

Youth Sports in the Community:
Building Active, Motivated, and Confident Youth

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Sport involvement is critical in the development of youth in our society. Sports can offer a chance for kids to become leaders, stay healthy, gain confidence, and learn social skills (Torres, 2013). The skills learned in sports can be taught to be transferred to all areas of life (Camire, 2011). By developing a balance of optimal performance, development, and experiences, (Vealey, 2005) young athletes will develop awareness, openness, motivation, and endurance that can contribute to success anywhere and also contribute to developing athletic talent (Gould, 2013). It is also difficult to predict sport talent at such an early age (Gould, 2013), making it even that more important to create equal sports opportunities for all. Thus, it is my hope to make sports available to youth in all areas.

Program: Set Up and Focus

I am looking to set up a youth sports program in a rural small town, Danville Youth Recreation Program. Currently there are no sports programs within thirty or less minutes for kids under the age of 5. After the age of 5 the town offers baseball and the local school offers basketball for elementary school students. Everything else is a 40 minute drive away. The youth recreation program would be aimed at kids aged 3 to 10 years old to focus on the sampling of sports as well as developing FUNDamentals. By the age of 10, or middle school, many athletes will be starting to focus on fewer sports and probably looking for more competitive teams than a small town can offer. My hope is to develop a feeder program that can allow young kids to sample a variety of sports, foster a love of sports, and help develop these kids' self-esteem. Sports that I believe we could offer would be dance, gymnastics, soccer, floor hockey, kickball, basketball (in combination with elementary school league) and a running club. In order to achieve these goals I need to focus on developing a sound *program philosophy* that can carry

over into the coaching philosophy of our coaches, understand what *motivates* young athletes and how to incorporate that into the program as well as how to educate our coaches, and understand how to help develop a strong sense of *self-confidence* in young athletes.

Rationale of Issue Topics

I feel that three very important components to developing a sports program aimed at young athletes is to make sure it has a.) a strong philosophy so that the goals of the program are understood, b.) a well-thought out method for motivation to keep kids participating in the programs and developing a love for sports, and c.) a plan to foster the development of self-esteem through nurturing their self-confidence.

It is critical to develop a strong program philosophy because all program decisions will be based on this philosophy. The way our programs will be run will be based on the philosophy, emphasizing inclusion and fun. Coaches will be expected to have coaching philosophies and values that are in line with the program philosophy. From there the team rules and team values will be developed based on both the program and coaching philosophies. Having a clear philosophy will also help in communication with parents so that they understand the mission of the program and our coaches stance on youth athletics (Torres, 2013). The program philosophy will also have an impact on how motivation and self-confidence is developed within the programs by emphasizing a positive, fun environment (Gilbert, 2010). Since the goal of the program is to equally foster the love of sports, participation of sports, and self-confidence in all children, parents will know that this program is not for early specialization or only for those already deemed to be “athletically gifted.” Instead this program is for all kids of all abilities and will encourage kids to try out a variety of sports and develop the fundamentals within them

(Vealey, 2005). In order to make sure all kids are being given attention and nurturing, the program will have a focus on fairness and equality in playing time, nurturing, and instructional attention (Kretchmar, 2013).

At this age, it is also very important to maintain motivation for the kids participating in the program. Motivation needs to be nurtured and developed just as any other skill. In order to do so, we have to consider the three needs of motivation: to be stimulated, to be accepted, and to demonstrate competency (Vealey, 2005). By creating a program philosophy that includes catering to all types of athletes, we are able to make sure all participants are being challenged but still successful and feel as if they are a necessary part of the team. If we can accomplish this, more athletes will want to continue in our program and stick with sports. Coaches can use emphatic accuracy to gauge which athletes need more challenges, which need more praise, and which need help making friends and building relationships (Lorimer, 2013). It is important for the athletes in the program to want to continue in sports not only so that the program itself survives but participating in sports will also help the athletes develop character, confidence, leadership, and teamwork that can be applied to any life situation (Gould, 2013).

In order to help keep the kids involved in sports, I feel as if the program really needs to focus on building self-confidence in the young athletes. Coaches and parents in the program should be taught to modify drills when athletes aren't being successful, set realistic expectations, give sincere praise, reduce fears, and be enthusiastic (Gould, 2013). Building self-confidence will also contribute to keeping kids involved in sports but also build a great foundation for anything they do in the future.

For the age group this program focuses on, 3 to 10 year olds, it is very important to simply get the kids active and sampling different activities as well as developing fundamentals (Crust, 2011). It is important to focus on giving them emotional support which can be achieved through strong program and coaching philosophies, increasing motivation, and developing self-confidence. While not all these kids will go on to be elite athletes, the lack of specialization but focus on fun, sampling, motivation, and self-confidence will still be the best talent development for future elite athletes at this age (Gould, 2013).

Structure: Why and How

In developing our program philosophy, the biggest thing I want to keep at the fore front is that this program is designed to allow all kids to sample sports, have fun, and develop self-confidence. Thus the program philosophy will state the following:

Danville Youth Recreation will strive to provide a safe, welcoming environment that allows kids ages three to ten to try a variety of sports. We promise to accept all types of athletes and foster skill development at appropriate levels. Athletes will receive positive feedback from energetic and caring coaches. Athletes will be expected to do their best and in return will receive equal attention and playing time. Our hope is that the athletes will leave the sports program feeling happy, accepted, and successful.

A large portion of this philosophy is focused on the emotional well-being of the children. It has been shown that the early stage of developing athletes is to make sure they are having fun, not focused on winning but on the accomplishment of improvement, and given high expectations within reason (Gould, 2013). This, in combination with sampling sports, will allow athletes to

develop the fundamental skills and a love of sports. Gould (2013) points out that pushing young athletes too far and treating them as an adult can have a negative impact on them.

To make sure that we are adhering to our philosophy we will set up the program to take into consideration the age of the athletes, the ability levels typical for that age, and the needs of the age group. We will use this to make modification to the rules and equipment sizes as well as the length of games and practices. Some program set ups would be as followed:

Sport	Length of Season	Players Per Team/Class	Modifications	Length of Practices/Games
Dance	12 weeks	Age 3-5: 8 Age 6-8: 10 Age 9-10: 12	None	Age 3-5: 45 min. x 1/ week Age 6-8: 1hr. x 1/ week Age 9 -10: 1 hr. x 2/ week
Gymnastics	12 weeks	Age 3-5: 8 Age 6-8: 10 Age 9-10: 12	Age 3-5: Only practices	Age 3-5: 45 min. x 1/ week Age 6-8: 1hr. x 1/ week Age 9 -10: 1 hr. x 2/ week
Floor Hockey	6 weeks	Age 3-5: 8 Age 6-8: 10 Age 9-10: 12	Age 3-5: Only practices Age 3-8: Small Court	Age 3-5: 45 min. x 1/ week Age 6-8: 1hr. x 1/ week Age 9 -10: 1 hr. x 2/ week
Soccer	6 weeks	Age 3-5: 8 Age 6-8: 10 Age 9-10: 12	Age 3-8: Small Court	Age 3-5: 45 min. x 2/ week Age 6-8: 1hr. x 2/ week Age 9 -10: 1 hr. x 2/ week
Basketball	6 weeks	Age 3-5: 8 Age 6-8: 10 Age 9-10: 12	Age 3-8: Small Court and Short Net	Age 3-5: 45 min. x 2/ week Age 6-8: 1hr. x 2/ week Age 9 -10: 1 hr. x 2/ week
Kick Ball	6 weeks	Age 6-8: 10 Age 9-10: 12	Age 6-8: Coach Pitch	Age 3-5: 45 min. x 1/ week Age 6-10: 1 hr x 1/week
Running Club	6 weeks	Age 4-10: 25 total	None	Age 4-5: 45 min. x 1/ week Age 6-10: 1 hr x 1/ week
Sample Sports	6 weeks	Age 3-5: 8 Age 6-8: 10	Practices only	Age 3-5: 45 min. x 1/ week Age 6-10: 1 hr x 1/ week

By adhering to our philosophy of creating fun, motivating, confidence building programs for all ages, we allow for age differences by making modifications for certain age groups.

Younger athletes might not be ready for meets or games until they can reach a certain skill level for more complex sports. So as to not make them feel like they are failing, we modify the

program to include only practices. Also, younger athletes have shorter attention spans therefore younger age groups have shorter meeting times. If practices or games are too long then we lose their attention and they become bored instead of ending in excitement of what they have just done, they will end whiny and bored and less motivated. By having smaller courts and smaller teams for younger athletes, we are recognizing the need for lots of attention to develop skills as well as make sure athletes can feel successful by having more opportunity to make contact with the ball which will inevitably happen in a smaller field and less players. We also adjust the length of the programs to shorter seasons or only one day a week so that athletes can participate in a variety of different sports over the course of a year. All of these considerations to build our program are based on our solid program philosophy and desire to build self-confidence and promote motivation.

In order to make sure our program philosophy is being followed by our coaches and being transferred into their coaching philosophies, team values, and team rules, it is important to make sure we select the right coaches. Before coaches are hired we will ask them to go through a process of interpretism in which they will be asked a series of questions about their thoughts on the purpose and reason of sport (Torres, 2013). This will force them to look at the reason of youth sport and look past the need for winning. Hopefully, their answers will line up with the philosophy of the program. Questions we might use to lead the prospects in investigating their coaching philosophy and understanding of youth sports are:

- What is the purpose of youth sports?
- What are the most important elements of youth sports?
- How important is winning to you?
- Would you bench athletes at this level?

- How would you motivate these athletes?
- What type of feedback do you see yourself giving to athletes?

In the case that they think winning is everything or view the need to bench lower level players, we would not use them as coaches. It is necessary for their coaching philosophies to match with the program philosophy in order to maintain the type of program we hope to achieve.

The selected coaches will be taught, through in-house trainings, to provide social support to the athletes. Our trainings will be organized in a fashion as to not overload the coaches. We may have coaches that are new to coaching and coaches with very little training. In order to provide a good training that is not over whelming, we will set up two levels of coaching. Coaches will have to complete level one before they can start coaching. Level two needs to be done sometime before the end of their second year of coaching, but can be done as early as six months after the completion of level one. By requiring coaches to take at least six months between trainings, we are forcing them to both ingest the information presented as well as put it into practice before coming back to reflect on it. Trainings will be approximately four hours long and taught by the program director. We will use methods besides lecturing in order to engage coaches and teach them how to apply the methods we are teaching. Coaches will have to perform short skits demonstrating positive verbal and non-verbal feedback, use a partner to go over scenario cards while developing modifications of a drill based on the given scenario, and write their team rules. This variety of teaching techniques will force coaches to think more critically about what is being taught as well as allowing them to come away from the classes with applicable material. The level two class would use a similar style of teaching and would take the material to the next level including reflection and revisiting of level one topics.

It is important to make sure the coaches really understand children to best create positive learning experiences (Gould, 2013). The trainings will focus on the following areas: emotional support, esteem support, informational support, and tangible support that will help increase motivation and build self-confidence (Crust, 2011). These four areas directly reflect the philosophy of the program. Coaches will be shown how to demonstrate a caring attitude by building relationships with their athletes (Camire, 2011) and by responding to the athletes needs through empathetic accuracy (Lorimer, 2013). Some guidelines of building relationships with their athletes are: using the athlete's name, asking them how their day is, telling them what to expect from the day, practice, or season, having individual and team discussions with the athletes, and using positive body language and verbal cues. The trainings would go into detail as to positive body language like a smile or a pat on the back or a high five and how far these simple gestures can go in building a positive relationship at this age (Vealey, 2005).

The stronger the relationship between a coach and an athlete, the easier it will be for coaches to gauge the feedback athletes need or adjustments in drills in order for the athlete to feel successful. The athlete will also feel more emotional support as they develop a trusting relationship with their coach, as well as their peers. Coaches can also use cues from the athlete as to necessary skill correction in which they can provide both informational and tangible support through verbal and physical demonstrations. By teaching coaches to focus on these four support areas (emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible) we are guiding coaches on proper development as well as laying a foundation for mentally tough athletes that will thrive in life (Crust, 2011).

We will then explain how these four support areas can be used by the coaches to motivate athletes. Motivation is the key to keeping athletes engaged as well as feeling successful in sports

making it very important to educate our coaches in motivational methods. The in-house training will discuss the five guidelines for building motivation in athletes (Vealey, 2005). First being that the situation, or environment, as well as personal traits will influence an athlete's motivation. It is important to recognize that not all athletes will be motivated in the same way even though they have the same coaches and are on the same team. Outside environmental factors such as home-life and parent pressure or support and previous experiences will play a large part in their motivation as well. If parents are forcing their kids to participate or giving them negative feedback after games and practices, an athlete might be less motivated. Also, individual factors such as perseverance and the ways they perceive success might play a part in how motivated they are. A highly skilled athlete may not be as motivated as much as a lower skilled athlete if they are focused on winning the game while the lower skill athlete is focused on improved individual skills. This shows that it is important to recognize that each athlete may have different motivational needs.

The second guideline for motivation that coaches must consider is that athletes might have multiple motives. The main three things that motivate athletes are outcome goals, task goals, and social goals (Vealey, 2005). Most athletes will be motivated by two or more of these. Some athletes might be motivated when they win, but also need to feel a part of the team. Others might be on the team mainly to feel as if they belong to something, but they are also motivated to try hard to accomplish performance success such as scoring a goal or mastering a slap shot. Coaches need to consider what motivates their athletes and how they can help their athletes feel successful. At this age, coaches need to focus on making it fun as well as developing strong skills without emphasizing winning but instead emphasizing task and social goals (Gould, 2013).

The third and fourth guidelines explain how they as a coach can manipulate environmental or situational factors in order to motivate athletes as well as realizing that they themselves can be powerful motivators. By adjusting a drill so that the athletes are more successful, athletes might become more motivated. Future self-confidence relies heavily on the feeling of past success, thus it is important that drills and games are set up so that athletes are successful (Vealey, 2005). At the same time, if a drill is too easy a coach can modify it to become more of a challenge, which will also motivate athletes to put forth more effort as long as the challenge is attainable.

And the last guideline acknowledges that some athletes will need guidance in relearning how to view success using the Achievement Goal Theory. Even at a young age, some athletes will have an innate need to win. Coaches will need to help teach them how to view success through accomplishing simple goals such as three take aways from the other team. By helping them to relearn their view of success in sports, we are also helping them learn how to feel more successful in other things they do in life (Torres, 2013).

At the end of the motivational training section, coaches will be given bullet points to help them stay in line with the program philosophy as well as utilize information given to them during the training. The way that the coach uses the coaching education to provide athlete feedback (Lorimer, 2013), develop positive relationships (Camire, 2011), and show enthusiasm will greatly affect the motivation of athletes (Vealey, 2005). The bullet point summary would be as follows:

Meeting the motivational needs of young athletes:

- To Be Stimulated and Challenged
 - Understand athletes skills and ability levels
 - Use feedback to adjust drills to appropriate levels
 - Gather information, Avoid Bias, Maintain Appropriate Levels of Empathy, and Be Reflexive (Lorimer, 2013)
 - Allow athletes to be at different skill levels
- To Be Accepted and Belong to a Group
 - Building Trusting Relationships with Coaches
 - Develop Rules and Follow Them
 - Have Team and Individual Talk Time
 - Be There to Listen and Enforce Rules
 - Allow Older Kids to Help Establish Rules and Values
 - Foster Positive and Fun Atmosphere during Practices/Games
- To Gain and Demonstrate Competency
 - Provide EQUAL Playing Time for All Athletes
 - Use Positive Body Language and Verbal Feedback
 - High Fives, Smiles, Good Job, Using Names
 - Help Set Up Realistic Goals of Success through Task Goals

Each Individual Athlete Presents with Unique Motivational Needs and Outside Factors

The way we motivate the athletes in our program will play a large role in building their self-confidence. As role models, our coaches will contribute heavily to this. The biggest thing our program and coaches need to do to nurture self-confidence in our athletes is to define success with our athletes as more than just winning (Vealey, 2013). Athletes find confidence in success of skills, goals, and outcome of games. By redefining the way athletes view success we can increase confidence which modifies their goals, persistence, and effort. If we teach athletes to

set smaller short term goals and view success as accomplishing these goals, not just winning, we can help increase self-confidence as these smaller, more realistic goals, are achieved. Increased confidence directly influences the amount of focus and consistency they have during performance, thus the more confident athletes are, the better they will perform (Vealey, 2013). Confidence also allows them to push past boundaries that allow them to develop farther both in sports and in other life skills (Vealey, 2013) as they aren't afraid to fail.

The way confidence can be influenced can be divided into three main categories: perspiration, regulation, and inspiration. Our coaches will be taught to focus on developing these three factors to improve self-confidence in their athletes. Although *perspiration* is more directly controllable by the athletes, rather than the coaches, coaches still need to educate athletes on how to prepare and present themselves as well as what it looks like to work hard. This can be done through team values that emphasize hard work, preparedness, and physical preparation. Our program will encourage coaches to use the following team value as a simple method of reminding athletes to give their all:

S – Stay Positive

T – Take time to be prepared

A – Appreciate value of hard work

R – Respect yourself and others

Coaches also can help increase the athletes' perspiration by being sure to provide quality training during practices. Thus it is important for coaches to follow the team values as well. This includes being on time, being prepared with a good practice plan, putting effort into developing plans, and pushing yourself as a coach.

The second main influence of confidence is *regulation*. Athletes have to learn how to regulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Even at a young age this can be done by having them focus on staying positive (a type of regulation of feelings) and working hard (a type of regulation of behavior/effort). The STAR team values set up for coaches to use already helps athletes with this basic regulation. As the athletes get older, coaches can increase how they teach mental training tools to help them regulate distractions, fears, performance errors and low self-confidence. Coaches can teach athletes to “fake it until they make it” by explaining that often times acting confident, even if you aren’t, leads to developing real confidence (Vealey, 2005).

The final main factor of confidence is *inspiration*. This is similar to the social support that we see athletes thriving from to increase motivation. Coaches can offer inspiration in the form of leadership, positive influence, being a role model and offering unconditional acceptance. It is important that coaches remain supportive and confident in their athletes even when they are performing poorly (Vealey, 2005). One of the biggest ways coaches can improve self-confidence is by giving positive encouragement through verbal and non-verbal feedback. By supporting athletes as they overcome obstacles, athletes will find a stronger sense of confidence as they overcome adversity. Coaches can also model how to be confident by being a confident coach. Making strong, confident decisions and setting a tone for the team will become contagious to your athletes (Vealey, 2005). A confident coach stands tall, makes eye contact, smiles, and speaks clearly and loudly. Coaches also make sure that the learning environment is comfortable for all athletes and make sure bullying, hazing, and isolation is not occurring within the team. This allows for a positive social support system to act as inspiration for the athlete’s self-confidence. Thus coaches in our program need to:

Be Confident Leaders and ALWAYS Provide
Positive Encouragement in a Safe Environment!

Summary

A strong program philosophy, motivation, and self-confidence are three major areas important to not only keeping youth involved in sports but also teaching them critical life skills that they can take away from the playing field. A strong program philosophy helps develop rules, values, and expectations for the teams and coaches that directly relate to how we build motivation and self-confidence. We also see how motivation directly impacts and increases self-confidence. The more motivation an athlete has to practice and perform, the better their skills will be developed. This will make that athlete feel more successful, which in turn will increase their self-confidence. Self-confidence will help athletes overcome challenges and distractions, such as performance errors, that will ultimately help the athlete achieve more individual success as well. After making sure we have dedicated coaches that adhere to our program philosophy, by providing a strong foundation of understanding youth, through coaching education, we will help our coaches make the greatest impact on the athletes they coach. Also, by providing short summaries of their education such as bullet points, the STAR rules, and key phrases, coaches will have quick reminders of their knowledge to constantly check how they are doing. Teaching about motivation and self-confidence in youth will help develop our coaches, who will ultimately be responsible for promoting our overall program philosophy of promoting equal and positive sports experiences to all youth in the community.

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