

Micro-Learning Club Coaching Drill Card #3



Week 3: 7 October 2026:

Motivating Young Athletes:

The most effective way to motivate young athletes is to build intrinsic motivation by supporting autonomy, competence, and connection- through choices in training, positive reinforcement, clear goals, fun practices, and strong coach-athlete relationships.

Core Principles of Motivation:

1: Support Autonomy:

- Offer meaningful choices (e.g. drill variations, order of activities).
- Explain the “why” behind drills and tasks.
- Acknowledge frustrations and emotions.
- Encourage initiative (leading warm-ups, learning better ways to execute drills).

2: Build Competence:

- Give specific constructive feedback (your footwork improved for that drill)
- Set realistic, achievable goals that build toward long term development.
- Celebrate small wins to reinforce progress.

3: Strengthen Relatedness:

- Build trust through open communication and active listening.
- Foster a squad connection and peer support.
- Create a positive, ego-free environment.

4: Practical Strategies: Purposeful Goal setting

- Use short term goals that ladder into long-term objectives
- Make progress visible with technical, performance and personal milestones.

5: Make practices Fun and Dynamic:

- Mix structure with games, competition and creative drills.
- Add variety to prevent monotony and burnout.

6: Positive reinforcement:

- Praise effort, attitude, and improvement – not just outcomes.
- Be specific with feedback to build confidence.

7: Celebrate success:

- Recognise individual achievements, even small ones.
- Create rituals and traditions to build pride and camaraderie in the squad.

8: Protect Mental freshness:

- Prioritise play over pressure to maintain joy.
- Schedule rest days and recovery periods.
- Watch for burnout signs (irritability, withdrawal, declining performance).

Summary: Motivating young athletes requires creating an environment where they feel ownership, improvement, and connection. Intrinsic motivation needs to be supported through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This will produce long term engagement, resilience, and enjoyment for the sport.

How can this work at club training:

A: Start training with a game of the group's choice.

B: Identify with the athlete when they have performed a PB, even if small.

C: Set short term goals for the session that are reachable.

For more reading:

Read our more detailed document on Motivating Young Athletes in our Coaching resource section.

Yours in Athletics

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