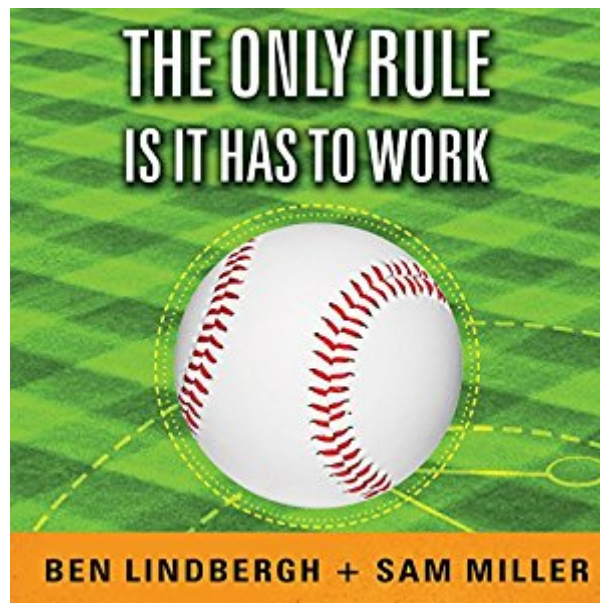




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The Only Rule Is It Has To Work: Our Wild Experiment Building A New Kind Of Baseball Team



Synopsis

It's the ultimate in fantasy baseball: You get to pick the roster, set the lineup, and decide on strategies - with real players, in a real ballpark, in a real playoff race. That's what baseball analysts Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller got to do when an independent minor-league team in California, the Sonoma Stompers, offered them the chance to run its baseball operations according to the most advanced statistics. We tag along as Lindbergh and Miller apply their number-crunching insights to all aspects of assembling and running a team, following one cardinal rule for judging each innovation they try: It has to work. We meet colorful figures like general manager Theo Fightmaster and boundary-breakers like the first openly gay player in professional baseball. Even José Canseco makes a cameo appearance. Will their knowledge of numbers help Lindbergh and Miller bring the Stompers a championship, or will they fall on their faces? Will the team have a competitive advantage or is the sport's folk wisdom true after all? Will the players attract the attention of big-league scouts, or are they on a fast track to oblivion?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the book "The Only Rule Is It Has to Work: Our Wild Experiment Building a New Kind of Baseball Team", Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller recount a grand adventure to take command of an independent league baseball team, with the vision of trying every idea, sane or crazy, in an attempt to achieve a winning edge. Five infielders, four outfielders, defensive shifts, optimizing lineups - everything. It was really an impossible task. Professional sports at every level are filled with highly accomplished and competitive athletes, with real lives and real egos. Now imagine walking in one

day and suddenly trying to convince them that they should be doing things differently. Who do you think you are? I was one of the analysts who helped Ben and Sam in this quest, and I wanted to write some thoughts down from my own perspective, not as one of the main characters, but as someone more behind the scenes. These are some very short initial thoughts only, but I'd like to follow up with some more ideas on where things went wrong from my perspective, and also how independent league teams can better identify roster talent from some non-traditional sources. My focus was on attempting to identify talent overlooked in the MLB draft. This is extremely challenging; there are 30 teams, 40 standard rounds plus other picks. Furthermore, among those players left, many sign as amateur free agents post-draft. You're left with players from lower divisions, very small schools, 23-year-old seniors, bad bodies, soft tossers, poor defenders, etc. But, still, there may be players who aren't good MLB prospects, but who could still perform well as part of an independent league team. Looking at top framing college catchers was a bust; this is a premium defensive position and very little is overlooked. Among the undrafted senior hitters and pitchers there were several potential prospects, many of whom you'll read about in the book. The most important fact to keep in mind is that these are real people with real lives, real families and real hopes and dreams, and playing independent ball isn't nearly lucrative enough to pay the bills. Harsh reality will limit your pool even more, and those who choose to pursue it will face the additional stress of financial strain. That being said, was Ben and Sam's experiment a success? You'll have to read the book, but absolutely, some talent was found.

As an avid listener of Effectively Wild and consistent reader of Ben and Sam's work, I know that they are statheads. I assumed this book would lean heavily on sabermetrics, the pages chock-full of numbers and advanced baseball analysis. I was wrong. This book offered much, much more. This is less of "The Book," by Tom Tango, and more of "The Soul of Baseball," by Joe Posnanski; it is more story than stat. Ben and Sam may have been the ones who got to run this indy-league baseball team, but through their writing you feel like you're right alongside them. You cringe when they're getting scolded by the team's manager. You're sad when a player leaves for greener pastures. You pump your fist when the team comes through. It's funny, it's dramatic, it's gripping. By the end, you realize you've grown to love this ragtag group of characters just as the authors did. This isn't just a baseball story. It's a story about people, about relationships, about finding your way. My only regret is that that summer in Sonoma had to end.

I absolutely loved this book. It reads like a top-flight novel, is packed with interesting stories and

details, and brings the game to life. Many of us are armchair coaches and general managers, always making recommendations and second-guessing our teams' decisions. We have the dream and we put it on a pedestal. Ben and Sam explain just how difficult it is. Sam's note and prepared speech especially hit home. But even more interesting than the baseball parts are the psychological undertones: how Ben and Sam's relationship changes during the season, the effect the season has on players, the toll it all takes on you. If you are a baseball fan or know a baseball fan, give them this book. They will find multiple stories in it that they can relate to.

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