

— A PLACE WHERE — **LEADERS ARE BUILT**

*Does My Contribution
Make A Difference?*

What Small-Town Football Still Gets Right



Where Responsibility Is Real, Standards Are Clear.
— Leadership is Earned. —

Coach Craig Ball

A PLACE WHERE LEADERS ARE BUILT

What Small-Town Football Still Gets Right

Coach Craig Ball

Executive Director, The All-State Foundation

The Colorado 8-Man All-State Football Game

The All-State Foundation

A 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organization

www.allstatefootball.org

To every player who showed up when it would have been easier not to.

To the coaches who stayed after the lights went out and came back the next morning.

To the parents who trusted us with their sons.

And to the supporters who believed this work was worth protecting.

This book is for all of you.

— Coach Ball

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

What Small-Town Football Still Gets Right

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Published by The All-State Foundation

Black Hawk, Colorado

www.allstatefootball.org

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The views expressed reflect the personal experience and professional judgment of the author. This book is not a solicitation for donations. All giving decisions should be made based on your own due diligence.

First Edition, 2026

Printed in the United States of America

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

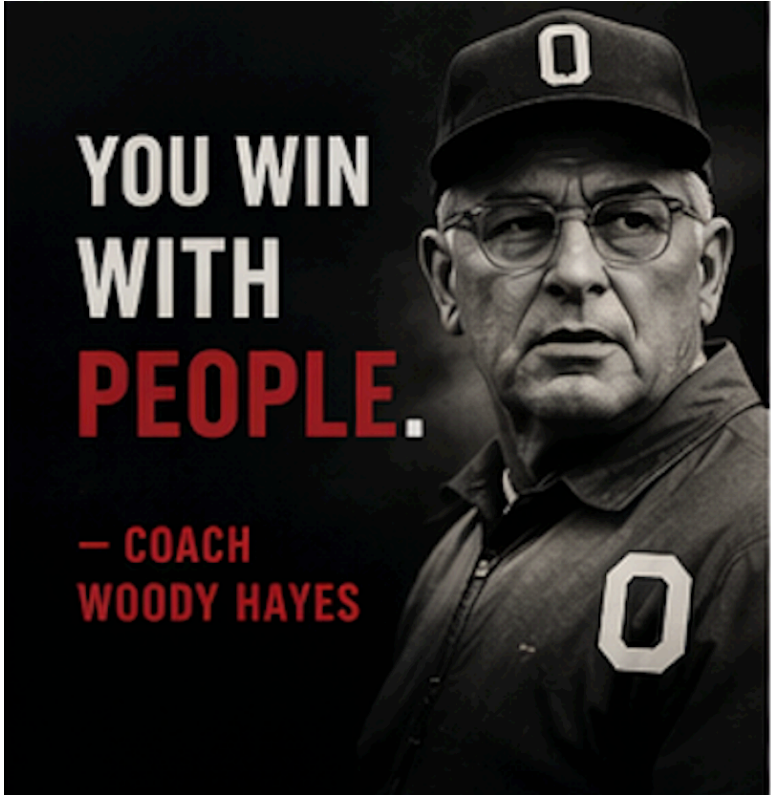


*Colorado's
8-Man All-State Football Game*



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Players, Coaches, Donors, and Parents Speak up about the All-State Game

"Heading up the coaching staff for the 2022 All-State Game was more than just leading a team on the field. I saw young men from small towns across Colorado come together to make their communities proud. The dedication and drive these players exhibited reinforced my belief that the game of football can play a significant role in shaping young men as leaders after high school. It was a great game decided on the game's final play."

JD Stone — Team North Head Coach, 2022 Game |
Head Coach, Haxtun Bulldogs | 2021, 2024, and 2025
Colorado 8-Man Football State Champions

"I used to think sponsoring sports programs was just a 'feel-good' expense. But after supporting the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game, I realized it's much more than that. Not only did our business get in front of a passionate community, but we also became part of something bigger. Helping small-town athletes get the recognition they deserve. It's not just an ad in a program. It's an investment in the future of the game."

David Sechler — Sechler Architecture LLC | 2021–
2025 Game Sponsor, Black Hawk, Colorado

"I remember thinking my high school football career was over, and I'd never get another shot to compete at a high level. But getting invited to the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game changed everything. The intensity, the coaching, and playing alongside the best in the state gave me a chance to prove myself one last time. It wasn't just a game. It was a brotherhood, and an experience I'll never forget."

Liam Buettenback — Team North, Sedgwick County HS | DE/G MVP, 2024 All-State Game

"Investing in community-building initiatives is a high priority for us. Partnering with The All-State Foundation for the All-State Game was a good fit with our company. The All-State Game, and its Foundation, is transforming the football field into a training ground for young leaders. We're thrilled to be part of building our young men into the leaders of the future."

Frank Stark — US Tarp Inc., Colorado | 2022–2024 Game Sponsor

"I've coached a lot of games, but there's something different about this one. The energy, the passion, the way these kids come together in just a few days. It's special. The Colorado 8-Man All-State Game isn't just a showcase. It's a celebration of what small-town football is all about. I came in as a coach, but I left with new friendships, new memories, and a renewed love for the game."

David Guy — Team South Head Coach, 2024 | Head Coach, Simla Cubs

"My name is Craig Bowker, parent of Brent Bowker, who was very fortunate to have the experience of the 8-Man All-State Game in 2024. When the selection came about we were a little apprehensive because Brent had been chosen for a few all-star events in different sports and many of those were frankly a joke. Well let me tell you, if my words can sway you then listen to me. This game is no joke. The host goes all out and does it for the kids. The level of competition is top notch. These kids are the best of the best. The atmosphere is truly awesome watching kids that were rivals become

teammates. My son said, 'The 8-Man All-State Game was the most positive fun time I ever had on a football field.' To me that says a bunch because he is just finishing his freshman year playing tight end in college. He absolutely loved it and he would encourage all those chosen to take this opportunity to grow as a football player, a teammate, and a human being. It truly is a special moment for the player. Trust me, they still want to win so there were pads popping. It was a football game, not an all-star walk around. I thank all those that work so hard for these kids and encourage all that can to help keep this program funded and going strong. First class events are rare and so valuable."

Craig Bowker — All-State Game Parent | Brent Bowker #17, 2024 Game, Simla High School

"After my last high school game, I thought that was it. I'd never put the pads on again. The thought crushed me. Then I got the call for the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game. One more chance. One more game. One more shot to prove myself. That week changed

everything. The competition, the friendships, the way we came together as a team. It was the perfect way to end my high school career. If you get the opportunity to play in this game, take it."

Rene' Dominguez — Team North, West Grand High School | RB/CB, 2021 All-State Game

"Every year, I pour everything I have into my team. Then the season ends, and it's over. But coaching in the Colorado 8-Man All-State Game gave me a chance to be part of something special. Watching the best small-school athletes in Colorado come together and compete at an elite level. These kids don't take a second for granted. They show up, they battle, and they leave it all on the field. It reminded me why I love this game so much."

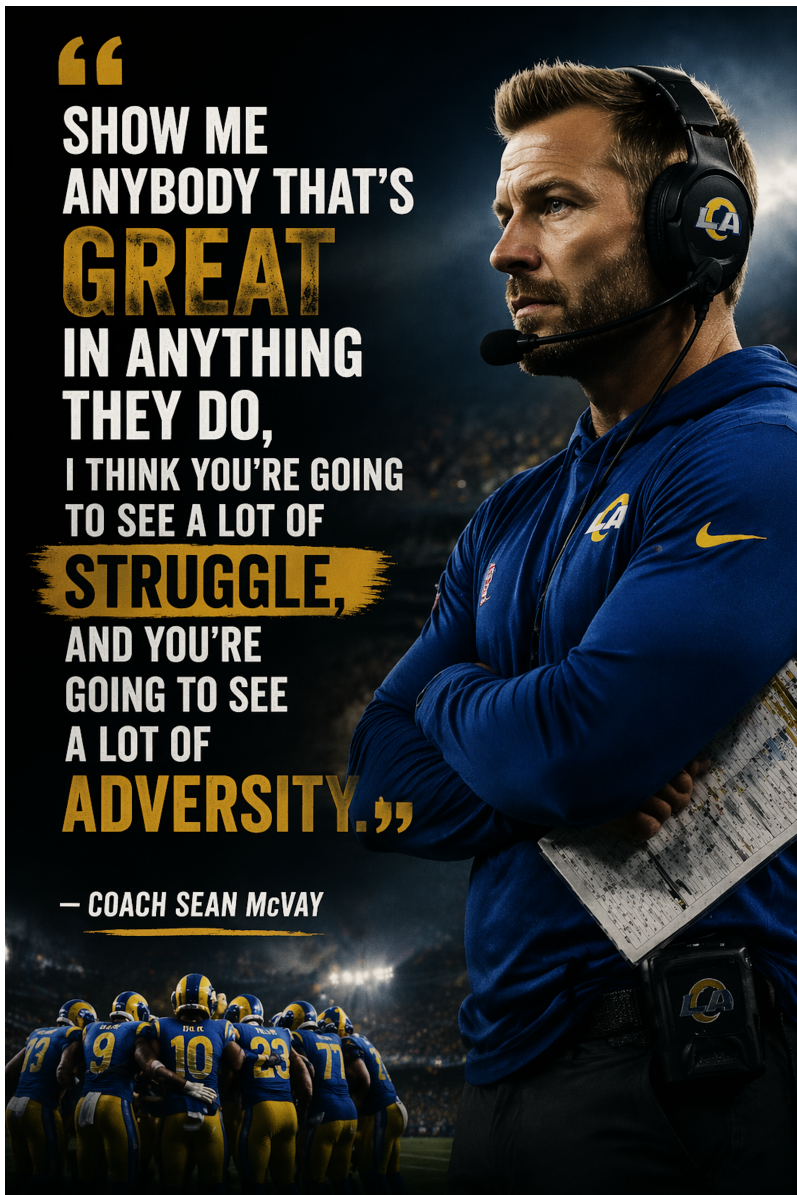
Dan Hiltz — Team South Head Coach, 2021 | Team South Assistant Coach, 2024 | Head Coach, Swink

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

“

SHOW ME
ANYBODY THAT'S
GREAT
IN ANYTHING
THEY DO,
I THINK YOU'RE GOING
TO SEE A LOT OF
STRUGGLE,
AND YOU'RE
GOING TO SEE
A LOT OF
ADVERSITY.”

— **COACH SEAN McVAY**







A Note from the Author

I'll be straight with you. I am not a writer. I am a football coach. I have spent more years than I can count on practice fields and in film rooms in small-town Colorado. Writing a book was never part of the plan.

But I kept running into people who wanted to support what we were doing and did not fully understand why we do the work we do as coaches. When thoughtful people kept asking these questions, I realized the problem was that nobody had taken the time to explain it honestly.

So that is what I tried to do here.

I started the All-State Foundation because the communities doing this work the right way needed more than a pat on the back. They needed real support from people who actually get what is at stake. But I was not going to ask anyone for that kind of support without first giving them a real answer to the question they were asking.

This book is an attempt to answer those questions. Does my contribution really matter?

This book is direct and plain. It is built around what I have seen and lived over a long career around young men figuring out who they are and how they can move to new levels of achievement past high school.

If something in here hits home for you, reach out. I mean that. The people who care about this stuff are worth knowing and I have always learned more from those conversations than from anything I could have put on a page.

— *Coach Ball, Executive Director, The All-State Foundation*

About the Author

Coach Ball has spent his adult life in environments where responsibility carried real consequences.

Raised in a Southeast Texas football program and coached by Texas Hall of Fame coach Ed Peveto, he learned early that standards matter. He later carried those lessons into the business world, earning his MBA in the Big Ten, where accountability, systems, and disciplined decision-making were reinforced at a different scale.

Before becoming a teacher and football coach, he spent more than two decades as a business owner and operator in Colorado's highly regulated casino industry. Working inside one of the most demanding compliance environments in the country, he learned that leadership requires accountability, discipline, and the ability to make clear decisions under pressure.

Those years shaped how he understands systems, people, and trust. In regulated gaming, standards are

mandatory. Preparation matters. Mistakes are visible. Outcomes are real. The margin for error is small, and responsibility cannot be delegated away.

Later, as a father, high school teacher, and football coach in a small mountain community, those same lessons reappeared in a different form. In classrooms and on football fields, leadership showed up in expectations. Whether young people were asked to prepare, to be accountable to others, and to respond honestly when things did not go their way. Coaching reinforced a simple truth: when standards are clear and adults stay present, young people rise to the occasion.

Coach Ball is the founder and executive director of the Colorado 8-Man All-State Football Game and the Foundation that runs it, created to recognize and reinforce leadership already being built in small-town programs across the state. The game is intentionally designed as a leadership environment. One that concentrates responsibility, accountability, and earned trust at a critical moment in a young man's life.

He has also been directly involved in building and improving the physical infrastructure that supports these communities, including the development of local athletic facilities. For him, place matters. Environments shape behavior. Standards live in policies, but also in the spaces where people gather and work together.

Across business, family, education, and sport, Coach Ball has seen the same pattern repeat: **leadership is rare because the conditions that build it are increasingly uncommon.**

This book reflects what he has learned across those worlds. Leadership is built slowly, honestly, and in full view of others. When we find places where that still happens, they are worth protecting.





Pre-Game Talk

Most people who give generously already understand money. They understand success. They have built something real. They have earned what they have. And at some point, a quiet question changes how they think about giving altogether.

Is my contribution actually making a difference?

They already know they were thanked. They already saw their name on the banner. The real question is whether what they gave changed anything that will still matter ten years from now.

This book is for people who care about that question. If you read nothing beyond this section, you will have the whole picture. The rest of the book goes deeper into each idea. But everything that matters starts right here.

The Problem

Leadership is one of the most over-taught and under-built skills in modern life. There are workshops, certifications, retreats, and online courses for every age and profession. Entire industries exist to teach people how to lead. And yet fewer people are actually prepared to do it when it counts.

That is because leadership is built through responsibility. Always has been.

Responsibility forces decisions. Decisions carry consequences. Consequences, handled honestly, shape judgment, character, and self-respect. You cannot download that from a course. You cannot pick it up at a weekend seminar. You have to live it.

Most leadership programs today are designed to be safe. They avoid discomfort. They avoid real stakes. Participants share, reflect, and collaborate. Those are valuable things. But rarely is anyone placed in a situation where other people depend on them to perform. Real leadership begins when your actions matter to people beyond yourself. When others are affected by your preparation, your focus, and your willingness to endure pressure.

Young people, especially young men, do not need more explanations. They need expectations. Clear standards. Clear consequences. Adults who hold the line even when it would be easier not to.

When responsibility is removed, something else fills the gap. Anxiety. Entitlement. Indifference. None of those produce leaders.

Leadership is forged when three things are present at the same time.

First, clear standards, where what is expected and why it matters are understood.

Second, real risk and reward, where success and failure both count.

Third, guidance from adults who stay present, not rescuing and not abandoning.

Remove any one of those and leadership formation breaks down.

The Place

Small-town football is one of the last environments in America where all three of those conditions still exist.

The reason it works has nothing to do with resources or facilities. It works because nothing stays hidden.

In a small community, visibility is unavoidable. Everyone knows who you are. Your effort is seen. Your mistakes are remembered. Your growth is noticed.

There is no anonymity. When young men realize that their actions do not disappear when they leave the field, they start to understand that effort, attitude, and reliability follow them into classrooms, jobs, and family life.

Accountability becomes real. Enforced from the inside, by the player himself.

In larger systems, responsibility is distributed so widely that it dissolves. In small towns, responsibility concentrates. A missed assignment matters. A lack of preparation shows. A failure to respond affects the whole group. Because the group is small, no one is easily replaced. That creates something rare: **earned importance**. Young men learn that they matter because other people depend on them.

Small-town football also resists specialization too early. Athletes play multiple roles. A player might be a captain, a student, a teammate, a sibling, and an employee all in the same week. That overlap produces maturity. You do not get to be one version of yourself on

the field and another version everywhere else. Character has to be consistent.

Coaches in these communities are not interchangeable technicians. They are long-term fixtures. They attend the same churches. They shop at the same stores. They know families across generations. Their authority comes from showing up year after year and doing what they said they would do. When a coach sets a standard in a small town, it does not stay in the locker room. It echoes through the community.

Failure in small-town football is different too. There is no disappearing into the crowd after a bad performance. Losses are discussed. Mistakes are remembered. Recovery is visible. This matters more than most people realize. Because anyone can lead when things are going well. The real test comes when they go sideways, and in a small town, everyone sees how you handle it.

Perhaps most importantly, small-town football preserves something modern culture is quietly losing: **intergenerational accountability**. Parents,

teachers, coaches, and community members are not operating in separate worlds. They reinforce expectations together. In a small community, young people know that standards are consistent, not situational. That coherence is rare. And it is powerful.

The Multiplier

The All-State Game takes everything those communities build and concentrates it into one defining moment.

By the time a young man reaches the end of high school, his football leadership formation has already happened. He has been tested. He has been counted on. He has been outmatched. He has failed publicly and learned how to respond. What remains at this stage is integration. Pulling it all together under pressure. That is where the All-State Game matters.

People assume the game is a reward. A final honor. Recognition matters, but the deeper purpose is the challenge. The game is designed to test who a young man is becoming.

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

Selection carries a message: You are trusted. You showed up, carried responsibility, and responded when pressure arrived. That earned you a seat at this table.

Athletes are removed from familiar systems. Comfort is reduced. They room with players they have never met. Standards are elevated. They are asked to integrate quickly, to communicate, and to perform alongside peers they have never played beside. In this setting, reputation resets. No one coasts on past success. Respect must be earned again through preparation, humility, and effort.

That design is intentional. Leadership shows up most clearly when familiarity is removed.

The power of the All-State Game comes from concentration. Years of leadership formation compressed into a short, demanding window. Expectations are clear. Feedback is immediate. Consequences are real. There is no time to pretend. Growth accelerates.

The timing matters. At 18, young men stand at the edge of independence. Decisions become theirs. Standards become internal. Character becomes portable. A moment that reinforces responsibility, accountability, and earned confidence at this stage does more than inspire. It anchors.

For many participants, the All-State Game becomes a reference point. A moment they return to when pressure shows up later in life. When work gets hard. When responsibility increases. When excuses are tempting. They remember who they were expected to be and who they proved they could become.

That is leadership multiplication.

The People Behind It

There are over 1,500 high schools in 30 states fielding football teams with fewer than 11 players. Small-town football programs have increased and have grown 12 percent in recent years, even as big-school numbers

have quietly declined. Small towns are not walking away from football. They are leaning into it.

Behind every one of those programs is a coach who teaches all day, walks across the parking lot when the bell rings, and runs practice until dark. He drives the bus to away games because no one else will. He does it on a stipend that does not come close to justifying the hours. He does it because those are his kids, and because the football field is one of the few places left where a young man can learn what it actually costs to be part of something bigger than himself.

He rarely works alone. His assistant coaches are volunteers. A former lineman who now runs the grain elevator. A local farmer who was all-state twenty years back. They show up every day, unpaid, because the program needs them and because they understand something simple: these young men need adults in their lives who show up by choice. The players notice.

The Overtime section of this book tells that story in full. It is worth your time.

The Investment

The All-State Foundation currently serves 43 small 8-man high school football programs across Colorado. We provide high-tech helmet grants to improve player safety, academic scholarships for young men who earn them, coaching education to raise the standard of mentorship, and an annual All-State Game that brings roughly 50 of the state's best small-school players together for one defining week.

This model works. It works because it was built for small-town communities and the way they actually operate. Relationship-driven. Standards-based. Accountable to people, not paperwork.

Colorado is the proof of concept. Nebraska and Kansas are next. From there, Wyoming, Montana, the Dakotas, New Mexico, Utah. Eventually, the larger football states: Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, Florida. The challenges will be different. The mission stays the same. Find the environments where leadership is already

being built and reinforce them at the moment when it matters most.

There is a difference between giving and investing. A donation can relieve a moment. An investment shapes a future. When leadership is missing, resources get consumed and problems repeat. When leadership is present, resources compound and communities strengthen. That is why leadership formation matters more than almost anything else a donor can support.

Every dollar that supports this mission goes directly toward building leadership infrastructure in communities that rarely ask for help but always deliver results. Equipment grants keep players safe. Scholarships reward young men who lead by example. Coaching education raises the adults who set the standard. The All-State Game creates a moment of concentrated growth that stays with these young men for the rest of their lives.

If you are looking for a place where your support compounds quietly, in actual lives and actual communities, you now know what to look for.

What's Ahead in This Book

If this section gave you the picture, the chapters ahead let you walk the field.

1st Quarter: Leaders Are Formed Through Responsibility. A deeper look at why responsibility builds leaders and why most modern approaches get this backwards.

2nd Quarter: Why Small-Town Football Still Works. How visibility, accountability, and intergenerational standards create one of the last honest leadership environments in America.

3rd Quarter: The All-State Game as a Leadership Multiplier. How a single, concentrated experience at the right moment can anchor years of leadership formation into something that lasts a lifetime.

4th Quarter: If You Are Going to Give, Give Where It Multiplies. How thoughtful donors decide

where their money actually lands, and what separates support that fades from support that compounds.

Where This Is Going. The expansion plan from Colorado into 30 states and 1,500 programs that share the same DNA.

Overtime: The Small-Town Football Coach's Story. The coaches, the volunteers, and the communities doing this work every week without fanfare. If any part of this book stays with you, it will be this one.

What the Gaming Industry Taught Me

What did running a regulated casino teach you about accountability and leadership that you could not have learned anywhere else?

The Last Building Standing: Book Preview

The schools that hold standards are not making life harder for the sake of it. They are making sure the experience means something by the time it is over.

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

If you would like to learn more about how this work is done, you are welcome to continue the conversation. Quietly. Personally. On your terms.

That is how meaningful things tend to begin anyway.

Coach Ball

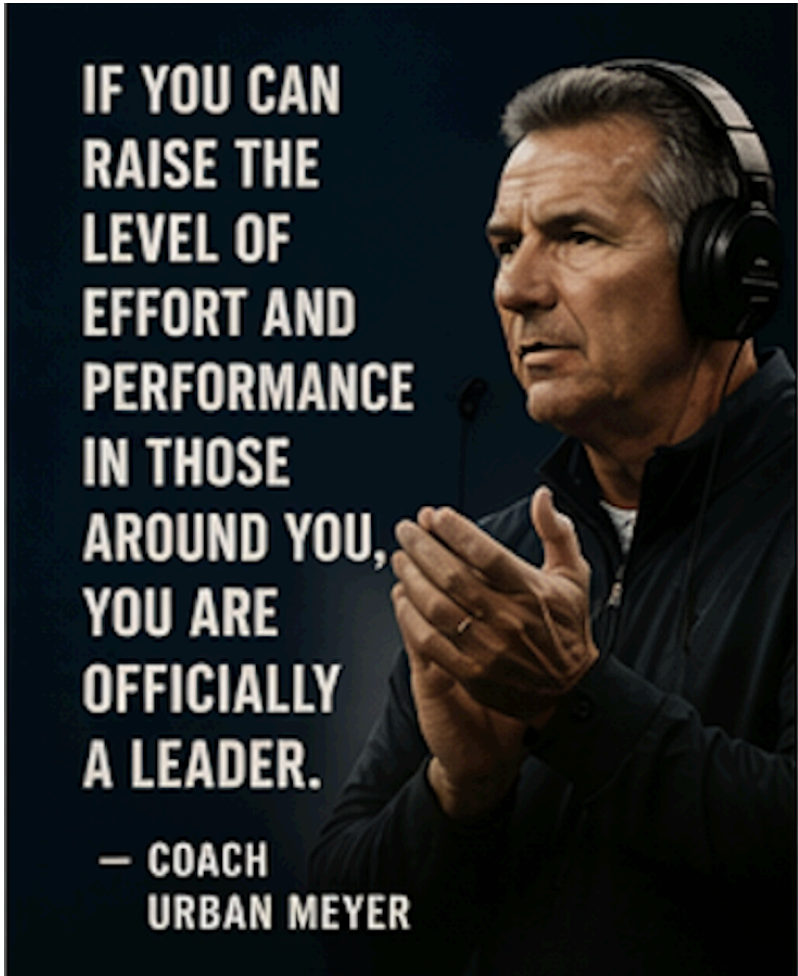
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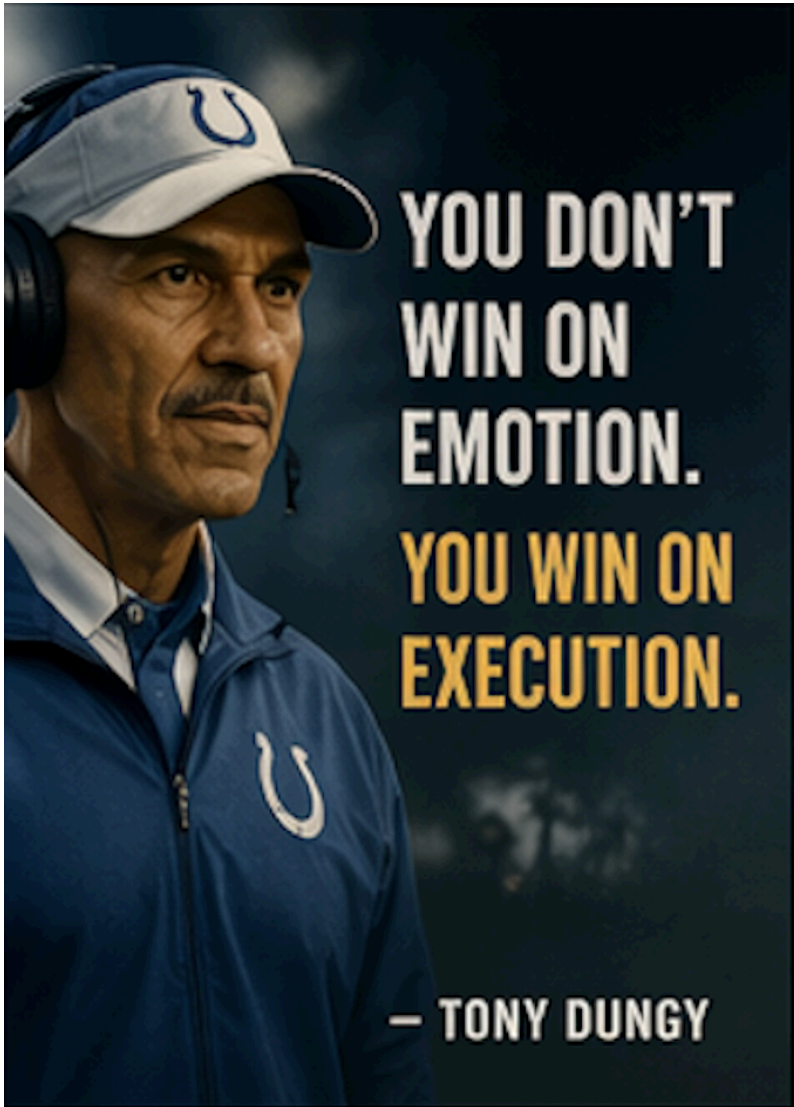
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**IF YOU CAN
RAISE THE
LEVEL OF
EFFORT AND
PERFORMANCE
IN THOSE
AROUND YOU,
YOU ARE
OFFICIALLY
A LEADER.**

**— COACH
URBAN MEYER**





1st Quarter: Leaders Are Formed Through Responsibility

Leadership is one of the most over-taught and under-built skills in modern life.

There are workshops, certifications, retreats, and online courses designed for every age and profession. Entire industries exist to teach people how to lead. And yet fewer people are actually prepared to do it when it matters.

That is because leadership is built through responsibility. Always has been.

Responsibility forces decisions. Decisions carry consequences. And consequences, handled honestly, are what shape judgment, character, and self-respect. You cannot download that from a course or pick it up at a weekend seminar.

Most leadership programs are designed to be safe. They avoid discomfort. They avoid failure. They avoid real stakes. Participants are encouraged to share, reflect, and collaborate. Those are all valuable things. But rarely are those participants placed in situations where someone else is depending on them to perform.

Real leadership begins when your actions matter to people beyond yourself. When others are affected by your preparation, your focus, and your willingness to endure pressure. That is why leadership formation has always been tied to responsibility.

Young people, especially young men, do not need more explanations. They need expectations. Clear standards. Clear consequences. And adults who are willing to hold

the line even when it would be easier to look the other way.

Responsibility changes how young men see themselves. When someone is trusted with something real, a role, a standard, a team, they begin to act differently. They prepare differently. They start to see themselves differently. Other people depend on them now. That changes a person.

There is a reason nearly every serious leadership tradition, whether military, trade, family, faith, or sport, has relied on initiation, apprenticeship, and earned responsibility. You are given responsibility before you feel fully ready. That is an uncomfortable reality all leaders face. You are expected to grow into it. You are expected to do what others will not.

That is how leaders have always been formed.

One of the quiet failures of modern institutions is that they have confused comfort with care. Out of good intentions, we have removed friction. We have softened

expectations. We have shielded young people from meaningful failure. But avoiding responsibility is the real enemy of growth, and discomfort was never the problem.

When responsibility is removed, something else fills the gap. Think of the epidemic of anxiety, entitlement, and indifference we see in so many places today. Those do not produce leaders.

Leadership is forged when three things are present at the same time. First, clear standards, where what is expected and why it matters are understood. Second, real risk and reward, where success and failure both count. And third, guidance from adults who stay present, who refuse to rescue and refuse to abandon. Remove any one of those and leadership formation breaks down.

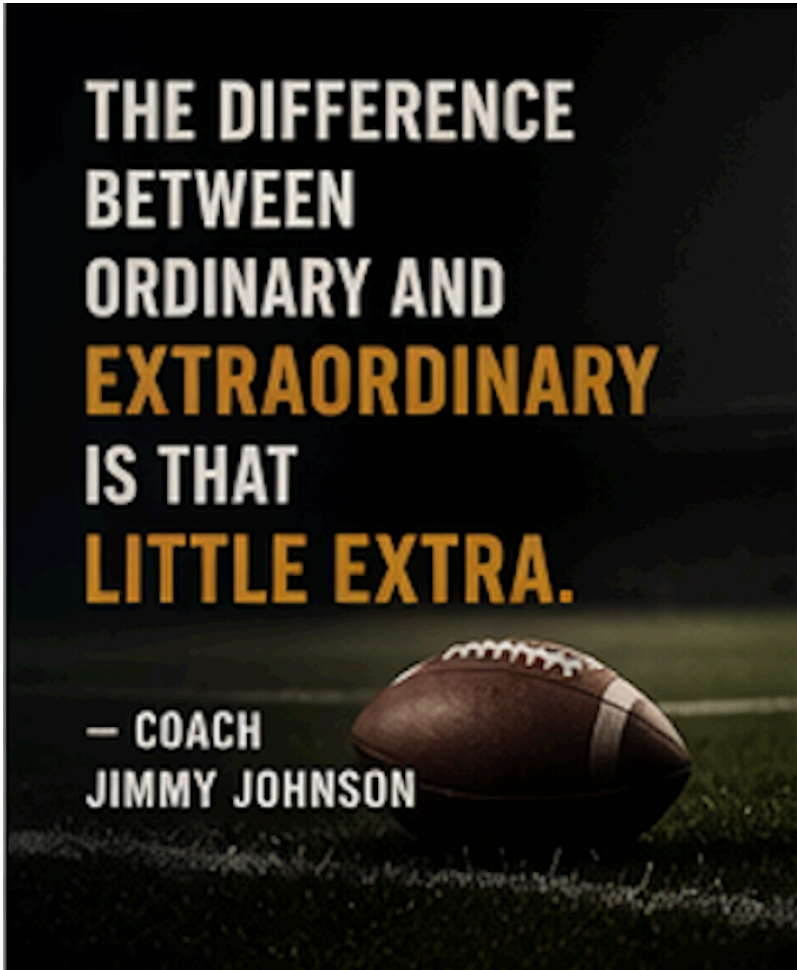
This is why leadership cannot be mass-produced. It has to be lived. Responsibility also creates something that no leadership course can simulate: **earned confidence**. The kind that comes from having been

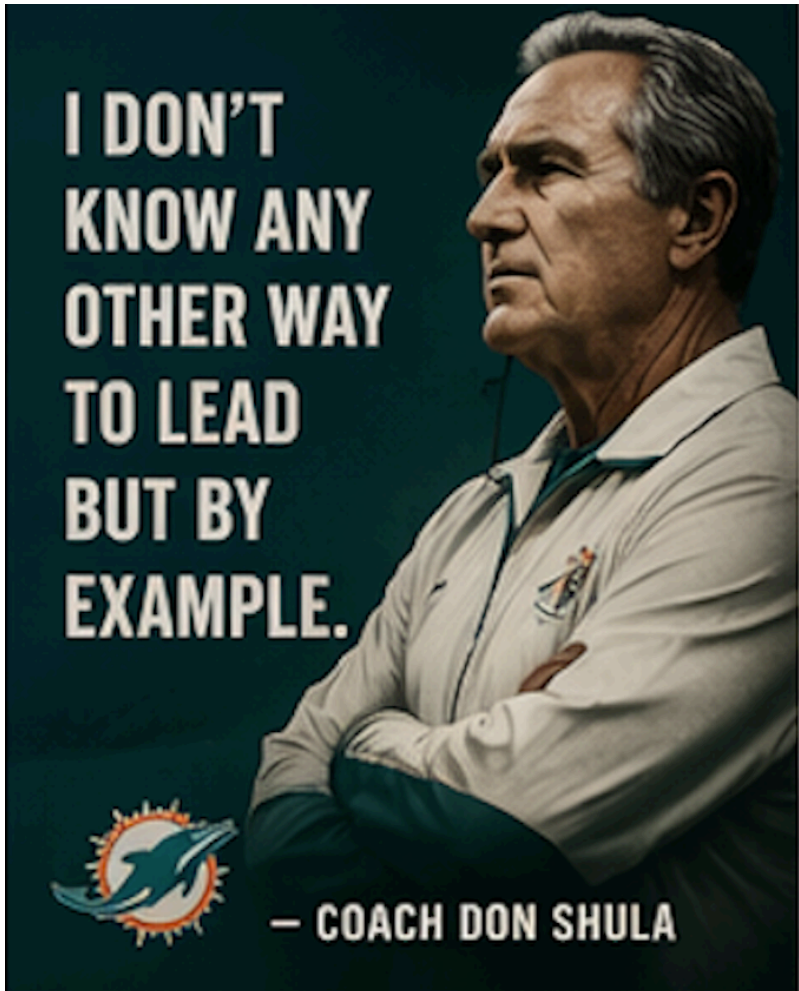
tested and having been prepared. From having failed and recovered. From knowing you can be relied upon when conditions are far from ideal. This kind of confidence does not announce itself. It shows up quietly in decision-making, in composure, in how someone carries pressure. And it lasts.

This is why environments that demand responsibility outperform those that merely encourage participation. Those environments are honest. They tell the truth about what leadership costs. They tell the truth about what it produces.

In the next quarter, we will look at one of the last places where this kind of responsibility is still demanded consistently, and why small-town football communities continue to produce leaders at a rate that surprises most people. That does not happen by accident. It happens by design.

Coach Ball can answer your questions about how you can help our young men directly: 720.751.8771 Text/Call







2nd Quarter: Why Small-Town Football Still Works

From the outside, small-town football can look outdated. Limited resources. Fewer specialists. Old facilities. Long bus rides. To someone scanning from a distance, it is easy to assume that leadership development would be better served somewhere larger, more advanced, or more polished.

But that assumption misunderstands how leadership is actually formed.

Small-town football works because nothing stays hidden.

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

In a small community, visibility is unavoidable. Everyone knows who you are. Your effort is seen. Your mistakes are remembered. Your growth is noticed. There is no anonymity. That alone changes behavior. When young men realize that their actions do not disappear when they leave the field, they start to understand that effort, attitude, and reliability follow them into classrooms, jobs, and family life.

Accountability becomes real. Enforced from the inside, by the player himself.

In larger systems, responsibility is often distributed so widely that it dissolves. In small towns, responsibility concentrates. A missed assignment matters. A lack of preparation shows. A failure to respond affects the whole group. And because the group is small, no one is easily replaced. That creates something rare: earned importance. Young men learn that they matter because other people depend on them.

Small-town football also resists a modern temptation: specialization too early. Athletes play multiple roles.

Students carry multiple identities. Leaders are expected to be adaptable. A player might be a captain, a student, a teammate, a sibling, and an employee, all in the same week. That overlap produces maturity. You do not get to be one version of yourself on the field and another version everywhere else. Character has to be consistent.

Coaches in these communities are long-term fixtures. They attend the same churches. They shop at the same stores. They know families across generations. Their authority comes from showing up year after year and doing what they said they would do. You can teach a young man a lot about leadership simply by being dependable. Just showing up is a marker of success across all domains.

When a coach sets a standard in a small town, it does not stay in the locker room. It echoes through the community. That kind of leadership instruction is slow, but it is durable. It impacts lives and communities far into the future.

Failure in small-town football is also different. There is no disappearing into the crowd after a bad performance. Losses are discussed. Mistakes are remembered. Recovery is visible. This matters more than most people realize. Because anyone can lead when things are going well. The real test comes when things go sideways, and in a small town, everyone sees how you handle it.

Another overlooked advantage is restraint. Without constant media attention, rankings, or hype, the focus remains on process. Preparation. Effort. Trust. Execution. When recognition comes, it is usually earned the hard way. And when it does not come, the work still matters. That orientation toward the work itself produces leaders who do not need applause to stay disciplined.

Perhaps most importantly, small-town football preserves something modern culture is quietly losing: **intergenerational accountability**. Parents, teachers, coaches, and community members are not operating in separate worlds. They speak to each other. They compare notes. They reinforce expectations. In a

small community, young people know that standards are consistent, not situational. That coherence is rare. And it is powerful.

Small-town football does not produce leaders by accident. It does so because the environment is honest. It demands responsibility. It refuses anonymity. It rewards preparation. It exposes weakness. And it provides a path to recovery. These conditions cannot be mass-produced. They must be protected.

In the 3rd Quarter, we will look at how the All-State Game intentionally concentrates these conditions and why a single, well-designed moment can multiply years of leadership formation into something that lasts a lifetime. The game carries real responsibility, and that is the whole point.



3RD QUARTER
The Leadership Multiplier

The All-State Game is not a reward for who they were. It is a **challenge** for who they are **becoming**.

(The Compression Effect)

- **Reputation Resets:** Removal of familiarity. Status must be earned again through humility and effort.
- **Compressed Growth:** Years of leadership lessons packed into one highly demanding week.
- **Earned Brotherhood:** Connection built entirely on shared responsibility and collective standards.



3rd Quarter: The All-State Game as a Leadership Multiplier

By the time a young man reaches the end of high school, most of his football leadership formation has already occurred. He has accumulated experiences. He has been tested. He has been counted on. He has been outmatched. He has failed publicly and learned how to respond.

What remains at this stage is integration. Pulling it all together under pressure. And this is where the All-State Game matters.

People assume the All-State Game is a reward. From the outside, it looks like recognition, a final honor for talented athletes. And while recognition is part of it, that framing misses the deeper purpose.

The All-State Game is designed to challenge who a young man is becoming.

Selection into the All-State Game carries a subtle but important message: You are trusted. You showed up, carried responsibility, and responded when pressure arrived. That earned you a place here.

That trust changes how young men carry themselves. Expectations rise, because they feel the weight of what they have been invited into. A chance to challenge themselves against the best of the best.

The environment of the All-State Game is intentionally different. Athletes are removed from familiar systems. Comfort is reduced. They stay in dorms with new players. Standards are elevated. They are asked to integrate quickly, to communicate, to collaborate, and

to perform with peers they have never played beside before.

That design is intentional. Leadership shows up most clearly when familiarity is removed. In this setting, reputation resets. No one arrives with guaranteed status. No one coasts on past success. Respect must be earned again through preparation, humility, effort, and responsiveness.

For many young men, this is the first time they experience a leadership environment where who you are matters more than where you came from. That moment is formative.

The All-State Game also reintroduces something increasingly rare: **earned brotherhood**. The real kind, built on shared responsibility. Late practices. High expectations. Collective standards. Mutual accountability. When young men are asked to commit to something larger than themselves, even briefly, it leaves a mark. They remember what it felt like to be held to a higher standard. And they carry that memory forward.

The power of the All-State Game comes from concentration. Years of leadership formation compressed into a short, demanding window. Expectations are clear. Feedback is immediate. Consequences are real. There is no time to pretend. And because of that, growth accelerates.

The timing matters. At 18, young men stand on the edge of independence. Decisions become theirs. Standards become internal. Character becomes portable. A moment that reinforces responsibility, accountability, and earned confidence at this stage does more than inspire. It anchors.

For many participants, the All-State Game becomes a reference point. A moment they return to when pressure shows up later. When work gets hard. When responsibility increases. When excuses are tempting. They remember who they were expected to be and who they proved they could be.

That is leadership multiplication.

The All-State Game is valuable because it produces standards. Standards that do not disappear when the jersey comes off. Standards that follow young men into college classrooms, workplaces, families, and communities. Standards that quietly shape future leaders.

The All-State Game is an investment in leadership infrastructure. It identifies environments that already work, small-town programs built on responsibility, and amplifies what they have already started at the exact moment when impact compounds.

In the 4th Quarter, we will return to the original question this book began with: If you are going to give, where does your money actually make a difference? And how thoughtful people can invest wisely in the places where leadership still gets built.





4th Quarter: If You Are Going to Give, Give Where It Multiplies

Most people who are serious about giving eventually reach the same place. Discernment.

They stop asking how much they should give. And they start asking where does my contribution actually matter.

That question is a sign of maturity. And it deserves a straight answer.

There is a difference between giving and investing. A donation can relieve a moment. An investment shapes a future. Both have value, but they are not interchangeable.

When leadership is missing, resources get consumed and problems repeat. When leadership is present, resources compound and communities strengthen. This is why leadership formation matters more than almost anything else a donor can support.

Leadership does not announce itself. It shows up quietly. In people who take responsibility when it would be easier to walk away. In people who hold standards when no one is watching. In people who steady others when pressure arrives. These traits are formed slowly, honestly, and often out of public view.

The environments that produce leaders share common characteristics. They are demanding. They are personal. They resist anonymity. They value accountability over comfort. These characteristics do not scale easily. And because of that, they are easy to overlook.

Small-town football programs, and the All-State Game that grows from them, exist inside this reality. They do not promise transformation. They do not manufacture outcomes. They create conditions. Conditions where responsibility is real. Where expectations are clear. Where young men are asked to carry weight and grow stronger because of it.

That is where leadership multiplies.

Thoughtful donors do not want their money to disappear into abstraction. They want it connected to people, to places, and to standards that last. They want to know that what they support will still matter when attention moves on.

Leadership formation meets that standard.

If you have read this far, you already understand something important. The most significant impact is rarely loud. The most lasting influence is rarely immediate. The important work happens quietly, upstream, before problems ever become visible.

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

This book was written to clarify. To help you see where leadership is still being built and why protecting those environments matters more than creating new ones.

If you are looking for a place where your support compounds quietly, in actual lives and actual communities, you now know what to look for.

The All-State Game exists because leadership matters. Right now. Right at the moment when a young man is becoming who he will be.

If you would like to learn more about how this work is done, you are welcome to continue the conversation. Quietly. Personally. On your terms.

That is how meaningful things tend to begin anyway.

Call, Text, or Email, *Coach Ball, Executive Director,*
The All-State Foundation

501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organization

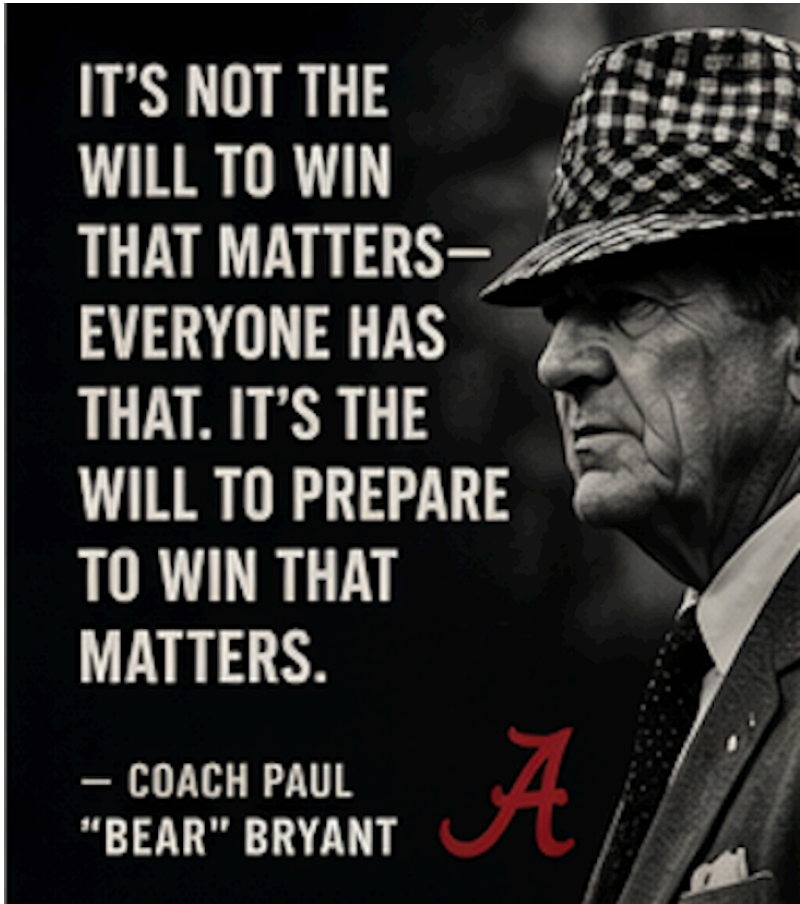
720.751.8771 - Text or Call

coachball@allstatefootball.org



**BELIEVE DEEP DOWN
IN YOUR HEART
THAT YOU ARE
DESTINED TO DO
GREAT THINGS.**

— COACH JOE PATERNO



**IT'S NOT THE
WILL TO WIN
THAT MATTERS—
EVERYONE HAS
THAT. IT'S THE
WILL TO PREPARE
TO WIN THAT
MATTERS.**

**— COACH PAUL
"BEAR" BRYANT**





End Game: Where This Is Going

What we have built in Colorado is a proof of concept. The All-State Foundation currently serves 43 small 8-man high school football programs across the state. We provide high-tech helmet grants to improve player safety, academic scholarships for young men who earn them, coaching education to raise the standard of mentorship, and an annual All-State Game that brings roughly 50 of the state's best small-school players together for one defining week.

This model works. It works because it was built for small-town communities and the way they actually

operate. Relationship-driven. Standards-based.
Accountable to people, not paperwork.

But Colorado is not the only place where this kind of leadership is being built.

Small-town football communities across the country share the same DNA. The same values. The same conditions that produce leaders. And most of them are working with the same limited resources we started with.

Our vision is to bring this model to the places where it fits naturally. Nebraska and Kansas are next. Those states embody the same spirit of small-town football where the game is a cornerstone of community identity. From there, the footprint expands into Wyoming, Montana, the Dakotas, New Mexico, and Utah. States where 6-man and 8-man football programs are the backbone of communities that most people drive right past without noticing.

Eventually, this reaches into the larger football states as well. Texas. Ohio. Pennsylvania. California. Florida. The

challenges in those places will be different, but the mission stays the same: find the environments where leadership is already being built, and reinforce them at the moment when it matters most.

What does success look like? It looks like small-town football programs across the country with safer equipment, better-trained coaches, and young men who have access to scholarships they earned through character and effort. It looks like All-State Games in multiple states, each one designed as a leadership environment. It looks like communities that feel the investment in the young men those programs send into the world.

This is about reaching the places where the work is already happening and making sure those places have what they need to keep doing it well.

Every dollar that supports this mission goes directly toward building leadership infrastructure in communities that rarely ask for help but always deliver results. Equipment grants keep players safe.

Scholarships reward the young men who lead by example. Coaching education raises the adults who set the standard. And the All-State Game itself creates a moment of concentrated growth that stays with these young men for the rest of their lives.

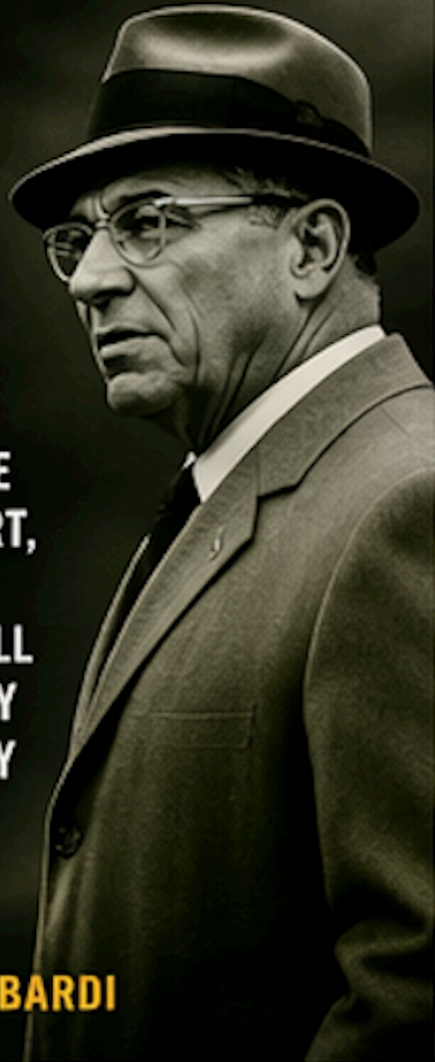
That is what your support builds. A pipeline of leaders coming out of the places where leadership has always been formed.

“

**LEADERS
ARE MADE,
THEY ARE
NOT BORN.**

**THEY ARE MADE
BY HARD EFFORT,
WHICH IS THE
PRICE WHICH ALL
OF US MUST PAY
TO ACHIEVE ANY
GOAL THAT IS
WORTHWHILE.**

**— COACH
VINCE LOMBARDI**

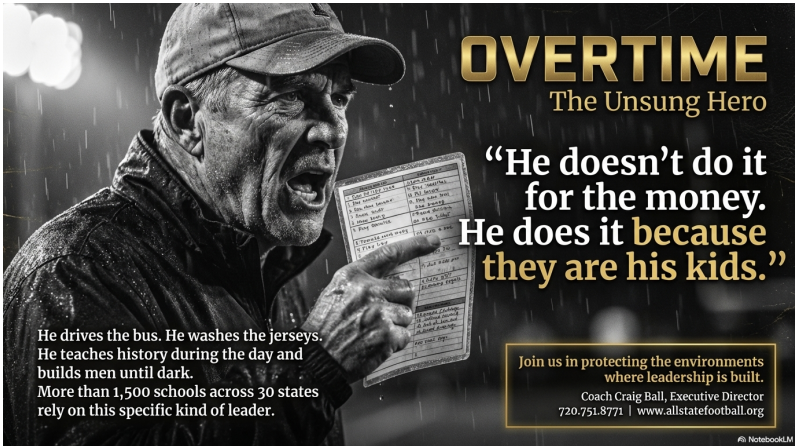


**“I ONLY HAD
3 RULES:**

- **BE ON TIME.**
- **PAY ATTENTION.**
- **PLAY LIKE HELL
WHEN I TELL
YOU TO.**

A photograph of Coach John Madden, an older man with white hair, wearing a black headset and a dark jacket. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression, pointing his right index finger upwards. The background is dark and out of focus.

— COACH JOHN MADDEN



OVERTIME
The Unsung Hero

“He doesn’t do it for the money. He does it because they are his kids.”

He drives the bus. He washes the jerseys. He teaches history during the day and builds men until dark. More than 1,500 schools across 30 states rely on this specific kind of leader.

Join us in protecting the environments where leadership is built.
Coach Craig Ball, Executive Director
720.751.8771 | www.allstatefootball.org

#NotabookM

Overtime

There are over 1,500 high schools in 30 states across this country that field a football team with fewer than 11 players.

More than 1,500 schools spread across small towns in Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, Montana, the Dakotas, and beyond are running football programs because their communities need them. And while participation in big-school football has been quietly declining, enrollment in 6-, 8-, and 9-man programs

has grown by 12 percent in recent years. Small towns aren't walking away from football. They're leaning into it.

This book was written for those communities.

But more than that, it was written for the coaches.

Let me tell you about the kind of coach I'm talking about.

He teaches during the day. Maybe it's history. Maybe it's shop class or PE or agriculture. When the bell rings at 4:00p, he doesn't go home. He walks across the parking lot to the old gym and game day field and starts setting up for practice.

Practice runs until dark. He drives the bus to away games because the district doesn't have a driver, or because the driver isn't available, or because nobody else stepped up. He may be just sitting in the front seat for a 4-hour ride to a town most people have never

heard of, and on the way back, win or lose, he's already thinking about next week.

He doesn't do it for the money. There isn't enough money in a small-town coaching stipend to justify the hours. That was never the point. He does it because those are his kids. Because in a town of 1,500 people, the football field is one of the few places left where a young man can learn what it actually costs to be part of something bigger than himself.

That's the coach this book is about.

What most people on the outside don't see is that this coach rarely works alone and the people working alongside him are even less compensated than he is.

In small-town football, the assistant coaching staff is largely a volunteer operation. These are men who finished their own playing days years ago and never really left the game. A former lineman who now runs the grain elevator. A local farmer who was an all-state linebacker twenty years back. A young teacher who just

moved to town and played college ball at a small school nobody's heard of outside a three-county radius.

They show up. Every day.

They study film on Sunday evening, breaking down the previous week's game on a laptop on a dining room table. They're in the weight room before school, spotting teenagers who are still learning how lifting heavy weights changes you. They're on the sidelines in 28-degree October weather, standing in the mud in jeans and a hoodie because they didn't get the memo about the team photos and the coaching staff polos.

They don't get paid for any of it. The film study. The game planning. The multi hour bus rides each direction for the Friday and Saturday games (many schools don't play under the lights because there are no lights). The Saturday morning film sessions. The conversations they have with a kid in the parking lot after practice because something clearly isn't right at home and someone needs to notice.

They do it because the head coach asked them to, and because the program needs them, and because deep down they understand something that's hard to explain to someone who's never lived it: these boys need men in their lives who show up consistently and voluntarily. Men who chose to be there. The players notice that distinction.

There's a version of this story playing out in towns all across America right now.

In rural Nebraska, a head coach finishes his school day, coaches practice, drives two hours to scout an opponent on a Friday night, and gets home after midnight, only to be back at it in the morning to set up the field and get ready for the game. He does this while holding down a teaching salary that, in many rural districts, doesn't reflect what he is building in the community.

In western Kansas, the assistant coach who runs the offensive line is a wheat farmer. His family has been in that county for four generations. He could be spending his evenings doing anything else. Instead, he's teaching

a 16-year-old how to fire off the ball with leverage and violence and somewhere in that lesson is also a lesson about effort, about doing your job right even when it's hard, even when nobody's watching.

In the mountains of Colorado, a program with 23 kids on the roster travels 200 miles each way for a league game. The coaching staff loads gear, manages injuries, keeps kids focused during long rides, and competes against schools happy to have a home game this weekend. They gear up to do it again the following week.

These stories aren't exceptional. They are ordinary. They happen every week, across every state that has small-town football, without fanfare and largely without recognition.

One year my team traveled over 2,200 miles on a bus for games and a summer football camp in Nebraska. Imagine riding a school bus from Denver to Key Largo Florida. That is just one year for our 8-man team in Colorado.

Big-school football and small-town football exist in different universes, and it's worth naming that plainly.

A head coach at a large suburban program can draw a salary that makes it a genuine career, with paid coordinators, a dedicated strength staff, video support, and the kind of institutional backing that lets the program run like a business. That's a reality. Those programs operate at a scale that demands professional infrastructure.

But the 8-man coach in eastern Colorado doesn't have any of that. He has a playbook he built himself, a staff of volunteers who rearrange their lives each fall, and a roster of young men who, in many cases, would have nothing comparable to play for if this program didn't exist.

He doesn't do it for the money. He never did.

What he does it for is harder to quantify and more important than any compensation package. He does it for the look on a kid's face when he realizes he can handle something he thought was too hard. He does it

for the Friday or Saturday when a small town's community shows up for a few hours, everything feels like it matters because it does. He does it because someone did it for him once, and he understood what that was worth, and he decided to pass it on.

I've been in this small-town coaching world long enough to know that the most important coaches I've encountered weren't always the most polished. They weren't running the most sophisticated offenses or producing Division I recruits. What they were doing, consistently, quietly, over years and sometimes decades, was showing up for young men who needed someone to show up for them.

That's the job.

And it doesn't get a highlight reel.

The great football writer and journalist John Ed Bradley once wrote about small-town football in Louisiana in a way that stuck with me, the idea that in certain communities, the game carries the weight of everything

a town hopes for and everything it fears losing. That the field at game time is one of the last communal spaces where a town can see itself whole. That's every small town in America that still has a program.

The novelist H.G. Bissinger spent a year embedded with a Texas high school football program and produced a book that the country couldn't stop talking about for decades, because what he found there went beyond football. He found identity. He found sacrifice. He found men pouring themselves into something larger than their own ambitions.

He was looking at the big school version of the story.

The small-town version is the same story, told with fewer resources and sometimes more impact.

More than 1,500 programs across 30 states are depending on people like the coaches I've described. They are the infrastructure of something America doesn't have a clean name for. It's the deliberate, unglamorous, volunteer-driven effort to turn boys into

men through accountability, hardship, and the kind of belonging that only comes from earning your place in something real.

This book was an attempt to explain why that effort matters and why the places doing it deserve our attention, our support, and our respect.

If you're one of those coaches, a head coach or volunteer assistant, paid stipend or nothing at all, I want you to hear this clearly: the work you're doing matters. What you're building in those young men doesn't stay in your town. It travels into the world with them. Into their marriages, their businesses, their children, their communities. You will likely never get a trophy for it. But you are shaping people in ways that outlast any season record.

That's what this is about, and that's why supporting small-town football is worth protecting.

The All-State Foundation exists to support these programs and the coaches who run them through

A Place Where Leaders Are Built

equipment grants, scholarships, coaching education, and the All-State Game that showcases the best of what small-town football produces the leaders of the future. If this book resonated with you, as a donor, a supporter, or someone who believes these communities deserve support for what they do for our communities, I welcome the chance to game plan ways you can make a difference. A place to invest in something that matters now and far into the future.

Coach Ball - All-State Foundation Executive Director

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www.allstatefootball.org

**IF YOU WANT
TO WIN,
DO THE ORDINARY
THINGS BETTER
THAN ANYONE ELSE
DOES THEM DAY IN
AND DAY OUT.**



— COACH CHUCK NOLL



What the Gaming Industry Taught Me About Leadership

What did running a regulated casino teach you about accountability and leadership that you could not have learned anywhere else?

The gaming industry taught me that accountability is not a value. It is a condition. In a regulated casino, you do not get to choose when to be accountable. The state chooses for you. Your license depends on it. Your livelihood depends on it. Every decision you make is auditable, and someone is always watching.

That changes how you think. When I opened the first casino in Black Hawk at twenty-six years old, I did not have the luxury of learning leadership from a book or a seminar. I had regulators, insurance auditors, attorneys, employees, and an entire community watching to see if I would do what I said I would do. If the paperwork was wrong, I heard about it. If a procedure was not followed, it was on me. Not on the floor manager, not on the dealer. On me. Because the license had my name on it.

Most people never operate in that kind of environment. They work in places where standards are suggested, not enforced. Where accountability shows up in a mission statement but not in everyday operations. In a casino, there is no gap between what you say the standard is and what you actually do. Regulators close that gap for you. And if you cannot maintain the standard, they shut you down.

What that teaches you is simple. Standards only matter if they are enforced. Accountability only matters if there are real consequences. And leadership only works if the person at the top is willing to own the outcome, every outcome, whether things go right or wrong.

I trained hundreds of employees over two decades. Every one of them had to understand that we operated inside a system where shortcuts had real costs. Not theoretical costs. Real ones. Fines, license suspensions, lawsuits, lost careers. That kind of clarity changes how people show up to work. It changed how I showed up. There was no version of leadership in that environment that allowed me to avoid hard decisions and keep my operation running.

You cannot learn that in a classroom. You cannot learn it from a case study. You have to live inside a system where the consequences are real and the margin for error is small. That is what the gaming industry gave me. Not theory. Conditions.

What was the moment those lessons connected to coaching?

When I walked into a school building for the first time as a teacher, I expected structure. I expected clear systems. I expected the kind of accountability I had lived with for twenty years. What I found was the opposite.

I watched a system where standards were written down but not enforced. Where policies existed in handbooks but not in hallways. Where the people closest to the work, the teachers, absorbed all the consequences of decisions they had no power to make. I had seen that pattern before. In business, that is what happens right before something fails.

But the moment it really connected, the moment I saw the direct line between the gaming floor and the football field, was when I started coaching. On a football field, the structure is clear. The expectations are clear. The consequences are immediate and visible. If a kid does not prepare, it shows on Friday night. If a coach does not hold the standard, the team falls apart. There is no hiding. There is no committee to defer the decision to. There is the standard, and there is what happens when you either hold it or let it slide.

That was the gaming industry all over again. Not the content. The structure. A regulated environment where accountability is built into the system, where preparation matters, where mistakes are visible, and where the person in charge owns the outcome.

Coaching gave me the same clarity the casino floor gave me. You are responsible for the people in your care. You set the standard. You enforce it. You own what happens. And the people around you either rise to meet the standard or they show you where the standard is not being held. Either way, you learn the truth fast.

The difference is that on a football field, the stakes are not financial. They are developmental. You are not protecting a license. You are building young men. But the operating principle is the same. Clear standards, enforced consistently, with real consequences, in front of people who are watching. That is where leadership gets built. Whether the environment is a casino floor or a practice field, the mechanism is identical.

What do compliance environments and football programs have in common?

More than most people would ever guess.

In a compliance environment, every process is documented. Every procedure has a reason. Every person in the operation knows what the standard is and what happens if they do not meet it. There is no

ambiguity. The rules exist because the consequences of not having rules are too expensive, too dangerous, or too damaging to the people the system is supposed to protect.

A football program works the same way when it is run correctly. The expectations are established before the season starts. The standards for effort, preparation, behavior, and accountability are communicated clearly. And when someone does not meet the standard, the response is immediate, visible, and consistent.

Both environments share something that most of modern life has quietly abandoned. They both operate on the principle that the standard is the standard. It does not change based on who is involved, how inconvenient enforcement is, or how uncomfortable the conversation might be. In a casino, the regulator does not care that you were having a bad day when the procedure was missed. On a football field, the opponent does not care that your team was not ready. The environment does not adjust to your excuses. You adjust to the environment.

Both environments also share something else. They protect the people closest to the work by holding the people at the top accountable. In a well-run casino, the owner absorbs the risk so the floor staff can do their jobs. In a well-run football program, the coach absorbs the pressure so the players can compete. Leadership in both settings means the same thing. You create conditions where people can perform, and you own what happens inside those conditions.

The last thing they share is maybe the most important. Both environments build trust through consistency. Employees trust a casino operator who enforces the rules the same way every time. Players trust a coach who holds the standard the same way every day. Trust does not come from being liked. It comes from being predictable. People need to know that the person in charge will do what they said they would do, especially when it is hard.

That is what compliance environments and football programs have in common. The standard is not negotiable. The leader owns the outcome. And trust is earned through consistency, not charisma.



**MEDIOCRE
PEOPLE DON'T
LIKE HIGH
ACHIEVERS,
AND HIGH
ACHIEVERS
DON'T LIKE
MEDIOCRE
PEOPLE.**

— COACH NICK SABAN



A Place Where Leaders Are Built



— THE —
LAST
BUILDING
STANDING

SCHOOLS WON'T DISAPPEAR.

THEY'LL JUST STOP WORKING.

A Framework for **SAVING** WHAT HAPPENS **INSIDE**.

This book is for teachers, parents, administrators and school boards ready to frame the problem, start the conversation, and push for real change in schools across America.

COACH CRAIG BALL

The Last Building Standing: A Book Preview

A Coach's Note Before the Preview

Before I became a teacher, I spent more than twenty years running businesses. I managed people. I operated in one of the most heavily regulated industries in the country. And one of the things that experience taught me is how to tell the difference between someone who is solving a problem and someone whose livelihood depends on the problem never being solved.

I also learned something else. When things go wrong in an organization, the people at the top almost never blame themselves. They blame the people closest to the problem. In business, it is the frontline employees. In medicine, it is the nurses. In education, it is the teachers.

I bring both of those lessons into this book because they explain what I found when I walked into a school building after twenty years in the private sector.

There is an industry built around the problems in American schools. It is large. It is profitable. And it is growing, because the problems are growing. Consultants, trainers, behavioral intervention specialists, social-emotional learning platforms, trauma-informed practice certifications. The market for helping schools manage dysfunction is booming. And almost none of it is designed to fix what is actually broken.

I have watched this from both sides. As a businessman, I recognize the model. As a teacher, I live inside it.

Schools bring in consultants to help teachers manage behaviors that leadership created and refuses to fix. One teaches emotional resilience using techniques developed for soldiers returning from combat zones. Let that settle. We are using methods built for men and women who survived armed conflict to help teachers get through a Tuesday in an American high school. Another teaches trauma-informed de-escalation, but never asks why there are so many traumatized students in the first place. A third teaches engagement strategies, and he is

good at it, but he is trying to light a fire in a room where someone left all the windows open.

None of them ask the harder question. Why are the conditions this bad?

The answer is structural. The phones are in the building. Attendance is not enforced in any meaningful way. AI is doing the thinking for students who never learn to do it themselves. And the people with the authority to change those conditions keep hiring consultants instead of making hard decisions.

I know this because I have lived it. I have raised these issues in my own school. I have made the case for structural change to the people who have the authority to make it. The response was polite, sometimes encouraging. And then nothing changed.

This book exists because I got tired of waiting for someone else to say what needed to be said.

The consultants are not the enemy. The model is. It persists because it is easier to buy training than to make hard structural decisions. Easier to send teachers to a

workshop on resilience than to remove the phones. Easier to hire a behavior specialist than to enforce attendance. Easier to learn engagement techniques than to require students to be present and invested.

Easy has a cost. And the cost is that nothing changes.

If you are a teacher, I want you to know something. It is not your fault. The conditions you are working in were not created by you. The behaviors you are managing were not caused by you. And the fact that someone keeps sending you to training instead of fixing the building around you is not a reflection of your failure. It is a reflection of theirs.

The next book is about the hard decisions. The ones that actually work. The ones that no consultant will ever recommend, because if those decisions were made, the consultants would not be needed.

The Hidden Problem: Investment

In the 1950s, General Mills launched a line of Betty Crocker cake mixes that should have changed everything. The mix contained all the ingredients. All a

baker needed to add was water. Stir, pour, bake. A perfect cake with almost no effort.

It did not sell.

General Mills brought in a consumer psychologist named Ernest Dichter to figure out why. He interviewed women across the country and came back with an answer that surprised the company. The problem was not the taste. Not the price. Not the packaging. The problem was that making the cake felt like cheating. The process was so effortless that the person baking it had no sense of ownership over the result. It did not feel like their cake. It felt like the box's cake.

What happened next went against every instinct in product development. Instead of keeping the mix easy, they made it harder. They removed the powdered eggs and required bakers to crack in their own fresh eggs, add oil, and mix by hand. The new version required more work. It was less convenient.

Sales took off.

The cake needed eggs. Not because eggs were the secret ingredient in the recipe. Because effort was the secret ingredient in the experience. When people put something of themselves into the process, they valued the result. They could bring that cake to a church potluck and say, with real pride, that they made it.

That is the hidden problem in American education right now. We have taken the eggs out of the cake.

Every system that makes education easier, that removes the cost of showing up, paying attention, and doing the work yourself, is removing the investment that gives the experience its value. The diploma still comes out of the oven. But nobody values it, because nobody invested enough of themselves to feel ownership over it.

This is not abstract. It is happening in three concrete ways, and all three of them trace back to the same dynamic.

Phones stole the attention.

A smartphone is not a distraction the way a passed note or a doodled notebook was a distraction. It is a portal. It

connects the student to every relationship, every conflict, every piece of social drama, every notification, every algorithmically optimized feed designed by some of the most sophisticated engineers on earth to capture and hold human attention. When a student has a phone in their pocket, they are not fully in the classroom. They cannot be.

I spent more than twenty years in the casino industry before I became a teacher. Casinos are built around psychology. Every light, every sound, every reward schedule inside a casino is carefully engineered to hold a person's attention just a little longer. I know how attention capture works because I built a business around it.

And I am telling you, as someone who has stood on both sides of this, what these companies are doing to our kids is worse than anything I ever saw on a casino floor. Because at least in a casino, you have to be twenty-one to walk in the door. Our students do not have that protection. The only people who can give it to them are the adults in the building. And right now, most of those adults have been convinced by the very companies

causing the harm that removing the phone would be going too far.

When you take a student's full attention out of the room, you have taken the eggs out of the cake. The student is physically present and mentally gone. The learning experience has been hollowed out. And the student who spends six hours a day in a building without ever fully being there will not value what that building gave them. Because it did not cost them anything real.

Frictionless attendance removed the presence.

Attendance is not just a policy. It is the mechanism through which students invest themselves in their own education. Showing up, physically, day after day, even on the days you do not want to, is the egg in the cake. It is what makes the experience yours.

When attendance becomes optional, when students can miss days without meaningful consequence, when credit recovery allows a student to earn a diploma without ever consistently being in the building, you have

removed the cost of the experience. And when you remove the cost, you remove the value.

Nobody debates this in athletics. If a player does not show up to practice, they do not play on Friday night. That is not punishment. It is structure. It is the recognition that being present is the baseline requirement for participation. The classroom deserves the same structural logic, and right now it does not have it.

A student who recovers credit online has completed something. But they have not belonged to anything. They were not part of the class discussion. They were not present for the lab experiment. They did not sit next to a classmate who was struggling with the same material and realize they were not alone. Completion is not belonging. A module is not a classroom. And a diploma that certifies completion without verifying presence is a credential that has been emptied of its meaning.

We have created a system where a student can earn an educational diploma without ever meaningfully being

present in the building. That is the just-add-water version of education. It looks right on paper. It means nothing in practice.

The Same Fight.

Phones, absence, and AI all do the same thing to the educational experience. They remove the investment. They take out the eggs. And without the eggs, the cake does not belong to the student anymore. It is just something that happened to them, not something they built.

If we want students to value their education, we have to require something of them. Not because suffering is virtuous, but because investment is how human beings create meaning. The difficulty is not a design flaw. It is the mechanism.

A school-wide phone ban during school hours puts the eggs back in. It restores the conditions under which attention, and therefore learning, can happen. Enforcing meaningful attendance standards puts the eggs back in. It is the decision that showing up matters,

that being in a classroom is not interchangeable with clicking through a screen at midnight.

The schools that hold these standards are not making life harder for the sake of it. They are making sure the experience means something by the time it is over.

That is what the next book is about. The hard decisions that protect the conditions where education actually works. The building is still standing. The question is whether what happens inside our schools it still matters.

A Place Where Leaders Are Built



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