

# Five paths to draft dominance

## Now is the time to hatch your merciless game plan

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Tidy preparation for draft day won't mean a thing if you don't implement a season-long plan early and execute it properly.

The fantasy baseball draft period is already in high gear. You

should already know your keepers, if applicable, and which players you will monitor during your league auction or draft. Perhaps you have already executed a great draft plan and your team is stocked and balanced.

Whether you have a chill approach to drafting or you've been mocking up draft boards since last fall, it's time to initiate your master plan for league domination. Here are some tips to help you draft like a champion. They're ranked from most important to least.

### 1. Review your league's rules and scoring

If you don't remember the parameters of your league, or are doubtful about a particular statistic or rule, then refresh yourself before the draft.

For instance, making the L.A. Angels' Chone Figgins your regular third baseman will backfire if your league

doesn't track stolen bases.

Likewise, understanding the pitching limits (the maximum number of innings pitchers can accumulate during a season) your league imposes will help you decide whether your pitching staff should be stronger on starters or relievers.

If the pitching limits are low, it's wise to pick two or three reliable starting pitchers, such as Houston Astros starter Roy Oswalt, and fill out your pitching roster with closers and middle relievers.

### 2. Create a team identity to gain leverage

In a recent 12-team draft, I loaded up on hitters and chose pitchers only toward the end. My goal was to get the most value out of each pick, regardless of position.

Here are two possible, positive outcomes of this strategy: 1) while my roster's pitching staff and shortstop are relatively unproductive, I possess the hitting depth to trade for more valuable players who can shore up the exposed positions; 2) I can be a ruthless jerk and hoard offensive firepower, thus keeping productive players away from my opponents and exposing their



To game your fantasy opponents, you'll need something like the single-minded focus of San Diego's Jake Peavy.

offensive weaknesses when I match up with them.

### 3. Value consistency

Don't be the person who fills his or her roster with unproven or injury-riddled players.

Many fantasy owners overlook consistent players because they are not exciting. It's tempting to place your bets on the potential of the Texas Rangers' 6-foot-4 second-year centerfielder Josh Hamilton than it is to "settle" for Pat Burrell's reliability as a Philadelphia Phillie (and Mets assassin).

If you do take a chance on

one or two high-risk/high-reward players at one or two positions, such as Milwaukee Brewers second baseman Rickie Weeks, make sure to pick more predictable players at other positions, such as Rangers shortstop Michael Young. Players with Young's consistency will keep your team above water.

Then, if enough of your risky picks hit on their potential, your team can rise to the top of your league standings.

### 4. Play mind games with your opponents

Every fantasy league needs someone who talks more smack than Gary Payton, Reggie Miller and Larry Bird combined. You can be that guy or girl! If you see a player whom you're not interested in that is still available, proclaim astonishment to your opponents that said player hasn't been drafted.

Your opponents might think you are being too obvious — or maybe they will think you are trying to make them think you are being obvious. Either way, it will get them thinking about something other than their

upcoming pick!

### 5. Have a backup plan (or two)

It happens to everybody. The player you are targeting goes a pick or two before your turn. Instead of filling your mind with expletives, ease your mind by immediately going to Plan B, or even Plan C. The worst thing you can do is to select a player in haste. Remember to jot down positional needs or potential high-value picks so that you're prepared when one of your buddies takes "your" guy.

## amNewYork's top fantasy baseball players at nine positions



If you're in a non-keeper league, you'll have a shot at drafting from the cream of the fantasy baseball crop. We polled five amNewYork fantasy enthusiasts about their top three players at nine positions (except for the outfield, where we asked for six choices), assuming standard scoring categories. The weighted voting points are in parentheses; the top choices are pictured directly above their positions. (All photos: Getty)

■ Catchers	■ First basemen	■ Second basemen	■ Shortstops	■ Third basemen	■ Outfielders	■ Starting pitchers	■ Relief pitchers
1. Victor Martinez (14)	1. Ryan Howard (12)	1. Chase Utley (15)	1. Jose Reyes (10)	1. Alex Rodriguez (15)	1. Matt Holliday (30)	1. Johan Santana (15)	1. Jonathan Papelbon (12)
2. Russell Martin (9)	2. Prince Fielder (11)	2. B.J. Upton (6)	1. Hanley Ramirez (10)	2. David Wright (7)	2. Alfonso Soriano (21)	2. Jake Peavy (10)	2. J.J. Putz (8)
3. Brian McCann (3)	3. Albert Pujols (5)	2. Brandon Phillips (6)	3. Jimmy Rollins (9)	2. Miguel Cabrera (7)	3. Grady Sizemore (15)	3. Eric Bedard (2)	3. Francisco Rodriguez (6)
3. Joe Mauer (3)					4. Carl Crawford (11)	3. Josh Beckett (2)	
					5. Magglio Ordonez (7)		
					6. Ichiro Suzuki (6)		