

Draft Recap: 2018 Iowa Crows

Eight years have passed since my last RUMBA draft. A year ago, I rejoined one of my old leagues and really enjoyed the draft, especially, 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 once it was over I felt like Ernie Banks, wishing we could play two. I had already signaled Todd that I was hoping to also get back into this league, so when an opening became available this winter, I jumped at the chance.

My first moves were perhaps mistakes (at least it seemed that way on “Draft Saturday,” but we’ll get to that later). My instinct, given the stellar cards of Nolan Arenado and Charlie Blackmon, was to try and win now. Going “all in” led to trades for thirty-somethings Neil Walker, Josh Harrison, and Gerardo Parra. More to the current point, I swapped my first two picks for Carlos Santana and Steve Souza, two more veterans, and it soon struck me that I might have just traded away future glory for what will probably just be a .500 season. (This dread was seemingly confirmed by running a few auto-play seasons last weekend.) During the draft, due to these second thoughts, I decided to change direction and mostly use the picks I still had to shore up thin positions with an eye toward the horizon. I tried to build up the team’s positional depth and if possible go 3-deep everywhere. As we’ll see, I came close to accomplishing this objective.

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 RUMBA’s newest franchise.

#54, KYLE FREELAND (LHP). I think it was Eisenhower who advised us to never fight a land war in Asia or draft a pitcher from Colorado. But imagine watching all those beautiful pitchers falling like so many dominos in picks leading to a moment on Saturday afternoon when Kyle Freeland and his 156 mediocre innings seemed about as good as it gets. His low K/9 rate is worrisome, so the truth of the matter is that the first pick of my return to RUMBA is likely to be regrettable.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Jose Pirela isn’t a sexy prospect, but a right-handed outfielder would have given me platoon options. Nick Delmonico also appealed to me as a ChiSox fan, but like Pirela would be gone before my next pick.*

#72, ERIC SOGARD (2B/SS). The Crows will be playing in Coors Field, so taking Sogard for middle infield depth might not have been the shrewdest move (since he needs about eighty ABs for each homer). But I have come to enjoy watching the Brewers (we get some games on tv each week from all six teams in states bordering Iowa), and Sogard is the kind of player that is easy to like. And an OBP close to .400 will play anywhere.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** CF depth was something I was looking for in this draft. Dustin Fowler, Boog Powell, Francys Cordero, Harrison Bader, and Magneuris Sierra were still on the board, so I thought it was safe to wait another round. Alas, all five were taken between 73 and 91.*

#92, VICTOR CARATINI (C). Having missed the boat in center, I decided I better scrounge up a catcher of the future. I didn’t need to look far: Caratini was an I-Cub last summer, and his bat looked really good for a catcher. His defense is still problematic, but he gives me a third catcher with potential to take over for Yadier Molina in a few years. 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.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** With Jordan Zimmermann and his 6.08 ERA still lurking in the back of my rotation, I probably should have grabbed a pitcher here. Every pick is freighted with opportunity costs, and taking a hitter means the pitching lags.*

#112, ADAM ENGEL (CF). As mentioned, one of my pre-draft goals was to add depth in center behind Charlie Blackmon and Carlos Gomez. 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 in the field. And at age 26, after a .166 year at the plate one assumes he can only get better with the bat.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** My bullpen is pretty good, but has some depth issues. I had identified Brian Duensing as help from the left side, and he would not be around for my next selection. At times like these, you second-guess whether you should have flipped the order and maybe ended up with both guys?*

#129, NATHAN KARNs (RHP). The Royals are my co-favorite club. I know it's a bit odd to like two teams that play in the same division, but generally speaking they don't contend and are just televised diversions. My love of KC dates back to Freddie Patek being traded there from the Pirates; as for the Sox it was the late-80s clubs with Baines and Guillen. Anyway, Karns bubbled up for this pick as a decent pitcher with upside. Frankly, I think he's going to be better than Freeland (which can only mean one thing: more arm troubles).

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** It was only about 100 picks into the draft that I started looking for good relief cards, and the bullpen arms on my short list were dropping pretty fast. Middleton, Peralta, etc. would have really helped my club this year, but I thought Karns was a better value as a potential innings eater.*

#152, CURTIS GRANDERSON (LF). This pick was "Moneyball" in a twisted draft league sense. With everyone trying to get younger, sometimes the best values have some wrinkles and age spots. This pick was also influenced by my park selection, Coors Field, where Granderson's power will be a good fit.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** The specific choice here came down to Granderson or Josh Tomlin. I hate to admit it, but I think my decision came down to which player was doing better in the early spring games.*

#172, CHRISTIAN VILLANUEVA (3B). Having traded Chase Headley, the Crows didn't really have anyone behind Nolan Arenado. After a quick sort of the free agent pool, this vaguely familiar name popped out at me: Villanueva had played with the I-Cubs a few years ago. He has a path to regular work in San Diego, and even if that never happens has a monster pinch-hitting card for this year.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Again, a stubborn refusal to do basic research on pitchers. Sifting for a particular position like 3B is a lot easier than trying to look a dozens of relief pitchers. And even my search for depth at the hot corner was pretty superficial; I am frankly unsure if I even looked at JD Davis (who was taken a few picks later).*

#192, AARON LOUP (LHP). Now two-deep everywhere, it was time to hunt some pitchers. I still had this name jotted down from a few days prior, and decided to take this lefty to work out of the pen. He *could* be useful for many years to come, but relievers are a pretty unreliable bunch so I won't count on it.

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** I was debating whether to take Loup or another fairly young catcher, Tom Murphy, with this pick. It was sort of a jolt to see Murphy taken at #193 — which of course makes me think I picked the wrong guy!*

#195, PHIL MATON (RHP). This was basically a Rotoworld pick: I noticed that Maton has a fairly prominent projected role in the Padres' bullpen, is fairly young, and good command (a 3:1 ratio of K's to BB's).

***Shoulda-Coulda-Woulda?** Last picks provide the ultimate opportunity for second thoughts. Part of me wanted to take a veteran starter like Clayton Richard for rotation depth. Or maybe a hitter, since I still wasn't 3-deep everywhere. For instance, I had thought about taking Chris Carter (he of the "retooled approach") or Jose Otuna for depth at 1B. And then there was JaCoby Jones, who like Engel hit below the Mendoza Line but has the glove to maybe win another shot in Detroit.*

The Crows drafted four pitchers and five hitters (or six, counting the trade for Parra). I took hitters for depth in the middle rounds, in part because I raised the white flag after seeing how much better some teams were getting during the draft. As is often the case, just one more good pitcher would have made an enormous difference (in my mind, Jordan Zimmermann in the rotation is going to ruin this team's chances). I might get an itchy trigger finger and spend next year's #1, but even if I don't we'll have one of those seasons that is pretty fun to play out even if we aren't playoff-bound. Here is a condensed version of my roster, with the new faces (drafted or acquired in the last few months) noted in **Red**.

Crows of 2018

21 Hitters (AB, OPS)

C) Yadier Molina (501, .751) and Sandy Leon# (271, .644) and **Victor Caratini#** (59, .689)
1B) **Carlos Santana#** (571, .818) and Chris Davis* (456, .732) and **Gerardo Parra*** (392, .793)
2B) **Neil Walker#** (385, .801) and **Josh Harrison** (486, .771)
3B) Nolan Arenado (606, .959) and **Christian Villanueva** (32, 1.094)
SS) Elvis Andrus (643, .808) and **Eric Sogard*** (249, .770) and Jurickson Profar (58, .501)
LF) Melky Cabrera (620, .746) and **Matt Kemp** (438, .781)
CF) Charlie Blackmon* (662, .759) and Carlos Gomez (368, .802) and **Adam Engel** (301, .517)
RF) **Steven Souza, Jr** (523, .810) and **Curtis Granderson*** (449, .775) and Robbie Grossman (382, .741)

24 Pitchers (IP, ERA)

#1) Ervin Santana (211, 3.28) and Steven Wright (24, 8.25) and Ryan Merritt* (21, 1.74)
#2) Chris Archer (201, 4.07) and **Nate Karns** (45, 4.17)
#3) Jordan Zimmermann (160, 6.08) and **Tyler Anderson*** (86, 4.81)
#4) Sean Manaea* (159, 4.37) and Tyler Skaggs* (85, 4.55)
#5) **Kyle Freeland*** (156, 4.10) and Chris Tillman (93, 7.84)
Closer) Sean Doolittle* (51, 2.81) and Fernando Rodney (55, 4.23)
Lefty) **Aaron Loup*** (58, 3.75), Fernando Abad* (44, 3.30), Mark Rzepczynski* (31, 4.02)
Righty) Jacob Barnes (72, 4.00), Juan Nicasio (72, 2.61), Hector Rondon (57, 4.24), **Phil Maton** (43, 4.19)
Depth) Sammy Solis* (26, 5.88), Nate Wittgren (42, 4.68), Brad Boxberger (29, 3.38), Brian Ellington (45, 7.25)

Final Notes

The pitcher pool is always deeper (in most ways) than the hitter pool.

Late picks are still valuable!

I don't know players as well as most of you, but still enjoy sharing my thoughts on the players and the process. It is in fact scary to consider that by the 3rd Round I was already a little unsure if some of the guys taken were hitters or pitchers! Increasingly, I am like the high school and college kids who try and pass the Light in August final using Spark Notes and a prayer.