

Chapter 1: Moment of Clarity

"I dumbed down for my audience to double my dollars / They criticized me for it, yet they all yell 'holla.'" — Jay-Z

I didn't show up to that game as a coach.
I showed up as a dad.

But everything about me still coached.
My posture.
My presence.
My silence.

It all said something—
even if I didn't.

And what it said was clear:
This matters more than breath.

Cole sat next to me.
Jersey pulled. Knees twitching.
Said his stomach hurt.

I told him it might be nerves.
Told him to breathe.
Told him he'd be fine.

He wasn't.
His shoulders curled.
His breaths skipped.
His face pale.

Nine years old.
And already
he couldn't breathe.
Over a game.

The coach had hyped them.
Said they were better.
Said they had to win.

Cole believed him.
Not because he said it well—
but because he said it first.
And because I didn't say anything different.

That's the part I can't forgive myself for.

He couldn't breathe
because I taught him winning

was oxygen.

Not in words.
In posture.
In silence.
In what I didn't stop.

And it wasn't just him.
Same game—
I'm in it with a parent.

Sideline back-and-forth
about a rule.
A rule I know cold.

I say something.
He says something.
I come back—tight in the chest,
a little louder.

Not loud.
Not belligerent.
But loud enough to lose the plot.

Because while my son
was unraveling next to me,
I was arguing
in a 9-year-old rec game
like it was the playoffs.

Like there was a scout in the stands.
Like pride was on the line.
Like I had something to prove
to a man I didn't even know.

I had become
what I swore I wouldn't:

Not just a dad.
Not just a coach.
But a part of the problem.

The kind that
praises control,
sells poise,
but never checks for breath.

The ride home was quiet.
Not sad.
Not scolding.
Reflective.

That silence
was the sound of a mirror breaking.

And I didn't try to tape it back together.
Didn't fill the car with lessons
or silver linings.
I just sat with it.

The lie I'd modeled.
The image I'd passed down.

A coach
preaching freedom
while performing pressure.

A father
saying "play free"
while modeling control
in every breath he held in.

That was my moment of clarity.
Not a decision.
A fracture.

The kind you don't notice right away.
You just know something's off.
That your balance is gone.
That what used to feel whole
now feels dangerous to stand on.

So I studied.
Not drills.
Not plays.

Learning.
Unlearning.

I became a ghost in my own film room.
Watching myself on the sideline—
every cue, every correction,
every flinch of disapproval
masquerading as leadership.

Late nights.

YouTube spirals.
Podcasts.

British guys.
Canadian dudes.
Talking motor learning like it was Miles Davis.

It didn't feel like theory.
It felt like truth I forgot.
Like someone describing a house
I used to live in
before I knew how to name the rooms.

Ecological dynamics.
Constraints-led approach.
Perception-action coupling.

They weren't teaching me to coach.
They were reminding me
how we learn.

I saw it everywhere.

In how we played in the '90s—
blacktops, not clinics.
Curiosity, not correction.
Chaos, not control.

In how Max used to move
through the world
before the hospital rooms.

Before appointments turned time
into task.
Before "good boy"
replaced "what did you feel?"

In how Cole
lit up when I backed off.
When I let the moment breathe
instead of instructing it into submission.

Max Potential wasn't born from branding.
It came from breath.
Or more honestly—
the lack of it.

It came from realizing
I was teaching my sons

to equate love with performance.
Approval with posture.
Care with correction.
And calling it parenting.
Calling it coaching.

That's when it all clicked.

The missed shots weren't the problem.
The drills weren't the answer.
The problem was me.

My silence.
My presence.
My breath—
held too long.

Now?

I still coach.
I still train.
I still teach.

But I sit different.
I watch different.
I breathe.

Because I know
what silence costs.
And what presence protects.

I've watched joy collapse
under the weight of my expectations.
Watched posture become pressure.
Watched kids turn into shadows
of what they think you want.

I'm not here for applause.
Not trying to go viral.
I'm trying to last.

Because I remember
what it feels like
to not be able to give your kid
his breath back.

There is a particular kind of silence

a father carries
when he's failed to protect the one thing
he didn't know he was supposed to.

And now I carry that silence like scripture.

Not to shame myself.
But to remember the weight of that moment
every time I'm tempted to speak
when I should stay still.

Because I've lived on the other side of breathlessness.
Not metaphor.
Not mindset.
Real.

A few days before Max passed,
I took him to the hospital
for what we thought would be a routine transfusion.
We packed light.
We thought we'd be home by dinner.
We didn't come home.

His oxygen kept dropping.
They put a mask on him—
but try keeping a mask on a three-year-old.
He kept pushing it away.
He didn't understand why we were making it harder to breathe.

So I sat with him.
For hours.
For days.
Trying to help him breathe.

Holding the mask.
Whispering calm.
Offering breath
in all the ways I knew how—
except the one way he really needed:
for me to take it for him.

And I couldn't.

So when I say
I know what silence costs,
it's not theory.
It's memory.

When I say
this matters more than breath—
I mean that literally.

I'm here
so the next kid
can breathe.

So their chest doesn't tighten
in the layup line.
So their joy doesn't collapse
under the scoreboard.
So their worth isn't measured
in win percentages
or a coach's tone.

I didn't show up to that game as a coach.
I showed up as a dad.

But if I'm honest?

I didn't really show up at all.
Not fully.
Not how it mattered.
Not in the way that could've
changed the weather in Cole's lungs.

Now?

Now I breathe first.
Then I speak.
If I speak at all.

Because presence
without pressure
is a language too.

And I want my sons
to be fluent in it