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Six Reasons Why Underdogs Are the Smart Bet in the NFL

By Wunderdog

Six Reasons Why Underdogs Are the Smart Bet in the NFL by Wunderdog

Underdog or favorite? It's a choice we make 16 times per week during the NFL regular season. While there are certainly times when favorites warrant our attention, my experience tells me that betting underdogs is the best way to make money in the NFL. Here are six reasons why you should pay special attention the dogs this NFL season.

1. NFL Parity

The NFL has made great strides to achieve rough equality among teams. It has succeeded. Just look at these SuperBowl teams from the past several years: St. Louis in 2000, Baltimore in 2001, New England in 2002, Tampa Bay in 2003, and Carolina last year. None of these teams were supposed to make it that far but they all did and many won, despite losing records the year before. Unlike the college game, any given team can win on Sunday in the NFL. Why not get some points to boot?

2. A Win is a Win

Again, unlike in College, there is no need to blow-out a team. Favorites that get up early don't typically run up the score in the NFL. It doesn't serve a purpose and in most cases, coaches would rather not embarrass their opponent and/or risk injury to their stars. In the NFL, big leads often dwindle, with underdogs covering late in the game.

3. The Rodney Dangerfield Effect

Underdogs don't get any respect! They don't get it from the public, sometimes leading to higher than deserved spreads. More importantly, they don't get it from their opposition. Good teams can sometimes take bad teams lightly (especially if players and coaches minds are on other things, like next week's tougher opponent). Research and an understanding of historical trends can reveal great situations in which underdogs are poised for an upset.

4. The Public Can't Help Itself

The average bettor loves the popular teams (favorites), oftentimes pushing lines unreasonably high. We saw it during the 90's with Dallas and San Francisco. In fact, almost every week, with the right research, you can spot teams that should be favorites but are getting points against a popular team

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that has been installed as a favorite due to the public "bandwagon effect." For example, last year Kansas City visited Cincinnati in week 10. The Chiefs had won nine straight and seemed invincible. In hindsight, Cincinnati was the easy underdog pick. Kansas City's defense was ranked 25th in the league at the time. Cincinnati was on a roll having won 3 of their last four games and Rudi Johnson was coming into his own. Cincinnati had the emotional edge and nothing to lose by taking a shot at an undefeated team they knew they could beat. However, the public couldn't get over Kansas City's success and spot this situation.

5. Got Courage?

Most bettors don't have the courage to go with certain underdogs. They see a (perceived) good team versus a (perceived) bad team and assume it won't be a contest. They have formed an opinion about how horrible some teams are based on a recent blowout or past personal gambling loss. Again, with

the right combination of statistical and situational research, some undervalued dogs can be spotted each week. There are also certain situations in which bad teams have historically and reliably outperformed their average. Match that with a historically-proven situation in which favorites under-perform and you have yourself a reliable upset scenario.

6. The Point-spread Matters Less than You Think

Historically, the point-spread matters in the NFL only about 16% of the time. In other words, 84% of the time, the team that covers the spread also wins. With this knowledge, if you have underdogs that you really like (based on the right research, not a hunch), you can take them to win straight-up (money line), collecting anywhere from 1.2 to 4 times your original bet. Usually a three-point dog will pay around 140 for 100 for a straight-up win versus 100 for 110 wagered on a regular spread-based pick. Seven point underdogs pay around 250 for 100 for a straight-up win.

What It All Means

Obviously just playing all underdogs is not the answer (that would yield you approximately 50% wins and a negative account balance). However, with the right research, you can spot some very high-value underdog winners each week.

The Wunderdog has been handicapping NFL games for over 15 years and specializes in picking underdogs (with the occasional underrated favorite). He publishes a free weekly newsletter, available on his website, with an underdog pick each week of the NFL season. The Wunderdog <http://www.freeunderdog.com> 1-877-DOG-WINS

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 "wise guys", 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

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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 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

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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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