

# Goal Setting for Athletes

## *Goal Structure for Improvement and Success and Sports*

*By Brad Woodall, Former Major League Pitcher and Owner of Woodall Training*

Athletes of all ages set goals or standards to strive for during a season. Some are formal, written goals and others are informal thoughts that the athlete would like to achieve during a season, game or competition. A common goal for each team is to win the game or the championship at the end of the season. On an individual basis, a baseball player may have a goal to hit .350, 10 home runs, or to win 10 games as a pitcher. By definition, proper goals should be challenging yet achievable.



However, many athletes set high reaching goals that are either too difficult to achieve or may be out of their control. Therefore, they are often just forgotten during the course of the daily competition of a season. A proper goal structure should include a set of long term, result-oriented goals supported by a series of short term goals designed to put the athlete in a position to reach their long term goals.

When I was pitching in the major and minor leagues, one of my annual goals was to have an ERA of 3.00 or below. With the 3.00 ERA being the long term goal, I was able to break this goal down into a short term goal such as giving up one run or less every 3 innings (for a 9 inning game). Beyond that, I had a series of daily goals that supported my season goal, such as setting aside time to study the scouting reports and working to create and implement a successful strategy for each game. With this structure, it gave me something to shoot for each game that will help me stay on course to achieve my long term goal.

### **Goal Setting Process:**

1. *Set Long term, result-oriented goals*
2. *Set individual game and daily, work-related goals to support the long term goals*
3. *Document all goals, and include a checklist of daily activities to act as a reminder to ensure you are doing what it takes to achieve goals.*

### **Effort-Related Goals to Support Long Term Goals**

Athletes are usually good at setting long term goals to reach for the season. However, these goals are often forgotten or derailed because we get caught up in daily competition and lose track of our goals. There is often one question left out of goal setting that a player should always ask: *"What am I going to do every day to help achieve my long term goals"*. Each athlete should develop a series of effort-related goals that can be achieved on a daily basis to create a work-ethic to support long term goals. These goals should be purely effort-related and specific to our long-term goals, such as taking 30 swings off of a tee before practice every day, working on a pick-off move (for pitchers) for 15 minutes 3-days a week, or taking 30 ground balls to the back hand side every day in practice.

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If a season goal is to hit .350 during the year, one game goal may be to simply swing at good pitches to hit. A daily goal may be to hit 50 balls off the tee to develop a consistent swing, and to focus in batting practice on swinging only at good pitches to hit in the game. If we are able to take our season goals and create a daily routine to support these goals, our odds of success are much greater.

### **Goal Setting Example**

Every year that I coach a team, I have my players go through a goal setting exercise that will cover our team goals, their individual goals on the field, and their personal goals that they would

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like to achieve during the course of the season. Once we determine our season-long goals, we drill down into these goals to set our short and medium range goals that will keep us on track with our season goals. I then make them create a checklist of what they will do every day to help them achieve each of the long-term goals. Having this goal structure in place (written and posted somewhere so that they see it daily), the players can remind themselves of the effort-related goals to keep them on track and working hard to achieve their goals at the end of the season.

With all of the players' goals in place, I am then able to compare the goals of the players, find common goals and create groups of players to work together during the season. This way, these groups of players can motivate each other to achieve their work-related goals on a daily basis. Each player has then created a goal structure and standards that will encourage a consistent work ethic to improve throughout the season and achieve their goals.

One of the most impressive set of goals that I have heard about was from Alex Rodriguez, 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman for the Yankees and one of the best hitters of all time. He was asked by a reporter about his goals going into a season. We expect the answer to be something like hitting .300 with 30 home runs and 100 RBI. Instead, his answer was that his goal was to maintain his consistent pre-game work ethic throughout the season and to ***focus on every pitch of every game***. He knew that if he were able to accomplish these short term daily goals, the results would be there at the end of the season.

With this type of goal structure in place, our result-oriented goals become reachable. Without it, our season goals may be just left up to "hope and luck" which is not a strategy that we can rely on. After all, result-oriented goals are truly a *result* of the specific work we put into our game on a daily basis.

Train Smart, Create your own luck, and Have Fun!!

- Brad Woodall; *Owner, Woodall Training*  
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*Former Major League Pitcher and Professional Coach*

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### Brad Woodall

Brad Woodall's baseball instruction experience spans nearly two decades and has reached players across the country. Since its inception in 1999, *Woodall Baseball Instruction* (now known as **Woodall Training**) has grown from a few individual pitching lessons at the local park to a thriving, all-encompassing baseball consulting business providing baseball instruction to players and coaches across the nation. Additionally, Brad authored the successful book: [A Parent's Guide to Pitching](#) in 1999.



In 1993, Brad earned his B.A in Economics from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where he was a pitcher, outfielder, and first baseman. He played in the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska (1989), was an All-ACC performer (1990, 1991) and a two-time summer league All-American as a pitcher and outfielder.

Brad's professional baseball experience comprises of ten years as a pitcher and two years as a coach. As a professional baseball player, he quickly climbed the ranks in the [Atlanta Braves](#) Organization and joined one of the most talented pitching staffs in history. After being named the (AAA) International League Player of the Year in 1994, Brad joined Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine, Chipper Jones, John Smoltz, and others in Atlanta for parts of 3 seasons. He was a member of the Atlanta Braves World Championship and National League Championship teams in 1995-1996. Brad subsequently spent the 1998-1999 seasons with the [Milwaukee Brewers](#) and [Chicago Cubs](#), respectively, appearing in 40 games (23 starts) during that period. Brad transitioned into coaching and served as a pitching coach in the [Tampa Bay Rays](#) organization for the 2002 and 2003 seasons.

After re-locating to Madison, WI, Brad earned an MBA in Entrepreneurial Management (2005) from UW-Madison. Brad and his wife, Kari, are co-owners of Woodall Training. Woodall Training provides fitness training, baseball and swim instruction to fitness enthusiasts and athletes throughout the country.