

Play Like You Mean It

*Passion, Laughs, and Leadership in the
World's Most Beautiful Game*

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with Don Yeager

DOUBLEDAY

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1. 2010 . . . A Wild Ride

On January 24, 2010, I looked up from the sidelines at Lucas Oil Stadium and watched the clock tick down to 0:00. The hard realization set in: our 2009 season, my rookie season as head coach of the New York Jets, was over. The Indianapolis Colts had won the AFC Championship. Losing is brutal—I don't think anyone can argue that. But some losses, well, they burn a little deeper. As 63,000 fans cheered for the Colts, and their players started putting on their championship hats and T-shirts, I jogged to the middle of the field to shake Jim Caldwell's hand with only two things on my mind: 1) Damn . . . Peyton beat me again; and 2) When do I get another shot at him?

Losing in the AFC Championship was tough enough, but having Peyton Manning take a second Super Bowl Ring from me just pissed me off. In 2006, when I was the Defensive Coordinator with the Baltimore Ravens, we got beat by the Colts in the playoffs. The whole thing just haunts me. Wait, let me rephrase that. *Peyton Manning* haunts me. In my opinion, simply winning isn't enough. You have to

win against the best, and Peyton Manning is the best. Now, don't get me wrong, we deserved to lose that 2009 AFC Championship game. We were outmanned, injuries killing us all over the field during the second half. And no one knows how to abuse your weakness quite like Peyton. But to watch your season end on that note was frustrating, and the only way I knew how to deal with that frustration was to let it drive me. That's why my first instinct was to imagine how we were going to beat Peyton the next time around . . . and to envision the Jets, if only in my mind, playing the Colts in the playoffs again.

My moment to mourn was short and sweet, because the second my hand left Caldwell's, the 2010 season began and we were 0-0.

Setting the tone with my Jets in that post-game locker room speech was a huge step toward a new season. Fortunately, it took very little effort. I just went in, was true to myself, and told them exactly what I believed. I told them that the fastest way to kick ourselves in the ass was to go into 2010 with the assumption that we were going to make it to the AFC Championship game. From that point on, every team was on a level playing field. There were no guarantees. We knew what it felt like to be right there and lose it. That would make us hungrier. We wanted to take it all. I told them to strive to get a home game in the 2010 playoffs. I said let's play for it again, let's win it, and let's do it in our city, at our stadium, in front of our fans. I wanted them to wear their Jets gear and be proud. We finished in the top four in the NFL, we turned an underdog team into an AFC title contender, and we earned the respect and support of the people in New York. I mean they lit up the Empire State Building green and white the week of the AFC championship game. If that didn't make my players proud to be Jets, then they shouldn't be on this team.

The future, I told them right there in the belly of that stadium, came with a challenge. I told the coaches and the players that I was challenging each of them and myself, to find a way for us to get better. I didn't know how it was going to happen, but we were going to find a way for each of us to get a little bit better. I knew as a team, we

were going to have to make some roster improvements. We had to get better in the corner and better in the back end. I also knew it was crucial for us to get a closer as a pass rusher. We needed someone who could close out guys so I wouldn't have to blitz every snap.

Coming out of that game and going into the off-season, we went right at those weaknesses to prepare for 2010. We signed Jason Taylor and Antonio Cromartie as free agents. We drafted Joe McKnight, who could help us both in the running and passing game; Kyle Wilson, who I know will be a dynamic player down the road; John Conner, who is an outstanding fullback; and Vladimir Ducasse who is a dynamite player on that field. We also ended up getting LaDainian Tomlinson, Santonio Holmes, Nick Folk and Trevor Pryce. We were determined to do everything we could to improve in every way possible. We even picked up Mark Brunell, an 18-year veteran quarterback, who has turned out to be a fantastic mentor to Mark Sanchez.

Unfortunately, this business is all about give and take. So, as excited as I was to get such amazing guys before our 2010, I was equally as upset to have to let some go. We released Alan Faneca, Thomas Jones, and Margues Douglas, who was one of my guys from Baltimore, and traded Leon Washington to Seattle. That is, by far, the worst part of my job. These guys are truly amazing players and people. If I had it my way I would keep everyone but that's just not how it works in the NFL. Every decision is for the betterment of the team.

With a week or two to go before our 2010 season opener, I was feeling good. We were back in Florham Park after spending training camp at SUNY Cortland, we had officially decided on our 53-man roster and we had settled some lingering contract negotiations. If you watched us on HBO's *Hard Knocks* at the beginning of the season, then I'm sure you're well aware that two of the contract negotiations I'm talking about were with our second year cornerback, Darrelle Revis, and our center, Nick Mangold. I'll get into further detail about this later in the book, but for now, let me just say that compared to the Revis situation, Mangold's contract was a breeze. Both

of these players are great guys, but the way their situations played out was far different. Woody Johnson and our General Manager, Mike Tannenbaum, approached Nick about a lucrative seven-year extension, and he signed two weeks later, making him the highest paid center in the league. On the day he signed, I actually held him out of practice. I mean, we're talking about a lot of money here! The last thing we needed was for him to walk out there and fall in a hole with that much on the table.

Revis, on the other hand, signed a big-time four-year deal after one of the most publicized holdouts in recent NFL history. The day he came back to practice might possibly have been the happiest day of my life. I have never wanted something to be over more than that whole ordeal.

From the very beginning of the season, it seemed like the New York Jets were the most talked about team in the NFL. A large part of this was due to our appearance on *Hard Knocks*. Apparently, some people think I'm entertaining. The truth is, I don't really care what other people have to say about me, including an NFL blogger, a broadcaster, or even a former head coach. I knew *Hard Knocks* was going to generate interest. Not everyone was going to like it and that's fine; that's what remote controls are for. I'd be lying if I said that I didn't like our name constantly in the press. People were talking about us, and that's really all that mattered. We were exactly where we wanted to be.

We put ourselves in a position where we had no other choice but to prove ourselves. I knew people looked at the Jets and me like, 'OK Rex, we've been hearing about you guys all preseason. Now show us what you've got.' I felt challenged by all the media attention, and I LOVE a challenge.

I also don't mind if the media's coverage of us isn't 100 percent positive, but I really don't like being portrayed as something we definitely are not. We had developed what the media called an "*Animal House*" image. At first, I think we got this image because people viewed my language on *Hard Knocks* as offensive, and when they

watched the show they thought they saw a team that was all play and no work, a claim I had to defend a million times in the media. It really escalated in September 2010 when Inez Sainz, a female reporter for Mexico's TV Azteca, accused some of the players and coaches, myself included, of acting inappropriately toward her during a visit to one of our practices.

The story hit the media on Monday, September 13, and we were exactly one week from opening the season against the Ravens in our new stadium . . . and this is what I'm dealing with. Now, I could go on for pages and pages about what happened, and what definitely did not happen, but at this point the whole incident has been discussed and dissected, and I don't think anyone on either side found much to talk about.

The whole incident shook me up beyond belief, partially because my name was being dragged into a situation that I hadn't even witnessed, and partially because we already had the image of being goof-offs because of *Hard Knocks*, and now we were on the verge of developing a reputation for being jerks, too. It was, honestly, killing me. It was a poor reflection of our football team, and I knew we're just the opposite of that. We always said we wanted to have some real bad-asses on the field, and gentlemen off the field—and that's what we had. That's why this whole thing made me madder than hell.

But in the end this was an example of the kind of distraction you have to expect from out of the blue—these things can either derail you and your team, or you can come together and learn from them.

The Sainz story began to fade after a few more days, and our full attention was on our home opener. Obviously, if I had to choose an opponent to face while opening up our new stadium and starting our season, I never would have chosen Baltimore. They are an outstanding team with a strong defense that plays with everything they've got each and every time they take the field. We are the exact same team. We knew going into it that this would be a competition to see who could play more physically. I thought we would kill them, I really

did. We were opening up our new stadium, our fans were so into it, and it was supposed to be a special night; unfortunately, it just never turned out that way.

The effort we gave was tremendous but mistakes killed us. It was tough to get beat 10-9, like taking a punch in the stomach. Offensively, we struggled. We were one for 11 on 3rd down conversions. When you compare that stat alone to Baltimore, who converted 58 percent on 3rd downs, we should have been clobbered. Defensively, we played solid, but penalties cost us. We took pride in playing great, physical defense, but you can't have 14 penalties and win. You have to play smarter than that.

Coming out of that long rainy night, the thing we tried to remember is that it was going to be a long season and we could—and would—come back. I had confidence in myself and in our coaches. I knew we were going to get better; the team just had to believe in us.

I've always said that every time we play New England, they're going to think they are better at two positions: head coach and quarterback. Mark Sanchez and I like to laugh about it because, honestly, we are matching up against Bill Belichick, one of the best coaches in NFL history, and the coach I personally admire the most, and Tom Brady, a quarterback who solidified his spot in the Hall of Fame years ago. Well, that might be true, but it doesn't stop Mark and me from looking at each other before we play the Patriots and saying, "So what? We can take 'em." I've always said as long as the rest of our team can overcome me as a head coach, and Mark as a quarterback, we should be able to beat the Patriots!

Turns out I was right in week two. A 28-14 victory over the Patriots was big for us, and I was so proud of the true team effort that we gave. This game definitely saved us from drowning in our loss the week before. It proved just how talented this team really is. The only negative coming out of the game was an injury to Darrelle Revis, but when he went down with a pulled hamstring on a touchdown to Randy Moss, we found away to overcome it. We held Tom Brady to a 72.5 quarterback rating, forced him to throw two interceptions

and six incompletions in a row. Mark had a 124.3 quarterback rating and started what I would say was the beginning of a beautiful relationship with Dustin Keller. There were no individuals on the field that night. We played like a team. That's what I was most proud of. New England is a great team; everyone knows that. But this night, we were greater.

We couldn't make it to our third game of the season before our "*Animal House*" image was back. On September 22, at 6 A.M., I got a phone call from Mike Tannenbaum telling me that Braylon Edwards had been arrested near the Lincoln Tunnel for a DUI. Like anyone else would be, I was pissed. By that point, I was fed up. I told Braylon and the team that I was tired of dealing with these issues. It's embarrassing, not just to me, but to our owner. I told the guys think that it's not just about them, that there can be no selfishness on a great football team. They represent a franchise. They wear the logo of that franchise, they wear the colors of that franchise and every week millions of fans scream for them because they are part of that franchise.

To do something like get a DUI just blew my mind. We have a Player Protection program available to these guys to prevent situations like this from happening. Not only did it look bad on the organization that Braylon either wasn't aware or chose to ignore the program, but two veteran Jets, D'Brickashaw Ferguson and Vernon Gholston, were in the car with him. I was so tired of the Jets carrying around this stigma that we're just a group of thugs. I had worked long and hard since my first day on the job to improve what people thought about the Jets. I wasn't going to let the carelessness of a few guys ruin it and I made sure they knew that.

Once time passed, I was able to calm down a little from the whole thing. I am able to see now that in the long run this may have been the best thing that could have happened to Braylon. He's really a good kid, and while it's disappointing what happened to him, sometimes you just have to take the consequences like a man.

I truly thought he had been embarrassed enough. My only punishment was choosing to sit him out for the first quarter against

Miami. I heard every opinion possible about my decision. Some people criticized me by saying that being benched for one quarter isn't a punishment, that I don't know how to discipline or control my team. Most people said they would have just suspended him from the team right then. I just don't work that way. I think we all mess up at some point in our lives. Now, I'm not going to let someone walk all over me, but I'm not going to turn my back on him either. This is my team and I will run it in the best way I see fit. Braylon was paying for his mistakes, whether the media knows it or not.

As we approached the next game, I decided to share my personal math formula with the team. Basically, I look at every divisional game as if it counts as a game and a half—which means our third game down in Miami could either put us up half a game, or down two and a half. I know it's not every day math, but it works for us. My point is that the game against the Dolphins in Miami was not just a normal regular season game. For us, it was huge. There is a history there. The fact that we were 0-2 against them in 2009 is still a burr in my saddle. And on top of that, you may have heard about a minor issue I had with a couple of fans at the Pro Bowl last year, which of course made front-page news in Miami and New York. I'll get back to that.

Needless to say, I wasn't exactly expecting the stadium to give me a standing ovation when I took the field in Miami. Given our past, I wanted to play so hard and so tough that we'd absolutely kill them. In the end it was a bittersweet victory. I was excited that we walked out with a 31-23 win, but I wanted more from my guys. Our defense allowed 463 yards. That stat alone killed me. This game was sort of personal for me because of the relationship I've built with Jason Taylor, who had an amazing career with the Dolphins. The truth is he never wanted to leave Miami; they let him go. Fortunately for us, their loss was our gain in 2010.

Jason's an unbelievable guy. He came to New York, into our building, and immediately became one of the guys. He had the best attitude and was so humble. Our victory over Miami was a memo-

rable conquest for him. Knowing how special it was, at the end of the game I dumped the Gatorade jug on him. It was the first time a coach had ever done that to a player. It was my own tribute to him, and one that he fully deserved.

After returning to New York and before heading to Buffalo for our fourth game we made some minor adjustments to our roster. We released veteran Howard Green and signed Trevor Pryce. In the time I was with Baltimore, Trevor averaged a quarterback hit for every ten snaps taken—not ten passes—ten snaps he was given. The minute we heard the Ravens had released him, we saw it as an opportunity for us. A lot of people questioned why I would “violate” some apparent unspoken rule in the NFL not to sign a player that another team releases with the intention that it plans to make active again. I must have been sleeping in Transactions 101 because apparently I missed this rule. To me, that’s part of the game. We released Howard Green and went after Trevor Pryce. That’s the risk you take and in my opinion, you don’t cut a guy as the Ravens did and roll the dice.

The match-up against Buffalo is what they call a classic trap game. We opened the season on Monday Night Football against the Ravens and got beat by a point, then we had New England and then a huge Sunday night game against Miami. So already, we had three huge games right out of the gate. In reality, they were probably the biggest games in the NFL at that stage of the season and we were involved in all three of them. Now, we are headed to play a team that we are physically and strategically better than, so people think it’s an automatic win. That’s a trap game.

We were in the same situation in 2009. We won our first three games against Houston, New England, and Tennessee and then played at New Orleans and ended up getting beaten. We threw six interceptions and lost. That’s why I made it a point to never look past ANYONE. We can’t assume we will get a victory, because it doesn’t always work out the way you plan. Fortunately in this case it did. The 38-14 win over Buffalo was another great divisional win for us.

The second of the five prime-time games we had scheduled for

the season was against the Minnesota Vikings right here at home. The hype surrounding this game was inevitable due simply to the fact that Brett Favre played here for a year in 2008. So here he was, back to take on his former team, and the media storm began. Of course, in the days before our game the focus had shifted from his return to New York to a new scandal involving Favre and one of our former employees. When the story broke, it was like a Tiger Woods media frenzy all over again. To add to the hype, the Patriots made an unexpected change to their roster and traded Randy Moss back to the Vikings. I thought to myself, “Why did Belichick have to trade him this week? Couldn’t he have waited until after we played them?”

It made me laugh, but in all seriousness, if there is one person you don’t want to have to face twice it’s Randy Moss. He is a freak of an athlete, and we already had to prepare for him once that month. All I could think about was whether I was going to see another ridiculous one-handed catch like he made against us in week two. Fortunately for us, the outcome was what we wanted. We beat the Vikings 29-20 in one hell of a game.

We were dominating the game, yet not scoring touchdowns—just kicking field goals. In games like that, you usually lose. Plus, you have Brett Favre on the other side and all you keep thinking is “Oh man, I know any second now this guy’s going to get hot.” We really seemed to drown everything out and focus on the goal though. When we got an interception to wrap it up and the game was ours I looked over at Matt Cavanaugh, one of our offensive assistant coaches, and he was smiling because I had predicted that exact ending.

Despite the off-field distractions—the hour-long delay of game, the brutal weather conditions and a total change to our game plan because of Randy Moss—we still managed to beat what I considered, at that point in the season, to be one of the most talented football teams in the league. Brett Favre is as good as they get in terms of an experienced quarterback, and while he didn’t have a 2010 season anything like he expected, there’s still nothing more nerve-racking as a coach than watching him start to scramble.

Our next match up was against the Broncos. Denver is a difficult place to play for us. Not only is it a long trip, but also the conditions are not anything like we are used to in New York. I don't care what anyone says, it takes a while to get used to playing in high altitude like that. We left earlier than we usually would for this reason. To sum it up, we walked away with our fifth win of the season, beating the Broncos 24-20. We now had the best record in the league, at 5-1, and it sure felt good. Yes, we definitely made some mistakes against Denver, but I think Bill Parcells is right when he says, "The best record reflects that you are the best team." I have always agreed with that; I was just waiting for other people to see it too.

Coming off our bye week, we played Green Bay at home on Halloween night. The Packers handed us our second loss of the season, embarrassing our offense in the process, shutting us out, 9-0. I have to give Green Bay all the credit. They were unbelievable on that day, far better than we were. On a positive note, I thought our defense was outstanding. We held them to only 14 percent on third down conversions. Overall, we just couldn't pull it together as a team.

Mark Sanchez couldn't throw the ball for the first half of the game, and then once he found his rhythm our receivers couldn't catch the ball in the second half. Nick Folk missed field goals that he usually could make in his sleep. All the way around, we were a mess. It's frustrating to watch a team you know is so damn good just throw it away like that.

My immediate reaction after a loss is to want to get that moment back. Unfortunately, in this league there are no do over's. I can spend all day going over the things we could have done differently. We just had a ton of errors, like Steve Weatherford calling for a fake punt when we were 4th and 18 on our own 20-yard line. I love Weatherford; he's an aggressive athlete, and by letting the guys call the plays themselves a lot of time they get too excited and act before they think.

All of those things contributed to our opening loss against Baltimore, and here they were again. What was disappointing was not

only that we tarnished our record, it's that we lost on our own turf. Losing at your place, that's never okay. It was the first time all year that we didn't play like Jets, and the worst part was that our fans had to see it live.

Going up to Detroit after that loss, I was glad to see how we handled the game mentally. Sometimes after teams suffer a loss, they can become mentally defeated, which takes a long time to overcome. Not us. We were still there to take it all. We came away with a 23-20 victory in overtime. I thought this was a huge turnaround for us. This game was all about mixing it up. We took a different approach and ran the ball a lot more, which is something Brian Schottenheimer, our offensive coordinator, and I had been talking about for some time.

I thought Mark did a great job, especially on the last three drives. He was calling two plays in the huddle and our guys were ready to go. We executed well and had so much confidence in our two-minute offense. Going into overtime, Sanchez came up to me and said, "Coach, if we get the ball back, can we stay in that two-minute mode?"

I said, "Heck, yeah, kid. Go for it! If that's what you want, you go ahead."

He was so confident and I thought that was a great change up for us. Mark proved more than once this year that he can lead this team to victory when we're behind in the fourth quarter. It's was cool to watch him each game as he got better and better. I know people want to rip on us for barely beating a team like Detroit, saying that we didn't play well and we just got lucky. The way I look at it, we still won. We were 6-2 and felt like there was a lot more gas in the tank.

Sibling rivalry—there's nothing better. Playing Cleveland, I went head to head against my twin brother Rob, the defensive coordinator for the Browns. Both of us had been looking forward to this match up all season. It was do or die all the way. Rob wasn't our only connection to Cleveland, though; we were also going up against the

Browns head coach Eric Mangini, the head coach of the Jets just before me. The entire week leading up to this game, Rob and I did nothing but give each other hell. It was great. Rob and I are so competitive. We would call and rip on each other's coaches. We would put each other on speakerphone and just go at it. I even went as far as to dress up like Rob in a press conference. The media gave this a lot of attention, but to me, it was just a way to keep things light for my players and to have a little fun. As you'll see in this book, I think it's vitally important to have fun with what you do—especially if you're lucky, like me, to have a job you really love. That's why I put on that wig and stuffed my shirt with a pillow. If you need a good laugh, look for it on Youtube.

In all seriousness, though, I knew that Cleveland game was going to be a great game. Rob is among the most creative defensive minds in the league; he and Mike Pettine are about as creative as it gets. They are unbelievable in putting their players in positions where they can be most successful. Rob doesn't worry about what a player can't do. He focuses on what he can do.

Against the Browns, we were able to win our second overtime game of the season, this one 26-20. At the end of the day, I think it's remarkable that Cleveland pushed us into overtime. I thought we were in total control of that game, but the scoreboard didn't show what I was feeling. The game showed us that we couldn't keep relying on fourth quarter points to pull us through. We had to find a way to score in the red zone. We had the opportunity in the first three quarters but for some reason, we couldn't make it happen. We had fallen into a bad habit of not scoring until the end of the game. Cleveland really exposed what a problem that was for us.

For the week after Cleveland, we worked in practice on becoming a more aggressive offensive team. It's a good thing, because when we faced the Texans the following Sunday we scored 30 points—but we gave up 27! Beating the Texans put us at 8-2, a really solid start. It's safe to say that the standout of that game was Santonio Holmes. He grabbed a 6-yard scoring reception with 10 seconds left. He finished

the game with seven receptions, 126-yards and two touchdowns. He's a stud. There's not much more you can say.

The next week was Thanksgiving, and in the NFL nothing says "Thankful" better than a win on Thanksgiving Day in front of a massive TV audience. Cincinnati was a great win for us. That game was won because of our special teams and Brad Smith. Our defense did an awesome job too. Although we rushed for 171 yards, our offense lagged behind a little, at least for our standards. We got off to a slow start, which like I said, had been our routine those past couple weeks. But in this case, I felt during the second half the momentum was shifting in our favor and we were about to take control of the game. Sure enough, that's what happened. We won 26-10 and felt like things were rolling in 2010 just as we had envisioned. We were confident.

We started into that following week with a laser-focus on preparing for our biggest road game of the year—our second match-up against the New England Patriots. Both teams were 9-2, and this Monday Night football game felt like a critical point in our season.

I'm going to take a break here and come back to this moment. So much happened in 2010, and before. Stick with me—there are a lot of details and stories I need to fill in.

18. Hard Knocks

One of my biggest goals for this franchise is for every coach to want to coach here and for every player to want to play here. We had already changed the culture of the Jets on the inside. We were a whole new team and we knew exactly how great we were. Our next step was to find a way to make sure outsiders knew it, too. In order for that to happen we had to sell ourselves, and it turned out that *Hard Knocks* was our platform.

Mr. Johnson was actually approached by NFL Films last year with the proposal to do *Hard Knocks* during the 2009 season. He ended up saying no, because it was my first year as head coach and clearly we were going through changes. I think he knew that I needed a year to get settled, and truthfully, I'm sure he needed a year to get settled with me. When NFL Films came back in 2010, it was really Ross Greenburg, president of HBO Sports, who was pushing hard for us to do it. Mr. Greenburg is a great guy. He's very smart and is highly respected by everyone in the league, so when Mr. Johnson knew he was behind it, he agreed. Over the years we had been deemed "the

same old Jets” and Mr. Johnson was sick of it. Like any NFL team owner, he has a lot of pride in his franchise, and to him “the same old Jets” was a derogatory term that he wanted to get away from. There was a new head coach, a new practice facility, a new stadium, and most important, a whole new culture to the Jets. *Hard Knocks* was the way to show all that and to let everyone see firsthand that the New York Jets were not the same old team.

I would be lying if I said that I was sold on doing the show right off the bat. I had experienced the *Hard Knocks* cameras before when they followed the Baltimore Ravens through training camp back in 2001. Needless to say, when I was first approached with the idea of doing it this year, my initial reaction was to pass. It wasn't until I realized how important it was to Mr. Johnson that I was 100 percent on board. Mr. Johnson knew the kind of potential *Hard Knocks* had for us. He knew it would be a great vehicle to show the American public exactly what this franchise stands for. He was sure of the good it would bring to the Jets, and, honestly, the more I thought about it, the more I realized he was right. When I looked at it that way, there was no reason not to do it.

Before we signed on the dotted line, though, we needed to make sure that we were all on the same page about a couple things. We had to agree on the goals. In other words, what were we hoping to gain from doing the show? It was simple: When *Hard Knocks* was said and done, every coach and player should want to be a part of this franchise. It was agreed upon by Mr. Johnson, Mike Tanenbaum, and me that the only way that was going to happen was if we stayed true to who we are. I wasn't going to change the way I coached, and they never expected any different from me. The way we looked at it, *Hard Knocks* was a reality television show and reality was exactly what we were going to give them.

In itself, *Hard Knocks* was a commercial for the Jets. It was a five-hour commercial that followed our team through two weeks of training camp. It cut two weeks of footage down to a one-hour episode that aired Wednesday nights for five weeks. And what can I say? We

were a hit. We gave *Hard Knocks* the highest ratings in history and provided sports broadcasters with enough color commentary to last them the entire regular season. People loved the show; they may not have loved us, but they sure as hell loved watching us.

Training camp is one of the most critical times during the whole season. It's the three weeks that you're building the team—not only from a roster standpoint, but the foundation and ideals of the team, too. As a coach, it's the time when you are developing a relationship with your players. You're learning them and they're learning you. It's a constant roller coaster from beginning to end. You have players that have dreamed their entire lives of playing in the NFL. They're out there fighting harder than hell for a spot on that roster, giving you everything they've got—and then you have to be the one to tell them that their best just isn't good enough. You have to cut guys you love and guys who are damn good athletes, because in the end it's about getting down to the 53-man roster. It's emotional for the players and it's tough for the coaches; there's no question about it. *Hard Knocks* followed us through the entire process and showed everything from players getting cut to the coaching staff's private meetings. A lot of people were shocked by how much the cameras revealed during episodes. Apparently, they showed the depth chart in one episode and it immediately sparked some talk. A lot of people felt like that was crossing the line (those were our fans). Others looked at us like we were stupid for just leaving our depth chart lying around (those probably weren't our fans). It makes me laugh when I think about what a big deal they made out of stuff like that. There were teams that truly thought they were going to get some sort of an advantage out of watching *Hard Knocks*. Obviously, they were wrong.

First of all, let me tell you that there is a board in every office with one of those charts. The names are not set in stone and the order has no significance. Secondly, I will tell you that there was a trust level between the *Hard Knocks* producers and our staff. There had to be because of situations like that. Sure, I guess they potentially could have revealed our entire season's game plan, but nothing

that important was even decided by then and they knew that. If it had been, I can promise you the producers never would have aired it. The names on those charts were not set in stone, clearly, given how the 53-man roster turned out.

“Distracted” was just one of the many opinions about our team that spun from us doing the show. But I will tell you this right now: During those five weeks of filming, there was never a moment that this project became a distraction to me or to the players. *Hard Knocks* did such a good job of really being invisible. The producers had cameras all over the place. They also put these microphones the size of a pen cap all around the facility. I didn’t realize there was one on my desk for a while. The producers wanted to get a realistic perspective of us, and that was made very clear to the players. Before they started airing footage they said, “If you act like an idiot or if you ham it up for the camera in any way, we will stop filming.” They were serious about that. The minute the players or staff stopped acting like themselves, the cameras stopped. Knowing this, it’s funny to listen to people say that *Hard Knocks* was a distraction for us. It wasn’t a distraction for us while the cameras were in our faces during games, so I have never understood why they think it would have been a distraction for us during the start of the season.

When we agreed to allow the public to see the ins and outs of this franchise, we knew exactly what was going to come our way. No one ever gets to see the way coaches interact with their players; whether it’s in practice, a pregame meeting, or training camp, most of those interactions are behind closed doors. Well, not with us; we opened the doors to them. In fact, we opened the doors and rolled out the carpet. I mean, why wouldn’t we? We have nothing to hide. No two coaches are going to lead their team the exact same way, so it’s expected that everyone is going to have different opinion of what’s the right and wrong way to lead a team. With *Hard Knocks* filming every aspect of my leadership strategies, it was a given that my method was going to be criticized. Honestly, I didn’t care.

When Mr. Johnson hired me as the head coach of the Jets, he

hired me knowing damn well the type of person I am, and he has never once asked me to be someone different. Mr. Johnson does this job for one reason: the fans. He has always wanted a way to reach the fans, but before hiring me he couldn't reach them exactly the way he wanted to. When I came on board, it became easier to speak to the fans. I feel the same way as Mr. Johnson; both of us work every day for the fans and we know that the media is how we get to them. The media is our voice, and with me being as open as I am, Mr. Johnson knows that the fans are going to get a lot; they're going to get the good, the bad, and the ugly.

When *Hard Knocks* aired, I knew that it would get some press. One of the things that people were the most critical about was my language. Right after that first episode aired, all hell broke loose. Aside from Roger Goodell and Woody Johnson, who have never said one word to me about it, I really don't think anyone is in a position to tell me the way I should or should not be doing something. Yet for some reason other coaches and players, such as Tony Dungy, Tom Brady, and Terry Bradshaw, felt that they had a right to judge me based off something they saw on TV. People were so quick to judge me because I dropped an f-bomb here and there, yet they fail to take into account the context I said it in. In a team meeting, at a team function, that's how I talk—but do I talk like that in interviews? I never curse when I'm speaking to the press, but when I am talking to my team I can't help but get carried away. I feel passionate and intense about what I am trying to say and it honestly slips out without me even knowing it. I am not intentionally trying to offend anyone. That's who I am, though, and that's who I've always been. Whether it is the right way to coach is not for anyone to decide but me. A lot of people don't stop to think about the fact that I allowed cameras to come in and film me in situations that are usually private. Apparently, people thought that because the cameras were there I was going to censor myself. I'm sorry for the misunderstanding, but that's not how I operate. I don't think it would be fair to have given you this false picture of myself, not on *Hard Knocks* and not now.

I was asked a lot during the filming if I regretted anything I said on camera, and my answer was always “Absolutely not.” I think everyone knows me well enough by now to know the answer to that. I sat down on Wednesday nights just like every other fan and flipped to HBO. I had no clue what was going to make it on the air and what was going to be left on the cutting-room floor. That’s a risk Mr. Johnson, the league, and I all took when we signed on to do it. I honestly didn’t care what people’s opinions were about me or my coaching style. I think I am a good coach and I think my players would agree. With the exception of my mom, I really couldn’t care less who is disappointed by my choice of language.

There were a couple things that were just expected by doing *Hard Knocks*. I mean, the feedback was given, the compliments were welcomed, and the criticisms (for the most part) were brushed off. Of everything that arose from *Hard Knocks*, the issue that grabbed the most media attention happened to be one that I just couldn’t seem to brush off. Of course, I’m talking about the comments made by Tony Dungy. I’m not going to lie—it really upset me. I was incredibly disappointed that he judged me the way he did. I just kept thinking to myself: I had never met Tony. He has built his reputation on being this honorable, Christian man, yet he was judging me without even knowing me? I didn’t understand it. I don’t judge him even though I know he’s not perfect—although he might be a lot closer to perfect than I will ever be. I was shocked by it. I really was, and I think the part that upset me the most was that he wasn’t just attacking me; he was attacking my father. To say comments like “He grew up with that” and “He gets it from his father”—well, you know what? You’re darn right I do, and I’m awful proud of that. I will follow my dad any day.

I thought for a long time about all this, and in the end I felt the right thing to do was to call him and talk it out with him. I called and left a message on his machine inviting him to come out to New Jersey. He was the one who had brought it all into the media, so I knew that he had to call me back eventually. I had nothing to hide,

and I wanted him to know that. When someone wrongs you, the best solution is to open all your doors and invite them in, so I did just that. It was about a week before I got a call back from him. We talked man-to-man and basically just made it a point to make our positions clear to each other. He took me up on my offer and on Saturday, September 25, he came out to my office at the Jets' facility.

Surprisingly, it was great. I think we both left with a very different understanding of each other. We sat down and talked, and he proceeded to tell me about some players he had coached who had also played for me. They told him that he didn't know me and that he was dead wrong in his opinion of me. He went on to tell me that his whole issue with me on *Hard Knocks* was that he had a dear friend who wanted to watch the show with his son and had to turn it off because of my language. I understand that completely, and I made sure I told him that. On the other hand, it was important for me to let him know, too, that I am not a monster. I'm just a person who maybe doesn't use appropriate language all the time, but I'm going to be who I am. I told our team to be true to themselves and I would do the same, cameras rolling or not. I wasn't going to change anything about myself just because I was on *Hard Knocks*. I never felt it was my responsibility to clean up my language. It's my responsibility to coach a football team and lead it any way that I choose to. Tony Dungy is not going to lead my team and he's not going to lead me. Now, do I have things to work on? Absolutely. I have an enormous amount of respect for Tony Dungy. I'm just a different person than he is, a completely different person.

Aside from Tony, the rest of the feedback from *Hard Knocks* was humorous. Tom Brady spoke out and said he hated us as well as the show. Well, guess what? We hate the Patriots. What's your point? It's about competition. There is nothing better than to get the juices going. You want to hate an opponent. When you get fired up over one team, you go out there playing harder than you've ever played before because that hatred is inside you; it's what's driving you. I call your attention to our recent AFC Divisional game against them . . .

a real highlight win for us. Do I really hate Tom Brady? I really don't know Tom Brady, but who wouldn't hate him? Look at his life. Actually, look at his wife. Every man in America hates Tom Brady, and he should be proud of that.

As I said earlier, I didn't know what was going to air on *Hard Knocks* until Wednesday night at 10 P.M. I was just like any other fan. And while I think it did a great job highlighting positive aspects of the franchise, there were a couple things that aired that really bothered me.

One philosophy we have is that we want it to be fun for the guys. We make no bones about saying that in that press. We want them to enjoy being here. We try to not take ourselves too seriously, but when it's time to be professional we are going to play with everything we've got. We love to have fun and that's our mentality, but I don't necessarily think *Hard Knocks* showed enough of us working. This team works their asses off, but I felt like it didn't portray them as these dedicated NFL players as much as it showed some of their other sides. There were situations when the show had the opportunity to go left and film them in one way, and it went right and made them look like this rowdy, undisciplined group of kids. That's just not true, and that's not the picture I wanted to paint to the public. For example, the episode with the whole cheeseburger incident was blown out of proportion. What really happened was that I moved the practice up 50 minutes early because we went to Long Island. There was a storm coming in, so I said let's just move this thing up. The guys hadn't had anything to eat on the bus trip and they saw a McDonald's. It was literally their only option at the time. We were starting the practice off and they were bringing those orders in. It wasn't like that happens all the time, but it just showed our guys in a bad light. Next thing I know, we are being referred to as the "Animal House" and people are saying that I can't control my team. What people forget, though, is that I chewed their asses for eating those cheeseburgers and *Hard Knocks* showed that, but people don't remember the positives; they only remember the negatives. I know

that, and I know that's what makes good TV. I just don't like seeing something panned out on TV that isn't completely true or that just doesn't need to be mentioned.

Antonio Cromartie is a good example; that is another situation that really bothered me. See, *Hard Knocks* producers would choose a couple guys from each practice and mic them up so viewers could listen to them during drills and stuff. Once the practices were over, they would interview them. A lot of times they would ask them personal questions, but mostly it was just about the practice, how camp was going, and so on. Anyway, I think it was the first or second episode they had a microphone on Cro and, during the interview portion, they asked him what the names of his kids are. I guess you would have to see the episode to know what I'm talking about, but I was not happy with how they filmed it. I was unhappy they even asked him that question and brought his personal situation into the show. Cro is an awesome guy and an unbelievable athlete. Unfortunately, he has had some personal struggles, but who hasn't? Watching the show later on TV, I wanted to shout, "Everyone knows the story. Why do you have to set him up like that?" It wasn't necessary. It had nothing to do with what we were trying to accomplish from *Hard Knocks*, nor did it have anything to do with who we are as a team. It was stuff like that I didn't like. I think it placed negative ideas in some people's heads about who we were before we played the first regular-season game.

Despite that, when I look back on the *Hard Knocks* experience I can honestly say that I am really glad we did it. We went into it with one goal, which was to show people who the Jets are and what we are all about, in the truest form. For the most part, I think we accomplished that. I think the show did a great job of highlighting all that we have to offer and the extent we will go to for each and every one of our players, how we will get them anything they need—whether it's a masseuse, a chiropractor, or a yoga instructor, we will find a way to get it for them. It was really important to Mr. Johnson, Mike Tannenbaum, and me that people see how we take care of our

players. We treat them like men, not children, and I personally make sure each of them is aware of how important their role is to making this team whole. We treat them right, and we take pride in that.

Aside from making sure the public saw the relationship between the franchise staff and the players, making sure they saw our facilities was just as important. We have the number-one facility in the league. Mr. Johnson is amazing at providing the absolute best for us in every situation. *Hard Knocks* did a great job of showing all of that. People were able to see where we held training camp; we were fortunate enough to spend two weeks at an unbelievable campus at Cortland University in upstate New York. We had fields unlike any I have ever seen before, dorm rooms, meeting rooms, and a kick-ass cafeteria. As a player and as a coach, you literally could not ask for anything better. I mean, after seeing that on TV, who wouldn't want to be a Jet? That's exactly what we wanted to get out of *Hard Knocks*.

Not everyone was left with the same impression of us from *Hard Knocks*, but one thing's for sure: We were entertaining as hell. Mr. Johnson says he knew people who would leave dinner parties early just to be home in time to watch it. I remember after watching the first episode that I thought it was great. I was entertained, and whether you know us or not, you can't help but laugh. We have so many stories to tell, and *Hard Knocks* was kind of a five-hour preview into the environment that we play in. We hooked people just by being us; that's the coolest thing in the world to me. I think everyone, whether they admit it or not, thought to themselves, "I bet it would be awesome to be a part of the Jets."

We are building a reputation in the league that is making people want to play our way of football, and that feels so damn good. Thanks to *Hard Knocks*, people were able to see firsthand that "the same old Jets" are gone. It was a great experience and one that I am truly glad we were given the opportunity to do. Would I do it again? Well, I think it's probably someone else's turn.