To kick off Hockey Prospectus 2015-16, I would like to talk to you about the state of statistical analysis in hockey: where we have come from, and where we are now.

As a long-time, diehard baseball fan, I have often contrasted the baseball and hockey statistical analysis (“analytics”) movements. While not perfectly overlapping, there are certainly a lot of similarities. The arguments against progression are strikingly similar, as is the drastic overhaul of an industry in a short period of time. If anything, once other sports had proved the concept’s merit in their fields, and once the ball got rolling in hockey, the pace of its widespread acceptance has arguably occurred faster than it did in baseball.

These changes were not the result of analytics companies forming, or teams looking to experiment. While those things have been happening for a while, the analytics movements in both baseball and hockey were initiated and driven by a particular group of people. One could argue that their work ethic regarding the analysis was unreasonable given the complete lack of financial incentives, and the audience was incredibly small. These groups of bloggers and fans, who could also be called academics, lawyers, engineers, scientists, or just overall smart people, helped create a voice, and a demand, for quality statistical analysis in hockey. It was out of this demand that sites like Hockey Prospectus (and Baseball Prospectus before it) were born, and it was what drew me to them. It was easy to qualify this new group of people as a niche… until they started getting calls right.

While we can get bogged down on the everyday conversations of a player’s Corsi, one would be misinformed if they were unaware of how hockey analysts have answered some big questions over the last decade. As a short example list: the value of outshooting opponents versus shooting percentage; the talent in shot quality; the amount of time needed to gain value from special teams; how long it takes for a goalie’s save percentage to normalize; the impact of opponents, linemates, and zone usage on performance; the impact of scorer bias on a goalie’s stats; the merit of adjusting stats for the score of a game; how to quantify a player’s game in all aspects, and then turning that into a financial value relevant for a hard salary-cap world.

Some of the answers simply reinforced existing beliefs within the industry. However, many people aren’t as informed as those within the industry and needed this insight to learn about the game. On the other hand, many discoveries ran contrary to the common beliefs of hockey people. For instance, there is still resistance within some corners of the NHL to the idea of shooting-percentage regression, and overreaction to a goalie’s three-month performance. One could easily argue that without the diehard hockey analysts, like those at Hockey Prospectus, the ones who plug away for the love of the game, and for the love of knowledge, that these big debates would not have occurred over the previous 10 years.

Like baseball, and other sports, hockey is substantially better off as a community for being more knowledgeable. Now, arguments over evaluations are more precise, and detailed, not to mention many of the newer metrics are quite simple. Detractors can no longer get away with the excuse that the game is too hard to quantify, complaining that there are too many variables to account for. It may not be perfect, but the hit rate for those who make evaluations using a variety of numbers, and their acquired skill for interpreting those numbers, has gotten attention for a reason.

Of course, we have a ways to go. Like how the baseball statistical community still has questions to answer about defense, in hockey, we still have big questions to answer: isolating performance; how to properly evaluate goalies; and what are the ideal tactics for a team to implement. But maybe the answers aren’t too far away with the advances of new technology. What we can be sure of is that the demand to have those questions answered hasn’t gone away—it has grown exponentially, and people will continue to discover...
new, exciting revelations about the game we all love, and they will have the evidence to back it up.

I read *Hockey Prospectus* originally for the new and thoughtful insight about an area of the game I had a strong desire to learn more about. As with *Baseball Prospectus*, the talent, and the commitment created an appeal in an emerging field. *Hockey Prospectus* is one of the longest-standing institutions in a field that has shed the “emerging” label, and is now established, and important.

This book, *Hockey Prospectus 2015-16*, will cover the complexities of player projection in a manner you won’t find in other places. It will statistically break down players for the casual and hardcore fan alike. It will carefully review last season and preview the upcoming one, not with a lazy opinion, but with reasoned analysis backed up by evidence. As I did in this space for four years, you will also see a group of up-and-coming scouts go into an excellent analysis on the top NHL prospects. You may not recognize every author’s name, although some are already quite noteworthy in the field, but do know that they all smart, care a lot about this sport, and put a volume of work into this publication that may make you question their sanity.

So give this book a read. You might learn something.

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