

A Special opportunity for athletes

By DAVID MOSER
L-P Sports Writer

Special Olympics are not just an athletic event, they're also a door opener.

For Gay Helmsing, the chairperson of the 1993 Saskatchewan Special Olympics Summer Games in Regina, the event has a very personal meaning. Helmsing, a Regina city councillor, was proud to watch her son, Clay, light the Games' flame on Friday and compete in track and field Saturday.

"It's opened so many doors for him," Helmsing said Saturday at Douglas Park. "Both his brother and sister are active in sport and dance. He's spent all his life sitting in the stands and watching them.

"Now that he's part of Special Olympics, he has to get his whole family out to watch him participate. Special Olympics provide the opportunity for kids to get out of the stands to participate."

Helmsing said that, as a parent of a Special Olympics athlete, she wanted to do as much as possible to make the organization work.

"Special Olympics (which is for athletes with a mental handicap) have done so much for Clay's sense of self-image," said Helmsing, who watched Clay win a gold medal in the men's level C 100 metres and a silver in the long jump. "He even walks like an athlete. He has that air of self-confidence. It comes from the opportunity to work out, to be in training and to practise.

"What is so great about Special Olympics is that it's not the best athlete who is going to win, but the one putting in the most effort or working the hardest."

Regina (Zone 2) coach Cam Huberdeau knows all about hard work. His throat was raw Saturday from yelling encouragement to his athletes.

"They need to know when they are running that, in the last 50 metres, they need to push themselves harder to get over the finish line," said Huberdeau, the 1992 Canadian Special Olympics coach-of-the-year.

"We're getting more athletes and more volunteers involved. We're getting more coaches who want to help out. We're known within the track clubs in the city. A lot of doors have been opening for us with the track clubs in letting us train with them, using their equipment and teaching us new skills."

Special Olympics track and field has become a boom sport. One of the reasons is that Special Olympics

have been competing in generic track meets. Special Olympic athletes had full-medal status at the 1992 Saskatchewan Summer Games.

Huberdeau, who works at the Jean Vanier School for mentally and physically handicapped children,



Huberdeau

has taken athletes to six meets during the past year, including the Knights of Columbus Indoor Games in Saskatoon and two Wheat City Kinsmen meets.

"We travel throughout Saskatchewan going to as many meets as we can to give them the opportunity of competition and to get the feeling what it's like to compete at generic meets," Huberdeau said. "They get a lot of cues by watching the generic athletes in the starting blocks and running. They pick up things they never thought of before."

Tim Cherkas of Regina, who won four gold medals Saturday in the men's level A 100m, 200m and 400m and the long jump, has competed in a lot of generic meets.

"My goal with a lot of my people is to get them involved with generic sports," said Huberdeau. "I don't want to take them totally out of Special Olympics. I want doors open on both sides."



Cherkas

Cherkas enjoyed competing in the generic meets.

"It helped me a lot because it helped me prepare for Games like this," said Cherkas. "I wouldn't mind competing for a track club.

"I wouldn't mind but I'd rather stick with Special Olympics because they are a great bunch of guys."

The Summer Games wrapped up with a banquet and dance Saturday and breakfast with the WHL's Regina Pats on Sunday.

Results in Scoreboard.