

The Manley Arts

WILL MANLEY

Sports and Librarians



“three strikes and you’re out clause”? What’s your “game plan” for marketing this new service? Can you “coach up” that “rookie” employee who “talks a big game” but rarely “delivers in the clutch”? Can that “superstar” public-relations person function as a “team player”? Can you “pass the puck” to a coworker when you get “double teamed” by too many projects? Who is “quarterbacking” the new computer installation? How good is your “pep talk” to a demoralized staff? Is that new computer programmer all “x’s and o’s,” or can he relate to heart and soul issues too? How do you react when a “flaky” employee comes up with a crazy idea “out of left field”? Do you provide a forum in which employees can “pitch” new ideas? Who are the “players” behind this latest capital proposal? Are they “heavy hitters”? Are you a manager who goes for the “grand slam,” or are you satisfied with hitting “singles and doubles”? Do you know who has “the inside track” for that new promotional opportunity in sales? Do you know who’s “driving” the process? When your “ace” salesman calls in sick, whom do you have in the “bullpen” for a “closer”?

Clearly, if you don’t know sports, you’ll be the odd man (or woman) out at the management team table, and it’s not just a matter of speaking the lingo. There’s the water-cooler angle, too. People often put down the importance of early-morning office chatter around the coffemaker and the water cooler, but small talk is what makes you one of the guys. If the boss is a golf nut, and Masters weekend is around the corner, you better have an opinion on Lefty’s short game or Tiger’s latest swing change. If you don’t, no one’s going to can you, but if you do say something clever and catch the Big Guy’s ear, you might be sitting front and center in his golf cart on the first tee after lunch on Friday afternoon while all your coworking stiffies are back at the office staring at computer screens and twiddling their thumbs on their iPhones. From the golf course, it’s just a hop, skip, and a jump to the nineteenth hole, and if you don’t know what that is, you’re truly clueless.

Unfortunately, most librarians are truly clueless when it comes to sports. Ever hear of ALA sponsoring a charity golf tournament to raise money for literacy awareness during Annual Conference? Of course not, but every other major professional

Sport is more than an array of games and activities. Sport is a language.

It’s a language that you pretty much have to be fluent in to get ahead in management. Does your termination policy have

association has a golf tournament. In my city-manager days, all the major players in the profession competed in the annual League of Cities and Towns golf tournament.

Ever hear of library staff members throwing a baseball around during lunch or shooting hoops during break time like they do at all the computer companies in Silicon Valley? Of course not. Librarians read during break time. I even saw a vigorous cricket game being played outside a Santa Clara digital company last week, but I’ve never even seen a bunch of librarians play anything during the lunch hour except maybe Angry Birds on their smartphones.

With the utterly unprecedented popularity of sports-fantasy leagues, the need for some sports knowledge has become even more critical for those with upwardly mobile career aspirations in the white-collar work-a-day world. Personally, I think fantasy football is strictly for candyasses and chickenshits who never played a down of football in their lives, but, my God, there are scores of websites devoted to it. Okay, you’re probably thinking that this is strictly for men,

but a growing number of women are not only participating in fantasy football but also dominating it with their meticulous attention to statistics, quantitative assessments, and sabermetric analytics.

But even bigger than the fantasy leagues is bracketology, that emerging field of probability in which you try to predict the winner of the NCAA Basketball Tournament otherwise known as March Madness. When the president of the U.S. unveils his bracket breakdown on national television, it’s a pretty big clue that you better start paying attention to basketball so you don’t embarrass yourself in the office pool.

Of course, librarians will play defense on the subject and protest that the library profession is a sports-free zone, and, therefore, there is no need to know a “hat trick” from “a goal line stand.” But that’s exactly where librarians are wrong. Clearly no one’s going to chat with you about the National League standings back in the cataloging room, but if you want to score some points at City Hall and network with the heavy hitters, it wouldn’t hurt to brush up on your baseball . . . or football . . . or golf. You’d be surprised by how much more the powers that be will be impressed by your knowledge of baseball statistics than your presentation of library statistics.

So get a clue. Take this issue of *Booklist* very seriously. Read all the reviews of the sports books. Better yet read some of the sports books. With the knowledge you gain, you can hit a home run back at City Hall and score some points for your library budget.

Will Manley has been writing the Manley Arts since 1991.

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