



## Sports as the True Equalizer

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By **Robert Stack**

Last week I was interviewed by WFAN Sports Radio for a public relations spot involving an upcoming national 5k fund raising event to benefit people with developmental disabilities. They were intrigued at the fact that we were doing the 5K in 10 states, within 24 cities nationwide and that we are expecting over 12,000 runners during the Valentine's Day weekend. I told them that from 97th Street in Riverside Park to Nashville to Pittsburgh to Santa Fe we were going to have a lot of fun with ripe bananas (I always hate the going to those runs with green bananas) and great bagels (with the exception of Albuquerque which has never gotten their act together for bagels).

They asked about the evolution of this race. This special event to benefit the nonprofit, Community Options, started four years ago very small and is now going viral. Our Honorary Chair is Mary Pat Christie, First Lady of New Jersey. We will be Livestreaming the event, which will enable runners' friends and family to watch them on the livestream channel on real time anywhere in the country. It is innovative and we are getting one registration every three minutes. When they asked about how we evolved from this instead of cookie, bake sales and testimonial dinners, I had to think about it.

I think I figured it out - sports, whether participatory or spectator is a real equalizer for people with disabilities and their families.

We all know the sports junkie: those folks that are so adept that not only can they tell you the number of third down successful attempts that were made by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 2009 season but how many seats were given away for free at the last Denver Bronco home game.

Sports, whether you are watching or playing is something everyone can do and everyone enjoys doing. How many of us have gone out on a date and had the other say, "I don't understand football" or "I don't follow hockey". However, when we get to the venue they become the most vocal fan? It is almost totally predictable. This is really the case for people with disabilities.

The truth of the matter is in my experience people with disabilities are every players dream. They love to root for the team regardless if it is on television or if they are court side. They identify with the players, the team and the venue. Many of my friends who happen to be persons with mental retardation or autism don't understand the infield fly rule. But for that matter, neither do I. I do know when the Mets are winning (who doesn't) I always remain totally enamored at the skill level of the athletes.

Sports are something that enable all Americans to participate. It is truly a great equalizer. It is the back stage pass for all persons with disabilities to be included in society. So lets root, root, root for the home team. It is our way of sharing common ground.

Just like with disabilities, sports does not discriminate with race, creed, political affiliation or intellectual stratification. We all need to enjoy each other in these very trying times, whether we have a child with a disability or not because we all want to belong to something.

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