

## My Phenomenal Experience at a Special Olympics Competition

by Stephen F. Coston (48, Special Olympics New Jersey, USA, athlete and Global Messenger)



Stephen Coston at La-Martinique Lanes in Stratford, New Jersey, which hosted the bowling tournament.

On 1 April 2007, I bowled the best performance of my life in the Special Olympics New Jersey (USA) Spring Sport Festival Individual Bowling Tournament. I bowled a 216, 235 and 161 for a 612 scratch series. I had bowled well before in other tournament formats, however, this competition was an event I will cherish for the rest of my life.

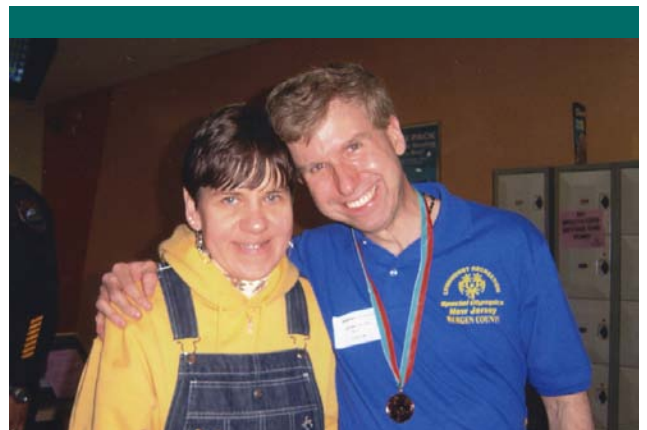
The spectators, families, coaches and other athletes had never seen a Special Olympics bowler score such high numbers. The most exciting moment was in game two, when I scored a 235. I started the match with seven consecutive strikes. The crowd went wild with cheers and screams. Even the volunteers were inspired. I was on my way to scoring a perfect 300 game.

On the eighth shot, I left a solid right corner pin. The crowd groaned. Nevertheless, they gave me a standing ovation. I received two more standing ovations when my score and series were announced on the public address system.

I felt like a role model for the first time in my life. It reminded me of Reggie Jackson of the New York Yankees, when he received a standing ovation at Yankee Stadium after he hit three home runs in one World Series game in 1977; or Mark Messier of the New York Rangers hockey team, when he received a standing ovation for the 1994 Stanley Cup Championship.

An 11-year-old volunteer named Andrew came over to shake my hand and said to me, "You are amazing!" His eyes sparkled with excitement and inspiration. I realize now how important a role model is: Someone to look up to that brings hope.

I would be honored if my accomplishment sends the message that Special Olympics athletes have talents and potential to be accepted in society and given opportunities; not only in sports, but in other aspects of life—education, careers, affordable housing and living a self-sufficient life.



Stephen Coston and his fiancée Linda Saarts will be married in October 2007.