



2023-24 Special Olympics Pennsylvania Interscholastic Unified Indoor Bocce

What is Interscholastic Unified Sports?

Special Olympics PA Interscholastic Unified Sports® (IUS) is a fully-inclusive co-ed after school high school sports program which successfully brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities. They train and compete as equal teammates and through this experience, become friends. IUS teams are regarded like every other interscholastic sports team at the high school.

IUS is part of Unified Champion Schools, a national program in more than 8,350 schools which offer inclusive sports, youth leadership, and whole school engagement activities. ESPN is the Global Presenting Sponsor for Unified Sports. Special Olympics PA partners with the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) and is the governing body for Interscholastic Unified Sports. Currently, Unified Indoor Bocce is offered by high schools in the winter and Unified Track and Field in the spring.



Interscholastic Unified Indoor Bocce Key Program Information

- The Unified Indoor Bocce team is regarded the same as all other interscholastic sports teams at the high school. For example, Unified Sports student athletes are eligible to earn varsity letters, matches are held in the main gym and conducted like a high school basketball game, and the team is included in all pep rallies and post-season awards ceremonies.
- **Required Roster Size:** Minimum of six and maximum of eight players on a roster who commit to attending all practices and competitions for the full season just like other interscholastic sports teams. If there is sufficient interest, a school can have a maximum of two teams, provided each one meets the proportionality requirements. No substitutes or alternates are allowed.

- **Eligibility:** This is an after school co-ed program open to boys and girls who must be in the 9th-12th grades. Students receiving services from the school district up until the age of 21 also are eligible. Winter season interscholastic athletes are not eligible to be members of the Interscholastic Unified Indoor Bocce team.
- **Proportionality Requirement:** A Unified Indoor Bocce team must have a minimum of three Special Olympics-eligible athletes (defined as having an intellectual disability or developmental disability including autism with a cognitive delay) **and** a minimum of three students without a disability. If there are eight members on a team, the ideal composition is four Special Olympics athletes and four students without an intellectual disability, but you are allowed to have 5-3 or 3-5. The additional one or two remaining spots (if there is a team roster of 7 or 8 members) also can be filled by students with other types of disabilities.
- **Unified Sports Principles:** One of the fundamental principles of Unified Sports to promote inclusion is meaningful involvement. To ensure all team members are empowered to contribute, everyone trains and competes as equal peers. This is not a mentorship program, but rather one where equality is emphasized and labels (i.e. “special education student” or “Special Olympics athlete”) are removed and people are valued for their unique qualities and strengths.
- **Paperwork Requirement:** All students who are members of the Unified Indoor Bocce team are required to complete the same PIAA paperwork (which includes the physical examination and parental consent forms) as the other interscholastic student athletes at the high school.

Additionally, Special Olympics PA needs its own consent form to be completed for each member of the team. This will be provided to the coaches to give to the students and their parents.

- **Season Length:** The season begins with the team having its first practices at the start of the PIAA winter season. Practices and competitions run through **March 1**, depending on the date of the culminating regional championship events.
- **Practices and Competitions:** There is a requirement for two after-school practices each week (most schools use the cafeteria for practices) **with at least four regular season competitions**. A school hosts at least one match which needs to be conducted in the main gym and treated the same way as a boys’ or girls’ basketball game (i.e. cheerleaders, PA announcer, use of the electronic scoreboard, introduction of the members of the teams, etc.). Additionally, there will be league playoffs followed by regional championships, with the winning 8 teams advancing to the Interscholastic Unified Indoor Bocce State Championships conducted as part of the PIAA State Basketball Championships in Hershey.
- **Coach Training Requirements**
 - Attend the Unified Sports Indoor Bocce Coaches’ Training in your region in the fall
 - During the preseason, complete the following required free online *Coaching Unified Sports* course and *Concussion Training* course offered through the National Federation of High Schools:

Unified Sports Training: <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/coaching-unified-sports>

Concussion Training: <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/concussion-in-sports-2>