

Criteria for Athlete Advancement to Higher Level Competition

This information is extracted from the **Official Special Olympics Summer Sports Rules**.

Introduction: The criteria for athlete advancement, along with the divisioning procedures, are considered two of the most critical elements of Special Olympics and serve to distinguish it from virtually every other sport organization in the world. Adherence to the fundamental principles of athlete advancement is essential for the consistent implementation and development of Special Olympics Programs world-wide.

Fundamental Principles

1. Athletes of all ability levels have an equal opportunity to advance to the next higher level competition.
2. Each competition reflects all aspects of the previous competition, including but not limited to the age, gender and ability level of athletes and the variety of sports events competed in at the previous competition.

Eligibility for Advancement: An athlete is eligible to advance to the next competition provided she or he has:

1. Participated in an organized training program for at least eight consecutive weeks with opportunities to compete and practice during that period.
2. Participated in the previous competition with the following exceptions.
 - When the Games or Tournament is the first competition opportunity for an athlete, previous competition experience is not required (e.g. SOVA Alpine Skiing Championships).
 - A team for which there has been no competition opportunity at a Tournament or Games shall be eligible to advance to the next competition (e.g. a very low skilled basketball team does not have another team at its level to play).

Procedure for Athlete and Team Selection

1. Determine quota to be filled.
2. Identify the number of athletes or teams eligible for advancement.
3. If the number of eligible athletes or teams does not exceed the quota, all athletes and teams shall advance.

4. If the number of eligible athletes or teams exceeds the quota, athletes or teams that advance shall be selected as follows:
 - Priority is given to first place finishers from all divisions of the sports/event. If the number of first place finishers exceeds the quota, select athletes or teams to advance by random draw.
 - If there are not enough first place finishers to fill the quota, all first place finishers advance. The remaining quota shall be filled by a random draw of second place finishers from all divisions of the sports/event.
 - If the quota is large enough for all second place finishers to advance, the remaining quota shall be filled by a random draw of third place finishers from all divisions of the sport/event.
 - Repeat this process, adding each place of finish as necessary, until the quota is filled.
5. These procedures apply to both individual and team sports.
6. An athlete shall not be barred from advancement based on prior competition experience (e.g., an athlete shall not be prohibited from advancing to Summer Games solely on the basis that she or he attends Summer Games in the past).

Additional Guidelines

1. The son or daughter of a coach, chaperone or Council Member cannot automatically advance to the next higher level of competition. Children of volunteers must go through the same random draw process as all other athletes.
2. Just as SOVA divides quotas among Areas based on athlete participation numbers, Areas may divide their quota among locals based on athlete participation numbers to insure that all segments of the Area are represented at the next higher level of competition. If the quota is not large enough to allow all local programs to advance, a random draw or the results of an Area-wide competition should be used to determine which local programs will receive a quota in any given sport.
3. Areas may also divide the quota based on ability levels, gender or age as long as all decisions are fair and representative of the athletes training. For example, if an Area has ten bowlers and eight are male and two are female, the Area could decide that 80% of the athletes who advance will be males and 20% will be females.

4. Areas may consider the behavior, medical needs and supervision requirements of athletes in determining which athletes are eligible to advance to the next higher level of competition. Areas should deem an athlete ineligible for statewide competitions for the following reasons.
 - Behavior exhibited by the athlete would render the Area coaching staff unable to meet the athlete's needs.
 - The athlete would be unable to travel overnight without parental/guardian supervision and the parent/guardian is unable to attend the event.
 - The parent/guardian wishes to exclude an athlete from being eligible for advancement.