CPSC 490 Project Proposal: Amateur Fantasy Football

Edward Kimo Hon
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Part I
Background & Motivation

Football is of course an enormous juggernaut of an industry in the USA, with millions of people tuning in every Sunday to watch the modern gladiatorial spectacle unfold from the comfort of their living rooms. In fact, the latest Super Bowl was estimated to have drawn 115 million viewers. Perhaps one of the game’s most interesting modern developments is the rise of “fantasy football,” a game where players accumulate points based on real life athlete’s performance. This of course has led to an increase in viewership, as previously irrelevant games can become of vital importance due to their implications for viewer’s fantasy teams. Though it has roots stretching back as far as the 1960s, fantasy football has only really become widespread since the turn of the century.

Accompanying the success of the NFL’s fantasy leagues has been the creation of an analogous game for the Barclay’s Premier League, the top flight soccer league in England. As in fantasy football, players accumulate points for members of their team’s positive actions (goals, assists, clean sheets) and lose points for negative actions (yellow/red cards, goals conceded, etc.). While NFL fantasy uses a “draft” format, where only one copy of a player exists per league, BPL fantasy typically uses a transfer format, where each player has a budget with which to construct their team. The price of each real life player is initially set at the beginning of the season, but adjusts to reflect market demand as players are transferred both in and out of many teams.

As an avid follower and player of soccer, it has occurred to me that while it is fun to play based on real life games, it would be even more fun to earn points based on how your friends are doing. Probably hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of men and women across the world play in recreational “Sunday League” amateur football, and represent my target population. My idea is to create an web based app to help facilitate the managing amateur fantasy games.

Part II
Vision & Technology

I envision a website where it is simple to get an amateur league off the ground and running very quickly. I identify three major components - 1) setup, 2) team building & scoring, 3) reporting results. User experience is crucial - if an application is difficult to use, people will not use it. This is particularly
important for fantasy, as a league’s success is dependent on having an active userbase competing for
the league title.

To start, users should be able to easily upload their league’s game schedule along with rosters for
every team in their league. This will probably be a .csv input file for both.

Similarly, an interface for team building is going to be of high importance. Users will transfer
players in and out of their team, as long as these moves are within the constraints of their budget.
The transfer interface will likely look very similar to the scoring interface, where users can see how the
players in their team scored each week.

Another important aspect is reporting of results and key actions so that scores can be assigned to
each player based on these outcomes.

I intend to create my web application using Ruby on Rails. However, because I do not have
experience using Rails, I will be learning as I go along. In the event of unanticipated difficulties or
delays, I have the fallback plan of developing using Django, which I am familiar with.

Part III
Goals

1 Minimum Expectations

My minimum expectations are to deliver a usable product. This version could be ugly, and not user
friendly, but will have the following features

- Setup - Users can upload a .csv file of a league schedule. This instantiates the league. Following
  this step, team rosters can be added to any individual team in the league, also in .csv files, in a
  pre-specified format.

- Team Building - Users can scroll through a list of players sorted by position and add players to
  their team to begin the season. There will be restrictions on how many players must be added
  to the team (ie: 2 Goalkeepers, 5 Defenders, 5 Midfielders, 3 Forwards)

- Transfers - Users will again have a text based interface for adding and removing players, much
  as specified in the team building point. Transfers will not affect player’s market value.

- Scoring - A table will display in one column the players name and in the other the number of
  points scored for that week.

- Reporting results - Users will have a text interface to report results. First, a score will be input,
  after which a user will be prompted to fill in goal scorers & assisters. Finally, disciplinary actions
  will be reported.

2 Semester Expectations

The semester expectations expand upon the functionality of the minimum expectations, with a partic-
ular emphasis on user experience. Many of the improvements I will focus on will be graphical, creating
a simple and clean user interface. All points include the minimum expectations unless something is
clearly replaced.
• Setup - Users can fix errors (spelling, etc.) in an online interface instead of being forced to reupload their files. Players can be added and removed to teams online. The option to upload pictures of players will be introduced.

• Team Building - Some kind of graphical depiction of the team being built will accompany the text list of players and prices, leveraging the pictures that users upload.

• Transfers - The improvements on Team Building will carry over. Players will be removable by selecting an option on the graphical depiction. Transferring players in and out of teams will impact their price through some yet to be specified algorithm, but one which responds to market demand.

• Scoring - Points will be displayed in the new interface, below each player’s position in the graphic.

• Reporting results - Most changes here will be simply in terms of making the interface nicer and more intuitive.

3 Stretch Goals and Possible Extensions

There are many ideas that can spin off of this main platform.

Most obviously, a game tracking application for mobile devices to report the scores would be a major improvement to the goals I have outlined above. I am not including it as a main goal yet as I know many challenges can come from mobile development. It is however high on my priorities for further work after I complete the expectations.

If mobile development is feasible, then another high impact improvement I can make is making a mobile version of the entire site.

Further, it may be the case that smaller minigames are easier to manage for the target audience. Perhaps an alternative game mode where 4 players are chosen each week would be easier to keep up with (1 Goalkeeper, 1 Defender, 1 Midfielder, 1 Forward).

Finally, I have noticed that the official EPL Fantasy game does not give many good graphical representations of how a player is doing. Charts & statistics are generally very important to fantasy players, and I would love to have some cool overviews that represent a player’s progress. These are just a few ideas, and I am sure I can think of many more.

Part IV
Evaluation and Deliverables

The project’s evaluation is very straightforward. Does it meet the expectations outlined in Part III? Is it a working product that could reasonably used to start an amateur fantasy football league? After this baseline is established, one should look at how the user experience is. Is the product clunky, or is it smooth and intuitive to use? Because this type of product is hard test live, I will create or provide the tools to create some simulated data for evaluators to upload into the site to test the functionality.