THE PERCEPTIONS OF COACHES AND ATHLETES/PLAYERS OF MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

It was the primary aim of this investigation to determine to what extent coaches and athletes/players agree or disagree on the importance of motivational factors in sport. Altogether 114 coaches and 454 athletes/players took part in the investigation. The following factors were identified as important motivational factors in sport: encouragement to perform better; goal setting; enjoyment and pleasure in sport; activation; self-efficacy; communication between coaches/players; reward for achievement; self-confidence in players; praise; individual attention; effective coaching methods and techniques; competition; and being intrinsically motivated. The results of a statistical analysis indicated that coaches and athletes/players differed mainly with regard to the factors communication between player and coach, praising the player and competition. The coaches considered these factors to be more important than players do. The main factor which both coaches and athletes/players considered to be important was goal setting. Both athletes/players and coaches considered encouragement to perform better as less important.

Key words: Motivational factors; Athletes/players; Coaches.

INTRODUCTION

The coaching of sport is a complex task and at the centre of all sporting activities are the coaches, *"... men and women who form the nucleus, giving life to the sport experience"* (Vernacchia *et al*., 1996: 3). They play the most important role in the success or failure, satisfaction or frustration, joy or disappointment of the sporting experience for athletes. To become a coach is a goal or dream that comes true for many. To become a coach means to have skills and abilities, knowledge and wisdom, to be receptive, to have insight and to be spurred on by an emotional dedication to sport, the self and others. To be a coach does not require a superhuman, but not everyone is suited to become a coach. Although coaches come from all spheres of society, they share a pride in and enthusiasm for sport, for their role as coach and, in particular, for their athletes.

Various authors (including Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966; Cratty, 1983; Gill, 1986; Vernacchia *et al*, 1996; Morris & Summers, 2002) refer to the characteristics of a successful coach. The views of these authors may be summarised as follows:

• The personality profiles of coaches correspond to a large extent with that of outstanding athletes.

• Successful coaches are also good "psychologists". The psychological principles that they apply improve relations between them and their athletes, which creates the ideal

environment for personal growth and results in better performance.

- The experiences of famous and successful coaches have consistently shown that the attention they were prepared to give their athletes was the key to unlocking their athletes' talent. The forming of relationships with the athlete is regarded by virtually all authors as critically important to the coaching process.

- Successful coaches are prepared to encourage their athletes along with the technical instructions that are given. The least popular coaches are those that are not prepared to apply disciplinary measures.

- Successful coaches are flexible in their approaches. They are able to handle different people and situations in different ways.

- The successful coach is able to analyse himself/herself, as well as the situation and his/her athletes, effectively and critically and to make appropriate recommendations.

- The successful coach not only maintains good relations with his/her athletes, but also with other people who work with the team (for example technical staff). Qualities that athletes appreciate least in coaches are sarcasm, signs of emotional immaturity and lack of technical skill.

- Successful coaches are people who pursue success, who are organised and orderly and plan in advance, who enjoy being with others, demonstrate leadership qualities, are reliable, not always on the defence, accept blame, are able to control stress and emotions, spiritually strong and display aggression in an acceptable way.

The idea that coaches are "builders of character" has been around for many years and is supported by their athletes. Unfortunately the influence of some coaches is not always as positive as one would like. A number of examples are mentioned here:

- Coaches sometimes make use of rigid and persuasive methods that make his/her athlete (especially in younger and less-experienced athletes) which may lead to friction in, for example, the family.

- Coaches are in a position to become role models for their athletes, but Coakley (1994: 203) says: *"Few coaches ever become real role models for athletes"*. The problem may lie in the fact that, in spite of what coaches say and the athletes expect, the emphasis of coaching is still on physical development (with the aim of winning contests), while general social and psychological development are overlooked.

- On the positive side, coaches act as advisors to their athletes. They help their athletes explore alternatives, accept new challenges, make choices and deal with triumphs and disappointments successfully. In many cases coaches play the roles of parent, therapist, psychologist and comforter.

The athletes' perception of an ideal coach depends on the type of sport and the athletes' needs. The degree to which coaches' perceptions of themselves and those of athletes differ is reflected in a study by Percival (in Cratty, 1983), where coaches awarded themselves a mark of 7 out of 10 for being a good coach, whereas their athletes gave them a mark of only 4 out of 10. Seventy-two percent of coaches described themselves as positive as opposed to only 32% of their athletes who regard them as positive. The following is a summary of what athletes more or less expect from their coaches (Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966; Cratty, 1983):

- Athletes regard their coaches as important decision makers in potentially stressful situations and expect them to remain calm if they become involved.

- Athletes report that they prefer coaches who can at least give the impression that they have their emotions under control. In general, athletes/players are against the practice where coaches run up and down the side of the field shouting abuse (Rushall & Potgieter, 1987).

- Cratty (1983) maintains that athletes with low self-confidence sometimes have a need for the authoritarian or dominant type of coach. This gives them a sense of security. The democratic type of coach is, however, more accessible for most athletes, especially females.

- Athletes expect their coaches to be reliable, stable and consistent, to be precise with regard to schedules and programmes, to be knowledgeable about the items in which their athletes are participating, not to improvise (in other words, say if you do not know) and to be careful when making promises.

Perhaps one of the most important problems in sports coaching is that coaches and their athletes/players do not always agree on specific coaching techniques and methods and, even more tragically, that they are not even aware of these differences. Furthermore, coaches are not always aware of specific qualities in their athletes. Huddleston *et al.* (1995), for example, found that there is a significant difference between coaches' estimated scores of their athletes' competitive ability and measured scores of this competitive ability. DeVoe and Carrol (1994) conducted an investigation into coaches' perceptions of why high school learners are motivated to participate in sport or to withdraw. They also found significant differences between what coaches regard as important motivators for sports participation (or not) for these learners and what learners themselves regard as important motivators.

MOTIVATION IN THE SPORTS CONTEXT

Motivation is probably one of the most important factors when coaching within a sporting context comes up for discussion. This can be seen by the eagerness with which sports coaches invite motivational speakers to "motivate" their sports teams. Le Roux (1999), for example, investigated the possibility of including sport psychology in the training programme of subject teachers who become involved in the coaching of sport. The respondents were asked, among other things, to arrange a total of 26 aspects connected with sport psychology from more important to less important for inclusion in their training programme. Motivation was consistently rated as the most important aspect. Athletes and players also involved in the research considered motivation the most important aspect of sport psychology that coaches should be aware of (Le Roux, 1999).

Sports coaches do not always know how to motivate their athletes effectively. Abusive language, threats, omission from teams and even physical punishment are often used to get athletes and players to participate with enthusiasm and commitment. These undesirable methods of "motivation" lead to the souring of the relationship between coach and athlete/player, which eventually results in a decrease in sporting achievement and even the termination of relationships.

Exactly what it is that motivates athletes and keeps them motivated is probably one of the

biggest problems that coaches have to contend with. We find, for example, those that have a "need" for achievement and who also achieve in a positive way, while there are also those who are anxious and would avoid failure at all costs. These two types will react differently under the pressure of competition and should be approached differently by the coach and the psychologist. Athletes may also compete for different "awards", such as social approbation, the overcoming of stress, the friendship of teammates, the approval of the coach, the feeling of excelling, and the expression of aggression. "The difficult job of the coach is to ascertain what motive, or collection of motives, inspires a particular athlete to perform and then to aid him or her in acquiring these" (Cratty, 1983: 64).

WHAT IS MOTIVATION?

Lack of space precludes a complete discussion of motivation here. Suffice it to say that the literature contains a multitude of definitions and descriptions in this regard. Cratty (1983: 48) says, for example, the term motivation *"... denotes the factors and processes that impel people to action or inaction in various situations"*. According to Silva and Weinberg (1984: 171), motivation refers *"... to the intensity and direction of behavior"*. According to Roberts (LeUnes & Nation 1996: 149), motivation refers to "... to those personality factors, social variables, and/or cognitions that come into play when persons undertake a task at which he or she is evaluated, enters into competition with others, or attempts to attain some standard of excellence". The study of motivation is therefore a search for variables that explain why people do what they do and also the intensity with which they do it. Motivation affects the type, intensity and duration of a person's behaviour, which, in sport, will have an important impact on the athlete's performance.

Although many studies have been conducted on the role of motivation in sport, little research has been done on the perceptions of coaches on the one hand and athletes/players on the other as to what motivation is and what factors influence motivation. It would therefore seem meaningful to pilot an investigation in this regard.

PROCEDURE OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

The primary goal of the empirical research was to establish to what extent coaches and athletes/players agree on the factors that are regarded as important for motivation in sport. Five schools were randomly selected in the Kempton Park/Ekhuruleni area. Altogether 114 coaches and 454 athletes/players of various team sports participated in the research.

In a literature study (Schuman, 2003), a number of factors were identified which are regarded as important for motivation in sport. To establish whether coaches in general also regard these factors as important and to determine whether there are other factors that should be added, a questionnaire was drawn up for a pilot study. Two hundred selected respondents (consisting of psychologists, sports coaches and other experts in the field of sport) were asked to assess on a nine-point scale (1= not important; 9= very important) how important they regarded the factors mentioned with regard to motivation. Space was also allowed for adding items that the respondents might consider important. The questionnaire was drawn up in English and Afrikaans.

After the arithmetical means were calculated for each of the factors, the following factors were selected as the most important: encouragement to perform better; goal setting; enjoyment

and pleasure in sport; activation; self-efficacy; communication between coaches/players; reward for achievement; self-confidence in players; praise; individual attention; effective coaching methods and techniques; competition; and being intrinsically motivated.

These selected motivation factors were then presented to the subjects of the present investigation (coaches and athletes/players) who were also asked to assess the importance of the factors according to the same nine-point scale.

RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

In order to determine if coaches and athletes/players responded differently to the motivation factors, the mean for coaches and athletes/players for each of the factors were calculated. To establish whether the means differ significantly, the t-test for independent samples was used in each instance. The analysis was done for each particular type of sport (rugby, netball, hockey, cricket and athletics). The results appear in Tables 1 to 5.

TABLE 1. **COMPARISON OF THE AVERAGE RESPONSES OF RUGBY PLAYERS AND COACHES**

Motivation factor	Respondent	n	x	s	t-value
Communication between player and coach	Players	125	7.20	1.56	4.94**
	Coaches	22	8.27	0.76	
Competition	Players	125	7.44	1.61	4.51**
	Coaches	22	8.40	0.73	
Efficient coaching methods and techniques	Players	125	7.53	1.60	0.28
	Coaches	22	7.63	1.25	
Encouragement to perform better	Players	125	6.88	2.06	0.04
	Coaches	22	6.86	1.42	
Enjoying sport	Players	125	7.60	1.60	3.41**
	Coaches	22	8.45	0.96	
Goal setting	Players	125	8.18	1.27	1.39
	Coaches	22	8.45	0.73	
Individual attention to players	Players	125	7.90	1.22	2.29*
	Coaches	22	8.36	0.78	
Intrinsic motivation	Players	125	7.37	1.64	1.33
	Coaches	22	7.86	1.16	
Praising of the player	Players	125	7.04	1.82	4.47**
	Coaches	22	8.22	0.97	
Psyching-up	Players	125	7.99	1.31	0.27
	Coaches	22	7.90	1.41	
Receiving awards for performance	Players	125	7.60	1.39	1.96*
	Coaches	22	6.95	1.58	
Self-efficiency	Players	125	7.29	1.51	1.95*
	Coaches	22	7.95	1.04	
Self-confidence of the player	Players	125	8.19	1.16	0.29
	Coaches	22	8.09	1.57	

* p< 0.05 ** p < 0.01. For the other t-values p > 0.05

Rugby players and their coaches showed the largest significant difference (between means) with regard to *communication between player and coach*, *praising the player* and *competition*. In all three instances coaches considered the factor more important than players. The factors where coaches and players did not differ significantly but according to the averages, considered the factors to be important, were *goal setting, psyching-up* and *self-confidence of the player*. The factor which both players and coaches considered less important was *encouragement to perform better*.

TABLE 2. **COMPARISON OF THE AVERAGE RESPONSES OF NETBALL PLAYERS AND COACHES**

Motivation factor	Respondent	n	x	s	t-value
Communication between player and coach	Players	87	7.00	1.59	5.57**
	Coaches	27	8.25	0.76	
Competition	Players	87	7.56	1.31	3.38**
	Coaches	27	8.22	0.69	
Efficient coaching methods and techniques	Players	87	6.68	1.86	1.75
	Coaches	27	7.37	1.36	
Encouragement to perform better	Players	87	6.83	1.88	0.41
	Coaches	27	7.00	1.27	
Enjoying sport	Players	87	7.86	1.28	0.51
	Coaches	27	8.00	0.96	
Goal setting	Players	87	8.57	0.94	0.63
	Coaches	27	8.44	0.89	
Individual attention to players	Players	87	8.20	1.20	0.50
	Coaches	27	8.33	1.00	
Intrinsic motivation	Players	87	7.35	1.41	2.72**
	Coaches	27	8.14	0.94	
Praising of the player	Players	87	7.21	1.48	2.39**
	Coaches	27	7.96	1.15	
Psyching-up	Players	87	8.00	1.48	0.36
	Coaches	27	8.11	1.08	
Receiving awards for performance	Players	87	7.50	1.41	0.93
	Coaches	27	7.22	1.25	
Self-efficiency	Players	87	7.55	1.42	1.79
	Coaches	27	8.07	0.95	
Self-confidence of the player	Players	87	8.28	0.99	0.41
	Coaches	27	8.14	1.65	

** $p < 0.01$. For the other t-values $p > 0.05$

Netball players and their coaches showed the largest significant difference (between means) with regard to *communication between player and coach* and *competition*. In both instances coaches considered the factor more important than players. The factors where coaches and players did not differ significantly but according to the averages, considered the factors to be important, were *goal setting,* and *individual attention to players*. The factor which both players and coaches considered less important was *encouragement to perform better*.

Hockey players and their coaches (Table 3) showed the largest significant difference (between

means) with regard to *praising of the player, communication between player and coach* and *competition*. In all three instances coaches considered the factor more important than players. The factors where coaches and players did not differ significantly but according to the averages, considered the factors to be important, were *goal setting,* and *enjoying sport*. The factor which both players and coaches considered less important was *encouragement to perform better*.

TABLE 3. **COMPARISON OF THE AVERAGE RESPONSES OF HOCKEY PLAYERS AND COACHES**

Motivation factor	**Respondent**	**n**	**x**	**s**	**t-value**
Communication between player and coach	Players	70	6.52	1.96	2.56**
	Coaches	14	7.92	1.20	
Competition	Players	70	7.37	1.22	2.20*
	Coaches	14	8.14	1.02	
Efficient coaching methods and techniques	Players	70	7.44	1.45	0.03
	Coaches	14	7.42	1.65	
Encouragement to perform better	Players	70	6.44	2.05	1.22
	Coaches	14	7.14	1.40	
Enjoying sport	Players	70	7.78	1.37	1.70
	Coaches	14	8.42	0.75	
Goal setting	Players	70	8.54	1.05	0.34
	Coaches	14	8.64	0.63	
Individual attention to players	Players	70	7.78	1.67	0.96
	Coaches	14	8.07	0.82	
Intrinsic motivation	Players	70	7.55	1.35	0.99
	Coaches	14	7.92	0.73	
Praising of the player	Players	70	7.08	1.62	3.58**
	Coaches	14	8.07	0.73	
Psyching-up	Players	70	7.77	1.24	1.06
	Coaches	14	8.14	0.94	
Receiving awards for performance	Players	70	7.40	1.44	0.24
	Coaches	14	7.50	1.45	
Self-efficiency	Players	70	7.55	1.32	0.82
	Coaches	14	7.85	0.77	
Self-confidence of the player	Players	70	7.98	1.31	0.70
	Coaches	14	7.57	2.13	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$. For the other t-values $p > 0.05$

Cricket players and their coaches (Table 4) showed the largest significant difference (between means) with regard to *communication between player and coach* and *receiving awards for performance*. In both instances coaches considered the factor more important than players. The factors where coaches and players did not differ significantly but according to the averages, considered the factors to be important, were *goal setting,* and *self-confidence of the player*. The factor which both players and coaches considered less important was *efficient coaching methods and techniques*.

Athletes and their coaches (Table 5) showed the largest significant difference (between

means) with regard to *communication between player and coach*, *praising the player* and *enjoying sport*. In all three instances coaches considered the factor more important than players. The factors where coaches and players did not differ significantly but according to the averages, considered the factors to be important, were *goal setting,* and *individual attention to players*. The factors which both players and coaches considered less important were *efficient coaching methods and techniques* and *encouragement to perform better*.

TABLE 4. **COMPARISON OF THE AVERAGE RESPONSES OF CRICKET PLAYERS AND COACHES**

Motivation factor	Respondent	n	x	s	t-value
Communication between player and coach	Players	65	6.29	1.80	5.84**
	Coaches	13	8.30	0.94	
Competition	Players	65	7.36	1.46	1.46
	Coaches	13	8.00	1.15	
Efficient coaching methods and techniques	Players	65	6.69	1.92	0.14
	Coaches	13	6.61	1.38	
Encouragement to perform better	Players	65	6.84	1.92	0.28
	Coaches	13	7.00	1.29	
Enjoying sport	Players	65	7.75	1.35	1.59
	Coaches	13	8.38	0.96	
Goal setting	Players	65	8.27	1.08	0.84
	Coaches	13	8.53	0.66	
Individual attention to players	Players	65	7.50	1.45	1.91
	Coaches	13	8.30	0.85	
Intrinsic motivation	Players	65	7.50	1.14	0.73
	Coaches	13	7.76	1.36	
Praising of the player	Players	65	7.30	1.49	1.95
	Coaches	13	8.15	0.98	
Psyching-up	Players	65	7.70	1.41	0.03
	Coaches	13	7.69	1.70	
Receiving awards for performance	Players	65	7.72	1.34	2.83**
	Coaches	13	6.53	1.56	
Self-efficiency	Players	65	7.67	1.01	1.38
	Coaches	13	7.23	1.30	
Self-confidence of the player	Players	65	8.27	0.87	0.12
	Coaches	13	8.30	0.85	

** $p < 0.01$. For the other t-values $p > 0.05$

If the results from all the different types of sport are analysed, the following conclusions can be made

$ Coaches and athletes/players differed mainly with regard to the factors *communication between player and coach*, *praising the player* and *competition*. The coaches considered these factors to be more important than players do.

$ The main factor which both coaches and athletes/players considered to be important was *goal setting*. They also agreed on the importance of *self-confidence of the player* and *individual attention to players*.

$ Both athletes/players and coaches considered *encouragement to perform better* as less important.

TABLE 5. **COMPARISON OF THE AVERAGE RESPONSES OF ATHLETES AND COACHES**

Motivation factor	Respondent	n	x	s	t-value
Communication between player and coach	Players	108	7.02	1.80	5.33**
	Coaches	36	8.27	0.94	
Competition	Players	108	7.63	1.37	2.74**
	Coaches	36	8.19	0.92	
Efficient coaching methods and techniques	Players	108	6.70	2.17	0.89
	Coaches	36	7.05	1.65	
Encouragement to perform better	Players	108	7.25	1.80	1.64
	Coaches	36	6.69	1.75	
Enjoying sport	Players	108	7.78	1.37	3.00**
	Coaches	36	8.38	0.90	
Goal setting	Players	108	8.36	0.95	0.48
	Coaches	36	8.44	0.77	
Individual attention to players	Players	108	8.15	1.06	0.75
	Coaches	36	8.30	0.88	
Intrinsic motivation	Players	108	7.62	1.23	1.76
	Coaches	36	8.02	1.10	
Praising of the player	Players	108	7.31	1.62	4.20**
	Coaches	36	8.16	0.77	
Psyching-up	Players	108	7.88	1.24	1.69
	Coaches	36	8.27	1.00	
Receiving awards for performance	Players	108	7.50	1.67	0.18
	Coaches	36	7.44	1.34	
Self-efficiency	Players	108	7.60	1.27	0.07
	Coaches	36	7.58	1.48	
Self-confidence of the player	Players	108	8.23	1.34	1.18
	Coaches	36	7.82	1.87	

** p < 0.01. For the other t-values p > 0.05

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS FOR COACHING

The most important significance of the results, is the significant differences that exist between the perceptions of coaches and athletes/players regarding the importance of certain motivational factors in sport, and also that in all cases, the coaches regard these motivational factors as of more importance compared to the meanings of athletes/players. In practice coaches will therefore place more emphasis on the motivational factors *they* regard as of importance, and in doing so, might miss their final target, namely the optimal motivational level of their athletes/players.

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