

THE MAN WITH THE PLAN

In the second of his two-parter on goal-setting, Alistair Whittingham looks at planning for improvement



Following on from last issue, I am going to look at the best ways to establish a goal-setting program, tailored to the requirements of an individual athlete. Although any given program will have an ultimate outcome goal that may well be set a long way in the future, it is the ability of the plan to show the route to achieve this that will define its effectiveness. In the last article it was seen that sole focus on outcome

goals may result in unrealistic expectations due to difficulty in attaining a far-off result. This can lead to decreased confidence, reduced effort and performance, and increased anxiety in some cases.

The athlete, with help of concerned others such as a coach, must identify the ultimate goal that they want to achieve and the sub-goals that are necessary to achieve this. The next step is to arrange these goals in order and link them in a believable pathway to achieving the final outcome. Finally, where possible, options must be in place that allow the athlete to continue along the pathway if it is time-controlled so that a single failure does not cause the whole plan to stall. These can be seen in figure 1. One of the important considerations is in breaking down the final goal into attainable outcome goals that are temporally controlled. The use of different length arrows to indicate time taken over the goal allows another check to be placed upon the program by the athlete and coach. Within this plan, it is important to give the athlete other routes to progress if the goals in the direct path

are not achieved. This level of planning allows the athlete to see that the situation is fluid and dynamic; similarly the level of control felt by the athlete is increased in planning for outcomes other than those in the direct line. The use of sub-goals allows the athlete to "tick off" important milestones towards their final goal. These sub-goals also allow the athlete to make the most of the resources open to them, these may include: practice time, coaching, money, etc and should be included on the plan.

Focus on outcome goals is purposeful within a plan with a defined outcome, as is this case. The opportunity to use process goals, which are by definition more difficult to measure, is open to an athlete but these goals may be less decisive. In the figure it would have been easy to use process goals such as "improved technical skills", "better feel to the shot" but the measure of these is subjective and the amount of effort required to predict success is difficult to measure. To this end, a goal of "score 1,300" is easier to manage, but a goal of "score 300 at 90m, 325 at 70 and 50m and 350 at 30m" is even stronger as it breaks down the requirements into smaller, manageable parts. The second of these goals has the advantage that several goals may be achieved on any given day and failure of the overall goal (1,300) may be identified as a poor 50m rather than just a failure overall. Segmented outcome goals allow the athlete and coach a greater flexibility to increase the difficulty or specificity of any of the route goals. It is worth bearing in mind that detail is crucial when designing a plan. Specific short-term goals are easier to manage and measure compared to vague or long-term goals. Similarly, performance improves linearly with increasing goal difficulty until the task becomes too difficult then it decreases, so the level of each goal must be balanced to push the athlete but within reason. Every goal must bring something to the plan as it is important that the athlete be consistently directed with respect to achieving the overall goal. Asw@performance-archery.com & www.performance-archery.com



"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal." ~Henry Ford

Goal-setting pointers

Sole focus on outcome goals may result in unrealistic expectations, decrease confidence, effort and performance and increase anxiety

Performance and process goals are those under the athlete's control, realistic expectations, increase confidence, effort and performance, decrease anxiety

Performance improves linearly with increasing goal difficulty until the task becomes too difficult, then it decreases

Specific goals are more effective than vague goals
Short-term goals are more effective than long-term goals because evaluation is more frequent

"It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." ~Albert Einstein



