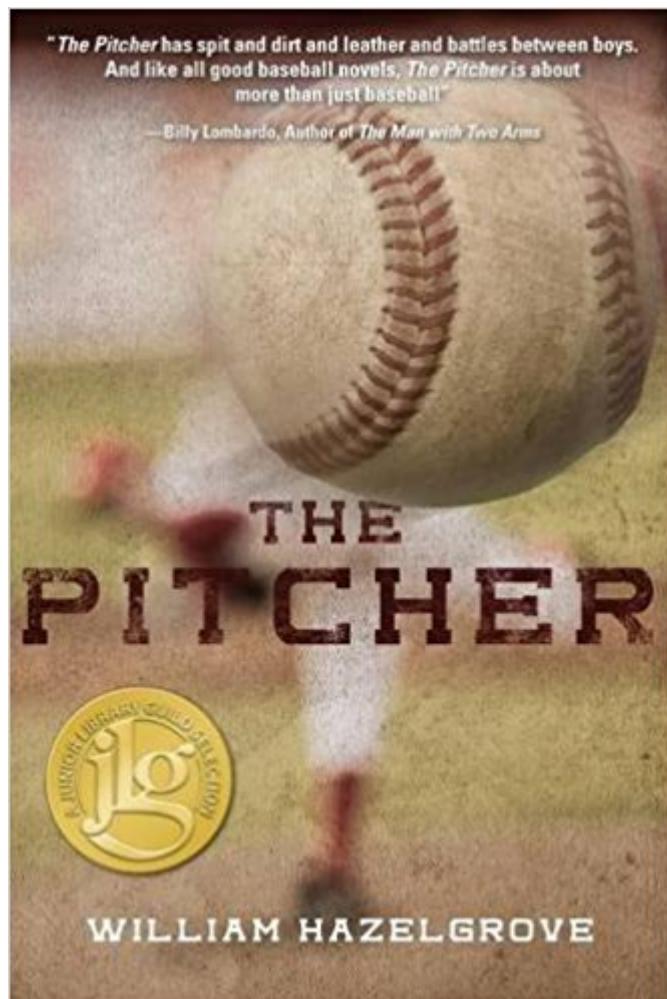


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The Pitcher



Synopsis

What A Mother Won't Do For Her Son...Top 50 Bestselling Baseball Books on Kindle "I never knew I had an arm until this guy called out, "Hey you want to try and get a ball in the hole, sonny?" I was only nine, but mom said, "come on, let's play." This Carney guy with no teeth and a fuming cigarette hands me five blue rubber balls and says if I throw three in the hole we win a prize. He's grinning, because he took mom's five bucks and figures a sucker is born every minute. That really got me, because we didn't have any money after Fernando took off, and he only comes back to beat up mom and steal our money. So I really wanted to get mom back something, you know, for her five bucks." A boy with a golden arm but no money for lessons. A mother who wants to give her son his dream before she dies. A broken down World Series pitcher who cannot go on after the death of his wife. These are the elements of The Pitcher. A story of a man at the end of his dream and a boy whose dream is to make his high school baseball team. In the tradition of The Natural and The Field of Dreams, this is a mythic story about how a man and a boy meet in the crossroads of their life and find a way to go on. You will laugh and you will cry as The Pitcher and Ricky prepare for the ultimate try out of life.

Book Information

Series: The Pitcher (Book 1)

Paperback: 252 pages

Publisher: Koehler Books (September 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1938467590

ISBN-13: 978-1938467592

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.8 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 175 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #110,020 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Sports > Baseball & Softball #136 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Baseball #376 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Sports

Customer Reviews

Ricky Hernandez, 13, can hurl a 75-miles-per-hour fastball. If only he could get it near the plate. Scraping by with a single mother suffering from lupus, Ricky is determined to show up the rich bullies, the kids who mock his Mexican heritage—~~all~~ of them. But it seems like a lost cause

until he meets his surly hermit neighbor, who just happens to be one-time World Series MVP Jack Langford. Soon a relationship begins between the Hernandezes and Langford, who begrudgingly agrees to give Ricky a few pointers. Mostly, though, he guzzles beer while forcing the kid to do puzzling things like throw stones at trees for weeks on end. It's a set-up you've seen before—bitter, fallen hero taking on his demons via a brash upstart—but Hazelgrove negates cliché by powering straight through it and embracing the classic nature of the tale, which manages to be both modern and timeless. You can taste the ballpark dust, feel the smack of the ball in your glove, and feel assured that, somehow, these three strongly drawn characters will push on to victory. Grades 5-8. --Daniel Kraus

ReviewHazelgrove knits a host of social issues into a difficult but believable tale in which junior high-age Ricky has a gift...a mean fastball. Given the portrayal of can't-catch-a-break lives and the cruelty and kindness of people young and old... readers might balk at a somewhat implausible solution when Ricky is thrown one final curve before tryouts. But no one will really mind--this kid deserves a break. An engaging, well-written sports story with plenty of human drama--this one is a solid

parents, coaches, and other kids."

"Hazelgrove (Rocket Man) measures out a generous sprinkling of American idealism while weaving in legitimate threads of sorrow, employing the oft-used baseball metaphor to fresh and moving effect. Adult characters are particularly well-crafted, giving the book crossover potential.

"Cevin Bryerman Publisher

Publishers Weekly "Like all good baseball novels, Hazelgrove's, The Pitcher has spit and dirt and leather and battles between boys. And like all good baseball novels, The Pitcher is also about more than just baseball. There are dreams here, and hope (and a mom, something even the best baseball novels often forget about). The Pitcher is a story about making lives, and in Hazelgrove's hands you can feel them taking

shape." Billy Lombardo, Author of The Man with Two Arms

Publishers Weekly While ostensibly a contemporary baseball story, Hazelgrove's expansive fifth novel also tackles issues of class, immigration law, and inequity. Thirteen-year-old Ricky Hernandez has a 75 mph pitch and dreams of making the freshman baseball team in Jacksonville, Fla., as the first step toward a professional career. He's dyslexic, of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent, and is ceaselessly taunted by his peers, led by a kid named Eric with an

insideÃ A track to making the team. While most of RickyÃ¢â„¢s teammates can afford sports camp and private lessons, he and his mother are broke due to his abusive fatherÃ¢â„¢s lack of financial support and his motherÃ¢â„¢s mounting medical bills. Despite her deteriorating health, she has loads of attitude, brains, and charm. She singlehandedly persuades their neighbor, The Pitcher, who played in the World Series, to set aside his beer, leave his garage, and coach Ricky. Hazelgrove (Rocket Man) measures out a generous sprinkling of American idealism while weaving in legitimate threads of sorrow, employing the oft-usedbaseball metaphor to fresh and moving effect. Adult characters are particularly well-crafted, giving the book crossover potential. --Cevin Bryerman, Publisher / Vice President, www.publishersweekly.com The Pitcher is a Junior Library Guild Selection ""Readers will be rooting for underdog Ricky every time he steps onto the mound and tries to control his wild pitch.Ã A With tense moments, unexpected twists, and a few humorous and joyful reprieves, Hazelgrove's writing reflects the dramatic arc of a baseball game. Will appeal to baseball players and fans, as well as anyone who has experienced the intensity of tryouts or a high-stakes game.""-Junior Library Guild School Library Journal Review of The Pitcher ""Ricky Hernandez has dreamed of pitching ever since, at nine years old, he astounded the grown-ups with his throwing speed at a carnival game. Now almost 14, heÃ¢â„¢s still got the speed, but has never learned to control his pitches. His mom is his biggest fan, and she scrapes together enough for him to play on a youth league team and acts as its assistant coach. But in affluent Jacksonville, Florida, where the other rising freshmen attend elite sport camps and have personal coaches, Ricky and his mom know that he needs more if heÃ¢â„¢s going to have any chance at the high school team. His reclusive neighbor is rumored to be Jack Langford, the winning pitcher of the 1978 World Series, so Maria begins her campaign to enlist him as RickyÃ¢â„¢s coach, but the Pitcher wants no part of it. He has spent the years since his wife died holed up in his garage with beer and cigarettes and ESPN. But Maria is tenacious, and he agrees reluctantly to help her son. The beauty of this story is that there is no sudden epiphany for Ricky when the Pitcher steps in. Langford is impatient and intolerant and sometimes drinks too much. Ricky is used to struggling academically because he canÃ¢â„¢t stay focused, and lets himself believe that this same lack of concentration is going to keep him from ever being a good pitcher. The other players pick up on his insecurities and use racial slurs to get under his skin at games. Hazelgrove is skilled at creating fully fleshed-out characters, and the dialogue carries the story along beautifully. While there is plenty of sports action, The Pitcher is ultimately about relationships, and the resolution and personal growth of the characters will appeal to a wide audience.""-Kim Dare, Fairfax County Public Schools, VA KIRKUS REVIEW ""Hazelgrove knits a host of social issues into a difficult but believable tale in

which junior high--age Ricky has a gift: He can throw a mean fastball. Although the story opens with triumph--young Ricky surprises and impresses a carnival barker with his pitching--success generally proves elusive for this son of undocumented immigrants. With an abusive, mostly absent father and racially motivated bullying by teammates and adults, it's not just Ricky's pitching in need of a change-up. His supportive, spitfire, Latina mother is seriously ill and without health insurance, his goal of making the high school team is increasingly unlikely, and the litany of obstacles appears otherwise unending. Class issues? Check. Dyslexia? You bet. But Ricky's first-person voice is entertaining and unflinching; when a drunk, ex-pro pitcher offers surprising assistance, the youngster notes that "we are equipped to handle all the bad shit, you know. But good things are a little trickier." Given the gritty portrayal of can't-catch-a-break lives and the cruelty and kindness of people young and old, sophisticated readers might balk at a somewhat implausible solution when Ricky is thrown one final curve before tryouts. But no one will really mind--this kid deserves a break. An engaging, well-written sports story with plenty of human drama--this one is a solid hit." THE PITCHER is destined to become a classic. It is well-written, funny, heart-warming, engaging, easy to read, romantic and uplifting. On the surface this story may seem to be all about baseball and pitchers, but it's more than that. THE PITCHER, a Junior Library Guild Selection, is about a loving and determined Hispanic mother who will endure anything and survive everything for the love of her child and his right to fulfill his dreams; it's about overcoming prejudice and poverty; it's about second chances; and most of all, it's about learning to believe in yourself. Latina Book Club <http://www.latinabookclub.com>

I've read many baseball novels throughout the years from Harold M. Sherman's books written in the 1930s, the TAB Books of the 1950s, like "The Kid Who Batted 1.000" and the many books of John R. Tunis, up through my adult years with books such as "The Natural," and the Crabbe Evers series and the excellent mysteries of Troy Soos. Many of these, and others, are quite decent, if not, excellent baseball novels. But none of these ever came close to leaving me with the intense sense of wonder that I felt after, and while, reading Mr. Hazelgrove's, "The Pitcher." "To Kill a Mockingbird" combined with the coach from "The Bad News Bears" might point you in the same direction, but, obviously, these two books cannot be combined. Although grounded in the trappings of reality, this book is magical. The son's ambitions and hopes combined with his mother's support are what the book is all about. But, throw in a down-at-the-heels, former star player, and the book becomes one that should be read slowly, and savored, in order to enjoy every nuance of the plot. Again, this book

is magical.

I am blown away by this novel. It gave me more chills than "The Field Of Dreams" and "The Natural" combined. I choked up more times reading this, soon to be classic tale, than a team that leaves 11 men on base during a game. I kid you not; it's that moving. This is much more than a story of the love of a game, or a mother's dream for her child. This is a perfectly crafted piece of literary fiction that is relevant to contemporary issues of the day. You will come to respect and admire Maria and her son Ricky. If you're like me, you will be fascinated by the Pitcher Jack Langford. All I could see when I read about him was Clint Eastwood (about 25 years younger). You'll love his evolution and root for him as well as Maria and Ricky. If this isn't made into a movie, Hollywood is missing out on a potential blockbuster as big or bigger than "Sandlot" or "The Natural". It weaves in hot button issues like illegal immigration, health care, and domestic violence in a way that isn't preachy or over the top. It is sentimental but not maudlin. These issues and the dream of a mother and child to have "their moment to shine" is brilliantly done in a manner that is at times humorous, tension filled, and totally satisfying. The last 25 % of the book will have you in angst as the the twists of the story unfold into a totally fulfilling conclusion. This novel is a must read for men and women of all ages. I just can't put into words how impressive this book is, but I have no doubt that this future best seller is Mr. Hazelgrove's "moment to shine".

Wish I had read something like this as a teen. It would have given me the hope and inspiration all boys need. This is just a story of a boy and a man, of dreams, and a strong mom who would not let her son fail. I have long maintained that a boy needs a man in his life, a positive role model. And, in order to be successful at any vocation or skill, one needs a mentor. It is almost impossible to succeed without strong and loving guidance. Ricky had the best of both worlds: mom and man as mentors. Being from the North Side, I resent that the author didn't use a Cub as The Pitcher. The book shares fond recollections of Wrigley Field and Chicago; thank you. Of course, since The Pitcher starred in and won a World Series, that would have changed the book from a novel to pure fantasy! Read it; you'll love it.

I'm picky about what I read, particularly when it comes to YA fiction and books about sports, as both are difficult nuts to crack for any author. I've read TOBACCO STICKS and ROCKET MAN, two of Hazelgrove's previous book, and while I enjoyed both, I was skeptical about his ability to create a narrative that melded these two new categories together into a story that would draw me in. So when

THE PITCHER was recommended to me by a friend who knows that SHOELESS JOE, THE CATCHER IN THE RYE and WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS are three of my favorite books, and FIELD OF DREAMS and BULL DURHAM are two of my all-time favorite movies, at first I ignored him. Then a second friend chimed in, unsolicited, with the same recommendation, so I gave it a chance. I'm glad I did. Hazelgrove has pulled off something not many authors can do -- he has created a story that manages to be a breezy read, while also being sweet, powerful and heart-felt. There are a thousand tales of kids reaching for their dreams, encouraged by a special "Obi-Wan"-esque mentor, but despite that THE PITCHER manages to come off as fresh and even original in its point-of-view of this tale as old as time. As I said before, I've read other books by the author. As much as I liked them, though, I have to say that THE PITCHER feels the most authentic. Hazelgrove has found his voice in this book, through these characters and with a story that feels personal and real. A good writer, like a good actor, can make almost any material work (though it will likely still come across as wooden), but no matter how good an author may be, he or she can't force their writing to live and breathe...that comes only from a well-grounded connection to the material. That's what Hazelgrove has accomplished here. Want to feel good? Read THE PITCHER.

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