# Chapter 1: The Watcher 2

“Things just ain’t the same for gangstas.” — Jay-Z

I didn’t show up to that game as a coach. I showed up as a dad. It was supposed to be just another weekend—me and Cole, watching a youth game. But that day, something cracked open in me. And it never closed back up.  
  
Cole was sitting beside me, visibly uncomfortable. He said his stomach hurt. At first, I assumed it was something he ate, maybe nerves. But it wasn’t that. His body was responding to stress. He was nine years old and having a full-on anxiety attack over a game of basketball.  
  
The coach had talked about their record. About how they were the better team. About how they needed to win. That mattered to him. It mattered because it had been made to matter. And now he carried the weight of expectation like it was his own.  
  
And I watched it happen.  
  
I watched his body tighten and his breathing shift. I watched my son, who loved to play, suddenly fear the thing he loved. And I couldn’t unsee it. He didn’t know how to carry that pressure—and I didn’t know how to help him. Yet.  
  
What made it worse was that I recognized it—not just in him, but in myself. That same game, I found myself in an argument with a parent from the opposing team. Not about philosophy, not even about coaching, but about a rule. Something the refs got wrong. I knew the rule. I’ve spent decades playing, coaching, and studying this game. And yet there I was, frustrated, emotionally tangled in a back-and-forth that had nothing to do with our kids.  
  
I wasn’t loud. I wasn’t belligerent. But I was still part of the loudness. Caught in pride, in the need to be right. It wasn’t about basketball. It was about me. That’s what hit hardest.  
  
That’s when I realized I had become what I always swore I wouldn’t. Not just a parent in the stands, but a participant in the problem. I was supposed to know better. I do know better. But knowing isn’t always enough.  
  
That day, I wasn’t coaching. I was watching. But I wasn’t removed. I was entangled. And it took my son’s fear to shake me loose.  
  
The ride home wasn’t quiet, but it wasn’t loud either. It was reflective. I didn’t make a vow in that moment. I didn’t know yet what I was building. I just knew something had to change. Because once you hear your child’s breath catch in fear, you’ll do anything to help them breathe freely again.  
  
And it wasn’t long before I realized that what happened to Cole that day? It wasn’t just happening to him.  
  
This is happening everywhere. Every weekend. In every gym. At every tournament. And the people causing it? We think we’re helping. But we’re not. We say it’s about development, but what are we really developing?  
  
That was the beginning of what would eventually become Max Potential. Not because I had the answers, but because I had questions. And the more I asked, the more I peeled back.  
  
Layer by layer.  
  
And what made it harder was that I recognized my own fingerprints. I had been that coach. I had coached through control. I had dictated instead of guided. I thought if I knew enough, if I was smart enough, if I explained it clearly enough, kids would just listen.  
  
But they don’t care what you know if it’s not for them.  
  
That’s what broke me open.  
  
Jay’s line kept echoing in my head: Things just ain’t the same for gangstas.  
  
And they’re not. Not for coaches. Not for parents. Not for kids.  
  
We’re in a new era. And most of us haven’t caught up. I had to learn that the hard way.  
  
So I started studying—not to coach better, but to love better.  
  
Late nights. YouTube spirals. Articles. Academic journals. Coaching videos. Podcasts. Course after course. And what I found wasn’t what I expected. I was being taught the game I grew up with by a group of people I never imagined would be my teachers—British guys and a Canadian dude. But they weren’t just showing drills. They were teaching learning.  
  
It felt like everything I knew about coaching got rewired.  
  
I was introduced to ecological dynamics. The constraints-led approach. Repetition without repetition. Perception-action coupling. Differential learning. Words I had never used, but concepts I had lived. This wasn’t a gimmick. It was a return to something I had forgotten.  
  
Because this way of learning? It’s not new. It’s ancient. It’s how kids learned in the 70s, 80s, and 90s—on the blacktop. On the playground. Through exploration. Through adaptation. Through play.  
  
What was old is new again.  
  
And I dove in.  
  
Not because I needed something else to study. But because I needed to change. I had to unlearn before I could teach differently. And once I saw it, I couldn’t unsee it.  
  
That’s when Max Potential started to form. Not as a brand. As a belief. A belief that there is a better way to train, a better way to coach, a better way to raise kids through sport.  
  
Because Cole is still watching.  
And his little brother Lennox is too.  
  
And I’ll be damned if I don’t give them something better.  
  
Not just drills. Not just wins.  
  
Freedom.  
  
Freedom to play. Freedom to fail. Freedom to discover who they are through the game.  
  
That’s the mission now.  
  
Because this system we’ve built? This system that trades joy for pressure, curiosity for control, becoming for branding?  
  
It’s not just broken.  
  
It’s breaking kids.  
  
And I can’t unsee that.  
  
Just like I couldn’t unsee what happened to Max.  
  
When we got the news of his final relapse, we started looking for anything that might help. There was an experimental treatment in Texas. We lined up an Airbnb. The world had just shut down from COVID, but we were going to make the trip anyway. We even had a friend of a friend with a private jet lined up. That’s how far we were willing to go to save his life.  
  
So when I think about Cole sitting in the passenger seat beside me, not breathing right before a basketball game? When I think about how many kids are breaking in silence, and how many parents feel lost watching it happen?  
  
Of course I’m going to rebuild something new.  
  
Of course I’m going to question everything I once believed about this game.  
  
I’m not here for tradition.  
  
I’m here for transformation.  
  
I’m not trying to burn it down. I’m trying to build something real.  
  
But if the old model needs fire to make room for something better?  
  
Then light the match.