

Alumni Books



Cyclist Lance Armstrong won a record **seven** Tours de France.



The Red Sox won the World Series in 2004, the first time in **eighty-six** years.

Doing the Math

A NEW BOOK COUNTS ON SPORTS GEEKS' FASCINATION WITH NUMBERS

John Veneziano and Michael Ferraro met at BU in 1987 and became fast friends. Ferraro (COM'90) was a sports reporter at the *Daily Free Press*; Veneziano (COM'86), a recent graduate and self-described "statistics geek," was BU's assistant sports information director. The two Philadelphia natives formed an instant kinship, Veneziano recalls, for many reasons: a love of the Phillies, a professional interest in BU sports, and a shared hatred of the Boston Celtics. But as with all good sports fans, the conversation always went back to one thing: numbers.

Twenty years later, Ferraro and Veneziano have turned the hobby that cemented their friendship into an entertaining collection of the successes, failures, and outright anomalies behind oft-quoted sports

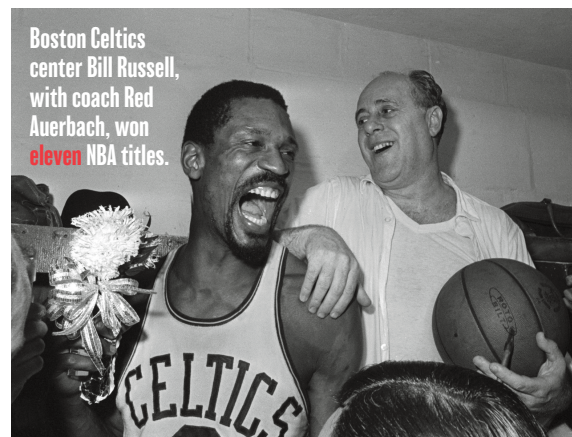
statistics. *Numbelievable! The Dramatic Stories Behind the Most Memorable Numbers in Sports History* (Triumph Books, 2007) chronicles both well-known achievements, like Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point basketball game in 1962, and more obscure feats, such as the 408 victories that Grambling State football coach Eddie Robinson racked up in fifty-seven years as coach.

There are infamous numbers, too. For every Lance Armstrong (the winner of seven Tours de France) or Roger Bannister (the first runner to break the 4-minute mile, at 3:59.4), there's a Rosie Ruiz or a Chicago White Sox; her faked Boston Marathon number (W50) and the team's shameful year of gambling (1919) are instantly recognizable to fans who follow sports scandals.

Then there are numbers that

in the minds of many sports fanatics haven't earned a place in stats history at all. Not every fan, Ferraro points out, will find it meaningful that NBA All-Star Charles Barkley stood six feet, four and three quarter inches. While Barkley's height may be better suited to bar trivia than to serious sports history, he argues, the number represents a great story.

"He listed himself as six feet, six inches, because that's what shorter players have to do in the game," Ferraro says. "But he went on to be a great rebounder and have a huge impact on the national sports scene."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Similarly, Veneziano defends the inclusion of the Wrigley Field location — Row 8, Aisle 4, Seat 113 — of the Chicago Cubs fan who grabbed an easy out from the stands in 2003, turning the Cubs' shot at the World Series into a crushing defeat.

"Not everyone knew where he sat, but everyone knew the story," Veneziano says. "By putting that seat number in the book, Cubs fans who happen to go may seek out that location."

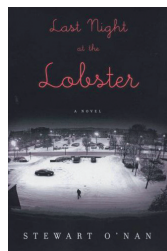
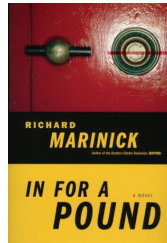
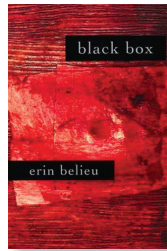
The authors say they aren't afraid of sparking debate; in fact, *Numbelievable* is a by-product of their own passionate, and enjoyable, arguments about numbers. Collaborating mostly through phone and e-mail — Veneziano, an NFL publications editor, lives in Lynn, Massachusetts, while Ferraro, a sports columnist and television writer and producer, lives in Los Angeles — the two had to cull a list of more than 200 classic statistics.

"We each defended certain numbers, but if the other guy could punch holes in the argument, we cut it," Ferraro says.

Veneziano, the more numbers-obsessed of the two, fought hard to include such things as the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team's victory over the Russians and basketball player Bob Lanier's shoe size (a whopping 22). Fortunately, their bicoastal bickering produced a highly readable book. ESPN commentator Dick Vitale liked it well enough to agree to write the introduction to each chapter.

Both Ferraro and Veneziano are looking forward to debating new numbers for years to come. Will college football history remember Veneziano's recent favorite, tiny Appalachian State's 34-32 upset over Michigan, a Division I powerhouse? Or will it favor Ferraro's pick, Trinity College's 2007 fifteen-lateral "miracle play," which has already been viewed more than one million times on YouTube? Only time will tell, they say.

"Great numbers come up every day," Veneziano says. "Part of the beauty of sports is that every time you watch a game, you just don't know what's going to unfold." **KATIE KOCH**



Michael Ferraro



John Veneziano

FICTION AND POETRY

BLACK BOX ERIN BELIEU (GRS'95) COPPER CANYON PRESS

The poet begins by looking back sixteen years, to days of youthful optimism, when "...Coke wasn't addictive yet, condoms prevented herpes//and men were only a form of practice for the Russian novel/we foolishly hoped our lives would become..." The foreshadowing is general: pleasure begets pain. The pain in the poems that follow is particular: the fury of a woman betrayed.

I am undead and sulfurous. I
stink like a tornado.
I lift my scarlet tail above your
grave
and let the idiot villagers take me
in torchlight
one by one by one

Flashes of humor in this well-paced collection provide traditional comic relief, breaking from the topic and the often-erotic anger while increasing tension with its own energy.

I'm watching football, which is
odd as
I hate football
in a hyperbolic and clinically
revealing way,
but I hate Bill Parcells more...

Gleeful in her for-once-impersonal rage, Belieu looks to justice through reincarnation, and

...Bill Parcells trapped in the
body of a teacup poodle,
as any despised thing,
forced to yap away his next life
staked to
a clothesline pole or doing hard
time on a rich old matron's lap,
dyed lilac to match her outfit.

So, even the dead are not forgiven. Tension builds through the collection to a ten-poem set, "In the Red Dress I Wear to Your Funeral," followed by the final poem, "At Last," which quietly accepts life's irony.

In the end, what you loved moves to Brooklyn. That's all.

NATALIE JACOBSON McCracken

IN FOR A POUND RICHARD MARINICK (MET'92,'95) JUSTIN, CHARLES & CO.

Marinick has been a laborer on the Big Dig, a nightclub bouncer, a Massachusetts state trooper, part of bank and armored car robbery gangs, and an inmate in Massachusetts Correctional Institution-Norfolk, where he earned two degrees in BU's prison program and became a writer. Except that he is innocent of the crime that sent him to jail, Delray McCauley, hero of Marinick's second novel (after *Boynos*, Justin, Charles & Co.), has had a similar career, suiting him well to take on a mystery set on the tough streets of Boston's Southie. **NJM**

JAN'S HOUSEBOAT HIDEAWAY: A BOY GROWS UP IN OCCUPIED HOLLAND SANDRA DEDEN (CAS'87) PUBLISHAMERICA

Preparing to write this young adult novel about occupied Holland during World War II, Deden talked to older relatives and learned that there are as many conflicting truths about history as there are people who lived it. This blended children's-eye view is moving, amusing, and informative about their times and how children view their circumstances. **NJM**

LAST NIGHT AT THE LOBSTER STEWART O'NAN (ENG'83) VIKING

"Will I like it as much as *A Prayer for the Dying*?" I ask Stewart O'Nan in requesting a review copy of his latest novel. "I guarantee you won't," he e-mails back, "but it has its own quiet charm." Indeed it does, which may well make it the favorite of those who don't share my enthusiasm for his well-honed horror.

O'Nan's self-assigned beat is the working class: individuals shaped by their upbringings, but not victimized — they have choices and make them. Manny De Leon has chosen to make his final day of work at the Red Lobster as much as possible like the others, although it is being closed for no clear reason and he is being demoted to assistant manager of an Olive Garden. It is hardly as if work were his

entire world; he has a complex personal life to manage as well. And so while pondering that and the irony of his unrequited devotion to the Lobster, he deals with outside obstacles (Christmas week, a snowstorm), the spirits of his staff (all but four of them about to be unemployed), the customers (his high school coach, retired and lonely; an obstreperous toddler and his mother, first indulgent and then inexplicably furious with the staff), while simultaneously making executive decisions and doing menial tasks as needed (busing tables, sweeping the snow away). As ever, O’Nan has done his homework with care and compassion: the minutiae of running a restaurant are utterly convincing, from early morning until he locks up, considers a late-night snack at Wendy’s, and goes home instead, preparing for a final few hours tomorrow handing out makeup coupons to customers who won’t much care.

(*Snow Angels*, a film directed by David Gordon Green based on O’Nan’s first novel, is playing the festival circuit and will soon be in theaters.) **NJM**

MAX & MO’S FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL
PATRICIA LAKIN (DGE’63, SED’65)
AND BRIAN FLOCA
ALADDIN/SIMON & SCHUSTER

In this new series of early readers for four- to six-year-olds, golden hamsters Max and Mo become classroom pets and use their wits to communicate with the “big ones” at school. Other books in the series take the critters apple picking and snowman building, the simple — but not simplistic — text complemented by Brian Floca’s cheery illustrations. **TAYLOR McNEIL**

A MONK JUMPED OVER A WALL
JAY NUSSBAUM (LAW’85)
TOBY PRESS

J. J. Spencer is morally ill-suited to be an associate in a white-shoe Manhattan-based law firm: he has too much conscience. His bosses realize this before he does, leading to his unemployment early in this good-humored and timely novel of discovery, personal as well as legal, centered on mortgages and foreclosures. **NJM**

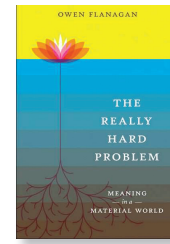
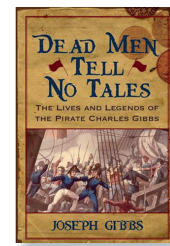
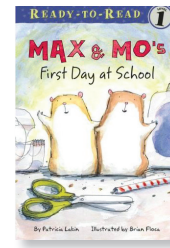
THE MURDER OF MARY BEAN AND OTHER STORIES
ELIZABETH A. DE WOLFE (GRS’96)
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Industrialization and employment in the mills of Sacco, Maine, in the mid-1800s offered unsophisticated young women the delights and dangers of an income and a relatively unsupervised life. Investigations following the discovery of an unidentified body in 1850 revealed the not-unexampled fate of one such woman, victim not so much of an illegal abortion as of the doctor’s efforts to cover up the resulting infection. Along with the mid-nineteenth-century Maine context of the victim’s life and death, the investigation, and the trial that followed, historian De Wolfe includes some contemporary illustrations and two fictionalized accounts, sensational, sentimental, and very Victorian. **NJM**

NEW SHORT FICTION FROM CUBA
JACQUELINE LOSS (CAS’93)
AND ESTHER WHITFIELD, EDS.
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS

The introduction points out that readers are, by definition, voyeurs, and thus we participate in the watching and being watched, which are central to many stories and often played out in unconsummated, sometimes joint sexual fantasies. There is the struggle for individuality by, variously, nameless characters and characters much concerned with names, their own and others’. There is isolation: a young man makes love to a younger girl by caressing her image in a mirror; to their mutual satisfaction; two old friends meet unexpectedly and find they are forever separated by their differing life choices; a writer is obsessed with the works of an artist of whom he knows nothing beyond a mention by a woman he has imagined based on her signature and her underlined passages in a used book. And there is pervading fear.

The Internet, limited tourism, and publications like this are now showing us Cuban life. Although only a few of these dozen short stories by as many



authors are explicitly about the impact of life in contemporary Cuba on the individual psyche, they all reflect it, elusively and hauntingly. **NJM**

SAVED
JACK FALLA (COM’67, ’90)
ST. MARTIN’S PRESS

This first novel by Falla, a sportswriter and a College of Communication lecturer in journalism, is full of details about the lives of professional hockey players on and off the ice. The book will be satisfyingly familiar to players and fans and informative to the rest of us. (Do some players really throw up before every game?) **NJM**

NONFICTION

THE BLACK AND WHITE OF AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC FROM SLAVERY TO WORLD WAR II
VERA LEE (GRS’62)
SCHENKMAN BOOKS

White performers as recent as Elvis Presley may be reviled for musical thievery, but Lee’s survey documents mutual influences and exchange over four centuries in which black music and white music were to a large if diminishing extent separate entities.

Early slave music retained some African rhythms and the clapping, dancing, and overlapping call-and-response singing that blurred separation of performers and audiences, while Christianity, enforced or embraced, added the strong influence of hymns. Meanwhile, influence was also flowing the other way, as slave owners overheard music their slaves made in the fields and at night and brought them into their homes to play for dances.

In the nineteenth century, white performers blacked up for minstrel shows, and black performers followed suit, complete with burnt cork. Minstrel shows gave way to vaudeville, then musical comedy and other species of stage show, but Al Jolson and others, white and black, still based their acts (and often their makeup) on black stereotypes. (Self-satire was fashionable entertain-

ment among other minorities as well: by the 1870s, the team Harrigan and Hart were telling both black and Irish jokes; in the 1920s, Jewish comedienne Fanny Brice cultivated her Yiddish accent.)

Lee traces the roots of jazz to New Orleans and details the evolution of ragtime, Dixieland, swing, the big bands, and bop. She describes the work of twentieth-century lyricists as being often appropriate for either race. Even the blues, she says, were about loneliness, poverty, and other sorrows, but seldom explicitly about racism; in “Poor Man’s Blues,” Bessie Smith pleaded for the sympathy of “mister rich man,” not mister white man. But lyrics were also written for segregated audiences. While white male vocalists of the teens and roaring twenties were praising their petite girls primly, or anyway coyly, (“could she love, could she woo, could she could she could she coo”), the ample Ma Rainey was singing wittily explicit “Copulating Blues.”

There’s much social history here in the accounts of Prohibition, the Depression, war, and peace, of recordings and radio, and particularly of segregation. Our popular music, now gray, is the result of continued and varied interchange, Lee concludes, but jazz, the music most distinctly American, is at its soul black. **NJM**

DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES: THE LIVES AND LEGENDS OF THE PIRATE CHARLES GIBBS

**JOSEPH GIBBS (COM’87, GRS’90, UNI’94)
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA PRESS**

Charles Gibbs, née James Jeffers — and no relation to the author — was no Captain Jack Sparrow. Joseph Gibbs tells us. One of the last true pirates to prowl nineteenth-century seas, his murderous and criminal feats would make Disney fans blush. Likewise, Gibbs’s account isn’t exactly family fare, but rather a scholarly work of maritime history.

Both seaworthy swashbuckler enthusiasts and pirate-curious landlubbers alike can appreciate Gibbs’s accessible portrait of the mysterious Jeffers, which

debunks the myths in the pirate’s own confessions. **KK**

THE REALLY HARD PROBLEM: MEANING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

**OWEN FLANAGAN (GRS’72, ’78)
MIT PRESS**

Flanagan earned both a master’s in chemistry and a doctorate in philosophy at BU, so it’s only fitting that his latest book tackle the relevance of philosophy in today’s science-based academic culture. The “really hard problem” facing scientists and philosophers, he argues, is not explaining how human consciousness works, but understanding why we humans assign such significance to our brief material lives. Flanagan, a professor of philosophy at Duke University, attacks the problem of meaning — our innate but subjective desire to seek happiness and fulfillment — from a multidisciplinary angle. His research into religion, psychology, and evolutionary biology, among other fields, paints an optimistic and humanistic portrait of the quest for a meaningful life. **KK**

Rosamond Purcell (CAS’64) is the fourth person to have owned, and treasured, this bit of vermin-eaten bread, given first to a prisoner during World War I. It has probably found a lasting home with Purcell, a visual artist with a penchant for decaying found objects. But why have others preserved, for example,



a box of used bobby pins, an undistinguished mussel shell, various toys, a light bulb from an abandoned steel mill, and other such objects? In *Taking Things Seriously*, by Joshua Glenn (SED’93) and Carol Hayes (Princeton Architectural Press), their owners say why.

NJM

