

Sabermetrics and *The Simpsons*
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A recent episode of the television comedy series *The Simpsons* was centered around sabermetrics, the statistical analysis of baseball. The name comes from the acronym SABR, which stands for the Society for American Baseball Research.

In the episode “MoneyBart” (Season 22, Episode 3, Original Airdate October 10, 2010), young Lisa Simpson agrees to fill in as coach for her older brother Bart’s Little League baseball team. She discovers that one of her scientist heroes, Professor Frink, and some of her father’s former college classmates are passionate about sabermetrics. As the professor explains, “The field was developed by statistician Bill James,” who replies in a cameo appearance, “I made baseball as much fun as doing your taxes!” They loan Lisa a large number of textbooks with titles including “Moneyball” and “Schrodinger’s Bat,” and one with Euler’s equation as its title.

Lisa becomes obsessed with using statistical results to coach her team toward victory.

Lisa: Bart, this guy has walked the last two batters, and if he walks you, we win the game. Don't swing at anything.

Bart: But I'm on a hot streak!

Lisa: Hot streaks are a statistical illusion!

Bart: I wish **you** were a statistical illusion!

Lisa: Well there's a 97% chance I'm not, so do what I say!

Later, Lisa cuts Bart from the team for disobeying her coaching based on sabermetrics.

Ralph: When is Bart coming back?

Lisa: He's not. He thought he was better than the laws of probability. Anyone else think he's better than the laws of probability?

[One player raises his hand.]

Lisa: Well, you're not!

When a player is unable to play for health reasons, Bart returns and is determined to play his favorite sport based on instinct. Lisa gets caught up in the excitement of his outrageous attempt to steal home. Though the team loses the championship game, she confides in her brother, “You made me love baseball, not as a collection of numbers, but as an unpredictable, passionate game, beaten in excitement only by every other sport.”

The episode features several staples of “Simpsons” episodes, in particular Lisa’s proclivity for logic and quantitative reasoning, and comedy based around math and science but not at the expense of those who study those subjects. For more information on math and *The Simpsons*, visit SimpsonsMath.com.

The title of the episode refers to the title of Michael M. Lewis’s book, “Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game” (W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 2003), which details the efforts of the Oakland Athletics’ general manager Billy Beane to use a sabermetric approach to create a competitive team. A feature film based on the book and starring Brad Pitt is filming now for a 2011 release.