

## *Special Olympics an Aid to Undeveloped Athletes*

"What impressed me about the Special Olympics," Bill Toomey said the other day, "was what I saw happen to the parents. There's always this certain emptiness on the part of parents who have mentally retarded children. I didn't see that emptiness at the International Special Olympics."

Toomey, the 1968 Olympic decathlon champion, was re-

ferring to his first significant exposure to the national competition that is giving mentally retarded children a chance to run the 50-yard dash or mile, to high jump, or to swim.

Over 250,000 children and 100,000 volunteers are involved in the Special Olympics, a non-profit sports charity sponsored by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foun-

ation. At a time when mental retardation centers and mental illness have become a controversial national issue, the Special Olympics, as Sargent Shriver noted the other day, "is giving the mentally retarded child a chance to compete like others."

### Challenges To Be Met

"The argument is that mentally retarded children have failures in their lives and there is the fear that athletic failures can add to their problems," Shriver added. "But you can't continually run away from challenges."

Shriver's wife, Mrs. Eunice Kennedy Shriver, is president of the Special Olympics program. Rafer Johnson, another former Olympic decathlon champion, is one of hundreds of prominent athletes who

are actively supporting the project.

The Special Olympics began in 1968 with 1,000 children in competition at Chicago. Last year, with programs organized at local, state and regional levels, athletes competed from Canada, France and Puerto Rico.

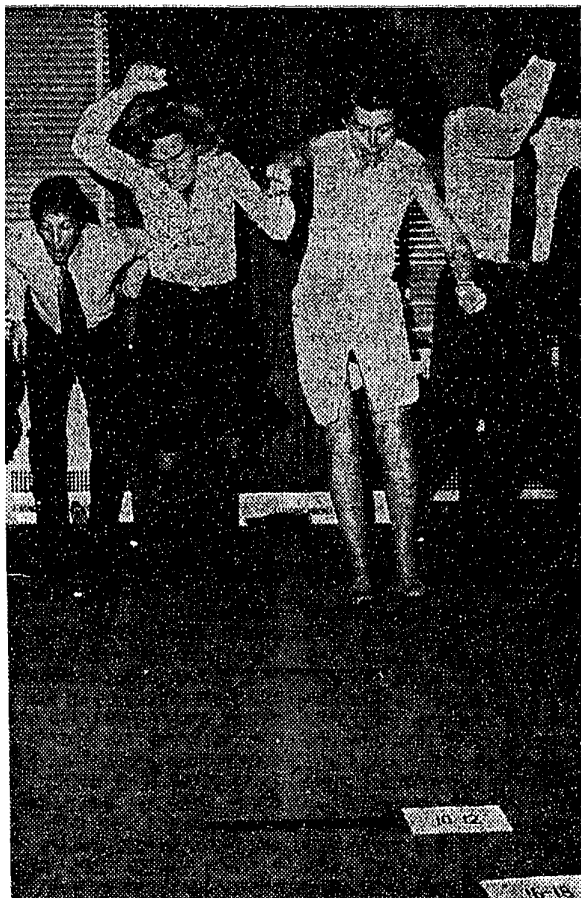
At a luncheon last week, Mrs. Shriver pointed proudly to one mentally retarded athlete who ran the mile in 4 minutes 54 seconds and another who leaped 5 feet 10 inches in the high jump. Then there was the 12-year-old girl from Indiana who ran 300 yards in 41.7 seconds and the blind boy from Glenville, Calif., who ran the 50-yard dash by following his coach's voice.

"There are 3-million mentally retarded children and

young adults in this country," Shriver said. "Special Olympics has reached 250,000 which means that we're still dealing with a small share of those who could benefit."

Shriver said it is important for parents to come forward and discover the program. State directors are available in all 50 states, he said. The directors in New York state are Ann Halstead of Rouses Point and Marty Seaman of Albany. The New York state meet is scheduled for June 16 through 18 at Syracuse University.

"There's a great deal of literature available to parents and coaches on working with mentally retarded youngsters," Shriver said. "It's all there. We just want them to come forward and help us."



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**AT SPECIAL OLYMPICS LUNCHEON: From left: Frank Gifford, Mrs. Ethel Kennedy, Mrs. R. Sargent Shriver and Rafer Johnson. They attempted to better marks set by retarded children in standing broad jump display.**