

Josh Abbey '24

MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference

Winter 2026

I attended the MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference, founded by Daryl Morey and Jessica Gelman, which began in MIT Sloan classrooms in 2006. Morey, an alumnus, and Gelman started this event, now known as a “dorkapalooza” for sports business and analytics. My goal was to network with professionals in the sports industry and learn how to break into the industry. With the VIP package, I met sponsors at a private event and had insightful conversations with the founders.

At the event, it was broken down into career panels and sports discussion panels. One of my favorites was the discussion between Nate Silver and Derek Thompson, where Thompson defined everything as a game you could play, for which there are two types: an infinite game and a finite game. A sports game is finite, but people’s enjoyment of it is infinite, and by solving or hacking the finite game, you may end up losing the infinite game. This brought up the negative use of data in sports. Besides the whole eye-test vs. numbers debate, it was a unique point I had not yet considered. But the most important thing for me was the connections made in the hallways, like, for example, the connection I made with NBA executive Rich Cho about how he broke into the NBA and his advice to me. I also had the chance to meet Amin Elhassan at the sponsors meeting, especially since he broke into the NBA before transitioning to media. He was someone I had seen growing up on TV and an easily recognizable face, and our easy going conversation the day before the conference helped set the tone for the whole event and meeting people.

Reflecting on the conference, my main takeaway was the value of being able to show your work to others. For example, building a portfolio is considered essential for breaking into the sports industry. I appreciated seeing links between the material I was learning in econometrics and how it could serve as a gateway for shifting my career focus from sports operations to sports analytics. Inspired by the conference, I have decided to take programming and data science courses, which have directly influenced my spring 2026 course selections. I am grateful to the Byrne family for their support, as my attendance would not have been possible otherwise. Overall, this conference was pivotal in sparking new academic interests for me.