

# Who knew fantasy football could be this stressful?

It's a Monday night and the living room is silent as my wife and I sit on the couch wondering what to do next.

Anxiety. Frustration.

Confusion.

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Quite frankly, I don't know what to say. So I nervously rap my knuckles on the table and reach for a cliché.

Less than

three months since our wedding day and already we're facing our first major marital challenge.

Jillian looks at me, wanting an explanation.



**Dan Wiederer**

"No one ever said this was going to be easy," I tell her.

But why, she thinks, does it have to be this hard?

We both swallow.

If this whole eternity bit is going to work, we need to make a decision. And fast. Because the clock is ticking. And if we don't act now, the computer is prepared to auto-select Eli Manning as

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the seventh-round pick for Jillian's Juggernauts in the 2009 Fleet Feet, Inc. fantasy football draft.

"Screw it," Jillian says. "Take Dwayne Bowe."

A deep exhale. Then a smile and an emphatic high-five.

Crisis averted.

"Who knew fantasy football could be this stressful?" she says.

## The love of the game

I'm not sure how we got ourselves into this mess.

But the Cliff's Notes version reads like this:

Jillian needed a quick way to socialize at her new job and I needed an excuse to watch more football on Sundays. So in August I nudged her to accept her invitation into the office fantasy league. And now an NFL addict and a pigskin adversary are co-owning a fantasy football team and staging a 16-week experiment in marital patience. (Somebody call the producers at "Oprah.")

This, I tell Jillian, should be everything marriage is about.

Unity. Compromise. Resilience.

Oh, and of course football. After all, we are native Chicagoans and dedicated Bears fans.

For me, between September and January, football ranks third on my "must have to live" list, behind oxygen and low-grade beer.

For Jillian? Well, let's just say she could tell you more about the inner-workings of the Russian Parliament than she could about Adrian Peterson.

So our initial preparation for her fantasy draft was shaky at best.

"You know who Tom Brady is, right?" I ask.

"Yeah," she answers confidently. "He's the guy who's dating Jessica Simpson."

No. That's Tony Romo. And he USED to be dating Jessica Simpson.

What about Greg Olsen? Ever heard of him?

"That's the Bears new quarterback," she responds.

Close enough, I guess.

And Brett Favre?

"Isn't he the guy who keeps quitting but never actually quits?"

Bingo.

"See. I'm pretty good," she brags. "And I know who Rex Grossman is!"

Oh boy.

## Pre-game jitters

So here we now are on the first Sunday of the 2009 season both wondering how today will go.

Last weekend, Jillian was indifferent at best to this whole fantasy football thing.

And then draft night came and she stared at a list of players and saw that draft clock ticking like a time-

bomb and her competitive adrenaline spiked.

On Wednesday, she woke up in the middle of the night and immediately started worrying about whether she had set her lineup correctly.

"I'm not going to lie," she said. "I'm actually nervous. I can't wait to see how my guys do. This is kind of exciting."

If she only knew what was ahead.

So far I've only had to provide marginal support, like a parent holding the handlebars steady as their 5-year-old pedals down the sidewalk.

There were tense moments Monday. Like when I had to quell Jillian's urge to draft Cleveland's Jamal Lewis.

"For some reason," she said, "I just want a guy named Jamal on my team."

Instead I gave her a Julius, as in Seattle's Jones. And she seemed mildly excited by that too.

## Ready for football

Besides, she could have things a lot worse.

Last weekend, for example, she found out her close friend Terra's husband owns three fantasy football teams plus a fantasy NASCAR squad. And her friend Kenzie's fiancée not only has a complicated spreadsheet program he uses to draft, but he also demanded she draft for him because he was playing in an Ultimate Frisbee tournament he couldn't miss.

So there was poor Kenzie, on a weekend getaway with her sister in Virginia Beach, trying to determine whether the M.I.T. formula in her husband's spreadsheet was pointing her towards Santonio Holmes or Jerricho Cotchery. And somehow she picked Donald Driver.

"I actually screamed a few times," Kenzie said. "I just quit my job last month because I was getting so frazzled that I was waking up in the middle of the night with work nightmares. And ya know what? That fantasy draft was the most stressful three hours of my life."

Jillian looked frightened.

Look, I remind her again, no one ever said this was supposed to be easy. And if we're truly going to live happily ever after, we're going to have to walk in each other's shoes every once in a while.

So today that might mean watching Panthers-Eagles at 1 p.m., 49ers-Cardinals at 4:15 and of course Bears-Packers in prime time. After all, she is the proud new owner of both Greg Olsen and Jay Cutler.

"Well, if I have to watch football all day," she tells me, "you're going to have to clean the toilets next weekend."

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