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TEAM BONDING. "Events such as Special Olympics allow our athletes to compete with others with simliar abilities. It promotes a great sense of pride in their accomplishments, as well as gives them several chances to be part of a team and grow both socially and in their indepen-
dence," Special Olympic coach Jan Williams said.

REACH UP

Soccer team helps at Special Olympics

Waking up on Saturday morning Feb. 13, the men's soccer team would come together to do something greater than soccer. They were about to make an impact in lives that wouldn't soon be forgotten by those affected. The team was about to volunteer at the annual Special Olympics basketball tournament in Cedar Falls.

Without being exactly sure what to expect in the upcoming hours, **Nate Shull ('16)** headed down Rainbow Drive on his way to pick up teammate and friend **Connor Houlihan ('16)**. The two seniors arrived at the University of Northern Iowa Wellness Center and headed to the gym to meet the other nine teammates.

The gym was split up into three sections, and each section consisted of an entire basketball court. After playing the Olympic theme song, the opening ceremony commenced, introducing all the athletes and teams. Teams came from Goodwill, Cedar Falls, Waterloo West and all over the Cedar Valley area. After introducing the athletes, the volunteers were split into 12 stations, four stations in each section; however, all four stations in each section were the same.

The volunteers would help shag balls for shooting challenges and help athletes with skill challenges such as dribbling and hitting targets. Shull helped out with the target challenge where athletes would attempt to dial in their accuracy by hitting designated spots on a target with a basketball, and Houlihan helped to rebound balls while athletes shot around and attempted to make as many baskets as possible.

"Nate and I both met and got pretty close to a guy named Tom," Houlihan said. "Tom

was a character and definitely pretty ballsy because he wore Iowa State attire to a UNI facility," Shull said.

Once the athletes had gone through all four stations, the scores were recorded and added up by the judges. The victors were then crowned, and each one of the men's soccer team members was able to place a ribbon upon one of the athletes.

Head soccer coach **Spencer Steffy** had suggested that the team help out because it felt like the right thing to do, but little did the team know the impact that the athletes would have on them. "It was actually a very fun experience and taught me to see things in a whole new perspective," Houlihan said. "It's awesome to just see how happy sports can make people and how many smiles you can receive just by helping shag balls or giving high fives."

"I couldn't agree more," Shull said. "It was a blast to frankly meet new people and honestly make friends. Those athletes were some of the happiest people I've ever seen and impacted me immensely."

After the event, the team headed over to Village Inn to continue their bonds and brotherhood that was hard to explain. Whether it's battling on the same field together, sharing some pancakes or helping volunteer at the Special Olympics, the men's soccer team continues to grow together, building inseparable bonds. "It's this kind of thing that you'll remember and won't regret in the future," Shull said. "I don't care how many championships you've won, genuinely helping others is what truly makes you feel like you've won."

by Nathan Hoy

WINNING RED. Standing up to get his award for the work he did in the Special Olympics basketball tournament, **Jacob Brustkern ('16)** is very pleased when the presenter puts the ribbon round his neck. "Basketball made me feel good. I won a red ribbon for it. I threw a shot on the free throw line," Brustkern ('16) said. Photo by Bree Zubrod



SHOOTING HIGH. Focusing on the basket, **Taryn Ackerman ('17)** shoots for the goal in front of her. "I was playing basketball for the Special Olympics team. I won a red ribbon, and I really liked shooting the ball. It made me feel good," Ackerman said. Photo by Megan Conrad



SLAM DUNK. Sharing the thrill of victory with her mother is **Jewell Alley ('21)** after winning a blue ribbon in the Special Olympic basketball tournament at UNI on Saturday, Feb. 13. Photo by John Dunlop



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FUN TIMES. Waiting patiently for this year's track and field competition, **Taryn Ackerman ('17)** laughs and plays games with friends trying to get ready for what's ahead. She ended up earning second place for both softball throw and the 50 m run.
Photo by Sarah Stortz



ALL TOGETHER. Standing with the other teams on Sunday, March 6, the CF Special Olympic track and field team waits to walk down the line. "It really raises the students' confidence. It makes them so excited, and it's a really positive experience," **special education teacher Tammy Frahm** said. *Photo by Sarah Stortz*



DRIBBLING FAST. Dribbling the ball to the goal in Special Olympics basketball is **Jacob Brustkern ('16)**. Brustkern also ended up earning first place in the 50 m run and second place in the softball throw in this year's track and field competition.
Photo by Bree Zubrod

THROWING FAR. Throwing the javelin as far as he can, **Alec Vetter ('18)** practices to be able to get the best scores in this year's track and field district competition at the UNI Dome. Vetter ended up earning first place in both the 100m dash and 4x100 relay, as well as second place in the shot put event. *Photo by Bree Zubrod*

Special Olympics 143
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