

Moneyball

reviewed by [Steve A. Vineberg](#) in the [November 15, 2011](#) issue

Moneyball has a slick, entertaining script by two pros, Aaron Sorkin and Steve Zaillian, and it's briskly directed by Bennett Miller. Culled from Michael Lewis's book of the same name, it tells the story of the efforts by general manager Billy Beane (Brad Pitt) to sculpt the Oakland Athletics into a winning baseball team in the face of opponents (especially the Yankees) with the financial clout to steal away the best players.

Beane's inspiration is a statistics-based philosophy developed by Bill James; Jonah Hill plays Peter Brand, the young economics major from Yale who turns Beane on to James's methods. The movie wrestles with a number of elements. Chief among them is Beane's struggle against colleagues, most significantly manager Art Howe (Philip Seymour Hoffman, in a wry, understated performance), who are more comfortable with the orthodox approaches to shaping a ball club, which Beane and Brand argue no longer work in a system where money rules.

Whenever the James approach doesn't bear fruit, however, Beane amends it—suggesting that what makes him a great GM is a combination of experience, instinct and open-mindedness. His own bitter past—as a ballplayer recruited out of high school who never delivered on the promise the scouts saw in him—plays a role in Beane's distrust of the kind of guesswork that goes into the acquisition of young hotshots.

The juxtaposition of these ideas should make *Moneyball* more complex than it is. But the filmmakers keep going for big revelatory moments that, enjoyable as they are, flatten out the movie. Still, the movie has an affable hard-boiled comic spirit and shows off a number of actors to advantage, especially Pitt.