

Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

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Dennis Stagliano's Best Bets Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter

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NCAA LANDSCAPE:

Week 8 weeded out this year's contenders from the pretenders. On a loaded Saturday that featured five ranked games, including three in the SEC, here are our winners and losers.

Winner: Vanderbilt Commodores

Vanderbilt is legit. Entering Week 8 as a rare favorite against a ranked SEC opponent, Vandy lived up to expectations in a 31-24 win over Associated Press No. 10 LSU (5-2, 2-2 in SEC), moving to 6-1 for the first time since 1950. The Commodores have a formidable remaining schedule, starting next Saturday at home against No. 16 Missouri (5-1, 1-1 in SEC). No. 17 Vanderbilt (6-1, 2-1 in SEC) also plays at No. 21 Texas (4-2, 1-1 in SEC) and No. 11 Tennessee (5-2, 2-2 in SEC). But rather than entering those games a massive underdog, No. 17 Vanderbilt (6-1, 2-1 in SEC) proved it's capable of winning any of them.

Loser: Tennessee's brutal goal-line interception

They played a second half in Tuscaloosa, but for all intents and purposes, Saturday's top 25 showdown between Tennessee and No. 6 Alabama Crimson Tide (6-1, 4-0 in SEC) ended with a devastating play at the end of the second quarter.

Tennessee, trailing by nine, drove to Bama's 1-yard line with one second left when disaster struck. Quarterback Joey Aguilar threw a goal-line interception that sophomore defensive back Zabien Brown returned 99 yards for a touchdown, turning what could have been a 16-14 halftime deficit into 23-7. Alabama kept Tennessee at a distance the rest of the way, putting the Vols on thin ice in their attempt to make the CFP for a second year in a row.

Winner: Upside down ACC

Heading into the back-half of the season, no conference has been more unpredictable than the ACC. No. 12 Georgia Tech (7-0, 4-0 in ACC) remained undefeated one day after No. 2 Miami (5-1, 1-1 in ACC) suffered its first loss of the season, beating Duke (4-3, 3-1 in ACC), 27-18. No. 18 Virginia (6-1, 3-0 in ACC) rallied against Washington State (3-4), coming back from a 20-10 deficit with 12 unanswered fourth-quarter points for a 22-20 win. Both teams, hardly considered ACC powers, have soft remaining conference schedules, giving each a viable path to the ACC title game on Dec. 6. Just like no one drew up in August.

Professional Handicappers Who Show Results...

Loser: Ole Miss Rebels

As soon as we think Ole Miss is different, Lane Kiffin's bunch proves how little has changed. The No. 5 team in the country had us going for three quarters against No. 9 Georgia (6-1, 4-1 in SEC), scoring touchdowns on its first five possessions. But when it mattered most, the Rebels cratered in a 43-35 loss.

Georgia outscored Ole Miss 17-0 in the fourth quarter, and the Rebels were held to 13 yards during the final 15 minutes. Quarterback Trinidad Chambliss, who up until that point was excellent, had an awful end to the game, going 1-of-10 for one yard in the fourth.

In the grand scheme of the 12-team College Football Playoff, one loss isn't debilitating. But for Ole Miss (6-1, 3-1 in SEC), the result raises concerns that in the toughest environments, it can't be trusted to deliver.

Winner: James Madison Dukes' second half versus Old Dominion Monarchs

A tight battle between two of the top Sun Belt programs turned into a laugh following a dominant James Madison performance after halftime.

The first half was a barn burner, with the two teams at one point trading touchdowns on six consecutive possessions. But it was all James Madison in the second half, with the Dukes turning a close 28-27 halftime lead into a 63-27 blowout, outscoring the Monarchs 35-0 in the third and fourth quarters. It wasn't even that close.

James Madison (6-1, 4-0 in Sun Belt) out-gained Old Dominion (4-3, 1-2 in Sun Belt) 258-10 while running twice as many plays (42-21). It forced three turnovers and allowed one first down.

The Dukes have won five in a row to take firm control of the Sun Belt in their fourth season in the conference. Their blistering second half showed that when they're clicking, there might not be a team in the Sun Belt that can beat them.

Loser: Memphis Tigers

No. 22 Memphis (6-1, 2-1 in American) entered Saturday with the highest odds (43.9 percent) among non-power conference teams to make the College Football Playoff (h/t ESPN Football Power Index), but its chances took a hit with a loss to UAB (3-4, 1-3 in American), playing in its first game since firing former head coach Trent Dilfer.

Adding to the pain of the loss, the Tigers had a golden opportunity to send the game to overtime, facing 1st-and-goal from the UAB 1-yard line with under a minute remaining. But Memphis imploded, committing two false starts at the goal line and a delay of game, eventually leaving it with a 4th-and-goal from the 11-yard line that it was unable to convert.

While the Tigers could still win the American, losing to UAB is a massive hit to their chances of earning an auto-bid as the highest-ranked Group of Five conference champion. The selection committee will have to compare Memphis' resume to other champs who might not have a loss nearly as ugly.

Professional Handicappers Who Show Results...

Winner: Ohio State Buckeyes wide receiver Carnell Tate

Ohio State has long had an embarrassment of riches at wide receiver, but even with a strong history, there's something special about this 2025 group. Sophomore Jeremiah Smith is the headliner, but junior Carnell Tate is every bit as gifted, giving the Buckeyes two legit WR1s.

Tate had one of his better games of the season in a 34-0 win at Wisconsin, finishing with six receptions for a team-high 111 receiving yards and two touchdowns, including an exceptional grab between two defenders while having his helmet jarred loose.

The Ohio State offense is starting to look as formidable as its defense, and Tate is a large reason why.

Loser: Big 12's dreams of multiple CFP bids

"I fully expect the Big 12 to earn multiple College Football Playoff bids this year," conference commissioner Brett Yormark told reporters during Big 12 media days in July. That bold prediction is much less likely to come true after this weekend.

No. 7 Texas Tech (6-1, 3-1 in Big 12) lost to Arizona State (5-2, 3-1 in Big 12), 26-22, and it might have to run the table to be considered for a playoff spot if it's a member of the at-large pool.

No. 15 BYU (7-0, 4-0 in Big 12) is the conference's lone unbeaten after defeating No. 23 Utah (5-2, 2-2 in Big 12), 24-21, but it has a difficult remaining schedule, making it unlikely to end the regular season unscathed.

Last season, only two teams (Ohio State, Tennessee) received auto-bids after losing multiple times before conference championship weekend, and a multi-loss Big 12 team will fall behind those from the Big Ten and SEC in a similar scenario this year. The Big 12 couldn't afford its teams beating up on each other to land more than one playoff bid, but that's exactly what's happening.

Winner: Tulane Green Wave

Tulane (6-1, 3-0 in American) kept its CFP hopes alive with a 24-17 win over upset-minded Army (3-4, 2-3 in American). The Green Wave trailed 17-10 at the two-minute timeout in the fourth quarter, but quarterback Jake Retzlaff threw two touchdowns, including one that ended with a circus catch from wideout Shazz Preston for the winning score with 27 seconds left.

The race for the fifth automatic playoff bid is wide open, but entering the second half of the season, the Green Wave have as realistic a shot as anyone.



COLLEGE FOOTBALL BEST BETS

Toledo @ Washington State — OVER 47

Both teams bring a blend of tempo and balance that points to points. Washington State's home offense has averaged better than 33 points per game in Pullman and is facing a Toledo defense that has shown vulnerability against high-efficiency passing attacks. The Rockets' secondary has surrendered over 270 yards per game on the road and now faces a Cougar attack that completes passes near 68 percent. Meanwhile, Toledo's own offense has quietly built a top-25 rushing success rate, giving them the ability to trade scores even when the Cougars surge early. The total of 48 looks short when measured against recent Pac-12/MAC crossover tempo—both sides operate above 70 plays per game. Even a modest uptick in finishing drives should push this contest past the number by the third quarter. Both models and historical splits at Martin Stadium support value on the high side when the forecast is mild and wind under 10 mph.

TAKE — Over 47

Ohio @ Eastern Michigan — Over 59

The Bobcats' offense continues to hum behind one of the nation's more consistent passing units. Ohio averages over 420 yards per game and has scored 30-plus in five of its last six. Eastern Michigan's defense, conversely, ranks near the bottom 20 in explosive-play prevention and has yielded 6.2 yards per snap at home. Our power ratings projection (64) offers a clear cushion above the Vegas line, and pace metrics back it up—both teams top 70 offensive snaps per game. Turnover regression also points upward; EMU has forced 14 takeaways already, a rate difficult to sustain. Expect sustained drives, short fields, and red-zone efficiency on both sides. A high-scoring MAC shootout fits the matchup profile perfectly.

TAKE — Over 59

Minnesota @ Iowa — Minnesota +10

Minnesota's defense has quietly elevated its level, allowing under 17 points per game since late September. Iowa's offense, though efficient in spurts, remains one-dimensional and rarely stretches the field vertically. That plays directly into the Gophers' hands, as they rank among the Big Ten leaders in yards-per-carry allowed and have won the possession battle in five straight. Our power ratings projection cuts the margin roughly in half (Hawkeyes by 4), giving Minnesota solid line value. Expect a game dominated by field position and third-down stops—exactly the kind of grind that favors a large underdog catching more than a touchdown. With the total sitting in the mid-30s, every point of spread value carries extra weight.

TAKE — Minnesota +10

South Carolina vs Alabama — Over 47

Alabama's scoring output on the road has dipped, but this is a prime rebound spot against a Gamecocks team that trades speed for physicality. South Carolina has allowed 29 points per game versus top-25 offenses and owns the SEC's second-worst third-down defense. That should help Alabama sustain possessions and reach the mid-30s. The Gamecocks counter with a creative

offensive design at home that averages 6.4 yards per play. Both units grade top-15 nationally in red-zone touchdown rate, signaling conversions rather than field goals. Weather looks ideal, and historical trends show Alabama totals cashing Over in four of its last five away games when favored by double digits. The numbers point up. Gamecocks and Tide roll over the total.

TAKE — Over 47

Utah vs Colorado — Utah -13

Rice-Eccles Stadium remains one of the toughest venues in the country, and the Utes' defense should dictate this matchup. Utah ranks top-10 in yards-per-rush allowed and red-zone stops, while Colorado's offensive line continues to struggle in protection—over 3.5 sacks allowed per game on the road. The line underscores the mismatch, and Utah's ball-control style ensures their defense isn't left exposed. Offensively, Utah's play-action and tight-end usage have thrived at home, where they've covered 7 of their last 8 against unranked opponents. If Colorado falls behind early, its tempo amplifies Utah's short-field advantage. Lay the two touchdowns with confidence.

TAKE — Utah -13

COLLEGE FOOTBALL QUICK PICKS

Tuesday — Kennesaw State at FIU

FIU has shown steady improvement in offensive rhythm at home, averaging over 27 points in its last three contests. Kennesaw State's defense struggles to contain mobile quarterbacks, and the Panthers' tempo should expose that. FIU has quietly covered four of its past five in Miami and continues to create takeaways. The home team's pace and field position edge point to another tight cover. **TAKE — FIU +2.5**

Tuesday — Western Kentucky at Louisiana Tech

Western Kentucky's defense has tightened considerably, holding opponents under 21 points in two straight, while La Tech's passing game has hit a wall. The Hilltoppers' balanced attack should sustain long drives and keep the Bulldogs off schedule. Conference USA road dogs with an efficient passing rate have thrived. Expect WKU to control tempo late. **TAKE — Western Kentucky +3.5**

Wednesday — Middle Tennessee at Delaware

Delaware's offense has produced over 430 yards per game at home, showing poise in third-down spots. Middle Tennessee's defense ranks near the bottom nationally in red-zone conversion rate allowed, which sets up trouble against a balanced Blue Hens attack. The talent gap is clear up front, where Delaware should dominate time of possession. Look for the home side to pull away steadily.

TAKE — Delaware -10

Wednesday — Missouri State at New Mexico State

New Mexico State continues to rely on its rushing game, which chews clock and limits total snaps. Missouri State lacks explosive capability, creating long but low-yield drives. Expect both teams to trade punts rather than touchdowns. The flow points to a slower pace than the oddsmakers anticipate. **TAKE — Under 52**

Thursday — South Alabama at Georgia State

Both offenses prefer to run first, and Georgia State's front seven has improved just enough to limit big plays. South Alabama's defense is built for containment rather than chaos, keeping scores modest. Neither team finishes drives efficiently inside the 20. All indicators suggest a field-position battle.

TAKE — Under 56

Friday — North Texas at Charlotte

North Texas remains one of the more explosive mid-majors, ranking top-30 in yards per play, while Charlotte's defense continues to leak yardage in chunks. The Mean Green's depth in the trenches should wear down a thin 49ers roster by halftime. Charlotte's inability to force turnovers makes this lopsided. Expect a comfortable win for the visitors.

TAKE — North Texas -27

Friday — California at Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech's home defense has quietly become the team's backbone, especially against the run. California's offense travels poorly, averaging just 16 points in road games. Expect the Hokies' secondary to dictate pace while both sides rely on short passing. Scoring opportunities will be limited.

TAKE — Under 50

Friday — Boise State at Nevada

Boise State has dominated this series thanks to a superior defense that rarely allows sustained drives. Nevada has scored under 20 points in five of its last six games, struggling badly in third-and-long. The Broncos' physical edge should suppress any late rally. Expect a cleaner, lower-scoring result.

TAKE — Under 52

Saturday — Virginia at North Carolina

North Carolina has slipped offensively in recent weeks, and Virginia's defensive line has come alive with consistent pressure. The Cavaliers thrive in slow, methodical games, forcing opponents to drive the length of the field. Expect both offenses to lean on the run to stay ahead of the sticks. Points will be scarce.

TAKE — Under 52

Saturday — Rutgers at Purdue

Purdue's offense has found new rhythm at home, averaging 6.3 yards per play the past two games. Rutgers struggles to generate chunk plays, which limits comeback potential. The Boilermakers' pass rush can tilt field position in their favor. Slight home advantage seals it.

TAKE — Purdue -2.5

Saturday — Syracuse at Georgia Tech

Syracuse's defensive discipline can frustrate a Georgia Tech offense that's inconsistent in the red zone. The Yellow Jackets' defense, meanwhile, has tightened up, creating a grind. Expect punts and

stalled drives to dominate the game.

TAKE — Under 54

Saturday — UCLA at Indiana

Indiana's home field remains a major advantage, especially for a defense that ranks among the nation's elite in points allowed. UCLA's offense fades on the road, where turnovers mount. The Hoosiers' efficiency and depth up front give them control from start to finish.

TAKE — Indiana -24.5

Saturday — Kansas State at Kansas

Kansas State brings the superior rushing attack and line play, which travel well. Kansas struggles to stop power running teams, yielding 5.1 yards per carry at home. Expect the Wildcats to dictate possession and pull the mild upset.

TAKE — Kansas State +3

Saturday — Appalachian State at Old Dominion

Old Dominion tends to fade late, allowing nearly 7 yards per play after halftime. Appalachian State's defense is built to withstand tempo and force turnovers. The overall pace leans conservative, keeping scoring in check through four quarters.

TAKE — Under 62

Saturday — Memphis at South Florida

Both teams rank among the top-25 nationally in plays per game, but their red-zone efficiency has been inconsistent. Defensive adjustments inside the 20s have kept recent USF games below expectations. Expect big yardage but limited finishing.

TAKE — Under 66

Saturday — Akron at Buffalo

Akron's offense rarely sustains drives, while Buffalo's defense is particularly strong against the run. Windy late-October conditions further favor the defenses. Expect long fields and limited possessions.

TAKE — Under 48

Saturday — Auburn at Arkansas

Auburn's defensive front has created pressure on nearly one-third of opponent dropbacks, which should disrupt Arkansas' rhythm. The Tigers' balanced attack offers more stability late. Arkansas' offensive line woes persist. Auburn grinds out a road win.

TAKE — Auburn -1

Saturday — UConn at Rice

UConn continues to cash thanks to strong tackling and clock control. Rice's defense allows over 30 points per game to winning opponents, suggesting more vulnerability than the line implies. The

Huskies' physical style wears down the Owls in the fourth quarter.

TAKE — UConn -10.5

Saturday — Utah State at New Mexico

Both teams favor the ground game and slow tempo, limiting total plays. Neither has shown consistent explosive capability through the air. Expect steady drives that stall before the red zone.

TAKE — Under 62

Saturday — Illinois at Washington

Illinois' defensive front can neutralize Washington's speed, forcing longer drives. The Illini have covered five of their past six as road underdogs. If their ground game clicks, they'll stay inside the number.

TAKE — Illinois +4.5

Saturday — Temple at Tulsa

Tulsa's defense has struggled to stop anyone, giving up over 38 points per game at home. Temple's offense has begun converting third downs efficiently, a key against a porous secondary. Look for the Owls to capitalize on a weak Hurricanes defense.

TAKE — Temple -6

Saturday — Navy vs Florida Atlantic

Navy's triple-option offense remains difficult to prepare for, and FAU's defensive front is undersized for 60 minutes of cut blocking. The pace quickens once Navy's ground game finds rhythm. Expect sustained drives and points both ways.

TAKE — Over 62

Saturday — Ball State at Northern Illinois

Both offenses lean on the run and short passing, producing consistent clock bleed. Field goals may outnumber touchdowns early. Once adjustments hit, scoring should rise modestly in the second half.

TAKE — Over 42

Saturday — Central Michigan vs Massachusetts

Massachusetts has been overwhelmed up front all year, and Central Michigan's running game is tailor-made to exploit that. Expect a heavy dose of ground control and play-action to seal it. The Minutemen simply can't match physicality.

TAKE — Central Michigan -15.5

Saturday — Miami (OH) vs Western Michigan

Both teams field capable defenses and emphasize time of possession. Expect a conservative game script featuring punts and clock-draining drives. Points will come at a premium throughout.

TAKE — Under 42

Saturday — Texas at Mississippi State

Texas continues to impose its will with balance and efficiency on both sides. Mississippi State's secondary can't handle that level of precision. Expect the Longhorns to separate after halftime.

TAKE — Texas -6.5

Saturday — TCU at West Virginia

TCU's front seven excels against the run, forcing opponents to pass into a disciplined secondary. West Virginia's inconsistency on third down will be costly. The visitors hold every measurable edge.

TAKE — TCU -15

Saturday — Stanford at Miami (FL)

Miami's speed advantage at every position should create early separation. Stanford's offense lacks the firepower to respond once behind. Expect the Hurricanes to dictate tempo and dominate from the outset.

TAKE — Miami -30.5

Saturday — Wisconsin at Oregon

Oregon remains nearly automatic at home, averaging more than 45 points per game in Eugene. Wisconsin's limited passing attack won't keep up with the Ducks' tempo. This has blowout written all over it.

TAKE — Oregon -34.5

Saturday — Louisiana-Lafayette at Troy

Troy's defense ranks among the nation's best in points allowed and should dictate pace. The Cajuns have struggled against physical fronts, which tips control to the home team. Expect a double-digit decision.

TAKE — Troy -9.5

Saturday — Michigan at Michigan State

Michigan's defense allows just a touchdown per game over the last month and shows no signs of slowing down. Michigan State's offensive line remains over matched against elite pressure. This rivalry is lopsided on paper and likely on the field.

TAKE — Michigan -14

Saturday — Boston College at Louisville

Louisville's offense is back in rhythm, averaging nearly 40 points over its last three outings. Boston College's defense struggles on the road and won't keep up with the Cardinals' tempo. Expect another decisive home performance.

TAKE — Louisville -25.5

Professional Handicappers Who Show Results...

Saturday — Texas A&M at LSU

LSU's passing game has a major advantage against an Aggie secondary giving up big plays in bunches. Death Valley has been a fortress in night games, and momentum should carry the Tigers late. Expect fireworks. Take the home dog Tigers.

TAKE — LSU +2.5

Saturday — Colorado State at Wyoming

Colorado State's offense continues to trend upward with improved quarterback play, while Wyoming's attack remains inconsistent. Expect the Rams to keep this within one score throughout.

TAKE — Colorado State +6

Saturday — Tennessee at Kentucky

Kentucky's defense stiffens at home, and Tennessee's offense has slowed against stronger fronts. The pace should crawl with both sides prioritizing field position. Cats kept a powerful Longhorn offense in check and should do the same here. Low scoring looks like the safest bet.

TAKE — Under 54

Saturday — Houston at Arizona State

Houston's passing attack has found balance, spreading the field effectively. Arizona State's defense fades in the fourth quarter, where the Cougars' tempo could steal control. Expect the visitors to hang tough throughout.

TAKE — Houston +8.5

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THIS WEEKS GRIDIRON GOLD SHEET BEST BETS

	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet	Best Bet
CFB	Toledo Over 47	Ohio Over 59	Minnesota +10	Alabama Over 47	Utah - 13

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