



Special Olympics
South Dakota
Bowling Handbook
January 1, 2026



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Practice ideas, skill assessment and development, and rules can be found in the SOI Quick Start Guides and SOI rules for each sport at <https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/sports/sports-offered?locale=en>



SOSD Official Bowling Events

Traditional State Bowling Events:

- Singles (Male, Female and Ramp)
- Doubles (Male, Female, Mixed and Ramp)
- Team (Male, Female, Mixed and Ramp)
- Ramp (assisted and unassisted)

Traditional Area Bowling Events:

- Singles only offered (Male, Female and Ramp)

Unified State Bowling Events:

- Doubles (Male, Female, Mixed and Ramp)
- Team (Male, Female, Mixed and Ramp)

Unified Area Bowling Events:

- Unified Doubles only offered (Male, Female, Ramp)

Description of Events

Traditional Bowling Events

- Singles (one bowler)
- Ramp unassisted (singles, doubles and team, unified)
 - Athlete aims ramp without assistance but may receive help placing ball on the ramp.
 - Athlete positions ball on the ramp without assistance and pushes ball down ramp toward target.
 - **Athlete bowls 3 frames at a time and potentially 4 frames at the end of the game.**
- Ramp assisted (singles, doubles, team, unified)
 - Assistant may aim the ramp toward the pins.
 - **Athlete bowls 3 frames at a time and potentially 4 frames at the end of the game.**
- Doubles (2 bowlers)
 - Male (2 male bowlers), Female (2 female bowlers), Mixed (male/female)
 - Ramp (Male (2 male bowlers or male/female), Female (2 female bowlers)
 - ✓ No distinction made between assisted/unassisted ramp bowlers when creating doubles teams.
- Team (4 bowlers)
 - Male (4 male bowlers), Female (4 female bowlers), Mixed (female/male combination).
 - Ramp (all 4 bowlers must be ramp bowlers)
 - ✓ No distinction made between assisted/unassisted ramp bowlers when creating teams.

Unified Bowling Events

- Doubles (2 bowlers: 1 athlete and 1 unified partner)
 - Male (1 male athlete/1 male unified partner)
 - Female (1 female athlete/1 unified partner)
 - Mixed (1 male athlete/1 female unified partner or 1 female athlete/1 male unified partner)
 - **Ramp (1 athlete ramp bowler/1 unified partner non ramp)**
- Team (4 bowlers: 2 athletes and 2 unified partners)
 - Male (2 male athletes/ 2 male unified partners)
 - Female (2 female athletes/2 female unified partners)
 - Mixed (2 male/female athletes/2 male/female unified partners)
 - **Ramp (2 male/female athletes on ramps/2 male/female unified partners, no ramps)**

Bowling Governing Rules

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) for bowling found at <http://bowling.sport/> IBF or National Governing Body (NGB) rules shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Bowling or Article 1.

Refer to Article 1 located at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/sports-essentials/sports-and-coaching/sport-rules-article-1?locale=en>, for more information pertaining to Codes of Conduct, Training Standards, Medical and Safety Requirements, Divisioning, Awards, Criteria for Advancement to Higher Levels of Competition, and Unified Sports.

General Bowling Rules

- Participation in area bowling tournaments is a requirement to attend state bowling tournaments.
- All bowling rules apply to both traditional and unified bowling events unless noted in this handbook.
- A 15-game average must be submitted for each athlete.
- All bowlers will bowl three games during both area and state competition, time permitting.
- Bowlers will bowl ten frames, alternating lanes every frame.
- Foul lines on all lanes will be on and utilized in all events (Traditional, Ramp, Unified events)
- Ramp bowlers will bowl three (3) frames in a row with 4 frames on the last rotation of the game, all in the same lane.
- SOSD Sports Staff may make “day of” decisions about increasing the number of consecutive ramp frames bowled based on the needs of our athletes, their wheelchairs and space. No fewer than 3 frames are allowed.
- Handicaps will be used to figure results. In Special Olympics, the handicap is normally based on 100% of the difference of the bowler’s average from 200. (Example: Player average is 100 so would receive a handicap of 100 so that their average and handicap equal 200.)
- No one will be allowed on the lanes other than assigned volunteers and designated coaches. Family member and spectators will not be allowed beyond the ball rack area.
- **All bowlers must be on their lanes and ready to bowl by the first frame of the first game. If not, the athlete will not be eligible to compete until the first frame of the second game. If they miss the first frame of the second game, they cannot begin to bowl until the third game. Simply – bowlers not present for the first frame of each game will be scratched from that game but may bowl the remaining games. Bowlers receive a zero (0) for missed games.**
- The third game will not be bowled if it has not begun at least 30 minutes prior to the scheduled finish time (each session). Tournament officials reserve the right to stop bowling as they see necessary to keep the tournament on schedule. **Results will be determined by complete games only.**
- Bowler not on lane during a game (bathroom/concessions/interruptions): IF a bowler is missing from the lane for an excessive amount of time when his/her turn is up (defined as 3 frames), he/she may receive a “0” for that frame and any subsequent frames until he/she returns. The Games Organizing Committee reserves the right to address this issue on an individual basis (ex: athlete taking more time in bathroom vs. at concession stand/wandering are two different issues)
- RAMP GUIDELINES
 - UNASSISTED BOWLER: Coaches/chaperones or volunteers are ONLY placing the ball onto the ramp. The bowler must independently line up the ramp and push the ball.

- ASSISTED BOWLER: Coaches/chaperones/volunteers are providing additional assistance beyond placing the ball onto the ramp (ex: aligning the ramp, pushing the ball, etc)
- Delegations are responsible for providing their ramp assistants for their athletes.
- ONE coach/assistant per athlete.
- No distinction will be made between assisted and unassisted when divisioning for ramp doubles and ramp teams. Each bowler will be provided with the amount of assistance needed.
- Ramp bowlers are only eligible to participate in either the Traditional area or Unified Area tournaments. They are only eligible to participate in one Traditional or Unified state bowling tournament.

Equipment and Attire

Equipment

- Bowling balls
 - An athlete may provide his/her ball but bowling balls (house) will be provided on a first come first serve basis.
- Special Equipment
 - 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. (example, a handle ball).
 - ✓ Clarification: A handle ball may be used by an athlete whose disability may make it difficult for them to grasp a regular bowling ball (not limited to loss of hand/fingers)
 - Special equipment must be approved by SOSD Sports Staff and local bowling alley.
- Bowling Shoes
 - Must be worn during bowling for the safety of the athletes.
 - No street shoes allowed below the ball racks in the seated area on lanes.
 - Bowling shoes provided by the bowling center may also be worn.
- Bowling Ball Ramps
 - **SOSD will provide ALL ramps used at area and state bowling events.**
 - **Delegations should NOT bring their ramps to competition. They will not be allowed.**
 - Ramps can be either one piece or two-piece metal units, one stand and one sloped piece. The stand is a minimum height of 24 inches and a maximum height of 30 inches.
 - Plastic one piece bowling ramps are acceptable as well, if they meet the height requirements.

Athlete Uniform

- Attire should be neat and clean.
- RECOMMENDATION: Tops should be short sleeved collared shirts (bowling shirts preferred).
- Crest/logo guidelines for tops can be found at:
 - <https://sosd.org/storage/2025/10/Sub-Program-Guideline-Refresher.pdf>
- Commercial messages/advertising are not allowed on uniforms.
- RECOMMENDATION: Athletes should wear long pants or dress/walking shorts.
- Bowling shoes and socks are required.

Rules of Competition

Handicap tournament rules

- The final score is the total pin fall plus the bowler's handicap added together. See General Rules (page 4) for more information.

The Game

- It consists of 10 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 is played on two lanes immediately adjoining each other. Members of competing teams, doubles and 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 following this alternating bowling order so that each player bowls 5 frames on each lane. (Training point: practice alternating lanes so that athletes are accustomed to this during area/state competition)
- Unified ramp doubles and unfied ramp teams will not alternate lanes. Ramp bowlers will bowl on one side and their unified partners will bowl on the other lane. They will share a set of lanes. Ramp bowlers may bowl multiple frames at a time within the SOSD guidelines.

Fouls

- A foul occurs when a part of the player's person goes beyond the foul line and touches any part of the lane, equipment or building during and after delivering a ball.
- When a player deliberately fouls to benefit by the calling of a foul, the player shall be credited with a 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

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 the 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

- If possible, a manual score correction will be made regarding a player or players bowling on the wrong lane; otherwise, the following protocol will be followed.
- A dead ball shall be called and the player or players required shall re-bowl on the correct 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 (goes in gutter and comes back on lane).
 - 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

- Scorekeeping
 - All games bowled in a tournament shall be recorded, either manually or by means of an approved automatic scoring device.
 - 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, when possible.

Errors/Scoring Corrections/Challenges

- Scoring errors must be corrected immediately when it occurs on the lanes.
- Bowlers/volunteers should notify front desk/tournament official and errors will be corrected before bowling resumes on that lane.
- Reasons/examples for error/scoring corrections:
 - Bowler goes out of turn
 - Bowler bowls on wrong lane
 - Foul line infractions
 - Ball goes in gutter and then comes out of gutter and knocks pins down (should be 0)
- Scoring errors that were not addressed on the lanes when they occurred will not be changed after the conclusion of the division on the lane or during awards.
- Questionable errors shall be decided upon by the designated tournament official.
- Any other challenges not related to scoring must be reported at the time it happens/before awards

Coaching

- Coaching will be allowed as long as the coach remains behind the lanes/the ball racks/off the lanes.
- Athletes may talk to their coaches but cannot leave the bowling area and no delay of game may occur.

Bowling Terminology

- 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 (10) 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 with a (/) in the small square in the upper right-hand corner of that frame.
 - The count for a spare is ten (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 circle (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 the 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.

Absent or Withdrawal of Bowlers

- **ABSENT: Bowlers who are missing from Doubles and Teams will receive a score of 180 per game OR 540 for 3 games for calculating awards/results (do not add handicap, it is included in the 180 and 540). Please refer to General Bowling Rules on page 4 for clarification on how results/awards are calculated using average and handicap.** As a result, doubles/teams do not have to scratch their doubles/teams due to a bowler missing.
- **WITHDRAWAL:**
 - SINGLES:
 - ✓ Bowlers who do not complete a minimum of 3 frames receive a zero score toward their event score and are not eligible for an award. They may receive a participation ribbon.
 - ✓ If a bowler completes a minimum of 3 frames in any given game, he/she will receive the score achieved (3 frame minimum) for partially completed games and a zero for not yet started games (or those with less than 3 frames completed) toward their awards.
 - ✓ Bowlers who complete a minimum of 3 frames are eligible for awards.
 - DOUBLES/TEAM:
 - ✓ If a doubles/team bowler completes a minimum of 3 frames in any given game, he/she will receive the score achieved (3 frame minimum) for partially completed games and a zero for not yet started games (or those with less than 3 frames completed) toward the doubles/team score for awards.
 - ✓ Bowlers in doubles/team competitions who complete a minimum of 3 frames in any given game are eligible for awards.

Divisioning

Traditional Divisioning Guidelines

- Divisions are based on gender, age groups and qualifying scores
- SOSD Singles Divisioning: Male, Female, Ramp. Age Groups: 8-15, 16-29, 30+
- SOSD Doubles and Team Divisioning: Male, Female, Ramp. 8-15, 16+
- Divisions may be combined or subdivided to create divisions of 3 athletes/teams and a maximum of 8.

Unified Divisioning Guidelines

- Divisions are based on gender, age groups and qualifying scores.
- Divisions may be combined or subdivided according to the number of bowlers. (male/mixed divisions)
- SOSD Unified Doubles Divisioning: Male, Female, Mixed, Ramp. Age Groups 8-15, 16+
- SOSD Unified Team Divisioning: Male, Female, Mixed, Ramp. Age Groups 8-15, 16+
- Mixed doubles/teams will be divisioned with other mixed teams.
- Ramp doubles/teams will be divisioned separately with other ramp bowling doubles/teams.
- Unified doubles MUST BE comprised of 1 athlete and 1 unified partner.
- Unified teams MUST BE comprised of 2 athletes and 2 unified partners.
- Unified Ramp doubles include 1 athlete ramp bowler and 1 Unified Partner non ramp bowler.
- Unified Ramp teams include 2 athlete ramp bowlers and 2 Unified Partner non ramp bowlers.
- Ramp doubles/teams will share a set of lanes and not alternate lanes: athletes will bowl with ramps on one side, and their unified partners will bowl on the other lane. NO ALTERNATING LANES.

Awards

Bowling Awards Guidelines

- Final scores for each athlete are compiled by adding the total of all games bowled + handicap.
- Absent bowlers will receive a total score of 540 for 3 games or 180 per game if only 1-2 games are bowled. (don't add handicap score to this)
- Area awards include ribbons for 1st-8th place in each division.
- State awards include place medals for 1st-3rd place and place ribbons for 4th-8th in each division.
- Awards are presented on the lanes immediately after the completion of each division.

Spirit and Sportsmanship Gert Lutz Award

- Coaches nominate one athlete from their team who demonstrates courtesy, sportsmanship and a love for bowling.
- One athlete at the traditional state bowling tournament is selected by the committee to receive this award presented at the Saturday night banquet/awards ceremony.

Sportsmanship

Good sportsmanship is both the coach's and athlete's commitment to fair play, ethical behavior and integrity. In theory and practice, sportsmanship is defined as those qualities which are characterized by generosity and genuine concern for others. Below we highlight a few focus points and ideas on how to teach and coach sportsmanship to your athletes. Lead by example.

Competitive Effort

- Put forth maximum effort during each event.
- Practice the skills with the same intensity as you would perform them in competition.
- Always finish a match/event: Never quit.

Fair Play at All Times

- Always comply with the rules.
- Demonstrate sportsmanship and fair play at all times.
- Respect the decision of the officials at all times.