

Unified Soccer 2026-27 Season Fact Sheet



UNIFIED Soccer

Unified Soccer is AIA-sanctioned sport supported by and in conjunction with Special Olympics Arizona (SOAZ), which has been established to foster **inclusion, camaraderie, and the development of meaningful relationships** between students with intellectual disabilities (Unified Athletes) and students without intellectual disabilities (Unified Partners) as high school athletes, teammates, and training partners.

2026-27 REGULAR SEASON

- SOAZ's "8-practice" rule is in effect for participation in AIA Unified Sports. Practices must be at least one hour to qualify as a sanctioned practice, and all eight hours of practice must be completed prior to the team's first competition.
- Unified Soccer teams are encouraged to schedule as many regular season interscholastic contests (matches) as they'd like under AIA rules. Please note there is a minimum number of regular season contests required to qualify for the state championship.

2027 UNIFIED SOCCER STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

- In order to qualify for the 2026 State Championship tournament -
 - Unified teams must participate in a **minimum** of two interscholastic contests (matches) against other high school Unified Soccer teams during the regular season.
 - Teams must attend a qualifying Unified Soccer Sectionals tournament in the valley.
 - **Friday, February 5th (West Valley)**
 - The **top two Unified Soccer teams from each division** at the conclusion of all Unified Sectionals tournaments will advance to the State Championship.
- This tournament will take place in conjunction with the **2027 AIA State Soccer Championships**.

GOVERNANCE AND RULES

For more information on specific rules and regulations, check the ***Unified Soccer Rules*** located on the AIA's website at <http://aiaonline.org/sports/unified>.

OVERVIEW

- ♦ Students with intellectual disabilities (Unified Athletes) and students without intellectual disabilities (Unified Partners) compete together on **co-ed Soccer** teams.
- ♦ Each soccer team consists of one Unified Athletes and one Unified Partners.

DIVISIONS

To ensure player safety, the following divisions have been established to accommodate teams of varying skill and ability level –

- ♦ **GOLD DIVISION**
 - ◊ Adequate understanding of the rules
 - ◊ *Advanced Playing Skills*
- ♦ **SILVER DIVISION**
 - ◊ Basic understanding of the rules
 - ◊ *Novice Playing Skills*

For more information, contact:

Thomas Miranda
Unified Sports Manager
Thomas@SpecialOlympicsArizona.org
623.388.1323

AIA UNIFIED SPORTS

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY AND CLEARANCE



UNIFIED SPORTS TEAM ROLES

- Unified Athlete – an enrolled student with an intellectual/developmental disability
- Unified Partner – an enrolled student without an intellectual/developmental disability

UNIFIED ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY

- Any enrolled student *with an intellectual disability* who meets both the Unified Athlete eligibility statement below and all requirements of the AIA and school district's athletic clearance policy is eligible to participate as a Unified Athlete in AIA Unified Sports.
- An individual is considered to have intellectual disabilities for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Unified Sports® if that individual:
 - Has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities; or
 - Has been identified by the school as receiving special education and related services consistent with an individual education program based on a cognitive, developmental and/or intellectual disability.

UNIFIED PARTNER ELIGIBILITY

- Any enrolled student who meets all requirements of the AIA and school district's athletic clearance policy is eligible to participate as a Unified Partner in AIA Unified Sports.
- Any student competing in an individual sport (i.e. Swim, Track & Field) **IS** eligible to participate as a Unified Partner in the same sport, **EXCEPT** during the following circumstances –
 - Any competition at which the student is attempting to qualify for advancement to a state-level competition in any non-Unified event.
 - Any state-level competition at which the student is competing in any non-Unified events.
- Any student competing in a team sport (i.e. Flag Football and Basketball) at the **varsity level** is **NOT** eligible to compete as a Unified Partner in the **same sport**.
 - Example – A varsity soccer player is **NOT** eligible to compete on the Unified Soccer team
 - Example – A varsity soccer player **IS** eligible to compete on a Unified Basketball team.

AIA STUDENT ATHLETIC CLEARANCE POLICY

- All participants in interscholastic activities must be in compliance with all student eligibility rules. The student eligibility rules are enumerated and presented in detail in Article 15 of the AIA Bylaws.
- **Physical Examination Rule (Article 15.7)** states a student shall not be allowed to practice or compete in interscholastic athletics until there is a record of a preparticipation physical examination on file with the school. The preparticipation physical examination forms provided by the AIA include three parts:
 1. Annual Preparticipation Physical EVALUATION – To be completed and signed by the parent or legal guardian and the student athlete. This form must also be signed by the examining medical provider. (Form 15.7-A)
 2. Annual Preparticipation Physical EXAMINATION – To be completed and signed by the examining medical provider. (Form 15.7-B)
 3. Annual Preparticipation ACKNOWLEDGEMENT – To be completed and signed by parent or guardian and student athlete. (Form 15.7-C).
 4. Annual Preparticipation Consent to Treat Form – To be completed and signed by parent or guardian and student athlete. (Form 15.7-D).
 5. Unified Sports Participant Release – To be completed and signed by parent or guardian. (Form 15.7-E).
- **Parental or Legal Guardian Consent Rule (Article 15.8)** states that parental or legal guardian consent is required before a student can be eligible to practice or compete in interscholastic competition. All students shall have appropriate permission in which the parent or legal guardian authorized participation on file with the school.

SCHOOL/DISTRICT ATHLETIC CLEARANCE POLICY

- Unified Athletes and Unified Partners are to be treated and recognized as AIA high school athletes, and will be expected to adhere to any and all district/school policies and procedures regarding student athletic participation and clearance.

