

SETTING GOALS FOR SUCCESS IN SOCCER



Sport psychology is a new and exciting field in the world of sports, and soccer in particular. The US men's and women's national team both have one, Manchester United has one, and many players work with a sport psychology consultant to enhance their performance and get the most out of their athletic experience. But sport psychology is not just for the pros, it's for any athlete who is looking to solve a problem, become a more well rounded player, or to get an extra edge over their opponent.

Legendary baseball manager Yogi Berra once said, "**Baseball is 90% mental -- the other half is physical.**" What percent of soccer is mental? _____ The older you get, and the higher the level of play, the more mental the game becomes. So after thinking about the first question, now answer this one: How much time in practice do you spend addressing the mental aspects of the game? _____ If the answer to the second question is less than the answer to the first, then please keep reading.

Sport psychology deals with mental skills such as visualization, focus and concentration, positive thinking, and breathing and relaxation. A player who can focus on relevant issues (hint: yelling at the ref is not placing your focus properly), maintain a positive attitude even when things aren't going well, and can anticipate what will happen before it happens will fare much better than a player who is not proficient in these areas.

So how can a player practice and improve their mental game? One of the best ways is through proper goal setting. Goal setting happens to be one of the most effective skills in the sport psychology toolbox. Good goals can help to increase motivation, focus, and effort in training and in games. Unfortunately, setting a goal improperly can have the opposite effect.

When deciding what you want to achieve, set goals that are **SMART**:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Adjustable**
- **Realistic**
- **Time-Based**

Let's take a simple example: Johnny and Sally each want to improve their soccer skills. Johnny sets his goal: "I want to improve my soccer skills." Sally sets her goal: "I want to get 25 juggles by the time

the season starts." Whose goal is more likely to be effective?

While the sentiment is there, Johnny's goal is very general, and he has set up no clear way to check and see if he has improved. Sally on the other hand, knows exactly what she is shooting for and can see her success. Also, if she meets the goal before the season starts, she can adjust the goal by making it higher.

Remember, the purpose of setting goals is to keep you challenged, motivated, and focused – in other words, mentally sharp. When you are mentally sharp in training and in games, you have a better chance for success. The more success you have, the more fun soccer is and the more you want to succeed!

Now go back to the original question of what percent soccer is mentally and how much you focus on it in training. Setting SMART goals, checking in on them regularly, and adjusting them as needed is the first step in the right direction.

Brian Baxter holds a Master's Degree in Sport Psychology from John F. Kennedy University, has a USSF C License, and is on the CYSA Coaching Staff. He lives in Oakland and has a private practice working with individuals, teams, coaches, and referees. He can be reached by email at baxtersportpsych@gmail.com or by phone at