

## 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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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?"

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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That  
was my moment of clarity.

And I've been breathing ever since.

## 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, non-existent.  
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.

AAU jersey?  
Reversible.  
Hanging off my shoulders like a borrowed cape.  
Warmups? No chance.

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 came down,  
half-joking,  
asked if I was ready to go back in.  
He already knew.  
I'd never say no.  
Even if my legs were gone.  
Even if my chest was tight.  
Even if my body was screaming.

I started to rise.  
He smiled—  
“No, no. You're done.”  
I laid back down.  
And for the first time all weekend,  
I exhaled.

It wasn't quitting.  
It was relief.  
And something about that scared me.  
Not because he got it wrong.  
But because maybe—  
he got it right for the wrong reasons.  
Maybe it wasn't about me.  
Maybe it was about the optics.  
The perception of care.  
The performance of doing the right thing.  
That's what the system trains you for.

There was no speech.  
No lesson.  
Just that moment.  
Heavy.  
Still.

Looking back,  
I wish someone had asked me  
if I was still having fun.  
But no one did.  
Not my coaches.  
Not my teammates.  
Not my father.  
He wasn't around for those conversations.  
Wasn't around, period.

And even if he had been,  
I'm not sure he would've asked.  
Or known how to hear the answer.  
The silence was generational.  
And I was raised inside it.

Maybe that's why I show up so fully now.  
Why I coach the way I do.  
Why I protect Cole's smile  
like it's sacred.  
Because joy was never protected for me.  
And I'll be damned  
if I don't guard it for my sons.

Because I gave Cole 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.

She didn't smell like asphalt.  
She came with onboarding documents.  
She didn't sing with rhythm.  
She spoke in bullet points.  
With pipelines,  
positioning,  
and tournament itineraries.

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 got married to the industry.  
And I'm still grieving the girl I met.

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

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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.

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I was still showing up.  
Still early to the gym.  
Still late to leave.  
Still scribbling in notebooks  
with plays I hadn’t tested  
but believed might work  
if the players just bought in.

Still building practice plans  
like blueprints for control.  
Still explaining footwork  
like it was scripture.  
Still mistaking repetition  
for revelation.

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

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It cracked slowly —  
the way ice does under foot  
right before it gives.

A moment here.  
A glimpse there.  
Tiny fractures  
until one morning  
I woke up  
and couldn’t feel my own voice  
in the gym anymore.

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It started with a question I couldn’t shake.

“Why are they doing that?”

Why are they shooting  
before they're balanced?

Why are they spinning into traffic  
like there's no one else on the court?

Why do their shoulders sag  
when the ball doesn't come their way?

It wasn't laziness.  
Wasn't ego.  
Wasn't disobedience.

It was survival.

It was protection.

It was the body adapting  
to a world that didn't make sense.

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That's when it hit me:

Perception drives action.

Not what I say.  
Not what I diagram.  
Not what they memorize.

How they see the floor  
is how they move through it.

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I stopped correcting for execution.  
Started observing for cues.

I watched the subtle things—  
The glance over the shoulder  
before a pass.

The shuffle of feet  
that gave away fear.

The pause after a miss  
where breath disappeared.

I stopped watching for compliance.  
Started listening for confusion.

Started feeling for rhythm.

That's when I knew  
I had been coaching the wrong thing.

Not the skill,  
but the symptom.

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The breakthrough didn't come on the court.  
It came on my couch.  
Midnight.  
Laptop open.  
Podcast playing.  
A voice I didn't know said a phrase  
I didn't understand yet:

"Behavior emerges from the interaction of constraints—task, environment, and individual."

I paused.  
Rewound.  
Listened again.

Then again.

And again.

Until the words started forming images.

Cole on the wing,  
waiting for a pass that never came.

Max, back in the day,  
figuring out his next move  
by watching what the other kids did first.

Players aren't just doing things.  
They're interpreting everything.

They're not resisting.  
They're responding.

To fear.  
To pressure.  
To cues I never realized I was giving.

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I started asking new questions.

Not "how do I fix them?"  
But "what have I created around them?"

What am I rewarding?  
What am I ignoring?

What patterns have I built  
without realizing they were scripts?

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That's when I rewired everything.

I threw away the perfect plan.  
Ditched the clean progression.  
Scrapped the block drills  
with predictable outcomes  
and unquestioned authority.

I started building sessions  
that looked like life.

Messy.  
Reactive.  
Rhythmic.  
Uncontrolled—but not chaotic.

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The first one bombed.

Kids looked lost.  
Parents looked worried.  
I looked like a guy  
who'd forgotten how to coach.

But something told me to hold.  
To wait.

Like rain hitting cold pavement,  
you don't see the effect right away.  
But the ground is changing underneath you.

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And then it happened.

One of the youngest players—quiet,  
didn't talk much—  
saw an opening that wasn't there  
a second before.

He faked, stepped, spun,  
laid it in without thinking.

Nobody had taught him that move.  
It wasn't in the playbook.  
It came from feel.  
From attunement.  
From permission.

He smiled.  
The kind of smile you don't see in structured drills.  
The kind that says,  
"I found that."  
Not "I was told that."  
Not "I executed it."  
But "I discovered it."

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That was the moment I knew  
I wasn't coaching plays anymore.  
I was coaching perception.

Not "read and react."  
Feel and respond.  
Trust and try.  
Miss and repeat—  
without shame.

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It changed everything.

I stopped yelling.  
Stopped interrupting.  
Started watching with curiosity  
instead of critique.

Started seeing the gym as a living thing.  
Breathing.  
Changing.  
Teaching us  
if we let it.

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Some of my peers called it soft.

Said I was letting players off the hook.  
Said they'd never be ready for varsity.  
Said this wouldn't fly in real games.

But the kids?

They got better.

Not cleaner.  
Better.

More grounded.  
More self-aware.  
More creative.

They failed more often—  
and recovered faster.

Because they weren't afraid  
of failing in front of me anymore.

They trusted the space.  
And when a player trusts the space,  
everything becomes a rep.

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I remember one moment in particular.  
It wasn't dramatic.  
Wasn't loud.

It was a game.

Close score.  
Time running down.

We had a play drawn.  
But LJ broke it.

Not by mistake—  
by feel.

He read the defense.  
Cut early.  
Caught it clean.  
Finished through contact.

We won.

But that wasn't the moment.

The moment was after.

He jogged back to the huddle,  
and looked at me  
like he was waiting for correction.

And all I said was,  
"You felt it."

He nodded.



That was it.

That was the work.

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I wasn't coaching plays anymore.  
I was coaching presence.

I wasn't chasing outcomes.  
I was designing invitations.

Invitations to be fully in it.  
To listen with the body.  
To trust themselves again.

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And it made me wonder:  
When did we stop doing that?

When did the game become  
about mastering patterns  
instead of meeting moments?

When did we start training fear  
and calling it discipline?

When did we start designing compliance  
and calling it culture?

---

I think about the players I lost.  
Not to transfers.  
Not to injury.  
To silence.

The ones who faded midseason.  
Still showed up,  
but you could see it—

Their eyes weren't searching.  
Their bodies were mimicking.  
They were still playing,  
but not from the inside anymore.

Those are the ones  
I carry with me.

Because I know now  
it wasn't them.

It was the space.  
The system.  
The silence.

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That's what Cold Rain is.

Not a storm.  
Not a flood.  
Not something that breaks you.

Something that reveals you.  
Cleanses you.

Not by force—  
by rhythm.

Drip.  
Drip.  
Drip.

---

I'm not a freedom fighter.  
Not in the way the lyric means.

But I am a freedom writer now.

With cones.  
With film.  
With questions.

With sideline silence that says:  
"I see you. And I trust you."

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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

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They say the system is broken.  
It’s not.  
It was built like this.  
On purpose.

I didn’t want to believe it at first.  
I thought maybe it was just misguided.  
Too many good people.  
Too many good intentions.  
It had to be salvageable, right?

But then I sat in on a league meeting.  
Watched them talk about rankings  
before they mentioned safety.  
Watched them debate exposure  
before they brought up joy.  
And that’s when it clicked.

This wasn’t accidental.  
It was engineered.  
Every form, every fee, every phrase on the website—  
crafted to sell dreams, not build futures.  
Designed to maximize control, not capacity.

And we all signed the terms.

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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.”

I’ve seen kids break down  
not from the reps—  
but from the performance of toughness.  
From coaches demanding eye contact  
while never offering it back.  
From “leadership training”  
that looks more like theater  
than truth.

I once watched a 12-year-old freeze in the middle of a game

after a turnover.  
Not because of the mistake.  
But because he didn't know whether to look at his coach,  
his parent,  
or the scoreboard.  
His body didn't fail.  
His perception did.

He was too busy scanning for judgment  
to remember how to move.

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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.

I heard a coach say  
he was trying to "build men."  
Then watched him scream in a kid's face  
because he forgot a set.  
That's not manhood.  
That's mimicry.  
We're not building character.  
We're cosplaying patriarchy.

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That's not accountability.  
That's branding.

It's control dressed up as culture.  
And the kids know.  
They always know.

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We've replaced play  
with programming.  
Expression  
with exposure.  
Development  
with deception.

There are teams who run 20 sets  
but can't handle pressure.  
Players with trainer-perfect form

who can't improvise when the ball skips off the rim.  
Because we trained performance,  
not presence.

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Not strong.  
Only aggressive.  
Not free.  
Only licensed.

And licensing is always conditional.  
Conditional on compliance.  
Conditional on polish.  
Conditional on performance.

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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?

I've seen 4th graders with personal trainers.  
Seen parents live-stream practices.  
Seen kids fake hustle  
just to keep a roster spot.

We're not preparing kids for the future.  
We're prepping them  
for the same trauma  
we swallowed  
and called resilience.  
We baptized them in our baggage  
and called it legacy.

Black Star said it clean—

\*"Get yours first, them other niggas secondary / That type of illing that be filling up the cemetery..."\*

And that's what this system is.  
A polished procession  
for kids we never asked to be full.  
Just hungry.  
Just sharp.  
Just marketable.

We're not coaching souls.  
We're inventorying bodies.

And calling it exposure.

---

We parade them like assets  
then post them like losses.

A kid has a bad game,  
and the silence is louder than the box score.  
A coach doesn't tag him in the recap.  
A parent scrolls without comment.  
A trainer stops texting.

The message is clear:  
You are only as valuable  
as your last performance.

All for clout.  
All for projection.  
All for a version of success  
that never measured breath.

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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.

You can feel it when you walk into those gyms.  
The air is different.  
The noise isn't as sharp.  
The kids aren't playing scared.  
They move like they belong.  
Like joy isn't a reward —  
it's a given.

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I used to think I had to protect players  
from losing.  
Now I protect them  
from the way we win.

Because winning has a cost  
if you're not careful.

If you don't ask what it's costing.

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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.

One false read.  
And they're benched.  
Not corrected.  
Benched.

We're not teaching decision-making.  
We're teaching obedience  
with a ball in hand.

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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.

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If a kid disobeys the system  
we built wrong,  
are they failing—

or refusing to fake it?

Sometimes rebellion is the only honest read.

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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.

Every look to the bench?  
That's a kid asking permission to exist.

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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.

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We stole the game  
and sold it back  
like a license.

And they're still paying.  
In joy.  
In confidence.  
In silence.

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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 the license always expires  
the second they stop producing.

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

I've seen grown men  
trying to fix their childhood  
through other people's children.  
That's not coaching.  
That's projection.

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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.

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I'm not trying to go viral.

I'm trying to build kids  
who know who they are

when the play breaks down.

Because that's when truth shows up—  
not in the set,  
but in the response.

## Chapter 5: HiiiPoWeR

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

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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.

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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 I know what happens  
when men coach from wounds  
they never named.

What happens when shame

gets dressed up  
as standards.

What happens when fear  
puts on a whistle  
and calls itself “accountability.”

---

I’ve been that man.  
I’ve been that voice.  
I’ve barked those phrases  
in a register  
meant to command,  
not connect.

“Get tough.”  
“Be a dog.”  
“Don’t be soft.”

What I meant was:

“I’m scared.”  
“I don’t know what to do with this moment.”  
“I want control.”

But none of that sounds strong.  
So I sold posture  
and called it poise.

---

The truth?

I inherited that tone.

Coaches who loved the game,  
but coached like they were still trying to earn their father’s respect.  
Men who never learned to regulate,  
only dominate.  
Who demanded eye contact  
but never saw us clearly.

And the worst part?  
It worked.

At least in the short term.

We won games.  
Got tough.  
Looked the part.

But we didn’t learn how to breathe under pressure.

We learned how to hold our breath  
and call it discipline.

---

That's why I walked out.

Not to perform virtue.  
But to break a pattern  
I was once proud of.

Because I saw a kid  
absorb shame  
as if it were a lesson.

And I know what that does to a body.

---

It tightens the shoulders.  
Clenches the jaw.  
Hardens the breath.  
Until all that's left  
is reaction.

Not rhythm.  
Not relationship.  
Just readiness  
to be yelled at again.

---

You can't teach from that place.

Not really.

You can train.

You can demand.

You can manufacture intensity  
through fear.

But you can't build wholeness.

---

So I walked out.

Because if I stayed,  
I would've had to silence something in myself  
just to keep the peace.



And I've already paid that cost.  
I won't pay it again.

---

Now?

Now I coach like Kendrick raps.

Urgent.  
Specific.  
Unapologetically awake.

Because the sky is falling.

The wind is calling.

And I won't be the one  
they remember for yelling  
when I could've been listening.

I won't be the man  
who barked "toughen up"  
when a kid just needed  
to feel safe enough  
to fail.

---

I'll be the man  
who stood in the storm,  
arms open.

The man who said,

"You're not soft.  
You're sensitive.  
And that's sacred."

The man who built gyms  
where no one had to trade their voice  
for playing time.

The man who taught dawg-coded coaches  
that breath  
is the real toughness.

---

This isn't about being soft.  
It's about being sovereign.

Rooted.

Clear.  
Unshakeable not because you yell—

but because your presence  
is louder than your voice.

---

So if they ask me why I left—

I'll tell them:

Because that coach  
wasn't the villain.

He was the mirror.

And I chose  
to shatter it.

---

I'm not here  
to prep kids for power.

I'm here  
to give them theirs back.

---

That's HiiiPoWeR.

That's breath.

That's me—  
still standing.  
Still building.  
Still believing  
there's a better way.

Even if I have to walk out alone  
to prove it exists.

## 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.

Even when the world feels tilted,  
and your insides don’t match the light  
that just slipped out your mouth.

---

That’s what this chapter is about.

Not pretending.  
Not performing.

Choosing.

To be here.  
To hold joy  
without apology.

To believe that joy is not a replacement for grief—  
but a companion.  
A co-witness.  
A returning.

---

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.

The kind that doesn't raise its voice.  
The kind that doesn't need an audience.  
The kind you feel  
in your bones  
before you have the language for it.

---

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.

That's breath re-entering the room.

---

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.

Not just to build better players.  
Not just to rewrite a system.

But to protect a space  
where wholeness is welcome.

Where joy is not proof of progress—  
it's part of the curriculum.

Where laughter is not a distraction—  
it's a signal.  
A sign that something living  
is still growing.

---

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.

---

That it can live in a gym  
lit by grief.  
That it can rise  
from floor burns and family loss  
and still find a way  
to fill the room.

That even after the worst thing happens—  
a child can laugh,  
and a father can smile,  
and no one has to explain why.

Not because the pain is gone.  
But because the love  
still echoes.

And the echo  
is holy.



## 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 won’t play more games, more tournaments.

I told them:

“Because it’s not about more games—it’s about more development.”

Not just because I believed it—

but because I’ve seen the difference.

Kids with rhythm move like water.

Kids chasing resumes tighten with every bounce.

---

They asked why their son didn’t get more shine.

I asked if they’d watched the practice film.

They hadn’t.

And it showed.

In how they spoke about effort like it was aesthetic.

In how they weighed their child’s value

in clicks, not connection.

---

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.

We have to filter out the fumes—

the noise, the pressure,

the transaction hiding as support.

---

The vibe is sacred.  
And sacred things require boundaries.

It took me a while to learn that.  
I used to believe I could hold the vibe for everyone.  
Absorb it.  
Translate it.  
Keep smiling through the static.

But you can't protect the vibe  
if you don't honor your own.

---

So I stopped explaining myself.  
Started clarifying.

Not defensively.  
Deliberately.

---

This isn't a platform.  
It's a sacred place.

This isn't for clout.  
It's for breath.

This isn't a shortcut.  
It's a decision.

A daily one.  
A sometimes-lonely one.  
But the only one that lets me sleep.

---

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.

Because I've lost roots before.  
And I won't do that again.

---

I almost 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 for a moment, I thought he'd walk.  
But he didn't.  
He stayed.  
And we worked through it.

---

We didn't write anything on the board.  
There was no signing.  
No contract.

But we did talk—  
about what mattered.  
About what we wanted to stand for.

Joy.  
Resilience.  
Humility.

That was enough.  
Not formal.  
But honest.

---

About a week ago, I had Cole in with me for a training session, and a new player showed up. A lot of the drill work wasn't new to Cole—he'd done it before. We were doing shoulder game, a one-on-one constraint drill I stole from Chris Oliver.

Cole drove to the basket, got cut off, and stopped. Didn't quite know what to do. The rep ended. And instead of stepping in like I normally would, I asked him, "Hey bud, what is it that you can do in that situation?"

He looked up and said, "You can back pivot."

Internally, I lit up. That was the answer I was hoping for. But I didn't know if he'd get there.

A couple of reps later? He got cut off again. This time, he back pivoted, stepped through, and made an incredible move and finish. The new kid guarding him looked at him and said, "Nice move."

And I watched Cole try not to smile. He was proud. He tried to hide it, but it was there.

Maybe it was the shot. Maybe it was the moment.  
But I was proud of all of it.

Not just the move.  
Not just the finish.  
But the joy.

---

I don't need revenge.  
I need rhythm.

And rhythm takes time.  
Takes consistency.  
Takes vibe.

It also takes saying no  
when yes is easier.

---

So now,  
when a parent asks,  
"What's different about this place?"

I tell them, honestly,  
*just* starting to turn the corner.  
Not fully locked in yet.  
But the echoes are there.  
The breath is beginning to fill the room.  
Not perfect.  
But promising.

---

Then welcome.

You might be witnessing something rare—  
not finished,  
not flawless,  
but real.

An environment  
where kids are starting to smile without flinching.  
Where they miss and try again  
without apology.  
Where joy isn't a reward.  
It's becoming the rhythm.

Where failure isn't punished—  
it's understood.

## 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.

We didn't need terminology.  
We had tension.  
We had terrain.  
We had to figure it out  
with no coach in sight  
and no parent in earshot.

---

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.

---

It's in the hesitation before a pass.  
In the second read that wasn't on the whiteboard.  
In the way a player adjusts without being told.  
That's structure.  
But it's lived, not listed.

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.

Where struggle isn't seen as regression,  
but as rehearsal.

---

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.

We're calling it coaching.  
Calling it mentorship.  
Framing it as leadership  
when it's really just rebranded performance culture  
in a quarter-zip.

---

Parents aren't the enemy.  
They're scared.  
Coaches aren't evil.  
They're trapped.

But fear doesn't justify harm.

And tradition doesn't excuse trauma.

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've seen the results.  
Kids who can recite plays  
but can't recognize joy.

Players who run every drill perfectly  
but crumble the moment rhythm leaves the room.

Leaders in name only—  
because they've never been taught how to trust themselves,  
only how to follow directions loudly.

We give them titles.  
We give them scripts.  
But we don't give them space.

---

So this is the work now:  
To protect space.  
To protect rhythm.  
To protect the possibility  
that learning can still feel like love.

---

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.



