

Uplifting efforts

Staten Island's Special Olympians have earned a well-deserved reputation for athletic excellence. Their success is far from accidental



Softball team member Doug Patterson gets a little pitching help from coach Chico Reyes



ADVANCE PHOTOS ■ MICHAEL McWEENEY

Luis Lopez practices his bench press as his coaches and other weightlifters look on.

By **URSULA REEL**
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The Staten Island Special Olympics and On Your Mark organizations are not day cares for those with mental retardation. They are training programs for serious athletes — athletes who win medals and ribbons for exceptional endeavors amid stiff competition.

"We aren't here to babysit," says Pete Sanzio, 26, a trainer for On Your Mark. "The athletes train full-time, have personal bests and work to better them in competition. They know when they are being challenged and they appreciate their rewards more when they have to step up

to the occasion.

"They don't get medals just for showing up," Sanzio states.

But every Staten Island athlete who showed up at the New York State Summer Special Olympics Games in Albany in mid-June came back with hardware.

Rich Salinardi, the area coordinator for Special Olympics, says Staten Island

has produced athletes who dominate state, national and international competitions for nearly 22 years — since the program's inception here.

And one of the reasons for that, in Salinardi's opinion, is that the Island is so ripe with volunteers — nearly 600 — so athletes are afforded advanced training and sport diversity.

"One of the more difficult things to teach is

team sports," Salinardi explains. "It is one thing to teach a particular skill, such as throwing or running, but it takes true dedication and a tremendous amount of time to get the athletes to work as one unit."

The dedication has been rewarded with success. The Island's women's softball team took second in the World Games last year, and the boys' softball team has a string of first-place titles in the NYS Fall games.

According to Salinardi, S.I. athletes currently have their choice of any sport that is in the 1996 Olympic Games, and the range of teams from the Island allows them to dominate medal counts.

"The other teams from the state are afraid

of us when we show up," Sanzio said. "They know we are always tough in every event."

Hence, the training sessions aren't play time. At a recent weightlifting session, Sanzio, John Buttermark, Joe Loglisci and Chico Reyes monitored approximately 15 athletes, all of whom had competed at the NYS Summer games. Buttermark and Reyes are parents of athletes, while Loglisci is a volunteer.

The athletes are expected to attend regular practice sessions in order to retain their spot on the competitive team. They come to learn, but they also clearly have fun at these training sessions.

Visitors are treated to rousing and cheerful hellos and handshakes. The athletes introduce themselves and make small talk and jokes. Then they get down to business.

"Russo, you're up," says Loglisci.

Ronnie Russo approaches the barbell for a deadlift. He puts on his weightlifting belt, plants his feet and adjusts his hands on the bar. While a moment ago, Ronnie was laughing with coach Sanzio, he now wears a face of serious concentration. Reyes calls for a few adjustments, Ronnie makes them, then hauls the weight up with minimal strain. His teammates applaud.

Up steps Maria Maisonet, who, like Ronnie, achieved a personal best in the recent Summer Games powerlifting competition. Maria, 28, holds the NYS record in the 132-pound division with a dead lift of 270 pounds. Maisonet makes her lift easily as well.

Parents stand by proudly and watch their children achieve. They openly discuss their happiness as guardians for the athletes.

"My son is the highlight of my life," says Buttermark of John Jr., a triple gold-medal winner in the Summer Games' powerlifting competition with a 225-pound bench press and a 365-pound deadlift.

"I take him everywhere I go — to Aruba, to Florida, wherever,"

dad says of his 32-year-old son. "I'm not ashamed of my kid. He's such a happy person and he's got a heart of gold. How many sons say 'I love you, dad,' every morning and every night?"

John Jr., a bubbly and handsome man, is nevertheless fierce in competition and has excelled at two sports — powerlifting and ice skating. He was recently selected as the only New York State figure skater for the Special Olympics World Winter Games coming in February. This is after being told at age nine that he would not walk again following a severe accident that severed his calf muscle.

"On his own he worked relentlessly to prove the diagnosis wrong," Buttermark Sr. says. "It is amazing what his will has allowed him to accomplish."

But the parents, volunteers and Special Olympics and On Your Mark programs display such iron-clad will daily.

According to Salinardi, the organizations continue to grow year after year and parents offer bottomless pits of time and dedication to both their own and others' children.

Volunteers dedicate up to four days every week, year round, for the cause.

And perhaps most significant of all, the athletes bear the fruits of their supporters' labor and continue to give Staten Islanders athletic achievements to be proud of.

Below are the Island medal winners at the 1996 New York State Summer Special Olympic Games held in Albany, N.Y.

TRACK AND FIELD

- Adult**
- James Anderson, 400-meter run 30+ age group — 2nd; 800M — 4th; 4x100 relay — 4th
- Debra Ellis, 30+ 400M — 3rd; 800M — 4th
- Stephen Fanning, 30+ 100M — 5th; softball throw — 3rd
- Frank Niosi, 22-29 50M — 1st; softball throw — 1st
- Mary Pannese, 30+ 100M — 4th; 800M — 5th
- Doug Patterson, 22-29 400M — 4th; 5000M — 3rd; 4x100 relay — 4th
- James Pierre, 22-29 50M — 2nd; softball throw — 3rd
- Christian Russo, 22-29 800M — 2nd; 1500M — 4th, 4x100 relay — 4th
- Tommy Sheedy, 30+ 200M — 4th; 400M — 4th
- Joseph Villane, 22-29 400M — 1st; 5000M — 1st; 4x100 — 4th

Youth

- Carlos Jackson, 8-11 100M — 5th; long jump — 1st
- Paxton Jerscheid, 8-11 bowling — silver
- Mark Knutsen, 8-11 50M — 1st; long jump — 3rd
- Peter Lovett, 8-11 50M — 5th; long jump — 1st
- Brittany Maya, 12-15 50M — 5th; softball throw — 3rd
- Kathryn Pennacchio, 8-11 50M — 1st; softball throw — 1st
- Stefane Rusinich, 8-11 100M — 2nd; softball throw — 5th
- Dupree Stanley, 8-11 100M — 2nd; long jump — 3rd

AQUATICS

- A division**
- Jackie Bouquoio, 16-21 50M free — 1st; 50M back — 4th
- Jeanine Long, 16-21 50M free — 1st; 50M back — 1st; 4x50M relay — 1st (club record)
- Greg Micieli, 16-21 50M breast — 3rd; 100M breast — 1st; 4x50M relay — 1st (club record)
- Anthony Mussetti, 16-21 50M free — 1st; 50M back — 1st; 4x50M relay — 1st (club record)
- Mark Revkin, 22-29 50M free — 2nd; 50M back — 4th
- Tina Stetter, 22-29 50M back — 1st; 100M free — 2nd; 4x50M relay — 1st (club record)
- B division**
- Kristine Garambone, 16-21 25M free — 5th; 25M back — 3rd
- Jeffrey Jacob, 22-29 25M free — 3rd; 25M back — 4th
- Victor Klamzon, 16-21 15M assisted — 1st
- Seth Winderman, 22-29 25M free — 2nd; 25M back — 4th

BOWLING

- Joseph Arale, 16-21 singles — 2nd; doubles — 2nd
- William Floyd, 13-15 singles — 3rd; doubles — 3rd
- Keri-Anne Loglisci, 16-21 singles — 3rd; doubles — 3rd
- Michael Messina, 16-21 singles — 2nd; doubles — 2nd

VOLLEYBALL — INDIVIDUAL SKILLS

- Coletta Bailey, 22-29 level 1 — 2nd
- Tina Marie Johnson, 16-21 level 1 — 2nd

BASKETBALL ADAPTIVE (INDIVIDUAL SKILLS)

- George Bowden, 30+, adaptive — 4th
- Nicky Graeven, 30+, adaptive — 1st
- Daniel Lane, 13-15, adaptive — 4th

BASKETBALL

- WAGNER COLLEGE BLUE SEAHAWKS, 4th Place
- Senior division**
- Patrick Boles, 30+ — most rebounds; James E. Champagne, 8-12 — led all clubs in steal; Timothy Colondres, 13-15 — high scorer over 5 games; Donaldson Davis, 22-29; Clint DeLeonardo, 22-29; Carlton Hurlston, 30+ — most assists; Scott Pedro, 22-29; James Williams, 16-21 — most rebounds, overall outstanding player

POWERLIFTING

- Anthony Aragona, 30+ bench press — 3rd; dead lift — 3rd; combination — 4th
- Anthony Bates, 22-29 bench press — 3rd, dead lift — 2nd; combination — 3rd
- John Buttermark, 30+ bench press — 1st; dead lift — 1st; combination — 1st
- Anthony Fairweather, 22-29 bench press — 2nd; Mark Fairweather, 22-29 bench press — 2nd; dead lift — 3rd; combination — 2nd
- Luis Lopez, 30+ bench press — 3rd; dead lift — 2nd; combination — 2nd
- Maria Maisonet, 22-29 bench press — 1st; dead lift — 1st; combination — 1st
- Ronnie Russo, 22-29 bench press — 1st; dead lift — 2nd; combination — 2nd
- Ken Tobin, 16-21 bench press — 2nd; dead lift — 3rd; combination — 3rd
- Dennis Verderosa, 30+ bench press — 3rd; dead lift — 3rd; combination — 3rd
- Christopher Young, 16-21 bench press — 2nd; dead lift — 1st; combination — 1st