

Taking Stock

**By Reg P. Wydeven
November 8, 2008**

Early on, athletes realize they're treated as commodities. We digest all their stats, and not just height and weight. The NFL has a combine every year where prospective draftees are evaluated for speed, strength, jumping ability and they are even tested for their football IQ.

If an unheralded prospect has an impressive combine, experts will claim his "stock has risen" for the upcoming draft. However, if an underclassman has a superb year and elects to return to school, those same experts typically say the player's stock can only fall.

Well, OneSeason.com has taken the concept of treating athletes as commodities one step further.

The new website that debuted last month allows users to trade virtual shares of sports stars. Founder and CEO Michael Sroka, a 27-year-old former hedge fund manager, wanted to provide investors with the opportunity to electronically buy and sell "synthetic ownership interests" in professional football, basketball, baseball and hockey players. Traders can deposit up to \$2,500 into an account over a 12-month period to invest in the "jock market" as it's known, and hopefully beef up their "sportfolio."

The site provides investors with data on each athlete, performance charts, shares outstanding (which start anywhere from 50-250 depending on demand, and can change when the stock splits, which happens if it hits \$20), market cap, and the current value of their portfolio.

Every day, OneSeason rolls out Initial Public Offerings for stock of new players. Each IPO is priced at \$5 per share, and after that, the share price is determined by basic supply and demand. The phantom stock is the virtual equivalent of trading cards: they have no true underlying value other than what other people are willing to pay for them.

Also like the trading card industry, OneSeason.com is not regulated by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission or any other government agency, like real stock is. Despite its Pokémon-like concept and lack of regulation, the market is up. By the close of its second day of trading, the site attracted about 2,000 accounts and the market value of all shares has already passed \$300,000.

Congress is discussing investing in the jock market for the next bailout.