

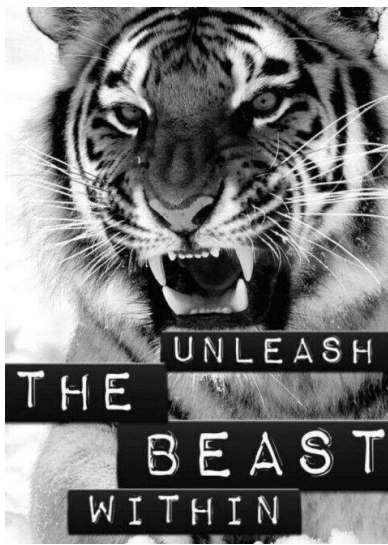
EYE OF THE TIGER

WHAT ATHLETES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

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What is motivation?

Motivation is what changes your behavior and drives your actions. A lack of motivation can leave you feeling drifting in life, while anything worth having requires motivation to get there.



What or who motivates you? How does your motivation impact your approach? Do you find your motivation wavering from day to day? All of these questions are incredibly important for an athlete.

When you think of motivation, what are the first thoughts that come to your mind?

For me, I grew up wanting to earn a scholarship in a sport and eventually go pro. Not knowing any better, my "why" was simply because pro athletes made a lot of money. This is an example of extrinsic motivation. In sports, extrinsic motivation is when an athlete is motivated by rewards such as money, objects, attention and fame. Avoiding punishment is another type of extrinsic motivation. If an athlete is entirely extrinsically motivated, they wouldn't play their sport if these rewards did not exist. In sports, intrinsic motivation is when an athlete is motivated to be the best they can be simply because they want to see what they're truly capable of. These athletes truly love the game. While many athletes' motivation are a mix of extrinsic and intrinsic, and certain extrinsic motivations can increase intrinsic motivation, a significant amount of intrinsic motivation is present in the vast majority of high-achieving athletes.

Athletes like Tom Brady, LeBron James, Serena Williams and Adrian Peterson continue to compete ferociously long after they've already accumulated more fame, wealth and accolades than they could've ever imagined. Why? Because it's not about those things for them.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology says athletes who are mainly intrinsically motivated generally see less changes in motivation over time, are less distracted, exhibit better focus, and experience less stress when mistakes are made compared to athletes who are mainly extrinsically motivated.

You can't tell me that getting up at 5 a.m. every morning to train, eat, work out or go to class are things that can be done without any motivation. There must be something deep within that drives those acts. Often, I ask the kids that come in our Athletic Gaines facilities, "What's Your Why?" The responses vary, but they often stem from being motivated by something or someone.

Your motivation impacts your approach and essentially keeps you working toward something over the long term if you stay motivated or forces you to eventually quit if you lose your motivation. Staying motivated is a constant challenge, but remembering your "why" behind your actions and setting goals (both short- and long-term) will keep you waking up at 5 a.m. for workouts, staying late after practice to run more sprints, or doing more reps than what's required in the weight room and practice. Everyone is motivated, but what you're motivated by has an impact on your work ethic and your ability to stay motivated over the long haul.

Here's a general tip I've seen help build rock-solid motivation for athletes. It involves a simple three-step process:

1. Think of something that you enjoy doing or do often that relates to your sport. This could be running sprints, lifting weights, catching a football, watching film, taking a number of swings in the batting cage, making a certain number of shots, etc.
2. Envision yourself becoming the absolute best you can at this activity. It sounds simple, but young athletes rarely do this. This alone may be enough motivation for you, but also envision where becoming the best you can be at this activity may take you. It may be making varsity, getting a collegiate scholarship, making the pros, etc.
3. Set concrete goals based around working to become the best you can at this skill. This could mean waking up at 6 a.m. each day to lift weights, doing 30 Push-Ups each night, running 6-10 sprints twice a week, scheduling to meet with a coach and watch film every week, catching 100 balls a day, making 100 shots a day, etc.

Once you start seeing yourself progress toward that vision of the best version of yourself, the process often becomes addicting. If you can surround yourself with like-minded people working toward similar goals, that can also help you stay motivated.

Once you find what really motivates you, think of what drives you to succeed, stay consistent and work hard until you ultimately become successful. It sounds simple, but adherence to that basic formula is what separates great athletes from the rest of the pack.

