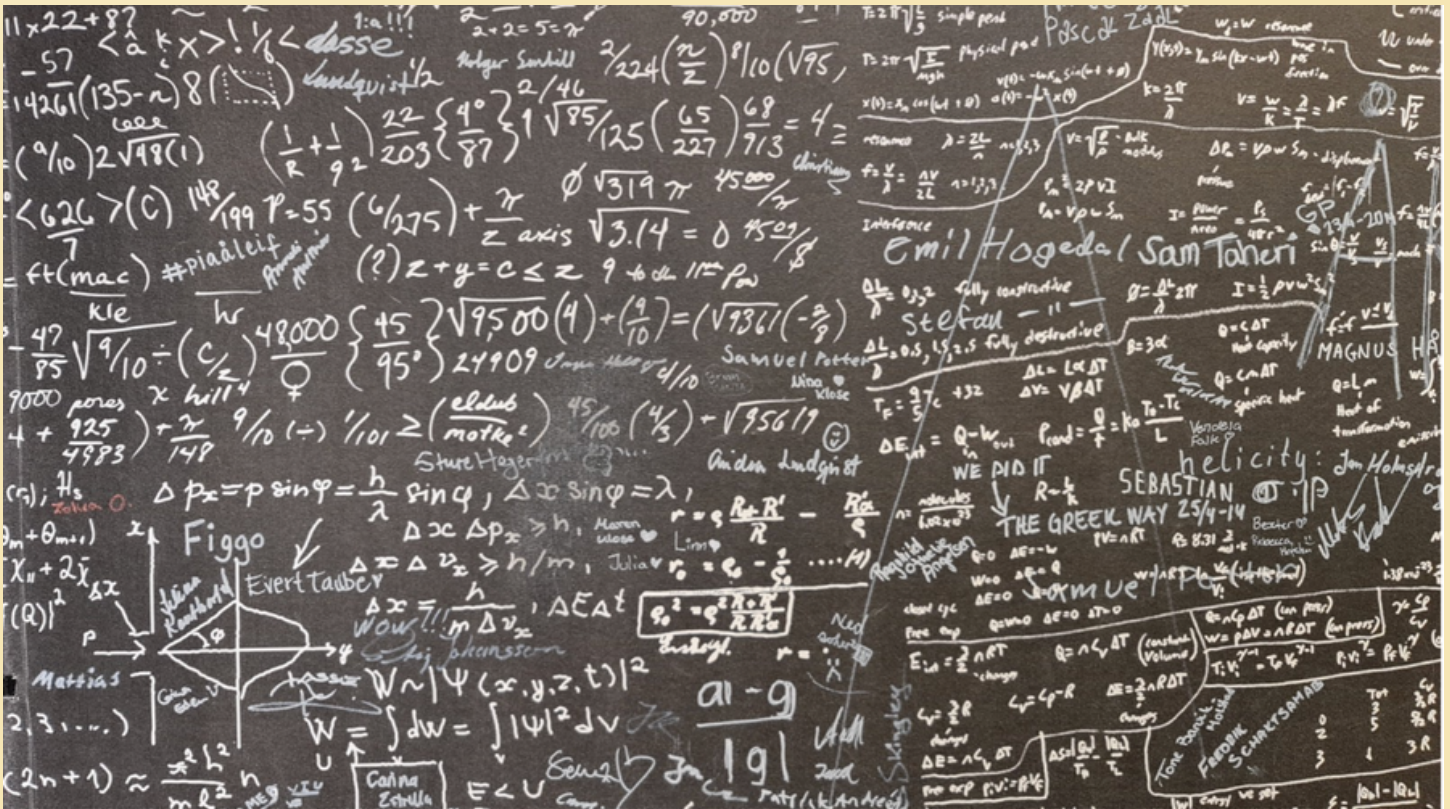




TWIN CITIES ORTHOPEDICS

PRESENTS

ANALYTICS - WHERE IT BEGAN FOR ME AND WHERE THE GAME IS HEADED



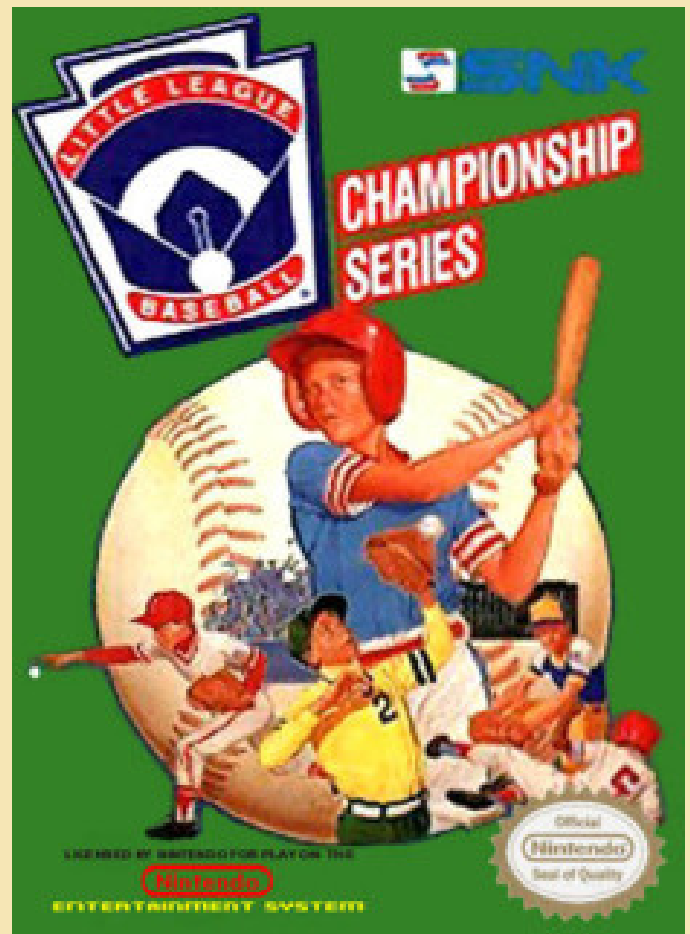
**BY MICHAEL
IVERSON**

MNBA.BLIZZARDELITEBASEBALL.COM



@BLIZZARDBASEBALL

Analytics, statistics, tracking and where the obsession all began for me. Back in the early 90's when I was not meeting friends at the Eau Claire North high school baseball fields or the field by my parents' house off Riverview Drive to play home-run derby or a "game" (only needed 3 people) I would play Little League Baseball on Nintendo. The video game was much different than those of today. I had a spiral notebook, and I would play a 162-game season (preferred Hawaii, Texas and Chinese Taipei as my teams) where I wrote down all the statistics after every at-bat or pitch. The game did not do it for you, and I tracked everything from power numbers to averages to everything associated with pitching. It was at this age of 12 where I became enthralled in the numbers game. I can honestly say to this day there are few things I do where I'm not internally keeping score tracking statistics as in my eyes someone wins every



competition. Statistics or math in general tells a story and although you might not like what you see it is pretty cut and dry. In art everyone can interpret a painting differently, or a song can signal a different emotion but $2+2$ is always going to equal 4. You can call it a curse, obsession, or OCD but numbers for the most part tell a factual story (in math there is no "gray" area). When it came to my own little league, prep, babe-ruth, high school and legion seasons I would track the same numbers on paper as there was no such thing as Game Changer, HitTrax, etc. My junior legion coach Jim Burian did provide statistics at the end of the year and even though I knew this was coming I kept my own to compare the two.

In high school I am convinced my coaches were "feel" coaches. The last thing they were concerned with were numbers, they went by there gut and what they saw at practice. I still address them as coach McHorney and coach Nic, the great coaches will impact you for a lifetime. In the early summer of 1998 following my freshman year of varsity baseball at Eau Claire Regis., myself along with two teammates (Ben Morrison and Adam Olson) went to Carson Park to try out for Eau Claire Pizza Hut Legion team. The tryout consisted of 100+ kids from Eau Claire, Altoona, Elk Mound, Fall Creek and other neighboring towns ranging from a few other freshmen to mostly upper class-man. I was not a strong hitter at that age but wanted to show what I could do on the mound. The nerd inside of me really geeked out when I discovered a police officer (dad of a player trying out) let the team use his radar gun to clock the pitchers. Again, pocket radar and parents owning radar guns was not a thing a little over twenty years ago. To say I was ecstatic to know what I threw was an understatement. You only saw velocity on the college world series and little league world series on tv. I was able to top out at 79 mph during the tryout. Although this velocity

was not enough to make the team my first time trying out it was a way for the evaluators to see we had more than enough talent in the area to start a junior legion team. The summer of 1998 marked the first time Eau Claire had a Senior legion team and a junior legion team, roughly 30 total players and the remaining players were cut. This tryout marked our first experience of seeing our velocity on a radar gun and is where year after year I started to see the shift to what the game is today.

In 1999 the movie for Love of the Game was released with Kevin Costner. He is out on a date with Jane, who knew nothing about baseball and was shocked at what was tracked.

Jane Aubrey: Do you lose very much?

Billy Chapel: I lose. I've lost 134 times.

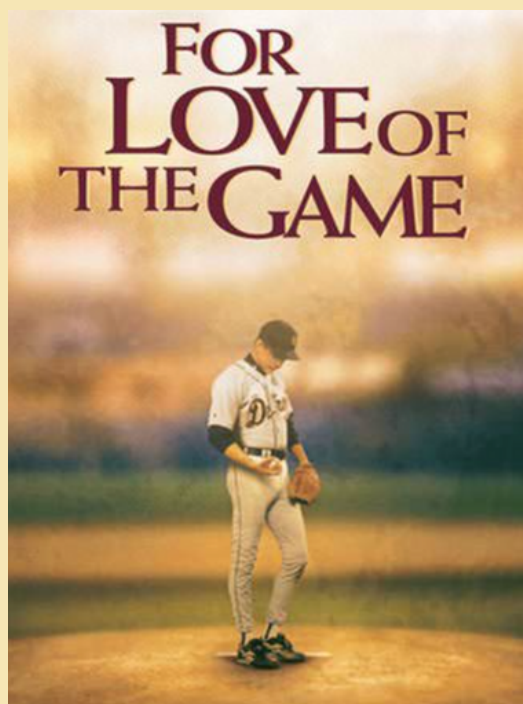
Jane Aubrey: You count them?

Billy Chapel: We count everything.

In selecting the school, the most important aspect to me was volume! I wanted a chance to play right away, and I wanted to play the most games possible. After a visit to Southwest Missouri State on our way home my family drove through La Crosse, WI. In my opinion La Crosse is a spitting image of Eau Claire. I ended up visiting Viterbo University (NAIA) and ultimately went to college there

after the coaches saw my high school team play La Crosse Aquinas. Viterbo played roughly 65 games a year while I was in college. The reason for the most games possible was it meant the most possible opportunities (example DIII can only schedule 40). I learned right away that everything is tracked in college. Every time we threw bullpens or games in the fall every pitch and the velocity was tracked. If you were a pitcher and you were not throwing you were tracking numbers. It would all go to the coaches at the end of the session, and I suspect they were analyzing the numbers. It was in college I met Blizzard Pitching Coach Ben Moore as we attended the same school. I will never forget our first college game together. I was a freshman that got to run the radar gun on the hillside at Campbellsville University in Kentucky. Ben (sophomore) got the first start and sat 91-94 mph on the radar gun on his way to victory. I was in complete aww over what I was witnessing. We would track velocity, spray charts of our opponents on paper, balls and strikes and of course scorebook. It probably will not be a shock if I told you I assisted with putting together stats for the coaching staff for all four years in various computer programs. I would create spreadsheets and analyze various things. I couldn't help myself then and I can't today I just like to see the numbers.

Fast forward roughly 20 years from my Nintendo days and the game is completely different. Twenty years ago, pitchers in high school were not throwing 90 mph and pitchers in college might touch 90. The athletes of today are bigger, faster, and stronger. The training is rigorous and never ending. You've got club teams playing top competition all over the country and showcases both scenarios did not exist. In today's game you've got so many specialty coaches to help you chase velo, apps that break down your



mechanics to find the weak spots, pocket radar and strength and conditioning coaches to work on your weak areas. On top of that you have tracking systems like PBR and PG that track everything and anyone can access the numbers to see where you stand. It's the evolution of the game and how technology has evolved. We simply didn't have the things that exist today.

Heck, if you haven't watched Money Ball look at how the Oakland Athletics analyzed players based on numbers. This is happening in every organization at this point. It is how they determine who they are keeping and who they release, who gets called up and who gets sent down. As a Brewers fan all I heard for years was how Rickie Weeks had all this potential, you blinked, and 10 years had passed, and the bottom line was he was a .240 hitter. The statistics told the story, the defense adjusted and shifted based on the analytics of what he had done. Yes, potential is a good thing but like art it is an unknown where hard evidence is going to paint a clearer picture.

For a while I was obsessed with reading about kids all over the country and the numbers they were putting up. I still do it because I find it fascinating but as a father with three kids, I must remind myself that everyone is on a different journey. I will say that you cannot get completely caught up in the numbers because one thing is for sure, having 100 mph exit velocity is awesome but if you can't hit in a game what good is it. Throwing a fastball 95 which seems to be the "norm" in baseball at this point is great, but you better be able to command it. At the end of the day, you still have to hit, still have to show up and ball out. The intangibles that are not tracked at showcases do matter, leadership, work ethic, etc. The game is hard enough but always remember to control what you can control. The little white ball is still the same as it was 100+ years ago but like art we all look at it and react differently which creates the numbers game based on results. Keep working hard, keep grinding and maybe you get to keep being part of the statistics of baseball! A couple parting thoughts from two of my favorites, Coach Bryan Sanchez and Crash Davis!

"I think analytics are very important. I am still not extremely educated yet, but I also don't think its rocket science. To me, it's just playing the numbers game. For example with the shift...will there still be balls that wouldn't been hit right at the SS that should be an out? yes. But there are a lot more ground balls hit up the middle that you are stealing outs on.

I like where the game is headed. I was very anti pitch clock at the beginning because I felt like we were tailoring the game to favor the common fan, which was going to ruin it for me as the die hard fan. I was completely wrong, lol. The part that really "got me" was the fact you can

go to a 1-0 game done and it can be done in 2 hours. Obviously the more fun game to go to is the 10-8 game, which will take longer but you're also seeing more action. The 1-0 games that took over 3 hours were the worst.

With all that being said, I still think the "eye test" is EXTREMELY important. Analytics can help with a lot but they can also "hide" an okay ballplayer in my opinion. Even watching basketball, and all the analytics that are in hoops now too I still think the eye test is a very important factor"

~Cole Albers~

"The game of baseball has evolved along side our rapid growth in technology just like every other sport. It will forever have its place in how we determine who's succeeding or not, or who could potentially succeed in the future. And like most people in the sport, there's a piece of us that love it because we can now point out the little things that matter in our sport. However, it can and is a slippery slope...it cannot be the ONLY tool used to determine success. There's something to be said about trusting your gut or trusting the work that someone has put in so that they have a chance to be successful. Sometimes you just gotta take a chance on someone, regardless of what the numbers say. Marcus Stroman is a perfect example. Numbers and stats can measure and tell you a lot...but it's tough to measure how bad you want to win, how much you're willing to sacrifice to get where you want to be personally or as a team. That's where I think we, as a sport, have started to fall short (Thanks Billy Beane lol). I think it's our duty as coaches, leaders, and mentors to real it in and learn how to properly combine the numbers and "our gut" so that the entire picture is being painted. That's a lot easier said than done...but it's do-able and that's all that matters." ~Bryan Sanchez~



"Know what the difference between hitting .250 and .300 is? It's 25 hits - 25 hits in 500 at-bats is 50 points. There's six months in a season, that's about 25 weeks. That means if you get just one extra flare a week - just one - you get a ground ball with eyes, you get a dying quail, just one more dying quail a week...and you're in Yankee Stadium"
Crash Davis - Bull Durham (1988)