



#ZusammenUnschlagbar
#UnbeatableTogether



Inclusive Editorial Volunteers

Language Barriers Not A Hindrance When Making Connections & Finding Respect

When you bring together nationals of more than 170 countries, a language barrier is indeed one of the challenges attendees will experience. Such was the case for many attending the Berlin 2023 Special Olympics World Games but this challenge didn't get in the way of the universal inclusive message the games promote. The authors, three Inclusive Editorial Team volunteers who collectively speak eight languages, found interviewing to be a fun challenge we were eager to overcome.

Speaking in Swahili, "Phenomenal" is how Oswaldi Kipoto, a player from the Tanzanian traditional male volleyball team describes his experience so far in Germany. "Although we lost our first game against Saudi Arabia on Sunday, we look forward to a great comeback in our next game on Tuesday," he stated.

Dr. Ali Shuqair, Iraqi men's 5X5 basketball coach, agrees and added through google translate, "I have a wonderful feeling in Berlin because I am working with this segment of people who have pure determination and that is phenomenal."

Like Oswaldi and Ali, the Tanzanian coach, Augustino has similar feelings regarding their next game and his time in Berlin. "These are people with physical and intellectual challenges and we, as coaches, need to be giving them support

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and guidance so as to boost their morale and help them compete in this once in a lifetime experience,” stated Augustino.

Germany is hosting the 2023 Special Olympics World Games for the first time; bringing together over 7000 athletes across 26 sports at multiple venues in Berlin. Between June 17-25, athletes, family members, volunteers, and coaches will experience the games. This involves traditional teams (only athletes with intellectual and multiple disabilities) and unified teams (where traditional athletes are joined by those without disabilities to promote partnership, inclusion, and understanding). The teams will also experience Berlin cuisine, culture, history, and hospitality.

Regarding German cuisine, Oswaldi finds it challenging, sharing that he prefers rice and chicken. The South African men’s basketball coach disagreed saying “German food is amazing and we are tremendously enjoying it.” No matter the opinion, the goal for all participants remains the same: to play their best and make meaningful connections with other athletes along the way.

Oyunbileg Batbayar, captain of the Mongolian traditional women’s volleyball team gave an interview in Mongolian and her coach translated it. She is very excited for the opportunity to participate in such events for people with disabilities. “I am very grateful to the organizers for making this moment possible for us.”

For Liliana Nilsson, an athlete from Sweden playing on the traditional women’s 5X5 basketball team, being part of the World Games is personal. “I want the politicians back home to know what it means to be inclusive and cover these topics about inclusive sports in our country.” Lilian’s teammate Lina Gustavsson added “I have grown so much as a person since I started playing sports. This is something everyone can and should experience. We should all have the opportunity to grow and develop as human beings. Being a Special Olympics athlete has changed my life.”

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Attending the Special Olympics World Games is indeed a life changing experience, especially if you've never been to Germany. Marina Vladimirovna, a women's 5X5 traditional basketball player from Kazakhstan who was interviewed in Russian, is participating in these games for the first time. Even though it's not about winning for her, Marina remains very happy with her team's performance so far. "I want to make new friends here, share more about my country and learn about other cultures too," reveals Marina. Bader Abdulghafar, a Saudi Arabian unified volleyball athlete, shares the same goals. "As we waited to enter the stadium on Sunday, I talked to my teammates as well as other athletes and made friends. We researched Berlin together and looked up different restaurants because it is our first time here. I also looked up how close Berlin is to Munich because that's where my favorite football team plays. It's too far but I am making friends now in Berlin and that's what is most important." Bader offered some of his responses making gestures and drawing pictures to make sure we captured his sentiments accurately. Who knew Charades and Pictionary would also be part of the games?

Beyond making connections, competing on a world stage allows athletes to show their strength and perseverance through all the challenges they've faced. "Athletes are ready to fight hard and compete. We have a lot of energy that we will use to be at our best. I like being around that energy because it pushes me to be even better" says Swedish traditional women's 5X5 basketball player Ulrika Nyström. Luckily, the volunteer Swedish delegation leader (DAL) served as our translator.

For Unified partner on the Samoan women's volleyball team, Faamelea Afea, being in Berlin is about achieving one goal. "Whatever the outcome, be happy and be yourself. This is who we are as Samoans and being here allows us to share that with everyone from everywhere." She went on to say that they couldn't agree more hence witnessing the spirit of the games has been inspirational.

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Beyond making connections, competing on a world stage allows athletes to show their strength and perseverance through all of the challenges they've faced. It is about hope and friendship, perseverance and determination, and most importantly about inclusion. Liliana Nilsson summed it up beautifully "Inclusion means love for me. People greet each other, we take pictures, cheer each other at our matches and we connect. This helps us develop a greater sense of peace with one another and where there is inclusion and peace, we find respect."

Text: Temirlan Anarkulov (Kyrgyz Republic), Modou Bajan (Gambia) and Liz Fernández (USA)

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