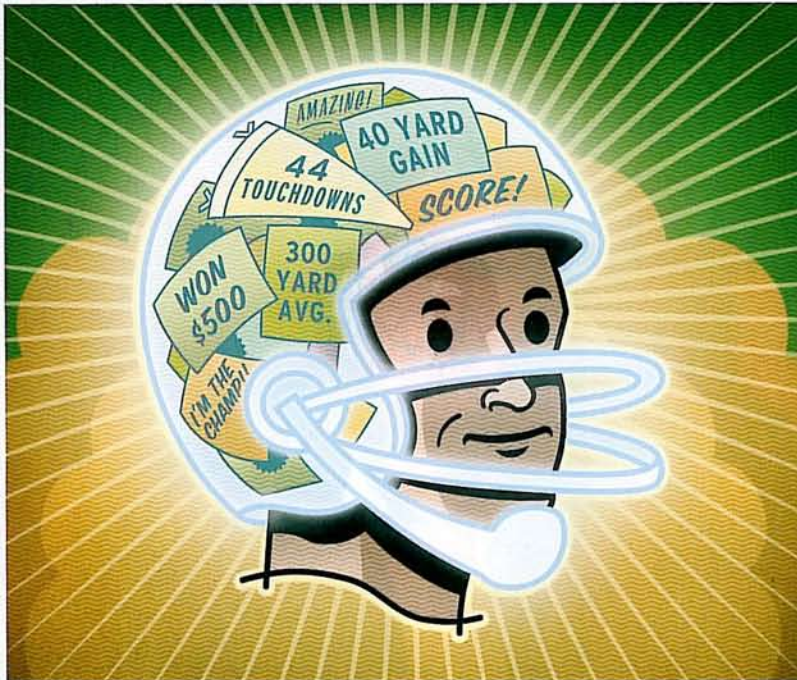


# PHILADELPHIA STYLE



City Life | The Scene



## Betting Season

Each fall, millions of football fans pore over stat sheets and plunk down cash—all to share in one big fantasy. By Pete Proko

**L**IKE OTHER EAGLES FANS who claim to bleed green, Dennis Yost roots for the day his Birds bring home the Vince Lombardi Trophy and new stories of Super Bowl victory.

But if the team doesn't make it to Glendale, Ariz., for the big game in February, the Cherry Hill, N.J., native may still be cheering. In fantasy football, Yost explains, loyalists don't always win.

"You hope your [favorite] team does well," he says. "But, when you have money riding on it ... it's hard not to root for a player from an opposing team."

In fact, many fantasy football enthusiasts such as Yost say sleeping with the enemy is the preferred method to get ahead.

Prevailing at this game requires drafting the best team possible—selecting players from several different pro teams—and playing them in a virtual competition against the teams assembled by family members, friends or coworkers. The reward for victory: cash prizes and, perhaps more importantly, a lifetime of bragging rights.

And so, at an estimated 16 million players deep, a cultural monster is born. Casual fans become more involved and hardcore fans become obsessed. During the course of the National Football League season, fantasy players act as a team's owner, manager and coach all in one, scouring the Internet and sports channels for the lat-

est statistical information, monitoring injuries and sweating out game-time decisions like a job interview. If football is a game of inches, fantasy football is a game of miles—as in miles from reality.

But it's easy to get lost in the land of make believe. There's no real map to follow and luck has as much to do with finding your way to a win as anything. Sports analysts say that's all part of the intrigue.

"It allows fans to participate in a way they never did before," says Ed Barkowitz, who covers fantasy football for the *Philadelphia Daily News* and Comcast SportsNet. It gives them "a deeper sense of the sport" than watching it from a stadium seat

## FOOTBALL 101

Need to learn the difference between an extra point and a field goal before Monday Night Football starts up? Download *A Woman's Guide to Football, How to Talk His Language*, a 43-minute lesson on the sport and its elements. Load the tutorial onto your iPod and you'll find out why dudes are always talking about "Hail Mary" plays. And after narrator and sports enthusiast Paula Duffy explains the myriad rules of football, you'll begin to understand why a game that consists of 15-minute quarters often takes three hours to finish. *Check out Paula Duffy's site, IncidentalContact.com and purchase tutorials at Audible.com.* —Shannon Grotzinger

