



## Why I Love Special Olympics

Emmett Abdo, Philadelphia County Athlete



Hi, my name is Emmett Abdo. I have been participating in Special Olympics for 17 years and have loved every moment of it! Swimming is my favorite sport; however, I also participate in soccer, tennis and basketball. Like many athletes, Special Olympics has helped me feel more confident and strive to do my very best in both sports and life. One example I'm proud of would be that it helped me get a job as a Bellhop at a Holiday Inn Express.

Recently, I was asked to speak at the Leprechaun Run with my fellow Philly athletes Lisa Barbour and Charlie Zisette. For those that aren't familiar, the

Leprechaun Run is one of Special Olympics Pennsylvania's fundraisers. Since I love speaking in front of large crowds, I decided that I wanted to be trained as a Global Messenger. As an athlete, I feel it's important that not only I share with others what Special Olympics has meant for me, but also explain to others how they can help make a difference in the lives of myself and the 20,000 other athletes throughout Pennsylvania.

My next biggest goal is to qualify for the 2022 USA Games in Orlando. Additionally, once I am trained as a Global Messenger, I would also like to be able to co-emcee Opening Ceremonies at Fall Festival.

I always enjoy telling others that just a little bit of their time or money can go a long way towards making a difference!

*Emmett Abdo is an athlete in Philadelphia County and has been participating in Special Olympics for 17 years. Outside of Special Olympics, Emmett enjoys watching American Idol, America's Got Talent and Dancing with the Stars as well as going to Reading Terminal Market.*

## ***My recent Health and Fitness Coordinator Accomplishments***

Chloe Phillips, Lancaster County Athlete Leader



In the many years I have been participating in Special Olympics, I've learned that in order to perform at my very best, I had to maintain a healthy lifestyle by actively exercising and eating healthy, even during a time when I'm not active in a sport. In 2017, I took a training at Athlete Leadership University called Healthy Lifestyles, where not only I learned how to improve my own health and fitness habits, but also how to become a Health and Fitness Coordinator and share that information with my fellow athletes.

I started my tasks as a Health and Fitness Coordinator by managing a Facebook page and invited Special Olympic athletes, friends and coaches to join. On the Facebook page, I put up tips that are helpful to athletes to understand the importance of eating healthy, getting proper exercise and hydration.

When I'm not competing, I enjoy going to events to volunteer with Healthy Athletes and Healthy Habits. Most recently, I went to the York Expo Center to help with Healthy Athletes out at the Indoor Winter Games. I helped in the registration of athletes for getting their ears checked through Healthy Hearing checked and teeth checked through Special Smiles. It was a long day but I know I helped many athletes. I saw many of my friends from other counties and it felt great encouraging them to take advantage of the free health screenings offered.

I also enjoy helping my swim team with Fit 5! My coach and I talked to the athletes and parents about exercise, hydration and nutrition. I was responsible for collecting and handing out the tracking sheets. Even if your coaches don't offer Fit 5, it's always good for you to set personal health and sports goals.

Every month, I've invited athletes in a walking, exercise and healthy eating challenge. I've also asked coaches to help me find interested athletes willing to join the challenges by sending letters inviting them to join. As an extra incentive, the winner each month received a small prize. The biggest challenge I still have is getting athletes to come to events. I like my friend Zach's idea of hosting a health fair in his home County, Fayette. My mentor and I will work on doing something similar. By doing this, I hope that will get more athletes interested in meeting monthly so that they're physically active year round.

Something else that I've worked very hard on is finding connections within the community. A Well Span Sport Medicine group hosted a sports injury prevention talk that I went to with my mom- The Doctors are willing to do a posture and strength screening for our athletes in the upcoming months.

Being a Health and Fitness Coordinator makes me think about ways I can share healthy habits with my friends, coworkers and my fellow athletes. If you're interested in becoming a Health and Fitness Coordinator, I encourage you to talk to your Local Program Manager, coaches and family so they can support you in doing the same things I'm doing as well!

*Chloe Phillips is an Athlete Leader from Lancaster County and has been participating in Special Olympics for 10 years. Chloe received a degree in Communications as a member of the Athlete Leadership University Class of 2017 and will be receiving one in Health during the 2019 Graduation Ceremony in August.*

## ***The Comeback Kid***

David Miller, Adams County Athlete Representative



Back in 2016, I broke my hip. It was during a basketball practice and I landed on the floor. Everyone thought it was a bad bruise but I tried to move my leg and I couldn't move it, even though I drove home the same day. The next day I woke up and my pain went up. I knew I had to go to the hospital. I had to have an x-ray and the doctor said we had to do surgery to save the ball of my hip. After the surgery the doctor said I had a 50/50 shot to heal right and if I pushed it I will have to have it replaced, which meant I could no longer participate in the sports I love. My career in sports could have been over. I had to take it easy until my hip healed. You don't want support until you need it

the most. My goal when I was healing was to get married and I did just that three months later. While nothing could certainly top that, a year later I went to states games for tennis. Three days after returning home from Summer Games, I found out that I was one of 50 athletes picked for the 2018 USA Games in Seattle as a part of Team PA.

The USA games were a great time to be there. After getting married, this was the second best thing to happen to me after my injury. I played as a level 5 athlete. It was also great having my family with me when I was there. We went to the glass museum and the space needle in Seattle. All I could say about Opening Ceremonies was wow in all the things they did. It was just breath taking to be in front of almost 50,000 people and getting to know my coach, Sally was great! After all the hard work and obstacles I had to overcome, I came home with the bronze medal. However, just being in that position was a victory in itself.

After I returned home from Seattle, I realized that there's more to Special Olympics than just sports. For many years, Adams County has been very supportive of Athlete Leaders of all ages and ability levels. When I found out that there were opportunities for me to grow as a leader, I didn't waste any time as I registered to take Athlete Representative I this past March. During this training session, I learned how to become a better leader and serve on inclusive committees at both the local and state level. At the end, I was asked why I wanted to become a leader. My response was that I wanted to give back to Special Olympics for all that I have been given over the last 11 years. While I didn't feel that way when I was younger, I have now come to be more appreciative of everything I have been given. Special Olympics has given me social skills to talk to people and has allowed me to come out of my shell. Most importantly, I now feel like I can be a role model that all athletes can look up to.

*David Miller is an Athlete Representative from Adams County and has been participating in Special Olympics for 11 years. Following David's completion of Athlete Representative I, 9 of the 50 athletes that made up Team PA at last year's USA Games are now certified Athlete Leaders.*

## ***Get Your Head in the Game!***

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



There's never a better feeling in Special Olympics than winning a gold medal. It's always a reminder of all the hard work you, your teammates and coaches put in for several months paying off. On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005, I won my first gold medal at Special Olympics Illinois' district basketball tournament (their qualifier for states). Fast forward to that date 11 years later, I participated in my first floor hockey tournament, where my team wound up being victorious that day. I thought that floor hockey would be easy. However, I quickly learned that was not the case.

The thing that I learned at an early age is that if you want to succeed in a sport, both your body and mind have to be fully invested. Floor hockey is a difficult sport both physically and mentally. However, it is truly an amazing game to play when you give it your all. Since I'm not the biggest or fastest athlete, I've had to teach myself how to outsmart opponents. In basketball, it's almost like chess, just by watching what direction your opponent's eyes go, you can better predict which move they're about to make. In floor hockey, it's a lot more challenging because everyone's face is covered, so you don't have time to get a good look at it.

Whenever I'm competing, I try to turn away from everything that could serve as a distraction. Before the game starts, I look all around and take in the moment while I can. Then, I pretend that the only people and objects around are my team, the other team, the officials, the puck and the net. The only time pressure gets to me is when I allow it to get to me. Whenever one of my opponents starts feeling pressure, I don't waste any time exploiting their moment of weakness because they'd do the same thing to me.

Two years ago, no one was more thrilled than I was when it was announced that the first Indoor Winter Games would take place in 2019 at the York Expo Center. The floor hockey venue at the York Expo Center is a lot more spectator friendly than most other gyms I've played in. The courts were a lot smaller than what I was used to, but they all had foam borders, which made it much easier to play the puck and not the body. This led to faster paced games, fewer penalties and most importantly, fewer injuries. Additionally, the smaller courts also made it better for the goalies to figure out when and where a shot would be taken (which was great for my goalie, however the opposing ones were on top of their games too). With all the extra strategizing to give me a mental advantage, there was one thing the inaugural Indoor Winter Games had that threw everyone off their game, Mother Nature.

It was supposed to snow almost everywhere across the state all day on Sunday, so all floor hockey and bowling competition had to take place Saturday. Figure and speed skating still took place on Sunday because there were not as many athletes and they could get done before the weather got really bad.

One thing that remained consistent at this tournament is that my team was placed into Division II, which I thought made perfect sense. We weren't skilled enough to match up with Division I teams like the top teams from Lebanon and Monroe, however, it wouldn't have been fair to other teams if we were placed any lower. Due to the condensed schedule, we could only have a round robin tournament, so there were no medal rounds. Whoever won the most games automatically won the gold. With four teams in our division, we had to play each other once, meaning every team had to play three games.

With Opening Ceremonies going until almost noon, prelims didn't get started until almost 1:00 PM. Since Todd Geiwitz, Special Olympics Pennsylvania's Floor Hockey Director, knows my team pretty well, we only had to play one preliminary game while most other teams had to play two. Competition finally got started after 3:00 PM. Our first game was at 3:45 against the Cambria Eagles, who easily beat us the two other times we played them. This time was different. Both teams were scoreless for almost the entire first period until their goalie was finally off sync with one of our shots. We then scored another goal midway through the 2<sup>nd</sup> period, however, Cambria had some very good looks. When I entered the game for my last shift midway through the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, we had a faceoff in our offensive zone. The thing I've learned the most playing this game is positioning is most critical on each faceoff, especially in that situation. Everyone on the other team is constantly guessing who has the best chance to get a shot off if they get the puck first. This is also where the goalie feels the most pressure because they need to look at the two defensemen first to make sure they're providing enough protection before the ref blows the whistle. When lining up for the faceoff, I saw a small opening on the right side of the net. Shortly after the puck was knocked out of the faceoff circle, I wasted no time collecting it and the goalie didn't realize I got the shot off until it was too late! It had been well over a year since I last scored a goal. While that was the only goal I scored all tournament, it was the start of many great things to come.

Shortly after I made it a 3-0 game, we then scored three more goals to close out the game against Cambria. Our other two games were against the Prince William Capitals from Virginia and the DelCo Massey. Virginia was really tough, I could only get 2-3 shots off that were anywhere near the goal. Fortunately, not a single goal was scored while I was on the court. Granted, my goalie, Albert Russo, made some spectacular saves. However, I did everything I could defensively so he didn't need to make that many diving saves. We were down 1-0 during the last line of the 3<sup>rd</sup> period. Since I was on the bench, all I could do was cheer on my teammates and hope for the best. While I may not have had the prettiest game, I felt like I did enough to wear Virginia down quite a bit as our dynamic Mikes, Mike Dimter and Mike Hines, put two laser pucks in the net. It hit me suddenly that we were one game away from winning gold! In our last game against DelCo, they didn't let us have anything easy. I almost got a shot to go in, however their goalie easily matched Albert for the entire 1<sup>st</sup> period and a good part of the 2<sup>nd</sup>. That didn't last too much longer in the second half of the game as the Mikes each scored another goal to put us up for good. When I saw the volunteer at the scorers table getting ready to throw the towel onto the court (yes, they actually do throw that to signal the end of a line/game), I couldn't believe it was actually happening. When it was all over, the feeling I had 14 years ago returned. When I won my first gold medal all those years ago, it was also on my mom's birthday. Before I posted anything on Social Media, the first thing I did moments after the game had ended was call her. Like most athletes, I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for my parents' support. When I told my mom we won, I'm almost positive everyone at the Expo Center could hear me. I didn't care one bit though. While I wish my parents were there, I still had a lot of other family members with me to celebrate.

Of the 60 medals I have won in the last 15 years, just a little over half of them are gold. I have never once participated in an individual sport, which means every time I look at my medals, none of them would be possible without my teammates. I don't consider my teammates to be friends; I see them more as family. Adding another medal to my collection is like adding another branch to my family tree.

The first Indoor Winter Games could have been a complete disaster; however everyone made the most of a difficult situation. Moments like this should make us extra thankful for the staff and volunteers we have that want to give each athlete the best experience possible. The thing that stood out to me the most, which you'll see after my story, is that of the 95 athletes that completed an Athlete Input Survey, despite all the circumstances, **75 of them said that this event was just as good, if not, better than Outdoor Winter Games, Summer Games, Fall Festival and the previous State Floor Hockey Tournament!**

Special Olympics' mission is and always will be to provide the best competition experiences to athletes of all ages and ability level. If you thought the first Indoor Winter Games was great, just wait until next year!

*Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Coordinator for Special Olympics Pennsylvania and has been participating in Special Olympics for 15 years. Jordan is a proud graduate of West Chester University and was named as a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Global Messenger by Special Olympics International.*

## **2019 Winter Games & Indoor Winter Games Athlete Input Survey Results**

Grading System: Percentage of answers selected as "Excellent" plus one half percentage of answers selected as "Average" divided by X (Total # of graded questions) = Grade  
Example: 80% Excellent + 20% Average ÷ 2= 90%

### **Winter Games 164 Surveys Completed as of 2/19 Approximately 25 athletes in attendance at Input Council**

#### **Survey Breakdown By Sport:**

- Alpine-80 (49%)
- Snowshoeing-48 (29%)
- Cross Country-35 (21%)
- Snowboarding-1 (1%)

#### **First Time vs. Returning Athlete:**

- First Time-38 (23%)
- Returning-126 (77%)

#### **Grades:**

- Event experience compared to previous years:
  - 70% Better + 23% Same ÷ 2= 82% (B-)
    1. 9 athletes answered "Needs Improvement"
      - a. Timing was confusing for Opening Ceremonies and competition.
      - b. Go back to original course (Alpine).
      - c. Need more athletes in divisions (All sports).
      - d. Advanced slopes were slippery (Alpine).
- Overall quality of competition:
  - 83% Excellent + 16% Average ÷ 2= 91% (A-)
- Quality of food and beverages provided:
  - 76% Excellent +20% Average ÷ 2= 86% (B)
    1. 7 athletes answered Poor:
      - a. Provide alternate bread options for people that can't eat multi-grain bread.
      - b. More beverage options.
      - c. Service was slow.
      - d. Ran out of chicken Sunday night.
      - e. More gluten free options.
- Opening Ceremonies:
  - 91% Excellent + 6% Average ÷ 2= 94% (A)
    1. 6 athletes answered "Poor"
      - a. Did not enjoy waiting for a long period of time.
      - b. Hard to see flame bearers.
- Olympic Village:
  - 72% Excellent + 18% Average ÷ 2= 81% (B-)
    1. 8 athletes answered "Poor"

#### **Overall Grade:**

- **87% (B)**

**Additional Comments:**

- Really enjoyed snowshoeing.
- Have more shuttle busses running.
- Loved the dance.
- Improve room check in process.
- Don't put the curves on slick slopes.
- Provide coupons to Seven Springs restaurants.
- Intermediate slop was improved.
- Enjoyed being at the President's Reception.
- Course was too easy (Novice Alpine).
- Enjoyed volunteers
- Have blue lines on slope for alpine.
- Have Canadian/Turkey bacon.
- Self serve coffee.
- Pancakes instead of waffles.
- More variety of entertainment at Opening Ceremonies.
- Add screen to follow flame bearers down slope.
- Took intermediate a long time to get their heat sheets.
- Snowshoe course lines needed to be redone, they were messed up by people walking on them.
- Advanced slopes were not fully set up before inspection.
- Staging on intermediate slopes took anywhere between 20-45 minutes.
- Have snowshoe events in order by distance.
- Poor communication between course officials and coaches in snowshoeing.

**Indoor Winter Games  
95 Surveys Completed as of 3/11**

**Survey Breakdown By Sport:**

- Bowling-39 (41%)
- Figure Skating-4 (4%)
- Floor Hockey-37 (39%)
- Floor Hockey Skills-11 (12%)
- Speed Skating-4 (4%)

**Have you previously competed in any of SOPA's other State Events?**

- Yes-83 (88%)
- No-12 (12%)

**If you answered, "Yes", how does this event compare to Outdoor Winter Games, Summer Games and Fall Festival?**

- Better-45 (52%)
- Same-30 (36%)
- Needs Improvement-8 (10%)

**If you answered, "Needs Improvement", please explain why.**

- Not enough details surrounding competition schedule (Figure Skating).
- Not much to do after competition (Bowling).

**Grades:**

- Overall quality of competition:
  - 69% Excellent + 31% Average ÷ 2= 85% (B)
- Quality of food and beverages provided:
  - 62% Excellent +32% Average ÷ 2= 78% (C+)
    1. 6 athletes answered Poor:
      - a. More gluten free options
- Opening Ceremonies:
  - 77% Excellent + 20% Average ÷ 2= 87% (B)
    1. 3 athletes answered "Poor"
      - a. Loved the drums, however give more advanced notice for athletes that are noise sensitive.
- Olympic Village:
  - 58% Excellent + 25% Average ÷ 2= 71% (C-)
    1. 6 athletes answered "Poor"
      - a. Not enough activities

**Overall Grade:**

- **80% (B-)**

**Additional Comments:**

- Enjoyed the music during Opening Ceremonies.
- Need more people checking credentials during dinner and the dance.
- Loved the news coverage!
- Loved the support from the greater York Community!
- Great event given the circumstances.

*Thanks to every athlete that provided feedback at both Winter State Competitions! Due to the condensed event schedule, Special Olympics Pennsylvania decided to cancel the Athlete Input Council for Indoor Winter Games. Athlete Input Councils are hosted at all four State Competitions and Athlete Input Surveys are conducted at all State Competitions, Spring and Fall Sectionals. If you are unable to attend the Athlete Input Council or complete an Athlete Input Survey at an event, you are always welcome to share your feedback with Senior Competition Director, Gina Reid at [greid@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:greid@specialolympicspa.org).*

## ***Athlete Recognition***

SOAR would like to congratulate the following athletes that competed at the 2019 World Games in Abu Dhabi as a part of Team USA!

### Athletics:

- Aaron Keller, Luzerne County
  - One gold and two silvers

### Powerlifting:

- Delina Rodrigues, Carbon County
  - Two golds, one bronze and one ribbon

### Tennis:

- Valerie Stiffy, Butler
  - Two silvers
- Brianna Whorl, Blair
  - Two Silvers

### Volleyball:

- Clinton County Hawks
  - Gold
    - Connor Borner
    - Robert Borner, Jr.
    - Elain Litz
    - Jordan Litz
    - Holdan Marr
    - Kathy Marr
    - Arthur Powers
    - Christopher Smith
    - Ronald Smith



## **Important Notices**

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

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### **Athlete Leadership University Updates:**

Registration is open for the Athlete Leadership University session taking place June 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> at the Sheetz Operations Center in Claysburg, PA (near Altoona). At this session, we will be offering Healthy Lifestyles and Athletes as Coaches. You can find more information [here](#). If interested in attending, please speak with your Local Program Manager/Director. Once they approve, please review the following instructions for registration:

- Starting this year, each athlete and mentor will be asked to submit their own registration form. Additionally, registration will be done through VSys Live, [Special Olympics Pennsylvania's Online Volunteer Portal](#)!
- Please use your email address as your User ID. If you have forgotten your User ID, please contact [vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org).
- If you are a new user to Special Olympics Pennsylvania's Online Volunteer Portal OR have forgotten your password, please click "Forgot Password?" A new password will be emailed to your email address (User ID) immediately following.
- Once logged in, please click on the "Athlete Leadership Opportunities" tab and complete for "June 2019."
  - If you are having any trouble, please contact Rita Schofield at [rschofield@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:rschofield@specialolympicspa.org).

August 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>: Athlete Representative I and Global Messenger I at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College, PA.

- Please note that while this session takes place prior to the start of Leadership Conference, it is a separate registration.

### **Athlete Leadership University Practicum Report Forms**

- All Athlete Leadership University Practicum Report Forms can now be filled in online!
  - [Global Messenger I](#)
  - [Global Messenger II](#)
  - [Athlete Representative I](#)
  - [Athlete Representative II](#)
  - [Healthy Lifestyles](#)
    - Athletes as Coaches does not have an online report form since it requires a signature of Head Coach or Training Coordinator.
    - Any report forms submitted by athletes that have not completed a course will not be counted.

### **Athlete Leadership University Graduation Ceremony**

- The 2019 Athlete Leadership University Graduation Ceremony will be taking place Saturday, August 17<sup>th</sup> during the Awards Banquet at Leadership Conference.
- Any athlete that has taken Athlete Representative II, Global Messenger II, Healthy Lifestyles and/or Athletes as Coaches must submit their practicum by Friday, June 28<sup>th</sup> to be eligible.

**Athlete Leadership Team Reminder:**

All Athlete Leadership Teams (ALTs) are required to submit their minutes to me following each meeting. Minutes 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 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!

**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 Summer Games, World Games or any other recent Special Olympics experiences, please e-mail me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org) by August 31<sup>st</sup> for a chance to have your story shared in the Summer 2019 Edition of SOAR.