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B.C. coach named Special Olympics North America 2015 Coach of the Year

Abbotsford's Tom Norton receives top international coaching honour

The excellence and dedication of Special Olympics British Columbia coach Tom Norton have earned international recognition, as the Abbotsford-based volunteer has been selected as Special Olympics North America's 2015 Coach of the Year.

The Special Olympics North America Coach of the Year Award was established in the late 1980s and is given annually to an active, certified Special Olympics coach who has met several criteria, particularly their having made a significant and demonstrable impact on local Special Olympics Programs and their communities. There are more than 120,000 coaches within Special Olympics North America, providing instruction and competition in more than 32 sports. The impressive scope and contributions of all those coaches puts the momentousness of this award into perspective.

"Tom's dedication and efforts are totally focused on the athletes and what he can do to bring out the best in them – he has spurred on his athletes to achieve things they never thought possible," said Annette Lynch, Senior Manager, Coaching Excellence & Sport Education, Special Olympics North America. "Quality athletes don't happen without excellent coaches and we could have no better role model for coaches than Tom Norton, who has positively impacted not just the athletes, but their families, other Special Olympics coaches and the community."

Norton, who has been a volunteer Special Olympics British Columbia (SOBC) – Abbotsford coach for the last 10 years, truly embodies Special Olympics' commitment to providing every athlete with the quality coaching they deserve. Norton has been involved in Special Olympics for more than 25 years, first as a member of the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics and for the last 10 years as an SOBC coach. He has been an outstanding coach at the local level, as a member of nine regional and provincial teams (for both Special Olympics and mainstream Games) and two Special Olympics national teams (in 2011 and [2015](#)), and as a local training coach for athletes going to Special Olympics Provincial and National Games.

As a coach who specializes in track and field and also helps athletes achieve excellence in speed skating and overall fitness and health, Norton sets annual performance goals, has designed individual training programs for each athlete, provides multiple training opportunities each week, and coordinates multiple competitions throughout the season to enable his athletes to further hone their skills.

Norton is also a mentor coach with the [SOBC Performance Program](#) and has worked hard to gain the necessary knowledge and experience to provide the best opportunities for his athletes in track and field and speed skating. He has achieved high levels of certification and training in order to provide outstanding instruction to Special Olympics athletes at local, regional, provincial, and national levels. He has provided world-class preparation, coaching, and results.

Norton has joyfully travelled a long journey with SOBC – Abbotsford athlete Mike Palitti, as the two made it all the way to the 2015 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Los Angeles together. Palitti said Norton has provided outstanding training, encouragement, feedback, direction, and friendship.

“Tom showed his commitment to me with each practice, pushing me to perform at my very best. Each practice Tom came with his written practice plans and offered opportunities for my sport-specific performance training each and every week during our seasons, 48 weeks of the year,” Palitti said. “My desire to excel was fueled by Tom’s ongoing inspiration in sharing his passion of athletics with others. On and off the practice field, Tom also provided the opportunities for social activities for fun and new friendships. Tom is more than a coach; he is a valued friend.”

As an athletics coach for Team Canada 2015, Norton was a vital part of a high-achieving and technically strong team.

“Tom has a great deal of integrity and truly cares about the athletes he coaches, helping them both athletically and personally to reach new heights in their movement forward. He brings the best of himself into his roles and is generous in his mentoring of others,” Team Canada 2015 athletics Head Coach Aleila Miller said. “He keeps his sight attuned to what truly matters, and is one of the most dedicated people I know in his countless and meaningful contributions to Special Olympics. He is progressive in his thinking and has inspired not only myself to grow in my coaching and leadership, but many others as well. Tom is respectful in every sense of the word and a calm, joyful, and powerful force within Special Olympics.”

In recent years, Norton has received several other awards in recognition of his outstanding work with and dedication to athletes in local programs as well as [Team BC 2014](#) and [Team Canada 2015](#). Norton was named the winner of the 2015 [Special Olympics BC Howard Carter Award](#) and Special Olympics Canada Male Coach of the Year award, and he was recognized for his work with Team Canada with a Coaching Association of Canada 2015 Coaching Excellence Award.

“Tom instills self-esteem and confidence in his athletes by developing individual training plans that identify their specific goals. He is a very worthy recipient of the Special Olympics North America Coach of the Year Award. We congratulate Tom and are extremely proud to have a Canadian coach receive this recognition,” said Sharon Bollenbach, Special Olympics Canada Chief Executive Officer.

“Tom has a remarkable ability to connect with our athletes to show them what they can accomplish and assist them to achieve their goals. Tom knows when to push an athlete to achieve their best and when to support an athlete’s current performance, and as such not only gets the best from those around him, but has also won the respect of all track and field coaches here in B.C.,” said Lois McNary, Special Olympics BC Vice President, Sport.

Norton was presented with the Special Olympics North America Coach of the Year award in a surprise ceremony on January 9 at an SOBC Athletics Performance Camp, where he was surrounded by fellow volunteer coaches dedicated to helping athletes with intellectual disabilities excel on and off the fields of play. Norton said it was “absolutely overwhelming” to win the Special Olympics North America award.

“Special Olympics is a part of my life that’s been there for a long time, and I get so much satisfaction from seeing even just the little tiny successes for some are monumental achievements, and that’s the kind of stuff you really relish, everyone else’s successes – they work so hard. It’s absolutely overwhelming [to win the Special Olympics North America award], and very humbling,” Norton said.

Norton was nominated by Special Olympics Canada and was selected from an impressive roster of 18 finalists from all over North America.

About Special Olympics

Special Olympics is a global movement that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports, every day around the world. We empower people with intellectual disabilities to become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all. Using sports as the catalyst and programming around health and education, Special Olympics is fighting inactivity, injustice and intolerance. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown to more than 4.4 million athletes in 170 countries. With the support of more than 1.3 million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics delivers 32 Olympic-type sports and more than 81,000 games and competitions throughout the year. Special Olympics is supported by individuals, foundations and partners, including the Christmas Records Trust, the Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics, The Coca-Cola Company, The Walt Disney Company and ESPN, Lions Clubs International, Mattel, Microsoft, P&G, Bank of America, Essilor Vision Foundation, the B. Thomas Golisano Foundation, Finish Line, The Safeway Foundation, and Safilo Group. Visit Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org, [Twitter @specialolympics](https://twitter.com/specialolympics), fb.com/specialolympics

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