

Mental Health Matters



Goal Setting - Season 2026/2027



What is goal Setting?

Goal setting is a mental health training technique used for many years. For referees this is a tool that can increase their commitment towards achieving a personal goal, such as promotion or being selected for the higher profile games etc. Match officials will be encouraged to work harder, be more focused on the task and overcome setbacks easier if they are working towards both short term and long term goals. Goals affect performance by focusing attention, mobilising effort in proportion to the demands of the task, enhancing persistence and encouraging the individual to develop strategies for achieving their goals.

Goal setting is identifying what you want to achieve, how you will achieve it (your process goals) and how you will measure your achievement (your performance goals). By breaking down challenging goals into realistic steps you will help your motivation, self-confidence and commitment grow. Goals need to be realistic and set with taking in your age, stage of development, confidence, motivation, and commitment into account.

There are different types of goals:

Outcome goals: These refer to a desired result, such as officiating a Cup final or play off final. They are essentially about winning or performing better than anyone else and whilst they can be highly motivated long term goals, they are not goals that are under your direct control. They are limited without process and performance goals and rely on the performances of other officials and the selection process by the person responsible for doing the appointments.

Process goals: These help to focus attention and deal with the technique or strategy needed to perform well and are goals that you have complete control over. Process goals are the steppingstones you will use to achieve your performance goals. Performance goals could include: implementing a specific pre-match routine before each game; maintain a high level of match control over the 90 mins; maintain focus across 90 mins; maintain consistency across 90 mins; and if you have identified a specific weakness such as blowing the whistle too quickly where an advantage could have been played then a process goal could be to give yourself an extra few seconds before blowing up or maybe giving yourself time to think about how to deal with an incident – man management or issuing a card for example.

Performance goals: These are centred around the specific standard that you want to achieve. These are your personal standards that you set for yourself and are unaffected by performance and are under your control. They can be used to monitor process goals and your progress towards your outcome goals. These are

designed to make you feel satisfied even if your performance was not 'perfect'.

When setting goals, you need to be **SMARTER**. Your goals need to be:

- 🕒 **Specific** – make your goals as precise and detailed as possible
- 🕒 **Measurable** – there needs to be a method that allows you to rate your current level and then determine the amount of improvement to take it to the next level.
- 🕒 **Accepted** – your goals need to be shared and set with all others involved such team members, coaches, and managers.
- 🕒 **Realistic** – goals need to be challenging but still remain realistic
- 🕒 **Time** – when the goals are to be achieved by
- 🕒 **Exciting** – the goals need to motivate you to improve
- 🕒 **Recorded** – keep a record of the goals and the progress towards them

The Grow Model:

The purpose of setting goals is part of the process of you as a referee looking for ways to help yourself solve problems and make better decisions during games, to learn new skills and progress in your officiating career. A proven method used to obtain this is the **GROW** model.

- 🕒 **Goal** – Decide what you want to work on. What is your specific goal for the season? What are your short term and long term goals?
- 🕒 **Reality** – Think about your current situation and ask yourself questions about where you are at to raise your awareness and to help promote self-reflection and thinking.
- 🕒 **Option** – Come up with as many options as possible, think outside of the box to find creative solutions. If you have run out of ideas speak to your coach or your manager.
- 🕒 **Will** – Ask yourself questions to help you to determine which is the best option for you to take, how you will take it and when you will take it. Agree this with your team, mentors, coaches, and manager.

Reflect on last season.

The first step in goal setting is not to look at what you want to achieve this coming season but is to take the time to sit and reflect on last season. You need to take a long hard look at where you went wrong as that may be the basis of some of your goals for next season but more importantly to also to look at what you got right and all the achievements that you had. These will give you a base on areas that you can continue to grow in. You need to ask yourself what did you achieve last season and what will you do differently moving forward into the next season? Did you monitor your progress across last season? Did you maintain statistics to help you monitor your progress?

Start by getting the nasty stuff out of the way, it's not pleasant to think about any failures or regrets but you need to be honest with yourself about them. It is however essential to your growth; you cannot improve if you do not look at where you went wrong previously. Today is day 1 of your new mindset – failure and regrets are nothing to be ashamed of, don't look on them as a negative or they will chip away at your self-confidence and self-belief. Instead count them as a positive, from now on they are your learning tools, they are simply a guide to let you know where to focus on where you can improve. Simply by acknowledging them, accepting them, and using them to learn from you have already start to build mental toughness, resilience and prepared yourself to be able to deal positively with any setbacks next season.

Use the Reflecting on Last Season worksheet as a template, the sample questions are a guide as to what you could/should be asking yourself.

Make a visualisation board:

Find somewhere at home to stick up a visualisation board a home. Add to it quotes or pictures that inspire you. A route map that you can add your wins to. A list of your goals for next season. Anything that you can look at that will give you a boost in motivation and help you stay focused.

The next step:

The review of last season gives you a foundation, you can see what achievements you made and the areas where you need to improve. This will help in deciding what your goals are to be next season.

Imagine you chose not to do a deep review from last season and decide to set

one of your goals as reaching a particular average merit mark across the season, and you decide 8.2 is the average mark that you want to attain and alongside of it you chose reaching and maintaining a minimum 85% accuracy in every game is another goal. What would be the benefit of those, if by doing the previous season review you realise that your average merit mark for the previous season was 8.3 and you had 87% accuracy? Goals are ineffective if you set them too low.

Your long term season goal requires short term strategic goals to help you reach it. These need to be regularly reviewed and monitored. One suggestion would be to set up a spreadsheet to record data from your games. Include things like date, match, merit mark, accuracy %, distance covered, what did you feel you did well, what did you feel you could have done better, the match observer's developmental points, what the observer felt you did well. Set your review time, for example every 3-5 games or the end of each month. Is your accuracy steady, improving, or random? Are your merit marks steady, improving or all over the place? Are the same developmental issues coming up regularly and if so your short term goals should focus on improving these areas. Are you on track to meet the targets that you have set yourself? Are you lagging behind where you should be and if so, what changes are you going to make to get on track?

Consider the type of goals you are going to set yourself. Will they be egocentric, or task orientated? Choosing an egocentric goal where you focus on comparing your performance to that of others, for example finishing above others in the merit table, gives you little to no control over the outcome. If you want to set a goal regarding merit table rankings it is better to seek to improve your position on the season before and to increase your average merit mark. These are things you have more control over because you will use task orientated goals to push yourself to keep improving, little by little, as such you will experience success more frequently, persist with challenges when they are taking longer than you would like and each small milestone will boost your confidence and keep you motivated.

Keep your goals positive and focus on the good practice that should be present rather than what should not be present as this will keep you focused on success rather than failure. If you say to yourself 'I'm going to reduce the number of times I fail to recognise foul play', that is a negative instead you could say 'I'm going to work hard, do my best and get as many decisions correct as I can' that is a positive. It focuses your mindset on succeeding, every decision you get right is a success instead of you focusing on every decision you got wrong as a failure. Identify a strategy to help you achieve your goals.

Don't set yourself too many goals, you will simply overwhelm yourself and instead of giving each goal enough time and focus you will start to flounder. Go for quality not quantity. If you have listed 6 goals, for example, choose the 3 that are the most important to you and make those your focus. You could make a note of the other 3, maybe label them as a reserve list and as you monitor your progress and realise you have reached one of your goals then replace it with one from

the reserve list. Giving yourself challenging goals does not mean try to change everything at once by setting an unrealistic number of goals to work towards – give yourself a chance on being able to succeed. Slow and steady wins the race.

Embrace failure. None of us want to fail but how we deal with the bumps along the journey can make a huge difference. If you miss reaching a goal in your desired time frame, don't give up, maybe the time frame was too short and unrealistic so reset the time frame and keep going after it. Maybe you've had one of 'those' games, error strewn, lack of focus, poor decision making, positioning everywhere but where you should have been – that's ok it happens. Dust yourself down, look at the mistakes you made long enough to learn from them and then move on armed with what you have learned. Don't dwell on mistakes because they will give you a negative mindset. If you go into a game expecting to make errors and wondering how long it will take before you make the first mistake, then you are going to make errors. Your mind will be focusing on the wrong thing.

Include training and fitness goals to complement your match day goals. If one of your goals is to increase the number of sprints you make during a game, then a complimentary fitness goal could be to increase your sprint speed or distance. If one of your goals is to improve your positioning, then as well as learning to read the game better you need to be physically fit enough to be able to get into the right positions. Your work ethic and attitude during training is as important as it is on match day.

Include your friends, family and loved ones in your goal setting as well as your coach/mentor. Not necessarily in the goal setting process as such but talk to them about the goals that you have set and what you are going to do to achieve them, their support and encouragement will be invaluable to you.

BE MINDFUL NOT MIND FULL