

# Athlete's Guide to Setting Goals

Setting goals can help athletes not only improve their overall performance--it can also boost their ability to handle adversity. Here are some guidelines to developing specific sports goals for yourself or your team and suggestions for making sure the goals are realized.

## Types of Goals

In an earlier [sports psychology article](#) I highlighted that there are three types of goals: performance goals, outcome goals and "do your best" goals. The preferred type of goals to set are performance goals that specify both the observable behavior and the time frame for when these changes will occur.

I generally recommend that for every outcome goal that a coach or athlete sets; it should be accompanied by at least four process goals. For example, if you set a goal to become a starter on next year's team (an outcome goal) you should set four process goals that will increase the likelihood of you achieving that goal.

These performance goals would be behavior or activities over which you have complete control and your participation and ultimate success is virtually guaranteed.

## Examples of Performance Goals

An example of four process goals to accompany the outcome goals might be:

1. I will complete my strength training program three days per week all year long
2. I will stay after practice on Wednesdays and Fridays to take 50 extra shots with my right foot and 50 extra shots with my left foot
3. I will watch game film at least two hours every week and write down three key tactical points for each video session
4. I will complete five, five-minute imagery sessions each week all season long

## Key Lessons From Process Goals

What should be clear from these examples is that:

1. Athletes can completely control whether or not they engage in these activities (whether or not the coach ultimately selects them to be a starter)
2. Engaging in these activities will lead to improvements in each of the specified areas of performance and these improvements will increase the likelihood of achieving the outcome of becoming a starter
3. Each of these goals provides a specific standard of proficiency and a specified time for achievement

## 10 Guidelines for Creating Performance Goals

In order for goal setting to work for you and your team, the following guidelines should be followed:

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1. Goals should be difficult but realistic to achieve (Unrealistic goals create anxiety and disbelief)
  2. Goals should be specific, observable and measurable
  3. Set proximal (short term) as well as distal (long term) goals
  4. Set performance or technique goals rather than outcome or do your best goals
  5. Write your goals down ("ink what you think")
  6. Discuss your goals with at least one other person
  7. Set the goals yourself rather than simply adopt someone else's goals for you
  8. Provide and get goal support through interactions with coaches, teammates and other important people in your life
  9. Evaluate your goal effectiveness and adjust the goal difficulty in the future so those goals are optimally challenging for your current abilities and your future potential
  10. Set goals in each of the four pillars of sport: technical, tactical, psychological and physiological
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