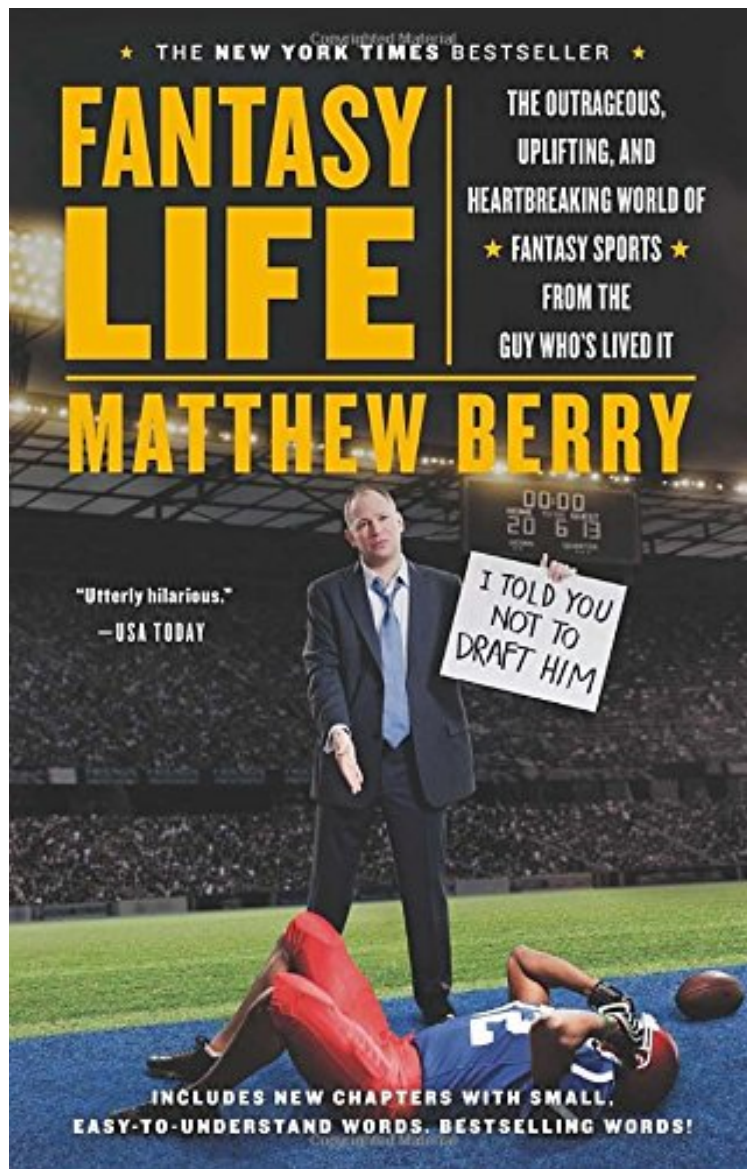


[Pdf free] Fantasy Life: The Outrageous, Uplifting, and Heartbreaking World of Fantasy Sports from the Guy Who's Lived It

Fantasy Life: The Outrageous, Uplifting, and Heartbreaking World of Fantasy Sports from the Guy Who's Lived It

Matthew Berry

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Matthew Berry : Fantasy Life: The Outrageous, Uplifting, and Heartbreaking World of Fantasy Sports from the Guy Who's Lived It before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fantasy Life: The Outrageous, Uplifting, and Heartbreaking World of Fantasy Sports from the Guy Who's Lived It:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fantasy sports stories written so goodBy DarrellThis book was recommended to me by a friend since I was getting into fantasy sports, so I decided to give it a read. Now in full disclosure I got the audiobook version of this book. I believe the author Matthew Berry read this book and his voice was the perfect voice for this book.This book talks about fantasy sports and the stories that common people have when playing fantasy sports. This is not a book of tips about playing daily and/or season long fantasy sports, but about the successes, failures, and struggles that people have playing fantasy. Many of the stories are very funny while others are serious as well as some that are life threatening.The combination of the different stories reminded me of the show The League on FX. This book was a breath of fresh air to know that many people play fantasy sports and have stories about people coming together for an event.I highly recommend this book for fantasy sport lovers in your family. I will even recommend this for non fantasy sports lovers because of the brotherhood or sisterhood that it provides.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. It's a hard knock fantasy life - justinmederich.comBy CustomerThis book is not just about fantasy sports. It's about life. It's about a man and his perilous journey to change the face of the sports world permanently through fantasy. It's about victory and defeat. It's about bringing together the most unlikely of people to bond over imaginary teams; celebrating and trash talking for victors, moaning, griping, and girly tattoo's for the losers. (Click past the break).Berry weaves a wonderful web of stories that will reach deep into your soul and inspire you to grab your very first fantasy team . As he tells his own tale of climbing from the plains of Hollywood treachery to the mountain top of becoming the Senior Fantasy Analyst at ESPN he shares stories of average Joes that are instantly relate-able. Chapters like "The Top 20 Most Soul-Crushing Ways to Lose" and "No one Seems to Realize That Adrian Peterson Isn't a Parishioner" will have people staring at you as you laugh out loud from Berry's great wit and humor.To my friends who don't watch Rated-R movies: There are a few portions of the book that are sexual or derogatory. I wouldn't say this is a Rated-R book, but Berry isn't trying to offend anyone; he's simply sharing true stories from fantasy players across the globe.With that said, I need to go pre-order my own (hard) copy. Fantasy Baseball is mid-season and I am in 4th, just a few games out of first and Fantasy Football is right around the corner! Thanks Mr. Berry for this book, and for sharing all those great fantasy sports moments. I know I'll be a better player and commissioner because of it.Read this review and more at justinmederich.com1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Looking for fantasy advice? Look elsewhere. Looking for some great stories? This is the book for you!By Jhonny CrespoMathew Berry TMR, is arguably one of the pioneers of fantasy sports in the mainstream. Admittedly, I purchased this book to get some fantasy advice and that is not really the purpose of the book. In fact, that is not the purpose of this book AT ALL.But after reading the first chapter you'll be hooked. Berry goes through different anecdotes both from his own life and other fantasy players from different walks of life. He takes you through the progression and evolution of fantasy sports.Great Read!

Includes new chapters with small, easy-to-understand words. Bestselling words!Fantasy football, fantasy baseball, fantasy basketball, even fantasy sumo wrestling: the world of fantasy sports is huge, and still growing. Today, more than 35 million people in the United States and Canada spend hours upon hours each week on their fantasy sports teams. And as the Senior Fantasy Sports Analyst for ESPN, Matthew Berry is on the front lines of what has grown from a niche subculture into a national pastime.In his New York Times-bestselling Fantasy Life, Berry celebrates every aspect of the fantasy sports world. Brilliant trash talk. Unbelievable trophies. Insane draft day locations. Shake-your-head-in-disbelief punishments. Ingenious attempts at cheating. And surprisingly uplifting stories that remind us why we play these games in the first place.Written with the same award-winning style that has made Berry one of the most popular columnists on ESPN.com, Fantasy Life is a book for both hard-core fantasy players and people who have never played before. Between tales of love and hate, birth and death, tattoos and furry animal costumes, the White House Situation Room and a 126-pound golden pelican, Matthew chronicles his journey from a fourteen-year-old fantasy player to the face of fantasy sports for the largest sports media company in the world.Fantasy will save your life. Fantasy will set you free. And fantasy life is most definitely better than real life. Youll see.

"An utterly hilarious romp through a wacky, yet occasionally poignant universe that runs parallel to reality as told by someone who's struggled to find his way in both...If you're already one of the 36 million who do play, the book will make you laugh out loud, pump your fist in agreement and shake your head in sympathy. If you don't play, this book is a great way to find out what all the fuss is about." - USA Today"As a longtime fan of Matthew Berry, I'm happy he's finally collected the most inane and hilarious things people will do in pursuit of fantasy glory. If I was in a fantasy league where you drafted people who write about fantasy leagues I would draft Matthew first. Also, I would need to make some major changes in my life." - Seth Meyers, Saturday Night Live Head Writer and three-time fantasy champion in a league you don't care aboutYou dont have to play fantasy sports to enjoy Matthew Berrys Fantasy Life. You dont even need to be a sports fan. If you like great writing, if you appreciate irreverent humor, if stories about friendship, family, backstabbing, and regrettable Justin Bieber tattoos warm your heart, youll love this book.Harlan Coben, #1 New York Times bestselling author I am a bad fantasy football player and worse fantasy baseballer. I am heartened after reading Fantasy Life that this apparently does not matter. Matthew Berrys book proves that there are

lots of people out there like us: people who don't use fantasy sports to escape from life, but rather to live it with more fun. Peter King, Senior Writer, Sports Illustrated, and owner, Montclair Pedroias, New Jersey Suburban League "I don't care about fantasy sports, and unless it involves a player shooting another player on the field like in The Last Boy Scout, I don't want to hear any stupid fantasy stories. But Matthew Berry did the impossible: He wrote a book about fantasy football that was hilarious and interesting to people who don't even like fantasy football. I loved this book." - Tucker Max, #1 New York Times bestselling author of I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell Football can be broken down into Xs and Os, but at the end of the day, were all after drama, human interest, and a great story. Matthew Berry's Fantasy Life is a great story. I know sports can make a difference in people's lives; Matthew Berry has shown that fantasy sports can, too. Ron Jaworski, ESPN NFL Analyst, and proud owner of multiple fantasy championships under the name "Jawbreaker" "If I had to choose between playing real football and fantasy football, I honestly don't know what I'd choose. (Just kidding.) For players like me, fantasy sports are an obsession, an escape, and a great opportunity to trash talk each other. Matthew Berry is THE guy (other than me) everyone listens to and texts for advice during drafts. Fantasy Life is a must-read for fantasy sports fans, athletes, and anyone who loves ridiculous stories" Maurice Jones-Drew, All Pro NFL running back, host of "Running with MJD" on SiriusXM Fantasy Sports Radio For those of us who compete in fantasy sports, it's a fraternity. And this book IS fantasy sports. It covers the highs and lows, the good and bad, in victory and in defeat. And it's told by the only man who could tell it: Matthew Berry, the Talented Mr. Roto himself. - Dale Earnhardt, Jr., NASCAR driver and 12-team "Dirty Mo Posse" league champion. I was excited to see that Matthew was writing a book about fantasy sports. As a pro athlete I've seen fantasy sports blow up in the last 10 years, and he's been in the middle of all of it. Thank you, Matthew Berry, for writing such a funny book and for being my personal consultant for the Cardinals fantasy football league. - Matt Holliday, All-Star Outfielder, St. Louis Cardinals Matthew Berry has gleefully documented everything that is so great about fantasy sports - the celebrations and the punishments, the conniving and backstabbing, the agony and the ecstasy. He's got an amazing story for any situation you find yourself in. It's the Kama Sutra of fantasy. If you've ever watched The League, you will love this book. Matthew shows in hilarious fashion that fantasy is like life - just better. - Jackie and Jeff Schaffer, Creators of The League One of the people who makes it so much easier for you to enjoy success in fantasy sports now explains why we all enjoy playing fantasy sports. Draft this book early in your first round. Keith Olbermann, four-time New York Times bestselling author, nine-time fantasy baseball pennant winner "Matthew Berry's personal journey in fantasy football is a lesson in a reality of life. Now, you can separate fantasy from reality in a fascinating read." - Chris Mortensen, ESPN Senior NFL Insider and "always in the money!" "Matthew Berry's Fantasy Life is touching, gripping, addicting. There's nothing like it." Adam Schefter, ESPN NFL Insider Is there anyone that still thinks fantasy-baseball players are some sort of niche, Trekkie sect? Countless Major League players admit themselves to playing the game, and the web hasn't only mainstreamed it, it has turned it into a multi-million-dollar business. At this point, we'd say more sports fans know who Matthew Berry is than know most of the players on his team. - New York Magazine About the Author Universally regarded as one of the leading voices on fantasy sports, Matthew Berry is ESPN's Senior Fantasy Sports Analyst. Known as the Talented Mr. Roto, he's an Emmy winner for his work on ESPN2's Fantasy Football Now. As one of the most popular columnists and podcasters on ESPN.com, he appears regularly on ESPN television and radio shows, including Sunday NFL Countdown, SportsCenter, and NFL Live. He is one of only four people to be in the Hall of Fame of both the Fantasy Sports Trade Association and the Fantasy Sports Writers Association. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. 1. It Starts with a League or Everyone Remembers Their First Time They were in a hot tub, and they were drunk. Good friends from college, they played in a 10-team fantasy football league together. And as the drinks kept flowing, so did the trash talk. Everyone in the league was a college athlete, so egos are pretty big, Quin Kilgore remembers. No one could even consider the thought of losing. Trash talk leads to bets, and bets lead to rules, and by the end of the evening the group had come to a very simple, but very real, agreement. Last place in the league . . . has to get a tattoo. Not some lame-ass henna tattoo that fades in a few weeks. No, were talking a legit, full-on, chosen by the winner, for-the-rest-of-your-life tattoo. Nights that start drunk in a hot tub often end in regret, but sobering up the next morning, we stuck with it, Quin tells me. One of the guys in the league, Spud Mann, was in law school at the time and drew up a contract dictating size, placement, and tone of the tattoo. The basic parameters: embarrassing tattoos are allowed, racist ones are not, and no going all Mike Tyson and putting it on the face. Just before the draft that year, we all signed it. And of course, the first year the loser was the guy who drew up the contract . . . Spud Mann. Basically, the way the Tattoo League works is, in weeks 15 and 16, the top four play for the right to choose the tattoo and the bottom four are playing to avoid the tattoo. In year two, the loser was a guy named Ron. And in year three Adam Palmer got the, uh, honors. Now, sometime between two-time league winner Dusty Carter explaining to a tattoo artist exactly what a Tebowing Care Bear should look like and then a year later trying to find the best picture of Justin Bieber to copy, JJ Dunn was in Spokane, Washington, working on one of his 10 fantasy football teams. I had stayed up an hour longer than I was planning to adjust my roster, and because of that I was able to hear a very quiet sound coming from my sons room in the basement. JJ decided to check out the sound before he went to bed. I found my 13-year-old boy without a pulse. I started CPR and yelled for my wife to wake up and call 911. Paramedics got there quickly, and after a lot of effort,

Jakes heart started pumping on its own. Jake has since been declared all but a miracle kid, suffering no brain damage. If it wasn't for fantasy football, I never would have been up at that hour and heard that. It may seem like hyperbole, but fantasy football helped save my son's life. Getting the word LOSER permanently inked on your body and being the reason your child is still alive are polar opposite stories, but in the world of fantasy sports I got news for you: neither one surprises me. When you're done with this book, you'll realize the same thing I did: From birth to funerals and everything in between, there is no aspect of life that fantasy doesn't touch. Most important, it touches people. I've said this a million times in interviews over the years. Long before Twitter, Facebook, or even MySpace and Friendster, fantasy football was the original online community. And now there are millions of people with the same shared experiences. From friends from high school, college, or work, to couples, families, and even people you've only met online . . . I know of leagues from every walk of life. Heikki Larsen and the Margarillas play while on tour with Jimmy Buffett. Many major league baseball players have a clubhouse fantasy football league with their teammates, including CC Sabathia, who would like you to know he's the 2012 New York Yankees clubhouse champion. There are leagues with prison inmates and leagues done on Army bases overseas. Dr. Melanie Friedlander plays in a league of all orthopedic surgeons. All 10 owners in Don Carlsons league are from Fire Station 1 in the Los Angeles Fire Department. And Miss January 2010, Jaime Edmondson, plays in a league with fellow Playmate playmates. I've heard of leagues in the White House and US Senate; leagues with all female lawyers, with Hollywood agents, and high stakes ones comprised of Vegas casino owners. David Bailey runs a 12-person league with six real-life couples. The trash talk gets pretty intense in that one. The cast of the Broadway play Rock of Ages has a league, as does Petty Officer 2nd Class Dick Shayne Fossett and the squadron aboard the USS George H. W. Bush. Jay-Z plays in a high-stakes league with music producers, record execs, and the people who run the 40/40 club. In fact, many celebrities play. Saturday Night Lives Seth Meyers is a longtime player, as are actors Paul Rudd, Jason Bateman, Ashton Kutcher, and Elizabeth Banks. Daniel Radcliffe, Harry Potter himself, once told my podcast audience that Anquan Boldin was his Fantasy Voldemort. Dale Earnhardt Jr. and the pit-crew guys at Hendrick Motorsports have a league, and there are tons of high-stakes Wall Street leagues. Priests, Rabbis, and Ministers sounds like the start of a joke, but it's actually three different fantasy leagues I know of. The best part of fantasy is that it gives people who normally would not have a reason to interact an excuse to talk. From the CEO and mailroom guys to long-lost cousins to everyone in between, they all have one thing in common: Fantasy brings them together. And it keeps them together too. That feeling of belonging is certainly what drew me to the game. From the time I was born in Denver to when we moved to Richmond, then Atlanta, then Charlottesville, Virginia, and finally to College Station, Texas, I had moved around a lot as a child by the age of 12. My big frizzy hair didn't help, nor did always being the new kid. Add thick glasses (I'm nearly blind without contacts), plus a general sense of being socially awkward, and the prom king I wasn't. Now, College Station is known for lots of things: Texas A&M University, where my father is a professor, is the big one. The George Bush Presidential Library, its sister city of Bryan, Texas, and the fact that singer Lyle Lovett got his start there all make the Wikipedia page. But among the things College Station is not known for? Jewish kids. Only a few handfuls of them live there, so that was yet another thing that made me feel different when I arrived. For as long as I live, I'll never forget one of my first days in Texas. I was sitting at lunch with some classmates, including a girl I had just met. It was during Passover week, and I mentioned that the odd bread I was eating was called matzoh and that I was Jewish: ME: What? HER: What what? ME: You're staring at me. HER (genuine curiosity): I'm trying to see your horns. ME: Horns? HER: My dad said all Jewish people have them. Half the table nodded. True story. Welcome to Texas, Berry. So as a bit of an outcast, perhaps it was only natural that I would be drawn to a brand-new, niche game like fantasy baseball and that I was so willing to try something, anything . . . as long as it included me. It was early spring in 1985, and I was actually a high school tennis player. Yes, that's right. In football-loving Texas, I played tennis, a sport you play without teammates. Looking back, it's amazing I had any friends at all. I took tennis seriously. Won some tournaments, ranked as a USTA junior in the state of Texas, went to the state finals in high school, etc. This is only important to our tale for this lone fact: As a result of being good at tennis, I took private tennis lessons. And that's only important because of the guy I took them from, the local tennis club pro, a man named Tommy V. Connell. Or as I prefer to call him, owner and general manager of the always plucky TV Sets. I was walking up to see him for my lesson one day, and he was talking to his best friend, a guy I would later come to know as Beloved Commissioner for Life Don Smith, owner of the Smith Ereens. They were talking in a strange language that felt newly familiar, and going through names of guys they could ask to join. What they were discussing would set my life on a course I'd never imagined. Are you guys talking about Rotisserie League Baseball? They were just as shocked that I knew what they were talking about as I was that anyone besides me read Rotisserie League Baseball, a weird little green book that had just been released detailing the rules, spirit, and advice about how to play The Greatest Game for Baseball Fans Since Baseball. Don, Tommy, and their friends were forming a league, and they needed a 10th guy who had both heard of this weird thing and was willing to try it. It was to be a National League only fantasy baseball league. They would have to do stats by hand because in 1985 there was no Internet, no one had cell phones, and people still bought magazines for their porn. I was 14 years old. The other guys in the league were in their twenties and thirties, and I was a freshman in high school. But we've all been in leagues where you just need one more guy any guy to play, and that first year the Fat Dog Rotisserie League

was no exception. I joined because it seemed like a helluva lot of fun. Almost 30 years later, I can confirm it is, in fact, ONE HELL. OF A LOT. OF FUN. Fifteen years after my initial fantasy auction (blurrily pictured here), I would get my first job writing about fantasy sports. Four and a half years after that, I would start TalentedMrRoto.com, and in 2006, just a scant 22 years after this picture was taken, I sold the site and came to ESPN as its senior director of fantasy sports. Along the way, a bunch of things happened. There were wars and presidents, and apparently some big wall overseas fell at some point, but probably most important, fantasy sports became not just mainstream but a way of life. Fantasy sports are popular for lots of reasons. The competition with your friends, family, and even strangers. The rooting interest it gives us in sporting events we would normally never care about or the athletes we never dreamed of cheering for. The ease of it, thanks to the Internet and other technology. But more than anything, its fun. For many people and I'm in this group it's all about your league. The guys and gals who are your league-mates. The good times, the bad times, the highs and the lows, it all comes back to someone's league. A bad league ruins the experience for so many, which is why I was so lucky that the Fat Dogs, my original league, is such a great one. It's where I learned not only how to play but how to play the right way, to enjoy the game with a good group of guys who want to win, sure, but who mainly just want to laugh and have fun. We draft on the same days every year. (Traditions are crucial for any good league.) The Friday after opening day we do the Lone Star American League auction (started the year after the Fat Dogs). Then on Saturday we do the National League. We sit in order of last year's standings, with the champion at the head of the table, second place sitting to his right, third next to second, and so forth. Twelfth place gets to throw the first guy out for auction, and the pizza is delivered promptly at 12:30. Even though I live in Connecticut now, I fly back to College Station every year. That's right, the league still exists. In fact, get this: 6 of the original 10 guys from 1985 are, many, many years later, still in the Fat Dog League. And two others have been in it for 20-plus years. For all the amazing advances the Internet has made to help the growth, popularity, and ease of fantasy sports, I see one major downside. That folks no longer have to be in the same room to draft. It's just not the same. Especially when you get to draft with people you've known for more than a quarter-century. Because when you do something embarrassing at the draft and we all have over the years it gets remembered. Forever. And the amount of trash talk is both hilarious and awe-inspiring. To this day, fellow Fat Dogger Woody Thompson, owner of the Thompson Twins, is reminded of the year he tried to draft promising youngster Ryan Howard to his minor league team, only to be told Howard was already owned. By him. When we started, we didn't draft with personal computers because they didn't exist. Standings came once a week . . . by mail. As for transactions, well, let Beloved Former Commissioner for Life Don Smith tell you. Originally, if someone wanted a player, they just called the commissioner. First to get to me, first served. Anyway, one Monday during that first year I was sitting in my office, and I heard a commotion. My brother Terry, owner of Smitty's Grills, was running down the hall with his five-year-old daughter in tow. Cmon, Heather, hurry, we've got to see Uncle Don! Hurry! There were no cell phones, of course; it was about 8:30 AM, and he was taking her to school, but he'd heard on the radio that San Diego had a new starting outfielder. He was huffing and puffing, dragging his kid into my office. I claim Carmelo Martinez! he wheezed as his confused daughter looked at her out-of-breath father. The Grills got their outfielder but Heather didn't make it to school on time. And we enjoyed the craziness of that moment for the next 26 years. Yeah, we did, Don, and it was with great sadness to all the Fat Dogs when Terry passed away in March of 2011. I'll never forget Terry dragging his young daughter down the hall. You know, since that first year, I've lost my glasses and a good chunk of the hair, I've gained experience, perspective, and weight, but most important, I have played in hundreds of fantasy leagues covering all kinds of sports and entertainment. I'm pretty sure I even played fantasy hockey once. What can I say? I was young and experimental. But the best league I've ever played in is still the first one. As a league, we've been through marriages and births, heart attacks and deaths, and a three-week email war over who owned Manny Ramirez. They are great guys, they are pains in the ass, and I wouldn't trade my sense of community with them for the world. Recently, in a public study, ESPN found that the average sports fan spends more than six hours a week with ESPN on one of our many platforms TV, radio, dot-com, the magazine, our mobile apps, etc. But the average fantasy player? He or she spends over 18 hours a week with ESPN. Almost a full day a week! Oh yeah, people are into it. But while stats like that are impressive and speak to the broad appeal of fantasy, the truth is it's all about the people. It's not the draft, it's not the trash talk or the punishments, it's not even the winning (okay, maybe it's a little bit the winning). It's the people. It's the people who make the draft and the trash talk and the punishments and the winning what it is. Consider the story of Kevin Hanzlik from Northfield, Minnesota. His team, Hanzies Heroes, lost in the finals of his 2011 10-team fantasy football league. It happens. The fact that he lost to his 87-year-old mother, Pat Hanzlik? Not as common. Grandma Pat, as she is known, rode Cam Newton's rookie year and 16 touchdowns from Calvin Johnson to a title for G-Mas Marauders. Look at that picture. Come on. She's 87 years old. Get better than that. Because of fantasy sports, I've had amazing experiences that I would have never thought possible. And I'm not alone. What follows are stories about me, stories about players, and stories about, to paraphrase Daniel Okrent and the founding fathers, the greatest game for sports fans since sports. So whether you are a lifelong fanatic, have never played before and want to understand what the fuss is about, or just have an afternoon to kill and need something with a bunch of small, easy-to-understand words, you'll soon realize what everyone else does. Fantasy sports is outrageous, poignant, obsessive, heartwarming, heartbreaking, frustrating, crazy, uplifting, life-changing, monstrously fun, very addicting,

and, quite simply, the best thing ever invented. You'll see.

TIME-OUT: Lessons of the Fat Dogs

The key to a great fantasy experience is a great league. And the lessons of the Fat Dogs are as good a blueprint as I've found in 30 years of playing:

We play fair: We all want to win, but we also play for fun. A victory you had to cheat to get isn't a real one. And as you'll see in upcoming chapters, people will do insane things to try and win a league. However, a league where no one cheats is a happy league. With the Fat Dogs, only one person has to report a trade. Every other league I've played in has to have both teams confirm. When I asked Beloved Commissioner for Life Don Smith about this early on, he said, very simply, Well, if you're lying about the trade, we'll all find out pretty quickly. We've never had a problem.

Now THAT's a trade deadline: Our trading deadline is the final out of the All-Star Game. Every year a bunch of the owners gather to watch the game, and those of us who can't make it call in knowing that everyone who needs to trade will be checking in. Trade talk really heats up around the eighth inning, and nobody wants a one-two-three ninth. Of course, technically, the trade deadline in 2002 still hasn't passed. What are you gonna do? It's a double-edged sword. Bottom line, make sure you have a trade deadline party, whether it's the last minute of the Monday Night Football Game or the All-Star Game or even just midnight on a specific Saturday night. The league that trades together is a league I wanna play in.

Have characters: Not character. Characters. That's a rule from Rick Hill, owner of the Zydeco Jukers. He brings a voodoo hand on a stick, Mardi Gras beads, and an iPod and large speaker to every draft. And every year, when the Jukers roster a player, loud Zydeco music blares as Rick waves the hand and shakes the beads. I've seen it for 30 years. It never gets old. Seriously. All leagues need silly and fun. Bring out your inner Juker.

No one tanks: Nothing and I mean nothing drives me more nuts than someone who stops playing or paying attention once their team is out of it. It's not only the wrong thing to do, it's bad karma. Even if you're out of it, your play has a bearing on the outcome of the league for others. And next year, when you're in the title hunt, you'll appreciate everyone else playing the season out and keeping your opponents honest. You're not always gonna win, but you'll always have your fantasy pride.

Of course, the Fat Dogs don't just rely on karma. We're a keeper league, so after the auction we do a minor league draft, where every year at least one Ryan Howard joke about Woody will be told. And first pick belongs not to the last-place team but rather the team finishing sixth, or just out of the money. So even if it's not your year, you still compete to try and finish sixth. It's no unicorn tattoo, but it works for us.

A league that eats together stays together: Just like the founding fathers did at La Rotisserie Francaise, our league eats lunch together every Thursday, rain or shine, at Jose's Mexican Restaurant in Bryan, Texas. During the second half of the season, this is also where we have a once-a-week, blind, free agent acquisition budget (FAAB) bidding on available free agents. If I am visiting my folks for a weekend, I will try to come in on Wednesday night, just so I can make Thursday lunch. Lotta laughs, trade talk, and studying of the standings. Your league's traditions can be simple or, as you'll soon see, wildly elaborate. What they are isn't important. The important part is that they exist at all . . .

2. Great Rules and Traditions or Every Team Has to Be Named After a Weird Kid from High School

For the Dartmouth Rotisserie Baseball League, the draft that year was perfectly normal. And the drinking was very typical. In fact, everything that happened that weekend was exactly as expected. Everything, that is, except one small thing . . .

Founded by 10 Dartmouth graduates in the late nineties, the league travels to different cities every year for their draft and parties all weekend. Mike Fleger explains that the winner of the DRBL gets to choose the city. We've drafted in Las Vegas, South Beach, New York, Boston, Washington, DC, Chicago, Key West, and even Columbus, Ohio. Draft weekend actually starts when they get to town on Wednesday night, and they go strong until they leave on Sunday. The group of guys all live up to the tradition of Dartmouth boyshard-drinking, partying guys guys, Mike says. And so, with the draft done, Mike and the gang went to a bar and, following the natural progression of life, did what guys do at bars. A guy in the league was hitting on a girl, and someone took a photo of the two of them. In the picture, they are grinning ear to ear as if they each won the one-night-stand lottery. After the picture, the rest of the league went back to drinking and left their buddy to hang out with his new friend. And everyone forgot about the night. Until the next year's draft. Well, find any reason to give a guy shit, Mike says, and in this case it was easy. The girl from the bar had certain features . . . masculine features. That's right. Their drunk buddy hooked up with a dude. So what does the league do? Let him forget it? Of course not. They all get T-shirts made up with a picture of this guy and his date and wear them to the draft. I'm guessing these shirts don't get a lot of repeat wear. But it was a success that night. Not only did they manage to give their buddy tons of grief, but it ended up becoming a great opening line to girls afterward. How many men do you see in this picture? Mike and his buddies would ask as they approached. Fifty to 60 percent responded, Two. I've seen a close-up of the photo, and I assure you, gentle reader, 40 percent of the women that night were wrong. It is definitely two guys in the picture. And just to be clear, I have no issue with someone hooking up with a dude if a dude is who you want to hook up with. Love who you want. But if you think you're hooking up with a woman . . . I told you last chapter . . . you do something embarrassing in a fantasy league and it gets remembered. Forever. At least it does in good fantasy leagues. And the DRBL is a great league. I love that they all travel to a different city to draft together every year. I love that they took the picture, all got T-shirts with it, and then waited a year to wear them. All for the sole purpose of giving one guy in the league crap. But mostly, I love that they are all great friends from college who use this league as a way to keep in touch. Because I can relate. Not only do I fly back to College Station for my original fantasy baseball league every year, I am still, more than 20 years later, in my original fantasy football league, which I joined when I was in

college. Half of my high school graduating class stayed local and enrolled at Texas AM University. The other half headed to Austin, where they attended the University of Texas. Neither was an option for me. My parents wouldnt allow it. Dad, or as hes known to the rest of you, Dr. Leonard L. Berry, grew up in Fresno, California. My mom Nancy was from Long Island. Dad went to the University of Denver, Mom went to CU in Boulder, and thats where they met. You need to learn to be on your own, my folks told me when it was time to start applying. There will be times when things get tough in college and you shouldnt be able to just drive home, do your laundry, and escape it. You need to be on your own and learn to figure it out for yourself. And so it was settled. They were forcing me to go out of state. And thank goodness they did. So because they had a good communications program, I chose Syracuse University. Go Orange! When I went to Syracuse, I was like a fish taken out of its bowl and dropped into the sea. Its like . . . Whoa! There are others like me? Who knew? Unlike small-town Texas, Syracuse had tons of Jewish kids, and I finally realized there was a genetic reason I was neurotic and talked with my hands. I dove into everything I could there. Being a morning DJ at the student radio station? Done. Writing a humor column for the student newspaper? You bet. And most important producing a show at the student TV station. Not just any show, but a sitcom. Producing a sitcom is hard enough, but its almost impossible on university TV. There werent a lot of resources or equipment in 1988 when I was a freshman. Most of the TV shows they did at that time were what I called one camera, one host, one plant. Literally, they were all music video shows or sports highlight shows. One person would sit next to one potted plant and talk into one camera about the new R.E.M. album for about fifteen seconds. And then play a Midnight Oil video. When I told the kids running the student station that I wanted to shoot a living, breathing, fully scripted, three-camera sitcom, shot in their studio, which was no bigger than a walk-in closet, they told me I was nuts. Plus, its college: kids dont want to work that hard; they want to drink and party. They said Id never get enough help with all the things a show needs scripts, costumes, props, a crew, you name it. How about doing a video countdown show? they suggested. Themes that would show up throughout my life suddenly surfaced: If you tell me I cant do something, I immediately set out to do exactly that. And no journey is taken alone. I printed up flyers and posted them all over. I went to a bunch of classes and made my case. They say this has never been done, they dont think it can be done, Id like to prove them wrong, who is with me? Turns out, a lot of kids just wanted someone to say, Hey, were meeting Saturday at three. We got more volunteers than we needed. Now, this wasnt just low-budget; it was no-budget. We had to bring in a remote news camera for our three-camera sitcom, which meant that every third shot was a little grainier than the others. We had college kids playing all the parts, no matter how old the character was supposed to be. And we only had enough money for one wig. There was lots and lots wrong with it, but we had a really funny cast, and if nothing else, it made us laugh. We ended up doing 20 half hours of the show, it won some student awards and got syndicated nationally on a college TV network, and many of the kids who worked on it went on to Hollywood careers. But the biggest thing for me was that I belonged. There were lots of late nights setting up the studio, longer days shooting, and even more laughs, but through it I developed a good group of friends who worked together, hung out together, and played fantasy football together. And thats why this story is in here. One of the guys who worked on the sitcom was my friend AJ Mass, now a fantasy analyst at ESPN. Hes the commissioner of the Doug Logan League (named for the longtime former radio broadcasting voice of Syracuse sports). I decided to co-own a team with the star of our sitcom, my college roommate and one of my best friends, a guy named Chris Lindsay. You already know I stayed in the league, but I am proud to say, 21 years later, 11 of the original 12 members are still in it. Its been a great way to keep in touch with everyone, especially Chris, since we live on opposite coasts. Every week were talking, texting, or emailing to set our lineup, prep for the draft, make pickups, or discuss the latest terrible trade offer. Neither of us needs to co-own a team, but I wouldnt want to do the league without him, and vice versa. The bonds of fantasy leagues formed in college run deeper than most. And they exemplify the spirit of fantasy as well as anything. In an odd way, a league is like a college. You have your own rules, language, and inside jokes. So whether its ultra-specific scoring, unique rules, or strange traditions, a fantasy league, like college, is a universe unto itself. Take, for example, Ryan Lentss CFL Fantasy League. Going into year 12 with 10 best friends from the Newman Center at Ball State University, they have a pretty good tradition. A month before the draft, Ryan tells me, we all start growing out mustaches. And then Ryan went one step further. I take pictures of all the guys staches, and throughout the season I make vintage 1970s-era football cards for each of them with their league nickname and their actual NFL team of choice. Its been an epic hit. Of course it was. As someone who actually collected cards in the seventies, these look damn authentic. Im not even in Ryan Lentss league, but after Ryan sent me this how could I not feel a kinship with them? I drew the line at growing a 70s mustache. A 70s mustache rule, meanwhile, might be the only thing the Ducal Crown Fantasy Football League doesnt have. Formed by fraternity brothers who went to the University of Virginia, the league is so popular, commish AJ McGraw tells me, that they have a waiting list. Its a group of guys who play in a separate league that we pull from when needed. Kind of like a fantasy farm system. The Ducal Crown guys have a six-page, fully vetted and ratified constitution, an off-season rules meeting, and AJ writes a weekly blog during the season. But what really sets them apart is the trash talk. The constant trash talk. They do so much tweeting about the league, in fact, that the whole league created separate, private Twitter accounts for the sole purpose of trash-talking each other. Brilliant. Deranged and obsessive, but brilliant. Now, on Twitter, these @Ducal accounts just follow each

other, so the only people who see the trash talk are the guys in the league. At least, that was the idea. Until one day, out of nowhere, there was a new Twitter account following all the guys in the league: @DucalSchefter. Oh yeah. Its a parody account of ESPN NFL reporter Adam Schefter. But unlike the real Schefter, who reports on the entire NFL, this one has a very simple beat he covers: the Ducal Crown League. Yep, says AJ. Our league has its own Insider. And if you think thats obsessive, wait until you hear this. According to AJ, We dont know who is running the account. Thats 50 shades of genius right there. One of the guys in the league started this account in secret, and now hes alternately helping and screwing the guys in the league. Yeah, AJ explains. Hell direct-message you for information about your trade talks. Then hell report on it. But, as AJ notes, talking with @DucalSchefter is playing with fire. You can potentially get good insider info on what other owners are doing and this Insider allows you to sneak false information to another owner. But since no one knows who it is, you could be sneaking info to the same guy youre trying to deal with! Personally, I love that they have an anonymous Insider reporting on and talking to everyone in the league. Very simply, whoever started that account is among the most clever fantasy minds ever. Diabolical, even. Whether its Twitter handles or football cards or even producing a league-only podcast (several leagues Ive heard of do this), Im a fan of any tradition that makes the league and the experience more memorable, more special, more . . . fun. Jeremy Gurtviss Gizmo League from Newton, Massachusetts, arrives at their draft in a stretch limo, all dressed in mandatory formal attire, and theyre videotaped as they walk down a red carpet. After each pick is announced by Jeremy, the owner comes to the podium for handshakes and a photo holding a copy of the players jersey. Think thats over the top? Andrew Fosters TGKL League has an anthem (yes, an anthem) that they all sing before the draft. And Anthony Bouressa is in a longtime 14-team league from Kaukauna, Wisconsin, that requires all owners to eat a live moth to gain admittance and maintain membership in the league. You read that right. A live moth. Tattoo is sounding better by the page, isnt it? Sometimes the traditions are what make a league unique; other times its the rules. Michael Duca Manduca finished second so many times in his Sacramento, Californiabased league that they enacted the Duca Rule, where first and third get paid out but second gets nothing. I know of leagues where you get two points every time your kicker makes a tackle, leagues where you cant draft a Yankee, leagues where the team that finishes last gets kicked out forever, and one league where every team had to be named after a weird kid from high school. In the St. Clair Rescue League out of St. Paul, Minnesota, John Palmersheim explains that the top two teams from the previous year do a draft in the off-season to decide who is in their division with them. Love the idea of choosing your own division and debating the merits of your league-mates right in front of them. Ill take Keith, the human black hole. Where running backs go to die. Thats fine. Gimme Charlie. He just sucks. And while that tradition is good for stirring up heated rivalries, there may not be a league rule that creates more of them than what they do in the Blut 3000 Fantasy Football League. Sal Iacono, better known as Cousin Sal from The Jimmy Kimmel Show, is a member of the league, an 11-team (yes, 11) league with a few celebrities and one very specific rule. Whoever wins the league gets to vote a team out the following season, Survivor-style. Then the owner who was voted out gets to return the following season replacing the newly ousted owner. The best (or worst) part of this rule? The champ doesnt announce his decision until the draft the following season. So all 11 team owners have to prepare and show up to the draft in September. Sal remembers that in 2010 Jon Hamm of Mad Men fame texted me that he was going to be 30 minutes late because the shoot that day was running long. Thirty minutes pass. More texts, more frantic calls. The shoots still going. Finally, after two hours, Jon arrives. He was out of breath and very apologetic (clearly having made an effort to be there), and then . . . promptly voted out by the winning owner. In very cavalier Don Draper fashion, Hamm took a swig of beer, flipped the room the bird, and took off. Great rule. Hilarious to 10 people and really annoying to one. And while Sals league keeps one person from playing in the league that year, theres another league that has a different type of exclusion based on, well, Ill let Jane (not her real name) explain it. Ive played in and commissioned an all-girls league for the past three years. We get together to watch the games, gossip, and drink martinis. And like lots of leagues, it was at those get-togethers that a specific tradition was born. One that Im guessing isnt in most leagues. You cant own a player youve dated. If you have dated a defensive player, you cant draft his teams defense, Jane explains. We are a bunch of hot women who have dated a lot of NFLers in our days. So with this twist it makes us really think, Do I want to draft him or date him? I am guessing theres lots of laughs and pointing at Janes draft, especially when someone passes over an obvious pick. Either that, or some jealous turf claiming. Oh really, Miss I already have two running backs? You better not be passing on Dez Bryant. What? Hes injury prone. Mmmmmhmmmm. Sure he is. Excuse me. I got to make a call. Adam Squiress 10-team Guinness Bowl League in Cleveland, Ohio, has been together for over a decade, and draft day is an all-day event where, Adams wife Jennifer tells me, I have one job: get the hell out of the house. How big is draft day for the Guinness Bowl? Two years ago, it was on Adams seven-year-old daughters birthday. Take one guess which celebration got rescheduled. Hey, she was only seven. Its not like it was her 16th or anything. Anyways, the Guinness League guys enjoy draft day so much, they dont simply analyze the draft right after, like many leagues do. No, they analyze every draft in the 10-year history of the league. Prior years draft boards are dragged out of the basement and hung next to the current years board, Jennifer tells me. Fueled by Bud Light and Jger bombs, the guys crush each others picks over the years and passionately defend their own all night long. And thats what its about. Spending time together. Whether its eating a live moth, wearing a T-shirt of your buddy hooking up

with a dude, or just sitting back, having a beer, and asking someone what the hell they were thinking in the third round seven years ago . . . these moments create memories and bond a group. There may be no better example of that than the South Side Fantasy Football League (SSFFL) out of Kansas City. As Kyle Maciejczyk tells me, their commissioner, Bruce J. (B.J.) Collins, is the most genuinely nice guy in the world, a die-hard Chiefs fan who injects fun into everything we do. He would buy draft day T-shirts for everyone, personalized with their team names. B.J. had everyone over to his house to watch games and handed out customized scoring and matchup sheets along with a coaster featuring each person's favorite NFL team. Whenever there was an opportunity to make the SSFFL a little bit more fun, B.J. did it. But a month before the season, Kyle tells me, the league got some terrible news. B.J. was diagnosed with a cancerous tumor in his jaw. Due to the circumstances, we didn't even know if B.J. would be up to playing in the league, let alone running it. After talking to B.J., though, they realized that he desperately wanted to play that year it was one of the few things he was looking forward to. So we brought the party to him and had the draft in the lobby of Good Shepherd Hospital in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Most hospitals only allow family members to visit a patient. Which is exactly why the SSFFL was allowed to see B.J. . . . 3. Drafting in Strange Places or Turns Out, a Cheat Sheet Taped Inside My Beak Was Not Ideal

Jeff Ralabate had a problem. As the commissioner of The League, a 10-team fantasy baseball league in the Buffalo area, he was used to problems. But this was a new one. And to make matters worse, he didn't have a lot of time to solve it. The problem was Joe Bozek. Specifically, Joe Bozek's job. More specifically, the fact that Joe had been called in at the last minute to work said job. Two hours before the draft. Jeff tried a bunch of different solutions, but they kept coming back to two main issues: One, this was the only time everyone in the league could get together for the foreseeable future. Two, the baseball season started the next day. They say desperate times call for desperate measures, and this certainly qualified. So, Joe suggested, why not keep the draft time the same and switch the location? To Joe's workplace. Which was the chain restaurant Red Robin. Where Joe would be dressed as the Red Robin. Yep. They were running a promotion, and Joe had to wear the Red Robin suit, hand out flyers, and shake hands. They let the Robin draft 10th so he would have plenty of time between picks. Every few minutes, Jeff remembers, he would waddle over to our table to see what pick we were on and who had been selected. Joe explains that it wasn't easy. Turns out, a cheat sheet taped inside my beak was not ideal. Nor was making picks quietly enough so children at nearby tables couldn't hear. It was, however, a fun and memorable experience. Jeff agrees. It ended up being the most fun we've ever had at a draft. I have no doubt. Is there any draft, anywhere, that wouldn't be improved by the addition of someone wearing a giant bird head? I was in a fantasy NBA league for a few years where a guy would come to every draft dressed in a head-to-toe Wookiee outfit. (Team name? The Wookiees, of course.) It was always funny. Always. If you think about it and by think about it I mean if you think about it with the goal of trying to make a flimsy connection between real life and fantasy life, draft day is the official start of your fantasy season, just like your first job out of college is really the official start of your professional life. Now, I never had to dress as a large bird, but dealing with kids? That I totally get. After graduating Syracuse with a degree in writing for electronic media and having done the prestigious (as far as you know) student sitcom Uncle Bob's World of Fun! I wanted to be a sitcom writer. So with my college writing partner (another big fantasy player named Eric Abrams), I moved to Los Angeles to try to break into television. Which I accomplished, of course, by getting my first job at FAO Schwarz, the famed toy store. Sigh. A successful sitcom writer had told me to get a retail job. Assistants in show business work long hours, rarely leaving time for writing. So with some nine-to-five retail job you can just concentrate on writing. Which is very true. The problem is that once you're done writing, all you can really do is show your sample scripts to other toy store guys. You never meet anyone. Well, that's not true. I did get to wait on stars, including Arnold Schwarzenegger (at the height of Terminator fame), Denzel Washington, and many other celebrities. But none of them were looking for scripts from the guy wearing a hat made of Legos. The job was no big red bird, but it was close. Since we had demos of every toy out, parents would just leave kids in the store to play. I couldn't believe it. Who just leaves kids unattended? And unattended kids do, well, what attended kids do, just more of it and with reckless abandon. Throwing things, breaking things, peeing everywhere. Seriously. I cleaned a lot of pee that first year. Hmmm. Maybe I would have been better off in a robin outfit.