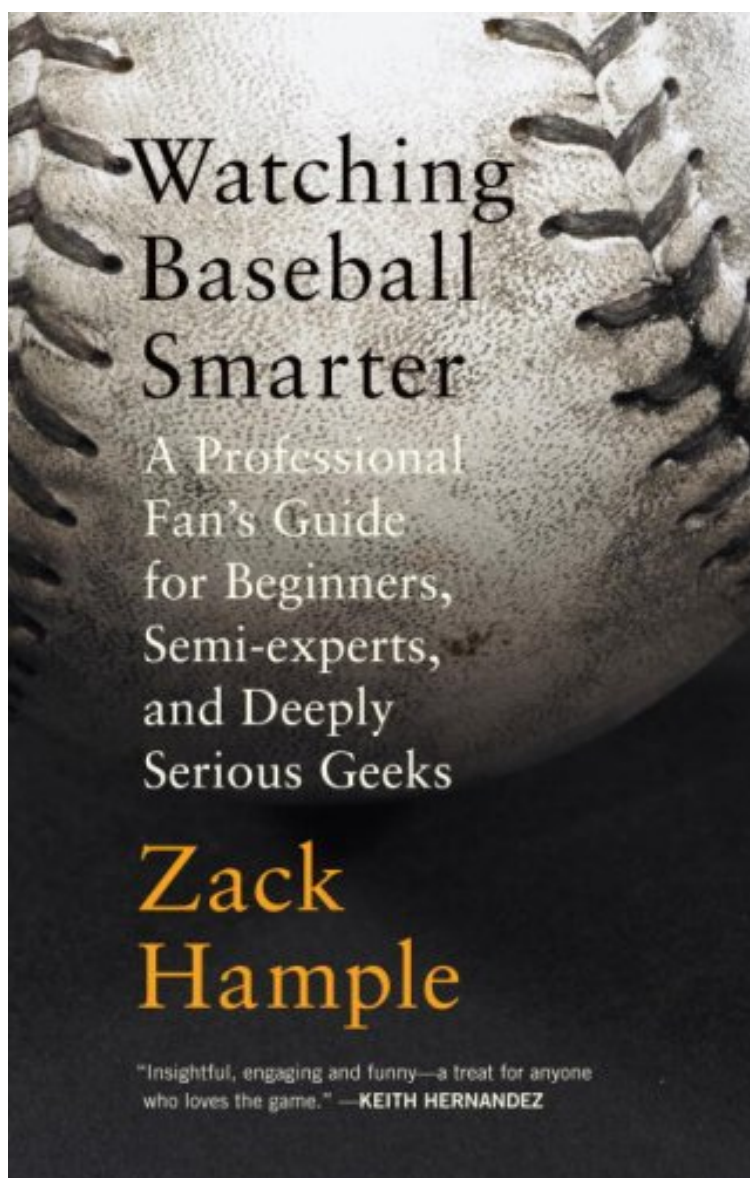


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Watching Baseball Smarter: A Professional Fan's Guide for Beginners, Semi-experts, and Deeply Serious Geeks



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[Read free] Watching Baseball Smarter: A Professional Fan's Guide for Beginners, Semi-experts, and Deeply Serious Geeks

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThis smart and funny fans guide to baseball explains the ins and outs of pitching, hitting, running, and fielding, while offering insider trivia and anecdotes that will appeal to anyonewhether you're a major league couch potato, life-long season ticket-holder, or a beginner.What is the difference

between a slider and a curveball? At which stadium did The Wave first make an appearance? How do some hitters use iPods to improve their skills? Which positions are never played by lefties? Why do some players urinate on their hands? Combining the narrative voice and attitude of Michael Lewis with the compulsive brilliance of Schott's Miscellany, *Watching Baseball Smarter* will increase your understanding and enjoyment of the sport no matter what your level of expertise. Features an glossary of baseball slang, an appendix of important baseball stats, and an appendix of uniform numbers. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Extrait CHAPTER 1 THE BASIC There's one word that describes baseball: "You never know." -- Joaquin Andujar, former major league pitcher

THE DREAM Life is pretty good if you're in the Major Leagues. First of all, you get to hang out with other major leaguers. You also get to be on TV every day and play in front of thousands of people. You get to see your name in newspapers and magazines and on the back of people's T-shirts. You get to see your face on scoreboards and baseball cards and posters. You get free equipment from sporting goods companies. You get unlimited bubble gum and sunflower seeds in the dugout. You get to relax in the clubhouse and watch big-screen TVs from fancy leather couches while other people get paid to wash your uniform. You get to fly on private jets and stay in nice hotels. You get recognized by kids and pretty women who scream for autographs. Sometimes old men scream too. You earn an average annual salary of \$2.9 million (or roughly \$17,900 per game), and when the team travels, you get over \$75 extra every day to spend on food. No wonder the dream starts early. But is it simply about fame and money? Maybe it's about having the chance to do something spectacular in one instant that people will always remember. Maybe it's about a subconscious desire to play a game full-time and act like a little boy well into adulthood. Maybe it's about having the manager and trainer race onto the field to make sure you're okay after you hit a foul ball off your ankle. The motivation is almost irrelevant because every kid with the dream wants it bad. Every kid has a reason. Every kid has a story. Every kid has a good baseball name. Every kid practices his swing in the mirror. Every kid can steal a base and catch a fly ball and throw strikes. Every kid converts his statistics into a 600-at-bat season and concludes that he'll be a superstar in the majors. Every kid is sure he's gonna make it--and 99,999 out of 100,000 kids are wrong. They don't know how much better the competition gets every step of the way. They don't know how long the journey takes. They don't know that there's always some other kid with an edge. Someone is always taller, stronger, faster, smarter. Someone has quicker feet and softer hands and sharper eyes and better instincts. Someone runs more. Someone lifts weights more. Someone is using steroids. Someone's father is a baseball coach. Someone's older brother is already playing pro ball. Someone has a batting tee in the basement or a batting cage in the backyard. Someone lives in warmer weather and gets to practice year-round. Someone wants it more than anyone on earth has ever wanted it. There's T-ball, Wiffle ball, softball, and Little League. There are baseball camps, baseball schools, private lessons, and winter clinics in stuffy gymnasiums. There's high school ball, college ball, summer ball, and fall ball. There's Babe Ruth League, the Cape Cod League, semipro leagues, and independent leagues. There are scouts, agents, tryouts, strikeouts, errors, cuts, injuries, surgeries, and lifelong dreams that can die in an instant. But every year, the dream stays alive for 1,500 young men, at least for a little while, when they're selected by major league organizations in the First-Year Player Draft.

THE DRAFT Basketball players regularly jump directly from high school to the NBA. Football players push right through college to the NFL. But baseball players have it much harder--as do the scouts who discover them. Almost all players start their careers in the Minor Leagues because their talent is less predictable and takes longer to develop. Each June the ongoing search for talent begins a new cycle with the 50-round draft. Every major league team employs dozens of scouts who focus on North American players--mostly high school and college graduates--who are eligible for the draft. Now that baseball is spreading internationally, scouts also comb the rest of the globe for prospects who can sign outside of the draft as free agents if they're at least 16 years old. But the draft supplies more future major leaguers than any other talent pool. Teams are assigned an order for selecting players, based on the previous season's won-lost records. The lousier teams get the higher picks. (Some people wonder if teams prefer to finish last once the season starts going downhill.) The draft serves two purposes: to distribute the talent evenly and to keep signing bonuses from surging. Players are not free agents in the draft. They are forced to negotiate only with the team that selects them. If a player refuses an offer, he must wait a year and reenter the draft. Even though every kid dreams of playing in the big leagues, it's not always easy for a team to complete the deal with a player it has drafted. For example, a high school star who's offered a \$10,000 signing bonus for his 16th-round selection might also have heard from dozens of colleges that offered him full scholarships and a chance to play on their Division I teams. He may choose to stay in school, knowing that his skills could improve so much in four years that he might

eventually be a first-round draft pick and earn a multimillion-dollar signing bonus. And if his future professional team pays him that much, the organization will stick with him if he struggles and give him all the instruction, attention, and support he needs to reach the majors. Scouts look for intangibles like maturity, aggressiveness, and baseball instincts. When it comes to finding position players, a scout's Holy Grail is the five-tool player, the five tools being the ability to field well, throw hard, run fast, hit home runs, and hit for a high batting average. Barry Bonds, in his prime, was the ultimate five-tool player. With pitchers, scouts look for velocity and accuracy, but they don't just want throwers; they want pitchers who use their heads and have a game plan. Left-handers are always in demand because their pitches naturally have more movement--no one's really sure why--and because they're more effective against left-handed hitters. Teams seek tall pitchers, not only because their big bodies are more durable, but because their long arms allow them to release the ball closer to home plate, giving hitters less time to react. Tall guys also have better leverage, meaning their higher release points allow them to throw with a greater downward angle for more velocity. Look at any team's roster and you'll notice that there aren't many players--especially pitchers--under six feet tall.

THE ROAD TO THE MAJOR LEAGUES Of the tens of thousands of players selected since the draft began in 1965, fewer than two dozen have jumped directly to the majors. Mike Adamson became the first in 1967 when the Baltimore Orioles plucked him from the University of Southern California. Dave Winfield is the lone Hall of Famer on the list, but there are other big names, such as Burt Hooton, Dick Ruthven, Mike Morgan, Bob Horner, Pete Incaviglia, John Olerud, Chan Ho Park, and one-handed pitcher Jim Abbott. Everyone else faces the ugly reality of life in the Minor Leagues. During homestands, some players live with host families who volunteer through their teams. On the road, all players endure endless bus rides, stay at cheap hotels, and receive a measly \$20 a day for meals. They earn a maximum of \$850 per month during their first season at the bottom of the professional baseball totem pole--and most of them couldn't be happier. Most teams' minor league systems have these six levels, each divided into several leagues:

LEVEL LEAGUE NAMES Rookie Appalachian, Arizona, Gulf Coast, Pioneer Class A Short-Season New York-Penn, Northwest Class A Midwest, South Atlantic Class A Advanced California, Carolina, Florida State Double-A Eastern, Southern, Texas Triple-A International, Pacific Coast

The Detroit Tigers, for example, have a Rookie team in the Gulf Coast League, a Class A Short-Season team in the New York-Penn League, a Class A team in the Midwest League, a Class A Advanced team in the Florida State League, a Double-A team in the Eastern League, and a Triple-A team in the International League. When advancing to Triple-A, the highest level before the majors, players face a significant competitive jump because the rosters include many former major leaguers (and current ones recovering from injuries on rehab assignments) who are trying to get back to The Show. Skipping a higher level of the Minor Leagues is rare; most players advance one level at a time only after demonstrating that they're better than most of the competition. So think twice before you yell, "He stinks!" about any major leaguer; he's spent his entire life beating the odds and proving himself as the best of the best of the best of the best. Players and scouts often mention that it's more difficult to make it from the minors to the majors than it is to get drafted in the first place. Of the minor leaguers who do reach the majors, many get just a cup of coffee before fading into oblivion--but even they get their names in the Baseball Encyclopedia. Most minor leaguers never make it and get released when their organizations give up on them (if they don't get discouraged and quit on their own). Still, they'll always be able to say that they played professional baseball.

LEAGUES, DIVISIONS, AND TEAMS Major League Baseball (MLB) has 30 teams and two leagues. The National League (NL) and American League (AL) each have three divisions called the East, Central, and West. Take a look at the breakdown:

NL EAST NL CENTRAL NL WEST Atlanta Braves Chicago Cubs Arizona Diamondbacks Florida Marlins Cincinnati Reds Colorado Rockies New York Mets Houston Astros Los Angeles Dodgers Philadelphia Phillies Milwaukee Brewers San Diego Padres Washington Nationals Pittsburgh Pirates San Francisco Giants St. Louis Cardinals

AL EAST AL CENTRAL AL WEST Baltimore Orioles Chicago White Sox Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim Boston Red Sox Cleveland... Revue de presse This isn't the first book to take on the challenge of explaining baseball intricacies, but I've never seen it done better. . . . When it comes to producing aha moments of baseball enlightenment, the book indeed has a high batting average. The Seattle Times Hample calls himself an obsessed fan obsessed in a good way and the product of his torment is a funny and informative guide for all levels of fans. Yankees Magazine Engaging. . . . Hample's book is both deceptive in its simplicity (the basic rules, but also the ten different ways a pitcher can commit a balk) and

surprising in its range. Fortune