

# Sklar gets medals for birthday

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By Colin McDonough, Special to the Register

Chapel Haven Special Olympics athlete Beth Sklar shares a birthday with coach Emily Anne Westman. On Friday at Jess Dow Field, they both received a gift neither will soon forget.

Sklar won the gold medal in the 200-meter race on her 47th birthday and asked for her coach to place the medal around her neck on the podium, on Westman's 22nd birthday.

"It was amazing. There are no words to describe it," Westman said. "It was pure excitement. I was so proud of her."

The two shared a hug on the podium, and with music blaring, Sklar raised her gold medal with Westman watching. On Saturday, Sklar followed up her gold in the 200 meters with a silver medal in the shot put.

"It was awesome," Sklar said. "It was also my coach's birthday yesterday. I'm not disappointed with silver. I threw it 15 feet."

Sklar is no rookie when it comes to Special Olympics Connecticut. She has competed since 1996.

"In 2002, I won a gold medal, and I applied to Ireland and got to go to the World Games," Sklar said. "I love Special Olympics. I work out everyday with a personal trainer and practice with the team once a week."

Westman also is experienced at the Special Olympics and has worked at the games for four years, but this year is her first Olympics as local coordinator.

"I was used to Special Olympics, but it was more about organizing everyone," Westman said. "It was difficult at times, but just to see people come back with medals and ribbons, all the practice and hard work pays off."

Chapel Haven is a school for special needs adults that teaches students independent living.

"Eighteen-year-olds and up come to learn how to cook and live independently," Westman said. "We have been doing the Special Olympics for the past decade, I believe."

The olympic team Chapel Haven brought to Southern Connecticut State consists of 57 athletes and 20 coaches.

“Some of the volunteer coaches work at Chapel Haven, but some are friends of ours as well,” Westman said.

Most teams stay in the dorms at Southern, but Chapel Haven commutes from its close location on Whalley Avenue. This forces athletes to wake up before the sun rises at 4 a.m. to be the first team to arrive at the track.

“They’re awesome about it. Everyone is there on time and ready to go,” Westman said. “It’s a very long day, but they try their hardest.”

The Chapel Haven team trained for eight weeks to prepare for the games, and although the weekend was about working hard, all of the athletes were able to have fun Friday and Saturday night. On Friday night, Special Olympics held its opening ceremonies in Moore Fieldhouse. On Saturday night, a dance was scheduled for the teams. Despite Sklar and other Chapel Haven athletes not planning going to attend, they still had an enjoyable weekend as a team.

When asked who else she’d want to spend her birthday weekend with, besides her teammates, Sklar said, “Nobody.”