

July 2001 - Goal setting

Previously, I talked about how some competitors try to shortcut their way to the top in shooting by adopting some of the ever-too-common gimmicks that are available on today's market. While some of the new devices have some merit, there is still no doubt in my mind that to be successful in shooting you need some of the fundamental principles that it takes to succeed in any other sport, business or personal endeavor. Undoubtedly, the first thing you need to do is set a goal for yourself. It has to be realistic, but also it needs to be at a standard that is higher than what you currently think you are capable of achieving. At least by setting your goals higher, you are always heading in the right direction. As an Olympic athlete I am setting my goals obviously in four-year cycles, but in reality they are broken down into smaller periods.

Every Olympian's goal is ultimately to win a medal, but smaller steps must be set along the way - things like using particular events throughout the year to understand how long your peaking cycle or fitness goals will take. You need to write down what your dreams and aspirations are. You don't need to show anybody what you have written, but you do need to periodically go back to that piece of paper to see where you are; it will become your road map for life.

I was first introduced to the task of goal setting after a disappointing end to the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. Both Michael Diamond and myself were competing in the trap event. We both finished with a score of 193 out of 200, which was two points behind the gold medallist. It was the closest Olympic event in history. We both felt very disappointed and I actually left Spain before the closing ceremony had taken place to come home and sulk.

About three months after the Barcelona Games I went up to the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra for a training camp. I sat down with one of the Institute's best sports planners, a gentleman by the name of Jeff Bond. We set out all of my goals for the next four years. I mapped out all of my training periods, rest periods and what I believed my competition schedule would be. Within 18 months I was world champion and the world cup final champion. Setting goals is something that we are all told about as kids. Making those dreams a reality just takes a little bit of time and planning.

The next step for success involves surrounding yourself with a group of people you have a lot of faith and trust in. Your own natural ability will only ever get you so far, as I found out in Barcelona. From 1992 to 1996 I had the unconditional support of three or four people, which without their help a gold medal would not have been possible.

A support team doesn't need to be made up of paid professional people, as mine was. It may consist simply of family members, but when times get hard you need someone to go back to the basics with, someone to bounce your ideas off. Eventually, everyone who hopes to make the top in anything will need to swallow some pride, put his or her hand up and say, "I need help". Help will never be far away. You just have to ask. Finally, and probably most importantly, you need the ability to keep learning from your mistakes. As a dual Olympic medallist, I am the first to admit I am still making mistakes in my life. I

would like to think, however, that I have the ability to keep learning from them and more importantly never repeat them. One characteristic that I have found in nearly all of the great Australian sporting champions that I have had the pleasure of meeting throughout the past five years is that I never hear them making excuses for themselves when they don't perform at their best. Real champions all make mistakes. They don't make excuses. They learn from their mistakes so they don't need to make excuses.

All of these ground rules come back to one basic principle in life: you must take responsibility for your own actions. Every person reading this article has 24 hours tomorrow to make the most of his or her life. The people that ultimately get to the top of the mountain they are trying to climb set goals, work as a team and learn from their mistakes along the way. The people that never get there are the ones that blame their coach, boss, family, staff or whoever gets in their way when something goes wrong. They never blame themselves. These people rarely make the dais or hear their country's national anthem.

Success in life does not necessarily mean that you have to win a gold medal. I have often said you cannot ask anyone on the Olympic team to do any more than to perform a personal best at the Games. Natasha Lonsdale did this in Sydney in the women's skeet competition and I regarded her Olympics as an outstanding success even though she was beaten in a sudden-death shoot off for the bronze medal. Success is far better qualified by simply obtaining a goal that a year or four or ten years ago you simply thought was a dream.