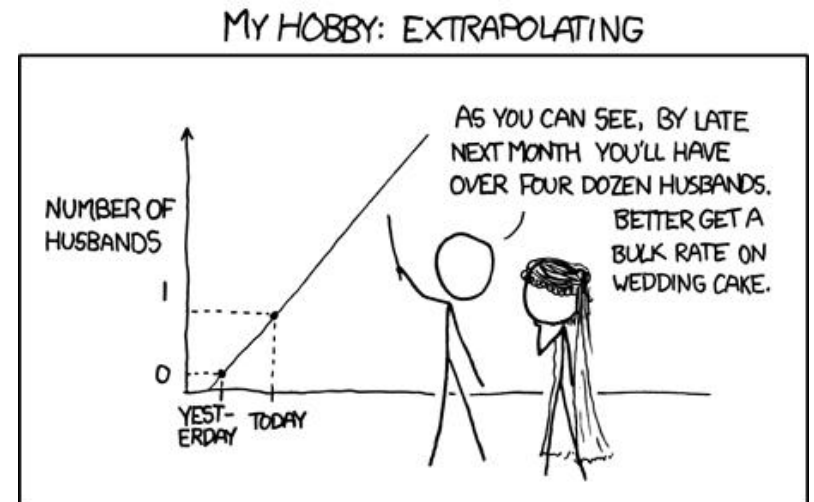# What's the Point Of Story Points?

Bob Payne
VP LitheSpeed
Agile Toolkit Podcast
http://LitheSpeed.com
@agiletoolkit

George Dinwiddie
iDIA Computing, LLC
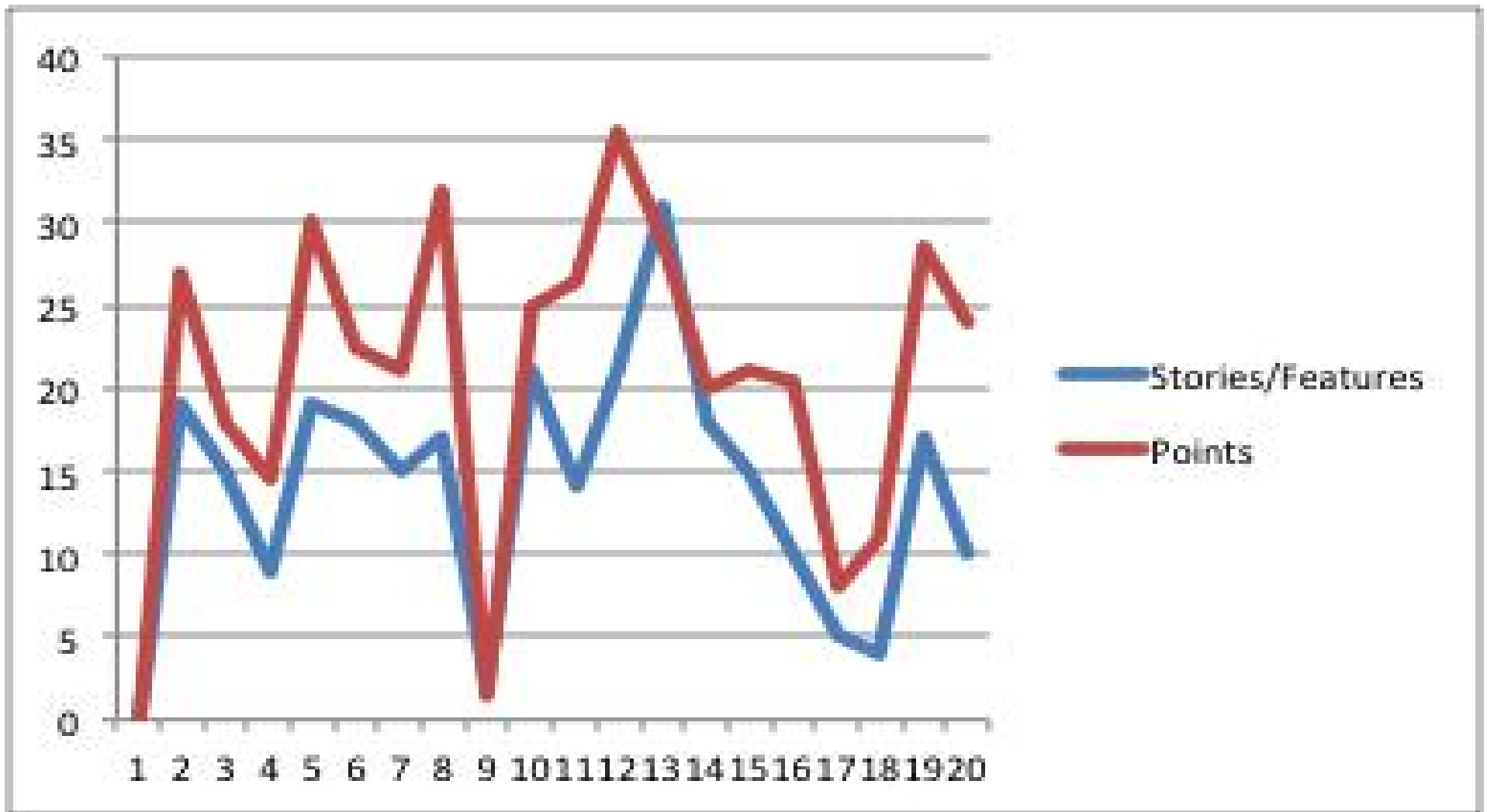http://idiacomputing.com/
http://blog.gdinwiddie.com/
@gdinwiddie

Purpose of Estimation

- Choosing how much work for the next sprint/iteration

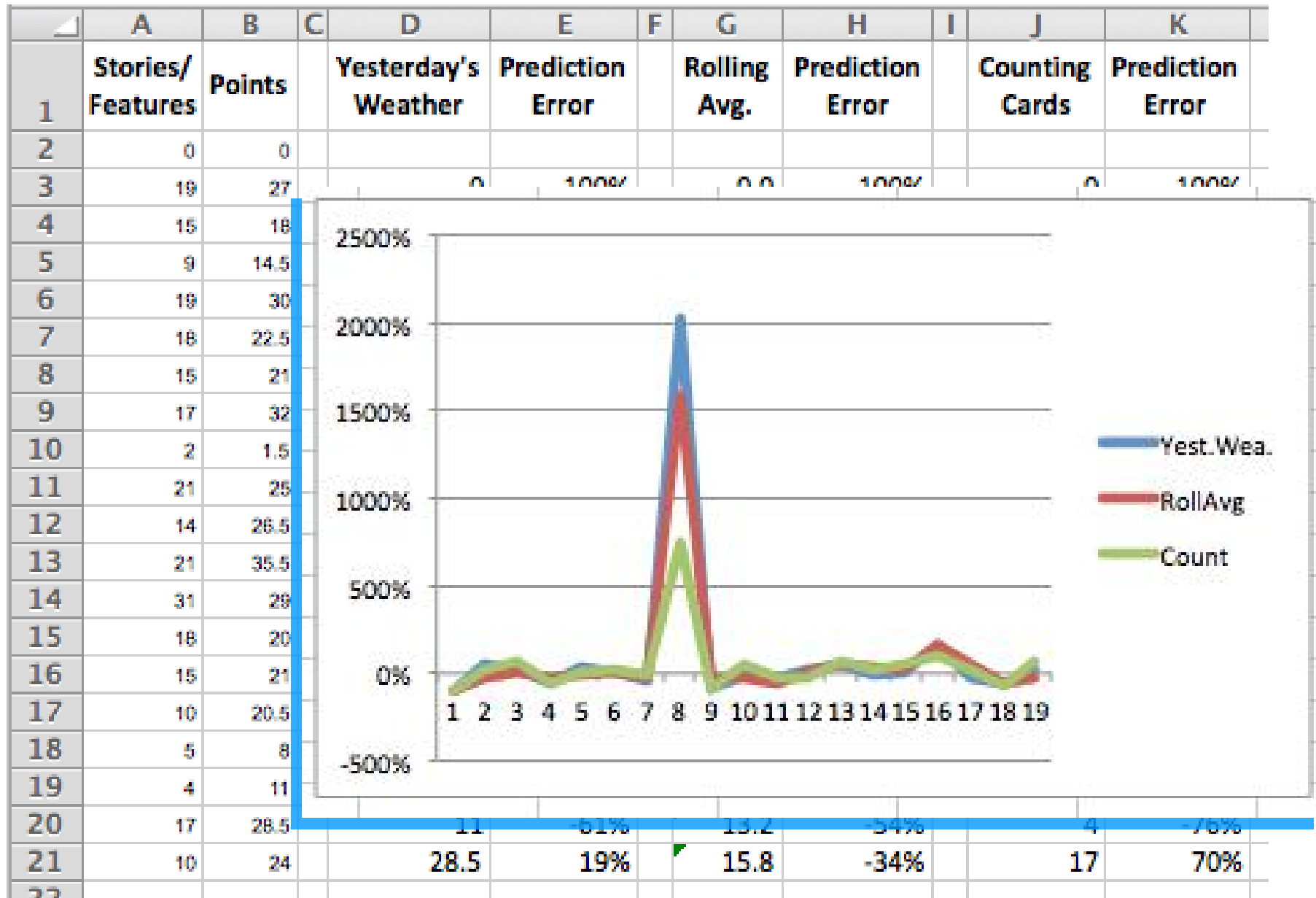- Getting a rough idea of how much can be done by a given date

MY HOBBY: EXTRAPOLATING

NUMBER OF HUSBANDS

AS YOU CAN SEE, BY LATE NEXT MONTH YOU'LL HAVE OVER FOUR DOZEN HUSBANDS. BETTER GET A BULK RATE ON WEDDING CAKE.

YEST-ERDAY TODAY

Story Points

- ## Unitless, relative measure of effort/complexity
  - Don't have to be "accurate" if they're consistent
  - Automatically accounts for overhead activities

- ## Velocity is the sum of story points accomplished by the team during one iteration
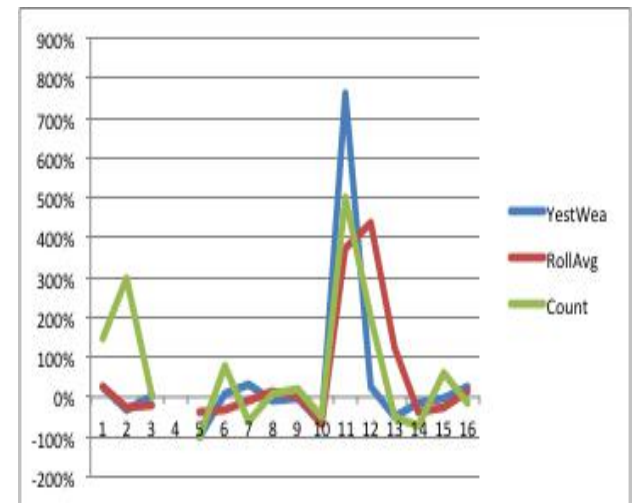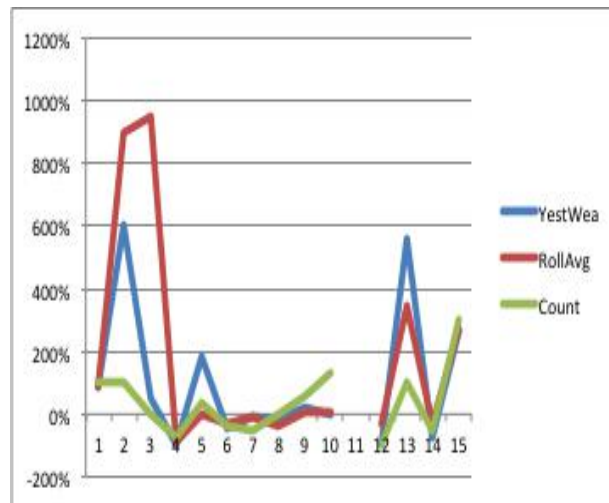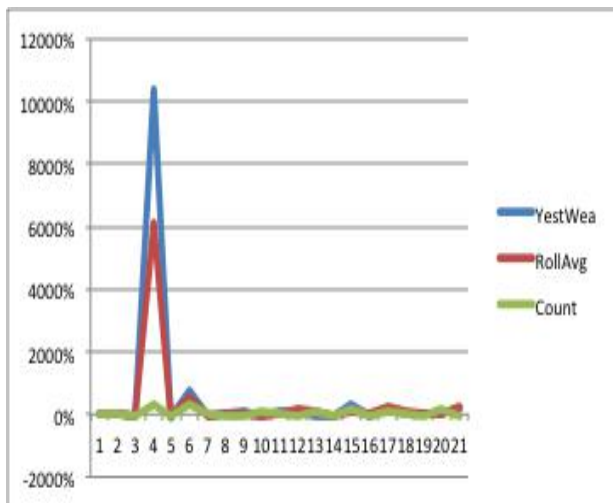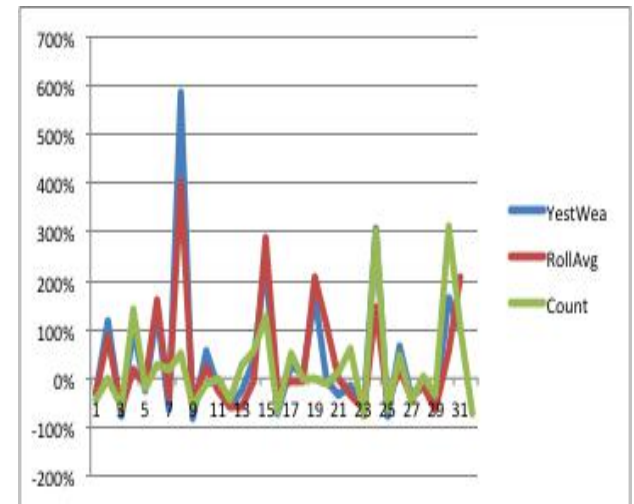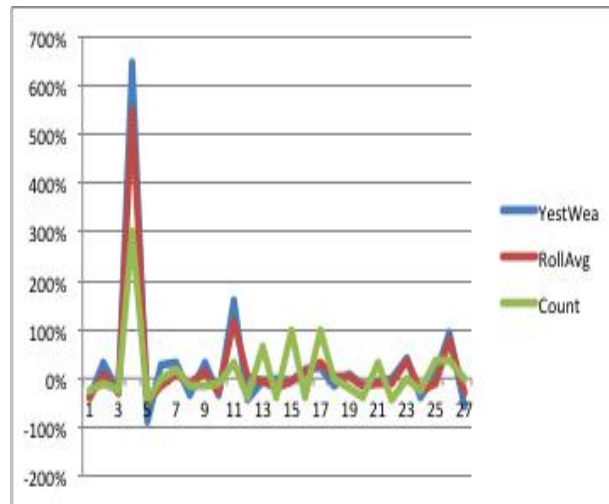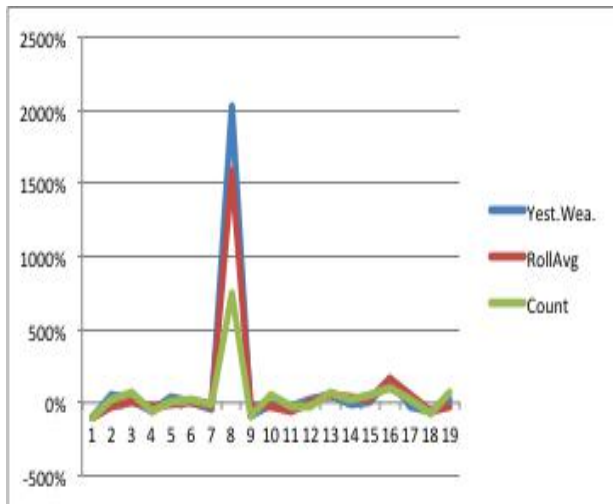 - We only count points for stories that are Done!

Velocity: How is This Team Doing?

Number Crunching

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Stories/ Features	Points		Yesterday's Weather	Prediction Error		Rolling Avg.	Prediction Error		Counting Cards	Prediction Error
2	0	0									
3	19	27		0	100%		0.0	100%		0	100%
4	15	18									
5	9	14.5									
6	19	30									
7	18	22.5									
8	15	21									
9	17	32									
10	2	1.5									
11	21	25									
12	14	26.5									
13	21	35.5									
14	31	28									
15	18	20									
16	15	21									
17	10	20.5									
18	5	8									
19	4	11									
20	17	28.5		11	-61%		13.2	-34%		4	-76%
21	10	24		28.5	19%		15.8	-34%		17	70%

Prediction Error

Prediction Error (cont'd)
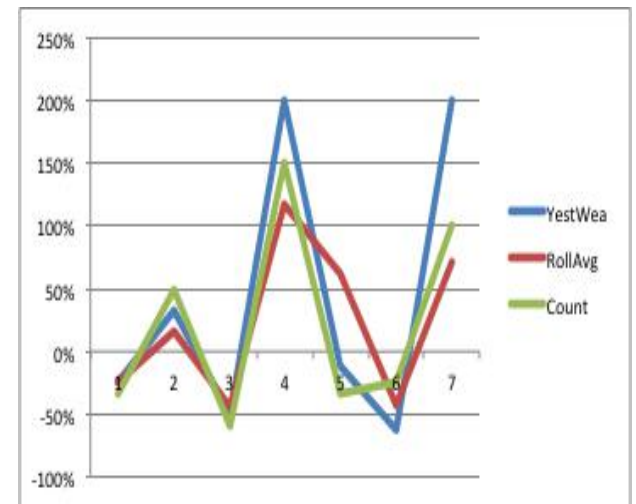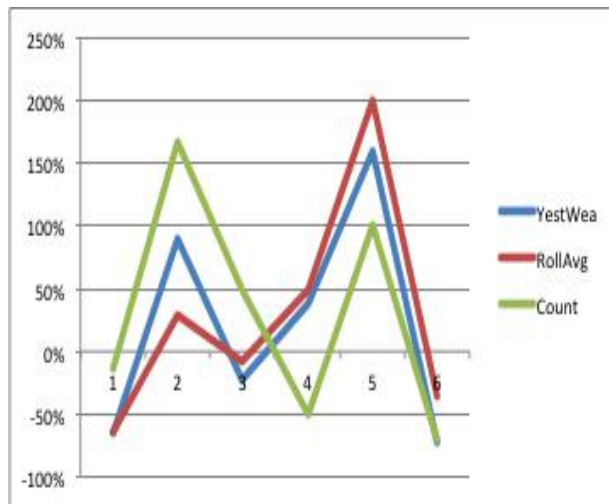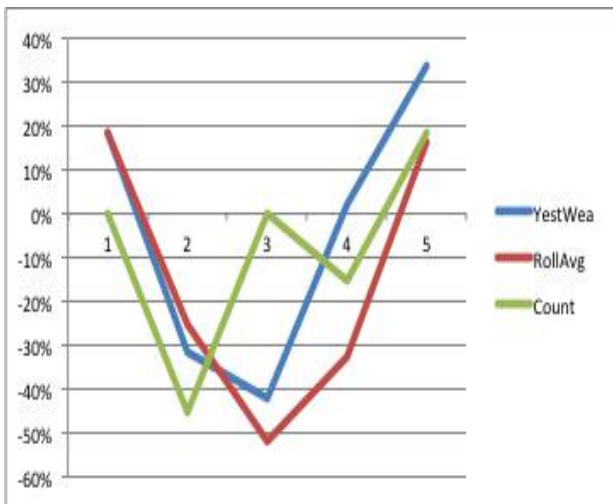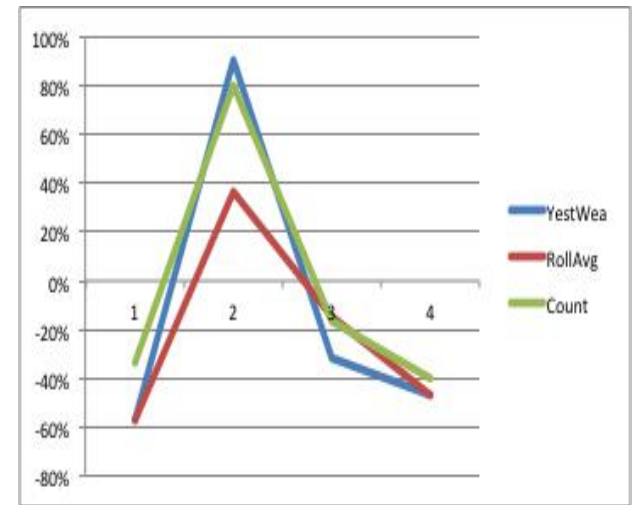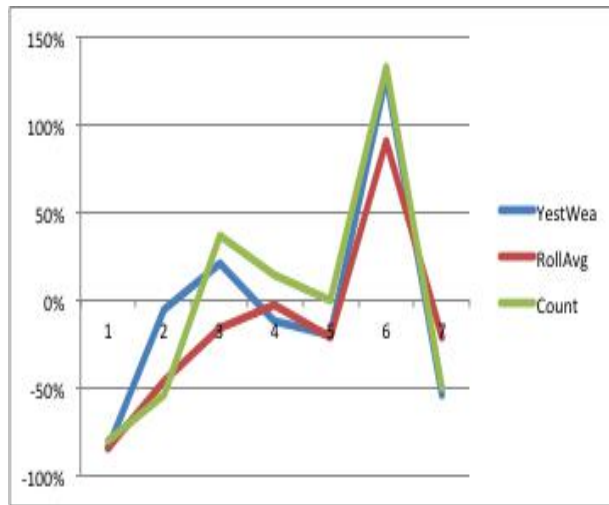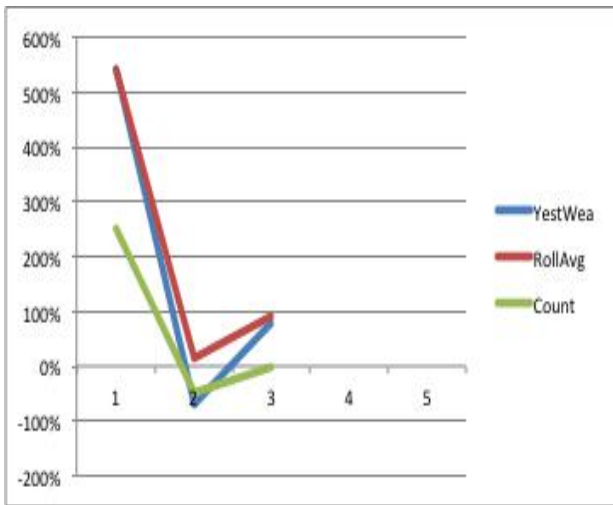
Prediction Error (end)
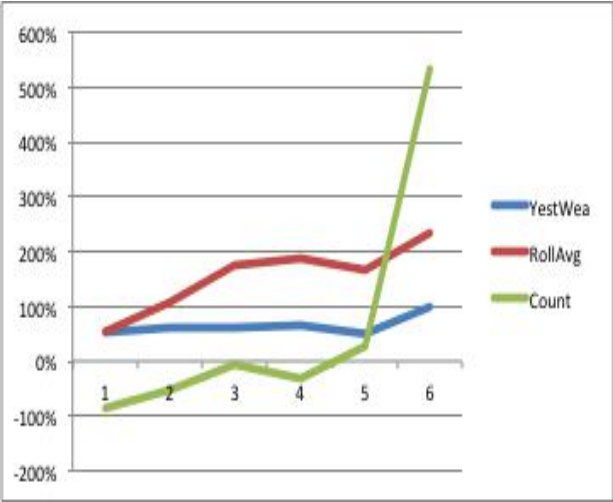
What is Your Goal?

- Estimation can be like a shiny squirrel with bass lures

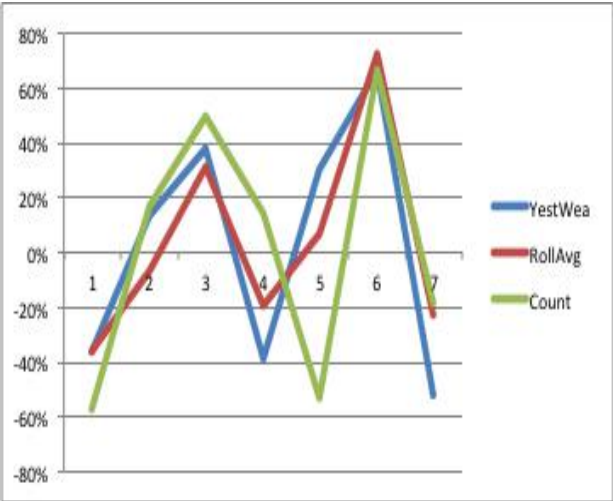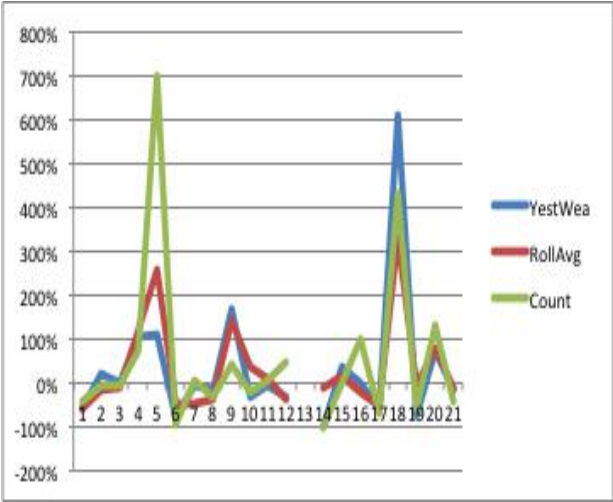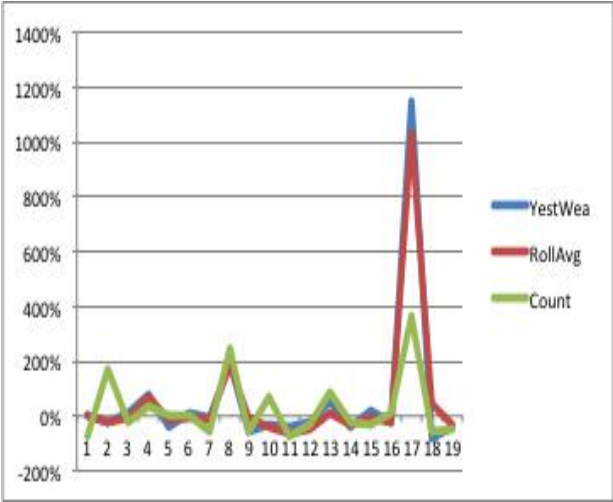
- Don't get distracted
- Keep your eye on the prize

Wasted Time and Effort

- Time wasted on estimating and trying to "estimate accurately"

- Time wasted on accounting for points when a story isn't finished within the sprint

- Effort spent developing a "complete" product backlog and decomposing to small stories for estimation purposes

  – Reluctance to "deviate from plan" because of the sunk cost of doing so.

Fractal Nature of Estimates

It turns out that *estimation is fractal*. The more fine-grained you break down the requirements, the more "edges" you will discover. This means that the more detailed you estimate, the more the total will tend towards infinity, simply due to rounding errors and the fear factors that we multiply into fine grained estimates.

– Dan North

http://dannorth.net/2009/07/01/the-perils-of-estimation/

Dysfunctions of Estimates

- Velocity as "credit to the team"

  – And temptation to cut corners on "done"

- Velocity as productivity

  – And pressure to raise the number

- Estimates treated as promises

"When estimates escape the trust circle, they often become goals, and pernicious. And they often escape."

– Ron Jeffries (on Twitter)

Relative Performance for Predictions

- How close in size do stories need to be for this to work well?

- Do estimation errors tend to cancel out over time?

- How much less time does it take to estimate if a story is "small enough" rather than give it a number?

- Lack of temptation to do a bunch of fancy number crunching on noisy data.

See the Future, Cheaply

1. Build one feature

2. Count the Team-Iterations required

3. Multiply by number of features

- Do we need to adjust for different size features?

4. Build a small feature

5. Build a large feature

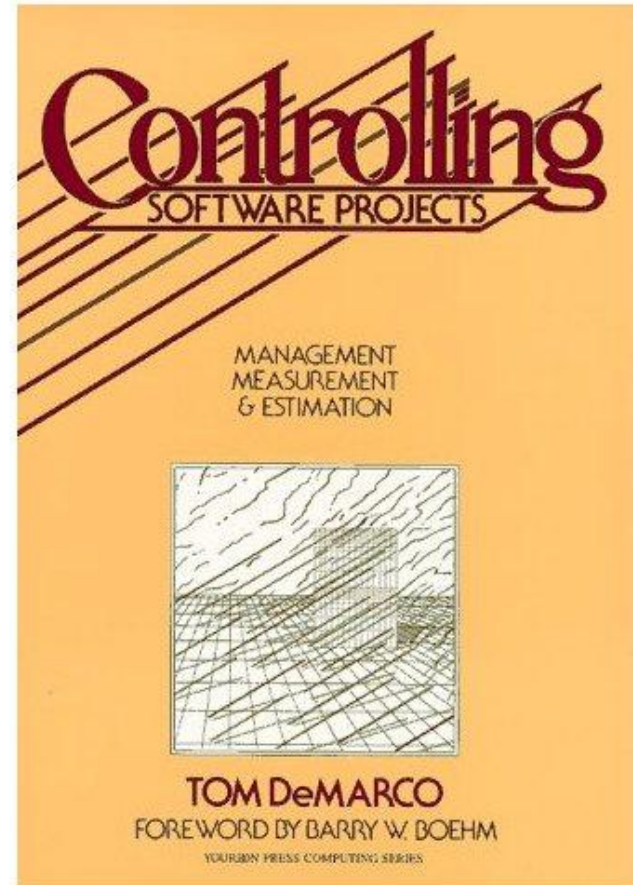6. Look at the mix of large and small features in the backlog

Graphic Projection
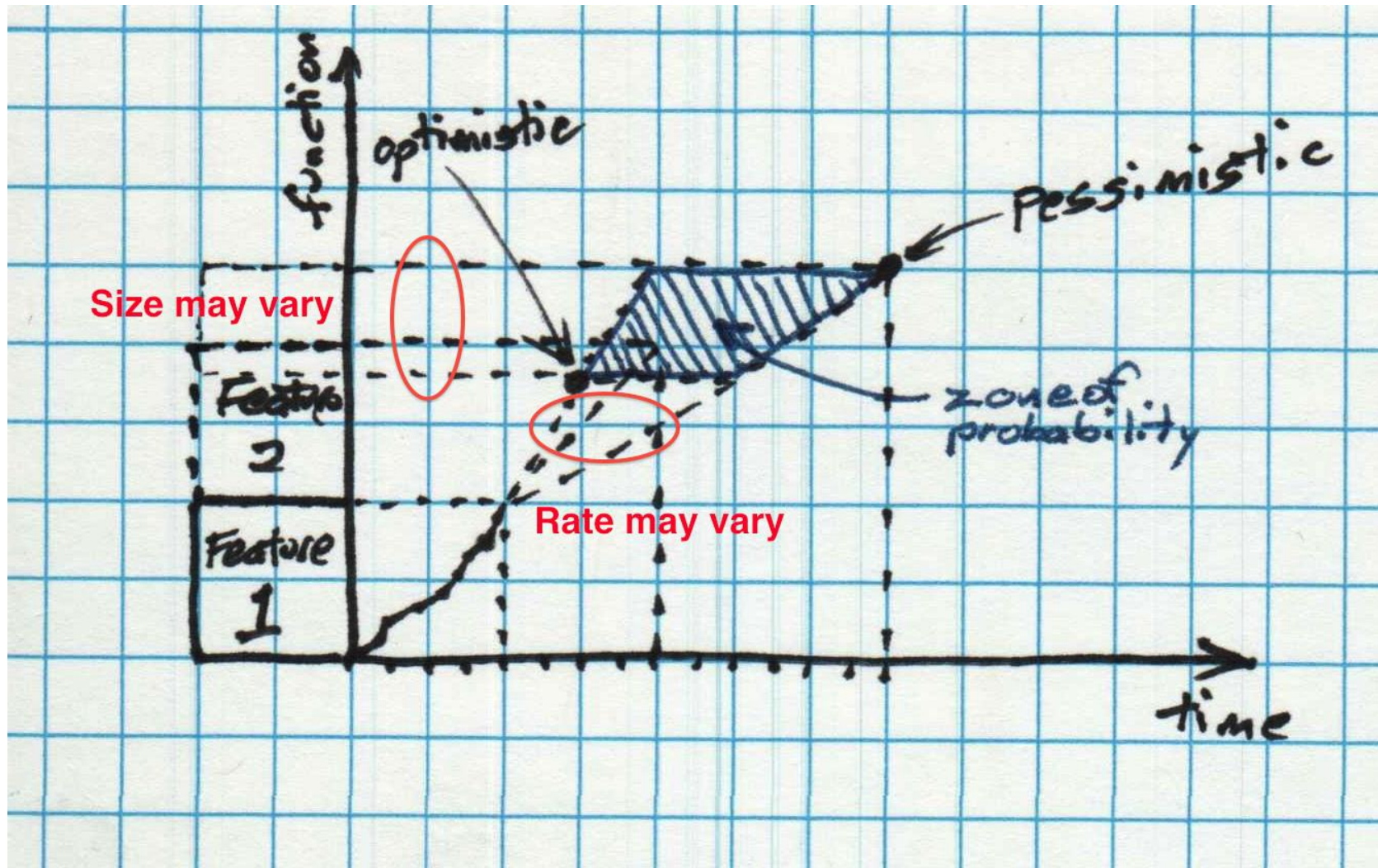
Tom DeMarco

"You can't control what
you can't measure."

— Tom DeMarco

Tom DeMarco reconsiders

"This leads us to the odd conclusion that strict control is something that matters a lot on relatively useless projects and much less on useful projects. It suggests that the more you focus on control, the more likely you're working on a project that's striving to deliver something of relatively minor value."

— Tom DeMarco

July/August 2009 IEEE Software

Conclusions

- Estimation is a tool, not a goal

    – Keep you eye on value delivery

- Choose appropriate estimation model

- Experimentation can be helpful

- What is the least amount of work for sufficient information?

Your assignment

- Breakout per table:

    – Discuss a challenge you're facing

    – Experiments you could run

    – How can you judge those experiments

- Report back to full session

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