

MARCH 2023

SPECIAL OLYMPICS UTAH

SPORTS FOR ATHLETES OF ALL ABILITIES



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The SOUT Basketball Tournament is Coming Soon!

Basketball season is coming to a close as all the Area Basketball Tournaments are over, and all eyes are on the SOUT State Tournament. This event will be hosted at the University of Utah on March 24th, from 4:00pm to 9:00pm, and March 25th, from 9:00am to 4:00pm. The divisioning rounds of play and athlete social are scheduled for Friday evening. Saturday's games will tip-off at 9:00am, including 3v3 and 5v5 traditional and unified divisions and MATP and Skills competition. Healthy Athletes and SO town activities will also be held on Saturday.

Enjoy our version of March Madness and cheer on the best Special Olympics Utah athletes and Unified partners offer.

Clinical Director Spotlight: Dr. Court Wilkins



Dr. Court Wilkins has volunteered with our Healthy Athletes program since 2017 and has been the Opening Eyes Clinical Director since 2021. Originally from Bountiful, Dr. Wilkins is a proud veteran of over 23 years in service, having served in both the Army and the Air Force. His military experience has sent him worldwide to serve our veterans and military personnel as a top-rated Optometrist. He graduated from Pacific University for Optometry school and received additional specialty training in primary care, ocular diseases, laser certifications, and anterior segments. He

also received a master's degree in emergency and disaster management. He has served as an adjunct professor at multiple universities throughout the United States.

Three Questions for Court!

Q. What motivated you to work with us?

A. "I truly believe in giving back to the community and individuals. Anyway, I can help improve the lives of others is our goal. I say our goal... it has been my amazing wife and our children's goal for as long as I can remember to help whenever we can."

Q. How do you enjoy your free time?

A. "My free time is always spent doing things with my family. We take any opportunity we can to gather with family and friends. Our favorite things are spending time together at Bear Lake and the Uinta Mountains."

Q. Do you have anything you want to tell us about yourself?

A. "I have the most amazing wife and kids! I retired from the Air Force, and we have nine beautiful children and 14 grandchildren. I currently work for Rocky Mountain University at the new Optometry School in Provo, Utah, and for Utah Eye Centers.

Thank You Dr. Court Wilkins!

NEW Unified Fitness Club



Special Olympics Utah is pleased to announce its NEW Unified Fitness Club! This free club is meant for athletes, unified partners, and anyone who wants to prioritize their health. Those who participate will receive a fitness kit with a jump rope, a resistance band, a fitness tracker, exercise instructions, and more! The goal is to help its members with endurance, flexibility, strength, and nutrition.

The Unified Fitness Club will begin on April 6th from 7:00pm–8:00pm at Glendale Middle School, 1430 Andrew Ave, Salt Lake City.

[Click here to sign up](#) or contact Julia Tateoka at jtateoka@sout.org.

Unified Champion Schools Take to the Hardwood

March Madness is full swing at Special Olympics Utah's Unified Champion Schools. Seventy-three unified basketball teams with over 800 student-athletes with and without disabilities from across the state competed in district tournaments for a chance to compete at the UCS State Championship held on March 8th at Weber State.



Mia Cox from Murray High School helped her team take third place at the Salt Lake City tournament. Mia was cheered by her two sisters on the Murray High School drill team. She counted down the days to her Unified basketball tournament, and after her first game, she repeatedly told her mom and coaches, "I'm so happy, I'm so happy."

Mia's Murry High School team advanced to the UCS State Championship at Weber State and finished 2nd in their division. **[Click here](#)** for a complete listing of results.

We made a **SPLASH** in Utah this year!

This year we took the polar plunge in Salt Lake Valley, North Ogden, Cedar City, Park City, and Cache Valley raising a total of \$67,604.05 for the athletes of Special Olympics Utah!

Thank you to all those who got “Freezin’ for a Reason”; either “Taking the Plunge” or coming out to support another as they braved the chilly waters at Polar Plunge.



We can’t thank our generous event sponsors enough. Without sponsors to help cover the costs of running the plunges, we wouldn’t have the same resources to be able to support our athletes in growing their skills in self-confidence through sports.

Thank you so much to all those who supported Polar Plunge!

Salt Lake Valley Polar Plunge raised \$21,889

- 15 Teams and 76 Plungers
- Thanks to supporters KONA Hot Kocoa and Mamas Toasted Cheeser

North Ogden Polar Plunge raised \$12,067

- 8 Teams and 83 Plungers
- Thanks to our sponsors, Post Asphalt Paving & Construction, Pobanz Orthodontics, and Murphy Door, and our supporters, Three Brothers Donuts, Asian Sons on Grill, Mamas Toasted Cheeser Food and 97.1 ZHT Radio Station

Cedar City Polar Plunge raised \$6,230

- 10 Teams and 42 Plungers
- Thanks to our sponsors, American Packaging Corp, Wilson Orthodontics and Modern Woodmen Fraternal Financial

Park City Polar Plunge raised \$16,783

- 16 Teams and 65 Plungers
- Thank you to our sponsor, Trish McMillen Realty and our supporters Lucky One’s Coffee, PC MARC and Park City Police Department

Cache Valley Polar Plunge raised \$10,632

- 17 Teams and 80 Plungers
- Thank you to our supporters, Logan City Fire, Three Brothers Donuts and the Utah Jazz Bear

Walk for Inclusion and Make a Difference

We are excited to announce that Molina Healthcare will be the presenting sponsor of the 3rd Annual Walk for Inclusion. This event will be hosted on Thursday, June 29th from 6:00pm-8:00pm. Join us at Liberty Park for an evening of food, fun, and a walk around the park with family and friends. Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to register and get information on setting up a team to support the athletes and mission of Special Olympics Utah.



The Arrival of Spring Means it's Time for Track!



3, 2, 1, GO! It's track season, baby! Dust off those running shoes and hit the track. This year's UCS State Track Meet will be held at the UHSAA State Track Meet at BYU on May 18th and 19th. High School teams wishing to compete in the UHSAA Unified State Track Meet will practice with their track team and participate at the region meet to qualify for state. Events offered for Unified track are 4x100 m, 50 m, and shot put. We are excited to add unified heats to the UHSAA State Track Meet! For more information, contact Courtne at worthen@sout.org.

Linkage Project a Resource for People with IDD

SOUT has partnered with DHSS to make our athletes and people with intellectual developmental disabilities aware of this free program. DHHS trained linkage coordinators will help individuals with IDD identify their health needs. Participants will then be linked to healthcare providers, mental health providers, and health promotion programs. Linkages will be based on participants' needs. Participants enrolled in the program will see:

- Fewer unmet preventive health and mental health care needs
- Improved health and wellness behaviors
- Reduced chronic conditions and risk factors

[Click here](#) to find out more about this free resource or use the [referral link](#) to connect an eligible person with a linkage coordinator. Send all questions to linkage@healthpolicyproject.org.

SOUT Hosts its First Young Athletes Event



Our first Young Athletes event held at the Loveland Living Planet Aquarium last month was a great success. Forty-five young athletes and family members had the opportunity to learn what Special Olympics offers to young athletes in the community and schools. One of the highlights of the event was the chance for young athletes to try out some of the activities that Special Olympics

has to offer. These activities were designed to be fun and engaging, but also to help children develop important physical and social skills. Participants had a great time trying out activities, such as running, jumping, throwing, catching, and drawing.

In addition to the physical activities, the event also featured a presentation to parents that covered a range of topics, from the history and mission of SOUT to the specific programs and services that are available to young athletes. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and learn more about how they could get involved in Special Olympics.

Overall, the Young Athletes event was a wonderful opportunity for families to learn about Special Olympics and the many benefits that we offer to young athletes with intellectual disabilities. By providing opportunities to participate in sports and physical activities, the Special Olympics Utah is helping to break down barriers and promote inclusion and acceptance in communities. It is events like this one that make it clear that SOUT is making a real difference in the lives of young people and their families.



March Spotlights:

Athlete Spotlight



Meet Ava Jennings! Ava has been a Special Olympics athlete for three years and initially got involved living in Park City. In 2022 Ava moved to Logan to attend Utah State University. She didn't know many people but became friends with a fellow student who coached the Aggie Special Olympics team. He helped get her signed up, and since then, Ava has made countless friends by participating in Special Olympics.

Ava has become widely known at the university for her bubbly personality, and she befriends anyone and everyone. When asked what her favorite part of Special Olympics was, she stated, "I can do sports with a disability, and that's really cool to see. We have an athlete on our team in a walker, it is super cool he gets to play with us." Ava always goes out of her way to ensure everyone is included. She's such a positive addition to the Aggie team. Next time you're at an event, say hi to Ava; she will say hi back.

Meet Carson Garrett! Carson has been a TURN Lightning Special Olympics team member since 2018. Carson enjoys participating in swimming, bocce, and snowshoeing. He says his favorite sport is bocce, and the most demanding sport is snowshoeing. This is Carson's first year of trying snowshoeing, and he is so excited about his progress.

Carson loves being involved in Special Olympics and likes a bit of friendly competition, especially among his teammates. Carson says his favorite coach is Becca and appreciates all she does to assist him in participating.

Carson says that Special Olympics has helped him in his life, allowing him to compete in sports on his level and stay involved in sports he couldn't do elsewhere. Carson hopes that Special Olympics will be a part of his life forever.



Volunteer Spotlight

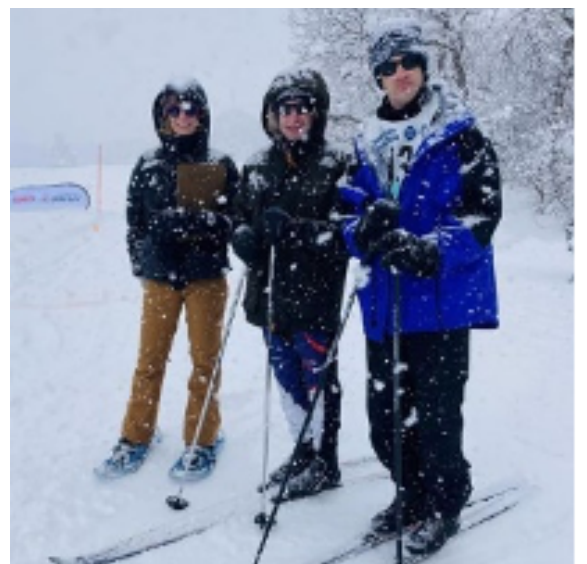


Meet Mrs. USA, Lora Forbush and Miss Utah 2022, Lindsey Larsen!

Special Olympics Utah is shining the volunteer spotlight this month on Mrs. USA Lora Forbush and Miss Utah 2022, Lindsey Larsen, for their help at our Metro/Central Area Basketball Tournament on March 4th! This is one of many events they both support, and it was great to have their help in presenting awards and posing for photos with your athletes. Thank you, Lora and Lindsey!

SOUT Winter Games Recap

The Snowshoe Invitational became the SOUT Winter Games with the addition of Cross-Country Skiing at the February 24th event. Over 50 athletes and coaches endured the snowy conditions and traveled to North Fork Park in Eden to compete in events ranging from 10 meters to 5 kilometers. A great group of volunteers helped set the courses and run the competition ensuring that all athletes had a safe and fun experience. Special thanks to the Rosemary and David Olsen Foundation for their financial sponsorship of the 2023 SOUT Winter Games.



E-Games Unite!

Submitted by Amber Gertsch

Hi Fellow Athletes! Did you realize that last September there was a national e-gaming competition for Special Olympics and there were no athletes from Utah! We need to change that for 2023.

My name is Amber Gertsch and I have been asked to be the E Gaming Coordinator for Special Olympics Utah. I know that most of you already play games on your electronic systems. All of you will make up the core of SOUT e-games. As we get started, we will be able to electronically connect you with other athletes across Utah and, eventually with athletes across the Nation! This will be another way to socialize with other athletes.



BUT, TO INCLUDE EVERYONE, I NEED YOUR HELP! We are going to start small and slowly but our goal is to eventually have several teams from Utah in national competitions. If you want to participate, please send me the following information (See my information as example):

- Your name (ex. Amber Gertsch)
- The gaming system you play on now (ex. Xbox, series X)
- Your favorite games (ex. HALO is my favorite, but i also play Rocket League, Foreza 7)
- Your gamer tag (ex. Ladyhawk117)
- Your email (ex. Ladyhawk.ag10@gmail.com)

I will develop a list after I receive this information so that all SOUT e-gamers can connect with each other to have some fun, learn new games, and make new friends. That's what gaming is all about! We will eventually have authorized gaming competitions. Gamers let's unite! Spread the word...give others the info and my email.