

Special folks vie in Olympics



Competitors unfurl a huge parachute at the opening of the track and field events .

One of the best things about Special Olympics is that everyone who participates is a winner. But even in Special Olympics, the competitive edge often gets through to the athletes.

"I look a little nervous, right?" asked Paul Newman as he lined up for his heat of the 50-meter dash during yesterday's track and field segment of the Staten Island Special Olympics at Wagner College, Grymes Hill. "I'd like it better if there was another slow runner in this race," he added. Though Newman's request for some administrative juggling went unheeded, he still went on to take a medal with a fine showing in the 22-year-and-older category.

In another 50-meter race for younger entries, 14-year-old Julio Ortiz not only won the gold medal going away, but continued running for nearly another 50 meters after crossing the tape — as if to drive home his victory margin even more emphatically. Ortiz, sporting a Superman T-shirt, eventually walked away with four gold medals for his super effort yesterday.

In all, nearly 150 of the Island's mentally handicapped participated in yesterday's four track and field events, and all who did received both a competitor's medal as well as free lunch and toys, courtesy of Burger King.

The Island Special Olympics will continue next Saturday with bowling events at the Colonial Lane in Clifton, concluding May 26 with the swimming competition at the South Beach Psychiatric Center pool. The top finishers will be

heading to the St. Bonaventure University campus in Olean, N.Y., next month for the New York State Special Olympics June 8-10 as representatives of Staten Island.

Rich Salinardi, coordinator of Staten Island Special Olympics, said that this year's games set a number of noteworthy precedents. First, yesterday's competition marked the first time that profoundly retarded youngsters were able to participate; and secondly, every Special Olympian at Wagner College yesterday competed in all four events rather than in just one or two.

said Salinardi, whose squad of volunteer chaperones and judges included Boy Scouts from five Island troops, off-duty police officers and high school students, not to mention former Port Richmond High School athletic coach Lou Trella, who served as the official starter.

After each competing in a 50-meter and 200-meter race, a standing broad jump and a softball throw, the Special Olympians lunched on 400 hamburgers provided by Burger King volunteers.

"It was a terrific day," Salinardi said afterward. "And they're all going to sleep well tonight, that's for sure."

—JOHN E. HURLEY

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