



Ballpark Homerun

Universal Player Coding System (UPCS)

Version 2.3

Introduction

The Universal Player Coding System is a shorthand notation I developed in 1995 to classify each player on my draft day cheat sheets. It tracks the type of player (prospect / veteran) the immediate role of the player (starter / minor leagues) and the players' eventual ceiling. Players are then classified by the position they will play for their career when possible.

Player Classification

B (Blue Chip Prospect) – To be a Blue Chip Prospect a player must meet one the following conditions:

1. The player must have nearly a full season of card value and be projected to be a regular the next year; or
2. The player must have a usable card in a supporting role and be projected to be a solid regular; or
3. The player must be projected to be an elite player or better.

P (Prospect) – A prospect is a young player with some future card value. The term *young* is dependent upon the position played. Young with respect to a left fielder would mean 25 or younger. Young for a catcher could be as old as 27. The term *future card value* means that the player is likely to have a printed card in the future.

V (Veteran) – A veteran is a player too old to be a prospect but has a usable card and some prospect of a Major League career.

R (Roller) – A roller is a veteran player who may not have any immediate card value, but still wants to play. As he has had some success in the past, there is a reasonable chance that a Major League team may give him some playing time and therefore he could have some future card value. A player like this may be worthy of a late round draft pick.

G (Goon) – This player has an amazing card, but with limited usage. He makes an ideal pinch hitter especially in the playoffs. He may or may not have any future value. Great Goon cards of the past include Rudy Pemberton (BOS) and Craig Wilson (CHA).

X (No Value) – This player has no card value now nor prospects for a card in the future. He is not worthy of a roster spot unless you need at-bats or innings in an emergency capacity.



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Player Value

Players are graded upon what they are going to do next year and what their ceiling will be over the course of their career.

| Next Year | Career |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| A – Hall of Famer | A – Hall of Famer |
| 9 – Elite | 9 – Elite |
| 8 – Solid Regular | 8 – Solid Regular |
| 7 – Average Regular | 7 – Average Regular |
| 6 – Platoon Player | 6 – Platoon Player |
| 5 – Reserve Player | 5 – Reserve Player |
| 4 – Quadruple-A Player | 4 – Quadruple-A Player |
| 3 – Minor League Regular | 3 – Minor League Regular |
| 2 – Minor League Reserve | 2 – Minor League Reserve |
| 1 – Organizational Player | 1 – Organizational Player |
| I – Injured | I – Injured |
| J – Foreign Service | J – Foreign Service |
| R – Retired | R – Retired |

There are six ratings that would require a player be on the Major League roster. A reserve player is a player who does not have a regular position. Backup catchers, utility players and defensive replacements are Reserve players. If the player has a set position but he is sharing the job, he is a platoon player. If the player is the sole player in his position, he is an average regular. A solid regular is someone who not only is the sole player in a position but he is also likely to have the position into the future. If the player is in the top ten percent for his position, he is rated an Elite player. I've never awarded a player the grade of Hall of Famer but I do have a grade for it if it ever happens.

For relievers if the player is bouncing between the Major Leagues and Triple-A or is a specialist like a LOOGY, I grade them a reserve player. A mop-up reliever is classified as a Platoon player. Setup and closers are usually rated Solid Regular or higher.

There are three additional grades, Injured, Foreign Service and Retired. A player is considered injured if they are expected to miss most of the season. The other grades of this type are self explanatory.



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Position

In some cases a player makes the Major League roster based upon a team's needs not how the team intends to use him in the future. For example a team might bring up a starting pitcher prospect but use him out of the bullpen to get experience like **David Price**. **Asbur Cabrera** has played second base for the Cleveland Indians, although he is considered a future shortstop.

When I rank players, I wanted to rank them by the position they will play for their career, not the position they happened to play when they received their first card. The position sometimes is hard to nail down. While the Indians see Cabrera as a future shortstop, he will play second until **Jhonny Peralta** moves to third or becomes a free agent. As Peralta was young and it looked like Cabrera would play second for a number of years, I classified him as a second baseman when he first came up.

Most positions are self explanatory. The classic UO player is professional hitter **Matt Stairs**.

| |
|--------------------------------------|
| CA – Catcher |
| 1B – First Base |
| 2B – Second Base |
| 3B – Third Base |
| SS – Shortstop |
| OF – Corner Outfielder |
| CF – Centerfielder |
| UI – Utility Infielder |
| UO – Utility Outfielder / First Base |
| DH – Designated Hitter |
| SP – Starting Pitcher |
| RP – Relief Pitcher |
| XP – Spot Starter |
| CP – Closer |



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Examples

B39-CA Matt Wieters

At the time this was written, Matt Wieters is expected to be sent down to Triple-A for at least the first couple of months. He is classified a Blue Chip prospect because his Career Value is graded as an Elite player.

G44-1B Oscar Salazar

Oscar Salazar has no trouble hitting Triple-A pitching but teams know he would be exposed if he played everyday. His card is outstanding, but can only be used for 81 at-bats. He is the classic Quadruple-A player and it is not likely to chance.

B79-SP David Price

In this case, Price was used as a reliever during the regular season. He is a Blue Chip prospect because he is expected to be a star. He still needs some experience, so his next card is likely to be just average. He is classified as a starting pitcher because that is the role he is to be used even if his card is best used as a reliever.

Final Words

The challenge for any Strat-O-Matic general manager is to balance the current and future values of a player. This can be seen by looking at who is drafted in the first round. Some first-round picks are selected because they can help a team immediately. There may be better long-term choices available to draft. Sometimes a first-round pick is a player has no card value but is likely to be a future All-Star. In fact, a prospect may receive a card early in their career because they were a September call-up but he is not expected to break into the lineup for a long time.

The classification of Blue Chip Prospect reflects the difference between long term and short term thinking. Both the average player with a good card and the good prospect with no card value can be Blue Chip Prospects.