Do you notice a difference?

DAYTON, Ohio — Two University of Dayton researchers have struck out a central theory about college versus high school players popularized by *Moneyball*, the influential 2003 book about Major League Baseball player evaluation.

The theory that college players were better picks than high school players is a key theme of *Mo neyball*
, as author Michael Lewis examined how the Oakland Athletics, although one of the poorest teams in MLB in the late 1990s, experienced success on the field disproportionate to their payroll.

Contrary to the *Moneyball* theory, the team of researchers found that after adjusting for draft position, baseball players drafted after college are no more productive than those drafted from high school.

In research published in *Applied Economics* in April, economists Tony Caporale and Trevor Collier examined the productivity of first-round picks for five MLB drafts from 1995 to 1999, controlled for order of selection.

Lewis attributed much of the Oakland A's success to the statistics-driven player selection strategy of general manager Billy Beane, who favored quantitative information over the scouts' more intuitive traditional observations of players.

Beane's system looked with greater favor on college players, because they accumulated more meaningful statistics: "They played a lot more games, against stiffer competition, than high school players," Lewis wrote.

But Collier and Caporale imply that since their research shows no difference in performance, the scouting system is equally efficient at identifying potential major leaguers.

"This suggests the importance of the scout system, which uses scores of intangible factors by men who have sat through thousands of innings of baseball, should not be readily discounted," they wrote.

So did Billy Beane get it wrong? And if so, how does that account for his success?

"You can't attribute all the success of the Oakland Athletics to Billy Beane's selection of college players," Collier said. "They were also drafting and trading for players with high on-base percentage and using different in-game management than was normal in baseball. It's hard to say what had the biggest impact."

Caporale and Collier noted nearly all organizations today use both the sabermetric and older scouting systems to identify promising players.

They also examined just how influential *Moneyball* may have been on the business of baseball,

asking "Did *Moneyball* influence the way MLB teams sign players?"

Not so much, they concluded.

They found no statistically significant change in the percentages of college players and high school players drafted after 2003, the year Moneyball was published.

However, they did find a "structural shift" in the pattern 20 years earlier, in 1981, which coincides with a favorable *Sports Illustrated* story on the theories of writer and analyst Bill James, who created the sabermetric method of scientifically analyzing baseball through the use of statistical data.

"This supports the notion that MLB managers were already incorporating the available information into their draft strategies, thus *Moneyball* did not introduce new information to baseball management," they wrote.

Collier said their research doesn't prove the shift in player selection was caused by the wider dissemination of James' ideas, but "it's an interesting possibility."

For Caporale, the research is an extension of his long-standing interest in baseball statistics, which started for him as a teenager who pored over James' annual abstracts.

Caporale continues his love affair with sports statistics and teaches sports economics in the University's School of Business Administration. He continues to follow baseball.

"I'm a Mets fan," he said. "That's my burden to bear."