

# A special time at Douglas Park



There are competitions which attract more spectators and exhibit more raw skill, perhaps none can rival the Special Olympics for the sheer joy of participation. Here are some scenes from the Saskatchewan Special Olympics held Saturday at Douglas Park.

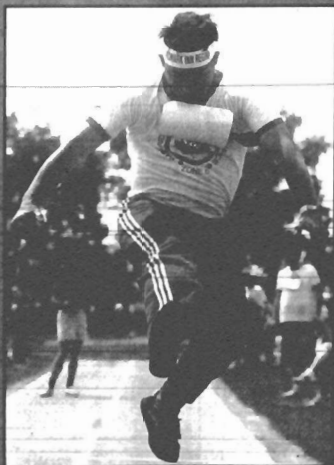
• **TOP RIGHT:** Pauline Juhászová of Bratislava became an avid athlete the minute she was in the swimming competitions at the beginning of her life pool.

• **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Joe Huberdeau of Weyburn (green shirt) beams in the track in a 100-meter race.

• **BOTTOM CENTRE:** Joe Matheson of Saskatoon lunges for the pit in the long jump.

• **LEFT:** Gary Thon congratulates fellow Outlook competitor Betty Thon after she has completed a race.

Leader-Post photos by **PATRICK PETTIT**



## 'They're here to make friends'

By **ROB VANSTONE**  
L-P Sports Writer

When Peter Watilin is asked to explain the allure of Special Olympics, he relates the tale of a little girl in North Battleford.

"She was running the 50 metres," he recalls of a spring day in 1960. "You could tell it was the first time she was competing in any kind of event."

"Her family was out there watching her compete. You could see it probably meant even more to her parents than it did to her, because she couldn't fully understand the magnitude of what she was doing."

At the time, neither did Watson. The 1980 Saskatchewan Special Olympics were his first as a volunteer.

"When the race started, the parents were walking with her at the side of the track," he continues. "Then they started running alongside her. It wasn't that they were helping her run. It was almost like they were running with her through the..."

rence it was for that family. Her family lives with it. They take it back home and live with every up and down in her life."

Ten years later, Watson and countless other volunteers remain dedicated to enriching the lives of mentally handicapped athletes. They were at it again Saturday at Douglas Park, site of the 1990 Saskatchewan Special Olympics.

The 22nd annual event featured 210 entrants from across Saskatchewan. Many got along famously with Watson, a former Saskatchewan Roughriders running back who remained in Regina after a 1974 knee injury brought his promising CFL career to a premature halt.

"I'll tell you what I like about this," says Watson, a financial planner. "To put it in one word, they're honest. If they don't like you, they tell you. You have to earn their love. If you love them, they'll love you back. It sounds trite, but it's true."

"They'll say to your face what's on their mind. It's not because they're simple. It's because they're not complex. There's a difference there."

Frank Kovacs can also attest to that difference. The Regina Pats forward was an enthusiastic volunteer at Saturday's proceedings.

"When I talk with the guys, it makes me realize they're normal just like everyone else," Kovacs says. "People think they're different. They're not. I talk with them and they're funny. I have more fun with these guys than with some of my friends."

"One guy knows all about the Western Hockey League. He was telling me everything about it. I was learning from him! It was awesome. It's really too bad they don't have the ability to live out that dream."

Kovacs and his Pats teammates are quite familiar with the Special Olympians, some of whom are unabashed Pats supporters.

"They come into our dressing room quite often and talk with the guys," Kovacs says. "One guy always comes over and hugs me."

"The guys call him Valero because he's always hanging on to me. I don't mind a bit. It's great."

The athletes have also embraced Cam Huberdeau of Regina, who works with them up to five

nights per week. He coached several competitors in Saturday's track and field event.

"You can tell by the kids' faces that they enjoy what they're doing," says Huberdeau, a Saskatchewan Special Olympics Society volunteer since 1987. "They don't care whether they win or lose. They're here to make friends."

"No matter who you are, they come over with a handshake and a hug to say hi."

And a heartfelt thank you.

"This has brought happiness into my life," says Robert Kelly, a 28-year-old Regina man who won four swimming medals. "I thank the coaches at Special Olympics. They helped train me to become a winner."

"Before, it was just rotten. I was bored. But I've made quite a few friends at Special Olympics and enjoyed myself."

Friendship is also the key ingredient for Watson. It's a virtually impossible not to notice.

"I won the Pats'... I claim a... a... gold medalist. I did it just for you."