



Winning At Sport



Goal Setting In Sport

by
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A note from Jeremy Lazarus

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Yours faithfully

Jeremy Lazarus

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Goal Setting AND Achieving in Sport – An Overview

Introduction

Anyone with a basic knowledge of coaching in sport (and business) and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) will be aware of the approaches to goal setting, often referred to as setting ‘a well-formed outcome’. This article will discuss the application and relevance of goal-setting in the field of sport, regardless of which level and which sport you play.

More specifically, the article will cover:

- ◆ Why set goals in sport?
- ◆ Some key elements of NLP goal-setting that are relevant to sport
- ◆ Some key elements of goal-setting from the field of ‘sports psychology’

Why Set Goals in Sport?

As with all areas of life, if you know where you are going, you are more likely to get there. If you don’t know where you are going, how will you know whether you are on- or off-track? In addition, by being clear that the goal is absolutely right for you, it can prevent you from chasing the ‘wrong’ goal.

Some key elements of NLP goal-setting

Although there are several elements to having a ‘well-formed outcome’, I would like to pinpoint some which I have found to be especially important:

1. Specific, measurable and timed. In other words, how would you know undeniably that you had achieved the goal?
 2. What is the purpose of achieving the goal? John Grinder, one of the co-founders of NLP, has stated that probably the major reason that people do not achieve their goal is because they don’t have a goal beyond the goal.
 3. Is the goal ecological? In other words, are there any negative consequences of achieving the goal, and if so, is the price of success worth it? Also, will the potential negative effects be ‘handled’ and accepted by the athlete and those affected?
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4. Is the athlete stating what they want or what they don't want? Ideally, the goal should be stated in the positive, with no negations or comparatives.
5. The athlete/player and the coach must both believe that the goal is achievable. If not, it can become de-motivating for the athlete, and the coach's doubt will be picked up (even if unconsciously) by the athlete.

Other Elements to Goal Setting

The approach often used in sports psychology to goal setting is based on:

- ◆ Outcome
- ◆ Performance and
- ◆ Process goals

Using an example to illustrate, an outcome goal could be 'to win the Olympic Gold in the 100 metres in the 2012 Olympics'.

Even if the goal were 'well-formed', achieving the goal is not totally within the athlete's power – there are other athletes involved in the race! A useful question is 'what level of performance would I need in order to be likely to win the race?' This is the performance goal, for example 9.72 seconds. This is within the athlete's control, and as such is measurable during training.

The next step would be to set some process goals, which when achieved would give the athlete the best chance to reach the performance goal, and hence the outcome goal.

Process goals could relate to technical or training-related elements, for example lifting the knees up to a certain level during the first 20 metres, or doing 1,000 press-ups per week etc.

The athlete's coach will be actively involved in setting these goals.

Summary

Combining a 'well-formed' outcome goal with having achievable yet stretching performance and process goals will move the athlete towards achieving the desired outcome and hence probably be motivating, which is an essential element to start to any athletic endeavour. Enjoy the journey!