

Shortstop Psychology: The Mystery of the Yips

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The Huffington Post:

Henry Skrimshander is a shortstop and the star of Chad Harbach's lyrical novel *The Art of Fielding*. Henry plays for the fictional Westish College, and his flawless defensive play is attracting the attention of major league scouts. But just as he is about to break the NCAA record for error-free games, he forgets how to throw. Just like that, and for no apparent reason, even the simplest routine toss to the first baseman becomes impossible.

Henry has a case of the “yips” — a well-documented syndrome that has ended real-life major league careers. This perplexing condition is also known as the “Steve Sax Syndrome,” after the Los Angeles Dodgers All-Star second baseman who suffered a similar fate. For just one season, in 1983, Sax was unable to make the routine throw to first, committing 30 errors and earning the mockery of fans. Several others — including pitcher Steve Blass, infielder Chuck Knoblauch, and one of my favorite former Nats, Rick Ankiel — have had their careers derailed by cases of the yips.

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Leiden University psychological scientists Bruno Bocanegra and Bernhard Hommel decided to explore this phenomenon in the laboratory. Bocanegra and Hommel were not really interested in the yips or shortstops or even baseball, but more generally in any kind of goal-directed behavior — and the role of cognitive control in performance. They wondered if it were possible that too much cognitive control — overthinking — might be a liability under certain circumstances.

Read the whole story: [The Huffington Post](#)

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