

With Draft Over, Indians Focused On Signing Players

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Saturday, June 12 2010 3:00 AM - Last Updated Saturday, June 12 2010 3:09 PM



Editor's note: There will be no Minor Happenings this week due to the heavy amount of draft coverage this week. It will be back next week.

The Indians had a very good draft this past week as they took a lot of good, young talent with upside. But all those pats on the back about their very good draft will mean nothing if they don't sign some of these risky, upside picks. The Indians know this and plan to be just as aggressive in their signing process as they were with their selection process.

"On paper we feel like it [was a good draft]," said Indians Scouting Director and Assistant GM John Mirabelli in a phone conversation last evening. "But you have to get them signed to make it stand for anything. But we did the first part."

Going into the draft the Indians stacked their top 150 players in order on their draft board and pulled from that listing through the first eight to ten rounds. Since there is no time for discussion when their pick comes up each round due to the fast pace of the draft, the Indians pull from that top 150 listing until it is exhausted and then move onto another listing where they stack the remaining players at each position.

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Most if not all discussions happen prior to the start of the draft, so they have to be prepared going in with what they want to do, and this year it was about going the extra step and adding some upside talent to the organization.

“I would say upside is a good word to describe our draft,” said Mirabelli. “We put our draft board in order of talent and ability and worked off it from there. We didn’t base it on signability. We looked at our values and how we valued the player and the upside and we thought we put our board in its natural order from top to bottom. When it was our time to pick, that’s the guy that we took.”

What helps the Indians and all other clubs is the first three rounds of the draft are protected where if the Indians were unable to sign any of their picks in the first three rounds this year, they would get a compensation pick next year. This is a good fallback and gives Major League clubs some leverage in the signing process, but the Indians’ first choice is to sign these players.

“The first three rounds are protected, so that is part of your strategy going in to take the best guys and worry about the other stuff later,” said Mirabelli. “We are going to take the best player and try to sign them, and if not we will get something for them next year. We know the players have leverage. We recognize that and respect that. This is a baseball draft and they have options, especially high school players. We understand that, but at the same time we needed some talent in the organization and we are pretty determined to take a shot.”

The Indians have built up a lot of “inventory” in the system the past few years as last year they signed 28 of their draft picks including all of their first 20 picks. In the 2008 Draft they signed 30 of their picks, including 25 of their first 28 picks. In 2007 they signed 26 picks and in 2006 they signed 37 picks.

But this year with so much inventory already in place and a lot of organizational filler already in the system, they really targeted upside right through the end of the draft. In previous years they may have spent a lot of last day picks on guys to sign so they could fill out the short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley and rookie level Arizona rosters. This year there will be more of a quality over quantity approach to the signings as in the end maybe only 15-20 players in total are signed.

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“I think this will be a substantially smaller group than what we traditionally sign, certainly smaller than what we signed last year,” said Mirabelli. “We have a lot of inventory of guys still in the system. We are in pretty good shape in terms of filling organizational spots, so we didn’t have to do that [in the draft]. I think that was the goal all along as we were taking upside late in the draft as opposed to organizational filler, so I think those [signing] numbers will just naturally come down.”

As for the signings themselves, a few will be announced in the next week as Mahoning Valley starts up play a week from today on June 18th and Arizona starts up a few days later on June 21st. But because of the questionable signability of so many of the players they took, the Indians expect the signing process to carry throughout the summer with most of the “big splashes” coming at the August 16th signing deadline.

“Yes, historically if you look back at what has happened in the last three or four years it is a pretty safe bet that a majority of these signings will be near or at the deadline,” said Mirabelli. “As I told you before we would be aggressive selecting them, and we are going to be aggressive trying to sign them. We are not going to be foolish, but we want to get players signed for what we think is the appropriate value. Hopefully the players and our values are close enough aligned and we can make it happen, and I am confident we will.”

Signing Updates

- I’ve spoken with several of the Indians 2010 Draft picks over the past 48 hours, and at this moment only two players are 100% signing with the Indians. Outfielder **Jordan Casas** (40th round, Long Beach State) and infielder

Aaron Fields

(42nd

round, Wright State) have confirmed to me that they will be signing within the next week. While I did not confirm this personally, outfielder

Henry Dunn

(50th

round, Binghamton U.) is also supposedly going to sign per a report in an on-line

[report from a Binghampton media outlet](#)

- Contrary to reports, outfielder **LeVon Washington** (2nd round, Chipola JC) is not close to signing with the Indians. In fact, the Indians have not even spoken to him or anybody associated with him. The reports that he is close to a \$1.55 million deal are greatly exaggerated, and most likely being fueled by his agent to put pressure on the Indians, which should be no surprise since in this case it is Scott Boras.

- [According to University of San Diego head coach Jay Johnson](#) , he doesn't expect shortstop

Tony Wolters

(3rd

round, Rancho Buena Vista HS) to sign with the Indians unless he receives "life changing money". Wolters will weigh his options, but if his demands are deemed too high for the Indians tastes, no matter how much they and other teams may have liked him going into the draft they could just decide to pass on signing him because they would get a compensation pick in the exact same spot of the 3rd

round next year for not signing him. Not saying they will go this route, but it is the leverage teams have with 1st

, 2nd

, and 3rd

round draft picks in that they always have a fallback if the player is unsignable.

- The Indians were excited to get right-hander **Robbie Aviles** (7th round, Suffern HS) as late in the draft as they did, but a lot of this had to do with him sliding because of a partial tear to the ligaments in his elbow a week ago. The injury made several clubs steer clear of him, but the Indians took a gamble on him and will want to have tests done on the elbow to determine the severity of the injury before going further in the signing process. He may have been a hard sign for any team going into the draft, but the injury may have changed things on that front.

- The Indians have hinted that there could be several late summer signings this year while they work through the signing process with a lot of high profile draft picks and see them play more. One of those players may be catcher **Alex Laviskey** (8th round, St. Edwards HS) who sounds

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like he [expects the process to drag out over the summer](#). Even still, I think it is very likely he will sign as he is very happy to be drafted by his hometown team and the Indians were very happy to snatch him up in the 8th round.

- Right-handed pitcher **Jordan Cooper** (9th round, Wichita St.) says [he is 50/50](#) on signing or returning to school. The Indians may opt to wait until later in the summer to sign him so they can get more looks at him where he is set to pitch for Falmouth in the Cape Cod League. However, his signing status is something that could be wrapped up soon as he has expressed an interest to know one way or the other rather quickly, so it wouldn't be a surprise if he is an announced signing this coming week.

- Right-handed pitcher **Cody Allen** (16th round, St. Pete JC) looks like he will be a hard sign as he is [requesting 5th to 10th round](#) money. These demands have a way of changing as the draft signing season carries on through the summer, so if he comes off he demands a little he could be a late summer signing.

- Right-handed pitcher **Jay Gause** (25th round, West Brunswick HS) is committed to North Carolina State next year to play baseball. According to a [report from a local TV station in his area](#), while he is leaning toward attending school he is also seriously considering going pro.

- According to [his new coach at Eau Claire](#), outfielder **DeMarcus Tidwell** (28th round, Yavapai College) is most likely not going to sign since he was not taken in the first ten rounds of he draft.

- Catcher **Tyler Pearson** (38th round, Monterey HS) looks like he will be a very tough signing for the Indians. I talked to him and he is requesting "no less than \$750K" to sign. He does not have an agent, but it looks like a big chunk of change is going to be needed to woe him away from getting his education now and also attending a top baseball school in Rice. If they Indians really like him they may pay that, but I think they will let him go on to school and keep tabs on him the next three years before re-considering him in 2013.

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- Right-handed pitcher **Bobby Wahl** (39th round, West Springfield HS) is all but likely going to attend Ole Miss in the fall. I talked with him yesterday and he said that "at the time right now I'm really positive I will be going to school, but anything can happen".

- Left-handed pitcher **Brock Stassi** (44th round, U. Nevada Reno) is currently pitching for Wisconsin in the Northwoods League. The interesting thing is while he was drafted by the Indians as a pitcher, he is playing first base with Wisconsin and [according to his father](#)

is a position his college is considering playing him at next season. His interest to try and play first base probably takes him off the signing radar for the Indians, if he was even on it to begin with.

- Shortstop **Chris Waylock** (43rd round, Cary-Grove HS) will probably honor his commitment to Iowa Western Community College, but the Indians were the team with the most interest in him when teams scouted him, and he may not be hard of a sell as the other high school and juco players the Indians selected.

- Right-handed pitcher **Frank DeJulio** (45th round, Daytona Beach CC) is currently pitching for Duluth in the Northwoods League. He missed the final three months of his college season after suffering from an ailment which came about due to some medication he was taking. He has a firm commitment to go to Florida in the fall, and unless something surprising happens he is all but certain to pass on signing with the Indians and instead become a Gator and take his chances in the draft next year.

Photo courtesy of Dan Mendlik of the Cleveland Indians

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