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Dennis Stagliano's Best Bets Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

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CFB LANDSCAPE:

LAST WEEKEND BELONGED TO TEAMS READY TO CLOCK IN. Oregon settled an old score with a decisive win over Big Ten foe USC. Pitt did far more than handle its business – it bulldozed Georgia Tech out of the ACC title race. Miami and SMU racked up some style points. And Oklahoma squeezed the life out of the Missouri offense.

No frills, no excuses. Last weekend was all about just taking care of business.

MONDAY SHOCKWAVES

Oregon squashes USC's College Football Playoff aspirations

A lot of the talk in the lead-up to the USC-Oregon clash was that this was a turning point moment for the Trojans' program, a moment to write a new chapter and vault into the College Football Playoff discussion. Unfortunately for USC, it was more of the same story in Autzen Stadium on Saturday afternoon.

USC's defense struggled to get off the field, limit Oregon in the air or on the ground, and simply didn't play well enough to knock off a Top 10 team. The CFP-bound Ducks started fast, finished strong, and comfortably eliminated USC from playoff contention with a 42-27 win.

USC scored on the game's opening possession, but Oregon quickly answered and truly never looked back. The Ducks' offense got just about anything it wanted on the afternoon, finishing with nearly 180 yards and three scores on the ground, along with a pair of scores from quarterback Dante Moore in the air. And the defense stifled USC at the lines of scrimmage, allowing just 52 yards on 28 carries.

Critical swings of momentum came in the second quarter. The first swing came when Oregon punt returner house-called a ridiculous 85-yard punt to put the Ducks up seven. Later in the half, USC committed one of many dumb penalties when a defender leapt over the long snapper on an Oregon failed field goal attempt. The penalty gave Oregon another bite at the apple, and the Ducks immediately scored a touchdown to stretch their lead to two scores.

Oregon is damn-near a slam dunk to make the College Football Playoff now, whereas USC has once again been relegated to the second tier of the Big Ten Conference.

Pitt knocks Georgia Tech out of ACC contention

As it turns out, spotting your opponent 28 points isn't exactly a fool proof strategy for winning a college football game. Who knew?

Mere days after I waxed poetic about the heroic nature of Georgia Tech quarterback Haynes King, it turns out that super weapon Pitt was the Yellow Jackets' Kryptonite after all. Pitt turned a rocket ship first quarter into an insurmountable lead and knocked off No. 16 Georgia Tech 42-28, giving itself an outside shot at the upcoming ACC title game. With the loss, the Yellow Jackets are effectively eliminated from the conference title game.

This contest felt like multiple scenes in a play. Act 1 saw Pitt jump out to a crazy 28-point lead, with three of those scores coming courtesy of freshman quarterback Mason Heintschel.

Act 2 was the Georgia Tech comeback, which saw King and the offense snap out of a funk and put a pair of touchdowns on the board. The crowd came alive. It felt like the game was on the verge of

slipping through Pitt's fingers.

Then Act 3 happened. With Georgia Tech in the red zone and knocking on the door for a score, King threw a back-breaking 100-yard interception return for a touchdown that completely took the air out of the game.

Pitt now needs to beat Miami next weekend and needs either Virginia or SMU to lose for a berth in the ACC title game. Crazier things have happened.

Boomer Sooner shuts down Missouri

First half Oklahoma looked a lot like Iowa with cooler uniforms.

The Sooners mustered just six plays for -7 yards in the first quarter. Quarterback John Mateer looked out of sorts. Brent Venables was getting especially creative with the use of swear words directed at both officials and his own players. And at least through 15 or so minutes, the offense looked inept at best and flat-out terrible at worst.

But in typical Brent Venables style, the defense kept the Sooners in the game until the offense finally woke up. The Sooners' defense deleted Missouri's run game, picked off quarterback Beau Pribula twice, and was the deciding factor in Oklahoma's 17-6 win.

In a way, Oklahoma can't keep getting away with this (playing putrid offense), but on the other hand, maybe the Sooners can? Mateer was tame by his standards, Oklahoma only ran for 3.2 yards per carry, and if it weren't for a busted coverage touchdown in the first half, this thing would've been a lot nervier down the stretch.

No matter what you or I think about this offense, Oklahoma is finding ways to win, and that's what matters. Barring some unforeseen slip-up, the Sooners will ride their fearsome defense to a College Football Playoff appearance. What they do from there...that's a different story.

Miami and SMU cruise to comfortable victories

This time of year, style points are like mashed potatoes on Thanksgiving. Not a nice-to-have, but a necessity. Miami and SMU piled their plates high with style points on Saturday in comfortable wins over Virginia Tech and Louisville.

Miami jumped out to a 17-point first-half lead and rode that to a 34-17 victory over a plucky but extremely flawed Virginia Tech team. Quarterback Carson Beck threw four touchdowns and had just five incompletions on 32 attempts. Wideout Malachi Toney did Malachi Toney things time and time again. And as far as I can tell, most everybody got out of there healthy.

The Hurricanes need all the help (and love from the CFP committee) they can get right now. (Side note: Many people are asking... does Notre Dame's 60-plus-point win over Syracuse strengthen Miami's CFP case? Food for thought, I suppose.)

SMU, on the other hand, demolished a noticeably weakened Louisville team 38-6 to keep its ACC title game hopes alive. The Mustangs offense eclipsed the 500-yard mark. The defense limited Louisville to just 100 passing yards. All in all, it was a clobbering in every sense of the word.

Since Georgia Tech lost to Pitt, SMU now has a win-and-you're-in scenario against Cal to make the ACC title game. What a wild time!

Utah wins a barn-burner

Utah somehow won a game in which it gave up 348 first-half rushing yards to Kansas State. Very normal, huh?

In all seriousness, this was probably the Original Four Loco game of the day. Kansas State rushed for 472 yards and five touchdowns. Utah also chipped in five touchdowns on the ground and two more in the air via quarterback Devon Dampier. And both teams combined for over 1,100 yards... just like Big 12 commissioner Brett Yormark drew it up.

With the win, Utah technically keeps itself alive for a very outside shot at the Big 12 title game. The Utes will likely need a BYU loss next week to make that come to fruition.

Other notable call-outs across college football

A suddenly frisky Wisconsin team handily beat No. 21 Illinois to notch just its second Big Ten win of the season. Maybe that Luke Fickell contract extension wasn't such a bad idea after all?

Vanderbilt quarterback Diego Pavia had a dynamite afternoon. The Commodores drilled Kentucky 45-17, and Pavia finished with 484 passing yards and six total touchdowns. I'm intrigued to see if this output is enough to get him a spot at the Heisman Trophy ceremony in a few weeks.

No. 23 Houston missed a pair of late field goals in a 17-14 loss to TCU. The Cougars have had a heck of a season, but that's a tough way to lose this late in the year.

Frank Reich's Stanford put a hurtin' on rival Cal to win its annual rivalry game against the Golden Bears. And on Sunday, Cal moved on from head coach Justin Wilcox. Add Cal to the list of jobs open this coaching cycle.



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COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BETS

Texas A&M at Texas

Line: Texas A&M -2.5, Total 51.5 — Friday 7:30 PM

The rivalry is back, and this time it comes with a narrow number that doesn't fully reflect the difference in line play. Texas A&M has been the more consistent side at the line of scrimmage, repeatedly winning on standard downs and forcing opponents into passing situations. That matters against a Texas offense that has been at its best front-running but has bogged down when forced to drive the length of the field. A&M's defensive front is good enough to squeeze the run, and the Aggies have shown a willingness to bring pressure and trust their corners in man coverage, something Texas hasn't handled cleanly for four quarters when facing top-end fronts.

Offensively, A&M doesn't need fireworks as much as it needs efficiency. They're comfortable leaning on a physical run game, mixing in play-action shots, and playing field position. That translates well in a rivalry atmosphere where both teams will be tight early. Texas' defense has given up too many chunk plays on early downs, and A&M has the balance to stress them horizontally first and then hit down the seams. The Aggies also have the more reliable kicking game, which matters in what projects as a one-score contest. With the spread sitting under a field goal, we're essentially being asked who wins the game. The trenches, special teams, and coaching tendency all tilt toward the Aggies. Aggies gig the horns.

TAKE: Texas A&M -2.5

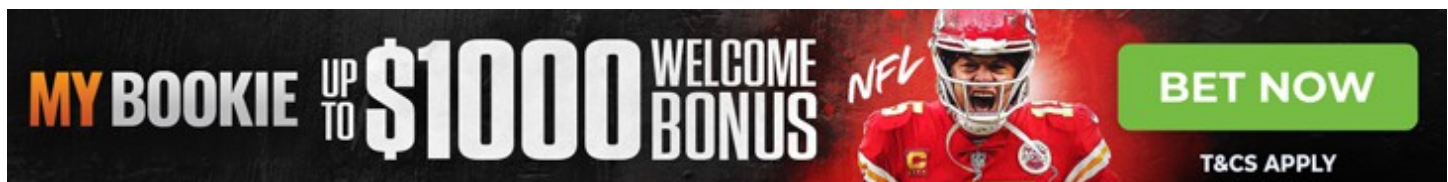
Old Dominion vs Georgia State

Line: Old Dominion -26, Total 59.5 — Saturday 2:00 PM

This sets up as a classic late-season blowout spot where one team is still pushing and the other is simply trying to get to the finish line. Old Dominion has been much more physical than Georgia State in the trenches, particularly on defense where the Monarchs have been sturdy against the run and willing to commit bodies to the box. Georgia State's offense leans heavily on staying ahead of the chains; when they fall behind, the protection issues surface quickly and drives stall out. That's bad news against an Old Dominion front that collapses pockets and has done a good job limiting explosive runs.

On the other side of the ball, Old Dominion's offense has grown more comfortable spreading defenses out and letting the run game operate into light boxes. Georgia State has struggled badly with tackling in space and red-zone defense, allowing too many drives to finish in touchdowns instead of field goals. That's exactly how big favorites cover large numbers: sustained drives plus a few short fields created by defensive stops or special-teams mistakes. Factor in home field, motivation to put a big number up before the postseason picture is set, and a Georgia State team that has shown very little resistance once it falls multiple scores behind, and the script points strongly toward a one-sided affair. Laying nearly four touchdowns is never cheap, but the matchup supports it. ODU big!

TAKE: Old Dominion -26

A promotional banner for MyBookie. On the left, it says "MY BOOKIE UP TO \$1000 WELCOME BONUS" in large, bold, white and yellow text. In the center is a red and white NFL football player helmet. On the right, there is a green button with the text "BET NOW" in white. Below the button, it says "T&CS APPLY" in small white text.

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Vanderbilt at Tennessee

Line: Tennessee -3, Total 64.5 — Saturday 3:30 PM

Rivalry games often tighten spreads, and here the short home favorite may still be overpriced. Tennessee's defense has been leaky against both the run and the pass, particularly in the middle of the field where communication busts have turned modest gains into explosives. Vanderbilt's offense, while not flashy, has enough balance to exploit that. They've shown a willingness to stick with the run, shorten the game, and then take selective shots off play-action. Against a Volunteers unit that's struggled to get off the field on third down, that recipe can sustain drives and keep Tennessee's tempo offense standing on the sideline.

Defensively, Vanderbilt has quietly improved in situational spots. They might bend between the 20s, but they've shown better red-zone discipline, forcing opponents into field-goal decisions rather than automatic touchdowns. Tennessee wants to play fast and get into a track meet; Vanderbilt's best path is to force longer drives and make the Vols execute repeatedly. In these kinds of rivalry settings, pressure tends to land heavier on the favorite, and Tennessee has not always handled adversity smoothly. Vanderbilt, meanwhile, can treat this as its bowl game, with nothing to lose and plenty of incentive to deliver a statement win. Getting a field goal with the tougher, more disciplined side is attractive in a game that profiles closer to a coin flip than the number suggests. We also prefer Pavia.

TAKE: Vanderbilt +3

South Florida vs Rice

Line: South Florida -27, Total 59.5 — Saturday 7:00 PM

South Florida has the kind of offensive firepower you want when laying a big number. Their tempo and spacing stress defenses horizontally and vertically, and Rice simply doesn't have the depth or speed in the back seven to hold up for four quarters. USF can score quickly, but they've also shown the ability to grind out long drives when needed, which is crucial to maintaining margin once they're ahead. The mismatch at receiver versus Rice's corners is pronounced; explosive plays after the catch have been a recurring problem for the Owls, evidenced by the beating they took last week against the North Texas Mean Green. South Florida's scheme is built to manufacture exactly those situations.

Rice's offense, meanwhile, is not built to chase. When forced out of its comfort zone, protection issues appear and the run game fades, leading to stalled drives and short fields for the opponent. South Florida's defense doesn't need to be dominant; it just needs to be opportunistic, and this matchup allows for that. Expect the Bulls to load up against the run, dare Rice to create explosives through the air, and then capitalize on mistakes. Special teams also favor South Florida, who has been better in both the return game and coverage units. With motivation to put an exclamation point on the regular season at home and a stylistic edge on both sides of the ball, this projects as a game where USF can clear the number even if they empty the bench late. Rice gets pounded again.

TAKE: South Florida -27



Tulane vs Charlotte

Line: Tulane -29, Total 53.5 — Saturday 7:30 PM

This is another spot where the talent and physicality gap is enormous. Tulane's lines on both sides of the ball should control this game from the opening kick. Offensively, the Green Wave can lean on a downhill run game behind a veteran offensive line that consistently moves bodies and creates second-and-short situations. Charlotte has had trouble all year with run fits and tackling; once opponents get rolling, they're rarely forced behind schedule. That plays right into Tulane's hands, allowing them to dictate tempo and wear the 49ers down.

Defensively, Tulane's front is built to suffocate one-dimensional attacks, and Charlotte's offense has lacked balance. When they can't establish the run, negative plays pile up, leading to third-and-longs the protection can't consistently handle. Tulane doesn't need exotic pressures to generate heat; their base rush can collapse pockets, and their back end has enough discipline to minimize cheap explosives. In a game where one side is tuning up for postseason play and the other is closing out a long season, the motivation and depth edge both reside with the Green Wave. If Tulane jumps out early—as the matchup suggests—Charlotte will be forced into a pass-heavy script that only widens the margin. The Green Wave rolls over the 49ers.

TAKE: Tulane -29

UNLV at Nevada

Line: UNLV -7, Total 53.5 — Saturday 9:00 PM

Rivalry or not, this is a major mismatch in terms of offensive efficiency. UNLV has been one of the more explosive Group of Five offenses, using motion and formation variation to create favorable matchups for its playmakers. Nevada's defense has struggled badly against spread concepts, particularly when asked to defend both quarterback run and perimeter screens. That combination stresses eye discipline and tackling—two areas where the Wolf Pack have been inconsistent at best. Once UNLV establishes rhythm, they can stack scores in bunches and force Nevada into a style of game it doesn't want to play.

On defense, UNLV doesn't need to pitch a shutout. Nevada has had trouble generating big plays, and long, multi-play drives aren't its strength. The Rebels can crowd the line of scrimmage, challenge receivers on the outside, and dare the Wolf Pack to put together mistake-free possessions. In a game where UNLV's offense is likely to reach the low-30s or more, that's a tall order. Add in the special-teams edge—UNLV has been far more consistent in the kicking and return phases—and you have a favorite that can cover a touchdown and the hook even if things get choppy for a quarter or two. The number doesn't fully reflect the gap in firepower. My action will be on the Runnin' Rebels of Las Vegas to cash my ticket.

TAKE: UNLV -7



COLLEGE FOOTBALL QUICK PICKS

Bowling Green at Massachusetts – Tuesday 4:30 PM

Bowling Green brings more balance on both sides of the ball, but this number is inflated for a road favorite with occasional turnover issues. Massachusetts has struggled but should be fully motivated at home in a standalone slot, and any kind of offensive pulse will make this margin tough to maintain. Expect Bowling Green to control the game but trade touchdowns for field goals a bit too often to run away. With a high spread and a total in the mid-40s, the backdoor is very real.

TAKE: Massachusetts +14.5

Western Michigan at Eastern Michigan – Tuesday 7:30 PM

Western Michigan has the more explosive offense, but Eastern Michigan typically plays a grind-it-out style at home that keeps games inside the number. The Eagles' defense does a good job limiting chunk runs, forcing opponents to convert third downs consistently. If Eastern can avoid early turnovers, they're set up to shorten the game and make every possession count. Catching a full touchdown at home is attractive in this rivalry setting.

TAKE: Eastern Michigan +6.5

Navy at Memphis — Thursday 7:30 PM

Both teams know each other well, and that familiarity often takes the surprise element out of Navy's option attack. Memphis can score in chunks, but Navy's style naturally shortens the game by keeping the clock running and limiting total possessions. The Tigers should still find openings downfield, but sustained Navy drives typically reduce the number of long, high-tempo stretches Memphis needs to push games into the 60s. With both teams trending toward methodical stretches rather than outright pace, the scoring environment looks slightly lower than the posted number.

TAKE: Under 60

Ohio at Buffalo – Friday 12:00 PM

Ohio is the more complete team, with a sturdier defense and an offense that can win both on the ground and through the air. Buffalo has struggled to sustain drives against quality fronts and often ends up in long-yardage passing situations where mistakes show up. The Bobcats' edge on third down and in the red zone looms large in a game lined under a touchdown. If Ohio protects the ball, their depth should show up after halftime.

TAKE: Ohio -6

Miami (OH) at Bowling Green – Friday 12:00 PM

B. Green is laying a short number at home, but Miami (OH) has the more trustworthy defense and limits explosive plays. The RedHawks' methodical style travels: run the ball, play field position, and avoid mistakes. Against a Falcons team that can be streaky offensively, that's often enough to flip tight games. Getting points with the side more likely to win has value. **TAKE: Miami (OH) +2.5**

Ole Miss at Mississippi State — Friday 12:00 PM

The Egg Bowl often swings on momentum bursts, but both defenses have enough familiarity with one another to limit outright shootout conditions. Ole Miss can score quickly, yet Mississippi State's ball-control stretches and quarterback mobility tend to slow the overall pace. Both offenses can be inconsistent finishing drives, which leads to more field-goal attempts and stalled possessions than the raw talent suggests. Add in the rivalry energy and the likelihood of emotional swings, and the total sits slightly higher than what these teams typically produce in this setting.

TAKE: Under 62

Iowa at Nebraska — Friday 12:00 PM

Iowa games consistently revolve around field position, long drives that drain clock, and conservative play-calling on both sides. Nebraska's defense matches up well enough to avoid giving up explosive plays, while their offense isn't built to push tempo or create multi-score sprints. Combined, these factors point toward a limited-possession game where punts and defensive stops define the afternoon. With very little margin for offensive error from either team, the scoring environment projects tighter than the posted number.

TAKE: Under 40

Kent State at Northern Illinois – Friday 12:00 PM

Northern Illinois matches up well in the trenches and should control the line of scrimmage on both sides. Kent State's offense has struggled to find rhythm against disciplined fronts, and NIU's defense fits that profile. Offensively, NIU can rely on a steady run game and play-action to build a lead. With the spread still under a touchdown, the Huskies have a clear path to covering if they avoid turnovers.

TAKE: Northern Illinois -4.5

Utah at Kansas – Friday 12:00 PM

Utah's physicality is a tough ask for Kansas over four quarters. The Utes' front seven should limit Kansas' ground game, forcing more obvious passing situations than the Jayhawks would prefer. Utah's offense doesn't need to be flashy; a steady dose of power runs and timely throws against a leaky Kansas defense can build a margin. In a trench-driven game, laying under two touchdowns with the more rugged roster is acceptable.

TAKE: Utah -13.5

Air Force at Colorado State – Friday 3:00 PM

Air Force's option attack can cause problems, but Colorado State is catching points at home in a spot where its defense has enough speed to at least slow the Falcons on the perimeter. The Rams also have the more explosive passing game, which gives them a way back into the contest if they fall behind. If CSU can force a couple of long-yardage option downs and steal a possession, the outright upset is live. Taking the points is the safer approach in a rivalry setting.

TAKE: Colorado State +3

Georgia at Georgia Tech – Friday 3:30 PM

Georgia owns a major talent gap on both lines and should lean into it early. Tech's defense has been overwhelmed by physical run games, and the Bulldogs can methodically wear them down before taking their shots over the top. On defense, Georgia's speed and depth make sustained Yellow Jacket drives unlikely. With playoff-level motivation and a chance to make a statement in Atlanta, a two-score victory is very achievable.

TAKE: Georgia -13.5

San Diego State at New Mexico – Friday 3:30 PM

San Diego State's offense is rarely explosive, but New Mexico's defense has had trouble stopping the run all season. The Aztecs' conservative style is designed to avoid mistakes and wait for their opponent to blink, and New Mexico's offense has been prone to just that with turnovers and stalled drives. In a low-total grind, the better defense and more consistent special teams are usually worth a small lay.

TAKE: San Diego State -1.5

Temple at North Texas – Friday 3:30 PM

North Texas brings a much higher offensive ceiling into this matchup, especially through the air. Temple's secondary has struggled against tempo and spread looks, and the Mean Green are comfortable playing fast and pushing the ball downfield. While North Texas' own defense is far from perfect, their ability to create separation on the scoreboard early should force Temple into a pass-heavy chase mode they aren't built for.

TAKE: North Texas -19.5

Boise State at Utah State – Friday 4:00 PM

Boise State is favored, but Utah State at home has enough offensive punch to keep this tight. The Aggies can stretch the field horizontally and vertically, putting pressure on a Broncos defense that has been inconsistent against spread formations. If Utah State avoids early self-inflicted wounds, they should trade scores and keep the game inside a field goal for most of the afternoon. Taking the home dog with a live offense is appealing.

TAKE: Utah State +3

Indiana at Purdue – Friday 7:30 PM

Indiana is laying a huge number on the road in a rivalry game, which is uncomfortable even against a struggling Purdue side. The Boilermakers' offense is capable of enough quick strikes to threaten a backdoor against a Hoosier defense that can lose focus with a big lead. Emotion often levels the playing field in this matchup, and Purdue should throw everything at spoiling Indiana's day. With over four touchdowns in pocket, the dog is the play.

TAKE: Purdue +28.5

Arizona at Arizona State – Friday 9:00 PM

This one should be chippy as always. Arizona has a bit more balance offensively, but Arizona State at home can lean on its ground game and crowd energy to hang around. The Sun Devils' defense is scrappy enough to generate a few key stops, and a turnover or special-teams swing could easily decide things. With the line sitting under a field goal, the safer side is the one that's more comfortable in a street fight on its home turf.

TAKE: Arizona St + 1

Texas Tech at West Virginia – Saturday 12:00 PM

Texas Tech's offense is built to punish soft coverage and force defenses into uncomfortable sub-packages. West Virginia's back end has shown cracks against up-tempo attacks, which is a bad fit here. The Mountaineers can run the ball, but if they fall behind early, their passing game may not be able to keep pace. Over four quarters, the Red Raiders' offensive depth and tempo should create enough separation to clear three touchdowns.

TAKE: Texas Tech -21

East Carolina at Florida Atlantic – Saturday 12:00 PM

East Carolina brings the slightly better defense, but Florida Atlantic has more balance and should benefit from home field. The Owls can exploit ECU's secondary with a steady mix of intermediate throws and selective deep shots. If FAU avoids turnovers, they're well positioned to hang around all game. Taking nearly a touchdown with the home side in a matchup that feels closer to a coin flip is attractive.

TAKE: Florida Atlantic +6.5

Kentucky at Louisville – Saturday 12:00 PM

Louisville has quietly built one of the more physical fronts in its league, and that matches up well against Kentucky's run-heavy approach. If the Cardinals can bottle up early downs, they'll force Kentucky into obvious passing spots where pressure can take over. Offensively, Louisville's balance and red-zone efficiency should produce enough scoring drives at home. Laying a short number with the more complete team is reasonable.

TAKE: Louisville -3

Clemson at South Carolina – Saturday 12:00 PM

Clemson's defense remains the best unit on the field and should dictate terms. South Carolina has struggled when unable to run consistently, and Clemson's front is built to win at the line of scrimmage. On offense, the Tigers don't need fireworks; a clean, low-mistake game with a couple of explosive plays will be enough. The emotional edge of the rivalry cuts both ways, but talent still leans orange.

TAKE: Clemson -2.5

FEAST ON TURKEY SHOOT WEEK [COLLEGE](#) & [NFL](#) FOOTBALL PICKS

Ohio State at Michigan – Saturday 12:00 PM

Ohio State is favored, but Michigan's defense is stout enough to keep this within one score for long stretches. The Wolverines can muddy things up with a physical run game and controlled passing attack, shortening the contest and limiting OSU's possessions. In that style, double-digit points become very valuable. This feels more like a field-goal either-way game than a blowout.

TAKE: Michigan +11

Miami (FL) at Pittsburgh – Saturday 12:00 PM

Miami has the bigger name, but Pitt's defense is tough at home and should force the Hurricanes into methodical drives. Miami's offense can be explosive but also streaky, and long-yardage situations have been a trouble spot. If the Panthers can get enough out of their own offense to avoid constant three-and-outs, they'll be positioned to keep this tight into the fourth quarter. The points are worth grabbing.

TAKE: Pittsburgh +6.5

Toledo at Central Michigan – Saturday 12:00 PM

Toledo is one of the league's most reliable favorites when it comes to taking care of business against inferior opponents. Central Michigan's offense lacks firepower, which is problematic against a Rockets team that can hit quick strikes and also grind clock with the run. If Toledo gets out in front early, CMU doesn't have the passing game to chase. Laying double digits on the road is never free, but the matchup supports the chalk.

TAKE: Toledo -10.5

Ball State at Miami (OH) – Saturday 12:00 PM

Miami (OH) owns clear advantages on defense and in the kicking game, and Ball State's offense has been too inconsistent to trust on the road. The RedHawks should control field position and be able to lean on their ground game as the afternoon progresses. Once Ball State is forced to open things up, mistakes tend to follow. That's the recipe for a comfortable favorite cover.

TAKE: Miami (OH) -17.5

Colorado at Kansas State – Saturday 12:00 PM

Kansas State is rightly favored at home, but Colorado's passing game gives them some backdoor potential with a big number. The Wildcats will try to pound the ball and control the clock, which can also limit total possessions. In a slower game script, grabbing more than two touchdowns is appealing, especially if Colorado can hit a couple of chunk plays against an occasionally vulnerable secondary.

TAKE: Colorado +17.5

FEAST ON TURKEY SHOOT WEEK [COLLEGE](#) & [NFL](#) FOOTBALL PICKS

Houston at Baylor – Saturday 12:00 PM

Baylor is laying a field goal, but Houston's offense is dangerous enough to swing momentum quickly. The Bears' defense has been uneven, especially against tempo and spread formations, which is exactly what Houston brings. If the Cougars can avoid the killer turnover, they're fully capable of winning outright. With the number at three, the points provide solid value.

TAKE: Houston +3

Iowa State at Oklahoma State – Saturday 12:00 PM

Iowa State's defense is built to frustrate opponents that rely on rhythm passing and outside runs. Oklahoma State can be streaky offensively and may find sustained drives hard to come by against the Cyclones' disciplined unit. On offense, Iowa State should do enough on the ground to stay ahead of the chains and protect the ball. Laying under two touchdowns with the better defense is acceptable.

TAKE: Iowa State -14

UTEP at Delaware – Saturday 1:00 PM

This is a tricky game with an FBS/FCS dynamic, but Delaware gets respect on the line for a reason. Still, UTEP's size along both lines could wear down the Blue Hens over four quarters. If the Miners can avoid penalties and finish drives, they're live to steal it late. Catching more than a field goal with the deeper roster is the way to go.

TAKE: UTEP +5.5

Florida International at Sam Houston – Saturday 1:00 PM

FIU is favored on the road for a reason: Sam Houston's offense has not consistently threatened downfield. The Panthers should be able to load the box, take away the run, and force the Bearkats into uncomfortable third-and-longs. Offensively, FIU's playmakers in space are enough to generate a handful of explosive plays. If they avoid self-inflicted mistakes, the visitors can cover the spread.

TAKE: Florida International -10

UCF at BYU – Saturday 1:00 PM

BYU in Provo is always dangerous, and UCF's trip altitude/road factor is real. The Cougars' physical approach on both sides of the ball wears on teams that aren't used to it, particularly in the trenches. UCF's offense may move the ball between the 20s but could stall in the red zone against BYU's size. Laying more than two touchdowns is hefty, but the situational edge and physical mismatch support the home favorite.

TAKE: BYU -17.5

Georgia Southern at Marshall – Saturday 1:30 PM

Marshall is favored, but Georgia Southern's offense can stress secondaries with tempo and spacing. If the Eagles can protect their quarterback just enough, they'll find soft spots in the intermediate zones. Marshall's offense isn't built to run away and hide, which makes covering more than a touchdown tricky. In what projects as a high-variance game, the dog is attractive.

TAKE: Georgia Southern +7

Louisiana Tech at Missouri State – Saturday 2:00 PM

Missouri State gets the nod at home, but Louisiana Tech's ability to create explosive plays keeps them live as a dog. The Bulldogs can stretch the field and turn broken plays into big gains, which is valuable in what should be a fairly even matchup. Missouri State may control stretches, yet their defense hasn't consistently closed teams out. Taking the points with the more volatile offense is the move.

TAKE: Louisiana Tech +3

Western Kentucky at Jacksonville State – Saturday 2:30 PM

Western Kentucky's passing game is the most dangerous unit on the field, and Jacksonville State's secondary has struggled at times against spread concepts. If WKU's offensive line holds up reasonably well, they should generate enough chunk plays to offset any ground success the Gamecocks find. In a game that could see plenty of scoring swings, siding with the more explosive attack at a short price makes sense.

TAKE: Western Kentucky -2.5

Arkansas State at Appalachian State – Saturday 2:30 PM

Appalachian State's home field is tough, but Arkansas State has enough offensive rhythm to keep this close. The Red Wolves can lean on their passing game to attack down the seams and on the perimeter, where App State has ceded some explosives. If Arkansas State can get any semblance of a run game going, the upset is in play. Taking more than a field goal is a reasonable position.

TAKE: Arkansas State +2.5

Boston College at Syracuse – Saturday 3:00 PM

Syracuse's run-heavy approach matches up fairly well against a Boston College defense that has been soft at the point of attack. The Orange can grind out drives, control the clock, and lean on their crowd in the Dome. BC's offense hasn't been consistent enough to trust away from home in a tight spread game. The modest number barks with the side more likely to win the ground battle.

TAKE: Syracuse +3

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UAB at Tulsa – Saturday 3:00 PM

Tulsa is a decent favorite at home, but UAB's offense does have some life and can exploit a shaky Golden Hurricane defense. Tulsa has also shown a tendency to allow opponents back into games after building a lead. In what could be a back-and-forth affair with swings on both sides, the value lies with a dog catching more than a touchdown.

TAKE: UAB +9.5

South Alabama at Texas State – Saturday 3:00 PM

Texas State's uptempo offense and home field make them rightful favorites. South Alabama has been inconsistent, particularly in pass defense, which spells trouble against an attack that wants to push pace and take deep shots. If Texas State can avoid the big negative plays that have occasionally sabotaged them, they can turn this into a track meet on their terms. Laying under double digits is acceptable.

TAKE: Texas State -9.5

Louisiana-Monroe at Louisiana – Saturday 3:00 PM

Rivalry aside, Louisiana has the more complete roster and the better offensive line. ULM's defense has struggled to get off the field, especially against run-first offenses. The Ragin' Cajuns should control the trenches and gradually stretch the margin as the game wears on. With motivation to dominate an in-state foe, they're capable of covering a mid-range number.

TAKE: Louisiana -11.5

Middle Tennessee at New Mexico State – Saturday 3:00 PM

New Mexico State's offense has quietly found a rhythm, and Middle Tennessee's defense has had trouble all year with mobile quarterbacks and option elements. The Aggies can mix the run and pass well enough to generate sustained drives. Middle Tennessee's attack is volatile and prone to stalls, particularly on the road. Laying less than a touchdown with the more efficient side is reasonable.

TAKE: New Mexico State -4.5

Wisconsin at Minnesota – Saturday 3:30 PM

Both teams want to play physical, low-scoring football, which makes points valuable. Minnesota is a slight home favorite, but Wisconsin's run game and defense are built for this style of contest. A key turnover or special-teams play could easily swing it. In what projects as a grind that likely comes down to the final possession, taking the dog with a point and a half is the move.

TAKE: Wisconsin +1.5

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Wake Forest at Duke – Saturday 3:30 PM

Duke has the more consistent defense and should be able to limit Wake's big-play passing game. The Blue Devils' offense isn't explosive, but it is efficient enough to stay in favorable down-and-distance situations and avoid mistakes. Wake Forest has been shaky upfront and may struggle to protect long enough for routes to develop. In a relatively short spread, the home favorite's defensive edge is decisive.

TAKE: Duke -2.5

Penn State at Rutgers – Saturday 3:30 PM

Penn State's talent edge is obvious, but Rutgers' physical defense and grind-it-out offense can make this a muddy affair. The Scarlet Knights are at their best dragging teams into low-scoring games, and the total supports that script. If they can string together a couple of sustained drives and avoid catastrophic turnovers, they can stay within two scores. Double-digit home dogs with competent defenses are usually worth a look.

TAKE: Rutgers +11.5

LSU at Oklahoma – Saturday 3:30 PM

Oklahoma is favored, but LSU's offense presents matchup problems with its playmakers in space. The Sooners' defense has improved but still allows the occasional breakdown against high-end talent. With a modest total and a spread at a full 10, LSU has multiple avenues to cash—from trading scores all day to a late backdoor drive. Take the points in what should be a tight, emotional clash.

TAKE: LSU +11

Army at UTSA – Saturday 3:30 PM

UTSA has offensive firepower, but Army's option can shorten the game and limit total possessions. The Black Knights are comfortable grinding out long, clock-eating drives that frustrate opponents and their backers. If they can sustain that formula and avoid falling into a multi-score hole early, seven points is a lot of cushion. The underdog's style makes them appealing.

TAKE: Army +7.5

Cincinnati at TCU – Saturday 3:30 PM

TCU's passing game gives it the edge at home, especially against a Cincinnati secondary that has been prone to coverage busts. The Horned Frogs can spread the field and stress the Bearcats horizontally and vertically. Cincinnati's offense may move in spurts but hasn't shown enough consistency to trust on the road. Laying just over a field goal with the more explosive side is reasonable.

TAKE: TCU -4

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Troy at Southern Miss – Saturday 3:30 PM

Southern Miss is favored, but Troy's defense is sturdy enough to limit chunk plays and keep this in doubt. The Trojans are comfortable in low-scoring games decided by field position, and Southern Miss has not shown much margin for error. If Troy can avoid early turnovers, they're live late. With a full touchdown in our pocket, the dog is the side.

TAKE: Troy +7

Missouri at Arkansas – Saturday 3:30 PM

Missouri is a small road favorite, but Arkansas' offense is dynamic enough at home to turn this into a shootout. The Tigers' defense has sprung leaks against explosive attacks, and the Razorbacks can capitalize with tempo and creative run-pass looks. In a rivalry game that could swing on a couple of big plays, taking points with the home dog is attractive.

TAKE: Arkansas +2.5

Oregon at Washington – Saturday 3:30 PM

Oregon brings a balanced, efficient attack, but Washington at home has the quarterback play to match scores and then some. The Huskies' passing game can exploit any secondary when given time, and their crowd provides a significant boost in key moments. With the line over a touchdown, this feels like a great spot to back a potent home dog. Even if Oregon escapes, Washington should keep it within one possession.

TAKE: Washington +7.5

Kennesaw State at Liberty – Saturday 3:30 PM

Liberty's offense is the standout unit here, capable of hitting explosive plays on the ground and through the air. Kennesaw State's step up in class on the road is significant, particularly in the trenches. Liberty should gradually impose its will and have chances to add on in the second half. A relatively short spread makes the favorite the logical side.

TAKE: Liberty -2.5

James Madison at Coastal Carolina – Saturday 3:45 PM

James Madison is laying a big number on the road, and while they may be the better team, Coastal's offense is too capable to dismiss. The Chanticleers can spread the field and create mismatches that even strong defenses have to respect. In a game where JMU is likely to be focused on the win more than style points, backdoor chances loom. The hefty cushion with a competent home attack is worth taking.

TAKE: Coastal Carolina +23

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Florida State at Florida – Saturday 4:30 PM

Florida is narrowly favored at home, but Florida State's defense and overall talent level keep them firmly in this. The Seminoles can match the Gators in the trenches and have the kind of playmakers who can flip field position and create short fields. With emotions running high on both sides, this feels more like a pick'em than a game where one team should be laying points. Taking the dog in a rivalry as tight as this is the call.

TAKE: Florida State +2.5

Oregon State at Washington State – Saturday 6:30 PM

Washington State's passing game and home environment are both pluses, especially against an Oregon State team that has been less reliable away from home. The Cougars can jump out early if they protect well enough, forcing the Beavers to chase with a style they're not as comfortable with. Over four quarters, Wazzu's air attack should create enough separation to cover a two-score line.

TAKE: Washington State -13.5

Maryland vs Michigan State (Ford Field) – Saturday 7:00 PM

On a neutral-style field in Detroit, Michigan State's power run game and defense have a slight edge. Maryland's offense can be dangerous but has also gone through extended droughts against physical fronts. If the Spartans control the line of scrimmage and avoid turnovers, they should gradually pull ahead. With the spread at only four, laying it with the more rugged side is reasonable.

TAKE: Michigan State -4

Virginia Tech at Virginia – Saturday 7:00 PM

Virginia is favored, but Virginia Tech's defense is capable of disrupting the Cavaliers' timing in the passing game. The Hokies also have enough speed on offense to create a few splash plays against a defense that has given up its share of explosives. In a rivalry where games often come down to the final minutes, a double-digit spread is rich. The value is grabbing the points.

TAKE: Virginia Tech +10.5

North Carolina at NC State – Saturday 7:30 PM

NC State's defense is the best unit in this game and should be able to limit North Carolina's big-play passing attack. The Wolfpack offense is methodical but efficient enough at home, especially with a crowd behind them in a rivalry spot. UNC has been shaky on the road in tight, physical contests. Laying a touchdown with the sturdier defense is acceptable.

TAKE: NC State -7

Alabama at Auburn – Saturday 7:30 PM

The Iron Bowl tends to bring out Auburn's best at home, and catching more than a field goal here is appealing. Alabama has the higher ceiling but has also shown vulnerability when forced into obvious passing situations. Auburn's crowd and defensive front can help engineer just enough chaos to keep it inside the number. Even if Alabama survives, a tight finish is likely.

TAKE: Auburn +5.5

Northwestern at Illinois – Saturday 7:30 PM

Illinois is favored, but Northwestern has quietly found ways to hang around in ugly games. The Wildcats' defense plays hard, and their offense does just enough to take advantage of mistakes. Illinois has the higher upside but hasn't shown enough consistency to trust laying over a full touchdown in a rivalry. The safer move is grabbing the points with the more conservative side.

TAKE: Northwestern +7.5

UCLA at USC – Saturday 7:30 PM

USC's offense remains explosive, and UCLA's defense has struggled when forced to defend space across the entire field. The Trojans should be able to create mismatches for their skill players and build a lead with quick-strike drives. UCLA can score, but their own protection and turnover issues make a sustained comeback difficult. The talent gap at quarterback and receiver justifies a big number.

TAKE: USC -20.5

SMU at California – Saturday 8:00 PM

SMU is the more dynamic offense, but a cross-country trip to face a physical Cal defense adds some risk. The Golden Bears should be able to slow the tempo and force the Mustangs into longer drives than they prefer. If Cal can find enough offense of its own to stay within striking distance, this spread is too high. Taking double digits with the home dog is the play.

TAKE: California +13

Fresno State at San Jose State – Saturday 10:30 PM

Fresno State is a small road favorite, but San Jose State's defense and home field give them a genuine shot to win outright. The Spartans have enough balance offensively to challenge a Fresno unit that's been inconsistent against the run. In a late-night game likely decided by a handful of key plays, taking points with a live home dog is attractive.

TAKE: San Jose State +2.5

Notre Dame at Stanford — Saturday 10:30 PM

Notre Dame has a massive edge in the trenches on both sides of the ball, and that usually shows up late in the season when depth is tested. The Irish should be able to lean on a physical ground game and a balanced passing attack to sustain long drives against a Stanford defense that's struggled to get off the field. On the other side, Stanford's offense has had trouble protecting the quarterback and finishing drives, a bad recipe against a disciplined, physical defense that doesn't give away cheap yardage. With the line sitting at Notre Dame -32.5 and the total 52.5, the matchup points to the visitors steadily stretching the margin as the game wears on.

TAKE: Notre Dame -32.5

Wyoming at Hawaii – Saturday 11:00 PM

Hawaii is laying a big number at home in the last game on the board, but Wyoming's physical style often travels better than expected. The Cowboys can lean on their run game and defense to shorten things and keep the Warriors' offense from getting too comfortable. In a spot where fatigue and focus can be factors for both sides, double-digit points with the more grounded team are valuable.

TAKE: Wyoming +10

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