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Description

The ILR Cornell Sports Business Society magazine is a semester publication titled *Sports, Inc.* This publication serves as a space for our membership to publish and feature in-depth research and well-thought out ideas to advance the world of sport. The magazine can be found in the Office of Student Services and is distributed to alumni who come visit us on campus. Issues are reproduced here with permission of the ILR Cornell Sports Business Society.

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ECONOMIC JAM?

HOW THE ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN IS AFFECTING THE NBA



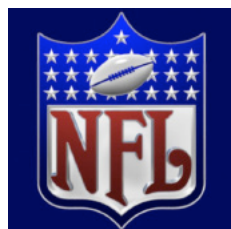
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Quantifying Soccer Baseball may be America's past time, but soccer is the world's most popular sport. Can some of the same evaluation processes in baseball also apply to soccer?



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A thorough analysis of why defense is undervalued in baseball.



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Quantifying Soccer

Gabe Gershenfeld



Baseball may be America's past time, but soccer is the world's most popular sport. Michael Lewis' best-selling book *Moneyball* (rumored to be a movie starring Brad Pitt!) celebrated advanced statistical analysis in baseball – a revolution in which the casual sports fan could comfortably question the basic strategy of the game as well as the front offices of major league baseball teams. Can some of the same evaluation processes in baseball also apply to soccer?

Chris Ballard's April 2008 *Sports Illustrated* article "Doing a Number on Soccer" showcased Billy Beane himself as a leader in analytically studying the game of soccer. The Oakland Athletics' GM "brainstormed soccer metrics with a Leeds professor" after watching a game in England five years ago, and bought a share of the San Jose Earthquakes in July 2007.¹ Beane works for San Jose with the title of "strategic overseer," while also juggling his baseball duties. He and the Earthquakes have formed a partnership with a California-based company called Match Analysis that "logs, charts and dissects every MLS game." Match Analysis's most popular service is video analysis and categorization. Like Beane did with baseball, Match Analysis is trying

to change the evaluative process of soccer through the new statistics. Ballard mentions terms like "touches per 90 minutes," "shot creation," and "possession percentage" as examples of important new statistics virtually unknown to the casual fan.

While it remains to be seen whether the Earthquakes will be as successful or influential in soccer as the A's in baseball, the international soccer community has already taken notice. Despite being a relative newcomer to the game, "a new generation of managers... seeking objective analysis" have flocked to Billy Beane's door. His "statistics'-based approach to talent scouting" has already influenced many high profile names in English soccer.² In November 2007, Beane presented his ideas at a "Future of Football"

conference to a variety of English club managers, owners, and agents, including the Manchester United's legendary manager, Sir Alex Ferguson.

What is a "statistics-based approach to talent scouting"? How would one calculate the statistics Ballard mentions in a game like soccer? Baseball is a relatively easy sport to quantify because the game can be broken down into individual discrete events and matchups: the batter hits a double off the pitcher, or the pitcher/catcher throw out the base runner. However, in a fluid game like soccer, separating individual merit from team success is more difficult. How can one tell when an assist was more noteworthy than a goal? What about the contributions of teammates not involved in the scoring decision? Goals, assists, shots on goal, and playing time are all indicators of a player's worth in soccer, but they do not approach the exactness and complexity of baseball sabermetrics.

Before any analysis can be performed, one first has to have the appropriate data. This is definitely one of the biggest issues facing soccer analysis, in America at least, and it's also where Match Analysis comes in. On the MLS website one will find only basic statistics recorded: minutes played, fouls, goals, assists, shots, shots on goal, game winning shots, game winning assists, etc. These numbers allow one to do little more than find basic rate calculations (i.e. a player's average goals scored per 90 minutes). MLS Deputy Commissioner Ivan Gazidis says the league doesn't track or release any more detailed indicators for reasons "more technical than philosophical"³ (in other words, they don't have enough money). However, private companies like Match Analysis watch the video, and with records of every run and pass, they can isolate individual merits (and demerits). This discrepancy is certainly one of the biggest differences between soccer and baseball. A soccer box score with summary statistics like

score, fouls, and time of goals will almost never convey the real dynamics of a game without a qualitative description, while since the 1860's Henry Chadwick's baseball box score has told the story behind every outcome in a baseball game.

What about in Europe, where soccer is older, more popular, and more profitable? Across the Atlantic it is more common for teams to hire private firms such as ProZone, Opta, and Sports Universal to help with data collection.⁴ ProZone sends film to India to manually break down player movements, and is used by exactly half of the teams in the top two English divisions. With operating incomes as high as \$82 million and franchise values over the \$1 billion mark,⁵ frugal soccer clubs such as Tottenham (Beane's favorite team) look for any advantage that may be overlooked by the wealthier teams.⁶

Chris Long, the Senior Quantitative Analyst for the San Diego Padres, has explored introductory statistical analysis in soccer. Once the "data capture issue" is resolved, he says the next step to establish the worth of specific players is to study plays and identify "when to pass, who to pass to, and completion percentages." In an article about Beane and Tottenham, the English newspaper *The Guardian* breaks down four such statistics relevant to identifying successful teams and players:⁷

- Number of touches—A measurement of how often a player is involved on the ball. This number measures the player's fitness level, the number of times he gets into a position to receive the ball and team-mates' willingness to pass to him.
- Shot creation—The number of times a player participates in a possession leading to a shot (both on target and off). This stat indicates the



attacking effectiveness of a player, especially attacking midfielders and forwards, as well as ability to balance ball retention with creating scoring chances.

- Ability to retain the ball—A measurement of the probability that the next player who touches the ball will be a member of your team. This ability shows contribution of players who are less directly involved in attack.
- Balls won per 90 minutes—Measures defensive effectiveness. Important for assessing the attacking players' willingness to defend; defenders' ability to tackle, intercept passes and position themselves well.

These four statistics are certainly similar (if not directly the same) as the terms "touches per 90 minutes," "shot creation" and "possession percentage" Chris Ballard mentions. Such measurements are not complicated and could possibly be recorded live

by the naked eye. A record of every touch of the game could be parsed through to find individual number of touches, ability to retain the ball, balls won per 90 minutes, and would give a close approximation of shot creation. Anatole Doak, a midfielder on the Cornell University men's soccer team, says these stats are helpful, particularly shot creation, which is "useful for identifying top players besides looking at goals and assists."

As a brief aside, it is also worth mentioning that these types of stats could be relevant for other fluid, possession-type sports like ice hockey, field hockey, or lacrosse. As long as you adjust for the obvious differences in the game, the basic concepts of breaking down possession, defense, and offense—identifying individual worth in a decidedly teammate-based game—could reveal interesting and useful information for these sports.

Tom Tango is a well-respected baseball statistician, but as a Canadian his first love was hockey and he currently consults for a number of NHL teams. Although he says hockey "is virgin territory... much more complex, and less quantifiable,"⁸ he believes that statistical analysis will be an asset for many NHL teams.

Oliver Anderson is an English soccer fan and coach and statistician by profession as well as the founder of Sports Statistical Reviews Ltd which annually publishes *The Football Review*. The Review and its website thefootballreview.co.uk bear a remarkable resemblance to *Baseball Prospectus*, both in terms of the combination of statistics, research and analysis as well as the specific formulas and translations used. For instance, aGVA⁹ stands for attacking goal value above-average and measure's a player's total value in goals added above that of an average performer that plays in the same position—similar to replacement value in BP's VORP (value over replacement player). Adjusted Estimate Points use advanced metrics

to predict a team's points scored, and then adjusts this value to take into account stadium factors and the strength of the opposition—not unlike the adjustment factors used for EQA (equivalent average). Moreover, Anderson uses a computer model called SIMprofler to project player performance. SIMprofler first looks at variety of data to find player's with the highest similarity scores, and incorporates the specified player's baseline performance with the future performance of the comparable players to create a regression analyses that projects playing time and attacking rate statistics within the 10th and 90th percentiles. Major and Minor attrition rates also finds the percentage that the player will see a fall off in ability and playing time. If any of these methods and terms sounds at all familiar, that's because they are all based off of Nate Silver's PECOTA (Player Empirical Comparison and Optimization Test Algorithm) player projection model, which has been the most accurate baseball forecast system since 2003. While it is hard to gauge the popularity and validity of Anderson's work (the 2007 Review is ranked #2,539,523 on Amazon.com), he certainly has the same objective approach that has led to significant change in baseball.

However, one reason to question the legitimacy of Anderson's work is the data collection issue. He writes "myth-busting" articles that challenge basic soccer tenets (like as rotation patterns), but he limits his research to 10 English Premier League teams. With the huge number of soccer games being played around the world, a statistician would feel more comfortable about his findings if he had a larger sample size. He also doesn't explicitly mention the source of his data for the SIMprofler system, and it is doubtful that he himself could have broken the film down to find meaningful statistics beyond the basic box score ones. Accordingly, if accurate research is to be done, a

passionate fan should have access to more resources. Retrosheet.org is a volunteer organization that is in the process of compiling and sharing play-by-play accounts for every MLB game (box-scores on baseball-reference.com go back to 1871). Now that Retrosheet is onto the mid-1950s, Baseball Prospectus can tell you Ted Williams had a VORP of 66.1 in 1954.

Match Analysis and ProZone may have compiled lots of detailed data, but soccer doesn't have the same free online databases available to any fan that baseball does. There is a business saying that "your smartest employee doesn't work for you." By releasing data online, a league or organization drastically increases the chance that a passionate fan could come up with an important finding.

When Voros McCracken first shared his revolutionary DIPS article at baseballprospectus.com on January 23, 2001 (and the Google group rec.sport.baseball.analysis before that), he was not yet working for the Red Sox or writing for Baseball Digest Daily. Instead, he was a graduate student living in Chicago. The popularity and influence of the Society of American Baseball Research (and their close ties with retrosheet.org) demonstrate what passionate and analytically inclined sports fans can contribute when not directly working for a team or league. And whose fans are more passionate than soccer?

On a forum entitled "Sabermetrics applying to soccer" at bigsoccer.com, member Tom Eaton posts:

"I once ran a study on the MLS possession statistic to determine whether having more possession correlated with winning... Out of the 170 games I studied, the team with more possession had a record of 75-67-28, slightly better than .500. The interesting thing, though, was that where possession was really lopsided

(one team had at least 56% of the possession), the team with more possession was only 18-24-10. I have some theories as to why this might be, but I won't bore you with my opinions. The point is, there is a correlation, but not a particularly strong one. I would have liked to have looked at some numbers for other leagues to see if the results were similar, but I didn't know where to get the numbers. I hope the [Match Analysis] people can keep track of stuff like that."

With interesting discussions such as this one running into dead ends, it is clear that exciting research could come outside official soccer organizations if soccer data can be publicly shared the way baseball has.

The president of Match Analysis, Mark Brunkart, says, "you don't need statistics to spot the real great players or the really bad ones. The trick is to take the player's between those two extremes and identify which are the best ones."¹¹ Goals and assists are obviously important statistics, but more detailed quantitative information should be assessed before offering large contracts. After all, Moneyball isn't about on-base percentage or when a batter should or shouldn't bunt, it's about identifying market inefficiencies and small market teams taking advantage of them. Michael Lewis is a business journalist, and the lessons concerning rational process and overcoming psychological dispositions apply to many fields outside of sports. If a soccer evaluator—possibly with the help of statistically knowledgeable fans—can successfully quantify and analyze the game in a novel way, it will be an important advantage.

A Lesson to MLB Managers: Defense Matters!

Jeff Lebow

It is relatively easy to judge the productivity of a Major League hitter. Statistics such as Home Runs, On Base Percentage, Slugging Percentage, Batting Average and Runs Batted In are marketed excessively. The typical fan will see these numbers at the bottom of their television screens when their favorite players come up to bat. Any fan will judge the player's total productivity on these popular categories. The fan will hear sports writers say that a certain player should be in the Hall of Fame because he had so many Career Home Runs or a Career Batting Average of such and such. Has the fan been misled? Definitely.

After reading this article, the average fan will realize that the most undervalued aspect of a player's ability is defense. Previous notions of good players and bad players will probably change. Thank the 2008 Tampa Bay Rays for illustrating the importance of defense.

Importance of Defensive Efficiency

The Tampa Bay Devil Rays officially changed their name before the 2008 season to simply, "The Tampa Bay Rays." Associating itself with the "Devil" is probably why Tampa Bay's defense was the work of Satan in 2007. To evaluate the Devil's work, never use outdated defensive statistics such as Fielding Percentage and Errors. The problem with these old measurements is that they don't account for the range of a fielder (in other words, how many balls he can get to). Which left fielder would you rather have? Left Fielder #1 who had a .987 fielding percentage, made two errors, and had 153 put outs in 1000 innings, or Left Fielder #2 who had a .978 Fielding percentage, made six errors and had 260 put outs in 1000 innings. Clearly, the extra 107 put outs that #2 made over #1 made him more valuable despite his lower fielding



percentage and greater number of errors. Therefore, the most significant defensive statistic among enlightened baseball fans is defensive efficiency. According to BaseballProspectus.com, Defensive Efficiency (Def Eff) is defined as, "... the rate at which balls put into play are converted into outs by a team's defense. Def Eff can be approximated with $(1 - \text{BABIP})$, if all you have is BABIP, but a team's actual Def Eff is computed with $1 - ((H + \text{ROE} - \text{HR}) / (\text{PA} - \text{BB} - \text{SO} - \text{HBP} - \text{HR}))$." Please see the Glossary at the end of the article for abbreviations.

Extent of Tampa Bay's Defensive Improvement

In 2007, the Devil Rays had the lowest Def Eff rating (.656) of any team since 1959. In other words, of over 1,000 Major League Baseball teams in the last fifty seasons, this unit played the worst team defense in that period. The Devil Rays won 66 games in 2007. In 2008, the Rays saw the light, ceased its relationship with Lucifer and found angels both in the infield and outfield. In 2008, Tampa Bay had the highest Def Eff rating

(.710) in baseball. In case you didn't know, the Rays won their division, which includes the mighty Yankees and Red Sox. Did I mention that they also made it to the World Series?

Tampa Bay's Hitting and Pitching Did Not Significantly Improve

Smart baseball fans are thinking, "Come on, to say that the Rays improved by 29 games purely based on defense is absurd! Their pitching got so much better with the addition of Garza and that bullpen was nasty this year. Plus, Longoria was the missing piece in that offense." But if you're a really smart baseball fan, you already know that the Rays' pitching and hitting actually didn't change much. So what happened?

The 2007 Devil Rays scored 782 runs while the 2008 Rays scored 774. Well, that settles the offense argument. Pena and Upton combined for twenty fewer homers in '08 than in '07.

What about the pitching?

The 2007 Devil Rays allowed 944 runs. The 2008 Rays allowed 671 runs. That wasn't a typo. For those of you calculating out there, that's an improvement of 273 runs or of over 1.68 runs per game. However, was it because of the pitching? The 2007 Devil Rays had a 2.10 Strikeout to Walk Ratio while the 2008 Rays had a 2.17 Strikeout to Walk Ratio. This improvement is marginal. However, the 2007 Devil Rays surrendered 33 fewer homeruns (199) than the 2008 Rays (166). The impact of such an improvement is mitigated by the fact that Tampa Bay faced 268 fewer batters in 2007 than in 2008. So if the 2008 defense played with the 2007 pitching, it's fair to say that the 2008 team would have surrendered only about 25 fewer home runs than in 2007 with the 2007 defense. The 2008 Rays allowed 253 runs from home runs. This means that Rays' opponents scored 1.52 runs from homeruns. Therefore, the twenty-five fewer homeruns the pitching allowed are responsible for preventing

approximately 38 fewer runs than last year. The Rays' improvement in preventing homeruns accounts for only 13% of the team's decrease of runs allowed from 2007 to 2008 (38/243).

Still not sold that the defense is primarily responsible for shaving 273 runs? Maybe Tampa Bay's pitchers gave up more line drives in 2007. In 2007, 14.4% of the plate appearances against Tampa Bay resulted in a line drive. In 2008, this number decreased slightly to 14.0%. The Rays' pitchers' ground ball percentage decreased from 29.3% in 2007 to 28.9% in 2008. Their fly ball percentage increased from 26.4% to 27.9%. So, if the '07 pitching staff pitched this year instead of the '08 pitching staff, Tampa Bay would have allowed twenty-six more line drives (885-859), twenty-five more ground balls (1,800-1,775) and ninety-three fewer fly balls (1,622-1,715). Since players have higher OPS (see glossary) when they hit fly balls than when they hit ground balls, there is a valid argument that the '07 pitchers were more successful than the '08 pitchers. The '07 pitchers induced slightly more ground balls, significantly fewer fly balls, and slightly more line drives. The two staffs were relatively even. It is some what of a fluke that a team that gave up nearly 100 more fly balls than another team actually had a lower home run rate. In this sense, luck could be partially attributed to the Rays' improvement in run prevention. However, it is clear that this improvement was almost solely attributed to better defense.

Why the Defense Improved

This improvement was largely due to a reshuffling of their existing players. The Rays were able to restructure their defense with two simple additions: calling up Evan Longoria and trading for Jason Bartlett. Longoria enabled the Rays to improve at third, second, and center field. Akinori Iwamura was a minor improvement in the field over the trio of B.J. Upton, Brendan Harris, and

Ty Wigginton. Longoria was fantastic at third base and was an upgrade over Iwamura who played out of position at third base last year. Upton played center field the whole year as opposed to performing spot duty at second base to compensate for Tampa Bay's ineptitude in their infield. He facilitated a tremendous improvement over the dreadful combination of Elijah Dukes and Delmon Young. Bartlett took the helm at shortstop, replacing the awful trio of Brendan Harris, Josh Wilson, and Ben Zobrist. How much money did it cost for the Rays to improve in the field?

Economical Cost of Defensive Improvement

Calling up Longoria was a painless decision, because he made relatively nothing this year. He recently signed a six year \$17.5 million dollar extension, which is still one of the biggest bargains in baseball. The Rays traded OF Delmon Young, IF Brendan Harris, and OF Jason Pridie to the Minnesota Twins for P Matt Garza, SS Jason Bartlett, and P Eduardo Morlan. This past season, the Rays paid Garza \$404,600 and Bartlett \$416,000. The Twins paid Young \$1.44 million and Harris 431,000. **The Twins essentially paid the Rays** slightly over \$1,000,000 for this deal.

Measuring the Individual Improvement at Shortstop

Not including double plays, Harris was responsible for making .427 outs per inning in 2007 at shortstop for Tampa Bay while Bartlett was responsible for making .453 outs per inning in 2008 at shortstop for Tampa Bay. These outs exclude double plays, because they could further benefit Bartlett unfairly for having a more skilled infield. Although the difference of .026 outs per inning doesn't seem like a big difference, a whole season of Jason Bartlett essentially took thirty-five balls which would have been hits in 2007 and turned them into outs in 2008 (assuming both players played nine innings in the field for 162 games).

To put this in perspective, if you took away thirty five of Bartlett's outs that he made as a batter and replaced them with hits, he would have batted .363 this season as opposed to the .286. Now, assuming he had 120 more at bats to compensate for the thirty-four games he missed due to injury, Bartlett would have batted .347 with the thirty five hits instead of outs.

Still, this analysis has not given Jason Bartlett proper justice. The amount of outs per inning a player makes relies on the other eight fielders at the time. For instance, if a professional baseball player plays second base with eight six year olds beside him in the field, he will make a higher percentage of his team's outs than if he played beside fellow professionals. In other words, it's impressive if a player makes .026 outs per inning more than another player. But it's substantially more impressive if that player is playing on the best defense in baseball as opposed to the worst defensive team since 1959. If Jason Bartlett had played with the 2007 team, he would have prevented far more than thirty-five hits.

How Defense is Undervalued in the MLB.

Tampa Bay simply did not noticeably improve their pitching or hitting this season! Tampa Bay was paid by the Twins to get better in the field and then became the best defensive team in baseball after having the worst defense by an MLB team since 1959.

How many baseball fans think that the Mets would have been better this year if Fernando Tatis had played a full season in Left Field instead of Endy Chavez? My guess is that most fans would prefer Tatis, considering that he played more than Chavez even though Tatis spent about two months either injured or in the minors. Tatis's batting average was thirty points higher than Chavez's. Fernando also hit ten more home runs than Endy even though Fernando had three fewer at bats. However, this season, Endy

made 2.92 outs per nine innings while Tatis made only 1.49 in left field. If each player played as many innings in left field as Carlos Beltran played in center field in 2008, Tatis would be responsible for 210 outs while Chavez would be responsible for 411 outs! Since an out reduces the number of at bats left in the game, and a hit does not, this number would be even higher! If the Mets had started Endy Chavez every game that Fernando Tatis started, it's safe to say that the Mets would have been in the playoffs.

General Managers must start to realize the importance of defense. Defense has become an aspect of the game that is overlooked and underappreciated. The General Managers who realize this phenomenon will draft, trade for, start, and pay more for better defenders, will thereby gain a huge edge over their competition. Which GMs in 2009 will find the holy defense?

Glossary

H: Hits allowed

ROE: Reached on Error- when a batter reaches first base as a direct result of a fielding error.

HR: Home Runs allowed

SH: Sacrifice Hits

SF: Sacrifice Fly Balls

PA: Plate Appearances- AB + BB + HBP + SH + SF

BB: Bases on Balls allowed

SO: Strikeouts

HBP: Number of times that an opposing batter was hit by a pitch.

BABIP: Batting Average of balls put into play-- A pitcher's average on batted balls ending a plate appearance, excluding home runs.

Def Eff: Defensive Efficiency--This can be approximated with $(1 - \text{BABIP})$, if all you have is BABIP, but a team's actual Def Eff is computed with $1 - ((H + \text{ROE} - \text{HR}) / (\text{PA} - \text{BB} - \text{SO} - \text{HBP} - \text{HR}))$.

OPS: On-Base Percentage + Slugging Percentage

Rays Don't Come Up Empty Handed

Eric Freeman

While the Tampa Bay Rays may be disappointed about their World Series loss, they still reaped substantial fiscal benefits. You might think the MLB would not dole out huge playoff bonuses to a team that generates as little revenue for the league as the Rays. You might think that the Rays' payouts would have been less charitable because they draw historically low ratings, breaking the previous lows, in fact, by 20 percent with an average rating of 8.1 (the percentage of homes with televisions tuned in).³ However, the method in which playoff bonuses in baseball are allocated, is independent of the team's success and popularity. It left the Rays with a very generous sum of bonus money.

Playoff bonuses are distributed from a pool compiled of a portion of the ticket sales from each postseason game. The pool is made up of 60 percent of the ticket revenues teams make from the first three games of the Division Series, the first four games of the League Championship Series, and the first four games of the World Series. It gets divided among 12 clubs: the 8 playoff teams, and the 4 teams that finished second in their division but did not win the wildcard.⁴ 60 percent of the total pot is allocated to the World Series participants. The World Series winner receives 36 percent of it, and the loser receives 24 percent.³ The remaining 40 percent is divided among the other eight teams.

In 2006, St. Louis Cardinals players took home an extra \$20.02 million. In 2007, the playoff bonus pot amounted to \$54 million dollars and the World Series champion Boston Red Sox players split \$18.89 million.³ When split roughly 25 ways (often players who were sent down to the minors or traded away get a little



slice of the pie), that sum translates to an average of approximately \$800 thousand per player on the winning team. The actual sum, however, is divided according to each player's contributions to the team's success or how many seasons he has spent with the team – before the playoffs commence, each team holds a vote to decide how the playoff bonus money should be allotted. They can vote for giving one player the whole pie or not even a bite. Based on last year's distributions, a player's portion of the pot could be from anywhere around \$50 thousand to a few million dollars.¹

Taking into account that the MLB had record revenues of over \$6.5 billion during the 2008 season, last year's pot of \$54 million is expected to have significantly risen this year.⁵ Let's say it was \$60 million in 2008. Percentages tell us that approximately \$38 million would go to the World Series contenders – about \$22 million for the Phillies and \$16 million for the Rays, with the difference between winning and losing amounting to merely \$6 million dollars. Divide \$16 million 25 ways and you'll find that the



Economic Jam?

Adam Schultz

The current economic crisis is certain to hit every sector of the nation's economy- and sports are no exception. While it is still fairly early to determine precisely how the economic downturn will affect the sports industry, it is clear that some form of change will eventually occur. There are numerous possibilities including the potential decrease in ticket sales, loss of sponsorships, and delay of the NBA's plans to expand its

market. Already, this change is being felt throughout the sporting world.

On October 13th, NBA Commissioner David Stern announced the layoffs of 80 NBA employees, effectively cutting nine percent of its American workforce due to what Stern referred to as "recent worldwide economic turmoil" (1). Needless to say, Commissioner Stern will have a difficult task of maintaining the strong foundation that has helped

the NBA expand in the US since the early 1980's. The NBA, with its high level of casual fans- arguably more than any other of the four major sports- remains highly susceptible to fluctuations in the economy. The NBA is also lacking in certain areas where other professional sports leagues are not: as author and journalist David Zirin explains, "The NBA doesn't have the diverse revenue streams of baseball or certainly football. Not even close. The absence of personal cable television contracts or massive network agreements means that the NBA has always been more reliant on ticket sales and merchandise to fill its coffers. Its non-guaranteed revenue is tied to the disposable income of the typical fan" (2).

At the moment, the NBA is yet to feel the effects of limited non-guaranteed revenue. In fact, in one instance, the Oklahoma City Thunder has shown an incredible resistance to the economic downturn. Of course, much of the Thunder's resistance can be attributed to their relocation from Seattle during this offseason, causing tremendous excitement in Oklahoma City over the arrival of their first professional sports franchise. Team spokesman Dan Mahoney said the organization sold 13,000 season tickets in a span of four days. At that point, they had not even created an advertising campaign for the team yet (3). Also, as MSNBC.com contributor David Sweet writes, "The day the team's logo and nickname were announced, the average transaction per customer reached \$100 at the franchise's store in downtown Oklahoma City and at NBATHundershop.com" (3). What is even more remarkable, as Mahoney explains, is that, "We didn't even have jerseys then. Lots of people were walking out with armfuls of t-shirts" (3). However, the organization understands such high spending is due to enthusiasm about the new presence of a professional sports team in the region and is also likely dependent



on the Thunder's performance this season. Considering the team finished 20-62 last year and are pace to do worse this year (as of January 30th), the organization is taking some precautions. To ensure families can afford to watch the team's home games at the Ford Center, 20% of all seats will be available for \$10- as compared to the average ticket price of \$48 (3). Thus, while riding the wave of enthusiasm the city brings, the organization is remaining wary of the economy and its effect on their fans.

The prospects of every NBA franchise, however, do not appear as promising as those the Thunder has experienced during their current honeymoon of sorts with the residents of Oklahoma City. For example in Detroit, a city heavily reliant on the auto industry, the economic crisis looms particularly large. With General Motors losing \$18.8 billion in the first half of 2008, discussions on Capitol Hill ultimately led to a federal bailout for Detroit's Big Three automobile manufacturers General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. After GM recently accepted the

first \$4 billion of \$9.4 billion of federal bailout funds, the company is expected to cancel production of a number of vehicles, close plants, and lay off as many as 30,000 workers (4). The potential tremendous job cuts in Detroit would certainly have a tremendous impact on the fixed income of Detroit residents, causing them to reevaluate their expenditures with their disposable income. Also, the Detroit Pistons have been partners with Chevrolet, a division of General Motors, since 2002 (5). These elements of the economic crisis quite simply indicate possible trouble in the near future for the Detroit Pistons. While Detroit has been heralded in recent years for having dedicated fans, the organization will soon discover if these fans will still be able to afford seats in the Palace at Auburn Hills.

In October, Commissioner Stern cut 9% of the NBA's American workforce

Quite evidently, the economic security of every NBA team is not currently equal. With this misbalance in the economy, will the league see more frugal owners, such as Donald Sterling of the Los Angeles Clippers or Bob Johnson of the Charlotte Bobcats, dump player salaries to cut costs? And if so, will the balance of power shift, as it often does in baseball, directly so that big spenders become instant contenders? With no foreseeable end to the economic recession in the immediate future, there are questions still remain to be answered. Ultimately, however, it appears that the economy will have an extraordinary impact on the operations of the NBA in the near future.

Rays Don't Come Up Empty Handed

Continued from Page 8

Rays' postseason success earned the players an average of \$580 thousand.

Traditionally, the Rays have been one of baseball's most financially downtrodden teams. In '08, the Rays had the 29th lowest payroll in the MLB at just under \$44 million, with an average salary of nearly \$1.75 million, well under the league average of \$2.8 million.³ And it's not as if they can afford to be more spend-thrifty, considering the fact that they ranked 27th in attendance the league this past season despite being one of baseball's youngest and most exciting teams.²

But this postseason most Rays nearly doubled their annual salary. It is incomprehensible how significant an average bonus of \$580 thousand is to them. Only nine of their players made over \$416 thousand per year on 2008. '08 ALCS MVP Matt Garza, for instance, made \$404 thousand last year, \$14,600 more than the league's minimum salary.⁶ After going 11-9 with a 3.70 ERA last season, the team certainly voted for him to receive his deserved share of the pie, and his salary likely doubled or tripled. Ditto for the team's would-be MVP, B.J. Upton, who helped the Rays reach the World Series by tying Troy Glaus' American League record for home runs in a single postseason with seven. He earned just \$412 thousand for his 2008 campaign. I'd bet Upton took home one of the fattest pieces of the cake.

It's safe to say that because of their astonishing postseason run, the Rays aren't as upset about their World Series loss as it may seem.

StatHead

Tyler Twilley

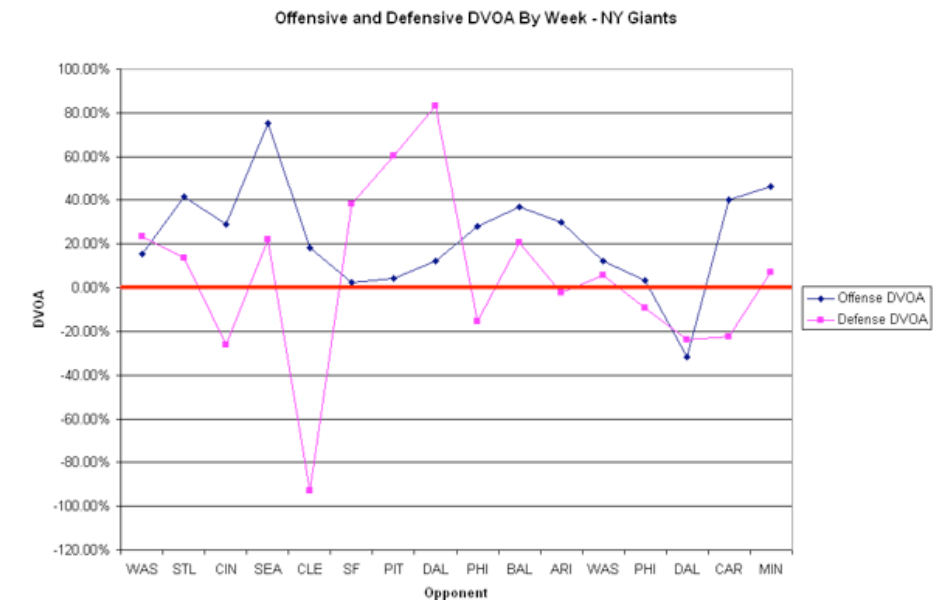
All Yards Are Not Created Equal

Thanks to sabermetrics disciples like Bill James and Billy Beane, baseball has become the sport best associated with advanced statistics. Other sports, though, are experiencing their own statistical revolutions, as those with the passion and time are finding ways to boil these sports down to an exact science. Football is no different. Football Outsiders, an advanced football statistics website partnered with ESPN and Pro Football Prospectus, may have found the next great football statistic: DVOA.

DVOA, or Defense-adjusted Value Over Average, is a general method of analyzing a player's performance in a way that extends beyond the reach of trading card

“By taking into account the context of a given play, a player's adjusted numbers can more accurately reflect their performance”

numbers. DVOA adds context, which makes all the difference when evaluating a player. The idea behind DVOA is that certain plays on a football field are more important than others, so a player's performance should be weighed differently depending on the situation. For example, a three yard rush on third-and-two for a first down is usually a more valuable contribution than a three yard rush on third-and-eight. By taking into account the context of a given play, a player's adjusted numbers can more accurately reflect their performance and their



contribution to their team's success.

DVOA also assigns each play a “success value” based on the total yards gained and the total yards gained towards a first down. This value is based on *The Hidden Game of Football*, a 1988 book that can be credited with sparking the debate on how to evaluate on-field performance. The authors claimed that a first down play should be considered a success if it gains 45 percent of yards needed. Second down plays should gain 60 percent of needed yards, and third and fourth down plays are only considered successful if they result in first downs. DVOA expands upon this by assigning points to each play based on the success of a play, giving extra points for big plays and taking away points for turnovers.

In evaluating every single play in the NFL, DVOA can provide an accurate measure of a player or

team's success. Not only does this help separate the fantasy football studs from the truly great players, it provides a way to compare players and teams across seasons, because the numbers reflect performance in comparison to the rest of the league. Additionally, by evaluating every play and grouping them into specific groups of situations (such as conversion percentage on third-and-nine plays and interceptions thrown on first down), DVOA is able to provide a more precise view of performance. It also enables players and coaches to improve upon situations in which they are less successful.

With individual players, DVOA is able to show a player's value on a per-play basis, while another number – Defense-adjusted Yards Above Replacement (DYAR) – shows the total value of a player.

Take running backs, for instance. In the 2008 season, Carolina Panthers running back DeAngelo Williams had the highest DYAR in the NFL, followed by New York Giants running back Brandon Jacobs. Using DVOA, Williams still rated as the top rusher in the league, but another Giants back, Derrick Ward, came in second.

Additionally, Football Outsiders created a category of stats – Weighted DVOA – that weighs recent games more heavily than games played earlier in the season. This can better reflect what teams are playing better in the present compared with teams, like the Buffalo Bills, that

DVOA may become the next default stat in football

started 5-1 but ended the season 7-9.

By DVOA standards, the best offenses in the league can expect a DVOA percentage of around 30%, while the worst offenses in the league can expect a DVOA percentage of -30%. For defenses, the scale is reversed, so a lower number represents a better defense. At the conclusion of the 2008 season, the New Orleans Saints and New York Giants had the best offenses in football, while the Pittsburgh Steelers and Baltimore Ravens had the best defenses. Using Weighted DVOA, the Saints and Indianapolis Colts have the best offenses in the league, while the Steelers and Philadelphia Eagles have the best defenses in the league.

Football Outsiders have a plethora of new and in-depth statistics that provide a more objective view of football, with DVOA being the cornerstone stat. More and more baseball fans are using “on-base plus slugging” in the same way as they use batting average when talking about baseball. Perhaps, years down the road, DVOA will be the default statistic when discussing football players and teams.

Fantasy

Need A Good Pitcher? Look at K/BB & HR Rate

Mathew Sevin

Most major league baseball fans evaluate pitchers in baseball using statistics that are inefficient. I'm afraid that baseball writers and

GMs fall into the same trap as well. When drafting a team, fantasy owners try to predict how individual players will perform in the upcoming season. Yet baseball writers continue to evaluate pitchers based on outdated statistics whose results can be affected by a pitcher's teammates. For instance, Jayson Stark, a lead sports writer for ESPN, says in his *Hot Stove* article from December 3, 2008, “Sanchez more closely resembles the Sanchez of the first half (8-5, 3.97 ERA) than the second half (1-7, 7.47).” Here he is referring to Giants pitcher Jonathon Sanchez. The two statistics Stark is using as shorthand for evaluating a pitcher is his win vs. loss record, and his earned run average.

For a while, it seemed a pitcher's win vs. loss record was the most telling measure. Mr. Stark probably knows, but all baseball enthusiasts may not, that this stat says little about the pitcher's effectiveness. A pitcher may throw a good game and have poor defense and bad offense on his side, resulting in a loss. On the contrary, another pitcher can pitch poorly and win because his team put up a football score on offense and played like they had rockets up their butts when snagging line drives.

Furthermore, one category that is in almost every fantasy league for pitching is wins. Therefore, fantasy leagues and owners are overvaluing a pitcher's supporting cast and luck. Another unreliable pitching stat is earned run average (ERA). Even today, a pitcher is commonly evaluated

by this statistic, which measures how many runs the pitcher gives up on average per nine innings. While this statistic is more reliable than a pitcher's winning percentage, it still does not eliminate factors such as poor defense and small ballparks. Poor defense behind a pitcher can lead to an inflated earned run average for a pitcher. If a team has a slow defense, certain balls put in play could be hits counted against the pitcher that would have been converted as outs by a quicker defense. While runs scored on errors are not charged to a pitcher's earned run average, hits that could have been outs are still counted against the pitcher rather than the fielder (see Jeff Lebow's article on the Tampa Bay Defense if you want proof). Also, an earned run average can be affected by ballpark size. Smaller ballparks yield more homeruns, adversely affecting the pitcher's ERA.

Thus ERA should also be a category not considered as important as it used to be. Maybe the category should be worth half of command and homerun rate, because it is still an important measure of a pitcher over an extended period of time, rather than over the season. The reason why ERA is a reliable statistic over a pitcher's career are that the variables that adversely affect ERA often come back to the mean or league average. For instance, it is rare that a pitcher will pitch in the same ballpark or for a poor defensive team his entire career. Thus earned run average eventually comes to show the pitcher's ability to limit

another team from scoring.

Last, WHIP (walks + hits / innings pitched) is unreliable because as aforementioned, hits are not a statistic controllable by the pitcher. The two most important stats in evaluating a pitcher are homeruns given up (per inning is preferable, although per start seems reliable as well) and strikeout to walk ratio. The pitcher dictates these statistics. When a pitcher gives up a homerun, it's generally his fault. Also, a homerun is rarely affected by bad defense. Jose Canseco, are you listening? Thus it is almost always the pitchers fault. Furthermore, a homerun is a worst possible outcome for a pitcher after a plate appearance. Pitchers who give up very few homeruns can actually afford more base runners, as I will demonstrate with the example of two starters who emerged as aces this season. The second statistic, strikeout to walk ratio, is also almost only dictated by the pitcher. He decides whether to throw a ball or strike.

Two aces emerged in the 2008 baseball season that had poor WHIPs and command ratios and still managed to be effective. The first example of a guy who liked to load 'em up and sit 'em down was Daisuke Matsuzaka. Our new, wealthy, immigrant friend posted a "brilliant" season according to statistics from long ago, going 18-3 with a 2.90 era. One may think this dominance came from good control or limiting base runners. In 2008, Daisuke posted a 1.32 WHIP, which is quite poor. That means for every inning he pitched, he averaged 1.32 walks or hits. The league average WHIP was 1.39, making Daisuke barely better than average. The league leader posted a 1.05 WHIP. What Daisuke did, though, was only allow 12 homeruns in 29 starts, whereas in 2007 he gave up 25 homeruns in 32 starts. This difference was the main reason Matsuzaka's ERA lowered, and his winning percentage improved. To note how important limiting homeruns is, also, Matsuzaka walked 94 batters



in 167 innings this season, while he walked only 80 in 204.2 innings in 2007. Even though his control worsened, he still achieved greater success by keeping the ball in the yard.

Another pitcher who had a breakout season because of his ability to limit homeruns was Mets starting pitcher Mike Pelfrey. Pelfrey nearly mirrored Matsuzaka, posting a mediocre 1.36 WHIP. Nevertheless, Pelfrey allowed only 12 homeruns in 32 innings. Mike throws what Mets announcers call a "bowling ball fastball" (in reference to its dramatic, heavy movement). While the pitch is hard to control, it is very effective, and is as important to fantasy owners and baseball general managers as the bread on their table (and maybe even their first born).

Equally as important as homeruns allowed is a pitcher's command. If homeruns allowed is the jelly, command is the peanut butter. A pitcher has the ability to decide whether he throws a ball or a strike, and thus strikeout to walk ratio is very much telling of a pitcher's ability to throw the ball where he wants. In evaluating young starters, my advice is

to always make sure they have at least a 3:1 K/BB ratio. Unless they truly keep the ball in the park like Pelfrey or Dice-K (a rarity), this 3:1 rule is a good benchmark.

A young pitcher may come into the league and get lucky with winning percentage and ERA and you may think you are watching something special. But I call this the Zach Duke virus (note: if you are infected, Gannett is giving out free shots). When Zach came into the league, he posted a 1.81 era in 14 starts for Pittsburgh in 2005. What fans did not see behind the mask was an ugly 2.5:1 K/BB ratio, and a mediocre 6 strikeouts per 9 innings pitched. The next season, Zach's numbers were uglier than Britney without hair. He posted a 4.47 era in 215 innings pitched because of a horrific 1.8:1 K/BB ratio. He also had a 1.5 WHIP, which led many 11 year olds to question the bane of their fantasy existence.

The king of command (and the new king of queens) is Johan Santana. But he is too much fun to play with, so let us look at his predecessor Francisco Liriano, who went unnoticed by fantasy owners when first breaking into the big leagues. In 2005, Liriano pitched in six games, starting four of them. According to the statistics from the 1600's, Liriano went 1-2 with a 5.70 ERA. Unless you read his scouting report (I too have better things to do with my time... wait I read it) you wouldn't have drafted him in fantasy leagues. When looking at the statistics I prefer, you'll see an almost 5:1 K/BB ratio in his 23.2 innings. He struck out 33 batters and walked 7 during this time. In his next season, Liriano went 12-3 with a 2.16 ERA. Now even those numbers would have pleased the outdated fantasy categories if fantasy owners had noticed these trends.

There are two caveats in utilizing homerun rate and strikeout to walk ratio. First, homeruns can be highly influenced by the ballpark the

pitcher plays in. We can all sympathize with the 15 homeruns Cole Hamels surrendered in Citizens Bank Park this year, as the ballpark dimensions are very small. Second, with young pitchers, do not necessarily look at K/BB as the most important factor. Generally, command comes with confidence. Look to see if they are under a good pitching coach, if they have a high strikeout rate, and a low homerun rate. Unless you are dealing with Cole Hamels, you probably will see delayed great command.

Now, it should be noted how these statistics affect your fantasy categories. If your league asks for wins, saves, ERA, K's and WHIP, you should not only consider the command and homerun rate. The pitcher's team offense will be important towards wins and saves. But, realistically, beg your fantasy commissioners to change the categories. The five categories considered should be strikeouts, walks (the fewer the better), homeruns allowed (the fewer the better), innings pitched, and quality starts + saves per week (A minimum of 6 innings pitched and maximum of 3 earned runs). By having quality starts plus saves, you are virtually continuing the tradition of wins and saves. However, the two categories will be condensed into one, and quality starts replaces wins.

Hopefully, homerun rate and strikeout to walk ratio will be the most common statistics for pitchers in the media. They are more valid and better predictors of performance. It also would be worth making a general benchmark for a good homerun rate. In my next article I may make an equation combining strikeout to walk ratio and homerun rate, while taking away ballpark effect. And to fantasy owners; beware of how effective these statistics are for predicting future performance. Also, try and keep in mind how these statistics affect your current categories, while asking your commissioners to be progressive and to implement these new, more influential categories.

The Future of the NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement

Michael Braverman

Over the past decade, the National Football League has enjoyed unprecedented and unmatched success in the form of popularity, television ratings, attendance, and merchandise sales. But the NFL's ascendancy to the throne of professional sports may be forgotten by 2011. And if that is the case, the league and its players will have nothing to blame but the collective bargaining agreement set forth in March of 2006.

Under the current labor deal, teams will operate with a salary cap for the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 seasons. If there is no new agreement reached by the end of the 2009-2010 season, the 2010-2011 season—the last one before the contract expires—will be played without a salary cap. This is a nightmare scenario for both owners and fans, as there are ample fears about whether players would be able to return to a salary cap system after experiencing life without it.

Many attribute the NFL's unparalleled parity—undoubtedly a factor in its popularity—to the existence of its stringent salary cap system. Unlike Major League Baseball—where the powerful Players Union has resisted the replacement of the lax “luxury tax” system—there are few “evil empires” in football. Any NFL team can beat another, and the turnaround from year to year can be dramatic as there is more emphasis on the draft than free agency. The NFC South is the perfect case study for this—from 2003-2008, the team that won the division had finished last the previous year. The “hard cap” system—which greatly decreases the amount owners must pay to manage their teams—has also contributed to the belief that the NFL is professional sports' most stable league. Football teams are a highly desirable purchase, as potential buyers can be assured that the cost

of actually operating the team will never dramatically increase. The salary cap also means that money that would otherwise have been in players' pockets will be allocated elsewhere, such as towards investments in new stadiums and the league's aggressive image expansion.

The benefits of a salary cap for the owners and fans are evident, but not all agree with it—a majority of players are surely yearning for change. Players have a career of uncertainty—one devastating injury or blunder can erase their source of income, as most of the money in NFL contracts are not guaranteed. With the bidding wars that would result from the lack of a salary cap, owners would have to make more concessions, particularly on the issue of guaranteed contracts. Players argue that because they play in the most physical of professional sports, they should be afforded the same job security as their counterparts in other leagues. Gene Upshaw, the late director of the NFL Players Association, stated explicitly in May of this year, “If we ever get beyond [the uncapped year], we're not going back [to a salary cap system]” (“For NFL, A Collective Disagreement”, Washington Times, 05/23/2008).

But few believe that the owners would sign off on an agreement that did not include a salary cap. With no system in place and skyrocketing costs for operating an organization, owners will lose the likelihood that someone else will always want to buy their team. With the current dismal state of the economy, that is a risk that few owners would be willing to take.

As if there were not enough systemic problems to this labor stalemate, it must be added that the NFLPA has no firm leadership after the tragic death of its leader of twenty-five years. The Association will be sending its interim executive director,

Richard Berthelsen, to the bargaining table, but he is in an unfavorable negotiating position of being a lame-duck executive. The NFLPA has not given any indication as to who will take over for the long term.

There is still hope that an agreement will be reached before the all-important 2010-2011 season, but it is hard to track the progress of the negotiations as the league's owners have kept a tight lip. As the threat of a lockout in 2011 looms large, the future is uncertain for the NFL. Enjoy it while you can.

Five Ways The Left Tackle Has Evolved

Matthew Morgante

As every quarterback in the NFL drops back to pass, a myriad of options fly through his head at lightning speed. The quarterback must consider what defense the opposition is running, which of his receivers will subsequently be open, and how long he has until he must throw the ball. As offensive systems in football have developed, so has the importance of certain skill positions. But one unsung hero of any offense is the one person who the quarterback often does not see as he drops back. The left tackle has become an integral part of any team, and the position's development has altered the sport of football through increases in salaries and positions on draft boards. the expansion of the spread offense, and their future as protectors of Quarterbacks. Here are the five ways in which the left tackle has changed football:

1. **Salary:** Left tackles have seen dramatic increases in their pay since executives and coaches started to appreciate their rare set of skills and size on the field. In 2007, the average starting left tackle was the second highest paid position in the sport, making 4 million dollars per season, while the average player made \$770,000 dollars. Whereas in 1980 the average salary for any player in the NFL was \$78,657, starting left tackles made just below \$100,000. Now, their salary is more than 4 times the league average.

2. **Draft Picks:** General Managers have also seen the enhanced values of tackles and drafted them higher and higher over the course of the last 20 years. In 1980, 17 tackles were taken in the entire draft, and just two in the first round. In the 2008 draft, 29 tackles were taken overall, and a gaudy seven of them were first rounders including the number one overall selection Jake Long. The development of the spread offense to the college level has enabled NFL scouts to observe collegiate lineman in similar situations to ones they would have to face on the professional level. Thus, executives across the board have more confidence in taking an offensive lineman with a higher draft pick.

3. **Spread Offense Expansion:** The development of the spread offense has changed football. Teams like the Tennessee Titans and Ohio State Buckeyes have proven that offenses can still achieve success with traditional styles of primarily running the ball in heavy sets with two tight ends and a fullback while only passing the ball occasionally. However, as a whole, teams with proven athletes and spread systems have established themselves as the new norm at all levels of football competition. Offensive coordinators have spread the field from sideline to sideline with more receivers and thus, more passing. When teams pass more frequently, the value of the left tackle increases.



4. Future: The future of the left tackle position is still a mixed bag. But if spread offenses continue to be as potent as they are today, there is no doubt that left tackles will continue their current pace as the second most important position on any football field. However, many football strategists claim there could be a sudden decrease in demand for left tackles in the near future. Many general managers who have spent millions of dollars on first round offensive lineman only to see them fizzle out after a couple years claim that the skill required to be proficient at any position on the offensive line is so minimal that they are not worth the current contracts and salaries they receive. Instead, some have proposed that it is more important for a team to not have a weak link at any position along the offensive line as opposed to simply obtaining a superstar left tackle.

5. Blindside: The development of the left tackle has not gone without notice from the mainstream media and many football experts. In 2006, sports author Michael Lewis' bestseller, The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game, was the first book about the specific development of left tackles. Lewis, by analyzing the development and increased scouting of left tackles, produced the first highly publicly celebrated work about the development of the left tackle in football. Throughout the novel, Lewis alternates back and forth between the story of the development of the spread offense in professional football and the story of one young high school left tackle recruit. Both stories value the importance of having a big, strong, athletic left tackle.

Fixing A Broken System

Should College Athletes Be Paid?

Shaun Werbelow

Ask most administrators, educators, parents, and even students, and they will claim that you cannot put a price on the value of a college education. In a society that is becoming highly specialized, during a time where the job market is ferociously competitive, it has become almost a necessity to possess a bachelor's degree for career purposes. However, attending college has implicit value that far surpasses the added inflation to one's salary. For many, college is a crucial maturation period and the essential transition into independent adulthood. Given increased freedom as well as responsibility, those four years often play a defining role in a student's life. To be realistic, the decision and even option to attend college is not always so cut and dry. Furthermore, there are a lot of distinguished and successful individuals who intentionally bypass college, and far more individuals who attend college yet never mature or prosper. However, the intentions of this article are not to debate whether it is actually beneficial and necessary to attend college. Rather, I would like to examine a unique case – the student athlete faced with the decision of “turning pro”.

If someone offered you \$1 million to drop out of school next week to play a professional sport, what would you do? What about \$5 million or \$10 million? If you were offered the opportunity to live in a large house, drive a fancy car, and spend every week traveling, all without needing to pick up a textbook or enter a library, would you even think twice? These questions are not just hypothetical, and actually become real decisions that many college athletes must ponder.



“If someone offered you \$1 million to drop out of school next week to play a professional sport what would you do?”

The choice most of us would make seems obvious- drop out of school and take the cash. However, the implications of such a decision are much more complex than they appear. The long-term effects of opting out of college are often overlooked, and are factors that college athletes must consider when the temptations of fame and riches become an imminent reality.

Though somewhat obvious, it is important to acknowledge the benefits afforded to an individual when choosing to leave college and turn pro. College athletes who are given the chance to turn pro receive multimillion dollar endorsement deals, contracts, and often fame. Players also receive minimum salaries in the hundreds of thousands, such as in the MLB where the minimum salary is \$390,000. Furthermore, turning pro is often an opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream for many college athletes. If one feels that they have mastered college athletics it seems natural to assume the challenge of professional athletics. Although there are many ways in which athletes benefit from leaving college to pursue a professional

career, there are many more costs and potential downsides to this decision.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) states that around 1% of college athletes become professional athletes. Even if a college athlete is fortunate enough to turn pro, there is no guarantee of a long and prosperous career. Many rookies sign partial or non guaranteed contracts in which their salary is only procured after meeting certain performance standards. Furthermore, as injuries are a regular part of professional sports, players who leave college early have no degree to fall back on if their career ends short due to injury. Many people also believe that one can always return to school to complete their degree later in life. However, this is a somewhat rare phenomenon, and it becomes increasingly difficult to do so if one has a spouse, children, or has been removed from the classroom setting for an extended period of time. Regardless of the costs and benefits, it is a reality that most college athletes with the opportunity choose to turn professional and forego graduation. Therefore, it is important to analyze the system, and examine why college athletes are subjected to financial constraints and limited options. Athletes, under NCAA rules, are prohibited from receiving financial gifts, endorsement contracts, or benefiting from any commercial sponsorship that results in profit on behalf of the student. Such rules are strictly enforced, as University of Colorado football player Jeremy Bloom learned when he lost his eligibility to play football after endorsing skiing products.

In a more unique scenario, University of Oklahoma baseball player Aaron Adair was shocked at the NCAA's decision to deem him ineligible because he profited from a published book he wrote documenting his fight against brain cancer. As a result of such strict rules, every year there are multiple investigations

and scandals regarding financial gifts or donations given to college athletes. Some of the most notable and recent controversies include those surrounding Reggie Bush and O.J. Mayo.

Although there is steadfast effort to prevent college athletes from reaping any financial benefit from their performance, colleges and universities themselves take full advantage of any potential income generated by the students. Through advertising, corporate sponsorships, media attention, and general revenue, the schools themselves benefit significantly from star college athletes. It is difficult to put an exact numerical value on a specific college athlete, but athletes such as J.J. Redick, Carmelo Anthony, and Tim Tebow often become trademarks of individual athletic programs. Extraordinary individual players undeniably bring increased attention and revenue to a school. It seems hypocritical

“The NCAA should revise its rules to allow students to receive monetary compensation”

that schools prohibit students from accumulating financial wealth, while the school itself benefits significantly. Furthermore, individuals in other areas outside of athletics are not restricted from financial benefits even though they generate revenue for the university, such as those students who do research and produce publications. Why has this become such an important and controversial issue? The answer lies in the fact that the number of athletes who are leaving school early to pursue a professional career has increased significantly. Some professional sports have even attempted to address the situation by requiring college athletes to attend school for a minimum number of years before becoming eligible to turn pro.

However, there is no solution within the current system. The violations and instances of students receiving illegal gifts had gained national attention. There is a crucial need for the NCAA to adjust its rules and regulations to allow student athletes to benefit financially from their performance and image. There are significant benefits from attending college and obtaining a degree that many student athletes choose to forego due to the pressure and restraints of the current NCAA rules. It is both hypocritical and unreasonable for the NCAA to prevent student athletes from financially benefiting as a result of their own achievements. The NCAA should revise its rules to allow students to receive monetary compensation in the forms of marketing deals, sponsorship contracts, endorsements, etc. College athletics, as well as the individual lives of many athletes, would benefit as a result.



