Goal Setting for Parents

Parents Can Help Athletes Set and Reach Goals

In last week's Coach Note, we began a closer look at the GROW approach by providing coaches with tips for setting goals with athletes. As parents, we also have a unique opportunity to help our young athlete as he or she strives to achieve both individual and team goals during a given season. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you support coaches in the goal setting process and help your child to set goals.

Set 3 Types of Goals

Athletes and teams of all ages should be setting 3 types of goals: physical, mental and sportsmanship (moral) goals. For athletes on Catholic teams, coaches can also help athletes set a spiritual goal for the season (i.e. growing in prayer). Here is a brief look at the 3 main types of goals:

- **Physical Goals:** As parents, we should keep in mind that physical goals should be set according to each child's level of development. We all realize it wouldn't make much sense for a 3rd grade basketball player to set the goal of dunking by the end of the season, but it may be equally as difficult for some children to dribble the ball between their legs or shoot a left-handed (or right-handed) layup at that age. Be realistic, start small and grow incrementally.

- **Mental Goals:** The mental side of sports can often go overlooked, but doing so would miss a big part of your child's development. At the youngest ages, overcoming an obstacle such as fear or developing the ability to focus during practices and games can be just as fundamental as learning physical skills. Consider what mental goals your young athlete might benefit from setting.

- **Sportsmanship Goals:** If we're going to teach our children character through sports, we must take the time to discuss what great sportsmanship looks like and set goals to improve in that area. Just like physical and mental goals, these should be age appropriate. At the young ages, discuss how we treat teammates and opponents. Set a goal to help up players who fall down or treat others with kindness. As athletes get older and strive to live the golden rule, these goals might evolve to
address specific situations a team encounters or areas where the individual athlete can grow.

Set SMART Goals
For each of the 3 types of goals above, we encourage setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely. Here is a worksheet that demonstrates this method and can be used to help your young athlete set goals. Particularly at young ages, it's important kids have success with the goals they set. After reaching a goal, kids should challenge themselves with another goal using this criteria.

Focus on Mastery
Too often, individuals today measure their success based on how they compare to others. This is a dangerous precedent when it comes to setting goals with our children. For young athletes, all goals should be focused on their own mastery (knowledge or proficiency). Since an athlete can't control how many games they win or even how many points they score, they should avoid setting goals to those ends. Instead, focus on setting goals that improve individual skills in the 3 areas above. The results will take care of themselves.

Intrinsic Goals
Young athletes should set goals for the sake of improving in skill and enjoying their sport, not for external rewards. Avoid promising ice cream as a reward for scoring a goal, or any similar reward system. It's certainly fun to celebrate success, but tying performance to an external reward will actually hinder motivation in the long-run and impede growth. Go out for ice cream as a way to celebrate a fun season, but teach your child to achieve goals for the sake of growth.

The Parent's Role
In order for the goal setting process to work as intended, it's important that each goal belong to the child. As parents, we should resist the urge to dictate goals to kids or set our own goals we want them to achieve. Instead, ask the child before each season what he or she hopes to accomplish and encourage them to come up with a few goals in the above categories. If they need help, we can suggest areas they might consider. In most cases, coaches should be active in helping athletes with this process, while parents play a supportive role. To this end, it's also important that parents learn what team goals have been set and support those goals throughout the season. Remember that in many cases, the team may be working on something different than what we expect: it does us no good to be shouting "shoot!" from the stands if the team has set a goal to complete a certain number of passes before shooting.

Goal setting is a continuous process. Whether your child is beginning winter sports or in-between seasons, now is a great time to talk to them about goal setting. Ask them what goals they've set and what they have planned for the current (or future) season. Then let them know how much you enjoy watching them play and cheer them as they strive to reach their goals.
For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
~ Hebrews 12:11

Sacred Spaces for Advent

Each day during Advent, the University of Notre Dame is once again taking us to "Sacred Spaces" on-campus to show how our daily lives allow us to glorify God and grow in prayer. We liked this short video from sophomore volleyball student-athlete Charity McDowell, who shares why the gym is her sacred space and how the arena can become a place of prayer.

Play Like a Champion's "Daily Prayers for Champions" page has been updated! Visit www.playlikeachampion.org/daily-prayers for more than 200 prayers plus resources that can help you and your team grow closer to God while participating in sports.

Access Resources & Learn More at www.playlikeachampion.org