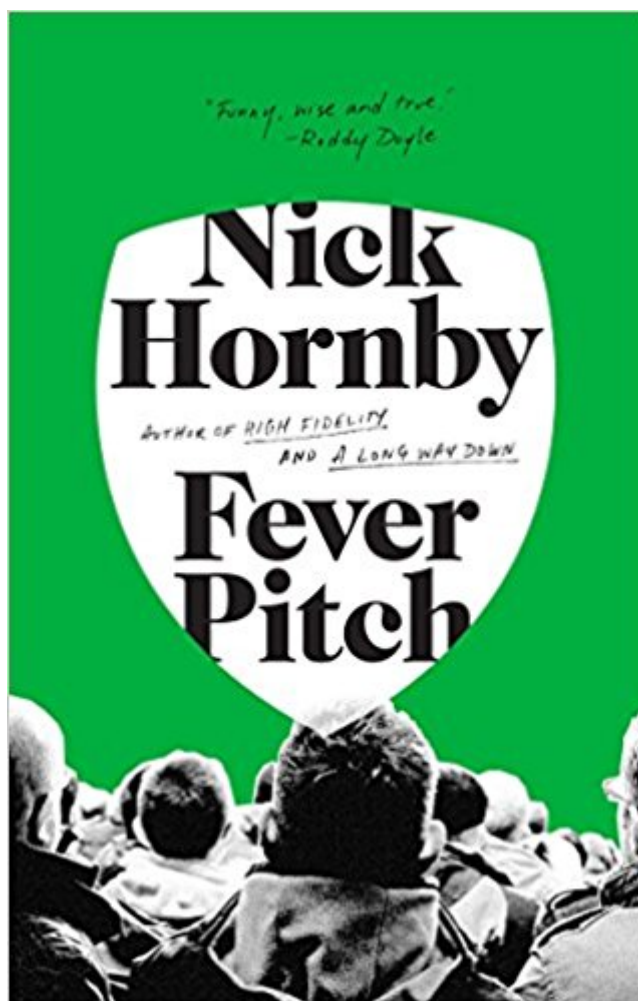


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# Fever Pitch



## Synopsis

A brilliant memoir from the beloved, bestselling author of *Funny Girl*, *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy*. In America, it is soccer. But in Great Britain, it is the real football. No pads, no prayers, no prisoners. And that's before the players even take the field. Nick Hornby has been a football fan since the moment he was conceived. Call it predestiny. Or call it preschool. *Fever Pitch* is his tribute to a lifelong obsession. Part autobiography, part comedy, part incisive analysis of insanity, Hornby's award-winning memoir captures the fever pitch of fandom—its agony and ecstasy, its community, its defining role in thousands of young men's coming-of-age stories. *Fever Pitch* is one for the home team. But above all, it is one for everyone who knows what it really means to have a losing season.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the States, Nick Hornby is best known as the author of *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy*, two wickedly funny novels about being thirtysomething and going nowhere fast. In Britain he is revered for his status as a fanatical football writer (sorry, fanatical soccer writer), owing to *Fever Pitch*--which is both an autobiography and a footballing Bible rolled into one. Hornby pinpoints 1968 as his formative year--the year he turned 11, the year his parents separated, and the year his father first took him to watch Arsenal play. The author quickly moved "way beyond fandom" into an extreme obsession that has dominated his life, loves, and relationships. His father had initially hoped that Saturday afternoon matches would draw the two closer together, but instead Hornby became completely besotted with the game at the expense of any conversation: "Football may have

provided us with a new medium through which we could communicate, but that was not to say that we used it, or what we chose to say was necessarily positive." Girlfriends also played second fiddle to one ball and 11 men. He fantasizes that even if a girlfriend "went into labor at an impossible moment" he would not be able to help out until after the final whistle. Fever Pitch is not a typical memoir--there are no chapters, just a series of match reports falling into three time frames (childhood, young adulthood, manhood). While watching the May 2, 1972, Reading v. Arsenal match, it became embarrassingly obvious to the then 15-year-old that his white, suburban, middle-class roots made him a wimp with no sense of identity: "Yorkshire men, Lancastrians, Scots, the Irish, blacks, the rich, the poor, even Americans and Australians have something they can sit in pubs and bars and weep about." But a boy from Maidenhead could only dream of coming from a place with "its own tube station and West Indian community and terrible, insoluble social problems." Fever Pitch reveals the very special intricacies of British football, which readers new to the game will find astonishing, and which Hornby presents with remarkable humor and honesty--the "unique" chants sung at matches, the cold rain-soaked terraces, giant cans of warm beer, the trains known as football specials carrying fans to and from matches in prisonlike conditions, bottles smashing on the tracks, thousands of policemen waiting in anticipation for the cargo of hooligans. The sport and one team in particular have crept into every aspect of Hornby's life--making him see the world through Arsenal-tinted spectacles. --Naomi Gesinger

Brought to print to take advantage of America's presumed fascination with the '94 World Cup (the first ever held here), Fever Pitch is a 24-year obsessional diary of English club football (soccer, to us Americans) games Hornby has witnessed and the way these games have become inextricable from his personal life. Hornby is the kind of fanatic who merely shrugs about the "tyranny" the sport exerts over his life--the mumbled excuses he must give at every missed christening or birthday party as a result of a schedule conflict. "Sometimes hurting someone," he writes, "is unavoidable." These occasions tend to bring out "disappointment and tired impatience" in his friends and family, but it is when he is exposed as a "worthless, shallow worm" that the similarly stricken reader can relate to the high costs of caring deeply about a game that means nothing to one's more well-adjusted friends. These moments are fleeting, however. The book has not been tailored for American audiences, so readers lacking a knowledge of English club football's rules, traditions, history and players will be left completely in the dark by Hornby's obscure references. Unfortunately, he has neither Roger Angell's ability to take us inside the game nor the pathos of Frederick Exley's brilliantly disturbed autobiographical trilogy. Though Hornby does show flashes of real humor, Fever

Pitch features mainly pedestrian insights on life and sport, and then it's on to the next game--the equivalent, for an American reader, of a nil-nil tie. Author appearances. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Easy to read and reads pretty quickly. I like how the book is laid out in three parts for different stages in his life with each part subdivided based on matches that represent the aspect of his fan life that he is discussing. As a fan that came to Arsenal in the last couple years this book provided a good history of the club from late 60's to early 90's and in this case maybe ignorance was bliss. I recommend this book to anyone that is or knows an avid sport fan and to any other poor sap like me that has recently made Arsenal their team.

"Fever Pitch" is Nick Hornby's biography of his football obsession, how football helped him to cope with the trauma of life as a smart and sensitive man: the divorce of his parents, the romances that never worked out, the long depression that came with being a young unpublished author. Life can be unpredictable, but football is football -- you expect to lose, and that your loss will unleash a predictable and controllable grief that you can share with thousands of people. The few times when Hornby actually discusses his own life are interesting, but those moments are far too few, and most of the time we have to somehow trudge through description and analysis of a game we don't understand and care about. There's something flippant about this work, which is too bad because Hornby at his best does offer penetrating analysis. Here's a sample of Hornby at his best: "One thing I know for sure about being a fan is this: it is not a vicarious pleasure, despite all the appearances to the contrary, and those who say that they would rather do than watch are missing the point. Football is a context where watching becomes doing -- not in the aerobic sense, because watching a game, smoking your head off while doing so, drinking after it has finished and eating chips on the way home is unlikely to do you a whole lot of Jane Fonda good, in the way that chuffing up and down a pitch is supposed to. But when there is some kind of triumph, the pleasure does not radiate from the players outwards until it reaches the likes of us at the back of the terraces in a pale and diminished form; our fun is not a watery version of the team's fun, even though they are the ones that get to score the goals and climb the steps at Wembley to meet Princess Diana. The joy we feel on occasions like this is not a celebration of others' good fortune, but a celebration of our own; and when there is a disastrous defeat the sorrow that engulfs us is, in effect, self-pity, and anyone who wishes to understand how football is consumed must realise this above all things. The players are merely our representatives, chosen by the manager rather than elected by us, but our

representatives nonetheless, and sometimes if you look hard you can see the little poles that join them together, and the handles at the side that enable us to move them. I am part of the club, just as the club is a part of me; and I say this fully aware that the club exploits me, disregards my views, and treats me shoddily on occasions, so my feeling of organic connection is not built on a muddle-headed and sentimental misunderstanding of how professional football works. This Wembley win belonged to me every bit as much as it belonged to Charlie Nicholas or George Graham...and I worked every bit as hard for it as they did. The only difference between me and them is that I have put in more hours, more years, more decades than them, and so had a better understanding of the afternoon, a sweeter appreciation of why the sun still shines when I remember it."

One of the things that I've come to understand when trying to review books (as well as many other things in life) is that sometimes I won't connect with a book that otherwise might be a good book. This is one of those times. I'm not saying that this is a bad book, but I struggled to complete it. The book is essentially an autobiography of the author, Nick Hornby, as told through the lens of his obsession with the Arsenal football team. I think the reason it didn't connect with me is that while Hornby seems like a nice fellow and has quite a few high profile works to his credit, I wasn't interested in reading his autobiography. That left the football content which was well done, but as an emerging fan of English football, there just wasn't enough original insight into football to hold my interest. I did learn quite a bit about the history and psychology of the Arsenal football club and that was the most interesting portion of the book for me. I now understand much better why Arsenal developed a reputation over the years as being "boring" and I thought the portion of the book where Hornby described the club's flirtation with "Total Football" to be interesting. There just wasn't enough of that sort of content in the book to hold my interest. If you are an Arsenal fan, I think this would be an excellent book to learn more about the history of the club as seen through a fan's eyes who watched it unfold over the years.

You don't have to be a soccer fan to love this book (but it's an added bonus). What I enjoyed about it is an amazing personal story. Anyone who has obsessive tendencies will see themselves in the main character and he explores how it affects relationships. I have given this book as a gift many times. Surprisingly, my 12th grade son who plays soccer chose this book to write one of his college essays about. He had a very different experience than the main character. That character chose to be a spectator / fan of soccer in hope it would bring him closer to his father. My son chose to play

because he loved playing the game and it brought him closer to his father (and me) because of all the driving and family commitment in club soccer. But I enjoyed it (and it's nothing like the movie which bastardized it with baseball). A great read. Not literature but well done.

This is a personal reflection by Hornby and aimed at a British audience of football fans. I'm a new convert to BPL football and I've enjoyed the book. However, if you are not an addict or don't have any concern about star soccer players in the 1970s and 1980s, this book might be a slog. Along the way, I've picked up some new jargon and better understand why their fans can be so frustrated by Arsenal. Hornby, of course, is a talented writer and his enthusiasm (and frustrations) come through very well in the prose.

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