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Dennis Stagliano's Award Winning Football Newsletter

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Myrtle Beach Bowl

December 21, 2020 2:30 ET

Appalachian St - 20 Over North Texas by 31

The Appalachian State Mountaineers won eight games and have a chance to win six straight bowl games. The Appalachian State Mountaineers have won three of their last five non-home games. Zac Thomas is completing 64.7 percent of his passes for 2,075 yards, 19 touchdowns and 11 interceptions. Thomas has two or more touchdown passes in five of his last eight games. Thomas Hennigan and Malik Williams have combined for 1,107 receiving yards and six touchdowns while Christian Wells has 14 receptions. The Appalachian State Mountaineers ground game is averaging 243.5 yards per contest, and Camerun Peoples leads the way with 807 yards and seven touchdowns. Defensively, Appalachian State is allowing 19.3 points and 331.5 yards per game. Trey Cobb leads the Appalachian State Mountaineers with 79 tackles, Demetrius Taylor has six sacks and Brendan Harrington has four interceptions.

The North Texas Mean Green won four games this season and look for their first bowl victory since the 2013 season. The North Texas Mean Green have won two of their last three non-home games. Austin Aune is completing 54.6 percent of his passes for 1,650 yards, 13 touchdowns and four interceptions. Aune and Jason Bean have combined for 25 touchdown passes and eight interceptions. Jaelon Darden and Deonte Simpson have combined for 1,707 receiving yards and 23 touchdowns while Austin Ogunmakin has 16 receptions. The North Texas Mean Green ground game is averaging 230.2 yards per contest, and DeAndre Torrey leads the way with 656 yards and six touchdowns. Defensively, North Texas is allowing 41.3 points and 509.4 yards per game. KD Davis leads the North Texas Mean Green with 70 tackles, Gabriel Murphy has 4.5 sacks and DeShawn Gaddie has two interceptions.

The Mountaineers are 1-5 ATS in their last 6 games as a favorite and 1-6 ATS in their last 7 games overall. The Mean Green are 1-7 ATS in their last 8 games as an underdog and 6-21 ATS in their last 27 games overall. The over is 3-1-1 in Mountaineers last 5 games in December. The over is 5-2 in Mean Green last 7 games in

December.

The Appalachian State Mountaineers are clearly the better team here and they played a tougher schedule. The North Texas Mean Green were one of the worst defensive teams in CFB this year. North Texas will not be able to slow down the Mountaineers. This has the feel of a blowout and a game that could be decided by half time.

Lay the lumber and take Appalachian St.

Projected Score: Appalachian St .52, North Texas 21

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

December 22, 2020 3:30 ET

Nevada + 2½ Over Tulane by 8

Tulane sits at 6-5 coming into this Famous Idaho Potato Bowl matchup. The Green Wave are 4-1 in their last five games and coming off a 14-point win over Memphis in their last outing. As for Nevada, they're 6-2 this season. The Wolf Pack are 1-2 over their last three games and fell to San Jose State in their last game.

Tulane kicked off the year at just 2-4, with losses to Navy, Houston, SMU and UCF in a five-game early-season stretch. The Wave have come out of their shell in the last five games though, with an overtime loss to Tulsa 30-24 as their only blemish. On December 5 in the Green Wave's last appearance, they took out Memphis 35-21.

In the win over the Tigers, Tulane quarterback Michael Pratt put up 254 yards and two touchdowns on 21-of-33 passing. Pratt also had a pair of rushing touchdowns. Jha'Quan Jackson was the leading receiver there with 57 yards and a score off three catches, and Stephon Huderson led the rush with 67 yards on 10 carries.

Over on the Nevada side, they've been a formidable team all season but have a couple of missteps in their last three. After starting out the year at 5-0, the Wolf Pack took a tough 24-21 loss to Hawaii. A 37-26 win over Fresno State followed, then on December 11 in Nevada's last game they dropped another one 30-20 to San Jose State.

In the loss to the Spartans, Nevada quarterback Carson Strong managed 260 yards with one touchdown on 33-of-48 passing. Toa Taua was the leading rusher on 11 carries for 96 yards, and Romeo Doubs managed 75 yards off nine catches to lead the Wolf Pack receivers.

The Green Wave are 6-1 ATS in their last seven games overall and 5-1 ATS in their last six non-conference games. Tulane is 4-1 ATS in their last five after an ATS win and 4-1 ATS in their last five games on turf.

Meanwhile, the Wolf Pack are 4-0 ATS in their last four after an ATS loss and 4-1-1 ATS in their last six bowl games. Nevada is 9-4 ATS in their last 13 overall and the under is 4-0 in their last four bowl games.

This game is being played in Boise, Idaho where it may be very cold. This may have an impact on the boys from New Orleans. Nevada has an explosive offense being directed by Nevada quarterback Carson Strong. Alternatively, Tulane quarterback Michael Pratt is a notch down compared to Carson Strong. I'm going with the better quarterback playing in his own neighborhood. **Give me small dog Nevada.**

Projected Score: Nevada 34, Tulane 26

Boca Raton Bowl

December 22, 2020 7:00 ET

B.Y.U. - 6½ Over U.C.F. By 17

The UCF Knights got their invite to the Boca Raton Bowl after finishing with an overall record of 6-3, finishing the year with a 58-46 win over South Florida last time out. Dillon Gabriel has thrown for 3,353 yards, 30 touchdowns and 4 interceptions on 61.7% passing while Greg McCrae leads the Knights in rushing with 681 rushing yards along with 9 touchdowns and Otis Anderson had 614 rushing yards with 4 scores in the regular season. Bentavious Thompson also added 369 rushing yards while Marlon Williams had a team-high 71 catches for 1,039 yards and 10 TDs to lead the UCF receiving group. Jaylon Robinson had 51 grabs for 935 yards and 5 scores while Jacob Harris added 472 receiving yards and Ryan O'Keefe had 383 receiving yards this season, with Harris logging 7 touchdowns. On defense, Richie Grant led the Knights with 72 total tackles including 49 solo tackles and 3 interceptions while Kenny Turnier had a team-high 4 sacks this season.

The BYU Cougars come into this bowl game after finishing the regular season with an impressive 10-1 record,

with the one blemish coming in the form of a 22-17 loss to Coastal Carolina. Zach Wilson threw for 3,267 yards, 20 touchdowns and 3 interceptions on 73.2% passing while Tyler Allgeier led BYU in rushing with 957 rushing yards and 12 TDs. Lopini Katoa added 423 rushing yards with 5 scores and the aforementioned Wilson added 242 rushing yards with 8 TDs. Dax Milne leads BYU with 63 catches for 1,118 yards with 8 touchdowns while Gunner Romney has 755 receiving yards and Neil Pau'u has 517 receiving yards. Isaac Rex has 333 receiving yards with a team-high 10 touchdowns as well for BYU this season. On defense, Isaiah Kaufusi has a team-high 75 total tackles including 42 solo tackles and 4 sacks while Tyler Batty has 4 sacks as well for the Cougars this season.

UCF is 4-0 ATS in their last 4 games against a team with a winning record and 5-1 ATS in their last 6 non-conference games while the over is 5-2 in their last 7 neutral site games. BYU is 1-5 ATS in their last 6 bowl games and 1-3-1 ATS in their last 5 games overall while the under is 5-2 in their last 7 games against a team with a winning record.

Okay, the trends lean to UCF, but to be honest, I'm not sure UCF can match points with BYU. When looking at these teams, we have one great QB and one good QB, but only one team has a defense, and that's BYU. BYU came within a whisker of going undefeated, whereas UCF has struggled at times this year because of their swiss cheese defensive unit. Before the line came out I figured BYU by a few touchdowns. To my surprise, the line was only one touchdown. I imagine you already named Zach Wilson as the great QB. You're right, I think he's a high first round draft pick with an exceptional arm and decision making with game management. BYU has made me a ton of money this year and I'm not getting off the money train. Like I said, by two touchdowns.

Give me BYU - 6½

Projected Score: BYU 45, UCF 31

New Orleans Bowl **December 23, 2020 3:00 ET**

Georgia Southern - 5½ Over LA Tech by 14

The Louisiana Tech Bulldogs have split their last eight games and look to win seven straight bowl games. The Louisiana Tech Bulldogs have lost three of their last four non-home games. Luke Anthony is completing 62.4 percent of his passes for 1,479 yards, 16 touchdowns and five interceptions. Anthony and Aaron Allen have combined for 20 touchdown passes and 10 interceptions. Adrian Hardy and Smoke Harris have combined for 725 receiving yards and eight touchdowns while Griffin Hebert has 19 receptions. The Louisiana Tech Bulldogs ground game is averaging 97.6 yards per contest, and Israel Tucker leads the way with 525 yards and four touchdowns. Defensively, Louisiana Tech is allowing 34.3 points and 425 yards per game. Tyler Grubbs leads the Louisiana Tech Bulldogs with 87 tackles, Milton Williams has 4.5 sacks and BeeJay Williamson has 3 picks

The Georgia Southern Eagles have lost three of their last four games and look for their third bowl win in school history. The Georgia Southern Eagles have lost three straight non-home games. Shai Werts is completing 60.3 percent of his passes for 936 yards, seven touchdowns and six interceptions. Werts and Justin Tomlin have combined for seven touchdown passes and nine interceptions. Malik Murray and Wesley Kennedy III have combined for 421 receiving yards and one touchdown while Khaleb Hood has 14 receptions. The Georgia Southern Eagles ground game is averaging 262.5 yards per contest, and Werts leads the way with 649 yards and eight touchdowns. Defensively, Georgia Southern is allowing 22.3 points and 333.5 yards per game. Rashad Byrd leads the Georgia Southern Eagles with 75 tackles, Raymond Johnson III has five sacks and Derrick Canteen has five interceptions.

The Bulldogs are 5-1 ATS in their last 6 neutral site games and 2-5 ATS in their last 7 games overall. The Eagles are 5-2 ATS in their last 7 non-conference games and 5-2 ATS in their last 7 games overall. The over is 4-1 in Bulldogs last 5 games overall. The over is 4-1 in Eagles last 5 games overall.

The Louisiana Tech Bulldogs have had offensive issues all season long, and they've scored 21 or less points in four of their last seven games. The Georgia Southern Eagles took a good Appalachian State team down to the wire their last time out, and they're one of the best rushing teams in college football. Louisiana Tech is not good defensively and is going to have trouble with the creativity of Georgia Southern and with a dual threat quarterback. **I'll lay the reasonable chalk with the Eagles here.**

Projected Score: Georgia Southern 31, LA Tech 17

Montgomery Bowl December 23, 2020 7:00 ET

Memphis - 8 Over FAU by 16

In this Montgomery Bowl matchup, the Tigers enter at 7-3 overall. Memphis fell to Tulane on December 5 but bounced back with a three-point win over Houston in their last appearance. As for Florida Atlantic, they're 5-3 this season. The Owls have lost consecutive games to Georgia Southern and Southern Miss in their last pair.

Memphis started out the season at 3-1, then took a big 49-10 blowout loss against Cincinnati. After that the Tigers won three straight: 34-33 over South Florida, 56-14 over Stephen F. Austin and 10-7 against Navy. Following a 35-21 loss to Tulane, Memphis bounced back with a 30-27 win over Houston on December 12.

In the win over the Cougars, Memphis' Brady White posted 246 yards with two touchdowns and an interception on 22-of-35 passing. Asa Martin led a tepid rush on 11 carries for 27 yards, and Calvin Austin added seven receptions for 74 yards and a touchdown.

Over on the Florida Atlantic side, they came out of the gate strong this season at 5-1. Outside of a loss to Marshall, the Owls took out Charlotte, UTSA, Western Kentucky, FIU and UMass. Since then it's been two losses for Florida Atlantic, 20-3 to Georgia Southern and 45-31 to Southern Miss.

In the loss to the Eagles, Florida Atlantic quarterback Nick Tronti posted 162 yards with one touchdown and one interception on 17-of-33 passing. Brandon Robinson caught five balls for 72 yards and a touchdown to lead the receivers, and James Charles added 79 yards and two scores off 16 carries.

The Tigers are 6-1 ATS in their last seven games against Conference USA and 2-5 ATS versus a team with a winning record. Memphis is 3-13 ATS in their last 16 in December and 0-5 ATS in their last five bowl games.

Meanwhile, the Owls are 4-0 ATS in their last four bowl games and 6-0 ATS in their last six neutral-site games. Florida Atlantic is 7-1 ATS versus a team with a winning record and 1-4 ATS in their last five overall.

This one's a little tough though, as it's been difficult to tell what to expect from either team this season. The bowl trends lean to FAU. In any case, Florida Atlantic has notched two double-digit losses in their last pair, and the offense hasn't exactly been consistent this season. Memphis has had their dud games as well (like 10 points against Navy in a win) but most times this season the Tigers are good for 30 points or so. I think the line on this one is a tad low. I'm backing the more explosive Tigers offensive. FAU better buckle up if Brady White gets hot. **I'm betting Memphis - 8.**

Projected Score: Memphis 33, FAU 17

New Mexico Bowl December 24, 2020 3:30 ET

Houston - 13 Over Hawaii by 6

The Hawai'i Rainbow Warriors look for back-to-back bowl wins while getting a game above a .500 record. The Hawai'i Rainbow Warriors have lost their last two non-home games. Chevan Cordeiro is completing 62.1 percent of his passes for 1,947 yards, 11 touchdowns and six interceptions. Cordeiro has three touchdown passes in his last three games. Calvin Turner and Jared Smart have combined for 745 receiving yards and six touchdowns while Rico Bussey has 31 receptions. The Hawai'i Rainbow Warriors ground game is averaging 155.1 yards per contest, and Cordeiro leads the way with 450 yards and seven touchdowns. Defensively, Hawai'i is allowing 29.3 points and 421.5 yards per game. Darius Muasau leads the Hawai'i Rainbow Warriors with 95 tackles, Justus Tavai has two sacks and Eugene Ford has two interceptions.

The Houston Cougars look to get to a .500 record while winning their first bowl game since the 2015 season. The Houston Cougars have lost two of their last three non-home games. Clayton Tune is completing 60.7 percent of his passes for 1,832 yards, 13 touchdowns and seven interceptions. Tune has five touchdown passes in his last two games. Keith Corbin and Nathaniel Dell have combined for 668 receiving yards and

three touchdowns while Marquez Stevenson has 20 receptions. The Houston Cougars ground game is averaging 155.2 yards per contest, and Kyle Porter leads the way with 394 yards and four touchdowns. Defensively, Houston is allowing 32.6 points and 417.3 yards per game. Grant Stuard leads the Houston Cougars with 61 tackles, Payton Turner has five sacks and Hasaan Hypolite has one interception.

The Rainbow Warriors are 15-36 ATS vs. a team with a losing record and 2-5 ATS in their last 7 games overall. The Cougars are 0-4 ATS in their last 4 games in December and 7-3 ATS in their last 10 Thursday games. The under is 4-1 in Rainbow Warriors last 5 games overall. The over is 5-1 in Cougars last 6 bowl games.

The Hawai'i Rainbow Warriors have not been great offensively this season, but they've competed and played their best football down the stretch. The Houston Cougars have allowed 30 or more points in five of their seven games and have played just one game since November 15. The Houston Cougars should be the favorites here, but this is a lot of points to lay with a team that's played just once in the last two months and has had issues getting stops defensively. We also can't overlook this game being on Christmas Eve and the fact some of these guys may have their minds elsewhere. Either way, give me Hawaii and the two touchdowns.

Projected Score: Houston 33, Hawaii 27

Camelia Bowl

December 25, 2020 2:30 ET

Buffalo - 3 Over Marshall by 10

The Marshall Thundering Herd come into this matchup with a 7-2 record, and they will be looking to rebound after dropping the Conference USA Championship against the UAB Blazers, 22-13. QB Grant Wells struggled to find much consistency for Marshall as he connected on 8 of his 23 pass attempts for 138 yards and 2 TDs. TE Xavier Gaines was able to have a productive outing for the Thundering Herd as he added a 70-yard TD reception.

The Marshall Thundering Herd were solid on the defensive side of the ball against the UAB Blazers as they held them to 22 points and a total of 468 yards of offense. Safety Nazeem Johnson and LB Tavante Beckett led the way for the Marshall defense with 13 tackles each. The secondary had a productive outing for the Thundering Herd as safety Derrek Pitts had 9 tackles and a pass breakup while DB Steven Gilmore had 2 pass breakups.

The Buffalo Bulls come into this matchup with a 5-1 record, and they will be looking to rebound after dropping their recent game against the Ball State Cardinals in MAC Championship, 38-28. QB Kyle Vantrease had a productive outing for the Bulls as he threw for 365 yards, 1 TD, and 1 interception. WR Antonio Nunn was the top target for Vantrease and the Bulls as he hauled in 13 catches for 182 yards.

The Buffalo Bulls struggled on the defensive side of the ball against the Ball State Cardinals as they allowed them to score 31 points and rack up a total of 439 yards of offense. LB James Patterson led the way for the Buffalo defense with 11 tackles and an interception. The Bulls were able to get into the Ball State backfield a handful of times as DT Tyrece Woods Jr. had 3 TFLs and 2 sacks while DT George Wolo had 1.5 TFLs and 1 sack.

Marshall are 7-1 SU in their last 8 games. The total has gone OVER in 7 of Marshall's last 10 games. Buffalo are 11-3 ATS in their last 14 games. The total has gone OVER in 9 of Buffalo's last 12 games.

The Buffalo Bulls were unable to get their effective ground game going in the conference championship as they only compiled 134 yards, and that resulted in them only scoring 7 points in the 2nd half. The Bulls have an explosive offense, especially when they can get RB Jaret Patterson (1072 yards, 19 TDs) and Kevin Marks Jr. (603 yards, 6 TDs) going, but don't forget WR Antonio Nunn who put up 182 yards in his recent game. The Marshall Thundering Herd have a very good defense and I am sure they will stack the box against the Buffalo run game, but QB Grant Wells has been turnover-prone for Marshall which is why I like Buffalo to capitalize on turnovers. I've been riding the Bulls all year long and I'm not stopping now. **Ride the Bulls - 3.**

Projected Score: Buffalo 31, Marshall 21



Coastal Carolina - 6 Over Liberty by 13

Liberty went 0-1 against teams ranked in the final College Football Playoff (CFP) Rankings top 25. Coastal Carolina went 2-0 against teams ranked in the final College Football Playoff (CFP) Rankings top 25.

Liberty and Coastal Carolina are a combined 18-1 on the season and two of just four teams in all of college football that have accumulated nine wins. Both programs feature high-powered offenses that are a blast to watch, led by a pair of dynamic dual-threat quarterbacks. And both teams feature defenses that rank in the top 15 nationally. Throw in a pair of highly acclaimed head coaches in Liberty's Hugh Freeze and CCU's Jamey Chadwell, and you have the perfect recipe for a "must-see" matchup.

There are still a couple of chapters yet to be written in Coastal Carolina's storybook season, including Saturday's contest against Liberty. Regardless, it has already been a magical run for a team that was picked to finish dead last in the Sun Belt East in the preseason. The Chanticleers not only proved the naysayers wrong by clinching their first-ever Sun Belt East title, but they are also off to the best start of any team in conference history with a perfect 9-0 record. For their efforts, the Chants have achieved the highest-ever national ranking for a Sun Belt team, coming in at No. 14 in the latest AP poll and No. 18 in the College Football Playoff rankings. But with upset-minded Liberty coming to play on Saturday, Coastal Carolina will face arguably its toughest test to date.

Coastal Carolina isn't the only non-Power 5 team that has captured the attention of the nation. It's been an exceptional campaign for Liberty as well. The Flames are a mere point away from also being undefeated, no thanks to a heartbreaking 15-14 loss to NC State a couple of weeks ago. Fortunately, any lingering effects of that loss were short-lived, as the Flames bounced back in resounding fashion to secure their first shutout of the season last week in a 45-0 blowout of UMass. They will look to carry that momentum on the road to face the unblemished Chanticleers in search of their first 10-win season since 2008.

Adding to the intrigue — Saturday's contest will be a rivalry renewed. Liberty and Coastal Carolina faced off every year from 2003-16 during their time together as bitter rivals in the Big South Conference (FCS). The all-time series is deadlocked at seven wins apiece. The Chanticleers won the most recent meeting in 2016 by a score of 42-7.

Quarterback Malik Willis is the driving force behind a potent Liberty offense that averages 38.3 points and 483.5 yards per game. The former Auburn transfer has completed 64.0 percent of his passes for 2,040 yards with 20 touchdowns against just four interceptions. However, he has reportedly tested positive for COVID-19, which would make him ineligible to play on Saturday. If he's sidelined, Chris Ferguson will take the reins. Ferguson, a graduate transfer from FCS Maine, has completed 19 of 37 passes for 197 yards and four touchdowns in limited snaps across six appearances, but he's nowhere near the running threat that Willis offers.

But Ferguson should be able to keep Liberty's passing attack going. Wide receiver DJ Stubbs leads the team in receptions (33) and receiving yards (455), while deep-threat Kevin Shaa leads the Flames in touchdown receptions (4) and yards per catch average (18.9). But it has truly been a collective effort this season for a Liberty passing attack that has featured 16 different pass catchers and 11 different players that have at least one touchdown reception.

The problem for the Flames is that they will be going up against Coastal Carolina's "Black Swarm" defense. The Chanticleers are giving up a modest 181.1 passing yards per game (12th in the FBS) and have allowed just eight touchdown passes all season. The Chants also have 11 interceptions to their credit. And a CCU pass rush that has already generated 31 sacks (sixth-most in the FBS) should be a big concern for a Liberty offensive line that has surrendered 21 sacks on the season. Defensive end and three-time Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Week Tarron Jackson leads the Chants with 8.5 sacks (fourth-most in the FBS), followed by standout defensive tackle C.J. Brewer with 6.5 and linebacker Jeffrey Gunter with 5.5.

Fortunately, the Flames have one of the best rushing attacks in the nation to fall back on, although it will probably look different on Saturday. Liberty ranks eighth in the FBS, averaging an impressive 252.1 rushing yards per game and 5.9 yards per carry. The caveat for this game is that Willis is the team's leading rusher with

807 yards and 10 scores on the ground. The good news is that he hasn't done it all by himself. Running backs Joshua Mack (125 att., 692 yds., 4 TDs), Peyton Pickett (87, 505, 6), and Shedro Louis (60, 431 yards, 3) have all played significant roles in the backfield. That group will need to come up big against a good, but not necessarily great, Coastal Carolina run defense that allows 140.3 rushing yards per game (42nd in the FBS).

Redshirt freshman quarterback Grayson McCall headlines a high-powered Coastal Carolina offensive attack that averages 38.7 points and 448.3 yards per game. Like his counterpart in this matchup, McCall has been nothing short of phenomenal so far this season, completing 67.2 percent of his pass attempts for 1,747 yards with 20 touchdown passes and just one interception. He also ranks in the top 10 nationally in passing efficiency (188.4) and yards per attempt (10.0). The Chants feature four pass catchers that all average better than 16 yards per reception, led by go-to receiver Jaivon Heiligh (41 rec., 682 yds., 8 TDs) and tight end Isaiah Likely (17, 423, 4).

The Chanticleers' passing attack will be put to the test on Saturday against a Liberty defense that allows just 171.6 passing yards per game (eighth in the FBS) and has 10 interceptions to its credit. However, the Flames haven't fared as well in keeping opposing passing games out of the end zone, surrendering 14 touchdowns through the air. Liberty does feature a formidable pass rush, led by defensive end Durrell Johnson (8 sacks), that has racked up 26 sacks this season. That should make for an interesting matchup in the trenches against a CCU offensive line that has been stellar in pass protection, giving up just 10 sacks in nine games.

Do-it-all running back CJ Marable (867 all-purpose yards and a Sun Belt-leading 14 total touchdowns) spearheads a solid three-man rotation in the backfield for a CCU run game that is averaging 220.3 yards per game (19th in FBS). That group also includes running backs Reese White (63 att., 402 yds., 5 TDs) and Shermari Jones (68, 341, 3). McCall also serves as an integral part of the Chants' run game with 365 yards and five scores on the ground.

The Chanticleers will be matched up against a Liberty defense that has been somewhat stingy against the run, giving up 129.6 rushing yards per game (34th in the FBS). However, the Flames have struggled against a few of the better running teams on their schedule — giving up 201 rushing yards against Virginia Tech, 215 against Southern Miss, and 167 against NC State. And Coastal Carolina may just have the best rushing attack that Liberty has seen all season. Likewise, for the CCU defense against Liberty's potent ground attack. It will be fun to see how the matchups between these two high-powered run games unfolds on Saturday.

From a statistical standpoint, these teams couldn't be more evenly matched... if Malik Willis was going to play. The likely absence of Liberty's dual-threat quarterback due to COVID-19 protocols is a reason why the Flames come into this game as a 6 point underdog. In fact, it wouldn't surprise if that number continues to grow closer to kickoff on Saturday. In many ways, Liberty has been as impressive, if not more so, than Coastal Carolina this season, especially when you consider the Flames have played a more difficult schedule. They also have a more experienced head coach in Hugh Freeze, who happens to have a very successful track record against big-time opponents in big-time games, particularly as an underdog.

That being said, there is something truly special about this Coastal Carolina team. The Chanticleers also appear to have a slight edge where it matters most — in the trenches. I was initially going to take the Flames with the points. With Covid lingering among the Flames, and a possibility QB Willis will not play. Also if he plays, how effective is he going to be (I doubt 100%). This will change the dynamic for Liberty's high-powered offense going up against Coastal Carolina's swarming defense. The Chants' storybook season will continue with another fairly comfortable win. **I'll lay the points, give me the Black Swarm Chanticleers.**

Projected Score: Coastal Carolina 37, Liberty 24



First Responder Bowl

December 26, 2020 3:30 ET

Louisiana - 13 Over UTSA by 18

Coming into this First Responder Bowl matchup, UTSA sits at 7-4 on the year. The Roadrunners have won three straight games over UTEP, Southern Miss and North Texas. As for Louisiana, they're 9-1 this season. The Cajuns are on a six-game winning streak themselves, taking out LA-Monroe and Appalachian State in their last pair.

UTSA opened up the year on a three-game win streak, then fell in three straight games to UAB, BYU and Army. Since then the Roadrunners are 4-1 with a 24-3 loss to Florida Atlantic as the only blemish. Otherwise UTSA has taken out LA Tech 27-26, UTEP 52-21, Southern Miss 23-20 and North Texas 49-17 in that stretch.

In the win over the Mean Green, UTSA quarterback Frank Harris managed 144 yards and two touchdowns on 19-of-24 passing. Zakhari Franklin topped the receivers with three catches for 49 yards, and Sincere McCormick led the rush with a whopping 251 yards and two touchdowns on 23 carries.

Over on the Louisiana side, they've had a great season with several close-escape wins mixed in. The Cajuns kicked off at 3-0 before their lone loss to Coastal Carolina 30-27. Since then it's been six straight wins for Louisiana. Those came 24-20 over UAB, 44-34 over Texas State, 27-20 over Arkansas State, 38-10 over South Alabama, 70-20 over LA-Monroe and 24-21 against App State.

In the win over the Mountaineers, Louisiana QB Levi Lewis threw for 101 yards and a score while Trey Ragas rushed for 43 yards and two touchdowns. Elijah Mitchell had 12 totes for 95 yards, and Jalen Williams' two catches for 39 yards led the receivers.

The Roadrunners are 4-0 ATS in their last four games on turf and 4-11 ATS in their last 15 after a straight-up win. UTSA is 1-4 ATS in their last five after an ATS win and the under is 7-1 in their last eight overall.

Meanwhile, Louisiana is 6-1 ATS in their last seven non-conference games and 3-7 ATS in their last 10 after a straight-up win. The Cajuns are 2-5 ATS versus a team with a winning record and the under is 4-1 in their last five bowl games.

The Cajuns defense has been solid overall this season, allowing 30 points or more just three times in 10 games. The effort on that side of the ball has aided the offense greatly, and Louisiana has been able to salvage a few wins because of it. UTSA aren't slouches on defense either, however; they've given up 21 points or fewer in each of their last three games. If the Cajuns can get that running game working and take a few timely shots downfield, I can see Louisiana running away with this game. The Cajuns have played a tougher schedule and have a win over App St by 3 and a loss to Coastal Carolina by 3. If those two teams were playing against UTSA, I would bet them. So it stands to reason that I'm laying the lumber. Take Louisiana -13.

Projected Score: Louisiana 38, UTSA 20

Lending Tree Bowl

December 26, 2020 3:30 ET

Western Kentucky + 5 Over Georgia St. by 5

The Western Kentucky Hilltoppers have won three straight games and look for back-to-back bowl victories. The Western Kentucky Hilltoppers have lost three of their last four non-home games. Tyrrell Pigrome is completing 58.3 percent of his passes for 1,423 yards, nine touchdowns and zero interceptions. Pigrome and Kevaris Thomas have combined for 12 touchdowns and two interceptions. Xavier Lane and Mitchell Tinsley have combined for 743 receiving yards and five touchdowns while Joshua Simon has 29 receptions. The Western Kentucky Hilltoppers ground game is averaging 128 yards per contest, and Gaej Walker leads the way with 614 yards and two touchdowns. Defensively, Western Kentucky is allowing 24.1 points and 336.3 yards per game. Devon Key leads the Western Kentucky Hilltoppers with 86 tackles, DeAngelo Malone has six sacks and Omari Alexander has one interception.

The Georgia State Panthers have won three of their last four games and look for their second bowl victory in school history. The Georgia State Panthers have split their last four non-home games. Cornelious Brown IV is completing 59.1 percent of his passes for 2,046 yards, 14 touchdowns and nine interceptions. Brown has two

touchdown passes in his last three games. Sam Pinckney and Cornelius McCoy have combined for 1,112 receiving yards and nine touchdowns while Roger Carter has 21 receptions. The Georgia State Panthers ground game is averaging 190.3 yards per contest, and Destin Coates leads the way with 652 yards and six touchdowns. Defensively, Georgia State is allowing 32.9 points and 424.3 yards per game. Blake Carroll leads the Georgia State Panthers with 72 tackles, Jordan Strachan has nine sacks and Antavious Lane has three interceptions.

The Hilltoppers are 1-3-1 ATS in their last 5 non-conference games and 4-1 ATS in their last 5 games overall. The Panthers are 3-8-1 ATS vs. a team with a losing record and 1-4 ATS in their last 5 games in December. The over is 5-2 in Hilltoppers last 7 neutral site games. The over is 7-3 in Panthers last 10 games overall.

The Western Kentucky Hilltoppers are playing their best ball of the season heading into the bowl game, and while the offense has struggled all year, they've scored a combined 75 points in their last two games. The Georgia State Panthers have been the more consistent team this season and need bowl wins and big victories as they continue to build their program on the D1 level. However, WKU is the type of team that usually shines in the bowl season, a team that gets hot at the right time and plays with a nothing to lose type attitude. I expect the Hilltoppers to win this game outright. But of course, **give me WKU and the 5 points.**

Projected Score: Western Kentucky 28, Georgia St. 23

GRIDIRON GOLD SHEET BOWL PICKS			
Appalachian St - 20	Nevada - 2½	B.Y.U. - 6½	Georgia Southern - 5½
Memphis - 8	Hawaii + 13	Buffalo - 3	Coastal Carolina - 6
Louisiana - 13	Western Kentucky + 5	Get Next Issue	Get Next Issue



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