

Goal Setting for Success in Sport, Exercise and Life

By Susan Farber, MA, LMFT

“Natural talent only determines the limits of your athletic potential. its dedication and a willingness to discipline your life that makes you great.” — Billie Jean King, Founder of the Women’s Sports Foundation

Research indicates that goal setting can enhance performance and success both on the playing field and in life pursuits. Effective goal setting can significantly impact your confidence level, motivation, and sense of mastery and control. The goals you set can create a roadmap for living your life with intention, purpose and meaning.

The following goal setting principles are adapted from the text, Exploring Sport and Exercise Psychology:

1. **Set specific goals** – Set measurable goals in behavioral terms so that you know when you have achieved them. Remember to set both physical and mental skills goals (i.e. regaining mental composure following an error, using thought stopping and relaxation to manage fear/anxiety)
2. **Set realistic, but challenging goals** – It is important to set goals that are not too easy or difficult. Goals that are too easy can result in less than maximum effort and too difficult goals can undermine confidence and lead to giving up due to seeing yourself as a failure.
3. **Set long term and short term goals** – Short term goals enable you to focus on small increments and can make goals appear more reachable. They help you remain motivated due to a sense of

accomplishment. Long term goals are important for providing direction and the big picture. They enable you to create a road map of incremental goals.

4. **Set goals for practice as well for competition** – Practice goals increases the quality of your work-out , enables you to utilize your time wisely, and helps with achieving short term goals. Set a combination of performance and nonperformance outcomes.
5. **Write down your goals** - Write down your goals and have them in a place where they can be easily seen. It is important that your goals be visually available and present in your mind. What you focus can serve to shape your reality.
6. **Develop goal achievement strategies** – Set appropriate strategies for achieving each goal. Incorporate relevant learning strategies into your training routine.
7. **Set performance goals in addition to outcome goals** – Set goals based on your level of performance rather than the outcome of winning and losing. Research shows that the best way to win an event is to focus on performance or process goals. Too much emphasis on winning can cause performance anxiety and impair performance. Your power lies in the moment and with focusing on the task at hand. If you meet performance goals than the outcome of winning will often ensue.
8. **Set individual and team goals** – When setting individual goals, make sure they contribute to the overall goals of the team or group.
9. **Develop social support for your goals** – Research shows that social support is an important component in staying motivated and persistent, especially in the face of obstacles that can interfere with goal attainment. Get your friends, family, spouse, partner on board.

10. **Evaluate goals on a regular basis** – Setting and achieving goals is an ongoing process that entails evaluation of your current performance level and achievement strategies in relation to your goals. Do not set fixed goals. Modify or replace goals to enable new motivation and commitment...

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