



A Slam-Dunk Story

Former professional basketball player Tamir Goodman channeled his learning differences into unique success on the court – and, now, a new book.

BY NAOMI SHULMAN, MANAGING EDITOR OF PJ PUBLISHING

In the 1990s, *Sports Illustrated* raved about the “Jewish Jordan”: an Orthodox Jewish kid from Baltimore who was winning game after game — except on Shabbat, when he didn’t play. Tamir Goodman was a lanky, good-natured redhead with uncommon grace on the basketball court. What fans didn’t know was that Goodman was privately struggling. He may have been winning games, but he wouldn’t know by looking at the scoreboard: He couldn’t read it.

When Goodman was diagnosed with dyslexia, he began to understand that his different way of seeing the world was not only a challenge — it was a superpower. The basketball player who had trouble reading books as a child has now authored his own: *Live Your Dream*

Basketball and Jewish values? Tamir Goodman says they go hand in hand.

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(coming from PJ Publishing in 2025), an inspiring tale about a child who learns to accept his limitations while simultaneously refusing to be held back by them.

Naomi Shulman: It’s easy to imagine how dyslexia might impact you in the classroom. How did it impact you on the court?

Tamir Goodman: Dyslexia gives you heightened sensitivities to problem solving. On the court, I could get the ball to my teammates in the right way at the right time and put them in a position to score — sometimes without them even knowing they were open. I’d see things differently, almost before they happened. There are a lot of no-no passes in basketball,

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but my coach realized that didn’t apply to me because I could see angles that they didn’t see. I totally remember sitting in front of my father’s bed watching a game on a Sunday — I was, like, 9 — and I just screamed out, “Alley-oop!” (An alley-oop is a specific offensive play in basketball.) And three seconds later, there was an alley-oop, and I saw it transpire before it happened. People would turn to me and say, “Tamir, how did you know?”

NS: Another thing that made you different from most other basketball players was, of course, the fact that you’re an observant Jew. What was the impact of your Jewishness on the court?


TG: Judaism helped me be a better basketball player and a better team player. The Torah is the perfect player’s manual. Take care of your body; your body is holy. You never lose by helping others. You have to love your teammates as you love yourself. Judaism is structured around your intentions. Blessings before you eat are a form of mindfulness — to realize, “I’m eating now.” Judaism makes you mindful and thankful. The second you get out of bed, you say *Modeh Ani* (a morning prayer of gratitude); taking a moment to appreciate what you have is the best way to start the day. It’s also the best way for an athlete to start the day. No one expects perfection, but we take accountability; at the beginning of the year, we apologize to others. Accountability is so important on the court. These are all Jewish values: Playing for something bigger than yourself or your ego. Trying to uplift the physical to the spiritual. These are the values we were raised on, and they’re timeless.

NS: Tell us how your book came into being.

TG: For a long time, I didn’t like to tell people about my struggles. Then, shortly before the pandemic, a *Players’ Tribune* documentary came out about me. In it, my coach gave

graphic examples of what I was going through — not being able to tell the score of the game, or if we were winning or losing, even the difference between a circle or square. I’d had all these scholarship offers at the best colleges, but no one knew that I probably couldn’t pass my SAT. That was a nightmare. During the pandemic, I ran into a friend who used to work for PJ Library. She asked, “What if you told your story to help kids?” I thought it was time to let kids know that it’s OK if your brain works in a unique way. You’re creative, a problem solver, and you have special blessings that need to come out. Challenges aren’t there to break you; they’re there to let you know how special you are in the world.

NS: What do you hope Jewish kids will take away from reading your book?

TG: I think it’s important in life to have a strong identity and healthy self-confidence. It’s a majorly Jewish virtue to use your talents all the way. If kids have a talent, they were given it for a special mission, and the world is incomplete without each and every kid fulfilling their unique blessings. Every single person has their contribution to give to the world in a way no one else can, and that alone should give each person self-confidence. 



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