OPINION PAGE

THE GUM LOG

by Van A. Tyson

Money and balls

The book and movie *Moneyball* is not really about money and baseball, but it is, sort off.

It is true that it focuses on the Oakland Athletics baseball team, and on its general manager, Billy Beane, but the main point is something broader.

I will come back to that broader point later.

The book is by Michael Lewis, who also wrote The Blind Side, which is not really about football, although football is the context, and The Big Short, which is not really about the stock market, although the stock market is the context.

Moneyball is now a blockbuster movie, that hit the theatres last Friday, and will probably be a hit, because it stars Brad Pitt as Billy Beane. I haven't seen it yet, but I just finished the book and loved it. Beane managed to win a lot of games, including a record 20 wins in a row using some techniques that other teams ignored, and he won with a budget one-fourth the size of other teams'. The other teams had bigger stadiums, bigger attendances and wealthier owners.

Some of Beane's techniques were:

- recruiting players with on-base percentages, rather than batting averages, counting walks as well as hits;
- closely related to this, seeking players with discipline at the plate, watching for good pitches and resisting swings at marginal pitches, therefore getting more walks, and furthermore making the pitchers throw more balls, wearing them down;
- paying attention to statistics, not the player's appearance, such as being overweight (like Babe Ruth), walking funny, or throwing funny.



Beane was especially sensitive to this last item because he looked very good, tall and muscular, fast and strong, causing him to be recruited right out of high school. But he had a spotty career, bouncing up and back from the major leagues and skipping college.

So he also preferred college students over high school graduates, because he could collect their college statistics and better judge their discipline.

Two examples were a pudgy catcher who injured his arm and couldn't be a catcher any more, but Beane moved him to first base and used his plate discipline. In one game, a pitcher became so frustrated with his failure to swing that he stepped down off the mound and shouted, "What do you want?"

Another example was a pitcher languishing in triple-A ball because he had a low side-arm pitch that didn't look good but confused batters.

At one point, after *Moneyball* was published eight years ago, other teams began to catch on and Beane had to be sneaky to keep other teams from noticing who he was recruiting and beat him. Now, enough other teams are using statistics to keep the As from winning as much.

This is especially true of the Boston Red Sox, who had money and used statistics. Beane almost went to work for them.

The broader point I mentioned at the beginning is (1) looking past the obvious and (2) not being blinded by conventional wisdom. In other words, think independently and have confidence in your instincts.

Lewis's other book, *The Blind Side*, portrayed a woman who refused to accept that a poor young black man couldn't succeed and go to college. And Lewis's book *The Big Short* showed that investors could make money in the failing real-estate and stock markets by betting against the conventional thinking.

At a party on Mount Nebo Saturday night at the Tim Tackett house, benefiting the River Valley Arts Center, we had another illustration of the need to overlook the obvious.

We played a game in which we told three stories, one of which was a lie. Then the rest of the people voted on which was the lie. Often what seemed to be the obvious truth was the lie.



O.M.D., 2011

BY "PETE MOSS"

Well . . . It's Saturday night and another Ozark Memories Day has come and gone. Maybe it's just me, maybe not, but I believe it may have been the best of the twenty-four celebrations we've lived here for. I know we've missed a few here and there, due to work and other inconveniences. Last year it just happened to be a knee replacement. Now, that's something that will sideline a person for a while!

This year, too, was a bit different from the norm. My firstborn's family was sort of helter-skelter. Mom and Dad were out of town on military training, but the grandkids are old enough to be involved in the activities of the day. That meant that we did most of the running this year. It truly has been a weekend of logistical genius thus far. Friday morning I found myself in the kitchen even before the morning ablutions had been performed in another room of the house. Knowing that I'd have extra people for supper and that I'd also be tired when I returned home from work, I browned meat, cut up onions and celery and filled the big soup pot half full of water, brought it to a boil and then turned down the heat and let it simmer all day – with the admonition to my spouse NOT to let it go dry.

I'm glad that there is a lot of stuff in the freezer. We're set for any rainy day that might come along. Actually, Thursday was chilly and felt like a soup-for-supper day, while Friday warmed up and we put the air-conditioning back on. We sliced and diced some fresh veggies and put in a lot of things from the freezer, adjusted the seasonings and feasted. When the herb and cheese biscuits were out of the oven, we filled each bowl almost to the top with the soup. I'm so glad our grandchildren appreciate the finer things in life. That's good upbringing. Homemade vegetable-beef soup is just about one of the most delicious and healthiest things a person can eat and those three kids came back and filled their bowls a second time!

In the morning we arrived in town and got everybody delivered to the correct locations before the parade and then found a place to view it. We already had a cake for the band dinner cooling in our kitchen. It was that "Great Chocolate Cake" recipe, frosted with cream cheese icing, and I almost wanted to dig right in, but stifled the urge and took the cake to the high school instead.

After living in a place for over two decades, a person gets to know a lot of people. Today I saw many of those, some good friends that we've all been too busy to keep up with.

In spite of all the activities this week, there was one point today when I just sat back and talked with some of those good souls and totally relaxed for a while.

The weather couldn't have been any more perfect than it was – this hasn't always been the case. The food was great and the activities, entertainment and presentations were, too. We were surprised and pleased to see that the other grandparents had made the trek from Mansfield to enjoy the activities.

Later in the day, whilst waiting in line for the band dinner, we decided to get take-out dinners. The line was much shorter! Not being the gambling type, I have one question to ask of you all. What are the odds? We got to the head of the line, just in time for the helpers to bring another tray of desserts to go with the dinners. Guess whose cake was on the tray! I thought we were back in the twilight zone again, but didn't complain. We just went to the house and enjoyed the chicken dinner and chocolate cake!

Pleasant Grove News

BY PAT LARUE

Cooler weather feels so much better, and thank the Lord for the little showers we have been getting.

Congratulations to Linda Bartholomew on opening her Avon Beauty Center. I met Linda several years ago when we both were selling Avon and congratulations on her grandchildren that I didn't know she had.

Vesta Steele, Vernon Clayton and Lucene Collins attended the Standridge reunion at Russellville last week. Vesta said they had 100 or more there and had two that were 95 years old and her sister in the nursing home got to come.

Wilma Rentfro told me the Yow-Rowland reunion will be the 9th of October at the Dover City Park. All friends and relatives are invited. Pot luck lunch will be served at noon. For more information, call Wilma at 331-2289.

My sympathy is extended this week to these families: Brent Keener, Jason Stringer, Leola Linker, Benjamin Pressnell and to a friend of Jesse and Edra Cossey, Bob Russell. They lived next door to each other at one time.

Congratulations to Jessie and Kerrie Chronister on the birth of their daughter, Sarah Beth, and to the grandparents, Gary Freeman and Kay Prestridge and to Jesse and Adonna Chronister.

Congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. W.A. Berg on their 65th wedding anniversary. We have heard him preach several times.

Gage Wilson of Mabelvale spent Friday and Saturday night with grandparents, Denise and Terry Duvall. Regan Duvall got to come to the Ozark Memories Day Parade with them Saturday morning.

Don't forget the singing will be at Pleasant Grove Assembly Saturday evening, Oct. 1, at 6 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

Juanita Van Ohlen and Pat LaRue had lunch with Bill and Anna LaRue Sunday after church. Juanita and Dick had just gotten back from Texas, visiting their son and family.

Thought for the week: Every human being is intended to have a character of his own; To be what no other is, and to do what no other can do.

Country Living

BY PAULA ALLISON

The leaves are not yet beginning to turn, as much as I had hoped. I suppose there are still many whom have not received enough moisture to begin their change from adapting to the summer heat to the autumn coolness. The time frame for change is never the same, nor can anyone exactly put a finger on the single date of the change. However, the days are cooling down, deer season is just a day or so away, and fishing has once again become a favorite pass time of many old timers.

Lately, I have been blessed to watch two young squirrels play hide and seek around, up and down, an oak tree. The tree naturally, is large, and hiding from one another on such is quite easy. They bark to one another and soon they are out of sight, as quickly as they were beginning their play, they ceased. Watching the tops of other trees, I see shaking in the leaves, and therefore am satisfied that the two playmates are scampering off to other playgrounds for the morning.

Fallfests and other activities are being anounced everywhere, near and far. Hopefully, if you have a favorite, you will be able to attend, enjoy the crowd, and live to tell about it, without regret. (In other words, many times we either eat too much or stay out too long, and come home exhausted!)

Get ready, there are Thanksgiving and Christmas decorations out everywhere. Yes, there are also Halloween items out, but Halloween is at the end of October. Our merchants are certainly becoming aware that more than just a few customers love to shop early. Everything seems to reflect the merchants' wishes, wanting to get their stuff off the shelves, and all things seem to be arranged in perfect order to catch the eyes of the shopper. Of course, it is all a part of City and Country Living.

Three Dog Nights

BY MARCUS KILBURN

The last few weeks there've been many three-dog nights at the Kilburn abode in Little Rock. It's not because of cold winter nights where it takes three dogs in bed with you to stay warm or because we've been on a kick to listen to the music of the popular 70s' rock band of the same name (Three Dog Night – *One, Joy to the World, An Old Fashioned Love Song*). Our three dog nights have been due to a specific quantity of canine friends calling the place "home."

The matriarch of the group is "Tess." Her full name is Contessa Noel Kilburn, but Tess is a lot less of a mouthful. Nowadays what you call her really doesn't much matter. Tess has been a member of the family for 15 plus years and her hearing has finally diminished to the point she can't hear whatever you call her. There was a time, however, when her hearing was much like my kids' in that it was extremely selective. Call her for a treat and she could hear you from a mile away. Call her for a bath and she couldn't seem to hear you from a couple of feet. Now she can't hear much at all. Did I mention she also has cataracts that limit her vision to objects directly in front of her nose? To say we treat her like a Queen would be an understatement.

The middle-age adult of our three dog night is Slack. An Australian Shepherd that is perhaps one of the smartest dogs I've ever seen, Slack is making a major adjustment in her new, if temporary, abode. Slack was raised on a working horse and cattle farm by my animal-loving daughter. Slack lives to run free in the pasture in search of wayward cows and any animal (snakes, opossums, armadillos, etc.) that has no business being there. It's obvious Slack doesn't enjoy her new surroundings and is merely tolerant of the confined quarters. It's almost like she knows the situation is temporary and is just biding her time. She really is that smart. Did I mention she's as well-mannered as any dog I've ever seen?



The youngster of the group is a black lab named Nelli. I can't say for sure that dogs have moods, but if they do, this dog is always in a good one. Nelli doesn't have an aggressive bone in her body and thinks only of two things - food and playtime. It is simply impossible to get mad at Nelli even when she chews the heels off a new pair of shoes or chews the stuffing out of her new bed or knocks a lamp off the end table with a forceful swipe from her constantly wagging tail. Regardless of what she has done, one look from those soulful big brown eyes and all is forgiven. Did I mention she is as lovable as any dog I've ever seen?

Nelli came to us when her owner, son Tanner, moved back home after graduating from college. Slack moved in when her owner, daughter Brooke, was displaced while building a new home. The personalities of the three dogs could not be more different, but there are rarely disagreements between them (except when Nelli begs Slack to play and Slack shows a lack of interest through barred teeth). The humans in the house have not only learned to live with three dog nights, but to actually enjoy the turmoil and tumult of three dog 24/7.

Our three dog nights recently became two dog nights when Slack moved into her new house. I can only imagine her glee at having a 100-acre pasture at her beck and call. Nelli doesn't seem to miss Slack too much, so long as someone plays Frisbee with her on demand. Tess sleeps most of the day and doesn't seem to miss anything, although she still enjoys being scratched behind the ears when the mood hits her. The rock band Three Dog Night had many hit records over the years and one sums up my recent experience with three dog nights very well. The title of the song? *Joy to the World*.

State Capitol Week in Review

FROM SENATOR MICHAEL LAMOUREUX

Legislative leaders have asked for an audit of questionable unemployment checks being sent from the state Workforce Services Department.

According to a federal report issued by the U.S. Labor Department, the state agency has mistakenly paid out more than $161 million in unemployment insurance since July of 2008.

The problem of overpayments took center stage at the most recent meeting of the Arkansas Legislative Council, when state lawmakers called for tighter controls within the Workforce Services Department to ensure that the problem gets fixed as soon as possible. Some lawmakers said they would introduce legislation to increase penalties for fraudulently filing an unemployment claim.

About 40,000 Arkansans are now receiving unemployment benefits. The federal report was based on a sample of fewer than a thousand cases in each of the past three years, randomly selected out of all claims paid in Arkansas. A spokesman for the U.S. Labor Department defended the validity of the report, saying its quality control methods had been proven over time.

However, the state Workforces Services Department disputed the numbers and said that last year the amount overpaid was $11 million, much less than the $50 million in overpayments reported by the federal agency for last year.

Whatever the amount in overpayments, legislative leaders called the federal report "disturbing" in a letter requesting a detailed audit of unemployment benefits paid in Arkansas.

It is especially frustrating for legislators because they passed difficult bills during the past two sessions to restore the financial health of the state Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund.

Act 861 of 2011 froze benefits for unemployed workers and Act 802 of 2009 raised the basic wage on which employers pay unemployment taxes, from $10,000 to $12,000. Those measures have reduced the deficit of the state Unemployment Trust Fund and will restore it to a a positive balance by 2015, according to recent estimates.

The news about overpayments is also particularly frustrating to the business community, which pays taxes to maintain the Unemployment Trust Fund.

The federal Labor Department lists reasons for the improper unemployment payments. The largest category of improper payments, 63 percent, were to people who had found work again but continued to claim unemployment benefits.

The second most common reason for improper payments was "separation issues," which means that new information came to light that would have disqualified the recipient had it been reported in a timely manner. The fault could be on the part of the employer or the employee, or the information may not have become available until a ruling is made on appeal.

Separation issues were the cause for 17 percent of the improper payments, according to the Labor Department report.

Being unable or unavailable to work accounted for seven percent of improper payments. that happens when the recipient turns out to be disqualified from receiving benefits because they were in the hospital or in prison, for example. Another three percent of improper payments were made to recipients who failed to look for work, as required in order to be eligible for benefits.

The improper payments represent 9.88 percent of all unemployment amounts paid in Arkansas in the three year period from July 2007 through June 2010.

In August the unemployment rate in Arkansas was 8.3 percent in August.

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