

## **FIBA and Special Olympics Europe Eurasia (EE) Mini Basketball Seminar Summary (May 2017)**

**Seminar:** 12 – 14 May 2017

**Attended by and report written by:** Jon Stonebridge (Special Olympics GB Basketball Coaching and Competition Advisor)



**Photo:** Seminar delegates and FIBA members including Kamil Novak, Executive Director FIBA Europe

The Special Olympics / Mini Basketball conference was an amazing opportunity to find out how different countries delivered their Special Olympics Basketball. The first day started at the Linder Hotel and Sports Academy in Frankfurt. The first thing that struck me was how great it was to be in a room with so many specialists in delivering Special Olympics basketball. Sometimes we get focused on our particular area and tasks and don't get to think about what is going on in other areas let alone other countries. There were 22 people in attendance from 18 different countries. Up first was a general overview from Special Olympics and its plans moving into the 2017-2020 period. Essentially Special Olympics EE will seek more playing, education and promotion of opportunities to continue development of Unified Basketball, 3x3 Basketball and Mini – Basketball.

Another interesting development that came forward was the Special Olympics Fit5 programme: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/fit-5/>

The programme focuses athletes on achieving fitness and their personal best with physical activity, nutrition and hydration. An athlete's goal is to do at least 5 days of exercise, have at least 5 portions of fruit and veg and 5 glasses or bottles of water.

The evening looked at a new style of divisioning called the Swiss Ladder System. Essentially all teams taking part in a competition are randomly drawn against another team. Once they have played one another, the winners go into one pool and the losers go into another pool. This is then repeated, after the various rounds (dependant on team numbers) equal teams of equal levels come together.

Day 2 of the conference started with a presentation from Belgium on their competitions and the adaptations they make when running Special Olympics Basketball. They have a three level system with rules adapted for each, as an example when looking at travelling Level 1 has no adaptations, at Level 2 two steps are allowed if there is no score or advantage gained, at Level 3 it is the same with the added rule of three steps allowed for an open lay-up.

The final part of the Special Olympics EE conference then focused on Special Olympics Mini-Basketball. This is where the other countries really highlighted the need to start the love of basketball at an early age. There is the Young Athlete Programme (YAP) which focuses on Foundational Skills for children aged 2-7 years old. An activity guide is available on the Special Olympics resource website.

The YAP programme then leads into Special Olympics Mini Basketball for 8-14 year olds which introduces sport specific skills with the emphasis solely remaining on having fun. One of the adaptations is that for any U10-12 games, on court game coaching is allowed during any matches/games to aid the players in whatever way they need.

Then the presentations moved onto the Special Olympics Youth Player from 15-18 years old, where the focus stays with fun but then transitions to the addition of technique, strength, mental preparation for training and competition and handling winning and losing.

The final elements of the Special Olympics EE side of the conference were around the Health and Fitness agenda amongst Special Olympics Athletes with the Healthy Athletes Programme and Coach Education Development. Both of which have new resources available and new resources on the coaching side of things being developed particularly around e-learning.

The Special Olympics EE conference delegates then joined the FIBA mini basketball convention 200+ delegates. This started with practical demonstrations at basketball facility in Neu-Isenburg. This started with a demonstration of a play unified session followed by coaches from Slovenia and Germany demonstration with players from local schools what a good mini basketball session looks like. Interestingly it doesn't look much like basketball at all, it just looks like fun activities that children would enjoy. As an example, there were coaches doing circuits with all the equipment they could find treading on mats, bouncing on small trampolines, zigzagging up over and through hurdles, sticks, cones, whilst the Slovenian mascot Lipko tumbled and danced all over the court. There was one coach who had tied a length of rope that stretched from the back board to the half way line and was using it to get his players skipping with the basketball board. Then there was also a coach using balloons and then finally a coach who was getting his players to dribble around the court using a tennis ball whilst playing Chuck Berry's 'riding along on my automobile'. If you know the song there are natural pauses throughout, whenever there was a pause the players had to do a jump stop and hold the ball until the music starts again and off they go dribbling again.

The biggest take away for me was that do coaches do everything they can to make a session fun and enjoyable. Coaches sometimes get stuck thinking about the technical elements of the sport when they could be thinking outside the box/court to do the one thing that will make people improve the most, enjoy the sport. My favourite quote from the practical sessions is that 'At practice your players should laugh out loud a minimum of twice'.

The final part of the whole conference was the updates around FIBA's Mini-Basketball. The theory was discussed behind it and how it can be used to help more young players enjoy playing basketball and how this will hopefully convert into more people playing basketball for longer. The basketball manual which gives some great practical ideas, can be used not only at the mini basketball age, but to at any session to inject some fun games, or ideas can be view at Basketball: <http://www.fiba.com/wabc>.

The whole event gave me a great opportunity to learn what other countries are doing and see how this can be brought back to Great Britain. I feel mini basketball can be used to help drive long term participation at Special Olympics clubs in the future. If you don't currently run a junior section then the FIBA resources is a great place to start.

One of the main things that came out of the opportunity to go to the Special Olympics EE FIBA conference was how important it is to learn from other people (that and people taller than me do exist, see the photo). Therefore I would like to set up a network of Special Olympics GB Basketball Coaches, if you are interested in becoming part of this network please email National Office and we can look at developing things further from there.