




FFU203: Understanding League Rules

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The next step on your journey of Fantasy Football (FF) enlightenment is the most important of all. You won't be required to scale any mountains in search of "Zen Master Wisdom" to find the keys to successful FF mastery. That's because unless you're Michael Jackson, the answer is as obvious as the nose on your face and has been right in front of you the whole time. That answer is to simply understand your league rules.

League rules are the blue print to any FF success, and the absolute road map that you must follow if you wish to dominate the competition. Too many FF participants make the mistake of assuming that because they know the principles of FF that they do not need to read the fine print that often reveal the clues of competitive advantage. But even when you are in the process of selecting or creating a league, knowing the boundaries of the game is vital if you want to have a successful FF experience.

League Structure:

There are a few elements that are clearly outlined in league rules that need to be considered like league structure, league scoring and the league guidelines. The first and most vital is the league structure that will tip you off up front as to what strategy you need to employ and what type of research needs to be done in advance. Here are a few of the important structural options that will help you know how to build your team.

Head-to-Head or Points League – The most common types of league are the "Head-to-Head" where you play a game based against one opponent to achieve the best win/loss record over the course of the season, or a "Points League" where the goal is to score as many points as possible over the course of a season.

Redraft, Keeper or Dynasty Leagues – By and large the most common league structure is the Redraft league where you select a new roster at the beginning of each season. A Keeper league is where you keep anywhere from one to a starting line-up from your previous seasons team. In a Dynasty league, owners carry their entire roster from season to season.

In-Person Draft, On-line Draft or Automated Draft – There are several ways for you to acquire your original roster, the most common form of player selection is via some form of draft. Most draft orders in redraft leagues are in a serpentine order that allows the draft order to reverse every round so to evenly distribute the picks. In Keeper and Dynasty leagues draft position is normally pre set based on the previous season's results. Most local leagues will hold an in-person draft where the participants gather in one place, while leagues where participants are spread over an area will hold their draft online. An automated draft is where a computer selects your roster either based on submitted rankings or previous year's results.

Auction – Auction drafts are popular alternative to Live, Online or Automated drafts. Instead of taking turns to fill a roster, the auction allows participants to build their roster by bidding dollar amounts on each player. Based on a pre-established salary cap, owners nominate players for auction, with the player being assigned to the team that bids the most. Teams must build their team by winning players while not exceeding their overall salary cap.

IDP or Team D – IDP stands for Individual Defensive Players, and generally means points are scored by the individual Defensive Lineman (DL), Linebackers (LB), and Defensive Backs (DB)

Roster Size – The number of players per position can vary, and is important to determine in advance. Very basic leagues will allow you to start one or two players per position with a similar number on the bench. A very basic league starting line-up is 1 QB, 2 RB, 2 WR, 1 TE, 1K and 1 Team D. (If the league uses IDP; 2 DL, 2 LB and 2 DB is standard.) Based on a starting lineup of 8 players, the roster size will normally be 16 to allow for one backup for every starting position. Realize that there is no hard and fast rule on roster size and almost every league is different.

Do not be afraid to try a league structure that is different than what you have done in the past, as you will likely find a new level of challenge from the new structure. Just make sure that you understand all the elements of league structure before your draft. If you wait until a few weeks into the season to figure out your strategy, it may be too late to get the pieces you need to build a strong roster. Make sure to ask your commissioner or somebody familiar with the structure to explain it in detail before you start your player research.

Once you understand the foundation of your league structure, grab a pen and paper, your handy-dandy calculator and start looking at the roster size compared to the number of participants in your league. For instance, in a 12 team league if there is 1 starting QB per team, and a likelihood of 2 total QB's per roster - it is safe to assume that you need to land at least 1 of the top 12 QB's as your starter and you should be prepared to have answers on at least 24 QB's at draft time. Sound obviously simple? It is simple but still vital to know how many players will be drafted in your league at every position so that you can be properly prepared in the important later rounds.

League Scoring:

For the offensive players, scoring is based on yardage and scoring. Defensive player scoring is based on tackles, turnovers and sacks. It is easy to research players who perform well in these disciplines, and there are generally a lot of tools available on the general categories. Here are some examples of how the offensive scoring works.

Yardage Leagues – Points are awarded for players as they accumulate yardage.

QB – 1 pt per 50 yds passing

RB – 1 pt per 20 yds rushing

WR/TE – 1 pt per 20 yds receiving

K – 3 pt per 1-30 yd FG, 4 pt per 31 – 40 yd FG, 5 pt per 41+ yd FG, 1 pt per PAT

Scoring Leagues – Points are awarded for players as the score TD's or FG's.

QB- 4 pts per passing TD, 6 pts per rushing TD

RB – 6 pts per rushing TD, 6 pts per receiving TD

WR/TE - 6 pts per rushing TD, 6 pts per receiving TD

K- 3 pts per FG, 1 pt per PAT

Performance Leagues – Points are awarded for both yardage and scoring, so combine the above totals. An example would be;

QB – 1 pt per 50 yds passing, 4 pts per passing TD, 6 pts per rushing TD

Bonus Scoring - Where the scoring usually gets interesting is the many other ways to score points, known as Bonus Scoring. Bonus scoring comes in many different shapes or forms, and can be as clever as your league members are creative. Some examples; bonus points for reaching a certain yardage or scoring plateau, kick or interception return yardage, assisted tackles, passes defended, holding an opponent under a certain amount of points, etc. These bonus points are added to the points earned above. More examples;

QB- 3 pts 300+ yds passing, 5 pts 400+ yds passing, 3 pts per 3 TD game

RB – 3 pts per 100 yds, minus 1 pt per fumble lost, 1 pt per carry

WR/TE – 3 pts per 100 yds, minus 1 pt per fumble lost, 1 pt per reception

K – 5 pts per 4 PAT game

In general, most leagues will use a combination of the scoring system listed above. It is vital to consider every method of scoring FF points while you are researching players. Keep an eye out for leagues that QB TD's are worth the same as rushing and receiving TD's. This will mean the difference in if QB's are the top producers or just on par with the other positions. Since there are normally plenty of QBs, this will help you determine how early you should reach for the position. Also, leagues that award the bonus for receptions make top WR's as valuable as many of the top RB's and should greatly alter your strategy. Pay close attention to any bonus scoring that many of the expert cheat sheets may not take into account.

League Guidelines:

If there are any future disagreements to come in your league, chances are it will start because of differing translations of the league guidelines. The following are some of the key items where understanding is vital for positive participation in your league. Always be sure your commissioner can clarify these before the season begins.

Free Agents and Waivers – Free agents are the pool of players that have not been claimed by another team and waivers are method of acquiring these players. Find out how waivers are awarded and how the selections order – if any - is determined.

Trading and Transaction Deadlines – Mark this date on the calendar in advance. Most leagues, especially those with playoffs, will have a deadline set where you can no longer trade players, and some will also shut down waivers.

Tiebreakers – There are two different types of tiebreakers that you may need during the season and should be looking for in the rules. If you are in a Head-to-Head league, it is important to know what happens if you and your opponent both score the same amount of points in a game. It is also important to know how a tie is broken if you end the regular season with the same win/loss record or amount of points as another team. Both instances happen more often than expected, and if your tiebreaker is based on a controllable element like total bench points or a tiebreaker player, you can prepare in advance in case a tie occurs.

Playoffs – If your league has a playoff, know how many teams will qualify and how they will be seeded once the playoffs begin. Also note if there will be a championship game in week 17 of the season, as many of the top teams will rest their star players for the playoffs – which of course could mean your FF star players are resting as well during your league championship.

Commissioner – All leagues have a Commissioner, whether it is a person who forms the league, is appointed by the participants, or is a hired league management service. Know how much power the commissioner can yield and how involved they will be in any issues that may arise. It is also important to note if the commissioner will have veto power over trades and if they have the ability to access and adjust your lineup if needed. If you can't trust your commissioner, you are in the wrong league.

Challenging the Rules – Know the protocol in advance. Always find out prior to the season the proper procedure of protest if you feel that the league management service, the commissioner or an opponent makes a decision that you do not agree with. The entire league will usually welcome a properly executed protest. A screaming participant can spell the end of the fun for everyone.

There are so many rules in every league, but by understanding them you have taken your first steps towards a winning season. Remember, losing can be about as much fun as a root canal but - as 4 out of 5 dentists will tell you - most oral surgery can be avoided by taking preventative measures. Brush up on your league rules so your focus can be on chewing up the competition!