

Special Olympics Europe Eurasia (EE) Table Tennis Seminar Summary (March 2013)

From 15 to 17 March 2013 Special Olympics EE held a Table Tennis seminar in Warsaw, Poland and Kevin Watt represented Special Olympics Great Britain at the event.

There were 15 National representatives from Austria, Belgium (2), Hungary (2), Great Britain, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland (2), Russia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine plus the following Special Olympics EE staff who presented a very informative and enjoyable weekend programme.

- Mariusz Damentko - Sports Director, Special Olympics Europe Eurasia
- Elzbieta (Ela) Madejska - Table Tennis Sports Advisor, Special Olympics Europe Eurasia
- Agnieszka Krukowska - Special Olympics Europe Eurasia staff
- Mirek Krogulec - Special Olympics Europe Eurasia staff

The format was a mixture of classroom and practical sessions.

Special Olympics General and Sports Sessions

Mariusz went through a brief history of Special Olympics, through the **Mission Statement** (*The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athlete competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for Children and Adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community*), **Philosophy** (centered on Athlete, Emphasis on Participation, Effort and Personal Achievement rather than Winning), **History of Athlete Participation** (from 100 Athletes in 1963 rising to 4,200,000 in 2012).

There are 7 continental sections of Special Olympics namely North America and Caribbean, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Africa, Asia Pacific, Asia (China/Singapore) and Europe/Eurasia.

The uniqueness of Special Olympics includes sports opportunities for **all** ability levels, divisioning for similar ability competition and awards for **all** participants.

Special Olympics Rules

Mariusz then guided the delegates through the rules and how they are adapted for Special Olympics. Starting with the International Table Tennis Federation and National Governing Body rules of Table Tennis they are then modified accordingly for Special Olympics. The Special Olympics rules are available on the Special Olympics International website.

Table Tennis is **one** of **twenty** Official Special Olympics Summer Games sports.

The subject of **servicing** was highlighted and all athletes are required to be able to serve correctly with the exception of any disabilities which may prevent them from doing so.

Divisioning

The seminar discussed divisioning and highlighted the **Maximum Effort Rule** which all athletes should adhere to (and their coaches must encourage this at all times).

Unified Table Tennis

Agnieszka ran through a presentation on Unified Sports and the inclusion for Table Tennis from 2012.

Unified Sports was first integrated into a softball program in Massachusetts in 1984, and has already been incorporated into Football (2004) and Basketball (2008), and from 2012, Volleyball and Table Tennis. Table Tennis is the exception here as the other sports are classed as typical team sports.

Within Table Tennis, a Unified Partner can compete with a Special Olympics athlete in any of the doubles events on the proviso that they are not a coach for that sport. Ideally the unified partner and athlete should be in a similar age category.

As of 2010 there were 11 National Programs and 1649 Players, increasing to 14 National Programs and 2731 in 2011 and Unified Table Tennis has been included in the European Games, Antwerp 2014 with a quota of 23 Unified Players representing 14 Countries and the World Summer Games, Los Angeles 2015.

Practical and FUNDamental coaching

The first practical session with Ela ran through the very basics of coaching (grip/stance/serve etc.) to some fun elements including walking/running whilst controlling the bouncing ball on the racket. The old universal favorite game of round the table was also included.

It was clear from specific sections on coaching the serve (using an A4 sheet of paper on the floor, start with the Athlete standing next to the paper holding the ball in the palm of the free hand, throwing it up vertically, should land on the paper if done correctly). This is an exercise that can also be done away from the sports hall, so excellent for the athlete to master this part of the service action.

Special Olympics cannot emphasize enough the importance of athletes being able to serve correctly and insist on Umpires calling 'Fault' when the serving standard is not obtained.

Special Olympics Poland Athletes

In the afternoon session, 4 Athletes from Special Olympics Poland participated with assisting with divisioning, coaching skills and unified partner demonstrations. They were various ability levels (perfect for the demonstration) and an absolute pleasure to work with and a credit to Special Olympics Poland.

This was an excellent and well prepared seminar which every single participant took home a lot of valued information to pass onto their fellow Special Olympics program, Coaches and in turn, our Athletes. After all, the most important people in Special Olympics are the **athletes** themselves.

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