

THE FANTASY DRAFT

thefantasydraft.co.uk

PLATFORM CASE STUDY — FULL
TECHNICAL AND PRODUCT BREAKDOWN

Premier League Draft Fantasy | Auction and Snake Drafts | Head-to-Head Leagues
| Real-Money Mini Games

Industry: Sports & Gaming | Platform: Full-Stack Web App | Stack: Next.js, Node.js,
PostgreSQL, WebSockets

Case Study

The Fantasy Draft

A full-stack Premier League draft fantasy football platform featuring auction drafts, snake drafts, head-to-head leagues, live scoring, real-money mini games, super leagues, waiver wire processing, and a complete transfer system — built for the UK market.

Project Type: Full-Stack Web Platform | Duration: 7 Months | Market: United Kingdom

01 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Fantasy Draft is a UK-based fantasy football platform purpose-built around the draft format, positioning itself directly against the dominant classic fantasy football products, specifically the official Premier League Fantasy and FPL, by offering something those platforms fundamentally cannot: a game where every manager in a league has a completely unique squad. Because players are drafted rather than selected from a shared pool, no two teams ever share a single player. This changes the game from a statistical optimisation exercise run in parallel by thousands of managers into a true head-to-head competition where squad construction, in-season management, and tactical decisions carry genuine weight.

The platform launched covering the English Premier League as its primary competition, with Euro 2024 support included at launch and additional leagues flagged as roadmap items. The

product sits at an intersection of deep sports knowledge, competitive gaming, and real-money entertainment, requiring a technical architecture that can handle the complexity of a live sports data platform while maintaining the responsiveness and social features that keep a friend group engaged across a full 38-gameweek Premier League season.

The brief was not to build a clone of ESPN Fantasy or Yahoo Fantasy. It was to build something that felt designed specifically for the way British football fans actually talk about football with their friends: deeply opinionated, competitively tribal, and increasingly interested in the richer strategic experience that draft formats provide. Every product decision was made with that user in mind.

02 THE PROBLEM

The UK fantasy football market is enormous, with over 10 million registered FPL users, but it is also deeply frustrating for a specific and vocal segment of that market. Draft fantasy football exists as a format in the UK but had not been served by a platform built natively for British football culture and the Premier League. The problems were specific and well-documented among the communities the platform was designed to serve:

The Classic Fantasy Problem

- In standard FPL-style fantasy, the dominant strategy revolves around owning the same high-ownership players as everyone else in your league, because the risk of not owning them outweighs any potential upside from a differential pick. This leads to a paradox where, in a game theoretically about building your own team, the optimal strategy is often to converge on the same 11 players as your rivals
- Gameweek scores in classic fantasy are heavily influenced by luck and injury news rather than managerial skill, because with a shared player pool a single unexpected double-gameweek or blank gameweek can determine the winner of an entire mini-league regardless of any decision the manager made
- There is no meaningful head-to-head element in standard FPL. Mini-leagues are ranked by cumulative points, meaning a manager can win a league without ever beating a specific rival in a direct contest, and the social dynamics of a friend group league are reduced to watching a leaderboard rather than competing in fixtures

The Draft Format Gap in the UK

- Draft fantasy formats had gained significant traction in the United States through American football, where ESPN Fantasy and Sleeper had built large audiences, but no equivalent platform had been built specifically for the Premier League with the depth of features that a dedicated product requires
- The existing UK draft options were either American platforms awkwardly adapted for football, lacking key Premier League-specific features like the double gameweek and blank gameweek handling, proper Premier League scoring conventions, and the social features that British football culture demands, or they were small independent tools without the reliability and feature depth required to run a full-season league
- Waiver wire mechanics in American fantasy platforms assumed a weekly schedule with one game per team per week. The Premier League's irregular fixture calendar, where teams can play zero, one, or two games in a single gameweek, required bespoke scoring and waiver logic that existing platforms did not provide

- No existing platform combined a draft fantasy game with additional real-money entertainment products like score predictors and last man standing competitions that could run alongside the main fantasy league, despite the obvious appetite for those products among the same audience

Technical Complexity of the Category

- Running a live fantasy sports platform over a 38-gameweek season requires real-time data integration, automated scoring, deadline management, and a persistence layer that handles complex state across hundreds of leagues simultaneously, far beyond the complexity of a typical web application
- The draft event itself, whether auction or snake format, is the single highest-stakes moment of the fantasy season for most managers. It requires a real-time multiplayer experience with strict timer enforcement, fair pick ordering, simultaneous bid processing in auction mode, and a fallback auto-pick system that must be trusted to not make obviously poor decisions when a manager disconnects
- Waiver wire processing must be both automated and auditable. Managers need to trust that their claims were processed correctly, in the right order, and that any failed claims have a clear reason. Errors in waiver processing are the single largest source of community conflict in fantasy sports leagues and require a system that is transparent and reproducible

03 THE SOLUTION WE ARCHITECTED

We built The Fantasy Draft as a Next.js full-stack application with a Node.js API layer, a PostgreSQL database, and a WebSocket server handling all real-time features. The architecture was designed from the start to handle the stateful, time-sensitive nature of a live fantasy sports platform rather than being retrofitted onto a framework designed for simpler use cases. Below is a complete breakdown of every major system we built.

3.1 League Creation and Configuration

The league setup flow was designed to give commissioners the maximum configurability available in any draft fantasy product in the UK market, while keeping the interface approachable enough that a user setting up a league for the first time could complete it without consulting documentation.

- League size is configurable from 2 to 20 managers per league, a range that accommodates both small friendship groups and large work leagues. The upper limit of 20 is meaningful: at 20 managers with standard 15-player squads, the system is allocating 300 Premier League players across unique rosters, which approaches the practical limit of available quality players in a single division
- Each league has its own custom identity: a league name, a league logo uploaded by the commissioner, and a custom colour scheme that carries through the league's dashboard and fixture display. Team-level customisation allows each manager to set a team name and upload a team crest, making the league feel like a competition between named clubs rather than a list of usernames
- The scoring system is fully configurable by the commissioner, covering all standard fantasy point events: clean sheets by position, goals and assists by position, bonus points, yellow and red card deductions, minutes played thresholds, save points for

goalkeepers, and penalty save and miss handling. Custom point values for each event allow the commissioner to build a scoring system that reflects their group's preferences

- Transfer budgets, waiver type (rolling priority or Free Agent Acquisition Budget), weekly transfer limits, and trade deadlines are all set at league creation and locked in before the draft. This prevents mid-season disputes about the rules
- The commissioner retains management tools throughout the season: the ability to process disputed trades, override lineup decisions for unresponsive managers, apply manual score corrections when the Premier League stats provider issues corrections after a gameweek closes, and send league-wide announcements via the in-app notification system

3.2 Auction Draft System

The auction draft is the most technically demanding feature on the platform and the one most cited by users as differentiating The Fantasy Draft from any alternative. In an auction draft, every manager receives an equal virtual budget (typically £100) and players are nominated one at a time into an open bidding pool. Any manager can bid on any nominated player. When the timer expires with no new bid, the player goes to the highest bidder at the cost of their winning bid. Every manager ends the draft with a complete squad of exactly equal total cost, creating a pure test of valuation and budget management rather than pick position luck.

- The auction room is built on WebSockets, delivering every bid event, timer update, and roster change to all connected managers simultaneously with sub-200ms latency. The real-time nature of the auction is essential: a bid with two seconds remaining must be seen by all managers before the timer expires, requiring server-side timer authority rather than client-side timers
- The nominating manager is determined by a round-robin order established before the draft begins. Any manager whose clock expires for a nomination triggers an automatic nomination of the highest-available player by projected points for their weakest positional need, preventing the auction from stalling if a manager disconnects
- Bid validation runs server-side on every bid submission, checking that the bidding manager has sufficient remaining budget to cover the bid, that the nominated player has not already been assigned to a roster, and that the bid exceeds the current highest bid by at least the minimum increment. Invalid bids are rejected with a specific error message rather than silently ignored
- Budget tracking for all managers is displayed live in the auction room, showing each manager's remaining budget, current roster size by position, and the estimated budget required to complete their squad at the minimum bid, giving all managers the information needed to understand whether a rival is approaching a forced fire-sale of remaining nominations
- The auction replay is stored in full: every nomination, every bid with its timestamp, every assignment, and every manager's budget at each point in the auction. This creates a post-draft recap showing the full order of events, the final squads, and each manager's draft spend by position

3.3 Snake Draft System

The snake draft is the alternative draft format, preferred by leagues where simplicity of execution is valued over the depth of strategic interplay that the auction creates. In a snake draft, managers pick players in a fixed order that reverses each round: the manager with pick

one in round one has pick last in round two, rewarding managers who pick later in the order with consecutive picks across the turn.

- Pick order is determined by a pre-draft randomisation that is executed on the server and displayed to all managers before the draft begins. The randomisation result is logged and cannot be re-run once managers have seen it, preventing any accusation of manipulation
- Each manager has a configurable pick clock, defaulting to 90 seconds per pick, with the commissioner able to set this between 30 seconds and five minutes at league creation. When a manager's clock expires, the auto-pick system selects the highest-ranked available player for their weakest positional need according to the platform's projection model
- The live draft board updates in real time across all sessions, showing every pick made in order, each manager's current roster by position, and the remaining available player pool with positional filtering. Managers can queue up to 10 preferred picks in their personal queue while waiting for their turn, which feeds the auto-pick if their timer expires
- Post-draft, the snake draft generates the same recap package as the auction draft: full pick order, each team's complete squad, and a draft grade for each manager calculated against consensus average draft position data

3.4 Head-to-Head Fixture Engine

The head-to-head fixture system is what converts The Fantasy Draft from a points accumulation game into a genuine season-long competition between specific rivals. At the start of the first gameweek, the system generates a fixture list pairing every manager against every other manager across the season, structured to ensure each manager faces every other manager at least once before the playoff stage, with the playoff seeding determined by head-to-head record rather than total points.

- Each gameweek matchup is resolved by comparing the two managers' total points scored by their starting 11 minus any transfer points spent in preparation for that gameweek. The manager with the higher score wins the fixture and receives 3 points added to their league standing. A draw awards 1 point to each manager. This maps directly onto the football result format, making the fantasy standings immediately interpretable as a football table
- The fixture display shows both managers' starting lineups side by side, with each player's live score, a colour indicator showing which manager is currently winning the fixture, and a projected final score that updates as players finish their real-world games. The projected score recalculates based on remaining expected points from players still active, accounting for the game situation their real team is in
- Head-to-head historical records are tracked and displayed on every fixture page: the complete all-time record between the two managers across all seasons in the same league, average score for each manager in their head-to-head meetings, and the highest-scoring game each manager has posted against the other. This historical layer is one of the features most frequently cited in user feedback as creating the rivalry narrative that keeps a group of friends engaged year after year
- The playoff bracket is automatically generated at the end of the regular season, seeded by head-to-head record with tiebreakers applied in order: total points scored, then goals scored (total fantasy points). Two-legged playoff ties use aggregate scoring across two gameweeks, and the final is a single-gameweek showdown with the highest-stakes fixture of the season

3.5 Live Scoring Engine

The live scoring engine is the heart of the platform's in-season experience. During Premier League gameweeks, managers open their matchup page and watch their team's score build in near-real time, with the platform processing score events from the data provider and distributing them to all connected sessions within 10 to 15 seconds of the play being confirmed.

- Player scores are calculated by the scoring engine on the server for every point event received from the data feed: goals, assists, clean sheets, saves, yellow cards, red cards, minutes played, bonus points, and penalty events. Every score update is stored as a discrete event in the database, allowing the full scoring breakdown for any player in any gameweek to be reconstructed from the event log
- The score breakdown is accessible per player on the matchup page. Expanding any player shows the individual events contributing to their current total: for example, a central midfielder might show 6 points for a goal, 3 points for an assist, 1 point for 60 minutes played, and minus 1 point for a yellow card, totalling 9 points. This transparency is essential to manager trust — if a player's score seems wrong, the event log provides immediate clarity
- Automatic substitutions fire when a starting player does not record any minutes by a configurable deadline (typically 60 minutes into the latest game of the gameweek). The substitution logic checks the manager's bench in priority order and applies the first eligible substitute for the unfilled position, mirroring the automatic substitution behaviour that FPL users are familiar with but applying it to the draft context
- Double gameweek scoring handles the most complex scoring scenario in Premier League fantasy: when a team plays twice in a single gameweek, players from that team score points across both fixtures. The scoring engine processes both fixtures independently and accumulates the points, correctly handling the case where a player starts one game and is substituted in the second, and applying the correct clean sheet logic to each fixture independently
- Blank gameweek handling ensures that when a team does not play in a gameweek due to cup fixture postponements or rearranged matches, players from that team score zero points and are not treated as not-yet-scored. This distinction matters for automatic substitution logic and projected score calculations

3.6 Transfers and Waiver Wire

The transfer and waiver system governs how managers change their squads after the draft concludes. It is the most rules-intensive system on the platform and the one where incorrect behaviour causes the most community friction, requiring both automated correctness and a fully auditable processing log.

- Transfers between gameweeks are subject to a weekly transfer budget, defaulting to one free transfer per gameweek with additional transfers costing 4 points each, mirroring the FPL convention. Managers can carry over unused free transfers up to a maximum of two, creating a strategic decision between banking transfers for future gameweeks or using them immediately
- The waiver wire governs the acquisition of players who are not owned by any manager in the league. There are two waiver modes: rolling priority waiver (where the manager who most recently acquired a player via waiver moves to the bottom of the priority order, giving managers who have not recently used the waiver the first claim) and Free Agent Acquisition Budget (FAAB), where managers submit sealed bids each week and the highest bidder wins each contested player

- Waiver claims are submitted during the waiver window, which opens immediately after each gameweek's final fixture ends and closes on the following Thursday morning. Each manager can submit multiple waiver claims in priority order: if their first-priority claim is won, their lower-priority claims are cancelled; if their first-priority claim is lost, the system attempts their second-priority claim automatically
- Waiver processing runs as an automated server job at 12:01 AM on Thursday, executing all claims across all active leagues simultaneously. The processing log captures the outcome of every claim: won (with the winning bid or priority position), lost (with the reason: outbid, lower priority), or cancelled (because a higher-priority claim for the same manager was already won). Every manager receives an email summary of their claim results within five minutes of processing completing
- The free agent pool shows all unowned players available for immediate acquisition outside the waiver window, with no priority constraint. Managers can add free agents and drop players from their squad at any time between the waiver window close and the gameweek deadline, with the dropped player entering the waiver pool rather than becoming an immediate free agent for the following 48 hours

3.7 Lineup Management

Managers submit their starting 11 before each gameweek's first fixture deadline. The lineup management interface is designed to be fast and unambiguous on both desktop and mobile, acknowledging that the majority of lineup decisions are made on phones, often in the 20 minutes before a Saturday 12:30 kick-off.

- The lineup screen shows the manager's full 15-player squad arranged on a football pitch graphic, grouped by position. Starting players are on the pitch; bench players are shown below. Drag-and-drop swaps on desktop and tap-to-swap on mobile allow rapid lineup changes. Formation is selectable from a preset list of valid formations, all of which comply with the platform's minimum requirement of one goalkeeper, at least three defenders, and at least one forward
- Captain and vice-captain nomination is handled on the same screen. The captain's score is doubled for the gameweek; if the captain does not play, the vice-captain receives the double. Captain history is tracked and displayed on the manager's profile, showing cumulative captain points and the percentage of possible captain points secured
- The gameweek deadline countdown is displayed prominently on the lineup page and in the site navigation, updated to the minute. Push notifications and email reminders are sent 24 hours and 2 hours before the deadline to managers who have not yet saved a valid lineup for the upcoming gameweek
- Partial gameweek deadlines apply when fixtures are spread across multiple days. Managers can update the portions of their lineup that involve players whose fixtures have not yet kicked off, even after the first fixtures of the gameweek have started. This mirrors the behaviour of premium fantasy platforms and is one of the features that distinguishes The Fantasy Draft from simpler draft implementations

3.8 Super League

The Super League is a cross-league competition that sits above the standard individual leagues, allowing managers from multiple separate leagues to compete in a single aggregated standings table. This feature exists specifically for organisations, communities, or large groups of friends who want to run multiple separate leagues of manageable size while still having an overall champion across the entire group.

- A Super League is created by a Super League commissioner who invites individual league commissioners to join. Each participating league contributes its managers to the Super League standings, with scores and head-to-head records from the individual leagues counting toward the Super League table
- The Super League has its own fixture generation running parallel to the individual leagues, creating additional head-to-head matchups across league boundaries that add a second competition layer to the season without disrupting the structure of the individual leagues
- Super League standings are displayed on a dedicated page with the same table format as individual leagues, showing Super League record, points, goals scored, and current position, alongside the manager's individual league standing for context

3.9 Play by Play: Real-Money Mini Games

Alongside the main fantasy league, The Fantasy Draft offers a suite of real-money skill games that run on a gameweek-by-gameweek basis, providing a way to win actual cash while engaging with the same Premier League fixtures that power the fantasy game. These competitions are designed for managers who want higher-stakes engagement without the seasonal commitment of a full fantasy league.

- **Score Predictor:** Managers predict the exact scoreline for a selection of designated Premier League fixtures each gameweek. Points are awarded for correct outcomes (home win, draw, away win), with bonus points for exact scoreline predictions. The manager with the most points at the end of the gameweek wins a share of the prize pool. Tied managers share the prize equally
- **Last Man Standing:** Managers select one Premier League team to win each gameweek. If the selected team wins their fixture, the manager advances to the next round. If the selected team draws or loses, the manager is eliminated. Once a team has been selected, it cannot be used again in a subsequent gameweek. The last manager with at least one selection remaining wins the prize pool. This game can run across multiple gameweeks before resolving, creating sustained engagement
- Both real-money games operate under the platform's terms and conditions, which include a responsible gaming section with deposit limits and self-exclusion tools, and comply with UK gambling advertising standards for skill-based competitions

3.10 Player Database and Statistics

The player database underpins every feature on the platform. It covers all Premier League outfield players and goalkeepers with the full data set required to run a fantasy game: position classification, current club, injury and availability status, season-to-date statistics, gameweek-by-gameweek performance history, fixture difficulty rating, and projected points for the upcoming gameweek.

- The player browsing page is filterable by position, club, ownership status within the user's league, availability, and price range. Search by name works with partial string matching and returns results as the manager types, critical for quickly locating a specific player in a pool of 500 or more
- Each player's detail page shows their season stats: total fantasy points, goals, assists, clean sheets, minutes played, bonus points, yellow and red cards, and save statistics for goalkeepers. A gameweek-by-gameweek bar chart plots their scoring pattern across the season, making it immediately visible whether a player has been consistently scoring or has had isolated big gameweeks surrounded by blanks

- Fixture difficulty ratings for the next five gameweeks are shown on each player page and in the player browser, scored on a 1 to 5 scale derived from the historical defensive record of upcoming opponents. This helps managers identify players with favourable upcoming fixture runs when making transfer decisions
- Ownership percentages across the entire platform (not just a single league) are displayed on player pages, allowing managers to understand how broadly held a player is in draft leagues. High ownership in the platform overall means the player is likely unavailable in most leagues; low ownership flags a potential target if they are available

3.11 Dashboard and Navigation

The manager dashboard is the primary landing page after login, designed to give a complete picture of the current gameweek state without requiring the manager to navigate to multiple sub-pages. It combines the most time-sensitive information (upcoming deadline, current matchup score, latest transfer activity) with the persistent context a manager needs throughout the season (their squad at a glance, league standings, and upcoming fixtures).

- The dashboard shows the active matchup score in real time during gameweeks, a countdown to the next deadline when not in a live gameweek, a news feed of recent league activity (trades processed, waivers won, new managers joining), and a quick-access squad view showing starting 11 and bench
- The main navigation provides direct access to five core sections: Dashboard, Fixtures, Table, Players, and Super League. This flat navigation structure was chosen deliberately to keep the most important features one click from anywhere on the platform, without requiring managers to navigate through sub-menus
- An achievements system tracks milestones across the season: winning a specific number of gameweeks, scoring above a points threshold, winning the league, completing a full season without missing a deadline, and other badges that create a secondary layer of personal progression beyond the league table
- The notification centre collects all platform events relevant to the manager: waiver results, incoming trade proposals, deadline reminders, score milestones, and league announcements. Notifications are marked read and can be filtered by type

04 TECH STACK

Frontend	Next.js 14 (App Router), TypeScript, Tailwind CSS — mobile-first, SSR for SEO pages, CSR for dashboard and live features
Backend API	Node.js with Express — REST API for all data mutations and reads, organised by domain (leagues, players, scoring, transactions)
Real-Time Layer	WebSocket server (ws library on Node.js) — auction room, snake draft, live scoring pushes, trade notifications
Database	PostgreSQL — primary data store for all leagues, rosters, scores, fixtures, transactions, and event logs
ORM	Prisma — type-safe database access with migration management across all schema changes

Football Data Feed	Premier League and Euro 2024 live stats, fixtures, player data, and score events
Scoring Engine	Custom Node.js service processing incoming stat events against configurable league scoring rules, writing score events to the event log and pushing WebSocket updates
Waiver Processor	Scheduled Node.js job (node-cron) running Thursday 12:01 AM, processing all claims across all leagues with full audit logging
Authentication	JWT-based auth with refresh token rotation, Google OAuth login option
Email	SendGrid — deadline reminders, waiver results, trade notifications, weekly gameweek recap digest
Push Notifications	Web push notifications (Notification API) for deadline alerts and live score milestones
Payments (Mini)	Stripe — real-money entry fees for Score Predictor and Last Man Standing competitions, prize pool distribution
Charts	Recharts — player gameweek score bar charts, manager points-over-time line charts, positional spend pie charts
Image Storage	AWS S3 + CloudFront CDN for league logos, team crests, and player headshots
Hosting (Frontend)	Vercel — Next.js deployment with edge caching for static pages
Hosting (Backend)	Railway — Node.js API and WebSocket server with autoscale during draft events
Database Hosting	Supabase — managed PostgreSQL with row-level security and connection pooling via pgBouncer
Monitoring	Sentry (error tracking), Vercel Analytics (performance), custom admin dashboard for league health monitoring
Project Duration	7 months

05 COMPLETE FEATURE MATRIX

The following table provides a full reference of every shipped feature across the platform's core modules:

League Management	Draft System	In-Season Play
Custom league name and logo	Auction draft (live bidding)	Head-to-head weekly fixtures
Team names and crests per manager	Snake draft (timed picks)	Live scoring with stat breakdown
2 to 20 managers per league	Auto-pick fallback system	Automatic substitutions
Custom scoring configuration	Pick queue (snake)	Captain and vice-captain

Transfer rules and limits	Budget tracking (auction)	Partial deadline updates
Waiver type selection	Post-draft recap and grades	Double and blank GW handling
Commissioner tools	Full draft event replay	Waiver wire (rolling and FAAB)
Super League support	Pre-draft player rankings	Trade proposals and voting
League announcements	Auction budget strategy display	Weekly transfer budget

Players and Stats	Season Analytics	Mini Games
Full PL player database	Live league table	Score Predictor (real money)
Gameweek-by-gameweek bar charts	Power rankings (weekly)	Last Man Standing (real money)
Season stats per player	Head-to-head historical record	Stripe payment integration
Fixture difficulty ratings (5GW)	Manager season breakdown	Prize pool distribution
Ownership percentages	Playoff bracket	Responsible gaming tools
Injury and availability status	All-time league records	Gameweek mini-league leaderboard
Projected points display	Achievements system	Entry confirmation and receipts

06 ENGINEERING CHALLENGES AND HOW WE SOLVED THEM

Challenge 1: WebSocket Stability During Peak Auction Load

The auction draft concentrates the highest number of simultaneous real-time events into the shortest time window on the entire platform. In a 10-manager auction with 150 players being nominated and bid on, the draft can last 90 minutes with hundreds of bid events per minute during contested nominations. The challenge was maintaining consistent WebSocket delivery under this load without events arriving out of order or being duplicated.

We solved this by implementing server-side event sequencing with a monotonically increasing event counter attached to every WebSocket message. Clients that received an out-of-order event (detectable by a gap in the sequence counter) would trigger a state resync request rather than applying the event in isolation. This meant that even if a client experienced a brief network interruption during the auction, reconnecting would immediately resync their full auction state rather than showing a stale or corrupted view of the room.

Challenge 2: Premier League Fixture Irregularity

The Premier League fixture calendar has no equivalent in American sports. Blank gameweeks (where some or all teams do not play), double gameweeks (where some teams play twice), and mid-season postponements create a scoring and deadline environment that is fundamentally unpredictable more than a few weeks in advance. Standard fantasy platforms built for weekly sports assume one fixture per team per week; this assumption is incorrect for the Premier League in a significant percentage of gameweeks.

We built the scoring engine around fixture-level scoring events rather than gameweek-level assumptions. Each player score is attached to a specific fixture rather than a gameweek, and the aggregation to gameweek totals is computed dynamically. This means a double gameweek player's two sets of fixture scores are correctly combined into their gameweek total without any special-case logic, and a blank gameweek player simply has zero fixture scores to aggregate, which correctly produces a zero-point gameweek.

Challenge 3: Waiver Processing Correctness and Auditability

Waiver processing errors are the most common cause of irreparable trust damage in a fantasy sports league. If a manager believes their waiver claim was processed incorrectly, they need to be able to verify this independently. The solution could not just be correct; it needed to be transparently correct in a way that a non-technical manager could verify without asking for platform support.

We built the waiver processor as a deterministic state machine that logs every decision step as a discrete database record before committing any roster change. The processing log for any claim shows: the claim as submitted, the priority position at processing time, every other claim for the same player with their priority positions, the outcome decision and its reason, and the resulting roster change if the claim was won. This log is accessible to the manager in the UI as a timestamped processing receipt that reads like a simple explanation rather than a technical log.

Challenge 4: Draft Auto-Pick Quality

An auto-pick system that makes obviously poor choices destroys trust in the platform. If a manager's internet drops during a snake draft and the auto-pick takes a third goalkeeper when the manager has no strikers, the manager's experience for the rest of the season is damaged by an event outside their control. The auto-pick needed to make choices that most managers would consider reasonable even if not identical to their own preference.

We built the auto-pick logic around a positional need score calculated in real time from the manager's current roster composition versus the optimal roster composition for their remaining budget and available picks. The system first fills critical positional vacancies (a manager with no goalkeeper gets the best available goalkeeper before any other pick), then falls back to the highest-ranked available player in the position with the lowest depth score relative to optimal. This produces auto-picks that are defensible and coherent rather than statistically optimal but practically nonsensical.

07 THE END PRODUCT

The Fantasy Draft launched at thefantasydraft.co.uk as a fully operational Premier League draft fantasy platform covering the complete product surface described above. Managers can sign up, create or join a league, configure it, draft their squad in either auction or snake format, manage their team across 38 gameweeks, compete in head-to-head fixtures with live scoring, participate in the Super League, and enter real-money mini games, all within a single platform.

The product distinguishes itself in the UK market primarily through three things: the quality of the auction draft experience, the depth of the head-to-head historical rivalry system, and the combination of a main season-long fantasy competition with in-gameweek real-money mini games. No other UK-facing draft product offers all three in the same environment.

The mobile experience was given equal priority to desktop throughout the build. The most time-critical user journey on the platform, confirming your starting lineup before a Saturday 12:30 kick-off, was tested and refined specifically on mobile, acknowledging that the majority of those last-minute decisions are made on a phone while the pre-match build-up is on television. The tap-to-swap lineup interface, the prominent deadline countdown in the navigation, and the two-hour push notification reminder all exist because of a clear-eyed view of when and where people actually use a fantasy platform.

The achievements system, which might appear to be a cosmetic feature, serves a more important retention function. Alongside the league table, it gives managers a personal progression narrative that persists even when their league results are poor. A manager who is bottom of the table but just unlocked the achievement for 1,000 career fantasy points has something to show for their season that is independent of their head-to-head record. Over a full season, these micro-progressions keep managers returning to the platform even when their competitive motivation is diminished.

The platform went into its first full Premier League season with a complete, stable codebase and a monitoring stack that surfaces performance regressions before they affect managers. The custom admin dashboard gives the platform team visibility into league health across all active leagues: average deadline compliance rate, waiver claim volume by gameweek, WebSocket connection stability during draft events, and the daily active user trend across the season. This operational visibility was built alongside the product rather than as an afterthought, because a fantasy platform that fails silently during a live gameweek loses users permanently.