



Your Fantasy, His Reality: A Year in the Life of a High Stakes Fantasy Football Player

This is a feature news story written by Eric Balkman about 2008 Fantasy Football Players Championship winner, Chad Schroeder. Schroeder won \$75,000 in the FFPC, and took 2nd place in the FFOC, for another \$100,000. Playing in 66 fantasy football leagues, Schroeder epitomizes the high stakes fantasy football lifestyle.

New York, NY ([PRWEB](#)) June 23, 2009 -- Matt Forte dives to the left, and then on the next play he dives to the right. After a quick timeout by the Green Bay Packers to try and ice Robbie Gould, the Chicago Bears kicker calmly drills a 38-yard field goal to end sudden-death overtime of the final game of Week 16 of the 2008 NFL season. And with that boot, most fantasy football seasons across the county also come to a close.

While this season is not unlike any of the ones before it, thousands of fantasy football players around the country are suddenly now well aware of the name Chad Schroeder.

Schroeder, a 35-year-old professional sports gambler from Omaha, Neb. competed in 66 fantasy football leagues last year and didn't just dip his toes in the pool of high-stakes fantasy football; he leapt in with a cannonball dive. Spending nearly \$60,000 in entry fees wasn't a big deal for Schroeder, especially since he ended up winning the inaugural Fantasy Football Players Championship Main Event this past December, which rewarded him with a cool \$75,000 purse.

Yet Schroeder could not have been more disappointed with how his season finished. You see, he also entered the Fantasy Football Open Championship which featured a \$1 million prize. The FFOC included thousands of different teams, with no limit on how many teams any one contestant could buy--a fantasy footballer's nirvana. Schroeder, being the conservative gambler that he is, only bought 23 teams at \$125 each. For those of you reading this whose math skills are as bad as mine, let me save you the time of looking for a calculator. Schroeder spent a total of \$2,875 to enter the FFOC, otherwise known as a half-year's rent to people like you and me.

The FFOC is divided up into 10-team leagues. In order to advance to the rounds where the cash gets paid out, each team must win its individual league. After Week 9 of the NFL season, teams are "cut" each week until Week 16 when the owners of the top 15 teams are invited to the Bellagio in Las Vegas to see who will be crowned champion. And while Schroeder would have been as happy as a post-PATMartin Gramatica to have just one of his 23 teams in the running, two of the "Vegas 15" teams were his.

So despite coming into Vegas with a roar, Schroeder walked out Belichick-style after the Giants beat him the Super Bowl--bewildered that he didn't come away with a championship. Still today Schroeder's voice trails off when he talks of the FFOC, as if he is still shell-shocked at what happened.

"It's just a one-week race at that point and I had a huge lead going into Sunday night, and it looked like I had the thing pretty much wrapped up," he says. "And then--wow. That happened."

Being a fantasy football player myself, I don't need to ask what "that" is. I already know. "That" is DeAngelo Williams--a name that Schroeder audibly grits his teeth when uttering. The Carolina Panthers running back made fantasy dreams come true for a lot of players in Week 16 with his 108-yard, four touchdown performance.



But he destroyed many teams as well including Schroeder's FFOC team, which placed second (a mere 14.71 points behind the winner) and earned him \$100,000. His other team finished 12th, which was good for \$5,000. Not bad, but certainly not good for Schroeder

So while Schroeder didn't win the FFOC, he was indeed lucky (and skilled) enough to win the FFPC--a bittersweet victory of sorts. In fact, for all intense and purposes, he had already chalked up the FFPC prize as money in the bank earlier that Sunday.

"I had my computer there, so I pretty much knew I had it won [at] about halftime of the afternoon games that day. Which I still had DeAngelo Williams left and I was already ahead. But I didn't need him to do what he did," Schroeder says with a laugh. It's unmistakably the laugh that comes from a man who knows unless he finds humor in the irony, he'll never shake off the disappointment.

Being a pro sports gambler requires the guts of someone who can stand losing thousands of dollars on a ball caroming off an upright, a putt rimming out of a cup, a relay throw from the outfield being an inch off, or a 50-foot buzzer-beater swishing through a net. It wasn't the first time Schroeder had lost, and it certainly wouldn't be the last.

"Well, I make quite a few high stakes wagers every day, so I guess it kind of goes hand-in-hand with that," he says. "I mean you can win a lot of money too, without risking a tremendous amount of money."

And how does one run a fantasy football empire like Schroeder's? By pulling a page from the Beatles' handbook and getting by with a little help from his friends. Schroeder owns about 60% of all the teams he runs, with a stable of eight investors sharing the remaining 40%. All investors have remained happy as Schroeder has come out well ahead in his high-stakes career. But in fantasy football, money isn't the only thing to worry about.

For instance, imagine you own 66 fantasy teams and you have Eagles running back Brian Westbrook in the starting lineup in 60 of them. It's 45 minutes before kickoff and he is declared out--what do you do? While most of us would probably soil ourselves and increase the bandwidth on our computers to quasi-nuclear levels trying to switch lineups, Schroeder takes a different approach.

It just so happens that he has indeed already run into this problem, but Kelly Schroeder--Chad's uncle--is only a phone call away to lend support. Especially when a certain quarterback is vomiting up breakfast 20 minutes before kickoff.

"Matt Schaub was sick one time and we needed to get him out of a lot lineups, so I called him up and said, 'Hey, you look over these 30 and I'll look over these 30 and let's get him out of there,'" Schroeder says as he takes me through his pre-game routine.

"Obviously I got a lot of time to do it, since I don't do anything else really," says Schroeder who has no additional income to support himself other than fantasy football and other sports wagering.

While Schroeder says he believes there are only handful of jobs better than his (i.e. NFL head coach or general manager), he loves what he does. But there are simple pleasures he does miss out on because of the increased time by himself or with his television.



"I can do whatever I want, whenever I want--I don't have to answer to anybody. But kind of at the same time, there's a negative there, too. It's kind of fun to go out with co-workers for a beer after work sometimes and stuff like that."

However, if he does not suffer through the chaos of always trying to please the boss at work, Schroeder says the hectic fourth quarter of Monday night games more than makes up for it. And while some of us might think that the fun of watching football on Sunday--especially with so much on the line--might be sucked out entirely, Schroeder doesn't concern himself with every single yard from scrimmage or incomplete pass, either.

"I pretty much just worry about a couple of the bigger teams and focus on them while I'm watching the games on Sunday, and that makes it a lot easier," he says. "If I was trying to watch all 66 of them, it wouldn't be so fun to watch football."

Something Schroeder says he always keeps in mind is that in high-stakes fantasy football, there's not a lot you can do after you're done drafting. Sure, a guy like Matt Cassel or Donnie Avery can be had on the waiver wire sometimes. But Schroeder says you need to be confident in your drafting skills if you want to win. And that's why his job is more fun than being tortured in our 9-5 cubicle dungeons.

"It doesn't seem like work really," he says. "When I get done drafting, I'm pretty comfortable that I have a pretty good team in every league. It's just a matter of playing itself out--it's not worth really stressing out over."

Also, if you are wondering if all his recent success has changed his lifestyle, it hasn't. Schroeder only plans on making minor changes to his fantasy football career, like not entering any leagues with an entry fee of less than \$1,000 this year. (He was in 15 \$500 entry fee leagues last year.) He also doesn't plan on adding any more fantasy teams, if for no other reason than the NFL would have to expand in order to give him a big enough player pool to choose from. Schroeder says he does not play in any local small-stakes fantasy football leagues with friends either, but does play in smaller leagues with no national prize. And while he's not willing to give away too much strategy in the differences in his approach to the two formats, he does say there is one difference he has experimented with over the past two years.

"It's not bad to try to get a combination wide receiver/quarterback that maybe gets hot during that three-week playoff run," Schroeder says. "...if I'm torn between [Green Bay wide receiver Greg] Jennings or a similar receiver and I have [Green Bay quarterback] Aaron Rodgers, I might lean towards Jennings in the [league] where there's a race for a big prize at the end. Whereas I might try to hedge it a little more in something that's just 'league only' and take the other receiver."

Schroeder says he would try to dissuade anyone from leading the same lifestyle as him because the government is making it increasingly difficult for gamblers to sustain profitability. However, if any fantasy football players--as in a fellow FFPC player like me--come to him for advice from an accomplished professional, Schroeder says that his experience has shown him sometimes the best outside-the-box thinking is staying inside the box during fantasy drafts.

"Don't be your own worst enemy; don't overanalyze things," he says. "It's OK if you like a guy higher than where he's going, but...look over a bunch of experts' ratings. That's why they're getting subscriptions--because they're supposed to know more than I do about how these guys are supposed to be ordered. And if you try to get too creative, sometimes that is a detriment; you're not getting the most value out of each pick."



The 2009 NFL season is now bearing down upon us. Some leagues are drafting and fantasy footballers across the nation are chomping at the bit, trying to become champions in their own right. It won't be too much longer until Chris Johnson and LenDale White will be trying to juke Troy Polamalu for extra yards and Ben Roethlisberger will be zipping passes to Hines Ward and Santonio Holmes on Opening Night. Many fantasy seasons will begin that Thursday evening in September and Chad Schroeder will be at it again, downing a fountain soda while studying his player personnel. He will be looking at hundreds of lineup decisions while trying to win every single league in which he enters one of his dozens of teams.

You'll probably see "Cocktails and Dreams"--Schroeder's fantasy team name of choice named after the bar Tom Cruise's character wanted to open in "Cocktail"--in a lot of leagues this year, maybe even yours.

Chances are he probably will be playing you at some point during this year. But you know his name now, don't you?

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