



DYNASTY

GAME PLAN





INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE GAME PLAN?

When the owners of DLF started the site back in 2006, we really had no idea what we were in store for. We knew we were passionate about dynasty leagues and fantasy football in general and found the information available online in regards to dynasty leagues was virtually non-existent.

Over the years, we've compiled thousands of articles that spoke to strategy, team building, trading tactics and overall league management. While many of our followers have been here from the beginning, a vast majority haven't.

So, we came up with an idea.

In order to maximize the value of our Premium Content membership, or to offer anyone a low-cost single strategy guide, we've taken the liberty of going through our archive and scouring through over 2,000 articles and compiling and updating our best tips in terms of strategy. We've also added a lot of new information and categorized it to make it easy to navigate. This new Game Plan is the second version and contains the original articles from the first, along with our newest strategic content.

After all, we recognize many of you are new to the dynasty format and this Game Plan can be used as your first and best reference to help you achieve your goal of building a dynasty.

The Game Plan is divided into three sections:

League Management

A guide on how to choose the right league and effectively manage your time.

Team Management

Year-to-year tips and strategies to stay on top of your league.

Trading Tactics

An in-depth look at the theories and skills behind making effective trades.

Good luck in your leagues and we hope you enjoy the latest version of the Dynasty Game Plan!

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LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY LEAGUE FORMATS AND RULE VARIATIONS

When you decide to make the leap from seasonal/redraft leagues to dynasty, there are many ways to set up your league and customize it to make it your own. There are a myriad of ways format your league, but here are some of the basics.

League Formats

Keeper Leagues

A Keeper League is a league in which a set number of players are kept by each owner from year to year. Some leagues require owners to keep that number while others let them choose to “toss players back” for extra draft selections.

A typical wrinkle is that keeping a player costs a draft pick one round earlier each year than where the player was last selected. Example: If AJ Green was selected in the sixth round last year, he'd cost a fifth rounder this year, a fourth next and so on. And he could only be kept a maximum of five years in that case.

Pros: Keeper Leagues let owners who are accustomed to redraft get their feet wet with dynasty while still having a robust annual draft. The two reasons we hear most often that people are hesitant to play dynasty are A) they really enjoy the draft and B) they are fearful that the league will become uncompetitive and therefore boring. Keeper Leagues help allay those concerns.

Cons: Most keeper formats eliminate or severely reduce the importance of the rookie draft. One of the most enjoyable aspects of dynasty is that it encourages owners to take a heightened interest in the NFL Draft and the incoming players. This isn't as important in Keeper Leagues because the draft and league play is largely similar to redraft.

Dynasty Leagues

A traditional Dynasty League is simply a Keeper League where all the players are kept. An original “start-up” draft is conducted and the entire pool of players is available for selection. Teams then keep those players as long as they wish. Because of the long term nature of a dynasty roster, generally teams hold in excess of 25 players on their squad – much more than a redraft league. This means the waiver wire is usually picked clean and owners need to rely on trades and the annual rookie draft to improve their squad. The annual rookie draft is the primary way of restocking. It's generally about four rounds and includes the incoming players to the NFL. Typically the draft is in the reverse order of the prior year's results thus giving the weakest teams the best picks and a chance to become more competitive. Sort of like the Colts getting Andrew Luck.

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Dynasty Leagues (continued from previous page)

Pros: This is the most prevalent dynasty format and therefore has the greatest number of participants, leagues and relevant content. It rewards the savvy trader and students of the NFL draft.

Cons: Bad management can result in a prolonged period of time where a team struggles to compete. While that is especially painful for the owner, it's also less enjoyable for the rest of the league. Choose your league-mates carefully so you have the best chance of a challenging league year-to-year.

Salary Cap Leagues

Salary Cap Leagues are Dynasty Leagues where players are put on contracts with a salary and duration. Just like an NFL team. Players are held by the owner for the length of the contract. Each team has a set salary cap that they cannot exceed and often a limit to the total number of contract years for all their players.

There preferred approach for starting a Salary Cap League is an auction based start-up draft. This sets the initial values for all of the players and owners manage their budgets accordingly. A stud player might get bid up to a salary that eats up as much as 20-25% of a team's cap. Salary Cap Leagues require an annual rookie draft and a separate free agent auction. The rookie draft is just like the rookie draft in a Dynasty League and rookies are on a preset wage scale based on where they are selected (just like the NFL). The free agent auction disperses the players who are coming off contract or who have been cut by their owner. Just like NFL free agency.

Pros: Salary Cap Leagues add many additional complexities to the game and the most engaged owners enjoy the challenges. Salary Cap rosters turn over more quickly than Dynasty rosters (because player contracts expire) and thus it's easier for a struggling team to dig out of a hole. The rookie draft is extremely significant in Salary Cap because the wage scale for rookies can put them on contracts that are far below market value. Adding a stud rookie to your team at a fraction of the price of a similarly productive WR gives you additional funds and therefore leverage in the free agent auction.

Cons: While not absolutely essential, Salary Cap leagues greatly benefit from auction based drafting. Some owners find auctions intimidating and/or cumbersome. Salary Cap leagues also tend to have rather complex rules governing things like restricted free agency, franchise tags, salary escalation etc. and this can be too much for some owners.

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DYNASTY LEAGUE FORMATS AND RULE VARIATIONS

Typical Variations

Now that we have the basic league formats behind us, let's look at the most prevalent variations that commissioners incorporate in their leagues. These variations can be applied to any of the formats above.

Variation: Point per Reception (PPR) vs. Standard Scoring

Probably the first decision a commish will make when setting up the league is the starting lineup requirements followed quickly by the scoring system. The primary scoring decision is whether or not to award points for receptions. In a standard league, receptions do not count – only yardage and touchdowns generate points. In a “PPR League” every catch counts as a point in addition to the yardage and TDs. Some leagues award fractional PPR such as a half point per reception.

In years past, PPR was not the norm but it is quickly overtaking Standard Scoring. The primary advantage to PPR is that it enhances the value of WRs making them closer in value to RBs. Simple math (eliminating QBs because their scoring remains the same in either format): In 2011 in a Standard League of the top-30 scorers 17 were RBs, 11 were WRs and 2 were TEs. In a PPR league it was 11 RBs, 17 WRs and 2 TEs. Clearly WR gets a boost. Remember that this doesn't actually make WRs more valuable than RBs because positional scarcity still helps the RBs. It just serves to even the playing field a good bit.

Probably the biggest disadvantage to PPR is that most mainstream media still focuses on Standard Scoring. People like to be able to visit the major sites like ESPN and CBS for rankings, weekly cheat sheets, etc. and by and large those still cater to the standard format. This will change over time as these sites catch up with the market demand for more PPR coverage.

Variation: Auction vs. Snake Draft

Another critical start-up decision: how do you disperse the players? The process for spreading players around has evolved over time. Most you reading this are probably too young to remember things like ranking 200 plus players and then coming back the next day to see who the computer picked for you or the days of third round reversal. But we digress.

LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY LEAGUE FORMATS AND RULE VARIATIONS

Variation: Auction vs. Snake Draft (continued)

Now the choice is better: do you do a snake draft where each team selects a player and in each subsequent round the selection order is reversed? Or do you do a live auction with a budget? In a live auction, owners take turns “nominating” a player for auction and then owners bid them up just like an art auction or a classic car auction.

Snake draft has the advantage that it’s simple; everyone understands it and it can easily be done slowly overtime on any of the sites that host leagues. The vast majority of drafts are conducted this way including most mocks and expert drafts.

The auction format requires a higher degree of attention and works best when done live (or live, on-line). The primary advantage of an auction is that it eliminates the randomness of the draft order and lets all owners have a higher degree of control over their team composition. Example: If you are awarded the 1.10 pick in a snake start-up, there are players who are basically out of your reach. That’s not the case in auction. If you want, you can get them but you may need to pay handsomely. Moreover, if you want two of them you can do that too. It will cost you dearly in depth, but that’s your decision. It’s all but impossible to make that happen in snake.

Variation: Team Defense (DST) vs. Individual Defensive Players (IDP)

The \$64,000 start-up decision is whether to play with Team DST or IDP. Of these three decisions, this one will have the most profound and lasting impact on your league. In a DST league, each team starts the defense and special teams from an entire NFL team each week – say the Giants DST. Scoring is based on the performance of the squad as a whole. In IDP, teams start individual defensive players are awarded based on their performance.

IDP adds more players to the roster, rookie draft and player pool. Generally IDP leagues have approximately 40 roster spots as opposed to about 25 in a DST league. This means more opportunities to trade, a deeper waiver wire and a deeper rookie draft. All good stuff for the active owner. It also means that owners can’t focus purely on the offensive players in the NFL. While the typical DST dynasty owner probably knows where the backup quarterbacks are on the depth chart, the IDP owner has to know much more.

The potential problem of setting your league up as IDP is that you limit the number of people who will want to participate. IDP is still a niche (like Salary Cap) and there are only so many people who feel confident in taking on the challenge. This can become a problem if and when you need to find a replacement owner for your league.

LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

PARTICIPATING IN A LEAGUE

As many of you know, the founders of DLF live in the great Northwest, so camping and spending time outdoors is simply a way of life. There have been times in the past where some of us have taken week long trips in an effort to “detach” a little and recharge from the work that goes into managing the machine known as DLF. After all, a week in the wilderness should help you detach.

It never works.

You see, we never really detach from DLF or our passion for dynasty leagues. In fact, we find ourselves thinking of articles and comparisons all the time. One particular trip gave one of us enough writing material for a long, long time. This article is all about some tips that are universal in both camping and participating in dynasty leagues. That may seem odd in this publication, but it serves to send some important points.

1. Have a Fire

In camping terms, this is an absolute must. No real camping trip is complete without roasting marshmallows and some type of animal flesh over an open flame. At one point, one of us overheard some people in a campground saying they didn’t want to have a fire because they were afraid their clothes would smell like smoke. I looked at their car and saw it was a BMW with a license plate frame that said, “I’d rather be shopping at Nordstrom.” I remember thinking they’ll probably be dead or missing in the wilderness by Thursday.

In dynasty leagues, you also must have a fire, but it’s of a whole different variety. In a yearly redraft league, you can afford to make some mistakes and not focus on what you’re doing because there’s always next year. In a dynasty league, you simply can’t afford to do that. You must have a fire to win burning inside you. One that gets stoked every time there’s a rookie draft, a hot free agent acquisition or a trade concept.

Show me a league with a decade or so of history and I’ll bet the owners who have the best winning percentage are the ones who spend the most time perfecting their rosters. Again, they have the fire.

Dynasty leagues are not for the faint of heart and if you don’t have a fire, you simply won’t be able to compete, no less win a title.



LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

PARTICIPATING IN A LEAGUE

2. Kids come first

One of us was camping just outside Bend, Oregon, over the 4th of July. For those of you who have been there, you'll likely agree it's one of the best outdoor cities in America. You can hike, raft, kayak, fish or do just about anything you want until you hit one of the several local breweries at night.

He did none of those things.

You see, his kids are very young. They're just learning how to ride bikes, and in one case, walk. While there were many other things he could have been doing, he and his wife spent their time going around the same loop of the campground pushing a tricycle, balancing a bike with training wheels, or standing in 90 degree weather to watch a pet parade in town.

They wouldn't have traded it for the world.

In dynasty terms, kids have to come first as well. You can't overload your team with veteran talent in the hopes to win an initial championship. No matter how talented you may be at evaluating young talent, there's simply no easy way to keep your team competitive if you have a roster full of players near 30 years old. It's tempting during the draft to go for those veterans and shoot for production over potential, but it's a rookie mistake that happens far too often with owners unfamiliar with the dynasty format.

3. Pay Attention to Details

One night, a couple rolled up to a camp site and started arguing shortly thereafter. It seems they had forgotten their tent stakes at home...five hours away. For anybody who has ever camped in a tent, you'll agree those are just a little bit important. Luckily, we always pack some extra stakes in case we have some that break. We were able to help them out, but we couldn't help thinking about how important it is to pay attention to details.

The same tip applies in dynasty leagues. You have to truly understand your league's rules, player scoring tiers, strengths and weaknesses of all the teams in the league and the waiver wire. If you find yourself saying, "Oh man, I didn't even realize that guy was available," you probably aren't paying attention to details.

LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

PARTICIPATING IN A LEAGUE

4. Prepare for an Emergency

It sounds simplistic in nature, but you honestly never know what can happen. You should always pack road flares, first aid kits and extra drinking water just in case whenever I go camping.

In dynasty league terms, you have to do the same thing. It's sometimes very easy to get complacent with a winning team and think the work is done. However, that one torn ACL to your RB1 on a Sunday morning can quickly get you into scramble mode. Do you have the depth to cover for it? Do you know who may be on the trading block? Do you understand which of your commodities is most attractive to others? Do you have a working relationship with other owners in your league so making a trade isn't so painful?

If you answered no to these questions, you're not prepared for an emergency.

5. Don't be a Moron

One of DLF's favorite camping moments came at 2:37 in the morning on a Tuesday night (or Wednesday morning to be more accurate). A camper in a site a few meters away was playing his guitar pretty loudly. He was attempting some John Denver tunes that simply weren't working out too well after downing a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon.

After he failed to sing the words "West Virginia" multiple times, one of my camping neighbors had enough. She screamed over to him and asked him to stop since people were trying to sleep. I'll keep his response with me for the rest of my life since it was one of the dumbest things I've ever heard anyone say. His response, you ask? "I have my own business." Seriously, what does that mean?

If someone can tell me where you get the license to be a jerk because you own your own business, sign us up. It was truly amazing.

In the land of dynasty leagues, the same idea applies. You can't be a moron. Yes, you're going to make some bad trades and drop some players you wish you hadn't. What I'm talking about is treating other owners like you know more than they do. Don't burn a bridge with someone because they won't take your deal or hold up a draft for a few days. Every league seems to have "that guy." If yours doesn't, take a good look in the mirror and make sure it's not you.

LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

PARTICIPATING IN A LEAGUE

6. Find the Right Combination

One of us was making some s'mores one night (see rule #1), and one of our friends put one together without a marshmallow. What!?! You can't take something OUT of a s'more. If so, it's NOT a s'more! We can be talked into adding a Reese's Peanut Butter cup instead of a chocolate bar, but we draw the line at leaving out the marshmallow.

That's bush league, people!

Same thing goes in dynasty league. You really need to find the right combination of running backs, quarterbacks, receivers and all other positions to truly be successful. All too often, we see teams who are totally stacked at running back or wide receiver and end up having to bench some truly great players because they're overloaded. Some of these same owners refuse to move their surplus of players at the same position because they feel like they have a competitive advantage by keeping them away from other teams.

They're wrong.

7. Choose the Right People

When you camp with a group, you're likely going to see the best and worst of every individual who you're with. Face it, it can be stressful at first when you're trying to unload everything, set up tents and take care of your family at the same time. If you're with someone who has extreme highs and lows, it's going to be a long trip, especially if they drink!

Choosing the right people for a dynasty league is the biggest decision a league manager makes. If you have a couple of owners who don't take the draft seriously or do other things to make the league not seem like fun, you're doomed. Make the right decision and get committed people to join – this may mean not including the same people you have in a redraft league. While that may be a hard decision for you to make, it's going to be best in the long run.

Find the right mix of people and you'll be in good shape.

Those are the seven best tips we have for camping that translate into achieving success in a dynasty league. Follow these rules in both endeavors and you'll find yourself one happy camper.

LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

MANAGING MULTIPLE LEAGUES

Lets face it. Fantasy Football is like crack.

You start off with a little, and you want more. And more. And then still more. Before you know it, what began as an enjoyable little pastime in a free Yahoo league with some buddies soon snowballs into a burdensome commitment to three dynasty leagues, two keeper leagues, a redraft league, a survivor league and a high-stakes Tournament Of Champions league. When you find yourself debating the merits of quitting your job just so you can keep up with it all, then you know it's time to find some balance.

The lure of "just one more league" is often a strong one. A new league might have a different group of coaches (or many of the same, familiar, fun ones), a unique roster or scoring system, a tantalizing reward pot, or some other new or interesting element which makes it intriguing. But as the additional leagues pile up, your ability to focus on each of them diminishes. Before long you find yourself spread so thin that you are unable to excel in any of your leagues. And how much fun are you really having when you are in nine different leagues, and losing in all of them?

But just how many leagues are too many? When is it time to say "no more?"

Unfortunately, there is no magic number. Each person has to find that line on their own. Some coaches start buckling under the pressure when running more than one league. Others can easily handle ten or more leagues without breaking a sweat. If you fall into the latter category, well then, hats off to you. But for everyone else, there are some general guidelines which can help you curb the addiction and find the balance needed to maximize the enjoyment of your leagues... and your life.

1. Prioritize

Identify the league or leagues most important to you, and give them the lion's share of your attention. Leagues which you have been involved in for many years are usually most deserving of your continued commitment and attention. The old 80/20 rule is often a good metric for allocating your time. Give 80% of your time and attention to your favorite league or two, 20% to the remaining league(s).

2. Resistance is not futile

As hard as it may be at times, you must resist the temptation to over-commit. There will always be another league you'd like to join, another game to play. But be cognizant of the commitments you have made to the coaches and commissioners in your existing league(s). If you are asked to join a new league, take some time to consider the implications of joining yet another league, and the impact it will have on existing commitments.

LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

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3. Keep it similar

While it is definitely more fun to play in a variety of league formats, that diversity also increases the team management workload. By sticking to similarly styled leagues (redraft and keeper, or dynasty and keeper, all dynasty, etc) with similar roster and scoring formats, you increase your ability to work from the same set of data and research. The same draft list will work well in pretty much all redraft leagues, as will the same rookie draft cheat sheet in all dynasty leagues. You still have to spend time making management decisions for each team – picking up a player off the wire may make sense for one team, but not for another. But at least your time spent researching and creating lists and sheets and organizing your thoughts is minimized.

4. Share the load

If you really want to get your feet wet in different leagues, consider starting a team jointly with another coach. This will allow you to each share the load of managing a team while still giving you the opportunity to experience something new. Shared coaching arrangements are usually less than ideal – the two coaches have to be very much on the same page and act in concert. Conflict between two owners of a team can destroy a team and adversely affect an entire league. So enter into this arrangement very carefully. But if you know someone who you can work well with, the league is OK with a shared coaching arrangement, and you are both committed to seeing it through, then this just might be an attractive solution.

5. Leave gracefully

If you find that, for whatever reason, you are no longer interested in a league, then do the right thing. Advise the league commissioner you will be resigning, and finish your commitment. If there is not already a waiting list for entry into the league, be sure to give plenty of advance notice so that a thorough search can be performed for a replacement. While you remain in command of your team, continue to field the best possible team each week. The worst thing a lame-duck coach can do is let his team languish, or just walk away in mid-season. You may have lost interest in the league, but odds are the other coaches still take it very seriously. Allowing any team get away with an easy win seriously upsets the balance of a league, and quite frankly, is just plain unprofessional.

Fantasy football, as we all know, is a blast. But it is also a serious commitment, and as such your fantasy football commitments should be taken seriously. Be careful about adding to your team management workload, and don't take on too many new obligations too quickly. Always strive to find balance between your current commitments and exploring new opportunities. Take your time considering these new opportunities and always be fair to your current league mates. Not only will you maximize the enjoyment of your existing leagues, you'll also be that much closer to striking a balance between your fantasy football life and that bothersome little thing called real life.

TRADING TACTICS

THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

As a coach, you cannot rely on yearly drafts alone to fill your team with players who will bring you a ring. The art of trading is a key skill which you must hone if you are going to build your dynasty. A good coach is always evaluating the parts of their team, continually looking for an edge. One game can be the difference between a championship and second place.

The following tactics, if used well, could help you assemble a true dynasty for years to come and help you avoid being the beer wench during each year's draft. Master these and let the pillaging begin:

#1: Assessment

You should strive to have three components on your team at all times:

- 1) Adequate depth at all positions
- 2) A balance of established fantasy producers and young productive talent
- 3) Developmental talent that will be producing within three years

The key here is in assessing your team with an eye towards identifying areas of extreme depth or value, even if it is in the area of developmental talent. These areas are then leveraged to obtain the objects of your affection. Always remember that if you are too thin in any one position, a single injury can mean disaster. Too old at a position and your run may be over before it starts. Too young and you might as well be playing craps.

So, what is "too thin" and "too old"?

Bye weeks are an inevitable occurrence and we have all had those weeks that cost us a very important game. Injuries are also going to affect your year. The older your roster becomes, the more susceptible you become to injury. When assessing your roster, you MUST prepare for these events and realize that there is an inverse relationship between a player's age and his fantasy value. Assume that at any point during the season, you will be without three of your starters during a given week. If you wish to be more aggressive, you may, but be prepared to suffer the consequences.

If your team has very little roster value to offer in trade, realize that in some cases, draft picks may carry more value than rostered players (depending on the coach).

TRADING TACTICS

THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

#2: Identify

After you have assessed your roster, identify the positions you can leverage to build an even stronger one. In a best case scenario, you will have assembled young, productive talent that will allow you to trade one or more aging, productive players in exchange for a young producer who bolsters your foundation without a loss of fantasy points per game (fppg).

If you become successful at this tactic, you can leverage your roster year over year, staying one step ahead of the competition. If you are not in a best case scenario, leverage what you do have. Developmental players, in good situations, can often times be as valuable as aging veterans.

As mentioned previously, future draft consideration often carries substantial weight. Just be very careful when trading away future opportunities for improving your team.

#3: Mining

You must always be sure that, at least in your own mind, you receive more than you give away when making a trade. Note that some other coaches may not evaluate a trade in the same way. They might evaluate it based solely on fppg potential and name recognition.

There are many catalysts that make for a good trade. Building depth and securing handcuffs are often as important as landing another quality starter. If you are able to kill multiple birds with a single stone, all the better. Just don't validate the deal based on how other coaches respond.

In the mining stage, you must perform steps #1 and #2 for each other team in your league, paying special attention to which division a prospective trade partner is in. After you have identified those players that have value upon your roster, you need to locate a team that can offer what you desire, and needs what you have to offer. This is not as difficult as it sounds. Your approach and shtick means everything in this step.

While you may not like the analogy, you are now a salesman. We will help you with this in another section of the Game Plan called, "Trading Tactics: Snakeoil Salesman."

TRADING TACTICS

THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

#4: Timing

Do not underestimate the importance of timing in securing maximum value for your offer. Whether it is pre-draft, preseason or week ten of the regular season, keeping your eyes open for a catalyst is essential. Coaches panic when a primary player is carried off on a cart. Your WR4 can quickly have the gleam of a WR1 if you act quickly enough and capitalize on the emotion and fear of a season potentially lost. The rookie draft can make backups of primary fantasy producers as quick as you can say "With the first pick in the draft..."

Mid or late year trades that fall just before your league's trade deadline are of particular interest. At this point in time, coaches who are in the hunt may be willing to overpay to add a particular player to their roster. This is also the time to survey the standings and assess other rosters as you may want to push through a trade that will net you a higher selection in the following year's draft; pay particular attention to those teams that are on the decline within reach of last place . especially if they have had a recent major injury.

Your draft picks and players can increase in value substantially overnight; be ready to take advantage of it. Nothing is more frustrating to a coach than the season-ending injury that occurs in the preseason.

Realize that the 'game' of fantasy football is as much about excitement of the upcoming season as it is about assembling a dominant team. Preseason injuries affecting primary producing players create an opportunity for you to maximize the value of your roster. Successfully capitalizing on these situations can shape your team for years to come. Let the morality battle be waged by those coaches who are accustomed to the bottom of your standings.

These simple foundational steps should come as no surprise to a seasoned fantasy football coach. In most cases, these steps alone will not guarantee a trade in your favor but are a means to an end.

Keep reading as we will now give you the 'ugly' side of trading that you must master in order to be successful.

TRADING TACTICS

BEING A SNAKE OIL SALESMAN

Successful trading can be a dirty job. It requires a coach to be one part psychic, one part strategist, one part best friend, one part psychologist and two parts snake-oil salesman. You need to be proficient in all of these roles before you can expect to start improving your team consistently over a long period of time. And make no mistake, successful trading is potentially the most important skill a coach must have if they have any hope of building and maintaining a dynasty.

For purposes of simplicity, we will assume that you have already become familiar with the steps from “The Essential Components.” The foundational guidelines must be understood if you expect to complete a successful trade. Let’s define “successful trade” as any trade that improves your team by giving up the least amount of “value.”

Sounds simple doesn’t it?

The problem is each coach is trying to do the same thing. Those who master the components of becoming a successful snake oil salesman will find themselves with the world at their feet. Those that cannot will be wearing a flower-print dress and serving Coronas at the next draft party.

Over the years we have heard variations of the following statement:

“If you are willing to make that trade, then somehow I am going to end up getting screwed. There must be something wrong with it.”

When you are known as a successful trader, then you must be also comfortable with the fact that you will be known, at least to some degree, as a snake oil salesman. How you manage that role is what really matters. Remember the salesman still makes his money.

For those who need a refresher, remember that a snake oil salesman is usually characterized as a man from the Old West who would market a miracle elixir from atop a soapbox or the back of his wagon.

While this elixir’s use would vary widely, in the end it was a miracle cure all for whatever ailed you. The most successful of these salesmen had great charisma and could work an audience like an artist, enticing the public to purchase his elixir based on the belief that it would solve any problem the person was experiencing. In short, the salesman would give the unwitting individuals exactly what they needed to hear in order to close the deal. And it is by no coincidence that visits to each new town were kept very, very short.

TRADING TACTICS

BEING A SNAKE OIL SALESMAN

If you are still struggling to link this concept in terms of our current day and fantasy football, let's see if we can help just a bit: Drew Rosenhaus. Now we have that cleared up.

Understand that while a successful trading coach could/will have many similarities to a snake oil salesman, you must also be aware of the pitfalls. Let's discuss some of the do's and don'ts:

Do: Maximize the value of what you are offering

It is not for you to correctly value a player or even be objective about his past performance - that's the job of the other coach in the trade. Focus on the positives from a player's performance, regardless of when it was. Extrapolate performance into full year numbers when it benefits the player, ignore injury history and team quality. An aging player is "proven" when trying to trade them away, and "diminishing" when trying to receive them in trade. A young player has "tremendous upside" when limited history is available and trying to trade them away, and is "unproven and susceptible" when trying to receive them in trade. Again, it is for the other coach to determine if your assessments are correct or not.

Do Not: Overtly lie or fabricate information

Successful trading is about accentuating the positive and diminishing the negative. But just as important is the fact that successful trading is about creating a relationship with a fellow coach in a way that keeps the lines of communication open and flowing. Overt misrepresentation, lying or insulting behavior will close the door to a trade faster than you can say Rosenhaus. In law it is called "leading the witness," whereby the attorney leads the witness towards agreeing to what is "commonly known." When you can influence a coach to buy into the value proposition of your offer, the advantage has swung to you. If your reputation is such that open lines of communication do not exist with other coaches in your league, whether earned or not, your ability to get deals done is severely limited. For this reason, you must always balance your sales tactics.

Do: State only the obvious and imply all else

Especially if you are known as a trader, then understand your reputation precedes you into the trade. A well-used tactic of successful trading, whether you have a reputation or not, is to state only those things that need to be stated and imply or indirectly turn the conversation into beneficial areas. In this case, less is more. Allow the other coach to take the bait and make the statement that benefits you. The more talking that is done by your trade partner, the more likely a successful outcome for you.

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Do: Shoot for the stars and hope for the moon

When a deal is close and you can tell that the other coach is excited about the offer, do not be afraid to include other variables in the trade equation. An additional second round pick, that deep developmental quarterback or bench riding handcuff all can be easily included in trades that are nearly complete. The trick in getting “adds” (additional) is to not overplay your hand or jump at any offer. To do so shows excitement which can then reduce the possibility of the additional player. Always stay well grounded during trade discussions and err on the side of pessimism for all deals until the end. If your trade partner is sold on a possible deal, your consternation can be rewarded when you ask “hmmm, that is a bit much, would you be willing to throw in your second round pick this year? Most coaches agree on trades based on the primary players involved. If secondary players or picks do not contain immediate impact or value, you are much more likely to get them included in a deal involving other primary targets. Do not, however, ask for too much additional. Once a coach says “no” to a request, the likelihood that a “yes” for another lesser option to follow is much less.

Do: Assess the tendencies of your fellow coaches

One of the most successful strategies to utilize in the dynasty league is to obtain future draft picks for players currently on your roster, characterized as excess depth or aging veterans. You must understand that each coach views and values draft picks and players differently. Being a successful trader involves not only understanding this concept, but also understanding the tendencies of the other coaches in your league. Which coaches covet draft picks highly when compared to current players? Which coaches value their players so ridiculously high, that discussing any trade is a waste of your time? Which coaches jump at the rookie that has just had a big game? Which coaches are not at all objective about the position of a draft pick compared to the talent available? Which coaches freely move players/picks almost without regard to their team needs? Assessment of the coaches allows you to be a chameleon when it comes to the trade discussions, giving a coach exactly what they need to hear in order to increase the chance of a successful trade. Remember, it is not up to you to be objective about your offer.

Do Not: Assume that coaches do not change their behavior(s)

While assessment of your fellow coaches is important, many factors can change their behavior. Tendencies often remain constant, but behaviors can and do change. Often times this will be due to the time of season, injuries, non-football related events, etc. Stay nimble and recognize the tendencies of the coaches you are dealing with, but allow for a certain amount of variation.

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Do: Analyze the amount of patience needed

This can be the most difficult task for any coach. Patience, or lack thereof, can determine whether a deal gets done or whether it dies on the vine. Whether the architect of a trade or the receiver of an offer, differing levels of patience is needed to increase the odds that a deal in your favor is done.

Use what you know about your counterpart to your advantage. Every coach loves a good deal. And when a coach believes he/she is the recipient of a good deal, and that deal is to your benefit, then it would serve you well to get it done as quickly as possible. Terms such as “why wait?,” “Slam Dunk,” “No Brainer” and “win/win” all imply that deal makes sense and to not think so proves some level of ignorance. By not closing the sale early, you risk the coach receiving other offers or getting cold feet. On the other hand, if you are the recipient of a trade offer or are making an offer to a coach that is more of an analyzer, recognize that patience is most likely your best friend. Research the claims of the offering coach as it relates to stats, age and player situation. As the offering coach, be patient if your trade partner is one to analyze a situation. Be confident in the fact that you have capitalized on a situation, given good information and that your seed has been planted. Give it time to bare fruit.

Do Not: Force a trade

While pillaging another team can elicit great feelings for many coaches, doing so does not raise their stock within the league, or their trade partner. While it is your main goal to improve your team by giving up the least amount of value, success will be determined over many years. There are a finite number of coaches in your league and you need to maintain good relations with as many as possible so that you can keep going back to the well. Forcing a coach into a trade that they later regret, and in which the league feels was terribly unbalanced to begin with (even though it served your needs), decreases the chances of you pulling off a successful trade on your next attempt. Do so more than once and you will quickly get a negative reputation that will significantly impact your future trade opportunities. Rely on the subtle use of your skills from this article, make the trade and keep your yap shut. If you know you got the better end of the deal, and the other coach is confident in the deal he/she made, then you could not have a better scenario.

Do: Focus on coaches who are willing trade partners

This goes back to assessing the coaches within your league. Every coach has different tendencies and those tendencies can be used to your advantage. Every coach has tradable assets, whether they exist in the form of rostered players or future draft picks. In most cases, coaches without significant rostered assets will have better draft picks in upcoming drafts; do not fail to recognize these situations. Identify those coaches that have immediate gratification personalities and trade your excess for future draft picks in the upcoming draft.

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Do Not: Try to get blood from a rock

Many coaches take an inordinate amount of effort to trade with, even if the trade involves secondary players. In most cases, this is due to the coach either overvaluing their players, undervaluing yours or due to the fear of the unknown.

We all make trades that eventually don't pan out. For an active trader, it is going to happen, get over it. But, as long as your league contains a number of willing coaches, there is no need to focus on those that are unwilling or unable. While you always want to give them an opportunity to make an offer, do not expect the zebra to change its stripes. Move along, nothing to see here.

Do: Establish allies, especially in the other division

If you have a divisional format for your league, do not underestimate the power of alliances against a common 'foe' (those usually being the divisional champion the year before).

By creating an air of teamwork towards a common enemy, you increase your chances of getting a deal done. Excessive enthusiasm and positive energy can go a long way in swaying the trade offer to your side. For example, in a trade scenario that you wish to move along with an inter-divisional coach, an overly cheerful phone call in which you state "Lets get this deal done, get them off the top of the standings, and we'll be meeting in the championship" can be all that is needed to secure the deal.

Your goal is to get final approval from the coach and get the deal to the commissioner for immediate approval. Do you care if you meet the other coach in the championship game next year? Of course not, but you are trying to increase your odds of being one of the participants.

It is always a good idea to trade outside your division whenever possible, unless you are certain that your team is getting the better end of the bargain. Making a divisional rival better via trade is never a recommended practice.

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Do Not: Burn bridges or sell-out

We have all had situations where information has been used against us. It happens in the NFL draft, and it happens in fantasy football drafts as well. It is always in your best interest to know who is going to be drafted ahead of you in the draft. It is also extremely helpful to know the players which coaches are targeting below you in the draft, though this information is usually difficult to get as coaches are very secretive about their draft selections, for obvious reasons. If you elect to share information with those above you, even if a coach has told you who he is taking, do so at your own risk. Even the slightest bit of logic as to your selection can make a coach change his mind. Ultimately, you become the loser in that situation. When establishing relationships with other coaches for the purpose of obtaining information, do not, do not, do not sell them out by sharing that info with coaches ahead of them in the draft.

As a successful snake-oil salesman, you do have to abide by some unwritten rules of engagement. Quite simply put, if you sell out a fellow coach that has shared information that benefits you, expect to never be trusted with information again. Or, if a coach below you has given you his direction based on your "selection," and you change direction and take their player, expect the same result. Coaches do not like to be burned and regardless of the reasoning, it won't float.

SUMMARY

As you can see, the seemingly simple task of completing a trade can be made very difficult. Know that none of this is required for working a deal. However, the name of the game is success over a long period of time. In order to be successful, you need to consistently get more than you give. Those coaches who pay special attention to the intricacies of psychology, communication and relationship building are the ones who will be able to stack the deck in their favor.

As one final reminder, always remember to downplay your trades and your role as a trader. While we all want to be successful traders, gaining that perception erodes your ability to continue engaging in successful trades. As your fellow coaches become familiar with your volume and success, the bar is raised. Do not under, any circumstances, allow your ego or joy from a successful trade to dictate your course of action in your rumor mill or distribution list to other coaches. Again, keep your yap shut and your enthusiasm to yourself.

Trade well.

TRADING TACTICS

BEING FUTURISTIC IN NATURE

It's important to use the future to your advantage. We've said many times that fantasy football is a little bit of math and a little bit of science. When looking at your team, there are three ways to use some math and science to get a step ahead. They are as follows:

- 1.) Avoid the big end of the two or three for one
- 2.) Use your roster limitations to your advantage
- 3.) Use generalized draft pick mindsets

Avoid the Big End of the Two or Three for one

This is one of the biggest areas of avoidance. Successful teams rarely sign off a two or three for one trade where they are getting multiple players in return. Some coaches will attempt to convince you their package of players is equal to or greater than the value you're giving up. While that may be true on paper, there are two things to consider.

- 1.) You're likely not going to play all the players you get in return regularly
- 2.) This doesn't take into consideration players you'll have to drop

In essence, every trade involving players is always a "2 for 2" or "3 for 3" when you consider your roster limitations. It may be great to acquire three players, but keep in mind you'll have to drop two players to make room...at the same time, the other coach gets to ACQUIRE two players off the wire for free, making it a "3 for 3." It's rare to see the recipient of multiple players make out better in this type of a deal. The only exception would be if you're getting back bona fide starters and #1 doesn't apply. Even then, you should prefer to get future commodities instead of players. See the next tip to understand why.

Use Your Roster Limitations to Your Advantage

This is one area we NEVER avoid when building or rebuilding a franchise!

In a dynasty league, you have roster limitations. It's a way of life you have to accept. However, most dynasty leagues don't have commodity restrictions. If you're forward thinking enough, you can strategically position yourself for the future well with this strategy. For example, I spend a lot of effort to acquire the 2nd and 3rd round picks in my league as part of bigger trades. These don't cost me any roster spots at the time of acquisition and I can always parlay them into better or future picks later if I choose not to use them. With no trades, every team would have a full roster and one pick for each round. If you use this wisely, you could have a full roster and massive picks for the future, setting your franchise up with a ton of flexibility. Many will say it poses a problem because you have to cut players

TRADING TACTICS

BEING FUTURISTIC IN NATURE

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when you draft, but if you plan properly, you can move excess players and/or trade those picks out into the future to acquire even more commodities. When used with tip #1, you can actually pull off a trade like this:

Player A

Player B

For

#1 in 2010

#1 in 2011

#2 in 2012

Take advantage of the roster limits to add two other prospects off the wire. For you, using the lack of a commodity restriction allows you to add two players to your roster as projects. This creates a trade where you not only get two #1s and a #2, but also two prospects for free. Knowledge of this basic fantasy math is essential for a rebuilding dynasty team.

Use Generalized Draft Pick Mindsets

If you're really good at team analysis, this can be a really good asset. If you're bad at it, avoid it like the plague. In many leagues, there are a group of coaches who view picks as equal by round. For example, some owners view a first round pick as something around #5, a second round pick as something around #15, etc. If you can uncover these owners, you can really use this to your advantage.

For example, if you believe your team will contend, another will not AND you're confident in your analysis, you can approach another owner with an offer of your first round pick for a solid player and their second round pick. Some owners will look at that as #5 for a player and #15 by using generalized draft pick mindsets. You know better. In fact, your expectation is this trade is something like pick #9 or #10 for a significant player asset and pick #11 or #12. This can be an easy way to get real value for perceived value. It can certainly be applied for #2s, #3s, etc.

Use this tip wisely, though. If you're in a league with some serious parity, I'd avoid it. While the difference in choices for a 10-team league could be as little as 1 (#10 vs. #11), it could be as great as 19 (#1 vs. #20). That's a huge swing, so you better be confident in your analysis of both squads. The more teams in your league, the more risk is associated as well.

TRADING TACTICS

THE ART OF THE DEAL

"It is a matter of life and death, a road to either safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject to inquiry which can on no account be neglected" -Sun Tzu

For those of you not familiar with the infamous fifth century BC Chinese military strategist, Sun Tzu, we urge you to read the translated strategy and tactic treatise, *The Art of War*. Even today, this timeless piece is extremely relevant. While it has never been suggested, could it be that the great Sun Tzu was concerned with some other type of dynasty? We'll leave you to ponder the similarities and the potential of such a thought.

Whether conquering a continent or your league, research and prudent soldier (player) selections alone cannot be your only sources of strategic focus. You must also focus on the art of the deal. More simply put, you must master and practice the art of successful trading.

The key here is in understanding four very important elements of each trade:

1. What you have
2. What you want
3. Variables
4. Psychology

1) What you have – This is not a subjective assessment of the player(s) involved, but the “what-is” of the situation. Note that this does not mean that you have to publicly disclaim the what-is, but you do need to understand, objectively, what the strengths, weaknesses and tangibles are of the player(s) you are attempting to move are. Without this, you are leaving yourself open to being wooed, surprised or otherwise stricken with accepting out of emotion and not from a position of sound reason. Understand fully what the player offers YOU first, before engaging in any negotiations.

2) What you want – We don't know how many times we've come across coaches who are offering trades, but don't know what they are really looking for. I personally love this situation because it allows me to “sell” assets that I don't need for potentially whatever it is they are offering. These types of coaches are easy marks in my book. Obviously, the players being sold must be assets that you want, but in many cases you can use these players as the gateway to a bigger, more impactful, deal. In many cases, just the response and resulting dialog to a trade offer is enough to open the door well beyond what was desired in the first place by the offering coach. You must take off the blinders when being approached and not see just a single player in an offer, but an entire team of low hanging fruit. Once a coach is in a selling mood, he can be taken advantage of in many cases. Remember that “no” is the only answer that has no retort. Even then, it doesn't close the door to further discussions.

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THE ART OF THE DEAL

3) Variables – These tiny, and sometimes not-so-tiny, tidbits of information are extremely important to understand. What is the situation of the other team? What does his depth chart look like? Is his team aging, young ... rebuilding? Are other coaches targeting the team in question already? Has he finished second in his division three years running? Every detail that you can uncover can be woven into an elaborate sales pitch that paints a favorable and convincing picture. These are the pawns in your game that will need to be managed to setup and ultimately close the deal.

4) Psychology – Arguably, this is THE most important factor. None of the other items in this list matter if you approach a fellow coach in a manner that doesn't setup the trade properly ahead of time, offends him or otherwise shuts him down before you have a chance to get to the details. You cannot use a one style fits all mentality when designing a trade. Is the other coach one that will buckle under pressure and give you an "ok, let's do it"? Is he one that, when pressured, defaults to "no"? Is he one that if given time to sleep on it, will always back out the next morning? Is he the type that is susceptible to subjective phrases about value ... or how his team is "much better" after the deal? Understanding the psychological behaviors of your trading partner is an absolute must in getting a trade done quickly and efficiently.

By doing a little bit of homework on these four items before approaching a fellow coach, you will significantly increase your chances of closing the deal and making your team better.

"Fair" does not mean "equal."

Whether you have a day job, follow politics or simply have children, something that you must realize is that being fair does not necessarily mean being equal. Better put, in *The Art of the Deal*, nowhere does it mandate that a trade needs to be equal for it to be proposed or accepted. In fact, we offer to you that if you are looking for equality before accepting or proposing possible trades, you are doing yourself a disservice. Let us be much more explicit by giving you these two rules that you must internally believe:

- 1) If you are an offering coach, it is NOT your responsibility to be concerned with equality of a deal
- 2) If you are a receiving coach, it is NOT your responsibility to give back equal value in any deal

Notice we used the term "internally believe?" We say this because to verbally express this prior to any communication(s) will only serve to shut down discussion or otherwise damage the potential trade relationship going forward. Understanding these two rules are tenets of successful (not in getting deals done, but deals benefitting your team) trading is all that is required ... verbalizing them is something that is needed.

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Let's talk a little bit about value. Every coach will have their own valuation system. Some will place more value on position, some may place more value on wide receivers in a PPR system, many prefer age over production while others may only look at fantasy points per game (fppg). Whatever the metric, value is a subjective argument as it relates to equality. If you only view value from a pure fppg perspective, that is one way to establish equality but it is also unrealistic as it is far too one dimensional.

Another very important fact about value is that the term immediately takes on another dimension when a player is applied to a different roster. A 13 fppg receiver on a roster full of good receivers will not nearly hold the same value as that same player on WR-needy team. Understanding the specifics of the team in trade with you is vital. That same 13 ppg WR could be highly valued, to a degree much greater than his positional ranking, to that same needy team ... and therefore will command more value in return. Making these teams your target is an exceptional way to trade off your depth for younger players, draft picks or a combination of both.

When looking at, and accepting, the two tenets above, you are ready to engage another coach. Once you have identified what you are looking for and what you are willing to move to get it, it's time to choose, in order, your targets. Your first step is to assess the strength and position of your target's team and coach. Where is he weak? Is he competitive within his division? Is he rebuilding or trying to get over the top? This assessment should ultimately yield your approach to him. There are a thousand ways to open a dialog for a trade ... but your attitude can make all the difference.

If you've done a thorough assessment of his team, and yours, you understand what dry powder you have available to get a deal done. By staying positive, complimentary and through using reinforcing statements such as "let's help each other" or "I'd like to see you win your division" may sound cliché but are statements the opposing coach can buy into and will keep the lines of communication open. Personally, we don't much care for deals where we're giving up the same fppg as I am receiving. Unless your team is an opposite match of my trade partner in areas of need, there just isn't enough catalyst for a trade in most situations.

We like to find true opportunities in teams that are loaded in a particular area of need for my team. Note that this isn't always a starting roster need, it could just as easily be for purposes of pairing with other players/positions to later trade. Regardless, coaches that have substantial depth, young performing talent or have other areas of need are more likely to trade for less in return due to the fact that the player may never see their starting lineup. Additionally, if the team isn't competitive but has an aging stud, there exists enormous potential to land this play due to the fact that he will "not be in the league by the time you're competitive. This trade helps you." Do not be afraid to make statements like that. Just like it isn't your responsibility to give up equal value, as a subjective statement, you don't have to be correct when you say it ... you just have to be convincing, but tread lightly.



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We firmly believe that you do not want to be overly aggressive with your value assessments or statements. Yes, you want to be convincing and, yes, you want to maintain a positive approach in your dealings, but avoid belittling a coach, his team or otherwise coming off as superior. To do so is a no-win situation. You must keep your assessments and statements positive and reassert the value that the trade has for HIS team.

If you are being approached for trade, much of the same preliminary due diligence must be performed. With any luck, you already know everything important about the offering coach's team. In most situations, this is the ideal scenario in that when another team comes calling, you are in a position of strength. This is why it is extremely important that when you are the offering coach, that you enter into negotiations in a very low-key and neutral way ... in order to retain the strength; you're not an offering coach, you're a strategist working for the benefit of both teams.

Near the top of your to-do list when approached, is to immediately assess the value of the trade for the offering coach in order to determine his desire for the deal. Your goal, just like at any other time, is to give up as little as possible while returning greater value (to you). From this point, a trade may take only moments or days. And unlike when you are the offering coach, this is the only situation where you can carefully insert a statement such as "if you want him you're going to need to make it worthwhile for me". This is just your way of saying "you've come to me for this trade and I expect greater value in return" or "I'm not interested in an equal trade solely to benefit you". Realize that in most situations, these previous two statements can be often implied so limited use is suggested, lest you come off as caustic and unapproachable, or worse, a coach who constantly overvalues his players.

To summarize, your goal in either situation, buyer or seller, is to create an environment and/or setting of team-work and success in the trade discussion. The work involved up to this point can be significant in both time and results. Understand the differences between "fair" and "equal" and use them to your advantage to complete a transaction. We all like to be the benefactor of a great trade, but your approach before and your actions following the trade will largely determine whether your level of success and possible future transactions.

TRADING TACTICS

LEAGUE POWER RANKING

There are as many styles and strategies to building a successful dynasty team as there are players in the NFL. Finding a style that YOU are comfortable with is key to building a successful approach over the long term.

Regardless of which tactics you use and to what degree you use them, trading must be near the top of your list if you are to maximize your efforts. Without successful trading, a coach is relegated to bettering his or her team only through either the rookie draft or via your league's waiver wire system. Both these strategies are important on their own, but the rookie draft carries a high bust rate and you will only be one of many combing your waiver wire for talent. Successful trading, on the other hand, is the primary method towards addressing specifically identified needs of your team. The beauty about trading is that it doesn't require the risks attached with the rookie draft (unless a draft pick is what you are seeking) or the mosh-pit that is your free agent pool.

In this exercise, we are focusing on identifying teams that are likely to have far better draft picks NEXT year than they did this year due to any number of reasons that we will discuss later.

My favorite part of trading has always been the psychological component required to do it well and pull off deals that benefit my team. There isn't just one approach that works, you must be a chameleon – being what the other coach needs in order to get a deal through. Is your approach one of a used car salesman, the unassuming coach with a soft-sell approach or perhaps the stats-driven logic nut? The best traders that I've seen use whatever is needed at the time to get a trade through. If you aren't able to change your style or tactics to fit the situation at hand, you will remain one dimensional and your results will suffer.

Let's talk about your league power ranking.

Some sites actually have a power ranking while others simply rely on a first-to-last approach toward determining who the best and worst teams are, respectively. But what I'm talking about here is nothing formal that you need be concerned with. In the minds of most fantasy coaches, their teams are better-off than their most recent record or roster would suggest, regardless of whether this is true or not. Within this belief is an opportunity that too few other coaches take advantage of, the ability to specifically target teams that will likely be holding very high draft picks at the end of the following year.

Contending or deep teams in the dynasty format are usually there for a reason, their owners do the work necessary to objectively assess and procure talent, are always monitoring their depth chart, do their homework on players to maximize draft pick success and are effective traders. Let me also state that one of the most important attributes to being a successful dynasty coach is having a healthy level of paranoia. I don't know many fantasy champions that aren't and it's the paranoia that is the gateway to the other "work" previously noted. Paranoia is an amazingly motivating feeling.

TRADING TACTICS

LEAGUE POWER RANKING

As it relates to the power ranking in your league, it's imperative that you understand the haves and the have-nots at the end of each year. Ignore the conjecture and posturing about luck, the fantasy gods or under-performance. See instead, age, injury and the team dynamic. We call this looking at the "what is." Your goal here is to find the team that finished higher than they should have or a team whose future prospects are far more dire than their record suggests due to aging players, possible retirement or other team dynamic. Specifically identify teams that have not identified or addressed depth issues such that a single key injury would render them largely uncompetitive.

There are, quite honestly, a vast number of variables in the equation that you can use towards ascertaining next year's final standings and draft order. Sure, it's a lot of logical guess work, but the alternative is to do nothing at all and you'll be surprised at your ability to forecast future standings when you put the work in. When you are moving for a future second round selection, you should immediately know whether that selection is likely to be 18-20 (ten team league) or 12-14. If you have your eye on a would-be rookie in next year's draft, your goal is to target a team that finished just out of the playoffs or as the lowest seed in the playoffs that is likely to take a significant drop next year.

Here are just some of the questions to ask yourself when surveying your league towards identifying these teams:

- Is there a team that won low-scoring affairs because of "off" weeks by stronger opponents?
- Is there a team that benefited from players that aren't likely to reproduce last year's results?
- Is there a team that was fortunate and had no injuries and has less than ideal depth?
- Is there a team that defied all logic in multiple weeks in winning their games?
- Is there a team that is relying on aging veterans that are at the end of their road?

Once you've done the work, you now break out your crystal ball towards building next year's finish order. Look for the biggest disparity between last year's finish and next year's finish. This team is your target for draft pick acquisition. Remember, it's not just about the first round in the rookie draft, either.

One last piece of advice when it comes to actively discussing and bartering with your targeted coach. Use the "what is" of LAST year as your basis for the trade. This simply means that you are free to ignore all the reasons that you have come up with for targeting the coach in the first place and, instead, concentrate on all the reasons why this coach is going to repeat or even exceed his last year's performance again next year. Your goal in these discussions is to minimize the value of the draft pick that you are seeking. You want your target coach to believe he has one hand on the league trophy next year and that his picks aren't nearly as valuable as you believe they are. Of course, you know different. If this all seems dirty and underhanded, it's not. It's the "what is" of the situation and trading in general. The quicker you can come to grips with it, the the quicker you'll have a grip on the league trophy.

TRADING TACTICS

MASS TRADE OFFERS

When you first start playing in dynasty leagues, you may have loved the feeling of negotiating a trade, but found it hard to find a partner. Part of the problem may not be understanding player values in dynasty, but another part of the problem may be playing it safe too often. It's easy to sit back and wait for trades to come to you, or maybe send out an offer or two hoping someone will bite. You may even go out of your way to make a post to your league's trade block, but that's often not enough.

When you really want to move a player, it's time to start sending out offers in bulk. Everyone has their players they want to target (if you're like us, there are dozens of them) and you can always find multiple players in the same tier you wish you could target. The good thing is you can target as many of them as you want while shopping guys you want to move. Instead of sitting around waiting for something to happen, begin sending out as many offers at once as you're comfortable with.

This strategy works on multiple fronts. By sending out trade offers to multiple teams in your league, everyone knows who you're looking to move, and you're much more likely to get someone to pull the trigger on a trade or to receive a counter that opens the door to negotiations. You'll be surprised how much easier it is to find trade partners if everyone knows what you're seeking from them in exchange for your players.

In fantasy football, just like anything else, most owners want to achieve as much success as possible with the least amount of work needed. While you may never receive an offer if you say you're looking to trade a top running back for a top receiver in a package, sending offers to all the teams with comparable wide receivers you're looking for takes most of the work out of your trading partner's hands, often leading to swift negotiations.

Sending out trade offers in mass will result in many more rejections than accepted trades, but this strategy leads to progress much quicker than targeting one or two teams and trying to work something out. Instead of an email or two, if you're in a 12-team league, send hard trade offers to 6-8 teams.

It's up to you what sort of trade offers you send. You can send out the fairest offer possible on your first attempt, or leave yourself a little wiggle room to make a compromise. Both ways have been tried, and leave yourself just a little room to pull back if an offer is rejected. If you send out your absolute best offer and the other owner comes back to negotiate, it can feel like pulling hairs to try to work something out.

TRADING TACTICS

MASS TRADE OFFERS

(continued from the previous page)

If there's a 4th round rookie pick coming back to you that you just threw into your original offer, you don't even have to hesitate in asking the other owner, "Would it make any difference if I took that 4th round pick out of the offer?" To the other owner it looks like you're doing a little to level with them, which you are. What they don't know is you weren't necessarily expecting them to pull the trigger on the deal in the first place. You shouldn't expect to make a trade on the first round of offers. Things usually heat up after your offer is rejected.

When an owner rejects your offer, send them a short email saying you're interested in working something out if they are, and are willing to negotiate if you can get a little insight into what they're looking for. Most owners will reply to your emails, and your follow-up is a sign that you're willing to work with them to make a trade that benefits their team.

This follow-up email often leads to nice dialogue about your offer, and can pave the road to a trade. If the other owner still isn't open to a trade, that's okay, too. Sending follow-up emails will help improve your relationships with other owners in the league, leading to further negotiations down the road. Always remember that just because you didn't make the deal today doesn't mean it won't lead anywhere in the future. A good impression can go a long way.

If an owner makes it known they're not interested in any sort of package involving those players, just cross them off the list of teams you've targeted, but don't stop making offers until you've crossed all possible partners off the list. With a little work, you shouldn't have trouble finding a partner in your league. It only takes 5-10 minutes to pump out quite a few offers, and then you can sit and wait for the rejections/accepted trades to come back to you before taking your next steps.

Sending out mass trade offers can speed up a rebuild quickly. Instead of planning the traditional "fire sale" that many owners attempt, you'll find yourself flipping players for others, and increasing the value on your team. Always remember the goal is to improve the value of your team. If you manage to swap a player for another with better value, don't be afraid to pull the trigger just because you don't like the player. Instead, make the trade and start all over, sending out multiple offers and flipping the player you received for one that you are higher on.

Everyone should have some sort of method they use for making dynasty trades. Without a plan, you'll have trouble making anything happen, but if you have an attack plan it'll be easier for you to make the deals you're looking for. All you need is a list of the teams in your league and a commitment to putting in the work needed to get a deal done. As long as you can handle the multiple rejections and be devoted to sending follow-up emails, you'll see an increase in the number of successful trades you make.

TRADING TACTICS

TRADE AND CONSOLIDATE

So, you hit the fantasy wall. Fantasy playoffs are over and it's time for the off-season. You're thinking that there's not much action to expect over the next few months leading up to the draft. Bummed? Well, you shouldn't be because that's the wrong mentality, my friend, especially if you want a successful dynasty team.

This is the time of the year where your dynasty team is made. There are certain things that will happen throughout the playoffs, as well up until the draft where you can take advantage of favorable value via trades and the waiver wire. Always try to do two things:

- 1) Trade; and
- 2) Consolidate

Trade

Having a consistent strong and competitive dynasty team is all about value plays. Each of us has the opportunity to take some serious advantage of NFL players whose value balloon in the offseason due to fluff pieces or solid statistical performances throughout the playoffs. You must take advantage and sell high.

Now, clearly that's easier than it sounds because the ideal move in this hobby (and what many of us try to do) is to sell at the peak and buy at the trough. However, too many of us fall in love with players, won't budge and don't selling high. There's always that second guess moment of, "I think this guy is at his peak value, but what if I sell now and he continues to produce?" You can't let that moment keep you from obtaining value. More likely than not, the guy will produce and end up rotting away on your roster after a few solid seasons and you'll have nothing to show for it.

We see too many dominant teams inactive in the offseason year after year and we routinely find them falling behind until one day they're middle of the pack with little trade value on their team and they go through a long struggle for a few seasons in an effort to rebuild. You've got to make the call to deal a high value player who may be a solid contributor to your team the following season or make the decision to sell a player who is losing value, even though you don't want to sell short. Sell him to get a lower valued guy who you think is undervalued plus a little bit more value in a prospect or rookie picks. There are very few players who are going to produce at a peak level for a number of years and carry your team to a championship and we've got to understand that to be successful.

TRADING TACTICS

TRADE AND CONSOLIDATE

Rarely is it wise to keep your team consistent, regardless of how well you did in the previous season. You should typically find one or two core players or cornerstone guys to center your squad around. Even if you win the championship in a league, you should still be wheeling and dealing in the offseason by trading players, even if they helped you win the trophy. We generally hold the view that it's highly unlikely that the same team that brought you to the championship will help you get there again.

You must continuously realign your team otherwise it goes stale, loses value and your forced into rebuild mode after a few seasons. Some may say that this may prevent you from winning a championship or that you're a trade addict, but look at it as an opportunity to annually make the playoffs and get a shot at the crown on an annual basis. Otherwise you're playing for a few years and that's not a solid dynasty game plan.

Consolidate

This goes right along with one of the tips you'll find in this Play Book - avoid the big end of the "2 for 1" or "3 for 1" trade, but this is from the opposite end of the trade.

This goes along with trading (strategy #1), but it's a different philosophy as compared to value plays since you may need to sacrifice a little bit more value to trade up a tier. What you do is package two or three players who are decent prospects or productive players and pair them with a higher tier player to trade up in value. You then grab your favorite lower tier rookie or sleeper off the waiver wire and sit him on your bench. This now upgrades your lineup and adds some potential to the team. Now some guys may knock this philosophy, but quite a number of these "long-shots" will eventually hold solid value in the dynasty format. It seems like every year there's a player or two that steps up and becomes a fantasy starter, so it's wise always try to trade up in value and get long-shots on my roster.

One side note is that many owners are reluctant to give up the best player in the deal, so often you need to overpay as added incentive to make the trade.

Right now in your league, there are players on the waiver wire that will eventually become fantasy starters. You hear some owners saying, "You win championships on the waiver wire," and this is how you do it. You need to open roster spots while upgrading your lineup. Roster flexibility is key in dynasty leagues.

So, trade and consolidate, rinse and repeat.

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: PAWN STARS

No matter how close a trade is, or how many people in a league agree the trade was even, it's not – someone wins and someone loses. Who doesn't want to always be on the winning side, but *how* is the bigger question?

We have to do is give the ol' remote control another couple presses and we can get a front row seat to some of the best negotiators out there, the cast of the History Channel's smash hit and focus of the second article in the Hidden Lessons series, **Pawn Stars**.

The cast of Pawn Stars consists of four central characters.

The patriarch of the Harrison family, Richard Harrison who, with his son, opened the pawn shop where the series is set, the "World Famous Gold & Silver Pawn Shop." Richard is affectionately referred to as "The Old Man" by the cast. Richard's son, Rick Harrison is co-owner of the store and appears to be in charge of the day-to-day managing of the store. Corey Harrison, Rick's son and Richard's grandson, helps operate the store along with his childhood friend, and fourth major member of the cast, Austin "Chumlee" Russell.

The premise of the show revolves around how the cast members negotiate with the clientele who come into their store. The store's clientele bring objects that they deem valuable and attempt to sell or pawn that item in return for money or store credit. A vast majority of the clientele shown on the show are simply looking to sell their items, very few actually are seeking to pawn them.

People come into a pawn shop with an item in their possession and expect to leave with a different item or, in most instances, cash. The negotiations surround any given item are all about maximizing one's value at the expense of one's trading partner. In other words, these negotiations are a zero-sum game. For those unfamiliar with zero-sum games, the definition of this term is essentially that if one side in the game gains it is directly at the expense of the opposing side.

Seeing any similarities to fantasy football yet?

If not, let me clue you in. This is a very similar scenario to trading in fantasy football. Whatever one side gives up is a direct gain for the opposing trade partner. The value both sides place upon their acquisitions is relative. However, make no mistake, every trade has one winner and one loser. Let's take a look at this popular show and try to take away some important lessons it has to share with us.

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: PAWN STARS

First, let's take a look at how the cast makes a successful deal and how we can use those lessons in the realm of fantasy football.

Central to the cast's negotiation process is they enter the negotiations from a position of power; they are not the party initiating the negotiations, their partner is. As such, the onus is on their partner to sell their position, not the cast member.

Immediately out of the gate, all the cast has to do is listen and take in information. Many times the party initiating the negotiations will tip their hand – they'll either give away a flaw in their item, they will expose a reason why they should not be offered their asking price or they will undersell a potentially valuable aspect of their item unintentionally.

The most important thing the cast must do at the opening of these negotiations is listen, closely. After taking in the opening pitch, the cast member in negotiation will always, always ask what their trading partner is seeking as a price and will begin negotiations from that starting point. If you notice, the cast member will never make the initial offer, they do not want to offer more than their trading partner is seeking.

Coupled with the information they collected from their trading partner, they will do one of three things

- 1.) They'll accept the initial offer, which rarely occurs.
- 2.) They'll ask to bring in one of their experts to appraise the item before they make an offer.
- 3.) They turn the initial offer down and work on bringing down the price of their trading partner – this happens more often than not.

The implications for fantasy football here are clear. If a deal is great, don't mess around and accept it. If your trading partner is asking too much or has exposed a weakness, work them down. The third option, which should be employed whenever possible, is to bring in your own expert, an opinion you trust which can give you a non-biased and clear assessment of the offer. Two, or more, heads are always better than one. Your friendly DLF staff and DLF Forum stand by ready and willing to be that expert – just ask!

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: PAWN STARS

When a person comes into a trade, they almost always overvalue their side of the deal with the expectation that their trading partner will try to work them down. Don't disappoint them if you aren't entirely comfortable with the deal. Simply offer less or ask for more. Remember, the burden to make the deal is on them, not you. Feel free to low ball their offer or ask for much more than you expect, this buys you the same wiggle room they have already built into their offer. The cast of Pawn Stars knows this and will almost always offer far less than one would expect. They have a myriad of reasons to explain the low ball offer, whether its their overhead cost, the time they'll have to hold onto the item, a soft market or numerous other reasons.

The true reason for the very low offer is to buy them negotiation room. The cast knows what they are willing to spend for the item very early in the negotiation process, and you should, too. Offer low, or ask for a lot, but establish in your mind the line you won't cross.

The Pawn Stars cast rarely accepts any offer of their trading partner; they fight for every extra inch and always leave the ball in the court of their opponent. If their trading partner makes an offer, they either counter-offer or stand their ground, but one thing you'll almost never see is a cast member accept an offer – they leave the accepting of offers up to the trade initiator. This tactic maximizes the value of the cast member's offer and leaves no value "sitting on the table."

How about if you're the trade initiator, though? Are you hopelessly out of luck and have to expect to be bulldozed by your potential trading partner? No, of course not. You've got options available to you as well, but you have to play your cards right and have all your ducks in a row before making the offer.

First, a person seeking to initiate a trade needs to do two things:

- 1.) First, come with a strong offer which forces the trade partner to consider the offer right out of the box.
- 2.) Second, the trade initiator needs to sell the offer, speaking only of the upside for both parties involved and must not discount either side of the initial offer.

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: PAWN STARS

If an initiator attempts to discount what they are seeking from their trade partner or points out issues with the offer they are making, then their partner will immediately be put on the defensive and will seek out other reasons why the trade must be altered. In Pawn Stars, these are the clientele who come in and point out flaws with their own item or keep telling the cast members how great of a deal they are trying to give them. There is a thin line between promoting the fairness to all parties involved and overselling value of the item the initiator is giving up. It's constantly tempting to cross that line to help get a deal done and unfortunately this is a critical flaw in the sales pitch of many trade initiators.

Humans all have an inherent sense of value, but how they value the world around them is slightly different in everyone. Think of it as a value fingerprint – no two value fingerprints are the same. Just as you wouldn't want someone rubbing the fingerprints off your hand, people get touchy when others try to alter the value they've established around them through a lifetime of experience. The most successful negotiators on Pawn Stars come into the store well informed about the item they are offering and have a good sense of its value. They don't try to change their trading partner's value system; they simply stick to their own.

So, how do trade initiators ever win trades?

Again, this answer is two-fold – an offer must ask for more than one expects from your trade partner and offer less than you expect to give. This is not to say one should ask for the world but offer nothing, far from. If a trade initiator makes such an offer their trade partner could, and should, feel insulted. Rather, a trade initiator needs to “leave some meat on the bone” for both sides to chew at. Expect to offer more and ask for less to get a deal done. If you are seen trying to compromise, your trade partner will feel compelled to do the same. If you ask for less, it's a good bet your trading partner will “play ball” and offer more. As you both chew at the meat left on the bone, you will likely meet at, or close to, the expected value.

What if your potential trading partner just isn't willing to negotiate with you or won't get into the realm of your expected value? Well, sometimes the best deal one ever makes is by not making a deal at all. If you don't get offered what you are looking for in order to get a deal done, don't be afraid to walk away. There is no rule that says once negotiations begin they must end with a completed deal.

Many times on Pawn Stars, one side or the other will simply walk away from the negotiating table. If the cast are unwilling to pay what their potential trade partner is expecting, then the threat by one side or the other to walk away from the deal will sometimes spur acceptance of the deal. Worst case, you walk away from the negotiations with exact what you started with, but at least you didn't lose value in the deal.



TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: PAWN STARS

This, of course, leads to the final lesson we can take away from Pawn Stars which is not accepting a trade that isn't in your best interest simply because you covet what is being offered or simply desire to get a deal done.

If you've watched Pawn Stars with any frequency, you know that at least once an episode one of these two phrases are uttered, "It wasn't the amount I was looking for, but it's better than nothing," or "Why did you buy that? You overspent and it will take forever to sell this." The first quote is always said by one of the clients who show up on the show when they get much less than what they felt their item was worth. The second quote is usually said by one of the Harrison clan when one of the other cast members overspent for an item they fell in love with. The lesson here, of course, is don't fall in love with an offer or accept an offer simply to feel the rush of a post-acceptance trade. Getting a trade done may feel good or get you a shiny new toy, but once the newness or euphoria wears off, you may not be happy with what you gave up and regret inevitably sets in.

Pawn Stars is an excellent show that produces textbook case studies on both how and how not to negotiate trades. It's nearly impossible to walk away from an episode without learning a thing or two about the dynamics of trade negotiations from a cast that carries out negotiations as their livelihood. If you've seen the show then you know just how useful it can be. If you haven't seen the show then check it out on the History Channel and join the party!

Don't forget, your friendly DLF staff and Forum Community are standing by to be your trade experts, send any questions about potential trades over and we'll all do our best to look out for you and give you an honest opinion.

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: AMERICAN PICKERS

What nuggets of hidden wisdom can we find in the History Channel's hit show American Pickers? As it turns out, there are several things we can take away from this highly entertaining show.

First and foremost is the obvious – people hoard things and forget about them. In fantasy football, we see this regularly. In many, many dynasty leagues, owners draft deep rosters of random players with little rhyme or reason beyond their expected starters. Your run of the mill fantasy football owner with a deep roster usually won't start many players beyond his or her expected ones. However, that same owner is a walking contradiction. They obviously value their starters much more than the rest of their lineup, yet when offered a fair deal for a player they never start, they almost always overvalue these players.

On more than one occasion over the course of a season, you've likely offered to trade for and away the same player to the same person in two separate leagues. The perceived value for that player varies greatly depending on who owns him. In fact, I can almost guarantee that if you shared two leagues with the same person and each of you owned a middle of the road player (we'll dub them "Player X") that in one of the two leagues it would be harder to obtain "Player X" then it would be to trade "Player X" away.

Why is that?

The cast of American Pickers deals with this exact quandary in nearly every episode. American Pickers centers on two best friends named Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz as they crisscross the United States looking for forgotten treasures. Mike and Frank dig through barns, sheds, warehouses and even fields filled with most people consider junk in search of items they can purchase from the owner and turn a profit on. It never fails – in every episode, our friendly pickers encounter people who haven't seen the item that Mike and Frank now covet in decades. Those people always ask an arm and a leg for that item that they didn't even know they had any longer. On the flip side, most episodes also feature Mike and Frank trying to move the items they purchased to prospective buyers. American Pickers provides a great way to see how ownership of an item affects valuation of that item.

Most of you can likely already see where I'm going here.

Fantasy football is all about valuation – both perceived and actual. What's valuable to me might be worthless to you and vice versa. However, it seems to be inherent human nature that even if the owner of an item finds it of little value; ownership itself seems to inflate it. Despite making almost no sense, I guarantee you we all do it. The sooner we realize that fact at the moment it's occurring, the better for each of us.

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: AMERICAN PICKERS

Countless times per episode, Mike and Frank will make a legitimate offer for what is essentially a forgotten item. The owner of that item will almost always decline that offer based solely on reflex. The value of the item doesn't seem to play a part in that answer, it's almost solely based upon emotion or instinct as opposed to logic. This reflex is based on the deep psychological remnants of generations passed where we collected what we needed to survive, not what we desired. Without digging too deep into matters of the mind, to be successful we need to separate what we need versus what we want to possess - we need to separate what we need to win versus what we want to own because we have some kind of sentimental attachment to.

Mike and Frank seem to understand this attachment and work hard to reason with the owner during negotiations. One of their "go to" arguments is pointing to the fact the owner hasn't used or seen this item in a very long time. When approaching a fantasy football owner, make the same initial argument. Point out they don't even use this player. Just as in American Pickers, your potential trading partner will seem to ignore this fact, but nonetheless, the seed has been planted in the back of their mind.

Choose a wide receiver who is good enough to start in a pinch, but given a choice, he isn't your stud wide receiver. He clearly has fantasy value in almost every league, but he sits in this weird nebulous area between starter and bench player. Some may feel differently, but arguments aside think of that player as our example in this article.

Let's say for arguments sake you are looking to get him as a fill in player at wide receiver due to an injury to your stud. The owner who currently owns him has only started him one or two times in a five year dynasty league. Upon approaching him with an offer, point this fact out. Stand fast because your initial offer will likely be turned down unless it's simply amazing and heavily slanted towards the other owner. As a smart dynasty owner who reads DLF, we all know you won't be sending offers that hurt your team though, right? The owner will shoot back an offer that you won't want to accept. Keep it open and let them know you'll think about it. Mike and Frank use this tactic regularly to keep the negotiations flowing and the communication channels open.

Accustomed to initial rejection, Mike and Frank have some strategies up their sleeves to sway the negotiations in their favor. They will continue to look around at the other items their host owns. They will chat the owner up about items they have little to no interest in and ask the price for each of these items. This does three things, it lets the owner share their knowledge about their treasures, it ingratiates the pickers to the owner by showing interest in what they own and it helps inflate the value of other items around the owner so that lowering the price on the original item doesn't seem like as much of a loss. An added bonus every once in a while comes when an owner shows an item to Mike and Frank they had no prior knowledge of and which suddenly intrigues them.

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: AMERICAN PICKERS

While this is occurring, Mike and Frank don't engage the owner, they simply let the owner talk. They don't really make much eye contact and almost seem to be barely listening to the owner. The owner doesn't realize it, but they are now working for Mike and Frank. The owner is working to impress them and earn their respect. Once this occurs, subconscious bonds begin to form. The owner doesn't know it, but they are softening themselves with little work from Mike and Frank.

To pull this move off in fantasy football, ask about several players on your potential trade partners roster. You don't even have to want these players, but ask about players who have some value. Take the conversation to a more fluid medium such as email, chat room or text message. It's very important to keep the discussion going, but don't seem too eager – pump them for information, but ask them to elaborate whenever possible. You want them to sell the players you don't want.

Right about this time, Mike and Frank try to break the ice and gain the owners trust by making a small buy. They'll offer five dollars for a small knick knack, they might even take a small loss just to gain that trust. In fantasy football, offer someone to your potential trading partner whom you will never start and request someone they likely won't start either. The drop in value between the two players should be minimal, but your trade partner must be seen to have won that trade. Maybe offer up a seventh round rookie draft pick as an extra bonus to sweeten the deal. You aren't looking to come out ahead here; you're simply looking to get your foot in the door.

Once Mike and Frank have broken the ice, they start to get back to the business at hand – obtaining the item they've had their mind on the entire time. What Mike and Frank like to do in order to achieve this is to bundle items together in order to lower the price for all the items involved. They love to bundle, particularly with items they have some interest in so they can get an item they really desire.

Bundling is particularly useful because values get muddled and properly valuing the deal becomes more difficult. If you can start adding pieces to the trade in order to help muddy the picture, even better. Talk up a lower grade player and make your potential trade partner think this player is your true target. Try to express the most interest in this player. Misdirection is key in order to lower the value of your true target and with the bundle as a whole. If your potential trading partner believes the centerpiece of the trade is a player less valuable than your true target, it's likely you can get the bundle as a whole for cheaper than expected because the centerpiece is what sticks in their mind.

Hopefully during your conversations with your potential trading partner you got a feel both for what they look for in players and which players on your squad they are particularly interested in. If you haven't had a chance to chat with your potential trade partner about this, it's time to play catch up and get their opinions on your mid-grade talent especially.

TRADING TACTICS

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: AMERICAN PICKERS

Mid-grade players particularly should be looked at as little more than bargaining chips. The reason for this is due to the fact that since you haven't had a high enough opinion to start these players on a regular basis, then you shouldn't internally value these players beyond how you treat them. Notice the key word in that last sentence, that word being "internally." You need to personally realize these players aren't very valuable to your team, but you must make your potential trade partner believe they are solid players worthy of a starting position on any team.

Just as in fantasy football, Mike and Frank seem to understand that you can't fall in love with everything you play eyes on. Sometimes you have to accept that some people just don't value things the same way you do. One of the prime tenants in fantasy football is, "don't fall in love with any one player." Don't try to work out a trade with only one owner – play the room, make the rounds, whichever cliché you choose, do it. If you find owners who are more open to dealing, foster that relationship.

So, what if you were able to pull off a bundled trade? You may have some players you may want to flip for some extra pieces and American Pickers helps us in this arena as well.

Mike and Frank always seem to have someone in mind who they can flip an item to when they make a purchase. Similarly, if you pull off a bundled trade, you should have a person in mind who you can flip extra players to also. Maybe you received an extra running back you can't use in a trade and another team in your league is very light at running back. Maybe one owner you know is very impressed with a certain player you just obtained. Whatever the case may be, send out feelers to these owners. Inquire about their interest in your newly acquired players. If there is even the slightest bit of interest, begin negotiations right away, without hesitation. Think back to your negotiations with the previous owner and use the talking points they mentioned to you. Why? Well, clearly the deal was completed between you and the previous owner, maybe those points helped sell you subconsciously. As a worst case, sharing these selling points can't hurt.

Let me be clear, moving all of your depth isn't advisable and is not the point of this article. However, leveraging your depth from time to time in order to improve your team is not only prudent, it's good strategy!

American Pickers is a great resource to observe low-level negotiations, misdirection and bundling in order to lower the overall price of items and flipping unneeded items for a profit. What's not to learn from digging through the forgotten treasures of others, negotiating with those people to try to make those treasures your own and then profiting from them? It's as if American Pickers is tailor-made for fantasy football lovers. Maybe Mike and Frank are fantasy football lovers at heart and just don't know it yet!

TRADING TACTICS

THE SKILL OF THE DYNASTY LEAGUE TRADE: TIPS, TECHNIQUES, TOOLS AND TERMS

Arguably the most crucial skill to learn if you want to be successful in a fantasy football dynasty league (or in any fantasy sport's dynasty league for that matter) is how to effectively make trades. This skill is neither pure science, nor pure skill, but certainly some combination of the two. The ideas are relatively simple, yet nearly impossible to master. Don't worry, this isn't a riddle, but then again, maybe it is!

Any successful dynasty league owner knows the importance of effective trading and has probably even cultivated their own system for evaluating trade proposals. They've learned the procedure of how to create the careful balance of relatively harmless psychological (and sometimes emotional) manipulation while using foundational tools such as statistical analysis, logic, and economic principals. If you've found yourself on a website like DLF reading an article about a topic as specific as this, you probably fit into one of the following categories:

Category A: You're an experienced dynasty owner who craves fantasy information which is specifically tailored for dynasty and keeper leagues and you're tired of sifting through the overabundance of generic and often mundane re-draft league directed articles on huge websites like ESPN and Yahoo.

Category B: You're relatively new to such leagues and need to get caught up to speed on one of the primary tactical differences between them and the old boring re-draft leagues to which you're probably accustomed.

Category C: A fellow owner in your dynasty league sent you a link to this article as a not-so-subtle way of saying you just made a horrible decision and to please figure this stuff out ASAP.

In any case, you're in the right spot!

To my brethren in Category A, most of the information below will probably second-nature to you already, but perhaps you can glean something new and useful. To those in Category B, some of the information herein is what precludes you from being in Category A, so take notes if you want to compete for a dynasty league championship anytime soon. Category C, the bad news is you've already been identified by your fellow league managers, but the good news is that your fortunes can (and will) change if you take heed to some of this advice.

TRADING TACTICS

THE SKILL OF THE DYNASTY LEAGUE TRADE: TIPS, TECHNIQUES, TOOLS AND TERMS

Trade Proposal Evaluation

Now, if you're anything like me – hypercompetitive, highly analytical, somewhat OCD, and borderline neurotic – or even if you're not, you need a basic system to evaluate trade proposals, both the ones you receive from other owners and the ones you create yourself. This process should be personal, repeatable, efficient and ultimately, effective. If you don't already have one, start with mine (below) as a basic template and modify it to fit your own needs.

It might take some trial and error to find something that works for you, but once you do, it will eventually become second-nature and you'll be competing for league titles in no time. If you're the owner who is sending the original proposal, make sure you complete Steps 1-3 on this list before making it official.

Step 1 – The Sniff Test

The first step in trade proposal evaluation is the Sniff Test. This step is pretty simple and it happens immediately when you open the proposal whether that's in an email from your league website or a text message directly from the offering owner. Wherever this initial reaction takes place, it's important. If it smells like excrement then it is excrement; reject the trade immediately without further consideration. Are you having a hard time identifying the scent? Is that cardamom? Hmmm...move on to Step 2. This step seems silly to mention, but without this filter, you'll end up wasting your time on proposals that are DOA.

Step 2 – The Bird's Eye View

Hooray for T-charts!

Grab a pencil and some scratch paper or even use an Excel spreadsheet if you're so inclined. In one-for-one player trade scenarios, this step isn't entirely necessary, but it's paramount in multiplayer, multi-pick, and/or multi-team trades.

This initial side-by-side comparison of the players/picks you're giving up with the players/picks you're receiving will help you determine if the trade is relatively balanced and if it should even be considered further. This bird's eye view comparison doesn't take relative value (we'll talk more about the term "value" later) into consideration, but it does help identify red flags and also helps start the process of a potential future counteroffer (Step 5).

TRADING TACTICS

THE SKILL OF THE DYNASTY LEAGUE TRADE: TIPS, TECHNIQUES, TOOLS AND TERMS

Step 3 – The Before and After

Rejoice for more T-charts!

If the proposal has survived past the Step 2 filter without rejection or requiring a counterproposal, Step 3 is a T-chart that does a side-by-side comparison of your team before and after the trade.

This step allows you to see how the trade will change the complexion of your team overall. For my money, it's the most important step in this entire process. However, it will be up to you to apply the parameters of your dynasty league's settings in order to determine the overall value of the trade.

At this point, the only way to answer the question about whether or not this trade is worth even further consideration is: it depends!** And before you ask, the answer is no, I'm not a lawyer.

With a hypothetical offer like this that looks somewhat even on paper, the only way to truly analyze it much more is to consider external factors such as: bye weeks, waiver wire pool, league scoring settings, number of keepers or dynasty effect (this has a great effect on the value of that second round pick), league standings, long term impact vs. short term gain (are you ramping up for the playoffs or rebuilding for the future?), etc. For our purposes here, let's assume the trade is still worthy of further consideration given all external factors and move on to Step 4.

*Use a color coding system to do this step so you can see which positions are being upgraded, downgraded, or staying the same. You can use green to signify an above-average player, yellow to signify an average player, and red to signify a below-average player.

** We get text messages and emails from friends in various fantasy football leagues all the time asking what we think of particular trade proposals and my answer is almost always the same: it depends!

Fantasy football, especially dynasty leagues, aren't played in a vacuum because there are so many dynamic factors involved so without all of that information handy it's almost an exercise in futility to even discuss a potential trade. Sorry for the side tangent, but hopefully you can understand our stance on the issue.

TRADING TACTICS

THE SKILL OF THE DYNASTY LEAGUE TRADE: TIPS, TECHNIQUES, TOOLS AND TERMS

Step 4 – The Consultant

Fantasy football has reached unprecedented levels of popularity in the past few years, so your available resources are anything but scarce. An ESPN radio commercial last year stated (paraphrasing here) ‘the average person’s fantasy football league commitment lasts longer than the average marriage!’ We have no idea whether or not that’s true but if it is, why aren’t there infinitely more dynasty leagues out there?! Oh yeah, and I guess that’s a sad indictment on our society or whatever and blah, blah, blah...but we digress.

Back to Step 4!

You should have one or two websites bookmarked (DLF is a good one to start with...hint, hint) that you trust for rankings and information. You should also have one or two people (friends / co-workers / brother-in laws / ombudsmen / sages / priests / sherpas, etc.) you can go to for quick feedback or advice. Just make sure you don’t abuse the privilege and if you really want valuable feedback, you must make sure that they have all of the relevant external information (as previously discussed) in order to provide it.

This step is certainly optional, but comes highly recommended. If you feel confident about your execution of Steps 1-3, this step is really nothing more than reassurance in a decision that has already been made but it’s part of our human nature to seek that so it’s totally justified. Just one thing, though – don’t go overboard with your consultations. You know what they say about too many cooks in the kitchen, right? When in doubt, rely on the KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid) method.

Step 5 – The Counteroffer

There isn’t much to say about the counteroffer step other than you should utilize it judiciously. We don’t mean you should be tentative about sending a counteroffer because it’s certainly an important part of any negotiation process, just that you should perform at least Steps 1-3 (preferably 1-4) on this list before sending it.

If your fellow league managers are setting their anchors appropriately, they should expect a counteroffer anyways so you might as well see what they might do to sweeten the deal for your franchise, right? After all, unless the anchor you send pulls you overboard and drowns the deal entirely, the original offer very rarely will ever come off the table, so you really have nothing to lose. You might have to go through this step several times within the course of negotiation but if it leads to Step 6, trust me when I say that it will all be worth it.

TRADING TACTICS

THE SKILL OF THE DYNASTY LEAGUE TRADE: TIPS, TECHNIQUES, TOOLS AND TERMS

Step 6 – The Acceptance

Hit the “Accept Trade” button, then sit back and relax. If you’ve put enough time and effort into steps 1-5, you won’t get that instantaneous buyer’s remorse feeling that impulsive shoppers often get. You’ll be excited about the future of your dynasty squad and ready to compete for championships!

Adages, Idioms, Mantras, and Other Trade Considerations to Live By

- 1.) The terms “value” or “worth” are completely relative in business and especially in fantasy sports. There is a market with a static number of teams in your league. Any player, pick, or combination of the two is only worth what somebody is willing to pay/trade for it.
- 2.) Performing “due diligence” is your responsibility. Don’t underestimate its importance.
- 3.) The value of draft picks is lowest right after the draft and highest right before the draft. The value of players is generally the inverse of that. Keep that in mind during negotiations.
- 4.) A “sunk cost” is a term for something that has already happened (a trade, a waiver claim, an injury, etc.) and cannot be changed. It should not affect future decision-making. I can’t stress the importance of this term enough.
- 5.) If your league allows them, multi-team trades are your friend. They’re a little bit trickier to navigate, but the extra effort will definitely pay off.
- 6.) If you’ve dug yourself a hole, stop digging.
- 7.) In general, your starters are the only ones who score points. Your bench is there as a supporting cast. Your focus in negotiations should be geared more towards the former, less towards the latter.
- 8.) Balanced teams with players who get hot at the end of the season usually win. Take this into account when evaluating a trade or even your own roster. Keep the playoff schedule (weeks 13-16, usually), Win-Loss records of the actual NFL teams, injuries and playing opportunities in mind.
- 9.) “Losing” a trade isn’t the worst thing in the world. Learn from your mistakes, but don’t harp on them.
- 10.) Know your competition. Which trading personality do the other owners in your league most resemble? Do they like to haggle like a street merchant at the Eiffel Tower or does the idea of a counteroffer freak them out?

TRADING TACTICS

THE SKILL OF THE DYNASTY LEAGUE TRADE: TIPS, TECHNIQUES, TOOLS AND TERMS

- 11.) Try to avoid biases whenever possible. We all have those natural subconscious biases but don't swear off a player forever just because he didn't pan out for you in a previous year. I once traded pre-fantasy stud LeSean McCoy for a pre-Beast-Mode Marshawn Lynch because I saw him whiff on a blitz pickup in a preseason game. I'm an Eagles fan and was mad about McCoy's missed block. Yes, I overreacted. And granted, that's probably the worst trade I've ever made, but still, I should have followed my own rules!
- 12.) Don't burn bridges with other owners in your league. Trade embargos don't usually work out in the long run. Just ask Fidel Castro.
- 13.) Always have a contingency plan prepared. This goes along with setting anchors, but you'll win more trades than you'll lose if you have a counter-counteroffer ready to go. The fantasy owners with the most success are usually playing chess when everyone else is playing checkers.
- 14.) As a general rule, two-for-one trades rarely work out for the team taking on more players. In fact, there's really no such thing as a two-for-one trade if both rosters at maximum capacity. Always factor players you'll be forced to waive into the equation.
- 15.) Always check the waiver wire to see if there are comparable options available.
- 16.) Timing is everything – check matchups, both past and future, especially in fantasy playoff weeks.
- 17.) Know when the trade deadline in your league is! The closer to the deadline, the more desperate the person proposing the trade will be. Use that information to your advantage.
- 18.) Know exactly how long it takes for a trade to clear the review period. Nothing worse than trading for a guy as a fill-in who won't even play for your team because it won't be executed until after games start that week.
- 19.) Excel spreadsheets are your friend. Use them to store notes, info, future predictions, etc.
- 20.) Get the App! If you've got a smart phone, having internet access and your league website's mobile app automatically gives you a leg up on the competition.
- 21.) Don't stress out too much. HAVE FUN!

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: SO, YOU WANT TO BUILD A DYNASTY?

Imagine you head out to your local mall, step into Foot Locker and shell out \$120 for a new pair of Nike track shoes. You stylishly walk outside, stretch your muscles, hit “go” on your stopwatch and take off. Now there’s only one question that needs to be answered – when do you want to stop running?

Continuing metaphorically, dynasty fantasy football is a marathon, not a sprint. In fact, we dynasty league aficionados strive to simulate the NFL process as closely as possible. The never-ending ebbs and flows that come with the territory of being a professional franchise are the very same we try to replicate in our little corner of the fantasy football universe.

In other words, the instincts you’ll channel as a dynasty leaguer parallel those faced by NFL front office personnel every day. The way you run your team is merely an extension of your inner general manager. However, instead of doing this on a year-to-year basis such as in a common re-draft league, you’re now assigned the mission of cultivating a team from the ground up, and maintaining it for a theoretically unending duration.

This is because contrary to the common re-draft mentality, dynasty football doesn’t end in December and start anew in August. In fact, the conclusion of the Super Bowl generally functions as the jumping off point for each new dynasty league year. Events such as roster cuts, free agent acquisitions, trades and, of course, the NFL Draft are directly mirrored in your dynasty league, rendering the “off-season” equally as important as when the games are played. Rookie evaluation also moves to the forefront, assuring your yearly draft desires remain met.

In essence, what you’re able to do in dynasty fantasy football is turn annual into perennial. To put that in perspective, think back to the most amazing re-draft roster you ever assembled. You nailed your draft, shrewdly acquired the best waiver prospects and trade targets and ultimately steamrolled the competition. It was your finest fantasy moment. Now that you’re through daydreaming, think about how if it were a dynasty format – the players on that team would remain on your roster for the duration of their careers unless traded or released.

This idea that you can perpetually repeat your greatest fantasy memory is one of the most enticing lures of dynasty leagues. Conversely, a poor draft won’t torpedo your team, as your long-term prospects are predicated on the culmination of more than just one year’s work. Regardless, emotions tend to magnify when you see your team grow from its initial-draft infancy through the many years that follow. You get to witness the constant evolution of something you created and fostered for as long as you’re willing.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: SO, YOU WANT TO BUILD A DYNASTY?

Now we'll admit, compared to the yearly turnover typified by re-draft leagues, it can initially seem a daunting concept, but the rewards far outweigh the risks. Moreover, we at DLF have you covered for the long haul. Between our daily articles, up to date collaborative rankings, top-notch interactive forum and premium member section, even dynasty neophytes are afforded every possible means to succeed. Coupled with the in-depth content offered by our partners at Fantasy Football Toolbox, your potential advantages over the competition are innumerable.

If you're still with us, we're off to a good start, because by now you clearly understand the appeal this specialized branch of fantasy football offers. With that said, it does require year-round hard work. A dynasty can only become as expansive as its architect is willing to design it, so the most important trait an owner can have is perseverance. Our mantra at DLF is "there is no off-season," and as you can see by our yearly content flow, that's no exaggeration.

So, take a few introspective moments and ask yourself if you're willing to be a dedicated, active participant on a constant basis? Will this passion endure throughout the years? If you've emphatically answered "yes" to both these questions, you might as well start forming a league now – the allure of year-round fantasy football has piqued your senses, and obviously proven too much to resist.

To that end, it's imperative to form a league comprised of dedicated owners who possess a passion similar to your own.

Though there are countless benefits and advantages to joining a dynasty league, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention any potential pitfalls. If your team doesn't perform at a high level, will your enthusiasm be compromised, leading to a divestment of interest and lack of fun? It's possible, but some of the most enjoyment you can have is satisfying your competitive cravings by taking a tomato can of a team and ultimately turning it into restaurant-caliber pasta sauce. Once again mimicking the NFL's fickle nature, it's more than possible to achieve a moderate turnaround in a short period of time. Many leagues like have measures by which it's easy to rebuild, including a dispersal draft.

So, when you choose to run that metaphorical marathon, remember that dynasty leagues afford a different experience than what re-draft leagues can offer. With the right dedication, as well as the right league, there's no reason your enjoyment won't persevere for the entirety of the journey. Rome wasn't built in a day and your team won't be either, but with the right mindset, there's no reason you can't achieve the same type of glory.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: DRAFT PREPARATION, A NUMBERS GAME

In the initial installment of Dynasty 101, we described the allure of dynasty leagues, as well as their advantages relative to the re-draft format. Now that you're hooked, we want to discuss how best to go about poring through the plethora of available data. You undoubtedly have various articles, rankings, cheat sheets and the like in front of you, but there's one document which, above all others, demands your immediate attention – your league manifest!

To illustrate the importance of knowing your league's rules, we want to share a story from one of our own writer's drafting experience. Does anyone out there remember Dante Hall? In his nine years in the league, the speedy but diminutive former Chief/Ram compiled an impressive 14,386 total yards. Hall really burst onto the scene in 2002, when he collected a robust 2,120 yards, to go along with six touchdowns. Yet when one of his buddies took him in the first round of his 2003 draft, he was laughed out of the room.

Why?

Well, for those who don't remember, Dante Hall was primarily a return man. In fact, all but 1,989 of those 14k-plus yards (86%) came from kickoff and punt returns, as did 57% of his career touchdowns. As a part-time receiver in a league that awards no points for return yards, Hall was roster deadweight.

Now, that was a competitive group, but not without compassion, so they gave him a mulligan and let him off the hook with no punishment other than his already red face. Playing Devil's advocate though, what if they weren't? He'd have wasted his first-round draft pick, putting himself at a huge disadvantage because he didn't know the rules.

What are the defining characteristics of your league? How many teams are there? Which positions are considered, and how many players start at each one? Is it a point-per-reception (PPR) league? Does the league utilize a standard scoring system, or is it specialized? What is the overall roster size? These questions, along with many others, need to have answers before you can begin your research.

As another example, let's consider two hypothetical leagues. League A is a 16-team league which starts two running backs, and League B is a 10-teamer which also starts two ball-carriers. If you were a member of both leagues, would you value the running back position in the same way?

Doing the math, on any given week League A will see 32 running backs in starting lineups, which is a 60% increase over the 20 starting ball carriers in League B. Given the relative lack of star power at the running back position, odds dictate they'll go off the draft board much sooner in League A than in League B, thereby necessitating an early commitment to the position, but also affording subsequent value at other positions. Playing this type of numbers game in advance of your draft can help you both predict and cope with a positional "run," as well as shape your overall strategy.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: DRAFT PREPARATION, A NUMBERS GAME

The next number I want to consider is one of extreme importance to dynasty leaguers: age. When one thinks of building an everlasting dynasty, it's standard belief that younger is better. Does that theory necessarily hold water? Does age truly matter?

In short, kinda sorta.

The two main factors in play during recent research was the average age of each position group (with the number of starters noted) as well as how many within each position group were age 28 or older. The number 28 was chosen due to the fact the average NFL rookie is approximately 22 years old, and the average lifespan of an NFL player is roughly six years.

The data showed that quarterbacks, wide receivers and tight ends have a greater likelihood of performing at a high level despite increasing age. This shouldn't be too surprising, as relative to running backs, the level of impact collisions is greatly diminished. In addition to an increased average age, each of the three positions has a higher proportion of players age 28 or older. This means that in terms of drafting, since overall skill persists, youth shouldn't function as the biggest factor.

The running back position, however, tells a different tale. Given the inherent punishment, it's not surprising to see ball carriers begin to fade at a younger age. Though there will always be exceptions like Adrian Peterson who prove the rule, youth and workload should serve as a definitive tiebreaker, and older players should generally be devalued.

Continuing with the impact of numbers, it's imperative to assess each player's consistency. On the microscopic level, this includes data such as games played, touchdowns, pass attempts, total yards, targets, receptions, yards per carry, etc. – the types of general statistics which can be found on most any sports website. On a macroscopic level, however, the combination of these numbers is manifested in each player's yearly fantasy finish. In other words, how likely is a player to replicate his statistics on a long-term basis? Though many will always be predisposed towards picking the boom or bust types of players, dependability cannot be understated.

Conversely, one of the more overrated concepts in dynasty football is a team's coaching situation. The average tenure amongst the current 32 NFL coaches is 3.2 years and few coaches will be with their respective franchises for at least ten years. While 3.2 years isn't an insignificant period of time, it more than likely represents only a fraction of a player's career. Drafting a player based upon projected long-term usage is meaningless given the strong likelihood he'll see multiple coaches over the duration of his career.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: DRAFT PREPARATION, A NUMBERS GAME

Similarly, selecting players based on positional circumstance is a good way to wind up overvaluing them. We can always find a poster boy who was drafted highly due to the expectations of a clear path to the starting job. Talent should always trump situation, as dynasty is a long-term investment. A player with immense natural ability is worth waiting for.

So given the aggregation of all the points (and numbers), you're now ready to rank. Doing so generally involves a system of tiers, and there are two main schools of thought with that concept. The first is that since your league has a finite size, the size of your tiers should directly reflect how many players can possibly be drafted in each round. For example, in a 12-team league, each tier would contain 12 players. While this method is not without merit, in my opinion, that's what ADP data is for.

One preferred technique is to rank directly based on talent and comfort level, and indiscriminately of the numbers. Given the combination of the four main positions, there's a strong likelihood you'll have a collection of talent that outnumbers the amount of potential slots in any given round. In other words, are the players selected at the top of the second round really any worse than those picked at the bottom of the first?

The main advantage to this system is that you're not shoehorning players into a rigid network. You're afforded greater flexibility with the numbers while still creating distinct levels. You're also benefited with ability to rank based on comfort, as opposed to surrendering to some inflexible matrix.

Given a thorough knowledge of your league's rules, as well as an understanding of several factors determining each player's "draft-worthiness," you now have the tools necessary to craft a rankings list. How are you going to put that list to use, as well as handle a live draft? That's a topic for the next installment.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: SURVIVING AND CONQUERING YOUR INITIAL DRAFT

In the previous segment of Dynasty 101, we discussed the importance of knowing your league's rules and provided a streamlined approach to researching players. With the combination of that information in hand, we presented a primer on how best to go about crafting a tiered ranking list. Now, the final installment in this series will cover how to approach your initial dynasty draft.

The biggest possible advantage you can bring to the table over your competitors is that it won't (well, shouldn't) actually be your first draft.

Come again?

Consistently participating in post-Super Bowl mock drafts is arguably the best type of "off-season" research you can do. DLF sets up a series of six mock drafts at the beginning of every month each off-season and they've served as an invaluable resource and mainline to the pulse of the dynasty community. Not only do these "pretend" drafts supply us with the all-important ADP data, they also show pertinent player movement as time passes and we edge closer to the start of the NFL season. Finally, mock drafts are a great opportunity to test different strategies, which will give you an idea how your team might look depending on your preferred tact.

When it comes time for your official draft, you should be experienced and ready with a refined strategy predicated upon a mixture of the ADP data and your own personal rankings list. It's critical to use both sets of data, as relying on only one is the quickest way to overdrafting a player you're targeting, or missing out on him altogether. These two lists should exist symbiotically, affording you a much needed link between your draft aspirations and the potential reality of them occurring.

In a perfect world, the two lists would align, enabling you to select your preferred players at a point commensurate with their respective ADP's, as well as the tier in which you ranked them. However, this isn't always the case. A "run" on a certain position can cause a shift to the averaged data, and frankly, ADP data simply can't take into account the whims of a "rogue" owner.

If it comes to a point of uncertainty, it's imperative to trust your gut. Overdrafting a player you want is not the largest drafting faux pas you could make, especially considering the fact he could be on your team for ten plus years. However, you should ensure that when you "reach" for your preferred target, you do so within reason.

Early in the draft (around the first four to five rounds), you should try to adhere to the ADP data within approximately "half a round." In other words, if your league has 12 owners, try not to overdraft a player by anymore than six to eight picks. Though this might entail making a pick you're not crazy about, it also leaves you with the ability to obtain value on the trade market equivalent with the point of selection. 55.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: SURVIVING AND CONQUERING YOUR INITIAL DRAFT

When the draft reaches its adolescence (approximately rounds five through twelve), it's common practice to "reach" a round to a round and a half over the ADP data. Usually at this point, the draft has moved past the traditional "studs" and into the range of players who elicit a strong gut response. When it comes to those you have strong feelings about, it's better to overextend than to be left hanging.

The end of the draft represents a sort of "free-for-all" scenario. This is the point where you should be rostering players with the highest upside, be it backups to injury-prone players, or promising young athletes stuck at the bottom of their depth charts. In these circumstances, ADP values can be thrown out the window and age can be used as a definitive tiebreaker. The final two rounds (and final two rounds only) should be reserved for your defense and kicker.

Getting back to the concept of overdrafting, the numbers can dictate scenarios where ignoring the ADP is forced upon you – these are the cases where mathematical probability will influence who you pick, and this is directly related to where you pick.

Though picking at either extreme has its advantages (i.e. back-to-back selections), it also comes with the pitfall of having a prolonged duration between picks. Therefore, drafting outside the scope of the ADP can become a necessity. If Team D (Pick #12) wants a player with an ADP anywhere between approximately 14 – 35, they'll have to use the first pick in the second round, as they won't pick again until #36 overall. Ditto for Team A (Pick #1). Relative to Teams B (Pick #6) and C (Pick #7) in the middle, teams at the top and bottom of each round are also more susceptible to positional "runs." According to the ADP data, if Team A doesn't select a running back with the first pick, they're looking at getting, at best, the overall RB12 at pick 24.

One way to mitigate this extended inactivity is through in-draft trading. While this technique works best with a slow draft, it's our inherent nature regardless as dynasty footballers to unleash our inner riverboat gambling mentalities. If you find yourself succumbing to a case of nerves in regards to a player you really want, simply extend an offer to a league-mate who picks before you do.

Speaking to in-draft trading, there are two general mindsets. The first is to trade up for multiple, early round picks. Doing this will help to ensure you have a larger proportion of elite players anchoring your lineup. As a consequence, however, you're likely to lose valuable middle round picks, where you would normally round out your starting positions and draft valuable depth. On the other hand, trading out of the early rounds can afford you a relative surplus of quality players, but this will occur at the expense of having more of the consensus "stud" players.



TEAM MANAGEMENT

DYNASTY 101: SURVIVING AND CONQUERING YOUR INITIAL DRAFT

Continuing with the trend, you can also set a strong future foundation for your squad through in-draft trading. If you find yourself at a crossroads where there's no player you're particularly set on drafting, offer up your selection for a future rookie draft pick. It beats forcing the issue, and as rookie draft picks continually appreciate until they're used, can give you valuable trade bait down the line.

Speaking to the issue of rookies, if your initial draft includes first-year players, don't succumb to the dreaded Rookie Fever. Every year rookies become overvalued due simply to the allure of the unknown. Often times, this can come at the expense of veterans with proven NFL production. This is not to say don't draft any rookies, but don't completely surrender to the temptation of untapped potential, as it's just that – potential.

Last, but certainly not least, is advice on how you should handle yourself during the draft. At its core, fantasy football is supposed to be fun, so don't do anything to detract from that. Don't worry about any criticism you may receive for your picks, and more importantly, don't mock anyone else's. Everyone sees things differently, and you don't want to immediately establish yourself as the "league jerk." Boorish behavior is a quick way to alienate potential trade partners and cripple the overall league dynamic.

Hopefully the preceding has given you some insight and understanding into how best to approach your initial draft. It's also our hope that the Dynasty 101 series in this Game Plan has served as an effective introduction for your foray into this exciting branch of fantasy football. So with your newfound knowledge and enthusiasm, get out there and go build your dynasty!

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DO THE MATH

Math. Some of us at DLF simply hate it. We really do.

Ken Kelly used to sit in his High School and College classes and think, “When am I ever going to use this?” His teachers used to feed him a line about it being useful if he was ever going to be an astronaut or a carpenter. They had never seen him attempt to build a box or fly, however. Ironically, there is a use for math in our adult life. Math can be used as an incredibly valuable research and planning tool for fantasy football, especially in dynasty leagues. This section will show you one way it can be used to diminish personal opinions and create a clear, strategic trading advantage.

You should always use the offseason to be evaluating your team and determining if you have a realistic chance at contending for this year’s Dynasty League Championship. This is the most important decision you may have all season, and it’s only Summer.

Take a good look at your team, the competition, and your schedule. Clearly define your goal for the year. If you can’t win, you’re rebuilding. We hate to tell you this, but you **HAVE** to or you will be stuck in the land of 8-8 for all eternity. Trust us, we’ve seen it happen.

Once that choice is made, you have to decide who to acquire or who to look to unload now or in the not too distant future (your league’s trading deadline). There are essentially three groups of players in a dynasty league:

- 1.) Players who have much more value **THIS** year than they do in the future
- 2.) Players whose value is essentially flat, in relation to dynasty value vs. re-draft league value
- 3.) Players who have much more value **IN THE FUTURE** than they do this upcoming season

So, you certainly have some good guesses as to who fit in each category, however, you need to back up your hypothesis. Break out your friends known as the Slide Rule and the Calculator to come up with an unbiased formula. Take the “Dynasty Rankings” you have compiled from a mix of fantasy football experts and sites across the globe or simply use ours, and compare them to the “Redraft” or “Yearly” rankings from sites. From that, it will be very clear to define who does, in reality fit within each group.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DO THE MATH

GROUP ONE - THE ONE YEAR WONDERS

These players have a significantly higher value this upcoming season in relation to their dynasty status. This means one of two things, depending on what type of team you have.

Dynasty Contenders – Target these players via trade. You likely won't have to give up nearly as much value for similar players of the same ability. Getting these players can ensure you maximize your team's ability this season in your effort to win or repeat. There is one BIG caveat, though. You can't, under any circumstances, trade what you consider to be core players or draft choices to acquire them. If you do, you're simply looking at winning one single championship and not building towards a true dynasty.

Non-Dynasty Contenders – You must rid yourself of players like these if you're not a contending team. While the value you can get for them may not be seen for a few years, these players have a chance of simply retiring off your roster or having little to no value with you getting nothing in return. That's a really bad habit to get into, especially if you're a non-contender. By shipping these players away, you can get some significant future value, while likely improving your draft status for next year.

Create a target list of prime candidates and react accordingly - these are players with a redraft value at least 10 spots higher than their dynasty value.

GROUP TWO - WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

These players have a relatively flat value when you compare their upcoming season in relation to their dynasty status. They have the best chance of being stable over a lengthy period. If you want to create a safe team, these are guys to get. Just remember, there's a relatively low risk of short-term diminishment (barring injury), but the same low chance of significant improvement.

Dynasty Contenders and Non-Contenders – It's going to be a difficult task to attempt to convince other teams that these players have either diminishing or rising values. This list is going to be self-explanatory when you compile it, but you must do the work to prove who these players are year after year.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DO THE MATH

THE DIAPER DANDIES

These players have a significantly higher value in relation to their dynasty status compared to this upcoming season. This also means one of two things, depending on what type of team you have.

Dynasty Contenders – These could be pawns for you to move. Non-contending teams typically look for these types of players when they are in rebuilding mode. Sending these players away can ensure you maximize your team's ability this season in your effort to win or repeat. There is the same BIG caveat, though. You can't, under any circumstances, trade what you consider to be future core players or draft choices to acquire them. If you do, you're simply looking at winning one single championship and not building towards a true dynasty.

Non-Dynasty Contenders – These are players you want if you're not a contending team. These players typically aren't helping the contenders and you could create a "win-win" situation by sending away a veteran (like one on our ONE YEAR WONDERS list) in exchange for some youth. While the value of these players may not be seen for a few years, you eliminate the chance of veterans simply retiring off your roster or having little to no value with you getting nothing in return. By acquiring players like these, you can get some significant future value, while likely improving your draft status for next year.

For the sake of stating the obvious, leave the rookies off this list. These players certainly have a higher dynasty ceiling than a yearly rating. Make a prime list of non-rookies (veteran players with a dynasty value at least 10 spots higher than their yearly or redraft value) and respond accordingly.

SUMMARY

In closing, I hate math. I really do. However, doing research like this helps me in making sound decisions based on the long-term health of my team. If you look at your team and can't clearly defined yourself as a contender or non-contender, you're probably not doing a good enough job of creating a strategy. Pick a direction, then use math as your unbiased weapon.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

REBUILDING A ROSTER

We at DLF are always a sucker for a challenge. Many of us are in a few different leagues out there personally, but not too many.

For those of you who know us or have contacted us through this site, you know that we take Dynasty Leagues (and Fantasy Football in general) very seriously. We never get into a league just for fun. If we decide to enter, we're in it 100% and you should be, too. As a Dynasty League Commissioner, you should expect that from all your participants.

Inevitably, you're going to find yourself taking over a team at some point and it's easy to just start making trades blindly, but there are some simple rules you need to follow to be successful.

Step #1 – Evaluate your rules

After you've dedicated yourself to the process, you need to understand the rules of your existing league. Do you understand the playoff system? The waiver system? The player pool? The starting requirements? The previous year's scoring leaders? You get the idea.

Step #2 – Evaluate your roster

This is extremely important. You have to really understand what you have before deciding what you want. Take a look at your roster, as well as the others in the league. Are you in a position of power? Should you be rebuilding? What players fit in the categories we've described in this play book?

Step #3 – Make your goal and complete your trades

This is where the bulk of your work needs to come in. When you're a new owner, be prepared to get multiple offers right off the bat from owners attempting to see if you know what you're doing. Make sure you respond to them COURTEOUSLY (remember the snake oil, people). Even though they may be trying to rip you off, don't burn a bridge.

Creating a goal seems obvious, but it's shocking how often it's not taken under consideration. Ever move you make should be part of a long list of action items that get you to your long term goal. Deviation from this plan could be a disaster.

Step #4 – Re-evaluate your roster

Start back at step #2 every chance you get. Dynasty leagues never end, so you shouldn't, either. Reshaping a roster takes a lot of work, but it's also a lot of fun.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

RISK TOLERANCE AND THE RULE OF 1.5

char•ac•ter [kar-ik-ter]
-noun

1. *The aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some person*
2. *One such feature or trait; characteristic.*
3. *Moral or ethical quality: a man of fine, honorable character.*
4. *Qualities of honesty, courage, or the like; integrity: It takes character to face up to a bully.*

There are many things you can measure with athletes. The scouting combine, along some simple statistical analysis of current players show us that every year. You can easily get a 40 time, a broad jump distance, the number of catches/carries or the number of TDs scored for someone pretty easily. However, that's not the only thing needed to accurately rank a player. Character is a big factor you need to use when building a team at the dynasty level. It's one of the biggest factors to use when evaluating players and prospects. This article is designed to give you an idea of just how important character should be to you and also give you a simple rule of thumb on how to use character as an evaluation tool.

First, let's start with the importance of character. To many, this is answered on an individual basis with one single question:

How important is it to you to have players with perceived high moral standards?

The answer to this is going to be different for everyone. You're a premium content subscriber, so you're obviously a die-hard dynasty league player. When a player you own goes haywire and gets in trouble with the law, it's easy to take it personally. You may be in the minority on that one, but spending so much time on this, then waking up to see strategic advantages you've worked hard to create disappear in one night with a drug charge, a dog killing spree or a pistol going off in someone's sweat pants is pretty frustrating. It could rip your guts out to see players you've invested so much time and effort in go in the tank. Some would rather lose with good guys than win with the Michael Vicks of the world. Some have no fun on Sundays rooting for guys who are looked upon as "bad apples" as well. It just doesn't feel right to some. Many stay pretty far away from these guys just to ensure (as much as they can) so you won't have any surprises.

If you don't feel a personal connection to your players and are only in it for financial gain or the thrill of victory, this likely doesn't come into play as much. It's not bad, either. In the end, FFB and especially Dynasty leagues are about competitive advantages and strategic maneuvering. If you can remove human emotion, it's likely a tool you can use to your advantage. However, you still need to be very smart about how much risk you take on.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

RISK TOLERANCE AND THE RULE OF 1.5

Before we introduce our own character risk-based ranking formula, let's assume two things. One, that you don't completely remove these players from your list and don't have a deep emotional connection to them. Two, you've categorized your team effectively. It's VERY important to categorize your team. There are two categories – the “ins” and the “outs.” The “ins” are the teams who are competitive now and trying to win a title this season or next. The “outs” are the ones who aren't. The “ins” are more likely to take on more risk than the “outs.” As one general rule, we suggest never having more than 1/10th of your roster filled with red flags.

The rule of thumb we use is something we call “the rule of 1.5.” Here's how it works:

First, you take your existing positional dynasty rankings and number each player from #1 and beyond. These rankings need to be unbiased and as complete and current as possible. If you don't have these made, shame has come down on you from us. You should ALWAYS have this ready to use for trades and evaluations. Do that, then come back and read the rest of this play book.

For players you mark with character concerns, take your existing positional ranking and multiply them by 1.5. For example, if I have Brandon Marshall at #5, you use the formula and multiply 5×1.5 for a total of 7.5. Marshall is now somewhere between #7 and #8 on my WR list. If you could trade him straight up for a player at #7 or #8, you do it.

From your list, it's up to you on who you want to indicate as “character concern.” There are lots of different things to factor in when making that decision. At times, we've even tiered my severity of rankings punishment based on the amount of risk. For example, you might use “2” as the multiplier on a player because of the criminal nature of his offenses. You could also likely use “1.25” on a player with simple maturity issues. How you use it is up to you, but the idea is that you use it in some way, shape or form. The simple “rule of 1.5” is a great start for a rookie coach.

In addition, the higher the ranking, the more extreme the difference is between players, thus a smaller gap in ranking number. The difference between #1 and #10 is big. The difference between #20 and #20 isn't quite as big. If you feel that your team isn't deep enough to handle suspensions, steer clear. This is also especially important if you're a team considered one of the “outs.” If that fits, you likely don't have enough in the cupboard to survive a player going in the tank. Move quickly BEFORE a pattern of behavior emerges. Failure to accurately account in some way for character can be a death sentence for your team.

Character is one of the biggest factors to use when evaluating players. Ask yourself the simple question of, “How important is it to me have players with perceived high moral standards?” Evaluate your team effectively and use the “rule of 1.5” as a general measuring stick, you'll find success in coming up with an accurate risk tolerance formula.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DLF'S SEVEN STEP PROGRAM

Much of this Game Plan is pretty heavy with content and thought provoking material. Let's take a break for a little fun. After all, dynasty leagues are meant to be just that.

You're going to hit other sites to see their tips for fantasy success every season and frankly, they're ridiculous. Anyone who has read this far in the play book is smart enough to know their league's rules, roster requirements, and waiver systems. If you're just now finding that out, you're already behind the eight ball.

At DLF, we cater to the professional fantasy football player. After all, dynasty leagues are simply not for the faint of heart. To truly enjoy any fantasy season, there are seven things you must do in order to set yourself up for success.

1. Make Sure Everything in Your Freezer is Buffalo Flavored

Food is a huge part of Fantasy Football Sundays across the land. Don't be the guy who opens their freezer to find veggie nuggets and tofu. Your friends will say it's no problem and eat whatever you have. After they drink their Diet Tab and Gardenburger brand hot dogs, they'll say they're happy. Inside, they'll hate you. Beef, chicken, ice cream, whatever. Everything just needs to be buffalo flavored.

2. Place a Desperation Call to your Satellite or Cable Provider

If you have Sunday Ticket or Red Zone, you have to make this call. You tell them it's too expensive to afford this year and you want out of it because of the tough economic times.

They may offer you a discounted rate for the season. They may not.

Either way, you treat it like a kidnapping. There's no price you won't pay. In fact, if you place this call and they tell you they made a billing mistake and that it's actually more, you pay it.

In the end, they have your Son. Pay the ransom.

Note: These rules do not apply in actual kidnappings. I think you pretty much do what the FBI tells you in these situations. If someone from your provider has actually kidnapped your child, there's probably some type of middle ground. Not sure on that one.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DLF'S SEVEN STEP PROGRAM

3. Complete Your "HoneyDo" list*

* = If you are not married, you can skip to #5.

This is as basic as it gets.

You make sure to get a list of all the things your Wife needs done before Fall and you do them all in the Summer. This may create a situation where you don't sleep for two weeks, but it could free up your Sundays. The list itself is inconsequential. Change light bulbs, sweep porches, build a new garage, create a new Government in Iraq. Whatever. Do it all. Now.

4. Buy the Pets

If one of the things on that "HoneyDo" list is breaking down and getting pets for your kids, just do it. My suggestion would be to get two puppies. You should name one "Red Zone" and the other "Andrew Siciliano." The names are NOT a requirement to fulfill this step, however.

5. Manage your Dating Life

If you're not married and have a steady girlfriend, you have to manage things the right way.

First, you avoid Sunday afternoon dates. They're obviously a bad idea. However, if your significant other knows how much you love fantasy football, there's a way to earn some points here.

It involves a lot of Mountain Dew, an Iphone and a carefully planned strategy.

My suggestion is to choose two or three Sundays and offer to go shopping with your girlfriend. She'll be amazed at your sacrifice, but won't realize what's really going on.

You begin drinking Mountain Dew around 12PM EDT. You MUST make sure she sees you doing this. I prefer the 24 ounce bottle, but anything will do.

At 12:50 EDT, you will have to go the bathroom. She'll obviously understand since she saw you working that Mountain Dew.

You enter the bathroom with 10 minutes to set your final lineup. You do it on your Iphone and get out of there.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

DLF'S SEVEN STEP PROGRAM

(continued from previous page)

Do NOT forget to actually go to the bathroom, though. That's a rookie mistake.

Continue this process throughout the day, making sure you're in the bathroom or a dressing room at 3:50 EDT as well to make any afternoon lineup adjustments. You should also encourage to have her shop away from you from time to time while you "rest" on the bench. This will give you the ability to check scores while she's gone. It's a sound strategy that allows you to be the nice guy, but still not be disconnected.

If you're married, forget about it. You DO NOT try this. Bad things will happen to you. Terrible, horrible and unspeakable things - wives are too savvy to fall for it.

6. Calculate Your Sick Days

Sick days are seldom used, yet they're incredibly valuable. We're not talking about work here, either. You should factor at least three sick days for the season. These are the Sundays where you wake up feeling terrible and have to spend the entire day on the couch.

Watch Ferris Bueller for sound strategies to fake the illness.

This should get you three free Sundays throughout the year. Don't get greedy, though. Anything after three will make your family very suspicious. You must also throw in a random Wednesday cold and a Saturday and Sunday flu combination day in there to throw off the scent of anyone who may be suspicious of your actions.

7. Check your Health

Early September is always a good time for a health screening. Get your cholesterol checked for peace of mind. Consider this a time to stop smoking as well. Nobody wants to die, especially during fantasy football season. You may have a will, but you likely don't have someone in place to manage your team - that may be the biggest tragedy of all. One caveat, though. If you currently have Tim Tebow as your No. 1 quarterback, this is not the right time to stop smoking. In fact, pick up the habit.

Many sites out there will give you 1,000 tips for dummies on how to run your team. If you're here at DLF, you already know. We provide you with the good stuff. Consider this your seven step survival guide to successful dynasty league enjoyment.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

GAMING YOUR INITIAL DRAFT

A quick glance around the message boards of many of the top fantasy football sites in the Summer (including, of course, DLF's) shows that it's that time of the year again – time for scores of new leagues to crop up, each with their own initial drafts. Many of you will join some of these leagues and be part of those. Like every owner involved, you want to get an advantage over your league mates and build the strongest, most dynamic team possible. We've all got little tricks to try and squeeze as much of an advantage out of initial drafts as possible. Some work, some don't. We'd like to use this article to share some tricks used and methods we've heard others have used successfully as well.

First, as many of you know, a dynasty draft is a far different beast than drafts which occur in re-draft leagues and must be treated as such. The decisions you make during the draft hold long lasting benefits or consequences for your franchise. While not a trick per se, an owner needs to go into a draft with a much different mindset than in a re-draft league. In re-draft leagues, you're looking for players who will produce in that season and could care less if a player needs development time. In a redraft league, if a player is still developing, it's pretty simple – you don't draft that player. In a dynasty league, however, a developing player is an opportunity for a future star. Therefore, it's extremely important that when preparing for a dynasty draft you don't place all your faith in ADP (Average Draft Position) projections unless they specifically say they are intended for dynasty use.

Furthermore, even if an ADP projection list is intended for dynasty use, then one must also confirm it's intended for the format you'll be drafting in. An ADP projection list for an IDP league will be very different than one intended for a team defense league. While these lists can be helpful, we must also warn against relying on these lists exclusively. Use them only as a guide, part of your evaluation strategy or as a tie-breaker when you are having a hard time deciding which player to choose. While all of this may seem obvious, I can't tell you how many times I've had people point to ADP lists that don't fit the format they are playing in or use lists as gospel when selecting their team. Worse yet is when they combine these two unfortunate mistakes.

Now then, with some basics out of the way, let's get to the good stuff.

How would you like to be picking your players several rounds ahead of your competition? Who wouldn't? This tactic requires an active trader, but if done correctly, you could be finishing your draft several rounds before your competition. We almost hesitate to share this tactic because we've used it against our fellow DLF staff in leagues we share. While we're not so bold as to claim we're the only one using this tactic, we don't see this tactic used very widely and it's very sneaky.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

GAMING YOUR INITIAL DRAFT

First, let your league know you're open to any and all trades. Make yourself available to listen to any offer no matter how silly. I'm not saying you have to accept these offers, but become known as a trader-friendly owner. You will likely get quite a few bites and some of those trades will be appealing to you. However, instead of simply accepting the trades as they come, share some wariness with your trading partner about accepting any trade offer you get.

Let's say you're in an IDP league that has a 50-round draft. You get a pretty standard 2/1-1/2 offer, you move out of the current round and move down a round and your trade partner will move you up two rounds later in the draft. This is a common trade in initial drafts and usually goes through without a hitch. However, if you are offered such an offer, express a bit of apprehension about accepting it and offer a counter. Tell the owner offering the trade you want to accept their offer, but you need a small additional bump to get the deal done. Re-offer them the same offer they just made you but tell them they'll need to trade their pick in round #48 for your pick in round #50. Most owners won't even bat an eye at this, it's so late in the draft after all, but you, you've got a plan.

Ignoring the 2/1-1/2 trade since, as we told you, only accept trades you feel comfortable with – if they accept, you've now shifted your draft 2% higher than your competition by moving your last pick from round #50 to round #49. Over the course of a slow draft, it's not inconceivable to re-use this method to move your last pick back a full five rounds. While this move alone won't get you the title, it will give you an advantage over everyone else. In a 50 round draft, if your last pick is chosen in round #45, you've now shifted your draft ten percent higher than your teammates. The depth you're stockpiling that late will be measurably better than everyone else and you can target sleepers much earlier than them as well.

So, now you've shifted your draft forward and can stockpile better depth players and sleepers. However, what about talent that can consistently start on your roster? Well, you can improve there as well. If you've read many pieces at DLF, you'll know rookie draft picks don't mean as much as some think and we've laid out a case why they shouldn't matter to you as well. What you can do is bundle together late round picks with mid-round rookie picks from future years to move up into the middle rounds of the initial draft.

Try bundling your last pick in the initial draft with a third or fourth round rookie pick to move up ten rounds. You can also try bundling middle round draft picks with a second or third round rookie pick to move up into the tail end of the high rounds. Any moves you can make with rookie picks can potentially improve your team which, in turn, makes those rookie picks you traded away less valuable. Building your foundation is paramount. However, if you are concerned about future draft picks, you can gather those back up as the year goes on and trades get made. It's nearly impossible to go a full season without offers being sent to you which include rookie draft picks.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

GAMING YOUR INITIAL DRAFT

With the previous two tactics, we've likely moved your average draft round much higher than the league average, so now how about some tactics to use on those picks?

One thing we've used to great success is cornering the market on rare players. For instance, in a league last year, the author of this piece drafted the top quarterback in the third and the fifth best in the fifth. It sounded crazy, but was it really? He took the second and fourth highest scoring players in the league. Yeah, he could only start one, but he kept a top five player out of the hands of the rest of the league. The jump from the top four quarterbacks to the fifth was a 10% jump, it's a 25% jump from the top four quarterbacks to the sixth. Holding two of the top five quarterbacks severely damaged the chances of the rest of the league and he went on to win the championship. What's better is at the end of the season he was able to trade away the QB5, a backup running back, an IDP player and a fourth round rookie pick for the QB8, RB6, a project receiver and a second round pick. This trade went down before the NFL draft this year, so he was able to cash in on that backup running back before his eventual demotion.

The point of this strategy is, when talent falls off severely as it did in the quarterback position in this league, subtracting talent from the league may be the best option. We were once asked by a reader if he should draft the TE1 and TE2 with his two first round picks. Our answer was not a tacit endorsement of that move, but we told him it was definitely a bold move. Between the fact that in his league tight ends didn't have any point advantage and striking for both of these options in the first round gave me pause. There is no "perfect" time to pull off this strategy, but we highly suggest doing this after having some essential pieces of your team in place. When it was done in that league, he mentioned he had one quarterback, two running backs and a wide receiver, if he missed on that QB5 in the fifth, he could still easily recover. In good conscience, we can't suggest rolling this one out before the fifth.

If you're unable to move your average draft round up very far in a draft, what many like to do instead is trade down late to collect future rookie draft picks. It's extremely unlikely you'll find that stud late in the draft who's going to put your team on his back and win you a championship. However, if you can collect additional draft picks, you now have more bargaining chips to work with in the future. You may have no intention of using these picks to actually draft, but you could package together these extra picks to go after a player who intrigues you or to move up early in a rookie draft. This strategy is lowest on the list of strategies only because it isn't building a team in the immediate term and deals instead with variables. However, as we said, at the end of a draft it's a crapshoot and such a strategy can't hurt.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

GAMING YOUR INITIAL DRAFT

When we originally asked DLF Forum members what kind of strategies or tips they employed in an initial draft, one strategy kept coming up. Several readers suggested trying to acquire fifth, sixth and seventh round draft picks.

The reason for this was it was far enough from the top rounds, but held value for grabbing players at the end of first or second tiers of players. This is absolutely a valid strategy and actually fits nicely with the tip I mentioned before. Grabbing a couple extra fifth, sixth or seventh picks could nab you a second top 5 quarterback or let you stock pile two top five tight ends. In an IDP league, you could even grab the top two defensive ends.. No matter if you couple the two strategies or not, obtaining extra picks in the top 100 provides a clear advantage.

So there you have it.

We've shared with you a couple tricks to help you go out and dominate your initial draft and build the team you deserve. We'd absolutely love to hear what kind of tricks you all use to build the strongest team in your league. We know it's tough to share every trick you may have, but if we can go out and share some of our biggest tips, you all can too! We look at it this way - the more people who know these tactics the sooner we get to learn and develop new tactics. Only by sharing the knowledge we all have can we actually move the game forward and in the end, isn't that really what it's all about, a constantly evolving and maturing game?

Now, of course, it's be really great if all the people reading this don't use these tactics against us in any league we may currently share, (or share in the future), but I guess that's just the risk we'll have to take!

TEAM MANAGEMENT

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: STORAGE WARS

“Yuuuupppp!!”

If you're like millions of others out there, then based on that one drawn out word you already know where we're going with this article. Well, that and the title of course. For the uninitiated out there, that phrase come from one of the cast members on the A&E's hit show, "Storage Wars" when he is bidding on a storage unit.

In the offseason, you should always try to look for lessons, tools and resources to help your fantasy game. We appear to have found a wealth of lessons to be learned in a very odd place – the nightly viewing addiction of value-based reality shows such as Storage Wars, Pawn Stars and American Pickers. Each of these shows, while entertaining, hold subtle, but powerful lessons upon which fantasy football owners can draw upon. We examine how we can learn from these highly entertaining shows and will later branch out to show how things we encounter in our everyday lives hold lessons for fantasy football as well.

In this article, we'll examine Storage Wars. This show revolves around several cast members viewing abandoned storage lockers without being able to enter them and interact with the contents inside. They then bid against each other in an effort to win the mysterious contents of the locker.

If there is a more perfect analogy to dynasty auctions drafts than this, it would be hard to find. In these drafts, owners bid against each other on players they've gotten a good look at in the past, but aren't completely sure what they are getting into if they're the winning bid. Just like the show, you've got basically four kinds of bidders:

- 1.) Very aggressive bidders**
- 2.) The antagonists**
- 3.) The value player bidders**
- 4.) Conservative bidders**

How these bidders interact with each other on the show can provide us with a great tool for identifying what type of bidders we're bidding against in our dynasty auction drafts, as well as successful tactics for dealing with each of these types of individuals.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: STORAGE WARS

Let's start with the first kind of bidder – the very aggressive bidder. On Storage Wars, the cast member who fits this mold is named David Hester. Hester is basically the villain of the show. Very cocky and verbose, he tries to bulldoze the other bidders with his bankroll. Hester constantly tries to make shows of power and intimidate other bidders by quickly driving up the price of units he is interested in. If you've ever been in a dynasty auction you know the type – this is the owner who bids up studs to levels that don't make logical sense to anyone other than themselves. These bidders tend to anger those around them by doing this with one or two select players at every position. Usually by the end of the first or second session, these owners are completely tapped out on cap space and aren't a factor until the very last rounds when they compile the rest of their team.

While a team using this strategy has one or two studs at every position, the rest of their team is below average as they employ an "all or nothing" approach to their team. These teams are generally top-heavy and very susceptible to injuries that could end their season. That's not to say the players themselves are injury prone, but if one or more of these players do fall to an injury, the aggressive bidder's team has no possible way to recover.

In order to counter the very aggressive bidder, you must be willing to sacrifice any hope of getting some stud players. Adjust your game plan to focus on value opportunities for other studs or above average players. Chime in every once in a while to keep the price moving upwards if possible. The sooner this bidder is out of the running, the sooner you can get down to business. You will have allies in this endeavor, especially the next bidder we'll examine.

The second kind of bidder you always see in dynasty leagues that is represented as a cast member on Storage Wars is the antagonist. This bidder on Storage Wars who fits the bill is Jarrod Schulz and he has an ongoing feud with Hester. Jarrod's goal on the show seems to be keeping Hester from winning any auctions. If that fails, he wants to make sure Hester has to pay a substantial amount in order to win.

In every auction, there exists at least one antagonist – a bidder who isn't particularly interested in some of the top players, but is bound and determined to make sure the very aggressive bidder has to pay through the nose in order to obtain the player in question. The antagonist views himself as standing up for the league or the "small guy" against a bidder who thinks the rules don't apply to him. The strategy is sound, but is usually overdone. When overdone, the antagonist can have their strategy blow up in their face when everyone else realizes what's happening and leaves the antagonist holding the proverbial bag when they stop bidding.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: STORAGE WARS

The antagonist will likely end up with several good to elite players in spite of themselves, but these are rarely the players the antagonist was targeting prior to the draft and they will inevitably be forced to try to “wheel and deal” after the auction. These bidders are usually the second highest class of spenders in a draft and need to be identified very early. If identified early enough, you can usually counter and neutralize them by acting interested in a player and bidding aggressively. The antagonist will usually pick up on this and dance with you for a while. It’s a dangerous dance, but work the price up to a value that is slightly above fair market price and abruptly stop bidding. Essentially you antagonize the antagonist. Provided you’re able to do this one or two times, you should be able to effectively remove the antagonist from future bids. When this bidder is taken out of the equation, the next type of bidder starts his run.

With “tweedle-dee” and “tweedle-dum” out of the way, the next bidder who steps up to the plate is the value bidder. This bidder usually misses out on the top of the line studs, but jumps in early enough to snag some borderline studs and above average players. This results in a roster of mostly “good” players.

In Storage Wars, this bidder is named Darrell Sheets and he has the nickname of “The Gambler.” I’m not entirely sure where that nickname comes from because the two bidders we’ve talked about prior to this one take more and larger risks. However, this bidder will likely put together a good team that will likely do well enough to make the playoffs due to the strength the bidder collects, coupled with the depth he or she has compiled.

This bidder tries very hard not to overspend on any one player and will usually drop out of an auction on specific players if pushed hard enough, just as Darrell goes home empty handed on a regular basis. The depth this bidder compiles will usually produce at least one gem, just as this bidder on Storage Wars always seems to find at least one big ticket item hidden away from view. In order to counter this type of bidder, you must bid hard for any specific player you are attempting to get in order to push this bidder out of the running early. Identify mid-level players you have no interest in and gently bid these players up en masse to slowly chip away at this bidder’s cap space. Be very careful not to bid too aggressively or this bidder is liable to remove themselves from contention on those players.

This, of course, leaves the last bidder who rounds out our merry group, the conservative bidder. This bidder tends to clean up the scraps near the end and rarely ends up with a top ten player in the draft. They are content to allow the auction to proceed around them without much engaging. On Storage Wars, this bidder is cast member Barry Weiss.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

THE HIDDEN LESSONS: STORAGE WARS

Despite his flashy outer appearance and jovial personality, Barry usually picks up the lower-end lockers and bows out of the bidding early and often. He is content to take in the atmosphere, but doesn't dig down deep and fight tooth and nail for any locker he sees. Barry, more often than not, like his conservative counterparts in dynasty auction drafts, dwells near the bottom in terms of profit – he generally takes a loss or barely breaks even. Every once in a while he'll luck out and pull a rabbit out of his hat with a big find. However, these are few and far between and sometimes only appear valuable until closer inspection, much like the one week wonders the conservative dynasty auction bidders uncover every once in a while.

The conservative bidder usually competes at the end of the draft with the very aggressive bidder who is suffering from a depleted salary cap. There isn't much you can do, or even need to do, in order to counter a conservative bidder. The good thing about these bidders is they do the work for you by their timid manner and generally just get out of the way.

Every episode of Storage Wars is entertaining and gives you a great insight into how to maneuver your dynasty fantasy draft. You'll definitely find yourself cheering for one character more regularly than you do others – usually it's this bidder's style you most closely resemble. Once you've singled out your counterpart in the show, try to make mental notes about how this cast member both succeeds and fails at what they do. Also observe how they interact with the other cast members for tips on how you too can do the same. Please ignore the prices the bidders themselves place on items as they are usually overinflated. Instead, listen to what the experts they visit value those items at – this will be your key indicator of success and failure.

Personally, we find ourselves split between the antagonist (Jarrod) and the value bidder (Darrell). We hate it when bidders try to bulldoze the league and have no problem bidding those people up in order to remove them from the rest of the auction I care about. However, we try to keep my emotions in check and back off every once in a while in order to assess what values we can find while everyone else is focused elsewhere.

It's always great to see a very aggressive bidder sitting silent after they realize they severely overpaid for their team. We know some people find the tactic of bidding others up "cheap" or "dishonest," but we feel it is a very essential part of the auction format and serves as a counterweight to those who have no regard for (or are reckless with) their salary cap space and who drive player prices up league-wide. If you don't care about your salary cap space, then why should anyone else? Sure, we may get burned now and then, but we can recover from that, can you?

TEAM MANAGEMENT

LESSONS LEARNED AT 3AM

Some of our favorite dynasty leagues are salary cap/contract leagues that has an annual free agent auction in late August. We've been doing this for years, so we're no stranger to live auctions. However, it had been a long, long time since one particular author (Tim Stafford) did a start-up auction.

This is his story in his words.

The new league is comprised of experienced dynasty players, plus most of the writers from DLF (pun intended). These folks know their players and player values, so I figured it would be a competitive draft. I sensed from e-mails and message board posts that maybe people were new to the auction process, so I thought that might prove interesting.

The less certain I am about player rankings, the more likely I am to use tiers rather than forced ranks. For example, I always use tier based rankings for rookies. It's extremely hard to know which similar rookie is going to be a better dynasty prospect. So, they are in the same tier for me and I let team needs, gut feel, or whatever else break the tie.

I use the same approach for auctions.

Not because of the uncertainty with the player, but the uncertainty that the auction format itself brings to the equation. If you have the 1.05 pick in a start-up draft, all you need to do is rank your top-5 players and you are guaranteed to get one of them. In an auction, you have no such guarantee, so you're better off to take your favorite ranking list and tier the players.

Each tier consists of players on which you'd be willing to spend a certain percentage of your budget. Within your tiers, you have to accept that the inherent unpredictability of the auction format means they are all fair game at approximately the same price. It's quite possible the receiver who you think is the WR1 will not be the most expensive receiver in an auction even though he is the consensus WR1 for dynasty.

Example:

My WR Tier One (approx. 20-25% of budget) = The top five receivers I believe are at the position
My WR Tier Two (approx. 15-20% of budget): The next six receivers I believe are the best

You keep going like this until you get to the point where you can't decide any more. The remaining guys are then basically the minimum bid or slightly more if you find yourself with excess cash when the auction moves to "roster fill out mode."

TEAM MANAGEMENT

LESSONS LEARNED AT 3AM

Lesson One: People discount players for age a ton.

The super elite guys went as I expected. The aging studs however came at a serious bargain. It's good to keep that in mind because if you get outbid on the studs, you may be able to fall back to this level of player and build around them with youth.

For those of you who are contemplating your first auction, you need to understand the concept of "Price Enforcement." Even if you don't intend to employ this approach, you want to be aware that others may. Essentially, the concept of price enforcement is that even if you have the players you want at a given position, you'd like to prevent other teams from getting silly bargains. Why? Because when it comes time to bid against them on players you do need, they will have less cash.

As you can imagine, there's an art form to "Price Enforcement." No science here. It's essentially the fantasy football equivalent of a game of chicken. Because I felt there were some people new to the auction format, I suspected people would be hesitant to bid aggressively early on. So, I decided to price enforce pretty heavily. I wanted to make sure the top-tier RBs really bled people of cash.

By and large, my approach worked. As you might expect, most of the top echelon of running backs were nominated for bidding during the first hour of the auction. An oft-injured top running back was nominated early and I decided to use him to set the bar for running back prices. I kept driving him up because I was okay with owning him (although I would have preferred not to), but mostly to establish what it was going to take to get a top tier running back. He went off at 17% of the cap. Fair value, maybe a tad cheap, honestly.

A bit later, three more top tier running backs were all nominated close together. I pushed these auctions, too. I ended up winning one of them because the bidding stopped at 24% of the cap. This is about what I expected and I pushed the bid one too many times. Oh well, there are worse things in the world than owning the player I deemed as the overall RB2.

Now is when price enforcement gets scary.

I've rostered those two players for a total of 41% of my cap, but now another top runner gets nominated. Being a gambler, I stick to my plan, but it backfires when the bidding stops at 17% of the cap with me holding the highest bid. I think the lesson here is I underestimated the discount that some running backs carry because of injury/age concerns. My mistake is your gain.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

LESSONS LEARNED AT 3AM

Side Note: I traded a bunch of my players the day after the auction. So, the take away here should be that you can generally fix a mistake in the auction via trade. It's fairly common in an auction that teams end up unbalanced at certain positions. If you are bidding purely on value (like selecting BPA in a rookie draft), you'll end up with excess at a position.

Lesson Two: I don't have the stamina I had in college.

For those of you who know me from the forums, you know I'm anything but a night owl. We started the auction at 9 pm ET on Wednesday. At 10:30 pm ET only 48 guys are off the board – so four rounds worth. And we are filling out 24 man rosters or a total of 300 players including developmental picks. Yikes – this is going to be a long, long night! Around 12:30 (with about 100 guys off the board), my brain comes up with the seemingly brilliant idea that I can rest my head on my desk during auctions that don't interest me. This works for a while until the brain decides a pillow would make this an even better plan. I missed twenty auctions and ended up with someone horrible as my WR2!! Try not to fall asleep during your auction. It's bad form.

I'm not going to use this article (which is supposed to be helping you prepare for an auction) to bash an up and coming quarterback, but consider what you want to do around these player before you go in to your draft. Either way you should have a plan. If you are a believer that the player is truly elite – be prepared to pay. If you are a doubter, you can probably sit back and watch the auction and be reasonably confident he will get run up - that's an important learning point for those who plan to price enforce.

Lesson Three: Beware of the "plus one" button on MFL.

If you've never done an auction – the "plus one" button is a seductive mistress that allows you to keep bumping the auction up by one dollar. This annoys other owners as it resets the clock on the auction to the full amount for just a dollar increment in the bidding. Two things to keep in mind about the "plus one":

- A) it's fun to use so you might find yourself overusing it and
- B) on MFL it can have a delay, so you'll hit it and a few seconds later your bid is registered.

I have it on authority that another DLF staffer highly recommends typing in your bid as opposed to using "plus one" because sometimes the "plus one" results in you getting someone you don't want for 15% of your cap because the delay allowed others to run the auction up before the "plus one" bid was registered by the system.

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Lesson Four: The Bulk of the Players will Be Nearly Free

Out of the 300 players or so drafted, 140 cost 1% of the cap or less. To put that another way, starting in round 13 of a standard 12-team draft, the draft almost converts to a regular draft. The person making the nomination has the upper hand at this point because people either are tapped out or just don't like the players. The initial bid can dictate more at this point than earlier in the auction because there's a reasonable chance it will be the only bid.

Our draft concluded at 3:14 am and during the final hour there were 104 players selected – only three of them were over 1% of the cap. That said, this is where some interesting sleepers lie. And remember this means one-third of the rosters were filled out in the final hour of a draft that lasted over six hours. Maybe my cat nap was a good strategy – I was wide awake at this point!

An obvious corollary to the fact that most of the players are free is that the top tiers are really, really expensive. If you're new to auctions, don't let yourself get pushed out of the top guys because the bidding feels expensive. There's a lot to learn in these numbers:

The top-24 players (8% of total) accounted for 39% of the total budget of the auction

The top-60 players (20% of total) accounted for 70% of the total budget in the auction

The bottom-200 players (66% of total) accounted for 13% of the total budget in the auction

The point here is you need to bid with confidence on those players who would be in the first five rounds of a normal draft start-up.

A common piece of advice given by DLF staffers is to bulk up on picks in the first five rounds of a dynasty start-up. Experienced players used 70% of their cash on only 20% of the players – this is an important lesson for anyone doing a start-up regardless of whether it's an auction or not.

Good luck!

TEAM MANAGEMENT

AVERAGES ARE NOT YOUR FRIEND

It's a dirty little secret, but one you may have guessed by the title of this article.

If you're assessing players based solely on the average number of points they score per game, you could be doing your team a grave injustice. Sure, in a pinch, without much data to rely upon, averages will do when you're forced to make a quick and dirty decision. Unfortunately, most decisions made based solely upon average points per game are not these "quick and dirty" calls, but are rather the extent of some owners so-called "research." I beg you, please don't be one of them.

With the information you already have on hand to determine a player's average points per game, you can much better assess which players are better for your team and which players you can let some poor other sap have. The information in this article requires a small degree of mathematical analysis, but it's nothing most of us didn't learn in high school. Yeah, I'm going to make you go back to those painful times, but just for a little bit.

Here's a fun exercise. Take any mock draft and find a player who had some monster games. Based solely on average points per game, they likely end in the top 30.

They're likely a good player, but much of their average was based upon a single game or two and that average could beat out some much better players.

Clearly, based upon this exercise, average just isn't a valid way of evaluating a player. What should take its place, though? Well, let's talk about the averages less known, and much sexier cousin, standard deviation. While averages attempt give you an idea as to how many points a player typically scores per game, it fails in many ways.

First, averages gloss over how many games a player actually played in as well as how well a player performed in those games. Standard deviation, however, illuminates players that had one amazing game, but didn't do much the rest of the season or those players who simply appeared in one or two games. An added bonus of using standard deviation is using it also helps identify those who are inconsistent in their play, and as we all know, consistency is a highly sought after commodity in dynasty leagues. If you can't depend on your players week in and week out, you're going to spend much of the season second guessing yourself and giving yourself an ulcer.

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Have I sold you yet on incorporating standard deviation into your player evaluations? I hope so, otherwise the rest of this article is going to pass you by.

Now then, how do we determine this magical number?

Well, if you know how to use Microsoft Excel then you're in luck – it's built right into the program. Referring back to a recent mock draft, we'll examine two players who ever very close in overall and average points. Look at #7 WRX (335.9 points overall/20.9938 average per game) and #8 QBX (335.6 points overall/20.975 average points per game). As you can see, those players are about as close as any two players could be, but who was more consistent?

Grab the values for both players from Week 1 through Week 17 and paste them into A1 through Q2. In R1 type with the quotes “=STDEV.P(A1:Q1)” and in R2 type without the quotes “=STDEV.P(A2:Q2)”. If you did this right for the receiver, you should get a value of 11.82 and for the quarterback you should get a value of 7.44.

Great, but what does this mean?

Well, it's actually pretty simple – this tells you how tightly clustered all the values for any given player's season are around their average. The lower the standard deviation, the more consistent a player is. Take the receiver for instance, in his comparison, his best game was 51.6 points, while his worst was 4.2 points. The quarterback on the other hand pulled down 38.0 points in his best game and 9.1 in his worst game. Sure, we'd all love to have that WR's 51.6 game, but that was the anomaly, not the rule. The closest he ever got in any other game last season to 51.6 points was a 36.0 game. The quarterback, on the other hand, scored 29.2 and 29.5 in two different games and was fairly consistent throughout the season. On a game-by-game basis, you'd want to draft the quarterback over the receiver because the average points per game you're seeing from him are going to be a better indication of what to expect from him. As you can see, while our two players appeared very similar at first, the actual story is very different!

If you're not too good with Microsoft Excel, never fear, we'll walk through calculating it the good old fashioned way as well. This is clearly not the preferred method as it's very time consuming, but it is possible. This is going to be where many of your eyes gloss over. If you hate math, just skip the next page and number description series.

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Just as with Microsoft Excel, in order to calculate the standard deviation by hand, you'll need all the point values the player you're evaluating scored during the season as well as the average points the player scored. In this fictional scenario let's say we have a five game season in which the player scored 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 points. First we need the average of all the games:

$$2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 = 20/5 = 4 \text{ points}$$

Now we need to subtract the average from every score:

$$2 - 4 = -2$$

$$3 - 4 = -1$$

$$4 - 4 = 0$$

$$5 - 4 = 1$$

$$6 - 4 = 2$$

After that, we have to square each of those numbers and add the squared numbers together:

$$(-2)^2 + (-1)^2 + (0)^2 + (1)^2 + (2)^2$$

$$4 + 1 + 0 + 1 + 4 = 10$$

We now have all the information we need and need to plug in the numbers:

$$\sqrt{10/5-1} = 1.5811$$

As I said earlier, it's time consuming, but not impossible.

For those re-joining us, there is a third way – simply look for an online standard deviation calculator. An online calculator of standard deviation requires the least knowledge and is the easiest method by far, but it doesn't provide a way for determining this important tool you can add to your evaluation toolset. It works in a pinch, but please don't depend solely on an online calculator.

So, now that we have standard deviation, what other calculations can we do to determine the best player to take out of two closely scoring players? We've looked at the sexy cousin of averages, but did you know the family is bigger than just averages and standard deviation? Indeed it is, average (sometimes referred to as mean) was born as one member in a set of triplets, so to speak – the other two triplets are mode and median. These two could be called the ugly sisters because it seems as if everyone wants to take average to the ball and leave mode and median sitting at home. Maybe they aren't as sexy, but it's inner beauty that counts with these two!

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AVERAGES ARE NOT YOUR FRIEND

First, let's look at how to calculate mode and apply it to fantasy football.

Mode is the number that occurs most often in a series of numbers. In fantasy football, this number tends to point to a better expectation of what to expect out of a player because these are actual numbers the player put up as opposed to average, which is an approximation of what to expect. In a league that scores fractionally I suggest rounding in order to find the mode. Given our scenario, we find the quarterback posts a mode of 14 while the receiver posts a mode of 11. Once again, we can see the quarterback deserves the pick based solely on how often he scores a higher mode than the receiver.

It's not looking so good for that receiver right now, but maybe he can turn it around with our median calculation.

Median is probably the easiest calculation to make out of all the options we've discussed. All you have to do to determine median is find the number right in the middle when you order the numbers numerically. If the number of values is even, then add the two middle numbers and divide that value by two. Once again, looking at our example, we find the receiver has a median of 21.60 while the quarterback pulls down a median of 19.90.

The receiver wins one!

Median is helpful to determine what you can expect as a middle value, it ignores very good or very bad performances. This is why home income in the United States is based upon the median as opposed to the average – it ignores the extremely rich and the extremely poor, aiming instead for what the households directly in the middle make.

With all of these tools the obvious question is, "Which is the best to use when evaluating players?" The honest answer is, whatever you value most. I prefer standard deviation myself because it tells me how consistent a player is. Others prefer mode because it's based upon actual numbers the player has scored and not derived calculations. Others still prefer median because it ignores values with are extremes in favor of a more central number. No one is right, the answer is based solely upon you value system. One might even want to perform all of these calculations and go with the player that performs best out of the three calculations, Stafford in our example.



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These calculations are particularly helpful in a start-up draft, but can be used throughout the dynasty experience. Perhaps you can't decide between two players on the waiver wire or are offered a trade that swaps similarly ranked players. These methods of evaluation are also very useful when proposing a trade or simply evaluating your own squad. What better way to give yourself the greatest advantage possible than to go out and get the players you need as opposed to just waiting for those players to be offered up to you and evaluating them then?

As with any dynasty league player, age must be factored into any player evaluation. Unfortunately it's tough gauge just how age affects a player, some players can't even make it to 30 in the NFL, and others can push playing until they are almost 40. There is no absolute way to gauge just how productive a player can be as those years tick away. However, using these evaluation methods to calculate outcomes year after year you can develop trend lines which can show how a player is trending of time.

Maybe a player is still performing at the top of their position but their play is becoming more erratic, or perhaps their median score is slowly trending downwards. Both of these trend lines would be red flags to look out for and a time to consider selling high while you can get as much as possible for a player on the decline. While a player on the decline might not be immediately apparent to most people, trend lines can help you be ahead of the pack and look like a genius as the player continues to slide as time goes on. Perhaps you can pull off a trade for a young player on the ascent but pulling up marginally lower numbers with the knowledge that they will "grow into" their numbers over time, just as your declining player is getting passed by.

With all these new tools, get out these and evaluate to your heart's content. At least now you have some actual numbers to rely upon when trying to choose between to similarly performing players. No longer do you have to rely upon the flipping of a coin.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION TO THE SANDBOXING CONCEPT

Several technical fields use a concept known as sandboxing to allow them to test how products, ideas or theories react in a real world environment. Sandboxing allows someone to try out fictional scenarios and develop likely outcomes for them. An exact copy of an established product is placed in a “sandbox” environment where tests are performed. The copy subjected to the sandbox tests will never be rolled out to the public and is simply for the consumption or education of those subjecting the product to the tests. Sandboxing is very useful when you have a theory you’d like to test, but you already have an established product in place you don’t want to ruin.

The sandboxing idea is tailor-made for dynasty fantasy football – it allows you to test your “what if’s” and “shoulda, coulda woulda” scenarios or allows you to play out how a trade might change the dynamics of your team or league as a whole. In years past, sandboxing a dynasty fantasy football league would require an enormous amount of work that made such an endeavor difficult by even the most dedicated enthusiasts. However, new advances in technology and the emergence of fresh competitors to large fantasy hosting companies have opened up new possibilities for dynasty fantasy football aficionados. Now, an owner can easily duplicate the league he or she is playing in and take control of the spinoff league. This sandboxed league allows the owner to alter the league as he or she sees fit and, in turn, allows them to obtain answers to any questions they may have.

The idea of sandboxing applied to fantasy football is a new one, but if applied properly, sandboxing has the potential to supercharge any dynasty fantasy football toolkit and can provide an immediate advantage over those members of a league who do not use this tool.

How does one go about creating a sandboxed league? It’s actually much easier than you can imagine. These steps should be pretty similar from league hosting service to services like FleaFlicker or ESPN, but in this example I’m going to use the service I’m the most familiar with – MyFantasyLeague.com, as the subject:

- 1.) First, create a new league by visiting the home page of the hosting site of your choice and choosing whichever opinion sounds closest to what would create a new league.
- 2.) Input the information which sounds closest to how your league is set up. If your league has two divisions, set up two divisions as well, if the league has 12 teams then create 12 teams. The same goes for format, roster spots, conferences, injured reserve, taxi squad spots, etc.
- 3.) Once the league is set up, head into the commissioner’s options. In this section, there will be an option to manually enter or load rosters. Duplicate the team rosters from the original league in the new sandbox league. Give each team a name which makes identification easy between the two leagues. This shouldn’t take that long, but the effort increases as the roster sizes increase.

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At this point, you should have your sandbox in place. From here you can adjust the league as you see fit in order to perform the scenarios you have developed or test any theories you may have – it's your league now!

A word of caution – once you create the sandbox league, you may want to duplicate that league as well in order to perform your experiments. It's good practice to keep a pristine version of your original, so you can produce copies that match it. If you begin to tweak your original, subsequent copies will reflect those changes and introduce variables that do not exist in the original league. Luckily it's much easier to create duplicate sandboxes once you create the original one. In MyFantasyLeague.com on the "Commissioner Setup Options" page select "Duplicate This League" under the "Use These Items With Caution!" section. This will create an exact copy of your original sandbox.

So, what can we do with our new sandbox? Many, many things! Take the following examples for instance:

- 1.) Perhaps you would like to see what a minor (or major) scoring change would do to the number of points players score. How would players in your league be affected if you moved points per reception up to two points from the previous one point? This is particularly helpful when deciding how to vote in a league poll or when rule changes are opened to the league at year's end. Minor tweaks in a scoring set up may seem pointless to some but equipped with your sandbox you can try to mold the leagues you participate in to your benefit.
- 2.) Determine just how scheduling affects the outcome of a league. Every year, one or more teams flat out get lucky. It's interesting just to see how much luck goes into making a champion. Shuffle the schedule up and see how your league plays out.
- 3.) Adding, modifying or removing starting line-up positions can drastically affect the outcome of a league. Perhaps your league does not have a flex position – try introducing one and see how things change. Maybe try making wide receivers and tight ends part of the same position pool or completely delete the kicker position. The options here are limitless, but really provide you a great insight into what's important in your league, and sometimes dynasty fantasy football as a whole.
- 4.) League realignment at year's end occurs in many leagues. If it occurs in yours, run the season out with the new alignment and get a feel for how your team might perform or who your major competitors will be. A slight variation of possibility #4 is to create projections based upon the schedule for next season given this year's scoring. Granted, this is very far from perfect with a ton of variables involved but even some insight is better than no insight at all.



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5.) A slight variation of possibility #4 is to create projections based upon the schedule for next season given this year's scoring. Granted, this is very far from perfect with a ton of variables involved but even some insight is better than no insight at all.

You can determine if a trade has worked for you as the season progresses or, conversely, if you should have made a trade you didn't make. This can drive you absolutely crazy if you're not careful, so don't dwell on this too much. This can, however, prompt you to make a trade given the results you observe.

Sandboxing provides an absolutely excellent way to get a feel for what it's like to be a commissioner for a league without all the, well, drama! If you like the experience, you might consider creating an actual league of your own.

There are many other experiments you can run; the only limit is your imagination. We have found that sandboxing a league can give you a much better idea of the ins and outs of that league, helps highlight the subtle nuances that every league has and gives you a much greater feeling of connection to the subject league due to the newly found understanding you obtain from this exercise.

We can't stress enough how useful of an exercise sandboxing is in rounding out your skills as a complete fantasy football player. Sandboxing provides insight into scoring systems and formats, the dynamics between luck and skill, the importance of various rules and a taste of commissioner duties.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

MAXIMIZING YOUR TOP DRAFT PICKS BY MINIMIZING CHURN

It's the age old question that all of us face when our turn to pick comes up in a start-up dynasty draft – which of these players holds the most long term value for my team?

It's no secret that sustained high-level production is the life-blood of any successful dynasty team. One year wonders are fun to ride when you can, but depending on those players to keep you in continued contention for your league title is best left for those players who focus solely on re-draft leagues. None of what I've said so far in this article is earth-shattering or ground-breaking research for dynasty owners – we all look for players who produce year in and year out.

What we're about to say next, however, just might be a bit of a revelation to many of you dynasty owners, probably even you reading this routinely sabotage your teams by selecting players, or rather players from positions, that have the lowest longevity with your highest picks. If a dynasty owner is in the dynasty experience for the long-term, one would expect that the players from the positions with the longest longevity would be selected with the highest picks. The problem usually occurs when owners plan for the dynasty experience with their brain, but only after drafting with their heart.

“Whoa, whoa,” you're saying, “I put a lot of research into my picks, I take players who are strong and look great for the long term.”

We have no doubt many of us share that sentiment. However, some research one of our authors did in 2012 forced him to dramatically reassess both how he valued players and which positions he valued the most.

Would you draft a player who was a top ten performer for his position last year with a first round pick? Depending on the player you would certainly consider it, who wouldn't right?

What if you were presented a choice between two players from two different positions, both of whom were top ten players in their position, both the same age and each score roughly the same amount? What you may not realize is that one player's position, on average, drops out of the top ten a full half year earlier than the other player's position – that difference becomes even more exaggerated if the players in question have been in the top ten for their positions more than once. If the players in question have been in the top ten more than once, one player's position appears in their top ten almost a full year longer than the other position. The decision seems elementary at this point – you select the player who will appear in their top ten an extra year, it just makes sense from a value standpoint, right?

Why then do nearly all of us covet running backs with first round picks and wide receivers with second or third round picks, but almost totally ignore quarterbacks until much later?

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Check out this research:



First, let's concentrate on the bars themselves; the blue bars represent all of the players who appeared in the top ten per position from 2002 through 2011, while the red bars represent players who appeared more than once between 2002 through 2011. The numbers above each bar represent how many times on average a player appears in each list. The numbers in the parentheses under each position are the number of players who appear on that position's list between 2002 and 2011. The numbers in the brackets under each position are the number of players that appear more than once on that position's list between 2002 and 2011.

As we pointed out earlier, you can clearly see running backs and wide receivers, on average, only stay in the top ten for 2.29 years and 2.21 years, respectively, while quarterbacks, the position with the most top ten longevity, stay in the top ten nearly half a year longer on average.

If we focus solely on players who repeat their top ten performances for two or more years then the difference is startling. Your average running back that repeats a top ten performance doesn't stay in the top ten much longer than the rest of his top ten running back compatriots, only staying there 3.07 years, a difference of 0.78 years. Wide receivers fare slightly better. A wide receiver who appears more than once in the top ten averages 3.45 years in the top ten, an average of 1.24 years, nearly a full year and a quarter longer than the average wide receiver appearance.

TEAM MANAGEMENT

MAXIMIZING YOUR TOP DRAFT PICKS BY MINIMIZING CHURN

The case seems pretty cut and dry at this point, however, we need to look a little further to get a full picture of what's going on here. The numbers on the above graph under each position play an important part in interrupting this data. This can be viewed as the churn rate for the top ten for each position. Since we are looking at data that encompasses ten years' time with ten top players at each position per year, we can obviously expect 100 potentially different players if there was a 100% churn rate. The first number under each position is the number of different players who appear on that position's top ten during the ten year period in question. This can essentially be viewed as a percentage, so wide receivers have the largest churn rate at 47%, followed by running backs that had a 45% churn rate, then tight ends at 43% and a nice drop off to quarterbacks who only churned at 36%.

Scratching beneath the surface, a couple of things should immediately stand out to you. First, the difference in churn from the more highly valued wide receivers to the often ignored quarterbacks is an amazing 23%, not simply an 11% difference. No, my math isn't wrong, you don't compare the totals to the original 100%, since we are comparing the positions we compare the numbers from each position. Therefore, the difference from 36% to 47% is a full 23% increase ($100 - [(36/47)*100]$). In more understandable terms, this means that if you select a wide receiver who has appeared in the top ten just once, over a quarterback who has ranked in the top ten at his position just once, you're 23% more likely to see that wide receiver fall out of the top ten the next year (Jordy Nelson, I'm looking squarely at you)! You may be thinking this same examination needs to be done by the serious dynasty owner right away!

Well, not really, here's a handy chart to refer to:

	QB	RB	WR	TE
QB		20.00%	23.40%	16.27%
RB	-20.00%		4.25%	-4.44%
WR	-23.40%	-4.25%		-8.51%
TE	-16.27%	4.44%	8.51%	

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What we have to do at this point is divide the number of re-appearing top ten players by the number of all the top ten players. Doing so yields us the following – clearly, as a dynasty fantasy football owner drafting a player who could fizzle out one times out of four over a similarly talented player is just not acceptable! What happens if we have to make a decision between two highly talented players who have appeared in the top ten of their position more than once? Here's where things get a bit complicated, but also where some interesting facts are unveiled.

Quarterbacks: $23/36 = 0.6389$ then $0.6389 * 100 = 63.89\%$
Running Backs: $28/45 = 0.6222$ then $0.6222 * 100 = 62.22\%$
Wide Receivers: $23/47 = 0.4894$ then $0.4894 * 100 = 48.94\%$
Tight Ends: $22/43 = 0.5116$ then $0.5116 * 100 = 51.16\%$

Great, lots of numbers, but what in the world does it mean? I'll walk you through it step by step.

We are taking the number of players who appear in the top ten multiple times and dividing that number by the number of players in the ten year period from 2002-2011 who have appeared in the top ten for that position. We are then given a number between zero and one. We then take this number and multiply that by 100 to get a percentage. This is the last number in each of the lines above.

Uhhh, OK, so what? What does that number mean?

It's simple – that number, in conjunction with the average number of years that re-occurring players who appear in the top ten, shows us the true dynasty worth of top ten players who aren't flukes. If we encounter a higher percentage here with a higher average number of years, this tells us how highly we should value a given position, quarterback for instance.

- 1.) More top ten quarterbacks who appear in the top ten for one year tend to reappear in the top ten more than one year.
- 2.) Quarterbacks also tend to stay in the top ten longer than running backs or wide receivers.
- 3.) Fewer tight ends re-appear in the top ten multiple years, but the ones who do reappear tend to be staples.
- 4.) Running backs tend to reappear in the top ten more than one year, but they stay in the top ten far shorter than any other position.
- 5.) The wide receiver position tends to be the worst long term investment with fewer wide receivers appearing in the top ten than any other position and those wide receivers who do reappear in the top ten have the second shortest stay in there out of the four offensive positions.

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Dynasty owners always aim for players who reside in that “sweet spot” where longevity intersects with top notch production. The numbers from those ten years seem to indicate the players most dynasty owners target early in initial drafts actually hamper the long term viability of their team’s success. Those owners looking to be successful longer than their league mates would be strongly advised to target young quarterbacks who have appeared in the top ten two or more times over a similarly producing player at any other position. Additionally, targeting wide receivers with high draft picks appears to be a poor investment long term.

Clearly there are exceptions to every rule. However, chasing exceptions is a losing man’s game. The numbers we’ve laid out should serve any dynasty owner with a great roadmap from which to value players who post similar fantasy points, but play at two different positions. Doing so has always been a hard proposition for most of us, yet now with firm numbers in hand, the decision should be much easier – you pick the player from the position with the lowest churn and longest longevity.

It should be very interesting to see how drafting strategies could be modified based on this research. One strategy perhaps would be that you pass on running backs and wide receivers with your picks in the top two rounds. Instead, you might opt for a high end young quarterback and tight end in rounds one and two. From the third round on you hold your initial draft as most others would grabbing the best young running backs and wide receivers available.

Based on research still in its infancy, this strategy is, admittedly, risky. However, the numbers are solid and point to this strategy being very sound. Grabbing a combination at quarterback and tight end is very feasible in this drafting scenario and many young, high profile running backs are available in the third and beyond. It’s hard to argue that a team built around those studs could fail long-term, which seems to lend a lot of credence to this research.

Now get out there and truly build your team for the true long-term!

TEAM MANAGEMENT

START UP DYNASTY DRAFT STRATEGIES

There are as many draft strategies as there are players in the NFL. No one strategy guarantees you a championship team or a cellar dweller and even the best laid plans can go awry as a draft unfolds. If you don't have a strategy chosen before your draft begins, you're leaving too much to chance. In the absence of a plan exists impulse. As soon as you have your draft slot, your plan should take shape. Give some consideration to the following items:

Things To Do

1. Where do you want to pick?

Do you like to be in the top three? Do you like to pick last in the round to get back to back picks? Somewhere in between? Ultimately, you aren't in control of where you pick, but you still need to be ready to adjust. Your first three picks go a long way toward establishing your first tier core. Just because you can't dictate your draft position doesn't mean that you can't easily move within those first three rounds to ultimately shape your first three picks. It's very easy to trade up, out or back. Keep all options open toward working your plan.

2. Know the scoring format

Point per reception (PPR) league? Six points for passing touchdowns? Performance scoring for big plays? Return yardage? PPR leagues can result in a dramatic value increase for top receivers and three-down backs. Six points for passing touchdowns adds value to quarterbacks. Performance scoring, which rewards players for 100 yard rushing games, 300 yard passing games, long touchdowns of a certain distance, or a myriad of other milestones tends to favor players that are center pieces in their respective offenses and high quality quarterbacks with legitimate weapons. Return yardage leagues, which reward players for punt and kick return yardage and touchdowns, highlight dual threat players. Don't forget to check to see if tight ends get 1.5 points per reception.

3. Know the positional format

Specifically, does the format require starting two running backs, or only a single running back? The difference is of great importance as it could very well help dictate your second and third round selections. If you are playing in a PPR format, know that many successful teams are built on the backs of receivers. The inclusion of a second starting running back requirement changes the dynamic considerably as the position can get very thin, very quickly. If the format allows for two quarterbacks to be started, you **MUST** spend an early pick on your first quarterback and I could easily justify spending your first two picks on the position if the right names fall. The weekly scoring advantage garnered with top quarterbacks can be sizable.

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4. Know how the players scored within the scoring format last year

Most league service sites allow you to access historical records such that you can see how a player performed in a particular scoring system in the previous year. Chances are that you have at least one league that you can reference to give you an idea of how the players performed within a closely matched scoring system. This is a critical understanding to have as you build your team. You'll undoubtedly be faced with difficult choices as your draft progresses. Remember that the only thing that matters week to week is fantasy point production. Points on your bench don't help you as much as points on the field in a head-to-head match. Don't force the selection of a RB4 if a well-scoring receiver remains undrafted. If you can't find how a player scored in the previous year of the scoring format in question, at least understand the productivity of the players in your ranking system.

5. Know the player tiers

Every position has tiers that must be understood. If the second tier of quarterbacks are ranked very closely in value, there's no great need to rush into that tier as long as at least one falls to you. Conversely, if a single player within a tier remains on the board at your selection, you'll know that there is virtually no chance he makes it back to you in the following round. His selection is an easy one to make. Understanding the tiers within each position is a critical research point as that single fact will tell you when it's time to grab your quarterback, your tight end and when it's safe to forego the same decision.

6. Don't draft in a vacuum

It's always a shock to me when I find that, while drafting, some coaches don't keep track of other teams as they draft. This strategy is imperative if you pick at the beginning, or near the end, of a round but is useful at any point. If you're faced with the decision of selecting the last quarterback in the tier at the end of a round, and you pick again within a few picks, know the makeup of the teams that pick after you. While it's never a guarantee that a team picking after you won't select a second quarterback, it's a good bet that in the early rounds if teams after you have already filled their quarterback position, or tight end for that matter, you're relatively safe in foregoing the pick until your next selection. You can often use this strategy even when picking in the middle of a round as you play the odds of a targeted player remaining on the board until your next pick.

Next, let's cover a few things I don't do.

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Things to NOT do

1. Pay attention to player forecasts

Most sites like to spend a lot of time forecasting the upcoming year as it relates to player scoring. We've found it's a waste of time. That's not to say you shouldn't understand the variables that suggest a player's performance for the upcoming season. Last year's scoring, a little bit of your own logic and a trusted site (like DLF) to help you sort out depth charts and player movement, is all you need to rank the players.

2. Force a strategy

Do your due-diligence prior to your draft and devise a strategy for your draft. But don't chisel that strategy into stone. Do not be impulsive. If a draft begins to go badly for you, don't force a busted strategy. I can't count the times when, during a draft, I've had five running backs or wide receivers ranked for a selection six picks away, only to see all five go off the board. It's frustrating but don't let it shake you to the point where you automatically reach for a the sixth player in the position if it doesn't make sense. Have a strategy, but understand when that strategy needs to change.

3. Don't mail-in the middle rounds

The first three to four rounds are extremely important for putting in your first and second tier foundation. But dynasties are created in rounds five through ten. The homework you've done and the educated chances you take in these early-middle rounds will ultimately determine how deep and how strong your team will be. A lot of coaches start sorting players purely by ADP (average draft position) or drafting somewhat indiscriminately after rounds four or five. The informed coach can work magic in these six rounds. Most players in the first four rounds of a draft will score relatively well. But the point advantage available to the savvy coach from players in the following five to six rounds can really separate them from the field.

4. Don't fall victim to early Kicker, IDP or Defense selections

There are a lot of strategies for these positions and we won't discount those that feel strongly about how and when to start selecting individual Individual Defensive Players (IDP). Do NOT select your kicker or your defense until the last two rounds. We know you're going to think about how you can gain a point advantage by selectively doing so, but we've researched it many times and never found anything that leads us to believe there's an advantage to be had. We don't waste time ranking kickers or defenses and simply use last year's scoring in most all situations.

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DYNASTY LEAGUE FOOTBALL