

OVERHEARD

# Should Companies Be Like Fantasy Football Teams?

United Airlines' president said well-run firms are like fantasy football teams, but luckily for investors he isn't familiar with the game



The Los Angeles Rams hosted the San Francisco 49ers on Sunday. PHOTO: WILL LESTER/ZUMA PRESS

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Is running a company similar to running a virtual football team? Luckily for investors, not really.

On Wednesday, shares of United Airlines rose more than 2% after the carrier reported better-than-expected profits for the third quarter. President Scott Kirby attributed part of the company's recent success to teamwork, and compared well-run companies with fantasy football—a game in which players draft footballers virtually and win points based on their actual performance during the sports season.

“You’re looking for players you can count on who are more than just standout individual performers,” Mr. Kirby said during a call with analysts Wednesday.

He clarified that he doesn’t play fantasy football himself. “My wife Kathleen is in a couple of leagues and is actually the commissioner of one of our leagues, so I hear about it a lot,” he added.

In reality, fantasy football leagues are often won by drafting a list of individualists rather than prioritizing team players—since the virtual athletes don't actually have to play together.

United investors may actually be relieved that Mr. Kirby isn't familiar with a game that is distinguished by two main characteristics: Sapping time away from work and a high dropout rate for would-be managers.

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