



Catcher: The Evolution of an American Folk Hero

Peter Morris

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Today the baseball catcher is a familiar but uninspiring figure. Decked out in the so-called tools of ignorance, he stolidly goes about his duty without attracting much attention. But it wasn't always that way, as Peter Morris shows in this lively and original study. In baseball's early days, catchers stood a safe distance back of the batter. Then the introduction of the curveball in the 1870s led them to move up directly behind home plate, even though they still wore no gloves or protective equipment. Extraordinary courage became the catcher's most notable requirement, but the new positioning also demanded that the catcher have lightning-fast reflexes, great hands, and a cannon for a throwing arm. With so great a range of needed skills, a special mystique came to surround the position, and it began to seem that a good catcher could single-handedly make the difference between winning and losing.

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