# Chapter 5: HiiiPoWeR

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

The gym was loud.  
  
Not joyful loud. Not the buzz of energy or the rhythm of sneakers and ball. It was oppressive. The kind of loud that makes your shoulders tighten. Adults barking. Kids bracing. Pressure masquerading as purpose.  
  
“He’s gotta be a dawg,” the man said to another adult nearby. “You can’t teach dawg.” Then he turned to another kid—the biggest kid on his team—who had just missed a layup, and yelled, “That’s the softest layup I’ve ever seen.”  
  
And yet, I recognized it. Because I had done it too.  
  
In fact, I’m still doing it.  
  
And if you’re reading this, I’m probably still doing it.  
  
I’m a work in progress. And that’s the point.  
  
I haven’t used phrases like “this ain’t daycare,” and I’ve never praised a player for finally showing toughness. But I’ve coached in ways that reflect those same values without using the words. I’ve made substitutions with body language. I’ve let my silence do the shouting. I’ve rewarded conformity without naming it, and punished risk with my facial expression. That’s still coaching through fear. That’s still noise.  
  
Cole didn’t hyperventilate. He didn’t collapse or cry. But he couldn’t eat. He was biting his fingernails more than usual, his shoulders were tight, and his answers were short. That’s what fear looks like in a nine-year-old. That’s what performance culture feels like before a fourth-grade game.  
  
So I made a shift.  
  
Not away from competition—but away from competition that prioritized exposure over experience.  
  
There’s a tournament circuit out there, run by a well-known figure in the grassroots scene. When Max was being treated for cancer, we signed him up for an experimental treatment—one that turned out to be the most painful he’d receive. The first session was on June 17th. My wife’s birthday. When I knew the pain was about to kick in, I asked her to go grab lunch—so she didn’t have to watch her son suffer on her birthday.  
  
Earlier that day, I had posted on what was then still called Twitter—about a coach caught up in the NCAA scandal. The Book Richardson case. I noted how light his sentence was given the charges—not because I wanted him in prison, but because the system came down hard on many and he got three months. I didn’t frame it well. It came off like I was advocating for punishment, when really, I wasn’t advocating anything. I was grieving, posting, venting.  
  
This gentleman—the one who runs the tournaments—called me. Not to ask for clarity. Not to check in. He called during Max’s treatment. While my son screamed and I tried to comfort him, I missed the call. When I called back, he cussed me out over speakerphone—my wife sitting beside me, Max finally asleep in pain. He hung up before I could explain.  
  
And this? This is who we let run the system. Who decides what development looks like. Who gets the platform, the power, the clout.  
  
That’s why I stopped showing up for their events.  
  
I don’t speak on this much. Not on main. Not on the app. I’ve talked about it in private conversations with other coaches learning through CLA. I don’t preach it. I share it. Some get it. Some don’t. Some aren’t ready yet. And that’s okay.  
  
This work isn’t loud. It’s layered.  
  
I’ve seen enough. I’ve lost enough. I’ve built enough now to know: I’m not here to be right. I’m here to be aligned.  
  
So I design practice differently.  
  
I plan differently.  
  
I sit differently on the sideline.  
  
Not because it’s trendy. Not because it’s efficient.  
  
Because it’s the only thing I trust now to keep kids safe from what broke mine.  
  
Not everyone gets that. But the ones who need to?  
  
They feel it.  
  
And if they don’t now, they will.

## Chapter Style Rationale

This chapter carries a tone of sober clarity and emotional conviction. It's not about convincing the reader—it’s about documenting the decision to walk away from an environment that cost too much. The voice is weathered but grounded. This isn’t a sermon—it’s a stand. Structurally, it is anchored in a blend of storytelling and call-out, moving from a charged sideline scene to personal testimony to systemic critique.  
  
Unlike earlier chapters that lingered in reflection, this one moves with purpose—because the author isn’t discovering truth anymore. He’s walking in it. The style reflects that shift. Short, honest sentences. No dressing it up. Just the truth, standing there in gym shoes.