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Editorials

'Brave in the attempt'

Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.

With those words, borrowed from ancient Roman gladiators as they headed into the arena, Eunice Kennedy Shriver opened the first International Games for athletes with intellectual disabilities in 1968 at Chicago's Soldier Field. Now known as the Special Olympics, the games include 2.8 million athletes in 180 countries, with some 29,000 competitions a year.

On Saturday, Chicago celebrates the 40th anniversary of this remarkable homegrown movement. An Olympic-style torch run begins at Daley Plaza at 10 a.m., ending at Soldier Field for a day of music, sports and other activities. It's free.

The games owe much of their success to Kennedy star power (and money), but it was Illinois' own Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke, then a 23-year-old Chicago parks instructor, who came up with the idea. The Kennedy Foundation donated \$25,000 to organize the event, attended by 1,000 athletes and hundreds of spectators.

The gladiators' words—now officially the Athletes' Oath—are worth pondering by those of us whose approach to life begins and ends with the "let me win" part. The phrase

telegraphs the ambition, competitive spirit and quest for glory that drive us to excel in work or at play. But for too many of us, the opposite of winning is failing. That mind-set has become so central to the modern American psyche that in mainstream youth sports, everyone gets a trophy just for showing up.

Lost in the feel-good spirit is the inevitability that we will sometimes come up short, and that most of the time, there's no shame in losing. To attend a Special Olympics is to be reminded of that, in a powerful and humbling way. For those athletes, victory comes from competing with dignity, determination—and a pure and unrestrained joy that is regret-

tably missing from many of our own daily endeavors.

"If I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." Words to live by.



Getty/AFP photo by Olaf Kraak

Chicago celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Special Olympics.