

Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

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Dennis Stagliano's Award Winning Football Newsletter

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FEATURING OUR ANNUAL ARMY VS NAVY BATTLE & OUR POPULAR GRIDIRON GOLD RUSH BOWLS NEWSLETTER WITH 40 BOWL GAME PICKS

Bowl Bonanza

The College Football Playoff is set with the semifinals to be played on New Year's Day. No. 1 seed Clemson will take on fourth-seeded Alabama in the Sugar Bowl in a rematch of the last two games played in the CFP finals.

The other semifinal will feature second-seeded Oklahoma, the winner of the Big 12 Championship Game, against No. 3 Georgia, which exacted revenge on Auburn with Saturday's 28-7 win as a two-point favorite in the SEC Championship Game in Atlanta.

The Westgate SuperBook in Las Vegas opened Alabama as the +200 'chalk' to win the CFP finals. Clemson was given +220 odds, followed by Oklahoma (+275) and Georgia (+350, risk \$100 to win \$350).

The Westgate opened Oklahoma as a 2.5-point 'chalk' vs. UGA, and sent out Alabama as a one-point favorite over Clemson. South Point opened the Sooners at two and Alabama-Clemson at pick 'em.

As of 4:00 p.m. Eastern, most Vegas shops had Lincoln Riley's squad listed as a 1.5-point favorite, but most offshores had OU favored by one point. The Mirage and a few offshore spots had the game at pick 'em.

In fact, the Mirage also had Alabama-Clemson at pick 'em, but most other books had the Crimson Tide favored by 1.5 points.

Alabama beat Clemson by a 45-40 count in the CFP finals two seasons ago, but the Tigers garnered a backdoor cover as 6.5-point underdogs on a Deshaun Watson TD pass with 12 seconds remaining. Dabo Swinney's team avenged that defeat with last year's 35-31 win in the finals as (again) a 6.5-point underdog thanks to another last-second TD pass from Watson, setting up a rubber match of sorts in this year's semifinals at the Superdome in New Orleans. This game will kick at 8:45 p.m. Eastern on ESPN.

OU and UGA will collide at 5:00 p.m. Eastern in Pasadena. The Sooners have won eight consecutive games, going 5-1 against the spread in their last six outings. They've been single-digit 'chalk' three times, producing a 3-0 straight-up record and a 2-1 ATS mark. Meanwhile, Georgia won outright by a 20-19 count at Notre Dame in its lone games as an underdog (+5.5).

UGA is ranked fourth in the nation in total defense, second at defending the pass, 12th in run defense and fourth in scoring 'D,' limiting foes to 13.2 points per game. The Bulldogs have won three in a row both SU and ATS since suffering their lone loss, a 40-17 defeat at Auburn.

Oklahoma is No. 1 in the country in total offense, third in passing yards and fourth in scoring with a 44.9 PPG average. Baker Mayfield has completed 71.0 percent of his passes for 4,340 yards with a 41/5 touchdown-to-interception ratio.

Although the injury report has Georgia RB Sony Michel listed as 'questionable' due to a knee injury sustained vs. Auburn, second-year head coach Kirby Smart told the media Sunday, "Everything looks good. A little bit of soreness. He should be good to go." Michel has rushed for 948 yards and 13 TDs while averaging 7.2 yards per carry.

On New Year's Day at the Peach Bowl in Atlanta, Auburn will take on unbeaten UCF. Scott Frost was in Lincoln today (12/3/17) to greet his new Nebraska team, but he will stay on to coach the Knights in the postseason. As for AU's Gus Malzahn, Arkansas was expecting an answer from him at some point today as to whether or not he would leave the Tigers to take a lucrative deal with the Razorbacks, who hired him from Springdale High School (in Arkansas) as their offensive coordinator more than a decade ago.

One offshore released Auburn as an 8.5-point favorite.

There are two other games on New Year's Day: Michigan vs. South Carolina at the Outback Bowl in Tampa, in addition to LSU vs. Notre Dame at the Citrus Bowl in Orlando. The Fighting Irish defeated LSU 31-28 at the 2014 Music City Bowl to avenge a blowout loss at the Sugar Bowl during Charlie Weis's tenure when Brady Quinn and JaMarcus Russell were the starting QBs.

On Dec. 30 at the Taxslayer Bowl in Jacksonville, Mississippi State and Louisville will collide. In what I have found to be a surprise, it appears that there hasn't been that much interest from other schools in Bobby Petrino, so at this point it looks like he'll be still at U of L going into 2018 (although that obviously could change). The Bulldogs won't have star QB Nick Fitzgerald (lower-leg injury) or head coach Dan Mullen, who is busy on the recruiting trail for his new team, the Florida Gators. RBs coach and special-teams coordinator Greg Knox will serve as MSU's interim head coach.

Also on Dec. 30, Iowa State will play a true road game against Memphis at the Liberty Bowl. The Tigers lost an instant classic in the AAC Championship Game, coming up on the wrong end of a 62-55 double-overtime thriller at UCF. If Malzahn doesn't go to Arkansas, most speculation points to Washington State's Mike Leach or Memphis coach Mike Norvell being the Razorbacks' next targets.

In the Orange Bowl, Wisconsin will also play a true road game at Miami. The Badgers lost a 27-21 decision to Ohio St. at the Big Ten Championship Game, while Miami got smashed by Clemson in Charlotte at the ACC Championship Game.

A few offshore books had Wisconsin installed as a six-point favorite vs. the Hurricanes.

Washington and Penn State will square off at the Fiesta Bowl. One offshore had the Huskies listed as six-point 'chalk.'

Ohio State will face Southern California at the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29.

****Gridiron Gold Nuggets****

-- Georgia LB Natrez Patrick was arrested early Sunday morning in Barrow County outside of Atlanta on a misdemeanor marijuana possession charge. Patrick, who served a four-game suspension earlier this season, has 35 tackles, 2.5 tackles for loss and three QB hurries in nine games this year. UGA had yet to comment on the matter when this story was filed late Sunday afternoon.

-- In the three-year history of the CFP, underdogs have produced a 6-3 spread record with five outright victories.

-- Washington star WR and special-teams phenom Dante Pettis (leg) is 'questionable' vs. PSU.

-- A CBSSports.com report last Sunday indicated that Arkansas made an offer to Gus Malzahn worth about \$50 million and an average of \$7.1 million per year. He made a \$4.75 million at Auburn this season. We'll see if AU steps up with an extension offer.

-- Keep an eye on the news as this time of year is when injuries, behavior and academically ineligible reports can be a major factor in line movement and predictions. For our top rated bowl game picks, check our guaranteed bowl game picks at <http://gridirongold.com/bowl-game-picks.htm>

PRES COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

NAVY - 3 & 46 Over ARMY By 10 & Over Total By 6

The annual Army/Navy game is one of the true spectacles of the entire college football season. These two teams always play against each other the week after all of the conference title games are said and done with, and it's a standalone game that ends up being one of the highest-rated of the entire season.

This year is a lot different than usual for Army. The Black Knights won the Army/Navy game last year for the first time since 2001. They haven't had a winning streak against the Middies since 1996, a victory at Veterans Stadium that capped off a five-year run of dominance for Army.

The last time Army was favored in this game was in 2001. There was a belief that might change this year, but now, the oddsmakers have installed the Midshipmen at -3. That's the smallest spread we've seen in the Army/Navy game since 2002 when Navy was set at just -3.5 (it won that game 58-12, for good measure).

The Black Knights have only been beaten once since September, and that came in their last game of the regular season against North Texas. The Mean Green went on to play in the Conference USA Championship Game, and the 52-49 loss could have easily gone either way.

There is reason for Navy to be encouraged about this game, though. The team went just 6-5, but it played against a significantly more difficult schedule than what Army had to endure. It's true that the Middies have only won once since October 7, that coming against SMU at home on November 11, but we're talking about an outfit that was also ranked after starting out the year at 5-0.

No one player ever makes the Army/Navy game, but Ahmad Bradshaw has a chance to be an exception to that rule. He's a three-year starter and is the first man who has an opportunity to score a second win against Navy since Ronnie McAda had his three straight wins in this series in 1994-96.

Unlike Navy's triple-option, one that generally relies on the quarterback to do most of the heavy lifting, the Army offense loves to spread the ball around a ton. Darnell Woolfork carried the ball 124 times this season, but there were six men who had at least 40 carries and a total of 10 who averaged at least one carry per game. Bradshaw, though, led them all this year with 1,472 yards and 11 touchdowns.

We know that Bradshaw isn't going to throw the ball unless he has to. He only completed 12 passes for the entire season, and no one on the team has more than five grabs in 11 games. But that doesn't mean he can't be a huge difference-maker in the penultimate game of his collegiate career.

Still, this is a lot of respect for a team that hasn't played much of a schedule to date. Beating Duke and Air Force was nice, but there aren't a lot of bowl teams that have shown up on this schedule.

You gotta know that this game is tremendously hard for me to handicap for the simple reason that I, and other members of my staff are US Army veterans. Because of that I'm bias to the Cadets. Nevertheless, I'm making this selection based on the numbers and the strength of schedule. That doesn't mean I will not back my brothers in my heart (not wallet).

The Side Pick: The Midshipmen have been challenged by the best teams in the AAC all season long. It's easy to say that they haven't won a lot lately, but they also haven't been beaten by more than 10 at any point this year either, including games against UCF, Memphis and Notre Dame. Based on those exemplary performances against high powered offensive competition, I am going to take my chances with the Middies and lay the 3.

The Over/Under Pick: It would make logical sense to bet the under in this game, knowing that the clock always runs quickly for Army and Navy. No one has scored more than 34 points in this series since 2007, and the last 10 meetings have all featured 48 points or fewer on the scoreboard. That said, this is a game I feel could open up a bit. Army has averaged 31.2 points per game this year, a mark that feels awfully high considering the fact that it hasn't scored 30+ points in the Army/Navy game since 1998. The line opened at 51 and wiseguy money pounded it down to 46.

I believe the opening line is more accurate, therefore, I will buck the trend here and take Over 46.

Projected Score: Navy 31, Army 21



DJ COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

JAMES MADISON -10 Over Weber St. by 17

The Weber State Wildcats and James Madison Dukes meet Friday in the college football playoff quarterfinals at Bridgeforth Stadium.

The Weber State Wildcats look to advance to the semifinals after beating Southern Utah last week, 30-14. The Weber State Wildcats have won six of their last seven road games. Stefan Cantwell is completing 63.3 percent of his passes for 2,740 yards, 23 touchdowns and six interceptions. Cantwell has two or more touchdown passes in six of his last seven games. Andrew Vollert and Drew Batchelor have combined for 1,272 receiving yards and 13 touchdowns while Rashid Shaheed has 24 receptions. The Weber State Wildcats ground game is averaging 186.2 yards per contest, and Treshawn Garrett leads the way with 698 yards and six touchdowns. Defensively, Weber State is allowing 16.5 points and 327.5 yards per game. Legrand Toia leads the Weber State Wildcats with 73 tackles, Cardon Malan has 7.5 sacks and Jordan Preator has four interceptions.

The James Madison Dukes hope to continue their perfect season after beating Stony Brook last week. The James Madison Dukes are 7-0 on their home field this season. Bryan Schor is completing 69.2 percent of his passes for 2,512 yards, 23 touchdowns and 11 interceptions. Schor has two or more touchdown passes in four of his last eight games. Terrence Alls and David Eldridge have combined for 984 receiving yards and six touchdowns while John Miller has 35 receptions. The James Madison Dukes ground game is averaging 197.8 yards per contest, and Trai Sharp leads the way with 692 yards and four touchdowns. Defensively, James Madison is allowing 8.8 points and 235.1 yards per game. Kyre Hawkins leads the James Madison Dukes with 85 tackles, Andrew Ankras has 7.5 sacks and Jordan Brown has seven interceptions.

Weber State has had a ton of success on the road this season, but we all know James Madison is in a class by itself right now and is looking to complete a perfect season. James Madison has a great defense, and a tough nut to crack at home. With a great defense; a dynamic offense; and undefeated at home, I will lay the lumber and back the Dukes.

Projected Score: Jimmie Madison 27, Weber St 10

BAGS COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

NORTH DAKOTA ST. -22 Over Wofford by 16

The Wofford Terriers and North Dakota State Bison meet Saturday in the college football playoff quarterfinals at the Fargodome.

The Wofford Terriers look to reach the semifinals after beating Furman last week, 28-10. The Wofford Terriers have won five of their last six road games. Brandon Goodson is completing 55.6 percent of his passes for 1,052 yards, four touchdowns and one interception. Goodson has one combined touchdown pass in his last three games. Blake Morgan and RJ Taylor have combined for 712 receiving yards and two touchdowns while Jason Hill has 16 receptions. The Wofford Terriers ground game is averaging 254 yards per contest, and Andre Stoddard leads the way with 807 yards and 14 touchdowns. Defensively, Wofford is allowing 20.7 points and 315.3 yards per game. Colton Clemons leads the Wofford Terriers with 76 tackles, Miles Brown has three sacks and Devin Watson has four interceptions.

The North Dakota State Bison look for another semifinal appearance after smoking San Diego, 38-3. The North Dakota State Bison are a perfect 7-0 at home this season. Easton Stick is completing 62.2 percent of his passes for 1,992 yards, 20 touchdowns and seven interceptions. Stick has two or more touchdown passes in six of his last 10 games. Darrius Shepherd and RJ Urzendowski have combined for 974 receiving yards and eight touchdowns while Jeff Illies has 15 receptions. The North Dakota State Bison ground game is averaging 268.1 yards per contest, and Bruce Anderson leads the way with 908 yards and six touchdowns. Defensively, North Dakota State is allowing 11.5 points and 232.6 yards per game. Robbie Grimsley leads the North Dakota State Bison with 55 tackles, Nick DeLuca has 4.5 sacks and Tre Dempsey has five interceptions.

Wofford gets after it defensively and the only road game its lost this season was against the South Carolina Gamecocks. Obviously the North Dakota State Bison have one of the best home field advantages in all of college football and are used to being in these big games. The Fargodome gets insanely loud and is tough for opposing teams no matter how experienced they are.

North Dakota State is a big favorite, but Wofford isn't some pushover who is going to be scared of the bright lights. The Terriers hung around with South Carolina and were able to cover the number, and they have a strong running game that can shorten things up and take the life out of the game. North Dakota State obviously wins, but I think Wofford can do just enough to keep this game within the number and get the cover.

Projected Score: North Dakota St. 30, Wofford 14

SAMMY COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

SOUTH DAKOTA ST. -18 Over New Hampshire by 27

The New Hampshire Wildcats and South Dakota State Jackrabbits meet Saturday in the college football playoff quarterfinals at Dana J. Dykhouse Stadium. The New Hampshire Wildcats have a chance to reach the semifinals after beating Central Arkansas, 21-15. The New Hampshire Wildcats have lost four of their last six road games. Trevor Knight is completing 62.4 percent of his passes for 3,197 yards, 25 touchdowns and eight interceptions. Knight must continue to take care of the football for the Wildcats to have a chance. Neil O'Connor and Malik Love have combined for 2,045 receiving yards and 13 touchdowns while Kieran Presley has 29 receptions. The New Hampshire Wildcats ground game is averaging 101.9 yards per contest, and Evan Gray leads the way with 590 yards and seven touchdowns. Defensively, New Hampshire is allowing 18.8 points and 353.2 yards per game. Quinlen Dean leads the New Hampshire Wildcats with 118 tackles, Rick Holt has nine sacks and Isiah Perkins has five interceptions.

The South Dakota State Jackrabbits look to reach the semifinals after beating Northern Iowa, 37-22. The South Dakota State Jackrabbits have won six of their last seven home games. Taryn Christion is completing 60.6 percent of his passes for 3,091 yards, 31 touchdowns and eight interceptions. Christion has at least two touchdown passes in each of his last eight games. Dallas Goedert and Jake Wieneke have combined for 1,769 receiving yards and 19 touchdowns while Cade Johnson has 23 receptions. The South Dakota State Jackrabbits ground game is averaging 174 yards per contest, and Brady Mengarelli leads the way with 734 yards and six touchdowns. Defensively, South Dakota State is allowing 22.5 points and 375.9 yards per game. Christian Rozeboom leads the South Dakota State Jackrabbits with 113 tackles, Ryan Earith has four sacks and Jordan Brown has three interceptions.

The New Hampshire Wildcats have had their struggles on the road this season, and they're running into an offensive machine in the South Dakota State Jackrabbits. This will not be an easy game for New Hampshire to say the least, but it's a team that already knocked off Central Arkansas on the road, so it's had success playing with house money.

New Hampshire has really had a hard time on the road and is now running into a South Dakota St squad that can score quickly and often. It's going to be tough for the Wildcats to keep up here. I think the Jackrabbits will get out quickly and the Wildcats will not be able to keep pace. Jackrabbits run away and win in a blowout.

Projected Score: South Dakota State 41, New Hampshire 14



CONSENSUS COLLEGE FOOTBALL UNDERDOG BEST BET

SAM HOUSTON ST. +2.5 Over Kennesaw St. by 7

The Kennesaw State Owls and Sam Houston State Bearkats meet Saturday in the college football playoff quarterfinals at Bowers Stadium. The Kennesaw State Owls have a chance to reach the semifinals after beating Jacksonville State, 17-7. The Kennesaw State Owls have won five of their last six road games. Chandler Burks is completing 48.9 percent of his passes for 1,187 yards, eight touchdowns and two interceptions. Burks is averaging 91.3 passing yards per game this season. Justin Sumpter and TJ Reed have combined for 642 receiving yards and six touchdowns while Xavier Harper has nine receptions. The Kennesaw State Owls ground game is averaging 328.5 yards per contest, and Burks leads the way with 1,060 yards and 17 touchdowns. Defensively, Kennesaw State is allowing 14.1 points and 287.5 yards per game. Bryson Armstrong leads the Kennesaw State Owls with 109 tackles, Justin Murcus has four sacks and Taylor Henkle has three interceptions.

The Sam Houston St Bearkats look to reach the semifinals after beating South Dakota, 54-42. Sam Houston St is a perfect 7-0 on their home field this season. Jeremiah Briscoe is completing 57 percent of his passes for 4,398 yards, 41 TD's and 12 interceptions. Briscoe is averaging 366.5 passing yards per game this season. Davion Davis and Nathan Stewart have combined for 2,606 receiving yards and 29 touchdowns while Yedidiah Louis has 57 receptions. The Sam Houston State Bearkats ground game is averaging 185.5 yards per contest, and Cory Avery leads the way with 939 yards and 13 touchdowns. Defensively, Sam Houston State is allowing 29.6 points and 436 yards per game. Justin Johnson leads the Sam Houston State Bearkats with 89 tackles, Chris Stewart has 11 sacks and Josh Price has two interceptions.

This is going to be a fun clash of styles, as Kennesaw State wants to run the ball and shorten the game for the defense, while Sam Houston State spreads the ball across the field and has topped 40 points in four straight games. Regardless, we should see a boatload of points scored in this game.

We're getting two free points with the home team that hasn't lost at its home field this season and has the better passing attack. If the Owls get down early, it's not going to be easy to rebound with such a run heavy offense. I'll take a shot with the two points and the Bearkats here to win this game straight up.

Projected Score: Sam Houston St. 34, Kennesaw State 27



NFL MAJOR MATCHUPS

SAINTS AT FALCONS

RAIDERS AT CHIEFS

EAGLES AT LA RAMS

Hot Vikes QB Keenum has been impressive

NFL Football Recap

-- The Minnesota Vikings passed a major test on the road against the Atlanta Falcons, winning 14-9 in a defensive battle. Case Keenum continued to play smart football. The Purple People Eaters are on a roll, winning eight straight while covering seven in a row. Might we see the first-ever team to play a Super Bowl in their home stadium? We'll find out if the Vikings can do it in back-to-back road games with a trip to meet the Carolina Panthers in Charlotte in Week 14. The Panthers had their four-game cover streak halted with a 31-21 loss against the New Orleans Saints.

-- The San Francisco 49ers turned to QB Jimmy Garoppolo to start in Week 13 against the Chicago Bears, and his first start with the team was a success. Suddenly the Niners have won twice in the past three weeks, while the 'under' improved to 4-1 over their past five. The offense still needs work, as they have scored 15 or fewer points in five of the past six outings. But the Niners look like an NFL team again with Garoppolo at the helm. And, really, they haven't been that bad on the road this season, posting a respectable 4-2 ATS mark. They're back on the road next Sunday against the turnover-prone Houston Texans.

-- Vegas was expecting a shootout in Western New York in the New England-Buffalo (49) battle, but it never came into fruition. 'Over' bettors had a sinking feeling when the teams couldn't muster any touchdowns in the first half, and that bad feeling was compounded when QB Tyrod Taylor (knee) was carted off to the locker room. The Patriots picked up the pace in the third quarter with 14 points, but the teams combined for a scoreless fourth quarter and barely made it halfway to the over. The second-highest total was in the Minnesota-Atlanta (48.5) game, and that also was never threatened with 23 total points. It isn't often Vegas is way off, but these two battles weren't even close to the number.

-- The three lowest totals on the board from Sunday -- Indianapolis-Jacksonville (41), Denver-Miami (41) and San Francisco-Chicago (42) -- went 2-1 to the 'under'. The Broncos-Dolphins game featured two safeties, a rarity, to add to the scoring total. The Colts-Jaguars game just barely made it 'under', with a total of 40 points. Oddly enough, this was the first weekend all season where the NFL slate did not have at least one matchup with a total in the 30's.

-- The Chargers defense continues to impress, allowing just 10 points to the winless Browns. They have yielded just 13.9 PPG over their past seven games, which is a major reason they find themselves tied atop the AFC West despite an 0-4 SU/0-3-1 ATS start. The 'under' is an impressive 6-1 over the past seven for the Bolts, including 4-0 in their past four road games. They are home in Week 14 against the Redskins before they hit the road to play the Chiefs in Week 15 and Jets in Week 16.

-- The 'Over/under' finished 1-1 in the first two primetime games during Week 13, and the 'over' is 24-16 (60.0%) through the first 40 primetime games of the 2017 season with Monday's Pittsburgh Steelers-Cincinnati Bengals result still pending. Officially, the 'over' finished 27-24 (52.9%) through 51 games under the lights in 2016. In 2015, the over finished 20-28-1 (41.7%) in 49 primetime games. In 2014, the over went 33-17 (66.0%) in primetime games, and the over was 28-22 (56.0%) in 2013.

Injury Report

-- Bills QB Tyrod Taylor (knee) was knocked out of the loss against the Patriots due to a knee injury, but he reportedly told sources after the game that the injury wasn't as serious and he'll have further tests. Taylor sounds optimistic about a return sooner rather than later.

-- Lions QB Matthew Stafford (hand) suffered a hand injury late in the loss at Baltimore, and he was taken to the locker room with a towel wrapped around his hand. X-rays were negative.

-- Eagles TE Zach Ertz (concussion) left for the locker room due to the league's mandated NFL concussion protocol in the third quarter and he did not return.

[CFB Pick Packs](#) [CFB Guaranteed Picks](#) [NFL Pick Packs](#) [NFL Guaranteed Picks](#)

PRES PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

KANSAS CITY Over Oakland by 11

The Kansas City Chiefs were the last undefeated team standing in the NFL this year at 5-0. Now, they're sitting at 6-6 and are going to be in a huge fight to win the AFC West. Fortunately for them, this division has been a wreck all season long. That said, if they lose again to the Oakland Raiders, they can probably kiss any chances of reaching the postseason goodbye. The truly disappointing part about this slide for the Chiefs is that they've been losing to teams they have no business losing to. They now have five losses this season when they've been listed as favorites, more than any team. Losing to the Steelers and Raiders is one thing. Even the loss at Dallas was modestly acceptable. But to come off of your bye and get beaten by the Giants, Bills and Jets? Yikes! It's no wonder that Alex Smith is probably playing for his career this week. Smith is on a pace to throw for over 4,000 yards this season, and he's coming off of a game in which he led the Chiefs to an average of nearly 11 yards per play against the Jets. But at some point, you have to actually win games, too, and Kansas City isn't doing enough of that. With Patrick Mahomes waiting in the wings, at some point, Andy Reid is going to have to make the call to make the switch, and that could happen as soon as this week.

Oakland has really been in good form since the start of November. The Raiders finally look a little bit like last year's team with wins against the Dolphins, Broncos and Giants. No one is going to blame them for getting blasted by the Patriots at Estadio Azteca. That said, the hole that was built at the start of the year is still looking large. If this game happens to be lost, the Raiders will be a game back in the AFC West with no parachute likely to form for a Wild Card. Plus, the team still has to play the desperate Cowboys at home next week followed by road games against the Eagles and Chargers. It'll take at least three wins in these last four games to win the AFC West, you'd think, and that's why this one is so darn important.

The Raiders got away with not having Amari Cooper and Michael Crabtree in the lineup last week against the Giants, but it wasn't a pretty game. Derek Carr was legitimately being outplayed by Geno Smith for a good quarter and a half of football before Carr started to get into the swing of things to connecting with Cordarrelle Patterson, Seth Roberts and Johnny Holton. There's no doubt that Crabtree, who is in the midst of serving his two-game suspension for his brawl with Aqib Talib, won't be playing in this game. That's why getting Cooper back is so important. He's still in concussion protocol at this point, and there's no telling when he'll be back. If Oakland is going to ultimately make the playoffs, Cooper is going to be a big part of the equation. He can't finish this year with just 499 yards and five touchdowns.

The Raiders were as desperate as could be when they hosted the Chiefs a couple months ago. That win started them on the upswing and put Kansas City into a tailspin. This time around, we think we're going to see the opposite happen. For as bad as the Chiefs have been, they finally turned the corner offensively last week against the Jets. Their defense struggled, but that isn't going to be the case every single week. With Reid turning play-calling duties over to the up and coming Matt Nagy, there is some definitive hope for the immediate future. It's survival of the fittest here. The Chiefs are being asked to lay 4 and I believe they'll cover that easily.

Projected Score: Kansas City 28, Oakland 17

DJ PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

New England -13 Over MIAMI By 6

South Beach has been a thorn in the side of the New England Patriots for a number of years. They had been beaten in three straight road games against the Miami Dolphins before last year's blowout at Hard Rock Stadium. Now, the Fins are going to hope to pull off a massive upset and shock the Pats on Monday Night Football to keep their playoff hopes alive in the AFC. The Patriots' train is continuing to roll down the tracks with ease at this point. New England has won eight straight games and has covered six straight, proving once again that it is an impossible team for the sportsbooks to stick a number up against. Even on a day when Tom Brady didn't throw a single touchdown for just the 23rd time in his illustrious career, the Patriots barreled right over Buffalo 23-3 to move within one win of yet another AFC East title. This is now eight straight games for the Pats allowing 17 points or fewer after conceding 33 points or more in three of their first four games. New England hasn't scored at a ridiculous rate of late, but it hasn't had to with its defense improving dramatically.

Miami is amazingly still in this playoff discussion with Jay Cutler under center. A 5-7 record is nothing to write home about, but the Fins saved their season last week against Denver and could have a relatively clear coast the rest of this way if this game happens to end in an upset. Keep an eye on Kenyan Drake in this game. Drake has taken over the Miami backfield in its entirety with Jay Ajayi traded and Damien Williams out injured. He rushed for 120 yards and a touchdown in last week's win over Denver, a game that was won in spite of Jay Cutler's two picks, one of which came back for a touchdown.

As tough as it is to go against the Patriots, this is the moment I think they'll be challenged. It's Monday Night Football, and it's the biggest game of the season for the Fins. They'll show up and give New England everything they've got before ultimately ceding. I'm not sure at this time if I will use this as my MNF guaranteed pick, but it's guaranteed so you have nothing to lose. [Buy my MNF pick to insure your pick.](#)

Projected Score: New England 23, Miami 17

BAGS PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

Indianapolis at BUFFALO Under Total By 7

It's really hard to put a read on the Bills right now. With Tyrod Taylor, they've at least looked competitive. Without him, they had to endure the five-pick half by Nathan Peterman. Peterman didn't get picked off a billion times by the Patriots last week, but when he was forced into duty after Taylor got carted off the field with a leg injury, he only went 6-for-15 and had no success moving the football. Things got so bad that McDermott tapped Joe Webb to go in and play quarterback.

The Colts are awful at 3-9, but for some reason, they still feel more competitive than their record suggests. Maybe it's the fact that Jacoby Brissett's numbers aren't god awful, and maybe it's the fact that the team has only been beaten by double-digits once in the last month. That said, the Colts only have wins over the Browns, 49ers and Texans this year, and that latter win came with Tom Savage under center for Houston, not Deshaun Watson. Still, when you rank dead last in the NFL against the pass and dead last in scoring defense, it's hard to just blame your No. 28-ranked offense.

McCoy is approaching the wrong side of 30-years old now, but he's still going strong at the end of the year. He has only had three runs of 30+ yards this year and just one of 40+, but he's still averaging a reasonable 4.1 yards per carry. In these last four games, McCoy has averaged 6.2, 2.2, 8.8 and 6.1 yards per tote respectively, and with that type of production, there's no way the ball should be in the hands of any quarterback for too long. The magic number to get to is 20 carries for McCoy. When he gets there, the Bills are 5-0 this season. When he doesn't get there, they're 1-6.

I'm going under the assumption that Taylor won't play in this game. Add that to the fact that the Bills have just flat out stunk offensively in recent weeks, and Peterman's one start was a fantasy comedy (or a horrible tragedy, depending upon your vantagepoint). Because of all the uncertainty on the offensive side of the ball for both teams I'm going to go under the total. Poor Bills QB play, coupled with the Colts outdoors in frigid Buffalo, is enough for me to play the tick. Take the under.

Projected Score: Buffalo 17, Indianapolis 16

SAMMY PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

San Francisco +1 & 43 at HOUSTON Under Total by 10

The 2017 Texans are going to be remembered as the unluckiest team in the NFL this season. They're just 1-5 in games decided by a single score, and that doesn't even include last week's 24-13 loss to Tennessee, a game that was a one-score game the whole way until Derrick Henry barreled down the sidelines for a 75-yard TD with less than a minute to go.

Houston has lost its franchise quarterback (Deshaun Watson) and its two best defensive players (J.J. Watt and Whitney Mercilus). Its No. 2 wide receiver (Will Fuller) has played in just six games this season while a budding rookie tailback (D'Onta Foreman) was lost to a season-ending injury after 10 games. The man replacing Foreman behind Lamar Miller (Alfred Blue) has a concussion. The Texans' second-best linebacker (Brian Cushing) has played in just one game this year thanks to a PED suspension, and he may legitimately not suit up again this year. Plus, the team has used five different players at right tackle this season thanks to injuries. The unluckiest break of all for Houston is that this is all coming in a season which it doesn't have its first- or second-round draft pick. Texans fans everywhere will clearly take Watson over having a couple high picks in this year's NFL Draft, but you certainly hate to bottom out right now.

The 49ers won't end up with the No. 1 pick this year, but they could have a top-3 pick for the second-straight season. They haven't scored more than one touchdown in a game in nine of 11 games this season, and have now ironically won one of those games. Last week's 15-14 win over Chicago featured five Robbie Gould field goals, something that must've felt great for Gould in his return to the Windy City. But the hero was Jimmy G. Garoppolo wasn't always spectacular, but he threw for 293 yards and led the team on five scoring drives even though he never actually got into the end zone.

Garoppolo made his mistakes against the Bears, especially in the red zone, but he got away with them because they're the Bears. All-in-all, though, this is about as much as could be expected out of Garoppolo. After all, they have just two wins and didn't score a touchdown against one of the worst teams in the NFL last week. It's asking too much of the Niners to explode offensively. Even with all of the injuries that the Texans have amassed, they have been playing excellent defensive football. Therefore the right play here is to take the Under 43.

Projected Score: Houston 17, San Francisco 16

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COLLEGE & PRO FOOTBALL LEANER PICKS

All leaner picks by Sammy & Bags. If game is not listed, it's a pass or not a leaner pick.

12/07 8:25 ET	New Orleans Saints Atlanta Falcons	53.5 PK	Saints are 9-3 this year, but they're 8-0 in games which they've been favored and just 1-3 when they've been underdogs. Tough call, take the Under.
12/10 1:00 ET	Detroit Lions Tampa Bay Bucs	NL	If Stafford happened to not be able to go, it would be Jake Rudock who is called upon. Rudock is out of Iowa, and he ran the exact same offense that C.J. Beathard did under Kirk Ferentz. Bucs win.
12/10 1:00 ET	Chicago Bears Cincinnati Bengals	39.5 -6.5	Bengals coming off the MNF game against the Steelers. As of this writing not sure what happened in that game, but have to side with the Bengals in the jungle.
12/10 1:00 ET	Minnesota Vikings Carolina Panthers	-3 41	We love the over in this game, especially with Minnesota's offense scoring at least 23 points in six straight games before the 14-point snoozer against Atlanta.
12/10 1:00 ET	Green Bay Packers Cleveland Browns	-3.5 40.5	We're getting a safety net here with the four points, but we don't think we're really going to need it. The Browns are going to give an early Christmas gift to their fans in the form of a 'W'
12/10 1:00 ET	Dallas Cowboys New York Giants	-4.5 41.5	Eli has been made out to be the fall guy. Dysfunction will again rule the day with the Cowboys coming to town, and a poised Prescott will bounce back with a nice effort on the road to get Dallas back above .500.
12/10 4:05 ET	Washington Redskins LA Chargers	46 -6.5	Redskins have allowed at least 33 points in 5 of last 7. We don't expect that to continue, but the Chargers will probably get into the high-20s. The good news? We think Washington will, too. Go Over.
12/10 4:05 ET	New York Jets Denver Broncos	-1.5 41	The Denver defense looks like it has given up on the offense, and with Talib suspended for one more game for his fight with Michael Crabtree, things aren't going to get any better this week. Go Jets.
12/10 4:05 ET	Tennessee Titans Arizona Cardinals	-3 44	We're going to assume that Peterson is going to be on the field, and if that's the case, we're going to take the points.
12/10 4:25 ET	Seattle Seahawks Jacksonville Jaguars	39.5 -3	The one thing that Jacksonville has right now that Seattle doesn't is an intact secondary. The Jaguars have the No. 1 D. Expect a low scoring game, go under.
12/10 4:25 ET	Philadelphia Eagles Los Angeles Rams	51 -2	The Rams have put up points against even the best teams in the NFC, and this might not be an exception to the rule. Wentz can light it up also, go over..
12/10 8:30 ET	Baltimore Ravens Pittsburgh Steelers	41 -7	These two teams really don't like each other very much and it's always a hard hitting brutal battle. Expect that trend to continue and take the under.

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