

FASTPITCH

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Softball

MAGAZINE



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VIDEO OF THE MONTH: Interview with Clint Meyers

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SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

Setting Goals for the New Season

By the time you read this article, most organizations will have already played their season openers or are just about to. This is the perfect time to pause and think about what you want or need to achieve this season. Every player should set a goal and come up with a plan to achieve that goal. The best types of goals are called SMART goals which also incorporate planning to achieve the goal. These goals need to be: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

Specific goals are ones that are obviously not vague. They need to spell out exactly what you are looking to achieve. An example of a specific goal is: "I want to improve my hitting. I can accomplish this by taking a lesson with an instructor once a week, working with a Tee and net once a week, and going to a batting cage once a week." This goal spells out what you want to accomplish and how you plan on doing it.

Measurable goals are ones that can be tracked. You need a way to see if you are progressing toward meeting your goal. Otherwise, you won't know if you've achieved it or if you ever will. This also

gives you a way to determine if the plan you've chosen is matched to the goal. An example of a measurable goal is: "I want to improve my batting average from .275 to .300." This is something you can measure game to game, week to week, etc.

Achievable goals are ones that are reasonable. If you set a goal too high, you may not be able to achieve it in the given time period or possibly ever. It's sometimes better to create a few smaller goals than one large goal that you cannot achieve. However, larger goals can be more motivational. In the previous example, a goal of increasing a batting average by 25 points is reasonable and achievable in one season. Doubling a batting average most likely is not achievable in any short-term time frame.

Realistic goals are ones that you can actually attain and want to attain. You must be willing to put the work in to meet the desired goal. Stating that you will practice hitting two hours a day is probably not a realistic plan. Very few players have the time, strength, and possibly motivation to practice hitting two hours a day.

Time-bound goals are ones that are met within a specific time frame. They are not open ended, like "I want to become a better hitter." They are very specific in how long the goal will be in place. "I want to become a better hitter this season" is a time-bound goal. However, it is still a vague goal. How will you do this?

An example of a well formed SMART goal for hitting is: "I want to improve my batting average by 25 points by August 1, 2016. I can accomplish this by taking a lesson with an instructor once a week, working with a Tee and net once a week, and going to a batting



cage once a week.” This goal/plan meets all of the SMART requirements.

Some example SMART goals for youth player include:

- Improving my hitting this season by xx% or xx points by taking lessons 1x/week.
- Improving my stolen base skills this season by xx% by performing sprinting drills 2x/week and working with a private coach.
- Increasing my fastball speed by xx mph this year by using lightweight and heavyweight balls and doing long throws from behind 2nd base at least once per week.
- Being able to tryout for short stop in August by working with my father at fielding from short stop and making various throws every Monday and Wednesday between now and August 1st.
- Improve my pitch selection skills by the Nationals by working with my hitting coach in an extra session per week dedicated to pitch selection.

Keep in mind that SMART goals can be applied to other related areas (as well as almost any area of your life!) such as recruiting:

- Select an area of study: one major and one minor by April 1st.
- Identify 25 potential schools with softball programs that have curriculums that address my proposed area of study and fit my other requirements by May 1st.
- Send out hand-written introduction letters to 25 college coaches by June 1st.



Humans tend to procrastinate when it comes to setting goals, creating action plans, and then executing these plans to achieve their goals. A great example of these are New Year's resolutions. People start off with great intentions but quickly abandon their goals as they don't have SMART goals with a realistic action plan. Creating SMART goals helps to break this pattern and provide a simple framework to achieve many things. It helps you hold yourself accountable. Consider that if you say I want to improve my hitting as a goal, you haven't thought through how you are going to do this. You don't know the how, where, how often answers that you need to be successful. The action plan part of the SMART goal keeps reminding you what you need to do and when. The more specific the action plan is, the more likely you are to follow it.

Players will improve if they attend practice. However, most players know what their shortcomings are. That is, the areas that are perhaps not as good as their other areas. A way to fast track bringing these shortcomings up to snuff is to create a plan to get it done. It doesn't have to be a grandiose plan. Simple ones work the best. SMART goals won't ensure you're successful, but they will give you a much better chance of actually making progress and achieving the set goal.

Imagine that you set a SMART goal for each season you play softball. If you achieve these goals, you will be taking major steps towards improving your softball play. This type of plan results in multiple achievements. You may be able to achieve a dozen or more SMART goals during your high school playing years. If you start earlier, then you can obviously achieve even more. If you don't set any goals, your progress and development will rely solely on



the practices you attend and any incidental clinics or private lessons you go to. Think about how much better you will be if you can achieve these SMART goals on top of the improvements through normal practice!

Mitch Alexander is the creator of www.varsityfastpitch.com, a new web site to help students play softball in college. His area of focus is on youth sports and college recruiting. His wife Marie was one of the first female student athletes in the country to play Little League softball after Title IX was passed and played in the first Little League World Series. Over the years, both have managed and coached Little League and select/travel teams at all levels and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. Mitch can be reached at mitch.varsityfastpitch@gmail.com.

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