

# They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven



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Ken Baker wanted nothing more than to play ice hockey with the pros-until a brain tumor cut his dreams short while in college. After surgery and several years of rehab, Baker, who in high school was a top prospect for the U.S. Olympic team, put his successful journalism career on hold to attempt the seemingly impossible: a comeback. He moved away from his family to become the third-string goalie for the Bakersfield Condors, an AA-level minor-league team in the dusty oil town of Bakersfield, California. At the age of thirty-one, Baker became the oldest rookie in all of pro-hockey, facing 1000-m.p.h. slap shots and long bus rides, hostile fans and cheap motel rooms, body bruises and battle-worn teammates. From his visit to an NHL training camp to his first nerve-rattled minutes as a pro, Baker joins the rookies who still dream of making it to the Show, the veterans long past their prime, and the obsessive fans who keep them going. There's the coach who tests Baker at every turn; the troubled captain who gets arrested for battery on his wife; the former NHL goon who stages fights out of boredom; and the team's other goalies who eye the newcomer warily knowing there's only room for one of them in the net. Baker's pro-hockey adventure ends up teaching him nearly everything he will ever need to know about life.

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