



Motivating Young Athletes

By Frank Lenti
Head Football Coach
Mount Carmel High School
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One of the hardest parts of high school football coaching is motivating young athletes to practice. To do this effectively, the coach has to foster an understanding of the relationship between training, practice and peak performance. He must encourage the athletes, provide structured training, and help them gain the self-discipline necessary for success and excellence on the field.

BUILDING THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP

Effective motivation flows from the partnership between coaches and athletes. As coaches, we must understand our athletes as individuals *and* as a team – gain their trust and respect.

We must remember that we're coaching people, not machines. We must teach youngsters the mechanics of a sport, but we must also assist in building their character. Showing support and interest in all facets of their lives helps build an effective coach-athlete relationship.

A good way to demonstrate such personal interest is by working out with the athletes. It will show them that you've been where they are, that you know it's hard work, and that you're willing to sweat, too.

DEVELOPING A WINNING ATTITUDE: SETTING GOALS

At Mount Carmel High School, we think in terms of attitude, motivation, performance, and success. *Success is a journey, not a destination.* Success is realized the moment an athlete gains a winning attitude, is motivated to set a worthwhile goal, and begins to move toward that goal.

A winning attitude is the best motivator. If athletes *believe* they can achieve their goals, they'll try harder and increase their likelihood of success.

A positive coach-athlete relationship lays the groundwork for this attitude, and the setting of clearcut goals helps establish it. Coaches should help the athletes set long-term goals and encourage them to achieve these goals through a series of short-term goals.

The incremental goals will keep motivation high, while giving the athletes an ongoing sense of achievement. Once the athlete begins developing a sense of accomplishment, he will be motivated to try even harder.

At Mount Carmel, we have our athletes write down a goal and the obstacles they anticipate in reaching it. We then identify the steps to take and the short-term achievements leading to the goal.

For example, if a football player wants to play wide receiver but isn't fast enough, we set short-term goals to increase his speed. Each tenth of a second improvement in speed will motivate him to try even harder. If he increases his speed enough, we will give him a chance at wide receiver. If he doesn't, we will examine why and set up a new workout schedule.

INCENTIVES AS MOTIVATORS

Incentives (material rewards for good performance) are commonly used for motivation, but may only be effective on a short-term basis. Athletes may become satisfied once they achieve rewards, such as helmet stickers or plaques, and the rewards will lose their power to motivate. We often have to increase the value or quantity of incentives to motivate players on an ongoing basis.

FEAR MOTIVATION

We do not believe that fear motivates. Fear motivation, or punishing players to "motivate" them, is only a temporary expedient. After repeated exposure to fear tactics, athletes become immune to threats, and continued punishment

may destroy their desire to participate. It's difficult to justify using fear to motivate young players.

T-E-A-M

It's important to remember that athletes can motivate one another. We usually split the players into drill groups and score them as a team rather than as individuals. These training sessions help build team morale and make the players feel they have invested in one another. Each player has a responsibility to the team. We share the short-term goals of improving attitudes and basic skills with the long-term benefit of overall improved performance.

SUMMARY

Motivation is simply a means to an end. If we provide exposure to positive ideas over a long period of time, we will produce a successfully motivated athlete.

To summarize, this is our Mount Carmel Credo: Attitude controls motivation; motivation controls performance; performance controls success. And there's no I in T-E-A-M.

Frank Lenti is head football coach and assistant dean at Mount Carmel High School in Chicago. During his four years as head coach, his teams have made both the City and State playoffs twice – winning the City championship in 1985 and making the State finals in 1986. A former college football player and 1986 Chicago Catholic League Coach of the Year, Lenti has spoken at numerous coaching clinics, and is a member of the Illinois H.S. Football Coaches Assn. and American Football Coaches Assn.

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Gatorade Sports Science Institute®
617 West Main Street
Barrington, Illinois 60010
800-616-GSSI (4774)

<http://www.gssiweb.com/>
email: gssi@gssiweb.com
