

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. By setting goals you can:

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

Research 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.

Deciding Your Goals

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 really want to achieve at this level, do you have the self-belief?

Skills to be Mastered

Once you have decided your level of commitment you can 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 career, relationships, ongoing education, and other facets of your life.

Setting Goals Effectively

The way in which you set goal strongly affects their effectiveness.

Before you start to set goals, you should have set the background of goal setting by:

- understanding your commitment to the sport
- understanding the level you want to reach within the sport
- knowing the skills that will have to be acquired and the levels of performance that will be needed
- know where this will fit into your overall life goals

General Guidelines

The following broad guidelines apply to setting effective goals:

- **Positive Statement:** express your goals positively: 'To execute this technique perfectly' is a much better goal than 'don't make this stupid mistake'
- **Be Precise:** if you set a precise goal, putting in dates, times and amounts so that achievement can be measured, then you know the exact goal to be achieved, and can take complete satisfaction from having completely achieved it.
- **Set Priorities:** where you have several goals, give each a priority. This helps you to avoid feeling overwhelmed by too many goals, and helps to direct your attention to the most important ones.
- **Write goals down** to avoid confusion and give them more force.
- **Keep Operational Goals Small:** Keep the goals you are working towards immediately (i.e. in this session) small and achievable. If a goal is too large, then it can seem that you are not making progress towards it. Keeping goals small and incremental gives more opportunities for reward. Today's goals should be derived from larger goals.

Important Points

A number of general principles should be noted about goal setting:

Set Performance, not Outcome Goals

This is *very* important. You should take care to set goals over which you have as much control as possible - there is nothing as dispiriting as failing to achieve a personal goal for reasons beyond your control such as poor judging, bad weather, injury, excellence in other athletes, or just plain bad luck. Goals based on outcomes are extremely vulnerable to things beyond your control.

If you base your goals on personal performance targets or skills to be acquired, then you can keep control over the achievement of your goals and draw satisfaction from them. For example, you might achieve a personal best time, but still be disqualified as a result of a poor judging decision. If you set an outcome goal of being in the top three, then this will be a defeat. If you set a performance goal of achieving a particular time, then you will have achieved the goal and can draw satisfaction and self-confidence from its achievement.

Another flaw is where outcome goals are based on the rewards of winning, whether these are financial or are based on the recognition of being a winner. In early stages these will be highly motivating factors, however as they are achieved, the benefit of winning another prize or championship at the same level reduces. You will become progressively less motivated.

One difficulty you will face is that people who are ignorant of sports psychology, such as many poor coaches, parents, media, fans, etc. base their assessment of success on winning. As with many things, stick with what you know is right rather than what uninformed people think.

Set Specific Goals

Set specific measurable goals. If you achieve all conditions of a measurable goal, then you can be confident and comfortable in its achievement. If you consistently fail to meet

a measurable goal, then you can adjust it or analyse the reason for failure and take appropriate action to improve skills.

Set Realistic Goals

Goals may be set unrealistically high for the following reasons:

- Other people: Other people can set unrealistic goals for you, based on what they want. Often this will be done in ignorance of your goals and training programs.
- Insufficient information: If you do not have a clear, realistic understanding of your sport and of the techniques and performance to be mastered, it is difficult to set effective and realistic goals.
- Always expecting your best performance: Many people base their goals on their best performance, however long ago that was. It is better to set goals that raise your average performance and make it more consistent.
- Lack of respect for self: If you do not respect your right to rest, relaxation and pleasure in life then you risk burnout.

Setting Goals Too Low

Alternatively goals can be set too low because of:

- Fear of failure: If you are frightened of failure you will not take the risks needed for optimum performance. As you apply goal setting and see the achievement of goals, your self-confidence should increase, helping you to take bigger risks. Know that failure is a positive thing: it shows you areas where you can improve your skills and performance.
- Taking it too easy: It is easy to take the reasons for not setting goals unrealistically high as an excuse to set them too low. If you're not prepared to stretch yourself and work hard, then you are extremely unlikely to achieve anything of any real worth.

Setting Goals at the Right Level

Setting goals at the correct level is a skill that is acquired by practice.

You should set goals so that they are slightly out of your immediate grasp, but not so far that there is no hope of achieving them: no-one will put serious effort into achieving a goal that they believe is unrealistic. However, remember that the belief that a goal is unrealistic may be incorrect. Such a belief can be changed by effective use of imagery.

Personal factors such as tiredness, injury, stage in the season, etc. should be taken into account when goals are set.

Achieving Goals and Feedback

Achieving Goals

When you have achieved a goal, take the time to enjoy the satisfaction of having achieved the goal. Absorb the implications of the goal achievement, and observe the progress you have made towards other goals.

If the goal was a significant one, or one that you had worked towards for some time, take the opportunity to reward yourself appropriately.

Feedback: Failure

Where you have failed to reach a goal, ensure that you learn the lessons of the failure. These may be:

- that you didn't try hard enough

- that your technique was faulty and needs to be adjusted
- that the goal you set was unrealistic

Use this information to adjust the goal if it was set too high, or to set goals to acquire new skills or build stamina. Feeding back like this turns everything into a positive learning experience - even failing to meet a goal is a step forward towards perfect technique!

Remember that the fact of trying something, even if it does not work, often opens doors that would otherwise have remained closed.

Feedback: Success

Where you have achieved a goal this should feed back into your next goals:

- If the goal was easily achieved, make your next goals harder
- If the goal took a dispiriting length of time to achieve, make the next goals a little easier
- If you learned something that would lead you to change goals still outstanding, do so
- If while achieving the goal you noticed a deficit in your skills, set goals to fix this.

Remember too that goals change as you mature - adjust them regularly to reflect this growth in your personality. If goals do not hold any attraction any longer, then let them go - goal setting is your servant, not your master. It should bring you real pleasure, satisfaction and achievement.

Summary of Goal Setting

- Goal setting is an important method of:
 - Deciding how committed you are to your sport
 - Deciding what is important for you to achieve, and what is irrelevant
 - Motivating yourself to achievement
 - Building your self-confidence based on measured achievement of goals
- You can set goals effectively by:
 - Phrasing them positively
 - Defining them precisely
 - Prioritising multiple goals
 - Writing them down
 - Keeping them manageable: Not too hard, but not too easy.
 - Setting performance goals, not outcome goals
- Failure in meeting goals is useful in improving technique and long term success as long as you draw useful lessons from it and feed these back into your training program.
- You should allow yourself to enjoy the achievement of goals and reward yourself appropriately. Lessons should be drawn where appropriate, and should be fed back into training.

For our next session I want you to have outlined a number of goals you feel you would like to achieve within the next month, four months, within the next 8 months and within the next year – at least 3 for each time period and of course keep coming back to review them to see if you are achieving them. Lets get professional on this!

Once you begin to understand the importance of goal setting you can even use them for a training session or tournament, allowing yourself to be in control of what you are working on for any particular moment in your sporting life.