

Fie On Figure Filberts: Some Historical Crimes of Baseball Statisticians

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Major league baseball's mighty grip on its fandom owes much to baseball statisticians; for more than a century those dutiful pack-rats have provided box scores of games, standings of teams and records of player performances. Such compilations, in addition to furnishing historians with basic data, have vivified past baseball seasons in the minds of fans.

Recently, however, over-zealous statisticians have done violence to historical principles of objectivity and of reverence for the integrity of past ways of life. By attempting to cast past eras of major league ball into present forms, the temporocentrism of some modern figure filberts poses a formidable challenge to baseball historians. Lest baseball historians guard against his "present is all that there is" mentality, there is a clear danger that the historical record be distorted by such latter-day Pythagoreans.

A major assault on historical integrity took place in 1968 when a special records committee was assigned to revamp all baseball records for what was touted as the ultimate official publication of major league records – the Macmillan *Baseball Encyclopedia* project. The committee dutifully met and proceeded to do violence to baseball's past by recomputing some statistics in the light of present day assumptions.

Some outrages stemming from this (and other statistician forays) include the crime of rejecting the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players as a major league; the crime of rewriting the 1887 seasonal records; the crime of compressing the 1892 split season; the crime of tampering with Cobb's 1910 batting title and Ruth's 1918 homer record; the crime of touting Rose's 1981 batting streak, and the 1981 Oakland and 1982 Atlanta breakaway gaits an unique. When challenged by historical-minded critics on some of these, one figure filbert airily dismissed 19th century official records as "stone age."

Clearly the integrity of past major league records and forms of the game is at stake. It is hoped that this paper might alert historians to the vulnerability of their logic. Forewarned is forarmed, and historians need ever to remind themselves that knowledge and not certainty is the goal of their enterprise. Past eras are entitled to their own logic-way; lest we forget that, lest we drop our guards, there is the ever present danger that smug certainists will trouble the waters with their rationalism without reason excesses.