Hi. We have some news for you, first off. I'm Bill James, and I have re-assumed the position of editor of this publication. The basic reason for this is that Jim Baker has found it frustrating trying to keep enough material coming in, which is also the reason that there are only 14 pages in this issue. We are desperate for material, but (assuming I can get the pump running again) will make up for the short issue by doing a 26-page one some time, or 3 22-page ones, or something.

The 14 pages include two articles by Tony Formo, the text of a presentation delivered at the SABR convention on computers and baseball being the first (it begins on page 2), and the other a re-examination of some familiar thoughts about the potential uses of Project Scoresheet information, which begins on page 12. Dick O'Brien again chimes in with some most intriguing thoughts, this time about left-handed hitters being lowball hitters, etc (page 6), and Mike Kopf entertains us with a variety of reflections on pages 8-10. Page 11 is more of me.

It's a short issue but, I think, a pretty good one, would be excellent if the think piece and the wit were balanced by a good, 4-to-6 page, meat-and-decimals technical analysis of something. I return to a familiar question, which is "Why is it that people love to write, 10–20–, even 100-page letters to me arguing about some damn little thing, and will do weeks worth of research to back up their positions, but absolutely will not transfer those thoughts and that research into articles that would give their work a much wider exposure?" I've never understood that, but I can't accept it as inevitable, and thus I know that there is enough good work being done out there to much more than fill up these pages.

Best,

Bill James

Send all submissions to P.O. Box 171, Winchester, KS, 66097. Articles should be camera-ready.
FROM THE ARTICLE ABOUT LAST YEAR’S SABR CONVENTION IN THE APRIL 28TH Sports Illustrated IT SEEMS LIKE THERE WAS SOME FEELING THAT COMPUTERS ARE COMPLICATED AND OVERLY-PRECISE DEVICES FOR NUMBER CRUNCHING. IN KEEPING WITH THIS TALK BEING GROUPED WITH THE NON-TECHNICAL PRESENTATIONS I’D LIKE TO DISCUSS HOW COMPUTERS CAN MAKE IT A LOT MORE FUN BEING A BALLFAN (AND TO DO SO WITH MINIMAL MENTION OF MATHEMATICAL ANALYSIS).

WE ALL KNOW THAT COMPUTERS DO WONDERFUL THINGS WITH NUMBERS BUT PEOPLE FREQUENTLY FAIL TO REALIZE THAT THE STUFF WITH NUMBERS IS MERELY A SUBSET OF THE NEAT THINGS THAT CAN BE DONE DIDDLING INFORMATION OF MANY VARIETIES.

A DECADE AND A HALF AGO IT WAS PRETTY WELL NECESSARY TO HAVE SOME MATHEMATICAL SOPHISTICATION TO USE A COMPUTER. SINCE THEN MEGABUCKS HAVE BEEN MADE DEVELOPING COMPUTER USES FOR LITTLE KIDS AND INSECURITY SALESMEN. THE HARDWARE KEEPS GETTING LESS COMPLICATED TO USE AND THERE’S SO MUCH GOOD SOFTWARE AROUND THAT BEING ABLE TO PROGRAM IS OCCASIONALLY HANDY BUT BY NO MEANS ESSENTIAL.

THERE ARE PROGRAMS FOR SALE FOR UNDER $50 THAT SIMULATE BALLGAMES. THE COMPUTER BASEBALL PROGRAM I HAVE COMES WITH A LIBRARY OF TEAMS SO I CAN HAVE THE ’27 YANKEES PLAY THE ’56 DODGERS. PEOPLE CAN ALSO MAKE UP TEAMS (BY A PLAYER DRAFT OR WHATEVER) AND HAVE THEM PLAY. THIS HAS INTERESTING APPLICATIONS LIKE HAVING THE BLUE JAYS PLAY THEMSELVES USING DIFFERENT BATTING ORDERS TO SEE THE EFFECTS OF HAVING DAMASO GARCIA AND HIS GODAWFUL ON BASE PERCENTAGE BATTING LEAD-OFF OR LATER. YOU CAN MAKE UP LINE-UPS AND PUT ON PLAYS (LIKE BUNTS AND STEALS) AND MAKE SUBSTITUTIONS.

ONE OF THE THINGS A COMPUTER CAN BE IS A BUDDY THAT’S HAPPY TO HAVE A BALLGAME WITH YOU AT 3 A.M. IN THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY.

IN THE LATE ’60S I WAS IN THE FIRST WAVE OF GRAD STUDENTS TO HAVE ACCESS TO COMPUTERS AND DISCOVERED THAT A COMPUTER CAN BE A DEVICE FOR REMOVING ROUTINE SHITWORK FROM YOUR LIFE SO YOU CAN USE YOUR TIME FOR MORE CREATIVE ACTIVITIES. WHILE MY CLASSMATES WERE SPENDING HOURS AND HOURS ADDING UP COLUMNS OF NUMBERS AND THEN SQUARES THE NUMBERS AND ADDING THEM UP AGAIN I’D WRITE A PROGRAM THAT COULD DO THAT STUFF FOR ME (AND ALSO BE USEFUL FOR REPEATING SIMILAR OPERATIONS WITH DIFFERENT DATA).

SINCE THEN ELECTRONIC SPREADSHEETS HAVE BECOME STANDARD SOFTWARE FOR MICROCOMPUTERS. A SPREADSHEET IS AN EXPANDABLE GRID THAT CAN BE USED FOR DOING CALCULATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE YOU COULD HAVE ROWS FOR DIFFERENT PLAYERS AND HAVE THEIR HITS AND DOUBLES AND TRIPLES AND HOMERS IN COLUMNS. A SPREADSHEET COULD USE THAT INFORMATION TO CALCULATE SLUGGING PERCENTAGES WITHOUT YOUR HAVING TO DO ALL OF THE CALCULATIONS INDIVIDUALLY.

A SPREADSHEET (OR A CUSTOM-MADE PROGRAM) COULD SAVE HOURS REPEATING THE SAME CALCULATIONS FOR FANTASY LEAGUES. BECAUSE COMPUTERS CRUNCH OUT NUMBERS SO HAPPILY WE CAN DO THINGS USING COMPUTERS THAT WE WOULDN’T BOTHER WITH OTHERWISE BECAUSE OF THE TIME THAT WOULD BE INVOLVED. FOR EXAMPLE A LARGE NUMBER OF FANS
COULD MAKE UP LISTS OF BALLPLAYERS IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE AND THE
COMPUTER COULD GENERATE MULTIPLE DRAFTS VARYING THE ORDER OF
PICKS AND KEEP TRACK OF IT ALL BY INPUTING A SINGLE SET OF DATA.
ANYWAYS I SAID I WOULD KEEP STATISTICAL APPLICATIONS TO A
MINIMUM IN THIS PRESENTATION.

AS WELL AS DOING THINGS WITH NUMBERS COMPUTERS ARE VERY
GOOD AT REARRANGING INFORMATION WITH DATABASE SOFTWARE. AN
EXCELLENT APPLICATION WOULD BE THE SABR MEMBERS DIRECTORY. IF IT
WERE AVAILABLE ON A COMPUTER IT WOULD BE A LOT EASIER TO DO
THINGS LIKE FIND ALL OF THE MEMBERS WHO LIVE IN A CERTAIN AREA OR
THAT ARE INTERESTED IN 19TH CENTURY BASEBALL OR WHATEVER.

ANOTHER STANDARD VARIETY OF SOFTWARE IS WORD PROCESSING.
WORD PROCESSING HAS RADICALLY ALTERED HOW EASY IT IS FOR ME TO
GET IDEAS TO OTHER PEOPLE. MY TYPING SPEED HAS INCREASED
INCREDIBLY BECAUSE IF I MAKE A MISTAKE I CAN CHANGE IT EASILY
INSTEAD OF WASTING TIME WITH THE WHITE GUNK OR RETYPING. WORDS
CAN BE INSERTED OR DELETED AND PARAGRAPHS SHIFTED AROUND WITHOUT
HAVING TO INVEST A LOT OF CLERICAL TIME RE-DOING STUFF YOU’VE
ALREADY DONE. IT’S POSSIBLE TO DO THINGS LIKE WRITE USING
ABBREVIATIONS AND THEN HAVE THE FULL SPELLING SUBSTITUTED AND ALL
OF THE SPACING JUSTIFIED AUTOMATICALLY.

AS WELL AS MAKING THINGS EASIER FOR WRITERS COMPUTERS ALSO
HAVE INTERESTING POSSIBILITIES FOR READERS. ELECTRONIC WRITING
DOESN’T HAVE TO HAVE A LINEAR STRUCTURE LIKE A BOOK. I’VE BEEN
EXPERIMENTING WITH WRITING THAT BRANCHES OUT AT DIFFERENT POINTS
AND READERS HAVE OPTIONS AS TO WHAT TO READ NEXT (SORT OF LIKE
ELECTRONIC FOOTNOTES). COMPUTERS CAN ALSO DO ALL SORTS OF
TRIPPYSHIT THAT PRINTED MATTER CAN’T DO LIKE ANIMATION AND SOUND
EFFECTS.

IT’S HANDY HAVING A DEVICE FOR PUTTING DOWN IDEAS AND BEING
ABLE TO GIVE THEM TO OTHER PEOPLE (AND A COMPUTER IS A LOT BETTER
THAN A TYPEWRITER FOR DOING SO). FOR EXAMPLE I CAN GIVE PEOPLE A
PRINTOUT OF MY INVENTORIES OF COMPUTERIZED BASEBALL DATA AND OF
BASEBALL BOOKS. I EVEN HAVE A CHECKLIST OF BUBBLEGUM CARDS
(ALTHOUGH I DON’T HAVE IT SET UP TO KEEP TRACK OF GOT IT’S AND
NEED IT’S). I ALSO USE MY COMPUTER’S WORD PROCESSING CAPABILITIES
FOR SPREADING PROPAGANDA.

COMPUTERS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO GET INFORMATION TO PEOPLE AT
MUCH LOWER COST WITHOUT GOING THROUGH THE LARGE SCALE MIDDLEMEN
OF INFORMATIONBIZ AS WE’VE KNOWN IT. IT COULD BE LIKE WHAT
HAPPENED WHEN THE PRINTING PRESS WAS INVENTED AND THE CHURCH LOST
ITS CONTROL OVER WHAT IDEAS PEOPLE CONSIDERED. WHAT PEOPLE PUT
INTO THEIR MINDS IS PROBABLY A MORE IMPORTANT ISSUE THAN WHAT
PEOPLE PUT INTO THEIR BODIES. I BELIEVE THAT POT-SMOKING IS A FAR
LESS SERIOUS SOCIAL PROBLEM THAN THE FACT THAT WE HAVE MASS MEDIA
THAT IS STRONGLY BIASED IN FAVOR OF EXPOSING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE
TO THE VIEWS OF PEOPLE WHO THINK LIKE DICK YOUNG.

Sports Illustrated AND The Sporting News HAVE THINK PIECES
ABOUT WHAT’S WRONG IN SPORTS YET SOMEHOW IGNORE SUCH ISSUES AS
HOW SPORTS ARE FUNDED THROUGH MEDIA AND THE TAX SYSTEM. THEY
NEVER SEEM TO QUESTION WHY SOME GEEK LIKE GEORGE ARGYROS SHOULD
RUN A BALLTEAM JUST BECAUSE HE HAS A LOT OF MONEY. IF PEOPLE
START THINKING ABOUT SUBVERSIVE QUESTIONS LIKE THAT THEY MAY
START QUESTIONING WHO RUNS THE MEDIA.
Computerized ideas can be transmitted several ways. You can run text through a printer. If you want to get the information to someone with a compatible computer you can copy a disk in a minute or so with information that might take almost an hour to spit out the printer.

Another nifty way to transmit information is with modems (which are devices for sending electronic information across phone lines). Telecommunications of this sort can allow exchange of information between computers with incompatible methods of storing information on disks (you can’t usually use an Apple disk on an IBM for example but such systems could exchange text with modems).

Friday Gary Skoog talked about People Link which is an information utility for folks with modems. One of the best features of such services is computerized conferencing which allows people to have on-going discussions out of the usual time-frames. We might consider such a system for next year’s SABR convention. While we needn’t skip live presentations we could have the presentations available on computer so that people could read them and make comments without the constraints we have with two rooms of scheduled presentations happening simultaneously.

The stuff I’ve mentioned so far can be done with plain ordinary 8-bit computers like Apples and Commodores. While newer computers can do things faster and handle more information at a time the basic 8-bit computer is far from obsolete. What’s obsolete is doing things without a computer.

Nevertheless there have been some exciting new developments in hardware.

One is portable computers the size of a notebook that have at least as much computing power as desktops of a few years ago and have goodies like build in modems and software packages. I’ve been fantasizing about having one to take out to the ballgame with me. Software could be developed fairly easily to keep score electronically and get back statistical summaries. It would also be possible to have a disk library along with information like rules and player records.

I usually take a small reference library with me to ballgames. If it were on computer disk it would be a lot more compact and a lot more useful. One of the few things that is as confusing as interpreting the balk rule is trying to find it in my rulebook. Computerized indexing would be a big improvement.

The other night while watching the All Star Game someone asked if Mike Scott gave up many home runs. I whipped out my 1986 Elias Baseball Analyst and found that in 1985 he faced 827 batters and gave up 20 home runs. Unless you feel like doing mental arithmetic and have some standard for comparison that’s not particularly helpful information. With a computer those calculations could be done quickly and easily (and even diddled for Astrodome effects and translated into standard scores for comparing with other players).

16-bit computers like the Macintosh and Amiga and Atari-ST are quite good at dealing with visual information. Not only can you create and animate your own graphics you can use any picture you can get on a video screen and use it as a computer graphic.
FOR EXAMPLE YOU COULD TAKE STOP ACTION FOOTAGE OF JOAQUIN ANDUJAR FROM THE 7TH GAME OF LAST YEAR'S WORLD SERIES AND SUPERIMPOSE IT ON A BACKGROUND OF A 18TH CENTURY LUNATIC ASYLUM.

THE MILT MAY MEMORIAL STADIUM IN THE HAMILTON REPLAY BASEBALL LEAGUE COULD HAVE AN ELECTRONIC SCOREBOARD WITH A PLAYER'S PICTURE AND STATS USING GOODIES THAT CAN BE USED WITH A PERSONAL COMPUTER.

SOME REALLY NEAT STUFF COULD HAPPEN SIMULATING BALLGAMES WITH VIDEODISK (WHICH IS A HIGH-DENSITY STORAGE MECHANISM THAT HANDLES FILM CLIPS AS WELL AS TEXT AND GRAPHICS AND SOUND). THE SORT OF PROGRAM THAT I HAVE FOR COMPUTER BASEBALL COULD BE SPIFFIED UP SO THAT WHEN THE PROGRAM HAS HAROLD BAINES HITTING A DOUBLE A CLIP OF A BAINES DOUBLE IS FOUND ON THE VIDEODISK AND SHOWN ON THE SCREEN.

YOU CAN GET EQUIPMENT THAT COULD BE USED TO GET VIDEO PICTURES OF PEOPLE ON YOUR BALLTEAM AND USE GRAPHICS PROGRAMS TO PUT ON LETTERING AND TEAM LOGOS AND HAVE PERSONALIZED BASEBALL CARDS. THE BALL LEAGUE I USED TO BE INVOLVED WITH WAS RATHER POOPY ABOUT WEIRD INNOVATIONS AND I'D LIKE TO GET INVOLVED WITH A LEAGUE THAT IS INTERESTED IN COMPUTER APPLICATIONS.

COMPUTERS CAN DO ALL SORTS OF WONDERFUL THINGS BEYOND CRUNCHING NUMBERS. IT'S A TECHNOLOGY THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO CHANGE OUR LIVES AND OUR SOCIETY. I BELIEVE IT'S OF VITAL IMPORTANCE TO HAVE COMPUTERS BECOME A TECHNOLOGY TO SAVE PEOPLE MONEY AND GIVE GREATER ACCESS TO INFORMATION RATHER THAN JUST BEING ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR A RELATIVELY FEW PEOPLE TO GET RICH.

I'D REALLY LIKE TO SEE THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPUTERIZED BASEBALL DATABASES. INSTEAD OF A LOT OF US DUPLICATING EFFORTS ON STATISTICAL DATA ENTRY FOR ROTISSERIE LEAGUES OR RESEARCH PROJECTS WHY NOT POOL EFFORTS IN DEVELOPING DATABASES. LIKewise WE COULD DEVELOP PUBLIC DOMAIN SOFTWARE FOR MANAGING DATA FOR FANTASY LEAGUES AND DOING RESEARCH.

XXX
WHY RIGHT-HANDED BATTERS ARE BETTER HIGH-BALL HITTERS
AND LEFT-HANDED BATTERS ARE BETTER LOW-BALL HITTERS

Dick O'Brien

I've been asking just about everyone I know the above question for longer
than I care to remember. I've never heard anyone attempt an explanation,
so I'll offer one in an act of sheer bravado.

Let's assume for the moment (quite correctly, too) that no pitcher stands
in the center of the pitching rubber and throws directly overhand to the
batter from his height of 10" above home plate. If he were to do this his
pitch would arrive in the strike zone in a gradually descending arc which
if each pitch he threw was clocked at 90 plus mph he would be KO'd within
three innings. The point to be made here is that every pitcher throws from
off-center at varying release points, different speeds and with different
movements on the ball to keep the hitter off balance and disrupt his timing.

Over a given period of time right-handed pitchers outnumber left-handed pit-
tchers 2:1 on major league rosters. Approximately 90% or more of these right-
handed pitchers release the pitch anywhere from 5-30 degrees to the right of
center of the pitching rubber, thus the pitch is thrown to the batter in a
descending diagonal arc of varying slope depending on the release point of
the pitch.

If the batter he is facing is right-handed the pitch will enter his strike
zone a fraction of a second earlier and higher than if he is left-handed.
The longer the pitch stays within his strike zone the lower and farther away
it will move. For maximum advantage against the right-handed pitcher, the
right-handed batter swings earlier and higher on a pitch to eliminate the
possibility of further movement on a breaking pitch that would preclude this
advantage. Hence through experience against the right-handed pitcher the
right-handed batter knows his success rate will be higher the earlier, and
consequently, higher the pitch.

Similarly, the left-handed batter facing the right-handed pitcher - because
he knows the pitch will arrive later and lower to him than it did to the
right-handed batter - optimizes his advantage by letting the pitch "show
itself" (curve, slider, sinker)before he commits himself. By waiting longer
to see the movement of the pitch the left-handed batter sees a lower and
closer ball to hit. Through experience he knows that seeing the course of
a pitch's flight path provides a definite advantage to him.

The diagram below illustrates the contention being made. It should also be
stated categorically that only when pitches are thrown "straight down the
pike" do batters from both sides of the plate have equal opportunities; a
situation that rarely, if ever, occurs. Why? Because the release point of
a pitch is virtually never over the center of the pitching rubber.
If the above explanation is correct we should see a significant number of right-handed batters being better low-ball hitters against left-handed pitchers, and a similar trend of left-handed batters being better high-ball hitters against southpaw pitching. Do we?

Yes, we do. For four years now Harper & Row has published The Scouting Report, edited by Marybeth Sullivan with technical input from various major league announcers. Quite frankly, this is not one of the better baseball annuals as every edition thus far contains numerous statistical errors. One of its features shows a hitter's strength by shading in the area of his strike zone where his hitting strength is to be found. Looking at the 1986 edition, I selected all hitters who had a significant difference in hitting strengths against right and left-handed pitchers to see how well the above contention checked out. Here are the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pitcher</th>
<th>Batter</th>
<th>Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RHP</td>
<td>RHB</td>
<td>7 low-ball 81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29 high-ball 81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHP</td>
<td>LHB</td>
<td>30 low-ball 77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 high-ball 77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHP</td>
<td>RHB</td>
<td>26 low-ball 81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 high-ball 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHP</td>
<td>LHB</td>
<td>10 low-ball 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24 high-ball 71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the information contained in The Scouting Report is accurate it appears that we do have some valid evidence to support the contention.

It should also be stated that 218 batters did not show an appreciable difference in hitting patterns against left and right-handed pitching which leads us to conclude, inescapably perhaps, that 60% of the batters are selective enough to wait for their desired pitch regardless of what handed pitcher is on the mound. Selective enough, that is, to wait for a pitch in the general area they prefer before committing themselves.
Some Random Thoughts on Baseball and Ballplayers

POETIC JUSTICE DEPT.—Now that the fate of Comiskey Park is sealed, and the White Sox prepare for their move to beautiful suburban Addison (will the team that resides there, if as mediocre as the current Chisox edition, be called the Addison’s Diseases?), we can at least be happy about this much—that no longer will there exist a monument to one of baseball’s all-time sons of a bitch, namely Charles A. Comiskey. Now almost universally recognized as a villain of comparable stature to Gandil or Risberg in the Black Sox scandal, he no more deserved a living memorial than Grant, Harding, or Nixon deserve to be on Mount Rushmore (Grant’s visage, of course, does grace the fifty dollar bill, but given the tenor of his administration, that’s only appropriate).

But now that’s all coming to an end, and the question before us is: who to memorialize with this new stadium in Addison? Lord knows Reinsdorf and Einhorn suffer delusions of adequacy and then some, but I still think it highly unlikely that they will attempt to foist off Reinsdorf Stadium or Einhorn Field on their admiring subjects. Nowadays stadiums are named only for the dead and buried (as opposed to the brain dead, which would make Harrelson Field a likely choice), so I propose that the new ball park memorialize a standout White Sock, one who, moreover, suffered an injustice at the hands of Comiskey and organized baseball that lives to this day. If the Commonwealth of Massachusetts can posthumously exonerate Sacco and Vanzetti (whose innocence is at best questionable), what better way to rehabilitate a clearly more innocent victim than—Weaver Stadium.

Here’s a riddle for you: what do America’s finest novelists and finest baseball players have in common? The answer is—as they get older their skills deteriorate. That’s not surprising in the case of ballplayers, but why should it be so with our novelists? The aging process is not supposed to affect the creative imagination. Yet look at the record: Dreiser, Lewis, Faulkner, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Wharton—the older they got the worse their novels. Sure there are exceptions: James among novelists, Phil Niekro among ballplayers, but the generalization is accurate—the careers of both follow parallel downward paths. Which raises the interesting question: what if declining novelists were treated the same as declining ballplayers. Imagine Faulkner, after striking out feebly with Intruder in the Dust and A Fable, being called in by the Editor-in-Chief at Random House and told, “Look, Bill, you’ve done a terrific job for us for a lot of years, but you’re not getting around on your sentences anymore, and we’ve got plenty of young novelists on the bench who can do the job better. We’d like to keep you in the organization, though; how about a nice cushy position as assistant associate editor?” Or conversely, what if declining ballplayers were treated like fading novelists: “Not to worry, Reggie, you’re still the greatest. We know you’ve been suffering from home run hitter’s block, but everyone still remembers your Nobel Prize for long balls in ’77, and the fans still turn out to see you, so we’d like to offer you this guaranteed contract that runs until you’re 50.”

It was not until Goose Gossage was suspended that I caught up with his earlier remark about Joan Kroc “poisoning the world” with her fast food. Leaving wide the absurdity of his
comment (somehow I doubt that Goose is a militant connoisseur of health food), it struck me as a truly novel way of lashing at the owner of the franchise. Players have traditionally attacked the magnates on the same grounds that most disgruntled employees attack their bosses: that they're avaricious on the one hand and parsimonious on the other; that they're short-sighted at best and out and out stupid at worst. But Gossage, it seems to me, has raised the art of owner-bashing to a new level by attacking their off-the-field products. I frankly hope this is the wave of the future, because after 100 years or so of the owners being vilified for their ignorance and greed, it's become boring. But if we're fortunate and the Gossage style catches on we'll soon hear this from Dave Winfield: "If Steinbrenner's company had built the Titanic, it would have sunk before hitting the iceberg." Wouldn't that be refreshing? Or how about an alienated Cardinal on Augie Busch: "His beer stinks—all it does is destroy brain cells and livers. I can't wait 'til I retire so I can do Lite Beer commercials." And when George Foster was ripping the Mets, wouldn't a nice line of attack have been: "And Doubleday's books are lousy—the bindings crack at the first opportunity, and Sidney Sheldon is their most intellectual author." Thanks to Gossage, I'm beginning to have more faith in the future of baseball. I just hope now that somewhere along the line Hugh Hefner or Bob Guccione buys a major league franchise. Then a significant player complaint is sure to be: "All those naked women in his magazine and we don't even get promiscuous ball girls."

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The late Theodore H. White may not exactly have been doing the country a favor when he pioneered the "presidential candidates under constant close scrutiny" school of journalism that resulted in the Making of the President ad nauseum books and their subsidiaries, but now that no one in their right mind cares about national political campaigns anymore, wouldn't it make sense to appropriate White's methods and apply them to something that sensible people do care about, i.e. major league baseball? Couldn't some veteran journalist and baseball aficionado (George F. Will perhaps, or Tom Wicker) be persuaded to devote 8 months of his life to the pennant races, as they gradually evolve out of Spring Training (baseball's equivalent of the New Hampshire primary, when even fantasists have a chance), take definite shape at the All-Star break, and rush to their inexorable conclusion in late September, with the field now limited to the big enchiladas, the Roosevelts, Kennedys, and Reagans of the majors, and finally that ultimate one-on-one showdown, the Lincoln-Douglas debates of baseball, the World Series. I certainly don't mean to imply that I consider baseball to be anywhere near as boring as politics; on the contrary, White's sound reportorial methods are wasted on politicians, but applied to baseball teams by the right journalists, they could provide us with an invaluable inside look at each season as it gradually unfolds. Am I hallucinating to think that there is an untapped market here? Or is everyone really looking forward to the Iowa caucuses?

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Why is it that baseball's worst books are consistently those "as told to" autobiographies that make a fleeting appearance in bookstores every year, then sink mercifully into oblivion, never to be seen again? You probably gave up reading them years ago; I know I did, but apparently suckers are still conceived every minute, and librarians still naively acquiescent, because the damn things still get published. So why should I care? It's no money out of my pocket, and miraculously, a good one occasionally does appear—Ted Williams' My Turn at Bat comes to mind. But Williams was a great player, looking homeward at the end of a brilliant career; today's baseball autobiogs are just as likely to be the pictures, descriptions, and accounts of the game by players in their twenties who are not necessarily destined for
Cooperstown. It wouldn't bother me so much except that still-living standouts from the past (the names Charlie Gehringer and Luke Appling come immediately to mind), men who have gained some perspective the hard way—by growing old—are apparently not pounding down publisher's doors with their memoirs. Or are they, but the publishers have all purchased deadbolts? Maybe Gehringer and Appling are dolts, I don't know, but that can hardly be true of all those old geezers, and we don't seem to be getting anything from them. And of course many are already beyond our reach, asleep with kings and counselors, and they never shared their knowledge with us. I regret especially the passing of one man, literally intestate. His base running gaffe in a crucial game created the greatest controversy in baseball history, and he's an unindicted co-conspirator in another bollix that cost his team the 1912 World Series. I'm referring of course to Fred Merkle, and was anyone ever in the neighborhood for more pivotal baseball games? Even the fall-out from the Black Sox scandal touched him. He left the majors under a cloud, only 32 years old. By all accounts an intelligent man in spite of the "Bonehead" appellation, he lived until 1956. So many years later, most of his comrades dead, why couldn't he have told us? Oh well, Wally Joyner's reminiscences should be hitting the stands any day now.

Addendum

THE CRIME OF PUNISHMENT: And not only are most baseball autobiographies lousy, but their titles show no imagination. Yogi Berra's book, for example, was called simply Yogi when, obviously, a better title would have been The Autobiography of a Yogi. Lou Brock earned baseball immortality with his hard slides into second base, but it probably never occurred to him to entitle his autobiography Intruder in the Dust. Gaylord Perry's book, I'm told, is wryly amusing; I might have bought it had it been called The Spit Hits the Fan. And of course Mark Fidrych's title No Big Deal is the epitome of boredom; so much better would have been To Kill a Markthebird.

And finally, think how many other baseball books may have died aborning because the author despaired of finding a proper title. Joey Amalfitano probably thinks that no one is interested in reading about his undeservedly brief managerial career, and maybe that's true, but it would be hard to resist a title such as The Task of Amalfitano.

Well, it's your own fault if you read this far.
How Long Do Players Spend in the Minor Leagues?
An interim report on a study by Bill James

I have seen or heard a number of comments recently, and I suppose you have too, to the effect that today's players are being rushed to the major leagues without having time to learn the game in the minor leagues. I got to wondering, then, to what extent this was true. Do today's players spend less time in the minor leagues than the players of earlier eras? If so, how much less? How many players are there who come up with very little professional experience? How many are there who spend many years in the minors before getting a chance? How are these things different now from the way they were five years ago, or twenty-five years ago?

I've been doing a study to answer those questions, and I need your help. The study encompasses all major league players playing in 100 or more games in any of five seasons (1940, 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1986.) There are two things I need help on. First of all, does anyone know of any other studies of this issue which have been done? If so, what were they, where were they published, etc.?

Second, there are some players, mostly from the 1940 season, for whom I cannot find minor league data. All I need is the number of minor league games played, up to and including the season of the study. I don't collect old Registers or Who's Who in Baseball systematically, so I've been doing this catch-as-catch-can. I have the data for 79 of the 132 major league regulars of 1940, but need the other 53, who are listed below. I have 136 of 140 for 1960 (names also listed below) and have all the players for 1970, 1980, and 1986. So basically, if you have a 1941 Register, I really need your help.


MISSING 1960: Gil McDougald, Al Pilarcik, Julio Becquer, and Walt Moryn.

I'd tell you where the study is headed, but my computer is out and I haven't run the numbers yet. It appears from what I can tell that the average number of games played in the minor leagues has probably decreased by about 15% over the last 25 years.
I don't have enough money to be allowed to play with Project Scoresheet data, but have some suggestions for the folks who do. One of the more important uses of Project Scoresheet data would be to do calculations on opportunities to score runs and use these calculations for new perspectives on pitching and batting stats. Such data could be a big improvement on traditional stats like ERA (which doesn't account for effects of relief pitching) and RBI's (where opportunities to drive in runs isn't accounted for). Start by doing a contingency table of the probabilities of runs being scored with different combinations of outs and baserunners in various positions (similar to the one in The Hidden Game of Baseball by Palmer & Thorn or in Gary Skoog's presentation at the 1986 SABR Convention). It's probably a good idea to calculate such base rate data for each league for each season to account and it would be possible to further refine such measures by working out contingency tables for various ballparks or for various types of pitchers or batters (as long as there are enough observations to have a stable statistic). For each time a batter is up there would be an expected value of runs scored given the position of baserunners and number of outs. Sum these figures and it'll give the number of runs that would score with someone batting at the league average. Compare that with a batter's RBI total and you have the difference between what that batter did and what an average player would do. Divide that by plate appearances (rather than at bats) and you have a normalized statistic for batters' chances of driving in runs in comparison with other batters. If the same players appear in the extreme ends of such a distribution over enough seasons they could be defined statistically as "clutch hitters" (of course Project Scoresheet data could be used to conditionallyize clutch play on the basis of how close the score is). Misleading stats 60 feet 6 inches away could be cleaned up with the same technique. One pitcher leaves a ballgame with nobody out and the bases loaded and a hot-shot reliever comes in and retires the side without any runs scoring. Another pitcher leaves with 2 out and a runner on first who scores because the guy from the bullpen walks 3 batters before getting an out. The traditional calculations for ERA would show the first starting pitcher doing better than the second one despite having left the game in a more precarious situation and not show any difference in the effectiveness of the relievers (neither being charged with a run of their own). It would make sense to recalculate pitching stats using the contingency tables of outs and runner positions. When a pitcher leaves a game the expected value of runs scored in that situation gets added onto the modified ERA (rather than leaving it up to what a reliever does). Comparing ERA and modified ERA it would be possible to identify pitchers whose stats have been most affected by the performances of relief pitchers.
Similarly, the effectiveness of relief pitchers could be evaluated by comparing runs actually allowed with the expected values from the contingency tables.

Another bit of research that could come from Project Scoresheet data would be a look at back-to-back home runs. It probably isn't a random phenomenon. I'd be really surprised if Dave Steib wasn't one of the leaders in ratio of back-to-back to total homers allowed and would further hypothesize that there would be common personality characteristics among the leaders in such a stat (lack of composure and hyper-competitiveness. Steib I'm only too familiar with and would guess that Jack Morris would have similar tendencies). Back-to-back homers might be a subset of a project's investigating the probabilities of various events following each other and opposing batting and slugging averages in various situations.

While we're at it, how about an examination of errors committed behind different pitchers? Over the years I've gotten a strong impression that teammates don't hustle as much when Steib pitches. Rate of errors committed behind different pitchers on the same teams—correcting for line-up changes if you want to be fancier and more accurate.

How about using Scoresheet data to conditionalize data on the basis of tightness of the game? It'd be possible to identify players who run up their season stats in blow-out games.

If scorers were willing, Project Scoresheet data could be used to identify situations where alternative stats could be applied. For example, if a pop-up drops between three fielders who failed to call for it, it could be noted as a team error (even Dick Young can have good ideas) in such a way that it could be coded so that it would be treated as a base hit for calculation of traditional stats but there would also be the option for recalculating with the team error.

How about playing around with non-parametric alternatives to traditional stats? A big problem with performance measures that look at season totals is that a few extreme performances can skew things in such a way that the totals are poor indices of how a player usually does (e.g., Kingman hitting diddly-squat except for a few big games or Henke and Nieves getting shelled a couple times and having lousy ERA's despite pitching well most of the time). One approach to this problem would be to use Scoresheet data to generate distributions of, say, runs allowed per inning by pitchers and look at things like the proportion of innings pitched in which no runs were allowed.

It would also be a good idea for Project Scoresheet to find funding for creating a data library that could be available at minimal expense to anyone wanting to use it rather than trying to operate on a pay-as-you-go basis that denies access to college students who donate their time to Project Scoresheet for scoring and coding games (along with others who have low income but could contribute to baseball research). It might be a good idea to check out philanthropic foundations and it seems reasonable that there's some tax shelter out there somewhere that would be happy to pick up the tab for at least some of Project Scoresheet's set-up costs.
AND THE USEFUL: PROJECT, WOULD BE TO HAVE SOMEONE, DO rapid.

AND, IN VARIOUS ASPECTS, OF EDUCATION, AND INFORMATION.

IF THEY ARE, IN FACT, IN PERSON, WE SHOULD TRY TO PROVIDE...

MORE OF SUCH INFORMATION, IF USEFUL, FEEDBACK, AND COMMUNICATION.

WITH EACH OTHER IN THE SAME WAY, I THINK THAT MORE CONVERSATION...

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