Motivation is the key to participation and performance. The purpose of this paper is to consider variables that increase or decrease motivation in youth sports. Youth motivation creates a complicated athletic environment for coaches. Several factors affect how high or low and the complexity of a young athlete’s motivation. Complexity is defined as varying levels of competition and cooperation, influences from gender stereotypes and guardians, extrinsic and intrinsic motives, as well as psychological development all affect youth motivation. Competition and cooperation within a team can either hinder or enhance motivation. To function well, teams need a healthy balance of competitive and cooperative behaviors. Gender and guardian influences can determine a child’s attraction to athletics. Social stereotypes implying that athletics are masculine hinder female participation. Resistance to sports could result from guardian discouragement. The specific motives influencing children determine their involvement. Intrinsically motivated youths are easier to work with than extrinsically motivated athletes. Psychological development, in addition to a child’s upbringing, plays a role in motivation. Youth with low self-efficacy levels are typically more difficult to motivate. External attributions for success lead athletes to feel incompetent and less motivated. High motivation only results if positive characteristics are emphasized. Differences in youth motivation levels lead to complex coaching situations. If motivation continues to be overlooked, coaching youth sports will become more complicated, due to the difficulty of enhancing motivation in sports.

Introduction

Coaches of every sport and age group deal with factors that either enhance or complicate the team environment. The purpose of this manuscript is to examine the complexity of motivation and its part in team environment.

Motivation is an individual’s drive to do something. An athlete’s level of motivation tends to reflect the effort put forth in a particular task. While levels of motivation can vary dramatically, it is a significant aspect to consider when coaching.

Many factors are associated with motivation among athletes. A child’s motivation ranges from very high to very low. Therefore, within a single team, a youth coach will have to work with a variety of motivation levels. These fluctuations are a significant contributing factor to complex coaching situations within the realm of youth sports. The interaction of numerous external and internal influences results in individual differences in motivation levels.

External influences on motivation include factors such as competition and cooperation within a team, gender stereotypes in society, and guardian influences on children. Internal factors which affect motivation include the level of psychological development, or mental capacity of a young athlete. When too much emphasis is placed on competition, motivation levels can be negatively impacted. Decreases in motivation also result from negative family and social influences.

Gender stereotypes conveyed by society communicate that athletic ability is a masculine trait. Female motivation and participation could decrease because of these ideals. Low motivation levels may also stem from negative guardian perceptions of sports, or low levels of guardian encouragement, especially for females. Finally, when youths attribute their successes to external factors, they become less motivated and may feel inadequate when participating on the team. These issues lead to difficulties in establishing high internal motives.

When coaching young athletes, motivation is a crucial characteristic to consider. Youth, in particular, have a wide spectrum of motivation levels. If a coach is able to identify a child’s motives, they can develop strategies to keep them involved. An understanding of both internal and external motivation and the complex interaction of all its parts will help ease difficulties of coaching young athletes. Once coaches recognize reasons for participation, they can avoid barriers to successful coaching.

Complexity and Motivation

Motivation is defined as involvement triggered by either personal happiness, outside stresses, or both (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). An athlete’s level of motivation can be broken down into phases. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, or Berryman-Fink and Fink’s Seven Needs to Motivate address contributing factors to motivation. These include qualities such as affiliation, achievement, esteem, and autonomy (Schneider & Baker, 2006). When an individual builds upon the characteristics of each stage, he or she will have greater motivation.

The reason for participation is referred to as a motive. Overall motivation is affected by intrinsic and extrinsic variables. Intrinsic motives are typically more abstract than extrinsic. These come from within the athlete. Characteristics such as personal satisfaction and self-improvement are intrinsic. Extrinsic motives are substantial, and consist of material rewards such as trophies, money, or clothing (see Figure 1). An athlete can be motivated by several of these factors simultaneously.

An array of motives usually explains involvement. Athletes, ages five- to eighteen-years-old, tend to participate for similar reasons. Typically, young athletes become involved in sports because they have
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motives

- Satisfaction
- Self-Improvement
- Fun
- Overall Fitness
- Money
- Team Clothing
- Popularity
- Trophies and Medals

Figure 1. Individuals who are intrinsically motivated participate in sports for self-improvement and fun. Reasons such as money and trophies externally motivate individuals to participate.

Fun, enjoy being physically active with friends, and want to improve skills (Sit & Lindner, 2006). Youth sport coaches should consider these motives. Athletic environments carefully established by the coach to include these reasons for involvement can increase levels of team motivation.

The difficulty caused by complexity arises when a coach encounters an athlete whose motives for participation are conflicted. Coaches sometimes prefer to promote cooperation and strong peer relationships for youth. Their athletes may be motivated to compete and be better than their teammates. When conflicts in motives occur, athletes may become more difficult to coach (Martin, Dale & Jackson, 2001).

Individuals who have high levels of extrinsic motivation create complicated coaching situations. It is harder to provide meaningful extrinsic rewards than it is to encourage motivation by having fun. Externally motivated athletes are usually driven by competition. Therefore, it becomes difficult for coaches to decide the best course of motivation to use to control levels of competition. The downside of controlling competition is that high levels of it also can decrease levels of intrinsic motivation.

Competition and Cooperation

Teamwork and cooperation are essential values for both coach-athlete interactions and well-rounded athletic teams. Coaches who emphasize these values will have athletes who are highly motivated. Problems arise when youth athletes begin to compare themselves to their teammates. The overall concept of competition is typically unclear to them. They only begin to recognize the outcome of competition when they are outperformed by a teammate. This may lower a young athlete’s motivation and fun, since they were outperformed or not winning (Reinhart, 2006).

The fun of being on a youth sports team can be decreased when winning is established as the ultimate goal. A competitive environment could overpower the intrinsic motivation of the children. As a result, athletes may set ego-oriented goals when they begin to win (Reinhart, 2006). Personal, or ego-centered goals can pit team members against each other. While intra-team rivalry may increase some athletes’ individual performances, cooperation and teamwork suffers. Too much emphasis on competition by the coach can lead to poor relationships and negative attitudes within the team. Thus, once a competitive atmosphere is created, personal effort toward a common goal may be lowered.

Cooperation and teamwork as an alternative should be emphasized in youth sport programs. A young athlete’s motivation to stay involved is enhanced by creating a positive environment. Settings in which coaches consistently use reinforcement techniques keep athletes motivated. Focusing on the overall performance, rather than the outcome of the competition, helps team members feel more successful. Feelings of success increase an athlete’s motivation to improve. Guardians and coaches must work to maintain a healthy balance of competition and cooperation in a team environment to increase motivation (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Competitive Environment</th>
<th>Cooperative Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teammate relationships</td>
<td>Social comparisons develop, lack of strong peer friendships, team rivalry occurs</td>
<td>Strong peer friendships form, team members encourage one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation levels</td>
<td>Motives become extrinsic, motivation decreases if too much competition</td>
<td>Team members work toward a common goal, motivation increases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning skills</td>
<td>Mistakes viewed as failures and attributed to lack of ability</td>
<td>Mistakes used as learning tools, viewed as personal improvements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Different situations occur as a result of an emphasis on either a competitive or cooperative athletic environment. A cooperative environment promotes positive progress with the team and enhances motivation in young athletes.
An emphasis on cooperation can also greatly increase a team’s collective overall motivation. Working toward a common goal brings a team together, promotes positive communication, and improves problem-solving skills (Reinhart, 2006). Clarifying the importance of cooperation in a team setting can promote healthy levels of competition. Competitiveness is beneficial, as long as it is not between team members. Competitive goals, such as passing the ball between players to score, can be a collaborative effort. These goals can lead to higher motivation levels in teammates. High athlete motivation is also shaped by the influences of social and family perspectives, especially when guardians equally support cooperation and competition in sport.

Gender and Guardian Influences

Gender stereotypes have a strong impact on youth athletic involvement (Yan & McCullagh, 2004). Messages implying that athletic ability is a masculine trait can support some males but hinder the participation of many females. Coaches of youth sports are predominantly male with programs including higher numbers of male participants. Thus, our society reflects the stereotype that supports athletic ability as masculine. But, gender differences regarding sport involvement are seen in all athletes’ motives (see Figure 2).

Participation Motives

Boys

- Competitive Nature of Sports
- Personal Physical Skill Assessment

Girls

- Overall Fitness and Exercise
- Formation of Friendships

Figure 2. Boys and girls are motivated by different characteristics. Boys are more competitively driven. Girls are attracted to cooperative environments that emphasize teamwork.

Boys tend to participate because they see themselves as physically skilled, competitive, and feel encouraged to do so. Girls become involved for friends, exercise, and excitement (Barber, Sukhi, & White, 1999). However, lack of female participation can be attributed to low social support found in society and from guardians. Society subtly implies that girls should not participate in organized sports. This occurs by providing less publicity and support for female athletic events, in certain cultures.

In American society, female participation in athletics has gradually increased. Female athletes on the 2004 United States Olympic Team outperformed many of the male athletes. Post-Olympic coverage allowed women’s events to become more accepted in America. Sports idols began to include more women, thus encouraging girls to join athletics. In addition to social views, children consider a guardian’s view of sports to be important.

Influences from parents significantly impact a young individual’s sport participation and motivation. Children tend to adopt the same views as their guardians. Mothers and fathers who view sports as providing positive outcomes encourage their children to participate. Children of these guardians want to become involved and are thought to have high sport motivation (Brustad, 1996). In both sports and the family, specific rules, or discipline strategies, are important to consider. These, as well as family values contribute to varying parental socialization practices.

Family perception and cultural factors also influence sport involvement. Young athletes from families who discourage sport participation likely avoid athletics (Yan & McCullagh, 2004). Negative perspectives will typically produce low athletic motivation. Children’s motivation levels are significantly influenced by family perceptions of sport (Brustad, 1996). Individuals with guardians who praise sport participation have increased motivation. But males and females in the same family may experience varying support from other family members, and thus be differently motivated to participate.

On the whole, girls tend to receive more negative feedback from society and parents, regarding sports. This occurs because many athletic icons in society are male. Therefore, much skepticism has been placed on female athletes, especially in the past. Some guardians feel that their daughters should fulfill stereotypical gender roles. As a result, females generally have lower team turnout rates than males. In females, this can be attributed to fear of doing something wrong by participating in athletics. Ultimately, girls develop a resistance to sports. As females become young parents, resistance to participation may be translated into efforts to support current society gender stereotypes.

The Journal of Youth Sports • Volume 4, Issue 1, 2008
Thus, new guardian perspectives may apply to gender stereotypes and socialization. Guardians may reason that boys have more athletic ability than girls. So, fathers are much more encouraging of sons, and motivate them to join sport teams. Mothers, who believe that girls should not participate in sports, significantly impact their daughters. As a result, girls may believe they are not talented enough for athletics, thereby supporting the societal stereotype.

Both male and female athletes have decreased motivation if the parents view certain physical activities negatively. Children’s participation rates are influenced by these perceptions of sports. While working with a team, coaches try to support participation and emphasize values which help establish intrinsic motivation. They provide schedules with fun activities, and support all athletes playing in the game. This ultimately leads to high motivation to participate in young athletes.

However, the level of guardian encouragement and other family factors have a stronger impact on a child’s attitude than do the coaches. These influences, in addition to a child’s level of psychological development, can either create or destroy a young athlete’s desire to participate in sports (see Figure 3).

Factors Influencing Positive Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive parental outlook on sports</th>
<th>High levels of self-efficacy</th>
<th>Ignore gender stereotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal attributions for success</td>
<td>High levels of cooperation</td>
<td>Low levels of competition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Positive characteristics should be highly encouraged by a coach. This will help to ensure high levels of motivation, and create a positive athletic environment.

Psychological Development

Psychological development is a determining factor of an athlete’s views of motivation and participation. An individual’s self-efficacy, or self-beliefs, significantly impacts motivation. Youth with low self-efficacy levels feel they lack talent to perform a particular task. Athletes with this mindset tend to become less motivated (Chase, 2001). They believe that improvement is nearly impossible to attain. This leads to a total lack of effort to try an activity; i.e., they are not motivated.

By implementing a different learning strategy, this situation could be avoided. A technique called “shaping” utilizes positive reinforcements for completing smaller steps of a larger skill. Higher levels of competence and self-confidence can be produced through this progressive learning process. However, too much self-confidence could be a potential problem.

Some young athletes may feel they are more talented than they actually may be. Coaches need to be able to recognize these instances of extremely high self-confidence. Youth should be given feedback regarding the reality of their performances. If an athlete becomes overconfident in his or her performance, lower levels of competence and motivation may be seen in other team members. Additionally, motivation may decrease since highly confident athletes see little room for improvement.

Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy typically have higher levels of participation motivation. However, these athletes may become bored with a task if they feel they are particularly skilled at the activity. This could be avoided in coaching by incorporating refining or more challenging tasks to encourage improvement. Coaches could also suggest further training outside of practice sessions to increase motivation for learning. Also, instructional feedback by coaches may raise motivation levels of the athletes. High motivation may also result when athletes become more competent and learn to internalize their successes.

Competence, control, and attribution are values that are related to the psychological development of a young athlete. Outside sources, such as parents and coaches, can influence these values. However, a child’s attributions for success, and level of control are imperative individual and internal characteristics. These attributions determine whether or not they are highly motivated to participate (Waldron & Krane, 2005).

An athlete’s attributions for successful or failed performances are linked to motivation levels. Furthermore, both ability and effort are related to performance. However, children younger than twelve-years-old often misunderstand the differences between these two characteristics. Failure leads young athletes to believe they have poor ability, despite the amount of effort put into the task (Folmer, Cole, Sigal, Benbow, Satterwhite, Swygert, & Ciesla, 2008). In turn, motivation is lower, and successes continue to be attributed to luck.

As long as young athletes consider themselves competent, they will remain interested in the activity.
Individuals begin to lose motivation to improve when they attribute their successes to factors outside of their control. Children often think negative outcomes are associated with their lack of ability, which decreases effort and motivation. Positive outcomes, however, are thought to occur from their own skill (Tolli & Schmidt, 2008). The desire to achieve mastery of a skill decreases if an athlete believes they only do well because of luck, or some other external factor. In contrast, internalizing factors of success leads young athletes to become more motivated.

Young athletes have high motivation when they feel in control of their abilities. Internal success attributions are commonly seen in these individuals. Athletes who are more intrinsically motivated to master a skill also feel more competent about their abilities to perform (Wong & Bridges, 1995). High levels of self-efficacy, competence, control and attributions of success influence an athlete’s motivation. Combining these factors leads to highly motivated athletes. Creating a suitable environment for sport participation also determines whether individuals are highly motivated.

The motivational climate established by the coach is critical for building a successful team. Two types of climate, (1) process-oriented and (2) product-oriented, can affect the overall motivation level of a young athlete. The process-oriented climate is typically associated with intrinsic motivation, personal satisfaction, and internal attributions for success. Product-oriented climates emphasize external attributions for success, boredom, and athlete favoritism (Treasure & Roberts, 2001).

A process-oriented motivational climate produces higher levels of motivation in athletes than a product-oriented motivational climate. The process-oriented climate emphasizes effort as the main cause of improvement. As a result, athletes feel more confident about their abilities, which increases motivation.

A product-oriented climate only motivates athletes who are favored by the coach. Other athletes who are struggling to learn new skills think that they are not good enough, and feel left out of the team unit (see Figure 4).

**Motivational Settings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extrinsic Motivation</th>
<th>External Attributions</th>
<th>Athlete Favoritism</th>
<th>Performance-Oriented Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>Internal Attributions</td>
<td>Cooperation with Coaches</td>
<td>Mastery-Oriented Climate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. A performance-oriented motivational climate tends to promote ideas of competition. The mastery-oriented motivational climate conveys cooperation and teamwork. Mastery-oriented climates are more conducive to a positive team atmosphere and increased motivational levels among athletes.

**Conclusion**

Competition and cooperation must be balanced in order to function well as a team. Social comparisons among teammates can create unnecessary competition within the group (see Figure 5). This can lead to team members feeling useless and less motivated. Competition within a team is important to monitor. Participant dropout and team rivalry can occur if too much emphasis is placed on competition between teammates. Cooperative environments, rather than competitive ones, tend to produce higher motivation in athletes.

Cooperation is a value that must be highly encouraged among teammates and coaches. Working toward a common goal and achieving success from teamwork increases a team’s motivation. Focusing on cooperation will generally produce a team that is easier for a coach. Other factors, such as social and family influences, also must be considered to enhance sport participation motivation.

Gender stereotypes conveyed by society significantly influence children. Messages often communicate that athletics are for males and thus females should not participate. Many guardians adopt these perspectives, which results in lower numbers of girls becoming involved in sports. Family values can also greatly impact whether or not children will want to participate in athletics.

Guardians who hold negative views of sports typically have children who avoid physical activity, for fear of doing something wrong. Girls especially receive little encouragement to do sports. Their motives for participation indicate that they participate for friends, exercise, and the excitement. Boys state they enjoy the competitiveness, excitement offered, and feel encouraged to participate.

Mothers tend to have a negative and protective attitude over their daughters’ participation in sport. As a result, fewer young females participate. Children’s athletic motivation is impacted by their psychological development.
Psychological development in children includes values such as self-efficacy, competence, attributions, and control. Children with high motivation typically have high levels of self-efficacy, feel competent and in control of their actions, and attribute successes to their abilities. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief that they can or cannot do an activity. Athletes who have low levels of self-efficacy and competence generally have lower levels of motivation. An environment that emphasizes internal attributions influences youth motivation positively.

Motivational climates are also significant contributors to an athletic environment. Young athletes tend to have higher motivation levels in a process-oriented climate. This setting emphasizes internal attributions and cooperation. Product-oriented motivational climates tend to produce low levels of motivation. This is, at least partially, due to the emphasis on ability, and the favoritism of a few athletes often expressed by the coach. Overall, high levels of motivation occur when athletes are in control of their actions; performance is not evaluated on ability, and when they develop high levels of self-efficacy and competence.

Motivational levels within youth sports are creating complex athletic environments for coaches. If motivation, and the factors affecting it, continues to be overlooked, coaching will become more complicated due to a lack of techniques to enhance motivation in sports.

An emphasis should be placed on increasing an individual's intrinsic motives, rather than using extrinsic rewards to produce a desired behavior. Extrinsic rewards tend to decrease an athlete's motivation. Individuals often become motivated to participate for the wrong reasons. When coaches look at both external and internal factors that influence an athlete, enhancing motivation may become easier. Evaluating these external and internal factors can alleviate difficulties when coaching youth sports. This can also provide ideas for establishing a good coaching environment.

References


Comparison Effects

| Social Comparisons | Lead to | Unnecessary Competition |

Figure 5. Athletes may lose motivation when the team environment becomes too competitive. This loss is also attributed to comparisons made by fellow teammates.