Making the decision to become a fantasy football commissioner can happen a couple different ways. Maybe you've been playing in a league where the previous commissioner stepped down or moved. Maybe you've been in a league for a few years and are frustrated with how things are being run. It could be that you have a couple good ideas for how to tweak an existing league and you can't get enough support from the other owners. You might even have a group of guys who want to start a league from scratch and someone needs to be the one calling the shots. Whatever the reason though, you've come to the right place. This commissioner series has something for everyone, and there are a lot of things to help you along. This article assumes that you're just starting out and will focus on building a league from scratch. For more in depth descriptions on different league sizes, check out this article. A big part of how owners build a team focuses on the draft night, free agency and trades. You can find more information on that in this article. Finally, every league should have a detailed constitution, and you can find tips on how to create one with sample language in this article.

GETTING STARTED

To begin with, you need to sit down for a bit and think about the type of league that you want to have. You need to make some key decisions before moving forward and once those are in place, you'll be able to get things rolling. Use this article as a guide to get things started, and check into the other sections when you get to that point.

Money or Not? How Competitive Will Your League Be?

The most basic questions to answer right out of the gate is if you are going to charge a league fee and pay prize money. Everything about your league really starts with this question. If plan on running just a friendly league where no money is collected, much of your approach will be laid back and open. If you plan on collecting money, you need to be much more focused in your approach. You need to ensure balance and fairness. You need to make sure that everyone is fully engaged. You should be as certain as possible that people can't cheat somehow by helping each other or tanking a game. You must create a league constitution that is as detailed as possible, and you need to try to anticipate as many of crazy things that can happen as possible and try to plan for them.

If you have a pay league, you need to decide how much money that you want each owner to pay. You want to charge enough to keep it interesting, but not so much that you have trouble recruiting owners. Will you charge a transaction fee for free agency or trades? If you do, how will you divide it up at the end of the season? How will you divide the prize money? Will you award weekly prizes or will it be winner take all? Any additional fees or prizes will also have to be determined before you start. In a pay league, you may also want to use a premium online service (see below). If so, you should consider collecting the league software fee on top of the prize money. You may also consider working out a way help defer the cost of the draft night festivities, such as through penalties for different infractions like starting a guy on a bye week. Finally, if you are going to run a money league, make sure that everyone pays their initial fee up front before the draft begins and make sure that the money is placed in a safe place until the end of the season. The quickest way to ruin a money league is to have some guys promise to pay later, only to stiff the league when they start losing too many games. Even worse is when the commissioner spends the money during the course of the season and not have the payout available when the season ends. Resolving these potential issues up front can save you a ton of pain and suffering down the road.

Picking a Scoring System

Once you know if your league is for money or not, your next step is to determine what the scoring system of your league will be. Your scoring system forms the basis of your entire league and is what will ultimately determine which team is the winner overall. It will also help in recruiting owners because some may not want to be in...
certain types of leagues. While you can certainly tweak the rules from year to year, your opening pitch will set the tone of the league from day one.

The most basic of leagues is based strictly on scoring, giving six points for every touchdown, whether it is via passing, rushing, or receiving. Defenses get points for special teams touchdowns, turnovers, and sacks. If you want to reward players for their performance, you can add points for yardage, such as one point for every 10 yards rushing/receiving and one for every 20 yards passing. You can even award a point to any player that makes a reception. You can also expand defensive scoring by awarding points based on how many yards or points the defense allows in a game.

To make things even more interesting, you can switch things up and go with more realistic league formats such as an auction league or a league that uses individual defensive players (IDP). You can expand the typical starting lineup to include flex players and even adjust scoring systems based on the position such as giving two points to a tight end for a reception, but only 0.5 to a running back. Think about some of the owners that you want to recruit before going too far down this route because some owners may not want to play in an auction or IDP league. Some owners prefer more NFL-like scores to their games and only want basic touchdown scoring implemented. Ultimately it is your call as commissioner, but keep these things in mind when making these decisions early.

Picking the Right League Software System

There are plenty of league software systems to help you run your fantasy league. Big professional sites like Yahoo and CBS offer commissioners the ability to create free leagues as long as you sign up with their service. Most of these sites also offer a premium version of their software that allow for expanded scoring rules and starting lineups. Sites like MyFantasyLeague.com are premium-only, but offer a wide range of options for rules and lineups. Google fantasy football league software and you'll find pages and pages of examples.

In leagues that don't have prize money, you are either forced to pony up the money yourself or go with some of the free league options. In money leagues, you can shop around a bit, or even split the league cost among all of the owners on top of the league fee. Whatever your decision though, make sure to test drive the software before you commit to using it. Most commissioner sites allow you to configure your league first before making the decision to purchase it. You should try out a couple different versions to make sure the league offers what you need.

Along those same lines, you need to compare your proposed scoring system with the league software that you are thinking of using. One of the most frustrating things that can happen as a commissioner is to come up with some great scoring rules and then find out that your league software doesn't support them. Starting from scratch, you can test out both the scoring rules and the league software at the same time to make sure that everything works the way you want.

Recruiting the Right Owners

Now that you've determined the basics of your league, you need to find the guys who are going to play in it. You may already have a group of people in mind, but you may need to add a few more once everyone knows the type of league that you are running. Start by recruiting guys that you trust, especially those that have played fantasy football before. Let them know what you're doing and why. It will be a great incentive for them to join your league.

Ultimately you're looking for owners that are active. You want folks who will be engaged at all points throughout the year. You want the guys who are always wheeling and dealing with trade offers. You want guys that will be logging into the website three or four times (or more) a week. You want the guys who you won't have to chase for their lineups, and you want the guys who will pay their money up front and can be trusted to pay their transaction fees as well.

If you are going to start an auction or IDP league, you might want to limit the number of rookie owners that you add to the league. If you have eight guys who have all played IDP and four owners that have never played, they might have a rough time adjusting to the new format. If you do have an owner or two who are new to fantasy football or maybe the format that you want to run, you might want to give them a crash course in how the league is run.

From time to time though, you may need to find a replacement owner. If that time comes, it's best to start with the guys inside the league. They know the ins and outs of the league, and can really help convince new owners why they will want to play in your league. If you can't recruit the right owners, you are faced with a couple choices. If the league is internet based, you can put out a notice on different message boards such as the ones at Footballguys.com. We have a forum for owners who are looking for leagues and leagues that are looking for owners. If you have a face-to-face league, you can still look to the message boards or you can look at contracting the league down by an owner for a year or two. Just make sure that you don't reduce the league beyond a point that really changes the format of the league. Going from 12 teams to 10 is acceptable. Going down to six teams completely changes the dynamics of the league.

A GOOD START

With these items in place, you'll be well on your way to launching your own fantasy football league. Ultimately there is no better teacher than experience, and plowing through your first year will take you farther than anything you'll be able to anticipate now. Do your best to gather as much information as you can from this series here at Footballguys.com, and don't be afraid to ask for help. There are plenty of us that have been doing this for many years, and we are always willing to help out. Good luck!

As always, feel free to provide comments or suggestions to grant@footballguys.com.