

# Play ball!

## They came from far and wide to hit, catch, run and field

By Julie Brown  
staff writer

The state softball tournament for Michigan Special Olympics attracted teams from such outstate communities as Grayling, Roscommon, Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and Flint.

Not all of the athletes traveled a great distance to the tournament,

however. Wayne and Oakland counties were also well-represented at the tournament, hosted by the Canton Softball Center.

The Special Olympics program provides opportunities for athletic competition and achievement for mentally retarded people.

Wayne County had 12 teams competing in the state tournament, said Susie Pidososy, area director for

Special Olympics in Wayne County. Those teams represented a number of communities, including Livonia, Dearborn, Wayne-Westland, Plymouth-Canton and the downriver area. "And we've got one all the way from Grosse Pointe," said Pidososy, a Canton resident. Athletes participated in team competition and in skills competition during the state tournament. Skills participants,

numbering about 50, competed in such areas as hitting, catching, base running and fielding.

OAKLAND COUNTY had three teams competing, said Nancy Joseph of Birmingham, area director for Special Olympics in Oakland County. A skills group and a softball team from Farmington Training Center participated in the state tournament. The FAR Conservatory in Birmingham also had a team competing.

A total of 39 teams competed during the tournament, held Friday and Saturday, Aug. 5-6, at the Canton Softball Center.

On Friday, screening for final placement in divisions was held, said Lois Arnold, associate director for Michigan Special Olympics. Team athletes competed in 10 different divisions, based on ability level.

Friday also included meetings for coaches, dinner and the start of the games. When it started to rain that evening, play had to be canceled.

Friday evening included opening ceremonies, featuring a performance by the Plymouth File and Drum Corps. A dance was held that evening at the UAW Local 735 Hall on Michigan Avenue in Canton.

"It's going great so far," Arnold said Saturday of the tournament. Some rescheduling of games had to be done, due to Friday's weather, but things worked out just fine.

On Saturday, skills competition and team competition were held. Closing ceremonies were held that afternoon, with the winning teams announced.

TEAM TROPHIES were given for first-, second- and third-place teams in each of the 10 divisions. Members of those winning teams received medals, with other team athletes receiving ribbons. Awards were also given for skills participants.

Having the state tournament in Canton was convenient for Pidososy, the Wayne County area director for Special Olympics.

"Oh, I love it. It took me five minutes to get here. It's been real nice," Her husband, Rick, was also keeping busy at the tournament on Saturday, helping to keep score. Rick Pidososy is assistant area director for Wayne County Special Olympics.

The Wayne County athletes held a Friday celebration for Susie Pidososy, who was celebrating her birthday that day. Although the Wayne County delegation was close to home for the tournament, members stayed at the Holiday Inn at Metro Airport. Other Special Olympics athletes from throughout the state stayed either at that Holiday Inn or at the Airport Hilton Inn.

The Wayne County athletes enjoyed staying at the airport hotel, Pidososy said. That also makes it easier to keep track of the athletes.

"They have a good time," Wayne County athletes remembered their friends from the Special Olympics state summer games.

WAYNE COUNTY had about 195 athletes competing; athletes ranged in age from 8 on up to 60 or so. Wayne County also had about 75 coaches and chaperones participating in the state tournament, Pidososy said.



The Farmington Falcons' Steve Goldberg winds up for the pitch.

Oakland County had a delegation of 50, including coaches and athletes, at the state event, said Nancy Joseph, Oakland County's area director.

Having the tournament close to home was helpful, she said.

"It's nicer for our parents." Even so, the parents don't mind driving a distance to attend Special Olympics events.

"You've got to kind of rotate it to be fair," Joseph said.

Special Olympics athletes must be at least 8 years old, the oldest Oakland County athletes competing over the weekend was about 50, with the youngest from that county age 14 or 15.

The Oakland County athletes went through an eight-week training program, preparing for the state tournament. Their training included warm-ups, skills practice and team practice. More recently, the teams

played each other for practice.

Joseph has been Oakland County area director for Special Olympics for 20 months. She started volunteering with Special Olympics about 10 years ago as a college student.

"I think the biggest change is in the abilities of the athletes." When she started volunteering, the athletes' skills weren't as sharp as they are now. They didn't understand the concepts of the games to the extent they do today.

"The training is the key concept there."

When people see Special Olympics athletes compete, they're often impressed with just how well those athletes do, Joseph said. She's now accustomed to seeing the athletes play well.

"This is what should be going on." She'd like to see that become as natural for other people as it is for her.



"They're doing very well," coach Sue Kissinger of Northville said of her team. She and Mike Todorov of South Lyon coach the Farmington Falcons.

The Falcons had 21 athletes at the tournament, 15 on the team and the others in the skills group. Athletes have been practicing for about eight weeks, since school got out.

"They had never played before, so they're doing great," Kissinger said of the team members who had never played together. Some athletes had never played softball; a few had played on Little League teams in their younger days.

THE ATHLETES had reason to be proud Saturday; their team won third place in Division 5, in the middle of the 10 ability levels. Athletes are from the South Oakland Skills Center in Farmington Training Center.

"Absolutely new" is how Kissinger described the Farmington Falcons team. She and Mike Todorov coach other Special Olympics sports during the school year.

"We just asked if there were kids interested" in softball competition. The Farmington High School athletes, ranging in age from 15 to 20, were doing just fine during the state softball tournament.

"They are hot now," Kissinger said.

The Farmington Falcons had a terrific cheering section. Many parents were able to attend the state tournament, because it was held close to home.

"It's great, because then our parents can come," she said. "They've been so helpful."

One mother took the athletes' uniforms home and washed them; other parents and volunteers also were a big help. Competing at the state tournament for the first time wasn't difficult because the team received so much help, she said.

Members of the Farmington Falcons stayed at the Airport Hilton Inn Friday night; they enjoyed swimming in the hotel pool. A Friday night dance at the UAW Local 735 Hall in Canton was also part of the fun for the athletes.

"They're so fired up," Kissinger said of the Farmington Falcons. "I think we'll be even better next year."

The Falcons will continue to compete at the state level, she said.

"We're just delighted to be here. Everybody's been so enthusiastic that we couldn't not do it next year."



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## Farmington Falcons score

The Farmington Falcons were giving the game their best on Saturday.

The Falcons were among athletes competing in the Special Olympics

state softball tournament, held at the Canton Softball Center. The Falcons had both a skills group and a team competing in the event, held Friday and Saturday, Aug. 5-6.

## Players clean-up, paint-up for the fall

Farmington Players Barn has closed shop for the summer but the members are busy nonetheless, with a scheduled picnic, a cleanup day, a paintup day and getting ready for the first auditions of the season that are always announced in August.

Their three productions for the 1998-99 season will be "The Foreigner," "The Butler Did It," and "Pack of Lies."

"We have just elected our new board members for the year and

they will be trying something new for our patrons in the way of ticket sales with group rates," said Lorlei Christy, speaking for the group.

"Our cleanup days are really fun and interesting, especially when someone finds some long-lost treasure in the props or costume rooms," she said. "Anyone who is interested in membership, season tickets or our new group rates can call our number anytime," she said.

The Players number is 538-1670.

## Aug. 14 is Health Day

The Greater Detroit Chapter of Hadassah and Sinai Hospital sponsor Health Day 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 14, in Hadassah House, 5930 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield.

Admission is free to the house filled with organization representatives, exhibits and handout materials on many diseases.

Lectures by members of the Sinai staff are scheduled on substance abuse, depression, AIDS and exercise. There is no charge for blood pressure and pulmonary function tests.

Cholesterol tests, skin fold measurement and tay-sachs screening will be available at minimum cost.

Free CPR classes will begin at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Simultaneously under the tent on the grounds, kosher food and snacks will be sold and Hadassah members will man booths offering white elephants and other merchandise to support Hadassah projects.

Members of the Hadassah-sponsored Hachashar Youth Group will lead games for pre-school and school-age children whose parents will be busy with other activities offered during Health Day.

People wishing to assure reservations for any of the lectures or CPR classes may call Hadassah, 683-5030, or 357-2920.

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