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# PREPARATION

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*“We don't rise to the level of our expectations, we fall to the level of our training.”*

~ **Archilochus**

*“One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation.”*

~ **Arthur Ashe**

*“There were other players who were more talented, but there was no one who could outprepare me. And because of that I have no regrets.”*

~ **Peyton Manning**

*“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”*

~ **Abraham Lincoln**

*“Good luck is the residue of preparation.”*

~ **Jack Youngblood**

At the age of 3, Jason McElwain was diagnosed with severe autism. Now, as an adult, McElwain has become a renowned author and public speaker. He has completed the Boston Marathon. He is also a public advocate for autism research. McElwain has overcome obstacles his entire life to get to where he is at today. A pivotal moment in McElwain's life was made possible by his preparation. When McElwain's chance came he capitalized on it and that changed the course of his life forever. <sup>1</sup>

McElwain did not talk until he was 5 years old. His first words were “Big Bird.” Up until age 6 he

wore diapers and could not chew. In junior high, McElwain grew to love basketball. Practicing and learning everything he could about basketball became his life. McElwain eagerly anticipated when he would have the chance to try out for his junior high's basketball team.

Unfortunately, McElwain did not make his junior high team, but he was given the position of student-manager. Despite his wishes to play, he was happy for each one of his teammates and cheered on the team with all of his heart. After helping out with the practices, on McElwain would then travel to his local YMCA to work on his shooting and dribbling skills. McElwain became a basketball expert and could recite any fact about teams and the sport. McElwain did not let being cut from the team discourage him or take away his heart for the game; he continued to train, push on, and prepare.

On February 15, 2006 Greece Athena High School played Spencerport High School for the division title. This day would change McElwain's life forever. It would also be a night that the crowd wouldn't soon forget, either. Coach Jim Johnson was the head basketball coach at Greece Athena and McElwain was his manager. The team was up with a little more than four-minutes to go in the game. Coach Johnson then gave McElwain the chance he had been preparing 18 years for.

McElwain took a shot. He missed. He took another shot. He missed. McElwain remained steadfast and took another courageous shot ... and he made it! A three-point basket for the team's manager. McElwain continued shooting and made

five more three-point shots, as well as a two-pointer. The crowd rushed the court after the game and celebrated the triumph of this young man.

This heartwarming story made headlines and McElwain and Coach Johnson were bombarded with interview requests. Some of the first interviews were rough, but McElwain began to write out his speeches and practice them relentlessly and soon became an incredible speaker.

McElwain is now an author and public speaker, but he was once a boy who did not utter a word until he was 5. We cannot choose our circumstances, but we can choose your attitude, work rate, and level of preparation.

McElwain is always setting new goals for himself, so he set out to qualify for the Boston Marathon. Coach Johnson gave him a training regimen to reach the incredibly difficult qualifying time for his age of 3 hours and 2 minutes. McElwain placed 15<sup>th</sup> at the MVP Health Care Rochester Marathon with a finishing time of 3 hours 1 minute and 41 seconds. He completed the Boston Marathon in 2014 with a time of 2:57.05.

Whether it be in basketball, public speaking, or running a marathon when McElwain's big moments came his preparation enabled him to succeed. In order for McElwain to have his famous 4 minutes on the basketball court, he needed 18 years of grind and preparation first.

One of McElwain's teammates, Steve Kerr (no, not that Steve Kerr!) said "He motivates me daily. I think he is out there at 5 in the morning, when it's snowing in Rochester, training for the Boston

Marathon. You see him pushing and making the most of every day. He's still pushing forward and trying to overcome the next obstacle."

Jason McElwain did not make excuses because of his disability and did not settle for the expectations of others, he prepared and when life finally gave him a window of opportunity he shined through it.

How about us? Are we ready for our opportunities when they come our way?

During the 2017 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, Kentucky and North Carolina went back and forth for 40 minutes in an Elite Eight game. When Kentucky's freshman sensation Malik Monk hit a crazy, contested, off-balance three-pointer with 7.2 seconds remaining to tie the game, it looked like the fans would be treated to bonus basketball in this instant classic.

However, a former UNC walk-on had something else in mind. Luke Maye, who was averaging only 5.5 PPG while playing only 14 minutes per game, hit a buzzer beating jump shot to win the game for the TarHeels and send them to the Final Four. North Carolina would go on to win the National Championship. Luke Maye was the eighth-leading scorer for UNC. He was not quite the guy one would expect to be on the court in a crucial situation, let alone become an instant legend for a traditional powerhouse.

The year before, shortly after UNC's last-second loss to Villanova in the 2016 NCAA Championship game, Maye visited coach Roy Williams and vowed to work harder than any player in the program

during the offseason. Maye averaged just 1.2 points as a freshman. After his legendary shot, Maye commented about his improvement, "Coach always preaches sweat and putting in the time. I put a lot of hours in the gym doing the extra shooting, whatever it takes. I always wanted to be ready for a moment like this." 2

There is no guarantee that if we prepare then our chance will come; however, we can be certain that if we do not prepare then we will not be ready when our opportunity happens to come.

Noted philosopher and scholar, Captain Jack Sparrow from the Pirates of the Caribbean, made a statement that is very applicable to sports. He said, "The problem is not the problem. The problem is our attitude toward the problem."

A lot of players are going to get frustrated with their playing time. They are going to disagree with a coach. They are going to struggle in their relationships with teammates. Those are problems that will exist. However, the problem is our attitude toward those adversities. In the story below, two players had problems. One chose to maintain a positive attitude about the problem and the other choose to feel sorry for herself.

As a coach, I did not play a lot of players. My starters received the bulk of the minutes. This could cause some frustration for some of the reserves. However, it also showed me which players were team players and which players were more concerned about themselves. It also showed me which players would continue to work on their games and which would play the victim card, letting

the situation dictate their behavior.

In two separate years, I had backup shooting guards (we'll call them Becky and Sadaria). The one year, Becky was playing behind an All-American receiving very little playing time. She thought that she should be playing more and continued to work on her game. She wanted to be ready when her time came, which would eventually happen. The starter was hurt and could not play against a nationally-ranked team. Becky stepped in and scored a career-high 28 points on 7 three-pointers. She was ready for her opportunity.

In another year, a similar situation emerged and Sadaria then got her chance to show me what she was capable of. She scored zero points in 28 minutes of playing time. She did not add much of value in any other areas either. This was not surprising because once she realized that she was not going to play much, she stopped working on her game. Every day after practice she would be one of the first to leave. She was not prepared for her opportunity and then proved me right as a coach.

Are we preparing for future opportunities? Are we ready and prepared like team manager Jason McElwain or UNC walk-on Luke Maye? Are we feeling sorry for ourselves or letting opportunities pass us by? We all have challenges. We all want things now. Remember that the problem is not the problem. The problem is our attitude toward our problem. Champions prepare the same day in and day out, regardless of when, how, or if the opportunities will come.