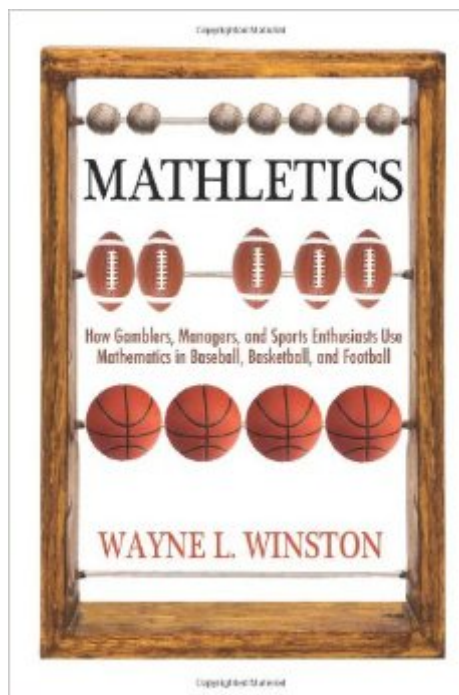


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Mathletics: How Gamblers, Managers, And Sports Enthusiasts Use Mathematics In Baseball, Basketball, And Football



Synopsis

Mathletics is a remarkably entertaining book that shows readers how to use simple mathematics to analyze a range of statistical and probability-related questions in professional baseball, basketball, and football, and in sports gambling. How does professional baseball evaluate hitters? Is a singles hitter like Wade Boggs more valuable than a power hitter like David Ortiz? Should NFL teams pass or run more often on first downs? Could professional basketball have used statistics to expose the crooked referee Tim Donaghy? Does money buy performance in professional sports? In Mathletics, Wayne Winston describes the mathematical methods that top coaches and managers use to evaluate players and improve team performance, and gives math enthusiasts the practical tools they need to enhance their understanding and enjoyment of their favorite sports--and maybe even gain the outside edge to winning bets. Mathletics blends fun math problems with sports stories of actual games, teams, and players, along with personal anecdotes from Winston's work as a sports consultant. Winston uses easy-to-read tables and illustrations to illuminate the techniques and ideas he presents, and all the necessary math concepts--such as arithmetic, basic statistics and probability, and Monte Carlo simulations--are fully explained in the examples. After reading Mathletics, you will understand why baseball teams should almost never bunt, why football overtime systems are unfair, why points, rebounds, and assists aren't enough to determine who's the NBA's best player--and much, much more.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wayne Winston addresses a myriad of topics in baseball, basketball and football via a statistics-heavy approach. There are 50 different "bites" spread out over 350 pages. There are many familiar topics for quantitative sports fans - Pythagorean theorem, platoon effects, player evaluations in different sports, and power rankings to name but a few. The entire book is moderately math heavy - over half of it is devoted to quantitative solutions using algebra, statistics and Excel worksheets (which you can find online via included addresses). If you do not enjoy the mathematical side of sports, you'll find most of the book unreadable. If you do enjoy math, stats or using quantitative approaches to gambling, this book is a nice review of most of the interesting approaches out there. The bibliography of cited books reads like a "who's who" of credible quantitative sports texts. A vast majority of the "bites" are already discussed extensively in other sources. The advantage of this book for most readers is that you can get such a diverse taste of different topics under one cover. If you are a sports modeler, the wide array of topics and approaches could help stir your own creativity. On more than one topic, I found myself saying "this assumption isn't valid!" But my making these assumptions and challenging them yourself, his approach opens up many unintended doors for the reader. For example, one bite addresses and argues that teams should pass more and run less than they do. To support this hypothesis, the book looks at a payoff chart for the yardage gained from a pass attempt versus a run attempt. The payoff chart does not consider volatility (rushing for 3 yards EVERY play is better than passing for 20 yards 1/4th of the time).

The book talks about various aspects of using statistics and probability theory in professional sports. It is divided to four parts: baseball (MLB), American football (NFL) and basketball (NBA), and the fourth section talks about some sport gambling and general comments that are not a good fit to any of the other sections. The author of the book is a professor for operations and decision technologies and was also a statistics consultant for several professional teams such as the NBA's Dallas Mavericks (season 2006-2007). Generally, the topics discussed in the book are interesting (to me both as a sports fan and with an interest and background in Math') and include topics like how to evaluate players, is there a correlation between teams wealth and the probability to win and how to compare players from different years. However, the book itself is not an interesting read mainly because each topic is discussed in a very shallow level. The basic flow of each topic is to introduce the motivation of what statistical insights we are now checking, give the required math formula (usually without enough explanations or examples to understand it thoroughly), and than a single conclusion of the analysis is presented before continuing to the next topic. This results in the reader

being left without any interesting findings or insights to learn about the topic in question with respect to different years, teams or players. For each given topic I could easily come up with several other questions that every die-hard NBA fan would like to see treated. Basically, the book looks like a cooking book, that present an idea, gives you the formula (often discusses Excel implementation) and leaves all the hard work to the reader.

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