



Coaching Youth Sports



Motivation and the Athlete

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One important aspect that is common in athletics and athletes alike, is motivation. Athletes use motivation in a variety of sports and settings. But one may ask, what exactly is motivation? Motivation is an incentive that prompts a person to act with a sense of purpose. Simply put, motivation is why we do the things we do. It provides the incentive to complete a task, regardless of how difficult or complex.

Athletes and coaches both rely on the numerous motivational techniques to provide the incentive for an athlete to perform up to expected standards. Without proper motivation, many things can not be accomplished.

The coach, parent, and/or the athlete need to examine both intrinsic and extrinsic values of the athlete in order to understand what motivates each individual athlete. Due to the complexities of motivation and people, this can be accomplished in a number of ways. An approach often used to motivate athletes is the extrinsic, hands on methods. Goal setting, t-shirts, and clubs can work to gain interest and promote specific activities. This method can be a valuable asset for parents, coaches, and athletes alike. Although this is beneficial, it may lose its effectiveness over time. Thus, motivation must then become intrinsic.

An intrinsic value such as motivation cannot be worn or experienced by joining a club. Instead, intrinsic motivation is learned, nurtured, and developed by parents, coaches, or the athletes themselves. It cannot be turned on and off like a light switch, but rather, must remain turned on. To provide strong, intrinsic motivation to an athlete, one must include the following guidelines into an athletes regimen. By doing so, the athlete will develop a stronger, more conscious level of motivation.

1. Show that you care. Be supportive towards the athlete. Take an interest in the athlete.
2. Be fair. Be firm but fair and consistent.
3. Demonstrate the value of effort. Discuss the benefits of mental imagery, positive self-talk, and good work ethics.
4. Set goals, not limits. Encourage athletes and help them to set attainable goals.
5. Lead by example. Set an example by working just as hard as the athletes.
6. Make workouts fun. Keep the athletes focused, and vary routines to avoid staleness.
7. Reward accomplishment. A simple handshake or pat on the back can go a long way in showing you care and maintaining motivation.

Remember that people are individuals and that they may need to be motivated differently. By following some of these basic guidelines, it may help to prevent motivational problems before they occur or they may enable a parent, coach, or athlete to rethink things and try a different approach.

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