



51 Ways To Motivate Your Athletes In The Offseason

(FROM ACTUAL STRENGTH COACHES)



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What is Motivation?

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“People say that motivation doesn’t last. Well, hygiene doesn’t either. That’s why we bathe every day.”

- Zig Ziglar

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We collected 100 tips and tactics from actual strength coaches to help kickstart your offseason. Every human sometimes struggles to find motivation. That is why we’re here to help! We also want to give a special thanks for the TeamBuildr customers that contributed to the majority of this list. We’ve identified them with the  symbol.

Warning: Some of these (like #41) might give you chills.



1. Stay Positive

"I like to stay positive at all times. Making sure they know that I am seeing more of the good things they are doing helps them become more confident in the weight room."

Matt Walker, Asst. S&C Coach at Arcadia University

2. Curls For The Girls

"With a group of younger basketball guys, I tell them if they work hard they can do curls. Works every time!"

Mylan Fairmont, St. Francis Xavier University

3. The Point System

"We use a point system where athletes can earn points for participating and earn bonus points for extra work that I designate for them. It's hard to cheat a point system."

Justin Gumm, S&C Coordinator at Madison East High School

4. T-Shirt For Attendance

"We give a shirt for 95% attendance per month of the off-season (basically not missing more than 1 workout per month)."

Jason Marucco, Head Football Coach at Greater Latrobe High School



5. Focus On The Relationship

“Building relationships and communicating positively and constructively. Most people respond better in general to positive and constructive communication.”

Tony Marshall, S&C at Middlesex University

6. Create A New Sport



“Coaches draft teams. Develop a point system for workout competitions, grades, community service, etc. Winning team name goes on a plaque in the locker room.”

Jerold Gaitan, Head Powerlifting Coach at Weimer High School

7. Focus On Mental Imagery

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I try to give incentives, challenges, competition and mental imagery (see yourself raising the trophy - wearing the ring. Almost have to trick kids into working these days.

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Michael Rankin, Head S&C Coach at Drexel University



8. Comparative Assessment

“I use a lot of testing standards. I have numbers for each test and age group to show the athletes where they are compared to other athletes in their age/sport.”

Chris Wychock, Owner at Capital Performance Training

9. Tough Love

“We will sometimes ‘call out’ athletes that don’t show up via a weekly list that is posted on both my office doors and is also emailed to our senior leaders.”

Tyler Nichols, Head Football Coach at Kewanee High School

10. The Champions Belt

“Captains draft 4 platoons and gain points for attendance, new maxes, competitions, etc. Platoon Captain gets to rock the belt each week!”

Ted Dorrell, Head Football Coach at Little Axe Football

11. Accountability Buddies

“I teach and instill accountability to their team from day 1. During break they have workout buddies that they stay in touch and encourage each other.”

Sandy Kriezel, Head Tennis Coach at Cal State - Los Angeles



12. Office Politics

“I've started a policy that gives teams with the highest percentage of athletes who do the off season program priority scheduling.”

Chris Wychock, Owner at Capital Performance Training

13. Leverage Numbers

“Assess and re-assess with quantifiable measurements. Seeing where they are and where they need to be will give athletes that want it bad enough all the intrinsic motivation they need.”

Kyle Jean, Owner at Pinnacle Performance

14. Playing Other Sports

“We encourage our athletes to play other sports. We have noticed when our athletes see coaches supporting them at their games outside of football it builds the relationship in a positive way.”

AJ Parnell, Head Football Coach at Lake Washington High School



15. Know Their Goals

“I make sure I know their individual goals and make sure they always remember that goal.”

Alex Puskarich, S&C Coordinator at Prospect Training Academy

16. Us vs. Them



“I have them visualize lining up against the opponent the 1st game of the season and think about how hard that opponent worked in the offseason. I then ask, ‘Truthfully, do you think that you outworked your opponent?’”

Steve Efantis, Football Coach at Chevy-Chase Bethesda High School

17. The Whiteboard



“Once a week I put up a weekly challenge for all of the players. Everybody's score goes up on a whiteboard. It gets their competitive juices going.”

Steve Efantis, Football Coach at Chevy-Chase Bethesda High School

18. The Fundamentals



“We stress and emphasize form and technique with a ton of positive reinforcement. We are trying to build trust with strength.”

Aaron Hutter, Head Softball Coach at Mt. Pleasant Junior High



19. Talent vs. Hard Work

“We tell our young athletes that talent will only take you so far. It's not the ones with talent that always succeed but the ones with talent and hard work

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Joey DeBellis, Owner at BodyTech

20. Coach Mac's Big Board

“We use an offseason competition to provide peer motivation & accountability. After drafting teams, I grade each workout then have daily and weekly competitions and post it on a big board for everyone to see.”

Ron McKeefery, Head Strength Coach at Eastern Michigan University

21. Explaining The Philosophy

“Focus on building intrinsic motivation by explaining to the athletes why you have them do what you do. Once they understand how it will help them, you will have a much easier time getting them to buy in.”

Jacob Behara, Performance Specialist at Michael Johnson Performance



22. Dog Tags

“We had anodized aluminum dog tags in the school colors. I bought the dog tags in bulk and it was cheap and easy.”

John Brown, Head Football Coach at Colonial Forge High School

23. Campus Run

“Prior to Thanksgiving break and spring break, all out-of-season teams meet at 6am and we compete in a campus run made up of 20 exercises. The energy is off the chart that day.”

Matt Nein, Head Strength Coach at Salisbury University

24. Weekly Point System

“Create weekly challenges and assign points to specific exercises each week with goal weights for each athlete. Reward athletes and teams accordingly.”

Mike Volkmar, Head Strength Coach at The Peddie School

25. Comprehensive Awards

“Divide into teams with a point system for attendance, competitions, and character awards. Make sure to reward with athletes’ choice.”

Travis Osborne, Head Strength Coach at North Valley High School



26. Red Zone

“We use what we call the Red Zone - at the end of every workout, we do a competition of some sort and record the time/rep count on a whiteboard in the weight room so every player knows what everyone else did.”

Dan Ellis, Head Football Coach at Great Valley High School

27. Embrace Social Media

“We have our players use social media like Instagram and Facebook and post their workouts there. By doing so, they can help inspire each other.”

Sebastian Brinkenfeldt, Fitness Consultant at Täby Flyers (Sweden)

28. Lifter Of The Month

“Issue a lifter of the month certificate to a player and post it in the weightroom. The team leaders and coaches vote for a player each month that is consistent & works their butt off in the gym.”

**Justin Folkwein
Football Strength & Conditioning at Avon High School**



29. Group Progression

“Set them up in workout groups based on needs rather than chronological age or position. This way you can program for specific regressions or implements based on the needs of the athletes in that group.”

Matt Busacca, Meridian Health and Fitness

30. Getting On The Playing Field

“Usually the motivation is the desire to become better...stronger, faster, quicker. The players want to get onto the varsity field!”

Frank Robinson, Head Football Coach at White Hall High School

31. Get Outside The Comfort Zone

“NASCAR offseason is short, so I try to do is get my athletes to compete in other events. For example a half marathon, or a different type of racing event.”

Ryan von Rueden, Strength Coach for Kasey Kahne Racing Team

32. Combine Testing

“I have found that 1RM and combine testing helps keep athletes motivated in the off-season. It creates a little completion not only against one another but against themselves.”

Brian Torres, Strength + Conditioning Coordinator at Tabor Academy



33. Show Them The Data

“I've always informed my athletes about their performance through data. The data help gives them purpose behind their work on the off season.”

Tony Hoffman, BMX Performance Coach

34. Fun Friday

“My favorite way of trying to keep my athletes engaged is Fun Friday. I get them to do tug of war, tire flips, uphill racing, partner (Fireman) carries, army and marine like drills, something that gets their mind off the weight room.”

Amer Nahhas, Personal Trainer at Lifetime Fitness

35. Keep It Candid

“I inform my athletes that the offseason is the opportune season to get better because when you are not preparing your competition is. Win the workout to be at the top.”

Justin Taylor, Lifetime Training



36. Assign A Mentor

"I tell my athletes to essentially shadow someone that's a better lifter/working harder than them in order to grow."

Ariel Parker, LSU

37. Investing = Return On Investment

"Have them understand what it means to build up that "work savings account." Because it's only when their account reaches a certain level can they "afford" to be disappointed in the shortcomings of their goals if they are not met. If they have put in the work, every game during the season should feel like, 'pay day!'"

Blair Wagner, Strength and Conditioning at University of Washington

38. Create A Fun Environment

"I want an atmosphere that is energetic, fun, and something they can look forward to throughout the week whether it be through the programming, music, etc."

Tyler Bohlke, S&C Coach at Adel DeSoto Minburn High School

39. Strongman Competition

"Once a week I put up a weekly challenge like the 90 meter Prowler or 30 meter Farmer's Walk for all of the footy players. Everybody's score goes up on a whiteboard."

Shaun Trainor, Owner at Project Warrior



40. Strength GPA

 “I use a STRENGTH GPA (that works like an academic GPA) to motivate progress. This gives a STRENGTH to weight coefficient that allows all students to compete for the highest score.” 

Chris Morland, Head Strength and Conditioning Coach
Cardinal Gibbons High School

41. Share The Load

“During off season workouts 1 person was responsible for carrying a 35 lb. rock to the workout. At the end of the fall I named an MVP of the off-season. That person addressed the team. They were then handed a sledgehammer and smashed the rock. Everyone then took a piece with them. The message was it is easier when everyone shares the load rather than 1 person carrying it.”

Steve Smith, Head Strength Coach at Lynchburg College

42. Shed Light On The Competition

“I try to use other teams as motivation. I explain how hard they are working and how many hours they are putting in to get my team to gauge themselves.”

Matt Bruce, Owner at Bruce Barbell and member of BrUTE Strength



43. The Communicator

“Each team is different and we mold the offseason around the input from the team leaders. Kids these days want WWE belts instead of hard hats, Drake instead of Rocky music. We try to win the kid and the motivation will come with time invested. Giving some rah rah speech means nothing unless the kids feel you have their best interest at heart.”

Michael Cano, Owner at ONEighty Athletics

44. Sincere, Unique Relationships

“When the rubber hits the road, you motivate young people by forming sincere, unique relationships. You have to make a human connection and gain an athlete’s trust. Once you do that, they’ll do anything you ask.”

Mark Asanovich, Head S&C Coach at Minnetonka High School

45. Support The Athletes Outside The Weight Room

“Going to their games is crucial. I love watching our athletes compete and they appreciate it when they see me in the stands and I compliment them on their performance the next day.”

Darnell Clark, Director of S&C at Charlotte Country Day School



46. Learn What Makes Them Tick

“You have to get to know each athlete as a person and learn what makes them tick. Whether it's wanting to move on to the next level, getting noticed for hard work, or living up to an older sibling's legacy, each athlete responds to their own motivational hot button.”

Rich Lansky, Head Strength Coach at Manatee High School (FL)

47. Attention & Honesty

“Athletes must know they have our full attention and honesty in the weight room. This means giving continuous feedback and following every criticism with something positive. Athletes understand I'm hard on them because I know they have great potential, and I tell them as much.”

Carol Happ, Head Strength Coach at Lawrence North High School

48. Evaluate & Test. Always

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“Do not ignore evaluation and testing. It's a great way to set the bar or to re-calibrate an athlete's off season motivation.”

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Jeff Gibbs, Owner & Strength Coach
Gibbs Performance Training



49. Unlock Self-Motivation

“My motivation is different for my athletes, in that it's a private gym. I tell them they don't HAVE to be here; they committed to putting in the individual work when others don't, and they choose to show up. If they're here I expect them to work, or I can decide not to work with them anymore if necessary. Motivation usually takes care of itself!”

Bryan Marlborough, Owner & Athlete Performance Coach at
Complete Strength

50. Display Results

“Tweet or instagram screenshots of all the testing results and leaderboards. Kids love seeing their name on stuff like that. Use the improvement - not just ranking - as a results so it doesn't just always show the 10 strongest guys.”

Chad Frigon, Head Football Coach and PE Teacher at
Liberty High School

51. There Are Still Games To Play

“Create "game day" situations each week for guys to improve on. Designating time every week for performance testing to give guys a chance each week to improve. We train hard during the week and have a game day on Friday.”

Jeremy Weeks, Director of Athletic Performance at
Jesuit College Prep of Dallas