Special Olympics Ohio

Golf Rules Manual (Rev. 10/2026)

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for golf shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics Ohio will be played under
the USGA rules and shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Golf or Article I. In such cases, the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Golf shall apply. Additional rules clarifications related to individuals with disabilities (for example visually impaired or wheelchair bound athletes) can be on found on the R&A or USGA website. Any modifications to those 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.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

The SOOH Golf season runs in the summer and into the fall from July to September. State competition occurs at the end of the season. An athlete and Unified Partner may only enter into one event for State Competition. Athletes and Unified Partners must be in a golf training plan a minimum of 8 weeks prior to the regional competition.

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 available in Special Olympics Ohio.

- Level 2 – Unified Sports Alternate Shot Team Play Competition (9-hole)
- Level 4 – Individual Stroke Play Competition (9-hole)

GENERAL RULES AND MODIFICATIONS

Eligibility Criteria

1. All competitors and teams must compete in a minimum of 3 nine-hole qualifying rounds and submit the scores from those games with registration materials. The par for the 9 holes should be indicated on the registration materials with the scores.
2. All competitors and teams must compete in a Regional Qualifying Golf tournament held prior to state competition.
3. Teams/individuals who submit qualifying scores must average less than 3 times the par for that qualifying score. For example, a unified team or individual golfer submitting three

qualifying scores from a par 36 golf course must be able to average less than 108 for those three scores.

4. Special Olympics Ohio does not enforce a minimum or maximum total score for each level since we only currently offer two different levels.
    a. However, for scoring at each hole, there will be a maximum of 10 strokes at Regional and State Competitions. Please see the scoring section for more details.

Golf Carts

1. For Regional events, the decision to offer the use of power golf carts will be left to the discretion of the specific Tournament Committee.
2. Golf carts will be used at State Competition.
    a. For Level 2, Unified Sports Alternate Shot, the Unified Partner will be required to drive the golf cart.
    b. For Level 4, Individual Stroke, each competitor will be required to have a Caddy who will drive the golf cart.
        - While it is preferred that the caddy is at the chaperone level of certification, the caddy must at least have a Class B Volunteer Form completed prior to the round their athlete is competing in.

Slow Play

1. For the purpose of preventing slow play, the Committee may, in the conditions of a competition establish a pace of play guideline including maximum periods of time to complete a
   stipulated round, a hole, or a stroke. Pace of play for State competition will be communicated at the Coaches Meeting prior to competition.

Attire

1. Athletes must wear shirts with collars and dress shorts or pants. Golf gloves are allowed.
2. Shoes: Golf, tennis or athletic shoes are acceptable, but are subject to inspection by an event official. No heeled shoes are allowed. No metal spikes.
3. Jewelry and denim may not be worn during games or practice. Headwear for religious or medical reasons are acceptable but must be brought to the attention of the Games Director prior to competition.

Equipment

1. Each player is responsible for providing their own equipment. This includes
    a. A Set of clubs (no more than 14 clubs)
    b. A golf bag
    c. Golf balls
    d. Tees
    e. Divot Repair Tool (Not required, but recommended)
    f. Ball Marker
2. A set of clubs shall include at least one wood, one iron and one putter. These clubs should be in an appropriate golf bag and should include golf balls.

Caddies

1. Each athlete competing in Level 4 must provide and coordinate their own caddy for all competitions. Special Olympics Ohio will not provide a caddy. Failure to provide a caddy may result in disqualification from the event.
2. Level 4, singles golfers, may not drive themselves during competition. They must use a caddy.
3. As per the USGA, a caddy is defined as "one who assists the player in accordance with the Rules, which may include carrying or handling the player's clubs during play."
4. For tournaments and competitions, coaches can assume the role of a caddy, with the understanding they will relinquish their coach privileges (ie. ability to file a protest) during the competition.
5. Caddies will assume the responsibility of driving the golf cart during competition.
6. All caddies must be at least 18 years old with a valid driver's license.

LEVEL 2—UNIFIED SPORTS ALTERNATE SHOT TEAM PLAY RULES (9HOLE)

Team Definition

1. A team shall consist of one athlete with an intellectual disability and one Unified partner without an intellectual disability.

Purpose for this Level of Play

1. For Special Olympics athlete golfers with an entry level of understanding of golf, this level is designed to give the Special Olympics athlete an opportunity to transition from individual skills to individual play and to progress under the guidance of a Unified partner whose ability and knowledge of golf is more advanced than that of the Special Olympics athlete. As a result, this scenario does not function in the traditional Unified Sports model where teammates are expected to be of similar ability. The Unified partner serves as a coach and mentor so that the Special Olympics athlete becomes self-sufficient on the golf course.
2. For more experienced Special Olympics athlete golfers, this level is also designed for athletes and Unified partners that have comparable ability levels and knowledge of the sport. This scenario would more closely resemble the traditional Unified Sports model whereby the teammates would be of similar ability. Even if the athlete has the skill set to play individually in Level 4, he/she may choose to continue playing at Level 2.

Form of Play

1. The form of play will be Foursome Rule 22 under the Rules of Golf (Alternate Shot) – The players play alternately from the teeing grounds and then alternate strokes until the ball is holed.
2. Each foursome will be assigned to one of the nine holes for a "shot gun" start.
3. Example: If Player "A" plays from the tee on the odd-numbered holes, then Player "B" would play from the tee on the even-numbered holes. Only one ball is in play on a hole.
4. In Alternate Shot, the partner and the athlete will predetermine which holes, odd or even, they will tee off from. After the first shot, players will alternate turns until the ball is holed out.
5. The ball must be played as it lies.

6. You have three minutes to search for your ball before adding a penalty stroke. If your ball comes to rest in a penalty area, you will add a stroke and may play another ball from where you played your last shot. In some instances, a drop zone may be indicated. We recommend you play a provisional ball when you first think your ball is lost.

7. All whiffs and duffs are considered 1 stroke. Whiffs are completely missed balls. Duffs are topping the ball. In both cases, that stroke or attempt at the stroke, counts as a players turn and it would be the other teammates turn in Unified Competition.

8. Tees to be used:

    a. All Female Athletes and Female Partners will tee off from the same tees.

    b. All Male Athletes and Male Partners will tee off from the same tees.

Please Note: If on a mixed gender team, the athlete or partner will always tee off on the tee assigned to their gender. Specific tee colors will be announced prior to the round starting.

Scoring

1. Once the ball is in play on each hole, the players shall alternate turns hitting the ball until the ball is holed, or until 10 strokes have been played. Note: a swing and miss count as a stroke.
2. If a 10th stroke is played without holing the shot, the team shall record a score of 10x and proceed to the next hole.
3. Scoring (marking of cards) – Athletes should be taught to keep score and, whenever possible in competition, serve as a marker for a fellow competitor. Each player on the team should verify their team's hole-by-hole scores, and both players must sign the scorecard at the end of the round. Additionally, it is required that for a foursome both unified pairs must sign both their own and the other team's scorecard at the end of the round to verify scores. For level 2, there must be the signatures off all the athletes AND partners who played the round together on the scorecard before turning the card into the scorer's table.

LEVEL 4—INDIVIDUAL STROKE PLAY RULES (9 HOLE)

Purpose of this Level of Play

1. This level is designed to meet the needs of those Special Olympics athletes who wish to play individually in a tournament where the stipulated round is nine holes.
2. While the player should be capable of playing independently, the athlete must have a designated caddy to drive the cart. Please see above for more information.

Form of Play

1. The form of play shall be stroke play competition.
2. Athletes will play their round paired with a caddy from their local program.
    a. This athlete and caddy will have a golf cart and be matched with one other athlete and caddy during play.
3. The ball must be played as it lies.
4. Golfers will be assigned to a hole so that we can have a "shotgun" start.

5. You have three minutes to search for your ball before adding a penalty stroke. If your ball comes to rest in a penalty area, you will add a stroke and may play another ball from where you played your last shot. In some instances, a drop zone may be indicated. We recommend you play a

provisional ball when you first think your ball is lost.

6. All whiffs and duffs are considered 1 stroke. Whiffs are completely missed balls. Duffs are topping the ball. That stroke or attempt at the stroke counts as a player's turn.

7. Specific tee colors will be announced prior to the round starting. However, female athletes will play from one color and male athletes will play from another, unless communicated differently prior to the round.

Scoring

1. If a 10th stroke is played without holing the shot, the player shall record a score of 10x and proceed to the next hole.

2. Scoring (marking of cards) – Athletes should be taught to keep score and, whenever possible in competition, serve as a marker for a fellow competitor. The caddies for each competitor will serve as a marker. The competitor will be responsible for verifying his/her own score and signing his/her scorecard and that of their opponent paired with them at the completion of the round.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

In the event that the weather during an outdoor competition does not cooperate, we may need to delay the continuation of events until the weather improves. We will follow the guidelines set forth by the Ohio High School Athletic Association for outdoor sports, unless the venue has specific requirements. Thunder or lightning will result in a 30-minute delay, which will reset from the latest occurrence. When available and confirmed, we will continue to monitor the activity utilizing an advanced weather tracking system. The games management committee will make any call to delay, should this occur, and notify Venue Managers and/or officials, who will in turn notify those present.