

# Ben Brizzolara

*Special  
Olympics  
Illinois*



**Sport: Powerlifting**  
**Hometown: Sugar Grove, IL**  
**Age: 44**

## **1. How long have you been with Special Olympics?**

I have been competing in Special Olympics for 36 years. I first began in 1985 at the age of eight. I have competed in softball, individual golf, tennis, cross country, skiing, track and field, softball, and shot put. I am currently competing in powerlifting, Unified golf, Unified bocce, snowshoeing, volleyball, basketball, and bowling. I spent several years attending events as a Global Messenger. I am very involved with Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run and do anything I can to help support them.

## **2. How has Special Olympics changed your life?**

Special Olympics has been and will continue to be a huge part of my life. It has enabled me to grow in so many ways. I continue to become more confident. I am always developing wonderful friendships with fellow athletes, coaches, Unified partners, Special Olympics staff, and so many others. Being involved in so many sports helps me to stay fit. I constantly am learning to improve my level of competition.

## **3. What has been your biggest obstacle to overcome?**

I have depth perception issues which can definitely cause issues with running, tracking balls, judging space, etc. I have had great coaches, trainers, and other athletes who have been instrumental in supporting, encouraging, and sharing some really good tips. I also have focus issues. I am constantly working on not being so easily distracted. I consider myself a constant work in progress.

## **4. What makes you most proud?**

Accomplishing a goal that I have been working on is what makes me feel proud. Also watching my teammates and friends be successful makes me happy and proud. I have learned we are all one big family. I have over 300 medals and ribbons.

## **5. What are some other accomplishments you are proud of?**

I was on Student Council all through junior high and high school. I was in a PSA with Otis Wilson. I have been at several Ron Santo golf outings and he became a friend. I have had the privilege of meeting numerous other personalities. I was awarded the Certificate of Merit and Key to the City of St. Charles. I was appointed first alternate to Winter World games in Japan in 2005. I attended 2013 North American Golf Invitational at Princeton University. I was named FVSRA Male Athlete of the Year in 2013. I have been plunging for the last 20 years in Polar Plunge. I have been very lucky to have been involved in numerous other events over the years.



**SPECIAL OLYMPICS  
USA GAMES  
ORLANDO 2022**

## **6. What other interests or hobbies do you have?**

I am very proud to have been installed as a member of the Knights of Columbus Council #17360 at our church. We are very busy as a council. I really love being involved. I am super involved with Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run and am involved in an event at least a couple times a month. My participation is very important to me. I love reading, watching, and talking about sports. I especially like spending time with my friends and family.

## **7. Who do you admire most and why?**

My father passed away 11 years ago. I admired him very much. I now have several people in my life who I cherish and admire because they love and support me unconditionally. I have learned so much from all of them and enjoy hanging out with them. Bob Gavelek has been my golf pro teacher mentor and a very good friend for over 20 years. Mike Chmielewski started out as my basketball coach and has now been my Unified golf partner for more than 15 years and is a very good friend. I first met Mary Pocius through Illinois Torch Run and she has become my Unified bocce partner and a good friend. Jerry Auchstetter, who is Geneva Vikings Football Coach Hall of Famer has been a huge supporter of me in powerlifting and everyday life. My family members Peter Post, Doug Brammer, Mike Gerritsen, Samuel Aubrey, Steve Auchstetter, John Burke and Bob Berry are all very important. Rick Dickens who is a family friend and father of a very good friend of mine also is very important to me. Jim McRunnells is also important to me. Of course my mom is on the list too. It takes a village and there are MANY people who I have not mentioned that are extremely important to me. They all love and support me in everything I do.

## **8. What does attending USA Games mean to you?**

It's been a dream of mine to be able to attend Special Olympics Games as an athlete. The fact that USA Games will be at Disney World is awesome. I have already had several people tell me that they are going to come support me. I will try very hard to do my best. I am looking forward also to being able to make new friends and have new experiences.

## **9. How are you preparing/training for USA Games?**

I am currently working and training with Joni Grant at Anytime Fitness in Sugar Grove. I will also be working out with my powerlifting team at FVSRA.

## **10. Have you been to a World Games or USA Games before?**

I was appointed first alternate at 2005 Winter World Games in Japan for snowshoeing, but because I was an alternate I did not go

## **11. Are you employed? If so, where at and what's your role?**

Before COVID I was working three days a week at a warehouse and two days a week at Thompson Center workshop. Now I currently work five days a week at Thompson Center Workshop.

## **12. Are you a currently a student? If so, where and is it a Unified Champion School?**

No

