Ed. Note: This article marks the first instalment of ***The Commissioner's Office****, a new regular column on DobberHockey that will examine issues that concern fantasy league commissioners – but hopefully will be of interest to all readers. In the months ahead, we'll be looking at league and draft formats, the plusses and minuses of counting various scoring categories, rule debates, dispute resolution, boosting GM interest and involvement, and much more. Today's piece is reprinted from a couple years ago, but serves as a fitting kick-off.*

There are hockey pools... and then there are fantasy leagues.

There are thousands of people who are content with joining a typical pool, whose priorities are in order and whose self-esteem and personal happiness aren't tied up in the performance of their team. They are, in a word, normal. Some take it extra casually, scarcely giving their team a thought before or after draft day. You know the type... twenty minutes before the office draft, they can be found frantically trying to print off last year's stats from NHL.com. During the draft they say things like, "I thought Jeff Carter plays for Philly," and then they try to draft Brian Rafalski, blissfully unaware that he just retired. In other words, they don't take their fantasy hockey all that seriously... not that there's anything wrong with that.

Then there are others of us – and if you're reading this, you're probably one of us. Driven by unfulfilled dreams of becoming an NHL GM, we spend untold hours trolling the internet for the tiniest scrap of information that could potentially impact our fantasy team – even in the dog days of summer. Our draft lists undergo more revisions than a federal tax bill, and our wives and girlfriends frequent sites like this . Some may say we have too much time on our hands (and they're probably right), but those people obviously haven't experienced the thrill of a last-minute empty net goal that secures a much needed victory.

As a certifiable member of the fantasy hockey obsessed, a few years ago I set out to create a league that only a true geek could love. Is it over the top? Absolutely. But it's a whole lot of fun, and that's what fantasy sports are all about. So for all you commissioners out there, here are some ideas to inject some *fantasy* into your fantasy league.

1. The Basics

A Clear Rulebook: On the surface, this one may not have a high excitement factor. But history has shown that few fantasy leagues remain fun for very long without a clearly defined set of rules. The more ambiguity you've got, the sooner you're going to encounter a dispute that sucks the joy out of the game and perhaps even threatens to derail your league. So nip this kind of trouble in the bud by putting a good deal of thought into your rules from the start. Think through the scenarios that are likely to crop up, and make sure they are adequately addressed. Don't forget to include rules governing how rule changes will be handled. If you need help getting started, Dobber's got a variety of keeper league rulebooks here . Or if you're truly bored, have a read through my 15-page manifesto here .

League & Team Identity: The first thing any team needs is a name... and I don't know about you, but I've never heard of a real life squad called Mike's Team. Encourage your GMs to put some effort into coming up with a creative team name, and then take it to the next level with team logos. Most online hockey pool services allow teams to upload an image, and having a proper logo adds a sense of realism. Those who are graphically challenged can usually find a willing helper from within the league, or even in Dobber's forum.

2. Virtual Reality

Deepening the Fantasy: When it comes to establishing team identity and league culture, team names and logos are just the beginning. Take the next step by encouraging your managers to name their farm teams, team captains and home arenas. Use the logos and Photoshop to create jerseys for each team. Many of the GMs in my league have fantasy managers and coaches for their teams, and our commissioner is the fictional King Theo (as in Fleury, my favourite player growing up).

Player Awards: Recognize the best performances of each season with fantasy awards, voted on by the GM's at season's end. In my league, we've got awards for MVP, best forward, defenseman and goalie, best goon, best rookie, breakout player of the year and more. After our first season, we named all the awards after the original winners. Who will win this year's Ovie Award, the Dion D-Man of the Year, and the Kane is Able Young Gun of the Year Award? Time will tell!

Trophies: It's always more fun when there's something on the line. In many leagues, cold hard cash ups the ante. We decided to keep money out of it, so instead I paid about $25 to commission a couple of trophies: the Theoren Fleury Memorial Trophy for the regular season champ, and the Mark Messier Trophy for the winner of our playoff pool. The winner gets to keep the prize on their shelf till next year, and because we've got GMs as far away as England, these trophies do get around.

3. Communication

Websites: One of the first decisions to be made when starting a league is choosing a website to host it. Though there are many fantastic online fantasy services during the season, there are few good options for keeper leagues that operate year-round or track farm teams. The good news is, in this day and age when everyone and their dog is an amateur web programmer, chances are there is someone in your league who would be willing and able to maintain a league website. Whether it's a very basic site that simply houses your rosters during the off-season, or a full-on professional quality site complete with high end graphics, blogs, feeds, calendars and more, a league website is an excellent way to more fully engage your GMs in the league and keep things cooking in the off-season. You can even add Dobber's ramblings to your site, if you're brave enough to share his insights with your opponents. Check out my league site at www.leagueheadquarters.com , and if you've got a site to show off, post your URL in the comments section below this article.

Message Boards: Trash talking is an essential part of any fantasy sports league. What's the fun of winning if you can't rub it in your buddies' faces? If you've got a website, most web hosts offer free, easy-to-use message board services. In about 20 minutes you can have your board set up, and the barbs will soon be flying. A great way to pass the long summer!

4. For the Truly Insane

Media Division: Okay, this is where I really go over the top. Understand that, had I followed my dreams, I would've pursued a career as a hockey writer and taken aim at a gig at The Hockey News. Instead I went in a different direction, and I'm forced to use my fantasy league as my outlet for what could have been. That being the case, I introduced the GFHL media division a couple years back. Our writing team (by which I mean me) produces a variety of online content dissecting the goings-on of our league. Season previews, midseason reports, weekly recaps,

draft previews, players to watch... I've produced all these and more. The guys in my league seem to enjoy them; perhaps they're just humouring their whacko friend, but I have enough fun writing them that I'd probably do it even if no one else bothered to read them. So, if you've got a repressed sports journalist in your league, set them loose as your beat reporter and see what fun they stir up.

Fun with Photoshop: The miracle of photo manipulation software makes possible all sorts of imagery to extend the fantasy. Put that team logo to good use by stitching it onto the jersey of your star player. Better yet, celebrate your championship with an image of your team captain hoisting the trophy as your desktop wallpaper. The only limit is your imagination.

So, how about you? Are you running a *hockey pool*, or a *fantasy league*? I'm always looking for new ideas to take it to the next level, so please share your comments below. If nothing else, it will reassure me that there are others out there as insane as I am... at least, I hope there are.