Special Olympics Ohio

Cornhole Rules Manual (rev. 10/2026)

All Special Olympics Ohio Cornhole games are run according to the American Cornhole Association (ACA) Rules. Any modifications and specific Special Olympics rules shall be found in this manual.

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.

NEW UPDATES SINCE LAST REVISION:

- A new SOOH specific cornhole assessment scorecard has been added at the back of this rule's manual. This is what programs should use to submit qualifying scores for regional competitions.
- SOOH has added a new cornhole event, Modified Unified, where the athlete and unified partner throw from the same pitcher's box, throwing to boards at different lengths, 12ft for athletes, 27ft for unified partners. ***This event is intended for athletes whose needs and abilities are not adequately served in Traditional Doubles or Unified Doubles Cornhole competition***
- New regulations for participation at regional and state level competitions have been added in the event of an absence of a participant on the team. Those regulations are as follows as well as found in the manual under the forfeiture section.
    - If a registered pair for a REGIONAL event does not show up to the regional tournament prior to their first game, they are a scratch and do not qualify to advance to the state tournament.
    - If a registered pair for a REGIONAL event has one athlete that does not show up for the regional tournament prior to their first game, the athlete who did show up will be permitted to compete in their scheduled division, without a modification to the rules (ie. throw all 4 bags per side, per inning), however regardless of the outcome of the matches, they will receive a participation ribbon for the event and WILL NOT qualify to advance to the state tournament.
        - The exception to this is if an athlete does not show up, but a Unified Partner does, the Unified Partner will not be permitted to compete alone and the team will be a scratch.

- If a registered pair for a REGIONAL event does not show up or has only one participant show up to the regional tournament and in turn would not qualify to attend the state tournament at that event, the local coordinator may reach out to register them for another Special Olympics Ohio qualifying regional tournament, if available, in order to attempt to have the pair qualify to attend the state tournament.
- If a registered pair for a STATE event does not have both athletes or the athlete and the Unified Partner, in the case of Unified divisions, show up prior to the first match of the event, it will be a scratch for all participants, without an option for any play by a single participant.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

Special Olympics Ohio provides a range of events to offer athletes of varying abilities the opportunity to compete. The following is a list of official events currently offered by Special Olympics Ohio.

Traditional Doubles (21 feet and 27 feet)

Unified Doubles (27 feet)

Modified Unified Doubles (Athletes at 12ft & Unified Partners at 27ft) ***This event is intended for athletes whose needs and abilities are not adequately served in traditional doubles or Unified Doubles Cornhole competition***

DIVISIONING

Prior to competition, a qualifying score will be submitted for divisioning. Each participant will toss 4 bags from each of the four pitching box areas, for a total of 16 tosses. Each toss will be scored by the following:

- In the hole = 3 Points
- On the board = 1 Point
- Hits the board, but falls off = 0.5 Points
- Misses the board completely = 0 Points

The qualifying score that will be submitted for this assessment will be the sum of all 16 tosses. Please only complete an assessment score for the length of the court for your chosen division. In the event an athlete does not score a minimum of 4 points using the criteria above at the 27ft distance, they should reassess at the 21ft distance and plan to enter that division. If they are unable to score a minimum of 4 points at the 21ft distance, you may choose to try to find them a Unified Partner and compete in Modified Unified division. For doubles, each participant's scores will be added together for the team score for divisioning. A copy of this assessment can be found at the back of this rules manual. When at all possible, divisions are formed based first on gender, then age, and finally the qualifying score. However, in some cases, genders may need to be combined into one division to ensure a quality competition. Mixed gender doubles teams will be divisioned as male teams.

THE COURT/SETUP

Court Dimensions

A cornhole court shall be a level rectangular area 10-12 feet wide and a minimum of 40-45 feet long. The court consists of two cornhole boards, designated pitcher's boxes, and foul lines. A minimum vertical clearance of 12 feet is recommended for indoor or sheltered cornhole courts.

Pitcher's Box

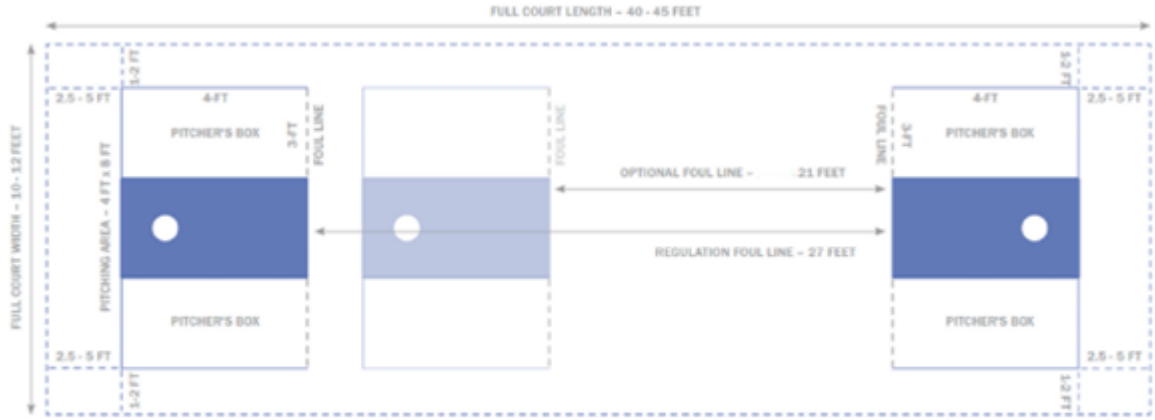
The pitcher's box is a rectangle 4 feet by 3 feet at each end of the court, parallel with and on both sides of the boards. Each player must remain in the pitcher's box while pitching a cornhole bag.

Foul Lines

The foul lines are lines parallel to the front of each cornhole board. The foul line distance for official gameplay is 27 feet. However, local programs may choose to offer a 21 ft. throwing distance, according to an athlete's skill assessment. In the case of the Modified Unified Division, athletes will throw from a 12-foot foul line distance.

Multiple Courts

To eliminate distraction and safely separate activity, cornhole courts adjacent to each other shall be a minimum of 10 feet apart. A greater distance of at least 12 feet is preferable.



A standard court layout with extra spacing dimensions

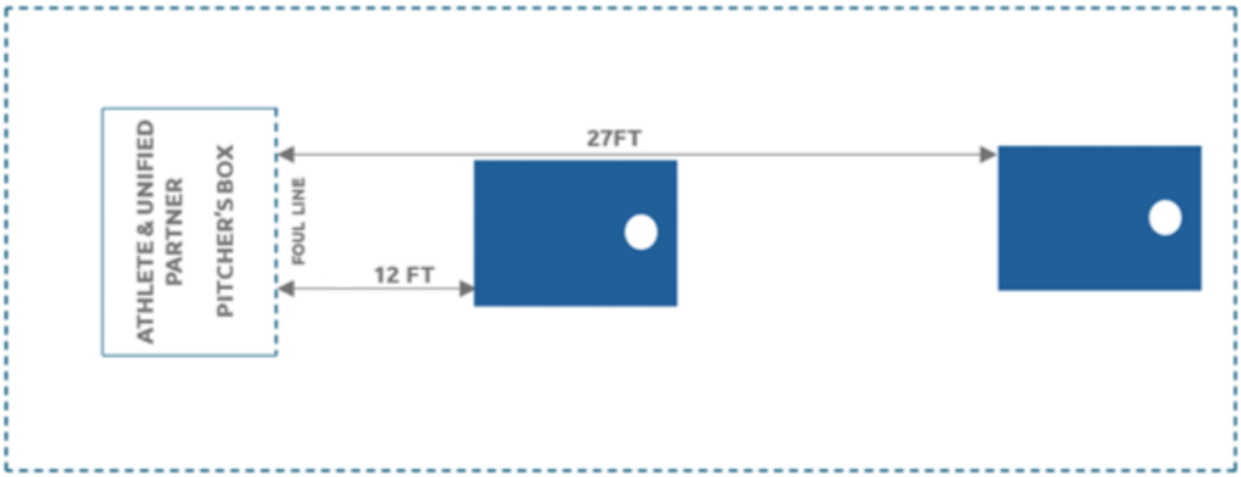
Modified Unified Doubles

Court Layout

- Pitcher's Box

- The pitcher's box is the rectangle 4-feet x 8-feet at one end of the court, directly across from the athlete competition board (12 feet away) and the Unified partner competition board (27 feet away). Players may enter and leave the pitcher's box to allow space for pitching athletes/partners. The athlete/partner must pitch from inside the pitcher's box.

- Foul Lines
  - The foul line is the front line of the pitcher's box. The foul line distance for modified gameplay is 12 feet and 27 feet from the cornhole boards for athletes and Unified partners.



EQUIPMENT STANDARDS

For Special Olympics Ohio cornhole competitions, it is strongly encouraged that programs follow the American Cornhole Association (ACA) guidance related to bags and boards:

- Cornhole Boards: Standard cornhole boards are 2-ft. x 4-ft. The hole is positioned 9 in. from the top of the board, with a 6-in diameter. The boards should be made of wood.
- Cornhole Bags: Each team has four cornhole bags of contrasting colors. Cornhole bags should be 6-in x 6-in. and weigh approximately 1 pound.

The Synergy Bags will be the official bag used during competitions above the local level (i.e. Regional and State Games), unless stated otherwise. To assist with consistency, programs are encouraged to utilize Synergy Cornhole bags. It is the games committee's discretion to determine if the opposing sides of the bags are "smooth" or "sticky". The "stickiness" of the bag will change over time, meaning newer bags will be "stickier" than bags that have been used.

Although bags made from duck cloth canvas filled with plastic pellet resin will most likely not be used during competitions above the Program level, these bags are still acceptable at the local level.

Cornhole boards should have sufficient weight to prevent bounce from thrown bags with a smooth top/throwing surface. Boards can be made from different forms of wood and should have a minimum of ½-inch playing surface.

For competition events overseen by ACA, in which Special Olympics participants are competing, as well as SONA National/Regional events (which will follow Special Olympics and ACA rules), specific guidance will be provided regarding the parameters for both cornhole bags and boards.

PREGAME/COIN TOSS:

Prior to beginning the game, a coin toss determines playing lanes and sequence of play. An official assigns heads and tails to each team. In lieu of a coin flip, an official may use a bag flip to help determine playing lanes and sequence of play.

The team that wins the coin toss chooses either their throwing lane or the throwing order in the first inning of play. The team that did not win the coin flip chooses the remaining option.

GENERAL RULES

Two teams, consisting of two players, compete against one another until a winning team is determined. Players line up directly across from their teammate in the same lane. All players must use an underhand pitch, with the exception being in the Modified Unified division as indicated below.

In Unified Divisions, partners and athletes should be aligned at opposite boards. In this setup, partners toss against partners, and athletes toss against athletes.

For the Modified Unified division, athletes pitch the distance of the 12-foot board and Unified partners pitch the distance of the 27-foot board. Athletes may pitch underhand, overhand, or side hand in Modified Unified. Unified partners must pitch underhand.

Each team stays in their designated lane for the duration of the game. Players at the headboard alternate pitching bags until each player has pitched all four of their bags. An inning is complete when both players (i.e. both athletes or Unified partners), pitching from one board, pitch all eight bags (four each).

Officials take the score, and players at the footboard resume pitching back to the other board. All players who are not pitching bags (i.e. those on the receiving board side) should be behind the cornhole board, outside of the pitcher's box, to prevent interference of play. Competitors on the throwing board side, are able to stand in their own throwing box while waiting for their turn to throw each bag.

SCORING

Cancellation Scoring

In cancellation scoring, the points of one player cancel out the points of their opponent. Cancellation scoring will only take place at the end of each inning. Using this method, only one team can score in each inning.

Bag In-The-Count (Woody): Any bag which comes to rest anywhere on top of the board. Each is worth one (1) point.

Bag In-The-Hole (Cornhole): Any bag which is thrown through the hole or knocked through the hole by another bag. Each is worth three (3) points.

Foul Bags: Refers to any bag that was designated a foul bag as the result of a rules violation. Each is worth zero (0) points.

Dead Bags: Refers to any bag that contacted the court or the ground before coming to rest on the board or any bag that struck a previously defined object such as a tree limb, wire, indoor court ceiling, etc. Each is worth zero (0) points.

Winning the Game

The first team to score (or exceed) 21 points or to be leading when the time limit is reached will be declared the winner.

PITCHING

The team who scored in the preceding inning has the honor of pitching first in the next inning. If neither team scores, the team who pitched first in the preceding inning shall retain first pitch in the next inning.

A player must pitch all four bags from their designated pitcher's box. Players must pitch the bag with an underhand release. A player may not step over or contact the foul line during their pitching, release, or follow through. A player must wait until the previous bag has come to a complete stop for at least 2 seconds before pitching the next bag.

Players may not jump, blow, kick, or otherwise do anything that may affect the cornhole board or the position of bags during an inning. Touching, adjusting, or aligning a cornhole board during an inning is prohibited.

Court officials may align the cornhole board between innings at the request of a player. During any inning, a player can seek a ruling or clarification from an official to determine the status of a bag.

OVERTIME

Each game may be given a time limit according to the competition management team's discretion. (See "Game Clock" section below).

If neither team has reached 21 points before time expires, the game is over, and the team that is leading at that point wins the game.

In the event the score is tied after time expires, one more inning is played, following the natural flow of the game.

If no team scores after one tiebreaker inning, a Sudden Death bag is played.

- In this inning, following the natural flow of the game, the last-frame winner tosses a single bag.
- The opponent then tosses one bag, attempting to match or beat the first player's throw.
- Whichever player scored more points from the Sudden Death Bag, and their team, is considered the winner of the game.
- Additional Sudden Death Bags may be played until a winner is declared. For example, if there is no declared winning team after the first Sudden Death Bag is thrown, those players will continue to throw bag vs. bag until a winner is determined or all 8 bags have been thrown (4 each). If no winner has been determined the 2nd players of each team will throw bag vs. bag from their end until all 8 bags (4 bags each) are thrown or until a winner is determined. For all sudden death bags, the competition rests at bag vs bag. Example, 1st bag (Team A) vs. 1st bag (Team B). If no winner from 1st bags, game continues to 2nd bag vs 2nd bags.
- All Sudden Death Bags should follow the natural flow of the game.

ROSTERS

Forfeiture

Teams with less than the prescribed number of players before the game begins must forfeit the game. The score of a forfeited game shall be 21-0 in favor of the team not at fault. The following regulations will be in place for all regional and state tournaments.

- If a registered pair for a REGIONAL event does not show up to the regional tournament prior to their first game, they are a scratch and do not qualify to advance to the state tournament.
- If a registered pair for a REGIONAL event has one athlete that does not show up for the regional tournament prior to their first game, the athlete who did show up will be permitted to compete in their scheduled division, without a modification to the rules (ie. throw all 4 bags per side, per inning), however regardless of the outcome of the matches, they will receive a participation ribbon for the event and WILL NOT qualify to advance to the state tournament.
    - The exception to this is if an athlete does not show up, but a Unified Partner does, the Unified Partner will not be permitted to compete alone and the team will be a scratch.
- If a registered pair for a REGIONAL event does not show up or has only one participant show up to the regional tournament and in turn would not qualify to attend the state tournament at that event, the local coordinator may reach out to register them for another Special Olympics Ohio qualifying regional tournament, if available, in order to attempt to have the pair qualify to attend the state tournament.

- If a registered pair for a STATE event does not have both athletes or the athlete and the Unified Partner, in the case of Unified divisions, show up prior to the first match of the event, it will be a scratch for all participants, without an option for any play by a single participant.

VIOLATIONS AND PENALTIES

Foul bags and rules violations are divided into impacting fouls and non-impacting fouls. A court official is responsible for spotting and calling penalties. The court official must determine if a foul bag was impacting or non-impacting.

Non-Impacting Bag

If a foul bag does not impact game play or any other bag in play, the bag is considered dead and is removed from play at the time of the infraction. This bag scores 0 points for the inning. All other bags remain in play.

No other movement of bags is permitted at this time.

The only person allowed to remove a bag from play is a court official.

Impacting Bag

If the bag in question impacts the position of one or more bags in play, it is an impacting bag foul.

- Leave the bag in question and all affected bags in play.
- Continue to play until the end of the inning without touching or removing any bags.
- At the end of the inning, the team who threw the offending bag will have their highest valued bag in play removed.
- The only person allowed to move bags is a court official.

Example: Team A steps over the line during their 3rd toss of the inning. The offending bag knocks a bag from Team B off the board. Bags are not replaced or affected at this time. At the end of the inning, subtract the highest scoring bag from Team A from the scoring calculation.

- If 0 points were scored for Team A in the inning, no scoring updates are made.

List of Fouls

The following are foul violations that must be spotted and called by an assigned judge. A foul is assessed to the offending team.

- Any bag pitched when the player has contacted or crossed over the foul line.
- Any bag pitched when the player has started or stepped completely outside the pitcher's box before the bag is released.
- Any bag not delivered within the 20-second time limit.

- Any bag pitched from a different pitcher's box than the first bag.
- Any bag that is not pitched with an underhand release.
- A player playing out of turn.

Interrupting Gameplay

A player shall not touch, alter, move, or affect the board or any bags on the board or in the hole before scoring has been agreed upon for the inning.

- If this foul occurs during play, please refer to IMPACTING BAG section above.
- If this foul occurs at the conclusion of an inning, and before a court official has taken score, the non-offending team receives 3 points for each bag removed prior to scoring confirmation.

Fouling Out

Any team that commits 3 fouls in a game automatically loses the game. The game ends immediately.

1st violation & 2nd violation will be marked on the scoresheet and stand as the only warnings before the 3rd violation concludes the game.

The non-offending team is awarded 21 points and wins the game.

The offending team ends the game with the score they have when the 3rd foul occurs.

Dead Bags

For Special Olympics Ohio cornhole competitions, it is strongly encouraged that officials remove dead bags during innings to prohibit opportunity of dead bags impacting play. If there is not a designated official to remove bags, follow the guidelines set below:

- Any bag that contacted the court or the ground before coming to rest on the board shall be ruled a dead bag.
- Any bag that struck a previously defined object, such as a tree limb, wire, indoor court ceiling, etc., shall be ruled a dead bag.
- Dead bags should not be considered in scoring but may assist a legal bag that is considered in scoring.

- **Example:** Team A throws a bag, and it lands on the ground in front of board A. This bag is considered a dead bag. Team B throws a bag, and it lands on top of Team A's bag on the ground. This bag is also considered a dead bag. Team A throws their second bag, and it lands on the board, but is also touching part of Team B's previous thrown bag. This bag is still considered legal, even though it is touching a dead bag.



Additional Foul Rules

A bag that leaves a player's hand once the final forward swing of the delivery process has started shall count as a pitched bag.

A bag that is accidentally dropped by a player before the final forward swing has started (i.e. during the back swing) shall not be considered a foul and may be picked up and pitched.

If players believe they have thrown all bags, clear the board for the next inning, but then realize they missed one bag, the inning ends. Points are scored as if the inning ended, and the missed bag is forfeited.

Any action or intentional use of a penalty that undermines the integrity of the game, as determined by the court official, will result in the player's disqualification and forfeiture of the game.

GAME CLOCK

The competition management team may limit games to a maximum game clock at their discretion.

A 30-minute clock is recommended for play. However, if an event has time limitations, a shorter game clock can be implemented. It is not recommended to use a game clock of less than 15 minutes.

During a team timeout, the game clock should continue to run. Any inning that starts should be finished even if time expires.

The official may stop the game clock at their discretion during an extended delay due to weather, injury, or other unforeseen circumstances.

TIME OUTS

Each team is permitted one (1) 2-minute timeout per game.

The player/team calling the timeout must have possession of play and throw.

A timeout cannot end the game. If a timeout is called and time expires, the current inning should still be completed.

The official may grant a timeout whenever the circumstances appear to be valid.

COACHING

Coaches and spectators shall be prohibited from engaging in discussions with any athlete and/or Partner once the athlete and/or Partner step onto the field-of-play area, except during a timeout.

If a court official determines a coach is strategically communicating with a player, the official may provide a verbal warning or a citation for unsporting conduct according to the discretion of the court official.

Discussions or disputes related to scoring or rules should be directed toward the court official.

COURT OFFICIALS

Each cornhole court should have at least one assigned court official. Court officials must be easily identifiable at an event.

Court Official/Supervisor: This is the head volunteer for each court. This position will make the final rulings on score, fouls, timing, and overall game discrepancies. Final rule judgments and calls will be made by this position and/or the competition management team.

Court Attendants: This volunteer position will assist the court official with the running of each individual game on the court. This may consist of bag retrieval, watching the foul lines, assisting with scoring, and watching the sequence of play or throws.

Each team has the right to object to a designated volunteer official or court attendant for any reason before the start of a game. The competition management team considers and decides upon this objection.

No member of a team is permitted to assist in officiating a game in which that team is playing.

CAPTAIN

On any team, the captain must be designated and made known to the officials before play begins. The captain may not be changed during the course of a game but may be changed during the course of a tournament. The competition management team and tournament officials must be notified of this change prior to any subsequent games.

DELAY OF GAMES

If the official believes that the game is intentionally delayed without sufficient or valid reason, the official must issue a warning.

If the delaying team does not immediately resume play, they will forfeit the game.

For delays caused by weather, acts of God, civil disorder, or other unforeseen circumstances, the ruling of the competition management team is decisive and final.

MODIFICATIONS/ADAPTIVE DEVICES

Any assisting device being used for adaptive purposes must not give the athlete and/or Unified partner a competitive advantage and must be approved by the competition management team prior to registration for the competition.

If an athlete uses a walker or wheelchair for assistance, they may sit in their walker or wheelchair and execute their throws from that position. However, as with the foul line rule, at no point should any part of the walker or wheelchair, including wheels, cross the foul line.

PROTESTS

It is the responsibility of each team captain or coach to sign the scorecard after a game. The signatures will indicate the indisputability of the final score. Games in which protests will be filed should not be signed by any captain or coach who disagrees with the score or its validity.

Any protest to an official's or competition manager's decision must be made by a Special Olympics certified cornhole coach within 30 minutes of the completion of any game, or the decision made by the official or competition manager will be considered as accepted.

Protests will be acknowledged and judged on the basis of merit in circumstances not specifically provided for herein.

UNSPORTING CONDUCT

Players shall display appropriate sporting conduct at all times.

Any behavior deemed unsporting, such as using insulting language, attempting to distract an opponent, or displaying inappropriate gestures, actions, or words, may result in disqualification at the discretion of the court official.

Purposely interfering with an opponent's pitching motion will disqualify a player and result in forfeiture of the game.

Any action or intentional use of a penalty that undermines the integrity of the game, as determined by the court official, will result in the player's disqualification and forfeiture of the game.

ATTIRE

Players will dress in a manner which will bring credit to them and the sport of cornhole.

All players should wear closed-toe athletic shoes.

Uniform tops must be similar in cut, color, and style for all team members.

ASSESSMENT SCORESHEET

Special Olympics Ohio Doubles Cornhole Assessment Scorecard/Instructions

Special Olympics Ohio

Athlete #1 Name:
Athlete #2 or Unified Partner Name:
Local Program Name:

				Traditional Cornhole			
				Distance - 27ft		Distance - 21ft	
			Toss Number	Athlete #1	Athlete #2 or Unified Partner	Athlete #1	Athlete #2
Board #1	1	Left Side	1				
	2		2				
	3		3				
	4		4				
	5	Right Side	1				
	6		2				
	7		3				
	8		4				
Board #2	9	Left Side	1				
	10		2				
	11		3				
	12		4				
	13	Right Side	1				
	14		2				
	15		3				
	16		4				
Total Score (0-48)							
Team Score (Sum of Both Scores)							

	Modified Unified Cornhole	
	Distance - 12ft	Distance - 27 ft
Toss Number	Athlete	Unified Partner
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
Total Score (0-48)		
Team Score (Sum of Both Scores)		

Traditional Cornhole Directions:

Athletes/Unified Partners attempt 4 tosses from each of the 4 pitchers boxes, for a total of 16 tosses

Record the score value of each bag thrown on the above scorecard

Clear bags after completing tosses in each pitcher's box

Sum the score of all 16 tosses to create a total player score for the assessment

Sum the score of both players to create a team total score

Either board can be designated as "Board 1" as long as the layout is consistant for all

Scoring:	
0 Points	Cornhole bag does not come in contact with board or bounces onto board
0.5 Points	Cornhole bag hits the board in the air, but does not stay on the board
1 Point	Cornhole bag comes to rest on the board
3 Points	Cornhole bag comes to rest in the hole
Total Score	Sum of points scored on 16 throws from assigned distance
Team Score	Sum of all scores for all players on the team

Modified Cornhole Directions:

Athlete and Unified Partner will both attempt all 16 tosses in the one pitchers box area

Record the score value of each bag thrown on the above scorecard

Clear bags after completing 4 tosses

Sum the score of all 16 tosses to create a total player score for the assessment

Sum the score of both players to create a team total score

GAME SCORECARD

AMERICAN CORNHOLE ASSOCIATION

Special Olympics Ohio

Special Olympics Ohio **Cornhole Competition**	**Date:** _____ **Time:** _____ **Court #:** _____ **Game #:** _____ **Division:** _____	**Event / Competition** ☐ Traditional Doubles ☐ 27 ft ☐ 21 ft ☐ Unified Doubles ☐ Modified Unified Doubles

Team A: _____

Team Color _____

Players

A	P		Cptn.
☐	☐	1) _____	☐
☐	☐	2) _____	☐

Team A Points	
1	11
2	12
3	13
4	14
5	15
6	16
7	17
8	18
9	19
10	20
	21

Coin toss ☐

Timeout ☐

Fouls ☐ ☐ ☐

X _____

Coach or captain signature

Team B Points	
1	11
2	12
3	13
4	14
5	15
6	16
7	17
8	18
9	19
10	20
	21

Team B: _____

Team Color _____

Players

A	P		Cptn.
☐	☐	1) _____	☐
☐	☐	2) _____	☐

Coin toss ☐

Timeout ☐

Fouls ☐ ☐ ☐

X _____

Coach or captain signature

Cancellation Scoring Guide:	*Bag on the board = 1 point*	*Bag in the hole = 3 points*	*Bag bounces on or misses board = 0 points*
	Points cancel out. Subtract lower inning total from larger inning total. That number of points is awarded to the high score team each inning.		
Games end at 21 points or 30 minutes max, whichever comes first			