*Moneyball* in the Classroom

Using Baseball to Teach Statistics

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**From the *Common Core State Standards***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interpreting Categorical and Quantitative Data (S-ID)** | | |
| **Summarize, represent, and interpret data on a single count or measurement variable** | | |
| 1. Represent data with plots on the real number line (dot plots, histograms, and box plots). | |
| 2. Use statistics appropriate to the shape of the data distribution to compare center (median, mean) and spread (interquartile range, standard deviation) of two or more different data sets. | |
| 3. Interpret differences in shape, center, and spread in the context of the data sets, accounting for possible effects of extreme data points (outliers). | |
| 4. Use the mean and standard deviation of a data set to fit it to a normal distribution and to estimate population percentages. Recognize that there are data sets for which such a procedure is not appropriate. Use calculators, spreadsheets, and tables to estimate areas under the normal curve. | |
| **Summarize, represent, and interpret data on two categorical and quantitative variables** | | |
| 5. Summarize categorical data for two categories in two-way frequency tables. Interpret relative frequencies in the context of the data (including joint, marginal, and conditional relative frequencies). Recognize possible associations and trends in the data. | |
| 6. Represent data on two quantitative variables on a scatter plot, and describe how the variables are related. | |
| a. Fit a function to the data; use functions fitted to data to solve problems in the context of the data. *Use given functions or choose* *a function suggested by the context. Emphasize linear, quadratic, and* *exponential models.* |
| b. Informally assess the fit of a function by plotting and analyzing residuals. |
| c. Fit a linear function for a scatter plot that suggests a linear association. |
| **Interpret linear models** | | |
| 7. Interpret the slope (rate of change) and the intercept (constant term) of a linear model in the context of the data. | |
| 8. Compute (using technology) and interpret the correlation coefficient of a linear fit. | |
| 9. Distinguish between correlation and causation. | |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Team** | **Runs Scored** | **Runs Allowed** | **Wins** |
| ARI | 734 | 688 | 81 |
| ATL | 700 | 600 | 94 |
| BAL | 712 | 705 | 93 |
| BOS | 734 | 806 | 69 |
| CHC | 613 | 759 | 61 |
| CHW | 748 | 676 | 85 |
| CIN | 669 | 588 | 97 |
| CLE | 667 | 845 | 68 |
| COL | 758 | 890 | 64 |
| DET | 726 | 670 | 88 |
| HOU | 583 | 794 | 55 |
| KCR | 676 | 746 | 72 |
| LAA | 767 | 699 | 89 |
| LAD | 637 | 597 | 86 |
| MIA | 609 | 724 | 69 |
| MIL | 776 | 733 | 83 |
| MIN | 701 | 832 | 66 |
| NYM | 650 | 709 | 74 |
| NYY | 804 | 668 | 95 |
| OAK | 713 | 614 | 94 |
| PHI | 684 | 680 | 81 |
| PIT | 651 | 674 | 79 |
| SDP | 651 | 710 | 76 |
| SEA | 619 | 651 | 75 |
| SFG | 718 | 649 | 94 |
| STL | 765 | 648 | 88 |
| TBR | 697 | 577 | 90 |
| TEX | 808 | 707 | 93 |
| TOR | 716 | 784 | 73 |
| WSN | 731 | 594 | 98 |

**Part 1: Pythagorean Winning Percentage**

Bill James, one of the leading figures in sabermetrics, proposed that a team’s winning percentage could be well modeled by the following formula, where *RS* = runs scored and *RA* = runs allowed. He called it the “Pythagorean” winning percentage formula because the denominator reminded him of the Pythagorean theorem.

Predicted winning percentage = 

How does it work? Why did he use an exponent of 2? Let’s find out using data from the 2012 Major League Baseball season.

**Part 2: Modeling Runs Scored**

Knowing how to predict winning percentage using runs scored and runs allowed is great. But, how can we predict runs scored? Let’s look at more data from 2012.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Team** | **Runs**  **scored** | **Hits** | **Home**  **runs** | **On-base** | **Slugging** | **OPS (On-base**  **Plus Slugging)** |
| ARI | 734 | 1416 | 165 | 0.328 | 0.418 | 0.746 |
| ATL | 700 | 1341 | 149 | 0.320 | 0.389 | 0.709 |
| BAL | 712 | 1375 | 214 | 0.311 | 0.417 | 0.728 |
| BOS | 734 | 1459 | 165 | 0.315 | 0.415 | 0.730 |
| CHC | 613 | 1297 | 137 | 0.302 | 0.378 | 0.680 |
| CHW | 748 | 1409 | 211 | 0.318 | 0.422 | 0.740 |
| CIN | 669 | 1377 | 172 | 0.315 | 0.411 | 0.726 |
| CLE | 667 | 1385 | 136 | 0.324 | 0.381 | 0.705 |
| COL | 758 | 1526 | 166 | 0.330 | 0.436 | 0.766 |
| DET | 726 | 1467 | 163 | 0.335 | 0.422 | 0.757 |
| HOU | 583 | 1276 | 146 | 0.302 | 0.371 | 0.673 |
| KCR | 676 | 1492 | 131 | 0.317 | 0.400 | 0.716 |
| LAA | 767 | 1518 | 187 | 0.332 | 0.433 | 0.764 |
| LAD | 637 | 1369 | 116 | 0.317 | 0.374 | 0.690 |
| MIA | 609 | 1327 | 137 | 0.308 | 0.382 | 0.690 |
| MIL | 776 | 1442 | 202 | 0.325 | 0.437 | 0.762 |
| MIN | 701 | 1448 | 131 | 0.325 | 0.390 | 0.715 |
| NYM | 650 | 1357 | 139 | 0.316 | 0.386 | 0.701 |
| NYY | 804 | 1462 | 245 | 0.337 | 0.453 | 0.790 |
| OAK | 713 | 1315 | 195 | 0.310 | 0.404 | 0.714 |
| PHI | 684 | 1414 | 158 | 0.317 | 0.400 | 0.716 |
| PIT | 651 | 1313 | 170 | 0.304 | 0.395 | 0.699 |
| SDP | 651 | 1339 | 121 | 0.319 | 0.380 | 0.699 |
| SEA | 619 | 1285 | 149 | 0.296 | 0.369 | 0.665 |
| SFG | 718 | 1495 | 103 | 0.327 | 0.397 | 0.724 |
| STL | 765 | 1526 | 159 | 0.338 | 0.421 | 0.759 |
| TBR | 697 | 1293 | 175 | 0.317 | 0.394 | 0.711 |
| TEX | 808 | 1526 | 200 | 0.334 | 0.446 | 0.780 |
| TOR | 716 | 1346 | 198 | 0.309 | 0.407 | 0.716 |
| WSN | 731 | 1468 | 194 | 0.322 | 0.428 | 0.750 |

**Part 3: Modeling Runs Allowed**

Modeling runs allowed is even more challenging than modeling runs scored. Fortunately, there has been much progress in the last 10 years. Here are some data from 2012:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Team** | **Runs**  **allowed** | **Home**  **runs** | **Walks** | **Strikeouts** | **Strikeout/**  **Walk** |
| ARI | 688 | 155 | 417 | 1200 | 2.88 |
| ATL | 600 | 145 | 464 | 1232 | 2.66 |
| BAL | 705 | 184 | 481 | 1177 | 2.45 |
| BOS | 806 | 190 | 529 | 1176 | 2.22 |
| CHC | 759 | 175 | 573 | 1128 | 1.97 |
| CHW | 676 | 186 | 503 | 1246 | 2.48 |
| CIN | 588 | 152 | 427 | 1248 | 2.92 |
| CLE | 845 | 174 | 543 | 1086 | 2 |
| COL | 890 | 198 | 566 | 1144 | 2.02 |
| DET | 670 | 151 | 438 | 1318 | 3.01 |
| HOU | 794 | 173 | 540 | 1170 | 2.17 |
| KCR | 746 | 163 | 542 | 1177 | 2.17 |
| LAA | 699 | 186 | 483 | 1157 | 2.4 |
| LAD | 597 | 122 | 539 | 1276 | 2.37 |
| MIA | 724 | 133 | 495 | 1113 | 2.25 |
| MIL | 733 | 169 | 525 | 1402 | 2.67 |
| MIN | 832 | 198 | 465 | 943 | 2.03 |
| NYM | 709 | 161 | 488 | 1240 | 2.54 |
| NYY | 668 | 190 | 431 | 1318 | 3.06 |
| OAK | 614 | 147 | 462 | 1136 | 2.46 |
| PHI | 680 | 178 | 409 | 1385 | 3.39 |
| PIT | 674 | 153 | 490 | 1192 | 2.43 |
| SDP | 710 | 162 | 539 | 1205 | 2.24 |
| SEA | 651 | 166 | 449 | 1166 | 2.6 |
| SFG | 649 | 142 | 489 | 1237 | 2.53 |
| STL | 648 | 134 | 436 | 1218 | 2.79 |
| TBR | 577 | 139 | 469 | 1383 | 2.95 |
| TEX | 707 | 175 | 446 | 1286 | 2.88 |
| TOR | 784 | 204 | 574 | 1142 | 1.99 |
| WSN | 594 | 129 | 497 | 1325 | 2.67 |

**Part 4: Regression to the Mean**

*It’s difficult to make predictions, especially about the future.*

–Yogi Berra

We now have a better understanding of how to model runs scored, model runs allowed, and use these values to model winning percentage. Of course, all of our “predictions” have been for values in the past. What does the concept of “regression to the mean” tell us about future performance?