-30%
3. **Combine athletes of different genders** provided that it will not pose a risk to the health and safety of athletes to do so.

EXCEPTIONS

- Final divisions of less than three athletes or teams are only permissible once age groups and ability range have been broadened as far as possible within the above guidelines.
- During individual events (e.g. Athletics and Aquatics), if a division consists of less than three individuals, the Competition Manager may run the event with multiple divisions, keeping a lane in between divisions and then award separately.
- Individual races between different genders of similar ability can be run at the same time but each gender must be in its own division and awarded separately.
- Where exceptions to these criteria are necessary, the Competition Manager will review proposed modifications to these criteria and make a final decision based on the goal of providing the most dignified and challenging competition experience for each athlete. The Competition Manager has final authority concerning divisions and any variation from these criteria. Protests based on divisioning are not allowed.

DISQUALIFICATIONS AND MAXIMUM EFFORT

- If an athlete is disqualified in a preliminary event, they may be advanced to the final competition provided that they can safely compete in that event and that a score that accurately measures their ability can be provided to the competition manager in charge of divisioning. Athletes disqualified due to sportsmanship issues will not be allowed to advance.
- If a Competition Manager determines that an athlete or team has not competed with maximum effort in preliminary and/or divisioning rounds with the clear intent to gain an unfair advantage in the divisioning process, he/she has the right to sanction that athlete or team. Sanctions may include: Verbal Warning to the player and/or coach, adjusted division placement, final placement or disqualification
- **NOTE:** The maximum effort rule is not currently enforced in SOSC local or chapter competition.



Additional Resources

- Divisioning in Special Olympics is explained in Article 1 Section 1 of the General Rules found here: <http://media.specialolympics.org/resources/sports-essentials/general/Sports-Rules-Article-1.pdf>
- Introductory video on Divisioning:
<http://media.specialolympics.org/resources/sports-essentials/divisioning/Intro-to-Divisioning.mp4>