

A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME: HOW FANTASY SPORTS
HAS EVOLVED IN THE MASS MEDIA

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

August 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I must acknowledge Monica, my wife and best friend, who made this process bearable. Your patience was essential, your calming voice was crucial, and your motivation was vital. I could not have completed this process without your unstinting support.

Dr. Andrew Clark, your leadership and vision shaped this project into something of which I can be proud. You helped me understand my research from its formative stages through completion, and at times understood what I was doing better than I did. You were a model chairman, and I'm fortunate to have worked with you. Dr. Paul Schrodt, thank you not only for your input but also your insight. You'll be missed at UTA. Dr. Alisa White, you have been an exemplary committee member, professor, and adviser. U.T. Tyler is in good hands!

Thanks also to Dr. Tom Christie for your research expertise, which guided me throughout. Special thanks to Dr. Earl Andresen, Dr. Tom Ingram, Dr. Charla Markham Shaw (a Stephenville girl who made good), Dr. Karin McCallum, Dr. Quint Randle, Dr. Ivana Segvic, and my fellow graduate students for the contributions you all made along the way.

And, of course, my gratitude goes to all the subjects for taking time to be interviewed.

July 12, 2005

ABSTRACT

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Publication No. _____

Daniel Fremon Woodward, M.A.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2005

Supervising Professor: Dr. Andrew M. Clark

Fantasy sports, a game that allows players to run their own virtual sports franchise, has been considered a hobby enjoyed outside the cultural mainstream. But recent adoption of fantasy sports-related content in the mass media has increasingly made fantasy sports widely accepted. This exploratory study, uses an inductive, qualitative approach, to examine how fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media in seven categories: awareness, interest, testing, adoption, use, benefits, and future projections. Fantasy sports is shown to be more prevalent in the mass media now than ever before, and different media use fantasy sports in different ways but always in accordance with

their existing strategies. Though fantasy sports is seen in all forms of mass media, it is best suited for the Web; therefore, the Web is seen as the most advantageous medium for fantasy-related content. Finally, these results are discussed in light of Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the early nineteenth century, when sports content first appeared in the mass media, sports journalism has been diversionary in nature; valued as entertainment rather than as hard news (Whitlam & Preston 1998; Majumdar 2003; Carvalho 2004). This is because sports journalism, especially non-event coverage, is often speculative, subjective, or based on rumor (Whitlam & Preston 1998). For example a paper might include a story about which player on the hometown team is likely to be traded, or which player might be traded for (O'Brien 2005). The story may be completely speculative, yet it is an important part of most sports fans daily diet of information. On the sports page, fact and opinion often appear side-by-side. For example sports columnists offer their take on a pitcher's performance alongside a game story (Buck 2005). Another important part of the sports page, or the sports broadcast, is statistics, where fans can see at a glance where a team or individual stands in any number of categories depending on the sport. These statistics may interest sports fans in general, but they have particular value to a select group of sports enthusiasts: the fantasy sports player. In fact, fantasy sports players may only read the sports pages or watch sporting events on television to get information for their fantasy teams (Todd et al. 2003).

Fantasy sports is a game, typically played on Internet sites, that allows individuals to play the role of owner and manager of a virtual sports franchise. As fantasy sports has become a more popular social pastime, the mass media have begun incorporating it into their content to the extent that journalists' observations about their own fantasy teams

have become accepted as sports journalism. Stories concerning the spread of fantasy sports and its social and economic implications have begun appearing as news content.

Despite the increase of fantasy sports-related content in the mass media, much less is known about the evolution of such content or how industry professionals make decisions regarding such content. The present study's purpose, then, is to explore how fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media. In order to study this, one must consider first how the mass media evaluates suitable content.

1.1 Commercial Media and Content Decisions

The mass media constantly search for ways to attract and retain audiences. The more people who watch a television show or read a newspaper, the more revenue those media can potentially bring in from advertisers. The relationship between media companies and their audience is governed by economics (Straubhaar & LaRose 2002). Campbell (2003) notes that media spare no expense in studying audiences and working to capture their attention. How successfully they do so is measured through ratings, subscriptions, rack sales, or hit counts (Stovall 2004; Mencher 2003; Wimmer & Dominick 2003; Eastman & Ferguson 2002). Maintaining large audience numbers, no matter how they are measured, means increased advertising sales and, thus, increased profits. Mass media companies feel economic pressures because, like any other capitalistic enterprise, their primary objective is financial success (Mencher 2003).

In a highly competitive media environment, with many different products from which to choose, audiences have become finicky and discerning (Straubhaar & LaRose 2002). Therefore, everything media do targets a specific audience (or audiences), and the nature of that audience may be the most important influence on media (Mencher, 2003).

Eastman and Ferguson (2002) state that understanding the targeted audience is the critical factor in selecting content, and audiences first and foremost want to be entertained and informed. The media cater to audiences in many ways, including what stories they select and how they present them (Wilber & Miller 2003), how they edit and interpret these stories (de Beer & Merrill 2004), or by employing popular cultural fads into their content (Eastman & Ferguson 2002). In fact, Straubhaar and LaRose (2002) state that some theorists consider communication and culture indispensable to one another.

Jeff Catlin (interview by author, 20 April 2005, Arlington, Texas), a radio programming director since 1992, said the media must be sensitive to consumer interests when making content decisions. In order to do this, media companies must be cognizant of their consumers' desires. Thus, companies administer surveys via e-mail or telephone, host public focus groups, track industry trends, monitor social and marketplace changes, as well as changes in their competition. In Catlin's words: "We have to please our listeners. My job is to deliver ratings. If we're broadcasting to nobody, they'll shut us down."

Editors, programming directors, and other decision-makers follow a similar pattern in selecting news content: (a) find what is new or unusual; (b) inform, educate, and entertain their target audience; (c) and satisfy their audience's desires (Mencher 2003). Mencher (2003) identified this set of factors that editors and programmers consider when selecting news content: timeliness, impact, prominence, proximity, conflict, unusualness, currency, and necessity. However, Mencher (2003) also stated that news content is relative from one audience to the next based on personal factors, economic pressures, competition, owner influence, and tradition. Therefore, what

content the media choose to publish or air depends upon what audience they are attempting to reach. It requires balancing audience preferences and needs with industry strategies (Eastman & Ferguson 2002).

Mencher (2003) further posits that the audience is a crucial factor in deciding upon content. For example, magazines aimed at teenage girls may feature articles on depression, Spanish-language newspapers may focus on issues of immigration, and the San Francisco press may include or more prominently display stories about gay and lesbian issues (Mencher 2003).

In addition, Wilber and Miller (2003) state that different media consider different criteria when making content decisions. For example, an event may be included on the nightly newscast but ignored by local newspapers. Content that works in one medium may not work in another (Wilber & Miller 2003). Thus, the next section considers the strategies involved in making content decisions for different types of media, beginning with print media.

1.1.1 Content Decisions for Print Media

Dating back to the mid-1600s, newspapers are one of the oldest mass media, with dailies appearing as early as 1702 (Wilber & Miller 2003). Early editors focused on foreign news, commercial, and economic reports (Straubhaar & LaRose 2002), but coverage soon shifted to local news and politics (Wilber & Miller 2003). Circulation for most papers was just a few hundred readers, and political censorship was almost universally a reality (Wilber & Miller 2003).

Print monopolized mass media for 350 years (Wilber & Miller 2003). The arrival of broadcast in the early twentieth century changed things, and new technologies, such as

cable and satellite networks and the Internet of the late twentieth century, continue to change how print editors fill their pages so that today's commercial print mass media looks much different. According to Wilber and Miller (2003), newspapers are redefining their definition of news in order to combat sagging circulation numbers. Likewise, Rich (2005) stated that the definition of news is evolving and that newspapers "have to serve [their] audience with content and information they want in whatever form they want" (p. 16). For example, in order to compete with newer forms of mass media, which often offer speedier delivery of the news, newspaper and magazines have opened bureaus across the world, embedded correspondents in the middle of news events, and even staked controlling interest in rival media (Wilber & Miller 2003). Magazines have become more specialized in order to attract a narrower, more niche readership, while modern newspapers tend to focus more on civic or digital journalism (Wilber & Miller 2003).

These are print media's efforts to give their audience what it wants. Broadcast and cable media face different realities because their audiences, strategies, and technologies are unlike those in print media.

1.1.2 Content Decisions for Cable and Broadcast Media

Since the development of broadcast and cable, stations and networks have looked for ways to attract and retain audiences with their programming. Eastman and Ferguson (2002) note that

In the media world, programming is the software that gives the hardware a reason for existing. Both are necessary for the system to work, but without programming, no broadcasting or wired services would exist. Programmers sincerely believe that "content is king" (p. 4).

Eastman and Ferguson (2002) state that programming can be considered either an outcome (i.e., a programming schedule on radio or television) or a process (i.e., selecting, scheduling and promoting the programs). Despite this dichotomy, however, “at its basic level, programming represents individual shows (programs) that people choose” (p. 5). Jeff Catlin (personal communication, April 20, 2005), radio programming director of KTCK-Dallas, states that broadcasters, regardless of content, must recognize and cater to their audience’s primary interests. However, this becomes difficult given competition for audience attention from rival networks and other media, such as the Internet. Catlin further states that instant access afforded by the Internet and, to a lesser extent broadcast, means media users often know as much as the media themselves. As Catlin contends, “That’s part of the evolution of the format. Everybody gets a lot more information now than they ever did before, and information overload makes everybody have ADD [attention deficit disorder]. That’s made our job even harder.” Therefore, programmers must find creative ways to overcome these challenges by providing programming that builds a strong audience and will, in turn, generate advertising revenue (Eastman & Ferguson 2002).

One such method involves focusing on narrowcasting over broadcasting; that is, targeting particular audiences based upon niche characteristics such as sex, religion, race, or hobby without regard to increasing audience size (Straubhaar and LaRose 2002). This is particularly evident in cable, with networks including Black Entertainment Television, Women’s Entertainment, and The History Channel. Even a network such as ESPN, which focuses on sports, is able to narrow its focus with ESPN 2, ESPN Classic, ESPN News, and ESPN U. Narrowcasting allows media companies to find profits while

targeting smaller audiences because that audience is more receptive to the message. Such a practice makes advertising messages more effective because they reach only a specifically targeted audience. Therefore narrowcasting represents an industry trend that is growing in popularity (Straubhaar & LaRose 2002).

Despite the market potential of narrowcasting, a new threat for audience attention has come from a different medium. The rise of the Internet, beginning in the late twentieth century, has presented new challenges for media because it has changed the way people get their news (Rich 2005).

1.1.3 Content Decisions for the World Wide Web

Web-based media are unique from print and cable/broadcast because of their capacity of interactivity. The dominant characteristic of the Internet is its ability to deliver information quickly and directly (Straubhaar & LaRose 2002). Stovall (2004) believes the audience—not the journalist—reigns supreme because “personalization is intrinsic to new media [and] the user, after all, is in the best position to know what he or she finds most interesting, valuable, useful, and newsworthy” (p. 47). The Internet differs from other media because it puts the user in the driver’s seat; therefore, Web-based content requires more planning and organization and allows for more risks than print or broadcast (Rich 2005).

Wilber and Miller (2003) note that good journalism is the same for any medium, and Web journalists still should “write like journalists” (p. 207). However, that does not mean Web content is like content in other media. The Web allows for content that is nonlinear and more personal, and traditional copy deadlines and spatial considerations do not apply to the Web (Stovall 2004). Ron Cariker, a Web journalist, (interview by

author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) acknowledges that anything that is in the local newspaper would be on his site (www.NewsOK.com), but uncut versions may run online because the paper is limited on space. Stovall (2004) states that because the Web is more versatile than print or broadcast/cable, more possibilities exist for presenting content than in the other media.

Different audiences may interpret identical media content in different ways (Campbell 2003). Regardless, all media aim their content at attracting the largest possible target audience (Straubhaar & LaRose 2002). One method by which media accomplish this is by incorporating popular culture into their content (McQuail 1985). One example of how popular culture has influenced media content to varying degrees is fantasy sports, which is the focus of the present study. The remainder of this chapter discusses in more detail fantasy sports, from its inception as a game among some friends to its current status as a billion-dollar industry that is changing the definition of sports journalism.

1.2 Fantasy Sports

Fantasy sports hobbyists draft real players for their fictional team. Those players' statistics from actual games determine which team in a fantasy league is doing the best. Winners typically receive cash or prizes (Isidore 2003). Fantasy sports offers a base of some fifteen million Americans spending \$1.5 billion on league subscription fees, draft kits, and other items (Fantasy Sports Trade Association [FSTA] 2003; Ipsos 2003). Ladd Biro (interview by author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas), whose syndicated column about fantasy football appears in newspapers from Dallas to Pittsburgh, observed that mass media companies have begun including fantasy sports as content, or at a minimum including references to fantasy sports in sports news, like never before. Noting a similar

trend, Umstead (2003) states that fantasy sports has become a fixture in mainstream media programming because of the large numbers of 18- to 34-year-olds who play fantasy sports. This clientele, in turn, provides an attractive demographic for commercial mass media because of their disposable income, spending power, and mobility. The following sections elaborate further on this “cultural obsession” Ballard (2004, p. 1), known as fanatsy sports.

1.2.1 A Brief History of Fantasy Sports

What began as a lark among eleven friends in Manhattan has become a worldwide fascination. Indeed, journalist Daniel Okrent could not have imagined the growth of fantasy sports when he conceptualized fantasy baseball during a 1979 cross-country flight (Wendel 2004). Okrent’s idea was to augment the upcoming season for himself and 10 friends, who believed they could run a Major League Baseball franchise better than the real-life general managers of the teams they followed. The group of mostly writers and advertising executives called their new association the Rotisserie League in honor of the Manhattan restaurant where they wrote the league’s rules and constitution (Tygiel 2000).

The Rotisserie Leaguers quickly became the first fantasy addicts. They rushed to the morning paper to check box scores. Once a week, Okrent drove forty miles roundtrip to pick up *The Sporting News* so he could compile league standings, although the publication would arrive at his home a day later. The sports writers in the group would even call Major League offices to get injury updates on the players they owned (Tygiel 2000). Today most leagues are maintained on Web sites such as ESPN.com, SportsLine.com, Yahoo.com, and even official league Web sites like NFL.com or

MLB.com. More than any other innovation, the Internet has facilitated the widespread popularity of fantasy sports and has made it profitable (Felps 2000).

1.2.2 An Explanation of Fantasy Sports

In forming a fantasy league hobbyists come together to compete against each other throughout the season. “Owners” draft players from real-life professional sports teams and score points based upon those athlete’s performances in actual games. For example, if Player A drafts baseball star Barry Bonds for his fantasy team, Player A’s fantasy team is credited with a home run for each home run Barry Bonds actually hits. The more home runs—and other statistics—Bonds and Player A’s other players compile, the more successful Player A’s fantasy team will be. Fantasy league formats vary, so that in some the hobbyists compete head-to-head in games that last one day or one week, and in others, points are compiled over a full season (FSTA 2003).

One person in each league serves as the “commissioner” and oversees the entire league, including everything from organizing and drafting, to scoring and transactions. Most leagues are maintained on Internet sites that allow hobbyists to make lineup updates or check league standings and statistics instantly (Berentson 2000; Felps 2000).

1.2.3 The Economics of Fantasy Sports

While fantasy sports has become profitable for those media organizing the various leagues, it also costs companies money. Two-thirds of fantasy participants admit to checking their fantasy teams at work (Suttell 2004), and the outplacement company Challenger, Gray, and Christmas estimated that American companies lose almost \$37 million in productivity per day because of it (Baker 2004).

If companies lose money because of fantasy sports, so, too, might unlucky fantasy participants. Though officially classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a game of chance and not a gambling industry, fantasy hobbyists typically pay to play in hopes of winning larger payouts (Ballard 2004). Only a few win, but they might win big. One famous Las Vegas-based league, the National Fantasy Baseball Championship, requires a \$1,250 entry fee; indeed the average entry fee per league is \$95, with the typical winnings ranging from \$300 to \$400 (Ballard 2004; Suttell 2004).

Fantasy league champions are not the only ones profiting. Wirakartakusumah (2003) found that media companies recognize fantasy sports as potentially profitable, and Berentson (2000) notes that one popular fantasy-oriented Web site, Sandbox.com, enjoyed revenues of nearly \$7 million in 2000 after grossing just \$200,000 two years earlier. Other similar Web sites have been sold to investors for as much as \$20 million. CBS-owned SportsLine.com increased its profits by more than one-third from 2002 to 2003 thanks to fantasy sports (Ballard 2004). Overall, online media bring in an estimated \$500 million annually because of fantasy sports (Umstead 2003). Corporate America has taken notice, too. Callaway Golf Company, a publicly held corporation manufacturing golf clubs and other golf equipment, launched a Fantasy Golf Challenge in March 2005 asking participants to spend \$9.95 and select golfers they believe will win predetermined match-ups. The top performers each week receive prizes such as golf balls, custom-made clubs, or golf-related vacations (Callaway 2005).

1.2.4 Types of Fantasy Sports

If a fantasy golf game seems remarkable, consider that hobbyists can also play fantasy auto racing, bass fishing, soccer, cricket, horseracing, rodeo, hot-rodding, and

more (*Multimedia Publisher* 2002; Ballard 2004; Iole 2004; Thé 2004). Web journalist Ron Cariker (interview by author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said his NewsOK.com site includes fantasy-style games for amateur sports, such as National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football and basketball, as well as local high school football.

However, National Football League (NFL) football is king, with 93% of fantasy players participating on the virtual gridiron. More than 60% play fantasy baseball, while other sports account for 30% of the market or less (Ballard 2004; Tedeschi 2003). Understandably, the NFL has fueled the fire, launching a promotional campaign before the 2003 season. In one commercial, New York Giants superstar Michael Strahan addressed fantasy sports owners in a post-game press conference, as though it were an actual NFL game (Wendel 2004).

1.2.5 Who Plays Fantasy Sports?

The appeal of fantasy sports spread quickly as mass media began to notice it. The first widely publicized articles were written by Rotisserie founder Daniel Okrent himself, but journalists at *Harvard Magazine* and *People*, which in 1981 called fantasy sports “the hottest craze to hit the national pastime since trading cards,” lent more wide-spread credence (Tygiel 2000).

The Rotisserie Leaguers published a “how-to” guidebook in 1984, and the craze was born. Celebrities, including politicians, musicians, and actors began drafting fantasy teams (Tygiel 2000; Wendel 2004). During a trip to China, television newsman Bryant Gumbel made frequent calls home to check on his fantasy baseball league (Tygiel 2000). Professional athletes play, too; former Major League outfielder Dwight Evans once traded the fantasy version of himself for a late-season boost in pitching (Ballard 2004).

1.2.6 The Life of a Fantasy Sports Player

Fanball.com, a Web site creating software for fantasy league participants, conducted a 1999 study on fantasy sports demographic. Evidently, 15% of U.S. adults (those over age 18) engage in fantasy sports. The vast majority (93%) of fantasy players are men (Ballard 2004). The average gamer has played for six years and spends six to 15 hours per week monitoring his or her 2.4 teams (Flood 2004). Eighty-five percent frequently visit sports-related Internet sites and have readily available Web access (Felps 2000). Those who play fantasy sports online are younger and more educated than other Internet users and are nearly 50% more likely to have a household income of greater than \$100,000 (Tedeschi 2003). Not surprisingly, they also watch more sports. A typical NFL fan watches 6.6 hours of games and analysis each week; by comparison, a fantasy football player watches 8.4 (Deford 2002). Some gamers say they would not follow real sports so closely if not for their fantasy teams (Wendel 2004).

Fantasy sports enthusiasts typically watch more televised sporting events in order to monitor how their teams are doing in real time and typically care more about the performance of an individual player than about whether their favorite team wins or loses (Deford 2002; Wendel 2004). Besides real-time statistics, fantasy gamers search for player news including injuries and transactions, weather reports, and probable starters (*USA Today* 2004). Reasons for participating in fantasy sports include bragging rights, cash payoffs, or even Super Bowl-style championship rings (Kilen 2004; Jostens 2004). Winners of an NFL league, sponsored by electronics retailer Best Buy, took home \$20,000 worth of store merchandise (Tedeschi 2003). Despite these tangible rewards, however, most say they play for nothing more than bragging rights and camaraderie

(Kilen 2004). No matter why one chooses to play, the mass media are determined to keep them tuned in and employ a variety of ways to do so.

1.3 Mass Media and Fantasy Sports

Unlike stories traditionally found in the sports section, Ladd Biro's column in *The Dallas Morning News* offers little in the way of news, personality profiles, or game coverage (Biro 2004). Charles Polansky's work at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* is similar (Polansky 2003). Instead, their columns speculate on which players might be fantasy studs or duds, whom they should trade away or trade for, whom they should start or bench, or how to win a fantasy league (Biro 2004; Polansky 2003). Both the *Star-Telegram* and *The Morning News* have also run news stories related to fantasy sports, as have many major newspapers including *USA Today* and *The New York Times* (Cummings 1998; Felps 2000; Hiestand 2002; Tedeschi 2003). Recently, the *Des Moines Register* spent an entire fall following the fantasy football season of a 34-year-old local named James Kelsh (Kilen 2004).

Among cable media, ESPN has added fantasy elements to its highly rated "SportsCenter" and "NFL Live" shows, as well as other mainstream programs, because they cannot ignore the fantasy fan (Choi 2002; Ulmstead 2003). EchoStar, which provides the Dish Network satellite system, began an interactive fantasy-style game available through a Dish channel (EDNet.com 2003). Cable channels Spike TV, The Football Network, and The NFL Network have all launched half-hour shows dedicated entirely to fantasy football, with varying degrees of success (Ulmstead 2003).

Traditional news-first organizations are also using their Web sites to push fantasy content. CNN runs daily fantasy fodder through its Web site (sportsillustrated.com,

2005). America Online, Yahoo!, and CBS have boosted fantasy content on their Web sites in recent years (Ballard 2004). Fantasy sports has become so widely accepted in the mainstream press that the Newspaper Association of America called SportsLine.com's strategy to make its fantasy games free to users "one of the year's top achievements" in the media in 2002 (Runett 2002, p. 1).

Fantasy sports permeates the popular media, with articles focusing on everything from the popularity and economics of the game, to its impact on sports fans, to the technological interface behind the Web sites (e.g., Cummings 1998; Felps 2000; Ballard 2004; Wendel 2004). As a result of this growing interest in fantasy-sports content across all forms of mass media, scholars have begun to examine this topic.

1.4 Fantasy Sports in Academic Studies

Although widespread throughout popular culture, fantasy sports has appeared in academic research only sparingly over the last decade. Despite the large population of hobbyists and the amount of money they spend, researchers have yet to study the evolution of fantasy sports in the mass media. What has been studied ranges across disciplines, from economics to rhetoric to kinesiology.

In one of the earliest studies of fantasy sports, Hiltner and Walker (1996) analyzed the qualitative content of messages posted on the electronic bulletin board of a Web-based fantasy provider during a period when the games were inaccessible (n = 846). Unable to monitor their fantasy teams for nineteen hours because of technological issues, hobbyists posted message after message to vent or rant against the provider. Hiltner and Walker argued that these hobbyists consciously and willingly formed a virtual

community during the technological breakdown that faded once access to their teams was restored.

While Hiltner and Walker suggested that fantasy players show addict-like withdrawal symptoms, Shipman (2001) stated that fantasy players are at least halfway grounded in reality. According to Shipman, fantasy sports hobbyists are unique from participants in other role-playing games because they have one foot in the real world (i.e., to follow games, sports news, etc.) and another in a virtual world (i.e., to update their fantasy teams accordingly). Thus, Shipman believes that player control and external control share equal weight in “opportunities for more engaging and immersive forms of entertainment” (p. 9). After analyzing the content of advertising language on the most popular fantasy Web sites, Shipman posited that hobbyists are attracted to a feeling of power, social and financial rewards, and entertainment.

Rowell (2003) takes a much different approach. He relied on the Game Theory of Economics to examine popular fantasy baseball drafting strategies. Rowell found advantages and disadvantages to each method, descriptions of which he retrieved from popular Web sites such as drafthelp.com and addictfantasysports.com, and developed a new theory-based draft strategy “to better maximize the potential profits from the auction” (p. 6).

In a similar vein, Wirakartakusmah (2003) adopted an economic approach in looking at fantasy sports, although in a more experimental and less theoretical way. Wirakartakusmah divided 150 Web sites that offered sports-related content into two groups—those that offer fantasy sports and those that did not. Those sites that offer fantasy sports saw a direct relationship between the amount of money they spend to

maintain their sites and their total profits, while no such relationship existed for non-fantasy sports sites. Wirakartakusmah hypothesized, therefore, that fantasy sports is a moneymaking venture for Web sites that already offer some sports-related content.

This study is particularly relevant considering Todd et al.'s (2003) research, in which a population of fantasy hobbyists consumed media in excess. These researchers found a direct correlation between fantasy sports participation and the amount of media consumed per hour. Specifically, gamers spent more time watching television sports shows, reading the sports section and sports magazines, listening to sports radio, and surfing among sports-related Internet sites than sports fans who did not participate in a fantasy league. Such information is useful to programming directors. As Choi (2002) noted in a content analysis of ESPN broadcasts, the network already accommodates fantasy hobbyists by including fantasy-relevant information in its crawlers and as material for its popular hour-long sports-news program, *SportsCenter*.

While fantasy sports-related habits may be measurable, hobbyists' motives for joining fantasy leagues are not. Cooper (2004) developed the Fantasy Sports Participant Motivation Scale and applied it to a population of fantasy sports players of varying ages. Ultimately he deemed it impossible to generalize why fantasy players choose to participate in the hobby. No matter why fantasy users play, Flood (2004) fears that their participation in fantasy sports comes at the exclusion of other forms of entertainment. Flood found that fantasy participants averaged fifteen hours per week updating their teams and watching real-life games in order to follow their players in real time. In doing so, these hobbyists spent less time in the gym and on the ball field, and, thus, according to Flood, virtual activity has superseded physical activity.

A noticeable gap is evident in the literature: Most studies, though different in writing and approach, take a user-centered approach. With Wirakartakushmah (2003) as the lone exception, a void of industry-centered research exists. No previous study explores how fantasy sports evolved across mass media, rather each addresses fantasy sports without examining its development or putting fantasy sports in the context of mass media studies. The present study is unique in that regard.

1.5 Popular Culture as Mass Media Content

The vast majority of scholarship related to mass media and culture examines the effects of mass media in a cultural context. For example, several studies explore advertising's effect on female body image (Tuchman 1978; Ferguson 1983; Myers & Biocca 1992; Fallon, Katzman, & Wooley 1994; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen 2002) or whether violent programming fosters violence in children (Maccoby 1963; Markowitz, Grossman, & Page 1998; Strasburger & Donnerstein 2000; Villani 2001; Strasburger & Wilson 2002). Contrary to these lines of research, the present study examines how mass media *incorporate* existing culture fads, trends, and phenomena into their content.

Rouse's (1978) historical study detailed how radio shows of the 1920s-30s catered specifically to homemakers and housewives. Rouse stated that the programming director's primary objectives vis-à-vis the housewives were to "entertain, teach, help raise children, offer conversation, and [discuss] cooking and shopping" (p. 316). Turow (1982) found that two publishers of children's books often rely on the stereotypical ideas of children, rather than on research specific to actual children, when deciding upon content. On the other hand, Blair (1993) stated that the mass media industry became all too aware of the hip-hop culture and its value in reaching younger consumers. The result

of incorporating this culture into content has paid huge dividends for corporations through direct marketing, narrowcasting music channels and niche-market magazines, and Web sites loaded with hip-hop references and hip-hop-related content.

McComas, Shanahan, and Butler (2001) found that television programmers typically ignore environmental issues as part of their shows' content because society as a whole cares little about such content. In fact, the number of references to a clean environment and other environmental values has decreased since the first Earth Day in 1971 (McComas, Shanahan, & Butler 2001). Programmers do, however, include content about which the public cares. Waldfogel (2001) used the Scarborough Prime Next dataset, U.S. Census statistics, and survey measures to examine how viewers' race affects their satisfaction with broadcast television, as measured by the tendency to watch a particular network. He found that a population's typical viewing habits and dominant race are directly related, and that networks broadcast programs specifically with race in mind. Similarly, LaFollette (2002) found that television programming directors in the 1940s and 1950s used science and space to attract viewers, corresponding with the cultural fascination with a fledgling space program.

Misinformation about a medium's target audience, however, can lead network programmers astray. Ha and Chan-Olmstead (2002) concluded that Enhanced TV, the technological blend of network television and the Internet, failed because programming directors did not take into account cultural e-commerce habits. Enhanced TV asked users to purchase merchandise featured on the networks' Web sites, but consumers either were not interested in purchasing products via e-commerce that they could purchase offline, or they were disinterested in the products the networks were selling. Ha and Chan-

Olmstead suggested the networks revisit Enhanced TV with more regard to consumer interest.

As illustrated from the beginning of this study, mass media decision-makers must keep culture in mind in order to be successful. One method through which they do that is incorporating popular culture into their content. In sports journalism, fantasy sports has become an increasingly popular way to do that because it appeals to a broad, passionate audience who is willing to spend money on fantasy sports-related material.

1.6 Research Question

As it becomes more prevalent in both popular culture and mass media, fantasy sports is becoming a topic of academic scholarship, including studies of mass media and communication. Despite the few studies that have examined fantasy sports, researchers have yet to explore how fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media. Other studies have explored the advantages and disadvantages of media decision-makers' cultural awareness when deciding on programming content. The present study explores the intersection of these two areas; that is, how the cultural phenomenon of fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media.

Based upon the previous review of literature, the following research question guides the present study:

RQ: How has fantasy sports evolved in the mass media?

In order to answer this question, Chapter 2 describes the methodology used in this study, examining the differences between qualitative and quantitative instruments, and

introduces the subjects who are used as experts. The results of the study, based upon interviews with the industry experts and using a constant comparison technique, are presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 interprets these results in light of Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Qualitative Versus Quantitative Methods

The present study relies on in-depth, qualitative interviews with mass media professionals in order to further understand the evolution of fantasy sports in the mass media. Interview subjects came from print, broadcast (both radio and television), cable, and Internet media.

2.1.1 The Benefit of Qualitative-Style Research

McCracken (1988) states that “qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much more intensive than extensive in its objectives” (p. 17). This is evident in the present study. Interviews with industry experts provide a broad overview of fantasy sports’ evolution in the mass media and, rather than explaining the trend superficially, offer a deeper look from inside the industry by providing specific and personal examples. The major differences between quantitative and qualitative research are the role of the researcher, the design and setting of the study, measurement instruments, and goals of the research (Wimmer & Dominick 2003). In the present study, qualitative research is preferable to quantitative research in order to develop depth of insight related to the evolution of fantasy sports in mass media. While statistics reveal how fantasy sports content affect subscriptions, ratings, or Web hits, they are less useful for examining how fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media. It would be difficult to develop a survey to yield the desired information because of the lack of foundational

knowledge to ground it since no previous studies examining the evolution of fantasy sports in mass media exist. In-depth interviews illuminate the process, as well as provide a basis for later survey research. A content analysis might reveal differences in mass media sports content in the present era compared with five years ago but could not answer why such differences exist.

2.1.2 Description of Various Qualitative Methods

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), qualitative research in communication mirrors research styles in other social sciences. It is based upon the assumption that humans interact in patterned ways, and discovery and verification are equally valued. Various types of qualitative research prove useful in various studies. Ethnographies allow researchers to live among and associate most personally with their research subjects. The researcher becomes, quite literally, an insider. Observational research means the researcher records data based upon observing his or her subjects. Case studies give the researcher several data sources to examine real-world events, individuals, or groups/organizations (Wimmer & Dominick 2003).

In the present study, in-depth interviews were the preferred method because they yield an understanding of a person's experiences and perspectives, help verify and validate information gleaned from other references, allow actors to relate accounts in their own words, and gather information that cannot be observed effectively (Lindlof & Taylor 2002). Specifically, the interview subjects (a) related, in their own words, personal experiences using or observing fantasy sports in the mass media; (b) corroborated popular media reports such as Cummings (1998), Felps (2000), Hiestand (2002), and Tedeschi (2003); (c) and established fantasy sports as an important topic of

study within mass media research. The next section describes the participants interviewed for the study and describes their various areas of expertise relating to fantasy sports..

2.2 Participants

2.2.1 *Internet*

To examine fantasy sports on the Internet, David Young and Ron Cariker were interviewed. Young's professional life has included stops in chemical engineering, law, and for the last eighteen months Internet journalism. Young writes a freelance fantasy baseball column for *Sports Illustrated's* Web site (www.sportsillustrated.cnn.com) and is an editor for the popular fantasy Web site www.TalentedMrRoto.com, which covers fantasy games in all sports. Young (interview by author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) stated that he and his editor select his column content before the baseball season begins, and then he amend his list as necessary during the season.

Ron Cariker is managing editor of www.NewsOK.com, an Oklahoma City-based news Web site that combines original content with content lifted from the local newspaper and television station. Cariker (interview by author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) describes his responsibility as overseeing all projects and all aspects of the Web site. Cariker has six years' experience in journalism, including three in his current position. NewsOK.com receives about twenty million hits per month, according to Cariker. Someone else selects the site's content, but Cariker is responsible for the site's inclusion of fantasy-style sports games.

Brendan Roberts offers expertise on both Web and print media. Roberts, a senior editor for *The Sporting News*, has fourteen years' experience in mass media, including the last four in his current position. He has spent nine years with *The Sporting News*,

including six years covering fantasy sports. Much of Roberts' work now appears on the magazine's Web site (www.sportingnews.com), but he wrote for the magazine before switching into his current role, which enables him to comment on both media. Roberts (interview by author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) stated that fantasy content on the Web is decided upon by striking a balance of writers' abilities and e-mailers' demand. Roberts also serves on the Board of Directors for the trade group Fantasy Sports Writers of America.

2.2.2 Print

Further data on print media were collected from fantasy sports columnists Ladd Biro and Charles Polansky. Ladd Biro is a syndicated columnist whose freelance work has appeared in major newspapers such as *The Dallas Morning News*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* over the last three years. He has also contributed to *The Sporting News*. Biro writes exclusively on fantasy football, as opposed to other fantasy games, because he considers himself to be an expert only on that topic (interview by author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). Unlike many of the other subjects, Biro is not a journalist by trade. He runs his own marketing agency fulltime but has played fantasy football for seven years. He approached *Morning News* editors about using him to ramp up their fantasy coverage. His reputation has spread to the other newspapers, and he hopes more papers will pick up his weekly column as well. For his columns, Biro agrees upon an approach for content. In Dallas, he is restricted to what players might make good free agent claims or trade bait. For example, the following is an excerpt from a column Biro wrote about Ben Roethlisberger, the Pittsburgh Steelers' promising rookie quarterback, in *The Morning News* last fall:

Who wouldn't want him leading their team? I wouldn't. And neither should you. That is, unless you happen to run a real NFL team. But last time I checked, there were only 32 of them, and only a handful are regular readers of my column. (Would you believe, just a few? Er, none?)

When you're talking fantasy football, Big Ben is the poster child for mediocrity. Lucky to crack the top 20 fantasy list of fantasy passers, Roethlisberger has had just one game with more than 200 passing yards. For Pete's sake, in Sunday's win over Washington, he had his third consecutive outing with less than 150 yards in the air! (Biro 2004, p.1).

In Cleveland, Biro is asked to recommend starters and sitters for readers' fantasy football teams.

Polansky, who has 10 years' experience in journalism, including the last eight at the *Star-Telegram*, spent a year and a half writing a fantasy sports column. Polansky (interview by author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said he had almost complete control over the content in his fantasy column and was ahead of the curve with regard to fantasy sports as print media content because "I was able to convince the powers-that-be to write more generally on sports, like most fantasy sites do these days." The following is a sample from one of Polansky's fantasy columns:

There's nothing more enjoyable in fantasy sports than sitting back at the end of the season to see you've really put one over on your fellow league members, especially if you haven't taken home the championship.

It's no fun to be seen by the rest of your league as a "cheater." It's no fun to win your league by making a series of lopsided deals with the weak sister of your bunch. Scratch that. It's fun no matter how you get there (Polansky 2003, p. 1).

2.2.3 Broadcasting

Jeff Catlin has been program director for KTCK-AM, the premier all-sports talk radio station in the Dallas market, since March 2003. He has thirteen years in radio, including a dozen for his current station's parent company, Susquehanna. Catlin is responsible for all programming content and approval of paid commercials. While the on-air personalities decide upon content for their own shows, Catlin establishes guidelines to steer them. Catlin (interview by author, 20 April 2005, Arlington, Texas) meets with the show hosts for critiques, coaching, and a reminder of station goals and objectives, e.g., whether or not fantasy sports is acceptable on-air content.

Joe Trahan and Mike Hill served as experts on the television side. Trahan, a sixteen-year veteran of television broadcasting, has been a sports anchor/sports reporter at WFAA-TV in Dallas since 2003. He anchors the nightly sportscast at least twice per week, and his station reaches two million households with every broadcast. That makes WFAA the market's top-ranked station at 5 and 6 p.m. and second at 10 p.m. When selecting content for the broadcast, WFAA's sports anchors work in tandem with the executive producer and assistant sports director to decide what they want and what they can get, all based upon station initiatives.

Mike Hill has been a sports anchor at the cable network ESPN News for almost a year, but he has ten years' experience overall in several markets. Hill anchors as often as five times per week and reaches seventy million households. Hill (interview by author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas) stated that each broadcast's co-anchors decide upon content and story order in conjunction with a team of producers about six hours before each broadcast.

2.2.4 Additional Sources

Two additional sources provided a broader look at mass media in general. For twelve years, Barry Horn has covered the national media at *The Dallas Morning News*, the seventh largest paper in the nation and one of the oldest continually printed publications in the Southwest. Fodder for Horn's media column, which appears weekly, comes from all types of mass media in markets other than Dallas. Horn (interview by author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas) stated that *Morning News* editors prefer he not write about the local market because the paper's parent company, the Dallas-based Belo Corporation, also owns the market's dominant television station.

David Sessions, a veteran sports reporter at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, is Horn's cross-town counterpart. He began writing his weekly "Media Insider" column in August 2004 and covers topics similar to Horn. With a circulation of 350,000, the *Star-Telegram* boasts a top-twenty nationally rated sports section (Associated Press Sports Editors 2004). Sessions personally decides the content of his column.

2.3 Interview Procedure

Although the term "interview" brings to mind the notion of questions and answers, many noted qualitative researchers stress the importance of listening as the most important part of the interview process. McCracken (1988) suggests the interviewer should serve as a benign-but-active listener. And, in accordance with Lindlof and Taylor (2002), he or she should act tactically and tactfully. Seidman (1998) stresses the importance of the interviewer's listening more while talking less, and Hunt and Eadie (1987) advise the interviewer to listen, focus, and probe in order to best understand the respondent's message. This advice proved useful as the researcher allowed the

respondents to answer in full before offering follow-ups and omitted questions that respondents answered as part of other answers, which made each interview unique. The researcher also allowed the respondents to deviate from the topic, but brought them back when necessary.

The organization of all interviews in the present study followed the format of a semi-standardized interview, as defined in Berg (2004): The interviews are more or less structured, questions may be reordered during the interview, wordings of questions are flexible, the level of language may be adjusted, and the interviewer may answer questions and make clarifications as needed. Generally, the same list of questions was used in each interview, although the order varied occasionally. When interviewing David Young, for example, many questions were asked out of planned order because Young's responses made a new order more logical. On several occasions, the same question was asked using different wording in order to get specific responses from respondents. For example, questions might have been reworded to best suit a subject's relevant medium or situation, such as asking about hit counts instead of circulation, or broadcasting instead of narrowcasting.

Most local subjects were interviewed face-to-face; out-of-town subjects were interviewed over the telephone. All subjects were interviewed independently of one another in order to avoid "group speak," i.e., members of the group tending to answer questions in the same manner (Lindlof & Taylor 2002), or to avoid monopolization of the interview, which Wimmer and Dominick (2003) describe as someone appointing himself or herself group spokesman. All interviews were recorded on audio tape or digital recorder and transcribed for ready access.

Interviews ranged from thirty to sixty minutes in length, averaging about forty-five minutes each. Following the completion of each interview, materials from the transcriptions were grouped by similarities as patterns emerged. Material for the interview questions was based on, and complemented by, the researchers' personal observations, and secondary material from academic and popular sources. Texts concerning the history of fantasy sports, the growth of statistics in sports, the changing of the manner in which Americans watch sports, and user and industry demographics provided context (Tygiel 2000; Patel 2002; Isidore 2003; Schwarz 2004; Tedeschi 2004; Wendel 2004). The variety and depth of interviews allowed the researcher to achieve saturation, defined by Baxter and Babbie (2004) as the point where additional interviews yield no new information. That is to say, information gleaned from the later interviews began to duplicate those conducted earlier. For example, several respondents interviewed at different times shared similar narratives, such as monitoring their fantasy teams in real time online (Barry Horn, interview by author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas; Joe Trahan, interview by author, 3 June 2005, Dallas). Common words and phrases even appeared in several transcripts, such as referring to how sports journalism has become "eye candy," or content that is heavy of graphics but low on quality (David Sessions, interview by author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; Charles Polansky, interview by author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas), or referring to fantasy players as being "geeks" or "geeky" (Barry Horn, interview by author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas; David Young, interview by author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; Mike Hill, interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

3.1 Themes of Fantasy Sports Content in Mass Media

The present study uses in-depth interviews to explore the evolution of fantasy sports in the mass media. In order to arrange the subjects' responses and understand how fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media, interview transcripts were coded into seven categories. These categories were selected because they emerged naturally based on repeated mentions by the respondents, and they provide a logical and coherent framework to answer the research question. The categories that emerged were (a) awareness, (b) interest, (c) testing the market, (d) adoption, (e) use, (f) benefits, (g) and projected future application.

3.1.1 Awareness

Awareness indicates that the respondents had knowledge of fantasy sports. Perhaps they played fantasy sports in their spare time, or knew someone who did. Awareness emerged in statements such as someone relating a personal experience as a fantasy player, an anecdote about draft day, or a reference to one first learning of fantasy sports. In analyzing the interviews, it was apparent that the concept of awareness manifested itself differently among the respondents. Each participant was aware of fantasy sports, regardless of whether he wanted to, or was allowed to, use it in his content. David Sessions (interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) estimates that fantasy sports integrated into the mainstream media around 1998 or 1999, which

coincides with large mass media companies such as ESPN introducing their own Web-based fantasy games. However, most respondents said they became aware of fantasy sports (i.e., they played or someone they knew played) before 1998, in some cases *long* before 1998. Their awareness came at different times and in different ways.

Mike Hill (interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas) recalled his first exposure to fantasy sports:

I show up for draft day, and there were guys who were taking it so seriously—they had three or four magazines, charts, papers, research. I felt way unprepared. I felt like a fish out of water. In fact, let me tell you how unprepared I was. I drafted [baseball player] Edgar Renteria back before he was a good hitter, when he was still with the Marlins, because he played good defense! Of course, defense doesn't matter at all in fantasy sports, but I didn't know anything about fantasy leagues. When I said his name, that I wanted Edgar Renteria, I heard people snickering, like 'what is this guy doing?' I had no clue.

The earliest reference in the interviews to anyone being aware of fantasy sports was David Young of TalentedMrRoto.com. He remembers his co-workers playing Rotisserie baseball as early as the 1980s. According to Young:

I first heard of fantasy sports in 1984, when I worked for Chevron and some of the engineers were playing fantasy sports. They cut out the box scores and made a spreadsheet and all that, but I didn't get involved because that was too complicated (interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Though his awareness of fantasy sports dates back more than twenty years, Young began writing about the topic scarcely eighteen months ago. Brendan Roberts of

The Sporting News has a similar story. As a cub reporter in 1991, he joined co-workers in a baseball points league. Despite a fourteen-year career in journalism, Roberts has written about fantasy sports for less than six years (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Charles Polansky and David Sessions, both of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, joined fantasy football leagues while in college, years before they had written their first stories as professionals (Charles Polansky, interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Ron Cariker (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) of NewsOK.com said his personal awareness in fantasy football also began in college and is the main reason his Web site offers fantasy games now. This suggests that fantasy sports was not initially reliant upon the mass media to become popular, and the mass media were slow to accept fantasy sports as mainstream. As Barry Horn (interview with author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas) notes, fantasy players were “a huge market that was untapped for awhile.”

As has been illustrated, it is one thing to possess an awareness of fantasy sports, but it is quite another for fantasy sports to become mass media content. There has to be an interest on the part of the managers making the decisions.

3.1.2 Interest

Interest entails a respondent’s wanting to use fantasy sports as in content he produced or his manager’s interest in reaching the fantasy audience, meaning there may be a gap between awareness and interest. Just because media professionals play fantasy sports does not mean they view it as viable media content. Joe Trahan, the Dallas-based

television sports anchor, said everyone in his station's sports department plays or has played fantasy sports:

Just about everybody in here, in this department, has played in a fantasy league in the last two or three years. ... We've all played it, and it's from everyone involved on all sides. Producers, the guys who are making the decisions, they're all playing. It's just one happy family when it comes to fantasy. Everybody loves it. Everybody who's in the business, everybody who's covering the business, can relate (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas).

Respondents generally mentioned interest only after they discussed awareness and suggested that interest is dependent upon intention. For example, *The Sporting News* did not conceive of itself as a destination for fantasy enthusiasts until 2002 when it began offering regular fantasy-related content, although it was the magazine's box scores that Daniel Okrent and his colleagues used to track their statistics and standings (Tygiel 2000). *The Sporting News* became interested in fantasy after its two principal Internet rivals, ESPN.com and the CBS-owned SportsLine.com, pioneered fantasy coverage in the late 1990s (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

On the whole, mass media managers were slow to become interested in fantasy sports as a vehicle for attracting new audiences because they felt fantasy sports catered to a select few. It is clear in the interviews that mass media decision-makers perceived the fantasy-playing crowd as being segmented or undesirable. Repeatedly, respondents used derogatory terms to describe the perception of fantasy players. Consider the following examples that illustrate why mass media decision-makers had little interest in fantasy

sports. The *Morning News*' Barry Horn (interview with author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas) said: "They were geeky until they realized everyone was into it—probably even the people who are making the broadcast decisions." Mike Hill of ESPN News uses similar words to describe management's initial views of the fantasy crowd: "When it first began, we thought that all the fantasy leagues were just a lot of geeks that got together and had never played sports in real life" (interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). Though the mass media's interest in fantasy sports has shifted, *The Sporting News*' fantasy editor Brendan Roberts (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said its attitude toward the fantasy constituency has not: "There's still a perception that fantasy sports players are all young college kids with lots of time on their hands. That's not true. Most fantasy owners are in their mid-30s with jobs, wives, kids, etc." That mirrors a larger social trend:

There's a lot of people who play these sports, but it's not 100% mainstream. ... I liken it to *Star Wars* fans when those movies come out. Between the times the movies are out, you don't want to look like a geek by talking about it all the time. But when the movies come out, you can get out the Darth Vader costume and go stand in line. In the last few years, it's become more accepted. You go to parties now, and people start talking about their fantasy teams (David Young, interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

A company may not adopt fantasy sports if it perceives no benefit in doing so. Because FOX and CBS compete against each other during Sunday afternoon NFL games, each has shown interest in fantasy-related segments, crawlers, and graphics to keep viewers tuned in. Meanwhile ABC, which offers its *Monday Night Football* to a captive

audience, ignores fantasy sports almost completely (Barry Horn, interview with author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Barry Horn (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said those that do employ fantasy sports do so as part of their never-ending quest to find an audience.

These networks will do anything to keep people glued to their TV set to watch their network. ... Basically, they're constantly looking for hooks to create viewers and keep them. The networks are fighting for every viewer and every tenth of a rating point. If they can prove there's a market out there, there's no question that they'll pander to it.

If a network, newspaper, or Web site becomes interested in employing fantasy-related content, it is apt to measure the success and continued demand for that content based upon market test.

3.1.3 Testing the Market

Testing the market describes how the mass media evaluate their target audience's interest in fantasy-related content. If their audience shows interest, they are likely to use fantasy; if not, they are likely to ignore it. Different media do this in different ways. *The Sporting News* regularly conducts audience surveys through its magazine and Web site in order to evaluate the popularity of all its content. The mantra of *The Sporting News* management is attracting younger readers, and the typical fantasy sports player is younger than 40 (FSTA 2003). *The Sporting News* also tailors its fantasy content strictly to players in the most-popular league format, based upon its survey information.

There are so many variations of fantasy that we get more and more specialized/bizarre leagues everyday. [But] we

still target the standard fantasy owner. For instance, we rarely target the deep-league points owner* because we realized the most common reader is the standard fantasy owner (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

While many media companies sponsor fantasy leagues as profit boosters or ask users to pay for fantasy content, as discussed in Chapter 1, NewsOK.com managing editor Ron Cariker (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) found that most visitors to the site were interested in playing for recreational purposes, not cash or prizes. Therefore, access to fantasy games on its site is free. That strategy has proved effective.

We're always looking for stuff to enhance and add to our site. About four years ago, I talked to someone about fantasy games, but it was cost prohibitive. We didn't have people asking that 'we want the games,' but once we added it, we saw there was clamoring for it. Our first year was men's NCAA basketball, and people wanted the women's game.

Audience feedback also helps media determine when *not* to use fantasy. WFAA-TV in Dallas is hesitant to employ fantasy sports, for example, because it determined fantasy players were not likely to seek content from them.

I'm savvy enough to know that they can get their stats in a heartbeat. So I feel like they're taken care of. And if they're not they know how to be. What they like is the

* A points league is a fantasy format where owners compete for points, rather than play against each other in head-to-head games, as in the standard fantasy league. In a points league, owners are awarded points for their league ranking in each of several statistical categories. For example, if Team A leads the league in home runs, Team A's owner would receive ten or twelve points. If Team B is in the middle of the pack in stolen bases, Team B's owner would receive five or six points, and so on. The league champion is the team with the most points across all statistical categories at the end of the season.

analytic stuff that the ESPNs can give them, and the CNNs. They like that analysis. ... But it's tough on a local level to specifically target that person (Joe Trahan, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas).

The Dallas radio station KTCK-AM found a similar environment, based on its audience surveys.

We used to have a fantasy football show on Sunday nights. The people that listened wanted to know how their guy is, and nobody else cares about that dude's team. In fantasy, it stops being about the broadcasting of that general thing, and it got our focus off. It's taking away for macro team issues because it's a beehive of individual people that are not related. ... They don't need us to get fantasy information. They'll get it from their own sources (Jeff Catlin, interview with author, 20 April 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Once media managers test their audience, they may choose to adopt fantasy sports as regular content.

3.1.4 Adoption of Fantasy Sports Content

Mass media who adopt fantasy sports as content do so to keep their edge in the marketplace, based upon their tests. For example, David Young (interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said he believes other sites are now immolating his all-encompassing TalentedMrRoto.com, which launched in March 2004, in order to keep pace in the market. The cable network ESPN News will employ any cultural trend in its information segments to keep viewers away from competitors. "All of a sudden if more women were watching sports, we'd start to show more WNBA. Right now, fantasy is

huge” and thus has become an audience retention tool (Mike Hill, interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

This illustrates a larger trend: A media company is more likely to adopt fantasy sports if its competitors do so as well. Media focused on the fantasy crowd only when they began to see it as sufficiently large enough to generate advertising revenue. That is, revenue they wanted to go to their company and away from their competitors. For example, editors at *The Sporting News* turned to fantasy sports after they realized so many of their readers were involved (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). FOX Sports is now not only conscious of the fantasy crowd but attempts to reach them specifically (David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Joe Trahan (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas) said mass media decision-makers now understand the fantasy sports population, and therefore fantasy sports has “a core foothold” in mass media content.

That core foothold is growing so that fantasy sports is more entrenched in the mass media than ever before. During NFL games on Sunday afternoons, the NFL’s Web site offers real-time statistics that allow fantasy fans to keep track of their players with each pass, rush, and kick (Mike Hill, interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). Brendan Roberts (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) figures his job at *The Sporting News* would not have even existed if the mass media were not adopting fantasy sports: “I literally write about fantasy sports, primarily baseball, which was unheard of years ago. And my columns are read online, rarely in the magazine, and people are willing to pay money for our content.”

Ladd Biro (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas) said mass media's capitalizing on society's fascination with fantasy sports was inevitable.

One of the main reasons that fantasy football has become so important is that players are moving from one team to another. ... [And] people are moving more in this generation than they used to. So they have a fantasy team to root for. It makes every game out there matter. If Atlanta's playing New Orleans, I wouldn't normally care about that, but I'll watch it. Not because I care who wins, but I'm wondering how my players are going to do.

In 1998, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* debuted a fantasy football column offering tips to readers, including such content as a "hot/not pick" and a profile of the writer's team (Charles Polansky, interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). *The Dallas Morning News* followed suit in 2001.

I don't think they [*The Morning News* managers] made any outgoing push to say that we have to have a fantasy column now. I think it was a maintenance thing. I think they said 'we need to give our readers what they're looking for.' They could see the landscape shifting, and they needed to keep up with it (Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

If the mass media had adopted fantasy previously, it was understated. As a fantasy baseballer in mid-1990s, David Young (interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) remembers looking for help from *Sports Illustrated's* Web site. He did not find much. "It was less conspicuous and less frequent [than now]. Right now they're running a column a day, whereas before...it was maybe two or three pieces of information per week." In some cases, the fantasy game has supplanted the actual game.

Stats used to supplement coverage, to explain things. You would see that a guy had rushed for 100 yards in five consecutive games and think, ‘he’s having a good year,’ or ‘that’s a great offensive line,’ or whatever. Now you see the same stat and think, ‘I should put him on my fantasy team’ (David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Just as media consumers think differently, the mass media must adapt to a new way of thinking as the nature of content shifts. On the whole, mass media are becoming more instantaneous, more interactive, and more reliant on charts, graphics, and other forms of quick-hitting, easy-to-digest information. In other words, “eye candy” is as important as journalistic content (David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; Charles Polansky, interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). For example, David Sessions notes the new world of sports journalism:

It’s almost like they feel like people wouldn’t watch sports if they didn’t jazz it up. ... In some ways, coverage has improved because there’s so much information that broadcasters have access to and can pass on. It’s always interesting to see a graphic that STATS, Inc. dug up quickly about the number of blue-eyed third basemen to hit for the cycle on Tuesdays. That’s relatively new. The Olympics was the perfect example of using new technology to enhance viewing—think of the superimposed flags and names in each lane of the swimming pool. But I also think much of sports programming has changed into this sort of dumbed-down, celebrity-based entertainment instead of responsible journalism (interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Audiences crave information in real time, making Web-based journalism more valuable than ever (Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

Information is accessible at the click of a mouse, which means media consumers have access to the same information as media providers. Because many may experience information overload, consumers often search for entertainment in the mass media (Jeff Catlin, interview with author, 20 April 2005, Arlington, Texas). This is the ideal environment for fantasy enthusiasts, and makes the media's adoption of fantasy sports logical. Once the media adopt fantasy sports, they must then decide how best to use it in their content.

3.1.5 Use of Fantasy Sports Content

For those companies that adopted fantasy sports as content, respondents described various ways they use it. While fantasy sports-related content may be obviously labeled as such, such as by following a "fantasy sports" link on a Web site or reading a magazine page labeled "fantasy sports," respondents revealed that it is often more subtle. For example, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* highlights nightly heroes in each box score package, and *The Dallas Morning News* prints statistics, standings, and box scores in every issue (Charles Polansky, interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). The media may do preseason specials in each major sport, where their experts prognosticate on who will have breakout years, win postseason awards, or fight for starting spots. Sports media also focus increasingly on statistics-oriented reporting, weather broadcasts, and injury news. While these may appeal to sports fans in general they also help prepare for a fantasy draft or starting lineup (Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas; David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

The respondents viewed fantasy-related content as unique; therefore, a good sports writer does not necessarily make a good fantasy sports writer. Ladd Biro, a syndicated columnist, said his career began because he was not satisfied with the newspaper coverage of fantasy sports.

This all started basically when I sent an e-mail to the sports editor at *The Dallas Morning News* a few years ago and said, basically, ‘your fantasy coverage really stinks.’ Lots of people really care about this stuff, and that’s how they watch football now. ... They had an internal guy writing a small column in the year before I started. It wasn’t very good. He’s a good writer, but fantasy’s not his thing (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

Because it requires a certain type of journalist, it follows that larger media companies with greater assets are more likely to use fantasy sports in their content. That trend transcended media. Among broadcast/cable networks, national networks were more likely to have shown an interest in fantasy sports than local networks. ESPN News reaches seventy million households and is heavy on fantasy content (Mike Hill, interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). By comparison, WFAA-TV in Dallas reaches two million households and largely ignores fantasy (Joe Trahan, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas). ESPN, FOX, and CBS, the networks with the largest sports-viewing audience, use fantasy regularly while smaller sports-broadcasting networks, such as ABC and NBC, do not (Barry Horn, interview with author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas). In print media, *The Sporting News* has a circulation of 750,000. Fantasy has become a staple in its coverage (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). *The Dallas Morning News* is one of the largest

newspapers in the United States and “is on the cutting edge to give [fantasy sports] constant play throughout the season” (Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). With regard to online media, NewsOK.com attracts twenty million visitors a month and offers a page dedicated entirely to fantasy and pick-‘em-style games (Ron Cariker, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Both *Sports Illustrated* and *The Sporting News*, national publications with prominent Web sites, employ fantasy content online (David Young, interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Since each medium presents content differently (i.e., print, visual broadcast, audio broadcast, hybrid, etc.), how each medium uses fantasy sports varies as well. In the case of print media, fantasy content typically appears in two ways: in a regularly appearing space or in a one-time special section at the beginning of each professional sport’s season. Each edition of *The Sporting News*, for example, contains a fantasy page designed to inform and entertain a younger, more “laidback” audience (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Both the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and *The Dallas Morning News* run regular fantasy football columns that offer readers insight on assembling and managing a fantasy team.

I think it’s important to have some longevity in doing this because you can see how players progress throughout the year. They follow patterns. That background and experience really comes in to play. You have to be able to separate fantasy from real life, such as Michael Vick. He’s a great quarterback in real life, but he’s a terrible fantasy quarterback. I don’t know that a guy who’s been playing for 10 years will learn anything from my column, but my

opinion will come into play. These people like to get different opinions before they make decisions. But it's a very inexact science (Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

While Ladd Biro's work for *The Dallas Morning News* means he is responsible for a column each Monday, he notes that other newspapers are not so dedicated to fantasy. Biro believes that print media ignore fantasy at their own peril. "Some papers are behind the curve, and they say it's not something they're focused on. Frankly, that's just stupid" (Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

Fantasy use is more varied among cable, broadcast, and radio networks. Fantasy is absent from most radio lineups because it does not translate well in an audio-only medium. Jeff Catlin, program director for KTCK, said:

Radio is different than any other medium. Radio is a broadcast medium. It is mass communications. We are trying to reach as many people as we can. Fantasy sports is generally big on the whole, but most fantasy players are in a league with five, ten, twenty people that they know. It's different for that guy and his five or ten buddies than for anyone else in any other league. When you start trying to do broadcast to what is a massive group of niche people, it just doesn't work. ... It's a beehive of individual people that are not related. The difference is that on an Internet site, it doesn't matter if they have a million hits if they're all at once or over a period of time, you still have a million hits. With TV you have your main box and a stat crawler, and you can treat it as different mediums [*sic*]. Even in newspaper it works to some extent. But radio can't be for the individual. It has to be for the masses. It just doesn't work (interview with author, 20 April 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

For much the same reason, local television stations often do not use fantasy sports. In order to keep ratings high, local programmers must attract the casual sports fan who may be curious about the outcome of a game but cares little about statistical information (Joe Trahan, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas). Cable networks, to which a sports fan must subscribe, can be, and are, much heavier users of fantasy sports. ESPN News, for example, airs regular fantasy-related segments such as “Experts Corner,” the sole function of which is dispensing fantasy advice. And “one of the reasons that ESPN News even runs the score panel after the highlights is for fantasy players, so they can see how people from their team did that night” (Mike Hill, interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

Fantasy sports is widely used prevalent in Internet media, where editors can combine written text (as in newspaper) with video (as in television), but face no time or space restrictions. TalentedMrRoto.com, a Web site devoted entirely to fantasy sports content, offers twenty-four different columns per week, each of which receives about 600 hits and ranges in interest from arena football to Major League baseball (David Young, interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). NewsOK.com provides news from the Oklahoma City area but uses fantasy games as a way to keep visitors on the site longer (Ron Cariker, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). *The Sporting News*’ Web site not only operates its own fantasy leagues but also runs several fantasy columns (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Regardless of the format, however, media do not employ fantasy-related material unless it fits logically with their overall content strategies. Therefore, fantasy sports has

minimum impact on mass media content. For example, one of the primary reasons to visit NewsOK.com is for the latest information on University of Oklahoma and Big XII Conference athletics. Therefore, the site's fantasy content does not supersede that, but rather enhances it by offering collegiate fantasy games. Ron Cariker explains the strategy:

I don't really think we have people who come to us just to play those games; I think they're a great complement to what we have people come here for. People come to look at OU football, but we make it very apparent that we have these games and other stuff. We hook them (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Editors at *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* concern themselves first with covering the local and national sporting scene so fantasy is a secondary supplement (Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas; Charles Polansky, interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Even at ESPN, fantasy sports has only increased the network's content, not altered or refocused it. As Mike Hill noted:

I haven't seen much of a change in the content—just more content. I see it more for baseball. In fact there's a new show on Saturdays on ESPN News that has polls and is more interactive. If you look at the tickers, they're all for fantasy players now—who's doing what, even if the game is still in progress. I just see more and more scoreboards and more and more tickers in just about every show (interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

While fantasy sports has done little to change mass media, it is increasingly shifting out of the broader scope toward one medium in particular: the World Wide Web.

Though various media employ fantasy sports with some degree of success, each respondent—regardless of what medium he works in—stated that fantasy sports works best online because of the immediate availability of information. In Mike Hill’s words: “You just hit the refresh button every fifteen seconds and you’re ready to go” (interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). Charles Polansky and Ladd Biro, in writing fantasy columns for their respective newspapers, typically troll Internet sites, rather than newspapers, for column fodder because of the instant availability of statistics (Charles Polansky, interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas; Ladd Biro, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). Given that most hobbyists already play fantasy sports online, they are familiar with the Web and using it for their fantasy sports needs. Barry Horn describes the Internet’s appeal:

You used to have to wait until you got the paper and wait to see how your guy did. Then ESPN came along and you could pretty much tell how your guys were doing. Now comes the Internet, and you could pretty much watch your player carry-by-carry or pass-by-pass (interview with author, 27 April 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Television sports anchor Joe Trahan said:

If I had [New Orleans’] Deuce McAllister as one my running backs, I knew that there were five or six sites I could go to before his game was even over. I could go online while I was covering the Saints and check out some of my other guys at halftime and see what they were doing. There was so much content there. ... It’s made it easy for the fantasy fan to follow what they do (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas).

The fantasy enthusiast is not the only one enjoying such benefits. The mass media industry has seen tangible benefits of employ fantasy-related content.

3.1.6 Benefits of Fantasy Sports Content

When respondents discussed the benefits of using fantasy sports-related content, they spoke in terms of increased audience size, larger profits, or longer retention time. For example, when *The Sporting News* launched a Web site dedicated solely to fantasy content in 2002, the company noted more people logging on for fantasy games, news, and information than ever before (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Web editor David Young (interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said fantasy sports is “definitely a way to increase hit counts.” Whether increased hit counts can be linked specifically to fantasy sports content, however, is tough to measure. Ron Cariker (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said visitors to his NewsOK.com probably do not log on specifically to play fantasy games. But the fantasy games do serve a specific purpose. As Cariker notes,

It increases traffic. It keeps people on our site longer. It adds to things we already have. We can't give people enough stuff. Everything we've done increases our traffic, but people don't come to us just to play these games (interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Similar results are apparent in other interviews with media professionals. Fantasy sports has boosted television numbers because fifteen million viewers (FSTA 2003) watch games they would not care about if not for monitoring their fantasy team. “Every game has some sort of impact on your fantasy league. It creates a fervent fan base for

certain sports. You have to watch all the games” (David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Ladd Biro (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas) estimates that as many as three-quarters of subscribers to DirecTV’s Sunday Ticket Package on satellite, which shows every NFL game every week, are fantasy football enthusiasts. “The more you can do for fantasy players, the more viewership you’re going to get. Period. And the more viewers you have, the more you can charge for advertising. Basically it’s dollar and cents” (Mike Hill, interview with author, 8 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas). Besides that, media companies such as *The Sporting News* ask Web visitors to pay a subscription fee to play fantasy games and view some fantasy content (Brendan Roberts, interview with author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Fantasy sports can have a different kind of financial impact, too. Joe Trahan from television station WFAA said:

They’ve got a lot of that stuff sponsored, so it’s also made new revenue streams for them by catering to that fantasy fan. And when you talk about revenue streams, they’re going to jump all over that, we know that! (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas).

As long as the mass media continue to benefit from fantasy sports-related content, it stands to reason that such content will continue. The interview subjects speculated on what the future might hold for fantasy-related media content.

3.1.7 Future of Fantasy Sports

Given the benefits of fantasy sports on the Web already mentioned, some media companies have already begun moving their fantasy-related content to their Web sites. For example, while Dallas television station WFAA-TV does not use fantasy sports in its

sports broadcasts, network executives do attempt to get fantasy-related hits from their Web site. As soon as a game ends, for example, box scores and statistics go up on wfaa.com. As Joe Trahan states:

That's where WFAA.com really comes in to play, and they do a good job of it. Like I said, as soon as the game's over you can get the box score pretty much instantaneously. It will be on our Web site, and you've got what you want, you've got what you need. I think that's how we're doing it, because I think we give the fantasy fan credit that they will know how to get what they need. If we can push them to the Web and get some page hits from it, that's good for us (interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas).

David Sessions (interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) said that national networks are also pushing fantasy audiences to their Web sites. The Internet could potentially replace television, too, with its streaming video capabilities (David Young, interview with author, 7 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Given that viewers want in-depth information immediately, broadcast is quickly fading as a viable medium (David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Charles Polansky (interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas) believes that the Internet is already replacing newspapers' fantasy content because news can be delivered so much more quickly. Polansky gives the example of a recent injury to Chicago Cubs pitcher and fantasy star Mark Prior:

The Internet Web sites had it immediately. I would've had to wait several days, perhaps almost a full week to write about that in my column if I wanted to do that. ... The immediacy of the Internet kills fantasy sports in newspapers. I'm not sure there's much more viable

information in newspapers (interview with author, 21 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

Based on recent trends, *The Dallas Morning News* plans to increase its fantasy content for the 2005 NFL season by increasing its online offerings (Ladd Biro, interview by author, 3 June 2005, Fort Worth, Texas).

Whether fantasy-related content shifts entirely to the Internet or remains diffused across media, it is apt to become even more interactive. DirecTV will debut its Red Zone channel for the 2005 NFL season. Rather than showing an entire NFL game, Red Zone will switch from game to game as teams get close to scoring. The idea is that fantasy users can see if their players are having big games (David Sessions, interview by author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Sessions also believes that watching NFL highlights may become more personalized, i.e., that fantasy fans can input their fantasy roster and watch only those highlights involving their players. The games themselves may become more personal, too. For example, new market software already allows fantasy providers to cater games for local regions, such as for high school or college teams (Ron Cariker, interview by author, 1 June 2005, Arlington, Texas).

These results reveal much about the evolution of fantasy sports in the mass media, including how media professionals became aware of it, corporate interest in it, how different markets tested it, adopted it, used it, benefited from it, and how these respondents projected its future. Chapter 4 summarizes the work and discusses its implications in light of extant theory. The limitations of this research are discussed, and suggestions are offered for future research.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrates how fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media, placing for the first time this empirical phenomenon of culture in an academic context. However, as with any study, limitations are present, and currently available data cannot answer some questions. This chapter addresses these, ending with an observation about the fantasy sports' place in the mass media.

4.1 Review of Results

In order to entertain themselves, a group of sportswriters in 1979 quietly created Rotisserie baseball, the forerunner to a \$1.5 billion industry that now entertains more than fifteen million Americans (Tygiel 2000; FSTA 2003; Ipsos 2003). Fantasy games are typically played via the Internet and allow fans to join leagues, draft players from real-life professional sports teams, and score points based upon those athletes' performances in actual games. Cash and prizes are often at stake (FSTA, 2003).

The principal goal of this research was to examine how the "cultural obsession" (Ballard 2004 p. 1) of fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media. In general, the results revealed how fantasy sports-related content serves as a method mass media employ to attract and retain consumers. In-depth interviews with professionals from various sectors of the industry illustrated how fantasy sports becomes viable media content according to seven themes: awareness, interest, testing, adoption, use, benefits, and future projections.

Each step is related and crucial to the process. For example, just because a member of the media plays fantasy sports, that does not mean he or she believes it translates well into professional content. Even if managers are interested in using fantasy sports, testing may prove it unwise for a particular medium or a particular market. Realized benefits may enhance use or alter future projections.

The results showed that fantasy sports impacts audience size for mass media entities. Most respondents were aware of fantasy sports long before they incorporated it into their content, but mass media decision-makers were hesitant to accept fantasy sports as suitable content. Competition affects the spread of fantasy sports among mass media corporations, and those with larger audiences are more likely to adopt it. As with all content, the success of fantasy sports is based upon audience feedback. It is evident that fantasy sports is more prevalent in the mass media now than ever before, and its adoption follows a larger trend toward more instantaneous, interactive media content. Additionally, different media use fantasy sports in different ways and always in accordance with their content strategies. Though fantasy sports is seen in all forms of mass media, respondents agreed that fantasy sports is best suited for the Web. Therefore, the Web is seen to be the medium of the future for fantasy-related content.

Based on these results, it is possible to understand how fantasy sports has evolved in the mass media. Within the coded interview transcripts, the final categories bear a similarity to diffusion of innovations. Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory offers a logical theoretical lens through which to view the results.

4.2 Theoretical Connection

Diffusion of Innovations describes how a social system adopts change over time through communication channels; in this case, how fantasy sports may or may not become incorporated into mass media content. Diffusion of Innovations is a useful theory in the present study given its ability to describe the adoption of change. In 1903, French sociologist Gabriel Tarde developed an S-shaped curve that shows an innovation's permeation over time. However, it was another 40 years before sociologists Ryan and Gross published a landmark study focusing on a new hybrid corn seed being adopted by Iowa farmers. Everett Rogers' explanation of the theory first appeared in 1960 and since then has been used in more than 5,200 studies (Rogers 1995).

Rogers (1995) theorized that a new idea, an innovation, becomes socially mainstream, or diffused, according to a five-step process: (1) potential adopters become aware of the innovation; (2) potential adopters form a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the innovation; (3) potential adopters adopt or reject the innovation; (4) adopters put the innovation to use; and (5) adopters evaluate the decision they made to adopt the innovation (p. 162). Accordingly, diffusion requires communication through a social system. Rogers stated that 2.5% of a social system, the so-called innovators or opinion leaders, will adopt the innovation first. Next, 13.5% of the population forms the early adopters, 34% comprise the early majority, 34% are the late majority, and the final 16% are labeled laggards (p. 262).

Time is another important and unique element in Rogers' theory. He argued that innovations are diffused over time along an S-shaped curve (p. 258), so that adoption begins slowly, takes off quickly, and then slowly levels off. However, if members of a

social system interact particularly closely with one another, diffusion may spread more quickly regardless of time (Young 2002).

4.2.1 Landmark Studies in Diffusion of Innovation

Diffusion of Innovations is adaptable to almost any idea, and although not all of the studies have focused on mass communications, they have aided in the development of the theory. The initial influential study was Ryan and Gross' (1943) examination of the adoption of the hybrid corn seed and concluded that the influence of the innovators to their more-cautious peers facilitated the likelihood of widespread diffusion. The diffusion paradigm spread through sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s, and then to a larger, interdisciplinary field by the late 1960s. Since Ryan and Gross, diffusion has become common in research of sociology, communication, and other social sciences (Valente & Rogers 1995).

Hagerstrand (1967), in researching tuberculosis testing in Swedish cattle, concluded that the closer-knit a social system is, the quicker a diffusion likely will spread. Similarly, Coleman, Katz, and Menzel (1966) stated that influence and respect are important factors in Diffusion of Innovations. They found that experimental drugs were more likely to be diffused into a social system of doctors when a well-respected physician first prescribed it. Likewise, Collier and Messick (1975) stated that smaller nations tend to follow the lead of leading countries on issues such as social spending. O'Loughlin, et al. (1998), used Diffusion of Innovations to explain the 1940s-1990s spread of democracy among former communist nations. They stated that, over time, "discrete changes in regimes" served as the innovators and early adopters (p. 545).

4.2.2 Studies Related to Communication

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) fashioned diffusions as a media theory in their influential book *Personal Influence*. They stated that the mass media impact the diffusion of an innovation given their influence on the social system and theorized that the mass media will impact one's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding an innovation. Following the notion outlined in that study, Oberschall (1994) hypothesized that mass media coverage of sit-in demonstrations during the Eastern European democracy movement facilitated the diffusion of similar protests. Grubb (1999) authored a case study examining radio broadcasts in Estonia after the fall of Communism. He stated that such broadcasts helped democratize the nation following the Velvet Revolution by broadcasting with cultural interests in mind, paying particular attention to political and economy rebuilding.

Many recent Diffusion studies in communication describe the diffusion of a technological innovation through a social system. Fichman and Kemerer (1999) found that adoption and knowledge barriers mean some innovations, including communication technologies, are never adopted. Carley (1999) stated that the spread of communication technologies creates in some cultures an artificial agent that changes the social system to allow faster spread of messages and greater inherent complexity in the messages. In his book *The Victorian Internet*, Standage (1998) argued that new communication technologies "shrink the world faster and further than ever before...revolutionize business practice, gives rise to new forms of crime, and inundate users with a deluge of information. The benefits are relentlessly hyped by advocates and dismissed by skeptics" (p. 1).

O'Hagan (2001) explained the increasing popularity of digital television through Diffusion of Innovations by stating that the technology "is but the beginning of a process of integration...that heralds new dimensions to entertainment and e-commerce" (p. 475). Schultz (2002) stated that outside factors, such as religion and age, may also play a role in such adoption. He observed a difference in digital implementation between religious and secular broadcast and cable networks. Survey results showed a positive correlation between the network executives' religious background and age and their acceptance or resistance of digital broadcast technologies.

Vagliasindi and Vagliasindi (2003) concluded that the diffusion of the Internet in Third World countries, as in more stable economic climates, is aided by innovative corporations that are ahead of the curve in adopting new technologies rather than the government or foreign influence.

In the present study, the innovation in question is fantasy sports as mass media content, and diffusion is the adoption of such content among the media entities. The mass media serve as the social system. Testing the market, a theme described in the previous chapter, enables the media to evaluate their decision to adopt or reject the innovation of fantasy sports. Among those media that decide to adopt fantasy sports, the innovators include the Web sites ESPN.com and Sportsline.com, among the first to feature fantasy-related content in 1997 or 1998. Those media that followed quickly, such as *The Sporting News*, are early adopters. Those that followed later, such as NewsOK.com, are early majority. Other media are considered late majority and laggards. Those who do not employ fantasy-related content, according to Rogers, have decided to reject the innovation.

While diffusion of innovations frames this research in a theoretical relevance, the present study, like any study, is not free from limitations.

4.3 Limitations

One limitation was the geographic centrality of the respondents. While some of the respondents work and live in Phoenix, New York, Oklahoma City, or other places, many live in or around Dallas. While this may have been inconsequential, it is possible that the Dallas media environment is different than other parts of the nation. For those respondents not available locally, or who had scheduling problems, telephone interviews were necessary. Telephone interviews may restrict the personal rapport between interviewer and subject, which may make the subject less likely to open up (Berg 2004). Some helpful potential subjects were not available or could not be scheduled. For example, communications sent to network executives at major broadcast and cable networks went ignored, unreturned, or refused participation. Interviews with upper-level decision-makers at large media corporations would have enhanced the study.

Additionally, all respondents were male. This is not surprising given the Fantasy Sports Trade Association's statistic that 93% of fantasy hobbyists are male (FSTA 2003) but it is possible that female members of the media few fantasy sports differently and thus were less likely to have an awareness or interest in it or to use it as journalism content.

Another limitation is the relative lack of existing literature regarding fantasy sports, which is only a recent topic for scholars. The absence of exploratory studies or comprehensive academic works made it difficult to know where to begin, and offered no set of comparative results.

4.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Given the relative newness of fantasy sports, scholars have the opportunity for continued research in this emerging field. The present research could serve as background for future studies. For example, one could apply the same topic to a consumer environment, specifically examining how consumers use the mass media to satisfy their fantasy sports needs. In such a study, an audience-focused theory, such as Uses and Gratifications, would be necessary. However, the research model and theory applied here could show how the mainstream mass media adopt cultural phenomenon other than fantasy sports.

The present principles could examine in further detail a trend presented here, namely that media content is likely to become more interactive. Another future study could take the results presented here and narrow the focus to explore how fantasy sports has evolved in a single medium, such as broadcast or Internet, or examine why fantasy sports seems to have become diffused while other cultural phenomenon have not.

Additionally, this study might be replicable using quantitative methods, such as ratings numbers for fantasy-related programming, advertising income generated from fantasy-related content, or surveys of media professionals using Likert scales or other quantifiers, in order to determine how fantasy sports impacts audience and revenue numbers.

4.5 Conclusion

In Chapter 3, the interview subjects spoke about what they believe the future of fantasy-related content will be. Answers varied, but the consensus was that it will be more interactive and customized. The day may come where fantasy players can input

their rosters directly into an Internet site or television feed and watch nightly highlights only of those players, rather than sitting through a half-hour broadcast in hopes of hearing some references (David Sessions, interview with author, 2 June 2005, Arlington, Texas). Sessions stated that fantasy content is already going overboard, but Barry Horn (interview with author, 27 April 2005, Arlington Texas) conceives of live game broadcasts be reduced entirely to stat crawlers and fantasy references. Maybe fantasy will become integrated into young sports fans' other obsession: video games (Joe Trahan, interview with author, 3 June 2005, Dallas).

Without new innovations, it is unlikely that many more media will adopt fantasy sports. Those who can best employ it already use it regularly, and those who cannot have stated so. Additionally, there is the question of how many more hobbyists fantasy sports can attract, given the sheer number of participants already engaged. Do many fervent NFL fans, for example, not already play fantasy football? This should not suggest that either fantasy sports or fantasy-related content are on the decline; indeed, the FSTA (2003) still show slight increases in participation levels. As long as fantasy sports sustains its present levels of popularity in society, mass media managers have no reason to scale back, or discontinue altogether, its use in their content.

APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview subjects were selected based upon several criteria. Each subject was selected because he:

- is a mass-media professional;
- is familiar with the concept of fantasy sports;
- was accessible;
- agreed to be interviewed;
- and agreed to have his name and company used in the study, in order to show why he is an expert.

Subjects were found through references, through their highly visible content, or through the researchers' knowledge of the subjects. The research neither knew nor had a previous relationship with most of the respondents.

As stated in Chapter 3, the interviews followed the format of a semi-standardized interview, as defined in Berg (2004): They were more or less structured, questions could be reordered as needed, wordings of questions were flexible, the level of language could be adjusted as needed, and the interviewer could answer questions and make clarifications as needed. Generally, the same list of questions was used in each interview, although the order varied occasionally. Some interviews included unique follow-up questions, based upon a particular unique response, and, if necessary, questions were reworded to reflect a subject's particular medium or situation. Sample interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Interviews were recorded either on cassette tape or digitally and transcribed for easy access. Some were conducted personally; others via telephone. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes each, and material for the questions was based on, and

complemented by, secondary material to include academic and popular sources; these sources are included in review of literature in Chapter 1. The variety and depth of interviews allowed the researcher to achieve saturation, as defined by Baxter and Babbie (2004) as the point where additional interviews yield no new information. That is to say, information gleaned from the later interviews began to duplicate those conducted earlier.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Some or all of the following questions were asked to some or all of the respondents. Questions may have been reworded slightly, depending upon the subjects' medium or particular situation. Follow-up questions unique to a given interview are not included in this list.

Sample questions

Name and job title...

How long have you worked in the media industry?

How long have you been in your current position?

What is the circulation of your newspaper?/How many households does your network reach?/How many hits does your Web site receive each day?

What role do you play in selecting content?

Through what process do you (or your editors) decide on content?

How does what's on other newspapers/Web sites/networks publish/air impact your content decisions?

Do other kinds of media—such as Internet—affect your content decisions?

In what ways has content changed since you've been in the mass media business?

In what ways has what your viewers/subscribers expect changed since you've been in your current position?

How does viewer/subscriber interest drive your content decisions?

How does advertiser interest drive your content decisions?

What are some examples of viewer-/subscriber-driven content in your newspaper/network/Web site?

What are some examples of advertiser-driven content in your newspaper/network/Web site?

How do you know what viewers/subscribers want to see?

How do you know what advertisers want to see?

Obviously, the media have many functions. What do you see as the media's most important function?

What trends have you noticed regarding fantasy sports in the mass media?

Overall, do you see more fantasy sports in the mass media now than ever before?

What do you think prompted these changes?

What is the benefit of these changes?

For what medium do you think fantasy sports is best suited?

Does your station/newspaper/Web site try to attract the fantasy sports hobbyists in particular?

In what ways do you use fantasy sports in your content?

When did you first become aware there was such a thing as fantasy sports?

When did fantasy sports first appear in your content?

Why did your newspaper/network/Web site begin using fantasy sports?

How would you gauge the impact of fantasy sports on your content?

In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Ladd Biro, Freelance Columnist, June 3, 2005

Q: What is your specific job title?

A: I'm a syndicated columnist. I write freelance columns, and several papers run them every week: *The Dallas Morning News*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, *The Sporting News*. Hopefully I'll have more this year.

Q: Do you just write about fantasy football?

A: I just do fantasy football, because this is just for fun. I run a marketing agency based out of Flower Mound. It's just for fun, just an excuse I give my wife to watch all the games.

Q: Did you ever work in the media business before doing these fantasy columns?

A: No, but I've always been a good writer. My friends have always told me that I should write a book. I knew I had that skill.

Q: How long have you been doing these columns?

A: This will be my third year this fall. This all started basically when I sent an e-mail to the sports editor at *The Dallas Morning News* a few years ago and said, basically, "your fantasy coverage really stinks." Lots of people really care about this stuff, and that's how they watch football now. Well, I kind of forgot about it. Then he called me back and said he liked my ideas and asked me to submit some columns.

Q: Do you have complete control over what's in your column, or is a topic assigned to you?

A: I have control over it. Well, we have an agreed approach. My format is that I talk about who would be good free-agent acquisitions or who you should trade for. That's about it. It's basically the same topic in all my columns, except in Cleveland I run on Saturdays, so I adapt what I write on Mondays for *The Morning News*. [In Cleveland] they want me to recommend starters and sitters for people's teams.

Q: Why did you start doing this?

A: I've played for six or seven years and always do well in my league, or leagues. I follow all the news. I think it's important to have some longevity in doing this because you can see how players progress throughout the year. They follow patterns. That background and experience really comes in to play. You have to be able to separate fantasy from real life, such as Michael Vick. He's a great quarterback in real life, but he's a terrible fantasy quarterback. I don't know that a guy who's been playing for 10 years will learn anything from my column, but my opinion will come into play. These people like to get different opinions before they make decisions. But it's a very inexact science.

Q: How does what's in other newspapers affect your column content?

A: I don't read their columnists, per se. I do get some e-mails from sites that I'm signed up for. I'm not looking to see what they're having to say, but I'll look at who people are recommending. And honestly, I have to write my column on Sunday night, so there's

nothing out there yet. Other than checking the wires to see if somebody got hurt, I don't have anything to look at.

Q: Do other kinds of media affect your content decisions?

A: I go to the NFL Web site and go through the stats on the Web site. I'm watching all the games, but I don't know all the stats. I might know that Donald Driver had a good game, but I won't know his exact stats. So I'll go look.

Q: In what ways has sports page content changed since you've been in the media business?

A: Web sites are the biggest change. That's the biggest difference because of the abundance of information available in real time. The daily paper really isn't what people want these days, so it's made the Web site more important. I'll rarely go to a newspaper to get statistics or an opinion. I'll go to the Web because it's so much easier. From a fantasy perspective, lots of newspapers have begun giving more space to fantasy sports. Some do it infrequently, such as a special section at the beginning of the season. But I think *The Morning News* is on the cutting edge to give it constant play throughout the season. Some papers are behind the curve. I've contacted another 30 or 40 papers, and they say it's not something they're focused on. Frankly, that's just stupid.

Q: What trends have you noticed regarding fantasy sports in the mass media overall?

A: Absolutely, there's more and more every year. The ultimate is FOX or CBS, who have started running stats all the time. Constantly. There are people who are starting to think

that they've gone a little bit overboard. Even for somebody like me, who watches the games entirely focused on fantasy football, it becomes overload. When they're showing a graphic that said someone's rushed three times for 15 yards, nobody cares about that.

Q: What about when you hear the announcers make fantasy references during the broadcast, such as someone catching a touchdown pass and he said "Oh, that's great! That guy's on my fantasy team!" Do you think that's appropriate?

A: The anchors and the play-by-play guys are factoring it into their discussions because they play, too. When their guys are doing well, you hear about it. I've heard Boomer Esiason say that. It doesn't bother me. It kind of humanizes those announcers more. It kind of puts them on a fan level.

Q: What do you think prompted these changes?

A: One of the main reasons that fantasy football has become so important is that players are moving from one team to another. I think people are not as loyal to their hometown team as they once were. People are moving more in this generation than they used to. I used to live in Miami, and I'm a big Dolphins fan. I don't play, I don't go to games, so I have to watch them from afar. So I have a fantasy team to root for. It's just a fun way to watch the game. It makes every game out there matter. If Atlanta's playing New Orleans, I wouldn't normally care about that, but I'll watch it. Not because I care who wins, but I'm wondering how my players are going to do. I don't know too many people who get out of fantasy football once they're in it because it adapts the way they watch the game.

Q: What is the benefit of these changes?

A: I don't know that it translates into advertising dollars in something like *The Dallas Morning News* because it's still a minor part of what they do. I think it helps maintain circulation among sports readers when there are stats in the paper the next day. That's almost as important as the column. Fantasy content is so ubiquitous that you can find it anywhere. I think fantasy football has been a huge boost and boon for television. There's 15 or 20 million other people who now have an interest in more than one game—probably all the games. They can use that to boost their advertising dollars because they can show increased viewership. But the big benefactor has been DirecTV for the Sunday Ticket package. Fifty to 75% of the people who subscribe to that are fantasy football players. I used to get Sunday Ticket to watch the Dolphins no matter where I lived. But that's not so much why I get it now.

Q: For what medium do you think fantasy sports is best suited?

A: The Internet is definitely number one. Not that it's always the best content-wise, because it's quick. The best-written articles are in print. Television is so fleeting, and none of the shows are terribly interesting. I don't even watch them. There's something about talking heads that isn't very interesting. But some people do watch them. I was on TXCN on Fridays talking fantasy, and people would call in and ask me questions about who I should start or who I should sit. So I know there's interest.

Q: How does *The DMN* try to attract the fantasy sports hobbyists in particular?

A: I don't think they made any outgoing push to say that we have to have a fantasy column. I think it was a maintenance thing. I think they said "we need to give our readers what they're looking for." They can see the landscape shifting, and they need to keep up with it. They're expanding their coverage quite a bit this fall. I'm not at liberty to talk about it, but I'll be doing another column, plus there'll be new stuff online to be ahead of the curve. It's continuing to give them what they want.

Q: When did fantasy sports first appear in *The DMN*?

A: I think they had an internal guy writing a small column in the year before I started. It wasn't very good. He's a good writer, but fantasy's not his thing.

Q: In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

A: It's definitely somewhere in between. It's well beyond the infancy stage, but it's hard to say how much bigger it's going to get. There's a limit as to how many people are going to get into fantasy football. There's only so many people who are real rabid football fans, and only so many people who have time to do this. I don't know that we're at the saturation point yet, but I don't think it's far off. There needs to be some kind of innovation to keep it going or it will plateau out.

Ron Cariker, Managing Editor of www.NewsOK.com, June 1, 2005

Q: What's your job title?

A: I'm the managing editor for NewsOK.com

Q: What does that mean you do?

A: I have the responsibility to oversee all projects and all aspects of the site. I'm like the Webmaster who facilitates all the projects that go on, finding vendors, and things like that. I work quite a bit internally with the newspaper and the TV station as well. It all finds its way to me.

Q: How long have you worked in the media industry?

A: Six years, but I have no background in journalism other than school.

Q: How long have you been in your current position?

A: Three years.

Q: How many hits does NewsOK.com receive each day?

A: I'll give you some numbers and let you do the math. Our monthly averages are about 20 million hits a month. Traffic has climbed and climbed and climbed to where 20 million is fairly common.

Q: What role do you play in selecting content for the Web site?

A: We have another editor who selects content, who does nothing but post content and breaking news. They put up content daily from the newspaper. There's one person who manages all that. Everything that's in the newspaper would be on the Web site, but what's online may not make it into the paper because of space. Plus there will be wire service stories and things like that.

Q: Whose idea were these fantasy games?

A: The fantasy sports thing is me. Personally, I was playing fantasy football online in college, and it's an interest I had way back when. We have a vendor who started to migrate into some of these systems, and they asked me questions of what I think would be cool. I asked them about fantasy games and picks games. The first thing we did was a college basketball pick-'em game.

Q: Has it helped your hit count?

A: Yeah, I think it helps. I don't really think we have people who come to us just to play those games; I think they're a great complement to what we have people come here for. People come to look at OU football, but we make it very apparent that we have these games and other stuff. We hook them. In fact, many people who play these games are outside of Oklahoma.

Q: Overall, do you see more fantasy sports in the mass media now than you used to?

A: You see it on television broadcasts. They make more of a deal of it than they did five or seven years ago. They have fantasy shows all the time, and they push to their Web sites constantly with e-mail questions, go play there, etc. It's used to complement their content.

Q: What do you think prompted these changes?

A: A big segment of the market thinks it has to do with gambling or betting. From my personal standpoint, it's fun. It's an enjoyment. And from the feedback we get, people just think it's fun. It's just a distraction. I don't think people take it too seriously.

Q: What is the benefit of these changes for NewsOK.com?

A: It increases traffic. It keeps people on our site longer. It adds to things we already have. We can't give people enough stuff. Everything we've done increases our traffic, but people don't come to us just to play these games.

Q: For what medium do you think fantasy sports is best suited?

A: The Web. Definitely. It's a huge improvement from how it used to be, and the Web has helped it explode.

Q: When did fantasy sports first appear in your content?

A: Not long after we launched about three years ago. We launched in '01. We started the fantasy games about the time I became ME.

Q: Why did NewsOK.com begin using fantasy sports?

A: It just sort of happened. We're always looking for stuff to enhance and add to our site. About 4 years ago, I talked to someone about fantasy games, but it was cost-prohibitive. We didn't have people asking that "we want the games." But once we added it, we saw there was clamoring for it. Our first year was men's NCAA basketball, and people wanted the women's game. We have not added the women's game because there's not that big a demand for it. We do a thing where you can localize games because people were wanting to use it for high school football. I don't think there's a big enough push for them to develop something like that nationwide, a high school pick-'em game. We have done prizes for this, but it varies depending on the advertising staff. We've done free pizza and things like that. We're about to do something in the fall that will benefit the newspaper partnership: We used to do a thing called Gridiron Greenbacks in single-copy sales. It became too complicated with entry forms and things, so now the paper will tell you to play online, then we'll tell them that the results are posted in the paper. The Web has outgrown what the newspaper's push was. It's starting to shift a little bit.

Q: In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

A: I'd say it's a little to the right of middle. It's not in its infancy at all. Each sport has its own niche. I know there's a certain level of information that people are going to say "I don't have time to read all the stats." It's still a growing market with things like college basketball and high school football. There's still potential online. As far as the big sports go, everybody's got one. We will continue to refine what we offer. We may

add a game. I don't see people moving away from it, because you have vendors who sell this product where it requires you to do very little.

Jeff Catlin, Program Director, KTCK-AM (1310, Dallas), April 20, 2005

Q: Can you describe your job for me, what you do on a daily basis?

A: I'm responsible for all the programming content, the commercials, and the hosts. Anything that has to do with the shows, marketing and everything. Basically, if you hear it on our air, I'm responsible for it.

Q: How long have you worked in radio?

A: I've worked in radio for 13 years. And for Susquehanna, which is the parent company of The Ticket, for 12 years.

Q: How long have you been at The Ticket?

A: I got here in 1994.

Q: How long have you been Program Director?

A: I've been programming director since March of 2003. I became assistant programming director in January of 1996.

Q: What steps do you go through in deciding the content of a program?

A: My biggest role is to be a coach, a guide, a steer. The hosts of the individual shows are responsible for content on their show. I critique them and coach them and let them know what we're trying to achieve, but I'm not involved day-to-day. I might only meet with them once or twice a week, but I see them everyday and talk to them about what

I've heard. I'll probably ask them "What are you working on," etc. We talk about those things in meetings, and I'll stick my head in there. I'm the guy with my hand on the rudder—but those guys are steering.

Q: Has sports programming content changed in the last few years?

A: Oh, absolutely. No question. The all-sports format was started at WFAN in New York in the 1990s. The Ticket came on in 1994, and it was very sports-fan oriented, very X's and O's about sports and statistics and information. But that format turned into a six-month format that was very good fall to winter because of football. But in the summer, the ratings would drop. It had a lull. As a business model, it didn't work. We need ratings and revenue over nine months. We saw that sports fans were going to check us out no matter what, so we became more "guy talk" to take more of an entertaining slant. But to be honest, the format is still evolving to this day, as far as the market and personalities on the station goes. Seventy to 75% of our content is still sports-driven. The rest is entertainment-driven, and those are the things that people really remember. But no one covers sports better than we do.

Q: Have your listeners changed, in your opinion?

A: Absolutely. The other thing that changed with sports radio and newspaper was T-1 technology. When The Ticket first started, we had no idea what the Internet was. About 1995 or '96, we heard about the Web. Now, everybody's had the Internet. Sports information can be gotten by anybody at any time with the touch of a button. In terms of day-to-day, we needed a different way because they [the listeners] all have the same

access that our guys do. But they [the show hosts] can analyze over the big picture. That's part of the evolution of the format. The sophistication of our listener has changed. Through osmosis, they get a lot more information now than they ever did before; now they just want to have fun. Information overload makes everybody have ADD, and ADD has made our job even harder. So that's where that balance has come in.

Q: Is listener interest the thing that drives your programming decisions?

A: It's one of them. We have to please our listeners. My job is to deliver ratings.

Q: How do you know what they want?

A: We do research, talk to them, e-mail and phone surveys, industry trends to find out what society is and what the marketplace is. You understand how all these things fit together. Sometime it's gut instincts, too. If we're broadcasting to nobody, they'll shut us down.

Q: Does the programming at competitive stations impact your programming decisions?

A: No, not really. We have the heritage in the market. I respect every other radio station from a competitive standpoint. We're cognizant of what they're doing. But we feel strongly that if we work hard, we should be able to take care of our own business.

Q: Does The Ticket try to attract specifically the fantasy sports hobbyists?

A: Absolutely not. Radio is different than another medium. Radio is a broadcast medium. It is mass communications. We are trying to reach as many people as we can. Fantasy sports is generally big on the whole, but most fantasy players are in a league with five, ten, twenty people that they know. It's different for that guy and his five or ten buddies than for anyone else in any other league. When you start trying to do broadcast to what is a massive group of niche people, it just doesn't work. We used to have a fantasy football show on Sunday nights. The people that listened wanted to know how their guy is, and nobody else cares about that dude's team. In fantasy, it stops being about the broadcasting of that general thing, and it got our focus off. It's taking away from macro team issues because it's a beehive of individual people that are not related. The difference is that on an Internet site, it doesn't matter if they have a million hits if they're all at once or over a period of time, you still have a million hits. With TV you have your main box and a stat crawler, and you can treat it as different mediums. Even in newspaper it works to some extent. But radio can't be for the individual. It has to be for the masses. It just doesn't work. They don't need us to get fantasy information. They'll get it from their own sources.

Q: Well, do you think it's possible that a fantasy show would work?

A: Anything is possible if it has all the elements—a great host, new information, new attitude that appeals to a lot of people—then I don't see why it wouldn't work. If you have those things, people will listen to you. You need great personalities. People like to listen to them. It doesn't matter that their content is different. You'd have to figure out a

way to do it, and I haven't heard anybody who's figured that out. It just turns into a laundry list of whose going to play and who isn't, and that's not very good radio.

Mike Hill, sports anchor, ESPN News, June 8, 2005

Q: What is your exact job title?

A: Sports anchor.

Q: How long have you worked in the media industry?

A: This is my tenth year. Well, I got my first job in 1995.

Q: How long have you been at ESPN?

A: I've been *here* almost a year.

Q: Do you know about how many households ESPN News reaches?

A: Actually, those numbers just came out, and we reach about 70 million homes now.

Q: What role do you play in selecting content for the broadcast?

A: My co-anchor and I have a say. We all meet about six hours before the show, after the producers and the coordinating producer have had their meeting. We'll throw in our two cents and decide what runs, what doesn't, and in what order things run.

Q: How many times per week do you anchor?

A: About four or five.

Q: How does what's on other networks affect your content decisions?

A: It doesn't really. ESPN decides for itself what is newsworthy for ESPN. ESPN wants to be the leader, and that's why we call ourselves "The Worldwide Leader in Sports."

Q: Well, what about other kinds of media, such as the Internet or print?

A: Oh, absolutely. For example, the whole Barry Bonds thing came from the *San Francisco Chronicle's* coverage. We scour newspapers and Web sites, but, of course, we source things ourselves before we put it on the air.

Q: In what ways have you seen sports broadcast content change since you've been in the business?

A: Well, I'm kind of a different story because I started off local and now I'm national. The biggest changes have been in the local markets because of ESPN. It's wiping out sports in the local market. When I first came on in the air in 1995, I would get six or seven minutes a night in local markets. Nowadays the consultants—or what I call the consultants—come in and have determined that local sports isn't relevant anymore. People are watching national broadcasts, or they can get stuff off the Internet. The key in local markets is to stay local. Local, local, local.

Q: Overall, what trends have you noticed regarding fantasy sports in the mass media?

A: It's huge. When it first began, we thought that all the fantasy leagues were just a lot of geeks that got together and had never played sports in real life. What we do with it at ESPN with our "Experts Corners" and things like that is tell players who to pick up, who to draft, etc. One of the reasons that ESPN News even runs the score panel after the

highlights is for fantasy players so they can see how people from their team did that night. It has definitely expanded.

Q: What do you think prompted these changes?

A: There's a lot of financial reasons. I think a lot of it has to do with finances. It cost so much to get in the league. I've heard of \$1,000 leagues, and more! Sometimes, people have to pay money just to make a trade or a transaction. It's become like a small business. You might be able to join high-stakes leagues in Vegas, like a real owner. It's all about the money. People don't care about the fun. If it's not about the money, I don't think people would do it. I've even heard people root against their team, the team they're passionate about, just because they want their fantasy players to play well. I remember a colleague of mine in Dallas who was a big Steelers fan—he had grown up in Pittsburgh—and they got beat, but we was happy because Marvin Harrison had a good game against them, and Marvin Harrison was on his fantasy team.

Q: What is the benefit of these changes for the media?

A: Viewers. That's the bottom line. Even if you don't like sports, or you're not a sports fan, you're going to watch because you want to see how your fantasy sports players did. You'll watch just to see how Ken Griffey Jr. did, if he went 3-for-4, or how many home runs he hit. It's huge. The more you can do for fantasy players, the more viewership you're going to get. Period. But it's just like any trend. All of a sudden if more women were watching sports, we'd start to show more WNBA. Right now fantasy is huge. And

the more viewers you have, the more you can charge for advertising. Basically it's dollars and cents.

Q: In your opinion, for what medium do you think fantasy sports is best suited?

A: I think it's the Internet. A lot of fantasy leagues are online. You're competing against people you've never met, sometimes from across the world. It's definitely the Internet because you can get the stats right away. In fact, one of the reasons that the NFL has up-to-the-second stats on the Web is because of fantasy players. You just hit the refresh button every 15 seconds and you're ready to go.

Q: When did you personally first become aware there was such a thing as fantasy sports?

A: 1997 in Nashville. I had a news director who was just crazy about it and got me in it. I had no idea how big it was, but I paid \$85 and joined a league. There were guys who were taking it so seriously—they had three or four magazines, charts, papers, research. I felt way unprepared. I felt like a fish out of water. In fact, let me tell you how unprepared I was. I drafted Edgar Renteria back before he was a good hitter, when he was still with the Marlins, because he played good defense! Of course, defense doesn't matter at all in fantasy sports, but I didn't know anything about fantasy leagues. When I said his name, that I wanted Edgar Renteria, I heard people snickering, like "what is this guy doing?" I had no clue. Now I go to the news rack and see fantasy magazines all over the place. This stuff is huge.

Q: When did you first start talking about fantasy sports in your content?

A: I can't recall exactly when it was. But I can tell you that I have incorporated it within the sportscast. For example, if the Cardinals are beating the Red Sox like 13-0, or 13-2, or something like that and all the highlights are Cardinals highlights, I'll throw out some Red Sox stats like "Johnny Damon went 3-for-4." That's because I know there's a lot of people out there who have Johnny Damon on their fantasy team and want to know how he did.

Q: How would you gauge the impact of fantasy sports on ESPN's content?

A: I haven't seen much of a change in the content—just more content. I see it more for baseball. In fact there's a new show on Saturdays on ESPN News that has polls and is more interactive. If you look at the tickers, they're all for fantasy players now—who's doing what, even if the game is still in progress. I just see more and more scoreboards and more and more tickers in just about every show.

Q: In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

A: I think you're right in the middle. I would use "saturated" as a word because everybody has a league, whether it's on ESPN or Yahoo! or whatever. I know people who are in three leagues, and they'd be in more if there were more. I can see it declining when some other niche comes along. Then it might go away. What that will be, I don't know.

Barry Horn, media columnist, The Dallas Morning News, April 27, 2005

Q: Can you please describe your job for me?

A: I cover the media, primarily the national media. They're kind of sensitive about me doing anything with local media because Belo owns this newspaper and WFAA, and if it's perceived as a conflict of interest then it's a conflict of interest. But everything else is fair game, including radio and broadcasting.

Q: How long have you been doing this?

A: About a dozen years.

Q: How long have you been at *The DMN*?

A: All that time.

Q: From what you've seen during those dozen years, how has sports programming content changed?

A: There's been a huge change in television with things like HD. And as far as fantasy goes, all the NFL pre-game shows, it's something that they cater to. It was a huge market that was untapped for awhile. They were geeky until they realized everyone was into it—probably even the people who are making the broadcast decisions. The real popularity of March Madness is the brackets, and they watch to see how it came out. That's expanded into Sunday morning pre-game shows. They cater to the fans. These networks will do anything to keep people glued to their TV set to watch their network. The Internet has made a big difference, too. You used to have to wait until you got the paper and wait to

see how your guy did. Then ESPN came along and you could pretty much tell how your guys were doing. Now comes the Internet, and you could pretty much watch your player carry-by-carry or pass-by-pass. You need things like an injury report before they set their lineup. Basically, they're constantly looking for hooks to create viewers and keep them.

Different sports are different, though. Fantasy baseball is not driven carry-by-carry or play-by-play. There's maybe a game a couple of times a week on ESPN. Football is the easiest to do because it's concentrated in this one 12-hour period. I know there are fantasy leagues for everything, but football drives the bus. I know there's a Fantasy NASCAR league with people from the networks in it. But it changes you because it forces you to pay attention. You may not be a NASCAR fan, but if you've got a team with four or five drivers in it, you're looking to see how your drivers are doing.

Different networks use it in different ways, too. ABC has one game on a Monday night. They have a captive audience. If you're at FOX or CBS on Sunday, for those networks there's lots of other games going on. ESPN is very big on fantasy, and ABC has kind of left fantasy to them within the family. But look at which network is obviously more successful. ABC has an illusion that "Monday Night Football" is bigger than it really is. "Monday Night Football" is a very snobbish institution because they have their own stats and everything. That's just stupid. I just think they're snobby about it and foolish about it. By the time they've come on, 28 of the 32 teams have already played, so you know where most of the players stand. But I guarantee you that a good portion of their ratings over the last few years are the fantasy crowd seeing what one of their receivers is doing.

Q: Is it difficult, though, to broadcast fantasy sports when there are only a few viewers who care about a particular player?

A: If you give an update on one player, that player has an effect on every person in the league. Either you have him or your opponent has him, there's a domino effect. I want to know how the teams around me are doing as well. There's a huge effect on it, and the people at the networks are very cognizant of that.

Q: When did fantasy sports first appear start appearing in programming content?

A: CBS and FOX have admitted the existence of fantasy and pandering to the fantasy crowd. The growth has been spurred by the Internet because you can sit on the computer and watch your team play and get your updated stats. This is just going to be huge. This *is* huge. If they could figure out a way to latch on to this in other sports, they would do it in a heartbeat. As part of the ESPN deal for \$1.1 billion for "Monday Night Football," they're working on a fantasy football league in conjunction with the NFL. That adds value. The networks are fighting for every viewer and every tenth of a rating point. If they can prove there's a market out there, there's no question that they'll pander to it.

Q: In your opinion, where is fantasy sports as a programming innovation? In its infancy stages or more advanced?

A: I think it's the infancy. If you look at the appeal of football, it's a very easy sport to bet on. Gambling and point spreads have a lot to do with the interest in the NFL over the years. Fantasy football is gambling. It's just a venue to attract more people. There's no

question that it's in its infancy. I can envision the day when there's nothing but a steady updating stat on the screen. It's not a fad at all.

Charles Polansky, sports writer, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 21, 2005

Q: How long have you worked in the media industry?

A: Since 1996.

Q: How long have you worked at the *Star-Telegram*?

A: Since 1998.

Q: How long did you write fantasy sports columns?

A: 18 months or so.

Q: Did you have complete control over what's in your column—or was a topic assigned to you?

A: I was pretty much left to do what I wanted with the column, with a few gentle nudges in a certain direction from time to time. I had an editor that wanted things done a certain way, writing things specifically about fantasy games and all, but I was able to convince the powers-that-be to write more generally on sports like most fantasy sites do these days.

Q: How did what was in other newspapers affect your column content?

A: Not really at all. Since I trolled the Internet and the AP Wire for information, I guess you could say I was affected by that content.

Q: Did other kinds of media—such as the Internet—affect your content decisions?

A: Yes. The Internet, I think, has helped fantasy sports explode. It's so *easy* to play the games now, and sites like Yahoo! or ESPN.com do all the dirty work with stat compilations and so on. The Internet was, and is, invaluable.

Q: In what ways has sports page content changed since you've been in the media business?

A: I'm not sure it's changed all that much in my seven or so years. There's probably more eye-candy, more charts and graphs, help boxes, and cutesy stuff like Q&A's. But for the most part, it's stayed pretty similar.

Q: What trends have you noticed regarding fantasy sports in the mass media overall?

A: It's all going to the Internet. I'm not sure there's much more viable information in newspapers. The Internet is able to update information immediately and give updates about players. Like when Mark Prior got hurt earlier this year, the Internet Web sites had it immediately. I would've had to wait several days, perhaps almost a full week, to write about that in my column if I wanted to do that.

Q: What do you think prompted these changes?

A: Again, the immediacy of the Internet. That kills fantasy sports in newspapers, except for season preview packages, or weekly fantasy football columns.

Q: What is the benefit of these changes?

A: Well, it's free for one. Granted, not everybody has Internet access, but for me it's easier to flip on the computer and hit a few Web sites than pay cash for a newspaper subscription. Newspapers still carry box scores and news and stuff, but for fantasy sports spin you've got to have Internet access.

Q: For what medium do you think fantasy sports is best suited?

A: Without question, the Internet, for the reasons I mentioned earlier.

Q: How does the *S-T* try to attract the fantasy sports hobbyists in particular?

A: I don't think we do much anymore. There is a section on the baseball page that highlights heroes from the night before across the top of the box scores/standings/recap page. I think *USA Today*—or maybe it's *The DMN*—runs a stat leader part in the game-by-game results part of the standings package. That's helpful.

Q: Personally, when did you first become aware there was such a thing as fantasy sports?

A: I joined a fantasy football league when I was in college, probably around '95 or so. Before that, I really didn't have much knowledge of fantasy sports. I'd heard of Rotisserie baseball but didn't know much about it.

Q: When did fantasy sports first appear in the *S-T*?

A: As long as I've been here, we'd run a Friday-before-the-weekend fantasy football column that somebody on the desk would run. It was pretty simple, pretty much a run-down of that guy's team, who he played and maybe a hot/not pick for the week.

Q: Why did the *S-T* begin using fantasy sports?

A: I'm not sure.

Q: How would you gauge the impact of fantasy sports on the *S-T*'s content?

A: I don't really think there's much impact.

Q: In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

A: I'd say it's somewhere near the beginning, perhaps at the beginning of the middle. The Internet is only 10- to 15-years-old max, so I think we're only seeing the tip of the iceberg in fantasy sports on the 'Net, which is what has allowed fantasy sports to explode in recent years.

Brendan Roberts, senior editor, The Sporting News, June 1, 2005

Q: What's your job title?

A: Senior editor. I work mostly online.

Q: How long have you worked in the media industry?

A: In total, about 14 years

Q: How long have you been in your current position?

A: Senior editor for about four years, on the fantasy staff for about 5½ years, at *TSN* about nine years.

Q: What is the circulation of *The Sporting News*?

A: About 750,000

Q: What role do you play in selecting content for the magazine?

A: Very little, actually, if you're talking about the weekly mag. I worked for the mag before I worked on the fantasy site, but I don't do it so much now. And our fantasy mag page is determined by fellow senior editor George Winkler.

Q: Through what process do you decide on content?

A: For the site, we determine based on the abilities of our available writers and the demand of our e-mailers. For the mag, it's a mixture of what we feel works, the abilities of our in-house writers, and the mantra of our editorial staff.

Q: How does what's in other magazine impact your content decisions?

A: A little, but we don't consider ourselves "other magazines." We get ideas from other magazines, but we rarely are impacted by them.

Q: Do other kinds of media—such as the Internet, television, or radio, for example—
affect your content decisions?

A: A little, especially what our competitors—ESPN, Sportsline—do.

Q: In what ways has content changed since you've been in the mass media business?

A: More online, more premium, more specialization. I literally write about fantasy sports, primarily baseball, which was unheard of years ago. And my columns are read online, rarely in the magazine, and people are willing to pay money for our content.

Q: In what ways have the expectations of your subscribers changed since you've been in your current position?

A: With the magazine, we're trying to target a younger and more-casual audience. Online, there are so many variations of fantasy that we get more and more specialized/bizarre leagues everyday.

Q: How do their interests drive your content decisions?

A: Somewhat, although we still target the standard fantasy owner. For instance, we rarely target the deep-league points owner because we realized the most common reader on our site is the standard fantasy owner.

Q: How does advertiser interest drive your content decisions?

A: It rarely does. They are two separate departments, and we they can rarely tell us what to target. We want to do what we do best.

Q: What are some examples of subscriber-driven content in *The Sporting News*?

A: Our “Five in Your Face” section is based on the mantra of quick-hitting humor that we want to achieve now.

Q: How do you know what subscribers want to see?

A: We just get a feel. Also, we have surveys, both in the industry, and across our site and mag.

Q: Do you know what advertisers want to see?

A: We rarely do. At least in the mag, our ad managers rarely communicate that.

Q: What do you see as the most important function of *The Sporting News*?

A: To entertain, to teach about the game.

Q: How does fantasy sports fit into that?

A: We do just that. For years we did primarily teaching about the game. Now we're doing more entertaining, too.

Q: What trends have you noticed regarding fantasy sports in the mass media overall?

A: There's more of it, but there's still not enough of it compared to how many people play fantasy sports.

Q: Overall, do you see more fantasy sports in the mass media now than you used to?

A: Yes, although there's still a perception that fantasy sports players are all young college kids with lots of time on their hands. That's not true. According to the FSTA survey, most fantasy owners are in their mid-30s with jobs, wives, kids, etc.

Q: What do you think prompted these changes?

A: A necessity. Though most sports purists don't play fantasy sports, they had to realize that it has become popular in both underground and mainstream America.

Q: What is the benefit of these changes?

A: Both an acceptance and a growth of fantasy sports.

Q: For what medium do you think fantasy sports is best suited?

A: Online ... by far. It's where most game programs, including *TSN Games*, are.

Q: How does *The Sporting News* try to attract fantasy sports hobbyists in particular?

A: Through advertising, through our fantasy pages in the mag, and by getting our content and games sites in front of as many people as possible.

Q: When did you first become aware there was such a thing as fantasy sports?

A: [In] 1991, when I was working at a daily newspaper that had an AL-only points league.

Q: When did fantasy sports first appear in *The Sporting News*?

A: About three years ago.

Q: Why did *The Sporting News* begin using fantasy sports?

A: Because we realized it was a popular activity for sports enthusiasts, i.e., the type of people who read TSN.

Q: How would you gauge the impact that fantasy sports has had on your content?

A: There's really no way to. But the growth of our games and our content site (www.fantasy.sportingnews.com) indicates that more people are coming to us for fantasy info and games than ever before.

Q: In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

A: Somewhere in between, but closer to the infancy stages. It's not like fantasy is a new concept. It's very popular today. There are plenty of publications devoted to it, especially pre-season publications; however, it's still not considered popular to the "mainstream" fan, although surveys show the mainstream fan more or less plays it, at least fantasy football. It could be a greater factor in our print media, but the process is slow.

David Sessions, media columnist, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 2, 2005

Q: Can you give me a description of your job?

A: I'm a sports reporter covering high schools and general assignments, with a weekly column on sports media.

Q: How long have you covered the media?

A: I took over the "Media Insider" column in August 2004.

Q: How long have you been at the *Star-Telegram*?

A: Since September 2003.

Q: How has sports programming content changed in the last few years?

A: It has changed mostly in presentation. I think networks are looking for eye-candy to keep people interested, from the cable cameras hovering over the field to the busy, expensive sets you see on TNT's NBA coverage. It's almost like they feel like people wouldn't watch sports if they didn't jazz it up. I don't think CBS has that problem with the Masters, though. In some ways, coverage has improved because there's so much information that broadcasters have access to and can pass on. It's always interesting to see a graphic that STATS, Inc. dug up quickly about the number of blue-eyed third basemen to hit for the cycle on Tuesdays. That's relatively new. The Olympics was the perfect example of using new technology to enhance viewing—think of the superimposed flags and names in each lane of the swimming pool. But I also think much of sports

programming has changed into this sort of dumbed-down, celebrity-based entertainment instead of responsible journalism. The same thing is happening at CNN—get a few guys to yell at each other and some slick graphics and forget about telling in-depth stories or asking the tough questions. There is way more “Stump the Schwab” and Stuart Scott mindlessness on ESPN than necessary. I think HBO does a better job at telling stories in a weekly half-hour show than “SportsCenter” does most nights.

Q: Has what viewers want to see changed?

A: Hard to say. Do viewers have any input in the matter? I think they are more concerned with stats and their fantasy teams than they were in the past. Viewers still watch important games and they still largely ignore unimportant ones. And there’s a certain group that will watch whatever’s on ESPN News for hours a day. I guess the main thing that has changed is [that] viewers want their information immediately, and a local news sportscast is not timely or in-depth enough for them. Why would you watch that when you can actually *see* the whole press conference, immediately after the game, on ESPN News?

Q: Have you seen an increase fantasy sports-related content in broadcast over the past few years?

A: Yes, absolutely.

Q: In what way?

A: Stats used to supplement coverage, to explain things. You would see that a guy had rushed for 100 yards in five consecutive games and think, “he’s having a good year,” or “that’s a great offensive line,” or whatever. Now you see the same stat and think, “I should put him on my fantasy team.” So in some ways, the actual game itself is secondary to the imaginary game. DirecTV is coming out with something they call the Red Zone channel. It will flip between games and only show teams that are about to score. Now obviously anyone who watches that doesn’t care about which teams win, but which players have good performances for their fantasy teams. Last season, ESPN had a cartoon character segment that broke down fantasy numbers and made suggestions. I would say no one would have predicted that kind of thing 10 years ago. Every network that airs NFL games breaks in with crawls listing players’ performances in other games. I don’t know that that is directly a fantasy influence, but it seems like one.

Q: Is this a direct effort to attract the 15 million fantasy sports hobbyists?

A: Yes. FOX Sports chairman David Hill said so when I asked him if they were trying specifically to reach fantasy players. The networks get a huge amount of traffic on their Web sites, where they run fantasy games, and it all ties in and enhances their product.

Q: When did fantasy sports first appear start appearing in programming content?

A: I would say about 1998 or 1999, when the big Web sites like ESPN.com and CBS SportsLine started offering fantasy games. But I’m not sure when it became such a big influence, maybe more recently. DirecTV’s NFL package was a big factor; I know my

college roommates and I would sit and flip between games until somebody scored. Just like the Red Zone channel.

Q: How would you gauge the impact of fantasy sports on programming?

A: It creates a fervent fan base for certain sports. You can't just follow your team, and by team I mean a real team. You have to watch all the games, and every game has some sort of impact on your fantasy league. So there's the added interest from it, and the networks try to cater to that with stats-oriented reporting and maybe a greater emphasis on injury reporting.

Q: In your opinion, where is fantasy sports as a programming innovation? In its infancy stages or more advanced?

A: It's still early, and we'll see if someday there'll be interactive TV where you can input your own fantasy team and watch those players' highlights. At the same time, maybe the luster will wear off fantasy sports a bit and maybe the networks will abandon it. But as long as they're driving traffic to the Web sites and creating appointment TV for fans, the networks will continue to cater to fantasy sports junkies.

Joe Trahan, sports anchor/sports reporter, WFAA-TV (Dallas-market ABC affiliate),
June 3, 2005

Q: What's your job title? What should I call you?

A: Sports anchor/sports reporter

Q: How long have you worked in the media industry?

A: It would have been June of '89, so it's June now...so I'm coming up on 16 years.

Q: How long have you been in your current position?

A: I've been here the last two years.

Q: Do you know about how many households you reach?

A: That's a good question. At least a couple million. *At least.*

Q: Where does that put you in the market?

A: We've got the top-ranked 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. newscast, and at 10 p.m. we finished second.

Q: What role do you play in selecting content?

A: When it comes down to myself, if I'm anchoring the show, I pretty much work in tandem with our executive producer and our assistant sports director. We all kind of work together. One guy has the operation side. He said "OK, here's the people I'm sending here" [and] he filters that through the content guy and we figure out what we can

get. And we kind of establish, “OK, well what do we want?” We all kind of work together in corroboration. Some days it’s just handed out like “OK, we know we’re going to be here and here. That just makes sense and we’ll do it.” Other days we have to make decisions and put our heads together to decide. Basically the way it works, if you’re anchoring the show you can have veto power. Most of the time.

Q: How many times do you anchor?

A: At least twice a week—on the weekends. At this point of the year, Dale takes off from now to training camp, so I do all his “Dale Hansen Sports Specials,” and I take a lot of Thursday and Fridays. So this time of year...quite a bit, yeah. I anchor quite a bit.

Q: How does what’s on other Dallas-area networks affect your content decisions?

A: Well, in our business we always check the competition. But what we do at WFAA, we’ve been the industry leader, I think, as far as local sports goes. With a guy like Dale, we’ve been the industry leader. We’ve been innovative and found creative ways of doing things. So while we may be watching, we still kind of do our own thing. We think we’ve got the resources, the people power to do things maybe a little bit differently and a little bit better. A lot of times, we try to set the market and let everybody catch up with us.

Q: Do other kinds of media—such as Internet—affect your content decisions?

A: It definitely all factors in. In fact, I read what’s in print first. I look at the newspapers. I think the Web is great tool for us in sports because I can literally go to sportspages.com and find any sports page in America and get the local take on what the big story is. For

me, it gives perspective more than anything. It can help you out with that. But as far as actually deciding what goes on our air, we make those decisions, you know? If it's local, that's the most important; if it's going to affect people in our community. Those are the most important...at the front of the decision. It's got to be local, and it's got to affect people who live in our community, because that's what we cover. After that, when it comes to some of those national stories, that's where those resources like the Web and those other sports pages comes into perspective.

Q: In what ways has content changed since you've been in the mass media business?

A: It's in part because of cable television, basically. Sixteen years ago, when I first started in the business, I would show a couple of highlights from Major League games, and I also made sure that I showed every Major League score. You would see graphics with scoreboards. Well, Dale was one of the first people to stop doing them. I stopped doing them several years ago as well when I was working in New Orleans, before I was working here. You don't need to do that anymore with the Web, with cable TV. Anybody who's a sports fan knows all they have to do is click on ESPN and look at the bottom line and they've got their scores in two minutes. That means I don't have to—I don't want to say *waste*—I don't have to spend that time on those scoreboard graphics. I could be spending that on other local news that affects our community, or other things we deem to be important.

Q: Would one broadcast time vary from another broadcast time? Like would you maybe see those scoreboard graphics at 10 p.m., or on the first newscast of the morning?

A: We don't do them at all anymore here at 'FAA. We don't do them. At all. Period. Because we know that people are savvy enough and that they've got the resources that they don't need us to do them. In fact, I don't know that...if there are still local sportscasters doing scoreboard graphics, other than on the bottom line, I would call that, at this point, a waste of time. That's not a good use of your resources if you're a sportscaster because while you're jabbering about that, you should be talking about something else, spending that time more wisely.

Q: What trends have you noticed regarding fantasy sports in the mass media?

A: I think the biggest impact that fantasy sports has had broadcast-wise you can find by looking at ESPN and ESPN2. They've got full segments that are targeted at fantasy players. They have got the time and the ability to put those numbers and talk about those numbers. They've got fantasy football analysts during football season. They come on every week. And you also notice that during a lot of their specialty shows like "Inside the NBA" or the baseball show that they do, they will do "Inside the Numbers." And all that is geared at fantasy players because they want to give them the numbers.

Now, on a local level...I am broadcast. And the cable guys, why they can do this so well, they are narrowcast. And because I'm broadcasting, it's tough for me to get bogged down in numbers, because the research shows that when you start getting bogged down in numbers, that's when you start to lose the person who isn't that hardcore fan. And I've

got to go get them! I've got to go get those people. I can't lose those people. So I think on local level it is more difficult to get that fantasy player what they need. Everybody in here...I'm not in one right now, but just about everybody in here in this department has played in a fantasy league in the last two or three years. I'm also savvy enough to know that they can get their stats in a heartbeat. So I feel like they're taken care of. And if they're not they know how to be. What they do like is the analytic stuff that the ESPNs can give them, and the CNNs. They like that analysis. They do it on radio as well, I've heard, where they try to pick out the guy who's going to be flying under radar that might be a good fantasy pickup and all those kind of things. But it's tough on a local level to specifically target that person.

Q: What do you think prompted these changes?

A: I think they realized just how big it's become. Anybody who's involved with sports knows. With the way the Web and different outlets have made it so easy to put together a fantasy league and to manage a fantasy league, we all know that. Now instead of having to get on the phone and having to have this draft and it used to be that if you wanted to make transactions you had to call the commissioner...well it's not like that anymore. It's just a few points and clicks, and that's helped it explode even further. And because of that, I think the big broadcast boys like your ESPNs of the world know that if they don't cater to those people they're missing out on opportunities. I'm sure they've got a lot of that stuff sponsored, so it's also made new revenue streams for them by catering to that fantasy fan. And when you talk about new revenue streams they're going to jump all over that, we know that!

Q: For what medium do you think fantasy sports is best suited?

A: That's a good question. That's a good question. From my own personal experience, when I was playing fantasy football, the best medium for me was the Web. The ability to quickly get what I needed tailor-made for me...if I had Duece McAllister as one of my running backs, I knew that there were five or six sites I could go to before his game was even over. There were several times when I'd be on the road, I could go online while I was covering the Saints and check out some of my other guys at halftime and see what they were doing. There was so much content there. There are so many different outlets. I just think it's awesome. It's made it really easy for the fantasy fan to follow what they do. And instantaneously, too...that's the thing. Every major sports franchise now has instantaneous Web coverage. You can follow a game on the Web, and I do this quite often while game is going on. I can get stats instantaneously. Hit refresh, and you're update to the last second of stuff. And that's what the fantasy guy wants. That's the heart of it, is the stats, and I think the Web does the best job of that because it's instantaneous.

Q: Does WFAA try to attract the fantasy sports hobbyists in particular?

A: I think that's where our Web comes in to play. That's where WFAA.com really comes in to play, and they do a good job of it. Like I said, as soon as the game's over you can get the box score pretty much instantaneously. It will be on our Web site, and you've got what you want, you've got what you need. I think that's how we're doing it, because I think we give the fantasy fan credit that they will know how to get what they need. If we can push them to the Web and get some page hits from it, that's good for us.

Q: What about over the air? Do you guys do anything different now because of fantasy?

A: Good question. I was actually thinking about this on drive down this morning. I really don't think we do; although...the one thing I do is I will throw in mentions when a guy is having a good season, when he's putting up big numbers, I will throw out the term "fantasy favorite" or "fantasy football favorite." You know? "Oh, this guy is really becoming a fantasy football favorite! He's been catching touchdown passes, that's twelve for the year...yadda, yadda, yadda." I will throw that in. That's probably the only tangible thing that's difference. I think that's significant because in that instance I am speaking directly to the fantasy fan. On a broader-based perspective everybody may not know what I'm talking about but by now they've got an inkling. They might just have an inkling. "Oh yeah, that fantasy stuff." But the fantasy fan is like, "So Joe's keeping up!" He knows that I know what I'm talking about, so I do throw that in.

Q: What do you think when you hear like Boomer Esiason during the coverage of the game, when Freddie Mitchell catches a touchdown pass, he said "Oh...that's great! He's on my fantasy team"?

A: Oh yeah! That's the other thing! You hear that all the time now. And that just helps the snowball of fantasy keep rolling. We've all played it, and it's from everyone involved on all sides. Producers, the guys who are making the decisions, they're all playing. It's just one happy family when it comes to fantasy. Everybody loves it. Everybody who's in the business, everybody who's covering the business, can relate.

Q: In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

A: Right. I think it's got a core foothold. I think those of us who are in the media understand that there is this core foothold of people who are doing it. And we've got to wait to see if it explodes and continues or if it levels off. I'm not ready to call it a plateau yet. With all the kids who come up now playing PlayStation, they should be able to translate that into a fantasy football environment for them. And if they can find a link between that, between the video gamer and the fantasy player, that's dynamite.

Q: Is that the next thing? You start hearing Al Michaels talking about a guy making "PlayStation moves" or something like that?

A: Absolutely. Not only that, I think the PlayStation thing is already here because of John Madden. John Madden worked so closely with EA Sports that there are times—and this is a quote—when they try to make the broadcast look like what's on the video game, as opposed to vice versa. That in and of itself is part of what makes EA Sports so popular. That Madden genre specifically is what I'm talking about, about what makes it so popular.

Q: Anything else to add?

A: I wish we could do more on the local level. It's a function of time though. It's really a function of time.

Q: What would you like to do, like a show similar to what's on TXCN?

A: Yeah, a "Fantasy Corner" or anything that would cater specifically. But again, we get into that narrowcasting-broadcasting issue. We're still broadcasters. I'm a broadcaster. It would be nice to find a niche for it, but as of yet I don't know if we're at the point where we could find one and make it viable in broadcasting. It's segmented. But you see these preview shows, that could certainly help. You could preview the week and put it in a fantasy context. You could preview the week the ask the questions for fantasy fans, like "Should I start..." different scenarios. "Do you think I should sit Brian Westbrook this week?" You know? And of course the injury issue is incredibly important. You could do it very well by covering a couple of bases.

David Young, fantasy sports columnist, CNNSI.com, June 7, 2005

Q: What's your exact job title?

A: Well, I'm not really an employee of *Sports Illustrated*. I'm the baseball and football editor for the "Talented Mister Roto" Web site (www.talentedmrroto.com). We share content with SI. We run about 24 baseball columns a week, and we give four to them.

Q: How long have you worked in the media industry?

A: Just a couple years, doing the writing. March of '04. But I've been playing fantasy sports since 2001. I first heard of fantasy sports in 1984, when I worked for Chevron and some of the engineers were playing fantasy sports. They cut out the box scores and made a spread sheet and all that, but I didn't get involved because that was too complicated.

Q: Hold on. I have to ask how you get from Chevron to journalism?

A: My undergrad was in chemical engineering. I did that for three years, then went to law school at Penn. There was another three years. I worked for a law firm, and then like any lawyer I had my fill of it. So I started writing. The question was finding my niche where I could fit in. This guy, Matt Berry, started this web site, Talented Mister Roto, and he put out feelers. So I sent him some stuff, and it worked out well. This year, SI contacted him about sharing columns, and two of mine ended up there. Part of it was just finding the opportunity.

Q: How many hits does Talented Mister Roto receive?

A: Overall, about 10,000 per month. Basically, we have about 24 baseball columns a week, and each one of them gets about 300 to 1,200 hits per week. The mean is around 600 per column per week. With football, we get more hits for the same number of columns. We also have columns for things like NASCAR, arena football, and golf, about 10 columns total for those sports.

Q: What role do you play in selecting content?

A: Within Talented Mister Roto, myself and my editor sat down at the beginning of the season—well, about February—and created a list of 24 different columns to be run, and what made sense on what day. That list has pretty much survived, I think, with a few exceptions. In terms of the idea, it was me and my editor, with Matt overseeing it. We give our writers a lot flexibility. That's kind of how the site advertises itself—you get the fantasy sports information but it's entertaining to read. For SI, they looked at the 24 columns, and they picked the four that they liked. We give them what they expect, but they also have the latitude to edit anyway they want. It's not been anything terrible.

Q: Overall, what trends have you noticed regarding fantasy sports in the mass media?

A: SI has its own menu column for fantasy sports on the home page. Going back to 1984 and people had to write this by hand, that was very difficult. Then it became a killer app for the Internet. I'd put fantasy sports up there with e-mail and pornography as a reason to bring people to the Internet. In terms of fantasy sports, it just doesn't work in other media. By the time you see it in a magazine, it's already old. It doesn't work on TV because there's so much information. Well, it works better for football on TV because

it's all on one day. On the Internet, it makes a difference to bringing people there. It's kind of easy to tell somebody's track record.

I liken it to *Star Wars* fans when those movies come out. Between the times the movies are out, you don't want to look like a geek by talking about it all the time. But when the movies come out, you can get out the Darth Vader costume and go stand in line. In the last few years it's become more accepted. You go to parties now and people start talking about their fantasy teams. It's even leaking out of sports and into other people's areas of expertise. My boss is in a fantasy movie league, where you draft movies that are going to be released over the last year. He won a lot of money last year because he drafted *The Passion of the Christ* for a dollar. It sets off the same neurons in your head that following the stock market would. I've always said that baseball could stop playing tomorrow and just put out random numbers, and we would just use those. The game doesn't even have to occur!

Q: Do other kinds of media—such as television—affect your content decisions?

A: It can. I don't think that Internet media and television media and print media are independent of each other. What we're going to see though is less on TV, but more streaming video on the Net. I've seen more of other sites immolating what we're doing than the other way around because we've pretty much hit every topic.

Q: Did CNN.com begin using fantasy sports only with you, or did they have fantasy content before you?

A: They had it before that, though it was less conspicuous and less frequent. Right now they're running a column a day, whereas before I tried to find info from them as a player and it was maybe two or three pieces of information per week. Their info has increased because they see it as a way to increase hits. It's definitely a way to increase hit counts.

Q: In your opinion, how saturated is fantasy sports in the mass media? In its infancy stages, at the end of the road, or somewhere in between?

A: There's no data to show it, but my feeling is that I think we've crested. It's like steroids: Once Congress hears about it, it's over. SI did a big story on it in their magazine last year, about how celebrities are playing fantasy sports and how Michael J. Fox jumped out of cab to draft a pitcher, and I think that was the peak. I'm confident in the 24 columns that we have standing alone, but when you add it to all those other sites, people's needs are more than being met. We'll get burned out and be on to something else. It's just like a fantasy baseball season. In April, everybody's in to it. By July half the owners are out of it, so only half the owners care. By Sept., it's only one or two owners who care about it.

Q: Anything else?

A: Well, I'll just say that it's a silent majority. There's a lot of people who play these sports, but it's not 100% mainstream. It's not something you start a conversation with. There are people from all walks of life doing this. I mean, I get e-mails from all around the world for people who are law professors, I get women, I get people from all around the world. It's everywhere.

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