



Goal Setting

Goal setting is a hugely powerful technique that can yield strong returns in all areas of your life.

At its simplest level the process of setting goals and targets allows you to choose where you want to go in life. By knowing what you want to achieve, you know what you have to concentrate on and improve, and what is merely a distraction. Goal setting gives you long-term vision and short-term motivation.

By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure and take pride in the achievement of those goals. You can see forward progress in what might previously have seemed a long pointless grind.

By setting goals you can:

- Achieve more
- Improve performance
- Improve the quality of your training
- Increase your motivation to achieve
- Increases your pride and satisfaction in your performance
- Improve your self-confidence

Research (Damon Burton, 1983) has shown that people who use goal-setting effectively:

- suffer less from stress and anxiety
- concentrate better
- show more self-confidence
- perform better
- are happier with their performances

Goal Setting Helps Self-Confidence

By setting goals, and measuring their achievement, you are able to see what you have done and what you are capable of. The process of achieving goals and seeing their achievement gives you the confidence and self-belief that you need that you will be able to achieve higher and more difficult goals.

Providing that you have the self-discipline to carry it through, goal setting is also relatively easy. The following section on goal setting will give you effective guidelines to help you to use this technique effectively.

Deciding Your Goals

Your Commitment to the Sport

The first step in setting sporting goals is to decide your level of commitment to your sport. If you want nothing more than a bit of fun every now and again, then you should have different goals from someone who has decided to dedicate his or her life to achieving excellence in the sport.

This decision about commitment will allow you to assess whether you 'own' the goals towards which you are currently working - do you want to achieve at this level, or are you being pushed by your parents or coach into a daily grind which you are not enjoying?

Skills to be Mastered

Once you have decided your level of commitment to the sport, the next stage is to analyze the sport. Work out the skills that you will need to have mastered to attain the level you want to reach within the sport. Understand what lies behind the performances exhibited by people operating at that level in the sport.

Your Goals in Life

Before you actually set any sporting goals, it is worth considering what your life goals are, so that you can further assess your commitment to the sport in the context of your relationships, ongoing education, and other facets of your life.

Just for Athletes

by Dr. Richard K. Stratton

Goal Setting: The Concept

We often hear a lot of talk about goals and goal setting. At the beginning of the season coaches are often asked "What are your goals for your team this year, coach?" This is certainly a valid question even if it is not stated correctly; that is, the goals should be the team's goals, not the coach's goals for the team. But why do we even use goals? Setting goals has at least three purposes:

1. setting goals **enhances motivation**, preferably focusing on internal motivation;
2. setting goals encourages athletes (and coaches) to **develop new skills and strategies** to improve performance; and,
3. setting goals helps **focus attention** on the task one hopes to accomplish.

Before moving on to the actual process, we need to discuss the various types of goals that one might want to accomplish. First are the time-line related goals.

Basically there are two types of goals in this category, although they are often referred to by various names. One is the **long-term** goal, also referred to as the ideal or ultimate goal. In sports, this is typically the goal set to be achieved by the end of the season. For a team it might be to win a league championship or reach a certain win-loss record. For an individual athlete it might be to have a .325 batting average or swim a 26 second 50m freestyle. Sometimes we talk about even more distant long-term goals, such as becoming a professional athlete or qualifying for the Olympics. The other type of goal is the **short-term** goal, also referred to as an action, momentary, or situational goal. These are the specific goals that are the stepping stones which lead us up the path to the long-term goal. Coaches focus on short-term goals as they plan each practice session and prepare their team for an upcoming game or meet.

Another way to describe types of goals is to address what one wants to accomplish. Here we are talking about **mastery** goals and **competitive** goals. Mastery goals, sometimes referred to as task oriented goals, focus on learning to perform skills.

Unlike competitive goals, mastery goals are self-referenced. That is, athletes compare their current performance to their own previous performances with self-improvement being the goal. One of the nice things about mastery goals is that the athletes themselves are responsible for success or failure to achieve these goals.

Competitive goals, sometimes referred to as ego oriented goals, focus on outcomes, typically winning. These goals involve social comparison, that is, comparing an athlete's or team's performance against that of another athlete or team.

While there is nothing wrong with wanting to win, one problem with competitive goals is that it is possible to achieve a competitive goal, winning, without playing well. Another major problem with competitive goals is that an athlete or team does not have as much control over success or failure because they cannot control the performance of the opposition. Thus it is possible to perform your best but not accomplish a competitive goal.

Although there is not an absolute answer to this problem, the best strategy seems to be to focus primarily on mastery goals and secondarily on competitive goals. Achieving mastery goals will likely lead to also accomplishing competitive goals.