



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **PIAA Basketball Championships to Host Special Olympics Unified Bocce Invitational at Giant Center in Hershey, PA**

**(Norristown, PA, March 12, 2015)** – Students with and without intellectual disabilities will participate in a Unified Indoor Bocce Invitational prior to the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) Boy’s and Girl’s state basketball championships on March 20, 2015. The Bocce Invitational will occur from 8:45am – 11am at the Giant Center in Hershey, PA. A total of five high schools from Allegheny, Delaware and Philadelphia Counties, who are a part of the Special Olympics Pennsylvania Interscholastic Unified Sports® program, will compete and culminate their unified bocce season.

The high schools participating in the Unified Bocce Invitational include: Baldwin, Carlynton, and Elizabeth Forward High Schools from Allegheny County, Upper Darby High School from Delaware County, and Abraham Lincoln High School from Philadelphia. Each Unified Indoor Bocce team has a roster of between 6-8 players, half with and half without intellectual disabilities. At the Invitational, the teams will compete in one of two divisions and be grouped with teams of similar abilities. Each team will play two 30 minute games, and an awards ceremony will be held during halftime of the AA Girl’s Basketball Championship game.

Special Olympics Pennsylvania Interscholastic Unified Sports® (IUS) is a fully-inclusive co-ed high school sports program that brings together a proportional number of students with and without disabilities on teams for training and competition. Over the course of four years, Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) seeks to build a network of partnerships with school districts to introduce Unified Sports programs in high schools throughout the state. Both the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education and the PIAA endorse IUS and have been working collaboratively with SOPA to promote these programs to schools.

“PIAA is proud to collaborate with Special Olympics Pennsylvania to offer unified sport opportunities to students to compete in an athletic environment. This program and others will assist all of us in reaching out to those who may not have an opportunity to participate in athletics”, said PIAA Executive Director, Dr. Robert A. Lombardi.

“Our partnership with the PIAA is important because our athletes and partners deserve the same opportunities as anyone else to participate in quality sports competitions,” said Matt Aaron, Special Olympics PA President and CEO. “This wonderful relationship helps us provide

those quality experiences for more students around the state while promoting the values of inclusion, acceptance, and respect. We are particularly grateful for the PIAA's support for this bocce invitational as it represents our first statewide Interscholastic Unified Sports competition."

Unified Sports® is the one Special Olympics program which helps schools fulfill the requirements of the Department of Education guidance letter reminding schools of the federal law (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) protecting the rights of all students with disabilities to have equal access to athletics activities.

In addition to the Interscholastic Unified Indoor Bocce Invitational, the PIAA will host three Interscholastic Unified Track and Field teams as part of its Boy's and Girl's Track and Field Championships on May 22 and 23 at Shippensburg University.

### **About Special Olympics Pennsylvania**

Special Olympics Pennsylvania provides year-round training and competition in 21 Olympic-type sports to nearly 20,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities. For more information about how you can help *Reveal the Champion Inside* thousands of Special Olympics athletes, visit our web site at [www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org).

### **About Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association**

Beginning in Pittsburgh, on December 29, 1913, PIAA was given the privilege of serving its member schools and registered officials by establishing policies and adopting contest rules that emphasize the educational values of interscholastic athletics, promote safe and sportsmanlike competition and provide uniform standards for all interscholastic levels of competition.

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