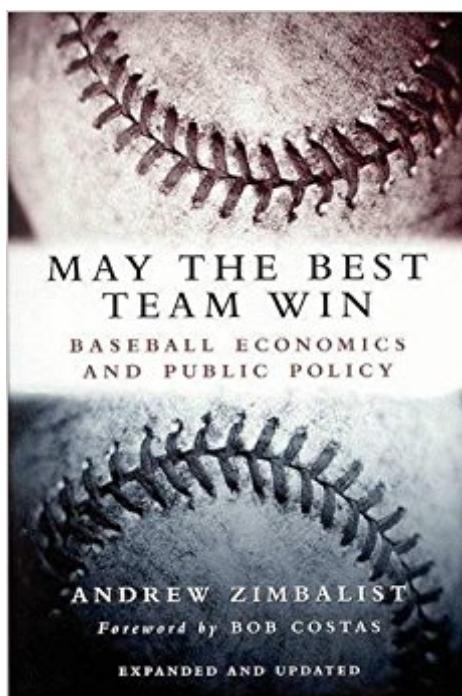


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# May The Best Team Win: Baseball Economics And Public Policy



## Synopsis

The business of baseball stands in sharp contrast to the game's wholesome image as America's favorite pastime. Major league baseball is a deeply troubled industry, facing chronic problems that threaten its future: persistent labor tensions, competitive dominance by high-revenue teams, migration of game telecasts to cable, and escalating ticket prices. Amid the threat of contraction, existing franchises are demanding public subsidies for new stadiums, while viable host cities are begging for teams. The game's core base of fans is aging, and MLB is doing precious little to attract a younger audience. According to Andrew Zimbalist, these problems have a common cause: monopoly. Since 1922 MLB has benefited from a presumed exemption from the nation's antitrust laws. It is the only top-level professional baseball league in the country, and each of its teams is assigned an exclusive territory. Monopolies have market power, which they use to derive higher returns, misallocate resources, and take advantage of consumers. Major league baseball is no exception. In *May the Best Team Win*, Zimbalist provides a critical analysis of the baseball industry, focusing on the abuses and inefficiencies that have plagued the game since the 1990s, when franchise owners appointed their colleague Bud Selig as MLB's independent commissioner.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Zimbalist, professor of economics at Smith College, is arguably the leading authority on sports economics in the country. His *Baseball and Billions* (1992) was one of the first books to take an

educated look at the business of baseball, and since the release of that book, Zimbalist has spent thousands of hours researching and writing about the industry. His conclusion in his latest work, that baseball is in trouble, is not a new idea, but the reasons behind baseball's problems and Zimbalist's solutions combine to create an absorbing, provocative discussion. Zimbalist is no friend of baseball owners or baseball commissioner Bud Selig, and he devotes much space to tearing down arguments about the poor financial health of most teams and the need for cities to subsidize teams by paying for new stadiums. Expansion, not contraction, for example, would help spread out talent. The root cause of baseball's problems, Zimbalist argues, is its monopoly, and his most radical idea is for Congress to lift baseball's antitrust exemption and to force divestiture into two competitive leagues. But failing that, Zimbalist has a number of suggestions to improve the status of the game, including attracting younger fans by starting some World Series games at an earlier time; lowering ticket prices; and creating an owner/player partnership to study baseball's problems. At the very least, this volume provides baseball fans with enough material to allow them to engage in one of their favorite pursuits—arguing over what should be done to save the national pastime. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"... argues Andrew Zimbalist, a professor... and author of 'May the Best Team Win.'" ; Michael K. Ozanian with Cecily J. Fluke, *Forbes*, 4/28/2003 "Instead of drinking beer and moaning, pick up a copy of Andrew Zimbalist's 'May the Best Team Win.' Zimbalist is the author of 'Baseball and Billions,' one of the most impressive books on the subject, trumped, perhaps, only by this one.... 'May the Best Team Win' is one that the critical fan needs in their arsenal." ; Mudville Magazine, 4/28/2003 "Andrew Zimbalist writes with obvious love, but deep concern for our national pastime. " ; Chris Berman, *ESPN*, 2/4/2003 "An absorbing, provocative discussion." ; Publishers Weekly, 2/24/2003 "Follows up his original tome by documenting perhaps the wildest set of chapters in MLB history. In just the past two years, commissioner Bud Selig and the owners have attempted and failed to wipe out two teams, narrowly averted a labor stoppage with the players, engineered a bizarre ownership swap involving the Boston, Florida and Montreal franchises, stumbled through a high-profile congressional tongue-lashing, and were beaten in court by a stadium commission from Minnesota. " ; Eric Fisher, *Washington Times* "Major league baseball has put a stranglehold on real competitive balance, and Zimbalist claims that the near-monopoly status is a detriment to any impulse for improvement. His prescriptions offer harsh but needed medicine. " ; Library Journal "Zimbalist offers a whirlwind tour of baseball chicanery.... Concise and coherent.... Anyone who holds an opinion on the state of the game, or fears its demise, owes it

to him- or herself to take Professor Zimbalist's 224-page class." &#x97;Jon Morgan, Baltimore Sun, 3/23/2003 "I highly recommend Andrew Zimbalist's new book, 'May the Best Team Win.' If you read this book... you'll know everything about the ugly side of baseball that you need to know."

&#x97;Rob Neyer, ESPN.com, 4/1/2003 "Exhilarating.... Combines an academic's precision with a fan's passion." &#x97;Allen Barra, Newhouse Newspapers "In the most damning chapter in the book, Zimbalist outlines a complex but convincing deconstruction of Selig's assertion that MLB lost \$519 million in 2001...As Paul Beeston, MLB's chief operating officer said, 'Under generally accepted accounting principles, I can turn a \$4 million profit into a \$2 million loss and I can get every national accounting firm to agree with me.'" &#x97;Sean Callahan, GeezerJock Media, Washington Post Book World, 5/18/2003 "Zimbalist demolished Commission Bud Selig's claim made before Congress that baseball's 30 teams lost \$519 million in 2001....A compelling critique." &#x97;Glenn C. Altschuler, Cornell University, Barron's, 6/2/2003 "[Zimbalist] has other arrows in his quiver, including a worldwide player draft with picks in reverse order or league standings, elimination of some of the tax shelters that owners now enjoy and tighter governmental oversight over team movement and labor relations." &#x97;Lawrence S. Ritter, New York University, New York Times, 5/25/2003 "Especially revealing." &#x97;The Boston Globe "May the Best Team Win' combines the precision of an academic with the passion of a fan.... you have no one to blame but yourselves if you don't get 'May the Best Team Win', read it and heed it." &#x97;Allen Barra, St. Petersburg Times (Florida), 4/6/2003 "My daydream... is that somehow every sports talk show host and every caller to such a show might mysteriously find himself or herself reading this illuminating book. That development would decrease the dumbness quotient of discussions between the former and the latter by about 99%." &#x97;Bill Littlefield, "Only A Game" (WBUR), 4/19/2003 "Major league baseball has put a stranglehold on real competitive balance, and Zimbalist claims that the near-monopoly status is a detriment to any impulse for improvement. His prescriptions offer harsh but needed medicine." &#x97;Library Journal, 5/1/2003 "Andrew Zimbalist's 'May the Best Team Win' is a stark reminder that many of the issues that divided baseball's owners and players during the contentious 2002 collective bargaining negotiations have not been fully resolved." &#x97;Daniel C. Glazer", Shearman and Sterling sports group, New York Law Journal, 5/29/2003 "The real case for reforming the sport is to reinstate that very American balance, rescuing the sport from a system, which, as it stands, is neither competitive nor fair." &#x97;The Economist, 5/31/2003 "[Zimbalist] is correct in identifying MLB's primary problem -- competitive imbalance." &#x97;Andrew M. Alexander, co-editor of Intellectual Conservative, Intellectual Conservative.com, 3/3/2004 "The author of one of the most significant works on baseball economics, 'Baseball and Billions,' Zimbalist

considers baseball's current state of economic health.... With amazing precision, Zimbalist turns Selig's claims of \$519 million in book losses for the 2001 season... into an actual operating profit." Geoff Wilson, *Baseball Magazine*, 4/20/2003 "These days a typical owner will rake in big money, claim he's nearly broke and then threatened to move unless his host city subsidizes a new stadium at taxpayer expense. If you think this is an exaggeration, read Zimbalist's brilliantly researched study on the economics of the game." Charles Hirshberg, *Sports Illustrated*, 5/26/2003 "Zimbalist's analysis is easily accessible, his data quite interesting and his judgments evenhanded almost to a fault." Washington Post, 4/6/2003 "One of the great strengths of *May the Best Team Win* is the way in which Zimbalist clearly unravels the workings of various markets & labour, product, broadcasting and stadiums and how they combine to make up the industry that is baseball. He provides a detailed analysis of collective bargaining in baseball.... Provides a very readable account of major issues associated with the recent operation of American baseball. It systematically examines various peculiarities and nuances of the operation of this legal cartel. Its major contribution lies in its analyses of the impact of recent collective bargaining deals, the various revenue sharing mechanisms they contain to enhance competitive balance and the moving feast that is broadcasting rights.... Highly recommended for all those interested in the economics of professional team sports and the operation of cartels."

Braham Dabscheck, *Economic Record*, 6/1/2004 "Zimbalist has written a compelling, accessible introduction to the economic issues surrounding the current state of major league baseball." D. A. Coffin, *Indiana University Northwest, Choice*, 1/1/2004 "Zimbalist writes a thorough but concise analysis of the economic health of MLB.... One of the strengths of *May the Best Team Win* is the way the book uncovers the hidden disincentives that are hurting the game."

Kevin Skelly, *Bureau of Labor Statistics, New York, Issues in Labor Statistics* "The overriding theme of the book is that MLB is an unregulated monopoly and as a consequence the industry suffers from inefficiency, exploits consumers, manipulates public policy and suffers from a competitive imbalance that threatens the future of the game.... A well-crafted book that gives a good view of the inner workings of MLB and its owner-barons and provides an interesting case study of cartel behavior. The intended audience is clearly broader than that of academic sports economists.... Zimbalist succeeds in making the material engaging for both economists working in this field and for non-specialists interested in the economics of baseball." Leo H. Kahane, *Mount Holyoke College and California State University, Hayward, Journal of Economic Literature*, 6/1/2004 "An interesting, insightful, and revealing examination of the business of baseball; a book that will shave the game to its roots. It will become the ultimate book on the economics of

professional sports. You will find it just as riveting as I did. " ;Pat Williams, senior vice president, Orlando Magic, 2/1/2003"The business of sports is more competitive than the games on the field because the business is conducted under the laws of commerce, not the rules of sport. In this excellent book, Andrew Zimbalist describes the action in the business of baseball like it was the seventh game of the World Series ;which it is." ;Clark C. Griffith, Chairman, Sports Law Division, American Bar Association Forum on Entertainment and Sports Law, 2/1/2003"A great book ;just the latest indication of why I tell my students at Harvard that Andrew Zimbalist is the top sports economist in the country. " ;Paul Weiler, Friendly Professor of Law and chair, Sports and Entertainment Law Program, 2/1/2003

This book provided a great analysis of the economics and policies of Major League Baseball. The author's points are clear and easy to follow. While the author appears slightly more in favor of the players' perspective than the owners', he makes a point to show both sides of the argument and does not favor particular teams. It was written in 2002 so some of the information is outdated, but it is amazing to look back and see what was important at the time, how little has actually changed since that time, and how the CBA of 2002 has impacted today's game.

I work for a professional sports franchise (but not baseball), and this book really helped me understand the issues surrounding a professional team. This covers some major subjects, such as labor agreements, stadium financing, and broadcasting deals, by using major league baseball as an example. Anyone wanting to further their knowledge of how the economics of a professional sports league should grab this book.

great

Excellent and very educational!!

The information presented in this book is amazing. The economics of baseball are hardly talked about. There are some things that go on behind the scenes that most of us don't know about. It was fascinating to find out about this, but it got to be too much for me to handle. I ended up being bored with it in the end and that is why I gave it two stars. I also disagree with some of Zimbalist's theories on how to reform baseball. He is not open to any other ways, and I should know since I met him once for a seminar.

A solid follow up to *Baseball and Billions* his more extensive book on the workings of baseball. While each is now dated it is important to trace how baseball's structure really is by following where it can from. It is also interesting to see how predictions have turned out. Finally no baseball author or sports writers seem to come out with the idea that competitive balance in baseball is much more than it is given credit for. Not just the Rays but also the Twins(although until this year there good years every year was a part of the problem actually) and the Giants and Rangers. Baseball has more parity then football in some studies. The other thing is does competitive balance matter? People think it matters but really it doesn't so much as people like it when the Red Sox and Yankees are always in the race.

Bob Costas's popular "Fair Ball" was an examination of baseball from the fan's perspective. "May the Best Team Win" is a similar work, but is written from the point of view of a professor of economics. Mr. Zimbalist's writing style is often just what you would expect from an economist; the text is very dense and may turn off some readers. Luckily, the book's fault is also its strength. The well-researched analysis provides irrefutable arguments in favor of making changes in the game, and educates the reader far better than other authors' attempts. This deeply probing work uncovers the abuses and inefficiencies in the baseball industry, and concludes that baseball's monopoly is the devil in the details. Team owners use their monopoly power to "derive higher returns, misallocate resources, and take advantage of consumers." Any fan who has paid \$5 for a ballpark hot dog will definitely empathize with his findings. "May the Best Team Win" addresses the competitive balance (or competitive imbalance), the myth of non-profitability, the collective bargaining agreements, and how teams convince cities to foot the bill for new stadiums. In the end, Mr. Zimbalist outlines some possible solutions to help improve the game. Some of his ideas seem workable, while others seem idealistic and unrealistic. However, all of his suggestions are well worth reading. This is an ambitious effort, and fans with serious concerns about the future of the sport will definitely appreciate this analytical endeavor. Zimbalist has taken on a difficult issue, and shown that he has more than just warning track power. Highly recommended.

Andrew Zimbalist's "May the Best Team Win" explains to the reader just how much the game aspect of baseball has dwindled over the years. Many owners nowadays seem to want to maximize profits out of their teams, not wins. He goes into detail about the history of the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) and their fights against ownership. It is interesting to note that while

the union is portrayed as the goat for many of the past labor work stoppages, after reading this book one can understand why the union's grievances with ownership are what they are. They have also harbored feelings of distrust not just against the owners, but against commissioners as well: Ueberroth and his role in the collusion scandal of the 1980s, and Selig and his ludicrous demands thrown on the bargaining table along with his claim after the 2001 season that Major League Baseball was in the red by millions of dollars. Zimbalist studies Major League Baseball's exemption from antitrust legislation, how it came about, and how it is congressionally and judicially deemed today. While it seems baseball will retain exemption so long as they can police themselves, given the bevy of problems plaguing the game (or, rather, business) today, it seems that the government must sooner or later step in and right the many wrongs. If baseball were not exempt from antitrust legislation, notwithstanding the fact that owners could sell a team to municipalities and amateurs could challenge the right of a team to withhold exclusive rights to their services for up to seven years, one would find out just how much money ownership really lost and by how much the number would differ from Selig's number. He writes with a viewpoint that seems to place most of the blame, right or wrong, on ownership and the commissioner's office. Labor problems aside, if the owners and commissioner would be open and honest with the union and the government while striking accord between themselves over what issues they should bring to the bargaining table, Zimbalist seems to rightly conclude this would lead to amicable relations between the union and management. He cannot be wrong in blaming management-because of their antitrust exemption, they are given a lot of liberty that many corporations in this country do not enjoy. In addition, the owners who own other businesses (John Hart, Ted Turner, et al) can rearrange their books to categorize revenue earned from the team under their other business ventures. He proposes many rational solutions to be implemented: a promotion/relegation system similar to the English Premier League where the worst team moves down into a second-tier league and the best team in that league moves up to the premier league; an international draft, along with more early draft picks for low-revenue teams; and an adjustment to the revenue sharing system that discourages excessive spending but will not reward low-revenue teams that simply pocket the money they receive. If the government chose to intervene, he suggests splitting MLB into the American League and the National League as two separate leagues. This, Zimbalist believes, would bring down team revenues, player salaries, and costs to attend games while at the same time resolving competitive-balance issues. These solutions are certainly not without merit, yet given the myopia of the current caretakers of the game (or, rather again, business), it is unlikely any of them will be enacted, and if so, reach remotely successful fruition. It seems really unfortunate to think about the

idea that baseball really has become less of a game and more of a business. Given the "new wave" of GMs who feel they can put a team together on the basis of sound sabermetrics, it appears that the players are seen more as commodities than they are as people. They say baseball is a game of numbers. While common numbers used to center around batting average, home runs, and runs batted in, numbers studied in the "game" today seem to include expected rate of return, comparative advantage, and cost-benefit analysis.

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