

This book is a rich source of mathematics and statistics in action and would give illuminating real-world examples of statistics being used outside our relatively constrained textbook and examination questions.

For a teacher or student with a passion and good understanding of the sports in this book I am sure this would be an engrossing and very interesting read. Sadly, although I found the analysis interesting, I fear my sports knowledge is a little too weak to appreciate fully how illuminating the analysis can be.

I would heartily recommend this book for a sports fan, particularly one who is grabbed by the data available and wishes to know more about how the data can be used to shed light on the performance of individuals and teams. There are clear examples which might be used in some of our A-level lessons to give practical examples for some of the techniques we usually teach.

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The art of mathematics—take two, tea time in Cambridge, by Béla Bollobás, pp 333, £19.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-10897-826-2, Cambridge University Press (2022)

‘Recreational’ mathematics is what mathematicians love to do after—or in-between—more ‘serious’ mathematics. Quite often, recreational mathematics is some kind of a social event, where toy problems and other brain teasers are tossed around during coffee breaks and between office doors. Béla Bollobás’s book contains 128 such problems from various fields of mathematics, ranging from analysis, geometry and number theory to probability and combinatorics. Some of the problems are ‘easy’ (like the Monty Hall problem), while some can be pretty hard (e.g. those involving prime numbers), but all of them can be solved in at most 4 pages. In some sense it is a modern and slightly more challenging continuation of the long tradition of recreational mathematics books by Lewis Carroll, W.W. Rouse Ball, Martin Gardner or Hugo Steinhaus, just to mention a few. Still, most of the brain-teasers should be accessible to undergraduates and even interested high-school students.

As the title indicates, this is already the second instalment and the structure of the presentation is similar to the first book. There are problems (32 pages), most of them have hints (11 pages) and all are fully solved in the third part of the book (286 pages). The solutions give an alternative, more mathematical statement of the problem (which is often part of the solution) and they come with detailed comments and a short bibliography. As one would expect, the selection reflects the author’s (good!) taste, yet there is some loose connection between the problems: all of them are linked to mathematicians which have some relation to Cambridge.

While it is clear that one should not (even try to) read this book from cover-to-cover, I think that it is best read in company, when one can immediately discuss the one or the other problem and when there is less incentive to give up and look at hints and solutions. Béla Bollobás’s book is the perfect coffee-table book for any maths department’s common room.

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