Chapter 1

"How'd it go?" my dad asked as I opened the door to his truck and settled down into my seat.

"It went great!" I confidently answered before glancing over at him with a smile. "Dad, that has to be the hardest I've ever thrown. I just want to make this team so bad that I ramped everything up a notch today. I had to prove that I belong."

"Well, I'm glad you feel good about it, Parker," he replied. "But I knew you'd do great. And there's no doubt in my mind that you belong. I don't know where you get it from, son—definitely not from me—but the way you throw that baseball is something

special. In fact, if you stick with it, your mom and I might be able to blow your college savings on a sports car or something," he finished with a laugh as he shifted the truck into gear.

Anyone who knows me understands that there are two things I love to do more than anything else in life—baseball and hunting. This combination has worked out well for me because I can focus on flinging baseballs in the spring and summer and flinging arrows in the fall and winter.

So, it was a real struggle for me when I got approached by a well-known coach in our area about playing on a baseball team that would compete in the fall. I knew this would interfere not just with my hunting, but with my dad's as well. And so, I was very hesitant to say "yes." But the struggle about what to do really began when the coach listed off the names of some of the

other boys who would be trying out for the team. These kids were the best players from all over our county. While I didn't know any of them personally, I did know how good they were from playing against them each summer in All-Star tournaments. And so, when this coach began telling me this was a real opportunity to see how I stacked up against the best of the best in our area, I became convinced it was something I definitely needed to do.

"I know you're a big hunter," the coach had said with a grin, "and I know this will mess with your hunting season. But Parker, you've got the rest of your life to chase after animals and only so long to chase after your baseball dreams. So, you need to think about that before you say 'no.' Opportunities to play on a team like this don't come around every day, son," he finished with a serious look.

I knew he was right. This was a rare opportunity to be a part of something special. But I also knew I'd have to talk to my dad. And I hadn't been sure what he'd say.

"Well, son," my dad answered with pursed lips and a long sigh when I first brought it up, "you know it's really going to mess with our hunting plans for you to play baseball this fall. And remember, I've got that bear hunt scheduled over in Georgia for the first week in October. I picked that week because it was fall break for you, and you'd be able to come," he continued. "But if you try out for this team, that plan is out the window. Because you'll be busy with practice that week and won't be able to join me like I had hoped."

"I know, Dad," I answered with a pleading tone. "And I've thought about all that—really," I assured him. "But I just think this is something I want to do. I hate to miss the bear hunting trip, but Coach Joe is right. I've

got the rest of my life to hunt. But who knows how many opportunities I have left to play on a team like this."

"Oh… I don't know if the situation is that serious, Parker. You'll have lots of opportunities to play on plenty of good baseball teams. But I understand what you're saying. And if this is something you really want to do, you know your mom and I will support you one hundred percent."

"So, I can try out?" I asked, full of excitement.

"I guess so," Dad answered with resignation. "But it's going to crush you when I come home with a bear. And I'm not going to feel bad about it one bit," he finished with a grin.