



Special Olympics
Belgium



Press Release and Invitation

Special Champions League European Tournament in Ghent

Special Olympics athletes from 12 European countries will meet on October 5 and 6

Ghent, September 30, 2024 – 22 football teams composed of Special Olympics athletes will meet on October 5 and 6 in Ghent for the Special Champions League European Tournament. This European event, organized by Special Olympics Belgium, will host participants from 12 countries (Belgium, Portugal, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, England, Luxembourg, France, Denmark, Poland, and the United Kingdom). It is a unique opportunity for these 240 Special Olympics athletes and their coaches to come together in Belgium and share the values of Special Olympics football.

A European gathering in Ghent

The Special Champions League European Tournament is an initiative of the European Football for Development Network (EFDN) and co-funded by the European Union. Such initiatives are organized several times a year in different European countries to highlight the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. This new edition is hosted by Special Olympics Belgium and will gather 22 teams from 12 European countries, representing about 240 athletes and 30 coaches. Seven Belgian teams, including the Special Devils and Special Flames, will be present on the field. Alongside them will be teams from Portugal, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, England, Luxembourg, France, Denmark, Poland, and the United Kingdom.

“Special Olympics Belgium has a lot of experience in organizing these types of large-scale events. That is one of the reasons why it was decided to have this final event take place in Belgium. Tournaments at European level offer athletes from all participating countries the opportunity to meet athletes from other countries and compete with them. For coaches and supervisors, it also offers the opportunity to start a conversation about social inclusion through sports”, says Dominique Dehaene, Director of Special Olympics Belgium and organizer of the event.

A 'divisioning' session on Saturday, October 5

As with every Special Olympics sports event, each team will play against one another. After these matches, which help assess the teams' levels, the competition match schedule will be drawn up. Divisioning ensures that teams of similar levels will compete, avoiding large disparities. The tournament, which will be held on Sunday, October 6, will take place on four half-sized football fields, measuring 30x45 meters.





Football, but more than just that

Special Olympics athletes will also be invited to participate in the 'Healthy Athlete Program,' where they can receive advice on their overall health and nutrition. Through interactions with healthcare professionals, athletes will be able to evaluate their knowledge and receive tips for maintaining a balanced diet in relation to sports. Throughout the day, activities and musical entertainment will be offered to both athletes and visitors in the 'Event Zone' near the competition fields.

"Inclusion is not just about being on the same pitch; it's about creating a space where everyone belongs. Through the Special Champions League, we celebrate diversity and unite people through the power of football", says Sander Bergland Henriksen from European Football for Development Network an organization that co-organizes this event.

Program

Friday, October 4: Arrival of teams at the Blaarmeersen site in Ghent

Saturday, October 5:

08:15 – Warm-up

09:00 – 12:30 – Divisioning

10:00 – Start of activities: Healthy Athletes Program, entertainment, DJ, etc.

12:45 – Announcement of the match schedule

13:30 – First competition match

Sunday, October 6:

08:45 – Warm-up

09:30 – Start of the competition

12:30 – End of the competition

13:00 – Medal ceremony

14:00 – End of the event

PRESS INVITATION

You are cordially invited to attend this large-scale European event and meet the Special Olympics athletes from Belgium and 11 other European countries. You are welcome on Saturday, October 5, and Sunday, October 6, at your convenience. The competition match schedule will be available [online](#) throughout Saturday.

To facilitate everyone's work, the organizers kindly ask you to accredit yourself in advance by contacting Amélie Putmans via email at amelie@racin.eu or by phone at 0032 477 20 09 70.

Interviews with Belgian teams are also possible before the tournament.

You can find the list of teams and the competition program attached.

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About Special Olympics Belgium

Since its founding in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics has worked globally to bring people with intellectual disabilities out of the shadows and into the light of their communities. With inclusive programs in over 190 countries and the participation of more than 6 million athletes with intellectual disabilities, Special Olympics has become the world's largest sports and health organization for people with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics Belgium was established in 1979 as a nonprofit organization and currently supports 20,000 athletes. Special Olympics Belgium is a nationally accredited program, part of the global movement, and recognized by the Belgian Olympic and Interfederal Committee. The Special Olympics Belgium National Games are the sporting highlight of the year for over 3,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics Belgium athletes will represent their country at the upcoming Special Olympics World Winter Games in Turin, Italy, in 2025.

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