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Hudson's MLB dream a reality

Orioles select Illini outfielder with 116th overall pick

BY STEVE CONTORNO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Kyle Hudson was bored. And hungry. Who cares that he was waiting to find out if a boyhood dream would become reality? After laboring through the first round of the MLB first-year player draft and (as expected) not hearing his name called, Hudson was tired of waiting and headed to Buffalo Wild Wings with his friends.

"It was a lot tougher than I thought it was going to be," Hudson said about watching the draft.

But when he was picked — sooner rather than later — Hudson, at his home in Mattoon, Ill., among family and friends, said it was a little hard to believe.

"I just kind of sat there for a second," he said.

With the fourth pick in the fourth round of Thursday's draft, the Baltimore Orioles selected the Illini centerfielder 116th overall and 71 spots ahead of Hudson's rank on Baseball America's list of the top 200 prospects in the draft. Hudson said Baltimore was one of the teams that expressed heavy interest in him throughout the season and leading up to the draft, and from Hudson's side, he sees plenty of upside to being an Oriole.

"There's not too many outfielders in their system so that puts me in a good situation," Hudson said. "Judging from the picks the Orioles made it seems like they need outfielders."

With a year of eligibility remaining, Hudson was hesitant to fully commit to leaving Illinois. However, he said it was a "very good situation" and he was happy with how the day's events played out, even discussing possible signing bonuses and negotiating a contract.

Hudson has been in sustained contact with Orioles personnel since he was a senior in high school when a then-Florida Marlins scout thought he could make the jump to the pros. However, Hudson chose to play college baseball, a decision he doesn't



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SPORTS INFORMATION
Kyle Hudson is hugged by his mother, Gayle Patrem, after being selected by the Baltimore Orioles in the fourth round of the MLB draft Thursday.

"(College baseball) has had a huge impact on my career. Coming out of high school I was a lot more immature as a person and as a player. I think for a high school player it's a lot tougher to deal with life when you come out at that age. When you're in college you're already living on your own."

KYLE HUDSON,

Illinois baseball player, Baltimore Orioles draft pick

regret.

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own."

Next, Hudson must ponder a significantly more difficult decision. Despite having been selected in the draft, he can still choose whether or not to play on the football team again in the upcoming season. Hudson has played both

sports since his freshman season, leading the team in receiving yards in 2005 and 2006. However, if Hudson were to play next year he would most likely see a significant decrease in playing time due to the progression of Arrelious Benn and Jeff Cumberland, and a recent influx of recruits at the same position.

Hudson said he is far from ready to make that decision yet, saying he would need to talk it over with his family before coming to a definite answer. But Hudson admitted he's better suited physically to be a baseball player and that his time away from football this spring helped his baseball career. In 2006 and 2007, Hudson left baseball midseason to join football during the spring workouts. That was not the case in 2008 which led to a significant increase in Hudson's numbers.

"It was tough on me the first two years to miss a whole month of games. To be able to play all the way through a season and be there with the team is something I struggled with," he said. "Before I would come back and my swing hadn't been the same."

The extra time with the team padded Hudson's statistics. As the leadoff hitter, Hudson posted 40 stolen bases, good enough for fifth in the nation, and a team-leading 61 runs. Hudson's speed, he said, was the most impressive asset to scouts — Baseball America rated Hudson the fastest collegiate baseball player in the draft — and his ability to consistently make contact and get on base nearly every other at bat (.498 OBP) made him a sought-after prospect, which is why the Orioles nabbed him earlier than expected in the fourth round.

The transition to the next level is an adjustment Hudson says he's ready for. At the very least, Hudson already has a black-and-orange Orioles hat in his collection.

"I might have to go upstairs and put it on and wear it proudly."

Hudson's career numbers

With his selection in the fourth round of MLB first-year player draft most likely comes the end of Kyle Hudson's time in an Illinois uniform. Throughout his career, Hudson has put up some pretty gaudy numbers, listed below.

Career overall

Yr.	Avg.	G-GS	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	K	OBP	SB-A
'06	.375	35-34	112	19	42	3	0	0	16	11	25	.437	10-14
'07	.351	53-53	171	35	60	5	4	0	28	23	21	.428	16-19
'08	.398	53-52	191	61	76	11	1	1	26	39	34	.498	40-49
Total	.376	141-139	474	115	178	19	5	1	70	73	80	.459	66-82

Career in Big Ten play

'06	.370	19-18	54	8	20	2	0	0	7	4	12	.424	4-6
'07	.301	30-30	93	18	28	1	3	0	11	11	11	.375	7-9
'08	.407	30-30	108	40	44	9	1	1	10	25	16	.522	25-31
Total	.361	79-78	255	66	92	12	4	1	28	40	39	.451	36-46

at that age. When you're in college you're already living on your