



# DIVISIONING

# FACT SHEET



*The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of well coached Olympic type sports for individuals with mental retardation, or closely-related developmental disabilities, by providing them with continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, express courage, experience joy, and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympic Athletes, and the community.*

## Divisioning, What is it?

**Divisioning** is a concept that is unique to Special Olympics. The goal of divisioning is to create fair, equitable and meaningful competition for all our athletes, and make sure that every competition is a meaningful experience each time he/she competes.

## How does the Divisioning Process Work?

Athletes/Teams are placed in divisions using three parameters: **Age, Gender and Ability**. Divisions are created to have anywhere between 3-8 competitors/teams in each division. Although ideally athletes compete against athletes of similar age and gender, **Ability is the determining factor when divisioning athletes**. To help equate ability, Special Olympics Inc. (SOI) has suggested a 15% guideline. This guideline suggests that all divisions be created where the variance between the highest and lowest score within a division not differ by more than 15%. To maximize the number of divisions that have at least 3 competitors in it, Special Olympics Massachusetts will sometimes inflate this 15% to 20%. For example:

- If Suzy runs the 100M dash in 60 seconds, she would be put in a division with someone who could run the 100M as fast as 51 seconds, or as slow as 69 seconds.
- If there are two or less people in Suzy's division after using the 15% range, SOMA will inflate this range to as much as 20% in order to create a division of at least 3 competitors to enhance the competition.
- If there are still two or less people in Suzy's division after raising the range to 20%, the next step would be to combine age groups by moving Suzy either up or down one age group, depending on where her ability level fit better.
- If after all the previous steps, she still has two or less competitors in her division, we would then look to combine her with a division in the age group of the opposite gender.
- As a last resort, Suzy may end up competing in a one-person division.

## Divisioning for Individual (timed) Sports

Divisioning differs from sport to sport. For individual/timed sports, times are recorded at a Qualifiers or Area Games. They are then processed with the state office, and divisioned for the State Games. They are broken down by age, gender and ability, **ability being the determining factor**.

## Divisioning for Team Sports

Divisioning for team sports begin at the qualifiers that all Athletes attend. At the qualifiers, coaches, referees and volunteers assess Athletes/Teams. That assessment is sent to the Director of Sports Management in charge of that particular sport, who then divisions the Athlete/Team by age and ability for State Tournament Competition. (**\*NOTE: The purpose of a qualifier is to serve as an assessment round for the state tournament. The Director of Sports Management takes all qualifier assessments and divisions for the State Tournament.**) For safety reasons, age groups in contact sports (basketball, softball, soccer, etc...) will not be combined as leniently. In addition, the oldest athlete on the team determines the team's age group.

## Final Thoughts

Divisioning is not an exact science. Timed sports are a little easier because the results are fairly cut and dry. Times are recorded and passed along. A 15% variance in division applies, but can be moved up to 20% to provide meaningful competition.

Team Sports divisioning is based on assessments. These assessments give a team a rating from 1-7, and through those assessments, teams are divisioned for competition.

There is also a "Sandbagging" Rule provided by SOI. If an Athlete does better than 15% of his qualifying time, then that Athlete is subject to disqualification. The competition/protest committee at the specific event will make this decision.