

Draft Recap: 2021 Iowa Owls

Let's not lose sight of the headline: the Owls made the playoffs for the first time since I came back to the league and I am proud of that. But it was still a bitter pill getting swept by the Knights in the first round. But that's yesterday's news, and at draft time having Pick 13 every round drives home the hollowness of sneaking into the post-season... it always seems better to lose 100 right up to the point where you start winning 100.

The Owls went into the off-season with a decimated starting rotation and made a couple of trades prior to the draft to fix this. Neither Danny Duffy (obtained for my #4) nor Steven Brault (swapped for Adam Engel) will go down as particularly "smart" acquisitions, but I don't like the idea of going into a draft desperate for innings and I've made my peace with the transactions.

In a broad sense the CBA's off-season was sort of like my rotation, a bit of a train wreck. It got a late start and seemed very unsettled up to just a few days before the draft started (with a whimper, late on a Sunday night). The crux of the uncertainty was a rule that was adopted letting players be rostered "for free" if they were hurt in 2020 or chose not to play due to Covid-19 fears. As a result of this rather perverse clause, my Owls felt lucky to have had some serious injuries to Chris Archer and Mitch Haniger — 2020 will go down in CBA history as the only year where bad fortune was a good thing! I didn't like this rule, which is probably why the CBA was the lesser priority when my two drafts were concurrent. And it might just have been because I was better prepared for RUMBA, which had a fixed draft scheduled weeks in advance (so it was harder to put off the homework for later). Whatever the reason, this was not my finest draft... but as we'll see, it seemed to go ok.

#13, DANE DUNNING (RHP). This was not a great draft pool for top talent because with no minor league season in 2020, the usual leavening on uncarded players was missing. We took Dunning here partly for his 100 innings, but he's also a decent prospect so he was just about perfect for covering current needs as well as giving a future hope. And Dane Dunning is also a great name to slot into a rotation after Danny Duffy.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** I had also considered taking an uncarded player here, Cristian Robinson. Robinson didn't get picked until #50 — showing I almost completely misread when the run on prospects would begin — so I'm glad to have taken a bird-in-the-hand over a bush-leaguer.*

#33, ALEJANDRO KIRK (C). Thomas took Andrew Stephenson at #16 and Jeff grabbed Max Stassi at #31, and these picks sort of spooked me towards taking a young catcher here. Kirk is attractive as a "carded prospect," but also runs the risk of being another Willians Astudillo so that tempers my excitement a bit. That said, this selection made me happy — between him and Luis Campusano, I really think we've got that elusive "catcher of the future."

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** As mentioned, Kristian Robinson did not last another round and he would have been my target had I not been pushed toward taking a catcher. And behind the scenes I had been trying to trade for a different uncarded outfielder, Sal's Corbin Carroll, and I think I was also hoping that I could get him instead of the more toolsy Robinson. The other serious consideration here was Garrett Richards (since I still needed innings), but he was having a bad spring so I passed on him as well.*

#53, GARRETT RICHARDS (RHP). It always feels good to draft a player that you strongly considered drafting with your previous pick. This was a tough one, though, because having traded my #4 there was going to be a long wait until my next pick. I have no regrets, given my inning shortage, but it would have been a lot more fun to take an uncarded player here.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** I wanted to draft either Nick Gonzales (a 2B/SS prospect) or one of the young KC hurlers (Asa Lacy or Daniel Lynch) for my first uncarded. More than usual, in this draft I had blinders on and wasn't really looking all that hard for other options, so I've been happy with what I got in any given round and not sad about missing out on various other options.*

#93, NICK GONZALES (2B/SS). He seems like my kind of player, but it's unusual for me to take a chance on a player like this. The last one, if memory serves, was Zack Collins who was also a college player without much of a pro track record. Let's pray this one turns out better.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Daniel Lynch was still available here, but I went with the one I wanted more. It was about this time in the draft that I sensed the lack of a real plan wasn't going to be the end of the world.*

#113, JOSE GARCIA (SS). Garcia has received some attention as a toolsy prospect on the Reds for a few years now. I was reminded of him in part because of the news that Amed Rosario was probably being shifted to the outfield, and suddenly felt like I should find some depth at this key position. He's a value pick, and almost like the kind of uncarded player I would have taken were it not for the fact that "shortstop of the future" shelf had already been picked clean (much like the toilet paper shortage last spring).

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** I would have taken Austin Barnes, but Dan grabbed him at #109. In some ways he did me a favor, because I think Garcia fits my long-term needs better.*

#133, BRENNEN DAVIS (CF). One of my primary aims in this draft was to grab another young centerfielder, and with no remaining hope on connecting with Corbin Carroll we went with a young Cub who might play in Des Moines this summer. Uncarded players are always hard to assign value, in that I would probably have traded my #2 for Carroll but got a player who slots about the same in #7.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** It was tempting to defer filling out my uncarded slots, in which case I would have taken Daniel Bard here. (I had drafted him in RUMBA and that also put him on my radar here.) But my short-list of prospects was rapidly shortening, so no regrets.*

#153, GEORGE KIRBY (RHP). As with Nick Gonzales, here is another guy that I'm essentially drafting straight out of college. My motivations are perhaps worth sharing. First of all, Kirby has such elite control that it makes me think he might succeed in ways that far exceed his "stuff." Second, he shares the first name of my father, who is in a nursing home now and is at an age where I might be running out of time to honor the guy who encouraged me as a Little Leaguer.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** I had taken a different George, Jorge Alcala, with an eye toward honoring my father in RUMBA and he was also on my mind here. It worked out fine, and just goes to show that we're all working off a different set of needs and personal preferences, so sometimes you can have your cake and eat it too.*

#173, JORGE ALCALA (RHP). I was officially without ideas by this point, so just took a repeat from my RUMBA draft. But Alcala does help finish off my bullpen, so the pick made sense.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? Doug selected Genesis Cabrera shortly after this, who seems to have better lineage. But there are still lots of interesting pitchers available at this point in the draft and you can't take them all!

#193, HECTOR NERIS (RHP). My tastes normally run to younger arms — such as Alcala at #173 — but Hector seems like a reasonable bet to pay off a year from now. And even if he doesn't, it's just a 10th-round pick.

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? I was also debating a couple of pitchers that I had cut here, Jose Alvarado and Joey Lucchesi. I don't have any real explanation for why I opted to go with Hector here, but I suspect it's because even though I am not into rotisserie baseball at all, I've been infected by the extra value of "saves" that dominates that game. Yet another vaccine to try and get an appointment for!

#213, JOSE ALVARADO (LHP). As something of a fatty myself, I'm extra impressed by this spring-time reports that a player has lost weight. They say that Jose dropped fifty pounds during the off-season, which probably won't do much to increase his ability to throw strikes but you never know, right? This marks the first time I have ever re-drafted a guy that I had cut a month before (at least as far as I remember).

Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda? My last few picks were relievers. I was tempted to make one a starter, either a young pup like Tyler Alexander or an old dog like Jake Arrieta. Starters have a lot of value as a hedge against the kind of problems my Owls had finding innings, so failure to take another starter might come back to bite me in the ass.

This was my fifth draft since rejoining the CBA. I got enough of the guys I wanted to be happy with how it turned out. Looking back, the 2017 class was a good one, with Amed Rosario (#7), Nick Senzel (#27), Mitch Haniger (#56), Matt Boyd (#87), Amir Garrett (#127), and Kyle Tucker (#187) still featuring prominently on the club. My notable whiff that year was on Zach Collins (#83), the young catcher in the ChiSox system who stagnated in the high minors.

Still rostered from the 2018 class are Matt Olson (#5), Scott Kingery (#45), and Victor Caratini (#121). Jose Alvarado, who I re-drafted after cutting him in February, sort of counts as a member of this class as well. Regardless, this bunch was not as successful as the Class of 2017.

The 2019 group is led by Peter Alonso (#41), an MLB-ready prospect that I snagged pretty early. We also did well with several of the filler picks that included Ryan McMahon (#63), Domingo German (#81), Dylan Cease (#105), Trevor May (#121), and Roberto Perez (#161).

Last year's draft class includes a pair of uncarded players that are still in the nest, Victor Brujan (#55) and Luis Campusano (#106). Top hitter picks were outfielders, Bryan Reynolds (#7) and Victor Reyes (#67), and the other keepers were all pitchers: Nate Pearson (#18), Nick Anderson (#27), Sergio Romo (#87), and Drew Pomeranz (#107). Overall, 33 of my current players have come via the draft, nine were netted in trades, and I believe just two of my players, outfielders Ender Inciarte and Michael Conforto, were on the inherited roster. It's my team, warts and all.

In closing, here follows a condensed look at my roster. The 14 new faces (drafted or acquired in the last 12 months) are in **Red**. Hitters have balance, ABs, and OPS listed; pitchers have IP and ERA. The hitting remains a relative strength, but the pitching is still suspect. I think we're roughly a .500 club — it would be nice to win more than we lose for a change — but the CBA has a lot of really good teams and unfortunately this isn't one of them.

CATCHERS. Roberto Perez (E, 291, .480) and Victor Caratini# (E, 348, .661) both picked the same season to do a belly-flop at bat, but the same virus hit several positions so it's not like it matters. I had planned on drafting another catcher but it was a definite audible to take [Alejandro Kirk](#) (5R, 72, .983) with my #2. And still looking like a pretty good future is a holdover uncarded, Luis Campusano, who looks ready to make the jump to the Bigs.

FIRSTBASE. The incumbents, lefty Matt Olson* (E, 630, .734) and righty Pete Alonso (3R, 624, .816), both suffered huge OPS declines relative to 2019. The pair should be fine — we're definitely hoping this was just something to write off as one of those weird 2020 things. As such, this was a position where we didn't bother going 3-deep.

SECONDBASE. Playing most days will be the left-handed Kolton Wong* (E, 543, .676), a '1' in the field. On paper the backup is Scott Kingery (1R, 339, .511), who had a really awful year. We're concerned enough about the position to roster a pair of uncarded players, Vidal Brujan# and [Nick Gonzales](#).

THIRDBASE. Eugenio Suarez (1L, 594, .782) is yet another power hitter whose productivity nose-dived. The backup is Ryan McMahon* (E, 516, .714), who has a '3' glove at 1B/2B/3B.

SHORTSTOP. I know it sounds like a broken record, but my two shortstops also suffered offensive declines. De best is still Paul DeJong (3R, 456, .671), but Amed Rosario (3L, 429, .643) will also play. With an eye toward the future, a third option was drafted: [Jose Garcia](#) (3L, 201, .400).

LEFTFIELD. Bryan Reynolds# (E, 555, .632) went from rock-solid to nigh unplayable. Fortunately Kyle Tucker* (4R, 627, .837) took a nice step forward. He's one of just three regulars in our lineup this year that mashed at an .800+ OPS.

CENTERFIELD. Ender Inciarte* (3L, 348, .512) continued his decline at the plate, and to add insult to injury is now a '2' in CF. As a result, Victor Reyes# (E, 606, .706) looks to start most of the time, with Nick Senzel (2R, 210, .604) to this point still longer on potential than performance. One of our new uncarded players, [Brennen Davis](#), is another future dart-throw that will hopefully be a bulls-eye.

RIGHTFIELD. Mitch Haniger took the year off and might never be the same, but so far his spring training performance has been promising. We are more than fine with Michael Conforto* (2R, 606, .927).

ROTATION. Matt Boyd* (9L, 180, 6.71) and Dylan Cease (5R, 174, 4.01) survived the dumpster fire of 2020, but it was tough going for the rest of my old rotation. Out with the old and in with the new! It took some doing, but [Danny Duffy](#)* (2L, 168, 4.95), [Garrett Richards](#)* (6R, 153, 4.03), [Steven Brault](#)* (3R, 129, 3.38), and [Dane Dunning](#) (5R, 102, 3.97) should be able to get us through 162 starts. Waiting in the wings and/or rehab facility are some decent bets for brighter days ahead: Chris Archer, Reynaldo Lopez (9L, 78, 6.49), Nate Pearson (9R, 54, 6.00), [George Kirby](#), Domingo German, and Michael Kopech.

BULLPEN. Although the rotation got shredded, 2020 wasn't too bad as far as my relievers were concerned. Matt Strahm* (2L, 63, 2.61), Drew Pomeranz* (1L, 57, 1.45), and Amir Garrett* (9L, 54, 2.45) give us a strong returning trio from the south side. And the righties are also quite solid, led by Nick Anderson (3R, 48, 0.55), Trevor May (E, 69, 3.86), and Sergio Romo (2L, 60, 4.05). One of the new hands will shore-up the starboard side, Jorge Alcala (9R, 72, 2.63), and drafted with an eye toward the horizon were Hector Neris (E, 66, 4.57) and Jose Alvarado* (9L, 27, 6.00). Normally, the better relievers would have been traded for less volatile commodities, but my thinking was that the hitting should be quite a bit better a year from now so it's better to keep these arms in Iowa for now. Check back with me around the trade deadline to see how I'm feeling about guys like Nick Anderson then.