

Draft Recap: 2019 Iowa Owls

It was my dubious honor to have the first draft pick this year, which of course means my Owls were really awful in 2018. This was partly a strategy on my part, in that I hitched a ride on one of the worst starting rotations in the history of baseball straight to the cellar. This off-season I hope to upgrade the staff and inch toward respectability... hopefully not another 52-110!

#1, MILES MIKOLAS (RHP). By early winter, I had decided to pick Mikolas (18-4, 2.83, 201 IP). He would immediately become the ace of my staff. This also allowed me to shed a couple of innings-eaters (James Shields and Chad Bettis) to Russ Baker prior to the draft. I was still going to keep a couple of gray-beards for depth, Clayton Richard and Homer Bailey, but it was time to start collecting arms with fewer miles on them. The idea of picking a Cardinal ruffled my feathers a bit (they are my least-favorite club in the Midwest), so I did something odd a week before the draft: I made a trade for two more Cards, Paul DeJong and Kolton Wong. Heck, if I have two regulars on **any** team they start they become must-see tv. I ended up trading Mikolas during the draft to a *real* Cardinal fan, Laurin Williams, but the swap was essentially for the same kind of guy: Jameson Taillon is another #1 starter with around 200 innings.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Three owners made attractive offers for this pick. I don't really have any regrets on this one, but would have traded down in hopes of then drafting Andrew Heaney (180 IP) or Jesus Luzardo (an uncarded starter).*

#21, JOEY LUCCHESI (LHP). After my pick, only two more carded starting pitchers went in Round 1: Andrew Heaney and Dereck Rodriguez. This still left me some nice candidates for this pick, but Lucchesi got the nod due to his youth and high K total. It was important to add another 130 IP to my rotation right now, but more importantly I think Joey has a great chance of being a key member of the rotation for a long time.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** There is more to a staff than starters, and Seranthony Dominguez was the last big-time closer still available. He might be the fish that got away. Aside from pitching, the Owls' main concern this off-season was the catcher position, since my trio of Manny Pina, James McCann, and Victor Caratini all look like backups. So when Doug jumped on Isiah Kiner-Falefa at #19, I gave serious thought to taking an uncarded catcher here. What stopped me was the tug of Lucchesi (who I really like) and the push from lingering doubts over which young backstop was my favorite.*

#41, PETER ALONSO (1B). My first pick last year was Matt Olson, Oakland's young left-handed first-sacker. The pick turned out ok, but all we have behind Olson at 1B is Kendrys Morales, who is more of a DH than anything at this point and is at an age (35) where I seriously thought about cutting him despite the 21 homers. My uncarded strategy this year was to try and fill my two open slots with hitters who were close to the majors, preferably with a catcher (Joey Bart or Sean Murphy), centerfielder, and/or Alonso (who was my only target at 1B). In some ways it is bad strategy to spend another high draft pick to take a slow DH-type, but he was too close to the majors for me to pass up. I also can use a right-handed slugger to balance Olson.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Greg took Bart late in Round 2, so it might have been smart to take my other young catcher here, Sean Murphy. Frankly, I was influenced by reports from Spring Training, where Alonso hit a homer and Murphy was scuffling a bit (and more blocked from playing time). It turned out that Murphy would stay on the board a long time, which only added to my uncertainty about him.*

#45, JACE FRY (LHP). My bullpen is very thin, and I decided to take a reliever with my other pick this round. Fry has two main virtues: the write-up in the *Baseball Prospectus* book made him seem like my

kind of guy (a real pitcher, not just a thrower), and he had enough saves to earn a '3' closer rating (giving me a second option to protect a lead in the 9th). It's a negative that he's a southpaw — we already have Jose Alvarado, Adam Conley, and Amir Garrett — but he was just too good to pass up.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** It remains a problem that I don't find myself interested enough in baseball to do the kind of homework that might have led me to one of several other relievers that went in the next dozen picks or so. I think my other serious option here was David Fletcher, who would be an insanely useful back-up all around the infield (with great defensive ratings and a good bat). But the Owls already have lots of infield depth, so I thought it better to grab Fry.*

#63, RYAN MCMAHON (1B/3B). Eugenio Suarez needs a backup, and with Fletcher gone to the Stallions it seemed like I better jump on McMahon, who is competing for the open 2B job with the Rockies. McMahon is a reminder that prospects don't always make it, but if nothing else he's an ok reserve behind Suarez and Olson.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** There was still a pretty deep list of relievers that interested me, so I thought it was smarter to take McMahon. But as it turned out, there was a run to fill bullpens in Round 4, and I missed out. I needed a lot of innings, and Jared Hughes would have been my guy. Part of what makes a draft so interesting to me is the way every pick represents a trade-off between hitter/pitcher and now/future. With McMahon there is hope for a brighter future as well as a somewhat useful guy for right now... but alas, he can't pitch.*

#81, DOMINGO GERMAN (RHP). I was at a rest stop on I-76 when I made this pick. My 'short lists' were all in tatters and I still had some ground to cover before I reached Colorado Springs, so I went with a guy that I own in my other league that I think will be great some day. But that day isn't today — I picked German to use all of his 86 IP in relief, but he's not a very useful option with a 5.57 ERA. My hope was to be somewhat competitive this year, and this selection seriously impedes my reaching this goal. He may indeed turn out to be a stud, in which case I will have no regrets. But meanwhile, with he and Sal Romano (5.31 ERA) ticketed to log a lot of relief innings, I'll be kicking myself every time one of them coughs up a lead.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Joe Jimenez would have been a much better selection for my current needs, and he should be also good for years to come. I am of the opinion that German has an even brighter future, but maybe that's just because the baseball world to which I was born values the 200-inning starter way, way more than the 60-inning reliever. But perhaps the world has changed... in a few years, will we all be using "openers" a few times a week?*

#105, DYLAN CEASE (RHP). I just couldn't resist taking another young Sox player. No regrets, since I thought he was a great prospect to get this late, but I tend to be "needs based" when it comes to these slots and my pre-draft blueprint was to take a young catcher (such as Sean Murphy) or outfielder here. The key with Cease, aside from staying healthy, is seeing if he gets a card soon — my plan this year was to have four of the slots convert to cards (Forrest Whitley, Nick Senzel, Pete Alonso, and Cease), and Murphy would have been a safer bet.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Even more than Murphy, I was getting psyched about taking an uncarded outfielder here. Cristian Pache would have made sense (as the real-life long-term replacement for Inciarte in CF), but my tastes were running more toward the Orioles' Yusniel Diaz. Ultimately, the fact that Cease had a much higher position on my combined expert prospect list was the deciding factor. I just hope he can avoid the usual injury bug!*

#121, TREVOR MAY (RHP). Another reminder that phenoms don't always pan out: several years ago May was a starting pitcher prospect. After TJ surgery, he closed the year closing for the Twins, so this is sort of a future pick. He is also a real reliever who throws right-handed, something this team desperately needs.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** There is one major flaw in this pick: May only had 25 innings last year. This will require me to take another reliever for sure, and the pickings are getting slim. Again, being in Colorado didn't help — just didn't have time to look at the great pool of the unwashed in the late rounds.*

#141, ROBERTO PEREZ (CA). I decided to go 4-deep at catcher before the draft started. I didn't care much for any of the carded guys, but would have taken Isiah Kiner-Falefa (who also could have backed up third) or Mitch Garver had the time been right. After jumping on Dylan Cease, I decided to take another look at the carded catchers and was impressed by what *Baseball Prospectus* had to say about Perez. I almost took him at #121 over May, and am glad I ended up with both.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** The Owls still are very thin in the bullpen. Perhaps my last two picks should have been decent relievers. I had also decided that Delino Deshields Jr. would potentially be a great value around here, but Perez would have to be my last hitter drafted.*

#161, SHANE CARLE (RHP). It was just a quick 3-day back-and-forth to Colorado, and when I got home last night I was glad my next pick would not be for awhile. I was fried from all that driving! Then, I wake up sometime after midnight and see that I'm up, and decided I should just pick somebody. After sorting the available relievers in various ways, I picked Carle because of his balance rating (we needed a backward righty). He might be the only mediocre reliever that I have ever picked who I didn't feel had some sort of upside. But he gives me 60 okay innings right now, and if he looks bad in June I can burn him up and then grab a free agent to take his place. So even though he isn't really part of the plan, it should work out either way.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** There were two Kansas City pitchers available that I thought long and hard about, Heath Fillmyer and Kevin McCarthy. Much as with my indecision over the uncarded catchers, once again "none of the above" was my de facto choice.*

The Owls drafted seven pitchers and just three hitters. This seems pitcher-heavy, but keep in mind we recently traded Shields and Bettis for picks and they needed to be replaced. In fact the team's balance of carded players is pretty normal at 20:15 in favor of hitters, and still finds itself a little short on relief innings. (I will need to either put a "slow hook" on the starters or tap the free-agent pool this summer.)

Here is a condensed look at my roster. The 14 new faces (drafted or acquired in the last 12 months) are in **Red**. Hitters have ABs and OPS listed; pitchers have IP and ERA. As is often the case in these leagues, last year's relative strength, hitting, has gone down in quality but the pitching will be stronger. I think we'll climb a bit in the standings — it would be nice to lose fewer than 100 games — but the CBA has a lot of good teams and this definitely isn't one of them.

CATCHERS. The platoon of Manny Pina (306, .702) and James McCann (427, .581) provides great defense and tolerable hitting, but is going to annoy me because neither of them hits lefties all that well. I had fished around for offers on Pina, who has the most value right now, but I will just have to live with it. It worries me that both of these men seem to have dropped to a 2nd-catcher role in the season ahead, which has me in a mini-panic. Thinking ahead, I was thinking of taking a prospect to ease my worries. I probably should have jumped on Joey Bart, but I wanted quick conversions to the majors and all I could think of is the slow progress of Zack Collins. Ultimately, I selected **Roberto Perez** (179, .519) as an older guy who seems to be the new #1 in Cleveland. Rounding out the group is a switch-hitter, Victor Caratini

(181, .597), who I drafted a year ago and still might develop into that offensive weapon behind the plate that is the stuff of dreams.

FIRSTBASE. The incumbent is young Matt Olson (580, .788), who has good power and a '1' glove. He's one of those guys who needs another dozen hits/walks to become truly solid in a draft league, so one of my early draft picks was the right-handed slugger, **Peter Alonso**, who should make his Mets debut this spring. A switch-hitter, Kendrys Morales (413, .769), provides some depth but is in the twilight of a fine career.

SECONDBASE. We have two regulars, the switch-hitting Cesar Hernandez (605, .718) and the left-handed **Kolton Wong** (353, .720). Wong is a '1' in the field so has the edge this summer; Hernandez is one of my favorites. Waiting in the wings is Scott Kingery (452, .605), who had a very disappointing rookie season.

THIRDBASE. Eugenio Suarez (527, .892) was acquired in the DJ LeMahieu deal a year ago, solidifying what had been a very weak position for the Owls. Nick Senzel (3B/CF) is the presumed depth at the hot corner, but is potentially being moved to CF. I thought it wise to draft some more help, and that turned out to be **Ryan McMahon** (181, .683), who might also be moved elsewhere on the diamond.

SHORTSTOP. My first player drafted (after my return to the CBA) was Amed Rosario (554, .676), who is still very young and has a chance to develop into a star. I made a big trade this off-season to acquire **Paul Dejong** (436, .746), a different kind of hitter (more power) who I also figure might eventually shift to 3b. This should be my strongest position over the next 5-10 years.

LEFTFIELD. Michael Conforto (543, .798) did not have a great year, but is solid. He was the best player on the team when I inherited it, and is still the guy we'll need to lean on if we ever make it above .500. Waiting in the wings is Kyle Tucker (64, .439), another lefty slugger for whom I envision greatness.

CENTERFIELD. Ender Inciarte (597, .705) is still a '1' but had a poor year at the plate. We have another great fielder in Adam Engel (429, .615), but I worry that this position will need an upgrade. I would normally have taken an uncarded player to prepare for Ender's possible demise, but just didn't see a pure CF prospect that I liked enough to roster.

RIGHTFIELD. Mitch Haniger (596, .859), Avisail Garcia (356, .719) and Scott Schebler (380, .776) give me a lot of options, but Haniger is the obvious starter. Schebler gives me a very solid 4th outfielder.

ROTATION. **Jameson Taillon** (191, 3.20), Reynaldo Lopez (189, 3.91), Matt Boyd (170, 4.39), **Joey Lucchesi*** (130, 4.08) and Hyun-Jin Ryu* (82, 1.97) give me five solid guys, which is a vast improvement from the past few years. Clayton Richard* (159, 5.33) and Homer Bailey (106, 6.09) are more like what I have been using, and their innings will still be used to fill in during the long season. **Domingo German** (86, 5.57) might also get some starts, but is more likely to be used in long relief. Further down the road, but hopefully coming fast, are a trio of potential aces: Forrest Whitley (RHP), **Michael Kopech** (RHP), and **Dylan Cease** (RHP).

BULLPEN. Jose Alvarado (64, 2.39) and **Jace Fry** (51, 4.38) are my closers. They are pretty good, but it would have been better if at least one threw right-handed. Two other southpaws are decent middle relievers, Amir Garrett (63, 4.29) and Adam Conley (51, 4.09). From the starboard side it's definitely a mixed bag: Sal Romano (146, 5.31), **Shane Carle** (63, 2.86), and **Trevor May** (25, 3.20). It would have been nice to draft another solid righty, but this was a "rebuild" draft so we couldn't afford the luxury of fixing the bullpen.