

*The Battle-Tested Teammate*  
Blake Williams

## Coach's Discussion Guide

In this document we're providing coaches with discussion questions they can choose to use during a team meeting as the team reads through *The Battle-Tested Teammate*. When reading through the book, it's recommended that coaches create an environment that will help make the group reading/discussion times as effective as possible. The following is recommended for each such session:

- Privacy: Provide your team with a space that is as free from outside noise and distractions as possible. A quiet classroom or meeting room would work just fine.
- Inclusion: If possible, have teammates sit in a circle so that everyone can see each other and be better heard.
- Time: Give students plenty of time to share and be heard. If a student feels like the coach is in a rush to get through a chapter so the team can move onto the skills portion of the practice, they'll be less inclined to open up.
- Discretion: It's good practice to remind all students prior to each meeting that the things shared in the sessions are not to be shared with others. Create a safe place where students feel they can share and not be judged, teased, or become the talk of the school. Among other things, this activity can be great at building trust as long as students can hold true to the discretion rule.

The following are suggested discussion questions for each chapter.

### Chapter 1: My Dad Memory

1. We're all wounded in some way. Blake was wounded by his father's absence and he spent many years trying to recover from that wound. Who (or what situation) wounded you?
2. Wounds limit us by causing us to believe things about ourselves that aren't true. Can you identify any ways in which your wound has hurt you or held you back?
3. Blake feels that over time, our wounds can serve us well in life and serve those around us. Can you identify any ways in which your wound has helped you or prepared you to help others?

### Chapter 2: Six Flags

1. Have you ever noticed that you built "walls" at some point in your life to protect you from someone or something? If so, why do you think you established those walls?
2. We all know that walls divide things and people. To function well as a team, we need to avoid walls dividing teammates. Is there some sort of plan or commitment you and your teammates can come up with now to ensure that no walls are put up between you?

### Chapter 3: Chipmunk

1. How would you define humility?
2. When you think of a humble person, do you think of a powerful person or do you think of someone weaker in nature?
3. What actions would you see in a player whom you deem to have humility?
4. Arrogance is an antonym for humility. How might arrogance help or hurt team dynamics?

### Chapter 4: Stuck in a Tree

1. Because of the adversity Blake went through as a child, it was more difficult for him to be willing to trust others. Do you find it difficult to be trusting in general or does it come easy to you? Why?
2. Have you ever declined help for a particular task from someone because you couldn't trust anyone else to do the task as well as you?
3. What actions can you and your teammates take during practice that could help foster trust in one another?

### Chapter 5: Jimbo

1. Can you share a time when someone's words really hurt you? Tell us about it.
2. Can you share a time when someone's words really increased your belief in yourself? Tell us about it.
3. Can you share with your teammates how you like to be encouraged as it relates to your sport?

### Chapter 6: Vicki

1. It's not uncommon for student-athletes to seek the approval of others when they play. They could be seeking the approval of parents, siblings, friends, the fans, coaches, etc. Do you find yourself seeking the approval of others when you play? If so, why do you think you do this?
2. How do you let your past performances in your sport affect you?
3. What does the voice inside your head say to you when you fail or make a mistake in your sport?
4. Negative self-talk does not help us perform better. Therefore we need to combat the negativity with positive self-talk. What could you do to help combat negativity when you make a mistake?

### Chapter 7: Middle School Bully

1. Can you identify with the "false self" that Blake mentions in this chapter? How?
2. In what ways can people disrespect themselves?
3. If you have a teammate who says disrespectful things about him or herself, how should you respond?

### Chapter 8: Gas Station

*The story I share in this chapter is a sensitive one. I would not suggest asking people to speak up if they've been the victim of sexual misconduct. With that said, the story might move someone to approach an adult to report an incident. Be prepared for that by knowing how to escalate any such reports you might receive. The questions below steer the discussion in a different direction.*

1. Describe a time in your life when you had to endure some physical pain but afterward felt very proud of what you accomplished.
2. We all live with regrets. You may live with regret because you quit at some point in life or perhaps you didn't give your best because you were afraid of the pain you'd have to face. Describe a time in your life in which you let temporary pain get the best of you.

### Chapter 9: The Batting Helmet

1. Who or what has served as a Freddie in your life that left you broken in some way?
2. When you were broken, who has played the role of Sammy or Martha in your life and was there to help you pick up the pieces?
3. What events happen in our sport that we need to learn how to respond better to in order to have a better outcome? *[Consider using a whiteboard to list events and desired responses for each teammate.]*

### Chapter 10: Olympic Dreams

1. At this moment, what would you say is the biggest dream you have?
2. What is the biggest dream you have in your sport?
3. Did you ever have a dream you gave up on? Why?
4. How can your coaches and teammates help support you in chasing after your dream?

### Chapter 11: Football

1. Describe a time in your sport when you were absolutely terrified because of the situation you - or your team - was in at the moment.
2. For those who shared, do you think that fear helped you or your teammates perform better or worse in that moment?
3. We will fail in the sports we play. Discuss things teammates can do to help lessen the pain of failure for each other.

### Chapter 12: Track Season

1. What is your "why" for being on this team?
2. Every team has one or more players who simply work harder at their sport than others. Who do you think that describes on this team? Ask those individuals to help you understand their "why" for working so hard.
3. What are things we could do to increase the size of your "why" as a teammate?

### Chapter 13: Stinky Feet

1. For those returning players, what adversity did the team face last year?
2. What were the opportunities for growth found in that adversity?
3. Are there ways that last year's team could have responded better to that adversity?
4. What adversity might a teammate or the team be experiencing right now?
5. What are the opportunities for growth in the current adversity?

### Chapter 14: Betrayal

1. Have you ever been wronged by a person to such a degree that you found it extremely difficult to forgive them? Explain.
2. Like Blake, have you ever done something for which you found it extremely difficult to forgive yourself? Explain.
3. Since we are humans, we will do and say things that hurt each other. This will happen on our team this season. What can we do as a team to help ensure that we don't allow these instances to derail our season?

### Chapter 15: Salvation

*I've prepared two sets of questions recognizing that some of you can speak about religion and God freely, while many of you may be in danger of losing your job if you do so. Choose the questions that best suit your setting.*

1. Do you feel that your spiritual beliefs help you be a better teammate? If so, how?
2. How do you think God might want to use sports in your life?
  
1. What things can cause us to lose belief in our team?
2. We need to believe in ourselves in order to have more success. What can we do as teammates to show each other that we believe in ourselves and each other?

### Chapter 16: Water Tower

1. Blake had Dennis. Of all the people you surround yourself with, who helps you become a better version of yourself? How do they do it?
2. As teammates, we should be helping each other get better. What are ways we could do that?

### Chapter 17: College Bully

1. Is there anyone on the team you know you can count on, even in your darkest hour? What has that person done in the past to make you so confident in them?
2. What types of things can we do as teammates to communicate loyalty to the team and each other?
3. What types of things must we avoid doing?

### Chapter 18: First Year of Marriage

1. Who comes to mind when you think of an athlete in your sport who regularly puts the “we” before the “me”?
2. What type of actions do you see from a teammate who puts the team first?
3. Blake mentioned being conditioned by the crowd as one reason it’s difficult to put the team first. What other influences in your life might make it challenging to put the needs of others before your own?

### Chapter 19: Sammy

1. In a strange way, Sammy was a great role model for Blake by showing him what not to do. Who has been a great role model in your life? How?
2. Have you ever been guilty of putting unrealistic expectations (expectations you don’t have full control of) on your performance in your sport? If so, how do you feel when you don’t live up to those expectations?
3. What are expectations for your performance that are within your control?

### Chapter 20: Abs Diet Champion

1. Can you recall a time in your life when you did your best to avoid discomfort? Maybe you avoided having a difficult conversation with a friend, owning up to a lie, attending that hard workout, or giving up unhealthy eating habits. Tell us about it.
2. For those who shared, did avoiding the discomfort make you better?
3. The way to make uncomfortable things more comfortable is by doing those things more often. In what ways might you be able to embrace discomfort during the course of a week in order to make yourself a better teammate?

### Chapter 21: Tough Mudder

1. Have you ever been in Ian’s shoes where you showed up for a task underprepared? How did it make you feel?
2. Describe a time in your life when you worked really hard at something and your hard work paid off. How did that accomplishment make you feel?
3. Have you experienced a time in your sport when you felt like you had put in the required work but you or your team came up short? Describe that experience. Did it feel unfair?

### Chapter 22: One Long Night

1. What choices do you see your teammates and coaches currently making that will help the team improve its chance for success?
2. Is there a choice you are making out of sight of the coaches and most teammates that is increasing your chances of performing better? Please share.
3. Should identified leaders on the team be held to a higher standard when making choices?

### Chapter 23: Marathon

1. What would you say is the most difficult sacrifice you've had to make in order to be the player you currently are?
2. We're all different and some sacrifices come easier for some than for others. What sacrifice might you routinely make that you find easy, but others might find hard?
3. Going forward, what do you need to sacrifice more of in order to be a more valuable teammate?
4. If your team has set a dream for the end of the season, what sacrifices do you think teammates will need to make in order to reach that dream?

### Chapter 24: Discipline

1. What is a common excuse you've heard from players in your sport when they fail in some way?
2. Discuss with the team what are and are not valid excuses for missing a team meeting, workout, or practice. *[Set the expectations now so everyone knows].*
3. Are there areas where you feel if the team/teammates showed more discipline, the team would experience greater success? Assuming there are, what could we do to hold each other accountable to higher standards of discipline?