

The Key to Improved Motivation and Focus

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"Motivation depends in a very large part on goal setting. The coach must have goals. The team must have goals. Each individual player must have goals - real, vivid, living goals . . . Goals keep everyone on target. Goals commit me to the work, time, pain, and whatever else is part of the price of achieving success.

Robert Weinberg, Ph.D.

Goal setting is one of the most fundamental of sport psyching strategies. By engaging the goal setting process, you activate a number of conscious and unconscious resources which enable you to direct your attention more intensely, prolong your effort, and develop problem solving strategies. This will dramatically increase your chances of achieving your goal.

Outcome versus Performance Goals:

There are two basic types of goals: outcome goals and performance goals. Outcome goals are usually of the "all or none" variety and are defined as the desired outcome of a single event or an entire season. An example of an out-come goal would be: "I want to win the game," or "I want to make the all star team this season." Outcome goals are useful at the beginning of a season if we think of them as dream goals. As such, they can define the ultimate possibility of our achievement. Dream goals can help us concentrate our energies, and act as an inspiration when we encounter difficulties in training or competition. Focusing strictly on outcome goals can be a problem since they are highly dependent on a number of factors outside of the individual athlete's control. Included in these factors are the performance of the opponent, the officiating, the playing conditions, and the ever present factor of luck.

Performance goals, on the other hand, focus on those thoughts and behaviors over which we have personal control. Performance goals are based on current skill level and degree of motivation. They define what we need to do in practice or in competition in order to perform at our best. An example of a well formulated performance goal would be: "I will do five laps in less than five minutes after practice three times this week."

Goal Setting Process:

To begin the goal setting process, first select a performance goal that is meaningful to you at this stage of your training and skill level. Take a few minutes and consider what mental and physical skills you wish to work on during the upcoming week. Try to picture particular behaviors that best define these mental and physical skills. In defining your performance goal, remember to state how well or how often you will perform this behavior. It may be helpful now to record your mental and physical goals on a Weekly Mental Training Plan sheet.

The next step is to try to think about what might possibly keep you from achieving the goals you have just written. In considering the possible obstacles, it may be helpful to recall previous attempts at attaining this goal and try to think about what kept you from achieving this goal in the past. Look carefully at your present life situation to determine if there are any real obstacles to reaching your goal at this time.

Now that you have identified obstacles, formulate a positive action plan that you can use to overcome each of these obstacles you have identified. This plan of action will describe something you can do, or something you can say to yourself, to neutralize each obstacle. Write down your positive action plans for each obstacle on the Weekly Mental Training Plan. As you complete your positive action plans, you can focus on the last part of your mental training plan - weekly affirmations. In this step you are going to formulate inspirational, positively charged messages called affirmations. An affirmation is a word or a phrase that you can use to psych yourself up when you feel your intensity, concentration or enthusiasm starting to diminish. Write these affirmations in your Weekly Mental Training Plan.

You have just completed one of the most powerful sports psyching interventions known: the Goal Setting Process. Be confident that you have done all that you can to prepare for the upcoming week of training. Commit yourself to your goals. Focus on your affirmations and carry out your positive action plans. Success is there for the taking. Work hard and allow your mental training to assist you every step of the way.