



## *My Special Olympics Experience*

Maribeth Sauder, Lancaster County Athlete



In 2003, at the encouragement of a friend, I joined the Lancaster County gymnastics team, to practice and compete in the State Games at Penn State in rhythmic gymnastics. This sport seemed to fit me just fine and I went on to win many gold medals.

In 2005, after winning five gold medals in the rope, ball, ribbon, hoop and best all-around, I was selected, by a random drawing of the gold medalists to compete in the first ever National Games in Ames, Iowa in 2006! I had my own coach for the National Games who worked with me to perfect my skills. I competed at the highest level I ever competed and came home with three gold, one silver and one bronze medal, proudly representing Pennsylvania!

In 2015, Lancaster County did not have volunteer coaches for gymnastics, either artistic or rhythmic. I believed that was unacceptable, so, I got on the phone and started making phone calls to find someone and somewhere for the Lancaster County gymnastics teams. Just in time, Prestige Gymnastics came forward and the Lancaster County gymnastics teams had a place to practice. Thanks to my persistent efforts!

Last year, I had the chance to participate in a once in a lifetime event. While athletes were at Penn State for Summer Games, the torch for the World Games in Los Angeles, CA passed through

Hershey, PA and I was asked to carry to torch. Wow, what an experience that was for me! These experiences have helped me with my self-confidence and self-esteem!

*Editor's Note: Maribeth Sauder is an athlete from Lancaster County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 13 years. Maribeth was also a member of the Pennsylvania delegation at the first USA National Games in 2006.*

## *Steps towards living a Healthy Lifestyle*

Bobbi Jo Rhen, Lebanon County Athlete Representative



My name is Bobbi Jo Rhen and I am an Athlete Representative from Lebanon County. This year I had really started to focus on my health. I did this by going to the YMCA more, walking with my dog, cutting down on my soda consumption and trying to eat healthier. I have even gone online to look for healthy meals recipes including smoothies (with vegetables, fruits and yogurts) and snacks.

While I have my ups and downs, I have yet to give up in improving my health. I keep remembering it's a day by day thing!

*Editor's Note: Bobbi Jo Rhen is an Athlete Representative from Lebanon County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 25 years. Bobbi Jo was named Lebanon County Athlete of the Year in 2011, helped Lebanon County start their tennis program and became the first Chair of Lebanon County's Athlete Leadership Team in 2016.*

## *2016 Summer Games Experience as a Health and Fitness Coordinator*

Adam Spiker, Somerset County Global Messenger

Nicole Huya, Warren County Athlete Representative & Global Messenger

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Smith, Delaware County Athlete Representative & Global Messenger



### **Adam's Experience:**

Hi my name is Adam Spiker and I had a great time volunteering at Summer Games at Penn State University.

It was a good time talking to the other athletes about Healthy Habits. For those who may be unfamiliar, Healthy Habits uses many of the core areas of Health Promotions, one of the Healthy Athletes disciplines.

While volunteering with Healthy Habits, I got to educate my fellow athletes about nutrition, hydration, and physical activity. I learned a lot myself and I really had a lot of fun volunteering with healthy habits.

I also volunteered with Healthy Athletes by helping with Opening Eyes. The group I worked with was also a lot of fun.

I would recommend any athlete who is not competing at a State Competition to volunteer.

### **Nicole's Experience:**

I wanted to take Healthy Lifestyles at Athlete Leadership University and become the Health and Fitness Coordinator for my local program, Warren County, because I wanted to lose weight and be healthy. I also want to help others do this!

I love talking in front of others which came extremely helpful when I volunteered with SOPA's Programming Projects Coordinator during the 2016 Summer Games at Penn State University. There were so many people at Aquatics and Athletics that were interested in learning about Healthy Habits, specifically: nutrition, hydration and physical activity. In addition, during my time at Summer Games, I was a Healthy Athlete Assistant working with the Special Smiles and Health Promotion Clinical Directors.

I learned during Healthy Lifestyles that as a Health and Fitness Coordinator I can create a club, such as a walking club for athletes, unified partners, coaches and families to participate in. When making menus for Special Olympic competitions we can choose to eat subs instead of pizza. Special Olympics Warren County used to have soda to drink but now we have water with flavor packets.

Some of the goals that I have for Special Olympics Warren County are to start a walking club, eat healthier at competitions, have all the athletes exercise 150 minutes a week and then have them record what activity they did.

### **Elizabeth's Experience:**

Working as a Healthy Athletes Assistant and Healthy Habits Volunteer at Penn State was SO MUCH fun! I really liked working at Healthy Habits at the track and pool. It was fun showing all the different athletes what was healthy and what was not. It was really fun doing the activities, rewarding the athletes who got the right answers, and giving out water bottles, flavorings, and healthy snacks.

I had fun at Special Smiles working with a certified dentist. We showed the athletes how to brush their teeth properly and how to practice good dental hygiene.

Being a Healthy Athlete Assistant and Healthy Habits Volunteer was the best! I liked seeing all the different athletes and teaching them how to live a healthier lifestyle inside and outside of Special Olympics. I loved doing all of it and would love to do it again!

*Editor's Notes: Adam Spiker is a Global Messenger from Somerset County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 24 years. Adam also volunteered as a Healthy Athletes assistant during the 2016 Winter Games.*

*Nicole Huya is a Global Messenger from Warren County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 10 years. In April 2016, Nicole served as an instructor at the very first Healthy Lifestyles session at Athlete Leadership University. Nicole also works for BEi and spoke at their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.*

*Elizabeth "Lizzie" Smith is an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Delaware County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 25 years. Elizabeth competed in the 1999 Special Olympics World Games, was inducted into the SOPA Hall of Fame in 2004 and was one of 15 athletes to attend the first Healthy Lifestyles session at Athlete Leadership University in April, 2016.*

*If you are interested in taking Healthy Lifestyles at Athlete Leadership University and becoming a Health and Fitness Coordinator, please contact Athlete Leadership Coordinator, Jordan Schubert at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org).*

## *The Learning Never Ends*

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



Through everything I've done with Special Olympics, I've always considered it to be a learning experience. Whether it was in the gold medal basketball game at Summer Games, recruiting athletes for various leadership opportunities or presenting important updates to the entire SOPA Team, I have always found knowledge of things I did not know previously.

Strong leadership is one of the biggest core values, not just here in Pennsylvania, but in Special Olympics programs around the world. Regardless whether you're an athlete, coach, local program manager, staff member or board member, everyone involved in Special Olympics has the ability to lead by example. That is one of the many key items addressed in SOPA's new strategic plan that was launched the beginning of this year.

In addition to SOPA beginning a new strategic plan this year, Special Olympics International (SOI) is also in the first year of its new five year strategic plan. In the past year, SOI has hosted three Leadership Academy sessions in different regions around the world. This past April, for the first time, the Leadership Academy was hosted in North America. Not only was it in North America, it was also in my backyard, Philadelphia.

One thing that Special Olympics programs around the world have done a great job with in recent years has been having Athlete Leaders not only attend leadership development events,

but also being actively included in them. One thing a lot of people might not know about SOPA President & CEO, Matt Aaron is that he is also the chair of the Athlete Leadership Committee for Special Olympics North America. In addition to making sure I was part of the Leadership Academy, Matt also got three other Athlete Leaders to be part of it. Those three athletes were:

- John Fitton from Florida: Southeastern representative on the US Athlete Input Council.
- Matthew Williams from Canada: Member of the SOI Board of Directors.
- Dustin Plunkett from Southern California: Works for the SO SoCal office in a position very similar to mine.

I had attended previous conferences with John, Matthew and Dustin and I was very excited to be working with them again.

All the other attendees at the Leadership Academy were Special Olympics staff members from all over the US, Canada and Caribbean. During the three and a half days of the Leadership Academy, we attended many interactive sessions on not only improving our leadership skills, but making sure we share those with other people we work with. Facilitating our sessions were some of the best leaders in different professions. Not only did I get the pleasure of meeting them, I also got to introduce two of them: Philadelphia Eagles President, Don Smolenski and Harvard Disability Law Professor, Dr. Michael Stein.

As much as I enjoyed each session, Dr. Stein's session was probably my favorite. Dr. Stein talked about the importance of inclusive leadership and how he has taught his students about advocating for disability rights, not just of those with intellectual disabilities, but all disabilities. This session led to a breakout group discussion of how we can incorporate athletes into making Special Olympics a more athlete led and athlete centered organization. If you've read SOAR before, then you have seen how many of our athletes are leading by example at the local and state level. I probably took up most of the time of the group discussion talking about all the great leadership training opportunities through Athlete Leadership University and the countless other opportunities following course completion. Every state, province and island in North America is in different stages of development when it comes to Athlete Leadership. The one thing that they all have in common though is that each of them are looking up and slowly adding more training and leadership opportunities that their athletes can pursue.

I'm sure you noticed a familiar face with me in the picture at the very beginning and I forgot to mention that there was another great Athlete Leader in attendance. Loretta Claiborne



was one of the first Athlete Leaders in Pennsylvania before Athlete Leadership became an official part of Special Olympics. Earlier this year, Loretta was named the Chief Inspiration Officer on the SOI Board of Directors. I first met Loretta shortly after I graduated high school five years ago and even now I'm always excited listening to her talk about her experiences as a leader and all the barriers she overcame to get to where she is today. Having Loretta at the Leadership Academy and sharing her wisdom is a perfect example of showing others how far Special Olympics has come in almost 50 years.

By attending the Leadership Academy, this was the beginning of a new professional development road by taking on greater responsibilities, and learning how to delegate responsibilities to others. By expanding my professional growth, this will push me in the right direction towards pursuing a larger role with SOPA. This is not only for my personal benefit though. In the near future, I hope by taking on a larger role, it also opens the door for other athletes to become meaningful members of SOPA's staff.

*Editor's Note: Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Coordinator for SOPA and is an athlete in Chester and Montgomery County. Jordan has been competing in Special Olympics for 12 years in Pennsylvania and Illinois and graduated from West Chester University in 2015.*

## 2016 Summer Games Athlete Input Survey and Athlete Input Council Results

### 207 – Athlete Input Survey

### 60 – Athlete Input Council

#### Athlete Input Survey:

##### 1. What sport did you compete in?

- a. Aquatics-58 (28%)
- b. Athletics-3 (1%)
- c. Basketball 5 v 5-65 (31%)**
- d. Basketball 3 v 3-5 (2%)
- e. Basketball Skills-1 (.5%)
- f. Bowling-4 (2%)
- g. Equestrian-1 (.5%)
- h. Golf-4 (2%)
- i. Golf Skills-1 (.5%)
- j. Gymnastics-1 (.5%)
- k. Softball-1 (.5%)
- l. Softball Skills-1 (.5%)
- m. Tennis-43 (21%)
- n. Tennis Skills-19 (9%)

##### 2. Was this your first time competing at Summer Games?

- a. Yes-70 (34%)
- b. No-137 (66%)**

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

- a. Better-42 (31%)
- b. Needs Improvement-36 (27%)
- c. Same-57 (42%)**

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

- a. The awards ceremony for 5 v 5 needs to be improved. Teams should receive their awards after medal rounds immediately after the game in the lobby of the IM Building. (Basketball 5 v 5)
- b. More organization (Aquatics)
- c. Sat around too long (Aquatics)
- d. Have a better rain plan (Golf and Tennis)
- e. Too much down time but could not go to Olympic Town (Aquatics)
- f. More courts to play (Basketball 5 v 5)
- g. More air conditioning (Basketball 5 v 5)
- h. More lanes (Bowling)
- i. More volunteers (Athletics)
- j. Transportation to and from venues (Athletics)
- k. More time to do Olympic Town and Healthy Athletes (Basketball 3 v 3)
- l. Have a theme.

#### Competition:

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

- a. Excellent-143 (70%)**
- b. Average-51 (25%)
- c. Poor-10 (5%)

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

- a. Poor sportsmanship and fighting (Basketball 5 v 5)
- b. Not enough lanes to swim in (Aquatics)
- c. Play against the same teams every year (Basketball 5 v 5)

### Extracurricular Activities:

1. **How would you rate the food and beverages provided at this event?**
  - a. **Excellent-107 (52%)**
  - b. 73 (36%)
  - c. Poor-24 (12%)
  
2. **If you answered "Poor", can you explain why?**
  - a. Too cold
  - b. Need more choices
  - c. Bad after taste
  - d. Food was dry
  
3. **How would you rate Opening Ceremonies?**
  - a. **Excellent-174 (84%)**
  - b. Average-22 (11%)
  - c. I did not attend Opening Ceremonies-10 (5%)
  
4. **How would you rate Olympic Town?**
  - a. **Excellent-105 (53%)**
  - b. Average-60 (30%)
  - c. Poor-6 (3%)
  - d. I did not attend Olympic Town-29 (15%)
  
5. **If you answered "Poor", can you explain why?**
  - a. Did not have time due to rain delays
  - b. Not enough things to do
  - c. Did not get to see everything due to time

### Additional Comments:

- Need more basketballs for everyone to warm up (Basketball 5 v 5)
- Loved the dance
- Dorms were out of paper products
- Too much down time during competition (Aquatics)
- Had a great time (Tennis Skills)
- Improve training for officials (Basketball 5 v 5)
- Awesome and great (Aquatics)
- More water at competition venues (Tennis and Tennis Skills)
- Can't wait until next year (Basketball 5 v 5)
- Food was awesome
- Too much time is wasted lining up for free throws. Clock should be stopped to allow players to line up. (Basketball 5 v 5)

### Athlete Input Council:

#### Competition:

1. **Did you have any delays in your competition schedule and if so, what were the causes and how could they have been prevented?**
  - a. Rushed to get athletes staged but sat for a long period of time (Athletics)
  - b. Divisioning was poor at 7 Hills and not a lot to do (Golf)
  - c. Ambulance was delayed (Athletics)
  - d. Credentials had wrong information (Athletics)

- e. Buses were delayed to and from the track (Athletics)
- f. Inappropriate communication via touching (Bowling)
- g. Unexplained delays (Bowling)
- h. Too chaotic (Aquatics)
- i. Busing wasn't organized (All sports)

### **Food/Drink:**

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

- a. More healthy juice options
- b. Food was dry
- c. Food gave me stomach virus
- d. 45 minute wait at breakfast
- e. Not a lot of options at meals
- f. Too many people filling up personal water bottles
- g. Have an open dining schedule

### **Extracurricular Activities:**

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

- a. Have a place designated for families at Opening Ceremonies
- b. Enjoyed cheerleaders and dance team
- c. Enjoyed the alternate venue
- d. Have mini Olympic Towns at competition venues
- e. Opening Ceremonies was too loud

### **Additional Comments:**

#### **4. Do you have any additional comments or concerns about Summer Games?**

- a. Too much fighting (Basketball 5 v 5)
- b. Lack of water (Athletics)
- c. Have stickers and labels on awards for all events (Aquatics)
- d. Not enough signage
- e. Should separate genders while divisioning (Athletics)
- f. Have water coolers at each court (Basketball 5 v 5 and 3 v 3)
- g. Add more loud speakers by pool (Aquatics)
- h. Have a lost and found pick up
- i. Serve more pasta at dinner
- j. Have video games at Olympic Town
- k. Have Gatorade or flavor mixes at competition venues for athletes that don't like plain water
- l. Better divisioning (Aquatics)
- m. Athletes did not know what caused a disqualification (Aquatics)

*Editor's Note: Thanks to all the athletes that took Athlete Input Surveys and attended the Athlete Input Council at the 2016 Summer Games. Athlete Input Councils take place at each state competition and Athlete Input Surveys are conducted at each sectional and state competition. No Athlete Leadership experience is required to attend an Athlete Input Council or take an Athlete Input Survey.*

*Athlete Recognition*

Congratulations to all the athletes that received awards during the 2016 Leadership Conference Awards Banquet!



**Steven Fields, Montgomery County**  
**Male Athlete of the Year**



**Christa Meren, Bedford County**  
**Female Athlete of the Year**



**Zachary Williams, Fayette County**  
**Athlete Leader of the Year**

## *Important Notices*

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

### **Athlete Leadership University Update:**

The session will be offering Athlete Representative II and Global Messenger II, taking place November 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> at Black Rock Retreat Center. Address: *1345 Kirkwood Pike, Quarryville, PA 17566*.

This session is only open to athletes that have taken Athlete Representative I and/or Global Messenger I and have completed their practicum. Report forms can be downloaded via this link: <http://specialolympicspa.org/special-programs/initiatives/athlete-leadership>.

All completed report forms can be sent via:

- E-mail: [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org) OR
- Mail: Attn: Jordan Schubert, 2570 Blvd. of the Generals Suite 124, Norristown, PA 19403  
OR
- Fax: Attn : Jordan Schubert, 610-630-9456

### **Athlete T-Shirt Design Contest:**

Do you love art? If your answer is yes, enter the 2017 Athlete T-Shirt Design Contest for a chance to have your logo featured on the volunteer t-shirts for each of SOPA's sectional competitions. Contest is open between now and Friday, November 11<sup>th</sup>.

Additional information is available via this link:

<http://www.specialolympicspa.org/component/content/article/8-news/690-16th-annual-athlete-t-shirt-design-contest?Itemid=490>.

Please contact Senior Sports Director, Michelle Boone, at [mboone@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:mboone@specialolympicspa.org) if you have any additional questions!

### **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, Jordan Schubert and Director of Programming Projects, 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!

### **Athletes as Coaches & Healthy Lifestyles Q & A:**

In April 2016, SOPA started offering two new courses at Athlete Leadership University: Athletes as Coaches and Healthy Lifestyles. With new courses come a lot of questions. To help answer these questions, a Q & A has been created for any potential frequently asked questions:

- Athletes as Coaches:  
[http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete\\_Leadership/Athletes\\_as\\_Coaches\\_-\\_Frequently\\_Asked\\_Questions.pdf](http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/Athletes_as_Coaches_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf)
- Healthy Lifestyles:  
[http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete\\_Leadership/Healthy\\_Lifestyles\\_-\\_Frequently\\_Asked\\_Questions.pdf](http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/Healthy_Lifestyles_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf)

**Email Address Update:** I would like to be able to reach as many athletes as possible. If you haven't received any emails from me, or your email address has changed in the last year, please email me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org).

**Share Your Story:** If you would like to share a story on Athlete Leadership University, Leadership Conference, Athlete Congress, Fall Festival or any other Special Olympics experiences, please e-mail me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org) by December 31<sup>st</sup> for a chance to have your story shared in the End of Year Edition of SOAR.