

The Stick vs. The Carrot

Two ways to motivate yourself without losing confidence, focus, or love for the game



The Stick: Pressure-Based Motivation

The stick is the critical voice that tries to push you forward through pressure, fear, or shame. It can sound like motivation because it creates urgency, but over time it often leads to tension, frustration, and harsh self-talk.

In soccer, the stick may make you feel like you should perform better immediately. In reality, it can make mistakes feel bigger, make learning harder, and make it easier to become upset with yourself or your teammates.

Common “stick” thoughts

- Work harder!
- Run faster!
- Play better!
- Give more effort!

What to notice

- Am I becoming focused or frustrated?
- Am I improving, or attacking myself?
- Is this making me a better teammate?





The Carrot: Encouragement-Based Motivation

The carrot is the encouraging voice that helps you keep going without tearing yourself down. It may feel slower at first because it gives you room to breathe, reset, and learn. But it usually helps you go further because you feel supported instead of defeated.

Using the carrot does not mean avoiding effort. It means challenging yourself with patience and respect. You can still work hard, take responsibility, and improve while speaking to yourself in a way that helps you stay steady.

Helpful “carrot” thoughts

- You’ve got this.
- Keep going.
- You are getting better.
- It’s okay to have an off day.
- I am still learning.

Try this reframe

- Stick: “I messed up.”
- Carrot: “That was a mistake. I can reset.”
- Stick: “I’m not good enough.”
- Carrot: “I’m still learning, and practice helps.”

Practice for this week

When you notice a stick thought, pause and rewrite it as a carrot thought. The goal is not to be easy on yourself. The goal is to motivate yourself in a way that helps you keep improving.

