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### **A Kid's Game Plan for Great Choices**

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# Starting Point

Play like a Pro, Live like a Leader

## **STEPHEN CURRY—A WARRIOR AND A CHAMPION**

The game is in overtime with just 20 seconds on the clock. The ball passes to No. 30—a young MVP known worldwide as the greatest shooter in NBA history. And today, Stephen Curry lives up to that reputation.

In one continuous motion, he grabs the ball and then releases it. A beautiful orange streak arcs through the air as the clock ticks down. *SWISH*...right on the buzzer!

The crowd roars, and the Golden State Warriors pick up another win.

Curry high-fives his teammates and points his index finger toward the sky. He quickly gives credit to the source of his abilities—and the very key to winning in life: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13 NKJV).

## **ALLYSON FELIX—ON A FAST TRACK TO GREATNESS**

The runner who was labeled “Chicken Legs” in high school—because of her lanky physique—now stands proudly on an Olympic platform with a gold medal dangling around her neck.

Cameras flash, the national anthem plays, and a sea of fans chant her name.

But Allyson Felix doesn't stop with just one victory. She goes on to win nine Olympic medals, six gold and three silver, making her the most decorated woman in US track and field history. "I'm always nervous," Felix admits. "If I wasn't nervous, it would be weird. I get the same feeling at all the big races. It's part of the routine, and I accept it. It means I'm there, and I'm ready."

Yet it's her faith in God that helps her beat the jitters, face the competition...and win in life, not just on the track. "The most important lesson that I have learned is to trust God in every circumstance," Felix says. "Lots of times we go through different trials. And sometimes following God's plan seems like it doesn't make sense at all. But I know that God is always in control. He will never leave us."<sup>1</sup>

## **MARK SANCHEZ—THE NFL'S COOL QB POWERHOUSE**

Mark Sanchez heads into his eighth season in the NFL, suiting up for the Chicago Bears as the backup to quarterback Mike Glennon. While Sanchez doesn't get to own the spotlight, this veteran QB knows he's serving a valuable role as a mentor. He gets to share his abilities with less experienced players.

Dallas rookie quarterback Dak Prescott is one of those guys. Prescott credits Sanchez for helping him learn how to be a professional.

"My dad always told me that if you want to be successful, you hang around people who are successful," Sanchez says. "If you want to be a good Christ-follower, be around people who will disciple you. I try to surround myself with people who will strengthen and challenge me in my faith and on the field. I try to do the same for others."

For Sanchez, playing like a pro means living like a leader. And both take obedience.

“If you love God, how do you show your love for Him?” he asks. “There’s no material thing you can give back. He’s already done everything for you, so you obey. That’s how you love God. So how do you love your neighbor? You help them love God.”<sup>2</sup>



Three athletes. Three very different stories. One rock-solid faith.

Curry, Felix, and Sanchez share an intense drive to win and a passion to push themselves and to excel under pressure. But they don’t live for trophies and titles, and showboating for their fans isn’t their style either. These athletes compete for something—*Someone!*—much greater than themselves. They share a purpose that makes them true champions. What is it?

They’re committed to knowing, loving, and following Jesus Christ.

They’re committed to obeying what God’s Word teaches.

They’re committed to a game plan that leads to an eternal prize.

“All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadow-boxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27 NLT).



I want that eternal prize.

And just like my sports heroes, I want to win in life, not just in the game.

I'm Christopher, a basketball-shootin', lacrosse-playin', football kickin', competition-crazed kid...and the cocreator of this book. Yep, that's my name on the cover—right next to my dad's. (Pretty cool for a 16-year-old, huh?)

I'm learning all kinds of cool stuff that's helping my faith to grow—like how to pray and read my Bible. I'm making better choices too—in my virtual worlds (music and gaming), with the team, at school, and at home—and I can't wait to share everything with you.

But be warned: The contents of this *A Kid's Game Plan for Great Choices* is highly contagious! I guarantee you'll never be the same as you fill your brain and heart with all the stories, stats, verses, and advice packed into these pages. You'll uncover the secrets to life as you discover some really cool stuff about God!

So let's get started with one more athlete profile...mine!

## CHRISTOPHER ROSS—A YOUNG HOOPSTER WITH HEART

*THUNK, THUNK, THUNK...SWOOSH!*

Another three-pointer for the visiting team. I glance at the scoreboard and groan. *Twenty-six to zero? They're killing us!*

My team's chances of winning the regional tourney and becoming middle-school champs just slipped away—which doesn't make sense to me.

Earlier that day, we owned the court. Just a couple of hours ago, we could taste victory. The fist bumps were bumping, my friends cheering, and my confidence soaring. *We* were the favored players.

"Excellent teamwork," the coach told everyone. "You won because you played like champions. You worked together, ran the plays, passed the ball, and really hustled out there. Most of all, you played hard until the clock ran out. I'm proud of each one of you."

But now? Our hopes of winning are gone.

It's as if we've forgotten everything the coach has taught us—every drill, every tactic. Suddenly, we're falling apart.

I look up again at the giant zero glaring down from the scoreboard. *That's how I feel right now*, I tell myself. *Champions? Not us. Not today.*

But then I notice the coach on the sidelines. He isn't pacing or slamming his clipboard on the ground. He's just standing there, calmly observing. His eye catches mine, and he gives me a thumbs-up.

*What? Can't he see the scoreboard?* I ask myself in disbelief. *Everything's going wrong, and he's not mad?*

And then I recall something he told me: “Character, commitment, *heart*—that's what I see in you, and believe me, that's what separates a mere player from a real champion. Sometimes we win, sometimes we lose...but it's a Christ-centered heart that guides us through trials.”

*Okay—I'll keep it together. I'll play like a champ—no matter what happens.*

“God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled”  
(Galatians 5:22-23 CEV).

Postgame update: We lost this competition but came in third place in the tournament. According to our coach, “Our game play made us the true champions! We had the right attitude.

Now it's your turn. Fill out your very own all-star stats on the next page.

**MY ALL-STAR STATS**

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*(Print your name here)*

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*(Add your sport and the position you play)*

***Write about your own game play.***

A big win or a crushing loss.

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***Jot a few lines about your favorite pro athlete.***

What makes this athlete special?

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***Share the best advice you've ever received—  
for the game and for real life.***

Who said it, and how did it help you?

You'll find "My All-Star Stats" in each section of the book. This is your journal space—a place to jot down what you're thinking and feeling, a place to record the most important tactics for winning in the game...and especially in life.

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## TACTICS YOU'LL LEARN

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*A Kid's Game Plan for Great Choices* is all about peer-to-peer connections. It's written through my eyes—and I'm a sports-crazed kid like you! Within these pages are stories from my world, kid-relevant lessons that bring to life Bible verses, and tons of pro tips about making good choices.

You'll find 40 devotions divided among four topics:

- Winning with Friends: A Game Plan for Championship Connections
- Winning with the Team: A Game Plan for Godly Sportsmanship
- Winning with Your Class: A Game Plan for A+ Encounters with Classmates and Teachers
- Winning with Family: A Game Plan for Scoring BIG with Parents and Siblings

This fast, fun book tackles what matters most to us.

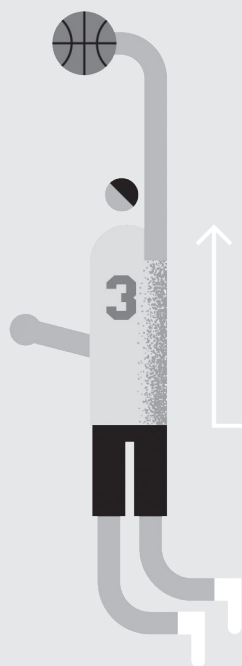
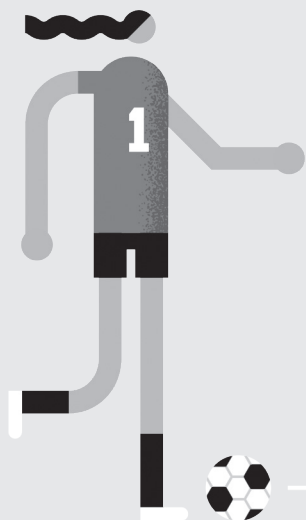
As you step into my world, meet my friends, and hear from the pro athletes we admire, we'll begin to think about our choices in life and clue in to an important truth: The paths we set foot on, the friends we associate with, and the way we choose to spend our time affect our lives and our friends' lives...for all eternity.

Let's head to the court...or field, or gym, or pool (wherever you like to compete). It's time for some intense training. It's time to win!

Part 1

# Winning with Friends

A Game Plan for  
Championship Connections





## Let the Cybergames Begin

**T**he battle is on.

*SMASH... CRUNCH!*

Ouch! My Arena Tower was hit but not taken down. I've deployed my troops, and I'm going after the King's Tower in my opponent's territory.

An "emote" pops up with a message from the enemy. (Emotes are short comments that can be accessed by the speech bubble icon.) This one is an emoji with a laughing king face.

*He's taunting me*, I tell myself.

I fire off my own emote: "You're goin' down!"

My warriors surround the tower and move in for a win. Can we succeed? Will my clan rule the day? In this competition, anything is possible.

I'm on my cell phone playing *Clash Royale*. It's a "freemium" tower-defense game that pits players against other real-world opponents, and it all takes place in a medieval cartoon world. The graphics are bright, simple, and pretty cool...and the action is thrilling. But the more I play, the more annoyed I become.

It's tough to succeed in this game without two things: patience and real-world money.

Rewards and upgrades require either lots of time or cash to unlock. (And I've already used up my allowance.) There's also an in-game chat function that lets players communicate directly with one another, and the guys I'm up against are swearing a lot. They're even sharing personal information. Those are two things I don't do.

*Should I keep playing?* I ask myself. *Hmmm...I won't quit just yet. One more battle.*

I quickly learn that players need super fast reaction times, and they have to come up with dozens of different strategies for many possible situations. That's all good. I like to be challenged and to solve problems under pressure. (It brings out my competitive side.) And I notice that with an amazing strategy, a level-two player can defeat a level-six competitor.

But then things go downhill again.

Players try to acquire seven legendary cards. But they come with a price: They cost real-world money, and they aren't cheap. Most high-level players rely on these cards, which give them an unfair advantage. Like I said, I've used up my allowance...so I'm at a huge disadvantage. My strategies are good, but I can't play if I can't pay. And that's so frustrating.

I notice something else: The longer I play this game, the harder it is for me to win...and to quit. There seems to be an addictive element. I'm serious!

Also, the system matches players with similar skills and styles. So if I play crazily, I'll be matched with other crazy players. Pretty smart thinking by the game makers...and yet another appealing feature of this game. But along with the good is the bad.

It's easy to get lost for hours in game play...and end up in a really bad mood.

Suddenly, more swearing from other players.

"That's it!" I say out loud. "Game over."

*CLICK.*



I love gaming with my friends. It's how a lot of kids socialize these days. Computers and the web keep us connected, and they are powerful tools—so powerful they can eat us alive if we don't watch out. Let's not give them a chance. The key: Stop acting like babies, not knowing right from wrong, constantly letting down our defenses in our cyberworlds, and getting pulled into dangerous traps.

It's time to grow up spiritually. Kids our age need to know how to make good choices.

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## WINNING WORDS

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“People who live on milk are like babies who don't really know what is right. Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong” (Hebrews 5:13-14 CEV).

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## WINNING TACTICS

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- *Honor Mom and Dad.* If we're serious about keeping our minds clean and our hearts pure, we need to get serious about accountability. Be open with your parents about your gaming and online activities. Remember, sin loves privacy and hates light. (See Isaiah 29:15.)
- *Have more face-to-face time with your friends...*and consider limiting game time and other activities online. This keeps us from becoming addicted to our favorite pastimes, and it reduces the chance of getting into trouble in our high-tech hangouts.

- *Never talk to strangers.* We're growing up with the "internet of things," and we're well aware that social network sites attract thousands of people. Some of them who play on kid-friendly games like *Minecraft* aren't kids. And some are dangerous. Be smart by playing smart. Never, ever talk to people you don't know.



Read Psalm 111:10. What leads to wisdom and helps us make good choices?