

# NICK FOLES

WITH  
JOSHUA COOLEY  
FOREWORD BY  
FRANK REICH

# BELIEVE IT

MY JOURNEY OF SUCCESS, FAILURE,  
AND OVERCOMING THE ODDS



**BELIEVE IT**

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*Believe It: My Journey of Success, Failure, and Overcoming the Odds*

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Published in association with the sports agency Athletes First.

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#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Foles, Nick, author.

Title: Believe it : my journey of success, failure, and overcoming the odds / Nick Foles, with Joshua Cooley.

Description: Carol Stream, Illinois : The nonfiction imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., [2018]

Identifiers: LCCN 2018021881 | ISBN 9781496436498 (hardcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Foles, Nick. | Quarterbacks (Football)—United States—Biography. | Football players—Religious life—United States.

Classification: LCC GV939.A2 F65 2018 | DDC 796.332092 [B]—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018021881>

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-800-323-9400.

Printed in the United States of America

24 23 22 21 20 19 18  
8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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# FOREWORD

“Where did he come from?”

It’s an easy question to ask in the wake of Nick Foles’s amazing playoff run in the 2017 season. In other circumstances—or from the sidelines—I might have asked it myself.

When we suddenly lost our starting quarterback right before the playoffs, much of the sports world was convinced we were done.

But we knew Nick Foles. We knew where he came from. And we knew he was ready to play the game.

So when Nick led our team to an incredible Super Bowl victory and stepped into the national spotlight as the MVP, those of us who had worked with him weren’t the least bit surprised. It’s the rest of the world that was stunned, asking, “Where did this guy come from? How did he do it?”

I got to work with Nick for only one season. But in the football business, time is like dog years: a year in the football trenches feels like seven anywhere else. Nick has a sense of confidence tempered by humility that every football coach looks for in a leader. That

combination stems from the fact that he's secure in his own identity. On the football field, he's one of the best quarterbacks in the NFL, and he has proven twice—on a very big stage—that he can play at an elite, championship level. And as a follower of Christ, he knows that his first job is to serve others, which makes him a great teammate—on the field and off.

As for humility . . . even as I write this, Nick still doesn't know where he's going to play next year. In fact, he may end up being the first guy ever to go from Super Bowl MVP to a backup role. A lot of guys would gripe and complain about that change of fortune, but not Nick. Whatever he's called to do and wherever he's called to work, he's going to be all in, 100 percent. More than anything, what he cares about is serving the Lord and making an impact for good. Wherever he is, he's going to pursue excellence.

In many ways, Nick's role this past season has been reminiscent of the story of David in the Bible. When David had to face off against Goliath—an ordinary man against an intimidating, larger-than-life foe—David likely thought, *Hey, killing this giant isn't going to be a big deal. I've already killed a lion and a bear. Been there, done that—let's go.* In that spirit, the idea that anyone would be surprised or shocked by what Nick did is downright comical.

Heading into the 2017 postseason, Nick had an unbelievable track record. He'd already thrown twenty-seven touchdowns in a single season, played in a Pro Bowl, and had countless other successes. He'd proven his skill and his character time and time again. When it came to football, he'd killed his lion and his bear.

So in Super Bowl LII, in the biggest game of his career, with the whole world watching, Nick took a chance. He pulled out his sling-shot and ran the Philly Special—a risky trick play—and he defeated that giant in front of everyone who had underestimated him.

## FOREWORD

Above all else, Nick is a man of faith, and his faith is what gives him both his confidence and his humility. It also makes him dangerous. There's a quote from C. S. Lewis's Narnia series that describes Aslan the lion this way: "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good." God isn't safe. But he is good. So why should we mere humans play it safe? There should be a boldness and fearlessness to our actions and our speech. Sometimes we think it's dangerous to make a move or take a new job, but we also know it's just as dangerous to do nothing.

Nick's faith, confidence, and humility made him dangerous in the Super Bowl—and they're what make him a winner every day in everything he does.

*Frank Reich*

SUMMER 2018



# PROLOGUE

Everything in my life changed in the span of sixty seconds.

It was March 10, 2015, the official start of the NFL calendar. The 2014 season was already a distant memory, which was fine by me. After enjoying a record-setting second season with the Eagles in 2013, I had regressed some during my third season. My accuracy wasn't as sharp, and my overall statistics were nowhere near my earlier Pro Bowl level. To make matters worse, I had suffered a broken collarbone in a week eight win over Houston and missed the rest of the season.

Nevertheless, I was filled with excitement heading into 2015. Despite my statistical drop-off the year before, I had led the Eagles to a 6–2 record, and we had a solid core of players returning to a 10–6 team that had barely missed the playoffs. My collarbone had fully healed, and I was feeling better than ever. Hope abounded.

That morning I headed to Equinox, my off-season gym in Irvine, California, to play some basketball and work out. I had been a decent

high school basketball player in Texas, and it was always nice to dust off those skills between NFL campaigns. I felt fluid and sharp as I played a little pickup and a couple of rounds of H-O-R-S-E with some gym buddies. Steph Curry's roster spot was by no means in jeopardy, but I *was* nailing some pretty crazy half-court shots. Everything was clicking.

Eventually the weight room beckoned. The earbuds went in, the country music went on, and the volume went up. (You can take the country boy out of Texas, but you can't take Texas out of the country boy.)

I was in the middle of a set of leg presses when my phone rang. Typically I don't answer my phone during workouts, but the caller ID read *Chip Kelly*, and when your head coach calls, you answer.

The regular season had been over for ten weeks. My last conversation with Chip had been our exit meeting in early January before I left for the off-season. I assumed he wanted to check on my collarbone and my overall progress—maybe even discuss his roster-building plans.

Boy, was I wrong.

The call started out benignly enough. "Hey, Chip. What's up?"

"Hey, Nick. How are you feeling?"

"I feel great. I'm in the best shape of my life." And I meant it. "I'm really excited about this season and this team."

Chip told me he was happy to hear that, and then he talked a little about how the team was building for the future. Then, out of nowhere, came the fifty-foot swell.

"Nick, I'm actually calling to tell you that we've traded you to the St. Louis Rams for Sam Bradford. I wanted to be the one to let you know. Thanks for all you've done for this organization and for me personally. I wish you the best of luck."

## PROLOGUE

Chip's tone was steady and measured—almost Belichickian—a stark contrast to what I was feeling. I stood up, faced the window, and blinked, unable to find words.

I'd loved playing in Chip's rapid-fire offense. We had so many dynamic weapons on the team—Riley Cooper, Zach Ertz, Jeremy Maclin, Jordan Matthews, LeSean McCoy, Darren Sproles. Besides, my wife, Tori, and I had quickly grown to love the city of Philadelphia, and we were excited about diving into community work there. We wanted to plant deep roots.

Now those dreams were being dashed in a matter of seconds. I was flabbergasted. What was I supposed to say? Like Barry Sanders in the open field, eloquent words escaped me.

"Well," I stammered, "thanks for the call. Obviously I want to be in Philly, but I understand."

Did I?

With all the graciousness I could muster, I said, "I'm truly grateful for my time with the Eagles. I wish you the best."

Chip informed me that I'd be getting a call from Rams head coach Jeff Fisher soon. Then we hung up.

I looked at my phone. The call had lasted exactly one minute. I stood frozen at the leg-press station, my body numb. Off-season trades are commonplace in the NFL, but you never think it's going to be you.

*What just happened?*

One moment I was planning my future as the franchise quarterback for the Eagles. The next, my world was like a merry-go-round flying off its axis.

Sure enough, Jeff Fisher called a minute later to welcome me to the Rams. I tried to sound enthusiastic, but honestly I was faking it.

After we wrapped up the call, I ditched the rest of my workout.

## BELIEVE IT

Whatever motivation I'd had that morning had evaporated. I called home and broke the news to Tori; then I called my dad.

The next day Tori and I flew to St. Louis to meet my new coaches, undergo a physical, and hold a press conference.

For the first time, I started to grasp a harsh reality: the NFL was a business, and I was an expendable commodity.

Everything I'd been working toward in Philadelphia had suddenly been stripped away.

None of this was part of my plan.

## CHAPTER 1

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# DEFINING MOMENTS

People have been trying to define me throughout my entire career.

I'm *the guy*. I'm not *the guy*.

I'm mechanically sound. I'm too slow.

I'm able to light up a scoreboard. I'm a game manager.

I'm a building block. I'm a stopgap.

I'm a franchise quarterback. I'm an insurance policy.

I'm a Pro Bowl MVP. I'm a career second-stringer.

I'm dependable. I'm a fluke.

I'm a Super Bowl MVP. I'm trade bait.

I've been overlooked, praised, questioned, lauded, labeled, celebrated, and derided—sometimes all in the span of a single week.

That's life in the NFL.

From the moment you enter the league, everyone wants to slap a label on you—some tidy description of what they think you bring to

the game. And more often than not, that tag sticks with you, regardless of whether it's accurate.

Most recently, I've worn the label *backup*, which, unfortunately, is fraught with negative connotations. Nobody aspires to be a backup. And although I take great pride in the supporting roles I've played in both Philadelphia and Kansas City, part of me still cringes every time I hear myself described that way. Not only is it limiting and one-dimensional, it doesn't come close to describing who I really am.

It took me years to separate Nick Foles the person from Nick Foles the football player. It was a long and, at times, painful process—in fact, I still struggle with it. But making that distinction has completely transformed my heart, my career, my perspective, and my life.

The journey hasn't always been easy, and I've made a lot of mistakes and missteps along the way. But looking back, I can honestly say that I wouldn't change a thing. Because at the end of the day, the lessons I've learned from my failures, struggles, and weaknesses have made me who I am today.

## **TEXAS TOUGH**

For me, the road to the Super Bowl started—quite literally—the day I was born. I had barely even opened my eyes when my dad wedged a toy football into my pudgy little hand and snapped a photo . . . because that's what Texas dads do.

I grew up in Austin, home of the Longhorns, deep in the heart of the most football-crazed state in America. Come fall, at high schools all across the state, those Friday-night lights shine big and bright over packed-to-capacity, multimillion-dollar stadiums that would make

even a few NFL teams green with envy. And when I say “packed to capacity,” I’m talking anywhere from ten to twenty thousand rabid high school football fans, cheering, screaming, praying, and loving on their teams . . . because that’s what Texans do.

I played high school ball at Westlake. By Texas standards, our stadium was on the modest side, seating just over ten thousand.

Before I got there, another Texas native, Drew Brees, led the Chaparrals to a perfect 16–0 record and a state championship, and he set records for passing yards and touchdowns that stood for almost a decade. Drew was already a Pro Bowl player in his third season with the Chargers by the time I was taking snaps at Westlake, but his legend loomed large.

I was a multisport athlete, lettering in both football and basketball. And I don’t like to brag, but at six foot five, my shadow loomed about six inches larger than his on the basketball court.

I played power forward on the varsity team for three years, and while I was no LeBron, I could hold my own. I was tall and lanky, and I had a decent vertical leap and a pretty good shot. I was a lot faster and more explosive on the court than I was on the football field.

I earned an MVP and all-district honors in basketball my sophomore and junior years, and I even received a scholarship offer from a Division I school. But as much as I loved the game, deep down I knew I had a better chance of making it to the next level in football.

My football coaches, however, weren’t sure I was tough enough to make it at first.

During my junior and senior seasons, I led Westlake to the 2006 Division 1 state championship game and broke the record for career passing yards (5,658) and touchdowns (56). But playing

two high-impact sports takes a toll on the body, and I was almost always fighting off some kind of injury. The worst one happened my senior year. We had just closed out a long, grueling season where I'd thrown for nearly 3,300 yards, and six days later I had to play in a basketball tournament.

Early in the football season, I'd torn my labrum three-quarters of the way around, and I played a dozen more games with the injury. Needless to say, my right arm was shot. Because of the quick turn-around time, the coach had planned to rest me for the first couple of games. Then a couple of our guys got hurt, and he had no choice but to put me in.

I started off strong. I made a few jump shots and even managed a couple of dunks. Then, in the middle of a behind-the-back pass, my right shoulder completely gave out. The pain was excruciating. I doubled over, and when I glanced down, I saw that my right arm was just hanging there like a limp noodle. I looked at the bench and, with my good arm, motioned to Coach Faulkner to take me out of the game.

That torn labrum really knocked me for a loop. Not only did it cost me my final basketball season at Westlake, but it set me way back in my preparation for my first year of college football.

Still, I figured if Drew could come back from his injury to play at an elite level, so could I . . . because that's what Texans do.

It was months before I could even pick up a football, but I knuckled down and powered through my rehab exercises. That spring, at my senior awards banquet, the same coaches who had questioned my ability to make it at the varsity level told a packed auditorium that I was one of the toughest players they'd ever seen—not because of what I'd done on the field, but because of the way I'd fought back from my injuries.

**PLAN B**

Something else had happened while I was recovering from my shoulder surgery. Midway through my junior year, I was recruited by Dirk Koetter at Arizona State, and I made a verbal commitment to play football there.

I felt a real connection to Coach Koetter, and I thought the offensive scheme Roy Wittke was running under him would be a great fit for me and my “air it out” style of play. I liked the idea of going to school in a place with no real winter, and I had family in the Phoenix area. It seemed like a perfect fit. Then, right around the time we were getting ready for the state championship game, Coach Koetter was fired. As is often the case, his entire coaching staff went with him.

Even though my scholarship offer was still intact, the relational connection I had committed to wasn't.

I've always been a relational guy. Football is football. You can play anywhere. For me, it's the people I'm playing for and with that make all the difference.

After I had my surgery, I met with Coach Koetter's replacement, Dennis Erickson, who had come over from the University of Idaho. He made it clear that there was still a place for me at ASU, but I just didn't feel the same connection to the program that I'd felt with Coach Koetter. So that February, I officially decommitted from Arizona State and signed on to play at Michigan State under Mark Dantonio.

Mark is a great guy and a fantastic coach. I assured him that I was going to do everything in my power to be game ready come September. I continued to rehab my shoulder, and by the time I left Austin, even though I was nowhere near 100 percent, I was ready to take the Big Ten by storm. I was young and confident, and I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

Shoulder reconstruction was like a walk in the park compared to my first year in East Lansing.

## SPARTAN CONDITIONS

That first Michigan winter hit me like a snow shovel. For that matter, so did the Big Ten coverage packages.

I pored over my playbook and tried to soak up as much information as possible, but the leap from high school to college ball was a lot more intense than I'd expected.

At quarterback meetings, Kirk Cousins, Connor Dixon, Brian Hoyer, John Van Dam, and I would sit and watch film, and Dave Warner, the quarterbacks coach, would look at me and say, "Foles, what coverage is this?"

I had no idea.

"Cover three?" I'd guess.

"Wrong," he'd shoot back. "It's cover one."

*Sigh.*

It's not that I hadn't seen coverage packages before. We ran schemes at Westlake just like everyone else. But I tended to play more by instinct. The more I struggled in meetings, the less confident I felt. And as a quarterback, once you lose your confidence, it's over.

And man, did my confidence take a hit across the board. Not only was I still recovering from shoulder surgery, but I was also more than a thousand miles away from home in a completely foreign environment. I had no family around me and not a single Texan in sight, and I had no idea what I was doing in position meetings. On top of all that, I was fighting for second string.

I only saw the field once that season, in a game against Alabama-Birmingham. Considering my arm wasn't quite 100 percent, I fared

pretty well, completing five of eight passes for 57 yards, but make no mistake, I was still the low man on the totem pole.

Making matters worse, my high school sweetheart and I had broken up, and every time I logged on to Facebook, all I saw were pictures of my friends back home—smiling, suntanned, and having the time of their lives at Texas A&M, Baylor, UT, and TCU. Meanwhile, I was grinding it out in the weight room, on the practice field, and in the classroom from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., all the while trying to figure out how to survive my first bone-chilling Midwestern winter.

At one point I called home, ready to throw in the towel. “Dad, I can’t do this.”

My dad is a tough guy. He never graduated from high school. His parents split up when he was young, so he had to help raise his brother and sisters. He has worked hard his entire life, and as far as I know, he hasn’t complained once. In short, he’s not a quitter.

So when I told him I didn’t think I could hack it, he said, “Stick it out through the spring. If you still don’t want to be there, you can transfer. But if you walk away from MSU one season after decommitting to Arizona State, you run the risk of never playing football again.”

I was quiet for a minute, letting his words sink in.

“Okay,” I told him. “I’ll stick it out through the spring.”

Things didn’t get any better. In fact, they got worse.

Within a span of a few weeks that year, both of my grandmothers passed away. Losing a loved one would have been difficult enough if I’d been surrounded by family and friends, but going through it alone on top of everything else I was dealing with put me over the emotional edge. One night I was sitting in my truck, and I broke down crying.

I grew up in a Christian home, and my mom, in particular, is a really strong Christian—always helping people, putting others first,

and never seeking attention for herself. We went to church as a family most weeks, but to be perfectly honest, most Sundays it was all I could do to stay awake. I knew who Jesus was, but I had never made the kind of commitment that my mom had.

Among other things, Mom was a real prayer warrior. Whenever she was struggling, she would pray to God for strength and guidance and for his will to be done. And no matter what happened—good or bad—she found peace in that.

So that day I followed her example. “God,” I prayed, “I don’t have any strength left. I don’t have any confidence left. I have no clue why I’m in Michigan right now, but I have to believe I’m here for a purpose. I believe you have a plan for me. I trust you more than I trust myself, so I’m giving everything over to you. I can’t do this on my own.”

It probably wasn’t the most eloquent prayer ever uttered, but it was sincere.

The next day I dug out the little travel Bible my mom had given me. Even though I’d had it for years, it still looked brand new. I started carrying it with me everywhere and read it whenever I had a few free minutes. By the time second-semester finals rolled around, that little Bible was as dog-eared, underlined, highlighted, and note-filled as my literature textbook.

I didn’t understand everything I was reading, but just knowing that I wasn’t alone—that God had a plan for my life, even if it wasn’t clear to me yet—changed my perspective immeasurably.

I started praying for guidance about my future. Was I supposed to stay at Michigan State, or did God have something else in mind for me? As much as I tried, I just didn’t feel settled there. I loved playing for Coach Dantonio, and I genuinely cared about all the guys on the team, but I felt like a fish out of water. If I was going to have any shot at being the kind of student athlete I believed I had

the potential to be, I couldn't see it happening in Michigan. I had to get back to an environment I was comfortable in—somewhere I belonged. I needed the heat. I needed the sun. I needed to be around other Texas boys.

My dad's warning still echoed in my head, and that semester I had plenty of sleepless nights worrying that he was right. Without a doubt, it would be a risky move to walk away from MSU. But I'd been praying about it for months, and eventually I knew what I had to do. By the time I sat down to talk to Coach Dantonio, I felt genuine peace about my decision.

Looking back, it would be easy to characterize that year in Michigan as a failure. I was hurt and homesick, and I didn't see much playing time. When it came to my confidence level, I'd never been lower. But truth be told, that was actually one of the best years of my life. There were a lot of bumps along the way, and those experiences exposed some of the weaknesses in my character. But those challenges also put me in a position to grow in my faith, which in turn made me stronger and more confident than I ever would have been had I not gone through those tough times.

When I walked away from Michigan State, I had no doubt that God had a plan for my life. Now I just needed to figure out what it was.

## **TURNING UP THE HEAT**

As soon as I got home, I started reaching out to all the colleges that had expressed an interest in me before I committed to ASU, but this time I limited my search to schools closer to home. These weren't big universities—they were small local colleges. I didn't care where I ended up as long as it was close to home and I got a chance to play.

Things didn't start off well. One school told me I was too big; another told me I wasn't their type.

Just as I was starting to get a little panicky, I got a text from Sonny Dykes. Sonny had recruited me when he was at Texas Tech, and now he was working as offensive coordinator under Mike Stoops at the University of Arizona.

The good news was they were interested in me. The bad news was they were all out of scholarships.

I wasn't in a spot to be choosy, so I decided to take a leap of faith and join the team as a walk-on. Granted, Tucson wasn't exactly next door, but I'd spent enough time in Arizona to know that I liked it. It also didn't hurt that I'd been a huge fan of Arizona's basketball team when I was growing up. Their football program hadn't made me an offer when I was in high school, but given my current situation, I decided not to hold that against them.

By the time training camp rolled around, my shoulder had completely healed, and my passing strength was back to 100 percent. It felt great being back out on the field with the sun beating down, hitting receivers in stride twenty-five, thirty-five, fifty yards downfield. There was no doubt about it: I definitely wasn't in Michigan anymore.

About a week into training camp, Coach Stoops called me over to the sideline. "Just so you know," he said with a smile, "you *will* be getting a scholarship come January."

I was ecstatic. It had been a tough road, but things were finally starting to turn around.

That's when I got blindsided.

I was walking up the stairs to get my sports physical at the McKale Memorial Center when the most beautiful woman I'd ever laid eyes on walked out of the weight room.

She had gorgeous brown eyes and long, dark-brown hair that was pulled back in a ponytail. She had an athletic build, and she was wearing a gray University of Arizona volleyball T-shirt. But it wasn't just her physical appearance that caught my attention. It was the way she walked, the way she carried herself. That confidence, combined with her looks—well, she took my breath away.

I didn't know who she was, but I was determined to find out.

As soon as my physical was over, I called my dad.

"Dad," I blurted out, "I just saw the most gorgeous girl I've ever seen in my life." I leaned against the cinder block wall, an enormous smile spread across my face. "I think I'm going to be okay here."

And you know what? I was.

I redshirted my first year, then took over for Matt Scott mid-season in 2009. I had a pretty decent year, throwing for 2,486 yards and nineteen touchdowns, which was good enough to guarantee me the starting position in 2010.

My junior year got off to a great start. We were 4–1, and I was leading the conference in passing yards when we faced off against Washington State on the road. Less than a minute into the second quarter, I stepped into a pass and got caught in a scrum at the line, and then a Washington State linebacker rolled into my right leg. We still won, but I ended up sitting out the next two weeks with a sprained knee. We finished at a modest 7–6, but it was a solid season statistically, with 3,191 total passing yards and twenty touchdowns.

My senior year was memorable for a couple of reasons. We started off terribly, losing five of our first six games and, as a result, Coach Stoops. He was fired midseason, immediately following a tough loss to Oregon State on the road. Tim Kish, our defensive coordinator, took over as interim head coach, and we ended up finishing out the

season at a disappointing 4–8. As much as I liked Tim, it was difficult losing Coach Stoops midway through the season. He believed in me when a lot of other people didn't, and I'll always be indebted to him for that.

During that time of leadership turnover, I was particularly grateful for a couple of people on the UA staff: Frank Scelfo and Corey Edmond. Frank was the quarterbacks coach, and without his expertise, I wouldn't have been NFL ready. Corey (aka Coach Ed), the strength coach, was not only a motivator in the weight room; he also showed me what it looks like to be a man of faith and to live that out in the world of football.

Ironically, even though we finished dead last in the conference, it ended up being one of my best seasons ever, statistically speaking. I completed 69 percent of my passes for 4,334 yards and twenty-eight touchdowns—all single-season records for Arizona—and ranked first in the Pac-12 for total offense per game.

As for the girl . . . believe it or not, she dated my roommate sophomore year. While that isn't the way I would have drawn it up, it wasn't so bad. For one thing, it gave me an excuse to spend a lot of time around her. As it turned out, we had a lot in common: we were both athletes, and we both came from tight-knit families. Her older brother Evan was a tight end for the Cleveland Browns, so she knew football. And most important, she was a strong Christian.

Even after Tori and my friend were no longer together, Tori and I remained good friends. I always imagined ending up with someone like her, but we never dated—at least not while we were in college.

That would have been too easy.

Instead, we decided to wait until we lived almost three thousand miles apart.

## FEELING A DRAFT

In April, heading into the draft, there was a lot of uncertainty about how things would play out for me. I was coming off a record-setting season, but the pro scouts didn't know what to make of me. I wasn't a player who made everyone say, "Oh, this guy is a first-round lock." It was more of a "Let's see where this guy goes" kind of vibe.

I put up big numbers at Arizona, but I did so for a team that went 19–19 during my time as a starter. And because we were often playing from behind, I was throwing a lot—all of which factored into each team's decision-making process. My mobility was another concern. I've got a strong arm, but I'm pretty much a classic pocket passer. I can move around well, but I'm not going to blow anyone away at a track meet. It's just not my thing, and my performance at the combine confirmed that. It also confirmed something else: I really should have gotten a haircut prior to my skills test.

My hair was really long and shaggy at the time, which normally wasn't a problem, because I always practiced with a hat or a helmet on. But at the combine, we weren't allowed to wear either, so every time I dropped back to throw, my hair kept getting in my face, meaning a large percentage of my passes were basically done blind.

Still, I ended up interviewing with virtually every team, though the Eagles were the only team that gave me an individual workout leading up to the draft. Doug Pederson, who was the Eagles' quarterbacks coach at the time, came out to Austin to put me through the paces in my old stomping grounds at Westlake.

It was an unusually cold and windy day in Austin, and Doug had me throw what's called a divide route, which is basically a long, diagonal route anywhere from 50 to 65 yards down the field. It was the first time I'd ever thrown this route in my career, and naturally,

I was throwing into the wind. I dropped back, cocked my arm, and let it fly. The ball came out wobbly and hit the wind like a wall. It died in mid-air and fluttered to the ground about twenty-five yards out—five yards short of Doug.

*Aww, man, I thought. That's not good.*

I was mortified. Because let's face it: if you're going to play anywhere on the East Coast or up north, you've *got* to be able to throw in weather like that.

As soon as the ball landed, I turned to Doug and said, "I want another one."

He gave me a second shot, and this time I launched it—a perfect, tight spiral that cut through the wind like a knife and hit the receiver in stride fifty yards downfield.

*That's what I'm talkin' about.*

A few days later, I met privately with head coach Andy Reid and his staff in Philadelphia. I kept telling myself, *There's no way they're going to draft me.* They already had Michael Vick. I wasn't their style—they wanted guys like Mike who were known for using their legs just as much as their arm. Still, I had tremendous respect for Coach Reid, and regardless of whether they were serious about me, I wanted to show him I was serious about them.

"So, Nick," Coach Reid stared me down, "are you ready to play here?"

I honestly had no idea. But I sure wasn't going to tell him that. So with all the courage a brazen twenty-three-year-old NFL hopeful could muster, I sat up straight in my chair and shot back, "Yes, I am."

His eyes narrowed cynically. "You know, this city has torn grown men apart," he said. "This is a tough place to play. You need thick

skin, and you need to know who you are, because you're gonna go through the wringer here. I promise you that."

*Huh*, I thought. *Maybe I'm not ready to play in Philadelphia.*

I knew he was right. The Philadelphia media is legendary for being tough on its athletes. But I held my ground.

"I can play here," I assured him. "I know I can."

He just smiled at me and shook his head.

The next morning, I flew back home to Austin and waited for draft day to arrive.

I wasn't invited to New York for the actual event, but that was fine with me, because I honestly had no clue where I'd be drafted—or if I'd get drafted at all. In fact, I was fully prepared to become an undrafted free agent. So I just settled in at my parents' house with my sisters, Lacey and Katie; my grandfather; my parents; and a couple of buddies to watch it all unfold on TV.

In a move that surprised no one, the Colts opened the draft by selecting Andrew Luck with the number one pick. Immediately after that, the Redskins went with Robert Griffin III. A few minutes later, Miami selected Ryan Tannehill. Three quarterbacks were already off the board, and they hadn't even gotten to the tenth pick yet. About an hour later, the Cleveland Browns picked up Brandon Weeden with the twenty-second pick, closing out the first round.

As the draft wore on, two more quarterbacks got picked up—Brock Osweiler went to Denver in the second round (57), followed by Russell Wilson, who went to Seattle in the third (75).

By this point, things were starting to look pretty grim. The Eagles had already selected three defensive players, but they had yet to make their pick in the third round. I reached down and patted the cell phone in my pocket, willing it to ring. Then, just as the Bengals

selected Mohamed Sanu, a wide receiver out of Rutgers (83), the power went out.

“Seriously?” I jumped up from the couch. “It isn’t even storming.”

As everyone started stumbling around in the dark looking for candles and flashlights, I reached down to grab my phone so I could at least follow the next few picks online. That’s when I realized it wasn’t there.

*Shoot. It must have fallen out of my pocket when I got up.*

“Hey, guys!” I called out. “Help me find my phone!” I couldn’t believe it. I was waiting for the most important call of my life, and I’d lost my phone in the dark.

So there we were, crawling around on our hands and knees in the dark, when Katie called out, “Here it is!”

Don’t ask me how, but somehow when my phone fell out of my pocket, it not only landed facedown but switched over to vibrate. Fortunately, Katie was crawling right next to it when it went off. “It’s a Philadelphia number!”

Quicker than you can say “Ron Jaworski,” I grabbed the phone from her and headed to the porch.

“Hey, Nick.” It was the Eagles’ general manager, Howie Roseman, and Coach Reid. I froze. Then Andy nonchalantly asked, “Are you okay if we take you with the eighty-eighth pick in a couple minutes?”

I love that guy.

“Yes, sir!”

I’d have been happy if they’d taken me dead last.

My dad saw me on the phone and made his way over to me. “The Eagles are about to draft me,” I mouthed to him. “They’re taking me with the eighty-eighth pick!”

Back in the house, the celebration had already started. Because

## DEFINING MOMENTS

the power was still out, I didn't get to see my name being called on TV, but I didn't care.

I had made it.

I was officially in the NFL.