



FFU601: Setting Up a Fantasy Football League

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Every year, thousands of new fantasy football leagues get started. The reason for this has less to do with the growth in popularity of the game, than the fact that most leagues just don't survive the first year. You may be asking yourself, "Self, why don't the leagues I start ever seem to last, despite my grandest plans?" Short answer is "global warming"; long answer is "lots of reasons, but essentially it's your fault", which is why you're reading this article.

The answer is really that your grand plans weren't planned at all. They were just big ideas of a keeper league for you and your buddies that would be fun year after year, where no one would get upset and quit or have to move, etc. Life happens. However, a little planning will help ensure that the league you start THIS year will have a better-than-even chance of making it to year two and beyond.

Here are ten questions for consideration in starting a new league.

QUESTION #1: What's the interest level of the people participating?

Don't make the league so complicated that it's not fun for the other players. You may know all there is to know about IDP, VBD, AVT, RBBC, Stud-RB Theory and all the other nuances of the hobby, but chances are the folks you invited into the league don't. Before determining how complicated the league is going to be, determine who is going to be in the league.

Build the league to the lowest common denominator (LCD) or the person who knows the least. This means pushing your LCD enough so he/she has to learn a few things, but not so much that they'll lose interest.

The question you have to ask yourself is; how do you balance adding new elements to make it fun, without alienating the guy who knows the least about the game? I'd encourage you to get your league together for an organizational meeting, and if that isn't feasible, send out a list of questions. Reading this article will help you come up with some of those questions.

QUESTION #2: What's the purpose of the league?

Why are you putting this together? Is this intended to be a competitive league or just a get together with your buddies, people from work, neighborhood league, etc.? It's a good idea to keep the purpose of the league in mind when you're setting it up, and when you're making decisions as a commissioner or organizer.

QUESTION #3: Is money involved?

Most leagues charge something to cover the cost of hosting the league online. There are other ways to do that, but most often to get a good league management system, you will need to pay something for it. I advise you to collect all monetary contributions for league fees at the door. Most likely league owners meet face-to-face only once (and in some cases, not even that) so make sure you collect money before an owner is allowed to draft a team.

Every year around fantasy championship time, questions come up on the message boards wondering how to deal with an owner in the championship game that is due a bunch of money if they win, but has yet to pay the league dues. The answer is that you, the commissioner, should cover how this is handled in your league rules (see below).

Some leagues want to be a little more intense and have, for lack of a better term “Rick Neuheisel” type money on the line. If this is the case, I strongly recommend that you draft a set of ironclad rules and have it reviewed by a team of attorneys. At minimum you should have a good set of rules drafted to prevent moves that would upset the competitive balance in the league. More on this later.

QUESTION #4: Do you want to use keepers (and if so how many), or just a straight redraft?

Here are a few glossary terms that can help you identify which league type serves you best:

Straight Redraft - (n.): A league where each year starts over with every player available in the draft/auction pool. This is a type of league that is good for one year and experiences a lot of turnover.

Keeper League - (n.): A league where, from the second year on, each team is allowed to carry over one to four players from their prior year's roster. Some keeper element is usually involved in leagues that stay together from year to year. *For more information on Keeper Leagues, read FFU405: Re-Draft vs. Keeper Leagues*

Dynasty League - (n.): A league where, from the second year on, each team keeps most of its players; Keeping 10 players on an 18 man roster, for example. These are pretty hard-core leagues. Some might be based on auctions, with separate rookie drafts, using restricted free agents, contracts, and every kind of FF nuance you can imagine. *For more information on Keeper Leagues, read FFU406: Keeper vs. Dynasty Leagues*

In some cases, you can convert your league from one type to another, but that can be a difficult transition. The owner who drafted Priest Holmes or Brett Favre may be less excited about switching to a straight redraft to a keeper league than the guy who drafted Julius Jones or LaDainian Tomlinson. If you make a switch, you should likely make that decision before the season starts, and for that change to go into effect after the season.

QUESTION #5: Do you want to use Team D/ST or Individual Defensive Players (IDP): DL, LB, and DB?

This is a trend in fantasy football that is gaining steam. For years most leagues have used the Team Defense/Special Teams as one roster position that covers the production of an entire team. Individual Defensive Players (IDP) has scoring for each defensive position, usually DLs, LBs, and DBs, where you get points if your guy gets credited with: sacks, tackles, interceptions, fumbles forced, fumbles recovered, TDs, and in some cases passes defended, kick/punt return yards. Some leagues even add in the Punter as a fantasy position and give points for yards, punts inside the 20, etc.

You will learn more about the game and IDP will provide a greater test of your football knowledge and abilities. For you and the rest of your league, making the switch to IDP will make watching football on Sunday afternoons twice as nerve-wracking, I mean exciting. *For more information on Keeper Leagues, read FFU206: Individual Defensive Player Introduction.*

QUESTION #6: How will the league be managed?

Online drafting / league management has revolutionized fantasy football. Gone are the days of waiting until the USA Today published the stats on Monday morning to determine whether or not you won your game the week before. Now you can have real-time scoring updates that are near real time.

There are a multitude of places to run your league. You need to check around and identify which league management resource will fit the needs of your league scoring, free agency rules and give you the most flexibility.

FantasyFootball.com will have league management this year so I highly encourage you to check that out.

QUESTION #7: What type of league scoring will you use?

If your league has several people who are new to fantasy football and the commitment level is pretty low, then you likely should keep the scoring simple, here are some examples:

SIMPLE#1: 6pts all TDs, 1 pt. 10 yards rushing/receiving 1 pt 40 yards passing.

SIMPLE#2: 6 pts for rushing/receiving TDs, 4 pts. For passing TDs, 1 pt. 10 yards rushing/receiving, 1 pt 20 yards passing, -2 for interceptions thrown or fumbles lost.

You might have higher expectations for your league members and collectively might have some things you prefer. Here are some other considerations:

You might like to balance out the scoring, where WRs and QBs are roughly equal to RBs and TEs.

For instance, leagues that gives 1.5 points per TE reception, as opposed to 0.5 per WR reception. This increases the value of the TE position and instead of someone in your league taking Heap/Shockey/Gonzalez in the 5th round; a scoring system like this might make them valuable enough to go in the 3rd round.

For whatever scoring system you choose, I strongly recommend that you convert the past two years of stats into your league's scoring system to determine if this system makes sense. Convert the stats into your particular scoring method before settling on the exact system you will use. Most league software companies have this ability and can do this once your league scoring is entered.

QUESTION #8: What league rules do I need to establish before we have the draft/auction?

Everything needed to run the league should be in writing before you begin to avoid any future disagreements. What do I mean by everything?

Scoring System: Spell out every way for a fantasy team to get points.

Starting Roster Requirements: How many of what position will you start

Deadlines: When is money due? When are lineups due? How far into the season can you trade? How far into the season can you make waiver wire pickups? Any off-season restrictions?

Maximum/Minimum Roster Sizes and League Fees : Carefully lay out the ground work for roster sizes and how much the league members will have to pay to participate.

Prizes for the Winners: Does the regular season champ get anything, or does it all go to the guy who won the league championship game in the playoffs. Spell it out.

Tiebreakers – They happen and it is best if you have a plan for when they occur.

Keeper League Rules (as required): Can you keep a guy for 10 years if you choose, or is there a certain number of years (contract) after which he goes back into the draft/auction.

Trading Rules: Can I make a trade for just one week with my buddy to cover my stud's off week, only to reverse the trade next week? Since I'm out of contention, can I trade my good guys to my buddy/brother/wife/whatever for their bench players? Can I make a trade with someone the week before the championship game?

Waiver Wire Rules: Who gets first pick, or is it first come, first served? Once a guy gets cut and put on waivers, is there a period of time where he cannot be acquired to ensure everyone has a fair chance at knowing the guy is available?

Authority of Commissioner: Can he step in and overturn a trade? Who can? Does he have final say when a question arises? If not him, who does?

Additional dispute resolution, especially how to handle disputes with the commissioner: I suggest a committee of 3 or so owners selected by the league to be the review committee should anyone question a decision of the commissioner or a move he's involved with.

Dispute Resolution:- What is an owner to do when he feels the commissioner made a decision that was unfair, how can he seek redress of grievances without waiting until Festivus? The final authority must be a vote of the entire league. The caution there is to try to avoid this as much as possible, especially regarding trades. Sometimes it's hard for an owner to separate out the difference of what's best for the league and what's best for his particular team.

Anything else: That you've ever heard of or thought about that might be a problem in a fantasy league. Even if there's just a remote chance of something happening, deal with it ahead of time in the rules.

QUESTION #9: How should we draft players?

There are several different ways to do this. Here are a few MORE glossary terms:

Draft – Where each team has a position in the draft and they select one player from the pool of available players who then goes on their roster.

Serpentine Draft: Where the team that selects in the first position in the first round, that same team selects in the last position in the second round. The idea here is to try to balance out the benefit of the first pick and make it as fair as possible. Who gets to pick in what position in year 1 is most often determined by drawing out of a hat. Most drafts operate in this way.

Drawing for Draft Position: There are a couple of variants here. First, you might draw numbers or in some other way determine an order. Then each person gets to CHOOSE their draft position, because in a 12 team league, maybe the guy that drew 5th doesn't want the 5th slot because it's in the middle of the order, but would prefer to take the 12th pick so he can have back to back picks. Second, you could draw for position every two rounds. This seems like more trouble than it's worth, but if it appeals to you and your

league, knock yourself out.

Auction: This is a system that is more involved than a draft, because it involves budgeting and a significantly higher commitment to prepare on behalf of the GMs in your league. To do this, you allot a certain dollar amount to each team (for simplicity sake, call it \$100). They then must use that money to acquire their full complement of players at your auction. This creates more of a market driven approach to filling rosters, as opposed to draft slots. If you choose this route (which I'd highly recommend if your league's GMs are committed and willing) you will need several additional rules. *For more information on Keeper Leagues, read FFU403: Auction Draft Preparation and FFU404: Auction vs. Re-Draft Leagues*

If everyone is close enough geographically, hold a live draft. If not, you may need to hold your draft/auction online. In that case, you can either set a time where everyone will be online at the same time for a block of time, or you set a time limit for each pick. With the time limit, the idea is to get the draft completed before the season starts. Most league management services have a time allocated, on-line drafting system so make sure you check this out when choosing which league software system works for you.

If you can get all your GMs together, then I strongly encourage you to hold a live draft. For some leagues that have been around for several years, this is an annual ritual that could happen in an evening or be drawn out further over the course of a weekend. There is nothing that can beat a live draft with your friends and family. If this is a possibility, I highly encourage you to consider this first and foremost.

QUESTION #10: Talking smack?

Talking smack, much like reminiscing, is difficult to do with people you don't know. This is another good reason to hold a live draft. Making fun of someone for picking all the players from his/her favorite team loses its meaning if you can't really mock them to their face – repeatedly. There are probably a million subtle nuances that make a live draft better than online, and this is one of the biggest.

There are no additional FF points for talking smack. However, if you can think of a way to incorporate it, you should. It's as much or more a part of the game as Tight Ends.

Bottom line, Use good judgment. If you think you've really offended someone, apologize and move on. However, talking smack is part of this hobby so get thicker skin and enjoy the talk among friends.