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ISSN 1652-7224 ::: Published 8 June 2011

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The growing interest in the commercial potential of sports, i.e. the capitalization of its entertainment value, has dominated the development of the field of sports over the past 15-20 years, evidenced by the adaptation of sports to the market economy requirements.

Professionalization of the athletes has been followed by a professionalization within the administrative and economic superstructure of sports. Sports Management training courses are supplying administrative personnel at various levels, and there is a lot of academic research into sport management issues. But of greater importance for the capitalization process is sports economics training and research. There are major serious initiatives to that end in academia and the business and sports sectors, and publishing houses are catching on. There are a few internationally reputed sports economists who dominate the field, among them Szymansky, Andreff, Chadwick, Aaron Smith; will David G. Surdam, author of *The Ball Game Biz: An Introduction To The Economics of Professional Team Sports* (McFarland), join that crowd? Well, if we're to believe our reviewer Kjetil Haugen, and we should, it won't happen.

Found wanting

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*David George Surdam***The Ball Game Biz: An Introduction to the Economics of Professional Team Sports**

198 pages, pb.

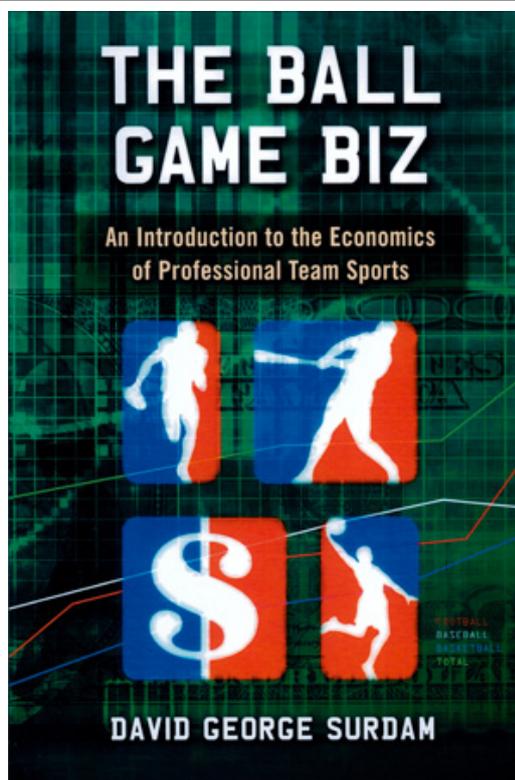
Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2010

ISBN 978-0-7864-6057-1

The other day, a small book named "The Ball Game Biz" landed in my mailbox, ready to be read and reviewed. The book, written by David G. Surdam, is, as mentioned, relatively sparse in size, but perhaps not necessarily in content. The author is reported (on the cover) as being an associate professor of economics at the University of Northern Iowa (US), who has published books on the economics of the American Civil War and Major League Baseball.

Curious me immediately checked google.com to find that Dr. Surdam has published at least three papers in *Journal of Sports Economics*, along with a remarkable set of publications in History. So, this information indicates an (economic) historian moving into sports economic theory – surely a fresh and different angle for entering this field.

So, what about the book? According to the introduction, it aims for the student market as well as for sportswriters and fans. I am somewhat reluctant as to its suitability for students. The book certainly has some fresh and different ways of introducing relatively complex topics, such as, for instance, game theory with and without incomplete information. However, the style is, in my opinion, too musing. The text drifts along anecdotally, without much structure. Talking about game theory without even mentioning Nash equilibrium indicates to me laxity bordering on negligence. Still, there is something about the book that attracts me, again perhaps the style itself, being



somewhat unstructured.

The other main objection from my point of view is the extreme Americanism reflected in the examples, jokes and anecdotes. I believe this book might be really funny, but my lack of expertise in US sports in general and baseball in particular simply makes these jokes hard for me to grasp. An example might clarify:

Suppose you are a .250 hitter. What is the likelihood of hitting exactly .400 after thirty at-bats off an average pitcher? (p. 45)

This is perhaps a combined assumption and question, but it might as well be a really funny joke, given my limited knowledge of baseball jargon.

In addition to the musing and unstructured style, the other striking feature of the book is its lack of both math and diagrams. The classical formula for price elasticity on page 21 may stand as the exception confirming this rule. As such, this book resembles a book I reviewed for idrottsforum.org recently, *Playbooks and Checkbooks* by Stefan Szymanski, though I must say that Szymanski's approach was significantly more successful than Surdam's.

” *It is hard to learn much game theory without any formal definitions of central concepts like Nash equilibrium or Best Reply functions.*

Szymanski, as opposed to Surdam, is able without the language of mathematics to express clearly and structured the main points of sports economic theory and maybe especially why sports economic theory is necessary as an “add-on” to economic theory. This fact is not as far as I can see even mentioned in *The Ball Game Biz*.

So, as I see it this book is almost unusable for the European student market. I must say I also doubt its suitability for US students. It is hard to learn much game theory without any formal definitions of central concepts like Nash equilibrium or Best Reply functions.

And what about the other market segment discussed above, fans and sportswriters? Again, the “americanisms” successfully rule out much interest for the European consumer. I have a feeling (as indicated above) that the book may very well serve a US audience in these segments. It remains to be seen. However, as a European with limited knowledge and interest in US sports in general, and baseball in particular, I cannot recommend this book for the readership of this Forum.

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