

# First province-wide meet proves to be highly successful gathering

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The Regina Kiwanis band played the National Anthem and athletes from each district paraded onto the field. The flame was lit and the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus raised the flag. Two hundred and sixty balloons, used in place of doves, floated into the air and the stage was set.

The occasion was the Saskatchewan Special Olympics and for 270 mentally retarded youngsters who gathered Saturday at Douglas Park it was truly special.

It was the first provincial-scale meet held in Saskatchewan and athletes from Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Moose Jaw, Yorkton and Regina took part in the training, fitness and Olympic programs.

Although it was an initial

attempt, the results were better than expected and the program will become an annual affair. Next year's Olympics will be geared to accommodate a 25 per cent increase in athletic participation and plans are being made to make it bigger and better each year.

The competitors were kept busy throughout the day and tested their skills on the track, in the sand pits and on the jump courses.

George Armstrong, who coached last year's ice hockey team in the Canadian National Special Olympics, flew in from Toronto Friday to lend a hand.

Around the field, persons were helping in the different clinics. Members of the Saskatchewan Roughriders were tossing the football with some of the athletes. Marlene Hoffman was handling the

volleyball court and Bill Cronin was mingling with the softball enthusiasts.

On the track, the dust had little time to settle as the heats were run continuously. Although some of the runners trailed the rest of the field, they always sported a smile as they were cheered on to the finish line. No matter how far they fell back they always managed to finish through sheer persistence.

Armstrong, who has attended meets for the mentally retarded in Chicago and Toronto felt the meet was a great success. "It's a great thrill for the kids. They learn more about the world and now they know more than just the backyard or corner store," said Armstrong.

"It's an education for the parents because they realize that their's isn't the only one in the world and that's prob-

ably the most important part. A lot of people around here have put a great deal of time into this thing and it's paying off. Look at the smiles on those faces," said the Chief.

Andy Schuck, chairman of the Special Olympics, is one who has toiled endless hours to make the meet a success. "This is tremendous," said Schuck. "Everything becomes worthwhile when I watched the first kid dive into the pool Friday, the first day of the Olympics."

Ned Helfrick, coach of the Saskatoon district team, expressed the same opinion as Schuck. "Everything became brings these people into society and most of them are trainable. We have one athlete who is three feet, nine inches and at the district meet he jumped 3' 6". After a few

hours of practice each night he managed to equal his own height here today and that shows you what a little practice and training can do," said Helfrick.

As the meet drew to a close, happy faces could be seen everywhere as the competitors displayed their prizes of victory — gold medals for first, silver for second and bronze for third.

To end the first Special Olympics, athletes along with spectators joined hands and formed a large circle as the air was filled with "Auld Lang Syne". The flame was extinguished and the flag lowered. Schuck, who was presented with the Olympic Flag, summed up the whole feeling of the meet in his closing speech when he said "To us you are all winners."