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Setting Goals for SUCCESS: THE SMARTEST SYSTEM

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The most important factor for motivation is goal setting. You should always have a goal." *Francie Larrieu Smith, Champion Runner*

Most athletes and coaches set goals because they know that goals are vital to success in competition and improvements in performance. By setting and working toward goals, athletes and coaches generally hope to:

1. Increase attention and focus – setting goals helps you stay focused on the task at hand and avoid becoming distracted by other internal or external demands, such as self-doubts or other work. "You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them." *Michael Jordan, Basketball Superstar*

2. Increase motivation and effort – goals act as markers against which you evaluate your progress and determine if your current efforts are satisfactory.

3. Increase confidence – as you attain a goal, your confidence in your abilities to be successful and to overcome obstacles and adversity increases. As *Stan Smith, Tennis Champion*, noted "Experience tells you what to do; confidence allows you to do it."

Clearly, there are many benefits to setting, working toward, and ultimately achieving goals. In fact, the difference between a champion and a runner-up may depend on the types of goals that were set and worked toward. To improve your chances of setting attainable, success-producing goals, consider using the SMARTEST system:

Short and Long Term Goals – long term goals act as the endpoint you want to reach, such as winning the conference championship – they provide direction for your energies. Even so, remaining

motivated and focused on something that may be months or even years into the future can be difficult. Short-term goals, though, help by acting as daily or weekly stepping stones toward the long-term goal. They are the markers against which you can evaluate your progress toward your long-term goal.

Measurable Goals – goals need to be specific and measurable as opposed to vague and ambiguous. Everyone wants to "do well" or "win a lot" but such goals make it difficult to evaluate performance and make needed improvements. Instead, make your goals specific and measurable, such as "run a 4:30 mile" or "shoot 85% at the free-throw line," so you can accurately gauge your progress.

Achievement Strategies – without achievement strategies, a goal is almost worthless. Achievement strategies represent the specific behaviors in which you need to engage to actually reach your goal, such as staying after practice for one hour each day to work on corner shots or adding one weight workout per week to improve your leg strength by 20%. As *Tom Landry, Football Coaching Legend*, has noted "Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan."

Realistic Goals – goals need to be challenging, but realistic in chance of being attained. Goals that are too difficult or too easy may lead to decreases in motivation and confidence. Thus, always set goals within the context of what would be challenging yet realistic for that individual or team.

Time-Bound Goals – setting a time-frame for completing a goal is important

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Editor's Note

Courtney Albinson, M.A.

Welcome to the new academic year and to the fall issue of our newsletter! Inside, you will find information on important topics such as goal setting, motivation, and developing a winning program. This issue is the first of three issues we will be producing this year – by becoming a Center member, you can look forward to future issues coming this winter and spring.

The Center's inaugural year was filled with activity as our sport psychology consultants gave presentations and consulted with local college teams, high school programs, and athletic clubs. The Center's staff members have also been actively involved with some interesting research projects. Most recently, Center members traveled to Myrtle Beach, SC (at the Dupont World Amateur Handicap Tournament) to study golfers use of physical and mental skills in practices and competitions and how these skills related to successful performance. Another research project being conducted concerns the influence of psychological factors (e.g., stress, social support) on injuries in college and high school football players. The results of this study will be used to help prevent injuries or rehabilitate those athletes who do become injured.

The Center is sponsoring a booth at the UNT Homecoming pregame activities on Saturday, October 23 (activities begin at 4 p.m.). We hope you will be able to join us and then cheer UNT to victory! You will also have the opportunity to meet the staff and visit our facilities at our second Open House to be held in early December, 1999. Look for more information about the Open House in our next issue. We look forward to meeting with you and working with your sport teams in the near future!

Inside This Issue

- Motivating Your Athletes • Interview With Coach Darrell Dickey
- Membership form

Keeping Motivation Game

By Karen D. Cogan, Ph.D.

We've all seen this one before: Tyler is an exceptionally talented basketball player who loves to play. He does well in the first part of the season, and everyone thinks he is going to be the next Michael Jordan. But then something changes. As the season progresses, his performance drops off . . . he doesn't seem to care or put much effort into training and practice. Everyone agrees that he's got so much potential . . . if only he would put his heart into it. Tyler, too, knows he has the talent, but he just isn't MOTIVATED.

Most everyone in the sport world knows about motivation and believes it makes a difference in sport performances (or any other performance for that matter). Coaches know motivation is important; many give pre-game motivational speeches to get athletes up for the game. Many coaches also know that motivational levels vary from athlete to athlete and from competition to practice. So how can athletes and teams remain motivated through long, challenging seasons and then peak at just the right time?

First, let's consider the different types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation involves finding motivation within oneself. With intrinsic motivation, an athlete trains and competes because he or she gets personal satisfaction out of doing so. An athlete wants to practice and usually completes his or her workouts without being pushed by a coach. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, involves influential factors outside of the athlete to keep him or her involved. For instance, other people such as parents, coaches or peers can encourage or even pressure an athlete to perform. Outside rewards such as money, awards, or prizes also can serve as external motivators. Initially, strong external factors can keep athletes involved, but ultimately, they need to develop some intrinsic motivation or training and/or competing will become chores.

As a coach, you can help your athletes develop intrinsic motivation through the practice and competitive environments you create. Here are some effective strategies for creating positive motivational environments

for you and your teams (adapted from Anshel, 1990):

Make it fun! Fun is one of the main reasons children participate in sports, and the lack of it is a primary reason children drop out. Even for older athletes who are more committed to sport, having fun remains a strong motivator. By putting forth a little thought in planning daily practice sessions, coaches can develop fun (and motivating!) activities to help athletes develop the necessary skills, strength, and conditioning. For example, rather than having athletes simply run laps or sprints to improve endurance, you might have them play tag or run relay-type races instead. You'll probably get just as much (if not more) out of them physically and they may be smiling when you are done.

Recognize each athlete. Despite our society's emphasis on being Number 1, there is more to sport than winning—there is effort! Effort is a vital component in every athletic endeavor and needs to be recognized. It is easy to overlook athletes who don't stand out, score lots of points, or place. Make sure those athletes know they are important to the team and that their contributions are valued.

Develop skills. Athletes often get involved in sport because they want to develop specific physical skills. Learning new skills and gaining a sense of movement mastery can help maintain motivation. Reward the advancement that each athlete makes in improving his or her skills.

Develop team friendships. Sport is a social environment, and many athletes choose to get (and stay) involved because of the friendships they make and the support they receive. Coaches can actively promote team friendships by supporting activities outside of regularly scheduled workouts and encouraging support within the team.

Get to know each athlete. Learn and use your athletes' names. Take the time to talk to each one and really get to know him or her. Display a genuine concern for each athlete as a person. By understanding each individual's needs, you are in a better position to motivate him or her in an effective way.

Respect individual differences. They may be part of a team, but each athlete has a unique personality characteristics and needs. For example, not all athletes learn in the same manner. Some athletes might like lots of detail in the instructions you give; others may have difficulty paying attention and need only the bottom line. At the same time, promote camaraderie and appreciation among these different individuals. A sense of "we" with accompanying respect for individual differences can enhance the motivational environment by making everyone feel valued.

Agree on future directions and actions. Communicate with athletes about goals and what is needed to reach those goals. Goals are important sources of motivation and are even more useful when coaches and athletes are working toward them together.

Know when to let an athlete go. Sometimes no matter what you do, athletes remain unmotivated. Realize that some athletes really do not want to be in a sport and are only involved because of external factors. Sometimes the best thing you can do is help the athlete get out of the sport and find more meaningful activities. Talk with the athlete and understand what he or she needs and then offer assistance to make any necessary changes.

Behavior precedes emotion. In some cases athletes don't feel motivated and wait around for some miraculous event to jump-start them. Unfortunately, miraculous events seldom occur, and athletes have to take a more active role in developing their motivation. Sometimes athletes have to "just do it" and start practicing anyway. What generally follows is a more positive attitude and a feeling of motivation.

Summary: Although athletes are ultimately responsible for finding their own sources of motivation, coaches play an important role in creating positive motivational environments. If you can promote respect, encouragement and friendships, and also make learning and training fun, you are well on your way to creating the necessary environment for your athletes' happiness and success. ■

COACHES CORNER:

an interview with
UNT HEAD FOOTBALL COACH

DARRELL DICKEY

By: Peggy A.,
Richardson, Ph.D.
and Scott B.
Martin, Ph.D.

UNT Head Football Coach, Darrell Dickey, enters his second season at the helm of this NCAA Division I program. His number 1 GOAL is to develop a winning program. But, it must be done the "correct" way. That is, his coaches and players must practice and perform with great character. Dickey hopes to instill a sense of pride in the football team because it represents the university and the community and should do so in a "first-class" manner. Dickey says that his basic blueprint for building a successful program is contingent on three factors.

1. STRENGTH IN NUMBERS.

"Recruit young men who will stay in the program four-to-five years, develop and learn the system, gain experience, and then provide upper-class leadership." Winning teams have talented athletes who have experience. However, coaches must effectively communicate with these 105 different individuals. To keep a player in a program, coaches have to know what motivates and scares each player and how far each one can be pushed. Even though a football team is made up of individuals, each athlete needs to learn how to be a member of a cohesive team that can come together and play as a unit.

2. GAME-BY-GAME PERFORMANCE PLAN.

Dickey's general approach to coaching and preparation for games is to emphasize two ideas. "Before the team takes the field, players

must believe that they have a chance to win and believe in what they are doing. They must remain committed, particularly when the game hangs in the balance." Of course, game goals related to passing yards, turnovers, etc. are important, but the UNT football coaching philosophy rests mainly on "talking more about things players have to put in their MINDS as opposed to a set of statistics. Specifically our coaches develop a plan each week for what is needed against a particular opponent that will allow the team to be in a position to win the game in the fourth quarter."

3. DEALING WITH UNEXPECTED EVENTS AND STRESSORS.

During a single football game or across an entire football season, unexpected events will happen, such as an errant player mistake that results in a loss of a down or yards. When mistakes or penalties are made, coaches have choices in how they respond. Although some will pull a player for a mistake and then verbally belittle him, Dickey disagrees with this approach noting that these coaching behaviors scare the athlete and make him timid and/or afraid of making future mistakes. When an athlete thinks this way, he can be hesitant in skill execution and fail to respond automatically. At UNT, Dickey follows a different philosophy. "We ask players to go out and give 100%, to perform at the highest level." Under these guidelines, if

mistakes are made, the head coach takes responsibility for them. In so doing, players can compete without fear. Coaches must make a plan for the game, but they should also anticipate what events or stressors might occur and how to help players adjust or adapt effectively.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Coach Dickey agrees that strength and physical skills underlie a successful football program. Yet, he insists that sport psychology skills also are critical for developing a winning team. "CONFIDENCE and COMMITMENT (believing in what you are doing) and the ABILITY TO DEAL WITH ADVERSITY are essential skills for all athletes in winning programs. Although position coaches work with athletes, know their strengths and weaknesses, talk with them and prepare them, I, as head coach must create an environment in which the team can bond, and I must be 'believable' when I tell the team what physical and mental skills are needed for the plans that lead to success each game and ultimately to a winning season. Coaches and players must respect the opponent, gain a mind-set about having a realistic chance to win, and develop strategies to overcome adversity."

To learn more from Coach Dickey, listen to his weekly radio show on Monday evenings at 7 p.m. on KNTU (FM 88.1, Denton) or KHYI (FM 95.3, Dallas). ■

Join the Winning Team!

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CENTER FOR SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

As a member, you will receive a UNT CSPPE t-shirt and the Center's newsletters (fall, winter, and spring), which like the current issue, will be filled with interesting and informative articles concerning the mental side of sport performance. Finally, you will be invited to any of the center's functions, such as its open house where you can meet and interact with the Center's staff to discuss issues related to your own or your team's performance. **Annual membership fee is \$50.00.**

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Please complete this membership application form and send it, with your check or money order for \$50.00 (payable to UNT Center for Sport Psychology), to:

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Setting Goals for **SUCCESS: THE SMARTEST SYSTEM**

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for helping you stay motivated and focused. Although many goals have a built-in timeframe, such as a competitive season, other goals do not. Without a timeframe, athletes may procrastinate and put off their goal until some undetermined point in the future. Whenever possible, make sure that you know by when you want to achieve your goal.

Exhibit Your Goals – writing down and keeping your goals visible can increase motivation and accountability. Goals that are left only in your mind can be easily forgotten or changed. When setting goals, find a place to exhibit your goal so you have a daily reminder of what you want to achieve.

Seek Support for Your Goals – staying focused and motivated as you work toward your goals can be difficult and lonely at times. So share your goals with friends, family or teammates who are supportive. These individuals can offer support and encouragement and listen when you are feeling down or

unmotivated. They can help you remain focused and energized even when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Target Obstacles to Achieving Your Goals – even with well-developed goals, obstacles may still exist. You can't plan for all of them, but you can identify in advance and develop strategies for overcoming them developed. Whenever possible, plan for the obstacles that may interfere with you making progress toward your goals.

By using the SMARTEST system for setting goals, you increase your chances of attaining what you want. Whenever you set goals, apply the eight guidelines outlined in the SMARTEST system. When you do, ask yourself the following questions to make sure you are setting the SMARTEST goals possible:

- Do my short-term goals lead me toward my long-term goal?
- Would another person know when I

reached my goal? If not, how might I change how my goal is stated?

- Have I identified all the behaviors I need to implement to actually reach my goal?
- Does my goal challenge me to work beyond my current capabilities? What percentage chance do I have of reaching my goal?
- Have I identified a clear and specific timeframe for completion of my goal?
- Have I made my goal visible so I am reminded each day of what I want to accomplish?
- Have I told a supportive person about my goals? If not, who might I tell?
- What might interfere with my being able to reach my goals?

Information on the SMARTEST system was drawn from Trent Petrie and Eric Denson's (1999) book entitled: "A student-athlete's guide to college success: Peak performance in class and life". Wadsworth Publishing in Belmont, CA (ISBN 0-534-54792-3) ■

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