

Play Ball!

Throwing Heat

PB: \$5.95 / 978-1-56145-540-9 / Ages 8–12

The Real Story behind THROWING HEAT:

The Real Story features two hard-throwing pitchers: Steve Dalkowski, the left-hander who was reputed to throw the ball as fast as anyone in the history of baseball—but never made it out of the minor leagues because he walked far too many batters—and Sandy Koufax, who gained fame later in his career when he began to pitch with more control.

The plot:

Thirteen-year-old Jack Lerner is obsessed with baseball. Among his friends, Jack is undisputedly the most athletic, and he's proud of that distinction. Well known in his baseball league for his blazing fastball, he's already able to pitch at 75 MPH.

In a new league this year, Jack learns he will now be required to pitch from farther back. He starts the first game of the season using his fastball, of course. Despite their impressive speed, his pitches are now harder to control. Jack throws more pitches than necessary, misses the strike zone way too often, and walks too many batters. He is frustrated and doesn't understand why he can't strike everyone out with his fastball.

Jack's older sister Sarah, a high school teacher, introduces him to her new boyfriend Finn, a college pitching coach. Finn offers to coach Jack, and Jack eagerly accepts. When they meet up for their first coaching session, however, Jack is quickly disillusioned. Finn seems unimpressed by speed and more concerned with control. Finn even wants him to throw changeups, which slow down his pitches. Finn suggests he occasionally let batters hit ground balls for easy outs, but Jack is only interested in strikeouts.

Disregarding Finn's advice, Jack continues to rely on his fastball, throwing too many pitches and walking too many players. He is not helping his team get any closer to the playoffs. It is only when Jack loses the Ping-Pong championship to a new kid in school that he begins to realize that sometimes consistency trumps speed. He decides to ask Finn for another coaching session. Finn again shows Jack the changeups, and has him practice throwing his fastball against a small chalked-out section of brick wall. After only a few workouts, Jack can already see an improvement in his control.

Jack's new skills come into play in the Bears' next game and he is able to pitch the entire game. His team wins, making it into the playoffs. Jack now sees that pitching is more than just throwing hard—it's constantly striving to develop all your skills as a player.

