



Capitol Hill Day Experience

Christa Mereen, Bedford County Global Messenger



In February, 2016 I represented Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) in Washington DC for the 14th annual Special Olympics Capitol Hill Day. I met many Special Olympic athletes, their mentors and family from all across the country.

On Capitol Hill Day, my family and I, along with Susan Wyland, SOPA Vice President of Finance and Administration visited 11 offices of congressmen and their staff. We asked their support of: Healthy Athletes and Unified Strategy for Schools (formerly known as Project UNIFY).

At the end of the day there was a reception for us at the Library of Congress building and we all talked about our experiences. I was so proud to represent SOPA and hope the politicians will vote to support us!

Editor's Note: Christa Mereen is a Global Messenger from Bedford County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 15 years. Christa also completed Global Messenger II training at SOPA's very first Advanced Athlete Leadership University session in November, 2015.

Athlete Leadership Beyond SOPA

Robert (Bobby) Fredricks, Special Olympics New Jersey Athlete & United States Athlete Input Council Mid-Atlantic Representative



Hello everyone, my name is Robert (Bobby) Fredericks and I am an athlete with Special Olympics New Jersey. I have been participating in Special Olympics since 1986. My sports are Soccer, Floor Hockey, Basketball and Track & Field. My favorite sport is Floor Hockey and I enjoy being with my teammates and making new friends.

I have had the opportunity to do a lot of cool events. My favorite is running in the annual Lincoln Tunnel Challenge 5K which helps raise money for the Law Enforcement Torch Run for SONJ. As part of my training, I run every day on my treadmill, and I also like to run in local 5K races and I completed the Philly Rock "N" Roll half marathon twice. In 2009, I had the honor of running with the branches of the military in the Law Enforcement Torch Run in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. I got to meet and interview Apolo Ohno before he ran in the NYC marathon in support of Special Olympics. I was also on Team New Jersey's track and field team for the 2010 National Games in Nebraska and the 2014 USA Games held in Princeton, NJ. And as a member of the 2014 USA Games Board of Directors, my role was to represent the athletes' ideas to help make the games a success.

As a Global Messenger, I enjoy working to help raise awareness for people with intellectual disabilities. I just recently completed my term as Chairperson of the Special Olympics New Jersey Athlete Congress that consists of athletes from around the State who work on issues and programs that benefit the programs and athletes across New Jersey. When I'm not participating in Special Olympics, I enjoy being with family and friends, model railroading with my Dad and working as an assistant counselor at a summer day camp for children with special needs. I'm also hoping to become a Special Olympics coach someday.

Recently I was selected to serve on the newly formed United States Athlete Input Council (USAIC) as the Regional Representative for the Mid-Atlantic Region of Special Olympics which covers New York, New Jersey, , Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia and of course, Pennsylvania. This council entails gathering and communicating input from athletes across all these states.

The USAIC is made up of a group of Special Olympics athlete leaders who meet on a regular basis to discuss issues related to policies and future plans that would significantly affect Special Olympics athletes. My role as a regional representative is to gather information from athlete leaders within the Mid-Atlantic States and communicate our ideas about various issues with our state's CEO's, the United States Leadership Council (USLC) and Special Olympics North America (SONA). We will also communicate the ideas that Special Olympics International (SOI) or SONA has shared with the USLC and pass that information down to the Athlete Leaders who are representing their state's Athlete Input Council.

I am really looking forward to this challenge but most of all, having the opportunity to connect with and discuss issues with athletes from other states. Most importantly, this USAIC process gives all of us (the athletes) an opportunity to get our ideas out to the overall Special Olympics organization. This will encourage athlete leaders and promote Athlete Leadership throughout the country. The goal of the USAIC

is help make athlete leadership a larger part of Special Olympics as well as to have athlete leaders become a part of SONA and SOI's decision-making process.

Editor's Note: Robert (Bobby) Fredricks is a Special Olympics New Jersey athlete and has been competing in Special Olympics for 30 years. Robert is the Mid-Atlantic Athlete Representative on the USAIC, a Global Messenger and served on the 2014 USA Games Board of Directors as well as the Chair of Special Olympics New Jersey's Athlete Congress. If you have any large scale ideas beyond SOPA and would like to have them heard by Robert and the USAIC, please send them to Athlete Leadership Coordinator, Jordan Schubert at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org.

Getting Pumped Up in Adams County

Michael Silvis, Adams County Athlete Representative & Global Messenger



This spring my local program, Adams County, and CrossFit Hanover teamed up to bring powerlifting as a new sport for our athletes. We had an amazing turnout with ten athletes and eight volunteers at our very first practice.

With some of us nervous not knowing what to expect, we came eager and ready to start this new program. In just the first night, we were all saying we couldn't wait for them to teach us everything we need to know so that next year we can compete! We all had a blast and are looking forward to continuing our training.

On behalf of Adams County, we would like to thank Coach Sharon Smith and her amazing CrossFit team for coming out and volunteering and making this program possible for myself, and my fellow athletes!!!

Editor's Note: Michael Silvis is an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Adams County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 16 years. Michael is also a certified coach, member of SOPA's Hall of Fame and instructed Athlete Representative II training at SOPA's very first Advanced Athlete Leadership University session in November, 2015.

The Art of Program Hopping

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



Many of you know that my favorite sport to compete in is basketball. In fact, until this year, that was the only sport I've competed in since I've lived in Pennsylvania. After I graduated from college and started working for SOPA on a full time basis, I decided to challenge myself by looking for another sport to compete in.

Last year in one of the editions of SOAR that was published, I was able to get a story from my friend Jerry Holy, a Global Messenger from Virginia that also works at Special Olympics International (SOI), on his experience at SOPA's State Floor Hockey Tournament. After reading Jerry's story, it seemed like a really exciting sport to play. That was when I decided that floor hockey would be the new sport I would be taking up.

There was only one problem though. My home program, Chester County, does not have a floor hockey team. The good news however, was that I found out shortly after that athletes are not restricted to just their home program. I learned that a few athletes I know do compete in sports with other local programs if their home program does not offer a sport they're interested in. That meant my next question became, which program do I play floor hockey with?

One of the many advantages of working for the state office is that I have a great relationship with a lot of our local program managers. Since my office is in Montgomery

County, I've gotten to know their manager. He was able to put me in contact with their two floor hockey coaches.

Two weeks after Fall Fest, I arrived at the Ambler YMCA for my very first floor hockey practice. When I first started, I was clueless as could be. I do watch hockey on TV, but there were a lot of new things to learn about playing it on the hardwood as opposed to ice. When I arrived at work the next day, I printed out a copy of the official SOI floor hockey rules and studied them during my lunch breaks. I also went onto YouTube quite a bit to watch some footage of floor hockey competition, including the gold medal game from the 2013 World Games in Korea.

One January 30th, my team, the Mayhem, and I headed up to Reading to compete at the Berks County invitational, my first official floor hockey competition. Even though I didn't score, I felt I did a great job pressuring my opponents and clearing space for my teammates to run into the open court and get a better shot on goal. After two hard fought battles, not only did my team win gold, but I also got a gold medal for the third time on my mom's birthday.

After the Berks Invitational, my team had a very intense month of practice. One of my biggest struggles from that tournament was my positioning on face-offs. However, thanks to my coach Fred Kranich, I quickly learned not only what position to be in on face-offs, but which direction to go as soon as the ref blew the whistle, especially in the defensive zone.

The first Saturday of March, my team, as well as the other Montgomery floor hockey team, the Panthers, headed off to Bald Eagle Area High School in Clinton County. After a three and a half hour bus ride, we had two tough preliminary matchups vs. Cambria and Clinton. Following prelims was lunch and Opening Ceremonies, and we had to wait a few more hours after that to play our first division game, against Cambria.

In the preliminary game that we played against Cambria, we tied 1-1, so I thought it would be a fairly close game. It was just like that for most of the first period, however Cambria wound up scoring six unanswered goals. The good news was that we still had plenty of games remaining on Sunday.

Our first game on Sunday was against Lebanon, one of the teams we beat at the Berks invitational back in January. While we played better in that game, we still made some silly mistakes, which allowed Lebanon to win 3-1. Down but not out, I finally got what I wished for, and that was playing against Jerry and his Virginia team, the Prince William Capitals. Less than two minutes into the game, with Jerry playing goalie, I got a loose puck and hustled down the floor. Even with some pressure from the defense, I was able to get a shot off fairly easily. Jerry appeared to be in perfect position to make the save, however the puck was just a few inches away from his glove, and went into the net for my very first goal!

After finally winning a game after two tough losses, we faced off against Lebanon again. Despite a late game rally after a slow start, we fell short again and were eliminated from a chance to play in the gold medal game. While I was disappointed, I was still excited to play against Jerry and his team in the bronze medal game. After a scoreless first period, I took the puck on the face off to start the second. After a quick spin move, I found myself in the open floor, and in almost the exact same spot, scored on Jerry again. We beat Virginia for the second time, which gave us the Bronze medal.

What I want every athlete to get out of this story is that you shouldn't be afraid to cross county lines and play a sport with a different local program if yours does not offer it. Program hopping has many great benefits. Not only does it allow you to learn a new sport, it also allows you to make friends with more athletes. It also gives you extra motivation to beat your new friends in other sports you compete in throughout the year. Not only do I encourage you to see what other programs in Pennsylvania have to offer, I also encourage you to see what neighboring states might have too. Pennsylvania borders six states: Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, New York, Ohio and West Virginia. During the

2014 USA Games in New Jersey, my friend competed in flag football with Delaware, a sport that's just growing here in Pennsylvania.

While it's good to explore what sports might be available in neighboring counties and states, it's important to share your experience with your fellow athletes in your home program and explain to your local program Management Team why the sport you just competed in should be added. Besides from money and training facilities, the most important things a program needs to start a sport are enough athletes that want to participate and volunteers that are certified to coach that sport. If your local program has one, you should join an Athlete Leadership Team (ALT) to share that input with your fellow athletes and local program. If your program does not have an ALT, then that means you should consider attending Athlete Leadership University to be trained as an Athlete Representative and start one following the completion of your training.

During the 1987 World Games, Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver said, "The right to play on any field, you have earned it!" You have earned the right to play any sport in Special Olympics, regardless of where you play it.

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

2016 Winter Games & State Floor Hockey Tournament
Athlete Input Survey/Athlete Input Council

Winter Games Athlete Input Survey: In total, 91 athletes took the survey.

1. Was this your first time competing at Winter Games:

- Yes-22 (24%)
- No-69 (76%)

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

- Better-37 (54%)
- Needs Improvement-4 (7%)
- Same-27 (39%)

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

- Let us train here, on the slopes we’re actually competing on for the same rate as Hidden Valley.
- We need more officials prepared before the events and are ready to go.
- Make sure lunch is here on time!
- Would like fluorescent vests in Alpine Skiing.

Competition

Alpine Skiing-47 Athletes (52%)

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

- Excellent-39 (83%)
- Average-7 (15%)
- Poor-1 (2%)

2. If you answered “Poor”, can you explain why?

- Long wait for novice.

Speed Skating-18 Athletes (20%)

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

- Excellent-13 (72%)
- Average-5

Snowshoeing-15 Athletes (17%)

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

- Excellent-13 (87%)
- Average-2 (13%)

Figure Skating-10 Athletes (11%)

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

- Excellent-8 (80%)
- Average-2 (20%)

Cross Country Skiing-1 Athlete (1%)

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

- Excellent-1 (100%)

Extracurricular Activities

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

- Excellent-58 (64%)
- Average-25 (27%)
- Poor-7 (8%)

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

- Need to alternate meal selection.
- Serve hot food instead of hoagies both days.
- Have more gluten free options.
- Sandwiches were soggy.
- Have better varieties to choose from both from Sheetz and Seven Springs.

3. Did you attend Opening Ceremonies?

- Yes-87 (96%)
- No-3 (3%)

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

- Excellent-76 (87%)
- Average-10 (11%)

5. Did you attend Olympic Town?

- Yes-51 (56%)
- No-39 (43 %)

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

- Excellent-36 (71%)
- Average-11(22%)
- Poor-3 (6%)

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

- Couldn't stay in the room, way too over stimulating.
- Not enough to occupy older athletes.

Additional Comments

- Have SOPA Gear Store open more during the event.
- Opening Ceremonies was awesome! Need more tables at Olympic Town and more wheelchair accessibility.
- No staging areas for intermediate skiing, parents were unable to watch.
- Love Seven Springs and want to come back.
- More fruit at lunch.

- Really neat experience got to bring torch down the mountain.
- More downtime in the evening.
- Earlier check-in time and more signage throughout the hotel.
- Wasn't able to stay in room at Olympic Town due to too much noise.
- Need more practice time prior to events. (Speed Skating)
- Would like to have hot sandwiches and protein bars at lunch.

Winter Games Athlete Input Council: In total, approximately 30-40 athletes attended.

1. Did you have any delays in your competition schedule and if so, what were the causes and how could they have been prevented?

- Teams at Cross Country skiing were not on time which caused everyone else to start late.
- Very icy conditions in intermediate Alpine.
- Course officials should have walkie talkies to communicate any delays to coaches and volunteers. (Alpine)
- Remove people not with Special Olympics so no one gets hurt. (Alpine)
- Mountains were foggy. (Alpine)

2. Were there enough healthy food and beverage choices at meals?

- Good variety!
- Provide healthier snacks at Olympic Town.
- Eggs were cold at breakfast.
- More cereal varieties at breakfast.

3. What would you like to add/change for next year's Opening Ceremonies and/or extracurricular activities?

- Have an athlete give a blessing during Opening Ceremonies.
- Have professional skiers/snowboarders perform during Opening Ceremonies.
- Counties should have designated signs at Opening Ceremonies.
- Standing on the steps is dangerous at Opening Ceremonies.
- More snow!
- More Fireworks!
- Better tuning on microphones.
- Have a stretching area for athletes pre and post competition.
- Have a quiet room for athletes that are too sensitive to the noise at Olympic Town.
- Make Olympic Town educational by teaching athletes more about each sport offered.

4. Do you have any additional comments or concerns about Winter Games?

- Skating venues are too far for all involved.
- Dinner awards weren't loud enough.
- Why did snowshoeing awards take place at dinner, shouldn't they be given out immediately following competition?
- Continue offering hotel rooms.

- Athletes should be given more breaks between competitions.

State Floor Hockey Tournament Athlete Input Survey: In total, 116 athletes took the survey.

1. Was this your first time competing at the State Floor Hockey Tournament:

- Yes-47 (35%)
- No-68 (59%)

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

- Better-26 (32%)
- Needs Improvement-7 (10%)
- Same-33 (49%)

2. If you answered “Needs Improvement”, can you explain why?

- Need to start earlier on Saturday
- More spectator seating in competition venues
- Not as balanced as other SOPA events
- Have the event Friday-Sunday
- More first aid and water access at competition venues

Competition

Team Competition- 111 Athletes (96%)

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

- Excellent- 65 (59%)
- Average-42 (38%)
- Poor-1 (1%)

Skills Competition- 5 Athletes (4%)

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

- Excellent-1 (20%)
- Average-4 (80%)

Extracurricular Activities

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

- Excellent-53 (46%)
- Average-58 (50%)
- Poor-4 (3%)

2. If you answered “Poor”, can you explain why?

- Have pasta instead of hoagies
- Better food and beverage selection

3. Did you attend Opening Ceremonies?

- Yes-100 (87%)
- No-15 (13%)

5. If you answered “Yes”, how would you rate Opening Ceremonies?

- Excellent-74 (74%)
- Average-23 (23%)
- Poor-2 (2%)

6. Did you attend Olympic Town?

- Yes-34 (29%)
- No-81 (70 %)

7. If you answered “Yes”, how would you rate Olympic Town?

- Excellent-10 (29%)
- Average-21(62%)
- Poor-3 (8%)

Additional Comments

- Have the tournament all weekend instead of Saturday-Sunday
- My first time at the State Floor Hockey Tournament and look forward to returning next year.
- Thanks for a great weekend.
- Enjoyed seeing old friends and making new ones.
- Use more space for competition.
- Have Opening Ceremonies outside.
- Love competing!
- The Committee was great!
- Ran out of food for dinner Saturday night.
- Not enough time to attend Olympic Town.
- Have Opening Ceremonies Saturday night following competition.

State Floor Hockey Tournament Athlete Input Council: Approximately 20-25 athletes attended.

1. Did you have any delays in your competition schedule and if so, what were the causes and how could they have been prevented?

- Games started over an hour late on Saturday.
- Unfair divisioning mixed up two teams from the same county.
- Better communication between coaches and officials.
- Some teams expected not to play on Saturday, but were drawn in at the last minute.

2. Were there enough healthy food and beverage choices at meals?

- Have salads and wraps from Sheetz.
- Plenty of food.
- Not enough water, should have water coolers in gym at high school.
- Give out water bottles at competition venues.
- Didn't have a water pitcher at dinner.
- Ran out of lemonade at dinner.

- Place water coolers in cafeteria and gymnasium.
- Have food prepared for teams arriving late on Saturday.

3. What would you like to add/change for next year's Opening Ceremonies and/or extracurricular activities?

- Don't have balloons at dance.
- Have a band at the dance.
- Liked when local program banners were held.
- Have activities outside (if the weather is nice).
- Healthy Athletes was run very well.
- Music was really loud at dance.
- Provide earplugs at dance.
- Have alternate activities at the dance (bocce, bingo, etc.)

4. Do you have any additional comments or concerns about the State Floor Hockey Tournament?

- Additional day and bigger Olympic Town.
- More medical staff.
- Be careful with divisioning.
- Have Olympic Town at hotel.
- Have karaoke at the dance and/or Olympic Town.
- Speak about Healthy Athletes at Opening Ceremonies.

Editor's Note: Thanks to all the athletes who attended the Athlete Input Council and took the Athlete Input Survey at both Winter Games and the State Floor Hockey Tournament. 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.

Important Notices

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

Athlete Congress Update:

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) needs your help completing the 2016 Athlete Congress Priority Survey! This September, Athlete Representatives from all over the state will be coming together to present recommendations to the Board of Directors for organizational change.

You **DO NOT** have to be an Athlete Representative to take this survey. However, this survey is for **ATHLETES ONLY**. Parents/guardians, coaches, managers, etc. may assist, but SOPA wants to hear from YOU, THE ATHLETE!

Please take the survey by Sunday, July 3rd at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ATHLETECONGRESSPRIORITYSURVEY>

Athlete Leadership University Update:

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) will be hosting Athlete Leadership University taking place Saturday, June 25th – 26th at Slippery Rock University. *Address: 1 Morrow Way, Slippery Rock, PA 16057*

This session will offer Athlete Representative I, Global Messenger I and Technology I for athletes hoping to become Athlete Leaders within in their local program as well as current Athlete Leaders looking to build on their skills.

- **Governance Major-Athlete Representative I:** Learn to represent your fellow athletes (be their voice) on the local Management Team, local and state Input Councils, Athlete Leadership Teams, Regional Input Council, all the way to the Board of Directors.
- **Communication Major- Global Messenger I:** Learn to be a spokesperson for the local Special Olympics program, SOPA, your church, your school, and yourself. You will learn to research a topic and audience, learn to create and to write a speech,

develop confidence, learn to express opinions, learn to focus speeches on a specific topic, how to speak before an audience.

- **Technology Major-Technology I:** Learn how to expand your leadership skills by using a computer. You will learn how to use Microsoft Office, create and use an e-mail account and navigate the internet.

If you're interested in attending this session, please review the attached Registration information. **Before registering, please confirm with your Local Program Manager / Director.** Once your Local Program Manager / Director has approved your request, you may register: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1SndK3LNA3CWNXE-6kLbU3LbslXxY1SNRfUK47IjxAqk/viewform>

The deadline to register is Friday, May 27th at 5:00 PM.

Athlete Leadership Facebook Group:

Are you on Facebook and want to communicate more with your fellow athletes? Send a friend request to Jelsea Schrob (a combined name for myself and Programming Projects Coordinator, Chelsea Drob) to be added to SOPA's Athlete Leadership Facebook group. This group is a great way to interact with athletes, as well as receive the most up to date Athlete Leadership information. If you're not on Facebook, creating an account is quick, easy and free!

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 Athlete Leadership University, Summer Games or any other Special Olympics experiences, please e-mail me at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org by July 31st for a chance to be shared in the Summer Edition of SOAR!