Fantasy Hockey Site Review: Fantrax

Note: This is the sixth in a series of reviews of the most popular online fantasy hockey league websites. All the sites have their strengths. The intention of these reviews is not to favour one site over another, but to provide a resource for league commissioners to determine which site will best meet the needs of their league. All sites are evaluated on the same criteria to provide for easy comparison, with a letter grade assigned to each factor. The opinions of the reviewer do not necessarily reflect those of Dobber Hockey.

Website Reviewed: Fantrax Fantasy Sports

Name of Reviewer: Blair Alexander

User-Friendliness B

From my perspective, Fantrax Fantasy Hockey proves to offer the most complete fantasy hockey experience. While it isn't overly flashy and doesn't offer the refined, polished look of its competitors, it provides fantasy hockey commissioners and GMs alike the functionality to offer a plethora of features without having to use the manual, "band-aid" workarounds typical of other websites.

While first time commissioners might feel a bit intimidated by the wealth of options and features that are at their disposal, the initial league setup offers messages which help guide the commissioner through the setup process. Every selectable option has an in-depth explanation and help feature (accessible via onscreen link) which does a thorough job of explaining the feature and its variants. While there is a steeper learning curve to setting up a Fantrax league, this is to be expected given the many features and high level of customization.

The roster management system makes for extremely easy and efficient day to day roster manipulation. Lineups lock at a time decided upon by the Commish but can include weekly/daily/monthly setups. Daily lineups can also be further broken down to lock for individual players at a time before the first game of the day or per individual player at a certain time before each game. GMs can choose to make lineup changes using the drag and drop system or the classic "click" interface, both of which can be toggled via your team owner preferences.

One feature that proactive GMs will appreciate is the ability to save your lineups for one specific scoring period or to reflect the roster for all scoring periods going forward. This is a huge time saver if you need to swap out a player at the last minute and do not want your change to reflect all scoring periods going forward. Also, team roster pages can be altered to show all games any given player plays for one specific matchup or between certain dates.

Free agency, waivers and trade blocks are all found in the transactions tab, and performing them is as simple as point and click. Before you pursue a transaction, you are always greeted with a prompt to ensure that you indeed want to carry out an action; if an action would result in an illegal roster, GMs will get a prompt ensuring they still want to proceed. If a GM carries out

an action which results in an illegal roster, a clear warning message is displayed at the top of the team page detailing the necessary steps that need to be taken to make the roster legal.

GMs have the option to prioritize their waiver claims so that multiple claims can be made, to ensure a GM gets first priority for all claims placed or so that after they make a successful claim the waiver priority is altered. Commissioners can choose to have Waivers run on certain days and times of the week, or for a specific duration after the player has been released from a team.

Scoring and Stats: A+

All major scoring formats are available in both the regular and playoff pools including Rotisserie, Points-based, Head to Head (Points-Based), Head to Head (Rotisserie/Category Based) Single Win and Head to Head (Rotisserie/Category Based) Multiple Win. Fantrax provides users with the most complete list of categories and statistical offerings I've ever witnessed in fantasy sports. It tracks all major stats but also includes more obscure stats such as match penalties, major and minor penalties, game misconducts, fights, shootout goals, Gordie Howe Hat tricks, TOI (shorthanded, PP variants) and 1st, 2nd, 3rd star delegations. For leagues that want goalie stats, specific skater stats can be added such as goalie points (goals, assists, PPP) along with all the regular goalie stats such as goals against average, save percentage, saves, wins, losses overtime losses, shootout wins, shootout losses etc. Stats can be the same for all players or you have the option to score different positions at different values for the same stats.

One amazing feature of percentage based stats tracking is the ability to set point values by a value point range which is ongoing throughout the weekly scoring period for head to head leagues, or for the year in the case of rotisserie leagues. The Commissioner assigns the value and wherever the goalie lies within the point range at week's (year's) end is the amount of points they would receive. Below is an example of the point ranges for GAA and SV% I have set for my H2H weekly points keeper league.

(GAA) Range Value

(SV%) Range Value

0 - .5 = 8

1.0 - .975 = 8

.6 – 1.0 = 6

.974 - .950 = 6

1.1 – 2.0 = 4

.949 - .925 = 4

2.1 – 2.5 = 2

.924 - .900 = 2

3.0 – 4 = 1

.899 - .700 = 1

4.1 – 10 = -1

.699 - .000 = -1

The Draft: A+

Fantrax supports both online and offline drafts. The draft applet is sturdy and allows you to pre-rank players you wish to acquire to make the draft process succinct and flow smoothly. While pre-ranking, you can separate by average draft position, point generation for various seasons as well as for best player in a specific category and more. If GMs are in a salary cap league, the salaries are displayed next to each player so you can keep active and up to date on salary remaining for your team and all others. The autodraft feature is specialized, allowing GMs to exclude players they have no intention of drafting, but can also queue the draft queue to draft specific positions per round. The site offers mock drafting so that GMs can plan specific strategies or hopefully pick up on current drafting trends or tendencies to better help prepare come draft day.

The draft room is very well customized in the sense that the GM has a wealth of tools at his disposal. Draft picks can be traded and players can be traded as well during the draft (depending on permissions set by the commish). There are features to rewind the draft to a certain round and also to pause and resume in the case of an emergency.

Keeper League Compatibility: A+

Keeper League Commisioners and GMs alike can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that Fantrax takes, at the most, a week's break after the end of the regular season before they offer the following year's hockey pool. Keepers, stats, weightings and traded picks all carry over to the following year along with the complete league history. EVERYTHING stays; Draft picks for future years can be traded but Commisioners can put restrictions in place for how many years in advance if they so wish.

Farm Teams: A+

The complete automation of farm team integration is one of the key pivots in what makes Fantrax excel when it comes to keeper leagues. Commsioners do not have to worry about adding extra IR spots or keeping tabs on a web forum as a way to simulate a farm team as it works as intended, with all the bells and whistles right from the get go. The total number of minor leaguers can be capped if so wished, but can also be set to no maximum for leagues looking for bulky teams and less depth on the waiver wire. Restrictions can be placed on minor league status based on age or games played (can be set different for skaters/goalies) current league status, etc. Minor league players can be drawn up from the farm team to be swapped into active roster spots if a GM sees fit, so it functions just like an NHL team and affiliate.

Salary Cap Leagues: A+

Commissioners seeking salary options will be pleased to know that Fantrax offers three salary type setups, including actual NHL player salaries and salary cap hits. For those more inclined to add their own personal touch, all salaries are also able to be changed manually to incorporate any further customization by the league's commissioner. Features for salary regeneration (allowing GMs to have to work with up to date salary) can be set to take place on reoccurring days of the week or can be also set to be manually handled. The salary options also include the ability to set contracts for players that can be renewed and/or extended depending on the tweaks, and are fully hands free and handled by the system.

Depending on the options chosen, rosters can be set to be illegal for not staying within the salary constraints set forth by the league, and result in GMs not accumulating points. Also, there are options that do not allow GMs to acquire players or make trades that would put them over the designated salary limit.

Playoff Pools: B

NHL playoff pools and regular season pools of each of the aforementioned types are offered yearly. Points-only, count Top X formats are not set up for Fantrax.

Customization: B+

The term customization is at the very heart of what makes Fantrax so special. Their tireless efforts to ensure commissioners and GMs alike are offered the most complete, autonomous, NHL owner experience is what sets Fantrax apart from the competition. Any rule, option, request that you can think of is at your disposal, to be added or modified.

Some of the neat features offered are fully operational farm teams with callups (eligibility), large roster sizes, multiple position offerings with the ability to add different stats per position, salaries and contract implementation, multiple head to head matchups per week (double headers), illegal rosters, live league chat, multiple team trades, automatic prize payouts and much, much more.

For a full list of features offered by Fantrax and a competitor comparison please visit: http://www1.fantrax.com/showPage.go?page=features

One weakness Fantrax has - it does not handle Points-Only leagues where you "count the Top X players". A surprising number of leagues require such a feature, so it's only a matter of time before Fantrax is on board. So for now, it falls short of an A here.

Fun Features: A

Through the team preferences page, GMs are able to customize their own personal look and feel in regards to stats that are shown as well as how their lineups are set, and can upload an

image for their team logo which displays on the live stats ticker as well as on each roster page.

For GMs who like to look at past draft trends or past league results for strategic purposes or just plain old good fun, commissioners have the option to link league histories together so that past stats, etc. are carried over to subsequent years. While this might not mean a lot to those in one year leagues, it is a very nice addition for keeper leagues participants.

Fantrax comes equipped like most fantasy sites with a fully operational message board for trash talk, trade discussions and any other form of communication which would otherwise keep the league connected. The one feature which really sets Fantrax apart is the chat room, which is built right into the league homepage, where messages can be typed in real time. Keeping a league active has never been easier! GMs can send public messages to each other or private messages to multiple GMs to swing three-way deal (which is automatically carried out by the system once all players accept via trade screen).

The host also keeps a backup of your league in the rare occasion a commissioner makes a mistake, offering the ability to roll back the league to a specific date.

Resources: B+

One of DobberHockey's own, Gates Imbeau, contributes to the NHL fantasy hockey column weekly with his insights into fantasy hockey and news happening around the league. The header applet that constantly appears on the top of your page links you to up to date news, injuries and transactions around the league and are frequently updated. Apart from this, each GM home page shows news pertaining to the players on their roster, with any news that may crop up, to keep GMs informed about the players on their rosters.

Responsiveness: A

The team running Fantrax is very prompt at returning emails and feedback requests for help. While premium members usually get feedback within a two-hour timeframe, sometimes there can be a 24 hour wait for non-paying leagues. On the whole, you are never left more than day waiting for a response.

The ever growing list of features is a direct result of the developer listening to the needs of its members, and they work tirelessly to implement what users want. While lineup changes, etc. can be done via mobile web browser, it would be nice to see the addition of a mobile app, which they say should make an appearance soon.

Cost: A+

Fantrax has a two-tiered service: while on one hand they do offer a free service, it does not contain all of the features that are included in the premium package. The premium service (including all features) is competitively priced at $59.95 per year but includes a free (with all features) sign up for one playoff pool as well. For Commissioners and GMs of keeper leagues, there is also an option for a lifetime membership offering multiple league packages. With these packs you are guaranteed to NEVER pay a higher price for league registration if the price ever goes up. To date, there isn't a fantasy hockey provider available that offers this many features at this low a price.

Overall Rating – One Year Leagues: A-

Overall Rating – Keeper Leagues: A-

I would recommend Fantrax Fantasy sports to any GM and or commissioner. One year leagues or keeper leagues, premium or non-premium, Fantrax provides, hands down, the most complete fantasy hockey experience. While it does have a small learning curve in part due to the level of customization, commissioners benefit largely from the time they save having a system that takes care of all the minuscule tasks and concerns automatically. Not only does this save time, it also helps to uphold the integrity of a league.

Getting this pool manager up to speed in terms of handling "Top X" players in points leagues is all that's stopping this manager from obtaining a perfect rating.