EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

MOTIVATION

SHARINGOALS

THE SYSTEMIC COACHING MANUAL
FOR FOOTBALL COACHES
AROUND THE WORLD

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Version:
1.0 - November 2026

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1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Scientific research

1.1.1. Definition

Motivation describes the direction, intensity and persistence of behaviour towards a goal, while passion describes a strong inclination toward an activity that individuals like, find important and invest time and energy in (Vallerand, 2003).

Motivation and Passion describe the psychological processes that energize, direct, and sustain players' engagement, effort, and long-term commitment in football. In sport science, motivation is commonly explained through Self-Determination Theory, Achievement Motivation Theory, and the Dualistic Model of Passion. Together, these frameworks explain why players engage in training and competition, how they regulate effort, and why some players maintain high-quality engagement over long periods of development.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory explains motivation as a continuum ranging from self-determined (autonomous) to controlled forms of regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Central to SDT is the assumption that optimal development depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs:

- Autonomy – the perception of choice and ownership of behaviour
- Competence – the perception of effectiveness and progress
- Relatedness – the perception of connection with teammates and significant others

When these needs are supported in the football environment, players demonstrate higher intrinsic motivation, persistence, well-being, and adaptive learning behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Sarrazin et al., 2002). Motivational climates created by coaches, teammates, and parents influence how strongly these needs are satisfied and therefore influence long-term engagement and performance development (Ames, 1992; Duda & Balaguer, 2007).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Within SDT, motivation is differentiated by its degree of self-determination.

Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in football because the activity itself is interesting, enjoyable, or inherently satisfying. Research in football contexts shows that intrinsically motivated players demonstrate higher persistence, greater enjoyment, and more adaptive learning strategies (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Sarrazin et al., 2002). Extrinsic motivation refers to engagement driven by outcomes that are separate from the activity itself, such as rewards, evaluation, recognition, or external expectations. SDT differentiates forms of extrinsic motivation according to the degree to which external goals are internalised:

- External regulation – behaviour controlled by rewards or punishment
- Introjected regulation – behaviour influenced by internal pressure (e.g. guilt, obligation)
- Identified regulation – behaviour accepted as personally meaningful
- Integrated regulation – behaviour aligned with personal values and identity

More autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation (identified and integrated regulation) are associated with greater persistence and long-term development compared to controlled forms of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Achievement Motivation Theory

Achievement Motivation Theory explains behaviour in achievement settings such as sport through the desire to demonstrate competence and attain valued goals (Nicholls, 1984; Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Two dominant goal orientations are commonly distinguished:

- Mastery orientation (task orientation) – focus on learning, improvement, and personal progress
- Performance orientation (ego orientation) – focus on comparison with others and demonstrating superior ability

Motivational climates created by coaches influence whether players interpret success primarily through effort and improvement or through comparison and ranking. Research in youth football environments shows that mastery-oriented climates are associated with higher enjoyment, persistence, perceived competence, and adaptive motivational patterns (Ames, 1992; Duda & Balaguer, 2007).

Mastery-oriented feedback emphasizing effort and learning can positively influence persistence and performance responses, particularly when players face challenges or setbacks (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Auerbach, 2016).

Passion

While motivation explains why players engage in football, passion explains how deeply the activity becomes part of the player's identity. Passion is defined as a strong inclination toward an activity that individuals like, find important, and in which they invest time and energy (Vallerand et al., 2003).

In football development contexts, passion contributes to sustained engagement in deliberate practice, persistence during setbacks, and long-term commitment to improvement.

1.1.2. Scientific Research and Models

Dualistic Model of Passion

The Dualistic Model of Passion differentiates between harmonious passion and obsessive passion, based on the way the activity is internalised into identity (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015).

Harmonious passion results from autonomous internalisation of football into the player's identity. The player experiences a strong desire to engage in football while maintaining balance with other life domains. Harmonious passion is associated with:

- adaptive persistence
- positive emotions
- concentration and flow
- flexible engagement patterns
- long-term well-being

Research in football populations shows that harmonious passion predicts higher quality engagement, greater persistence, and more adaptive motivational patterns (Vallerand et al., 2008; Curran et al., 2015).

Obsessive passion results from controlled internalisation of football into identity. Participation becomes linked to pressure, ego involvement, or contingent self-worth. Obsessive passion is associated with:

- rigid persistence
- pressure to perform
- difficulty disengaging
- increased anxiety and rumination

Although obsessive passion can be associated with high effort, research suggests it may also increase risk of burnout, emotional conflict, and maladaptive coping behaviours (Vallerand, 2015; Rip et al., 2006).

The model of Motivation & Passion integrates Self-Determination Theory, Achievement Motivation Theory, and the Dualistic Model of Passion to explain how motivational processes influence both individual performance development and team cohesion in football.

The model assumes that motivation is not a fixed personality trait but a dynamic process influenced by the interaction between the player and the environment. Coaches, teammates, parents, and the broader sporting context continuously shape the quality of motivation through feedback, communication, expectations, and social relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Duda & Balaguer, 2007; Mills et al., 2022).

At the centre of the model are the three basic psychological needs described in Self-Determination Theory:

- autonomy
- competence
- relatedness

When these needs are satisfied, players are more likely to develop self-determined motivation, characterised by intrinsic motivation and more internalised forms of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Research indicates that need satisfaction is associated with persistence, learning engagement, well-being, and long-term participation in football (Sarrazin et al., 2002; Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018).

From a neurocognitive perspective, satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is associated with activation of reward-related neural processes that support learning, reinforcement of behaviour, and continued engagement. Intrinsically motivated activities are processed as rewarding experiences, which strengthens neural pathways involved in skill acquisition and adaptive decision making (Murayama et al., 2010; Schultz, 2015).

Achievement Motivation Theory complements this perspective by explaining how players interpret competence and success. Mastery-oriented environments emphasizing improvement, effort, and learning promote adaptive motivational patterns, while environments emphasizing comparison and evaluation may increase pressure and controlled forms of motivation (Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992).

Motivation influences attentional processes and behavioural regulation, which are important for effective deliberate practice and performance adaptation (Ericsson et al., 1993).

The Dualistic Model of Passion extends motivation theory by explaining how football becomes part of a player's identity. Harmonious passion develops when players internalise football in an autonomous way, leading to flexible persistence, enjoyment, and balanced commitment. Obsessive passion develops when participation becomes linked to external pressure or contingent self-worth, often leading to rigid persistence and increased risk of emotional conflict (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015).

Research suggests that harmonious passion is associated with more adaptive emotional regulation processes, supporting concentration and behavioural flexibility in performance environments. These processes are linked to neural systems involved in emotional control and decision making, which influence how players respond to pressure and setbacks (Rip et al., 2006).

Within the integrated model, the social environment plays a central role. Motivational climates created by coaches, teammates, and parents influence satisfaction of psychological needs and therefore the quality of motivation and passion (Martínez-González et al., 2025; Orosz & Mezo, 2015). Positive social interactions also reinforce motivation through perceived belonging and shared goals, which are relevant for cohesion processes.

Motivation and passion influence football development through two interconnected pathways:

Individual development pathway

Motivation influences how players engage in learning processes, regulate effort, and persist in deliberate practice. Self-determined motivation and harmonious passion support sustained engagement in practice activities necessary for skill acquisition and expertise development (Ericsson et al., 1993; Hamoud et al., 2024).

Psychological characteristics such as grit interact with motivation and passion by strengthening persistence toward long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007; Mähliß, 2022).

Collective development pathway

Motivation and passion influence how players contribute to team processes such as cooperation, communication, and commitment to shared goals. Task-oriented motivational climates and supportive interpersonal relationships contribute to team cohesion and collective functioning (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018; Sulistiyo et al., 2024).

Commitment to team processes is influenced by the quality of coach–athlete relationships, communication patterns, and perceived motivational climate (Notario-Alonso et al., 2023).



Integrated perspective for football development

The model highlights that optimal football development occurs when:

- psychological needs are supported
- motivational climate emphasises learning and improvement
- players develop intrinsic motivation and internalised extrinsic motivation
- passion develops in a harmonious rather than obsessive form
- social environments support both individual growth and collective functioning

Motivation & Passion therefore function as linking mechanisms between emotional competences, cognitive processes, social competences, and performance development.

They influence how strongly players engage in training, how they respond to challenges, and how effectively they contribute to team processes over time.

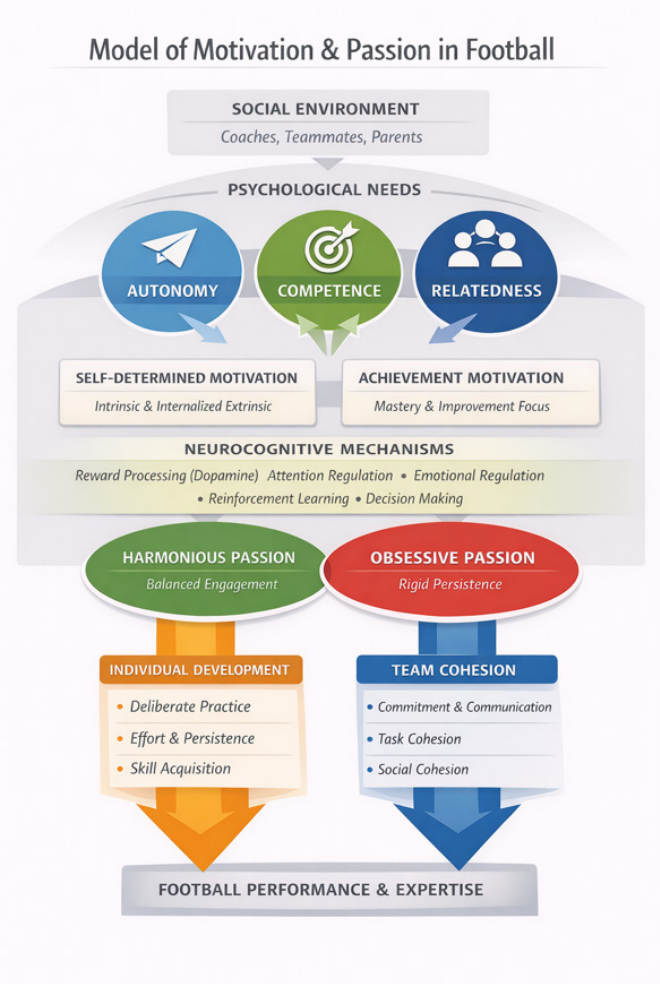


Figure 1: Dual Model of Motivation & Passion, own illustration

1.1.3. Impact on performance

Motivation and passion influence football performance through their effects on effort regulation, persistence, deliberate practice behaviour, learning quality, emotional control, and long-term engagement. Research consistently shows that performance development is influenced not only by physical and technical training load, but also by the quality of motivational processes underlying training behaviour.

Self-determined motivation and performance development

Self-Determination Theory proposes that athletes demonstrate higher quality engagement and performance development when the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In football environments, satisfaction of these needs is associated with higher intrinsic motivation, persistence, and perceived competence (Sarrazin et al., 2002; Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018).

Motivational climates emphasizing learning, improvement, and effort contribute to higher self-determined motivation and more adaptive learning behaviours in youth football players (Sarmiento Espiau et al., 2024; Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018). Achievement goals mediate the relationship between motivation and performance, as players with approach-oriented goals demonstrate stronger self-regulated learning and higher coach-rated performance levels (Hamoud et al., 2024).

Self-regulated learning behaviours influenced by intrinsic motivation support deliberate practice engagement, which is considered a central mechanism for expertise development in sport (Ericsson et al., 1993; Hamoud et al., 2024).

Achievement motivation, mastery climate, and persistence

Achievement Motivation Theory explains performance behaviour through athletes' goal orientations and perceptions of competence (Nicholls, 1984; Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Mastery-oriented motivational climates emphasizing effort and personal improvement are associated with greater persistence, adaptive coping responses, and long-term engagement in training (Ames, 1992; Duda & Balaguer, 2007).

Feedback emphasizing effort rather than talent can positively influence performance adaptation, particularly when players face challenges. Experimental evidence in youth football players shows that mastery-oriented feedback improves performance responses, especially in athletes with lower grit levels (Auerbach, 2016).

Grit, defined as sustained passion and perseverance for long-term goals, is associated with persistence in deliberate practice and long-term achievement behaviour (Duckworth et al., 2007). Research in football talent development suggests that integrating psychological characteristics such as motivation and grit improves prediction of long-term performance outcomes (Mähliß, 2022).

Passion and long-term performance development

Passion contributes to sustained engagement in the extended practice processes required for expertise development. Harmonious passion is associated with adaptive persistence, concentration, and flexible engagement patterns supporting consistent performance development (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015).

Research with football players shows that passion is a significant predictor of performance level, with elite players demonstrating higher passion scores compared to lower-level players (Sigmundsson et al., 2022). Passion is also positively correlated with grit, suggesting an important interaction between emotional commitment and perseverance in long-term player development (Sigmundsson et al., 2022).

Obsessive passion may increase effort intensity but is associated with higher risk of anxiety, rigid persistence patterns, and maladaptive coping behaviours that may negatively affect long-term performance stability (Vallerand, 2015).

Psychological skills and performance readiness

Psychological skills supporting motivational processes can positively influence performance outcomes. Mindfulness-based training interventions have demonstrated improvements in achievement motivation, self-confidence, and performance readiness in football players (Mashhoot et al., 2025).

Motivation and confidence are consistently identified as key psychological contributors to performance consistency and ability to cope with competitive pressure (Gilson, 2015).

Neuroscientific findings indicate that intrinsic motivation is associated with neural mechanisms supporting learning processes, error monitoring, and adaptive behavioural regulation (Sekh, 2023).

Social environment and performance development

The social environment created by coaches, teammates, and parents influences motivational processes and performance development. Emotional coach–athlete relationships contribute to achievement motivation and performance outcomes through trust, emotional support, and communication quality (Sulistiyo et al., 2024).

Empowering motivational climates created by coaches, parents, and peers positively influence athletes' optimal functioning and performance development (Martínez-González et al., 2025). Research in football talent development highlights the importance of integrating psychological factors such as motivation into holistic development models alongside physical, technical, and tactical components (Mills et al., 2022; Orosz & Mezo, 2015).

1.1.4. Impact on social cohesion

Motivation and passion influence team cohesion through their effects on commitment to shared goals, interpersonal relationships, communication quality, and willingness to contribute to collective performance. Research indicates that motivational processes affect both task cohesion (commitment to common objectives) and social cohesion (quality of relationships within the team).

Motivational climate and cohesion

Motivational climates created by coaches significantly influence cohesion in football teams. Task-oriented climates emphasizing effort, improvement, and cooperation are associated with higher levels of group cohesion, pro-social behaviour, and commitment to team objectives (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018). Players in such environments demonstrate stronger identification with team goals and greater willingness to contribute to collective success.

Empowering motivational climates created by coaches, parents, and peers positively influence athletes' psychological needs satisfaction and contribute to optimal functioning in youth football environments (Martínez-González et al., 2025). Satisfaction of the need for relatedness is particularly relevant for social cohesion, as feelings of belonging and mutual support strengthen interpersonal connections within the team.

Research indicates that motivational climates can influence cohesion both directly and indirectly through enjoyment, commitment, and perceived competence (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018; Sarmiento Espiau et al., 2024).

Coach–athlete relationship and team cohesion

The quality of emotional relationships between coaches and players plays an important role in the development of cohesion. Trust, emotional support, and effective communication contribute to higher achievement motivation and more positive team dynamics (Sulistiyo et al., 2024).

Commitment to team processes is also influenced by the coach's ability to create an environment characterised by clarity, support, and constructive feedback. A systematic review on sport commitment in football highlights that coach behaviour and motivational climate influence players' cognitive and emotional commitment to the team, which are key components of cohesion (Notario-Alonso et al., 2023).

The broader talent development literature emphasises that social agents, including coaches, parents, and peers, jointly shape the motivational environment and influence athletes' engagement and commitment to collective processes (Orosz & Mezo, 2015; Mills et al., 2022).

Passion, motivation, and interpersonal processes

Passion influences cohesion through its effects on persistence, emotional engagement, and willingness to invest effort for collective goals. Harmonious passion is associated with more adaptive interpersonal behaviour patterns, including cooperation, flexibility, and openness to team processes (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015).

Research in football players indicates that passion is strongly related to grit, suggesting that emotional attachment to the activity contributes to persistence not only at an individual level but also in collaborative performance contexts (Sigmundsson et al., 2022).

Motivational processes influence how players interpret feedback from teammates, respond to shared challenges, and regulate emotions in competitive situations. Constructive feedback and positive communication patterns support both motivation and team cohesion (Gilson, 2015).

Social environment and collective functioning

Studies on talent development emphasise the importance of cooperation among multiple stakeholders in supporting players' development and engagement. Positive social environments contribute to self-realization, motivation, and commitment to team processes (Orosz & Mezo, 2015).

Socialization processes involving coaches, parents, and peers influence motivation and engagement patterns in young football players, highlighting the importance of supportive interpersonal environments for both individual development and team cohesion (Mladenović & Marjanović, 2011).

Overall, research suggests that motivation and passion influence cohesion by shaping players' willingness to invest effort in shared goals, support teammates, and maintain commitment to collective development processes. Motivational climates supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness contribute to stronger interpersonal connections and more effective collaboration within football teams.

1.1.5. Correlations with private and family life, academic and work career

Research shows that motivation and passion developed in sport influence behaviour, engagement patterns and wellbeing across multiple life domains. The psychological processes underlying motivation — such as perceived competence, autonomy, persistence of interest and personal meaning — are transferable and influence how individuals approach challenges, relationships and long-term development (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vallerand, 2003; Duckworth et al., 2007).

Motivation and passion influence how individuals regulate effort, maintain commitment and pursue meaningful goals across contexts. Harmonious passion in particular is associated with adaptive functioning, wellbeing and sustained engagement in different areas of life, while obsessive passion can lead to imbalance when self-worth becomes overly dependent on achievement outcomes (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2008).

Relationships

Motivation and passion influence the quality of interpersonal relationships. Individuals with higher levels of intrinsic motivation tend to show greater engagement in maintaining relationships and demonstrate higher levels of empathy, cooperation and constructive communication (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2008).

Harmonious passion is associated with flexible goal pursuit and balanced integration of personal interests with social responsibilities, which supports stable friendships and partnerships. In contrast, obsessive passion may lead to interpersonal tension when achievement goals dominate relational needs (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2010).

Research indicates that athletes who experience autonomy-supportive environments demonstrate higher levels of prosocial behaviour, trust and social connectedness, contributing positively to relationship quality.

Motivation therefore not only influences individual performance but also the ability to maintain constructive and supportive relationships over time.

Family life

Motivation and passion influence how young people engage in family responsibilities and shared activities. Environments that support autonomy, competence and relatedness foster internal motivation and contribute to psychological wellbeing and positive family interactions (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Young athletes who develop intrinsic motivation in sport often demonstrate:

- higher initiative in completing responsibilities
- stronger sense of responsibility
- greater willingness to contribute to shared family goals
- improved communication with parents
- increased ability to balance different life demands

Parental autonomy support has been shown to strengthen internalisation of values and promote self-regulation, which positively influences behaviour across home and school environments (Grolnick, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Motivation therefore contributes to constructive family dynamics and supports the development of responsibility and initiative beyond sport.

School

Motivational processes developed in sport transfer strongly to academic engagement. Intrinsic motivation is associated with higher levels of concentration, persistence and willingness to invest effort in learning tasks (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Students with higher intrinsic motivation demonstrate:

- stronger self-regulation
- higher persistence when facing academic challenges
- greater engagement in learning processes
- stronger mastery orientation
- higher perceived competence

Achievement motivation research shows that individuals who focus on improvement and mastery demonstrate greater long-term academic engagement compared to individuals primarily motivated by external rewards (Nicholls, 1989; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Grit, defined as sustained passion and perseverance for long-term goals, has been identified as an important predictor of educational attainment and long-term learning engagement (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Experiences in sport can therefore strengthen motivational patterns that support long-term learning and academic development.



Work career

Motivation and passion are strongly associated with long-term career development and professional engagement. Individuals with higher levels of intrinsic motivation demonstrate greater persistence in skill development and higher adaptability when facing professional challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2010).

Harmonious passion is associated with:

- higher job satisfaction
- greater engagement in professional learning
- better work-life balance
- sustained commitment to development
- increased wellbeing

Obsessive passion, in contrast, may increase vulnerability to stress and burnout when performance becomes strongly linked to identity and external validation (Vallerand et al., 2010).

Long-term passion and sustained effort have been identified as important predictors of expertise development across performance domains requiring deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993; Duckworth et al., 2007).

Motivation and passion therefore influence initiative, responsibility, and continuous development in professional environments.

1.1.6. Development of motivation

From a developmental perspective, motivation and passion influence how players approach practice, respond to feedback, and sustain engagement across long time periods required for expertise development. Research shows that athletes who demonstrate high intrinsic motivation, mastery orientation, and harmonious passion are more likely to engage in deliberate practice and maintain persistence despite setbacks (Duckworth et al., 2007; Vallerand et al., 2008).

Motivation quality therefore influences:

- persistence in training
- engagement in deliberate practice
- response to challenge and failure
- learning behaviour
- long-term participation
- well-being
- team commitment

For coaches and sport scientists, motivation and passion should therefore be understood not only as intensity of effort, but as quality of regulation. Environments supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness increase the likelihood that players develop intrinsic motivation, mastery orientation, and harmonious passion, which together support sustainable performance development.

Motivation and passion develop through continuous interaction between the player and the environment. They are shaped by experiences of learning, improvement, success, setbacks, social relationships, and perceived meaning of participation in football. Research consistently shows that motivation is dynamic and influenced by contextual factors such as coaching behaviour, team climate, perceived competence, and personal goals (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Duda & Balaguer, 2007). Across football development pathways, motivation evolves through processes of need satisfaction, internalisation, identity formation, and commitment development, which together influence the emergence of passion and long-term engagement in the sport (Vallerand et al., 2003; Mills et al., 2022).

Early motivational experiences

In early phases of participation, motivation is strongly influenced by enjoyment, curiosity, and positive emotional experiences associated with playing football. Opportunities for exploration, play, and social interaction support intrinsic motivation and create positive associations with the activity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Feelings of belonging and positive peer interaction contribute significantly to continued participation in sport, particularly in childhood and early adolescence (Sarrazin et al., 2002). Early experiences of competence, enjoyment, and peer acceptance form an important foundation for later commitment and passion development. Environments that emphasise learning and enjoyment rather than early performance evaluation are associated with more adaptive motivational patterns and sustained participation (Duda & Balaguer, 2007).

Development through competence and achievement processes

As players gain experience, perceived competence becomes an increasingly important driver of motivation. Experiences of improvement strengthen confidence and support internalisation of training-related behaviours (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Achievement motivation develops as players begin to evaluate their competence relative to personal or external standards. Mastery-oriented climates emphasizing

improvement, effort, and learning are associated with higher persistence and adaptive motivational patterns (Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992). Research in football players shows that perceived competence and achievement motivation are related to performance level and commitment to training processes (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018; Sarmiento Espiau et al., 2024). Academic level and cognitive engagement have also been found to relate to motivational orientation, suggesting that cognitive development processes influence how players interpret learning situations and regulate effort (Orosz & Mezo, 2015).

Internalisation and development of passion

Over time, motivation becomes more stable as football becomes integrated into the player's identity. Internalisation processes influence whether passion develops in a harmonious or obsessive form (Vallerand et al., 2003). Harmonious passion develops when participation is experienced as meaningful and self-endorsed, allowing players to invest strongly in football while maintaining psychological balance. Obsessive passion may develop when motivation becomes strongly linked to external expectations, pressure, or identity contingencies (Vallerand, 2015). Research in football populations indicates that passion interacts with grit and mental toughness, suggesting that emotional attachment to football contributes to long-term persistence in demanding development environments (Sigmundsson et al., 2022; Mähliß, 2022). Longitudinal findings suggest that harmonious passion is associated with sustained engagement and adaptive coping patterns, while obsessive passion may increase vulnerability to stress and burnout if not balanced by autonomy-supportive environments (Rip et al., 2006).

Influence of coaching behaviour and motivational climate

Coaches play a central role in shaping motivational development through communication style, leadership behaviour, and goal structures. Empowering coaching environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with more self-determined motivation and stronger commitment to training (Duda & Balaguer, 2007; Martínez-González et al., 2025). Leadership style influences athletes' motivation, confidence, and commitment levels, highlighting the importance of interpersonal behaviour in talent development environments (Notario-Alonso et al., 2023). Communication style and feedback strategies influence how players interpret success and failure, which affects persistence and willingness to invest effort in improvement processes (Ames, 1992).

Research also shows that motivational climate influences enjoyment, engagement, and long-term participation in football (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018).

Psychological skills and regulation of motivation

Psychological skills such as emotional regulation, attentional control, and self-reflection influence how motivation is maintained in challenging situations. Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to improve achievement motivation, confidence, and performance readiness in football players, suggesting that psychological regulation skills support stable motivational patterns (Mashhoot et al., 2025). Mental toughness and grit interact with motivation by strengthening persistence toward long-term goals and supporting engagement in deliberate practice (Duckworth et al., 2007; Mähliß, 2022). These findings suggest that motivation is supported not only by environmental conditions but also by the development of psychological self-regulation skills.

Social influences and commitment development

Motivation develops within social systems involving coaches, teammates, parents, and peers. Social support influences perceived competence, enjoyment, and persistence in football participation (Orosz & Mezo, 2015). Commitment emerges as an important outcome of motivational processes and reflects the willingness to invest effort in long-term development pathways. Research shows that commitment is influenced by perceived competence, enjoyment, social relationships, and the quality of coaching (Notario-Alonso et al., 2023). Positive social environments contribute to both individual motivation and team cohesion, highlighting the interaction between emotional competences and social competences in football development.

Developmental dynamics

Motivation and passion are dynamic and may fluctuate due to transitions between teams, changes in coaching staff, injuries, performance expectations, or personal development processes. Research suggests that adaptive motivational patterns are strengthened when players interpret challenges as opportunities for development rather than threats to competence (Dweck, 2006). Repeated experiences of progress, meaningful participation, and supportive social interaction contribute to stable engagement patterns and long-term commitment to football development.

1.2. Window of opportunities

A window of opportunity describes a period in development when a competence, or the components underlying it, develops disproportionately faster than at other times. Motivation and passion do not have a single narrowly defined sensitive period. They develop instead through several phases characterised by increased psychological plasticity, associated with changes in cognitive development, identity formation and social orientation, which influence how individuals interpret competence, effort and personal meaning in achievement contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

In early sport participation, motivation is strongly influenced by enjoyment, curiosity and perceived competence. Positive early experiences of play, exploration and social interaction contribute to intrinsic motivation and increase the likelihood of sustained participation (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Sarrazin et al., 2002).



Research on participation pathways indicates that early multi-sport experiences may support intrinsic motivation by providing varied competence experiences and reducing early performance pressure (Côté et al., 2009). What this asks of Stages 1 and 2 is less a curriculum than a climate: enough variety that competence is experienced in more than one way, and little enough pressure that it is experienced at all.

A particularly important developmental transition occurs during early adolescence. Athletes increasingly internalise external expectations and begin to integrate achievement-related experiences into their self-concept. Studies have identified significant age-related differences in motivational regulation around ages 13 to 14, suggesting qualitative developmental changes in how athletes perceive achievement, responsibility and personal goals (Nicholls, 1989; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Internalisation during this period influences whether motivation becomes more autonomous or more dependent on external validation, which places Stage 4 at the centre of this competence. The same experiences that produce a self-determined player at fourteen can produce one who plays for approval, and the difference lies largely in the environment rather than in the player.

The motivational climate created by coaches, parents and peers therefore matters most during adolescence. Environments that satisfy the psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are associated with stronger intrinsic motivation and more adaptive forms of passion (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 2003). Harmonious passion develops when participation becomes integrated into personal identity in a self-determined way, contributing to sustained engagement and long-term commitment.

Overall, motivation and passion appear particularly sensitive to environmental influence during phases characterised by identity development and changing social orientation. These transitions create opportunities for accelerated motivational development when athletes experience competence, autonomy and meaningful engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vallerand et al., 2003; Duckworth et al., 2007).

1.3. Correlation with other skills and competencies



Correlation with Emotional Competencies
Motivation and passion drive several emotional competencies. Motivated players sustain effort through difficulty, which is the core of perseverance and determination. Self-determined goals increase commitment, linking motivation to goal setting. Perceived competence feeds intrinsic motivation and mastery builds confidence. Engagement also supports attention, linking motivation to focus and mindfulness.

Correlation with Physical Skills
Physical development reflects how many sessions a player wants to attend. Endurance and strength depend on conditioning players see the point of and keep doing. Speed training requires motivation beyond fatigue, as sprint repetitions only help when performed at full intensity.

Correlation with Technical Abilities
Technical repetition continues only if the player wants to. Dribbling and feinting improve through chosen practice, while juggling shows motivation sustaining solitary repetition. A weaker foot improves through repetitions nobody enforces, so first touch depends on the player's own drive.

Correlation with Social Competencies
Motivated players engage more actively in team processes, so communication improves when players care about the group's outcome. Motivation spreads through the group, which makes cooperation depend on shared engagement. A player's effort also raises or lowers the engagement of those around them, so leadership shows in how far a player's own motivation lifts others.

Correlation with Cognitive Skills
Players motivated to learn search for solutions rather than waiting to be given them, so problem solving depends on motivation. Sustained engagement allows attention to be directed during learning, which supports quick decision making.

Correlation with Tactical Principles
Off-the-ball movement is the tactical principle most dependent on wanting to be involved, so mobility depends on a player's motivation. Offensive unity depends on interest as well: tactical instructions are absorbed only by a player who wants to understand why they were given.

1.4. Key learnings

- Motivation and passion influence how much effort players invest in learning and how consistently they engage in training over time.
- Intrinsic motivation increases the likelihood that players participate voluntarily, show curiosity and maintain engagement even without external rewards or pressure.
- The satisfaction of the psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness strengthens intrinsic motivation and supports long-term commitment.
- Players are more motivated when they experience improvement and perceive themselves as competent in relevant tasks.
- Appropriate challenge levels are important, as tasks that are too easy reduce engagement, while tasks perceived as too difficult can reduce perceived competence and motivation.
- Motivation develops through repeated positive experiences that connect effort with progress and enjoyment.
- Harmonious passion develops when players perceive the activity as personally meaningful and experience ownership of their development process.
- Excessive external pressure and constant evaluation can increase controlled motivation and may reduce enjoyment and long-term engagement.
- Motivation is influenced by how success and mistakes are interpreted. A focus on learning and improvement supports sustained engagement.
- Positive emotional experiences during training contribute to the development of long-term interest in the activity.
- Motivational climate influences how players approach challenges, effort and collaboration within the team.
- Players influence each other's motivation through shared enthusiasm, support and commitment.
- Social belonging and positive relationships within the team strengthen motivation and increase engagement.
- Motivation can fluctuate over time and is influenced by perceived progress, emotional experiences and environmental factors.
- Supportive feedback and encouragement can help maintain engagement during challenging phases.
- Meaningful goals can strengthen motivation by providing direction and reinforcing progress experiences.
- Motivation influences the willingness to practice, which indirectly contributes to the development of technical, tactical and physical skills.
- Coaches play an important role in shaping learning environments that support curiosity, initiative and sustained engagement.



1.5. From science to practice

Motivation and passion influence the willingness of players to engage in learning processes and invest effort over time. Scientific research shows that intrinsic motivation develops when players experience competence, autonomy and social belonging. When players perceive progress, experience meaningful challenges and feel connected to teammates, they are more likely to demonstrate initiative, curiosity and sustained engagement. Motivation is not a fixed trait but develops dynamically through interaction with the learning environment. The following stages translate scientific findings into age-appropriate developmental priorities for Motivation & Passion in football.

Stage 1
7-8 years



Enjoyment and curiosity

At this stage, motivation is strongly influenced by enjoyment, playfulness and positive emotional experiences. Children are naturally curious and engage in activities perceived as fun and interesting. Learning environments that allow exploration increase engagement and positive associations with football.

Shared enjoyment strengthens connections between teammates, while high engagement increases learning repetitions and supports basic technical abilities.

Stage 2
9-10 years



Interest and perceived competence

Players begin to develop a stronger awareness of their own abilities. Experiences of improvement and successful task completion strengthen perceived competence and motivation to continue practicing. Players become more willing to invest effort when they recognise progress.

Positive feedback and achievable challenges support continued engagement. Motivation supports regular participation in training and the stabilization of learning processes.

Stage 3
11-12 years



Personal relevance and commitment

Metacognition begins to emerge. Players increasingly reflect on their interests and develop preferences for specific activities or roles. Motivation becomes more stable when players perceive personal relevance in their engagement. Opportunities to take initiative and make small choices strengthen ownership of the learning process.

Players begin to support each other's development and recognise the value of shared effort, while increased commitment supports consistent engagement in training.

Stage 4
13-14 years



Responsibility and self-driven engagement

Players become more capable of regulating their own effort and engagement. Motivation is increasingly influenced by perceived responsibility and the desire to improve. Meaningful challenges and visible progress support continued engagement. Motivation becomes more closely connected to individual improvement goals.

Sustained engagement supports structured learning processes and contributes to increased training intensity.

Stage 5
15-16 years



Goal commitment and persistence

Players increasingly understand the connection between effort and improvement. Motivation is supported by meaningful goals and the perception that progress results from sustained practice. Players become more willing to invest effort over longer periods.

Shared commitment strengthens team cohesion and a positive training environment. From a performance perspective, sustained motivation increases deliberate practice and supports continued development.

Stage 6
17–18 years



Identity and long-term passion

Motivation becomes more strongly connected to personal identity and long-term engagement. Players increasingly understand why they invest effort and how football contributes to their development. Passion can develop when the activity is meaningful and consistent with their values.

Players may show initiative beyond structured training and responsibility for their own development. Stable motivation supports consistent effort, resilience and long-term engagement.

2. COACHES' BEHAVIOUR

2.1. Coaching style

2.1.1. Scientific grounding

Research consistently highlights the important role of coaches in shaping the motivational environment of athletes. Coaching behaviour influences how players interpret effort, competence, success and failure, and therefore strongly affects the quality of motivation and long-term engagement in sport (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Coaches influence motivation not only through instruction, but through the motivational climate they create in training and competition environments.

Self-Determination Theory suggests that athletes develop more self-determined forms of motivation when their psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are supported (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Coaching behaviours that provide meaningful choices, competence-based feedback and emotionally supportive relationships are associated with stronger intrinsic motivation, greater persistence and more adaptive learning behaviours (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005). Environments that allow players to experience ownership of their development process contribute to more stable engagement and long-term commitment.

Research in football indicates that mastery-oriented motivational climates are positively associated with autonomous motivation, enjoyment and lower levels of performance anxiety (Duda & Balaguer, 2007; Ureña-Lopera et al., 2020). Coaching approaches that emphasise effort, improvement and learning processes encourage athletes to interpret challenges as opportunities for development. Such climates support adaptive motivational patterns and contribute to sustained participation in sport.

Achievement motivation research further suggests that coaching behaviour influences how athletes define success and evaluate their own competence (Nicholls, 1989). When success is defined through improvement and learning rather than comparison with others, athletes are more likely to adopt mastery-oriented goals and demonstrate higher levels of engagement. Achievement goals therefore mediate the relationship between motivational processes and performance development (Hamoud et al., 2022).

The coach–athlete relationship represents an additional important factor influencing motivation. Positive relationships characterised by trust, emotional support and effective communication are associated with higher levels of self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and commitment (Jowett, 2007; Sulistiyo et al., 2022). Emotional intelligence and communication competence of coaches contribute to the development of supportive relationships, which influence athletes' motivation and engagement.

Research on passion suggests that harmonious passion develops when athletes experience autonomy and perceive their activity as consistent with their personal values (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2008). In contrast, environments characterised by excessive pressure, control or external rewards may contribute to more controlled forms of motivation, which are associated with lower wellbeing and less stable long-term engagement (Mladenović & Marjanović, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Overall, the scientific literature suggests that coaching styles supporting motivation and passion are characterised by autonomy-supportive communication, competence-oriented feedback, emotionally supportive relationships and a consistent focus on learning and development processes. Such environments increase the likelihood that players develop self-determined motivation and maintain long-term engagement in football.



2.1.2. Practical implications

Practically, this means that the coach creates a learning environment in which players experience competence, autonomy and belonging. Motivation develops when players feel that their effort leads to improvement, when they understand the purpose of learning activities and when they feel socially connected within the team.

A coaching style that supports Motivation & Passion includes:

Supporting perceived competence

- providing tasks that allow players to experience success and improvement
- adjusting difficulty levels to create appropriate challenges
- highlighting individual progress instead of only comparing players
- giving feedback that links effort to improvement
- recognizing learning progress over time
- creating situations in which players experience mastery

Supporting autonomy

- giving players age-appropriate choices within training activities
- encouraging players to try their own solutions
- involving players in problem-solving processes
- allowing space for creativity and initiative
- encouraging responsibility for individual development
- supporting ownership of the learning process

Supporting relatedness and belonging

- creating an environment in which players feel accepted and valued
- encouraging supportive interactions between teammates
- emphasizing shared effort and collective development
- showing interest in players as individuals
- strengthening positive relationships within the team
- promoting respectful communication

Emphasizing learning and improvement

- focusing feedback on effort and development
- reinforcing the connection between effort and progress
- normalizing mistakes as part of learning
- encouraging players to try new solutions
- supporting curiosity and exploration
- reducing fear of failure

Supporting meaningful engagement

- explaining the purpose of exercises
- connecting training content to match situations
- highlighting the relevance of skills for development
- encouraging reflection about improvement
- helping players recognise progress
- strengthening the perceived value of practice

Supporting positive emotional experiences

- creating enjoyable and engaging training environments
- varying learning activities to maintain interest
- encouraging enthusiasm and active participation
- reinforcing positive effort and commitment
- balancing challenge and enjoyment
- creating positive associations with learning processes

Supporting long-term engagement

- reinforcing consistent participation
- supporting players during phases of reduced motivation
- emphasizing long-term development instead of short-term results
- encouraging patience in development processes
- helping players maintain perspective during challenges
- strengthening commitment to continued learning

2.2. Choice of words

Coach language influences how players interpret effort, success, mistakes and improvement, and plays an important role in developing motivation and passion. Feedback emphasizing effort, progress and learning supports intrinsic motivation and engagement in challenging tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Language highlighting controllable factors such as effort, strategy and persistence strengthens perceived competence and encourages participation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Understanding that improvement is possible through effort supports initiative and curiosity (Dweck, 2006).

Self-Determination Theory emphasises that communication can support autonomy, competence and relatedness, which are essential for intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy-supportive language strengthens ownership and engagement (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), while reflection and problem solving increase involvement and responsibility (Reeve, 2012).

Achievement Goal Theory suggests that focusing on improvement and learning supports mastery-oriented motivation, while player comparison may reduce enjoyment and increase pressure (Nicholls, 1989; Ames, 1992). Motivation is stronger when mistakes are part of learning and feedback reinforces progress rather than only outcomes.

Supportive communication also contributes to harmonious passion by fostering encouragement, competence and meaning (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2008). Coaches therefore influence motivation through both training design and communication.

Language should reflect developmental stage. Younger players respond strongly to encouragement and enjoyment, while older players benefit from communication that strengthens ownership, responsibility and long-term engagement.

Stage 1
7-8 years



At this stage, motivation is strongly influenced by enjoyment and excitement.

Example tone:

- *"I love your energy - keep going!"*
- *"That looked really fun - try it again!"*
- *"Great effort, you are really exploring!"*
- *"Yes! Keep playing with courage!"*

Stage 2
9-10 years



Players are motivated when they feel they are improving and developing new abilities.

Example tone:

- *"You are getting better every time you try!"*
- *"Your effort is really paying off!"*
- *"I can see your progress - keep pushing!"*
- *"You are learning fast - keep enjoying the challenge!"*

Stage 3
11-12 years



Players begin to connect effort, improvement and personal satisfaction.

Example tone:

- *"Your hard work is making a real difference!"*
- *"Keep challenging yourself - you are growing!"*
- *"I love how committed you are to improving!"*
- *"Your effort is helping you become stronger!"*

Stage 4
13-14 years



Motivation grows when players feel responsible for their development.

Example tone:

- *"You are taking real ownership of your progress!"*
- *"Keep pushing your limits — you are improving!"*
- *"Your commitment is raising your level!"*
- *"Stay hungry to learn — you are developing well!"*

Stage 5
15-16 years



Players become motivated when effort connects to meaningful goals and development.

Example tone:

- *"Your dedication is building something strong!"*
- *"Keep investing in your growth!"*
- *"You are showing real commitment to improvement!"*
- *"Your work today strengthens your future performance!"*

Stage 6
17–18 years



Motivation becomes strongly connected to identity, ambition and long-term passion.

Example tone:

- *"Your passion for improvement is clearly visible!"*
- *"Keep striving to become the best version of yourself!"*
- *"Your commitment is driving your development!"*
- *"Stay ambitious and keep growing every day!"*

2.3. Body language

A coach's body language shows how much engagement, initiative and enjoyment are valued. Players read it closely in moments of uncertainty or challenge, and visible enthusiasm tells them that effort and exploration are welcome.

Eye Contact

- Maintain attentive eye contact when players show effort
- Use encouraging eye contact to reinforce initiative
- Include all players to signal that engagement is valued

Facial Expression

- Show visible enthusiasm when players engage actively
- Smile when players try new solutions or show initiative
- Avoid indifferent or disengaged expressions



Gestures

- Use encouraging gestures to reinforce effort and initiative
- Show positive reactions when players try new approaches
- Avoid gestures that signal boredom or disinterest

Posture

- Maintain an open and energetic posture during training
- Lean slightly forward to show interest and attention
- Avoid passive or disengaged body positioning

Positioning & Distance

- Move actively within the training environment
- Stay close enough to signal involvement and support
- Avoid distant positioning that signals detachment

When a coach's body language consistently communicates enthusiasm and enjoyment of the learning process, players are more likely to engage actively and develop a positive emotional connection to improvement. This strengthens intrinsic motivation.

3. TRAINING

THE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

of motivation from foundation to maturity:



7-8 years

1. Join in when the activity starts, without needing to be persuaded.
2. Try an activity, movement or position you have not done before.
3. Name one moment you enjoyed in the session and say what made it good.



9-10 years

1. Stay with the demanding version of a task instead of switching to easier ones.
2. Name something you got better at during the session, and what produced it.
3. Go back to a task you did not manage the first time.



11-12 years

1. Say what you are practising and what it is for.
2. Compare your performance only with your own earlier performance.
3. Keep working at the same level after a teammate does something better.



13-14 years

1. Say what a training task is for, or ask when you cannot.
2. Keep your effort at the same level across all repetitions of an exercise.
3. Come back to the next session at the same level after a bad game.



15-16 years

1. Choose part of your own training and say why you chose it.
2. Work across several sessions on a strength or weakness you identified.
3. Keep your football commitments alongside school, family and rest.



17-18 years

1. Name what your motivation depends on and what makes it drop.
2. Do something deliberate to lift your engagement on a day it is low.
3. Raise the level of the group through your own effort rather than by talking about it.

Training

7-8 years



3.1. Stage 1 (7-8 years)

3.1.1. Stage characteristics

Children are primarily motivated through enjoyment, curiosity, and positive emotional experiences. Motivation is strongly influenced by fun, movement, and playful interaction with others. At this stage, children engage when activities feel interesting and allow exploration without pressure or expectations. Positive feedback and encouraging environments strengthen the association between effort and enjoyment. Motivation can fluctuate quickly depending on how engaging and accessible the activity feels.

Children begin to experience that participation and trying are valuable in themselves. Early positive experiences contribute to the development of a basic willingness to participate and engage in activities.

3.1.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, motivation is primarily influenced by enjoyment and positive emotional experiences. Children engage in activities that feel interesting, playful, and socially rewarding. Positive early experiences contribute to the development of a basic willingness to participate and try. Experiencing enjoyment while being active strengthens the foundation for future motivation.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

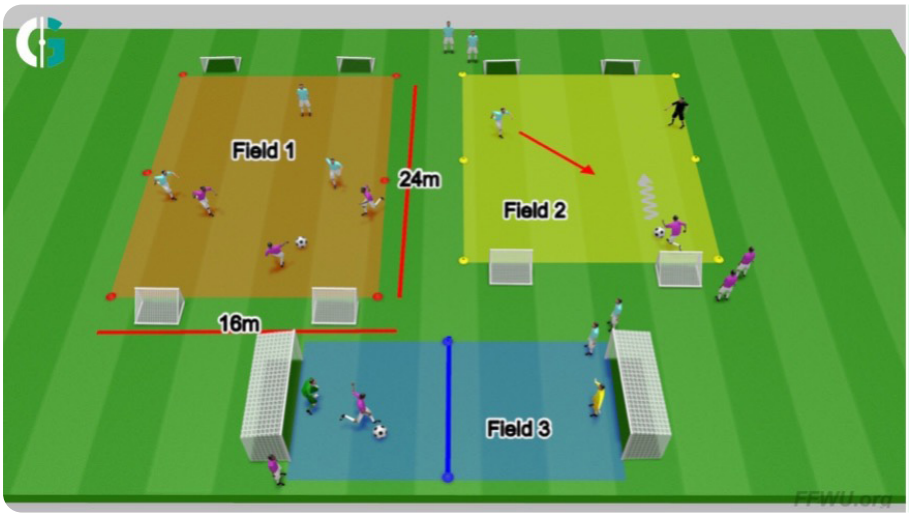
1. Join in when the activity starts, without needing to be persuaded.
2. Try an activity, movement or position you have not done before.
3. Name one moment you enjoyed in the session and say what made it good.

3.1.3. Coach insight

Motivation at this age is made of enjoyment, and enjoyment is not a reward for taking part but the reason for it. Children engage when activities are playful, varied and leave room to explore, and they judge football by how the session felt rather than by what they achieved in it. What gets praised here is taking part, not the outcome.

EXERCISE

FUN-BALL



Players	6+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	24 x 16 m
Equipment	3 balls, 3 bibs, 2 goals, 8 mini-goals, 18 cones
Duration	total: 26 min play: 6 x 3 min breaks: 1 min
Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Set up three fields.
- Divide players into 3 groups.
- Field one – Playing 3v3 with a focus on passing (max. 2 touches) on 4 goals.
- Field two – Dribbling with different feinting moves. First 2 rounds is dribbling with right foot, left foot, inside and outside, changing every 30 seconds. Afterwards players try out a new move every minute. Each round a new player is demonstrating a feinting move to inspire the other players.
- Field three – Shooting competition. Players shoot on 2 goals. Each player takes one shot and becomes the goalkeeper afterwards. After those two actions they rotate with their team partner.
- Groups play at each station twice.
- Playing time is always 3min.

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage laughter and enjoyment to **create a positive atmosphere**.
2. Reinforce that trying new things is part of the game and that **mistakes are normal**.
3. Give individual attention to players who are shy or hesitant, **correcting individually** while the others keep playing.

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players join in at each new field as soon as the rotation starts, without needing to be persuaded.	○ *What made you excited to participate in today's activities?* ○ *How did your teammates' enthusiasm affect you?* ○ *Which field did you want to start on, and why?*
2	Players try a feinting move on the dribbling field that they have not used before.	○ *What new skill or movement did you try today?* ○ *How did you feel when you attempted something new?* ○ *What other football actions would you like to explore?*
3	Players name one moment from the three fields they enjoyed, and say what made it good.	○ *Which moment of the session did you enjoy most?* ○ *What made that moment good?* ○ *When did you try something that did not work out?*

Training

9-10 years



3.2. Stage 2 (9-10 years)

3.2.1. Stage characteristics

Children increasingly understand that effort can influence improvement. Motivation is often connected to experiencing small successes and feeling capable of completing tasks. Enjoyment remains important, but children begin to accept that effort is sometimes required in order to achieve positive outcomes. Motivation can still decrease quickly when tasks feel too difficult or when immediate success is not visible.

Children start to experience satisfaction when they invest effort and notice progress. Encouragement and achievable challenges support the development of a more stable willingness to try, even when tasks require concentration or persistence.

3.2.2. Specific learning objectives

Motivation develops when children experience that trying leads to progress and small successes. Enjoyment remains an important factor, yet children begin to accept that effort is sometimes necessary in order to improve. Positive experiences with effort strengthen the willingness to try repeatedly.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

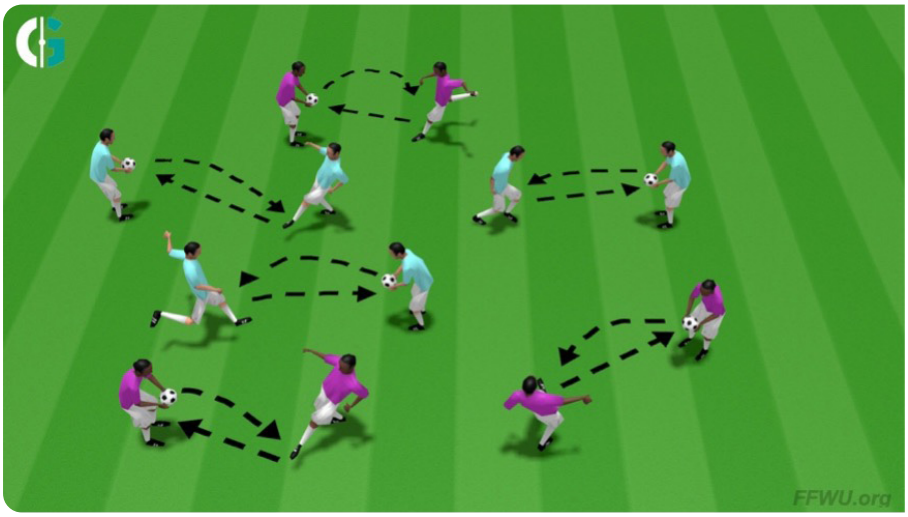
1. Stay with the demanding version of a task instead of switching to easier ones.
2. Name something you got better at during the session, and what produced it.
3. Go back to a task you did not manage the first time.

3.2.3. Coach insight

Children begin to notice that effort produces improvement, and the noticing is fragile. It survives when success comes often enough to be felt, and when the improvement is pointed out while it is still small. A task that is too easy teaches nothing; one that is too hard teaches that effort does not work. The useful range is narrow at this age.

EXERCISE

NUMBER JUGGLING WITH POSITIVE FEEDBACK



Players	4+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	flexible
Equipment	1 ball for 2 players
Duration	total: 13 min play: 10 min breaks: -
Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players pair up and perform number-juggling.
- Body parts are numbered. Right foot = 1, Left foot = 2, Right thigh = 3, Left thigh = 4
- One player throws the ball and tells the other player a number from 1-4. With the body part that has that number, the player returns the ball with the first touch.
- Always after 10 attempts, the partner provides positive feedback and suggestions for improvement.
- After both players have attempted 10 times, the players progress and tell each other two numbers.
- Rotate partners afterwards to diversify interactions.
- Variations:
  - Use letters instead of numbers.
  - Use female/male names to indicate left or right.
  - Assign different numbers to different body parts.

Coaching Tips

1. Model constructive feedback and encourage **specific praise** rather than general encouragement.
2. Make clear that **both giving and receiving feedback matter** for improvement.
3. Check that players understand how **encouragement keeps a partner going** when the task is hard.

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players stay with the harder body parts in the juggling task rather than asking for the easy numbers.	○ *Which version of the task was harder?* ○ *What made you want to switch to something easier?* ○ *Which number did your partner call that you least wanted?*
2	Players name something that improved across their ten attempts, and say what produced it.	○ *How did repetitions help you to get better, and why?* ○ *How did you notice your improvement during the activity?* ○ *What exactly changed between your first and last attempt?*
3	Players go back to the number they kept missing rather than moving on to another.	○ *Did you go back to the attempt that failed, or move on?* ○ *How did you encourage your partner after their attempts?* ○ *What impact did your encouragement have on them?*

Training

11-12 years



3.3. Stage 3 (11-12 years)

3.3.1. Stage characteristics

Children increasingly recognise the relationship between effort and improvement. Motivation becomes more stable when they experience that practice leads to progress. They begin to understand that development requires repeated engagement, even when activities are demanding. Social comparison and perceived competence can influence motivation more strongly at this stage.

Children become more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. Positive learning experiences strengthen the belief that effort contributes to development, which supports continued engagement in practice activities.

3.3.2. Specific learning objectives

Players increasingly understand the relationship between effort and improvement. Motivation becomes more stable when players recognise that practice contributes to development. They begin to accept that progress requires repeated engagement, even when improvement is not immediate. Recognizing improvement supports the development of a more consistent willingness to invest effort.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

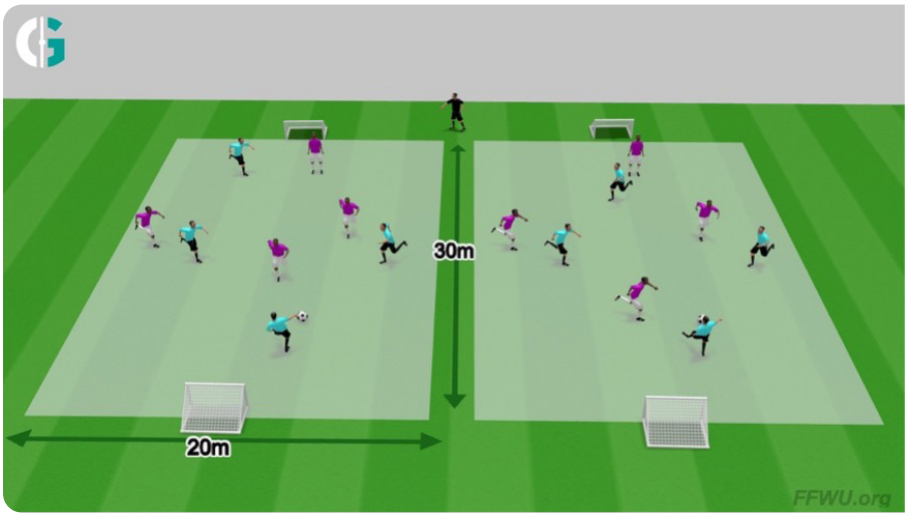
1. Say what you are practising and what it is for.
2. Compare your performance only with your own earlier performance.
3. Keep working at the same level after a teammate does something better.

3.3.3. Coach insight

Motivation becomes steadier once players see that repeated practice leads to improvement - and less steady because they now measure themselves against everyone else. Players who decide they are less able than their teammates disengage quietly rather than visibly. What protects them is having their own small improvements named, since progress they can see is the only comparison that helps.

EXERCISE

EXPLORATION DAY



Players	12+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	40 x 30 m
Equipment	2 balls, 16 cones, 4 mini-goals, 8 bibs
Duration	total: 37 min play: 6 x 4 min breaks: 2 min
Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players explore different technical skills in free play.
- Organise 2 parallel games to guarantee lots of touches and opportunities to try things out.
- Example for technical skills that are not practised regularly: backheel pass, rabona-cross/shot, bicycle kick, all feinting-moves like Zidane-turn.
- Players choose which special skills to practice and experiment with and collectively decide on 5 moves/skills.
- Each special move attempted counts like a goal, a successful special move that leads to a goal counts triple.
- Let players come up with their own moves.
- Encourage creativity and self-expression in skill development.

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage players to **set their own challenge** for each skill they explore.
2. Treat **failed attempts as part of exploring**, and ask players to encourage each other when attempts fail.
3. Demonstrate moves **only when players run out of ideas**, then discuss which skills they enjoyed and why.

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players say which of the five chosen skills they are practising, and what it is for in a game.	○ *What effort did you put into improving your skills today?* ○ *What were you practising, and what is it for?* ○ *Which of the skills did the group choose, and why that one?*
2	Players compare today's attempts at the new skill with their own earlier attempts, not with a teammate's.	○ *What kept you engaged during the exploration of skills?* ○ *How does what you managed today compare with the last time you tried it?*
3	Players keep working on the skill after a teammate performs it better than them.	○ *What did you do after someone did a skill better than you?* ○ *How did you help teammates when they faced challenges?* ○ *Which skill did you nearly give up on?*

Training

13-14 years



3.4. Stage 4 (13-14 Years)

3.4.1. Stage characteristics

Adolescents increasingly experience motivation as the ability to maintain effort across repeated attempts and different types of challenges. Motivation is influenced by the perceived relevance of activities and the opportunity to demonstrate competence. Emotional reactions to success and failure can influence engagement more strongly. Motivation becomes more stable when adolescents experience autonomy and understand the purpose of training tasks.

At this stage, motivation is strengthened when players experience that continuous effort contributes to improvement across different contexts. Opportunities to take responsibility for effort and engagement support the development of sustained motivation.

3.4.2. Specific learning objectives

Adolescents increasingly develop the ability to maintain effort across repeated attempts and different types of challenges. Motivation becomes more stable when players understand the relevance of training activities and experience opportunities to demonstrate competence. Emotional reactions to success or failure can influence engagement, but players increasingly learn to remain engaged across different situations.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

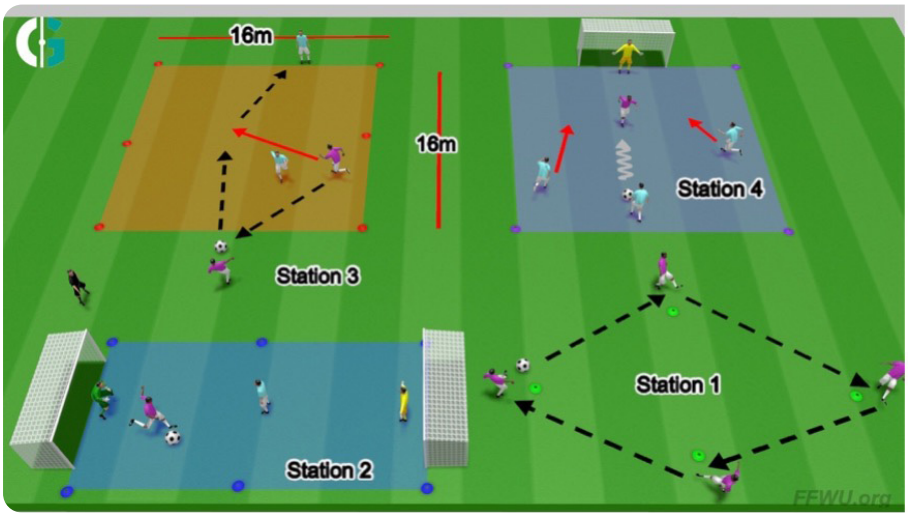
1. Say what a training task is for, or ask when you cannot.
2. Keep your effort at the same level across all repetitions of an exercise.
3. Come back to the next session at the same level after a bad game.

3.4.3. Coach insight

Adolescents invest effort when they understand why a task is being asked of them. An exercise whose purpose goes unexplained is experienced as an imposition, and emotional reactions to success and failure now carry further into the session than they did a year ago. Connecting the drill to the game is not a courtesy at this stage — it is the condition of engagement.

EXERCISE

EFFORT LEAGUE CHALLENGE



Players	16+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	50 x 40 m
Equipment	4 balls, 20 cones, 8 bibs
Duration	total: 25 min play: 4 x 4 min breaks: 2 min
Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players rotate stations every 4 min.
- Station 1 – Passing Diamond Challenge
  Four players combine in a passing diamond and try to complete as many successful passes as possible within 4 minutes.
- Station 2 – 1v1 Competition with Goalkeepers
  1v1 to score on two goals while the goalkeepers encourage and track goals before rotating.
- Station 3 – 1v1 Passing Square
  1v1 inside a square with outside support, aiming to complete as many passes as possible.
- Station 4 – 3v1 Combination Finishing Challenge
  3 players combine freely to create goal scoring opportunities and try to score as many goals as possible within 4 minutes.

Coaching Tips

1. Emphasise improvement **between repetitions rather than comparison between groups**.
2. Encourage players to maintain high effort **across all rounds** and to encourage one another actively.
3. Give the groups three questions to use independently **between rounds**: what helped us improve, where did we invest effort, and how did we support each other?

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players say what each station is for in a game, or ask before the rotation starts.	○ *What is this challenge for, in a game?* ○ *When did your group show the strongest commitment?* ○ *What helped your group stay focused?*
2	Players keep their effort at the same level across all four stations, including the last one.	○ *Which challenge required the greatest effort from you?* ○ *When did you decide to push yourself further?* ○ *Did your last station look like your first?*
3	Players return to the next station at the same level after one that went badly.	○ *How did you arrive at the station after the bad one?* ○ *How did you help your teammates stay motivated?* ○ *When did the group energy help you continue trying?*

Training

15-16 years



3.5. Stage 5 (15-16 years)

3.5.1. Stage characteristics

Adolescents increasingly connect motivation with personal identity, interests, and individual strengths. Motivation becomes more self-directed and less dependent on external rewards or recognition. Players begin to understand how their individual qualities contribute to their development and performance. Personal relevance and perceived meaning of activities strongly influence engagement.

Motivation is strengthened when players take ownership of their development and experience that investing effort in their strengths contributes to long-term improvement. Interest-driven practice and self-initiated engagement support the development of passion for improvement.

3.5.2. Specific learning objectives

Motivation becomes increasingly self-directed and connected to personal interests, strengths, and identity as a player. Players recognise that their individual qualities influence development and performance. Intrinsic motivation is strengthened when players take ownership of their development and experience personal meaning in practice activities.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

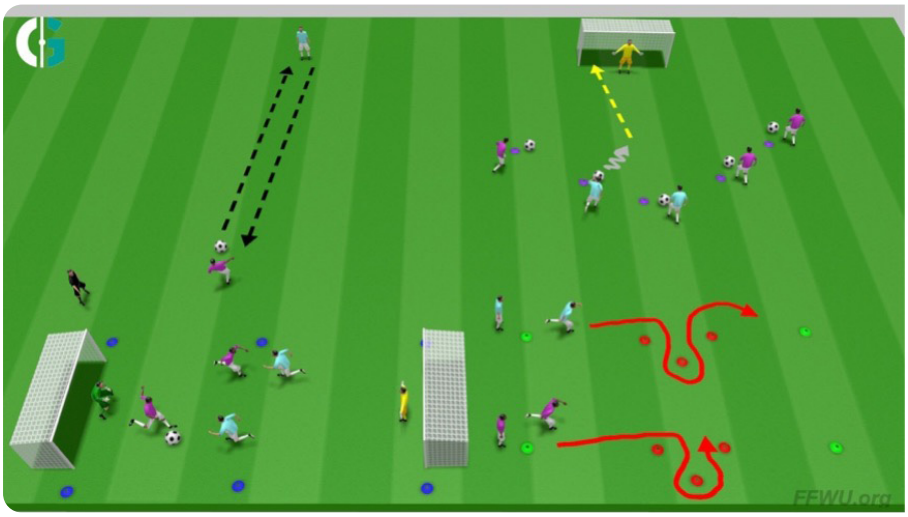
1. Choose part of your own training and say why you chose it.
2. Work across several sessions on a strength or weakness you identified.
3. Keep your football commitments alongside school, family and rest.

3.5.3. Coach insight

Motivation becomes self-directed here, and self-direction cannot be handed over in instructions. Players invest more when they own part of their development, and when what makes them individually good is treated as something to build on rather than as a deviation from a model. A player whose particular strength is never named will go looking for somewhere it is.

EXERCISE

MY UNIQUE PERFORMANCE CODE



Players	4+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	flexible
Equipment	all bibs, cones and balls available, for players to choose freely
Duration	total: 60 min play: 60 min breaks: -
Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- As a Player Challenge before the training session, players use the performance code to identify their 3 biggest strengths as well as 1 area that needs clear improvement.
- In training, players briefly present their individual performance codes, sharing their strengths and improvement area with teammates.
- Based on the skills they want to develop further, players decide independently whether they want to work individually or together with teammates.
- Over the next four training sessions, players work repeatedly on their selected strengths and improvement area and observe how continuous effort influences their development on and off the pitch.

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage players to choose strengths that are **meaningful for their own development**, giving examples only if they are stuck.
2. Reinforce **ownership of the improvement process** across all four sessions.
3. Observe the activities players choose and **reflect with them afterwards** on whether they worked.

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players choose which strength or improvement area to work on in this session, and say why they chose it.	○ *Which strength did you choose to develop further?* ○ *Why did you choose that one?* ○ *How did you take initiative to improve it?*
2	Players work across the four sessions on the area they identified in their performance code.	○ *What progress did you notice through repeated practice across the four sessions?* ○ *Which part of working on your strengths motivated you?*
3	Players keep the four sessions of independent work going alongside school, family and rest.	○ *How did you fit this work around school etc.?* ○ *What did you have to move?* ○ *Did anything get squeezed out?*

Training

17-18 years



3.6. Stage 6 (17-18 years)

3.6.1. Stage characteristics

Young athletes increasingly experience motivation as a stable personal characteristic that influences their behaviour across different situations. Motivation becomes connected to personal standards, long-term ambitions, and commitment to continuous development. Players recognise that motivation can fluctuate depending on context, pressure, and situational demands, but also understand that effort can be regulated intentionally.

Motivation and passion are expressed through consistent engagement in training and competition, independent of external rewards or short-term outcomes. Players increasingly take responsibility for maintaining their own level of motivation and positively influencing the motivational climate of the team. Personal standards and commitment to development support sustained engagement in performance contexts.

3.6.2. Specific learning objectives

Motivation becomes increasingly stable across situations and integrated into personal performance identity. Players recognise that motivation can fluctuate depending on context and situational demands. The ability to maintain engagement across different performance situations becomes an important factor for development and performance. Players increasingly take responsibility for their own motivation and influence the motivational climate of the team.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

1. Name what your motivation depends on and what makes it drop.
2. Do something deliberate to lift your engagement on a day it is low.
3. Raise the level of the group through your own effort rather than by talking about it.

3.6.3. Coach insight

Motivation stops being a state a player is in and becomes something they manage. It still fluctuates with context, pressure and form — that does not change — but a player at this stage can notice the drop and act on it rather than wait for it to lift. What separates them is not how motivated they feel but what they do on the days they do not.

EXERCISE

MY GAME DRIVE



Players	8+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	half field
Equipment	1 ball, 2 goals, 8 cones, 10 bibs
Duration	total: 63 min play: 5 x 10 min breaks: 2 min
Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- As a Player Challenge before the training session, players reflect on game situations in which they feel highly motivated and situations in which they struggle to maintain motivation.
- In training, players share their individual game drive by describing when they feel most engaged and when maintaining motivation is more difficult.
- Based on these situations, players organise game-related training situations independently and observe how motivation and passion influence their behaviour and performance.
- Variations:
  - Use two fields to recreate more situations, yet with reduced complexity.

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage players to identify the situations that **most influence their motivation**.
2. Reinforce responsibility for maintaining engagement **independently of the game context**.
3. Give each player a **limited time** to recreate their game situation, and use several sessions for this purpose.

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players name the game situations their motivation depends on, and the ones that make it drop.	○ *In which game situations do you feel highly motivated?* ○ *When is it difficult to maintain motivation?* ○ *What does your motivation depend on?*
2	Players do something deliberate in the recreated game situation to lift their engagement.	○ *What did you do the last time you did not feel like training?* ○ *Which situations show your passion for the game?* ○ *What did you change to lift your engagement?*
3	Players raise the level of the recreated situation through their own effort rather than by talking about it.	○ *Did you raise the level by what you did or what you said?* ○ *How do you influence the team's motivation in the game?* ○ *When do teammates benefit from your energy?*

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