



BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

SPORTS, *fantasy style*

In the past two decades, the fantasy sports industry has grown to include more than 15 million Americans

BY WILL SEYMOUR
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For some, it is a harmless diversion. For others, this billion-dollar industry is a serious competition. From the casual sports fan to the hard-core statistician, the world of fantasy sports has something for every one of the 15 million Americans it serves.

Fantasy sports had its humble beginning in 1980, in the back room of La Rotisserie Francaise, a Big Apple eatery. According to fiso.co.uk, a New Yorker named David Okrent is credited with the concept of a competition where each participant would choose a team of real baseball players, and then based on the statistics of these players, they'd proclaim a winner. Most fantasy baseball leagues follow this same premise; some hold the title "rotisserie leagues" in honor of the founders' meeting place.

The rapid growth of the fantasy sports industry can be traced to the advent of the World Wide Web, which forever put an end to the laborious task of cutting out box scores every day. This information is now available with a few clicks of a mouse. To further aid this process, there are a multitude of sites that host fantasy leagues, doing everything from compiling the stats to facilitating transactions between teams.

These services don't come cheap. The Fantasy Sports Trade Association says fantasy baseball fans spent an average of \$178 last season, covering everything from site fees to research materials. Sportsline.com reports it took in \$14.2 million in fantasy revenues last year.

The idea of fantasy sports has spread from the baseball diamond to leagues for football, baseball, golf and hockey, to name a few. Fantasy competition has even gone beyond the world of sports, as there are leagues for

"Survivor" and WWE fans.

Football, the most popular sport in America, is also the most popular fantasy sport in the country. According to a study conducted by the FSTA, more than 10 million American adults take to the virtual gridiron each year.

Among them is freshman Corey Brown, who has been an owner since his freshman year of high school. For him, the primary attraction of fantasy sports is the entertainment, and although he said he isn't overly serious about the game, Brown said he understands how people could get to that point.

Junior Dan Elliott used to be a fanatic in his fantasy basketball league, until he found himself spending too much time running his team.

"I could easily spend a few hours a day, looking to see who had played the most games and thinking about trades," he said.

Elliott's reason for playing the game showed his solemn purpose.

"You're competing against your friends and thousands of people at the same time," he said.

Elliott was by no means alone in his level of devotion. According to the FSTA study, the average fantasy football owner spends three hours per week on team business and will likely become more involved over time. Owners are even seeing effects on their production at work. Assuming that the average player wastes 10 minutes of company time a day, the consulting firm Challenger, Gray and Christmas predicts that fantasy football alone will cost businesses \$36 million this year.

Thanks to technology and the competitive drive of the participants, fantasy sports should continue to grow. In light of the almost addictive properties it holds for some, what began in the back room of a restaurant 25 years ago has become a phenomenon of epidemic proportions.

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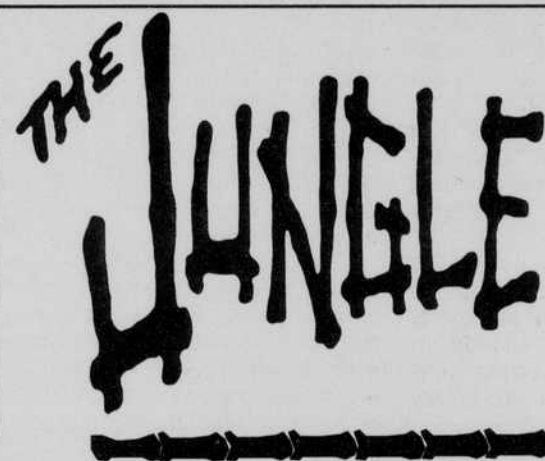
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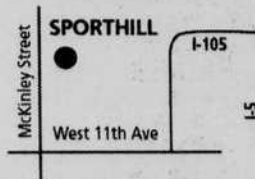
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