



## CONNECT WEEKLY

### HEART TO HEART with the EDITOR

*This week I had an opportunity to have a walk down memory lane with John Dunican, Coach, South Offaly Special Olympics Club. John is a father who understands the impact of mental health not only from his home life but also in the Bowling Alley. He wanted to highlight the impact COVID 19 has had on his daughter Nikita and her fellow team players.*



Left to Right Jake, John Dunican & Minnie

**Name:** Mr. John Dunican

**Position:** Coach, South Offaly Special Olympics Club.

**How did you get involved in special Olympics Ireland?**

I saw an advertisement in the local paper looking for parents that had children /adults with special needs to start a Special Olympic Club in South Offaly in 2004.

**What is the most challenging aspect of a role as a Coach?**

To design an appropriate programme/plan to suit the needs of each bowler.

**What training did you undertake?**

I undertook two courses including Introduction to Bowling and also Level One. This was run by the Irish Ten Pin Bowling Association Ireland.

**How do you juggle life between Father and Coach?**

This is an interesting question as my daughter is an athlete in bowling. Supporting Nikita is absolutely brilliant. As a coach I get to support her and also the entire Team.

**Mental Health is a topical conversation, can you share with us how COVID 19 can impact Special Olympic team players?**

As an autistic child or adult change in routine can have an enormous impact. As a parent we must prepare the daily plan to aid the Child or Adult coping mechanism throughout the day. The overall goal is to work towards the least change possible. Schooling, sports has been removed completely during COVID 19 from the normal routine. The result of this is that the child or adult can regress and the wellbeing reduced. Time is a key factor in all this.

**Name a person who has inspired you to be you?**

My daughter Nikita

**What do you do in your free time?**

Pinch and Putt, Bridge, Cycling and walking the dogs Jake and Minnie

**Give us one example of what challenges you met back in 2002, as Autism awareness was not what it is today?**

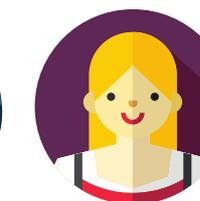
Most children when diagnosed were recommended to have speech therapy and physiotherapy. Back in 2002 you would have to fight tooth and nail to receive such services. Today in 2020 parents are still fighting for these services.

**What Special Olympic Event inspired you?**

I was watching the television during the time of the Special Olympic World Games held in Dublin in June 2003. The display the people of Ireland put on for the World was magnificent. Through incorporating Teams from all over the world. This made me set a personal goal that "One day I would attend the World Games somewhere in the world".



*Verona Pentony, Momentum Support presenting a Bronze medal to Nikita Dunican Special Olympic Games Ireland*





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### What would you say to other parents starting on the path to parenting a child with special needs?

To make sure they receive the best education possible. To involve the child in sports at an early age helps them develop more quickly.

### What support had you as a parent supporting a child with special needs?

Nikita attended a special needs school and received speech and language and physiotherapy.

### What is your life motto?

Smoke free, healthy meals

### Turn back the clock with me today to 2003 so we can gain an understanding of why John Dunican was inspired to be the coach he is today. Why he dreams one day of going to a World Games, anywhere in the World?

The **2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games** hosted in Dublin Ireland 21-29 June 2003, were the first to be held outside the United States. About 7000 athletes from 150 countries competed in the Ireland games across 18 official disciplines, and three exhibition sports. The opening ceremony was held in Croke Park, Dublin, hosted by Patrick Kielty, a major feature was Ireland's own U2, and Nelson Mandela officially opened the games. The Corrs and Riverdance performed on stage. 75,000 athletes and spectators in attendance and special guest Muhammad Ali. Other Celebrities present were Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jon Bon Jovi, Manchester United and Roy Keane.



*Verona Pentony, Momentum Support with John Dunican Coach, South Offaly Special Olympics Club. & Team*

### Team Ireland arrive at Croke Park, Dublin for the Opening Ceremony, June 2013



The Games Flame was lit at the culmination of the Law Enforcement Torch Run, which more than 2,000 members of the [Garda Síochána](#) and the [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#). This was a series of relays carrying the Special Olympics Torch, the "[Flame of Hope](#)", from Europe to the Games' official opening. [The](#) ceremony was officially opened by president of Ireland Mary McAleese.

30,000 volunteer officials and support staff assisted in the running of the games. 165 volunteers from the then 15 countries of the EU took part in a European Volunteer Project (EVS), the first ever to be organised in event-related mode. The volunteers are commemorated by having their names on a series of plaques situated in [Dublin Castle](#), just outside the [Chester Beatty Library](#).

*I hope One Day John Dunican will fulfil his dream and attend a World Games.*

