THE EFFECTS OF GOAL SETTING ON BASKETBALL PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This was an investigative study on the effects of goal setting in basketball. Participants completed a goal setting questionnaire three times during the season to examine how goal setting related to performance levels. Findings revealed that participants high in ability set goals more frequently and found these to be effective. There was positive correlation between frequency of set goals and effectiveness for performance levels over the course of a season. Barriers to goals were overcome through specific plans being set in conjunction with individual requirements of each participant. Engaging in goal setting throughout the season provided participants with opportunities to self-evaluate their own performance levels and that of the team. The investigation supports previous research about the benefits of setting goals to raise performance levels. Future research should look at utilising goal setting with additional mental skills to support participants.

Key words: Goal Setting, Performance, Basketball, Ability, Effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Measuring performance in sport provides performers with direction. Goal setting is a strategy that can help facilitate direction and is commonly employed by sport psychologists. It can be argued that goal setting acts like a catalyst to performance. For example, to raise performance levels one could argue that setting goals would help to achieve aims and direct focus. Conversely, goal setting can be employed to maintain high performance levels. To this degree, it could be argued that goal setting is the fulcrum
from which aspects of performance can be raised. The efficacy of goal setting has been demonstrated with high internal and external validity that has been previously reported (Locke and Latham, 2006). Further, a review of evidence (Locke and Latham, 1990) shows that 91% of studies supported the hypothesis of specific goals leading to better performance than setting no goals. Additionally, meta-analysis results have established that 78% of studies demonstrated moderate to strong effects for goal setting (Kyllo and Landers, 1995) leading to performance improvements.

A number of key reviews have evidenced how goal setting enhances performance levels (Burton, 1989; Locke, Shaw, and Saari, et al., 1981; Locke and Latham, 1990; Mento et al., 1987; Weinberg, 2003). Locke and Latham (1985) identified a number of proposals that align to different types of goals being set and suggested that goal setting should be tested in the competitive sports arena. One common practice is to set short-term goals that lead to long-term objectives. Research has shown that setting short-term and long-term goals leads to more productive performance than setting no goals (Kane et al., 2001; Kingston and Hardy, 1997; Locke and Latham, 1985; Tenenbaum et al., 1991, 1999; Weinberg et al., 1993, 1997, 2000). Measuring goal proximity is possible through setting up a season long goal setting intervention programme. In consideration of the above evidence, it could be argued that the setting of short-term goals would be beneficial for the sport of basketball. Given the fluctuating nature of basketball, the ability to set short-term goals and then modifying these could enhance performance levels. One consideration of this study was to assess the impact of setting short-term goals to achieve long-term objectives. To this degree, it was postulated that goal effectiveness
would increase through goal frequency as performers would be continuously setting goals.

The sports arena also provides ample opportunities for research to be carried out in ecological valid settings (Lane and Streeter, 2003). Ecological valid research helps overcome a major limitation of goal setting research conducted in laboratory settings (Locke and Latham, 2006). For example, Goudas, Theodorakis and Laparidis (2007) identified that goal setting allowed performers to increase their endurance performance significantly in a laboratory experiment. Laboratory based research is deemed a limitation because it fails to take into account human motivation. To this degree, there are calls for ecological valid research to be applied (Kyllo and Landers, 1995; Lane and Streeter, 2003) to goal setting as it relates to natural environments that performers operate within. Weinberg (2003) contends that researchers have been guilty of carrying out laboratory based research without any consideration of performers understanding of how, when and why athletes set goals. It is therefore argued that research in ecological valid settings can help answer the contention put forward by Weinberg (2003).

In reviewing the evidence above, it was decided to investigate the effects of a season long goal setting intervention on basketball performance. Weinberg (2003) supports the use of season long studies in examining the effects of goal setting. Goal setting in basketball should be central in supporting performers as the sport allows for rapid movement leading to increased opportunities to score with each turnover. It is therefore argued that through goal-setting performers receive instant feedback that can raise motivation levels. To this degree, short-term goals could arguably provide opportunities for performers to set goals frequently that lead to goal effectiveness. An
additional aspect of this study is further strengthened because it is based in an ecological valid setting. It has been suggested that exploration of human behaviour in natural environments is important and goals can act like immediate regulators (Weinberg, 2003).

**METHODOLOGY**

Basketball players (N=13) participated for a local college in the West Midlands. Participants were between 16-20 years old, M = 16.69 years, SD = .73 years and competed in Basketball for M = 4.64 years, SD = 1.34 years, participants practised goal setting for M = 2.49 years, SD = 2.25 years. Participants results suggest that on average M = 5.10 participants were equal or of higher ability. Participants were informed initially of the study before signing informed consent forms.

Goal setting questionnaire:

The iteration of the goal-setting questionnaire (Weinberg et al. 1993, 2000) was previously implemented with Collegiate and Olympian participants. Six sections comprise the questionnaire and include: (a) demographic and background information; (b) frequency of goal setting strategy use from 1 (never) to 7 (always); (c) effectiveness of goal setting strategies from 1 (very ineffective) to 7 (very effective); (d) effort expanded to achieve goals from 1 (no effort) to 7 (max effort); (e) barriers to achieving goals from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal); (f) goal preference (ranking the importance of eight different competitive basketball goals). Weinberg et al. (2000) loaded all values over .40 onto scales, which gave the following independent factors based on frequency and effectiveness towards: goal type, psychological consequences, practices of goal
strategies and competitive outcome. Goal barriers were related to internal and external factors; from these factors the present study was conducted when handing out the questionnaire.

Prior to completing questionnaires all participants completed ethical clearance forms and parents were mailed letters before any measurements were conducted. The goal-setting questionnaire was administered to the participants in autumn, spring and summer. All questionnaires were completed prior to a training session in a classroom.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Correlations between each area of goal-setting are illustrated in table 1 and data suggests that performers frequently set goals. For example, results suggest that performers with higher levels of ability set frequent goals and found these to be effective .861 (p < .01). Performers were also eager to participate and put effort into training and game situations. The amount of effort put in by performers recorded a correlation of .715** showing an eagerness to develop to facilitate their own progression. A relationship between frequency and effort (.549**) shows that performers were consistently setting goals and regulated their effort towards this process. Persistence within training and game situations allowed performers to be attentive to tasks (.549**). Assessing performers’ effectiveness (.427**) suggested that performers were eager to succeed and willing to put in extra effort.
**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFECTIVENESS</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>BARRIERS</th>
<th>YEARS</th>
<th>BASKETBALL</th>
<th>COMPETE</th>
<th>ABILITY</th>
<th>ATTENTION</th>
<th>EFFORT</th>
<th>PERSISTENCE</th>
<th>PROBABILITY</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
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<td>.412*</td>
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**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**
The present study investigated the effectiveness of goal setting in basketball performance over a competitive season. Goal setting research has called for season long interventions that take place in ecological valid settings (Burton, 1989; Kane et al., 2001; Kingston and Hardy, 1997; Pierce and Burton, 1998; Swain and Jones, 1995; Weinberg et al., 1994). Evidence from the present study indicates that performers with higher ability levels set frequent goals and found these to be effective. This therefore demonstrates that goal setting arguably can be utilised to increase motivation levels and aid performance levels. These results lend support to the argument of ecological valid research (Kyllo and Landers, 1995; Lane and Streeter, 2003). The purpose of this discussion will be to identify key results and provide future recommendations for practitioners to follow.

Theoretically (Locke and Latham, 1990) have proposed that accepting goals with correct support from coaches and practising these during training can lead to rewards and incentives. Evidence from the data highlights that performers with higher ability are more likely to set goals that can help improve performance levels. This evidence aligns closely with previous research (Weinberg et al., 1993, 1997, 2000) that has shown performers are keen to set goals to aid development. Arguably, it could be suggested that performers were motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically to achieve success through continuous goal setting.

Support for setting goals over a season carried credence as performers continually set specific goals. Theoretically, Locke and Latham (1985, 1990) have suggested that specific goals lead to more effective performance than generic or no goals. Further, there is evidence that supports the role of setting goals over a whole season (Kingston and Hardy, 1997; Weinberg et al., 1993, 1997, 2000; Weinberg et al., 1994). Arguably, frequent goal setting can align with
enhanced focus and directs attention. Further support alludes to the manifestation that season long campaigns require performers to continuously maintain high motivation levels and focus, which can be aided through regular goal setting (Locke and Latham, 1990).

Goal effectiveness was aligned by the frequency of set goals. Performers set specific plans, worked on skills and improved performance by displaying a positive acceptance towards goal setting. If these goals were successful, which in turn enhanced motivation (Bandura, 1997) and aided direction (Locke and Latham, 1985) vague goals would have the opposite effect.

It was evident that with continued effort goals became more effective for performers. Locke and Latham (1990) suggest that effort must be expended to reach goals. Performers displayed eagerness to target goals and results suggested effort was expended for very difficult and moderately difficult goals. In addition, participants set goals frequently and found these to be effective. Goal setting therefore became a natural skill that was important to performers. To overcome barriers of goal setting performers were expending extra effort during basketball training and competitive games. Performers found barriers related towards their goals easier to overcome than those that related to external factors, such as, work commitments, family and education. It could be argued that this was possible through specific goals being set to maintain focus on basketball performance.

Whilst the results highlight the importance of goal setting, it would be prudent to also explain some limitations. The sample size was (N=13) and it is acknowledged that a larger sample would have provided deeper analysis to be explored. In addition, one could argue that these results are difficult to generalise to wider sporting populations. Whilst this study was
focused on the generic mechanism of goal setting in basketball, a more refined exploration could have related to technical aspects (e.g. Lane and Streeter, 2003). In addition, Weinberg (2003) suggests that although performers set goals they fail to write these down. Future research could look at developing mechanisms where logbooks could be utilised when setting goals to enable evaluation and reflection of goals. A further recommendation could allude to developing more qualitative research. Qualitative research would provide a rich source of information and help us better understand the process of goal setting through an exploration of coaches and performer thoughts.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the present study shows that setting goals benefited performers in both training and competition. The study alludes to the idea that setting goals in an ecological valid setting can enhance performance levels. In addition, frequency of setting short-term goals that led to long-term effectiveness was evident.

**REFERENCES**


