

Debate

Fantasy Football: Skill or Chance?

ISSUE: Is fantasy football a game of skill or gambling?

For many people, fantasy football will be the only chance they will ever have to manage or coach their own football team. To play fantasy football online, each fantasy football player drafts his or her own team from a list of some of the best players in the National Football League (NFL). Twelve teams make a league. During the week, the performance of the real-life football players on the field determines the points a team receives in fantasy football. Hence, fantasy football players try to select NFL players they think will do well on the field because the better-the real-life players do, the more points fantasy football teams with those players can receive.

Fantasy football players often make the game more interesting by playing for money based upon how well they think their team will do. A person whose team scores big during the week can earn a lot of money from other players. As an online activity, fantasy football players can come from all areas of the country. This makes the potential for earning (or losing) money on their teams huge.

The popularity of Fantasy Football is growing. There are more than 57 million players in the United States and Canada, and the industry itself is worth \$15 billion. Popular fantasy football league operators include FanDuel, Fanball, and DraftDay. Players who earn money on fantasy football use the money in multiple ways, but some fans choose to use the money as extra income so they can attend real sports events.

Despite the excitement of the game, regulators are becoming concerned that fantasy football is becoming a type of gambling over the Internet. In 2007 a lawsuit targeted three pay-for-play fantasy sites on grounds of gambling. However, the court dismissed the suit. According to the current definition of gambling, fantasy football bets do not qualify as gambling for several reasons. Fantasy football is seen as being a game of skill rather than chance. The success of teams depends on the NFL players each gamer picks and how those NFL players perform in real-life. Football is deemed to be a skill that not everyone can do. Gambling, on the other hand, is based on chance.

On the other hand, some believe fantasy football is getting too close to gambling. One democrat thinks that NFL players or fantasy football league operators might use fantasy football games to place bets. He views this as disconcerting because they might be able to impact the outcome of the game (e.g. an NFL player might change his or her behavior on the field in order to impact fantasy football games). Fantasy football has also become highly addictive for some people. One consumer lost \$70,000 to \$80,000 on fantasy football games. Critics would point out that while football games might be based on the skill of individual players, there are still chance elements to the games that could affect the outcome. Finally, some also maintain that fantasy football is similar to gambling on horse races. After all, horse racing enthusiasts will often work hard studying the horses to select the best ones they believe will win—similar to how a fantasy football player would rate different NFL players to determine which ones they believe will perform best on the field during the upcoming week. Tim Donaghy, former NBA referee found guilty of participating in a gambling scandal, is allegedly quoted to have said that fantasy sports are “absolutely gambling.”

There are two sides to every issue:

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1. Fantasy football is a legitimate hobby based on a game of skill.
 2. Fantasy football encourages online gambling and should be regulated.
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