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First-Ever Bay Area Games Competition a Winner at Acalanes

By Cathy Tyson



These runners and hundreds more came from three counties to Acalanes High School to run, jump and throw at the Special Olympics' inaugural Bay Area Games. Acalanes coach in blue shirt with hat in the background. Photo Kevin Nguyen

without a hitch. All of the athletes, from kindergarten through 12th grade and even some students from Transition schools, where students age 18 to 22 who have aged out of high school still learn valuable life skills, were recognized for their achievements.

"We are absolutely thrilled and excited to work with the games committee," said Acalanes Principal Aida Glimme. "We hope to do this every year." The voice of Lamorinda and the Oakland A's, Dick Callahan, was the master of ceremonies. The Bay Area Games are such a big deal for Lafayette, the City Council approved a proclamation recognizing the event.

Proud law enforcement officers and the entire Acalanes Cheer Squad - all dolled up in their uniforms complete with blue and white pom-poms - flanked the track to welcome the parade of special athletes and the Olympic torch. Logan Da Hora, an Acalanes student, along with students from two other schools had a chance to carry the lit torch.

"I thought it was fabulous," said Miramonte Education Specialist and Special Education Department Chair Rosemary Black. This was the first time her class has participated in a Special Olympics event. "Yesterday was a great opportunity for the students from Miramonte to spend the day seeing and competing with their friends from other schools. The students practiced various sporting events at Miramonte for the last month so that they would feel comfortable competing in the events at the Olympics. All of my students felt excited to have the opportunity to participate and they were really proud of themselves after each of the events, and at the end of the day asked if we could do it again next year."

Acalanes Special Education teacher Marie Townsend said her students were very excited, even the next day. "[There was] an amazing amount of energy around the entire school," she said.

"A huge thank you to Chevron - they really stepped up to support and make the competition possible today," said Rick Collett, President and CEO of Special Olympics Northern California & Nevada who has children who are Acalanes students. "Sports is the great equalizer, it gives everyone a chance to be a gold medalist. This is about success and self-confidence, acceptance and respect."

"Be sure to stay in your lane the whole way," reminded the track starter as student-athletes giddy with excitement lined up on the Acalanes track to make a run for it.

Central casting could not have provided a better day. The brilliant blue sky and light breeze seemed to energize the 330 student-athletes, roughly 65 Acalanes volunteers, cheerleaders, dignitaries and lots of law enforcement staff at the Special Olympics Bay Area Games held at Acalanes High School May 1. Supportive teammates and teachers lined the area to root them on. Nathan Roa, from the Bridge Transition Program, was "excited and nervous" at the same time.

The Special Olympics Schools Partnership Program enabled school districts and Special Olympics of Northern California to put together the day to celebrate accomplishments. It was funded through the generous support of Chevron. The Bay Area Games interscholastic competition included 50- and 100-meter runs, the standing long jump, and throwing options included softball, javelin and tennis ball, accommodating differing ability levels. Everyone was a winner.

School buses ferried students from all over Contra Costa County, San Francisco County, San Mateo County, and even a tiny sliver of Alameda County represented by Dublin High School, and the debut Bay Area Games went off



Most of the team from Miramonte High School, from lower left bleacher bench: Brandon Runyon/ Instructional Assistant, Kyle Kogler/Sports Medicine Student MHS, Kim Pirie/Instructional Assistant; middle bench - Rosemary Black/Teacher, Amanda Boehrer/Student, Kendall Skelton/Student; back row - Gino Paoletti/Student, Daniel McLean/Student, Sofia Martinez Wexler/Student. Photos Kevin Nguyen



An officer lit the torch to officially launch the Bay Area Games.



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