

2. GOALS

*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.
-Lao Tzu-*

Now that you are more aware of yourself and of why and how you can remain engaged in your sport or other personal endeavours, you can chart your course by setting some goals. Goals are best reflected by statements that can be transformed into actions that you can perform. In many ways, they reflect your level of ambition and desire to excel.

To what extent do you want to succeed in your sport?

Once again, there is no right or wrong answer to this question; what's important is that you are doing what you truly want to do, and not necessarily what everybody else wants you to do. This leads me to another important question:

What is success to you? How do you define it?

Before getting into the specifics of goal-setting, I think you should ponder this question because it will likely affect the types of goals you will set for yourself. How do you determine if you have been successful or not? Is it all about the outcome or results or can you succeed even if you don't win? What about effort, does this count for anything? If you truly felt the way you wanted to feel during a performance but did not place first, would you say you still succeeded? What other criteria do you or can you use to evaluate if your performance was successful or not? You can think outside the box here as long as the criteria is meaningful to you and you will actually use it.

EXERCISE 2.1 – MY DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Indicate what success means to you and the criteria you use to determine if you have been successful or not.

Based on your definition of success, what types of goals can you set to help you achieve it? Or are goals even important to you? One could argue that goals can help you perform better because they provide you with a **direction** and **purpose** and they can give **meaning** to your pursuits, but only if they are your goals.

Some athletes have reported that setting goals has helped them to:

- engage in what they do, especially if their goals were aligned with how they wanted to feel
- have a focus
- persevere in the face of challenges

How can goals personally help you?

We all have ideas and aspirations, many of which are translated into concrete goals. Upon setting a goal, we make the decision to accomplish something that is worthwhile, which explains why we are willing to put our heart and soul into achieving it. Here's a thought. Think about how many ideas you have had throughout your life so far. Pretty overwhelming? Now think about the ideas that you have translated into goals. Why is that? Because the thought or experience of pursuing these ideas made you feel a certain way? Sound familiar? Let's explore one of the biggest ideas you have.

EXERCISE 2.2 - MY DREAM GOAL

What is your dream goal, that is, the ultimate thing you would like to achieve in your sport or life?

It's one thing to have goals, but it's another to fulfill them. Often, people set goals but they don't follow-up or find ways to achieve them. One way to increase your chances of fulfilling them is by making sure that your goals are in line with *how you want to feel* (see exercise 1.3 in Section 1). If they aren't, how will you have the energy and motivation to stick things out to achieve them? Doesn't it make sense to set goals that will allow you to be yourself and for the most part feel good?

YOUR GOALS SHOULD INSPIRE YOU AND ENGAGE YOU IN YOUR PERFORMANCES

Once you have identified meaningful and engaging goals, it helps to break them down into smaller chunks, that is, short-term goals that are manageable and within reach.

Imagine someone who has a goal of building his own house, but doesn't really know how to go about it. This person isn't fully aware of the steps involved but decides to "wing it." What do you think the house is going to look like at the end? How long do you think it's going to take this person to build it? Would you want to be the first one to sleep underneath that roof? Probably not!

If you think that setting goals can help you better your performance and well-being, strive to set **meaningful goals** that offer you a clear, comfortable, but **flexible** structure so that you don't feel too confined in the process of achieving them. Some athletes have told me that they do not set goals because they feel too much pressure from trying to reach them. This is why you should be aware of the types of goals you may set as well as why and how they can help you rather than hinder you.

Examples of different types of goals are provided in the following table.

| TABLE 2.1 - TYPES OF GOALS | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Dream goal: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ultimate goal that could potentially become a reality if you fully commit yourself to the development of your potential and abilities. • i.e., "Go to the Olympics." |
| Long-term goal: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic goals set for the future that are based on your current level of ability and your potential and motivation to improve. These goals, for example, can be set over a competitive season. • i.e., "Be the starting player during finals at the end of the season." |
| Short-term goal: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals set on a more short-term basis (i.e., every month or week) to help you focus on what you need to do to achieve your long-term goals, and ultimately your dream goal. These goals should be based on your annual/quadrennial training and competitive plans. • i.e., "Improve backhand shot from the center." |
| Daily goal: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals set on a daily basis to improve specific areas in training or competitions. These small goals help you stay focused on the present and the intricate details you need to refine in order to achieve your extended goals. • i.e., "Do 3 sets of 50 sit-ups 45 minutes before practice." |

TABLE 2.1 - TYPES OF GOALS (*cont*)

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Goal of engagement: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals set in conjunction with all other types of goals that will help you remain engaged and experience <i>the way you want to feel</i> as often as possible (<i>see Exercise 1.3</i>). These goals will motivate and allow you to accept yourself and feel like you have accomplished something meaningful even when you don't achieve your external or more outcome-oriented goals. i.e., "During this race, I will free myself to run like I'm on fire. If I attempt to do this for 75% of the race, I will feel good about myself no matter what." |
|----------------------------|---|

Now that you are aware of the different types of goals you can set, note that they can be aimed at improving various skills and perspectives. Here are some examples.

- Physical:**
- Increase VO_2 max.
 - Rehabilitate dislocated shoulder.
 - Increase flexibility of torso.
- Mental:**
- Visualize top-right corner shot on goalie.
 - Adopt a more positive attitude.
 - Develop a refocusing plan for competitions.
- Technical:**
- Land triple lutz.
 - Improve stick-handling.
 - Refine left-handed passes.
- Tactical:**
- Protect the ball when pressured.
 - Master silent rotation drill.
 - Be more aggressive during two-on-one situations.
- Lifestyle:**
- Eat foods containing salt after a competition to replace electrolytes.
 - Drink more fluids throughout the day.
 - Eat healthy snacks rather than junk food on days leading up to a competition.
 - Take more frequent naps to allow body and mind to recover.

Take some time to identify skills and perspectives you would like to work on. Make a point of setting goals that target all the areas in which you need to improve. If you need to refresh your memory, go back to *Exercises 1.8* and *1.9* in the previous section.

Here's an acronym you can use to remember what's important to consider when setting goals: **SMARTEST**. The guidelines provided in Table 2.2 may help you to set the SMARTEST goals for yourself and to be in a better position to evaluate and monitor your progress.

TABLE 2.2 - SETTING SMARTEST GOALS

Specific

- Set detailed, focused, meaningful, and positive goals.
- "Improve my time in the 100 metre front crawl for the upcoming swim test."

Measurable

- Set quantifiable goals that give you a standard for comparing your performances.
- "Improve my time in the 100 metre front crawl by **four** seconds, focusing on the first and last laps."

Action oriented

- Set goals that target process and performance, rather than end results.
- "**Improve**.... by four seconds...." rather than "Beat my teammate by..."

Realistic

- Set practical and achievable goals but make sure that they are challenging enough.
- "Improve my test time from 59 seconds to approximately 55 seconds."

Time and resource based

- Set a deadline to achieve your goals. Consider the extent of the resources available to you.
- "By December 31, 2006, without adding any more practice time."

Elastic

- Set goals using a target window rather than a target that is too narrow to allow some flexibility and to also avoid limiting yourself in what you can achieve.
- "Improve my test time from 59 seconds to 54-56 seconds."

Repeatable

- Set goals that will allow you to repeat your performance several times to ensure that you have fully mastered the tasks at hand and can reliably perform them under the most stressful situations.
- "Repeat my new standard of performance (i.e., 54-56 seconds) at least five times before setting a new goal."

Tailored to how you want to feel

- Set goals that you will allow you to feel the way you want to feel in your pursuits so that the process is rewarding and sustainable regardless of the outcome.
- "Throughout practice and tests, focus on feeling light, fluid, and harmonious with the water like seals dancing."

EXERCISE 2.3 - MY LONG-TERM GOALS

Write down your long-term goals for this season in the space provided below, taking into consideration the different areas in which you want to improve (e.g., physical, mental, technical, tactical skills; lifestyle habits and perspectives).

My dream goal:

←..... 1st half of season▶▶..... 2nd half of season▶

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EXERCISE 2.4 - MY SHORT-TERM GOALS

Write down your short-term goals in the space provided below, taking into consideration the different areas in which you want to improve on a weekly basis. Remember to set goals of engagement and to assess whether or not you achieved your different goals. Put a check mark beside those you accomplished or colour the boxes to highlight them. Photocopy this sheet to be able to set weekly training goals in the future.

| Area to improve | GOALS - Week _____ From _____ To _____ (insert date) | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
| Physical | | | | | | | |
| Mental | | | | | | | |
| Technical | | | | | | | |
| Tactical | | | | | | | |
| Lifestyle | | | | | | | |

EXERCISE 2.5 - MY DAILY TRAINING GOALS

Write down your goals for next practice. Make sure to review them afterward to assess your level of accomplishment and satisfaction. Modify them for the following practice if necessary. Photocopy this sheet to be able to set daily training goals in the future.

Date _____

Type of training _____

EXERCISE 2.6 - MY COMPETITION GOALS

Write down your goals for your next competition. This will help you approach it with a sense of purpose and meaning. Remember to set goals that will inspire you rather than put pressure on you. Once again, review your goals after the competition and determine areas for more engagement or further improvement. Implement your lessons in the next practice.

The Wave of Performance

Before the competition

At the site of the competition

During the warm-up

During the competition

After the competition

So far, you have identified several goals to guide your performance in both training and competitions. At the same time, it is crucial for you to determine what you will do to accomplish these goals. Your **preparation** is key and will largely contribute to the process and outcome of your performance. Go back to *Exercise 1.10* to refresh your memory of how you want to prepare, keeping in mind that not all preparation activities will allow you to feel the way you want to feel. For example, you might not particularly like lifting weights but realize the importance of it and thus have set a goal to weight train every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I am assuming that you are working with a weight trainer or you have the requisite knowledge to develop an appropriate program. Having said this, how you actually implement the program, therefore go through the workout is crucial. In other words, with what quality will you do the exercises? Are you just going to go through the motions simply to get things done and check the goal off your list? Or are you going to pay attention to the process and really try to execute each movement with focus and intensity so that you get the most out of your work? If you want to be the best, you cannot afford to compromise the quality of anything that you do.

Figuring out how you will want to feel when you do your workout (e.g., feel the energy in your muscles, feel the burning sensation in your muscles as you lift heavy weights, feel fatigued toward the end of a set, feel confident in your capacity to complete the set, etc.) and just naturally or deliberately focusing on feeling this when you do the actual workout can make a huge difference in the process. I would argue that you will be more engaged, fulfilled, and satisfied with your workout, even if you end up not being able to complete every single set or lift every weight you originally intended to.

If you adopt a similar approach to prepare and achieve all of your goals, you will likely get much more out of your sport than just winning. What you have to realize is that in any competition, there is only one winner. Sometimes you will win and sometimes you will lose. Let's face it, although you are striving to win all the time, there is no such thing as perfection. You must thus prepare for and learn from both your successes and losses. If you train 20 years of your life to go to the Olympics and have only one shot at victory (in some sports you have less than one minute to make it happen) but fall short of your goal, do you want to look back on all those hours and years of training and competing and say: "I hate this. I didn't win so this was just a waste of time. All that hard work wasn't worth it. I have really missed out on life." I sure hope you wouldn't come to this conclusion. In my opinion, it would be quite sad. This is why you have to make every part of the process worthwhile. You have to find other ways of defining success if you are just basing it on winning. If your **daily** preparation process is **engaging**, **fulfilling**, and relatively **feels good**, chances are you will look back and say: "I have learned and accomplished so many valuable things. I have grown so much through this experience both as an athlete and as a person. This was all worth it, regardless of the outcome."

**Daily preparation that is engaging and fulfilling
is key in the achievement of your goals.**

As previously mentioned, this process of preparation and performance will not always be fun. In all truthfulness, you will face some obstacles along the way because life isn't flawless and neither are we. However, it is not so much the obstacles that are important, it is the way you choose to perceive and respond to them that is. Identifying potential obstacles as well as appropriate responses is part of the preparation process. It is not that you want to focus on obstacles, but if you can anticipate them based on your past and current experiences, and plan appropriate responses to them, you will be in a better position to overcome them if they do arise. Once again, **the responses you choose to obstacles should allow you to reconnect with the way you want to feel.**

This way, you cannot go wrong because no matter how big or small the obstacles, you will choose to do things that will allow you to 1) feel good about yourself, 2) reconnect with why you engaged in the activity or endeavour in the first place, and 3) make wise and efficient decisions about where you want to go next (i.e., engage in more preparation or choose to do something different).

EXERCISE 2.8 - OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Identify potential obstacles or barriers that you might need to overcome in order to achieve your goals and remain engaged throughout the process (refer to Exercise 1.10 of the last section since you already started to identify some of your obstacles). Try to list them in order of priority, starting with your biggest or most important obstacles within your control. Then outline appropriate actions that will best prepare you to overcome these barriers. Remember the responses you outlined in Exercise 1.10 and the resources that are available to you.

| BARRIERS / OBSTACLES | ACTION STEPS |
|----------------------|--------------|
| 1. | • |
| 2. | • |
| 3. | • |
| 4. | • |
| 5. | • |
| 6. | • |
| 7. | • |

MONITORING YOUR GOALS

It is important that you **monitor** the goals you have set for yourself to ensure that they are allowing you to live the way you want to feel and to achieve what you set out to do. Taking a step back to evaluate your goals is as important as setting them. It will enable you to change or adapt them if they are either too easy or too difficult. Discuss your goals with your coach, a consultant, your teammates or your parents, who are there to support you. Seek feedback from these individuals to ensure that you are evaluating your goals properly.

In great attempts, it is glorious even to fail.

If you don't fulfill your goals or just achieve them partially, don't panic. More importantly, don't put pressure on yourself, simply ask yourself why. Is it because you didn't work hard enough, because you tried to skip a step, or because you didn't seek direction from someone you could trust? It is because you focused too much on the outcome and forgot to enjoy the process? In other words, is it because they did not allow you to experience the way you want to feel as often as you would have liked? Whatever the reason, reach within yourself to determine the path you need to take to improve the quality and enjoyment of your performance. Reflect on goals that you accomplished in the past as these can remind you of valuable lessons or qualities you have that could serve you well right now.

TABLE 2.3 - SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS

1. Set goals that inspire you and allow you to live the way you want to feel on a daily basis.
2. Don't underestimate your potential in your sport. Set a dream goal you believe you can achieve if you fully commit yourself to extensive high quality training and improvement.
3. Set long-term goals over a season that you can break down into smaller steps (monthly, weekly, daily goals).
4. Once you have set goals, determine **how** you will achieve them, that is, outline specific actions or activities that will facilitate the process.
5. Set goals to improve different areas of your performance (i.e., physical, mental, technical, tactical skills, lifestyle habits).
6. Set goals that are directed at changing or improving something about yourself, rather than others. Focus your energy on what **you can control**.
7. Recognize your limits. Prioritize your goals so you're not trying to do too much at once.
8. Set goals for both training and competition.
9. Set SMARTTEST goals.
10. Set goals of engagement that will enable you to enjoy the process of performance and to see yourself as a worthy person and athlete, even when you don't achieve everything as planned.
11. Write down your goals and share them with others to make them more authentic.
12. Be a student of the game. Monitor your goals regularly and get feedback from people you can trust.