SPECIAL OLYMPICS
INCLUSION DEBATES AND EQUITY IN SPORT

Edited by
Florian Kiuppis and Daniela Schwarz
This book brings together academic work on Special Olympics and specifically on the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in various sport contexts and other areas of life, by ways of both empirical research and theoretically informed papers.

Inclusion in sport is a topic that is mostly explored in connection with the participation of people with disabilities in general. In public debates on inclusion and sport in the global society, participation is predominantly discussed in a normative way, e.g., in connection with the campaign *The Revolution is Inclusion* by Special Olympics, describing it as an “all-out effort to end discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities”. With this international collection, the authors seek to contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of *Special Olympics in Context of Inclusion Debates* and establish a foundation for future scholarship. The chapters in this book can contribute to a new research agenda on Special Olympics, particularly participatory approaches.

The chapters in this book were originally published in *Sport in Society*.

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Special Olympics
Inclusion Debates and Equity in Sport

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Rosita Olvhøj, Tobias Knudgaard Jensen, Jacob Wienecke and Helle Winther
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Introduction: Special Olympics in context of inclusion debates

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This book brings together academic work on Special Olympics and specifically on the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in various sport realms and other areas of life, by ways of both empirical research and theoretically informed papers.

Inclusion in sport is a topic that is mostly explored in connection with the participation of people with disabilities. In public debates on inclusion and sport in the global society, participation is predominantly discussed in a normative way, e.g., in context of the campaign *The Revolution is Inclusion* by Special Olympics, describing it as an “all-out effort to end discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities”.

In 2023, the Special Olympics World Games took place in Germany for the very first time. The guest editors of this book, who work together in context of the scientific committee for Special Olympics Germany, can remember very well the moment watching the application video “Our dream: Special Olympics World Games 2023 in Berlin” five years ago. Our first impression was that alone the athletes who were involved as actors in the shooting of the clip would feel so honored if their “City of Dreams”, “of Freedom”, and “of Change” would become awarded the opportunity to host this world’s largest inclusive sports event. Their dream came through. We consider the biggest milestone to be that the motto #TogetherUnbeatable, as well as the principle “Let’s tear down walls together” in connection with the development and orientation of the World Games, not only has been presented as a marketing-strategic slogan but also, in our opinion, in fact adequately reflects the overall process of the development of the games. In our opinion, there is literally no other mega-event, including previous Special Olympics World Games, that has such a consistent, inclusive orientation running through the entire process. As far as we know, Special Olympics athletes, i.e., people with intellectual disabilities, are now represented in all relevant organizational and committee structures.

What we just described as a “milestone”, namely that the Special Olympics World Games can be considered the world’s largest inclusive sporting event is from our point of view, a development in which the Special Olympics in particular is a Best Practice global movement and organization. What counts in context of Special Olympics games is not primarily seeing your best athletic performance as the highest gain but rather enabling all people with intellectual disabilities to participate in the process.

With this international collection, both the guest editors and the authors seek to contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of *Special Olympics in Context of Inclusion Debates* and establish a foundation for future scholarship. The chapters in this book can contribute to a new research agenda on *Special Olympics*, particularly participatory approaches.