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Introduction

Within a football program there are many different levels of goals and achievements the coaching staff want to achieve. It is kind of similar to a pyramid scheme, where if the goals at the bottom are achieved, it is easier to advance up the pyramid to achieve the ultimate goal. With these goals the players are aware of what they need to achieve in order to be successful and as a coaching staff, we set goals that are achievable, but can be reached with maximum effort. With goals the players can see the standard and level of play the coaches expect from them week in and week out so they will be able to decide if they are capable of playing at that level all the time. The goals that we set are based in different levels; positional, side of the ball, and team. Each grouping allows for the others above it to achieve their goals and to take a deeper look at this I will explain my position goals as a running backs coach, and then our offensive goal, and finally our team goals.

With the team broken down into smaller and smaller groups, the goals become more detailed and specific to each group. While looking at the whole team we have a lot of goals that we would like to achieve each year, and can be considered audacious for a first year program. Our first goal is to be ranked #1 in the region. With a high regional ranking we will be seen as the best in the southeast and we want to be known as the best in our area. Albeit we have a very competitive and tough region of team to compete against we want to have that high standard of play to compete with the elite. The second goal we have, as a team is the ultimate goal: win the National Championship. This is a lofty goal to have, especially with a first year program, but we want our guys to understand the importance of having the

high goals in order to push them to perform at their best. Having those high goals allows for the more detailed goals to be more important. As an offense we set the goals of having a top 25 offenses in the country. That is the major goal, I do not have enough time to go over each aspect of that goal, there are too many parts to it, but in short we want to be able to run and throw the ball at will and have minimal to no turnovers. If we can command the game and set the tone we will be a very successful offense. Within my running backs group I have two goals for them to have each week, because I believe if we can succeed in these two areas we can help the offense be great. Our first goal is to average 4 yards per carry. If we can gain 4 yards every time we are given the ball, we will have a first down every three plays and will be able to move the ball efficiently. The second goal is be the group the offense looks to in a big situation. The big situation is a 3rd or 4th and short, a goal line play, or even a two-point conversion to win a game. I want our guys to be the ones that have the game in their hands and trusted to make a play.

These goals are all achievable and if each of the more detailed goals is achieved the bigger broader ones will come easily. I think setting these goals with our players are well within their athletic ability to make them happen. If our guys are willing to work and fight for each goal they will be able to be one of the best teams in the country, if not the best.

Needs Assessment

Within the five arenas of performance there are needs and deficiencies. In order for the layer to perform at their optimal level of performance each realm of

performance needs to be addressed specifically and worked on in order to improve overall performance. These realms of performance are technical, tactical, physical, mental and life. Within each realm there are specific ideas and concepts that can be used help each player perform well enough to be great. I was able to sit down with one of my fellow coaches, along with one of the players from my position group and one player from the other coaches group. We sat in our office and I discussed with them what we were together for and how we needed to collaborate as coaches and players to find the needs for each performance area that would be able to make our team better. The following is what we were able to come up with.

With the first area of performance being technical it was an easy topic because there is a lot of technique involved in the sport of football. As a group we found that there is a huge need for technique amongst our team because we have a bunch of players from different systems and now we need to re-teach them how to play the sport so they fit the system of the coaching staff. The big need was a constant reminder of technique drills and corrections through practices each day because some players' will still revert to their old high school system and need to fix their mistakes. Technique plays a crucial role in football, especially college; because now it is a whole new level of play that needs a higher skill set to compete. The players felt that we lost our harping on technique once the season got going because we were so concerned about the game plan that most of the time technique was not a high priority when it should have been, because it could have cleaned up a lot of the mistakes we made.

The area of tactical performance was an interesting topic to discuss with the group because there is a line that a coach is not supposed to cross when discussing the team strategies and processes because of how players could interpret what we say to be negative. So this portion I will break up to when it was myself and my colleague and when the players were in the room. So when it was the whole group discussing the tactical performance of the offense we talked about how it needed to be executed better, but we understood how it was a team full of freshman and there were going to be mistakes made. For the most part that was the major concern of the players being the biggest need of the offense, was that our players just needed to grow up and learn the system to execute it. When it was myself and my colleague we talked about how we had a lot of stress to make sure the players were able to execute the system so we may have over-coached them at times, and we needed to stick closer to our basics, instead of changing things each week. Overall we have a system that is capable of working, we just need the players to buy into the way they have in the past in order for it to work.

Within the area of physical performance we all discussed how as a first year program and team we were at a physical disadvantage because of the players we had to play against. The two players we had in the room said they felt that in some games the other team was just a stronger group altogether because they had older players who have been around for four years and have had a lot of time to gain mass and physicality to just beat guys with their strength. It was an issue we all saw as a need for our players to get stronger in order to compete because when you play with 22 freshmen on the field is a lot different from having a mixed group with

established seniors and juniors. We feel that there is a need at strength that will need to be developed in order to make sure the players can compete for four full quarters of the game and help with the tactical, and technical aspects of performance.

There was a resounding need for a better overall belief in the team. Both players and my colleague believed that there was a clear lack of energy and emotion from some of the players because we ended the season with a 2-9 record. It is tough to keep every player believing in the system when we aren't winning any games. So the struggle was keeping the players who weren't playing happy because they had an attitude that they could do better than the starters. We all agreed that there was a clear need for a morale boost during the year that we did not address, and could have handled better. When it was myself and my colleague we discussed how it tough for us to address the morale needs of the scout team and practice squad guys because we are so focused on making sure the starters are ready for the upcoming game, that there really isn't much for us to do to baby some of the players so they feel like the superstar they were in high school. We believed that it was tough for the players to adjust from being the big fish in a small pond compared to the small fish in the big pond, and how it is necessary for them to realize they will not have anything handed to them like they did in high school. So there is a need of being aware of the player morale so that we can everyone believing in they system and not just the starters.

This final area of performance had a lot to do with the players when they are not around the program. So the players talked about how the outside factors played

a role in their performance and they felt the biggest need was more fan support from the school and the locals. They felt that if they had more support from the fans and the surrounding area they would have felt more drive to perform well. While the players had points about how the fan support from surrounding factors effected them, as a staff we felt that there was a lot of pressure form our head coach to get the payers to perform and it took a toll on our staff on being broken down each week that it was a lot to factor into our game plan each week so that our players could be in a good position to perform well. So there were a lot of off the field factors that could be addressed for next season to make the players and staff feel better about their performance, and have more motivation to perform well.

Strategize and Develop Benchmarks

With each area of performance being so crucial to the success of the team there must be a way for the coaching staff to make sure the players are preforming at their highest level. Within each area I have been able to find a specific need that should be improved so that we as a team can achieve our overall gaols of becoming a national champion. I think with a proper strategy for each goal, we as a staff and a team can come together to make us a perennial powerhouse.

As I mentioned before there needs to be a way for our staff to pay more attention to our fundamentals on technique amongst the team so that our players are playing fundamental football. It is tough to touch on technique and fundamentals while the season is in full swing because we lose a lot of practice time during the school year, and we need to focus on key aspects of the game plan to be

prepared for the upcoming game. I think the plan we need to have as coaches to address this need is to set aside a ten-minute period before practice for the players to come out and we do fundamental work. The offensive line goes through all their steps, to make sure they are taking the proper steps. The running backs work on our initial steps for handoffs. The wide receivers can work on their routes and blocking, and the quarterbacks can work through their mechanics of throwing to make sure they are getting the correct releases on the ball for certain throws. I think the “pre-practice” period would be beneficial to the players technique because now we can track their progression of the season and see how they have taken their work in pre-practice and put it into effect on the field.

The second area that we discussed was the tactical aspect of performance. The problem we had was the players felt that we were capable of running the system and they just needed to grow up and get more comfortable in the system. There is not much we could really do to improve this need, except just take our lumps now and then be better when we have guys in the system for three or four years. The area we could work on is the coaching staff sticking to our base plays and not being afraid to change what we run in a game because the opposing defense scares us out of a play. What we could do is trust our players more and let them have some control of what they like running on the field, because in the end they are the ones on the field seeing the play happen in front of them, while we watch from the side line. We, as a staff, just need to trust our guys to make the plays happen and be able to run our offense effectively. We can judge this trust by comparing our goal boards from the previous year to now, when we allow them to have some more

trust, and we could see if there is a difference when they feel we have more confidence in them.

When it comes to the physical aspect of football, there is a major degree where the physicality of a player makes a difference. The problem or need we saw from this year was that our guys were just being beat by the overall strength of the other team. I believe if we are able to help our redshirt freshman and our freshman get stronger and in no time, our physical play will be extremely better. We can achieve this by having our strength coaches set personal goals for each player so that they all know where they want to be by the end of the school year, and then they do what they can during the off season to achieve that goal. The strength staff does a great job of assessing the needs of each position group so that they can get them to perform at their peak physical strength. I think with the plans they have in place for our players we will be a force to be reckoned with on the field in a few years when our players begin lifting like college football players, and not high school players.

Overall the mental performance of our players is the toughest to work on because it is so hard to break through to an 18 or 19 year-old kid because they are new to college and they think they know best. For the most case some of the players are so delicate mentally that you have to tread lightly when you speak to them because if we say the wrong thing, they could break down altogether and become ineffective. With each player being so drastically different, it is our job as coaches to make sure we help them tap their full potential and if they are not in a proper mental state, then they will never reach that peak. So I think the best way to track

each player is to have weekly meetings with them so that the staff and the players can be on the same page so that we can track how each player is doing week to week on all aspects of college. I think tracking them to make sure they are buying in to the system and trusting the staff would be crucial to us being a successful football team. These meetings would also allow us to find out which players are unhappy and find out why, so that we can do a better job of showing them why certain things are happening a certain way. These goals of weekly meetings would allow us to also set goals of where they want to be by the seasons end and we as coaches can tell them what they need to do to achieve them, so at their end of the season meeting we can address each goal and talk through why they were achieved, or why they weren't.

There is mainly one way we could find a way to make the outside pressures of the sport to be more supportive and for the football program, and that is to win games. We are a team that is in South Carolina and can be considered a football town. The high school has had a lot of success over the years with 15 to 20 state titles, and we are the first college football programs the town has ever had. At the beginning there was excitement for the program, but after losing the first few home games, we lost a lot of support from the locals, albeit the high school team was facing the same hardship of losing early. So as a staff we have to plan to make the student body and the fans more involved in what we are trying to accomplish because we will have more energy on the field if there are more than 2,000 people in the stands. The players will perform well and we will feel a lot more support to keep doing what we are doing. I think the staff could set up more events in the off-season to get fans involved and excited for the season. We do need to understand

that our efforts to get fans excited all depends on how we perform each week, so all the other aspects of performance have to be perfected in order to get the outside support and help.

Reflection

I think making this a group discussion was very beneficial because it allowed for the coaches to get together and discuss each aspect and then allowed the players to come in and have insight on the issues we are facing when it comes to these five topics. It allowed myself to hear the opinions of others and for the most part they were a lot different from the ones I had. I believe adding the players was a great option because now they feel they had input of how the team was being run, and what they saw as players because they do see a lot of things we as coaches are unable to see, especially player morale because most players are afraid to say anything in front of authority figures in fear of getting into trouble. So the player's input was extremely beneficial to our overall results.

I was happy to ask my colleague and the players to give their input on the process and share what they liked about it and they all seemed to be on the same page. The two players we asked to join us are team leaders and their opinions and thoughts are held very highly and are respected. They thought it was really cool that we asked them to tell us how they felt about the five areas of performance because they said most of the time coaches don't listen to the opinions of the players and it made them feel like we really care about how their team is run. My colleague felt that it was good to have the two sessions of just the coaches, and then the players

because it allowed the coaches to really talk about “the man behind the curtain” while the players spoke about everything they know about.

I felt it was an overall success because we were able to hear some things that we usually do not see during the season because we get tunnel vision on most topics. I think this is an effective way for the coaches and player to meet at the end of the year so that the players could have an overall effect on what needs to be worked on for the next season. So it is a very good exercise that can be used for the leaders of the position groups to get together with the staff and discuss their thoughts and feeling about what we can improve on.

Improving The Process

I think benchmarking is extremely productive in the sports world because it allows the teams to look at themselves and compare them to other programs and see what some of the differences are. Even though there is not a lot of literature about benchmarking in sports we still see it everyday in the sports world because teams will look at the best team in their division or area and want to achieve that potential. Our head coach has a habit of bringing up Lenoir-Rhyne the top team in our region and our conference, not because he wants to be them, but because if we want to be national champions we have to beat them. So we have to set goals to reach that same potential as them.

I think the process of benchmarking in sports is necessary because you need to set high goals and standards in order to be able to reach them. I think the process is an interesting concept because it allows for the team to look inward and reflect on

what they have done, and also realize what they need to work on in order to become better. I think the process is successful because we were able to get a lot of opinions on what we need to work on or pay more attention to because at the end of the day it is going to make us better.

I think the only part that really dragged for the process was just the time it took to discuss all the topics in one afternoon. It was tough to find a block of time for the two players to come in and not miss any classes. So it did take a while for the whole discussion to finish up, but in the end it was extremely beneficial to the team as a whole so that we could address the issues that need to be addressed. I overall felt that this concept will help us improve a great deal if we stick to the ideas and concepts we came up with because if we are able to stick to them we will be a better team in the end. So I enjoyed doing this process because if there is anything I have learned from any class I have taken at MSU is that self-reflections are the most crucial part of being an educator and a coach because it will help you find new ways to make yourself better, which will in turn make the individuals you work with better.