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summary

Regardless of how well designed our training programs, their success is dependent upon the athlete's effort; motivation is a key to consistent effort, and this article outlines methods by which motivation can be enhanced in high school programs.

As strength and conditioning coaches, we are all looking at developing the perfect training program for our athletes, yet what we consistently see is that athletes are achieving great results with a variety of programs. However, when we look closely at successful programs, we need to go beyond the program itself and focus on the effort that the athletes put into their training. The perfect program is impossible if the athlete does not put in the effort required for optimal benefit and does not combine this with appropriate recovery. For an athlete to put forth

Enhancing Motivation in High School Programs

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this effort consistently, strong motivation is an absolutely essential requirement (1).

Motivation can be defined as the direction and intensity of one's efforts (3). In terms of strength and conditioning, the *direction* of effort refers to whether the athlete seeks out and is attracted to the training, and the *intensity* of effort refers to the effort the athlete puts into the training. Although direction and intensity can be separated, the reality is that if the athlete is attracted to the activity, he or she is likely to apply greater effort. With motivation playing an important role in program success, it is important that strength and conditioning coaches plan their programs to maximize the motivation of all their athletes.

With regard to motivation, the following seven techniques have been used effectively in our strength and conditioning program.

Make Athletes Feel Valued— Share Their Goals

Athletes are motivated when they feel valued in an environment and feel that their goals are appreciated and addressed. Athletes coming into strength

and conditioning programs will have different goals and will be motivated by different factors (4). For some, reaching the professional level of sport may be a burning ambition; for others, aims that may be far less grand but equally important to them, such as losing body fat, are the objectives. As part of our Athlete Development Program (2), all of our athletes outline their goals at the start of the year and consistently monitor these along with a measure of motivation within their training logs (2). By being aware of these goals and the levels of motivation, our coaches can ensure that motivation levels are maintained for each individual.

Tell Them Why and How the Program Helps Them Meet Their Goals

Athletes are motivated when they see the relevance of the exercises to their goals. Although the relevance may appear obvious to us as strength and conditioning coaches, it may not be clear to the athlete. The process of explaining the aims of each exercise in a session and the relevance to their performance may be one of the most important things that strength and conditioning coaches can do to ensure

motivation and adherence to the program.

Show Them Results—How This Has Worked for Others

For optimum motivation, athletes need to believe that the program will work. Many high school programs produce data, such as fitness scores, that clearly show the success of athletes using the program. Displaying “before” and “after” testing data on past athletes or athlete testimonials can provide effective evidence for the athletes that the program works if they commit to it. This can help provide the motivation to work hard at the program, in the knowledge that it will contribute to them achieving their goals.

Show Their Own Progress

Athletes are motivated by success (4), and direct evidence that the program is working for them is a great motivational tool. By keeping training and performance logs, athletes can demonstrate their progress on both a short-term and long-term basis. Strength and conditioning has a great advantage in this area, because each day there are data on training progress, such as extra repetitions, more weight lifted, and improved 40-yd dash times. This can be emphasized further by rewarding improvement and not just record performances.

Develop a Motivational Environment

A quality training environment can be a major motivating influence. Ideally the environment should be one that provides a pleasant training experience and facilitates the effective carrying out of the given workout. Although budgetary limitations often will influence the environment, one area that all coaches can influence is the work ethic. Often, you can walk into a program and immediately sense the work ethic of the athletes; as coaches, we can greatly influence this. By using the earlier

points and rewarding effort as well as achievement, a quality work environment can be developed. Once athletes feel they are being valued, they are more likely to work hard; in this way, the work ethic starts to develop. A great advantage of developing a great work ethic is that once it is established, it can often be self-perpetuating. When new athletes walk into a program with a great work ethic, they immediately are motivated to work hard; over time, they too will feel the need to maintain this.

Make It Enjoyable

Adherence to programs requires a degree of enjoyment (4), and as strength and conditioning coaches it is important that we plan for long-term results as well as short-term. Whereas enhanced athletic performance is often the main short-term aim, we can equally influence athletes for the long-term and develop a mindset where physical activity is valued and enjoyed. To facilitate this, it is important that athletes enjoy working out, and making working out an enjoyable experience is an important part of our job. Introducing variety, lighter days, and fun competitions are all ways that we can maintain enjoyment in the program. If athletes do not enjoy our workouts, they are unlikely to put full effort into them, and their results will necessarily be compromised.

Be a Role Model—Set a Positive Image

As strength coaches we are constantly giving our athletes messages, and our actions have a key role in reinforcing or weakening these messages. We need to act out our messages by showing we value good nutrition, exercise, and a healthy lifestyle. Our messages will be diluted if we say one thing and act in a different way.

These seven areas are by no means exclusive but do provide a framework around

which we, as coaches, can build programs that maintain motivation and maximize the results our athletes get from our workouts. ♦

References

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