



The Bird: The Life and Legacy of Mark Fidrych

Doug Wilson

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The first biography of the eccentric pitcher, rookie All-Star starter, 70s pop icon, and first athlete on the cover of *Rolling Stone*


For those who remember him, Mark Fidrych is still that player who brings a smile to your face, the irresistibly likable pitcher whose sudden rise brightened the star-spangled season of 1976 and reminded us of the pure joy of the game.

Lanky, mop-topped, and nicknamed for his resemblance to Big Bird on *Sesame Street*, Fidrych exploded onto the national stage during the Bicentennial summer as a rookie with the Detroit Tigers. He won over fans nationwide with his wildly endearing antics such as talking to the ball---and throwing back the ones that "had hits in them"; getting down on his knees to "manicure" the mound of any cleat marks; and shaking hands with just about everyone from teammates to groundskeepers to cops during and after games. Female fans tried to obtain locks of his hair from his barber and even named babies after him.

But The Bird was no mere sideshow. The non-roster invitee to spring training that year quickly emerged as one of the best pitchers in the game. Meanwhile, his boyish enthusiasm, his famously modest lifestyle, and his refusal to sign with an agent during the days of labor disputes and free agency made him such a breath of fresh air for fans that not only did attendance in Detroit increase---by *tens* of thousands---for games he pitched, *opposing teams* would specifically ask the Tigers to shuffle their rotation so Fidrych would pitch in their cities, too. A rare player who transcended pop culture, Fidrych was named starting pitcher in the All-Star Game as a rookie (the first of his two All-Star nods) and became the first athlete to appear on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine.

Baseball researcher Doug Wilson delivers the first biography of this once-in-a-lifetime player. Through extensive interviews and meticulous research, the author recounts Fidrych's meteoric rise from Northborough, Massachusetts, to the big leagues, his heartbreaking fall after a torn knee ligament and then rotator cuff, his comeback attempts with the Tigers and in the Red Sox system, and one unforgettable night when The Bird pitched a swan song for the Pawtucket Red Sox against future star Dave Righetti in a game that remains part of local folklore. Finally, Wilson captures Fidrych's post-baseball life and his roles in the community, tragically culminating with his death in a freak accident in 2009.

The Bird gives readers a long-overdue look into the life of a player whom baseball had never seen before---and has never seen since.

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