

SETTING CONTROLLABLE GOALS

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As I observed the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, I was reminded that athletes who win medals have, for years, had the goal of winning a medal. Yet, it was the daily work and effort that pays off at the Olympic Games.

In the men's 4x100 freestyle relay, the USA team trailed France going into the last 100. But Jason Lezak came from behind and by .08 seconds beat the French world champion and set a world record. After the race, Lezak was quoted as saying to himself that he felt the fatigued.

"Then I changed," he said. "I said, 'You know what? That's ridiculous. This is the Olympics. I'm here for these guys. I'm here for the United States of America. It's more than me. I don't care how bad it hurts, or whatever, I'm just going to go out there and hit it.'"

The rest is Olympic history. But that history began with the goal of Olympic success. It is important to learn how to set goals in order to achieve your own swimming performance goals. As you prepare for this upcoming competitive season, make sure you have followed some important steps to effective goal setting:

Make daily practice goals. Take a notebook (could be your mental training journal) or some 3x5 cards and write down 1-3 goals for each practice. Not just doing what is on the practice schedule, but make the goal specific to your improvement (e.g. achieving 80% of your fast-paced intervals). Just 1-3 goals a day. Then review after each practice. Did you accomplish your goals? Did you make good progress? Then make revisions and be goal-directed at the next practice – every day.

Review your goals each day. Find time to sit down and review the goals you had for that particular practice/meet. Did you achieve the goal? What did you do (or not do) to help you achieve that goal? How can you make the goal more challenging tomorrow? Make this process your own and don't wait for a coach to give you goal direction. The results will be more confidence in yourself when you step up on the starting block.

Learn how to refocus your goals during practice. If you made a practice goal that is going to be tough to accomplish (due to a bad start or change in drills), make the adjustment so you can still find success. Even small successes (finishing a tough set, using a positive cue word) can lead to confidence and focus. As soon as you drift from goals, you lose self-direction and focus.

Good luck to you in your pursuit of your swimming goals and successes...have fun and swim fast!

"The fight is won or lost far away from the witnesses...behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights." – Muhammad Ali