



The Phenomenon: Pressure, the Yips, and the Pitch that Changed My Life

Rick Ankiel, Tim Brown

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On October 3, 2000, 21-year-old pitcher Rick Ankiel took the mound for the St. Louis Cardinals in Game One of the National League division series. All was going well until Ankiel, who'd been lauded as the next Bob Gibson, threw a pitch that missed the mitt--wildly. Then he threw another. Then another, five in all. Slowly at first, then rapidly, his once-impenetrable pitcher's psyche crumbled. He would forever look back on that day as the day the unwelcome, inexplicable Phenomenon arrived.

In this book, written with veteran sports journalist Tim Brown, Rick Ankiel tells the story of his personal battle with an anxiety condition widely known as the Yips, the courageous soul-searching that followed, and his eventual triumph over the demons in his own mind to reenter the game. For the next four and a half years after that day in October, Ankiel fought the Yips with every bow in his quiver: psychotherapy, medication, deep breathing exercises, self-help books, and, eventually, vodka. Yet the cure eluded Ankiel, much as the clinical diagnosis eluded the physicians and psychotherapists who studied it.

Forced not just to retire from baseball but to reconsider his whole life the age of 25, Ankiel made an amazing turnaround, returning to the major leagues, this time as a hitter. He played seven successful years in the majors, finally retiring in 2013.

The book is also an exploration of this bizarre disorder, which is ultimately an extreme version of something that affects everyone: pressure. Ankiel, who is now a coach with the Washington Nationals, specializing in the mental elements of the game, has embarked on a journey beyond baseball, into the psychology and science of pressure, and how it affects us all as we attempt to be great. This book is the story of a once-in-a-generation talent, a man haunted by strange personal demons, and who found the strength to overcome them.



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