

Motivating Athletes

Senior Individualized Project

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Part I: Main Questions and Methodology

Motivation is the foundation of sport performance and achievement, and in order for athletes to perform at a high level, they must know how to maximize all the tools necessary to be fully motivated. Some people are born with motivation skills so that they can attain anything they want, and others have to work hard in order to get to that same point. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, motivation is the psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a desired goal. In this case, the organism talked about is the athlete. According to Vallerand and Thill (1993), motivation is a concept described as "the hypothetical construct used to describe the internal and/or external forces that produce the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior" (18). Prominent theories on motivation include Vallerand and Losier's (1999) integrated theory of motivation in sport. Vallerand and Losier incorporate Deci and Ryan's (1985) concept of self-determination in a sport environment as the core of their theory. The theory explains how social factors, including coaches' behavior, affect the athlete's psychological perceptions pertaining to motivation.

Many people believe that coaches are the ones who motivate athletes with their pre-game talks or in practice, but a lot of it has to do with the athlete and how they respond to what the coach does. According to Joan L. Duda and Darren C. Treasure, both sports psychologists at major universities, "motivation is dependent on both some malleable, psychological tendencies of the athletes themselves and on aspects of the social environment in which they develop, train, and compete" (58). In saying this, they

are also expressing that different types of motivation are held to be a function of the diverse ways in which athletes interpret and adjust to their experiences. In this project, I will aim at defining what good techniques on how to get an athlete motivated are, but also talk about some psychological ideas that athletes may find useful in their sport-related experiences.

Ever since people have asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, I always wanted to be a teacher and a coach. I am surrounded by teachers in my family, and have had some great coaches in my life, some of who I would love to emulate when I coach. These professions are looked at some of the hardest because they deal with kids, some of which are teenagers, and everyone knows how tough they can be to deal with in school and at practice. This is exactly why I wanted to do it. I have been in that situation before, being the hot-headed teenager who didn't want anything to do with authority figures of any kind. I was never good at confrontation, so when a coach would get into my face, I would either fire back at him, or I would sulk around the rest of practice until I put it out of my head. I didn't have the motivation tools necessary to overcome this hardship and push through it. When my high school career moved on, I thought that just because our coach would give a "rah-rah" talk before the game and got us wired that we would go out and play with the intensity and focus that was needed to win. I was completely wrong. It wasn't until I started working camps and coach younger kids that I realized what I said had just as much impact as how they reacted to it.

I have been working basketball and football camps for almost eight years now, and I still have trouble getting some of the kids motivated. As is the case with many day camps, some of the kids are there just because it may be a cheaper alternative to a babysitter. The kids who are there because their parents made them are not motivated very much at all. These kids are not the ones who I am that worried about. They will be there for a week and forget most of what they learned, that's just something coaches have to deal with. The athletes that I am concerned about are the ones who have the ability to succeed, but need the motivation from within, and from coaches, to do so.

The first things that young players learn are the basic skills and fundamentals. This is where the foundation is created so that they will be able to build and succeed in the game they are trying to play. As coaches, we can't just teach our athletes the skills; we must tell them how well they are performing the skills and how we want the skills to be done. These skills, no doubt, take time and even individualized instruction, but they are vital in motivating and keeping motivated the athlete. If we simply instruct, correct, and evaluate without taking these actions, we may actually decrease some athletes' interest and motivation. "The best I can do" should never come out of an athlete's mouth after a poor performance. If coaches begin to accept this excuse as a reason for their poor performance, then motivating them becomes twice as hard. Poor performances are not a time to go crazy about, but they should not be treated with silence either. We have to say something directly to the athlete, just as teachers do in a classroom. A poor performance can be taken care of with reprimand, or it can be taken

care of simply by a conversation. Either way, we are teaching the athlete that standards count. We are communicating that the athlete is capable of performing at a higher level – and this kind of communication is motivating.

Part II: Literary Review

When I began researching the idea of motivation and the best ways to motivate athletes, I found some of the best resources available. Whether it was asking current or former coaches about the topic, asking them for books on the topic, or simply interviewing players of different levels about motivation, I used everything I could to make sure I found the best methods. In this section, I will review what sources I have found and talk about them and what information I found useful in them. Some of the sources were whole books, and some just chapters, but nearly all of them had some insightful information. When I decided to interview some people, I decided to interview a diverse group; I talked to a coach, a high school/AAU player and a professional player, all of which had similar *and* contrasting views on the topic.

The two players who I talked to, Sara Lappan and Dan Aultman, both played collegiately, and Dan now plays professionally overseas in France. I knew they would be great interviews because they know what it's like to be an athlete at high levels and what they need in order to be the best players they can be. When I interviewed Dan, he was very intrigued by this because he had never really thought about motivation to this extent. He asked me to call him back because he needed to think about it and get back to me. When he did get back to me, he was very insightful because of his playing experience. He began to tell me that when he was in high school, he had a coach who was very laid back and let Dan do whatever he wanted to do because he was the best player. When he accepted a scholarship to Division II Grand Valley State University, he was in for a rude awakening because it was not like this at all. He vividly remembers

his coach saying on the first day of practice, "Aultman, who the hell do you think you are taking that shot?" The shot he took was one that he took every game in high school, but he soon realized that this was not acceptable in college. This coach was very "in-your-face," and aggressive, something that Dan was not accustomed to, so he decided to transfer to nearby Calvin College, where coach Kevin Vandestreek was known for developing players the way they wanted to be molded. When Dan enrolled at Calvin, he said it wasn't exactly like high school, but instead of hollering at him, coach Vandestreek would calmly talk to Dan about what he wanted him to do on each possession. For Dan, positive reinforcement was definitely the way to go; he even said that if he would have stayed at GVSU, he "never would have been in France right now" (Aultman, personal communication).

When I talked to Sara Lappan, a 2007 graduate of Kalamazoo College, she had a different experience in high school and college, which was intriguing. She had coaches who were all about punishing their players, which in turn led Sara and the rest of her teammates to lose the love of the game and some even quit. She also mentioned that some of her coaches seemed to have problems with player that seemed beyond basketball. She said the coaches would treat players well because they were better than the other girls, which tore the lesser players down even further. When punishment is used, it brings fear to players, which is something Sara talked about. However, when she had coaches who instilled no fear in her, she was able to talk to them about how she could improve, and when she was given tips, her motivation rose significantly and she was able to perform at a high level. She mentioned that her AAU

coach was some of the best coaching she has had because of his philosophy and her level of play was much higher; “I can confidently say that this was directly affected by the different styles of coaching I endured” (Lappan, personal communication).

The book that was used in Sports Psychology, a class taught at Kalamazoo College by Dr. Bob Grossman is the text that I found most useful in my research. It is titled, *Applied Sports Psychology*, edited by Jean M. Williams and is a compilation of chapters on peak performance and personal growth in sports. The chapters that I used most were chapters 3 and 4: “Positive Reinforcement, Performance Feedback, and Performance Enhancement”, and “Motivational Processes and the Facilitation of Performance, Persistence, and Well-Being in Sport.” Chapter three, written by Ronald E. Smith, a professor at University of Wisconsin, is where I got a lot of information on positive and negative reinforcement as well as punishment. A lot of what Smith talks about is “how to manage approaches to influencing behavior” (Smith, 42), more importantly influencing behavior in athletes who are trying to reach their peak potential. The figure that I found most interesting in Smith’s chapter is:

	Present	Remove
Positive Stimuli	positive reinforcement (<i>strengthens behavior</i>)	Extinction (<i>weakens behavior</i>) Response cost punishment (<i>weakens behavior</i>)
Aversive Stimuli	Punishment (<i>suppresses/ weakens behavior</i>)	Negative reinforcement (<i>strengthens behavior</i>)

This is just a simple grid reflecting the types of responses should be given when a coach uses different types of motivational tools. Basically, when positive attitudes are present, behavior and attitude is stronger, but when negative attitudes are present, behavior decreases. One would think that this is a pretty easy concept to grasp, but for some coaches it isn't because the reverse has been used before, and it has been successful.

In chapter 4 of the book, written by Joan L. Duda and Darren C. Treasure, the main idea is the motivational process and the facilitation of performance. At the beginning of the chapter, they pose the question, "what is motivation, and how does an athlete optimize it" (57)? This is essential to my study, so this chapter was amazing in helping me find some useful information. This is the chapter in which I found a lot of information on "self-efficacy", and its relation to be successful in sports. This idea of "self-efficacy" is a topic that is very important in my research and to motivational purposes in general. If people, more specifically athletes, are not able to believe in themselves and have confidence, they will not be very effective in whatever they do. When an athlete has a swagger about them when they take the court or field, they are considered cocky; but that's not the case, they are simply confident in themselves to perform at the level that is needed to succeed.

In *Coaching Mental Excellence*, compiled by Ralph Vernacchia, Rick McGuire, and David Cook, the chapter that I focused solely on was titled "Effective Motivation." In this chapter, the authors talk about the idea of learned helplessness, a psychological term that is most often used in cognitive psychology. It refers to the concept of one's

mind being constructed and developed to believe something so much that it is almost irreversible. This idea is seen most often when athletes are conditioned by losing or bad situations, so they automatically expect losing to be the result they achieve. This is very common among young athletes who are good physically or talent wise, but have this psychological mentality that they will lose in everything they do. In order to break down this mentality, coaches must have players win at something, no matter how little, everyday. Whether that is in a shooting drill in practice, or a simple relay race, the players must feel a sense of self-respect for that fear of failure to leave their thinking.

Although these were the most helpful books and sources, I had a couple more that helped with some research. The first source is called *Coaching Basketball Successfully*, and is written by Morgan Wootten, a legendary high school coach at DeMatha Catholic High School. In his book he talks about reinforcing what is good to his players and not dwelling on the negative aspects of their games. He says, "I try to reward whenever possible; players love to hear compliments, so rewards really grab their attention" (Wootten, 21). In order for players to appreciate it and full rewarded, it is best to do it in front of the rest of the team, singling out the individual player.

In Rainer Martens book, *Coaches Guide to Sport Psychology*, he has a little different approach to coaching players. He uses what he calls the "Donkey Approach;" which is humans and donkeys are much the same – stubborn and stupid, so there is one way to drive them; with a carrot, the reward, and the stick, the punishment.

Although he doesn't take it to this extent, Martens says some coaches take this to the

extreme and use swearing, chastising and other forms of psychological abuse to get their players to perform what they want. In another book by Martens, *Successful Coaching*, he talks about how helping your players focus on their own personal goals will help them be a stronger member of a team and help the team be successful in the long run. When players see that the coach is interested in helping them achieve and maintain their own performance goals, the stress and anxiety in the athlete will deteriorate and help them flourish in their respective sport.

Part III: Research and Data

A major way in which athletes become motivated and stay motivated is in a term called “self-efficacy.” This term is defined as a person’s judgment about her or his capability to successfully perform a specific task (Duda and Treasure, 59). These judgments rely on three major characteristics: the *level* expected, the *strength* or certainty of those beliefs, and the *generality* of those beliefs to other related tasks or domains. Self-efficacy is something that many athletes deal with, even professionals who are at the top of their game. If athletes experience only easy successes they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of self-efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort. Setbacks and difficulties in athletic competition serve as a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort. After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By sticking it out through tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity.

Taking a positive approach to coaching is not about praising athletes continuously, regardless of success or failure, but about giving praise when it is merited. That means recognizing and rewarding not just successful overall outcomes – i.e. winning – but also performance improvements, improved approximations, like better

form on a jump shot, and effort. One study that I found in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* showed that children who were praised for their efforts following failure were more persistent, enjoyed the task more and performed better than children praised for having high ability. If coaches see their athletes working hard, they must never take good work or good effort for granted. They don't have to rant and rave about something an athlete has done, but some glorification must be shown. There is no athlete in the world who does not become motivated when their coach glorifies what they have done. This may be the biggest key to motivating athletes. In practice, we must have little games or competitions in which they can win and build up their confidence so that when they are faced with bigger challenges, they will know what it's like to be successful. For instance, previous performance is a very strong factor that affects self-efficacy; therefore, a coach may want to set up situations that provide for successful experiences for the athlete. An effective method can be to break down more complex skills into smaller, more specific components that challenge the athlete but are within his or her current ability level. In basketball, when athletes are lesser developed, the fundamentals must be taught at a pace in which they can gain success, but also learn at a high level.

I have had many coaches in my lifetime who give very little praise but a lot of negative thoughts, and those years were some of the worst of my life. I had a coach who said, "Everyone knows what great effort is," but that's not the case. As athletes, we want to know what we have done great and that will keep us motivated to be great in the next thing we do. If we want our athletes to become better and achieve higher

success, then we must show them what we want from them in measurable and observable levels of performance. The coach is maybe the most important person in developing the confidence or self-efficacy that athletes strive to achieve. Personally, I don't do well with coaches who yell and scream negative things. There always has to be some negative comments, but coaches who are constantly negative are never good for athletes, especially younger athletes like high school or college. In virtually every class I have taken here at Kalamazoo College, especially psychology and education class, the one thing that makes people go is their confidence and self-esteem.

I believe that providing compliments to players when they do something correctly is very important in having a successful team and successful relationships with a coach's players. This is why if I were a coach, I would implement positive reinforcement as the most common aspect of my coaching style. At times coaches need to be critical, but this can lead to defensive behavior on the part of the athlete, as criticism can be perceived as a threat to self-esteem. One way to avoid this is to 'sandwich' your corrective feedback between two positive statements. In sports psychology, one of the most popular classes on campus for athletes, we talked about this exact theory. Dr. Grossman coined this term, a "shit sandwich" because in the middle of the two positive thoughts, there was the bad thing an athlete did (Grossman, personal communication).

Though that is not to say that from time to time I would not employ punishment if I felt it were necessary. However, if I were to punish my team members, I would make it very clear that it is for something they did on the court and nothing personal because

letting someone know you are unhappy is perfectly justified – as long as the criticism is limited to the particular behavior that has made you unhappy rather than indulging in more general character assassination. I also understand that constant praise can be counter-productive because it devalues the praise and the praise can be seen as too easily attainable. I believe praise should be given when it is earned. This continuous praise may cause players to switch off because the praise is too easily attainable.

I talked to Sara Lappan, a recent graduate of Kalamazoo College who majored in psychology and was a member of the women's basketball team for four years. She is going to graduate school at Western Michigan University in the fall of 2008 for a degree in counseling psychology. She is one of the most motivated athletes I have ever been around, so I wanted her to discuss which type of coaching is better for her: a loud coach who yells and uses punishment, or a coach who uses positive reinforcement and praise. She had some very insightful thoughts about this:

Throughout my high school and college careers, playing in both school leagues and in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), I was exposed to several different coaching styles. I found that the coaches I played for at both the high school and college levels used punishment as their primary coaching style whereas the coaches I played for in AAU used positive reinforcement to motivate their players. Looking back and evaluating each coaching style, I definitely found that a coaching style utilizing positive reinforcement helped me cultivate my basketball skills and confidence, where playing for a coach who operated his or

her team with punishment impaired my abilities and severely decreased my confidence.

During my six years participating in AAU, I consistently had coaches who encouraged their teams and used constructive criticism to help their players improve. I began my career with AAU as a player who only played at the end of the game when my team was either winning or losing by a large margin, but because my coaches encouraged me, emphasized when I was doing things correctly, and consequently, kept an open line of communication with me, my abilities vastly improved and by the last 3 years playing AAU, I played nearly the entire game and helped my team win several tournaments.

Adversely, in both high school and college basketball, both of my coaches applied punishment as a means to get their teams to perform. I found that not only was my confidence during these seasons severely compromised, but I also did not enjoy playing for either of these coaches. Through using punishment, they instilled fear in their players; fear to make a mistake during games and a fear to openly communicate with each coach. By having little to no communication with these coaches, I thus had a very poor relationship with them. When they would try to talk to me, I would become very defensive and would not allow them to try to help me with any aspect of my game that needed attention for fear that they would further berate me and hinder my performance along with my self-esteem. While playing AAU, I was confident and not afraid to make a mistake on the court and if I got pulled out of a game, I felt comfortable

enough with my coaches to ask them what I had done wrong to come out of the game. But during high school and college, I didn't take nearly as many chances during games as I did in AAU for fear of being pulled out of a game and also not being able to ask my coach what I was doing incorrectly to make them feel I was not contributing on the court.

I also talked to Dan Aultman, a 22-year-old who plays professionally in France right now, and he agreed with the research. Dan played at Calvin when I was a freshman here at Kalamazoo and he was the best player in our league, but was nervous about trying to play overseas. He said, "Coming from the MIAA, I knew I was ready competitive wise to play overseas, but I wasn't sure if I was mentally ready to play a pro schedule." This is very common amongst players who try to follow this path. Since 2004-05, when I was a freshman at Kalamazoo College, there have been twenty seven players who have tried to play overseas, and another eleven that I know from other institutions. They all have very similar thoughts, except for one, Ben Reed; Ben was a standout player at Western Michigan University and was well on his way to play in the National Basketball Association before a knee injury sidelined him. Ben had off-the-charts self-efficacy because of his mental toughness and confidence in himself. When his NBA dreams were put on halt, he considered giving up on basketball and using his degree to get a job, but he decided to follow his dream and play basketball in Germany. Duda and Treasure point out that "high self-efficacy does not always translate into a win. It does increase the probability, however, that the athlete will do well in terms of

the facets of performance within his or her personal control” (59). Athletes have a lot to do with their motivation, but they are not the only ones who can control this facet of competition.

The psychological terms for what I just discussed are entitled positive and negative reinforcement and punishment. Positive reinforcement is the presentation of a positive stimulus, which will cause a certain behavior to happen again in the future (Smith, 42). In coaching, an example of this is when a punishment of running sprints is presented, but if the team makes a certain amount of free throws, the running is deducted and the team does not have to run. In the future, the team will make free throws in order to remove the running from the end of practice. The positive reinforce in this situation is the coach eliminated the running at the end of practice. On the other end of the spectrum is punishment, which is defined as the stimuli that weakens or suppresses a behavior that produces it (Smith, 43). In this case, many coaches use this idea to get their point across. For instance, when a coach is not happy with their players' attitude or focus, they may have them do wall sits for 2 minutes. In return, the coach hopes that the team will focus better and get what he wanted to get done in his practice. These two psychological ideas are the cornerstones of positive and aversive control of athletes' behavior. They underlie the positive approach and negative approach to coaching (Smith, 43).

The third concept I mentioned is negative reinforcement; this is defined as the “removal or avoidance of aversive stimuli, the effect being a strengthening of the

behavior that results in successful escape or avoidance” (Smith, 42). This last one is a very important concept for me when I become a coach because I know exactly what it’s like. When I was a junior in high school, we had just hired a new basketball coach from one of our rival schools, and immediately we disliked each other. I’m not sure why I disliked him, I just did, but he didn’t like me because he thought I had an attitude and poor leadership skills. About a month into the season, he got so fed up with me that one practice he made me run the whole time; I couldn’t touch a basketball. I went home and told my parents that I wanted to quit, that I didn’t want to play for a coach like this. They calmly told me that I must have done something to set him off, so I can’t give up or else I will have no respect from anyone on the team. It would have been easy for me to quit and forget about him, but I made a pledge to myself that I would never be like that and never hold a grudge against a player. I look at a player quitting on me as something that I did, not him.

Another person that I talked to in relation to this topic was Derek Lefevre, a grade school teacher in Sterling Heights, MI, and a varsity basketball coach at Warren Mott High School. He has a little different idea about how he handles his athletes. Although we agree about showing them that he truly cares about their personal lives and not just how they play, but he says he is definitely the “bad cop.” He said, “...I have to be, when you’re the head coach of a program, you are responsible for discipline and behavioral issues with your players, and you have to be harder on them.” I have seen him teaching and coaching in person, and he does definitely care about his players, and he

strives to get them to believe in themselves just as he does about them. Holding his kids accountable is something that he really preaches; when one of his players isn't doing well in a class, he has a "no holds bar" approach to talking about it. He will tell them like it is and has the respect from them, so they know it's for the better. In both interviews, I noticed that one thing came up often: respect. Derek had a great insight on how he gets respect and how it is a two-way street: "If a coach or teacher is both honest and fair along with open communication respect will come. The respect is earned; if I expect my players and students to work hard I must do the same as their teacher or coach."

According to Derek, "motivation is a tricky thing." One motivational technique might work with one student or player but not with another. You must first get to know the student/athlete on a personal level so that you know how this person thinks. Then you can develop strategies to help that student/athlete become more successful. Goal setting helps motivate, setting attainable goals helps players focus on small outcomes and at the same time helps our team achieve our larger goal: a team victory. For any team, this is the ultimate goal, and with this goal may come some individual achievements, but none of those are possible without the respect of fellow teammates.

According to Ralph Vernacchia, Rick McGuire, and David Cook, sports psychologists at Western Washington University, University of Missouri, and University of Kansas, respectively, many athletes suffer from "learned helplessness." This is a term that is commonly used in psychological circles referring to battered women

syndrome or other abuse related cases, but I had never heard of this in sports. This pattern of learned helplessness is “exhibited by a lack of effort and is characterized by low intensity behavior in practice and in competition” (Vernacchia, McGuire, Cook, 62). The athletes who fall into this pattern are those who attribute success and/or failure to external luck, dimensions that are out of their reach. Therefore, these athletes believe that no matter how hard they work or prepare, the outcome is beyond their control. The reason this is constituted as “learned” is because it was reinforced over and over when athletes were younger. If athletes participated on consistently losing teams or competing against unfair opponents, they feel “helpless” and may never gain the maturity to get out of it. Athletes that have this type of attitude must be taught to redefine success and to measure improvement against themselves, not their competition. In order to do this, they must experience success and improvement, which is helped tremendously by setting goals for the short term. In this chapter, the authors list five ways in which to coach and help the “learned helpless” athlete:

- **Redefine success** – success equals improvement in one’s own performance
- **Chart performance and improvement**
- **Develop short term goals** – point to small success at first
- **Daily success in practice**
- **Make sure the athlete feels the success**

In contrast, a psychologist by the name of Rotella came up with a way to counter this learned helplessness: learned effective. The "learned effective athlete is intensely motivated and attributes success and failure to internal factors such as *effort, ability, and skill*" (Vernacchia, McGuire, Cook, 62). This athlete believes that the outcome of competition is, for the most part, within their reach. They assume control of the situation and never blame others or make excuses for failure. When this athlete performs at a low level, they cannot be shattered by this, they know that the next time, they will meet their goal and perform up to the level they want. Athletes who gain this mentality have obtained it by being successful and gaining confidence in all they do. They are motivated by inspirations and remain focused on their goals, having blocked out any outside attributes their competition has. There is a story about Michael Jordan in which he was cut from his Junior Varsity basketball team when he was a sophomore in high school. It's a true story, but by this incident happening, it made Jordan stronger and he was not scared to fail at things because he knew he would survive them. He went on to become the best basketball player of our time, and a lot of that has to do with how he reacted to that situation. As seen here, unproductive motivational behavior can be recognized, understood and corrected. As coaches, we must fully involve ourselves in the lives of the athletes we teach, and we must take time to realize and help them reach their potential through the use of effective motivation.

The next couple of motivation techniques that I think need to be done for athletes are able to be cross-sectioned within the classroom. The first thing is showing positive

reinforcement to everyone, not just the best athletes or the best students. Although this is a broad concept, we must be specific in how we praise and how we show understanding. To be honest and sincere in the praise that we show lets the athlete exactly what the coach and teacher are talking about. When a student increases a score on a test or homework, we must show them praise and show how much we appreciate the hard work they have done. Knowing this, we must focus on what praise works best for which student and what reinforcement works best for which athletes. When your motivational approach recognizes, appreciates, and respects each athlete as an individual, then the athlete is more willing to respond positively to both your words and actions. When you develop a personal relationship with your team as a whole, you will be the first to notice that you praise, correct and motivate differently with each individual. One final thing that I think is extremely important in motivation is the correct form of communication. Humans, especially student and athletes, will listen better if we as teachers and coaches listen first. If we listen first, they will listen much more effectively and because of this, they will tend to be more motivated.

Part IV: Conclusion

In conclusion, it is most common that the process of motivation stems from stimulation whether that is of the mind or body. For non-athletes, it is essential to stimulate their mind more than their body, and with athletes, it is better to stimulate both. This, in turn is followed by an emotional reaction that leads to a specific behavioral response. Positive reinforcement motivates the athlete to repeat the desirable behavior. This reinforcement helps build up "self-efficacy," which is one of the most important aspects of motivating athletes, and the main topic of my project. This term is the psychological word for ego or self-esteem, and when talking about these terms, they are comparable; one just pertains to athletes more often.

As I did my research in this topic, I found out that most athletes deal better with positive reinforcement and ego-boosting, rather than reprimand and punishment. As a player, I deal better with positive reinforcement and a coach who is willing to talk to you like a person, rather than make you run and treat you like a basketball player. Personal communication and interaction is a very important part of coaching to me, and if I want to be a good coach, I have to treat my players like this. It is obvious that coaches who use this technique have players who are more focused and willing to play hard for them. There is no question that coaches have to be able to adapt to what certain players want and need, but it is apparent that most athletes, although not all, react better to coaches who are understanding and cordial.

On the court, if a player is performing poorly, reprimand may be the way to reverse their work ethic or performance. Because of this, anxiety and frustration often

result if behavior thought to be positive does not lead to proper recognition; these recognitions being reinforcement and reward. Coaches obviously have a right to coach how they want, but if they want to get the best out of their players, they may want to think about using a more positive approach. When dealing with younger/mid-level athletes especially, they are very impressionable and their coach is the person they look up to the most as a part of a team. Positive and negative reinforcement, as well as punishment, are key concepts in motivating humans to do things. When we deal with young athletes who are very impressionable, we must do whatever is needed to make sure they succeed and thrive on and off the court. These concepts are essential to motivating anyone, let alone athletes.

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