



Athlete on the Fall Festival Planning Committee

Daniel Kolb, Chester County Athlete Representative



The Fall Festival planning starts with everyone sharing what their views are on how to run the event. Athlete Representatives help the committee to understand what athletes want. During the meeting, Athlete Representatives join the different sub-committees. In one meeting, I could work with two or three different sub-committees and help put plans into place and make changes with enough given time. Every week I meet with a lot of different people. After the games are over, we begin to discuss ways to improve for the next Fall Festival to make it an even better experience for all athletes. I believe that it is important that the athlete's voices are a part of games planning committees!

Editor's Note: Daniel Kolb is an Athlete Representative from Chester County and has been competing in Special Olympics for over 40 years. Daniel competed in tennis at the 1995 World Games and also won the Sheetz Family Spirit Award at the 2013 SOPA Summer Games.

Athlete as ALPs U Instructors

Josh Stranix, Schuylkill County Athlete Representative & Global Messenger



I really enjoyed teaching the Global Messenger Course with my mom at ALPs U in November. There were many things I liked about it. I enjoyed getting to know the athletes and their mentors. My mom took the lead and I filled in with a lot of my own experiences. Having this position helped me teach athletes things I learned about being a Global Messenger in the past. On Friday, we started out with a very shy lady and by Sunday she progressed tremendously and gave a wonderful speech. My mom and I had each athlete do a one minute “silly speech” on their favorite food. I thought it was very helpful for the athletes to start off with a topic they were familiar and comfortable with. I liked the small group we had because it allowed us to get to know each other better. My mom and I also enjoyed the thank you gifts we received, a gift basket from Highland Chocolates.

Editor’s Note: Josh Stranix is an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Schuylkill County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 33 years. Josh was also one of 6 athletes to be elected to the Regional Input Council at this year’s Athlete Congress and will be representing the Southeast.

2014: An Amazing Year in Special Olympics Pennsylvania
Tarre Apreala, Lehigh County Athlete Representative



My name is Tarre Apreala from Allentown, Pennsylvania. I have been involved with Special Olympics for more than 14 years. In 2000, I started with Special Olympics Michigan and my first sport was bowling. I continued with the Lehigh County Special Olympics program, when I moved to Pennsylvania. Thanks to Special Olympics, including our volunteers, coaches, families, friends, staff and fans, I have continued to enjoy playing soccer, basketball, track and field, softball, bowling, and bocce ball for all of these years. In all my years with Special Olympics, I would say 2014 stands out the most. It has been an amazing year; two events in particular make it extra special and unforgettable.

I had the most wonderful time this past summer when I had the chance to train and compete in the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games in New Jersey. This dream of a lifetime was followed by an invitation to attend the Athlete Congress in Harrisburg last September. Both events were full of joy and doing extraordinary things. I love meeting, greeting, and competing with athletes from all over the state and country. They inspire me every day with their courage, as they share their gifts, skills and friendship. I have learned and grown as an athlete and as a leader by making and experiencing the 2014 USA games as well as by attending the 2014 Athlete Congress.

I really felt honored playing soccer for Team PA, and it has made me a better athlete and a leader. I learned watching my team transform from the Lehigh County Running Rebels to Team PA. It started with rallies right from our training weekend in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The silver medal we won at the games was hard fought. Athletes from all over the country showed a lot of bravery. We put our hearts and soul into every game and our fans saw great competition.

The 2014 Special Olympics USA National Games will be remembered as the best sporting event in my lifetime. Fox Sports and WWE did a great job showcasing the event and demonstrated our love for Special Olympics sports to the public. Another great highlight included going on the boat cruise to see the Statute of Liberty. Inside the boat, they had great food and music. In an interview, I heard a teammate say that we were treated as royalty, and I agree. I learned new things, made new friends, and gained a better appreciation for the Special Olympics movement. This will help me serve my fellow athletes as an athlete leader.

The second event was the Athlete Congress in September. Seeing athlete delegates from every county convening in the state capital for the 2nd Athlete Congress was a great experience. We became the voices, eyes, and ears for all athletes throughout the state. I enjoyed participating in meetings and discussions that led to the election of the Regional Input Council representatives, Athlete Congress chairperson, and the election of a fellow athlete to the SOPA Board of Directors. We also addressed issues that affect the wellbeing of all athletes in the State of Pennsylvania. I learned a lot in the process, made new friends, and liked what I saw regarding the future of Special Olympics Pennsylvania.

Indeed 2014 has been an incredible year for me. Of all my years in Special Olympics, I would say this year definitely stands out the most. I have learned and grown as an athlete and as a leader. I will cherish forever the fond memories of the 2014 USA games as well as

the 2014 Athlete Congress. I thank Special Olympics Pennsylvania for taking the time and commitment to develop our future leaders.

Editors Notes: Tarre Apreala is an Athlete Representative from Lehigh County and has competed in Special Olympics for over 14 years. Following the USA Games and Athlete Congress, Tarre officially became certified as an Athlete Representative at ALPs University in Lebanon this past November.

Year in Review

Jordan Schubert, ALPs Coordinator



It's amazing to realize that I have been in the position as SOPA's Athlete Leadership Program Coordinator for just over a year now. There are a lot of great things to look back on that I accomplished for myself as well as helped SOPA accomplish.

In March I was chosen as one of two SOPA athletes to be represented at Special Olympics Capitol Hill Day. It was a great opportunity to meet with PA Congressmen and make friends with other athletes from around the country.

As a part of SOPA's partnership with the Philadelphia 76ers, the Sixers hosted SOPA Night at the Wells Fargo Center. At every Sixers home game, they present the

“Hero Among Us” award to someone who shows dedication and passion towards a Philadelphia area nonprofit. I received the award because of the volunteer work I have done with Special Olympics. Along with me receiving a plaque, which hangs proudly in my office, almost \$4,000 went to SOPA as part of the 50/50 raffle.

This past June was my second year competing in basketball at Summer Games. The previous year, my Chester County team fought hard but came up with a bronze. This year we were determined as ever to get the gold. After some intense battles with Adams, Venango Forest, and two nail biters against Butler, we came out on top in all four games, and we won the gold.

In September, SOPA hosted its second Athlete Congress during the weekend of its annual Leadership Conference. Some of my responsibilities for Congress included creating a list of potential topics for athletes to vote on what would be addressed, as well as the creation of our new Regional Input Council. You will also have the opportunity to see the full Athlete Congress Report Out and meet the Regional Input Council later in the newsletter.

This year SOPA hosted their first two ALPs U Sessions. The first one was held at Slippery Rock University in July and Kenbrook in November. In the past, SOPA hosted individual Athlete Representative and Global Messenger training sessions. This year was the first year the two came together, as well as the introduction of our technology training session to improve electronic communications between athletes. Starting next year, we will be offering advanced ALPs U Courses, developing athletes’ leadership skills even further.

I’m proud of both my personal accomplishments as well as the accomplishments I helped SOPA achieve over the past year. This year helped my overall professional growth in SOPA and I have developed a network of great Athlete Leaders throughout the state.

Next year I'm making it my mission to help SOPA's Athlete Leaders to pursue opportunities like attending an ALPs University.

Editors Notes: Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Coordinator for Special Olympics Pennsylvania and is an athlete for Chester County. Jordan has been competing in Special Olympics for 11 years .Prior to joining the SOPA staff, Jordan was a member of the National Youth Activation Committee for Special Olympics Project UNIFY and was an intern for Project UNIFY at Special Olympics International in 2013.

2014 Athlete Congress Report Out

Athlete Congress Steering Committee:

- Mike Gray
- Melissa Holt
- Chris Jagielski
- Josh Stranix
- Lisa Barbour
- Ernie Roundtree
- Raymond Vanetten
- Robby Jones
- Meghan Jayne
- Johanna Schoeneck
- Liz Smith
- Melissa Woerner: *2014 Athlete Congress Chair*
- Mike Stephens: *Athlete elected SOPA Board of Directors term ends September 2015*
- Samantha Wasson: *SOPA Board of Directors*
- Loretta Claiborne: *SOI Board of Directors*



Athlete Congress Mission Statement: To empower athletes to improve the quality of leadership, communication, training and competition.

Vision for Athlete Congress: Making sure the athletes voices are heard, involving athletes in decision making and building confident leaders.

Health, Nutrition and Fitness: Explore the ways to encourage and to be an example of good health, nutrition, and fitness.

Recommendation #1, Health: Ban all tobacco products from all competitions. This includes athletes, volunteers, coaches, friends, families and spectators.

Recommendation #2, Nutrition: Provide more varieties of healthy food and beverage options at competitions.

Recommendation #3, Fitness: Create a year round fitness club at local parks led by athletes for athletes and unified partners.

Strategic Plan:

- **As we build our future, what do we hold near and dear that we want to carry forward?**
 - Growing Unified Sports programs in the community for athletes and unified partners of all ages.
- **What is the “big idea” you would like to see SOPA champion over the next 3-4 years?**
 - Verify that officials are receiving uniformed training so they can make fair calls at competitions throughout the state.

- **What is SOPA not doing that you would like to see SOPA do as it relates to our mission?**
 - Develop a basic introductory training during the on boarding process of new volunteers through interactive resources.

**The 2014 SOPA Athlete Congress voted for 8 positions for athletes to fill:
Athlete elected to Board of Directors: Melissa Woerner, Bucks County**



Athlete elected as 2016 Athlete Congress Chair: Ernie Roundtree, Monroe County



Regional Input Council Representatives elected:

Tim Spence

Marilyn Leonhart

Michael Baker

Robert Jones

Nina Kaneriya

Josh Stranix



Editors Notes: Hosted every 2 years, is a forum for Athlete Representatives to present recommendations to the SOPA Board of Directors for organizational change. Athlete Congress attendees must be trained Athlete Representatives -- one participant per county.

2014 Fall Festival Athlete Input Council Notes

- 20 athletes were present at the Input Council.
 - 4 from LDR
 - 4 from soccer
 - 5 from volleyball
 - 5 from bocce
 - 1 as an event volunteer
 - 1 as a member of the Fall Fest committee.
- 13 local programs were represented.

Competition: 2 Questions/ 10 Minutes

- How would you assess the overall quality of the competition in your sport?
- Were there delays in your events? What were the causes and how could they have been prevented?
- **Topic 1-Competition:**
 - Competition was fair.
 - A lot of people were cheering.
 - Much better than years prior.
 - Loved bocce at the pavilion.
 - Need to have award ceremonies in a handicap accessible location.
 - Hard to hear awards ceremonies because there was no microphone.
 - Overall, 7 v 7 soccer was a good venue.
 - However some 7v7 soccer fields were too close to the street and any high kick would go over the fence.
 - LDR was right on schedule.
 - Have a tarp on soccer fields in preparation for bad weather.
 - More time for bocce to warm up.
 - Bocce was ahead of schedule.
 - Have credentials for volunteers.

Dinning: 2 Questions/ 10 Minutes

- Were there enough healthy/nutritious food and beverage options at meals?
- Were you able to enter and leave the dining hall in a timely matter?
- **Topic 2-Dining:**
 - More vegetarian options.
 - Everything was either too healthy or too unhealthy.
 - Food was not hot enough.

- Have more diabetic friendly options.
- Serve whole wheat pasta on Friday night to give athletes extra energy for the next day.
- Less junk food in cafeteria.
- York County almost missed dinner on Friday.
- Always have sandwiches available throughout the weekend in case local program can't make a meal in the cafeteria due to time restrictions.

Opening Ceremonies/Olympic Town/Dance/Movie: 2 Questions/ 10 Minutes

- What did you like at these events?
- What would you like to add/change for next year?
- **Topic 3- Opening Ceremonies/Olympic Town/Dance/Movie:**
 - More media exposure.
 - Have meet and greet with more Villanova athletes.
 - Make Olympic Town bigger.
 - Enjoyed live band at dance.
 - Live band and DJ at dance.
 - Purchase fans or turn on air conditioning at dance.
 - Have athletes come up and say their name and local program at Opening Ceremonies.
 - Have flags at opening ceremonies to identify which program is sitting where.
 - Some athletes couldn't see screen at Opening Ceremonies.
 - At Healthy Athletes, offer massages with hot stones.
 - Have 3 LPHs per local program.
 - Allow LPH's to take athletes to special events like Olympic Town.

Additional Feedback: 10 Minutes

- **Topic 4-Additional Feedback:**

- No time to attend Healthy Athletes.
- Make Healthy Athletes two days long.
- Better scheduling overall
- Butler Volleyball had a long wait in between games.
- York reported that Hampton Inn wasn't ready for their arrival.
- Opening Ceremonies was only 10 minutes behind schedule.
- Need golf carts for any physically disabled athletes.

Editor's Note:

Athlete Input Councils are held after each SOPA State Competition to allow athletes to share their thoughts on the games both in and outside of competition. Their feedback is then shared with the Senior Sports Director and the Competition Director who is in charge of the event. This past Fall Festival was the first time we opened it up to all athletes. While ALPs experience is encouraged, it is not required.

Important Notices

Jordan Schubert, ALPs Coordinator

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 ALPs event in your area or a personal experience, please e-mail ALPs Coordinator Jordan Schubert at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org by March 6th for a chance to have it shared in the Winter edition of SOAR.