PICKS WITHOUT PARTNERS at Sportsbooks

The bettor-friendliest football forecasts in the field...

COLLEGE, NFL BEST BETS & MORE!

VOLUME 50, #5   WEEK ENDING MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

On Sunday evening, some girl writer at espn.com contributed to the latest misperception on passing:

"[Caleb] Williams set the Bears single-game rookie passing record against the Colts upon completing 33 of 52 attempts for 363 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions with an 80.8 passer rating. The No. 1 overall pick had 267 passing yards combined in Chicago's first two games of the season."

"The Bears single-game rookie passing record." That's a good one, lady. Who has the Bears' single-game "record" for a second-season QB? Or for a seventh-season QB? Ha-ha-ha. You see how moronic stuff like this is? Why is it that according to sportswriters, only rookies can set records – which aren't even records?

Earth to lady: The Bears lost the game! There is no "passing record!" It's just a meaningless statistic! In her own story, she contradicts the heroics she is trying to invent by pointing out how futile the "record performance!" was: "More than half of Williams' 33 completions were thrown five or fewer yards downfield (18), and he was 4-of-14 for 137 yards and an interception on passes thrown 15 or more yards."

People like her are helping to ruin America with their misguided priorities, by the way. If I don't take them to task, then who will?

Last Thursday's and Friday's four college games were great examples of how "big passing yards!" and "multiple touchdown passes!" are overrated. As was the case with the Bears, the quarterbacks on all four sides that lost against the spread (1-3 SU) passed for more yardage (much of it obtained via runs after the catch) than the quarterback on the team that covered the spread:

ATS Loss	Pass yards	ATS Win	Pass Yards
App State	266	So. Alabama	154
Syracuse	339	Stanford	178
Nebraska	297	Illinois	215
Wash St.	390	San Jose State	375

Now, look at the disparities in rushing yardage in those games:

ATS Win	Rush yards	ATS Loss	Rush Yards
So. Alabama	320	App State	119
Stanford	173	Syracuse	26
Illinois	168	Nebraska	50
San Jose St.	116	Wash State	237

San Jose State was the only ATS winner of the four that didn't accumulate mucho more rushing yardage than the other side. However, as I'd told everyone in last week's page 1 diatribe, San Jose State's prior lack of rushing yardage entering the game wasn't a bad thing, because they'd switched to a Run N' Shoot offense – Run N' Shoot being a ridiculous term because it's a pass-heavy system. (But these are football people, not English majors, who put names on things. So, give them a break.) Little Sparty's Run-Pass split in the game was 21-54, more than 2.5 times as many throws as runs, which is what happens with a Run N' Shoot. They should call it Pass N' Shoot, or Routes N' Throws. But like I said, these are football people, so…

Anyway, it's just more evidence of how, 'Ya' gotta be able to run the ball!,' like the smart folks say, as the squares continue to develop man-crushes on quarterbacks who throw passes 6 yards then watch the receiver run another 16. Then you have somebody like Mel Kiper, Jr.,

the draft ranking clown, coming out last week and saying that the NFL should institute more rules than it already has to help offense, saying specifically that in his bloviating opinion, the popular two-high safety defensive alignment should be banned, forcing safeties to play nearer to the line of scrimmage so as to make it easier for quarterbacks to complete passes downfield. Kiper actually said, "The NFL is being ruined by these two-high safeties."

What the heck? I thought these QBs were already superstars who didn't need artificial assistance? Isn't that how you portray them every year? (Wink-wink).

I was told a while back, by the man who had hired him, that Mel Kiper, Jr. is a former Sports Reporter staffer. Assuming it as the truth, our respective tenures did not overlap. Therefore, I don't know him. If I did, then I'd pick up the phone and ask, "Have you been more than slightly delusional all along and I didn't realize it, or did you suddenly just become that way? Obviously, you are upset that so many of the college quarterbacks whom you've ranked highly on the imaginary draft board in your head, then recommended that NFL franchises – who don't employ you -- draft as "franchise quarterbacks!," tend to perform so poorly and are making you look bad! You want to change the rules to save your reputation. Instead, why don't you correct your flawed perceptions of the college football and NFL sports which, as an alleged expert on both, you're supposed to understand, okay? Have a nice day and go back to putting together the first of your five updated 2025 Mock NFL Drafts and while you're at it, tell us who'll win the 2025 Mock NFL Season."

I just remembered two more offense-friendly things that didn't exist in the NFL when Joe Namath was throwing more interceptions than touchdown passes en route to being enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame:

- Receivers didn't wear gloves.
- The only indoor, weather-proofed stadium was in Houston (until the Lions opened the Silverdome in 1975)!

How bad do you think many quarterbacks of the last 25 years and today would look if 31% percent of the games weren't being played indoors, if their linemen couldn't use their hands to block, if their receivers were being bumped repeatedly while trying to run their routes, if their drives weren't being extended via roughing the passer or high or low hits that were never penalized in the past (allowing them to keep taking snaps and accrue more stats instead of punting), if only one player could go in motion before the snap, and if receivers couldn't snag a pass with one hand via the benefit of sticky gloves? Well, Joe Namath's career completion percentage was 50.1%, at 7.4 Yards Per Attempt, on bad knees throughout, with none of those aids. Somebody like Bryce Young, benched last week with a 55.4% completion rate and 4.4 YPA, in what the media and others call a "quarterback-driven league," would probably complete 30% of his passes at 3.0 YPA under the conditions Namath played under, despite being blessed with mobility to escape a rush! "Quarterback-driven league," ho-ho-ho. What's the driving destination, a large lake? If today's young QBs were playing under the old conditions, then Jim Nantz and others like him wouldn't be calling them by their first names. They'd be calling them insulting names instead! -- *Bobby Smith, Editor*

PRO FOOTBALL: Week 4 Past Performances

Yr.	Wk	V	Pts	H	Pts	Vis QB	Hm QB	V off	V next	H off	H next	Notes
2023	10	NYG	17	DAL	49	DeVito	Prescott	L at LV	W at WAS	L at PHI	W at CAR	Just 172 yds for Giants. DeVito struggles. Dak 404, 4 TD.
2023	1	DAL	40	NYG	0	Prescott	Jones	NONE	W NYJ	NONE	W at ARI	Cowboys score early, often, game never in doubt.
2023	18	ATL	17	NO	48	Ridder	Carr	L at CHI	NONE	W at TB	NONE	Saints outscore Falcons 31-0 in second half. Carr 4 TDs.
2023	12	NO	15	ATL	24	Carr	Ridder	BYE	L DET	BYE	W at NYJ	Falcons win despite 2 INT by Ridder. Robinson 91 yds, TD.
2023	17	GB	33	MIN	10	Love	Mullens	W at CAR	W CHI	L DET	L at DET	Vikes just 211 yards with two turnovers. Love 3 TDs.
2023	8	MIN	24	GB	10	Cousins	Love	W SF	W at ATL	L at DEN	W LAR	Cousins leads two 3Q TD drives, but goes down with injury.
2023	15	PIT	13	IND	30	Trubisky	Minshew	L NE	W CIN	L at CIN	L at ATL	Minshew picks apart PIT w/ 3 TDs. Colts score final 30 pts.
2022	12	PIT	24	IND	17	Pickett	Ryan	L CIN	W at ATL	L PHI	L at DAL	Pittman, Taylor TDs give Colts 3Q lead, but they lose.
2023	5	NYJ	31	DEN	21	Z. Wilson	R. Wilson	L KC	W PHI	W at CHI	L at KC	Hall rushes for 177 yards, TD as Jets hold off Broncos.
2022	7	NYJ	16	DEN	9	Rypien	Z. Wilson	W at GB	L NE	L at LAC	W JAX	62-yard TD run by Hall plus 3 Jets FGs enough to get by.
2023	WC	PHI	9	TB	32	Hurts	Mayfield	L at NYG	NONE	W at CAR	L at DET	TB gets revenge. Baker 3 TDs. Eagles 42 rush yds.
2023	3	PHI	25	TB	11	Hurts	Mayfield	W MIN	W WAS	W CHI	W at NO	Philly outrushes TB 201-41. TB just 12 first downs.
2021	WC	PHI	14	TB	31	Brady	Hurts	L DAL	NONE	W CAR	L LAR	Bucs jump to 31-0 lead to send Eagles packing. Brady 2 TD
2021	6	TB	28	PHI	22	Brady	Hurts	W MIA	W CHI	W at CAR	L at LV	Eagles can't climb out of 28-7 hole. Fournette 81 yds, 2 TD
2023	13	JAX	24	HOU	21	L'wrnce	Stroud	W TEN	L CIN	L IND	W PIT	Texans miss FG in final minute as comeback stalls.
2023	3	HOU	37	JAX	17	Stroud	L'wrnce	L IND	W PIT	L KC	W ATL	Stroud-to-Dell a big winner as Texans pull aways from Jags.
2023	1	ARI	16	WAS	20	Dobbs	Howell	NONE	L NYG	NONE	W at DEN	Neither offense impressive in turnover filled game.
2023	18	KC	13	LAC	12	Gabbert	Stick	W CIN	W MIA	L at DEN	NONE	97-yd fumble return TD the different in game with all FGs.
2023	7	LAC	17	KC	31	Herbert	Mahmes	L DAL	W CHI	W DEN	L at DEN	Huge day for Kelce w/179 yds, TD. Mahomes 4 TDs, INT.
2022	4	BUF	23	BAL	20	Allen	Jackson	L at MIA	W PIT	W at NE	W CIN	Bills get late interception, drive the field for GW FG.
2023	14	TEN	28	MIA	27	Levis	Tagvailoa	L IND	L HOU	W at WAS	W NYJ	Teams total 4 TDs in final 6 minutes, Titans score last.
2023	2	SEA	37	DET	31	G. Smith	Goff	L LAR	W CAR	W at KC	W ATL	Seahawks get the ball in OT, drive the field for the win.
2022	4	SEA	48	DET	45	G. Smith	Goff	L ATL	L at NO	L at MIN	L at NE	Goff and Geno lead surprise shootout with 698 yds, six TDs

PRO FOOTBALL

This week's NFL match-ups, listed in Las Vegas/Offshore order, home team at bottom, with: Kickoff times, Opening Line and Total, average PF-PA (next week), Spread Score (based on the Vegas Line/Total), and. SRr's computer-made lines.

Time	THURSDAY, 9/26	Line	SR line	Spr Scr	PF	PA
8:15	**Dallas**	-5.5	-4	25.25	25.7	29.7
	NY Giants	45	44.5	19.75	15.0	21.3

Time	SUNDAY, 9/29	Line	SR line	Spr Scr	PF	PA
1:00	**New Orleans**	42	39.5	20.25	34.3	14.7
	Atlanta	-1.5	-3	21.75	16.3	20.3
1:00	**Pittsburgh**	-2	-5	21.00	17.0	8.7
	Indianapolis	40	37	19.00	19.3	20.3
1:00	**Jacksonville**	45.5	43	19.25	13.3	28.3
	Houston	-7	-6	26.25	18.3	24.7
1:00	**Minnesota**	43.5	47.5	20.50	28.3	10.0
	Green Bay	-2.5	-5.5	23.00	25.0	19.3
1:00	**Cincinnati**	-4.5	-4	26.00	22.7	26.7
	Carolina	47.5	53.5	21.50	16.3	31.7
1:00	**LA Rams**	41	38	19.25	19.0	30.3
	Chicago	-2.5	-1	21.75	17.7	19.0
1:00	**Denver**	38.5	40.5	15.50	17.3	15.3
	NY Jets	-7.5	-11	23.00	22.3	17.3
1:00	**Philadelphia**	-2.5	-4	23.75	23.3	21.0
	Tampa Bay	45	43.5	21.25	21.3	20.7
4:05	**Washington**	50.5	59	23.50	26.3	29.3
	Arizona	-3.5	P	27.00	27.3	21.3
4:05	**New England**	39.5	38.5	14.75	13.0	19.0
	San Francisco	-10	-11	24.75	24.3	23.0
4:25	**Cleveland**	37	36.5	18.00	16.7	22.3
	Las Vegas	-1	-3	19.00	19.3	27.0
4:25	**Kansas City**	-8	-9	23.50	25.0	20.7
	LA Chargers	39	38	15.50	19.3	11.0
8:20	**Buffalo**	46	49	21.75	37.3	16.0
	Baltimore	-2.5	-2	24.25	23.7	26.0

Time	MONDAY, 9/30	Line	SR line	Spr Scr	PF	PA
7:30	**Tennessee**	37	-1	18.00	16.0	26.0
	Miami	-1	39	19.00	11.0	24.0
8:15	**Seattle**	47	51.5	21.75	24.3	14.3
	Detroit	-3.5	-6	25.25	20.7	17.7

BYE WEEKS: None

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

DALLAS over *NY GIANTS by 3

The Cowboys have won seven in a row against the Giants, 12 of the last 13. Last year's scores were 40-0 and 44-17. Double-revenge for a pair of humiliating defeats in a parity-laden league might be an intangible in New York's favor. Perhaps – combined with New York getting off the schneid in Cleveland -- it'll motivate the home fans to keep their tickets instead of selling them to Cowboys fans who routinely turn MetLife into Jerry World East once a year. Last week, we noted that Dallas had the NFL's best recent record when coming off a loss. Didn't do them any good vs. Baltimore, did it? Now, they're off two losses. They haven't lost three in a row since Mike McCarthy's first season, 2020, which they spent turning the ball over. It was also a pass-heavy season for them. They're currently running for only 74 yards per game, and "leading" the NFL in passing yards per game (267). First-season DC Mike Zimmer must feel like he's back in Minnesota with Kirk Cousins and non-complementary football again, and rolling his eyes to the ceiling. DALLAS, 24-21.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

*ATLANTA over NEW ORLEANS by 6

Well, that was the earliest peaking of an offense (Saints) in history, wasn't it? But the worst part about the Saints' 15-12 loss vs. the Eagles was being in man-to-man defense on 3rd and 12 with 1:00 remaining and a 5-point lead when the Eagles were missing wideouts Devonta Smith and A.J. Brown, playing two tight ends, and the Saints let one of them cross the field to catch a pass in stride and run 50 more yards. Tell us again why head coach Dennis Allen is such a great defensive play-caller? Meanwhile, not to be outdone, the Falcons moved the ball with Kirk Cousins doing play-action against the Chiefs, then moved away from it in the second half. Duh. For this, we'll figure it's Derek Carr on the road in a loud dome s visitor against a pretty good Falcons' defense, and a 2-point head start isn't enough. ATLANTA, 23-17.

BEST BET
PITTSBURGH over *INDIANAPOLIS by 16

The Colts once again lost the time-of-possession (by 10 minutes this time) and they threw in having 89 fewer yards and 11 fewer first downs than the Bears for good measure. That being said, they won, ☺ thanks to rookie QB mistakes and no running game on the other side (Chicago). They won't be dealing with those issues here. The Steelers won't do anything fancy, but it's clear they are establishing an identity. QB Justin Fields hasn't fully let loose with his arm or his legs, but he's also not making mistakes. Completing 73.3% of his passes with one interception and no fumbles has allowed Pittsburgh to sustain long drives. No defense has faced more plays or spent more time on the field than the Colts. Their points allowed and yards per play are slightly better, but still sit in the bottom third of the league. It's not all on the defense however, as QB Anthony Richardson has twice as many interceptions as TDs and has fumbled twice (both recovered). While he is 2nd on the team in rushing, most of his yards have come on designed runs rather than scrambles. Add in a 49.3% completion percentage and it can be very hard to score against the Pittsburgh's D. The Steelers surely remember last year's game where they jumped to a 13-0 lead before the Colts scored the final 30 points. PITTSBURGH 27-11.

Call 1-800-305-9604, or Click here to email us
for Sports Reporter Customer Service inquiries

*HOUSTON over JACKSONVILLE over by 3

The Jags enter off a short week for a second straight road game in a desperate state: 0-3, and off a 37-point road loss. Yow! Doesn't seem to make much sense. But consider this: they've lost the last seven games in which Trevor Lawrence was their starting QB. Hey, we've always known he was overrated, but we didn't know that he might be that bad! The only game they've won since Nov. 26 last year – against the Texans, by the way – was when C.J. Beathard played in Lawrence's place, at Carolina. But you try to remain grounded with your analysis instead of writing off Jacksonville. For one thing, the Texans haven't covered a spread yet. "The Man" had to crank their power rating upwards in the off-season after the surprising season they had last year, but opposing defensive coordinators were always destined to adjust against their QB, C.J. Stroud, after he heaved his way to being NFL Rookie of the Year. Stroud's YPA is down by a full yard after three games, and the Texans haven't spent much time with a lead larger than this full game spread. HOUSTON, 23-20.

BEST BET
*GREEN BAY over MINNESOTA by 14

It's a hump game for Sam Darnold. When he played QB for Carolina, his team zipped to a 3-0 record in the first three weeks (Not a 3-0 "start." The "start" is the first game!). They finished 5-12 and he was benched mid-season. That's an example of things changing quickly in the NFL. Another example is Packers' QB Malik Willis. One day, he is a back-up QB on Tennessee; four weeks later, he's starting QB for the Packers, helping to beat Tennessee with only 19 throws. The Packers were able to maintain the run-heaviness they'd displayed when they'd won at Indianapolis the week before with 40-20 Time of Possession ownership. Against the Titans, it wasn't as severe: 32:28 to 27:32. But as long as you're not turning the ball over, and punting it deep when you don't score, more TOP is a good thing to have. We're getting tired of the "revenge game!" angle being put on one individual player in a match-up. Last week it was Willis; this week it's Vikings' RB Aaron Jones, former Green Bay workhorse. Too simplistic. We're getting into intra-division play here, where the Packers have steadily come through under Matt LaFleur, and where the Vikings have been lagging behind. GREEN BAY, 31-17.

CINCINNATI over *CAROLINA by 3

0-3 Bengals! And they have to play against their old QB, Andy Dalton! Scoring 33 points with 30 first downs and losing on Monday Night doesn't seem like a positive sign for Cincinnati. But will Dalton be throwing 21-for-23 against their defense, and running another 12 times, as rookie Jayden Daniels did? Probably not, despite the wake-up call Dalton gave the rest of the offense in Las Vegas. The Bengals' coaching staff needs to keep the players from reading newspapers and web sites this week, which will be loaded with the miniscule rate of 0-3 NFL teams that have eventually made the post-season. But after Cincinnati has lost outright laying -9.5 home vs. New England, and lost outright as -7.5 home vs. Washington, how can you like them laying -4.5 on the road against anyone, even the Panthers, in what's supposed to be parity-laden league? CINCINNATI, 28-25.

THE DAILY BRIEF: *September & Post-season BASEBALL winners! Online, every day!*

LA RAMS over *CHICAGO by 1

Why should we lay 3 points on a home team QB'd by a rookie with a 5.3 YPA and 2-4 TD-INT, who takes snaps on an offense averaging a mere 3.7 yards per play, fewest in the NFL? Defense and special teams? Okay, Chicago's will probably show. They usually do. But the other team plays D and ST, too, and it wants to win, too. Yes, the Rams are off a hard-fought win against a division rival – quite an unlikely one given the size of the deficit and the fact that the divison rival had mostly owned them -- and they have injuries, to boot. But they're not being asked to make a margin, merely to compete, stay in the game, and find a way to win it by at least 1 point. Sean McVay vs. Matt Eberflus, with Eberflus' team throwing its previous run-heavy ways to the wind (35.5% runs vs. 49.0% last year, which was the #2 running play percentage)… LA RAMS, 17-16.

RECOMMENDED
*NY JETS over DENVER by 16

Bo Nix and the Broncos picked up their first win of the year in a game where the Buccaneers – not surprisingly, given the situation -- didn't show up. Baker Mayfield dinked and dunked to virtually no success while Nix played a clean game for once. The rookie had thrown two picks in each of his first two games and while we can't guarantee that here, we do know that the Jets will provide a much greater challenge. The NYJ have won and covered each of the last two years when traveling to Denver and that was with Zach Wilson at QB. It's safe to say that Aaron Rodgers gives them a good chance to repeat. Sure, Zach Wilson is on the Broncos now and can provide some knowledge to the defense, but unless he is going to show them how to be an all-time bust of a draft pick, we're happy to downplay that aspect. New York has clearly improved from last year. The offense has more weapons and a QB that can use them as well as an offensive line that is, well, not offensive. The defense has been hit by injuries, but they still are at the top of the league in getting to the QB. Broncos are staying in West Virginia, rather than fly back-and-forth on consecutive weekends. Didn't do the Chargers any good in Pittsburgh ☹. NY JETS 28-12.

PHILADELPHIA over *TAMPA BAY by 5

He was probably half-joking, but former Eagles' center Jason Kelce told people that the reason he retired was because he didn't want to try to block Bucs' DT Vita Vea anymore. Sometimes, the Bucs' defense goes as Vea goes, and he didn't go this past Sunday in the home loss vs. Denver, which we'd warned you about. Fellow DT didn't play, either. Until we know for sure they'll return, we can't recommended Tampa. Another absence by those two, combined with the Bucs' lack of edge-rush pressure, would give the revenge-minded Eagles a big edge with their mobile QB Jaylen Hurts. Philly's offense has some question marks with WRs A.J. Brown missing the Saints game and DeVonta Smith concussed during it. They finished the game playing two tight ends, which wouldn't be the worst way to go at it in this match-up if the Tampa interior d-line is still messed up. PHILADELPHIA, 24-19.

PRO FOOTBALL

RECOMMENDED

WASHINGTON over *ARIZONA by 8

Uh-oh. We should probably issue a warning to Totals players about not playing an Under. Bengals' head coach Zac Taylor after his team's 38-33 loss on Monday night, regarding the team formerly known as Redskins: "They scored on every possession last week, and they scored on every possession this week. It was a dangerous team. They were ready for us. They dictated the flow of the game." Kliff Kingsbury is the new offensive coordinator of Washington. You may remember that he was Arizona's head coach and the reason they drafted QB Kyler Murray. You may also remember that under clown-coordinator Eric Bienemy last season, Washington made turnover after turnover after turnover, putting themselves in position to generate value this season with better ball-security. Guess how many turnovers Washington has committed after three games? How about 0? None, zip, nada. Nary a one, the only team in the NFL with no turnovers. The D has only 1 takeaway, all the more reason to avoid playing an Under. But points are available and they won here last season. We'll bite. WASHINGTON, 37-29.

*SAN FRANCISCO over NEW ENGLAND by 13

The Niners have lost two straight road games to playoff contenders by a total of 9 points and sit in last place in the NFC West. Losing Christian McCaffrey to the IR has been a big blow, but Jordan Mason has provided great ground production. TE George Kittle should return to practice this week, but Deebo Samuel is a question mark. DT Javon Hargrave is suddenly out for the season. The Pats can play some D, but if Kittle returns the passing game should be able to pick up yardage with ease, even with Brock Purdy's sore back. As for the Patriots' offense, only two teams have scored fewer points and they have the fourth worst yards per play. QB Jacoby Brissett will be good for rookie Drake Maye's development, but he's not helping New England on the field, averaging 5.3 YPA and 122 passing yards per game. They won't be able to keep up. SAN FRANCISCO 26-13.

*LAS VEGAS over CLEVELAND by 3

The Raiders could be one of those teams that performs best in the underdog role against a high-profile opponent. Predicting flatness vs. Carolina was quite predictable. QB Gardner Minshew is the ultimate underdog himself, so favoritism and Las Vegas… not appealing. Just as favoritism and the Browns isn't appealing, either. They're 0-2 SU laying points, in ugly efforts vs. Dallas and the Giants. They managed to win outright as the underdog on the road at Jacksonville. It's a short sample, though. The Browns average a measly 3.8 yards per snap. They can't protect QB DeShaun Watson: 16 sacks in three games. Watson was sacked a lot when he played for Houston, so at some point, blaming of the o-lines must be minimized and shifted to the overpaid QB himself. With 57.8% completions, 4.8 YPA, an ailing Myles Garrett on their defensive line and Minshew getting the ball out quickly for the Raiders, perhaps the home chalk can find it within themselves to keep an opponent's misery going. LAS VEGAS, 19-16.

KANSAS CITY over *LA CHARGERS by 10

They're already writing that the Chargers have "insane injury woes" that will make the Chiefs' quest for a ninth consecutive AFC West title "easier than expected." Maybe, but in a parity-laden league, with Jim Harbaugh as head coach of an 8-point underdog – coaching up the team that had been dragged down by the previous clown coach – you don't make this knee-jerk assessments in Week 4 in front of the first division game. But when you toss in the suspension to Derwin James and OL Joe Alt being out, you don't want to go running around with a Chargers' banner either because the margin for error is slim. Opponents have adjusted to keep KC's offense less explosive than its reputation, and Harbaugh can one-up Andy Reid's 2-tight end formations by playing three. KANSAS CITY, 23-13.

*BALTIMORE over BUFFALO by 4

After overcoming a feisty Cardinals team in week one, the Bills set their sights on the Florida teams, winning by a combined 78-20 score. The improvements from QB Josh Allen and a defense that seems to have successfully reloaded has them being talked about as the best team in the league. They might be! We also know the Jags and Dolphins are 1-5. The Ravens have played three games with all three being decided within one score. They blew a late lead against the Raiders and almost blew an even bigger lead against the Cowboys in a game that looked over early in the third quarter. What does this mean? Both teams have a lot to prove and that's before accounting for their preseason Super Bowl aspirations. The Bills have to show that they can stop the run and Baltimore will challenge them there on multiple levels. Can the Ravens continue to right the ship? BALTIMORE, 26-22.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

TENNESSEE over *MIAMI by 4

You're watching a season fall apart before your very eyes. Sure, you can't predict a concussion like what happened to Tua Tagovailoa, but when you have a QB with his concussion history, you'd probably want a backup with some capability. The Dolphins didn't see it that way. They hung on to Skylar Thompson, who then got hurt, which forced them to bring in Tim Boyle, who somehow keeps getting signed despite not ever having success at any level of football. Whether it's Boyle or newly-signed Tyler Huntley, this offense is not in a good place. Tennessee is playing good pass defense. The scoring defense lags behind, but this is a good spot to bolster those numbers. Tyler Huntley proved a capable backup in Baltimore, but how much is going to do if they turn to him with less than two weeks on the team? As for the Miami defense, it ranks just one spot ahead of Tennessee in scoring while sitting top 2 in time on field and plays faced. What does that mean? Teams are gashing them for big yardage. Good luck, Fins. TENNESSEE 23-19.

*DETROIT over SEATTLE by 8

The yards per snap allowed by 3-0 Seattle's defense is off the charts good: 3.9. But it's destined to rise. It has been achieved under very favorable circumstances: 1) Hosting Denver, with rookie QB Bo Nix absolutely overwhelmed in his first game, unable to check down after his first read was covered. 2) At New England, first game for journeyman QB Jacoby Brissett with very little in the way of dynamic playmakers supporting him. 3) Hosting Miami in the Dolphins' first game without QB Tua Tagovailoa, with replacement starter Sklyar Thompson getting injured in it. So, unless they knock out Lions' QB Jared Goff, and maybe one RB and one wideout, the full playbook from a balanced and reasonably productive opposing offense will be deployed against the Seahawks' defense for the first time this season. Geno Smith and the Seattle offense have grinded to 26, 20 and 24 points in regulation after the other offenses stood still. DETROIT, 30-22.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOARD

This week's match-ups in Rotation # order, home team at bottom, with: Kickoff time (ET), Opening line, Sports Reporter computer line, past three years of scores. Asterisk (*) in past scores indicates home. No asterisk: neutral field.

Time	THURSDAY, 9/26	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
7:30	Army / Temple	-13	-12			

Time	FRIDAY, 9/27	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
7:30	Virginia Tech / Miami	-19.5	-18		14* / 20	26 / 38*
8:00	Washington / Rutgers	-2.5	-1			

Time	SATURDAY, 9/28	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
3:30	Eastern Michigan / Kent St.	-15	-14	28* / 14		
3:30	Liberty / Appalachian St.	-3.5	-5			
4:00	UTSA / East Carolina	-4	-3	41* / 27		
7:00	Stanford / Clemson	-22	-24			
3:30	Georgia Southern / Georgia St.	-3.5	-2	44* / 27	33 / 41*	14* / 21
12:00	Northern Illinois / North Carolina St.	-6	-4.5			
3:30	San Diego St. / Central Michigan	-3	-5			
3:30	Louisiana-Laf. / Wake Forest	-3	-1			
1:30	Ball St. / James Madison	-20.5	-19			
4:00	North Carolina / Duke	-2.5	-1	47*o / 45	38 / 35*	38* / 7
3:30	Akron / Ohio	-12	-11	25* / 14	34 / 55*	17* / 34
12:00	Maryland / Indiana	-6.5	-8	44* / 17	38 / 33*	38* / 35
12:00	Buffalo / Connecticut	-5.5	-6			
3:30	Massachusetts / Miami OH	-17.5	-16.5	*28 / 41		
3:30	Colorado / Central Florida	-14.5	-13			
3:30	Western Michigan / Marshall	-4	-4			
5:00	Old Dominion / Bowling Green	-9.5	-8			
12:00	Western KY / Boston College	-13	-9.5			
12:00	Nebraska / Purdue	-10	-9.5	31* / 14	37 / 43*	23* / 28
8:00	Florida St. / SMU	-6	-3.5			
12:00	Kentucky / Mississippi	-17.5	-14		19 / 22*	

Time	SATURDAY, 9/28	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
12:00	Oklahoma St. / Kansas St.	-4.5	-6	28* / 21	0 / 48*	31* / 20
8:00	Cincinnati / Texas Tech	-3	-2			
3:30	TCU / Kansas	-2	P		38 / 31*	31* / 28
12:00	South Florida / Tulane	-6	-3.5		31* / 45	14 / 45*
10:15	Arizona / Utah	-11	-7.5	42* / 18	20 / 45*	29* / 38
10:00	Washington St. / Boise St.	-7.5	-11			
3:00	Texas St. / Sam Houston St.	-8	-10			
12:00	Navy / UAB	-3.5	P	31* / 6		
7:30	Middle Tenn / Memphis	-25.5	-29			
4:15	Mississippi St. / Texas	-38.5	-38.5			
12:00	BYU / Baylor	-3	3.5		26 / 20*	24* / 38
7:45	South Alabama / LSU	-21.5	-20			
7:00	Iowa St. / Houston	-13.5	-15			
7:00	Charlotte / Rice	-7	-8	7* / 28	56 / 23*	31* / 24
3:40	Oklahoma / Auburn	-1.5	-2			
7:00	Louisiana-Mon. / Troy	-7	-5	14* / 45		29 / 16*
7:00	Tulsa / North Texas	-6.5	-4	28* / 35		
3:30	Fresno St. / UNLV	-4	-3	31* / 24	37 / 30*	38* / 30
11:00	Oregon / UCLA	-24	-27		45* / 30	34 / 31*
3:30	Arkansas / Texas A&M	-4	-2.5	22 / 34	21 / 23	20 / 10
3:30	Louisville / Notre Dame	-6	-8	33* / 20		
7:30	Illinois / Penn St.	-18	-16	13* / 30		20 / 18*
12:00	Minnesota / Michigan	-9	-10.5	10* / 52		
3:30	Wisconsin / USC	-16	-14.5			
6:00	Louisiana Tech / Florida Int	-2.5	-1	22* / 17	34 / 42*	
7:30	Georgia / Alabama	-2	P	24 / 27		24 / 41
8:00	New Mexico / New Mexico St.	-9	-11	17* / 27	9 / 21*	34* / 25
7:00	Ohio St. / Michigan St.	-24	-21.5	38* / 3	49 / 20*	56* / 7
8:00	Air Force / Wyoming	-4	-3	34* / 27	14 / 17*	24* / 14

CLICK HERE to Email the Editor

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

ARMY over *TEMPLE by 10

Army hates Owls. They seek to make it 3-for-3 against programs named for the unique bird after tromping over FAU and Rice by a combined 61-21. Two TDs is traditionally not a good number to lay with academy football run-heaviness, but this qualifies as good run O vs. weak run D until Temple proves otherwise. The short week is not conducive to good defense against triple-option. Temple QB Evan Simon, a Rutgers refugee, was a revelation vs. Utah State (5-0 TD-INT, pretty much out of the blue). But how much time will he get with the ball? ARMY, 31-21.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

*MIAMI-FL over VIRGINIA TECH by 17

Va. Tech kicked off 2024 laying -20 on the road at Vanderbilt, and less than a month later, takes +20 in its ACC opener at the 'Canes? You don't know if Miami truly is "back" until they win and cover as the favorite against a halfway decent ACC team. Va. Tech qualifies as such, in a league with few elites. People were patting Va. Tech on the back before the season began because they were "returning everyone!" But in college football these days, sometimes you need to go out and get better players instead of dancing with the girls that brung ya' to 6-6. MIAMI-FL, 34-17.

WASHINGTON over *RUTGERS by 1

A Rutgers QB completed 64.0% of his throws for 10.8 YPA against a real opponent! When was the last time that happened? Minnesota transfer Athan Kaliakmanis didn't complete any into the end zone at Virginia Tech but he didn't toss an INT or lose a fumble, either. Still, we'll need to see some consistency in that area before we go back to the well with the Scarlet Knights, who pounded Va. Tech with a 52-25 Run-Pass split (but for only 2.5 ypc). Their good pass D numbers dating back to last season have come against too many bad pass offenses. WASHINGTON, 23-22.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

EASTERN MICHIGAN over *KENT STATE by 12

4-0 ATS Eastern Mich is a scrappy road dog. That's pretty much the only time we'd want to rely on them. They're favored here. 0-4 ATS Kent State has spent most of September collecting $1+ million checks and getting killed on purpose, while pointing for this MAC home opener in Year Two that followed a dismal Year One. They actually outgained EMU running and passing in last year's 28-14 road loss (-2 in TO Margin). EASTERN MICH, 29-17.

LIBERTY over *APPALACHIAN STATE by 8

South Alabama walked – make that ran – all over the App State defense last Thursday night. Very disappointing to see. The Liberty running game is a main piece in the program's blueprint. 5'7", 220 RB Quinton Cooley is already on pace for another 6.0+ ypc season with 16 TDs, which he had a year ago during their unbeaten run to the Fiesta Bowl. How does App State respond against a conference champ, as they return home after being embarrassed on national TV? LIBERTY, 35-27.

UTSA over *EAST CAROLINA by 1

The American Conference bell has rung! Jeff Traylor's UTSA coaching staff and players tend to give the Pavlovian salivating response, so we can probably discard much of the data they've littered the field with at Texas State and at Texas in the two blowout losses that preceded last week's bye. Non-conference blowout losses by 39 and 49 points do wonders for deflating power ratings and creating potential value. ECU's "next-level" DB, Shavon Revel Jr. has been lost for the season and we trust their QB Jake Garcia to protect the football about as far as we can throw him. UTSA, 23-22.

*CLEMSON over STANFORD by 24

Stanford's supply truck drove straight from Syracuse to Clemson following the team's Thursday night score. But the team flew back to Palo Alto, CA in between back-to-back, West-to-East road trips as it prepares to step up in class off the win. It's a different situation than they've ever encountered. This, as classes for the Fall semester began yesterday (Monday, 9/23). Clemson is doing Stanford's laundry for them and the Tigers – hell-bent 66- and 59-point scorers recently – could also clean their clocks. CLEMSON, 41-17.

GEORGIA SOUTHERN over *GEORGIA STATE by 1

Georgia State has home field, revenge, a bye week. Nice intangibles to own. Georgia Southern's defense hasn't met a play it can stop in time (7+ yards per play allowed), so the host has that going for it. But the visitor will test their pass D like nobody else has in their first three games, and it wasn't good last season. Visiting coach Helton: "We've played a challenging nonconference schedule [true, with Boise State and Ole Miss], and we're confident we're prepared to play when conference starts next week." GEORGIA SOUTHERN, 31-30.

*NORTH CAROLINA ST. over NO. ILLINOIS by 3

NIU, back to their best role (told ya' not to believe in them as chalk in the MAC opener!) Unlike the Notre Dame game, this non-con outing is stuck between Buffalo and another game next week -- not a bye. But at least it's only UMass on deck, a lowly Independent. NIU invaded ACC territory last season and brought home some BC scalp, just another in its long line of "scrappy road dog scores. Off the blowout loss vs. Clemson, the Wolfpack may be stunned into action. Or, maybe Clemson exposed that NC State's run defense is way, way off from its standard level. NC STATE, 23-20.

*CENTRAL MICHIGAN over SAN DIEGO ST. by 7

First-season head coach of San Diego State, Sean Lewis, takes his team for a rare, long road trip across the Mississippi and a Great Lake, as it's still way early in the transition to the offense he envisions. It's an offense that frequently flowed fine at Kent State, for which CMU has plenty of tape. Jim McElwain is happy to welcome him to Mt. Pleasant and is in position to make it Mount Unpleasant for the visitor, considering his team's well-established identity: run until they stop it. It appears as if part of Lewis' process is a disintegrating run defense. CENTRAL MICH, 27-20.

UL-LAFAYETTE over *WAKE FOREST by 1

The performance of ULL's run defense vs. Tulane would have been pretty good had the unit been comprised of 11 schoolgirl Music majors. As it was, they were all football scholarship males who allowed 47-272 rushing, off a bye week. Good luck if you think they can get tougher and/or take better tackling angles against Wake's misdirection, but at least the offense can move the ball as long as QB Ben Woolridge avoids throwing it to the other team – which is not a given. UL-LAFAYETTE, 35-34.

*JAMES MADISON over BALL STATE by 17

After hitting 70 points on the speedometer on the ACC road, and before next week's Sun Belt opener at UL-Monroe, ya' gotta be a little leery about layin' it with JMU. After the Monroe trip comes a short-week clash with Coastal Carolina on ESPN2, and they probably can't take everyone to Monroe. They gotta spread the playing time around somehow, somewhere. Ball State's offense made its expected improvement off the bye at Central Mich as QB Kaden Semonza (71.2% completions so far) showed some progress. The defense is another story. JAMES MADISON, 38-21.

NORTH CAROLINA over *DUKE by 1

Mack Brown may want to choke new DC Geoff Collins for that unit's role in the ACC's latest embarrassment, the 611 yards allowed in the 70-50 home loss vs. James Madison. But hey, all is not lost. They gained 616 yards in their third QB's first start, 475 via the pass at 9.9 YPA. Mack Brown said he wanted to play all his QBs this season, didn't he? So what if the Amazing Criswell turned it over 3 times? Get those mistakes outta the way! Duke has yet to crack 4.0 ypc rushing in any of its four games. NORTH CAROLINA, 31-30.

*OHIO over AKRON by 10

With power rating-deflating 52-6, 49-17 and 50-7 losses vs. two Big Ten schools and an SEC school, Akron shows up for its class-drop MAC opener, the only game the coaching staff of Mr. Moorhead was truly pointing for all along. Beware the road dog, despite the fact that its 3 wins since the beginning of 2022 have been against two FCS schools and Kent State. They lost by only 11 vs. the Bobcats last season and are 8-8-1 ATS as a road dog since that 2022 season despite an average scoring margin of -19.3. OHIO, 27-17.

*INDIANA over MARYLAND by 10

A look at the 4-0 Hoosiers' scores leading into this Big Ten opener and you'd think they were Maryland! 31-7, 77-3, 42-13 and 52-14. That's how the Terps have typically acted in September non-conference games under Mike Locksley. Maryland has already played a conference game and lost it, 27-24, as home favorite vs. Michigan State, allowing a suspect passer to complete 24 throws for 9.6 YPA. The same kid completed only 48.6% at BC on Saturday. Indiana QB Kurtis Rourke (grad transfer, Ohio) has it all over counterpart Billy Edwards in the experience category. INDIANA, 31-21.

*CONNECTICUT over BUFFALO by 6

UConn threw only 15 passes to get to 48 points against Florida Atlantic on Saturday. They followed the Army method in their own running style: 66-421 on the ground, for 41:47 Time of Possession. Hard to lose when the other team only has the ball for 18:03! How's Buffalo's run defense, you'll want to know? So far, improved from last season, down to 3.6 ypc allowed. But their offense has averaged only 26:08 with the football. UCONN, 26-20.

*MIAMI-OH over MASSACHUSETTS by 15

Chuck Martin's RedHawks are 15-7 ATS off a loss the last 5+ seasons. They have excuses for scoring only 6 and 3 points at Northwestern and Notre Dame. But they scored only 16 vs. Cincinnati, where they rushed for only 21-24. Yes, UMass is a huge class drop for them and they are a desperate 0-3. But you can't fall in love with offensive "potential" at this number. Revenge-minded Minutemen covered with revenge at Toledo already. MIAMI-OH, 27-12.

*CENTRAL FLORIDA over COLORADO by 11

Told ya' these Buffs weren't so bad (38-31 OT stick-to-it, semi-miraculous home win vs. Baylor). But after that gut-buster and celebration, they get on a plane to play the role of stranger in a strange, faraway land, in the raucous Bounce House against an opponent whose offense flows much faster and more efficiently than Baylor's. However, who trusts a Gus Malzahn-coached team, as the favorite, to protect any lead it may get against an opponent with a decent pass attack? TCU threw for 402 yards against UCF's defense with a QB (Josh Hoover) who is no Shedeur Sanders. Unless it's rainy with soggy grass, the score should be large. UCF, 41-30.

*MARSHALL over WESTERN MICHIGAN by 6

Both played Ohio State. WMU gained 99 total yards losing by 56 points. Marshall gained 264 yards losing by 35 points, with the Buckeyes a little farther along in their season's "let's get better every week" curve. Edge to the home favorite? Well, that's a crude measurement tool, especially when it seems to favor a program 4-10 ATS as a home favorite the last three-plus seasons, which we've been known to call the Blundering Herd for good reasons. MARSHALL, 30-24.

*BOWLING GREEN over OLD DOMINION by 6

Wasted huge efforts in narrow losses at Penn State and Texas A&M probably do no favors for Bowling Green and its backers down the road. At what price, non-glory, given that there are no moral victories and effort playing up in class often takes a physical toll while inflating the power rating? It's a class drop and return home. But after they won at Georgia Tech last year, they came home to lose 27-0 vs. Miami-OH. Playing to the level of the opponent." BOWLING GREEN, 28-22.

BEST BET
WESTERN KY over *BOSTON COLLEGE by 1

Seems like the many middling ACC programs are ripe for being taken by an interested Group of Five foe. With no game on deck next week and only UTEP after that, Western Kentucky should arrive with plenty of interest. Weather conditions for their hosting of Toledo were not conducive to their style on Saturday night, yet they prevailed in the end despite only 25:41 with the football. As we'd expected, BC's first foray as favorite for Bill O'Brien was an ATS failure. They were reluctant to throw it vs. Michigan State and the offense had only 56 snaps (39-16 Run-Pass). WKU is comfortable throwing it 40-45 times and their secondary has land mines lurking within in it. WESTERN KENTUCKY, 27-26.

NEBRASKA over *PURDUE by 8

Purdue's defense has been gashed on the ground on back-to-back Saturdays for 57-341 by Oregon State, after 44-362 by Notre Dame. Defensive coordinator Kevin Kane needs to get his girls to better embrace the physicality. Nebraska, in love with a quarterback who can finally throw the ball, saw its running backs do only 24-99 vs. Illinois. It's like the golf problem: your short game suffers as you improve off the tee. Purdue D: 0 takeaways. NEBRASKA, 27-19.

FLORIDA STATE over *SMU by 1

Interesting new intra-conference match-up in the ACC. 1-3 SU and ATS Florida State hasn't scored more than 21 points in a game yet, but they might tonight. SMU averaged 38.7 ppg en route to winning the American championship last season and hung 66 on TCU on Saturday. However, as you'll read further on here, the Mustangs gained only 347 yards and were seriously aided by TCU boo-boos. Off a long-awaited intra-city rivalry revenge win, which put more of their Kevin Jennings-tailored offense on tape, SMU lines up against a better defense. FLORIDA ST, 24-23.

RECOMMENDED
*MISSISSIPPI over KENTUCKY by 7
[Kentucky, plus the points.] This takes either a little bit of nerve, or a lot of foolishness. Which? We shall see. Road underdogs that struggle to score and don't seem built for comebacks are normally behind the 8-ball against a national #1 Total Offense. But – ah, always a but, eh? -- Ole Miss' numbers are inflated by having played against nothing defenses. The schools have met three times since 2017 and the final margins have been 3, 1, 3 points for Ole Miss, including here in 2022 when Kiffin's Rebels would eventually rank #8 in Total Offense and Kentucky's was destined for #116. Sell high, buy low, as they say. SEC season is usually when the real Ole Miss defense shows up. OLE MISS, 28-21.

*KANSAS STATE over OKLAHOMA STATE by 7
K-State seems to be a pretty good team, and is definitely coming home off an embarrassing road loss at BYU. Nice angle when you figure there's less than a TD to lay. The Wildcats are 14-6-1 ATS off a loss under coach Klieman. Mike Gundy has been one of the best road underdog investments in his tenure with OSU: 60.9% ATS last ten seasons. But the average scoring margin is -7.3 and the SU record when expected to lose away from Stillwater is 9-14. KANSAS ST, 30-23.

CINCINNATI over *TEXAS TECH by 1
The Red Raiders got the job done vs. Arizona State, but it wasn't too pretty at only 4.6 YPA, 20 incompletions vs. 24 catches by the receivers. A 14-0 first quarter lead for Texas Tech forced ASU away from its rushing strength – wait a minute, it didn't! ASU used the run game and bad pass D (against weak pass O) to drive deep into Tech territory on the next possession, only to fail on fourth down. Then, Tech allowed 10 points on ASU's next two possessions. Cincinnati's D probably isn't as good as its 34-0 score vs. Houston, but Tech QB Behrens Morton isn't going anywhere special with his legs. CINCINNATI, 31-30.

TCU over *KANSAS by 3
0-4 ATS vs. 0-4 ATS! For Kansas, putting 17, 20, 28 points on the scoreboard won't do it in most instances. Their defense usually isn't capable of holding opponents down to that level. That's why they've lost three in a row heading into this. TCU comes to town after the Horned Frogs have allowed 28 second-half points vs. UCF, and 25 second-half points at SMU after they'd already allowed 41 in the first half (!). A timely visit for KU to get well on O? Maybe not. SMU gained only 376 total yards vs. TCU, who did an all-around nice job of beating themselves with penalties and turnovers. TCU, 31-28.

SOUTH FLORIDA over *TULANE by 1
Some of the style points Tulane may have picked up in impressive-looking losses vs. Kansas State and at Oklahoma probably should be taken away after K-State lost by 29 points at BYU and Oklahoma was no match for Tennessee on Saturday. Also, it took a Pick Six and a kickoff return TD to put Tulane backers over the hump at UL-Lafayette on Saturday as the Green Wave's defense was allowing 413 yards in only 26:03 on the field. Quick-snapping USF will be glad to be getting away from the Miami-FL and Alabama defenses. SOUTH FLORIDA, 38-37.

CLICK HERE to email the Editor.

BEST BET
ARIZONA over *UTAH by 1
Hmm… Arizona, 0-3 ATS so far. But they're a decent passing team, vs. a run-heavy host, taking points. That's often a pretty good arrangement. Utah had the football for 42:26 at Oklahoma State but put only 22 points on the board. Yes, they did what they had to do to win the game, but… when they fell behind 0-21 at Arizona last year, the physicality and time of possession was rendered meaningless. Revenge for the humiliating defeat doesn't change the match-up scenario. If the media reporters tie Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham in a chair and torture him to release clear-cut info on whether or not QB Cam Rising will return, he probably would endure the torture rather than tell. ARIZONA, 27-26.

BEST BET
*BOISE STATE over WASHINGTON ST. by 21
After chasing San Jose State's Run N' Shoot receivers around all night and surviving 54-52, 4-0 SU Washington State must face a more balanced Boise attack that happens to be gaining more rushing yards per game than everyone except for UCF and Army. The Cougars often choose to sell out against the run and leave their DBs in man-to-man coverage. Boise has benefited from taking deep shots for a while and they probably haven't come close to tapping the potential of this season's receiving crew. They stayed mostly grounded (38-20 Run-Pass) using three QBs to beat Portland State 56-14 tuning up for this. BOISE ST, 41-23.

TEXAS STATE over SAM HOUSTON ST. by 14
(Houston, TX) We've already established that Texas State head coach G.J. Kinne is on a "Take Back Texas!" mission, which he punctuated a few weeks ago with a demolition of the recent prince of the Group of Fives located within the state, UTSA. Sam Houston State is located in Texas. Therefore, it's Kinne's favored Bobcats or pass for us, as Kinne doesn't want in-state recruits to even consider playing at relative FBS newbie Sam Houston, whose offense has lagged behind most at this level since joining it last season. 34-20.

RECOMMENDED
*UAB over NAVY by 7
Having a bye week before Navy – with revenge for a 31-6 loss last year that was closer than the score indicates -- is preferable for more practice against the option-oriented run-heavy attack. Also, the Blazers have a pass attack capable of countering however many scores they're likely to give up. A year ago, they allowed only 1 TD in the first three quarters. We liked Navy vs. Memphis on Saturday, but the Middies' D didn't distinguish itself giving up 659 yards and 44 points. They can't score 56 every week, can they? UAB, 33-26.

RECOMMENDED
*MEMPHIS over MIDDLE TENNESSEE by 35
Angry Memphis! Couldn't stop Navy's rushing attack. We didn't think they'd do well against it, especially after they'd been patting themselves on the back all week for the virtual non-accomplishment of winning at Florida State. Had no problems movin' the ball on offense, however: 659 total yards. First-season MTS head coach Derek Mason replaced longtime program leader Rick Stockstill. The longer an old coach was there, the tougher the re-start. Middle Tennessee arrives 0-4 ATS, after allowing 49 and 45 points vs. Western Kentucky and Duke, and the host has a four-season starting quarterback comfortable in the system. MEMPHIS, 52-17.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

*TEXAS over MISSISSIPPI STATE by 39
If Mississippi State has any idea about what it's doing, how, and why, then it has a funny way of showing it. Lots o' work and reps to go through, and lumps to suffer. Maybe they should shift conference to the Pac 12? Ha-ha. No game next week for Texas. Oklahoma and Georgia to follow post-bye, so the starters may have to "finish" this, or at least use more of the playbook than the 52-29 Run-Pass split that killed UL-Monroe. If Quin Ewers returns, that's likely. TEXAS, 51-12.

*BAYLOR over BYU by 3
Offsetting some QB-juggling by Baylor, reportedly out of necessity due to a lingering injury to original starter DeQuan Finn, is the fact that BYU QB Jake Retzlaff is a game manager at best, but prone to try to do more than that. He had very little to do with the Cougars' 38-9 win vs. Kansas State on Saturday, which was powered by bang-bang plays (3 TOs, punt return TD). BAYLOR, 24-21.

*LSU over SOUTH ALABAMA by 20
Sun Belt road dogs, sometimes South Alabama themselves -- have been known to do their share of damage against Power 4 or 5 home favorites. USA won't be scoring 87 points like they did two games ago, probably not near 48 like they did at App State last Thursday. But they have to be giving the LSU defense some worries. LSU enters 0-3 ATS, and possibly without star OLB Harold Perkins, considered by many as the Tigers' only defender worth preparing against. LSU, 41-21.

IOWA STATE over *HOUSTON by 17
Nowhere to go but up for the Houston offense after being blanked at Cincinnati. But Iowa State's defense has allowed only 3.96 yards per snap, 260 yards per game. The current national median for Total Offense is 402 yards per game, and Houston's offense is averaging only 294 yards per game, 4.8 per play. Houston QB Donovan Smith didn't get a chance to play against the Iowa State defense when he was a Texas Tech Red Raider. It's a deep and versatile unit. IOWA ST, 30-13.

*RICE over CHARLOTTE by 10
Off two embarrassing road losses, Rice may deserve the benefit of the doubt in their American Athletic home opener against an opponent they handled with relative ease, 28-7, at Charlotte last season. Army did the ol' 40-20 Time of Possession trick against them and in a low-possession game, they gave away two of them with turnovers. Offensively, forced to pass-pass-pass when trailing 0-28 at halftime, they really had no shot. Charlotte has already used three different QBs. What are you doin', coach? RICE, 30-20.

RECOMMENDED
*AUBURN over OKLAHOMA by 8
Sooners not gaining many yards, and not scorin'. Only 378 offensive yards vs. Temple, 249 vs. Houston, 349 vs. Tulane, 222 vs. Tennessee. On top of that, they may be forced to juggle QBs trying to get a spark, and WR Nic Anderson and RB Taylor Tarum were injured vs. Tennessee. The offensive line has some injury issues as well. Auburn's defense doesn't have to deal with a mobile QB as large as their linebackers, as was the case against Arkansas ☺. Oklahoma carried the worst three-season ATS percentage in the Big 12 (40.7%) into its debut SEC season. Auburn must clean up its 14-turnover mess. They're gaining 8.0+ yards per snap to Oklahoma's 4.45, the latter number necessitating a Sooners' switch to the freshman runnin' QB. Nevertheless… AUBURN, 27-19.

---

*TROY over UL-MONROE by 4
Monrovians arrive at the gates of Troy $1.6 richer after visiting Austin, TX to be blown away, and with revenge on their minds for a 45-14 loss last season. Troy was last year's Sun Belt champs, when they allowed only 4.76 yards per play in conference. But their 2024 non-conference defensive efforts have been nowhere near as good as they were last season, when they played a stronger non-con schedule. First-season coaching staff and much player turnover are among the reasons, which also includes 0 takeaways, after last year's unit had 23. TROY, 24-20.

TULSA over *NORTH TEXAS by 1
Everyone and his brother knows that the NoTex team can move the ball and score points… and that the defense is almost always life and death to be able protect any lead the Mean Green might have if the other side has a halfway decent offense. Tulsa's qualifies. (Wyoming, the team NoTex beat 44-17 on Saturday, most certainly did not.) The Tulsa team is one of those scrappy road dogs, too, 12-3 ATS in the role since the 2021 season. They bring revenge for a 35-28 loss late last season. TULSA, 38-37.

FRESNO STATE over *UNLV by 1
Home field, revenge, and a bye week for UNLV. That used to be a "thing" for us, but it more or less outlived its usefulness and it also required the home side to be an underdog, which the Runnin' Rebels are not. UNLV gave away last year's game with 4 turnovers, en route to out-passing Fresno by 1.5 YPA, and out-running them by 0.8 ypc. But can they out-pass them again? This QB from Long Island via Holy Cross doesn't seem to be the type. FRESNO ST., 27-26.

OREGON over *UCLA by 31
UCLA's cover at +21 or so at LSU only strengthens our despising of Brian Kelly and LSU, where the Bruins rushed 14 times for 22 yards and gained only 295 total yards in 26:24 with the ball. LSU rushed for only 28-102. Oregon will probably gain 2.5 times the rushing yardage in as many carries, maybe a few more, enabling an 83.7% Oregon passer at 9.5 YPA, Dylan Gabriel, to pick a guy here and a guy there to play catch with all night long. OREGON, 45-14.

ARKANSAS over TEXAS A&M by 1 *(Arlington, TX)*
As long as he doesn't get himself killed against SEC defenses with such a brazen running style, Boise State transfer QB Taylen Green helps give the Arkansas running attack what it lacked last season when then-QB K.J. Jefferson was bothered by too many injuries to be an effective runner. A&M barely got past Bowling Green, whose QB isn't/ wasn't a runner. You could say that Green isn't a passer, but a sub-60 percenter, Riley Leonard, helped guide Notre Dame past them recently. A&M head coach Mike Elko is calling #1 QB Conner Weigman a "game-time decision for the rest of the season." Overrated, anyway. ARKANSAS, 27-26.

*NOTRE DAME over LOUISVILLE by 11
Revenge-minded Irish got burned by the Brohmeisters' Cardinals last season partly because Louisville was in then-QB Sam Hartman's head. They'd intercepted him 4 times in 2022 when he played for Wake Forest, then picked him 3 more times. Notre Dame's latest ACC import, Riley Leonard, "led" Duke to a 23-0 loss vs. Louisville last season, 9-for-23, 0-1 TD-INT. Uh-oh! But – ah, there's always a but – Louisville rushed for only 37-98 vs. Georgia Tech last Saturday, and only for 34 and 130 total yards vs. Austin Peay (FCS) and Jax State before that. NOTRE DAME, 27-16.

*PENN STATE over ILLINOIS by 15

Classic Bielema on Friday night at Nebraska, with Illinois winning the battles at the line of scrimmage for yet another "upset" against a "ranked" opponent on the road. But this time, Illinois was ranked, too! Still is. Nebraska was ranked because people who vote on rankings like to dream. Penn State has long justified being ranked. Illini QB Luke Altmyer must prove he isn't spooked by a defense that intercepted him 4 times on his home field in last year's 30-13 loss. PENN ST, 29-14.

*MICHIGAN over MINNESOTA by 11

Classic capitalization by Michigan backers on Saturday vs. USC: Home dog, better defense. An old-school winner with a team getting bad-mouthed from coast to coast. Too bad those situations don't come around more frequently, eh? Now, it's on to the Big Ten grind for the Wolverines, against Mr. Row the Boat's revenge for last season's 52-10 home loss. The gap has closed. A TD head start is not available this time. But for Minnesota QB FCS import QB Brosmer, the Michigan D is several steps up from what he faced in his Holy Cross days. So was Iowa's, and he and the Gopher offense put only 14 points on the board home against it. MICHIGAN, 21-10.

*USC over WISCONSIN by 11

The Badgers haven't been underdogs much lately. Just four times since the 2021 season. Care to guess the summary results?: How about 0-4 SU? The latest was home vs. Alabama a few weeks ago. They were never close. Braedyn Locke assumes the QB position following Tyler Van Dyke's injury. Wisconsin scored 25, 10, 14 points in his three starts last year. After three games Wisconsin has as many offensive plays of 20+ yards as Old Dominion and UL-Monroe, fewer than Miami-OH and Wyoming. Try to muscle up and run it, pray you don't get passed on for two early scores, and that USC displays its 10-13 ATS form as favorite under Lincoln Riley. USC, 31-20.

LOUISIANA TECH over *FLORIDA INTL by 2

Since their rather fake 52-16 scoreboard win vs. Central Michigan, revenge-minded FIU has lost by 18 points vs. FAU, then allowed 42 points (542 total yards) losing to Monmouth of FCS, while their own offense was 1-for-8 on third down. But who knows what's going through the head of La. Tech head coach Sonny Cumbie, who juggled three QBs in the overtime home loss vs. Tulsa. His team has 11 turnovers in three games. LA TECH, 27-25.

Call 1-800-305-9604, or
 Click here to email us
for Sports Reporter
Customer Service inquiries

*ALABAMA over GEORGIA by 3

Discussing differences in offensive and defensive third down conversions has the potential to be silly because you don't know what they'll be doing on first and second down before that. But the split happens to be in Alabama's favor: 39.4%/39.0% for Georgia; 52.5%/16.3% for Alabama. Georgia is off a 13-12 squeaker vs. Kentucky in its SEC opener. Since Kirby Smart's second season, the 'Dawgs are 7-1 SU, averaging 37.2 ppg after scoring <20 points. But how many times have they played Alabama in the next game? Zero. Kentucky twice, Georgia Tech twice, ranked Florida twice (split), UAB and Samford. ALABAMA, 26-23.

NEW MEXICO over *NEW MEXICO STATE by 14

Lobo defense improved in its Mountain West opener. The 38 points allowed was misleading, because agita-causing 5'10" QB Devon Dampier was allowed to put the ball in the air 53 times. The meaning of the phrase "ball security" has yet to dent his thought process. Fresno's last two scoring drives were 12 and 28 yards; three of their first four were 39, 58 and 58 yards. Wonderful starting field position to be handed. The bright side: the New Mexico D allowed only 2.8 ypc, and New Mexico is passing for only 88 yards per game. NEW MEXICO, 34-20.

OHIO STATE over *MICHIGAN STATE by 23

Long TD plays haven't been a thing for Sparty so far. Other than a 71-yard TD pass surprise in the fourth quarter at Maryland, they've been at it slowly and steadily, against defenses not in Ohio State's class. They figure to operate slower and less steadily than that. But if anyone is gonna tell you not to trust OSU QB Will Howard in his first crack at a Big Ten defense, it'd be us: 52-6, 56-0, 49-14 vs. Akron, Western Mich, Marshall. Way to go, Howard. You're great. So is sarcasm. OHIO ST, 34-11.

AIR FORCE over *WYOMING by 3

Both offenses have been operating with the training wheels still screwed on. How much longer can Wyoming allow Evan Swoboda to play QB completing less than 50% at less than 5.0 YPA? Meanwhile, an Air Force offense rushing for only 3.2 ypc is so far below the 5.0 it needs to be for a 75% run-heavy offense to have its best chance to succeed. AIR FORCE, 19-16.