



***Special
Olympics***

**SPECIAL OLYMPICS SPORTS SCIENCES:
SPORT PSYCHOLOGY FOR COACHES**

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Advancing the public well-being through improved communication

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Special Olympics welcomes your ideas and comments for future revisions of this guide. We apologize if, for any reason, an acknowledgement has been inadvertently omitted.

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Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches

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Special Olympics Sport Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

Special Olympics is committed to coaching excellence. The most important thing to know as a coach in Special Olympics is that athletes are individuals, and coaching them is just like coaching any other youth or community sports team. But we recognize that there are some situations that make Special Olympics coaching unique, Athletes are people who have been identified as slow learners; beyond that, they are just like everyone else, individuals with unique challenges, talents, abilities and interests. People with an intellectual disability learn just like everyone else, they use different strategies and strengths to help them understand. Some learn best through seeing things, others through hearing things, some need to feel what it is like to do something before they can learn it.

There are three main considerations to take into account that will affect your coaching

1. Learning Considerations (Motivation; Perception; Comprehension; Memory)
2. Medical Considerations (Intellectual Disability and other related developmental disabilities section)

The most important things to remember regarding these issues are safety, dignity and expectations.

- ♦ Safety is dealt with by talking to parents, guardians and athletes themselves about what coaches should be aware of. They are not expected to be a physician, but must be aware of any restriction on activity (Medical Release Form).
- ♦ Dignity is an easy thing to deny or to give. The best gauge of ability comes from talking to athletes about what they like, how they feel during a workout or what they want to accomplish in this sport.
- ♦ Expectations come from many sources. Coaches will set expectations for their athletes and for themselves in order to challenge and push the Athletes, designing workouts to help them meet those expectations. Athlete's families may have expectations about what they can or cannot do.

3. Social Considerations (Social Skills; Physical recreation at home; Economic status)

The role of the Special Olympics coach is much the same as any other volunteer coach in the community. There is an expectation that the coach will know something about the sport and how to teach it. This expectation varies with the skill level of the athletes and the environments in which the coaching takes place. These expectations will:

1. Help athletes select appropriate sport(s) and levels of participation
2. Offer a range of activities/events for all ability levels
3. Provide safe training and competition opportunities
4. Conduct high quality training and competition
5. Involve families and/or other support groups
6. Assist athletes to becoming integrated into the overall community

Coaching and Teaching Basic Sport Skills

The main objectives of coaching and teaching basic sport skills are:

- ♦ Move athletes from being coach dependent to being independent and self-monitoring
- ♦ Teach athletes sports skills and to know when and how to use them

One of the primary roles of the coach is teaching. Teaching means helping athletes learn physical skills and improve their athletic performance. The coach has the responsibility to develop athletes from the beginning stage of learning to becoming skilled athletes. Like all training, the process of learning skills is a long-term process. Teaching techniques is a fundamental skill in successful coaching. Techniques are the building blocks of skilled performance. A skilled athlete has good consistent technique and knows when and how to use technique to produce the best results.

How Athletes Learn

Techniques are the basic building blocks of skilled performance. Techniques are learned skills that allow athletes to compete most efficiently within the rules of sport. Skill has two meanings: a task and/or performance; the observable behavior that demonstrates a skill. Learning is the relative improvement in performance through practice. Skill learning is an invisible process. Because other factors can impact changes in performance, it is not always easy to know if an athlete has learned a skill. An athlete's consistent performance of a skill is the key to knowing if the skill has been learned.

Motor Program

As athletes continue to practice, feedback and instruction are the basic pieces of information used to create a sequence of the athlete's movement (motor program). The motor program is developed whenever we practice a skill. The memory of the previous attempts is used to physically perform the action again. With practice, a clear and precise memory of the skill is formed. The development of an athlete's motor skills is what allows him/her to master a skill. As a coach, one of your major responsibilities is to help athletes develop good motor skills. Many factors impact the learning of motor skills: your coaching ability, the environment, and the athlete's physical and cognitive ability to name a few. Most importantly, your athletes will be influenced greatly by what you do: how you teach, organize practice and give feedback.

Stages of Learning

Beginning Stage

The beginning stage of learning is the thinking stage. This is where the athlete is working out in his mind what to do. As the coach, first you must explain very clearly to athletes the skills they are to learn. It is imperative to be very patient in this stage. The athlete can get easily overwhelmed when he or she is given too many tasks to learn at one time or if you put a lot of pressure on the athlete too quickly. The stage is complete when the athlete can perform the skill, even though he or she may not perform it perfectly.

Intermediate Stage

The intermediate stage is the next level in learning. This stage invokes the motor program that was started in the beginning stage. The athlete needs to be motivated and given feedback on his/her skill development. The emphasis is now on the quality of practice to refine skills. The shift is from mental activity to learning the sequence of movements to master the skill. Athletes work on refining their timing and coordination. They need to know what they are doing incorrectly and how they can make corrections. Feedback is vitally important at this stage. As the skill becomes more automatic, the athlete has entered the advanced stage.

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Coaching and Teaching Basic Sport Skills

Advanced Stage

The advanced stage is when the athlete is performing the skill. The control of the movement becomes more automatic. The athlete is not thinking about the movement as much. The athlete can now focus on more critical skills and applying strategy of the new skill to his/her sport. It is important to note that improvement in this area is smaller and may require more motivation for the athlete to practice.

Coaching Tips

- ❑ An athlete may be at the advanced stage for one skill and at the beginning or intermediate stage for another skill. Your success is in being able to determine where your athlete is at various learning stages and provide the best instruction, motivation and feedback for each one's success.

Learning Models

There is more to coaching than knowing sport specific skills. Successful coaches must properly teach skills and mentally prepare athletes for competition. Regardless of physical, mental, social and emotional well-being, all students learn differently. Coaches must be aware of the learning process in order to create an improved learning experience for the athlete. Coaches must honor the athletes learning style; sensory mode and reasons for participation when assessing and selecting athletes' levels of competition.

- ♦ Athletes may tend to process visually
- ♦ Athletes may tend to process auditorily.
- ♦ Athletes may tend to process kinesthetically.
- ♦ Athletes may tend to process using a blend of all of the above.

Coaches must take notice of how an athlete processes the information he or she receives. After you have identified how an athlete processes information, it is your job to help athletes set goals that will allow them to maximize participation and potential and simultaneously develop their own goal setting skills.

Teaching Skills

There are two basic types of skills: simple and complex. Learning simple skills typically require little practice. However, they are only considered simple if the athlete can learn them quickly. What is simple for one athlete may not be as simple for another.

Simple Skills

Simple skills are most easily mastered from seeing them performed. It is generally considered that 80 percent of learning takes place through what is seen. The basic methods in teaching simple skills are imitation and demonstration. Basically, athletes copy what you show them ("Watch this ... Try it."). If the imitation is accurate, immediate and specific positive feedback is a good way to confirm this to the athlete ("Yes, you got it. Good job as you followed through with your wrist. Now, let's practice it a couple more times to make sure we remember it."). Coaches should strive to identify specific behaviors to notice and provide positive feedback on as this confirms to athletes what they did correctly and increases the odds that they will repeat the correct skill/behavior.

Complex Skills

Complex skills require a little more effort on the part of the coach. First, learn to break down complex skills into smaller tasks to assist athletes in learning the skill. Some coaches and educators call this shaping. How do I break down complex skills into smaller tasks? Your sport specific coaching guide will go into greater detail and illustrate actual teaching progressions.

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Coaching and Teaching Basic Sport Skills

Levels of Instruction

Regardless of the type of skill, the basic levels of instruction are verbal, demonstration, physical prompting and physical assistance. Athletes may require a single method or a combination of these methods to learn a sport skill. It is important to identify the methods that work best for your athletes. For example, one athlete may require only verbal instruction to learn skills; another athlete may require both demonstration and physical assistance.

Verbal Instruction

Verbal instruction is the most common form of teaching and should be used first when presenting new skills. Be conscious of presenting the task in one or two-part directions. All language should be clear and consistent throughout the lesson. Using simple key words is essential. For example, a “lay-up” should always be a “lay-up” and not a “toss” or a “shot.”

Be clear, concise, consistent and command-oriented.

Demonstration

This level of teaching is universal and can be used by the coach to assist with the verbal instruction of a skill. When a skill becomes too difficult for the athlete to verbally comprehend, demonstration should be used.

For new skills, linking demonstration with verbal instruction is most effective.

Physical Prompting

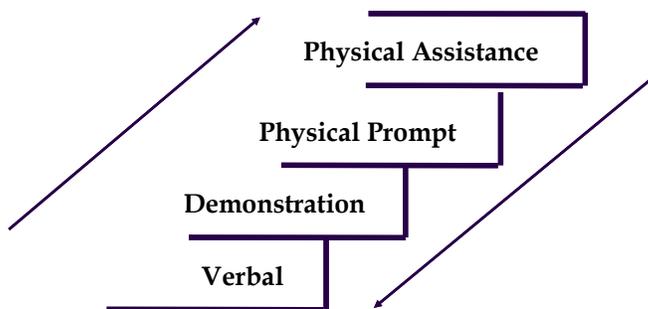
Physical prompting is best used when verbal and demonstration methods are not working. Guidance by touch to prompt an athlete into proper position is an example of a physical prompt.

Verbal and demonstration instruction is also good to use during physical prompting.

Physical Assistance

Physical assistance is used when all other levels of instruction have been exhausted. This level requires the coach to physically move the athlete into position and to physically assist the athlete to complete the skill. This method should be used with caution, especially if the athlete functions at a lower level and/or does not like to be touched.

Levels of Instruction



Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Coaching and Teaching Basic Sport Skills

Below are general guidelines to help Coaches teach sport skills more effectively.

- ♦ Briefly explain the skill.
- ♦ Break the skills into smaller, simpler steps so that the athlete can be successful.
- ♦ Briefly demonstrate the skill.
- ♦ Let the athletes practice the simpler skills.
- ♦ Gradually combine steps so that the entire skill is shaped into the desired performance.

Watch athletes carefully during practice so that you can provide positive feedback and reinforcement. Allow athletes to continue practicing once you have given feedback and corrected errors. It is important to make sure that athletes complete the practice feeling successful and good about themselves.

Coaching Tips

- Develop one component of a skill at a time.
- Learning is a long-term process. Patience is required.

Coach as the Model

Your every action as a coach on and off the playing field is a form of nonverbal communication. One of the most important things you communicate by your actions is respect or the lack of it. How you walk, approach others, your gestures and what you say and how you say it convey your attitudes about sportsmanship, other coaches and athletes. Athletes can be highly impressionable, and they hold their coach in high esteem. Your actions can teach athletes much more than sport skills and rules of your sport.

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Intellectual Disability and Other Closely Related Developmental Disabilities

Intellectual Disability and Other Closely Related Developmental Disabilities

At times, you may see or hear the following terms to describe something about an athlete. These terms describe traits, or conditions, but they do not describe the person. There are very few traits or characteristics that are true for all people with any label.

Disability	Characteristics	Best 3 Strategies to Affect Learning
Intellectual Disability (General)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information processing and learning occurs at a slower rate; attention span is short This was noticed for the first time before the person turned 18. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train for short periods of time Provide repetition (key to athlete gaining new skill development) When training, think of athletes as literal thinkers
Autism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication difficulties "In their own world," but frequently aware and bright 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Craves established routines Signal transition, change, loud noises, etc. Provide highly structured and least distracting environment
Cerebral Palsy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor muscle control Does not necessarily indicate intellectual disability Difficulty with speech articulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on strengthening muscles Teach skills in isolation to help build muscles Develop gross motor skills
Down Syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anywhere from moderate to significant intellectual disability Genetic cause Make sure you know about atlanto-axial instability before you do a drill that puts pressure on the neck or head. About 10 percent of people with Down syndrome have weakened vertebrae. The information will be on the medical release. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set clear expectations and limits Use eye contact when talking; work one-on-one to demonstrate new skill (gain full attention) Use repetition and review
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tends to have attention and memory deficits. Finds it difficult to stay on task. Has difficulty in remembering what was previously learned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create routine Set rules and limits Reinforce acceptable behaviors
Fragile X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elongated face Prone to seizures Coordination difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide structured and predictable activities Provide minimal auditory and visual stimulations Establish routine and structure
Prader Willi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sleep disturbance Compulsive eating Skin picking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signal and practice transition Set firm rules and expectations Establish routine and structure

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Athlete's Behavior Characteristics and Strategies to Improve Learning

Athlete's Behavior Characteristics and Strategies to Improve Learning

The goal of this chart is to provide coaches with information about Special Olympics athletes with different functional and learning characteristics (not labels) so that coaches can teach and coach Special Olympics athletes more effectively. When an athlete exhibits what is generally perceived as inappropriate behaviors, those behaviors may simply be a reflection or part of the person. Inappropriate behaviors that will not be tolerated include defiance, acting out or silliness.

When possible, talk with parents, providers, teachers, former coaches, etc., about an athlete's common characteristics and the successful strategies used to affect learning. Use the characteristics as a checklist. Ensure that one or more of the strategies opposite the respective characteristics are employed in each practice. Finally, be aware that not all athletes will demonstrate these characteristics.

Athlete Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning occurs at a slower rate	1. Provide structure 2. Provide repetition and review 3. Break down skills into smaller parts
<input type="checkbox"/> Short attention span	4. Train for short periods of time 5. Provide repetition and review (key to gaining new skill) 6. Work one-on-one (gain full attention)
<input type="checkbox"/> Resistance to change	7. Provide clear and continuous transitions 8. Establish routines (enforce concept of flexibility) 9. Build on successes
<input type="checkbox"/> Stubborn/Behavior problems	10. Set clear rules, expectations and limits 11. Enforce rules but provide conditions for coming back 12. Reinforce acceptable behaviors
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal communication difficulties or not all	13. Allow for additional time to express thoughts 14. Use picture boards/other assistive devices 15. Ask him or her to demonstrate or show what he/she means
<input type="checkbox"/> Prone to seizures	16. Know signs and symptoms 17. Control atmosphere (heat, sun, sugar, etc.) 18. Inform and assure teammates when they occur
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor muscle tone	19. Provide specific exercise and strengthening programs 20. Stretch safely; do not allow athletes to stretch beyond normal joint range of motion
<input type="checkbox"/> Lower pain threshold; sensitive to touch	21. Establish eye contact when talking 22. Use softer/adaptive equipment 23. Forewarn if any touch is necessary
<input type="checkbox"/> Failure to form social bonds	24. Work in small groups 25. Have athletes work in pairs (same pairs for several weeks) 26. Provide highly structured and least distracting environment
<input type="checkbox"/> Over-stimulated easily	27. Remove or lessen stimuli (dim lights; soften sound; remove unnecessary objects) 28. Train in separate room or smaller group; gradually add people

**Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches
Athlete’s Behavior Characteristics and Strategies to Improve Learning**

Athlete Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty with balance or stability	29. Provide additional assistance 30. If stretching, sit down, lean against wall or hold on to partner 31. Allow for extra time to complete a task
<input type="checkbox"/> Compulsive eating	32. Remove food from practice/competition sites 33. Provide structure and routine for eating
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordination problems	34. Break down drills to easier movements 35. Allow additional time with one-on-one support 36. Progress according to athlete’s ability
<input type="checkbox"/> Mood swings (frequency and intensity)	37. Provide structured and predictable activities 38. Set clear expectations, limits and conditions 39. Separate from group when necessary, but allow back
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical limitations or impairments	40. Provide adaptive equipment or modifications 41. Provide exercises that strengthen and stretch muscles 42. Develop gross motor and stability skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Blind	43. Use many verbal cues 44. Provide action-specific feedback 45. Hand-over-hand demonstration may be needed
<input type="checkbox"/> Deaf	46. Establish eye contact when talking 47. Use signs or pictures or American Sign Language 48. demonstrate what is desired

Understanding and Utilizing Sport Psychology

Psychological Considerations

Coaching goes well beyond teaching fundamental skills. Once the athlete has learned the basic skills of the game, they must then learn how to apply their skills, knowledge of the rules and etiquette of the game in preparation for competition.

Before any of that can happen, the athlete must enjoy the sport and want to play it. Establishing that from the outset will give the coach an immediate platform for learning. When the going gets tough, the coach can remind athletes that it is meant to be challenging and that sport is an activity they really want to be able to do. Without setting that groundwork, the concept of quitting becomes an option—the worst possible scenario in sport.

Tasks ⇒ Skills ⇒ Application ⇒ Competition

Special Olympics athletes have been given the tasks or elements required to perform a skill. Skills are the fundamental abilities required for application to sport. They have developed a combination of skills to apply in preparation for competition. They are now ready for competition according to the rules and guidelines of the sport.

Athletes will develop sport confidence by following a simple to more complex skills training progression that allows the athlete to experience successful athletic achievement through repetition in settings similar to the competitive environment.

Athlete Readiness

Readiness of the athlete means being focused and it must be determined in preparation for competition.

- ♦ **Mental Readiness:** Being a contender in the event, showing confidence and understanding strategy
- ♦ **Physical Readiness:** Being physically conditioned and trained in the skills required for competition

Physical Readiness + Mental Readiness = Competition Readiness

The Special Olympics Sports Skills Assessment and Daily Performance sheets are excellent resources for measurement of skill and competition readiness. These tools will help the Coach determine the athlete's appropriate events.

For example in Athletics, Special Olympics offers many disciplines - sprints, long-distance running, jumps, throws and race walking and wheelchair events. Athletes must not only be placed in a level of competition that will challenge their skills and keep them motivated to continue their effort to surpass their personal bests, but they must also be placed in events that they like and enjoy. Positive motivation and participation can inspire the athlete to excel and gain sport confidence.

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches

Developing Communications Skills

Developing Communications Skills

There are many aspects of sport psychology, however none will be more important to coaching than learning how to communicate with your athletes and understanding what motivates them to train and compete in sports. By default, successful coaches are good sport psychologists – skillful communicators and motivators.

Coaching is communication. Every act of coaching requires you to communicate. As a coach you must be able to communicate effectively in countless situations

1. Teaching athletes how to do certain skills, run plays
2. Talking to an official who you believe has made an incorrect call
3. Talking to parents or caregivers about their family member

Communication is more than a two-way process; it is dimensional. Communication encompasses sending and receiving messages, verbal and nonverbal language and emotions and feelings involved in the content of the message.

- ♦ Coaches must be as skillful in receiving messages as they are in giving clear understandable messages. Successful coaches need to be sharp, active listeners so they can understand their athletes.
- ♦ It is also essential that coaches be aware of nonverbal communication. It is estimated that over 70 percent of communication is nonverbal. Therefore, coaches must be aware that their athletes are constantly observing and modeling their actions.
- ♦ Content is the substance of the message and emotions and feelings pack the content.

Coaching Tips

<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate unto others as you wish them to communicate unto you.
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The Communication Flow

1. The coach has a thought that he/she wants to tell the athlete.
2. The coach translates the thought into a message.
3. The coach conveys the message – verbally or nonverbally.
4. The athlete receives the message.
5. The athlete interprets the meaning of the message.
6. The athlete responds inwardly and/or outwardly to the message.
7. Much of communication is non-verbal so it is important to watch facial expressions as well as other physical gestures

Sometimes this flow is smooth and sometimes it is not. It is based on the clarity of the message and the athlete's understanding of the message.

What Makes Communication Ineffective

- ♦ The content of the message may not fit the situation.
- ♦ The message does not adequately communicate your intentions.
- ♦ The athlete does not receive the message.
- ♦ The athlete does not understand the message.
- ♦ The athlete misinterprets the content of the message.
- ♦ The message itself is inconsistent.

Ineffective communication is not about finding fault. Poor communication can be a result of many factors as noted above. Finding where the communication flow stopped is the key to building successful communication between coach and athletes.

Developing Credibility When You Communicate

Your credibility is the single most important element in communicating effectively with athletes. Your credibility is reflected in the trust athletes place in you as a coach. Athletes give you initial credibility because you are the coach. You also have the ability to maintain and build upon this place of trust or to lose it. Once lost, it is tough to get back. How can you build credibility as a coach?

1. Be an emotionally balanced coach
2. Know your sport, be willing to learn more and be honest about what you do not know
3. Be reliable, consistent and fair
4. Express empathy, warmth and acceptance of your athletes and where they are in their development
5. Be positive

Coaching Tips

- It is natural for athletes to play and joke around.
- If athletes behaved perfectly, they would not need a coach.

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Learning How to Listen

Learning How to Listen

Statistics show that untrained listeners hear less than 20 percent of a conversation. The majority of us fall within this category. Poor listening skills cause a breakdown in the communication process. If an athlete continually fails in getting you to listen, he/she will simply stop talking with you. Coaches who are poor listeners often have more discipline problems; athletes stop listening to their coach because he/she is not listening to them. Athletes may make a drastic attempt to get you to listen by misbehaving or acting out. Your response to athletes' views and thoughts is important as you begin teaching and training them in their sport.

Improving Your Listening Skills

1. Recognize the need to listen.
2. Concentrate on listening by giving your undivided attention to what is being said.
3. Search for the meaning behind what is being communicated to you.
4. Avoid interrupting athletes as they are talking with you.
5. Respond constructively to athletes emotions.
6. Respect the rights of athletes to share their views with you. Listen to their fears, joys, problems and accomplishments.

Coaching Tips

- Emphasize praise and rewards to strengthen desired behaviors.
- Positive communication helps athlete value themselves as individuals, athletes.
- Be aware of the emotion expressed in your messages to athletes.
- Set realistic goals about athletes' athletic performance abilities as well as their emotional and social behavior.
- Be consistent.
- Keep your word.
- Be as good as your word.

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Information and Problem Solving

Information and Problem Solving

Description of Common Behaviors and Recommended Accommodations

Oral Expression

Athletes may	Accommodations
Speak only in single word statements or phrases	If you understand what they mean - great! If you do not understand, ask them to say it differently
Exhibit word retrieval problems and substitute words for words they are having trouble retrieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Help them calm down and relax so they can find the words they want ♦ Come up with "signs" for common requests or concerns
Exhibit bizarre patterns of language usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ It may be bizarre to you but make perfect sense to the athlete. ♦ Explain that you are having trouble understanding what they mean. Get a conversation going - the give and take should make their intent more clear
Imitate or repeat words incorrectly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ The accommodation is only necessary if you do not understand. ♦ If that is the case, ask them to pick a different word to tell you what they mean.
Use gestures as a substitute for a word	Learn what the signs or gestures mean.
Have difficulty relating ideas in sequence	Break down sequences into steps and learn them individually; then put them together after the steps have been mastered.
Have difficulty making themselves understood to peers	If one peer does not understand, ask others if they understand and would they be willing to help "translate."
Contribute to discussion with off-task comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Again, it may seem "off task" to you but very on task to the athlete. ♦ Ask them how their comment fits the discussion. They will explain it, give insight into their thinking or realize that they were off the topic.
Confuse words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Help them use the correct term. ♦ Be patient; give them an opportunity to formalize ideas.

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Information and Problem Solving

Listening Comprehension

Athletes may	Accommodations
Ask that questions be repeated	Repeat them. If it starts to take too much time, pair the athlete with another athlete who can provide assistance.
Often say "what," or "huh," etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Check for hearing issues. ♦ Switch from verbal instruction to visual demonstration of the task.
Confuse the meaning of similar sounding words	Explain the difference between the words and try visual techniques instead of auditory.
Fail to follow verbal directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Have them repeat directions back to you to verify understanding. ♦ If failure to follow directions creates distractions for other athletes, have the athlete sit out or work with an assistant coach until you can determine the reason for not following original directions.
Do the opposite of the given instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Have them repeat directions back to you to verify understanding. ♦ If failure to follow directions creates distractions for other athletes, have the athlete sit out or work with an assistant coach until you can determine the reason for not following original directions. ♦ Make sure you are stating the direction as a "positive" statement, such as, "Dribble all the way to the basket and shoot a lay-up," as opposed to, "Never dribble all the way to the basket and then NOT shoot a lay-up!"
Have difficulty locating the direction of sounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Switch to visual cues ♦ Set up a physical reaction to the sound no matter where it comes from. For example, "When you hear my whistle, stop and look at the sideline."
Answer questions inappropriately	Establish that they understood the question by restating the question with their answer and then asking if that was what they meant to say.
Confuse time concepts (before/after)	Switch to physical (Kinesthetic) mode so that the end of one action leads to the next and will "feel" right. Like what is supposed to happen next.
Confuse direction words (front/back)	Instead of saying, "Go to the top of the key," say, "Come and stand right here," so they have a visual and physical way to remember.
Ask irrelevant questions	Make sure you understood the question, or what they were really asking. You may not understand at first, so ask them to help you understand the question.
Show increased difficulty in any of the above areas when noise increases	Make a rule that it must be quiet when you are talking, and explain that it is because some athletes won't be able to understand if it is noisy. "Let's all help each other have the best chance to learn this skill!"

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Information and Problem Solving

Attention Skills

Athletes may	Accommodations
Fail to finish	Provide reward via praise or the right to move on once a task is completed.
Seem easily distracted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Keep them busy using a variety of short tasks. ♦ Be quick with praise and give it often.
Appear not to listen	Touch on arm, forearm, or get down to athlete level and ask if they understand what to do.
Have difficulty concentrating on tasks requiring sustained attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Break skills down into smaller tasks, and ♦ Keep instruction time limited so they move more quickly from one activity to the next. ♦ Teach as you do it with them.
Appear to act before thinking (impulse control issue)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Pair them with another athlete who can act as a screener for the impulse. ♦ Deep breaths help them slow down to focus and help you calm down as well!
Shift excessively from one activity to another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Set up rewards for mastering a skill before moving on. ♦ Ask them to teach the skill to another athlete who is having trouble. This keeps them focused on someone else's action and not on their desire to move on.
Have difficulty waiting for their turns in games/drills	Teach Athletes patience waiting in line and waiting their turn being a team player.
Excessively run about to climb on things	Help organize activities/limit materials if feasible.
Have difficulty staying seated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ There should not be a lot of sitting during a sports practice. ♦ Have activities set up so that the minute they arrive they have something to start on. "The first thing you should do when you get to practice is get a ball and shoot five baskets from each of these blue Xs."

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Social Perception

Athletes may	Accommodations
Make inappropriate comments	Depends on the nature of the comments. If it is disruptive or makes other athletes uncomfortable, have them sit out or move to work with an assistant until you can explain that this is hurting their teammates.
Make inappropriate use of personal space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Do a warm up drill that establishes an arm's length; talk about giving everyone space. ♦ Have partners shake hands and remind everyone that hand-shake distance is usually best for talking. Any closer and people get nervous and can't focus on what you are saying.
Have difficulty anticipating behavior in others	Repetition via drills will help in learning patterns of actions.
Have difficulty in changing behavior	Reward and praise positive behavior and changes. Notice and comment on improvements no matter how slight.
Appear to be inflexible	Make every action a choice. Say, "Do you want to join the group over here or do you want to join the group over there?" Try to avoid "or else" comments.
Difficulty responding to non-verbal cues, hand gestures, facial expressions	Experiment with different cues and have them decide which ones work best for them.

Positive Reinforcement and Rewards

When used appropriately, reinforcement is one of the primary communication tools of a successful coach. Reinforcement is used to praise an athlete when he/she does well or to get an athlete to stop undesirable behavior. Reinforcement is relative and not absolute. For reinforcement to work, a coach must be consistent and systematic in its use. If you are not consistent, your athletes will behave erratically, like the coach. If you are not systematic, you will send confusing messages to your athletes.

Communicating and Correcting Errors

1. **One skill at a time.** Correct only one behavior or movement at a time.
2. **Ask before giving correction.** Allow the chance to explain what they believe they did. This lets them feel they are a part of the process.
3. **Find the cause.** The cause of an error may be something that you may not see. Again, ask the athlete what they believe they are doing.
4. **Provide constructive instruction.** Avoid too much of “what’s not right” by focusing on “how to do it right.” Always build up the athlete; do not tear them down.
5. **Praise before correction.** Begin with a positive comment about something that the athlete is doing well. Now they are attuned to you. You have gained their attention and trust. Follow up with constructive instruction. Be concise and to the point. Remember to send another message of praise and encouragement.

The “Sandwich approach” is an effective way to provide both positive reinforcement and corrective feedback. Start off with a compliment such as “Great effort on the backcheck and not letting up and then identify what they need to improve on such as, “but when backchecking stay on her inside shoulder” followed by encouragement and a positive outcome, “Staying on her inside shoulder will insure she cannot cut to the basket”

Using Rewards

Coaches should observe and know their athletes to determine why they participate in Special Olympics and reward them accordingly. Rewarding athletes is not always as easy as it sounds. Below are a few tips on rewarding athletes.

- ♦ Reward the performance, not the outcome.
- ♦ Reward athletes just as much for their effort as you do for the desired outcome.
- ♦ Reward little accomplishments on the way to learning an entire skill.
- ♦ Reward the learning and performance of desired emotional and social skills too.
- ♦ Reward frequently, especially when new skills are being learned.
- ♦ Reward as soon as possible when new skills are learned.
- ♦ Reward an athlete when they have earned it.

Types of Rewards

- ♦ Intrinsic: Athlete competes for the thrill and joy of the sport
- ♦ Extrinsic: Athlete competes for the reward

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Positive Reinforcement and Rewards

Misbehavior

Although coaches should reinforce what athletes do correctly it is not uncommon for athletes to misbehave. One approach is to ignore the bad behavior. This approach can prove successful in certain situations because punishing the athlete's misbehavior encourages them to act out more. Ignoring misbehavior does not work when the athlete causes danger to himself/herself or other teammates and coaches. In that case, immediate action is necessary. Sometimes ignoring misbehavior if it is not habitual can be successful. Punishment delivered calmly and matter of factly can also correct an athlete's misbehavior. Below are a few suggestions for appropriate use of punishment.

- ♦ Have athletes discuss and decide on appropriate team rules and the consequences for violating them so that your punishment reflects what the athletes decided upon. Coaches will need to set some guidelines so the team rules and consequences are reasonable and not trivial.
- ♦ When possible, give a warning before using punishment.
- ♦ Reducing playing time is often an effective punishment.
- ♦ Deliver punishment in a calm and rationale manner.
- ♦ Be consistent when administering punishment.
- ♦ Never use exercise as punishment and never engage in physical punishment.
- ♦ Do not choose a punishment that causes you to feel guilty or upset.
- ♦ Once a punishment has been given, do not make the athlete feel like they are still in trouble.
- ♦ Punish sparingly, only when absolutely necessary.

Some examples other than excessive exercise might be; putting away equipment at the end of practice such as picking up all of the balls, retrieving balls from a player practicing free throws, sitting out and missing practice/game time (although this obviously is counterproductive for learning), maybe having a starter NOT start for 5 minutes.

Motivation

According to Burton, Damon and Thomas Raedeke in *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (2008), motivation is reflected in three behaviors:

- ♦ **Choice:** Motivation shows in the choices athletes make—choosing to play sport, to practice, to set challenging goals, and to train even in the off-season.
- ♦ **Effort:** Motivation is also reflected in how much effort athletes give—how intensely they train, compete, and strive to achieve their goals.
- ♦ **Persistence:** Motivation level can be seen in how long athletes persist at striving to attain their goals, even in the face of adversity and obstacles.

Motivation is better understood by debunking some myths.

Motivation Myth 1: Athletes are either motivated or not motivated

Some coaches believe that motivation is simply a personality trait, a static internal characteristic. They believe that an athlete either has motivation or doesn't. They don't believe motivation is something coaches can develop. For these coaches, the key to having a motivated team is to find and recruit athletes who have the right personality. However, while some athletes are, in fact, more motivated than others, this view does not provide any direction or guidance on how coaches can help develop and sustain athletes' motivation. The fact is, coaches can help athletes develop motivation.

Motivation Myth 2: Coaches give athletes motivation

Other coaches view motivation as something they can inject into their athletes on demand, like a flu shot, by means of inspirational pep talks or gimmicks. They may use slogans, posters, and bulletin board quotes from upcoming opponents. These strategies may be helpful, but they are only a small piece of the motivation puzzle. There is much more to the story—motivation is not something coaches can simply give their athletes.

Motivation Myth 3: Motivation means sticks and carrots

Some experts suggest that effective motivation means using carrots (rewards) and sticks (punishments) to drive athletes to do things they would not do on their own. This may seem innocuous, but think about it on a deeper level. It assumes that athletes don't want to do something, so the coach will provide motivation to make them do it through punishments or rewards. Coaches who emphasize the stick, in the form of chastising, criticizing, yelling, coercing, and creating guilt, often find themselves swimming upstream. No matter what they try, they meet resistance and negative attitudes. Not only is this approach ineffective, it saps the enjoyment out of sport. Coaches must understand athletes' needs in order to create a team culture that naturally motivates them.

Athletes' needs and intrinsic motivation

According to Burton and Raedeke in *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (2008), great coaches know that they don't give athletes motivation. Rather, they create the conditions or team climate in which athletes motivate themselves. Coaches do this by recognizing the importance of **intrinsic motivation**, which stems from the sheer pleasure and inner satisfaction athletes experience from participating in sport. Intrinsically motivated athletes play for the love of the game. They enjoy the process of learning and mastering difficult sport skills and play for the pride they feel when working hard toward accomplishing a challenging goal. They also find sport stimulating and feel exhilarated when engaged in it.

The secret to cultivate athletes' intrinsic motivation is to understand what athletes need from the sport. Structuring sport in a way that meets athletes' needs fosters intrinsic motivation, and failure to meet athletes' needs lowers it. What do athletes need from sport? Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that athletes seek to fulfill four primary needs

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Motivation

1. The need for fun and stimulation)

In a survey done to 10,000 former athletes (Ewing & Seefeldt 1990; Seefeldt, Ewing, & Walk 1992), was found that having fun and developing skills were the most common reason why athletes participate in sports, even more important than winning

When they were asked why they quit, they typically answered something along these lines:

- ♦ “I found other activities more interesting.”
- ♦ “I would rather do other things than play sport.”
- ♦ “Sport was no longer fun.”
- ♦ “I burnt out on sport.”

It was found that the connection between the reasons athletes play sport and the reasons they drop out was motivation, which comes naturally and easily when athletes are having fun. Lack of fun makes sport seem like a boring job, lowers motivation, and even causes athletes to drop out. If sport is not fun, coaches find that motivating athletes is difficult, if not impossible. Sport is much more enjoyable when athletes find practice activities stimulating, challenging, and exciting.

One of the greatest challenges as a coach is to avoid destroying the athletes’ intrinsic motivation to play sport. Some coaches erroneously believe that fun means easy workouts, frivolous games, and countless team parties. But challenging practices, intense workouts, and focusing on skill development can be fun. In fact, fun is maximized when athletes experience optimal stimulation and excitement. No one finds it fun to lose or fail constantly, so build in some success. Most athletes are also bored by being underchallenged while performing tedious drills. Thus coaches should strive to fit the difficulty of the skill to the ability of the athletes. Coached this way, athletes feel challenged but not overwhelmed, because they have the ability to meet the challenge.

Coaching Tips

- | |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coaches must understand athletes’ needs in order to create a team culture that naturally motivates them. |
|---|

Wise coaches have long known that meeting athletes’ need for fun enhances motivation. Yet they also know that athletes must practice to learn and improve skills. The creative coach can find ways to facilitate skill development in a way that is fun for athletes. Here are a few examples:

- ♦ Use developmental progressions to create an optimal skill–challenge balance.
- ♦ Keep practices stimulating by varying the activities.
- ♦ Teach fundamentals by means of action-packed, gamelike activities that use the targeted skills.
- ♦ Keep everyone active. Don’t give players time to get bored by having them stand in long lines.
- ♦ Set aside time in each practice when athletes can just play the game, without receiving evaluation or feedback from the coach.

Structuring sport to be fun is key not only to motivation but also to helping athletes develop their skills. If athletes enjoy sport, they become more motivated and are less likely to drop out. If they are more motivated, they improve. As they improve, they enjoy sport more. And so it goes. Athletes who are motivated primarily by their need to have fun may present discipline problems for coaches who have sapped the fun out of sport. As these athletes try to find creative ways to have fun, they may be seen as goof-offs or discipline problems. Some coaches assume that athletes are not motivated when they balk at doing everything the coach’s way. In reality, such players are often highly motivated to play—just not according to the structure and methods dictated by the coach.

2. The need for acceptance and belonging

The second basic need athletes strive to fill through sport is for acceptance and belonging. This need can be met if athletes feel they fit in and are accepted by others on the team. In fact, some athletes play sport primarily because they enjoy being with their friends and being part of a team, and coaches can use this need as a powerful motivator. Here are some guidelines: Many children with various disabilities are often teased or ignored. Being a member of team that includes similar other peers can be a tremendously gratifying social experience. Hence coaches should not underestimate the value of the social benefits that the athletes will derive from their sport experience. In fact being with their friends may be a more powerful motivation than playing the sport.

- ♦ Recognize that these athletes are usually responsive to team goals. Although performing well and winning may not be as significant to them as is identifying with the team, they will internalize team goals because of their desire to be part of the group.
- ♦ Arrange activities that allow athletes to get to know each other and spend time together. Social activities are a good way to help fulfill the need for acceptance and belonging.
- ♦ Include team building activities to help build cohesion. By working together toward a common goal that is not directly related to sport, athletes can learn to appreciate previously overlooked strengths in themselves and their teammates.
- ♦ Create an atmosphere on the team where athletes feel they are playing with each other rather than against one another.
- ♦ Have returning athletes serve as mentors to new athletes
- ♦ Ensure that all athletes feel they are important members of the team and that their roles are important and valued.

3. The need for control and autonomy

This need is important but easily overlooked. In fact, one of the most basic human needs is to develop autonomy, and this is especially true among adolescents on their journey to adulthood. Filling this need requires that athletes have control over their own lives and determine their own course of behavior. Once they choose to participate in a sport, they need to have ownership and feel they have a say in decisions affecting their involvement. Otherwise, they feel pressured or obligated to act, think, or feel a certain way. High autonomy encourages wanting to participate, whereas low autonomy means having to participate.

You can use several strategies to help athletes develop a sense of ownership and responsibility. When appropriate, involve athletes in decision making, provide choice, and request their input. You can do this, for example, by giving them a say in their training regimen. You can teach athletes how to develop their own training program, giving them more and more responsibility as they learn more about effective training principles. Encourage athletes to take as much responsibility as you judge they have the maturity to handle. Provide structure and guidance, giving more control as athletes demonstrate the wise use of responsibility. When athletes err in using their responsibility, constructively help them better understand how to act responsibly. Athletes should neither expect nor be given free rein, but they should be given choices within a structured environment.

The coach who facilitates this type of graduated responsibility development is not necessarily a democratic coach in every respect. Not all decisions are voted on—many are the sole responsibility of the coach. But by shifting some control to athletes, it is possible to develop a disciplined team where athletes feel a strong sense of ownership.

In summary, to meet athletes' need for control and autonomy, you should make sure they feel a sense of ownership over their sport involvement. Ways to do this include the following:

- ♦ Provide a rationale for your decisions.
- ♦ Ensure that athletes feel they are responsible for their own fate and are not merely pawns.

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- ♦ Solicit athletes' input and provide choices whenever possible.
- ♦ Involve athletes in developing practice plans and game strategies, evaluating practices and competitions, developing team rules and a team covenant or mission, and selecting captains.

4. The need to feel competent and successful

The need to feel competent is one of the most important components of motivation. Perceived competence means having positive perceptions of one's skills and abilities and feeling capable of succeeding in sport. It is doubtful that athletes will work hard, or even stay in sport, if they feel like failures. Athletes use many sources to judge their skill and success at sport. Even the simple act of choosing up sides can influence athletes' feelings of competence. Always getting picked first by one's peers contributes to feeling competent, thus enhancing motivation, whereas routinely getting picked last may cause an athlete to feel incompetent and walk away from sport.

Athletes' perceived competence can be raised through success at challenging tasks, positive feedback from a coach, and approval from parents. Effective coaches spend a lot of time and energy structuring sport in a way that makes each athlete feel competent. Although experiencing success is central to feeling competent, experiencing failure is inevitable in the sport world, as in life. All athletes, no matter how talented, experience failure, adversity, and setbacks at some point. How athletes respond to failure has a huge effect on long-term motivation.

Many athletes will equate winning and losing with success and failure. This is often a self-defeating perspective as athletes only partly control the outcome of competition and often winning is unrealistic. Coaches should almost always focus on individual effort, self-improvement and learning as barometers of success.

Developing Sport Confidence

Sport confidence is gained through experiencing success, time and time again, in the same or similar situation. Sport confidence is one of the most important predictors of athletic achievement. Your coaching strategies should be devised around repetition in settings similar to the competitive environment.

1. Developing sport confidence in athletes helps to make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation.
2. A considerable amount of anxiety is eliminated when athletes know what is expected of them and when they have to be prepared.
3. Mental preparation is just as important as skills training.
4. Progressing to more difficult skills increases the challenge.
5. Dropping back into easier skills increases one's confidence.

Place emphasis on the importance of improving a personal best and giving maximum effort at all times during training and competition.

- ♦ Reward the athletes when goals are achieved (verbal, nonverbal, and tangible).
- ♦ Motivate and challenge the athlete through well-planned training sessions.
- ♦ Establish guidelines for acceptable behavior and expectations by creating positive cues and reinforcements.

Coaching Tips

□ The only things an athlete can control are: Attitude and Effort

Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting

Realistic yet challenging goals for each athlete are important to the motivation of the athlete both at training and during competition. Accomplishing goals at practice through repetition in settings similar to the competition environment will instill confidence. Sport confidence in athletes helps make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Setting goals is a joint effort between athletes and coaches. The main features of goal setting are:

1. Goals need to be structured as short-term, intermediate and long-term.
2. Goals need to be viewed as stepping stones to success.
3. Goals must be accepted by the athlete.
4. Goals need to vary in difficulty— from easily attainable to challenging.
5. Goals must be measurable.
6. Goals need to be used to establish the athlete's training and competition plan.
7. Goals need to be flexible
8. Goals need to be written down
9. Goals need to be identified as either performance goals or practice goals
10. Sometimes athletes will need to seek support to accomplish their goals

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Athletes with or without an intellectual disability may be more motivated by accomplishing short-term goals than long-term goals; however, do not be afraid to challenge athletes. Include athletes in setting their personal goals. For example, ask the athlete, “How far do you want to jump today? Let’s see how far you jumped at the last practice. What is your personal best? What do YOU think you can do?” Awareness of why the athlete is participating is also important when setting goals. There are participation factors, which may influence motivation and goal setting:

Age appropriateness	Ability level
Readiness level	Athlete performance
Family influence	Peer influence
Athlete preference	

Performance Goals versus Outcome Goals

Effective goals focus on performance, not outcome. Performance is what the athlete controls. Outcomes are frequently controlled by others. An athlete may have an outstanding performance and not win a contest because other athletes have performed even better. Conversely, an athlete may perform poorly and still win if all other athletes perform at a lower level. If an athlete’s goal is to run 12.10 seconds in the 100m, the athlete has greater control in achieving this goal than winning. However, the athlete has even greater control of achieving a goal if the goal is to run using the correct form, driving the knees through the entire race. This performance goal ultimately gives the athlete more control over his/her performance.

Performance Goal	Outcome Goal
Athletics	
Run in lane the entire race, completing event	Run race hitting split goals
Basketball	
Make contact with opponent and block out after the shot	Get the rebound
Football	
Sprint after balls coming into play	Get to the ball first and control it

Motivation through Goal Setting

Goal setting has proved to be one of the most simple and effective motivational devices developed for sports. While the concept is not new, today the techniques for effective goal setting have been refined and clarified. Motivation is all about having needs and striving to have those needs met. How can you enhance an athlete's motivation?

1. Provide more time and attention to an athlete when he/she is having difficulty learning a skill.
2. Reward small gains of achievement in skill level
3. Develop other measures of achievement outside of winning
4. Show your athletes that they are important to you
5. Show your athletes that you are proud of them and excited about what they are doing
6. Fill your athletes with self-worth

Goals give direction. They tell us what needs to be accomplished. They increase effort, persistence and the quality of performance. Establishing goals also requires that the athlete and coach determine techniques for how to achieve those goals.

Measurable and Specific

Effective goals are very specific and measurable. Goals stated in the form of "I want to be the best that I can be!" or "I want to improve my performance!" are vague and difficult to measure. It is positive sounding but difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether they have been reached. Measurable goals must establish a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks for them to be realistic.

Difficult, but Realistic

Effective goals are perceived as challenging, not threatening. A challenging goal is one perceived as difficult but attainable within a reasonable amount of time and with a reasonable amount of effort or ability. A threatening goal is one perceived as being beyond one's current capacity. Realistic implies that judgment is involved. Goals based upon a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks are likely to be realistic.

Long- versus Short-Term Goals

Both long and short-term goals provide direction, but short-term goals appear to have the greatest motivational effects. Short-term goals are more readily attainable and are stepping stones to more distant long-term goals. Unrealistic short-term goals are easier to recognize than unrealistic long-term goals. Unrealistic goals can then be modified before valuable practice time has been lost.

Positive versus Negative Goal Setting

Positive goals direct what to do rather than what not to do. Negative goals direct our attention to the errors we wish to avoid or eliminate. Positive goals also require coaches and athletes to decide how they will reach those specific goals. Once the goal is decided, the athlete and coach must determine specific strategies and techniques which allow that goal to be successfully attained.

Set Priorities

Effective goals are limited in number and meaningful to the athlete. Setting a limited number of goals requires that athletes and coaches decide what is important and fundamental for continued development. Establishing a few, carefully selected goals also allow athletes and coaches to keep accurate records without becoming overwhelmed with record keeping.

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Mutual Goal Setting

Goal setting becomes an effective motivational device when athletes are committed to achieving those goals. When goals are imposed or established without significant input from the athletes, motivation is unlikely to be enhanced.

Set Specific Time Lines

Target dates provide urgency to an athlete's efforts. Specific target dates tend to eliminate wishful thinking and clarify what goals are realistic and which are not. Timelines are especially valuable in high-risk sports where fear often promotes procrastination in learning new skills.

Formal versus Informal Goal Setting

Some coaches and athletes think that goals must be set in formal meetings outside of practice and require long periods of thoughtful evaluation before they are decided upon. Goals are literally progressions which coaches have been using for years but are now expressed in measurable, performance terms rather than as vague, generalized outcomes.

Team versus Individual Goals

While team goals appear to have great importance for team sports, the reality is that most team goals can be broken down into individual roles or responsibilities. Each player must achieve these individual roles or responsibilities for the team to function effectively.

Goal Setting Domains

When asked to set goals, athletes typically focus on the learning of new skills or performances in competitions. A major role of the coach is to broaden the athlete's perception of those areas, and goal setting can be an effective tool. Goals can be set to enhance fitness, improve attendance, increase intensity, promote sportsmanship, develop team spirit, find more free time, or establish consistency.

Coaching Tips

Ask yourself "What motivates me to be the best coach that I can be."

Winning and Losing

Many coaches face the issue of winning when developing their coaching objectives. Society clearly places great emphasis on winning. However, society also looks to sport as a means to help young and old athletes alike build character and develop leadership skills. The balance is in not evaluating yourself or your athletes on the win-loss record. You, the coach, must resist trying to win and encouraging your athletes to win at all costs. How do you overcome this temptation? Place your athletes first—athletes first at practice; athletes first at competition.

Striving to Win

Placing athletes first does not mean that winning is not important. Striving to win within the rules of sport and the competition is an important objective for both athlete and coach. Striving to win is essential for an enjoyable competition. The emphasis should not be on winning itself but on striving to win. It is the pursuit of victory, the dream of achieving the goal that matters most.

Keeping Winning in Perspective

Striving to win is important in sport. The process of winning can bring out the best in people—performance, attitude and approach to life. As coach, it is imperative that you not lose sight of the long-term objectives: helping athletes to develop and improve sports skills, have fun, and do well in sport competition—to win. Winning or striving to win is never more important than your athletes' well-being. Keep winning in perspective - there is room for fun too.

Coaches and athletes must remind themselves that winning is measured by how well they apply all their effort and maintain self-control in pressure situations. Winning means more than where you place at the finish line. An athlete is never a loser if he/she gives maximum effort.

To that end, the first question a coach needs to ask before a competition is

- ♦ "Are you ready to give it everything you've got?"

The first questions after a competition needs to be

- ♦ "How did that feel?"
- ♦ "Do you feel like you did your best?"

Coaching Tip

❑ Remember, positive thoughts yield positive results.

Well-prepared athletes will handle their performance and the performance of their competitors in a positive and sportsmanlike manner in accordance to the Athlete's Code of Conduct and the Official Sports Rules for your sport. A losing outcome does not negatively impact the athletes' confidence if the coach and athletes have been successful in developing a winning attitude.

The athlete's effort, attitude and personal skills attainment must be rewarded and positively reinforced.

It is also important to remind athletes that the point of competing in Special Olympics is to prove to themselves and the rest of the world what they can do. The award ceremony is a chance for the world to see a group of skilled athletes celebrating their sport skills and enjoyment of competition.

Athletes of all ages, regardless of intellectual ability, enter competitions to do their best and hopefully to win. Is it all right to be disappointed when you do not win? Of course it is. But also, it is a chance to evaluate your performance and make a training commitment that will help you perform better next time.

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Handling Grief

Communication strategies by the coach, fellow athletes, families and friends will help an athlete handle grief or disappointment. Listen to what the athlete says and why he/she may be experiencing the grief. Offer positive switches – positive comment – correction – positive comment to take the athlete's attention away from his/her disappointment. Again, the athlete's effort, attitude and preparation should be emphasized, not the result of the competition.

It is important to not discount feelings of disappointment. It is appropriate to be disappointed when we lose a game or match. The challenge of the coach is to redirect that disappointment into a renewed commitment to training for the next competition or season. Becoming obsessed with losing is not a healthy or natural reaction for anyone.

Anxiety and Stress Management

Anxiety and stress can be controlled through proper preparation. A winning attitude and confidence will equip an athlete with coping skills to handle his/her emotions when confronted with a stressful or anxious moment. Below are a few hints a well-prepared coach might consider to better prepare his athlete for competition.

- ♦ Repetition in a familiar environment can help alleviate a lot of stress when preparing the athlete for competition. Include mini meets in practice that simulate the competition.
- ♦ Provide athletes with additional competition opportunities at as many local-level meets as possible.
- ♦ Have athletes perform in front of spectators and peers.
- ♦ Make sure athletes are in proper events that they like and can display their talents and skills.
- ♦ Also, to reinterpret "arousal" as excitement and not anxiety.
- ♦ Visit the track or stadium prior to competition. When possible, practice on the track or in the stadium before competition.
- ♦ Teach your athletes visual imagery to help them practice the event in their mind before competition.
- ♦ Review the rules of competition and event calls and strategies with your athletes.

Positive self-talk and imagery

Self-talk represents the things you say in your head about yourself and is often negative (e.g., that team is much better than ours). Positive self-talk involves repeating a helpful and positive word or phrase such as "I am fit and ready to play" Imagery or visualization is using the "mind's eye" to recreate a past great performance or to create a future correct play or movement. Imagery is also much more than seeing yourself as it also involves "feeling" a correct movement and incorporating all of the senses (i.e., smell, sound, even taste) to most accurately capture reality in your head.

Positive self-talk and imagery can promote confidence and success. Hence, coaches can help educate their athletes on the value of positive self-talk and imagery. One thing coaches can do is help athletes set up a pre-performance routine. At the start of a competition athletes can very briefly (10-15 seconds) do four helpful behaviors: Close their eyes, take a few deep calming breathes, repeat a positive phrase "I am ready" and picture themselves successfully making a shot, or running strongly, depending on their sport.

Taking Athletes to Competition

It is the coach's responsibility to have the athletes prepared physically and mentally for the competition. This involves ensuring that all uniforms are ready, all athletes have proper footwear, all equipment is present, meals and transportation are available and all entries are correct. Below are a few tips for coaches to follow before, during and after the game/meet/match.

Athlete Flow at Competitions

Coaches do not determine flow of athletes. Coaches have to know the athlete flow of a specific competition to ensure that athletes are where they need to be at the time that they need to be there.

Coaching Tip

- ❑ Athlete flow process is designed to make the athlete experience as smooth as possible from arriving at the competition to receiving awards to leaving the competition.

Before the Game/Meet/Match

- ◆ Make final check of all equipment and athlete needs.
- ◆ Be confident and relaxed.
- ◆ Be sure your athletes are warmed up, stretched and ready to compete.
- ◆ Be sure to have the proper equipment for each event.
- ◆ Be positive and upbeat but do not over excite.
- ◆ Make sure that the athletes have plenty of fluids.

At the Game/Meet/Match

- ◆ Encourage and support your athletes, but do not yell and scream. Keep calm and offer positive reinforcement at the competition.
- ◆ Restrict coaching from the bench to positive comments that athletes can use at the time of competition.
- ◆ Tell parents to be supportive but not to coach athletes.
- ◆ Keep substitutions simple. Have substitutes ready in case of injuries or no-shows.
- ◆ Commit yourself to equal participation throughout the season.
- ◆ Give different athletes the chance to compete in new events for which they have trained. Be a coach who allows the athlete to progress to new levels.
- ◆ Make sure that the athletes have plenty of fluids.

When to Drink Water	How Much Water to Drink
Night before practice or competition	Glass of water (8 oz./250ml)
Four hours before event	Glass of water (8 oz./250ml)
15 minutes before event	One-half glass of water (4 oz./125 ml)
During event of less than one hour	One water break
During event of more than one hour	One-half glass of water (4 oz./125 ml)
After event	Glass of water every three hours until next day

Special Olympics Sports Sciences: Sport Psychology for Coaches Taking Athletes to Competition

After the Game/Meet/Match

- ♦ Say “well done” or “good effort” to all your athletes when appropriate. Good effort when you.....
But eliminate “Well done” as not specific enough.
- ♦ Feedback is usually best (not always) done right after the behavior.
- ♦ Be sure to collect all the equipment from each athlete.
- ♦ Cool down after competition to prevent soreness.
- ♦ Spend time reviewing the athletes’ performances and prepare some useful comments for the beginning of the next practice.
- ♦ Somewhere a mention of keeping a training log for a) to build confidence by revisiting good workouts and b) to know what workouts were effective at getting athletes in really good condition.
- ♦ Make sure that the athletes have plenty of fluids.

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