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What the Best
Do Better
Than Everyone Else

Training Camp

A Fable About Excellence



JON GORDON

International bestselling author of *The Energy Bus*

Praise for *Training Camp*

“Inspiration on every page. I picked this book up and couldn’t put it back down. It will help you become the best you can be.”

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Author, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*

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—Todd Gothberg, Vice President,
Volvo Construction Equipment

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For Kathryn,

you give me strength.

For Jade and Cole,

*always strive to be your best and bring out the
best in others.*

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Introduction

Before the 2008 NFL season, Mike Smith, the Jacksonville Jaguars' defensive coordinator, was hired to be the head coach of the Atlanta Falcons. They had won only four games the previous year and Coach Smith was charged with improving the culture and turning the team around. As summer approached, Coach Smith called me and told me that he was having all the coaches and players read my book *The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy* and invited me to speak to the team during training camp. I had met Coach Smith the year before while speaking to the Jacksonville Jaguars during their 2007 training camp.

The same week that I was to speak to the Atlanta Falcons I was also scheduled to speak to a financial services company that was regarded by many as having the best sales team in the financial industry. As I prepared for these talks I thought a lot about what I should say that would benefit them. After all, I would be talking to people who had reached the pinnacle of their industry. On one

hand you had the best football players in the world. On the other hand you had the best salespeople in the world.

As part of my preparation I interviewed the top salespeople from the financial services company and while I was expecting to hear some new sales techniques that I hadn't heard before, I discovered there wasn't any secret formula to their success. They told me they simply worked hard, focused on the fundamentals, stayed positive, and had a great desire to succeed and make an impact. These were the same things I had heard from the best professional athletes I knew and from all the people I had interviewed over the years that were considered the best in their field.

This inspired a series of thoughts about what makes someone great in their field of work. I discovered that the best of the best, whether they're salespeople, athletes, teachers, nurses, entrepreneurs, musicians, and so on, share a number of similar characteristics. There is a formula for success. There are things that the best do that others don't and things that they do better than everyone else. There is a way that the best of the best approach their life and work and craft that differentiates them from others. This formula is predictable, repeatable, and simple to understand, but it's a process and it requires initiative, dedication, focus, and loads of positive energy.

As I left the Falcons' training camp after my talk and headed to the airport, the idea for this book popped into my head. I heard the words *Training Camp* loud and clear, from God's mouth to my ears. I knew I was supposed to

share the principles and lessons in this book, not with just athletes but with anyone in any field who strived to be their best. While this story takes place in a sports setting, I hope you realize it's a life story that applies to you, your team, your co-workers, your family and kids.

I have even shared the lessons from this book with my daughter, Jade, and son, Cole. My hope is that when they are in high school and college this book will serve as a playbook for their lives and inspire them to strive for excellence in whatever career path they choose.

In this spirit, as you go through the training camp of your life, I hope that wherever you are on your journey, that this book will also inspire you to strive to be your best and bring out the best in your team—your work team, your sports team, your family team, your church team, and your school team. After all, life is a team sport.

Leave a Legacy,
Jon

Chapter 1

Kickoff



Martin Jones stood at the five-yard line waiting for the kickoff. He could feel the electricity in the air. The stadium was packed with 60,000 people—all screaming wildly—but Martin didn't hear a thing. His eyes were focused on the flight of the ball. His ears were filled with the sounds of his own breath and the perpetual thumping of his racing heart. The smell of fresh-cut grass reminded him of the hundreds of games, practices, and kickoffs that brought him to this very moment. He had played thousands of hours of football throughout his life, and yet he had never experienced a moment quite like this. It was the moment of all moments. It was his first pre-season game and as an undrafted rookie trying to make it in the NFL, this was his one shot to get noticed.

Veterans didn't have to get noticed. First-round draft picks with big signing bonuses didn't have to stand out. But undrafted nobodies had to do something special during the pre-season to catch the eye of the coaches, scouts, and key decision makers who would decide their fate. Every play,

every moment, every movement mattered. This was his one shot to do something special, to make the statement that he had what it took to compete with the best football players in the world. A great play meant he would be on the team for at least another week. A mistake would surely mean the end of his dream. An average play . . . well, that wasn't an option for Martin. Playing it safe was never his style, and he wasn't about to start now. He was going to go for broke or fail trying. He owed it to his high school and college coaches. He owed it to his family. He owed it to himself.

And as Martin caught the kickoff, he made the most of his opportunity. He ran slowly to the left looking for an opening as 11 opposing tacklers raced toward him. When his blockers met the defense with fierce collisions, he cut to the right and saw the opening he was waiting for. It wasn't a big opening, but it was big enough for him to sprint through it into the open field. A player dove at his feet, but Martin was one step ahead. One person to beat and he was in the clear. The kicker, the last line of defense, ran straight toward him, but Martin made such a quick fake that the kicker fell to the ground and Martin ran past him.

All that could get between him and the end zone were two players chasing him. One dove and just missed his leg while the other closed in on him. Martin pumped his arms and legs as fast as he could and ran toward the end zone like a man shot from a cannon.