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MATT YOUMANS: Books waffle on Tiger, like rest of us

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MATT YOUMANS: Books waffle on Tiger, like rest of us

Feb. 22, 2010

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MATT YOUMANS: Books waffle on Tiger, like rest of us

Imagine how dull golf would be without Tiger Woods. The game would be an afterthought now, ranking somewhere below figure skating in terms of interest from sports fans and the media.

Hate is a strong word, so I'll say I despise figure skating. But who doesn't love a sex scandal?

When Woods' dirty laundry was exposed to the public after his mysterious Thanksgiving night car crash, the story became much bigger than the game he plays. And that will prove to be great for golf, because all eyes are on Tiger, on and off the course.

Wagering on golf eventually might get a boost, too. But for now, Woods' uncertain playing status has cast a cloud of confusion over oddsmakers. Woods is the betting favorite in every tournament he plays, but he's not saying if or when he will play this year.

"So much is guarded with him," Las Vegas Hilton golf oddsmaker Jeff Sherman said, "who knows what he's doing?"

Woods is reportedly in a sex rehabilitation clinic in Mississippi, where he might be sitting in quiet therapy with white-coated sexologists, watching tapes of Dr. Ruth Westheimer and prancing being faithful to a blow-up doll. That's just a wild guess.

Some people will argue sex addiction is a terrible thing that can destroy lives and relationships. In the case of Woods, my opinion is it's a joke and a lame excuse.

If you're a filthy rich, single athlete and hot women are throwing themselves at you, it's party time. You are idolized, like Derek Jeter. If you're a filthy rich, married father of two and countless hot women (plus a not-so-hot Perkins pancake waitress) are at your fingertips, then it's a problem.

Woods carefully crafted a family-man image and carelessly wrecked it by living an opposite lifestyle. So maybe his management team put him in sex therapy, declared he had a serious issue to deal with and began working on

repairing his image.

Woods issued a public apology Friday, and it blew up into the biggest story in the history of ESPN. While his scripted speech was televised, trading slowed on the New York Stock Exchange.

Speculation is rampant about when Woods will return to golf. Will he make it back for the Masters, the year's first major, on April 8 at the hallowed ground of Augusta National?

"My guess would be no," Sherman said. "It certainly doesn't sound like Augusta to me."

If there is a driving range near the sex clinic, Woods is probably sneaking out to hit a few buckets of balls. Still, the timing of the Masters makes his return there seem impractical.

Before Woods' crash, figuratively and literally, the Hilton posted him as the 9-4 favorite to win the Masters. Woods is currently a 6-1 co-favorite with Phil Mickelson. But don't make that bet on Woods, because all bets are action despite a golfer not qualifying or playing.

"If he doesn't play, then you don't get your money back on this," Sherman said, adding that Woods' bizarre situation is paralyzing bettors and causing them to "take a wait-and-see approach."

All Las Vegas sports books and most offshore books have removed Tiger-related props, such as: Will Woods win at least one major in 2010? At Betfair.com, wagering "No" is minus-210.

If Woods misses the Masters, the "No" side would be adjusted to about minus-400. I know one professional sports gambler who bet Woods to win zero majors at plus-180 in December, but Woods must tee off in the Masters for that bet to be action. The best guess is he comes back for the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach in June.

Woods did not win a major last year, even missing the cut at the British Open. The four major winners were Angel Cabrera (Masters), Lucas Glover (U.S. Open), Stewart Cink (British) and Y.E. Yang, who stunningly outduled Woods on the final day of the PGA.

"What we noticed last year, even when he was winning tournaments, he wasn't winning in dominant fashion," Sherman said. "All it's going to take is for him to win a tournament, and then all the questions will go away and the focus will be on golf."

"Winning will start curing a lot of stuff for him. That's the only way he's going to silence some of the talk."

Woods hurt his wife and family and damaged his reputation. He's apparently facing his problems, trying to pull it back together and dedicating himself to an honest life devoid of skirt chasing. Give him credit for that, and let's hope he's playing golf again soon.

Sherman said those who normally would bet on Woods "might shy away" when he returns to golf. Eventually, though, Tiger will win back the betting public. It just might not happen this year.



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MATT YOUMANS: Free-fallin' Longhorns aren't worth betting on

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MATT YOUMANS: Free-fallin' Longhorns aren't worth betting on

Mar. 05, 2010
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MATT YOUMANS: Free-fallin' Longhorns aren't worth betting on

Not that long ago, Texas coach Rick Barnes was enjoying the view from college basketball's penthouse. His team was 17-0 and ranked No. 1 by the fools who waste their time filling out the ballots every week.

The polls mean next to nothing. They are meaningless games of musical chairs. Who's No. 1 and who's No. 21 this week -- who cares? The NCAA Tournament decides the chaos.

The only poll that means something is the final one, and Texas might not find itself in it. In fact, the Longhorns, 23-7 and sixth in the Big 12 Conference, are nowhere to be found in The Associated Press Top 25 this week. They are free fallin', as Tom Petty would say.

Barnes has been evicted from his high-rise condo, even blaming himself for "as poor a coaching job as I've done." At least he's not publicly pointing fingers at his players.

"Texas has a lot of highly recruited players, and the sum of their parts does not really equal their individual talent," said Vegas Sports Authority handicapper Paul Stone, who closely follows the Big 12.

Two of those parts, senior forward Darnell James and freshman guard Avery Bradley from Findlay Prep, are rock solid. James is one of the nation's top 10 players, and Bradley has a bright future.

As December turned to January and the Longhorns kept rolling, "It looks like it's all blending together, and it's looking like a possible Final Four team," Stone said. "They just somewhere along the way, without warning, lost their way. The wheels have just come off."

It's possible for a team to have too much talent, partly because it leads to arrogance and selfishness. Barnes recruited a Rivals.com all-star team, and not enough players are willing to do the dirty work.

Texas is 3-14 against the spread in 2010, with two of the covers coming against Oklahoma State. Because of the Longhorns' talent and their public perception, they have been overvalued, still regarded by many as the former No. 1 team that can flip the switch at any time.

"As a bettor, I think we all know, until you see something different from the recent results, you continue to ride the hot hand," Stone said. "Texas has been losing decisively on the road for over a month."

The Longhorns are on the road Saturday at Baylor, which will be about a 3½-point favorite. Texas is 1-9 ATS in true road games.

Stone is riding the Bears, who have won eight of their past 10. That stretch started with an 80-77 overtime victory at Texas on Jan. 30, when Tweedy Carter had the hot hand for Baylor with 27 points.

James was a monster in that game with 20 points and 19 rebounds. But he can't solve all the problems for the Longhorns, who are one of the worst free-throw shooting teams in the nation at 62.7 percent. Still, if Barnes can push the right buttons, Texas has the talent to make a minor run in the NCAA Tournament.

Another team in free fall is defending national champion North Carolina, which is headed for the National Invitation Tournament at 16-14 and 5-10 in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

The Tar Heels will be about 15-point underdogs at Duke. Coming off a loss at Maryland, expect the Blue Devils to show no mercy. Duke has won its seven home ACC games by an average of 18 points.

Stone recommends plays on Arkansas, a 1½-point home underdog to Mississippi, and Marquette, a 6½-point home favorite over Notre Dame. Despite an injury to senior star Luke Harangody, the Irish are sticking to the NCAA bubble.

"Notre Dame has been impressive playing without Harangody, but at some point it will start to miss his 24 points and 10 rebounds a game," said Stone (VegasSportsAuthority.com). "Marquette might be somewhat under the national radar, but it is playing exceptionally well and has an NCAA Tournament bid wrapped up."

One team that won't play beyond Saturday, despite a winning record, is Southern California.

The Trojans, banned from the postseason, finish coach Kevin O'Neill's first season with a game at Arizona. Look for a strong effort from USC as about a 3-point underdog. O'Neill was pushed out as the Wildcats' named successor to Luke Olson.

With most conference tournaments about to begin, the Las Vegas Hilton is posting odds to win. Gonzaga is the 2-5 favorite in the West Coast Conference tourney, which tips today at the Orleans Arena.

The Longhorns will be a long shot to win the Big 12 next week, and seldom has a team fallen so far, so fast from a No. 1 ranking.

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 MATT YOUMANS: Error-prone Pryor not Buckeyes' only problem

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MATT YOUMANS: Error-prone Pryor not Buckeyes' only problem

Oct. 23, 2009
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MATT YOUMANS: Error-prone Pryor not Buckeyes' only problem

Midway through his sophomore season, Ohio State quarterback Terrelle Pryor is under fire from critics who want to see him benched or switched to wide receiver. None of it makes sense.

A year ago, many of the same people were praising Pryor as the second coming of Troy Smith, only better.

The Buckeyes and their backers are up in arms after Pryor's poor effort in a 26-18 loss to two-touchdown underdog Purdue last week. One popular way to panic and vent frustration is to target the quarterback as the down.

Here's the truth, as spoken by The Gold Sheet handicapper Bruce Marshall: "Ohio State is just not that good."

The next thing I'll say is that Pryor is only partially at fault, and most of the blame should fall on Buckeyes coach Jim Tressel.

Ohio State has no offensive identity. The smash-mouth running attack is missing, the wideouts are average, and Pryor is being asked to run a system with no definitive game plan. Pryor's footwork is poor, and it's obvious he's not being coached properly.

Put Pryor at Michigan or Purdue -- the only two Big Ten teams that use the passing game effectively and consistently produce NFL quarterbacks -- and the results would be different.

Tressel had been living on the edge, and winning masks most mistakes, but it could be a good thing for the Buckeyes that they finally slipped off the cliff and got exposed by the Bolleermakers.

Ohio State's 31-13 victory over Wisconsin on Oct. 10 was as deceiving as it gets. The Badgers held a 368-184 advantage in total yards, while the Buckeyes had eight first downs and Pryor completed only five passes. But Ohio State covered as a 15-point favorite by scoring on two interception returns and a kickoff return.

Pryor's turnover problems -- eight interceptions and three fumbles -- are a product of his youth and a weak

support system. He's a rare talent at 6 feet 6 inches, but he has regressed because the offense fits him like a new suit that's two sizes too small.

The Buckeyes will kick but the next two weeks, as a 16-point favorite over Minnesota on Saturday and again at home against pitiful New Mexico State on Oct. 31.

The Gold Sheet projects Ohio State, which is 5-2 against the spread, to beat Minnesota, 34-10. Criticism of Pryor, who is being counseled by Lebron James, will quiet down, and in a few weeks we'll see if Tressel is getting the offense figured out.

It's not often this happens, but the Big Ten is in the background this weekend and a Mountain West Conference game is in the spotlight.

Brigham Young is a 21/2-point home underdog to Texas Christian, and the early money has been on the Horned Frogs, who won last year's meeting, 32-7.

Marshall (goldsheet.com) is siding with TCU, which he said will put too much pressure on the Cougars' big but slow offensive line and quarterback Max Hall.

"It's a matchup that works against BYU because of TCU's speed on defense," Marshall said. "Hall has been throwing too many picks this year. He has been a little sloppy."

Marshall also recommends Air Force as a 91/2-point underdog at Utah. The Utes are still in the league title hunt.

"The Mountain West is better than the Big Ten this year," Marshall said. "The top teams are definitely better in the Mountain West. At the top and middle, I would say that. I'd take BYU over Ohio State in a minute, and I'd take TCU over Penn State."

"But the bottom of the Mountain West is pretty bad, and that's the problem."

UNLV opened as a slight favorite at winless New Mexico, but money moved the Lobos to 1-point favorites, and the line has steadied at about pick-ern. The Gold Sheet projects the Rebels to win by 11.

Marshall also recommends plays on Oklahoma State (-9) over Baylor, and Texas Tech (-211/2) over Texas A&M.

• CLOSING NUMBERS -- Bad luck with Washington and bad handicapping with UNLV led to a 2-4 record last week, but I plan to bounce back with these six picks for Saturday (home team in CAPS):

Illinois (+11) over PURDUE; Indiana (+51/2) over NORTHWESTERN; Boston College (+8) over NOTRE DAME; WASHINGTON (+10) over Oregon; MICHIGAN (+41/2) over Penn State; Auburn (+71/2) over LOUISIANA STATE.

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MATT YOUNMANS: Oddsmakers wary of siding with favored Mountain West teams

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Star

MATT YOUNMANS: Oddsmakers wary of siding with favored Mountain West teams

Mar. 15, 2010
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MATT YOUNMANS: Oddsmakers wary of siding with favored Mountain West teams

When he was washing dishes at a seafood restaurant five years ago, Anthony Johnson was an unlikely candidate to play a starring role in this NCAA Tournament. But his story is not a fish tale.

Johnson will lead Montana against New Mexico in an East Region first-round game on Thursday. Predictably, the Grizzlies are underdogs. Don't count them out, though.

"Montana is a 'dog that I think has a good chance," Las Vegas Sports Consultants oddsmaker Ken White said.

In the Big Sky Conference title game, Johnson, a senior guard, scored 34 of his 42 points in the second half as the Grizzlies overcame a 20-point deficit to beat Weber State, 66-65. More on Johnson later.

New Mexico is one of a record four Mountain West Conference teams to make the NCAA's 65-team field. Two of those teams are favorites.

LVSC opened the Lobos as 10-point favorites over Montana, and the line dropped to 9 on Sunday night, when the sharpest bettors were picking off what they perceived to be the best numbers.

Brigham Young, carried by sharp-shooting guard Jimmer Fredette, opened as a 3½-point favorite over Florida. The Cougars struggled to beat Texas Christian in the MWC tournament before falling to UNLV in the semifinals.

White said the Gators, who survived the NCAA bubble, are quicker, more athletic and capable of a minor upset.

"BYU just didn't impress me against TCU and UNLV. If you can put some pressure on Jimmer, they could be in trouble because they don't have a real strong No. 2 scorer," White said. "I think Florida has got a great shot to win that game."

Fredette was phenomenal last week in Las Vegas, scoring a total of 75 points in two games. But New Mexico was not at its best, barely holding off Air Force and losing to San Diego State.

The Acters, whose No. 11 seed was lower than expected, are 3½-point underdogs to Tennessee. LVSC opened the Rebels as 1½-point underdogs to Northern Iowa, but the Las Vegas Hilton and MGM Mirage sports books posted the line at pick'em.

The wrong team might have opened as the favorite in the Gonzaga-Florida State game. LVSC opened the Bulldogs minus-1½, but the line shifted to the Seminoles' side (-1) at the Hilton.

"I think Florida State, which has got far superior athletes, is going to end up being the favorite," White said. "The Zags, as I've said most of the year, they're not as good as people think."

How good is Purdue without injured forward Robbie Hummel, the team's most valuable player?

Greg Anthony, a CBS analyst and former UNLV star, made this Las Vegas-themed statement when the brackets were unveiled: "Could we possibly have a scenario where a 13 seed is favored over a 4 seed?"

But the Boilermakers, who have won 11 consecutive NCAA first-round games, opened as 4-point favorites over Siena. When various TV analysts made predictions, the Saints were a popular upset pick.

"That's going to be an interesting game because I'm sure Purdue, which is getting no respect, is going to be ready to play," White said. "They are a lame-duck team because they lost Hummel, but that's still a really talented team."

Butler, a No. 5 seed, is favored by just 2½ points over Texas-El Paso, but White made the line 5.

The Bulldogs, 28-4 and 18-0 in the Horizon League, boast four double-digit scorers in Gordon Hayward, Shelvin Mack, Matt Howard and Willie Veasley. The Miners are led by high-scoring guard Randy Cutpepper and forward Derrick Caracter.

"I do like Butler. That's the kind of team you want to bet on," White said. "I love their frontcourt with Howard and Hayward."

In another intriguing matchup, White gives Oklahoma State, a 1-point favorite over Georgia Tech, a slight nod.

"I thought Oklahoma State has the edge just because of James Anderson, the best player on the court," White said.

Three more underdogs to watch, White said, are Morgan State (+17½) against West Virginia, Oakland (+10½) against Pittsburgh and Wofford (+10) against Wisconsin.

And don't forget about Montana and its unlikely star.

Johnson was washing dishes and saving money to buy a car in 2005, when his future wife lobbied to get him a junior-college tryout. He already has made a great underdog story, and it could get better.

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LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

BY MATT YOUMANS

1. NEW MEXICO

RECORD: 28-3, 14-2 MWC

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: California, Texas A&M, Dayton

PLAYER TO WATCH: Dairese Gary. The junior guard runs the show for the Lobos with consistency and efficiency. He averaged 20.3 points in the past three games, and had 25 assists and five turnovers in the past six games.

FAST FACT: The Lobos have started the same five players -- MWC Player of the Year Darrington Hobson, Roman Martinez, A.J. Hardeman, Phillip McDonald and Gary -- in all 31 games.

COACHSPEAK: "I've always said, and I totally believe this, I think coaches get too much credit when things are going really well and they probably get too much heat when things aren't going well." -- Steve Alford

2. BRIGHAM YOUNG

RECORD: 28-4, 13-3

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Arizona State, Arizona, Texas-El Paso

PLAYER TO WATCH: Jimmer Fredette. A first-team All-MWC pick for the second straight year, the junior guard ranks in the league's top 10 in seven statistical categories, including second in scoring (19.7) and first in 3-point field-goal percentage (.494).

FAST FACT: The Cougars scored 70 points or more in 29 games, including 14 straight to finish the regular season.

COACHSPEAK: "There's no doubt, there's four teams in this league that deserve to be in the NCAA Tournament. The team that wins three games in three days is in. The rest of us are going to have to sit around and wait to be invited." -- Dave Rose

3. UNLV

RECORD: 23-7, 11-5

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Louisville, Arizona, UNR

PLAYER TO WATCH: Tre'Von Willis. The junior guard scored 27 and 32 points in this season's two losses to Utah, shooting 18-for-35 from the field and 20-for-25 on free throws.

FAST FACT: In conference games, the Rebels rank first in scoring defense (63.0), field-goal percentage defense (.403), field-goal percentage (.480) and assists per game (17.2).

COACHSPEAK: "The chemistry is great. From start to finish, we've consistently made progress. We had a little dip there with that three-game losing streak." -- Lon Kruger

4. SAN DIEGO STATE

RECORD: 22-8, 11-5

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Arizona, UC Santa Barbara

PLAYER TO WATCH: Kawhi Leonard. The 6-foot-6-inch forward was voted MWC Freshman of the Year. He averaged team highs of 14.4 points and 9.6 rebounds, and posted nine double-doubles in 16 league games.

FAST FACT: The Aztecs, entering the conference tournament as the No. 4 seed for the third straight season, have won 10 consecutive regular-season meetings with first-round opponent Colorado State.

COACHSPEAK: "We're not a young team. We've got a lot of new faces, but we've played a season with these new faces." -- Steve Fisher

5. COLORADO STATE

RECORD: 16-14, 7-9

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Colorado, Montana

PLAYER TO WATCH: Dorian Green. The freshman point guard leads the league by clocking 34.8 minutes per game. He averages 11.7 points, but was held scoreless in the Rams' 68-55 loss at San Diego State last week.

FAST FACT: The Rams are 0-8 against the MWC's top four teams this season, losing by an average of 19.3 points.

COACHSPEAK: "There's not a coach in the world who doesn't feel like he's got to win one more game. We're happy we drew San Diego State, and we're ready to go. San Diego State has as much athletic talent as anybody in the West." -- Tim Miles

6. UTAH

RECORD: 14-16, 7-9

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Utah State, Illinois

PLAYER TO WATCH: Carlton Brown. In two victories over UNLV, the junior guard shot 13-for-24 from the field and totaled 34 points. He came off the bench in both games.

FAST FACT: The Utes boast the winner of the past two Defensive Player of the Year awards. David Foster, a 7-foot-3-inch sophomore, followed in the footsteps of departed Luke Nevill. Foster set a Utah season record with 113 blocked shots, despite missing two full games and the second half of two others.

COACHSPEAK: "It's a great matchup [with UNLV], a Thursday night prime-time game and it should be a great

crowd. Everybody knows we beat them twice, so their teeth will be out." -- Jim Boylen

7. TEXAS CHRISTIAN

RECORD: 13-18, 5-11

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Southern Methodist, Texas State

PLAYER TO WATCH: Ronnie Moss. The sophomore point guard ranked seventh in the nation in assists per game (6.0). He had four double-digit assist performances, making him the only player in the conference with 10 or more assists in more than one game.

FAST FACT: TCU also finished 5-11 in the MWC last year to get the seventh seed in the tournament.

COACHSPEAK: "They came in and kicked our tail. It's going to be a huge test for our kids' character to see how we respond to what just happened. It was a bad way for us to go out on our floor." -- Jim Christan, on Saturday's 107-77 loss to BYU, the Horned Frogs' next opponent.

8. WYOMING

RECORD: 10-20, 3-13

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Northern Colorado, Loyola Marymount

PLAYER TO WATCH: Desmar Jackson. A third-team All-MWC selection, the freshman guard averaged 18.5 points in the last 11 regular-season games.

FAST FACT: Aïam Muojeke, voted the league's top freshman a year ago, suffered a season-ending knee injury Jan. 20. The Cowboys went 2-9 in the 11 games he missed.

COACHSPEAK: "We talk about the big picture. We only have one senior and one junior in the program, so it is a big-picture idea." -- Heath Schroyer

9. AIR FORCE

RECORD: 9-20, 1-15

BEST NONCONFERENCE WINS: Niagara, UC Davis

PLAYER TO WATCH: Evan Washington. The junior guard is the only Air Force player to start all 29 games. He scored a career-high 23 points in a 70-63 victory over Wyoming on Jan. 30, stopping the team's 22-game conference losing streak.

FAST FACT: The Falcons scored 56 points or fewer in 15 of 16 MWC games, and nine times finished with a score in the 40s.

COACHSPEAK: "We're a little disappointed with the fact that the season has turned out as it has, yet the guys have continued to work very hard and stay focused." -- Jeff Reynolds

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 MATT YOUMANS: While fun to root for, Cinderellas not always smart bets

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Today, 06:18 AM

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Staff

MATT YOUMANS: While fun to root for, Cinderellas not always smart bets

Mar. 22, 2010
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MATT YOUMANS: While fun to root for, Cinderellas not always smart bets

Kansas State, Kentucky reward bettors' faith with easy wins

Upsets are always a colorful theme early in the NCAA Tournament. The little guys become the biggest and best stories, and superstars such as Ohio State's Evan Turner get overshadowed.

That's the way it should be, because that's what makes the tournament so fascinating.

But there are times when bettors are with fine with boring games. Upsets bust brackets (did the Kansas loss knock you out of the office pool?) and blow up parlays, and the truth is a majority of bettors are parlaying favorites.

"People might talk about it and root for the Cinderella," said Jimmy Vaccaro, director of operations for Lucky's sports books. "But when they get to the window, it's Syracuse and West Virginia, and they still bet the best teams."

Syracuse and West Virginia covered Sunday, as did Duke and Ohio State. All four were favored in the range of six to seven points, and little point-spread drama was involved.

But the public was attracted to one underdog, and jumping on Cornell against Wisconsin was a wise move. It was a boring game, which in this case also was a good thing. The Big Red of the Ivy League schooled Bo Ryan and blew out the Badgers, 87-69.

Cornell was the rare underdog that took an early lead and did not let it slowly slip away. There was no reason to nervously suck on cigarettes while pacing around the sports book cussing to no one in particular.

"That was the only game where we actually had more money on the 'dog in the parlay action," Vaccaro said. "It looked like people just woke up at the same time and said this Cornell team isn't a 12 seed."

The Badgers, who were 4-point favorites, looked nothing like a 4 seed.

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There are good stories behind the Big Red. Its star, guard Ryan Wittman, is the son of a former NBA head coach, Wittman, like most of his teammates, could not get a major scholarship offer.

Those stories will be told frequently this week. Cornell is headed to the Sweet 16, where it will run into John Wall and Kentucky. So this is when dreams collide with reality. The Wildcats are 9½-point favorites. How much faith remains in the Big Red?

Four underdogs won outright in Sunday's second round, and while none of the results were major surprises, two of the games featured dramatic endings.

Korie Lucious drained a 3-pointer at the buzzer to lift Michigan State to an 85-83 victory over Maryland. The game opened pick'em and closed Terrapins minus-1.

The Spartans had squandered all of a 16-point second-half lead after Greivis Vasquez hit a driving jumper to put Maryland up one with six seconds left.

The finish was a flurry of emotions, the agony of defeat and the thrill of victory switching sides in an instant.

"It's just wonderful to watch," Vaccaro said. "How many games came down to the last minute, whether you win or lose your bet?"

The Purdue-Texas A&M game was another. The Boilermakers climbed out of an 11-point second-half hole and won 63-61 in overtime on Chris Kramer's hard-charging layup with four seconds to go.

The money was on the Aggies, who closed as 2-point favorites. It was not a boring game, and most bettors hated it.

"The A&M game would have been a disaster for us. We really needed Purdue," Vaccaro said. "That was our biggest parlay game of the day. We got a little bit lucky on that one."

The bettors did beat the books decisively on at least two games Saturday, when Kansas State beat Brigham Young by 12 and Kentucky crushed Wake Forest by 30.

"We couldn't get a bet on BYU if we gave away a coupon," Vaccaro said. "The Kentucky game was an absolute one-way attack.

"Our ticket count was good, just a little down from last year. The people are still betting, but they're simply betting a little bit less."

Vaccaro said Las Vegas books are "looking at a 60 to 70 percent decrease in volume" from the first two rounds to the Sweet 16.

The action slows now, but it's still far from boring.

Michigan State, which appears to have lost star guard Kalin Lucas to a likely Achilles' tendon tear, is tentatively a 4-point favorite over Northern Iowa and Ali Farokhmanesh. That matchup is intriguing.

The Cinderella teams -- Cornell, Northern Iowa and Butler -- will be fun to watch. But will you be betting on them?



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MATT YOUMANS: Smart team, talent add up to smart play

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MATT YOUMANS: Smart team, talent add up to smart play

Mar. 08, 2010
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MATT YOUMANS: Smart team, talent add up to smart play

If a formal test existed to measure basketball IQ, Gonzaga senior guard Matt Bouldin would have a shot to ace it. He's a cerebral player who sets the example for a well-coached, well-conceived team.

The Bulldogs are talented and smart. I always put an emphasis on intelligence when judging teams, and this is one that records high scores.

Bouldin is a slick passer with a nose for making the right moves and a knack for knocking down big shots. Add to the equation guard Steven Gray, freshman forward Elias Harris and 7-foot Robert Sacre, and the Zags are a potential monster in March.

A week from today, we'll start filling out NCAA Tournament brackets and forking over \$20 for the office pool. It's tough to make predictions without knowing the matchups, but Gonzaga will match up favorably against almost every team in the field.

"If I see a sleeper team that can win it all, it would be Gonzaga," said John Kelly, a sharp college basketball bettor who writes for EOG.com. "Gonzaga is usually the NCAA Tournament darling and falls, with so many disappointments in years' past. But I think this year could be different."

Kelly said the Zags "have a chance to outsmart some opponents," in the postseason, and they continue to outclass the rest of the West Coast Conference.

A friend texted Sunday to ask if I liked Loyola Marymount plus-12½ in the WCC Tournament semifinals at the Orleans Arena.

The reply: I hate to bet against Gonzaga.

If going bald, I wouldn't experiment with spray-on hair. If down to my last few dollars, I wouldn't bet them against the Zags.

Gonzaga (26-5) led by 16 points at halftime and got the win and cover by rolling over the Lions, 77-62.

The Bulldogs will be about 5½-point favorites over St. Mary's in tonight's championship game.

The Gaels were 4½-point favorites in their 69-55 victory over Portland. St. Mary's was blown out by Gonzaga in last year's title game.

"Everyone drools over the first four days of the NCAA Tournament," Kelly said. "Some of the best bets are in these minor tournament games."

Lost in the shuffle will be National Invitation Tournament, the College Basketball Invitational and the CollegeInsider.com tourney. Those games are not as big, but they are just as bettable.

As the conference tournaments unfold this week, great wagering opportunities will be all over the board. Most tournaments are on neutral courts -- the Mountain West at UNLV being an exception -- and upsets will be a common theme.

"The oddsmakers have to post the numbers on the fly, and a lot of times they lean on the power ratings," Kelly said. "Deep teams usually have a nice advantage."

With some teams playing three games in three days, fatigue will be a factor. The Big Ten tournament in Indianapolis will be an interesting case study.

Ohio State, for example, is a team with no bench. As good as Eyan Turner is, can he carry the Buckeyes for three straight days?

Purdue, running on fumes without star forward Robbie Hummel, will be a vulnerable favorite.

Illinois (18-13) is a desperate team on the NCAA bubble. But the Illini got whipped 72-57 on their home floor by Wisconsin, a 3-point favorite, on Sunday. The teams meet again Friday.

The Badgers are my sleeper pick to win the Big Ten tourney, which will see some low-scoring games as teams start to tire.

There has been a lot of Pac-10 bashing going on, for good reason, but too many talking heads are predicting just one NCAA bid for the conference. Look for the Pac-10 to get two teams in, with California and Arizona State the favorites, and both teams need strong tournament showings this week.

UCLA (13-17) faces Arizona on Thursday. The Bruins have lost four of their past five games, and coach Ben Howland has a mess on his hands.

"The underachieving teams get a second chance in the conference tournaments," Kelly said. "It's also the last chance to bet against these dead teams. UCLA is a dead team."

This week separates the corpses from the contenders. The smart money is on teams such as Gonzaga, which is alive and well once again.

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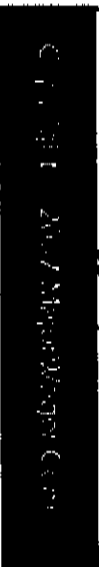
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MATT YOUMANS: UNR's bowl stumble rewards smart money

Dec. 25, 2009
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MATT YOUMANS: UNR's bowl stumble rewards smart money
HONOLULU

In need of an example of a disinterested favorite in a bowl game? Look at the team UNR coach Chris Ault brought to the Hawaii Bowl, and the embarrassing effort it produced.

Ault, a great coach for many years, said his team was motivated and had spirited practices before leaving Reno. But it turns out he was whipping a lame horse.

This was the equivalent of the favorite finishing last in a 20-horse race.

The Wolf Pack packed it in early in a 45-10 loss to Southern Methodist on Christmas Eve at Aloha Stadium. The score could have been much worse. It was 31-0 at halftime.

The Mustangs, coming back from college football irrelevance induced by the NCAA death penalty, were in their first bowl since 1984, and they wanted to be here. Their coach, June Jones, is beloved here, a consequence of his nine seasons as coach at Hawaii.

Kyle Padron, a freshman, passed for 460 yards and two touchdowns while operating Jones' run-and-shoot offense with precision. Padron completed 32 of 41 passes.

The underdogs are barking loud in the bowl season, and the bettors definitely sniffed out this one.

On Dec. 17 at the Las Vegas Hilton, UNR was a 151/2-point favorite with a money line of minus-600. The line closed at 11 with the money line at minus-400. The smart money was on SMU.

Ault not only brought a lackadaisical team to the Hawaii Bowl, he brought a short-handed one. Luke Lippincott was injured, and Vai Tava was suspended for academic reasons. Tava rushed for 1,345 yards this season and Lippincott for 1,034, and they combined for 19 touchdowns.

The Wolf Pack did not get a touchdown Thursday until Collin Kaepernick's 10-yard pass to Brandon Wimberly with

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1:04 to play. Kaepernick was held to 23 yards rushing and 177 yards passing, and he was not facing a quality defense.

Ault dismissed two defensive players before the bowl, but that was not a factor in the outcome. After the losses of Uppincott and Traua, and a season-ending 44-33 loss at Boise State, UNR was emotionally flat.

At the same time, the Mustangs (8-5) were hitting full stride. Jones' system is proven to be successful, and Padron seems to be a perfect quarterback for it.

The anticipated shootout never happened. The total of 72 was the highest of all the bowls. SMU did its part.

When a bowl favorite is fighting injuries and suspensions, and the 'dog is hungry, it's the perfect storm for an upset.

Bowl underdogs were 4-1 straight up and against the spread through Wednesday, and the Mustangs ran those records to 5-1.

The bowl season has been especially beneficial for the Mountain West Conference. Brigham Young, Utah and Wyoming posted wins as underdogs, with the Cougars and Utes taking down Pac-10 opponents.

BYU's 44-20 victory over Oregon State in the MAACO Bowl Las Vegas -- regarded worldwide as the granddaddy of all the pre-Christmas bowls -- was another example of a motivated underdog putting a whipping on a flat favorite.

The lone favorite to cash was Rutgers, a 21/2-point favorite in a 45-24 victory over Central Florida in the St. Petersburg Bowl.

Southern California might find itself in a trap Saturday in the Emerald Bowl, and the same could go for Clemson in the Music City Bowl, UCLA in the Eagle Bank Bowl and Oklahoma in the Sun Bowl.

The Wolf Pack finished the season 8-5, and Kaepernick is a fourth-year junior. So if he's back, UNR will be good again next season.

But a game such as this gives new UNLV coach Bobby Hauck more hope that the Rebels finally can hang with the Wolf Pack.

Kaepernick ran into a well-prepared SMU defense in the Hawaii Bowl. Ault ran into June Jones, who in no way resembles Mike Sanford.

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MATT YOUMANS: Beware of disinterested favorites in bowl season

Dec. 18, 2009
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MATT YOUMANS: Beware of disinterested favorites in bowl season

Anticipating a trip to Las Vegas excites most people. Oregon State football coach Mike Riley might be an exception.

Riley's life would be more intriguing now if he were preparing for the Rose Bowl. But the Beavers fell short of Pasadena, Calif., by losing to Oregon 37-33 on Dec. 3 and stumbling a few steps down the Pacific-10 Conference's bowl ladder.

Welcome to Sam Boyd Stadium for the MAACO Bowl Las Vegas, the granddaddy of all the pre-Christmas bowl games.

Brigham Young (10-2) is making its fifth consecutive bowl appearance in Las Vegas. Oregon State (8-4) is preparing for the second-place team from the Mountain West Conference. It's an attractive matchup of ranked teams, but is either team excited to be here playing under the Tuesday night lights?

If you're considering betting on any or all of the 34 bowls, the motivation question requires speculation.

"It's one of the larger determining factors in starting to find the right side of a game," Playbook.com handicapper Marc Lawrence said. "You don't want to be on a team that is disinterested or disappointed in the bowl game, especially the disinterested favorite."

Because it smelled the Rose Bowl but just missed out, "Oregon State probably would be the classic case," Lawrence said. "I like the BYU side of the game for that reason."

Lawrence added more reasons for backing the Cougars, who are 2-point underdogs at most sports books. For those who prefer the 'dog, the best line available is plus-3 at MGM Mirage books.

In his comprehensive "Bowl Stat Report," Lawrence crunches more numbers than a Goldman Sachs Group accountant. His calculations conclude BYU should be a 10-point winner.

The Cougars, led by 24-year-old quarterback Max Hall, are 2-2 in their past four Las Vegas bowl trips. Hall recently admitted BYU had little interest in playing last year's game, a 31-21 loss to Arizona.

The Beavers are 5-0 straight up and 4-1 against the spread in their past five bowls under Riley. Oregon State was a 1-point favorite in its boring 3-0 victory over Pittsburgh in last year's Sun Bowl.

There is no questioning the Beavers' talent -- quarterback Sean Canfield, running back Jacquizz Rodgers and flanker James Rodgers -- but we don't know if Riley can motivate his team for this bowl.

The postseason kicks off Saturday with the New Mexico Bowl, where Fresno State is an 11-point favorite over Wyoming. Lawrence sees the Cowboys as live underdogs, and they fit that profile with first-year coach Dave Christensen and freshman quarterback Austyn Carta-Samuels among the few who will be excited to be in Albuquerque.

"I think Fresno State is a disappointed favorite, a team with bigger and better visions," Lawrence said.

It's interesting to note, Lawrence said, that the favorite was a straight-up loser in the Bulldogs' past eight bowls.

Lawrence and Northeast Sports handicapper Phil Steele each produce newsletters with thorough scouting reports and projections on the bowls. Steele also sides with Wyoming on Saturday, and he has a four-star play on BYU over Oregon State.

Steele put a two-star rating on Southern Mississippi as a 31/2-point favorite over Middle Tennessee in the New Orleans Bowl on Sunday.

This time of year reminds me of the great bowling movie "Kingpin," in which Roy Munson (Woody Harrelson) duels with Ernie McCracken (Bill Murray) in the finals of a \$1 million tournament in Reno. McCracken rolled three consecutive strikes to beat Munson in the finals.

I'm entered in several bowl-game office pools, none worth anywhere close to \$1 million.

Here are my top three plays: Miami (-3) over Wisconsin in the Champs Sports Bowl, Stanford (+8) over Oklahoma in the Sun Bowl and Oregon (-31/2) over Ohio State in the Rose Bowl.

It's time to go bowling, so put on your clown shoes and your handicapping hat, and good luck rolling strikes.

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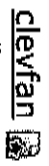
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MATT YOUMANS: Saints good, lucky enough for 16-0 regular season

A week ago, Drew Brees was a surgeon, precisely cutting up one of the NFL's most respected defenses. On Sunday, the New Orleans Saints quarterback was a magician, escaping in a matter of seconds from a straitjacket while being attacked by a swarm of bees.

Brees gets only partial credit for the Saints' improbable 33-30 overtime victory over the Washington Redskins. He got a lot of help, some of it in the form of charity from the Redskins.

But the point is, it's now clear that Brees and the Saints are good enough and lucky enough to go 16-0 in the regular season.

Six days after demoralizing the New England Patriots, the Saints faced a situation of near-certain defeat. It was bound to happen sometime, and they somehow survived it.

"Could you imagine the Super Bowl," MGM Mirage sports book director Jay Rood said, "if the Colts and Saints both get there undefeated?"

Imagine the historic significance of that game. Imagine the wagering intrigue, and all the proposition bets that are possible.

It's OK to fantasize occasionally. Some guys like to visit strip clubs to do it. A dancer often will give you her number, but she rarely goes home with you.

In this case, a Super Bowl featuring Brees, Peyton Manning and two unbeaten teams is probably a tease, too. But the odds are getting a little more realistic.

The chances also are increasing that both 12-0 teams will be so far ahead of the pack that they will rest key starters in Week 17 and lose a game. At the least, Indianapolis almost is sure to own home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs, and New Orleans is close to securing it in the NFC.

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1 (permalink)

Join Date: Jul 2002
Posts: 33,441

The games involving the Colts and Saints attracted an abundance of betting action as Las Vegas sports books recorded a winning Week 13, one of the best Sundays of the season for the books.

The Colts were bet from 7- to 6-point home favorites. In a 27-17 victory over the Tennessee Titans. Most bettors sided with the Titans in a game that turned into a major decision for the books.

"We went down to 6 1/2 and 6, and they were still taking the points with the Titans," Rood said.

Tennessee took its best shot and came up short. Twice in the second half, the Titans went for it on fourth down deep in Colts territory -- once from the 2-yard line -- and failed both times.

The Saints were 8 1/2-point road favorites over the Redskins, who led 30-23 when Shaun Suisham shanked a 23-yard field-goal attempt with 1:52 remaining. Brees, who passed for 419 yards, hit Robert Meachem for a 53-yard touchdown 33 seconds later.

"It was all sharp money on the Redskins and all public money on the Saints," Rood said. "I told the guys here, 'Hey, (terrible) teams find a way to lose in the fourth quarter.'"

But some bad teams -- Cleveland, Detroit and St. Louis -- also found ways to cover the spread.

The Browns, 13 1/2-point home underdogs, helped the books and hurt the betting public by covering in a 30-23 loss to San Diego.

"We took just a ton of money on the Chargers," said Rood, who was pleased when the Chargers took a 30-14 lead with four minutes left and quickly quit playing.

The Lions scored with 1:36 left to get a back-door cover at Cincinnati, and the Patriots blew a 14-0 lead in a 22-21 loss at Miami, prompting Wynn Las Vegas sports book director John Avello to say, "We had two real big decisions, and we got those two."

Jacksonville and Seattle closed as slight home underdogs, and each won outright, so the dogs went 10-4 against the spread Sunday. The real stunner was Oakland's 27-24 victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers, who closed as 15-point home favorites. The Raiders paid off at plus-700 to win straight up, but who would make that crazy wager?

"We actually had people who were betting the Raiders on the money line," said Jay Komegay, Las Vegas Hilton sports book director.

Not as surprising was Kurt Warner leading the Arizona Cardinals, 31 1/2-point home underdogs, to a 30-17 upset of Minnesota.

The Vikings dropped to 10-2, two games behind the Saints in the NFC. It's more likely now that New Orleans and Indianapolis will reach the Super Bowl, but it's still a fantasy that both will get there undefeated.


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10-26-2007, 06:34 AM

1 (permalink)

[clevfan](#)

Join Date: Jul 2002
Posts: 33,383

Staff

[NFL: League stance softened with London gambling](#)

Oct. 26, 2007
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League stance softened with London gambling

By MATT YOUMANS
REVIEW-JOURNAL

In a short period of time, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has earned a reputation as a no-nonsense disciplinarian. Apparently, though, he can accept his league being associated with legal gambling.

The only catch is the action must happen in London and not Las Vegas.

For the first time, the NFL is staging a regular-season game overseas as the Miami Dolphins and New York Giants meet Sunday at Wembley Stadium. Every sports book in London but one will be open for wagering on the game.

Betfred, a major British bookmaker, is closing its betting windows at Wembley Stadium at the NFL's insistence.

"We requested and were granted a restriction on gambling at the stadium," NFL spokesman Greg Aiello said.

"There will be no on-site betting facility. Those will not be operating on the day of the game."

But sports books surround the stadium, and all of them will be taking action on the game. The Giants are favored by 9 1/2 points, and many books have posted proposition wagers.

When the NBA brought its All-Star game to Las Vegas in February, Nevada agreed to take the game off the betting board.

Aiello said the NFL did not seek a similar arrangement in England.

"We did not think that was necessary or appropriate," Aiello said. "Those are legal operations."

That would be a reasonable explanation, if not for the NFL's hard-line stance against Las Vegas because of its legal sports books. Goodell even talked of a potential Super Bowl in London.

"I just don't understand the hypocrisy. It's beyond me," Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman said.

Jeff Sherman, an oddsmaker at the Las Vegas Hilton sports book, has visited London about five times and said books are more prevalent there and restrictions are not as tight as in Nevada.

"Over there, you can open up a betting shop like a corner bar," Sherman said. "The NFL is going right into a hotbed of sports books and hoping nobody mentions anything about it."

If the NFL can take a game to London, Sherman said, "There is no reason they should take such a negative approach to what we do here."

In 2003, the league rejected Super Bowl commercials that featured scenes from Las Vegas. Goodman threatened litigation, and his response attracted national media attention.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority was told the commercial was not in the league's best interest, though Goodman said the ad had no gambling theme.

"We were going to pay a small fortune for it, and they just turned us down flat," Goodman said. "I blasted them, and instead of paying about \$2.5 million for that ad, we got \$20 million in free publicity."

"I can't get (the NFL) to show us any kindness. It doesn't make any sense, and I say that sadly, because I think an NFL franchise in Las Vegas would be the greatest thing since sliced bread."

10-26-2007, 01:19 PM

2 (permalink)

Join Date: Jul 2002
Posts: 33,383

cleveland

Staff

E

Today: October 26, 2007

Jeff Harney points out the NFL's hypocrisy in staging a game in betting-crazed England while taking a hard line on Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS SUN

The latest line on Sunday's game between the Giants and the Dolphins has New York favored by 9 1/2 points, according to a major British bookmaking outfit called Betfred.

English gamblers routinely make bets on American football along with snooker tournaments and the latest misadventures of the royal family, so there's nothing inherently unusual about that.

There's nothing unusual, that is, until you consider Betfred has the sports bookmaking concession at London's Wembley Stadium - the site of the Giants-Dolphins game, the first regular-season NFL game outside North America.

That's right. In a betting-mad country filled with legal bookie shops, the capital city's most venerated sports stadium has its own official bookmaker. Under a contract good through 2010, Betfred operates dozens of betting windows at Wembley.

In acquiescence to the NFL, the windows at the stadium will be closed for Sunday's game.

Yet copious gambling on the Giants and Dolphins will surely be taking place at the hundreds of other bookie shops, run by Betfred and other companies, throughout London.

An NFL game in a U.S. city with legal sports betting (read: Las Vegas) would be virtually unthinkable.

When the NBA played its All-Star Game here, it was under the condition - which Nevada gaming interests ridiculously agreed to - that no wagering would take place on the game or related activities.

NFL officials, though, are so virulently anti-gambling - or at least anti-Vegas - that the prospect of holding a game here has not reached even the level of serious discussion.

Remember, this is the league that cracked down on Las Vegas casinos for showing games on big screens at private parties for high-rolling gamblers. This is the league that prohibits promos for a dumb TV dramatic comedy called "Las Vegas" from airing during football telecasts.

It has become a running joke in betting circles that it is impossible to bet on the Super Bowl in Las Vegas - although you can wager as much as you want on the "annual professional football championship contest," or whatever goofy, non trademarked euphemism is en vogue among casinos these days.

But London gets off easy. OK, no gambling on the game ... inside the stadium. Big deal.

The NFL's schizophrenic stance on gambling has not gone unnoticed by sports -betting insiders in Las Vegas.

"This is another example of the monumental hypocrisy of the NFL when it comes to betting and Las Vegas," said UNLV professor Bill Thompson, who studies gaming issues. "Sports betting is so widespread throughout Britain, and yet the NFL continues to pick on Vegas."

Thompson recently spent a couple of weeks touring Ireland and was struck by the presence of a sports bookmaking shop in "every little town" of a few thousand souls.

The NFL is trying to expand its appeal abroad, where it will encounter a more enlightened approach toward sports betting than the prevailing attitude in the United States, best described as an unholy alliance of puritanism and paranoia.

"At some point, the NFL is just going to have to bite the bullet and deal with it," Thompson said.

The phenomenon of a regular-season NFL game 's being held in a city with rampant legal sports betting has received surprisingly little notice in the media, which is usually saturated with all things NFL.

If it were taking place in Las Vegas, the nation's self-described, self-promoting and self-important sports "experts" and pundits would be debating the issue ad infinitum.

"I think the NFL is hoping it goes unnoticed," said oddsmaker Jeff Sherman, assistant manager of the Las Vegas Hilton sports book.

An aficionado of European soccer, Sherman has spent time in London and is familiar with the city's bet-shop-on-every-corner layout.

"Even if betting is disallowed at the stadium, it will be going on right down the street," Sherman said. "I guarantee all the bookies in London will be taking plenty of action on this game. The NFL takes such a hard stand against Las Vegas, but they don't do anything to try to stop them."

Bookies in the United Kingdom are known for taking offbeat bets on topics ranging from U.S. politics (Hillary looks unstoppable) to which Catholic saint will be decanonized (Italy's Padre Pio accused of faking his stigmata).

Dozens of betting propositions - or "props" - on Sunday's game at Wembley are expected to be offered in London, which drew Sherman's attention. The Hilton annually issues the most extensive selection of Super Bowl props in Las Vegas.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell recently floated the idea of one day playing the Super Bowl abroad. Can you picture a Super Bowl in Las Vegas and the ensuing betting frenzy?

"Give us a shot," Sherman said. "We could do a better job on props than anybody."

It's a far-fetched notion. But whether they like to acknowledge it or not, NFL officials took a small step in the right direction when they gave the OK to a regular-season game in a sports -betting city.

"If the NFL tried to say that betting on the NFL would have to stop before they played in London," UNLV's Thompson said, "well, they just wouldn't have been able to go to London. The NFL isn't going to stop the betting."

10-26-2007, 01:22 PM

3 (permalink)

Mr Falcone

Three Star General

John Date: Feb 2001
Location: City of Angels
Posts: 10,280



Quote:

Betfred, a major British bookmaker, is closing its betting windows at Wembley Stadium at the NFL's insistence.

Ass kissers

The house doesn't beat the player. It just gives him the opportunity to beat himself. ~Nick Dandalos

5/18/10

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MATT YOUMANS: Contenders, pretenders becoming more evident User Name

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09-28-2009, 07:13 AM

#1 (permalink)

clevfan

Join Date: Jul 2002
Posts: 33,441

Staff

MATT YOUMANS: Contenders, pretenders becoming more evident

Sep. 28, 2009

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MATT YOUMANS: Contenders, pretenders becoming more evident

For anyone who suspected the New York Jets would be just another patsy this season, with rookie quarterback Mark Sanchez and first-year coach Rex Ryan imitating Gilligan and the Skipper, it's time to admit the mistake.

There are plenty of clumsy NFL teams producing comic misadventures. The Jets are not one of them, and neither are the New Orleans Saints.

"The Jets are a pretty popular team," MGM Mirage sports book director Jay Rood said. "New Orleans looks like the best team in the league right now."

The league's best and worst are becoming more clearly defined, and, for the first time in a long time, the Detroit Lions are not included with the laughingstocks.

The joke is now on Cleveland, Kansas City, St. Louis and Tampa Bay. Those shipwrecked teams are a combined 0-12, and they were outscored 128-34 in four lopsided losses Sunday.

Veteran handicappers who succeed with the NFL normally shy away from road favorites laying a touchdown or more, and double-digit favorites are all but off limits.

But the public smelled some skunks Sunday, and the bettors knew exactly what teams to go against -- the Browns, Chiefs, Rams and Buccaneers.

"There are some really terrible teams out there," Vegas Insider handicapper Barry Holthaus said. "Some of these teams are so far behind. I think you have to re-examine your philosophy about road favorites, as far as laying significant points on the road, and double-digit favorites."

"The question is, how much do the oddsmakers adjust for Cleveland and these bad teams?"

The Browns are a lost cause, and most bettors had that figured out before Baltimore's 34-3 victory over Cleveland on Sunday. As coach Eric Mangini, formerly known as a genius, benched Brady Quinn and tried Derek Anderson at

quarterback, all three were left looking like stooges. The Ravens covered as 13 1/2-point favorites, and it's not supposed to be that easy.

The New York Giants, 6 1/2-point road favorites, skunked the Buccaneers, 24-0. The Green Bay Packers, also 6 1/2-point road favorites, pounded the Rams, 36-17. The Philadelphia Eagles, 7 1/2-point home favorites, coasted past the Chiefs, 34-14.

Chicago, Denver, New England, New Orleans, San Diego and the Jets also covered to make favorites 10-4 going into the night game, in which Arizona was a 3-point favorite over Indianapolis.

With so many favorites cashing in the morning games, Rood said, "The parlays kicked in and made the late games ugly."

The books needed the Colts to survive what was turning into a losing day. Of course, Peyton Manning did it again, passing for four touchdowns as the Colts hammered the Cardinals, 31-10.

The NFL can serve up a lot of agitation with your betting action. I was on the Cardinals, foolishly, and it capped off one of those days that makes you want to smash your new Erik Estrada sunglasses.

I also bet against Chicago and Cincinnati. The Bears, 2 1/2-point favorites at Seattle, won 25-19 on Jay Cutler's 36-yard touchdown pass to Devin Hester with 1:52 remaining.

The Steelers, favored by 3 1/2 points at Cincinnati, took a 20-9 lead into the fourth quarter and lost 23-20 on Carson Palmer's 4-yard touchdown pass with 14 seconds to go.

Only Brett Favre was able to top that comeback.

The Lions, 6-point home underdogs, stopped their 19-game losing streak by beating Washington, 19-14. Detroit was plus-220 on the money line to win outright -- a bet that rarely pays off.

The Oakland Raiders are every bit as bad as predicted. Oakland opened a small favorite over Denver, but bettors rode the Broncos, who closed as 2 1/2-point favorites and won, 23-3.

"At some point, if you keep clicking off wins, you're for real," Rood said of the unbeaten Broncos.

The Jets, who beat Tennessee, and Saints, who ran over Buffalo, are also 3-0 straight up and against the spread. The Jets visit New Orleans in Week 4, and the Saints opened as 6-point favorites. It's time to count both teams as serious contenders.

The Browns, Chiefs, Rams and Buccaneers, on the other hand, are 0-3 and six feet under.

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 MATT YOUMANS: Belichick might've been right

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Join Date: Jul 2002
Posts: 33,441

clevfan

Staff

MATT YOUMANS: Belichick might've been right

Nov. 16, 2009
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MATT YOUMANS: Belichick might've been right

Always propped up and praised for his higher intelligence, New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick found himself in an odd position Sunday -- being fitted for a dunce cap by the talking heads of the national media. But it's not as simple as that, so this being the NFL, the play call in question is now under further review.

Don't pile on Belichick and jump in on the second-guessing party until you hear the logic of Steve Fezlik, a professional gambler and advantage player who knows a lot about playing the percentages.

"It was a brilliant call. It's not even debatable. It's not even close," Fezlik said. "The guy is a genius."

But Belichick's arrogance and intelligence is being derided from coast to coast, so the debate is unavoidable.

In the most stunning ending to a game yet this season, the Patriots squandered a 17-point fourth-quarter lead and collapsed in a 35-34 loss to the Indianapolis Colts.

Belichick took a gamble -- a highly controversial one to some -- by deciding to go for a potential clinching first down on fourth-and-2 at the Patriots' own 28-yard line with 2:08 left.

The end result was Belichick's risk blew up in his face, as Tom Brady's completion to Kevin Faulk was ruled just short of the first-down marker. Belichick was tagged as the goat by NBC analysts Cris Collinsworth, Rodney Harrison and Al Michaels, and almost everyone else who weighed in to rip the NFL's most successful coach.

It took only four plays for the Colts to score the tying touchdown. Peyton Manning expertly milked the clock before connecting with Reggie Wayne, who snagged a 1-yard pass with 13 seconds left. The point-after kick drove the nail in the Patriots' coffin.

So here's the big question: Was Belichick wrong not to punt and force Manning to drive about 75 yards with less than two minutes to go?

Harrison, who played for Belichick in New England, sternly said, "This is the worst coaching decision I've ever seen

Belichick make."

Collinsworth said Harrison's opinion was "dead on the money," and Michaels said the call will "live in infamy."

Belichick explained he was trying to win the game on one play, and avoid leaving his defense at Manning's mercy. The safe call would have been to punt and squelch the chance of rampant second-guessing.

"Belichick was absolutely correct to go for it there," Fezzik said. "If the Patriots punt, they lose anyway."

The only scenario in which Manning could not have won the game is the one where the Patriots get the first down and run out the clock. That's the option Belichick chose with little hesitation.

As Fezzik said, everyone who bet the Colts to win straight up on the money line was hoping the Patriots would punt and put the game in Manning's hands.

"The second the Patriots go for it, the Colts become a bigger underdog" in the live in-game betting market, Fezzik said.

The odds speak loudly in this case, and Belichick played the percentages the right way. The result just went wrong.

If the Patriots had picked up the first down, Belichick would have been hailed as a gutsy, unconventional genius. Instead, the game will be remembered by most for Belichick's blunder and Manning's miracle.

Belichick's lone regret is not having a timeout left so he could have challenged the spot on Faulk's reception. If you bet New England plus-3 as I did, you won your wager regardless, and all the debating is strictly for entertainment. It was a phenomenal game with a fascinating ending.

The Patriots continued a day of dominance for the underdogs, who went 9-3-1 against the spread. Carolina, Cincinnati, Green Bay, Jacksonville, Kansas City and Washington won outright.

Arizona, San Diego and Tennessee were the only favorites to cover. Miami and New Orleans won but failed to cover as double-digit favorites. The bottom line is NFL underdogs are back with a vengeance, and Las Vegas sports books are again welcoming the business.

"It should have been a very good day for most books," said Jimmy Vaccaro, director of operations for Lucky's sports books.

The Patriots-Colts showdown drew a healthy handle, as anticipated, and the game exceeded the hype.

"It was pretty good two-way action," Vaccaro said. "You truly love to have these types of games. You can talk to 10 people, and five can give you reasons for taking the Colts and five can give you reasons for taking the Patriots."

Fezzik gave you reasons for supporting Belichick's controversial decision, whether you liked it or not.

11-16-2009, 05:07 PM

#2 (permalink)

niltex

Join Date: Dec 2001
Posts: 871

Sergeant

the key part of the analysis is determining what new england's chances were to stop the colts from marching 70 yards or so for the score. the math is actually quite simple.

1st is the % new england makes a first (assume they win the game if they do)

2nd the chances of the colts driving 70 yards to score (also assume they win the game if they do)

3rd the chances of the colts scoring from 30 yards (again assume they win if they do)

let's make the first 50% (i think that's low, but others may think that is high), but it is only 2 yards, new england has been strong offensively, and it is my thread.

let's make the second 50% (i think that is too low and obviously belichick thought so too otherwise he would punt) let's make the third 90%

if new england punts they win 50% of the time with these assumptions. i believe this # is too high as the pats defense looked overmatched in the 4th quarter and was very tired.

if new england goes for it they win 50% by make the first down and another 5% by holding the colts from the 30. math .5 X (1-.90) = 5% THESE 2 SCENARIOS, WHICH I BELIEVE I HAVE UNDERSTATED, GIVE THE PATS A 55% CHANCE OF WINNING VS A 50% BY PUNTING. THE FACT THAT THE INTERACTIVE LIVE BETTING MARKETS MOVED IN THE PATRIOTS FAVOUR IS ADDITIONAL SUPPORT THAT MY ASSUMPTIONS ARE REASONABLE AND BB MADE THE CORRECT DECISION. that being said, it was an unconventional, gutsy call that no coach without tremendous job security would even consider.

11-16-2009, 05:13 PM

3 (permlink)

stevo Moderator

Join Date: Jul 2002 Posts: 51,701

that being said, it was an unconventional, gutsy call that no coach without tremendous job security would even consider.

Yes and thats why we see so many coaches not take risks they will get pounded for in press if they lose. Hell even Belichick got pounded by some and these are just guys behind a computer with no real coaching experience.

JMO

We're not tough we're just crazy

Terry Noonan in State of Grace

11-16-2009, 05:38 PM

4 (permlink)

Dell Dude Four Star General

Join Date: Apr 2002 Posts: 19,535

I just wrote about this Saturday. Correct call.

Quote:

Originally Posted by Dell Dude
Here is a similar situation. No coach has ever done it. I would. Last minute touch puts you up 7. I would go for dagger too. Ends game practically. Miss it, other team gets guaranteed ty if they touch instead of having to make too points. I think worth the risk definitely. But if you miss and other team wins in overtime, basically out of a job Monday unless you are established coach. Also, I would go for it fourth and short anyplace on the field if my team was up 8 or less and frist down ends game. That's me, though. I'm a gambler.

Have too chances to win. Make frist down or stop Colts. Pats had opportunity to win game. Had too opportunities. Failed twice. Correct call. Much rather lose being aggressive. Losing by punting is much worse. Then you second guess.



Indio - 'A chimpanzee would beat me in a Heads Up freezeout 3 times out of 10.'
Dell Dude's 2010 payout total - \$1659.00



11-16-2009, 06:14 PM

5 (permalink)

Gambet

Join Date: Jul 2006
Posts: 137

Corporal

"Belichick was absolutely correct to go for it there," Fezzik said. "If the Patriots punt, they lose anyway."

The only scenario in which Manning could not have won the game is the one where the Patriots get the first down and run out the clock. That's the option Belichick chose with little hesitation.

Another idiot talking out of his ass. According to Fezzik, if they punt the ball, they lose anyway. Really. HOW???? He states this like the only outcome was a touchdown for Indianapolis no matter where they got the ball. I've seen enough punts to know that the odds are more likely to have Indy inside their own 20. Why? Because, more likely than not, Indy would have committed a penalty on the punt return. Everyone of us who watches the NFL KNOWS that there are a lot of penalties called on punt returns. So, the odds now increase that a punt is the best option. How about the probability of the punt returner fumbling the punt or the ball accidentally hits an Indy player and New England recovers. Yep, see how the odds are ever growing that a punt was the best option. The only reason I am showing all these other possibilities is to stress that the odds can go the other way to show that a punt is a better option.

This guy Fezzik shoves his foot even farther up his mouth. Let me see, according to Fezzik, the only scenario in which Manning could not have won the game is for Belichick to get a first down and then run out the clock. BULLLLLLL-CRAPPpppppp!!!!

Unfortunately for this idiot there are LOTS AND LOTS OF SCENARIOS where Belichick punts the ball and Manning does not direct his team to a LONG DRIVE, game winning, touchdown in the last two-minutes. Did this idiot, Fezzik, ever hear of incomplete passes, interceptions, fumbles, penalties, etc?

The reality is that Belichick believes all the bull-crap written about him being a genius. Professing himself to be wise he has shown himself to be a fool.

Bad call on Belichick's part (in my educated opinion, that is.)



11-16-2009, 08:07 PM

6 (permalink)

stevo

Join Date: Jul 2002
Posts: 51,701

Moderator

Can't use whole league stats in all cases. This is Peyton manning to score from 30 on the miss FD or punt and make him go about 70 with 2 min left.

Can't forsee what would of happened but I sure don't put Peyton at same odds to score from 30 as the rest of league.

Math doesnt cut it all the time unless everything remains the same and is consistent. Peyton in a class above so you try to make it as hard on him as possible IMO.

All hindsight but I punt. It's fuckin Peyton manning. Much more of a chance to make a mistake or bad throw having to go 70 than go 30. Sure he scored quick on drive before but Pats were way ahead. Would of been different defensive scheme on last drive than previous.

And Peyton also threw some bad passes earlier. Had an INT with 7 min left. Colts punted more that night than all year probably.....LOL

All this statistical math is useless IMO unless all teams and players are the same. They are not. Has to be looked at by a game by game situation.

We're not tough we're just crazy

Terry Noonan in State of Grace

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EXHIBIT 14

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LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL reviewjournal.com

March 18, 2010

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March to book begins

Matt Youmans

By MATT YOUMANS

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Even if the sun is bright and the weather is warm today, don't expect to see many guys at the pool checking out girls in bikinis. There's a time for that, and it's not the middle of March.

The only place to be is in dark, smoky sports books watching basketball. Get there early, sweat out the games, and stay late. In terms of betting events, nothing tops the NCAA Tournament.

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FRIDAY

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NCAA TOURNAMENT FANTASY CHALLENGE

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Contact reporter Matt Youmans at myoumans@reviewjournal.com or 702-3872907.

EXHIBIT 15

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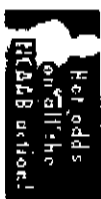
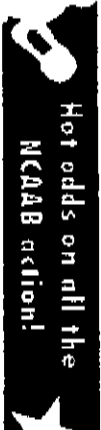
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Mar. 18, 2010
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NCAA TOURNAMENT FANTASY CHALLENGE: March to book begins

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By **MATT YOUMANS**
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