



# NEW BLOOD

“Wherever baseball  
is being played—  
we need to be there”

by Tyler Chirdon

**T**his is a survey of the Indians’ 10 most noteworthy amateur signings over the past year, but maybe the best way to explain this list is to note the players who aren’t on it. The Indians’ third and fourth picks in last year’s June draft, Cord Phelps and David Roberts, are both well regarded by scouts, and each received a six-figure signing bonus. Yet if we assume that the biggest talents are getting the largest signing bonuses, then neither one is among the club’s most noteworthy new amateur signings.

How is this possible? Part of the answer is that the draft is no longer as simple as it appears to be, nor as straightforward as it used to be. The Indians pursued more hard-to-get players in later rounds of the draft—players who, for one reason or another, were deemed too expensive by other clubs. Some critics characterize this approach as “gambling,” or worse, a corruption of the draft system. To Brad Grant, the Tribe’s director of amateur scouting, it’s simply a matter of putting the club’s money where the talent is. “Our philosophy

is to use all 50 rounds of the draft effectively,” he said.

Five of the six draftees profiled below signed for bonuses significantly higher than those suggested by MLB for their draft slots. According to Grant, those signings are the product of “a conscious decision for us to target specific players later in the draft.” The Tribe is hardly the first team to employ that strategy. As Jim Callis of *Baseball America* noted, “It’s difficult to take highly touted and high-priced players in the early rounds, because if something goes wrong, a team can be left with a bunch of unsigned picks.” (As a rule, major league clubs do not officially release signing bonus figures, so the dollar amounts used here are estimates, based on unofficial reports by *Baseball America* and from other sources.)

International signings also figure heavily into this mix. The Indians spent roughly \$10 million on amateur signings in 2008, of which nearly a quarter was invested in international free agents. As a source of premier talent, the international market is every bit as important to the Indians as the

Rule 4 draft in June, which deals only with amateur players in the US and Canada. “Wherever baseball is being played, and our scouts feel there is legit major league talent, we have to be there,” said John Mirabelli, the Indians’ assistant general manager, scouting operations.

To be sure, international scouting presents unique challenges, particularly since major league clubs can sign international free agents as young as 16 years old. In Latin America, Mirabelli explained, “There are no organized leagues or team competition” for amateurs, and at that level, “statistical analysis does not exist.” Instead, prospects are signed on the basis of workouts and simulated games. “Scouting a 16-year-old, in some cases a 15-and-a-half-year-old, in this forum is the most difficult projection, both physically and mentally, in all of baseball.” That said, as any Tribe fan who has cheered for Victor Martinez and Fausto Carmona can attest, the rewards of signing and developing international talent can be very, very high.

“Scouting is driven by gathering information,” said Grant, “and we believe strongly in using all of the information available to us to make decisions.” Over the past 12 months, here’s what all that gathering got them.

**TREY HALEY (RHP, 6'3" 180)**

**Bats: R Throws: R Age for 2009: 19.0**

*Central Heights High School, Texas*

*Drafted #76 overall, \$1.25 million est. bonus*

Tall, lanky, and live-armed, prep school righthander Trey Haley certainly looks and sounds like a first-round pick, and the Indians elected to pay him like one. Haley signed with the Indians just hours before the midnight deadline to sign draftees on August 15, breaking his earlier commitment to Rice University. Though *Baseball America* ranked Haley as one of Texas’ top prep school arms, some mock drafts slotted him as low as the fifth round. The thinking went that 2008 was a weak year for prep pitchers, and that Haley in particular—a product of a three-hours-from-everywhere town called Nacogdoches—had not proved himself against notable competition.

Inducing a player to break a commitment to Rice is notoriously difficult and always expensive. Haley’s bonus is evidence that the Indians were too enamored of his young age, raw talent, poised approach, and projectable frame to blink at the negotiating table. He has a four-pitch arsenal—four-seamer, cutter, curveball, and a (to date) little-used change-up—though Haley himself admitted that he rarely needed more than his fastball to beat prep school hitters. His late-breaking heater has already been clocked as high as 95 mph, and his hook is considered a potential out pitch.

**LONNIE CHISENHALL (3B, 6'1" 200)**

**Bats: L Throws: R Age for 2009: 20.7**

*Pitt Community College, North Carolina*

*Drafted #29 overall, \$1.2 million est. bonus*

Lonnie Chisenhall’s game revolves around advanced plate discipline and solid contact. Drafted out of high school by the Pirates in the 12th round, he instead attended the University of South Carolina, where he hit .313 in 20 games. In his sophomore season at North Carolina’s Pitt Community College, he outclassed the competition, slugging .765 and striking out just eight times in 166 at bats.

Perhaps swayed by his young age, the Indians evidently valued Chisenhall’s skill set more highly than many draft observers, some of whom believed he was taken several dozen picks too early. Some may have been turned off by Chisenhall’s JuCo affiliation, but the Indians are not shy about shopping for picks in less fashionable venues—“We recognize that players come from all over,” said Grant. Others no doubt had concerns about the event that forced Chisenhall to transfer to that school out of a more significant program—a burglary conviction at USC in early



*Lonnie Chisenhall's bat is his calling card.*

Photo on previous page: Andrew Cutrano/Aurora/Getty Images Photo on this page: Carl Kline

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2007. Calling the crime a one-time incident, the Indians quickly signed Chisenhall for a bonus that was somewhat below slot.

Though it may seem to some that they were dipping into the bargain bin, the Indians had scouting reports on Chisenhall dating back to his high school career. Grant's defense of the pick on draft day was simple: "This was the best player available." If Chisenhall wants to prove Grant right, he's off to a fine start. At short-season Mahoning Valley, he maintained his trademark bat-to-ball ability, and his defense at shortstop was a pleasant surprise. Still, the Indians are committed to moving Chisenhall to third base.

### **T.J. HOUSE (LHP, 6'2" 215)**

**Bats:** L **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 19.8

*Picayune Memorial High School, Missouri*

*Drafted in the 16th round, \$750,000 est. bonus*

Even in a down year for prep school prospects, an accomplished 18-year-old lefthander's bonus demands can be large enough that he'll drop down several rounds later than his talent alone would suggest. Such was the case with T.J. House, *Baseball America's* 100th best overall prospect in the draft, who broke a commitment to Tulane University to sign with the Indians.

Big-bodied and athletic—he was also an excellent swimmer in high school—House's combination of low-90s southpaw heat and two breaking pitches proved too much for Mississippi's high school hitters. House closed out his junior year with a school-record, 20-strikeout victory, and followed that up with a 7–2 senior season in which he struck out 99 batters and walked 25. Of House, Jim Callis wrote, "There weren't many lefthanders in the draft with better stuff."

Prep school pitchers sometimes sport gaudy stat lines that owe more to the widely varying quality of hitters they oppose than to their own ability, and in that respect, House carries the same risks as Haley. Big-armed southpaws who can spin the ball both ways are quite rare, however, and chances are good that House can perform like the early-round talent the Indians apparently project him to be.

### **ALEX MONSALVE (C, 6'2" 170)**

**Bats:** R **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 17.2

*Venezuela, \$730,000 est. bonus*

The pricier of two teenage Venezuelan catchers signed by the Indians in 2008, Monsalve has a medium frame that gives him a lot of room to grow, and his bat has the Tribe front office excited. "Every time we saw this kid, he always swung the bat," Mirabelli said. "He's a pretty good combination of



*At 22 years old, Tim Fedroff will try to move through the system quickly.*

hit-ability and raw power." Monsalve played both third base and catcher in his amateur career, but the Indians will try him at catcher full-time. "[That's] not a 360-degree conversion," noted Mirabelli. "When you look at his hands, his feet, his arm strength, and his arm action, you see a guy who can stick behind the plate." Third base remains a possibility for Monsalve if catching doesn't work out.

### **TIM FEDROFF (CF, 5'11" 220)**

**Bats:** L **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 22.4

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

*Drafted in the 7th round, \$725,000 est. bonus*

Though Tim Fedroff primarily played right field in his two years at the University of North Carolina, the Indians started him off in center field, where his above-average speed and range served him well. Sticking in center would take some of the pressure off Fedroff's bat, which is not to say he lacks promise as a run producer. In his last college season, 39 of Fedroff's 115 hits went for extra bases, and he

was fifth in the NCAA in total bases. He also showcased his plate discipline, posting 35 walks and only 34 strikeouts in 285 at bats.

With two productive, healthy seasons under his belt at a championship-quality program and two years of eligibility remaining, Fedroff came to the table with a great deal of leverage. The Indians paid him considerably over slot, but that premium may be commensurate with the relatively low risk of an older, more experienced hitter.

**BRYCE STOWELL (RHP, 6'2" 205)**

**Bats:** R **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 22.8

*University of California at Irvine*

*Drafted in the 22nd round, \$725,000 est. bonus*

Bryce Stowell's appeal as a prospect can be summed up with the letter "K." Stowell mowed down 101 batters in 88.1 innings as a 21-year-old sophomore at UC-Irvine, then put an exclamation point on his amateur career by striking out 58 in 45.2 summer innings in the Cape Cod League. Stowell stayed in the zone to get his outs, too, walking just 2.7 hitters per nine innings in 2007–2008, and he was even stingier in the summer league with 1.8 walks per nine. "The greatest indicator for future success is a pitcher's ability to miss bats," noted Grant.

With that performance, Stowell may have assuaged some of the concerns scouts had voiced about his command. At Irvine, he surrendered nearly one hit per inning during the 2007–2008 seasons, uncorking nine wild pitches and plunking ten batsmen in the process. Stowell's arm action is somewhat inconsistent, but the Indians must be optimistic about Stowell's ability to address his flaws. If they're right, they'll get to enjoy his sweeping, slurvy slider and an improving circle-change, which complement his four- and two-seam fastballs. At his fastest, Stowell throws in the low- to mid-90s.

Ranked as a top-100 NCAA player by *Baseball America*, Stowell was yet another 11th-hour signee receiving a bonus well above slot, reflecting both the strength of his summer performance and his leverage as a sophomore-eligible draftee.

**ZACH PUTNAM (RHP, 6'2" 215)**

**Bats:** R **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 22.0

*University of Michigan*

*Drafted in the 5th round, \$600,000 est. bonus*

Fans of Big Ten baseball won't have to ask why the Indians signed Zach Putnam for second-round money, but they may wonder why he was still available in the fifth round. After all, for a junior like Putnam with little else to prove in college



***A man of many talents, Zach Putnam had a 958 OPS in his junior year at Michigan.***

ball, signability would seem an unlikely concern. Some teams may have been worried about Putnam's health—he suffered a few injuries over his college career, and his junior season was shortened by a non-baseball illness. Another possible explanation is that some teams just didn't know where to slot him. Though he was an athletic, two-way star at the University of Michigan, some fear that Putnam's subpar pitching mechanics call into question his command and durability on the mound.

Nobody questions his stuff, however. His heavy-sinking fastball sits in the low 90s and has touched 96 mph. He complements the heat with a superb splitter, an average slider, and an occasional curveball or change-up. Putnam struck out more than a batter an inning during Michigan's 2008 season, fanning 3.4 batters for every walk he issued. "Ultimately, we see Zach fitting into the bullpen," Grant commented. "We feel his aggressive demeanor and stuff will fit best in that role." He received a lot of money for a relief prospect, but power pitchers with legitimate secondary pitches are hard to come by. *Baseball America* considered Putnam the 50th-best prospect in the draft, a slot valued by MLB at nearly \$800,000, so the Indians may have found themselves a bargain here.

Photo: Carl Kline

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**JOSE OZORIA (SS, 6'1" 160)****Bats:** R **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 17.2*Dominican Republic, \$575,000 est. bonus*

*Baseball America* reports that Jose Ozoria is a smooth-fielding shortstop with soft hands and quick lateral movement.

Mirabelli concurred: "He's a plus athlete, a plus runner, and he has the defensive skills to stay at shortstop." The Indians are also high on Ozoria's bat-to-ball skills. "He's not a slap hitter. He's more of a doubles, gap-to-gap guy," said Mirabelli, "He's got a way to go physically, but outfielders can't cheat in on him."

Ozoria's homeland is now heavily scouted territory, and it may not be quite the gold mine of baseball talent it once was. The only other Dominican picked up by the Tribe in 2008 was 18-year-old lefthander Harold Guerrero, who signed in January and debuted with the Indians' Dominican Summer League team. The remainder of the club's international free agents come from northern South America or the Pacific Rim. "We are not partial to any one country," noted Mirabelli. "That being said, history tells us that we must effectively allocate our resources in the most productive regions."

**CHEN-CHANG LEE (RHP, 5'11" 175)****Bats:** R **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 22.7*Taipei Physical Education College**Taiwan, \$400,000 est. bonus*

Lee reportedly signed with the Indians for third-round money, turning down a far more lucrative offer from a Japanese team in the process. Such is the allure of Major League

Baseball. "We are very familiar with Chen-Chang, as we have scouted him since he was a 16-year-old," said Mirabelli.

Lee attended Taipei Physical Education College, a municipal school which counts Yankees starter Chien-Ming Wang among its alumni. Much of his experience, however, is at the international level. He had a number of fine outings for the Taiwanese national team in the 2006 and 2008 World University Baseball Championships, the 2006 Asian Games and Intercontinental Cup, and the 2008 Olympics. Lee's Olympic performance was highlighted by a three-hit, one-run gem against Cuba, and he was one of just three amateurs on Taiwan's 2008 squad. Lee has also logged some North American innings—44.2 of them, in the 2007 Alaskan Summer League, in which he struck out 27 and surrendered 13 runs over seven starts.

Lee's repertoire consists of a few different fastballs, including a sinker and a splitter; his breaking pitch is a slider. A sidearmer, he reaches the low 90s on the radar gun with good movement on all his pitches. Though he's worked primarily as a starter, the Indians envision Lee coming out of the bullpen.

**ROLANDO PETIT (C, 6'2" 205)****Bats:** S **Throws:** R **Age for 2009:** 19.3*Caracas, Venezuela, \$300,000 est. bonus*

Mirabelli explains that there are some challenges with signing a Latin American catcher at 18 as opposed to 16, when the learning curve for the position would be less steep. "He has a long way to go defensively," Mirabelli said. "These kids don't get structured leagues, so in terms of his sense of managing the game and setting up hitters, he's a little behind the eight ball."

But Petit's size and strength are encouraging. "He's a physical kid, very strong," noted Mirabelli. "He has more power from the right side, but a better swing from the left." Put it all together, and the Indians think Petit has everyday-player potential. Petit made his professional debut last summer with the Indians' Dominican Summer League team. **MSP**

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Tyler Chirdon is completing his final year at the University of Toledo College of Law. A native of Olmsted Falls, Ohio, he's been watching Indians games his whole life, and his "I Was There" banner from Municipal Stadium is one of his proudest possessions.



*Chen-Chang Lee started for Taiwan in the Olympics.*

# INDIANS 5-YEAR DEPTH CHART

POS.	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1B-DH	Travis Hafner				CLUB OPTION
	Ryan Garko				
	Michael Aubrey				
	Jordan Brown				
SS-2B	Jamey Carroll				
	Jhonny Peralta		CLUB OPTION		
	Josh Barfield				
	Asdrubal Cabrera				
	Luis Valbuena				
	Josh Rodriguez				
C-3B	Mark DeRosa				
	Victor Martinez	CLUB OPTION			
	Kelly Shoppach				
	Andy Marte				
	Chris Gimenez				
	Wyatt Toregas				
	Wes Hodges				
	Carlos Santana				
OF	Dave Dellucci				
	Grady Sizemore			CLUB OPTION	
	Shin-Soo Choo				
	Ben Francisco				
	Matt LaPorta				
	Trevor Crowe				
	Michael Brantley				
SP	Cliff Lee	CLUB OPTION			
	Jake Westbrook				
	Fausto Carmona			CLUB OPTION	CLUB OPTION
	Anthony Reyes				
	Jeremy Sowers				
	Aaron Laffey				
	Zach Jackson				
	Scott Lewis				
	David Huff				
	Hector Rondon				
	Bryce Stowell				
	Kelvin De La Cruz				
	Jeanmar Gomez				
T.J. House					
Trey Haley					
RP	Rafael Betancourt	CLUB OPTION			
	Masahide Kobayashi	CLUB OPTION			
	Kerry Wood		VESTING OPTION		
	Rafael Perez				
	Joe Smith				
	Jensen Lewis				
	Ed Mujica				
	John Meloan				
	Rich Rundles				
	Adam Miller				
KEY	PROJECTED ARRIVAL	PRE-ARBITRATION YEARS	ARBITRATION YEARS OR MULTI-YEAR CONTRACT	LAST YEAR OF CLUB CONTROL	