A Qualitative Analysis of the Types of Goals Athletes Set in Training and Competition

Krista J. Munroe-Chandler and Craig R. Hall
The University of Western Ontario

Robert S. Weinberg
Miami University Ohio

Research has demonstrated that goal setting is an effective performance enhancement technique in sport (Kyillo & Landers, 1995; Weinberg, 1992; Weinberg, Burton, Yukelson, & Weigand, 2000). However, Weinberg and colleagues (Weinberg et al., 2000; Weinberg, Butt, & Knight, 2001) argue that the goal setting research has still not effectively examined such issues as where athletes set goals (e.g., training versus competition), and previous research (Burton, 1999; Burton, Naylor, & Holliday, 2001) has indicated that goals might differ across these two situations. The purpose of the present study was to use a qualitative approach to investigate the specific types of goals athletes set in training and competition. Employing a framework generated from previous research, athletes (N = 249, representing 18 different sports) were asked about the goals they set in both training and competition. Results showed that the goals athletes set in these two situations are quite similar. Furthermore, these findings provided more specific information about the types of goals athletes set than was available from previous research (Weinberg, Burton, Yukelson, & Weigand, 1993; Burton, Weinberg, Yukelson, & Weigand, 1998).

Address Correspondence To: Krista J. Chandler, Faculty of Human Kinetics, University of Windsor, 401 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4. Email: Chandler@uwindsor.ca
Studies have shown that athletes (e.g., youth, collegiate and Olympic level) report using goal setting to enhance their performance (Weinberg, Burke, & Jackson, 1997; Weinberg, Burton, Yukelson, & Weigand, 1993). Moreover, research has demonstrated that goal setting is an effective performance enhancement technique in sport (Kyllo & Landers, 1995). This conclusion has been reached through the use of meta-analysis (Kyllo & Landers, 1995) and enumerative reviews (Burton, 1992, 1993; Weinberg, 1992). Although these studies have helped to illuminate some of the previous inconsistencies in the sport goal setting research (see Weinberg, Burton, Yukelson, & Weigand, 2000 for a discussion of this issue), there still remains a need for additional research. Researchers argue that goal setting research has not effectively examined such issues as where athletes set goals (e.g., training versus competition) and what types of goals are most important to the athletes (Weinberg et al., 2000; Weinberg, Butt, & Knight, 2001). Several investigators have suggested that qualitative goal setting studies would supplement the previous research in this area (Burton, Naylor & Holliday, 1998; Weinberg et al., 2000). The results of such studies would provide a more complete understanding of goal setting by athletes and be useful to sport psychologists in the development of goal setting programs. Therefore, the primary purpose of the present study was to qualitatively examine the types of goals athletes set in both training and competition.

Goals Set in Training and Competition

As would be expected, athletes set goals for both training and competition, although collegiate and Olympic athletes set more competition goals than practice goals (Burton, Weinberg, Yukelson, & Weigand, 1998; Weinberg et al., 2000). It was suggested that this could be due to the fact that athletes consider competition more important and therefore place more emphasis, albeit frequency, on setting competition goals. However, Burton and colleagues did report that their sample of college athletes rated both practice and competition goals as equally effective.

Burton and colleagues further propose that the function of these goals may differ considerably (2001). Enhanced learning is often times the focus in practice situations, while performing optimally or outperforming one’s opponent is the focus in competitive situations. Because practices generally foster minimal evaluation and social comparison, as compared to competition, the function of practice goals may be on skill development as opposed to arousal goals and mental toughness goals, which are more prominent in competition. Although Burton and colleagues contend that the types of goals athletes set in training and competition probably differ, little research exists comparing the goals athletes set in these two situations. Therefore, this comparison was undertaken in the present study and given the proposals made by Burton et al., it was hypothesised that athletes would set primarily learning oriented goals in practice and execution oriented goals in competition.
Specific Types of Goals Athletes Set

Those investigating goal setting in sport have typically studied the nature of the goals set by athletes and the influence of these goals on enhancing performance. Much of the early research investigated goal difficulty (e.g., difficult versus easy goals), goal specificity (e.g., specific performance goals versus vague “do your best” goals), and the temporal nature of the goals (e.g., short-term versus long-term goals) (see Kyllo & Landers, 1995 for a summary of this research). Researchers have made also distinctions between outcome and performance goals (Burton, et al., 2001; Kingston & Hardy, 1994, 1997). Outcome goals are conceptualized as more product oriented, focusing on social comparison and object outcome such as winning or losing in competition. Performance goals are usually defined in terms of their process focus, emphasizing execution, improvement and achieving specific performance standards; for example, swimming a certain distance in a given time and “watching the ball” in a game (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996). More recently, Kingston and Hardy (1994, 1997) have broadened this goal focus into performance and process goals. Process goals involve improving form, technique and strategy (e.g., keeping the elbow high in front crawl) while performance goals involve improving overall performance (e.g., swimming faster split times). For years, practicing sport psychologists have encouraged the use of process and performance goals rather than outcome goals because of the perceived control and increased self-confidence derived from those goals (Burton, 1992; Filby, Maynard, & Graydon, 1999). However, more recently, researchers examining these three goal focuses have supported the benefits of maintaining a balance in the use of all three (Burton et al., 2001; Filby et al., 1999). Process, performance and outcome goals are all examples of objective goals while general statements of intent are considered subjective goals (Hardy et al., 1996).

While there is considerable research concerning goal difficulty, goal specificity and the temporal nature of these goals, there is less known about the specific types of goals set by athletes. Researchers have attempted to answer this question by examining athlete’s goal preference, goal frequency, goal focus, and goal effectiveness (Burton et al., 1998; Weinberg et al., 2000). For example, Weinberg and colleagues investigated Olympic athletes’ perceptions concerning goal frequency and effectiveness as well as goal preference and the barriers impeding these goals. Olympic athletes were found to set goals and found this strategy to be highly effective. Furthermore, Olympic athletes reported their three most important goals as having fun, winning and improving overall performance. Overall, these goal setting studies have found that athletes set goals for skill and strategy improvement, motivation enhancement/maintenance, confidence enhancement, physical conditioning and for outcomes such as winning. It is likely, however, that athletes set goals for additional purposes (e.g., the proper execution of skills, staying focused) and these were considered in the present study.
Examining Goal Setting Using a Qualitative Analysis

One limitation of this previous goal setting research is that these studies have used researcher-defined goals. This approach undoubtedly has hindered a full determination of the various goals athletes set. Even in studies in which athletes were surveyed about the goals they use, the researchers generated the items on the survey. For example, Burton et al. (1998) examined how frequently and effectively collegiate athletes set goals and goal strategies by administering the Collegiate Goal Setting in Sport Questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed by four goal-setting experts and is relatively comprehensive. Results indicated that most athletes set goals, although rated these goals as only moderately effective. Furthermore, the results indicated that effective goal setters set all types of goals (competitive, practice, outcome and performance goals) more frequently than their less effective counterparts. Similar methodologies have been employed in other goal setting studies in which athletes were asked to rank order goals from a goal preference list that had been developed by goal-setting experts (Weinberg et al., 1993, 2000).

Consequently, it is very likely the specific types of goals that athletes set are not fully captured in the questionnaires and lists employed in this previous research. Rather than providing the athletes with lists of goals, an alternative approach is to ask athletes the specific types of goals they set; that is, take a qualitative approach. Research supports such an approach stating, "qualitative research is needed to supplement these quantitative data to provide a richer, more in-depth understanding of the complexities of the goal-setting process” (Burton et al., 1998, p. 415).

Patton (1990) suggests three qualitative approaches researchers can employ: interviews, direct observation, and written documents such as open-ended surveys. Given the extensive research previously conducted on goal setting by athletes and the desire to make our findings more generalizable, the latter approach was adopted in the present study. Athletes completed an open-ended questionnaire about the specific types of goals they set. The questionnaire was structured around issues of interest in the present research (e.g., goal setting in training versus competition) and previous findings (e.g., athletes set goals for skill improvement, confidence enhancement, and for outcomes such as winning). This structure represented the deductive nature of our approach, while the open-ended responses provided by the athletes represented the inductive nature of our approach (see Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001 for a discussion). It was hypothesized that athletes would report setting more specific types of goals in both training and competition than had been reported in previous research.
Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 249 volunteer athletes representing 18 different sports: soccer (n = 37), rowing (n = 30), volleyball (n = 29), rugby (n = 28), ice hockey (n = 25), basketball (n = 22), swimming (n = 14), football (n = 10), field hockey (n = 10), wrestling (n = 8), karate (n = 6), taekwondo (n = 5), track (n = 5), alpine skiing (n = 5), fencing (n = 5), water polo (n = 5), lacrosse (n = 4), and baseball (n = 1). Athletes varied in participation from high school to national team level with 74% representing the varsity level. From the group of participants, 109 were males while 140 were female. The age of the participants ranged from 18-30 years.

Measures

In order to understand the types of goals set by competitive athletes, an open-ended format was employed. Participants completed a questionnaire that asked them about the goals they set and the imagery they employed. Only the information pertaining to goal setting is considered in the present study. A total of 10 questions were asked dealing with the goals athletes set in their specific sport with respect to skills, strategies, performance goals, mental preparation goals and outcome goals. These questions were derived from Paivio’s (1985) framework. The 10 questions, 5 for training and 5 for competition, emanating from the framework provided some direction for the athletes in making their responses without suggesting any specific types of goals they might set. An example of a question dealing with setting goals in training for skills was “What goals do you set [in training] for working on a specific skill?” Athletes were told to not answer (i.e., leave blank) any questions that did not pertain to them. As well as completing the open-ended questions, demographic data were obtained from the participants including sport, level of participation, and sex.

Procedure

The investigators administered the questionnaire to the athletes on an individual basis. A letter of information and a consent form were read and completed by each participant prior to the answering of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed either before or after practice. The athletes were recruited from university and club teams within the Southwestern Ontario region. A total of 269 questionnaires were distributed, and 249 (95%) were returned to the investigator and included in the present study.
Data Analyses

A constant comparative method was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in which transcripts were divided into text units and were compared and regrouped into a hierarchy of knowledge. This analysis was independently undertaken by two investigators following the procedures outlined by Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993). The computer program, QSR NUDIST (Non-numerical, Unstructured Data, Indexing, Searching and Theorizing) was used in the analyses. The program is designed to store, code, retrieve, and analyze text (Weitzman & Miles, 1995). The answers to the open-ended questions were transcribed and imported into the NUDIST program. They were then divided into text units, which were the responses to each question. Two hierarchical trees were used to represent the data, one for training and one for competition. The root of the each tree is the most general level with the branches being the higher order levels. Tesch (1990) contends that it is important for the branches to remain flexible as this allows for the modification and refinement of the branches until the classification system proves satisfactory to the researchers. When the categorization of new data or text units fits adequately into the existing framework or hierarchical tree, theoretical saturation has been reached (Miles & Huberman, 1990). Between the two investigators, there was a 97% agreement on the coding of the various text units. When disagreements occurred, the text units were reread and discussed until a consensus was reached.

Results and Discussion

While previous research (e.g., Burton et al., 1998; Weinberg et al., 2000) has shown that athletes set goals in both training and competition, the specific types of goals comprising each of these two situations has not been fully examined. As well, some of the same research has suggested that there are differences in the goals athletes set for training and competition (e.g., Burton et al., 1998). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine the types of goals athletes set in both training and competition, thereby elaborating on previous findings. As suggested by Burton et al. (1998), a qualitative approach was adopted.

Figure 1 depicts the types of goals athletes set in training, while Figure 2 represents the types of goals they set in competition. Both figures consist of three levels; Level 1 is simply the situation, or where athletes set goals, training and competition; Level 2 represents the skills, strategies, mental preparation, outcome and effort goals; and Level 3 represents an elaboration of the previous level. The data in the figures are presented from left to right, while the reader is reminded that the actual analysis progressed from right to left.

The frequencies of the various types of goals for training and competition are located in parentheses in Figure 1 and 2. The frequencies were determined by the number of responses
Figure 1. Specific types of goals set in training: A conceptual framework.

Training Goals (1304)

Skills (421)
- Improvement (136)
  - Execution (285)
  - Improvement (170)
  - Execution (102)

Strategies (272)
- Arousal (92)
  - Mental Toughness (79)

Mental Preparation (459)
- Focus (98)
  - Staying Positive (72)
  - Confidence (34)
  - Training Effectively (72)

Subjective (152)
- Having Fun (34)
  - Making the Most (46)

Effort (84)

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3
Figure 2. Specific types of goals set in competition: A conceptual framework.
(meaning units) elicited from the athletes. While an athlete could give more than one response for a specific type of goal (e.g., skill improvement), the total number of responses for a specific goal provides a general indication of the number of athletes endorsing that type of goal. Overall, athletes reported slightly more goals for training (a total of 1304 meaning units) than competition (a total of 1281 meaning units). These findings are secondary to the actual content analysis since a particular goal (e.g., regulating arousal) might not have been mentioned as frequently as another goal (e.g., being focused) but still could be very important to some athletes. Therefore, the values in the figures should be interpreted with some caution.

Before outlining the goals athletes set, it should be noted that the athletes set many types of goals (a total of 2585 meaning units), they were usually able to state these goals clearly and concisely, and they set goals for both training and competition.

**Skills**

The skills' category contains the types of goals athletes gave for specific sport skills. It is further divided into improvement and execution. Improvement includes goals related to skill development and correction. An example of an improvement goal in training was, “I set goals to improve and strengthen my weaker skills while still keeping up with all my other skills.” With respect to skill execution goals in training, athletes most often reported setting goals to perform perfectly and to properly execute a skill.

As might be expected, in competition athletes reported setting goals primarily for skill execution rather than skill improvement. The most frequently cited execution-related goals were for performing perfectly and performing with the proper form/technique. This is evident in the following quotation from a basketball player: “I set goals to consistently have proper follow through in the execution of my free throw shots.” Some athletes did report setting goals for improvement in competition, and this suggests these athletes are using competition situations for skill development purposes, at least to some extent. Overall, athletes reported setting skills’ goals in training more than twice as frequently as in competition.

Results supported our prediction that athletes would report setting more specific types of goals in both training and competition than had been reported in previous research. In terms of setting goals for specific sport skills, research has indicated that athletes set goals on improving skills (Weinberg et al., 1993, 2000). This finding was replicated in the present study with some athletes reporting setting skill improvement goals. One could assume that athletes would set improvement goals in training but what was rather surprising was that some athletes set such goals for competition as well, although to a much lesser extent. Perhaps athletes that set improvement goals in competition are at a more developmental stage. Although Weinberg and colleagues (1997) did not examine the types of goals set in practice and in competition,
they did find that youth athletes (i.e., developmental athletes) focussed more on skill/technique goals than did Olympic and collegiate athletes.

In both training and competition, athletes reported more skill execution goals than skill improvement goals. An explanation for this finding is that about 80% of the athletes were relatively elite (i.e., university, national, and international levels) and these athletes may have already “perfected” many of the skills in their sports. Therefore, they would be more concerned with properly executing these skills than further improving them, and this would be reflected in their goal setting.

**Strategies**

The strategies’ category entails the goals athletes set for strategies of play. This category was further divided into improvement and execution, and in training athletes reported setting slightly more goals more for the former than the latter. An example of an improvement goal in training was, “In training, my goal is to become familiar with the strategy. I want to have the best strategy possible for game situations.”

As with skills, it might be expected that in competition, athletes would be more concerned with strategy execution than improvement. Somewhat surprisingly, the frequencies of goals set for strategy execution and improvement in competition were quite similar. The following citation exemplifies goals set for the execution of strategies in competition, “I set goals to run the plays as effectively as possible. I want to be able to read the defence and then execute the most effective strategy.”

From the responses athletes gave for setting strategy improvement goals, it appears that during the competition they determine whether the strategies they are using are effective and they modify them as necessary. Furthermore, competition may be the best situation for working on strategies, especially if the strategies are geared to an opponent’s specific weaknesses or strengths. For example, during a basketball game, a team may set a goal to improve the amount of pressure being put on the ball as their opponents move the ball up the court. This finding is consistent with research by Weinberg et al. (1997) in which they found athletes frequently set goals to improve sport strategies.

**Skills versus strategies.** When comparing the reported frequencies of skill goals versus strategy goals in training, athletes in the present sample set far more goals for skills than strategies. This is consistent with previous research in which it was found that collegiate athletes tend to set goals more frequently for skill development rather than strategy development or execution (Burton et al., 1998). Furthermore, Weinberg et al. (1993) found that collegiate athletes prefer to set goals for improving skills more so than for improving strategies.
This finding may be useful to practitioners or coaches when educating athletes about goal setting indicating that the value of setting strategy improvement goals in training should be emphasized.

**Mental Preparation**

The mental preparation category was divided into five higher ordered themes including controlling arousal, being mental tough, being focused, staying positive, and increasing self-confidence. Because mental preparation is needed in both training and competition, similar themes emerged from the data, although the frequencies with which they were reported often differed.

The arousal theme, most frequently cited in both training and competition, involves setting goals to control or maintain one’s emotional arousal level. In training, athletes reported setting goals most for getting themselves psyched up and ready to practice as shown in the following quote, “I want to get myself as excited as possible so I can get out on the ice and release it. Sometimes you just don’t want to be there so you need that extra push to get you going.” In competition, athletes’ most often cited arousal goals were to stay relaxed. For example, one athlete stated, “In competition, the goals are to reduce my anxiety level so that I can relax and just let things happen.” Athletes reported setting more than twice the number of arousal goals in competition compared to training. This could be due to the fact that athletes tend to place more importance on competition than on training. Research by Kingston and Hardy (1997) has suggested that goals may exert a positive influence on other psychological or behavioural patterns such as controlling arousal and anxiety. Furthermore, Burton (1999) suggested that a psychological skill highlighted in competition should be stress management (i.e., arousal and anxiety). Therefore, when educating athletes about arousal and anxiety types of goals, the value of setting such goals for both training (e.g., getting psyched up for practice) and competition (i.e., staying relaxed) should be highlighted.

Athletes indicated that they set goals to work through adverse situations in both training and competition. These goals were termed mental toughness goals and were cited slightly more often in competition than in practice. “I set goals to pull through in tough games and to stay level headed,” is an example of a mental toughness goal set for competition. Less emphasis in the literature has been placed on setting mental toughness goals, yet athletes seem to view this as a very important reason. Kingston and Hardy (1997) have suggested that one of the most important factors in goal setting training is the extent to which athletes learn to prioritize their different goals. The present findings suggest that when setting mental preparation goals in competition, priority should be given to setting goals for maintaining or controlling arousal.
Athletes also reported setting goals in training and competition to stay focused. The frequency with which they set these goals was comparable in both situations. An example of an athlete setting goals to stay focused in competition is evident in the following citation, “In competition, I set goals to focus in on the task at hand and zone everything else out.” Previous researchers have argued that one of the main reasons athletes set goals is to stay focused on the task at hand and this would be especially important in competition where additional distractions (e.g., spectators, media) are often present (Locke, 1968; Weinberg et al., 1997, 2001).

Staying positive was a higher ordered goal theme often reported by athletes in both training and competition, although to a much greater extent in the latter. “If we are behind a couple of points, I set a goal to stay positive and not let it get me down,” is one athlete’s response to staying positive in games. In training, athletes also reported the need to stay positive, which is exemplified in the following, “Sometimes in practice the coach is running us the entire time. When this happens, I set a goal to stay positive and not to let her get to me.” Many times practices can be both mentally and physically demanding. The present results suggest that it may be necessary that athletes set goals to stay positive when faced with perhaps mentally mundane drills or physically difficult skills.

Another interesting finding was that increasing self-confidence was the least frequently reported goal for mental preparation in both training and competition. One athlete’s response indicates the importance of setting a goal to stay confident in training, “When I’m trying and trying to perfect a new skill in practice, I try to stay positive because if I don’t the skill will never come.” Along these lines, research has distinguished between setting goals to enhance motivation and setting goals to increase self-confidence, and this research shows that athletes tend to set goals more for the former reason than the latter, and find motivational goals more effective (Burton, 1992; Burton et al., 1998). While the present research sub-divided the mental preparation goals into very specific types (e.g., staying positive, being focused), it clearly supports the previous goal setting literature which emphasizes that goal setting should be used more to enhance motivation, as a more global concept, rather than self-confidence (e.g., Burton, 1992).

Subjective and Objective

This category represents the subjective and objective goals athletes set with respect to both training and competition, respectively. In training, athletes reported setting three specific types of subjective goals. Training effectively was the most often reported goal, while having fun at practice, and making the most of practice were reported less often. An example of a training subjective goal given by one athlete was, “My main goal in practice is to have fun. At least when it’s fun it seems more bearable.” With respect to competition, the objective goals
athletes set were primarily outcome in nature such as winning, which was the most frequently reported type of goal, followed by getting a medal and beating their opponent. An example of the latter is, “In competition, my goals are to stop my attacker from their offence and demolish them with my offence and defence.”

Overall, athletes reported setting almost twice as many outcome-related goals for competition than subjective goals for training. There has been considerable debate on the use of outcome goals to motivate athletes. Burton (1989) argued that when athletes, particularly low ability athletes matched against higher ability athletes, focus on outcome goals, unrealistic future expectations ensues leading to lower levels of motivation, self-confidence, and increased anxiety. Other researchers (e.g., Hardy et al., 1996) have been less critical of outcome goals and suggest that outcome goals are most effective in creating practice motivation by reminding athletes of the long-term accomplishments they are trying to attain. Most athletes in the present study, the majority of whom were relatively elite, reported setting outcome-related competition goals. Hence the present findings seem to support Hardy et al. (1996).

The subjective goals athletes set were training effectively, having fun, and making the most of practice. Previous research has found that having fun is an important goal for athletes at all levels of competition (Weinberg et al., 1993, 2000). The other two subjective goals for training emanating from the present research, training effectively and making the most of practice, have not specifically been identified in previous studies.

**Effort**

The basis of the questionnaire employed in this study included a category labeled “performance goals”. This category failed to emerge from the inductive analysis of the data. Instead, performance goals were assumed under the “skills” and “strategies” categories. However, an additional category emerged for both training and competition that was not originally part of the framework and this category was labeled “effort”. The effort category is concerned with athletes’ work ethic and their setting of goals about the amount of effort they want to put forth in both practice and competition. For instance, one athlete reported setting the following goal in practice, “Every practice I set a goal to give 110%.” Athletes also indicated setting similar goals for effort in competition. This is exemplified in the following, “I want to push as hard as I can in a game. I want to be able to give it all I’ve got.” Overall, athletes reported setting about as many effort goals in competition (75 meaning units) as they did in practice (84 meaning units). This suggests that in order for many athletes to stay motivated and give 100% effort in practice, they find it valuable to set effort goals. Previous goal setting research has shown that setting goals lead to increased effort (Locke & Latham, 1985; Weinberg, Burke, & Jackson, 1997), however, there has been no research specifically suggesting that athletes set
effort goals. Given how frequently athletes reported setting effort goals in the present study, future research should explore the value of such goals in more depth.

**Goals Set in Training and Competition**

Burton et al. (2001) proposed that goals likely serve different functions in training versus competition, thus suggesting the types of goals set in these situations must be different. They propose that enhanced learning is usually the primary focus in practice situations, while performing optimally or outperforming one’s opponent is the main focus in competitive situations. Since practice situations generally foster minimal evaluation and social comparison as compared to competition, the function of practice goals may be on skill development/improvement, as opposed to arousal goals and mental toughness goals, which may be more prominent in competition. Given this rationale, it was hypothesized in the present study that athletes would set primarily learning oriented goals in practice and execution oriented goals in competition. Some support for this hypothesis was found as athletes reported setting more improvement-oriented goals for both skills and strategies in training than in competition. However, the frequency with which they set execution-oriented goals for skills was actually higher in training than in competition. Therefore, these results only provide partial support for the proposal by Burton et al. (2001) that in practice, athletes set goals that tend to focus on learning, while in competition they set goals that tend to focus on execution.

As noted above, athletes set different types of goals in competition than in training. In competition, the goals were objective such as winning, beating an opponent, and receiving a medal whereas in training the goals were subjective (i.e., more general) such as training effectively, having fun, and making the most of practice. As well, athletes set far more outcome goals in competition than subjective goals in training. This is not surprising given that athletes may consider competition more important than practice and because competitions occur less frequently than practices (Burton et al., 1998, 2001). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, enhanced learning is often times the focus in practice situations, while performing optimally or outperforming one’s opponent is the focus in competitive situations.

**Concluding Remarks**

The framework used to derive the questions employed in this study could be viewed as a limitation because it provided the athletes some direction in making their responses. However, given the extensive research previously conducted on goal setting by athletes, using such a framework seemed like a sensible approach. The sub-categories that emerged from the athletes’ responses (e.g., skill execution, mental toughness) represent more specific types of goals than were depicted in the initial questions. Therefore, these sub-categories provide a
more detailed outline of the specific types of goals athletes set than was previously available in the goal setting research.

Given that the athletes in the present study reported setting many types of goals for both training and competition, this study provides some support for the conclusion reached by Filby et al. (1999) and Kingston and Hardy (1997) that multiple-goal strategies may be better than those that involve only one type of goal. In Kingston and Hardy’s (1994) article, it is suggested that golfers may use different types of goals. A golfer may set a goal to win the tournament, a goal to increase the salience of practice, and a goal to aid in concentration. Kingston and Hardy add that it is important to have athletes prioritise their goals within different situations.

The two conceptual frameworks (i.e., Figures 1 and 2) for the specific types of goals athletes set in training and competition that emanated from the present research represent an important contribution to both research and practice. These two frameworks can be used to direct and stimulate future goal setting research. For example, the present study indicates the goal preference lists that have been used in previous goal setting research (Weinberg et al., 1993, 2000) do not include all possibilities. The present frameworks can be employed by researchers to develop a revised goal preference list. In addition, the frameworks can be used to guide athletes, coaches and practitioners in the development of specific and effective goal setting programs. Coaches could use these frameworks to ensure that athletes are setting the proper goals during practice and competition, depending on the individual’s need. For example, the frameworks indicate that athletes set skill goals for both improvement and execution of the skill, so a coach can check to ensure both are being included in individual’s goal setting program.

References


