

# Role of perfect motivation in enhancing the quality of coaching

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**Abstract:** Motivation is an internal energy force that determines all aspects of our behaviour; it also impacts on how we think, feel and interact with others. As the architects of optimal training environments, coaches require an informed understanding of the underlying motives of athletes. The commonly held view is that motivation is either ‘good’ (intrinsic) or ‘bad’ (extrinsic). However, this understanding is limited and promotes an inaccurate understanding of extrinsic motivation and its varying influences on sport participation. Self-determination theory also proposes several forms of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and a motivation. Intrinsic motivation is associated with the inherent fun and enjoyment associated with sport participation. For example, some athletes naturally enjoy running fast or striking the ball ‘sweetly’. In between these two opposing forms of motivation is extrinsic motivation, which is generally associated with the achievement of some goal, such as winning an Olympic gold medal. Of primary interest here is a more thorough understanding of extrinsic motivation and its influence on sport participation.

**Keywords:** motivation, coaching, Olympic, participation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Motivation is an internal energy force that determines all aspects of our behaviour; it also impacts on how we think, feel and interact with others. In sport, high motivation is widely accepted as an essential prerequisite in getting athletes to fulfil their potential. However, given its inherently abstract nature, it is a force that is often difficult to exploit fully. Some coaches, like Portugal manager Luiz Felipe ‘Big Phil’ Scolari, appear to have a ‘magic touch’, being able to get a great deal more out of a team than the sum of its individual parts; others find motivation to be an elusive concept they are forever struggling to master.

The article will also outline some of the key findings from recent literature and provide four evidence-based techniques relating to the enhancement of motivation. You will be able to tailor the motivational techniques to enhance your participation in sport or the performance of others. You will learn that motivation is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that can be manipulated, to some degree at least, in the pursuit of superior sporting performance.

### The Importance of Youth Sport Coaches

Behavior observation research has provided compelling evidence that coaching behaviors influence the quality of youth sport experiences. In one study, youth reported greater liking for basketball when their coaches exhibited high levels of mistake-contingent technical instruction, and low levels of keeping control and general encouragement (Smith, Zane, Smoll, & Coppel, 1983). Similarly, youth evaluated their coaches more positively when the coaches exhibited high levels of instructive (e.g., general and mistake-contingent technical instruction) and supportive (e.g., reinforcement, mistake-contingent encouragement) behaviors, and low levels of punishment (Smith et al., 1983; Smith & Smoll, 1990). Interestingly, Smith and Smoll (1990) also found that youth self-esteem at the beginning of the season moderated the effects of coach behavior on youth evaluations – low self-esteem athletes’ evaluations of coaches seem to be especially influenced by the coaches use of the desirable coaching behaviors described above. Clearly, what coaches do impacts how youth evaluate those coaches and the activities that are organized by those coaches.

Beyond a specific behavioral repertoire, coaches are able to create motivational climates by the way they choose to structure the setting. To illustrate the role of coaching climates on young athletes’ sport experience, consider a recent study of female and male recreational swim league participants aged 8 – 18 years (Conroy, Kaye, & Coatsworth, in press). In this

study, we were interested in whether and how the perceived coaching climate predicted changes in youths' reasons for swimming. Youth completed measures of their situational motivation (i.e., their reasons for swimming) at the beginning, middle, and end of the season. At the beginning and end of season, youth also rated their achievement goals. Achievement goals represent the purpose or aim of their achievement behavior. We employed Elliot's (1999) 2x2 model of achievement goals that distinguishes four goals based on their definition of competence (i.e., task- or self-referenced criteria vs. normatively-referenced criteria) and the valence of the goal (i.e., approaching competence vs. avoiding incompetence). At the end of the swim season, youth rated their perceptions of the coaching climate – that is, the degree to which youth perceived the coaches as emphasizing each of the four achievement goals when evaluating the youths' competence.

Results indicated that youth perceptions of avoidance coaching climates positively predicted approximately 40% of the change in youths' corresponding avoidance achievement goals during the season. Additionally, to the extent that youth increased their focus on avoiding self-referenced incompetence (e.g., not performing worse than they previously performed), they described their reasons for swimming as being more externally regulated (i.e., done to satisfy external demands, such as parents' directives) and more amotivated (i.e., done without a clear purpose in mind). Thus, avoidance coaching climates in swimming appear to be linked with deterioration in the self-determination of young swimmers' motivation.

The studies described above illustrate the emerging conclusion from this literature – coaches may influence youth motivation both through their observed behaviors and the motivational climate they create. Similar to the literature on developmental correlates of youth sport participation, evidence for coaching effects on youth sport motivation is based largely on non-experimental research that does not permit strong causal inferences. For this reason, a number of researchers in this area have turned to experimental designs to test their hypotheses about the critical factors for optimizing youth sport experiences.

First, it appears that some coach behaviors may be modified by brief training programs. Specifically, coaches' use of reinforcement following desirable behaviors appears to be the behavior most amenable to change following training (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2004; Rushall & Smith, 1979; Smith et al., 1979). Other theoretically-important behaviors may be sufficiently well-engrained that they are resistant to modification or infrequent enough to escape detection of modest changes in their base rates. Second, athletes evaluate CET-trained coaches more positively than non-CET-trained coaches (Smith et al., 1979; Smith et al., 1995; Smoll et al., 1993). These findings are based on post-training differences in youth perceptions of coach behaviors; it will be important to determine whether randomly-assigned coach training programs can account for changes in youth perceptions of coaches.

One of the most consistent findings from this literature concerns the effects of coach training on youth self-perceptions. Psychosocial coach training programs have led to increases in self-esteem for low self-esteem youth (Coatsworth & Conroy, in press; Smoll et al., 1993). It is worth noting that these self-esteem enhancement effects for low self-esteem youth are significantly larger when coaches and youth are homogeneous as opposed to heterogeneous with respect to biological sex. Finally, experimental investigations of the effects of coach training on youth motivation are scarce in the literature. The most compelling evidence for the motivational benefits of coach training was provided by Barnett, Smoll, & Smith (1992) who found that 95% of youth who played for CET-trained coaches returned the following year whereas only 74% of youth who played for non-CET-trained coaches returned the following year.

### **Developing Prime Motivation**

Try to generate the feelings of inspiration and pride that you will experience when you reach your goals. This technique will distract you from the discomfort of the Grind, focus you on what you want to achieve, and generate positive thoughts and emotions that will get you through the Grind.

**Focus on your long-term goals.** To be your best, you have to put a lot of time and effort into your sport. But, as I noted above, there are going to be times-the Grind-when you don't feel that motivated.

**When you feel this way, focus on your long-term goals.** Remind yourself why you're working so hard. Imagine exactly what you want to accomplish and tell yourself that the only way you'll be able to reach your goals is to continue to work hard.

**Have a training partner.** It's difficult to be highly motivated all of the time on your own. There are going to be some days when you just don't feel like getting out there. Also, no matter how hard you push yourself, you will work that much harder if you have someone pushing you. That someone can be a coach, personal trainer, or parent. But the best person to have is a regular training partner, someone at about your level of ability and with similar goals. You can work together to accomplish your goals. The chances are on any given day that one of you will be motivated. Even if you're not very psyched to practice on a particular day, you will still put in the time and effort because your partner is counting on you.

**Focus on greatest competitor.** Another way to keep yourself motivated is to focus on your greatest competitor. Identify who your biggest competition is and put his or her name or photo where you can see it every day. Ask yourself, "Am I working as hard as him/her?" Remember that only by working your hardest will you have a chance to overcome your greatest competitor.

**Motivational cues.** A big part of staying motivated involves generating positive emotions associated with your efforts and achieving your goals. A way to keep those feelings is with motivational cues such as inspirational phrases and photographs. If you come across a quote or a picture that moves you, place it where you can see it regularly such as in your bedroom, on your refrigerator door, or in your locker. Look at it periodically and allow yourself to experience the emotions it creates in you. These reminders and the emotions associated with them will inspire and motivate you to continue to work hard toward your goals.

**Set goals.** There are few things more rewarding and motivating than setting a goal, putting effort toward the goal, and achieving the goal. The sense of accomplishment and validation of the effort makes you feel good and motivates you to strive higher. It's valuable to establish clear goals of what you want to accomplish in your sport and how you will achieve those goals. Seeing that your hard work leads to progress and results should motivate you further to realize your goals.

**Daily questions.** Every day, you should ask yourself two questions. When you get up in the morning, ask, "What can I do today to become the best athlete I can be?" and before you go to sleep, ask, "Did I do everything possible today to become the best athlete I can be?" These two questions will remind you daily of what your goals are and will challenge you to be motivated to become your best.

**The heart of motivation.** A final point about motivation. The techniques I've just described are effective in increasing your short-term motivation. Motivation, though, is not something that can be given to you. Rather, motivation must ultimately come from within. You must simply want to participate in your sport. You just have to want it really bad

### **Motivational Techniques for Coaches and Athletes**

#### **1. Goal setting**

Athletes should be encouraged to set a few ambitious but achievable long-term goals; perhaps to represent their country in a major championship in three or four years. Through empowering athletes to set their own goals, they are more likely to accept the challenges that lie ahead and pursue the goals with enthusiasm(13); To keep athletes on track with their long-term goals, they should also set appropriate medium-term goals. For example, following a bronze medal-winning performance at the 2004 Athens Olympics, UK heptathlete Kelly Sotherton set herself the medium-term goal of winning the 2006 Commonwealth title in Melbourne (which she achieved) en route to pursuing her long-term goal to be crowned Olympic champion at the 2008 Beijing Games;

By far the most important goals in practical terms are those for the short-term, as it is these that keep athletes focused on the checkmarks which are seminal to achieving superior performance. Therefore, short-term goals should be predominantly process-oriented. For example, when Manchester United's Wayne Rooney injured a metatarsal six weeks before the start of the soccer World Cup, he set a series of process goals in his race to regain full fitness. These included daily physiotherapy sessions, remedial exercises in an oxygen chamber, non weight-bearing aerobic activities, monitoring of nutritional intake and so on;

Goals need to be monitored and revised on a regular basis. One of the biggest mistakes that coaches make in setting goals is that they are often too rigid in their approach. The goal setting process works best when there is some flexibility and the individual athlete or team take ownership of each goal. Thus, coaches and managers are better off exercising some democracy when setting goals, particularly if working with more experienced athletes.

## **2. Using extrinsic rewards**

According to SDT(1), the key aspect in using extrinsic rewards effectively is that they reinforce an athlete's sense of competence and self-worth. Thus, a reward should be informational in nature rather than controlling. If a reward comes to be controlling, it can significantly undermine intrinsic motivation. For a reward to be informational, it is advisable that it has relatively little monetary worth (ie it is a token reward), such as a 'woman of the match' or 'athlete of the tour' title. Also, the reward should be presented to an athlete in front of all potential recipients with some emphasis placed on the prestige associated with it. Other popular ways of using token rewards include etching athletes' names on annual honours boards for their contributions, or awarding a special item of clothing.

## **3. Motivational music**

A particularly good way to motivate athletes in training and prior to competition is through the use of music they perceive to be inspirational. Sydney Olympics rowing gold medallist, Tim Foster, now a respected coach, uses music to punctuate all of the indoor training sessions that he leads. Specifically, during circuit training or rowing ergometer intervals, he puts on loud/fast music, while during recovery periods he plays soft/slow music. Therefore, work and recovery times are regulated by music. Research from Brunel University indicates that this approach increases work output, reduces perceived exertion and improves in-task affect – the pleasure experienced during the activity(14,15).

## **4. Positive self-talk**

Positive self-talk is a technique that can be used to enhance motivation across a wide range of achievement domains. It makes use of an athlete's powerful inner voice to reinforce their self-esteem or important aspects of their performance. With appropriate repetition, self-talk can positively alter an athlete's belief system. I use three types of self-talk in my work with athletes and will illustrate each with an example to assist you in coming up with your own.

The first type is known as task-relevant self-talk, which serves to focus an athlete's attention on the task at hand. A karateka I worked with used the mantra 'pillar of power' to reinforce his strong posture. The second type is known as mood-related self-talk, which impacts on how athletes feel. An international water skier came up with 'butterflies in formation' to represent how the butterflies in her tummy would work for her rather than against her. The third type is known as a positive self-affirmation statement and the most famous exponent of these was the legendary boxer Mohammed Ali who repeated the claim, 'I am the greatest' so many times that even his opponents believed it.

## **Conclusion**

Motivation always boosts up the energy levels of Sport performers. The available evidence suggests more developmental benefits than costs to youth sport participation; however, rigorous experimental studies that manipulate characteristics of the youth sport context and isolate change in causal mechanisms are needed to strengthen conclusions from this literature. In light of the public health crisis and persisting social problems confronting youth in the United States, psychologists will make a positive impact on society by enhancing understanding of the factors that motivate youth to participate in organized sport. This knowledge also may help to explain why some individuals persist in their deliberate practice and reach the most elite levels of athletic competition whereas others drop out of sport altogether.

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