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Coaching in the Special Olympics: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Resources and the Need for Continued Research in Canada

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ABSTRACT: *Special Olympics is a global movement dedicated to promoting inclusion and fostering a sense of community through sports for individuals with intellectual disabilities. In Canada, the organization serves over 42,000 athletes, providing lifelong athletic opportunities from childhood through adulthood. This annotated bibliography examines 34 resources on coaching in the Special Olympics, including peer-reviewed articles and grey literature with a practical focus. It highlights the ongoing nature of Special Olympics programming, which occurs weekly in communities worldwide, contrasting with the perception of it being limited to occasional Olympic events. Research underscores the benefits of Special Olympics participation, while also highlighting the need for coaching resources. Further empirical research is needed to evaluate the impact of coaching interventions and to enhance coach development and athlete experiences within the Canadian context specifically. Continued research is essential for fostering long-term success within the Special Olympics community.*

Key words*: Coach education, Coaching, Inclusion, Inclusive sports, Intellectual disabilities, Special Olympics.*

1. Introduction

Special Olympics is an international organization and global movement dedicated to promoting and supporting inclusion and fostering a sense of community through various sports and activities. By encouraging physical activity and sport, the organization aims to support healthier lifestyles for individuals with intellectual disabilities. In Canada, the Special Olympics provides athletic opportunities to more than 42,000 athletes, making it the largest sports organization for this particular population (Special Olympics Canada, 2024a). With programs available from age two through to adulthood, it offers a lifelong pathway for individuals to engage in organized sports and experience the associated health benefits (Special Olympics Canada, 2024a; Lloyd et. al, 2024). Given its mission to enhance the well-being of children, youth, adults with intellectual disabilities and their communities through sport, it is important to examine existing research on coaching athletes in the Special Olympics organization.

This annotated bibliography will serve as a foundation for future research to support researchers, volunteers and athletes who work, serve and learn in the areas of Special Olympics. This Annotated Bibliography examined 34 articles and resources based on Coaching within the Special Olympics. This annotated bibliography examined both peer-reviewed articles and grey literature to better understand research, resources and policy documents related to the Special Olympics as it pertains specifically to coaching.

Many members of the public tend to associate the Special Olympics with the same frequency as the Olympic or Paralympic Games, imagining that these events occur once every four years. However, Special Olympics programming is ongoing and happens weekly in communities worldwide, providing year-round

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opportunities for athletes with intellectual disabilities to engage in sports and physical activities (Special Olympics Ontario, 2025). This distinction is important because it highlights the continuous, localized nature of Special Olympics, which focuses on consistent participation and skill development rather than a singular, high-profile competition. Special Olympics programs are integrated into communities, ensuring that athletes have regular access to training, competition, and socialization, regardless of their proximity to major events. This ongoing support contributes to both personal and athletic growth for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Cybulski et al., 2016; Stynes et al., 2017).

2. Research Questions

1) What coaching resources exist to support Special Olympics Coaches?
2) What research exists that could be impactful and influential for Special Olympics coaches?

3. Findings

3.1. General Special Olympics Resources

This section will examine coaching resources, focusing specifically on Special Olympics Canada, and explore how these resources support coaches in providing quality sport experiences for athletes with intellectual disabilities. It will highlight the strategies and frameworks designed to enhance coaching effectiveness, promote athlete development, and ensure inclusive, supportive environments within the Special Olympics community. Through this examination, the role of these resources in fostering long-term athlete growth and success will be emphasized.

Coaching Association of Canada. (n.d.-a). *Coaching Association of Canada*. https://coach.ca/

Annotation: The Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) supports coaches across Canada, offering resources, certifications, and training opportunities to enhance coaching standards. Their mission focuses on ensuring that coaches have the tools to create positive, inclusive sports environments for athletes of all ages and abilities. CAC also works on policy development, advocacy, and building a national network of coaches.

Coaching Association of Canada. (n.d.-b). *The Locker: Login*. https://thelocker.coach.ca/account/login

Annotation: This page provides access to *The Locker*, the Coaching Association of Canada's online platform for coach education, training, and certification. It allows coaches to manage their accounts, complete courses, and track certifications. It is an essential tool for Canadian coaches seeking to improve their qualifications and maintain up-to-date credentials in their respective sports. Special Olympics Coaches have access to some free training through this site.

Coaches Association of Ontario. (2020). *Home*. https://www.coachesontario.ca/

Annotation: The Coaches Association of Ontario (CAO) website offers resources and information about coaching in Ontario, including professional development, NCCP training, and programs to support coaches across various sports. It also features resources on safe sport, funding opportunities, and coaching in parasport, making it an essential tool for coaches looking to enhance their skills and knowledge in the field of coaching.

Davies, T., Wiens, L., Trono, C., Wilson, A., Griffiths, G., & Griffiths, S. (2021). *Long-term athlete development: Supporting quality sport experiences 2.0*. Special Olympics Canada. https://www.specialolympics.ca/sites/default/files/SO-LTAD2_EN_FINAL_WEB.pdf

Annotation: The *Long-Term Athlete Development: Supporting Quality Sport Experiences 2.0* document outlines the key principles of athlete development, emphasizing the importance of inclusive, sustainable sport programs. It provides a framework for fostering optimal athletic growth through a focus on physical, mental, and emotional well-being, specifically for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The resource guides coaches and organizations in creating impactful and accessible sports experiences for athletes in the Special Olympics community.

Heenan, J. (2021). *Special Olympics basketball: A guide for coaches*. Special Olympics Ontario. https://www1.specialolympicsontario.com/resources/wp-content/uploads/sites/39/2021/10/Special-Olympics-Basketball-A-Guide-for-Coaches-Justin-Heenan.pdf

Annotation: This coaching guide for Special Olympics Ontario, provides comprehensive strategies for coaching basketball players with intellectual disabilities. It covers fundamental skills, game strategies, and inclusive coaching techniques tailored to the needs of Special Olympics athletes. The guide emphasizes athlete-centered coaching, skill progression, and fostering a supportive team environment for athletes to thrive. This resource is particularly useful for understanding mentorship and skill development in adaptive

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sports settings, aligning with research on effective coaching practices and community engagement in Special Olympics programs.

Special Olympics Canada. (2014a). *Active Start Guide*. Special Olympics Canada. https://www.specialolympics.ca/sites/default/files/Active%20Start%20Guide%20.pdf

Annotation: The *Active Start Guide* from Special Olympics Canada focuses on developing physical skills for young children aged 2 to 6 years old, promoting fun, safe, and inclusive activities that build basic motor skills. It provides practical strategies for coaches and families to engage children in active play, setting the foundation for later sports participation in Special Olympics programs. This guide emphasizes the importance of early physical activity for social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Special Olympics Canada. (2014b). *FUNdamentals Guide*. Special Olympics Canada. https://www.specialolympics.ca/sites/default/files/SOBC_FUNdamentalsGuide_2014.pdf

Annotation: The *FUNdamentals Guide* provides a comprehensive framework for coaches working with young athletes in Special Olympics programs, emphasizing basic skill development in sports such as running, jumping, and throwing. It outlines strategies for creating inclusive, engaging environments that promote motor skills and physical activity while building confidence. This guide is tailored for young athletes, supporting their development in sports as well as in social and emotional areas.

Special Olympics Canada. (2025). *Sport rules & regulations*. https://www.specialolympics.ca/ programs/sportsrules

Annotation: This webpage provides an overview of the Special Olympics Canada programs and their approach to ensuring that athletes participate at a level that meets their individual needs. It emphasizes the process of "divisioning," which helps place athletes in appropriate competition groups based on their skill levels, fostering an inclusive environment for both competitive and personal growth. The page lists the official sports offered in both winter and summer categories, such as 5-pin bowling, athletics, and soccer, with links to the specific rulebooks for each sport. The rules are reviewed every four years following National Games, ensuring they remain current and relevant to the athletes' needs.

Special Olympics. (2025a). *Sports offered.* Special Olympics. https://www.specialolympics.org/ what-we-do/sports/sports-offered

Annotation: This webpage from Special Olympics provides an overview of the sports offered within the organization, detailing opportunities for athletes with intellectual disabilities to participate in a variety of individual and team sports. It outlines the structure of these programs, emphasizing inclusion, skill development, and competition at local, national, and international levels. The resource is valuable for researchers, coaches, and practitioners in disability sport, as it highlights the breadth of athletic opportunities available and the role of Special Olympics in promoting adaptive sports. Additionally, the webpage serves as a practical reference for those interested in understanding the scope of sport offerings and the frameworks supporting athletes with disabilities.

Special Olympics Ontario. (2025). *Events*. https://www1.specialolympicsontario.com/events/

Annotation: Special Olympics Ontario's events page highlights the wide range of activities and competitions hosted regularly across communities. These programs provide athletes with opportunities to engage in sports, build skills, and foster inclusion year-round. The page is a valuable resource for understanding how Special Olympics programming extends beyond the once-every-four-years model, offering continuous participation opportunities globally.

Special Olympics Ontario. (2021). *7000-209 coach ratios.* https://www1.specialolympicsontario.com/resources/7000-209-coach-ratios/

Annotation: This resource from Special Olympics Ontario outlines the minimum athlete-to-coach ratios required for various sports, ensuring athlete safety and supervision during practices and competitions. The guidelines apply to all levels of competition, including conference events, provincial and national games. The document categorizes sports based on different supervision needs, with ratios ranging from 5:1 for team sports like basketball and soccer to 3:1 for individual winter sports such as alpine skiing and speed skating. By establishing these standards, Special Olympics Ontario emphasizes the importance of structured coaching support in disability sport. This resource is useful for coaches, program administrators, and researchers studying best practices in inclusive coaching and athlete development.

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Special Olympics Saskatchewan. (2025). *Coaching and volunteer resources*. Special Olympics Canada. https://www.specialolympics.ca/saskatchewanget-involvedbecome- volunteer/coaching-and-volunteer-resources

Annotation: This webpage provides essential coaching and volunteer resources for Special Olympics Saskatchewan, including training requirements, competition hosting guidelines, and sport-specific coaching tools. It offers access to NCCP and Special Olympics Canada (SOC) eLearning modules, ethical decision-making training, and sport-specific coaching guides for both summer and winter sports. Additionally, the page includes resources for competition organization, fitness testing, and seasonal training plans. This resource is valuable for coaches, volunteers, and program coordinators seeking structured support for athlete development and competition preparation within Special Olympics programs.

Special Olympics Canada. (2024). *Our Mission*. https://www.specialolympics.ca/about/mission

Annotation: This webpage from Special Olympics Canada outlines the organization's mission, vision, and strategic priorities. It emphasizes the role of sport in improving the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities and fostering inclusive communities across Canada. The organization is committed to providing quality programs, increasing community awareness, and supporting volunteers. Additionally, the strategic plan highlights goals related to athlete and volunteer growth, program expansion, and enhanced training opportunities. This source is valuable for understanding the foundational principles guiding Special Olympics Canada and their ongoing efforts to promote accessibility and inclusion in sports.

Special Olympics Canada. (2021). *Volunteer roles*. https://www.specialolympics.ca/ get-involved/volunteer-roles

Annotation: This webpage from Special Olympics Canada outlines the various volunteer roles available within the organization. It provides detailed descriptions of the responsibilities and expectations for volunteers in different capacities, ranging from coaching to administrative support. The page emphasizes the importance of volunteer involvement in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for athletes. It also highlights the personal and professional benefits of volunteering, such as gaining leadership experience and contributing to the development of individuals with intellectual disabilities. This resource serves as a comprehensive guide for prospective volunteers interested in supporting Special Olympics programs.

Special Olympics Ontario. (2021). *Athlete eligibility*. https://www1.specialolympicsontario.com/ resources/athlete-eligibility-new/

Annotation: This webpage from Special Olympics Ontario provides detailed eligibility criteria for participation in Special Olympics programs. It outlines the requirements for individuals with intellectual and related developmental disabilities while clarifying that those with only physical, emotional, or sensory disabilities do not qualify. The page also specifies age-based participation guidelines, including youth programs such as Active Start (ages 2–6) and FUNdamentals (ages 7–12), as well as the minimum age requirements for provincial and national competitions (13 years of age). This resource is useful for understanding eligibility policies and structured pathways for athletes within Special Olympics Ontario.

Special Olympics. (2025b). *Sports & coaching*. Special Olympics Resources. https://resources.specialolympics.org/sports-essentials/sports-and-coaching

Annotation: This webpage from Special Olympics provides essential resources on sports programming and coaching strategies for athletes with intellectual disabilities. It outlines sport-specific rules, training guides, and best practices for coaches working with Special Olympics athletes. The resource emphasizes inclusive coaching methods, athlete development, and the role of mentorship in adaptive sports. This source is valuable for understanding the structure and principles of Special Olympics coaching, particularly in the context of volunteer mentorship and athlete engagement. It supports research on mentorship practices in Special Olympics, aligning with themes of community building, athlete retention, and skill development.

3.2. Research Impacting the Practice of Coaching

This section will explore peer-reviewed literature on topics that influence the way Special Olympics sports and programming are coached. By examining studies on coaching techniques, athlete development, and inclusive practices, the focus will be on identifying key factors that shape effective coaching strategies. The goal is to understand how research can inform and improve the quality of coaching, ensuring that Special Olympics athletes receive the best possible support and guidance in their sports experiences.

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Alexander-Urquhart, D., Bloom, G. A., & Fraser, M. M. (2024). Understanding the career experiences and reflections of Special Olympics Canada's national team program coaches. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 17*(1), 32–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2024.2425430
Annotation: This qualitative study explores the career experiences of Special Olympics Canada's National Team Program coaches through narrative inquiry. 13 coaches participated in semi-structured interviews, and findings were presented as composite vignettes highlighting key coaching challenges and reflections. The study underscores the complexities of coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities, including travel logistics, emotional and behavioral management, and balancing coaching with personal responsibilities. It also highlights the need for improved mentorship and coach education within Special Olympics programs. By utilizing creative non-fiction as a learning tool, this research provides an accessible and practical resource for coaching development in disability sport. This study is particularly valuable for understanding the lived experiences of Special Olympics coaches and informing best practices in coach education.

Culver, D.M., Kraft, E., Trudel, P., Duarte, T., & Werthner, P. (2020). Coaching athletes with disabilities. In R. Resende & A.R. Gomes (Eds.), *Coaching for Human Development and Performance in Sports*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63912-9_13

Annotation: This chapter explores the evolving field of coaching athletes with disabilities, highlighting the increasing scholarly attention to the domain. While much of the existing research focuses on coaching athletes with physical disabilities, the chapter acknowledges the limited but growing body of literature on coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities. The authors provide an overview of disability sport coaching, including an examination of international coach education programs from various countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. They analyze the gaps in learning opportunities for disability sport coaches and conclude with a synthesis of key issues in coach education. Additionally, the chapter introduces a coach development model designed to facilitate ongoing learning despite the scarcity of formal training programs. By presenting a vignette to illustrate a pathway for professional growth, the authors aim to support the advancement of disability sport coaching. This chapter is particularly relevant for scholars, practitioners, and organizations seeking to enhance coaching practices and education in disability sport.

Cybulski, S., Culver, D. M., Kraft, E., & Formeris, T. (2016). Special Olympics coaches: Examining the strategies they use to encourage their athletes to develop life skills. *International Journal of Coaching Science,10*(2), 3–23. https://www.researchgate.net/ profile/Diane-Culver/publication/310806282_Special_Olympics_coaches_Examining_the_strategies_they_use_to_encourage_their_athletes_to_develop_life_skills/links/5838611d08ae3a74b49d157e/Special-Olympics-coaches-Examining-the-strategies-they-use-to-encourage-their-athletes-to-develop-life-skills.pdf

Annotation: This study highlights the role of Special Olympics (SO) coaches in fostering life skills for athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID), using Merriam's (2002) basic interpretive qualitative approach. The research aligns with existing literature emphasizing the benefits of sports for social inclusion (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003; McConkey et al., 2013) and extends previous frameworks on coaching strategies (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012). The seven deductive themes provide a structured understanding of effective coaching practices, including philosophy, relationships, athlete awareness, skill-building opportunities, modeling, teachable moments, and volunteerism. Notably, the study uncovers an additional inductive theme - being stern and direct - suggesting that SO coaches employ a distinct approach tailored to their athletes' needs. This finding raises questions about how direct communication strategies contribute to athlete development and whether they align with broader coaching methodologies in adaptive sports.

Collins, K., & Staples, K. (2017). The role of physical activity in improving physical fitness in children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 69*, 49–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2017.07.020
Annotation: This study aims to reveal ways to improve the health-related fitness of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, in an effort to inform coaches and program development professionals. The study assessed the physical fitness of 35 children with intellectual and developmental disabilities using the Brockport Physical Fitness Test. The children then engaged in a 10 week physical activity program, totalling 15 hours of instruction. After the program, participants repeated the Brockport Physical Fitness Test to allow for a comparison of their results before and after the intervention. Participating in the 10 week program, resulted in significant improvements of aerobic functioning, muscular strength and muscular endurance. The researchers claimed that effective programming must incorporate a balance between improving fitness and

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creating a fun environment that encourages children to continue to participate in physical activity. Additionally, the results suggest that individualized instruction using motivational techniques has the potential to improve the fitness capacities of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Eliasson, I. (2017). The gap between formalised children's rights and children's real lives in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 52*(4), 470–496. https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690215608516
Annotation: Eliasson, an associate professor in Education at Umeå University in Sweden, conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 children and six coaches to determine how children's rights are experienced by child athletes and adult coaches in floorball and equestrian programs. The findings revealed neither the coaches nor the athletes were aware that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was incorporated in Swedish sport policy. Moreover, they were not well informed about the UNCRC and how to work with it in relation to sport policy. Therefore, both the athletes and the coaches were unprepared to assess the degree in which children's rights were being upheld. A culture of complacency was revealed among both coaches and athletes as they shared the UNCRC did not hold significance in the context of children's sport. This article highlights how children's rights are experienced in the lives of children engaging in sport.

Lloyd, M., Temple, V. A., Foley, J. T., Yeatman, S., Lunsky, Y., Huang, A., & Balogh, R. (2024). Participation in Special Olympics reduces the rate for developing diabetes in adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Diabetic Medicine, 41*(6), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1111/dme.15393
Annotation: This study investigates the impact of Special Olympics participation on diabetes risk in adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). A 20-year cohort study found that participants in Special Olympics had a 15% reduced risk of developing Type 2 diabetes compared to non-participants. The results suggest that Special Olympics, through promoting physical activity, health screenings, and healthy eating, can significantly reduce diabetes risk. This low-cost intervention may be an effective way to promote long-term health in adults with IDD.

Lloyd, M., Temple, V.A., Foley, J.T., Yeatman, S., Lunksy, Y., Huang, A., & Balogh, R. (2022). Young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who participate in Special Olympics are less likely to be diagnosed with depression. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 58*, 1699-1708. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-022-02406-8
Annotation: This 20-year retrospective cohort study compared depression rates between young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who participated in Special Olympics (n=8,710) and non-participants (n=42,393) in Ontario, Canada. The results showed that Special Olympics participants had a 49% lower risk of developing depression, with an adjusted hazard ratio of 0.51, indicating a medium effect size. The study suggests that physical activity and social connectedness in Special Olympics may contribute to the reduction in depression, though further research is needed to explore the specific factors involved.

Lohani, G., Yadav R., Khattar S., Saxena A., Kaushik N, Sahni S., & Meena, K. (2021). A qualitative study: Effect of sport participation on general mental health of athletes with intellectual disabilities from Special Olympics Bharat. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology, 9*, 498–513. 10.25215/0901.050

Annotation: Lohani et al. (2021) explore the impact of sports participation on the mental health of athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Special Olympics Bharat. Through in-depth interviews with 20 athletes across India, the study identifies seven themes related to confidence, communication, teamwork, social skills, independence, leadership, and overcoming barriers. The findings reinforce the role of sports in fostering personal growth and social inclusion, aligning with broader research on the benefits of Special Olympics participation. Notably, while athletes encounter personal and environmental barriers, they navigate these challenges with support from mentors and increased opportunities. This study underscores the transformative potential of sports for individuals with ID, particularly in enhancing self-efficacy and social well-being within this context.

MacDonald, D. J., Beck, K., Erickson, K., & Côté, J. (2016). Understanding sources of knowledge for coaches of athletes with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 29(3),* 242–249. https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12174

Annotation: This study explores how Special Olympics coaches acquire coaching knowledge, focusing on actual and ideal sources of learning. Through structured interviews with 45 Canadian coaches, the study identifies that most learning occurs through hands-on experience and peer consultation. Coaches also express a desire for more structured education, mentorship, and administrative support. The findings highlight the need for a broader approach to coaching education, emphasizing formal training opportunities alongside

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experiential learning. This research is relevant to studies on mentorship in Special Olympics programs, providing insight into how coaching knowledge can be enhanced through structured mentorship and professional development initiatives.

McGarty, A. M., & Melville, C. A. (2018). Parental perceptions of facilitators and barriers to physical activity for children with intellectual disabilities: A mixed methods systematic review. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 73*, 40–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2017.12.007
Annotation: The authors, researchers at the School of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow, systematically reviewed literature concerning parental perceptions of facilitators and barriers to physical activity for intellectually disabled children. Several themes emerged that acted as both facilitators and barriers to participating in physical activity including family, child factors, social motivation, inclusive programs and facilities as well as the child's experiences of physical activity. The education and level of information accessible to parents, coaches and staff regarding physical activity for intellectually disabled children determined if these identified themes acted as facilitators or barriers. Furthermore, the study revealed that intellectually disabled children face lower autonomy, resulting in the family playing a significant 'gatekeeper' role in their participation in physical activity. Overall, the researchers identified the need to develop effective intervention policy to address low levels of physical activity in intellectually disabled children, to inform gatekeepers and transform barriers into facilitators.

Stynes, J., Pink, M., & Aumand, E. (2017). Stressors, coping strategies and effectiveness: A study of Special Olympics coaches at a major sporting event. *International Sports Studies, 39*(2), 21–34. https://doi.org/10.30819/iss.39-2.03
Annotation: This study examines the stressors experienced by Special Olympics (SO) coaches at a major sporting event, an area that has been underexplored in sport psychology literature. Data were collected from 13 SO coaches to identify sources of stress, preferred coping strategies, and their perceived effectiveness. The study found that coaches faced three major types of stressors: logistical-organizational challenges, athlete management issues, and personal needs. Additionally, findings indicated that the coaches relied on a limited range of coping strategies, which were not always effective. The authors suggest that SO coaches would benefit from proactive preparation for stressors and the development of a broader set of coping strategies. This research is valuable for educators, coaches, and sports organizations looking to enhance support systems for SO coaches.

Sumner, S., & Heenan, J. (2025) At promise, not at risk: A literature review of Special Olympics impact on early childhood health. *Canadian Journal of New Scholars in Education.* Annotation: This paper reviews 17 empirical studies on the health outcomes of intellectually disabled children and youth who participate in Special Olympics programs. It examines the issue through the lens of the medical and social models of disability, as well as disabled children's childhood studies. The findings highlight significant health disparities faced by intellectually disabled youth and emphasize the role of Special Olympics in promoting physical activity and well-being. The authors identify gaps in existing research and advocate for a rights-based approach to improving inclusion and equitable access to physical activity. This study is relevant to mentorship in Special Olympics coaching, as it underscores the importance of structured programs in fostering both social and health benefits for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

Temple, V. A., & Field, S. C. (2023). Evaluation of the Special Olympics Canada coaching young athletes training: Part B how's it going? A study of Active Start and FUNdamentals program implementation. *Palaestra, 37*(3), 35–39. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.palaestra.2023.05.007

Annotation: This article evaluates the effectiveness of the Special Olympics Canada (SOC) Coaching Young Athletes Training course, specifically focusing on the "on the job" behavior (Level 3) of program leaders, as outlined in Kirkpatrick's four-level model of training evaluation. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 11 youth program leaders from across eight provinces, the study highlights the need for further training in working with children with autism and promoting positive athlete behavior. The authors suggest that a more comprehensive approach to skill mastery is necessary, with an emphasis on practicing skills in diverse and repeated ways. The findings contribute valuable insights into the challenges faced by program leaders and propose areas for improvement in training to enhance the overall effectiveness of Special Olympics programs.

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Thurston, R. J., Alexander, D. M., & Michaud, M. (2021). Practical considerations for coaching athletes with learning disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 9(2),* 244–251. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2021-0008

Annotation: This article provides practical recommendations for coaching athletes with learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia) and neurodevelopmental disorders (ADHD, autism spectrum disorder). The authors emphasize inclusive coaching strategies that focus on adapting the environment, communication methods, and coaching behaviors rather than problematizing the disability. They encourage self-reflection on biases and assumptions while promoting individualized coaching approaches. This research is valuable for understanding how coaches can create accessible and supportive spaces for athletes with disabilities, aligning with mentorship models that prioritize inclusivity, athlete-centered learning, and adaptive coaching practices in Special Olympics and other sports programs.

Turgeon, S., Turgeon, J., & Morin, D. (2023). Coaching Special Olympics: A scoping review. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 18*(1), 304–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541221134338

Annotation: This scoping review examines existing research on Special Olympics coach training and practices, analyzing 16 studies published between 1988 and 2021. The findings highlight a significant gap in research regarding the effectiveness of formal coaching education programs and their impact on both coaches and athletes. While some studies provide insights into coaching methods, there is limited empirical evidence supporting best practices in Special Olympics coaching. The authors emphasize the urgent need for further research to evaluate coach training programs and their influence on athlete development. This study is valuable for understanding the current state of Special Olympics coaching and underscores the importance of mentorship and professional development in adaptive sports coaching.

Válková, H. (2014). A detailed consideration of the effectiveness of the 'maximum effort rule' in the Special Olympics. In D. Hassan, S. Dowling & R. McKonkey (Eds.), *Sport, Coaching and Intellectual Disability* (pp. 235–247). Routledge.

Annotation: In this chapter, Válková critically examines the "maximum effort rule" (MER), a key policy governing movement between preliminary rounds and finals in Special Olympics competitions. The MER ensures that athletes compete at their highest potential. The chapter highlights instances of coaches manipulating athlete's performances during the preliminary phase to enter a 'low achievement' division, thereby securing advantages in the final. Through an analysis of two case studies, Válková evaluates the rule's impact on both athlete performance and overall experience to determine whether it encourages meaningful participation. Ultimately, Válková concludes that the MER is a valid and necessary policy to ensure fair competition within Special Olympics. The examination of the MER emphasizes important considerations for coaches to enhance the sport experience while promoting fairness and athlete well-being. This research is valuable for coaches seeking to understand the policy implications in Special Olympics coaching and program development.

van Putten, C. (2025). A formative and utilization-focused evaluation of assessment efficacy in Special Olympics coach education programmes across the Asia Pacific region. *Journal of Sport for Development, 13*(1), 45-60. https://jsfd.org/2025/03/03/a-formative- and-utilization-focused-evaluation-of-assessment-efficacy-in-special-olympics-coach-education-programmes-across-the-asia-pacific-region/

Annotation: In this article, van Putten (2025) explores the efficacy of assessment strategies in Special Olympics coach education programs across the Asia Pacific region, focusing on the impact of coach learning on social development for people with intellectual disabilities. Using Bernstein's (1971) theoretical framework of three message systems, the study conducts a formative and utilization-focused evaluation to examine how assessments can enhance coach learning. Through focus group interviews with five Special Olympics coach developers, the research identifies five principles of good assessment: (1) assessment as a fluid and ongoing process, (2) based on what a coach values most, (3) situated within the context of coaching practice, (4) informed by input from other coaches, and (5) guided by transparent success criteria. These principles are framed as essential components for fostering effective coach learning and are proposed as a guide for Special Olympics coach educators, promoting discussions around assessment efficacy to improve coach training and its impact on athletes with intellectual disabilities.

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Wareham, Y., Burkett, B., Innes, P., & Lovell, G. P. (2017). Coaching athletes with disability: Preconceptions and reality. *Sport in Society*, *20*(9), 1185–1202. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2016.1269084

Annotation: This study explores the holistic experience of coaching elite athletes with disabilities, focusing on both preconceptions and lived experiences. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 coaches across multiple sports, the study highlights the unique challenges and rewards of coaching athletes with disabilities. While coaches overwhelmingly describe their experiences as positive, they also report encountering difficulties not typically faced in non-disabled sport coaching. The findings emphasize the need for specialized training and support systems for coaches to ensure athletes with disabilities receive high-quality coaching. This research contributes to discussions on mentorship, inclusive coaching practices, and professional development in adaptive sports settings

4. Conclusion

In examining the aforementioned annotated resources, it is clear that there is a significant amount of research about coaching in Special Olympics focuses on the experiences, challenges, and strategies of coaches, including mentorship, training, and coaching practices tailored for athletes with intellectual disabilities. Several studies highlight the need for improved formal education, mentorship, and structured resources to enhance coach effectiveness, as seen in works by Alexander-Urquhart et al. (2024), Turgeon et al. (2023), and MacDonald et al. (2016). However, a gap in the literature remains in better understanding the research that directly impacts coaching within Special Olympics Canada. While there is some exploration of informal learning and experiential knowledge (e.g., Culver et al., 2020), more empirical research is needed to assess the effectiveness of specific coaching interventions and their long-term influence on athlete development in Special Olympics contexts.

A systematic literature review focused on Canadian coaching resources and research would be instrumental in identifying the next steps to support research about Special Olympics Canada coaching and could also potentially enhance athlete participation and experience in the Special Olympics. By synthesizing existing research, this review would provide a comprehensive overview of effective coaching strategies, mentorship models, and best practices tailored to athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It could identify key areas where coaches need further training or support and highlight successful approaches to volunteer retention and development. Additionally, the review would help pinpoint gaps in current knowledge, informing the creation of targeted resources and interventions that address both the unique challenges coaches face and the specific needs of athletes with a Canadian context. Ultimately, this research would serve as a foundation for developing evidence-based recommendations that enhance the quality of coaching and athlete experiences in the Special Olympics community in Canada and potentially beyond.

Furthermore, there are some significant policy documents that volunteers and coaches have access to. A next step, based on research and practice, could be the creation of more resources on various coaching strategies as well as mentorship for new coaches to improve volunteer retention and improve athletic outcomes for athletes within the Canadian context. Investing in more research and resources to support coaches, especially those in community-based programs like the Special Olympics, is a logical next step toward improving both volunteer retention and athletic outcomes. With a deeper understanding of the unique challenges coaches face, particularly when working with athletes with diverse needs, tailored resources can help bridge gaps in knowledge and skills. Research could uncover effective coaching strategies, mentorship models, and volunteer engagement techniques that promote long-term success and reduce burnout. By providing coaches with access to comprehensive training materials, peer support networks, and ongoing professional development opportunities, organizations can empower coaches to deliver high-quality, inclusive experiences that foster athlete growth and retention. These next steps could significantly enhance Special Olympics Canada's Coaching resources, volunteer retention and athlete outcomes across the country.

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