

POWERS' PICKS \$10

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Five Week 1 College Football Best Bets on Page 3! NFL Preseason Shows a Profit in 9 out of 10 Updates!

To all present and future customers:

First let me thank the majority of you who either signed up for the Powers' Picks newsletter this season or even took the bigger plunge and signed up for my VIP late phone/email service for the entire year.

I have to be honest and say that I have been simply overwhelmed and flattered at how many of you took the chance on a new service. I know this is a shady industry and there are a lot of dishonest people and services out there on the market today. It takes a big leap of faith to spend money with a new start-up service and for that I thank you guys sincerely. I'll certainly never forget the customers that jumped on board with me my first year.

The 2015 season did get off to a great start in NFL preseason action as we showed a profit in 9 of the first 10 football updates. Most importantly, we have gone 3-1 (75%) on our star-rated picks so far highlighted by a 3★ top play winner on Oakland (-1) over St. Louis in week 1 where the Raiders won comfortably 18-3.

I also do give out what I call a lean on almost every football game to my VIP customers who want as much action as possible. These leans have gone 19-12 so far in the first two weeks of the NFL preseason and while they shouldn't influence your bankroll too much (they should only be played as \$5, \$10 or \$20 bets), it is refreshing to see that I have a solid pulse on the NFL preseason to date. Check out my example of a VIP email update on the right to see what a lean is.

While I have enjoyed handicapping the NFL preseason so far and it's always more fun when you start off the season well, my true passion lies in the college game. In this issue, I've included my top 5 best bets for week 1 of the season.

Unlike most newsletters out there, I am not withholding any of my top plays. These are without a doubt my top 5 plays as of Friday evening and I wouldn't be shocked if most of those plays end up being on my updates come next week as long as we don't see heavy line moves.

With that being said, things can change dramatically in the world we live in today. Just ask former Illinois head coach Tim Beckman who was fired today, a week before they host Kent State next Friday night.

If you're wondering about the format of my newsletter, please don't judge me on this single issue alone. A normal week in the regular season would obviously include NFL write-ups and my plays, team-by-team logs, updated power ratings, fantasy sleeper picks and much, much more.

This was the only regular season week this year that I would have the time to physically mail out thousands of copies to even my non-subscribers so I tried to keep it simple and sweet and also cut down on the printing and mailing costs to do a 12-page normal issue. I am not ashamed to admit that I'm on a strict marketing budget this first year of my new business.

One final thing I want to mention. From your overwhelming positive feedback, last month's issue that featured my question and answer article about me, my company and the industry apparently helped a lot of you get to know who I am, what I stand for and where this company and this industry is heading in the future. If you need a copy of that article, please go to bradpowerssports.com and download my preseason/July issue or call my office 440-641-1074.

Again thanks for the past many years and I look forward to what should be a very successful 2015-16 football season!

Brad Powers

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Daily VIP Service Offers Even More Info!

If my newsletter doesn't have enough info for you, then I would suggest trying out my VIP service (you get two FREE weeks when signing up for my newsletter as a bonus). Below is an example of what I send out daily to my VIP customers.

8/24 NFL Preseason Update

That was a nice rebound performance after our first losing day of the year. As of now, I'm satisfied with the results with a 3-1 record on star-rated plays and 17-12 on leans. We've only had one bad day out of 9 updates and I'll take those kind of records moving forward.

Yesterday's Results: 1-0 (+\$100) on star-rated plays. 2-0 on leans if you played sides and totals (they shouldn't influence your bankroll as they're \$5-20 bets).

427/428 Dallas at San Francisco (-4.5, 39.5) Final: San Francisco 23-6, a 1-star winner on the UNDER.

This was a comfortable star-rated winner on the UNDER as the 49ers led 13-0 at halftime, 16-0 after three quarters and cruised to a 23-6 win. Tony Romo did get the start for the Cowboys (main reason why the line dropped from San Fran -4.5 to -3.5) but played only one series and attempted just one pass. Brandon Weeden replaced him, but would leave the game with a concussion. On the other side, former rugby player Jarryd Hayne continues to be a star for the 49ers (3 gains of 20 or more yards) and now has 258 total yards in two preseason games. After all the talk about the field issues, it actually looked fine on my TV set and after the game, both Jason Garrett and Cowboys owner Jerry Jones apologized for all their comments during the week criticizing the turf. Garrett falls to 7-12 SU/5-13-1 ATS in the preseason and up next for the Cowboys are the preseason juggernaut Minnesota Vikings who have yet to lose a preseason game under Mike Zimmer.

425/426 Green Bay at Pittsburgh (-2.5, 41) Final: Pittsburgh 24-19

There was some late line moves with this one as all the money came in on the Packers (went from being a 2.5-point dog to a 1-point dog) while the closing total line was 42 with many including myself leaning with the OVER. Obviously the big story here was the Packers losing WR Jordy Nelson to a possible torn ACL. If that is indeed the case, then that's a devastating blow to a team many thought were the Super Bowl favorite this year. On the other side, the Steelers can't catch a break when it comes to keeping offensive lineman healthy these past couple of years. In the first half, Maurkice Pouncey went down with a lower leg injury and had surgery today. He will miss significant time. As far as the game went, the Packers jumped out to a 16-9 halftime lead and led 19-9 mid-3rd quarter before the Steelers rallied late. Aaron Rodgers played two series and led a TD drive while also taking a nasty hit for a safety in his second drive (he is fine). On the other side, I thought Ben Roethlisberger would get significant action and that indeed was the case as he was 11 of 14 for 100 yards and a TD. Thankfully, Landry Jones put forth his best performance of the preseason to date going 10 of 19 for 172 yards and threw a pair of fourth quarter TD passes. The last TD pass came with just 4:26 left and gave us the cover for both side and the OVER.

429/430 St. Louis at Tennessee (-2, 38.5) Final: Tennessee 27-14

The Titans pretty much controlled this game from start to finish as they led 20-0 at halftime. After a sloppy performance last week that featured two turnovers, Marcus Mariota had a clean home debut going 5 of 8 for 59 yards and had 0 TO's (had a potential TD pass dropped). On the other side, Nick Foles struggled completing just 3 of 7 for 18 yards and had an interception. Case Keenum got the majority of the work for the Rams going 7 of 16 for 164 yards and a TD. This game was a total pass for me, but I really feel for anyone that had the UNDER in this one as a 54-yard TD pass for the Rams with just :39 left put this game OVER the total. Looking ahead to next week, the Titans do have a quick turnaround traveling to Kansas City on Friday while St. Louis gets their first home game of the preseason hosting Indianapolis on Saturday.

Today's Games: Passing on star-rated plays.

431/432 Cincinnati at Tampa Bay (-2.5, 40) 8:00pm ET.

Cincinnati QB Rotation: Andy Dalton, AJ McCarron, Josh Johnson, Keith Wenning
Tampa Bay QB Rotation: Jameis Winston, Mike Glennon, Seth Lobato

After going 10 days between their first two preseason games, the Bengals are going to play three games in the next week and a half starting tonight. It will be interesting to see how much action the starters will get in these games as they will not want to get overworked. It is presumed that Andy Dalton will only play the first quarter tonight giving way to AJ McCarron who sat out last week's game. On the other side, after a so-so week 1 performance (9 of 19 for 131 yards) look for Jameis Winston to get off to a better start tonight and he could play the entire first half like last week. Tampa Bay does have some concerns on their OL with RT DeMar Dotson getting injured last week and the Bengals have some solid DL depth. I am personally not going to get involved with this game tonight side or total as obviously I've been pleased with the first two weeks to date and there's no reason to force anything here in an isolated game. If you absolutely have to get involved, then I'd recommend a slight lean on Tampa Bay getting a bounce back effort and also the UNDER.

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College Football Schedules with Vegas and Brad Powers Lines Week 1 September 3rd-7th

Thursday, September 3rd		Open	BP	All Times Eastern	Saturday, September 5th		Open	BP	All Times Eastern
133 SOUTH CAROLINA	8:00 p.m. ESPN	-3	E		197 TEXAS	7:30 p.m. NBC	54.5	47	
134 NORTH CAROLINA		64.5	61		198 NOTRE DAME		-10	-7	
135 FIU	6:00 p.m. CBS College	46.5	46		199 TEXAS STATE	8:00 p.m. ESPN NEWS	58	57	
136 UCF		-17	-14		200 FLORIDA STATE		-30	-31	
137 OKLAHOMA STATE	7:00 p.m. ESPN	-22.5	-32		201 WISCONSIN	8:00 p.m. ABC	51.5	46	
138 CENTRAL MICHIGAN		54	66		202 ALABAMA		-10	-14	
139 MICHIGAN	8:30 p.m. FOX Sports 1	46.5	40		203 MISSISSIPPI STATE	Fox Sports 1	-23	-21	
140 UTAH		-5.5	-6		204 SOUTHERN MISS		55.5	55	
141 TCU	9:00 p.m. ESPN	-14.5	-14		205 ARKANSAS STATE	11:00 p.m. Pac-12 Network	67	68	
142 MINNESOTA		57.5	54		206 USC		-29	-28	
143 DUKE	9:30 p.m. CBS College	-9.5	-7		Sunday, September 6th		Open	BP	
144 TULANE		47.5	47		207 PURDUE	3:00 p.m. Fox Sports 1	64	54	
145 OHIO	9:00 p.m.	-8.5	-6		208 MARSHALL		-7.5	-6	
146 IDAHO		54.5	60		Monday, September 7th		Open	BP	
147 UTSA	10:00 p.m. Pac-12 Network	52.5	57		209 OHIO STATE	8:00 p.m.	-11	-13	
148 ARIZONA		-31.5	-31		210 VIRGINIA TECH		54	53	
211 WKU	8:00 p.m. SEC Network	65	61						
212 VANDERBILT		-1	E						

Friday, September 4th		Open	BP
149 COLORADO	1:00 a.m.	-7.5	-4
150 HAWAII		57	58
151 BAYLOR	7:00 p.m. ESPN	-35	-35
152 SMU		74.5	69
153 CHARLOTTE	3:30 p.m. ESPN	74.5	79
154 GEORGIA STATE		-6	-9
155 MICHIGAN STATE	7:00 p.m. ESPN	-18.5	-23
156 WESTERN MICHIGAN		58.5	57
157 KENT STATE	8:00 p.m. Big Ten Network	51.5	54
158 ILLINOIS		-15	-14
159 WASHINGTON	10:15 p.m. ESPN	56.5	50
160 BOISE STATE		-11	-10

Saturday, September 5th		Open	BP
161 OLD DOMINION	3:00 p.m.	-6	-3
162 EASTERN MICHIGAN		66	57
163 NEW MEXICO STATE	7:30 p.m. SEC Network	57.5	55
164 FLORIDA		-36	-35
165 PENN STATE	3:30 p.m. ESPN	-7	-10
166 TEMPLE		39	38
167 FLORIDA ATLANTIC	3:30 p.m. CBS College	62	64
168 TULSA		-7	-4
169 VIRGINIA	3:30 p.m. FOX	54	48
170 UCLA		-17	-14
171 STANFORD	12:00 p.m. ESPN	-12	-10
172 NORTHWESTERN		45	44
173 LOUISVILLE	3:30 p.m. CBS	58.5	58
174 AUBURN		-11	-10
175 ARIZONA STATE	7:00 p.m. ESPN	66	61
176 TEXAS A&M		-3	E
177 BYU	3:30 p.m. ABC	65.5	51
178 NEBRASKA		-6	-3
179 TROY	6:00 p.m.	58	67
180 NC STATE		-25.5	-27
181 UNLV	7:30 p.m. CBS College	62.5	56
182 NORTHERN ILLINOIS		-21	-28
183 AKRON	7:00 p.m.	56	65
184 OKLAHOMA		-31	-31
185 BOWLING GREEN	4:00 p.m. SEC Network	60	65
186 TENNESSEE		-20.5	-19
189 ULM	12:00 p.m. SEC Network	52	48
190 GEORGIA		-35.5	-34
191 UL-LAFAYETTE	7:00 p.m. ESPN	60.5	60
192 KENTUCKY		-15.5	-28
193 UTEP	3:30 p.m. ESPN	49	55
194 ARKANSAS		-33	-35
195 GA SOUTHERN	7:30 p.m. Fox Sports Network	58	51
196 WEST VIRGINIA		-19.5	-17

FBS vs FCS Matchups Lines Courtesy of 5Dimes.eu

Thursday, September 3	Saturday, September 5 (cont)
301 Elon	349 Morgan State
302 Wake Forest -28½	350 Air Force -32½
303 VMI	351 North Dakota
304 Ball State -28½	352 Wyoming -18½
305 Stony Brook	353 Savannah State
306 Toledo -26½	354 Colorado State -50½
307 Alcorn State	355 Presbyterian
308 Georgia Tech -44	356 Miami Ohio -9
309 Villanova -3	357 Howard
310 Connecticut	358 Appalachian State -32
311 Southern Utah	359 Wagner
312 Utah State -32	360 Rice -29½
313 UC Davis	361 SE Missouri St
314 Nevada -24½	362 Missouri -41½
315 New Hampshire	363 Southern Illinois
316 San Jose State -5½	364 Indiana -16
317 Abilene Christian	365 Grambling State
318 Fresno State -21	366 California -43½
Friday, September 4	
319 Fordham	367 Bethune-Cookman
320 Army -7	368 Miami Florida -39
321 Rhode Island	369 Towson
322 Syracuse -33	370 East Carolina -30½
323 Weber State	371 Southern
324 Oregon State -28	372 Louisiana Tech -40
Saturday, September 5	
325 South Dakota State	373 Sam Houston State
326 Kansas -5	374 Texas Tech -15½
327 Norfolk State	375 Florida A&M
328 Rutgers -38	376 South Florida -28
329 Illinois State	377 Missouri State
330 Iowa -9	378 Memphis -23
331 Richmond	379 Jackson State
332 Maryland -20½	380 Middle Tennessee -38½
333 Colgate	381 Alabama A&M
334 Navy -28½	382 Cincinnati -43½
335 Tennessee Martin	383 South Dakota
336 Mississippi -40½	384 Kansas State -36
337 Wofford	385 McNeese State
338 Clemson -39½	386 LSU -36½
339 Youngstown State	387 Eastern Washington
340 Pittsburgh -12	388 Oregon -35
341 Maine	389 Northern Iowa
342 Boston College -28½	390 Iowa State -8
343 Portland State	391 Tennessee Tech
344 Washington St -28	392 Houston -35½
345 Gardner-Webb	393 Mississippi Valley St
346 South Alabama -22	394 New Mexico -43½
347 Albany NY	395 San Diego
348 Buffalo -13½	396 San Diego State -38½

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4★ = BEST
3★ = BETTER
2★ = GOOD
1★ = FAIR

THE POWERS' PACK

4★ **Byu/NEBRASKA UNDER 65.5 (Sat)**

3★ **KENTUCKY (-15.5) over Louisiana-Lafayette (Sat)**

3★ **Oklahoma State (-22.5) over CENTRAL MICHIGAN (Thu)**

2★ **Purdue/MARSHALL UNDER 64 (Sun)**

2★ **NC STATE/Troy OVER 58 (Sat)**

Games in Rotation Order

Thursday, September 3rd

† **North Carolina 31 South Carolina 30**, Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte, NC on Thursday. These two just met in the 2013 season opener, a game South Carolina won 27-10 (-12) at home. Both teams are coming off disappointing seasons and both decided to make a much needed change at the defensive coordinator spots. The Tar Heels bring in Gene Chizik (former Auburn HC) while Steve Spurrier is reunited with Jon Hoke who coached with him back at his Florida days. I expect improvement from both teams' defenses this year, therefore be wary of automatically siding with the OVER here. NC is in better shape experience wise as they have 17 returning starters while SC has just 12. They also are in much better shape at the QB spot as the dual-threat Marquise Williams will be making his 20th career start while the Gamecocks will be breaking in a brand new starter. This line originally opened back in March with SC being a 7.5-point favorite. At that point, I was heavily leaning with NC, but that line has since dropped to 3. Look for an exciting back and forth game that comes down to the final possession and I wouldn't be shocked if the Tar Heels pulled the outright upset especially considering SC's poor 1-7 ATS mark as a favorite last year. **CENTRAL FLORIDA 30 Florida International 16**. These two met 3 straight years from 2011-13 with UCF going 2-1 SU/1-2 ATS. The Knights are usually a play-on team whenever they are at home as they own a 32-17-1 overall ATS mark since opening up Bright House Stadium in 2007. With that being said, they only return 9 starters this year and I have them power-rated 3 points lower than LY's 9-4 team. While the offense looks better especially at the skill positions, my worry comes with the back 7 on defense as the Knights lose their top 5 tacklers. On the other side, this is Ron Turner's best FIU team yet. In '13 they were arguably the worst team in the FBS getting outscored by 27 ppg but last year were only outscored by 2 ppg. They should be plenty fired up playing an in-state "Big Brother" and I'll slightly lean with them plus the points here.

3★ **Oklahoma State 49 CENTRAL MICHIGAN 17**. After being the least experienced team in the country last year (just 8 returning starters), the Cowboys should be one of the most improved teams this year with 16 returning starters and could be favored in as many as 10 games. They should get their best QB play since Brandon Weeden left in 2011 as Mason Rudolph started the final 3 games of last year as a frosh and led 2 upsets wins over Oklahoma and Washington. On the other side, CMU returns just 9 starters from last year and loses a talented RB in Rawls and their all-time leading receiver in Davis. Head coach Dan Enos shockingly resigned to take the Arkansas OC job on January 22 and they hired 16-year NFL coaching vet John Bonamego. However, Bonamego was away from this team for several months this off-season while treating his cancer diagnosis (didn't return until August 22nd). During that time, CMU lost their possible starting RB in Lavallii for the season to injury and 2-year starting CB Greer was kicked off the team. If you're afraid of laying the huge spread on the road, don't be here. OSU sports a solid 12-8 ATS mark as a 20-point or more favorite since 2006 and are 28-18 ATS as a double-digit favorite during that time. Meanwhile, CMU is just 1-8 ATS as a home underdog and 1-6 ATS as an underdog of 20 or more points. I'm not afraid to lay it and play it here.

UTAH 23 Michigan 17. Utah is 2-1 SU/3-0 ATS in the series with all the meetings being played at the Big House in the last 12 years. LY the Utes went into Ann Arbor and embarrassed the Wolverines 26-10 (+3) but were notably outgained 308-286 (were +3 TO's). Now they get the Wolverines at home, at night, in a season opener and they are a perfect 8-0 ATS in their last 8 games vs non-conference opponents. This is Michigan's first true road trip in a season opener since 1998 but they should be sky-high in new head coach Jim Harbaugh's debut. They have 15 returning starters, but have to settle on a QB. On the other side, Utah has 14 returning starters and a better QB situation with Travis Wilson back (27 career starts) and the mobile Kendall Thompson contending. When I first gave out my lean on this game back in March, Utah was just a 1.5-point favorite but now that line has appropriately climbed to 5.5. I don't see much value here on the side as the Wolverines are an unknown commodity under Harbaugh while Utah also has two new coordinators. I'll call this one near the line and will only get involved on a possible UNDER 46.5 play.

Tcu 34 MINNESOTA 20. The Horned Frogs easily handled Minnesota last year winning 30-7 (-16) at home. It will be interesting to see how the Horned Frogs handle the enormous expectations and after their nation-best 11-2 overall ATS mark a year ago, it's a near certainty there will be less value on them this year (Vegas will adjust). They do return 15 starters including 10 from an offense that averaged 46.5 ppg a year ago. Their QB Trevone Boykin is the Heisman favorite entering the season after compiling 4,608 total yards and 41 total touchdowns last year. On the other side, Minnesota returns 12 starters and Jerry Kill has this Gopher program positioned nicely with back-to-back 8-win seasons. While on paper TCU should win this game by at least 3 TD's, keep in mind LY's eventual National Champ Ohio St was laying only 12.5 points at Minnesota (would win the game 31-24). The Gophers are the type of team that could give the Horned Frogs fits. They play ball-control on offense, have Jerry Kill's most talented and deepest defense yet featuring two lock-down CB's and have a Top 10 special team's unit that returns in tact. The early betting markets had TCU listed as 19.5-point road favorites but that line has correctly dropped.

Duke 27 TULANE 20. If you've been following my newsletter all off-season you know that my top play of Week 1 early was to take Tulane +20.5 over Duke. Flash forward three months and you have an incredible 11-point line move. Last year the Blue

Devils beat Tulane 47-13 (-17) at home. However, a closer look into that box score reveals that Duke only out-gained Tulane 437-391 and Duke scored 21 points off five Tulane TO's including two pick-six's. This year Tulane is the more experienced team with 16 returning starters (Duke has 12). The Blue Devils will be breaking in a new QB and since spring practice was completed, they lost their best defensive player in LB Kelby Brown for the season. With that being said the Blue Devils are now laying a number close to what my power ratings have on this game and their impressive 19-7-1 overall ATS mark the last two years can't be overlooked. I'm still riding the Wave, but not as my top play of the week anymore considering the massive line move.

Ohio 33 IDAHO 27. These two teams squared off LY with Ohio taking home a 36-24 (-13.5) win in Athens. After going to 5 straight bowl games and winning an average of 8.6 games per year, the Bobcats slipped to 6-6 last year and spent the holidays at home. This year they return 18 starters and are the most experienced team in Frank Solich's 11 years here. I have them power-rated 10 points higher than LY and it's one of the reasons I featured them in my best season win total bets in my June issue (OVER 5 wins, -140). On the other side, Idaho has gone just 3-32 the last 3 years combined, but this year Vegas boldly set their season win total at 3.5 wins despite the fact they return just 12 starters. I had the UNDER 3.5 wins (-110) as one of my top 10 best value bets and have them favored in only one game. While I am "buying" Ohio and "selling" Idaho as far as season win totals go, this individual game is a different story. Ohio is making the unique trip to the Kibbie Dome and are laying more than a TD (this line has dropped from an opening number of 10). I'll gladly back the home team who was 7-1 ATS as an underdog last year but it's nothing more than a lean for me. However, the OVER 54.5 might be worth a look.

ARIZONA 44 Texas-San Antonio 13. These teams have played each of the last two years with Arizona winning each game but LY failed to cover a 7-point spread in a 26-23 nail-biter at UTSA. Rich Rodriguez has done a great job in Tuscon with three bowl appearances and a Pac-12 South Division championship LY. This year they return 13 starters led by super soph's QB Anu Solomon and RB Nick Wilson. The defense features last year's National Defensive POY in LB Scooby Wright who had 163 tackles and 14 sacks. On the other side, one of last year's biggest shocks had to be UTSA's disappointing 4-8 finish. The Roadrunners came into the season as one of the most experienced teams in the history of college football with 20 returning starters (18 of them seniors). They were 15-9 the previous two years and many thought they had a shot at winning the CUSA championship. Flash forward to this year, and they are the least experienced team in the country with just 6 returning starters. This is clearly a huge mismatch but I want no business laying the 31.5. Pass.

Colorado 31 HAWAII 27. These two teams just met LY with Colorado taking home a 21-12 win (-8) as they had a 405-286 yard edge. Despite going from 4-8 in 2013 to just 2-10 last year, Colorado was an improved team as they went from being outgained by 98 ypg to just 22 ypg. This year they welcome back 16 returning starters and this is clearly Mike MacIntyre's best team yet. On the other side, it's been a struggle for Norm Chow in his first head coaching gig as he is just 8-29 here in 3 years and is on the hot seat heading into this season. This year's team returns 14 starters and get the addition of QB Max Wittek from USC. I'm not a big fan of backing teams in rare roles and this will be only the fourth time since 2008 that Colorado is a favorite on the road. In their previous three away favorite roles they failed to cover each by an average of 17 ppg. While my original power ratings had Colorado favored by 10 in this game, I am no longer backing the Buffaloes here and I'll gladly take the points with the home team who is 5-1 ATS vs Pac-12 teams under Chow and nearly upset Washington in last year's opener (lost 17-16 +17').

Western Kentucky 31 VANDERBILT 30. James Franklin left some big shoes to fill in Nashville and Derek Mason and the Commodores had a disastrous 2014 season in which they were fortunate just to be 3-9. This year they are in much better shape with the return of 18 starters (just 10 last year) and I have them power-rated two touchdowns better than last year. Expectations are high for WKU as they won their final 5 games of 2014 highlighted by a 67-66 OT win at #19 Marshall in the regular season finale. They welcome back 16 returning starters led by QB Brandon Doughty who threw for 4,830 yards last year with an amazing 49-10 ratio. While I originally had Vandy listed as a 3-point favorite in this game, they have notably lost their top returning WR in CJ Duncan and their top OL in LT Andrew Jelks for the season in fall camp. Keep in mind, this is a WKU team that beat SEC Kentucky two straight years in 2012 and 2013 and are on a 13-5 ATS run as an away dog with 8 outright upsets. I'll call for another slight upset here in a game that should go down to the wire.

Friday, September 4th

Baylor 52 SMU 17. The Bears crushed the Mustangs last year in the season opener 45-0 (-33) with an unbelievable 574-67 yard edge. This year's contest should be more competitive as the Chad Morris era begins at SMU. He welcomes back 15 starters in what should be one of the most improved teams in the country after going a dismal 1-11 last year getting outscored by 30 ppg (I have them power-rated 12 points higher than LY's team). On the other side, Baylor is going to be a bona-fide National Title contender with 18 returning starters. While QB Bryce Petty is gone, Art Briles has had no problems replacing a QB with his offense and Jr Seth Russell could be just as talented as RGIII. On defense, the Bears have their best personnel in the Briles era led by future 1st-round pick Shawn Oakman at DE. While I think Chad Morris' new high-octane offense will be capable of pulling a backdoor cover here, it should be noted that SMU is on a 0-8 ATS run vs non-conference opponents while Baylor is 6-0 ATS the last two years vs non-conference opponents in the regular season. Pass.

GEORGIA STATE 44 Charlotte 35. This will not only be the first season of playing football at the FBS level for Charlotte, but this will be their first ever game playing an FBS foe. In the last two years they've played a combination of FCS, Division II and III foes and have managed a 10-12 overall record. This year they welcome back 17 returning starters and I have them power-rated about a TD better than LY's team. The problem is now they play 11 FBS foes and I only have them favored in only one game. Their opponent Georgia State is no stranger in taking the step up to the FBS level as they did so 2 years ago. While they've managed a putrid 2-33 record the last three years, this is by far their best team yet with 17 returning starters and I have them power-rated 2 TD's better than LY's team. While this line has been on the move (Georgia St opened as a 4.5-point favorite), I think the Panthers are worth a look here as long as you can get them at -6.5 or less.

Michigan State 40 WESTERN MICHIGAN 17. These two met in the season opener in 2013 with the Spartans coming away with a 26-13 (-28) non-covering win. This will be MSU's first trip ever to Kalamazoo. The Spartans return 14 starters from last year led by QB Connor Cook and All-American DE Shilique Calhoun. However, they do have to replace their long-time DC Pat Narduzzi, their leading rusher (Langford), leading receiver (Lippett) and they lost top LB Davis in fall camp to injury for the season. With that being said, this a bona-fide Top 10 team that has playoff aspirations. After a disastrous 1-11 first year in Kalamazoo, PJ Fleck was named MAC Coach of the Year last season after guiding WMU to an 8-5 record. This year's team is even more talented led by the return of a 3,000-yd passer, a 1,500-yard rusher and a 1,400-yard receiver. If you're afraid of laying the big spread here, don't be. With the Spartans finally having a legitimate offense last year that averaged 43 ppg, they went 8-1 ATS as a double digit favorite. They are also a remarkable 16-3-1 ATS as an away favorite since 2008 while WMU is 3-8-1 ATS as a home underdog. Again, I'm not a big chalk eater, but Sparty is worth a look here especially considering they are laying under 3 TD's. The only thing that prevents me from making it a star-rated play is the huge game against Oregon on deck.

ILLINOIS 34 Kent State 20. Illinois had improved each season under Tim Beckman going from 2 wins in 2012 to 4 wins in 2013 to 6 wins and a bowl LY but off-the-field issues and complaints from former players saw him get the axe this morning. Former Western Michigan head coach and current Illini OC Bill Cubit will take over as the interim. This year the Illini welcome back 15 starters including QB Wes Lunt who could be in store for a breakout season. On the other side, Kent State is just 6-17 under Paul Haynes. However, this year's team should be his best yet with 17 returning starters and I have them power-rated 12 points better than LY. Kent State has struggled with non-conference opponents going 9-21 ATS since 2007 including 2-6 ATS under Haynes. The Illini are clearly the better team, but it's their defense that worries me as they have allowed 34 ppg and 35 ppg in each of the last two years and didn't beat a single team last year by more than two TD's including Youngstown State and Texas State. They are also just 2-8 ATS their last 10 games as a favorite. With today's news about Beckman being fired, I'm passing on this for now.

BOISE STATE 30 Washington 20. Obviously the main story in this one is the return of HC Chris Petersen to Boise where he had an incredible 92-12 record from 2006-2013. In their L/meeting with Petersen on the Boise sidelines, the Huskies crushed the Broncos 38-6 (-3⁺). A lot has changed since that game as UW had a disappointing 8-6 season a year ago and returns just 9 starters this year. On the other side, Boise had a surprising 12-win season a year ago under Bryan Harsin capped off by a Fiesta Bowl win. This year the Broncos return 17 starters and are loaded at every position except QB/RB. I originally only had Boise power-rated as a 4-point favorite in this game, but my tune has changed on this match-up in the last few months. UW has since confirmed that QB Miles won't return to the team (LY's starter) and they also lost their best and most experienced OL in LT Charles. I have the Huskies power-rated down 6 maximum points on the OL/DL alone. Boise routinely plays the big boys tough as evidence of their 24-12 ATS mark vs non-conf opponents including 4-1 ATS last year under Harsin. Still we are talking about a non-Power 5 team laying double digits to a Power 5 team that is coached by a man who fully knows the "Boise" culture. I'll call this one near the line for now.

Saturday, September 5th

Old Dominion 30 EASTERN MICHIGAN 27. These two played in a rain-soaked game at ODU LY with the Monarchs coming out on top 17-3 (-19). HC Bobby Wilder has done a tremendous job going 52-20 here despite the fact they have made the quick jump to FBS after starting their program in 2009. However, this year could be a little rocky as 4-year starting QB Taylor Heinicke departs after throwing for 14,959 yards in his career and the new starter will have exactly ZERO career passing yards. They are going to switch up their offensive style and feature the ground game more led by RB Ray Lawry who was the CUSA Freshman POY last year. On the other side, EMU is off 3-straight 2-10 seasons and despite the fact this year's team is improved, they could see themselves as an underdog in every single game. On the bright side, they have a dynamic QB in Reggie Bell and the defense looks improved with 8 returning starters and a solid LB corps. This is only the second away favorite role in ODU's young FBS history and I'll side with the home underdog that has the more experienced QB while also giving the UNDER 66 a long look because of the drastic changes to ODU's offensive style.

FLORIDA 45 New Mexico State 10. The Jim McElwain era begins in Gainesville as the Gators have lost at least 5 games in 4 of the last 5 seasons. He inherits just 11 returning starters and two of those starters (WR Pittman and DB Maye) will be suspended for this game. Due to a tough schedule, it looks like another 5-loss season unless one of the young QB's really emerge. On the other side, New Mexico State has gone 2-10 in each of Doug Martin's 2 years. On the positive side, this is his best team yet with 18 returning starters led by RB Larry Rose and I have them power-rated 8 points better than last year. They haven't fared well in these non-conference games, however as they are just 10-28-3 ATS the last 8 years including a 2-13-1 ATS mark as an underdog on the road the last 3 years. The Gators will want to start off the McElwain with a bang, but this spread is just too high for me to recommend any kind of lean especially with the Gators' inexperience. Pass.

Penn State 24 TEMPLE 14. The Nittany Lions have remarkably won 31 straight games in this series dating back to 1941 including an impressive 30-13 win (-12) last year where they had a 366-248 yard edge. This year Penn St returns 15 starters from a 7-6 team and they should be much improved. It starts with QB Hackenberg who took a step back in his second year as a starter going from a 20-10 TD-int ratio to just 12-15 but that was mostly to horrible play on the OL (gave up 44 sacks). On the other side, expectations are very high in Philadelphia as the Owls fresh off a 6-6 season return 19 starters and they have one of the best defenses in the country after allowing just 17.5 ppg a year ago. While this technically is an away game for Penn St, I wouldn't be shocked if they had more fans than Temple. HC Franklin always took care of business in non-conference games at Vandy and LY was no exception here as he went 5-0 ATS. A couple of issues back, I recommended a play on Penn St (-5), but that number has since climbed to (-7) and it's tough laying too many points against such a good Temple defense. The Lions are still worth a look, but I'll back off making them a star-rated play in week 1.

TULSA 34 Florida Atlantic 30. Last year FAU crushed Tulsa 50-21 (E) at home and now find themselves a TD underdog a year later. The Owls struggled in Charlie Partridge's first year going just 3-9 but 4 of those losses came in the final :30 and they should be improved this year starting with the return of QB Jaquez Johnson. On the other side, Tulsa welcomes in new coach Philip Montgomery who was the OC at Baylor the last 3 years. He inherits 10 returning starters on the offensive side and they should be much improved (I have them power-rated 7 points better). The defense was a huge issue last year allowing 39 ppg and they do lose 7 of their top 12 tacklers. All the technicals favor the Owls here as they are 14-3 ATS as an away underdog while Tulsa is just 1-6 ATS as a home favorite and were 0-8 ATS vs non-conference opponents the last two years. I'll lean with the road underdog.

UCLA 31 Virginia 17. If you watched last year's game, you would have seen a Cavaliers team out-play the Bruins in every facet of the game except the scoreboard as UCLA benefited from 3 defensive TD's in their 8-point win (28-20, -20⁺). This year the Bruins have everything in place to make a run for the CFB playoffs as they return 18 starters including 10 on offense. The only non-returning starter comes at the QB position where 3-year starting QB Hundley is off to the NFL and highly-touted true freshman Rosen steps in. On the other side, UVA HC London is firmly on the hot seat as he has suffered 3 straight losing seasons, but did just miss out on a bowl last year at 5-7 (5 losses by 8 points or less). This year doesn't look promising as they return just 10 starters and play a brutal schedule. The Cavs were 4-0 ATS in non-conf play last year and while I don't see a tremendous amount of value, I would lean with them plus the points. I may also get involved on the UNDER here as UCLA will be conservative with Rosen while Virginia was 8-4 ATS to the UNDER a year ago.

Stanford 27 NORTHWESTERN 17. Both teams look prime to improve upon disappointing seasons a year ago. While I have Stanford power-rated only slightly above LY's 8-5 team, keep in mind those 5 losses all came to ranked teams and 3 of those were only by a FG. They welcome back 9 starters on offense led by QB Kevin Hogan who should have his best season yet, but a I do worry about a defense that returns only 4 starters. On the other side, it was a weird season for Northwestern LY as despite huge upset wins over Penn St, Wisconsin and ND, they failed to make it to a bowl for the second straight year. This year they welcome back 14 starters and should be slightly improved in all 3 phases. The formula has been simple when handicapping NW games under Fitzgerald. Play against them when they are favored (they are just 15-30-1 ATS as a favorite under him) and play on them when they are an underdog as they are a solid 27-20 ATS as a dog since '08 featuring multiple upsets. Despite the fact I love Stanford this year, I'll follow the winning formula and back the home team getting 12.5 points.

†Auburn 34 Louisville 24 Georgia Dome in Atlanta, GA. After starting off 17-3 in his first 20 games as Auburn coach, Gus Malzahn and the Tigers dropped 4 of their last 5 games in 2014 and finished a disappointing 8-5. This year the expectations are high despite the loss of their leading passer, rusher and receiver. They have great replacements for each position starting with QB Jeremy Johnson who figures to give the Auburn offense a much-needed passing threat. The main reason for the excitement comes on the other side of the ball as they bring in Will Muschamp as their DC and have 8 returning starters. Louisville, meanwhile only has 9 returning starters this year, but it is a little deceiving considering they bring in some high-level transfers led by Devonte Fields who was the Big 12 defensive player of the year as a freshman at TCU in 2012. Despite the inexperience, I actually have them power-rated equal to LY's 9-4 team. I originally had Louisville listed as a 14-point underdog in this game but after going through each team's position-by-position ratings, I dropped my line on the game to 10 which is near the current Vegas number.

†Texas A&M 31 Arizona State 30. NRG Stadium in Houston TX. A win here for either team could prelude to a surprising season. Last year A&M jumped out to a 5-0 start and were ranked #6 before the roof caved in and they finished 3-5. This year's team is in much better shape on both sides of the ball as they welcome back 16 starters. Todd Graham has done a wonderful job in Tempe leading the Sun Devils to back-to-back 10-win seasons. This year's team could be his best yet as they return 16 starters. At quick glance, you may think the "OVER" is the play here, but be wary with that assessment. A&M made a great hire in bringing in John Chavis from LSU as DC and they have one of the best players in America on that side of the ball in DE Myles Garrett. On the other side, Graham has stated that this will be by far is best defense he's had here. Both teams haven't fared well in these neutral site games as A&M is 3-10 ATS while ASU is just 1-7 ATS. This line had A&M favored by as many as 6-points several months ago, but has since correctly dropped to A&M -3. I don't see much value in this one side or total so just sit back, relax and enjoy what should be an exciting down to the wire game.

POWERS' PICKS Featuring Expanded logs in 2015!

Example: 2014 Ohio State (14-1 SU, 10-5 ATS, 12-3 O/U)

Date	Opponent	Line	Total	Score	W/L	Margin	O/U	Margin	Yds Diff
8/30	*Navy (MD)	-15	54	34-17	W	+2	U	-3	+30
9/6	Virginia Tech	-11	47	21-35	L	-25	O	+9	+3
9/13	Kent State	-31.5	48.5	66-0	W	+34.5	O	+17.5	+502
9/20	Bye								
9/27	Cincinnati	-17	61	50-28	W	+5	O	+17	+288
10/4	at Maryland	-7.5	59.5	52-24	W	+20.5	O	+16.5	+223
10/11	Bye								
10/18	Rutgers	-21.5	63	56-17	W	+17.5	O	+10	+240
10/25	at Penn St (OT)	-14	52.5	31-24	L	-7	O	+2.5	+53
11/1	Illinois	-28.5	65.5	55-14	W	+12.5	O	+5.5	+302
11/8	at Michigan St	+4	55.5	49-37	W	+16	O	+30.5	+32
11/15	at Minnesota	-12.5	56	31-24	L	-5.5	U	-1	+186
11/22	Indiana	-35.5	66.5	42-27	L	-20.5	O	+2.5	+132
11/29	Michigan	-21	52.5	42-28	L	-7	O	+17.5	+44
12/6	*Wisconsin (IN)	+4	54.5	59-0	W	+63	O	+4.5	+300
1/1	*Alabama (LA)	+9	58	42-35	W	+16	O	+19	+130
1/12	*Oregon (TX)	+6.5	74.5	42-20	W	+28.5	U	-12.5	+73
	Avg per game	-12.8	57.9	45-22	+10.0			+9.0	+169.0

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4★ UNDER 65.5 NEBRASKA 27 Byu 24. Before I get into my reasons for liking the UNDER in this game, let me first explain why this total sits at 65.5. BYU went to a high-tempo offense last year and their games averaged 64.6 total ppg (highest for BYU since 2001). Nebraska, on the other hand, had several dynamic players on offense, had a beat-up, inexperienced D and their games averaged 64.2 ppg (highest for Nebraska since 1995). BYU was 9-4 ATS to the "OVER" while Nebraska was 8-5 ATS to the "OVER". However, this year is a completely different story. The Huskers lose their two best players on offense in RB Abdullah (2nd in career rush yards) and their all-time leading receiver in Bell. Their best returning weapon was WR Pierson-El who was also arguably the best punt returner in the country last year (3 TD's). However, he'll miss at least the first 4 games due to a broken foot. On top of this, running QB Armstrong isn't a great fit for Riley's preferred pro-style offense. If you're thinking Riley while head coach at Oreg St featured nothing but high scoring games, you'd be wrong as their games averaged just 54.8 total ppg in his 12 years. On the other side, you have a BYU team that just lost their All-American RB in Williams for the season and their starting TE in fall camp. If you're afraid of dual-threat QB Hill, don't be as he tore every major ligament in his knee last year and they don't want to run him as much this year. Then to top all of this off you have Nebraska with 5 un-named suspended players and at least a half-dozen BYU players that will be suspended due to the brawl at the end of the Miami Beach Bowl. Despite all of this, we have the 3rd highest totals' line for a BYU game in the last 10 years and the 4th highest Nebraska totals' line in the last 5 years (higher than any of their totals' lines from last year). When you factor all of these scenarios up, you get my top play of Week 1.

2★ OVER 58 N.C. STATE 47 Troy 20. If you've been following a long with these newsletters this off-season you know that I am very high on the Wolfpack as they were my No. 1 best value season win total bet to go "OVER" 7.5 wins at -105. They welcome back 15 starters from an 8-5 team last year and are led by one of the most underrated QB's in the country in Jacoby Brissett who had 3,135 total yards and a 23-5 TD-INT ratio. On the other side, new head coach Neal Brown inherits a solid situation as Troy had underachieved the last couple of years. They have 13 returning starters (2nd most here in the last 7 years) and he will be installing the "Air Raid" offense which gives us some solid value on the OVER. Last year Troy was 7-5 ATS to the UNDER, but that was because they couldn't find a healthy starting QB and once they did, Freshman QB Brandon Silvers hit an incredible 65 of 80 passes in the final three games and Troy avg'd 34 ppg (avg'd just 17.8 ppg the first 9). Prior to last season, Troy was on a 15-2-1 ATS run to the OVER. Meanwhile, NC State also got their offense in gear late last season averaging 37 ppg in their last three games and they also weren't afraid to score some points against their lesser opponents a year ago. They had 46 against ODU, 49 against USF and 42 against Presbyterian. While I don't think there's much value to the side here with NC State laying 25.5 points, I do think the "OVER" is worth a look.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS 42 Unlv 14. These two teams just met LY as the Huskies took home a 48-34 (-10) win on the road as they managed 616 yards of offense. The more things change, the more they stay the same in Dekalb as the Huskies despite 3 different coaching changes have won at least 11 games in each of the last 5 years and have been to 5 straight MAC Championship games. This year's team looks to continue that winning tradition as they return 13 starters led by QB Drew Hare who threw for 2,322 yards (18-2 ratio) and had 900 rush yards last year. On the other side, it will be interesting to see how Tony Sanchez does in Vegas as he moved 14 miles down the road from Bishop Gorman HS where he went 85-5 the last 6 years. This looks like a rebuilding year with just 10 returning starters from a 2-11 team. You will be hard pressed to find a bigger disparity this entire football season in home/away dichotomies than this one. UNLV is just 6-54 SU on the road the last 10 years while NIU is 30-1 SU in their last 31. Again I don't usually side with large favorites, but I'm not afraid to lay it and play it here.

OKLAHOMA 48 Akron 17. Expectations are relatively low in Norman as the Sooners went 4-5 in their last 9 games of 2014 and finished unranked for only the 2nd time since Bob Stoops' first year. However, that could be a good thing for Sooners fans as the last two times the Sooners began the preseason outside the Top 10, they finished #1 (2000) and #6 (2013). This year's team could surprise especially on offense as they move to the "Air Raid" with new OC Lincoln Riley. Baker Mayfield (former TT walk-on) has been named the starter since it fits his style and he will have a talented arsenal of weapons led by RB Perine who ran for 1,723 yards as a freshman last year. On the other side, this looks like Terry Bowden's best team yet at Akron as last year's team was a huge disappointment going 5-7 despite being favored in 9 games. The Zips only have 12 returning starters but Bowden brings in BCS cast-off transfers each year. Akron has lost 21 straight road openers SU by an average of 28 ppg. My original power ratings called for Oklahoma by 27 in this one, but I like what I've heard coming out of Norman this fall camp and will put this right at the Vegas number.

† Tennessee 42 Bowling Green 23. Nissan Stadium in Nashville, TN. Expectations are high in Knoxville after the Vols won 4 of their last 5 games to finish 2014 and they return 18 starters. While everyone focuses in on the QB and skill positions, I do notably have Tennessee power-rated at the maximum +3 points on both the OL and DL this year. However, fall camp has not been kind to the Vols as their leading returning receiver in Pig Howard will be suspended for this game and they also lost OL and DB starters to significant injuries. On the other side, BG returns 15 starters from LY's MAC East division champs. They notably have 10 starters back from on offense and also see the return of QB Matt Johnson who got injured in LY's opener and was out for the year. Defense was an issue last year for them as they allowed 33.5 ppg (17.6 ppg more than 2013) and this year it remains a major question mark as they lost their top 4 tacklers. While I have Tennessee power-rated more than 10 points better than LY's team, I do not like the situation here with a huge home game on deck against Oklahoma. The Falcons' offense is perfectly capable of pulling the backdoor cover late against the backups and I will only get involved on a possible OVER play in this one.

GEORGIA 41 Ulm 7. While Mark Richt has done a solid job in Athens going 136-48 in 14 years, Bulldog fans have started to grow restless as they haven't won an SEC Championship since 2005 and haven't played in the National Title game since the early 1980's. Like many recent Georgia teams, the Bulldogs head in to the season as the favorite to win the SEC East. They return 13 starters from a 10-3 team led by RB Nick Chubb who had 1,547 rushing yards as a freshman last year. The Bulldogs still haven't named a starting QB as of press-time and they may use the first couple of games to feel one out (lowly SEC Vanderbilt on deck). On the other side, ULM returns 14 starters from a 4-8 squad LY. This year's team actually looks weaker on offense after averaging just 20.1 ppg last year, but better on defense after allowing a respectable 26.3 ppg. That could bode well for "UNDER" plays in ULM games this year and that's after they went 8-4 ATS to the UNDER a year ago. I would look into a possible "UNDER" play in this one, but it should be noted that Georgia is 19-9 ATS to the "OVER" dating back to the last two games in 2012. This game is a total pass for me at this point.

3★ KENTUCKY 44 Louisiana-Lafayette 16. The Wildcats were so close to getting to a bowl last year as after a 5-1 start which included a 3OT loss at Florida, they dropped their last 6 games. However, those 6 straight losses to close the 2014 season give us a little bit of line value here. This year's Kentucky returns 14 starters and I have them power-rated 6 points better than LY's team as every position is improved except the defensive line (lost 1st Round draft pick Bud Dupree). On the other side, UL-Lafayette has been a model of consistency under head coach Mark Hudspeth as in each of the last 4 years they have gone 9-4 and capped off the season by winning the New Orleans bowl. However, this year's team could be his weakest. On offense, they must replace their 3-year starting QB Terrace Broadway (No. 2 all-time career passer here) and they have to replace their No. 3 all-time leading rusher in Alonzo Harris. On the other side, the defense loses 5 of their top 6 tacklers and I actually have UL-Lafayette power-rated 8 points lower than LY's team. There is not one position on the entire team that looks improved on paper going in. If you're afraid of laying the points in this one, don't be. Kentucky, under Mark Stoops in just two years have gone a perfect 5-0 ATS vs non-conference opponents when they were laying double digits. The average score in those 5 games was 43-10 with an average cover of 13 ppg! If that wasn't enough for you, UL-Lafayette under Mark Hudspeth fare extremely poor in these games. In the last two years alone vs Power 5 conference opponents, the Ragin' Cajuns have gone 0-4 ATS getting outscored by an average of 43-16 and failed to cover the spreads by an average of 10 ppg. Add of all of this up and you get one of my favorite side plays for Week 1.

ARKANSAS 45 Utep 10. A case could be made that Arkansas was one of the best 6-loss teams in the history of college football a year ago. They outscored their opponents by 13 ppg, became the first team since 1942 to shut out ranked opponents (LSU and Ole Miss) in back-to-back weeks and then hammered Texas 31-7 in the bowl allowing just 59 total yards of offense. I actually had them power-rated as a Top 15 team by season's end. This year's team looks even stronger with the return of 15 starters. However, they did suffer a major blow when RB Jonathan Williams was lost for the season in Fall camp (2,090 rush yards the last two years). While they still have Alex Collins (2,126 rush yards the last two years), they'll need to find another RB in Bielema's heavy run offense. UTEP, meanwhile surprised many by getting to a bowl in head coach Sean Kugler's 2nd season last year. He is a former NFL OL coach and stresses the importance of power football as they use 2-RB sets. Dating back to his days at Wisconsin, Bret Bielema is certainly not afraid to lay the wood against inferior opponents. Last year when stepping outside of SEC action, the Hogs went a perfect 5-0 ATS vs their non-conference opponents and won those games by an average of 50-15 with an average cover of 18 ppg! However, Vegas looks like they have caught up with the Hogs here as they are laying nearly 5 touchdowns. I was going to lean with the "OVER" but Arkansas finished last season cashing the "UNDER" in 6 straight games while UTEP cashed the "UNDER" in each of their final 7 games. Pass.

WEST VIRGINIA 34 Georgia Southern 17. This one hurt. We had a star-rated play potentially on Georgia Southern plus the points go out the window when their QB Kevin Ellison was ruled ineligible for the first two games of the season last week. The Eagles were one of my best value season win total bets to go "OVER" 7.5 wins (+120) as they returned 13 starters from a team that went 9-3 last year including a perfect 8-0 in the Sun Belt. They have fared quite well facing Power 5 schools as they upset Florida in the Swamp in 2013 (26-20, +28) and then LY nearly beat NC State in the opener (lost 24-23, +20') and dropped a heart-breaker to the eventual Orange Bowl champ Georgia Tech 42-38 (+17). On the other side, West Virginia has 15 returning starters from a 7-6 team that lost 4 of their last 5 games to close the season. They do have their best defense in the last 5 years with the return of 9 starters on that side of the ball but do have to replace their QB and a No. 1 draft pick at WR in Kevin White. The Mountaineers are just 5-12 ATS as a home favorite under Holgorsen while Georgia Southern is on a 6-1 ATS run as an away dog. While Ellison's backup Favian Upshaw has experience, I'll downgrade this to a lean on Georgia Southern for now and also take the "UNDER" as West Virginia finished on a 8-1 ATS run to the "UNDER" a year ago.

NOTRE DAME 27 Texas 20. ND returns 17 starters from what was a topsy-turvy 2014 season. After starting out 6-0, their season collapsed due to numerous injuries on the defensive side of the ball. They would rebound to upset LSU in the bowl and expectations like usual in South Bend are extremely high. Malik Zaire will be making his first home start after his bowl performance forced Everett Golson to transfer to FSU. It should be noted that the Irish have suffered some attrition since the spring losing 3 DL including starting NT Jarron Jones. On the other side, Texas should be improved in Charlie Strong's 2nd year as they adjust to his culture change. However, they do lose their leading rusher and leading receiver on offense and 6 of their top 7 tacklers on defense. The Irish are traditionally a poor home favorite (31-52-3 ATS since 1997) and are just 3-11 ATS as a double-digit favorite dating back to mid-2012. This was a star-rated play on Texas for me a couple months ago (see May issue) when the Irish were listed as 13.5-point favorites, but since that number has dropped to 10, this becomes only a slight lean on the Horns.

FLORIDA STATE 44 Texas State 13. While the Seminoles went 13-0 during the regular season a year ago, they were living a lie for a majority of it and took it on the chin in the Rose Bowl (finished just 3-11 ATS). They received good news last week when RB Dalvin Cook was reinstated, but they still only return 4 starters on offense and must replace the No. 1 player taken in the draft in QB Jameis Winston. QB Everett Golson transfers in from ND and while he plays like a Heisman candidate at times, he also has major TO issues. Dennis Franchione has done a solid job in San Marcos while Texas State has made the jump up to the FBS. They return 14 starters and this looks like his best team yet. While FSU's great ATS records under Fisher came to a screeching halt last year, Texas State is 9-4 ATS as a double digit underdog. This however, will be the best team they've faced in school history. I'll pass on this one for now as Florida State's inexperience makes them a major question mark when it comes to laying huge spreads.

†**Alabama 30 Wisconsin 16.** AT&T Stadium in Arlington, TX. The Crimson Tide are 6-1 ATS in openers under Nick Saban. The Badgers should be familiar playing SEC opponents in the state of Texas as they lost to LSU 28-24 (+4) in Houston a year ago. However, they were leading that game 24-7 in the third quarter and then RB Melvin Gordon went down with an injury. Alabama returns just 10 starters from last year's SEC Championship squad and All-American WR Amari Cooper is off to the NFL. While they have a stud RB in Henry, the Crimson Tide have yet to find out who their starting QB is going to be in this game. On the other side, Wisconsin isn't that much more experienced as they return just 11 starters in Paul Chryst's first year and gone is Heisman finalist Gordon. While Clement is a fine replacement, he doesn't have the home-run ability of Gordon and that will prove costly against an Bama front 7 that is arguably the best in college football this year. QB Stave is mediocre at best (9-10 ratio LY) so I look for the Crimson Tide to stack the line of scrimmage. If Alabama had more clarity at the QB spot, then this would be a star-rated play for me, but since they'll be breaking in a new starter, I'll just put a lean on them and the UNDER.

Mississippi State 38 SOUTHERN MISS 17. These two teams just met in LY's season opener which was a 49-0 (-30) blowout in Starkville as the Bulldogs had a 550-283 yard edge. Last year Mississippi State achieved their first ever No. 1 ranking and they stayed there for an entire month until 3 losses in their final 4 games put a damper on what was a great season. This year's team returns just 7 starters and I have them power-rated 10 points lower than LY's team. On the bright side one of those starter's coming back is QB Prescott who had a 4,435 yards of total offense and 41 total touchdowns a year ago. On the other side, it's amazing to think that in 2011 Southern Miss finished 12-2 and No. 20 in the country. The last 3 years have been ugly as they are just 4-32 (although 4-9 in their last 13). This does look like Todd Monken's best team yet with 15 returning starters including 10 on offense and all 5 of their OL. While "The Rock" used to be a feared place for visiting teams, they were only 0-5-1 ATS at home a year ago. Mississippi State head coach Dan Mullen isn't afraid to put the hammer down in some of these non-conference games but the overall youth of the Bulldogs' squad has me passing on the game for now.

USC 48 Arkansas State 20. Expectations are extremely high in the land of Troy as they went 9-4 in the first year under Steve Sarkisian, return 14 starters led by a Heisman candidate in QB Cody Kessler (39.5 ratio LY) and they have much better depth than their probation-stricken teams of the last 5 years. Obviously, the big story to come out in the last week was Sarkisian's drunken antics at a booster club, but I'm not sure that influences this outcome. Four years, four different head coaches and four bowl trips. That's what Arkansas State has done and most of the credit

should go to the players for adjusting so well to different styles and schemes. This will be the first time since 2003 that Arkansas State sees their head coach make it to the second season. LY the Red Wolves went 7-6 under Blake Anderson and this year's team returns 15 starters (most since 2007) led by dual-threat QB Fredi Knighton who had 4,056 total yards and 35 total touchdowns last year. I'm not sure if I'll get involved with this one too much as there aren't enough data points for USC under Sarkisian and the same holds true for Anderson at Arkansas State. One thing to keep track is the total, specifically the OVER (it's pretty high at 67) as Sarkisian likes to run as many plays as possible and Arkansas State finished LY cashing an OVER ticket in 7 straight games. Pass for now.

Sunday, September 6th

2★ UNDER 64 MARSHALL 30 Purdue 24. During LY's outstanding 13-1 season, the Thundering Herd did not play a single Power 5 conference opponent. This year they return just 10 starters and there will be a new starting QB in Huntington for the first time since 2010 as Rakeem Cato departs as the school's all-time passing leader (14,079 yards and 131 touchdowns). They also lost their all-time leading receiver in catches in Tommy Shuler. On the other side, Purdue returns 15 starters from a 3-9 team and while they are just 4-20 under head coach Darrell Hazell, they were much more competitive in year two (-8 ppg in 2014 compared to -23 ppg in 2013). While there are some question marks at the skill positions for the Boilers, one thing that does get overlooked this time of year is experience on the OL and they return all 5 starters from LY. This line was originally Marshall -13.5 a few months ago and at that point the Boilers were a star-rated play for me (see my May issue), it is has since appropriately dropped to Marshall -7.5 and now I only have a lean on the Boilers. I am however going to get involved on the UNDER. This is the 3rd highest totals line for a Purdue game in the last 5 years. They should be able to grind some clock on the Marshall defense with their big, experienced OL. Marshall has far less dynamic players on their offense and they will be a ground heavy team this year.

Monday, September 7th

Ohio State 33 VIRGINIA TECH 20. The defending national champion Buckeyes will be out for revenge after the Hokies handed them their only loss of the season last year 35-21 (-11) in Columbus. With their unbelievable finish to LY (covered their last 3 games by an average of 35.5 ppg all in the underdog role) and with the return of 14 starters, they are the first unanimous preseason No. 1 team in the history of the AP poll. However, that means most of OSU games this year will feature inflated lines. This line was no exception as it opened with the Buckeyes being favored by 16.5 points and climbed to high as a 20.5 points. However, we've seen a huge line drop here due to several Buckeye players being suspended including WR's Jalin Marshall, Corey Smith, Dontre Wilson and All-American DE Joey Bosa. Also damaging to the Buckeyes was losing WR Noah Brown for the season this week as he was expected to be a breakout player. That means Braxton Miller could get the start at WR in his debut and VT who features arguably the best CB duo in the country in Facyson and Fuller is not the team you want to start your first game against at a new position. On the other side, VT returns 16 starters from another disappointing season, but this looks like Beamer's best team in several years especially on the defensive side of the ball. If the Buckeyes weren't in the role of revenging a loss, then I'd definitely be on the Hokies here. However, this is a marquee, isolated game featuring the No. 1 team in the country. That usually signifies that there isn't a lot of value and I'm not going to get involved right now.

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