

DRAFT 3

**Book of Holden: Scriptures from the Sideline**

*A witness statement from inside the game.  
A collection of lived truths, written in the margins of coaching, fatherhood, and becoming.*

TRACKLIST

Scriptures from the Sideline

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**Chapter 1: Moment of Clarity**

*"I dumbbed 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.

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.

I didn't make a vow that night.

Didn't launch a mission.

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.

So I studied.

Not drills.  
Not plays.

Learning.  
Unlearning.

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.

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.

In how Cole  
lit up when I backed off.

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

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'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.

I'm here  
so the next kid  
can breathe.

## Chapter 2: I Used to Love H.E.R.

*“I met this girl when I was ten years old /  
And what I loved most, she had so much soul.”*

— Common

---

I met her in the street.

Not a driveway.

Not a gym.

A street.

A crate nailed to a telephone pole,  
leaning like it had been watching us for years.

The backboard—splintered plywood.

The rim?

Bent coat hanger energy.

But to us,

it was everything.

We shot till the wood gave.

Till the ball lost air.

Till sunset made the asphalt glow.

No cones.

No coaches.

Just noise.

Just rhythm.

Just soul.

We didn't know what we were doing.

And that's why we learned.

We were six.

Seven.

Maybe eight.

Later, Count Basie Park felt like the Garden.

We'd bike down, pick up games with kids three years older.

Earn our stripes.

Wait our turn.

No parents watching.

No trophies.

Just joy.

That's when I met her.

And what I loved most—  
she had so much soul.

First AAU jersey?

Reversible.

Hanging off my shoulders like a borrowed cape.

Warmups were long-sleeve tees.

No compression.

No sponsors.

No politics.

Just cotton.

Just tension.

Just us.

I remember listening to the plays  
chalked out in an elementary school hallway.

Legs twitching.

Hearts loud.

That was real.

But even then—  
the shift had started.

Sneakers got louder.  
Logos got cleaner.  
And soul started to fade.

Not all at once.  
But gradually.

Exposure crept in.  
So did pressure.  
So did polish.

Freshman year?  
I was six-seven.  
Long. Awkward. Raw.

Didn't make varsity.  
Didn't make JV.

Started on the freshman team.  
Earned it.

Sophomore year?

Came back two inches taller.

New coach.

Got the start.

Looking back,

I probably didn't deserve it.

But height got me in the door.

Not hunger.

Not readiness.

Structure rewards surface.

Not soul.

Then came the AAU tournament.

Six games.

Three days.

Championship right after the semifinal.

No break.

They had a bye.

They had three future NBA players.

By halftime,

I was done.

Coach asked if I was ready.

I laid down at the end of the bench.

Didn't speak.

Didn't move.

He said I was done for the day.

And I felt

both seen

and sacrificed.

Another time—

freshman year again.

Didn't play.

Not a second.

No explanation.

Just silence.

Sat there wondering if I belonged.

If I ever would.

My shoulders?

Tight.

My chest?

Bruised.

The silence?

Louder than the buzzer.

There was a hotel bathroom.

Another tournament.

Another game.

Three games in one day.

Coach said we had a fourth.

I walked into the bathroom.

Closed the door.

Sat down—

fully clothed.



And cried.

Not long.

Not loud.

But deeply.

Not because we lost.

Because something was gone.

And I didn't know how to get it back.

On the drive home,

my dad asked:

“You still having fun?”

I paused.

He never asked again.

That pause?

Said everything.

Years later,

Cole sat beside me in a gym.

His body said things

his mouth didn't know how to form.

I'd seen that posture before.

Slumped.

Defeated.

Quiet.

I'd seen it in mirrors.

And it cracked something in me.

Because I gave him the game

like it was a gift.

But the version I handed him

wasn't the girl I met on the block.

It was someone else.

Polished.

Packaged.

Posed.

I didn't fall out of love with her.

I was coached out of it.

Structured out of it.

Systemed out of it.

The game didn't leave me.

She changed.

She got logos.

Got pipelines.

Got curriculum.

The girl I met in the street

became a machine

with parent portals

and weekend circuits.

Soul became system.

And now

too many kids

are being asked to perform

where they were once allowed to play.

I used to love her.

I still do.

But I don't recognize  
who she became.

Not yet.

But I'm trying to bring her back.

One breath at a time.

One kid at a time.

One real smile—

the kind you don't coach—

at a time.

### Chapter 3: Cold Rain

“Freedom fighters / We’re freedom writers like Bob Moses / The chosen, freedom writers like Voltaire.”

— Talib Kweli

---

I didn’t fall out of love with coaching.  
I fell out of sync with the version of myself  
that was doing it.

The louder I got,  
the less I heard.

---

I was still showing up,  
but I wasn’t seeing anything new.

Still drilling.  
Still correcting.  
Still performing clarity  
instead of becoming clear.

---

Then something broke—  
but not all at once.

It cracked  
the way glass cracks  
before it shatters.

Subtle first.  
Then undeniable.

---

It started when I asked a simple question:

“Why are they doing that?”

Why are they shooting before they’re balanced?  
Why are they rushing to pass when pressure shows up?  
Why does their body collapse after a mistake?

It wasn’t defiance.  
It was pattern.  
It was protection.

---

That's when I realized:

Perception drives action.

Not knowledge.

Not drills.

Not cues.

How they see the world

is how they move in it.

---

So I stopped obsessing over correction

and started watching perception.

I studied the pause before the pass.

The false step before the help rotation.

The shoulder sag when they didn't get the ball.

I stopped watching the skill

and started watching the story

underneath it.

---

That's when it all opened.

Because once you start watching for perception,  
you stop coaching for compliance.

You start coaching for  
awareness.

Adaptability.

Attunement.

---

I remember standing in front of a whiteboard,  
sketching out a new practice plan,  
and thinking—

“What if this whole thing is upside down?”

What if the problem isn't the player?

What if it's the environment I've built  
that's limiting their freedom to learn?

---



That's when I found the research.

The ones nobody told me to read.

Ecological dynamics.

Constraints-led approach.

Nonlinear pedagogy.

Not trendy.

Not marketable.

But true.

They weren't preaching structure.

They were describing emergence.

---

And I couldn't unsee it.

I started designing practices  
that made players problem-solvers—  
not pattern followers.

Started creating situations  
where the game was the teacher,

and I was just a guide  
with better questions.

---

It didn't always look clean.  
Didn't always feel controlled.

But it felt honest.  
And honesty  
was long overdue.

---

Some of my peers called it soft.  
Some said it wasn't "real coaching."

But I didn't care.

Because what I was watching  
wasn't chaos.  
It was consciousness.

Players making decisions.  
Adjusting on the fly.

Tuning into the rhythm of the gym.

They weren't waiting for instructions.

They were creating solutions.

---

And for the first time in a long time,  
they looked free.

---

That's when I realized  
I wasn't just coaching differently—  
I was living differently.

Less obsessed with being right.  
More interested in being present.

Less focused on performance.  
More curious about process.

---

I wasn't shouting plays anymore.

I was listening for breath.

For rhythm.

For recognition.

The “aha” moment

when a kid felt something

before they could even name it.

That was the win.

---

I didn't need to control every rep.

I just needed to build a space

where reps could evolve.

Where players could bump into the truth

instead of memorize it.

Where learning was messy

because life is messy—

and movement should be too.

---

That's what "Cold Rain" is.

Not a storm.

Not a flood.

Just the quiet presence

of something true.

Unavoidable.

Patient.

And cleansing.

---

I'm not a freedom fighter.

Not in the way the lyric means.

But I'm a freedom writer now.

With cones.

With questions.

With film study and free play

and sideline silence

that says:

"I trust you to figure this out."

That's the work now.

---

I don't coach to control.

I coach to reveal.

And that revelation comes slow.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

Like cold rain.

## Chapter 4: Thieves in the Night

“Not strong, only aggressive / Not free, we only licensed / Not compassionate, only  
polite / Not whores, but who’s solicitin’?”

— Black Star

---

They say the system is broken.

It’s not.

It was built like this.

On purpose.

---

They say kids are soft now.

They’re not.

They’re responsive.

To stress.

To surveillance.

To control wrapped in a hoodie that says “grind.”

---

We say we're building character.  
But whose definition are we using?

We say "team first."  
But punish them  
for not being stars.

We say "family."  
But bench them  
for missing practice  
after a funeral.

---

That's not accountability.  
That's branding.

---

We've replaced play  
with programming.

Expression  
with exposure.



Development  
with deception.

---

Not strong.  
Only aggressive.

Not free.  
Only licensed.

---

I watched a team run the score up  
in a 9U game  
because “they’ll need this toughness later.”

Later for what?  
A career that 98% won’t have?  
A scholarship that costs them their joy?  
A work ethic they never chose?

We’re not preparing kids for the future.  
We’re prepping them

for the same trauma  
we swallowed  
and called resilience.

---

We parade them like assets  
then post them like losses.  
All for clout.  
All for projection.  
All for a version of success  
that never measured breath.

---

You know what's rare?  
A kid smiling  
while playing hard.

You know what's rare?  
A coach who listens  
more than he lectures.

You know what's rare?  
An environment

where kids fail  
and still feel whole.

---

I used to think I had to protect players  
from losing.

Now I protect them  
from the way we win.

---

We say we're building leaders.  
But we reward compliance.

We say "make reads."  
Then punish them  
for not executing our script.

We say "freedom."  
Then run plays  
that have one outcome.

We're not teaching decision-making.

We're teaching obedience  
with a ball in hand.

---

I've heard coaches say,

"He doesn't listen."

What they mean is:

"He doesn't conform."

I've said it too.

Until I realized

the problem wasn't their ears.

It was our ego.

---

If a kid disobeys the system

we built wrong,

are they failing—

or refusing to fake it?

---

We make them memorize.

Repeat.

Replicate.

And then wonder

why they can't adapt.

Why they freeze under pressure.

Why they play scared.

Why they don't trust themselves.

We trained them

to wait for approval.

---

That's theft.

We stole their instincts

and called it polish.

We stole their breath

and called it buy-in.

We stole their chaos

and called it culture.

---

We stole the game

and sold it back

like a license.

---

But I'm done playing that role.

I'm not here

to sharpen them for a machine

that devours joy

and prints out recruits.

I'm here to build systems

that make breath visible.

That make failure recoverable.

That make pressure feel like information—

not indictment.

---

Because the real thieves  
move quietly.

Not strong.  
Only aggressive.

Not free.  
Only licensed.

---

And I'm not here to watch kids  
lose themselves  
while chasing praise  
from coaches  
still chasing ghosts.

---

I don't need them to be perfect.  
I need them to be present.

---

And presence

doesn't show up on a box score.

But you can feel it  
in the way they move.  
In the way they listen.  
In the way they recover  
without flinching.

That's the goal now.

Not production.  
But presence.

Not polish.  
But possibility.

Not fear-based obedience.  
But decision-making  
built on breath.

---

I'm not trying to go viral.  
I'm trying to build kids  
who know who they are



when the play breaks down.

## Chapter 5: HiiiPoWeR

“The sky is falling, the wind is calling / Stand for something or die in the morning.”

— Kendrick Lamar

---

He strolled in late.

Didn't say much at first.

Didn't introduce himself.

Didn't even look like a coach.

Just a guy in sweats,

phone in his pocket,

checking scores

like he was managing a fantasy team

not mentoring kids.

---

The game started.

He barked some instructions.

Nothing about spacing.

Nothing about reads.

Just outcomes.

“Go get it.”

“Come on, finish that.”

“Dawg him. Be tougher.”

Then back to silence.

Then back to his phone.

---

The kid he was yelling at—

he couldn't have been more than twelve.

Thin.

Still learning how to move in his body.

Probably nervous.

Definitely outmatched.

Made a mistake.

Didn't rotate.

Didn't fight through.

Didn't live up to some imaginary “dawg” code

that only made sense to grown men

trying to relive something  
through middle school bodies.

---

“Soft!” he shouted.

“Be a dawg or sit down!”

No clipboard.

No huddle.

No teaching.

Just performance.

---

And the rest of the team?

They didn’t laugh.

They didn’t nod.

They didn’t pile on.

They just froze.

Not in loyalty.

In fear.

Because they knew  
he wasn't coaching.  
He was searching  
for control.

And they didn't want to be next.

---

I didn't say anything.  
Didn't pull him aside.  
Didn't start a conversation.

I just walked out.

Not in protest.  
In refusal.

---

It didn't make me feel noble.  
It made me feel complicit.

Because I'd coached like that.

Not always.

Not loudly.

But subtly.

Focused on outcomes.

Selling discipline.

Performing care

while suppressing curiosity.

---

I wasn't a bad coach.

I was a perfect product.

Trained to value winning

more than wondering.

Trained to control

before connecting.

And that day,

in that gym,

watching that man yell

at a child

while checking his phone—

I saw the whole thing  
for what it was.

Not broken.

Built.

---

That was the day  
I stopped asking how to be better  
in their system.

And started building a new one.

---

I wrote one sentence that night:

“You are not here to prepare kids for systems that harm them.”

Everything else followed.

---

No more “kill spots.”

No more “dawg talk.”

No more barking from the sideline  
while pretending it’s about effort.

---

If a kid misses,  
we ask why.

If a kid looks off,  
we stay close.

If a kid fails,  
we make room.  
So they can try again  
without carrying shame.

---

This isn’t rebellion.

This is return.

Return to rhythm.

Return to real leadership.



Return to breath.

Return to building gyms

where presence matters more than posture.

---

Some coaches didn't understand.

Some didn't speak to me after meetings.

But one did.

Quietly.

Privately.

Said,

"You made me think, man."

That's it.

That's all.

And that was enough

to keep going.

---

Because the sky is falling.

The wind is calling.

And I'm not dying in the morning.

I'm standing.

Here.

Now.

So the next kid doesn't have to unlearn  
everything we trained into them  
in the name of winning.

## Chapter 6: Smile

“I often wish that I could save everyone, but I’m a dreamer.”

— Scarface (feat. 2Pac)

---

The first time I smiled after Max died,  
it scared me.

Not because it hurt.  
Because it didn’t.

For a second,  
the weight lifted.  
And I felt light.

And then I felt guilty.

How could I laugh  
when he’s not here to?

How could I let go  
of the heaviness  
I told myself I had to carry

to honor him?

---

But the truth is—

the heaviness wasn't the tribute.

The presence was.

And presence

means staying open.

Even when it breaks you.

Even when it makes no sense.

Even when smiling feels

like betrayal.

---

That's what this chapter is about.

Not pretending.

Not performing.

Choosing.

To be here.  
To hold joy  
without apology.

---

I remember the first time I laughed again.

Not a chuckle.  
Not a polite smirk.

A real laugh.

Cole had slipped on the gym floor,  
went down hard,  
then popped up grinning like he meant to do it.

He looked around—  
like he wasn't sure if it was okay.

And I didn't say a word.

I just laughed with him.  
Held eye contact  
long enough for him to know—

You're safe here.

---

That moment did more  
than any drill I've ever run.

Because joy  
isn't a reward.

It's a requirement.

If joy isn't part of the system,  
it's not a development model.  
It's a slow extraction.

---

Max taught me that.

Not in theory.

In practice.

He once came out of his room

with two different shoes on.

One Jordan.

One Croc.

Said,

“They both feel right.”

And then just kept it moving.

That was Max.

Unbothered.

Unshakeable.

Unscripted.

---

He wasn't unaware of what was happening.

He was just unwilling to let it define him.

That's not denial.

That's clarity.

---

Now I carry that forward.

With Cole.

With my players.

With myself.

When they laugh,

I don't rush to refocus them.

I take a beat.

Because that sound—

that unforced joy—

that's data too.

That's rhythm.

That's restoration.

---

We always talk about safety.

But most programs treat it

like an insurance clause.



“They’re safe here...  
as long as they don’t disrupt practice.”

“They’re safe here...  
as long as they perform.”

That’s not safety.  
That’s surveillance.

Real safety means  
they can cry.  
They can pause.  
They can laugh  
mid-rep  
and not get punished.

Real safety means  
they can smile  
without calculating the cost.

---

Some days,  
Cole’s body carries something  
he doesn’t know how to say.

He doesn't throw fits.

He gets quiet.

Withdraws.

Goes internal.

And everything in me

wants to fix it.

Frame it.

Coach it.

But I don't.

I just stay near.

And if I can,

I make him laugh.

Not to change his state.

To remind him

he's allowed to feel all of it—

and still be held.

---

That's the work now.

That's the dream I still carry.

I often wish  
that I could save everyone.

But I'm a dreamer.

And this  
is how I keep dreaming.

By showing up  
on the days that ache.

By smiling  
when the silence softens.

By protecting the possibility  
that joy  
can survive this.

## Chapter 7: Stakes Is High

“Stakes is high / You know them stakes is high / When we talkin’ ’bout the vibe...”

— De La Soul

---

They asked me  
why we didn’t play more tournaments.

I told them:

“Because we’re building rhythm, not resumes.”

---

They asked why their son didn’t get more highlights.  
I asked if they’d watched the practice film.

They hadn’t.

---

That’s when I knew—  
they weren’t here for growth.

They were here for exposure.

And that's fine.

But not here.

---

Because if we're gonna do this,  
if we're gonna build a system  
that lets kids breathe,  
then we have to protect the air.

---

The vibe is sacred.  
And sacred things require boundaries.

---

So I stopped explaining myself.

Started clarifying.

---

This isn't a platform.

It's a gym.

This isn't for clout.

It's for breath.

This isn't a shortcut.

It's a decision.

---

If that's too much—

you can go.

And I'll still wish you well.

But I'm not chasing anyone

who makes me question the soil

I've been planting in.

---

I lost a player last spring.

He didn't like being held accountable.

Didn't like being asked

to listen without posturing.

Didn't like when joy required presence,  
not performance.

And when he left,  
I didn't beg.  
I didn't vent.

I blessed and released.

---

Because you can't build a culture  
and be scared of losing players.

That's not culture.  
That's codependence.

---

I wrote a code on the board.  
Not rules.  
Words.

JOY

PRESENCE

ENERGY

INTEGRITY

We signed under them.

Kids, too.

That's the real contract.

That's the real culture.

---

One weekend,

a coach poached one of my players.

DM'd him.

Sold him a dream.

Called us soft.

I read the message twice.

Never responded.

Because you don't fix the system

by fighting its clones.

You fix it

by building something it can't touch.



---

I don't need revenge.

I need rhythm.

And rhythm takes time.

Takes consistency.

Takes vibe.

---

So now,

when a parent asks,

“What's your edge?”

I tell them,

“We play. We grow. We breathe.”

If that's not enough—

we're not a good fit.

---

But if it is?

Then welcome.

You just found the rare thing.

A gym

where kids smile without flinching.

Where they miss and try again

without apology.

Where they lead from joy,

not fear.

---

This isn't about being different.

It's about being aligned.

---

Because the stakes?

They're high.

Every time we let fear run the system,

we lose the kids we claim to be developing.

Every time we make performance the price of belonging,  
we betray the reason we started.

---

So I stopped marketing.  
Stopped adjusting.  
Stopped trying to make it palatable.

I just built.  
And kept building.

---

Now?  
The kids echo the right way.

Their breath fills the room.  
Their vibe sets the tone.

---

I don't coach out of scarcity anymore.  
I coach like we already have everything we need.

Because we do.

If we protect it.

---

The stakes are high.

But so is the bar.

And the vibe?

That's non-negotiable.

## Chapter 8: Re:Definition

“Re:Definition, turnin’ your play into a tragedy / Exhibit level degree on the mic,  
passionately.”

— Black Star

---

I’ve seen play turned into tragedy.

Not from loss, but from overstructure.

From systems that look like care but feel like control.

From coaches who script joy out of the game

one clipboard command at a time.

I’ve watched a kid shrink in front of me—

not because he failed,

but because he was never free.

He followed the rules.

Played the role.

Ran the sets.

And still, somehow, became less.

That’s not development.

That's design gone wrong.

---

I wasn't always like this.

Five science classes senior year.

A 1320 SAT.

I was supposed to be an engineer.

Inputs. Outputs. Systems. Feedback loops.

Basketball wasn't my rebellion.

It was just the better offer.

But I never stopped seeing the game like a system.

Patterns. Data. Design.

So when I stumbled into Ecological Dynamics, into CLA,

it didn't radicalize me.

It reminded me.

It gave a name to the way we used to play:

— Four on three on blacktops

— Crate hoops nailed to telephone poles

— Uneven numbers, weird bounces, real decisions

We didn't call it "constraints."

We just called it basketball.

---

Now I teach through constraint.

Not because it's easier—

but because it works.

I ask players questions.

I design problems.

I set parameters and let them adapt.

I don't hand them scripts.

I give them contexts.

And at first?

It's messy.

Kids look confused.

Parents get nervous.

Coaches pull me aside.

“Where’s the structure?”

And I tell them:

It’s right there.

You just haven’t seen it before.

---

To create an ecosystem

where development means more than drills.

Where autonomy, joy, problem-solving, and play  
are non-negotiables.

Where kids can fail and smile in the same rep.

---

Because the real stakes here?

They’re not scholarships.

They’re not rankings.

They’re identity.



They're joy.

They're the quiet erosion of self-worth,  
rep by rep,  
when a kid starts to believe  
they're only valuable when they perform.

We are teaching them  
that love is earned.

That rest is weakness.  
That pressure is preparation.  
That to be seen  
is more important than to become.

And we're doing it with smiles on our faces.

---

Parents aren't the enemy.  
They're scared.

Coaches aren't evil.  
They're trapped.

But fear doesn't justify harm.

So this isn't a call-out.

It's a call-up.

Let's be better.

Or stop pretending we care.

Because too many kids are hurting.

And the silence of adults?

That's complicity.

---

I'm not here to save the industry.

I'm here to save the kids it forgot.

This chapter?

This is the line in the sand.

Let's choose better.

Or move out of the way.

Because the stakes?

They've never been higher.

## Chapter 9: Sixteen

“Sixteen ain’t enough.”

— André 3000

---

When he was younger,  
you might’ve called him quiet.  
Respectful.  
Polite.  
A coach’s dream.

But that wasn’t the full picture.

He wasn’t shy.  
He was watching.  
Waiting.  
Reading the room.

And once he trusted you?

You couldn’t get him to shut up.

---

He was funny.

Quick-witted.

Sharp without being cruel.

He had the kind of timing  
you couldn't teach.

In his movement.

In his mind.

In his mouth.

Everything he did had rhythm.

---

He didn't just play the game—  
he played with it.

He moved like joy  
had been hardwired into his muscle memory.  
Like smiling was a skill he had mastered  
before the first rep.

---

And we loved him for it.  
Not just because he was good.  
Because he was full.

He filled up the gym.  
He filled up the gaps.  
He filled up your spirit  
just by being near.

---

That's what made it hard  
when he came back from college  
and something was missing.

---

It wasn't his shot.  
It wasn't his body.

It was something quieter.  
Smaller.  
But heavier.

That rhythm

he used to move with?

Gone.

The beat was still playing,  
but the joy wasn't dancing anymore.

---

One day,  
he came to the gym.  
Just to watch.

He stood off to the side,  
like always.

Except this time,  
he walked out.

No explanation.

Then came back a minute later.

I asked him,

“Everything good?”

He nodded.

“Yeah. I just had to yawn.”

I paused.

“Why’d you leave the gym to yawn?”

He looked me dead in the eye.

“We weren’t allowed to yawn at practice.”

---

He wasn’t joking.

And he wasn’t trying to make a point.

But I knew what he meant.

---

That yawn wasn’t about fatigue.

It was about freedom.



And the fact that he left the gym  
to do something as human  
as take a breath—

That told me everything  
about what the game had become for him.

---

He didn't quit.  
He didn't fail.  
He just changed.

Or maybe  
he learned to survive  
in a system that didn't make space  
for who he really was.

---

I remember the last time I coached him.  
He was electric.

Bouncing across the floor  
like joy had a destination.

His feet never walked  
when his soul could run.

That version of him—  
the one who played like he couldn't believe he got to do this—  
that's the kid I still see  
when I close my eyes.

---

But I wasn't present enough  
when it mattered.

Max was sick.  
I was stretched thin.  
Distracted.

But even when I was there,  
I wasn't really there.

And I let things slide.

Too many voices around him.  
Too much noise.  
Too many people telling him what to be

instead of making space for who he already was.

---

He started training in third grade.

The joy was real.

At first.

But the reps added up.

The structure got tighter.

The space for laughter shrank.

And by the time college came,  
it wasn't about playing anymore.

It was about surviving.

---

The system didn't break him.

But it drained something  
he didn't know he'd need later.

The freedom to be full.

The safety to be himself.

The ability to yawn  
without having to leave the room.

---

I should've known.

I should've done more.

I should've built a gym  
where he didn't have to earn joy  
with perfect behavior.

Where his voice  
could be as loud as his game.

Where yawn meant tired—  
not punished.

---

Sixteen ain't enough.

Sixteen games.

Sixteen sessions.

Sixteen months of light  
before the dimming started.

---

Now when I see him,  
he still smiles.  
Still makes me laugh.  
Still offers glimpses  
of who he's always been.

But there's a part of him  
I haven't seen in years.

And I helped bury it.

---

Not out of malice.  
Out of neglect.  
Out of trust in a system  
that never earned it.

---

This chapter isn't about blame.

It's about cost.

About all the ways joy gets edged out

by polish,

by pressure,

by performance.

---

Sixteen ain't enough.

But if I could get those reps back—

one more summer—

I'd run the kind of practice

where he could laugh

until he couldn't breathe.

And never once

have to ask permission

to yawn.

## Chapter 10: UMI Says

“My Umi says, shine your light on the world. Shine your light for the world to see.”

— Mos Def

---

Carrying this mission  
feels like walking with cracked ribs.

Not broken.  
Just aching.

Every breath costs something.

But I keep breathing anyway.

---

Not for validation.  
Not for branding.

Because I know what silence steals.  
I’ve watched it work.

On Cole.

On Max.

On myself.

---

This isn't about fixing the system anymore.

It's about refusing to disappear in it.

I don't coach to be a savior.

I coach because someone has to hold the light  
when the gym goes dim.

---

There's a kind of clarity  
that doesn't speak at clinics  
or post reels.

The kind that moves through you  
when the gym is empty.

When the cones are picked up  
and you're the last one out.



When no one's watching—

but the work is still there.

Still humming.

Still calling.

---

I used to chase success.

Now I chase stillness.

Because the deeper I got into this—

the more I saw how loud the noise was.

And how few people

were breathing.

---

Max's death didn't make me wise.

It made me honest.

It stripped me of illusion.

It gave me a language

I never wanted to speak—

but couldn't unlearn.

It taught me what matters.

And what never did.

---

So now, when a kid is quiet,

I don't assume they're fine.

When a parent shrugs,

I don't let it slide.

When a teammate lashes out,

I don't just call it "edge."

I stay.

I ask.

I pause.

Because breath doesn't shout.

It waits.

---

I remember the pain.

I let it walk beside me.

Not for drama.

For discipline.

It reminds me

why I refuse to perform light

when I could be it.

---

My mother never preached.

She stayed.

She moved like love.

Quiet. Constant.

No spectacle.

Max was the same.

Still. Soft. Present.

Even in suffering,

he had clarity.

Now Cole watches me.

And Lennox listens.

They don't need a superhero.

They need a father  
who doesn't flinch.

Who doesn't need applause  
to keep showing up.

---

So I smile.

Not because I've healed—  
but because I'm choosing not to hide.

I coach with my chest open now.  
Not to prove anything.  
But to protect the kids  
still learning how to stand upright  
in a world that bends them early.

---

The work is heavy.  
But it's mine.

And I carry it because

Umi said shine.

And I believe her.

Even when the light hurts.

Even when it doesn't reach.

Even when I can't see the reflection—

only the obligation.

---

This chapter isn't about coaching.

It's about presence.

It's about knowing I can't save everyone—

but I can love like I'm trying.

That's the light.

And it still shines.

## Chapter 11: Still Feel Me

“Now the road to the riches is taking me longer / It ain’t kill yet so it making me stronger  
/ I don’t know if it’s the hate, frustration, or hunger.” — Jadakiss

---

There’s a clarity that only comes  
once the fire dies down.

Not the kind that yells.  
The kind that waits  
to see who’s still listening.

That’s where I am now.

Not on a pedestal.  
Not on a podium.  
Just standing.

Still coaching.  
Still building.  
Still carrying names—  
some that are gone,

some that are growing.

---

They used to call me intense.

Cold. Unrelenting.

Now they just call me consistent.

Because I'm still doing it.

Not for rankings.

Not for the photos.

But because the kids still show up—  
and someone has to show up with them.

---

My fuel used to come from three places:

Hate.

Not spite.

Memory.

Of who didn't believe.

Of what wasn't said.

What wasn't given.

Frustration.

With the games behind the games.

The fake care.

The adults who say "development"

but chase clout.

Hunger.

For honesty.

For peace.

For air.

They're still with me.

Just softer now.

Not fuel.

Compass.

---

The grief never left.

It just changed shape.

Doesn't punch me in the chest anymore.



Now it walks beside me.

Quiet.

Steady.

I see Max in the pauses.

Not just his memory—

his mirror.

Every kid I coach

is someone's Max.

So I protect what I can now.

---

I never got to finish the conversation with my father.

Cancer ended it

before it could start.

So I stay now—

for the ones who can't speak.

For the ones still learning

what it means to stay.

---

Nobody told me real manhood  
is presence.

That strength isn't what you endure.  
It's how you love through it.

---

I don't coach to be a savior.  
I coach so my kids will say:

“He stood for something.”

So they'll know what love looks like  
when it's built—  
not just felt.

---

There are days I want to rest.  
Disappear.  
Turn off the gym lights  
and just be  
somewhere quiet.

But I stay.

Because Umi said shine.

And shining doesn't mean loud.

It means refusing to let the world stay dim

just because it's easier

to sit in the dark.

---

A friend once told me

Jay-Z said everyone has genius.

Mine isn't hype.

It's clarity.

I see the pain.

I see the systems.

I see the silence behind the performance.

And I still show up

with joy in my hands

like a lantern.

---

That's my genius.

And it comes with obligation.

To the block.

To the borough.

To the baseline.

---

No one sees the light work.

They see the clips.

The trophies.

The posts.

But the real work?

It's internal.

Invisible.

It's the labor of presence

when nobody claps.

And I do it anyway.

Because even when the light is heavy,  
it's still mine to carry.

---

This chapter isn't about coaching.  
It's about presence.

About knowing I can't fix everything—  
but I can refuse to disappear.

I can't heal every system.  
But I can love within it  
like I'm trying.

And that matters.

That's the light.  
And it still shines.

## Chapter 12: Outro

“I’m nothin’ like you rap dudes / I’m a man with my own flaws / But I stand for somethin’ / That’s more than your downloads or your applause.” — Nas

---

There’s a moment—quiet, unscripted—  
when you realize you’ve done the work.

Not all of it.

Not perfectly.

But enough to know  
you’re not who you used to be.

That’s what this is.

Not a mic drop.

A mirror.

---

I didn’t write this to be liked.

I wrote it because I couldn’t stay silent.

Because I saw my son lose his breath—  
and realized I'd been teaching him to hold it.

Because I watched kids cry through games  
and called it resilience.

Because I coached for reputation  
when I should've been coaching for restoration.

Because I was part of the problem.  
And I decided to become part of the rebuild.

---

This isn't a book about drills.  
Or programs.  
Or systems.

It's a record of what broke—  
and what I'm building in its place.

It's Max's name  
stitched between the lines.

It's Cole's silence  
on that drive home.

It's the kids I'll never meet—  
but who won't have to carry  
the same weight if I do this right.

---

I had to make a choice.

Not between wins and losses—  
but between presence and performance.

Between being known  
and being honest.

Between building for applause—  
or building for breath.

I chose breath.

---

There's a story I haven't told many.



During Max's treatment—his most painful one—  
we had the Airbnb booked.  
The private jet ready.

The world was shut down.  
But we were going.

That's how far I was willing to go  
to give my son a shot at life.

---

So when people ask  
why I'm so intense about coaching—  
about youth basketball, about clarity—  
it's because I've already been  
where everything else fades away.

And what stays?

Is breath.

---

The leaders we trust with our kids  
shouldn't be the loudest.

They should be the ones  
who still carry their own silence  
with reverence.

I've had chances to cash in.  
To chase clout.  
To brand something sleek and scalable.

I said no.

Because Max taught me what matters.  
Because Cole still watches.  
Because Lennox is still learning.

---

This book wasn't written  
for industry approval.

It was written for the kid  
biting his nails in the layup line.

For the parent in the stands  
with a lump in their throat,  
unsure if they've done too much  
or not enough.

For the coach wondering  
if the system they're in  
is breaking the very kids  
they swore to build up.

---

I've been in gyms  
where nobody felt me.

But the kid who needed me?

He did.

That's the only echo I'm chasing.

---

Here's the story.

I laid it all out.

Still building.

Still breathing.

Still feeling.

And if you don't know...

## TRACKLIST

### *Scriptures from the Sideline*

Moment of Clarity – 03:24

I Used to Love H.E.R. – 11:12

Cold Rain – 01:17

Thieves in the Night – 03:17

HiiiPoWeR – 04:01

Smile – 10:22

Stakes Is High – 08:17

Re:Definition – 08:31

Sixteen – 02:04

UMI Says – 12:25

Still Feel Me – 12:18

Outro – 06:17

## LINER NOTES

### 01. Moment of Clarity – Jay-Z – 03:24

There's something surgical about this track. Jay isn't just spitting—he's revealing. "I dumbbed down for my audience..." is one of the most honest bars in rap. This song gave me permission to admit what I'd been performing, who I was trying to impress, and how much of myself I'd hidden behind the mask. It's not loud. It's not triumphant. It's a breaking point for me, just like the track was for him.

### 02. I Used to Love H.E.R. – Common – 11:12

This one hit me the first time I heard it, and it still does. It's not just about hip-hop—it's about falling in love with something pure, only to watch it get distorted by culture, money, and ego. That's how I felt about basketball. What I was handed, what I passed down, what I had to reckon with. I wasn't betrayed—I became part of the betrayal.

### 03. Cold Rain – Talib Kweli – 01:17

"Freedom writers like Bob Moses." That line always shook me. The idea that writing—even coaching—could be liberation work. This song isn't a hit, but it feels elemental. Cold rain doesn't flood. It doesn't scream. It just doesn't stop. Neither did the questions.

### 04. Thieves in the Night – Black Star – 03:17

This song stays with me. "Not strong, only aggressive. Not free, we only licensed." I heard that and had to sit still for a minute. It named something I felt but hadn't put into words. The illusion of strength we sell to kids. The permission we mistake for freedom. This one feels like the quiet that comes before a storm—and the storm never stops.

### 05. HiiiPoWeR – Kendrick Lamar – 04:01

This felt like a call to arms the first time I heard it. Kendrick's urgency—the refusal to look away, the hunger to stand for something bigger than yourself—it lit something in me. I wasn't walking out of that gym to make a point. I was walking out because I couldn't stay and still recognize myself.

06. Smile – Scarface feat. 2Pac – 10:22

There's this weariness in Scarface's voice that I've always felt underneath the surface of joy. Like smiling isn't about being okay—it's about surviving long enough to choose joy anyway. I held so much guilt after Max passed, like smiling too soon was disrespectful. But eventually I let go. This track reminds me that joy can hold pain without erasing it.

07. Stakes Is High – De La Soul – 08:17

There's clarity in this song that I didn't have words for at first. It made me think harder about what I was actually building. Not just programs, but beliefs. It's easy to get lost in the machine and call it culture. This track made me pause. Ask better questions. Let go of trying to be seen and focus on what I actually stand for.

08. Re:Definition – Black Star – 08:31

This one's all edge and urgency. That beat grabs you, and the bars don't let go. It reminded me that we don't always need new answers—sometimes we just need to stop lying about what's not working. I was done polishing broken models. This song helped me feel okay about burning old frameworks down to build something breathable.

09. Sixteen – André 3000 – 02:04

The sadness in this song cut through me. "Sixteen ain't enough" wasn't just about bars—it was about constraint. About all the things that don't get said when the space isn't safe. I've seen kids who follow every direction, hit every mark, do everything "right"—but you can feel what's missing. Not because they can't speak, but because they've learned how to survive in silence. I know that feeling. I coached that way longer than I want to admit.

10. UMI Says – Mos Def – 12:25

This is the slow breath. The sit-still-and-listen song. "Shine your light on the world" sounds simple until you try to live it every day. I hear Carrie in this song. I hear my mother. I hear Max. It reminds me that presence matters more than volume. That leadership doesn't have to be loud. That care is a practice, not a post.

11. Still Feel Me – Jadakiss – 12:18

There's something unshakable about this track. Not in its bravado—in its insistence. "I'm still here." That's what I hear in it. That first game at Ranney, I wasn't doing it differently yet, but something had started shifting. I was watching myself now. That felt like a beginning, even if no one else could see it yet.

12. Outro – Nas – 06:17

I've replayed this one more than almost any other. "I'm a man with my own flaws / But I stand for something..." That's it. That's all I ever wanted this to be about. Not perfection. Not performance. Just clarity. Just presence. Just staying close enough to the breath to recognize yourself when it's time to speak.