

## Train Your Brain:

### Peak Performance through Mental Training

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Excelling in sport – especially at the high school level – isn't always the easiest thing to accomplish. With the amount of pressures adolescents face on a daily basis, who can blame them if they lose focus every now and then? The purpose of this five-part series is to help you maintain that focus and drive through the use of some simple psychological tools. And no, you're not crazy just because you decide to slip a little mind power into your game. Although, you are probably crazy if you don't see this stuff being able to help you get to that next level whether that be playing in college, winning districts, or even just making the team.

You don't need to read these chapters in any type of sequential order. Feel free to read what interests you and go from there. Please note that the information presented in these lessons is by no means meant to undermine anything said or taught by your coach. The information presented is simply a summary of some of the more popular trends and research in sport and exercise psychology. Anyone interested in these topics could hop on-line or visit the media center to get this information.

## Chapter 4: Motivation

*"The ones who want to win and achieve championships motivate themselves."*

– Mike Ditka, NFL Hall-of-Fame Player & Coach

What motivates you? Do you know? Are you motivated by external rewards such as trophies and acclaim? Does your motivation come from within, knowing that you gave it your all, improved, and helped the team succeed? You probably have a good idea what it means to be motivated, but do you know how motivation can be developed and sustained over a lifetime?

We know that motivation can be determined by numerous social and psychological factors. These social factors, or perhaps "personal experiences," help to shape how we feel about ourselves and have a direct bearing on our motivation. These personal experiences include successes and failures, how we fare in competition, the cooperation we receive from our teammates, and the behavior of our coaches.

We can take the concept of motivation and discuss it from a number of different aspects. In Chapter 1, we investigated the circular relationship between team cohesion and performance. We saw how when one went up, the other would typically follow. So, if we learn how to enhance our teammates' motivation, we are likely to see both cohesion and performance improve. In Chapter 2, we examined what it takes to be a leader. As you hopefully learned, it takes good leaders to enhance motivation. So, assume you're the captain of your team. As the captain, you need to understand how motivating your teammates to achieve optimal performance will help to insure a successful season.

### Self-determination Theory

In a perfect world, coaches would appreciate not having to worry about motivating their players. In lieu of striving to maintain the high motivational levels required for optimal performance, they could spend more time planning practices and working on their game plans. But unfortunately, that is not the case. That being said, understanding how motivation can fall towards being internally or externally regulated – or somewhere in between – is going to be important in getting players to shift their motivation towards one that is more self-sustaining.

The rarest form of motivation, **amotivation** refers to behaviors that are neither internally nor externally based. Amotivation is the absence of motivation. If you were to ask an unmotivated golfer why he plays golf, he will most likely tell you that he has no idea why he plays golf and that he sees not particular benefit from even playing. Typically, unmotivated individuals don't even bother getting involved in sport.

**Extrinsic motivation** comes from external factors. Some of the external factors that mediate participation include trophies or awards, money, praise, social approval or acclaim, and the fear of punishment. It should be noted that the definition of such "external rewards" is based on the perception of the individual. For instance, an athlete may look at a scholarship as being highly valuable as it is associated with an opportunity to gain knowledge and therefore, to strive for it is a matter of personal choice (making it an internal motivation).

There are varying degrees of extrinsic motivation. As one matures as an athlete, he will hopefully be able to shift his motivation from one that relies on the use of external rewards to one that is more self-sustaining or that comes from within. The least self-determined form of extrinsic motivation is **external regulation, which** refers to a behavior that is performed only to obtain a reward or avoid punishment. Once extrinsic behavior has become partially internalized, it has undergone **introjected regulation**. For example, a player feels that he's practicing daily to please his parents, teammates, or coach, as opposed to practicing to improve because he wants to improve.

Further along, when an athlete comes to "identify" with a behavior or activity (even though it might not be particularly interesting), he participates in it because it is instrumental to achieving a goal that is interesting to him. This type of extrinsic motivation is referred to as **identified regulation**. An example of this would be a player who participates in an off-season strength program because he knows it will improve his game during the season. At some point, we will hope that behaviors become personally valued and freely done. At this level, a behavior that was previously seen as being the result of external forces is now internalized and become self-controlled. For example, a player sees his coach's behavior as consistent with his own goals and no longer sees them as controlling. There is a very fine line between this **integrated regulation** and intrinsic motivation; in fact, they are very similar.

**Intrinsically motivated** individuals experience a drive that comes from within, participating in activities that interest them, engaging in them freely without any undue influence. These individuals find competition to be inherently pleasurable as well as enjoyable and exciting. Additionally, they have a desire to learn and improve. Intrinsic motivation may be negatively affected if extrinsic incentives find their way into the picture. Athletes who once found themselves in control on their efforts may now see these rewards as an infringement on their independence. They might now see their behavior as being under the control of someone other than themselves. This can eventually lead to

### Achievement goal orientations

Motivation has also been examined through eyes of two different goal orientations: task and ego (Nicholls, as cited in Lochbaum & Roberts, 1993). These goal orientations can have profound effect on an individual's motivation. Athletes with a **task orientation** value personal improvement, mastery, and/or achievement. Athletes with an **ego orientation** are motivated to demonstrate ability that is equal to or greater than those individuals with whom they are performing. Typically, ego-orientated athletes are more likely to believe that sport should serve to enhance one's self-esteem and status, while a task-orientated athlete was more likely to perceive that sport should teach one to try to be one's best (Duda, 1989).

Task- and ego-orientated athletes will perceive success and failure in two entirely different manners. Task-orientated athletes will define success and failure according to the self-referenced perception of their performance. For example, a task-orientated athlete will set a goal for himself and then proceed to try to reach or exceed that goal through the necessary means. If the goal is met, then he has succeeded. If it is not, then he has failed. Ego-orientated athletes will define success and failure according to their comparison with the performance of others. For example, if an ego-orientated athlete outperforms his opponent or teammate, he is successful, while if he does not, failure has occurred.

While both orientations seem to serve as a viable means of motivation, athletes with an ego orientation may experience problems due to various external factors that may occur. By definition, ego-orientated athletes have little control over their successes and failures because they focus on external criteria for determining success (e.g., winning and losing). Because their performance depends upon how those around them perform, they may be setting themselves up for disappointment. To compound their apparent lack of control, ego-orientated athletes may be more susceptible to the stress and anxiety of competition due to some of the uncontrollable factors that can often occur (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998). As Roberts (1992) explained, we often assume that in sport winning and losing are synonymous with success and failure. This assumption does not bode well for ego-orientated athletes, who will often determine whether they have been a success or a failure by whether they win or lose. Thus, they create a very black and white, all or nothing, win or lose situation with no room for anything in between. Conversely, athletes with a task orientation have a self-referenced or internal determination of success. Task-orientated athletes will see a spectrum with varying levels of success; from a small amount of success to a great success. This also allows for a better sense of control due to the fact they can adapt their achievement strategies to find better ways to succeed. Athletes with a task-orientated approach are also not usually susceptible to competitive anxiety because of their internal standards of success and their adaptive achievement strategies.

In a study of 298 high school students, Lochbaum and Roberts (1993) examined how task and ego orientations effect perceptions and beliefs about success, competition, practice, and satisfaction. It was found that task-orientated athletes: (a) endorsed persistence as a competitive strategy, meaning that one must practice to optimize performance, (b) that practice is important for enhancing skill, and (c) that satisfaction is derived from personal mastery attempts on competition. Task-orientated athletes valued effort, persistence, and hard work in practice in order to enhance their skills. Ego-orientated athletes were found to endorse: (a) chance and social approval as causes of athletic success, (b) practice as important for demonstrating superior athletic ability, and (c) satisfaction as derived from both mastery experience and normative ability assessments. These athletes did not see the exertion of effort and persistence as valid achievement strategies. They chose to focus more upon assessing their ability by comparing themselves to others.

### Guidelines for building motivation

**Athletes are motivated by personal and environmental factors.** Athlete motivation results from a combination of personal and environmental factors. Oftentimes, it's easier to change or influence the environmental factors. You are not ignoring personal traits or characteristics, just trying to make the environment or situational factors more conducive to them.

**Athletes can sometimes have multiple motives for participation.** Understanding why athletes participate will go a long way to understanding how to enhance their motivation. At the high school level, there could be a number of factors why students participate in sport. Intrinsically, they might want to

demonstrate competence or develop new skills; they might want to challenge themselves or simply experience the excitement and fun that accompany competition. Extrinsically, they might want to make new friends and socialize; they might want to receive the accolades and awards that often accompany winning and being successful. Sometimes, athletes participate in activities for numerous reasons. For example, a high school girl might like lifting weights because it shapes and tones her body, while at the same time improving her strength and conditioning for her respective sport. She may also find that she enjoys the camaraderie and social aspect of being in the weight-room or gym.

It's important to know when an athlete may have competing motives in their life. For student-athletes, this is no small task to try and balance interests such as their classes, sport, family, social-life, and possibly religion. It helps to know what's going on in an athlete's life as these conflicting interests can affect participation. Whatever the case may be for participation, you must realize that athletes will have both shared and unique reasons for participating. Do your best to understand your teammates' motives so that you can help put them in an environment that is conducive to optimal performance.

**Change the environment to enhance motivation.** It's not going to be easy to meet all your teammates' needs. The trick is creating an environment that meets the multiple needs of those on your team. If you have the authority, allow for some fun to be thrown in with your physical training. If you don't, talk to your coach and ask for that responsibility! Let's be honest, you are much more likely to know what your teammates enjoy doing in practices. For example, if you are on the swim team and you know your teammates like to play water polo, ask the coach if you can organize a regular game. Water polo is fun and it offers a great workout without actually making it feel like you're working out. Take the time to get to know your teammates and what makes them tick. You're going to find that you can't treat them all the same. Some will only respond to some of the more positive forms of reinforcement or encouragement, while some will need to you to yell at them, push them, and challenge them to push harder. You will need to vary your interaction when dealing with them on an individual basis, as well as find a style that works best for all when addressing the group.

**Leaders influence motivation.** As the captain or one of the leaders of your team, you have a critical role in influencing the behavior of your teammates. Not surprisingly, your teammates will look to you for guidance throughout the season. At times, your influence may be indirect and you might not even recognize your actions. It's important to be aware of your how you respond or act in front of them, especially when the going gets tough.

**Use behavior modification to change undesirable athlete motives.** For the most part, we're talking about rewarding or reinforcing good behaviors and punishing bad behaviors. While this may or may not be within the realm of your responsibilities with your team, it is always best to discuss any such type of actions with your coach.

### References

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