

This Day in History... July 20, 1968

First International Special Olympics

On July 20, 1968, Eunice Kennedy Shriver held the first International Special Olympic Games in Chicago, Illinois.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of President John F. Kennedy, was the founder of the Special Olympics. In 1962, she opened “Camp Shriver” in her backyard to provide children with intellectual disabilities a place to play. This turned into an annual event and led to the creation of similar camps across the nation.



From the Celebrate the Century – 1990s Sheet



Issued to coincide with the 5th Special Olympics in Brockport, New York.



Issued for the 1985 International Winter Games in Park City, Utah.

Next, Shriver called for nationwide sports contests. She received a proposal from the Chicago Park District for a citywide track meet, similar to the Olympics. Excited by the idea, she asked that it be opened to athletes from around the country. Held on July 20, 1968, the event became the first Special Olympics. One thousand athletes from the United States and Canada participated in about 200 events.



Stamp issued for the 2015 Special Olympics.

The Special Olympics movement has since grown to include about 4.4 million athletes in over 170 countries. There are thousands of competitions yearly, with World Summer and Winter Games every two years. The International Olympic Committee officially recognized the Special Olympics in 1988.



Stamp issued for the 2003 Special Olympics, which were held in Ireland.

Special Olympics provide genuine sports, competition, and achievement opportunities for adults and children with intellectual disabilities. As the focus on disabilities fades, people drop the emphasis on what Special Olympics athletes cannot do, and instead celebrate their skills and accomplishments.

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