



TEAM ONTARIO BASEBALL

Dealing With Pro Scouts

TYPES OF SCOUTS

Many Team Ontario players will be approached by professional scouts at some point to complete a player information card and it's important to remember to treat them with the same respect and courtesy they show you. There are three types of scouts that you will typically initially meet:

1. One is the part time gentleman who acts as a referring scout, in the business they are often referred to as "bird dogs". A bird dog is not a derisive title but more a crude description of their role in the larger scheme. A bird dog or referring scout typically has the responsibility of having you complete an information card and passing it on to their area supervisor. These are usually volunteer positions that may offer some re-imbusement of expenses for the costs they incur. These gentlemen usually perform this role out of a deep love for the game and the desire to help young players. They are often the first contact a player has with major league baseball. These gentlemen have very little input in who or when a player may get drafted. They are simply too far removed from where those decisions get made. These individuals have little or no contact with their Major League team's scouting department.
2. Another type of scout you may have initial contact with is an actual paid employee of one of the thirty major league teams. They could be part time or full time but this is a job for them. One-way to tell the whether you are dealing with a team employee is to do some research; these individuals are typically listed in the teams' media guide, the Baseball America Almanac and other directories. They are closer to the decision making process but most are not in a strong influential position to impact team decisions of this magnitude. These gentlemen may invite you to an open tryout camp or a workout often with their supervisor to take a closer look at your abilities. You should try to attend as many of these as you can.
3. Another type of scout is a representative of the Major League Scouting Bureau (MLSB). This is the central scouting operation for baseball and is a part of the Commissioner's Office. In Canada, there are about 12-15 part time "paid" scouts and one full time supervisor. The role of the bureau is to provide information to each of the thirty major league teams to augment their own scouting system. Professional scouts have a large territory they are responsible for and the bureau can fill in some of the gaps in a teams' coverage. Bureau scouts will make team reports and individual player reports that grade a prospect's baseball tools. Player reports are sent to each of the thirty teams who may decide to add it to their information on a player or if it is their first report on that player they may advise one of their own scouts to take a look at that prospect and file their own report. A bureau scout may be more on your side, he works for all 30 teams and if he's talking to you he must see something, however, since he works for MLB and believes the best baseball training available is in the minor leagues (a difficult point to dispute) he may encourage you to sign, rather than attending school.

The MLSB will hold open tryout camps every summer usually in August and invitational camps each May before the draft. These are outstanding opportunities to display your skills and to be seen and get into the system.

USING COURTESY AND COMMON SENSE

Your initial contact may come through your coach or directly to you often asking you to fill out a Player Information Card. Do it as often as it is requested, each scout even within the same organization maintains their own records on players that interest them. A scout may also invite you to attend a tryout camp, again go to as many as you can but not to the point of exhaustion. You are better off performing when you are best able to display your skills rather than attending when you are physically exhausted, sore, tired or injured. You will do yourself more harm than good. As the draft approaches, pitchers especially may find they can't attend all the private workouts they are invited to, be sure whenever you pitch you are fresh, rested and healthy enough to throw without injuring yourself. A Bureau Camp will allow many teams to see you at one time. If you have the scout's email or phone number, let him know that regrettably you will be unable to attend. This will show intelligence, courtesy and responsibility. It may also allow the scout to invite another player if desired and also to be able to tell the scouts who came to see you that you were responsible. Be sure to tell the scout your upcoming schedule so they can come to see you play.

As the draft gets closer, Bureau or team scouts may request a home visit with you and your parent(s). Do it whenever you are asked. Draft picks are very valuable assets to the teams that hold them. Signability is a vital criterion scouts use to determine if and in what round a player may be drafted. Keep in mind that as with most things in life, honesty is the best policy. If you have truly decided that you are going to College even if you were to be drafted in the top 3 rounds and be in a position for a substantial signing bonus, tell the scout this truth. If you are truly undecided, tell that to the scout. Remember that scout's job may depend on providing the right information to his team about a player's signability that is what they get paid to do-to provide accurate information.

If you have a different story for each scout that will damage your reputation and hurt you. Scouts talk to each other all the time, although they are competitors, many of them have become friends and besides there are very few secrets in today's game. Baseball is a small close community and there are many horror stories concerning mistakes players or their families have made in dealing with scouts. Such as overplaying your hand, when numerous scouts are telling an 18 year-old young man about the future he could have in Major League baseball, it is hard sometimes to maintain one's perspective. Don't overvalue your worth. Ontario is only one of many areas where teams find players. In a small pond like Ontario you may be the biggest fish, but there are many other ponds available for teams to go fishing for prospects.

If you want to see how you stack up to your competition go to a Minor League game on the Class A or AA level. This is where you want to get, take an honest look at what a player who plays the same position as you play, on that level looks like. It may help you to maintain some humility in these very heady times. It may also help to show you that with some very hard work you may be able to succeed on that level and beyond.



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When you are asked, "how much will it take for you to sign a professional contract"? Tell the scout you have no idea of what is appropriate, but you want fair money for the round you are drafted in. Ask the scout what range of rounds he thinks you may be drafted. It will usually be in a range of rounds i.e. rounds 8-12 or rounds 15-20. Remember no one knows exactly when a player will be drafted except possibly the team with the first overall pick, everyone else is continually adjusting his wish list.

It is important to keep in mind that only the top few rounds of draft picks get sizeable bonus money. All minor league starting salaries are the same until you get to the higher levels where two-way contracts come into play. If you know you want a professional baseball career and you would sign for the proverbial cup of coffee, you better make sure you have a scholarship offer or two or you will have absolutely no leverage in your negotiations with the club that drafts you. They will know you have no plausible alternate option and they will know if you really want to play you may very well sign for that cup of coffee. A scholarship offer also gives you options if you are not drafted at all or you are not drafted in a round that will make financial sense to you. Are you ready to go to any organization? With the draft you cannot choose where you want to play.

Again, don't underplay your hand either, it's one thing to say that you would seriously consider a reasonable offer if you will. Signability is important to every team, but you don't want to appear over anxious either. Many players will say they want "fair money for the round they are drafted in". You gain nothing but animosity by telling a team you will sign for X if you know in your heart you won't.

Each of you is as unique as a snowflake so these suggestions are just general guidelines.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Signing a Letter of Intent with a school will not, REPEAT NOT hurt your chances of being drafted. In fact NOT SIGNING A LETTER can hurt your leverage dramatically when negotiating with a pro team. Be wary of a scout who tells you otherwise, he is trying to limit your options.

Most scouts are very honourable men; some however may start a disinformation campaign to steer other teams away from a particular player they like, hoping to draft that player in a later round. They do this by saying "I heard he wants too much money" or "I hope he stays out of trouble between now and the draft". This is a reminder that this is a business and ambitious people just like in the real world bend some rules at times, to get ahead. Scouts you trust like Bureau Scouts can tell you if they have heard any of these stories.

Parents, if you attend a camp or showcase with your son, don't sit in behind home plate with the scouts. Some have been known to make self-serving statements that are intended to diminish the value of your son or throw other scouts less familiar with your son off the scent.

Did you know you could sign two Letters of Intent, one with a 4-year school and another with a Junior College? Keep your options open.

A good strategy many players employ is to make a decision on a school in the fall, a decision you have control over and keep your mind free in the spring to focus on graduating from school and the draft, over which you have no control.

This is a very exciting time for a young man and his family, try to keep as calm and levelheaded as possible. It will help you enjoy this once in a lifetime process.