



Pitch by Pitch: My View of One Unforgettable Game

Bob Gibson, Lonnie Wheeler

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Pitch by Pitch gets inside the head of Bob Gibson on October 2, 1968, when he took the mound for game one of the World Series against the Detroit Tigers and struck out a record seventeen batters.

With the tension rising in the stadium, an uproarious crowd behind him, and the record for the most strikeouts thrown in a World Series game on the line, Gibson, known as one of the most intimidating pitchers in baseball history, relives every inning and each pitch of this iconic game. Facing down batter after batter, he breaks down his thought process and recounts in vivid and candid detail his analysis of the players who stepped into the batter's box against him, his control of both the ball and the elements of the day, and his moments of synchronicity with teammate Tim McCarver, all the while capturing the fascinating relationship and unspoken dialogue that carries on between pitcher and catcher over the course of nine critical innings.

From the dugout to the locker room, Gibson offers a behind-the-scenes look at the lives of the players, the team's chemistry, and clubhouse culture. He recounts the story of Curt Flood, Gibson's best friend and the Cardinal center fielder, who would go on to become one of the pioneers of free agency; shares colorful anecdotes of his interactions with some of baseball's most unforgettable names, from Denny McLain and Roger Maris to Sandy Koufax and Harry Caray; and relives the confluence of events, both on and off the field, that led to one of his---and baseball's---most memorable games ever.

This deep, unfiltered insider look at one particular afternoon of baseball allows for a better understanding of how pros play the game and all the variables that a pitcher contends with as he navigates his way through a formidable lineup. Gibson's extraordinary and engrossing tale is retold from the unique viewpoint of an extremely perceptive pitcher who happens to be one of baseball's all-time greats.

Pitch by Pitch: My View of One Unforgettable Game Details

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Chuck Neumann says

An excellent baseball book. Bob Gibson talks about his great game 1 win in the 1968 World Series over the Detroit Tigers when he set a new World Series record for strikeouts in a game. He goes into the game, as the title says, pitch by pitch. That might sound boring, but Gibson makes it very entertaining. His memory of the game nearly 50 years ago is remarkable, aided by the video of the game. He also goes into the other players in the game, both teammates on the Cardinals as well as the Tigers, revealing information that greatly helps the book. He does also cover the rest of the series, in which the Tigers won in game 7, when Lolich beat Gibson. But mainly it concerns Game one, and he does so in brilliant fashion. You really get to know Bob Gibson, and he is worth knowing. Highly recommend this book to baseball fans.

John Kaufmann says

My one baseball book of the year. Solid, but not great (not quite as good as I was expecting). It's a pitch-by-pitch account of game 1 of the 1968 World Series between Gibson's St. Louis Cardinals and the AL's champion Detroit Tigers. The game featured the author pitching for the Cards against the last 30-game winner Denny McLain, both of whom won their respective league's Cy Young award for best pitcher of the year and the Most Valuable Player award. It is interesting at times, especially with good hitters batting, but it also gets quite tedious (and repetitive) after a while.

The pitch-by-pitch account is interspersed with stories and anecdotes about the other players in the game - Lou Brock, Curt Flood, Orlando Cepeda, Mike Shannon, Dal Maxvill, Al Kaline, Willie Horton, Bill Freehan, Jim Northrup, etc. It also included some other stars from other teams that Gibson played against over his career, which, while interesting, disrupted the flow of the main storyline. The book also had numerous gratuitous comments reminding us about the records Gibson holds.

Richard Bray says

PITCH BY PITCH: MY VIEW OF ONE UNFORGETTABLE GAME can be described simply -- it's Bob Gibson, unfiltered, brash, confidence still oozing with every word, walking the reader pitch by pitch through Game 1 of the 1968 World Series.

It's a great idea for a book, and Bob Gibson and Lonnie Wheeler execute the concept with thoughtfulness, humor and an eye for detail.

The parts where Gibson walks us through the game pitch by pitch, outlining his approach to each batter, interesting as they are, aren't even the best parts. The real juice is when Gibson is telling stories about the personalities involved, talking about his teammates or opponents, and what they were like off the field. That's when I was most engaged, most interested in Gibson's perspective -- when i got an opportunity to

glimpse what it was like to be a Major League Baseball player in 1968.

Of course, that's not to say that the play-by-play was uninteresting. Gibson is clearly rewatching the television broadcast of the game as he relays his thoughts. As a baseball fan, it's fascinating to hear how Gibson approached each at-bat, each hitter, as he struck out 17 batters en route to a Game 1 World Series victory. It also shows how imperfect an art it is, even for a battery as incredible as Gibson and McCarver. Gibson details how one pitch sets up the next pitch, and how the previous at-bat impacts his pitch selection. It gets especially interesting when Gibson and McCarver attempt to get into the head of the hitter, avoiding certain pitches because they know that the batter knows that Pitch #1 sets up Pitch #2, so maybe they should go with Pitch #3, though the batter may be aware of their thinking so maybe they should go back to Pitch#1.

Nonetheless, the most interesting aspect of the game is the personalities involved. From Denny McLain to Lou Brock to Curt Flood to Norm Cash to Dick McAuliffe to Roger Maris, the game is packed with talented ballplayers and curious personalities that all made their impact on the history of Major League Baseball. As someone born almost 15 years after this game was played, it was fascinating to learn more about the familiar names I've heard through the years.

If you're interested in the teams or this era of baseball, and you love the idea of hearing from one of the game's greatest legends as he walks through one of his most historic performances, you will enjoy this book. It's well-written, thoughtful, and well-paced, and deserves its place on the bookshelves of St. Louis Cardinals fans and baseball historians alike.

Doctor Moss says

This is the book I hoped Daniel Okrent's Nine Innings would be when I read it years ago. Okrent's book was good, but I think this is better.

Bob Gibson was incredible in 1968. Denny McLain was, too. Gibson's 1.12 ERA and McLain's 31 wins are mind-boggling, even given that it was the "year of the pitcher." And they were the opposing pitchers in the opening game of the World Series that year. Gibson's done us a huge favor by putting himself back on that day and telling us everything that went through his mind, batter by batter, pitch by pitch.

Casual baseball fans complain that the game is too slow, that, for most of the game, nothing is really happening. But most of what happens in baseball happens when nothing is happening. It's the strategizing, and it's the pitcher vs. batter mental matchup — if you watch a game for action, I think you're missing the best part.

And that's what Gibson tells us. It's all about what pitch to throw and where to throw it when. What did I throw this guy before? How was his swing on that fastball? What is he expecting now? Am I getting too tired to rely on my slider?

Several things impressed me about Gibson in particular. One was his confidence in how he could dictate where a batter would hit a ball — not just in the obvious cases where he wanted a double play groundball, but where he just wanted to get a quick out (he seems to think some guys aren't even worth the pitches it would take to strike them out).

Another is his lack of concern, or even attention, for the positioning of the fielders behind him. I remember

how Jim Palmer would move outfielders around. So far as you can tell from this, Gibson hardly pays any attention. And it's not because he intended to strike everyone out — in fact, he says, as a rule, he didn't even think about strikeouts until he got two strikes on a batter.

Gibson had a reputation as an intimidator. But, judging from what he says here (yes, it could be cleaned up), that wasn't a big thing. He shows a lot of respect for hitters like Norm Cash, Willie Horton, Al Kaline, and Jim Northrup. He does move the ball in and out, setting up sliders away by first throwing fastballs in and off the plate. But I would expect any pitcher to do that.

And he does watch body language. He notices when batters step out of the box, to reset themselves, and he thinks about what he can conclude from it. He notices Northrup move up a step in the batter's box, and he thinks Northrup must be moving up to hit a breaking pitch before it breaks. So Northrup gets a fastball.

It's all pretty good stuff. And even if you know that this is how a pitcher thinks, it's different hearing it, pitch by pitch, from the pitcher himself. I'm giving the book four stars instead of five, just because, like a pitching duel itself, I suspect it doesn't appeal to everyone. The action is in Gibson's head, not on the field.

Honestly, it'd be interesting to hear the same kind of account from a pitcher who is very different from Gibson. Maybe somebody without Gibson's overpowering fastball. I'd love to hear Luis Tiant's thoughts pitch by pitch. Or maybe a pitcher who just wasn't as good, to understand the struggles he's going through.

Joe Strnad says

Gibson's approach to pitching, based on the inning and situation, is the most insightful/meaningful aspect of his book. The ultra competitive ace pitched an insane number of innings during the 1960s. Pitcher used to start every fourth day instead of every fifth like today's players. Gibson intently established the inside part of the plate in order to setup fastballs on the outside corner. He details the difference between pitching inside vs. throwing inside strikes. A subtle difference that seems lost on many pitchers now.

Entertaining clubhouse stories are peppered throughout the chapters. As a diehard Cardinals fan, I enjoyed hearing about legends Brock, Cepeda, McCarver, and Shannon. This book gave me a new appreciation for Cards' catcher Tim McCarver. Gibson credits McCarver for much of his and the team's sustained success during the decade. Ball player nicknames and pre-game rituals are also included. Mike Shannon was known as The Moon Man by his teammates. For anyone who has listened to Cardinals' radio broadcasts and wondered 'what planet is he on?' this fits well. Apparently Shannon's teammates didn't know what he was talking about half the time either. Curt Flood deserves his own biography. He stood up to Gussie Busch and challenged MLB's reserve clause. Gibson gives a brief description of Flood's life post-baseball which piqued my interest.

Recommended for knowledgeable baseball fans anywhere.

On-deck: a quality Curt Flood bio.

Ryan Miller says

What impressed me about this book is not just the thought process behind Gibson's pitching, but the obvious respect he holds for the game and the other players. Knowing his reputation as an ultra-intense, almost mean competitor, I expected the text to be full of anger. It wasn't. Gibson writes with kindness toward his fellow players, even as he is striking them out.

Liz says

This has been on my TBR pile for a while, so am glad it finally made it to the top. Told in a conversational style, as the title states it is a review of one game in October, 1968. And very interesting it is too to get the insight into a pitcher's mind of how and why he pitches the way he does. Also, enjoyed the insights and stories on the people he played with or against. Free e-book from the library.

John says

Nuts and bolts baseball!

Bill Pence says

Bob Gibson, now 82 years old, is a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. He played seventeen seasons with the St. Louis Cardinals. During that time, he won two Cy Young Awards and pitched for two World Series champs. In this book he takes the reader through each pitch of game one of the 1968 World Series against the Detroit Tigers, 50 years ago.

Gibson was coming off of a record-setting season in which he had an earned run average of an incredible 1.12. His opponent in the October 2 game was Denny McLain, who won an unbelievable 31 games for the Tigers. So, we had two pitchers at the top of their games going in game one on a warm October afternoon in St. Louis.

I really enjoyed Gibson's insights on each pitch. He takes the reader through his thought process on what he was planning to throw and how it turned out. In between, he tells some very interesting stories about his Cardinal teammates and the Tigers he was facing. As a baseball fan and a Cardinal fan, I loved every page of this book.

One story in particular was of personal interest. He tells of Cardinal Curt Simmons getting Hank Aaron out on change-up pitches. He writes "When Aaron finally timed one of Simmons's slowballs and clubbed it over the fence, he was called out for stepping on the plate." The fascinating thing about that story is that I was at that August 18, 1965 game in St. Louis at the original Busch Stadium (initially called Sportsman Park), as an 8-year-old boy with my family when that took place.

Gibson writes in a confident manner about racial issues, his pitching "The slider was next; and it was perfect, if you don't mind my saying so," catcher McCarver "Tim has since confessed that he can't think of a single intelligent thing he ever pointed out to me in our little mid-inning visits," his roommate Curt Flood's challenge of major league baseball's reserve clause, and much, much more.

Gibson would break Sandy Koufax's World Series strikeout record in the game and the Cardinals would win, but ultimately lose the series.

If you are a baseball fan, and in particular a Cardinals fan, you'll love this book.

David says

On October 2, 1968, Bob Gibson struck out 17 Detroit Tigers in the World Series, a record that still stands. He also set the "live-ball" era (since 1920) record for the lowest earned run average (1.12) during a season in which he got surprisingly little offensive support from his team. Gibson's fierce demeanor, intelligence, and willingness to remind batters that he too had a claim to the inside of the plate, made him an intimidating presence on the mound. If you think baseball is boring, as many people do, this pitch-by-pitch account, accompanied by entertaining anecdotes and insights, demonstrates the strategic storm that lies beneath the plodding calm of the game.

Steven Peterson says

This is a fascinating work. And one that resonates with me, since I watched the 1968 World Series on TV. This book is a pitch by pitch analysis by the winning pitcher in that game--the great and formidable Bob Gibson. I can still see in my mind his wrenching and powerful pitching style. The pitch by pitch analysis comes from Gibson's memory of events and a video of the game between his St. Louis Cardinals and the Detroit Tigers. And that is what makes this such a good read. Such detail!

And one is reminded of quirky players (Dick McAuliffe's batting stance made me think that he could not hit at all--but he was a good hitter and a scrappy player), role players (Dal Maxvill or the Cardinals), great players (Al Kaline of the Tigers and Orlando Cepeda of the Cardinals), and winners (such as catcher for the Cards Tim McCarver). Other players of repute: Norm Cash, Bill Freehan, Mickey Stanley, Lou Brock, Curt Flood, and Roger Maris (closing out his major league career).

The pitch by pitch analysis is a nice conceit in this book. One feels a certain degree of suspense as the game is described (Yeah, I already knew that the Cards won, but the book is written such as one doesn't really know how a specific at bat goes).

Another thing that makes this book such a good read is the writing style. Lonnie Wheeler is listed (in small print) as a co-author. I would guess that he did a good job in compiling, organizing, and editing Gibson's recollections. But the writing style seems to me to be in Bob Gibson's words. And the narrative is witty and also suggestive of a very smart person with a good command of English. It is quite literate (in that, reminiscent of much earlier works by ex-players such as Jim Brosnan and Jim Bouton--although Gibson may be even better).

Anyhow, a terrific book, bringing back to my mind the baseball played in the 1960s. And this being one of the better World Series of that period, with a great cast of players involved.

Well worth reading. . . .

Patrick says

This will, for as long as I live, be considered one of the better baseball books I've ever read. Truly. Get one

of the single greatest pitchers take you pitch by pitch of a game he hadn't even realized he K'd 17 in a WS game and shared so much tremendous information about other players. Here is the thing: if you love baseball, pitching and reading this will be as good as anything you'll ever read.

Anup Sinha says

I loved it! You not only get into the mind of one of the all-time greatest pitchers working in an iconic game, but you get all the backstories of the other iconic and less iconic participants. I learned so much about all the other players and coaches and broadcasters I thought I already knew.

I grew up a Tiger fan born 2 1/2 years after the 1968 World Series but I knew all about it and had seen the video of the famous game one where Gibson dominated the Tigers with a record 17-strikeout shutout. Though I never saw Gibson pitch live, his blend of superior stuff, great athleticism, insane competitiveness, and high intellect has long him made me a fan of his. I wish we had pitchers today with half his passion and guts, much less his talent!

Lonnie Wheeler is a hell of a co-writer, I have read several of his baseball books and it is always a clean narrative with lots of good backstories.

If you have any interest in this athlete, this team, the other team, or the year, you will love this book. One of the best baseball books I have ever read.

Brett Marshall says

While reading pitch by pitch by Bob Gibson and Lonnie Wheeler I truly enjoyed the way the authors accelerated the story inning by inning, pitch by pitch, and batter by batter, analyzing each batter for the Detroit Tigers and St. Louis Cardinals going through how they batted and his personal relationships with them, as well as giving his own thoughts on the game of baseball and what he thought of breaking the Sandy Koufax one game strikeout record, which truly makes this an excellent read.

Matthew Bachmann says

Surprisingly boring. Was hoping for pitching insights and what Gibson offered was 200 pages of "I throw what I want, when I want, because I'm Bob Gibson." I did learn a lot about Cardinals' history – and realized how little I do know about the Cardinals pre-1980s. Gibson comes off as arrogant and a real jerk to be teammates with. Not really my opinion so much as Gibson more/less admits this throughout the book. Only recommended if you want backstory on the late 60s Cardinals like Flood, Javier and Mike Shannon.
