

## Youth Sports and Intrinsic Motivation

The better you feel about yourself and your contributions to an activity,  
the more intrinsically motivated you will be to do the task.

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Youth sports provide a venue for pursuing health and positive values. From a mental health perspective, the school's role with student athletes is to promote positive social and emotional development and prevent problems. Organized sports and related physical activity have been documented as making significant contributions to physical, psychological, and social well-being. Motivation plays a major role in this, especially intrinsic motivation.

Outcomes tend to be most positive when the social environment is supportive of the basic psychological needs and youth are *intrinsically* motivated. This underscores the importance of coaches and other social agents at school being supportive of such needs.

In general, all teaching affects students' intrinsic motivation (see the references to Deci & Ryan and their colleagues). Research on intrinsic motivation stresses the importance and (a) maximizing feelings of self-determination, competence, and relatedness to significant others and (b) minimizing threats to such feelings. Student athletes' feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness are especially affected by coaches training styles. Moreover, sports and related physical activity at school can affect intrinsic motivation not only for such activity but also for school in general.

### Two Research Examples

Amorose and Horn (2000) examined "the relationships among athletes' intrinsic motivation (IM), gender, scholarship status, perceptions of the number of their teammates receiving scholarships, and perceptions of their coaches' behavior. Male and female college athletes (N = 386) from a variety of Division I sports completed a series of paper-and-pencil questionnaires. Multivariate analyses revealed that (a) scholarship athletes reported higher levels of IM than did nonscholarship athletes, (b) male athletes reported higher IM than did female athletes, and (c) perceived coaching behaviors were related to athletes' IM. Specifically, athletes with higher IM perceived their coaches to exhibit a leadership style that emphasized training and instruction and was high in democratic behavior and low in autocratic behavior. In addition, athletes with higher levels of IM perceived that their coaches provided high frequencies of positive and informationally based feedback and low frequencies of punishment-oriented and ignoring behaviors."

Hollembek and Amorose (2005). "Using self-determination theory (SDT) as a framework, this study tested whether perceived competence, autonomy and relatedness mediated the relationships between perceived coaching behaviors and athletes' intrinsic motivation (IM). Male and female college athletes (N = 280) completed questionnaires assessing perceived coaching behaviors (i.e., training and instruction, positive feedback, social support, and autocratic and democratic behavior), as well as their IM, perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Structural equation modeling revealed support for a mediational effect. Specifically, results indicated that all of the coaching behaviors, with the exception of social support, significantly predicted perceived competence, autonomy and/or relatedness, which, in turn, predicted IM. Only perceived autocratic and democratic behaviors had a significant indirect effect on IM. Results are discussed in relation to SDT and coaching effectiveness."

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**\*For those interested in learning more about Deci, et al.'s work on intrinsic motivation, see**

- > *When rewards compete with nature: The undermining of intrinsic motivation (e.g., browse "Extrinsic Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation in Education: Reconsidered Once Again," Review of Educational Research (2001) online at <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/71/1/1.full.pdf+html> )*
- > *Intrinsic Motivation, Student Engagement, and the Work of Deci and Ryan*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/decinforesource.pdf>
- > *About Intrinsic Motivation from the Perspective of Self-determination Theory*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/selfdeter.pdf>
- > *Deci has a 14 minute Youtube presentation at*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGrcets0E6I#t=19>
- > Ryan & Deci. (2000) "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being." *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2000, pp. 68-78., doi:10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.68.
- > *Ryan & Deci's recent book – Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness.* Guilford Press.

Also see the Center's Quick Find on Motivation – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>