Jets’ Brandon Marshall reads defenses, self-help books

By Bob Glauber

The journey of self-discovery that led Brandon Marshall to McLean Hospital outside Boston left him with more than a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. It also awakened in him something that was completely unexpected, something he hadn’t experienced since his junior year in high school: a love of reading.

Marshall, who sought help for problematic behavior that had alienated himself from teammates, coaches and fans, said he hadn’t read a book from cover-to-cover since his days at Lake Howell High School in Winter Park, Florida.

Along with learning at McLean about his disorder characterized by frequent and wild emotional swings and an inability to maintain normal relationships — he had been involved in repeated domestic disputes and was suspended in 2008 for violating the NFL’s personal conduct code — he found that reading might help him better cope.

“I picked up a book that was on mindfulness and meditation, and I flew through it,” Marshall, 31, said Wednesday while sitting at his locker at the Jets’ training facility. “I was on a flight and I read the whole book. It was the first time I had read a whole book since my 11th-grade year in language arts when we read ‘To Kill a Mockingbird.’ ”

Marshall doesn’t recall the name of the book, but the experience awakened in him a thirst for knowledge that generates as much passion as catching passes from Ryan Fitzpatrick and helping the Jets in their quest to reach the playoffs. That journey continues on Sunday against the Titans at MetLife Stadium.

“I started reading because it was something I figured that could be a skill that I could use, a tool that I would use to cope and get through stressful times,” he said. “Since I read that first book, I’m always looking for the next book.”

His reading list is expansive, but usually focuses on what he calls “the five f’s: finances, fitness, food, family and faith.” He now has a small library’s worth of self-help books, some of which he keeps in his locker, but most that he keeps at home.

One of his favorite authors: Eckhart Tolle, the German-born writer who is considered one of the world’s most prominent voices on spiritual issues. Tolle wrote the best-sellers “The Power of Now” and “A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose.” Marshall considers “A New Earth” one of the greatest books he’s ever read.

He ticks off the names of others:

“There’s Dave Gibbons’ ‘Xealots,’ Tony Evans has an awesome book called ‘Kingdom Man,’ all of Jim Collins’ books. John Maxwell, all his stuff is amazing. Those are some of the core books for me.”

Marshall, whose locker houses many books, has focused on leadership topics in recent months, especially during the most recent offseason, when he studied the principles of former UCLA basketball coach John Wooden. Marshall actually quoted Wooden after the Jets’ worst loss of the season — a 34-20 drubbing in Oakland on Nov. 1.
“Coach Wooden talks about how adversity is an asset,” Marshall said. “If we punch through it and handle it right, when we face it again, we’ll be able to overcome it.”

It’s that kind of perspective, something Marshall didn’t have early in his career, especially because of his issues traced to borderline personality disorder.

But he is now one of the leading voices in the Jets’ locker room.

Marshall said the Jets are a good fit, which was not the case during much of his time with the Bears.

“I’m doing it the same way, but I think the difference is, when I got to Chicago, [in a trade from the Dolphins in 2012] there were a lot of older vets and it’s kind of hard when you go in there and you may be an alpha male, step on people’s toes, you may rock the boat a little bit. They may not like the way you approach things. But here, I think our vets here, there are no egos, no prima donnas. The younger guys really follow the veterans, so that’s why it’s been a good fit for me. You’ve got [veteran players] like D’Brickashaw Ferguson, Nick Mangold, Calvin Pace, Antonio Cromartie, Darrelle Revis. Those guys appreciate my approach and it doesn’t offend them.”

It helps that Marshall is in the midst of one of the best seasons of his NFL career, already going over 1,000 yards in just 12 games (he’s on pace for 1,416 yards, which would be the second highest total of his career). He also has 10 touchdown catches, just two short of his all-time high. Right time, right place? No question.

But there is at least one recent change that will affect his reading schedule; he decided a few weeks ago it’s best not to read too much during the season. A conversation with Jets linebackers coach Mark Collins convinced him to put down his books.

“He posed a question, and it was very thought-provoking and it started this two-day discussion,” Marshall said. “He said I was getting too civilized, so I stopped reading these last few weeks. I was reading like two books a week, and maybe I was too civilized. You can’t be civilized on the football field. I’m just trying to find balance. You have to have that switch as a player to be a warrior on the field and be civilized off of it. So I’ll pick it back up in the offseason.”

For now, the only book that really counts is the playbook, and the reading will focus on the opponents’ defense.