

ning everything I'd have to do to succeed. The more I thought about it, the more realistic the idea became.

Yet, with any new venture, there is always the insistent insidious voice of skepticism.

I don't know a thing about tennis.

How am I going to teach them a game I can't even play?

What if my wife doesn't want to have more children?

Why do I always think of these crazy ideas?

Feelings of doubt rocked me, but I had always been a dreamer, obsessed with originality, so why was this any different? Whenever I had a major decision to make I used to look into the night sky for a sign or some confirmation to reassure me. That night I went outside, lay in the backyard, and gazed at the stars the way I used to when I was a boy. I remembered Chili Bowl and me lying like that in the yard with our hands behind our heads, gazing into the sky with twigs hanging from our mouths, talking about all the things we wanted to do when we grew up. I knew what he would have said to me about my plan. "You can do it, Richard!"

I just wished he had been there to say it.

A big bright star sat apart from the rest. I thought, *My children will be set apart from the rest of the tennis players just like that star. They won't be set apart because they're African Americans, either. They will be distinguished because they are going to dominate the game.*

I fell asleep on the ground and dreamed I had two daughters. I was unable to see their faces but they called me Daddy. Their voices were angelic and sweet and slowly faded into the distance as I woke up. Several raindrops touched my face but I could still hear the sound of their voices.

"I'm going to have two daughters," I sang as I went inside

I always believed in planning ahead. My motto was, "When you fail to plan, you plan to fail." I went into my office and began to plan for the day my daughters would dominate tennis. My first plan was a seventy-eight-page typewritten document covering every aspect of tennis training for my daughters. Forgetting the most obvious problem of not having any daughters, my most serious issue was that the game of tennis had never interested me. I thought it was a sissy sport. It lacked the masculine strength and tenacity I admired in basketball, football, and even golf. Hitting a little ball with a big racquet seemed feminine. In addition, it wasn't popular among black people, at least the ones I knew. Yet, in a funny way, that made it an open field. What were the reasons black people shied away from tennis? Could I turn that to our advantage? Had any of the great African-American athletes dissected the game the way they had basketball or baseball? Was there anything to learn from Gibson, Ashe, or others? Would the entrance of strong, fast, ghetto-bred black people into the game change it as dramatically as it had all other sports?

Despite my dislike of the game, I grew even more convinced it was perfect for my future daughters. My plan was simple: to bring two children out of the ghetto to the forefront of a white-dominated game. Could it be done? I hoped so. In fact, I was beyond hope. I was certain. It was just a matter of time. Eliminating the last doubts from my mind, I wrote a final seventy-five-page tennis-training plan for myself, Oracene, and my daughters-to-be, detailing every step of the road we would travel, more than two and a half years before they were both born.

I was now short only one thing. Daughters. Happily, however, affection was always something Oracene and I shared.

deal, I was at the table for every transaction and negotiation. I'm a really savvy businesswoman, and I learned a lot of that through him. We spent a lot of days and nights in the negotiation room, no matter how tired I was. I know he respects the fact that I never lost money, that my businesses run right, and I take care of all the people who I'm responsible for and who depend on me."

That's a great attitude. Unlike so many sports figures who lose their money through bad management or poor judgment, I know Venus and Serena will always be in charge of their businesses, their tennis, their relationships, and their lives. They have the confidence they learned from the time they were children. But commitment and confidence are only the first steps in being champions.

There is another truth I believe in totally.
Even a champion can falter without faith.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

DEUTERONOMY 31:6

Faith is a belief in something unseen. We all have faith, in some sense, but how strong is your faith? When Venus was nine years old, she told me something that has impressed me to this day. She was number one in the girls' ten-year-old junior tennis division, and we were driving home from a tournament in our old Volkswagen bus.

She said, "You know, I'm very good in tennis, huh?"
"Yes."

"I'm number one."

"Yes, you're number one."

"You know, I could beat McEnroe."

At the time, John McEnroe was number four in the world.

as good, or that they were inferior or subservient to anyone in any way. On this, there were no grays. Their strength was an article of faith, clear as black and white.

No child starts out bad. No child is born anything but good. Any time you see a bad child, you're seeing the home that child came from. Home brands a child forever. Home is where kids learn faith, or don't learn it. If you see a child doing drugs, go look at the home. If a child cheats and steals, go look at the home. If a child goes to jail, go look at the home. Long before Venus and Serena were born, I couldn't wait to teach them about the world, to give them faith in themselves, to make them champions. I even started talking to them about it when they were in their mother's womb.

Oracene used to say they didn't know what I was talking about.

I said, "If they don't know, how come they kick every time I'm talking?"

I wanted to teach Venus and Serena that being a woman wasn't a disadvantage, it was an advantage. I saw what women could do. I saw what my wife could do, what she was able to achieve, how she could make a home so happy, how she stood right by my side throughout everything in life. Even before we met, she was a very committed person with a strong faith.

I didn't have a dad or a brother, so I learned about strength from my mom. Oracene had the same kind of strength that she did. Beyond how beautiful she was physically, Oracene was equally strong as a person. You could feel the force of her faith inside her, and she inspired others with it. Her faith in what the girls could do stemmed from her faith in God. It really

her any longer, she had so much rage she poisoned me. I was taken to Harbor General Hospital in Torrance, California, and my sister Penny called my mom in Shreveport to come to the hospital. When she got there I was awake, but the doctors told her I was at the end.

She asked them, "Have you done all you can do for him?"

"Yes, ma'am. We have."

"Is there anything else you can do?"

"There's nothing we can do. He's dying."

"In that case," she said, "take all them IVs out of him and all those bags and everything else."

They protested, but she insisted. When everything was removed, she came to my side. "Sonny, do you have faith that you believe you can get up and start walking today?"

In all honesty, I really didn't, but I didn't want to let Mom down.

I said, "Oh, yes, ma'am."

"Then get up."

She put one of my arms over her shoulder and the other over my sister's. "Sonny, do you believe with all the faith you have that God can have you walking this afternoon?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She said, "Now you need to put your faith together, and if you really put your faith together you be walking this afternoon."

I tried to believe I'd be walking that afternoon. I prayed as I never prayed before. That same afternoon, I was walking. The record is on file to this day, Harbor General Hospital, Richard Williams. Without my mom's faith, I would have perished. Hers was a woman's faith, a faith that men cannot touch. Women can do anything. I taught my girls that. I never gave

be bitterly ashamed." Due to her stand, Gibson was given entry into the 1950 U.S. Championships, becoming the first African-American player to compete in a Grand Slam event.

Althea Gibson herself went through so much. She could throw a ball as hard as a man, dance better than a man, hit the golf ball better than a man, and struggled against racism all her career, yet she never lost her faith. Faith breeds confidence. Confidence comes from a fundamental belief in spirit and in God. It is vital to success in life, in tennis, in investing, or even in cutting the lawn or whatever you set out to do, big or small. You gain all the confidence in the world when you believe. We sometimes live through trials and tribulations. Life goes wrong from time to time. Faith gives you the confidence to carry on.

I wanted my children to have faith. I believed faith was essential to rearing successful children. Faith and confidence work hand in hand, side by side. If you don't have confidence that you can do something, you're never going to achieve it. It's where the strength to finish the match comes from. The stronger children's faith, the more confident they are, the more attractive they are as friends and models, and the more they exhibit that confidence among their peers and adults.

If you solve things for your children, they cannot learn to have faith in themselves. The only thing they will have faith in is you. They will not have faith in God because their faith has never been tested. It has been stolen. Too many parents interfere with their children and prevent them from taking responsibility for working out their problems. Therefore, the children's faith does not grow. They don't get stronger. They get weaker, more needy, and more dependent.

I saw lots of tennis parents get upset with their children, more so than in any other sport. *She should be doing better. I wish*

could have beaten that girl if she played harder. Then the parents impose more rules or harsher punishment. More stress. More damage. Where did the responsibility go? They took it away. The young person doesn't have enough experience at trial and error and making mistakes to know what is right or wrong.

Serena told me it was very important to her to feel we had faith in her as she was growing up. She explained it this way: "As we got older, my dad trusted us. He wasn't the kind of parent who told us, 'You have to do this,' or, 'You have to be that.' Even when my mom moved out, we always did what we were supposed to do without being told. Venus had a car at sixteen that she bought herself, and we went to the movies and to practice. We did everything. He trusted us, and we didn't do anything bad, *because* he trusted us. The faith he put in us made us not have to manipulate him. He gave us expectations that we wanted to live up to. That was the way we were raised. When I got my first check at sixteen, and it was a check for a million dollars as a signing bonus, he just gave it to me. Usually, parents take the kid's money away or try and manage it. He just gave it to me and asked me if I was going to be like some athletes and go broke, or was I going to make the right decisions? Now that's faith, and I've always tried to live up to it. I plan to do a lot of the same things when I am a parent."

When Venus played the 1997 U.S. Open, she was interviewed on a major television show right before the final against Martina Hingis. In a conversation with the host, she said, "I don't have to come home now, Daddy, 'cause I'm in the final."

I'd been telling her to come home because she needed to be back in school. "Venus," I said, "I know you're seventeen, but

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Wait on the Lord; be of good courage,
and he shall strengthen your heart;

Wait, I say, on the Lord!

PSALM 27:14

Courage is a magnificent thing. It's the strength of heart to triumph we find within us. Courage comes when you do not have the best of everything. It comes when you have the worst of everything. Courage comes when you set your life goal to make something out of nothing. It comes when you are laughed at and belittled but keep on going. Courage comes when you are picked on, but fight back. Courage comes when it seems like everyone has turned against you, and does not understand you, and leaves you standing all alone—and still you go on.

Courage is hope.

Courage is going one more step while the next person falls short. Courage is being able to smile when the whole world is

come out victorious—and even if you don't, you take heart in the knowledge you let God's will be done, and prayed for your enemies.

I saw true courage on Saturday, March 17, 2001, when the community of Indian Wells, California, disgraced America.

Indian Wells was far from the average community. Compared to Compton, which my family and I had driven from a week earlier, it was different as day and night. Located in Riverside County in the middle of the desert, framed by the beauty of the Santa Rosa Mountains accented in snow, Indian Wells was simply perfect; the perfect sunset, the perfect stadium, the perfect tennis tournament. The grass at Indian Wells was greener than any I'd ever seen before. Palm trees stood like soldiers at attention along perfectly clean streets with lights shining on them bright as diamonds. Flowers blossomed in every direction. Rolls-Royces, Bentleys, Alfa Romeos, Jags, and Mercedeses sat casually in the spotless driveways of exquisite mansions.

In a place like this, a black man had to be on his best behavior.

People who lived in this community did not tolerate foolishness. Unlike Compton, staggering drunks or drug addicts would find no comfort. There were no gangbangers here, no Crips, no Bloods.

We had come here to play the Tennis Master Series tournament. It was going well. The girls were winning, their stars steadily rising. The world seemed perfect. No act of violence could occur here. Open-minded and liberal, the people here could never show racism or prejudice. Unusual for me, I felt welcome, till things suddenly exploded in a way I could never have predicted.

Venus and Serena both won their quarterfinal matches and were due to face each other in the semifinals. It was going to be

ters, who burst upon the world stage and challenged the white tennis establishment, were going to challenge each other. I always discussed strategy with the girls before a match, but with Venus playing Serena, there was no strategy. Each one would do her best. During practice, my only advice was, "Have fun."

The only cloud on the horizon was that Venus had hurt her knee during her quarterfinal match against Elena Dementieva. We watched her carefully during her practice session. It was increasingly painful. After practice that day, enthusiastic fans surrounded the girls, pleading for autographs. The crowd got so large, Venus and Serena were whisked off by security onto a waiting golf cart and taken to their dressing rooms to prepare for their match, just hours away.

As my daughters continued their success, I had a responsibility as their father to make sure they kept everything in perspective, mentally, emotionally, and physically. That's why injuries were such a dilemma. Thousands of people had paid good money to see Venus and Serena play, and hundreds of tournament organizers had worked for weeks or months and had millions of dollars at stake. How could we disappoint all those people? Yet, I also had a responsibility to Venus herself. If Venus played hurt, she risked permanent injury and, potentially, the end of her career.

That's what we faced, right before the tournament semifinals. Knees are a tennis player's nightmare. With a knee injury, you can't play anywhere near the top of your game. My rule was firm. The girls decided for themselves if an injury required them to withdraw. They knew their bodies best. Venus was really in pain. Three doctors examined her before the match, and while she made it clear she keenly wanted to play against her sister, they advised her not to do so. The doctors were

network. Their only concern was Venus's physical ability to perform without causing more injury.

Venus notified the tournament trainer that she had to withdraw. I believed she made a mature and good decision. We did everything by the WTA book, but the tournament officials didn't want Venus to pull out so they kept stalling. They waited till just five minutes before the match was scheduled to go on before they finally announced that Venus couldn't play. It got nasty almost at once. Now, if Venus said she couldn't play, she couldn't play. Both Serena and I knew that without doubt. But suddenly we, and especially me, were accused of everything from fixing the match to manipulating the rankings. It was all foolishness, but when we were interviewed after the cancellation, the antagonism of broadcasters was palpable.

The fans' anger simmered like a volcano through the following day, and by the time we arrived to play the finals, the eruption was inevitable. The heat of it fell on Serena, Venus, and me. When Venus and I entered the stadium, we were booed steadily. The media speculated about why the crowd booed, but to my knowledge, not one spectator was ever interviewed. Paying customers have every right to voice their opinion at a sporting event, but tennis etiquette has always been required. Why was such rude behavior so uniformly defended?

The chorus of boos that cascaded through the stadium sent a powerful message to America, to Venus, to Serena, and to me. It was a message from the past, one America tries to put behind it but can never forget. It was a snapshot from the days when the open humiliation of the black race was accepted without question. Accusations and racial epithets flew through the stadium. No one questioned the unruly behavior of the fans. The only thing in question was our character and integrity.

spect. They were treated like criminals. How Serena managed to come out to play, and how Venus managed to keep her composure without breaking down, can only be credited to their spiritual strength and the training they received as children on the courts of Compton.

Deep down inside, I kept asking for a higher power to lead and guide us as we sustained the verbal lashing. My mom had always taught me, when white people did or said something I did not approve of, to hold my head up high and ignore them. I never liked doing it then, and didn't do it often or well, but that was exactly what I did that day.

I did not know that events at Indian Wells were destined to follow me wherever I went. From radio stations in Los Angeles, to newspapers in New York, to television stations throughout the world, the talk was about Richard Williams and his tennis-playing daughters. The media called me a racist and the tennis father from hell. They said I was manipulating the powerful tennis industry and I needed to be silenced.

He's destroying his daughters marketing and advertising abilities, they cried.

Venus and Serena need a new coach. Richard is in the way.

Why doesn't he just let them play?

I tried to respond. It turned out I was damned if I did, damned if I didn't. The powerful mass media that disseminate information at the speed of light were relentless. The following is an excerpt from a *Los Angeles Times* column by Bill Dwyre, reprinted in "What Happened at Indian Wells?" by Joel Drucker, published on ESPN.com on March 11, 2009.

If these situations are truly just happenstance; if Venus's knee truly did get sore just in time for her match with Se-

podium of Olympic victory, but when she came down, she was still just another nigger.

According to one of the commentators, "The fans are looking for someone to blame for the situation. They [Serena and Venus] really shouldn't be in the same tournament. It's not fair for everybody to be left wondering."

Fair?

Did he mean it was fair for thousands of fans to jeer a teenager because they believed the accusations against me for fixing games when both Venus and Serena played the same tournament? Even Elena Dementieva, when she was asked at her news conference after losing the quarterfinal to Venus, "Any predictions on tomorrow's match between sisters?" answered, "I mean, I don't know what Richard thinks about it. I think he will decide who's going to win tomorrow."

Here was the truth of that day. A doctor confirmed Venus's injury and instructed her not to play. That decision was met with suspicion and distrust because we were not white.

The reception we received that day at the Master Series final at Indian Wells was heartbreaking, but Serena rose to meet the challenge with real courage. She prayed for the strength to endure and refused to quit even when it felt like the whole world was against her.

Later, she told me, "I went over on the changeover and I prayed to God just to help me be strong, not even to win, but to be strong, not to listen to the crowd. I just wanted some strength to go on."

The difference between an ordinary person and an extraordinary person is simple. The extraordinary person is willing to fight a little harder. Serena proved no matter how harsh the treatment, she had the faith to overcome, the strength to make

When the last ball was hit, Serena held her hands up in victory. The audience had a mixed reaction. Some booed, some applauded. When Serena came over to hug Venus and me, the boos echoed through the stadium. I will remember that moment as long as I live. Commentators made excuses for the audience. They were just as guilty. One announcer said I requested a security guard. That was a lie. At no time did I request security. I believe the guard's presence was a way of adding fuel to the fire by whoever sent him.

The memory of Indian Wells will always leave a sour taste in my mouth, but I want this statement to stand beside it. It would be a grave injustice to allow people to believe that every single individual in the stadium was against us. In the midst of the jeering, I could hear the voices of some who cheered for us. For them, I leave this message. What better friend than a friend who is willing to stand up for you in a time of trouble, in your time of need, when the whole world has turned its back on you? Regardless of how many people jeered us and called me nigger, today I still believe I had friends at Indian Wells. Thank you.

That day, Serena was a true champion. She let no one else define her or her family, not with insults or with accusations. She rose to victory and defined herself. When she won the match, she faced the crowd from the center of the stadium court and said, "First and foremost, I'd like to thank my God, Jehovah, because you guys were a little tough on me today. I'd like to thank my dad, my family, my sister, and the sponsors. And I'd like to thank Kim for providing such a wonderful final. I'd like to thank everyone who supported me, and if you didn't, I love you guys anyway."

That is the courage of a true champion.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

For I know the plans I have for you,
declares the Lord, plans to prosper
you and not to harm you, plans to
give you hope and a future.

JEREMIAH 29:11

I am a great planner. It's the way I approach life. My plan to teach Venus and Serena to play tennis began with the seventy-eight-page written document I created before they were even born. I had a goal. I needed a plan to pursue it. The reality of our situation was that we had no shot at winning. We lived in the ghetto. We had no tennis background. The decision to raise the best tennis players in the world required planning that was outside the bounds of our family experience. We knew very few people in what was, and still is, an overwhelmingly white sport. We had no way to begin—except to pick up our second-hand racquets and balls and begin to play.

Along the way, we learned a great deal. Not all of it was

The greatest learning was about life. One of the

reasons I wrote this book was to share that experience with you. If you want to raise kids to be champions at life, sports, academics, or anything else, I've put together the most important principles I gathered as a father, a teacher, and a man. These principles are the result of a lifetime of learning, and putting into practice what I learned. I call them my Top Ten Rules for Success.

Top Ten Rules for Success

1. Failing to plan is planning to fail.
2. Always be positive.
3. Confidence is essential to success.
4. Faith is essential to confidence.
5. When you fail, you fail alone.
6. You learn by looking, seeing, and listening.
7. Create theories and test them out.
8. Always have a Plan B.
9. An appreciative child is a blessing.
10. Let no one define you but you.

I can't say I had these rules so neatly put together in the beginning, but over the years, as our successes mounted, I came to realize these were the ideas that mattered most. First, I believe that failing to plan is planning to fail. Planning is not faith. It's not an accident. It's the deliberate attempt to succeed. A child should be taught not only how to plan, but how to *write* a plan. Writing clarifies thinking. It defines the actions we are going to take to achieve our plan.

I want to be honest. I wanted my kids to be the best tennis players in the world because I didn't have faith that I could make millions of dollars. I wanted them to have that level of

Over the years, I asked a lot of parents, "Why did *you* put your child into tennis?"

The usual reply is, "Oh, they love it so much."

I've never seen one child love tennis so much that they'd give up everything for it, including their free time. They might like to hit the ball, and tennis is a great family sport, but when you're talking about putting children out there by themselves for hours every day, for years, no child really wants that. To teach my kids to follow the plan, I asked them how many dollars they would like to earn. Then I wrote down top incomes from many jobs and professions. I asked them which income they would prefer to have. They picked sports every time.

Most parents don't teach their kids to plan because they don't know how to plan themselves. Here's where you have to create theories and test them out. I may believe X or Y, but is X or Y working? Are we closer to the goal we have set? Should this action be maintained? Is this person successful enough for me to listen to? Don't do what others say is the "best" for your children, if they are not where you want them to be. If what you try doesn't work, have a Plan B ready. If tennis failed, my Plan B was education. It was a perfect Plan B because either way, they would be prepared for the world they would have to face.

I read somewhere that Serena said she never liked tennis. At such an early age, who would? At three and four years old, she and her sister were on the court hitting tennis balls while other girls were going to Chuck E. Cheese to eat, have fun, and ride the slides. Knowing that, I tried my best not to make them bored. We never practiced like at the big tennis academies. I tried to make it fun and I never criticized them, no matter

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The roar of the crowd at Wimbledon Stadium as Serena won the finals match pulled me back from my thoughts of the past. The cheers pulled me back from Shreveport, back from the cotton fields where my mother toiled in near slavery, back from the fear and danger I had lived with every day as a child. It pulled me back seventy years. I was standing at the end of my journey. What is it like when your plans succeed? There is pride beyond measure. Could I count my blessings? There were so many, I was almost overcome. Watching Serena receive the winner's trophy, tears coursed freely down my cheeks and I didn't care who saw them.

Being a champion starts with a dream, and the dedication

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CE PRAISE FOR BLACK AND WHITE

Richard Williams has long been widely regarded as an enigma. In his own words he reveals himself as a proud—and sometimes stubborn—warrior with a keen, incisive mind. Part memoir and part how-to guide on raising children, this is a fascinating tale of a character who refused to give up or give in to the status quo.

ATHAN MCCALL, author of *Makes Me Wanna Holler*

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BLACK AND WHITE

RICHARD WILLIAMS WITH BART D.

B
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THE WAY I SEE IT



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