

THE YOUNG PITCHER

Synopsis and Research Summaries

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Zane Grey's West Society

The Young Pitcher



ZANE GREY

INTRODUCTION

A youngster with a successful past record playing high school baseball finds himself thrust into an unfamiliar world as a university freshman where he encounters humiliating hazing and even physical attacks, causing him to feel he has no place in college athletics. As a result of a most peculiar defense mechanism whereby he escapes from a violent mob he draws the attention of the varsity baseball coach who promises to make him a success on the field. When the college administration disqualifies the entire championship team from the previous year for having played on minor league professional teams during the summer, the door is opened for the new arrival and the fresh recruits who will have to defend the university's honor in the new season. Perseverance and dedication to team rules insisted upon by the coach and enforced among the new players themselves, leads the team to a new championship season, but not without experiencing the agony of defeat before success arrives, very much as a result of the young pitcher who initially arrived on campus with a question as to whether he would fit in.

LIST OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

(XX) Indicates the page where each character first appears in the Walter J. Black, Inc., edition of *THE YOUNG PITCHER*.

- **Ken Ward (aka Peg) (1)**...16-year old Wayne University student.
- **Dale (8)**...captain of the Wayne University baseball team when Ken Ward arrived.
- **Worry Arthurs (21)**...baseball coach at Wayne University when Ken Ward arrived.
- **Giraffe Boswick (28)**...student who had his eye blackened by Ken's potato throwing.
- **Mac Murray (51)**...famous athletic trainer at Wayne University.
- **Kel Raymond, Weir (51) Graves (60), Hickie, Hollis, Dreer (74), Dean (107)**...baseball players on the Wayne University team.
- **President Halstead (97)**...President of Wayne University.
- **Roy Homans and Reddy Ray (103)**...two additional talented players who join the team.

SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1. Sixteen-year old freshman Ken Ward learns after just a few days at Wayne University that a freshman's lot is miserable due to the hazing and bullying by the sophomores and upper classmen among the four thousand students at the university. Ward feels lonely and that there is nothing right about him as he is unrelentingly heckled and pestered. When he slips into a lecture room and takes a seat in an area reserved for sophomores he is attacked and his clothes are torn off of him. In the fight Ken slugs the president of the sophomores, the captain of the baseball team named Dale.

Chapter 2. Realizing he has become a target for the sophomores, Ken does his best to avoid them, including renting a room in town rather than staying in one of the dormitories. He studies forestry and reads everything he can on the subject in the library before Christmas. He visits Carlton Hall where the university's trophies and athletic memorabilia are on display, and he worries that because he had slugged the baseball team captain he likely has no chance of ever being a part of the legacy there. Days later in January Ken is chased by a mob of students, until he comes upon another student with a bushel basket of potatoes. He throws the potatoes one at a time at his pursuers, hitting and bruising many of them, before he escapes to his boarding house. Later that evening the baseball coach, Worry Arthurs, knocks on Ken's door. He compliments Ken on his great arm, as he had seen the potato throwing episode. He says he is impressed with the way Ken had "pegged" his pursuers, and that he will be looking him up.

Chapter 3. Coach Arthurs tells Ken he will make him a star. Ken tells Arthur how he had slugged the team captain. Arthur takes Ken to Dale's dormitory room to reconcile their differences. Ken apologizes. Dale and other baseball players in his room decide they will make Ken the bowl-man in one of the traditional annual scraps between the freshmen and the sophomores. The players tell Ken that they will hold him captive in Dale's room. After an unsuccessful brawl and scuffle, Ken succumbs to their plan where his whereabouts will be kept secret, where he will remain silent, and where the other players will bring him food and drinks, his books, class lecture notes and assignments, and where he will not try to escape.

Chapter 4. Coach Arthurs begins calling Ken "Kid" and "Peg" acknowledging the coach's respect for his throwing power. The day of the bowl-fight and Ken's tenure as bowl-man passes, and with them Ken gains new respect on campus. The athletic faculty announces that all of the players from the previous year's championship team are banned from playing because they participated on semi-pro or professional teams during the off-season, a violation all of the universities had accepted as improper. The coach issues a Call For Candidates inviting students to apply for the varsity baseball team.

Chapter 5. Students volunteering for consideration for the baseball team are invited to meet at the Cage. The Cage is a huge, open, airy room, lighted by many windows, and, with the exception of a platform, it is entirely enclosed by heavy netting. The coach attempts to determine the batting skills of those who are applying for consideration to be on the team, and he begins talking to them about the training rules, such as no alcohol or smoking. He makes all of them run laps to begin conditioning.

Chapter 6. The coach narrows down the number of applicants to twenty. They are besieged by onlookers who are scornful and abusive because of the new rules that made their championship team from the previous year ineligible. The coach enlists Ken to pitch to the boys, even though he has not decided that he will eventually be a pitcher. He instructs Ken to purposefully hit each boy in order to see which of them are afraid of the ball. Three players, Gage, Weir, and Raymond appear to have the most promise of being good players. Graves threatens to someday get even with Ken for hitting him. The coach tries Ken at various positions in the infield and the outfield, and he attempts to stretch a double into a triple at

batting practice, only to be stopped in a fierce collision with Graves who reminds him, “Ward, I said I’d get you!”

Chapter 7. The collision put Ken out of practice for three days, even though Graves told the coach he had only been trying to tag him. Ken’s performance in the field never improved. On the day of their first game against the ineligible players the coach finally took the players to Grant Field. Ken is impressed by the beautiful level playground and the magnificent turreted grandstand. He is astounded at the four thousand or so people in the stands. The coach puts Ken at right field to start the game. The old disgraced varsity team shows up in masse with their W-sweaters, Ken reviewing in his mind about what he knew of the outstanding abilities of each player. Ken strikes out in his first time at bat. Ken loses count of the runs after the old first stringers have scored eleven runs. While chasing a fly ball from the old captain, Ken runs head first into the bleachers.

Chapter 8. After regaining consciousness he was led to the bench to learn he had not caught the fly ball. The final score is 41 to 0. The coach compliments Ken for trying hard saying his effort had made a difference. Ken clamps down on his studies. On the first of April he appears before the old professor called Crab to attempt to pass his annual finals ahead of tie, which will allow him to play in the team’s official opening game of the season. Ken discovers the professor is a baseball fan who asks him more about baseball terms than about physics. He passes the examination, even though the professor says Ken knows more about baseball than physics. Ken is thrilled that he is no longer a freshman.

Chapter 9. Hudson, the opposing team, wins the opening game 9 to 2. The team is to play Travers College the next Saturday. Before the game President Halstead holds a student assembly in the auditorium during which he commends Ward for his effort when he ran into the bleachers, and he admonishes the students for failure to have a school spirit.

Chapter 10. Coach Arthurs gets a player named Holman to join the team, a result of President Halstead’s pep talk. A second player named Ray also shows up to join the team, a very fast runner, an intercollegiate track team member who had kept in shape after track season. Ken approaches the coach and asks him to give him a try as a pitcher, something the coach admits he should have thought of. The coach instructs the team catcher Dean to try to catch Ken’s pitches. The coach then takes Ken off alone and works with him on his pitching, after which he calls him a natural born pitcher.

Chapter 11. The coach announces the varsity to include Ken Ward, Dean, McCord, Raymond, Weir, Graves, Ray, Holman, Trace, Duncan, and Schoonover, and he instructs them to report immediately to Trainer Murray at 36 Spring Street within sight of Grant Field where they will be assigned rooms in the sacred precinct of the chosen athletes. The trainer immediately gives each player a steam bath. Ken and Raymond are assigned to be roommates. At the dinner table there are twelve players with the coach seated at the head of the table. The coach lays down the training rules – eat only at 36 Spring Street, cut out cigarettes and drinks, and in bed

by ten o'clock. He also advises the players to spend any leisure time they may have there at the facility. On the field there is a marked improvement in the performance of the players.

On the day of the game with State University, the coach tells them they should think about how they had been roasted by the students, put out of their mind everything but trying, and that errors are nothing, mistakes are nothing, and they should play as a team. He promises them that he will not say anything from the bench, as he trusts them. Ken pitches a great game, and Wayne wins 6 to 3. After the game the coach tells the team that he is inspired, and that he expects they will beat Herne. He also tells them that if he fails to build up a good team this year, the directors will let him go, and he doesn't want that to happen as he has a son who is preparing for Wayne, and his heart is set on seeing him enter.

Chapter 12. The coach tells Ken he has to learn how and where to pitch the players of Herne and Place, and that he is sending Ken to Washington to watch both teams play Georgetown where he is to sit right behind the plate in the stands, and keep a written record on each batter. The coach calls the team together and tells them they must play more like a team and he knows some of them have broken training. Ken catches Graves and Trace carrying cake and pie to their room and smoking cigarettes with the window open. Graves offers cigarettes to Kel, Trace, and Ken. Ken waits until the other boys are gone, then he takes Kel aside and admonishes him. Kel tells Ken that Graves has no use for him, and Ken says it was the potato throwing stunt when Ken hit Graves. Kel tells Ken to watch out for Graves. Ken goes to Washington on his scouting trip where he takes notes on all of the players on both teams. When he returns he discovers Kel sick in his room, the result of having some drinks with Graves the night before. Ken encourages Kel to tell the coach. Kel refuses. Kel tells Graves he had told Ken about having the drinks. Ken and Graves have a fight.

Chapter 13. The coach learns that Ken and Graves have had a fight. When challenged Ken tells the coach the fight was a "personal matter" without divulging their differences involved the breaking of the training rules by Graves. Ray intervenes and confesses to the coach his own transgression at the hands of Graves. The coach dismisses Graves, releases the other players from further training rules, saying he would rather them do whatever they want without deceiving him. Reddy Ray speaks up saying the players want the training rules and that Graves was a disorganizer. He says the team will elect Homans as their captain and cut loose like a lot of demons and finish fast. That afternoon Wayne plays Hornell University and Wayne beats them in a shutout. Coach Worry realizes his team is waking up. He advises the team to stick together and to avoid contact with other students. The team plays a joke on Weir with fake letters to each player from Weir's girlfriend. The rest of the week sees pranks played on each of the players indicating their spirit is running high as a team. At the end of the week Ken plays a trick on Raymond, Weir, and Trace by turning the steam all the way up in their steam baths, making sure they could not escape until they were uncomfortably "overcooked" but not injured.

Chapter 14. The coach is sure there would be great attendance to the team's June 1 game with Herne, the team he so wanted to beat badly. The coach rides Ken hard trying to get him

mentally prepared for the big game, trying to make sure he doesn't get swelled on himself. He shares some of the public comments of the Herne players in order to fire up the team. He reviews Ken's plans for how he will pitch to each Herne player based upon Ken's scouting visit. When Ken is out of the room, the coach tells the rest of the players he has been hard on Ken to make him sore and to put him in the proper frame of mind for the game. Dale and Stevens of the previous year's disqualified team ask to sit on the bench for the Herne game, but when the coach leaves that decision to the captain Roy Homans, the captain denies their request. During the game the coach tells the team that there are scouts of players from the Place team scouting them, so he plans to remove Ken from the game and allow the relief pitcher Schoonover to finish the game since Wayne was ahead 7 to 1 at that point. Toward the end of the game the Wayne speedster Reddy Ray runs home to win the game for Wayne 14 to 4. The coach orders the team to sprint to the training house to escape the celebrating Wayne students.

Chapter 15. The captain eventually leads each team member to the window to acknowledge the cheering students. The newspaper account the following day raves about each of the players on the Wayne team. Shortly thereafter Ken remembers that during a visit to the mountains with his mother the year before he had played in a game between Eagle's Nest and Glenwood, and he feared that may have made him ineligible under the rules that had made the old Wayne team players ineligible. Ken finally gets the coach to permit him and Reddy Ray to go to the university directors to make them aware of the situation. One of the directors named Andrews states he admires Ken's honesty, but he declines to invoke enforcement of the rule. When Ken and Ray return to meet with the coach and the team, they initially act as if Ken has been suspended, playing a joke on the team. They finally tell the truth that Ken will be playing in the first place game with Place.

Chapter 16. On the day of the game Ken is overwhelmed with the sight of the Place players, the magnificence of the stadium, and the spirit of the Place supporters in the bleachers. After a frantic back-and-forth several innings, during which Ken begins to doubt himself, with only one more Place batter to bat, the Place captain hits a walk-off, grand slam home run allowing Place to win by one run.

Chapter 17. After an almost sleepless night for Ken, the coach on the following day after the Place loss, shares a glaring newspaper column with Ken, a column calling the winning home run "a lucky drive" and calling Ken's performance "the greatest game ever pitched to Place". The coach tells Ken it is all right to lose a game like that. He gives each player a Wayne University sweater with a "W" in the center. With one more game to play, Ken realizes he was not likely to lose his control, and he feels he can win the game. When he walks onto the field for the final game he is met by a crowd holding signs reading "Peg Ward's Day" and the crowd cheering him on. During the game with the score tied in the fifth inning, Ken keeps up his tireless, swift cannonading over the plate. Place scores another run with a home-run. Ken later strikes out the Place captain who had hit the winning home run in the earlier game. Ken strikes out the three Place batters in the top of the ninth inning. In the bottom half of the ninth inning, the speedy Reddy Ray gets on base, and he steals his way to third base. He scores on a bunt by Weir, winning the game for Wayne on "Peg Ward's Day".

Chapter 18. The coach holds a closed door meeting with the team giving full credit for the victory to the entire varsity team. He also announces that he has been awarded a full five-year contract to coach Wayne baseball teams. Ken cheers saying that now the coach's son will be in college next year, asking if he will be on the team. The coach replies that his son will have to go some to make next year's team with only three vacancies to fill. Then the coach asks everyone to sit down, and he polls each player as to whether or not they would be coming back next year. Ken says he is going to Arizona in the off-season to further study forestry. The coach asks Captain Homans to see to the election of the captain for next year's season. Out of the twelve votes cast, eleven are for Ken Ward.

HELPFUL RESEARCH AND STUDY SUMMARIES

ZANE GREY'S "BASEBALL TRILOGY"

THE SHORTSTOP (1909), THE YOUNG PITCHER (1911), THE REDHEADED OUTFIELD (1920)

Much of the content contained in the fictional "Baseball Trilogy" is based upon Zane Grey's personal experiences as a baseball player, albeit it a short-lived career. He borrows personalities of major characters he met along the way. Grey participated in various activities and events and the aura surrounding the game as it was played during his formative years as a youngster through his semi-professional and professional baseball years. He played for such teams as the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Phillies, the Jackson, Michigan Jaxons, the Findlay, Ohio Findlay Sluggers, and the Newark, New Jersey Colts. In 1899 Grey abandoned his quest for professional baseball and opened a cramped office to practice dentistry in New York City. He struggled unhappily in the dentistry profession, until he decided to instead follow to his desires and dreams to become a writer.

The most comprehensive discussion of his baseball years can be found on pages 28 through 40 of the 2005 book ***ZANE GREY HIS LIFE, HIS ADVENTURES, HIS WOMEN*** by Thomas H. Pauly (ISBN 13:978-0-252-03044-4 / cloth) (ISBN 978-0-252-07492-9 /paperback). This book should be an absolute "must have" for the library of any fan and avid reader of Zane Grey. Below are a few highlights from that book which should be of interest to any reader who reads any of the books in the "Baseball Trilogy".

- Grey was known for his strong arm and natural talent for pitching, much of which was developed as a result of throwing rocks as a youngster.
- He became known as a pitcher while playing pick-up games at the Madden Hill playground in his native Zanesville, Ohio.
- He was known for his curve ball as early as at age fourteen.
- Before his family moved to Columbus he pitched for a Terrace Team.
- He and his brother R.C. sought to play baseball in Columbus where they played with a team for the Town Street School, where their reputations qualified them to play for the Capitals, in the semi-professional City League of Columbus.

- He is famous for his role as an unknown “ringer” playing for a Baltimore team against a Jacktown team where an umpire awarded a forfeiture victory to Jacktown when he realized their pitcher Grey was a professional baseball player.
- A University of Pennsylvania scout who saw Grey pitch in the Jacktown game encouraged him to enroll in that university where his performance in a game exempted him from the university’s dental school’s entrance exams and earned him a \$100 scholarship for tuition.
- Grey conflicted with the mores and values of many of his back-East upper classmen, resulting in many instances of hazing and harassment, the descriptions of which found their way into his future writing.
- When the baseball coach saw Grey hurling potatoes in defense of students who attacked him, the coach realized his potential as a pitcher, another episode from real life about which he later wrote.
- Grey eventually signed with the Phillies, and eventually he played summer baseball for the Orange Athletic Club (OAC) in Orange, New Jersey.
- A Newark team eventually offered to sign him for what was identified as a “handsome salary”, but he declined and stayed with the OAC, as it was believed they matched the salary offer, and he preferred to play for the OAC, which did not play on Sundays.
- When his batting average fell more than a hundred points below his previous year’s average, Grey decided to finally abandon his quest for a professional baseball career, deciding instead to move to New York City and concentrate on his dentistry career.

Charles G. Pfeiffer, *Zane Grey, A Study in Values – Above and Beyond the West*

(Zane Grey’s West Society, 2005) ISBN 0-9768720-0-5

References (17-18)

(17-18) Baseball was directly responsible for Grey’s leaving Ohio and entering the world’s stage. Oddly enough, while he liked baseball and excelled at it I do not recall a single instance where he works it into one of his Western romances. He first mentions playing baseball on Madden’s Hill when he was fourteen, and he lists it as his favorite pastime after fishing. He preferred playing the outfield but was forced into pitching as he was first in the area to develop a curve ball. It was after the Grey’s moved to Columbus that his baseball career took off. He had a job ushering at a theatre which left most of his afternoons free. He and his brother Romer played together on the team at Town Street School. He moved on to play for the Capitol team in the Columbus City League. After that he played on a number of teams in a number of leagues. When he moved to Philadelphia, it was the first time the major leagues moved the pitcher’s mound ten feet farther from home plate, and colleges were forced to follow suit. Grey was never able to adjust his curve and drop balls to the increased distance; but he was fleet of foot, sure handed, a good hitter, and he was able to continue on scholarship as an outfielder. After graduation from dental school at the University of Pennsylvania in 1896, he played baseball for the Newark Atlantic League team and for the Orange Athletic Club team.