



# Vagrant League

## Fantasy Baseball



Volume 2, Issue 2

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## Odds And Ends

*And Bold Predictions*

### Barry Greenberg

Team Owner

My initial planned article for this edition of this publication was an analysis of the Greatest Vagrant League Fantasy Baseball teams of all time, i.e.: the last thirteen years. I had planned to rank the teams by an as of yet undetermined criteria, but as of this writing the league website was down for the last several days. As such, I was not able to access the necessary database and that article will have to wait for another day.

Thus I am relegated to Plan B. On reading the last issue of this publication, I found myself much amused by the sentiments of our commissioner as expressed in his 'I suck at Roto' article. Unfortunately, based on my overall record in this league, I have often felt the same way about my own roto ability, so I believe a comment about the article was warranted. Knowing that this in itself was a sad excuse for an article, I decided instead to prepare a synopsis of how the teams in our league have fared to date. My recitation on this subject being equally lame;

*Continued on page 3 – Bold Predictions*

## Hold This!

*Putting Skill back in the Auction*

### Doug Drotman

Team Owner

In the last newsletter several people complained about the grueling length of the draft. Although my 25-minute delay did not help matters, it certainly was not the problem. The problem is THE HOLD. Slow low scoring games are killing the NBA and THE HOLD is killing our draft. Pardon another NBA reference but, before the 24-second clock, bad teams competed by slowing down the game.

My problem with THE HOLD is less about the length of the draft but more about how it affects the draft. Hey, I have 3 kids – I'm in no hurry to get home.

I understand that everyone wants a safety net and is afraid to make a mistake. But the fact that all player values are public and everyone suffers from information overload, now is the time to get rid of THE HOLD.

Part of drafting is the ebb and flow, the ability to make quick decisions, the ability to prepare and adjust your strategy on the fly. THE HOLD eliminates all of these skills.

The reason we never have any bargains until the end of the draft is because of THE HOLD. By slowing down the draft you are giving people way too much time to analyze every player. Removing THE HOLD will add a new dynamic to the draft – bargains! And, isn't that what we all want?

Although now is not the time to make this decision, it is a discussion that must happen. We need to change THE HOLD. If we can't agree on eliminating it, I'm sure we can agree to drop it to 10 seconds, or giving each team 3 HOLDS for the draft or limiting it to one HOLD per player. Anything but what we have right now.

Hey, I was the guy who pushed for a \$260 salary scale. I was right then ... and I'm right now.



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 [Odd And Ends](#)
- 1 [Hold This!](#)
- 2 [The History of Roto](#)
- 4 [Roster Moves](#) | [Web Links](#) | [Calendar of Events](#)
- 5 [Rule Refresher](#) | [U.S. Historical Facts](#)
- 6 [Mid-Season Analysis](#)

# The History of Roto

Originally written by Mark Newman, a writer for MLB.com

## Ed Feldman

Team Owner

As fantasy owners battle it out around the country for another year of fantasy league bragging rights and the wonderful anticipation of the next days stats, consider for a moment how this all began. It started on a flight and then over French food. Dan Okrent was flying to Texas on Nov. 17, 1979, when he scripted the first rules for a statistics-based league. Two weeks later, the New York writer pitched the idea to like-minded friends with whom he lunched monthly at La Rotisserie Francaise, then a Manhattan restaurant.

The group formed the Rotisserie League Baseball Association (or RLBA), the very first rotisserie league, naming it for the eatery where they regularly met and managed their teams. Their concept: Simulate owning and managing your very own baseball team comprised of actual players, acquired either through a draft or an auction. Players from the rosters of teams in the American or National leagues then compete against other teams in your own unique league. The batting and pitching stats from the real games would fuel the competition, and the winner would get a trophy, cash award or whatever the individual league decided. In those pre-wired days, "owners" would pore over weekly print box scores and specific stats, making transactions to be viable over 162 games.

So much has changed in that quarter-century, and so much remains the same. It is still the pure joy, the camaraderie and the empowerment, that those group of fantasy pioneers felt during those regular lunches at La Rotisserie Francaise. As the fever pitch of Fantasy 2004 builds and another season's winner is yet to be determined, it is just bigger now.

Thanks to the advent of the Internet and ever-advancing technology, that small group's roto legacy is a surging industry and a way of life. The Fantasy Sports Trade Association (FSTA) estimates that 15 million people play fantasy sports worldwide, and although football has climbed to the top in overall involvement, baseball is the beating heart and the pipeline of passion. That is where it all began. Fantasy baseball owners spend more time per week (three hours and two minutes on average in 2003) managing their teams than owners of other fantasy

sports; more money per year on entering and maintaining their teams (\$179 to football's \$161); and they are more likely to watch at least one game in person per year (an average of six games) than in any other sport.

Those are just some of the findings last year by the FSTA, after surveying some 500 fantasy sports owners. It is now a billion-dollar industry, although one must qualify that by noting that a good chunk of the money is exchanged among participants within countless leagues. No one can deny its relentless growth, and it is likely to become ever more visible even to fans who "just watch the games."

"It is popular in baseball and football because of the same principle, the old armchair-quarterback theory where you say, 'I can do this better than that GM or coach or manager,'" said Greg Ambrosius, the editor of *Fantasy Sports* magazine since 1989 and the president of the FSTA. "Fantasy not only lets you be the coach, where you can determine who is in the starting lineup, but also the GM who decides which players to acquire, and the owner who decides how much you pay them. It's no different than the board games (i.e. Stratomatic) we played in the '60s and '70s by drafting players.

"With the Internet, it just allows you to really take that fascination to another level because you can do it in multiple leagues, with multiple people, to prove you are a better sports fan than the next guy."

Fantasy baseball was revolutionized by the advent of personal computers and the Internet, allowing leagues to develop their own scoring system, often based on more arcane stats than people followed years ago. It has allowed many people to become more enlightened by the little things that make baseball great, and anyone who looks at a Eric Gagne's WHIP or A-Rod's OPS can tell you that. Now it is right there to see on a real-time basis, to make roster moves as soon as possible.

Technology is part of the fun in playing fantasy baseball. Although the average age of a fantasy sports owner increased from 37 in 2002 to 41 in 2003, the Internet invites younger and younger tech-savvy fans to join. Last year, the percentage of fantasy baseball owners who use email in day-to-day roster management jumped from 39 to 59 percent. The percentage of baseball owners who said they checked their teams online during work jumped from 29 to 51 percent.

The originals at La Rotisserie Francaise realized they had a

*Continued on page 4 – Roto History*

## Bold Predictions

that was no answer either. My solution for meeting my publishing quota was simple; I will address both issues.

Our commissioner laments the fact that he sucks at this. Well, having read his article, all I can say is that I suck worse! My average place finish is actually worse than that of our commissioner. Furthermore, our commissioner can at least hold his head up high and say he has won this league in the past. There can however be no such prideful boast from my mouth. So if the commissioner sucks, where does that leave me?

Actually, in pretty good company. Take a look at the historical records. Only four current league members: the Monarchs, Futurians, MasterBlasters, and Craig in his various incarnations, have won the league in its entire history. Beyond these teams, only two others, since retired, have won. That leaves all the rest of us still searching for the Holy Grail of a Championship and Roto immortality. Does this also mean the rest of us are just suckers and should simply mail our checks each year to one of those teams? As much as Craig would like that idea (and might even encourage league management to codify such a procedure), as Homey the Clown might say, "I don't think so!" I for one plan on doing something about this oligarchy this year thus nicely segueing into the next topic.

Here are my odds for which team will win the league this year.

1:2 BarBarryans. Typo you ask? Did I just have the gaul, the hubris, to not only install myself as the favorite, but an ODDS ON favorite as well? Is this absurd and did I just jinx myself? Probably not; just look at the numbers. As of this point (June 16th) the season is about 40% over. There is still a lot of baseball left to play, however patterns have emerged and generally, the good players remain strong performers while the players having poor seasons will not dramatically improve. Thus, barring minor fluctuations, what you now see from your teams is generally what you will get for the remainder of the

season.

Back to the numbers, again as of today, the BarBarryans closest pursuer is the KrackerJacks, who trail by 25 points. Further behind in 3rd place is Eight Men Out, a distant 32 points back, and beyond that is a group of teams trailing by 38 points or greater. While this lead is not insurmountable, as teams have increased their June point totals from the mid 80s to over 100 in the past, the odds are strongly against such an event occurring in any particular year.

Furthermore, the team achieving such an improvement would still need the BarBarryans to falter significantly to effectuate the catchup. And I would be remiss if I did not state my belief that my team is truly a strong, deep, balanced group. Although I have benefited from some career years and resurgent veterans (Womack, Mackowiak, Clayton, Casey) and would not be surprised to see some slippage in performance, I do not foresee the collapse necessary for a pursuer to catch this team. Of course, come August or September, I may be Smarty Jones and hear the hoof beats from behind, but really do not expect such.

10:1 DoubleD. This team was many prognosticators preseason favorite, including myself. Its offense is easily capable of surpassing 50 points, and is now starting to come around after a slow start. Its pitching staff will shortly be bolstered by the return of Josh Beckett and Jake Peavy from the DL. With some luck and the right moves, this bunch could improve its score 30 points or more. The problem is that DoubleD now has several teams and 39 points between them and first place.

12:1 KrackerJacks. The current second place team, while talented and balanced, is probably at or close to its ceiling. The KrackerJacks, along with the BarBarryans, are the only teams with over 40 points in both pitching and hitting. They can expect a boost when Sammy Sosa and Ryan Klesko return, but lack a huge upside. This team should however, reward Frank for the first time with a high money spot.

20:1 Eight Men Out. Lee's new strategy of spending

Continued on page 6 – Bold Predictions

## WEBSITE LINKS

[Vagrant League Fantasy Baseball](#) (Our home page)

[USAStats](#)

[Major League Baseball](#)

[ESPN MLB](#)

[Rotoworld](#)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### WEEKLY ROSTER MOVES

PLACE: EMAIL TO ED AT WORK

TIME: EVERY TUESDAY BY NOON

“Dibs” (not Rob Dibble) on players is based on who is lower in the standings on the Tuesday of reported moves.

### TRADING DEADLINE

TIME: AUGUST 10<sup>TH</sup>, NOON (JUST 7 WEEKS AWAY)

There is no trading after this deadline until the season is over.

### SEPTEMBER EXPANSION

TIME: SEPTEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup> ROSTER MOVES OR LATER

Beginning with the September 7<sup>th</sup> moves you can expand your roster from 23 players to 24. The extra player can be either a hitter or pitcher.



## Roster Moves

*Changing Your Active Roster*

### Ed Feldman

League Commissioner

Roster moves are due on Tuesdays as usual by noon. **Reminder:** when activating a player from the DL you can waive or bench any active player on your roster as long as position eligibility is maintained. Also remember that you do NOT have to activate a player from your bench before picking up a player from the free agent pool. Email me the moves at [edwardfeldman@kpmg.com](mailto:edwardfeldman@kpmg.com). I prefer email over voicemail as much as possible so that I can keep move history more easily. Lastly, the stat period with respect to roster moves is based on a Tuesday – Monday week for those of you that don't remember.



## Roto History

*Continued from page 2*

good thing nearly a quarter-century ago. Okrent authored the rules for an industry and then authored books; he is now the Public Editor at the *New York Times*, hired in an ombudsman role last year in the wake of the Jayson Blair scandal. "I now know how J. Robert Oppenheimer felt inventing the atomic bomb," Okrent told the *Boston Globe* in December. "It's not the thing I want to be remembered for, but I will be."

Glen Waggoner, an ESPN The Magazine editor, was part of that original roto league and recently was inducted into the Fantasy Sports Hall of Fame along with Okrent. Waggoner was the editor of the Rotisserie League Baseball books that spawned the industry's growth in the 1980s, and fondly recalls how it all began. Although 2004 marks the 25th anniversary of Okrent's rules document and the group's formation, Waggoner surely will be an even bigger celebrity one year from now, when an official 25th anniversary celebration for the first league figures to be a big deal.

"Needless to say, we never had a clue that it would come to this," Waggoner said in a *Fantasy Sports* magazine interview. "I distinctly remember the thrill of buying Neil Allen for two bucks at our first Auction Draft in 1980. I also remember buying Gene Richards for nine dollars and flipping through the *Baseball Register* to find out who he played for. When Okrent published his seminal article, "The Year George Foster Wasn't Worth \$35," in *Inside Sports* (magazine) in 1981, we basked in our 15 minutes of celebrity. And we figured that was that. But of course it wasn't.

"We had a gang of fun introducing an unsuspecting world to our peculiar craziness in the inaugural edition of Rotisserie League Baseball in 1984. Personally, I had a gang of fun editing the first nine editions, even after it became work. But most of all, we've all had a gang of fun playing the game."

The average fantasy baseball fan spends 32 minutes a day thinking about his or her roster. It remains to be seen how long they will spend per day in 2004, from checking stats to watching highlights shows, but it is considered a foregone conclusion in fantasy circles that there will be even more fans joining the movement.



## RULES REFRESHER

### TRADING

- Unrestricted trading with other teams until noon on the second Tuesday in August. No trading after this date.
- After the start of the auction until the trading deadline, any players traded with a salary of \$12 or less will have \$4 added to his contract each time he is traded.
- After every trade, both teams must have eligible players at all 23 positions. You cannot leave a position “empty”.

### FARM SYSTEM CONTRACTS

- Farm system players called up will have a contract of \$2 his call up year, \$6 his second year and \$10 his third year.

### MINIMUM INNINGS PITCHED AND AT BATS

- *Minimum Innings Pitched:* 900 - Needed to earn your ERA & Ratio points. Otherwise you get moved to the bottom in each category (1 point for each)
- *Minimum At Bats:* 4250 - Needed to earn your Batting Average points. Otherwise you get moved to the bottom of BA and get only 1 point.

### PLAYER POSITION ELIGIBILITY

- If a player did not play 20 or more games at one position then he is only eligible at the position he played the most at.
- Only 1 game once the regular season starts

### ROSTER MOVES

- All roster moves are due to Ed by noon on Tuesday.
- Either call in moves at 631.425.6067 or email them to [edwardfeldman@kpmg.com](mailto:edwardfeldman@kpmg.com). (Email is preferred).
- Once per season each team can make a move on an active player that has not been placed on the DL, sent down, etc.. This is called the “Free Move”

### “Extra” Auction Dollars

- Starting in 2005, 6<sup>th</sup> place gets \$4 extra, 7<sup>th</sup> gets \$3 and 8<sup>th</sup> gets \$2



## U.S. Historical Facts

*Happenings in 1991 When the VLFB Was Formed*

### Ed Feldman

Team Owner

While we were off forming Vagrant League Fantasy baseball, reality was happening all around us. Here is a look at some of what was happening in the United States in 1991, our inaugural season. Where does the time go?

### General History

- Operation Desert Storm begins as the United States lead the Allied forces against Iraq, driving Iraqi forces from Kuwait
- The Soviet Union falls apart becoming 15 independent nations

### Sports Moments

- Earvin “Magic” Johnson announces that he has the HIV virus and retires from the NBA
- Rickey Henderson sets a new baseball record for career steals with 939

### On The Tube

- Doogie Howser tops the ratings

### At The Movies

- Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast” finds box office success
- “Silence of the Lambs” wins the Academy Award for Best Picture

### Popular Culture

- U.S. first-class postage: 29 cents.
- U.S. minimum wage moves from \$3.80 to \$4.25 per hour.

### World of Science

- Hewlett Packard introduces the first PC that weighs less than one pound

### Music

- Vanilla Ice dances his way onto the charts with “Ice, Ice, Baby”

### VLFB

- Inaugural season of ten teams (there were only twelve teams in the National League)



## Bold Predictions

*Continued from page 3*

for superior pitching has paid off so far. There is balance here as well as opportunity. Improvement in saves and steals is possible via the trade route, which would yield a significant upside.

25:1 Arms and Hammers. Ineffectiveness and injuries to Austin Kearns, Cliff Floyd and Jose Vidro have hurt this team. Losing Kerry Wood to the DL didn't help either, but lack of offense is the main impediment to the success of A&H. Any charge will likely be too little too late to win this year, but continued contention for a high money finish is likely.

30:1 Futurians. That joyful shout you hear coming from draft headquarters is Ed anticipating Preston Wilson's return to active service. Wilson in a Rockies uniform is one of the few players who can make a large statistical difference. A healthy Andy Pettite also will help. Still, probably not nearly enough to challenge for a high money spot.

30:1 The Field. The Master Blasters, all hit and no throw, should never be counted out based on history, and will fight for a money spot. Same for the Mutts. The Marauders have to overcome a lack of depth beyond Bonds and Helton. Shu's Crew, although master of the late season charge, has too much room to make up. The Monarchs can thank Mark Prior's return for helping them avoid the possibility of a first to worst finish in consecutive years. Red Storm is playing for next year.



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## MID SEASON ANALYSIS

### Lee Sunshine

Team Owner

First off, I'd like to analyze my own team of course. I have to say that my draft strategy of spending money on pitching, for the most part has worked out. I am surprised that I'm 11<sup>th</sup> in saves, though. One would have thought that a healthy Smoltz would have been right up there with the league leaders.

My hitting has not been too bad. Everybody laughed at me when I bid up for Adrian Beltre. Maybe, I shouldn't speak too soon, but I think I'll have the last laugh on that one. I may now have my regrets on protecting Chase Utley, but I think the Phillies are not a smart team. He can hit----play him!. The same goes for Jason Lane of the Astros. He can hit----play him. On the other hand, Tike Redman stinks, and I can't blame the Pirates for benching him. Only 3 steals all season. He's doing his best Roger Cedeno impersonation.

As far as the rest of the league, Barry is going to continue to run away with it. Tony Womack and Rob Mackowiak for a buck. Who can beat that. Great job Barry. Frank has continued his hold on 2<sup>nd</sup> even with Sosa on the DL. As for John, I hope Armando Benitez, after his performance last night, continues to show why Mets fans hate him. I believe John is a Yankee fan, so it's not surprising that he'd end up with him. Doug looked strong early, but has lost ground since. As I've come to find out, Doug, you need pitching. Ed, I apologize to you and Ira on Scott Rolen. At the draft, I said you way overpaid for him. I was dead wrong, and Ira backed you. Ira, I hope David Bell gets hurt again, so the Phillies will give Utley a real shot. And if I remember correctly, at the draft, you cringed when you had found out you won the bid on Kaz Matsui. You knew it was risky. At least fielding doesn't count in this league. One last comment on the rest of the league, Craig has been awfully quiet.

There is still plenty of season left, and undoubtedly injuries will play a major part. I think we all know who will win. The race is on for 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>.

