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AMERICAN MONTHLY FOOTBALL

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SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY: SETTING GOALS

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Setting Goals to Develop a Championship Attitude

The fall football season is fast approaching. Coaches across America are starting to develop objectives for the upcoming football season and this process involves setting goals for the season. I discuss goals under the language of developing a championship attitude. "Goal setting" can be boring for some athletes, but having a meeting to discuss the team philosophy and developing a championship attitude will get their interest.

What is developing a championship attitude? This is a broad statement that includes several facets such as: 1) Have every team member and coach agree to the team philosophy and goals; 2) develop an atmosphere of teamwork; 3) instill an attitude of winning and success in the players and coaches.

The first step before setting goals is developing a team philosophy. This helps all players and coaches "get on the same page." Every team member and coach needs to feel apart of the process rather than ramming the goals down the throat of the team. In addition, every member of the team needs to adopt the philosophy that team goals are more important than individual accomplishments. Once a team agrees to the team philosophy, setting goals flows easily. Here is an example of a team philosophy:

"Every team member and coach agrees to have an unselfish, ego-less attitude, in which the team wins with all and/or any parts of the game (offense, defense, special teams, etc.)."

Teams should consider three types of goals: 1) outcome goals; 2) performance goals; 3) mental goals. Outcome goals focus on W-L record, conference championships and titles. These are long-term or season-end goals. Performance goals are shorter-term and include goals that focus on certain areas of the game such as decreasing points allowed, decreasing turnovers, rushing yardage,

and consist of any game statistic. Mental goals focus on improving mental game abilities (very short term and based on one play at a time) such as committing to the play call, rehearsing each play, and letting go of errors. All three types of goals should be a part of your goals setting program.

What is the process for setting goals? I always ask my students to begin by setting some goals based on they want to accomplish at the end of the season. If it's to make the playoffs or get a bowl game for example, what do you need to focus on each week to reach that goal? A key element is setting goals based on what the team needs to improve. Finally, what goals (or cues) does each player have to focus on in the games? I call these process goals (mental game goals) that help players focus on one play at a time. So, work backwards with your goals setting and end at what has to be done on each play.

What are some guidelines for setting goals? Goals should include the following criteria:

- Set specific and measurable goals. Stats work well here.
- Set goals that match player ability (do not get stuck trying to be "realistic" here)
- Set season, mid-season, end of season as well as weekly goals
- Set goals for practice and games
- Set positively stated goals instead of negatively stated goals

Finally, set performance goals, not just outcome goals. Outcome goals are easy to set. What is harder is setting performance goals that will help you accomplish the outcome. These should focus on improving your weaknesses and building on strengths. A performance goal may involve retaining possession of the ball on each drive (no turnovers) or having players commit to each play of the game (mental goal). My philosophy is this: working the process (setting performance & mental goals) is what wins championships. Good results flow from taking care of business on each play!

By Patrick J. Cohn, Ph.D. • Peak Performance Sports
www.PeakSports.com

