

## **The Datafication of Sport: Sports Analytics and Technological Change**

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### **Lecture summary:**

Sport is in an era of ‘datafication’, meaning a time when seemingly every aspect of sport performance can be recorded, quantified, and analyzed. If you’re a sports fan, you might recognize this datafication:

- From stories in news media about your favourite team hiring analytics personnel to help with front office decisions.
- From the ‘advanced statistics’ shown during sports broadcasts – for example, on whether a football team should ‘go for it’ on fourth down.
- Or, perhaps from your own involvement in sport and exercise, where you might track your steps, jogging routes, or bike rides on your phone or with a wearable device.

The datafication of sport takes these and many other forms.

This lecture adopts historical, sociological, and managerial perspectives in examining the datafication of sport. In Part 1, the lecture considers two historical imperatives that have led to our current ‘datafied’ moment in sport: 1) the ongoing history of technological innovation in sport; and 2) the longstanding desire to know the truth of sport performance.

In Part 2, the lecture considers why the datafication of sport is meaningful at the current moment in time. Here, the focus lies with how data and analytics are impacting work dynamics, communication, and in-game performance in the sport industry.

### **Relevant readings:**

- The book, *Moneyball: The art of winning an unfair game*, by Michael Lewis (2003), helped popularize a data-intensive view of sport performance. It was adapted as a film, also called *Moneyball*, that was released in 2011.
- The book, *Game of edges: The analytics revolution and the future of professional sports*, by Bruce Schoenfeld (2023), is a more recent contribution in a similar vein to *Moneyball*.
- Chris Jones’s (2022) book, *The eye test: A case for human creativity in the age of analytics*, offers thoughtful counter-arguments to the growing emphasis on data and analytics in various aspects of life (including sport).
- There are many features in news media about the incorporation of analytics into different sports leagues.
  - One example is the story, “How the WNBA experienced the 3-point revolution,” from *The Athletic*: <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/2586371/2021/05/14/how-the-wnba-experienced-the-3-point-revolution/>.
  - Another example is the story, “‘Open people’s eyes’: How the NHL’s evolved in the decade of data,” from *theScore*: <https://www.thescore.com/nhl/news/2848474>.
- Along with research collaborators, I co-authored a short piece for the Sport Information Resource Centre called, “Sport after Moneyball: Exploring sports analytics and the digital economy”: <https://sirc.ca/articles/sports-analytics/>.