

The importance of athletes setting – and reaching – goals

Helping young athletes reach goals builds their confidence and leads to greater enjoyment of the sport. Use these 10 tips to help your players master the art of goal setting to maximize their experience.

Goal!

When you hear the word goal, what comes to mind? In the world of sports, probably two things: 1) Scoring goals, and 2) Setting and/or accomplishing goals. As a coach and/or a parent, part of your role is helping athletes work toward their goals.

Youth who participate in sports learn a variety of skills from coaches and teammates, including physical skills, interpersonal skills and mental skills. Furthermore, setting goals is a skill that can be developed; the more proficient someone becomes at being able to set

goals, the more effectively they will be able to reach the goals they have set.

USE GOAL SETTING TO ENHANCE PLAYERS' PERFORMANCES

When setting goals, the likelihood of accomplishing them increases if a few principles (see below) are followed. Additionally, goal setting helps direct attention, mobilize effort, increase persistence and help with the development and execution of strategies that lead to goal achievement. As an athlete learns how to set goals effectively, he or she will not only become more likely to reach their goals on the field, but the principles of goal setting can be applied to school and life situations as well.

The following 10 guidelines can be taught to young athletes to help them meet the goals they want to accomplish. Additionally, coaches and parents can use the same techniques to set and accomplish goals.

► **Set SMART goals:** Setting goals using SMART as a guideline makes it more likely they will be achieved. SMART goals are specific, measurable, adjustable, realistic and time-based. For example, rather than a player simply saying, "I want to be a better baseball player," the SMART version may be, "I want to improve the accuracy of my fastball by at least 10 percent by the end of the month."

► **Set outcome and performance goals:** Outcome goals compare a player's performance to others, such as wanting to beat an opponent, while performance goals have to do with improving on their performance. Performance goals are more within the control of the individual



and therefore more likely to be reached. By focusing on performance goals, an individual or team has a better chance of achieving the desired outcome.

► **Set long-term, short-term and daily goals:** If you are helping an athlete work toward a big goal or a goal for the future, break it down into smaller, short-term goals (think of these as the steps to reach the long-term goal). Additionally, daily goals help players take steps toward their short-term goals and their long-term goals on a regular basis.

► **Create strategies to help players accomplish their goals:** If your goal is to help players be more consistent at free-throws, strategies might include spending an extra 10 minutes a day at the free-throw line, helping

about what they want to accomplish rather than what they are trying to avoid.

► **Write goals down:** When young athletes put their goals on paper it makes it more likely that they will work on them, but make sure they put them in a place where they will see them often: on their bulletin board at home, on a note card on the inside of their sports bag, or even on their mirror at home.

► **Evaluate progress:** Take time on a regular basis to assess your athletes' progress toward their goals. You'll probably find that some players are making more progress than expected, while others may be lagging. Be ready to adjust goals and strategies accordingly so that every player can reap the benefits of goal setting.

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them develop a pre-shot routine and performing imagery to see successful free-throws in their mind prior to releasing the ball, etc. These strategies are concrete steps your young athletes can use to make progress toward their goals.

► **Be a constant source of support:** Be supportive at all times, hold athletes accountable and help maintain their motivation. As coaches and parents you are a great support network for athletes working on accomplishing goals. You can not only help athletes apply the principles listed here, but also remind them to work on their goals, help them see how far they have come and provide on-going encouragement.

► **Set positive goals:** Stress to players the importance of setting goals around the things they want to do rather than those they do not want to do. For example, rather than a player focusing on, "I don't want to walk batters," steer them to concentrating on, "I will focus on finding the strike zone." This way, athletes have information

► **Progress is not always linear:** Even if goals are set using the above guidelines that does not mean that every player will progress in a forward pattern from start to finish. There may be unexpected setbacks or times where progress stalls. This is all normal, and when players run into challenges, help them look for solutions rather than becoming frustrated that they got stuck. The important thing for all young athletes to remember is that there is overall forward movement toward their goals.

► **Have fun:** Remind players that they are in control of their goals and how they accomplish them. Even though it will take hard work and dedication it's important that they enjoy the process and feel good about the progress – both the big and small gains – in reaching their goals.

Now that you have learned the 10 key principles for goal setting, be sure to use them with your athletes to help them get the most out of their experience. **sk**

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