



How Far Ahead Should an Athlete Look?

Effective goal setting entails setting long-term and short-term goals; these goals will identify where the athlete is going and how they are going to get there. When planning a vacation, you often think about dream destinations. Where would you go if you had unlimited funds and abilities... Egypt, the Caribbean, Europe? As with traveling and many other aspects of life it is fun to dream. In sport, it is also fun and important to dream. Dream goals allow you to project years into the future without any limits. For example, for many athletes making the Olympic Team is a dream goal.

Athletes need to progress from a dream goal to a long-term goal. Long-term goals are typically one season to numerous seasons down the road; as in the road trip analogy, this goal is the destination. One way to determine a good long-term goal would be to have swimmers ask themselves the question “where do I want to be at the end of the season or the end of high school or college?” Examples of the answer to this question can be in terms of having an improved streamline by the end of the season, a goal time, making a specific time standard, or earning a spot on a junior or senior national team.

In order to make the long-term goal seem less daunting, short-term goals are set. Short-term goals are set for shorter lengths of time than long-term goals, usually between two weeks and a month. Short-term goals serve as stepping-stones for the long-term goals. Setting short-term goals allow one to monitor success towards the long-term goals. A good question to have swimmers ask themselves is “Where do I want to be at the end of this month?”

Finally, short-term goals can also often feel far off therefore something more within reach is needed to maintain focus and motivation. For these reasons it is also important to set daily goals. Daily goals are to be set every day in practice and in competition. Setting effective daily goals will help motivate and bring higher intensity to training. Daily goals can be set for both physical training and psychological skill development. A good question for swimmers to ask themselves is “why am I getting in the water today?”