This week we're turning over the Commissioner's Office to Dobber Nation and taking some questions from the readers. Some queries have been edited for brevity. Over to you...

Question from LawMan: *Our weekly ESPN head-to-head league has 2 add/drops max per week and 3 goalie starts minimum (Goalie stats are W, GAA and SV%). Our league's rule surrounding goalie starts has always been that if a manager fails to get 3 goalie starts in a week, he forfeits the 3 goalie stats to his opponent. However, since ESPN software does not have a way to automatically control this, the commissioner has to manually alter the standings when this occurs. The dispute in question occurred when 2 managers who were facing each other both failed to get 3 goalie starts in a week, due to injuries and using both their moves early in the week. The managers not involved argued that since both managers failed to get 3 starts, they could not qualify for the points and both should go 0-3-0 (3 losses, 0 points each) for the week in goalie stats. The managers involved argued that on other servers that have automatic*

minimum start software (such as Yahoo, where our league was previously), when both managers fail to meet the minimum, they are considered tied and therefore both teams go 0-0-3 (3 ties, 3 points each). They argued that giving out 0 points would create a stats imbalance and further, they argued that since this situation had never come up, they should get the benefit of the doubt because creating a rule and applying it after the fact would be unfair. Oh Mighty Commissioner what is your ruling?

I'm a big proponent of thinking through every possible scenario and addressing it in the rulebook ahead of time – hence my league's rulebook that is longer than a Dostoevsky novel. But unless you have a crystal ball, freak unforeseen occurrences like this are bound to crop up occasionally and send the league into a tizzy. That's when the commissioner has to step in with a ruling that is most fair for as many teams as possible.

In this case, I would give each team 3 points (3 ties). As the two managers in question astutely pointed out, giving them both 0 would create an imbalance in which this match-up is worth less in the standings than all other match-ups. I feel the same way about that as I do about the fact that some NHL games count for 2 points and others for 3 – I hate it. A match-up can't have two losers, so saw it off and call it even; there's a reason most other websites do it that way. And whichever way you rule, be sure to update the league rulebook based on this precedent, in case it ever happens again.

Question from Bomb Bastic: *I am starting a 12-team dynasty, multi-cat league with 12-man active rosters (2C, 2RW, 2LW, 4D, 2G) and a 10-man bench + farm; weekly starts. A few questions: 1. What's a good way to determine when rosters freeze (ie waiver and trades)? 2. Is it best to set up a Fantrax account now, or is it ok to wait 'till after the first draft? Not sure if there are fees. 3. As defined by number of games played, prospect-eligible in terms of drafting, and prospect-eligible in terms of how long a player can stay on the farm should be two different numbers... correct?*

Welcome to the world of commishing! (Is that a word?) It's great that you're thinking so far ahead and laying the groundwork for next season already. To answer your questions:

1. I've always just used the NHL's trade deadline as the trade and transaction deadline in my league. It works well and adds even more excitement to "Trade Centre" day – one of my favourite days of the year! I know some leagues allow transactions through to the end of the season, but I like to mirror the NHL as closely as possible. It also prevents roster streaming late in the season, which in theory favours the managers who have built the best teams – which is how I think it should be.

2. There are no fees at Fantrax (not yet, anyway), so if you want to get in there now and start setting things up, you could certainly do so. But it wouldn't hurt to wait until the summer, either. Until you have players on the rosters, there's not much need for the website. However, I would definitely get it up and running before your draft, so you are full steam ahead as soon as your draft is complete.

3. I don't think there necessarily has to be a difference in the number of games for a prospect to be draftable, and how many games he can stay on the farm. In my league, the magic number is 100 GP for goalies and 165 GP for skaters. This number is the same for both the draft and farm eligibility. These numbers are roughly equivalent to two full NHL seasons. I think this works well because many players don't establish themselves as fantasy-worthy prospects until they have some NHL games under their belt. It also lets us stash guys on the farm until they are really

established, rather than using an active roster spot on a player who may not be producing much after his first season in the league. Look for a full article on this topic in the future.

Question from Killer67: *We run a money league and there's great debate over payout structure. (Note: it's a head-to-head league with playoffs that take place from mid-March to the end of the NHL season, so "playoffs" refers to that March-April period.) It's a 12-team league, with the top 6 making the playoffs. I think 1st place in the regular season should get the same as 1st place in the playoffs due to the grind of the regular season and luck of the playoffs. We also pay 2nd & 3rd for the playoffs but not regular season. Have you seen anything that truly works to maintain a nice balance in payout structure?*

To be honest, I haven't played in a money league for quite some time. I'd be happy to play for cash, but the league I manage is for nothing more than bragging rights (which I currently enjoy).

There's probably no right answer to this, but in my opinion, the biggest prize should go to the team that's still standing at the end of the head-to-head playoffs. That's what we all play for – to hoist the trophy in April.

Yes, there's an element of luck involved. A couple years ago I romped through the regular season and then got knocked out of the playoffs with one bad week in late March. It hurts, but them's the breaks. Ultimately, no one remembers who was in first place on March 16.

So, as much as I'd love to back you on this, I'd probably side with those who think the top prize should go to the playoff champ. I like having some money going to 2nd and 3rd place teams, with a bonus to the first place regular season team (perhaps they get their entry fee back). More often than not, the regular season champ will also finish in the top 3 in the playoffs, so the regular season bonus is gravy.

Question from Sportfreunde: *For a 30-team league looking to keep the salary cap below the NHL cap (because some GM's are far better than others, since this is a video game based league rather than fantasy stats)...what cap number would you recommend and why? What's the best way to set up a farm system that prevents GMs from hogging/stashing good young players but at the same time, allows for prospects to develop? This is for a league which has a 40-player roster limit instead of 50, but a lot of the teams in the league now are nearing or at the 40 limit and are having to drop players to FA, in which case they usually choose average prospects so there should be a better system for keeping them on a farm.*

To start with, let me whet your appetite by saying that my next article will kick off an extended series on salary cap-related commissioner issues, so watch for that for further insight on your first question.

Perhaps I'm not fully understanding your situation, but it seems to me that it would be very difficult to keep the cap below the NHL cap in a 30-team league with 40-man rosters. Under that scenario, pretty much every viable NHL player will be owned, and given the fact that the average NHL team is within a few million of the cap, I don't see how you can reduce the cap and still expect 30 teams to fit under it; the numbers just don't add up. In a league of that size and depth, I think you're pretty much stuck with the NHL cap. If I'm missing something that would clarify your situation, let me know below in the comments and I'll address it there.

Regarding prospects, as I said in my answer to Bomb Bastic, I'm in favour of requiring teams to call up prospects after 165 NHL games played. To prevent stashing, this number could be reduced, but then you may be forcing teams to dress young players that aren't ready to contribute in a meaningful way.

You might also consider reducing the size of the roster/farm teams. While a super-deep league is attractive to freaks like me, the reality is that if your farm is more than 10-12 deep, there's more guesswork than skill involved in filling out your farm, and many of your prospects will never see the light of day in the NHL. I'm in a league like yours (30 teams, deep farm teams) and I enjoy the challenge, but not many fantasy GM's are knowledgeable enough to go 600 players deep into the minor leagues and junior circuits. Truthfully, I prefer my shallower league in which most teams have only 10-12 prospects. It allows every team to stock a nice selection of up-and-comers.

Question from Grapes: *Hey, just wanted your take on open roster spots. It's a Yahoo points-only keeper pool with monthly line-ups and no waivers. The problem arises when trades are made. I have had it happen twice, where the guys I have traded have left an open roster spot because the Commish doesn't set the new players into the roster in time. I have lost out on*

points as a result. It has happened to a couple other GM's as well. The answer from the Commish, "it happens to all of us so it will balance out." It hasn't happened to the Commish. Your thoughts?

It sounds to me like perhaps your commish has too much control over the process. As you know, when you make a trade in Yahoo, all traded players are placed on the bench of their new team, which usually creates roster holes. In my league (which is also a Yahoo league), it is the responsibility of each team to rectify that for themselves. As soon as the commissioner approves the trade, both teams receive an automatic e-mail from Yahoo telling them that the trade has been processed. They can then edit their own line-up for the next roster period to fill the holes.

If I'm understanding you correctly, it sounds like your Commissioner has set it up so that only he can edit the lineup, and he's failing to do so in time. Allowing teams to do it themselves puts the onus on them – if they fail to make the changes in time, they have no one to blame but themselves. So, the way I see it, the solution is to take the roster control out of the commissioner's hands entirely. As a commish, I personally wouldn't want that level of control over other people's teams anyway.

Thanks to all who submitted questions! If you'd like to participate in future mailbags, follow me on Twitter @commishoffice.