

Goal Setting

“Excuse me Sir,” Alice inquires. “Could you tell me which road to take?” Wisely the caterpillar asks, “Where are you going?” Alice responds, “Oh, I don’t know where I am going, Sir.” “Well,” responds the caterpillar, “if you don’t know where you are going, it really doesn’t matter which road you take.” (Alice in Wonderland - Lewis Carroll)

Goal setting helps athletes get where they want to go. Athletes similarly need to determine where they want to go and that will help them plan and organize they will get there.

How does goal setting help?

Good goal setting gives an athlete an edge in three areas:

1. Goals provide **direction**
2. Goals provide **feedback** - this is important for confidence building as well as future goal setting
3. Goals motivate by providing a daily **purpose**
4. Goals help **organize** the athlete with multiple tasks including practice, competitions, and other activities such as school work

I tried setting goals, that didn’t work for me!

Goal setting often is unsuccessful because of the following errors:

1. Setting only long term or ‘dream’ goals (eg To make the Olympic team, to win Summer Nationals), but failing to set specific, relevant daily and short term goals.
2. Failing to reevaluate and modify goals on a regular basis. At times one will achieve more or less than the original goal. This means that the goal must be readjusted to bring it in line with reality
3. Lack of commitment to training - if you spend two hours at a practice, how much time do you actually spend on focused, high quality training? Make the commitment to invest your time and energy on your daily goals, take them seriously.

What types of goals are there?

There are many different types of goals- it is important to identify short term, long term, and dream goals. Many athletes focus on dream goals or long term goals, however that does not help them on a daily basis as the goals do not seem real. Athletes should learn to set both long term and short term goals. Short term goals should be seen as the series of steps necessary to move toward the long term goals - essentially breaking the long term goal into manageable pieces. Goals are like mountain climbing - break large scale goals into parts and work on achieving each piece - climb each part of the mountain separately.

Similarly there should be both practice and competition goals. Recognize that there are two different types of goals: goals can be

- a. Outcome goals - any goal directed at a specific end result - (eg place in the top 8 of the under 17 junior olympics)
- b. Skill based (be able to execute a feint disengage from advance lunge distance effectively in competitive bouts, or to stay focused during the first round on every touch). Skills or Task based goals are what the athlete needs to DO physically and mentally to accomplish their outcome goals.

Most athletes are already setting goals for outcome in their minds. Let's take an organized approach to help with that.

Goal Questions:

1. Dream Goals - What is your dream goal - what would you really love to accomplish? What is potentially possible in the long run if you remove all barriers and stretch your limits?
2. Realistic Goals - What do you feel is a realistic best performance goal that you can achieve this year? (this should be based on your present skill level, your current motivation, and your commitment to focus on improvement)
3. Goal of Self-Acceptance - Can you make a commitment to accept yourself as a worthy human being and grow from the experience regardless of whether you achieve your dream goal or realistic performance goal for this year?

Goals are important for self motivation and can help direct practice efforts. Even if the athlete falls short of attaining the ultimate goal, the dream and goal setting process helps the athlete to become far better and draw far closer to the dream than otherwise.

Practice goals are important - it is important to realize the critical importance of effective practices to prepare for competition. Goals related to practice effort and attitude are essential. Showing up on time ready to practice, entering warm-up with enthusiasm and paying attention to the coach are examples. Practice goals should also involve using mental skills such as imagery which can help with skill learning, strategies, presentation and working through competitive anxiety.

Set goals in positive terms. For example an positive termed attitudinal goal would be "I want to focus on my ripostes and distance defense in my next bout" rather than "I want to stop counterattacking."

Set academic goals in addition to sports oriented goals.

It is important to write down goals - the act of writing it down helps make the commitment to achieve.

When planning goals for each season they should be **S.M.A.R.T.** meaning

Specific - be as specific as you can with the goal. For example "I want to make a top three finish at a Division 1 NAC this season."

Measurable - top three result

Adaptable and Attainable - "I would be happy with a top 8 finish if top fencers from other countries were at the event"

Realistic - "I have achieved this goal before". The goal should be close to your prior level of performance. Reflect on your past results at similar type competitions. For example if you usually make the top 32 in the Y12 and once you made top 16, but you have also had times when you lost in the 64 then you are a "top 32" fencer. Your goal might be to make top 8 (one level above your prior best level.) Top 16 would still be a good/realistic goal for the season.

Time Based "this season"

Write down one SPORTS GOAL for this season:

Explain how your goal is:

Specific _____

Measurable _____

Adaptable and Attainable _____

Realistic _____

Time Based _____

Now create a ladder for how to achieve your goal. Write down a long term goal and three short term goals that will help you get there. Then write down process goals (things you need to learn in practice to achieve each short term goal).

_____ Long Term Goal

_____ Short Term Goals

_____ Short Term Goals

_____ Short Term Goals

_____ Process Goals

_____ Process Goals

_____ Process Goals

Training Log - Monthly

1. What is my long term goal for this season?

2. What are the abilities or skills you need to achieve this goal?

a.

b.

c.

3. What can you do between now and the end of the season to develop those skills and abilities?

a.

b.

c.

4. What will you do this week to develop those skills and abilities?

a.

b.

c.

5. What can you do next practice to develop those abilities and skills?

a.

b.

c.

6. What is my goal to learn by the end of this month?

a.

b.

c.

Competition Goals

Fencer Name:

Name of Competition:

Date of Competition:

Event:

Goal Result:

Skills needed to achieve this goal:

What am I going to work on in practice to help me achieve this goal?

Fencer Name:

Name of Competition:

Date of Competition:

Event:

Goal Result:

Skills needed to achieve this goal:

What am I going to work on in practice to help me achieve this goal?

Training Logbook

Date _____

This Week's Goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Strategies for attaining goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Obstacles that might prevent me from achieving goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Self Evaluation:

Training Logbook

Before practice

Physical Training Goals:

- 1.
- 2.

Mental Training Goals:

- 1.
- 2.

After Practice Evaluation

Physical Training Goals - Accomplishments:

- 1.
- 2.

Physical Training Goals - Things to keep working on:

- 1.
- 2.

Mental Training Goals - Accomplishment:

- 1.
- 2.

Mental Training Goals - Things to keep working on:

- 1.
- 2.

Remember your Zen

While setting goals help organize and focus on what the athlete wants to achieve, the athlete should take a zen moment now and then to enjoy the path. Live in the moment. Whenever a pursuit involves only a distant destination but no joy in the step by step progress toward it, a harsh reality is not far ahead. The REAL trip is in embracing or loving the journey, not necessarily in the arrival at a specific place. Immerse yourself in the simple joys of your current experiences. That wave of nerves and nausea you experience at the beginning of an important bout is some of the most exciting time you will have in your life, so appreciate it for its worth!

Don't forget the Olympic creed - "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle."