Praise for
Sports Analytics

“Getting coaches and general managers to listen and understand the numbers is a classic problem for high-level star geeks in pro sports. In this brisk narrative, Benjamin C. Alamar takes us inside that process, using telling anecdotes from his colleagues and his own experience as a consultant with the Oklahoma City Thunder. This is a great read for job seekers, teams interested in improving their own analytics platform, and smart fans wanting a peek inside team decision making.”
—Zach Lowe, staff writer for Grantland

“Outstanding! This is a serious look at the challenges of bringing analytics into the ‘actionable’ realm within an organization, with great ideas and stories based on some of Benjamin C. Alamar’s own experiences.”
—Roland Beech, director of analytics, Dallas Mavericks

“Benjamin C. Alamar combines firsthand experience as an analytics consultant with investigative research to provide an insider’s view of team-sports decision making. Using industry examples instead of complicated formulas or equations, he is able to bridge the gap between the executive suite and sports fans. This is a great read for anyone interested in learning more about how the sports world operates behind the scenes.”
—Brian C. Kopp, vice president of strategy and development and head of Sports Solutions Group, STATS LLC

Benjamin C. Alamar is the director of Production Analytics at ESPN, leading the development of sports analytics for the network. He worked for seven years in the NBA with the front offices of the Denver Nuggets and Seattle SuperSonics, using analytics to improve trades, free agency, the draft, and coaching tactics. The contents of his book, Basketball on Paper, are now used broadly across the NBA. Oliver has a Ph.D. in engineering and has years of experience as an advance scout, collegiate scout, and coach.

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—Benjamin C. Alamar, Sports Analytics: A Guide for Coaches, Managers, and Other Decision Makers
SPORTS ANALYTICS

A GUIDE FOR COACHES, MANAGERS, AND OTHER DECISION MAKERS

BENJAMIN C. ALAMAR

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FOR AMY, WHO IS JUST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.
CONTENTS

Foreword by Dean Oliver ix
Acknowledgments xiii

1 Introduction to Sports Analytics 1
2 Data and Data Management 24
3 Data and Information 35
4 Predictive Analytics and Metrics 44
5 New Metrics 65
6 Information Systems 79
7 Analytics in the Organization: Innovation and Implementation 91
8 A Blueprint for Analytic Success 104
9 Building and Managing an Analytic Team 117

Notes 125
Index 127

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Sports analytics experts understand that The Game is still human. It is why they got into the field in the first place. It is what all the formulas, numbers, and analyses are about—measuring, managing, and making the most of the people who get to play The Game.

That may not be explicit in Ben Alamar’s book, but it is implicit. He was a sports fan who was analytically inclined. I was, too. We rooted for teams and players. A lot of people like us wanted to play sports at the highest level but ran out of physical gifts somewhere below that. The passion to do something competitive, to understand and improve on The Game—that kept us watching. The ability to understand data, work with data, and think analytically about sports—that is what created the field that Ben is writing about.

Sports analytics didn’t exist as a real job description until long after it was a job for people like Bill James, Pete Palmer, and Tom Tango. They, among others, took to writing about baseball and using numbers to better understand players and tactics roughly in the 1970s. There were other books about numbers in other sports that followed, but these failed to achieve the following of the baseball books. People like Ben read those, learned what to do and what not to do.

The Internet came about in the mid-1990s and allowed so many more people to write, people who may not have had connections to

FOREWORD

Dean Oliver