

LITTLE

Rhino

by RYAN HOWARD
and KRYSTLE HOWARD

● BOOK SIX ●
TROPHY NIGHT

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To Matt, Rich, and our team who helped make this series possible.

Thank you.

—R.H. & K.H.



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• CHAPTER 1 •
The Trophy Shelf



Rhino ran his fingers over the letters on the trophy: MVP.

Most Valuable Player. The shiny metal baseball player was frozen in mid-swing at the top of the trophy. *He's smacking a home run*, Rhino thought.

Rhino had hit quite a few homers for the Mustangs. He'd been having a great baseball season. But the trophy wasn't his. It belonged to his brother, C.J., from two years ago.

Rhino's first baseball season was nearing its end. He hoped he'd soon be bringing home a trophy like C.J.'s.

MVP of this league. Then record-setting home-run hitter in middle school. Player of the Year in high school and college. Then the Major Leagues. The All-Star Game! The World Series! World Series champions!

Rhino admired the trophy again, feeling the smooth metal.

“Making room for my new one?” C.J. said with a laugh as he entered the living room. Rhino and his older brother looked a lot alike, but C.J. was taller and more muscular. They both had a quick smile.

“Or mine,” Rhino said. He set the trophy back on the ledge, between C.J.’s championship basketball and soccer trophies.

Grandpa James had set up a shelf in the living room and filled it with all of their awards. Rhino spent a lot of time looking at the various trophies and plaques they had collected as a family.

“Here’s the most important one yet,” said Grandpa James, following C.J. into the room. He held C.J.’s latest award—a third-place plaque from

the middle-school science fair. Sports were very important in Grandpa James's house, but school and learning always came first. C.J.'s prizewinning poster about Jupiter's moons had taken a lot of brainwork. He'd stayed up late several nights researching the facts, and then he carefully drew the moons circling the giant planet.

"That's quite a lineup of awards," Grandpa said, placing his hand on Rhino's shoulder. "And there will be one for you soon. Every player in your baseball league gets a trophy for taking part."

Rhino nodded, but just "taking part" wasn't enough for him. He wanted a trophy for best hitter, or all-star first baseman, or most home runs. And another one for winning the championship. The Mustangs had hit a rough stretch and lost their two most recent games, but they could wrap up a spot in the playoffs by winning their final regular-season game this weekend. From there, they'd have a shot at the title.

C.J. pointed to an older trophy behind the



others. “There’s Grandpa’s league championship award from high school basketball,” he said. “That’s a big-time trophy.”

“We won that game on a last-second shot,” Grandpa said. “I grabbed a rebound, gave a quick fake, then dished the ball to my teammate. He scored at the buzzer.”

Everybody in this family has won major sports awards, Rhino thought. *Except me.* His only contribution to the table was a blue ribbon from the school talent show. He’d performed with two of his teammates and won first prize, but most of that credit belonged to Carlos, the singer in the Mustang Rock band. Rhino had helped Carlos gain enough confidence to use his great singing voice in the talent show.

Rhino’s thinker told him not to worry. He’d earn a sports trophy soon.

“Little Rhino, you should hear more about how C.J. earned that MVP trophy,” Grandpa said.

“For being the star of your team, right?” Rhino asked.