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College Football Betting And Nfl Betting Are Not The Same Thing

By Luken Karel

There are at least a half-dozen factors that separate college football betting from NFL betting. For

starters, action on college football is much more likely to come from sophisticated bettors, known as "sharps" or "wiseguys", who often possess some insight or kernel of information that may provide them with an edge against the house. Experienced bet takers know not to treat heavy activity on an obscure game, such as East Carolina versus Wake Forest, as casually as they might deal with increased wagering interest on a marquee NFL game such as a Redskins-Cowboys confrontation. For that reason, bookmakers usually move college football betting lines quickly, often one full point at a time. In general, it takes more money to move an NFL betting line and, when it is moved, usually it is by only half a point.

Largely because of a lack of proficiency in the kicking game, key numbers such as 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 13 and 14 are not nearly as sacrosanct in college football betting as they are in the NFL. College football games just do not fall on those numbers as often as they do in NFL contests.

We may never again see a three-touchdown favorite in the NFL but lines of -30, -40, or even -50 are not that uncommon in the college gridiron game. Oddsmakers and bookmakers also find college totals more difficult to gauge because some coaches try to impress those who have a vote in the polls by running up the score. Others, such as Penn State's Joe Paterno, feel that a third-string player's reward for practicing all week is to get to play in a blowout. It's just these types of unique uncertainties that compel bookmakers to shift college "over/under" numbers more quickly than they move NFL totals.

It's also the nature of college football that personnel change every year. This makes early season evaluation more difficult and leads bet takers to move lines and totals more quickly, especially in September and early October when the season is still young. There is personnel movement in the NFL too, of course, but mostly it involves players of established ability moving from team to team. In college football, you're always dealing with fresh faces.

By collective bargaining agreement, each week, the NFL publishes a comprehensive list of injured players and their status. Sure, there are mistakes and abuses and players who have been listed as "doubtful" have played while those regarded as "probable" have not but overall, the list is accurate. On

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the other hand, colleges are under no obligation to announce the status of injured or disciplined football players. This vagueness over availability sometimes can create opportunities in college football betting. Consequently, bookmakers are wary if too much wagering attention is paid to one team.

When it comes to parlay card numbers, you are much more apt to see a slight gap between those prices printed on cards and those posted on the board in the NFL than you are in college football. The key element is that bookmakers can more accurately predict the public inclination for an NFL game than they can for a college football game. It's not unusual then for traditionally popular team such as Dallas or a "hot" team such as Cincinnati, to be listed as a 7 1/2–point favorite on a parlay card but just a 6 1/2 or 7–point choice on the board. Through experience, bookmakers know that "public" teams such as the Cowboys, as well as "now" teams such as the Bengals, will be more aggressively played on parlay cards than they are straight up.

Clearly, understanding the differences between college football betting and NFL betting is essential to winning.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COLLEGE AND PRO FOOTBALL

College Football: `Wiseguys' frequently supply the action College football betting lines often are moved by a full point at a time Key numbers are not as important Personnel changes can make early season analysis difficult Information on injuries is not always accessible There's usually not a disparity between parlay card and board numbers

NFL: Money from public is prevalent Betting lines are usually moved by a half–point at a time Key numbers are VERY important Personnel changes are less volatile and easier to evaluate Information on injuries usually is accessible Parlay card numbers sometimes are intentionally different than prices on the board.

By Luken Karel for

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College Football Betting Cues

By Luken Karel

A number of dicey factors, including the disparity between the nation's finest teams and those that still have struggling programs, the massive turnover of personnel each year, and the absurdly large number of teams involved, conspire to make college football betting far more difficult than its NFL counterpart.

With the college gridiron campaign currently in full swing, bettors would be wise to join experienced bookmakers in analyzing these three key factors:

The Gap Factor: The difference between upper echelon teams and middle to bottom teams can be enormous in college football betting. When you have that situation, certain oddsmaking criteria go out the window. For example, when you have an Ohio State or a USC on the road, the talent level versus an Indiana or an Arizona is going to be so wide that it will negate any home field advantage those teams may have. Of course, that goes for other college super powers such as a Florida or a Texas.

So, although most books use Power Ratings as a place to begin the pointspread making process, they're not nearly as reliable as they are for the NFL. For example, when Texas opened the season with a sparring partner in North Texas State, it was difficult to know what the right number was. Most books settled on 42 with the knowledge that the final score would depend on the mercy of the Long Horns. Alas, Texas showed little sympathy for its overwhelmed opponent, crushing North Texas State, 56–7 for the cover.

Given the above example—Louisville (–40) versus Temple, Sept. 9 was another—typically, bookmakers often add a touchdown or so to the raw numbers. Conversely, if you're using pure Power Ratings, they can be skewed if you're looking at scores such as 56–0, 62–0 and 72–7 heading into conference play. That's a different level.

The People Factor: From year to year you have a much greater turnover of personnel in the college game than you do in the NFL. That means there's a sharper learning curve each year for the colleges. You might get every bit of information about a team for two months but then every thought and every projection you had for that team could change after the first game. New players really can't be judged until bet takers see them in a game. Admittedly, the college football betting public is in the same boat.

So even though responsible bookmakers put in an incredible amount of work during the summer to get a feel for the college teams, they never know if their assessments are valid until the teams start playing.

The Numbers Factor: There's no doubt that it's easier to keep tabs on 32 NFL teams than it is to keep track of over 100 college squads. The NFL is all there for you, on television every weekend. In college football betting, the big games are there but most bet house personnel aren't going to see a lot of Wyoming or Louisiana Tech on the tube. As oddsmakers, they need to be right on every game. The bettor only has to be right on a few games each week to be successful. Obviously, from the perspective of the bookmakers, it's a lot more dangerous posting numbers on 50 college games than it is on 16 NFL games.

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There are a number of other differences between the collegiate gridiron game and its NFL cousin.

For one, in general, bettors are far more willing to lay big numbers in college than they are in the NFL. It's just the nature of the non-professional gambler to lay it rather than take it. Or as one prominent bookmaker pointed out, "You have to give them a minus or they don't know which side to take. When in doubt, they go with the favorite."

Scheduling also is more of a consideration in college football betting because the players lack maturity and are more susceptible to the emotional high of playing a rival, not to mention the letdown often associated with games preceding or following one of those contests.

Another thing to watch is the emergence of a betting glamour team. It's a team that gets hot early and captures the imagination of the college football betting public. LSU did that when it went 11-2 against the spread in 2003. Auburn was the hot team a year before that. Bookmakers are aware of these teams and are constantly adjusting the numbers, but until that team loses a couple of times, the public bets them every week.

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