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### Chaseburg Fantasy Football League

“What time does it start?” I ask my dad as he walks down the hallway away from me. He stops for a mere second to adjust a crooked photo hanging on the wall.

“Two o’clock,” he mumbles in the opposite direction. My dad, an in shape dark haired man with a mustache, doesn’t talk very much, unless he’s had a few beers in him. When he does converse with my family, it’s usually because we asked him a question. He usually mumbles an answer as he walks into the other room: we can never understand him.

“So that means we have to leave when?” I ask, cringing my face, hoping I will be able to hear and understand his reply.

He ignores the question for a few seconds; then glances at his watch and answers, “Between 1:15 and 1:30.” Holy crap I think to myself: why so early? It takes less than ten minutes to get there. And he never goes anywhere early, or on time for that matter. Anytime my family goes anywhere together, he’s always the last one to walk out the door. Awe, but today is different: today is *the draft*.

My dad is one of eight members of the Chaseburg Fantasy Football League (CFFL). And today they’re meeting to draft the rookies for the upcoming football season. This meeting is taking place at the village hall in Chaseburg, Wisconsin—a small town of 306. This is one of their many events that take place each year. But this particular event

is critical: the players they draft at this meeting could either make or break their upcoming season.

As we approach the brown building, we drive down the lower level driveway to get to back of the building. Two cars are already parked alongside the narrow driveway.

“Wow, I didn’t think anyone would be here yet, I thought for sure we’d be the first,” my dad says with utter disappointment, as if he were losing in some type of race.

We get out of the car. Behind the village hall, down a steep hill, there’s a softball team practicing at the baseball field. We walk through the blue doors of basement of the village hall-I can tell it hasn’t been touched in quite a while. All the folding chairs are stacked in the corner of the room. The heat isn’t on and it’s 41 degrees outside: the large room is freezing. It stinks of musky old air. There are seven long tables arranged in a large circle, each with a chair facing in toward the middle of the circle. There is an additional table outside the circle with a chair at it as well.

John is standing by the isolated table and has clearly marked his territory. John is the commissioner of the league; he takes care of all the paper work and keeps track of all the trades that take place. He reminds me of my dad: laid back, dark hair and mustache. John’s a nice guy.

Burt-the other guy who “beat” us there-is sitting at the table closest to the door. He’s dressed in a red sweater with a collared shirt underneath it; a baseball cap sits on his head. Burt’s a little bit older than my dad. He used to coach the Chaseburg baseball team that my dad played on when I was little. My dad sets his things down at the table next to Burt’s and declares his spot.

Immediately, John starts discussing an error he has made in his trading records. "Do you have down that BJ traded his fourth round pick for one of Burt's guys?" he asks my dad.

"Well yeah, didn't you?" my dad notions towards Burt.

"Nope, we never traded," replies Burt.

"All right, well I must have screwed something up here. I'm going to run home and reprint this sheet off," John announces as he heads for the door.

The idea of fantasy football originated in 1962 by three men: Bill Winkenbach, Scotty Sterling and Bill Tunnell (Mousalimas). Today, 15 billion people play fantasy football (Frola). Like my dad's league, you can get together with your friends and play with your own rules, or you can join one of the hundreds of leagues on the Internet.

Out the window we watch Brian (a.k.a. BJ) getting dropped off by his wife. As she drives off, he begins to chase after her; he forgot his cooler in the backseat. I look around the room; Burt has his own cooler, there's a cooler sitting at John's table, and what do you know, my dad has a cooler as well. Everyone brings their own personal cooler filled with their choice of beer. Brian walks in and sets his things down on the table located on the other side of Burt. Brian's a comical guy with gray hair, large glasses, and an oversized belly. He's the jokester of the league.

"Did you get that e-mail I sent you guys?" Brian questions with a chuckle, "The joke?" Everyone smiles to acknowledge that they got it and Brian chuckles even louder; it's quickly forgotten.

In walks Joe, a kind man with grayish white hair.

“You want your truck door open all day?” my dad asks Joe, thinking he forgot to shut it.

Joe pauses for a few seconds, then replies, “I still have to get my cooler, it’s gonna take two of us to lift it.” He laughs as he walks around the circle and places a square pad of paper and a pen on each table. The laughter in the room is broken up when the door opens. A short character of a guy walks in, hooded sweatshirt pulled over his head, tied tight, and sunglasses on.

“Is that Sam?” Brian asks in a joking voice.

Everyone else chimes in as well. “Sam is that you? Nah, that can’t be Sam,” sarcastic voices fill the room. Everyone knows damn well it’s not Sam.

“Oh no, that can’t be Sam,” Brian reassures everyone sarcastically. “He would have said ‘c c cock sucker, it’s c cold in here’,” Brian imitates Sam with a stutter.

The character reveals himself by taking off his hood: it’s Sonny. Sonny’s a short, balding man, with reddish hair. I never really hear him say much.

“It’s chilly in here,” Sonny says as he sets his cooler and folder on one of the remaining tables.

“Yeah, I should have worn my sweatshirt,” comments Brian, who’s only wearing a t-shirt. Brian looks down at his shirt and remembers what t-shirt he’s wearing, than looks around the room. “Hey, Burt’s not wearing his CFFL apparel,” Brian tattles, “He should be penalized, take his first round pick away from him.” Everyone laughs.

It’s absolutely crazy how passionate these guys are about this fantasy football league. My dad spends hours on the computer at home-creating spreadsheets, making rosters, surfing the web-for fantasy football, and he’s not even the commissioner. At the

end of each season, the winner for that year buys everyone in the league some type of “CFFL” gear. They have sweatpants, t-shirts, and sweatshirts. And there’s only more to come. Anytime these guys get together down in Chaseburg over the weekend, even when it’s not football season, they talk fantasy football. What’s going to happen next season? What happened last season? They’re constantly e-mailing each other to announce updates on which players are injured. They’re dedicated to it and they love it. This league is their getaway: from work, stress, family, children, etc. These men are starting to get too old to play physical sports themselves, this serves as their substitute. This is their way of playing the game and being competitive.

We all see Sam pull up in his red pickup truck. Everyone starts cracking little jokes about him, predicting the first thing he’ll say when he walks in the door. Sam is the oldest man in the group; he seems a bit grumpy.

Brian the Jokester asks, “Sam, are you wearing your CFFL apparel?” Brian puts his hands on his hips, indicating Sam is in big trouble.

“What the fuck do I want to wear that for?” Sam replies. Everyone laughs at Sam. Then he adds, “I gotta wear my suspenders and I can’t wear no sweatshirt over them, I have to take them down to relieve myself.” He reminds me of Walter Matthau playing Max in *Grumpy Old Men*.

My dad starts reading off old drafts from the past. Everyone starts to reminisce about how well or how horrible they did in the previous years.

Of course that triggered Brian’s attention. “Sam, you might actually win this year, hell might have just frozen over: it’s snowing,” Brian chuckles. I turn around and what do you know, it’s snowing on May 1. Sam shrugs off the comment.

“Wow BJ, you must have been up early today, you gotta lotta wit in ya,” my dad laughs, rocking back on his chair.

There’s silence for a few minutes as everyone organizes their things.

“Anticipation’s tough, ant it Burt?” Joe asks Burt with a grin on his face. We all look over at Burt, tapping his fingers and pacing back and fourth along side the window. Marv is the only one that’s not here yet; he’s ten minutes late so far. I have to admit, I’m getting a bit impatient as well, considering I’ve been here 40 minutes already.

A few more minutes of silence pass by; everyone waits impatiently for Marv to arrive.

Finally, through the window, we see Marv pull up in his pickup truck, pulling a trailer with a grill on it. Following him, in a gold car, is his wife and kids. They enter the basement door hauling in food and utensils for a grill out that will take place after the draft.

To start out, the rules are discussed. My dad brings up a rule that was taken into effect in 1999, and forgotten about for the past four year. Everyone discusses their opinions, interrupting each other at all cost. They decide to vote that rule out. They debate about a few more subjects before they’re ready to start the draft.

As they discussed the rules, I could really tell how serious they are about this league. They all know the rulebook like the back of their hand; they actually have their own rulebook. They stick to the rules and there are no exceptions; everybody feels this way. This is how they make it so competitive, and that’s why they like doing it so much.

Coming into the draft, each member has 44 players from the previous year. During this draft, each member gets six turns to pick a player from the 48 chosen in the

NFL Rookie Draft. The order in which the league members pick is determined by last year's winnings: the winner goes last, runner up goes second to last and so on. Last year my dad won, so he has to go last in every round. However, there's a twist. Anytime before the draft, any league member can trade one of their "picks" for another member's player from the previous year. This means that some members of the league may have more than six "picks" during the draft and some may have less than six "picks".

"Each person gets five minutes to make their pick," Joe announces, holding the timer, "Sonny, you're first, and you're on the clock."

The first round has started. Sonny knew right away whom he was going to pick. He writes the player's name on a piece of paper from the square notepad and brings it up to John.

"Ronnie Brown" announces John, writing down the name in his records.

"oooo," everyone comments as they write down the name in their personal records as well.

Marv is next and then Burt: they both have their picks ready to go and bring them up to John at their turn.

Brian is next on the clock. He flips through his papers, tapping his pencil and shaking his leg. He scribbles something down on his notepad and brings it up to John.

"Alex Smith" John announces to everyone.

"Awe you son of a bitch," Sam says to Brian, cracking open a beer, "That's who I was going to pick."

"First foul language of the round," John announces laughing.

Sam's turn is next. He must have had a backup plan because he wrote his pick down pretty fast.

Next, Joe gets to pick twice in a row: he traded one of his previous guys for John's first round pick.

Now, Marv is up again because my dad traded his first round pick to him for a previous player.

The first round is completed. This process is very repetitive and very boring, unless someone cracks a joke of course. It also gets interesting when one member picks a player that another member was going to pick. They usually throw some foul language at each other, laugh, and it's soon forgotten. The rounds toward the end tend to go a bit faster than the first and second rounds.

After the repetitive process is through with, everyone organizes their papers and places them back into their folders. A few of them comment on how the draft didn't go the way they thought it would. They ask each other "what if" questions, seeing what other people would have done if something went a different way.

This group of guys has one major thing in common: a love for football. They look forward to every event, season, and game. Not only does the league allow the members to become more connected with the game, but they also get a chance to become more connected with their friends. Spending time talking about fantasy football together is their high: it's interesting to them. They drink beer and they bullshit. They joke with each other and crack jokes about each other, but it's all in good fun.

The Chaseburg Fantasy Football League has been together for eight years so far, and there will be many more to come. They'll grow old together, still playing the game and still being competitive (and a little bullshit on the side of course).