



Introduction to Sports Wagering

A Seven-Part Series by Hansel Wei








Part Six – Numbers that Matter

Rule 6: Go Beyond the Box Score

The final score in any professional sports game never tells the whole story. Your job as a bettor is to get a full sense of what a team's character is like, and that is something that can never be summed up in the scores that you see scrolling along the bottom of your television. In addition to reading game recaps and watching a team play, the following statistics are important to look for when gauging whether a team is a worthy investment:

1. Momentum – Once a team gets on a roll, do they keep it going? Conversely, if a team gets scored against, will they get flustered and be scored against a few times in a row before the bleeding stops? Or will they buckle down and look for an equalizer immediately?

You can get an idea of what the momentum swings in a game were like by looking at a scoring summary, generally available for all professional sports except for basketball. An MLB scoring summary looks like this, for a game between the Florida Marlins and the Washington Nationals:

	Inning	Scoring Summary	FLA	WAS
	3rd	P Lo Duca singled to left, J Pierre scored.	1	0
	7th	C Delgado reached on infield single to second, L Castillo scored, C Delgado to second on throwing error by second baseman J Carroll.	2	0
	7th	T Blanco singled to shallow left, R Church scored, B Schneider to second.	2	1
	7th	C Baerga hit by pitch, T Ohka scored, T Blanco to third, J Guillen to second.	2	2
	7th	M Byrd hit sacrifice fly, left to shortstop to third, T Blanco scored, J Guillen out at third.	2	3
	8th	L Harris doubled to deep right, M Lowell scored, A Gonzalez to third.	3	3
	8th	R Church homered to right, N Johnson and V Castilla scored.	3	6

Although Washington got in a hole early, they managed to hang in there and put together a big inning in the 7th to take the lead. When Florida came back to tie it in the next inning, Washington responded with a three-run home run. As a bettor, this tells me that Washington is unlikely to get fazed by a little pressure and can make clutch hits to win a game.

For the NBA, most news sources do a good job of mentioning significant game-changing runs by each team in their game recaps. Although points are easy to come by in basketball, giving up a game-changing 20-0 run, for instance, can be a huge morale breaker for a team and can put them in an insurmountable hole. Be careful of teams that get in the habit of having to crawl out of such holes to win games.

2. *How* points are scored – Scoring summaries and game recaps should give you an idea of how a team puts points on the board. Don't think for a minute that all points are equal—just because points count for the same values does not mean that the implications are the same for the serious sports bettor.

This is particularly evident in baseball. Before someone bets on a starting pitcher, he should be familiar with how runs have been scored against that pitcher. If a pitcher is credited with one earned run against him in an inning, he may have thrown well and struck out three batters, but left one bad pitch up over the plate and given up a home run. Compare this pitcher with another pitcher credited with one earned run, but who gave up a long double, walked someone, gave up another single to load the bases, and hit a batter to bring in the run. While the two pitchers have the same number of runs against, it's clear who the smarter one to wager on is.

In football, look at whether a team prefers to run the ball or throw the ball, and compare these numbers with their upcoming opponents' defense against the run and the pass. If you find you've got a great running team against a team that defends well against passes but is weak on the ground, for instance, you may consider making a wager.

3. *When* points are scored – Often the final score doesn't give one team full credit over the other. By tracking score changes throughout the game, you can get a sense of whether the outcome of the game was ever really in question.

How many times have you heard the expressions “this game was closer than the final score indicated” or “don't let the final score fool you; (team x) wasn't ever really threatened in this one”? This is what you have to be careful to watch out for. If two football teams engage in a hard-fought, back-and-forth battle, and one team ekes out a gritty three-point win on a last second field goal, it says a lot more about the character of both teams than if the game is a blowout, one team has held a comfortable ten-point cushion and has been playing reserves for the whole second half, and the losing team happens to close the gap to three on a last-minute touchdown. In the second instance, the final score gives the losing team more credit than they are due, and you should by no means assume that they will ever be within such a slim margin of other good teams.

Look at when in the games teams like to score points. Is one basketball team known for their ability to “turn it on” in the fourth quarter? Does another team rely on a big first half and then hope that the cushion is enough to outlast their opponents and win?

A key stat that should be emphasized is how teams fare late in the game. Entering the fourth quarter down by 15, most basketball teams will buckle and call it a night. Even if they come up short, the teams that work feverishly to close the gap are the teams you want to keep in mind when you’re wagering. Their “heart” and refusal to roll over will overwhelm less committed teams, and when these plucky teams enter the fourth quarter in a close game or with a lead, you can count on them usually pulling out the victory.

Naturally, the stats that count the most will vary from sport to sport. However, by adopting these approaches into your betting strategies, you can go beyond the box score and give yourself the Inside Advantage over your competition.

Until next time, do yourself a favor...

Keep doing things Hansel’s Wei.