Alexandra Cequeria

Professor Abrams

MATH-150

10/13/15

Moneyball Paper

Statistics have been involved in the game of baseball since the late nineteenth century. Henry Chadwick, often referred to as the “father of baseball”, first recorded statistics on baseball players and created the modern box score. However, radical new ideas about traditional baseball concepts transformed the way statisticians evaluate players and games.

Bill James, the creator of sabermetrics, was a revolutionary in the field of baseball statistics. He challenged “baseball’s conventional wisdom” (Lewis 69) by clarifying the meaning of fielding statistics, which he argued were opinionated and subjective. He also believed that fielding statistics could convey a baseball player’s character through not only the numbers, but language. The meaning behind the numbers needed to be clarified through improved fielding statistics that were not simply a “record of opinions” (66). James’s most general point underlying his opinions on fielding statistics was that observation alone was not a proper evaluation of baseball players and baseball games.

Measuring players and games off of baseball statistics was not an entirely new idea when Bill James wrote *1977 Baseball Abstract*. However, many concepts that were previously recorded were outdated, untrue, or simply inaccessible. There was also the issue of Henry Chadwick’s oversimplification of statistics and interpretation of walks as errors. James attempted to mend the evaluation of fielding performance by proposing a new statistic: the “range factor”. This statistic calculated “a player’s *successful* plays he made in the field per game.” (Lewis 69) Although range factors had calculation problems as well, James’s ideas provoked a new interpretation of baseball knowledge: “What mattered was James’s ability to light a torch in a dark chamber and throw a new light on a dusty problem.” (Lewis 69)

The advancement of computer technology following James’s *1977 Baseball Abstract* reduced the cost of analyzing data and made it easier to store large amounts of data. By the 2002 draft, Billy Beane “had his own idea about where to find future major league baseball players: inside Paul [DePodesta]’s computer.” (Lewis 37) With a vast knowledge of statistics on practically every college player, the scouts’ subjective opinions began to lessen an indication for success. The scouts would argue that Billy and Paul were “performance scouting”, or determining a player entirely on stats, but their goals were slightly more complex than that.

Paul DePodesta, an economics major from Harvard, is one of the brilliant minds who followed James’s “new light” on baseball knowledge. He was more interested in “the uneasy border between psychology and economics” (18) than finance. DePodesta’s beliefs emphasized objectivity in the evaluation of baseball: “The human mind played tricks on itself when it relied exclusively on what it saw….” (18) He also understood the significance of statistics that others did not, particularly with walks. When scouts criticized players like Jeremy Brown for a large amount of walks, DePodesta thought otherwise. Rather than an indicator of poor hitting, he believed that a hitter’s numbers of walks was “the best indicator of whether he understood how to control the strike zone.” ( 33) His observations that some statistics were more significant than others led him to discover that on-base percentage and slugging percentage were most closely correlated with winning percentage.

The boost in players’ salaries around the time of *Baseball Abstract* also brought more economic factors to statistics. The numbers began to matter more when determining the economic worth of a player. This importance was emphasized even more when players began to get paid in the millions. There was also the introduction of economic statisticians to baseball statistics. Ken Mauriello and Jack Ambruster took their knowledge of derivative securities and applied it to baseball. In 1994, they formed AVM systems, which more precisely evaluated players than James’s STATS Inc.

Overall, the advancement of baseball statistics created a precise evaluation of baseball that was unlike anything else. Without iconic figures such as Bill James, baseball stats would not have been revolutionized the way that they were, if at all. Players would be undervalued by scouts who determined worth by subjective means. Beane and DePodesta may have been called “performance scouters” by scouts, but they were able to evaluate more than simply current player performance. Like James believed, the numbers determined character along with performance. When the numbers acquired true meaning, they became an essential part of baseball.

Works Cited

"Henry Chadwick." Baseball Hall of Fame. National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, n.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2015.

Lewis, Michael. Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003. Print.