

March 19, 2014

Current as of Balance Patch - 6.80

Written by: [tsunami](#)

## How Drafting Works

**W**hen I first started watching competitive Dota, I just assumed that Tobi and LD and other casters possessed some sort of telepathic link to team captains. It blew my mind how accurately they would be able to predict picks with seemingly zero outside information. After a couple of months, and seeing how many first bloods were missed, it became obvious that casters were no more in tune with the players than any other spectator. The more games I watched, the clearer it became to me that drafting in Captain's Mode all comes down to recognizing patterns.

Yes, it feels pretentious to say, but it's true that drafting in Dota is a lot like playing chess. Drafters need to always be thinking multiple picks in advance. They need to be familiar with how the opponent likes to play. They need to make their moves subtle, so they don't give strategies away. They need to have contingency plans for a vast number of different situations. And of course, they need to be able to recognize and capitalize on their opponents' mistakes.

But that's all stuff that I don't worry about. When I play Captain's Mode, I sit back and enjoy the fact that I'll be able to eat my pre-match sandwich before it gets cold.

But I'm here to educate, so here's a general guide to how Captain's Mode drafting *typically* works.

## The Structure

As of 6.75, the picking/banning structure is as follows:



*One team does stuff, the other team does other stuff.*

You've probably seen this screen a million times (as long as some gaudy overlay isn't covering it), but let's break down each section.

### The First Ban Phase

The first four stages of the picking phase are a succession of alternating bans from each team. These are what I like to call the **reflex bans**. Does your team historically not know how to deal with Lycan? Ban him. Did the enemy Mirana completely destroy you last game? Ban her. Do you find Slark ridiculously OP and you hate having to play against him? Ban him. **This is the part where you just straight up kick out heroes that you don't want to play against.**

At this point in the draft, both teams are keeping it cool. **If a team has a strategy in mind, now is not the time to show it.** For the most part, captains won't stray out of banning the top tier heroes in the pool as of a balance patch in this phase.

### The First Pick Phase

Things are still somewhat slow-paced here. **The important thing to note is that one team gets first pick, but the second team gets two consecutive picks.** First pick is obviously great for being able to scoop up the toppest tier hero who slipped through four bans. And being able to get two back-to-back picks is great for acquiring quick synergies.

I always wondered why the 'two pick' team always makes their two picks super fast in this phase. Really, the only reason is that they want to give the enemy team less time to react.

Letting the opposing team stare at your lone Crystal Maiden's face with an empty portrait beside her is just awarding free bonus time for them to figure out what you're up to and how to stop you.

## *The Second Ban Phase*

This is arguably the most important phase in the draft. With two picks on the board from each team, certain strategies can start crystallizing. **Now that you're back to banning, the thing drafters will be trying to determine is, "What are the lanes?"**

It seems crazy to be able to start theorycrafting a whole team's worth of lanes based on just two picks, but those two picks can tell a lot. Did Visage get picked up? They probably want to run a trilane. I should ban out strong trilane heroes in this phase. Did an offlaner and/or a carry get picked up? I should probably ban out strong supports or junglers that synergize well with them.

Though, that's just if you're trying to mess up the enemy's plans. **If you're cooking up your own strategy, this is the point at which you need to ensure that you won't get countered.** Do you want to run an early push lineup? Better ban out strong anti-pushers like Keeper of the Light. Running a four-protect-one strat? It'd be wise to ban out strong ganking heroes like Clockwerk or Nyx Assassin. It can even be as simple as banning a hero that hard counters another hero that you want to pick in the next phase.

The mark of a strong drafter is the ability to shut down enemy plans while keeping your own under wraps.

## *The Second Pick Phase*

Now it's time to see how well you out-drafted. Depending on how accurately the enemy captain predicted your plans, this is the point at which your strategy will have to start revealing itself.

There isn't really a cookie cutter dynamic at this phase since strategies can vary so wildly depending on the heroes left in the pool. **The goal is to be able to pick out critical heroes without letting the opponent counter you, or pick them before you.** Technically, that's really the whole tl;dr of drafting in general, but this is the phase where it all comes to fruition.

## *The Third Ban Phase*

You've seen the flop and turn; now it's time to cross the river. **The third ban phase is simultaneously the most easily predicted, yet varied, banning phase out of the whole draft.** It's obvious that this is the point at which captains will ban out the 'gaps' in their enemy team. This is where you ban out the 5 position support that the enemy is lacking, or the hard carry that'll counter your team.

Since the mid matchup can be so delicate, captains will often keep their chosen mid hero hidden until the very end of the draft. As a result, mid heroes will often get banned in this phase as well.

## *The Third Pick Phase*

Filling in the holes. As 80% of your team is now decided, this pick is all about rounding out the roster so that each role is fulfilled. **You'll frequently see five-position supports, mid heroes, or weird situational 'pocket' picks getting selected here.** Hard carries can also occasionally get picked during this phase, but recently it's become more popular to pick your carry earlier on, rather than risking having them banned or pre-counterered.

---

This was a very cursory and general explanation of how drafting in Dota works. It goes way deeper, I assure you. All the way to knowing what popular strategies certain teams run, or knowing the different kind of roles each hero can play, or even knowing what signature heroes a player may have been practicing with recently. For better or for worse, many games are won and lost on the pick screen. So next time you're watching a Captain's Mode/Draft game, try to see how accurate you can be with predicting the picks. Becoming a better player is as much becoming more mechanically skilled as it is understanding how every hero can be viable in a given situation.

---

*Images taken from Dota 2 and Valve's [Free to Play](#) documentary.*

*[Visit Team eHug for more articles!](#)*

*This document is exclusive content of Team eHug and should not be uploaded or reproduced without express consent of Team eHug.*