

John Paulsen writes and ranks for 4for4 Fantasy Football and has kept up a blistering pace over at Fantasy Pros with his weekly rankings, um, rankings. He was kind enough to answer a few questions below about fantasy, rankings, dynasty and more!

1. How did you get interested in fantasy football?

I started playing in college in the early 90s. My first league was actually an auction league, which is sort of funny since snake drafts still dominate the industry. We used to calculate our own scores using the box scores in the Monday/Tuesday editions of the USA Today. I loved the marriage between statistics and sports, and the challenge of outwitting my competition. I won that league and have been hooked since.

2. How did you get started in the fantasy football business?

After college, I worked as an industrial engineer for FedEx doing a variety of work, but it was all very math-heavy. They were downsizing in the early 2000s and I took a buyout because I didn't want to move back to Memphis. Knowing that I could always go back to engineering, I wanted to pursue a career in sportswriting, and I found a job working for a sports blog (The Scores Report). There, I started writing about fantasy sports and when I saw that FantasyPros was judging accuracy in 2010, I entered the contest and managed to win it. A year or two later I joined 4for4.com as their full-time ranker.

3. Looking over your accuracy finishes over at FantasyPros it appears you've been smoking the competition! Number one finishes in 2010 and 2014 to go along with a second place in 2012 and plenty of near the top finishes to go along with those. What is your secret? Well, I take that back because I don't want you to tell everyone, just me! How about, in broad terms, what is your philosophy of ranking?

You're pretty darn accurate yourself, Chet. I get asked this question a lot and I'm never sure exactly how to answer it. At 4for4, we have a strong statistical system that provides a baseline set of rankings, which I then tweak until the rankings look good. I tend to be conservative (not

ranking players “too high” or “too low”) because one of my characteristics is that I can always see both sides of the coin. I think I do a pretty good job of weighing all the factors that go into a weekly ranking of a player (injury, matchup, opportunity, weather, etc.) and land on a reasonable ranking that I can defend if need be. It has resulted in good accuracy, so I’m not going to change my approach anytime soon.

4. With many fantasy teams out of contention at this point in the season, what do you recommend dynasty owners do to improve their teams for next season?

It’s usually wise to get younger. For example, trading Calvin Johnson for Allen Robinson or Martavis Bryant makes a lot of sense and should position the team for success for years to come. A savvy dynasty owner probably wouldn’t agree to this trade, so owners may have to sweeten the pot with another player or aim a bit lower. Underperforming players like T.Y. Hilton or Randall Cobb can be had for a discount due to the injuries surrounding them (Andrew Luck and Jordy Nelson, respectively), and they should both bounce back next season. It’s wise to invest in stud receivers, especially in PPR formats, since their careers tend to be more productive for a longer period of time.

5. For all those up and coming fantasy writers, what words of wisdom would you give them on their own journey in this field of work?

With the emergence of daily fantasy, there has never been a better time to find a paying job writing about fantasy sports. Unfortunately, the industry will continue to be very competitive, so writers need to hone their craft and find their niche. If you’re good with numbers, then do a study in the offseason that (hopefully) provides some actionable information. If you’re funny/witty, let that show in your work. Make sure that there are no typos. Reach out to a few sites and if it’s good, someone will publish it. They may even pay you. Plug your Twitter and post intelligent information. Build your following. Continue to write. If you can get a few thousand followers, you’ll become more attractive to the fantasy sites and maybe there will be a paying gig down the line. But be warned — if you’re looking to get rich writing about fantasy sports, you’ll very likely be disappointed. It’s a labor of love and that means that there’s probably someone out there who’s willing to work for less. There is also the notion that everything on the internet should be free. This will keep salaries fairly low.

6. Where do you see the fantasy football business in the next 10 years?

It depends on how this legal battle over daily fantasy shakes out. If DFS ends up being legal on a national scale, then the venture capital money will continue to pour in and we’ll all get a piece. If daily fantasy goes the way of online poker, then the industry will regress to where we were before DFS. There will always be demand for season-long analysis, but it will be far more

Q&A with John Paulsen

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