Special Olympics Ohio

Bowling Rules Manual (rev. 10/2026)

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Bowling shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon International Bowling Federation (IBF) rules found at http://www.bowling.sport/. IBF or National Governing Body (NGB) rules shall be employed except when they conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Bowling or Article I. In such cases, the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Bowling shall apply. The rules found in this manual are Ohio specific and will be used at all competitions in Ohio, even if when they may conflict with the IBF or NGB rules.

All Special Olympics Ohio regional and state level competitions will enforce the participation regulations for athletes and Unified partners, of which is derived from Article 1 of the Special Olympics Sport Rules. This rule shall be that each team and/or individual athlete or Unified partner, must play all eligible and rostered team members in every game unless a player is injured or has been removed due to disciplinary reasons. Coaches must notify the competition management prior to each game if players on the approved tournament roster will not be playing due to injury or disciplinary reasons, and this needs to be approved by the tournament director. Failure to play all eligible team members in each game will result in forfeit and disqualification.

UPDATE (as of October 2026)

- The qualifying score for competition has been reduced from a 15-game average to a 10-game average.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

Special Olympics Ohio official events are intended to offer competition opportunities for athletes of all abilities. The following are the official events currently offered by Special Olympics Ohio for bowling.

- Singles (ramp accommodations are divisioned alongside other non-ramp bowlers)

EQUIPMENT

BOWLING BALLS

- Must be approved and identifiable as a ball listed in the "Approved Bowling Balls" list. To view the approved ball list, please visit http://bowl.com
- If the serial number can no longer be identified, it must be replaced by engraving another serial number, provided the ball's original product name and manufacturer's name are still visible for the ball to be used in competition.
- House balls may be used if on the approved bowling ball list.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT TO GRIP THE BALL

- A player may use special equipment to aid in grasping and delivering the ball if it is in place of a hand, or major portion thereof, lost by amputation or otherwise.
- A player may, if granted permission by Special Olympics and each league or tournament in which the player participates, use one or either hand and/ or use special equipment to aid in grasping and delivering the ball.
- The aid cannot incorporate a mechanical device with moving parts that would impart force or impetus to the ball unless permission is granted by Special Olympics and tournament officials.

BOWLING SHOES

- Must be worn during bowling for the safety of the athletes.
- Bowling shoes are made with special soles so the bowler can slide right before the release of the ball.
- The bottom of the bowling shoes needs to stay clean and dry, so the bowler does not stick on the approach.
- Bowling shoes provided by the bowling center may also be worn.

BOWLING BALL RAMPS

- Are used when an athlete does not have the physical ability to roll a ball with their hand or hands.
- Ramps are a two-piece metal unit, one stand and one sloped piece. The stand is a minimum height of 24 inches and maximum height of 30 inches. The stand width is 24 to 25 inches across. The sloped piece from connecting point to stand to first bend is 16 inches and from first bend to bottom of sloped piece is 54 inches.
- Bowling ramps and other assistance devices may be used with the approval of the Competition Committee.
- Athletes using ramps will be placed in divisions with other non-ramp bowlers based on their qualifying scores for the competition.
- All other tournament rules apply to athletes who use a ramp.
- All Special Olympics Ohio athletes must provide their own ramps for regional and state competition.

ATHLETE UNIFORM

- Attire should consist of neat and clean outfits.
- The tops are to be sleeved (short or long-sleeved) and collared or non-collared.
- The rest of the attire may consist of long pants or dress or walking shorts. Women may also wear knee-length skirts or skorts.
- No athletic-type shorts are to be worn for competition.
- All competitors must wear bowling shoes.
- Socks are required.

RULES OF COMPETITION

Special Olympics Ohio follows a scratch tournament style for all State and Regional Competition. The athletes final score will be the total pin fall after the required number of games has been completed, which

in most cases will be two games.

QUALIFYING SCORES FOR REGIONAL AND STATE TOURNAMENT

- Athletes are assigned divisions based on their most recent 10-game average score received with registration for regional competition.
- For state competition, athletes will be divisioned based on their total pin count score from the regional tournament games.

THE GAME

- A game of tenpin consists of ten frames. A player delivers two balls in each of the first nine frames unless a strike is scored. In the tenth frame, a player delivers three balls if a strike or a spare is scored. Every frame must be completed by each player bowling in regular order.
- A game may be played on two lanes (a pair) immediately adjoining each other. Single entrants shall successively and in regular order bowl one frame on one lane, and for the next frame alternate and use the other lane until five frames are bowled on each lane of the pair. This is also referred to as tournament style bowling.

FOULS

- A foul occurs when a part of the player's person encroaches on or goes beyond the foul line and touches any part of the lane, equipment or building during or after a delivery.
- When a player deliberately fouls to benefit by the calling of a foul, the player shall be credited with zero pin fall for that delivery and not allowed further deliveries in that frame.
- When a foul is recorded the delivery counts but the player is not credited with any pins knocked down by that delivery. Pins knocked down by the ball when the foul occurred must be re-spotted if the player who fouled is entitled to additional deliveries in the frame.
- A foul shall be declared and recorded if the automatic foul detecting device or foul judge fails to call a foul that is apparent to:
    - Both captains or one or more of the opposing players.
    - The official score keepers
    - A tournament official
- A foul judge may be appointed by the tournament director when needed.

DEAD BALL

- A ball shall be declared dead if any of the following occur:
    - After a delivery (and before the next delivery on the same lane), attention is immediately called to the fact that one or more pins were missing from setup of the pins.
    - A player bowls on the wrong lane or out of turn. Or one player from each team on the pair of lanes bowls on the wrong lane.
    - Any pin is moved or knocked down as a player delivers the ball but before the ball reaches the pins.

- A delivered ball comes in contact with a foreign obstacle.

BOWLING ON THE WRONG LANE

- A dead ball shall be called and the players or players required shall re-bowl on the correct lane when one player bowls on the wrong lane.
- A dead ball shall be called and the player or players required shall re-bowl on the correct lane when one player from each team on the pair of lanes bowls on the wrong lane.
- If more than one player on the same team bowls on the wrong lane in turn, that game will be completed without adjustment. Any succeeding game must be started on the correct scheduled lane.

ILLEGAL PINFALL

- When any of the following occurs the delivery counts but the resulting pin fall does not:
  - A ball leaves the lane before reaching the pins.
  - A ball rebounds from the rear cushion.
  - A pin rebounds after coming in contact with the body, arms or legs of a human pinsetter.
  - A pin is touched by mechanical pin setting equipment.
  - Any pin knocked down when dead wood is being removed.
  - Any pin knocked down by a human pinsetter
  - The player commits a foul
  - A delivery is made with dead wood on the lane or in the gutter and the ball contacts such dead wood before leaving the lane surface

SCORING PROCEDURES AND TERMINOLOGY

SCOREKEEPING

- All games bowled in a tournament shall be recorded, either manually or by means of an approved automatic scoring device. The score sheets shall indicate the pin fall on each ball so that if necessary a frame-by- frame audit can be made.
- Except when a strike is scored, the number of pins knocked down by the player's first delivery is to be marked in the small square in the upper left-hand corner of that frame, and the number of pins knocked down by the player's second delivery is to be marked in the upper right-hand corner. If none of the standing pins are knocked down by the second delivery in the frame, the score sheet shall be marked with a (-). The count for the two deliveries in the frame shall be recorded immediately.

STRIKE

- A strike is made when a full up of ten pins is knocked down with the first delivery in a frame.
- It is marked by an (X) in the small square in the upper left-hand corner of the frame where the strike was made.
- The count for one strike is ten plus the number of pins knocked down on the player's next two deliveries.

DOUBLE

- Two consecutive strikes is a double.
- The count for the first strike is 20 plus the number of pins knocked down with the first delivery following the second strike.

TRIPLE OR TURKEY

- Three successive strikes is a triple/turkey. The count for the first strike is 30.
- To bowl the maximum score of 300, the player must bowl 12 strikes in succession.

SPARE

- A spare is scored when pins left standing after the first delivery are knocked down with the second delivery in that frame.
- It is marked by a (/) in the small square in the upper right- hand corner of that frame.
- The count for a spare is 10 plus the number of pins knocked down by the player's next delivery.

OPEN

- An open frame is when a player fails to bowl down all 10 pins after two deliveries in a frame, unless the pins left standing after the first delivery constitute a split.

SPLIT

- A split is normally marked with a "0" around the number of pins is a setup of pins left, standing after the first delivery, provided the head pin is down and:
    - At least one pin is down between two or more standing pins: i.e. 7-9 or 3- 10.
    - At least one pin is down immediately ahead of two or more standing pins: 5-6.

ERRORS IN SCORING

- Scoring or calculation errors must be corrected by a responsible tournament official immediately upon discovery of such error.
- Questionable errors shall be decided upon by the designated official.

PROTESTS

- The time limit for filing protests on scoring errors shall be 30 minutes from the end of the event or block of games for each day of the tournament, but must be before the award presentation or the commencement of the next round (or event) whichever is sooner.
- Each protest under this rule must be specific in itself and this rule shall not be construed to cover a previous or similar violation.

COACHING

- Coaching will be allowed as long as the coach remains in the designated coaches' area.
- Only one coach is allowed per 2 athletes.
- Athletes may go to their coach, but athletes cannot leave the bowlers' area, and no delay of game may occur.

WITHDRAWALS

- Bowlers who complete at least three frames and cannot continue will receive one-tenth of their average per remaining frames toward their event score.