

# How to motivate young people

Understanding what motivates people, especially young people, to be involved in sport will help the coach provide a fun, enjoyable and supportive training environment.

## What motivates young people to play sport?

Young people are motivated to participate in sport for a variety of reasons. These include ego, pride, fear of failure, the challenge of competition, a desire and determination to succeed, the feeling of achievement from perfecting a skill and acknowledgement from peers, coaches and family. Research has shown that young people highly value the intrinsic rewards gained from participating in sport. Rewards such as the of learning a new skill, or merely being involved in sport with their friends, mean more for young athletes than the extrinsic rewards of receiving trophies or prizes.

## Ways to motivate

**Recognise achievement** Recognition of effort, especially when it comes from someone such as a coach, parent or senior player, is a significant factor in motivation. Ensure that you recognise athletes' achievements in a variety of areas, not just performance (e.g. recognise regular attendance at training). Strategies can range from a simple well done or a pat on the back to using incentive schemes.

**Set goals** Success or failure should not be determined by the scoreboard, nor by the number of competitions won. Provide opportunities for all athletes to experience success by setting short and long term goals for the individual and the team. Examples of goals include trying to achieve a certain score in a game, or a personal best performance, or getting to training on time! Make sure you recognise when goals are achieved.

**Provide leadership opportunities** Providing opportunities for leadership and expecting athletes to assume responsibilities are very important. The responsibilities should start off small and may increase over time. Acknowledging efforts through leadership motivates further success. Examples of leadership opportunities may include asking a player to demonstrate a skill, or being the team captain for the week.

**Be consistent and enthusiastic** Young people are often heard to say 'I hope the coach is in a good mood today'. This indicates that the mood of the coach affects how young people enjoy their sport. The environment a coach creates, what they say and how they say it, should be consistent, caring and enthusiastic.

**Provide challenges** Small sided games allow for maximum participation by young people and therefore provide greater enjoyment. Team composition may be regularly rotated to match ability and ensure competition is even.

**Vary your practice programs** A variety of practice routines and activities will reduce the possibility of boredom. Challenging young participants to invent a game to practice a particular skill can also be very successful.

**Be organised** A carefully planned session increases the coach's confidence and this effort will rub off and help motivate players. Make sure there is enough equipment available for the number of participants involved. Waiting in long lines, or watching the more talented athletes dominate the equipment can lead to boredom and disruptive behaviour.

**Make practice fun** Most young people take part in sport for enjoyment and fun. Ensuring that they have fun encourages them to maintain their involvement. Try modifying the rules of your sport to ensure laughter – for example a game of touch football where the players can only walk, using the non-preferred hand, or dog paddle relays in a swim session. Don't ignore the contribution a few laughs have on motivational levels.

