

## Mirabelli, Indians Plan To Be "Aggressive" In Draft

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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The First Year Player Draft for Major League Baseball is quickly approaching. This year the first round of the draft will be carried live on TV on Monday night June 7<sup>th</sup> and then the rest of the draft will be completed on Tuesday June 8

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and Wednesday June 9  
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As the draft clock gets closer to striking midnight, scouts and scouting directors for every team are bouncing around racking up their frequent flyer miles taking in some last minute action at conference tournaments or other events all around the country. Cleveland Indians Scouting Director John Mirabelli is one of those scouting directors who is taking part in such frenetic activity to see as many players again and again who are being considered for the Indians fifth overall pick in the first round this year.

This is Mirabelli's 11<sup>th</sup> season in charge of the Indians' Scouting Department. While Brad Grant was appointed as the Director of Amateur Scouting for the Indians two years ago, Mirabelli still is the head man in charge of the entire scouting operation in Cleveland and is very much involved with the draft, especially the selection of the first few picks.

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I was able to catch up with Mirabelli on Wednesday evening in between trips to the airport and ballpark for a long talk about the process in preparing for the draft and how they plan to approach it this year, and after careful consideration felt a Q&A was best in order to accurately convey his comments.

**We are a little over a week away from the draft. What is your involvement this late in the process?**

John Mirabelli (JM): It is a collective process. We really got started on this year's draft two weeks after the '09 Draft was over. The [area scouts] get right back at it and start seeing guys in the summer and fall and start putting priority players together so that when we get to January we can sort of have a priority target list for Brad and I to attack. Obviously, picking at #5 overall makes it a lot easier to do as I don't have to start with 40 guys on my list and get to 20. Instead, I can start with 20 and get down to five. My process really has been to go back and go back and go back again [to get many looks at players]. I haven't really focused on getting too deep into this draft though I have seen some other guys along the way. My focus has been to follow the lead of Brad and the crosscheckers and who they have identified who should be in the mix at #5 and go see that guy.

**Who makes the call on the first round pick? After the first few picks, you really rely on the scouts for your picks since you and Brad likely have not seen any of those players, but the first pick or two you have seen the players you are considering. Does it really come down to yours and Brad's decision?**

JM: Yes, that's how we do it. Brad and I go out and see the players. It's another look and while it could be a good day or bad day [for the player] we are trying to identify the tools. We need to look at them so that when we walk into the room we can ask the right questions [from our scouts] about the guy. Not that it is going to be my opinion or Brad's one look, but certainly we will go with our area guys and ask questions to make sure we are comparing the high school kids from California and the high school kids from Florida fairly.

**Is there a pitcher in this draft up to the level of your first pick from last year, right-hander Alex White?**

JM: No, I don't think there is necessarily a guy of his caliber. Every draft is different as you can only evaluate and you can only select the players that are in this pool. Whether 5th, 12th or 25th that's what we have to evaluate. I will say in my 20 years of scouting this has been one of the most challenging years of scouting. Not because the talent isn't good as it is a really good draft and there are a lot of good players in this draft, it's just that there are not a lot of star players. There are only a handful of them. We know that there will be some guys drafted in the 10th round or wherever who becomes a good major league player, but that happens all the time and is the nature of this business. There are a lot of good players in this draft, but a lot of them are the same. There is a lot of right-handed pitching, but not many position players or left-handed pitchers. It is just a unique draft where so many of these guys are alike in terms of ability, and that's where we are being challenged in separating them out. I don't mean that negatively, I am just saying that because of the dynamics of this draft it makes it a very unique talent pool.

**Knowing that it may be challenging to separate the options at your disposal with the fifth overall pick, does it make you more inclined to take a safer pick there or are you truly open to anything there?**

JM: We are absolutely open to anything. I think in terms that with that pick at #5 you have to look at who has the most upside. I am not sure there are many of those guys in this draft, so we have to determine which we think could present the most upside for us.

**With the #5 pick, does knowing that if you are unable to sign your first round pick this year that you will get a pick in the same slot in the first round next year as compensation affect who you may target with the pick? Or does that have no bearing on the decision?**

JM: When you are picking this high, we are absolutely going to take the best player available. That compensation could work to our advantage, but that's why it is in place. We are going to be aggressive throughout the draft and we are going to stick to that philosophy as long as there are good players on the board. I know the first round pick gets a lot of attention, and I understand that, but I can tell you as a Scouting Department we know that one player is not going to make a difference and we have to bring a lot of talent into the organization. It's not just the 5th pick in the draft; it is the 5th pick in every round. We are prepared right now to be very aggressive in this draft, I can tell you that.

**There have been reports that the Indians will be in the red this year financially because of attendance shortfalls. Is the draft budget in any way affected by this?**

JM: The budget is set way in advance and approved in October. We have a very aggressive budget this year and we have a pretty good idea where we are going to be picking and that still remains in place as I have not been told anything differently. Sometimes there can be changes after the fact if we trade players before the trade deadline and there is some salary relief and now all of a sudden you have some additional surplus to the budget. It's kind of late to put it into the draft, but we can apply some of those funds to the International [signings].

**Is the idea to be "aggressive" always decided before the draft, or is this something that can change in the moment of the draft depending on how it is going?**

JM: I think it is more predetermined. We go back and look back at our draft processes every year. Where we are successful, where can we do a better job, and where could we look for an opportunity to be more aggressive here or be more conservative there. So it is a predetermined assessment of what we could possibly get more out of the draft and get better.

**What do you think is the strength of the draft this year?**

JM: I think without question it is very deep in right-handed pitching. I don't think there is any question about that as high school and college overall there is a deep group of right-handed pitching in this draft. As you know, this is a common denominator every year where there is always some right-handed pitching you have to choose from. Some years may be a little bit better than others on the top end, but that's something that is always going to be there. It's a challenge this year as left-handed pitching is extremely thin. Catching, which is a premium position, is awfully thin. Those guys will get inflated because catching is a supply and demand position and is very similar to major league frontline pitching as everybody needs and wants catching. The few guys in this draft that are legitimate are going to be propped way up.

**Your drafts appear to be more fruitful recently. Have you changed your draft approach over the past few years? Is there something you changed systematically or is it a byproduct of the guys you have selected staying healthy for once?**

JM: I don't want to get into the specifics from the proprietary standpoint that we'd like to keep it to ourselves, but I will say from the vetting process I feel like we have gotten a lot more detailed and lot deeper with these guys. From a technology standpoint we have gotten a lot more quantity looks at players. We have also done some things internally with our scouts getting different looks, getting different opinions, guys going out of their normal realm of responsibilities, and just getting some outside opinions. I think putting all that together it has given us more information to hopefully make better decisions.

**While you are still heavily involved and oversee the draft, how exactly has your role changed since Brad Grant was put in charge of amateur scouting two years ago?**

JM: Yeah, I have been involved. I think my role is more of the big picture broader scope of how we do things and the processes and procedures and things we have implemented. I am someone who can see where the players fit in not only with the draft, but where they fit into our system. Where are the strengths, where do they fit in our system, and where do they fit in internationally with what we do there. So I think just being more efficient with the amateur draft is my role. While I am evaluating players I am a fresh set of eyes. I am kind of the truth doctor. I don't go out all summer and see any amateur guys in the Cape Code and summer stuff. The first time I see these guys is early in the spring, and I think that helps in that I don't have any preconceived ideas since I did not see them in the summer and I think there is a place for that in the evaluation process.

**Do you take a lot of stock in the guys who shoot up draft boards in the final weeks before the draft?**

JM: No, actually we won't. We've had some internal studies looking at what has happened in past drafts and where there has been success, and along with that looked at these guys who late in the draft season seem to make the climb or fall. We just go back and look at it all, and especially with the college players we look at the body of work. It's tough to do as that [last month of play] is the last thing on the mind. I think we have established some discipline to go back and look at the body of work to see how they did from their freshman to sophomore year and so on and put that all together and not just focus on what they have done the last month. I think we have done a better job of that, and I will tell you that is part of our new process also.

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**Scouting Directors and tons of scouts for every organization are all scrambling last minute to get final looks at thousands of players. It's a pretty crazy final month not only for you and the rest of the Indians' Scouting Department, but the Scouting Departments for every other organization as well, yes?**

JM: Here is the best way I can explain it to you. As soon as we reach April 1st to April 13th there are concerns you are running out of Friday's as that is when most guys pitch. So now you are counting down the days and you have to be efficient. So that means you have to go where they are playing and when they are playing. No body cares how much sleep I get or how many 4:15 AM wakeup calls I get in a row or how many different planes, hotels and rental cars I have been in on a daily basis. You just know from experience when April comes, okay now I gotta go. When scouts call you and guys are playing you gotta go and we'll rest and catch up on our sleep after the draft.

**Now that draft day is quickly approaching, what is the process in getting ready for it?**

JM: We start Sunday morning. The scouts will come into Cleveland on Saturday night and we will start our individual scout meetings on Sunday morning. We'll get through every scout and talk about every guy on their list and that will probably take until Wednesday and then we start putting the big board together with all our top players. That will take us through probably Saturday, and then Sunday we will spend the day reviewing the whole process. We will go through it one more time, go through scenarios, go through questions on if anyone is too high or too low, and talk about some players again. And then Monday is the draft. I think we have a good process, and we have tweaked and adjusted it throughout the years. I like our dynamics in our draft and I think we are very efficient. Brad does a heck of a job running that and with the leadership he provides, and I think we are in a very good spot as far as our draft is concerned.

**What is considered a successful draft?**

JM: I think you have to look at it in terms of what has happened in the industry. Are you doing what the industry norm is? The goals are kind of simple. If you can find in each draft a rotation starter, be it a 1-4 starter, and an everyday position player, then you have beaten most of the drafts. In any given year in the draft there are only 20-30 position players and 20-30 rotation starters, so if you can get one of each I think you are beating the competition. There are a lot of players who will get a cup of coffee, or guys who become an extra player or middle reliever, but those obviously are not the goals. This isn't my goal or the Cleveland Indians' goal. This is the

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distribution of talent in the draft and on average if you can come away with one of each of those and if you can do better than that you are way ahead of the game. We've done our best and taken some chances in the past where things have not worked out, and we have had some bad luck in there too, but you can look at a lot of teams and it is a tough deal with injuries and guys not performing or reaching their potential. It happens a lot. I think we are on the right track, I can tell you that.

**With the good drafts you seem to have had recently, another good draft this year could really set the organization up well, no?**

JM: I really think that if we can do the same type of thing that we have done the last couple of years I think we will really be in a good spot.

*Photo courtesy of Ken Carr*

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