




FFU104: Basics of How to Draft

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Even if you are new to fantasy football, you have likely heard of this thing called “the draft.” It was the first, and is still the most popular, method of distributing players in fantasy football leagues. In order to have a fantasy football league, you need teams, and in order to have teams, you need players to make up the rosters. Therefore some means of determining which players go to which team to fill out which rosters is needed. That's the reason leagues hold drafts.

In a draft, each team takes turns selecting players, with each team getting the same number of turns, until enough players are taken to fill out every team's roster. It all sounds simple enough, but several things need to be determined before holding your standard fantasy football draft.

Time and Place

There's a time and place for everything, including fantasy football drafts. Figuring out exactly when and where that is, however, can be a frustrating task for commissioners. The best rule of thumb is to get a general feel from the owners in the league of which times work (e.g. nights during the week, weekend afternoons, etc.) and then just pick a date and go with it. Be sure to do so a few months in advance if possible to avoid as many schedule conflicts as you can.

Where to hold the draft requires some thought too. Homes or offices usually work pretty well, as long as there is ample elbow room for each owner to sit and have a working space on which to cross names off cheat sheets, flip through rankings and magazines, or set up their laptops. You also need to figure out if your draft setup is going to require some sort of podium for the commissioner and/or space for a team-by-team draft tracker to be displayed on the wall (more on that later). In other words, you're going to need a spacious area. Meeting rooms, basements, and garages can all work. Also keep in mind, though, that a wireless connection may be needed by some who are using an online draft tracking application or if the league is using an online management service into which the commissioner is inputting picks as they are made.

Having a place to serve food and drinks is also a critical matter to consider, which is one of the reasons why many leagues now opt to hold their draft at a bar or restaurant. Fantasy football has become so main-stream many establishments have rooms or sections that they set aside for drafts and some even offer beer and food discounts to leagues on draft day.

Online or Offline?

Back in the day before Al Gore invented the Internet, all the owners had to be present at the draft in order to make it work. Or if an owner couldn't be there because they moved or were out of town, they needed to assign a proxy to draft for them or try to do it by phone, often with disastrous results. Nowadays, however, online draft rooms such as the Mock Draft tool we have here at FFChamps, make it possible to hold drafts with people from all over the world. The point of this matter is that a decision needs to be made in advance of the draft if your league is going to allow some owners to draft remotely via some online web application, and if so, who is going to be in charge of making that happen. It often falls on the shoulders of the league commissioner, but whoever is responsible should test out the software ahead of time and make sure that wherever the draft is being held has online accessibility.

The Order

The next thing that needs to be determined is a draft order. In some leagues, the order is determined by the league standings from the year before, often times with the champion of the league picking last and the worst team in the league from the year before picking first. However, many leagues, new and old, like to have a drawing for the draft order. This can be done in a variety of ways, be it picking names from a hat or drawing cards.

Having an initial order is only half the battle, though. The question then becomes: will the order be maintained from one round to the next? In other words, will the draft order start with Team 1 and go through Team 12 (in a 12-team league) every round or will the order be reversed each round, 1-12, 12-1, 1-12, 12-1, and so on? This second method of drafting is often called a “serpentine” or “snake” draft, and it is both more popular and more equitable than a straightforward 1-12, 1-12 draft.

There are some leagues that get too carried away with the draft order and do wacky things like re-draw cards for re-ordering every round or two rounds or three rounds. Just know that doing so makes the draft inherently more unfair than it already is and has the potential of rewarding teams for good luck and penalizing teams for bad luck rather than rewarding preparation, knowledge, and skill.

Drafts in keeper and dynasty leagues are obviously a little different than drafts in normal re-draft leagues because some players are being held over from one year to the next. Make certain that all the draft day implications—usually the loss of certain draft picks—is spelled out in your rules and the draft order is adjusted accordingly.

Another thing that could affect the draft order is trading. In most leagues, trading draft picks is allowed. Make sure there is an understanding in advance by all owners of how these types of transactions are processed to avoid any misunderstandings and long interruptions during the draft itself.

Draft Day enjoyment

The most important things to remember about draft day are to have fun and have lots of alcohol available. Seriously, draft day should be an event. It should be exciting. If it's not, then why have a league? In order to make things more enjoyable it is recommended that the space in which you hold your draft not only have easy access to beer and bathrooms, but also have a large “draft board” that shows all the teams' picks in the order they were selected. Having a board like this prominently displayed not only makes it easy to follow along and know whose turn it is, but also helps owners avoid calling out the name of a player who has already been selected. It also enables owners to employ draft strategy more efficiently since they can see at a glance what the teams before and after them in the draft have done and still need. Draft boards such as this are sold by many fantasy football companies, but a big white board and someone with neat handwriting will do the job just as well.