

## CHAPTER 1



**I** climbed down out of the front seat of my dad's old truck and slammed the door behind me. My face was hot even before the heat blazed up from the sun-baked parking lot. I'd been invited to another basketball tournament. But instead of thinking about the first practice that was about to start, I was angry because Dad and I had had a dumb argument on the ride over.

*Shake it off, Amar'e,* I told myself. Before I even looked up, the sound of rims rattling, balls bouncing, and kids hollering told me where I needed to go. My first good look at the court told me what I already knew: These kids were good. I saw silky crossover dribbles and shots dropping in as smooth as rainwater. And they

were older, too. I'd already been told I was the youngest kid they'd invited, and now I could see it. I felt my stomach tighten a little with nerves.

Dad's run-down truck somehow managed to drive off, slowly. The engine revved, the wheels turned, and the truck backfired loudly as it pulled away. It was sounding bad lately. On the ride over I'd made the mistake of asking him when he was going to get it fixed. Man, that did it: *When am I supposed to find the time for that?* he'd snapped.

Dad always had busy times and quiet times at work. I think that's just part of running a lawn-care company. But this busy time had gone on and on. I usually helped out on the weekends, but now I had practice instead. The last thing Dad had said before I got out: *Got to go pick up the extra guy.*

Dad made his point — he wouldn't need an extra guy if I helped out — and I made mine when I slammed the door. Didn't he understand that this was my biggest tourney yet? It was an opportunity to really step up my game. Wasn't that more important than pushing a lawn mower for the millionth time?

