DRAFT STRATEGY: A Five-Year Study of Player Pools

Introduction

Fantasy baseball players do not live by auction alone. A significant percentage of the fantasy baseball brethren prefer a draft as opposed to an auction, yet there is a disproportionate amount of published information regarding draft strategy as compared to the more discussed auction strategy. The following serves to bridge the gap and should provide the drafter with a solid foundation when constructing a roster.

Draft versus Auction

The dynamics of a draft are significantly different from that of an auction.

1. An auction normally can be graphed into a series of ebbs and flows, reflecting periods where players are bought for an inflated or deflated salary. While there are occasions where a drafter takes a flier, more often than not a draft goes "chalk" in that the players are predominantly drafted in order of their perceived value

2. A draft inevitably has a series of runs, where several players of the same position or statistical contribution are consecutively selected. While auctions contain similar runs of tabled players which may induce specific positional or statistical scarcity, the auction participant has equal opportunity to roster any player. The same cannot be reasonably stated about drafts. Most drafts are snake (or serpentine) style which means the drafter with a very early or very late pick has to wait longer between consecutive selections, often resulting in missing a run.

3. Another offshoot of the drafter not having a reasonable chance at everyone in the pool is it makes it that much harder to pull off an unorthodox strategy. Strategies such as LIMA and Sweeney are surely possible in a draft, but are a bit more difficult to accomplish.

4. A draft does not contain an 'end-game', an element so important to an auction.

Draft: For Value or Position?

Something to keep in mind is although values are not needed to guide bids; they can be used to rank the players. Both the order of the players and the relative value between them is important.

Assuming it has been decided to select a position player, the process can be simplified into two options: consider value first and then look at the position or look at position and then value. A specific strategy may still be employed, but implementation of the strategy boils down to one of those pair of options.

The first option assumes that the player pool is stocked with sufficient quality and quantity of each position. Towards the end of the draft, there will not be a position that has more available talent than the others.

The second option assumes certain positions are lacking in either quality or quantity, or both. This is commonly referred to as scarcity. Early in the draft, value is sacrificed to secure a player at a scarce position, with the anticipation that this value deficit will be made up late in the draft by choosing players of higher value while others do not have available roster space for these better players.

The Composition of the Player Pool

The best way to decide if scarcity exists is to take a comprehensive look at the player pool. Since the pool is transient, it is best not to rely solely on the data of the previous year, but rather look at multiple years and observe if there are any significant trends.

This study will examine the composition of the player pool for 12-team AL, 13-team NL, and 12-team mixed leagues. The pool will be divided into four components:

1. Catchers (C)
2. First and third base (1B/3B)
3. Second base and shortstop (2B/SS)
4. Outfielder and designated hitter (OF/DH)

Player values for each league were calculated, spanning the past five years. Players were assigned to positions at which they qualified at the beginning of the year, using 20 games played at the position the previous year as the yardstick, according to the following hierarchy: C > 2B/SS > 1B/3B > OF/DH.

Each league assumed a $260 budget per team with the standard roster of 2 C, 5 OF and 1 each at 1B, 2B, 3B, SS, 1B/3B, 2B/SS and DH/UT. Values were calculated for a 5x5 league, giving 67% of the budget to hitting. The data represents those players earning positive value.

The following tables display number of players by year in each player pool:

American League

Year	C	1B/3B	2B/SS	OF/DH
2002	24	36	43	65
2001	24	42	41	61
2000	24	39	38	67
1999	24	37	38	69
1998	24	37	36	71

National League

Year	C	1B/3B	2B/SS	OF
2002	26	46	44	66
2001	26	41	48	67
2000	26	44	44	68
1999	26	39	42	75
1998	26	42	46	68

Mixed

Year	C	1B/3B	2B/SS	OF/UT
2002	24	40	36	66
2001	24	37	36	67
2000	24	40	38	68
1999	24	42	36	75
1998	24	38	36	68

Examining the pools, it appears that catcher can be deemed a scarce position in all three. There are exactly enough catchers to fill everyone's roster. Catchers are so scarce that an adjustment needs to be incorporated into the valuation procedure insuring an adequate supply.

The American League data suggests that the number of draft-worthy middle infielders has increased over the past couple of seasons. The increase can be traced to more players with dual position eligibility. In 1998, there were only 9 American League draft-worthy players who began the year with multiple position eligibility, as compared to 15 last year. In addition, there are presently more AL players that pick up extra eligibility as compared to five years ago. For the record, the number in the National League has consistently been in the mid to high 20s, enabling every team to draft two such players. Again, more come along as the season progresses.

In general, the pool in the National League has remained pretty consistent over the past five years. This is undoubtedly a repercussion of the league having more players with at least dual eligibility, reflective of the style of play in the league devoid of the designated hitter.

The compelling feature of the mixed pool is the paucity of middle infielders, a fancy way of saying that middle infielders appear to be a scarce position in terms of quantity. The slack is picked up at the corner and outfield. If a couple middle infielders occupy the utility spot or if they are placed at another eligible position, middle infielders projected to earn less than a dollar will have to be drafted.

The following tables show the total dollar value of the four components of the draft-worthy pool, presented as the average value per player:

American League

Year	C	1B/3B	2B/SS	OF/DH
2002	$6.58	$13.58	$12.58	$13.88
2001	$6.21	$12.40	$12.59	$14.82
2000	$7.67	$13.77	$12.13	$13.54
1999	$7.67	$12.78	$14.39	$12.84
1998	$5.17	$14.05	$12.36	$14.11

National League

Year	C	1B/3B	2B/SS	OF/DH
2002	$6.77	$12.35	$12.70	$14.56
2001	$6.81	$13.71	$10.58	$15.19
2000	$7.88	$12.11	$11.02	$15.31
1999	$6.92	$14.90	$11.69	$13.52
1998	$6.85	$14.26	$11.13	$14.34

Mixed

Year	C	1B/3B	2B/SS	OF/DH
2002	$8.71	$11.95	$13.36	$13.97
2001	$7.83	$13.86	$11.19	$14.72
2000	$10.29	$12.28	$11.63	$13.40
1999	$10.63	$12.24	$10.94	$12.37
1998	$10.63	$12.79	$14.03	$13.53

One way to analyze this data is to compare each player average to the overall player average. If there are 14 roster spots per team dividing up $260 x .67, the average player should earn $12.44. In all instances, catchers are well below this target and may therefore be considered scarce in terms of quality. National League and mixed middle infielders also exhibit a little hint of scarcity, although this trend may be on the verge of ending based on last year's statistics. One year of a higher average at the position is not sufficient discount the possibility of scarcity, but is worth watching.

The best way to examine scarcity in terms of quality is to study the distribution of players within defined dollar ranges. This goes back to the concept that if scarcity exists, there is a paucity of certain talent at the end of the draft.

To help keep the data in perspective, before breaking the pool into its components, it will be looked at as a whole in terms of the total number of players drafted within the defined ranges.

2002	AL	NL	Mixed
1$-$5	50	58	50
6$-$10	42	40	36
$11-$20	40	46	49
$21-$30	23	24	27
$31-$40	12	12	4
$41-$50	0	1	2
>$50	1	1	0

2001	AL	NL	Mixed
1$-$5	54	63	54
6$-$10	42	33	28
$11-$20	34	48	47
$21-$30	27	20	27
$31-$40	7	13	9
$41-$50	4	5	3
>$50	0	0	0

2000	AL	NL	Mixed
1$-$5	62	61	52
6$-$10	24	37	33
$11-$20	46	45	49
$21-$30	23	23	28
$31-$40	10	14	6
$41-$50	3	2	0
>$50	0	0	0

1999	AL	NL	Mixed
1$-$5	56	65	42
6$-$10	29	32	44
$11-$20	51	42	51
$21-$30	18	32	23
$31-$40	12	11	7
$41-$50	2	0	1
>$50	0	0	0

1998	AL	NL	Mixed
1$-$5	57	71	54
6$-$10	41	34	35
$11-$20	31	34	41
$21-$30	24	23	26
$31-$40	13	17	9
$41-$50	1	2	3
>$50	1	1	0

Considering that 2-3 pitchers will be drafted in the each of the first two rounds, first round hitters will be valued at least mid to high 30s with second round hitters ranging between the mid 20s and mid 30s. By the end of the fourth round, the highest ranked player will be valued in the teens. The drop off now levels, as there are a multitude of equal valued players available for the next several rounds, especially when pitching is added into the mix.

Here is the data by individual pools.

Catchers

AL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	16	13	14	13	18
6$-$10	2	7	3	6	5
$11-$20	5	3	5	3	0
$21-$30	1	1	2	1	0
$31-$40	0	0	0	0	1
$41-$50	0	0	0	1	0
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

NL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	15	14	15	15	18
6$-$10	4	7	4	4	5
$11-$20	6	3	5	5	0
$21-$30	1	2	1	2	1
$31-$40	0	0	1	0	2
$41-$50	0	0	0	0	0
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

MIXED	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	15	14	15	15	18
6$-$10	4	7	4	4	5
$11-$20	6	3	5	5	0
$21-$30	1	2	1	2	1
$31-$40	0	0	1	0	2
$41-$50	0	0	0	0	0
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

The most relevant information gleaned from analyzing this data is the overwhelming concentration of catchers earning less than $5. Of course because of the low average earned per player there would be a plethora of single digit catchers, but the relative amount is certainly eye-catching. An argument can be made for making every effort to secure the services of an upper echelon receiver in an effort to gain a big advantage at the position. However, a stronger argument can be made by those believing in risk aversion. There is relatively little risk involved when drafting a low end catcher. The worst case scenario is they get hurt and are replaced by a free agent who is barely a notch lower in quality. Best case scenario is draft a guy who earns around $5 as there is no worry about the supply.

1B/3B

AL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	6	11	12	7	6
6$-$10	8	11	4	7	12
$11-$20	13	8	13	17	8
$21-$30	8	11	6	5	9
$31-$40	1	1	4	1	2
$41-$50	0	0	0	0	0
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

NL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	16	12	12	11	11
6$-$10	8	7	12	5	7
$11-$20	11	12	11	12	12
$21-$30	8	5	6	9	6
$31-$40	3	4	2	2	6
$41-$50	0	1	1	0	0
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

MIXED	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	12	9	10	9	10
6$-$10	7	4	11	15	5
$11-$20	16	15	11	11	15
$21-$30	5	8	6	4	6
$31-$40	0	1	2	3	2
$41-$50	0	1	0	0	0
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

The top end of corner infielders appear to be stronger in the National League, as the senior circuit provides a few more first and second round picks than does the American League. Proponents of scarcity might have a harder time sticking to the plan in the NL. The irony is there are also a greater number of lower end corner men in the National League. Part of this is due to the fact that there have been more players drafted in the National League, as it consists of 13 teams, while the American League and mixed are comprised of 12 teams.

2B/SS

AL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	14	13	14	10	16
6$-$10	13	14	8	7	7
$11-$20	6	4	9	12	5
$21-$30	5	6	2	5	4
$31-$40	4	1	4	3	3
$41-$50	0	3	1	1	0
>$50	1	0	0	0	1

NL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	8	19	18	12	17
6$-$10	17	7	9	11	12
$11-$20	12	15	10	9	9
$21-$30	5	5	4	9	5
$31-$40	2	2	2	1	2
$41-$50	0	0	1	0	0
>$50	0	0	0	0	1

MIXED	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	9	12	15	13	11
6$-$10	10	8	5	5	6
$11-$20	9	9	11	13	10
$21-$30	6	5	5	3	5
$31-$40	1	2	2	2	2
$41-$50	1	0	0	0	2
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

Not too surprisingly, the American League has more first and second round middle infielders than the National League. Stalwarts like Alex Rodriguez, Derek Jeter and Nomar Garciaparra have been joined by Miguel Tejada and Alfonso Soriano atop the rankings at the position. Believers in scarcity should favor American League drafts, as they may not have to sacrifice value to obtain a player at a perennially scarce position.

In both the AL and NL, there is a greater abundance of bottom echelon middlemen as compared to corner men. This lends credence to the notion of drafting a middle infielder earlier so as not to get stuck with a dreg at the end.

The comparison of 1B/3B to 2B/SS in mixed leagues is pretty muddled, but there is a little but of evidence suggesting that the early rounds have similar numbers of each position, but then there are more corner men than middlemen in the middle rounds.

OF/DH

AL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	14	17	22	26	17
6$-$10	19	10	9	9	17
$11-$20	16	19	19	19	18
$21-$30	9	9	13	7	11
$31-$40	7	5	2	8	7
$41-$50	0	1	2	0	1
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

NL	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	19	18	16	27	25
6$-$10	11	12	12	12	10
$11-$20	17	18	19	16	13
$21-$30	10	8	12	12	11
$31-$40	7	7	9	8	7
$41-$50	1	4	0	0	2
>$50	1	0	0	0	0

MIXED	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
1$-$5	18	22	16	10	18
6$-$10	12	9	10	19	19
$11-$20	21	21	24	22	16
$21-$30	13	11	14	13	12
$31-$40	3	6	2	2	4
$41-$50	1	2	0	0	1
>$50	0	0	0	0	0

When looking at the outfield data, it must be considered that the standard roster has spots for 3 middlemen, 3 corner men but 5 outfielders, so the numbers are obviously higher. Also consider that a greater percentage of OF/DH will occupy the utility role. Keeping this in mind, there are relatively more first and second round outfielders, but there is less at the end of the draft. There appears to be a rather significant abundance of outfielders valued in the teens, which may serve as a target for those employing the scarcity model.

Difference Potential

In order to better understand draft dynamics, a new term will be introduced, namely ***difference potential***. This will be examined via the following study.

The player pools just examined will be distributed into teams via a snake style draft, the order of picks being reversed in each round. Recall the pools were arranged so that there are ample players to fill all the rosters. The players will be ranked according to value. The highest ranked player on the board will be assigned to each successive team with the following provisions:

1. If the team has the roster space available, it is assigned that player, even if it fills the CI, MI or UT positions.

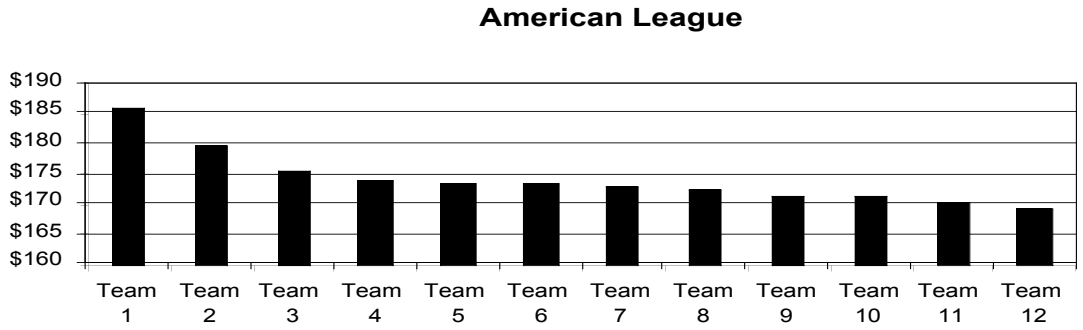
2. If the team is unable to roster the highest ranked player, then the next highest valued player is considered.

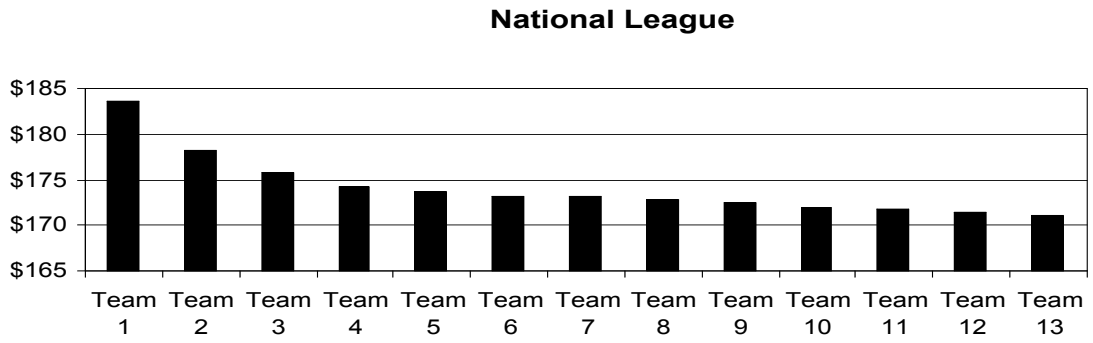
3. Every effort is made to move players with multiple eligibility around, except those slated for catcher as those were valued accordingly.

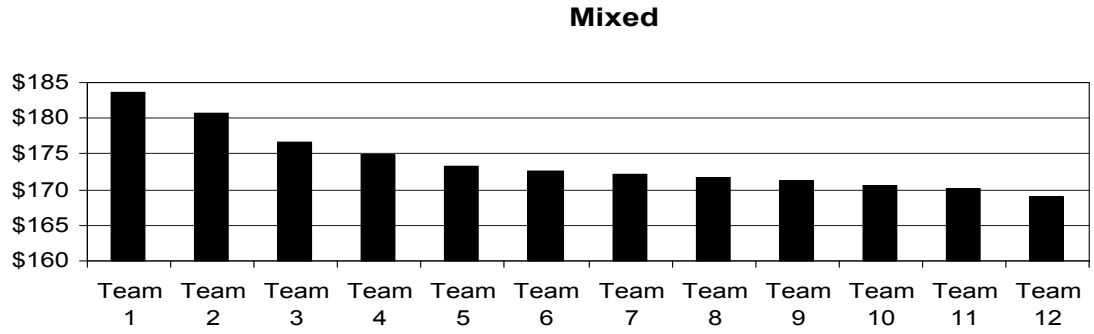
4. If the positive player pool runs out at a position, the highest ranking non-positive player at that position will be awarded.

This exercise will be carried out for all the player pools used in the previous study. The data will be presented by league as a five year average.

Below is a graphical representation of the average total value accrued per team in the individual leagues.



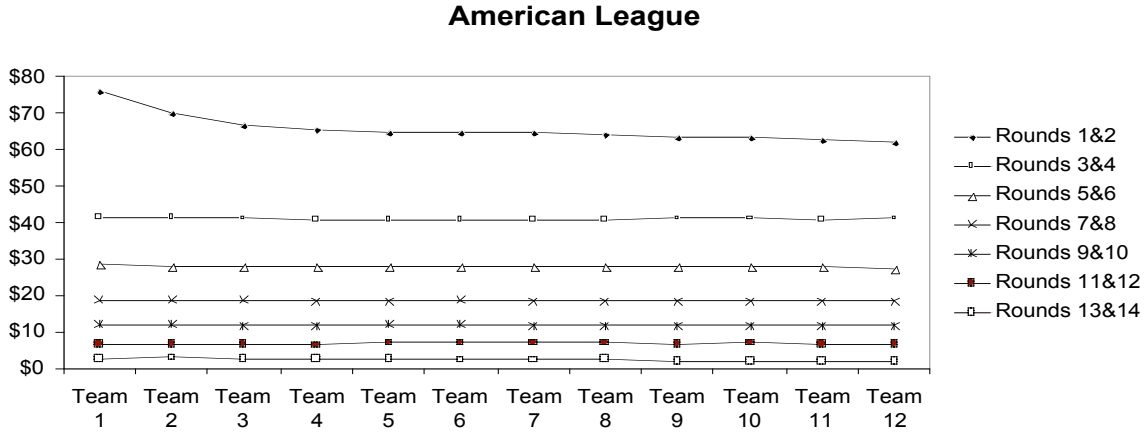


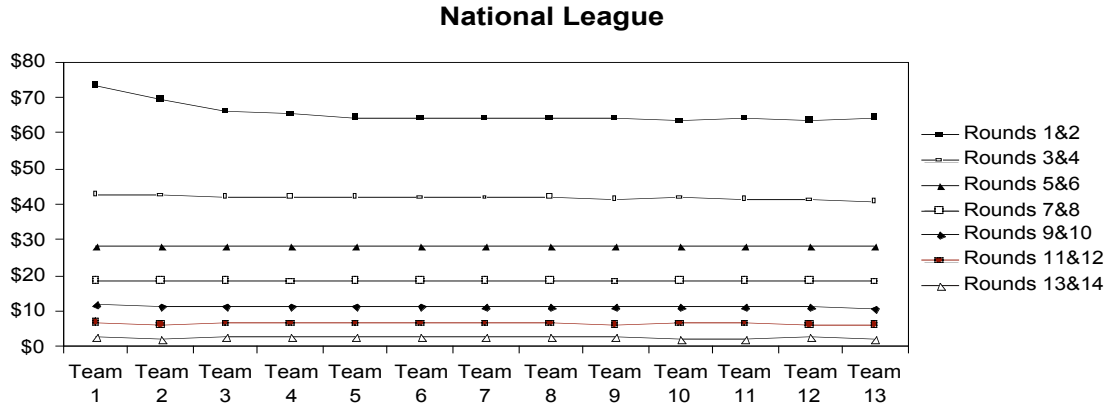


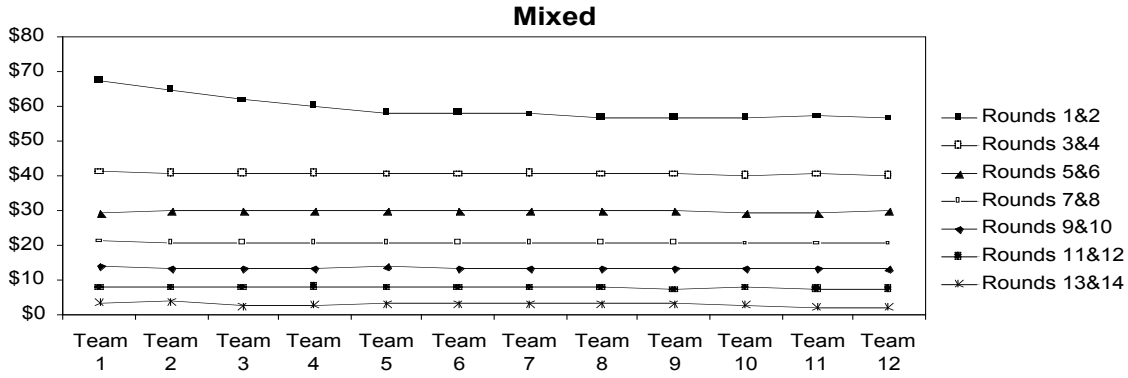
In all three cases, Team 1 achieved the greatest cumulative value, followed by Team 2, Team 3 and Team 4. The least value was accumulated by the last two teams.

The data suggests that the teams with the first few picks have the potential to obtain more value than the other teams. If scarcity is eschewed, the earlier the pick, the greater is the difference potential.

It would be interesting to determine if the source of the extra value could be pinpointed. To that end, the data will be examined by summing the average total value each team mustered every two rounds. The rounds are paired to account for the serpentine nature of the draft. The average total value drafted per pair of rounds for the five years worth of data is along the y-axis, with the team designated across the x-axis.







This is perhaps the most telling data presented thus far. The difference in value enjoyed by the teams with the initial picks is specifically a result of players chosen in the first two rounds. Ergo, the highest valued players offer the greatest difference potential. It stands to reason that this difference is even greater in just the first round, which is corroborated by looking at the average of just the first round picks per draft. In the American League, Team 1 drafted a player with an average value of $51 while Team 12 settled for a player with an average value of $31. The difference was not so pronounced in the National League, but is still considerable, $47 compared to $34. The mixed league ranged from $43 down to $30. The end result is a team has the highest draft potential in the first round, meaning they have the best opportunity to distance themselves from the pack. The question becomes is it worth sacrificing some of that difference potential in the name of scarcity.

Pitching in a Draft

Conspicuous by its absence thus far has been any mention of pitching as relates to draft strategy. It is difficult to produce an overall ranking list including both hitters and pitcher as their relative ranking is dependent upon the amount of money that is distributed to hitting versus pitching. In auction leagues, this split can mimic what is most often utilized in that format. In draft leagues, there are a myriad of ancillary factors governing the decision to opt for a pitcher.

Quality starting pitching is considered a scarce commodity and there are those who believe hitters can be had anytime and choose a staff anchor with their first pick. There are others who preach that pitching is inherently unreliable and that the first round pick should not be used for suck a risky selection.

Inevitably, in every draft, there is a run on closers. Usually the teams with picks at the extreme beginning and end of the round have to make a decision: join the run and draft a closer even if there are higher ranked players on the board or bypass the closer and draft for value. Often, there are two such runs on saves. This scenario is amplified this coming season with so many bullpens still in flux along with the thought that some closers are "sure things". The 2002 plights of Mariano Rivera and Keith Fouke put a damper on that theory.

Something to consider when mapping out a pitching strategy is the fact that there exists a greater amount of valuable pitching on the waiver wire after a draft than there is valuable hitting. To examine this, the same player pools utilized in the other aspects of this presentation will be utilized once again.

The parameters used to set the player pools are those associated with the Tout Wars expert leagues. This explains the fact the National League data presented has 13-team leagues, as this is the structure of Tout Wars.

The calculated values are based on the season ending statistics for the respective seasons. In order to quantify the amount of free agent, or waiver wire talent, the players initially drafted onto a Tout Wars roster are noted. Any player earning positive value not checked off was available as a free agent. The value of the drafted and free agent components of each player pool can be compared, and the percentage of hitting and pitching available for in-season pick up can be determined. It stands to reason that a viable draft strategy is to rely on picking up some of this available talent, and therefore not expend prime draft picks on an entity that will ultimately be replaced.

The results reveal that on average, 92% of the positive hitting in the American League and 90% in the National League is taken in the draft. The corresponding numbers for pitching are 79% in the AL and 80% in the NL.

Further analysis shows only 79% of the AL hitters and 76% of the NL hitters earned positive value. On a 14-hitter roster, that works out to three hitters per team that should be replaced with free agents.

Meanwhile, only 62% in the AL and 61% in the NL of the pitchers earned positive value. On a 9-team pitching roster, that equates to almost three pitchers targeted to be released in favor of a better performer.

Putting the percentage of players drafted together with the amount of leftover value to be had, it makes perfect sense to roll the dice on pitching and concentrate the bulk of the early draft picks on hitting. The pool of positively valued free agents pitchers is deeper in both number and value than the pool of positively valued free agent hitters.

Inside the Hitting and Pitching Numbers

A further breakdown of the hitting and pitching pools in terms of what statistical categories are most benefited by the influx of free agents also lends some guidance. Here is that data:

Hitting

	HR	RBI	SB	RUNS	BA
AL	93.6%	93.3%	91.6%	90.1%	90.9%
NL	93.8%	91.7%	90.9%	90.7%	83.9%

The hitting is consistent across the board, with the exception that extra batting average value is available in the National League. It makes little sense to purposely shy away from an individual

hitting category in the draft with the plan on supplementing that category as the season wears on.

Pitching

	W	SV	ERA	WHIP	K
AL	78.0%	89.1%	70.2%	73.1%	86.4%
NL	80.9%	92.5%	70.3%	73.5%	83.2%

The pitching data is more varied. As expected, more saves are drafted than the other categories. The interesting point to note is there is significant help available in the areas of ERA and WHIP. There is a false belief that it is difficult to improve in the categories of ERA and WHIP. This table shows that some of that help is available for free agent pickup.

One more piece of information is integral to formulating a draft strategy. Earlier, it was stated that only 79% of the positively valued AL hitters along with 76% of their NL counterparts were drafted. It would be beneficial to understand how that breaks down in terms of the position classifications studied earlier. In order to best analyze the data, it is necessary to consider the raw number of available players in terms of roster spots dedicated to that position.

It turns out that the easiest position to replace in either league is catcher and is true in terms of both quality and quantity. On the average, in the AL, 16% of the value at catcher is still available, divided amongst 7.75 players. In the NL, 13% of the catcher value is split between 9.25 players.

Corner infield is the most difficult to replace. In the AL, an average of 6.7 1B/3B provides an additional 7% of value. The corresponding NL numbers are 6.8 and 93%.

The quality of middle infielders in the AL is reflected in there results. In the junior circuit, an average of 7.3 2B/SS is available to provide an additional 7% of value. In contrast, the senior circuit has 11.75 replacement middlemen supplying an extra 15% of value.

To complete the story, an average of 13 AL outfielders yields 8% of the free agent value while 16.25 free agent NL outfielders donate 10%.

Unfortunately, insufficient data was available to include mixed leagues in this study. An effort is being made to secure that information and will be a focus of a follow-up study.

Draft Position

The results of the difference potential study imply that it is optimal to own the first pick. In theory, this is true. In a retro draft where the standings are based on season ending statistics, then the team with the first overall pick most definitely enjoys a significant advantage, provided the players are valued properly.

That being said, this advantage is not automatically manifested in a regular draft. As evidence, here are the top three hitters in terms of value for each of the player pools studied.

1998
AL: Alex Rodriguez, Albert Belle, Ken Griffey
NL: Craig Biggio, Sammy Sosa, Barry Bonds
Mixed: Craig Biggio, Alex Rodriguez, Sammy Sosa

1999
AL: Ivan Rodriguez, Roberto Alomar, Shawn Green
NL: Chipper Jones, Larry Walker, Jeff Bagwell
Mixed: Ivan Rodriguez, Larry Walker, Chipper Jones

2000
AL: Darin Erstad, Johnny Damon, Roberto Alomar
NL: Todd Helton, Luis Castillo, Vladimir Guerrero
Mixed: Johnny Damon, Todd Helton, Darin Erstad

2001
AL: Ichiro Suzuki, Alex Rodriguez, Roberto Alomar
NL: Barry Bonds, Vladimir Guerrero, Sammy Sosa
Mixed: Ichiro Suzuki, Barry Bonds, Alex Rodriguez

2002
AL: Alfonso Soriano, Alex Rodriguez, Carlos Beltran
NL: Vladimir Guerrero, Barry Bonds, Bobby Abreu
Mixed: Vladimir Guerrero, Alfonso Soriano, Alex Rodriguez

Many of these players would not have been predicted to finish in the top 3 that year. Obviously, having a top pick does not assure that a top player will be chosen, it only provides first crack at guessing correctly.

So while difference potential is useful and should be considered when making an early pick, it is important to understand that the league champion can come from any of the draft positions. Remember that the difference potential only considers hitters which account for only half the rotisserie points. Keep in mind that value is not what wins, expressing that value in terms of the most rotisserie points wins. It is very possible to have less total value but more rotisserie points.

Draft Strategy Guidelines

To reiterate, the primary question to be answered is, "which is better, to draft for value or to consider scarcity". Keep in mind that some of the data used may change over time, which may require an alteration of the proposed strategies. Consider the following to be ten guidelines for a successful draft in 2003.

1. Even though the data suggests otherwise, do not consider catchers early in a draft

Simply put, the injury risk associated with catchers is too great to chance losing the player and having to scrounge for a very weak substitute. The percentage play is to wait until the very end. There is just as much of a chance of turning a $4 profit on a last round catcher as there is turning a $4 profit on a catcher drafted earlier in the draft. And if the drafted catchers turn out to be a bust, the loss is minimal as there is an ample supply of free agent catchers who will earn a profit.

2: Do not sacrifice value in the name of scarcity in rounds 1 through 3

The most compelling argument for this is looking at the results of the difference potential study. There is simply not enough value available at the end of the draft to compensate for the potential loss of value if a player of higher value is skipped over to draft a player at a scarce position. This may be more difficult to adhere to in mixed leagues as the middle infield appears so shallow, but is still the best way to approach the early rounds.

2. At the start of round 4, consider drafting players at scarce positions

Scarcity is still a real entity and deserves attention, just not before round 4. At this point, the relative difference in value between players is minimal. There is enough evidence that there will be more quality outfielders at the end of the draft than middle or corner infielders. This is the time to lock up the middle infielders and third baseman.

3. If the choice is between outfielders and corner infielders of equal value, select the corner infielder

The reason for this is the dearth of available first and third baseman in the free agent pool.

4. Unless the pitcher answers to the name of Pedro or Randy, stock up on hitting early in the draft and draft starting pitchers with decent skill sets later

When healthy, Pedro Martinez and Randy Johnson have the ability to simply dominate. To borrow the term coined earlier, they offer a degree of difference potential that is too much to pass up with anything after the third overall pick.

Without Pedro or the Big Unit to anchor a staff, seriously consider drafting a starting pitcher beginning in round 4. This is when the difference potential for hitters has dissipated and there are pockets of players with similar value.

Although an argument can be made for waiting longer, there is a fundamental difference when building a pitching staff in an auction versus a draft. As mentioned in the beginning, every player is available for acquisition in an auction provided the budget is managed properly. A handful of pitchers perceived to be of low value but possessing decent skill sets or some other desirable characteristic can be targeted and bought in an auction. In a draft, with a long wait between picks, perhaps only one or two of this target group will be on the board when it is time to select.

5. Do not draft a closer during the first run

This one may take some discipline, but invariably closers begin to fall in rounds 2 and 3, where the difference potential of the hitters is still significant. Closers are too risky. Instead,

shoot for a pair of closers during the second run. Every year, there are several instances of second-tier closers outperforming those considered to be of first-tier status. If only a single closer can be obtained during the second run, do not fret. At a later point in the draft, take a flier on a speculative closer. The worst thing that can happen is that pitcher is replaced by one of the bountiful available free agent pitchers.

5. Target Players with Multiple Position Eligibility

This is especially true after round 4, but multiple position eligibility can be used to break a tie in the early rounds. The ability to move players around is extremely useful. Players eligible at more than one position increase the likelihood that the drafter can roster the highest ranked player on the board. In effect, multiple position eligibility eliminates the need to draft for scarcity.

On the average, every National League roster will have two players with multiple eligibility which helps combat the scarcity in the middle infield. Targeting a third player will not only amplify the ability to draft the top player on the board, but it could serve to restrict other's ability to do the same. In the American League, an effort should be made to secure the services of two multiple eligibility players, especially if the utility spot may be filled by a designated hitter not eligible at another position.

Do not discount the importance of dual eligibility at OF and 1B/3B. Since the free agent pool is rather devoid of viable corner men, it is a nice bonus to be able to move Adam Dunn or Albert Pujols from the outfield to first base, clearing the way for a more valuable outfielder to be acquired as a free agent.

Finally, the numbers provided for multiple eligibility did not include those players eligible at both middle or corner infield positions. These players are also important, as every little bit of flexibility helps.

7. Wait as long as possible before filling in the MI position

Grab a 2B and SS, but hold off on the MI. The primary reason for singling out MI is the abundant supply available late in the draft. Everyone will rank these players differently, which sets up the opportunity of a bargain to slide. And if the late round middle infielder is a bust, there exists a decent supply of substitute free agents.

8. Do not hesitate to fill in the CI with the highest ranking player on the board

This is resultant of the weak late round pool of first and third baseman as will as their relative scarcity in the free agent pool.

9. Try to fill in the UT with a quality corner infielder

The player pool is changing and there are less quality corner infielders than in previous years. It is highly likely that not everyone is aware of this dynamic and assumes there will be bountiful supple of first and third baseman at the end of the draft. This is no longer the case. In addition, having a fourth corner infielder means that the skimpy free agent pool at the position does not have to supply a substitute if one of the three regular CI need to be replaced.

10. Unless a special strategy is being employed, draft with balance in mind

A popular credo is to garner the most value possible and rely on free agents and trading to balance the roster. This is more effective in an auction, as there are more "bargains" in an auction. There are less "steals", not to be confused with stolen bases, in a draft. Do not be overly concerned if the first three picks are power hitters, there will be plenty of opportunity to balance out the categories later when the difference potential has evaporated. Do try to avoid drafting more than one stolen base specialist early in the draft, as it is more difficult to make up for the lost power than speed. In addition, speed players are a tad more unreliable than sluggers.

Closing Remarks

The results of this study demonstrate there is more to a successful draft than knowing this player is better than that player. Advantages can be realized by understanding the dynamics of the player pool. These advantages can translate to a greater rate of success. Good luck.