

Northwest University's Student Magazine

TALON



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NU PARTNERS WITH SPECIAL OLYMPICS FOR SOCCER TOURNAMENT

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By Alayna Wood

Photo by Luke Pamer



Northwest University athletes will be partnering with the Special Olympics for the Special Olympics College Unified Soccer Invitational, which will be hosted by Seattle University on April 18th.

Throughout the state of Washington there are 17 colleges and universities tentatively signed up to participate in this soccer tournament. The definite number will not be set until the deadline at the end of March.

Participating schools must fill their roster with five college students or athletes and five transitional students with disabilities. Currently filling the Northwest University team is Micah Atwood, senior, Mark Olsen, junior, Kathryn Kerr, junior, Aaron Gleason, senior, Annie-Brynn Gleason, senior, and freshman exchange student, Socheata Seng.

Transitional students are those with disabilities who have completed K-12 and are in an additional two-year education program within a high school. Often, these students feel disconnected from their schools and are unable to join the clubs and sports teams as they exceed the age limit for participation.

The event's purpose is to foster unity and partnership between university athletes, referred to as "partners", and transitional students with disabilities, referred to as "athletes".

On the night of April 17th, athletes and partners from all participating schools will get together for an evening social. This night is meant to unify the teams and allow them to join together in camaraderie and get to know one another.

The tournament will take place on the following day and there will be halftime events, an award ceremony and celebratory dinner.

So far, NU's team has two transitional students from the community and are still in need of at least two more to fill the roster.

Rachel Saleen, senior, is serving as the liaison and student representative for NU. She said that this event is meant for transitional students to feel part of a team and community once more.

"It's a really difficult transition for the students after high school," Saleen said. "They feel lonely and like they are different. The heart of this event is to connect with these students and make them feel accepted and like they belong by building relationships with them."

Saleen, captain of the NU women's soccer team during the 2014 season, and sophomore Kortney Hudak will both be coaching the NU team.

Saleen's job for the event is to recruit partners from the university team and to be the point of contact between the Special Olympics organization and NU. She is also in charge of setting practice times to get together before the event and coordinating with the team.

After completing their first practice on Saturday, March 21st, Saleen was deeply impacted by the sense of joy and pride that the

After completing their first practice on Saturday, March 21, Saleen was deeply impacted by the sense of joy and pride that the athletes felt during the practice.

"This got me thinking about the power of truly feeling welcomed into someone else's presence instead of just feeling tolerated by them, and this made me reflect upon how God even more perfectly and readily welcomes us into His presence," Saleen wrote in her journal following the first practice Saturday. "Playing soccer with these students has brought me closer to the heart of God."

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