



The Only Rule Is It Has to Work: Our Wild Experiment Building a New Kind of Baseball Team

By Ben Lindbergh, Sam Miller

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What would happen if two statistics-minded outsiders were allowed to run a professional baseball team?

It's the ultimate in fantasy baseball: You get to pick the roster, set the lineup, and decide on strategies -- with real players, in a real ballpark, in a real playoff race. That's what baseball analysts Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller got to do when an independent minor-league team in California, the Sonoma Stompers, offered them the chance to run its baseball operations according to the most advanced statistics. Their story in *The Only Rule is It Has to Work* is unlike any other baseball tale you've ever read.

We tag along as Lindbergh and Miller apply their number-crunching insights to all aspects of assembling and running a team, following one cardinal rule for judging each innovation they try: *it has to work*. We meet colorful figures like general manager Theo Fightmaster and boundary-breakers like the first openly gay player in professional baseball. Even José Canseco makes a cameo appearance.

Will their knowledge of numbers help Lindbergh and Miller bring the Stompers a championship, or will they fall on their faces? Will the team have a competitive advantage or is the sport's folk wisdom true after all? Will the players attract the attention of big-league scouts, or are they on a fast track to oblivion?

It's a wild ride, by turns provocative and absurd, as Lindbergh and Miller tell a story that will speak to numbers geeks and traditionalists alike. And they prove that you don't need a bat or a glove to make a genuine contribution to the game.



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Editorial Review

Review

“Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller have given us a brutally honest but blissfully funny look at where we really stand a decade into the ‘analytics revolution.’ If you want the insights that statheads and baseball traditionalists still need to learn from one another, start by reading this book.”--**Nate Silver, bestselling author of *The Signal and the Noise* and the founder and editor in chief of *FiveThirtyEight***

“*The Only Rule Is It Has to Work* is a terrific read, as Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller – two of baseball’s leading sabermetric writers – put their beliefs on the line by taking over an actual team of actual players and trying to implement their unorthodox theories. The story of their season with the Sonoma Stompers is a fascinating human drama about the give-and-take between the new thinking and the old school.”--**Ken Rosenthal, MLB on FOX reporter, FOXSports.com senior baseball writer, and MLB Network insider**

“In a phenomenal book that is a fun, breezy, and moving read, Ben Lindbergh and Sam Miller invite us into their mad experiment. They show us the trials, travails, and challenges of running an independent league baseball team, and along the way they do something remarkable: they make us care deeply for the players who put their hearts into every point of on-base percentage.”--**Jonah Keri, bestselling author of *Up, Up, and Away* and *The Extra 2%***

“*The Only Rule Is It Has to Work* is the happy, improbable spawn of *Moneyball* and *Bull Durham*?a relentlessly smart and consistently funny journey into the dregs of the minors that proves one thing above all: No matter how many statistics you apply to baseball, you can never kill its heart.”--**Stefan Fatsis, author of *Word Freak, A Few Seconds of Panic, and Wild and Outside***

About the Author

Ben Lindbergh is a staff writer for *FiveThirtyEight* and, with Sam Miller, the cohost of *Effectively Wild*, the daily *Baseball Prospectus* podcast. He is a former staff writer for *Grantland* and a former editor in chief of *Baseball Prospectus*. He lives in New York City.

Sam Miller is the editor in chief of *Baseball Prospectus*, the coeditor of *Baseball Prospectus*’s annual guidebook, and a contributing writer at *ESPN The Magazine*. He lives on the San Francisco peninsula with his wife and daughter.

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