

Math plays odds with peanuts and Crackerjacks

Ken Ross aims to make probability a relevant baseball concept in his book, 'A Mathematician at the Ballpark'

ALLISON PARKER
FREELANCE REPORTER

Although his daughters prefer the Mariners, "Deep down I'm a traditionalist who prefers most of the National League teams," said Ken Ross, author of "A Mathematician At the Ballpark: Odds and Probabilities for Baseball Fans."

Ross, a former University math professor of 35 years, spoke at the University Bookstore Thursday about his latest book.

"A Mathematician At the

Ballpark" is for a wide audience from "eager 12-year-olds" to their grandparents, Ross said.

The book was an exciting release, said Brian Juenemann, the event organizer at the University Bookstore. Juenemann must pick one to two University professors each academic term for whom to sponsor an event or book reading.

"I try to promote less academic books" in order to create more student interest than a textbook format might, Juenemann said.

Ross' book came out just as base-

ball season began this year, which spiked Juenemann's interest when picking his choice for the term.

With nationwide interest in the playoffs, it seems Ross couldn't have picked a better time to speak about baseball at the University campus.

The book concentrates on baseball and probability — two of Ross' biggest interests. "Doing probability with odds would be like doing multiplication with Roman numerals," Ross said. That is where his book comes in. Given that odds only make sense in gambling settings, Ross hopes to bring probability and odds together and make them more relevant as mathematical objects.

Ross said he put most of his energy into making the book "accessible

and friendly."

"My purpose was definitely to communicate with baseball fans

about the language and ideas of odds and probability," Ross said, although it

has also appealed to colleagues and students who use Ross' book in various math classes.

Ross first began combining the all-American sport of baseball with his mathematical career in 2000, when he held a freshman seminar called "Statistics and Mathematics of Baseball." Ross' class not only had an emphasis on methods from the theory of statistics, but it also studied batting averages, streaks and other records in baseball history.

It wasn't until Ross taught this

course that he began finding "all kinds of books and articles on the subject."

Ross earned his B.S. and M.S. at the University of Utah then received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington two years later. After teaching for 35 years, he retired from the University of Oregon in the spring of 2000.

The Pacific Northwest Section of the Mathematical Association of America honored Ross with the fourth sectional Certificate for Meritorious Service. He also serves as chair of the Carus Monographs Editorial Board and was chair of the President's Task Force on the NCTM Standards.

He has co-authored both volumes of "Abstract Harmonic Analysis," recently reprinted by Springer-Verlag. "A Mathematician at the Ballpark" was published by Pi Press.

Allison Parker is a freelance reporter for the Daily Emerald

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Journalist: Many Israelis support Bush

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because he has recognized that holding on to Gaza is counterproductive," he said.

As he discussed the disengagement plan, Wohlgelernter reminded the audience of the "human cost" for displaced Israeli families. He also outlined the financial cost, now estimated to be between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion dollars. He did not comment on the cost to Palestinians of a continuing Israeli presence.

"He did not look at the conflict from a Palestinian point of view, nor did I expect him to," said Shlomo Libeskind, a professor of mathematics who attended the talk.

Near the end of the evening, Wohlgelernter turned to the question of the influence of the U.S. election on Israeli affairs. While he said the internal politics of Israel were more important than any Washington influence, he also commented on the Israeli public opinion of the election.

"A majority of Israelis believe Bush is the greatest leader in U.S. history," Wohlgelernter said. He attributed this strong support to Bush's continuing support of Sharon and his refusal to meet with Yasser Arafat, a pariah even to liberal Israelis.

Frank agrees that most Israelis support Bush. However, he believes

a John Kerry presidency would hold more promise for the peace process.

"I hope he can take a more Clintonesque approach," said Frank. "It's in Israel's self-interest to have an administration that would take a more even-handed approach."

While Israeli politics remain unpredictable and often confusing, audience members at Wednesday's talk remained cautiously optimistic.

"The future of Israel I have no doubt about," said Libeskind. "It's the future of peace that is uncertain."

Thomas Munro is a freelance reporter for the Daily Emerald



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