



The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract

By Bill James

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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.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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*.

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From Library Journal

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

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Since James' work began appearing in the early 1980s, he has changed the way discerning fans watch and discuss baseball. The game has always been a number-cruncher's delight, but James' *Baseball Abstract* and its progeny have taken statistical analysis to a new level. One of his main contributions is context: Is a .300 batting average compiled in a season when the overall league average is .280 as praiseworthy as it is in a year when the league average is .250? In this revised edition of the *Historical*

Abstract, he focuses, in two major sections, on "The Game" and "The Players." In the former, he examines trends, oddities, and myths decade by decade. James' appeal has never been limited to his numbers; he is also an engaging writer whose prose is enlivened with humor, the telling anecdote, and more than a touch of whimsy. (See his comments on the growth in the 1930s of nasty nicknames: Ernie "Schnozz" Lombardi, Henry "Stinky" Davis, "Dim" Dom Dallesandro. In the second section, he ranks the 100 all-time best players at each position, something others have done but few with the style or compelling logic that James brings to the task. Given the wealth of information and opinion this huge volume contains (statistics are updated through the 2000 season), it remains a bargain even at \$45. If you add just one baseball book to your collection this year, make it this one. *Wes Lukowsky*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Fred Green:

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Joshua Miner:

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