



- 9.3.1 Age Groups may be combined under the following circumstances provided the health and safety of all participants are considered.
- 9.3.1.1 In individual sports, if there are less than three competitors within an age group, the athletes shall compete in the next oldest age group. That age group shall then be renamed to accurately reflect the entire range of competitors within that age group. Age groups may also be combined to reduce the range between the highest and lowest scores within a division.
- 9.3.1.2 In team sports: within each ability group, a team may compete against a team of a different age group. If there is only one team within an age or ability group, that team may compete against teams of other age and/or ability groups.

10. SPECIAL OLYMPICS DIVISIONING

- 10.1 Ensuring fair divisioning of athletes for competition is one of the primary duties of competition management, which may include a Technical Delegate. The following criteria shall be used to assign Special Olympics athletes to competition divisions at Special Olympics competitions.
- 10.2 Divisioning Guidelines
- 10.2.1 Special Olympics suggests a guideline of no more than 15% variance between the highest and lowest scores within any division. This 15% guideline is not a rule.
- 10.2.2 Ability and Determining Criteria for Divisioning
- 10.2.2.1 An athlete's ability is the primary factor in divisioning for Special Olympics competition. The ability level of an athlete or team is determined by an entry score from a prior competition or is the result of a seeding round or preliminary event at the competition itself. The team Head Coach is responsible for ensuring that the athlete score used for divisioning most accurately reflects the true ability of the athlete. There should be a process to allow Coach to amend qualifying or preliminary scores that will be used in the divisioning process. . Age and gender are also considered when making divisions.
- 10.2.2.1.1 Note: "Preliminary" in these rules refers to on-site divisioning events used to determine final divisions.
- 10.2.2.2 Within each division the minimum number of competitors or teams is three and the maximum number is eight. In some cases, however, the number of athletes or teams within a competition will be insufficient to achieve this goal. The following procedures describe the sequential process for creating equitable divisions. It also provides guidance for managing athlete participation when factors preclude ideal divisioning.
- 10.3 Divisioning Individual Sports: Timed and measured events
- 10.3.1 Step One: Divide Athletes By Gender.
- 10.3.1.1 Divide athletes into a female group and a male group.
- 10.3.1.2 Athletes shall normally compete against other athletes of the same gender, unless the IF/NGB rules specifically allow mixed-gender events (e.g., equestrian, pairs figure skating, bowling, table tennis, ice dancing, tennis, etc.).
- 10.3.2 Step Two: Divide Athletes by Age.
- 10.3.2.1 Divide male and female athletes into the following age groups: ages 8-11; 12-15; 16-21; 22-29; and ages 30 years and over. An age group may be added if there are a sufficient number of competitors in the 30 years and over age group.



- 10.3.2.2 An athlete's age group is determined by the athlete's age on the date of the opening of the competition.
- 10.3.3 Step Three: Divide Athletes By Ability.
- 10.3.3.1 To complete the divisioning process, the following guidelines shall be applied according to the event being divisioned.
- 10.3.3.1.1 In events that are measured in time, distance, or points:
- 10.3.3.1.1.1 For both genders and all age groups, rank athletes in descending order based upon submitted entry scores or divisioning events.
- 10.3.3.1.1.2 Group these ranked athletes so that the highest and lowest scores are as close as possible to the 15% guideline and the number of competitors is not less than three or more than eight.
- 10.3.3.1.2 In events that are judged and when divisioning events will be conducted during the competition:
- 10.3.3.1.2.1 For both genders and all age groups within a performance level, rank athletes in descending order based upon divisioning scores.
- 10.3.3.1.2.2 Group these ranked athletes so that the highest and lowest scores are as close as possible to the 15% guideline and the number of competitors is not less than three or more than eight.
- 10.3.3.1.3 In events that are judged and where divisioning events will not be conducted during the competition:
- 10.3.3.1.3.1 The nature of judging precludes the use of scores from prior competitions(s) in divisioning. Without scores from preliminary competition, performance level remains as the only criterion of athlete ability.
- 10.3.3.1.3.2 For both genders and all age groups, identify athletes within each performance level.
- 10.3.3.1.3.3 If more than eight athletes are in the same gender and age group of a performance level, group athletes into divisions of no less than three and no more than eight competitors.
- 10.4 Divisioning Team Sports
- 10.4.1 Step One: Divide Teams By Gender.
- 10.4.1.1 Divide teams into two groups based upon gender. Female teams shall compete against other female teams, and male teams shall compete against other male teams. Mixed gender teams shall be divisioned with male teams unless there are sufficient mixed gender teams of similar ability to make a separate division.
- 10.4.2 Step Two: Divide Teams By Age.
- 10.4.2.1 Divide male and female teams into the following age groups: ages 15 and under; 16-21; and 22 and over. An additional group may be established if there are a sufficient number of teams in the "22 and over" age group.
- 10.4.2.2 Teams should compete against other teams within the same age group.



- 10.4.2.3 The age group of a team is determined by the age of the oldest athlete on that team on the date of the opening of the competition.
- 10.4.3 Step Three: Divide Teams By Ability.
 - 10.4.3.1 All Special Olympics team sport competitions shall utilize sport specific skills assessment tools and a divisioning round to assess the level of ability of the participating teams.
 - 10.4.3.2 Refer to the [Special Olympics Sports Rules](#) for each team sport for a description of the skills assessment tool.
 - 10.4.3.3 Group teams according to ability based upon the skills assessment tool and results from the divisioning round.
 - 10.4.3.4 Create divisions of no less than three and no more than eight teams.
- 10.5 Resolving Divisioning Issues
 - 10.5.1 When the above process has been completed and there may be instances where there will still be less than three competitors in each division, the following method should be used:
 - 10.5.1.1 Modify Age Groups: Age groups may be broadened to achieve an equitable division of no less than three athletes or teams. The age group should then be re-named to accurately reflect the age range of the competitors.

If there are still divisions of less than three competitors or teams:
 - 10.5.1.2 Modify Ability Range: The ability range may be broadened beyond the 15% guideline provided that it will not pose a risk to the health and safety of athletes to do so.
 - 10.5.1.3 If there are still divisions of less than three competitors or teams:
 - 10.5.1.3.1 Combine athletes/teams of different genders provided that it will not pose a risk to the health and safety of athletes to do so.
 - 10.5.1.3.2 Where exceptions to these criteria are necessary, competition management will review proposed modifications to these criteria and make a final decision based on the goal of providing the most dignified, safe and challenging competition experience for each athlete. Competition management has final authority concerning divisions and any variation from these criteria. Protests based on divisioning are not allowed.
- 10.6 Proxy Events
 - 10.6.1 Proxy events are used in some cases to division for multiple events at a competition. Proxy events may use one preliminary event or one designated final event. For example, in the case of alpine skiing, a Giant Slalom proxy event may be used to division for the finals for the Slalom, Giant Slalom, and Super Giant Slalom races.
 - 10.6.2 If a proxy event is used for divisioning, an athlete's performance in any of the final races may be used to division for subsequent finals at that competition. For example, a Giant Slalom proxy event is used to division for three events (Giant Slalom, Slalom and Super Giant Slalom). After the first event has been run (Giant Slalom), it may be clear based on performance that an athlete should be moved to a higher or lower division. In that case, competition management may re-division the athlete for the finals of the Slalom and Super Giant Slalom.
- 10.7 Disqualified Athletes



- 10.7.1 If an athlete is disqualified in a divisioning/preliminary event, they may advance to the final competition if they can safely compete in that event and a score that accurately measures their ability can be provided to competition management in charge of divisioning. Athletes disqualified due to unsportsmanlike conduct will not be allowed to advance to final competition. Athletes disqualified during final competition will receive participation ribbons. Athletes disqualified for unsportsmanlike competition during final competition will not receive an award.

11. MAXIMUM EFFORT RULE (formerly known as Honest Effort Rule)

11.1 Reasons for the use of the Maximum Effort Rule

- 11.1.1 The divisioning process used at Special Olympics competitions is unique. It ensures that athletes are competing against other athletes of similar ability. It also ensures the awards process provides recognition to all competitors. As a result, it is sometimes necessary to employ the Maximum Effort Rule to ensure that participants are competing with Maximum Effort at all stages of competition. Therefore, the Maximum Effort Rule is used:
- 11.1.1.1 To provide a fair competitive environment for athletes
 - 11.1.1.2 To provide a resource for officials/event directors to create a fair competitive environment

11.2 Rule Application

- 11.2.1 Events which use a numerical score to determine divisions offer an opportunity to take a quantitative approach as it relates to the Maximum Effort Rule.
- 11.2.2 The following options may be used alone or in combination to apply Maximum Effort Rule guidelines:
- 11.2.2.1 Percentage Rule - A percentage is established and published for each event in which the rule will be applied. Athletes and teams may not exceed this percentage of improvement from their divisioning score to their final score. If an athlete or team exceeds this performance percentage, disqualification may take place. For some sports, percentages have already been established within the [Special Olympics Official Sports Rules](#).
 - 11.2.2.2 Jury Review – A percentage is established and published for each event in which the rule will be applied. If an athlete or team exceeds this percentage from their divisioning score to their final score this will automatically “trigger” a jury review to determine if the athlete or team shall be disqualified from the event.
- 11.2.3 In both cases above, the following procedures must be used to apply the Maximum Effort Rule:
- 11.2.3.1 The coach must be provided an opportunity to submit an improved performance score if the score recorded in the divisioning competition is not a true reflection of the athlete’s ability.
 - 11.2.3.2 Competition management may take the better of a submitted training score or a divisioning score to determine placement for the final.
 - 11.2.3.3 Competition management may determine that an athlete or team has not competed with maximum effort in preliminary and/or divisioning rounds with the clear intent to gain an unfair advantage in the divisioning process. In that case, competition management may sanction that athlete or team. Sanctions may include: Verbal Warning to the player and/or coach, adjusted division



placement, final placement or disqualification from the event or the entire competition.

- 11.3 Factors to consider when establishing Maximum Effort performance percentages and for applying the Maximum Effort rule:
- 11.3.1 Ability levels of the majority of athletes in an event
- 11.3.1.1 In entry-level events, or events designed for athletes of lower abilities, scores and performance will tend to have a greater variance between divisioning and final competition.
- 11.3.2 Event Type – Natural Variance in Scores Example
- 11.3.2.1 A relatively small distance improvement of 0.3 m in the standing long jump event may have a significant impact on the performance variance between the divisioning and final score. Therefore, a larger performance percentage should be considered.
- 11.3.2.2 An event such as the 3000m run, a small score improvement of 10 seconds would likely not cause a significant percentage increase between the divisioning and final score. Therefore, a smaller performance percentage may be considered.
- 11.3.2.3 Divisioning percentages: Competition Management must take into account the percentage difference between the highest and lowest scores within a division. The enforced Maximum Effort percentage must always be greater than the percentage difference between the highest and lowest scores in a division. How an event is divisioned should impact the implementation of a Maximum Effort percentage rule/guideline.
- 11.3.2.4 When and where divisioning scores were established: Competition Management must take into account when and where the divisioning scores were established. The Maximum Effort performance percentages may be different for events where divisioning and final scores are taken at the same event versus events where divisioning scores are established from previous competition(s) or training.
- 11.3.2.5 Weather conditions: Competition Management must take into account if the weather conditions have changed from the divisioning events to final events.

12. AWARDS

- 12.1 Medals and Ribbons
- 12.1.1 At all Program-Level Games, Regional Games, World Games and any other Games or events, medals shall be presented to the first, second and third-place winners in each event. Ribbons shall be presented to athletes who finish in fourth through eighth place. Athletes who are disqualified (for reasons other than unsportsmanlike conduct) or who do not finish an event shall be presented with a participation ribbon.
- 12.2 Ties
- 12.2.1 Each sport will follow sport specific criteria related to ties. If this is not defined and athletes or teams tie for any place, they each receive the highest award for that place. As a result, a tie for one place will result in no award being given for the following place.
- 12.3 Special Recognition
- 12.3.1 In addition to medals and ribbons, athletes may receive special recognition for significant accomplishments (e.g., Highest Pins Over Average, Most Improved Athlete, Personal Bests, Sportsmanship, etc.) following the official awards ceremony. Official Medals and