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For immediate release

Media release LA2015 is Open!

It's been a long time coming for the athletes, their families, their coaches and the management team but the 2015 Special Olympics finally got underway in spectacular fashion in Los Angeles on Saturday evening (local time).

The Opening Ceremony held on a beautiful summer evening with a star studded list of celebrities, celebrated the courage and joy that has brought 180 countries together in unity for 8 days of competition in 25 sports.



Headlining talent included Stevie Wonder, Avril Lavigne, O.A.R., Cody Simpson, Nicole Scherzinger, J Balvin and 'Reach Up LA' theme song creator Siedah Garrett and also featured appearances by Jimmy Kimmel, Eva Longoria, Lauren Potter, Michael Phelps, Yao Ming, Greg Louganis, Stephanie McMahon and many more.

Maria Shriver, daughter of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver, spoke of her mother's desire to create a world that celebrated disability. Timothy Shriver, President of Special Olympics International described the World Games as a "celebration of intellectual differentiability".

The New Zealand delegation, including 36 athletes and 17 support staff, entered the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to huge cheers from the crowd. The Coliseum is the only venue in the world to host two Olympiads (1932 and 1984), two Super Bowls (I and VII) and one World Series (1959). The star-studded show celebrated the true stars of the Games - the athletes of Special Olympics - with exciting entertainment, the Parade of Athletes and the culmination of the Final Leg of the Law Enforcement Torch Run and lighting of the Special Olympics cauldron. Broadcast internationally by ESPN, fans around the world were able to participate in this memorable start to the World Games!

The New Zealand team made the most of their moment in the spotlight, high fiving fellow athletes as they walked down the red carpet and took their seats close to the stage. United States of America's First Lady Michelle Obama officially opened the Games to a roaring applause from the whole stadium.

"I really liked seeing Stevie Wonder. It was good seeing all the people in real life that I see on tv. I loved the fireworks and I'm looking forward to playing golf", said Special Olympics golfer Daryl Smith.

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“The opening ceremony was an amazing event to kick off what will be a wonderful Games week. The team are all in good shape and ready for the competition over the next 8 days. All coaches have now switched to competition mode and are getting their heads around the sports arrangements” said Max Brooking, Head of the New Zealand Delegation.

New Zealand athletes will compete in seven sports over the next week (athletics, aquatics, basketball, bowling, equestrian, golf and powerlifting) before the Closing Ceremony on August 2.

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