EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

GOAL SETTING

SHARINGOALS

THE SYSTEMIC COACHING MANUAL
FOR FOOTBALL COACHES
AROUND THE WORLD

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1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Scientific research

1.1.1. Definition

A Goal can be defined as “what an individual is trying to achieve; it is the object or aim of an action” (Locke et al., 1981, p. 126). Goal setting describes the process in which individuals create aims or objectives for their respective actions (Bird et al., 2024). Goal setting has its roots in organisational management in work settings but has been applied in sport settings long before research in the area began in the 1980s. Back then, the underlying assumption was that goals should be specific and challenging, rather than easy or broad, in order to be performance enhancing (Williamson et al., 2022). The performance enhancing tool of goal setting falls under the umbrella term of motivation. Brent Rushall argues that “athletes are considered motivated if specific behaviours occur at consistently high rates, with seemingly few rewards”. Goal setting is seen as one of the most effective behavioural interventions to enhance motivation (Grant, 2012). Athletes commonly pursue a variety of short-, medium- and long-term goals. These can include winning a game, improving performance, or performing at one’s best. However, goals do not need to be set in isolation, hence one at a time, but can be set in combination, for instance winning the game and improving one’s performance (Healy et al., 2018).

Goal setting involves the development of an action plan designed to motivate and guide a person or group of people towards the realisation of a desired outcome (Grant, 2012). Goals are more deliberate than desires and momentary intentions. Therefore, setting goals means that a person has committed to thoughts, emotions, and behaviours useful for attaining the goal. In doing so, the individual has established a desired future state which differs from their current state, thus creating a mismatch which in turn spurs future actions (Inzlicht, 2014). According to Weinberg (2010), for achieving a desired outcome through future actions, it is important to combine goal setting with feedback. In the literature it is argued that this combination is essential and leads to better performance than goal setting alone.

Goal Setting Theory

One of the most prominent theories in the field of goal setting, which is shortly introduced in this section, is the Goal Setting Theory (GST). This theory was developed to understand improved productivity in the workplace (Kingston & Wilson, 2008). Locke suggests that four mechanisms of goal setting can lead to improved performance. First, when a goal is set, attention and effort is shifted from irrelevant activities to activities that are in alignment with the goal. Furthermore, when a goal is set, an individual potentially puts more energy into the task performed. Third, this energy is expected to be more persistent, as long as tasks are performed that are in alignment with the set goal.

Lastly, the setting of goals can lead to adopting strategies and knowledge relevant for goal achievement. A commitment to the goal is of high relevance and expected to positively influence performance (Healy et al., 2018). Thereby, difficult goals improve performance more than easier goals and specific goals improve performance more than non-specific goals (Kingston & Wilson, 2008). Although this theory has its roots in a business context, goal setting is also applied in sports.

While several methods exist on how to successfully set goals in sport, goal setting remains complex, specific to the individual, the environment, and the characteristics of the goals set. Especially in sports, goal setting may be more complex than in a business context because it does not solely rely on efforts by the athlete. For example, while a football player can set goals like achieving a high passing rate, a specific number of shots on a goal, or a running distance, achieving these goals does not guarantee winning the game. Winning a game may be impacted by factors outside of the individual player’s control, such as the opponents, other teammates, or the coach. Consequently, applying goal setting in sport may be more complex than in other contexts (Healy et al., 2018).

Common principles applied include writing down goals or using SMART principles. However, it is arguably of importance to additionally consider the broader social motivational choices of athletes such as reasons for pursuing specific goals (Healy et al., 2018).

Types of Goals

In total, over 20 different types of goals exist (Grant, 2012). However, the three most common types of goals include outcome, performance and process goals. Outcome goals are related to the outcomes of an event or activity and often include a social comparison such as winning a game (Kingston & Hardy, 1997). Therefore, outcome goals are often used in sports and coaching programmes as these state a desired outcome. Consequently, they allow to regulate performance and can lead to improved performance.

However, this may not always be the most useful type of goal (Grant, 2012). In a football context, reaching the outcome goal of winning a game is not only dependent on the player but also on the opponent's performance (Weinberg, 2010). Furthermore, individuals with a deliberative mindset might benefit from more abstract goals (Grant, 2012). Performance goals also describe products of performance, but the focus is on task execution, hence performing well on a specific task. In a football context, this could be 'becoming the best football player in my city' or 'scoring at least two goals' (Kingston & Hardy, 1997; Grant, 2012).

Consequently, performance goals are independent of the opponent or other external sources (Weinberg, 2010). Process goals focus on specific behaviours an athlete wants to execute during performance, for instance ensuring the use of the right technical shot execution (Kingston & Hardy, 1997). Process goals are often used during training (Weinberg, 2010). Literature argues for a superiority of performance goals over outcome goals because performance goals can be controlled better and are more flexible, hence athletes can keep these more challenging and realistic. Nevertheless, performance goals may cause negative effects because they require action, are not always attained and are important, consequently they may generate stress and anxiety (Kingston & Hardy, 1997). All three types of goals can be useful, and the context should be considered to determine the type of goal appropriate (Weinberg, 2010).

Grant (2012) adds several other types of goals to the general idea of these three types of goals. These include time framing goals, where distal goals refer to long-term goals and proximal goals to short-term goals. Weinberg (2010) argues that both goals are relevant because short-term goals can provide motivation to achieve long-term goals. Long-term goals, on the other hand, provide direction. Researchers argue for the importance of celebrating short-term goals for them to provide this motivation to keep striving for the long-term goals (e.g. Baptiste, 1996; Schweitzer, 2006).

Reflecting on the reasons for the success of a short-term goal can help the learning process. Furthermore, celebrations create a positive atmosphere within the team but also for the individual; it consequently provides motivation and inspiration to further achieve goals (Schweitzer, 2006).

Furthermore, avoidance and approach goals may be considered as outcome goals, nevertheless, they do not define detailed behaviour descriptions. Avoidance goals define behaviours that move away from a specific outcome, while approach goals define behaviours that move towards a more specific outcome. Another type of goal is described as learning goals which focus on learning a task rather than performing it (Grant, 2012). This could be 'improving the accuracy in short passes over the next four weeks'.



1.1.2. Scientific Research and Models

The importance of goal setting in sport

In sport, goal setting is an action plan that facilitates the development and actualization of a desired outcome. As an action plan, goals are designed to motivate the individual into action and incorporate means of monitoring and evaluating performance, thus providing information on which to base follow-up (Bird et al., 2024). However, as suggested before, goal setting is not always a straightforward method to be applied in sports. While the achievement of goals in team sports often depends on other factors than the athlete themselves, young athletes often struggle to understand and identify different types of goals. Additionally, they tend to believe that goal setting can have detrimental effects should the goal not be reached. Research has also shown some difficulties concerning feedback and goal evaluation (Bird et al., 2024).

These factors are important to additionally consider when applying interventions such as SMART, as the sole application may not be sufficient in a sporting context (Bird et al., 2024).

Fixed and growth mindset

Persons differ in their mindset; they either have a fixed or a growth mindset. Those with a fixed mindset see ability as a fixed characteristic while those with a growth mindset see ability as something that can be developed. A person with a fixed mindset might find challenges threatening because of the belief that their ability is fixed and may not be sufficient for the task. This could be a player saying, “I can’t play as a defender, I’m a striker and it’s just not my position and no amount of practice will make a difference”. This might also mean finding failures particularly demoralizing.

A person with a growth mindset understands that not everyone has the same abilities, but that effort and education can improve one’s abilities. This makes them face challenges and learn from mistakes (Dweck, 2008). In the same example as given above, a player with a growth mindset might sound like: “I’m not very good at playing as a defender yet, but if I practice it regularly, I can become better at it”.

To be successful in goal setting and consequent goal achievement, several factors related to the growth mindset are important. Athletes should learn to embrace change and learn from it by adapting goals, treating failure not as a threat but as a natural and expected part of the improvement process. Those athletes who can learn from their setbacks will be able to learn and grow. In order to cultivate a growth mindset, athletes should work on reframing setbacks as valuable feedback for their success (Dweck, 2008).

Habits

Goal-directed behaviours are only one of two ways how action is controlled. To understand behaviour towards goal achievement, it is essential to take a look at habits and how these influence behaviour and their interplay with goal-directed behaviour (Ceceli & Tricomi, 2018).

Habits are responses which are cued by contexts (Wood, 2022). They develop when an individual repeats a behaviour in a specific context, usually when trying to achieve a goal. For instance, a football player may drink a cup of coffee before training believing it will wake him or her up. However, too much caffeine leads to dehydration which can have the opposite effect. Consequently, it can be the case that habits do not serve a newly set goal. Athletes may then need to inhibit habits and repeat actions which are in favour of achieving this set goal in order to form a now desired habit. This requires the exhibiting of self-control (see self-control) (Wood, 2016). Not only can habits be inhibiting goal achievement, but the right habits can also increase an athlete’s efficiency when striving for goal achievement. New habits can be learned when specific cues precede new behaviour and the successful application of the behaviour is then rewarded. Thereby, commitment, motivation and practice are important (Berkman, 2018). Which habits are inhibiting or supporting goal achievement in football players cannot be generalised but need to be considered in the respective context.

Nevertheless, some videos of successful sports players may provide some insight on the importance of habits for goal setting and goal achievement:

- Kobe Bryant on using meditation as a way to achieve his goals: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nF2iuVmT8ME
- Cristian Ronaldo on his fitness and dietary habits: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJTJUNdXDu4
- Alex Morgan on using habits such as yoga, going for breakfast with a friend, to prepare for a game day: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIorvpAM-Gk

How to set a goal in football

Several different models and suggestions on how to effectively set goals in sport exist. Bird et al. (2024) recently reviewed literature on those models, synthesized this information and created a goal setting process which is deemed valuable for the current football context and displayed in Figure 1.

According to Bird et al. (2024), the goal setting process includes four stages:

1. Preparing to set goals
2. Setting goals
3. Preparing for goal achievement
4. Following up

Preparing to set goals should first include a needs analysis. This needs analysis is suggested to involve a description of the goal style (performance, success or failure-oriented) and situational variables such as activity importance, performance expectancies, situation type, and task complexity. Furthermore, during this stage it is useful to help the players identify their reasons for setting these specific goals by identifying their mission or purpose. Additionally, the players should develop an understanding of the goal setting process. It is important to speak to them about the different types of goals, long- and short-term goals, as well as the different stages of goal setting. This way, the players will develop a sense of autonomy when it comes to goal setting and will be more likely to independently set goals in other areas (Bird et al., 2024).

The consequent stage involves the setting of goals. While goal setting theory suggests that goals should be specific and difficult, reviews of literature on goal setting in sports shows that specific goals are not always better than non-specific goals (Bird et al., 2024). Furthermore, in sports it is of importance that the goals set are neither too easy nor too difficult. Weinberg (2013 in Healy et al., 2018) suggests that goals should be set not more than 5% higher than the athlete's current performance. This argument is also backed up by findings in Bird et al.'s (2024) review who suggest that goals should be of moderate difficulty. This stage also includes deciding on the type of goal to be set, be it a performance, outcome, avoidance goal etc.

No established theory exists on the right number of goals to be set, however, results from the needs analysis should be used in order to avoid setting too broad and too many goals (Bird et al., 2024).

When setting goals, it is important to record goals, for instance through writing them down and displaying them where they are easily seen. Furthermore, team and individual goals should be made use of, and it should be ensured that these reinforce each other rather than collide (Weinberg, 2010).

The stage of goal achievement refers to an athlete's commitment and determination to reach a goal. Generally, more challenging goals lead to higher commitment and performance. During this stage, it can also be useful to consider the overall purpose and mission of the athlete to increase commitment. Furthermore, the athlete should then identify achievement strategies and recognise barriers (such as lack of confidence, lack of time, lack of feedback or unhelpful habits) to this achievement. These strategies can be manifold and can include vision-boarding or intuitive living:

Vision-boarding is a goal-setting approach where one selects pictures to support a future-oriented intention. These pictures may be collected from the internet, magazines, or may be artistically rendered by the athlete. These pictures are then placed on a board or put into a presentation in such a way that the athlete will see the pictures every day. The effect of this process is increased when the athlete shares their goals with others because people tend to feel a stronger desire to accomplish goals that are externalized. Each picture should have one sentence and a clear description of the goal as it relates to the image. For instance, an image of an MLS player may be accompanied with a caption: "I will play in the MLS by the year 2030." It is common for people to refer to their goals by "I want to..." This is a psychological technique that one falls into when tempering the possibility of failure. It is more motivating to utilise "I will..." connecting our intentions to commitment to the goal.

Intuitive living: "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?" This phrase can allow the athlete to intuitively live out his intentions by refocusing his efforts and evaluating if what he is about to do will contribute to a fulfilment of his internalised goals, core values, and beliefs. Placing this statement on the bathroom mirror can be a powerful intuitive redirecting practice. When the answer to this question is no for multiple days in a row, it begs him to change something in order to reach his set goal.

The final step of this stage is related to strategies on feedback and monitoring. Feedback and monitoring are of importance to determine whether a goal should be refined or not. The goals set should be measurable so that performance could be tracked and discrepancies between the athlete's performance and the set goal can be highlighted. Furthermore, feedback provides a way to evaluate the usefulness and effect of applied strategies or behaviours used for goal achievement. A way to evaluate performance can be for an athlete to keep a performance diary. Research has shown that this method has a positive influence on goal performance as those athletes who self-monitor show increased commitment to training (Bird et al., 2024).

The final stage is the follow-up. Although in sport, persistence is often key, it is not useful to continue pursuing an unattainable goal. Therefore, there may be a need to adjust a goal to prevent consequences of perceived goal failure, such as guilt or shame. It is important to continually move between the rewarding of progress and the adjusting of goals until a goal is achieved.

It is also possible that an athlete overachieves on a goal in which case a move should be made back to earlier stages of the goal setting process. Positive reinforcement can be a useful method for goal setting, especially reinforcing effort and commitment. Especially for coaches it is relevant to understand how to use positive reinforcement in an informational, rather than a controlling manner (Bird et al., 2024). Positive reinforcement has been found to improve performance and satisfaction among athletes (Smith & Smoll, 1997). If positive feedback and support is provided after a behaviour is executed, it is more likely an athlete will perform this behaviour again (Smith & Smoll, 1997). For goal setting, it is important for coaches to include positive reinforcement which supports the intrinsic motivation of players. This should include verbal positive support rather than external rewards (Bird et al., 2024; Smith & Smoll, 1997).

The SMART tool can be used to further specify the goals set, however, as argued before, it is important to consider the wider context of the athlete when applying such standardised tools.

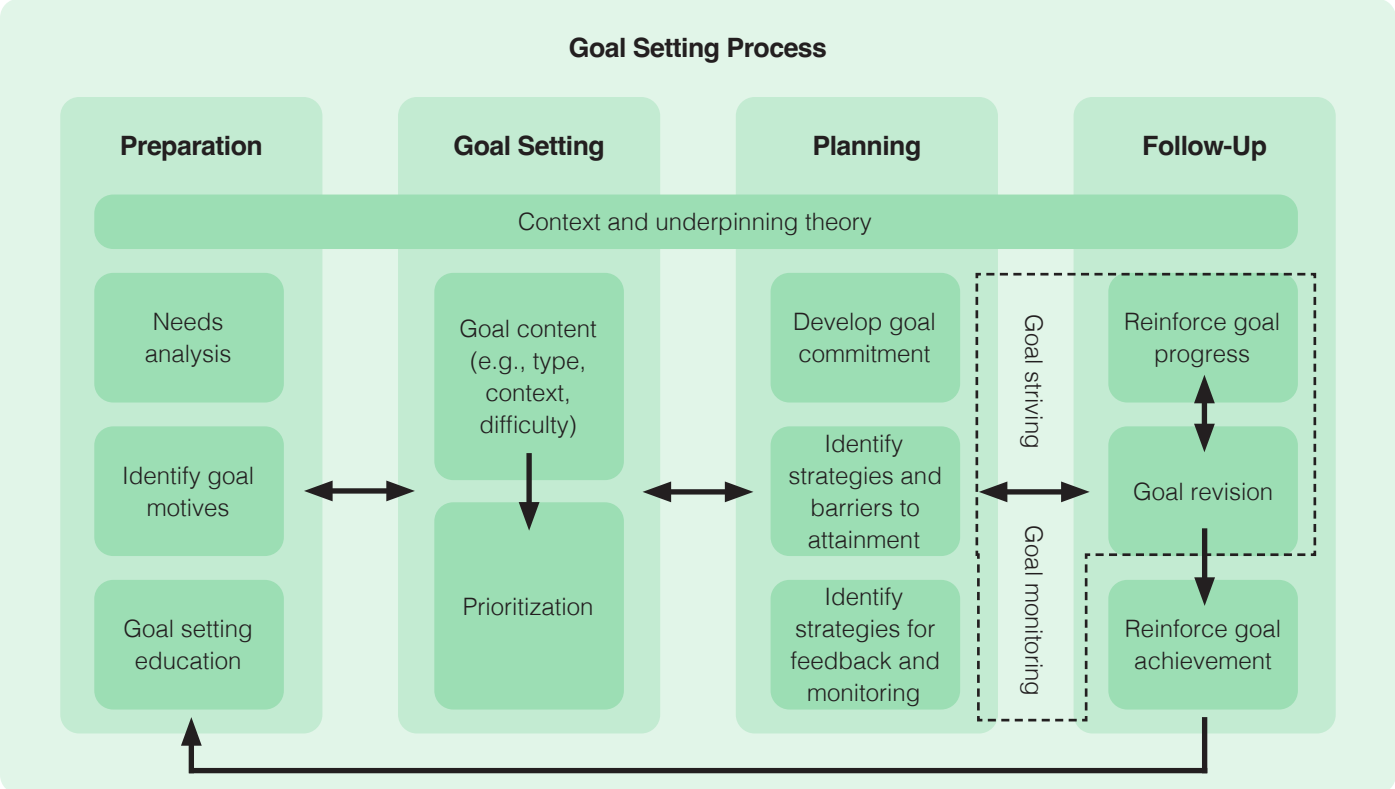


Figure 1
Goal Setting Process (Bird et al., 2024)

SMART goal setting

The SMART model, originally introduced as a way of writing management objectives (Doran, 1981), has been utilised widely in sport and does not come without its limitations as discussed before. However, if its limitations are considered and kept in mind, as well as the context specificity of goal setting in football, the tool can prove to be useful for goal setting.

SMART provides acronyms that describe the goal setting process as displayed in Figure 2: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time. Meaning that the set goals should be specific, however, as discussed above, the relevance of specific goals in sport is a topic of debate. Furthermore, a goal should be measurable so that progress and achievement can be tracked. The goal should also be challenging but achievable; a right balance should be found. Additionally, the goal must serve a purpose, hence should be relevant as otherwise the commitment will be lacking. Finally, a timeline should be attached to the goal in order for evaluation and monitoring to be applied (Bird et al., 2024).



Figure 2
SMART Goal Setting (Trace, 2024)

1.1.3. Impact on performance

Goal setting has a well-documented impact on performance in football and sport more broadly. Interest in the area has grown from the suggestion that goal setting could be as effective a performance tool in sport as it has proven to be in business contexts, and over 1,400 studies have examined goal setting in sport since 1985, the majority reporting a positive effect on athletes' performance (Bird et al., 2024). More specifically, process goals have been found to improve self-efficacy, satisfaction, and intrinsic interest; performance goals to decrease anxiety while increasing effort mobilization, satisfaction, and self-confidence; and outcome goals to reduce anxiety and increase engagement (Williamson et al., 2022). Grant (2012) further found that effective goal setting changes an athlete's attitude towards achieving a specific goal, making their approach more rational and efficient and contributing directly to the optimization of competitive performance.

This performance effect is explained by Goal Setting Theory, introduced earlier in this chapter: setting a goal redirects attention and effort towards goal-relevant activities, increases the energy invested in a task, sustains that energy for longer, and prompts the development of new strategies relevant to achieving the goal (Locke et al., 1981). Consistent with this mechanism, difficult goals have been found to improve performance more than easy goals, and specific goals more than non-specific ones (Kingston & Wilson, 2008).

The way a goal is set also affects the size of this performance benefit. Research shows that performance is higher when athletes set their own goals rather than having goals set for them by a coach: athletes given coach-set goals tend to stop once the goal is reached, whereas those who set their own goals are more likely to exceed it, and both goal commitment and intrinsic motivation are higher when the goal originates with the athlete (Baghurst et al., 2012). Positive reinforcement adds a further performance benefit on top of this: it improves both performance and satisfaction among athletes, and behaviour that is reinforced with positive feedback is more likely to be repeated (Smith & Smoll, 1997) – provided the reinforcement is delivered in an informational rather than a controlling manner and favours verbal encouragement over external rewards.

1.1.4. Impact on social cohesion

Goal setting is not only an individual performance tool – it is also one of the most consistently effective team-building methods for building cohesion within a sport team. The existing observation that individual and team goals should reinforce rather than compete with each other (Weinberg, 2010) reflects a broader body of evidence on why and how shared goals bring a team together.

Team goal setting builds cohesion because it gives players a shared reference point: a common target that the whole group is working towards, which clarifies each player's role and increases collective commitment to the team as a unit rather than only to individual outcomes (Widmeyer & Ducharme, 1997). This effect has been demonstrated directly in sport: in a season-long study of youth basketball teams, teams that took part in a structured team goal-setting programme showed significantly higher cohesion by the end of the season than teams that did not, even though both groups started at similar levels (Sénécal, Loughead & Bloom, 2008).

This finding is not an isolated result. A meta-analysis of team-building interventions across sport teams found that, among all the methods used to build cohesion, goal setting was the single most effective – more effective than any other individual team-building technique studied (Martin, Carron & Burke, 2009). Celebrating short-term goals together, already discussed earlier in this chapter, adds to this effect: shared celebration creates a positive atmosphere for the team as well as the individual, reinforcing the sense of collective progress (Schweitzer, 2006).

1.1.5. Correlations with private and family life, academic and work career

The skills involved in setting and pursuing goals do not stay confined to football. Goal setting is consistently identified as one of the core "life skills" that sport can teach, alongside skills such as problem solving, time management, and performing under pressure – transferable skills that carry over from the sports field into school, work, and family life (Gould & Carson, 2008).

This transfer has been demonstrated directly through structured life-skills programmes delivered inside sport. The Play It Smart programme, delivered through high school football specifically, taught student-athletes goal setting alongside other life skills as part of their athletic experience. Following the programme, participating athletes showed measurable academic gains, including higher grade point averages and graduation rates, alongside increased community involvement and healthier lifestyle behaviours (Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius & Presbrey, 2004).

Similar results have been found in programmes that focus specifically on teaching goal setting as a skill in its own right. The Going for the Goal programme, evaluated in two large studies involving several hundred middle school students, found significant increases in students' knowledge of goal-setting skills and in their actual goal attainment (O'Hearn & Gatz, 1999), as well as improvements in problem-solving skills as a further benefit (O'Hearn & Gatz, 2002).

Beyond school and work, athletes themselves report that skills learned through goal setting and planning in sport carry over into family life. In interviews with adolescent athletes, time management – organising time to balance schoolwork, football, and family commitments – was described as a skill developed directly through sport and applied at home, and athletes reported that the discipline and perspective gained through their sporting experience shaped how they related to and appreciated their families (Jones & Lavallee, 2009).



1.1.6. Development of goal setting

Goal setting develops as a structured, cyclical skill rather than a single ability that is simply present or absent. The goal-setting process already introduced in this chapter – preparing to set a goal, setting it, working towards its achievement, and following up – mirrors what developmental psychology describes as self-regulated learning: a repeating cycle of forethought (setting a goal and planning a strategy), performance (acting on the goal and monitoring progress), and self-reflection (evaluating the outcome against the goal) (Zimmerman, 2002). Developing the ability to set goals in football is therefore best understood as developing the capacity to move independently through this whole cycle, rather than mastering any single step in isolation.

This capacity is not present from birth and develops gradually. In early childhood, choosing and pursuing a goal depends heavily on cues available in the immediate environment rather than on an internally held plan, which makes young children's goals fragile and easily disrupted by unexpected changes; this instability only begins to reduce as cognitive flexibility and metacognition mature over the preschool years (Leclercq, Gimenes, Maintenant & Clerc, 2023). This explains why goal setting at the youngest stage of this framework must remain simple, immediate, and led by the coach: the underlying cognitive capacity to hold and pursue a more independent, self-generated goal is still forming.

A simple illustration of this is a self-referenced scoring activity, where a coach designs the task, the format, and the method of measuring success, and a player's only job is to compare a new score to their own previous one and try to beat it – removing every part of the goal-setting process except the one small, concrete comparison a seven- or eight-year-old is ready to make independently.

As this capacity matures, the process of self-regulation shifts from being externally modeled to being internally driven. Early research on self-regulated learning found that children's goal-setting and self-monitoring skills develop substantially through modelling and guided practice – for instance, when an adult demonstrates how to set a specific, proximal goal and how to track progress towards it – before children are able to carry out this process independently (Zimmerman, 2002). This mirrors the coaching progression already built into this framework: coaches play an active, directive role in the goal-setting process at the younger stages, gradually withdrawing this support as players develop the independent capacity to prepare, set, pursue, and reflect on their own goals.

By the time this capacity is fully developed, players are able to apply the mechanisms described by Goal Setting Theory – directing attention and effort, sustaining energy, and generating new strategies (Locke et al., 1981) – independently and flexibly across short-, medium-, and long-term goals. The developmental progression from coach-led to player-led goal setting, reflected across the six stages of this framework, is therefore not simply a matter of increasing football experience, but reflects the underlying maturation of self-regulation itself.

1.2. Window of opportunities

A window of opportunity describes a period during development when a competence, or the components underlying it, develops disproportionately faster than at other points in life – not because development is impossible outside that period, but because the same coaching input produces much larger gains during it.

Goal setting is, at its core, a form of goal-directed cognition: choosing an objective, holding it in mind, directing effort towards it, and adjusting behaviour when circumstances change. Developmentally, this is the domain of executive function – planning, working memory, and self-monitoring – rather than a standalone skill with its own separate timeline.

The clearest evidence on when this capacity develops fastest comes from a large-scale study integrating over ten thousand participants across four independent datasets: executive function follows a non-linear trajectory, with rapid, statistically significant development in late childhood to mid-adolescence, specifically ages 10 to 15, before stabilising to adult levels by around 18 to 20 (Tervo-Clemmens et al., 2023). This maps closely onto Stage 3 and Stage 4 of the Sharing Goals framework, suggesting these two stages are where deliberate goal-setting practice is likely to produce the largest, most durable gains.

This accelerated period has a clear biological basis. From the onset of puberty, the prefrontal cortex – the brain region most responsible for planning, forward-thinking, and self-regulated behaviour – undergoes substantial reorganisation, reaching full structural maturation only around age 25 (Arain et al., 2013).

This means goal-setting ability does not stop developing once the fastest-growth window closes; it continues to refine well into early adulthood, consistent with the more independent, self-directed goal setting expected of players in Stage 5 and Stage 6. For Stage 1 and Stage 2, this evidence cuts the other way: players in this age range are developing the foundational capacities of executive function before its steepest growth phase begins. This is consistent with what the framework already asks of coaches at these stages – keeping goals short-term, simple, and externally guided – since the underlying planning and self-monitoring capacity required for more complex goal setting has not yet entered its period of fastest development.

Taken together, the evidence points to a genuine, identifiable window: goal setting develops fastest during Stage 3 and Stage 4, when the underlying executive-function capacity is maturing most rapidly, while meaningful development continues at a slower, stabilising rate through Stage 5 and Stage 6 as the prefrontal cortex completes its maturation into early adulthood.



1.3. Correlation with other skills and competencies



Correlation with Emotional Competencies
Motivation grows out of a goal the player has chosen, because it turns training from something they are told to do into something they want. Self-Control is easier with a goal behind it, as a player working on possession has a reason to stop forcing the early shot. Grit needs a goal to work towards, as it tells the player a failed attempt was one step and not the end. Self-Reflection becomes concrete when the player compares what happened with what was intended.

Correlation with Physical Skills
Endurance improves too slowly to feel, so a measured goal is what shows the player the work is paying off. Speed lends itself to goal setting, because a sprint time is something a player can set, test and beat alone.

Correlation with Technical Abilities
Passing goals can be tracked by counting passes reaching a teammate under pressure in each game. Shooting practice gains meaning when players set targets like the far corner from the box edge. Juggling lets players set and beat personal goals alone.

Correlation with Social Competencies
Communication is where a team goal begins, as a shared goal exists only once it has been talked through and agreed. Leadership shows when the game is not going to plan and someone holds the group to the goal it set.

Correlation with Cognitive Skills
Problem Solving starts when a goal stalls, as the player looks for what is in the way and changes the plan instead of giving up. Critical Thinking judges whether a goal was the right one, which asks more than checking whether it was reached.

Correlation with Tactical Principles
Penetration becomes a goal once the instruction is made countable, such as forward passes attempted in a half. Offensive Unity gets a shared target, such as four players in the box for every cross, that the whole team can check.

1.4. Key learnings

- Goal setting is the process in which an individual creates objectives for their respective actions (stage 2-6)
- Goal setting enhances motivation and motivation is required for goal achievement (stage 2-6)
- Goal setting is most effective when combined with feedback (stage 2-6)
- Goal setting in a sports context does not only rely on efforts by the player (stage 1-6)
- The three most common types of goals are outcome, performance, and process goals (stage 4-6)
- Team goals should be incorporated with individual goals (stage 3-6)
- Short-term goals (stage 1-6), medium term (stage 3-6), and long-term goals (stage 4-6) should be incorporated
- Developing a growth mindset in players can improve goal setting processes (stage 4-6)
- The right habits can enhance goal achievement while the wrong habits can inhibit goal achievement (stage 3-6)
- The goal setting process includes four stages: Preparation, Setting goals, Preparation for achievement, follow-up (stage 3-6)
- The SMART tool can improve goal setting processes if applied cautiously (stage 3-6)



1.5. From science to practice

The scientific understanding of goal setting highlights that it develops as a structured, cyclical skill that shifts from being externally scaffolded to internally self-directed. In football, this process is most effective when players are given a goal-setting structure appropriate to their current stage of cognitive and self-regulatory development, and are gradually given more ownership over that structure as their capacity for independent planning, monitoring, and reflection matures.

Across the different stages of development, goal setting progresses from simple, coach-led, and immediately achievable targets towards independent, flexible, and long-term goal setting integrated into a player's everyday life. This progression reflects both the executive-function window of accelerated growth described earlier in this chapter and the broader maturation of self-regulation into early adulthood.

Stage 1
7-8 years



At this stage, goal setting is almost entirely coach-led. Players are given simple, short-term goals within a single session and can see success and improvement immediately, such as beating their own previous score in a repeated activity. The coach designs the task and tracks progress, since the underlying capacity for independent planning is still forming.

Stage 2
9-10 years



Players begin to hold a goal in mind across multiple sessions rather than only within one, with short-term goals now improved across a training week. Goals remain concrete and tied to specific, measurable actions, and the coach continues to guide the process, but players start to take on slightly more responsibility for tracking their own progress.

Stage 3
11-12 years



At this stage, players begin to combine individual and team goals and can work towards medium-term goals across roughly a month. Coaches still help break these longer goals into manageable weekly steps, but players are increasingly able to connect their personal contribution to a shared team target.

Stage 4
13-14 years



Players begin to connect their goals on the field with their behaviour off it and can manage more complex, tactically oriented goals. Coaches shift from setting goals for players to asking guiding questions, handing over increasing ownership of the goal-setting process while still providing feedback and support.

Stage 5
15-16 years



Players are able to set specific, performance-oriented goals independently across short-, medium-, and long-term horizons and to monitor and adapt these goals with less coaching support. Habits and routines outside football, such as sleep and recovery, become part of the goals players set for themselves.

Stage 6
17–18 years



By this stage, players drive their own goal-setting process almost entirely, connecting their football goals to broader career aspirations and life habits. The coach's role shifts to that of a sounding board, and goal setting becomes a self-sustaining skill that players carry with them beyond football.

2. COACHES' BEHAVIOUR

2.1. Coaching style

Coaches tend to focus on long-term goals, such as winning a competition. However, different types of goals are of similar importance depending on the context and the players' age (Weinberg, 2010). Consequently, it is important for coaches to understand these types of goals and their importance when applying goal setting strategies with his or her players.

2.1.1. Scientific grounding

Considering the importance of athletes being motivated to reach their goals and receiving feedback from their coaches, a useful leadership style for coaches could be democratic coaching. Thereby, coaches allow input from their athletes on decision-making and goal setting. While the coach provides the framework, athletes are given autonomy which is of importance for goal achievement (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

This is supported by De Albuquerque et al. (2021) who found that goal setting is positively correlated to a leadership profile that focuses on teaching, as well as motivating and offering social support. Athletes were found to take responsibility for solving problems that arose rather than relying on their coach. The authors argue that a training environment in which athletes can make decisions themselves and receive positive feedback enables them to set goals. On the other hand, an autocratic leadership style was found to inhibit the athletes' ability to set goals (De Albuquerque et al., 2021).

In younger age groups (stage 1-4) the coach should track and guide the goal setting process of the players while in older age groups (stage 5-6) players become able to more independently track and guide their own goal setting process.

2.1.2. Practical implications

As the previous sections have argued and shown, feedback is an essential part of goal setting. While other actors, such as the athletes or their parents, may provide feedback, on the football field this is often the coach's role. Interviews with elite team-sport coaches show that coaches themselves understand feedback as a tool to improve performance, build confidence, and help athletes monitor their own progress, and that checking whether feedback has actually been received and understood is part of giving it well (Mason, Farrow & Hattie, 2020).

As a coach, feedback should be considered as a motivational method and should provide the athletes with information which allows them to correct or maintain their performance. Furthermore, feedback can be a powerful tool to help players reach their goals and facilitate the achievement of team goals.

- Feedback should be transparent and objective, hence it should rely on available and agreeable information. Consequently, information on each player in relation to their goals is essential.
- Feedback should relate to what is meaningful to the athlete. For this it is essential to listen to the athletes when they set their goals and speak about their overall mission. By leaning into what is meaningful to them, the coach can support their objective feedback and remind the player about why they set this goal in the first place.
- Ask for the athletes' subjective feedback by providing them with a space to describe their feelings and rewatch behaviour. By hearing their subjective interpretation, the coach can better understand their frame of reference and support them to bring them closer to achieving their goals.
- Adapt a player-centred approach, providing autonomy to the player in choosing their behaviour. However, giving objective feedback remains essential. If a player is underperforming, the coach should spend time learning about the player, listening to their needs, and finding ways to meet these needs.

One effective method for feedback is called the 'sandwich method'. This method has the following components:

- Positive and descriptive statement of what you observed.
- Statement for what can be improved upon an action.
- Future-oriented statement for why the action provided is important.

Based on this information, objective feedback could sound like the following:

Coach: *"You had four shots from outside of the box in the first half. If I am not mistaken, you said that you have been working on increasing your range for scoring goals. How do you feel about the effectiveness (power and/or accuracy) of your shots in the first half?"*

Player: *"I feel like they have been a bit too weak from that distance to score against this goalkeeper."*

Coach: *"I applaud you for having courage to work on extending your range and implementing that in the game. Based on your observations, you may consider shooting from the edge of the box or just within to increase your effectiveness in this game while you are still fine-tuning the skill of striking from longer distances. It is your game, and you are the player on the field making the decisions, so go out there and enjoy yourself, taking into the second half what you learned about the opposition from the first half!"*

It is also essential that the communicated expectations are within the control of the player. For instance, "I can't believe you lost us the game!" is never an appropriate or accurate communication to a player because the outcome of the game is not within the control of the individual. Choices are within the control of each player. Teaching players to adopt an internal locus of control by referencing the things within their capacity to change and showing them that they influence the circumstances of their situation by making intentional individual choices can be an empowering approach.

This may seem obvious, but it is very common for coaches to model an external locus of control by complaining about calls from the referee or blaming a player for a win or loss. Players should be taught to make each decision intentionally as, over time, the right, small, intentional choices within one's control will lead to completion of objectives that contribute to overall goals. For instance, in order to win a championship each player may first commit to getting proper sleep (defined in many contexts as 8+ hours) on a habitual basis if they want to be able to recover from the high training loads necessary to learn and grow.

Furthermore, it is necessary to establish a safe space for players amongst their peers. Here as well, feedback should be kept positive and motivating rather than overcritical. Realistic and positive feedback can help a player to improve their own scores. Michael Jordan used to say in his book 'My Triumph Philosophy' that learning to have the correct technique can help an athlete reach their goals. On the contrary, no matter how much an athlete practices a technical skill, if he does it the wrong way, he will be a specialist in performing that activity incorrectly, which can make it difficult for him to achieve his goals (Jordan, 1996). This observation aligns with research on deliberate practice, which shows that improvement depends on practice that is attentively performed and corrected rather than on repetition alone (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

2.2. Choice of words

Stage 1
7-8 years



At this age, language should stay simple, immediate, and tied directly to the concrete outcome the player just experienced, since players are not yet able to hold an abstract or distant goal in mind on their own.

Example tone:

- *"You beat your score from last time!" (immediate, concrete recognition)*
- *"Let's see if you can do it again." (short-term, achievable framing)*
- *"You did five more than before!" (specific, measurable feedback)*

Stage 2
9-10 years



Players at this age can now hold a goal in mind across a whole training week, so language can start to reference progress over time rather than only the current moment, while remaining concrete and specific.

Example tone:

- *"You're getting closer to your goal from Monday." (progress over time)*
- *"What was your target again? Let's check how close you are." (self-tracking prompt)*
- *"What do you want to work on this week?" (introducing simple choice)*

Stage 3
11-12 years



As players begin to combine individual and team goals across a longer time frame, language can start to connect a player's personal target to the team's shared goal, while still helping break the goal into manageable weekly steps.

Example tone:

- *"How does your goal this week help the team reach its goal this month?" (connecting individual to team)*
- *"What's one small step you can take this week towards your monthly goal?" (breaking down)*
- *"What did the team do well together today?" (team-goal reinforcement)*

Stage 4
13-14 years



Players at this stage are ready to connect their goals with behaviour beyond the field, so language should shift from instruction towards guiding questions that hand over more ownership of the process.

Example tone:

- *"What do you think you need to do, on and off the pitch, to reach that goal?" (guiding question, off-field link)*
- *"How did that decision move you closer to your goal?" (self-reflection prompt)*
- *"What would you like feedback on today?" (player-led feedback request)*

Stage 5
15-16 years



Players are increasingly able to set and monitor their own goals independently, so language should support autonomy and self-monitoring rather than direct guidance, while still being available when needed.

Example tone:

- *"What's your plan for tracking that this week?" (self-monitoring support)*
- *"How do you think that session went against your own goal?" (self-evaluation prompt)*
- *"Let me know if you want a second opinion on your goal." (available, not directive)*

Stage 6
17–18 years



By this stage, players are expected to drive their own goal-setting process almost entirely, so language should position the coach as a sounding board who supports the player's own thinking rather than leading it.

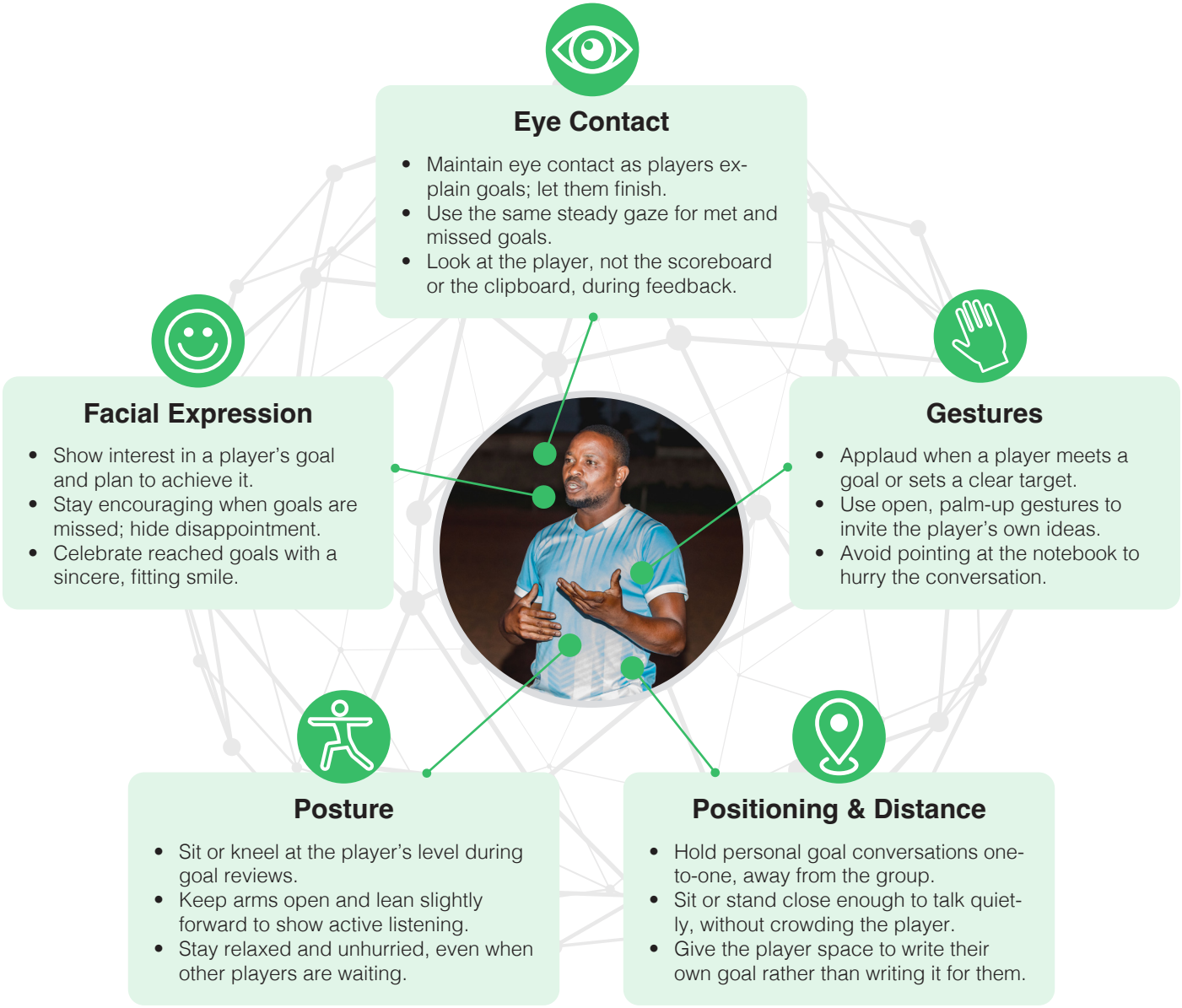
Example tone:

- *"Talk me through your thinking on that goal." (sounding-board framing)*
- *"How does this goal connect to where you want to be in a few years?" (career/life connection)*
- *"What support do you need from me on this?" (coach as resource, not director)*

2.3. Body language

The appropriate body language can often be context specific. Nevertheless, during feedback sessions, it is recommended that the coach's body language is calm and collected. It is useful to show the player that the coach is actively listening, for example through:

When the coach is celebrating an achievement, it can be appropriate to show positive emotions through applauding, congratulating etc. For players to reach their goals, commitment and motivation is important. Consequently, players will benefit if the coach mirrors this commitment.



3. TRAINING

THE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

of goal setting from foundation to maturity:



7-8 years

1. Do a trial run first and record what you managed, before setting a target.
2. State the goal as a number that can be counted at the end of the session.
3. Say when the goal has been reached, and mark it before setting a new one.



9-10 years

1. Write down a goal for the next session, with the number to beat.
2. Record the score each session so the change from last time is visible.
3. Say whether the goal was met, separately from whether the session went well.



11-12 years

1. Name one specific part of the game to improve.
2. Break a long-term goal into one for the next few weeks.
3. Review a game against the goal they set for it, not against the result.



13-14 years

1. Set goals around what can be controlled, alongside desired results.
2. Name the actions and habits, in training and outside it, that the goal depends on.
3. Change a goal that is no longer reachable and say what made them change it.



15-16 years

1. Choose a goal themselves and say why it matters to them.
2. Keep the goal written somewhere they will read it again.
3. Track progress between sessions without being asked for it.



17-18 years

1. Work out for themselves what needs improving, and set the goal from that.
2. Build the habits the goal depends on into the week, and say which ones held.
3. Adjust or abandon a goal during a block of weeks, and give the reason.

Training

7-8 years



3.1. Stage 1 (7-8 years)

3.1.1. Stage characteristics

For this age group, it is of importance to incorporate fun exercises that encourage basic and simple short-term goal setting. Intrinsic motivation is important to keep the players engaged and ensure goal achievement.

3.1.2. Specific learning objectives

Players in this developmental age are able to set short-term goals during a training practice. It is important that they see success and goal achievement fast. Therefore, it is also important that the goals set are achievable. For example, an exercise can be executed multiple times throughout a session, attempting to continuously improve the score.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

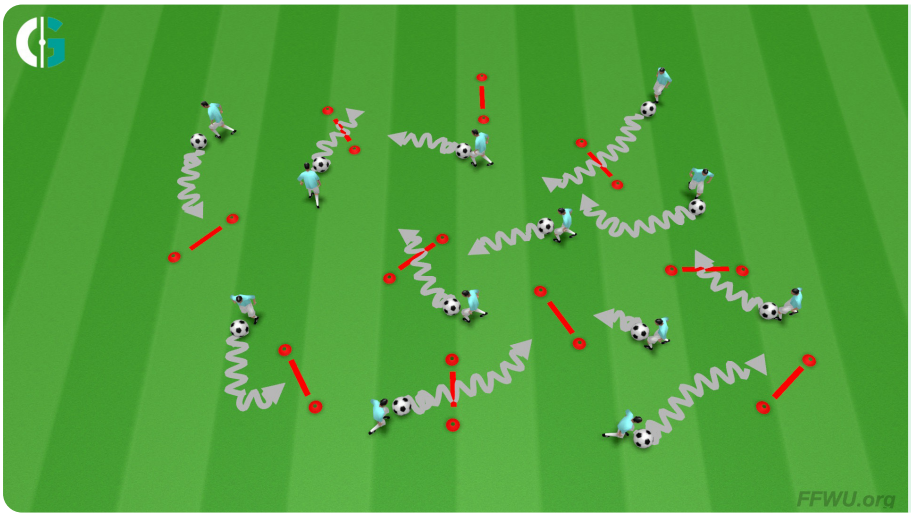
1. Do a trial run first and record what you managed, before setting a target.
2. State the goal as a number that can be counted at the end of the session.
3. Say when the goal has been reached, and mark it before setting a new one.

3.1.3. Coach insight

At this age, goal setting works best when it is playful and immediate – players need to see success within the same session rather than working towards something distant. Keep track of each player's short-term goal yourself rather than expecting them to remember or record it, and make celebration a visible, built-in part of the exercise rather than an afterthought.

EXERCISE

BEAT YOUR OWN SCORE



Players	2+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	quarter of a field
Equipment	1 ball per player, 20 cones
Duration	total: 12 min play: 5 x 1 min breaks: 1 min
Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Set up 10 cone goals
- The players should dribble through the cones with a ball for one minute and count the number of cones they dribbled through
- After each round, the players come together for a short reflection
- With every new attempt, players should try to improve their own score
- Repeat 5x for 1 minute
- Variations:
  - The players can use one foot first and then set a new goal for dribbling through the cones with their other foot
  - Multiple stations can be set up, e.g. shooting on small goals (--> up your score from 1st to 3rd round)

Coaching Tips

1. Provide the players with **feedback** on their goal setting process
2. Encourage the players to **focus on their own scores** and not compare with other teammates
3. Make sure the players **celebrate their achievements** (give positive and encouraging feedback, let them play a game they enjoy afterwards)

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players count their cones on the first round before setting a target for the next.	○ *How many did you manage on your first round?* ○ *Why is it useful to measure before choosing a target?* ○ *What number did you set for round two?*
2	Players state their target as a number of cones they can count at the end of the round.	○ *Was it difficult to continuously try to improve your score?* ○ *What exactly were you counting?* ○ *How close were you to the number you set?*
3	Players say when they beat their score, and mark it before setting a new one.	○ *How did you feel when you improved your score?* ○ *Could you make use of the feedback the coach gave you?* ○ *What did you do when you reached your target?*

Training

9-10 years



3.2. Stage 2 (9-10 years)

3.2.1. Stage characteristics

For this age group, it continues to be important that the activities are fun, achievable and include the setting of short-term goals. Players can now set goals that can be improved throughout a training week.

3.2.2. Specific learning objectives

Children in this developmental stage can start to focus on their personal skill development, for instance through improving dribble speed in different situations or improving shooting techniques with both feet. Goals can be set to be improved within a practice or throughout the week. Players start to understand the importance of setting goals in order to improve their skills.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

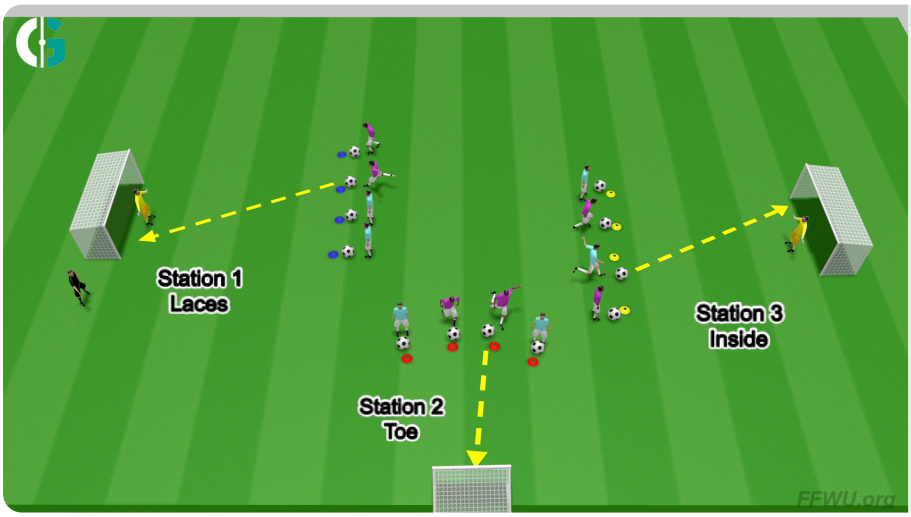
1. Write down a goal for the next session, with the number to beat.
2. Record the score each session so the change from last time is visible.
3. Say whether the goal was met, separately from whether the session went well.

3.2.3. Coach insight

Players at this stage can now hold a goal in mind across multiple sessions, not just within one, so it is worth writing their weekly goal down somewhere visible rather than relying on memory. Keep goals tied to concrete, measurable actions such as dribble speed or shooting accuracy, and continue to give clear feedback, since players are still learning why goal setting matters rather than just how to do it.

EXERCISE

SHOOTING SCORES



Players	8+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	half field
Equipment	12 balls, 2 goals, 1 mini-goal, 12 cones
Duration	total: 23 min play: 3 x 6 min breaks: 1 min
Author	SJ Weber

Description

- 3 stations are set up
  - Station 1: Shot with laces on one goal with goalkeeper
  - Station 2: Shot with the toe into a mini-goal
  - Station 3: Shot with inside on one goal with goalkeeper
- Groups of 4 (or less) at each station which rotate after 4 minutes
- In the first round at each station, they count their goals scored; subsequent rounds can be done during the same training session or during a session on a day later that week
- The players should write down their scores and try to improve them in the subsequent rounds
- Variations:
  - Use of both feet and trying to improve the scores for each foot

Coaching Tips

1. Support the players in their goal setting process; **write their scores down**
2. Remind them to only **focus on their own scores** and not compare with others
3. Provide the players with **feedback on their techniques**

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players write down a shooting target for the next session, with the number to beat.	○ *What was difficult about setting a goal in one session and achieving it in the next?* ○ *Which station will you aim to improve?*
2	Players record their score at each station so the change from last time is visible.	○ *How can setting goals help you become better at football?* ○ *Can you see progress since last week?* ○ *Which station shows the clearest change?*
3	Players say whether they met their target, separately from whether the session went well.	○ *How can feedback help you achieve your goals?* ○ *Did you meet your goal, even if it did not go well overall?* ○ *Which station did you judge yourself hardest on?*

Training

11-12 years



3.3. Stage 3 (11-12 years)

3.3.1. Stage characteristics

During this stage, players develop an increased game understanding which should be supported by setting appropriate goals. Players aged 11 to 12 can think beyond their personal development and acknowledge and understand how teamwork is of relevance for success.

3.3.2. Specific learning objectives

In this developmental stage, the players are able to set both individual and teamwork goals which should be incorporated. Goals can be more structured and complex and can be set for a more extended period of time, such as a month. However, players should continue to set short-term goals which support them in reaching their medium-term goals.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

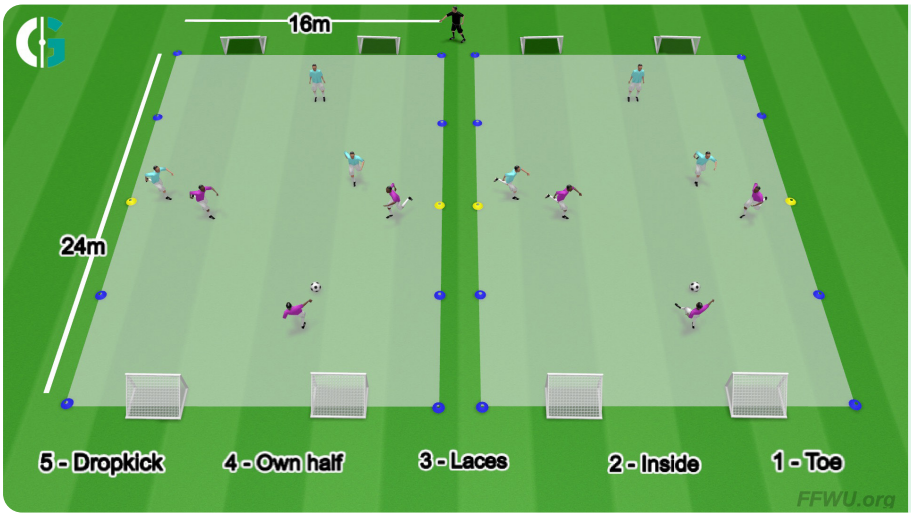
1. Name one specific part of the game to improve.
2. Break a long-term goal into one for the next few weeks.
3. Review a game against the goal they set for it, not against the result.

3.3.3. Coach insight

This is the first stage where team goals genuinely make sense to players alongside personal ones, so it is worth explicitly connecting the two – showing how an individual's short-term goal contributes to a team's medium-term one. Goals can now stretch across a month, but players still need the coach's help breaking a medium-term goal into weekly steps rather than being asked to plan that far ahead independently.

EXERCISE

TAKE EVERY SHOT



Players	6+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	24 x 16 m
Equipment	2 balls, 8 mini-goals, 20 cones
Duration	total: 26 min play:6 x 3 min breaks: 1 min
Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Two fields are set up with two goals on each end of each field
- Play 3v3 on both fields
- Players on each field receive different points for executing different shots
  - 5 points: dropkick
  - 4 points: shot from own side of the field
  - 3 points: laces shot
  - 2 points: inside shot
  - 1 point: toe shot
- Players should count their scores and improve them when this exercise is repeated
- This exercise can be done once a week to achieve the medium-term goal of scoring more goals
- After a month, this exercise can be done on a big field with all team members

Coaching Tips

1. Provide **guidance** in the goal setting process as it becomes more complex
2. Provide **positive and encouraging feedback**
3. Encourage players to **record their scores each week** so they can see their medium-term progress over time

Learning Objectives

1. Players name the one shot type they want to improve, rather than wanting to score more.
2. Players break their season goal into a target for the next few weeks, and say how they connect.
3. Players review the game against the goal they set for it, not against the points scored.

Reflection Questions

- *Which specific part of your game did you work on?*
- *Why do you think medium-term goals help your own development and your team's success?*
- *How can this exercise help you achieve your individual goals, as well as team goals?*
- *What will you work on before the next session?*
- *What is stopping you improving your score?*
- *Did you meet the goal you set for this game?*
- *Which shot did you take only because it was worth points?*

Training

13-14 years



3.4. Stage 4 (13-14 Years)

3.4.1. Stage characteristics

Adolescents between 13 and 14 years of age are becoming able to cognitively control themselves and work towards their goals. Goal setting can increasingly be linked between behaviours on and off the field. Some guidance should still be provided by the coach.

3.4.2. Specific learning objectives

Players in this developmental stage are able to further enhance their personal skills. Goals should continue to focus on personal and team development. More complex and tactically oriented goals can be introduced in order to ensure holistic development. Thereby, goals can focus on team tactics or improving fitness levels in the medium-term, such as within a month.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

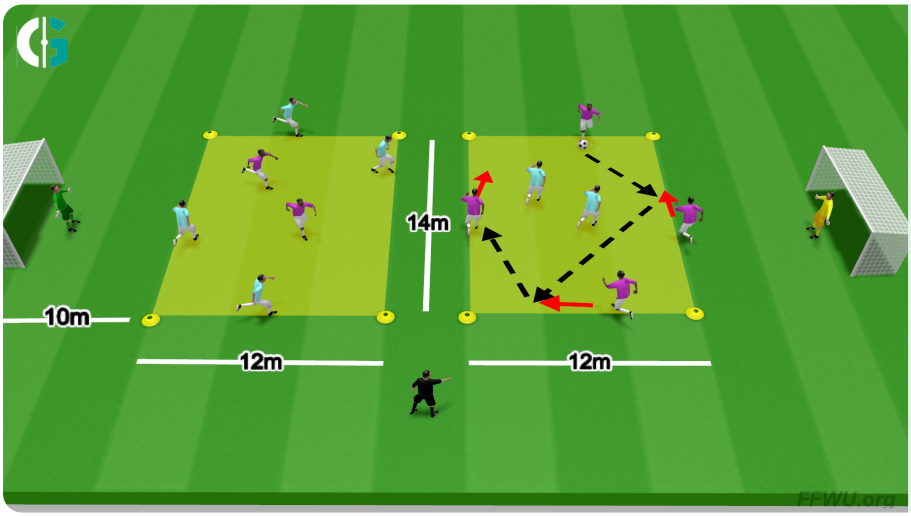
1. Set goals around what can be controlled, alongside desired results.
2. Name the actions and habits, in training and outside it, that the goal depends on.
3. Change a goal that is no longer reachable and say what made them change it.

3.4.3. Coach insight

Players are beginning to connect what happens off the field with their footballing goals, so this is a good stage to start asking questions rather than only setting goals for them – for example, asking what they need to do physically and mentally to reach a goal, not just stating it. Keep providing feedback, but deliberately hand over more of the goal-setting process itself, since players are ready to start guiding it rather than only following it.

EXERCISE

SCORING RONDOS



Players	14+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	half field
Equipment	1 ball, 2 goals, 8 cones
Duration	total: 25 min play: 2 x 10 min breaks: 2 min
Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Two small field are set up with a goal on one side
- In each field a rondo of 4 v 2 is played
- Thereby, the defender on the one side belongs to the attackers' team on the other
- Goals can be scored either:
  - After 10 passes, the attacking team can play the ball to their team members on the other field who then can score
  - Or the defenders win the ball in the rondo and can score on the big goal
- Depending on the medium-term goals, the exercise can focus on scoring as many goals as possible or completing a certain number of passes
- The exercise can be repeated throughout a month for the players to achieve their set short-term goals

Coaching Tips

1. Players should bring their medium-term goals set in their players book to training which should be **incorporated into the exercise**
2. Provide feedback but start **letting the players guide their goal-setting process**
3. Encourage players to briefly reflect after each repetition on **whether they are getting closer** to their medium-term goal

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players set a goal for the rondo aimed at something they control, not only at scoring.	○ *Did you encounter any challenges when thinking about your medium-term goals?* ○ *Can you control your goal, or does it depend on others?*
2	Players name what has to happen each week for their medium-term goal to be reachable.	○ *How can this help you achieve your medium-term goals?* ○ *What has to happen every week, in training and outside it, for this goal to be reachable?*
3	Players change a medium-term goal that is no longer reachable, and say what made them change it.	○ *Do you feel your medium-term goals are still appropriate?* ○ *What made you decide to change it?* ○ *Which goal have you been carrying too long?*

Training

15-16 years



3.5. Stage 5 (15-16 years)

3.5.1. Stage characteristics

Players in this stage are able to consider the long-term when it comes to goal setting. They can make decisions independently and show the ability to incorporate habits that support their goal achievement.

3.5.2. Specific learning objectives

In this developmental stage, players can further improve their performance and goals can be set with a competitive focus. The role of the coach in guiding the goal-setting process decreases. Players become able to independently set personal and team-oriented goals which are specific, measurable, and performance-oriented. Goals include specific targets or outcomes in competitions and can be set long-term from several months to a year.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

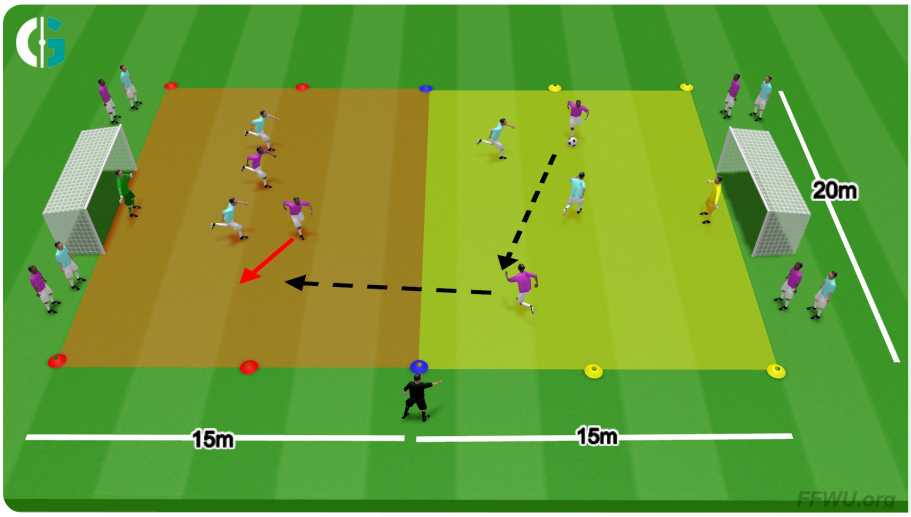
1. Choose a goal themselves and say why it matters to them.
2. Keep the goal written somewhere they will read it again.
3. Track progress between sessions without being asked for it.

3.5.3. Coach insight

At this stage the coach's role shifts from setting the process to supporting it – players are ready to independently set specific, performance-oriented goals across short, medium, and long-term horizons. Encourage regular self-monitoring after every session rather than only at the end of a block, and use feedback conversations to help players notice when a goal needs adapting, rather than adapting it for them.

EXERCISE

4V4 IN TWO ZONES



Players	18+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	half field
Equipment	1 ball, 2 goals, 8 bibs, 10 cones
Duration	total: 42 min play: 8 x 4 min breaks: 1 min
Author	SJ Weber

Description

- A field is set up in which a 4 v 4 is played; the remaining players stand outside the field, behind and next to the goal their team is scoring at
- Two players of each team are defending and only move in the half close to their goal; the other two move in the half of the attacking goal
- After 4 minutes, all outside players will be substituted with those on the field
- Players set their own goals for this game, for example:
  - Shooting at the goal a specific amount of times within 4 minutes
  - Completing a certain number of forward passes
  - Blocking a specific number of shots in defense
  - Making a certain number of runs into space
- The focus set should be continuously tried to improve by the players

Coaching Tips

1. Make sure to set the **appropriate focus** depending on your players' short-, medium-, and long-term goals
2. Incorporate feedback sessions but encourage the players to **guide their own goal-setting process**
3. Encourage players to **independently track their own progress** between sessions rather than relying on the coach to do it for them

	Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1	Players choose which zone role to work on themselves, and say why it matters to them.	○ *How is this aligned with your short-, and long-term goals?* ○ *Why does this goal matter to you?* ○ *Which role did you choose, attacking or defending?*
2	Players keep their goal written in their players' book where they will read it again.	○ *Where do you keep your goal written down?* ○ *When did you last read it?* ○ *What does it say, without looking?*
3	Players track their progress between sessions without being asked for it.	○ *Did you realise any problems with the goals you set?* ○ *What did you track between the last session and this one?* ○ *What does your record show over the last month?*

Training

17-18 years



3.6. Stage 6 (17-18 years)

3.6.1. Stage characteristics

Youth aged between 17 and 18 have a developed sense of their long-term career aspirations. Their motivation is self-sustaining and they are committed to their personal and team development. The players understand the complexities and relevance of setting appropriate goals aligned with their aspirations.

3.6.2. Specific learning objectives

For players in this developmental stage, goals should be set which support the players personal and team aspirations. Goal setting should be part of their personal and sports life and goals should be incorporated to support success on and off the field. The players should now be able to set long-term goals, as well as medium- and short-term goals which support the achievement of their long-term goals. Furthermore, players should be able to track and guide their own goal-setting process, the coach plays only a supporting role in this process.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

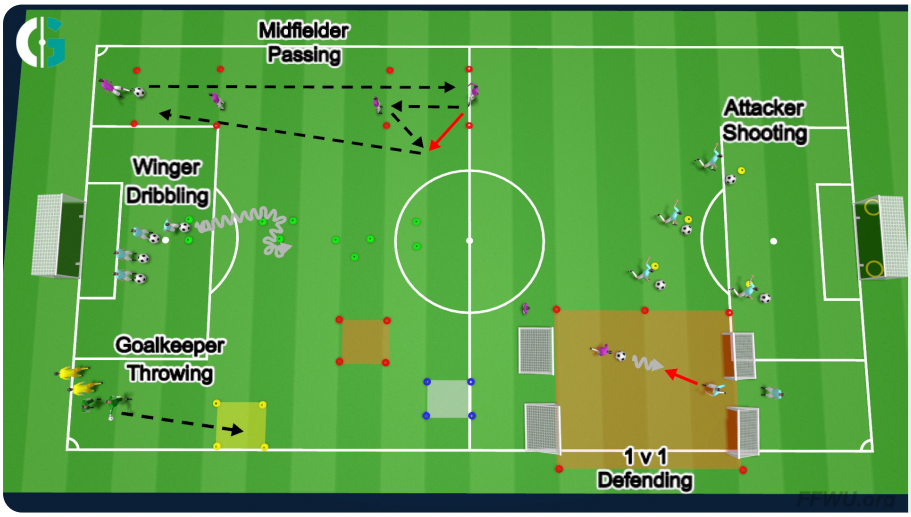
1. Work out for themselves what needs improving, and set the goal from that.
2. Build the habits the goal depends on into the week, and say which ones held.
3. Adjust or abandon a goal during a block of weeks, and give the reason.

3.6.3. Coach insight

By this stage, players should be driving their own goal-setting process almost entirely, with the coach acting as a sounding board rather than a guide. Use conversations to help players connect their football goals to their broader career aspirations and life habits, and trust players to track and adapt their own goals – stepping in only when asked or when something is clearly off track.

EXERCISE

TECHNICAL SKILL STATIONS



Players	15+
Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
Pitch	full field
Equipment	12 balls, 2 goals, 2 mini-goals, 40 cones
Duration	total: 58 min play: 5 x 10 min breaks: 1 min
Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Set up 5 different stations:
  - Dribbling and ball control: players dribble through the cones as quickly and accurately as possible (measure time)
  - Passing and receiving: ball is passed in pairs from differing distances (count number of accurate passes)
  - Shooting accuracy: set up different targets in the goal; shots to be taken from different distances and angles (count number of successful shots)
  - Defensive skills: One-on-one defending where a defender must prevent an attacker from scoring a goal (count number of successful tackles)
  - Goalkeeper throwing: Throw the ball into three different target areas
- Rotate stations every 10 min

Coaching Tips

1. Provide feedback and encourage players to **revise and adapt their goals** after having done the different stations
2. Encourage **self-assessment and tracking**
3. Provide **constructive criticism** and positive reinforcement

Learning Objectives	Reflection Questions
1 Players work out from the station times and counts what needs improving, and set the goal from that.	○ *How are these exercises helping you achieve your short-, medium- and long-term goals?* ○ *What did you work out for yourself needed improving?*
2 Players build the weekly habits their goal depends on, and say which ones held.	○ *How did you set your goals?* ○ *Did you have to adapt any because of difficulties?* ○ *Which habits held this week, and which did not?*
3 Players adjust or abandon a goal across the block of sessions, and give the reason.	○ *What can you reflect on, in terms of your previously set goals, after these exercises?* ○ *Which goal did you adjust or abandon during the block?*

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