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**NFL Betting, According To Roxy**

**By Luken Karel**

Football returned to gridirons, TV screens and sports books recently, and while the game surely

was a welcome sight for bored eyes, bulging wallets, beer distributors and casino spread sheets, there also is a widely held perception that when it comes to NFL betting, gamblers hold an edge over bookmakers early in the season.

Roxy Roxborough, the founder of Las Vegas Sports Consultants and the man who revolutionized sports wagering by using mathematical formulas and computer models to help compute accurate odds, disagrees with that notion.

"For years it's been said that oddsmakers are more vulnerable earlier in the year because the teams are new, but I don't buy it," said Roxborough, now retired. "Oddsmakers work with the same information as the bettors. Sometimes it's just a matter of interpretation. In the case of NFL betting, you often have teams with new coaches and—because of trades, free agency or injuries—new quarterbacks. You don't learn a lot in the exhibition season and that's basically because teams try to limit the playing time of their significant players because they're worried about them getting hurt. So you really have to start making assessments based on projections rather than past performances. But I think the oddsmakers and the players are in the same spot. I don't believe there is any inherent edge early in the NFL betting season. Sometimes people just pick winners. That's important to remember. Technically, the pointspread makes each game a 50/50 proposition so there are going to be times when players pick more winners than losers."

The early portion of the NFL betting season is no more stressful than any other segment of the season, insisted Roxborough.

"I don't think there's pressure on any particular game or any particular week but I think there is pressure over the long haul to produce," he said. "Oddsmakers shouldn't measure their work after a week or after a month. It's better to assess it in terms of the entire season."

Nevertheless, the tendency is for both NFL bet takers and NFL bet makers to take stock every Tuesday morning. Interestingly, Roxborough says that winning or losing over a 7-day period usually is

determined by the results of only a handful of games.

"Generally, when wiseguys and squares clash, when they wind up on opposite sides of a game, it's because the public has pushed the favorite too high and the sharps, who perceive some value, buy back the underdog," explained Roxborough, who literally wrote the book (Race and Sports Book Management) on the topic. "That often helps balance the line. But there are games each week where the public and the squares wind up on the same side and those games are the biggest decisions.

"If I can break down a typical 14 or 15-game NFL weekend, there are usually four or five games where there's not much of a decision," explained Roxborough, who founded LVSC on his kitchen table in 1982. "For some reason, those game aren't particularly attractive, be it the matchup or that people don't see any edge in the number. Those games don't move. Then there are four or five games where the NFL betting action is split, where there's good two-way action. And then there are a handful of games—let's say four—where most of the action is on one team, where the betting is very one-sided. It

all comes down to those one-sided games. If the bookmaker splits them, because of the vigorish, he does fine. If he goes 3-1, he does great; if he goes 4-0, he does absolutely fantastic; if he goes 1-3, that's not so good; if he goes 0-4, that's a disaster."

Although any new season offers fresh hope for the bettor, Roxborough, who was a professional gambler for five years before launching his oddsmaking company, pointed out that few professional players earn their living betting football.

"If I were still a professional gambler I wouldn't play NFL football," revealed Roxborough. "For starters, there aren't enough games. So trend analysis, which was one thing I was big on, is pointless. Second, you can't turn your money over fast enough to get a reasonable rate of return because you only get to choose from 13-16 games a week and each team only plays 16 games. I just never saw NFL betting as being a viable opportunity. That's why most sports betting pros end up wagering on what they call linear sports, sports such as baseball and pro basketball."

By Luken Karel for

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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 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

## NFL Betting, According To Roxy

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.

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