



2015 World Summer Games Experience

Amanda Swazey, Northumberland/Snyder Global Messenger



I had a nice time in California as a member of the SO USA equestrian team competing at the 2015 World Summer Games. There were 10 members of the team. They came from Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Arizona and two from Pennsylvania.

The week before the World Summer Games, the equestrians practiced at town called Norco, which is a horse town. It has dirt sidewalks for people to ride their horses and hitching posts in front of every store and the churches!

The host town of Riverside had a parade for the SO USA and SO Sweden athletes. Lauren Potter from the cast of Glee was the parade marshal; she high fived me at the parade. I also got to meet First Lady, Michelle Obama, before the Opening Ceremonies!

I competed against equestrians from Hellas (Greece), Gibraltar, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Bulgaria. I had to learn to say hello in different languages.

I earned a Silver medal in equitation, 5th place in dressage and won the Gold medal in working trail. Equitation tests me as a rider. The word Dressage is French and means training. Working trails is like an obstacle course done on horseback.

At home I ride Berry at Random Canyon Therapeutic Riding program. I did not take Berry to California. Berry would have been very upset and thrown a “horsey fit” if he had to fly to California. In California I rode Barney. Barney came from Ventura Farms in Thousand Oaks, California. He is an Ardennes cross. Barney is a big teddy bear. My team mate from Mississippi, Kyle, also competed on Barney.

When I came back home, Selinsgrove had a parade for me and named August 22 “Amanda Swazey Day.” My employer, Weis Markets, put a banner on the outside of the store and signs in the windows honoring me. Weis Markets also wrote a story about me and put my picture in the company newsletter. I was interviewed by WNEP-16 and all the SO Pennsylvania athletes were invited to the state capital to be recognized.

It has been a great ride!

Editor’s Note: Amanda Swazey is a Global Messenger from Northumberland/Snyder County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 14 years. Amanda was one of nine SOPA athletes representing Team USA at this past World Summer Games in Los Angeles. Amanda also completed Global Messenger II training at the very first advanced Athlete Leadership University session this past November.

Advanced Athlete Leadership University Experience

Tim Spence, Butler County Athlete Representative & Global Messenger

I have been involved with Athlete Leadership since 1998 and have helped instruct both Global Messenger and Athlete Representative. So, when I got an email to attend the first ever advanced Athlete Leadership training I didn't think it was for me...but after talking to the Special Olympics Pennsylvania Athlete Leadership Coordinator, I decided to give it a try.

My mentor and I arrived on Friday afternoon. Other athletes with their mentors who, like me, were going to be trained as instructors in Global Messenger II and Athlete Representative II were also there. On Friday afternoon and Saturday morning we were trained as instructors. Then we were able to assist in the training of other athletes on Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

I soon found that the training was very informative and fun. It gave me a chance to add to what I already knew about Special Olympics. Most jobs require employees to keep their skills up to date, and that is what this experience did for me. It gave me a chance to refresh my skills.

At the end of the training I was awarded a certificate of completion. But to earn a degree I have to complete a practicum for Global Messenger II and one for Athlete Representative II. The practicums are really goals for me to work toward. These goals will help me grow as a leader because they make me get out of my comfort zone and stretch my skills. When I complete my practicum's I will receive a degree from Athlete Leadership University! Of course being involved in Special Olympics training always gives me a chance to make new friends and renew old friendships. That's the best part!



So if you are like me... If you have attended a Global Messenger or Athlete Representative class in the past, think about refreshing your skills. Challenge yourself to become an even better Global Messenger or Athlete Representative by attending an advanced Athlete Leadership training and working toward a degree. Challenge yourself to become better and open the door to new experiences that will help you grow as an athlete and a leader.

Editor's Note: Tim Spence is an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Butler County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 35 years. Tim is also the Southwest Representative on SOPA's Regional Input Council (RIC).

Athlete Input Survey Experience

Matthew Prosek, Centre County Athlete Representative & Global Messenger



I had the opportunity to conduct Athlete Input Surveys at Juniata College during the Central Fall Sectional. It was fun to go around and talk with people who enjoy the sport they participate in.

I learned everyone's perspective of lunch is different. Most people commented that removing soda from lunch was a positive change. It was fun going around to each county passing around the survey.

Watching my fellow athletes play their sports was fun too. I enjoyed watching the athletes developing their skills. It is important to get the athlete's point of view to help SOPA's competition department hear directly from the athletes and make the event run better.

Conducting Athlete Input Surveys was a positive thing and I hope other Athlete Leaders consider doing this at events they're not competing at.

Editor's Note: Matthew Prosek is an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Centre County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 32 years in Pennsylvania and Virginia. Matt received SOPA's Volunteer of the Year award this past Leadership Conference for his dedication to improve the Special Olympics experience for his fellow athletes. If you're an Athlete Representative and/or Global Messenger and are interested in conducting Athlete Input Surveys at a Sectional/State competition you're not competing in, contact Athlete Leadership Coordinator, Jordan Schubert at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org.

November, A Busy Month In The World Of Athlete Leadership

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



November is a very busy time, not just for me, but everyone at Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA). In addition to Fall Festival, it's also a time to get a lot of important things done before the end of the year. My November was probably the busiest month I have had. But, I would also say it was the most productive month!

Since I don't participate in any fall sports and I was previously in school, I never got to fully experience everything that goes on during Fall Festival until this year. While I did not compete at Villanova, I got to do a lot of amazing things throughout the weekend!

On Friday, I got to co-emcee Opening Ceremonies with 2016 Athlete Congress Chair, Ernie Roundtree, from Monroe County. Some of the biggest highlights of Opening Ceremonies were being able to introduce Villanova President, Father Peter Donahue and have Dr. Monica Lepore, a professor at my alma matter, West Chester University, give the coach's oath.

Since I wasn't competing, I spent Saturday conducting Athlete Input Survey with Melissa Holt, an Athlete Representative from Area M, and her mentor. The input provided in these surveys will be very beneficial to our Eastern Competition Director, Morgan Muñoz and all the Villanova students on the Games Organizing Committee.

On Sunday, I got to go through my very first Healthy Athletes screening. I went through Special Smiles and Fit Feet. One of the biggest reasons why a lot of athletes, might not go through Healthy Athletes when competing at a state event is due to the schedule. Obviously, you shouldn't skip any competition, but if you do have a gap of free time between competitions or finish early, I highly encourage you to go to Healthy Athletes. The screenings are quick, fun and the Clinicians are very friendly!

A week following Fall Fest, my colleague, Chelsea Drob, Programming Projects Coordinator, and I went to Stowe, Vermont. Special Olympics Vermont invited us to their annual Leadership Conference.

The first thing we did was lead a public speaking workshop with their State Youth Activation Committee (YAC). This was to help students with and without intellectual disabilities, who are athletes and unified partners in school based programs, learn how to write, practice and deliver a speech on the importance of an inclusive environment in their schools. On Saturday, we got the opportunity to present our advanced Global Messenger training to their Global Messengers.

I'm interested and amazed to know what other Special Olympics programs are doing compared to SOPA. To give you an idea of how different Vermont is, the number of total athletes that they have training and competing is about the same number that compete at our Summer Games. That of course is to be expected in a much smaller state, however just like with what we're doing, there's always room for growth. One of the key factors to recruiting more athletes and volunteers is having current athletes trained to become leaders and promote the positive impact Special Olympics has had on them. That is why

when I left Vermont, I believed those Global Messengers would be ready to take the Special Olympics experience in Vermont to the next level.

Last but not least, a week after returning from Vermont, we had our very first advanced Athlete Leadership University session. Ever since I was first hired by SOPA, one of the biggest things we wanted to do with Athlete Leadership is give our Athlete Representatives and Global Messengers goals they can reach following the completion of their introductory training. Just like with any university curriculum, we wanted to challenge our athletes to use their leadership skills in bigger and more meaningful leadership capacities. Another reason why we're offering advanced Athlete Leadership University sessions is to continue spreading the word about Athlete Leadership throughout each program and have our current Athlete Leaders motivate their fellow athletes back home to become trained as an Athlete Representative, Global Messenger and much more!

I don't think I ever had a month as crazy as I did last November. However, instead of looking at it just as that I was busy with work, I looked at it more as an opportunity to see old friends, make new friends, travel in the sky and on the ground and most importantly take the next big step in making Special Olympics a more athlete led and athlete centered organization not just here in Pennsylvania, but everywhere!

Editor's Note: Editor's Note: Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Program Coordinator for Special Olympics Pennsylvania and is an athlete from Chester County. Jordan has been competing in Special Olympics for 12 years in Pennsylvania and Illinois and is a graduate of West Chester University.

2015 Fall Festival

Athlete Input Survey/Athlete Input Council

Athlete Input Survey: In total, 114 athletes took the survey.

- Volleyball-48 Athletes (42%)
- Bocce-22 Athletes (19%)
- Soccer 5 v 5-14 Athletes (12%)
- Soccer 11 v 11-9 Athletes (8%)
- Soccer 7 v 7-9 Athletes (8%)
- Power Lifting-5 Athletes (4%)
- LDR/LDW- 4 Athletes (4%)
- Soccer Skills-2 Athletes (2%)
- Volleyball Skills-1 Athlete (1%)

1. Was this your first time competing at Fall Festival?

- a. Yes-15 (13%)
- b. No-99 (87%)

2. If you answered "No", how has this year compared to previous years?

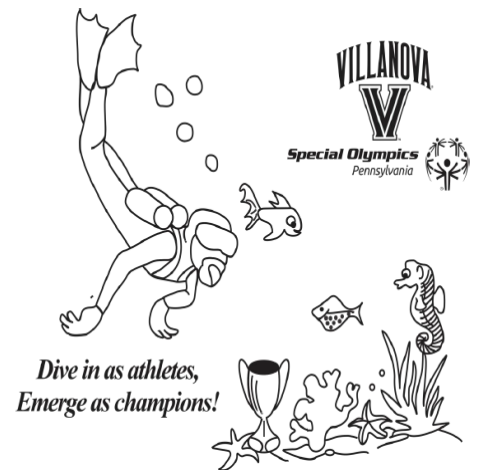
- a. Better-48 (49%)
- b. Needs Improvement-8 (8%)
- c. Same-43 (43%)

3. If you answered "Needs Improvement", can you explain why?

- a. Needs to be more organized
- b. Too much walking to competition
- c. Need to change things around / Needs improvement in different areas

4. How would you rate the overall quality of competition?

- a. Excellent-83 (73%)
- b. Average-30 (26%)
- c. Poor-1 (1%)



5. How would you rate the food and beverages provided at this event?

- a. Excellent-79 (69%)
- b. Average-26 (23%)
- c. Poor-6 (8%)

6. If you answered "Poor", can you explain why?

- a. Eggs were soggy
- b. Veggies were not fully cooked
- c. Not hot, no flavor and very mushy.

7. Did you attend Opening Ceremonies?

- a. Yes-98 (86%)
- b. No-16 (14%)

8. If you answered "Yes", how would you rate Opening Ceremonies?

- a. Excellent-90 (92%)
- b. Average-7 (8%)
- c. Poor-0
 - i. One athlete did not answer

9. Did you attend Olympic Town?

- a. Yes-86 (75%)
- b. No-28 (25%)

10. If you answered "Yes", how would you rate Olympic Town?

- a. Excellent-74 (86%)
- b. Average-9 (10%)
- c. Poor-0
 - i. Three athletes did not answer

Athlete Input Council: In total, approximately 20 athletes attended.

1. **Were there any delays in your competition schedule and if so, what were the causes and how could they have been prevented?**
 - a. Awards were late at LDR/LDW because local programs did not show up on time.
 - b. Too many breaks for volunteers.
 - c. Coaches did not know LDR/LDW divisions.
 - d. Local programs were late or did not show up (Bocce)

2. **Were there enough healthy food and beverage options/Were you given enough time in between meals and competition?**
 - a. Soda machines were on during breakfast and lunch.
 - b. Ice machine did not work.
 - c. Have bigger chairs in cafeteria.
 - d. Some programs refused to move.
 - e. Benefitted greatly by having Healthy Athletes take place two days.
 - i. Push to give glasses on site.
 - f. LPHs were great! Especially at meals and competition venues.
 - g. Olympic Town was great, kept more people together.
 - h. Healthy Athletes was overcrowded.

Editor's Note: Thanks to all the athletes who attended the Athlete Input Council and took the Athlete Input Survey at Fall Festival. Athlete Input Councils take place at each state competition and Athlete Input Surveys are conducted at each state and sectional competition. No Athlete Leadership experience is required to attend an Athlete Input Council or take an Athlete Input Survey.

Exciting News Beyond SOPA

Hotel Centered Around Workers With Special Needs Set To Open



This past December, the Courtyard Munice at the Horizon Convention Center in Munice, Indiana opened its doors. This is a first-of-its-kind hotel designed to provide training and employment for people with intellectual disabilities. Read more here:

<https://www.disabilitycoop.com/2015/12/18/hotel-special-needs-open/21708/>

Exciting News Beyond SOPA Continued...

Special Olympics Canada Athlete Speaks on Ted Talk



Special Olympics Canada athlete, Global Messenger and Special Olympics International Board Member, Matthew Williams, recently spoke at a Ted Talk explaining how Special Olympics changes lives and promotes respect and acceptance. Watch Matthew's full speech here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=BURbLmQL1BE&app=desktop>

Important Notices

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

Athlete Leadership University Update:

This April, SOPA will be offering two new Athlete Leadership University trainings in Central, PA:

Healthy Lifestyles: Not just focuses on the Healthy Athletes initiative offered during state competitions but also training athletes to promote better health, nutrition and fitness in their local programs.

Athletes as Coaches: A non-sports specific training to help athletes who currently are or want to become certified coaches transition from being a competitor to a coach.

No prior Athlete Leadership experience is required to take these trainings. More information will be available soon. Contact your program manager/director if interested!

New SOPA Code of Conduct:

One of the priorities identified by athletes prior to the 2014 Athlete Congress was creating a single Code of Conduct for athletes and Unified partners, coaches and local program volunteers.

- To help develop the Code of Conduct, SOPA's Regional Input Council (RIC) created an initial draft using feedback collected from athletes across the state.
- The Code of Conduct was then reviewed by an ad-hoc committee of local program volunteer leaders.
- Finally, during the 2015 Leadership Conference, the RIC presented the Code of Conduct to athletes, coaches and local program volunteers for one last opportunity to offer suggestions, etc.
- At the November 2015 Board of Directors meeting, the board unanimously approved the Code of Conduct.

The new Code of Conduct will be used by all local programs to make SOPA a safe and fun organization for everyone involved.

Email Address Update: I would like to be able to reach as many athletes as possible. If you haven't had any email conversations with me, or your email address has changed in the last year, please email me at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org.

Share Your Story: If you would like to share a story on an Athlete Leadership event in your area or a personal experience, please e-mail me at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org by March 11th for a chance to be shared in the Winter Edition of SOAR.