



FFU205: The Art of Trading

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In a nutshell, trading is exchanging something of value for something else of value. The number one rule for trading is that it should help your team. If you do not think the deal will improve your team, don't do it. Always keep the notion in the back of your bonnet that the best trades are often the ones not made. And, because it is an exchange of value, you need to be comfortable helping your trading partner's team as well. Thus proving the Beatles were actually talking about fantasy football when they said the love you take is equal to the love you make.

Other than the outcome of your game, the process of trading – or attempting to trade – players is the most exciting part of the fantasy football regular season. Being that you have followed our number one commandment and are well versed in your league's rules, you are therefore very familiar with the requirements for your league in regards to trading players. Therefore, we will now explore the steps you should be taking anytime you look to make a deal.

Step One – Evaluate Your Team:

This is often the hardest part of trading because it requires you to be honest with the person that you lie to the most – yourself. You need to objectively look at your own team and honestly list its strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes this is readily apparent as it is with teams that leave their auctions with three receivers and no true second running back. Sometimes it is a little tougher, especially in the post-draft glow that most owners have following what they view as yet another successful draft. Like mowing your yard it is okay to sit back and admire your work for a spell, but do so with the understanding that there is always more work ahead.

In looking at your team you need to remove your rose colored glasses and the blinders of shortsightedness. Strategically look at where your team needs to improve long-term, not just in the coming week or weeks. That may mean starting to look at bye weeks and even playoff schedules, keeping in mind that week one defensive "trends" may not be indicative of how the entire season will likely go. Regardless, after some self reflection you should have a thorough understanding where you have some excess talent and where you may need to start fingering dikes.

Step Two – Evaluate Your League:

The old joke is that sex is like bridge – if your hand is good enough you can go it alone. Conversely, trading actually requires a willing partner. And while match.com or eharmony may be available to help you find a partner for trading bodily fluids, you're on your own for finding a fantasy football love connection. However, like the lessons of love, compatibility will ultimately drive willingness. But compatibility in this sense is truly more about opposite attracting because you need to find a team that is weak where you are strong – and strong where you are weak. The process of evaluating other teams' talent is the same as you went through in Step One while evaluating your own team. After looking at all the strengths and weaknesses of the teams in your league you should now have a list of two or three teams that should be interested in at least starting the trading dance with you.

Step Three – Script Your Offers:

You've identified your needs. You've located logical trading partners. Now you must build your wish list. Before you go out to market and make offers willy-nilly you must first think of the ramifications of each offer. What happens if they say yes? What happens if they say no? One trick we like to use is ranking each guy in a proposed deal, especially if the deal is larger than just one-for-one. This will slow you down to make sure the thrill of the chase isn't blinding you; but it will also become useful in the future when you actually make your offers.

Next, write down what you believe would be the best possible deal for you. This is the dream deal. This is the deal that you would make without hesitation or regret. Of course, because you may not actually live the dream, you need to have fallback deals scripted out. It is time for you to brainstorm and come up with offers and counteroffers. Put a bunch of deals with myriad teams on paper. Make the deals bigger, make them smaller, add different pieces to the mix, or maybe even explore a three-way.

After listing them, then you need to rank them in the order you like them the best. In ranking them it should become apparent if there is a "must have" player or level of player in the deals. If there is, congratulations, you've found your line in the sand. Any deals that do not meet your expectations should be removed from the list and no longer considered. The remaining deals above the Mendoza Line are the piggies you are going to bring to market.

Step Four – Making your Offer:

At this point the hard work of evaluating teams and scripting offers is out of the way; now it is all about the fun and gamesmanship trying to consummate a deal. This is also the part of the process that is more art than science. How you actually present your offers is a matter of personal style. Some like to come in guns blazing, shooting for the top deal right away and then work their way down to a doable deal. Others take the frog in the pot strategy of starting low and slowly building toward a boil.

Each technique has their merits, but each comes with words of caution as well. Again, remember that any offer made can be accepted unless withdrawn by you prior to acceptance. So if you are trying to work your way up to a bigger deal you may run the risk of never even getting that deal to the start line because a lesser offer was already accepted. Conversely, offering the huge deal may scare a potential trading partner – too much shock and awe. In the right situation, however, this may actually work to your advantage. Let's say your would-be trading partner has three running backs that would help out your team. Getting the top guy would be tough, but you sure would like that middle guy. It may be to your advantage to go hard after the top back with a deal you would gladly do for the second back. The shock of somebody taking a run at the number one guy may be helpful in counter offering your way down to the back you really wanted.

Regardless of how you make your initial offer, you should always include some basic elements. The offers should always be reasonable; otherwise you will quickly lose credibility within the league. You should include information in the offer other than just the players to be included. This accomplishes a couple of things. First off, it gets back to making a reasonable offer because you lay the foundation as to why you made the offer. It could be as simple as, "You need a running back – I need a receiver. What do you think of this deal?" By doing that it shows the other owner that you have at least looked at his team enough to understand what he needs in return for doing a deal. Secondly, by including additional information you have the ability to clearly state what the offer is so that there is no confusion as to the expectations. This is especially helpful in the online commissioner environment where incorrect deals can be inadvertently dumped into trade tools. Having your true intentions spelled out up front could help avoid trouble downstream.

Step Five – Negotiating:

Again, this gets back to style over substance. How you choose to handle the actual nuts and bolt of haggling over a deal is up to you. Reminding yourself exactly who the other league members are – i.e. friends and family – may be a place to start. Of course, the old adage about catching more flies with honey than vinegar should be in the back of your cranium as well. Personally traits aside, you should try to be upfront with the other owner. There is nothing wrong telling him that you really need a second running back. He already knows it, but by you admitting it you have bought some credibility in his eyes.

A big mistake that is often made is trashing the player you want – which often leads to the question of "If he sucks so bad why do you want him?" That's a valid question, and one not answered by saying you can coach this player to his true potential. It is okay to say he's underperformed so far and you are willing to take the chance that he may turn it around, however. Be sincere, but keep the kind words to a minimum. Because after all, singing the praises of a player too much will simply drive the price of acquiring him higher.

A tried and true technique is drawing reasonable comparisons between the players you are offering and the players you want to acquire. Use statistics – either current or historical, in-season player rankings, preseason rankings, or schedule analysis. Any information that you can pull together to build your case as to why this deal makes sense. And because you are being upfront, if you are questioned as to why make a deal of equals, remind the other owner of how this all started – with the mutual understanding that both teams could benefit from this deal.

This is also a good time to bring out that trick from Step Three where you ranked all the players in the deal. Share that with the other owner and get his buy-in. Some owners insist on always getting the single best player in a deal. What better way of reinforcing that he is getting the best player? Other owners are willing to accept depth over star-quality. Again, by having him agree to the ranked order of each player in the deal, the likelihood of him doing the deal increases.

Can't we all just get along? All of this talk of being reasonable and straight forward doesn't mean you cannot still do your best to get the best possible deal for yourself. Nothing gets a deal done quicker than adding some urgency to the situation. Trade deadlines do this automatically, but bye week schedules can assist as well. And while we're talking about turning up the heat on a potential deal, let's not forget that competition in the market place will also add urgency. Creating competing trade offers – either real or imaginary

– can often get a fellow owner to crap or get off the pot. However, as you know, bluffing comes with the risks and rewards of bluffing; so you've been warned.







Step Six – Pull the Trigger:

After marathon negotiation efforts featuring more offers and counteroffers than Meatloaf's Paradise by the Dashboard Light, you are finally at the altar. Prior to ratifying the deal, however, you should do one last check on *all* the players in the deal. Go and read the latest news on them. Make sure none of them are hurt. Nothing says "you'll never make another deal in this league" more than trading a player that is hurt – even if that was not your intention. On the other hand, you want to avoid that flaming bag of dog poo landing on your front doorstep as well.

Once you've checked out all the players, you need to finalize the terms with the other owner. Make sure the deal is clear and understood by both parties. It may sound petty, but the price of making sure one last time that you both are on the same page is worth it to avoid the pain of any future claim of shenanigans. If everything checks out go ahead and pull the trigger. Do so without remorse and without looking back. After pulling the trigger alert the proper authorities as required in your league's rules. You would hate to have all your work thrown out at this point on a technicality.

As word of your deal gets out to the rest of your league, the reaction of the other owners is usually pretty vocal and usually the result of jealousy on their part. However, remember that you did the work, you cultivated the deal, and ultimately you should reap the harvest. And while the chorus of disgruntled owners continues, they should be reminded that the true impact of the trade will not be known until they receive the clarity that only hindsight can provide.

Key Takeaways:

-  Objective evaluation of your team, as well as the other teams in your league.
-  Script your offers – thus knowing your best and worst case scenarios.
-  Make reasonable offers.
-  Negotiate in good faith – always being honest about any health issues a player may have.
-  Be willing to walk away – the best deal still may be the one you don't make.
-  Be nice – as Dalton said in Road House, "All you have to do is follow three simple rules. One, never underestimate your opponent. Expect the unexpected. Two, take it outside. Never start anything inside the bar unless it's absolutely necessary. And three, be nice."