

Introduction

We all know it can be extremely difficult to get players to stay focused and work hard the entire season, yet player motivation can have a dramatic effect on your success. By effectively motivating your players, they will learn MUCH faster, win more games, learn life lessons, improve skills faster, have more fun, and become better players & people.

Nothing is worse than losing control of your team (even for a brief time) or getting in a habit of “mediocre” practices.

“Coaches who can outline plays on a blackboard are a dime a dozen. The ones who win get inside their players and motivate.” — Vince Lombardi

The Solution Depends on Your Situation

There is NO one-size-fits-all solution. *What works for one coach might not work for another*

Your technique(s) will depend on the age level of your players, your coaching experience, your style, the resources you have available, and the type of players you have.

For example, a rookie coach will need to use different techniques than a 30 year veteran with proven success and a tradition built within the program. While a youth coach working with 7 year olds may simply use the “clap technique” (explained below) to motivate players, a high school coach would never use that technique. Not to mention, each player responds differently to motivation tactics. It all depends on what makes them tick. One player might be motivated by playing time, and another player might just want to feel part of something. Some players respond to challenges, some don't. Don't treat all of your players the same because they aren't.

Top 17 Most Effective Motivation Techniques

Tactic #1 – Recognize the Importance of Player Motivation

If you can first recognize the importance of player motivation, it will go a long way in your success. Every good coach must do two things: teach and motivate!

Far too few coaches devote the time needed to understand how to motivate. Nor do they spend enough time doing the things necessary to motivate (like getting to know your players and find out what makes them tick). Motivating players can be the difference between an average season and a state championship. Hard work and motivation will dramatically improve players' skills and conditioning, improve execution, accelerate learning, and improve everything a team needs to be successful.

Simply by recognizing and thinking about how important this is could be the difference in how hard your players work this season.

Tactic #2 – Do NOT Run at the End of Practice

If you save your conditioning for the very end of practice, many times kids don't play 100% throughout the body of practice because they know they're going to be running at the end.

Instead, you should include conditioning as part of your regular drills and practice. This way they go HARD the entire practice and it just becomes a habit. Plus, running is not much fun for players and that's what they'll be talking about in the locker room. They'll be moaning and groaning about Coach making them run – or if it's a youth team, they're getting in the car with Mom and Dad talking negatively about practice.

You want your players to be excited about soccer and feel good about it. That's why it's so important to end on a positive note!

Run fast paced drills that both condition and improve skill at the same time. Not only does this save time and make your practice more efficient, but it improves motivation too. Players don't even know you're conditioning them.

Tactic #3 – Be a Teacher

Coaching is teaching. What's the priority and overriding concern of a teacher? It's the progress of the student, not wins and losses.

This is a simple and profound concept that you need to embrace. When the coach treats the player as a student, players and the team show tremendous improvement.

The harsh reality is that players do in games exactly what they do in practice. Don't fool yourself. A remarkable pre-game speech isn't going to suddenly light a fire that lasts the entire game. This is not the answer.

The easiest way to motivate players is to teach them. Players will respond if you teach them. And when they notice that they have improved, this will yield even more motivation.

The lesson here is simple: Treat your players like students. Teach them. Help them improve. Make sure they see that they are improving. Don't let improvement slow down. Make sure they are always improving and see the results. If you get stuck, seek help from an experienced mentor. Embracing this simple technique alone can make you more successful than you ever thought possible.

Tactic #4 – Explain the Reason Why

A good teacher (and sales person for that matter) explains the "reason why". Many times coaches need to put their sales hat on (in addition to teaching) because you need to make sure players believe.

Quite often players don't understand why they are doing a certain drill, and frankly they lose motivation. They don't truly believe the drill is helping them. This is why you need to explain the "reason why" the fundamentals and drills you run are important. Don't assume the players know, because I promise that they don't.

Explaining the "reason why" is a proven psychological trigger that causes people to take a desired action. At a psychological level, humans by nature want to know the reason why they are doing something.

Let's take one-on-one defending as an example...

If your players don't understand the reason you want them to "contain" a player without "throwing their leg", then they will NOT give 100%! If you want them to give 100%, you need to teach the reason why you're doing something.

Teach them why you're quicker if you are in an athletic stance with the knees slightly bent.

Teach them why you're supposed to let the offensive player make the first move.

Teach them why it's ok to let an offensive player move from side-to-side and backwards but not forwards.

The more your players understand the science behind defending, the more they will buy into it and perform!

This concept works. Don't slow your practice to a halt. But work the explanations into certain places where players might not appreciate what you're doing

Tactic #5 – Show Improvement and Growth the Entire Season

As briefly mentioned earlier, perhaps the best motivation of all is when athletes can see and feel that they are constantly improving. The beginning of the season is always very productive because it's new, fresh, and players feel like they are quickly getting better.

But as the season goes on, many times things can get stale and players feel that they are no longer improving. This makes it really tough for them to keep working hard.

Kids are motivated by progress and by growing; so offering constant feedback on their effort and performance is very important. Especially for the kids that don't play very much.

Make sure that your practices evolve as the season progresses. In other words, continue to refine your drills and routines so that there is an element of challenge and growth present at all times.

Be confident. Study the fundamentals and be confident when teaching the fundamentals. If a coach can't teach (details) how will they instill confidence for the players to trust in the coach? And, without the players' confidence, how can a coach even begin to motivate?

To show your players improvement and growth, you must be organized. A disorganized and unbalanced training session can de-motivate players from giving their best. Plan well ahead and cater for the individual group's and team's needs. Remember variety is the spice of life! Training should be both mentally and physically stimulating.

For players who are often substitutes, keeping them motivated is difficult. For example, try to have a weekly game in which the head coach works solely with the substitutes and an assistant coach works with the first-team but don't at any time put distance between the players.

Each individual should feel that he or she has been successful at some point in the practice. Not necessarily the best, the quickest, the winner – but maybe the one who was first to training, or remembered to bring a piece of equipment they were asked to provide. There are so many ways. Use your imagination!

As the season goes on, remind them of how much they improved. Remind them of how they were shooting a month ago. Remind them of how much their ball handling has improved since the beginning of the season. Remind them of how much their rebounding and defense has blown up since the first game.

Tactic #6 – Celebrate Small Successes — Both Team and Individual

Instead of worrying about winning, put players in a position where they can experience other successes. For example, if you work on shooting form, you can chart their progress and show their improvement in shooting percentage during practice. Celebrate these small successes!

Maybe you can also measure things like turnovers, rebounds, and celebrate improving in those areas. Show them how they are improving!

Kids want to be successful and have fun. But unfortunately not everyone can win. That's why it's very important for you to find other ways for players to succeed.

Here are just a few ideas:

- Celebrate finishing a tough drill
- Celebrate meeting a goal
- Celebrate accurate shots on goal
- Celebrate when they learn a new skill
- Celebrate when the team strings together numerous passes.
- Celebrate when they learn an offensive set-piece
- Celebrate when the team or a player breaks a tough habit
- Celebrate when a player demonstrates supreme teamwork
- Celebrate when a player legally slide tackles an opponent.

Don't let a losing season bring you or your team down. I know it can be hard. But just because you lost every game doesn't mean it was NOT a success! If your players improved, had some fun, and learned life lessons, then it was most certainly a success! Celebrate those successes. That's what teaching and soccer is all about.

Tactic #7 – Relentlessly Reward Hard Work and Offer Positive Reinforcement

Coaches get what they reward. It's simple, really. That's why you should relentlessly reward your desired result. This is a very important topic to understand, and is often misunderstood.

Positive reinforcement is giving a child a reward immediately following a behavior to encourage them to do it again. If a child gets positive reinforcement such as a reward for doing a behavior, they will focus on doing the

right thing and repeating that behavior.

If a child gets a patch as a reward for providing an assist in a match or training session they will want to do that action again because they gain approval for it. When the other players see that this behavior gets rewarded, they will also try to copy the behavior because they want a reward too.

When a child does something right or good, it is necessary that you reward them for their action. This could be a simple “well done” but a more tangible reward – a patch – works even better. Children can take soccer patches home (or to school) where they can show them to their friends and parents.

Positive reinforcement is successful with children because it focuses on the positive goals rather than on the negative events that occur. Positive reinforcement also gives the child psychological satisfaction.

Give specific praise, and a lot of it.

Types of Rewards & Reinforcement

There are many ways to reward players and offer positive reinforcement. For example, you can (and should) give frequent verbal rewards in practice and in games. Players love to hear compliments, so they really grab their attention.

Occasionally, for significant effort, praise players in front of the team. Public praise is often well received and players will work hard to earn such praise.

Remember that if negative feedback is required, use the “sandwich” technique to sandwich it between positive feedback. For example: “You did a great job hustling down the field, next time look for the open team-mate. Keep up the great hustle.”

Here are a few “reward” ideas for you to consider:

- Verbal rewards
- Stop practice momentarily to point a positive behavior you want to emphasize. Taking a charge, making an extra pass, etc.
- Gatorades
- Reward ball (this can be an old sentimental ball or a special ball that is given out each practice)
- Pizza after practice
- Let the team play whiffle ball the last half of practice
- High fives
- More playing time
- Hustle trophy

We need to go out of our way to find positive things that kids do because you get what you reward. You get what you encourage; you get what you talk about. So reward them relentlessly when they play hard or something good happens.

Frequency of Feedback and Praise

To keep players motivated, the frequency in which you offer feedback is paramount. Positive reinforcement works best when it isn't a once-in-a-while thing; the more it happens, the more effective it is.

Here's a trick that may help coaches deal with the matter of praise-making sure that they do it a lot. Upon going to practice, make sure you have four paper clips and a marble in your pocket. Whenever you practice, put four paper clips and a marble into your pocket. Move one clip to your left pocket whenever you give a positive remark. However, move the marble to your right pocket whenever a negative remark is made.

The point of this is that you can only move the marble back to the right pocket when all the paperclips from the right pocket are moved to the left pocket. You can do this technique over and over throughout the workout.

You can use your own variation of this practice, and it doesn't have to be with marbles and paper clips or a four-to-one ratio. You also don't have to repeat it all season, just every once in a while or every few days.

It's a good way to get back into the habit of praising your athletes and showing them that you appreciate them.

Be Specific

When you praise a child, it is best to be specific with your words. Obviously saying something like “great job” or “nice shot” is better than nothing but being specific helps to promote the positive behavior or the behavior you want. The players will also feel like you are paying attention to what they do if you are specific with your praise.

“Good job stopping the ball” is better than “good job.” And “way to keep your head up and look around” is better than “Way to be tough out there.”

Let them know exactly what you want. Explain it in a way that is getting across to a player who isn’t playing up to expectation.

Tactic #8 – Set Tangible Goals

Setting short, medium, and long terms goals can be a very effective motivation technique. The key is to set tangible goals (things that can be measured) and also provide frequent feedback.

Players need both instant and long term motivation. Both need to be touched on regularly. Short term might be the game Friday night; long term winning the state championship.

Goals are very important, and when done properly they can be incredibly effective. Use goals as a primary source of focus could set your players up for failure. When it is all said and done, how many goals are actually met?

The key here is not overdoing it with too many goals and taking care to choose realistic goals that mean something. Players and teams need goals so that they know what to focus on and what to strive for. But the key is the “type” of goals you choose.

Don’t forget to provide frequent feedback of their status and reward players for achieving their goals.

Athletes need to have a clear idea of what they are expected to achieve. Goals need to be individualized. They can be tricky to set because people are not motivated by goals which they perceive to be either too easy or too difficult.

Know that what motivates some players will not motivate others. It is important to get to know your players as individuals and to know how they will respond individually and as a team to motivational tactics. In the end, if you’re involved, excited, and willing to take the time to keep practices interesting, then your team will respond.

Tactic #9 – Measure Performance

Measuring performance might sound the same as setting goals, but it’s not. Here’s a business fact that carries over into soccer:

“When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and reported back, the rate of improvement significantly accelerates.”

In the business world, this phenomenon is called Pearson’s Law.

Simply showing the right statistics and metrics to your players will boost their performance. You’d be surprised how effective this is. Posting reports in the locker room, sharing them in practice, and talking about them will make players more aware of how they are performing.

They key is to share the data. You don’t even need to set goals. Simply sharing the data improves performance and motivates.

There are so many things you can measure – team statistics, individual’s statistics, high fives, compliments, player satisfaction rating, etc.

All you need to do is just sit down and think about WHAT IS IMPORTANT to you and your team. Then think about what you can measure to determine if you’re doing a good job in that area.

Don’t think you can measure everything that’s important to you? You’d be surprised what you can measure when you put some thought into it. For example, I’ll bet you didn’t realize that you could measure how much

fun your players are having. An example might be to track the length of time spent on each drill (players like to keep things moving). Once a week, you can have an assistant track the number of smiles he sees the first 20 minutes of practice and the last 20 minutes of practice. You can survey your players once a week with this question, “On a scale of 1-10, how much fun did you have in practice this week?” A warning before you try this technique. Don’t share too many measurements and stats. That will dilute what you are trying to accomplish. Only share and post the CRITICAL numbers that are most important to the team and your players.

Tactic #10 – Show You Care and Improve Relationships

One of the best ways to motivate players is to show that you care about them outside of soccer. Demonstrate that you care about players by showing a sincere interest in what they do away from the game. For example, you could attend their choir concerts, basketball games, baseball games, or whatever they participate in. Help them with school. Get to know them. Support them. Show a genuine interest. This will show them that you really care about them and will help you build a better relationship. And once they believe you truly care, they will go to war for you.

Get to know your players as individuals. Spend time talking to them one on one. It doesn’t have to be for hours; a couple of minutes will do the trick. The point is to let them know that they’re important to you on and off the soccer field.

It’s also importance of showing concern for your players’ academics. Not only is it good for your players’ future, but it shows you care and motivates. Do you have a way to monitor their progress during the entire year? What do you do for them academically during the summer? Do your players want to go to college? Are you helping them get there and decide where to go?

Do you post academic as well as athletic accomplishments in your locker room? Do you know when your players have tests? Do you meet with them to keep close track of their progress and needs?

If you try to find out the answer to these questions, you are showing that you care. They will really believe that you are on their side.

Tactic #11 – Find Out What Makes Each Player Tick

Some players are (realistically) motivated to play at the next level (or levels); while others are not. Larry Bird was motivated by his fear of playing poorly. Every player gets motivated in different ways. For some it’s the “rah rah” session; others take a more focused, quiet approach. You have to know who is who.

What do you know about your players? What makes them tick? Do you know how to deal with gender and age differences? We can’t coach 8 year-olds like high school players, nor can we duplicate what works for high school boys and make it work for high school girls. One can know a lot about motivating a player by understanding something of the psychological makeup of that player and the individual player’s personal background. (Unfortunately, this can be even tougher today with the use of so many coaches that are not part of the school staff, as they don’t have the daily exposure and experiences that teachers and students share.)

Here is a thought for you to ponder: Everyone is motivated by the same thing, success.

The difference in people leads to different definitions of success. In soccer, it can be winning, playing time, scoring a lot of points, just making the team, attracting a cheerleader or any number of other things that exist in the world. It is the coach’s job to find out what motivates each of his players. It might be different things at different times of the year and it will definitely be different for different people.

There is no way to figure this out without spending time trying to learn your players’ motivations. Most coaches demand that their players dedicate time outside of practice to do necessary things to make them better players. Do coaches demand of themselves to do what is necessary to make a better team by spending time away from practice working on their team? I don’t mean calling every player onto your couch and analyzing them. But, coaches must understand that players are motivated by both on and off court issues. You must learn what they are.

The next challenge is to take all of those individual motivations and meld them together. It, again, requires

individual time spent with players because in team situations, it has to be all-for-one-and-one-for-all. The coach has to feel what to say to each player during private moments.

Tactic #12 – Make Practice and Drills Fun & Competitive

All human beings are more motivated by things they enjoy; so try to have FUN, especially with youth players!!! As the players get older, adding a competitive aspect to practice can really drive the players to work harder. Let's face it. Do you really think players are going to be motivated to work hard if they know drills are going to be monotonous, super hard, and they'll be yelled at by drill sergeants? Of course not! Players need to work hard but IF they are having fun at practice you know that you will get the best out of them. Learn to laugh with them, even if it's at your expense.

To make practice fun, be sure to have fun yourself. Smile. Enjoy the process.

Most importantly, kids enjoy succeeding. So be sure to run drills and put kids in situations where they can succeed.

And of course, make your drills fun. You can make almost any ordinary drill fun. Just use your imagination.

You can do things like:

- Turn the drill into a game. Nothing says, "FUN" like a game. You can turn a simple lay up drill into a game by keeping track of missed shots. If you miss you're out. The last player standing wins.
- You can incorporate other sports like golf and baseball to come up with new drills.
- Tricks like offering points will make any drill enjoyable. Allow players to earn redeemable points for paying attention, properly executing a drill, helping out a teammate, or whatever you choose. Points can get players rewards that range from a Gatorade to a few less sprints.
- Keep kids moving. No standing in lines.
- Use multifaceted drills that are simulating.

Tactic #13 – Establish Habits

Playing hard should not be something you save for the end of the second half. Playing hard should be a habit that you do ALL THE TIME.

Play every play like it's the last play of the championship game!

The key is to get in the habit of playing hard, no matter what. You go hard in practice, in each drill, and every minute of the game, no matter what.

It's easier said than done. But the tactics in this report will help you and it's something a coach should strive for.

You can't always inspire a player with a great half time speech. That type of thing only works for so long and wears out. Players become numb to the pre-game speeches and motivational talks. The motivation must come from within.

The key here is for players to develop a habit of giving 100%. If they give 100% in practice, they will give 100% in a game. They won't know how to play any different.

This is practically the ONLY way to maintain intensity throughout the entire season. Without good habits, you're bound to have major inconsistency and swings.

Tactic #14 – Competition

One of the most common ways to motivate players is by adding competition to your drills and practice.

Most players are more motivated when there is something on the line. Plus adding some competition here and there can make it more fun for your players. So you may want to consider designing practices and workouts that are competitive.

As an example, you could establish teams for a shooting drill and reward the team or individual player that makes the most shots successfully.

With a little imagination, you can come up with ways to make almost ALL your drills competitive. Just

remember that comparisons between teammates can make some players feel badly about themselves and can spur rivalries between teammates. In short, it can squash a player's motivation. In addition, competition can hinder NEW skill development. When learning a brand new skill, you should remove all competition and get as many reps as possible. So you certainly don't want to over do it when adding competition to drills.

Here are a bunch of ideas for you to add competition to drills and practice:

- Competitive full and half field scrimmages.
- Competitive first-touch drills. Reward the winner or make the loser run sprints.
- Number of completed passes in a drill
- Number of successful shots on goal.
- Keep track of team time of possession. Track points based on this stat. This can be done in scrimmages or drills.
- 3 on 3 or 4 on 4 competitive drills, keep score.
- Competitive penalty shot shooting.
- Knock out shots from distance – winner gets a Gatorade
- Most set piece scores in a row.

These are just a few examples. There are so many more. If you have more competitive ideas, list them in the comments below.

Tactic #15 – Create Unparalleled Drive by Promoting Teamwork

Generally speaking, people are more apt to work hard for a team (or other people) than for themselves. In business, the most outstanding organizations seem to have one overriding purpose that is brought to the forefront of that organization. The purpose is kept as a focal point for everyone involved.

What is your team's collective and overriding purpose?

Is teamwork your overriding purpose? Do some soul searching to determine your team's purpose.

Consider emphasizing teamwork in your practices and games. Remind players that they are stronger by working together. Give them examples. Tell them stories. Stories are powerful ways to persuade and teach players important concepts.

Consider the story called The Bundle of Sticks (from Aesop's famous fables):

“An old man on the point of death summoned his sons around him to give them some parting advice. He ordered his servants to bring in a bundle of sticks, and said to his eldest son: “Break it.” The son strained and strained, but with all his efforts was unable to break the Bundle. The other sons also tried, but none of them was successful. “Untie the bundle,” said the father, “and each of you takes a stick.” When they had done so, he called out to them: “Now, break,” and each stick was easily broken. “You see my meaning,” said their father. Union gives strength.”

Are your players a close group? Do they hang out together? Do they respect each other? What can you do to improve their relationships?

You'll find that the hardest working teams are often good friends, respect each other, believe in teamwork, and have camaraderie. Teams like this win championships, work hard, play for each other, and achieve the highest success.

In addition, teach your players commitment, in particular, commitment to the team and themselves.

Many young athletes have never committed to anything in their lives. To obtain their commitment, you must do at least three things:

First, explain what commitment means and discuss it with the group. Example: “Commitment is a promise to focus completely at practice and to conduct yourself with honor outside of practice.”

Second, ask for their commitment. This will often take the form of a contract with the athlete.

Third, be explicit in explaining the benefits of committing to the programs, such as:

By focusing on success in practice, you can help the athletes block out their day-to-day problems. Players will often find that the things that trouble them before practice will become easier to resolve or not even be worth bothering about.

Learning to commit to one thing will help them learn to commit to other things such as schoolwork, relationships, staying in shape, social causes, religious beliefs.

Struggling with teammates to maintain a commitment will strengthen their bonds. Committed athletes learn to support each other the way they in turn receive support from others.

Tactic #16 – Keep Practice Fresh, Fast-Paced, and Moving

To motivate kids, keep your practice moving! Try not spending a lot of time on any one aspect of the game. Be short and to the point. Maybe 3-5 minutes tops on throw-ins, 10 to 12 minutes on small-sided games. If they are not getting it, then drop it and move on. Either come back to it later or the next day. Don't dwell on things for too long. Remember it is a development process, usually not instantaneous results.

Keep Things Fresh

Try to switch your drills from time to time so they don't get stale. One idea is to insert yourself into some drills and compete with the players. Players like coaches who sweat with them and will take it as a challenge to work harder and beat you.

Make sure that you adhere to the practice plan. Do NOT go past your scheduled time. If the kids find you doing that, they will start to pace themselves. As the season goes on, consider cutting back practice time. You don't want to leave their legs on the practice floor.

Tactic #17 – Take a Break

One of the most important ways to keep players motivated is to encourage them to get AWAY from the game several times a year. Michael Jordan loved to play golf. Jack Nicklaus was a good competitive tennis player. Tiger Woods loves to boat. It's very important, in my opinion, for competitive players to get away from the game as completely as they can, yet still keep the juices flowing in some other manner.

Take them bowling. Try some other activities. Encourage them to pursue other passions. Encourage them to take a break after the season.

Players need this time to recover mentally and physically. Not to mention, playing all year weakens overused body parts and increases chance of injury 3 fold!

13 More Motivation Tips, Techniques, & Ideas

Like we mentioned earlier, this is supposed to be the "ultimate" guide to player motivation. So here are even more tips and techniques that you can try. You need to find a combination of techniques that work for you. Review the tips below and see if any of them resonate with you. If they do, incorporate them into your plan.

Tip #1 – Establish Discipline

A simple way to quickly establish control is to set a precedent on the first day of practice. Establishing your expectations from the very beginning is the best way to not only establish your role within the team but to also let your players know that you're serious.

For example: As your first practice starts and players are milling about, blow your whistle and call them to the center of the field. If they don't sprint to you, they get to run right then and there. After they've run, blow the

whistle again. This time all your players will enthusiastically sprint to you. And more importantly, you'll have their full attention for the rest of the year.

Tip #2 – Talk to Players One on One

One of the best ways to motivate a young person is through one-on-one talks. Occasionally take a player aside, pat them on the back, and let them know they are special to you and the team. Praise their effort and encourage them to give even better effort. You'll be amazed at what a seemingly small talk can do.

Tip #3 – Open Lines of Communication

You have to constantly and consciously have your lines of communications open. Encourage your players to talk to you. Some will, some won't, some might do both, depending on the situation. It is something that has to be constantly reinforced.

Tip #4 – Playing is a Privilege

Remember that kids who make the team have an obligation to the kids who got cut, who did not make the team. What would these kids who got cut do to change places with these kids on the team? Anything. So when a player's attention wanes, when his attitude is not so great or his effort is less than 100%, he should be reminded that he is lucky. There are many kids who would take his spot in a minute.

Do not allow players to participate in practice if they are constantly misbehaving. The reward for good behavior should be participation in the game rather than disciplining the athlete(s) with running when they do something wrong. If you run the kids when they do something wrong, it can affect them negatively from a psychologically perspective, because it can lead to a dislike for the sport or even a dislike for fitness altogether which is the last thing we want. Running should be looked at as a privilege.

Sometimes, kids behave in a bad manner, simply to get attention. With youth players, it is important to reward the behavior you want and ignore the behavior you do not want.

Tip #5 – Avoid Team Punishment

I used to believe in team rewards and team penalties. If one player was late, everyone would run. The purpose was to try to make each player responsible to each other. Theoretically, the slackers will be raised by the achievers.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. The negative influences will always win out over the positive ones. What happened was the responsible players developed animosity toward the irresponsible; it removed the incentive for them to do the right thing (why should I be on time when I have to run anyway?) and created anger toward me as a coach for punishing them while they were doing the right thing. I believe, that even in a team setting, players have to be held accountable individually for their actions. That helps the other players focus on what they believe is important.

Tip #6 – Create Team Unity

If you like and respect the players you work with, you will play hard for them. You will feel obligated to not let them down.

Here are a few techniques to improve team unity:

- Always Pick Players Up – Have you ever watched an MLS game and noticed what happens if there is player on the ground after a hard tackle? As many players in the vicinity runs to the player on the ground and helps him up. I'm certain that the coach engrains this into his players from day 1 and it's important that you do too. This builds team unity and motivates. Put yourself in the player's shoes. If you get

knocked down, what feels better? To have teammates sprinting over to help you up or seeing your teammates just looking at you and you have to get yourself up. I would think knowing that your teammates have your back no matter what would be the better feeling. This feeling naturally boosts confidence as well.

When your team helps each other out like this, it naturally builds that togetherness that you want. This unity leads to the desire to go the extra mile by going for a dangerous header or putting your body on the line to score.

- Develop a Team Covenant – This is an effective way to get players to buy into your system and promote unity.
- High Fives – Instruct the leaders on your team to get in the habit of giving lots of high fives. Have you noticed how many times Diego Maradona gives out high fives and hugs during a World Cup game? He is a proven winner that brings an upbeat attitude to the game, improves players' confidence, and improves unity. Have your players follow his example.

Tip #7 – Structure Your Practice Properly

It's tricky for new coaches to know how to organize a practice—when to give breaks, when to use certain drills and for how long. But a good structure can break up the monotony, save time, and keep things flowing smoothly.

Tip #8 – Change of Face

Players can get bored of the same old faces! Try bringing in new coaches with fresh and different ideas, perhaps even on a short-term basis.

Tip #9 – Communicate Roles

Much is made of players “knowing their roles.” Let every athlete know exactly how he or she can contribute to the team. This will motivate them! Ask yourself: “If this player left tomorrow, would anyone notice it?”

Every coach would like to believe that everyone on the team is contributing a particular skill or something special to the team, such as dependability, a sense of humor, or simply a willingness to give 100%.

While it is easy to establish the roles of the more gifted athletes, it is much more challenging to connect with the athletes who are less gifted or less socially engaging.

Anytime a coach can bring the more difficult athletes into the fold, he or she will achieve a far more meaningful satisfaction.

Tip #10 – Be Consistent and Enthusiastic

Young people are often heard to say ‘I hope the coach is in good form today’. This indicates that the mood of the coach affects how young people enjoy their sport.

The environment that you create, what you say and how you say it, should be consistent, caring and enthusiastic. Your behavior towards all young people, regardless of their ability, should be the same.

Tip #11 – Develop a Tradition and Talk About It

If you've had hard working and successful players in the past, talk about them. Tell their stories.

Hearing these stories about players that kids probably look up to will encourage and inspire them. It also adds a little “social proof”. If Jim played so hard, and was one of the most successful players ever, maybe I should work hard too.

Tip #12 – Players in Leadership Roles Should Lead by Example

Make sure you choose leaders that are hard working players and have strong inner drive. Encourage them to lead by example.

Assign responsibilities to your leaders and encourage them to lead by example. The other players will follow.

Tip #13 – Reduce Negative Feedback

Correcting errors in team sports such as soccer provide unique challenges. Yelling across the field to correct a player can cause embarrassment and when done too often, can damage the player's confidence and motivation. How do you correct errors in a group setting using a positive approach?

One method is to substitute the player after an error and provide feedback on the sideline. We know that can be difficult to do, so you can also save feedback for after the drill.

Most coaches are too quick to correct, and if you give your player time, you'll often find they correct the error on their own. But when correcting players, try to avoid too much negative feedback. Too much can be extremely de-motivating. Sometimes you just need to let it go.

Motivating Youth Players

In many ways, motivating young players is very easy. They are much less complicated than older players who are motivated for many different reasons. For young players it's simple. They just want to HAVE FUN! That is clearly their biggest motivation factor.

With that said, there are some things you need to do to keep their attention. You must be very prepared and organized with a good practice plan so you can keep things moving very efficiently. You don't want confusion or kids standing in line. That's when they get antsy and things get out of control.

Not to mention, kids just want to keep moving. It's fun for them to be stimulated and keep moving.

Here are some tips to keep practice fun and motivate young players:

Keep lectures short (2 minutes or less). If you lecture any longer than this, most kids will be in "lala" land by then. And kids don't come to practice to hear you talk the whole practice, they come to have fun.

Keep drills short and fun (5-10 minutes or less). If you stay on a drill for too long, it becomes monotonous and the kids lose interest.

Clap Method – You tell the kids at the very beginning of your first practice that whenever you clap, they have to clap the same number of times you clap. You clap twice, they clap twice. Make sure to also tell them that this is time for them to listen.

You can usually get everybody's attention after 2 to 3 sequences of claps and that only takes normally 3 to 5 seconds. Much better than yelling so much you can't talk the next day.

Line Method – Whenever you blow the whistle or yell "lines", the kids race to an assigned line and sit down. You might have 5 lines of 6 or 3 lines of 3, depending on the size of your group. The team that lines up and sits down first wins. Congratulate them with some enthusiasm by giving them fist-pounds, high fives, and/or verbal praise.

I've seen both of these methods work in small practices and huge groups.

Treats – At youth soccer practice, all the kids get treats at the end. One of the parents is in charge of supplying treats. It works wonderfully because the kids know that if they participate they get a little snack at the end. It doesn't have to be a sugar filled snack. The point is that kids love treats. They look forward to the treat after practice. It makes everything more fun.

Learn Skills, Be with Friends, and Get Exercise

All these things are important to youth players. Notice winning is nowhere on the list? I think it's really important for coaches to understand why kids play.

Why Kids Participate

1990 Athletic Footwear Association Survey of over 20,000 kids nation-wide asked, "Why they participate in sports."

1. To have fun
2. To improve their skills
3. To stay in shape
4. To do something they are good at
5. The excitement of the competition
6. To get exercise
7. To play as part of a team
8. The challenge of the competition
9. To learn new skills
10. To win

Over 65% said they participate in sports to be with friends.

15% were reluctant to participate.

Only 20% want to improve their skills.

Winning was LAST.

A UCLA Sports Psychology Lab survey found the same results.

Notice how "fun" was at the top of the list and many of the items in the list related to having fun (excitement of competition, being with friends, do something they are good at, etc)?

* Source <http://www.thecenterforkidsfirst.org/pdf/Statistics.pdf>

Your Youth Motivational Formula

Based on what's important to young kids, it's clear that as a youth coach your motivational formula should be:

- Make it fun (#1 priority)
- Be a teacher / teach skills (see Tactic #3 above)
- Show improvement (see Tactic #5)
- Celebrate small successes (see Tactic #6)
- Relentlessly Reward Hard Work and Offer Positive Reinforcement (see Tactic #7)
- Show You Care (see Tactic #10)
- Mix in some competition on occasion, without over doing it (see Tactic #14)
- Promote and Emphasize Teamwork (see Tactic #15)
- Keep practices moving and fact paced (see Tactic #16)

Motivating Female Athletes

Let's face it. Women tend to compete for different reasons than men. Women will react to motivation techniques in a different way than men. This is why women require different kinds of motivation to achieve. Quite often men are coaching women's teams. And frankly men don't usually understand the dynamics of motivating and coaching female players. Obviously not the ideal situation and this can be frustrating for everyone involved.

If you can understand some of the differences in what makes them tick, you'll go a long way in successfully implementing the motivation techniques in this guide.

Here are some of the differences you should consider:

- First, simply by realizing that women react to motivation techniques differently will solve many problems. This will allow you to try different things and not get stuck on using a tactic just because it worked well with boys.
- This is an issue with men too, but with girls you need to be especially careful about them spending too much time with only one or two teammates for partner work. Requiring them to switch partners and teams can be important.
- Women tend to be more goal oriented than men.
- Women tend to put a lower priority on winning than men. Everyone wants to win, but women tend to think more in terms of goals and the big picture.
- Boys tend to put a higher priority on school sports, where women tend to put a priority on more than just sports.
- Women appreciate more of a nurturing family type of environment with camaraderie. Conversely, too much yelling and screaming can be a big de-motivator. A more Zen-like environment seems to be a more productive environment for women.
- Team chemistry and camaraderie is important for men. For women it is paramount! It's very important for everyone to get along and feel like a team.
- Women tend to perceive their skills in more of a negative way than men. Many times they are better than what they think. So self perception and confidence is very important for women. Make sure your players are comfortable with what is asked of them and their position on the team.
- Clear and positive feedback is critical for women. They will respond to good communication, good listening, and frequent feedback. This is what they almost always want!

When coaching a girl's team, remember that they need that reinforcement that they belong. Give them confidence. Provide constant feedback and excellent communication. Spend lots of time developing camaraderie and team chemistry. Remember each player is different and has different needs. Do the little things to show you care. Do all those things well and you'll have a team that will run through a brick wall for you.