



Hardball: Are You Playing to Play or Playing to Win?

George Stalk

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Great companies stumble and fall when they lose it. Highfliers crash when a competitor notices they don't have it. Start-ups shut down if they can't develop it. "It" is a strategy so powerful and an execution-driven mindset so relentless that companies use it to gain more than just competitive advantage--they achieve an industry dominance that is virtually unassailable and that competitors often try to explain away as unfair. In their "hardball manifesto," authors George Stalk and Rob Lachenauer of the leading strategy consulting firm The Boston Consulting Group show how hardball competitors can build or maintain an enviable competitive edge by pursuing one or more of the classic "hardball strategies": unleash massive and overwhelming force, exploit anomalies, devastate profit sanctuaries, raise competitors' costs, and break compromises.

Based on 25 years of experience advising and observing a range of companies, the authors argue that hardball competitors can gain extreme competitive advantage--neutralizing, marginalizing, or even destroying competitors--without violating their contracts with customers or employees and without breaking the rules. A clear-eyed paean to the timeless strategies that have driven the world's winning companies, Hardball Strategy redefines and reinterprets the meaning of competition for a new generation of business players. George Stalk and Rob Lachenauer are directors of The Boston Consulting Group. Stalk is the author of *Competing Against Time*, the classic work on time-based competition.

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