



# The Southpaw

*Mark Harris*

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*The Southpaw* is a story about coming of age in America by way of the baseball diamond. Lefthander Henry Wiggen, six feet three, a hundred ninety-five pounds, and the greatest pitcher going, grows to manhood in a right-handed world. From his small-town beginnings to the top of the game, Henry finds out how hard it is to please his coach, his girl, and the sports page—and himself, too—all at once. Written in Henry's own words, this exuberant, funny novel follows his eccentric course from bush league to the World Series. Although Mark Harris loves and writes tellingly about the pleasures of baseball, his primary subject has always been the human condition and the shifts of mortal men and women as they try to understand and survive what life has dealt them. This new Bison Books edition celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Southpaw*. In his introduction to this edition, Mark Harris discusses the genesis of the novel in his own life experience. Also available in Bison Books editions are *The Southpaw*, *It Looked Like For Ever*, and *A Ticket for a Seamstitch*, the other three volumes in the Henry Wiggen series.

## The Southpaw Details

Date : Published December 1st 2003 by Bison Books (first published January 1st 1953)

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Author : Mark Harris

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# From Reader Review The Southpaw for online ebook

## cheeseblab says

A Bildungsroman (and it's always fun to get to use that word) about an uneducated baseball pitcher. Owes sizable debts to *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye*--it was published only a couple of years after the latter--and like those novels, its strength is in the quirky, vivid language of the first-person narrator. Followed shortly by two other Henry Wiggen novels, then decades later by a fourth, and I expect I'll reread the other three over the next three years. The second Wiggen novel, *Bang the Drum Slowly*, was adapted for a TV drama starring a young Paul Newman, then done on the big screen in the '70s with Michael Moriarty and Robert DeNiro. It's the best baseball movie I know.

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## Dave says

I knew of Mark Harris, through the 70's movie *Bang the Drum Slowly*. The movie is based on the second book this series. *The Southpaw* the first of 4, is written as a memoir of a rookie phenom pitcher named Henry Wiggen and his first season as a pitcher, following his life from the bush leagues to the World Series. It was written in the 50's but thankfully it did not have any of the 'hero worship, and cliché' that many sports books from that era have. It is a credible story, and could have been written about the game in this era as well. Even people who have a elemental knowledge about baseball, and want a good story about a young man coming of age will find this book well worth your time.

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## C.E. says

One of the best baseball books ever--the first of Harris' four stories about Henry "Author" Wiggins, left hand pitcher for the New York Mammoths. More a character study than a traditional sports books, it follows the green rookie Wiggin through a rookie season where he learns a lot about baseball and life. Beautiful written in a very simple, humble voice.

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## Dot says

I would say that you really have to be a baseball fan to enjoy this book. It is an older book (1953) and written very cleverly with the young left-handed pitcher Henry Wiggen telling his story. Henry has only a high school education but learns a lot about life, love, and baseball during his first year as a major league baseball player with the fictional New York Mammoths. Spelling and grammar are set aside in Henry's narrative. I loved it, but there are many detailed descriptions of the nuances of the game of baseball so I wouldn't recommend it unless you love the sport.

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## Wendybird says

I know only a little about baseball but enjoyed this mix of baseball and post World War II America very much. It's a simple undramatic tale with very real, likeable characters as told from the Huck Finn-like perspective of a dedicated young pitcher. A pleasant, upbeat story with a generous amount of humor.

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### **Tara says**

A fun baseball novel from the 1950's, *The Southpaw* approaches its subject more critically than anything would until *Ball Four*. A tendency to get bogged down with the details of games is more than up for with great characters.

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### **Tom says**

While in the process of reading, "Bang the Drum Slowly" I learned that this book, "The Southpaw" was the first of the two books written by Mark Harris to tell the tale of Henry Wiggins.

*The Southpaw* tells of his playing days as a young man (he made the major league when he was 20). It tells how his father, also a ballplayer, taught him the game and taught him how to pitch.

The book is written as a book written by Wiggins. Most is enjoyable but some paragraphs were too dry and it cost a star.

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### **Bryan Jaketic says**

Spring is a great time of year to read a good baseball novel, and this is a classic. I was worried that it would be a bit hokey, based on the time period from when it was written. But that turned out not to be the case at all - it's a very honest novel, and describes the game beautifully. I will definitely be reading the other books in this series.

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### **M. Newman says**

This book, the first in the four-book series that ends with the great "Bang the Drum Slowly" is a very enjoyable piece of baseball fiction. It documents the rookie season of left-handed pitcher, Henry Wiggen and his coming of age as a baseball player and a man. It is narrated by Wiggen, the "author" of the book and is reminiscent of the writing of Ring Lardner. There are some lapses in baseball fundamentals but the overall quality of the writing makes it easy to suspend disbelief.

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### **Claire S says**

Baseball time again! My grandfather had a great spitball, threw out his arm the night before tryouts for a

major league team about 90 years ago! Perhaps that's why I tend to enjoy the sport, as do most others in my family. This book looks like a kinda sweet take on it, with enough real-world anchoring to suit me. This one and the next one (which was made into a film) would be fun to catch up on.

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## **Ron says**

I 1st read this book when I was about 15-16 years old. It was about baseball. That's all I needed to know.

Since that time, I've looked for this novel several times in different libraries. Never finding it until with my most recent library. It is part of a trilogy, with the more famous *Bang the Drum Slowly* being the more famous part of that trilogy. And, it has the reputation of being probably the most famous baseball trilogy in existence. For all I know, it might be the only baseball trilogy.

At any rate, I was pleased to find it. More pleased than I was to have read it. Not that it's a bad book as it is not. But, written in 1st person and that person is a young ball player it's not the most attractively written book I've ever read. But, it does tell a story of a young man growing up. It's just that he does it as the star left handed rookie pitcher for a major league baseball team. As that, it is a good book. It does that story well.

Henry Wiggins is the baseball phenom in question. His "Pop" was a sandlot pitching legend and passes along his knowledge of the game, and pitching, to his son. And Henry soaked it all up as does a sponge. Hence, the phenom. He has a great fastball, a suitable curve and can pitch the occasional screwball to keep batters off their comfort zone. The baseball side of the story you can probably figure out by now.

But, all in all, I did enjoy the story. Enough to finish this book even though it was printed in a smaller font than is comfortable for these old eyes. Also, enough to continue on in what, I understand now, has become a 4-part story. *Bang the Drum Slowly* is the next book in this 4-part trilogy (no idea what a 4-part story should be called) and probably, the other 2. Just not immediately.

All in all, the book is not as good as I remembered. Remember that I was 15-16 in the 50's when I read it. But, it isn't as bad as I make it out to be here, either. So, I'm looking forward to *Bang the Drum Slowly*. I've seen that movie and I want to know if it happened like that.

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## **Kevin Mcpherson says**

This baseball tale, set in the city of Gotham about the same time as Mantle, Mays, and Snider, chronicles the early rise of Henry Wiggen of the fictitious New York Mammoths. But Wiggen as a narrator reminds us more of Huckleberry Finn than Roy Hobbs, for he uses the same style of grammar-challenged dialect and naive honesty as Mark Twain's persona who made a good bit of commentary on society, religion, education, and such. Ironically, what is most important about his rookie season in the majors (a good portion of the second half of the novel) is not so much the outcome of the team and its quest for the pennant, but the harsh education of Wiggen (much like Huck Finn).

Like the rest of us, Henry must learn that our idols are human and faulty, that baseball--and humanity--is cruel, and success comes at a price.

If you aren't a baseball fan, don't bother with Harris' book.

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## Thom says

After reading "Bang the Drum Slowly" I thought I would give this book a shot. It is the first book in this series where we meet the "hero" and southpaw Henry Wiggen.

While I liked this book for the great description of the baseball scenes, it didn't get to the point until page 340 out of 350.

"Bang the Drum Slowly" is a superior book. I even enjoyed the movie, which is Robert De Niro's first major role and what led to him starring in Godfather II.

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## Matt says

Being a big baseball fan, I'm always on the lookout for baseball literature. It wasn't until recently that I came across 'The Southpaw,' but I'm sure glad I did.

In an era where so many authors feel duty-bound to dazzle their readers with their million-dollar vocabularies, clever turns-of-phrase, and over-wrought use of simile and metaphor, and continual one-upmanship, 'The Southpaw' is a literal breath of fresh air. It's a lot like 'To Kill a Mockingbird' in that often the deepest and most meaningful of sentiments are usually expressed simply, thoughtfully, and don't require a lot of words to get it across. Unfortunately, a lot of today's 'literature' is completely unreadable, a fate 'The Southpaw' thankfully avoids.

Mark Harris is a very seductive writer, in the truest sense of the word. He so effortlessly pulls you into Wiggens' world and its colorful (not 'quirky') cast of characters. You sometimes read four or five (or more) pages and not a thing happens to push the plot along, but so engaging is Wiggens' voice, so likeable (using 'I' instead of 'one' and 'at all' instead of 'at all') his guileless character, that you can't help but continue reading and enjoying every second of it.

At its core, 'The Southpaw' is a simple story about a pitcher's journey from flame-throwing adolescent to star pitcher for the fictional New York Mammoths, but what a journey it is. Harris tackles a lot of topics (racism, segregation, economics, fidelity, power and class struggles, etc), and in doing so, elevates it from a simple, nostalgic yarn to a complex literary work simply told. Literature need not be depressing and bleak (contrary to what some of my profs told me). 'The Southpaw' is a prime example of great literature that doesn't wallow in its own gloom. I loved reading it. If you're a fan of baseball, and even if you're not, this book comes highly recommended.

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## Daniel Gotkowitz says

Daniel Gotkowitz  
Ms. Cole  
English 2, Period 2  
8 January 2015

## The Southpaw by Mark Harris: Review

We all know a superb baseball book is an excellent way to spend a Sunday night, right? Well, this book, *The Southpaw*, by Mark Harris is definitely worth every second you will sacrifice to read it. *The Southpaw* is a thrilling adventure through the protagonist, Henry Wiggen, who aspires to be a great baseball player.

Through long days of hard work at the gas station to finding just a few extra hours to toss the ball, Henry is able to strive for his dream of becoming a professional baseball player.

As Henry grows up in the small southern town of Perkinsville he is faced with many internal conflicts that will shape his personality and values. One internal conflict that Henry is faced with right as the story begins is whether or not he should share his inner emotions with friends such as his bold, yet understanding neighbor Aaron, his old man, Pops, who is quite a ball player himself, and his girlfriend Holly who he will share many passionate times with. Through hard work and dedication Henry shows that he will put in what it takes to get to the top, no matter how challenging. His determination to make it to the big leagues, specifically the New York Mammoths, is as intense as a mama bear defending her cubs. To reach the top Henry must overcome many obstacles, but he has the will and tenacity to be the best ball player he can be. This book has a very casual style, which makes Henry's southern upbringing highly influence his word choice when he uses words like, "ain't," and the number "1" instead of the word "one." This style isn't necessarily helpful for the reader but it makes the book unique and compelling. One external conflict that joins Henry throughout the story is his outgoingness and sometimes cockiness that he shows towards doubters and those that he thinks are wrong. The trait of cockiness is exemplified in the following quote: "I turned in my seat and shouted to him, 'You have got brains in your shoes'" (54-55). Henry says this after a man at a Mammoths game says his pitching idol, Sad Sam Yale, is washed up. This shows that Henry, at times, has no regard for how others are feeling and how his words might affect the feelings of others. Through the story this external conflict is brought up many times and steadily Henry improves in his filtering for what he says in public.

*The Southpaw* at times can be a slow and frustrating book. At some points in the book the plot seems to hit still waters and every character seems to be static. Despite that, the plot of a young baseball player making his way through the farm system to the majors is a satisfying storyline that ties the life of Henry Wiggen together. During Henry's journey he gets to meet his biggest idol, Sad Same Yale, who he has read many books about and studied, to mimic Sam's pitching technique. Sam's pitching tactics are very inspiring to Henry and leads him to believe he can achieve great feats. The story of *The Southpaw* is a story you truly need to read to understand fully. I encourage everyone of you reading this to give this book a chance and, just maybe, it will surprise you. To see the life and aspirations of a young, hardworking baseball player I encourage you to read the heartfelt book *The Southpaw* by Mark Harris.

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## Chris says

Timing is everything, and picking up a book about the boys of summer just as summer was starting was the right time. Everyone should read this book, not just baseball fans.

Mark Harris creates in Henry Wiggen a portrait of a 1950s hurler who shares in first person auto-biography style his rookie season with the New York Mammoths. Wiggen is an uneducated young man, and the prose is drafted in a style that matches the character. Often when writers attempt to do this they fail, straying between the uneducated manner of the character and the writer's own natural prose. Harris does a good job of staying true to Wiggen's nature. Henry will write in '1' instead of spelling out 'one' or will, when referring to a hotel suite spells it as 'sweet'. This adds to the feeling that Wiggen is a small-town boy.

It is rewarding to see Henry grow up over his first season. Sometimes he listens to the veterans of the sport

while other times he learns things the hard way. He learns that some of his revered heroes are not all they are made out to be in books and newsprint. In a time where I have become disillusioned by the overpaid, arrogant athlete, it was refreshing to read this tale and see that the issue is not really new. Even Wiggen is excoriated for being a petulant child by the New York newspapers when he refuses to go to Korea to play in exhibition games for the troops. We live in a time where the bad behavior of athletes is heightened because of the prevalence of Facebook, Twitter and the like. Our technology makes it easier for everyone to know everything that happens everywhere. At one point in the book Wiggen gives 'the finger' to opposing fans while standing on the mound. He got away with it because there was no one in the stands had a smart phone to capture the moment. The same is said about a banned 'spitball' he throws at an opposing batter. The anonymity of the ball players is something that has changed with time, not the behavior. Wiggen uses the fact that people are not familiar with his face more than once, such as a time when he needles a cab driver about 'that pitcher for the Mammoths' referring to himself. The cabbie bites, not knowing that he is talking to 'that pitcher'.

It is the behavior of the ball players that also makes them endearing as people. At one point the players start speaking in reverse, at first as a joke. Then others start catching on, and it becomes a tie that binds them together as friends. The practical jokes and banter and even the singing in the shower after games reminds readers that they are people, and the atmosphere that is created is one that reflects how one might picture an old time clubhouse to be.

I also enjoyed the fact that the New York team was trying to hold off the team from Boston as they attempted to 'cop the flag'. But that just shows my bias and loyalty to the real life New York club and my disdain for the real life team from Boston.

This is one southpaw who really enjoyed 'The Southpaw'

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## Jason says

Having picked up its more famous sequel *Bang the Drum Slowly* on sale, I got *The Southpaw* so I would know the background. Now I have no desire to read the sequel. This is supposedly serious fiction for baseball fans, though most commentary will tell you it is not about baseball at all. Perhaps not, but there is a lot of boring baseball in it (the recounting of baseball games ought not to be boring, but it is here). The non-baseball stuff is at least interesting at times but otherwise has almost no redeeming value. Apparently "coming-of-age" should lead one to become *more* selfish and *more* cynical. And it is hard to conceive of a first-person narrator so lacking in self-awareness. We are supposed to like Henry Wiggen, but he is not likable. None of the characters in this book are likable. *The Southpaw* is boring, pretentious, and profane. I finished this because I started it, but I would not recommend this to anyone.

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## Jenny says

I'm not a sports fan, but I like a good inspirational sports movie or book now and then. I listened to THE SOUTHPAW on tape nearly 20 years ago (followed by Mark Harris's sequels BANG THE DRUM SLOWLY (made into a movie in 1973) and IT LOOKED LIKE FOREVER. It's a wonderful book told in first person narration by Henry Wiggen, a small-town baseball player who made it into the big leagues. Full of charm and humor. I loved it and would listen to it again if I can find it.



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## Daniel says

The coming-of-age story of Henry Wiggen, southpaw extraordinaire, coming up through the minors to lead the Mammoths into the playoffs. You know, this was nothing at all special until the very end. It's an uber linear story with no real twists or complications, save for Henry's rickety back, until the final 15 pages, and the twists have nothing to do with the outcome of the baseball season. Henry has some sudden epiphanies as the season ends, and he basically decides that he will no longer take b.s. from anyone, be it his coach, his self-obsessed teammates, the press, and so on. Easy-going Henry had had enough! Until that point, it was a grammatically and orthographically challenged ball player recalling his first year. But I enjoyed Harry growing a bit and coming to some grown-up conclusions.

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## Robert Palmer says

Whoever wants to know America had better  
Learn baseball, the rules and realities of the  
Game, and do it by watching first some high  
School or small town teams.

Jacques Barzun French-American

Inscribed on a plaque in the baseball hall of fame

Gods country and mine 1954

The story is told by Henry Wiggen and his prose isn't exactly high caliber, however it's simplicity gives a sense of realism, it may not be great literature and some people may have problems with Henry using #4 pencil instead of a four but he is baseball player and for him it's harder work than pitching a 16 inning game in a long run for the flag. A careful reading of the title page may help, it is the of Henry (AKA Hank ) Wiggen and his lifelong love of baseball growing up in Perkinsville, New York, where the train doesn't exactly stop, just slows down.

Henry lives and breaths baseball, he dreams of the day when he and his baseball hero "Sad Sam Yale" will be driving off to spring training with the fictional New York Mammoths.

Most of the story concerns his first full season with the Mammoths, but as the days and weeks go by he begins to realize that all of his boyhood heroes are just men and many of them are not very good men off the field.

Mike Mulroney, the Queen City minor league manager had advised Henry to watch everything that Sad Sam Yale does on the field but do not listen to anything he says off the field and if you see him with a woman stay away from that woman because if she wasn't a tramp when she met Sam he will soon turn her into one. In a long run for the pennant Henry will become a great pitching star but he will no longer worship at the feet of such men as Sad Sam Yale and Dutch Schnell he will always love the game, but playing it only for the kicks and the money.

I first read this book when I was about 18 years old and have reread it many times and will no doubt read again.

You don't have to be a real baseball fan to enjoy this novel because throughout the story Harris brings out a lot of topics such as Racism and segregation, economics, fidelity, power and the class struggle and adapting to life as it is ———— not what you may imagine it will be.

Meanwhile let's get back to baseball!

It ain't over till it's over

Yogi Berra

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