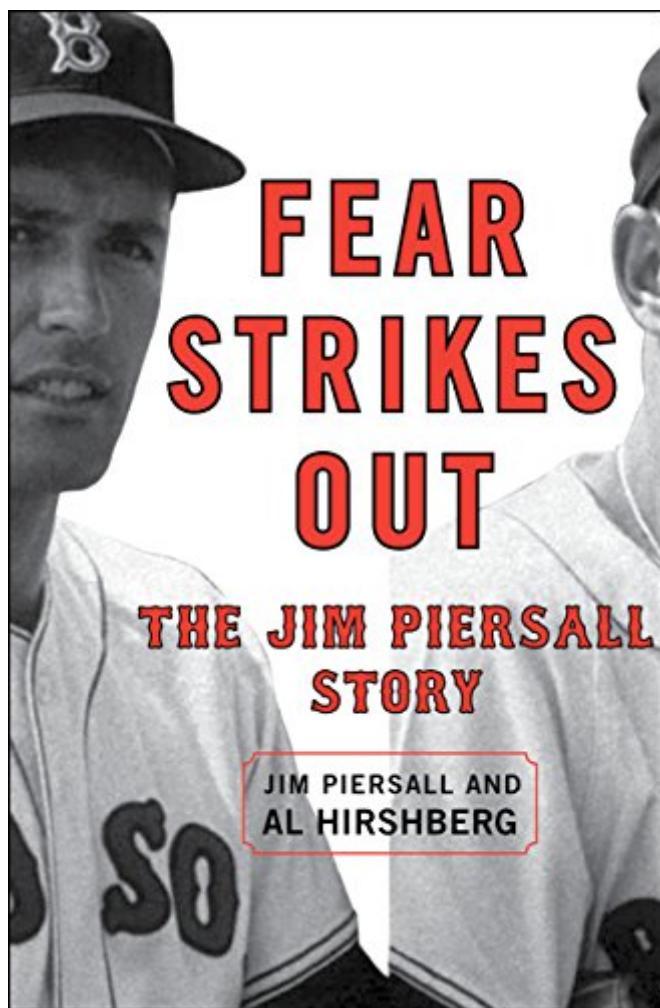


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# Fear Strikes Out: The Jim Piersall Story



## Synopsis

A star of the 1950s Red Sox recounts his career and his battle with mental illnessWhen Jim Piersall first donned a Boston Red Sox uniform, he quickly distinguished himself as one of baseball's most colorful figures. Prone to wild rages, he argued with umpires, managers, and his fellow teammates, showing off an unpredictable personality that fans and sportswriters ate up, but which infuriated his club. His behavior became more erratic until he suffered a violent breakdown that saw him institutionalized and diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Cowritten with Boston sportswriter Al Hirshberg, this is the story of Piersall's collapse and his subsequent attempt to return to the major leagues. A shattering confessional of mental hardship, *Fear Strikes Out* is an unforgettable look at the difficulties of playing sports at the highest level.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Written at a very young age, after he'd only been an established major-league baseball player for three full seasons, "Fear Strikes Out" chronicles Jim Piersall's struggles with mental illness, and the ultimate breakdown that led to his being hospitalized in a mental institution during the 1952 season.

The book came out in 1955, and must have been fairly ground-breaking in its day. While such a book written today would include a lot more specific detail about diagnosis and treatment (at the time, Piersall was only said to have had "nervous exhaustion"), Piersall leads the reader step-by-step through his condition. Several passages in the book are written in first-person narrative, as the author illustrates Piersall's uncontrolled racing thoughts. Piersall then blacks out, losing several months of his life in 1952, and awakening in the "violent ward" of a State mental hospital after having undergone electro-shock therapy (this book pre-dates "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"). It's only after that that Piersall describes, in slow-motion and painful detail, the symptoms and behavior that prematurely ended his 1952 baseball season and which led to his waking up in the violent ward. Piersall holds back few of his thought processes in the months and years leading up to his breakdown. He describes his mother's history of mental illness, and father's demanding personality (which, according to Piersall, was then over-played as a plot point for the 1957 movie adaptation). The book is dated, in a few senses. Piersall is told that he can simply wish, or think away, his mental illness; from a modern perspective, I assume this would now be regarded as incorrect or at least incomplete advice. Also, the book is written basically as one single chapter, with few breaks between sections; modern sports autobiographies no longer tend to look like this (although it does make the book harder to put down!). Happily, Jim Piersall is still alive today. He ended up playing in the big leagues for parts of 16 seasons, and slugged over 100 career home runs, with his 100th most memorably coming as a member of the New York Mets, which he celebrated by running the bases backward. He was then famously paired with Harry Caray as a Chicago White Sox broadcaster in the late 1970s, and later spent many years as an instructor and scout with the Chicago Cubs. While many passages in the book are painful to read, in terms of their honesty and level of detail, the incidents that are portrayed are now nearly 65 years old, and Piersall has wound up with what appears to be a happy ending.

This book was published in 1955. For the time it was published it was remarkable how candid Piersall was about his illness. Back then this type of illness was usually only talked about in hushed tones. For just writing this book candidly Piersall should be highly commended. I'm sure this went a long way for people to understand mental illness better. In this book Piersall goes through his young life to his days of treatment with mental illness. He had a somewhat harsh upbringing. His mother had mental illness and was treated successfully for it. His father could be very harsh at times but was supportive of Piersall's athletic pursuits. Piersall was a fine athlete in high school. Excelling in basketball as well as baseball. He probably could have excelled in football too but his dad forbade

him to play it. Piersall quickly went through the Red Sox farm system and made the team in 1952. But his mental illness overtook him during that season and was eventually taken to a mental facility for treatment. He was treated successfully there and went on to a good MLB career. No mention though as to what kind of treatments he had. That would have been interesting to read about and compare to todays treatments. He also has written a small portion at the end in 1999. But not much was written about how he has progressed since his time as a player. Although you can read in other places as to some things that went on his life after his playing days. This is a good book but there is so much more that could have been written and followed up on. He is still alive (Though I do not know his overall health condition) so maybe he can relate more details sometime soon to fill in some of the blanks left in this book.

I really loved this book. Very informative about Piersall's life. I wish it would have covered more of his life outside of his playing days.

I remember Jim Piersall. When he passed, I had to get this book. It is very good. A lot of people helped him. And he was a great ball player. Easy reading.

Really insightful. I am so glad I read this courageous auto-biography. As I was enjoying (to my surprise!) "The Kid" - The Immortal Life of Ted Williams, he referred to this book. I really got hooked on Jim Piersall's story of perseverance, faith, struggle with mental illness and eventual success. I learned a lot from his positive attitude.

This was a great book and well written...it was frustrating to me though to know after this book was written and after overcoming such adversity Piersall turned into a total jerk!

"Fear Strikes Out" tells the tale of Jimmy Piersall, who played for the Boston Red Sox in the early to late 1950s. He and Willy Mays of the Giants were the best defensive center fielders in pro baseball then and perhaps ever. "FSO" is more concerned with Jimmy's nervous breakdown in 1952 and his subsequent recovery. The real story should be his patient wife, without whom Piersall would have been at sea. The Catholic Church has canonized people for less! "FSO" skims along the edges of Jimmy's problems but to its' credit does not sweep them under a rug. The problems may be sanitized but not trivialized. In my opinion, the true meat of the book is its' 1950s American League backdrop, which I'm just barely old enough to remember. Red Sox fans should enjoy reading about

Ted Lepcio, Lou Boudreau, Ellis Kinder, Joe Cronin and Billy Goodman. "FSO" has a limited scope and appeal. The 1950s sportsworld was lilly white and not given to tell all, dirt digging locker room scoops and the book reflects that era. Jimmy gets a free pass on some (not all) of his antics. Readers who accept those constraints should find "FSO" enjoyable and worthwhile. Anyone with a dad or uncle, etc who is a hardcore Red Sox fan has a great Christmas present to click unto.

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