

Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

\$15

**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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CFB Week 8, 2025

Week 7 felt like an ode to Mike Leach and his Swing Your Sword mentality. Indiana slayed the Oregon dragon with a few mighty, late-game swings. Texas and Oklahoma turned the Red River Rivalry into an old-school rock fight. Alabama and Missouri clashed in a construction zone. Ohio State squashed Illinois' upset bid behind another excellent defensive showing. A ton of Top 25 teams also took a tumble. Plus, Penn State fired head coach James Franklin.

Curt Cignetti's mouth has written plenty of checks since he arrived in Bloomington.

On Saturday, the Hoosiers finally cashed one. Indiana lived out that Dr. Seuss/Lil Wayne mantra "I said what I said, and I meant what I said," storming into Autzen Stadium and walking out with a gargantuan 30-20 statement win over No. 3 Oregon.

This game was back and forth, highlighting the best and worst parts of both teams. We got a good glimpse at the struggling Oregon run game, which amassed just 81 yards on 30 carries. We saw a steely Fernando Mendoza, who came up big in big spots, time and time again. And we saw a Hoosiers defensive line make Oregon quarterback Dante Moore look mortal. But more than anything, we saw the power of belief and the impact it can have on a team.

It was a duel between two coaches who never doubt themselves, but by night's end, only one had a reason not to.

It's hard to overstate just how much this win means for Indiana in the moment and moving forward. Last year, the Hoosiers felt like a feel-good story, and in big spots, played like a team trying to convince both themselves and us of just how good they truly were. Now? This team doesn't flinch, doesn't fake, and doesn't need to prove it anymore. They know just how good they are.

Alabama is a Kalen DeBoer team now

Nothing summed up the year-and-a-half-long Alabama remodeling job quite like the sequence that unfolded late in the fourth quarter in the Crimson Tide's 27-24 road win over 14th-ranked Missouri.

First, Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson laced a ball to an open receiver to help the Crimson Tide convert on a crucial fourth down with a three-point lead in Missouri territory. A few plays later on the very same drive, Simpson pinged a pass to an open pass-catcher to convert on fourth and goal to push Alabama's lead to 10 points. It was Kalen DeBoer's vision coming to life before our very eyes—a quarterback he hand-picked, coming up clutch in risky situations. It was the type of play-calling we didn't often see in the Nick Saban era.

Missouri answered with a touchdown of its own and later forced a punt with one last chance to tie or win it in the final minute. But Tigers' quarterback, Beau Pribula, sailed a pass over the head of an open man and into the arms of a Crimson Tide defender, icing the game for the road team.

Other highlights in the game included a Kayden Proctor Big Man Wildcat near-touchdown and an odd choice by Missouri head coach Eli Drinkwitz to fake a punt in a big spot instead of just going for it on fourth down.

Simpson was mustard, finishing with 200 yards and three touchdowns. The Crimson Tide defense limited Ahmad Hardy to 52 yards and no scores on 12 carries. And just like that, Alabama has come out the other side of a grueling stretch that included games against Georgia, Vanderbilt, and Missouri unscathed.

Missouri looked like a good team that came up short. Alabama looked like a potentially elite team that keeps finding ways to win in tough spots. So glad we released Alabama as our Private Gold Pick early in the week at -2.5.

Red River rock fight

For my money, Red River tends to be perhaps the most unhinged and truly unpredictable rivalry game in all of college football. Think about it, how many times has the game started one way, only for it to fly off the handle in the opposite direction?

Saturday didn't quite have that see-saw nature, but it did see a previously undefeated, sixth-ranked Oklahoma team get stonewalled by an unranked Texas team 23-6.

Nothing about this game was pretty. Texas quarterback Arch Manning was accurate and mistake-free, but averaged just a little over six yards per completion. Oklahoma quarterback John Mateer, just two weeks and change removed from hand surgery, was dreadful, barely completing 50% of his passes and tossing a trio of bad interceptions. All in all, it took a ridiculous 75-yard Texas punt return and a wildly successful defensive showing from the Longhorns to get out of there with a win.

I walked away from this game feeling like both teams are extremely flawed and are, in all likelihood, not the cream of the SEC crop.

The wheels have fallen off

Rarely do we see a pair of teams with either lofty expectations (Penn State) or a monster early-season win (Florida State) fall completely apart by early October, but that's what happened on Saturday.

In the noon slate, 24th-ranked Florida State lost for the third week in a row, this time to a weirdly constructed Pitt team with a backup quarterback turned starter. Pitt's Mason Heintschel threw for 321 yards, a pair of touchdowns, and led the Panthers to a 13-point fourth-quarter rally to win 34-31. We told you last week, right in this spot that Pittsburgh would battle them and it was our upset TV pick.

Whatever we watched and thought about this Florida State team after whoopin' Alabama in Week 1 is long gone. A fact that's hard to believe but true is that since September 22, 2024, 46 different schools have more wins vs. the ACC than Florida St does. Sometimes the truth really is stranger than fiction.

At this point, I think it's fair to question the direction of this program and what the future might hold for head coach Mike Norvell. Could he be on his way out soon? Can the school afford to push him out? What's the floor for this team? So many questions!

Speaking of force-outs and fading expectations

Two weeks ago, the Nittany Lions lost a double overtime nail-biter to Oregon and looked like a worthy (if even flawed) challenger for the Big 10 throne.

But after a stunning loss to a previously winless UCLA team last week and dropping a 22-21 stinker to Northwestern, it's totally fair to write off this team the rest of the way. To make matters worse, quarterback Drew Allar got hurt late in the game, and head coach James Franklin announced postgame that Allar suffered a season-ending injury and that his college career was over. When it rains, it pours.

After the dust settled on Saturday's loss, Penn State fired James Franklin around midday on Sunday. This is the first monster coaching domino to fall, with more fallout in the coming weeks a guarantee.

The Penn State job is a premier one, a position that will surely lure away a sitting head coach to Happy Valley. Is Penn State alum Matt Rhule a favorite to make that move? What about Syracuse's Fran Brown? Make no bones about it, this is a monumental move that will shake up the sport moving forward.

The Buckeyes were business as usual

Nothing sums up the bat out of hell nature of the Ohio State defense quite like the goal-line stands we saw in Saturday's 34-16 win over No. 17 Illinois.

On the first, Ohio State stuffed Illinois, forcing the Fighting Illini to kick a field goal. Later, Illinois scored, but it took every ounce of tooth, nail, skin, and a trick play to get the job done. My takeaway: even when you score on this Ohio State team, it's exhausting to actually get the job done.

Give Illinois some credit for scoring 16 points on this defense (that's seven more than any other team had managed this season), but the game never quite felt within reach. In a season with so many fun-but-flawed teams, Ohio State just might be the lone flawless group of the bunch.

Texas Two-Step

Texas A&M and Texas Tech survived strong first-half pushes to stay undefeated midway through the season.

After giving up a pair of early touchdowns, the Aggies allowed just three second-half points in their 34-17 win over Florida in College Station. A&M's defense was suffocating, particularly in the run game, allowing just 74 yards on 24 carries.

A&M checks a lot of boxes for a legitimate SEC contender. Good quarterback? Check. Vicious defense? Check. Well-respected head coach? Double check.

Alabama is probably the best team in the conference, but I wouldn't discount A&M.

Texas Tech, on the other hand, needed a big rushing output after quarterback Behren Morton exited the game with a lower-body injury. Fortunately, it stepped running back Cameron Dickey, who had a career day with 263 yards and two touchdowns on 21 carries.

Despite the ongoing injury concerns with Morton, Texas Tech looks like the real deal. I'd be shocked if they're not in the Big 12 title game at year's end.

Georgia, Tennessee, and LSU all survive a scare

On a night where a handful of SEC teams got tested, Georgia, Tennessee, and LSU all survived scares from SEC upstarts. Georgia needed a bizarre second-quarter goal-line stop to flip the field and suck the momentum out of Auburn. Garrett Nussmeier and the LSU defense did just enough to outlast South Carolina. And Tennessee got all it bargained for in a back-and-forth affair against Arkansas. All three teams needed wins to keep pace with Alabama and Texas A&M and got 'em.

USF wins in Freaky Friday fashion

Nothing screams preposterous Friday night football quite like an eight-turnover, 99-point game between American Conference teams, does it?

USF started sloppily but finished strong in its 66-36 drubbing of a previously undefeated North Texas team. Bulls quarterback Byrum Brown continues to be HIM, shaking off a pair of early turnovers to produce a five-touchdown outing.

North Texas felt a bit like a feel-good story in the lead-up to the game. I think the Mean Green are solid, but perhaps not quite ready to contend with the upper crust of the conference. USF has as good a shot as anyone to come out of this league to represent the Group of 5 in the College Football Playoff. I can't wait to watch them square off with Memphis later this season.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BETS

UConn +2.5 at Boston College

Connecticut has shown steady defensive growth and discipline, allowing under 20 points per game over the last three weeks. The Huskies have leaned into their strengths — a ground-oriented offense that shortens games and a defense that rallies to the football. Boston College, meanwhile, has struggled to separate from opponents, with four of its last five games decided by one score or less. The Eagles' offensive line remains inconsistent, leading to stalled drives and missed red-zone chances. UConn's physical front should contain the run and force BC into long passing downs, where protection breaks down. The Huskies' conservative approach plays well as an underdog, and their defense has the edge in situational execution. Expect a close, low-possession battle that stays inside the number, with UConn's ground control and tackling keeping them live throughout.

TAKE — UConn +2.5

Arizona +2 at Houston

Arizona is trending up thanks to a balanced offensive approach that travels well. The Wildcats have averaged over 430 total yards in their last three, with an improved run game setting up efficient play-action strikes. Houston's defense, on the other hand, has been vulnerable to tempo and explosive plays, allowing over 7 yards per pass attempt and 35 points per game in its last four. Arizona's front seven should create pressure against a Cougars line that's allowed nearly three sacks per contest. The Wildcats also have a notable edge in third-down efficiency, converting 45% compared to Houston's 34%. While both teams can score, Arizona's consistency and defensive tackling give them the upper hand late. In a tight matchup, the better two-way team and the points are the right side.

TAKE — Arizona +2

James Madison -1.5 vs Old Dominion

James Madison continues to dominate in the trenches, boasting one of the nation's most physical defensive lines. The Dukes are allowing just 16 points per game at home and under 3.2 yards per rush — a brutal formula for an Old Dominion offense that struggles on early downs. JMU's balance on offense gives them control of tempo, and their efficiency on third down (47%) keeps drives alive while wearing out opposing defenses. Old Dominion has been competitive, but their offensive line depth remains an issue, and they'll face relentless pressure for four quarters. The Dukes also hold a major advantage on special teams and field position, two areas that have quietly fueled their success all season. Expect a methodical, physical win from a James Madison team built for these exact matchups.

TAKE — James Madison -1.5

South Carolina +5.5 vs Oklahoma

South Carolina has turned its home field into a genuine advantage, covering five of its last six in Columbia. The Gamecocks' defense is rounding into form, allowing just 17 points per game in October while forcing turnovers in key moments. Oklahoma's offensive rhythm has cooled after a hot start, and their offensive line has shown cracks against top-tier SEC fronts. Expect South Carolina to lean on balance — pounding the ball on early downs and using play-action to keep the Sooners off balance. The home atmosphere will also play a role, as the Gamecocks tend to feed off night-game energy at Williams-Brice. With South Carolina's defensive discipline and red-zone toughness, this matchup shapes up as a nail-biter that favors the dog.

TAKE — South Carolina +5.5

UTSA +4.5 at North Texas

UTSA enters this matchup underrated and undervalued, with a veteran roster that's found rhythm offensively over the past month. The Roadrunners' offense averages over 430 yards per game during that stretch, anchored by a balanced attack that converts 48% on third down. North Texas has been explosive on offense but remains one of the worst defensive teams in the country, allowing 6.6 yards per play and nearly 37 points per game. UTSA's defensive front should exploit those weaknesses, particularly on the ground, where the Mean Green surrender 200+ rushing yards per contest. The Roadrunners' experience and superior line play make them the more complete team, even on the road. Expect UTSA to control tempo, win the turnover battle, and grab a late cover — if not the outright win.

TAKE — UTSA +4.5



COLLEGE FOOTBALL QUICK PICKS

Tuesday 7:00 PM ET — New Mexico State at Liberty

Liberty keeps winning behind one of the most efficient rushing attacks in C-USA, topping 230 yards in three of its last four. The Flames control tempo and rarely beat themselves with turnovers. New Mexico State has improved offensively but still struggles against top-tier run defenses. Expect Liberty to dominate time of possession and wear the Aggies down after halftime.

TAKE — Liberty -10

Tuesday 7:30 PM ET — Arkansas State at South Alabama

South Alabama's ground game has regained form, averaging nearly 190 yards per outing. Arkansas State's defense allows over 6 yards per carry and gives up sustained drives. The Jaguars' home field and balanced play-calling should tilt the contest. Expect South Alabama to pull away late.

TAKE — South Alabama -6.5

Tuesday 8:00 PM ET — FIU at Western Kentucky

FIU's defense has quietly improved, while Western Kentucky's offense has struggled to finish drives. Both teams prefer controlled tempo and rely on short passing. Expect long possessions and few explosive plays. Points should be at a premium.

TAKE — Under 58

Wednesday 7:00 PM ET — UTEP at Sam Houston

UTEP has leaned on its run game recently, while Sam Houston's offense still ranks near the bottom nationally in finishing drives. Both defenses are more physical than the offenses they'll face. Expect several empty possessions and a slower second half. This total doesn't look reachable..

TAKE — Under 48

Wednesday 7:00 PM ET — Delaware at Jacksonville State

Delaware's defense bends but rarely breaks, forcing long drives that eat clock. Jacksonville State has struggled in red-zone execution, settling for field goals. Expect conservative play-calling early and a grind down the stretch. Scoring opportunities will be limited.

TAKE — Under 58

Thursday 7:30 PM ET — Tulsa at East Carolina

East Carolina has found its rhythm offensively with better third-down execution, while Tulsa continues to leak yards. The Pirates' defense is stout up front and should win the line battle. Home-field advantage and ball control favor ECU. Expect steady separation.

TAKE — East Carolina -16.5

Friday 7:00 PM ET — Louisville at Miami

Miami's defense ranks top-25 nationally and should keep Louisville's passing game contained. The Cardinals rely on rhythm, which the Hurricanes' pressure can disrupt. Expect a measured pace and long drives that end in field goals more than touchdowns. This matchup profiles as a defensive struggle.

TAKE — Under 54

Friday 8:00 PM ET — Nebraska at Minnesota

Nebraska's defense remains among the best against the run, while Minnesota's offense continues to stall on third downs. Both teams lean heavy on the ground and limit possessions. Expect a physical, low-scoring game decided late. The home side has value catching points.

TAKE — Minnesota +9.5

Friday 9:00 PM ET — San Jose State at Utah State

Utah State's up-tempo approach creates volume but also turnovers. San Jose State prefers patience and short gains to avoid mistakes. With both defenses capable of red-zone stops, scoring should come in spurts. Expect a slower second half. **TAKE — Under 65**

Friday 10:30 PM ET — North Carolina at California

California has quietly built a rugged identity at home, limiting opponents to under 20 PPG across its last three. North Carolina's offensive line remains inconsistent against pressure. The Bears' ball-control style should frustrate the Tar Heels. Staying within double digits feels very doable.

TAKE — North Carolina +11.5

Saturday 12:00 PM ET — Washington at Michigan

Michigan's front line gives it a clear edge at home, but Washington's passing can challenge any secondary. Both teams move efficiently and convert in the red zone. Expect early scoring drives before defenses tighten. A balanced shootout leans to the high side.

TAKE — Over 50

Saturday 12:00 PM ET — Duke vs Georgia Tech

Duke's disciplined defense rarely gives up big plays and should contain Georgia Tech's offense. The Blue Devils have scored 30+ in four of their last five home games. If they avoid turnovers, they'll control this matchup start to finish.

TAKE — Duke -1.5

Saturday 12:00 PM ET — Vanderbilt vs LSU

LSU's offense is explosive, while Vanderbilt continues to give up huge plays through the air. The Tigers should stretch the field early and dictate tempo. With both defenses allowing points late, this total could climb fast.

TAKE — Over 48

Saturday 12:00 PM ET — Baylor at TCU

Neither defense has been able to stop the run consistently, and both offenses like tempo. Expect sustained drives and red-zone chances throughout. Once pace quickens, the scoreboard follows.

TAKE — Over 65

Saturday 12:00 PM ET — Army at Tulane

Tulane's defensive speed can neutralize Army's option game on the edges. The Green Wave are solid on third down and should win the field-position battle. Expect Army to struggle sustaining drives. Tulane controls from wire to wire.

TAKE — Tulane -9.5

Saturday 12:00 PM ET — Bowling Green vs Central Michigan

Bowling Green has shown better balance and reduced turnovers, while Central Michigan's defense allows nearly 400 yards per outing. Expect the Falcons to pound the run and wear down the Chippewas. Late scoring extends the margin.

TAKE — Bowling Green -4

Saturday 12:00 PM ET — Miami (OH) vs Eastern Michigan

Miami's defense has been elite in conference play, while Eastern Michigan continues to struggle offensively. Expect long drives and limited explosive plays. The pace and style point squarely to fewer points overall.

TAKE — Under 48

Saturday 2:00 PM ET — Toledo vs Kent State

Toledo's defense has dominated MAC opponents, allowing under 17 PPG. Kent State's offense remains one of the nation's weakest. Expect a methodical game with minimal scoring threats.

TAKE — Under 52

Saturday 2:30 PM ET — Buffalo at UMass

Buffalo's physical edge up front should wear down a soft UMass defense. The Bulls can control tempo with their rushing attack and limit mistakes. Look for a steady pull-away in the second half.

TAKE — Buffalo -16.5

Saturday 3:00 PM ET — Purdue at Northwestern

Purdue's offense is rounding into form, while Northwestern continues to give up long drives. Expect Purdue to find success through the air and control momentum late. Northwestern's home field won't offset its defensive holes.

TAKE — Purdue +3.5

Saturday 3:00 PM ET — Troy at Louisiana-Monroe

Troy's defense sets the tone, ranking among the nation's best against the run. UL-Monroe's offense lacks explosiveness and could struggle to sustain possessions. Expect the Trojans to pull away as fatigue sets in.

TAKE — Troy -6

Saturday 3:30 PM ET — Clemson vs SMU

Clemson's defense will pressure SMU into mistakes, and its offense should manage the game with balance. Expect field position to heavily favor the Tigers. Once Clemson finds rhythm, SMU won't keep pace.

TAKE — Clemson -8.5

Saturday 3:30 PM ET — Ohio vs Northern Illinois

Ohio's defense has dominated MAC play, and NIU's offense lacks the firepower to change that trend. Expect punts and field goals more than touchdowns. Another low-tempo grind in Athens.

TAKE — Under 42

Saturday 3:30 PM ET — Ball State vs Akron

Neither team stops much, but Ball State's rushing attack has begun to click. Akron's defense has been gashed on big plays all season. Expect steady scoring from both sides in a loose, wide-open game.

TAKE — Over 42

Saturday 3:30 PM ET — Texas Tech at Arizona State

Texas Tech's tempo and balance should stress a thin Arizona State defense. The Red Raiders' pass rush can also limit ASU's response. Expect momentum to swing Tech's way after halftime.

TAKE — Texas Tech -9.5

Saturday 4:00 PM ET — Memphis at UAB

Memphis thrives against porous defenses, but UAB's offense isn't reliable enough to keep pace. Expect the Tigers to jump ahead and slow tempo late. Scoring should stall after halftime.

TAKE — Under 64

Saturday 4:15 PM ET — Mississippi State at Florida

Both teams defend well on early downs, and neither has been explosive through the air. Expect a classic SEC slugfest of field goals and punts. The total sits too high for this matchup.

TAKE — Under 52

Saturday 5:00 PM ET — Southern Miss at Louisiana-Lafayette

Southern Miss has found offensive rhythm, but both defenses give up big plays. Louisiana's secondary remains suspect, which should keep scoring consistent on both sides. This shapes up as a shootout.

TAKE — Over 54

Saturday 6:30 PM ET — Oregon at Rutgers

Oregon's offensive versatility makes it tough to slow for four quarters. Rutgers' defense is gritty but overmatched by Oregon's depth. Expect the Ducks to extend the margin in the third quarter.

TAKE — Oregon -17.5

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Saturday 6:30 PM ET — Washington State at Virginia

Virginia's balanced approach and improved defense make it the steadier team. Washington State struggles to protect the passer against pressure looks. Expect Virginia to control tempo and stay in command.

TAKE — Virginia -17.5

Saturday 7:00 PM ET — Penn State at Iowa

Two elite defenses face off in what projects as a field-position game. Neither offense is built for quick strikes. Expect punts, conservative calls, and limited scoring chances.

TAKE — Under 40

Saturday 7:00 PM ET — Kentucky vs Texas

Texas' defensive front and red-zone precision separate these teams. Kentucky's offense won't find many easy yards. Expect a professional, efficient showing from the Longhorns.

TAKE — Texas -12

Saturday 7:00 PM ET — Hawaii at Colorado State

Hawaii's passing attack keeps improving, while Colorado State's secondary continues to give up chunk plays. Both offenses can move quickly, leading to an uptempo game. Points should pile up on both sides.

TAKE — Over 54

Saturday 7:30 PM ET — Pittsburgh at Syracuse

Syracuse's quick tempo and home-field edge should create consistent scoring chances. Pittsburgh lacks offensive rhythm and big-play capability. Expect Syracuse to maintain control throughout.

TAKE — Syracuse +11.5

Saturday 7:30 PM ET — Tennessee at Alabama

Alabama's defense thrives in Tuscaloosa, allowing under 13 PPG at home. Tennessee's offense tends to slow against elite fronts. Expect a controlled, defensive-minded clash that stays below the total.

TAKE — Under 60

Saturday 7:30 PM ET — USC at Notre Dame

Notre Dame's defensive line should collapse USC's pocket and dictate tempo. The Irish will lean on their run game to wear down the Trojans. Expect methodical drives and late control by the home team.

TAKE — Notre Dame -7.5

Saturday 7:30 PM ET — Florida Atlantic at South Florida

Both teams push tempo and attack vertically, creating plenty of explosive plays. South Florida's offense has been unstoppable at home, averaging 500+ yards. Expect another fireworks show.

TAKE — Over 73

Saturday 7:45 PM ET — Missouri at Auburn

Both defenses are physical and limit big plays, setting up a grind-it-out SEC contest. Offenses will rely on field position and short gains. Expect a close, low-scoring finish.

TAKE — Under 44

Saturday 8:00 PM ET — Cincinnati at Oklahoma State

Cincinnati's defense travels well, but its offense can stall in the red zone. Oklahoma State's home crowd and opportunistic secondary give them a chance to hang around. Expect a tighter game than the spread suggests.

TAKE — Oklahoma State +22

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Saturday 8:00 PM ET — Utah at BYU

Utah's defensive front will control the line and force BYU into third-and-longs. The Utes' balanced offense should sustain drives and wear down the Cougars. Expect Utah to pull away in the fourth.

TAKE — Utah -3.5

Saturday 9:45 PM ET — Nevada at New Mexico

New Mexico's offense has improved steadily, while Nevada continues to allow explosive runs. Expect the Lobos to dominate time of possession and eventually break the game open.

TAKE — New Mexico -10.5

Saturday 10:30 PM ET — Florida State at Stanford

Florida State's defense is physical and deep, particularly in second halves. Stanford lacks the vertical threat to stretch the field. Expect FSU to dictate pace and squeeze out a lower-scoring finish.

TAKE — Under 54

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THIS WEEKS GRIDIRON GOLD SHEET BEST BETS

	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet
CFB	UConn + 2.5	Arizona + 2	J Madison - 1.5	S Carolina +5.5	UTSA + 4.5

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