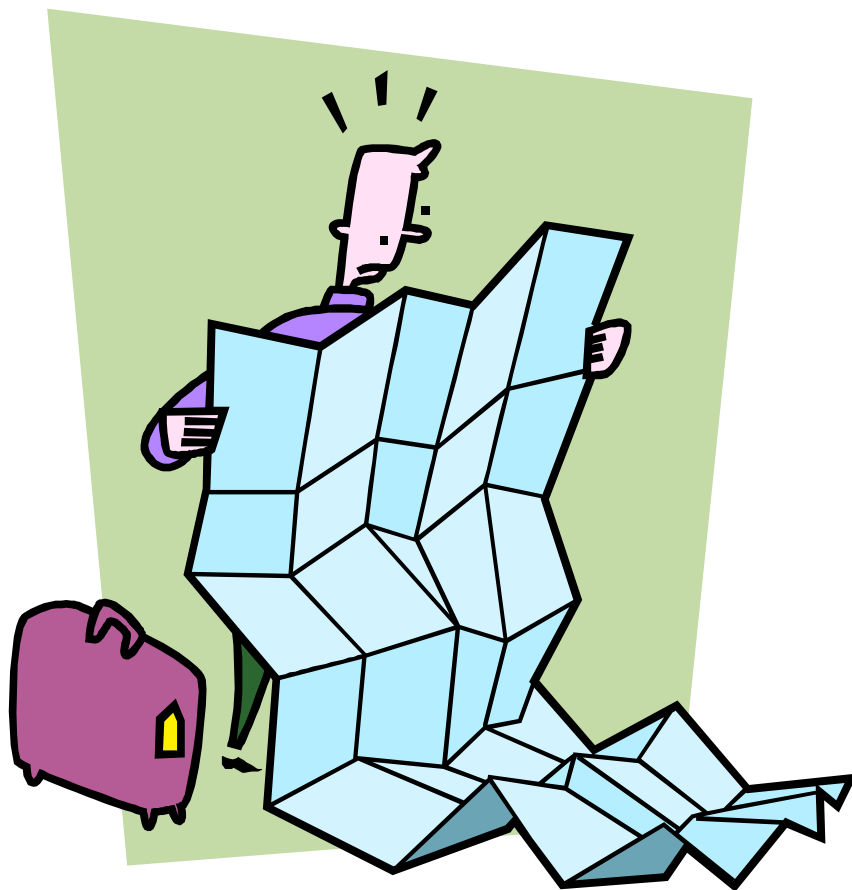# Chapter 1
GOAL SETTING

Your Road Map to Success

GOAL SETTING

Your Road Map to Success

"Excuse me, Sir," Alice inquires. *"Could you tell me which road to take?"* Wisely, the caterpillar asks, *"Where are you going?"* Somewhat dismayed, Alice responds, *"Oh, I don't know where I am going, Sir."* *"Well,"* replied the caterpillar, *"if you don't know where you are going, it really doesn't matter which road you take."*

(Alice in Wonderland – Lewis Carrol)

Let's Take a Road Trip.

Goal setting CAN help in the pursuit for the final destination.

Before we go anywhere, a little planning needs to be done. Where do we want to go? Let's drive from Colorado Springs to Myrtle Beach, SC. How are we going to get there? Let's drive! What supplies are we going to need? Sunglasses, some money, snacks for the trip, CD's…..

But, don't forget the map. The easiest way to plan for a trip is with a road map. When using a road map you are in essence setting goals for the trip. The road map can:

- locate specifically where it is you're going (long term goal),
- determine how many planned stops to take along the way (short-term goal),
- tell you how many miles to the next destination (daily goal)
- tell you the alternate routes along the way, and
- help locate tourist stops en route (you should always enjoy the journey ☺).

Now, let's apply this to swimming. Similar questions should be asked of swimmers before they take off on an athletic journey. Where will they want to be at the end of the season? What are they going to do physically and mentally in order to get there? What skills and tools do they need in order to reach their destination?

This installment of the Mental Toolbox will help swimmers plan their athletic journey with consistent use of goals. The chapter contains a brief introduction, tips on the presentation of goal setting to swim teams and some exercises to help build the swimming season road map.

How Exactly Does Goal Setting Help?

Good goal setting gives an athlete an edge in three areas:

1. Goals provide **direction**.
2. Goals provide **feedback**.
3. Goals **motivate;** provide a daily purpose.

Basic Tips for Effective Goal Setting

✓ *Identify both Short-term and Long-term goals.*

✓ *Identify task goals in addition to outcome goals.*

✓ *Take action.*

✓ *Evaluate your goals.*

✓ *Set both team and individual goals.*

Let's look at each of these in more detail . . .

How Far Ahead Should an Athlete Look?

Effective goal setting entails setting long-term and short-term goals; these goals will identify where the athlete is going and how they are going to get there.

When planning a vacation, you often think about dream destinations. Where would you go if you had unlimited funds and abilities…Egypt, the Caribbean, Europe? As with traveling and many other aspects of life it is fun to dream. In sport, it is also fun and important to dream. **Dream goals** allow you to project years into the future without any limits. For example, for many athletes making the Olympic Team is a dream goal.

Athletes need to progress from a dream goal to a long-term goal. **Long-term goals** are typically one season to numerous seasons down the road; as in the road trip analogy, this goal is the destination. One way to determine a good long-term goal would be to have swimmers ask themselves the question "where do I want to be at the end of the season or the end of high school or college?" Examples of the answer to this question can be in terms of having an improved streamline by the end of the season, a goal time, making a specific time standard, or earning a spot on a junior or senior national team.

In order to make the long-term goal seem less daunting, **short-term goals** are set. **Short-term goals** are set for shorter lengths of time than long-term goals, usually between two weeks and a month. Short-term goals serve as stepping-stones for the long-term goals. Setting short-term goals allow one to monitor success towards the long-term goals. A good question to have swimmers ask themselves is " Where do I want to be at the end of this month?"

Finally, short-term goals can also often feel far off therefore something more within reach is needed to maintain focus and motivation. For these reasons it is also important to set **daily goals**. **Daily goals** are to be set every day in practice and in competition. Setting effective daily goals will help motivate and bring higher intensity to training. Daily goals can be set for both physical training and psychological skill development. A good question for swimmers to ask themselves is "why am I getting in the water today?" (See exercises 1, 4 and 5)

Identify Outcome Goals and Task Goals

Effective goal setting necessitates that athletes set both outcome and task goals.

Most swimmers are good at setting outcome goals; an **outcome goal** is any type of goal directed at the end result. Swimming outcome goals are set when an individual focuses on attaining a specific place at a meet, achieving a time standard or a personal best, or beating a teammate in practice. Outcome goals are hard to control because they depend on both the ability and skill of the swimmer and his opponents.

However, the swimmer has more control over **task goals** because they depend on their skill and ability only.   **Task goals** are what the swimmer has to DO (physically and mentally) in order to accomplish their outcome goals.   Examples of task goals include being aggressive in and out of each turn, holding a specific stroke count and maintaining splits through an event. (See exercise 2)

Last year, Jason placed second at Regionals in both the 100 and 200m fly. Regionals will start in 2 days and all Jason is talking about is winning both the events. He says, "Nothing but first will be good enough." Because such a goal is out of his control, it would be more effective to get him focused on what he needs to do to win the events. He needs to focus on a powerful start, control through 75, then working his kick. If he can do this, the outcome will take care of itself.

Taking Action

Effective goal setting must involve not just a road map but a strategy to keep the goals "real" on a consistent basis.

Without much, if any, prodding from coaches, swimmers are already setting goals (especially outcome goals).   When asked, athletes talk about goals such as wanting to swim a certain time, making cuts, improving a specific aspect or their stroke, and staying streamlined off the walls.   However, coaches need to help swimmers progress from setting long-term and short–term goals to actually acting on these goals.

For example, when Grace, a 10-year-old swimmer, gets in the water every afternoon for practice, one wonders if any of her goals are salient? Does she focus on her stroke during warm-up? Is she conscious of her body position as she pushes off the wall? Or, is she "just swimming", merely in the water doing the workout that her coaches instructed her to do?

Once a goal setting "map" had been established, the next critical piece is to keep the athlete accountable to these goals.   Doing this is largely a matter of creativity and finding a means of accountability that will work for athletes. Some examples of ways to keep goals at the forefront so they are acted upon include:

- Complete weekly goal setting forms
- Developing a goal chart
- Write goals on visible items such as water bottles or caps
- Verbalize goals to teammates, friends, family (See exercise 6)

Evaluate your Goals

Effective goal setting requires athletes to regularly evaluate progress towards their goals, note successes along the way, and modify goals if necessary.

Let's go back to the road map analogy, where the goal is to drive from Colorado Springs to Myrtle Beach. Suppose you take off bright and early in the morning with your trusty roadmap in hand. On day one, your goal is to make it to St. Louis by sundown. However, outside of Kansas City there was an accident and you end up sitting on the interstate for 2 hours. At what point, if ever, will you stop to assess your progress and re-evaluate your goals?

Back in the pool, Robert, the star distance freestyler on the team, developed a shoulder problem and only kicked for the month of September. At what point should he reassess his goal of improving his stroke rate? Robert will only be disappointed and frustrated if he only evaluates his training based on his original goal of improving his stroke rate.

Goals are meant to provide direction, give feedback on progress and motivate. To ensure they serve this purpose, goals must also be flexible. It is necessary to evaluate goals at several points during the swim season. Set up specific dates for your athletes to monitor their success and to make changes if needed.

Team Goal Setting

Effective team goal setting includes both the coaches and the athletes. Team goal setting allows the swimmers to be supported by the group and the group goals in their individual athletic pursuits.

The goal setting terms thus far have all been in reference to individual goals. Individual goals are very important, but as a swim team, it is also important to set team goals. Team goals define a desirable state for the group at the end of a certain length of time. Team goals can guide how individual goals are set. Both swimmers and coaches can be included in the team goal setting process. If the coach sets the overall team goals, it is important to include the swimmers in setting group goals for their specific training group. After the group goals are set the swimmers can then set their individual goals as a reflection of the group and team goals. (See exercise 7)

COACHES GUIDE: Key Points to Emphasize when Introducing Goal Setting to Your Swimmers

- Ask your swimmers to define GOALS. Have them discuss why they set goals. Then, discuss additional ways that goals can help performance.

- Teach your swimmers the importance of Systematic Goal Setting (using different lengths and types of goals) and give examples of elite athletes to stress your point.

- Discuss, in detail, the tips of effective goal setting as outlined above.

- Have the swimmers complete some of the goal setting exercises, included at the end of the chapter.

- Brainstorm ways for the team to "stay on top of" the goal setting plan.

> *Every day, for three years and ten months, I wrote at the top of my training log, 'I work harder than anyone else, that is why I will be an Olympic Medalist!' I also wrote down specific goals for every competition and every day and week of training. These goals were very specific and focused on MY performance, not my competitors.*
>
> *Having these goals was the only way I was able to get through all my injuries (operations and bone breaks), and stay focused enough at the Olympics to win a medal. There were so many days when I just wanted to sleep in, but having my training goals made me head into rehab or weight training instead. At the Olympics, simple goals kept me intense and focused. Goal setting seems like more work, but if I didn't do it, I wouldn't have a medal around my neck today.*
>
> *Olympic medal winner in Atlanta.*

Goal Setting Exercises

To help your swimmers understand and use goals more often in practice and competition several goal setting worksheets and recording sheets have been included. Feel free to pick and choose which ones work best for you. The sheets have been included to get athletes started on effective goal setting; feel free to modify the forms by incorporating your own ideas into your goal setting program.

Exercises 1 and 2 are targeted toward older swimmers; they are designed to bring home differences between short and long term goals and outcome and task goals.

Exercise 3 is an example of a goal setting sheet for swim meets and can be used with any age group. Pick four swim meets within each season in which you want to emphasize goal setting. Write the name of the meet in the first blank given. Choose a goal time for each meet, remembering to keep them challenging but realistic. Keep the sheet in a safe place and remember to review it before you compete in the next upcoming meet.

Exercise 4, 5 and 6 are targeted towards younger swimmers. The main purpose of these exercises is to get the younger swimmers thinking about short and long-term goals and emphasize how one type of goal influences the other.

Exercise 7 can also be used with any age group. Setting and recording daily goals is important. Daily goals can be recorded in many different ways. One way of recording daily goals is on a 3x5 card.

Exercise 8 is designed for creating individuals goals as a reflection of team goals. Once your swimmers have set group goals for the season, then have them set goals to further progress towards the group and team goals. Then ask you swimmers what they can do daily as individuals to further progress towards the group and team goals.

Finally, at the end of this chapter, some training log templates have been included and will be described in more detail there.

**Goal Setting Exercise 1:
How Far should I Look Ahead?**

Long-term goals tell you where you want to go and short-term goals tell you how you are going to get there. Both are important for effective goal setting. Try this exercise to help you breakdown your long-term goals.

1. **What is one of your long-term goals for this season?**

2. **What are the abilities or skills you need to achieve this goal?**

    a.

    b.

    c.

3. **What can you do between now and the end of the season to develop those abilities and skills?**

    a.

    b.

    c.

4. **What will you do this week to develop those abilities and skills?**

    a.

    b.

    c.

5. **What can you do next practice to develop those abilities and skills?**

    a.

    b.

    c.

Goal Setting Exercise 2:
Moving Beyond Outcome Goals to Task Goal Setting

Outcome goals tell you where you want to be which can help motivate. But, on a daily basis, they do not tell you what you need to DO.

1. Start With an Outcome
Choose an upcoming meet, and pick a challenging but not impossible outcome goal (win, place, get a certain score or time, etc.). Write that goal down in detail here:

2. Moving From Outcome to Task Goals
How can you maximize your chances to achieve this goal? Write down three things (i.e. pacing, stoke count, concentration, good breakfast, plenty of sleep) **you can do at the meet** in order to increase your odds of achieving the outcome goal.

      1. I will: _____

      2. I will: _____

      3. I will: _____

[You have just gone from goal setting to task goal setting.]

3. Practicing the Task Goals in Training
What can you do in practice between now and your competition to increase your chances of achieving your three competition tasks? Write down two things to focus on in practice that will gear you towards your competition task goals.

For example, if your competition task goal is to hold a specific stroke rate, you might focus on specific stroke rating sets in practice.

      1. In training, I will _____

      2. In training, I will _____
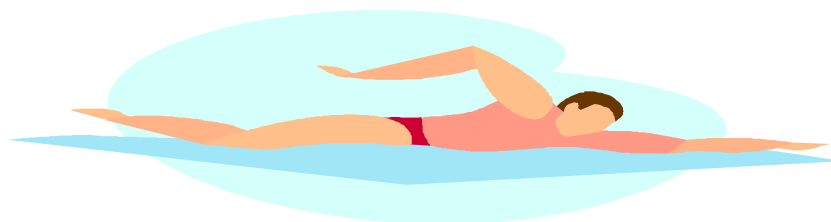
Goal Setting Exercise 3: Setting Goals for Swim Meets

Name:

Date of Meet:

Name of Meet:

Event:

GOAL TIME:

Skills needed to achieve this goal:

What I am going to work on in practice to help me achieve this goal:

Name:
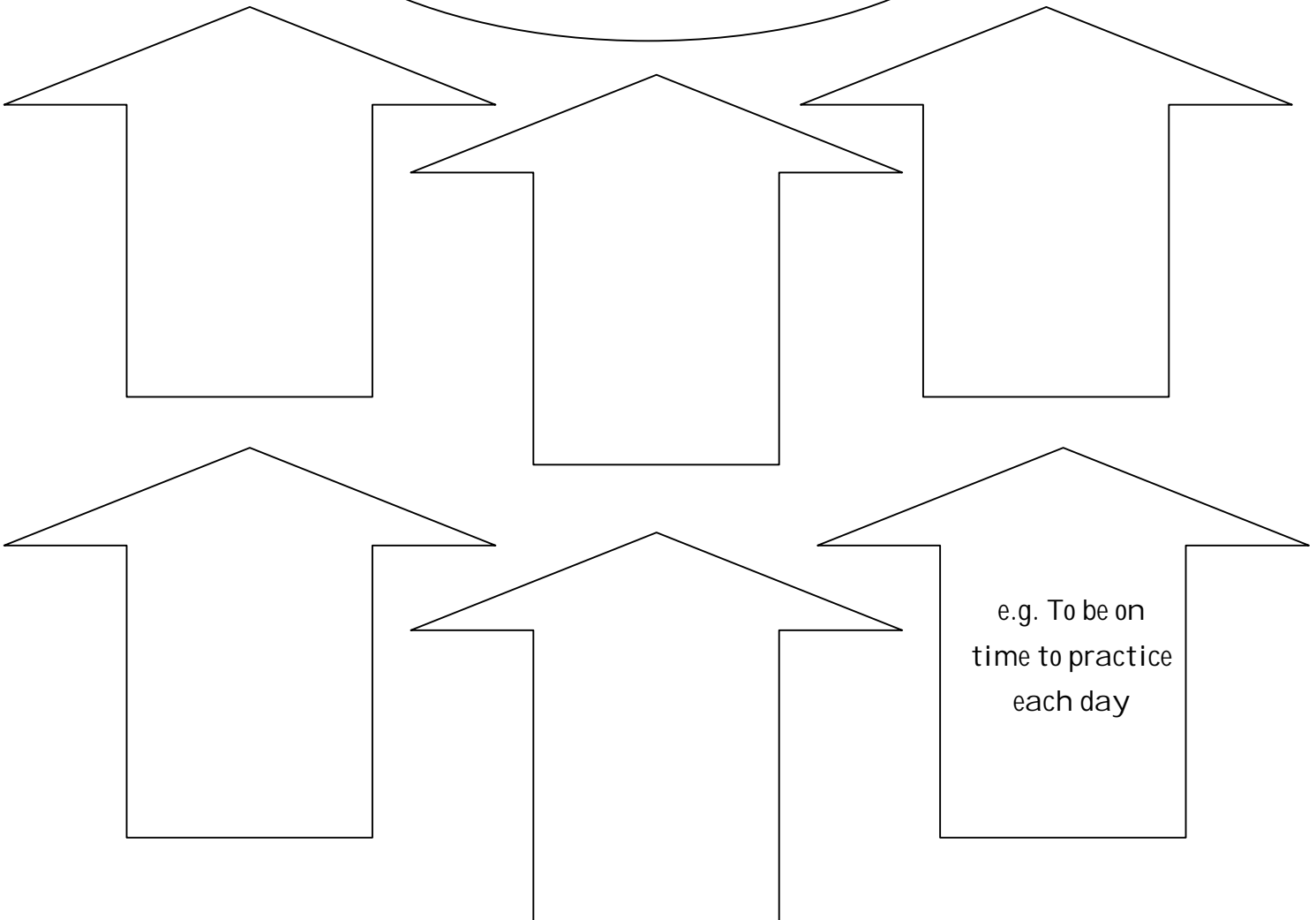
Date of Meet:

Name of Meet:

Event:

GOAL TIME:

Skills needed to achieve this goal:

What I am going to work on in practice to help me achieve this goal:

Goal Setting Exercise 4: Stepping Stone Exercise

Write your long-term goal in the oval. The arrows all point towards the goal. Use the arrows as stepping stones and write down your short-term goals that will lead to your long-term goal.

e.g. To be on time to practice each day

Adapted from <u>Mental Skills for Young Athletes</u> by John M. Hogg (1997)
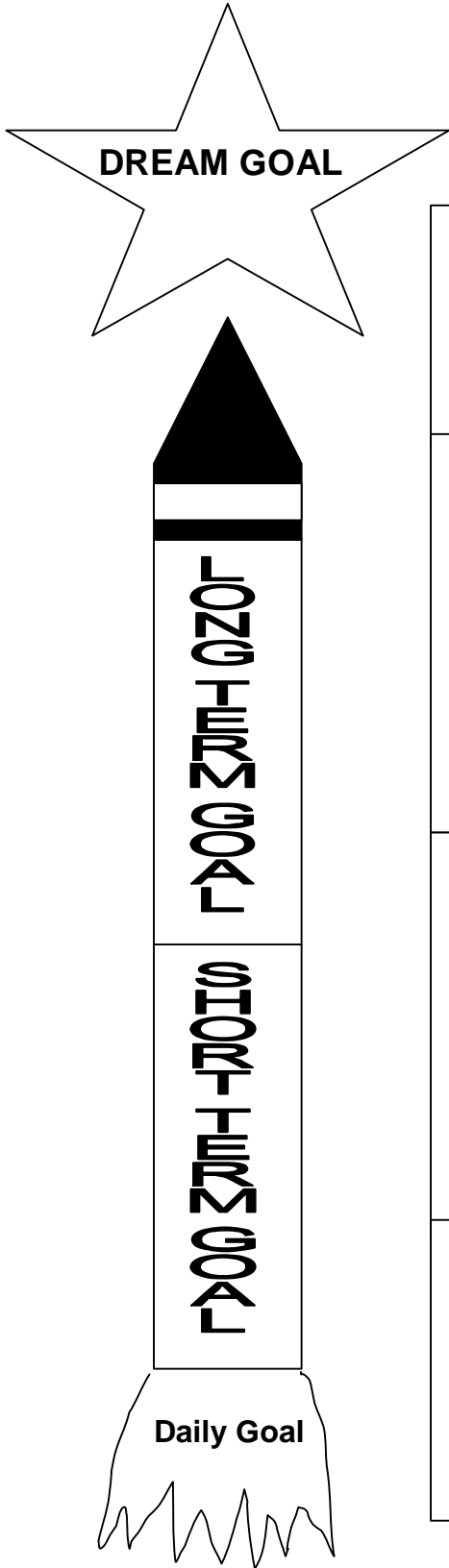
Goal Setting Exercise 5: Make Dreams Reality

In the box provided write down your dreams as a swimmer. Then underneath write down four things you can do today in practice to bring you a little closer to your dreams.

My Dream List:

Four Things I can do **Today** to Help Me Reach My DREAMS:

1.

2.

3.

-

DREAM GOAL

L O N G   T E R M   G O A L

S H O R T   T E R M   G O A L

Daily Goal

Exercise 6: Shoot for the Stars!

Use the goal setting rocket to help define your dream goal(s), long term, short term and daily goals.

Dream Goals
1.
2.

Long Term Goals
1.
2.
3.

Short Term Goals
1.
2.
3.

Daily Goals
1.
2.
3.

Goal Setting Exercise 7: Daily Goal Setting Cards/Sheet

My goal for today:

What do I need to do physically to accomplish my goal?

1.

2.

What do I need to do mentally to accomplish my goal?

1.

2.

Goal Setting Exercise 8: Team, Group and Individual Goals.

Name:

Date:

Group:

Team Goal(s) for 200___:

1.

2.

3.

Group Goal(s) for 200___: (What can we do as a group to work towards the team goals?)

1.

2.

3.

Individual Goal(s) for 200___: (What can I do as an individual to work towards both the team and group goals?)

1.

2.

3.

Keeping Track of Progress

Training Logs

An important aspect of setting goals is writing them down and making them real. One way to help keep track of goals is by maintaining a training log. This written log of daily activities serves as a way to help maintain a more systematic focus on all aspects of training and competition. Training logs can include information about both physical and mental practice and goals. Benefits from keeping a training log, include developing a better sense of how you spend your practice time, knowing where improvements are coming from, increasing your motivation to keep working, and heightening your awareness at competitions.

On the next pages you will find some sample training logbook pages. Note that logging will take place both before and after each practice and before and after swim meets.

Feel free to make copies of any of these sheets and try them out with your team.

Training Log Book

Before Practice

Physical Training Goals:

1._____

_____

2._____

_____

3._____

_____

Mental Training Goals:

1._____

_____

2._____

_____

3._____

_____

After Practice Evaluation:

Physical Training Goals – Accomplishments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Physical Training Goals –- Things to keep working on:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Mental Training Goals -- Accomplishments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Mental Training Goals – Things to keep working on:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Training Logbook

Date _____

THIS WEEK'S GOALS:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Strategies for attaining goals:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Obstacles that might prevent me from achieving goals:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Self-evaluation:

Daily Training Logbook

Date _____   AM or PM

Type of Workout: Pool   Dryland/Weights

Physical Training goals:

Mental Training goals:

Workout:

Comments:

Competition Logbook

Date_____

Swim Meet:

Event:

Time:

How did you feel?

Coaches' Comments:

Competition Logbook

Date_____

Swim Meet:

Event:

Time:

How did you feel?

Coaches' Comments: