

# The Ultimate Guide to Motivating Players – 35 Ways to Keep Your Players Focused and Working Hard ALL Season Long!

[www.BreakthroughBasketball.com](http://www.BreakthroughBasketball.com)

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## Introduction

**According to coaches that subscribe to our [newsletter](#), one of the BIGGEST challenges they face is motivating players on a consistent basis!**

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*

To help you motivate your players and keep them more focused than ever before, we have put together this “Ultimate Guide to Player Motivation”. Many of these ideas came from exceptional coaches that we have run into along the way.

When possible, we tried to mention their name in this report. Many thanks to everyone that contributed!

**IF you have additional motivation techniques you'd like to share**, please add them at the bottom of this page. As we get more suggestions, we'll work them into the report.

## Save This Report

I suggest that you save this report in an easy to remember place so you can refer to it throughout the year. You'll find this invaluable when things get stale and your players lose a little focus. There are so many motivational ideas in this report that if you actually use them, you're almost guaranteed to get your players giving 100% all year round.

Now, pay close attention to all the tips and techniques below. We guarantee that you'll find them to be extremely effective!

## The Solution Depends on Your Situation

Before we get started, you must realize that there is NO one-size-fits-all solution.

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 with in the program.

A youth coach working with 7 year olds may simply use the “clap technique” (which we explain below) to motivate players. But a varsity 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. Do not treat all of your players the same because they are not the same.

We're not going to fool you by trying to force a few tactics down your throat. ***What works for one coach might not work for another.***

That's why we have compiled a huge list of techniques so you can quickly and easily mold your own formula to motivate players. We will also address specific situations, gender, and age levels to make this report more useful for everyone.

# Top 18 Most Effective Motivation Techniques

We're starting with 18 techniques that we feel are the most effective and that everyone should consider.

Again, it depends on your situation, but these 18 techniques have been proven to be very effective. After reading this section, you might have everything you need. But we will still offer more tactics for you below. Since this is the "ultimate guide to motivation", we're offering you with all kinds of techniques to choose from.

To get started, here are the top 18 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: they must teach and they must 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 a .500 ball club and a state championship. Hard work and motivation will dramatically improve players' skills, improve rebounding, improve defense, 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

This might surprise you, but for many coaches this is secretly ruining your 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, "I'm gonna run 10, 15, 20 sprints at the end and I need to save myself for that."

If players know they have to run at the end of practice, they will pace themselves throughout your drills because they know RUNNING is coming. You don't even realize this is happening. Heck, your players probably don't even realize that they are pacing themselves.

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 basketball and feel good about it. That's why it's so important to end on a positive note!

Now that I've had the opportunity to talk with countless successful coaches all over the country, I have discovered that almost all of them include conditioning as part of their regular drills. They 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**

This is perhaps the most important and most powerful concept for you to embrace.

Coaching is teaching. What is 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 easy. 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.

### **John Wooden Food for Thought**

This is from the book called [The Talent Code](#). In 1974, two educational psychologists named Ron Gallimore and Roland Tharp studied John Wooden during every one of his practices throughout the season. They recorded each teaching act that Wooden instructed that year.

“There were 2,326 discrete acts of teaching. Of them, a mere 6.9 percent were compliments. Only 6.6 percent were expressions of displeasure. But 75 percent were pure information on what to do, how to do it, when to intensify an activity.

One of Wooden's most frequent forms of teaching was a 3-part method when he modeled the right way to do something, showed the incorrect way, and then remodeled the right way to do something. His actions rarely took longer than 3 seconds."

## **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 man-to-man defense as an example...

If your players don't understand the reason you want them to keep their knees bent, always be ready to help, see man and ball, and apply ball pressure, 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.

Teach them why you're not supposed to leave your feet and get out of position.

Teach them why they are sagging away from their man when they are one pass away or why they are in the passing lane denying the pass.

The more your players understand the science behind your defense, 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. Give it a try.

## **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 ballhandling has improved since the beginning of the season. Remind them of how much their rebounding and defense has blown up since the first game.

Are you beginning to see how so many of the tactics are closely related? Here's yet another closely related tactic...

## **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 out rebounding the opponent
- Celebrate when they learn a new skill
- Celebrate when the team or individual shooting percentages improves
- Celebrate when they learn the offense
- Celebrate when the team or a player breaks a tough habit
- Celebrate when a player demonstrates supreme teamwork
- Celebrate when a player dives after a loose ball

**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 basketball 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 (hard work and effort!).

This is a very important topic to understand. It is often misunderstood.

What is positive reinforcement?

Positive reinforcement is “catching” a person doing something you want them to do and rewarding it. The person gets attention and reward as positive reinforcement for doing the right thing. They will in turn focus on repeating that behavior.

For example, if you reward a player for diving on the floor, they will try to repeat the action because of the approval it attracts. Other players will also try to replicate the behavior (the hustle) because they want to be rewarded in a similar way.

Players really do want to be 'good' - you just need to make sure you reward them for doing so.

Why does positive reinforcement work?

Positive reinforcement works because it gives players positive goals to work towards instead of only focusing on negative consequences to avoid. Positive reinforcement fulfills strong basic psychological needs of every human.

### **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 [Morgan Wooten's](#) technique to sandwich it between positive feedback. For example: "You did a great job hustling down the court, next time wait for a better shot. Keep up the great hustle and the good shots will be there for you."

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

(If you have more rewards ideas, please share them at the bottom of this report.)

When coaching high school freshman, I used to give a Gatorade to players every time they took a charge and drew the foul during a game and scrimmages. This helped with "top of mind awareness" so they were often thinking about charges. But the players also had a lot of fun with it. One of the first things they'd say after games, with a big SMILE on their face, would be, "Did you see that charge coach? You owe me a Gatorade!"

Even at the high school and college level, you'd be amazed how such a simple thing like a Gatorade is such a big deal to young players. They seem to love taking a dip into the coach's pocket book. :)

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 can help coaches make certain they are being generous with praise.

Before practice, put four paper clips and a marble into your pocket. Every time you make a favorable comment, move a clip to the left pocket.

When you make a negative comment, move the marble to the other (right) pocket.

The catch is that you cannot move the marble back to the right pocket until you have moved all the paper clips from the right pocket to the left pocket. You can repeat this process throughout the practice.

You can of course come up with your own version of this or a way to remember. And you don't have to do it all year long. It's just something that might help you remember.

### **Be Specific**

Another point on praise: the more specific you are, the better. "Good job" and "nice hustle" are better than no praise at all, but being specific helps reinforce the behavior you want. It also tells the athletes that you are paying attention to them.

"Good job running to the rim on the break" beats "good job." And "way to be tough setting that hard screen" beats "Way to be tough out there."

Teach them what you want and why you want it.

If an athlete isn't performing up to expectation, make sure you are teaching them the correct way to perform the activity. It should only be a few seconds, but always be teaching so players know what to do.

## **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.

[Alan Stein](#) points out that 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.”

I believe goals are very important, and when done properly they can be incredibly effective. But as [Don Kelbick](#) points out, you need to be careful... “I am not saying that you should not have goals, but to use them 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? You need to be careful about that because those goals will eventually become meaningless and even cheapen other goals.”

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...

I'm a firm believer that you should NOT set goals for the prestigious statistics, like scoring the most points and even winning games. Players already want those things without setting goals. Not to mention, it gives them the wrong idea.

However, if you set goals for other critical aspects of the game you will see huge success!

You can set goals for a low number of turnovers, team shooting percentage, your opponent's shooting percentage, offensive efficiency, team rebounds (not individual), defensive stats, and possessions per game. You always want more possessions than the other team and that comes from rebounding and taking care of the basketball.

You could even have conditioning goals like 100 push-ups or run 5 yo yo's in less than 30 seconds for each one. Just be careful about the message you send your players when setting goals. When used properly, goals are a powerful motivator.

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 goal setting. But it's not the same. Here's a business fact that carries over into basketball...

"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.

The 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, and so on. There are too many options to mention here.

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. There are lots of ways to measure this...

You can 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?"

If it's important to you, I promise there is at least something you can measure to keep track of how you're doing.

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 - Conduct Occasional Tests**

Another way to measure performance is to conduct occasional tests. Here is an example what you can do that came from [Coaching Basketball Technical and Tactical Skills by Kathy McGee](#).

Several times during the year you can conduct evaluation tests. You can do a test in the off season, pre-season, mid-season, and post-season. This is just an example. The

frequency of the test is up to you. If your evaluation test is very simple, you could even conduct it weekly.

You can test strength, shooting accuracy (percentage) in various drills, ballhandling skills, speed, speed while dribbling the ball, quickness, and so on. The number of things you can test are endless.

These tests can be fun, motivational, and really help players improve. A couple suggestions when conducting tests...

Consider creating a game day atmosphere with many players present and watching as you conduct testing. In this environment, players will compete with lots of energy and enthusiasm. You can have goal boards and record boards that list all time best performances, this can also motivate the athletes. These boards are most effective when they have several categories (e.g. separating guards from forwards and post players so that guards can compete against each other in things such as strength), and list several places such as the top 5 or top 10 performances to give more athletes a reasonable chance to compete for a spot on the board.

The best motivation, though, is the concept of striving for a personal best effort in physical skills testing or striving for an improved score compared to the athlete's last evaluation on measurements of technical, tactical, communication and mental skills.

When the athletes compare themselves today to themselves yesterday, they can always succeed and make progress, regardless of the achievements of their teammates. And when the athletes see themselves making progress, they will be motivated to continue to practice and train. This concept, while focusing on the individual, is not negating the team concept. You simply need to remind the team that if every player gets better every day, the team must be getting better every day!

As you evaluate your players, one concept is crucial; athletes should focus on trying to improve their own previous performance, as opposed to comparing their performance to those of teammates. Certainly, comparative data can help athletes see where they rank on the team and perhaps among other players as their position, and this kind of information may motivate players or help them set goals. But all rankings place some athletes on the team below others and the danger of focusing on this type of system is that athletes can easily become discouraged if they consistently rank in the bottom part of the team.

*\* We learned this technique from the book:*

*<http://www.humankinetics.com/products/all-products/Coaching-Basketball-Technical-Tactical-Skills-E-Book-PDF>*

## **Tactic #11 - Show You Care and Improve Relationships**

One of the best ways to motivate players is to show that you care about them outside of basketball.

Demonstrate that you care about players by showing a sincere interest in what they do OUTSIDE of basketball. For example, you could attend their choir concerts, soccer 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 basketball court.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski preaches the 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 #12 - Inspire Players

*"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."*

--William A. Ward

One of [Coach Morgan Wooten's](#) favorite ways to reach players was through motivational thought provoking poems. Some of his greatest players, such as Adrian Dantley and Danny Ferry, have told him how much some of those poems have helped them.

I know several coaches that start every practice with a "Quote of the Day". Many times, it is something motivational from a pro player or coach. And they sometimes end practice with another quote.

By searching on the internet you can find hundreds of inspirational poems and quotes. Not to mention dozens of books that are available. Here are just a few resources that I know of:

<http://coachlokhoops.homestead.com/quotesuntitled1.html>

<http://www.inspirational-quotes-and-quotations.com/basketball-quotes.html>

<http://www.coachingtoolbox.net/filingcabinet/basketball-quotes.html>

<http://www.basketballsbest.com/motivate.htm>

<http://www.jimabbott.info/motivationalquotations.html>



## **Tactic #13 - 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 is 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 basketball, 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 #14 - 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.

Coach Ken Sartini says the last thing they did in practice was to run "situations". The kids LOVED these mini games, they looked forward to them every day. If I laid my practice plan down somewhere I would catch a couple of them taking a look to see what we were going to do.

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.

If you want more ideas and fun basketball drills to try, go to:  
<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/pr/fun-youth-drills.html>

## **Tactic #15 – Establish Habits**

As [Ray Lokar](#) points out, playing hard should not be something you do in the fourth quarter at the end of the game. 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 #16 - 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, Don Kelbick points out that competition can hinder 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 half and full court scrimmages.
- OER (Offensive Efficiency Rating) scrimmages. Track your OER instead of points and see which team gets the best rating. Reward the winner or make the loser run sprints.
- Number of makes in a drill
- Number of makes in a full court 1 minute lay up drill
- Keep track of defensive stops, charges, and deflections. Track points based on those stats. This can be done in scrimmages or drills.
- 1 on 1 competitive drills, keep score.
- Competitive rebounding drills – track the number of rebounds. Award a winning team or individual.
- Knock out – winner gets a Gatorade

- Most free throws made in a row. You get five minutes to see who gets the longest streak.
- Highest free throw percentage

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

## **Tactic #17 - 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? Is it a mutually determined [team covenant](#)? 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 #18 - 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 5-7 minutes tops on half court drills, 10 to 12 minutes on full court drills. 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 competing 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 #19 - Implement a Reward System**

Many coaches have had great success by implementing reward systems. Of course, you can't completely rely on a reward system. You must compliment your system with other motivation techniques and find a combination of techniques that work for you.

Here are some reward systems that other coaches have used successfully:

[Koran Godwin](#) uses a reward system that is all about accountability and competition. Each one of the drills has a winner and a loser. The loser has to run more than the winner before you get back into the next drill. With the reward system each player knows that they can not slack at practice because they will be responsible for their team running more than necessary. Coach Godwin likes the reward system because it motivates the 15th guy on your team to work just as hard as the 1st. It also creates conflict which allows teammates to learn how to communicate under duress. He gauges the success of his team motivation on that 15th player. If he is working hard everyday your team gets better. If he is not into it and not motivated, that cancer can spread among the others.

Legendary Coach [Morgan Wooten](#) uses a system that he calls “permissions”. Permissions were rewards granted to players based on outstanding efforts or reaching set goals. The permissions are earned throughout the practice and then totaled up at the end. Each permission resulted in one less lap, suicide, or other conditioning drill.

## **Tactic #20 - Take a Break**

Coach [Jim McGannon](#) thinks one of the most important ways to keep players motivated is to encourage them to get AWAY from the game several times a year. Jordan loved to play golf. Nicklaus (golfer) 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!

## 15 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.

I suggest that you review the tips below and see if any of them resonate with you. If they do, incorporate them into your plan. We believe that the most powerful techniques are shared above. But like we said earlier, each situation is different and you need to find the combination that works for you. Many of the techniques below work very well too.

### 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 gym. 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.

For youth coaches, here is a simple tip I picked up from Kwame Brown at the [IYCA](#):

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

Coach Don Kelbick sums up this tip nicely with this quote..

“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 a Duke game and noticed what happens if there is a Duke player on the ground after a dead ball?

Every single Duke player on the floor runs to the player on the ground and helps him up. I'm certain that Coach K 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 4 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 extra pass being made, teammates setting better screens for each other, and players playing harder for each other.

[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 Steve Nash gives out high fives during a 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 - Model Motivation in All of Your Actions**

Have fun, remain positive, and let your players know what is expected of them immediately. Your players will pick up on everything that you say and do and they will respond accordingly. Verbalize your philosophy so your players know what to expect and to what to strive for.

For example: If you tell your players that the best rebounders will be starters, then players will all strive to be good rebounders. You've told them through your words and actions that rebounding is important to you.

It's all about what you emphasize! If you're constantly talking about rebounding, you're players will pick up on that and become good rebounders.

### **Tip #12 - 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 #13 - Draw Crowds and Excitement**

Anything you can do to draw larger crowds and generate excitement will improve motivation. Make playing a privilege. Who doesn't want to be part of something that generates so much excitement and enthusiasm from the crowds?

Have special events. Promote your team. Generate awareness. Remind people about games. Run a fast paced and exciting style of play. Put all the parents and players on a mission to spread the word of an upcoming game. Set attendance goals with the parents. Make it a collaborative effort to get more people in the stands.

All of these things will help generate bigger crowds and more excitement.

### **Tip #14 - 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 #15 - Reduce Negative Feedback**

Correcting errors in team sports such as basketball provide unique challenges. Yelling across the court 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** (half court – 5 minutes or less, full court – 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** – When we attend 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.

If you want more ideas for fun drills and tips for running a FUN practice, check out our [60 Fun Youth Basketball Drills & Games](#)

## 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 #11*)
- Mix in some competition on occasion, without over doing it (*see Tactic #16*)
- Promote and Emphasize Teamwork (*see Tactic #17*)
- Keep practices moving and fact paced (*see Tactic #18*)

## 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 demotivator. 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 girls 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!

## Coaches and Resources Contributing to this Report

Here's a list of coaches and resources that have somewhere along the way contributed or given us ideas for this report.

Alan Stein - <http://www.strongerteam.com>

Ray Lokar - <http://coachlokhoops.homestead.com>

Don Kelbick - <http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/aboutus.html#DonKelbick>

Tim Springer - <http://www.spartanpt.com/blog1/>

Ronn Wyckoff - <http://www.top-basketball-coaching.com>

Koran Godwin - <http://www.jumpstarhoops.com>

Jim McGannon - <http://mybasketballbasics.com>

Larry Ronglien - <http://athletics.uwstout.edu/staff.aspx?staff=47>

Ken Sartini

IYCA – [www.iyca.org](http://www.iyca.org)

[The Talent Code](#)

[Coaching Basketball Technical and Tactical Skills](#)

[Positive Coaching Alliance](#)

[Coaching Basketball Successfully](#) by Morgan Wooten

[The Basketball Coaches Bible](#)

[Coaching Youth Basketball with Faith and Fundamentals](#)

[Coaching Basketball - Krause](#)



## Leave Your Ideas and Suggestions

If you have any ideas or motivation techniques that have worked for you, please leave your comments here:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/mental/motivate-players.html#comment>

As we discover new techniques, we'll add them to this report.

You can also contact us at:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/contact-us.asp>