

Draft Recap: 2017 Iowa Owls

Seven years have passed since my last baseball draft. I don't remember all of the players selected, but the last pick was Aaron Hicks, then a young outfielder in the Twins organization. He and Drew Stubbs, another uncarded pickup, virtually guaranteed my outfield of the future would be the envy of the CBA. History shows that every draft class is littered with disappointment, but in the moment every pick — from first to last — has a certain genius and potency. And so, without further ado, let me introduce the newest members of the CBA's newest franchise.

#7, AMED ROSARIO (SS). In the seven years away from Strat, my general knowledge of players has narrowed considerably. Even the all-star lineups in recent years contain "who the heck is that?" guys, so cramming for the draft was quite a challenge. The easiest picks, in a sense, are always the future guys, so I decided fairly early to take an uncarded in Round 1. I had a few guys in mind, but the selection of Bellinger ahead of me was a quick reminder that drafts seldom work out the way you hope. I didn't go into the draft wanting Amed Rosario in particular, since there were a couple of other shortstops in the pool that looked like similar prospects, but I took him here because he was the 'best available' on my uncarded sheet — and I used the average of a trio of top prospect lists, so who am I to argue with the experts?

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Jharel Cotton, Reynaldo Lopez, or Luke Weaver. A "carded prospect" would have been nice at #27. This is the kind of thinking that governs most of us on Draft Day, so in a "Moneyball" sense it might be smarter to take what is being undervalued: the somewhat older carded players, like Junior Guerra and Sandy Leon.*

#27, NICK SENZEL (3B). I like to be two-deep at every position. My team is thinnest at catcher and third, so I let my wife choose between Senzel and a young catcher, Francisco Mejia (who Ray would soon take). Later in the day, I vividly recall hearing that Senzel got hit in the wrist during BP and was going for x-rays. The strain on our marriage those next few hours has never been greater. Fortunately, the wrist was ok and it looks like we will be celebrating 30 years together this summer after all.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Perhaps I should have looked at the position scarcity and gotten a catcher earlier. Both Tony Wolters and Tucker Barnhart will be taken before my next pick, which sort of blew apart my plan to get someone decent behind James McCann!*

#47, SCOTT SCHEBLER (RF). I went into the draft with a good CF, Ender Inciarte, but lots of questions on the corners. Fortunately, there were quite a few interesting cards in the draft pool, and the one with the most local interest was Schebler. He grew up in Iowa, played baseball at DMACC here in the Des Moines area, and has a pretty good card, so I was very happy to give him a cap and jersey and make him the first 'real' addition to my roster. At this point, I was thinking it would be fun to make another Iowan, AJ Puk, my last uncarded selection.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** The formula I used to rate players had Jorge Polanco as the best player in the entire hitter pool. The methodology must have a serious flaw — heck, even I don't follow the lists in any strict fashion — but let me give a shout-out to the Hurricanes for making a truly wise pick!*

#56, MITCH HANIGER (RF). I traded a good uncarded pitcher, Carson Fulmer, for this draft pick. My strategy was to shore up position depth before worrying about pitchers. The selection of Haniger was influenced by his strong performance in spring training, but I also needed to draft a right-handed outfielder. I was also sorely tempted to take my 'catcher of the future' in this slot, but was thinking the attractive carded players were starting to thin out and there were still three uncarded catchers on my radar (Zach Collins, Carson Kelly, and Chance Sisco).

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? Alex Dickerson is a lot like Schebler and Haniger (and Guillermo Heredia), in that they all have a decent chance but the odds are against them to be regulars (or even semi-regulars) for more than a few years. You always wonder if you picked the right one (or 2).

#67, MATT BOYD (LHP). This is another selection I can blame on Jenny. As usually seems to be the case, I was debating on three players for this slot: Zach Collins, Roman Quinn, or Matt Boyd. She made the pick for me. I immediately regretted it, because pitching was not meant to be a priority. But the Owls desperately needed a long reliever, so it was probably wise.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? There are two here, Tyler O'Neill and Hernan Perez. Before the draft, I had thought I would take O'Neill right about here, and I was also starting to like the idea of having Perez as my super-utility guy.

#83, ZACH COLLINS (C). This was the uncarded catcher that I had targeted pre-draft, and I made a trade to get this pick in a sort of panic over the thought of losing him.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? I got the fast CF prospect that I wanted in Quinn, but Mallex Smith might turn out to be the better pick.

#87, ROMAN QUINN (CF). With my regular pick in the 5th, I took the third name I was debating at #67. He gives me some depth in center.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? I skipped a round, so will list a pair of young hitters: Cheslor Cuthbert and Jefry Marte. I had wanted to eventually pick up some depth at 3B, but suddenly the rest of the guys I had in mind pre-draft were gone. Eventually I would sort through the Strat free agents and find Rua, but this was another moment when all my plans seemed to be going up in smoke.

#127, AMIR GARRETT (LHP). All things equal, it is best to take 'old prospects' who are close to the majors. Neither Rosario, Senzel, nor Collins is likely to be carded a year from now, and this pick was essentially the top guy on my list who should convert quickly to a card.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? Chance Sisco. I had thought about taking him at #127 instead of Garrett, but thought Sisco was more likely to last another round. I was wrong.

#147, JARROD SALTALAMACCHIA (C). This was the point where the freedom to pick started to narrow: I was going to draft four more cards, and one had to have 200 catching ABs. So I took Salty, even though there were a lot more interesting hitters still in the pool.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? Guillermo Heredia. In many ways, I prefer him over Quinn. I found myself making short lists of players to cover certain needs and then wanting all of them!

#167, RYAN RUA (1B/3B/LF). I was on pins and needles waiting for this pick, after realizing I needed another card for my 25-man roster. Rua gives me decent ABs for LF and 3B, and I feel fortunate to get him in the 9th Round. It is worth noting that on my draft list I had noted a plan to split evenly the eight cards I would be drafting between hitters and pitchers. Rua was my 5th hitter, and eventually I couldn't resist taking a 6th.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? Ronald Acuna. 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.

#187, KYLE TUCKER (RF). It will be interesting to see how soon I come to regret the decision to draft another Aaron Hicks! Funny how the siren call of the next Roberto Clemente attracts even an experienced captain like me. Belief in teen outfielders is my Achilles Heel.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** This pick could also have been Eric Thames or Pablo Sandoval. An hour earlier, in fact, I decided it was going to be Sandoval.*

#207, MANNY PINA (C). He seems to have hit a homer in every Brewers game on tv this spring. Even as just a backup catcher he's worth a flyer. I don't think I have ever been this excited about a carded pick in the 11th Round. (I probably won't be quite as giddy come July, though.)

#227, WILY PERALTA (RHP). I flipped a coin between him and Chad Green, but am astounded by how many 5th-starter types are still in the pool (including most of the Padres rotation). I now have a sense of what the change from 24 to 20 teams really means to the draft pool... I should have cut more of my fringe players!

The Owls drafted five outfielders (counting Rua) and three catchers among their 13 picks. The weakness that we did not do a good job of addressing is the hot corner, so the pressure on Nick Senzel to actually be good is pretty enormous. My incumbent at the position, Yangervis Solarte, is rumored to be shifting to 2B, which is potentially disastrous but sometimes these things sort themselves out in ways that cannot be foreseen.

It's hard to believe I only drafted three pitchers. I definitely wanted to go "hitters first," but always assumed I would take a few pitchers with the last picks. In part it was just laziness: I had done almost no research on pitchers, so it was easier to just continue drafting the hitters I had become familiar with. I also have a pitcher, Trevor May, who will need elbow surgery, so I knew I had an easy cut to add either relief innings or catcher ABs during the upcoming season. It looks like we'll definitely be sifting through the bone pile for relievers.

I have really enjoyed this draft after my long hiatus. There were moments when I thought it would never end — I do miss the compressed action of the old single Draft Day! — but 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!