

I have a confession about my personal priorities. I simply cannot force myself to sit and watch a baseball game—the extremely-slow, snail’s-pace unfolding of baseball annoys me! Sooooo, spectators dutifully wait for a pitcher for an interminable amount of time between *every* pitch. Sometimes, the catcher goes out to the pitcher’s mound to talk. The manager of the team joins them. They replace the pitcher. The new pitcher takes a number of warm-up pitches, something he’s already been doing in the bullpen. Repeat later, as desired! Hey, just recently, a close family member attended two college-baseball playoff games in a row—together, those two games lasted *eleven hours!*

For sure, I have a number of close friends who are far more intelligent than I am, and they assure me I am indefensibly clueless about the coolness inherent to baseball: the amazing nuances...the crafty tactics...the unfolding drama embodied in each and every move or hesitation or orchestrated delay. And all that goodness delivered over several hours! Well, all of that’s still lost on me! When I happen to have to be at a game, I try to find someone attending who can catch me up on their fascinating family or their business.

But I *have* paid attention to a key, specific, long-evolving development in Major League Baseball in the U.S. and Canada (MLB for short). And that is the vital role that research and statistics can play in the success of a particular team. And I’ll just bet you might know a little smidgen about that history yourself—that is, if you watched the entertaining movie *Moneyball* starring Brad Pitt, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Jonah Hill. Hey, that movie is really very engaging! Here’s a synopsis of the underlying story of *Moneyball*.

Some teams in MLB are much more valuable than others, mostly due to the size of local market they serve. So, teams in New York City like the Mets or the Yankees have a much bigger local fan or customer base than, say, the Milwaukee Brewers. So, as the case is built, the “smaller-market” teams cannot pay as much compensation to the very best, big-time players. And a couple of decades ago, the small-market team in Oakland, California, was in jeopardy of losing its big-name players to wealthier teams. Then Billy Beane, the general manager for Oakland, stumbled onto a guy named Paul DePodesta, a young man who had been a college athlete who graduated from Harvard with an economics degree.

Paul DePodesta was working for the Cleveland Indians team back then, focused on *sabermetrics*, which is actually a formal name for the focus on baseball statistics measuring in-game activity. And, to take a simple example that could be meaningful to a team like the Oakland A’s, MLB teams were paying more for players who could get to first base by *hitting the ball* than they were paying for players who could get to first base with a “walk” from the pitcher. So, the result of getting to first base was the same, but the cost of a hitter was much higher. You see the point! Billy Beane was already a measurement guy himself, and DePodesta kinda pushed him over the top. Beane used sabermetrics when it came time to re-stock the Oakland team with fresh new players, yes, players that cost less but were still highly, *customizably* effective. After all, Beane was in the money squeeze: the reports for that time were that the Oakland A’s had an annual budget of \$39 million while the New York Yankees had a budget of \$130 million!

For sure, DePodesta and Beane were early pioneers as “measurement guys” in MLB. Here’s some background. The name *sabermetrics*—which is spelled like a sword coupled with a measurement (yes, that’s saber-metrics) actually had its roots in *The Society for American Baseball Research*. Yep, the acronym for that organization is SABR. The organization was started in 1971 by a sportswriter. Nowadays, it has thousands of members, you know, true baseball nerds engaged in some way in the sport of baseball! And, early on, a guy named Bill James picked up both the substance and the cheerleading for sabermetrics ...then DePodesta and Beane picked right up on the core philosophy and approaches of Bill James.

Historically, probably the most well-known individual stat for baseball is a player’s batting average. But sabermetrics folks’ nose for success dictates always going deeper than conventional wisdom—you know, like getting a walk to first base is just as good as getting a hit to go to first base...and cheaper, too!

Trouble was, other key people working for the Oakland A's were not very impressed, like the field manager for Oakland, Art Howe. And a bunch of other A's folks balked, too, just like you'd expect! After all, baseball is a game of deep traditions...where results on the playing field are considered the product of good scouting and solid selection. The fireworks started, but Beane pushed ahead anyway and the Oakland A's won a record-breaking 20 games in a row! Sabermetrics and Moneyball were a force to be reckoned with!

But that was not without controversy—weren't sabermetrics folks just a bunch of data geeks who didn't truly understand *real* baseball? It didn't help that DePodesta was later hired by the Los Angeles Dodgers and didn't really set the baseball world on fire there. But John W. Henry, the owner of the Boston Red Sox—a large-market team in MLB—tried to hire Beane as the Red Sox general manager for \$12.5 million. Unsuccessful at that, Henry pressed on, hiring sabermetrics guru Bill James. Then, the ultimate, long-term results came on the playing field, all the way to the Red Sox winning the World Series—four times!

So, a number of MLB teams hired sabermetrics experts. But are all the teams using sabermetrics to the same great effect? It's obvious that they aren't—because that's not human nature: some people do things well, some do not, and many default to what they learned back when, no matter how that's been eclipsed by better methods. But the reality is, sabermetrics—using research from the actual playing field—significantly changed Major League Baseball! Nowadays, there are lots of measurements for baseball with weird acronyms, like OBP, OBA, SLG, and OPS. Probably most interesting is that baseball sabermetrics have drilled down to every *pitch*, ultimately resulting in measurements named WHIP and DIPS!

Now that's *one truly interesting* tale about research, wisdom, and action focusing on the playing field of baseball, with results going all the way to winning multiple World Series! And that's pretty fascinating! But here's the deal. This kind of story can be told about virtually every industry...every sector...in a modern economy. That's because there are always the “old school” folks who think it's all about experienced folks kinda eyeballing the situation for best results. But, as a previous Whitestone episode discussed, the reality is that a lack of effective measurement that's needed to fulfill strong stewardship expectations is a sure indicator of a *dysfunction* that works to defeat every enterprise—including yours!

So, now we get to the playing field that matters *eternally*—the playing field that works to immediately transfer living, breathing people to the Kingdom of God! Colossians 1:13 (ESV) says, “[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” Yes, those *successful transferees* are real believers like you see at church. That's the goal, right? That *none should perish*? 2 Peter 3:9. That gets a person beyond first base—all the way to home...to God's Kingdom!

Perhaps your chosen theology has confined your measurement and your actions—yeah, maybe you think all of that's completely in God's hands. Or you might think that perhaps it really *is* all about “tarmac Christianity”—endure ten grueling hours of flying, be dramatically impacted by seeing all that poverty and need, and then, a week later, return to report how much *your* life was changed! But what about changing the lives of *others* who didn't hear the salvation story of Christ and Him crucified?

When I speak to Americans, I am stunned to see how many people don't even know the name of the late Reinhard Bonnke, the German evangelist called the “Billy Graham of Africa.” Bonnke died in 2019, and his ministry officially recorded 77 million new believers. Ludicrous, you say? Unbelievable? OK, so how about *just half that*? And, hey, those many million-plus-person crowds in Africa attending his speaking were not entranced by the latest football game or rock concert—they heard about Christ and Him crucified!

By the way, Bonnke's numbers represent the collection of statistics on the Kingdom playing field—you know, like those 3,000 people added the very first day of the church! (Acts 2:41) Notice the pattern? It's about adding to the Kingdom—God is a *measurement* God! Yes, feed 'em with soup. But be sure to spiritually feed 'em with the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. After all, Jesus told us what's it really all about in Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission. Very direct. So, what are your personal *Kingdom-metrics*?

A&A: Application & Action

1. Give a quick summary of a specific in your workplace of the latest new data and research that's challenging long-held, even cherished, assumptions about how your workplace should "do business." If your workplace has that specific, what "next steps" are your workplace pursuing? If your workplace doesn't have that specific, why not?
2. In your workplace, how do you push for the fruitful balance between hard-earned experience and the legitimate research that definitely pushes in a different direction? Do you have an effective blend of being a change-catalyst even while honoring experience? Describe how you do that.
3. Sorry if you haven't fully bought in, but God really *is* looking for activists witnessing for Christ and Him crucified! To that end, just what are your personal Kingdom-metrics? Be specific.