



# RULES FOR GOAL SETTING

By Dale Hierlmeier

**S**etting goals is an important process for high school coaches. By setting goals, coaches can establish priorities, broaden perspective and describe areas of strengths and weaknesses, along with helping the decision-making process, saving time and creating a sense of purpose.

Although defining, establishing and meeting challenges may trigger the thought process of individuals, they seldom follow a designed plan of action when setting goals.



## BALANCE ALL GOALS

Coaches and athletes oftentimes have tunnel-vision tendencies by focusing on a particular aspect of life, such as sports, or concentrating on a specific sport or skill within a sport at the expense of balancing life's goals. A coach would not think of limiting a training program to merely running or shooting, but would in basketball, for instance, include a balance of mechanics, conditioning, weight work, mental training, strategy, diet and rest. So, if balance is required for success within pinpoint areas of our lives, it would stand to reason that goals should be set in a number of areas of life in general.

Determine important areas of life and design goals in each of those areas. For example, consider setting goals for education, career, finances, diet, exercise, sports, travel, recreational pastimes or retirement. Balanced goal setting provides a network, shelter or landing net on which to fall back or recuperate when the unexpected happens.



## DETERMINE GOAL PRIORITIES

Establish what is important by simply making a list of those items that carry high priority in life. When lethargy, procrastination or temptation strikes, if it's not on the list, don't do it. Having priorities and setting goals encourages the athlete or coach to work with intensity in the area that he or she is in at that particular time.



## DEFINE GOALS

Goals must be defined and must be specific. Clearly identify what needs to be achieved. In a timed event, such as the 400-meter dash, having to break a minute as a goal is not specific enough. State exactly what needs to be done or is to

be accomplished. For example, "I want to run the 400-meter dash in 49.5 or better. I want to make a 'B+' or better on the next assignment." Stating in clear vivid detail exactly what it is that needs to be done clearly determines if the athlete reaches the goal or ever started the goal.



## MAKE GOALS IMAGINABLE

In an effort to design a plan for short-range goal setting, believing that reaching goals is possible is critical. Goals that are unrealistic or exceed the realm of imagination are seldom accomplished. The imagination becomes blurry when the bar is set too high.

In the case of events involving time and distance, such as track and field, one approach is to attempt to imagine reaching a goal that is beyond reason and blurry to the imagination and continually adjusting the goal until it becomes reasonable and clear to the imagination.

For example, if a runner's 400-meter dash personal best is 55.1 seconds, can the athlete imagine lowering that time to 49.5 seconds? Since the athlete has improved just a few seconds each year, 49.5 seconds is unimaginable. What about a goal of 51.5 seconds? The athlete begins to see the possibilities, but the risk of failing is still there. Next, suggest establishing a goal of 53.5 seconds. Now, the runner begins to feel confident and can actually see and imagine reaching this practical goal.



## STATE GOALS POSITIVELY

Often, people experience success in practice or when reviewing for a written examination, then become overwhelmed on game day or test day, resulting in a poor performance or even failure. Many people have experienced getting "psyched out" at the exact moment when performance is required most. The solution seems clear: just set a goal to avoid getting "psyched out," and the problem is solved. "I am not going to get psyched out." Is this goal stated positively and will it be useful?

When an athlete goes to the free-throw line in a game-winning situation thinking, "I am not going to get psyched out. I am not going to get psyched out," the double negatives may affect the athlete's ability to remain tranquil and, therefore, hurt performance. All the athlete hears over and over in the subconscious mind are the negative words "not" and "psyched out," plus the player is hearing the roar of the crowd and is under the magnifying glass of the players, coaches and media. A positive and more productive approach might be to state this goal positively: "I always remain calm during stress-

ful situations." This is a completely positive statement is not laced with self-defeating negative images.



## AVOID TIME LIMITS ON GOALS

It is unlikely that reaching all goals in a timely manner is realistic or there would be no failures and everyone would be a world record-holder. Setting a long-range goal for the end of the season without short-term goals in between is questionable, since the athlete may think that with the whole season ahead there is ample time to reach goals and, therefore, may not train hard throughout the year. On the other hand, setting a long-range goal for next week may be too soon to attain, requiring additional training, competition and experience for achievement to occur.

A logical course of action is to attempt to reach short-term goals progressively throughout the season. Avoid waiting for the "big contests" or state tournaments to reach goals or break personal records, since unforeseen circumstances can appear when least expected.

For example, saving the "record-breaking run" for the big meet or studying all night for the semester exam may prove disastrous, if the athlete wakes up sick on race day or experiences an injury along the way. How many athletes would cherish the chance to rerun that final botched race, replay that final bungled game or retake that failed final test? Short- and long-term goals should be reached as soon as possible.



## SEE THE END RESULT

When the going gets tough, the athlete must see the end result. The runner must see a new record being set, the award for first place being placed around his or her neck, the look on the coach's face when victory has been achieved, or the personal gratification experienced by the runner when a goal has been reached. Academically, the student must see the "A" grade on the test or the look on mom and dad's face when a good report card is brought home or feel the self-satisfaction of passing a course or making the honor roll. When the going gets tough, see the end result.



## SHARE GOALS DISCRIMINATELY

Should an athlete advertise goals to everyone? Although initially this rule sounds somewhat restrictive, in reality, confining goal sharing to people who can be trusted is a wise choice. Individual goals are personal in nature. In part, goals

"Success is a journey,

reveal the athlete's inner game plan to succeed, and it is crucial that distractions and exterior forces are minimized. With whom can an athlete share goals, and who can be trusted to support the athlete's goal-setting process?

Certainly, the coach is a stakeholder, supporter and team player who cannot only be trusted with an athlete's goals, but also should be an integral if not primary part of the goal-setting process. All things being equal, when an athlete or team is successful the coach appears successful. Share goals with the coach and trust the coach with goal setting confidentially.

In most cases, parents can be relied upon to keep the athlete's goals confidential; however, only an athlete knows the parent's characteristics. Goals may be shared only with an athlete's closest friends, perhaps a boyfriend or girlfriend or a prominent individual who takes the goal-setting process seriously. Likewise, goals may be shared with only the closest teammates who have similar interests at heart and are devoted to the team's success.



## WRITE DOWN GOALS

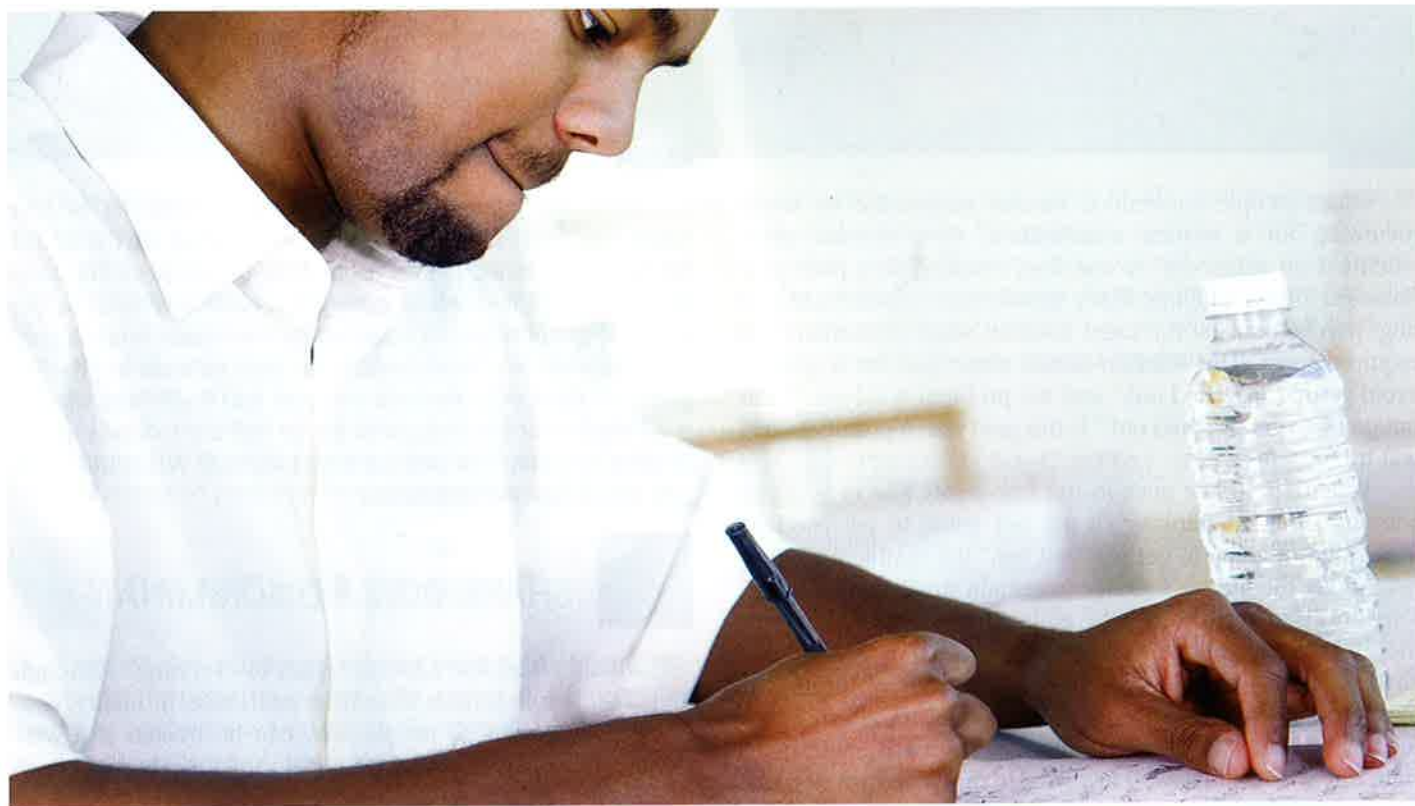
Writing down goals is important because as the season progresses, the written record enables the athlete to review the goals periodically for accuracy, before entering competi-

tion, or at the conclusion of competition. Without a written record, athletes may forget various goals were ever established. The chances for success are greater if the goal is written.

Writing down goals helps to make the goal setting process official, particularly if the athlete signs individual goal cards or a goal sheet. Writing down a goal is the same as making a contract with one's self. It becomes binding. It holds the athlete accountable for meeting the goal. Where else in life is a signed contract required? Many areas require a signed contract to make the agreement official and binding, such as check writing; borrowing money; purchasing a car, home or other large-scale items; investment purchases; and entering marriage.

Goal writing can be accomplished on index cards, a notebook, diary or any number of usable sources. A notebook is one idea because all goals can be maintained in one convenient location; however, index cards are handy because goal cards can be placed in strategic locations, such as a locker, mirror or textbook and used as reminders or carried in a pocket, purse or backpack as a daily reminder.

To be effective, the goal does not even have to be physically seen. An athlete can simply place a hand in a pocket and feel the card and be reminded of the goal throughout the day. Writing down the goal and signing the goal card holds the athlete accountable.



not a destination.”



## RESET GOALS AS THEY ARE REACHED

Once a goal is reached, a new goal must take its place. Goal setting is a continuous process of set, reach, reset and repeat. Goal setting is a journey. Like goal setting, some authorities view success as a continuous process, exclaiming that, "Success is a journey, not a destination." The successful goal setter never really reaches his or her ultimate aim because there is always a faster time, improved performance, greater number of victories, more attractive job or a different or higher goal to pursue.

If an athlete or team reaches a personal or team goal in a preliminary round, sometime before the next contest or level of play, goals must be reset. Certainly, athletes or teams may not be as successful when competing against stronger or more talented competition; however, resetting goals is very measurable and visible in individual sports like track and field, swimming, archery, bowling and other self-testing non-contact sports.

For all sports and within the process of goal setting, resetting goals is imperative. Goal setting keeps everything on

track, but an athlete or team can be on the right track and still get run over if he or she doesn't move, if goals are not reset. Remember goals as stepping-stones not stopping stones.

Goal setting is a positive approach to help athletes and teams reach maximum performance. Although there are a number of aspects to successful performance, such as physical conditioning, nutrition, mechanics, mental training, visualization and strategy, goal setting is another tool to help give athletes an added motivational and strategic edge. Not having goals is like shooting a basketball without a rim or shooting arrows without an archery target or high jumping without a crossbar. Goals are targets. Goals give direction. Goals give purpose and create a clear focus. For enhanced performance use goal setting as an added edge to optimal athletic achievement. **CQ**

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