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Football Newsletter

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Dennis Stagliano's Best Bets Gridiron Gold Sheet Football Newsletter
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NFL Landscape: The Good and the Bad

Star running backs ran roughshod, while a league MVP candidate flopped in one of his bigger tests.

Philadelphia Eagles' rushing attack: The Eagles hadn't rushed for 158 yards or more in their first seven games — they broke a cold spell in Sunday's 38-20 win over the New York Giants.

Starting running back Saquon Barkley had 150 yards and one TD on 14 carries before exiting with a groin injury in the fourth quarter. Fellow RB Tank Bigsby, meanwhile, had nine carries for 104 yards. They became the first Eagles RBs with 100-plus rushing yards in a game since LeSean McCoy and Bryce Brown in Week 16 of the 2013 season against the Chicago Bears.

Justin Fields, quarterback, New York Jets: Fields made Jets owner Woody Johnson eat some crow after he called him out earlier this week. The QB helped the Jets score 23 fourth-quarter points en route to a 39-38 comeback win over the Cincinnati Bengals. The beleaguered passer completed 21-of-32 passes for 244 yards and one TD in New York's first victory of the season.

Jonathan Taylor, running back: Indianapolis Colts. Taylor may be solidifying himself as an Offensive Player of the Year favorite. In a 38-14 blowout against the Tennessee Titans, the two-time Pro Bowler feasted, rushing for 153 yards and two TDs on 12 carries. Taylor is now the first player with 500 scrimmage yards and 10 TDs in a four-game span since former Kansas City Chiefs star RB Jamaal Charles during the 2013 season.

Tyler Huntley, quarterback, Baltimore Ravens: With starting QB Lamar Jackson out for a third straight game because of a hamstring issue, it seemed likely the Ravens would lose a fifth consecutive game. Huntley, though, helped prevent that from happening. In a 30-16 victory over Chicago, he completed 17-of-22 passes for 186 yards and one TD.

C.J. Stroud, quarterback, Houston Texans: Stroud, the 2023 Offensive Rookie of the Year, had a rebound performance against the San Francisco 49ers. In the 26-15 win, he completed 30-of-39 passes for 318 yards and tossed two TDs and one interception.

Dallas Cowboys QB Dak Prescott's chances of winning MVP: Prescott floundered against the Denver Broncos' elite defense. In the 44-24 loss, he completed 19-of-31 passes for 188 yards and threw two interceptions. He also posted a season-low 51.5 passer rating. Entering Sunday's game, Prescott ranked seventh in the league in passer rating (107.6).

Atlanta Falcons' offense: In a 34-10 blowout loss to the Miami Dolphins, the Falcons averaged a meager 4.3 yards per play (213 yards on 49 plays). Surprisingly, star Atlanta RB Bijan Robinson wasn't immune to the offensive struggles. He ran for just 25 yards on nine carries and lost one fumble.

Caleb Williams, quarterback, Chicago Bears: Questions about whether 2024 No. 1 pick Williams is a franchise QB remain after Chicago's loss to Baltimore. Against the Ravens, the former USC star finished 25-of-38 passing for 285 yards and one interception. Remember, Baltimore has allowed the third-most points in the league (30 PPG) this season.

Spencer Rattler, quarterback, New Orleans Saints: Rattler's days as the starting QB for the Saints may be over. In a 23-3 loss to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, he had one pick and lost a fumble before being benched in favor of rookie QB Tyler Shough late in the third quarter. In his Saints head coach Kellen Moore refused to name a starter for Week 9 against the Los Angeles Rams.

Al Golden, defensive coordinator, Cincinnati Bengals: When the Bengals replaced Lou Anarumo (now with the Colts) with Golden this offseason, they were banking on the former Notre Dame DC improving the unit. It may be regressing instead. The Jets had a season-high 502 yards against the Bengals. Before Sunday's game, New York hadn't surpassed 404 yards in a game this season.

A Look Back

Chiefs crush Commanders 28-7 - Kansas City outgained Washington 432 to 260. The Chiefs picked up 26 first downs to the Commanders' 14. Patrick Mahomes threw two interceptions on consecutive drives to open the game, but rebounded with a strong second half. He completed 25 of 34 passes (74%) for 299 yards and three touchdowns. His top targets were Travis Kelce (6-99-1) and Rashee Rice (9-93-1). Marcus Mariota (21/30, 213, 1, 2) underwhelmed, while Washington's run game produced just 60 yards on 20 carries (3.0 ypc). Terry McLaurin caught three passes for 54 yards and a touchdown before reinjuring his quad in the fourth quarter.

Rico Dowdle set for more work - Dave Canales indicated that Dowdle will be the Panthers' lead back moving forward. Dowdle alternated series with Chuba Hubbard over the past two weeks. Dowdle has 726 scrimmage yards and three touchdowns on 119 touches (6.1 ypt) this season, compared to 400 yards and three touchdowns on 94 touches (4.3 ypt) for Hubbard. When Hubbard was injured in Weeks 5-6, Carolina averaged 25.5 points per game. Since he's returned, the Panthers have averaged just 11 per game.

Lamar Jackson (hamstring) expected to play on TNF * John Harbaugh told reporters he's "very confident" about Jackson playing against Miami on Thursday. The 2x MVP has been out since Week 4. Jackson was listed as a full participant on Monday's estimated practice report. Despite a borderline disastrous first half of the season, Baltimore (2-5) has a real opportunity to win the AFC North — Steelers (4-3), Bengals (3-5), and Browns (2-6). The Ravens should also be getting a more effective version of Derrick Henry, who historically thrives in the colder months — 4.5 yards per carry in September to October, compared to 5.2 in November to January.

Travis Hunter trending toward WR1 role - The first-rounder flashed in Jacksonville's last game, catching eight of 14 targets for 101 yards and a touchdown against the Rams. He played a season-high 64 snaps on offense, compared to just 12 on defense. The struggles of Brian Thomas are a factor in Hunter's expected elevation. Thomas has caught 27 of 55 targets (49%) for 365 yards and one touchdown this season. Drops (five in seven games) have been an issue.

Puka Nacua (ankle) expected to play this week - Sean McVay told reporters he expects Nacua to return to practice and play against the Saints on Sunday. Nacua has been out since Week 6. Nacua caught 54 of 65 targets for 616 yards (118 per completed game) and two touchdowns before getting injured. Also Back: McVay also anticipates a return to action for right tackle Rob Havenstein, who has been out since Week 5 with an ankle injury of his own. The Rams traded a conditional fifth-round pick to the Titans for cornerback Roger McCreary (66.4 PFF grade) and a conditional sixth-round pick.

PRO FOOTBALL BEST BETS

ATLANTA at NEW ENGLAND — Line: NEW ENGLAND -6, O/U 45.5

This matchup tilts heavily toward New England in the trenches and in situational football. The Patriots' front seven has evolved into one of the most assignment-sound units in the league, shutting down inside zone and forcing offenses into third-and-long. That's crucial against an Atlanta team missing continuity up front and lacking rhythm in the passing game. The Patriots can collapse the pocket without blitzing, freeing linebackers to read and react. Atlanta's play-action attack has flattened since their injuries; without vertical threats to stretch safeties, New England can keep two high and still stop the run.

Drake Maye's consistency on early downs is another quiet separator. His timing with Hunter Henry and his ability to manipulate linebackers with his eyes has reduced turnover-worthy plays while keeping the offense on schedule. Atlanta's coverage has been exposed repeatedly when facing motion-heavy schemes, and New England ranks top five in pre-snap movement frequency. The result: favorable leverage, open middle windows, and a steady diet of high-probability completions.

Defensively, the Patriots' interior line can overwhelm Atlanta's guards. Expect New England to dictate tempo by controlling time of possession and forcing Atlanta's quarterback into uncomfortable situations. The Falcons haven't converted more than 35% on third down in a month; meanwhile, the Patriots are climbing above 46% offensively. Even special teams lean the Patriots' way — field position has been a hidden edge, with their punt unit repeatedly pinning opponents inside the 15.

Momentum also favors New England: they've grown sharper with each passing week, while Atlanta's confidence cratered after being blown out last week. The Patriots' balance and discipline make this spread reachable even in a low-scoring script.

TAKE: NEW ENGLAND -6

CAROLINA at GREEN BAY — Line: GREEN BAY -13, O/U 44.5

Green Bay is built to create margin when facing a limited offense. At Lambeau, their offensive efficiency has spiked because of balance — establishing the run early to open vertical windows for Jordan Love. The Packers' play design thrives off motion, keeping defenses guessing between jet sweeps, play-action, and deep overs. Against Carolina's front, which has cratered in gap integrity, Green Bay can stay on schedule and pound out long drives.

On defense, the Packers can stack the box against a Panthers offense that lacks explosive ability. Carolina's passing game ranks near the bottom in yards per attempt, with little success outside the numbers. Green Bay's corners can sit on routes while their front four generates consistent pressure. That combination forces checkdowns, short gains, and punts. Once the Packers jump out early, their running game — particularly on duo and inside zone — can salt away the clock.

The contrast in red-zone output is striking: Green Bay converts drives into touchdowns at a top-tier rate, while Carolina settles for field goals. The Packers' home advantage amplifies when playing with a lead; they've outscored opponents by double digits in the second half at Lambeau since Week 3. This is the kind of game where their defensive depth and patience can choke out a weaker opponent. Unless Carolina finds explosive special teams plays, their offense will struggle to reach 17 points.

TAKE: GREEN BAY -13

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SAN FRANCISCO at NY GIANTS — Line: SAN FRANCISCO -2.5, O/U 48

Expect fireworks in this one. Both teams bring offensive versatility and tempo that can create an up-tempo rhythm early. The 49ers' pre-snap movement and layered play-action make them difficult to defend, especially against a Giants defense that has struggled with misdirection. San Francisco can dictate matchups with motion, getting skill players into space and isolating linebackers. On the flip side, the Giants' offense has quietly improved its pace and pass protection, leading to more chunk plays downfield.

Red-zone efficiency should tilt upward — both teams rank near the top in plays inside the 20, but mid-pack in conversion rate. That typically normalizes over time. Expect touchdowns instead of field goals this week. The Giants' secondary has also been prone to busted assignments on crossing routes, and the 49ers feast on those looks. Likewise, the Giants' offensive tempo can stress a San Francisco defense that's still patching together its edge rotation.

Turnovers could shorten fields and boost scoring opportunities. Both teams have shown aggressiveness on fourth down, adding potential short drives that end quickly or in points. Neither defense matches up cleanly against the opposing play-call style — meaning sustained drives and chances for quick strikes. Weather won't be a factor, and both coaching staffs lean forward with analytics-friendly tendencies on early downs. Expect a fast pace, moderate efficiency, and enough explosive plays to push this into the 50s.

TAKE: OVER 48

JACKSONVILLE at LAS VEGAS — Line: JACKSONVILLE -3.0, O/U 46

This matchup sets up for a grind. Both offenses are conservative, preferring ball control over volatility, and both defenses can win on first down. Jacksonville leans on its front seven to stifle runs and force third-and-mediums, while Las Vegas quietly ranks near the top in limiting red-zone touchdowns at home. Expect long possessions with limited explosives.

The Jaguars' passing game has struggled to stretch the field — they're completing less than 20% of deep shots in their last four outings. That means shorter completions and clock-draining drives. The Raiders can neutralize that with bracket coverage on Jacksonville's top receiver and a pass rush that wins on quick wins rather than sacks. On the other side, Las Vegas is even more limited vertically. They rely heavily on underneath routes and screens, and Jacksonville's linebackers close fast on those throws.

Neither team pushes pace. The Raiders' last three home games have averaged fewer than 120 total snaps combined, and both rank in the bottom third in explosive play rate. Special teams lean field-position, not scoring — more punts inside the 20 than any AFC matchup this week. The conditions, tendencies, and personnel all point toward a field-position battle where drives stall beyond the 40-yard line.

TAKE: UNDER 46



PRO FOOTBALL QUICK PICKS

BALTIMORE at MIAMI — Line: BALTIMORE - 8, O/U 51.5

Baltimore's defense remains elite but draws a tricky road spot against a Miami team capable of quick strikes and tempo. The Ravens can control early downs, but the Dolphins' ability to generate chunk plays through motion and speed makes this line heavy. Look for a competitive, lower-tempo affair where field goals keep the game within one score.

TAKE: MIAMI +8

DENVER at HOUSTON — Line: HOUSTON -1.5, O/U 39.5

Denver's defense has improved dramatically against the pass, but both teams' quarterbacks can exploit soft coverage. With two efficient passers and modest totals, the Over holds better value than picking sides. Expect efficiency over explosiveness and a final score creeping into the 40s.

TAKE: OVER 39.5

CHICAGO at CINCINNATI — Line: CHICAGO -2.5, O/U 52.5

Both offenses are inconsistent, with red-zone inefficiency driving recent unders. Chicago's defensive pressure rate has spiked, and Cincinnati has leaned on short passes that eat clock. Scoring chances should shrink as drives stall inside the 30s.

TAKE: UNDER 51.5

LA CHARGERS at TENNESSEE — Line: LA CHARGERS -9.5, O/U 43.5

The Chargers can dictate game flow with balance, but Tennessee's defense is physical enough to limit big plays. The Titans struggle offensively but can drag tempo, producing a low-possession grind. Expect limited scoring bursts and more punts than touchdowns.

TAKE: UNDER 42.5

INDIANAPOLIS at PITTSBURGH — Line: INDIANAPOLIS -3.0, O/U 50.5

Indianapolis has been sharp on scripted drives and can attack Pittsburgh's secondary with play-action. The Colts' defense is underrated against the run, forcing the Steelers to pass more often than they'd like. Efficiency and situational poise tilt to Indy.

TAKE: INDIANAPOLIS -3.0

MINNESOTA at DETROIT — Line: DETROIT -9, O/U 47.5

Detroit remains the stronger overall roster, but Minnesota's passing attack can test the Lions' secondary. Expect a mid range pace and moderate scoring output. Detroit likely controls the trenches but wins by a modest margin.

TAKE: MINNESOTA +9

NEW ORLEANS at LA RAMS — Line: LA RAMS -14, O/U 44

The Rams' offense is efficient, but New Orleans' defense can force red-zone field goals and extend possessions. Neither team plays fast enough to justify a high total. Expect a measured, methodical Rams win.

TAKE: UNDER 44

KANSAS CITY at BUFFALO — Line: KANSAS CITY -2, O/U 52.5

Patrick Mahomes remains the difference-maker in close matchups. Kansas City's defense disguises coverage well enough to frustrate Buffalo's rhythm passing. Expect timely turnovers and one or two short-field touchdowns.

TAKE: KANSAS CITY -2

SEATTLE at WASHINGTON — Line: SEATTLE -3.0, O/U 47.5

Seattle's offensive inconsistency meets a Washington team gaining confidence at home. The Commanders' defense bends but doesn't break, and their quarterback play should be stabilized with Daniels. Expect a one-score finish either way.

TAKE: WASHINGTON +3.0

ARIZONA at DALLAS — Line: DALLAS -2.5, O/U 55

Dallas can score in bursts but also commits penalties that kill drives. Arizona's improved offensive balance can shorten possessions and keep totals in check. Expect a choppy tempo than the line implies.

TAKE: UNDER 55

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