



Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game

By Michael Lewis

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Moneyball is a quest for the secret of success in baseball. Following the low-budget Oakland Athletics, their larger-than-life general manager, Billy Beane, and the strange brotherhood of amateur baseball enthusiasts, Michael Lewis has written not only "the single most influential baseball book ever" (Rob Neyer, *Slate*) but also what "may be the best book ever written on business" (*Weekly Standard*).

"I wrote this book because I fell in love with a story. The story concerned a small group of undervalued professional baseball players and executives, many of whom had been rejected as unfit for the big leagues, who had turned themselves into one of the most successful franchises in Major League Baseball. But the idea for the book came well before I had good reason to write it—before I had a story to fall in love with. It began, really, with an innocent question: how did one of the poorest teams in baseball, the Oakland Athletics, win so many games?"

With these words Michael Lewis launches us into the funniest, smartest, and most contrarian book since, well, since *Liar's Poker*. *Moneyball* is a quest for something as elusive as the Holy Grail, something that money apparently can't buy: the secret of success in baseball. The logical places to look would be the front offices of major league teams, and the dugouts, perhaps even in the minds of the players themselves. Lewis mines all these possibilities—his intimate and original portraits of big league ballplayers are alone worth the price of admission—but the real jackpot is a cache of numbers—numbers!—collected over the years by a strange brotherhood of amateur baseball enthusiasts: software engineers, statisticians, Wall Street analysts, lawyers and physics professors.

What these geek numbers show—no, prove—is that the traditional yardsticks of success for players and teams are fatally flawed. Even the box score misleads us by ignoring the crucial importance of the humble base-on-balls. This information has been around for years, and nobody inside Major League Baseball paid it any mind. And then came Billy Beane, General Manager of the Oakland Athletics.

Billy paid attention to those numbers —with the second lowest payroll in baseball at his disposal he had to—and this book records his astonishing

experiment in finding and fielding a team that nobody else wanted. *Moneyball* is a roller coaster ride: before the 2002 season opens, Oakland must relinquish its three most prominent (and expensive) players, is written off by just about everyone, and then comes roaring back to challenge the American League record for consecutive wins.

In a narrative full of fabulous characters and brilliant excursions into the unexpected, Michael Lewis shows us how and why the new baseball knowledge works. He also sets up a sly and hilarious morality tale: Big Money, like Goliath, is always supposed to win...how can we not cheer for David?

"One of the best baseball—and management—books out....Deserves a place in the Baseball Hall of Fame."—*Forbes*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Billy Beane, general manager of MLB's Oakland A's and protagonist of Michael Lewis's *Moneyball*, had a problem: how to win in the Major Leagues with a budget that's smaller than that of nearly every other team. Conventional wisdom long held that big name, highly athletic hitters and young pitchers with rocket arms were the ticket to success. But Beane and his staff, buoyed by massive amounts of carefully interpreted statistical data, believed that wins could be had by more affordable methods such as hitters with high on-base percentage and pitchers who get lots of ground outs. Given this information and a tight budget, Beane defied tradition and his own scouting department to build winning teams of young affordable players and inexpensive castoff veterans.

Lewis was in the room with the A's top management as they spent the summer of 2002 adding and subtracting players and he provides outstanding play-by-play. In the June player draft, Beane acquired nearly every prospect he coveted (few of whom were coveted by other teams) and at the July trading deadline he engaged in a tense battle of nerves to acquire a lefty reliever. Besides being one of the most insider accounts ever written about baseball, *Moneyball* is populated with fascinating characters. We meet Jeremy Brown, an overweight college catcher who most teams project to be a 15th round draft pick (Beane takes him in the first). Sidearm pitcher Chad Bradford is plucked from the White Sox triple-A club to be a key set-up man and catcher Scott Hatteberg is rebuilt as a first baseman. But the most interesting character is Beane himself. A speedy athletic can't-miss prospect who somehow missed, Beane reinvents himself as a front-office guru, relying on players completely unlike, say, Billy Beane. Lewis, one of the top nonfiction writers of his era (*Liar's Poker*, *The New New Thing*), offers highly accessible explanations of baseball stats and his roadmap of Beane's economic approach makes *Moneyball* an appealing reading experience for business people and sports fans alike. --John Moe

From Publishers Weekly

Lewis (*Liar's Poker*; *The New New Thing*) examines how in 2002 the Oakland Athletics achieved a spectacular winning record while having the smallest player payroll of any major league baseball team. Given the heavily publicized salaries of players for teams like the Boston Red Sox or New York Yankees, baseball insiders and fans assume that the biggest talents deserve and get the biggest salaries. However, argues Lewis, little-known numbers and statistics matter more. Lewis discusses Bill James and his annual stats newsletter, *Baseball Abstract*, along with other mathematical analysis of the game. Surprisingly, though, most managers have not paid attention to this research, except for Billy Beane, general manager of the A's and a former player; according to Lewis, "[B]y the beginning of the 2002 season, the Oakland A's, by winning so much with so little, had become something of an embarrassment to Bud Selig and, by extension, Major League Baseball." The team's success is actually a shrewd combination of luck, careful player choices and Beane's first-rate negotiating skills. Beane knows which players are likely to be traded by other teams, and he manages to involve himself even when the trade is unconnected to the A's. "'Trawling' is what he called this activity," writes Lewis. "His constant chatter was a way of keeping tabs on the body of information critical to his trading success." Lewis chronicles Beane's life, focusing on his uncanny ability to find and sign the right players. His descriptive writing allows Beane and the others in the lively cast of baseball characters to come alive.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

The Oakland Athletics have reached the post-season playoffs three years in a row, even though they spend

just one dollar for every three that the New York Yankees spend. Their secret, as Lewis's lively account demonstrates, is not on the field but in the front office, in the shape of the general manager, Billy Beane. Unable to afford the star hires of his big-spending rivals, Beane disdains the received wisdom about what makes a player valuable, and has a passion for neglected statistics that reveal how runs are really scored. Beane's ideas are beginning to attract disciples, most notably at the Boston Red Sox, who nearly lured him away from Oakland over the winter. At the last moment, Beane's loyalty got the better of him; besides, moving to a team with a much larger payroll would have diminished the challenge.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daniel Moore:

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