

Special athletes value coaches

By IAN HAMILTON
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When the Saskatchewan Special Olympics 1989 Winter Games come to Regina next week, the spotlight will shine — and deservedly so — on the athletes.

However, even the participants will admit the Games wouldn't go off without the help of the people in the shadows — the coaches and volunteers.



Gilroy

"They give us support, take us everywhere, make the plans for all of our trips — we couldn't do it without our coaches." Gary Gilroy, a Special Olympics floor hockey player, said following a media conference staged Thursday at the Sands Hotel to publicize the Games.

"I've been there when coaches couldn't make it. People are running all over the place. We need somebody all the time."

Not surprisingly, there are those who are willing to give all of their time to the Special Olympians.

"For a lot of athletes, this is their life and not only in athletics, but in the

social aspect of their life," said Cam Huberdeau, a 13-year Special Olympics volunteer who's the chief de mission for Regina's team at the upcoming Winter Games.

"To know you've had a hand in that part of their life, to have helped them develop into the person they are now, is very rewarding."

Huberdeau first got involved with Special Olympics while working at a special needs school. After hearing from a co-worker that some volunteers were needed at a Special Olympics event, Huberdeau went out — and got hooked.

The same thing happened to Daryl Wiebe 13 years ago.

"A weekend like this came and they needed some extra officials," said Wiebe, a coach with the Regina Razors' floor hockey team and the Canadian Special Olympics male coach of the year in 1986.

"Both my wife (Theresa) and I had decided to get involved as a volunteer in some area, so we thought, 'Why not this?' We thought we'd take part in that one weekend and by golly if it doesn't snowball from there."

"Someone threw out an anchor, I caught it and I've been dragged along ever since."

The Razors are one of the teams slated to play in the Winter Games, which

begin Feb. 26 and wrap up Feb. 28.

More than 250 athletes, coaches and mission staff are to be in Regina to participate in four sports — floor hockey, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and speed skating.

A fifth event, figure skating, has been moved from Regina to Moose Jaw's Wally Boshuck Arena in the Pla More Palace complex.

There are roughly 500 recorded volunteers for Special Olympics in Saskatchewan, but countless others have helped out in the past. More helpers would be welcome.

"It's pretty difficult to find volunteers," Huberdeau said. "I don't think we're out there enough."

"We need to educate the public as to what special needs is and to what Special Olympics is. This is not a once-a-year thing. In Regina, for instance, we run the program 12 months a year."

And the volunteers may get as much from those 12 months as do the athletes.

"When you see them on the street, they always have a smile on their face," Huberdeau said of the athletes. "Then when you go to practice, no matter what kind of mood you're in, you'll always leave with a smile on your face."

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