

Fantasy Football FOR **DUMMIES®**

by Martin “Cyber Tuna” Signore

Fantasy football expert, screenwriter, and game designer



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

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About the Author

Martin Signore relishes turning his hobbies into paying gigs. He began shooting home videos with a 50-pound VHS camera in high school, which led him to NYU film school. After college, Martin went west and has been working in film and television ever since. Having worked in almost every crew position, Martin is now a freelance writer/producer and has sold a feature pitch to 20th Century Fox and a feature-length screenplay to Eden Rock Media and Film Office. He'll still work "below the line" when duty (and friendship) calls.

Raised as a first-generation gamer, Martin's love of Atari also somehow leads to paychecks. Martin is now a writer/designer of video games, having worked on story-driven titles such as *Fantastic Four*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Jack Sparrow*, and *The Sopranos: Road to Respect*.

An avid computer hobbyist, Martin's infatuation with Windows and PC gaming led him to start his own consulting firm, All Things Digital. Luckily for his business, Windows crashes all the time, which results in hourly billing that supports his screenwriting career.

And last, but certainly not least, Martin is an avid fantasy football coach. Over the years, he has won several public, private, and expert leagues and, some might say, found his true calling. A fellow member of his favorite fantasy league, *The Hollywood Football League*, works for Wiley Publishing. The rest is fantasy.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to my mother, Norma Feuer, my stepfather, Steve Feuer, and my father, Don Signore. Mom, thanks for all of your support of my creative endeavors over the years and for your unconditional love through it all. Steve, thanks for helping me put this book deal together (your check is in the mail) and for being there for Mom while I am off chasing rainbows in Hollywood. Don't worry, Dad. Fantasy football fame and fortune won't stop me from wearing other hats in the film industry. It's always sunny in L.A., wish you were here.

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Finally, much thanks to my old friend and fellow fantasy football fanatic, David Perrin. Dave's help was indispensable when I was putting together Part IV of this book. Dave, you have our gratitude.

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Introduction

In 1999, I was exactly where you may be right now. I decided to give the whole “fantasy football” thing a try, even though I had no idea how to play. Back then, the online version of the game was just starting to take off, and Yahoo! just began offering its free league services. I did a bit of research and talked to a few buddies about strategy, but I mainly learned the game through trial and error(s). I had no definitive resource guide to help me get off to a good start in my fantasy football career.

Things have changed today. With *Fantasy Football For Dummies*, you have helpful guidance and friendly advice right at your fingertips — the keys to a successful fantasy season, which I didn’t have when I began to play the game. This resource can make your fantasy football season less frustrating. You can avoid many mistakes and start racking up victories by knowing the basics of the game, the popular strategies for winning, and the etiquette of league play. Also, when I began playing, I knew very little about the available online resources. I just bought the first fantasy magazine I saw and went from there. This book also includes an overview of major fantasy football providers and expert Web sites that offer tools and advice you can turn to when looking to improve your team.

This game was built to mirror pro football and it does just that. Fantasy football is as exciting and as fun as it is frustrating and unpredictable. Hope for the best and expect the worst!

About This Book

Fantasy Football For Dummies gives you the foundational information you need to play fantasy football. This book is a unique guide because it offers in-depth lessons on how to play the game and serves as a reference on where to play and where to get great expert advice. Unlike most fantasy Web sites and magazines, which offer advice with the assumption that you’re already a fantasy addict, this book serves the beginning fantasy player and has plenty of advice sprinkled throughout for more advanced players. You can open this book, scan the table of contents or index to find a subject that interests you, and flip to those pages to improve certain parts of your fantasy game or to read up on a fantasy league provider.

Conventions Used in This Book

I provide the following basic conventions to help you navigate your way through the concepts and discussions in this book:

- ✓ I *italicize* all new terms and follow them with easy-to-understand definitions.
- ✓ I **boldface** all keywords in bulleted lists and all steps in numbered lists.
- ✓ I use `monofont` to highlight all Web sites and e-mail addresses to set them apart from the normal text.

Most of the companies that provide fantasy football games and content have Web sites of the same name. For example, you can find Rotowire at `www.rotowire.com`. If some Web addresses break across two lines of text, rest assured that I didn't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the breaks. So, when using a Web address that spans two lines of text, type in exactly what you see, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. For the fantasy Web sites, I also capitalize all the links to help you easily identify them.

- ✓ Although you can choose to play fantasy football on a wide array of Web providers, to simplify matters throughout this book I use the default settings for Yahoo!. No matter what provider you choose, make sure you double-check the league settings before you start to play.

Furthermore, because fantasy football is a game based on the National Football League (NFL), it can feature some confusing terminology. For example, each person who plays fantasy football is a player in the fantasy game, and he or she depends on the players in the NFL game. See what I mean? Therefore, when I refer to *coaches*, I mean you, the fantasy participant — unless I specifically say “NFL coach.” (I also may refer to you as the *owner* or *GM* [general manager] — not to be confused with NFL owners or GMs.) Whenever I say *player*, I'm referring to the NFL players who make up your fantasy league.

Finally, fantasy sites and experts use a lot of positional shorthand based on NFL depth charts, and this book is no different. I call the starting running back the RB1, and his backups are called RB2 and RB3. You can apply the same shorthand when you're the king of your own team's depth chart. Here are the positional abbreviations to look for:

QB = Quarterback

RB = Running back

WR = Wide receiver

TE = Tight end

K = Kicker

DEF = Team defense

D/ST = Defense/Special teams

What You're Not to Read

Throughout the book, I refer to some of my fondest and funniest memories of playing in the Hollywood Football League — my fantasy league — with my buddies. These anecdotes, which I often place in sidebars, are meant to entertain and inform because they're examples of the rules and strategies I lay out in the chapters. However, the info in these anecdotes isn't essential reading in order to grasp fantasy football. Feel free to read them if you want to read about my personal experiences.

Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, I made a couple assumptions about you, my dear reader. Here are my two main assumptions:

- ✔ **You're a football fan.** I don't explain how offenses can get a first down or when the forward pass was invented. You know the pro league, and you know many of the NFL studs by name. Understanding the game helps you evaluate talent and choose quality players during the fantasy draft process and during the season. It's possible to stick only to expert advice and cheat sheets and play fantasy football, but I don't advise it. For a more in-depth look at the game of football, check out *Football For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, by Howie Long and John Czarnecki (Wiley).
- ✔ **You own (or have regular access to) a computer and you're not afraid to use it.** Almost all fantasy leagues are run exclusively online, from the drafting process to weekly team management. I assume that you can surf the Web, use search engines, and point and click on links. Being able to navigate the Internet quickly and effectively is part of the game.

How This Book Is Organized

Fantasy Football For Dummies explains the game to you from start (the draft) to finish (the championship). However, like the NFL, the fantasy season is never truly over. You can use the research information to scout players and potential sleepers year-round. This book is organized so that you can jump in anywhere, depending on your experience level and the status of your season and league.

Part I: The Xs and Os of Fantasy Football: Just the Basics, Please

Part I provides readers with an overview of the game. You find out how it works, how different fantasy leagues are set up and run, why scoring is so important in fantasy football, and how you can join or create a league that's right for you. I also explain how you can prepare for the most fun day on the fantasy calendar: the all-important fantasy league draft.

Part II: Advanced Scouting and Drafting Secrets

Researching the NFL players and picking the best possible talent for your fantasy team is a very important part of fantasy football. This part provides guidelines for you to use when you try to separate the wheat from the chaff at the different roster positions. Then when you're ready for draft day, this part explains important draft strategies to help you assemble your team.

Part III: Let the Games Begin: In-Season Strategy Guide

After you assemble your dream team in the draft (or endure a nightmare brought on by another coach always selecting your coveted players), you need to know how to guide your team to glory during the fantasy season. This part walks you through your many in-season management duties and breaks down the most common issues you'll face and decisions you'll have to make. If you draft well and you make some shrewd moves during the season, your team may qualify for your league's playoffs, and you may even win

your league championship! The fantasy postseason is its own beast, so I end this part by explaining the rules and strategies for enjoying postseason success.

Part IV: The Research Guide to Online Play

The online business of fantasy sports has spawned a slew of major fantasy league providers and expert news Web sites. The provider sites are massive fantasy playlands bombarded by endless links and stats, which may be overwhelming to a first timer. The fantasy-specific news and advice sites offer in-depth coverage of the NFL from a fantasy perspective. These chapters help you understand the services offered by each site and how you can use them to build a winning fantasy team.

Part V: The Part of Tens

Part V is the classic *For Dummies* feature, the Part of Tens. The chapters here are filled with quick reminders that you can refer to before your draft and well into the fantasy season. Specifically, I present ten quick fixes you can make after your draft concludes and you determine that your team is less than perfect, and I cover ten common rookie mistakes you should avoid at any time during your fantasy season.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you navigate your way through this book, I provide the following friendly and useful icons in the left margin. These little pictures enhance your reading pleasure and point out specific types of information.



This icon provides some fantasy football advice in a nutshell. I give you specific actions or strategies you can implement to improve your team or your fantasy football gaming experience.



Here you find important advice worth repeating and remembering. If you have time to only skim the chapters I provide here, these are the bits of information you should keep with you.



Most fantasy advice follows the “rule,” but there are always “exceptions,” right? When I see a possible contradiction or a path that could lead you to fantasy failure or exile from the rest of your league-mates, I warn you about it. Consider this icon a yellow flag.



This icon highlights personal stories recounting my most memorable fantasy football moments in the Hollywood Football League. The stories are meant to be examples of the rules and strategies I present in the text.

Where to Go from Here

Like all *For Dummies* titles, this is a reference book, and each chapter is a modular piece about a specific area of fantasy football. You can skip around and not get lost! Flip to the table of contents or the index, find the location of what you want to know, read what you want to read, and feel free to skip the rest of the info.

If you're totally new to the game, you can start your reading with Part I. If you know the game but want to improve your skills as a fantasy coach, you may want to focus on Parts II and III. If you already had your league's draft, you may want to skip to Part III, which discusses in-season game management. The research guide and the Part of Tens (Parts IV and V) are filled with helpful information and expert advice that can benefit players of all experience levels. For example, if you want to read about playing in an ESPN.com league, you don't need to worry about the chapter on Yahoo! leagues.

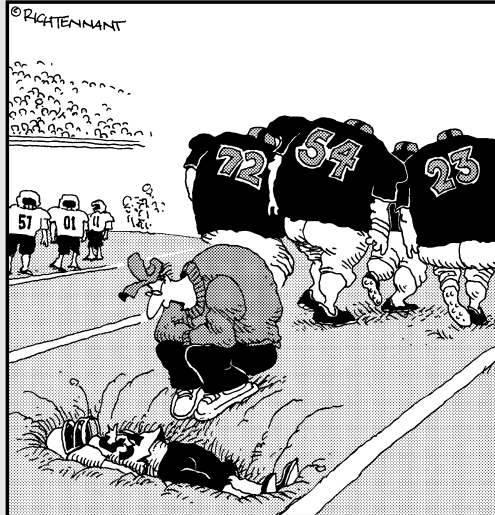
From the day you first sign up for a fantasy league to the day you hoist your league's championship trophy over your head to the day you sign up for another season, this book will be your guide through the world of fantasy football. No matter what you read, I wish you luck in your future fantasy adventures.

Part I

The Xs and Os of Fantasy Football: Just the Basics, Please

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Just so you know if it were up to me, I'd take you out of the game, but the owner said it would screw up his fantasy football team if I did."

In this part . . .

If you're new to the game of fantasy football, Part I has you covered. Chapter 1 gives you the quick lowdown on fantasy football. In Chapter 2, I explain how fantasy points are scored and why scoring is so important to the game. Chapter 3 covers the types of leagues available to fantasy players and helps you determine which one to join, if you aren't already in one. Finally, Chapter 4 helps prepare you for your fantasy draft so you can create a fantasy team that would make NFL general managers green with envy.

Chapter 1

The Reality of Fantasy Football: What's It All About?

In This Chapter

- ▶ Focusing on fantasy football's big picture
 - ▶ Getting up to speed on the draft process
 - ▶ Filling your roster with the right players
 - ▶ Reviewing the responsibilities of team management
 - ▶ Starting your fantasy journey
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Sports fans usually root only for their favorite local teams, but fantasy sports allow the diehard sports fan to root for every team. In fact, playing fantasy makes watching every real game more fun and exciting. Millions of online fantasy sports enthusiasts can't be wrong. The biggest of all the fantasy sports is fantasy football, and after you start playing, you'll quickly know why. But before you start playing fantasy football, you need to know the basics.

This chapter gives you a quick overview of fantasy football. Consider this chapter your jumping board into fantasy football. If you already know how to play but want to improve your game, feel free to skip to Chapter 4. However, if you keep reading, you may discover something about fantasy football that you didn't know!

Understanding Fantasy Football: A Quick Overview

What is fantasy football all about? Instead of just watching the NFL game, fantasy football allows you to feel like you're part of the action by controlling an all-star lineup of the best players in the league. Fantasy allows you to imagine the fireworks of all those football studs playing as one unit. In this section, I give you a quick walkthrough of the basics of fantasy football so that you can get a better grasp of this popular activity you're considering playing.

How fantasy and the NFL differ

When comparing fantasy and the NFL, two significant differences stick out. In the NFL, all that matters is which team wins or loses. In fantasy, however, NFL wins and losses don't count. Instead of team stats, fantasy relies not only on scored touchdowns but also on individual stats (such as yards gained) to calculate each fantasy player's performance based on a determined league scoring system (see Chapter 2 for more on scoring). The results are called *fantasy points*, and your team's fantasy point total is the sum of your starting players' efforts. Your fantasy team will win or lose based on those results. So, in a way, fantasy football and the NFL both are about wins and losses that lead up to the best teams battling in a playoff format to decide a champion (see Chapter 12).

The other major difference is that fantasy teams consist of players from every team in the league, not just one NFL team (see the "Drafting the Right Players for Your Roster" section later in this chapter for a breakdown of a fantasy team roster). Only the best players are drafted; thus, each team is a sports fan's *fantasy*. Everything else in the game tries to reflect and simulate real football.

How to play fantasy football

So, you've decided that you want to play fantasy football. Perhaps a buddy asked you to join a league, or maybe a coworker started talking trash and bet that he could easily beat you in a new league that he's forming. Perhaps you don't know anyone who plays, but you're always hearing about fantasy football and you want to join a public league to find out what the fuss is all about.



No matter your reasons for playing fantasy football, you're in for a fun-filled experience that's sure to get you hooked. I can guarantee that at different times, this game can make you cheer, make you nuts, and break your heart. The following list gives you a snapshot of what happens in a fantasy season:

1. You join a league.

You can join a public league, where anyone can sign up for a spot, or a private league, where you need an invitation to play. Some people play just for fun and some play for serious coin. League selection is an important factor, so don't take it lightly. (Chapter 3 discusses the different kinds of leagues and what to look for when signing up for one.)

2. You prepare for your league draft by scouting players.

Before choosing your fantasy team, you need to research all the available players so you can pre-rank them according to your personal preference. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I tell you what I look for when scouting the NFL so you can become your own expert.

3. You build your fantasy team via the draft.

The draft is the most fun and exciting day of the fantasy season. During the draft, each fantasy coach selects one NFL player at a time until the rosters are complete. Chapter 4 explains how to prepare for every type of draft and how the draft works. Chapters 8 and 9 offer in-depth draft strategies to help you outsmart your opponents and create a fantasy force.

4. Your team competes against another team every week.

During the NFL season, the real teams face each other and so do the fantasy teams in your league. The players' real-time stats are converted into fantasy points by your league provider, and the fantasy team that scores the most points wins the game for the week. Check out Chapter 2 for a breakdown of how fantasy scoring works.

5. You make moves to improve your team.

As a fantasy coach, you're in total control. You can drop players you think aren't good enough and replace them with free agents. If one of your starters gets hurt, you can bench him and start a healthy player instead. You may even make a trade offer to another coach. Chapters 10 and 11 explain how to manage your team each week and how to adjust your roster via player movement.

6. Your team (hopefully) makes the playoffs and wins your league.

Only the strong survive, and at the end of the fantasy season, the top teams square off in a tournament to decide the league champion. Chapter 12 offers some strategic advice for managing your playoff team and presents a breakdown of the various playoff formats. The last team standing may win a trophy, a cash prize, or just honor; but make no mistake, there will be only one winner.

How scoring makes you a winner

Fantasy football simulates the real deal by using a performance-based scoring system. A touchdown (TD) is worth 6 points for an NFL team and 6 fantasy points for a player on a fantasy team (in most leagues). Fantasy players are also awarded points for yardage gained, such as 1 point for every 10 yards gained rushing or receiving. Bad NFL plays often count as negative fantasy points; sacks can be worth -1 or interceptions worth -2 . In general, every statistic can be used to rate a player's achievements, good and bad, depending on your fantasy league.



Your fantasy team's final score each week is the sum of all your starting players' fantasy points. Table 1-1 shows an example of fantasy scoring for one week in a league with fractional and negative points. Don't worry about having to calculate all this each week. Your league provider does the math for you. For more specifics about scoring, check out Chapter 2.

<i>Position</i>	<i>Actual Performance</i>	<i>Fantasy Points Scored</i>	<i>Fantasy Point Total</i>
Quarterback	240 yds passing	$240 \div 20 = 12$	22
	2 touchdowns	$2 \times 6 = 12$	
	1 interception	$1 \times -2 = -2$	
Wide receiver	110 yds receiving	$110 \div 10 = 11$	17
	1 touchdown	$1 \times 6 = 6$	
Wide receiver	85 yds receiving	$85 \div 10 = 8.5$	8.5

<i>Position</i>	<i>Actual Performance</i>	<i>Fantasy Points Scored</i>	<i>Fantasy Point Total</i>
Wide receiver	40 yds receiving	$40 \div 10 = 4$	2
	1 lost fumble	$1 \times -2 = -2$	
Running back	140 yds rushing	$140 \div 10 = 14$	35.5
	35 yds receiving	$35 \div 10 = 3.5$	
	3 touchdowns	$3 \times 6 = 18$	
Running back	80 yds rushing	$80 \div 10 = 8$	17.5
	75 yds receiving	$75 \div 10 = 7.5$	
	1 touchdown	$1 \times 6 = 6$	
	2 lost fumbles	$2 \times -2 = -4$	
Tight end	0 yds	0	0
Kicker	2 field goals	$2 \times 3 = 6$	8
	2 extra points	$2 \times 1 = 2$	
Team defense	14 points allowed	14 points = 1	9
	2 sacks	$2 \times 2 = 4$	
	1 fumble recovered	$1 \times 2 = 2$	
	1 interception	$1 \times 2 = 2$	
			119.5

How important fantasy terms keep you in the loop

Like the rest of the sports world, fantasy sports has a lingo all its own. The slang terms are all fairly easy to grasp and fun to use, so don't be scared off! I include the following list so you can get a good feel for these fantasy football terms before you start playing, and I use them repeatedly throughout the book:

- ✔ **Breakout:** When a player goes from average to great.
- ✔ **Bye week:** Every NFL team is inactive once during the regular season; an NFL team's off week is its bye week.