

THE ART OF WINNING

Lessons from My Life in Football

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‘Coach Belichick
brought out the best
in me. His book will do
the same for you.’

– TOM BRADY

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1

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*To my mom, Jeannette, and my dad, Steve,
for their love and support.*

*To Bill Edwards, my godfather, and
my father's college and NFL coach.*

*My father's book, Football Scouting Methods, was dedicated
to Bill Edwards, but the dedication page was left out.
The Belichick family is forever indebted to Bill Edwards and
his wife, Dorothy, for inspiring three generations of coaches.*

*To my grandparents, Leslie and Irene Munn and
John and Mary Belichick, for the sacrifices they made for
their children, grandchildren, and future generations.*

*To my children, Amanda, Stephen, and Brian.
Your love and inspiration power our journey.
I have watched you grow as parents and as coaches.*

CONTENTS

	INTRODUCTION	1
One	BIG GAMES, BIG MOMENTS	9
Two	MOTIVATION	29
Three	FIRING AND HIRING	49
Four	HANDLING SUCCESS	71
Five	ROSTER CONSTRUCTION	91
Six	STAR PLAYERS	109
Seven	PREPARATION	125
Eight	IMPROVEMENT	143
Nine	MOVING ON	161
Ten	MISTAKES	179
Eleven	COMMUNICATION	197
Twelve	ADVERSITY	211
Thirteen	CONFIDENCE	225
Fourteen	CHANGE	241
Fifteen	CULTURE	261
	EPILOGUE	283
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	285

INTRODUCTION

This book will tell you how I did my job as a coach, coordinator, and general manager (without the title). Titles do not mean as much as your performance on the job. This book will also tell you how I did my job as an assistant, well before I could point to any sustained success in my career, because the foundation for success can be—and must be—built wherever you are, and in whatever role you have. Each person in an organization contributes to the success of the team.

I have been on ninety-seven sports teams in my life. Forty as a player, fifty-six as a coach, and the NFL 100 All-Time Team. I have learned from all of them.

Nineteen of the teams were before high school, and included basketball, softball, lacrosse, and football. My first basketball coach, Barry Carter, taught me about team defense, not scoring. My first softball coach owned a pharmacy in Annapolis called Carville's. He taught our team about sportsmanship. We always went to his soda

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INTRODUCTION

fountain after our games and got snow cones. After one of our (few) losses, we did not give a good cheer and we did not go to Carville's. My 135-pound football coach, Richard Mann, ran the single wing. I am glad I played on that offense.

I played on ten teams in high school and eleven teams in college. Every year was a great learning experience. Al Laramore and Steve Sorota were great high school football coaches, but had very different coaching styles. I learned that both styles of coaching worked. Sorota, and my college lacrosse coach, Terry Jackson, gave the players a lot of responsibility on the field. I learned to do that when I became a coach. And I played one year of club lacrosse in Denver as a weekend warrior—playing on weekends without training was tough.

My coaching career in the NFL is well-documented. I also coached my sons' teams in lacrosse: Steve in Huntington, New York, with Scott DeMonte, and Brian in Weston, Massachusetts, with Matt Dwyer (and Brian's summer team, the Nor'easters). I learned that the rate of improvement with pre-high school players was much greater than with professionals.

Being part of the 100 All-Time Team, organized in 2019 on the hundredth anniversary of the league, was my biggest personal honor. The members of that team are elite—I idolized many of the players and coaches who were older than me. Those men were the stars when I first started watching and learning about football. I appreciated the contemporary players and coaches from competing against them. Walking onto the field before the Super Bowl in 2020 with the likes of Jim Brown, Lawrence Taylor, Tom Brady, and the rest of the 100 All-Time Team was the best feeling. What a team!

Finally, I want to acknowledge the 1963 Navy team, or "The President's Team," as author Michael Connelly calls it. Documentaries by Jack Ford and Pete Radovich have captured moments

about this special group of players and coaches. Admiral Tom Lynch captained the team, which still remains very close today. As a head football coach, I have always wanted my team to play and act like the 1963 Navy team: tough, smart, dependable, unselfish. I never dreamed my team would have a Hall of Fame quarterback like Roger Staubach, but we did—Tom Brady. We also had leadership comparable to Tom Lynch. I was touched by Lynch's offer to be an honorary member of his team.

At the beginning of my coaching career, I wasn't just at the bottom of the ladder, I wasn't even *on* the ladder. I was underground, but I was observing, and learning.

Eventually, I got a spot on the bottom of the NFL ladder and began to climb. Along the way, I learned from hundreds of players, coaches, scouts, and other associates on four different teams before I became a head coach in Cleveland. I also learned a lot from studying my opponents—nothing forced me to improve more than strong competition. I learned from victories, from losses, and from my many mistakes. Through it all, I never stopped learning and working to produce better results.

As your job or role in life changes, you have to evolve and adjust too. I hope that this book will help you improve your performance, wherever you happen to be on the ladder.

I was born into football. For years my father, Steve Belichick, was an assistant coach at the Naval Academy, and by all accounts, he was the best game scout anyone had ever seen. I grew up immersed in preparation as I watched my father scout opponents. I learned how to watch a game, how to break down film, how to find keys and tips for players to use in the game, and how to gain an advantage by studying opponents' tendencies. I still use these techniques.

INTRODUCTION

For the last half century, I have been a coach. I have never stopped learning about the game and learning about competition. I have learned about what makes human beings excel and what makes human beings *want* to excel. I have led men through months of mental and physical preparation, and then into months of the most intense athletic competition in the history of the world. The game of football combines hand-to-hand combat with circus-like acrobatics, and coaching the game demands complex strategic planning—and success in the game requires the highest commitment from its players, coaches, and staff.

As I began to succeed as a coach, first in New York and then in New England, I started to establish in my mind a series of principles, rules of thumb, habits, and philosophies that I understood to be fundamental to our teams' successes. When we won, I kept what worked. When we lost, I threw out what hadn't. Over time, these ideas coalesced into a single, coherent program. But that was only half the battle. If my program—or any program—were to ever have any chance of success, it would have to be communicated to hundreds of people with unique personalities, who came from all walks of life and were in possession of a wide range of different skills. Those people would have to unite under one vision, coordinated to seek one goal. Happily, my program works, and I can communicate it. The proof of that is in the record books.

In a game as competitive as football, you might be surprised to see a practitioner decide to share secrets of his trade. But it happens. In fact, my father did it, in 1962, with *Football Scouting Methods*, a now-classic book on the subject. Generations of scouts have made use of his methods. Football has been very good to me and my family—spanning three generations. I am inspired to write this book partly because of what he did, and partly because I would like to give back to the game that has done so much for me and

three generations of my family. Giving back to the game has been something I have been committed to for a long time. I welcomed college and high school coaches to our spring practices in New England and I spoke annually at coaching clinics around the country, as far back as Frank Glazier's clinics in the eighties on the Jersey Shore. I attended the annual coaches' convention with my dad for years, and we would listen together to the top college coaches give clinic talks. (Although I probably learned more outside the lecture rooms, where I was able to listen in on conversations about everything from job hunting to proper stance technique, and every new play, idea, or training method that traveled through the hotel lobby.)

I hope that this book can give back some of what I have taken from football.

Besides my father's model, I was also inspired to write this book by Ray Dalio, the brilliant founder of Bridgewater and author of *Principles*. Although Ray seldom refers to football in his book, I found his book incredibly useful. I had opportunities to talk with Ray and he helped convince me to share my own principles, as he shared his. I am glad he did. By the way, I acknowledge right here that Ray has given me permission to borrow his term "principles," which I will use in this book. Principles are foundational pieces—pillars, if you will—upon which you will build your base for sustained success. Some are nonnegotiable and some are flexible. However you choose which principles are best for you, consistency in application will be critical to their working.

If a team cannot consistently do the most important things that correlate to winning, that team has no chance to win consistently. Almost every day of my coaching career, I have organized and prioritized my thoughts for that day—whether that involved talking to the team and staff, or summarizing evaluations on college

INTRODUCTION

players. Authoring a book allowed me to pull all these principles together on a large scale. Thank you, Ray.

And thanks to Jack and Suzy Welch for sharing their thoughts in our many football and business conversations. Jack and Suzy gave me so much insight on what the other side is thinking in business deals, and they helped me understand the four quadrants of employees, ranging from “Must keep them” to “Get rid of them ASAP”: productive with a great attitude; productive with a bad attitude; not productive with a good attitude; not productive with a bad attitude.

Ultimately, my NFL career was centered on one thing, and only one thing: What can I do to help our team win? I learned the centrality of that question as a kid running around the facilities at Annapolis, listening and paying attention to my father and the other coaches. In high school I played, but I was never a great player. I did have the privilege to play for Al Laramore and the Annapolis High School Fighting Panthers. Coach Laramore was a legendary multi-sport coach in Maryland and had success at football, basketball, and lacrosse. His style reinforced many principles that I learned from my childhood observations of Navy football. First, anything that involved helping the team win was important, and other than family and academics, most everything that didn’t relate to winning took a back seat. Second, hard work and conditioning were paramount—outworking your competition was absolutely a pillar of both programs. Third, discipline on the football field correlated to winning. In other words: don’t beat yourself. Finally, everybody was replaceable. Anybody could be injured, so everyone had to be ready to do their job.

We’re going to work, we’re going to be disciplined, and it’s going to be hard. Football is hard. Winning is hard. Life is hard and so is our program. It’s demanding and it’s not for everyone. Neither am

I. But to get to the top, and stay there, is close to impossibly hard. So we do hard things. Everyone wants something, but how much pain and sacrifice are you willing to endure to get it? That's the work part and that's part of a winning culture.

Above all, do not beat yourself—you cannot win until you keep from losing.

As a head coach, more often than not, helping the team win doesn't look warm and fuzzy. It looks like work—usually hard work—if you want to outcompete your opponent. In this book, I want to take the reader deep inside my coaching and leadership style and share what I have learned. My philosophy is what led to winning—winning didn't develop into a philosophy. My philosophy may surprise you at times. At other times it might seem almost strangely obvious. (My rule on how to win football games: score the most points. Job titles and likes on social media do not win football games.)

Finally, a lot has been made of the way I communicate with players in team meetings or with the media after games. It has been described in many different ways over the years—direct, constructive, scathing, educational. Occasionally entertaining, perhaps.

But this is my playbook. I'm not talking to any TV reporter, and I'm not in the middle of another season of football with its infinite exigencies and requirements on my time. Now I get to explain what I mean, and why I mean it. For many of the principles in *The Art of Winning* that I'll share with you, I'll also share stories to illustrate them. And I don't have to worry about my words getting clipped into a sound bite or twisted out of context.

ONE

BIG GAMES, BIG MOMENTS

Big games aren't different from any other games. But everything *around* big games is different. It's the same for big moments in any line of work. Fundamentally, your process for getting to the big moment is the process that is most likely to win the day. Don't get distracted by all the other stuff. Nevertheless, this is a chapter about all the other stuff, and how to deal with it.

It might seem strange to start the book here with the “final goal”—the culmination of all your work—but focusing first on that goal will ground and orient all the principles in this book and how you think about them. For us in football, the final goal is the Super Bowl. To win one, we must have a vision of what we're trying to accomplish, and we have to stick to that vision, no matter how many distractions are around. To win more than one, we have to realize

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that a big win isn't the end of anything. It's the beginning of trying to win the next one.

You cannot think of big tests and triumphs as “final” in any respect. If you think about winning as something that starts and stops, something that can be turned on or off, or as something that can be “ramped up” when convenient, then you will never be ready to implement a true sustainable winning program. There are no end points in winning, period.

An NFL team plays seventeen regular-season games, and they're all highly consequential. You can't underperform for an entire regular season, get to the postseason, and declare “I'm ready.” With that attitude, you'll never get there to begin with. To reach your ultimate goal, you cannot try to master a result. You must master a *process*. A good process results in good habits. Consistent good habits result in dependability. The goal is to have a good, consistent process—and good results will follow. Then, winning becomes a practice. And finally, a habit. In other words, when we prepare to win, we prepare to win all the time.

I understand that this might seem easier said than done. What about those moments at work when you pull something off, something big, and you get celebrated for it? You're supposed to just take that in stride? You work hard, you get recognized, and suddenly your boss hands you a big opportunity, a real chance to prove yourself, and you're *not* supposed to treat it as a big deal? How do you not feel a mixture of hype and dread about that? How many of those opportunities come up for any of us in our careers?

I get that. Just because I don't think about big moments this way doesn't erase a very human tendency to get panicked or excited when facing a big test. Plenty of players in the NFL operate that way too (believe me), and treating a big game as something separate from the rest of the season certainly isn't confined to football.

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Have you ever gone out and bought new shoes or a new suit before a big day at work? Perhaps you were going to represent the company somewhere, or it was the first time back with your team after working remotely for a while. You want to make an impression, of course. It's natural. But then by lunch you have blisters because the shoes aren't broken in, or the suit jacket's too tight—and then you start thinking about rushing back home to get your old loafers, and you lose track of all your careful preparation.

Building a good process starts with identifying and understanding what is most important to success. Make sure to prioritize the major points for a successful process, and don't waste time and energy on stuff that doesn't really move the needle. A successful process depends on ignoring the noise.

And, unfortunately, the noise exists.

While I maintain that big games are no different from regular games, it is unavoidably true that what *surrounds* a big game sets it apart. There's a chaos that you need to meet and manage. That chaos can be a problem—but, like any problem, you can turn things around to your advantage by understanding what you need to focus on (and letting your opponents get distracted by the bright lights).

To manage the chaos around big moments you will need to call up your administrative and managerial skills, rather than anything dramatic or decisive. As a football coach, for every triumphant moment in the swirling confetti, there are ten thousand moments of quiet preparation. Big moments are won by winning all the small moments that come before them. And they're not all fun. Learn to embrace this kind of tedious detail work and you will be successful in your job, which will eventually lead to other opportunities and more responsibility. **Copyrighted Material**

Here's an example. The moment we win a conference championship game and advance to the Super Bowl, the Belichick Travel Agency opens. I wear many, many hats as a coach—organizer, motivator, amateur psychologist, disciplinarian, truth teller, accountant—and travel agent is one of them. The Super Bowl is a big, complicated affair, and I've got sixteen hundred tickets, three hundred hotel rooms, thousands of miscellaneous event tickets, and two planes' worth of family travelers to organize and distribute. Even though it's not my favorite part of the job, I do it with as much energy and attention as I can muster. These kinds of details are important to people, and for a brief time, I'm all ears. After that, we're all ball.

When the Belichick Travel Agency is open, I perform my role as energetically as I do any other part of my job. There's a time to say yes and there's a time to say no, and in the pursuit of sustained excellence, you're going to end up saying no a lot more than yes—so when I *do* say yes, I don't do it begrudgingly. I give people what they need so that we as a team get what we need later on, and what we need is for each player to play well and not be worried about making arrangements for his family. My job is to minimize (or eliminate) distraction so that each player can perform at his highest level. If I expect to be able to ask my slot receiver to play in a pinch at cornerback in front of a hundred million viewers on TV, I don't get to ignore his request for a hotel room with a nice view.

Dividing the inventory of tickets and prime travel positions isn't something I would ever hand off to an assistant or intern, at least not initially. It takes a steady hand to plan what amounts to a five-day party for hundreds of people. Everyone is already on edge from the competitive pressure of the upcoming game and from their phones, which have been exploding with congratulatory messages

(and requests). You cannot ignore the frenzy and hope it will go away. Leaders adapt, and leaders do what needs to be done.

So, instead of being laser-focused on red-zone tendencies and takeaway opportunities, I'll spend some of my time and attention addressing hotel accommodations and ticket allotments and help my players' families and friends make arrangements to come and cheer us on. It might sound funny to be worrying about room sizes or complimentary breakfasts, but if it does, I'm guessing you've never performed your job in front of 125 million people. If you did, the people you love and who love you would also want to be there to support you, to show off their rightful pride. And you would want to help facilitate that. Is it ultimately a sideshow? Of course. But it doesn't feel like it to the guys who have worked as hard as they have to get to the biggest moment in their lives. As a leader, I can't look at the team and tell them they're wasting their time. So when those calls come in and a player's cousin is asking for a king over a queen bed, or an uncle is wondering what party he can get into, the Belichick Travel Agency policy is to give players the opportunity to answer. But we will do it on a clock.

Two days. That's how long we like to keep the agency open. And during that time, while I'm thinking about the players' accommodations, they are required to think about this question: In two months, two years, or twenty years from now, what part of this process will they remember? It won't be the size and spectacle, and it won't be whether they got a junior or full suite. The only thing anyone will remember is whether we won or lost.

To help them focus on what matters, I like to tell my players and coaches to think about "the drawer." Whether real or imagined, the drawer is the place where they can put every nonessential task, responsibility, and commitment so that their focus can be purely on doing their jobs. To be clear, I'm not telling them to throw anything

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away—it's a drawer, not a trash can—just place it somewhere safe that they can return to once the job is done. The drawer is a tool for managing distractions. It's also my way of acknowledging that we are all human, we are all pulled in different directions, and we are all imperfect—but we *can* make a choice to rise above that imperfection and those distractions, if temporarily.

It might sound simple, but it's effective. Really big moments are infrequent and nobody wants to look back with regret because they were distracted and didn't perform their best when it mattered most. You honor commitments by paying full attention to them, not by randomly swinging back and forth between what matters and what doesn't based on your mood or anxiety.

I am asking my players to honor their *current* commitment to win, while at the same time acknowledging the other obligations in their lives. There will be a time for the other stuff.

The drawer is a toolbox, something you can open and grab from when you need to. It's about adaptability (more on that later) and about awareness. Sometimes, a player might realize that they *can't* put something in there. If that happens, we deal with it. And we're better for it.

The day before the 2002 Super Bowl, downtown New Orleans had become an early Mardi Gras, jam-packed with people, fans, media, anyone trying to get close to the action—no place to sequester a team trying to concentrate on the upcoming game, much less walk through some plays. It became untenable, so early Saturday evening, we boarded buses for a nondescript and infinitely quieter hotel outside of town. It was perfect. Except for the fact that Adam Vinatieri had drawn the short straw and been placed in a smoking room. And man, had that room been smoked in. (It was 2002, it was New Orleans, and it was a hotel next to the airport. Use your imagination.) The stench was eye-watering. If we had been in “big

game mode,” Adam might have convinced himself that the stakes were too high to complain, or that it was something he could shove in the drawer. But instead, he knew what he needed to perform. So he spoke up about his accommodations, and the Belichick Travel Agency made a rare exception to act outside our stipulated operating hours and switched him to another room. He rewarded us the next day by kicking a fairly significant field goal. His win became our win.

Concepts like the drawer and the Belichick Travel Agency are ways I navigate the distractions surrounding big games. These techniques acknowledge reality, while at the same time emphasizing what our job really is. Without them, I’d just be hoping for the best. I’d have to bet on several dozen different people, all uniquely motivated, to remain focused during an unbelievably distracting time. I don’t like those odds. Once players (and coaches) get distracted, they lose touch with the preparation that got them to the big moment in the first place. That’s where losing begins. If distractions take over an event, and we lose, the results can never be reversed and we will all live with the outcome for the rest of our lives. I work hard to make sure that this doesn’t happen, and we don’t underperform.

Sometimes, the pressure and hoopla surrounding the Super Bowl can also cause some coaches (and certainly some players) to forget what got them there in the first place. When people get to the big game, they think they need to meet the moment by doing something dramatic. The thought process is like this: it’s the biggest stage, so it’s the time to pull out a new plan, a surprise play, something that’s going to shock and awe. For example, instead of drinking one 5-Hour Energy drink, you might drink three to triple your energy. Take it from me: it doesn’t work like that.

We won our first Patriots Super Bowl in part because we *didn't* do anything we hadn't done before. People focus on the fact that we developed a new defensive game plan against the St. Louis Rams between the first time we played them that season and when we faced off in New Orleans for the championship, but what they forget is that we had also developed a new game plan against *every* team we played that year (and every team we would play during my entire time with the Patriots). It would have been a betrayal of the principles and practices that had brought our team to the Super Bowl if we had pumped the brakes and decided to "play it safe" by simply and passively replaying a game we had played before, especially considering the fact that the Rams had beaten us in the regular season—we couldn't be tempted to keep things the same, or fall back on what had already worked, because then we would just lose again. Consistency doesn't mean a resistance to change. It means commitment. And in our case, our commitment was to adapting. I was determined to treat the Super Bowl just like we treated every other game that season, and that meant we were going to adjust what we did on defense to what our opponent wanted to do on offense.

The Rams offense that year was truly special, and they did a great job of building it, coaching it, and winning with Kurt Warner, Marshall Faulk, and a wide receiver corps for the ages. So when they beat us in the regular season, it was frustrating. The final tally was 24–17—closer than it should have been, but we got a defensive touchdown on an interception return by our cornerback Terrell Buckley, meaning we scored only ten points on offense. Tom Brady was ineffective in that game, in large part because I gave him only half of his normal reps in practice that week (more on that later). On defense, I also made a major miscalculation by thinking we could disrupt the Rams' passing game by blitzing Kurt Warner with

five-man pressures on over half the plays. The Rams blocked them cleanly. The only thing we ended up disrupting with our defensive plan was our own pass coverage, and Warner chewed us up. That game had one of the worst defensive game plans of my career.

My job as head coach is to give the players a chance to win. I have to provide them with a game plan and prepare them for their opponent. In the NFL, where the playing field is level, our game plans and preparation matter a lot, but ultimately the players have to go on the field and make the plays to win the game. Good players cannot overcome bad coaching. If I do not do my job, they cannot do theirs. In the regular season, I had done a poor job and we lost against the Rams. Two and a half months later, when we met again in the Super Bowl, we did what any winning team should do: we looked at our opponent, and we adapted to what we saw. It wasn't a "Super Bowl game plan" or a "kitchen sink game plan." Nothing special, nothing unique, nothing dramatic. Just the same strategizing and film study that we had done every other week that year, the same commitment to planning that had gotten us to where we wanted to be.

I'll say it again: not the same *plan*; the same *planning*.

In New Orleans, I did a better job of preparing the team than I had in the regular season (although the game still came down to the final play). Our game plan this time around was fundamentally different: we decided to give less attention to disrupting Warner and instead go after the lynchpin of their timing-based offense, Marshall Faulk, who was an extraordinary, multitalented back, capable of breaking off for huge gains as a runner or receiver. In concrete terms, we were going to weaken our front line in favor of beefing up our defensive backs. We ran plays with five, six, or even seven players in the secondary, a defense that I had first experimented with some years before with the Giants, when we were facing the

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legendary Barry Sanders, one of the most difficult running backs I have ever prepared against.

Not only did we try to contain Faulk, but also we shifted resources away from the front line (and from pressure on Warner) and toward disrupting wide receivers Torry Holt and Isaac Bruce. To be blunt: we physically harassed them on every step they tried to take. During the regular-season game, the trio of Holt, Bruce, and Faulk had combined for nearly three hundred receiving yards and two TDs. Perhaps even more significantly, Warner had targeted those three players twenty-eight times. If he felt any pressure from our defense that day, it didn't matter: he had plenty of star talents to target, and he did, and they won.

Ironically, by focusing on disrupting the receivers rather than putting pressure on Warner, we were actually able to get to Warner more because the receivers weren't able to run uncontested routes, and Warner had to hold the ball longer on pass plays. We blitzed less, but our smothering defense of his favorite targets ended up disrupting their overall timing and we got more sacks—and one franchise-changing pick-six by Ty Law.

So, to sum up, our two areas of focus in that 2002 Super Bowl were: (1) to be extremely physical with the Rams' explosive receivers; and (2) to attack Marshall Faulk wherever he went. Tactically, this meant that instead of bringing five or six defenders at Warner when he dropped back (as we did during the regular-season matchup), we sent those defenders after his targets. It worked out for us, and we won.

Well, it worked out for *most* of us.

Before each of the Patriots' nine trips to the Super Bowl, I delivered the same cautionary message to our team and staff: This is a business trip. We aren't fans, and we're here to do our jobs. If you

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want to soak in the atmosphere and the hoopla, buy a ticket and enjoy. You have the rest of your life to experience Super Bowl week as a fan. But when we're there as a team, *we* are the show and the rest of the circus is for everyone else. Sure, there will be a little social time for family and friends, but in every other step of the week leading up to the game, we should focus on our preparation and our readiness to perform at our highest level.

And that means: *there are no guests in your hotel room*. To be clear, that rule goes for training camp and regular-season road trips, and it certainly applies at the Super Bowl. No friends, wives, girlfriends, agents, cousins. If you want to see someone in a hotel room, go somewhere else. I could not have been more direct about it, during my entire career.

Unfortunately, two nights before the 2002 Super Bowl, a player had a female friend in his room. Although he wasn't going to play in the game anyway, he still wasn't going to get away with this indiscretion. So I sent him home.

Think of how embarrassing that must have been.

There he was, with his team at the biggest game in the world, the pinnacle of professional sports, a lifelong dream for every football player . . . and he had to return home the day before the game, while his family and friends were still in town. For the rest of his life, every time that Super Bowl is mentioned, or a highlight is shown, he'll think about not having been there (and he'll think about why he wasn't there). By getting caught up in non-football stuff, he made a bad decision, took a risk, rolled the dice—and lost. It wasn't a total loss, to be fair. We won the game, and he got his Super Bowl ring. As a team, we also got a good cautionary tale going forward. Rules and expectations are not hollow. They're at the foundation of how any winning team must operate.

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Dwelling on all the bright lights and distractions surrounding big moments sets us up for failure, because it takes us away from winning habits. All the hype reorients our focus on things that don't have to do with winning (such as "legacy"). And that's when people start playing selfishly and stupidly. It's critical to remind people of this. Collectively as a team, we need to do everything together and support each other.

Before every game in the regular season leading up to the 2002 Super Bowl, our team walked out of the tunnel as one. It was just what we did. But four days before the Super Bowl, an NFL game operations representative got in touch with us about the league's final preparations with the pregame script and timeline—did we want our starting offensive or defensive players to be announced as we took the field? I told my colleague Berj Najarian to tell them, "Neither." Our entire team would come out as a group, as it had all season long. On the Friday before the Super Bowl, when word of my answer had spread, a league representative called and told me this wouldn't work. He said that we all had a very strict schedule, that the Super Bowl was a television product of astonishing complexity, and that it was critically important that we all follow the script: eleven starters for each team had to be announced individually during a period of time not to exceed one minute and forty seconds. With this additional pushback from the league and network, I revisited the decision with our captains to make sure that the team was still on board with the plan. The captains agreed that we should come out as a team.

We would come out as we had been coming out, in the way that had gotten us, as a team, to this moment: instead of having eleven starters trotting out one at a time as our opponent did, all forty-five

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Patriots poured onto the field as one entity far stronger than the sum of our individual parts.*

It's a widely celebrated decision now, but there was no guarantee that it would be received warmly in the moment.

Athletes dream their whole lives about running out onto the field, hearing their name announced to the world amid as much pageantry as possible. For a few precious seconds, a global spotlight was set to be trained on them alone. But our group of players decided to forgo that individual glory in favor of the collective. That is real sacrifice and a real commitment to winning. Some of those players would go on to become immortal in their own right and have careers that would afford them dozens or hundreds of opportunities to be globally recognized. For many others, that was their one moment in the spotlight.

On TV, Pat Summerall described to millions of people all over the world how, "instead of being introduced individually, as is the tradition in Super Bowls, the team [is] coming out en masse as the Patriots . . ." His partner John Madden added: "Showing the unity that this team has shown all season long." If we hadn't already been doing that group introduction all season, and if we hadn't all bought into a team-first identity, and if we hadn't really committed to all doing our jobs together, it would have meant nothing. People would have thought it was just a PR stunt. But the work we did before the big game made it possible for us to exploit all the hoopla and recommit to our fundamental principles. For years, people have told me they rooted for the Patriots because of that one image. We shared equally in what became a much greater moment than we

* The moment was indeed very powerful, but, sure enough, the timing ended up being awkward. They weren't kidding about that minute and forty seconds—after our initial group introduction, we stood on the field looking a little lost and waiting for the signal to head to the bench.