



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

Rick Ankiel

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A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Rick Ankiel had the talent to be one of the best pitchers ever. Then, one day, he lost it.

The Phenomenon is the story of how St. Louis Cardinals prodigy Rick Ankiel lost his once-in-a-generation ability to pitch--not due to an injury or a bolt of lightning, but a mysterious anxiety condition widely known as "the Yips." It came without warning, in the middle of a playoff game, with millions of people watching. And it has never gone away.

Yet the true test of Ankiel's character came not on the mound, but in the long days and nights that followed as he searched for a way to get back in the game. For four and a half years, he fought the Yips with every arrow in his quiver: psychotherapy, medication, deep-breathing exercises, self-help books, and, eventually, vodka. And then, after reconsidering his whole life at the age of twenty-five, Ankiel made an amazing turnaround: returning to the Major Leagues as a hitter and playing seven successful seasons.

This book is an incredible story about a universal experience--pressure--and what happened when a person on the brink had to make a choice about who he was going to be.

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

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Author : Rick Ankiel

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From Reader Review The Phenomenon: Pressure, the Yips, and the Pitch that Changed My Life for online ebook

Carson says

I was 21 years old in the years of Mark McGwire resuscitating baseball and when the St. Louis Cardinals - my lifelong team - were back in the news and playoffs. Rick Ankiel popped on the scene and was electric to watch - he had an incredible rookie season but unraveled in Game 1 of the division series. I was amongst the countless who rooted for his successful return the following season, only to see him struggle, go to the minors, get hurt, and return... only to make the unprecedented decision to become an outfielder. When he was promoted to the Cardinals in 2007, I scored tickets to the game and sat on the third base line as he hit a 3-run homer in his first game back as a major league outfielder. When he was signed by the New York Mets and announced as a starter at Busch Stadium in St. Louis, I changed my travel plans and drove 2 hours back home early so I could see him play. Saw him twice in that series. Got to see him play with 4 teams. Followed his career for years. Finally got to meet him in person last year. When I saw this book was coming out, I bought and added it to my queue right away. Read it in days.

Rick Ankiel's book is raw, honest, and inspiring. Not only was I able to re-live these games I watched through his eyes, but could read how he coped with the anxiety that struck, how he mounted multiple comebacks and what went through his mind after he grappled with challenge after challenge. Loved this book. 5 stars.

Aaron says

4 stars not for the writing, but for the story. This is a pretty classic baseball story that makes you cheer for someone I definitely once laughed at. And the redemption is pretty great. The writing though? Not so much.

Kevin Scantlan says

Very enlightening. As a Cardinal fan, I was watching on tv when the monster reared its ugly head. I, like most, had no idea what was going on. It was unbearable to watch. I wanted to go and hide. And I saw on tv his first game back as an outfielder when he hit the HR and I was cheering. Kudos to Rick for being very open and vulnerable and allows us to see what was happening. This book lets those who are fighting the monster to know they are not alone.

Mike says

One of the most honest and heartfelt baseball memoirs I have ever read. Ankiel, who famously imploded on the mound in a playoff game at the age of 21 due to a case of "the yips", peels back the layers of his life and exposes a childhood filled with pain and instability, and allows his readers a window into his mind as he struggled with a psychological condition that took away his livelihood, and his comeback as an outfielder with a golden arm. There are many many baseball books that glide over the human aspects of players, their

struggles and insecurities and fears, but in *The Phenomenon*, Ankiel opens up not only his life, but his psyche. This is a genuinely remarkable book, and has much to teach everyone about the value (and pitfalls) of introspection and perseverance.

Matthew says

Rick Ankiel was a star rookie pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals in 2000, when quite famously in the middle of a playoff game, he suddenly contracted a bout of wildness, and completely lost the ability to throw the ball to the catcher. The abusive and criminal shadow of his father had finally reared its ugly head, and led to a complete psychological breakdown that became fodder for the media and public for years to come. After several minor league stints and unsuccessful comeback attempts, Ankiel decided that his baseball career was over, washed up in his early 20s, until suddenly the Cardinals gave him another chance, as an outfielder, which yielded improbable but healing results. Much better than your average sports story, this book is like a baseball memoir crossed with "The Glass Castle," with an utterly honest, searching voice still trying to comprehend inexplicable things, many years after "the monster" appeared.

Daniel Chaikin says

37. *The Phenomenon : Pressure, the Yips, and the Pitch that Changed My Life (Audio)* by Rick Ankiel & Tim Brown

read by the author

published: 2017

format: Overdrive digital audio, 6:28 (~179 pages, but 304 pages in print)

acquired: Library

listened: Sep 5-11

rating: 3

For baseball fans and those interested in lives that encounter something akin to a car wreck.

Despite Ankiel's optimism, this is really a sad story. Baseball fans know Rick Ankiel as a pitcher who lost control after one bad playoff game. It was worse than that. He was a very talented left handed pitcher, maybe exceptionally talented. He had a solid rookie year, and was named a starter in a key playoff game. Then, in that game, winning 6-0, he threw a wild pitch, one bad pitch, and he never recovered. Ankiel was 21 years old, healthy, fine in practice sessions, but he was unable to pitch in a game. He had some unknown undefined issue, maybe akin to anxiety. He was talented enough that several years later he returned to the major leagues as an outfielder (with a spectacular arm).

So, he tells his story here. He's a nice guy, gives a pretty straight-forward memoir, and reads it nicely. You'll feel bad for him, for his abusive father, for what he might have done, and you'll be impressed. And, if you're like me, afterward you'll have some guilt for being so interested.

Scott Perdue says

Rick Ankiel's rise, fall, and resurrection is one of baseball's greatest stories, but it's clear that Rick is a ballplayer and not a writer/narrator. I listened to the audiobook. While it was interesting to hear his story in his own words, it made me appreciate professional narrators who make it sound natural and not so obviously read from a book. I hate to say it, but in listening to him read, it was obvious that he put his athletic training well above his education.

On a positive note, I do love that Ankiel pulls no punches and comes across as completely honest in this autobiography. Ankiel's story is one of the most unique in baseball history, and it deserves to be made into a movie. Until then, this imperfect autobiography will do.

Anna says

Rick Ankiel's story is really amazing. I know that athletes go into slumps but Ankiel's spectacular loss of control that really never came back is a few steps beyond that. It's cool that he reinvented himself as an outfielder although I never really saw him play. What a shame he was injured when the Cardinals won the world series. I hope he continues to find a way to make a career in baseball and that he is as good as father as he wants to be.

Lance says

In October 2000, Rick Ankiel felt like he was on the top of the baseball world. He was considered one of the best young pitchers in the game and was on the mound for a post-season game against the team he cheered for as a boy, the Atlanta Braves. In the third inning, a seemingly innocent wild pitch led to even more of them and he had to soon thereafter be removed from the game. That led to even more wildness and Ankiel was in the fight for his baseball career. But that fight was an internal one and how he handled that is chronicled in his recently published memoir.

When I saw that Ankiel was the narrator of the audio version, I decided to listen as I always believe that hearing the author tell his or her story lends an air of credibility to the book if he or she sounds honest. That was certainly the case here as Ankiel comes across in both words and voice as completely honest. While he had a difficult childhood by seeing his father treat his mother badly, he doesn't blame that or any other external reason for his sudden loss of the ability to throw a baseball where he wanted.

When Ankiel subsequently underwent surgery on his throwing arm and still did not have success, the reader or listener will be surprised at how he decided to change from being a pitcher to an outfielder. Even though I knew the story behind his decision to change and his subsequent work to learn a new position, I believed this was the most inspiring part of his story. Late in his career, he played in another post-season game, this time for the Braves and he hit a game-winning home run against the San Francisco Giants.

He also spoke honestly about his name appearing on the Mitchell Report, the report written by former senator George Mitchell on his investigation in the use of performance enhancing drugs in baseball. Ankiel states that he took human growth hormone while recovering from his surgery and at the time, he checked if it was a banned substance in the game. He stated that it was not at the time (not until 2005) and therefore he

decided to use it. There was no defiance, no bitterness at being listed on the report – just stated as a matter of fact.

This statement is in line with the rest of his book – narrated as just what happened without a lot of emotions, regrets or anger. It was an audiobook that I enjoyed listening to and would recommend this book, either print or audio, to baseball fans who enjoy memoirs or a good comeback story.

<http://sportsbookguy.blogspot.com/201...>

Patrick says

When I was a kid, loved All-Star Baseball '99 for the Nintendo 64. It had an awesome feature that allowed you to do a fantasy draft in season mode, so you could take, for instance, the Red Sox (my team of choice), and then engage in a fantasy draft that would allow you to select all players from available rosters at the time. There were some weird hiccups on the A.I.'s part in both the draft itself (mediocre Sox middle reliever Rich Garces, for instance, was always a top 4 pick by the computer for some reason), and in the gameplay (future Brewers slugger Richie Sexson, for example, had a terrible rating and strike zone gauge, but was actually the best HR hitter in the game), that would allow you to manipulate your team to a slight advantage. But it was a great game.

Nowadays, player ratings are so hyped up that NBA stars get into twitter fights with the game makers over their ratings, and they're tweaked throughout the season. But back in 2000, it was much more under the radar. And that must be how a flame throwing rookie from the St. Louis Cardinals received a rating in the high 90s, despite throwing barely 30 innings in the major leagues the season prior.

I give that meandering intro, because I think it's important to understanding just what Rick Ankiel dealt with in his career. He was a can't miss prospect, a guy who was so well thought of that he was rated among the best players in a video game before he was even eligible for Rookie of the Year (in that aforementioned fantasy draft, he was always taken in Round 1 or 2 by the A.I. - in order to have him on my team just to see what the hype was about, I took in the first round once). He had the world on a platter, and then the Yips came for him.

I won't rehash his story here. I'll only say that what Ankiel did was incredible, and his honesty and self-reflection in this book is astonishing. I know that some people look at what he gave up (potentially being the next Sandy Koufax), and what he inevitably did (became a solid starting OF for multiple seasons in MLB), and write it off, wondering why he would stop trying to be a pitcher. What that discounts is just how hard it is to be a professional athlete. We lionize guys like Bo Jackson and Deion Sanders, and deservedly so, for being so talented that they were able to be successful in multiple professional sports. But what Ankiel did is nearly as impressive. Guys don't go from being major league pitchers to being major league hitters. It's a different skill set, and many have tried and failed (Adam Loewen, for example, recently switched from a pitcher to a hitter, and actually made the majors, but had nowhere near the career Ankiel did, and actually went back to pitching over the last couple of years, to limited success). Ankiel was a true anomaly, and it's incredible what he accomplished.

I recall reading in Sports Illustrated years ago, when Ankiel was in the depths of his battle with the yips, Tony La Russa being asked about Ankiel being a hitter full-time, as he showed flashes of power when he

was still pitching. La Russa jokingly responded, "he's a good hitter, but he's not that good," with the implication being, "come on guys, get real. You can't just be a major league hitter like that." And yet, years later, Ankiel did it. It's amazing.

But what really makes the book stand out is Ankiel's raw honesty about what it was like, how he combated it, and how he found the intestinal fortitude to keep going (and, even more so, when he finally found the strength to quit pitching). It's emotional, insightful, and much appreciated by this baseball junkie. A great read for any baseball fan.

Jowanza Joseph says

Overall, I was a bit disappointed with this read. Even though it was short, it just got a bit boring in the middle for my tastes. The storytelling was good enough that it's still a worthy listen for most baseball fans.

Amanda says

I was so excited about this book that I pre-ordered the hardcover. I mean, who wasn't mesmerized by the hot pitching prospect who suddenly couldn't throw a strike? (even if he was a Cardinal) And co-written by Tim Brown? Sign me up. But sigh ... I was disappointed. It just seemed like nobody ever sat down and made an outline for the book. It bounced around a lot and seemed to assume the reader knew a lot about what had happened already that made it feel disjointed. I think it would have been better if Tim Brown had just written it ... sorry Rick ...

Hewitt Moore says

Typical has-been memoir. I've read my share of these and some are more interesting than others. You can tell the ones who just want to make a quick buck (they're short and choppy, like this one).

This book's plot in a sentence: Phenom pitcher with a drunkard for a dad who develops anxiety and can't throw a ball 60 ft, then becomes a mediocre outfielder.

Dan says

Decent book. I enjoyed the parts about The Yips. The baseball stuff was pretty cut and dry.

SheriC (PM) says

I was not a fan of Ankiel, as he didn't play on my favorite team or even in the same league, at the time he was most famous/infamous. So I was aware of his name, and had vaguely heard of him in connection with the yips, but knew nothing of his story. I found his memoir interesting, and his determination to return to

baseball admirable. Even more admirable is his decision to give back to the sport and to players who are suffering a similar experience, in the hopes that, if they can't overcome the anxiety and have a successful career in baseball, then at least they can move on to other things with courage and pride and still lead a happy and productive life.

Audiobook, purchased via Audible. The author reads his own work, and does as well as can be expected from someone who is not a professional voice actor.
