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Don: Can you share a story of the role your older brother, M.R., made you play when starting your football career?

Sean: My brother Stephen was a football player. He was the first in the family to do it. He came to me when I was going into seventh grade and said, "Shawn, if you don't play football, you're a wimp." I said, "Really?" I didn't want to be a wimp, and he's my big brother. I admired him. So, I went out for the football team. I was out of shape, not ready psychologically, plus it was the first practice in the summer, so it was hot. The coach was yelling, swearing, and making us line up for wind sprints.

I thought a wind sprint was like a Popsicle or something. He started running us, and we did like 20 80 yard sprints. I thought I was going to die. I came home and decided to quit. I came to school the next day, and my best friend said, "Hey, excited for football today? It was great yesterday, wasn't it?" I said, "You know, I'd love to play, but my dad said--" I made this up. "--that he doesn't want me to play, so he's forcing me to quit." So I quit after one practice. That was my seventh-grade football experience. I blamed it on him. He never even knew I tried out and was unaware of the whole thing. If he would have told me at that point, "Someday you're going to be starting division one quarterback," I would have said, "Yeah, right, and monkeys are going to fly out of my nose." Then I stuck it out in eighth grade. I hated it. In ninth grade, I started enjoying it.

Don: You played quarterback at Provo High School in Utah. In your senior year, you led your team to the school's first football state championship. What lessons did you learn on the road to the trophy that you still think about today?

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Sean: Yeah, and Provo High School never won a state championship prior to or after then. Anyone who has won a state championship knows how hard it is; you have to get lucky, and you have to be good. There are so many lessons. I don't even know where to start. One major lesson would be the power of teamwork. When we became seniors, about forty of us, both juniors and seniors, got together without the coaches to set a goal for the season. We said, "Okay, what should our goal be?" Someone responded, "Well, let's set a goal to win our games or win our region," and someone answered that with "Let's win the state championship." It was just kind of beyond our imagination that we ended up saying, "Okay, let's do it." After then, we had a quote that goes like this, "There is no chance, no fate, no destiny, that can circumvent, hinder, or control the firm resolve of a determined soul." I'm not sure who said it, but I had heard it, and after reading it to the team, we all adopted it as our theme. We all wrote it down on a three by five index card and gave everybody a card, so we started the season with that kind of togetherness. We were very cohesive. It was a fabulous season, and I learned about the power of that team. We've stuck together to a point where we're still best friends and continue to have reunions. I also learned about comfort zones; playing football was always so hard for me because I would get so nervous. Any time I was timed or had to perform, I would feel like I was going to die because of how nervous I would get. Even as a senior after starting for three years, to know I just had to push the limits and that it's okay to be uncomfortable. Unless you're stretching yourself all the time and living part of your life outside of your comfort zone, trying new things, meeting new people, challenging yourself, and setting new goals, you just don't grow.

Don: I know your father, Stephen Covey, is most famous for his book 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. He loved coming to your games. Can you tell me a story of a time when your parents went to the "ends of the Earth" to watch you play?

Sean: Yeah, I remember a time. So, I was a freshman at BYU, and we would play really powerhouse junior colleges. They'd throw together the team the night before, so you hadn't played together at all. You had more talent than the team you're playing, but they were more organized. We were playing Rick's college, who kept winning national championships from Rexburg, Idaho, along with them having Jason back on the team who won the Outland trophy a couple of years later at BYU. So, even though it was just a JV game, my dad didn't want to miss the game; he flew across the country, got there just in time, and just made such a huge effort. I was so thrilled that dad had flown across from back east and made it there in time. He had made it a priority. We got killed. I threw three interceptions, got sacked like eight times by Jason Buck, yelling trophy guy, and just got hammered. I mean, I just got pounded, again and again. I was so beat up. After the game, I met up with my dad outside of the locker room. He hugged me and said, "Sean, you were amazing today." I said, "What?" He goes, "Because that was the best game I've ever seen you play. I have never been so proud of you." I said, "I suck at

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this." And he responds with, "I know the stats weren't good, and you didn't win, but you've never been so tough. You were getting killed out there, and I could not believe the way you kept getting up again and again and again. I've never been so proud of you." I didn't think anyone could make me feel good after this game, but he just did.

Don: You know the premise of this podcast, that a disproportionate number of Fortune 500 executives were actively engaged in sports at both the high school and collegiate level and that that experience helped shape the way they lead today. Do you agree that being an athlete made you a better leader? Does whether or not someone has participated in sports catch your attention when you're hiring team members?

Sean: Yeah, those are good questions. Sports have absolutely made me a better executive. I just overall learned mental toughness. It helped me get used to the pressure, like when I have a big deadline coming up. I feel like playing football, especially at the collegiate level on national TV again and again, with division one school pressure, I was put so far outside of my comfort zone that I became so much tougher mentally. Now being in the corporate world, there are deadlines, there's pressure, and being a public company, you have to watch your stock price every day. There's a lot of pressure hitting your numbers, hitting your quarters kind of pressure. You don't do well if you're not mentally tough. I look back at my college education, and I think half of it was playing football, with the other half being everything I learned as an English major. I got my MBA later, but football was equally important for my business career. It taught me discipline, mental toughness, teamwork, getting outside my comfort zone, and to suck it up. Yes, I do notice athletic history when I'm interviewing people. If I look down and they were a state champion swimmer, I know what that means. I know that means they spent thousands of hours in the early morning, getting up when other people were sleeping in and sucking it up; I know they have great mental toughness and capacity. So, absolutely, it's a big, big positive. I take a double look at these people.

Don: We mentioned your father, best known for his book 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Your favorite habit is #5—"seek first to understand then to be understood." In other words, listen more than you talk. Can you share why that is your favorite habit?

Sean: It's the key to relationships and the key to communication. Most people are not good listeners, and they don't know it. People think they're a good listener, but unless they have good intent and the skill, it's actually hard to be a good listener. And I think so much of communication is on the surface because there's no real dialogue going on. Most people listen with the intent to reply, so they're preparing their response while the other person is speaking. If you listen with the intent to understand, it's a different kind of conversation. I also think when people become leaders, some of these skills that made them successful as a leader become blind spots. So, I love it because it's difficult. The best way to listen is to reflect back in

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your own words. Anytime there's an issue at work or at home with your spouse or teenage daughter, reflect back on what the other person is saying and feeling. My dad used to talk about this skill all the time. He would do role plays with big groups of people, and he would play the role of the teenage son that wanted to drop out of school. He would have the other people play the role of the father and mother; they didn't think they could get it at first, but they would start being empathic, and he would teach them how to do it. And they'd realize that the son wanted to quit school because he just took a test, and even though he was a senior in school, he was reading at a seventh-grade reading level, so he was embarrassed. The group would leave the meetings thinking they were the worst listeners. So, habit five, seek first to understand then to be understood, is magic. It's powerful.

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