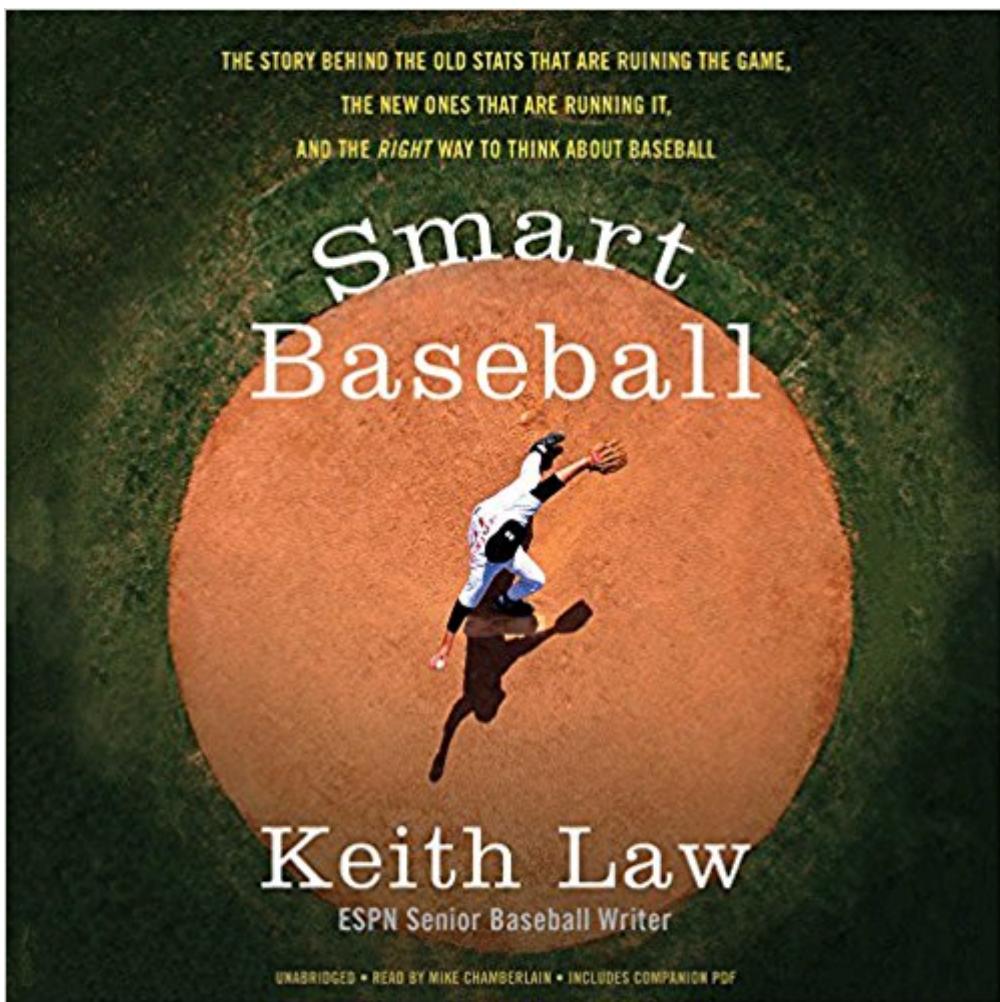


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Smart Baseball: The Story Behind The Old Stats That Are Ruining The Game, The New Ones That Are Running It, And The Right Way To Think About Baseball





Synopsis

[Read by Mike Chamberlain] Predictably Irrational meets Moneyball in ESPN veteran writer and statistical analyst Keith Law's iconoclastic look at the numbers game of baseball, proving why some of the most trusted stats are surprisingly wrong, explaining what numbers actually work, and exploring what the rise of Big Data means for the future of the sport. For decades, statistics such as batting average, saves recorded, and pitching won-lost records have been used to measure individual players' and teams' potential and success. But in the past fifteen years, a revolutionary new standard of measurement -- sabermetrics -- has been embraced by front offices in Major League Baseball and among fantasy baseball enthusiasts. But while sabermetrics is recognized as being smarter and more accurate, traditionalists, including journalists, fans, and managers, stubbornly believe that the "old" way -- a combination of outdated numbers and "gut" instinct -- is still the best way. Baseball, they argue, should be run by people, not by numbers. In this informative and provocative book, the renowned ESPN analyst and senior baseball writer demolishes a century's worth of accepted wisdom, making the definitive case against the long-established view. Armed with concrete examples from different eras of baseball history, logic, a little math, and lively commentary, he shows how the allegiance to these numbers -- dating back to the beginning of the professional game -- is firmly rooted not in accuracy or success, but in baseball's irrational adherence to tradition. While Law gores sacred cows, from clutch performers to RBIs to the infamous save rule, he also demystifies sabermetrics, explaining what these "new" numbers really are and why they're vital. He also considers the game's future, examining how teams are using Data -- from PhDs to sophisticated statistical databases -- to build future rosters; changes that will transform baseball and all of professional sports.

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Customer Reviews

"Mr. Law's book will increase any fan's enjoyment of the sport." (Wall Street Journal)"Smart Baseball is an engaging account of the evolution of baseball metrics...His experience and insight make him uniquely qualified to answer the driving question in MLB today: how best to account for everything that happens on the field. This look is a must-read for the serious fan." (Billy Beane, Executive Vice President of Baseball Operations, Oakland A's)"Law provides necessary insight into how front offices have come to evaluate talent...Smart Baseball is an essential and accessible primer on how data and analytics shape America's Pastime, and where it's headed. " (Sean Doolittle, pitcher, Oakland A's)"No flawed statistic is safe from Keith's insights in this clear-eyed, data driven tour of the bases. Smart Baseball gives us a preview of the future as Keith introduces the stats that really matter in a way that all fans will enjoy." (Molly Knight, author of New York Times Bestseller The Best Team Money Can Buy)"There is still, probably, someone in your life who thinks that "grit", "intensity," and "hustle" are more important than "on-base percentage" and "WHIP." Give that person this book, and end the argument forever." (Mike Schur, co-creator of Parks & Recreation, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, and The Good Place)Smart Baseball can help any baseball follower evolve along with the game. It provides an insightful and thorough look at how this great game is being viewed now and into the future. Definitely a great read for anyone who loves baseball." (A.J. Hinch, manager, Houston Astros)"In Smart Baseball, Keith Law deftly answers everything you always wanted to know about sabermetrics but were too afraid to ask. Its final three chapters probably each deserve their own books, and hopefully Law will oblige. I will think of Joey Bagodonuts often." -- Molly Knight, author of New York Times Bestseller The Best Team Money Can Buy)"Law brilliantly dismantles some of the game's most sacred and most misleading statistics...with a style in which smart trumps snarky...Law challenges longtime fans to think differently about a game that he says has been hindered by inefficient traditions for far too long." (Publishers Weekly)"[Law] shatters myths about how to accurately measure a baseball player's ability and then explains modern criteria that offer better results...provides a spirited exploration of statistics sure to start arguments among devoted baseball fans...A smooth combination of erudition and his obvious love of the sport." (Kirkus)"In mercifully plain English, Law explains how the new statistical tools can answer questions that previously baffled baseball experts. A must-read

for everyone who brings a curious head as well as an impassioned heart to the ballpark.” (Booklist) “Law’s background as an analyst gives him the knowledge and experience to put these different statistics in perspective...If you’re unsure of the way the new statistics operate, or wonder why the old approaches are being disparaged, this book is for you.” --(Library Journal) “Keith Law is one of the best baseball minds on the planet.” --(Will Leitch, *Sports on Earth*) “[Law] is as cocky-confident in his analysis as the title suggests. But he backs it up not just with numbers but his experience in the game...His charting of the ways baseball uses metrics...is clear-eyed and, even for traditionalists, hard to argue with.” --(Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

For the past fifteen years, many baseball fans, writers, and commentators have remained mired in the muck of old statistics—baseball card numbers such as batting average, saves recorded, and a pitcher’s won-lost record—while newer, smarter, and at times counterintuitive baseball stats known as sabermetrics have become commonplace throughout Major League Baseball. Yet, despite their popularity, confusion persists about these new stats, with much of the baseball world still following the “old” way—a combination of those outdated numbers and gut instinct—to evaluate players’ contributions and careers. Baseball, they argue, should be run by people, not by numbers. ESPN senior baseball writer Keith Law, respectfully, or perhaps not so respectfully, disagrees. In this provocative book, the outspoken Law takes on the established view of baseball stats, undermining over a century’s worth of baseball dogma. With many of these numbers dating back to the beginning of the game, he examines how allegiance to these old stats is firmly rooted, not in the modern game as it’s played, but in baseball’s irrational adherence to tradition. Using entertaining anecdotes, logic, and occasionally just a little math, he exposes the flaws in much of the game’s orthodoxy, from the illusion of clutch performers, to the dishonesty of RBIs, to how the save rule—*invented by a journalist*—has ruined bullpens for decades. But Smart Baseball is not just about tearing down tradition. Law also offers a clear-eyed discussion of the new stats that are helping teams win, changing how players are valued, and altering how we talk about the game. Exploring long-underappreciated numbers like On-Base Percentage, as well as newer stats like Win Probability Added and Wins Above Replacement, he simplifies the math that has gotten in the way for many curious fans, providing understandable explanations of what these numbers measure and why they work better. In addition he delves into the future of baseball stats, uncovering the escalating arms race for statistical talent being waged by almost every MLB front office, as the teams search for innovative ways to find the statistical edge on and off the field.

What emerges is an intelligent, informative, and engaging assault on the baseball establishment. Brought to life by Law's unapologetic style, Smart Baseball is an iconoclastic look at the numbers game of baseball, proving why some of the most trusted stats are surprisingly wrong, detailing the numbers that actually work, and revealing what the rise of Big Data means for the future of the sport. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

A great primer for the 'new' stats that add greater numerical description to the performance of a baseball player and team. Wonderful discussions around the old standbys (BA, ERA, etc.) and a quick look at new tools for performance analysis. A pleasant read for this retired math educator.

I'm an avid fan of baseball, and particularly baseball from a sabermetric angle. This book challenged me to think about the game in new and different ways, and the author did a superb job of explaining some of the current concepts in the game (such as ways to analyze defense) in an easily accessible manner. I can't recommend it enough for anyone interested in reading about how today's game isn't like the game we grew up with, and how that's a good thing.

There are two things that are perfectly clear when you read "Smart Baseball": Keith Law knows statistics and he knows baseball. The book is perfectly organized -- here are all the old stats that you know and love (batting average, RBIs, pitcher wins, etc.) and why they're stupid (at worst) or misleading (at best). Having led you to that point, he introduces statistics that actually tell us something about players (WAR, OBP, OPS, etc.) and how they are constructed. All of this is done in a perfectly accessible way, whether you have a strong background in statistics or not. It reads quickly, but you never feel like something important is being glossed over. When Law starts talking about Statcast, the book slows down a bit. It's still good material, but almost feels "tacked on" to the rest of the book. The only bad thing is that once you've finished, watching games on TV with all the old statistics gets a little frustrating.

I've been following Keith Law since he wrote for Baseball Prospectus. I pay for ESPN Insider mostly to read Keith's current work. This book does not disappoint. Keith has always had a nice, clean way of presenting often complex information and it comes to the fore in Smart Baseball. His experience as a scout, analyst and writer makes him the top baseball pundit currently working and this book is excellent reading for someone interested in how baseball has changed and how a layman can understand the new inner workings of the game.

I am a college professor who teaches teachers. I am also an avid baseball fan with no more than a B average when it comes to sabermetrics. I try to get teachers to integrate baseball concepts into classrooms as a vehicle to teach their required curricula. This book is now required reading for its broad appeal regarding math, economics, problem-solving, logic and of course, snarky writing. The two sections are easy enough for newbies but still good refreshers for people like me who read books & blogs but not religiously. Part Three taps into Mr. Law's ideas about where baseball is headed with scouting & data, with front-office insights from baseball business people. Do yourself a favor and get this book. Buy a copy for that friend that talks baseball & goes to the games with you. It will add to your enjoyment & knowledge of the game - what more can you ask from a book!

I have always devoured baseball stats, played table baseball games as a kid (APBA was my choice and later the computer version) so Smart Baseball was a perfect read for someone like me. I also believe it will enhance the enjoyment and understanding of anyone who simply enjoys watching the game. This book provides he information to help you discern the value and also question the stats that have defined the game for years.

Good explanations for baseball fans who haven't kept up with the statistics revolution. Law describes the drawbacks of baseball's traditional measures of performance. Then he details the most common new stats such as OBP and OPS. After that, he moves to more advanced statistics. And finally, he talks about the vast amount of data that is available to MLB teams but not to fans. Interesting stuff but I wish he used more specific examples of individual players and how the new stats give a different perspective of their performance. And he didn't convince me that there is no such thing as a clutch player.

Shame on the publishers and George Will (WSJ). This is not a bad book by any means, and there are some valuable insights scattered here and there, but after the success of "MoneyBall" and much written about Bill James and SabrMetrics, it's not exactly new. There are one or two egregious errors of fact however-enough to wonder how much baseball history the author really knows.

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