

## Late to the Game

**I HAVE A CONFESSION.** Baseball is not in my blood. Not in the way it is for most guys of my generation. I did not grow up collecting cards, memorizing stats, following teams, or worshiping baseball heroes. Sure, I played the game, but it wasn't a pretty sight. My dad got me on a Little League team once. I played bench. At the end of that humiliating season, my dad and I called a truce and left it at that. For me, the field of dreams was more about dreaming I was someplace else. Anyplace else.

It wasn't until my daughter Katie was born that all that changed. She's a thousand times more athletic than I, and she roped me into coaching her first softball team when she was 11. OK, so it was a team made up of little girls, most of them rookies, but it was daunting. Not only did I have to learn the game in a way I never had to before; I had to teach it. And we had a ball. We lost a lot, but we had a ball.

It was a crash course, precipitated and fueled by love. And in many ways, my ignorance as an adult was even more humiliating than it was as a kid. But this time I didn't care. It left me with a convert's appreciation for the game, but without the attendant database of stats and names and trivia that informs the casual expertise of so many die-hard baseball fans.

So now I watch baseball with pleasure. I couldn't tell you what the infield fly rule is without looking it up, I probably miss a few of the finer points of strategy, and I still don't pay much attention to the stats. But I'm a junior member of a season ticket pool for the Baltimore Orioles. I can watch a game and know exactly what's going on. I even played amateur softball down on the Ellipse by the White House with my fellow workers for a couple seasons, until my knees gave out. I wasn't nearly

as bad as I thought I'd be.

So even though I was able to read Michael Lewis's *Moneyball* with pleasure—not just because it's about baseball but because it's smart and funny and a great story—I had to approach Bill James with caution.

Bill James is the father of sabermetrics, the science of baseball statistics. If that sounds like an oxymoron, it isn't. Trust me. James eats, sleeps, and breathes baseball stats, and he writes about them with consummate skill. Everything I'd read about the man left the impression of a testy genius, someone who doesn't suffer fools gladly. And I—Mr. Baseball—was going to try to come up with intelligent questions nobody else had ever asked him before.

If this were a movie, I could tell you about how I succeeded beyond my wildest expectations, how I won his grudging respect and we became fast friends and pen pals. But no. He thought my questions were pretty lame, my insights mundane at best. But he answered the questions, and the results are in the story on Page 34. He didn't quite send me to the showers, but I watched this game from the dugout.

Maybe I shouldn't feel so bad. He was testy with the actuaries, too, as you'll see when you go to our exclusive feature on [www.contingencies.org](http://www.contingencies.org). And these are guys who know numbers, who know baseball, who speak the language like natives. And even those guys couldn't quite make the team. At least not in the Bigs. ☒

EDITOR

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