AIA Unified Volleyball
2026-27 Season Fact Sheet

UNIFIED Volleyball

Unified Volleyball is an AIA-sanctioned sport supported by and in conjunction with Special Olympics Arizona (SOAZ), which has been established to foster **inclusion, camaraderie, and the development of meaningful relationships** between students with intellectual disabilities (Unified Athletes) and students without intellectual disabilities (Unified Partners) as high school athletes, teammates, and training partners.

To ensure the safety of all players, the following divisions have been established to accommodate teams of varying skill and ability level—

GOLD DIVISION
- Adequate understanding of rules
- Lineup includes at least 5 top players
- ***Advanced Playing Skills***

SILVER DIVISION
- Basic understanding of rules
- Lineup typically includes 2-3 top players
- ***Novice Playing Skills***

2026-27 REGULAR SEASON

- SOAZ's "8-practice" rule is in effect for participation in high school Unified Sports. Practices must be at least one hour to qualify as a sanctioned practice, and all eight hours of practice must be completed prior to the team's first regular season contest/competition.
- Unified Basketball teams are encouraged to schedule as many regular season interscholastic contests (games) as they'd like under AIA rules. Please note there is a minimum number of regular season contests required for teams wishing to advance to the state championship.

2026-27 STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

- In order to qualify for the 2027 AIA Unified Volleyball State Championship tournament, Unified Volleyball teams must meet the following criteria -
  - Teams must participate in a ***minimum*** of two interscholastic contests (games) against other high school Unified Volleyball teams.
  - Teams must attend a qualifying Unified Volleyball Sectionals tournament, which will be held statewide in conjunction with SOAZ area competitions. ***The top two teams from all Unified Sectionals statewide will advance to the Unified State Championship.***
- This tournament will take place in conjunction with the 2026 AIA State Basketball Championships held:

GOVERNANCE AND RULES

For more information on specific rules and regulations, check the ***AIA Unified Volleyball Sports and Competition Rules*** and the ***2026 AIA Unified Volleyball State Tournament Guide*** located on the AIA's website at http://aiaonline.org/sports/unified.

AIA UNIFIED SPORTS
STUDENT ELIGIBILITY AND CLEARANCE

UNIFIED SPORTS TEAM ROLES

- Unified Athlete – an enrolled student *with* an intellectual/developmental disability
- Unified Partner – an enrolled student *without* an intellectual/developmental disability

UNIFIED ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY

- Enrolled students *with an intellectual disability* who meet both the below eligibility statement below and all requirements of the AIA and school district's athletic clearance policy is eligible to participate as a Unified Athlete in AIA Unified Sports.
- An individual is considered to have intellectual disabilities for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Unified Sports® if that individual:
  - Has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities; or
  - Has been identified by the school as receiving special education and related services consistent with an individual education program based on a cognitive, developmental and/or intellectual disability.

UNIFIED PARTNER ELIGIBILITY

- Any enrolled student who meets all requirements of the AIA and school district's athletic clearance policy is eligible to participate as a Unified Partner in AIA Unified Sports.
- Any student competing in an individual sport (i.e. Swim, Track & Field) ***IS*** eligible to participate as a Unified Partner in the same sport, ***EXCEPT*** during the following circumstances –
  - Any competition at which the student is attempting to qualify for advancement to a state-level competition in any non-Unified event.
  - Any state-level competition at which the student is competing in any non-Unified events.
- Any student competing in a team sport (i.e. Flag Football and Basketball) at the **varsity level** is ***NOT*** eligible to compete as a Unified Partner in the ***same sport***.
  - Example – A varsity soccer player is *NOT* eligible to compete on the Unified Soccer team
  - Example – A varsity soccer player *IS* eligible to compete on a Unified Basketball team.

AIA STUDENT ATHLETIC CLEARANCE POLICY

- All participants in interscholastic activities must be in compliance with all student eligibility rules. The student eligibility rules are enumerated and presented in detail in Article 15 of the AIA Bylaws.
- ***Physical Examination Rule (Article 15.7)*** states a student shall not be allowed to practice or compete in interscholastic athletics until there is a record of a preparticipation physical examination on file with the school. The preparticipation physical examination forms provided by the AIA include three parts:
  1. Annual Preparticipation Physical EVALUATION – (Form 15.7-A)
  2. Annual Preparticipation Physical EXAMINATION – (Form 15.7-B)
  3. Annual Preparticipation Acknowledgement – (Form 15.7-C).
  4. Annual Preparticipation Consent to Treat Form – (Form 15.7-D)
  5. Unified Sports Participant Release—(Form 15.7-E)
- ***Parental or Legal Guardian Consent Rule (Article 15.8)*** states that parental or legal guardian consent is required before a student can be eligible to practice or compete in interscholastic competition. All students shall have appropriate permission in which the parent or legal guardian authorized participation on file with the school.

SCHOOL/DISTRICT ATHLETIC CLEARANCE POLICY

- Unified Athletes and Unified Partners are to be treated and recognized as AIA high school athletes, and will be expected to adhere to any and all district/school policies and procedures regarding student athletic participation and clearance.
- If a district has a "Pay to Play" policy, it is the district's choice to charge a participation fee for AIA Unified Sports.
- Unified Athletes and Unified Partners are subjected to a grade check as defined by their district/ and/or school's athletic academic eligibility policy.