



## TRAINING ROOM

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Although Coach Dunn was glad to be leaving the situation with Learie’s dad, he dreaded what awaited him as he headed toward the athletic training room.

“How’s Jaylen?” Coach Dunn asked Angela.

Angela had been the Eagles’ trainer for many years. She was very good at what she did. Angela was knowledgeable and extremely caring. She had a great mix of personality and wisdom. She could put players and coaches at ease but also knew where the boundaries were. She was a true professional and the Eagles were lucky to have her.

“It’s not good,” Angela replied. “We won’t know for certain until tomorrow when we can get an MRI, but I’m guessing that it’s completely torn, and he’ll miss the remainder of the season.”

This was not the news Coach was hoping for. The season had been challenging enough with Jaylen running the point guard position and doing all he could to help the team. He was someone that always did what coach asked and he did it with a smile. He wasn’t the most gifted, but he was smart, tough, and had a positive attitude. It seemed like everyone liked Jaylen. It still amazed him that Jaylen and Learie were roommates. They seemed to be polar opposites with their attitudes and sense of responsibility.

“I’m really sorry about this Jaylen. Hang in there, buddy,” said Coach Dunn.

“I just can’t believe my season might be over. This hasn’t been a good year, but I was determined to do all I could to help us on the court to finish strong,” said Jaylen.

“I know that. Let’s wait and see what the doctor says tomorrow,” said Coach Dunn. “But, if it’s torn and you’re out for the rest of the season, you can still help us turn this season around. We only have about six weeks left but there are enough games for us to finish strong. You might not be able to lead from the court, but you can certainly lead from the bench.”

“Thanks, coach. I will do what I can.”

“I know you will. You control the controllable, Jaylen, and you definitely know how to bring the energy and positivity to the team. You can do that wherever you’re at, whether it be the court or the bench.”

Angela brought over some crutches and handed them to Jaylen.

“I think Jaylen can serve as a good role model for the team,” she said. “And you’re right he’ll provide enthusiasm and energy even though he isn’t playing. I think he can be infectious, but in a good way.”

Coach Dunn shook his head in agreement and patted Jaylen on the back, “I’ll see you on the bus.”

After Coach Dunn had left the training room to go to the media center, Angela, Jaylen, and Travis were the only Eagles remaining in the training room.

“I can’t believe that you got hurt,” Travis said from another training table. “You bring so much energy to the team. You’ve got to be the hardest worker I’ve ever been around. Your effort is incredible. Day in and day out, it doesn’t matter.”

“I appreciate that, Travis. But I don’t do anything special. I’ve just always played hard because I knew that one day my basketball career

would be over, and I didn't want to look back and have any regrets. Looks like my season might be over a little sooner than expected but I still have no regrets other than I wasn't able to help us get more wins."

"You did what you could," said Travis. "But maybe the season isn't over. Maybe you'll just be out for like a week or something."

"Hope so but the reality is that Angela is pretty good at what she does, and she has prepared me for the possibility that I'm done. She thinks that even if it isn't officially torn all the way, that it might be difficult to come back from this in the month or so we have left in the season. I'm starting to prepare myself mentally that this is probably it for me."

Jaylen was tough and had a good attitude, but it was obvious that the thought of missing the remainder of the season was hard on him. He was trying to stay optimistic around Travis. He knew that Travis looked up to him ever since Jaylen hosted Travis on a recruiting visit last year. Travis came from a good background. He was a solid player and a good student. Jaylen could see a little bit of himself in Travis as he didn't excel at anything but also didn't have many obvious flaws.

"You're the energy for our team. I'm not sure what we'll do without you. It certainly won't be the same," said Travis.

"But it can be. What I bring to the team is probably the easiest skill a person can have. Giving consistent effort and providing energy is something that anyone can do regardless of size, athletic ability, status on the team, or shooting ability," Jaylen pointed out.

"You say that but if it's so easy, why don't more players bust their tail like you do?" Travis asked.

"That's a great question," said Jaylen. "Unfortunately, I was never very big or fast. I also was not as naturally gifted shooting the ball like James or Antonio. I had to find other ways to make myself valuable. Certainly, I knew a positive attitude could help but I had to do more. I had to go further than that. I had to find a way to turn that positive

attitude into a basketball skill. I figured that I could outwork other people.”

Jaylen adjusted the ice pack on his knee before continuing his answer.

“I figured I could hustle on the court. I could be aggressive. If I got into shape and stayed in shape, then I’d be able to do these things much longer than someone else. When other players got tired, I’d be the one getting rebounds, deflections, steals, and outrunning people down the court. I might not be good enough to score on people in the half-court, but if they were tired or loafing then I could gain an edge. It’s worked well for me through the years.”

“I wish that I could do what you do.”

Jaylen responded to Travis, “That’s the thing. What I do shouldn’t be special. Anyone can do it. You definitely can do it. It’s a mentality. It’s me saying every day that I will be the last one to quit. It’s me saying that I will get every loose ball. It’s me saying that I’m going to fire up our team through my play on the court.”

Though Travis hadn’t really thought of all this in the way Jaylen was explaining it, Travis was locked in on what he was saying. It sounded so simple as he listened to Jaylen break it down.

“I always think in terms of what can I do today that will bring us momentum?” continued Jaylen. “You can do that very thing also. It’s baby steps. You build habits practice after practice and play after play. It starts with just deciding that you want to be a person that puts forth effort and brings energy.”

“But I don’t really play much,” Travis stated.

“How we perform in games is usually a direct reflection of how we’ve prepared,” Jaylen responded. “You build habits daily, not in just a day. You can decide today that you will be this way but then each day, you have to recommit to that mentality and go out and do it. Touching the lines on sprints instead of turning six inches too soon, not standing up on defense, sprinting the floor every time regardless if

you'll get the ball, or blocking out on every shot are just some of the ways you can become this kind of player. It starts in practice and will eventually become automatic for you."

"I definitely could improve in those areas."

"We all can do better," admitted Jaylen. "It's easy to be a spectator and watch shots go up without hitting the boards. But when we have a mentality that every shot is a miss, then it's easier to rebound. Some players struggle when they aren't getting shots, or they're playing with a ball hog. Playing with a ball hog can actually be good."

That last statement threw Travis for a loop and confused him.

"Wait, what? How's that possible? I've got to hear this one."

"Well, think about it," Jaylen said. "If a ball hog shoots the ball, then two things could happen. First, the ball goes in the basket, which is a good thing for our team. Our team scored and that's what we should be wanting on every possession. The second thing that can happen is the ball hog misses the shot. If this happens just think of their shot as a pass to you. It just happened to hit the rim or the backboard first. If you have a ball hog that misses five, six, seven, or even more shots in a game then that's a lot of opportunities for you to go get an extra basket. That's also probably more opportunities than the number of plays Coach will call for you during the course of the game. It's really just a mindset. Hustle is a talent and I'm going find every way possible to cash in on that talent."

"I never really thought of that stuff," said Travis.

"Even the best shooter will be off some nights. There will be some days when the ball just doesn't bounce our way. But my hustle and effort will never have an off night. I determine my effort. Not the coach, not the officials, not my teammates, and not the circumstances. I'm the only one that can control how hard I work," Jaylen pointed out.

“Even though I’m a freshman riding the bench, I think that I can start applying some of this stuff you said. I’m going to try it,” said Travis.

“When I was a freshman, I experienced some of the same things that you may be struggling with,” said Jaylen. “It was a big jump up in level of play and some of the things I did in high school didn’t work as easily at this level. I wasn’t playing as much as maybe I expected coming out of high school. Let me tell you what Coach did my freshman year that I’ll never forget.”