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2021 NFL FOOTBALL WEEK 1 KICKOFF ISSUE



Welcome to Dennis Stagliano's Gridiron Gold Sheet 2021 NFL kickoff issue. We're celebrating our 40th year in the sports service business. We want to start out by thanking all of our loyal subscribers. **THANK YOU!**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BETS

MICHIGAN ST - 17½ Over Youngstown St by 30

Youngstown State eked out an overtime victory over Incarnate Word in their first action of the season. As for Michigan State, they played Northwestern in their first game. The Spartans posted a 17-point win to go 1-0 on the young season.

Youngstown State managed to play seven games this past spring, but things didn't go so well. The Penguins finished a dismal 1-6 overall and one spot out of the basement in the Missouri Valley Football Conference standings, just above Western Illinois. Youngstown State got off to a nice start in 2021, posting a gutsy 44-41 overtime victory versus Incarnate Word. Jaleel McLaughlin was the star of the show in that one, rushing 29 times for a whopping 242 yards and two touchdowns. QB Demeatric Crenshaw added two rushing scores and a pass TD as well.

Over on the Michigan State side, they played seven games last season, ultimately posting a rough 2-5 record. That mark left the Spartans in last place in the East Division of the Big Ten Conference. It was a step back from 2019 as well; a season which included a 7-6 record and a bowl win. In the opener game this year versus Northwestern, Michigan State emerged victorious 38-21. The Spartans had a 21-7 lead at the break and were in control for most of the game. Kenny Walker was the biggest contributor, notching a whopping 264 yards and four scores on 23 rushes.

The Spartans looked pretty good in their opener against a Northwestern team with a much better defense than Y.S.U. They notched 511 total yards (326 rushing) and 8.1 yards per play. Michigan State worked quickly with 63 total plays (to Northwestern's 81) and just 22:25 in time of possession. As for Youngstown State, they showcased some nice rushing capabilities in their opener, so you can expect a lot of ground attacking on both sides here. The Penguins are going way up in class opposed to Incarnate Wood. Kinda like the JV team playing against the Varsity team. It has been a long time since the Spartans played in front of a large home crowd. They're pumped after their road win last week. They should get pumped in front of the home crowd. Look for the much bigger warrior Spartans to wear down the small Penguins and cover the spread.

Projected Score: Michigan State 47, Y.S.U. 17

NORTH CAROLINA - 25 Over Georgia St by 37

The Georgia State Panthers will be looking to rebound from a 43-10 loss at the hands of Army last time out. Cornelious Brown IV threw for 129 yards and an interception on 12 of 20 passing while Destin Coates rushed for a team-high 48 yards and a touchdown. Jamari Thrash led Georgia State's receiving group with 7 catches for 87 yards while Roger Carter had a pair of receptions as well in the defeat. Defensively, Thomas Gore and Jordan Veneziale each had a team-high 8 total tackles in the losing effort for the Panthers.

The North Carolina Tar Heels will attempt to rebound from a 10-16 loss at the hands of Virginia Tech on the road in their season-opener. Sam Howell threw for a touchdown, 3 interceptions on 208 yards on 17 of 32 passing while Ty Chandler rushed for a team-high 66 yards and D.J. Jones had 43 rushing yards. Josh Downs had 8 grabs for 123 yards and a touchdown while Emery Simmons added 3 catches for 46 yards in the victory. Defensively, Ja'Quirious Conley, Trey Morrison, Eugene Asante and Jeremiah Gemmel each had a team-high seven solo tackles with Conley logging a team-high 6 solo tackles and an interception in the loss.

Georgia State is 4-1 ATS in their last 5 games overall and 4-1 ATS in their last 5 Saturday games while the over is 9-3 in their last 12 games overall. North Carolina is 1-5 ATS in their last 6 games overall and 1-4 ATS in their last 5 games as a favorite while the over is 6-3 in their last 9 games overall.

This is a lot of points to be giving up with the Tar Heels, but Georgia State did not look good in being run over by Army in the opener and now have to take on a ticked-off UNC team that knows they beat themselves in that opening loss to Virginia Tech. No way Sam Howell is going to throw 3 interceptions in this game. This week UNC is at home and will not disappoint the home crowd. Virginia Tech poked and woke up the bear. This simply feels like a wrong place, wrong time scenario for Georgia State, so I'll lay the lumber with UNC in what I see ending up as a rout.

Projected Score: UNC 47 , Georgia St. 10

VIRGINIA TECH - 19 Over Middle Tenn St by 31

The Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders will look to build on their 50-15 rout over Monmouth in their last game. Bailey Hockman threw for 215 yards and 3 touchdowns on 17 of 22 passing while Frank Peasant and Brad Anderson had 27 and 25 rushing yards respectively. Chaton Mobley added 24 rushing yards with a touchdown and Martell Pettaway added a rushing score of his own. Jaylin Lane led the Raiders with 4 grabs for 91 yards and a touchdown while CJ Windham had 5 grabs for 46 yards and a score and DJ England-Chisolm added 42 receiving yards with a score. On defense, DQ Thomas had a team-high 9 total tackles while Decorian Patterson and Teldrick Ross each had 6 solo tackles with Ross logging a pick-six. Marley Cook, Tra Fluellen and Jordan Ferguson each had a sack as well for the Blue Raiders in the victory.

The Virginia Tech Hokies will look to build on their massive 16-10 season-opening win over North Carolina last time out. Braxton Burmeister threw for 169 yards, an interception and a touchdown on 12 of 19 passing while rushing for 42 yards and a touchdown as well. Jalen Holston had a team-high 49 rushing yards while Raheem Blackshear led Virginia Tech with 66 receiving yards and Tre Turner had 4 catches for 64 yards. James Mitchell added 3 catches for 36 yards and a touchdown. On defense, TyJuan Garbutt had a pair of sacks and Amare Barno had 1.5 sacks while Alan Tisdale and Mario Kendricks each had a sack. Chamarri Conner led the Hokies with 8 total tackles, including 6 solo tackles and an interception while Dax Hollifield and Jermaine Walker each added an INT to the win as well.

Middle Tennessee is 13-5 ATS in their last 18 week 2 matchups and 6-2 ATS in their last 8 games overall while the over is 4-1 in their last 5 road games. Virginia Tech is 2-4 ATS in their last 6 games overall and 1-4 ATS in their last 5 games played on Saturday while the under is 5-1 in their last 6 home games.

Some are questioning if there's a bit of a letdown here with the Hokies coming off of the win over UNC and with Virginia Tech having bigger fish to fry in the ACC down the road. However, I need to see more than a win over Monmouth before really trusting the Hawks in a step-up spot like this, even with a large amount of points. I expect that if the Hokies confused Sam Howell (UNC), they surely will do the same to a one dimensional MTSU squad. I'll lay the lumber and play it with Virginia Tech as I think the Hokies will stifle the MTSU attack and keep the ball rolling with a decisive win and cover.

Projected Score: Virginia Tech 41 , MTSU 10

RICE + 9½ Over Houston by 1

Houston is coming off a week one match-up versus Texas Tech. In that one, the Cougars lost by 17 points. As for Rice, they played Arkansas in their first game. The Owls also lost their opener, falling by 21 points.

Houston got to play eight games last fall, going 3-5 overall and 3-3 in American Athletic Conference play. The Cougars would finish in sixth place in the conference standings. Houston got an invite to the New Mexico Bowl, where they lost 28-14 to Hawaii. In the season opener versus Texas Tech, Houston had a 21-7 lead at the break but couldn't score from there in a 38-21 loss. QB Clayton Tune put up 174 yards with two TDs and four interceptions, and Nathaniel Dell posted seven catches for 80 yards and a score.

Over on the Rice side, they managed five games last fall. The Owls posted a 2-3 record overall, leaving the team two spots out of the basement in the West Division. The good news is that Rice didn't lose consecutive games; the bad news is that they didn't win consecutive games, either.

In Rice's week one game against Arkansas, the Owls took a 10-7 lead into the break but then gave up 21 points in the fourth quarter during a 38-17 defeat. Wiley Green tossed for 152 yards, one TD and three picks, and Khalan Griffin led the rush with 35 yards from 13 carries.

The Cougars looked good initially in their opener game, but couldn't do much of anything in the second half. Houston posted just 77 rush yards and 174 passing yards, averaging 3.4 yards per play in a limp effort overall. Combo of Tune and Hogorson are a paltry 7-14 straight up.

As for Rice, they were able to control much of the game against Arkansas, but with three picks, 10 penalties and just 81 rush yards they weren't able to keep up. Still, the Owls showed some promise in certain aspects and if they clean up their mistakes, I think they have the ability to upset the Cougars.

Projected Score: Rice 27, Houston 26

COLORADO ST - 6 Over Vanderbilt by 16

Both teams in this game are coming off disappointing losses in their opening games. Vanderbilt only managed 3 points off of 1 red zone trip against East Tennessee State, despite the Commodores having out-gained their opponents in yards and producing 25 first downs.

CSU managed 23 points in their game, but their defense was less than stellar, giving up 43 points and being down as much as 32 points in the 4th quarter. The Ram's offense did manage a respectable 462 total yards of offense, 338 of which came through the pass game, but the Ram's still lost outright to a 25 point underdog.

Based on their Week 1 performances, neither team inspires much confidence, however, the Rams should be able to handle this Vanderbilt team which will be traveling to Fort Collins for this game. Despite their loss, the Rams passing game looked capable as QB Todd Centeio threw for more than 300 and two of the Rams WRs went over the 100 yard mark.

With solid passing production and Vanderbilt's complete lack of run defense, the Ram's offense should have no issues producing points. On the other side of the ball, Vanderbilt's inability to produce any threatening offense at home will likely not find an offensive rhythm sucking wind on the road. Take CSU to cover the spread.

Projected Score: Colorado State 33, Vanderbilt 17





NFL KICKOFF ISSUE HAS DAK's RETURN vs BRADY AND THE GRONKANEERS TNF KICKOFF

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BETS

Dallas + 8½ Over TAMPA BAY by 1

The Dallas Cowboys and Tampa Bay Buccaneers meet Thursday in week 1 NFL action at Raymond James Stadium. The Cowboys enter their second season under coach Mike McCarthy and are considered by oddsmakers to be a dark horse Super Bowl contender. Where have we heard that before? Let me see, just about every preseason. They face the Buccaneers who are fresh off their second Super Bowl in franchise history and enter a third year under coach Bruce Arians.

The Dallas Cowboys have nowhere to go but up after a disappointing 6-10 season that had one of the worst defenses in franchise history. The Cowboys attacked defense hard in the draft and free agency, which includes the addition of Micah Parsons, who is a strong candidate for DPOY honors. The Cowboys also bring in defensive coordinator Dan Quinn, which is an instant upgrade over Mike Nolan and should improve that side of the ball. Offensively, the Cowboys are loaded with running back Ezekiel Elliott and possibly the best trio of wide receivers in Amari Cooper, CeeDee Lamb and Michael Gallup. Of course, a lot depends on the health of quarterback Dak Prescott and if that shoulder can hold up for 17 games. On paper, the Cowboys look good and should be favored to win the NFC East. However, this isn't the first time we've said this, so the Cowboys are buyer beware until further notice.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers are coming off their first title since 2002 and return all 22 starters that made it all possible. The Bucs now have a chance to repeat as Super Bowl champs for the first time since the 2004 Patriots, which were also led by some guy named Brady. The Bucs have their quarterback and a handful of offensive weapons in Chris Godwin, Mike Evans, Antonio Brown and Rob Gronkowski. The Buccaneers finished third in offensive points and seventh in yards, numbers they should be able to build on this season. Defensively, Ndamukong Suh will miss the start of the season, but the Buccaneers have a trio of young studs in Vita Vea, Antoine Winfield Jr. and Devin White (a beast). Jason Pierre-Paul has also had no less than seven sacks in each of his last five seasons. It's not easy to repeat as Super Bowl champs, but the Tampa Bay Buccaneers have everything in place to give it a serious run.

The Cowboys are 2-8 ATS in their last 10 road games and 5-11 ATS in their last 16 games overall. The Buccaneers are 4-0 ATS in their last 4 home games and 5-1 ATS in their last 6 games overall. The over is 5-2 in Cowboys last 7 games overall. The over is 23-11 in Buccaneers last 34 games overall. The Cowboys are 0-4 ATS in their last 4 meetings. The underdog is 4-0 ATS in their last 4 meetings.

Everything is pointing towards the Bucs in this match-up, especially the trends and the loss of their best offensive lineman in Zack Martin. The Bucs remain a serious threat to every team they face this season and the fact that Mike Evans, Chris Godwin, and Rob Gronkowski are all still around with Tom Brady throwing to them is a scary thing. We will find out how the Boys new DC has improved the defense.

Nevertheless, the Cowboys are too talented of a team offensively to turn down a two score spread, regardless of where the game is or who they're playing. The Cowboys have also covered 12 of their last 17 games in the underdog role, which includes outright wins in three of their last four games. The defending Super Bowl champs have also lost two of the last four season openers, and three of the last four champs that won, the game was decided by seven or less points. As a fan, I love the Bucs. As good as the Bucs are, the value is with the Cowboys and the points. I hope you're ready Dak because the rush defense of the Bucs will be a tough nut to crack. Dak will have to air it out very often. We're fading the superbowl champs in week one.

Projected Score: Dallas 27, Tampa Bay 26

NY Jets + 6 Over CAROLINA by 2

The New York Jets and the Carolina Panthers meet Sunday in Week 1 NFL action from Bank of America Stadium. The Jets are coming off a 2-14 season in 2020 and finished 2-0-1 in the preseason. As for the Panthers, they went 5-11 last year and notched a 1-2 mark in preseason play.

New York had another disappointing season in 2020, finishing 2-14 and last place once again in the AFC East. The Jets got off to a franchise-worst 0-13 start before finally taking out the LA Rams in Week 15. New York hasn't been to the postseason since 2010, the longest active streak in the league.

The Jets found a bit of success in preseason play, beating the Giants 12-7 and the Packers 23-14 before a 31-31 tie with the Eagles in the final exhibition game. Jets QB James Morgan put up a 13-of-23 line for 158 yards, two TDs and a pick in the tie.

Over on the Panthers' side, they're coming off a lost season as well at 5-11. Carolina started off decently at 3-2, but then hit a five-game losing streak that lasted into November. Carolina would win just two of their final six games and missed the playoffs for the third straight year.

Carolina fell in their first two preseason games, 21-18 to the Colts and 20-3 to the Ravens. The Panthers managed a win in their final outing however, taking out the Steelers 34-9. Carolina quarterback Sam Darnold logged a 19-of-25 line for 162 yards and a pair of scores in the victory.

The Jets are 19-39-4 ATS in their last 62 as a road underdog and 7-18-1 ATS in their last 26 on grass. New York is 2-6 ATS in their last eight road games and 1-4 ATS in their last five in Week 1. As Charles Barkley would say "these are terrible trends".

Meanwhile, the Panthers are 1-5 ATS in their last six as a favorite and 1-5 ATS in their last six home games. Carolina is 0-5 ATS in their last five as a home favorite and the under is 5-2 in the last seven home games. As Charles Barkley would say "these are terrible trends".

This is a great matchup to start out the season, made extra interesting with ex-Jets QB Sam Darnold now playing for the Panthers. Darnold could find some major success versus the Jets defense, which he knows so well. I mean didn't he practice against them for years? Well things don't always work out that simple in the NFL. Not many people are expecting a large improvement with the Jets, but that rookie QB they drafted and then traded Darnold must be better than Darnold. Wouldn't you think the Jets made a wise decision in preseason. In a game with a lot of public money on the Panthers, I'm going with the Wilson and the Jets.

Projected Score: NY Jets 23, Carolina 21

WASHINGTON + 1½ Over San Diego by 6

The Los Angeles Chargers will look to take another step forward under first-year head coach Brandon Staley, hoping to improve on a 7-9 mark in 2020 with a potential first playoff spot since 2018 and maybe even a first division title since 2009. It's mostly returning parts for the Charger offense, led by second-year QB Justin Herbert who lit the NFL on fire last season once he took over the Los Angeles offense. Austin Ekeler and Josh Kelley provide the two headed monster in L.A.'s backfield and Keenan Allen and Mike Williams make up a stellar 1-2 punch at receiver. Defensively, Linval Joseph, Joey Bosa, Kyler Fackrell and rookie Amen Ogbongbemiga sit in front of a loaded Charger secondary featuring pieces like Derwin James, Chris Harris Jr. and rookie Asante Samuel Jr.

The WFT will try to take another step forward under Ron Rivera and potentially make the playoffs in back-to-back years for the first time in almost 30 years. The WFT made their stake at QB by picking up Ryan Fitzpatrick while the WFT have arguably one of the best running back groups in the entire NFL with Antonio Gibson, Jaret Patterson and J.D. McKissic all in the mix. Terry McLaurin and Curtis Samuel lead the receiving group for Washington, while the defense is headlined by players like Montez Sweat, Chase Young, Jon Bostic, Kamren Curl and Landon Collins. A formidable group for sure and the strength of the team.

Los Angeles is 15-7-2 ATS in their last 24 road games and 4-0 ATS in their last 4 games overall while the under is 6-0 in their last 6 September games. Washington is 6-2 ATS in their last 8 games overall and 5-1 ATS in their last 6 games as an underdog while the under is 6-1 in their last 7 home games.

I give the WFT full marks for their defensive prowess under Ron Rivera last season. As I said earlier, the strength of the team and a nasty bunch of dudes. You don't always know what you're going to get with new

WFT QB Ryan Fitzpatrick. It's almost like a thrill ride when you wager on him as your QB. He carries himself out in a way that's out there, style-wise, but when it gets down to the action, he seems to morph into Fitzmagic. Justin Herbert was every bit as good as advertised last season, but he didn't take a snap in preseason. I'm not taking a road team like this week 1, so I'm backing the Fitzpatrick and the WFT defense as my play here.
Projected Score: Washington 23, San Diego 17

NY GIANTS + 3½ Over Denver by 3

The Denver Broncos are coming off a 5-11 season and will enter the third year under coach Vic Fangio, who is on the hot seat. The New York Giants finished 6-10 last season and are in the second season behind coach Joe Judge. The Denver Broncos are still looking for their first playoff appearance since winning the Super Bowl in 2015. The Broncos have a lot of talent on both sides of the ball, as Courtland Sutton, Noah Want and Jerry Jeudy are above-average receivers and Melvin Gordon III has nearly topped 1,000 rushing yards in three of his last five seasons. Defensively, Bradley Chubb is a rising star at linebacker and a secondary that includes Kyle Fuller, Kareem Jackson and Justin Simmons is more than solid. The return of eight-time Pro Bowler Von Miller also doesn't hurt the Broncos defense. The talent is there for the Broncos, it's just a matter of Teddy Bridgewater or Drew Lock settling in at quarterback.

The New York Giants are looking for their first playoff appearance since 2016 and their first playoff win since 2011 when they won the Super Bowl. The Giants went on a spending spree this off season to end the drought, and they brought in guys like Kenny Golladay, Kyle Rudolph, Devontae Booker and Adoree' Jackson. Of course, a lot of the Giants success this season comes down to the improvement of quarterback Daniel Jones and the return of running back Saquon Barkley. If Jones is able to be more accurate with the ball and Barkley is able to return to a Pro Bowl level, the Giants expectations will increase. Until then, the jury is still out on Jones and there's no guarantee Barkley will be able to hit the ground running this season. The Giants have potential to be a surprise team this season, but there's a lot of question marks.

The Broncos are 2-6 ATS in their last 8 games as a favorite and 3-1-2 ATS in their last 6 games in Week 1. The Giants are 6-17-1 ATS in their last 24 home games and 5-11 ATS in their last 16 games in September. The under is 8-2 in Broncos last 10 games as a favorite. The under is 4-0 in Giants last 4 home games. The Broncos are 4-1 ATS in their last 5 meetings.

All the trends point to an easy win for the Broncos. The Giants and the free points at home is intriguing. The Broncos are the better team from top to bottom and enter the season with less questions. Will Daniel Jones take that next step and to expect from Barkley in week 1?. The Broncos have a playoff caliber roster and could push the AFC West if they get consistent production at the quarterback position. I believe Daniel Jones will be much better this year and I expect Barkley to take the field this week. If not, they have capable backups. In a shocker in week one, I'm with the Giants. Take the points with the Giants in what I see as a very close game.

Projected Score: NY Giants 23, Denver 20

THIS WEEKS GRIDIRON GOLD SHEET BEST BETS

	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet
CFB	Michigan St- 17½	UNC - 25	Virginia T - 19	Rice + 9½	Colorado St - 6
NFL	Cowboys + 8½	Jets + 6	WFT + 1½	Giants + 3½	

