

Q: How will pre-divisioned direct finals work?

A: Competing athletes will be placed in divisions three weeks prior to the World Games using the most updated entry time submitted by the coach on or before 11 February 2019 (four weeks in advance of the Games). We will communicate with coaches as we get closer to the date as to how we will collect these time entries.

Q: Which events will be direct finals?

A: Athletics – 100m run, 200m run, 400m run, 800m run, 1500m run, 400m walk, 800m walk, 3,000m run, 5,000m run, 10,000m run, half marathon, 4x100m relay, 4x400m relay

Roller skating - 100m race, 300m race, 500m race, 1000m race

Swimming - 100m freestyle, 100m backstroke, 100m butterfly, 100m breaststroke, 100m individual medley, 200m individual medley, 200m breaststroke, 200m freestyle, 200 backstroke, 400m freestyle, 800m freestyle, 1500m freestyle

Open water swimming - 1500m open water swimming, 1500m unified open water swimming

Triathlon - 750m swim, 20K bike, 5K run

Q: Why is this being done?

A: In the Global Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, one of Special Olympics' primary goals is to improve athlete performance by strengthening coaching and promoting year-round training and local competitions around the world. The use of direct finals will improve all aspects of competition management by advancing training, divisioning, and ensuring consistent implementation of sports rules across the world.

By using entry scores and times to form final divisions, we are promoting the concept that Special Olympics Programs are capable of ensuring athletes have received sufficient training, which can be measured by their ability to provide an accurate time or score, so athletes will be placed in a competitive and fair division based on their actual ability and training in the sport. It is the coach's responsibility to ensure the athlete has a positive competitive experience. To help, we have strengthened coach recruitment and education to develop fit, skillful athletes who are prepared to compete. Just like any international sports organization, we expect our athletes to train in their events, so they are ready to compete on the world stage.

Additionally, athletes, coaches, media, and spectators will benefit by knowing when, where, and against which competitors an athlete will compete in prior to their arrival. This will enable athletes and coaches to be better prepared in advance of their final race and for the organization to promote the event and highlight the participating athletes.

By utilizing direct finals, scheduling and information flows will make it easier for media, family, and fans to follow the athletic performances of athletes and teams. They will also provide adequate lead time as we prepare for commentary for live sports broadcast coverage of the World Games.

It is expected that all athletes be well trained in order to achieve consistent results between their qualifying scores and final competition. Poor training or preparation will not be considered an acceptable excuse for variations in performance. The integrity of the divisioning process can be adversely affected by both poor athlete training and lack of maximum effort, and if we do not do our best to uphold the integrity of the divisioning process, those athletes who abide by the rules and train properly are unfairly penalized. Athletes strive to compete at the World Games, and by instituting direct finals, we are guaranteeing that they will be competing at the top level of an international sports organization that values fairness and quality.

Q: Is there data to support this?

A: We have successfully conducted direct final events at previous World Games based on entry times in endurance events, such as the half marathon and the following swimming events: 100m butterfly, 400m freestyle, and 800m freestyle.

Most recently, at the Los Angeles 2015 World Games, 100m butterfly and 400m freestyle swimming events were conducted as direct finals. Registration entry times were used to division the athletes for their finals, and coaches were given the opportunity to update the times at the Games if needed. For this pilot program, only 2 swimmers entered in the 100m butterfly and 400m freestyle events were disqualified for Maximum Effort violations (when final times exceeded entry times by more than 15%).

Additionally, when we compared the divisioning times to the registration entry times for the 100m athletics event, only 6.33% of the athletes' times were 15% faster than the entry times. This demonstrates that the submitted entry times were fairly accurate assessments for divisioning. It is projected that less than 6.33% of the athletes will be at risk of Maximum Effort violations (finals times that exceed submitted entry times by more than 15%) due to the increased importance of submitting accurate entry times for pre-divisioned direct finals.

Q: Who was consulted?

A: The SOI Global Leadership Team requested and approved a concept proposal to conduct pre-divisioned direct finals at the 2019 World Games in Abu Dhabi. Subsequently we have consulted with the Regional Sport Directors, Technical Delegates, and the Sports Rules Advisory Committee.

Q: Please explain how the 30 percent of competition means?

A: At least 30% of all timed sport events will be divisioned in advance of the games based on [entry times](#) submitted as part of the registration process.

Q: What is the process and timelines?

A: Athletes will be placed in divisions 3 weeks prior to the Games using the most updated entry time submitted by the coach on or before February 11, 2019 (4 weeks in advance of the Games). We will post these divisions as soon as we make them.

Q: Is this a pilot or a new way of divisioning for the future?

A: This isn't a new way of divisioning, but it is a movement toward relying on accurate entry scores from properly trained athletes who are ready to compete to the best of their ability. Many Programs use pre-divisioned direct finals to conduct their local, area, state, and national competitions, and it has been utilized at World Games in the past, including LA 2015 for 100m butterfly and 400m freestyle, with success.

Q: Should Programs be changing the structure of divisioning locally? If so, how?

A: Because of time and resource limitations, many local programs do not conduct on-site divisioning but rely on entry scores already.

Q: Will direct finals affect Unified Sports teammates?

A: No, it will not affect Unified teammates. Most of these timed events are individual events without Unified Partners. For Unified Sports, Unified Partners will be held to the same standard as athletes and required to send accurate entry scores in advance just as they are held to the same standards with every competition.

Q: How will the effectiveness of direct finals be monitored?

A: We will assess the variances in performance results versus entry scores to determine if accurate entry scores were submitted. Prior to the Abu Dhabi 2019 World Games, the 2018 USA Games in Seattle will have all timed individual swimming events and individual track events, as well as field events, for athletics as direct finals. In addition to analyzing prior Games results that utilized direct finals, we will evaluate how well it works for the USA Games.

Q: What will be the appeal protocol/structure at the World Games?

A: Anyone can submit a rule proposal or an appeal to the Sports Rules Advisory Committee regarding the general divisioning process. However, per Special Olympics rules, the actual divisioning of athletes into certain divisions at a specific event cannot be protested because of its subjective nature.

Q: Is there a contingency plan if large numbers of athletes in the pre-divisioned direct finals are disqualified for violation of the Maximum Effort Rule?

A: As pre-divisioned direct finals is a new initiative, SOI sports staff will be monitoring the results closely and will make adjustments to the disqualification percentage as needed.

Q: Will SOI provide the specifications of the venues beforehand?

A: Yes, SOI will. The HODs have already been provided with the type of floor for roller skating, and the sports team is working on acquiring venue specifics for swimming and athletics. These will be available as soon as possible.

Q: Will Programs with less funding and/or completely volunteer-run Programs be able to record scores/times properly? Are there resources in place/being put in place to help them?

A: In a Program's accreditation documents, the Program agrees to run a quality sport program. Making sure that athletes who will compete at the World Games are prepared for their events ahead of the Games is part of being a quality program. However, if a Program is unable to submit an accurate assessment of the athlete's ability, SOI will be available to help.

Q: How will we guarantee coaches don't submit inaccurate times?

A: We expect coaches to abide by the Special Olympics' coaches' code of conduct that specifically states, "I will ensure that accurate scores are provided for entry of an athlete into any event." Moreover, if a coach is consistently training an athlete for competition, he or she will be able to review historical data to ensure that the submitted score is the most indicative of how the athlete will perform. Coaches are responsible for helping place athletes in the proper division to ensure they have a competitive experience regardless of their ability level.

Q: What will happen if there is an extreme number of disqualifications?

A: A jury review is recommended to determine if there were any unfair advantages or special circumstances. If so, the jury will adjust accordingly. If there are no unfair advantages or special circumstances, then the disqualification stands.