

## Draft Recap: 2018 Iowa Owls

Some notable hurricanes made landfall in 2017; among them was a tsunami that wiped out much of the Iowa Owls' starting rotation. The team broke camp last spring with Drew Smyley (elbow), Chad Bettis (cancer), James Shields, Hisashi Iwakuma (shoulder), and Wei-Yin Chen (elbow). A year later, only two, Bettis and Shields, are carded and they combine for under 170 innings. Suffice to say that rebuilding this rotation was the team's major concern. I began to address this shortage prior to the draft with trades, picking up scrubs like Derek Holland, Yovani Gallardo, Homer Bailey, and Adam Conley, all of whom being significant downgrades in quality to what we had a year ago.

Meanwhile, I also decided to stick with the general plan of building up the team's positional depth and try to go 3-deep at every position. As we'll see, I came close to accomplishing this objective.

**#5, MATT OLSON (1B).** This was a deep draft for carded hitters of the "slow-footed slugger" variety, and I was able to draft the #2 guy on my list to give me a young first-baseman to work into the lineup as Kendrys Morales goes into his inevitable age-related decline. This pick was in part a "position need" as opposed to "best available," but given the shortage of prospects at this position on my lists I am very happy about this selection.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Zack Godley or German Marquez. I really like the upside of Marquez, and Godley is already pitching at a high level of quality. In an alternate reality, I would have taken a starter here and then Eric Thames in Round 2 — but Thames has some questions due to his age and second-half, so I think 1B was worth addressing at #5.*

**#25, FORREST WHITLEY (RHP).** To establish depth at my other two thin positions, I went into the draft planning to fill my last two uncarded slots with Scott Kingerey and Keibert Ruiz. But I see Whitley as too good to pass up: dominant stuff and already in AA. He has a drug-related suspension to worry over a bit (it makes him less likely to get a card for next year), but I am still hopeful. Note my first pitcher selected a year ago was in Round 4, so this represents a significant deviation from my "hitting first" mantra.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Eric Thames or Derek Fisher. The pitcher I really wanted here was Luiz Gohara, who was "stolen" from me by Florida at #22. I was also looking at carded prospects for this slot such as Fisher, and think Thames might have a few monster seasons left in him (and is really fun to listen to when he does interviews).*

**#45, SCOTT KINGERY (2B).** I traded away my Round 4 pick, so this was my last round to fill a need with someone exciting. The carded outfield prospects were rapidly going — Harrison Bader a bit earlier (to my draft nemesis in Florida) and Brett Phillips soon after (to LaCrosse). Ultimately, I took a prospect that would be extremely likely to get a card next year and who would literally replace my incumbent at the position, the Phillies' Cesar Hernandez, should he be moved to a new team or position. (I have a similar dynamic at 3B, with the Reds' Eugenio Suarez and Nick Senzel.)

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** It was a long wait for my next pick, but a few players I considered at #45 would have filled various needs. Matt Olson needs a partner at 1B, and Jesus Aguillar or Eric Thames were on my short list. My SS position is awful this season, and another Brewer, Eric Sogard, would have been a great fit. Finally, it might have been smarter to grab some innings here — many possibilities, but I think my favorite would have been Garrett Richards.*

**#85, HYUN-JIN RYU (LHP).** I had already loaded Franchy Cordero onto my team, only to have Central Iowa steal him from me at #84. This left me somewhat flustered, and while I had intended to grab another hitter it seemed easier to just look at my short-list of starters and take the top guy available. I was going to have a long wait for my next pick (#121), so getting 130 innings here was probably smart.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?*** *In some ways my bullpen was in even worse shape than my rotation, so I had thought about Shane Greene (a righty) or Wandy Peralta (a lefty). Nick Pivetta would have been younger rotation fill. And Gulf Coast would soon take the other guy I had identified as help at SS, Miguel Rojas.*

**#121, VICTOR CARATINI (C).** As mentioned, I had gone into the draft planning to take Keibert Ruiz, a switch-hitting catcher still a few years away (and if not him, I figured I could re-draft Zach Collins). Much closer to the bigs is Caratini, who I watched a few times last summer. His defense is still problematic, but he gives me my 3-deep at catcher and something to potentially platoon with the righties that we have now, James McCann and Manny Pina. Probably a bit of a reach at this draft slot, but I have learned it is better to actually get the guys you want than to hope they fall to the bargain basement.

**#125, ADAM ENGEL (CF).** One of my pre-draft goals was depth in center behind Ender Inciarte. I decided to reach for Engel here, in part because I like the ChiSox but also because he's already got the '1' going for him, and can only get better with the bat. Oakland's Boog Powell was another possibility, but he's already got two strikes for PEDs and doesn't play on local tv.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?*** *These two early Round 7 picks probably should have gone for pitching. As with last year, though, I have found it difficult to summon the energy to look very hard at relievers and found myself following the easier path of drafting for specific positions and from lists dominated by players from the six clubs bordering Iowa (they are all on my tv at least a few times a week). As time passes, hopefully I'll get to know more players — amazing to think how much more I seemed to know about baseball ten years ago, when I took this a lot more seriously!*

**#165, CLAYTON RICHARD (LHP).** I have a confession to make: I really like Clayton Richard. I essentially only remember his prime, of course, but I am sincerely delighted to put him in an Owls jersey... and it was reaching that point where if someone else took him my alternatives would be pretty scary.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?*** *I had been talking with Sal off-and-on about acquiring Tyler Duffey. Now Tyler is pretty much the same as a dozen other guys in the pool, but for reasons that I cannot fathom myself he appeals to me. The downside of trading #185, in this case, was not being able to draft Craig Stammen (who would go to Middlesex). But so many teams will drop out of the draft after Round 9 that the trade won't come to bite me too hard.*

**#205, KEYNAN MIDDLETON (RHP).** I was very excited about this pick, but in reality hard-throwers like this aren't all that rare anymore. Anyway, he adequately fills a bullpen slot and might turn into something better.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?*** *J.C. Ramirez. We need starter innings, and hey JC, JC, you're alright by me. Supposedly he has potential elbow troubles, but if the stem cell treatment holds up he would have been a great pick too.*

**#225, BRIAN DUENSING (LHP).** Like Clayton Richard, this guy's a bit of a graybeard and thus not a classic selection by a rebuilding club. But I needed a lefty in the bullpen and think he's got some value over the next few years.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?*** *Kyle Gibson. I still need another starter, but fortunately there are still quite a few worth consideration at the tail-end of this draft.*

**#245, SAL ROMANO (RHP).** I always draft from Michael's spreadsheet, and assign each player a rating based on present value, predicted value, and age. This is used to sort guys into a pecking order, but of course it's only a guide (and I usually skip down the list pretty far as the subjective elements are applied). For this pick, I almost took the "top guy," Adalberto Mejia, but decided that I preferred a guy who is eerily similar, Romano — essentially same age, same innings, and same ERA — who was a righty.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?*** Jose Osuna or Chris Carter. I had intended to pick up a righty platoon partner for Olson at 1B, but the futures of both of these players are murky (to put it mildly). I also failed to get some help at SS, but couldn't find anything to get excited about.

**#265, JOSE ADALBERTO (LHP).** All I know is that he's a young lefty who throws hard and has decent control. Sometimes, that's enough — but he's not a "top prospect list" kind of guy, so presumably this is all he has in his favor.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?*** There were quite a few strong relief candidates available. I narrowed it down to four, the others being Brad Boxberger, Jose Leclerc, and Phil Maton. Inevitably, one of those other three will be remembered as the one that got away.

The Owls drafted seven pitchers (or eight, counting the trade for Duffey) and just four hitters. This was more pitcher-heavy than intended, in part because of the early decision to take Whitley in Round 2. As a result, I failed to meet my 3-deep goal at both SS and 1B but we'll be fine. The two shortstops we have (Tim Anderson and Amed Rosario) are both young and, at least in theory, it should always be easy to get platoon bats at first.

Last year at this time I joked about perhaps being bad enough to get the #1 pick in 2018. Being the worst is a pretty tall order; the race to the bottom is at least as crowded as the one for the top. The Owls do have a better lineup this year (see below), but we obviously still haven't recovered from the loss of Smyly, Iwakuma, and Chen. Here is a condensed version of my roster, with the 19 new faces (drafted or acquired in the last 12 months) noted in **Red**.

Owls of 2018

Hitters (AB, OPS)

C) Manny Pina (330, .751) and James McCann (352, .733) and **Victor Caratini#** (59, .689)  
1B) Kendrys Morales# (557, .753) and Brandon Moss\* (362, .707) and **Matt Olson\*** (189, 1.003)  
2B) Cesar Hernandez# (511, .793) and **Brad Miller\*** (338, .664)  
3B) **Eugenio Suarez** (534, .828) and Yangerveris Solarte# (466, .731)  
SS) Tim Anderson (587, .679) and Amed Rosario (165, .665)  
LF) Michael Conforto\* (373, .939) and Mitch Haniger (369, .843)  
CF) Ender Inciarte\* (662, .759) and **Adam Engel** (301, .517)  
RF) Avisail Garcia (518, .885) and Scott Schebler\* (473, .791)  
Uncarded) Nick Senzel (3B), Kyle Tucker\* (RF), **Scott Kingerey** (2B), **Austin Meadows\*** (LF)

Pitchers (IP, ERA)

#1) **Clayton Richard\*** (197, 4.79) and Amir Garrett (71, 7.39)  
#2) Matt Boyd\* (135, 5.27) and **Sal Romano** (87, 4.45)  
#3) **Yovani Gallardo** (131, 5.72) and **Homer Bailey** (91, 6.43)  
#4) **Hyun-Jin Ryu\*** (127, 3.77) and Reynaldo Lopez (48, 4.72) and Chad Bettis (46, 5.05)  
#5) James Shields (117, 5.23) and **Adam Conley** (103, 6.14)  
Closer) **Santiago Casilla** (59, 4.27) and **Keynan Middleton** (58, 3.86)  
Relief) Steve Cishek (45, 2.01), **Brian Duensing\*** (62, 2.74), **Tyler Duffey** (71, 4.94), **Jose Alvarado\*** (30, 3.64)  
Uncarded) **Forrest Whitley** (RHP)

## Class of 2017

Amed Rosario (#7), Nick Senzel (#27), Scott Schebler (#47), Mitch Haniger (#56), Matt Boyd (#67), Kyle Tucker (#187), and Manny Pina (#207) are still looking like good picks. So far, a very lucky draft.

Amir Garrett (#127) and Zach Collins (#83) are looking iffy. I decided not to keep the uncarded Collins, but am giving the carded Garrett time to develop.

Jarrold Saltalamacchia (#147), Ryan Rua (#167), and Wily Peralta (#227) were all busts. My notes from last year on these players shows just how luck-driven these things can be. For the Peralta pick: "I flipped a coin between him and Chad Green." Chad went 5-0 with a 1.83 ERA; Wily had 7.85 ERA. And for Rua the following comment: "I had settled on Acuna as the remaining prospect with the most star potential, so it was somewhat crushing to see him go. I resolved to take my last uncarded next, instead of waiting until the very end." It turned out to be Kyle Tucker, but you get the idea!

## Notes to Self

The pitcher pool is always deeper in some ways than the hitter pool. I tend to forget this, so trading for the likes of Derek Holland and Yovani Gallardo is rather pointless (at the time, I might have also been hoping they would finish strong, but mostly it was to have the small comfort of a few guys with over 100 IP). Given hindsight, I might have also cut Gallardo.

Hitters are more scarce, but it also may have been wise to cut Brandon Moss. I held him because I assumed a guy with his contract would be given a chance. (Little did I realize that the A's would just cut him!) Small difference, and he might be useful if I need to cut a player to pick up some relief innings.

Best hitters remaining, per my formula assigning overall value, were Jose Osuna, Ryan Schimpf, Daniel Robertson, JaCoby Jones, and Gorkys Hernandez. Best pitchers are Adalberto Mejia, Dillon Peters, Daniel Gossett, Steven Brault, and Brock Stewart.

I averaged out a few Top 100 prospect lists. The first five not drafted were, as always, pitchers: Michel Baez, Kolby Allard, Cal Quantrill, Alec Hansen, and Ian Anderson (interestingly enough, two from Atlanta and two from San Diego). There were two overlooked hitting prospects next on the list: Monte Harrison (CF) and Nick Gordon (SS). South Mountain leads the way with EIGHT of the prospects on this list (getting cards were Magneuris Sierra, Victor Robles, and Franklin Barrett), followed by Ankeny and Houston with six apiece. As always, Ken (among others) looks more closely at school and Carribean leagues than do I, so my apologies for being clueless about Conine's college kid or the latest Cuban running from Castro.

Uncarded strategies are interesting. Vermeer hit the mother lode (apparently) with Ronald Acuna late in last year's draft, and we currently have five players that were still in short-season leagues at summer's end: Kevin Maitan and Hunter Greene were both hold overs from last year's draft, and the newly-selected MacKenzie Gore, Jo Adell, and Heliot Ramos. I went with a "AA or closer" approach this year, which is optimal in some ways but forces you to use early picks to get the potential stars (Whitley was #8 and Kingerey #32 on the averaged prospect list). Another viable approach is to think about players who might be returning from injury or who seem to have a starting gig lined up, but I have noticed we as a group are less inclined to seek out these types — I remember last year thinking Eric Thames was a tad old, and the rest of you apparently agreed.

Last year I ended my report with the following: "... now that it's over I feel like Ernie Banks, wishing we could play two. Now I think I know why some of you seem to be in a thousand leagues: the love multiplies, it doesn't divide!" Well, I took my own advice and rejoined my other old league (RUMBA) and had the joy of trying to follow two drafts simultaneously. Two is definitely enough for me, but this has been a great week. I hope you all enjoyed it as much as I did!