

# Winning isn't everything

By RAQUEL EXNER  
of the Herald

**When** the competition begins to heat up, Cindy Hopcraft pictures herself floating away on currents of air.

It keeps her relaxed. And it keeps her focused. "I just pretend I'm a bird and I'm flying. I flow actually. I just think, 'I'm just practising,'" explained the 19-year-old Hopcraft, one of more than 450 athletes participating in the Special Olympics Summer Games, held on the weekend in Prince Albert.

Although training for the Games can be a grueling task at times, it's something many local athletes take pride in.

Hopcraft explained the types of exercise she uses to help perfect the three key components she needs to work on in order to win the high jump: her run to the bar, her jump, and her landing.

"We run and we just stretch our muscles out," she said. "I always run to school all the time."

But being physically fit isn't the only aspect of training. Being mentally focused is just as important.

This dedication to physical and mental training does pay off for athletes, such as Prince Albert's Tracy Bird, who won four gold medals on the weekend.

Her excitement was quite apparent, especially when she clinched first place after an amazing shot put of 7.15 metres.

"7.15? 7.15? Did you see that?" she squealed as she clapped and dashed over to her coach jumping up and down to celebrate her first great throw.

And after the second throw she cheered some more.

"7.02! Woohoo!" said Bird as she ran her fingers through her hair and stared in amazement at the length of the tape measure gauging her shot.

But winning isn't everything for the athletes, concedes 17-year-old Bird. In fact, it doesn't really matter who wins.

"It's just for fun," she said. "You just do what you can and work hard."

Hopcraft agrees. She only had one goal in coming to the sporting event.



**RUN N' JUMP** — Chris St. Denis, a Zone 8 athlete, took part in the running long jump event at the Saskatchewan Special Olympics Summer Games on Saturday morning near the track at Carlton Comprehensive High School. St. Denis placed third in the event. Meanwhile, a handful of athletes — including Zone 8 runners Regan Mooney, third from left, Gary McKay, fourth from left, and Adam Hyggen, fifth — take off from their starting blocks moments after the gun fired to start the 100 metre race.

—Herald Photos by Raquel Exner



"You try hard and you try your best. If you lost it doesn't matter. It's just a sport. I just keep on just trying my best," she said. "If I lose I lose. If I win I win."

Keeping an upbeat attitude doesn't take much work said Adam Hyggen, 16. All athletes have to do is have fun. Then he showed what having fun is all about when he shouted out his secret about what keeps his adrenaline pumping during training and competition.

"Sugar!" he laughed.

After a bit more joking around, Hyggen explained that being a good athlete has more to do with positive attitude than the amount of one's physical or mental training.

"You don't put down your other teammates," said Hyggen. "You say 'Good luck and hope you do good next time.'"

## Games a rewarding experience

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The Zone 8 team which hosted the provincial Special Olympics Summer Games in Prince Albert on the weekend clinched first place overall.

The team of about 60, which includes athletes from Prince Albert, Melfort, Nipawin, Tisdale, and northern communities, finished with 505 points — nearly 200 points more than the second-place Zone 1 team from Estevan-Weyburn which earned 308 points.

The third-place Zone 4 team from the Yorkton-Melville area followed closely with 297.5 points.

Organizing committee chairman Phil Fredette was happy with Zone 8's showing, but didn't want to single out the team. He was just happy everyone had a good time, despite a flash flood.

"All the zones did really well. And all the athletes were smiling from ear to ear. The rain didn't seem to dampen anyone's spirits."

Many athletes and coaches said they had a good time at the event which featured track and field sports, bowling, powerlifting, softball, and

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### ON THE GAMES

- About 500 mentally challenged athletes and their coaches took part in the weekend's Special Olympics Summer Games in Prince Albert.
- Many Prince Albert athletes were multiple gold medal winners. Tracy Bird won four gold medals, while Jason Ballantyne, Justin Beaton and Ryan Roznosky all won three gold medals.

swimming.

"It's fun to be here," said Regina's Tim Cherkas from Zone 2. "There's lots of excitement. And you get to meet a lot of new people and make a lot of new friends."

Leona Ducharme from Zone 4 said she especially enjoyed the Games because this was her first visit to Prince Albert.

"This gives us a chance to show our skills and that we can improve."

But the weekend sporting event wasn't just a rewarding experience for the athletes.

Faufette Georget, a coach for Zone 8, explained how much she learned from watching the impressive behavior of the athletes.

"It's really nice to see them cheer each other on and help one another. Everybody's happy. The effort is there. I think it's been quite a reward because you see yourself working with these guys who go out there and put everything into it. These guys aren't afraid to try," noted Georget.

The only disappointment surrounding the event was that very few people not involved in Special Olympics showed up to watch and cheer on the athletes.

Overall, though, Fredette felt the Games went smoothly.

"We can all say that everything went well because we didn't hear any complaints. But they were all having so much fun, that's how we have to measure our success by."

The Saskatchewan team for the 1998 Canadian Summer Special Olympics Games in Ontario will be chosen from the athletes who competed at the Prince Albert games.