

## TWO-SEASON SPORTS CALENDAR FACT SHEET



In keeping with Special Olympics Southern California's (SOSC) mission of providing year-round Olympic-type sports to people with intellectual disabilities and our strategic goal to serve more athletes with quality sports programs, we will begin a new two-season calendar starting in January 2010 to support our program of 12 sports.

### **Background**

In 2005, the Board of Directors recognized that SOSC athlete participation numbers had been flat for at least five years. In addition, the average age of athletes was increasing and participation among school age athletes was in steep decline. In fact, the ratio of athletes to total population was among the lowest of Special Olympics North America's programs. The decision was made to create a new strategic plan for SOSC. The Strategic Plan calls for increasing athlete participation by developing partnerships with public schools, which dovetails with Special Olympics Headquarters' strong priority of school-based programming. Among the initiatives was an examination of current program offerings and a commitment to structure SOSC's programs in a way that would provide opportunities for the maximum number of individuals of all ages.

Thus began a process that culminated in September 2008 when the Board adopted a 12-sport program. Some sports were eliminated because of continuing low participation, scarce or distant facilities, and high per-athlete costs. In December 2008, the Board endorsed a two-season calendar. Since then, staff and key volunteers collaborated to finalize the new calendar.

Throughout the four-year process, we gathered feedback from a wide range of our constituents. While we did not reach every one of our athletes, volunteers, family members and supporters, we received representative feedback that helped us make decisions consistent with SOSC's Strategic Plan. In addition, we communicated with Special Olympics programs in other states to learn from their successes and challenges. We also coordinated our plans with Special Olympics Headquarters and Special Olympics North America. Our research unveiled some interesting data about athlete participation:

- Of SOSC's more than 13,000 athletes, approximately 1,100 were participating in Winter sports, with more than 700 of those in Floor Hockey. This means that a very large number of athletes were not participating at all during the Winter season.
- The maximum amount of time that the majority of athletes participated in Special Olympics in a given year was 7 months.
- We estimated that nearly all of the athletes who were participating in snow and ice sports were also engaged in other Special Olympics sports.
- Fewer than 4 percent of SOSC's athletes were participating in the eight eliminated sports combined.

As staff and volunteers worked to develop a new sports calendar, we looked at two vs. three sports seasons. We found that:

- There is a desire for more time for athlete skill development.
- We needed a program that would accommodate new athletes enrolling mid-season.
- Staff and volunteers wanted more time for season preparation, including a more systematic and thorough approach to coach training and athlete registration.
- People want more competition opportunities throughout the season.

### **The New Two-Season Sports Calendar**

Based on our extensive research and planning we believe the new two-season sports calendar (Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter) addresses the greatest need, balancing constituent concerns and desires to the greatest benefit of the vast majority of athletes in a way that is consistent with SOSOC's mission and Strategic Plan. We believe the following questions and answers will be helpful in understanding the new Two-Season Sports Calendar.

#### **1. What are the new sports seasons?**

Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter.

#### **2. When will the new sports seasons begin?**

January 1, 2010. However, we will immediately begin detailed Region-by-Region planning with a goal of announcing the 2010 calendar by September 2009.

#### **3. When does each season begin and end?**

Spring/Summer: Preparation for the season begins in October. Athlete training begins in February. The season ends in June with Summer Games.

Fall/Winter: Preparation for the season begins in April. Athlete training begins in July. The season ends in December with Winter Games.

#### **4. How long is each season once athlete training begins?**

Each season is approximately 20 weeks long.

#### **5. What sports are included in each season?**

Spring/Summer: Athletics, Aquatics, Basketball, Bocce, Golf and Gymnastics.

Fall/Winter: Bowling, Floor Hockey, Soccer, Softball, Tennis and Volleyball.

#### **6. Will SOSOC host Summer Games and Winter Games?**

Yes. SOSOC will continue hosting Summer Games in June for the Spring/Summer season sports. We will also host Winter Games beginning in December 2010 for the Fall/Winter season sports.

#### **7. What are the plans for the 2009 Fall and Winter sports?**

Sports will continue as they are currently scheduled and will conclude in December 2009. As previously announced, SOSOC will not host a Fall or Winter Games in 2009. The 2009 Fall/Winter season will conclude with Regional Games.

**8. How will this new calendar result in more opportunities for more athletes and coaches when there are fewer sports?**

It allows us to focus our efforts on the 12 sports that we believe have the greatest potential to accommodate many more athletes in our traditional Special Olympics programs and in our School Partnership Program. We believe our athletes' experience will be enriched because they will have more training and our coaches will have more time for preparation. In addition athletes will have more local competition, including scrimmages and league play.

**9. How did you make the decision between a three-season and two-season calendar?**

There were pros and cons to both options. However, after thorough evaluation we believe the two-season calendar:

- Accommodates the greatest number of current and future athletes.
- Increases local competition opportunities.
- Enhances athlete training.
- Creates the most capacity to include new athletes.
- Promotes the most effective use of our staff, volunteer and financial resources.
- Provides the best balance between the number of sports offered and individual and team sports and opportunities to participate based on age and ability level.
- Takes into consideration the availability of facilities and provides minimal disruption to current partnerships with facilities and other organizations.

**10. Will two 20-week seasons be too long and result in athlete and coach burnout and less participation?**

Based on the feedback that we received, we believe it will actually result in less burnout, more participation and a higher quality of experience.

**11. In how many sports can athletes participate in one year?**

Athletes may participate in two Special Olympics sports each season (four sports each year), except in cases where a program may have waiting lists. In this case athletes can register for one sport so that there is room for others who are not already registered in a sport. Athletes must choose one sport each season for competition and may choose one sport each season for cross training. Any athlete who wants to participate in even more sports will be advised to seek other community sports and recreation programs.

**12. Have you considered the impact of the new calendar on volunteer coaches?**

Yes. We realize that some coaches will not be able to coach multiple sports. We see this as an opportunity to attract additional new coaches and to reduce the burden on current coaches.

**13. What if this new plan results in teams without coaches?**

Consistent with our plans to increase the number of athletes, we will need to actively recruit and train new coaches. We believe this will be of great benefit to Special Olympics because more people will be a part of our movement.

**14. Was the reason SOSOC went with two seasons related to the current economy and concerns about sponsorship and funding?**

No. The decision was driven by the belief that this new program delivery model would provide a higher quality experience to more athletes and volunteers. Some of the changes will result in

increased costs, others in reduced costs, and resources may be reallocated to support the new programs.

**15. What kind of input did you get from athletes and coaches in making the two-season decision?**

Since September 2008, our Regional sports staff has been gathering feedback from coaches and athletes through an informal process. All of this feedback was taken into account in evaluating alternatives for the sports calendar. Ultimately it became clear that the most effective way to address the challenges and desires that were expressed by constituents and to achieve the goal of serving many more athletes with quality programs was to do so within a two-season calendar.

**16. How will this calendar work in the Regions and Areas given that they are so different?**

Staff and volunteers will use the new calendar as a basic framework along with Special Olympics standards to create an approach for each Region that will build from the successes of current programs. Plans will be customized within the new calendar based on each Region's background, resources and opportunities.

**17. What are the next steps, and how can I get involved?**

Staff and volunteers will immediately begin creating plans and communicating with constituents. We encourage all interested volunteers and athletes to work with your Regional and Area staff to help create the best plan possible for each Special Olympics program.

Here is the timeline for 2009:

May –June	Begin planning for 2010
July 14 and 15	Sports planning meeting for all Regional staff
August	Finalize sports planning and calendar
September 1	Publish complete 2010 sports calendar

**18. Who should I contact if I have additional questions?**

Current coaches and volunteers should contact Regional staff for specific questions about your program or e-mail your comments to [info@sosc.org](mailto:info@sosc.org).