

## **“Healthy Athletes” Provides SO ILL Athletes With Free Health Screenings**

by Jeff McKinzie

Marcel Smith is an athlete with Area 3/West Pullman Park who competed in the Summer Games in June 2012. A standing long jumper, he competed with athletes from other agencies across Illinois, and won first place in his respective division. At 37 years old, he had been preparing for Summer Games for months, and has had to keep his body in good physical shape.

On the weekend of June 15-17, Smith was one of many athletes that took advantage of Summer Games’ FUNfitness program, a program that offers strength, balance, flexibility and aerobics screenings to athletes during the weekend. FUNfitness is part of the larger Healthy Athletes, a health screening that also has an Opening Eyes program and a Healthy Hearing program.

At FUNfitness, screenings are broken down into different stations that focus on different aspects of therapy. For example, at one station athletes’ range of motion is measured. At another, flexibility is measured. One station measures balance when athletes sit and stand repetitively for a short period of time.

Dr. Gail Huber, a Physical Therapy professor at Northwestern University who coordinates FUNfitness, expressed the importance for athletes to maintain their health. “It’s important to be healthy and it’s important for [athletes] to learn to be healthy,” she said.

Huber also says that booklets are provided for athletes to take home and learn techniques on their own.

Brett Greenberg and Mike Bruszer, both student volunteers, said an offer had come up in one of their classes to help athletes at Special Olympics Illinois. Students from Northwestern and Bradley, as well as students from the University of Illinois-Chicago, were also volunteering at the venue.

The FUNfitness program has been part of Special Olympics Illinois since about 2008.

In the Opening Eyes portion, athletes’ eyes are tested by a variety of methods. Dr. Sandra Block, a Global Clinical Advisor at SOILL and a consultant for Lions Club International – Opening Eyes, said that Opening Eyes determines how well athletes see, if their eyes are healthy and how well their eyes are working.

According to Dr. Block, if glasses are appropriate for athletes, the doctors on site will provide them. Sports goggles are given out as well, so athletes can wear them if they are playing in contact sports. Sunglasses are also available for those who don’t need glasses.

So, how does Opening Eyes determine whether athletes need glasses?

At each station, Dr. Block explained the methods used by volunteers. At one area, athletes test their visual acuity, or clearness of their eyes, by matching spoken words with the corresponding

shapes. Other methods of testing include visual acuity from a distance, depth perception and color vision tests (for colorblindness).

When the weekend was over, Opening Eyes saw 240 traditional athletes and 2 Young Athletes. 116 athletes will receive regular eyewear, 42 will receive sports eyewear (one athlete will receive non-prescription sports goggles), and 73 athletes who did not need prescription glasses received sunglasses on site.

The Healthy Hearing program, which offers free hearing screenings, had 25 volunteers, audiology students and audiologists on hand Friday and Saturday. At Healthy Hearing, tests for ear wax and middle ear tests are provided, with referrals made for athletes to receive additional testing or hearing aids if they need them.

Dr. Lindsay Bondurant, an assistant professor of audiology at Illinois State University and the coordinator for Healthy Hearing, said the program currently doesn't remove ear wax, but hopes to in the future. "Next year, maybe – this year we make referrals."

Bondurant also said that about 30% of athletes don't pass the hearing exams that they provide, as volunteers often find "a hole in the eardrum or other problems."

It was the second year Healthy Hearing offered its services.