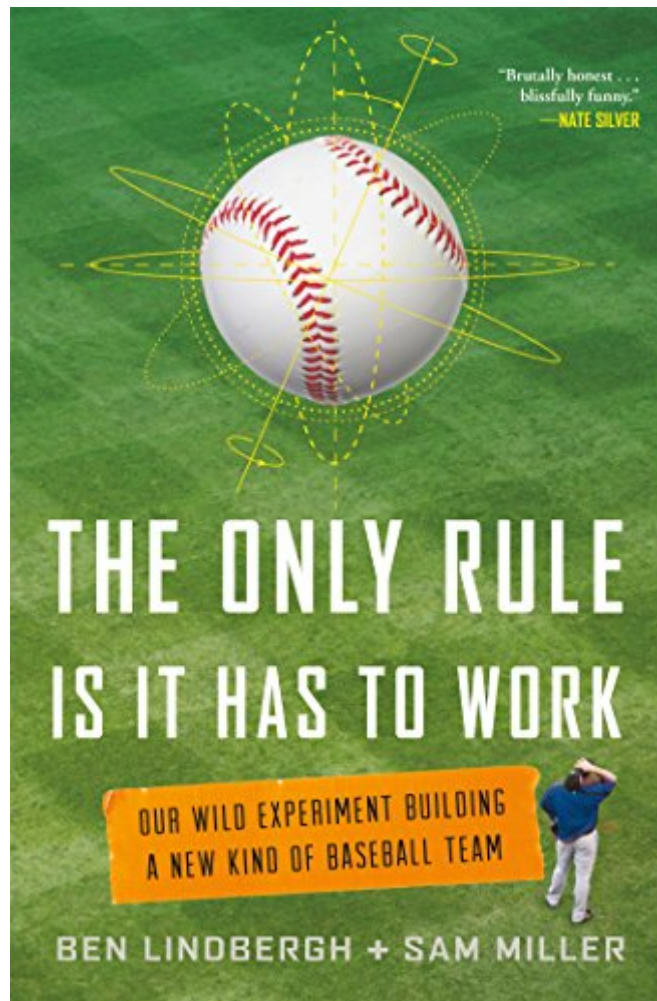


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The Only Rule Is It Has To Work: Our Wild Experiment Building A New Kind Of Baseball Team



Synopsis

What would happen if two statistics-minded outsiders were allowed to run a professional baseball team? It's the ultimate in fantasy baseball: You get to pick the roster, set the lineup, and decide on strategies -- with real players, in a real ballpark, in a real playoff race. That's what baseball analysts Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller got to do when an independent minor-league team in California, the Sonoma Stompers, offered them the chance to run its baseball operations according to the most advanced statistics. Their story in *The Only Rule is it Has to Work* is unlike any other baseball tale you've ever read. We tag along as Lindbergh and Miller apply their number-crunching insights to all aspects of assembling and running a team, following one cardinal rule for judging each innovation they try: it has to work. We meet colorful figures like general manager Theo Fightmaster and boundary-breakers like the first openly gay player in professional baseball. Even José Canseco makes a cameo appearance. Will their knowledge of numbers help Lindbergh and Miller bring the Stompers a championship, or will they fall on their faces? Will the team have a competitive advantage or is the sport's folk wisdom true after all? Will the players attract the attention of big-league scouts, or are they on a fast track to oblivion? It's a wild ride, by turns provocative and absurd, as Lindbergh and Miller tell a story that will speak to numbers geeks and traditionalists alike. And they prove that you don't need a bat or a glove to make a genuine contribution to the game.

Book Information

File Size: 8094 KB

Print Length: 368 pages

Publisher: Henry Holt and Co. (May 3, 2016)

Publication Date: May 3, 2016

Sold by: Amazon Macmillan

Language: English

ASIN: B016IBVN6Y

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #25,403 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #2 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Sports > Baseball > Statistics #4 in Books > Business &

Money > Industries > Sports & Entertainment > Sports #4 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Industries > Sports & Entertainment

Customer Reviews

In the book "The Only Rule Is It Has to Work: Our Wild Experiment Building a New Kind of Baseball Team", Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller recount a grand adventure to take command of an independent league baseball team, with the vision of trying every idea, sane or crazy, in an attempt to achieve a winning edge. Five infielders, four outfielders, defensive shifts, optimizing lineups - everything. It was really an impossible task. Professional sports at every level are filled with highly accomplished and competitive athletes, with real lives and real egos. Now imagine walking in one day and suddenly trying to convince them that they should be doing things differently. Who do you think you are? I was one of the analysts who helped Ben and Sam in this quest, and I wanted to write some thoughts down from my own perspective, not as one of the main characters, but as someone more behind the scenes. These are some very short initial thoughts only, but I'd like to follow up with some more ideas on where things went wrong from my perspective, and also how independent league teams can better identify roster talent from some non-traditional sources. My focus was on attempting to identify talent overlooked in the MLB draft. This is extremely challenging; there are 30 teams, 40 standard rounds plus other picks. Furthermore, among those players left, many sign as amateur free agents post-draft. You're left with players from lower divisions, very small schools, 23-year-old seniors, bad bodies, soft tossers, poor defenders, etc. But, still, there may be players who aren't good MLB prospects, but who could still perform well as part of an independent league team.

This book may not be for everyone. But as someone who writes baseball simulations for a living, I have to say that this book is *perfect*. The authors start with the sequence of events that landed them with the Sonoma Stompers for the Summer of 2015. One key reason is something that hadn't occurred to me: the "General Manager" of a low-budget team spends most of his time selling tickets and keep the concessions flowing, so he is happy to get free help building a roster (the task we associate most often with a team's front office). Then Ben and Sam dig into the nitty-gritty of building a team. They do a great job of laying out all the numbers that they had in front of them for such tasks as: choosing which players to sign; making lineup recommendations; employing extreme defensive shifts; and building detailed reports on opposing pitchers for use by the team's hitters. Seeing the raw data made the book much more enjoyable than if they had just jumped ahead to the

conclusions that they reached. The authors also do a great job of conveying the storylines and emotions associated with the team. It's reminiscent of a movie like Bull Durham: the overarching plot is about baseball players trying to get a crack at the majors, but the most interesting and important events revolve around the players' individual growth and interpersonal relationships. Finally, I found this book inspiring as a personal story of humility and frustration, combined with some great insight into how to "make friends and influence people". I would honestly recommend this book to aspiring business leaders or consultants. Ben and Sam are two extremely bright guys with great communication skills.

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