

David Cassidy wants you — if you fall in the pre-adult league.

America's idol of the under-aged masses will be sending letters to high schools across the land next week, asking students to volunteer as athletic coaches for mentally retarded children.

David, this year's youth chairman of the National Special Olympics, will also be using concert gig bandstands as enlistment centers for the program and urge audiences to become involved in the work with handicapped youth that's met astounding success in the five years since its inception.

Jan Sarnoff, wife of NBC vice president Tom Sarnoff, is the president of the Western Special Olympics and tells me that in California alone some 60,000 mentally retarded children are now competing in weekly athletic competitions as part of program.

"When we began our work in 1967," she says "It was considered unthinkable to train handicapped children in physical fitness."

These were children who had been hidden away by parents, ridiculed and abused by playmates, whose lives had been beleaguered by failure fru-

strations — and who, for the first time, were being given the chance to feel pride of accomplishment.

At the first Special Olympics

games held at Soldier's Field in Chicago in 1968, there were sightless youngsters competing who had to be led to the playing field; children with such limited motor skills that they stumbled instead of ran through the races; a young boy who took part in a relay on crutches.

"For them," says Mrs. Sarnoff, "the point isn't breaking records or even winning — it's competing; knowing the joy for the first time in their lives of receiving recognition, of being applauded and singled out as an achiever."

In spite of all the amazingly good work the organization has already done there are still, according to Jan Sarnoff, more than 400,000 mentally re-

tarded in California alone who are denied the chance to develop sports skills.

With David Cassidy's help, the organization hopes to be enlisting scores of teens around the land to help less fortunate youth find the self-con-

fidence of learning how to toss a ball, to run, to jump rope.

If you're interested, check your school or state Special Olympics department, or write me in care of The Palm Beach Post. Or tell David Cassidy about it when he visits your city.