

Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

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5 NCAA & 4 NFL BEST BETS + PICKS FOR ALL GAMES
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Dennis Stagliano's Best Bets Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

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NCAA LANDSCAPE:

A thrilling championship weekend is in the books.

Indiana Hoosiers, football powerhouse

There's a new sheriff in town. College Football Playoff No. 2 Indiana (13-0, 9-0 in Big Ten) is the undisputed best team in the country entering selection Sunday, handing defending champion No. 1 Ohio State Buckeyes (12-1, 9-0 in Big Ten) its first loss of the season in a 13-10 Big Ten title game triumph.

The Hoosiers beat the Buckeyes at the line of scrimmage, becoming just the third team to gain over 100 rushing yards against them (joining Texas and Michigan), while also holding Ohio State to a season-low 2.2 yards per carry.

Quarterback Fernando Mendoza may have sealed the Heisman with a stoic performance after throwing a first-quarter interception. He completed 12 of his final 15 pass attempts for 192 yards and a touchdown. Eight of those completions gained a first-down, including a massive 33-yarder on 3rd-and-6 late in the fourth quarter.

Indiana is three wins away from the national title, and instead of just being a feel-good story — like in 2024 when it lost to Notre Dame in the CFP opening round — it should be considered the favorite entering this year's playoff.

ACC Dumped

One year after stealing a bid and sneaking two teams past the velvet rope, the ACC is missing out on the CFP entirely. The Duke Blue Devils (8-5, 6-2 in ACC) sunk the conference's playoff hopes with a 27-20 overtime win over No. 17 Virginia Cavaliers (10-3, 7-1 in ACC).

No. 20 Tulane Green Wave (11-2, 7-1 in American) and No. 25 James Madison Dukes (12-1, 8-0 in Sun Belt) won their respective conference championship games on Friday, and nothing about Duke's performance Saturday suggested it should be ahead of either when the field was set.

Texas Tech Red Raiders as national title contender

The Red Raiders won the first Big 12 championship in program history, easily handing College Football Playoff No. 11 BYU Cougars (11-2, 8-1 in Big 12) their second loss of the season, 34-7. No. 4 Texas Tech (12-1, 8-1 in Big Ten) has a program-record 12 wins, all over 20 points, steamrolling through the competition ahead of a deserving first-round playoff bye.

On Saturday, Texas Tech out-gained BYU, 374-200, forced four turnovers and produced 10 big plays, defined as pass plays of at least 15 yards and run plays of at least 10 yards. With a stout, havoc-wreaking defense and explosive offense, Texas Tech has the pieces necessary to be the last team standing when the national champion is crowned in Miami.

Alabama Crimson Tide's playoff path

Alabama's playoff bubble did not bust with a non-competitive performance in the SEC championship game over No. 3 Georgia Bulldogs (12-1, 7-1 in SEC). The Tide's weaknesses sank them again, raising serious doubts about whether they're truly one of the seven best non-conference champions.

Quarterback Ty Simpson played his worst game since the season-opener flop at Florida State (5-7, 2-6 in ACC), completing less than half of his passes (19-of-39) for 212 yards, one touchdown and an interception. Alabama's rushing attack was nonexistent. It finished with minus-three yards, its fewest since at least 1995.

No. 10 Notre Dame (10-2) is much better at the line of scrimmage than the Tide, making them far more deserving of a playoff berth. But the concerning offensive showing was not enough for the selection committee to look elsewhere for the final at-large berth as they took into account their whole body of work and their strength of schedule. Notre Dame being out is a major disappointment.

Georgia gets over Alabama hump

Georgia was 0-4 all-time against Alabama in the SEC championship game before Saturday's win, including 0-3 under head coach Kirby Smart. For as much as the Bulldogs have accomplished in recent years, the Tide have been their kryptonite. Not anymore. The 21-point margin of victory was Georgia's largest against Alabama in nearly 50 years, dating back to October 1976.

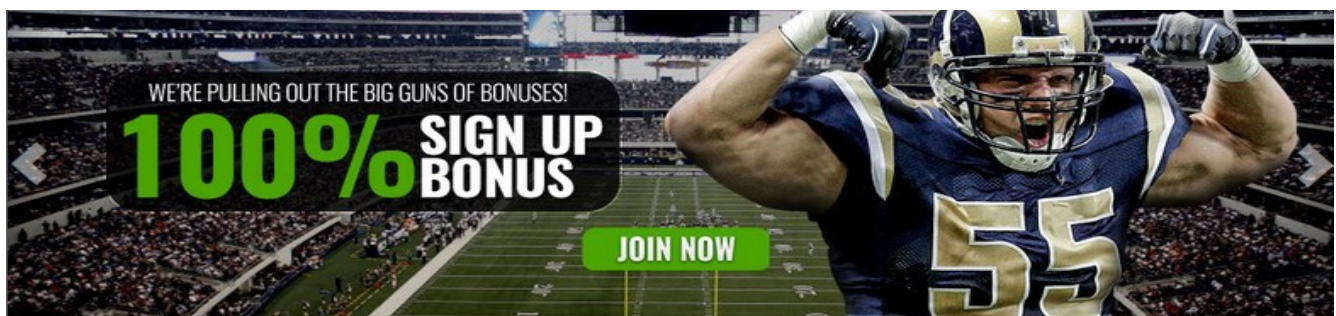
North Dakota State Bison

Down goes Goliath.

North Dakota State (12-1, 8-1 in MVFC), which won its 10th national championship since 2011 last season, fell at home in the second round of the FCS Playoffs to Illinois State Redbirds despite forcing five turnovers and holding a 15-point advantage with less than five minutes remaining.

Illinois State (10-4, 6-3 MVFC) took the late lead on a two-point conversion, sending the FCS into chaos.

Regardless of division, the result was one of the most stunning of the 2025 college football season.



COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

Army vs Navy — Saturday 3:00 PM | M&T Bank Stadium

Army–Navy nearly always produces one of the slowest, most possession-limited games of the season, and nothing about this year's matchup suggests a departure from that identity. Both teams rely heavily on run-centric offenses that grind the clock, reduce overall play volume, and create long stretches without scoring opportunities. When two option-based teams face each other, the element of surprise disappears, and the game becomes a battle of discipline, leverage, and field position — all core factors that suppress scoring.

Navy may enter as the slightly more explosive offense, but Army's defensive structure is built specifically for battles like this. The Black Knights stay fundamentally sound on the perimeter and force opponents to string together long drives without mistakes. Navy's offense has improved efficiency, but finishing drives remains inconsistent, especially when the field compresses near the goal line. Army, as usual, is comfortable living in a game decided by punts, field position, and fourth-down decisions — all favorable traits for an Under.

Army's offense is even more conservative than Navy's, relying on ball control and patience rather than explosive plays. Against a Navy defense that understands every option principle, Army will have to fight for every yard. Sustained drives are possible, but quick scoring is unlikely. Red-zone execution should be the deciding factor, and both units often stall inside the 20 due to condensed spacing and heavy defensive fronts.

This rivalry's history also reinforces the matchup profile — even in seasons where one team appears stronger, the shared familiarity keeps the game tight and low scoring. Neither coaching staff deviates from identity, even when trailing, which minimizes the risk of late-game shootouts or frantic scoring.

With two disciplined defenses, limited possession counts, and minimal big-play probability, this matchup aligns cleanly with another classic service-academy Under.

TAKE: Under 40

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BET

Army vs Navy — Saturday 3:00 PM | M&T Bank Stadium

While Army–Navy games are traditionally close, low-possession battles, this year's matchup carries a meaningful separation in overall physicality and defensive consistency — both of which tilt toward Navy. The Midshipmen have been the steadier team throughout the second half of the season, improving significantly on the defensive front and showing more control offensively than in recent years. Their ability to generate push at the line of scrimmage is the single biggest edge in a rivalry that often hinges on which side wins the trenches.

Army can frustrate opponents by shortening the game and leaning on toughness, but this particular Navy defense is better equipped to handle the option than many of the matchups they've faced. Navy's front seven has been disruptive against interior run-heavy offenses, and their discipline on the perimeter prevents the type of cutback lanes and pitch-space Army needs to stay ahead of the chains. If Army is forced into long-yardage situations — even occasionally — their offense simply does not have the passing structure to recover.

On the other side, Navy's offense has shown more dimension this season. While still rooted in the option, QB Blake Horvath has incorporated enough variation at quarterback to keep defenses honest. Army's defense has shown flashes, but they've been vulnerable to sustained, methodical drives from teams that can match their physicality. Navy is one of the few opponents on Army's schedule that can do exactly that for four quarters.

In a game where possessions are limited, efficiency matters more than explosiveness, and Navy has been the more reliable team at sustaining drives and finishing them. Army will battle as always, but Navy’s defensive discipline and superior red-zone execution give them the edge to cover a number that remains manageable.

TAKE: Navy -5.5

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