

Special Olympics a 'turn-on' for special boy

By MARIANNE NELSON
"Main man Mike" is going to march along with some 3,000 mentally impaired children and adults when the 1978 state Special Olympic Games open on Friday.

Mike is Michael Cassidy, a Southfield boy who attends the High Meadows School in Farmington. He was one of six children chosen from the school to represent Oakland County in the state Special Olympics.

It's going to be a memorable time with the drums beating and the marching band striking up familiar march music to signal the start of the parade. Down the track they'll come, marching bands, color guards and the athletes themselves in their distinctive uniforms under the banners of their schools or institutions.

The setting will be the campus of Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant and it will all be official when the Olympic flame is lit and the 1978 games begin.

For Mike, whose friends call him "Main Man" being chosen for the Special Olympics was a real turn-on. He told his friends and neighbors about it. And his friends are legion because Mike's specialty is people.

IN MIKE'S circle of family friends, neighbors and fellow parishioners at St. Bede Church, he is dearly loved by all.

He's what you'd call "a charmer from way back." Although he is only 12-plus years old, his frank and honest manner and amiable personality have won him a coterie of friends larger than most people twice his age.

Mike's friends are a very important part of his life too. He's not the type of guy to wait until he is greeted to say hello. Mike will quickly say "Hi" and extend his hand.

"Give me five" is one of his favorite expressions.

Mrs. Gale Johnson, Mike's teacher and coach at High Meadows Schools,

describes the young man as "an extremely positive child, a good sport and one who takes failure in his stride."

"He's a delight to teach and makes everyone in the class happy," said Mrs. Johnson.

You might say he is one of those sunny people gifted with the ability of bringing out the best in others.

Mike will travel to the games with Mrs. Johnson and other coaches and five other students from his school tomorrow. Their participation and that of the other thousands is not only to assist the physical development of the impaired, but also their social and psychological development.

The Olympic events will take place Friday and Saturday and the group will return home Saturday night. It will be a unique educational experience for all the participants.

TRAVELING with coaches and other children outside the family structure teaches them independence and self-confidence.

While in Mount Pleasant, Mike and the other aspiring athletes will stay in college dorms. Central Michigan University has been the site of the Michigan Special Olympics since 1972 and continues to coordinate and host the event.

Initially, the Special Olympics began through the efforts of Eunice Kennedy Shriver and the Kennedy Foundation back in 1968. The foundation supplies materials, rule books and professional support for the event. It is funded by the United Fund and by fund raising efforts of supporters of the Oakland County Association for Retarded Citizens (OARC).

Mary Anne Rickens, program coordinator of the Oakland County Special Olympics said: "There will be 26 participants from Oakland County in the games." The age range spans from eight years and

up. The oldest participant is 64 years old.

An All-Star Special Olympic Fund Raiser was held early this spring at Oakland University and \$30,000 was raised by local celebrities. The luminaries got into the act themselves, participating in five athletic events along with the contestants.

He's what you'd call a 'charmer from way back.'

Funds raised will help begin the Special Olympics Hall of Fame at Oakland University and also will pay for uniforms, transportation and housing for the participating athletes.

Both summer and winter competition are provided by the Special Olympics. Summer events include track and field, swimming and gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, floor hockey and bowling.

WINTER events include skiing, skating, tobogganing and snowshoeing.

In the eight years since Special Olympics was started, it has grown from a single statewide meet with 1,000 athletes to 1,400 meets in 50 states, the District of Columbia, Canada and France, involving some 300,000 participants.

Through positive successful experiences in sports, special olympic contenders can gain confidence and self-mastery and begin to build a self-image associated with success rather than failure. Often success on the playing field translates into posi-

tive results in the classroom, home and workshop.

Fashioned after the World Olympic Games, the Special Olympics have international games every four years. In August of 1979, the international version will take place in New York.

"Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt" is the motto of the Special Olympics which also translates into a special goal.

Mike Cassidy, the Southfielder from a Farmington school, will participate in three events: the 50 yard dash, the long jump and the softball throw.

Each locale will be given individual colored sweat suits to represent their area. Participants are grouped by age and ability and are assigned to "competition divisions" based on age and actual performance. Even those in the lowest divisions have the possibility of advancing to national finals.

WHEN Mike participated in the Oakland County Regionals in May, he took first place in the long jump and placed third in the 50 yard dash.

Mike is a spirited youth who loves sports of any variety. Two years ago, he was voted "Team Manager" for St. Bede Varsity Basketball Team, which his uncle, Jack Frasco, was coaching at the time.

His parents are Mr. and Mrs. William Cassidy and Mike has two older sisters, a younger brother and a baby sister.

No doubt on Friday "Main Man Mike" will march along proudly with the other special athletes, his freckled face wearing a big, disarming grin as he waves to the cheering crowd.

Maybe he'll win a gold, silver or bronze Olympic medal, but victories or not, Mike will always win the hearts of those he encounters. And lots of Southfield folks will be rooting for him too.



Michael Cassidy, known to friends as "Main Man Mike", will represent Oakland County in the Special Olympics in Mount Pleasant this weekend. Mike, a Southfield resident, will compete in three events. (Staff photo by Gary A. Friedman)

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