



2008 Snake Draft Strategies for Experienced Players

Written by

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Some follow their own hearts and hunches, some depend on the “experts”, some do their own research, and some do a combination of all three. Fact is, no matter what we do, we all have our own plans and draft strategies. Whether it’s the LIMA Plan, Drafting for Categories, Punting Saves or some crazy combination, everyone has a different perspective on the draft. I can only provide what I know from what I have seen and from what I have personally experienced to start this 2008 season. I have done a load of mock drafts already and we’re only halfway through January. I’ve done expert mocks and experienced player mocks as well as mocks with beginner players. And yes, I have done drafts for leagues that I am actually participating in. Not many, but a few this early. Put all of that together and I have one heck of a knowledge base for 2008.

Below, I will breakdown the draft by position and what you can expect from each position. I have basically taken out all of the work for you. Some of you more serious and experienced players could find some of this obvious, but be patient, this is the first of many draft strategy tools we plan to post here in the **Greatest Fantasy Baseball Draft Guide Ever Assembled** for experienced fantasy baseball players! This is the base! Once you know who will be available and when, you can then start to single out specific players and that’s when the real strategy comes into play.

For sake of argument, let’s assume we are talking about 12 team, 5x5, Mixed League Roto, 23 man roster, 2C, 1B, 2B, 3B, SS, MI, CI, 5OF, 1DH, 9P....a normal league. You can adjust these ideas individually according to your own league guidelines.



Catchers

These are your top 5 catchers in the order I prefer them...

Victor Martinez – As much a lock at .300/20/100 as you can get at C

Russell Martin - .290/20/100/20 potential, still young and Torre will depend on him

Brian McCann – 20/100 potential is there but can he stay healthy all season?

Jorge Posada – Even if he regresses back to his normal production, expect .280/20/90

Joe Mauer – Mr. Hype, the .300+AVG is there but will he develop power & stay healthy?

After these 5, you don't need to exert yourself in the middle rounds to get Kenji Johjima or Ivan Rodriguez. Let them go! You can steal Ramon Hernandez, Kurt Suzuki, Ryan Doumit, Bengie Molina, Jason Varitek, John Buck, Chris Snyder, and Justin Towles all in or after the 16th. Geovany Soto may also slip that late.

V-Mart & Martin go one right after the other sometime as early as the late 2nd round and into the early 3rd. Once they're gone, you don't need to jump on McCann/Mauer/Posada because since they all have some kind of risk, you'd be overvaluing them if chosen before round 5. Personally, if you plan to select V-Mart/Martin, then do it. If not, wait until after the 16th even in leagues where you have to draft two. It doesn't pay to take a guy like Kenji Johjima at .290/15/80/5 in the 10th round when you can take a .300/25/100/100 guy in Hideki Matsui or possibly a comeback .275/35/100+ in Carlos Delgado. It doesn't pay to take an Ivan Rodriguez at .290/10/60/5 in the 14th round when you can take a higher risk/higher reward player in Matt Kemp who could have .300/20/20 potential. This late in the draft is when you want to take these risks. In the end, in the 16th & 17th rounds, you can steal maybe Justin Towles who might hit .280/10/65/10 assuming he can keep a full-time role and you're getting I-Rod numbers 2-3 picks later with a player who is younger and has even more potential. Kurt Suzuki on the other hand, doesn't have the hype of Towles and can be had in the 17th or 18th at .280/15/75. This will allow you to go after players like Kemp, Josh Hamilton, Pat Burrell, Jeremy Hermida, Michael Bourn, etc...players who will produce more offensively.

Let's put it this way.... The average catcher will normally produce something like .275/10/60. Whether you select Michael Barrett late or Kenji Johjima in the 12th, there's not a huge difference. This is how you get the most value at the Catchers position if you decide to pass on V-Mart/Martin.

First Base

Obviously 1B is the deepest of the positions so we won't have to go crazy here, but, if you're the savvy type, you'll love this....

In the first 3 rounds, you'll have a choice between Albert Pujols, Prince Fielder, Ryan Howard, Mark Teixeira, Lance Berkman, and Justin Morneau....in that order. Pujols, Fielder, Howard all usually gone by the end of the first round with Tex & Berkman going by the end of the 2nd and Morneau by the end of the 3rd. After that, you have Derrek Lee who lingers in there by himself for a few rounds but slips to the 6th in some drafts I've seen. Follow me here.....

The real steals come with Paul Konerko and Carlos Delgado. Konerko can occasionally slip to the 8th. Konerko is a safe and durable .290/35+/120 kind of power and he's due for a better year as he seems to alternate. Last year was somewhat a down year. Delgado on the other hand is dropping to 12th, 13th, and even 14th in some leagues. I just completed an expert mock draft in which I had no choice but to steal Delgado in the 16th round. That's an insane value. It's not usual that a .275/35/120 potential is available in the 16th round. As situation like that is what you fill a DH spot with. I actually think Delgado would be lucky to have a .270-.280 AVG but the potential for higher is there. Chalk up 2007 as a lost year.

This gets better. We actually did an expert draft here at Fantasy Baseball Express where Delgado fell to the 16th!!!! If you want to wait until the 16th(the round where anything can start to happen), you can also find a 30+HR hitter in Jason Giambi or a 100+Runs guy in Kevin Youkilis on occasion.

Wait until the 19th and you can steal Lyle Overbay who was hurt last season but has .300/20/100/100 potentials.

The point here is, if you miss out on the top 6 or 7, don't panic! Plenty of value left in the draft and specifically... Delgado, Giambi, and Overbay all who I like this season!



Second Base

2B is actually a bit deeper than you would expect because all after the 16th round, you can steal guys like....

Felipe Lopez – Versatile at 2B/SS, has 15/30 potential which is a modest projection as he could certainly hit 20+HR and steal 40+ bases as he has shown in the past. We're waiting for the year he puts it altogether. Maybe the new ballpark, the growing success of Ryan Zimmerman and an new outfield with a world of offensive potential, the fantasy gods are looking at Lopez.....while everyone else in your fantasy league is scrambling in the middle rounds for Rickie Weeks and Howie Kendrick, not to mention the moron in your league who thinks he's getting a great value with Tad Iguchi in the final rounds.

Orlando Hudson – Hudson was on fire early last year and then got hurt down the stretch. He'll be healthy for opening day and although he doesn't have a ton of offensive potential, you can at least expect a solid .285/10-15HR/75+RBI/90+R/10-15SB.

Aaron Hill – Turns 26 in March and looks like he'll bat 2nd in Toronto in front of Alex Rios, Frank Thomas and Lyle Overbay. Hill has possible 20+HR power with .290-.300/100+R/80+RBI potential and is someone no one is thinking about in normal 12 team drafts.

The point here.....if you wait on 2B or MI, don't panic, there's plenty of upside out there that no one else cares about.

Third Base

3B drops off big time after the big names are off the board...A-Rod, David Wright, Miguel Cabrera, Ryan Braun, Aramis Ramirez. Garratt Atkins, Chone Figgins, Mike Lowell, and Ryan Zimmerman are in their own little group and then you got Alex Gordon, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Josh Fields and Edwin Encarnacion. That's 13 3B for a 12 team league. But, count in CI's and DH's and once these 13 are gone, you run into a problem because the next group of characters all have issues, Troy Glaus, Eric Chavez, Scott Rolen, Joe Crede and Hank Blalock and then its on to taking a risk with possible rookie Evan Longoria.

The best way to deal with 3B is to....

- A. Take one of the top 3 in the first round and build from there.
- B. Take Ryan Braun in the 2nd
- C. Take Aramis Ramirez in the late 3rd or early 4th
- D. Take Figgins in the 5th and nab 50+SB at the same time
- E. Take Atkins if he slips to the 5th (if you miss out on Figgins) or 6th
- F. Take Figgins in the 4th, a top SP in the 5th and then Atkins in the 6th if he slips
- G. Wait until the 9th or 10th round and take who ever slips of Zimmerman/Lowell
- H. Anytime between the 10th & 14th you should be able to grab Gordon, Kouzmanoff, Fields, or Encarnacion, sometimes Kouzmaoff lasts into the 18th.
- I. Try not to wait much longer unless you want risks with Glaus, Rolen, Chavez, Crede or Blalock
- J. Blalock is probably the safest overall bet of that risky group of 5 but take by the 16th to ensure you get him.

Shortstop

Shortstop is the same as second base this year. They both appear weak, but if you wait, you can usually grab a decent player with some upside in or after the 16th round.

Felipe Lopez – Scroll up and see what I wrote above for Lopez as he qualifies for both SS & 2B. Lopez makes a great upside pick!

Stephen Drew – That sub .240 average in 2007 is a killer but look at how young Drew is, take in account his effectiveness down the stretch and in the playoffs and you have yourselves an excellent sleeper candidate. Drew possesses what is believed to be eventual .300/20/100/100/15. Maybe its in a few years but maybe it comes in 2008. We don't know, but Drew is worth the wait as a late upside pick in 12 team drafts.

Khalil Greene – Greene has the type of AVG to rival Adam Dunn, but at SS and 30/100 potential, Greene makes a great upside pick. He just entering his prime, show last season he could stay healthy and hit for power with stats just below what I mentioned as his potential.

Some other tips for SS's....

Derek Jeter makes for a better choice in the late 4th or 5th rounds. He's a bit over paid earlier than that although selecting him in the late third/early 4th can be justified and will not hurt your team no matter what anyone says. Jeter is a guaranteed .320/15/75/100/15 GUARANTEED! He's super durable, can expect 600+AB, and he ultra dependable. In The Fantasy Man's world, that goes a long way and sometimes is just as important as pure stats.

In the 1st round, Hanley Ramirez, Jose Reyes, and Jimmy Rollins are gone! Jeter goes anytime between the 3rd-6th as he's dropped in some drafts. Michael Young, Miguel Tejada, Carlos Guillen, Edgar Renteria, and Rafael Furcal all tend to go between the 6th and 8th rounds. Orlando Cabrera is gone by the 10th and then guys like J.J. Hardy, Julio Lugo, Khalil Greene, Stephen Drew and Felipe Lopez can go at anytime after the 12th. Occasionally Hardy could be picked before the 12th but everyone else slips. I have seen Lugo go in the 11th but I myself have drafted him in the 18th. With these SS's, it really depends on who the other managers are targeting.

Outfield

Some will tell you that the outfield lacks depth, but tend to disagree. Yes, in 2008, I would definitely try to squeeze out 2-3 solid outfielders sometime in the first 10-12 rounds, then you can work on the bargains. I am going to use the 13th as the drop off point. Obviously, the first few rounds you can scoop up guys like Alfonso Soriano, Grady Sizemore and Carl Crawford. In the early middle rounds(7-12) you can look to Delmon Young, Brad Hawpe, Shane Victorino, Nick Swisher, and Hideki Matsui to load up on categories. At that same time, you'll find some "star" players falling that will be considered great values like Andruw Jones, Jermaine Dye, and even Gary Sheffield in leagues where he qualifies. Jones, Dye, and Sheffield, in

some cases, you can steal after the 10th rounds because they all come with some kind of risk (with high reward potential of course).

In or after the 13th, you'll start to see guys like Ken Griffey Jr., Garret Anderson, Austin Kearns, Pat Burrell and you'll start to wonder if you should grab them or not. Instead, assuming you already have 2-3 solid OF's, I'd opt for upside picks like Matt Kemp and Josh Hamilton and then once into the 16th, you could see Michael Bourn and Josh Anderson for steals, Melky Cabrera for all around numbers and upside, and Nate McLouth and Jayson Werth who are two of my favorite sleepers and both with speed/power combo potentials, McLouth with 15/30 potential and Werth with 20/20 potential with 500+AB. In my professional opinion, assuming they win their respective jobs out of spring training, you are looking at two of the best kept sleeper secrets in fantasy baseball.

Starting Pitching

Right off the bat, Johan Santana should NOT be picked in the first round. Although his potential in this contract year is great, and the potential to be traded to a top contender (Yankees, Mets or Red Sox), I still wouldn't take him in the first round. Just ask everyone who took him early in 2007.

Peavy is a solid pick just after Santana. After that, any combination of Brandon Webb, Josh Beckett, C.C. Sabathia, John Lackey, Erik Bedard, Carlos Zambrano are gone between rounds 4-6. Some other pitchers getting picked between the 4-6 can include Scott Kazmir, Justin Verlander, Felix Hernandez, Aaron Harang which is the next wave. Interestingly, Fausto Carmona, Chris Young, Dice-K, Roy Oswalt and Roy Halladay are falling sometimes into the 8th and 9th rounds making all of them great values!

My advice is to try to grab two of these guys between rounds 4 – 8 unless one sneaks to you in the 9th. I feel two-three of the starting pitchers listed above can keep your staff competitive. After that, worry about hitting and go back to pitching in the 14th or 15th and grab a guy like Phil Hughes, Oliver Perez or Adam Wainwright. Or, take a guy like John Maine, Chad Billingsley, or Joba Chamberlain if they slip into the 14th-15th.

Matt Cain, Tim Lincecum, Yovani Gallardo are usually gone by the 12th-13th but guys like A.J. Burnett, Chien-Ming Wang, Ian Snell and Rich Hill could slip into the 14th.

Great late options in or after the 16th include: Tom Gorzelanny, Jon Lester, Kevin Slowey, Andy Pettitte, Barry Zito, Chris Capuano, Shawn Hill, Randy Johnson, Curt Schilling and Pedro Martinez. All of these players can be had between the 16th and 22nd rounds. I have consistently been filling ALL of my teams with Gorzelanny, Slowey, Zito, Lester, Pettitte, and Johnson after the 16th rounds in ALL of my drafts, mock and real. Each of them has some kind of upside or value along with the risk. However, looking at these players and their situations, these are the obvious pitchers that can be drafted late while most likely helping your team and not hurting it.

Closers

For this draft tool, we will focus on closers as opposed to all relief pitchers. There are a few ways to go about this and it depends on your own personal strategy, so pay attention....

Punting Saves – Personally, I'd never punt saves! You can always find closers in a 12 team draft and still draft a competitive team. Starting out with no closers puts you at a disadvantage from the beginning for two reasons. First, you are not accumulating any saves which means you are not gaining points in the standing from saves while everyone else is. Second, closers, or quality closers help lower ERA/WHIP. So by punting saves, you are also taking a risk at punting ERA/WHIP. There is a reason why we draft a mix of SP's and closers, so it's wise not to ignore it.

Wait on Closers – It is undoubtedly so that there will be closers available after the 14th round in your draft and it could be any mix of the following players: (You can see their full analysis in the Rankings section)

Todd Jones – 40+SV potential but likely ERA/WHIP over 4.50/1.35 with maybe 35-45K

Joe Borowski - 40+SV potential but likely ERA/WHIP over 4.50/1.35 with maybe 60K

Rafael Soriano – Risky because he has never been the full time closer but could post a WHIP under 1.20

Matt Capps – We don't expect the Pirates to give Capps 40+ SV opportunities

Eric Gagne – Can depend on his health and you still Have Turnbow and Riske to back up

Tony Pena – Has potential and should have 40+ opportunities but hasn't proven anything

Brian Wilson – The Giants may not provide many opportunities and he is also unproven

Grab Closers Early – This is the strategy I am using in 2008. I want to have peace of mind that I know I drafted at least two quality closers. You need at least two solid closers on draft day to at least compete. Adding a 3rd later on via trade or waiver wire is how you put your team over the top. Now, here is my rationale. My goal here in 2008 is to draft the best closer I can in the 5th round which usually will be any one of Jon Papelbon, Joe Nathan, Francisco Rodriguez or J.J. Putz. Then , around the 8th-10th, depending on the main closer run, I can usually grab one of Mariano Rivera, Bobby Jenks or Jose Valverde. What I am looking for out of my two closers is 70-80 potential saves, an ERA under 1.80, a WHIP under 1.10 and 140-170K. The reasoning is that I know that first, I am going to grab 2-3 top starting pitchers in the first 8-9 rounds. Then, I know I am going to wait to fill my starting pitching later in the draft (after the 16th) with guys like Zito, Slowey, Lester, Gorzelanny, etc., as I mentioned before. By drafting two top closers earlier that I can trust to consistently notch saves and lower ERA/WHIP, I can feel better about waiting until the end of my draft to grab those specific starting pitchers. There's no question that Barry Zito has some huge risk, Jon Lester has risk, Slowey is still unproven, Pettitte's ERA can easily be over 4.00. Top quality closers can help take away some of that risk.

An example.....

On Jan. 14th, 2008 I participate in an expert mock draft in which I selected Papelbon in the 5th and got lucky and stole Joe Nathan in the 7th (I still could have taken Jenks in the 10th but I saw extra proven value in Nathan as a steal in the 7th). My plan was to select two top closers early. Combined, I am expecting 70-80SV, an ERA lower than 1.50, a WHIP lower than 1.00, and approximately 160K give or take a few. Those are serious numbers from two closers.

Now, the other option would be to wait on closers in which I could have taken Todd Jones and Joe Borowski both after the 14th rounds while combined expecting 70-80SV, an ERA above 4.50, a WHIP above 1.35, and maybe 100K total if I'm lucky. Clearly, Papelbon/Nathan is better than Jones/Borowski.

The trick here is realizing that closers are more than just for the saves category. Top closers contribute to K's and lowering ERA/WHIP. Most closers available late will most likely hurt your overall ERA/WHIP unless you catch "lightning in a bottle" like some managers did with Jose Valverde in 2007.

My point here is that if my late choices in starting pitching in the Lester's, Gorzelanny's and Zito's fail, then the Jones', Borowski's, Gagne's of the world will put my team and my ERA/WHIP categories even further in the hole. **YOU CAN STILL DRAFT TWO TOP NOTCH CLOSERS AND STILL DRAFT TWO-THREE SOLID PITCHERS AND STILL HAVE A STRONG OVERALL PITCHING STAFF!!!**

The Fantasy Man's Overall Plan:

I'll keep this simple. Here is how I am drafting in normal 12 team snake drafts in 2008. Barring any setbacks and extreme bargains I can't pass up, here is an example of my overall strategy.....

R1 - Hitter (Probably power)

R2 – Hitter (Speed or power or both)

R3 – Hitter (More power)

- R4 - SP (Best Available)
- R5 – RP (Best Available but eyes on Papelbon/Nathan/Putz/KRod)
- R6 – SP (Best Available)
- R7 – Hitter (Best Available with an eye on filling positions and adding to categories)
- R8 – Hitter (Best Available with an eye on filling positions and adding to categories)
- R9 – SP (Best Available of Dice-K, Carmona, Oswalt, Halladay, if not I'll go hitting)
- R10 – RP (Hoping for Jenks, Rivera, Valverde but will stretch for Wagner and Lidge)
- R11 – Hitter (Best Available with an eye on filling positions and adding to categories)
- R12 – Hitter (Best Available with an eye on filling positions and adding to categories)
- R13 – Hitter (Best Available with an eye on filling positions and adding to categories)
- R14 – Hitter (Looking for Sleepers to fill positions and add to categories)
- R15 – Hitter (Looking for Sleepers to fill positions and add to categories)

----- Anything in or after the 16th anything is possible, fill needs, and add to categories!

- R16 – Hitter (Looking for Sleepers to fill positions and add to categories)
- R17 – SP (I have a list of Sleepers)
- R18 – RP (If Pena, Soriano, Wilson are available, if not, then SP)
- R19 – Hitter (Depends what I do in the 14th)
- R20 – Hitter (Looking for Sleepers to fill positions and add to categories)
- R21 – Hitter (Looking for Sleepers to fill positions and add to categories)
- R22 – SP (I have a list of Sleepers)
- R23 – SP (I have a list of Sleepers)

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