

Eight ways to motivate young athletes

By Jack Perconte

A big concern of parents and coaches is that their players are not motivated. Rarely does trying to motivate youth with yelling, threatening or negativity work to bring on increased motivation. Those methods usually backfire, serving only to create tension and alienate kids from wanting to play. Adults of unmotivated kids should not give up hope.

Parents who remain positive with their words, actions, and display patience with their kids have the best chance of seeing their kids' motivation improve. Kids who have success usually become motivated, but success is fleeting and does not come right away for many. Until success comes, parents and coaches will inspire players with their attention, approval and knowledge. Parents, who stay attentive to these three ingredients without going overboard with any of them, might see their players' motivation appear in the future.

Additionally, parents and coaches might use some of the following:

1. Stay enthusiastic about the sport that the young player is playing. Watching games of the particular sport on TV or in person with players and talking about the sport in general terms is good. Young players who notice that even professionals fail, can receive encouragement from that.
2. Suggest tips in a positive manner. Any tip will give players hope for their next game. Hope can lead to confidence, which may lead to motivation.
3. Allow kids to play games without inundating them with how-to instructions. Saving instructions for practice is best.
4. Occasionally remind players of good plays they had in the past. This will give them a good, positive feeling that they could do it again.
5. Do not keep players' statistics, averages, percentages and the like. They may be good to know when they are doing well but they can be very discouraging when not performing well.
6. Have a person who the player respects talk to the young player about fundamental adjustments to their skills. Knowing they can improve their results with physical actions as opposed to failure being a "mental thing" can be helpful.
7. Occasionally watch inspirational movies and read uplifting stories. This can add the missing spark to an unmotivated athlete.
8. Remind players that success is achievable with practice, determination and dedication. This is always a good thing when said in a positive non-accusatory way.

Jack Perconte played 12 years of professional baseball, including seven in the majors for the Dodgers, Indians, Mariners and White Sox. After retiring from professional baseball in 1987, Perconte opened a baseball training academy in Naperville, Ill.