

Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

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Dennis Stagliano's Best Bets Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

Volume 44 Issue 13

CFB Week 13, 2025

NCAA Landscape:

FLIP THE SCRIPT SATURDAY LIVED UP TO ITS NAME. Oklahoma rolled into Tuscaloosa and left with a monster win over Alabama, throwing the SEC title race off its axis. Texas A&M clawed back from a first-half stinker to stun South Carolina. USC punched Iowa in the mouth and vaulted straight into the College Football Playoff conversation. And Georgia took care of business against Texas.

Just when we thought we had the SEC figured out, Oklahoma knocked off fourth-ranked Alabama 23-21 to vault itself into the College Football Playoff picture.

This game was a Brent Venables masterclass. The Sooners took a bend-but-don't-break approach to defense, giving up plenty of yards but getting stops when they needed them. Oklahoma picked off Simpson once, forced a pair of critical fumbles, held the Crimson Tide to under 2.5 yards per carry, and recorded four sacks and five tackles for loss.

Oklahoma did a nice job of starting fast and finishing strong. The Sooners started the game with a quick field goal and soon after, picked off Simpson and returned it to the house to take a quick 10-0 lead. The Crimson Tide responded well, chipping in a pair of touchdowns in the second quarter, but the offense came up short down the stretch in the fourth quarter with the game hanging in the balance.

Alabama's inability to consistently run the ball has been a problem for much of the season, and it reared its ugly head on Saturday evening. Even using Alabama this year in multiple winning [Private Gold Picks](#), I have some serious questions about Alabama moving forward, considering the offense is so one-dimensional.

Oklahoma's win immediately vaults them into the College Football Playoff party and shuts down any questions about Brent Venables' job. Alabama's undefeated SEC record is now gone. This loss might keep the Crimson Tide out of Atlanta and surely adds another wrinkle to the SEC title game race.

Texas A&M survives a swoon to stun South Carolina

There are unravelings. There's shitting your pants. And then there's whatever Texas A&M did in the first half on Saturday.

Through a half of football, the Aggies did everything in their power to stink up the joint against a three-win Gamecocks team, mere hours after news leaked that head coach Mike Elko was due to signing a monster contract extension. Texas A&M dropped passes, exhibited bad o-line play, missed field goals, and missed tackle after tackle. Up 27 points at the break, South Carolina looked primed for a Top 5 upset.

But then the game flipped on its head. I'm not sure what Elko said to his team at halftime. But whatever it was, it worked.

The second half was a total 180 for the Aggies. Quarterback Marcel Reed was suddenly accurate again, zipping passes with poise. The receivers could catch. The o-line was opening holes and keeping Reed upright. And the defense was wreaking havoc on the Gamecocks offense.

The Aggies survived the first-half swoon and scored 21 points in the third quarter. Then came the final period. Down six with the ball on his own one-yard line, Reed engineered a doozy of a 99-yard drive as Texas A&M punched it in to take a one-point lead. Later, the Aggies got a big-time, final drive stop to put the punctuation mark on the 27-point comeback win.

With the win, Texas A&M remains undefeated and in the driver's seat in the SEC's race to Atlanta. South Carolina, on the other hand, must be in a puddle of misery. The loss was so bad, I even wondered to myself if this is something head coach Shane Beamer can come back from. I suppose time will tell.

Gunner Stockton has got the goods -

In a game billed as the biggest showdown of the night, it was the quarterback without the prized family lineage that lit it up in prime time. Ultimately, Georgia proved to be too much for Texas as the Bulldogs pulled away for a 35-10 win.

Much has been made this season about Texas quarterback Arch Manning. Fair enough. But on Saturday night? It was all about UGA signal-caller Gunner Stockton.

Stockton delivered on the big stage and then some. Squaring off against a killer Texas defense, Stockton threw for over 200 passing yards and four touchdowns. He was ultra-precise, he was cool in the big moment, and alongside the defense, he was the reason UGA came out on top.

Texas did a nice job of hanging around. But Georgia turned on the afterburners in the fourth quarter, chipping in three late touchdowns to pull away. Texas struggled mightily with drops in big spots and it made it pretty difficult to string together drives.

Outside of Stockton, I was particularly impressed with the Georgia defense. I thought that unit did a nice job of squashing any semblance of the Texas run game (the Longhorns had fewer than 50 yards rushing) and blowing up plays at the point of attack.

Georgia keeps on trucking and looks bound to represent the SEC in Atlanta for the Championship Game. Texas is likely out of the broader CFP discussion, but can still wreak havoc by knocking off Texas A&M on Black Friday.

Notre Dame squashes Pitt

This was Dennis' Private Gold Pick! Notre Dame essentially booked its place in the College Football Playoff field on Saturday with its 37-15 dismantling of Pitt.

Entering the game, Pitt head coach Pat Narduzzi boldly claimed this wasn't a "must-win" game. His team sure played like it.

For all the good things freshman quarterback Mason Heintschel has done this season, he looked every bit a freshman against Notre Dame's nasty defense. He completed fewer than 50% of his

passes, threw for just 126 yards on 16 completions, and spent the majority of the afternoon running for his life.

Notre Dame looked every bit the part of a CFP-contending team. The defense ruthlessly swarmed Pitt's offense. Quarterback CJ Carr overcame a pair of miscues to steer the ship to victory. And man, oh man, what more can you say about Jeremiah Love?

Love was a capital-D DAWG all afternoon. He finished with 147 yards on 23 carries and a touchdown. His lone score of the game was a 56-yard scamper where he spin cycle'd a Pitt defender so hard he went flying into a different zip code. It was an elite game from an elite player.

For as badly as this game went for Pitt, it wasn't a conference game. The Panthers still have a big part to play in the ACC title race over the next few weeks with games remaining against Georgia Tech and Miami. If the Panthers can run the table, there's a chance they'll play for the conference crown in Charlotte.

USC notches a statement win over Iowa

For years, USC has perpetuated the California "soft" stereotype. When the Trojans joined the Big Ten, pundits said that games like this would prove they weren't physical enough for their new conference.

But on Saturday, USC had a point to prove. The Trojans went toe-to-toe with a Midwest Tough Iowa team, rallying from an early deficit to win 26-21 to keep their College Football Playoff hopes alive.

Iowa jumped out to a 21-10 first-half lead, thanks to the strong play of quarterback Mark Gronowski. Through 30 minutes, Gronowski did a bit of everything—throwing, catching, and running for a touchdown in the same half. Iowa had its foot on the gas and looked like it was heading for a Hollywood ending against Lincoln Riley's bunch.

But this version of USC doesn't wilt so easily. In the second half, the Trojans got their act together, in large part because of the Jayden Maiava-Makhi Lemon connection. Lemon was a menace all afternoon, hauling in 10 catches for 153 yards and a touchdown.

And how 'bout that USC defense, huh? After giving up some early scores, the group buckled down and blanked the Hawkeyes in the second half. Defensive Coordinator D'Anton Lynn remains perhaps the most important hire Lincoln Riley has ever made.

With the win, USC sets up a monster showdown against Oregon this week.

The Lane Train keeps rollin'

We were really close to seeing Lane Kiffin lose to his potential next employer. But alas, the seventh-ranked Rebels used a late surge to stave off an upset in a 34-24 win over Florida.

Ole Miss spent a lot of time on Florida's side of the field and largely failed to punish the Gators. Otherwise, the scoreline might've looked vastly different.

This game had five different lead changes with both teams trading blows like a heavyweight fight. The Gators punched first, putting up a 17-point second quarter to take a slim lead into the halftime break. But Ole Miss came out throwing haymakers and answered, in large part, with running back Kewan Lacy.

Lacy entered the “Dude of the Week” conversation with his insane stat line against the Gators. He finished with 224 yards and three touchdowns on 31 carries. He got the hard yards, busted explosive plays, and finished drives with fury. He was the X-Factor in this game and was the reason Ole Miss escaped with a win.

Finding ways to win is the name of the game this time of year, and Ole Miss just keeps winning.

The American Conference has lost its marbles

All year, I’ve found the American a perplexing league. It’s filled with good, not great teams. There’s been a log jam at the top of the conference standings for a while now. And every week, at least one of those core teams in contention takes an L and makes things murky. Saturday was no different.

Contenders Navy and USF squared off in a juicy battle with major conference title implications. Navy’s offense proved to be too much for the Bulls, with the Midshipmen holding on to win 41-38. USF quarterback Byrum Brown had a monster day, but it felt like a one-man band out there at times. With the loss, USF is likely out of College Football Playoff contention. I’ll be curious to see if Alex Golesh starts getting more serious sniffs from Power 5 openings now.

Elsewhere in the league, we saw fellow contender Memphis drop its third conference game of the season in a loss against East Carolina, while both Tulane and North Texas rolled to victory.

November is here in full force, and this conference continues to be wild. It now appears to be a four-horse race between Navy, North Texas, Tulane, and ECU to see who will win the league and possibly represent the G6 in the CFP. I say “possibly” because there’s a chance James Madison could come out of the Sun Belt and steal the playoff bid. Ultimately, the committee decide which conference it prefers. But if it was my choice, it would be James Madison hands down.

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BETS

Western Kentucky Hilltoppers at LSU Tigers — 7:45 PM ET

Line: LSU -21, O/U 50

Western Kentucky steps way up in class here, trading its usual C-USA comfort zone for a trip into Tiger Stadium against an LSU team that still has all the traits of a bully when it gets a chance to lean on someone. The mismatch starts up front: LSU's offensive line has a clear power and size advantage over a Hilltoppers front that's more accustomed to defending spread looks than dealing with downhill SEC run games for four quarters. That kind of trench edge typically shows up in the second half, when broken tackles and pile-moving runs turn into chunk plays and clock-bleeding drives. Western Kentucky's defense has already shown it can be gashed on the ground; here it's facing a deeper backfield and more physical offensive line than it's seen all year.

On the other side of the ball, Western Kentucky's passing-centric offense is going to be under constant stress. LSU's defense hasn't been perfect, but the Tigers still recruit and play with SEC speed on the back end, and that matters when you're defending an offense that wants to live on timing routes and perimeter spacing. If the LSU front can generate pressure without constantly blitzing, it shrinks throwing windows and invites the kind of hurried throws that lead to turnovers. Short fields for LSU's offense are a real possibility.

There's also a stylistic issue for the Hilltoppers: their tempo and aggressive fourth-down mindset are great when the opponent can't fully punish mistakes. Against an LSU team that can turn every short field into seven points, those same tendencies magnify risk. Even if Western Kentucky lands an early shot or two, the cumulative physicality and depth advantage for LSU should take over as the game moves into the late third and fourth quarters. In a night game at Tiger Stadium, with a huge edge in the trenches and superior athletes at every level, LSU is well positioned to win this by four scores or more.

TAKE: LSU -21

Tennessee Volunteers at Florida Gators — 7:30 PM ET

Line: Tennessee -3.5, O/U 58

This is one of those SEC games where line play and pace matter more than rivalry mystique. Tennessee's offense is designed to stress defenses horizontally and vertically, but the whole engine is powered by efficient early-down runs and a tempo that keeps opponents from subbing and disguising coverages. Florida's front seven has been inconsistent against the run and has had tackling issues in space; that's a dangerous combination against a Volunteer attack that uses wide splits and quick perimeter looks to force one-on-one situations. When Tennessee is on schedule, second-and-short becomes a green light for deep shots, and the Vols have the speed outside to turn those into explosive plays.

Defensively, Tennessee has quietly become more physical at the point of attack. Florida is at its best when it can lean on a balanced approach and protect the quarterback with play-action. If Tennessee can bottle up the Gator ground game and force more true drop-back situations, the Volunteers' pass rush can tee off on predictable passing downs. Florida's protection has not been bulletproof, and pressure has led to stalled drives, penalties, and turnovers in key spots this season. That's exactly how a small road favorite can turn a competitive game into a multiple-score margin.

The matchup also favors Tennessee in terms of game script. If the Vols jump out to an early lead, their tempo becomes even more problematic for a Florida defense that will be stuck on the field for

long stretches. Florida's offense isn't built to chase from two scores down against a defense that can play pass first. Add in special teams—where Tennessee's return units and kicking game have often provided field-position boosts—and the Volunteers look like the more complete, better-equipped side. Laying less than a touchdown in a game where they have edges in pace, explosiveness, and defensive front play is a spot worth backing.

TAKE: Tennessee -3.5

Delaware Fightin' Blue Hens at Wake Forest Demon Deacons — 12:00 PM ET

Line: Wake Forest -17.5, O/U 52

From a physicality and depth standpoint, this is a tall ask for Delaware. Wake Forest isn't a traditional ACC bruiser, but the Demon Deacons still bring ACC-level size and speed across both lines, and that gap tends to widen as the game moves along. Offensively, Wake's slow-mesh concepts and RPO package are difficult for Power-5 defenses to handle when the Demon Deacons are in rhythm; for an FCS defense stepping into this environment, it's an even steeper climb. The Blue Hens will be forced to choose between committing extra bodies to the box or protecting against the vertical throws that Wake's attack builds toward. Either choice creates exploitable space somewhere.

Wake Forest also enjoys a big edge in sheer weaponry on the perimeter. Their receivers are comfortable winning one-on-one battles, especially against smaller corners, and their tempo allows them to string together quick-hitting drives that can turn a modest lead into a full-blown avalanche. Even if the Demon Deacons start a bit conservatively, once they find a matchup they like, they're not shy about leaning into it repeatedly. With a high probability of explosive plays and a sizable athleticism advantage, sustained scoring drives should be on the table throughout the afternoon.

Defensively, Wake Forest doesn't need to be dominant to cover this number; it just needs to prevent Delaware from consistently flipping field position with chunk plays. The Demon Deacons' front has enough size and depth to control the line of scrimmage, and their speed at linebacker and in the secondary allows them to close space quickly if Delaware tries to spread things out. As the game moves into the second half, the depth gap should show up in the form of tired legs and missed assignments from the visitors. With home field, more talent, and a scheme that punishes overmatched defenses, Wake Forest has multiple paths to winning this by three touchdowns or more.

TAKE: Wake Forest -17.5

Kansas Jayhawks at Iowa State Cyclones — 12:00 PM ET

Line: Iowa State -4.5, O/U 56

Iowa State's identity on both sides of the ball lines up well against what Kansas wants to do. The Cyclones are built around a disciplined, structurally sound defense that takes away easy throws and limits explosive plays, especially at home. Kansas thrives when it can create misdirection and hit chunk gains off play-action, but those looks are much harder to manufacture against a defense that keeps its eyes disciplined and rallies to the football. Iowa State's front is also sturdy enough to avoid getting bullied in the run game, which is critical against a Jayhawk offense that needs its ground attack to be respected to open up its best passing concepts.

On offense, Iowa State doesn't always look flashy, but it is efficient when it stays ahead of the chains. Kansas has had issues with tackling and gap integrity, particularly on the road, and the Cyclones are well coached at taking the free yards that are available: underneath throws against soft coverage, efficient inside runs against light boxes, and smart checks into favorable looks. Over four quarters,

that approach tends to generate long drives that not only produce points but also keep the Cyclone defense fresh.

Jack Trice Stadium has also developed into a real home-field edge. Crowd noise and energy help the Iowa State defense on key third downs, and Kansas has shown that its offense can bog down when communication and timing are disrupted. In what projects as a physical, field-position-oriented contest, the Cyclones' advantages in defensive structure, home environment, and consistency on early downs loom large. Laying less than a touchdown with the more complete, home-field-backed side feels justified.

TAKE: Iowa State -4.5

California Golden Bears at Stanford Cardinal — 7:30 PM ET

Line: California -3, O/U 49

The Big Game this year profiles as more of a grind than a track meet. California's offense is built on a traditional West Coast blend of run game and timing routes, and while it can be effective, it isn't typically explosive enough to single-handedly drive games into shootout territory. Stanford's defense has been inconsistent, but at home it has shown stretches of competence, particularly when it can focus on stopping the run and forcing opponents into obvious passing downs. Cal's approach leans toward ball control rather than tempo, which naturally bleeds clock and shortens the game.

Stanford's offense, meanwhile, has struggled with consistency all year. The Cardinal have had difficulty sustaining drives against even average defenses, and they've leaned heavily on a small handful of big plays just to stay afloat on the scoreboard. California's defense isn't elite, but it is fundamentally sound enough to keep a lid on explosives and force Stanford to convert repeatedly on third down. That's not a recipe for high scoring, especially when both teams are content to punt and play field position rather than taking unnecessary risks in their own territory.

Rivalry games also tend to tighten up in the red zone as both coaching staffs pull out their best situational calls and defenses sell out to prevent touchdowns. That often leads to field-goal attempts instead of seven-point finishes, which matters a lot with a total sitting at a modest but still reachable number like this. Between Cal's methodical offense, Stanford's offensive inconsistency, and two defenses that should know each other's tendencies inside and out, this matchup has all the ingredients of a game that finishes in the low 40s rather than sailing past the posted total.

TAKE: Under 49



COLLEGE FOOTBALL QUICK PICKS

Massachusetts Minutemen at Ohio Bobcats — Tuesday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Ohio -32.5, O/U 52

Ohio has been vastly superior on both sides of the ball, and Massachusetts has been a poor road team, frequently overwhelmed at the line of scrimmage. The Bobcats should control field position all night and have little trouble turning long drives into points against a porous Minutemen defense. Once Ohio builds a lead, its ground game can salt this away without much resistance.

TAKE: Ohio -32.5

Akron Zips at Bowling Green Falcons — Tuesday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Bowling Green -3.5, O/U 48

Bowling Green's defense is the steadier unit here and should have the upper hand against an Akron offense that has struggled to consistently move the chains. At home, the Falcons typically play with more confidence and have been better at finishing drives. In a matchup of inconsistent offenses, siding with the stronger defense and home field at a short number makes sense.

TAKE: Bowling Green -3.5

Western Michigan Broncos at Northern Illinois Huskies — Tuesday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Western Michigan -7, O/U 38

Northern Illinois tends to drag games into the mud with a conservative offensive approach and a defense that plays tough in the red zone. Western Michigan may have a bit more pop, but laying nearly a touchdown on the road in a low-total MAC game is always risky. With both teams leaning on the run and possessions at a premium, the underdog has a good chance to hang around.

TAKE: Northern Illinois +7

Miami (OH) RedHawks at Buffalo Bulls — Wednesday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Buffalo -2, O/U 40

Miami (OH) brings the more balanced team into this one, with a defense that has consistently limited big plays and an offense comfortable grinding out drives. Buffalo has flashed at times but has struggled with efficiency and turnovers, which is a bad combination against a disciplined opponent. Getting points with the tougher, more complete squad is appealing.

TAKE: Miami (OH) +2

Central Michigan Chippewas at Kent State Golden Flashes — Wednesday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Central Michigan -8, O/U 47

Kent State has been one of the weakest teams in the conference, especially on offense, where sustained drives have been rare. Central Michigan isn't perfect but has a functioning attack and enough defensive backbone to keep the Flashes under pressure. If the Chippewas avoid self-inflicted

mistakes, they should separate over four quarters.

TAKE: Central Michigan -8

Louisiana-Lafayette Ragin' Cajuns at Arkansas State Red Wolves — Thursday, 7:30 PM ET

Line: Arkansas State -3, O/U 54

Both offenses can score, but Arkansas State at home has shown more ability to hit explosive plays and finish drives in the red zone. Louisiana-Lafayette's defense has been leaky enough that it's hard to trust them on the road in what could become a back-and-forth affair. With the crowd behind them and the edge in firepower, the Red Wolves are in a good spot.

TAKE: Arkansas State -3

Florida State Seminoles at North Carolina State Wolfpack — Friday, 8:00 PM ET

Line: Florida State -4.5, O/U 62

NC State's home environment and balanced offense make this a tricky road spot for Florida State. The Wolfpack can score through the air and on the ground, and their defense is usually sound enough to force opponents to drive the length of the field. In a game that could trade scores, grabbing more than a field goal with the home side is attractive.

TAKE: North Carolina State +4.5

Hawaii Rainbow Warriors at UNLV Runnin' Rebels — Friday, 10:30 PM ET

Line: UNLV -3, O/U 64

Hawaii's offense has found a rhythm and should be able to exploit a UNLV defense that can struggle against spread passing attacks. The Rebels can certainly score, but their reliance on trading big plays leaves the back door open for a live underdog. With Hawaii's passing game in decent form, taking the points is reasonable.

TAKE: Hawaii +3

Rutgers Scarlet Knights at Ohio State Buckeyes — Saturday, 12:00 PM ET

Line: Ohio State -31, O/U 56

Ohio State's offensive ceiling is sky-high, and Rutgers doesn't have the speed or depth to keep up for four quarters. The Buckeyes should dominate field position, create short fields, and hit multiple explosive plays in the passing game. Even if they ease off late, the damage may already be done.

TAKE: Ohio State -31

Missouri Tigers at Oklahoma Sooners — Saturday, 12:00 PM ET

Line: Oklahoma -7.5, O/U 43

This projects as a defensive battle, with both teams capable of generating pressure and taking away

easy completions. Oklahoma has the edge in talent but may be content to play field-position football once it gains control, especially at home. With both defenses capable of limiting big plays, points should be at a premium.

TAKE: Under 43

Louisville Cardinals at SMU Mustangs — Saturday, 12:00 PM ET

Line: SMU -3, O/U 54

SMU's offense is explosive, particularly at home, and Louisville's defense has shown cracks against spread attacks that can push tempo. The Mustangs' ability to score quickly and from anywhere on the field makes it tough for visitors to trade punches for four quarters. With an edge in offensive firepower and home field, SMU is worth laying a short number.

TAKE: SMU -3

Miami Hurricanes at Virginia Tech Hokies — Saturday, 12:00 PM ET

Line: Miami -18, O/U 48

Miami owns the talent edge, especially on the perimeter, but Virginia Tech's home crowd and physical front can keep the Hokies competitive longer than the number suggests. The Hurricanes have occasionally stalled in the red zone and committed drive-killing penalties, which matter when laying big points on the road. A feisty Hokies squad can do enough to stay within the margin.

TAKE: Virginia Tech +18

Minnesota Golden Gophers vs Northwestern Wildcats (Wrigley Field) — Saturday, 12:00 PM ET

Line: Northwestern -3.5, O/U 40

Neutral-site settings often favor the more polished passing game, and Northwestern's offense has shown more comfort throwing the ball than Minnesota's. The Wildcats also have a defense that typically plays tough situationally, forcing opponents to string together long drives. With the Gophers' offense limited through the air, Northwestern has the edge in a low-scoring contest.

TAKE: Northwestern -3.5

Tulsa Golden Hurricane at Army Black Knights — Saturday, 12:00 PM ET

Line: Army -10.5, O/U 46

Army's option attack is hard to prepare for and usually grinds clock, but Tulsa's offense has enough explosiveness to punish any missed assignments. Laying double digits in a low-total game is always tricky, especially when the underdog can hit quick scores through the air. Tulsa's ability to shorten the number with a handful of big plays makes the points tempting.

TAKE: Tulsa +10.5

Charlotte 49ers at Georgia Bulldogs — Saturday, 12:45 PM ET

Line: Georgia -44.5, O/U 54

Georgia has overwhelming advantages in size, speed, and depth at every position group; this is a pure “name your score” spot. The risk with a number this large is late game pace and substitutions, but Georgia’s backups are often still far superior to opponents’ starters. Charlotte will struggle to sustain drives or protect its quarterback, leaving the door open for a blowout.

TAKE: Georgia -44.5

Washington State Cougars at James Madison Dukes — Saturday, 1:00 PM ET

Line: James Madison -13.5, O/U 44

James Madison has quietly developed into a powerhouse at this level, with a defense that suffocates the run and an offense that punishes mistakes. Washington State’s air-raid tendencies can be blunted by a Dukes front that gets pressure without blitzing, shrinking windows and creating turnover chances. At home, JMU’s balance and physicality should tell.

TAKE: James Madison -13.5

Baylor Bears at Arizona Wildcats — Saturday, 1:00 PM ET

Line: Arizona -6.5, O/U 62

Baylor’s defense has been inconsistent, and Arizona’s offense has the personnel to exploit mismatches in space. The Wildcats at home can lean into tempo and spread the field, which stresses a Bear front that has struggled with tackling and coverage communication. In what could be a high-scoring game, laying under a touchdown with the better offense is reasonable.

TAKE: Arizona -6.5

Old Dominion Monarchs at Georgia Southern Eagles — Saturday, 1:00 PM ET

Line: Old Dominion -12.5, O/U 64

Old Dominion’s defense has the look of the sturdier unit, while Georgia Southern tends to rely heavily on its passing game to stay in shootouts. If the Monarchs can get consistent pressure and force hurried throws, turnovers become a real concern for the home side. ODU’s offense should be efficient enough to take advantage.

TAKE: Old Dominion -12.5

Missouri State Bears at Kennesaw State Owls — Saturday, 2:00 PM ET

Line: Kennesaw State -6.5, O/U 58

Kennesaw State’s option-based run game is built to control tempo and wear down defenses that aren’t used to that style. Missouri State’s front has struggled against physical rushing attacks, and adjusting on the fly to a unique scheme is a big ask on the road. Over four quarters, the Owls’ ground-and-pound approach should create separation.

TAKE: Kennesaw State -6.5

Nevada Wolf Pack at Wyoming Cowboys — Saturday, 2:00 PM ET

Line: Wyoming -6.5, O/U 42

Both offenses here lean on the run and conservative play-calling, and both defenses are more solid than spectacular. That recipe typically leads to a slow-paced, field-position battle with limited explosive plays. With possessions likely to be scarce, the points with Nevada have added value.

TAKE: Nevada +6.5

Ball State Cardinals at Toledo Rockets — Saturday, 2:00 PM ET

Line: Toledo -27, O/U 48

Toledo's offense has the firepower to light up the scoreboard, and Ball State's defense has struggled to get timely stops against top-tier MAC attacks. The Rockets can score through multiple avenues and have a knack for piling on once they grab momentum. If they avoid turnovers, the talent gap should be evident early.

TAKE: Toledo -27

Marshall Thundering Herd at Appalachian State Mountaineers — Saturday, 2:30 PM ET

Line: Marshall -4.5, O/U 54

Marshall's strength is its defense, but Appalachian State at home is always dangerous with a balanced offense and a solid run game. The Mountaineers can match Marshall's physicality in the trenches while also featuring a more diverse passing attack. Getting more than a field goal with a strong home program is appealing.

TAKE: Appalachian State +4.5

Connecticut Huskies at Florida Atlantic Owls — Saturday, 3:00 PM ET

Line: Connecticut -7.5, O/U 66

Connecticut has quietly become more competitive, with an offense capable of moving the ball and a defense that, while not dominant, at least competes. Florida Atlantic's inconsistency on both sides makes it hard to trust as an underdog in a high-total game, especially if they fall behind and become one-dimensional. UConn's balance gives it multiple paths to a comfortable win.

TAKE: Connecticut -7.5

Liberty Flames at Louisiana Tech Bulldogs — Saturday, 3:00 PM ET

Line: Louisiana Tech -1.5, O/U 46

Liberty's offense has enough explosiveness to threaten downfield, and Louisiana Tech's defense has not always held up against teams that can push the ball vertically. In a game with a small spread, turnovers and big plays often decide things, and the Flames may have the more dynamic attack. Taking the slight road underdog is reasonable.

TAKE: Liberty +1.5

Sam Houston Bearkats at Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders — Saturday, 3:00 PM ET

Line: Middle Tennessee -7, O/U 54

Sam Houston's offense has struggled to find consistent rhythm, and Middle Tennessee at home should be able to generate enough pressure to keep it that way. The Blue Raiders don't always put together a complete game, but their upside on offense is higher, especially against a defense that can be worn down. At under a touchdown, the favorite is worth a look.

TAKE: Middle Tennessee -7

New Mexico State Aggies at UTEP Miners — Saturday, 3:00 PM ET

Line: UTEP -3, O/U 44

These familiar rivals tend to play tight, physical games, and both offenses lean on the run more than the pass. That profile pushes toward a lower-scoring contest where every possession matters. In that setting, taking points with an Aggies team that can match UTEP's physicality is appealing.

TAKE: New Mexico State +3

South Florida Bulls at UAB Blazers — Saturday, 3:00 PM ET

Line: South Florida -21, O/U 70

South Florida's offense is among the more explosive in the Group of Five, and UAB's defense has had trouble getting stops against far less dynamic attacks. The Bulls can score quickly and often, and the Blazers don't have the firepower to trade scores if this gets into the 40s. Even with a big number, the matchup leans heavily toward the favorite.

TAKE: South Florida -21

Duke Blue Devils at North Carolina Tar Heels — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Duke -7, O/U 52

Duke's defense has been more trustworthy than North Carolina's, particularly in limiting explosive plays, and that matters in a rivalry game. The Blue Devils' offense isn't flashy but is efficient enough to take advantage of a Tar Heel defense that has struggled on third downs. With the better defense and more consistent execution, Duke is positioned to justify the favorite tag.

TAKE: Duke -7

Michigan State Spartans at Iowa Hawkeyes — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Iowa -16.5, O/U 42

Iowa's defense and special teams are elite, but its offense typically doesn't generate the kind of margin that makes laying more than two touchdowns comfortable. Michigan State's offense has issues, yet the Spartans are physical enough on defense to avoid being completely steamrolled. In a low-total game, the underdog has extra value with this kind of cushion.

TAKE: Michigan State +16.5

Kentucky Wildcats at Vanderbilt Commodores — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Vanderbilt -10, O/U 54

Vanderbilt's improvement, especially on offense, has given it the ability to punish defensive lapses, and Kentucky's inconsistency on that side has shown up more often lately. The Commodores should be able to dictate tempo at home and exploit mismatches in the passing game. If their defense can just be serviceable against a streaky Wildcat attack, the margin can stretch into double digits.

TAKE: Vanderbilt -10

USC Trojans at Oregon Ducks — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Oregon -9.5, O/U 59

This has shootout written all over it, with USC's high-octane offense and shaky defense combining with an Oregon attack that can score from anywhere on the field. Both teams prefer tempo and aren't shy about pushing the ball vertically, and neither stop unit has consistently proved it can clamp down on elite offenses. Expect long touchdowns and very few empty possessions.

TAKE: Over 59

Arkansas Razorbacks at Texas Longhorns — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Texas -10, O/U 56

Texas brings a significant talent edge, especially at quarterback and receiver, and Arkansas has struggled to hold up against top-flight passing games. The Longhorns' defense is also physical enough to bottle up the Razorbacks' run game and force obvious passing downs. In front of a fired-up home crowd, Texas has multiple paths to a two-score win.

TAKE: Texas -10

Syracuse Orange at Notre Dame Fighting Irish — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Notre Dame -34.5, O/U 52

Notre Dame's physicality on both lines should completely overwhelm Syracuse over four quarters. The Irish offense can lean on the run and still find big plays through the air, while their defense is equipped to smother an Orange attack that lacks consistent identity. Even with a big number, the talent and depth gaps are enormous.

TAKE: Notre Dame -34.5

Jacksonville State Gamecocks at Florida International Panthers — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Jacksonville State -1.5, O/U 56

This is a tight matchup between two flawed but competitive mid-majors. FIU's offense has a bit more pop, especially at home, and Jacksonville State has been prone to defensive breakdowns in space. In a virtual pick'em, backing the home side with the slightly better play making profile is logical.

TAKE: Florida International +1.5

Southern Miss Golden Eagles at South Alabama Jaguars — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: Southern Miss -2.5, O/U 54

South Alabama is tough at home and generally brings a balanced offense that can exploit defensive weaknesses through either the run or pass. Southern Miss has been erratic, and laying points on the road with that profile is risky. A live home dog with a solid defense and competent offense is the play.

TAKE: South Alabama +2.5

East Carolina Pirates at UTSA Roadrunners — Saturday, 3:30 PM ET

Line: East Carolina -3, O/U 62

Both teams can score, but UTSA has quietly tightened up defensively and has enough offensive balance to stress the Pirates on every level. East Carolina's defense has been leaky against good passing teams, and the Roadrunners have the quarterback play to take advantage. Getting points with a capable home offense is attractive.

TAKE: UTSA +3

Tulane Green Wave at Temple Owls — Saturday, 3:45 PM ET

Line: Tulane -8.5, O/U 56

Tulane's physical run game and efficient passing attack make it a tough matchup for a Temple defense that has struggled with missed tackles and blown assignments. The Green Wave also play solid red-zone defense, which forces opponents to settle for three more often than seven. Over four quarters, that kind of profile usually yields a comfortable margin.

TAKE: Tulane -8.5

Michigan Wolverines at Maryland Terrapins — Saturday, 4:00 PM ET

Line: Michigan -14, O/U 46

Michigan's defense is built to choke off spread passing attacks, and Maryland's offense tends to sputter when it can't create explosives early. On offense, the Wolverines should be able to lean on their ground game to control tempo and wear down the Terps' front. It may take some time, but Michigan's depth and physicality should show up on the scoreboard.

TAKE: Michigan -14

Oklahoma State Cowboys at UCF Knights — Saturday, 4:00 PM ET

Line: UCF -14, O/U 48

Oklahoma State has struggled to stop the run and has given up its share of big plays, which doesn't bode well against a UCF offense that likes to spread the field and go fast. The Knights' home environment only adds to the challenge for a Cowboy team that hasn't traveled particularly well. If UCF jumps out early, it has the tools to keep the pressure on and extend the lead.

TAKE: UCF -14

TCU Horned Frogs at Houston Cougars — Saturday, 4:00 PM ET

Line: Houston -2.5, O/U 54

TCU's defense is still aggressive and capable of creating negative plays, and Houston's offense has at times struggled with protection and turnovers. The Horned Frogs' offense isn't the juggernaut it once was, but it's capable of moving the ball effectively against a Cougar defense that has been inconsistent. With a tight spread, siding with the underdog that can win outright is sensible.

TAKE: TCU +2.5

Kansas State Wildcats at Utah Utes — Saturday, 4:00 PM ET

Line: Utah -17.5, O/U 52

Rice-Eccles is one of the tougher venues in the country, and Utah's physical profile is a bad matchup for a Kansas State team that relies heavily on its run game. The Utes' front is elite against the run and should force the Wildcats into uncomfortable passing situations. Combined with Utah's ability to grind out long, punishing drives, the home side has a real chance to pull away.

TAKE: Utah -17.5

Georgia State Panthers at Troy Trojans — Saturday, 4:00 PM ET

Line: Troy -10.5, O/U 52

Troy's defense is the class of this matchup and should be able to bottle up a Georgia State offense that's far less dangerous on the road. The Trojans' offense isn't explosive, but it is efficient enough to take advantage of the field position their defense creates. With a superior stop unit and home field, Troy can gradually stretch the margin.

TAKE: Troy -10.5

Coastal Carolina Chanticleers at South Carolina Gamecocks — Saturday, 4:15 PM ET

Line: South Carolina -24.5, O/U 54

Coastal Carolina has enough offensive creativity to hit a few plays, but South Carolina's overall talent advantage is substantial. The Gamecocks should control both lines and have their way in the passing game against a Chanticleer defense that has struggled with tackling and coverage. Over four quarters, that tends to result in a multi-score SEC win.

TAKE: South Carolina -24.5

Louisiana-Monroe Warhawks at Texas State Bobcats — Saturday, 5:00 PM ET

Line: Texas State -19.5, O/U 56

Texas State's offense has become dangerous, and ULM's defense doesn't have the personnel to consistently get stops against this group. The Bobcats can score quickly and in bunches, particularly at home, and the Warhawks don't have the firepower to keep up in a shootout. As long as Texas State protects the football, this will be lopsided.

TAKE: Texas State -19.5

Nebraska Cornhuskers at Penn State Nittany Lions — Saturday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Penn State -9.5, O/U 44

Penn State's defense is built to suffocate offenses like Nebraska's that rely heavily on the run and short passing game. The Nittany Lions should control the line of scrimmage and force the Huskers into third-and-longs, where mistakes are more likely. A modest spread at home with the better defense is worth laying the lumber.

TAKE: Penn State -9.5

Pittsburgh Panthers at Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets — Saturday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Georgia Tech -3.5, O/U 62

Pitt's defense is typically physical and disciplined, and that travels well against a Georgia Tech offense that can be up-and-down. The Panthers' offense doesn't need to be explosive to take advantage of a Yellow Jacket defense that has given up big plays all season. In a game that may not live up to its lofty total, taking the points with a tough defensive dog is our play.

TAKE: Pittsburgh +3.5

New Mexico Lobos at Air Force Falcons — Saturday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: New Mexico -3, O/U 58

Air Force's option attack is built to grind out long drives and wear down defenses, and New Mexico's front hasn't shown the consistency needed to hold up for four quarters. The Falcons also tend to control time of possession, which limits opponents' chances. In what could be a high-scoring affair by service-academy standards, backing the team more comfortable in its identity is sensible.

TAKE: Air Force +3

Colorado State Rams at Boise State Broncos — Saturday, 7:00 PM ET

Line: Boise State -16.5, O/U 46

Boise State is tough to beat on the blue turf, with a defense that typically tightens up in front of the home crowd and an offense efficient enough to capitalize on mistakes. Colorado State has had trouble sustaining drives and protecting the quarterback, which is a bad combination on the road in this environment. The Broncos should run roughshod over the Rams.

TAKE: Boise State -16.5

Illinois Fighting Illini at Wisconsin Badgers — Saturday, 7:30 PM ET

Line: Illinois -9, O/U 42

Both teams prefer a physical, run-heavy style, and both defenses are more than capable of holding their own. That formula usually points to a game decided by a handful of key third downs and red-zone trips. With points at a premium, Wisconsin catching more than a TD at home holds value.

TAKE: Wisconsin +9

North Texas Mean Green at Rice Owls — Saturday, 7:30 PM ET

Line: North Texas -18.5, O/U 56

North Texas can score, but its defense has had issues against even modest offenses, making a big road number a bit uncomfortable. Rice has enough of a passing game to take advantage of that and at least trade punches for a while. If the Owls can avoid a disastrous turnover stretch, they can stay within the margin.

TAKE: Rice +18.5

BYU Cougars at Cincinnati Bearcats — Saturday, 8:00 PM ET

Line: BYU -2.5, O/U 54

BYU's physical style and experienced roster are well suited for a tough road environment like Nippert Stadium. Cincinnati has talent but has struggled with consistency on both sides of the ball. The Cougars' ability to win in the trenches and execute in the red zone gives them the edge in a close one.

TAKE: BYU -2.5

Arizona State Sun Devils at Colorado Buffaloes — Saturday, 8:00 PM ET

Line: Arizona State -7, O/U 49

Arizona State's defense has been sturdier than Colorado's, and the Sun Devils' offense is balanced enough to exploit a Buffalo unit that has given up big plays all season. Colorado's passing game can create some fireworks, but sustained success is harder to come by. Over four quarters, ASU's balance should win out.

TAKE: Arizona State -7

Washington Huskies at UCLA Bruins — Saturday, 10:30 PM ET

Line: Washington -10.5, O/U 52

Washington's offense is among the most efficient in the country, and UCLA's defense will be hard-pressed to consistently pressure the quarterback without compromising coverage. The Huskies can run or throw to move the chains and have plenty of explosiveness built in. If they jump ahead early, the Bruins may not have enough answers to reel them back in.

TAKE: Washington -10.5

San Jose State Spartans at San Diego State Aztecs — Saturday, 10:30 PM ET

Line: San Diego State -12.5, O/U 50

San Diego State prefers a defense-first, run-heavy style, but San Jose State's offense is capable enough to steal some possessions and hit a few chunk plays. That makes covering a big number more challenging for an Aztec team that doesn't always separate comfortably. The Spartans can do enough on both sides of the ball to keep this within shouting distance.

TAKE: San Jose State +12.5

Utah State Aggies at Fresno State Bulldogs — Saturday, 10:30 PM ET

Line: Fresno State -3, O/U 52

Utah State's offense is dangerous when it finds rhythm, and Fresno State's defense has had lapses against spread attacks. In a game with a narrow spread, the Aggies' ability to generate explosives makes them a live dog. If they protect the ball, they have a real shot to win outright.

TAKE: Utah State +3

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