



Getting More Intensity from Your Players

By Todd M. Kays, Ph.D.

Sport Psychologist

One of the more common concerns of coaches at all levels is not being able to get more intensity from their players. Many times this is the one issue that frustrates coaches more than any other – when their athletes are not displaying any sort of desire or intensity in practice or competition. When coaches are seeing or sensing this lack of intensity, there are certain things to assess and/or change to raise the intensity.

1. Address Perception of Intensity Directly: First, ask other coaches if they are picking up on a lack of intensity. Most of the time, they see the same thing. If so, address it with the players and/or captains directly and see if they can provide feedback as to the reasons for the lower intensity. If changes are made and the lack of intensity still remains, more action must be taken.
2. Assess Possibility of Staleness or Burnout: Lack of intensity can indicate the team, individual players or even the coaching staff may be tired. Sports today are year round, sometimes in the same sport and sometimes not. Either way, it is easy to become stale. Take a day of fun with your players and participate in teambuilding away from the sport or simply make the decision to take a day off. Examples of teambuilding might be bowling, swimming, or playing dodge ball.
3. Create High-Paced Competitive Drills in Practice: Set time aside in practice for players to have short, highly competitive drills with one another where there is a cost and benefit to winning and losing. For example, a lacrosse team can see who can make the most shots with only a certain amount of balls and time. These drills can help break the monotony of day to day practice routines and raise the level of intensity.
4. Create A Pattern-Interrupt: Break the typical routine of practice by conducting activities in a different order or sequence. Also, if players have low concentration levels, break this pattern by having them do something - such as hard sprints – to “wake them up.”
5. Hold Tryouts Again: If team or player intensity is not changing after direct discussion or the things mentioned above, hold tryouts again where younger and/or less experienced players have a chance to break into the starting line up.

Many times “starters” can become complacent and feel they “own” the role and that can bring down intensity. Tryouts always raise intensity.

6. Bring in Former Player, Motivational Speaker, or Sport Psychologist: Vary the routine up by bringing someone in from the outside. These individuals bring a fresh look and different perspective and sometimes can create energy simply because of a different face and voice.

Coach Hard, Coach Fun, Coach Well!