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Probability Theory, Live!

Ion Saliu
Xlibris (February 2010)
Softcover $10.00 (123pp)
978-1-4500-3734-1

Probability theory is a branch of mathematics that examines the likelihood of one particular outcome or a group of outcomes for any event. In Probability Theory, Live! author Ion Saliu, who studied political economics in Romania before immigrating to the US, presents a formula in which probability equals n (favorable elements) divided by N (total elements), or p=n/N.

In the first section of the book, Saliu attempts to explain probability theory in detail. He presents the history and some important concepts, such as numeric sets, standard deviation, and probability of repetition. He discusses the idea of randomness at length, asserting that it is the only method of interaction between elements in the universe. Saliu also introduces what he calls the “Fundamental Formula of Gambling,” which, he explains, is “the number of trials, N, for an event of probability, p, to appear with a degree of certainty, DC.”

Of particular interest is his assertion that the past has a significant effect on the present and future. To explain this he uses an example of two men playing a best-of-three backgammon series. After the first match, the player in the lead has a 75% chance of winning the series, while the player who lost the first game has only a 25% chance of winning. He attributes this concept to Blaise Pascal, who is considered the father of probability theory.

Probability Theory, Live! serves primarily as an advertisement for the author’s Web site. Saliu has created a number of probability software programs that are used chiefly for gambling purposes. Much of the book is devoted to the different software programs and the ways in which they can best be utilized.

The author’s tremendous ego is on display here, and he makes some truly remarkable and unsupportable statements. At one point he writes, “I consider myself the best blackjack player ever.” In another instance he states, “if all gamblers would be like me, following probability theory instead of guts, then there would be no casinos.” He also reveals his contempt for academic mathematicians. In a discussion of lotto wheels, he writes, “the professors come up with all kinds of approximations that look like mathematical formulas (by highly symbolized notation and heavy dosage of jargon). The margin of error, however, is as large as the area of Canada!”

The overall credibility of the book is damaged by statements like the above and the fact that, as he admits himself, his fundamental formula of gambling has not yet made him rich. But for readers who are looking for new gambling methods, particularly in games of blackjack, roulette, and lotteries, the book will hold some appeal.

CATHERINE THURESON (May 18, 2010)

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