



Special Olympics Milestones

June 1962

Eunice Kennedy Shriver begins a summer day camp at her home in Maryland for children with intellectual disabilities to realize their capabilities in sports and physical activities.

July 1968

The first International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. 1000 individuals with intellectual disabilities from 26 states and Canada compete in track and field and swimming.

July 1969

The first Western Regional Special Olympics is held at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Nine hundred athletes from Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah participate. With the success of this event, each western state begins to formulate plans to organize its own chapter program, and the California chapter is formed, co-founded by Olympic Gold Medalist Rafer Johnson.

August 13th -15th 1970

The second International Special Olympics Summer Games take place in Chicago, Ill., with 1,500 athletes from all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, Canada and France.

December 1971

The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval as one of only two organizations authorized to use the name "Olympics" in the United States.

August 13th -18th 1972

California hosts the Third International Special Olympics Summer Games at UCLA for 2,500 athletes and coaches from all 50 states and three international Programs. Actor Michael Landon is among celebrity attendees.

August 7th -11th 1975

The Fourth International Special Olympics Summer Games are held in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, with 3,200 participants from 10 countries. Athletes participate in basketball; bowling; floor hockey; gymnastics; ice skating; the pentathlon; swimming and diving; softball throw; track and field events including the high jump, long jump, 440-yard relay and the mile, and volleyball

February 5th-11th 1977

Steamboat Springs, Colorado, hosts the first International Special Olympics Winter Games, with more than 500 athletes competing in skiing and skating events. U.S. television networks CBS, ABC & NBC cover the Games.



August 8th -13th 1979

The Fifth International Special Olympics Summer Games take place on the Brockport campus of the State University of New York. More than 3,500 competitors participate from all fifty states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and more than twenty other countries.

March 8th -13th 1981

The Second International Special Olympics Winter Games take place at the Village at Smugglers' Notch and Stowe, Vermont. More than 600 athletes from seven countries participate in skiing and skating events. Former U.S. Ski Team Coach Dave Durrenre heads Special Olympics Winter Sports activities.

June 1981

The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is launched in Wichita, Kansas, USA, after Police Chief Richard LaMunyon saw an urgent need to raise awareness for Special Olympics. The Torch Run is now Special Olympics' largest grassroots fundraiser, raising nearly \$40 million annually.

July 12th -18th 1983

The International Special Olympics Summer Games—the sixth such games—are held at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. More than 4,000 athletes from all fifty states, four U.S. territories, and forty-eight other countries participate, almost double the number of foreign countries represented at the 1979 International Games. Events include: basketball, bowling, diving, floor hockey, frisbee-disc, gymnastics, poly hockey, soccer, softball, swimming, track and field, volleyball, and wheelchair events. The Games' Opening Ceremonies are attended by more than 65,000 spectators. ABC broadcasts a 90-minute television special on the Games that airs in fifteen countries.

March 26th 1984

At a ceremony held at the White House, President Ronald Reagan awards Special Olympics Founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver a Presidential Medal of Freedom to honor her work with Special Olympics and her efforts on behalf of persons with intellectual disabilities.

March 24th -29th 1985

The Third Special Olympics World Winter Games take place in Park City and Salt Lake City, Utah. The Games attract 825 athletes who compete in skiing and skating events.

September 1986

The United Nations in New York City launches the International Year of Special Olympics under the banner "Special Olympics—Uniting the World."

July 1987

More than 30,000 law enforcement officers from all 50 U.S. states and seven different countries run 26,000 miles to raise \$2 million in the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics.



July 31st - Aug 8th 1987

The Seventh International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at the University of Notre Dame and St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana. More than 4,500 athletes participate from all fifty states and U.S. territories and more than sixty countries. Official sports are aquatics, athletics, basketball, bowling, gymnastics, soccer, softball, volleyball, and wheelchair events; demonstration sports are cycling, equestrian, roller-skating, table tennis, tennis, and weight-lifting. The Games also feature exhibitions for canoeing and team handball, and clinics are held in rowing, sailing, and synchronized swimming. ABC's "Wide World of Sports" films the Games for a primetime special.

October 1987

"A Very Special Christmas," a benefit album featuring holiday music by top performers is released worldwide. Produced by Jimmy and Vicki Iovine of A&M Records and Bobby Shriver, all proceeds benefit Special Olympics. More than two million records, compact discs and cassette tapes are sold.

February 1988

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) signs a historic agreement with Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, in which the IOC officially endorses and recognizes Special Olympics. During the Winter Olympic Games in Calgary, Juan Antonio Samaranch, the president of the International Olympic Committee, officially recognizes Special Olympics on behalf of the IOC.

February 1989

Special Olympics officially launches Unified Sports, a new initiative aimed at bringing together people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team.

April 1st - 8th 1989

The Fourth Special Olympics World Winter Games take place in Reno, Nevada, and Lake Tahoe, California. More than 1,000 athletes from twenty-seven countries compete in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, speed skating, figure skating, and floor hockey.

July 19th - 27th 1991

The Eighth Special Olympics International Summer Games take place in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. About 6,000 athletes from 107 countries compete in nineteen sports: aquatics, athletics, badminton, half-marathon, basketball, bowling, cycling, equestrian events, football, artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, powerlifting, artistic roller-skating, speed roller-skating, softball, table tennis, team handball, tennis, and volleyball. Unified Sports are also incorporated into the Games

March 20th - 27th 1993

The fifth Special Olympics World Winter Games (**Games officially re-named 'World' instead of 'international' games in 1991*) are hosted in the Austrian cities of Salzburg and Schladming, the first World Winter Games held outside North America.



July 1st -9th 1995

A number of new initiatives make their debut at the Ninth Special Olympics World Summer Games held in New Haven, Connecticut, including the Host Town Program, Healthy Athletes® and Research and Policy Symposia. For the first time, individuals with intellectual disabilities serve as certified sports officials.

January 1997

Healthy Athletes® becomes an official Special Olympics initiative, providing health care services to Special Olympics athletes worldwide. The program includes free vision, hearing and dental screenings; injury prevention clinics and nutrition education.

February 1st - 8th 1997

The Sixth Special Olympics World Winter Games are held in Toronto and Collingwood in Ontario, Canada. About 1,450 athletes from eighty-two countries compete in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, speed skating, figure skating, snowshoeing and floor hockey events.

July 1998

Special Olympics celebrates its 30th anniversary with the introduction of the Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers, 12 athletes who travel the world as spokespeople.

December 14th 1998

U.S. President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton host a Christmas concert at the White House — titled “A Very Special Christmas from Washington, D.C.” — to celebrate the “Spirit of Special Olympics.”

June 26th-July 4th 1999

The Tenth Special Olympics World Summer Games take place in Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill and Cary, North Carolina. More than 6,500 athletes from 150 countries participate in twenty sports: aquatics, athletics, badminton, basketball, bocce, bowling, cycling, equestrian, football, golf, artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, powerlifting, roller-skating, sailing, softball, table tennis, team handball, tennis, and volleyball. In her address at opening ceremonies, Eunice Kennedy Shriver reminds the athletes how far they have come since Special Olympics began, noting: “Thirty years ago, the world said you are not able to run 100 meters. Today, you run the marathon. Thirty years ago, the world said you must remain hidden away inside institutions. Today, you are being seen on international television throughout the world.

January 16th 2000

ABC-TV’s The Wonderful World of Disney presents The Loretta Claiborne Story, the first prime-time television movie about the life of a Special Olympics athlete

May 2000

The first-ever Global Athlete Congress takes place in The Hague, Netherlands. Special Olympics athletes from every region in the world come together to discuss the future of the Special Olympics movement. Despite differences in language, culture, age and gender they hold discussions, challenge existing ideas and vote on new resolutions.



May 18th-22nd 2000

As part of the “Campaign for Special Olympics,” the Special Olympics China Millennium March is launched; the Movement’s most ambitious growth campaign in history. China pledges to increase its current number of athletes from 50,000 to 500,000 by 2005.

December 14th 2000

U.S. President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton host a Christmas concert at the White House — titled “A Very Special Christmas from Washington, D.C.” — to celebrate the “Spirit of Special Olympics.”

March 4th-11th 2001

More than 1,600 athletes representing 63 countries compete in seven Olympic-type sports at the 2001 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Anchorage, Alaska. The Games are the largest event ever held in the history of Alaska.

March 5th 2001

The U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations conducts a public hearing, chaired by Senator Ted Stevens, on promoting health for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics presents a special report, “The Health Status and Needs of Individuals with Mental Retardation,” identifying actions to improve the quality and length of life of persons with intellectual disabilities. A panel of distinguished speakers in the fields of intellectual disabilities, health care and physical fitness testify

July 12th-14th 2001

The South African cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Sun City host Special Olympics African Hope. President Nelson Mandela returns to Robben Island with Special Olympics athletes to light the “*Flame of Hope*” and kick off the Law Enforcement Torch Run® through the streets of Cape Town. The event generates awareness of Special Olympics throughout the continent and launches a major growth initiative to reach 100,000 new athletes in Africa by 2005.

October 2001

Special Olympics develops and distributes So Get Into It® kits for students with and without disabilities to schools and teachers worldwide at no cost. They teach young people about intellectual disabilities while empowering them to “be the difference.” The lessons highlight values of inclusion, acceptance and respect.

December 13th 2001

U.S. President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush host a holiday dinner at the White House to celebrate the “Spirit of Special Olympics.” Musician B.B. King performs for the more than 100 guests.



July 19th- 20th 2002

The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund partners with Special Olympics to host an annual birthday celebration for its founder and chairperson, President of South Africa Nelson Mandela, and helps Special Olympics launch its Unified Sports® program in South Africa.

April 28th 2003

Stock exchange bells are rung simultaneously around the world to launch "Invest in a Life," a web-based initiative where donations could be made to support the Special Olympics "Campaign for Growth." Global financial leaders and Special Olympics athletes join together at the opening of Stock Exchanges in New York City, USA; Dublin, Ireland; Johannesburg, South Africa; London, England; Mexico City, Mexico; Mumbai, India; Tokyo, Japan; and Warsaw, Poland.

June 21st- 29th 2003

Ireland hosts the first Special Olympics World Summer Games held outside the United States. With 5,500 athletes participating, it is Ireland's largest sporting event of the year, capturing the hearts and imaginations of an entire nation.

June 2004

Special Olympics releases "The Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities," a report on how people across the world view the roles and capabilities of persons with intellectual disabilities in the workplace, classroom and in daily life. The study is the most comprehensive ever conducted on this subject.

October 30th 2004

U.S. President George W. Bush signs the "Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act," which authorizes \$15 million per year over five years to fund the growth of Special Olympics and support initiatives that foster greater respect and understanding for people with intellectual disabilities. The signing of the bill marks the first time that Special Olympics secures support through legislation.

February 26th- March 5th 2005

The 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games are held in Nagano, Japan, the first time the World Games are held in Asia. The Games draw nearly 1,800 athletes from more than 80 countries and thousands of families, volunteers, spectators and journalists from around the world. The seven sports venues include many previously used for the 1998 Winter Olympic Games.

June 6th -8th 2005

The second Global Athlete Conference is held in Panama City at the City of Knowledge. Nearly 80 Special Olympics athletes ages 16 to 50 from more than 35 countries come together and discuss issues from competition management to how the athletes could serve a more prominent leadership role in government relations and fundraising.

December 2005

"The Ringer," a Farrelly Brothers film starring Johnny Knoxville, opens in theaters throughout Canada and the United States. The film includes appearances from more than 150 Special Olympics athletes. Its



producers collaborated with Special Olympics to challenge destructive stereotypes and negative thinking about people with intellectual disabilities.

May 2006

Special Olympics surpasses its goal of doubling the number of athletes worldwide to 2.5 million participants. With sports at the core, Special Olympics stands as a leader in advancing rights and opportunities for its athletes in 165 countries.

June 10th 2006

In celebration of the 85th birthday of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver, President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush host a tribute dinner at the White House to honor Special Olympics.

October 2nd -11th 2007

The city of Shanghai, China, hosts the 12th Special Olympics World Summer Games, which are broadcast internationally on an unprecedented scale. These Games, with more than 7,500 athletes from 164 countries participating, are a major milestone in Special Olympics' history.

July 20th 2008

Special Olympics celebrates its 40th Anniversary. Since July 20, 1968 the Special Olympics movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to 2.8 million athletes in over 180 countries in all regions of the world with nearly 30,000 competitions year round. The U.S. Congress passes House Resolution 1279 officially recognizing Special Olympics 40th Anniversary as celebrations take place in Washington D.C., on Chicago's Soldier Field – site of the first International Special Olympics Games, and around the world.

February 7th -13th 2009

Special Olympics World Winter Games are hosted in Boise, Idaho; stemming from grassroots youth activation at those games the 'Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign' is founded by college students Soeren Palumbo (Notre Dame 2011) and Timbo Shriver (Yale 2011) and continues to be led by passionate young people to raise the consciousness of society about the hurtful effects of the R-word.

May 2009

The U.S. National Portrait Gallery unveils a portrait of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the founder of Special Olympics. It is the first portrait the Gallery has ever commissioned of an individual who has not served as a U.S. President or First Lady.

August 11th 2009

Special Olympics mourns the loss of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver who died surrounded by her family in Massachusetts. Letters and messages celebrating her contribution to humanity pour in from world leaders and everyday people around the world.

June 2010

The Special Olympics Global Congress is held in Marrakech, Morocco, bringing together hundreds of Movement leaders from countries around the world to chart the next five years of work.



September 2010

The first global “Eunice Kennedy Shriver Day” is held in more than 100 countries to celebrate the vision and legacy of the founder of Special Olympics. The event also aims to increase the momentum of the Special Olympics movement.

January 18th 2011

Special Olympics mourns the death of Sargent Shriver, husband of late founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Chairman of the Board Emeritus. Shriver served as president of the Movement from 1984 through 1996 and served as Chairman of the Board of Directors from 1990 to 2003.

June 25th July 4th 2011

The 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games are held in Athens, Greece. 7,000 athletes from around the world gather to compete in the birthplace of the Olympics—demonstrating to the world just how far Special Olympics has come.

September 14th 2011

At a press event at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, it is announced that the 2015 Special Olympics World Games will be held in Los Angeles, marking the first time the Summer Games will be held in the United States in 16 years.

February 2012

The National Basketball Association and Special Olympics, with the support of The Coca-Cola Company, hold the first annual NBA Cares Unified Sports Basketball game. The event takes place as part of the 2012 NBA All-Star weekend in Houston, Texas, USA.

May 2012

Special Olympics’ global reach hits a new milestone, with more than 4 million athletes participating in Programs around the world.

December 2012

“A Very Special Christmas,” holiday benefit album series marks its 25th anniversary, celebrating more than \$100 million generated to benefit Special Olympics worldwide.

January 2013

The first Special Olympics Global Development Summit, an event bringing together government officials, human rights activists, as well as leaders from the sports and business worlds to explore ways to “End the Cycle of Poverty and Exclusion for People with Intellectual Disabilities” is held as part of the Special Olympics World Winter Games 2013 in Pyeong Chang, Republic of Korea. More than 2,000 athletes from 100 countries take part in the Games



February 1st 2013

The 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games are held in PyeongChang, Korea. The Games featured more than 2,300 athletes from more than 110 countries.

March 2013

The Special Olympics program in Bharat (India) welcomes its one-millionth registered athlete.

May 2013

The annual census shows Special Olympics reaching new milestones in growth: more than 4.2 million athletes and 70,000 competitions around the world.

July 30th 2013

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announces that President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama have committed to serve as Honorary Chairs of the Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015 (LA2015). Mayor Garcetti and California Governor Jerry Brown will serve as Honorary Hosts.

July 31st 2013

The 2015 World Games logo, designed by Los Angeles-based ad agency Davis Elen, is unveiled. Featuring a celebratory figure inside a circle of acceptance and inclusion; and comprised of colors of flags from around the world, the logo is universally praised for its design and message.

September 6th 2013

The Walt Disney Company, ESPN and Special Olympics announce a two-year global initiative that will leverage the power of sports to promote an environment of social inclusion and acceptance. This effort will unite people with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) through Special Olympics Unified Sports. With a multi-million dollar financial and in-kind investment, Disney and ESPN will support Special Olympics' goal of registering one million Unified Sports participants, including athletes (individuals with ID), partners (individuals without ID) and coaches, by 2015.

February 9th-11th 2014

Her Excellency President Joyce Banda of the Republic of Malawi hosts the first-ever African Leaders Forum on Disability in partnership with Special Olympics. The effort spearheads collaboration among the region's Heads of State to develop a more inclusive Africa.

April 2nd 2014

Long Beach, home of Special Olympics Southern California (SOSC) headquarters since 2007 and site of SOSC Summer Games, is announced as the first 2015 Special Olympics World Games Host Town at a ceremony on the deck of the Queen Mary. In the months ahead, more than 100 Southern California communities from San Luis Obispo to San Diego eventually join the program.



April 30th 2014

The LA2015 Games Organizing Committee and ESPN announce a global programming deal that will see ESPN bring coverage of the Special Olympics World Games to millions of fans around the world. ESPN's coverage will include a three-hour live telecast of the Opening Ceremony and nightly studio programs from Los Angeles.

July 31st 2014

U.S. President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama host "Celebration for Special Olympics and a Unified Generation" at the White House. Some of the world's leading social activists, business leaders, sports legends and entertainers attended the event, which saluted the work of Special Olympics in engaging young people to fight inactivity, intolerance and injustice in their schools and communities.

March 25th 2015

Residents and leaders from more than 100 Host Town communities begin learning which delegations they will be hosting in the days prior to start of the World Games.

April 16th 2015

To mark the "100 Days Away" countdown to the Opening Ceremony, LA2015 unveils the World Games medals and distinction ribbons at a ceremony at the LA84 Foundation.

May 14th 2015

The Special Olympics Flame of Hope for the 2015 World Games is lit during a formal Torch Lighting Ceremony at the Sacred Site of Pnyx, opposite the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

May 26th 2015

The Unified Relay Across America Presented by Bank of America begins with three simultaneous routes starting in Augusta, Maine; Miami, Florida; and Washington, D.C. Traveling west, all three routes become unified in Los Angeles on July 10.

July 13th 2015

The Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg begins in Sacramento, with three routes that will merge in Los Angeles for the start of the World Games on July 25. Covering a total distance of 4,648 miles, a team of 126 members – which include 88 law enforcement officer runners, 10 Special Olympics athletes, and logistics personnel – run the Flame of Hope through 120 cities across California.

July 21st 2015

Special Olympics athletes and coaches from around the world arrive in Los Angeles. After departing LAX, the delegates are welcomed at Loyola Marymount before heading to more than 100 Host Town communities from San Luis Obispo to San Diego.

July 24th 2015

Special Olympics athletes and coaches arrive at the Athlete Villages at USC and UCLA, where they will stay for the duration of the World Games.



July 25th 2015

The Golisano Foundation announces a \$25 million gift to expand the reach and impact of the Special Olympics global health program -- the largest single donation ever received by Special Olympics. This is in addition to Tom Golisano's previous gift of \$12 million, announced in 2012.

July 25th – August 2nd 2015

The 2015 Special Olympics World Summer Games are held in Los Angeles, Calif., USA. More than 6,200 athletes and Unified partners from 165 countries take part in competition in 25 sports. These World Games are the largest gathering of nations for any event in the history of Los Angeles.

May 12th 2016

Mary Davis of Dublin, Ireland is named Chief Executive Officer. A longtime Special Olympics volunteer, leader and Regional President, Davis is the first CEO from outside the U.S. in Special Olympics' nearly 50-year history.

June 8th 2016

Special Olympics exceeds its ambitious goal of getting 1 million athletes and partners involved in Unified Sports®, bringing together people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. There are now more than 1.2 million Unified teammates – thanks to the support of ESPN, the Global Presenting Sponsor of Unified Sports, the Samuel Family Foundation and Lions Club International.

July 2016

New census numbers show that Special Olympics' reach has expanded to more than 5.3 million athletes and Unified partners – a new global record. Athletes in 169 countries took part in more than 108,000 games and competitions.

March 14th – 25th 2017

The 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games are held in Graz, Schladming and Ramsau, Austria. More than 2,700 athletes and Unified partners from 107 countries take part in competition in 9 sports.

July 2017

New census numbers show that Special Olympics' reach has expanded to more than 5.7 million athletes and Unified partners – a new global record. Athletes in 172 countries took part in more than 108,000 games and competitions.