

This Book Is Not About Baseball. But Baseball Teams Swear by It.

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Baseball is littered with examples of varying body types — Astros second baseman Jose Altuve, who is 5-foot-6, and Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge, who is 6-7, finished 1-2 in the 2017 American League Most Valuable Player Award voting — but cognitive bias can cloud judgment, too. In Teaford's case, the scouting evaluation was predisposed to a mental shortcut called the representativeness heuristic, which was first defined by the psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. In such cases, an assessment is heavily influenced by what is believed to be the standard or the ideal.

“When we look at the players standing for the national anthem, it's hard not to realize that quite a few of these guys are far from stereotypical or prototypical,” Mejdal said. “Yet our mind still is attracted quite loudly to the stereotypical and prototypical.”

Kahneman, a professor emeritus at Princeton University and a winner of the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002, later wrote “Thinking, Fast and Slow,” a book that has become essential among many of baseball's front offices and coaching staffs.

There aren't many explicit references to baseball in “Thinking, Fast and Slow,” yet many executives swear by it. It has circulated heavily in the front offices of the Oakland Athletics, the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Baltimore Orioles and the Astros, among others. But there is no more ardent a disciple of the tome than Mejdal, a former biomathematician at NASA who earned master's degrees in both cognitive psychology and operations research.

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