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*

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.