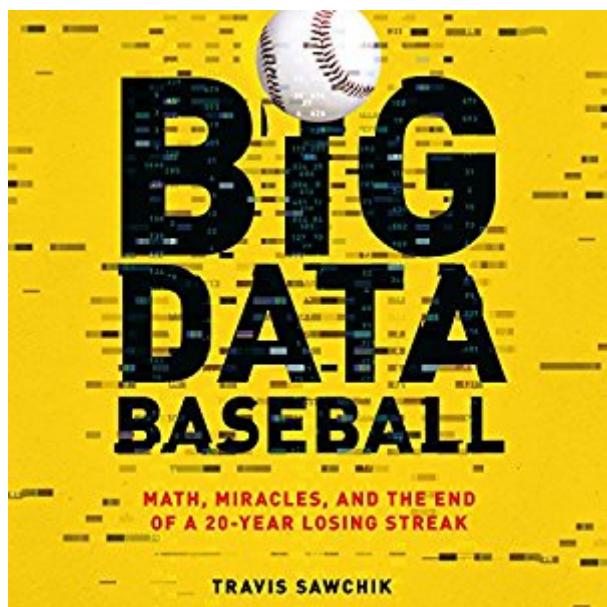


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# Big Data Baseball: Math, Miracles, And The End Of A 20-Year Losing Streak



## Synopsis

Pittsburgh Pirates manager Clint Hurdle was old school and stubborn. But after 20 straight losing seasons and his job on the line, he was ready to try anything. So when he met with GM Neal Huntington in October 2012, they decided to discard everything they knew about the game and instead take on drastic "big data" strategies. Going well beyond the number-crunching of Moneyball, which used statistics found on the back of baseball cards to identify market inefficiencies, the data the Pirates employed was not easily observable. They collected millions of data points on pitches and balls in play, creating a tome of reports that revealed key insights for how to win more games without spending a dime. They discovered that most batters struggled to hit two-seam fastballs, that an aggressive defensive shift on the field could turn more batted balls into outs, and that a catcher's most valuable skill was hidden. Hurdle and Huntington got to work trying to convince the entire Pirates organization and disgruntled fans to embrace these unconventional yet groundbreaking methods. All this led to the end of the longest consecutive run of losing seasons in North American pro sports history. The Pirates' 2013 season is the perfect lens for examining baseball's burgeoning big-data movement. Using flawless reporting, award-winning journalist Travis Sawchik takes you behind the scenes to reveal a game-changing audiobook of miracles and math.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In many ways, this is a book similar to those written by Malcolm Gladwell. In 2013, the Pirates were at a "tipping point". Their GM and Manager needed to win or be fired. They, along with non-baseball playing math nerds, sought out "outliers", players who out-performed their peers in ways that other

teams didn't recognize. With considerably fewer resources, the GM and Manager were confronting a "David and Goliath" battle. To beat those odds, Clint Hurdle not only had to abandon much of what he considered important like a pitcher's Win Loss record and ERA, and batting average as the most important metric for position players, he had to convince his coaches and next his players. To do this, Hurdle integrated the stat people with the scouts, as well as with the coaches. How Hurdle did this is explained in this very readable book. Although the specifics here deal with baseball, in a general way, it would be useful for businesses, especially those which need to be re-organized.

I found this book to be an enjoyable read about building a successful team in baseball. You do not have to be a fan of the Pittsburgh Pirates to enjoy this book, but it certainly helps. This book offers amazing insight into the transformation of the Pirates organization from having the longest span of losing seasons in professional sports history to a viable threat in the National League. Also, the renaissance in Clint Hurdle's approach to baseball is discussed, along with his background in the sport. Whereas this book is not as transformative for baseball as Moneyball was, there is still quite a bit of information one can gain from this book. Pitch framing and defensive alignments are the two mechanisms of successfully managing a team which are excellently explained in this book.

I am a diehard baseball fan and was recommended the book by my team's (not the Pirates) radio announcer. Loved the book. I was not expecting a book written by a local sports journalist to be as well-written as it was, nor was I expecting to be so overwhelmed by how data has changed the game. As baseball fans, we are quick to second-guess managers and our teams, but I think this book is a good reminder that decisions for most teams are not always made by "gut," but made from mountains and mountains of data. The book tackles what could be a boring subject with a brilliant narrative, complete with character development and plot twists. But I think Sawchick nails the main thesis, which is that baseball is a constantly evolving game of cat-and-mouse. Highly recommended for any baseball fan.

I absolutely loved this book. It was a great combination of stats (explaining the sabermetrics approaches) and stories about the players and personnel to get to know the 2013 Pirates a little better. One of my favorite baseball books ever written, and I say that despite having to read and relive the Pirates win in the wild card game (I am a Reds fan)! Great read for anyone interested in new ideas to the game and how sabermetrics can produce real results

Sawchick presents statistics in an easily digestible fashion for the layperson. Reading this book will give you a new appreciation for the undervalued aspects of baseball. You will find yourself noticing nuances of pitch framing, pitch selection, and defensive positioning based on this in-depth narrative of the Pittsburgh Pirates and the components that turned the franchise around.

Really enjoyed it, and bought copies for family who raved about it. I suspect the editor provided the name - it is really about the resurgence of the Pirates in the last couple years, and how they did it as an organization. The author did heavy reporting, and really spread the credit around. He got into how their success is the result of a collaboration between data driven types and those who have a more intuitive sense of what works, based on experience. This means that in some cases, the traditionalists actually suggests avenues of exploration for the quants - and that's great. A possible criticism is that the manager, Clint Hurdle, might deserve more credit for pulling this off. It was kind of a miracle, and the "how did this get orchestrated" question wasn't answered too well. A small problem. Tons of insights about how baseball (and front office baseball) is played today. Hats off to Travis Sawchick.

Since I was part of the original Project Scoresheet back in the 80s, which has spun off into so many different directions over the years, it was nice to read about those days again. Also interesting, of course, was Clint Hurdle's graduation from an old school baseball guy to somebody who embraces the new analytics and gets buy-ins from his staff and players, to play-off level effect. (Did I mention I hate the Pirates? Nevermind....lol) Terrific inside look at an organization that turned around a situation that had been so horrible for so long.

I enjoyed the book and am glad that I read it. The beginning is quite interesting as the author does a very nice job of describing the analysts getting together with the baseball people. At that point, the hypothesis that big data was responsible for changing the team seemed a bit overblown. As the story goes on, this fact becomes clear. For example, there is a very interesting chapter that goes through the work of a scout and how he finds players. Great story but directly contradictory to the big data hypothesis. I'm sure the title was encouraged by the publisher to sell books. That's not an issue. I just wish the fascinating story of how the Pirates were rebuilt was married to the title, until it wasn't.

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