

7 Drafts

Detailed fantasy baseball analysis of my 7 NFBC drafts

By: Jack Brown rotoswami.com @rotoswami rotoswami@yahoo.com

Selecting OF Alex Gordon and 3B Ke'Bryan Hayes in the 49th and 50th rounds, I just finished my seventh NFBC fantasy baseball draft. For those who don't know, the NFBC is a high stakes fantasy baseball website, legal in most states. All my drafts listed below are Rotisserie Baseball 5x5 leagues with standard snake drafts. Rosters consist of the standard 23 starters, 9 pitchers and 14 bats: C, C, 1B, 3B, CI, 2B, SS, MI, 5 OFs, Utility Bat. In the 50 round drafts, it is draft and hold: the team you draft is your team for the year, no player acquisitions after the draft. You do have to set your lineup weekly. With the 30 round drafts, there is weekly Free Agent acquisition bidding (FAAB). Before an NFBC draft, the number of your pick is determined by a Kentucky Derby styled, blind draw. You rank your preferred draft slots (1-15 or 1-12). Draft order is then determined by a blind draw of who gets draft order preference.

Four 15 team, 50 rounders (750 players deep): Drafts 1, 2, 5 and 6 summarized below. \$150 buy in, League prizes: \$1,000.00 1st, \$350 2nd, \$150 3rd, Nationwide championship in what they call Draft Champions leagues pays places 1-40 with a \$30,000 grand prize. These were all slow drafts, with 1 or 2 hours to make each pick, so they take a loong time. Plenty of time for doing draft prep. I have done so much draft prep since my first draft started on February 2, 2020, my brain is past full.

One 12 team, 50 rounder (600): My most recent draft, Draft 7 detailed below.

One 15 team, 30 rounder (450): Draft 3 summarized below was my 1st draft with free agent acquisition during the season. FAAB bidding makes these teams harder to manage, but allows more risk taking later in drafts.

One 12 team, 30 rounder (360): Draft 4 summarized below. This was my only draft on the traditional one minute clock between picks. With a \$50 entry, first prize is qualification to enter next years' \$350 Online Championship, plus \$50 credit (a jippy way they keep you in, while holding your money). Winning my only similar contest last year, I had qualified for an entry in this year's NFBC's Online Championship, but the contest was closed after the pandemic stoppage.

In reverse chronological order, I will review my seven drafts to a varying degree.

Draft 7 – started 5/7/20: <https://draft.shgn.com/nfc/plain/dp/1610/grid>

12 team, 50 rounder, 12th pick (5th choice, drawn 8th in derby preference)

<u>Round</u>	<u>Pick</u>	<u>Pos</u>	<u>Player</u>	<u>Stats</u>
1	12	P	Walker Buehler	LAD 182IP/215K/3.26ERA/1.04WHIP/14W
2	13	P	Max Scherzer	WAS 172/243/2.92/1.03/11

Heading into this draft, the industry buzz was that with the expected short season, starting pitchers were plentiful given that some of the younger pitchers and injured pitchers would not have innings limits or would have time to heal before the start of the season. Having already focused most of my teams on starting pitching early in drafts, I was resolved to draft offense early. However, I drew the 12th pick and no bats fell to me. So, I returned to my now ingrained strategy of early starting pitching. Buehler is the highest ranked starting pitcher whom the lack of innings limits benefits. I have him about even with Scherzer, just behind Cole and DeGrom. I paired Buehler with Scherzer who became the first and only player of whom I own 4 shares (out of my 7 drafts). In previous drafts, I had paired Scherzer with Verlander and Degrom, while also owning him as a stand alone ace. With starting pitching in vogue this year and everyone trying to grab at least one ace early, it is my opinion that in order to gain a pitching advantage, you have to grab at least two Aces early. Picking at the end of the first round (10th, 12th, 13th and 15th picks in my drafts), adding at least one, if not two pitchers back to back, only makes sense. Two, three or four early starters solidify your pitching points, while leaving a whole lot of picks later for offense. After drafting pitching early, I usually wait until it is time to start drafting closers to resume picking pitchers.

3	36	1B	Pete Alonso	NYM	597AB/.260BA/103R/53HR/120RBI/1SB
4	37	SS	Adalberto Mondesi	KC	415/.263/58/9/62/43

With two aces in hand, I turn to offense and grab 2019's leader in Home Runs (Alonso – 53) and Stolen Bases (Mondesi – 43). Pretty easy picks really. 1B is deep, but the top tier (Freeman, Alonso) is not. With stolen bases being so scarce these days, it is important to enter each draft with a plan to obtain SBs. If you are able to get a base of SBs early, it makes more bats draftable later. I tend to find that if I'm going to fade a category, it's batting average. Batting average is a bit contrary, where counting stats are not as much. I like piling up home runs, while grabbing a couple of stud base stealers (particularly in the middle infield) to carry me.

5	60	3B	Vladimir Guerrero, Jr.	TOR	464/.272/52/15/69/0
6.	61	3B	Eugenio Suarez	CIN	575/.271/87/49/103/3

Vladdy, Jr. was the most hyped prospect coming into last year that we have seen in a while and that was before his showing in the Home Run Derby. The Blue Jays are young and exciting prodigies, with Vlad leading the way. His potential for high batting average may mitigate some of my other picks. Suarez is one of the most underrated stars in baseball. Perhaps because he plays half his games in the Great American Smallpark, he didn't seem to get credit for his 49 homers last year. Some commentators have him outside of their top 10 at 3B, a travesty. He has continued to improve every year and is only available because his early draft capital was squashed by a pool injury. He should be healthy and slot into everyday at bats in the middle of a stacked Reds line-up. With corner infielders available anywhere in the draft, does it concern me that I have filled my 3 corner infield positions in my first 4 bat picks? Not really, grabbing as many high end bats as possible early, regardless of position, is essential.

7.	84	2B/3B	Mike Moustakis	CIN	523/.254/80/35/87/3
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8. 85 P Trevor Bauer CIN 213/253/4.46/1.24/11

Admittedly, the Reds are my favorite team. Drafting 3 in a row feels great. I wondered if Sonny Gray or Trevor Bauer would make it back to me. Gray got snagged, so I went with Bauer and paired him with 2B/3B Mike Moustakis. Grabbing a serviceable 2B in the first 8 rounds is imperative. The 2B position falls off significantly. Get one early or wait til late. Bauer's 2019 ERA left a lot to be desired, but his ability to eat up innings with such a high strikeout rate, makes him a borderline SP2. Just bench him at home in a single start week occasionally. Moustakis has bounced around lately before signing a 3 year \$60 mil contract with the Reds. He has consistently hit for power and produced runs wherever he has been. He may lead second basemen in home runs this year.

9. 108 P Frankie Montas OAK 96/103/2.62/1.11/9

10. 109 P Ken Giles TOR 53/83/1.83/.98/2/23saves

The draft seemed to be focusing on bats at this point. Always nice to zig when they zag. I went with my fourth starter Montas who was unbelievably effective last year after developing a slider and before his PED suspension. Playing in Oakland offsets the fact that he pitches in the American League. When in doubt, I have always leaned toward NL SPs (no DH, which may not be the case this year). In these deep leagues, where there are no in-season acquisitions, Closers tend to come off the board early and often. In a 12 team league, you need the equivalent of 3 or more closers to finish in the top 3, at least 2½ in 15 teamers. You have to grab at least a couple during the middle rounds or you will be left out. I chose to take Giles. Good team, low ratios and high K rate, what's not to like?

11. 132 P/DH Shohei Ohtani LAA 384/.286/59/22/61/12

12. 133 OF Lourdes Gurriel, Jr. TOR 314/.277/52/20/50/6

Don't really need another pitcher here, but owning Ohtani is just too great a temptation to pass up. Ohtani is only player that qualifies as a pitcher or a hitter. At the beginning of each week, teams in this format will have to start Ohtani at either P or DH. If the season had not been delayed, Ohtani, who only batted last year while recovering from Tommy John Surgery, would not have been ready to pitch from day one. With the short season, not starting until July 1 we hope, Ohtani should be ready to pitch opening day or soon after. Don't forget how highly touted he was as a pitcher when he came over. He could give you Ace stuff in the 11th round. I also have an open position at DH, so even better. His power/speed/avg mix is hard to find. At this point, with the first pick of the 12th round, I find myself without any outfielders. Several that I was hoping fell to me earlier and here have been snagged in front of me. I take Lourdes Gurriel, Jr., two Jr. Blue Jay prodigies is nice. Gurriel's second half was sensational. I had been wanting a share of him for a while, and get one here.

13. 156 P Brandon Workman BOS 72/104/1.88/1.03/10/16

14. 157 SS Jorge Polanco MIN 631/.295/107/22/79/4

I grab my second closer Workman, who grabbed that role in Boston last year and didn't let go. His numbers were salivating, allowing zero (0) home runs, zero. Jorge Polanco is another underrated numbers man. You always want hitters hitting high in dominant offenses, like the Twins. You'll get runs, if nothing else. In his first All-Star year, Polanco produced 107 runs, to go along with 22 home runs, 186 hits and a high average. At age 26, he is just entering his prime and he should continue to produce at a high level. I now have a solid core (5 SPs, 2 Closers, 6 infielders, 1 OF).

15. 180 OF/3B J. D. Davis NYM 410/.307/57/22/65/3

16. 181 C Omar Narvaez MIL 428/.278/62/23/55/0

It is now time to fill in my offense. I still need 4 outfielders and 2 catchers. Over the next 14 picks, I will take 11 bats. I begin with up and coming Mets OF J. D. Davis, who hit .307 with 22 HRs in less than a full season. Another suspected rule change in the short season is that the all games may include a DH. If so, certain NL players will see additional at bats. Davis, who is a bit of a defensive liability, is one who will potentially benefit. His dual eligibility at 3B, along with that of Moustakis, provides insurance for my early 3B picks. Next, I take my first catcher, choosing Narvaez over Wilson Ramos. I have shares of both catchers, while most have Ramos ranked higher. However, already having 2 Mets, I branch out on Narvaez. He split time in Seattle (a pitcher's park) with good numbers last year, and will replace Yasmani Grandal in Milwaukee (a hitter's park) this year, where he should receive more at bats. Unlike one catcher leagues, where if you can wait on catcher almost endlessly (ie I got Grandal with my last pick in the 27th round in 2018), a catcher strategy is a must in a two catcher league. There are many different ways to approach the catcher position. It's a balancing act between position scarcity and the facts that catchers don't produce as much as other positions, have more days off and get injured more often. Catchers tend to come off the board in runs. It is usually better to start a run than finish one, so you must anticipate the runs. I tend to take that first catcher in a tier or wait for the last catcher in a tier who has stayed on the board too long. I like to have at least one top 10 catcher. I try to draft another catcher in the top 17 or so. If I wait on my second catcher, I will grab a third catcher sooner in these draft and hold leagues.

17. 204 P Mike Minor TEX 208/200/3.59/1.24/14

18. 205 OF Avisail Garcia MIL 489/.282/61/20/72/10

Mike Minor was excellent last year before tailing off at the end of the season. Solid innings and solid K's are almost assured. All else being equal, his ERA should drop some due to the Ranger's new indoor ballpark, reducing the humidity effects on balls in play. Also, fences are a bit deeper. I usually shy away from Garcia. As a higher average, modest home run hitter, he doesn't fit the profile of hitters I draft. However, with Guerrero, Polanco and Davis in the fold, punting average is not in the cards, and an opportunity arises for an across-the-board offensive strategy.

19. 228 C Tom Murphy SEA 260/.273/32/18/40/2

20. 229 P Brandon Kintzler MIA 57/45/2.68/1.04/3/1

With a couple of reaches, I grab my second catcher Murphy who had 18 home runs as the Mariner's backup and Brandon Kintzler a veteran ground ball specialist whom Marlin manager Donnie Baseball tabbed as likely closer before the layoff. I could have waited on a catcher, a glob of mediocre catchers were available, but locked up another power catcher who won't kill your average and who will likely get more at bats this year. I have seen projected lineups with Murphy hitting in the Mariners cleanup spot. As with speedsters and steals, closers and potential closers are the players for which most drafters reach. I doubt Kintzler will stick in the closers role. He would seem more likely a pitcher who enters with men on. In these deep draft and hold formats, I tend to grab pitchers who I think will start in the closer position. If they pitch well, you could end up with 30 saves, even on a bad team. If they lose their spot, at least you earn a few saves and can go heavy starting pitching later in the season.

21. 252 P A. J. Puk OAK 10/13/3.18/1.82

22. 253 OF Will Myers SD 435/.239/58/18/53/16

There seems to be a plethora of 'hot' young pitchers to choose from this short season: Lizardo, Lamet, Fried, Soroka, McKay, Pearson, etc. With my 21st pick, I take as my SP7, a young Big Unit: A. J. Puk. Like Johnson, Puk is a 6-7 lefty with long hair who throws gas. While Lizardo gets more hype deservedly, Puk also has a high ceiling and won't be hampered by an innings limit. Of all American League parks, the Oakland Coliseum provides some of the most spacial forgiveness. He is available in the 21st because young pitchers are often more erratic and there is a chance he gets stuck in middle relief. I don't like Will Myers and I already own one share of him. But in today's base to base strategy, you have to reach for stolen bases. Besides Mondesi, I have little appreciable speed on this team. With my roster filling up fast, I have to consider how to get more speed in my lineup. An underperformer who will hurt your average, Myers does provide a potential 20/20 in a normal year.

23. 276 OF Corey Dickerson MIA 260/33/12/59/1

24. 277 2B Nick Madrigal CWS played in minors only

With 10 pitchers in hand, I continue to pound offense with the selections of boring, high average OF5 Corey Dickerson of the Marlins and Speed/avg. White Sox prospect 2B Nick Madrigal. Dickerson is really just a placeholder who won't hurt you in the middle of the Marlins lineup. At least they moved the fences in some at Marlins Park. If/when Madrigal enters the White Sox lineup, he will be instantly playable. Deep drafts cause you predict the future. Madrigal only struck out 7 times last year while hitting .300 and stealing 30 bases in the high minors. In a deep draft like this, you have to keep your roster in mind. Although position flexibility is nice, you just have to have a good back up plan. I like to have two solid options at each of the infield positions. In this draft, I already have 2 SS and 1 2B. Madrigal can fill in for any of these hitters or bat Utility when Ohtani pitches. Plus, Moustakis, who is ahead of him at 2B, also qualifies at third, giving me a lot of flexibility with my first sub.

25. 300 1B Joey Votto CIN 525/.261/79/15/47/5

26. 301 OF Sam Hilliard COL 77/.273/13/7/13/2

My next two picks fit perfectly into my depth chart. Former National League MVP Joey Votto bats second in the deepest line-up in the National League, could go .290/95/20/85 in a full year, playing every other game at the Smallpark. His counting stats provide a high floor 1B to round out my offense. Hilliard hit 42 homers between the minors and majors last year and he will be the Rockies DH, nuff said.

27. 324 OF Anthony Santander BAL 380/.261/46/20/59/1

28. 325 OF Bret Gardner NYY 491/.251/86/28/74/10

I really like these two guys. Santander will get more at bats this year, albeit in the middle of a somewhat depleted Orioles lineup. Trey Mancini will miss the year recovering from cancer. Santander's numbers from last year were solid and he will help produce what few runs the O's score. Gardner is so old, but surprisingly had one of his best overall seasons in 2019. He may see few at bats against lefties this year IF Stanton, Judge and Hicks are healthy. However, he will be worth starting every game he bats near the top of a stacked Yankees lineup.

29. 348 P Yoshihisa Hirano SEA 53/61/4.67/1.35/5/1

30. 349 2B Dee Gordon SEA 393/.275/36/3/34/22

With two Mariners, I'm again reaching for saves and steals. One of my strategies over the years is, if I'm picking toward either end of the snake draft, I take a one bag stealer with one closer back to back. Speed/saves double-up makes other picks easier. As important as it is to have positional flexibility, it is more important to draft for categories. SBs and Saves are the most scarce and isolated, so you must account for them accordingly.

31. 372 P Anibal Sanchez WAS 166/134/3.85/1.27/11

32. 373 P Mike Fiers OAK 184/126/3.88/1.18/15

Forty starting pitchers have been drafted since I selected A. J. Puk. I tap two crafty veterans. If you look at their numbers, they have both done it for two years in a row, pitched a lot of innings with ERAs under 4. Although Sanchez did not duplicate his sublime 2019 numbers, he is still a steady fixture in the World Champion Nationals rotation. My third A's pitcher Fiers had a 1.18 WHIP in each of the last two years. I just hope the A's are playing at home. Many will note neither of these pitchers has a high K rate. However, at this point in the draft, you need high floor pitchers to stream on their two start weeks.

33. 396 C Brian McCann CWS 439/.273/62/18/60/4

34. 397 C Tucker Barnhardt CIN 316/.231/32/11/40/1

Once everyone or almost everyone fills their 2 catcher positions, there will be an extreme drought of catcher picks. If you time it right, you can get a good backup catcher ahead of the second wave. In this draft, only one catcher had been chosen in the eight previous rounds, I doubled down on backstops.

Another strategy I like when you are at the end of the snake is doubling down at a position or in a category. You know that you are going to draft 4 or 5 catchers in the 50 rounds, so why not avoid the rush and lock down the best catcher depth in the league. McCann was a top 5 catcher down the stretch last year who came out of nowhere. The Brewers rewarded him by signing Yasmani Grandal. When he does play, his stats should be good and with a compacted season he should play significant time. Tucker stunk so bad from the right side, he is giving up switch hitting. Tucker is the starter in Cincinnati, but he will share time with Curt Casali. With my catcher position filled, I won't have to waste picks later on scrub catchers.

35. 420 OF Tyler O'Neill STL 141/.262/16/5/18/1

36. 421 1B Rowdy Tellez TOR 370/.227/49/21/41/1

Dupliciously, I have drafted two Mariners, two starting pitchers, and two catchers. I now double-up on power. Chicks dig the long ball; and, I have to admit, so do I. O'Neill and Tellez have light tower power and will serve as DH's for the Cardinals and Blue Jays while qualifying at OF and 1B, respectively. Don't forget to line your bench with some power bats even if swings and misses and low average are expected. If you fall behind in HRs or end up tanking average, these guys become instantly playable and can lead your team to the league home run crown.

37. 444 P James Karinchak CLE 5/8/1.69/.75

38. 445 P Wade Miley CIN 167/140/3.98/1.34/14

I don't know if Karinchak will get any save opportunities, but he strikes out almost 2 per inning. Some believe you draft stuff and the opportunities will follow. He certainly has the profile of a stopper. The Indians also have Wittgren and another young fireballer Emanuel Clouse (came over in the Kluber trade, but suffered a back injury) to back up closer Brad Hand. Saves may be more spread out with the new 3 batter minimum rule and the compacted schedule, so who knows. I drafted a lot of Wade Miley last year and he delivered. His sub 4 ERA would have been even better if not for a few late season duds. The Reds fifth starter had more wins and a lower ERA than the Red's number 3 starter Trevor Bauer who I drafted 85th overall. Miley is another 2 start streaming option at worst, especially on the road.

39. 468 OF Cameron Maybin DET 239/.285/48/11/32/9

40. 469 1B Mitch Moreland BOS 298/.252/48/19/58/1

Maybin was signed late in the spring by the rebuilding Tigers. The journeyman stole 36 in 2018 and could hit at the top of the Tiger lineup. This is my first share of Maybin, having taken Tigers Niko Goodrum and Victor Reyes previously. All three are stolen base threats, who may bat near the top of the order, but the Tigers don't run much. Mitch Moreland is the type of professional hitter who merits

starting when healthy. He will sit against lefties some, but has solid power and production with a decent average. At pick 469, I round out my first basemen with another depth bat.

41.	492	2B	Brandon Rodgers	COL	76/.224/8/0/7/0
42.	493	P	Tyler Rogers	SF	17/16/1.02/.85/2/0

Brandon Rodgers is another Rocky top prospect. Injuries last year and at the beginning of this year have held him back. He faces competition for playing time even when healthy, but along with Hilliard, he could benefit from a full-time National League DH. Tyler Rogers is a modern day Dan Quisenberry, a submariner who brought it from down south for a .98 ERA in a small 17 inning sample. The volatile new Giants manager could close with anyone and everyone. He is the last of my 6 relief pitchers. Although many drafters will use a strategy of drafting middle relievers with excellent ratios, my strategy is only to start starters and closers. Middle relievers, a desperate man's folly, don't do enough for me. When any of my 6 relievers is closing, there is a good chance he is starting. Otherwise, I'm going with proven starters or streaming mediocre 2 start per week pitchers.

43.	516	SS	Jose Iglesias	BAL	502/.288/62/11/59/6
44.	517	P	Eric Lauer	MIL	149/138/4.42/1.39/8

Passing on shortstop since the 14th round, I take an unspectacular Jose Iglesias. He was surprisingly effective with the Reds last year and will stay in the Oriole lineup due to his glove. At this point in the draft, I'm looking for players who will get playing time. If either Mondesi or Polanco gets injured, I would have my three backup 2Bs to fill in at middle infield. If they both get hurt, I want someone who plays who won't hurt my batting average. Rhymingly, I now have Bauer and Lauer at starting pitcher. Lauer provides pretty good K/9, but I won't be streaming him at his new home in Miller Park. A spring training injury drove down his draft stock, but he is another who should be ready by the belated opening day.

45.	540	P	Casey Mize	DET	Played only in minor league
46.	541	P	Matt Manning	DET	Played only in minor league

Since my Puk pick, I have drafted the oldest and most boring pitchers available. These two upside Tiger phenoms are Aces in the making. Taken much earlier before the delay, they could be squeezed by the compacted season. Their starts should be playable if they get any starts, but they may pitch in middle relief or as an opener, if they pitch at all.

47.	564	P	Tyler Chatwood	CHC	76/74/3.76/1.33/5/2
48.	565	SS	Miguel Rojas	MIA	483/.284/52/5/46/9

My last starter Tyler Chatwood looked good in spring training before its abrupt stoppage and will probably be the fifth starter for the Cubs after pitching well in middle relief in 2019. In all, my 20 man

pitching staff consists of 14 starters and 6 relievers. Rojas is Jose Iglesias clone with a little more speed to round out my shortstops.

49.	588	OF	Alex Gordon	KC	566/.266/77/13/76/5
50.	589	3B	Ke'Bryan Hayes	PIT	Only played in minor leagues

Having already participated in four 15 team, 750 player drafts, I have over 150 players that I want to draft at 588 and 589. I settle on another veteran depth outfielder and the Pirates' top positional prospect. Gordon should play and at least produce .270/70/20/70, not bad in the 49th round. After researching Hayes, I realize he is more of a glove man. However, in the NL, he may now see time at 3rd if Colin Moran plays DH. Hayes is young and will continue to mature as a hitter with any regular playing time.

In summation, Draft 7 resulted in a strong pitching staff and a balanced offense. Fantasy Pros provides grading of each NFBC draft. This draft received a grade of A, 95% and is projected to finish 1st out of 12. Fantasy Pros listed RBI, W, K, ERA and WHIP as team strengths, while finding only Runs as a weakness. I tend to disagree with grading of my team's Runs. With multiple 2, 3 and 4 hitters, I think I'll at least finish in the middle of the pack. Fantasy Pros grading can be skewed, but a balanced team with strong pitching seems to grade out well. I'm not going to argue with a 95, tied for my second highest draft grade among my 7 drafts. In hindsight, it seems I drafted a lot of players who had less than a full seasons at bats. It's too easy and provocative at times to extrapolate partial numbers over a full season and expect that production in the coming year. My outfield is deep but has no stars. Injuries at SP or 2B could derail my championship hopes. In a relatively quiet chat room, I taunted that after I drafted Brett Gardner as my OF8, I smelled a championship. I just hope they play.

Draft 6 – Started April 7, 2020: <https://draft.shgn.com/nfc/plain/dp/1463/grid>

Sometime in April, the NFBC closed off entries to its Draft Champions contest, under the theory that people who drafted in January and February shouldn't have to play against teams drafted after the parameters for the season are established. The site did offer a similar 2nd Chance Draft Champions. Same 15 team/50 round format, less teams overall, smaller overall prizes. In this setting, I drafted my 6th team. I drew the 10th pick out of 15. With 3 shares of Scherzer and his tricky back already flaring up, I pivoted to Walker Buehler in the 1st to fortify the staff. With innings limits off, Buehler should shine. I may regret not selecting Juan Soto or Trevor Story with my 1st pick. With the 17th pick, I took high upside, fun to own OF Bryce Harper. He does everything consistently, including some steals, except hit for average. With a high on-base percentage, he will score plenty of runs. I follow that pick with big speed with power 2B/SS Jonathan Villar in his new home in Miami, good ole SP Charlie Morton and oft-injured Aaron Judge. With 27 year old Harper and Judge in hand, I decide to focus on hitters at or near their prime. In fantasy baseball, age 27 has long been considered the age around which batters reach

their prime. In all, I drafted 18 batters age 23 to 29, including 26 year old shortstops Corey Seager and Paul Dejong and speed/power upside OF Byron Buxton, as well as 27 year old 3Bs Maikel Franco and Colin Moran, 1B Daniel Vogelbach and OF Jake Cave in addition to Harper and Judge.

We mock what we don't understand. Fantasy Pros did not like my Draft 6, predicting a 14th place finish. After an A+, 2 As and two B+ in my other drafts, giving me a 76, C is a slap in the face. Fantasy Pros found no strengths (hard to do), but at least found only two weaknesses: AVG and Saves. In hindsight, I waited too long to draft my top relievers (Workman, 6+ ERA Wade Davis and unproven closer-in-waiting Hunter Harvey). If Davis and/or Harvey works out, this team will be competitive. I also waited on corner infielders, a shortcoming I tried to address with depth at those positions. With a starting staff of Buehler, Morgan, Kluber, Maeda, Folty, Garrett Richards and Rich Hill and a starting outfield of Harper, Judge, Castellanos, Buxton and Senzel, I feel pretty good in a 15 team league. Despite a youthful bent early, I rounded out my team with veterans Pence, Hamilton, Kipnis, Dozier, and Kung Fu Panda Pablo Sandoval. I also focused on NL bats whose value may increase with a full time DH.

Draft 5 – Started March 25, 2020: <https://draft.shgn.com/nfc/plain/dp/1379/grid>

At the time the season was suspended indefinitely, I had just finished drafting my 4th team. Despite the uncertainty, with no sports on TV and locked in my home, I started a new draft to stem the melancholy and give me some sports to distract me. This was my 3rd Draft Champions team and I slotted into the 5 hole, the highest pick of my 12 drafts. With the big three (Acuna, Trout and Yelich) and SP Cole off the table, I stepped up and grabbed a player who over produced for me last year, 5 category 1B/OF Cody Bellinger. I followed him up with back to back consistent SPs Strasberg and Kershaw. I love this start. I have been in a keeper league for over 25 years, and many of my championship staffs were anchored by Kershaw and Strasberg. I then took a hopefully recovered Aaron Judge and the venerable Jose Cruz at Utility. Judge's prodigious power is on sale after he suffered a compression rib fracture (never good for a hitter). If he is ready to go on or near opening day and remains relatively healthy, he could lead the league in homers and runs scored. Some people shy away from picking a DH with no positional eligibility early in drafts, wanting to leave their Utility position open. I tend to value production over position and Cruz has definitely stayed very productive for a long time. I solidified the core of my offense with a balance of power (Donaldson, C. J. Cron, Mitch Garver, Tom Murphy, Joc Peterson and Mark Cahna) and speed (Andrus, Buxton, Goodrum, Reyes and Dee Gordon). My staff also includes 3 viable closers (Chapman, Bradley and Kela) and high upside youthful SPs (a now healthy Lance McCullers, Jr., flame throwing Nate Pearson and Brandon McKay).

Fantasy Pros graded Draft 5 as an 87, B+ and projected a middle of the road 8th place finish. It noted Saves and ERA as strengths, while AVG and Ks were listed as weaknesses. If my upside pitchers come through and my batters hit for a little higher average than projected, I'm confident this team will compete for the league championship. Some intriguing late round picks included post-hype sleeper Orlando Arcia, late speed Monte Harrison and Jordan Hicks, who may be recovered sufficiently from his Tommy John surgery last June to regain his starting closer gig. Gotta like the 105 mph.

Draft 4 – Started March 12, 2020: <https://draft.shgn.com/nfc/plain/dp/1228/grid>

This was the last draft that I began before the season suspension. In this draft, I took SP Max Scherzer with the 13th pick in the 1st round, ahead of Jose Ramirez, Nolan Arenado and Alex Bregman. Soto and Buehler were already gone. Again, drafting at the end of the 1st round, I like to get at least one ace to lead my staff. Starting pitchers were very popular early in this draft with 8 going in the first 21 picks: Cole, DeGrom, Buehler, my pick Scherzer, Flaherty, Verlander, Clevinger and Bieber. With the 18th pick in the second, I took my only share of 1B Freddie Freeman who does everything well but steal bases. As the draft progressed, I started drafting power hitters; and, probably to my detriment, I couldn't stop. After Freeman, I took 1B Pete Alonso, DH Yordan Alvarez, 3B Eugenio Suarez, OF Giancarlo Stanton, C Aaron Sanchez and OF Joey Gallo. Wow, that's some beef. I reach for speed in the 9th with Cavin Biggio, before returning to my staff and taking SP Julio Urias, SP Hyun-Jin Ryu, RPs Sean Doolittle and Keona Kela. One strategy in these formats, where you start 9 pitchers weekly, is you draft a base of 5 or 6 starters and relievers in the early/mid rounds. Then, later draft 6 to 8 starters in fairly close succession to vie for the final 3-4 rotation spots each week. When you have multiple similarly tiered starters, you can start the pitchers with a 2-start week or who have the best matchups. I followed this strategy. After Scherzer, Urias and Ryu, I filled out my offense with new Phillies shortstop Didi Grigorius, Reds OF Nick Senzel and Sleeper SS Dansby Swanson, then in rounds 17 to 30, I took 8 starters to round out my staff: A.J. Puk, Aaron Civale, Steven Matz, Nate Pearson, John Means, Anibal Sanchez and Sean Newcomb. This is one effective way to build a staff when you wait on starting pitching.

Fantasy Pros gave this draft an 88/B+ and projected a 5th place finish. Admittedly, after spending so much draft capital on power hitters, I was left with an offense short on steals and struggling in batting average. My third closer Kintzler is weak and my bench bats (Dyson, O'Neill and Frazier) won't provide much. There is free agency, so I can pick up some Saves, but speed and average are hard to get off the wire. Longball totals may lead all my 7 teams and will be fun to watch.

Draft 3 - On March 7, 2020: <https://draft.shgn.com/nfc/plain/dp/1104/grid>

Finally, I'm actually on the clock, After multiple slow drafts, I sit down to a traditional 1 minute clock, 12 teams, 30 round with FAAB. I can't really buy a break on draft slot and pick 9th. True to form, I take my only share of DeGrom at 9, followed by Scherzer at 16, Kershaw in the 4th and Kluber in the 9th. Interspersed with my potentially dominant staff, I anchored my offense with OF Jorge Soler and infielders Adalberto Mondesi (get your steals early), Jose Altuve (Astro hate made him fall to the end of 5th), Vlad, Jr., Miguel Sano and Carlos Correa. Similar to my recent 12 team draft, I waited on outfielders, and then drafted a bunch together to choose from weekly: Joc Peterson, Will Myers, Kole Calhoun, Mike Yazstremski, and Teoscar Hernandez. Note: I took OF Mallex Smith in the middle of the draft. Together with Mondesi, I have last year's 2 best base stealers who are projected to lead the league in steals again. I also got 3 established closers: Raisel Iglesias, Brandon Workman and Ian Kennedy. To win this league, I will have to earn at least 50 of the available 60 pitching points, but it's definitely possible.

Fantasy Pros graded this draft a 95/A, with a 3rd place projected finish, noting strengths in all pitching categories and steals, but with weaknesses in Avg, R, HR and RBI.

Draft 2 – Started February 22, 2020: <https://draft.shgn.com/nfc/plain/dp/726/grid>

My second Draft Champions 15 team, 50 round draft afforded me with my highest grade (A+, 97). Drafting 6th, I drafted a more balanced team led by 1B Cody Bellinger, SP Stephen Strasberg, SS Adalberto Mondesi, SP Chris Paddock, OF Eloy Jimenez, RP Kirby Yates, OF Joey Gallo, SS Carlos Correa, OF Franmil Reyes and SP/DH Shohei Ohtani. I added Closer Archie Bradley and then reached in rounds 16 and 18 for potential closers Mychal Givens and Brandon Kintzler. Again, in this deep draft and hold setting, closers go fast and I prefer to get 3-4 closer options in the first 18-20 picks, so I don't have to waste a lot of picks later on questionable closers in waiting. I supplemented my starting staff in the middle rounds with the picks of Johnny Cueto, Pearson, Means, Miley, Marco Gonzales, Kwang-Hyun Kim, Rich Hill, Sixto Sanchez and Danny Duffy. After pick 31, I backed up my already formidable offense with steady bats: Pujols, Hunter Pence, Brandon Crawford, Ryan O'Hearn, Josh Reddick and Jason Kipnis. As previously stated, later in deep drafts, I like to draft hitters who should at least get playing time. It's tempting to draft high ceiling, low floor prospects who may never see the field, but you have to balance these picks with boring veterans who will play. This balanced roster is projected to finish 1st out of 15 and may compete nationally. In this large nationwide contests (4,500 teams), you have to be viable in all 10 categories to have a chance. When you are only competing for a league title against 11 or 14 other teams, it is easier to compete while punting a category or being weak in 2 categories. In this draft, Fantasy Pros found HR, RBI, Saves, WHIP as strengths, while labeling Wins and Ks as weaknesses. Wins are somewhat unpredictable, but by focusing on Games Started, you can mitigate the negatives.

Draft 1 – Started February 2, 2020: <https://draft.shgn.com/nfc/plain/dp/316/grid>

As I sat down for my first draft, the coronavirus was nowhere in my thoughts. I really like doing slow deep drafts (750 players) early in draft season. The depth of your research will provide a base of knowledge for all future drafts. As a foreshadowing of things to come, I picked last (15th) in the first round. Especially before my early drafts, after preferring the first 3 to 5 draft slots, I admittedly did enter later pick preferences in the Kentucky Derby blind draw, with a strategy of drafting starting pitchers later in the 1st round. At the 15/16 turn, my first two picks of the year were Max Scherzer (no surprise) and Justin Verlander. I couldn't help myself at the end of Round 3 and drafted Clayton Kershaw and Louis Castillo, giving me an almost overly dominant start to my starting staff, at the expense of my offense. Considering I did not pick a bat until pick 75, I think my offense will compete in all categories (except maybe average): OF Eloy Jimenez, C Aaron Sanchez, 2B/3B Mike Moustakis, SS Carlos Correa, SS Ahmed Rosario, OF Mallex Smith, 1B Luke Voit, C Wilson Ramos, OF Nick Senzel, 3B/OF Brian Anderson, OF Hunter Renfroe, 1B/3B Yandy Diaz, 1B Joey Votto, OF Brett Gardner, OF Anthony Santander, and 2B/SS Freddy Galvis. It doesn't look that impressive, but in a 15 team draft, it should suffice. I only took 2 established closers (Iglesius and Alex Colome) and other than Masahiro Tanaka in round 16, I didn't draft more starters before Round 22. I rounded out my staff with mediocre pitchers (ie Cueto, Miley, Hill, Alex Wood and Zach Davies) to stream weekly where advisable.

Fantasy Pros graded my 1st draft as a 91/A-, with a projected 4th place finish. With my early focus on starting pitching, it is not surprising that my projected strengths were W, K, ERA and WHIP or that my projected weaknesses were BA, HR, RBI and Runs. Like the TR-7 (a sports car from the 70's), this draft

represented “the shape of things to come”. I guess we will see if my apparent over emphasis on starting pitching throughout my drafts will pay off or will debilitate my teams with inept offenses. Given my later draft slots in most of my drafts, I seem to have reverted to my comfort level SP strategy time and again. At least once, it would have been nice to have one of the top draft slots and draft from the other end of the draft. You can pick one of the big 3 can’t miss hitters (Acuna, Trout or Yelich) to build around, but you play the hand you’re dealt. I had similar issues in the NFBC fantasy football, the KY derby slotting must be rigged.

Player Shares: Below, I outline the player shares I drafted most in my 7 drafts by position (not ranked).

4 shares: SP Max Scherzer

3 shares: SPs Clayton Kershaw, Wade Miley, Rich Hill, Nate Pearson, RPs Brandon Workman, Brandon Kintzler, C Austin Romine, 2B Brandon Rodgers, SS Carlos Correa, Adalberto Mondesi, 3B Todd Frazier, OFs Hunter Pence, Nick Senzel, Jarrod Dyson

2 Shares: SPs Masahiro Tanaka, Johny Cueto, Jacob Junis, Tyler Chatwood, Ivan Nova, Shohei Ohtani, Stephen Strasberg, John Means, Danny Duffy, Corey Kluber, Steven Matz, AJ Puk, Anibal Sanchez, Sean Newcomb, Mike Foltyniewicz, Walker Buehler, Mike Fiers; RPs Raisel Iglesias, Jordan Hicks, Archie Bradley, Hunter Harvey, Keona Kela; Cs Curt Casali, Omar Narvaez, Tom Murphy, 1Bs Joey Votto, Rowdy Tellez, Matt Adams, Cody Bellinger, Trey Mancini, Joc Pederson, Daniel Vogelbach, Pete Alonso, Mitch Moreland, 2Bs Freddy Galvis, Mike Moustakis, Hanser Alberto, Jason Kipnis, Niko Goodrum, Dee Gordon, 3Bs Vladamir Guerrero, Jr., Eugenio Suarez, J.D. Davis, SS Brandon Crawford, Miguel Rojas, OFs Eloy Jimenez, Anthony Santander, Mallex Smith, Brett Gardner, Joey Gallo, Will Myers, Tyler O’Neill, Aaron Judge, Byron Buxton, Jake Cave

Observations/Conclusions:

My general strategy is to queue the players you like and then rank your queue by recent ADP. You then attempt to draft as many players you like as possible, while covering all the categories. That gives you a general idea of who will be available when. Especially later in the draft, I determine the available players with lowest ADP to see who may have been passed over. You compare these players with the highest players in your queue and make your choice. If picking toward one end of the snake draft, you may have to reach a little more for the players you want.

If drafting in a slow draft, you can have a more scattered approach to your draft. In a traditional snake draft with a quick 1 minute or so clock, you will need a cheat sheet, with tiered position rankings and a top 150. I also like to have lists of late round speed/power. Make sure your closer list is at least 30 pitchers deep.

In a short season with an expanded roster, more players will have a role. Do you want the closer at the beginning of the season, because there will be less time to replace him or are all closers discounted by spread out saves because of managers’ itchy quick trigger fingers and the new 3 out rule? In deeper NFBC leagues, just make sure to get several closers early and be aggressive to beat the runs. Beware of

all the talk of no innings limits. Young pitchers may work as middle relievers or starters, while workhorses will be more likely to go 5 or more innings. A full time DH for all games would add 15 bats (NL DHs) to the mix, further expanding depth primarily at the corners and in the outfield.

Although heading into the season, I liked taking attacking starting pitching early to cement your pitching advantage, especially when you have a pick late in round 1. With the short schedule, more starting pitchers are viable and I would take a more balanced approach between pitchers and hitters, while still making sure to fortify your starting staff.

Draft by categories, and try to be competitive in all categories until you can't. Position scarcity matters in that you need to be aware where the each position drops off.

Just pray we play and everyone stays safe.

Resources: My research during the drafts included:

Fantasy Pros: Expert Consensus Rankings (ECR), Projections, Draft Simulator, Articles and Podcasts

Sirius XM expert's 14-team mixed snake draft on RTSports (January draft nearly obsolete)

LABR mixed draft and auction on RTSports.com, as well as NL and AL Auctions (good late round picks)

CBS Sports Tiered position rankings and in-season weekly starting pitcher rankings

Rotoballer articles, especially for sleepers/undervalued players

ESPN Closer Depth Chart, Rankings and Mock Drafts

Yahoo Articles and Mock Drafts

NFBC Average Draft Position (ADP) filtered to include the most recent drafts (at least 5 drafts)

RotoChamp sortable stat projections and projected batting orders

Rotowire projected batting orders, player previews, in season daily lineups

MLB.com Depth Charts and in-season projected starters

Closer Monkey closer depth charts and analysis

StatCast for advanced stats such as my favorite Barrel%

My previous draft boards