

Since asking the question about expanding the reserve/draft squad I've also been making some notes and getting feedback on other tweaks to Gameplan Baseball I can make to improve the game, so a fairly lengthy list of possible changes follows.

Please be clear that none of these are definite, some might even contradict others, but they're all things I'd like feedback on.

### Background Notes

First of all, I think it's important to re-emphasise that it's important not to lose the flavour of the game. Gameplan Baseball is about the Major League aspect of a Baseball Organisation, mixing the decisions of a General Manager and Manager. I don't propose expanding it to cover the minor leagues, or the 40 man roster – that should be a different game (which I've love to write, but I need a spare year, and rather more players to make it viable).

Someone made the good point that the game has to be simple enough that you can write your turn in half an hour if necessary and be confident you haven't totally messed up the turn, but that you can also spend much longer, knowing that's useful too if required. The game does currently manage that balance, and we don't want to lose that.

It's also important to remember there are some restrictions on what the system can handle. Gameplan Baseball is run on a pre-Windows system (i.e. pretty old) and therefore has memory limitations. Rewriting it for Windows and the modern day requires that spare year, and at the moment that's not practical (much as I wish it was!).

### Things to Fix/Clarify

**Saves** – it's pretty obscure, but in the Major Leagues if the pitcher who finishes a game (which his team wins) pitches at least three innings he's awarded a saved, regardless of the score when he came in. This can be added to Gameplan Baseball.

**Holdouts** – this is actually a rules clarification – you can't have a player holdout in week 18 (because there's no wages the following turn for the team to save).

**Trades** – another rules clarification – a player can be LISTed in consecutive weeks. I'll also see if I can expand some of the information you ask for in a trade (specific positions, experienced players etc).

### Things I Can't/Won't Change

There are various suggestions I've had which I've already rejected (sorry guys). Amongst these (and the reasons) are:-

- **Full Season Assignments** - Anything that locks a player into a certain squad for a full season. It's been suggested that managers could designate a rookie on the draft squad for the whole season, but this only offers scope for making a mess. A good decision made in week 1 might not seem so good in week 10, so you need to have the flexibility to change your mind.
- **Multiple Free Agent Bids** – this is simply a practicality issue. Go and read the free agent rules, what you can bid, what compensation is factored in and so forth. That's pretty complex just to cope with one bid per team, but multiple bids would get far too complex, and with too much scope for people making a mess (the real solution is to get the draft right, so you've much more scope in the off-season to genuinely retool your roster).
- **Draft Squad Culls** – like it or not, the draft squad slots have to be freed up at the end of the regular season, because they have to be available for the incoming draftees from the next draft. It's a software issue as much as anything, but there's no way around it – there's only limited memory space for storing players. Yes, you'd like to be able to see what they can do during preseason, but you have to get that evidence on the basis of their performance as soon as they're drafted.

## Possible Changes and Improvements

*Deep breathe time, as a long list follows. Please remember I'm not proposing all of these changes come in at once – I don't want to risk significantly changing the balance of the game, so these might well come in gradually, so we can monitor how they work. Some of them might well not come in at all!*

**The Draft** – I think definitely needs some attention. The first round is useful, you'll get a player who can start playing immediately if you choose, and will develop into a decent player if looked after properly. The second round is a bit more of a stretch, depending on position and development, and the third round is usually a waste of time, simply generating losing points.

There are various possible solutions. One would be to split it into two, have a "Rule 4 Draft" (which is the draft in its current form, drafting amateur players) of two rounds, and a Rule 5 Draft (where teams in real life can actually take players from other teams if they aren't on their 40 man roster). The rule 5 draft basically yields "low level" major league players, probably no better than "role players". But they do offer the scope to "plug a hole".

Personally speaking, I'd rather effectively combine the two of them. Still have one three round draft, but maybe half to a third of the players on the list would be level 7 or 8s, but with potential in the 0 to 9 range (and varying levels of professional experience). You'd then have a choice to make of building by selecting veterans (for instant results) or rookies (through development), which is effectively how teams build in real-life, albeit via a lot of trading as well.

Other solutions would be to truncate the draft, or simply make it deeper, so that the worst players available are level 6, rather than 4 or 5.

It's worth noting that our draft isn't really a realistic simulation of real-life. In the Major Leagues they'll anticipate a draftee taking 2-7 seasons to develop to a level where he can play in the Majors, we're really want them there within a season (or two). Effectively it's like we're having a draft of the best AAA players, so it's a bit of a compromise.

Whatever we do, I think it's important that we have a draft where each team gets to add three valuable players, and therefore has the opportunity to significantly change the balance of their roster.

**Reserve/Draft Squad** – the overall reserve/draft squad (the only difference at present is you're forced to clear the Draft Squad prior to the draft) to be expanded to allow more scope for developing players on the roster. I know one spot can be added easily, but if I can expand it by a couple more I could do so (though there may be significant software/memory barriers that would restrict that). Probably we'd start with adding the one spot and see how that works.

Note that it doesn't matter if you have to move Draft Squad players to the Reserve Squad to develop, except that they occupy a spot. Any expansion would therefore be to the Reserve Squad.

If the squad is expanded, then possibly teams' incomes would need to increase slightly to preserve the overall balance (but not by much, and maybe not at all!).

**Player Development** – Should players, particularly the high potential ones be able to develop more quickly than they currently do? If so, should we expand the options available for development.

**Potential Conversion** – one easy change to make would be that any player with 10 or more potential loses/converts more of it per season. For example instead of losing 1 point of potential flat, he could convert a second (and even third) point (randomly), and if he converts more than 1, he'll gain additional skills (though not proportionately).

That seems realistic to me, the raw but potential laden pitcher rapidly matures into a superstar (did anyone mention David Price). Such players won't develop better, but they will develop quicker, and you'll have a much more interesting gamble to take on those 12+ potential rookies!

**Minor League System (MINORS)** – teams could have a level (as with Trainers) which denotes the quality of their Minor League System and Instruction. The higher your MINORS, the better your younger players (not all players!) improve (but of course, at the cost of building it up) – effectively adding a bonus to their Total Form in that calculation. MINORS would depreciate each season.

This is slightly clunky – one could argue that the teams with the best minor league systems actually draft the best prospects, but there’s no doubt that some clubs (Twins, Marlins and Rays for example in recent seasons) are better at producing players from their own farm system. Whether that’s because of investment in younger players, who how they bring them through, it can’t be doubted they put resources in, and get results at the other end.

**Winter Ball** – another common feature of player development is that young players get to spend their winters in the Arizona Fall League, or Venezuela etc. We could add a WINTERBALL action that works much the same as ADDFORM, but simply tacking some bonus form onto a player’s total form at the end of a season. There would either be an LP cost, or possibly such players start the next season on an elevated Fatigue Level (because they’ve missed the winter’s rest).

**Player Abilities** – at present when players are created there’s no bias towards a particular ability, and the same applies as they gain and lose abilities as they develop/decline. That’s something I could tweak – the most obvious one would be that younger players tend to have better speed than power, and tend not to develop speed too much (though they can) whereas in the Majors it’s not uncommon for a player to develop power in their first few seasons.

We wouldn’t be removing coaching options or anything like that, and all of it would remain hidden to you guys, but we could tweak it so that it’s a bit more realistic in those areas.

**Free Agents (Old Teams)** – when I introduced Free Agents, having them all have an “Old Team” seemed logical. Nowadays it isn’t. Major League teams sign players from Japan (no MLB team got compensation for Daisuke Matsuzaka, the Seibu Lions did) and all over Central America.

When the free agent list generates new free agents, should such players be “old team-less”, so no-one gets compensation (or a head-start on signing them)?

**Free Agents (Posting Fees)** – part II to the Daisuke Matsuzaka concept, occasionally the free agent list should see a “superstar” appear from nowhere, mirroring what happens when players move to the Major Leagues from elsewhere?

**Free Agents and Scouting** – different teams undoubtedly make different investments in scouting systems, and recruiting players outside the draft. I don’t think we should ever have teams able to have access free agents without others competing for them (i.e. they aren’t free agents at all) but we could have a system whereby those who wish to place more emphasis on free agency get a discount in signing free agents.

Teams could have a SCOUTING level (improved and declining in the usual way) but when you sign a free agent, your SCOUTING level is refunded from the cost (so the teams with better scouting systems get free agents cheaper).

**September Call-ups** – in the Major Leagues once teams hit the final month of the season the roster expands from 25 to cover the full 40 man roster, explicitly to allow those out of the playoff hunt to look at the players of next season, and see how they’re developing.

We could mirror this by allowing you to select players from the reserve and draft squads in weeks 16, 17 and 18 (just the same as for preseason games) and see what they can do.

**Reserve Squad** – at present if you send a player to the reserve squad, he gains form because he’s assumed to be playing at AAA level and padding his stats and confidence against lesser players.

However, at present it also sees his fatigue drop. Realistically this fatigue drop ought to be deleted – if you want to rest him, give him time off on the Active squad by not selecting him/platooning etc. If you send him to the minors, his fatigue ought to remain unchanged.

**Draft Squad Wages** – is there a case for reduced wages on the Draft Squad (though that would mean 1 LP for most anyway)? I’m definitely against having no wages (there ought to be a decision for you to make – spend LPs on keeping players on it for the season, gaining form, or clear them early and spend LPs elsewhere) but is there a case for reduced wages?

**Form and Changing Team** – at present when a player changes team (via a trade or free agency) his form (and season form) remain unchanged. Which doesn’t exactly encourage the “fresh start” mentality.

Given that form is all psychological, should a players' form be halved if he changes teams (this wouldn't apply to a free agent resigning for his most recent team), and should it apply only to negative form, (human nature being what it is, you forget bad things, but take the good things with you).

**Scouting** – should form be shown when you scout a player?

**Batting Changes** – I'm fairly sure I could extend the batting changes option to work for pitchers as well, so you could swap injured pitchers in and out of the pitching rotation or bullpen as required during the turn. I don't think this could be used to swap players between the active and reserve squads mid-turn, but I could check.

**Injuries** – should the scope of injuries be varied. At present (partly in a sop to try and prevent sulks from managers!) every team gets one injury each turn, although trainers significantly affect the potential severity. Has the time come that there should be a chance (trainer driven) of no injuries, and maybe even have two injuries (one to a position player, one to a pitcher) per turn? There is some need to limit how many players can be nobbled overall, but perhaps this could be opened up a bit more.

**Pitchers and Hits** – At present sometimes a pitcher's MAXHITS can be a bit inflexible. You might want to leave him in a game in the first inning but not in the fifth. We could introduce a MINBATS option – until he's pitched to MINBATS hitters then he'll only be pulled if he's allowed say MAXHITS x 2 (or is it MAXHITS x 1.5, rounded up), but once he's pitched MINBATS then it's MAXHITS.

It might mean you'll be juggling MAXHITS a touch, but it'd mean you could set it to 3, and in the first inning you'd only yank a starter if he's allowed six men on base, but once it gets to later innings (i.e. he's pitched to the "minimum") then the hook is quicker, and three would get the job done.

**Defensive Substitutions** – we could introduce these, to work almost exactly the same as pinch hitting (with innings and lead parameters, and four slots), but rather than applying when you're behind, it applies when you're ahead, and rather than removing players struggling to hit, it brings in a better fielding backup (presumably) regardless of the starter's performance. It could also be used to get at-bats for bench players when you're effectively cruising.

**Long Relief** – I could extend the option to allow the long reliever to come in after the fourth inning if you wish (I can't really imagine why you'd want to do this, but some people say they want it, and it doesn't offer huge scope for making a mess, so why not increase the flexibility for managers).

*Comments on all of these options (and any others) are more than welcome. I'm not going to rush into them, and as I say will probably make sure any chances are filtered in slowly, but I'd like feedback on what you think of the various aspects.*

*Danny McConnell (December 2008)*