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Coaching the Mental Game

“Goal Setting”

Mentally preparing yourself and your team is becoming a key role of any coach in camogie. It is particularly relevant as one season finishes and another season another looms large on the horizon with the fast-approaching New Year. As a coach, you begin to dream of a successful season ahead, you can imagine that moment in late summer when your team puts together that perfect performance to finally win the championship. But how do we move from hopes and dreams to the reality of training a squad of camogie players in a soft mucky field under lights as the rain falls in January.

This requires some soul-searching, asking some fundamental questions of yourself and the team. What do we want to achieve? How do we want to achieve it? How will we know we are getting there? These basic questions should be a fundamental part of a team's start to the season. Mentally planning the season ahead requires a focus, honesty and discipline to move from dreams to reality. An under-rated part of mentally preparing a team is goal setting with the focus of preparing them mentally for the season ahead. Effective goal setting and planning can help guide your coaching and enable your players to keep sight of what they should focus on. We are all familiar with the concept of goal setting and probably use it in some form in our daily lives, however moving from the goal of "winning the championship" to a more focussed and controlled approach to goal setting will help coaches and teams perform.

Goal-setting can help motivate as it directs coaches and players effort and energy to focus on the things that will contribute to performance. Goals have been found to improve sporting performance by up to a third. The greatest effects found when goals were moderately difficult, were focussed on an outcome combined with elements of performance and were self-set by the players themselves. Goals enhance performance by directing attention towards relevant actions, help



elicit effort and commitment from players, boost self-confidence, enhance team cohesion, help players break large problems into smaller components and develop action plans. Goals help you sustain your focus and have a sense of achievement whilst, reminding players what they are striving for collectively (especially when championship is a long time away). Achievement of goals (no matter how small) has been shown to develop self-confidence so realistic goal setting can also improve the confidence of your players and team.

So, what does effective goal setting look like? How should you approach this with your team?

1. Plan a training session with team focussed on discussing and developing goals for the coming season. You should try to facilitate and structure the session bearing in mind that it is better if the goals are developed by the players themselves, enabling them to take ownership of the goals and become more committed to them.
2. Look to structure your goals positively on three sequential levels:
 - a. **Outcome Goal** – based on the result or outcome of a specific event for example: “win the league, reach championship semi-final”.



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b. Performance Goals – what standards do you want to attain in a game for example: “win 60% of your own puckouts, score more than 10 points from play, concede less than five frees in scoring zone”.

c. Process Goals – these are the goals you focus on in every training session which enable you to achieve your performance goals such as: “practice shooting in every training session, players attend 80% of training sessions, work on first touch in every training session, practice 30 puck-outs in every session”

Write these goals down to re-enforce your and the team’s commitment to working on them.

3. Use these to plan your seasons training around specific “process and performance goals”, review progress in games with performance goals and enable players to set their own individual goals for their own performance and development.
4. Goals should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**imebound, using this SMART logic will ensure the goals you develop are meaningful.
5. Regularly review goals and progress towards attaining them, this will enable you to keep everyone focussed and provide opportunity for review or modification based on progress, ensuring they stay current and relevant.
6. Encourage players to create their own individual goals, these can include all elements of the game such as: position, skills, conditioning, behaviour, mental preparation. Emphasise that they should be within their reach, relevant and attainable.
7. Review every training session and match to ensure that it has been focussed on making progress towards your performance and process goals. Exceptional players immerse themselves in process goals, guiding their training. Use goals and progress to provide constructive feedback to your team.
8. Be creative to keep goals top of mind and in focus for example: posters in dressing room, customised wristbands.
9. Celebrate the attainment of goals, provide positive re-enforcement and feedback to players on their progress.

Remember goals relate to performance and progress not an individual’s self-worth, not achieving a goal does not mean you are a failure, you just haven’t got there yet. Using goals to develop a growth mindset as highlighted in “Mindset” by Carol Dweck will enable players to find success in learning and improving their camogie skills through continually seeking to achieve their goals. Those who develop a growth mindset were found to thrive during challenging times and continually develop and progress.

You may not achieve an outcome goal such as winning the championship, only one team can do this, however making sustainable progress towards achieving performance and process goals will enable you to focus on building capability, skills, motivation and confidence in your players which can support their development as players over the long term and enable them to remain committed to camogie in the long term. The most successful players are known to be goal setters, goal-setting is a fundamental psychological skill that you can help your team and players to develop, to maximise their potential.

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