



***Coach Guide***  
***for Special Olympics Unified Sports®***  
***Creating a Unified Team - Basketball***

2017

This document was developed for people, mostly PE teachers and coaches, who want to start a Special Olympics Unified Basketball Team. It includes general information about the Unified Sports® Program and instructions how to build a Unified Basketball team. The purpose of this document is to give an idea on how a Unified team works, how it is set up, what special rules exist and how to encourage people to be part of the Unified Basketball community in Europe as well as to give some examples for a training session.

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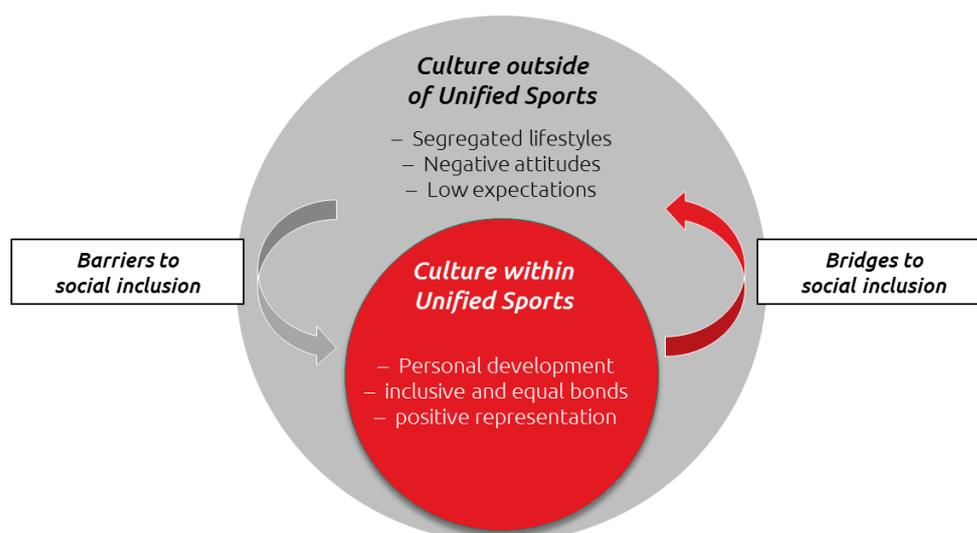
## 1 **About Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

The concept behind Special Olympics Unified Sports is simple yet powerful: people with and without intellectual disabilities playing together on the same team is a quick path to friendship and social inclusion. Driven by fun, development of new skills and talents supported by positive attitudes, community activation and engagement.

We call the teammates with intellectual disabilities “Athletes”, the players without intellectual disabilities “Partners”.

## 2 **Results**

Various studies conducted by Universities across Europe led by the Special Olympics Regional Research collaboration Centre at the University of Ulster/Northern Ireland show the impact of Unified Sports on social inclusion. It serves as a bridge to social inclusion transferring the positive and inclusive culture within the Unified setting into the community, into the environment, into society which typically presents a rather negative culture for people with intellectual disabilities.



## 3 **The 'menu': Three Options Model**

Unified Sports is structured around three different models:

- The Unified Sports Competitive Model
- The Unified Sports Player Development Model
- The Unified Sports Recreation Model

All three models have social inclusion as the core outcome; however, the structure and function of each model varies.

In the **Unified Sports Competitive Model** equal numbers of players with and without intellectual disabilities are on the same sport teams for regular training and competition. Players should be of similar age and ability and should have the necessary sport skills and tactics to compete without modification of the official Special Olympics Sports Rules. There should be a minimum of 8 weeks training period before the first competition of a new team.



Teams that participate in this model are eligible for advancement to international competition at Regional and World Games.

In the **Player Development Model**, we should have equal numbers of players with and without intellectual disabilities on the same sport teams. They should be of similar age. Opposed to the Competitive model teammates are not required to be of similar abilities. Teammates of higher abilities are in the role of mentors assisting teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics. It is important that mentors should not be coaches but peers. Rules modifications are allowed and designed to ensure Meaningful Involvement of all teammates. Similar to the Competitive model there should be a minimum of 8 weeks training period before the first competition of a new team. Teams that participate in this model are eligible to compete up to national Program level.

**The Unified Sports Recreation Model** is different from the other two models as it does not follow any specific training and competition requirements. Only for team composition, a minimum of 25% of participants should be Athletes and a minimum of 25% with any disability. The remaining 50% may be made up of Athletes and Partners. Competition can only be run on local level. The focus is on having fun together in inclusive sport teams and activities of any type. A typical event could be a sport demonstration event, a sports day or a series of inclusive sport courses or classes in a school or local sport club.

Competitive Model	Player Development Model	Recreation Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar age and ability</li> <li>• Necessary sport skills and tactics</li> <li>• Compete without modification of Rules</li> <li>• 8 weeks training period before competition</li> <li>• Eligible for advancement for Regional and World Games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar age not ability</li> <li>• Players of higher abilities as mentors</li> <li>• Modification of Rules</li> <li>• 8 weeks training period before competition</li> <li>• Competition up to national Program level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No specific training, competition and team composition requirements</li> <li>• The focus is on having fun together</li> <li>• Inclusive sport teams and activities of any type</li> <li>• Competition on local level</li> </ul>

## **4 Right choice of Model and Meaningful Involvement of Players**

### **4.1 How to choose the right model**

There is no rule which model to choose, it’s an individual decision of the coach and the team: To be able to adjust and adapt to the local situation, to the people involved, to their motivation, interest and availability. To allow a positive experience for everyone who participates, which can be achieved through “Meaningful Involvement” of all players.

### **4.2 The “Principle of Meaningful Involvement (POMI)”**

The “Principle of Meaningful Involvement” ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and abilities.

For all three models, it is important that every teammate

- Plays a valued role on the team that emphasizes his or her personal talents and skills.
- Has an opportunity to play without a heightened risk of injury.

### The „Principle of Meaningful Involvement“

- Valued role for each team member
- Emphasis on talents and skills
- Play without risk of injury

Only a positive climate in the team can lead to true social inclusion.

It is recommended to begin with the Recreation or the Player Development model when a new team is starting to guarantee that the team can shape without the higher requirements and expectations of the Competitive Model. You can build on that for the development of each individual player and the entire team.

## 5 **The role of the Unified Coach**

A Unified Coach has a key role in the Unified Team. She or he has the responsibility to form the team and ensure that it's working as a team as well as to facilitate social inclusion and Meaningful Involvement in the team. The coach needs to demonstrate and support this philosophy during training and competition. He or she has the same role and authority to all Players with and without intellectual disabilities. Further, she or he is responsible for appropriate medical equipment, that the gym and the training court is safe and that all used sport materials are in good conditions.

The coaches' main focus in the different models:

Competitive Model	Player Development Model	Recreation Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be familiar with the federation rules as well as Special Olympics Unified rules</li> <li>• ensure that the competition challenges are appropriate to the ability and level of playing of each individual player as well as for the overall team</li> <li>• ensure that every player in the team has a Meaningful role in the team and the game</li> <li>• offer opportunities for players who are ready to move to a development team or want to engage rather in recreational activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motivate all players to engage in the game</li> <li>• motivate players of higher skill level to assist and mentor players of lower skill level</li> <li>• offer opportunities for players who are ready to move to a competitive team or want to engage rather in recreational activities</li> <li>• be familiar with the federation rules as well as Special Olympics Unified rules</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No specific training, competition and team composition requirements</li> <li>• The focus is on having fun together</li> <li>• Inclusive sport teams and activities of any type</li> <li>• Competition on local level</li> </ul>

## **6 How to create a Unified Team?**

### **6.1 Network creation**

For creating a new Unified Team, it is recommended to get different stakeholders (e.g. special, mainstream or inclusive schools, community sports clubs and federations) involved and start cooperation for recruiting players and to develop Unified Sports further. Looking at the value of the competition experience it would be best to establish several Unified Teams in a particular city or region if possible to have the chance to compete against each other. Players in existing teams report that competition is a great incentive to be on a Unified Team and to stay. Winning and losing together makes teamwork and social inclusion even stronger.

Networking with federations and clubs is also essential for the engagement and education of referees. While this task is primarily with the local Special Olympics Program rather than with the coach, the coach often is the first point of contact for referees in his/her community. Referees for Special Olympics Unified Sports competitions should be licensed by the respective governing body. Training for Unified Sports usually needs to take place in Partnership with the governing body. Materials for this training can be based on this guide and focus specifically on the rules section below.

### **6.2 Team and Player recruitment**

Recreational come-and-try events as mentioned above can be a gateway to finding interested players for your team. Coaches should use a targeted approach when recruiting teammates to match the local situation. For example, a good match could be a group of interested persons from a workshop for people with intellectual disabilities (“Athletes”) who are beyond school age and adult players from local sport clubs (“Partners”). Community youth sport programs or schools would more adequately serve the needs of youth-aged Athletes. For example, a coach or teacher at a special, mainstream or inclusive school who wants to start a Unified Sports Team could contact a mainstream school for cooperation.

If you start a new Unified Team, there should at least an eight-week training phase before the first competition. Generally training should be regular, at least once a week.

### **6.3 Team building**

There is no limit to activities that drive team building during the training session for example through specific exercises, tactics and team play instructions. Inclusion and team building also can be developed through socializing activities off the court such as barbecues, weekend trips, watching movies together.

Remember that all activities on and off the court should be fun and should satisfy every player. The quality time players get to spend together will lead to a real team which is built on friendship, respect and positive common experience.

### **6.4 Specific Skills and fitness**

Fitness is important to achieving your best in your sport and health. Doing fitness year-round can be fun. It will keep you active, healthy and help you reach your sport personal best.

The coach wants a player to perform best at every training and competition. You can easily achieve this by following a healthy life-style and including fitness in your weekly routines.

By fitness, we mean a state of optimal health and functional ability (movement), as the result of physical activities, healthy nutrition and appropriate hydration.

Ideally, Athletes should be equipped with tailored exercises to do at home, between the training sessions and all year, even when not in sport season. They should have individual fitness goals built into their plans and their performance which should be monitored regularly.

If you encourage your Athletes and Unified Partners to go to a gym, it may be useful to contact the gym manager in advance. You could introduce yourself and the players and explain their specific training program. This action may help to ensure your Athletes and Unified Partners are adequately supported during their training in the gym and reduce the risk of injuries.

In addition to the fitness exercises at home, gym or outdoor, healthy and balanced nutrition and drinking water are crucial for Athletes to perform at their best.

Here are some proposals for fitness that can be included in traditional and Unified sports training.

- Fit 5 Guidebook for fitness training  
<http://resources.specialolympics.org/fit-5/#.WljfIn2BxP0>
- Fitness Cards for exercises  
<http://resources.specialolympics.org/Fitness-Cards/#.WljfPn2BxP0>
- Fitness Tracker  
<http://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/ Catalog of Fitness Model.a spx>
- Athlete Lifestyle survey and goal setting  
<http://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/ Catalog of Fitness Model.a spx>
- Fitness programmes and models  
<http://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/ Catalog of Fitness Model.a spx>
- STRIVE fitness testing:  
[http://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Strive/Strive\\_Resources.aspx](http://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Strive/Strive_Resources.aspx)

## **7 Rules of Unified Basketball**

In the section below this guide focuses on Unified Basketball. Unified Basketball offers great opportunities for the Unified experience and can be applied in all three models. We will highlight some rules and regulations for competition as well as guidelines for training.

### **7.1 FIBA Basketball Rules**

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Basketball shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon “Federation Internationale de Basketball” (FIBA) rules for basketball found at <http://www.fiba.com>. FIBA or “National Governing Body” (NGB) rules shall be employed except when they conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Basketball or Article I. In such cases, the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Basketball shall apply.

- For male competition for Athletes 14 years and over, a **size 7** basketball should be used (circumference between 749mm [29.5 inches] and 780mm [30.7 inches] and weight between 567g [20 oz.] and 650g [23 oz.]) (Note: FIBA U14 play with size 5)
- A smaller **size 6** basketball should be used for all female competition for Athletes 12 years and over (circumference between 724mm [28.5 inches] and 737mm [29 inches] and weight between 510g [18 oz.] and 567g [20 oz.])
- A smaller **size 5** basketball should be used for competition for all Athletes (male and female) under 14 years of age (circumference between 686mm [27 inches] and 724mm [28.5 inches] and weight between 397g [14 oz.] and 454g [16 oz.])
- The baskets shall comprise the backboard, rings and nets. For competition, the basket ring is normally 3.05 meters (10 feet) above the court. A shorter basket which has its ring 2.60 m meters (8 feet) above the court may be used for junior division competition.

The rules could be applied with some exceptions (See chapter ‘Competition Adaptations’).

### **7.2 Special Olympics Unified Basketball Rules**

The following link gives an overall overview of the current rules on Basketball in general and also about Unified Basketball:

<http://media.specialolympics.org/resources/sports-essentials/sport-rules/Basketball-Sports-Rules.pdf>

#### *7.2.1 Roster and Lineup of Athletes and Partners on the basketball court*

The roster shall contain a proportionate number of athletes and partners.

##### **Team 5-on 5:**

Five players are required to start a game. FIBA rules allow a team to continue to play with a lineup with as few as two players before a game is forfeited.

The FIBA rule requires five (5) players to start a game and the Unified Sports rule requires this ratio to be three (3) Athletes and two (2) Partners.

After a game begins, only the following lineups are allowed:

- 3 Athletes and 2 Partners
- 3 Athletes and 1 Partner
- 2 Athletes and 2 Partners
- 2 Athletes and 1 Partner
- 1 Athlete and 1 Partner

### **Team 3-on-3:**

A team may drop below three after the start of the game due to player injury or illness but must have three to start the game. The minimum allowable ratio will be one Athlete and one Partner. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.

The FIBA rule requires three (3) players to start a game and the Unified Sports rule requires this ratio to be two (2) Athletes and one (1) Partner.

Note: there is no foul out rule on 3x3

After a game begins, only the following lineups are allowed:

- 2 Athletes and 1 Partner
- 1 Athlete and 1 Partner

### *7.2.2 Team composition – age recommendations:*

Concerning team composition use the following age recommendation that have been tested at 2015 WG in LA and will be used at 2019 World Games. *(Note: The age requirements are currently in review process to be included in the SOI Sport Rules)*

“Similar Age Requirement for the purpose of providing additional clarification as to what “similar” age delegations should apply the following guidelines to their team composition. If any member of the team is under the age of 22 the variance between the youngest and oldest member of the team should be no more than 5 years (e.g. if the youngest team member is 21 the oldest could be 26). When all members of the team are 22 and over there cannot be more than a 20-year difference between the youngest and oldest member of the team (e.g. If the youngest team member is 22 the oldest can be 42).”

### *7.2.3 Coach*

Each team shall have an adult, non-playing coach responsible for the lineup and conduct of the team during competition and training.

### *7.2.4 Basketball Skill Assessment Test (BSAT)*

- 2 basketball fundamental exercises help to assess level of Unified teammates in team and measure their progress
- Make the tests a regularly part of your training
- Might be required by tournament organizer to begin Divisioning

### 7.2.5 Meaningful Involvement

Ensures every member is playing a valuable role in the team and has opportunities to contribute to their team's performance. Practice Meaningful Involvement in the training sessions and competitions but also off the court.

Examples when Meaningful Involvement is NOT being followed

- a) Players consistently have very limited opportunities to handle, pass, shoot and dribble the ball while there is team control.
- b) Teams changing the way they play; in particular, how individual players are engaged, in medal matches compared to Divisioning rounds.
- c) Team's activities during warm up, break times, cheering when scored, is this happening as a real team or is there sub-groups of e.g. Athletes on one side and Partners on other side.
- d) Coaches' substitution policy: particular players remaining on the bench most of the time.
- e) Constant negative communication (shouting, humiliating, blaming) and lack of cooperation among teammates and between team members and coach on and off the field.

When players or coaches don't follow the Principle of Meaningful Involvement following steps can be applied by Unified Sports Evaluation Committee (USEC) [protocol is currently being updated for General Sports Rules Article 1 2017 cycle]:

#### **Divisioning Round**

1. The Divisioning team identifies Unified Sports teams with issues regarding Meaningful Involvement to a USEC member.
2. The USEC member informs the respective coach with the specifics about why his/her team is not following the Principle of Meaningful Involvement, and what needs to be done to correct it.
3. If violations continue to occur, a meeting with the USEC member, coach, and Head of Delegation (HOD) will be held to outline consequences. These may include the following:
  - a. The team will be identified for close observation during the medal round and will be penalized if failure to adhere to the Principle of Meaningful Involvement continues.
  - b. If a team has a number of members who continue to not Meaningfully involve their teammates and are of a much higher ability level, it will be placed in a separate division in which only participation ribbons will be awarded.

#### **Games or Matches after Divisioning**

1. When the USEC member determines that the team is not incorporating the Principle of Meaningful Involvement, he/she consults with the TD.
2. If the USEC member determines a violation has occurred, a written warning is given. The coach is held accountable.

3. If the USEC member determines a second violation has occurred, the coach will be suspended for the remainder of that match/game. A time out will be called and the USEC member meets with the coach. The HOD will be informed of the suspension
4. If the USEC member determines a third violation has occurred, the team will forfeit the game or match. Following the game or match, a meeting with the TD, USEC member, HOD (if present) and coach is held. A written sanction is given. If the HOD is not present, he/she will be informed.
5. If an additional violation occurs in subsequent games, the team will be removed from official competition and receive a Participation ribbon.

It is not player dominance when players have the opportunity to display their individual skills to the best of their ability. Opportunities include, but are not limited to, the following: Fast break and layup after a steal, Open shot and playing the point guard position.

### *7.2.6 Competition adaptations (except for Recreation Model)*

The given adaptations are optional, and it remains the responsibility of each individual Special Olympics Program and tournament organizers to determine whether they will be employed.

1. A player may take two steps beyond what is permitted by NGB rules. However, if the player scores, is deemed to have “traveled” or escapes the defense as a result of these additional steps, an advantage has been gained. A violation is called immediately.
2. A team may be granted four timeouts per game, cumulative: two per half.
3. The three-second rule restriction is in force when team control exists in the opponents’ front court.
4. The free throw shooter shall release the ball within 10 seconds from the time it is placed at the shooter’s disposal by one of the officials.”

## **8 Set-up of training sessions for Unified Basketball**

In this chapter, you will find an example of the structure of a training session for a Unified Basketball Team. For further reading it is recommended to check the “Special Olympics Basketball Coaching Guides”:

[http://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Sports\\_Essentials/\\_Sports\\_Info/Basketball.aspx](http://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Sports_Essentials/_Sports_Info/Basketball.aspx)

In general, we can divide a training session into three parts: Warm-Up, Main-Part and Cool-Down. It is essential that each training session needs to contain those parts. It depends on the training session duration (e.g. one hour or 90 minutes or 120 minutes) how long each part lasts.

It is very important that all players with and without intellectual disabilities engage in the training sessions and that they engage with each other at all parts of the session. The coach has an important role to make mixed (Athletes/Partners) groups during training sessions. The bonds created between Athlete(s) and Partner(s) through exercises are crucial to the process of Meaningful Involvement.

For example, it is important that sample exercises will be shown by mixed groups or alternated by Athletes and Partners. E.g. during the stretching Athletes and Partners show an exercise alternating or a passing drill will be shown by a mixed group. Pairing Athletes and Partners for individual skill training can add value. Extra tips among each other will increase the performance of team play.

As Partners and Athletes spend a significant amount of time together on the court, there are a lot of interactions between them. It is important that the Partners and Athletes communicate with the coach and gives any useful feedback. The coach can adjust the exercises or training so the performance of the individual and performance of the team could be enhanced (e.g. a teammate will make an easy catch if you pass the ball to his/her right hand).

### 8.1 **The Warm Up**

A warm up period is the first part of every training session or preparation for competition. The warm up starts slowly and gradually involves all muscles and body parts.

The warm up raises the body temperature and prepares the muscles and nervous system for the exercise session. The total warm up period takes at least 15 minutes. The table shows and example of how to structure the warm-up.

Activity	Purpose	1,5h-2h of training session
Half court easy scoring in combination with ball handling, dribbling, passing (focus individual warming up)	Warm-up the muscles. Repeat the basic skills.	10-15 Minutes
Stretching	Increase range of movement.	5-10 Minutes
Full court warming up drills with multiple players (focus team warming up)	Coordination and preparation for training/competition. Readiness for some contact	10-15 Minutes

Important facts concerning stretching:

Stretching is one of the most critical parts of the Warm Up and player’s performance. It helps to prevent injury and increase flexibility of the players. Particularly, dynamic stretching has been shown to be better at reducing injury risk, especially in sports where explosive power is needed (e.g. in jumping to play the ball). It is also more appropriate for athletes with hyper mobility since they will not over stretch the muscles.

Some Athletes, like those with Down Syndrome, may have low muscle tone that makes them appear more flexible. Be careful to not allow these Athletes to stretch beyond a normal, safe range.

Stretching is effective only if the stretch is performed accurately. Athletes need to focus on correct body positioning and alignment.

## 8.2 Main Part

Activity	Purpose	1,5h-2h of training session
Half court team/game tactical exercises (focus learning/breakdown drills)	Learn to play with teammates. Learn to use all the space on the court in offense and defense.	20-25 Minutes
Individual/Team Shooting (game wise/fun)	Improve shooting skills No complicated exercises	15-20 Minutes
Full court game situations (outnumber situations/5on5)	Practice the team/game tactics in real game situations and game pace	20-30 Minutes

By conducting the main part, you must consider that the progression through the session allows for a gradual buildup of physical activity. By developing the training sessions keep in mind that good and positive experience comes through team work and playing together on the court. Try to have a lot of team work exercises in your session.

## 8.3 Cooling down

The cool down is as important as the warm up, however it is often ignored. It reduces the body temperature and heart rate and speeds up the recovery process before the next training session or competitive experience. The whole team should come together and do the exercises as one group.

Remember the cool-down phase is not only meant for cooling down the body. It should also be used for a recap of the session, any new tactics or moves practiced in the main part can be reflected and discussed. Any open issues may be discussed. Give also compliment players for their training achievements. So, everyone is going home with positive emotions and motivation to come to the next training session.

Activity	Purpose	1,5h-2h of training session
Easy shooting (Shooting by 2 or small groups/free throws) Stretching if necessary	Cool down to stop the practice. Switch the competing mind set to relax.	5-10 Minutes
Team yell (recap practice by the coach)	Stop the practice with a positive vibe.	5 Minutes

## **9 Appendix**

About Special Olympics:

[www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)

About Unified Sports®:

[www.playunified.org](http://www.playunified.org)

Successful Unified:

[http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified\\_Sports/Files/4.13-Guidelines%20for%20a%20Successful%20Competition\\_8-23-12.pdf](http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified_Sports/Files/4.13-Guidelines%20for%20a%20Successful%20Competition_8-23-12.pdf)

Assessing Players: the link is for Basketball

[http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified\\_Sports/Files/4.10-Assessing-Forming%20Teams\\_no%20pix\\_9-16-12.pdf](http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified_Sports/Files/4.10-Assessing-Forming%20Teams_no%20pix_9-16-12.pdf)

Teammate Guidelines:

[http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified\\_Sports/Files/4.11-UnifSp%20Teammate%20Guidelines\\_09%2012%2012.pdf](http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified_Sports/Files/4.11-UnifSp%20Teammate%20Guidelines_09%2012%2012.pdf)

Special Olympics Europe Eurasia 2017

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