



NEWS RELEASE

AIA ACADEMY TEAMS UP WITH SPECIAL OLYMPICS FOR NEW PROGRAM

PHOENIX, AZ (October 4, 2010) – The Arizona Interscholastic Association Academy and Special Olympics are teaming up for a new pilot program that will allow special-needs students to join with high school students in athletic competition.

“Project Unify” was organized by Scott Brown, Coach Education Specialist and Lead Trainer for the AIA Academy and Athletic Director of the Paradise Valley Unified School District. Also providing key input was Tracy Roberts, Unified Sports and Young Athletes Program Manager for the Special Olympics.

The initial focus will be on basketball. Two special-needs students will team with three students from their high school and play a competitive game against a Special Olympics team. The format will be co-ed, according to Roberts.

The pilot program will involve six schools from the metropolitan Phoenix area, but Brown said the long-range goal will be to involve as many of the AIA’s 275 member schools as possible throughout Arizona.

The initial six schools are in the process of being chosen, Brown said. He added that a large cross-section of metro Phoenix schools have shown interest. The program is expected to begin in the spring of 2011, when access to gymnasiums is more readily available.

“We think it’s a win-win situation for Arizona’s students and the Special Olympics,” Brown said. “It will be beneficial for the special-needs students and the more traditional students. It will involve more than just playing basketball together. We are looking for students who will do other things with the special-needs kids, like take them to lunch.”

Said Roberts: “It’s about helping with the social development of the special-needs students. And they want to hear their accomplishments announced over the loudspeaker at school. It’s about these students developing positive relationships with each other. We think it will work out well.”

To help get the program off the ground, Brown enlisted the help of Nick Sundberg, a former football star at Phoenix North Canyon High who played when Brown was athletic director there.

Sundberg went on to become a long snapper at the University of California and now is the long snapper for the NFL’s Washington Redskins. Brown said Sundberg and his mother, Stacie, each contributed \$10,000 to the project.

“Those are big contributions and we are extremely appreciative,” Brown said.

When Sundberg learned what Brown was doing, he was eager to jump on board.

“He has never led me down the wrong path, so when he told me about this, I knew it would be a good thing,” Sundberg said. “When I was younger, my mother would always tell me that I should give as much as I could to help people, even if I didn’t have much. When I heard that the Special Olympics would be involved, I couldn’t have agreed more.”

He said he hopes his schedule will allow time for him to return to the Valley and help first-hand with some of the competition. He also would like to hold some additional fund-raising events and involve other professional athletes from around the state.

Stacie Sundberg said charity “truly does begin at home.”

“Special-needs students want to be accepted just like any of us,” she said. “We wanted to help get this program going. It appears to be a perfect fit in the community, both now and for years to come.”

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