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Volume 42 Issue 2

Football Week 1, 2023



Now Do You Believe, Says Coach Primetime.

GRIDIRON GOLD GUARANTEED CFB PICKS REPEAT ANOTHER SOLID WEEK WITH ANOTHER SUPER 9-3 ATS Mark

NCAA WEEK 1 RECAP:

Think of all we've endured over the past nine months. Realignment, tampering, NIL proposals from the federal government, the 2023 Yankees. It's been rough. But then college football Week 1 kicked off, and all was right with the world once more.

Welcome to Prime Time

We doubted. We paid. So keep doubting if you must. We were embarrassed with our preferred pick on TCU last week. We're done with all that. We're buying whatever Deion is selling.

Who wouldn't have doubted this Colorado team. All the hoopla and hype in the world couldn't erase the utter catastrophe of 2022, when the Buffaloes were 1-11 with seven losses by at least 30 points.

We lectured. Of course we lectured. Deion Sanders essentially upended every lofty, moral (and, yes, utterly ridiculous) notion of genuine amateurism by effectively cutting two-thirds of his team upon arrival. If Coach Prime had a constant megaphone to tout his new approach to roster building, we could at least use our soapbox to argue against it.

We learned, Oh, yes, we learned so much Saturday, and we came away looking like fools after Colorado beat TCU, last year's national runner-up, 45-42 in Sanders' first game as the Buffaloes' head coach.

For months, the great college football punditry laughed off Prime's rollicking hype machine, knowing that, once the games began, a hard truth would be revealed. Instead, Colorado pulled back the curtain on an offense that was nothing short of miraculous, a college football reveal that was something akin to Michael Jackson's moonwalk, JR getting shot on "Dallas" and UConn making a bowl game all wrapped together.

If aliens had landed at midfield wearing cowboy hats, it wouldn't have been any more shocking. Sanders' quarterback son, Shedeur Sanders throws for school-record 510 yards, 4 TDs in his debut. Four different Colorado receivers hauled in 100 yards' worth of catches.

Travis Hunter was a superstar playing both receiver and corner and probably drove the team bus, too. In a time when every new action movie, tech invention or Netflix college football documentary is hyped endlessly only to fizzle out into mediocrity, Deion Sanders and his Buffaloes delivered something truly remarkable on Saturday.

Sure, this wasn't last year's TCU. Those Frogs had a host of NFL-caliber players. This year's team -- well, it's a little like seeing Skynyrd today. There's no one from the original band left.

So yes, TCU's defense was a mess and couldn't get off the field despite having Colorado backed up repeatedly in the second half. But can that really explain 565 yards of Buffaloes offense?

And it's true, the Colorado defense had its own issues. TCU rushed for 262 yards in the game, including three touchdowns from the one Sanders -- Trey Sanders -- who wasn't playing for Coach Prime, but when the Buffs absolutely needed a stop in the final two minutes of action, they stuffed the Frogs at the line on back-to-back plays, setting up a turnover on downs that effectively sealed the game. Nitpick all you want. This was a genuinely epic performance by Colorado,

Yes, Colorado stole the show with coach primetimes Buffalo's passing and running roughshod over the TCU Horned Frogs. Last Saturday had everything we've been missing since the last time TCU was embarrassed on a national stage.

High expectations, because this was, after all, just one game. But to do that is to miss the point. In a sport that routinely churns out the same great teams year after year, this was a genuine surprise. In a week with relatively few marquee matchups, Colorado and TCU delivered the highest of drama, a game with seven lead changes and constant fireworks. And after an off season marred by endlessly frustrating intrusions of business and economics into college football, Coach Prime gave us something we so desperately needed: fun.

After Saturday's win, he suggested Colorado has "a couple of Heisman" contenders. Hey, why stop there? Maybe three or four.

There's film on Colorado now, so its next game should only get tougher. Oh, but Colorado gets Nebraska? Is Nebraska better than TCU?

The future of college football will be written by Sanders, his sons (Shilo Sanders is a safety for the Buffs), Hunter and a host of other sudden superstars who followed their coach out to Boulder? Bring it on. If every week looks even close to this one, the future can't come soon enough.

Iowa threw a passing touchdown on its opening drive of the season for the first time since 1991. And then, of course, offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz's offense did so little in the second half against Utah State that the quest for 25 points per game is already behind schedule.

Oregon, meanwhile, had so much offense it nearly killed its mascot. Not since the KFC Double Down sandwich has a bird been so battered.

As has become tradition, Georgia toyed with an obviously over matched opponent like a cat batting a mouse around before delivering the fatal blow. The Bulldogs led just 17-0 at the half but ultimately beat Tennessee-Martin 48-7.

We saw a man driving a motorized garbage can. We'd note that, had Butch Jones only thought to attach a lawnmower engine to his famed turnover trash can, his time at Tennessee might've turned out entirely different. But we're not here to pile on. Jones had a rough enough day already.

Sure, it was a little disappointing that Texas A&M won a game without Jimbo Fisher and Bobby Petrino coming to blows on the sideline, but there's a genuine Chekhov's gun scenario here. There will be a payoff before the show's over.

The wheels came off the Texas Tech bandwagon, as Wyoming stunned the Red Raiders in walk-off style. Wyoming takes home an exciting 35-33 win in double overtime against Texas Tech. The fans rushed the field after Wyoming secured the thrilling 2OT victory.

We saw upsets -- Fresno State over Purdue, Northern Illinois over Boston College and, most shockingly, Texas State over Baylor.

We saw blowouts -- Ole Miss, Washington and USC all cruised.

We saw vintage Alabama, another impressive performance from Tulane, and a Quinn Ewers performance just good enough to pronounce that Texas ... is ... back!

It wasn't the best Saturday of football we're likely to see this year, but that's beside the point. It was college football -- back at long last after a joyless off season of arguments over all the things that threaten the sport's future.

But last Saturday -- this one, every one -- reminds us that, for all the supposed enemies at the gates, the game itself never wavers.

Our Heisman Top Five This Week

The Pac-12 might be on life support, but after Colorado's stellar start, it has command of the early Heisman race. Much will change over the next three months, but for now, the West Coast is the best coast.

1. Colorado WR/CB Travis Hunter

You know what college football needed? Its own Shohei Ohtani. Hunter played 129 snaps, caught 11 passes, had 3 tackles, picked off a pass and broke up another. The only difference between Hunter and Ohtani is Colorado actually won a game in which he did something historic.

2. Colorado QB Shedeur Sanders

He opened the week with 100-to-1 odds to win the Heisman and finished it by throwing for 510 yards and four touchdowns. The only downside to his game is auto correct keeps trying to change his name to Shedder.

3. USC QB Caleb Williams

Caleb Williams continues his red-hot start to the season with a five-touchdown performance vs. Nevada. In the 2023 calendar year, Williams has thrown for 1,059 yards with 14 touchdown passes and one interception. For comparison, 22 FBS teams, including four of USC's future conference mates in the Big Ten, failed to throw for 14 total touchdowns in all of 2022.

4. Washington QB Michael Penix Jr.

Boise State ranked fourth nationally in defensive success rate last season. Penix torched the Broncos to the tune of 450 yards and five touchdowns on Saturday.

5. All three Alabama QBs

Nick Saban isn't into depth charts these days, which was just as well against MTSU. It didn't matter which QB was in the game. The three contenders for the starting job -- Jalen Milroe, who actually started, along with Tyler Buchner and Ty Simpson -- combined for 295 yards of offense and seven touchdowns.

Buckeyes start slow

Should we be worried about Ohio State?

The Buckeyes beat Indiana handily but scored just 23 points in the process. New starting QB Kyle McCord threw for 239 yards but no touchdowns and one pick. It was just the third time since 2018 the Buckeyes didn't throw a touchdown pass -- and both of the others came against Northwestern. Less than 10 months ago, Ohio State hung 56 on the Hoosiers.

Frankly, this was a performance Michigan was expecting Ohio State to save for late November. Still, it's probably far from time for anyone in Columbus, Ohio, to panic. Ohio State was a woeful 2-for-12 on third down, which stunted any sustained drives. Marvin Harrison Jr. missed some time after a minor arm injury. He and Emeka Egbuka combined for just 34 yards, which they'd typically rack up before the coin toss.

After all, it was just a year ago when Ohio State -- complete with star QB CJ Stroud -- struggled to score 10 points in the first half of its opener against Notre Dame before rambling to a 21-10 win. The rest of the 2022 season turned out OK.

So no, let's not fill the message board with doomsday (or "Fire Day") scenarios just yet.

Freeze and others nab win No. 1

A year ago, Hugh Freeze's team managed to lose to both UConn and New Mexico State, so it was fair to have a few worries as he began his tenure at Auburn against perennial Bottom 10 stalwart UMass.

Turns out, Auburn's win was as comfortable as a motorized hospital bed, with the Tigers rushing for six touchdowns and racking 491 yards of offense -- their most against an FBS opponent since the 2021 opener against Akron.

It was a strong start for the bulk of the other 23 first-year head coaches, too.

G.J. Kinne scored the second-biggest shocker of the day, leading Texas State past Baylor 42-31. Former Auburn QB TJ Finley led the way, throwing for 298 yards and three touchdowns, rushing for a fourth. In 11 starts for LSU and Auburn over the past three years, Finley had never thrown for three touchdowns or racked up as many passing yards in a game.

Jeff Brohm's homecoming to Louisville started brilliantly with a win over Georgia Tech. Former Louisville coach Scott Satterfield proved he knows how to get the most out of dual-threat QBs, as Emory Jones threw for five touchdowns and ran for two more in Cincinnati's win over Eastern Kentucky. And Charlotte's Biff Poggi led the 49ers to a 24-3 win over South Carolina State while, we assume, smoking a cigar, complaining about the concession lines and using the headset exclusively to tell "Yo Mama" jokes about the opposing offensive linemen.

In all, the 22 new coaches in action Saturday posted a solid 16-7 record, with Northwestern still on the docket.

M.I.A. in Michigan

Michigan played its first of three games without head coach Jim Harbaugh, who is serving a self-imposed suspension, and his players let it be known they didn't agree with it.

On the first offensive possession of the game, the players lined up in his infamous train formation and held up four fingers -- Harbaugh's jersey number as a player. J.J. McCarthy even donned a "Free Harbaugh" shirt before and after the game (despite the far more emphatic message that would've been sent by simply playing the game wearing a pair of Dockers khakis), then told reporters after the win that he was eager to support his coach.

But while Harbaugh was secluded from the action and (we assume) by calling recruits, his team thumped East Carolina 30-3 behind three passing TDs from McCarthy.

With UNLV and Bowling Green on the docket before Harbaugh returns to the sideline, there's a good chance Michigan would start 3-0 even with a magic eight ball calling plays, but the high-profile show of support certainly keeps the suspension -- and the long saga with the NCAA that preceded it -- front and center.

Tennessee wins big

No Hendon Hooker, no problem for Tennessee. Joe Milton III opened the 2023 season proving last year's late-season highlights weren't a fluke, as Tennessee dominated Virginia 49-13.

The box score says Milton threw for just 201 yards, but we're going to assume that's only because he actually threw the ball so far so often that the yardage counter hit its max and circled back to zero at some point early in the third quarter. Tennessee's ground game offered ample support, accounting for 287 yards and five touchdowns, too.

Since Hooker went down with a season-ending injury in the Vols' shocking loss to South Carolina in November, Tennessee's offense has put up 56, 31 and 49 points.

No Luck for Nebraska

Thursday was supposed to represent the start of a new, better era at Nebraska. Instead, it was more like subsequent chapters in the John Wick series -- bloody, brutal and essentially just a continuation of the previous films.

Daniel Jackson's gorgeous 13-yard touchdown grab erased a late Cornhuskers lead, and Jeff Sims' third interception of the game handed Minnesota a short field for a game-winning field goal and, for the 26th time since the start of the 2018 season, Nebraska lost a one-possession game 13-10.

For the record, that's seven more one-possession losses than any other team in the country over the same span.

For the record, Nebraska's .212 winning percentage in one-possession games since 2018 is also by far the worst in the nation.

For the record, Matt Rhule had one of the worst one-possession records in the NFL during his stint with the Carolina Panthers, so perhaps none of Week 1's loss should come as a surprise.

But fear not, Nebraska fans. No matter how cursed the team appears to be, we fundamentally believe in the law of averages that eventually everyone regresses to the mean, and over a long enough timeline, even the Huskers' close-game luck has to even out.

So, see your glass as, well, 21% full, and know that, buried deep below the 19-38 record Nebraska has posted over the past five-plus seasons, there's an entirely mediocre program just destined for a date with the Quick Lane Bowl.

Changes in latitudes

For the first time since 1991, Florida left its own state for a non-conference game, and it did not go well.

Utah was without its star QB and a host of other key players, and yet the Utes had no trouble demolishing Florida 24-11 on Thursday. It was a reminder that Kyle Whittingham is arguably the most underappreciated head coach in the country.

It was also a reminder that Billy Napier inherited a huge job at Florida. Over the Gators' past 30 games, they're just 12-18. Worse, a quarter of those wins came by just a field goal, two more came vs. FCS teams, and two others came vs. a USF program that is 4-29 over the past three seasons. Indeed, Florida has lost 17 of its last 24 games vs. Power 5 opponents -- in line with the production of Missouri, Cal and Syracuse over the same span.

Under-the-radar game of the week

Friday gave us another confusing plot overlap for the ages when Miami (the Ohio one) faced off against Miami (the Florida one).

The matchup came with its share of smack talk, as Miami (Ohio)'s QB, Brett Gabbert, announced the "real Miami" was in Oxford, Ohio. But it turned out Miami (Florida)'s players weren't worried about geography lessons and instead inflicted a physical pounding against that other Miami.

Final score: Miami 38, Miami 3

Miami couldn't have asked for a better start to the season. Meanwhile, Miami will be left to lick its wounds on the sandy shores of Miami ... or maybe amid the leafy trees of another cool, colorful fall in Miami.

Under-the-radar play of the week

There wasn't much drama in Oklahoma's opener, with the Sooners stomping Arkansas State 73-0, but the blowout didn't mean Jayden Gibson was taking any plays off. The Sooners receiver used the defender to keep the ball alive and hauled in a 21-yard touchdown pass before tumbling out of bounds.

Best bets and bad beats

Colorado closed as a 20.5-point underdog but pulled out the 3-point win. That's some prime cash for at least one bettor.

Kentucky bettors owe the gambling gods a serious offering this week. Not only did the Wildcats enjoy a nice 69-yard scoop-and-score, but tailback Ray Davis racked up one of the all-time great backdoor covers with an otherwise meaningless 30-yard touchdown run with just six seconds left on the clock. Kentucky covered the spread on a TD with 6 seconds remaining. Re'mahn Davis rushes in for a 30-yard touchdown with six seconds left in the game for Kentucky. The Wildcats were 24.5-point favorites over Ball State. Thanks to Davis' late score, they won by 30.

Northern Illinois pulled the upset over Boston College in overtime, and the OT rules added another insult to any Eagles backers who had the over, too. NIU's OT touchdown secured the 27-21 win, but since no PAT was required, the final tally of 48 points came up exactly one point shy of the total.

Good teams win, and Penn State has been good for a while. But great teams? Great teams cover, which is exactly what the Nittany Lions did when second-string QB Beau Pribula waltzed into the end zone from 5 yards out with six seconds to play to give Penn State -- a 21-point favorite against West Virginia -- a 38-15 win and cover for PSU.

Pribula was the star for the betting community, but it was Drew Allar who led the way for Penn State. The Lions have had a long line of effective QBs, including Sean Clifford, who manned the position admirably for the past 23 years. But Clifford was a bit like Paul Giamatti -- an effective leading man who churned out solid performances for years without ever once being considered a sex symbol.

Allar, on the other hand, offers Penn State hope for something more. His Saturday performance -- 325 passing yards and three touchdowns without an interception and a win -- is something Clifford did just once in his career.



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COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

VIRGINIA TECH - 3 Over Purdue by 11

The Purdue Boilermakers visit Lane Stadium in Blacksburg, Virginia on Saturday to play the Virginia Tech Hokies. Purdue is 0-1 after opening the regular season with a 39-35 loss to Fresno State on Saturday. Purdue gave up 487 yards of total offense to Fresno State, while the Boilermakers gained 363 yards of total offense. Purdue forced one turnover and the Boilermakers did not turn the ball over in their loss.

Purdue quarterback Hudson Card has passed for 254 yards with two touchdowns. The leading rusher is Devin Mockobee with 60 yards and one touchdown, while the leading receiver is Deion Burks with 152 yards and two touchdown receptions. Dillon Thieneman is the leading tackler for Purdue with 10. Purdue has two quarterback sacks.

The Virginia Tech Hokies are 1-0 following a 36-17 victory over the Old Dominion Monarchs on Saturday. Virginia Tech gained 368 yards of total offense, while holding Old Dominion to 295 yards of total offense and forcing the Monarchs into turning the ball over three times. Virginia Tech posted a safety in the first quarter to take an early 2-0 lead they would not relinquish.

Virginia Tech quarterback Grant Wells, a redshirt senior, went 17 of 29 for 251 yards and three touchdowns in a 36-17 home win over Old Dominion. The leading rusher for Virginia Tech is Bhayshu Tuten with 55 yards, while Wells has rushed for 27 yards and one touchdown. The leading receiver is Ali Jennings with 72 yards and two touchdown receptions. Antwaun Powell-Ryland is the leading tackler for Virginia Tech with six and also has a team high two quarterback sacks.

Purdue is 1-4 ATS in its last 5 games and Virginia Tech is 4-2 ATS in its last 6 games.

This line is a off when you consider Purdue looked awful defensively in its season opener and now goes on the road in a tough environment. Not many teams allowed more than Purdue's 487 yards last week, and the Boilermakers also gave up 11 first downs on 17 third down attempts. Remember, Purdue had a below average scoring defense last season and was 123rd in the country with nineteen 40-plus yardage plays allowed. Those issues usually don't fix itself on the road.

Purdue has a new face to its program at quarterback but certainly not a new face to college football. Hudson Card played three seasons at Texas before transferring to Purdue, and the redshirt junior seemed to fit in well in his first start with the Boilermakers.

Purdue lost its season opener at home to Fresno State 39-35, but Card went 17 of 30 passing for 254 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions.

"You saw flashes of what he's capable of doing with his arms and his legs," Purdue head coach Ryan Walters said. "We've got to do a better job of protecting him and giving him an opportunity to stand in there and deliver accurate and confident throws."

Defense was the biggest issue for the Boilermakers as they gave up 371 yards passing. Purdue next faces an experienced quarterback in Virginia Tech starter Grant Wells, who is coming off a good debut.

Virginia Tech is still physical in the trenches and has a senior quarterback who is coming off a strong game. I kind of like getting the free point with the Hokies at home, as they start 2-0 for the third time in the last 4 seasons. Although Virginia Tech will face a much tougher opponent when playing Purdue than it's opener against Old Dominion, the Hokies will look to exploit a weak Purdue passing defense that gave up 371 yards of passing to Fresno State. Virginia Tech's talented quarterback Grant Wells will dissect the Purdue secondary. Virginia Tech has covered the number in four of the last six and Purdue has failed to cover the nut in four of the last five. Virginia Tech Hokies win and cover ATS.

Projected Score: Virginia Tech 28, Purdue 17

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

WAKE FOREST - 10 Over Vanderbilt by 20

The Vanderbilt Commodores and Wake Forest Demon Deacons meet Saturday in week 2 college football action at Allegacy Federal Credit Union Stadium, Winston-Salem. Let's preview this game and give out a pick and prediction.

The Vanderbilt Commodores are fresh off wins over Hawaii and Alabama A&M, and now look for their first 3-0 start since 2017. The Commodores (2-0) have scored 82 points through their first two games and are looking to make their first bowl appearance since 2018. On Saturday, Vanderbilt exploded for 35 points during the second half of a 47-13 home victory versus Alabama A&M.

QB A.J. Swann (194 yards) found senior WR Will Sheppard on touchdown passes of three and 17 yards to give Vanderbilt a 19-3 lead. Sedrick Alexander rushed for two scores in the fourth quarter and finished with 87 yards on the ground for the Commodores.

This will be Vanderbilts first road game of the season. AJ Swann is completing 57.6 percent of his passes for 452 yards, 5 touchdowns and 1 interception. Jayden McGowan and Will Sheppard have combined for 272 receiving yards and 4 touchdowns, while London Humphreys has 2 receptions. The Vanderbilt Commodores ground game is averaging 127 yards per contest, and Sedrick Alexander leads the way with 89 yards and 2 touchdowns.

Defensively, Vanderbilt is allowing 20.5 points and 334.5 yards per game. CJ Taylor leads the Vanderbilt Commodores with 15 tackles, Nate Clifton has 2 sacks and De'Rickey Wright has 2 interceptions.

The Wake Forest Demon Deacons beat Elon in their season opener and look for a third straight 2-0 start to a season. The Wake Forest Demon Deacons lost QB Sam Hartman to Notre Dame in the transfer portal and have played in a bowl game in seven straight seasons.

On Thursday, Wake Forest opened the season with a comfortable 37-17 home victory versus Elon. The Demon Deacons (1-0) led 24-0 at halftime and out gained the Phoenix by a 427-251 margin.

Sophomore QB Mitch Griffis looked impressive for Wake Forest with 329 passing yards and three touchdowns. Junior WR Jahmal Banks caught six passes for 108 yards and found the end zone on a 33-yard strike.

Wake Forest has won 12 of its last 14 home games. Mitch Griffis is completing 63.3 percent of his passes for 329 yards, 3 touchdowns and 1 interception. Jahmal Banks and Cameron Hite have combined for 199 receiving yards and 2 touchdowns, while Wesley Grimes has 3 receptions. The Wake Forest Demon Deacons ground game is averaging 98 yards per contest, and Demond Claiborne leads the way with 70 yards and 1 touchdown.

Defensively, Wake Forest is allowing 17 points and 251 yards per game. Malik Mustapha leads the Wake Forest Demon Deacons with 9 tackles, Jacob Roberts has 1 sack and DaShawn Jones has 1 interception.

The Vanderbilt Commodores may be 2-0 SU on the season, but I'm not impressed. Hawaii had its chances to beat Vanderbilt in the season opener, and Alabama A&M only trailed 12-3 at halftime last week. Now, Vanderbilt plays real competition on the road.

Wake Forest beat Vanderbilt by 20 points on the road last year. I'm just not all that high on Vanderbilt, probably the worst team in the SEC. At home and with an explosive offense, Wake Forest should roll the Commodores just like last season.

Projected Score: Wake Forest 37, Vanderbilt 17

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

NORTH CAROLINA - 16 Over Appalachian St by 27

The Appalachian State Mountaineers and the North Carolina Tar Heels meet Saturday in college football action from Kenan Memorial Stadium. Appalachian State enters this one after an opener matchup versus Gardner-Webb. In that one the Mountaineers won by 21 points. As for North Carolina, they're coming off a game against South Carolina. The Tar Heels ended up winning by two scores.

Appalachian State had a home matchup against Gardner-Webb in their opener last weekend. The Mountaineers went into halftime with a 14-10 lead, then turned on the jets in the second half on the way to a 45-24 victory. QB Joey Aguilar led the way on 174 yards and four scores, while Nate Noel had 117 rush yards with a score on 24 carries.

The Mountaineers gave up 360 total yards on defense (to their own 394) during their opener win, along with 19 first downs and 7-of-17 on third-down plays. The key stat on that side of the ball was the three takeaways however, as App State had zero turnovers themselves.

Over on the North Carolina side, they had a tough time keeping South Carolina at bay during the first half of their opener game. The Tar Heels went into the break with a 17-14 lead, but then held a 14-3 advantage the rest of the way for a 31-17 win. QB Drake Maye posted 269 yards, two scores and two picks. British Brooks added 103 yards on 15 carries.

The Tar Heels' defense was on point Saturday when it came to stopping the run. North Carolina gave up minus-2 yards on the ground, 20 first downs and 4-of-14 on third-down tries. South Carolina had a little success through the air though, as UNC gave up 353 passing yards to their own 269.

The Tar Heels played pretty well overall in a tricky road opener versus South Carolina last weekend, but there's still plenty to clean up. UNC had two interceptions and seven penalties for 49 yards, not to mention the zero takeaways on defense. Still, there's not much to complain about when it comes to a road victory.

As for App State, they benefited from Gardner-Webb's three turnovers and a clean game with just two penalties. The Mountaineers are going to have to move the chains better in game two if they want to stay in range, though; 4-of-13 on third downs isn't going to do it.

Carolina played a tight one at Boone a year ago, coming out with the final 63-61 victory, but not before the Mountaineers put a scare into the Tar Heels defense to the tune of 649 total yards and a 6 touchdown showing from Chase Brice, who engineered a 40 point fourth quarter in that game.

Granted, that game wasn't a great look for Gene Chizik's defensive strategy, but in the months since then, Carolina does appear to have tightened things up somewhat on that side of the ball after recording 9 sacks and holding the Gamecocks to 11 yards rushing in an important season opener last weekend.

The Tar Heels are dropping in class and the Mountaineers are going up in class. Combine that with Appalachian St's struggle against Gardner Webb in the first half. They didn't break it up into they got turnovers. Appalachian State surrendered 30 pass completions on 46 attempts for 231 yds, and a completion percentage of 65.2% against Gardner-Webb last week.

Drake Maye (2 touchdowns) ended the game vs South Carolina with 269 yards on 24/32 through the air while his QB rating was 153.7. I expect Maye to rip the Mountaineer secondary to shreds. The Tar Heels will clean up their act and be more productive in this game as Drake Maye gets himself back in the Heisman race. Tar Heels win and cover convincingly in their first home game.

Projected Score: North Carolina 44, Appalachian St 17

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

TEXAS TECH + 7 Over Oregon by 3

The Oregon Ducks come to Lubbock on Saturday to battle the Texas Tech Red Raiders in a big Pac-12 vs. Big 12 showdown on the week two schedule. The Ducks opened fast in week one, pounding out mangled Portland State, 81-7. They were able to get guys like QB Bo Nix, RB Mar'Keise Irving, and WR Troy Franklin warmed up with what was really a glorified scrimmage. Texas Tech, conversely, might be more battle-tested after a week one struggle, but it was a rough season debut taking a 17-0 lead against Wyoming, blowing it, and losing in OT on a failed two-point conversion in a 35-33 loss.

With how vast college football is, it's still a small world, as Texas Tech quarterback Tyler Shough will see his old team coming into town. Shough started for the Ducks in the abbreviated Covid season of 2020, transferring to Texas Tech and now earning starting duties. Game one was a success, albeit in a loss, with Shough throwing for 338 yards and three TDs. He connected well with Jerand Bradley and Myles Price, and suffice to say, the Ducks' defense will be pressed to an extent that far surpasses last week. While Oregon can just wallop teams and drown everything out with their high-powered offense, their "D" does lag behind their offense, and for all their success, we've seen it isn't hard for teams to put up points against them.

Whether this one ends up being a competitive affair or not might hinge on the Texas Tech defense. It doesn't paint them in a great light to have given up a big lead to the Cowboys last week, as Wyoming kept poking and prodding their way to victory. On the surface, it doesn't set up well when taking on this Ducks' offense with all their talent and options. The front has some pieces to establish, but Oregon will be facing what is, in fact a deep and talented secondary.

Head coach Dan Lanning and his staff know what they're up against with this Red Raiders defense. If throwing the ball is something that is met with resistance, that is no problem for an Oregon team that can run the heck out of the ball. The 348 yards last week against the opponent they had with the type of lead they built provides a faulty gauge, perhaps, but this is a team whose offense is built on balance. With Irving leading the way with his game-breaking runs, they have a wealth of options to keep throwing fresh-legged backs down the throat of a Texas Tech defense that still has a lot of questions to answer along the line and in the middle. And even if you sign off on the idea that the Red Raiders' secondary is pretty good, that still doesn't insulate them from the damage Bo Nix can wield with his accurate arm and his large cast of aerial weaponry.

I'd be a little concerned about Shough and his weapons against this Oregon defense. Based on what we saw against Wyoming, the Red Raiders might not be able to run the ball with a lot of success against an Oregon front that has some real talent, with Brandon Dorius and Jordan Burch on either side with some meat in the middle. Talent is abundant in the secondary, but with key slots occupied by transfers, they might take some time to jell. Going against a potent Texas Tech air attack with Shough having a nice handful of viable and speedy targets who can do serious damage should provide some early answers for this Oregon pass defense.

We have a ranked Oregon team that was a few turns away from having a really big year last season. A lot of their offense is back, and they put up an ungodly 81 in week one. On the other sideline is a Texas Tech team that couldn't even repel a Mountain West opponent in their first game, losing a draining second-overtime battle.

Still, they're a dangerous team coming off a pretty good season and making their home-opener. We can see Mr OddsMaker thinks highly of them, making them just a TD underdog to the high-powered Ducks. It seems like a trap game! A Texas Tech squad in their home opener taking it to a new-look Oregon "D" and maybe threatening to win the game. I see both sides. but in the end, I'm not going to bite that cheese and I don't want to get trapped. I'm backing the Red Raiders with the points.

Projected Score: Texas Tech 35, Oregon 32

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

COLORADO - 2½ Over Nebraska by 16

The Nebraska Cornhuskers and the Colorado Buffaloes meet Saturday in college football action from Folsom Field. The Buffaloes faced off against TCU in their Week 1 opener. In that matchup Colorado powered out a three-point upset win. As for Nebraska, they took on Minnesota in their opener, ultimately falling in a close outcome.

Colorado took on a very good TCU team in their opener matchup back on Saturday. In that one the Buffaloes posted points in each quarter (double-digit points in the final three quarters) on the way to a wild 45-42 upset win. Shedeur Sanders was stellar with 510 yards and four passing scores, while Dylan Edwards caught five balls for 135 yards and three TDs.

The Buffaloes had four different receivers with 117 yards or more in their opener matchup, so the passing game (565 yards) was firing on all cylinders. Colorado bagged 30 first downs, 34:33 in time of possession and a nice 11-of-17 rate on third- and fourth-down tries.

Over on the Nebraska side, they played a close game versus Minnesota last Thursday. The Cornhuskers were up 7-3 heading into the fourth quarter, but ended up surrendering 10 points from there in a 13-10 defeat. QB Jeff Sims had a rough day on 114 yards, one TD and three picks while also leading the rush with 91 yards on 19 carries.

The good news for Nebraska is that they out-gained Minnesota 295-251 in total yards and didn't do a terrible job on defense. The Cornhuskers just couldn't get much going on the scoreboard though, notching four turnovers (one fumble) seven penalties and a tepid 5-of-11 rate on third downs. Minnesota went 8-for-17 on thirds with just three penalties on the other side in comparison.

The Buffaloes should be optimistic coming into this one, given Nebraska's tepid offensive effort and myriad mistakes in the Minnesota game. The Cornhuskers allowed just 55 rush yards and 3.6 yards per play though, so Colorado is going to have to get the running game going in order to control the clock here.

This game could come down to who scores first. If Nebraska can lean on its run game and avoid relying too much on the arm of Jeff Sims, a QB who has a history of turnovers, the Cornhuskers have a chance to stick with CU. If Colorado can score early and often and force Nebraska into being a passing team, the Buffs' defense could feast on the Cornhuskers' offense.

Deion Sanders and Matt Rhule are both in their first seasons with Colorado and Nebraska, and we've seen very different outings in one game. Colorado will be a high-flying offense without much of a defense, while Nebraska is all about defense, but has little to no offense.

Speaking of the Buffaloes, in their opener they surprised a lot of people with their offensive capabilities, and the defense played just well enough to help secure the win. Colorado did give up a whopping 262 rushing yards and 27 first downs, however. Still, so long as the Buffaloes don't have a big-win hangover and a big head, I think they'll be OK.

Colorado will be on cloud nine when playing Nebraska on Saturday after upsetting No. 17 ranked TCU this past Saturday. Nebraska was defeated by Minnesota in its opening game and will be a tougher opponent for Colorado on defense, but will not have the offense to keep pace with that of the Buffaloes. Nebraska has failed to cover the number in five of the last six head to head versus Colorado. Yes, coach prime, we do believe for another week.

Projected Score: Colorado 37, Nebraska 21

A promotional banner for MyBookie.com. On the left, it says "MY BOOKIE" in large, bold, orange and white letters, with "PROMOCODE GRIDIRONGOLD" in smaller white text below it. In the center, it says "UP TO \$1000 WELCOME BONUS" in large, bold, white letters. On the right, there is a green button with the text "BET NOW" in white. The background features a green and black color scheme with a football player's face partially visible on the right side.

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICKS

Utah - 7 at BAYLOR

This is another line where where we're on Cam Rising watch. Will the Utah quarterback make his return from a torn ACL? Will Kyle Whittingham turn him loose against a Baylor defense that allowed 441 total yards to Texas State? Baylor will be in desperation mode at home. Still, with Blake Shapen out for the next three weeks, the Bears might be in trouble. **Take: Utah - 7**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICKS

Troy at Kansas St - 17

The Wildcats get a tough home game against Troy, which has not played against a Power 5 opponent under second-year coach Jon Sumrall since the opener against Ole Miss last season. Troy running back Kimani Vidal rushed for 248 yards in the opener. The yardage will be tougher against a disciplined Wildcats' defense. Troy will be a trendy upset pick. Kansas State will prevail straight up. **Take: Troy + 17**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICKS

Wisconsin - 7 at Washington St

Washington State pulled this upset last year, and the Badgers are 1-3 in their last four road games against Pac-12 schools since 2000. Which tempo wins? Luke Fickell's ground-heavy rushing attack with Braelon Allen and Chez Mellusi? Or will Cam Ward allow the Cougars to dictate the tempo with a high-octane passing attack? **Take: Washington St + 7**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICKS

Ole Miss at TULANE O/U 63

This has to be the biggest regular season game in recent memory for Tulane, which features an NFL-caliber quarterback in Michael Pratt and has a nasty defense that can stop the run. This is the high point of the season – and the crowd will be jacked up. The problem is Lane Kiffin will be happy to play villain with an offense that put up 73 points last week. That rushing attack with Quinshon Judkins is top notch. Two quick strike offensive units. **Take: Over 63**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICK

WASHINGTON - 35 vs Tulsa

Washington covered the spread in Week 1, and Dennis' nailed his guaranteed Private Gold pick. Michael Penix is operating at a Heisman Trophy level with the Huskies' high level of skill-position talent. Tulsa won in Kevin Wilson's debut. Quarterback Cardell Williams threw three TD passes and Jordan Ford rushed for 110 yards for the Golden Hurricane. Maybe Washington peeks ahead to Michigan State just enough for Tulsa to get a backdoor cover. **Take: Tulsa + 35**





R U READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL 2023 NFL KICKOFF ISSUE IS HERE

NFL LANDSCAPE:

2023 NFL Props & Futures Trends Seen Among Sportsbook Bettors

As nationwide bettors sharpen their handicapping skills, they observe more than NFL Week 1 action, which starts with the Sept. 7 matchup between the Detroit Lions and defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs.

Top sportsbooks showcase numerous season-long props for individual players and teams.

Fading Arizona: Cardinals' Expectations Plummet

The low-expectation Cardinals delivered two signals sending gamblers south on the team's win-total wagers Aug. 29. First came news that injured Kyler Murray will miss at least the first four games. Then the Cardinals cut Colt McCoy, the expected starter. No Week 1 quarterback has been announced, as Joshua Dobbs and Clayton Tune are the most recent finalists at that position. The Cardinals look rudderless and gamblers pounced on the Under 4.5 enough to move the line. Arizona's win total moved from 4.5 to 3.5. That's a full game, which is unusual this close to the start of the season.

Bettors Go All In on J-E-T-S.

Everything but a Super Bowl parade has been outlined in Big Apple media centers amid high expectations for the Jets. They look loaded with the pickups of four-time MVP Aaron Rodgers, Randall Cobb, Allen Lazard, and Dalvin Cook, augmented by a flurry of recent draft choices. Rodgers and his one-time Packer posse have landed at MetLife Stadium. Sportsbook bettors are all over Jets futures wagers for the 2023 season. The fever-pitched vibe from the New York market has become music to the ears of sportsbook operators. The Jets are one of the top teams being bet in the future books (+1600), they always got that big New York market betting them to start with. They received a lot of action even when they stunk. Now with all these moves and being on Hard Knocks, the Jets are very popular.

They are one of the top 3 teams getting support, along with the Cincinnati Bengals and Dallas Cowboys +1400 at this point.

The Bengals +1100, Cowboys +1400), and Jets (+1600) rank as the Nos. 5-7 choices to win the Super Bowl on the board. The defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs remain the +600 favorite.

Jets euphoria resembles the 2019 season, when they brandished off-season acquisition Le'Veon Bell and substantial optimism. But both the star running back and the Jets flopped.

The Jets never recovered from blowing a 16-0 late third-quarter lead and losing 17-16 to the Buffalo Bills in Week 1. They began 1-7, finished 7-9, and Bell was gone the next year. This situation could be different for the Jets. Bell had a lot of personal problems at that time (he missed the 2018 season and 2019 pre-season with a holdout). You don't see that here. Bettors who believe the Jets will make a big run, but not quite reach the promised land, can obtain good value for them to win the AFC East. The Buffalo Bills are the +120 favorite.

Lions are Chalk

Yes, for the first time in about three decades, the Lions are favored at +145 to win the NFC North. Detroit last won its division in 1993. The Lions had a breakout 2022 campaign, notching 453 points. That was third in the NFC behind the Philadelphia Eagles and Cowboys. Detroit flipped a 1-6 start into an 8-2 finish, including five straight division victories. The Lions finished ahead of the Packers with Rodgers and, at 9-8, raised expectations for this season.

In that division, you are seeing four teams not that far apart, and it's probably closer than any other division. There is not a lot of interest in the Packers, but they got some money, and there is some on the Bears, too. Detroit is going to need a real good season to overtake the Minnesota Vikings. So far, the oddsmakers believe the Lions will.

Bengals Backed by Bettors

Bengals money stagnated after quarterback Joe Burrow sustained a right-calf strain injury during training camp. He was carted off the field, taking Bengal optimism with him.

Reports are he will be ready for Game 1, and bettors resumed backing the Bengals in futures bets. Injury concerns over Burrow are starting to mount, however. He missed the last six games of his rookie campaign with a torn ACL.

Although he led the Bengals to a Super Bowl appearance two years ago and had a stellar 2022 campaign, being carted off after a non-contact play raises concerns about his vulnerability. Teammate Ja'Marr Chase says he doesn't want Burrow to rush back for the Week 1 opener against the Browns.

Season Prop Bets for Wave of New Quarterbacks

Gamblers will bone up on matching new faces, new teams, and projected stats. Not only have several signal callers changed teams, but rookies entered the mix, too. Gamblers have some enticing considerations on season-long pass-yardage total for these players.

The Big QB Names:

Rodgers, 3800.5 (-112). Modest numbers suggest ground-game help.

Burrow, 4275.5 (-112). If he misses just one game, he'd be on pace to go Under, based on 4,611 and 4,475 totals the last two seasons.

Other Notable QB Props

Rookie Anthony Richardson, Indianapolis Colts, 2800.5. Teamed with new coach Shane Steichen, who coordinated the potent Philadelphia Eagles offense last year.

Sam Howell, Washington Commanders, 3075.5 (-112)

Rookie Bryce Young, Carolina Panthers, 3199.5 (-110)

Rookie C.J. Stroud, Houston Texans, 3050.5 (-110)

Derek Carr, New Orleans Saints, 3575.5 (-115)

Jordan Love, Green Bay Packers, 3275.5 (-115)

Jimmy Garoppolo, Las Vegas Raiders, 3300.5 (+100)

Highest Total for QB Passing Yard Prop

Patrick Mahomes, Kansas City Chiefs, 4650.5 (-112)

Lowest Total for QB Passing Yard Prop

Deshaun Watson, Atlanta Falcons, 2500.5 (-112)

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

ATLANTA - 3½ Over Carolina by 10

One of the more interesting openers surrounds an NFC South showdown between the Carolina Panthers and Atlanta Falcons, who will meet inside Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Both the Panthers and the Falcons are attempting to turn their organizations around. Head Coach Arthur Smith needs to take a step forward after back-to-back 7-10 SU seasons. Meanwhile, the Panthers are turning the page to the Frank Reich era after several years of disappointment.

Perhaps the biggest storyline going into this specific Week 1 opener is the interest around the young guys in this game. Panthers will be turning to rookie quarterback Bryce Young, who they believe will be the face of the franchise in years to come. Carolina has dealt with multiple awful quarterback situations in the last few years and is looking to find some stability on the offensive side of the football. Likewise, Atlanta is hoping to revitalize their offense with another highly touted rookie in the likes of running back Bijan Robinson, who the Falcons took in the 1st round of the NFL Draft at the 8th overall pick. The Falcons offense has been centered around the running attack under Arthur Smith, and Many believe Robinson is the type of talent that can take this offense to the next level.

While the Panthers look to get Bryce Young's feet wet, I would still point out that Young's talent is severely lacking in the skill positions around him. The Panthers traded former star RB Christian McCaffrey away mid-season in 2022, and former WR1 DJ Moore is now in Chicago. The Panthers brought in RB Miles Sanders from Philadelphia following the most successful season of his career. Sanders racked up 1,269 yards with 11 touchdowns last season, but that was also behind the best offensive line in the NFL. This season, Sanders will not have the luxury of gaping holes with every touch of the football, and defenses are likely to focus on the run to put Young into throwing situations.

While the Panthers' defense should be pretty solid, I am just not convinced they are going to get any help from the offense, especially early in the season. QB Bryce Young is going to need some time before he is performing at a high level. Perhaps most importantly, the Panthers do not have any stars in the receiving corps. The group is composed of journeymen, including an aging Adam Theilen, DJ Chark, and rookie Jonathan Mingo. Needless to say, I'm expecting struggles for this offense in the opening week of the season with so much inexperience and lack of go-to guys in Reich's system.

The Falcons did not exactly set the world on fire in 2022 on the offensive side of the football. In fact, Atlanta ranked 24th in total offense, averaging just 318 yards per game. However, Atlanta did maximize their scoring opportunities with a much higher rank (15th) in scoring, averaging nearly 22 points per game. All of those numbers were the product of a shaky quarterback situation, an inefficient passing attack, and a running game by committee. For this year, 2nd year QB Desmond Ridder moves into the starting role after taking over the final four games of the 2022 season. Ridder flashed some promising signs in his few starts last year, and most importantly, he protected the rock.

Personally, I'm expecting this passing offense to be better with Ridder behind center. WR Drake London was a reliable target with Ridder under center, and TE Kyle Pitts is healthy after returning from an MCL injury at the end of last year. With those things in mind, the Falcons finally have a workhorse tailback in rookie Bijan Robinson, who is expected to carry a heavy load this year. The running schemes and attack that this offense runs are successful. Therefore, I expect Robinson to live up to the expectations. With a solid running game and emerging young talents at the skill positions, Atlanta has all the ingredients to take a step forward on the offensive side of the football.

Both offenses have serious concerns, and I expect this to be a defensive-oriented game. However, I still like the weapons that the Falcons have and the experience to succeed right out of the gates. Atlanta is 10-5 ATS in the last 15 games against Carolina. I'm not confident in anything Carolina has to work with; therefore, let's ride with the home team that has covered at a high rate in this rivalry!

Projected Score: Atlanta 24, Carolina 14

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

Las Vegas + 4 Over DENVER by 6

The Las Vegas Raiders meet the Denver Broncos at Mile High in a week one AFC West battle. Both teams look to kick their seasons off well this week and put a rough 2022 behind them, with the Raiders winning six games and the Broncos winning five. Two of the Raiders' wins came in their two games against the Broncos, who really produced a dud despite ample hope with Russell Wilson coming into town.

Coming off bad seasons, each team has a lot of moving pieces heading into the new season. The Raiders didn't really make a ton of moves other than moving their QB, Derek Carr, go to the Saints. In comes Jimmy Garoppolo, and we'll see if he can extract the same things out of a Raiders' offense that he did when he was with the Niners. The Broncos have a new head coach in, the well-respected Sean Payton. You'd think his competence would give the Broncos an edge they lacked last season.

This Vegas offense did well against Denver last season, and Garoppolo is stepping into a nice situation, being able to lean on a difference-making back like Joshua Jacobs and receivers like Davante Adams, Jakobi Meyers, and Hunter Renfrow. They added TE Austin Hooper, along with rookie Michael Mayer from Notre Dame. On paper, it's an offense that could take it to a Denver defense that has some holes, especially up-front. They added Frank Clark, and new coordinator Vance Joseph should get them to be more aggressive. Patrick Surtain, II. is one of the best corners in the NFL and leads a secondary that should be pretty good. A bad season last season by Wilson and this Denver offense may have camouflaged some of the strides made on the other side of the ball.

Ideally, as a Denver fan, you'd like to see Wilson and this Denver offense hit the ground running against this Las Vegas defense. Maxx Crosby appears to be the only standout from a lackluster group. And they will be going against what should be an improved Denver offensive line that added a few nice pieces in the offseason. That line, along with the leadership of Payton, should help Wilson and this offense. Getting Javonte Williams back is big, and seeing this receiver crew come alive is key. You'd think this is as good a spot as any for Denver to showcase the improvements made.

Again, other than Crosby, the Raiders are rather thin. They added Tyree Wilson with a high draft pick, but poor drafts and shaky signings have led to this unit being short on talent. Chandler Jones could have a bounce-back season after a dud last year. The rookie Wilson could be an impactful player. But even getting Marcus Peters last season didn't help a secondary that is in real disarray. The interior line and entire middle are comprised of guys who would likely not be in heavy rotation on most other defenses. It creates a situation where Denver should have some success both running and throwing the ball. Still, in two games against the Raiders last year, they managed 39 combined points, with a lot of the key roles in this equation occupied by the same cast. Are we steeped in a fallacy that a new coach and some pieces up-front are going to transform this Denver offense into a real factor?

To go with Denver in this spot, you're forecasting some better offensive results against a team that has beaten them six times in a row, laying points to boot. You might be basing it on an iffy premise as if Sean Payton can just come in and wave his wand, and suddenly Wilson isn't getting old anymore, and receivers who have 4-5 good games a year with a dozen forgettable ones suddenly become consistent factors.

I think a game one situation like this where one team is working in a new system while the other team is working in a new quarterback, along with the altitude, almost makes me think this will be a bit of a grind. Denver is dealing with injuries already, with WR Jerry Jeudy carted off in practice with a hamstring injury. It also isn't promising. It's just that with what seems like a close-type game with so many game elements in the air, I'm inclined to take a Raiders team with four points. I'm going with the Las Vegas Raiders in this one.

Projected Score: Las Vegas 26, Denver 20

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

Green Bay + 2 Over CHICAGO by 7

The Packers begin the post-Aaron Rodgers era, fittingly enough, when they visit Chicago Sunday afternoon for a Week 1 battle the rival Bears. + 2 ½ the first time since 2007, Green Bay opens a season with somebody other than Rodgers at quarterback. Cheesehead Nation can only wish this QB change works out as well as the last one. Chicago, meanwhile, is looking to advance toward playoff contention this season after winning just three games last season.

The Week 1 NFL betting odds opened the Bears as 2.5-point home favorites over the Packers, with an over/under of right around 44.5. Both figures were holding firm in the early betting action but just dropped to Bears -1 today.

Green Bay played 8-9 last year and missed the playoffs for only the fourth time in 15 seasons, with Rodgers behind center. The Packers started 3-1 last season and led the Giants by 10 points at halftime in that game played in London. But a second-half collapse there led to a puzzling five-game losing skid. Green Bay later fell to 4-8, then won four in a row. So all they had to do was beat Detroit in the season finale at Lambeau Field to make the playoffs. Instead, they choked and lost 20-16.

In all, the Packers lost five games last season by seven points or less.

Then, over the off-season came the inevitable; Green Bay traded Rodgers to the Jets, turning the offense over to three-year clipboard holder Jordan Love.

The Packers ranked 17th in total offense last year, averaging 338 yards per game and 15th in rushing at 124 YPG. On the other side of the ball, Green Bay ranked 17th in total defense, allowing 337 YPG, and 26th against the run, giving up 140 YPG.

Green Bay grabbed Iowa DE Lukas Van Ness with its first pick in the draft, then went offense with its next three picks. But the big question for the Packers right now, of course, is whether Love can produce at this level.

Chicago, meanwhile, is looking to advance this season after winning just three games last season. The Bears started 2-1 last year, with a win over San Francisco and a loss to the Packers. But Chicago proceeded to lose 12 of its last 13 games, seven by one score or less but also several in blow-out fashion, to finish with the worst record in the League.

The Bears ranked 28th in total offense last season at 308 YPG but No. 1 in rushing at 177 YPG. But only 101 of those rushing YPG came from running backs; QB Justin Fields averaged 76 YPG on the ground, running for his life a lot of the time. Meanwhile, Chicago ranked 29th in total defense at 376 YPG and 31st against the run at 157 YPG.

Over the off-season, Chicago traded the No. 1 overall pick to Carolina for wide receiver DJ Moore and other picks, then used three of its top four choices on linemen, which was probably a good idea for a team trying to upgrade its roster.

Green Bay owns an eight-game winning streak on Chicago, going 8-0 ATS along the way. Last year, the Packers swept the two games with the Bears by scores of 27-10 and 28-19. But, of course, Rodgers quarterbacked Green Bay in both games. He won't be around for this one.

Green Bay can run the ball (without its QB), and the defense should be improved. Also, we've liked what we've seen from Love, albeit in his limited exposure. Chicago, meanwhile, relies too much offensively on Fields – who's electric at times but also needs to be helped up off the field too much – and the defense is terrible. We're a bit bullish on the Packers this season, playing without expectations; we like Green Bay to win this game outright.

Projected Score: Green Bay 27, Chicago 20

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BET

LA CHARGERS - 3 Over Miami by 13

The Miami Dolphins make the trip out west for a week one AFC faceoff with the Los Angeles Chargers. We have a 10-win team in the Chargers from last season, along with the 9-win Dolphins, with both teams eliminated in the wild-card round of the AFC playoffs last season. Mike McDaniel starts his second season at the helm, with the Chargers' Brandon Staley beginning his third season. Hopes are high with both teams, but there are also questions and concerns that could send either team's fortunes in any number of directions. Let's see who has the better chance of getting us the cover in week one at SoFi Stadium.

For the purposes of a one-game breakdown, examining Tua Tagovailoa's durability and concussion concerns might not hold much water. When he was out there, he was able to make it happen, getting a lot out of what turned into perhaps the best 1-2 punch at wide receiver in Tyreek Hill (questionable) and Jaylen Waddle (questionable). They can run the ball really well and, all told, might even be more bankable on offense than Justin Herbert and his pieces, who seem to surface in a big way with slightly less regularity.

Getting Joey Bosa back healthy to go along with Khalil Mack should give the Bolts a real pass-rushing presence. Also costing the Chargers last season on this side were JC Jackson getting hurt. His returning at the corner will help, as well. They have talent on this side of the ball, but it never quite came off the way the Chargers were expecting or what the talent on this side of the ball would suggest. Staley does game-plan well, and last season's 23-17 win in this very stadium attests to that. Other than a 60-yard connection from Tua to Hill, they kept the Dolphins' offense relatively quiet. So maybe the Dolphins won't be able to count on the Chargers' shortcomings on that side of the ball as much as some might think.

I also think there is something to be said for Tua's overall health predicament when he's facing defenses like this. With Derwin James and other hard-hitters, along with a pass rush that could flourish in spots, we might see a toned-down offensive approach. The Miami offensive line saw some things break their way last year with the signings of Terrod Armstead (questionable) paying off, as well as Connor Williams. But as we saw last season, there are issues and some soft spots along that line, an outstanding issue that can rear its head in a matchup against this Chargers' defense.

We also didn't really see the Bolts thrive on offense in this spot last season, getting in the end zone just twice. I think some better news on the injury front could do wonders for a talented Miami "D." Vic Fangio has shown his chops in the role of defensive coordinator, coming on board to commandeer a group with some fine pieces. The preseason injury to Jalen Ramsey hurts, but their secondary is OK with Xavien Howard and a pair of impactful safeties in Jevon Holland and Brandon Jones. Up front, Jaelan Phillips is on the precipice of becoming a star. They only had 14 takeaways last season and look for better with Fangio at the helm.

Miami faces a real issue with Herbert. In last season's game, they were fortunate the Bolts saw the end zone just twice, even with Herbert putting up almost 400 yards. I think the Chargers might have an edge here with the advantages they possess with a better O-line, a more play making defense, and, dare I say, a better quarterback. I think the best way for Tua and this Miami offense to gain an edge would be to air it out and connect big deep. I'm just not sure that's the best way to beat the Chargers, and we saw how hard it was for the 'Fins to do that to them last season. I also don't think it's helpful that Miami enters 2023 dealing with some injuries in key spots already. I see the Chargers' offense as having more routes to success, whether it be the run game, the short passing game, or what might be an even enhanced deep-passing game this season. I'm betting on the Los Angeles Chargers minus 3 points.

Projected Score: LA Chargers 34, Miami 21

PRO FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICK

Detroit at KANSAS CITY Over 52

Thursday Night Game

This has all the makings of a hugely exciting matchup with two of the most electric offenses in the league coming into Week 1. If you like high-scoring games then make sure you don't miss this matchup. I'm taking the over in this game for many reasons. First off, both of these pass defenses were not very good last year. The Lions gave up the 3rd-most passing yards and the Chiefs gave up the 9th-most, and never team has improved their secondary enough to make me believe that things will be much different in this matchup. And that's without mentioning that the Lions gave up the most total yards in the NFL last season, surpassing over 6,600 yards.

The Lions and the Chiefs have talented offensive play makers that can score anytime they touch the ball. With Mahomes and Kelce on one side and Goff and St. Brown on the other, we should see plenty of fireworks on Thursday night. Let's roll with the over and enjoy a game full of points.

TAKE: Lions/Chiefs Over 54

PRO FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICK

Dallas at NY Giants Over 46

Last year, the Giants finished 22nd in yards per play and third-down conversion rate, but they avoided turnovers and rode Saquon Barkley to success in the run game.

The Cowboys moved on from Ezekiel Elliott and will give Tony Pollard a full workload behind an offensive line that gained stability when pro-bowl guard Zack Martin ended his holdout in early August. The Giants struggled to stop the run last season, coughing up the second-most yards per carry (5.3) and the fifth-most rushing yards per game (146.3).

Dallas posted the best TD conversion rate in the red zone (71.4%) and averaged the fourth-most points per game (26.8) last season. Defensive Player of the Year Micah Parsons led a pass rush that finished third in sack rate (8.25%) and the Cowboys should be stronger defensively after trading for CB Stephon Gilmore and drafting DT Mazi Smith.

Cowboys games against NFC East foes are 8-4 to the Over since 2021.

TAKE: Cowboys/Giants Over 46

PRO FOOTBALL PREFERRED PICK

Buffalo at NY JETS Under 47

The Bills were one of the best defenses in the league. CB Tre'Davious White is fully healthy as part of a talented secondary that helped the Bills allow just 17.9 points per game a season ago.

The New York Jets managed just 17.4 points per game last season and needed to do something drastic to bolster their offense. After months of off season drama, the Jets (7-10) struck a deal to acquire 39 year-old QB Aaron Rodgers from Green Bay. WR Garrett Wilson won the Rookie of the Year by catching 83 passes for 1,103 yards. Breece Hall and Dalvin Cook give the Jets a formidable combination in the backfield.

While Rodgers should stabilize the New York offense, it may be tough going the first few games. The defense should remain solid after allowing 18.6 points per contest. Second year pro Sauce Gardner is one of the best at his position and provides the team with plenty of moxie. DT Quinnen Williams led New York with 12 sacks.

TAKE: Bills/Jets Under 47

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NFL	Falcons - 3½	Raiders + 4	Green Bay + 2	Chargers - 3	
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CFB	Utah - 7	Troy + 17	Wash State + 7½	Tulane Over 63	Tulsa + 35
NFL	Chiefs Over 52	Giants Over 46	Bills Under 47		



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