

SPECIAL OLYMPICS CANADA - DIVISIONING PROCESS

COMPETITION EXPECTATIONS

- a) Special Olympics competitions provide athletes with the opportunity to demonstrate sport skills they have acquired during training. Special Olympics athletes, like all dedicated athletes, strive for their best performance at each competition. To enhance their competitive experience, competitions should be organized to highlight the athletes. In Special Olympics this means that regardless of an athlete's place of finish, each performance is considered a personal victory. The athlete is paramount.
- b) Sport Rules are generally based on National/International Governing Body competition rules and regulations for that sport. Special Olympics Canada has developed modified rules, where necessary, in order to maximize the successful participation of all athletes and to encourage competition throughout every level of the organization. Competitions must be conducted consistently, in accordance with these recognized rules and capably officiated.
- c) The fundamental difference which sets Special Olympics competitions apart from those of other sports organizations is that athletes of all ability levels are encouraged to participate and every athlete is recognized for his or her performance. Competitions are structured so that athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability in equitable divisions. Historically, Special Olympics has suggested that all divisions be created where the variance between the highest and lowest scores within that division not differ more than 25%. This 25% statement is *not a rule*, but should be used as guidelines for establishing equitable divisions when the number of athletes competing is appropriate.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMPETITOR

- a) Athletes shall abide by the letter and spirit of the rules and be responsible for conducting themselves in a sportsmanlike manner at all times. Athletes who do not conduct themselves in this manner, or who are offensive by action or language toward other athletes, coaches, volunteers, opponents, officials, and/or spectators, may be disqualified from further participation.
- b) Athletes who do not participate honestly and with maximum effort in all preliminary trial and/or finals may be subject to the Maximum Performance Rule (refer to page 5).

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COACH

- a) Coaches shall place the health and safety of Special Olympics athletes above all else.
- b) Coaches shall abide by the letter and spirit of the rules and be responsible for conducting themselves in a sportsmanlike manner at all times. Coaches who do not conduct themselves in this manner, or who are offensive by action or language toward athletes, other coaches, volunteers, opponents, officials, and/or spectators, may be prohibited from coaching.
- c) Coaches shall be knowledgeable of all existing Special Olympics and National/International Governing Body competition rules and regulations, and prepare their athletes prior to competition in accordance with those rules.

- d) Coaches shall ensure that athletes compete in events within their sport which challenge their potential and are appropriate to their ability.
- e) Coaches shall be honest and instruct athletes to compete with maximum effort in all preliminary trials and/or finals and they shall be prohibited from coaching by the sports specific rules committee at the competition.
- c) Team Coaches shall ensure that athletes of all ability levels on a team participate in every game.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMPETITION MANAGER

- a) Competition Managers shall ensure that a complete range of events is scheduled in each sport to provide maximum competition opportunities to athletes.
- b) Competition Managers shall organize competitions in accordance with Special Olympics principles and conduct all events to the letter and spirit of the sports rules.
- c) Competition Managers shall utilize the procedures for divisioning when structuring Special Olympics competitions.

INTRODUCTION TO DIVISIONING

- a) Divisions must be a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 8 athletes and/or teams. The exception is if there are less than 3 individuals entered into a specific event or level in a judged sport (refer to “Procedures for Divisioning”). The procedures for divisioning have been developed to assist Competition Managers in applying the principles of fair and equitable competition to athletes of all ability levels within their competitions.
- b) This document was designed to provide Competition Managers with a foundation for competent decision making in terms of divisioning. The primary focus throughout the divisioning process should be on the competitiveness of the Special Olympics athlete.
- c) Competition Managers are entrusted with the responsibility and must meet the challenge of providing Special Olympics athletes with quality competition.

PROCEDURES FOR DIVISIONING

- a) An athlete's ability is the primary factor in divisioning Special Olympics competitions. The ability of an athlete or team is determined by an entry score from a prior competition, or is the result of a seeding round or preliminary event at the competition itself or submitted assessments in the case of team sports. In some sports, another factor that is significant in establishing competitive divisions is gender.

- b) Competition is enhanced when all divisions are a minimum of 3 and maximum of 8 competitors or teams of similar ability. In some cases, however, the number of athletes or teams within a competition may be insufficient to achieve this goal. The following procedures describe the sequential process for creating equitable divisions by event and also provides guidance for managing athlete participation when factors preclude ideal divisioning.

Divisioning Process for Individual Sports:

This would include Summer - Athletics, Aquatics, Golf, and Powerlifting
 Winter - Speed Skating, Snowshoeing, Cross Country Skiing, Alpine Skiing,

Step 1: Divide by gender

Step 2: Divide by ability

- Proceed on the premise that the recommended performance difference between athletes in a division is 25%.

Step 3: Divide number of athletes registered in an event.

For 3 or more athletes:

- Place athletes into division (minimum 3, maximum 8 athletes per division)
- If you have more than 8 athletes in a division reduce the performance percentage to produce new ability groupings – 5% at a time is suggested. For example an ability group could be reduced to 20% difference in performance to create two ability groupings.

For 2 athletes entered into an event:

- Athletes compete against each other (providing they are of the same gender).

For 1 athlete entered into an event;

- For events that are not divisioned the athlete would be awarded a gold medal (NOTE: Divisioned events are those which have a preliminary and final event in the same competition)
- For events that are divisioned an athlete would compete against their own divisioning time in the event. If they are competing against their own divisioning time medals would be awarded as follows:
 - Gold medal: Final performance is better than the divisioning performance
 - Silver medal: Final performance is the same as or less than the divisioning performance by 10%
 - Bronze medal: Final performance is less than the seed performance by 11 – 25%

Divisioning Process for Judged Sports:

This would include Summer - Rhythmic Gymnastics / Winter - Figure Skating

Step 1: Divide by gender

Step 2: Divide by ability, using predetermined levels of ability as outlined in sport rules.

Step 3: If there are 8 or less competitors in a level, no divisioning will occur and all competitors in that level will compete against each other. If there are more than 8 competitors in a level, you would:

- Figure Skating – Divide by ability using their element scores
- Rhythmic Gymnastics – A divisioning round will be run and athletes will be placed in their final division according to their all round scores.

Divisioning Process for 10-Pin Bowling:

Step 1: Divide by gender

Step 2: Divide by ability

- Classification for divisioning will be based upon no more than 8 competitors/teams per division.
- For competition, there must be a minimum of 3 entries in any one event.
- When establishing divisions for competition:
 - Individuals will be placed into categories based on their average.
 - Doubles teams will be placed into divisions based upon the bowler's combined averages.
 - Teams will be placed into divisions based upon the bowlers combined averages.
- An individual athlete may or may not be assigned to the same division for the individual, doubles or team competition.

Divisioning Process for Team Sports:

This would include Summer - Basketball, Bocce, Soccer, and Softball
Winter – Curling and Floor Hockey, 5 Pin Bowling

Step 1: Teams are placed in divisioning round groupings based on the Team Skill Assessment/Pre-Competition Questionnaire (in the case of 5 Pin bowling this would be by the total of team averages)

Step 2: The divisioning round will be run in accordance with the rules in the technical package for that sport.

Step 3: Following the divisioning round, teams will be placed in final divisions (minimum 3, maximum 8 teams per division). A coaches meeting will be held to announce the divisions and coaches may express concerns on the divisions to the divisioning committee but final divisioning may not be protested.

****NOTE:** In a competition where there are no divisioning rounds due to schedule limitations, divisions would be based on submitted assessments. Refer to Sport Sanctioning Supplements

MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE RULE (MPR)

Divisioning heats are conducted to ensure that athletes compete against athletes of a similar ability level in their final competition. To ensure that athletes compete at the best of their ability during the divisioning round, the maximum performance rule will be implemented.

NOTE: The Maximum Performance Rule pertains to competition in which there is a divisioning event and final event in the same competition.

Maximum performance would indicate that there should be no more than 15% difference in performance between divisioning and final events. If an athlete exceeds their divisioning event performance by 15% in the final round of competition the following shall occur.

- Athlete is flagged under the Maximum Performance Rule (MPR).
- The athlete will be re-divisioned and placed in the correct division as indicated by their time/distance.
- The athlete will be eligible for a medal if their time/distance warrants.
- Re-divisioning will not affect the standing of athletes in the division where the flagged athlete is placed (i.e. re-divisioned athlete places third in new division, the athlete in that division who currently holds third place will also be awarded third place).
- Flagged athlete will not receive any selection points (for advancement to higher levels of competition) for the event.
- The Maximum Performance Rule would not apply if an athlete when re-divisioned would still be placed in the same division.

If the coach is of the opinion that his/her athlete has not competed at the best of their ability in the divisioning race, and may be in danger of violating the MPR, they have the option to submit a faster time for their athlete so that they can be placed in a division which reflects their ability.

If an athlete falls or is disqualified in their divisioning event, the coach has the following options:

1. Submit a faster time or longer distance/greater height
2. Concede the event qualifying time/distance/height
3. Rerun the event
 - Note: the following events are eligible to be rerun:
 - Aquatics: all 25m and 50m races
 - Athletics: 50m, 100m, 200m, 400m, hurdles
 - Cross-country Skiing: 100m and 500m
 - Snowshoeing: 100m and 200m
 - Speed Skating: 111m and 222m

If an athlete falls or is disqualified in the second divisioning race they will have the following options:

1. Submit a faster time or longer distance/greater height
2. Concede the event qualifying time/distance/height

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE RULE CANNOT BE PROTESTED.

(Maximum Performance Rule – Continued)

Cross-country Skiing Exception:

For sports like cross-country skiing, where environmental changes can impact the performance of the athlete, the following procedure should be implemented:

- Prior to the start of each cross-country divisioning event, a forerunner will ski the track to determine a baseline time for the course. The same forerunner would ski the track again prior to the final race in each event to establish if the track conditions favour a faster time. This will establish if a percentage change is required to be made to the maximum performance rule. Coaches will be informed if a percentage change is to be made.

CONCLUSION

Divisioning is an element of Special Olympics many feel facilitates the best competition in sport. When done properly it allows all athletes to compete in an environment that is challenging and provides opportunity for success. Thank you for your commitment to create quality competition opportunities for our athletes and coaches.

Questions on divisioning can be directed to:

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