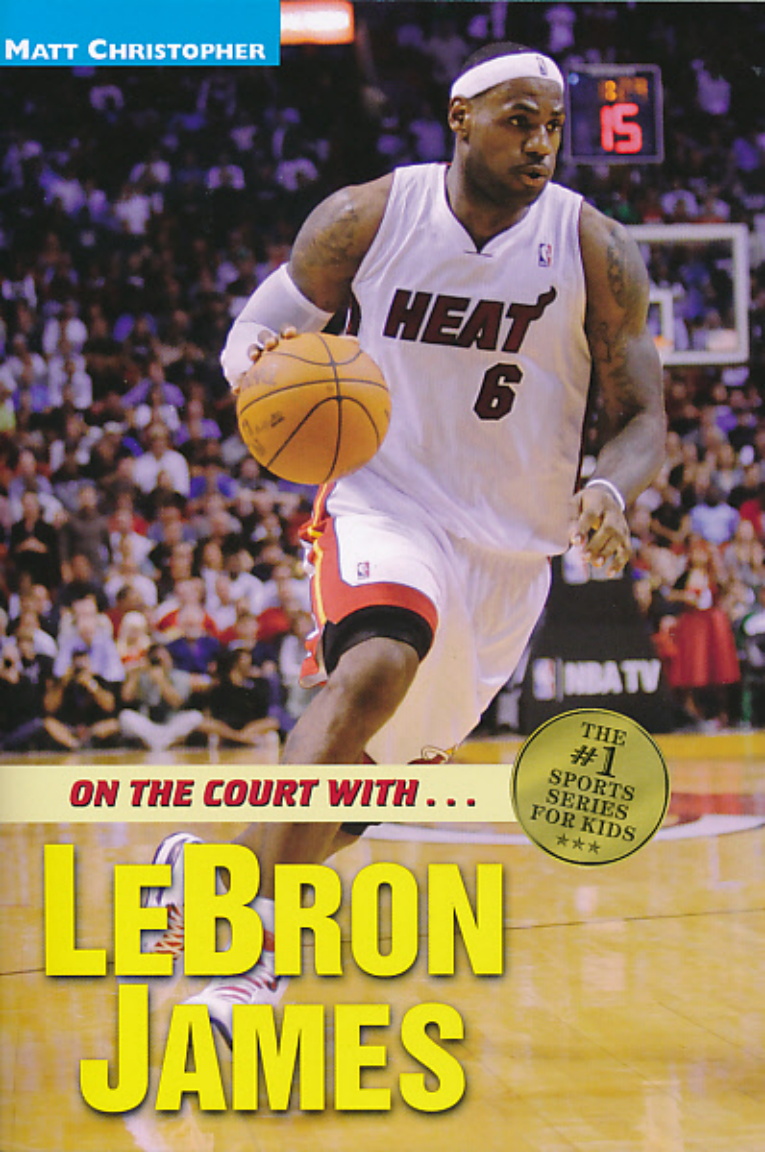


MATT CHRISTOPHER



ON THE COURT WITH . . .

THE
#1
SPORTS
SERIES
FOR KIDS

LEBRON JAMES

★ CHAPTER ONE ★

1984-1987

Hickory Street

LeBron James was born on December 30, 1984. His mother, Gloria James, was a sixteen-year-old high school student and unmarried. No one has ever known for certain who his father was.

LeBron and Gloria lived with her mother, Freda, and Gloria's two brothers, Terry and Curt, in a small house on Hickory Street in Akron, Ohio. Hickory Street was in one of Akron's poorer neighborhoods. Sometimes, homes in such areas can fall into disrepair. The neighborhoods themselves can become crime-ridden and dangerous.

Not so with Hickory Street. The residents there kept their homes neat. If a person or family was in need, neighbors stepped forward with food, shelter, clothes, or other help. The people there may not have had much, but what they had they were glad to share, because they knew that someday, they might be the ones who needed help.

Freda, Gloria, Terry, and even Curt, who was only nine when Gloria's baby was born, worked hard to give LeBron all the love and care he needed. It wasn't easy, for money was tight and newborns can be challenging. But they made it work all the same.

They soon had another set of hands to help out. When LeBron was eight months old, Gloria began dating a man named Eddie Jackson. Eddie was twenty years old and struggling to find his direction in life. Freda helped him by giving him a place in her home with her children and grandson.

Not all twenty-year-old men are comfortable around babies, but Eddie took to LeBron right away. In fact, he is the only man LeBron has ever called Dad.

LeBron quickly grew from an infant to an active toddler. Jumping, running, tackling — he was in constant motion. "You could be laying on the floor," Eddie once recalled, "and the next thing you know . . . he'd jump right on you."

So much energy needed an outlet. So, for Christmas just before LeBron's third birthday, Eddie and Gloria purchased a child-sized basketball hoop and ball. They set it up near the tree on Christmas Eve.

But that night, tragedy struck. Around three o'clock, Freda James collapsed in her kitchen. Eddie heard her fall and came running. He shouted for Gloria to

call for help. But it was too late. Freda died in his arms within minutes.

Gloria, Eddie, Terry, and Curt were grief-stricken. Yet with great effort, they hid their sorrow from little LeBron that Christmas morning.

"We wanted to make things as normal for him as possible," Eddie later said. "He had no idea that his grandmother had died."

Indeed, photographs they took that day show LeBron laughing and enjoying the wonder of the holiday. They also show him playing with his brand-new basketball set. At first, he didn't really know how to use it properly. Instead of tossing the ball into the hoop, he rammed it through the rim with fierce slam dunks.

Gloria and Eddie raised the hoop to its highest level, thinking it would encourage LeBron to try shooting. Instead, as the family watched half amused, half amazed, LeBron simply took a running leap and stuffed the ball.

"I was thinking, 'Man, this kid has some elevation for just being three years old,'" Eddie remembered.

LeBron's happiness that Christmas morning was a welcome distraction from the grief the others were feeling over Freda's death. But when the holidays were over, the reality of their loss and their situation set in.

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LEBRON JAMES

Outstanding. Unbelievable. Mind-blowing.

These are just a few of the words used to describe the talents of LeBron James. He was a sensation in his early days playing AAU ball in Akron, Ohio—and he continued to amaze throughout his four years as a high school phenomenon. Now a star of the Miami Heat, he is touted as one of the best players in basketball today. He is that one-of-a-kind superstar whose main goal isn't to rack up the stats—it's to make his team better.

Here's an in-depth biography of one of the NBA's brightest stars. And because it comes from Matt Christopher, readers know they're getting the best sports writing on the shelf.

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