

THE NEXT PLAY

You Can't Change the Last Play, But You Can Choose the Next One

There is something about sitting inside a football stadium that changes your perspective.

Thousands of people are watching. The band is playing. Coaches are calling plays. Players are trying to execute. One moment the entire stadium erupts because something incredible happened. A few seconds later, everyone may be wondering how a player could have made such a simple mistake.

But regardless of what happened, something important comes next.

The ball gets spotted again.

The teams line up.

And another play begins.

Sitting inside Bryant-Denny Stadium recently reminded me how much football can teach us about life.

Because whether the last play was a touchdown, a turnover, a missed tackle, or something completely unexpected, nobody gets to stay there very long.

There is another play coming.

We Spend a Lot of Time Replaying Yesterday

Have you ever replayed a conversation in your head?

Maybe you wish you had said something differently.

Maybe you made a decision you regret.

Maybe someone disappointed you.

Maybe you disappointed yourself.

We can spend hours, days, and sometimes years mentally replaying something that has already happened.

We ask:

What if I had done something differently?

Why did I say that?

Why did that happen to me?

Those can be important questions when they help us learn.

They become dangerous when they keep us from moving.

There is a difference between learning from yesterday and living in yesterday.

One helps prepare us for what's ahead.

The other keeps us trapped in something we can no longer change.

That's why I've come to appreciate this simple thought:

Yesterday's play is already on the scoreboard.

You can't run it again.

But you can learn from it.

And then you have to line up for the next play.

Success Can Hold Us Back Too

We usually think about moving beyond our failures.

But sometimes we need to move beyond our successes too.

Imagine a football player scoring a touchdown and then spending the next ten minutes celebrating while everyone else continues playing.

It sounds ridiculous.

Yet we sometimes do exactly that in life.

We accomplish something important and begin believing yesterday's success guarantees tomorrow's results.

It doesn't.

Be proud of what you've accomplished.

Celebrate the people who helped you get there.

Remember the lessons.

Then get ready again.

Yesterday's touchdown counts on the scoreboard, but it won't run today's play for you.

Leadership requires us to appreciate where we've been without allowing past accomplishments to become our identity.

There is still work ahead.

The Next Play Is Usually Small

When we're dealing with something difficult, we often believe our "next play" has to solve everything.

It doesn't.

Sometimes your next play is simply making the phone call you've been avoiding.

Sometimes it's apologizing.

Sometimes it's getting out of bed and showing up.

Sometimes it's asking for help.

Sometimes it's sitting down with someone and listening instead of talking.

Sometimes it's finally beginning something you've been putting off.

And sometimes your next play isn't about accomplishing anything.

It's simply being there for somebody who needs you.

We often underestimate small actions because they don't feel significant enough.

But football games aren't played with one 100-yard play.

They're usually won a few yards at a time.

Life is often the same way.

You Don't Play Alone

There is another lesson from football that may be even more important.

Nobody takes the field alone.

Eleven people line up together.

One person may carry the ball, but someone else blocked.

Someone may catch the pass, but someone protected the quarterback long enough for him to throw it.

The person receiving the applause is rarely the only person responsible for the result.

That's leadership.

That's family.

That's friendship.

That's community.

And that's the difference between I and WE.

Sometimes you're carrying the ball.

Sometimes you're blocking for somebody else.

Sometimes you're encouraging from the sideline.

And sometimes you're the person lying on the ground who needs a teammate to reach down and help you back up.

Every one of those roles matters.

Strong teams understand that.

Strong families understand that.

Strong organizations understand that.

And strong leaders understand that leadership isn't always about making the play.

Sometimes leadership means helping somebody else make theirs.

What Happens After a Bad Play?

One of the greatest tests of leadership isn't what happens when everything works.

It's what happens immediately after something doesn't.

When someone on our team makes a mistake, what do we do?

Do we embarrass them?

Do we remind everyone who was responsible?

Do we spend the rest of the game talking about what went wrong?

Or do we correct what needs correcting, learn from it, and help them get ready for what's next?

Accountability matters.

Standards matter.

Consequences sometimes matter.

But good leadership should ultimately help people become better prepared for the next play.

That includes how we lead ourselves.

We can hold ourselves accountable without destroying ourselves over mistakes.

Learn.

Adjust.

Line back up.

Someone May Need You in Their Huddle

There's another side to this conversation.

Maybe your next play isn't about you at all.

Look around.

Someone in your family, workplace, church, veterans organization, or community may have just experienced one of the worst "plays" of their life.

They may be discouraged.

They may have failed.

They may simply be tired.

They don't necessarily need somebody standing over them explaining everything they did wrong.

They may need somebody beside them saying:

"Come on. We've got another play."

Never underestimate what encouragement can do.

A conversation.

A phone call.

A cup of coffee.

A hand reaching down.

Those small moments can change somebody's direction.

That's why this Coffee Cup Family has never really been about coffee.

Coffee simply gives us a reason to sit down together.

The real purpose is the conversation.

Your Next Play

So grab your coffee and think about your own scoreboard for a minute.

What's something from yesterday you're still replaying?

Maybe it's a failure.

Maybe it's disappointment.

Maybe it's hurt.

Maybe it's even success.

Acknowledge it.

Learn from it.

Be grateful for whatever it taught you.

Then look forward.

You don't need to know how the entire game ends.

You don't need every answer.

You don't need the perfect plan.

You simply need to ask:

What's my next play?

Then run it.

As long as there's time on the clock, there's another opportunity ahead.

Instead of replaying the last play, ask: What's my next play?

Keep learning. Keep leaning on teammates. Keep running the next play.

One person. One conversation. One cup.

Line up again and run the next play.
One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.

COFFEE CUP WORKBOOK

Episode 17

THE NEXT PLAY

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As long as there's time on the clock, there's another opportunity ahead.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Personal Reflection

1. LOOK AT THE SCOREBOARD

Before moving forward, identify what you're still carrying.

What is one situation from your past that you find yourself replaying?

Why do you think you keep returning to it?

Is it primarily:

☐ A mistake I made ☐ Something someone did to me ☐ A missed opportunity ☐ A disappointment ☐
A past success ☐ A relationship ☐ Something else:

Coffee Cup Question

Am I learning from this—or living in it?

Watch the Film

2. WATCH THE FILM

Good teams review what happened—not so they can stay there, but so they can improve.

Think about the situation you identified.

What went well?

What went wrong?

What was within my control?

What was outside my control?

What did this experience teach me?

The lesson I want to carry forward is:

Leave the Last Play

3. LEAVE THE LAST PLAY

There are things we need to learn from and things we simply need to release.

Complete this sentence:

I cannot change _____ .

But I can choose _____ .

Now write down one thing you're ready to stop replaying:

Rate Yourself

On a scale of 1–5, how much energy are you currently spending on something you cannot change?

1 — Very little 2 3 4 5 — A great deal

My number: _____

What could you do with some of that energy if you redirected it toward today?

Call the Next Play

4. CALL THE NEXT PLAY

Don't try to solve the entire game.

Identify your next action.

My Next Play

One thing I can do within the next 24 hours is:

Make it specific.

☐ Make the phone call ☐ Have the conversation ☐ Apologize ☐ Ask for help ☐ Show up ☐ Begin the task ☐ Forgive ☐ Listen ☐ Encourage someone ☐ Take care of myself ☐ Other:

When will I do it?

Who can help hold me accountable?

Who's in Your Huddle?

5. WHO'S IN YOUR HUDDLE?

Nobody plays alone.

Write down three people you can depend on when life gets difficult.

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Now ask yourself a harder question:

Do these people know I consider them part of my team?

☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ Probably not

Choose one person and reach out this week.

Person: _____

What I want to tell them:

Who Needs You?

9. WHO NEEDS YOU?

Leadership isn't always carrying the ball.

Sometimes it's blocking for somebody else.

Sometimes it's helping someone back to their feet.

Think about the people around you.

Who may be struggling with their last play right now?

What could encouragement from you look like?

☐ Phone call ☐ Coffee together ☐ Text message ☐ Listening without trying to fix it ☐ Offering practical help ☐ Simply showing up ☐ Other:

What will I do?

When?

From I to WE

10. FROM I TO WE

Think about your family, workplace, organization, church, or team.

Rate yourself from 1–5:

I recognize other people’s contributions. _____

I ask for help when I need it. _____

I help others recover from mistakes. _____

I listen before reacting. _____

I focus more on solutions than blame. _____

I celebrate team success instead of personal credit. _____

Now identify one area where you can move from I to WE:

The Seven-Day Next Play Challenge

11. THE SEVEN-DAY NEXT PLAY CHALLENGE

For the next seven days, begin your morning with one question:

WHAT'S MY NEXT PLAY?

Don't make it complicated.

Choose one meaningful action each day.

DAY 1: _____ ☐

DAY 2: _____ ☐

DAY 3: _____ ☐

DAY 4: _____ ☐

DAY 5: _____ ☐

DAY 6: _____ ☐

DAY 7: _____ ☐

At the end of the week:

Which small action made the biggest difference?

When the Next Play Goes Wrong

12. WHEN THE NEXT PLAY GOES WRONG

Not every next play will work.

That's part of life.

When something doesn't go as planned, complete these four steps:

13. ACKNOWLEDGE IT

What happened?

14. LEARN FROM IT

What did it teach me?

15. ADJUST

What will I do differently?

16. LINE UP AGAIN

What's my next play?

My Commitment

17. MY COMMITMENT

Finish these statements:

Something I’m leaving on yesterday’s scoreboard:

Something I’m carrying forward because it taught me something:

My next play is:

Someone I’m going to help with their next play:

My Commitment

I cannot change the last play.

I can learn from it.

I can grow from it.

And I can choose what I do next.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

30-DAY CHECK-IN

Come back to this page 30 days from today.

What happened because I took that first next step?

What have I stopped replaying?

Where have I grown?

Who helped me along the way?

Who did I help?

Final Cup

You don't have to know how the whole game ends.

You don't need every answer before moving.

Learn from the last play.

Lean on your teammates.

Help somebody else back up.

Then line up and take the next step.

The clock is still running.

There's still time on the scoreboard.

And you've still got another play in you.

 One person. One conversation. One cup.

As long as there's time on the clock, there's another opportunity ahead.

Keep planting.

Keep watering.

Keep showing up.

Line up again and run the next play.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.