

A Lazy Sunday Feeling A Draft

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Sunday, August 22 2010 11:04 AM -



Coming to you live (if late) from the satellite office in Milwaukee, and having been spared from watching the recent games live (though the game recaps, the highlights, and the box scores paint a pretty vivid picture), let's take on a few appetizers before getting into the Main Course. The Main Course is obviously the recent Draft that blowing it's way off of the Lake. Before getting into the whole Draft, a couple of the low and high points as the Indians go into Sunday's game attempting to avoid a sweep AGAIN, this time at the hands of the Tigers, as the Indians' "easy" part of the schedule hasn't done much to further the optimism that existed around these parts a week or two ago.

The Indians have looked like a team decimated by injuries and (more importantly) inconsistency as the hope that a couple of these young players would emerge and really assert themselves in August has given way to a feeling that the string is being played out. If they hit, they can't pitch and vice versa...as it's become Groundhog Day on the North Coast. The result has been dreadful to watch and even the bright spots (notably Brantley) come with strings attached as the Indians are trying to finish off the season with some kind of momentum towards 2011.

That momentum, or any semblance of good news, is particularly bereft at 3B, where Andy Marte continues to waste opportunities afforded to him as he plays what figures to be his final 6 weeks in the organization. While a possible solution existed in the form of Jared Goedert, the hits just keep coming for the Indians at 3B as the hits have dried up for Goedert in Columbus. To wit, Goedert's numbers in Columbus since the All-Star Break have him posting a .234 BA / .342 OBP / .419 SLG / .762 OPS with 3 HR in 32 games, a decided difference from the 1.102 OPS that he posted in his first 33 games with the Clippers, during which he hammered 15 HR. So...yeah, he's cooled off with the bat and, if that was his ticket to Cleveland, he may be waiting in the concourse for a while.

Outside of the happenings on the field, the second biggest news of the week came in the form of the announcement of the PTBNL for Austin Kearns as the Yankees sent RHP Zach McCallister to Cleveland to complete the deal. McCallister is, by all accounts, a big RH arm, whose size doesn't translate to him being a power pitcher as he relies on control and command. Prior to the season, [Baseball Prospectus had him as the Yankees' 4th best prospect](#) and the fact that the Indians received the Yankees'

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4th best prospect going into this year either speaks to the scarcity of depth in the Yankees' system or that the Indians just continue to pilfer other teams' upper levels for pitching talent. I tend to think the former as Goldstein said before the season that a perfect world projection of him pegs him "as a back-of-the-rotation starter who delivers 200 solid innings annually." Remember, that's the optimistic view of how he projects...

However, that shouldn't dismiss McCallister, who is just 22 and is already in AAA, a year after leading the Eastern League (the same league the Aeros are in) in ERA as a 21-year-old with the player with the second lowest ERA finishing the season a full run below McCallister's pace. If the Indians had a 21-year-old arm who led the Eastern League in ERA, he would be so squarely on the prospect map that he would be a household name on the North Coast. For now, McCallister joins the Indians from an organization in which he was likely never going to be given much of a chance to start, much less a long leash to prove himself. Suddenly, he finds himself as another section in the Layer Cake of Arms that the Indians have been compiling for the better part of two years now. With McCallister and Kluber (from the Westbrook deal) joining the growing list of arms that the Indians continue to add with their trades, there are more arms to filter through as the Indians continue to attempt to build from beneath and from within, which leads us to the Main Offering of the day – the 2010 MLB Draft.

While we've all seen the numbers thrown around regarding how much the Indians spent this draft and how they went overslot on their first 10 picks in an attempt to infuse talent into the upper levels of their minor leagues, let's take a look WAY back in an attempt to determine not only how the Indians find themselves employing this draft strategy, but also why a change in strategy was wildly necessary.

Much has been made of the difference in the drafts run by Brad Grant, who has run the 2008, 2009, and 2010 drafts, versus those run by John Mirabelli, who was responsible for the draft from 2000 to 2007. The Indians are touting these signing bonuses for the 2010 Draftees as a way to be "hyper-aggressive" to add talent to the system in short order. However, if you start to look at some of the money that was doled out from 2000 to 2007, which is Mirabelli's regime when he was running the draft, it's not as if the Indians have never spent in the Draft in an attempt to find talent...they were just giving money to the wrong players that they were selecting.

Of course, I realize that this is old news, but in light of all of the high numbers being thrown around in terms of Pomeranz, Washington, Wolters, and Lavisky, let's realize that a simple outlay of cash doesn't guarantee much of anything by way of MLB success. To wit, take a look at all of the players who received more than \$500K as a signing bonus in the Mirabelli regime:

Jeremy Sowers (1st Round, 2005) - \$2,475,000

Michael Aubrey (1st Round, 2004) - \$2,010,000

Jeremy Guthrie (1st Round, 2003) - \$2,000,000

Dan Denham (1st Round, 2002) - \$2,000,000

Trevor Crowe (1st Round, 2006) - \$1,695,000

Beau Mills (1st Round, 2007) - \$1,575,000

Brad Snyder (1st Round, 2004) - \$1,525,000

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Corey Smith (1st Round, 2000) - \$1,375,000
Matt Whitney (1st Round, 2003) - \$1,125,000
Adam Miller (1st Round, 2004) - \$1,025,000
John Drennan (1st Round, 2006) - \$1,000,000
Wes Hodges (2nd Round, 2006) - \$1,000,000

JD Martin (1st Round, 2001) - \$975,000
David Huff (1st Round, 2006) - \$900,000
Mike Conroy (1st Round, 2001) - \$892,500
Derek Thompson (1st Round, 2000) - \$850,000
Jake Dittler (2nd Round, 2001) - \$750,000
Justin Hoyman (2nd Round, 2005) - \$725,000
Javier Herrerra (2nd Round, 2004) - \$710,000
Mark Folsom (2nd Round, 2000) - \$700,000
Chuck Lofgren (4th Round, 2005) - \$650,000
Steven Wright (2nd Round, 2006) - \$630,000
Josh Rodriguez (2nd Round, 2006) - \$625,000
Stephen Head (2nd Round, 2005) - \$605,000
Brian Tallet (2nd Round, 2000) - \$595,000
Ryan Morris (4th Round, 2006) - \$500,000

Obviously, all of those guys are 1st, 2nd, or (oddly) 4th Round Picks, meaning that the Indians didn't take many fliers or go overslot the way that they have in recent years...but I'll get to that in a minute. Sure, they gave \$363K to Aaron Laffey (a late-round pick) and they actually paid Wes Hodges (a 2nd Round Pick) more than Dave Huff (their 1st Round Pick of the same year), but for the most part, the Indians spent their money at the top of the Draft and the results above more or less speak for themselves.

If you want to see how the results speak for themselves, take a look at the players drafted by the Indians from 2000 to 2007 who made it to MLB and how the players performed in MLB, as measured by WAR (Wins Above Replacement). If you're not familiar with WAR, here's [a handy primer from Jon Steiner at WFNY](#)

(who breaks it down in easy-to-understand terms), with the draftees from the Indians over an 8-year period compiling these numbers, with their cumulative WAR as Indians indicated in parentheses:

2000 Draft: 0.4 WAR Total for the Indians

Ryan Church: 5.2 (none as an Indian)
Joe Inglett: 3.2 (0.3 as an Indian)
Brian Tallet: 1.8 (0.1 as an Indian)
Jonathon Van Every: 0.3 (none as an Indian)
Derek Thompson: 0.3 (none as an Indian)
Eric Crozier: -0.2 (none as an Indian)

2001 Draft: 0.0 WAR Total for the Indians

Luke Scott: 9.9 (none as an Indian)
JD Martin: 0.6 (none as an Indian)

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2002 Draft: 1.6 WAR Total for the Indians

Jeremy Guthrie: 13.6 (-0.3 as an Indian)
Ben Francisco: 2.8 (2.1 as an Indian)
Brian Slocum: -0.2 (-0.2 as an Indian)

2003 Draft: 4.0 WAR Total for the Indians

Kevin Kouzmanoff: 5.7 (-0.2 as an Indian)
Aaron Laffey: 1.7 (1.7 as an Indian)
Ryan Garko: 1.6 (2.8 as an Indian)
Michael Aubrey: 0.0 (-0.3 as an Indian)

2004 Draft: 1.0 WAR Total for the Indians

Jeremy Sowers: 1.7 (1.7 as an Indian)
Scott Lewis: 0.6 (0.6 as an Indian)
Tony Sipp: 0.3 (0.5 as an Indian)
Wyatt Toregas: -0.2 (-0.2 as an Indian)
Chris Gimenez: -1.4 (-1.4 as an Indian)

2005 Draft: 1.5 WAR Total for the Indians

Jensen Lewis: 1.7 (1.7 as an Indian)
Jordan Brown: 0.1 (0.1 as an Indian)
Trevor Crowe: -0.3 (-0.3 as an Indian)

2006 Draft: -1.4 WAR Total for the Indians

Josh Tomlin: 0.6 (0.6 as an Indian)
David Huff: -2.0 (-2.0 as an Indian)

2007 Draft: N/A

As a quick aside here, the only draftee from 2007 that has made it past AA is Josh Judy, who was a 34th Round Pick that year, meaning that the Indians have not had any MLB contributions from this Draft class, with the prospect of any of them contributing extensively looking rather bleak.

To recap that list, the players drafted by the Indians from 2000 to 2007 with the highest career WAR are as follows:

Jeremy Guthrie: 13.6
Luke Scott: 9.9
Kevin Kouzmanoff: 5.7
Ryan Church: 5.2
Joe Inglett: 3.2

The obvious issue (as if it isn't already obvious) is that those players posted a cumulative -0.2 while playing for Cleveland and the list of players with the highest WAR as Indians is certainly less compelling:

Ryan Garko: 2.8
Ben Francisco: 2.1

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Jeremy Sowers: 1.7
Jensen Lewis: 1.7
Aaron Laffey: 1.7

Maybe this isn't fair to judge some of the Indians' youngsters on the basis of their first real taste of MLB (like Gimenez, who should heretofore be known as ["The Pile Jumper", courtesy of Anthony Caskronowich and Buck Showalter](#)), in that they're still making adjustments. However, if you want some perspective on this, Carlos Santana compiled a 2.1 WAR in 192 Plate Appearances this year and Jeanmar Gomez has compiled a 0.9 WAR in his 29 1/3 IP this year.

Obviously, WAR is a fluid number that's going to go up and down (Sowers' 2004 season produced a 2.4 WAR, a number that fell precipitously each ensuing year), but the Indians' inability to identify, draft, and develop impact players is jarring, particularly when you go back and look at the outlay of cash over an 8-year period. Doubly concerning is the fact that the drafted players who have evolved into role players even look marginal most times or find themselves out of the organization altogether.

Thus, given that the Indians HAVE spent money in the past (although admittedly the 2008 and 2010 drafts do represent a change in strategy), the issue is not as much as HOW much money they're spending, but rather WHO they're spending it on.

With that in mind, let's move on to the "Brad Grant drafts", starting with the total signing bonus numbers for the Indians for the last 3 years, [courtesy of Jim Callis, via Stephanie Storm at the ABJ](#) (with a listing for all the teams for the proper context):

Indians 2010
\$9,381,500

Indians 2009
\$4,943,000

Indians 2008
\$6,984,500

Indians' Three-Year Total
\$21,309,000

If you're wondering, that three-year total is the 6th most among MLB teams behind (in order), the Pirates, the Red Sox, the Nationals, the Orioles, and the Royals. Obviously, some of those teams have a larger amount by virtue of where they've drafted (like the Nats, for example, with Strasburg and Harper), but 2010 is the first time that the Indians occupied that high draft slot, so they've spent money in an overslot situation, just as the other team on that list (the one from the Northeast) has mastered in the past few years.

For a breakdown of players who have received more than \$250K as signing bonuses for the last three drafts, here they are, with their draft position noted and listed in descending order for

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signing bonus, not draft position:

2008 Signing Bonuses

Trey Haley (2nd Round) - \$1,250,000
Lonnie Chisenhall (1st Round) - \$1,100,000
TJ House (16th Round) - \$750,000
Tim Fedroff (7th Round) - \$725,000
Bryce Stowell (22nd Round) - \$725,000
Zach Putnam (5th Round) - \$600,000
Cord Phelps (3rd Round) - \$327,000

2009 Signing Bonuses

Alex White (1st Round) - \$2,250,000
Jason Kipnis (2nd Round) - \$575,000
Joseph Gardner (3rd Round) - \$363,000

2010 Signing Bonuses

Drew Pomeranz (1st Round) - \$2,650,000
Toby Wolters (3rd Round) - \$1,350,000
LaVon Washington (2nd Round) - \$1,200,000
Alex Lavisky (8th Round) - \$1,000,000
Kyle Blair (4th Round) - \$580,000
Tyler Holt (10th Round) - \$500,000
Michael Goodnight (13th Round) - \$315,000
Cole Cook (5th Round) - \$299,000
Tony Dischler (23rd Round) - \$255,000

That's not to assume that some of these guys that signed for less than \$250K aren't going to project, but what jumps out is that the Indians went overslot in 2008 and 2010 (not so much in 2009) to give healthy bonuses to late-round picks, particularly in 2008, when they gave \$600K or more to four players drafted in the 5th Round or later.

The encouraging news there is how the Indians have utilized the end of their drafts and paid the overslot money (at least in 2008 and 2010) with some of the immediate results from those players bearing fruit in short order. While the outlier of the three most recent drafts is that 2009 draft, the other encouraging aspect to these classes is how quickly those players have moved as the 2009 draft didn't offer any overslot players and the Indians paid dollars that were pretty much commensurate with draft position as they paid \$250K or more in bonuses to only their top 3 draft picks.

To that end, here is an update of the aforementioned 2008 and 2009 Draftees that received more than \$250K. For the sake of brevity (which is not my strong suit), I'll use just the stats for each player despite the fact that some of the players (most notably the pitchers, like Stowell and White) have played a multiple levels this year as it gives an idea as to how each player has performed against the highest level of competition faced to date:

Currently in Columbus (AAA)

Bryce Stowell (Age 23): 4.24 ERA, 1.47 WHIP with 25 K, 16 BB in 17 IP

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Zach Putnam (Age 22): 5.79 ERA, 1.43 WHIP with 13 K, 4 BB in 14 IP
Cord Phelps (Age 23): .330 BA / .400 OBP / .524 SLG / .924 OPS with 16 2B, 6 HR in 231 PA

Currently in Akron (AA)

Lonnie Chisenhall (Age 21): .271 BA / .341 OBP / .443 SLG / .784 OPS with 17 2B, 15 HR in 437 PA
Alex White (Age 21): 2.39 ERA, 1.09 WHIP with 66 K, 23 BB in 94 1/3 IP
Jason Kipnis (Age 23): .342 BA / .423 OBP / .560 SLG / .983 OPS with 16 2B, 9 HR in 269 PA
Tim Fedroff (Age 23): .277 BA / .347 OBP / .361 SLG / .708 OPS with 18 2B, 2 HR in 452 PA

Currently in Kinston (A+)

TJ House (Age 20): 3.84 ERA, 1.41 WHIP with 96 K, 51 BB in 122 IP
Joseph Gardner (Age 23): 2.86 ERA, 1.08 WHIP with 94 K, 42 BB in 107 IP

Currently in Lake County (A)

Trey Haley (Age 20): 5.50 ERA, 1.68 WHIP with 85 K, 67 BB in 103 IP

Interestingly, Trey Haley actually received the 4th largest signing bonus since Grant has taken over the draft (behind Pomeranz, White, and Wolters) as he was an overslot signing who (to date) has not justified the \$1.25M price tag associated with signing him. While that may not be fair to a 20-year-old in Lake County, it speaks to the volatile nature of the Draft, where nothing is guaranteed and money spent on a particular player does not guarantee immediate results.

That being said, the correct assumption that the Indians should be investing in the development side of things (because they're simply not able to compete on the money side of the player acquisition system in place in MLB) figures to be put to the test over the next couple of years. The truth is that the Indians DID spend money in the past, only that the money was spent largely on one or two players in a draft who were signed to dollar amounts that were commensurate with their draft position. What they're attempting to do now is spread that money out (while spending more money) in an attempt to diffuse the attrition rate that hampers the development of most players drafted in MLB...and not just for the Indians.

At one point, most people assumed that Adam Miller and Matt Whitney were obvious cogs in the machine for the next decade for the Indians, but real life gets in the way for the best-laid plans as the Indians have developed a new strategy (utilized in two of the last three years) that attempts to place best-laid plans alongside other best-laid plans in the hopes that one of those plans will yield some sort of benefit to the parent club.

The money spent this year (and for the two previous years) are encouraging in terms of employing this strategy and dreaming on some of these young players. However, the question as to whether the players selected were the "right" talent to pay overslot money to or whether they are destined to go the way of Mike Aubrey and Jerry Sowers (non-impact and barely marginal role players) will play out over the course of the next few years.

The success of the players selected in the 2008 and 2009 drafts are just as, if not more, encouraging than the dollars spent as the dollars have been spent before by an Indians'

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organization that has always touted “building from within”.

Whether that pillar upon which the Indians are supposed to be built (and were supposed to be built upon by now) can actually bear some weight will ultimately determine if the organization is destined for an extended walk in the MLB desert or if greener pastures are truly ahead.