

AJ Hinch: Being A Teammate In All Aspects Of Life

Welcome to PCA's One on One Positive Coaching Alliance's podcast series where we talk with leading experts about how to develop Better Athletes, Better People through sports. And now here's your host: Tina Syer, PCA Chief Impact Officer.

00:15 – TINA: AJ, I want to start off by introducing you to our Positive Coaching Alliance audience. AJ Hinch grew up in Iowa and Oklahoma. After being drafted in the second round coming out of high school, AJ chose to attend Stanford University where he graduated with a degree in psychology. After his senior season, AJ was drafted in the third round by the Oakland Athletics. During AJ's eight seasons as a player, AJ played for the Oakland A's, the Kansas City Royals, the Detroit Tigers, and the Philadelphia Phillies. In his post-playing career, AJ managed the Arizona Diamondbacks, and he currently manages the Houston Astros. AJ, thanks for joining the Positive Coaching Alliance audience and me today.

00:56 – AJ: Thank you, happy to be here

00:8 – TINA: I'm curious, when you were growing up did you play multiple sports and when did the time come when you decided it was time to specialize in baseball?

01:06 – AJ: I did. My parents believed in providing as many opportunities as we could to play a lot of different sports. I was into music, I was into sports, we did drama, we did every activity known to man we tried. Obviously, interested started to specify as I got older but I played three sports: football, basketball and baseball up until high school. And then at that point – I grew up in Oklahoma so you're not going to give up football very easily in the Midwest, but in football and baseball became more of a priority for me all the way up until my senior year, I played both sports all the way through my senior year in high school and considered playing football in college, but I...once my skills, my exposure – things started to get a little bit more serious about college and professional baseball, I became a little bit more fixated on that sport and less about the other sports. But, I am a believer in exposing young athletes to as many things as possible even though I know the trend has started to shift towards these year-round specializations.

02:25 – TINA: What do you think about that trend? At PCA we get a lot of questions about that when we are doing workshops – parents that come up and ask, "When is the right time for my son or my daughter to specialize in a given sport?" What are your thoughts on that, about that trend of earlier and earlier specialization?

02:41 – AJ: Yeah, I think it's hard. I think we want our children to feel successful; we want them to have passion. We want them to get fulfillment in everything they do, but we also want to teach them that aren't any limitations, that they should try new things and play new sports and expose themselves to as much as possible. So, it is a tough balance that we have to strike. I know with my own kids, I want them to be passionate about a sport maybe without being married to it too early. I think you learn a lot in the different sports that you're introduced to whether it's individual sports like golf and tennis

or team sports like soccer and basketball, and football, baseball – those are all questions...I think you have to know your child. You have to know their strengths and weaknesses. When there's an overwhelming passion for something, I certainly wouldn't want to stunt that, but, at the same time, you can't force our own desires and our own thoughts about our kids onto those kids. If they don't love the sport; if they don't love the practice part of the sport; if they're not driven to be the best that they can be then we're probably doing them a disservice by limiting them.

03:55 – TINA: Yup. Yup. AJ, I know you've got two daughters who are now 13 and 11. I'm curious when you think about the kind of coach that you hope they have whether that's in tennis or soccer or another sport., what do you view as the perfect youth sports coach that you'd like working with your kids?

04:12 – AJ: I like the coaches that – I like positive coaches, but I like constructive coaches. A lot of times when we talk about positive influences in our kids' lives in coaching... it's not always about giving them the pat on the back. It is about being constructive, about challenging their mind, their body, their athletic ability, things like that. It's finding the right influence that balances like a competitive spirit with some positivity with also pushing our kids to handle failure, to deal with adversity, to fight for their playing time a little bit in various sports. More than anything, if I was going to describe the coach that I want, I want a fair, balanced coach that has best interest of my kids and other kids at the forefront of their mind.

05:11 – TINA: When you look back on your career, you've had the opportunity to play for so many different coaches, and I know, in particular, like you I was a Stanford undergraduate and you can't be at Stanford without knowing about Mark Marquess who's the baseball coach there going into his, unbelievably, his 40th season. I'm curious, what it was like playing for him and what coaching lessons, lessons you've taken into managing, what you've taken from him? And, then, any other coaches in your history that you've either played for or even coached with that have really shaped the way that you manage.

05:42 – AJ: Sure. One of the best parts, I guess, of my career from my amateur days to my professional days has been being a journey-man traveling through four/five different organizations, I've had a number of jobs, managed a couple of places now. So, I've been around a lot of coaches. I've had different styles – I've had the old-school hard-nosed, very, very difficult personality type of coach. I've had maybe the more positive, feel-good coach. I've had somewhere in-between. Mark Marquess is a huge influence in my life. He became a second father figure for me at a time where I really needed it in my college days. For him to last 40 years, one lesson you learn from him is how coaches evolve over time. I've always said to myself, when I embark into coaching department and managing a major league team, "if I'm managing the same way 10 years from now that I'm managing today than I've probably not evolved enough. I've probably not learned enough; probably not investigated on better ways and more efficient ways to reach players enough." I think Mark Marquess has done a good job of evolving over the years while keeping his core principles in his traditions in sort of old-

school mentality intact. He hasn't sold out his integrity for the sake of new ways of doing things. If you can strike that balance you can last a long time in our sports. When I think back on positive influences for me that have touched my career, there aren't all one flavor. They aren't just the guys that made me feel good. They aren't just guys that gave me constructive criticism. They are a blend of all of that, that challenge me in different ways. They found different ways to tap into my intelligence, to tap into my athleticism, to tap into my fear of failure, to tap into my drive to be excellent. Those – I think of Charlie Manuel, I think of Gene Lamont. I had Tony Peña in Kansas City who English was his second language and he found a way to reach me. Art Howe was my first manager in baseball and he was like the fatherly figure – I didn't want to disappoint him so I tried harder and worked harder to try to appease him like you would a parent. I think those different entities in these men who touched my career – I always felt like I've taken something away from these coaches that I can apply to how I reach players here with the Houston Astros. I have a group of Venezuelan players, I have a Cuban player, I have some kids from the inner city, I have kids who grew up in more prestigious neighborhoods throughout the country – I've got to find a way to reach every one of those guys so I tap into different people that touched my life.

08:40 – TINA: I wanted to ask you – you got your first opportunity to manage when you were only 34 years old which is pretty incredible to be managing at that level at that age – and now, seven years later, how would you say you've evolved as a manager from when you first took the reins of the Diamondbacks at age 34 now to your time with the Astros? How has your management changed and how have you evolved?

09:04 – AJ: Well, at 34 I probably didn't know what I didn't know. I'd learned over time, you know, at 34 years old – similar to how I'm reaching the teenage years with my kids and they sort of know everything right now; they've learned life already, they've got it all figured out – I was probably that guy as a 34 year old manager because I – you so desperately want to show them – the players, and the media, and the fans – how much you know, how much of a baseball expert you are. You lose the leadership component of how to delegate and how to impact different players. For me, I'd learned a lot about myself and what I needed to do, some of my blind spots in how to be an effective leader by trying and failing at 34 years old. I didn't do everything wrong as a 34 year old manager. I had a lot of good things going as well, but you're taught a lot of lessons through the professional ranks when you get a job like that. So, for me, I think the understanding of the difference between leadership and, maybe, being a teammate. I gave a – I built this one speech up once when I was a 34 year old manager and my message to them was they needed me more as a teammate than they needed me as a manager. Looking back at that speech that I gave when we had lost three or four games straight and we were in the heat of the battle of the National League West, I realize what I was telling them was more about me: I wanted to be their teammate more than I wanted to be their leader. [TINA: That's interesting.] That wasn't an effective way of getting the most out of them. I think one of the attributes of a coach at any level, be it amateur or professional, the highest level where we're at, Olympic coaches when I played in the Olympics, your job is to get the most out of your players for them not for

you. That lesson is learned through experience, through trial and error and, ultimately, through selflessness when you're bestowed the responsibility of being a coach.

11:10 – TINA: AJ, I really like that: get the most out of players for them, not for you. Certainly at the high school and at the youth level a lot, the vast majority of these coaches are working with athletes who won't go pro and it won't be that baseball is their career. What are those things that you think high school coaches, youth coaches are teaching their players that transcend the playing field? So, even when they're not playing baseball anymore, the lessons they learned that are going to help them in the workplace or in college or with their family later?

11:43 – AJ: No ques---I mean, they're life lessons that are hard to find anywhere other than the sporting venue. I think being a good teammate is helpful in marriage, being a good teammate is helpful in a work environment. I remember riding the buses when I was in the minor leagues and I found myself for the first time, I grew up in middle America, in Oklahoma, born in Iowa, raised in the Midwest and, for the first time, there were guys from Latin America that were on the back of the bus playing loud salsa music and they're speaking in their own native tongue. You know, you got to be a good teammate to understand the different cultures as a young player. I think that goes back to my days in high school when Chuck White who was one of my high school coaches in Midwest City, Oklahoma, was adamant about being a good teammate for all of us. We were going to be good teammates to one another; we don't have to be best friends, we don't have to hang out on the weekends, we don't have to go to prom together when we were in high school, but what we do have to do is be a good teammate if you're going to be on his team. Those lessons – I've worked in offices; I've worked in various capacities in life; I have a fantastic marriage of 15 years – those—being able to rely on somebody, being able to delegate to somebody, being able to ask for advice, ask for permission, have the greater good be the focus rather than, maybe, a selfish success story...those are things that when you're in youth sports, when you show up and wear a common uniform with nine or 10 or 12 or 15 other boys and girls, you learn that later when you're our age now and you've got a little bit of life experience under you, that being a teammate shows up in all aspects of life.

13:36 – TINA: Yup. Yup. Well, AJ, it's been really amazing to see what the Astros did this past season and the culture you're trying to shape there is really paying off also on the scoreboard. I'm curious if you could talk to our audience briefly about what is, if you had to describe that environment you're trying to create within your organization, what is that environment? Obviously, there's a link to performing well and why does that kind of environment you're trying to shape result in good play on the field?

14:05 – AJ: Well, I think two words that come to mind immediately are: culture and mindset. Culture for me, and this goes in any level of sports, is when you provide an environment where practice, pregame, the games are the most important parts of the day. Everybody is excited to show up and work to a common goal. That is a culture that people want to be a part of. I don't care if you're coaching eight-year-old little leaguers or if you're coaching 27 year old multimillionaires like I do. It is a culture where these

guys, when they show up to the ballpark, they're excited to be here, they're open-minded, they want to get better incrementally towards the common good of the team. That's a culture that stands the test of time over a 162 game season at the level that I'm at. The mindset part of it goes to the individual athlete. In our sport we have to find a way to individually push these guys within a team concept. That's hard because you want the guy to hit the ball to the right side with a runner on second in baseball to advance the runner. His batting average goes down but his run production goes up. Getting the right mindset for our players to compete, to try to win tonight's game is something that we were able to establish inside our clubhouse. When you're trying to reach athletes, they all adapt to that in different ways. I have Dallas Keuchel who's our best starting pitcher is an ultra-competitive, intense, wears a mouth guard, grinds his teeth, really focused kind of competitor reaching him is different than reaching a free-spirited Jose Altuve – light hearted, doesn't love to be yelled at, doesn't really want to be pushed too hard but you got to push him enough. Those are personality traits to coach that I'm paid to tap into with the idea that my job is to unlock the key to every one of these men that gets the most out of them.

16:22 – TINA: Yeah, well, I was really excited to read some quotes from Carlos Correa who was recently named the AL Rookie of the Year, your shortstop. One of the things he said was when he first walked into your office, was first getting to know you, you told him, "Your best is going to be good enough for us." I'm curious if you can talk a little bit about coaching Carlos and the performance he had this season and that quote you had, "Your best is going to be good enough for us?"

16:49 – AJ: Carlos is a terrific athlete. He was 20 years old when he arrived on the national scene in the major leagues. I think one of things that I try to do with our guys is instill confidence in them. Belief goes a long way whether you're handling young athletes to older athletes. It's amazing how confidence wavers regardless of what athlete you're dealing with. Our job or my job as a coach was to instill that confidence in him. I believe in him before he believes in himself. I wanted to make sure that he understood that all we expected was his best and whatever his best is on any given night is good enough. I am a process-oriented type of guy. In baseball you have to be very, very careful not to focus too much on the results because a player can go out and go one for four and feel like a failure when in actuality his process was perfect throughout the night and he only got one hit. With Carlos, when he got to the big leagues and he had the accolades of being the number one pick, he had a lot of pressure on him, he was supposed to be the savior for our team; I wanted to make sure he understood the standards that I have for him which is to be his best. Whatever his best was, I was going to accept because I can't ask for anything more than that. I'm proud that – I read that quote, it was sent to me from our people here in Houston and I didn't know that it impacted him that much, I didn't know that he grabbed that out of a three or four or five minute meeting with him on shaking his hands and welcoming him to the big leagues – but I think it's a lesson for me to understand how much these players absorb from their leadership to instill that kind of belief from the beginning that his best is good enough—how can I ask for anything more than his best? That's all he can give.

18:49 – TINA: Yup, fantastic. One of the things – you talked about instilling confidence in players; I’ve certainly noticed that so many really successful major league managers were catchers. I’m here in the Bay Area and I look at Bruce Bochi and how successful he’s been recently with the Giants and look at Joe Torre and Mike Matheny and you and...there’s just so many where I’m starting to wonder if there’s something about being a catcher and the way you see the game and the way you interact with your pitcher that it leads people later to be in that position of manager and leader. I’m hoping you can talk for a little bit about...rewind back to when you were a player and catcher – what did you do in that role to help your pitchers settle down and to get the best performance out of your pitchers?

19:37 – AJ: It is a trend that’s sort of taken over our sport. You get an uptick when you interview for a job and you’re an ex-catcher, I think you get grandfathered in to this idea that you’re going to be the next Joe Torre or Mike Scioscia or, like you said, Bruce Bochi and I think part of it is we handle – as a catcher you handle all aspects of the game. It’s something for a coach to have to learn – if you’re a football coach and you were a quarterback, how much do you know about defensive line, linebackers, defensive back? Or if you were in soccer and you were a forward, how much do you know about goaltending or how much do you know about the defense part of the game? From the catching perspective, we have an advantage given that I was offensive players, we understand as defensive players, we understand and then handling pitchers – which is a critical element of being major league managers – we have those experiences on the mound when 50,000 fans at Yankee Stadium and you got a young pitcher and you have to visit them and it’s a 2-0 count on Derek Jeter, I have experiences to pull back from my playing days saying...instilling belief, having a game plan, being a leader and again trying to believe in the pitcher before he believes in himself and having that conviction is very important. I think the way you handle pitchers is no different than the way you handle any athlete, which is you have to know them. You have to know what buttons to push. You have to know what kids can be pushed with aggressiveness, what players can be pushed with maybe a little bit of a massage; how many players can be pushed by ignoring them? Some guys, if you ignore them as a catcher you just pay no attention to them that fuels their fire as well. I think it speaks to trying to figure out what unlocks each of these guys to their optimum performance. With catchers, we have the most experience with that over the vast majority of the game. I think that’s why opportunities are provided to us more often.

21:50 – TINA: Yup. I think one of the things about baseball, and you’ve mentioned it before, is that there is a lot of failure in baseball. Players who are able to deal with that failure... at Positive Coaching Alliance we talk about having a short memory or the ability to focus forward, not ruminate on a mistake. Were there things or tools that you used with pitchers? Maybe they gave up a hit or they gave up a walk and they’re beating themselves up over it when you’re going out to the mound. Are there tools you use as a manager or you used as a catcher to help a pitcher or any player sort of have a short memory and focus forward?

22:28 – AJ: One thing that I know is very important, I think, distinction and I'm not sure side of the fence coaches are generally on but, a lot of times when I was—I had a big fear of failure. At the time, growing up, I didn't really understand what failure meant. I think failure to me was getting out in baseball or failure to me was an incompleteness in football or was a missed free throw in basketball. In a lot of ways I was—I had coaches that would tell me, "You're an exceptional athlete you shouldn't ever fear failure." The reality is all athletes fear that failure and they should! Failure is terrible and it doesn't feel good; it's not something that we set out to do. I think that if you embrace the idea of why that failure exists, you got to shift their mindset to worry about the process and worry about things that they can control. In my career, I never let a pitcher focus on the result. If he gave up a hit, he gave up a homerun; I focus on "did he execute the pitch?" If he can't say that he executed the pitch, I don't want to talk about the result. The result doesn't matter. I don't know if you throw a down and away fast ball and it leaks to the middle part of the plate and Miguel Cabrera hits the ball to the second deck how can I argue you failed when you didn't execute the right pitch at the right time to the right hitter. I think it just shifts the mindset away from the result being the reason that I call it failure and more about "What was it in my delivery that didn't allow me to execute the pitch?" or "was it the right choice of pitch? I should've thrown a curveball or a change up." I guess in some ways it's a play on words and it's a little bit of a mind-psychology trying to get them not to be fixated on the result because, in our sport where guys hit 330 now-a-days and they're potential MVP candidates, that's still seven times out of ten where you're not having success. If you give up a number of hits – I mean, our best pitcher had a two and a half ERA; he's still giving up a boatload of runs throughout the year, that doesn't mean he's failing. I think, the strategy is to really get the athlete to focus on what he can control and not what other guys can control. At my level, I get a chance to—these guys are paid to hit homeruns, they're paid—Mike Trout is going tear...Buster Posey is going to terrorize the ball. There's a little bit of a small margin of success-failure that goes on. But even the best have a hard time with dominating a sport at this level. That, to me, signals that is way more about the process and much less about necessarily the net-result.

25:21 – TINA: I think another, beside the execution of a certain pitch, I think about what a good at-bat. I'm curious what advice you would give youth coaches about how they can talk to their athletes about whether or not they had a good at-bat where I think for so many people it's just "did they get on base?" "Did they get an RBI?" It's very scoreboard oriented. How would you describe a good at-bat? How would you encourage youth coaches to talk to their players about a good at-bat?

22:51 – AJ: It's hard because I think what happens is, no matter what we tell our players, is if you line out to shortstop it never feels like a good at-bat; it's an out. I'm turning and I'm going to the dugout. I'm putting my helmet away. I'm taking my batting gloves off and I'm angry. I think, on the flipside of that, if I bloop in a base hit behind second base, in front of the right fielder, the first baseman's colliding and I stand at first base I feel like a million bucks and I did my job because got a base hit. I think it's hard to avoid that. That's just a reality of when I get a hit I feel like it's a good at-bat, when I get out, I feel like it's a bad at-bat. Now, to me, a good at-bat, with athletes of any age, I

would say, “Did you get a good pitch to hit? Did you recognize the pitch?” Obviously, as you get older it’s about recognizing fastball versus slider or change-up or curveball or whatever. A little younger it’s not—it doesn’t work for T-ball, it’s not going to work for maybe the first level of coach pitch or player pitch. “Did I get a good pitch to hit? and “Did I put a good swing on it?” Those are—that’s all I can control. I can’t control a lot of what happens. I can’t control the centerfielder racing to left-center field the way that Carlos Gomez or Jake Marisnick, my guys, do and robbing a hit. That’s out of my control. Did I get a good pitch to hit? Did I put a good swing on it? Did I recognize the pitch? That, to me, is what defines a good at bat. Now, because if I stop at “Did I get a good pitch?” if I swung at a ball over my head, it doesn’t matter what the result is, I didn’t do what I set out to do which is get a good pitch to hit. A good at-bat, we have these debates in our coach’s room all the time: is there a strikeout that’s a quality at-bat? And, the answer is probably yes even though you’re not going to convince a hitter to say, “Yeah, I...” you know, a World Series at-bat that was 11 pitches and I struck out. You’re not going to get a lot of high-fives or you’re not going to want the high-fives. You’ll get it from your coach and you extended the pitching count, and you did a lot of positive things, but I don’t want to hear that. I want a hit. That’s what I want to do. Hitters want to hit. I think the encouragement comes from having a good plan and executing that plan and then you *have* to deal with the results, good or bad. Regardless of what happens. It’s why baseball is one of the most mentally grueling sports out there along with golf, along with tennis. Some of the really fine-tuned things that you don’t control everything in our sport that allows for success, if you can define that on the front end before the batting averages come out, before the all-star teams come out, before, maybe, the mom or dad that’s keeping the team statistics is sending it around via emails now-a-days. That, to me, is...getting their mindset to understand you can have success and, a lot of times you’re going to get the results you want, and sometimes you’re not, but I’m fixated on repeating my process as often as possible during the season. I think you’ll win at the end. You’ll win over the course of an entire season.

29:11 – TINA: Yup. Excellent. I’m curious, AJ, you mentioned some of your stops in the big leagues where you weren’t necessarily a manager, you know, with the Diamondbacks managing the minor league operations, the Director of Player Development, and scouting for the Padres. Can you share with our audience a little bit about what you were looking for in players in those different roles? How much did some of this mentality of the ability to focus on what a player could control were you looking for in a player? That side of things: the mental side not just the physical side.

29:44 – AJ: It is. The different roles are different. When I was Director of Player Development I got to know the players a lot better than you do when I ran the scouting department in San Diego it was a little less personal. Your viewing – the scouts are generally looking at physical tools, they’re looking at how—bat speed and power and running speed and arm strength, your defensive flexibility and things like that. I think it’s a little bit more of a... the scouting sense is a little bit more tools and the things how they relate to the game. I think when you’re talking about player development then you insert the scouting part plus the application of the mental aspects of the game: the make-up, the fortitude for each player and trying to maximize his potential. I enjoyed

seeing the players; you view players from different ways based on your job description. As a manager, I have just a touch of a different relationship to the players compared to the hitting coach. The hitting coach sees the raw player in the cage distraught over being one for his last 19. Or, on the flipside, our pitching coach sees our potential Cy Young award winner, Dallas Keuchel, who's dominating the league and he's as confident in his practice as any player I've ever been around. You deal with different spectrums based on your job. For me, I always looked for – the make-up was always important, the---and it's not just try hard make-up; it's not just the guys that put in the hours. There's an application to how we combine the physical attributes; talents that we've been given, how we've nurtured those and, ultimately, how we compete and how we view ourselves and how we view the sport. I think that when you look at all those, when you're dealing with professional athletes you can't slip in too many of those categories. You're looking for a leap across the board. Those are the guys that get through the minor leagues; they get to the big leagues. They establish themselves as long time major leaguers because they're elite at virtually all of those categories. They may not have the best arm, but they can obviously throw. But they may not have the best speed, but they're applicable for the position they play. And, I think, when --- that doesn't mean you need perfect players. If you're a parent of a kid who is a college or professionally – being recruited by colleges or going professionally – doesn't need to be perfect; you need to be your best at those levels and then you get factored in based on the big talent pool in the universe and where that's going to be. But you won't reach the highest spot you can get if you don't bring your best.

32:45 – TINA: Yup. One of the things that we encourage high school athletes to be is something we've coined as a Triple-Impact Competitor that makes himself better, but also makes his teammates better and actually leaves the sport better than he found it. It's sort of improving himself, his teammates and the game. I think at the high school level people are pretty self-focused and really wanting to get the best and maybe they're working out extra, watching video, you know, going to extra camps. Maybe they even have a special hitting coach outside of their team. There's a lot of focus on individual improvement. I'm curious if there are any players that, again, were teammates of yours or that maybe you're coaching now that you feel like really raise the game, not just for themselves, but for their teammates and the sport as a whole.

32:32 – AJ: Yeah. I think that type of impact—well, first of all, it's hard to find. I think we have one in Carlos Correa here and Jose Altuve both are exceptional, they play up the middle for us which is premium position in baseball. Their presence means a lot to the team. I think more...not so much about individual players as much as the attributes these guys that they showcase are consistency; they're not volatile guys that show up some days and don't show up other days mentally and physically. They're not guys that--there's stability to these types of players. We had Jason Giambi when I was in Oakland. We had Mike Sweeney in Kansas City. Trevor Hoffman was that guy in San Diego. Where there was a reliability and a consistency every day when they showed up to the game or to the clubhouse that they were going to deposit good vibes, good presence, good energy onto the team and not withdraw too much from it. I felt like those attributes are things that you—they're hard to teach, they're not that hard to recognize –

it's not the popular kid, it's not the one who everybody gravitates to. It's actually the ones that actually influence behavior. The most powerful thing I think we can do as coaches is create a fairness in the clubhouse or on our teams to where they don't just feel like they're playing for the coach, they feel like they're playing for each other. That's the definition of a team for us. We do it at the major league level, so, if you're doing it at the major league level why wouldn't you do it at the little league level, or the pony-league level, or the high-school level. Those players often gravitate to the top. Those players often reach the pinnacle of each team. Then they get identified as a leader. Then they get their college scholarship or then they turn pro. But they all have that common characteristic of consistency in how they go about their business, their drive, their passion. Some are vocal, some aren't vocal. But they're awfully consistent.

35:52 – TINA: Well, AJ, I just want to ask you one more question. One of the things that Positive Coaching Alliance is really trying to do is share lessons from psychology – sports psychology – with coaches and parents and athletes to both help them perform better and also just enjoy the sports experience more and to really glean all those life lessons from sports. I know you were a psych major back at Stanford. I'm curious if you feel like that impacted the way that you approach the game as a player and, now, the way you manage.

36:21 – AJ: It does...every day. It did as a player; it did as a ---it does as a manager. Because I think sports – there's a physical aspect to sports that we can't get away from. It's a grind. Some sports are more physically tolling than others, but I believe in this psychology part of sport. There's something inside all of us that are drawn to sports, that have a will to win, that have a little bit of fear of failure, that have – how we deal with competition that each of us have to define on your own time. For me, as I've handled the challenge of – I had a very good amateur career, I got signed as a professional, I go on to a playing career in the big leagues and all along the way there were coaches that told me I could do it, there were coaches that doubted me, but most importantly, the psychology part that I learned from Stanford is: it is really focused on what I can get out of myself. How I think—how I respond to failure. How do I respond to the challenges that are put ahead of me in sports? It's hard. It's not in a book. It's not something that you can necessarily articulate easily but there's a ton of sports psychology in our sport in how we nurture our minds to get the most out of us physically. That's the definition of sport for me; trying to make sure that we provide an environment that challenges our players to be their best. My time at Stanford, my time as a player and now my time as a manager that – all of that in one big cloud of “how do I get the most out of myself?” is something I remember.

38:30 – TINA: Well, AJ, thank you so much for spending this time with me today. I know all of our listeners will really appreciate hearing from you and learning from you. We're really going to be rooting for you guys hard next season with the Astros; following your managing career; looking up to you as a role model. So thank you so much.

38:47 – AJ: Thank you. Thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.