

SDQL Function Hits Las Vegas

The annual SDQL convention in Nevada gave educated bettors a chance to mingle with pro handicappers while gaining new insight to the revolutionary Sports Data Query Language.

By Jarvis Simes

Trips to Las Vegas can have a lot of different meanings to different people. For many, gambling is at the root of their adventures in Sin City and sportsbooks have been a big part of the scene since the early 1950s.

The offerings at various outlets across the desert were in a constant evolution throughout the following decades. Technology made the books 'smarter' and as the betting menu diversified, handicappers were faced with a decision: They could either stick with their old-school methods or try and utilize the updated science to discover new techniques that would change the rules of the game.

Joe Meyer and his brother Ed are an example of two people that saw the challenge and went to work looking for a way to not only gain an advantage, but set it into motion. The platform is called Sports Data Query Language, or SDQL for short. Originally launched in 1998 as a python front end on an SQL database, the concept morphed into a database running entirely in the Python programming language. The current version, SDQL 2.0, came out in 2013 and has quickly become one of the internet's top sources for high profile betting information on North America's primary sporting events.

CHALK & TALK

In December of 2016, Ed and Joe hosted a convention in the heart of America's sports betting capital open to anyone with an interest in expanding their knowledge of SDQL with likeminded individuals. By all accounts, the seminar was a resounding success.

"The attendees were terrific," said Ed. "There was a wide range of experience but they were eager to learn and eager to help others. They were simply a funny, delightful group."

As a PhD and Business Analytics teacher, Dr. Ed Meyer has plenty of experience in a classroom setting. Meyer has conducted private workshops in the past and he has also offered free seminars at handicapping conferences on the Strip, but said the energy with this group was unique.

"The classes were scheduled for 90 minutes each night," he said, "but I think every class went at least two and-a-half hours. I'm glad we kept the group small because there was a lot of

questions from the attendees. Everyone had a laptop and everyone was performing queries throughout the class.”

The timing of this seminar coincided perfectly with the U.S. Table Tennis Open, held at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Joe, also a PhD in Physics, teaches table tennis at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and said the competition helps keep him sharp.

“I am not a high ranked player,” he said. “My rating is about 1300 and Will Shortz [NY Times, NPR] is about 1800. I accidentally entered the Open Division last December and got four points in my best game (but) I read somewhere that table tennis is good for the brain.”

That same intellectual fuel is what helped motivate the younger sibling to design and share SDQL. “The French philosopher Rousseau was always saying that humans are different from other animals because they love to learn. I say we are different because we love to watch people learn; because we love to engage in learning with each other.”

Joe said that the most rewarding aspect of the three-day event was the continuous development of each student but he added that, ‘those four points’ in the Open were pretty cool, too.

SDQL LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD

Any good handicapper realizes the time and intensity that goes into picking winners. The internet has granted access to a wide range of statistical data that was considered privileged information 25 years ago but the secret is knowing how to sort through all the clutter. While there is a distinct learning curve that goes along with SDQL mastery, once harnessed the tool works with the precision of a scalpel.

Ed Meyer compared what SDQL has meant to him in terms of analyzing a matchup.

“A decade ago, when handicapping I would wonder things like, ‘How do the Patriots do after a loss in which they led at the half?’ or ‘How do the Tigers do with Justin Verlander when he went eight-plus innings and lost in his last start?’”

“Before the SDQL, there was no way simple way to access the answer to these questions” said Meyer, “but now anyone on the planet can find the answers with a few clicks and the knowledge of the SDQL.”

Ralph Michaels, formerly of Northcoast Sports, had similar sentiment towards SDQL and during a phone interview said that it’s helping bettors stay competitive in a market that’s more fierce than ever.

“The lines are sharper nowadays and sportsbooks are not in the business to gamble,” said Michaels. “They see a line move and they’ll go with it.”

Documented as a top handicapper in college basketball, Michaels (@CalSportsLV) spends time working on football throughout the year and he has also used SDQL to help discover unique strategies for Major League Baseball.

“As the betting industry grows, you can still find value. Just look at ‘First Five Innings’ for example. This market is growing in popularity with the books but the public can’t find information to handicap it. With SDQL, it’s as easy going into baseball and typing ‘M5 > 0’ to get the margins for each team.”

Michaels discussed the options for comparing a team’s strengths or weaknesses in first five innings vs. full game at Wager Talk and he also noted how SDQL can complement a player’s live betting arsenal. With an endless number of possibilities and so many resources available online to help learn the language, he couldn’t understate the impact Killer Sports has had on his approach to wagering.

“From my standpoint, the SDQL is a powerful force in handicapping and I don’t think anyone should be intimidated when getting into it,” he said.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

The list of professional handicappers in attendance included Bryan Leonard, Johnny Detroit, Shaun Hess and Marco D’Angelo. Leonard (@BLeonardSports) knew Ed Meyer from his days living in the Cleveland area and as a situational capper, likes how the database allows instant access to anything specific to the matchup he’s researching.

“Anyone who wants to discover how a situation has actually fared in the past, has to get involved with SDQL. Many times we assume what are and (what) are not profitable situations. This lets you know if it’s already factored into a line,” Leonard said. “It’s a great time saver for someone handicapping a full card on a day-to-day basis.”

Paul Sam (@bklynboy63), a former dealer and shift manager at several Vegas casinos, was also onsite for each of the classroom sessions and offered his thoughts.

“I’m always looking for interesting sports forums and other sites to stay sharp... [and with SDQL] ... you’re only limited by your imagination,” said Sam. “I use scheduling, situations, angles and trends when looking at the day’s games and the SDQL gives me validation in what I’m looking at.”

Sam also noted that although he's proficient with computers for everyday use, he has never taken any programming courses or advanced training. Another student, John Currey, is a software developer that has been programming for years. With the help of Joe and Ed Meyer, Currey was able to challenge the SDQL Masters exam in Vegas and is now recognized at www.sdql.com/masters.html. Curry was also featured in the 2017 KillerSports.com Journal of MLB Research ("After a Complete Game Shutout," pg. 18).

"Meeting Joe and Ed Meyer was very cool. Not only are they extremely bright guys, they were a lot of fun to hang out with. Their phenomenal presentation skills provided the information in a useful and understandable way," said Currey.

"I got a better understanding of KillerSports.com, Sportdatabase.com, and the database. I now understand the relationship between the sites and what's available... (and) understanding the database better has assisted me in creating better queries."

Currey said he would recommend the classroom sessions to anyone that sees the potential of SDQL and wants to get more out of it.

"Sure, I think I have an advantage in learning SDQL since I have a strong programming background. However, the way the class is run and with all the examples that are presented, it gives the non-programmer more than enough information to make significant advances in using SDQL as a tool to be better informed."

The plan to present another three-day session in December is already in the works and if there is enough interest, Dr. Meyer said he will also consider a course in August 2017, just ahead of the NFL and NCAA football seasons. Follow @Killer_Sports for updates and stay in the loop with the Sports Database Google Group online.

Jarvis is a certified SDQL Master and the lead handicapper at Pick Sixty Sports. Follow @PickSixtySports for NFL handicapping information throughout the season and look for his weekly column in the KillerSports.com NFL newsletter!