



MOTIVATION

Motivation plays a key role in continued participation, enjoyment, and success in sports. To engage athletes and motivate them to participate fully and energetically, coaches can use strategies based on self-determination theory (SDT).^{1,2} SDT suggests that higher quality motivation occurs when we meet three essential needs among athletes: competence, relatedness, and autonomy.^{1,3}

Competence

Improving athletes' ability to execute skills, tactics, and techniques.

Relatedness

Fostering belonging, relationships, connections and supports.



Autonomy

Giving athletes a choice and voice and fostering independence and personal decision-making.

ENCOURAGING ATHLETE MOTIVATION

Athlete Need	Strategies
COMPETENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide quality instruction using cues, modeling the skills and tactics, and giving contingent feedback to support learning and growth.² • Acknowledge success with praise, positive reinforcements, and rewards.^{2-5,7} • Implement goal setting in written or verbal discussions.²⁻⁵ • Celebrate incremental improvements in and out of sport, regardless of outcome.^{3,5,6} • Reflect on practices and competitions to identify successes and areas for improvement.^{2,3,5} • Design drills to meet athletes' abilities by starting with drills that allow for athlete success before working through challenges.^{2,3,6} • If there is a bad practice or a lost game, reflect on what went well, what can be improved, and how to move forward.²
RELATEDNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a strong relationship with every athlete on your team. What are their hopes and dreams? Would they come to you for help if they needed it?² • Be approachable. Allow for individual players to gain trust in you off the playing field. Today's youth want to feel connectedness.² • Organize team-building activities like external events or team meals.^{3,5,6} • Ask athletes questions about their lives outside of sports related to school, family, etc.^{3,5,6} • Understand each athlete's motivation or "why" for participating and individualize techniques to engage.^{3,6} • Use appropriate humor to connect with athletes.^{2,3,6} • Create opportunities for athletes on your team to get to know each other, develop friendships, and foster mutual respect.²
AUTONOMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an athlete-centered approach that is individualized and supportive.² • Allow athletes to make decisions about gameplay or strategies during practices and scrimmages.²⁻⁶ • Ask athletes for their feelings and opinions on uniforms, team activities, and drills.^{2,4,6} • Encourage athletes to reflect on their performances, identify areas for improvement, and set goals.^{2-4,7} • Empower athletes to make decisions, even if they may lead to failure.^{2,3,6} • Explain the "why" or purpose behind your coaching to foster buy-in and understanding.² • Communicate by asking questions that invite input (e.g., "What should we work on based on our performance? What were your mistakes and how might you correct them?")² • Allow them to have a "say" in their program to create a sense of ownership and "buy in." Athletes want to be heard.²

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