

Coaching Principles –Goal Setting

This article is a special presentation from Tom Crawford, one of the nation's leading experts in the development of sports assessment and training programs for children, parents and coaches of all ages.

Most successful athletes swear by goal setting to achieve excellence. As the start of a new season approaches, a coach and his/her team should review why setting goals is so important, and some key characteristics of successful goal setting.

Have you ever been on a long car trip and wondered how far you had left to go? Have you ever noticed how helpful it is to have a map to track your progress? Knowing where you are going, and how much progress you have made, helps all trips go smoother and keeps you going even when you get tired.

Setting goals, or having a map, is one of the best motivational tools we can use in all parts of our lives, including sports. Our goals become our own personal map, and help us stay on course and keep working toward reaching the final goal, whatever that happens to be for us and our teams. So how do you set goals or build a success map?

Building Your Success Map

How do you set goals or build a success map? There are some key characteristics we have learned about over the years when it comes to setting goals for success. One of the most important is that you must have a long-term goal, intermediate goals, and short-term goals.

Believe it or not, it is probably easiest to pick a long-term goal, and that is where many players/athletes/teams begin and end their goal setting. Unfortunately, it doesn't help very much to just set a long-term goal like, "I want to be this year's champion". That would be like saying, "let's go visit the beaches in Rhode Island this summer." Unless you were lucky enough to live in Rhode Island, you would have to develop a plan and map in order to get there and really accomplish your goal. Otherwise it would just be a good idea. As you can see from this example, we know that intermediate and short-term goals are a very important part of goal setting. So what's the process?

First, it is important to have a long-term goal you are shooting for; what's your dream for this year? Then develop intermediate goals and short-term goals to help you reach the long-term goal. These intermediate and short-term goals become your success map...the things you do every week and month (intermediate), and the things you do everyday (short-term) in order to get to your season goal (long-term).

So, first set your long-term goal and then work backwards to establish a plan to get there:

One: What is my long-term goal for the year or season?

Two: Intermediate goals: What things do I have to accomplish each month in order to be able to achieve my long term goal?

Three: Short-term goals: What do I have to do today and this week in order to reach my first set of intermediate goals.

As you set your goals, or establish your map, try to be sure your goals are overcoming any obstacles that may prevent you from achieving the goals. These obstacles may include skills you need to develop, or a level of strength you must achieve, or a new mental strategy to stay focused during practice and competition. Whatever the case may be, don't be afraid of obstacles. Write down the obstacles and then set goals to overcome them. This becomes your map to success!

Every goal you set should meet the following critical guidelines:

One: **State your goals positively!** Say what you will do, not what you won't do.

Two: **Make sure the goal is "concrete"!** Each goal has to be measurable and observable. A goal like "I'm going to try really hard", is not nearly as good as, "I'm going to try really hard, by doing 50 extra sit-ups every day this season!" That's measurable.

Three: **Make the goals realistic.** Set yourself up for success not failure.

Four: Goals must be written down in a map as described above. Just thinking about goals never works.

Getting Started

Now the key is to get started on developing your roadmap to a successful and fun season. First, try to develop the outline for your map on your own. Then ask your coach or a parent to help you refine the map so it follows all the guidelines described above. The tough part sometimes is to just get started...but once you do you'll be on your way to achieving your goals and dreams for this season.