

Leonard Woodson

*Special
Olympics
Illinois*



Coach - Athletics
Hometown: Chicago, IL

1. How long have you been with Special Olympics?

I have been involved in Special Olympics since 1989. Initially I started as a coach with Evanston Special Recreation for aquatics, athletics, and bowling. Since then, I have become a coach for basketball, bocce, flag football, floor hockey, powerlifting, snowshoe, volleyball, and, as of this year, softball and tennis. I have been fortunate enough to be a coach for the Illinois bocce team in the 2014 and 2018 USA Games.

2. How has Special Olympics changed your life?

I have learned all about a number of sports that I likely would have never been interested in if not for my involvement with my athletes in Special Olympics. Having been around so many athletes I have learned patience as well as when to be firm. I have also learned how to be a better teacher and how to effectively motivate athletes to push beyond what they think they can do so they continue to improve.

3. What has been your biggest obstacle to overcome?

The biggest obstacle that I continue to overcome is getting ways to have more of the general public not only accept but also welcome Special Olympics athletes as part of the community. Having developed a strong relationship with both the police and fire departments in Evanston has been very instrumental in that many of the members have often looked out for my athletes when they see them in the community. Additionally, developing a strong relationship with the athletics department at Northwestern University has allowed my athletes to not only build bonds with a number of the Northwestern athletes in various sports, but also given my athletes greater exposure to the general public by being able to play in front of crowds during Northwestern University sporting events.

4. What makes you most proud?

I have been most proud of seeing my athletes succeed, whether it be a personal improvement in sports, becoming friends with Northwestern University athletes, or seeing them be selected as a part of Team Illinois as they compete in USA Games.

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

I received my first medal in Special Olympics competition as a Unified partner at the Region E volleyball tournament this year. Although it was a bronze, I was still very proud of how hard my athletes/teammates played during their matches.



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USA GAMES
ORLANDO 2022**

6. What other interests or hobbies do you have?

Since last year I have gotten involved in delivering food to needy families. In my spare time I enjoy watching martial arts movies and movies/shows from Marvel comics.

7. Who do you admire most and why?

Since 2021 would have been his 80th birthday year, I would have to say Bruce Lee. I admire the fact that he was able to overcome a lot of prejudice and adversity both in the U.S. as well as in China to become a very successful box office star in front of and behind the camera. Additionally, I admire him for having the skill and wisdom to create what was a completely new martial art system then daring to go against tradition by teaching any students, regardless of race, as long as they were willing to learn. Many movie stars and producers credit him as having a significant influence on how they act in or make movies today.

8. What does attending USA Games mean to you?

I am very honored to have been selected to be a coach for Team Illinois at the 2022 USA Games. I am really looking forward to meeting and preparing the athletes for competition.

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

I am fine tuning my training to be able to help the athletes do their best at the games.

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

I was a bocce coach for Team Illinois at the 2014 and 2018 USA Games.

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

I work as a program coordinator for the City of Evanston's Special Recreation Department. I am in charge of all Special Olympics programming.

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

I am no longer in school. I received my undergraduate degree in psychology from Loyola University of Chicago in 1990 and received my master's degree in social work from University of Illinois at Chicago in 1998.

