



**Positive Youth Development:
Using sport to develop transferable life skills and encourage personal
development.**

This short resource introduces using goal setting, imagery, self-talk, and mindset. A more comprehensive discussion concerning how these mental skills facilitate positive youth development, and how they themselves can be viewed as transferable life skills, is contained in the positive youth development handbook.

Who Has Produced This Resource?



This resource has been written by Joe Varga (left), *BSc, MBPsS (GBC)*, and Professor Tim Woodman (right), *PhD, CPsychol*. Joe graduated top of his cohort with a 1st Class Honours degree in (BSc) Sport and Exercise Psychology from Edge Hill University and is currently completing his Masters of Science (MSC) degree in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Bangor University, projected for a Distinction.

Previously, Joe has published research on life skills development through sport and conducted research exploring how one's attentional focus during movement execution can impact skilled performance. The resource presented here and others elsewhere for Squash Wales, including the hosted webinars, form part of a period of supervised experience.

Professor Tim Woodman is a leading Professor of Performance Psychology; is world-renowned for his work on personality, stress, and anxiety; and is supervising Joe during his period of supervised experience. Both Joe and Prof Woodman are members of the Institute for the Psychology of Elite Performance (IPEP) in the School of Sport, Health, and Exercise Sciences at Bangor University. Joe can be contacted at: jjv20zcn@bangor.ac.uk or through his Twitter: @JosephVarga7 and Prof Woodman at: t.woodman@bangor.ac.uk. Both welcome questions, comments, or feedback, and are happy to hold an informal conversation on anything contained in this resource or on Sport and Performance Psychology more broadly.

Why Mental Skills And How Can I Use Them?

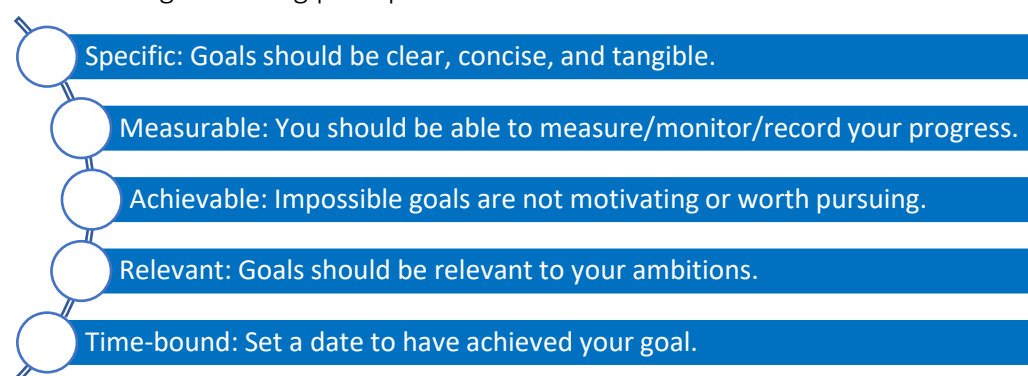
The Why...

The positive youth development literature is ever-expanding and diversifying. One constant, however, is researchers investigating how sport provides an ideal setting for developing transferable life skills, and how these life skills help youth and adolescent individuals experience self-growth and thrive as competent, contributing members of society. There are many approaches, theories, debates, models, and frameworks for implementing a youth development programme, and for optimising existing sporting settings to facilitate development. Given that Squash Wales already provides an environment that is beneficial for promoting youth development in sport, the question then becomes: how can we facilitate this? What can we do to optimise positive youth development in this environment? One way is through using a selection of mental skills that assist sports performance but also facilitate positive youth development elsewhere in day-to-day life. This is the approach that we have taken; our approach introduces goal setting, imagery, self-talk, and mindset as facilitators of positive youth development. In this resource, we are only concerned with demonstrating *how* each can be used effectively and appropriately. We encourage you to use as many as you feel comfortable with.

The How...

Goal Setting

Goal setting is a familiar, simple, yet highly effective mental skill and life skill – especially when done right! To use goal setting effectively in Squash and elsewhere in life, such as school, education, or in any work-related setting, it is important to set challenging but achievable goals, and select a clear end date. To help you set such goals, it is useful to follow the SMART goal setting principles. These are:



Using the SMART principles above will help you set worthwhile, beneficial goals. However, you can choose to further strengthen the relationship between goal setting and performance (i.e., ‘make your goals better’) by ensuring that you feel: (1) committed to your goals; (2) confident enough to achieve them; (3) that they feel important to you; and (4) you can receive feedback on them.

Mindset

A positive mindset is important in sport but also in life generally. It is important to remember that the world's best surgeons were not born holding a scalpel. Likewise, the world's best Squash players were not born holding a Squash racket. Everything in life and in sport is achieved through a process of learning. A beneficial mindset to adopt is that of a *growth mindset*. Simply, it is where one genuinely believes that they can improve on the skill they are learning, and that initial challenges can be overcome with patience, effort, and by considering how one can improve. It is not just about trying hard, but more-so about trying hard *and* thinking critically on how to improve. To adopt a growth mindset, it is important to remember that ability is not fixed – you can improve through practice. Some example statements that reflect a growth mindset include, *“I know I am not excellent at Squash yet, but I know that if I keep trying, I will improve”* and *“it is not about getting everything right straight away, it takes time, but how can I work on this? What can I do to improve? How can I make myself better?”*.

Self-Talk

Using positively valenced self-talk complements and promotes a growth mindset, but it also, for example, helps maintain feelings of confidence and motivation. It is best to think of self-talk as effortful spoken or silent self-directed talk. It can be particularly useful before and during stressful events; for instance, after a disheartening training drill or session, or when feeling anxious before a presentation or important meeting. Its versatility and applicability to diverse settings makes it an appropriate mental skill and transferable skill for the sporting domain and life in general. Two forms of self-talk are instructional (to promote focus & concentration) and motivational (to promote feelings of confidence & psych oneself up). These ought to be particularly useful for facilitating youth development because feelings of confidence, an ability to focus and concentrate, and feeling motivated are necessities for successful sport performance but also useful in life more generally. An example of an instructional self-talk cue is, *“see the ball; watch the ball”*, and an example of a motivational cue is, *“all or nothing – 100%”*. We encourage you to create your own short, concise cues. Make sure that your self-talk refers to some motivational aspect of performance or is instructional and relates to technique, movement, or skill execution.

Imagery

Recalling past experiences and their associated sensory stimulations (i.e., tactile, auditory, visual etc) and then recreating the experience in your mind is referred to as imagery. Similar to other mental skills, it also can alter mood and increase feelings of confidence and motivation, making it useful for sport and broader life too. A simple yet effective approach to imaging is to create an imagery script that you can either read aloud or listen to as a pre-recording. To create an imagery script, simply write down the process that you would go

through when practising the skill physically, in the real-world. To help guide you in creating an imagery script, follow these 7 principles:

1. Make the imagery as physical as possible (e.g., hold your Squash racket).
2. Practise imagery on a Squash court or the next best thing (you can use photographs to help).
3. Imagery should match your skill level.
4. The pace of your imagery should match the pace you normally play at.
5. As your skill level improves, so should the duration and content of your imagery.
6. Recreate the emotions you typically feel.
7. Image through your own eyes (i.e., not through the eyes of someone watching you).

[Want More Information On Something In This Resource?](#)

We discuss the mental skills presented in this resource in some more detail in the accompanying handbook, including some research and theoretical approaches that underpin each mental skill. We suggest you first read through the handbook or consider sending either (or both) of us an email. We welcome questions and comments!

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