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# Special games for special people

By Darron Kloster  
L-P Sports Writer

The Saskatchewan Special Olympics will provide social interaction, emotional and physical development and integration into an ever-changing world for hundreds of the province's mentally handicapped athletes.

Those seemingly simple personal qualities that millions of Canadians take for granted aren't always that easy to attain for the mentally handicapped, said Benoit Bouchard, secretary of state for the status of disabled persons in Canada. The games, organized by the Saskatchewan Special Olympics Society, will be held this weekend in Regina.

"Since 1969, the games have been helping the handicapped in so many ways to fit into our society," said Bouchard, who stopped in Regina this week during a whirlwind tour of the country to promote the Special Olympics program.

Saskatchewan has always been impressive. The games have always been a success here. It's good to see people working hard to ensure their success.

Over 300 athletes and coaches from eight provincial zones will be bringing their talent to Regina for the multi-event competition.

of the athletes competed for the right to attend the provincial games at qualifier competitions held in their respective zones during May. Training programs for zone teams took place in early June.

Local organizers, headed by chairman Andy Schuck, are putting together a host of track and field events as well as swimming, bowling and horseshoes. George Reed, former Canadian Football League star and founder of Club 34, is honorary head coach for the games.

"We're really looking forward to it," said Zone J1 (Regina) chairperson Karen Wihak. "The participants in our zone are so excited. They've been practising every chance they get. Some are swimming, some are running - it's a good variety for everyone."

Wihak said winning is actually a small part of the games for the athletes. The social aspects of participation and involvement play the major roles.

"They can have fun without the pressure of winning," she said. "A lot of these kids remember each other from other years and they keep in touch by writing. By the time the games roll around, they

Each zone will send 30 athletes and as many as eight coaches. Most

can't wait to see each other. Friendship is what makes these games such a success and so much fun."

The games will get under way on Friday at 4:30 p.m. with swimming at the Lawson Aquatic Centre. Bowling starts at 5 p.m. at Prairie Bowling Lanes. Opening ceremonies at Douglas Park will take place at 9 a.m. on Saturday, followed by track and field and the super athlete events. Horseshoes start at 10:15 a.m. at Kiwanis Park.

The super athlete event, a relatively new concept in the Special Olympics program, involves a professional athlete from each of the province's eight zones teaming up with eight participants in selected events. A complete list of those athletes will be announced Friday.

