Using Effort Goals

Effort Goals are a powerful tool of the Double-Goal Coach. Most coaches set Outcome Goals, which are highly dependent on the quality of one's opponent. A beginner playing tennis against a professional player is not likely to achieve the Outcome Goal of winning the match regardless of how hard he tries which can be discouraging. Effort Goals are largely under one's control regardless of the competition. A beginner playing an experienced player may lose on the scoreboard but still has a chance to achieve his Effort Goal.

If players are recognized for trying hard, they will be likely to continue. Getting players to understand what it means to try hard can help them throughout their life. Effort goals are motivating to all players because they can control them and they can see their progress.

EFFORT vs. OUTCOME GOALS

Effort and Outcome Goals are often confused. Here are some examples.

	EFFORT GOAL	OUTCOME GOAL
Baseball/ Softball	• Run hard through first base on a grounder	• Beat the throw to first base
Basketball	• Make contact with opponent to block out after shot	• Get the rebound
Lacrosse	• Sprint after ground balls	• Gain possession of the ball
Soccer	• Sprint after balls	• Get to the ball first and control it

The Link Between EFFORT GOALS and OUTCOME GOALS

Outcome Goals can discourage effort, especially for younger, beginning or outmatched athletes. It's not that coaches should pay no attention to Outcome Goals because there is a definite connection between Effort and Outcome Goals. Well-designed Effort Goals should, over time, move one toward Outcome Goals. If a team focuses on Effort Goals and begins to achieve them, its performance will improve and, over time, it will begin to get the Outcome Goals it desires (again, depending on relative talent).

For example, if a basketball coach wants her team to work hard at driving to the basket, together they can set an Effort Goal of shooting at least 20 free throws per game. Taking the ball aggressively to the basket will often lead the other team to foul, giving her team free throws. If the team achieves its Effort Goal of 20 free throws in the game, it is much more likely to also achieve its Outcome Goal of winning the game.

Using Effort Goals *continued*

Setting Effort Goals

Effort Goals can be set by the coach, but it is more powerful to involve players in setting their own. Initially, players may not understand the difference between an Effort Goal and an Outcome Goal so coaches need to stress that Effort Goals are 1) about how hard one tries, and 2) under the control of the player. A coach can "seed" the discussion by throwing out some possible Effort Goals. Then players can be asked to select Effort Goals they'd like to achieve.

The ideal situation is for players to set their own Effort Goals and attach a number to them for each practice, game or season. For example, "I will sprint after out-of-bounds shots" is less effective than "I will sprint after at least 5 out-of-bounds shots in the game." The coach can then review the game with the player and they can set an Effort Goal for the next game based on how well he did in this one.

Game and Season-Long Effort

Effort Goals can keep teams trying throughout a game or season regardless of the score. As long as a team has a chance to achieve its Effort Goals, it will be more likely to play hard all game long. At halftime or during time-outs, coaches can review progress toward Effort Goals.

In the example above, the basketball coach can review the team's progress toward its Effort Goal of 20 free throws at halftime. Having a goal of 20 free throws and realizing they have only gotten four can motivate the team to be more aggressive in the second half.

Wayne Pinegar once coached a soccer team of 7- and 8-year-old girls that had a challenging season. In the opening minutes of the first game his team scored a goal. That not only was the team's only goal that season, it was its only shot on goal.

Wayne developed a set of Effort Goals to keep the team from getting discouraged because they had virtually no chance of winning on the scoreboard. One of the goals was to move the ball across midfield at least five times in a game.

Toward the end of the final game of the season, with his team way behind, the girls moved the ball past midfield and they, and their parents on the sidelines, went nuts. Their celebration caused the opposing team and parents some confusion – weren't they winning? Why was this other team, which was getting trounced according to the scoreboard, celebrating so enthusiastically? The answer, of course, is that when a coach develops Effort Goals, the players can feel good about their improvement and continue giving their best effort even when they lose by a big margin on the Scoreboard.

Effort Goals for Talented Athletes and Teams

Effort Goals are not just for out-matched athletes or teams. Effort Goals can be useful for a talented team when it is playing an over-matched team and winning easily on the scoreboard. If a team has put the game away early, the coach can have players focus on Effort Goals using their weak hand or foot or trying a new move that they have not yet been able to master in a game. Using Effort Goals in this way has another benefit – it tends to keep the more talented team from rolling up the score even further.

Share Your Effort Goal Experience with PCA

Let us know your experience with Effort Goals. E-mail us at pca@positivecoach.org.

This is adapted from *The Double-Goal Coach* by Jim Thompson.