To maximize time, it is vital that written plans and programs be developed. They are necessary to chart developments and to keep on target. In addition, they are necessary for the center or school or in the unlikely event of an accident.

There are a variety of levels of instruction and assistance that can be provided to athletes/students to facilitate learning, skill development, and competition success. Each coach/teacher needs to address each athlete individually.

Organizing a Training Program

- **Assessment of athletes’/student’s level of fitness and skills**
  - Appropriate sport selection
  - Appropriate goals
  - Means of following progress of athlete and training program - record
  - Examples of assessment tests

- **Goal setting and seasonal planning**
  - Readily attainable, short-term, concrete, and individual
  - Athlete involvement in individual and team goal setting
  - Goals incorporated into a preliminary “Season Plan”

- **Planning a training session**
  - Medical information on each athlete at every practice
  - Effective use of limited time; planning and prioritizing
  - Components: warm-up and stretching, skills instruction, competition experience, and cool-down
  - Familiar and comfortable training “routine”

Conducting a Training Session

There are many ways to conduct a training session for Special Olympics athletes. Because of comprehension and memory challenges for the athlete, there is considerable value in a developing a consistent training “routine” that provides familiarity, stability, and comfort.

There are four essential components of a typical sport training session: warm-up and stretching, skills instruction, competition experience, and cool-down and stretching. (Fitness training or conditioning can also be included following competition experience and prior to cool-down.) The following techniques and tips will provide the most successful learning opportunities.
1. **Warm-up and Stretching**
   - Time is precious and skills repetition vital. Warm up in a way specific to the sport. For example in soccer, dribble a ball while jogging as opposed to just running.
   - When athletes have difficulties with balance, use stretching activities that can be done while sitting, lying down, or leaning against a wall or partner.
   - Involve athletes in leading the exercises; coaches are then free to circulate and directly assist others who need help. The coaches must insure that each athlete is performing the warm-up and stretching activities correctly so that injuries are prevented.
   - Teach a simple routine involving the major muscle groups, which athletes can repeat at home and at competition. Warm-up by walking or jogging 5 minutes. Then perform the following stretches: 1) calf stretch against wall, 2) hamstring stretch or toe touch, 3) quad stretch holding onto wall for balance (both directions), 4) groin stretch while sitting or lunging to each side, 5) shoulder stretch (grasping hands behind body and leaning forward, and 6) triceps stretch (reaching to sky with one arm, bending elbow which points forward, and pulling elbow straight back with opposite hand; performing stretch with other arm).
   - Concerning stretching, what to do and not to do follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Do</strong></th>
<th><strong>Do Not</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perform warm-up activity for 5 minutes (walk or run slowly).</td>
<td>Do not begin practice by stretching or playing; can tear muscle fibers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform held stretches for 10-30 seconds each.</td>
<td>Do not bounce when stretching; can also tear muscle fibers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start with the large muscle groups such as the legs then move to the shoulders, etc.</td>
<td>Do not start with the smaller muscles. Go from large to small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform each stretch to the point of tension.</td>
<td>Do not put strain on the joints, back or neck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathe while stretching.</td>
<td>Do not hold breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform stretches in a “safe” position and through range of motion.</td>
<td>Avoid the hurdler’s stretch, deep knee bends, straight-leg sit-ups, sit-ups pulling on the neck, and lying on the back and moving legs overhead as if riding a bicycle.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Skills Instruction**
   Training Sequence (tasks → skills → application in game/event → implementation in competition)
   - The key is to break down skills into small tasks or steps; tasks are then put together to form skills. *(Addresses difficulty in performing multi-step tasks)*
   - Drills are developed so that skills can be applied in a game or an event situation. The result is skills applied and performed in competition.
Communication when Teaching and Coaching

• Communicate effectively.

  - Clear: Use words that an athlete can understand or that an athlete has a point of reference such as “see the ball” as opposed to “find the target”. *(Addresses an athlete’s need to understand what he or she is asked to do)*

  - Concrete: Use words that are specific to something physical and/or real. Since athletes have a cognitive delay in processing information (especially words), the challenge is to make concepts concrete. For example, when teaching the 3-second lane in basketball, a coach can use the physical words of “hot” and “cold” to assist an athlete learning the concept. “Hot” refers to the lane on offense; the athlete will burn up if he stops in the lane and not move through it. “Cold” refers to the lane at the defensive end of the court. The lane is cool and the athlete’s friend. *(Addresses difficulty in understanding concepts and desired actions)*

  - Concise: Use a few descriptive “key words” or cues. Do not use long sentences or multi-part instructions. For example: “Reach for the sky.” *(Addresses an athlete’s difficulty in understanding verbal instructions and desired actions)*

  - Consistent: Use the same word or words for the same action. *(Addresses an athlete’s need for repetition and reinforcement)*

  - Command-oriented: Verbally reinforce the athlete immediately after a desired action. Make the reinforcement action-oriented and specific to the skill. *(Addresses an athlete’s need for frequent motivation and words associated with a physical action)*

• Make sure an athlete is looking at you when making a coaching point. When needed, physically prompt an athlete to look at you. *(Addresses difficulty in maintaining attention)*

• Ask athletes questions rather than always provide directions. Lead them to think for themselves. Verify athlete responses. *(Addresses independence because they are not always asked to think)*

Providing Appropriate Level of Assistance

• Assess what an athlete is ready and able to do; build upon strengths.

• Use appropriate levels of assistance for each athlete - verbal, visual (demonstration), partial physical assistance, full physical assistance. Gradually reduce physical assistance in favor of simple cues and eventually no prompting at all. *(Addresses difficulty in learning & improving)*
  - The lower the ability athlete, the more assistance may be required.
  - Verbal cues should always be accompanied by demonstration.
  - Physical prompts may be needed to help the athlete get positioned properly.
  - When all else fails, move the athlete through the complete skill.

• Practice skills in situations that are related to the game or event. *(Addresses difficulty in generalizing to new situations)*
• Use drills and activities that involve many athletes at all times. *(Addresses slower rate of learning and the need for motivation and repetition)*

• Decide on the best method of teaching what is required in terms of game or event strategies. For example in team sports, build from skills to offense to defense. Concerning an offense in basketball:
  - Evaluate player strengths.
  - Design an offense based on those strengths.
  - Place people on the court where they can be successful.
  - Evaluate who can best play with whom.
  - Design a substitution schedule so that all players on the court contribute to the team and that each line up is effective.

**Managing Athlete Behavioral Challenges**

• The goal is for coaches/teachers to teach and coach Special Olympics athletes more effectively. However, a coach/teacher may have certain expectations of an athlete/student that may not be realistic...not because the coach/teacher does not care, but because the coach/teacher does not understand or appreciate the differences that may exist.

• When an athlete/student exhibits what is generally perceived as inappropriate behavior(s), the inappropriate behavior(s) may not be defiance, acting out or silliness. These behaviors may simply be a reflection or part of the person and/or what is operating in the moment.

• Use the forms “Athlete/Student Behavior Assessment & Measure of Progress” and “Athlete Behavior Characteristics and Strategies to Improve Learning” on pages 5-7. Assess the athlete’s/student’s behavior that is preventing him or her from learning a skill. Identify a progression of strategies to positively affect learning.

3. **Competition Experience**

• Provide a realistic competition experience during each practice in order to improve confidence and performance under the pressure of real competition.

• In team sports, help athletes understand game concepts by providing immediate and concrete feedback. During scrimmages or practice games, stop the play to help athletes recognize critical situations and learn how to react successfully.

• Emphasize the value of enforcing the rules during training. Rules enforcement helps prepare athletes for participation in community sports and in life.

4. **Cool-down and Stretching**

• Having athletes do several light stretching with the major muscle groups will prevent muscle cramps and soreness and increase flexibility.

• Review the main themes of the training session; reward athlete performance, and talk about the next competition or training session.

The following tools should be helpful in assessing behavior and providing effective ways in teaching & coaching the athlete/student.
## Athlete/Student Behavior Assessment & Measure of Progress

**Athlete’s/student’s name:**

**Coach/Teacher:**

**Email** address:

**Cell phone:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation / Promptness</strong></td>
<td>Athlete is always prompt and regularly participates.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete is late once every two weeks and regularly participates.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete is late more than once every two weeks and regularly participates.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete is late every week and/or has poor participation.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Engagement in Sport</strong></td>
<td>Athlete proactively contributes regularly to the team through play.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete proactively contributes somewhat to the team through play.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete rarely contributes to the team through play.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete never contributes to the team through play.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening Skills</strong></td>
<td>Athlete listens when others talk, both in practice and in play Incorporates or builds off of others through participation.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete listens most of the time when others talk, both in practice and in play.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete does not always listen when others talk, both in practice and in play and occasionally interrupts when others speak.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete does not listen when others talk, both in practice and in play. Athlete often interrupts when others speak.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Athlete never displays disruptive behavior during sports activities.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete rarely displays disruptive behavior during sports activities.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete occasionally displays disruptive behavior during sports activities.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete almost always displays disruptive behavior during sports activities.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Athlete is always prepared for sports activities with required dress and personal supplies.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete is almost always prepared for sports activities with required dress and personal supplies.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete is occasionally prepared for sports activities with required dress and personal supplies.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athlete is almost never prepared for sports activities with required dress and personal supplies.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Points Goal</strong></td>
<td>Points earned</td>
<td><strong>---</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coach’s/teacher’s comments:
**Athlete Behavior Characteristics & Strategies to Improve Learning**

The goal of the chart below is to provide coaches with information (not labels) and strategies regarding different functional and learning behavioral characteristics (not labels) of athletes. The goal is for coaches to teach and coach Special Olympics athletes more effectively. However, a coach may have certain expectations of an athlete that may not be realistic ... not because the coach does not care, but because the coach does not understand or appreciate the differences that may exist.

When an athlete exhibits what is generally perceived as inappropriate behavior(s), the inappropriate behavior(s) may not be defiance, acting out or silliness. These behaviors may simply be a reflection or part of the person and/or what is operating at the moment.

When possible, talk with parents, providers, teachers, former coaches, etc. about an athlete’s characteristics and the successful strategies used to affect learning. Use the characteristics as a checklist. Ensure that one or more of the strategies opposite the respective characteristics are employed in each practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athlete Behavior Characteristics</th>
<th>Strategies to Improve Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Learning occurs at a slower rate | 1) Provide structure & train more frequently.  
2) Provide repetition and review.  
3) Break skills down into smaller parts. |
| Short attention span             | 1) Train for short periods of time; provide numerous activities focusing on same task.  
2) Provide repetition & review (key to gaining new skill).  
3) Work one-on-one (gain full attention). |
| Resistance to change; stubborn   | 1) Structure training with clear rules, consistent routines, smooth transitions and signals for changing activities.  
2) Establish routines (provide flexibility within routine);  
3) Identify motivating factors; build on successes. |
| Behavior problems – acting out; mood swings | 1) Set clear rules, expectations and limits; specify location for individual to regain self control.  
2) Speak calmly, enforce rules but provide conditions for coming back.  
3) Reinforce acceptable behaviors. |
| Verbal expression difficulties    | 1) Allow for additional time to express thoughts.  
2) Use picture boards/other assistive devices.  
3) Ask him or her to demonstrate or show what he/she means. |
| Verbal interpretation difficulties| 1) Provide the appropriate level of instruction beginning with demonstration followed by physical prompt and physical assistance.  
2) Keep verbal instructions to a minimum.  
3) Use key words/cues, sign language or pictures to communicate. |
| Prone to seizures                | 1) Know signs and symptoms of different types of seizures.  
2) Control atmosphere/triggers (heat, sun, sugar, loud noise, etc.) of seizures; respond appropriately.  
3) Prepare teammates to respond appropriately should a seizure occur. |
| Poor muscle tone                 | 1) Provide specific exercise and strengthening programs.  
2) Stretch within normal range of motion.  
3) Uneven surfaces increase risk of injury. |
| Lower pain threshold; sensitive to touch | 1) Establish eye contact when talking, unless individual is autistic.  
2) Use softer/adaptive equipment; minimize loud noises like whistles.  
3) Forewarn if any touch is necessary; respect wishes. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athlete Behavior Characteristics</th>
<th>Strategies to Improve Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Failure to form social bonds** | 1) Work in small groups.  
2) Have each child work in pairs (same 2 people for several weeks).  
3) Remove highly structured and least distracting environment; expose to individual or dual sports. |
| **Easily over-stimulated**       | 1) Remove or lessen distracting stimuli (dim lights; soften sounds; remove unnecessary objects).  
2) Train in separate room or smaller group; gradually add people.  
3) Train with athletes who tend to be nonverbal. |
| **Difficulty with balance or stability** | 1) Provide physical support, as needed, via partner or other assistive device.  
2) Broaden base of support such as sitting down or leaning against wall; minimize uneven surfaces.  
3) Allow for extra time to complete a task. |
| **Compulsive eating**           | 1) Remove food from practice/competition sites.  
2) Do not use food as reward (especially for individuals with Prader Willi).  
3) Provide structure and routine for eating. |
| **Poor coordination**           | 1) Break skills down into sequential tasks; substitute easier movement patterns (walking instead of running).  
2) Progress from athlete's current level of performance.  
3) Allow additional time with one-on-one support. |
| **Physical limitations or impairments** | 1) Utilize those skills or parts of skills athlete can perform.  
2) For those skills or parts of skills athlete is unable to perform, allow athlete to substitute other skills, have partner execute those skills or use assistive device.  
3) Focus on activities that develop mobility and stability. |
| **Visual impairments**          | 1) Use verbal cues, physical prompt and physical assistance.  
2) Utilize sound or physical devices like beep balls, guide rope along lane line, tether when running with partner, etc.  
3) Provide precise and action-specific and feedback. |
| **Hearing impairments**         | 1) Establish eye contact when talking.  
2) Use signs, pictures or sign language; keep cochlear implants dry.  
3) Demonstrate what is desired. |
| **Autism spectrum disorders**   | 1) Minimize verbal; emphasize visual (Board Maker) because of difficulty in processing sensory stimuli (overarousal); provide only one item per picture.  
2) Reduce sensory overload like whistles (some athletes are hypersensitive to noise).  
3) Individualize schedule with known start & known finish (predictability); use clear, consistent cues & prompts; cue transition from one activity to next. |
| **Self-stimulatory behaviors**  | 1) Become aware and monitor.  
2) Control situation.  
3) May need to block such behaviors if inappropriate or distracting. |
| **Self-injurious behaviors**    | 1) Become aware of cuts or banging head against table or wall. Work with medical person.  
2) Control or block behavior.  
3) Provide behavior support plan to manage. |
| **Obsessive-compulsive behaviors** | 1) Become aware and monitor.  
2) Control situation or block behavior.  
3) Provide a behavior support plan to manage. |
| **Hyperactivity**               | 1) Use three or more sensory channels – tactile; kinesthetic; visual; auditory.  
2) Set clear rules, consistent routines and smooth transitions with signals for changing activities with motivating reinforcement.  
3) Keep directions simple; minimize information. |
| **Lethargy (due to disability or medication)** | 1) Provide frequent rest intervals.  
2) Expose to sports that provide natural rest periods such as bocce, bowling, golf, etc.  
3) Slowly progress to longer periods of activity. |
| **Lack of motivation to push self** | 1) Be aware that the greater the intellectual disability, the less motivated to continue activity once individual feels uncomfortable.  
2) Add positive consequence/reward to continue activity such as peddling on stationary bike to drive power to TV or music player; transition to sport).  
3) Reward even small improvements in performance. |
Description of Common Behaviors and Recommended Accommodations

**ORAL EXPRESSION**

They may . . .
- Speak in single word statements or phrases only
- Exhibit word retrieval problems and substitute words for words s/he is having trouble retrieving
- Exhibit bizarre patterns of language usage
- Imitate or repeat words incorrectly
- Use gestures as a substitute for a word
- Have difficulty relating ideas in sequence
- Have difficulty making self understood to peers
- Contribute to discussion with off-task comments
- Confuse words

Accommodations . . .
- Repeat last phrase to assist in re-focusing
- Calm Individual down - help them relax
- Pose leading questions to help clarify information
- Minimize help from their peers
- Be patient, give them an opportunity to formalize ideas

**LISTENING COMPREHENSION**

They may . . .
- Ask that questions be repeated
- Often say “what”, or “huh”, etc.
- Confuse the meaning of similar sounding words
- Fail to follow directions given verbally
- Do the opposite of the given instructions
- Have difficulty listening attentively to stories, television show, records.
- Have difficulty locating the direction of sounds
- Answer questions inappropriately
- Confuse time concepts (before/after)
- Confuse direction words (front/back)
- Ask irrelevant questions
- Show increased difficulty in any of the above areas when noise increase.

Accommodations . . .
- Position to maximize attention
- Model
- Physical Contact to help them focus on oral expression
- Develop eye contact before making requests
- Have them repeat directions
- Remember generally not an issue of volume but clarity
ATTENTIONAL SKILLS
They may . . .
- Fail to finish
- Seem easily distracted
- Appear not to listen
- Have difficulty concentrating on tasks requiring sustained attention
- Appear to act before thinking (impulse control)
- Shift excessively from one activity to another
- Have difficulty organizing work
- Frequently calls out
- Have difficulty awaiting turns in games
- Run about to climb on things excessively
- Have difficulty staying seated
- Appear to be always “on the go” — “driven by a motor”
- Appear not just “over-active” but haphazard, poorly organized, non-goal directed

Accommodations . . .
- Keep them busy using a variety of short tasks
- Quick with praise and often
- Outline schedule so they understand expectations
- Monitor closely
- Help organize activities/limit materials if feasible

SOCIAL PERCEPTION
They may . . .
- Make inappropriate comments
- Make inappropriate use of personal space
- Have difficulty anticipating behavior in others
- Have difficulty on changing behavior issues
- Appear to be inflexible
- Tend towards impulsive decisions or judgments
- Difficulty responding to non-verbal cues, hand gestures, facial expressions

Accommodations . . .
- Be consistent with responses and expectations
- Discipline in private
- Deal with chronological age not perceived mental age
- Use plain versus simple language and directions
- Minimize inappropriate behaviors - replace with appropriate

Accommodations for persons with PHYSICAL CHALLENGES . . .
- Adapt rules - always clarify to entire group
- Invite them to be involved with decision making on adaptations
- Positioning
- Educate everyone involved in Wheelchair safety issues
- Explore other roles, i.e. scorekeeper, manager and coach
Safety Checklist

The following checklist is offered as a shorthand method of assessing an activity plan and bringing the most critical components into focus.

1. Have enough supervisors been provided? _____
2. Do all personnel possess the necessary skills? ______
   - Certification   % yes
   - Outside training   % yes
   - In-house training   % yes
3. Have the responsibilities of all supervisory personnel been clearly defined and articulated?____
4. Has the location of personnel been planned to guarantee effective coverage? _____
5. Do supervisors have clear line of sight over their areas of responsibility?____
6. Are there areas that are being under or over supervised?____
7. Is there immediate access to trained first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)? _____
8. Are there carefully developed plans for medical emergencies to include telephone access, notifications to be made, etc.? _____
9. Are all supervisory personnel familiar with the emergency action plan(s) and procedures? _____
10. Is there an effective means of crisis communication among supervisory personnel? _____
11. Have the participants been made aware to the maximum reasonable degree of their responsibilities and obligations?____
12. Have provisions been made to provide follow-up and reminders regarding participant responsibilities and obligations? _____
13. Does the supervisor have all necessary medical information on each participant, including special medical problems, names and telephone numbers of persons to be notified, and list of current medications? _____
14. Does all activity planning include specific considerations for safety? _____
15. Have rules of conduct been established, explained, and rigidly enforced? ______
16. Has there been careful consideration of the matter of participant readiness, to include assessing, ability grouping, etc.? _____
17. Do the participants and their parents understand insofar as is reasonable, the risks inherent in the activity and the safety procedures? _____
18. Within the reasonable limits of their individual capabilities, do the participants recognize and accept responsibility for their own safety? _____
19. Has careful consideration been given to possible activity adaptations to increase safety? _____
20. Has consideration been given to the question of appropriate footwear, clothing, equipment, and safety equipment? _____
21. Are there regularly scheduled inspection and maintenance procedures for all equipment and facilities? _____
22. Are the results of inspections & completed maintenance procedures recorded & maintained? _____
23. Has careful attention been given to the following environmental conditions:
   - Appropriate playing surface? ______
   - Sufficient buffer zones around playing areas? _____
   - Elimination of potholes? ______
   - Removal of obstructions? _____
   - Slippery surface conditions? _____
   - Sufficient quantity of equipment? _____
24. Does all equipment meet or exceed appropriate safety standards? _____
25. Has consideration been given to spectator safety and pedestrian traffic near the event? _____
26. Have equipment and field modifications been considered in light of participant needs (such as scaled down, reduced flight, or lighter weight)? _____
## Training Session Plan

**Sport** ____________________________  **Date** _________  **# of athletes** ___  **# of coaches** ___

**Goal for session** ________________________________________________________________

**Facility safety check:**  
- [ ] Equipment  
- [ ] Surface  
- [ ] Layout  
- [ ] Supervision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Specific Objectives</th>
<th>Drills/Activities</th>
<th>Layout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warm-up exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stretching exercises</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skills instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competition experience</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cool-down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Team talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>