

NORTHERN SLOPES



SPECIAL OLYMPICS ITALY

Special Olympics Italy holds two successful winter sports events

by **Tiziana Bartolini**

Special Olympics Italy began 2002 with two spectacular events — the National Winter Games held in Predazzo from 30 January-2 February and the first North Alpine Skiing Oasi Zegna Trophy held in Biella from 20-24 February.

At the Winter Games in Predazzo, which is situated in the heart of the Dolomites (a mountain group in the northern Italian Alps), 127 athletes competed, representing 20 sport clubs from central and northern Italy. "There were double the number of athletes this year as compared to last year's competition," said Alessandro Palazzotti, Special Olympics Italy President and National Director.

Special Olympics athletes competed at the same venue where the Nordic World Ski Championships 2003 will be held and where great champions had already skied in a preliminary event. There was excellent cooperation from local authorities and more than 150 volunteers to help organize and run the Games.

The first North Alpine Skiing Oasi Zegna Trophy in Biella was held on the Bielmonte slopes. Laura Zegna, who is a member of one of the most distinguished families in Italy and who, with her sister, runs Ermenegildo Zegna, a well-known

clothing company, led the Games Organizing Committee. Skiers from Special Olympics Italy competed with teams from Special Olympics France, Special Olympics Poland, Special Olympics Switzerland and Special Olympics Monaco. In total, 80 athletes participated in the competition.

Among the many guests who attended the Games were Tiziana Nasi, President of the Games Organizing Committee for the IX Paralympic Games at Torino (Italy) in 2006, and Michael Smith, Managing Director for Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia. One hundred and sixty volunteers ensured that the Games were run smoothly.

Special Olympics Italy held its National Summer Games near Venice in Caorle, Bibione and Portogruaro, from 1-8 June. During the Games, 1,500 athletes competed in tennis, table tennis, volleyball, sailing, bowling and orienteering. □

Tiziana Bartolini is the Communications Director for Special Olympics Italy.

CAPITAL GAMES

Special Olympics Botswana athletes parade through the streets of Gaborone as part of Opening Ceremonies

by Heather Morris-Eyton

Special Olympics Botswana football athlete Gotatweng Lesole, 13, had been training for his first National Games since January and was so excited about competing that the three-hour ride from his hometown of Selebi Phikwe to Gaborone, where the Games were held, seemed to take an eternity.

Lesole was one of 400 athletes from all parts of the country who gathered in the capital city in March for the Special Olympics Botswana National Games. For many athletes, including Lesole, it was the first time they had been to Gaborone.

Athletes marched through the streets as part of the Opening Ceremonies. Police officers and a local church youth band led the athletes into the stadium. The spectacle was great for public awareness and gave the athletes a chance to be seen and cheered in the city.

Botswana athlete Gotatweng Lesole (left), and his sister and coach, Olerato Matenje, were among 400 athletes who participated in the country's National Games. (Below) An athlete competes in shot-put.

The athletes competed in both five-a-side football (soccer) and athletics. The Games formed part of the process for selecting the team to go to the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Dublin, Ireland.

Special Olympics coach (and Lesole's sister) Olerato Matenje says that the movement helps athletes fit in. "In addition to great sports, Special Olympics gives athletes a feeling of belonging in society by being able to train and compete in sports," she said.

The event also featured *Special Olympics Healthy Athletes* screenings for all the athletes by dental technicians and other health professionals from the Department of Social Services who volunteered their time. Each athlete received a toothbrush and toothpaste donated by Colgate, and Lions Clubs International provided free eyewear for athletes who needed it. This was a very successful screening done under the guidance of Special Olympics Botswana Board Member Dr. Goldblach, who organized all the volunteers, record sheets and equipment. □

Heather Morris-Eyton is the Sports Manager for Special Olympics Africa.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS BOTSWANA



SPECIAL OLYMPICS MOROCCO

IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

Special Olympics Morocco athletes compete in a yearlong football league.

by Ghada Khalek

Under the auspices of HRH Princess Lala Amina, Chairman of Special Olympics Morocco, the Program launched its first Throne Cup for indoor football (soccer) on 7 December at Ibn Yassin Stadium Indoor Hall in Rabat. The event marked the first match of a new football league that will consist of round-robin competitions throughout 2002. Ten teams of athletes from schools and nongovernment organizations throughout Morocco will vie for the Throne Cup in monthly matches throughout the year, concluding with a final match on 3 November at Rabat's Molai Abdullah Stadium.

Guests included Minister of Youth and Sports Ahmed Al Mosawy; Minister of Social and Family Affairs Nozha Al Shakrouni; Rabat's Governor Moustafa Al Sahel; and President of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation Gen. Dokordani Hosni Binsoliman.

Special Olympics Morocco Board Member Omar Alwai explained, "Through this event, the Program is seeking to spread this type of indoor football competition for people with mental disabilities." Alwai added that if successful, the Throne Cup indoor football games will take place annually.

The first game, held on International Day for People with Mental Disabilities, attracted a huge number of spectators. □

Ghada Khalek is the Manager of Communications for Special Olympics Middle East/North Africa.

HRH Princess Lala Amina, Honorary Chairman of Special Olympics Morocco, with Special Olympics Morocco athletes at the first Special Olympics Throne Cup for indoor football.

HOOP DREAMS

With millions of fans throughout China, Special Olympics holds a nationwide basketball competition.

by **Jacob Ulevich**

Basketball is one of the most popular sports in China today. It is so popular that Special Olympics China devoted a national competition to it. At the Haidian Athletic Center in Beijing, more than 100 athletes from 15 provinces attended the first annual Special Olympics China National Basketball Competition, which featured men's 5-on-5 full-court matches, women's 3-on-3 half-court matches and individual skills competitions.

Special Olympics China National Director Yong Zhijun was pleased by the event's smooth execution, its lively Opening and Closing Ceremonies and high level of competition standards — three referees held international sports certifications. "Basketball is a terrific sport [for China] and this event is a good start for Special Olympics basketball to expand in the future." Next on the agenda for Yong is incorporating Special Olympics Unified Sports™ into the annual competition.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS CHINA

Special Olympics China athletes participate in the China National Basketball Competition held in Beijing at the Haidian Athletic Center.

Much of the credit for the success of the tournament was due to the overwhelming enthusiasm and support of student volunteers from Beijing People's University. They not only helped organize and implement the competition but also cheered loudly for athletes who were thrilled with all of the attention.

Hoping to make the most of China's surging interest in basketball, the Program expects that by conducting future tournaments it will encourage greater participation and interest in Special Olympics and raise awareness of the organization and its mission. Plans are already underway for next year's competition. Yong hopes many more athletes from all parts of China will participate. □

Jacob Ulevich is an intern for the Special Olympics East Asia/Chinese Programs region.

BASKETBALL FEVER

In the United States, "March Madness" describes championship basketball tournaments and Special Olympics is no exception

From 15-17 March, nearly 1,100 athletes brought the excitement of Special Olympics Illinois (USA) State Basketball to Bloomington-Normal as athletes competed in senior, junior and all-female team play as well as individual skills competition. Shirk Center at Illinois Wesleyan University and Horton Field House at Illinois State University were the venues that hosted the athletes and more than 400 family members for the three-day event. □



Allyson Lintz guards John Bidawid during the first game in Senior Division I at the Special Olympics Illinois State Basketball Tournament, 15-17 March. Lintz plays with the SAVE Lazers out of downstate Belleville and Bidawid plays on Chicago Park District's Independence Park team.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS ILLINOIS

Ed Berver of the Friendship Firebirds from Ottawa, Illinois, dribbles down court with Johnny Horn of the SPARC Redbirds of Springfield in pursuit. They competed in Senior Division XI at the Special Olympics Illinois State Basketball Tournament, 15-17 March.

SERVING IT UP

Special Olympics Georgia starts its new sports season with a national winter tennis tournament

by **Archil Kekelia**

It was game, set and match for tennis players in February as Special Olympics Georgia organized the National Winter Tennis Tournament in the country's capital of Tbilisi. Sixteen Special Olympics athletes of various ages participated in the event.

The athletes trained for the tournament and throughout the year at the tennis academy owned by Leila Meskhi, one of the best tennis players in the world in the 1990s. She also is President of the Georgian Tennis Federation. The event was held at the Orbi sports gymnasium of the Ministry of Defense Military Academy.

The Opening and Closing Ceremonies were organized by the coaches of the tennis academy and students from the Military Academy. The umpires were from the Georgian Tennis Federation and volunteers included professional male and female tennis players from Georgia's national teams. In total, 14 volunteers worked to make the tournament a success.

At the Closing Ceremonies, Meskhi observed, "The eagerness and effort the Special Olympics athletes demonstrated during their matches is an example of true athletic spirit." Special Olympics tennis player and top seed Gigori Vepkhvadze declared, "I am happy I can play in tennis together with my friends because tennis is an important part of my life."

About 300 spectators attended the tournament during the two days and all major television stations covered the event.

The event was sponsored by the Austrian company Herz Armaturen GmbH and Georgian Company Alioni 99 Ltd.

During the tournament press conference, Vazha Lortkipanidze, President of Special Olympics Georgia and member of Parliament, stated, "I see the joy of the athletes who participated in the tournament. I see that the organizers, volunteers, coaches, umpires and fans did their best to put on a successful event. I can say that today we are all winners." □

Archil Kekelia is a Special Olympics Georgia tennis coach.



Left to right: Ekaterine Vepkhvadze, Gigori Vepkhvadze and Irina Sakoyan show off their winning medals after the Special Olympics Georgia National Winter Tennis Tournament.

MURMAN CHACHUA

SPORTS FOR ALL

Special Olympics Nepal includes competition for athletes of all abilities

by **Kathy Smallwood**

Special Olympics has been operating in Nepal — a country located in Southern Asia, between China and India — since 1987, much to the delight of the Program's 1,400 athletes.

In March, Special Olympics Nepal held a Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) event in Thimi for 29 students with mental retardation and multiple disabilities from five villages in the Bhaktapur District, near the capital of Kathmandu. It was the first Special Olympics Motor Activities Training Program for children with severe disabilities and parents were overjoyed both for the opportunity for their athletes to compete and affirmation that their children were not forgotten.

The event was the brain-child of Babu Krishna, a Special Olympics Nepal coach and Principal of the Manav Viddhyagriha School in Sanothimi, where the children who participated are enrolled. Shankar Prasad Poudel, Principal of Hermann Gmeiner Higher Secondary School, also was instrumental in organizing the event. Students took part in MATP activities, including therapyball, basketball throw and balloon volley, and were assisted by 18 teachers and 15 volunteers, students from Japan, Korea and Nepal.

Krishna credited parents, teachers, school principals, donors and volunteers for the day's success. "This will give our school the motivation to continue our strength in improving quality of life for our students with severe disabilities," he said.

Honored guests included the Mayor of Sanothimi, Madhan Krishna Shrestha; Shanker Prasad Poudel; and the donors who funded the event: Truus Boom, also a Program volunteer; Regina Mueller, volunteer advisor for Special Olympics Nepal; and the Swiss Parents' Donor Group, an informal group of Swiss parents who support Special Olympics activities in Nepal. □

REGINA MUELLER/KATHMANDU



Special Olympics Nepal athletes participate in the first Motor Activity Training Program in Nepal.

SPORTS GALORE

Special Olympics Cuba's National Games has the main ingredients for success — lots of sports

by **Denize Strapetti**

It was four days of pageantry, excitement and rousing competition for 750 athletes who vied at the 4th Special Olympics Cuba National Games, which took place in February in the city of Santiago de Cuba.



The volleyball team from Matanzas won a gold medal at the Special Olympics Cuba National Games.

Special Olympics Cuba Executive Director Rafael Bell was the master of ceremonies for a vibrant Opening Ceremonies that included gymnastics exhibitions and a Parade of Athletes that featured teams from past Special Olympics World Games. Athletes recited the oath led by Adisyanelis Perez, who competed in artistic gymnastics at the 1999 Special Olympics World Summer Games in North Carolina. Floor hockey champion Guillermo de la Cruz, a member of a gold-medal winning team at

the 2001 Special Olympics World Winter Games, had the honor of lighting the Special Olympics cauldron.

Athletes were joined by 181 coaches, 200 volunteers, 15 families and 30 delegations. Competition was held in

11 sports — athletics, aquatics, badminton, baseball, basketball, cycling, gymnastics, football, powerlifting, table tennis and volleyball. Athletes also were invited to watch a team handball demonstration.

One of the highlights of the Games was an exceptional performance by Daer Rodriguez, 32, an athlete from Holguin state, who competed in the 3,000m, 5,000m and 10,000m races. He explained to the media during an interview that he practices every day at work, usually by carrying rice on his shoulder. He said that is the way he really enjoys training — by doing his work running.

During the Games, coaches had an opportunity to attend the 1st National Sport Training Congress and 75 athletes participated in the 2nd National Athlete Congress where athletes discussed issues of importance to them. Athletes said that the benefits of Special Olympics included the opportunity to make many friends. They also thought that each year, athletes are better and better prepared to compete.

The families that attended represented the 14 states of Cuba and worked as volunteers at the Games. They were very proud of their athletes who competed. One parent voiced the consensus of the group. “Special Olympics opens the door for happiness and it is open to everyone,” he said. Another added, “I have learned how strong my son is despite his apparent weakness.”

Humberto Rodrigues, Cuba's National Director of the Sports and Recreation Institute, emceed the Closing Ceremonies. A memorable moment occurred when the Games flag was handed to a representative of Ciudad de la Habana, the city where the 2003 Special Olympics Cuba National Games will be held. □

Denize Strapetti is the Regional Coordinator for Special Olympics Latin America.

DRY RUN

Organizers eye Special Olympics Lebanon athletics event as a dress rehearsal for Regional Games

by **Abeer Anwar**

Athletes throughout Lebanon competed in the Special Olympics Lebanon athletics competition at Beirut's American University in February. The event included 50m, 100m, 200m and 400m running for 400 athletes of all ability levels. Ali Shaaban enjoyed the competition and looks forward to joining his teammates for more events like this. “It was very exciting and fun as well. Special Olympics has added many things to my life,” Shaaban said. “I have a dream to be a coach and I am working on it thanks to Special Olympics.”

Twelve different mental disability care organizations and non-government organizations took part in the event, with invaluable assistance from volunteers and family members.

Special Olympics Lebanon National Director Hala El-Husseini, who has worked with her country's Program for more than 10 years, helped ensure the smooth operation of the competition. “It was a great and successful event that gathered athletes, volunteers and family members,” she said. “Holding such events all year round is very beneficial for all.”

The competition also served as a dress rehearsal for the Special Olympics Middle East/North Africa Regional Games that Lebanon will host in September. This event gave the Program an opportunity to assess strengths and weaknesses of the competition and develop a plan to make improvements. It also provided a chance to train a number of coaches, volunteers and family members on the Special Olympics General Rules. □

Abeer Anwar is the Sports Editor at Al Ahram weekly newspaper in Egypt.



Coach Abd Jawad awards medals to athletes during the Special Olympics Lebanon athletics competition.

SKIERS PARADISE

Russia holds its National Alpine Skiing and Cross-Country Tournament

by **Krzysztof Krukowski**

Special Olympics Russia held the National Alpine Skiing and Cross-Country Skiing Tournament from 18-22 February. This high-profile event was organized by the Special Olympics Sverdlovsk regional Program in the city of Novouralsk. (approximately 1,864 miles or 3,000 km from Moscow).

Seventy-two athletes representing 18 regions of the Russian Federation took part in cross-country competitions, while 12 athletes from three regions conquered the Alpine skiing slopes. Twenty-one coaches and 24 volunteers actively supported participating athletes.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS RUSSIA

Special Olympics athletes and organizers at the Special Olympics Russia National Alpine Skiing and Cross-Country Skiing Tournament.

During Opening Ceremonies, Russia's famous junior national skiing team member and 2001 European junior skiing champion Aleksei Konshin and Special Olympics Alpine skier Mikhail "Misha" Koryakin jointly recited the Special Olympics oath and officially opened the tournament. "I believe that people with mental retardation should have their distinguished place in the world of sports," Konshin said.

During the competition athletes participated in a range of cross-country skiing events including the 25m, 50m, 100m, 500m, 1,000m, 3,000m, 5,000m and 10,000m as well as relays, and particularly the 4 X 100m, 4 X 500m and 4 X 1,000m. Alpine skiers competed in slalom, giant slalom and downhill events.

Proud supporters of the National tournament included the Sverdlovsk regional government, Russia's National Committee for Sports, Rosneft (an oil company), Otis Elevator and a number of local sponsors. □

Krzysztof Krukowski is the Director of Organizational Development for Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia.

DYNAMIC DUO

Two athletes share medals and admiration for each other

by **Krzysztof Krukowski**

An 11-year-old Special Olympics Alpine skier, Mikhail "Misha" Koryakin, and the 20-year-old 2001 European Junior Champion in cross-country skiing, Aleksei Konshin, both live in the city of Novouralsk. Their paths had never crossed until one day when they met and became friends in an unusual and exciting circumstance.

At the Opening Ceremonies of the Special Olympics Russia Alpine skiing and cross-country skiing tournament, Koryakin and Konshin had the opportunity to officially open the tournament and recite the Special Olympics oath. As the moment came for the two athletes to come up to the stage, Koryakin took a close look at Konshin and noticed two medals he won at the 2001 Junior European Championship. Standing on the stage Koryakin could not take his eyes away from Konshin's medals. In front of the journalists' cameras, Koryakin and Konshin were captured with Koryakin holding Konshin's medals in his hands.

After the Ceremonies Koryakin and Konshin sat together and talked about their sports achievements and plans. Konshin said that he had planned to represent Russia at the Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, but could not go because of health problems. Koryakin, in turn, spoke about his respect for Konshin's achievements and his own desire to win medals during the Special Olympics Alpine skiing tournament.

The next day competitions began and Koryakin's dream came true — he won the first medal of his sports career — a bronze. The next day was even greater — Koryakin won a silver medal. After the awards ceremony it was Konshin who held Koryakin's medals.

Koryakin and Konshin said goodbye to each other as friends and equals and looked forward to their next meeting. □

Krzysztof Krukowski is the Director of Organizational Development for Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia.



ALEKSEI KONSHIN

Special Olympics Alpine skier Mikhail "Misha" Koryakin (right), and the 2001 European Junior Champion in cross-country skiing, Aleksei Konshin.

PEAK PERFORMANCE



CAREY CORONA, THE MOUNTAIN TIMES

Charlie Hobson of Special Olympics South Carolina (USA) celebrates a successful run.

U.S. Southeast Region Alpine Games Reach 25-Year Milestone

by Amy P. Johnson

For many athletes, coaches and volunteers who took part in the 2002 Special Olympics Southeast Region Alpine Games 3-5 February, it was a familiar scene in the 25-year tradition of skiing at Appalachian Ski Mountain near Boone, North Carolina, USA. For others, the Games were a new experience—from the competition right down to the snow itself.

In the moments prior to the Opening Ceremony and 25th anniversary celebration of the Southeast Region Alpine Games, the sky opened up and released a flurry of winter wonder that made for ideal skiing conditions for the competition. Jerrishon Tolver, 16, of Florida was seeing snow for the very first time. He'd prepared for the event through dry-land training using pine straw to simulate the snow he anticipated in the North Carolina mountains. He expected to deliver an expert performance. "I think I'm great!" he remarked, and added that he was having fun meeting people from other states.



AMY P. JOHNSON

PACE SETTER

Alpine skiing is a tradition in the Southeast region thanks to Jim Cottrell

Special Olympics Programs need innovators and Jim Cottrell qualifies as one of the best. Having served on the international committee for Special Olympics Alpine skiing and as chair of the Alpine skiing sport development team for Special Olympics North Carolina, Cottrell has made a global impact on the sport within the Special Olympics movement. He got involved with Special Olympics when he helped seven athletes from North Carolina train for the First International Special Olympics Winter Games in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, USA, in 1977. "I felt like people representing our state in that event should be well prepared," Cottrell says. Upon the athletes' return from the International Games, no time was wasted in organizing the Southeast Region event, which resulted in the first regional Winter Games in Special Olympics history. □

Jim Cottrell spearheaded development of the Southeast Region's Alpine skiing program.



CAREY CORONA, THE MOUNTAIN TIMES



AMY P. JOHNSON

Above: Delegations enjoy the 25th anniversary fireworks show. Left: Greg Norley and Fran Barabas are ready to compete.

Games Director Jim Cottrell, who is President of the French Swiss Ski College at Appalachian Ski Mountain, says it is not unusual to see athletes at this event each year who have never seen snow. Cottrell has served as Games Director since the inaugural Games in 1978, and spearheaded development of the Southeast Region's Alpine skiing program. Cottrell created the Special Olympics Dry Land Ski School for the benefit of athletes like Tolver who don't have access to the snowy peaks more familiar to athletes in other parts of the world.

It takes about 100 volunteers to run the Southeast Region Alpine Games for the more than 150 athletes who compete. Of those volunteers, 40 are instructors who spend the first day of the event in additional training with the athletes. With the increase in trained instructors over the years, Cottrell says, the quality of the experience for the athletes continues to improve. Cottrell explained that about a quarter of the athletes who competed this year are intermediate or advanced. "Twenty-five years ago, no athlete was at that level," he said. "But the real joy in this for me is to see the excitement of a group of beginners who make a straight run for 20 yards."

In 25 years, Cottrell has seen not only the evolution of skiing in Special Olympics, but also a change in attitudes toward people with mental retardation. □

Amy Johnson is Vice President of Communications for Special Olympics North Carolina.



PAULINA BAUDET

From Athlete to Coach and Volunteer

Special Olympics Paraguay's Víctor Raúl Saavedra Ojeda gives something back.

by **Paulina Baudet**

Since 1994, 23-year-old Víctor Raúl Saavedra Ojeda has been a Special Olympics Paraguay mainstay. He has excited the crowds with his football prowess, eventually being selected to represent his Program in football at the 1999 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Raleigh, North Carolina. He was even selected as a Special Olympics Paraguay Global Messenger where he spreads his love of sport to the masses. But what has made him truly unique is that he's taken his involvement to the next level by becoming a coach for the Program.

It is a role reversal that seems to suit Ojeda well, as his transformation from initially shy athlete to confident Global Messenger and knowledgeable coach is nothing if not inspirational. Always cheerful and enthusiastic, he has formed close relationships with the athletes he coaches, staying in close contact with them. Residing with his mother in Paraguay's capitol city Asuncion, Ojeda's story is a living one, and he should keep flourishing as time goes by — to the benefit of Special Olympics Paraguay and the rest of us. □

Paulina Baudet is the Program Innovations Manager for Special Olympics Latin America.