

ADVANCE PHOTOS ■ RICH KANE

Kristine Garombone, above, swims the 25-meter freestyle. Right, Louis Lopez runs the 100-meter dash.



The thrill of competing

■ Athletes in Special Olympics share triumphs big and small

By **SUSAN LUNNY**
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Many people would have been shocked to see the smiling face of Louis Lopez as he hugged and endlessly congratulated Special Olympian and gold medal winner William Jackson of Monroe County, N.Y. Just moments before, Jackson had beaten 30-year-old Lopez, of Willowbrook, in a close competition for the gold medal in the 100-meter race.

But no one attending the statewide Special Olympics this weekend at the State University of New York at Albany was surprised by Lopez' reaction.

"They really get so much enjoyment out of this ... everybody's part of the same team," said Richard Salinardi of Elting-

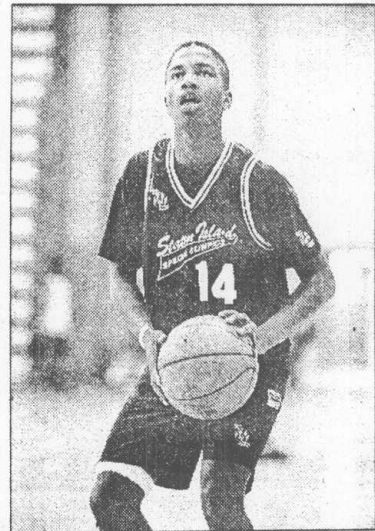
ville, coordinator of the Staten Island Special Olympics.

The Staten Island Special Olympics sent 70 athletes, ranging from age 14 to 62, and more than 30 volunteers, to the games. They were also joined by Special Olympics participants from public schools.

Salinardi said they teach the athletes that sometimes you lose but that success is not just about winning but also having fun and performing your best.

"They look forward to it all year," said Coach Mario Papa of South Beach. "If they win or lose, they're just as happy because they're participating."

Kristine Garambone, 20, New Springville, admitted she had been "just a little bit nervous" about her first performance in the competition. As Miss Garambone waited to receive her silver medal for her performance in the 25-meter freestyle, she said that "winning felt good," but the best part of the competition was "staying here



Charlie Haynes shoots a free-throw basket.

for the whole weekend with my friends."

The athletes stayed in the SUNY-Albany dormitories for the weekend, which adds to their

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