




FFU603: Commissioner Duties

 October 11, 2008

To the best of our knowledge a fantasy football commissioner has never been knighted or sainted. We're not saying they should be. Teachers, soldiers, parents and guardians (some at least) should be in line way ahead of commissioners for such honors. What we *are* saying, however, is that they should at least be thanked once in a while because, in virtually every case, they are not compensated for their hard work either monetarily or otherwise. They have a tough job. And like they say about all tough jobs: someone's got to do it.

Without a commissioner, you can't have a fantasy football league; it's that simple.

The commissioner is responsible for setting up the league and maintaining its operation—all season long in re-draft leagues and all year long in keeper and dynasty leagues. The first job of a commissioner is to establish league rules and enforce them throughout the year. This includes the number of teams, roster size, a scoring system, and transaction procedures—essentially everything you find in your league's rule book. Setting up the rules can be controversial, especially when some owners want to make changes. A good commish will ensure that all such requests for rule changes are heard and voted on by league members. Sometimes league rules will have loopholes; this is especially prevalent in younger leagues that haven't had an owner try to exploit a transaction rule, had the NFL make a scoring change on a play, or experienced a tie in a playoff game without any league tie-breaker in place. It is up to the commissioner to determine how to most equitably close such loopholes. This is not to say that a commissioner cannot listen to advice from owners in the league, but it is ultimately up to the commissioner to do something about loopholes or other disputes that invariably arise during the course of a fantasy season.

It is also the duty of the commissioner to make sure the league is scored accurately, usually via an online league management service. Thus, the commish is usually the one signing the league up online, collecting money to pay for the service, inputting all the rules and rosters, and contacting the web service if scoring or other issues arise. That's a lot of work.

Two of the most frustrating jobs of a commissioner are finding a draft or auction date that works for everyone in your league and collecting league entry fees from the owners. Finding a day that works for everyone to be in the same place for four or five hours to hold a draft or auction is tough—there are always a few owners who have impossible schedules to work with. A commissioner's best bet is usually to just pick a day and time that seems to work for the vast majority of owners and go with it, like it or not. Another alternative gaining in popularity is online drafting and auctioning, but again it is up to the commissioner to find and sign the league up for such services. Getting everyone to then pay their league fees can be maddening. Begging owners to do so can lead to a lot of harsh exchanges. Don't be that owner. Get your league entry fees in on time and save everyone the hassle... or just don't play. Another option is to use a convenient online league finance management service such as the one offered by League Safe. We at Fantasy Football 101 use the services of League Safe for all of our Fantasy Leagues. Check them out at www.leaguesafe.com. It's free, it's reliable, and it makes life a lot easier for your commish.

Properly done, draft day doesn't just happen without a lot of work from the commissioner. In many ways it is like planning a party or event. You need to find a venue for the extravaganza, you need to get an auctioneer if you are holding an auction, you may also need a white board to track finances, a large draft board to track the rosters, various sheets with rosters and rules to pass out to the owners... and so much more. And what about the cold beer? You can't have a fantasy draft without alcohol and good food to stuff your face with...that's just not how the forefathers would have wanted it. It's up to the commissioner to make sure all of these things get taken care of ahead of time in order to maximize the draft day experience.

Trade approval is oftentimes left up to the commissioner or a vote of the league, depending on your rulebook. No trade will be made without a certain amount of scrutiny from the owners not involved in the deal and in many cases a lot of bickering will result.

It is the opinion of this fantasy football scholar that trades only be vetoed if there is clear evidence of collusion or cheating. Simply stupid trades should not be governed—you can't legislate against stupidity. A lot of times trades that appear lopsided to begin with

work out quite the opposite. Besides, if an owner consistently makes bonehead moves and deals, either take advantage of them or don't invite them to be in the league next year.

The one thing all fantasy owners need to be wary of is abuse of power by a commissioner. We've heard tons of horror stories about leagues that devolve into fighting and friendships destroyed in the process. In reality, though, most commissioners take their jobs seriously and do the best they can for the good of the league and the enjoyment of all league owners. So never take the duty of choosing a commissioner lightly. You might want to steer away from the guy who still owes you \$50 from a golf bet last summer, is too much of a follower, or is never on time.

A commissioner can make or break a fantasy league.