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118th RED RIVER RIVALRY WEEK OKLAHOMA vs TEXAS FOOTBALL & TEXAS STATE FAIR UNIQUE FOODS BOOMER SCHOONER or LONGHORNS

NCAA Landscape

Texas football fans, State Fair of Texas fans, the time has officially come. Get ready for the 118th edition of the Red River Showdown at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. The State Fair of Texas says, "More than 100,000 people travel to the State Fair for the AT&T Red River Showdown game between the Texas Longhorns and the Oklahoma Sooners. The game, played in Cotton Bowl Stadium since 1929, is an iconic staple of the State Fair." We had the pleasure of watching 15 straight games between these two great football universities. You gotta be there to believe the pageantry and electric atmosphere. Not to mention the unique state fair food.

We're a little more than a month into the college football season and some teams with massive preseason expectations have already been major disappointments. Here are 10 teams in particular who have fallen well short of what their fan bases and sports bettors were hoping to this point in the season.

Oklahoma

Brent Venables hasn't been able to make much of an impact on Oklahoma's leaky defense. The Sooners were torched for 668 yards in an embarrassing 55-24 loss to TCU. It marked the second straight Big 12 loss for the Sooners after a 3-0 start in non-conference play.

Venables, the longtime defensive coordinator at Clemson, was brought back to Oklahoma after Lincoln Riley's departure to USC. With Riley as coach, OU frequently had explosive offenses but struggled on defense. The Sooners won four Big 12 titles in Riley's five seasons and made three trips to the College Football Playoff. All three of those trips resulted in semifinal losses.

OU fans were hopeful Venables' defensive acumen would be an upgrade over Riley. So far, that clearly has not been the case, with losses to Kansas State and TCU already this year. Venables is playing a lot of young players, but that's no excuse for TCU players continually running wide open for 60-plus yard touchdowns. There were four of those on Saturday.

The Sooners opened the season ranked No. 9 in the country but will likely find themselves unranked ahead of this week's rivalry game vs. Texas. The Big 12 is wide open and it's still early in the year, but these two losses have put the Sooners in a big hole. And it's a place very few expected the Venables era in Norman to begin.

Texas A&M

Texas A&M should be better than this by this point in the Jimbo Fisher era. After losing four games a year ago, the Aggies are now 3-2 through five games in 2022 following a 42-24 loss to Mississippi State in Starkville. In the loss, Fisher's offense again was unimpressive as it turned the ball over four times. There were also issues on defense and special teams. A&M had a field goal blocked and returned for a touchdown and the defense allowed MSU to put up 473 yards of offense.

A&M had an ugly home loss to Appalachian State back in Week 2 and then was able to squeak out victories over Miami and Arkansas. The Arkansas win contained some fortuitous bounces, otherwise A&M's record could be even worse.

With the way Fisher and his staff have recruited, fans have expected the Aggies to compete for national championships. Instead, the offense is still mediocre at best and the Aggies appear destined to finish in the middle of the pack in the SEC yet again.

Wisconsin

Getting blown out by Ohio State in Columbus was one thing, but getting embarrassed at home by Illinois has some alarm bells ringing in Madison.

The Fighting Illini, led by former Wisconsin head coach Bret Bielema, torched the Badgers at Camp Randall Stadium on Saturday, 34-10. Wisconsin finished with a measly two rushing yards and were doomed by three turnovers in the loss.

Wisconsin opened the year ranked No. 18 but is now 2-3 on the year. UW also was upset at home by Washington State in Week 2. After years as the class of the Big Ten West, the Badgers have quietly descended into the middle of the pack in the Big Ten. Wisconsin is now 9-8 in conference play since the beginning of the 2020 season and fans are starting to voice frustration about the job Paul Chryst is doing.

Houston

Many looked at Houston as the favorite to represent the Group of Five conferences in a big bowl game. Instead, the Cougars look like a team that may not even reach a bowl game.

Houston, which went 12-2 last year, dropped to 2-3 with an ugly loss to Tulane. Tulane was down to its third-string quarterback, yet the UH defense could not get the stops it needed in the 27-24 overtime loss. The Cougars are the most-penalized team in the country and Dana Holgorsen has continually voiced displeasure with his team's undisciplined play. It's pretty clear he's not getting through to his players.

Miami

Mario Cristobal was supposed to be the savior for Miami football, but losing 45-31 at home to Middle Tennessee was not part of the plan. With the loss, the Hurricanes dropped to 2-2 on the year. It was

the team's third underwhelming effort in four outings. Miami struggled in a home win over Southern Miss, didn't reach the end zone a single time in a road loss to Texas A&M and then allowed 507 yards in the loss to MTSU.

Miami, which began the year ranked No. 16, had a well-timed bye this week before ACC play begins at home against North Carolina next Saturday.

Notre Dame

Notre Dame was ranked No. 5 to start the year but promptly lost its first two games of the season. Losing on the road to Ohio State was expected, but getting beat 26-21 at home by Marshall was an ugly outcome.

The Fighting Irish have since won games over Cal and North Carolina, but a 2-2 start after losing no more than two regular season games in every season since 2017 is not a great way for the Marcus Freeman era in South Bend to begin.

Michigan State

After a remarkable 2021 season, Michigan State has come crashing back to earth. The Spartans fell to 2-3 with a 27-13 road loss to Maryland. It was MSU's third consecutive double-digit loss. MSU previously got blown out by Washington and Minnesota.

MSU overcame its complete inability to defend the pass last year en route to a surprising 11-win season, but hasn't been able to do so this year. Mel Tucker's group allowed Maryland QB Taulia Tagovailoa to complete 32-of-41 throws in this one. In all, the Terps had 489 yards of offense and completely controlled the game.

With a very challenging upcoming schedule, the Spartans could be in danger of missing a bowl game. After Tucker received a \$95 million contract, that'd be a significant step back for the program.

Louisville

Scott Satterfield is on tenuous ground with Louisville off to an 0-3 start in ACC play. The Cardinals now have losses to Syracuse, Florida State and Boston College so far this season. Saturday's 34-33 loss to BC may have been the worst of the bunch.

BC's offensive line is decimated, leaving the Eagles struggling mightily to put up points. But against Louisville, BC had 454 yards of offense and were able to pull out a win despite three turnovers.

Satterfield is now 20-22 overall and 12-17 in ACC play during his time coaching the Cardinals.

Iowa

After finishing No. 121 in the country in total offense in 2021, Kirk Ferentz's big plan to improve the offense in 2022 was to keep his son Brian in place as offensive coordinator and also give him the title of quarterbacks coach. Unsurprisingly, it hasn't made a difference.

The Hawkeyes entered Week 5 dead last in total offense, averaging 232.5 yards per game. That average will move up a bit after the Hawkeyes had 281 yards in a 27-14 loss to Michigan, but a

significant amount of that yardage came in the second half when Michigan had a three-score lead. Iowa dropped to 3-2 with the loss and could struggle in Big Ten play.

Nebraska

It took just three weeks for Nebraska to finally pull the plug on the Scott Frost era. Frost made changes throughout the offseason in an effort to finally get things going at his alma mater, but he was fired after an ugly 45-42 home loss to Georgia Southern. That loss came on the heels of a loss to Northwestern in Dublin and a home win over FCS North Dakota that was too close for comfort.

In the first game after Frost's firing, the Huskers were blitzed 49-14 at home by Oklahoma. They had a bye last week before beating Indiana 35-21. Many thought this would be the year the Huskers started stringing wins together. Instead, it's been another disastrous season.

Louisiana

Louisiana started the season 2-0 to increase the nation's longest winning streak to 15. Since then, UL lost to both Rice, Louisiana Monroe and South Alabama to drop to 2-3. That start comes after the Ragin' Cajuns went a combined 33-5 from 2019 to 2021, Billy Napier's final three seasons with the program.

Napier has since gone to Florida and his longtime assistant, Michael Desormeaux, has stepped in. But UL lost more than Napier. The Ragin' Cajuns were a veteran group that won multiple Sun Belt titles. While some players graduated, others followed Napier to Gainesville. It looks like Desormeaux has a bit of a rebuild ahead.

Here are Week 5's winners and losers.

Winners

UCLA: The Bruins moved to 5-0 with a 40-32 win over No. 15 Washington that wasn't as close as the score indicated. Washington scored 16 points in the fourth quarter after UCLA had opened up a 24-point lead. QB Dorian Thompson-Robinson was 24-of-33 passing for 315 yards and three TDs while rushing for another and Zach Charbonnet ran for 124 yards and a score. The Pac-12 is wide open and UCLA has a huge win in the race for the conference title game now that the conference has ditched its divisions. The Bruins will undoubtedly be ranked in the AP Top 25 come Sunday.

TCU: The Horned Frogs just steamrolled Oklahoma through the first three quarters in a 55-24 win. Oklahoma's defense couldn't do anything to stop TCU's offense. TCU had a whopping 668 yards of offense and averaged nearly nine yards a carry. Kendre Miller had a 69-yard run and Max Duggan had a 67-yard run as each rushed for two scores. Duggan also threw for 302 yards. The win pushes TCU to 4-0 ahead of a suddenly massive matchup at Kansas.

Wake Forest: The Demon Deacons bounced back from a Week 4 loss to Clemson with a great 31-21 win over previously undefeated Florida State. Sam Hartman was 22-of-34 passing for 234 yards and two scores and Justice Ellison ran for 114 yards. The Wake Forest defense, meanwhile, kept Florida State's run game in check and forced the Seminoles into seven failed third down attempts. Wake Forest was by far the more disciplined team too. Wake had just four penalties to FSU's 11.

Illinois: The Illini got their first win at Wisconsin since 2002 as Bret Bielema beat his former employer 34-10. Illinois forced three Wisconsin turnovers in the game and barely cracked 300 yards of total offense. But QB Tommy DeVito rushed for three touchdowns as the Illini are now 4-1 and eyeing a

bowl game. A bowl looks very possible in what's a very mediocre Big Ten West. There's no real favorite in the division and every team has at least one loss.

Kansas State: The Wildcats rushed for 343 yards in a 37-28 win over Texas Tech on Saturday. Adrian Martinez and Deuce Vaughn each had nice 69-yard runs and Martinez had 75 yards rushing and a TD just 40 seconds into the game. KSU's defense also did what Texas' was unable to do a week ago and stopped Tech on fourth downs. The Red Raiders were just 1-of-3 on fourth downs against the Wildcats. Kansas State is now 4-1 and, more importantly, 2-0 in the conference. This week they're at Iowa State.

Mississippi State: The Bulldogs bounced back from a loss to LSU with an easy 42-24 win over Texas A&M. Will Rodgers threw for 329 yards and three touchdowns and the MSU defense held a struggling A&M offense in check again. MSU scored the 18-point win despite 13 penalties for 138 yards. Those penalties were canceled out by four A&M turnovers. The Aggies fumbled twice and Haynes King threw two interceptions in mop-up duty. At 4-1, Miss St is still a factor in the SEC West and is at home in a very intriguing game against Arkansas.

Maryland: The Terrapins are 4-1 after an easy 27-13 win over Michigan State. Taulia Tagovailoa was 32-of-41 passing for 314 yards and a TD while Antwain Littleton rushed for 120 yards and a score. The defense held Michigan State QB Payton Thorne to just five yards a pass and MSU kickers missed two field goals. Maryland can get to a bowl game with just two more wins that would be back-to-back bowl games for the first time since 2013 and 2014.

Boston College WR Zay Flowers: Flowers had five catches for 151 yards and two scores as Boston College beat Louisville 34-33. Flowers scored on a 57-yard catch in the second quarter and put Boston College on top in the third quarter with a 69-yard TD catch. Boston College QB Phil Jurkovec was 18-of-21 passing for 304 yards and threw three touchdowns as the Eagles got a huge second win of the season. Boston College has dealt with injuries all over the offensive line and those injuries have led to a lot of offensive struggles.

Georgia State: The Panthers got their first win of the season in a 31-14 win over Army on Saturday. Georgia State ran the ball 46 times for 299 yards and three touchdowns. Army cut Georgia State's lead to three at the start of the fourth quarter but the Panthers picked off Cade Ballard and Tucker Gregg ran for a 56-yard TD two plays later to put the game out of reach with less than three minutes to go. Even after that 0-4 start, GSU has enough talent to compete for the Sun Belt title.

Losers

Minnesota: The Golden Gophers' undefeated season is no more. Minnesota lost 20-10 at home to Purdue in an ugly game. Minnesota QB Tanner Morgan threw three interceptions while Purdue QB Aidan O'Connell threw two after missing last week's game with an injury. Neither QB threw for a TD. Minnesota's run game was nonexistent, too. Without Mo Ibrahim available, Minnesota ran 26 times for 47 yards and leading rusher Bryce Williams had 11 carries for 35 yards. With most everyone else struggling in the Big Ten West, Minnesota had a great chance to establish itself as the division frontrunner. Instead, there's no clear favorite.

Kentucky: The Wildcats had two chances to get a tie late against Ole Miss and both of their late drives ended in Will Levis fumbles in Ole Miss' 22-19 win. Levis fumbled while going for a first down on third and short with 2:55 left and then was strip sacked by Jared Ivey with less than a minute to go after Kentucky got in position for a potential game-winning touchdown. Levis is being talked about as a potential early pick in the 2023 NFL draft, but it's hard not to wonder about the validity of that discussion until Levis comes up big in big games.

San Diego State: The Aztecs haven't been known for explosive passing in recent years but the lack of passing attack in 2022 is pretty incredible. SDSU lost 35-13 to Boise State on Friday night as its quarterbacks were a combined 2-of-16 for 33 yards. Braxton Burmeister was 2-of-8 and Liu Aumavae was 0-of-7. Kyle Crum was 0-of-1 for good measure. Burmeister, a Virginia Tech transfer, is 36-of-72 passing for 263 yards and two TDs and three interceptions through five games. Friday's struggles led to the Saturday firing of OC Jeff Hecklinks.

Iowa State: The Cyclones should have beaten Kansas. Instead, the Jayhawks are 5-0 and ISU is 3-2 after KU's 14-11 win. Kicker Jace Gilbert was 1-of-4 on field goal attempts. Two of his three misses hit an upright and his third miss came in the waning seconds and could have sent the game to overtime. Oh, Iowa State also botched an extra point, but the holder was able to run it in for two points. ISU did a phenomenal job of keeping Kansas QB Jalon Daniels in check, as he had just 93 yards passing and nine yards rushing. But ISU was just 5-of-18 on third downs and couldn't take advantage of KU's first offensive struggles of the season.

South Florida: The Bulls' defense got torched by ECU QB Holton Ahlers in a 48-28 loss. Ahlers threw for 465 yards and six touchdowns in the rout as ECU moved to 3-2 and South Florida dropped to 1-4.

Auburn: Things were going great for Auburn as the Tigers took a 17-0 lead on LSU. Then Auburn gave up 21 consecutive points in a 21-17 loss to fall to 3-2. The home Tigers had the ball inside the LSU 10 early in the fourth quarter but called a trick play on second down. Koy Moore threw an ill-advised interception and Auburn never got close to the end zone again.

Virginia: Things are not going well in Charlottesville. Virginia didn't have a chance in a 38-17 loss to Duke as the Blue Devils had a 21-10 halftime lead and pulled away in the second half. Virginia has struggled to run the ball and averaged less than four yards a carry while Brennan Armstrong threw for just 202 yards. After throwing for 4,449 yards in 2021, Armstrong has just 1,050 yards passing through five games in 2022.

BONUS: FRIDAY COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

NEVADA - 3 Over Colorado St by 10

The Colorado State Rams come to Reno to take on the Nevada Wolf Pack in a Mountain West battle on Friday night. It has been a rough go recently for both teams. Each squad has sponged embarrassing losses as of late.

Colorado State didn't play last week but are coming off an ugly 41-10 loss to Sacramento State, their fourth straight loss to open a season where they've yet to cover a spread.

Nevada opened the season with two wins, but three straight losses have landed them on the rocks. They also got last week off but are coming off a 48-20 loss to Air Force. Who used the break well and can come into this game with a little head of steam?

In a word—yes. A 31-point loss to Sacramento State in Fort Collins has to qualify as some form of rock-bottom. They could barely hit the scoreboard in their two other games while also getting the run-around from Middle Tennessee. Not only have they not covered a spread, but they've missed by a combined 82.5 points. Now they have to dust themselves off and head into Reno to face a team that beat them at home last year by 42 points.

The one saving grace for the Rams could be the state of their opponent. And it's possible that the Rams might not be in a spot to take much advantage of whatever problems the Wolf Pack are having. But they could be fortunate in catching Nevada at the worst they've been in a while. A few wins to open the season seemed routine enough, but giving up 55 points in a loss to Incarnate Word at home, getting blanked by Iowa, and then getting hammered by Air Force makes for a pretty rough three weeks. Again, with both teams getting a week off leading into this, maybe they were able to find some answers.

After a decent five-year run as Nevada head coach, Jay Norvell was given the tall task of resuscitating this Colorado Rams program, a team that has been on its back since 2017. And with the Rams taking a step back this season so far, it's clear that Norvell's plans with this squad will be more of a longer-term project. Coming into a team steeped with dysfunction on both sides of the ball, his vision hasn't had a chance to take hold yet. And for them to move forward, they maybe had to take a step backward, and that's what we're seeing weekly.

Anyone who has watched Nevada these last several weeks will not feel comfortable about taking them and laying points to boot. They have no real identity on either side of the ball, and there seems to be a total disconnect teamwide after a half-decent start to the season.

But I don't think they're as far gone as Colorado State and might have enough playmaking at home on the defensive side of the ball to make for another tough outing for the Rams' offense on the road this week. In what might be a slog at times, I see Nevada having enough to take control in the second half and get the win and cover at home. I'll take the Wolf Pack.

Projected Score: Nevada 27, Colorado St 17

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

Oklahoma + 7½ Over Texas by 3

The Longhorns have an overall record of 3-2. This includes a 1-1 mark in Big 12 action. This season, the Longhorns have been favored in 3 games while posting an ATS mark of 3-1. Their average over-under betting line is 48.6 leading to an over-under record of 2-2.

The Longhorns are coming off a 38-20 win over West Virginia. Texas finished with 4 touchdowns through the air, while throwing for 336 yards. On the ground, the team ended with 1 rushing touchdown while averaging 3.4 yards per carry for a total of 110 yards.

Texas QB Hudson Card has a current passer rating of 110.46. So far, he has completed 74 passes for a total of 923 yards. Receiver Xavier Worthy heads into the game, as the team's leader in receiving yards, with a total of 331. The Longhorns have turned to running back Bijan Robinson a total of 88 times for a total of 515 rushing yards.

The Sooners head into this week's game with an overall record of 3-2. However, they are 0-2 in Big 12 action. The Sooners have an ATS mark of 2-3-0 while being favored in every game. Their over-under record sits at 2-2-1 on an average point total betting line of 63.7.

Oklahoma is coming off an embarrassing loss to TCU by a score of 55-24. The Sooners had a yards per completion figure of 12.6 and a total of 176 yards through the air. However, they did not come up with a touchdown pass through the air. The team ended the game with 3 rushing touchdowns, along with a total of 179 yards on the ground.

Quarterback Dillon Gabriel comes in the game having completed 85 of 133 passes for a passer rating of 120.97. But, leading up to the game, he is listed as questionable on the injury report. Check his status as this pick presumes he will play.

Marvin Mims Jr. leads the team's receiving corps with 22 catches for a total of 438 yards. The top option in the run game for the team is Eric Gray, who has carried the ball 66 times for a total of 460 yards.

Through their last 10 matchups, Texas has gone 4-6-0 straight up and 5-5 vs the spread. On average, the team scored 31.6 points while allowing 27.3, leading to a positive scoring differential.

Although Texas has a straight up record of 1-4 in their last 5 road games, they have not held up as well vs the spread going 1-4. The team averaged 24.0 points per game in these games.

Over their last 10 games, the Sooners have covered the spread at a rate of 60.0%. In these games, they posted a straight up mark of 6-4. They maintained a positive scoring differential in these games by averaging 35.9 per game and allowing 26.4. Their last 10 over-under record is 5-4-1.

Heading into the game, the Longhorns are ranked 32nd in points per game and are matchup up against an Oklahoma defense, allowing an average of 25.2 points per contest.

Although the Longhorns have turned to the passing attack at a below average rate this season, they have an opportunity to find success through the air vs an Oklahoma defense allowing teams to complete passes at a rate of 66.42%.

So far, the Texas offense is averaging just 154.4 yards per game on the ground. This production has come on an average of 32.0 rush attempts per game (105th).

This week, the Longhorns will be facing an Oklahoma defense ranked 158th in rush yards allowed per game. This year, they have averaged 173.25 yards per game when facing defenses ranked outside the top 50.

Going into the game, the Longhorns' defensive unit is 43rd in the NCAA in points allowed per game at 21.4.

Heading into the game, the Sooners are ranked 31st in points per game and face off against a Texas defense giving up 21.4 points per game.

The Sooners should have an opportunity to put together some big plays in the passing game, as Texas is a below-average unit in generating pressure. So far, the Longhorns are just 77th in sacks per game.

So far, Oklahoma has relied heavily on the ground game, as they rank 19th in attempts per game, with an average of 42.2. This heavy usage has led to an average of 220.8 rush yards per game, placing them 14th in the NCAA.

This week, the Sooners will be facing a Texas defense that is 48th in rush yards allowed per game. So far, they have averaged 220.0 yards per game when facing top 25 rush defenses.

This is a rivalry of rivalries and 8 of the last 9 meetings have been decided by one score, including 4 of which were decided by 5 points or less. This should be a tight game, so give me Oklahoma and the points here. If you're at the game, stop at the fantastic Texas state fair.

Make sure you check the status of Oklahoma quarterback Dillon Gabriel because we'll need his veteran leadership and accurate passing in this game.

Projected Score: Oklahoma 34, Texas 31

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

ILLINOIS - 3 Over Iowa by 10

The Hawkeyes are coming into the game with a 1-1 record in Big Ten play. Their overall record is 3-2. This season, the Hawkeyes have been favored in 4 games while posting an ATS mark of 2-3-0. Their average over-under betting line is 39.1 leading to an over-under record of 1-4-0.

The Hawkeyes dropped their last game to Michigan by a score of 27-14. Iowa entered action as 10.5 point underdogs at home. In the game, Iowa finished with 1 touchdown through the air, while throwing for 246 yards. On the ground, the team ended with 1 rushing touchdown, while averaging 1.5 yards per carry for a total of 35 yards.

Quarterback Spencer Petras comes in the game having completed 69 of 125 passes for a passer rating of 72.42. Overall, he has a total of 770 passing yards. Wide receiver Arland Bruce IV, has come up with the most production for the team, with a total of 139 receiving yards. The Hawkeyes have turned to running back Kaleb Johnson a total of 41 times for a total of 206 rushing yards.

The Fighting Illini come into the game with a 1-1 in Big Ten play. Overall, they have a mark of 4-1. This season, the Fighting Illini have been favored in 3 games while posting an ATS mark of 4-1-0. Their average over-under betting line is 46.6 leading to an over-under record of 2-3-0.

In their previous game, the Fighting Illini picked up a 34-10 road win over Wisconsin. This was an impressive victory as they were also the 6.5-point underdogs. Illinois ended the game with a total of 167 passing yards on 24 attempts. However, they did not find the endzone. The team ended the game with 4 rushing touchdowns, along with a total of 137 yards on the ground.

So far, quarterback Tommy DeVito has a passer rating of 105.1 while completing 106 of his 152 attempts. So far, the team's most productive wide receiver is Pat Bryant, who has caught 18 passes for a total of 313 yards. The top option in the run game for the team is Chase Brown, who has carried the ball 120 times for a total of 733 yards.

Through their last 10 matchups, Iowa has gone 6-4-0 straight up and 4-5-1 vs the spread. Their last 10 scoring differential sits at +1.2, as they averaged 19.0 points per game while allowing 17.8. The over-under record in these games was 5-5-0.

Through their last 5 road contests, the Hawkeyes' offense has averaged 19.2 points per game while allowing an average of 18.0. Iowa posted an overall record of 3-2-0 while going 2-2-1 ATS.

Illinois has gone 7-3-0 over their last 10 contests, including posting an ATS record of 8-2-0. On average, the team scored 26.5 points while allowing 13.3, leading to a positive scoring differential.

In their last 5 home games, Illinois has averaged 30.8 points per game while allowing 8.6. The team's record in this stretch was 4-1-0 while going 4-1-0.

Heading into this week's matchup, the Hawkeyes need to pick things up on offense as they are just 122nd in the NCAA in points scored. One area in need of improvement is their ability to move the chains on 3rd downs.

One thing working against Iowa is the fact that they struggle to move the ball in the passing game and are facing a defense that is just outside the top 25 in sacks per game.

So far, the Iowa offense is averaging just 88.2 yards per game on the ground. This production has come on an average of 31.6 rush attempts per game (110th). This week, the Hawkeyes will be facing an Illinois defense that is ranked 4th in rush yards allowed per game. So far, they are averaging 69.75 yards per game when facing top 25 rush defenses.

Heading into this week's matchup, the Fighting Illini will need to be on top of their game, as so far they are a below average scoring offense and have a tough matchup against Iowa.

Offensively, Illinois will need to do a better job picking up first downs in this week matchup, as not only are a below-average team in 3rd down conversion percentage and are facing one of the top scoring defenses in the NCAA.

Early on, Illinois is averaging 43.8 rush attempts per game, good for 29th in the country. In terms of production, they are 13th in yards per game at 195.6. This week, the Fighting Illini will be facing an Iowa defense that is ranked 28th in rush yards allowed per game. So far, they have not faced a defense ranked inside the top 50 rush defense.

The Illinois Fighting Illini will look to build on their current three-game win streak, sitting at 4-1 on the year after a very impressive 34-10 road win over Wisconsin last time out. Tommy DeVito's thrown for 1,121 yards, 9 touchdowns and a pair of interceptions on 69.9% passing

Illinois is 7-0-1 ATS in their last 8 games against a team with a winning record and 7-1 ATS in their last 8 games overall.

The Iowa Hawkeyes will look to rebound from a 27-14 loss to Michigan, falling to 3-2 on the year in the process. Spencer Petras has thrown for 770 yards, 2 touchdowns and 2 interceptions on 55.2% passing.

That's the difference I'm leaning towards. DeVito 70% passer, Petras 55% passer. Illini off a great win, Iowa off a bruising loss. Give me the hot Illini at home -3.

Projected Score: Illinois 23, Iowa 13

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

Kansas St - 2 Over IOWA ST by 10

The Wildcats come into the game with an overall record of 4-1. This strong play includes going 2-0 in Big 12 action. This season, the Wildcats have been favored in 4 games while posting an ATS mark of 4-1-0. Their average over-under betting line is 52.4 leading to an over-under record of 2-3-0.

In their last game, the Wildcats are coming off a 37-28 win over Texas Tech. In addition, they added an ATS win as they were 7.5 favorites on the spread. The team finished the game throwing for 1 touchdown pass. Overall, the Wildcats had 116 passing yards on a completion percentage of 63.2%. The team ended the game with 3 rushing touchdowns, along with a total of 343 yards on the ground.

Quarterback Adrian Martinez comes in the game having completed 74 of 119 passes for a passer rating of 85.21. Overall, he has a total of 654 passing yards. So far, the team's most productive wide receiver is Malik Knowles, who has caught 15 passes for a total of 157 yards. The Wildcats have turned to running back Deuce Vaughn a total of 110 times for a total of 638 rushing yards.

The Cyclones come into the game with an overall record of 3-2. This includes going 0-2 in Big 12 action. This season, the Cyclones have been favored in 3 games while posting an ATS mark of 2-2-0. Their average over-under betting line is 37.9 leading to an over-under record of 2-2-0.

Iowa State is coming off a 3-point loss to Kansas by a score of 14-11. The Cyclones entered the game as 3.5-point home underdogs, making this an ATS win. The team finished the game throwing for 1 touchdown pass. Overall, the Cyclones had 287 passing yards on a completion percentage of 62.5%. In the rushing game, the Cyclones did not find the endzone while finishing with a total of 16 yards on the ground.

Heading into the matchup, Hunter Dekkers has an overall passer rating of 95.03 on a total of 1316 yards. Thus far, he has thrown for 11 touchdowns and 6 interceptions. Through the air, the team will be looking for a big game from leading receiver Xavier Hutchinson. On the season, he has caught 49 for 504 yards. In the run game, Jirehl Brock has accumulated 361 on 65 attempts to lead the team.

Kansas State have gone 7-3-0 over their last 10 contests, including posting an ATS record 7-3-0. The team's average scoring differential was 12.0, as they averaged 30.0 points per game.

Defensively, they allowed an average of 18.0. Their last 10 over-under record is 4-6-0. Across their 5 previous road games, Kansas State has an ATS mark of 3-2-0. Their straight-up record in these matchups was 3-2-0 while averaging 27.6 points per game.

Through their last 10 matchups, Iowa State, has gone 5-5-0 straight up and 4-6-0 vs the spread. The team's average scoring differential was 9.8, as they averaged 28.0 points per game.

Defensively, they allowed an average of 18.2. Their last 10 over-under record is 4-6-0. In their last 5 games at home, the Cyclones have a straight-up record of 3-2-0 while going 2-3-0 vs the spread. The team's offense averaged 34.0 points per game in these contests.

Heading into this week's matchup, the Wildcats will look to improve their offensive output, as they are ranked just 60th in the NCAA in points scored. However, this week they have a tough matchup against an Iowa State defense, giving up just 14.4 points per game and allowing teams to convert 3rd downs at a rate of just 28%. This presents a problem for the Wildcats' offense, as they are one of the worst performing team's on 3rd down this season.

Although the Wildcats have turned to the passing attack at a below-average rate this season, they have an opportunity to find success through the air vs an Iowa State defense allowing teams to complete passes at a rate of 58.98%.

So far, Kansas State has relied heavily on the ground game, as they rank 14th in attempts per game, with an average of 43.6. This heavy usage has led to an average of 267.2 rush yards per game,

placing them 4th in the NCAA. Something will have to give in this matchup, as Iowa State is one of the top rush defenses in college football.

Heading into this week's matchup, the Cyclones will look to improve their offensive output, as they are ranked just 91st in the NCAA in points scored. This week, they have a matchup against a Kansas State defense, giving up 18.2 points per game.

However, their unit has done a good job getting off the field on 3rd downs, allowing opponents to convert at a rate of just 27.0%. This presents a problem for the Cyclones' offense, as they are one of the worst performing teams on 3rd down this season.

So far, the Iowa State offense is averaging just 110.0 yards per game on the ground. This production has come on an average of 33.4 rush attempts per game (94th). But they could be in line for a good game as Kansas State is a below-average defensive unit. This year, the team is averaging 169.5 yards per game when facing defenses ranked outside the top 50.

I'm not ready to give up on the Iowa State Cyclones just yet, as they usually show up at home and their defense is still arguably the best in the conference. However, Iowa State still has issues offensively and the Kansas State Wildcats have far and away been the more impressive team. Not only did Kansas State beat Oklahoma a couple of weeks ago, but it has the fourth best rushing attack in the country, and that's how you win on the road. We're not being asked to lay anything crazy. Give me Kansas State - 2½k.

Projected Score: Kansas St 27, Iowa St. 17

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

Clemson - 20½ Over BOSTON COLLEGE by 31

So far, the Tigers have a strong overall record (5-0), and in the Atlantic Coast play, going 3-0. This season, the Tigers have an ATS mark of 2-2-0 while being favored in every game. Their over-under record sits at 3-1-0 on an average point total betting line of 41.8.

The Tigers are coming off a 30-20 win over NC State. In addition, they added an ATS win as they were 6.5 favorites on the spread. In the game, Clemson finished with 1 touchdown through the air while throwing for 209 yards. The team ended the game with 2 rushing touchdowns, along with a total of 145 yards on the ground.

Quarterback DJ Uiagalelei comes in the game having completed 104 of 159 passes for a passer rating of 109.58. Overall, he has a total of 1242 passing yards. So far, the team's most productive wide receiver is Beaux Collins, who has caught 14 passes for a total of 232 yards. The Tigers have turned to running back Will Shipley a total of 66 times for a total of 413 rushing yards.

The Eagles head into this week's game with an overall record of 2-3. However, they are 1-2 in Atlantic Coast action. This season, the Eagles have been favored in 1 game while posting an ATS mark of 1-3-0. Their average over-under betting line is 38.2 leading to an over-under record of 2-2-0.

In their previous game, the Eagles picked up a 34-33 road win over Louisville. This was an impressive victory as they were also the 13.5-point underdogs. In the win, Boston College completed 85.7% of their 21 passes, 3 of which resulted in touchdowns. On the ground, the team ended with 1 rushing touchdown while averaging 4.0 yards per carry for a total of 144 yards.

So far, quarterback Phil Jurkovec has a passer rating of 92.83 while completing 96 of his 150 attempts. So far, the team's most productive wide receiver is Zay Flowers, who has caught 34 passes for a total of 481 yards. The top option in the run game for the team is Pat Garwo III, who has carried the ball 62 times for a total of 225 yards.

Against the spread, Clemson have gone 6-4-0 in their last 10 games. Over this same period, their straight-up record is 10-0-0. They maintained a positive scoring differential in these games by averaging 37.7 per game and allowing 17.8. Their last 10 over-under record is 5-4-1.

Clemson has played well in their previous 5 road games, going 5-0-0 straight up. In this stretch, they averaged 34.4 points per game while allowing 18.4. The team also performed well vs the spread at 4-1-0.

Through their last 10 matchups, Boston College has gone 4-6-0 straight up and 3-7-0 vs the spread. Their last 10 scoring differential sits at -5.0, as they averaged 21.4 points per game while allowing 26.4 points. The over-under record in these games was 4-6-0.

In their last 5 games at home, the Eagles have a straight up record of 2-3-0 while going 1-4-0 vs the spread. The team's offense averaged 25.2 points per game in these contests.

So far, the Tigers have been one of college football's top offenses, averaging 41.0 points per game on offense, which is good for 15th most in college football. The Tigers head into this week's matchup against a Boston College defense, allowing 28.6 points per game. Clemson must continue to move the chains with a high rate of success, as they are among the NCAA leaders in converting on 3rd downs.

Although the Tigers have turned to the passing attack at a below-average rate this season, they have an opportunity to find success through the air vs a Boston College defense allowing teams to complete passes at a rate of 61.18%.

So far, the Clemson offense is averaging 175.8 yards per game on the ground. This production has come on an average of 38.0 rush attempts per game (54th). This week, the Tigers could be in line for a big game on the ground, as Boston College is 119th in rush yards allowed per game. This year, they have averaged 183.5 yards per game when facing defenses ranked outside the top 50.

Heading into this week's matchup, the Eagles will look to improve their offensive output, as they are ranked just 103rd in the NCAA in points scored. This week, they are matched up against a Clemson defense that is allowing an average of 21.4 points per game.

One aspect of the game that could benefit a BC offense that struggles to generate big plays in the passing attack is that they are facing off a Clemson defense that has yet to generate a lot of pressure on opposing quarterbacks. So far, the Tigers are just 74th in sacks per game.

Don't look for Boston College to generate much offense on the ground, as they are averaging just 76.6 yards per game in the rushing attack. This production has come on an average of 31.4 rush attempts per game (113th). In addition, Clemson is the top-ranked defense against the run this year.

The Tigers put up an impressive effort against NC State last week as Tiger QB DJ Uiagalelei had one of his best games. As for Boston College, they powered out a gutsy win vs Louisville, despite being overpowered in a lot of categories. The Eagles committed 13 penalties and three turnovers during the game.

Eagles banged up offensive line is in deep trouble against this Tigers front seven. If the Tigers avoid a letdown after their victory over NC St, then Clemson should be in control.

Projected Score: Clemson 41, Boston College 10

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

USC - 13½ Over Washington St by 3

The Cougars come into the game with a 1-1 in Pac-12 play. Overall, they have a mark of 4-1. This season, the Cougars have been favored in 3 game while posting an ATS mark of 4-1-0. Their average over-under betting line is 54.8 leading to an over-under record of 1-4-0.

In their last game, the Cougars are coming off a 28-9 win over California. In addition, they added an ATS win as they were 4.0 favorites on the spread. The team finished the game throwing for 3 touchdown passes. Overall, the Cougars had 343 passing yards on a completion percentage of 67.5%. On the ground, the team ended with 1 rushing touchdown while averaging 2.9 yards per carry for a total of 72 yards.

Heading into the matchup, Cameron Ward has an overall passer rating of 98.18 on a total of 1445 yards. Thus far, he has thrown for 13 touchdowns and 7 interceptions. Receiver Donovan Ollie heads into the game, as the team's leader in receiving yards, with a total of 298. The top option in the run game for the team is Nakia Watson, who has carried the ball 62 times for a total of 312 yards.

This season, the Trojans hope to continue playing well against Pac-12 teams, as they are 3-0. Their overall record is 5-0. This season, the Trojans have an ATS mark of 3-2-0 while being favored in every game. Their over-under record sits at 3-2-0 on an average point total betting line of 65.9.

In their previous game, USC knocked off Arizona State by a score of 42-25. However, despite the road win, the Trojans did not cover the spread, as they were 24.5-point favorites. The team finished the game throwing for 3 touchdown passes. Overall, the Trojans had 348 passing yards on a completion percentage of 73.0%. The team ended the game with 3 rushing touchdowns, along with a total of 137 yards on the ground.

Quarterback Caleb Williams comes in the game having completed 107 of 159 passes for a passer rating of 117.44. So far, the team's most productive wide receiver is Jordan Addison, who has caught 29 passes for a total of 442 yards. The Cougars have turned to running back Travis Dye a total of 62 times for a total of 422 rushing yards.

Washington State have gone 7-3-0 over their last 10 contests, including posting an ATS record 7-3-0. They maintained a positive scoring differential in these games by averaging 31.1 per game and allowing 20.5. Their last 10 over-under record is 5-5-0.

In their last 5 games away from home, the Cougars have a straight-up record of 3-2-0 while going 3-2-0 vs the spread. The team's offense averaged 27.2 points per game in these contests.

Through their last 10 matchups, USC has gone 6-4-0 straight up and 4-6-0 vs the spread. They maintained a positive scoring differential in these games by averaging 34.6 per game and allowing 28.4. Their last 10 over-under record is 6-4-0.

Through their last 5 home contests, the Trojans' offense has averaged 43.4 points per game while allowing an average of 30.6. USC posted an overall record of 3-2-0 while going 3-2-0 ATS.

Heading into this week's matchup, the Cougars will look to improve their offensive output, as they are ranked just 73rd in the NCAA in points scored. However, they have drawn a tough matchup against a USC defense that is allowing an average of 19.6 points per game.

So far, the Washington State offense is averaging just 91.8 yards per game on the ground. This production has come on an average of 25.0 rush attempts per game (130th). However, one area that Washington State can attack is the USC rush defense, as they are ranked 94th in rush yards allowed per game. This year, Washington State has averaged 111.33 yards per game when facing defenses ranked outside the top 50.

So far, the Trojans are averaging 42.2 points per game on offense, which is good for 10th most in college football. One area of concern for the Trojans will be their performance on 3rd down, as their conversion rate currently sits at just 40.0%. They are facing off against a Washington State defense that is 25th in points allowed but has allowed opponents to convert on 3rd down at a rate higher than the NCAA average in just 1 of their games. One reason for the Cougars' success is their ability to get after the quarterback, ranking 13th in sacks per game.

This season, the run game has not been a big part of the USC offense, as they are averaging just 33.8 attempts per game. With their limited opportunities, they have an average of 183.8 yards per contest, good for 43rd in the NCAA. This week, the Trojans will be facing a Washington State defense that is 25th in rush yards allowed per game. So far, they have averaged 177.0 yards per game when facing top 25 rush defenses.

The Washington State Cougars put up a nice game against Cal last week, posting 415 yards (343 passing), 21 first downs and 6.4 yards per play.

As for USC, they kept it rolling with another solid effort in the Arizona State win. The Trojans posted 485 yards of offense, 7.2 yards per play and 29 first downs.

It's a tough matchup and always dangerous going against such a good coach, but if Washington State is on their average game here, they have the weapons to make this a very competitive game.

As mentioned earlier, Washington State is 7-3 over their last 10, including posting an ATS record 7-3. Look for the Cougars to claw their way to another point spread cover.

Projected Score: USC 34, Washington St. 31

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NFL Landscape

NFL Winners and Losers:

Buffalo Bills

One weird stat with the Buffalo Bills the past couple seasons was their record in close games. Over the past two seasons they were 0-7 in games decided by seven points or less, including playoffs.

It made the Bills look like frontrunners. They're fine if they get up early and can dominate a team, but could they win if there was adversity?

The Bills had an answer to that question Sunday. Early in the first half against the Baltimore Ravens, everything went wrong. Buffalo turned it over on two of its first three possessions. The Bills made sloppy mistakes in the rain. They had 68 yards on their first five possessions. The Ravens led 20-3.

Buffalo overcame it. The Bills got their first win after trailing by 17 or more points since Week 3 of the 2011 season, coming back to beat the Ravens 23-20 in a game that wasn't pretty but meaningful for the Bills.

Josh Allen didn't have his best game but he made the plays that the Bills needed, especially on the final drive. A 20-yard pass to Dawson Knox on third-and-2 was huge. So was a roughing the passer penalty on the Ravens on that drive. Tyler Bass kicked a FG goal as time expired.

The Ravens had a questionable decision before that final Bills drive, but Allen and the Bills' offense probably factored into it. Ravens head coach John Harbaugh decided to go for it on fourth-and-goal at the 2-yard line instead of kicking a field goal and taking a lead. Lamar Jackson was pressured and threw a desperate interception into the end zone. The Bills' final drive would have played out differently if the Ravens took the field goal with Justin Tucker. The Ravens probably didn't want to settle for a field goal, knowing Allen had the capability of leading a touchdown drive right afterward.

The Bills needed a win. They didn't want to fall to 2-2 with the weight of being preseason Super Bowl favorites weighing on them. Also, they needed a close win like Sunday. They faced a big hole and dug themselves out of it.

The Bills are going to face close games, for the rest of this season and in the playoffs. It was an ugly game with a big deficit, and the Bills won it. Now they go forward with the confidence they can win in that situation.

Green Bay Packers

Yet, it's OK to feel cold after they struggled to put away a New England Patriots team that had to turn to rookie QB Bailey Zappe, their third-string option.

Green Bay won on the final play of overtime, 27-24. Mason Crosby kicked a short field goal after a nice drive by Aaron Rodgers. The Packers improved to 3-1 but like last week, when they couldn't put away the Buccaneers and had to hang on at the end, you expect a little more from a team expected to contend for a Super Bowl. It wasn't the most impressive performance.

Las Vegas Raiders

Finally, McDaniels got his first NFL head coaching win since 2010. The Raiders won 32-23, and there are no more teams without a win or at least a tie this NFL season (the Houston Texans are the lone winless team at 0-3-1). The Raiders got a big 144-yard game from Josh Jacobs on the ground and 101 receiver yards from Davante Adams.

It wasn't an entirely lost afternoon for the Broncos. Denver has been searching for its offense and it finally showed up Sunday. Russell Wilson looked good with 237 passing yards, two passing touchdowns and another one rushing. Denver might have taken on a big loss if running back Javonte Williams' knee injury is serious, but at least there were signs of life from the offense.

NY Jets & Zach Wilson

Wilson wasn't great for the New York Jets, but he was good enough. The Jets got a huge comeback 24-20 win over the Pittsburgh Steelers, with Wilson completing big passes on the deciding drive. Breece Hall scored on a 1-yard run in the final seconds to lift the Jets to a win.

Wilson, playing his first game this season after hurting his knee in the preseason, threw for 252 yards and a touchdown. He also caught a TD on a trick play. He threw two interceptions, so he still has work to do. But it was a positive first step in a big second season for him.

Atlanta Falcons & Arthur Smith

Head coach Arthur Smith continues to get the most out of an Atlanta roster that didn't get a lot of respect before the season started.

The Falcons are 2-2 after a close win over the Cleveland Browns. The Falcons got a late field goal and picked off Jacoby Brissett to seal the 23-20 win. Atlanta ran the ball very well, gaining 202 yards on the ground. That was the difference.

The Falcons have two heartbreaking losses (the Saints came back on them in the final minute and their own huge comeback over the Rams came short) to go with the two wins. The Falcons are a lot better than anyone predicted, and that's a reflection on their coach.

Philadelphia Eagles' Defense

Haason Reddick was a big signing for the Eagles this offseason. The linebacker has been worth the \$15 million per year Philadelphia is paying.

Reddick had two sacks, including the play that sealed the Eagles' fourth straight win to start the season. After the Eagles didn't get a fourth-down conversion, the Jacksonville Jaguars had a chance to tie trailing 29-21. But Reddick stripped QB Trevor Lawrence, the Eagles recovered and ran out the clock after that.

The Eagles started Sunday's game in a hole. They fell behind 14-0, with seven of those points coming off a pick-six. The defense mostly held after that, allowing the offense to get a lead. When the Eagles needed a big play to clinch the win, Reddick came through.

Everything is clicking for the Eagles early in the season, and they won after a bad start Sunday. They're proving their mettle early in the season.

Los Angeles Chargers & Justin Herbert:

Chargers lost two straight and faced a tricky game at the Houston Texans. Going 1-3 to start the season would have been a tough start after a lot of preseason hype.

Herbert was playing hurt, after fracturing rib cartilage in Week 2. Franchise quarterbacks have to be their best when a win is needed most, and Herbert rose to the occasion.

Herbert threw for 340 yards and two touchdowns in a 34-24 win. When it looked like the Chargers were blowing a big lead, Herbert hit Austin Ekeler for a 21-yard gain on fourth-and-2 and later in the drive hit Ekeler for the running back's third touchdown of the game. That turned away the Texans' comeback.

The Chargers still have a lot to overcome including some enormous injuries. But they have Herbert, and that is enough to give them hope.

Justin Jefferson:

After a couple of quiet games, Jefferson was back. Jefferson, often matched up against New Orleans Saints Pro Bowl corner Marshon Lattimore, had a huge game in the Minnesota Vikings' exciting 28-25 win in London. Jefferson had 147 yards on 10 catches and had the biggest play of the game. He beat Lattimore for 39 yards to set up the Vikings' go-ahead FG.

The Vikings held on when Wil Lutz's 61-yard field-goal attempt in the final seconds double-dinked off the upright and then the crossbar.

LOSERS

Baker Mayfield:

Sunday night Sam Darnold was trending on twitter. That's not great for Mayfield, who beat out Darnold in preseason to be the Carolina Panthers' starting QB. Darnold is out with injury and, shockingly, Panthers fans might be hoping he returns soon and retakes the team's QB spot.

Mayfield had another bad day as the Panthers lost 26-16 to the Arizona Cardinals. Mayfield hasn't played well all season and didn't get much against an Arizona defense that hasn't been very good this year. Mayfield had 197 yards on 36 attempts in the loss.

Darnold probably isn't the answer but it's looking like Mayfield isn't either. It might be a long season in Carolina, with an uncertain offseason to follow.

Frank Reich:

The Indianapolis Colts weren't supposed to be bad this season. They're 1-2-1 with those two losses and a tie in the division. That's a big hole to dig out of. The Colts lost 24-17 Sunday to the Tennessee Titans, looking flat from the outset in a defeat that gives back any gains they made with a win over the Kansas City Chiefs last week.

Reich hasn't had the answers. The Colts haven't won a playoff game with him as head coach since the 2018 season and it's a very disappointing start to this year after a really bad end to last season. Reich might not be under any extreme pressure yet, but at some point, he has to feel heat for the Colts' repeated failures.

The Colts were sloppy Sunday, whether it was a Jonathan Taylor fumble on a key third-and-1 or Matt Ryan taking a key third-down sack in the fourth quarter that led to a missed field goal. Indianapolis' season is slipping away fast, and Reich better come up with answers.

Carson Wentz:

The Cowboys have won all three of Rush's starts, a surprising development after Dak Prescott's thumb injury. Rush outplayed Wentz on Sunday in the Cowboys' 25-10 win and it wasn't close. The Cowboys have a fierce defense that Washington doesn't have, and that's one reason Wentz struggled. But he has practically been the same Wentz he has been since his brief flash of brilliance with the Eagles. He makes too many mistakes.

The Cowboys are 3-1 with a backup quarterback leading the way. The Commanders are 1-3 and can't be thrilled about the direction of their season or their future with Wentz.

Detroit Lions:

The Lions came into this season with positive buzz and high hopes. They were up against it Sunday, with several key pieces of their offense, notably Amon-Ra St. Brown and D'Andre Swift, out due to injury. Still, you can't lose at home to the Seattle Seahawks.

The Lions are 1-3 after a miserable 48-45 loss, a week after blowing a game in the final minute to the Vikings. The Lions looked bad in the first half and then Jared Goff started the second half with a terrible interception that was returned for a touchdown that put Seattle up 31-15.

The Lions got back in the game after that a couple times, but the defense let them down. The final failure came with a little more than two minutes left and Seattle leading 41-38. On a third-and-5, Rashaad Penny broke a 41-yard touchdown run. That's inexcusable.

The Lions have done some good things this season, and there are reasons to hope they're improving. But they're also 1-3 and nobody wants to hear about empty promise anymore.

Chicago Bears

It's tough to watch the Bears when they have the ball. They had a chance to win at the New York Giants on Sunday but couldn't get much going on offense. Justin Fields completed 11 passes, which

is actually a lot for him this season, and they didn't score a touchdown in a 20-12 loss. The Bears got 149 on the ground and 174 passing on those rare Fields completions.

But it wasn't close to enough. They don't trust the offensive cast around Fields, they don't trust Fields or both, because the conservative approach looks like something from 40 or more years ago. Hello, it's 2022! They need to open things up or keep losing winnable games.

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

LA Chargers - 3 Over CLEVELAND by 11

The Los Angeles Chargers take on the Cleveland Browns in a battle of 2-2 AFC teams. The Chargers were able to even their record at .500 last week in a 34-24 win over the Texans on the road. They take to the road again this week to take on a Browns team that returns home after dropping a tough 23-20 game to the Falcons last week.

Both teams are already dealing with less-than-ideal scenarios. This wasn't what the Browns had in mind this season, with QB Jacoby Brissett at the helm. While being a mobile quarterback who adds another ground angle to go along with Nick Chubb and Kareem Hunt, the aerial game is going to suffer more weeks than not. Brissett can work behind a strong line and employ a run game that is the envy of most teams, but that one-dimensional approach could suffer against a Chargers' defense high on talent, especially in the secondary. And while one shouldn't expect the Cleveland defense to melt without Myles Garrett, this is a spot where he really would have come in handy.

With Joey Bosa already missing time, a banged-up Keenan Allen and Justin Herbert, and an offensive line that has already taken some bad hits, it's been hard for the Chargers to find their footing. We started to see a more characteristic showing last week, albeit against an exploitable Houston "D." But seeing Herbert throw for 340 yards, with Austin Ekeler getting three TDs, and Mike Williams having a big day receiving is what we're going to need to see more of if the Chargers want to break from the pack of conference also-rans. But even in victory, we saw a lot of issues. One is how the Chargers' offense needs to be a better job in the second half or just when holding leads in general. After going up 21-0 on the Texans, they had to withstand a rally, with the Texans making it 27-24 with a lot of time left in the 4th quarter.

Something about the Browns tends to make people low-rate them. That's especially the case when the other team has a bright young QB, wide receivers with all-pro credentials, and a versatile running back, along with a "D" loaded with talent and big names. Brissett isn't getting anyone's blood pumping, nor is the pedestrian aerial corps of Amari Cooper, Donovan Peoples-Jones, and David Njoku. But with Brissett's legs, the power-running of Chubb, and the key contributions of Hunt, it's an offense that can do damage while not really providing a ton of highlights. And getting this at home against a Chargers team on its second road-spot in a row doesn't hurt either.

Besides, the game before last, when the Browns came on strong to beat the Steelers convincingly, they've exclusively been in really close games. It's hardly enough to warrant a pattern, but with their style of play, it makes sense that they'd be in a lot of close ones, something that would likely get their backers a cover if that repeated it this week. In games against the Panthers, Falcons, and Jets, it was back and forth, with little to separate the teams. One might say the Chargers are a cut above those teams, and that's true, but the Browns' ability to hang in there, combined with the Bolts seemingly always playing down to the level of their opponent, could give way to a tightly-contested game.

Granted, the Chargers looked good on paper to open the season, but maybe the recipe for success is an easily-disrupted one. Bosa being gone really makes that defensive front less-fierce. Ekeler scoring three times speaks loudest, but the Chargers still haven't been able to really establish a run-game this season. And with the Browns being a little better against the pass, maybe this isn't such a bad matchup for them. Maybe a Chargers' front that has been compromised will allow the Cleveland defense to wreak some havoc, even without Garrett.

They may not have hit the ground running, back-to-back road spots aren't ideal, and the Browns' defense aren't pushovers, but of all the aspects in this game, it's the Chargers' offense that is most poised for a spike in form. Presumably, Herbert should stand to gain from putting more time between himself and that rib injury. That line took some blows, but if Allen is back in there, they're at pretty much full strength in the skill positions. The Cleveland defense has seen the likes of Mayfield, Flacco, Trubisky, and Mariota behind center this season so far. Herbert might be a different bowl of wax altogether.

The Chargers' defense can roll with the punches of the Cleveland run-game enough while allowing the offense to do its thing—getting out of town with the win and the cover in week five.

Projected Score: LA Chargers 31, Cleveland 20

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

BUFFALO - 14 Over Pittsburgh by 7

The Buffalo Bills bounced back from their first loss of the season with a 23-20 victory over Baltimore last week. Playing in rainy conditions, the Bills fell behind 20-3 in the 1st half and appeared to be destined for a 2nd straight loss. However, the Bills' defense came alive in the 2nd half, and QB Josh Allen put the offense on his back to rally to a 23-20 victory, which kept Buffalo tied at 3-1 SU with Miami for the top spot in the AFC East. Now, Buffalo returns home for the first time since week 2 when they host the Pittsburgh Steelers at Highmark Stadium.

The visiting Steelers dropped their 3rd straight game last week to the lowly New York Jets, marking the 3rd time in Mike Tomlin's tenure that the Steelers started 1-3 SU. In each prior instance, Pittsburgh did not make the playoffs, and I'm sure the playoffs are the last thing Pittsburgh fans are worried about. The offense has been outright bad through the first four games averaging just 18.5 points per game. However, there was a glimmer of hope in last week's loss to the Jets when Head Coach Mike Tomlin benched QB Mitch Trubisky for Kenny Pickett and provided Steelers fans with their first glimmer of hope for the 2022 season.

Last week, Head Coach Mike Tomlin benched starting quarterback Mitch Trubisky after yet another ugly performance which has been a staple of Trubisky anywhere he has started. With perceived limited potential and another shaky start where Trubisky hit just 7 of 13 passing for 84 yards with one interception, Tomlin made the tough decision to bench the starter for 2022 first-round draft selection. Kenny Pickett. Pickett's debut was filled with excitement and disappointment. The rookie hit 10 of 13 passes and scored two rushing touchdowns at the goal line. However, all three incomplete passes were the result of interceptions which essentially led to the Steelers' 24-20 demise against the lowly New York Jets.

Obviously, Tomlin has been tasked with the difficult challenge of finding a new quarterback in the wake of Ben Roethlisberger's retirement. Following last week's changing of the guard, Tomlin was undecided about who would start this week's road trip against Buffalo against the number 1 offense in the NFL. However, on Tuesday, Tomlin officially ended speculation and announced that Pickett would

be the starter this week against Buffalo. In my personal opinion, this decision was obvious as Pickett displayed the better ability to control this offense, and it will be exciting to see the youngster get his 1st start this week.

The Buffalo Bills defense has been hit early with injury issues in the secondary which was a major concern in last week's contest against the Baltimore Ravens. Fortunately, the Bills were able to survive unfavorable weather conditions against Lamar Jackson, but that has not exactly relieved the concerns surrounding the injuries to Micah Hyde, Xavier Rhodes, Christian Benford, and Tre'Davious White. More importantly, safety Jordan Poyer suffered a foot injury against the Ravens, which will jeopardize his availability on Sunday. On the offensive side of the football, WR Jamison Crowder suffered a broken ankle that will cause him to miss several weeks, and Isaiah McKenzie is in the concussion protocol. Needless to say, there were several concerns mounting in Buffalo on the injury front.

Despite the fact QB Josh Allen is playing at an extremely high level. Pickett indeed gets the start as expected. Yes, this could be a total blowout or an exciting game with Pickett starting his first game against the Bills. The 14-point spread is a bit wide here, especially for a banged-up defense in Buffalo. Buffalo is 4-1-1 ATS in the last six games as a favorite, but Pittsburgh is 11-3 SU and 11-3 ATS in the last 14 meetings against Buffalo.

Projected Score: Buffalo 27, Pittsburgh 20

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

TENNESSEE - 2 Over WASHINGTON by 13

After a disconcerting 0-2 start, last season's top AFC seed Tennessee has righted the ship with two straight wins, including a 24-17 win over the Colts on the road last week. They now look for their third win in a row, again on the road against the Commanders. After a week one win, the Commanders have struggled mightily in dropping their last three. Last week, they lost to the Cowboys, 25-10.

Being that the Titans are a team that often times wins ugly, perhaps nit-picking their games misses the point. Through four games, they were beaten by the lowly Giants and slayed by Buffalo before beating the Raiders and Colts in one-score games. Something seems discernibly off. A defense that was never that stout and relied on a ton of major playmaking ability hasn't been getting it this year. A balanced offense with a lot of weapons has been diminished. Ryan Tannehill has lost some shine over the past few seasons. But then again, maybe some of these things were to be forecasted, and a slow start to the season can be misleading.

First of all, they're 2-2, so not everything is in shambles. They can be 3-2 and back in the divisional driver's seat with a win over the slipping Commanders, so let's not get carried away. With Derrick Henry coming off a bad injury, maybe it should have been expected that he wouldn't come out the gate fast, but the last few weeks shows him to be back in good form.

Their revamped receiver crew consists mostly of a rookie in Treyton Burks and another player coming off an injury in Robert Woods, who is also on a new team. Throw in a bunch of injuries into the mix which have affected the offensive line and the defensive secondary and middle, and it becomes clearer that maybe we should keep our perception of Tennessee a bit fluid.

It's not easy at this point, but in this crazy league, it almost sets up for a surprise from Washington this week. We saw Carson Wentz and the Commanders looking pretty good in beating the Jags in week one and even in parts of a second-half comeback attempt against the Lions the next week. The

last few weeks have featured a total of 18 points scoring, a defense that has been hung out to dry, and sequences of downright slapstick, especially on offense.

Granted, no one thought Wentz and the Commanders would soar this season. And their injuries offer a form of an excuse. But even within that framework, it's starting to get ugly.

The return of RB Brian Robinson from a gunshot wound offers promise, but he still has to work behind a bad line against opposing defenses showing Wentz's arm less and less respect. Terry McLaurin has started disappearing in this offense with more and more regularity. Jahan Dotson is a nice rookie receiver who has done some early damage, but there are a lot of mouths to feed in this offense that is riddled with poor offensive line and quarterback play. Curtis Samuel is also there looking to do damage, along with a decent tight end in Logan Thomas, and more often than not, this offense is spinning its wheels. But we've still seen this group do good things this season, meaning that is a possibility at home against a Tennessee defense that is prone to giving up production.

While an unfortunate slew of injuries has taken a lot of steam out of this Commanders' defense, one could have anticipated better results this season so far. This is a spot where it's not difficult imagining the Titans getting it done with Derrick Henry or some of their aerial weapons. In the last three weeks, we've seen Jared Goff throw four touchdowns against this bunch. We've seen Jalen Hurts have a big day through the air. And last week, Dallas backup Cooper Rush had his best game of the season playing this defense. Maybe we see Tannehill rely on Henry, but there's a chance here for the Titans' aerial attack to take better hold after showing some good signs.

It's understandable why one would think the arrival of Robinson, being at home, and playing a vulnerable defense sets up well for a little Washington spike this week. But with Tennessee, you have the reliable contribution of Henry and a quarterback in Tannehill who usually doesn't upend the entire effort with errors. He's not going to throw a ton of picks, cough up the rock, or sail wide open third-and-eight passes ten yards out of bounds. The Titans are a streaky type of team, and when things start clicking, they can be dangerous. They might be in that mode now, and that's bad news for a Washington team struggling to get things right heading into week five.

The possibility of a Washington surge in this spot, combined with the Titans having an off-week, could be asking for a little too much. Not that the Titans are infallible or that the Commanders can't reverse form at home. But, it's going to take more than a wayward Washington squad to send the Titans back onto the rocks. I think this sets up for a more-complete Tennessee offensive performance than we've seen in recent weeks, along with a spot for the Tennessee defense to reestablish their big-play ability. Take the Titans - 2½.

Projected Score: Tennessee 27, Washington 14

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

Houston + 7 Over JACKSONVILLE by 2

The Houston Texans meet the Jacksonville Jaguars in AFC South divisional action. After a promising two-game win streak, the Jaguars ran into the unbeaten Eagles, falling short in a 29-21 game on the road. They now return home to take on a plucky Houston Texans team that hasn't won this season, but has only failed to cover the spread once so far. Last week, they gave it a good go before falling to the Chargers, 34-24, for their third straight loss. Can they put up a good scrap in this divisional battle, or will the Jaguars illustrate their improvement this season?

Even a downright lousy 2021 Houston team twice beat Jacksonville last season, with Davis Mills showing his fangs behind center for the Texans. That might not mean much now. But the Texans are a winless team that has actually been tougher in spots than some thought they would be. The addition of Dameon Pierce gives them a conventional option in the backfield. They have a little more juice on defense that doesn't make that side of the ball great, perhaps, but still makes them slightly more respectable than they've been recently. We've seen a higher level of resistance from a Houston team that really fights for Lovie Smith. Down 21-0 to the Bolts last week, they stormed back and made it 27-24 in the fourth quarter before the Chargers scored the decisive TD. To say the least, it's not quite the slam-dunk it was last season, and even then, it was good enough for the Jaguars.

Even in losing to unbeaten Philly last week, the improvements are palpable with the Jaguars. We see Trevor Lawrence having elevated his game, enhanced with some better stuff around him. Receiver Christian Kirk has lent a new element to an offense that could do damage to the Texans' secondary. Zay Jones (questionable) has given Lawrence another option. A new tight end in Evan Engram and the emergence of 2021 first-round RB Travis Etienne, combined with existing talent like James Robinson, Marvin Jones, and others, has the Jaguars offense looking like a group on the upswing. And the now two-headed monster at RB and the nifty legs of Lawrence could do damage on a vulnerable Houston run-defense and open up the air-attack, another area of the Houston "D" that can be exploited.

The Jacksonville defense could also have a chance to show its improvement this week. It didn't work much last week against a really good offense in Philadelphia's, but in their previous two games, they allowed a combined ten points. And even against the Eagles last week, with the Jaguars' defense leaving them on the field a lot, they still didn't completely fold. Josh Allen and Devin Lloyd are giving the Jags' defense their playmaking aggressive edge once again. They've been decent against the pass and pretty good against the run so far, and a home spot for this "D" against Houston would seem like a nice get-right spot after allowing damage last week to Philly.

The Texans have a combination of traits that make them scrappy. They have an old-school coach and a lot of young and old marginal NFL figures who are fighting for their careers. At their best, Mills can sling it around, Brandin Cooks makes an impact, and the complimentary pieces are playing over their heads a little bit. But at its worst, the run-game grinds to a halt, Mills is ineffective, Cooks seems mentally out of it, and the whole thing is just flat. Other than an aging Rex Burkhead whose fame comes more from being on good teams than being great himself, a forgotten receiver in Cooks, and a decent-looking low-round rookie back in Dameon Pierce, there's not much with which Mills can work.

Still, there are subtle categories even within being bad, and maybe Houston is toward the higher end. They've made a few changes along both lines of scrimmage, with some boosts in the secondary. Still, this is a spot where you figure James Robinson or maybe Travis Etienne can do some damage after seeing a succession of big running back performances against the Texans in recent weeks. They were still decent against the Broncos and the Chargers in terms of sheer rushing, and nothing about the Jacksonville offense should be considered automatic after a few decent showings. But things like a 38-10 road win against a Chargers team that beat Houston by ten the following week sure has a way of gaining respect. That performance might end up being an outlier at the end of the season, but that could also be said for their failings on offense the following week against the Eagles. As with most things, the truth might lie somewhere in the middle.

Houston has a lot of fight in them and a certain spirit that makes them a difficult team to put away, particularly in a divisional contest against a team just starting to crawl out of doormat status themselves. Even if one is a buyer in the concept of a Jaguars upturn this season, they still represent an imperfect team that will be prone to going through growing pains. It won't be smooth sailing every game, and coming off a draining stretch of games in recent weeks, I think Houston will be able to

match up well enough to hang in there and possibly spring an upset. Look for a full sixty-minute effort from Houston, as they get an upset win and cover in a tough one from Jacksonville. I'll take the Texans and the points.

Projected Score: Houston 23, Jacksonville 21

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NFL	Chargers - 3	Steelers + 14	Titans - 2	Texans + 7	Bonus CFB Nevada - 3

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