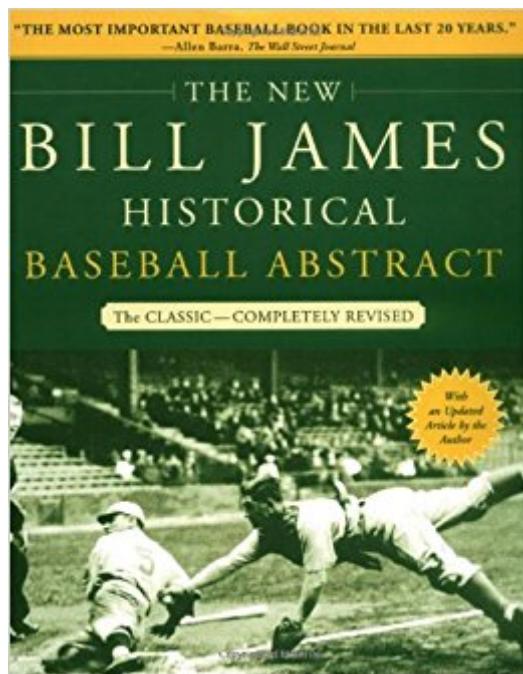


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The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract



Synopsis

When Bill James published his original Historical Baseball Abstract in 1985, he produced an immediate classic, hailed by the Chicago Tribune as the "holy book of baseball." Now, baseball's beloved "Sultan of Stats" (The Boston Globe) is back with a fully revised and updated edition for the new millennium. Like the original, The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract is really several books in one. The Game provides a century's worth of American baseball history, told one decade at a time, with energetic facts and figures about How, Where, and by Whom the game was played. In The Players, you'll find listings of the top 100 players at each position in the major leagues, along with James's signature stats-based ratings method called "Win Shares," a way of quantifying individual performance and calculating the offensive and defensive contributions of catchers, pitchers, infielders, and outfielders. And there's more: the Reference section covers Win Shares for each season and each player, and even offers a Win Share team comparison. A must-have for baseball fans and historians alike, The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract is as essential, entertaining, and enlightening as the sport itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A premier baseball analyst and brand name, James (The Bill James Player Ratings Book, The Bill James Guide to Baseball Managers) releases a revised edition of his 1985 classic, with expanded player and team histories and reconsidered commentary. Divided into two sections, "The Game" and "The Players," this comprehensive and opinionated tome describes the evolution of the sport over the decades (uniforms in the 1890s, best minor league teams of the 1930s, the Negro

Leagues, etc.) and the characteristics of its players (stats, injuries, habits and proclivities). The thumbnail player sketches in the second section (the 100 greatest players at each position) vary widely in content and tone: the entry on Lefty Gomez includes a page on his public-speaking abilities, while of Kevin Brown, James merely writes, "I don't root for him, either, but he is a great pitcher." (James has assigned the rankings according to a statistical rating formula he calls Win Shares, which he explains conceptually and mathematically.) The game section, though, is the standout. It may not contain detailed statistical leaders or standings for each year, or even who won each World Series, but it does offer information on new stadiums, the competitiveness of different leagues and shifts in the way the game was played. At the end of each chapter, a "decade in a box" lists major statistics and Jamesian awards, varying from the quantitative (the team with the best record) and the qualitative (the best switch hitter) to the quirky (the decade's ugliest player).

(Dec.) Forecast: There are enough baseball and Bill James fans to ensure steady sales, and the pub date near enough to the World Series might encourage a few extra readers. A uniquely personal, even iconoclastic guide, this belongs in baseball libraries to counterpoint *The Baseball Encyclopedia* and *Total Baseball*. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

True to form, James's new *Historical Baseball Abstract* is filled with often fascinating and frequently quirky evaluations and insights regarding the history of baseball. Starting with the 1870s, James explores, decade by decade, how and where the game was played and who played it. He discusses nicknames, top minor-league teams, and the most admirable superstars, among other matters. At the close of the initial 13 chapters, the author highlights each ten-year period "in a box," with a player or two tagged as the best-looking, the ugliest, the fastest, the slowest, and so forth. The last half of the book presents James's evaluations of the top 100 or more players at each position. Some are expected, with Lou Gehrig and Jimmie Foxx, for example, deemed the top first basemen. But Hank Greenberg is slotted in only at eighth place, and then James spends most of his time ragging on the great slugger's performance as the Cleveland Indians' general manager from 1949 to 1957. In other instances, the description of a player's on-field antics is melded with curious social commentary. All of this makes for a sometimes illuminating, occasionally exasperating book certain to engender controversy among baseball aficionados. For general libraries. R. C. Cottrell, California State Univ., Chico Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

After reading "Moneyball" by Michael Lewis, I believed I had struck major league nirvana. I didn't believe I would ever find a baseball book to equal it. With every bit of respect to Mr Lewis, Bill James 1000 page abstract is every bit the superior read to "Moneyball". The breadth of Mr. James historical knowledge, and his salient social observations combine with his knack for storytelling to make this an eye-opening, funny, treasure trove of baseball knowledge. He ranks the 100 best players at each position by virtue of a metric he has invented called a win-share. Furthermore, he has developed an algebraic formula whereby he can project players performances in the dead-ball eras into the live ball eras, and give comparable stats. Some of the player mini bios are sad, some hilarious, and some incredibly thoughtful. He interjects his experience as a Kansas City Athletic fan, and later, a Royal fan. The most interesting comparisons are in the pitching category, as there is so much completion from the top to bottom. The choices in the infield get thin down past number 50. The statistical performances are but a backdrop to each players actual value. There are some legitimate surprises. Jimmy Wynn is rated #10 in left field, despite a .250 lifetime batting average. Mercifully, this book was written in the late 1990's, before the ugliness of the steroid scandal skewed the real player values and lifetime achievements. At this writing, the damage done to baseball is just being sorted out from this chemical imbalance. I salute Mr. James for putting this in print, and if I met him tomorrow, would only be able to say "Wow!!".

If you are a baseball fanatic, if you love statistics, if you love nostalgia, then you'll absolutely love this book. My son loves all things baseball, and this book gives him hours and hours of baseball lore and statistics to ponder over. This is definitely for the passionate baseball fan, not for the casual reader. If you love baseball, baseball history, and baseball statistics, this is the book for you.

Excellent overview of baseball history from 1871 to 1999, along with dozens of descriptions and anecdotes of more than a thousand players in baseball history. The bulk of the book is dedicated to rating the hundred greatest players at each position. While excellent on its own merits, this section of the book is brought down a bit by the lack of a full description of the process by which these ratings are derived (purchasing James' Win Shares is essential to this knowledge). Additionally, 15 years of baseball and new research has made this section somewhat obsolete, though of course the descriptions of the players themselves is still excellent and informative. This might be the best book for a baseball fanatic who nevertheless doesn't have full knowledge of the grand overview of baseball history.

I know what to expect when I read a Bill James book--a good many nice anecdotes, lots of huffing and puffing about his view of how baseball has and should work, and some nifty new statistical formulae which are usually more miss than hit, but an honest try nonetheless. This book is no exception. The chapters on each decade are nice strolls down memory lane with some fun stories about some baseball characters. The details are often sketchy--he lists player names as winning the "O.J. Simpson Award" or "Best Curve Ball" or "Better Man than a Baseball Player," but usually doesn't tell us why the player(s) are bestowed these honors. Still, I found the "decades" section of the book to be interesting, even though the complete lack of proofreading mystifies me (in one paragraph, I'm referred to "page 000"). His self-exhaulted "Win Shares" formula, which he seems to have worked very hard to create, is a large part of the rest of the book. He goes over just why and how he doles out merits and demerits, ultimately computing a single Rotisserie dollar value for each player. There is a lot of arm waving and much hocus pocus and fudge factoring going on in this "statistic," and I'm not entirely sure I care all that much after all the adjustments he makes. But, like most of James' statistics, you can take home pieces of his analysis--like first basemen's unassisted putouts and assists to fielders other than the pitcher (though he misses the boat somewhat here, too)--and you get a good partial statistic or two. All in all, this is an interesting calculation, but not something I expect will sweep the baseball world. Finally, he uses these Win Shares and his own subjective thought processes to list the best 100 players at each position. The reading gets a bit tedious, but you'll often find a nugget within one of those vignettes, so if you're like me, you wind up reading all of them just trying to find where the "meat" of this book lies. I say it's a good one to check out in the library. If you're one who collects "statistical expository" books, go ahead and purchase it and you won't be too disappointed. This would have passed as a seminal work 20 years ago, but now we expect much more hard evidence and true statistics from sabermetricians. Bill is slipping a little.

All around great book for anyone who loves baseball and the history of baseball. Bill James has such an enjoyable writing style that is humorous and informative. He includes a lot of quirky baseball stories from every decade (up to the 90's) as well as new ways to look at the sport. One of the coolest parts of the book, in my opinion, is how for each decade he includes baseball book recommendations from that decade; I have already read some of his recommendations and found even more great books to read. If you love baseball, you'll love this book.

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