



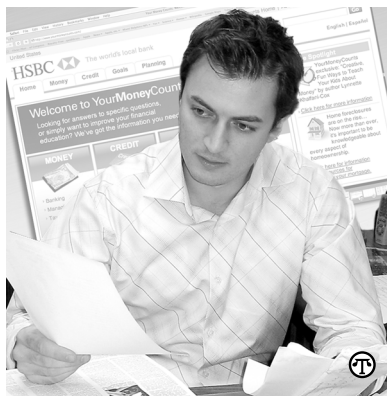
Batting Average Versus Credit Scores

(NAPSA)—Many Americans are knowledgeable when it comes to sports scores and stats. You can chat with a guy sitting next to you on the train and he can tell you right away how many yards his favorite football team rushed last year or the current standings of his hometown baseball team.

However, it's a different ball game when you ask people about their credit score. Surveys in recent years have indicated that the majority of Americans do not understand what credit scores mean and many who struggle because of low credit scores have no idea what steps they can take to improve their credit situation.

Loretta Abrams, senior vice president of Consumer Affairs at HSBC-North America, encourages consumers to learn and enhance their credit scores, which affect every aspect of our daily lives, from purchasing homes and cars to finding employment and renting an apartment.

Credit scores have been developed to predict a consumer's creditworthiness. Credit-reporting agencies use a formula to crunch all the stats from a person's credit activities into one number—usually between 300 and 850. The higher the score, the better (just like a baseball batting average). A high credit score means that a consumer may have access to loans and other financial services at a more



favorable rate. For example, an average homeowner can save thousands of dollars in interest over the term of a loan if his or her credit score is above 700, compared to someone whose score falls below 660.

In addition, employers, insurers and landlords are increasingly incorporating individuals' credit reports into their lineups to inform their decision making. Therefore, understanding credit scores and maintaining good credit history are critical to your financial high standing in today's challenging economy.

A baseball player increases his batting average by taking more batting practice and working on his swing. Similarly, there are proven methods to improve your credit score. The first step is to check your credit report. The FACT Act of 2003 allows consumers to receive a free credit

report, from each of the three credit-reporting agencies, once each year. Take advantage of this benefit; request your report and check it for accuracy. If your credit score needs to be raised, develop a plan and begin now to adopt new behaviors that will have a positive impact on your credit score.

Keep your eye on the ball with the following steps: Create a budget, pay all bills on time to keep credit card balances low and only open new credit accounts when absolutely necessary. If you want to increase your knowledge in personal finance, there are all kinds of free resources available on the Internet. For example, HSBC-North America has a financial education Web site, YourMoneyCounts.com, which provides consumers with free information on a wide range of topics, from credit scores to homeownership preservation.

As sports fans are tracking the batting average of their favorite baseball players for the season, we also encourage everyone to spend time learning how to manage money and track and improve his or her credit score. Good credit means more resources are accessible to you in life, gives you the peace of mind to enjoy all the games you want and, more important, offers you the hope for a winning and healthy personal financial future.