



Dollar Sign on the Muscle: The World of Baseball Scouting

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In a new epilogue Kevin Kerrane explores the world of baseball scouting in the late 1990s. Kerrane is a professor of English at the University of Delaware.

Dollar Sign on the Muscle: The World of Baseball Scouting Details

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From Reader Review Dollar Sign on the Muscle: The World of Baseball Scouting for online ebook

Syd Polk says

This is a reprint of a classic rare baseball book about scouting. It follows the author as he scounts with 1981 Philadelphia Phillies. Interesting inflection point in history. The Phillies had just won the World Series, but the strike happened during the 1981 season.

Kerrane interviews old and new scouts all during the season, learns quite a bit about scouting himself, and has interesting commentary on the state of baseball at the time. It is quite fun to read about the prospects of the time. Some of them (Strawberry, Schmidt, Gooden, McReynolds, Gubicza, etc.) had good to great major league careers. Many of them did not.

The author added a chapter written in 2013 about the current state of the game. This chapter is actually really good; he touches on many themes from 1981 and comments on them. He also comments on the stathead revolution and Moneyball.

The original is quite rare and expensive; Baseball Prospectus published the new version.

Outstanding book.

Thicks1 says

This book explores the historical changes that have overtaking the scouting profession in baseball through its history. In addition it posses some fundamental questions of what makes a good prospect, how do you find one, how does money effect the choice etc... Do we really need a draft or shall we allow an allotted set of dollars to sign players and have the teams compete for top talent? This book has "good face" and "good voice". Read the Diamond appraised then this book.

Brian Eshleman says

I never realized how much wisdom goes into baseball scouting that is more broadly applicable outside of it. I also never realized how much my work as a college enrollment counselor resembles what baseball scouts do, trying to project the adolescence into adulthood, trying to assess temperament realistically, and trying, even if briefly, to sneak a little coaching or teaching into the most brief encounter.

This is a great companion to Moneyball. It shows the state of mind in scouting just before sabermetrics came on the scene, and, as usually happens upon closer examination of a starkly drawn line, shows more of a continuum. That is, many of the concepts and "modern" scouting had precursors with the same old-school scouts that are so easily dismissed. The author, and of course the scouts, are good at drawing out these principles in a specific place and time in baseball's history.

Aaron Sinner says

1984 CASEY Award nominee (1st ed.)
#52 Sports Illustrated Top 100 Sports Books of All Time (2002)
Briefly: Nostalgia-focused

Dollar Sign on the Muscle presents a series of interviews with scouts and scouting directors across baseball, lifting up an often unsung yet essential line of work within the game. The book is at its best in illustrating the colorful personalities of scouts past, regaling vivid stories, and painting a picture of the special insights scouts bring to player analysis through years of experience.

Somewhat appropriately, the drawback of the book is that its overview of scouting isn't systematic. It reads more as a series of vignettes than it does a comprehensive history of scouting or overview of the principles scouts bring to their work. In a book on individuals who pine for the glory days of yore and often argue that their evaluations can't be quantified, such an approach is fitting, even if it ultimately means the book is a collection of enjoyable anecdotes rather than something truly insightful.

James says

It's nice to see a book like this brought back to a new generation of readers. Originally written in the early 1980s, *Dollar Sign* highlights a cast of old scouts who are long gone. Their tales of scouting from back before the advent of the draft in the 1960s are great. The business of the game and the way players are signed has changed so much, but the tools that make a great ball player and what scouts look for are still pretty much the same. I learned a lot about how scouts look at players, the things they like and the red flags.

Kerrane added a couple of chapters at the end to update the book, and they highlight some of the ways the game has changed over the past three decades. The money involved is the #1 difference. The price tags on the players from the '80s seem comically low in today's money. As if they only knew what was coming they wouldn't have thought twice about some kid asking for \$100,000.

Kerrane does a great job of capturing the character of the old scouts, sharing the anecdotes of men who loved the game more than it loved them back in many cases. This is a fun and educational look at an important part of the game most fans don't think much about.

Scott says

Great baseball stories. Written in '84, there's some fun scouting reports on Daryl Strawberry, Julio Franco, and Chris Sabo, amongst many other failed and successful prospects. The lore of old-timey baseball and the "good face" and other baseball anachronisms makes this a wonderful read for any baseball fan who is interested in where guys come from, and how the game has progressed in the last hundred years. Cursory knowledge of how scouting occurs now only enhances the book. Really enjoyable.

Connor says

Stories of scouts told by scouts. Most of the interviews took place in 1981 with scouts who had worked for decades. By retelling the stories of their mentors combined with their own and the author's afterword, we get almost a hundred years worth of baseball history at all levels.

Michael says

This book was a gift from a departing friend from Alice Springs, before he flew off to South America. The book is a reprint of a classic baseball book covering the arcane subject of baseball scouts. This is old school baseball at its finest. The book is definitely only for a hard core baseball fan. I found it a fascinating insight into how men (and it was almost exclusively men) who loved the game so much they travelled hundreds of miles in a day to watch a promising prospect play for very little reward. It also captures the mood of baseball in its 'golden' age. I enjoyed this, but it won't be for everyone

Apsalz08 says

Older book that was recently reprinted. For baseball fans, it's a great read to learn the history of scouting. While baseball prospect coverage has exploded over the last few years thanks to the internet and an increasing number of dynasty fantasy leagues, there's not much reading material on the life of scouts, and how they found/find players. Their path follows the evolution of baseball. Even if you don't care about scouting, there are a ton of funny anecdotes regarding competition to sign players, travel mishaps, and general chicanery.

yh says

All baseball fans know that the whole "scouts vs. stats" conflict is extremely played out, and that scouting brings a lot to the table in terms of baseball knowledge. It's with that expectation that I read this book, written in the early 80s and reissued this year by Baseball Prospectus, which I've often heard is the best book on scouting ever written. I haven't read any other books on scouting, but I didn't think this book was good enough to deserve that title. However, it IS a very readable trip through the history of scouting, and offers plenty of fun stories about the "baseball men" who would travel cross-country trying to sign amateur players. The 2013 afterword was probably my favorite part of the book, as it tackled some hard questions like the role of statistics in scouting, as well as the role of pro scouts, which did not exist when the book was first written. All in all, very worthwhile if you want to know the basics of scouting and what exactly goes on when seeking out and evaluating amateur talent. I feel smarter for having read it, even if it didn't necessarily change my life.

Joel says

The romantic life of the solitary scout on the road is not explored in *Dollar Sign on the Muscle*. Rather, this is an interesting look at the life-cycle of scouting in baseball on the tail end of one of the biggest changes to the conventions of baseball history (the Draft).

Kerrane spent time predominantly with the 1981 Phillies scouts, pulling stories and characters from walking baseball history.

What comes around to make this book hit home more is the post-script. In 2013 Kerrane went back to the well to see what had happened. The stories of hope, inspiration, and dreaming that is the 17-20 year old ball player all have the same ending. But the Scout is there for all of it. The parable and pride of the scout who found the guy who found the guy and how (to borrow from Ernie Harwell's Hall of Fame speech) "that's baseball" makes the people in this book more than just people. They are baseball in a very almost uncomfortable sense.

The stories contained here are often quick vignettes, being retold for the umpteenth time for the same crowd, but they get to be new one more time.

This is a good read for baseball fans jonesing for spring training, where hope springs eternal.

John Weiler says

A poorly written, and even more poorly edited, hodgepodge of anecdotes. Many of these tales are feeble or have little or no connection to scouting or even baseball. Some are tediously repeated multiple times.

Very strong focus on the early '80s with little relevance today. No update of the original text just a weird chapter and a few stats tacked on. Precious little on the technical and philosophical changes which characterize baseball scouting today.

Tom Stamper says

Dollar Sign on the Muscle is a collection of conversations and stories about the origins and evolution of baseball scouting. By the 1980s when the book was written, scouts were more or less in the third generation of the profession with the earliest ones coming in the 1920s. Much of the book focuses on the changes that came from the amateur draft in the mid 1960s. Before the draft a scout had to be a salesman and a psychologist to land the top talent. After the draft, scouts lost the advantage of being aggressive and had to settle ranking talent, something the old scouts lamented even 15 years later. And if you wonder why the game has become more Latin it's because signing free agents outside of the U.S. and Canada is still open season.

If you've read *Moneyball* or the Bill James books about the analytics of baseball this is the other side. It's the intuitive approach to finding and acquiring talent. Here is where scouts will say the kid has a good face and

uses his size and mechanics to project future growth. Scouts will say things like, he's a good prospect despite the horse sh-- tatoo or he pushes the ball instead of throwing it. They will tell you how a small lefthander projects better than a small righthander because lefthanders almost never throw over the top and their angle is tough on lefty hitters who have seen very few southpaws before pro sports.

If there is a team that gets the most ink it's the Phillies. At the beginning of the book they are still family-owned and have the biggest scouting budget in the majors, while many other clubs have reduced their own scouts and now subscribe to the MLB scouting bureau. We go through the Phillies ranking system of players before draft and they like Kevin McReynolds as the best all-around player because consensus says Ron Darling is not going to leave college to play. That these are two guys that have above average careers says the scouts aren't blind although a number of these players are total busts.

All in all the book is an interesting time capsule and maybe one of the few ways to learn how the old timers did it.

Chuck says

This book was originally published in 1984. An updated edition has been reissued by the folks at the Baseball Prospectus web site. The book resulted from the time in the summer of 1981 that the author spent traveling with baseball scouts. It is full of the history of scouting as well as portraits of some of the game's best practitioners at the time. I rated it as five stars, a rating that I rarely give, not because it is great literature, but because it is a book that the baseball fan will want to read and enjoy.

B says

After reading this, it feels like it only scratches the surface of a much deeper world. Part of the problem in describing it is that it's so clearly intuitive, which is always hard to relate.

But there are some super-big questions that this book elicits.

For instance, virtually every player discussed is a tremendous bust. Why? Is that in the nature of things?

The author at one point suggests that if a player makes it to AAA the scout has been successful. Is such a player actually useful to the organization? Is that really a success?

How do you set up a system that rewards the players but forces the teams to make the investments to find them?

The new epilogue is super interesting, although I wish the book had divided the parts more cleanly because the jump is pretty sudden.

Finally, worth noting how racist/racialized all of the scouting was -- by black and white scouts -- in the 1980's. I would imagine there's less of that today, but also a lot more focus on Latin American players (regardless of race). Also, would be interesting to know how the new media affects the scouting.

