The 2011 MLB Rule 4 Draft will kick off on Monday, June 6. The MLB draft is not nearly as celebrated as its NFL and NBA counterparts, and with good reason. One, the draft takes place during the season, so there are real, actual games to keep fans interested rather than monitoring who their team takes in the 42nd round of the draft.

Two, the players selected next week will not see the majors for two to five years from now, if ever. And C, 99.9% of fans will have never seen the player their favorite team selects in the first round, and 97% of them probably won't have ever heard the player's name before Monday. Here at TCF though, we have a more intelligent set of fans thirsting for knowledge, so I'm going to do my best to make you at least a little bit familiar with whichever yout we select in the first round.

We all know that the draft is the cheapest and most effective way to build a competitive major league team, and we all know that this was an area that the Indians were found wanting throughout most of the last decade. In fact, if you go back to 1990, the Indians have had a grand total of six (6) of their 1st round and supplemental sandwich round picks post a Wins Above Replacement (WAR) of more than 1.0 in the major leagues. I'll spot you Manny Ramirez (1991) and Carsten Charles Sabathia (1998), but can you guess the other four? Answer at the end of the column.

So while the past 20 years have been pretty bad, the Indians last three 1st round picks look

pretty good. Lonnie Chisenhall, Alex White and Drew Pomeranz are all among the top prospects in the organization, and White has even had some measure of success in The Show already. Baseball America called the Indians 2010 draft the best in baseball. So things are trending upward here on the North Coast, and there's no reason to think that trend will dissipate here in 2011. Before we get into scouting the Indians potential 1st round picks, a quick draft refresher for the newbies:

- The Rule 4 Draft lasts 50 rounds
- Players from the U.S., Canada and U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico are eligible
- Players are eligible after their senior year in HS, junior year in college, or at any point during their time in junior or community college
- Compensatory picks during and after the 1st round ("sandwich picks")are awarded to teams losing marquee free agents. The Indians have no compensatory picks this year.

- The Commissioner's Office has a recommended bonus level (termed "slot") for every pick in the draft. The "slot" is only a guideline and cannot be enforced by the Commissioner's Office in any way. If a team wants to pay a 50th round pick $10 million to sign, that's their prerogative.

Much has been made of whether the Indians will go at or above slot with their 1st pick in the draft. The way I see it, they have two options. One, they can go over slot with their first pick and try to sign one of the really elite talents in the draft, then be forced to go a little more conservative in the rest of the draft. Two, they can go close to slot with their first pick and still get a really good player, and then be free to gamble on high upside talent later in the draft because they will have more money to play with. I can see a very valid argument either way, and we'll likely know right off the bat which strategy the front office has elected to go with based on who they take with their first pick. The Indians have shown that they are willing to spend big money in the draft, so I won't be crushed if they take a guy who is projected to sign at slot in the 1st round. All that means is that we'll get more talent later in the draft. Based on the past couple years, I trust this front office with their approach either way.

I thought about doing a mock of the 1st round of the draft, but then I realized that no one hear really cares who I think the Colorado Rockies are going to take 20th overall (if you do, feel free to e-mail me and we can discuss). You care who the Indians take with the 8th overall pick. Also keep in mind that there is a lot of uncertainty with this year's draft, even at the very top. It's a very deep and talented pool of players, but there's no Strasburg or Harper that is

the clear-cut first overall pick. Projecting the 1st round would be extremely difficult, and I'd probably be wrong with a majority of the picks. So today we will look at some of the collegiate options for the Indians at #8, and then we'll be back tomorrow to look at the prep players who the Indians are considering. To top it off, I'll tell you both who I think the Indians will pick, and who I think they SHOULD pick. So without further delay, on to the players:

Not Going to Be There:

- **Anthony Rendon, 3B-Rice University**
- **Gerrit Cole, RHP-UCLA**
- **Danny Hultzen, LHP-University of Virginia**

These three are pretty much the consensus top three players off the board in most of the mock drafts that are out there. Cole is the top college arm, Rendon is the top college bat, and Hultzen is a polished college arm that will be in the majors as fast as anyone and is seen as the safest pick in the draft (although he doesn't have the upside of Cole). If any of the three are on the board when the Indians pick at #8, they will be a slam-dunk pick. That being said, it is highly, highly doubtful that any of them will be on the board, so I'm not going to waste a lot of time and space here talking about them.

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