Fantasy football’s popularity sweeps Ohlone students and the nation

ALBERT REBOSURA
Sports editor

Austin Gamble sits in the Speech Lab on his phone – not checking social media or email, but managing his fantasy football team. Gamble is one of many at Ohlone and millions worldwide who participate in the gaming phenomenon.

According to Forbes.com, more than 33 million people play fantasy football today and it has become a $70 million market.

The idea of fantasy football actually originated here in the Bay Area – in Oakland – by Bill Winkenbach in 1962.

The following year, Winkenbach, a businessman and minority owner of the Oakland Raiders, with help from Scotty Sterling and George Ross, who worked for the Oakland Tribune, created the first fantasy football league: the Greater Oakland Professional Pigskin Prognosticators League.

Winkenbach, the “Godfather” of fantasy football and the first commissioner, died in 1993 at the age of 81. The Fantasy Sports Trade Association estimated 1 million to 3 million people played fantasy sports at the time of his death.

“It has grown exponentially since then, and is still growing today,” said Allen Chan, who went to Ohlone from 2010-2012. “As more people begin to play fantasy, their football awareness increases. Now fantasy football is an everyday conversation starter.”

Business major Amanpreet Sahota and criminal justice major Anant Jannu met in a statistics class this semester – thanks to fantasy football. “I saw him checking his app and I asked him, ‘You play fantasy?’” Jannu said.

Sophomore Austin Gamble manages his fantasy football team through an application on his phone. He is among many in the nation and Ohlone who participate in the growing online game.

So what is fantasy football?

Fantasy football is an in-person or online game that is primarily played online, which allows users to draft and manage NFL players to create their own unique teams. The participants are essentially “pretend” NFL general managers. They draft, trade, add and drop players. They set starting lineups and bench players every week like a head coach. Fantasy football simulates an actual professional football team.

All leagues are different, from the way they draft to the way teams are scored, to the amount of players teams can have on their rosters. All of that is based on the preferences of participants.

The uniqueness of every league is fascinating. Leagues can be playing for $25 to $1,000 or even more in a season. But not every one plays for money; some leagues play for trophies, WWE-style championship belts or any other item that players value.

Whether it’s for money, a trophy or pride, managing a fantasy football team is a 24/7 operation, and with thousands of leagues in existence, it is hard to keep up with all of them.

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