

# SPORTS reporter



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**37 Games Thursday thru Labor Day, Week 1**

# COLLEGE FOOTBALL!

Greetings again, Football followers! Thanks for returning! Where the heck have you been? We haven't gone anywhere. We're here 361 days a year, and have been for a while. But it's good to have you back!

You know, one of the best things about College Football, compared to the NFL, is that there is no two-minute warning. Oops! Sorry! There is now a two-minute warning in College Football in both halves! I guess they decided that there weren't enough commercial breaks. Instead of the final 2:00 of a game taking 10 minutes or more of real time, it will take 15 minutes or more. Lovely, just lovely. We're not getting any younger, you know what I mean?

They refuse to call it the "two-minute warning." They call it the "two-minute timeout," because the NCAA Football Rules Committee reportedly doesn't want it to look and sound like they're emulating the NFL... when they're emulating the NFL, including approving the use of sideline tablets, communication with headsets, and don't forget paying players. Seriously, you can't make up this type of an embarrassing explanation. I wonder if they decided to start using electronic communication between players and coaches to avoid having to deal with accusations and investigations of sign stealing, which new LA Chargers head coach Jim Harbaugh – in one of the most absurd situations ever – is now suspended for the first four college football games he may coach again. LOL. By the way, as soon as they approved electronic communications, you can bet that at least half the 134 teams at the FBS level launched some sort of electronic spying program.

They make it hard for people to find out who is on the NCAA Football Rules Committee. I've seen the roster in other years. It has usually consisted of people with some of the lowest profiles in the sport – representatives of Oklahoma Baptist University or The College of Saint Rose -- and only 6 of the 12 committee members are from Division I (FBS). Maybe it's changed since I was last able to find the member make-up. But if it has, the changes probably involve mandating that more people named Tiffany, Lexie or Karen – who may or may not be women, who never played or coached football -- be selected to help add to the ever-growing list of football rules.

\* \* \*

The nonsense began early with the announcers, as it usually does. Oh, it's gon-

na be a not-so-fun listening season once again, buddy boys! In the intro before Saturday night's SMU at Nevada telecast on CBS Sports Network, this is what the analyst had to say:

*"I don't know if I've ever been more fired up for a college football season. All the changes, all the newness. It feels like there's no parity. Anybody can win it this season."*

I'd leave it at that, and pause, for everyone to laugh at how the announcer revealed how he doesn't understand the meaning of the word "parity." But, I just wanted to make sure that everybody understands that the announcer revealed that he doesn't understand the meaning of the word "parity." You can all laugh now. By the way, if he doesn't know if he's ever been more fired up for a college football season, then why does he bother saying that? Nobody asked him a question, so he didn't have to say, "I don't know..." Tell people what you know! Not what you don't know! The thing is, he should know! Because only he could! Nobody else would!

Then, they went to the sideline girl – I think her name was Amanda Hugandkiss -- for her inanity, interviewing Nevada's head coach: *"I love the analogy you used of putting this team in a microwave trying to get them ready for tonight. The timer's gone off..."*

Some analogy. If you put a team in a microwave, set the timer for 6 months, then when buzzer sounds and the door opens, it'd be burnt beyond recognition.

\* \* \*

We said and did this last year, so I'll say and do it again. With the way College Football has changed very recently, with so many teams re-making large percentages of their rosters from year to year, we don't dive headfirst into Week 1 going crazy with a boatload of selections. Last year, there were 45 Week 1 games and we had six boxed selections. This year's Week 1 has 8 fewer games, and 44% of them have lines of 17 or greater. Somebody with a 22-point lead laying -24 could send in the fourth stringers late and give up a TD in the final minute, and the coaches could be ecstatic about giving up the points because they were able to play the entire team. Yes, four picks is enough, with more to come in the Midweek Update on Friday. – Bobby Smith, Editor

# College Football Board

This week's match-ups in Vegas/Online order, home team at bottom, with: Kickoff time (ET), Opening line, Sports Reporter computer line (will debut in a couple o' weeks), past three years of prior-meeting scores. Asterisk (\*) in past scores indicates home. No asterisk: neutral field.

Time	THURSDAY, 8/29	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
8:00	North Carolina Minnesota	-1.5		31*		
8:00	Coastal Carolina Jacksonville St.	-2.5		30*		16

Time	FRIDAY, 8/30	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
7:00	Temple Oklahoma	-42.5				
10:30	TCU Stanford	-9.5				
9:00	Western Michigan Wisconsin	-23.5				
7:00	Florida Atl Michigan St.	-13.5				

Time	SATURDAY, 8/31	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
3:30	Florida Int Indiana	-21.5				
12:00	Kent St. Pittsburgh	-24.5				
12:00	Connecticut Maryland	-20.5				
3:30	Kennesaw St. UTSA	-24.5				
12:00	Clemson Georgia (Atlanta)	-13.5				3 10
3:30	Eastern Michigan Massachusetts	-3		19*		17
3:30	Ohio Syracuse	-17.5				9* 29
8:00	Georgia St. Georgia Tech	-21.5				
4:15	Old Dominion South Carolina	-20.5				
8:00	James Madison Charlotte	-7				
12:00	Penn St. West Virginia	-8.5		38*		15
4:00	Boise St. Georgia Southern	-12.5				
7:45	Southern Miss Kentucky	-27.5				
3:30	Akron Ohio St.	-49.5				7 59*
10:30	New Mexico Arizona	-31				
10:30	Wyoming Arizona St.	-6.5				
3:30	Miami FL Florida	-2.5				
3:30	Colorado St. Texas	-33				

Time	SATURDAY, 8/31	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
3:30	UTEP Nebraska	-27.5				
3:30	Miami OH Northwestern	-3			17 14*	
7:00	UNLV Houston	-2				
5:00	North Texas South Alabama	-5.5				
7:00	Nevada Troy	-9.5				
12:00	Virginia Tech Vanderbilt	-13.5				
7:00	Sam Houston St. Rice	-9.5				
7:30	UCLA Hawaii	-14.5				44* 10
7:00	Western KY Alabama	-31.5				
7:30	Fresno St. Michigan	-21.5				
7:30	Notre Dame Texas A&M	-2.5				

Time	SUNDAY, 9/1	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
7:30	LSU Southern Cal (Las Vegas)	-4.5				

Time	MONDAY, 9/2	Line	sr line	2023	2022	2021
7:30	Boston College Florida St.	-15.5		29* 31	14 44*	23* 26



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# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## THURSDAY, AUGUST 29

### \*MINNESOTA over NORTH CAROLINA by 5

The Golden Gophers, who may have a real quarterback for the first time in a while (FCS Offensive Player of the Year Max Brosmer), should be extra-motivated to avenge last year's 18-point loss at UNC, after which our man Mr. the Boat lamented: "We had plenty of opportunities. I think everybody saw that. We had people open all over down the field. We had dropped balls, tipped balls, balls that were inaccurate, balls that missed the explosive plays. And we were still in the game." On defense, Minnesota allowed one Tar Heel receiver, Nate McCollum, to catch 15 passes, one-third of his eventual season amount as the team's fourth option. Weird! Speaking of weird, ol' reliable Mack Brown: "Depending on how the game goes, we would like to play both quarterbacks. And we'd like to do it for the season." MINNESOTA, 27-22

### \*JACKSONVILLE ST. over COASTAL CAROLINA by 5

Like Minnesota above, Jax State may have a real passer in a home revenge setting. They juggled 50% and 55% completion dudes in their successful, run-heavy attack last year, during which they lost 30-16 at Coastal, mostly due to Coastal beginning two 2nd-half drives deep in Jax St. territory. QB Tyler Huff (Furman) was/is another FCS conference Player of the Year type. Naturally, Rich Rodriguez won't commit, taking it several steps beyond bizarre talking about possibly playing four QBs. (This is getting out of hand!) Coastal offense must try to pick up where it left off without its own multi-Player of the Year QB, Grayson McCall. Coach Tim Beck won't play the reveal game until Thursday. His choice will be w/o last year's top two receivers (130 catches, 12 TDs) and the D lost its top four tacklers. JACKSONVILLE ST, 30-25.

## FRIDAY, AUGUST 30

### \*OKLAHOMA over TEMPLE by 44

It is written that Temple's defense was dominating the offense in training camp practices leading up to preparation for OU. Lots of defenses would dominate Temple's offense. Last year's only QB worth anything to them, E.J. (son of Kurt) Warner, said, 'The heck with this place,' and transferred to Rice. Unless the Sooners are playing, "save the best stuff for SEC season," their tempo, talent and scoring abilities should erase any "perfect game" chance the Owls have to play, thereby producing a blowout. OKLAHOMA, 52-8.

### TCU over \*STANFORD by 4

Hard to believe that Sonny Dykes would have TCU less prepared for an opener than they were last season vs. Stanford's former Pac 12 cousins from Colorado but hey, you never know, you know? Also, consider this: Not that TCU athletes positively go to class, but... classes began at TCU on August 19. They don't begin at Stanford until September 23, so Cardinal football has had less responsibility outside Cardinal football in the weeks leading up to their first game as a member of the ACC. That miscellaneous fact, and the squad's 85% retention of last year's production, can serve Stanford well in early-season action before West-East-West travel and studies collide. We hope. TCU, 28-24.

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## RECOMMENDED

### \*WISCONSIN over WESTERN MICHIGAN by 33

Last season's disappointing Year One for the Luke Fickell coaching staff at Wisconsin places Year Two in the "possibly pleasant" category. We shall see, hopefully here anyway. Some blue-chip talent that didn't see the field during last year's most dismal offensive performance in 19 seasons will probably create better depth at the skill spots, and QB Tyler Van Dyke (Miami-FL) is a real quarterback the program usually lacks, being pushed by Braedyn Locke. The running back room is deep enough so that if they want to run through it after Chez Mellusi and Braelon Allen have done their things, the back-ups can run through some questionable MAC run defense, the type that allowed 43-254 rushing at Iowa last season in a 41-10 loss. WISCONSIN, 42-9.

### \*MICHIGAN ST. over FLORIDA ATLANTIC by 15

From Week 3 through the end of being 4-8SU last season, Sparty was an underdog in every game. But they had enough talent to play down and class and win/cover Week 1 as the favorite, 31-7 at -14 vs. Central Mich. Jonathan Smith has plucked many new legitimate starters from the portal but QB Aidan Chiles is only 18 years old and a running game needs to rise from the ashes of last year's #127 rank (only 84 ypg). FAU head coach Tom Herman was a great underdog guy in the big time, but was 2-4-1 ATS in Year One with his FAU team. Lefty interception tosser Cam Fancher is his new starting QB. Good luck. MICHIGAN ST, 29-14.

## SATURDAY, AUGUST 31

### \*INDIANA over FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL by 24

Belushi/Blutarski Award candidate Kurtis Rourke is a sixth-year senior who completed 66.3% of his passes in the MAC. He'll probably be taking snaps for the low-level Big Ten host playing in its best scenario – down in conference class. Oughta be, anyway. Former head coach Tom Allen had finally gotten the Hoosiers' o-line Big Ten presentable before they eventually canned him for all-around underperformance, so the unit should want to make hay while the sun shines. The two best teams FIU played last season, Liberty and Arkansas, were 32- and 24-point losses. INDIANA, 41-17.

### \*PITTSBURGH over KENT STATE by 22

Off a 3-9 SU year, Pitt pays MAC cellar-dweller Kent State \$1.5 million to show up for this match-up. Head coach Pat Narduzzi is signed through 2030, so if anyone seems ripe to mess up a guaranteed game, it's him, with a plan to play two quarterbacks – Nate Yarnell and Eli Holstein – neither with stellar credentials, and offensive and defensive units that until proven otherwise, have lost their identities. Narduzzi is a defensive-minded head coach whose team's offensive portal work has been questionable, at best. Kent State has nowhere to go but up after last season's 14.7 ppg average and 1-11 SU mark. PITTSBURGH, 37-15.

### \*MARYLAND over CONNECTICUT by 27

This match-up was inked in 2019. Sportswriters, apparently unaware of the average tenure of a college football coach before he's fired, wrote: "Of course, the added flavor to this game will be Randy Edsall coaching against his former team." Perhaps Mike Locksley would have taken it easy on Edsall, for whom he once worked as an assistant (at Maryland, actually). But Locksley normally goes for the kill (and often gets it) when playing down in class early in the season, and has no allegiance to Jim Mora, Jr., whose UConn team generally struggles to score against this level. Worries about replacing Taulia Tagovailoa at QB, and the secrecy within, are mitigated by the fact that he was undrafted by the NFL, with no free-agent offers. Hello? MARYLAND, 37-10.

# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## **\*UTSA over KENNESAW STATE by 20**

Remember the Sam Houston team that debuted at the FBS level last season, couldn't score much, and went 0-8 before winning a game? The win was against Kennesaw State, 24-21. KSU debuts at the FBS level here, off a season in which they were 3-6 in FCS but two of the wins were against a Division II school, Tusculum, and one from the National Christian College Athletic Association, Virginia Lynchburg. But – oh, there's always a but – they run triple-option-like offense, something that UTSA could not get off the field against in a home loss vs. Army last season. UTSA, 33-13.

## **\*GEORGIA over CLEMSON by 10 (Atlanta, GA)**

Clemson's ability to score enough against the best defenses of the best teams remains suspect until the Tigers prove differently. When they lost 10-3 to Georgia to open the 2021 season, their own defense was en route to a #2 finish in yards allowed, Georgia's en route to #1 in the category. Last season's Clemson's D ranked #30, Georgia's #5. The Tigers' are a tad younger on the d-line this season but by all accounts, the unit is still among the nation's best. Problem is, they're probably not better on the o-line or d-line than #1-ranked Georgia is over the course of four quarters. A little more speed at receiver this season could help the quality underdog stay within two TDs. GEORGIA, 27-17.

## **EASTERN MICHIGAN over \*MASSACHUSETTS by 2**

EMU has a well-established, scrappy road underdog profile, meaning they hang around and do better than expected in games they're not expected to win away from home. There has been a line move for this affair, from EMU, -1.5, to UMass, -2.5. Perhaps it's based on the fact that EMU could only eke past UMass at home last season, 19-17, getting out-gained 464-371 but able to take advantage of being +3 in Turnover Margin. But look, it's UMass. EMU has gone to school on last year's game and had bowl-season practices for the third straight season, while UMass had none for the 13th straight season since joining FBS-level ball. EASTERN MICH, 26-24.

## **\*SYRACUSE over OHIO by 21**

Early excellence, then Fall flameouts, have been Syracuse's general identity. There is potential for some Orange value to realized if, under first-season head coach Fran Brown, the Orange can protect the football. Brown inherits the team that committed more turnovers last season (24) than any other team with a 2024 first-season coaching staff. Of course, he won't be able to recruit to upstate New York as well as he recruited to Athens, GA for Kirby Smart. Ohio's D was among the nation's leaders in Turnovers acquired (22), but such numbers can fluctuate drastically with player turnover. Ohio – who lost 11 players from its MAC Championship team to power conferences via the portal -- gets farther and farther away from the recruiting of Frank Solich, as Tim Albin enters his fourth season as head coach. SYRACUSE, 34-13.

## **\*GEORGIA TECH over GEORGIA STATE by 16**

'Georgia Tech beat #10 Florida State! Let's all get down on the Yellow Jackets laying three TDs coming home and dropping in class!' No, thanks. While it's possible that the Georgia State mass transition in coaches and players fails to gain any traction here, the Georgia Tech DNA – as they're sandwiched between conference games with a trip to Syracuse on deck -- is to play to the level of the competition. Look no further (or is it farther?) than last season's win at then-#17 Miami-FL, which had been preceded by a home loss vs. Bowling Green and was fol-

lowed by a home loss vs. unranked Boston College, which was followed by a win vs. then-#17 North Carolina. Georgia Tech head coach Brent Key: "We're not trying to prove anything to anyone. We're not trying to go out and impress people..." Alrighty, then, we'll take him at his word. GSU has a motivated former Ga. Tech QB (Zach Gibson) on hand, for a game in which the number of incestuous coaching ties is high (you could look it up!). GEORGIA TECH, 37-21.

## **\*SOUTH CAROLINA over OLD DOMINION by 18**

ODU had bowl-season practices last year, South Carolina did not. We'll respect the Monarchs' "head start" last year and approximate 3-TD head start in this game, but there is always the class factor to consider, being on the road in SEC territory. Not that Sun Belt teams haven't engineered early season upsets playing up in conference class on the road. It's what they do, nearly every season. But for a \$1.5 million guarantee, you worry about ODU using this as a scrimmage for the next two home games, also out of conference, vs. ECU and in-state Va. Tech. You also worry about a) South Carolina QB, 6'3", 245 LaNorris Sellers, playing to his 4-Star potential right away, and b) the Gamecocks' improved defensive depth. SOUTH CAROLINA, 35-17.

## **JAMES MADISON over \*CHARLOTTE by 10**

Charlotte thinks they have an improved passing game in the second season of Biff Poggi's coaching tenure. However, he's a run-first Harbaugh type of coach. Therefore, if the new James Madison coaching staff hasn't tinkered with the successful blueprint of the former regime, which was to lock in on stopping the run – doing it very well most of the time -- then the visiting Dukes should be fine despite the media warnings of, 'This guy, that guy and the other guy not being there anymore!' JAMES MADISON, 27-17.

## **PENN STATE over \*WEST VIRGINIA by 4**

Morgantown, WV will be a revenge-fueled madhouse. Penn State has been a mighty fine road favorite under James Franklin: 25-8 SU, 20-12-1 ATS. Last three seasons, the Nittany Lions are 9-1 ATS as road chalk. Oh, great. Whadda we do now? Well, gotta figure that with West Virginia's inaccurate passer Garrett Greene (hovering in the low 50% range for two seasons), and a strength (running) against what has been very good run defense (if Penn State's D is still anything like last season's #1 nationally, 76 rushing yards per game allowed), that the Nittany Lions weather the early wave of emotion and find ways to prevail by the end of the evening. Unless the new coordinators botch the ballyhooed new electronic communications – just one more ridiculous variable for handicappers and bettors to be concerned about. PENN ST, 26-22.

### **BEST BET**

#### **\*GEORGIA SOUTHERN over BOISE STATE by 3**

The visiting Broncos' suspect pass D, on the road against a pass-offense-minded host that could feature better balance this season, raises some yellow flags, at least. Boise State QB Maddux Madsen: "We've got depth at that (receiver) position. It's unlike any other year that I've been here. We've had guys in the past that have been good, this year all those guys aren't going to be able to play... we're going to have guys who can go in and make plays for us, for sure." GSU defensive coordinator Brandon Bailey: "There are some areas we've got to grow defensively and a lot of people see that and rightfully so. We've got to give up less explosive plays." But if they don't, then the host may nevertheless be able to answer and stay in the game in a place where they usually don't lose, and Boise must deal with heat/humidity. GEORGIA SOUTHERN, 35-32.

# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## \*KENTUCKY over SOUTHERN MISS by 28

Sun Belt road underdogs have been famous for pulling early-season, up-in-class road upsets. But is Southern Miss really a Sun Belt team yet? They haven't done much since entering the conference from C-USA, and Florida State transfer QB Tate Rodemaker doesn't have the array of jump-ball talents on hand at the receiver spots that helped his performances at Florida State. The offense has been a run-based, quarterback-juggling, turnover-prone mess in recent seasons, undermining ordinary defense that can't withstand the abuse. Kentucky has a fifth offensive coordinator in five seasons, but at least the other guys attracted offers from elsewhere to leave. The Wildcats also have former 5-star recruit Brock Vandagriff (from Georgia) at QB. KENTUCKY, 35-7.

## \*OHIO STATE over AKRON by 49

An 18-team Big Ten conference, yet Ohio State must have Akron on its schedule? A joke. We're not fans of K-State transfer QB Will Howard, but there is more NFL-worthy talent around him than he had at Kansas State, which was a pretty well-stocked team itself. While the Buckeyes were acquiring major-conference starters, plus Chip Kelly to call the plays, Akron and head coach/"offensive genius" Joe Moorhead with the #127-ranked offense were working the portal for lesser lights. Again, Good luck. OHIO ST, 56-7.

## \*ARIZONA over NEW MEXICO by 25

The Lobos opened the Bronco Mendenhall Era with an "Extra Board," 35-31 home loss vs. Montana State of the FCS last weekend, playing a 0-21 fourth quarter after leading 31-17 after three. However, we should note that the line was Montana State, -13.5. Lobos covered. Montana State was/is a pretty good team that led FCS in rushing last season and went tromp-tromp-tromp for 47-362 on the ground at New Mexico, wearin' 'em down. But that hasn't really been Arizona's M.O. New Mexico sold out against the run in that game, couldn't stop it, but could show an entirely different defense in this match-up. Which may not matter in the SU, but could in the ATS. ARIZONA, 39-14.

## RECOMMENDED

### WYOMING over \*ARIZONA STATE by 3

At the beginning of last season, the last for final-season-before-retiring Craig Bohl, Wyoming was fielding a team with some of the least returning production from prior-year. Their first task was to host Texas Tech, a respectable, mid-level Big 12 team with a decent offense and suspect defense. They trailed 0-17 after the first quarter. But after four quarters, the score was 20-20. They eventually won in double-overtime, and had bowl-season practices while Arizona State, who had the #124 scoring offense (17.8 ppg) did not following a 3-9 SU Year One for head coach Kenny Dillingham who nevertheless displayed good coaching creativity with little talent following the wreckage that Herman Edwards and the AD who'd hired him had wrought upon the Sun Devils program. Bohl has passed the baton to his defensive coordinator, Jay Sawvel. The transition probably won't go as smoothly as it did when he passed it to Chris Klieman at North Dakota State (15-1, FCS Champion replacing Bohl) or when Klieman passed it to the next guy after leaving for Kansas State (16-0, FCS Champion the season after Klieman left) but you get the idea. WYOMING, 23-20.

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## \*FLORIDA over MIAMI-FL by 3

We respect linemakers a lot. They do good work. We'd never say something like, "The wrong team is favored here." The line is the line. Period. Someone will cover it. The day we believe that the always-hyped, always overestimated Miami Hurricanes under Mario Cristobal will waltz through in-state, SEC territory with a win by 3 points or more has yet to arrive. Many pundits: "The 'Canes got this guy, and that guy, and look at Cameron Ward's QB stats at Washington State, and blah, blah, blah.' Yeah, fine, whatever. Say what you will about Gators' QB Graham Mertz – and we've said so many negative things! – he completed 72.9% of his passes last season with a 20-3 TD-INT. FLORIDA, 27-24.

## \*TEXAS over COLORADO STATE by 35

Colorado State head coach Jay Norvell begins his third season with the program, which he is transitioning from Dinosaur Ball of Mr. Physical, back to an Air Raid type of offense that gained some traction last year following a dismal-but-predictable Year One. But even when he was building up his reputation with a thriving offense at Nevada, that Mountain West program traveled to a national power (Oregon) and simply pocketed the big check in a 77-6 loss. He'll earn \$1.8 million for showing up here, for a game that was scheduled when Mr. Physical was head coach and CSU had a different AD, too. TEXAS, 45-10.

## \*NEBRASKA over UTEP by 30

UTEP administrators let Dana Dimel's contract run its course, waved bye-bye, gives Scotty Walden a shot at making something from not much. Dimel's last team lost 38-7 at Nebraska's Big Ten cousins, Northwestern, who would eventually beat Northwestern 17-9. Under Dimel, UTEP never tried to do much more than stay in the game by inching ahead on offense, trying to keep the play in front of them on defense. Playing up in class against good D and decent running attack is recipe for short gains, punts, and getting worn down. First-time deviation from that plan wouldn't figure to go any better, but for \$1.6 million guaranteed, it works for them. NEBRASKA, 37-7.

## BEST BET

### MIAMI-OH over \*NORTHWESTERN by 10

The MAC champ, who won key games with its back-up QB and had bowl-season practices, takes aim at a Northwestern group that didn't have bowl-season practices last year. The head start on 2024, the vast amount of returnees on defense and the offensive line, and what appears to be an offensive upgrade at skill positions via the transfer route, seems like a good deal, even at this relatively low number for a MAC roadie in Big Ten territory. Miami's long-time #1 QB, Brett Gabbert, is a sixth-year senior who, as usual, was injured when the RedHawks beat the Wildcats 17-14 on this field in 2022 with only 62 passing yards. Mike Wright, who has helped bog down offense at Vanderbilt and Mississippi State, steps in as Northwestern's new starting QB. M-eh. Normally, Miami-OH head coach Chuck Martin wouldn't take non-con games too seriously. But the chance to win again in a Big Ten house should be too tempting to pass up. He has a bye on deck, while Northwestern looks ahead to hosting Duke off a short week in a FS1 national telecast. MIAMI-OH, 26-16.

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# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## **\*HOUSTON over UNLV by 4**

When Year One is a pleasant surprise, as it was for head coach Barry Odom and UNLV when it ended with a competitive loss in a bowl game vs. Kansas, Year Two is often a disappointment. The Runnin' Rebels won't sneak up on anybody this season. However, Odom claims, "We're a much better football team than we were at any point last year." Could be. Meantime, you have to feel that the need to fire (justly!) Dana Holgorsen after his first season in the Big 12 means that Houston wasn't properly prepared to be where it is. Holgorsen's last team lost to Rice out of conference but their D could have trouble containing QB Donovan Smith's legs. HOUSTON, 31-27.

## **\*SOUTH ALABAMA over NORTH TEXAS by 7**

When a team (North Texas) has 74 new players on its roster in Year Two of its coaching staff, you don't get involved in its first game if you don't have to. We don't have to. Coach Eric Morris recently said, about being 3-5 in one-score games last season, "We got to look at ourselves in the mirror and figure out" why they didn't do better in one-score games. Hello? Coach? There's nobody left to look at themselves in the mirror! USA... not as good as they looked in that 59-10 bowl win vs. EMU, that's for sure, and the QBs will be new. SOUTH ALABAMA, 35-28.

## **\*TROY over NEVADA by 8**

The made-over roster of road underdog Nevada has a mediocre, SMU-screw-up assisted performance under its belt. Nevada travels to another 2023 champion, this one with a new coaching staff and only 35% of its prior-season production returning (according to returning production master Bill Connelly). As under-the-radar potential value situations go, we kinda like it. However, Nevada's offense does not excite, and it put itself on tape for Troy to evaluate while having no game-tape of what Troy's new talents and tendencies might be. TROY, 27-19.

## **VIRGINIA TECH over \*VANDERBILT by 11**

Consensus of public opinion on the Hokies claims best depth to date for third-season head coach Brent Pry, coaching-staff continuity, and 22 returning starters including the entire offense, which experienced a resurgence last season when Kyron Drones became the #1 quarterback. Sometimes, this creates an overrated team. However, the Hokies were 8-0 SU and ATS as the favorite last season, their first profitable ATS campaign since 2016. Sometimes, public opinion can be correct. We shall see. This is a "new stadium opener!" for Vandy, so beware the magical, mystical bump-up, despite the program's penchant for perpetually failing to meet perpetual low expectations. VIRGINIA TECH, 31-20.

## **\*RICE over SAM HOUSTON STATE by 14**

Sam Houston head coach KC Keeler claims to have "really embraced new ideas." Can't hurt, especially if they can execute 'em. His team averaged a mere 11.1 ppg in the first six games of last season's FBS debut year, then 28.3 ppg in the next six. Offensive improvement noted. After six straight years of an offense with only 6 to 16 TD passes, Rice QBs have thrown 23 and 29 the last two seasons, thereby attracting the transfer of E.J. Warner from Temple to help continue the offense's pass progression, they hope, as the team retained 81% of its 2023 production according to that Connelly guy. RICE, 31-17.

## **UCLA over \*HAWAII by 16**

UCLA's new offensive coordinator is Eric Bienemy, who became a "great offensive mind!" when Andy Reid was calling plays for Patrick Mahomes. When Bienemy called plays last season for QB Sam Howell with the Washington Football Team Formerly Known as Redskins, it was atrocious. He now gives it a shot with Ethan Garbers, as UCLA backers cross their fingers on one hand and grasp rosary beads with the other. The host 'Bows got a win under their belts last weekend, by the way. But it wasn't pretty, and the other team was 1-10 in FCS last year and had huge problems getting to the site from the State of Delaware. UCLA, 38-22.

## **\*ALABAMA over WESTERN KENTUCKY by 34**

Alabama's new coaches must take Western Kentucky seriously and plan to score a lot of points. The Hilltoppers have had the #15, #2 and #1 pass offenses the last three seasons and add a former SEC starting QB, T.J. Finley (Auburn, LSU). First-season Alabama head coach Kaelin DeBoer was an offensive-minded assistant, is now an offensive-minded head coach after Fresno State and Washington previously, and will be danged if Tyson Helton's group gets close to out-scoring his when he's forced to pay \$1.9 million guaranteed to the visitor. WKU took Ohio State's \$1.8 million last season in return for losing 63-10. ALABAMA, 51-17.

## **\*MICHIGAN over FRESNO STATE by 17**

With first-season head coach Sherrone Moore replacing Jim Harbaugh following the National Championship season, the Wolverines would seem to have no place to go but down, through no real fault of Moore. (In 2015, Harbaugh assumed control of Michigan after a 5-win season in which the Wolverines were #124 in TO Margin at -16). Michigan committed only 8 turnovers in 2023, had the #1 Turnover Margin in College Football (+19), but returns only 5 of 22 starters. Fresno QB Mikey Keene and the pass offense won't get anywhere near the 366 passing yards they got while winning at Purdue in Week 1 last season, and the Fresno D probably will be pounded by Michigan's o-line for a \$1.85 million guarantee. Michigan was 0-3 ATS in the guaranteed-payout games vs. ECU, UNLV and Bowling Green last season. MICHIGAN, 33-16.

## **\*TEXAS A&M over NOTRE DAME by 4**

The "magic" that A&M first-season head coach Mike Elko worked at Duke had a lot to do with the defense creating turnovers, which the Aggies' D hasn't been getting for several seasons. Also suspect, is that with Collin Klein the new offensive coordinator (Kansas State through and through), there's a chance that they'll be forcing a collegiate system onto a pro-style Connor Weigman at QB. But you could say the same thing about Notre Dame's offense, with the added issue of dual-threat tough-runner QB Riley Leonard being asked to debut against his defensive-minded head coach from Duke. Elko inherits an established, very good run D, and Leonard was merely a 57.6%, 6.7 YPA passer last season. Low score coming? TEXAS A&M, 20-16.

## SUNDAY and MONDAY

### College Football

*on next page*

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# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1**

**LSU over SOUTHERN CAL by 10 (Las Vegas, NV)**

USC QB Miller Moss can't escape trouble like the Trojans' departed QB, the NFL's #1 overall draft pick. He had a nice bowl game against Louisville, with 6 TD passes, but Louisville was "geared down" at that point and it's a bar too high to be fair for the kid. If LSU still has the superior rushing offense and rushing defense, then Brian Kelly's Tigers should be giving better support to their own "new" QB, the more experienced Garrett Nussmeier, while the defense is able to put more pressure on Moss to perform. Staying in the LSU for four seasons, being willing to step aside for the now-departed Heisman Trophy winner Jayden Daniels after he arrived from Arizona State, seems to indicate good things for Nussmeier. We shall see. LSU, 37-27.

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2**

**\*FLORIDA STATE over BOSTON COLLEGE by 11**

When last seen competing, Boston College enjoyed a misleading victory on a rainy day in a bowl game vs. SMU in Fenway Park. Head coach Jeff Hafley was so thrilled with the result, and how it boded for the future, that he walked away from two years' more of \$3-million-a-year salary to become defensive coordinator of the Green Bay Packers at -- best guess -- \$500k per year. However, as we said about the Seminoles while leaning a little to outright underdog winner Georgia Tech last Saturday: we don't know why they wanted QB D.J. Uiagalelei, and dual-threat opposing QBs (like GT's Haynes King, and BC's Thomas Castellanos, the latter 16-95 rushing with 305 passing yards in last year's 31-29 game) have given their defense fits. FLORIDA ST, 31-20.

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# MIDWEEK UPDATE

More COLLEGE FOOTBALL coming, **BEST BET** and **RECOMMENDED** side and totals, in this week's posting on Friday at about 1 pm, ET.



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