

Chapter 5: Hearing with Your Eyes

Chapter 5: Hearing with Your Eyes highlights the unique challenges and hidden advantages faced by deaf individuals in a predominantly hearing world. While many may focus on the limitations of deafness, this chapter underscores how these very challenges can be transformed into strengths. For example, deaf individuals are not distracted by the ambient noise that often overwhelms hearing people in places like crowded bars or stadiums. This ability to filter out surrounding noise proved particularly advantageous for deaf scuba divers, who can easily communicate underwater, and deaf football players, who were able to neutralize the crowd's noise—traditionally considered a powerful "twelfth man" in sports. In these contexts, what many would view as a hindrance became an asset, allowing for clearer communication and better focus.

Trevin Adams, the Cubs' quarterback, exemplified this perspective by viewing his deafness as a strategic advantage. Without the distractions of verbal trash talk or the constant chatter from opposing players, Trevin could focus solely on the game, enhancing his concentration and decision-making. This focus was echoed by many other deaf individuals who reject the traditional narrative that deafness is a disability. Instead, they embrace it as a condition that fosters resilience and perseverance. In this light, their experiences of adversity not only shape their mental fortitude but also empower them to approach challenges with a mindset geared towards overcoming obstacles, rather than succumbing to them.

The Cubs developed inventive solutions to overcome the demands of the football game, particularly when it came to communication. In a traditional football setting, the snap count is usually called out verbally, but this posed a challenge for the deaf players. Initially, a bass drum was used to provide rhythm for the snap count, but this method was later replaced with a more effective system. The quarterback would

simply clap his hands to signal the rhythm, allowing players to respond visually rather than relying on auditory cues. This adaptation, which depended on precise visual coordination, was something that the deaf players had already honed in their daily lives, where visual cues were the primary means of communication.

Studies have shown that individuals who are profoundly deaf may develop heightened peripheral vision and a more acute sense of biological movement perception. These advantages proved beneficial on the football field, where the Cubs could react more quickly to the movements of opposing players. Their heightened visual acuity allowed them to read plays and anticipate movements in ways that gave them an edge over their hearing counterparts. The ability to perceive and interpret movements more rapidly helped the Cubs adjust their strategy on the fly, making them formidable opponents on the field.

The Cubs' use of sign language further enhanced their communication and strategy execution, providing them with a tactical advantage that was virtually undetectable to their opponents. The team employed a coded sign system to keep their plays confidential, a method that thwarted efforts from teams bringing interpreters to gain insight into their tactics. Fast-paced ASL conversations allowed the Cubs to make quick, efficient decisions without the need for traditional huddles, which often slowed down the game. This made their offense more dynamic and harder to predict, as the opposing teams could not decipher their strategy in real time.

One memorable moment highlighted the Cubs' ingenuity when they used their sign language system to deceive their opponents during a critical play. The quarterback, with the help of coordinated signing, distracted the opposing team's defense, creating an opening for a successful touchdown pass. This clever use of their unique communication method not only showcased the Cubs' tactical creativity but also reinforced the importance of their deafness as an asset. Coach Keith Adams was especially proud of this play, seeing it as a perfect example of how the Cubs had turned potential challenges into celebrated victories. The Cubs' success on the field demonstrated that their ability to communicate and adapt to their circumstances was

a key factor in their ability to thrive in competitive sports.

