Everyone in this room has something intangible in common. We all have a desire to succeed and we all have things we want to accomplish in life. Goals, or ambitions to achieve a certain result, are how we set our sights on accomplishing our desires. Yet, not all goals are created equal, and neither are the goal setters; thus the impact of goal setting upon reaching one’s goals depends on how they are set. Ever had a teacher or coach tell you to just do your best on an assignment or on the field? For the longest time, I was a fan of those types of goals until I saw an article online about effective goal setting, which spurred further research.As it turns out, those are not the most effective method for translating goals into results. Studies have shown that the most effective goals for helping achieve their ambitions are specific, measurable, and results driven. A goal without a plan is just a wish. In general, people who self-set goals tend to be more motivated and more likely to achieve what they set out to do. I hope to show how setting effective goals can lead to increased performance as an athlete, in the work place, and in the classroom.

Setting effective goals can have a profound effect on athletes and their performance. (Slide) A study of the North Hampton rugby program revealed just how much goal setting can boost athletes’ performance. Halfway through the season, the team brought in sport psychologists to talk with each player about an area of the game that the player thought they could improve in, and set measureable goals to set their desired level of performance. Performance for these rugby players was measured by the number of tackles per game, the number of turnovers won, the number of successful kicks made, and the like. 48 hours before the match, they reviewed their goals with the sports psychologists. For each of the players in the back half of the season, each of them improved in their targeted area compared to their performance in the first half the season. Self-setting clear and measurable goals and reviewing them therefore seems to help athletes improve in desired areas.

Effective goal setting can also be beneficial in increasing productivity in the work place. ScienceDirect.com reported a study about a factory in Germany that measured if goal setting could have an impact on boosting output per worker. The factory divided workers into 3 groups; one group had set specific goals for output, another group was given an output goal, and the last group was given the same output goal, but were also offered a bonus if they reached the goal. As it turns out, the two groups that were given goals vastly out-performed the control group. Even without a financial incentive to perform any better than before, the group with just a goal in mind saw their productivity increase by 15%. Therefore, focusing the brain on meeting a certain standard can improve performance even if there isn’t necessarily an immediate reward for it.

Goal setting can also have a strong impact on student academic performance. Studies done by Harvard have shown that students who set their own academic goals for a semester have a higher sense of agency for their education and increased intrinsic motivation rather than if the instructor sets the goals. Harvard did another study where they took struggling students and had these students take a 4 month goal setting intervention where the students learned to set specific goals and make personal commitments for obtaining these goals. On average these students’ grade point averages for their courses that they were struggling in rose 20 percent. Harvard found that students who learned to set effective goals for themselves had a higher sense of self-efficacy, or belief about their ability to learn new concepts despite how difficult it was. This increase in self-efficacy helps students reach their goals because they believe that they are in reach.

I hope that by sharing studies about the effects of targeted, specific, self-set goals has enlightened your understanding of the potential impact of goal setting in the classroom, in the work place, and on the court or field. However, as discussed, how effective the goals are depends on one’s commitment to them and how measureable they are. Goals can’t achieve themselves; although they can certainly help motivate one to strive for their ambitions and dreams. As the American author Zig Zigaler quipped: “A goal properly set is halfway reached.” We’ve all got goals. We all now know how to set them. We are all halfway there now. Thank you.