

An Introduction to Fantasy Football

By Ryan Troeschel, pcDrafter.com

Where's the Fantasy in Football?

Football has been the most popular contact sport in America for a while now. I'm sure you've gone into the office in the morning and heard all of the guys talking about the wild ending to last night's game. Are you tired of being left out of all the football conversations? Even more, are you tired of not even being thought of when the office is putting together a fantasy football league? Well, we're here to help you to get a grasp of the basic concepts and give you the knowledge and tools necessary to quickly become a dominate player in your league!

For starters, you probably know that in football each team has eleven players on the field at a time and there are three ways to score points: touchdowns, field goals, and safeties (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_football_positions). Touchdowns occur when a player crosses the opponent's goal line. Field goals occur when the kicker puts the ball through the up-rights and a safety occurs when a team is taken down in their own end zone (or when the football goes out of the back of their own end zone). You can easily find the rest of the rules and regulations for football online so we aren't even going to get into such details. We are here for a totally different reason.

General Concepts

The general concept of fantasy football is that participants hand-pick a virtual team of real NFL players and compete to accrue as many points as possible. Participants, that's you, are known as team owners or managers. Points are accumulated weekly, based on the statistics of the real-life football games. Fantasy football is a season long competition in which team owners participate in a draft and go head-to-head against each other's hand-selected teams within a League. Generally, leagues have 8 to 12 team owners and designate a league commissioner to oversee the rules, administer the game and settle disputes. Winners are determined by the number of points their teams accumulate over the year based on each player's real life counterpart. There are five players that can score points on offense (Wide Receiver, Running Back, Quarterback, Tight End, and Kicker) and an entire Defense is usually elected unless your league rules allow for Independent Defensive Players. Depending on your league you will see various setups and scoring systems. In general, a touchdown results in points for the scoring player and if a pass was involved, the quarterback also accumulates points. Field goals award points and in most leagues, longer field goals get more points. Players are also awarded points based on passing, receiving, and rushing yards. In the most common scoring systems, one point is given for every ten yards rushing and receiving and one point is also given for every twenty five yards passing. Defenses score depending on the number of points that they give up in an entire game (less points given up results in higher fantasy team points) and are also awarded points for interceptions, fumble recoveries, safeties, sacks, and defensive touchdowns.

Your fantasy team is just that, a fantasy. You are given the power of the Owner or the Manager of your very own team and are able to compile the team according to your personal

preferences. Your team has real players, but the quarterback is playing for Dallas, your kicker is a Bronco, and your running backs play for New York, St. Louis, and Miami, for example. Well thanks to the Internet, the statistics for each player's moves are readily available electronically, to the point that you can watch your fantasy football score accumulate in a web browser (or even on your cellular phone) while you're watching the game in your living room. By Tuesday morning, the Sunday and Monday games are over, and your final score has been posted. Now comes your shining moment: was your hand-selected team able to outscore your competition? As you can imagine, there's a fine art to picking the best possible team, but also some plain old luck involved. The end result is bragging rights (or possibly a wager!). There are a countless number of terms used in fantasy football so please take the time to familiarize yourself with some of the most important ones (http://www.fftoolbox.com/fantasy_football_dictionary.cfm).

Picking Your Players: The Draft

Now you have a solid understanding of fantasy football and you are ready to gather all of your friends and dominate your draft right? Not so fast! No matter who is hosting your league, the draft will be conducted either by using a computer with users in separate locations or on a whiteboard with everybody together in the same room. Selections are usually made depending on each player's projected points for that year, but this statistic alone will not always lead to a successful draft. What position do you draft first? Who are really the best players at each position? How many players do you need at each position? Do you draft that stud tight end or that playmaking quarterback? The list of questions goes on and there is not one particular strategy that guarantees success. There are several different strategies that individuals use when preparing for an upcoming draft. Some may simply read all of the latest tips and gossip on chat boards, while others will listen to scouting reports in order to get the inside scoop. There are numerous websites that provide users with insight about how the draft will play out, but this is all subjective information and is never guaranteed to lead you in the right direction. Furthermore, your league has specific scoring rules, yet most forecasts and draft cheat sheets are based on just one set of common scoring rules (more on this later). There are even more questions that you want to ask yourself when preparing for the draft. Will there be GOOD quarterbacks left if you use your next draft pick on a stud tight end? Do you really think that this particular running back is going to last all season or is he prone to injury? Every draft choice is precious and it would be a shame to "waste" any selection on a player that will not give you value in return.

Draft Nuances

So you have prepared for the draft and have a solid idea of the players you are looking to draft when the time comes. Next, we get into the actual drafting process. Is your league using a serpentine, cyclical, or auction style draft? Remember, these are all very important factors to think about and will have a direct impact on when particular players will be taken. The serpentine draft assigns each user a spot in the draft for the first round and then reverses the order in the next and so on. (Ex: in a 10 team league it would be 1,2,3...10, 10,9, 8...1) Cyclical draft does not reverse the order every other round so users keep their same position in each round. Finally, an auction style draft allots users a certain amount of fantasy cash to fill their roster by bidding on individual players. Regardless of the particular style of your draft, the actual process is very similar. Many online leagues randomize the draft order 30 minutes beforehand. That's a

curve ball that makes it hard to plan! Each manager is allotted a slot with which they get to choose any player that is still available. This sequence is repeated for however many rounds that are included in your draft, picking both your starting lineup and your bench. To help users more easily identify the actions taken around the league, most drafts have a display (web page or white board) showing all players that have been selected and another for available players, along with their projected ranking.

Depending on you league's current needs, scoring system, and rules the draft can play out in a number of ways. Modern computers have opened the door and given users the ability to customize league scoring rules. The power of the Pentium along with electronic statistical feeds from every professional football game made it possible to build leagues around various scoring systems. No matter how heavily weighted a particular position may be, the team owners will always receive instant feedback on their standing when customized league rules can be taken into consideration. Because of these customized scoring rules, this season's top draft pick is not necessarily the top draft pick in YOUR league. Your particular league may favor quarterbacks and the way that they score as opposed to another league that places more emphasis on running backs. It is up to you to hand-pick your team so that choices are optimized based on your leagues scoring rules, not some static list ("cheat sheet") of top prospective players. As the draft progresses, the list of top players will change significantly. Why you ask? Well, with the top quarterback and the top 5 running backs all off of the board, those quarterbacks and running backs remaining might represent a fairly level playing field. You need to snag the difference maker. For example, let's say that Larry Johnson (one of the premiere running backs in the NFL), Stephen Jackson (another premiere running back), Antonio Gates (a premiere tight end), and Jeremy Shockey (another premiere tight end) are all available. Larry Johnson is projected higher than Stephen Jackson while Antonio Gates is projected higher than Jeremy Shockey. Who do you select? Many would choose Larry Johnson if they had not yet filled the running back position because running backs usually get more points than tight ends, but this is not necessarily the optimal selection! You must consider exactly how much better one player is than another and make a decision based on these calculations. Gates is leaps and bounds above any other tight end in the league, and is therefore a key difference maker. It is recommended that you snag this stud tight end because with your next selection you can still get a superior running back that is only a few points lower than Johnson. Had you taken Johnson, it is almost certain that someone else would draft Gates and you would be stuck with another tight end that would not get you nearly as many points. Let's use sample statistics to clarify a bit more and show you just one of zillions of calculations that our software processes in just a few seconds. Larry Johnson is projected to get 384 points over the course of the season while the next best back, Stephen Jackson, is projected to get 367. Antonio Gates is projected to get 230 points while the next best tight end, Jeremy Shockey, is projected to get 195 points. $384-367 = 17$ point differential, while $230-195 = 35$ point differential. Make sense? If you pick up Gates, you can still get a running back that will get you around 350 points, where if you pick up Johnson, the best tight end when your next selection comes around may only get you 150 points. If you select Gates you only drop 34 total points between the running back you can get in the next selection, but if you select Johnson you drop 80 total points between the best available tight end in the next round.

Emotions, Mathematics, and the Pentium

With so many different factors to consider, how in the world will a beginner be able to compete with the veterans who have been participating in fantasy football leagues for years upon years? Well the computer can be used as an extremely powerful tool and can make your drafting process much easier and less stressful. Quantifying who is left on the draft board, what their contribution to your team is, and who to pick next can become quite overwhelming. It can also become emotional, as your passions start to interfere with the math of the game. Enter the power of the Pentium and PC Drafter to assist in creating the most successful team possible. We created PC Drafter just for this purpose: it is software that you install on your PC to take the guesswork out of your draft. No Internet connection is needed and our software uses the GOLD algorithm to take all factors into account. It considers the current league needs (not just YOUR team's needs) and also uses your league's customized scoring system to recommend the best suited player that will make the largest contribution to your team. In addition, PC Drafter downloads the latest player projections, via the Internet when available. 4For4.com updates these player projections numerous times from May through the first kickoff in September, so that whenever your draft happens, you've got the very latest information. PC Drafter also makes forecasts that can help decide who will still be available in the next round so you can draft an impact player who may not be available during your next selection. PC Drafter does not just recommend the best overall player; the Gold Algorithm recommends the top difference makers. Our software takes into account exactly how much better a player is when compared to other available players at that same position.

Conclusion

Fantasy Football lasts the entire football season, and makes football very personal for millions of us mere mortals. There is not one standard method that can be used while drafting because of many other factors which can affect a particular player's value. Does it sound like the draft can become a bit overwhelming? You're exactly right, but with the latest player ranking updates, customized scoring system, player value calculations, team and player tracking system all influencing our GOLD algorithm to recommend your draft picks, you are almost guaranteed to dominate every other competitor in your league. We support an unlimited number of leagues from keeper to auction drafts and even provide you with realistic mock drafts to let you get some practice runs in before the official draft day. Why try to conduct a draft without PC Drafter? For only \$19.95 (or \$15 before August 1st) you can have everyone in your league regretting that they ever invited you to join. Take advantage of the GOLD algorithm now and sack the competition!

Additional Reading:

The Gold Algorithm, and a Deeper look at the math in the Gold Algorithm
(www.pcdrafter.com/Gold.shtml and www.pcdrafter.com/MoreGold.shtml)

Difference-makers: why you might pick a TE instead of a QB
(www.pcDrafter.com/difference.shtml)

Video Tutorials on how to install and use PC Drafter (www.pcdrafter.com/tutorials.shtml)