

## History of the Kansas Special Olympics

A delegation of six students from Holy Family Center, Wichita, who participated in the 1968 International Special Olympics at Chicago were the forerunners of the Kansas Special Olympics. Within a few months after the first Olympics, a committee was formed to plan a State Special Olympics in 1969. Members of the committee were: Dennis Popp, Sister Veronica Born, Charles Myers, Charles Watson, and Byrona Wiley. Due to lack of funds, the meet was cancelled. However, as Kansans are not a group to be discouraged, the meet was scheduled to be held in 1970.

The first Kansas Special Olympics was held at Parsons State Hospital and Training Center on May 30, 1970, after having received financial and other support from the Joseph Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, the Kansas Association for Retarded Children, the Kansas Recreation, and Parks Association, Parsons Jaycees and the four state institutions for the mentally retarded. Bill Blackwell and Charles Watson were appointed co-directors. There were approximately 300 mentally retarded persons involved.

It became apparent that the Special Olympics could become a very important factor in the lives of many mentally retarded children and young adults living in Kansas. Those volunteers who played a key role in the 1970 Kansas Special Olympics were the most enthusiastic about the need for a sponsoring organization. It was felt that the Special Olympics required the guidance of an organization which understood the program and the needs of individuals who would be participating. The Kansas Association for Retarded Citizens was asked to assume this responsibility.

The 1971 Special Olympics program was sponsored by the Kansas Association for Retarded Citizens with a small grant through the Developmental Disabilities Act and with the cooperation of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. Charles Myers was named Kansas Special Olympics Director for that year. Wichita State University was the site with over 600 contestants participating. Ethel Kennedy was a special guest at the 1971 Kansas Special Olympics along with other dignitaries and sports figures which added much to the excitement of the occasion.

Under the guidance of the 1972 co-directors, Charles Myers and Charles Watson, the Kansas Special Olympics was a great success. As a result of their efforts and the efforts of many others, 1,200 children and young adults participated in games held at Southwestern College in Winfield. Former Gold Medal Decathlon winner, Rafer Johnson, was on hand to officially open the games.

In August of 1972, the Third International Games took place on the Campus of the University of California at Los Angeles 2,500 participants. The Kansas delegation consisted of 26 athletes from across the state.

Buck Buchanan of the Kansas City Chiefs and "Head Coach" for the Kansas Special Olympics was on hand to share in the thrills and joys of competition with over 1,300 participants at the 1973 Kansas Special Olympics at Washburn University in Topeka. Under the direction of Charlene Drosselmeyer, and with the invaluable assistance of many volunteers, the athletes

participated in track and field, bowling, swimming, and skating competition. Honorary guests included U.S. Senator Bob Dole, U.S. Congressman Dr. William R. Roy, Keith G. Sebelius, and Larry Winn, Jr., Bill Eddy, Host City Chairman, Charlene Drosselmeyer, State Director and many volunteers assisted in making the 1974 Kansas Special Olympics an overwhelming success. 500 mentally retarded children and young adults participated in the events held at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Head Coach Buck Buchanan of the Kansas City Chiefs was on hand to encourage the special athletes.

In September of 1974, a new State Director was employed. Kirk Miles, a Pittsburg State University graduate, assumed the duties and immediately began preparations for the 1975 Kansas Special Olympics.

Kansas State University, Manhattan was the site of the 1975 games. John Bolan and many Manhattan volunteers staged the event. Among visiting VIPs were Jan Stenerud and Buck Buchanan of the Kansas City Chiefs and Chuckie Williams and Mike Evans, K.S.U. Basketball standouts.

The Fourth International Special Olympics Games took place in August of 1975 at Central Michigan University with 3,200 athletes from 10 countries taking part. CBS-TV had a broadcast of the event on its Sports Spectacular Show. Thirty-two athletes from Kansas attended the event.

In 1976, the Pittsburg community celebrated their Bicentennial-Centennial in a big way by hosting the Kansas Special Olympics. New Kansas Special Olympics "Head Coach", Scott Wedman of The Kansas City Kings was on hand to deliver the Special Olympics oath and present numerous medals. The event was made most successful through the efforts of Dr. Bill Dickey, Rev. Bob Docherty and Tom Murry, Business Manager of the Pittsburg Bicentennial-Centennial Committee.

February of 1977 became a milestone in Special Olympics history. The First International Winter Special Olympics was held in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Kansas was well-represented by a group that was only exceeded in number by the Colorado contingent. Over 550 Special Olympians from 36 states and Canada took part in Nordic and Alpine skiing, skating, tubing, and ice sculpturing.

Over 1,700 participants gathered for the 1977 Kansas Special Olympics Summer Games which were held on the Kansas University campus in Lawrence. Special guests included Scott Wedman, Bruce Rice, KCMO-TV, and Tony Chiaverini, World-Middle weight Boxing Contender. Despite the dreadful heat, the event was a complete success. Gymnastics and Frisbee competition were included for the first time.

The 1978 games were held on June 29, 30, and July 1 at Wichita State University, and were again sponsored by the Kansas Association for Retarded Citizens and the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. The games were partially supported by a grant provided through the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

July of 1979 brought about change. During that month, Kansas Special Olympics was incorporated within the state as a non-profit 501 © 3 organization. Until that time, Special Olympics were administered as a program of the Kansas Association for Retarded Citizens. Because of its tremendous growth, it became apparent Kansas Special Olympics could and should stand on its own. K.A.R.C. discontinued sponsorship of the Special Olympics on June 30, 1979. The Kansas Special Olympics Board of Directors was made of individuals selected by a task force of K.A.R.C. members.

More than 3,500 participants from throughout the United States and 21 foreign countries competed in 12 individual and team sports at 1979 International Special Olympics Summer Games in Brockport, New York. The Kansas delegation consisted of 49 athletes who came home with a total of 51 medals.

Until September of 1980, the program was administered by an Executive Director and an Administrative Assistant. A program Coordinator joined the staff in September, followed by a Secretary in November. We continue to grow.

The 1981 Summer Games were held in Wichita with 1,600 participants. Eunice Kennedy Shriver, President of Special Olympics, Inc. was present to join in the festivities as was Miss U.S.A, Miss Kansas, and Dave Lindstrom of the Kansas City Chiefs, our “Head Coach”, Scott Wedman, Cotton Fitzsimmons, Coach of the Kansas City Kings, Byron Baltimore, and Larry Gordon of the Wichita Wind Hockey Club. Ms. Shriver praised the event and described the Kansas Special Olympics program as a model program.

Nine Special Olympians from Kansas competed in the 1981 International Special Olympic Winter Games held March 8-13 at Smugglers Notch in Stowe, Vermont. The event was complete with pomp and ceremony, celebrity participation, media coverage, super volunteers, and surrounding beauty. Eight medals and nine ribbons were awarded to the Kansas athletes.

The Kansas Special Olympics Summer Games of 1982 were, once again, held at Wichita South High School. 1,800 athletes and hundreds of volunteers joined the celebrities including Scott Wedman, Kevin Handlan, Mike Woodson, Miss U.S.A., Miss Kansas, Ted McKnight, Tom Condon, and Secretary of State Jack Brier. Bobby Johnson of the Topeka Chargers team was presented by the first Most Inspirational Athlete award by Scott Wedman.

The 1983 Summer Games were sponsored by the Wichita Police Department and Koch Industries. Over 1,900 athletes competed in a very exciting and highly organized event. On hand to present awards were celebrities such as Miss U.S.A., Miss Kansas, Attorney General Robert Stephan, and professional athletes including Scott Wedman, Kevin Handlan, Mike Woodson, Tom Condon, Dave Langston, and “Head Coaches” of the Kansas Comets and Kansas City Chiefs, Pat McBride and John Mackovic. Kansas’ U.S. Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum was on hand to present the Most Inspirational Athlete Trophy to Bobby Heard of Hill City.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana was the site for the 1983 International Summer Special Olympics Games. The Kansas delegation consisted of 68 athletes competing in basketball, volleyball, softball, track and field, swimming, gymnastics, wheelchair events, and bowling. 17 coaches and

4 staff members traveled with the team to the I.S.O. Games which were organized by Mr. Bill Bankhead and Louisiana Special Olympics Chapter Director Emmanuel Bourgeois.

The first Kansas Special Olympics State Conference was held in September of 1983 in Hays, Kansas with approximately 60 coaches in attendance. Topics ranged from how to recruit new volunteers to fundraising ideas and how to accredit a local committee. The conference was a tremendous success and will continue to be an annual event.

The 1984 Kansas Special Olympics Summer Games took place at Wichita South High School and Wichita State University. Cycling was added to the sports offered and All-Star Games were held in the team sports. Race walking was added as a new event. The Mist Inspirational Athlete award was presented to Ron Michaelis of the Capper Foundation by Lt. Governor Tom Docking. Other celebrities in attendance included Mrs. Kansas, Miss U.S.A., Miss Kansas, Attorney General Robert Stephan, Tony Pesznecker of the Wichita Wings soccer team, Tim Leiweke, Kevin Handlan, and Enzo DiPede of the Kansas City Comets Soccer Team and Tom Condon, and Buck Buchanan of the Kansas City Chiefs. 2,100 athletes competed in the 1984 Kansas Special Olympics Summer Games.

In June of 1984, eight athletes from Kansas represented the United States in the International Soccer Competition in Brussels, Belgium. Kansas was chosen in recognition of the effective, successful program the organization has established. The Kansas delegation joined athletes from Louisiana, Texas, and Arizona in Washington, D.C. for two days of training prior to leaving from Belgium. All twenty athletes representing the United States spent the two months before leaving for Belgium in intense training programs and their performances overseas were evidence of this.

In addition to the Summer Games, Kansas Special Olympics presently coordinates a State Soccer Tournament with over 20 teams, Softball Tournament with other 30 teams, Basketball Tournament with over 85 teams, Indoor Games (consisting of Bowling, Roller-Skating, and Co-ed Volleyball), Sports Camps, Winter Sports Training, and Ski Trips.

Kansas Special Olympics, Inc. continues to be committed to improving the lives of mentally retarded citizens by providing well-organized, year-round sports training and competition.

Four new staff members were hired in 1984 to help the present staff deal with increasing programs, budgets, training requirements, and special events. A training director, a special events/media coordinator, field representative, field representative east and field representative west joined the K.S.O. team. A branch office was opened in Wichita, Kansas. The field representative west and the area 6 director used this office space.

2,150 athletes competed in the 1985 K.S.O. Summer Games. Aquatics, Gymnastics, and Cycling were again held at Wichita State University and Athletics were held at Wichita South High School. An Olympic Village, Family Hospitality Center, and Developmental Events were new and welcomed additions to the games. The Wichita Police Department and Koch Industries were again prime sponsors. Celebrities included Governor John Carlin, Attorney General Robert Stephan, Secretary of State Jack Brier, Former Kansas City Chiefs Buck Buchanan and Jim

Lynch, present Chiefs players Bill Massey and Gary Spani, Kansas City Comets Kevin Handling and Clive Griffiths, and Wichita Wings player Tony Picnicker. Virgil Leek from the Winfield State Hospital was presented with the Most Inspirational Athlete Award.

In March of 1985, nine athletes and three coaches from Kansas participated in the 1985 International Winter Special Olympics in Park City, Utah. The Kansas delegation consisted of three ice skaters, three cross-country skiers, and three alpine skiers. Many of the athletes established personal bests in their events and all came home with at least one medal! Cessna flew the delegation from Wichita to Salt Lake City in two of their private aircrafts.

During the spring of 1986, Kansas Special Olympics videotaped the six sectional basketball tournaments and used this for divisioning purposes. This cut down on travel time for teams and eliminated the lengthy evaluation period at the beginning of the tournament.

The 1986 Kansas Special Olympic Summer Games were held for the last time at Wichita South High School. Volleyball was added to the Friday competition with four teams from the Indoor Games West and four teams from the Indoor Games East competing for the Championship. Koch Industries and the Wichita Police Department sponsored the event again in 1986. Kristi Longhoffer from Wichita was named Most Inspirational Athlete!

In July of 1986, a sports camp was held at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Approximately 175 athletes and coaches attended the event which involved six different sports. Coaching staff from the different university themes served as clinicians.

The 1987 Kansas Special Olympic Summer Games were held at The Wichita State University and were again sponsored by Koch Industries and The Wichita Police Department. Tennis was a new sport this year and over 100 athletes competed in the event. The Summer Games now consist of four official sports and two demonstration sports plus an Olympic Village, Clinics, Opening/Closing Ceremonies, and a Banquet and Dance. Edwin Basart from Clay Center was named the Most Inspirational Athlete. 2,400 athletes were registered for the 1987 Summer Games.

The University of Notre Dame and St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana were the sites for the International Summer Special Olympics Games. Kansas took a delegation of 44 athletes and 11 coaches. The team brought home 99 medals in seven different sports – volleyball, softball, bowling, tennis, aquatics, athletics, and gymnastics. A highlight of the trip was the gold medal performances by both the volleyball and softball teams. The Kansas delegation was flown to South Bend in private Cessna aircraft and was housed in Lyons Dorm on the University of Notre Dame campus.