

Previewing The 2008 Rule 5 Draft

Written by {ga=consigliere}
Tuesday, December 09 2008 7:00 PM -

We are about 24 hours from the 2008 Rule 5 Draft, which commences at noon ET on Thursday December 11th. As the draft time nears, as with every year around this time with minor league diehards, there is some anticipation from the fans that the Indians may lose a player or two in the draft. In his latest, Tony checks in to preview the Rule 5 Draft, and prepare Indians fans for how it may affect our beloved Wahoo Warriors.



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Predicting what ultimately happens in the Rule 5 Draft is a crapshoot, and the Indians may indeed lose a few players when all is said and done, but according to sources from three different organizations I have talked to over the past week they believe the Indians may end up having no one selected. The general consensus is other teams just have a far greater depth of players to choose from on their Rule 5 eligibles list compared to those on the Indians eligibles list. One person even said "I think the last team we take anything from will be the Indians";

As far as Indians who are eligible to be selected, there is absolutely no sure thing to be taken as there are question marks with everyone. The players themselves have no idea what to expect as they can only go by what their agents tell them, and since the player is still the property of their current team the agent and player cannot contact other teams to gauge interest.

For more information on the Rule 5 Draft and how it works, check out my [FAQ housed on my blog](#) . Here is a quick

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rundown in alphabetical order of the Indians top Rule 5 eligibles and why or why they won't be picked.

Jordan Brown - First Baseman

2008: .281 AVG, 30 2B, 3 3B, 7 HR, 51 RBI, 35 BB, 67 K, .754 OPS in 109 games @ Buffalo

Why he will be taken: His bat is major league ready, and if you can hit, teams will find a spot for you. His excellent bat-to-ball-ability and ability to pile up doubles could be enticing to a non-contending team looking for a first baseman to plug into their major league lineup this year. He plays a solid first base and is also somewhat versatile having played some left field during his time with the Indians.

Why he won't be taken: First base is typically not a position that garners much attention in the Rule 5 Draft. Brown's lack of power may turn some teams off since many like a left-handed bat off the bench with some pop.

While he has played some outfield, he is still very raw out there and really hasn't played out there since 2006 in Kinston.

Also, he has been slowed down with a few injuries the last two years, and some teams may pass because of his questionable health.

Predicted outcome: While Brown has certainly been the most popular and talked about Rule 5 eligible player discussed by fans, after talking to a few people in other organizations the consensus is they believe he is a longshot to be taken. Anything can happen, but at this point the Indians gamble to not roster him may pay off.

Stephen Head - First baseman/Outfielder

2008: .290 AVG, 24 2B, 2 3B, 13 HR, 49 RBI, 24 BB, 75 K, .780 OPS in 106 games @ Akron

Why he will be taken: Head is an excellent defender at first base and also in right field. His versatility, athleticism, left-handed pop, and high character have him on the radar for a lot of teams.

He may also get more consideration than the popular Jordan Brown because of his superior defense, versatility, and home run potential.

Why he will not be taken: Head's strike zone management declined in 2008 with a 24-75 walk to strikeout ratio compared to a 48-89 walk to strikeout ratio in 2007.

He has been inconsistent up until this past season, and has yet to play a game above Double-A.

He has also had some recent injury issues with his shoulder, although he came back from that

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this year 100%.

Predicted outcome: Because of his excellent defense at two positions and left-handed pop, Head actually has as good or a better chance than Jordan Brown to be selected.

If it weren't for his inconsistent approach at the plate, he would have a very good chance of being selected.

Even still, if anyone is selected from the Indians, Head may have the best chance.

Frank Herrmann - Right-handed Pitcher

2008: 11-8, 4.14 ERA, 26 games, 150.0 IP, 161 H, 43 BB, 104 K @ Akron/Buffalo

Why he will be taken: Herrmann is big and strong at 6'4" and 220-pounds. He has been a very durable starter in his three year minor league career with the Indians, making 26 starts every year and never missing a start.

With his power sinker and fastball that touches 93-94 MPH Herrmann keeps his teams in just about every game, which may be attractive to a team looking for a reliable fifth starter for 2009.

Why he won't be taken: While Herrmann throws in the low 90s, he really lacks a true out pitch (career 6.05 K/9). Also, starting pitchers typically are not selected in the Rule 5 Draft because unlike a fourth outfielder, utility player or reliever, you can't hide a starter on the roster and use them strategically since they pitch every fifth day.

He has also made only two starts above the Double-A level.

Predicted outcome: Herrmann is a longshot to be selected, and is all but certain not to be taken. A non-contending team may like his ability to eat innings and put up quality starts, but his inexperience above the Double-A level holds him back.

Chuck Lofgren - Left-handed Pitcher

2008: 2-6, 5.99 ERA, 28 games, 85.2 IP, 93 H, 52 BB, 72 K @ Akron

Why he will be taken: One of the things the Indians and people from other organizations love about Lofgren is his excellent makeup and his drive to succeed. The general feeling is while he had a poor season in 2008 as far as statistics go, the problem was mechanical to where new coaching and instruction in another organization can get his performance back on track.

He throws left-handed and in the low 90s and is a former top prospect in the Indians system, so there is value there.

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Why he won't be taken: After a sensational year in Kinston in 2006 when he went 17-5 with a 2.32 ERA and was the Carolina League Pitcher of the Year, Lofgren has been in decline the past two years going 12-7 with a 4.37 ERA at Akron in 2007 and then went down from there in a return trip this season. He has also had a hard time with the walks, and this past season averaged nearly six walks every nine innings.

Predicted outcome: There is no question that Lofgren has the talent, and there is the possibility some organization takes a \$50K gamble on him because of his prospect pedigree.

That said, his rough 2008 season may be too much of a disappointment and ultimately scares teams away.

Randy Newsom - Right-handed reliever

2008: 5-2, 30 saves, 2.80 ERA, 56 games, 54.2 IP, 52 H, 35 BB, 34 K @ Akron/Buffalo

Why he will be taken: Newsom is a gimmick pitcher who throws from a unique low three-quarters slot (submarine) that may be attractive to another organization that wants different "look" for hitters to face out of their bullpen. His arm is resilient and he has proven he can pitch effectively on no rest for two-three days in a row.

He is a groundball pitcher, is smart, has pitched a lot of games at Double-A and above, and has proven himself pitching in the late innings.

Why he will not be taken: Newsom's fastball velocity sits in the low 80s, which goes against the Rule 5 way of selecting power armed relievers. While he is deceptive with the delivery, he often gives up a lot of hits.

In addition to the hits, Newsom's biggest problem is his penchant for giving up walks this past season as he allowed 35 in 54.2 innings in 2008.

With no true out pitch, he doesn't figure to factor into a late inning role at the major league level.

Predicted outcome: Newsom is a wildcard as it is really hard to gauge interest in him. This is where I consult the Magic 8-Ball....shake, shake, shake....."Better not tell you now";.

Yeah, that's what I thought.

Newsom could go to someone, possibly the Pirates because of GM Neal Huntington's knowledge of him, but he is not likely to be taken by anyone.

If I were a betting man, I'd give 3:1 odds on him getting selected.

Neil Wagner - Right-handed reliever

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2008: 3-8, 4.38 ERA, 48 games, 72 IP, 77 H, 25 BB, 92 K @ Kinston/Akron

Why he will be taken: Wagner has a plus fastball that sits around 95 MPH and tops out as high as 98 MPH. Relievers with power arms typically are the top target in this draft, in fact about 60% of the players selected in the last five years have been relievers, so this is why Wagner may be someone a team looks at selecting.

He is extremely intelligent, is a strike thrower, and really came on at the end of the year in the Double-A Eastern League playoffs and had a good showing in the Arizona Fall League.

Why he won't be taken: Wagner has only spent a few days above Double-A, having only pitched in seven regular season games at Double-A Akron this year when he was called up in August. He lacks a good second pitch, which ultimately should be what makes teams shy away from him.

Predicted outcome: Wagner certainly has the power, but his lack of a second pitch and inexperience in the upper levels of the minor leagues will likely result in teams passing on him.

Very doubtful.

Others who may get consideration, but should not be selected:

Jose Constanza (OF - Akron): A scrappy, small outfielder who is a joy to watch because of how he can change a game with his speed. He can latch on somewhere as a fourth outfielder, but better options are available in the draft as far as outfielders are concerned.

Kevin Dixon (RHP - Akron): Big, strong, and durable right-hander with a low 90s fastball, but there are many other starting pitching options available in the draft, including one in his same organization (Herrmann).

Ryan Edell (LHP - Akron): A mature left-handed pitcher who can start of pitch in relief, but his fastball is average and he lacks a dominating pitch.

Lucas Montero (OF - Lake County/Kinston): A nice power/speed combo and the ability to play anywhere in the outfield, but lacks any playing time above Single-A in the minors.

In the end, while there could be a surprise, the Indians are not expected to lose anyone in this year's Rule 5 Draft. Now, there is a good chance that the Indians could lose a player in the Triple-A and Double-A phase. The players listed above are protected from these phases as all are on the Triple-A reserve list, but some players on the not on the Triple-A or Double-A reserve list I am told have been targeted.

For whatever reason, right-hander Jose Jimenez came up in one discussion.

It was not clear why he was brought up, but his name did come up as a possible pick in the

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Triple-A phase.

One final note, if the Indians lose any of the six players profiled above, all have agreed to appear on my radio show "Smoke Signals" if they are picked. So, be sure to [tune in this Thursday night at 9:30 pm](#)

if one is picked, but do tune in anyway as right-hander Randy Newsom will be on regardless and we will talk about the Indians offseason developments.

More On Mastny

Here are some additional details regarding the sale of Tom Mastny to the Yokohama Bay Stars in Japan:

- Mastny is excited about the deal and feels it can help jumpstart his career which he feels has stalled last season. He feels he never got comfortable last season, and with a job up in the air in Cleveland next year and him likely on the Cleveland-Columbus shuttle all year because he has two options left, he wanted more stability and something to provide a spark to his career, and to him this was it.

- The Japanese team actually had been pursuing Mastny, and when they got wind of it Mastny and his agent pursued signing with them. Eventually, the Indians front office was brought into the mix and the Indians obliged by agreeing to send sell him to the Japanese club for cash.

- Japanese clubs actually have scouts in the USA all the time scouting minor league teams and pro teams looking for potential fits and players who they deem signable. Most of the time these are players at the tailend of their major league career or players stuck in a rut with another organization on the shuttle between the big leagues and Triple-A.

- Mastny's contract is for one year and his new club has a team option on him for 2010. After his contract is up, he is free to come back to the major leagues and sign with any team he wants.

- Japanese teams can only have a maximum of six foreign players on their roster, with a max of two pitchers and a max of four positions players.

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- He is expected to move back into a starters role, which is a role he wanted to get back into after spending the last three years in the bullpen for the Indians.

- During his time in Japan, he will be afforded an interpreter much like what the Indians gave to Masa Kobayashi last year.

Photo courtesy of Ken Carr