# Chapter 3: Cold Rain

“I know where I’m going, even when it’s dark.” — Talib Kweli

There’s a kind of darkness that doesn’t come from pain—it comes from not knowing. A fog. A weightless disorientation. That’s what that season felt like. The 12–13 season at Ranney. We weren’t losing in blowouts. We weren’t falling apart. But something was off. Practices were loud, but not productive. Players showed up, but didn’t grow. I coached hard—but it didn’t land.  
  
And at the end of it all, I was tired.  
  
Not tired like needing sleep. Tired like questioning everything. Tired like looking in the mirror and not recognizing the coach staring back at me. I had built a style—built an identity. But it wasn’t working. And for the first time in my life, I didn’t have answers.  
  
That’s when the rain started.  
  
Cold, silent, unsettling.  
  
And I sat in it. I didn’t run from it. Because something in me knew: this was a necessary storm.  
  
Late nights turned into research binges. I wasn’t looking for trends—I was looking for truth. I found Chris Oliver first. Then Alex Sarama. Then Rob Gray. Academic work I wouldn’t have touched in college suddenly became my lifeline. They weren’t preaching. They were revealing. Ecological Dynamics. Constraints-Led Approach. Perception-action coupling. Repetition without repetition. These weren’t buzzwords. They were blueprints.  
  
And more than anything—they made sense.  
  
But sense isn’t simplicity. Applying them was hard. I remember trying to explain the concept of affordances to a group of middle schoolers—and watching their eyes glaze over. I remember building small-sided games that fell flat. I remember feeling like I was learning to coach all over again.  
  
And in many ways, I was.  
  
I had to unlearn decades of control. I had to kill the coach-as-commander in me. I had to stop chasing perfection and start designing for adaptation. The goal wasn’t execution. It was emergence.  
  
But when you discover something that powerful, the temptation is to become a preacher. To tell everyone they’re doing it wrong. And I almost did. I almost ruined the revelation by needing to be right.  
  
That’s the hill I almost died on.  
  
CLA felt like salvation—and I wanted everyone to convert. But then I looked around. And I realized the coaches I respected most didn’t evangelize. They experimented. They stayed humble. They stayed curious.  
  
So I quieted down.  
  
I stopped trying to prove I knew something.  
  
I started trying to build something.  
  
Max Potential wasn’t born to be a brand. It was born to be a system—a system that mirrored how humans actually learn. Not through memorization. Through movement. Through interaction. Through mistakes.  
  
Development, real development, isn’t clean.  
  
It’s chaotic.  
  
It’s messy and unpredictable and beautiful. Just like the game itself.  
  
That’s what CLA taught me. That my job isn’t to perfect the player. It’s to build the environment. To shape the space. To guide the chaos—not control it.  
  
Because control is an illusion. And the sooner you let it go, the better your players will become.  
  
It’s not about being “right.” It’s about being aligned.  
  
Aligned with how kids learn. Aligned with the complexity of the game. Aligned with the humanity of each player who walks into the gym.  
  
And that alignment? That’s clarity. That’s peace.  
  
Even when it rains.  
  
Even when it’s dark.  
  
Because I know where I’m going now.  
  
Not because I have all the answers.  
  
But because I’ve stopped pretending I need them.  
  
That’s what real coaching is. That’s what real leadership is.  
  
It’s not about being seen as the smartest in the room.  
  
It’s about building a room where others learn how to think for themselves.  
  
And when I see that in my players?  
  
When I see them adapt, adjust, solve, smile?  
  
I know I’m doing it right.  
  
Even in the cold rain.  
  
Especially then.