

Weekly Picks

Each Friday I will be e-mailing out my selections, then posting them and the rationale behind them on this website. (If there are ever Thursday night selections, they will go out Wednesday.) You will find that there is a heavier emphasis on over/under and Money Line wagers compared to the traditional against-the-spread selections.

Finally, while I was holidaying in Las Vegas last month I made a number of pre-season wagers at various sports books. Last year, my pre-season wagers earned a 50% return and I'm hoping (fingers crossed!) to do even better this year.

Here are those selections and the underlying rationale:

- 33.3% of portfolio: Carolina Panthers win 7.5 games or fewer, +120
- 16.7% of portfolio: Atlanta Falcons +140 to make playoffs
- 16.7% of portfolio: Seattle Seahawks +150 to make playoffs
- 8.3% of portfolio: Seattle Seahawks +300 to win NFC West
- 8.3% of portfolio: Pittsburgh Steelers +200 to win AFC North
- 8.3% of portfolio: Houston Texans +350 to win AFC South
- 8.3% of portfolio: Atlanta Falcons 40:1 to win Super Bowl

When I look at the NFC South, I feel very strongly that the New Orleans Saints and Atlanta Falcons are the class of the division and will finish 1 & 2. If this is the case, it is something close to a probabilistic certainty that neither the 3rd nor 4th place teams will achieve 8 wins or more. I would not have made this wager at Even Money, but at +120 it represented the best value I could find on the Number of Wins board.

And if my thesis is correct and Atlanta do finish first or second, then it's more likely rather than less likely that they win they make the playoffs. And you'll

see that I made a sort of “paired trade” with Seattle at +150 as well. If either team makes the playoffs, then I’m up on these combined wagers.

When I look at the NFC West, I agree that the Los Angeles Rams should be favoured... but only slightly. +300 gives the Seattle Seahawks a 25% chance to win the Division and given that I think they have both the best coach and best QB in the division, this strikes me as showing them little or no respect. I don’t see Arizona challenging for the division and even though there is the potential for great upside out of the 49ers, there are too many questions marks for me to predict more than 8 victories – which simply doesn’t get it done when it comes to winning a division in the NFL.

I use similar logic for my Pittsburgh and Houston wagers. Start with the AFC North. If your life is on the line, what QB do you want to start on your behalf: Dalton, Jackson, Mayfield or Rothlisberger? I’m going with Big Ben. Mike Tomlin has led the Steelers to two Super Bowls and without the distractions of Leveon Bell and Antonio Brown, I sense a new start for the Steelers. They have more than a 33% chance to win the Division, at least as I see it.

The Houston Texans under Bill O’Brien have consistently been an above-average team and I love their QB and defensive unit. It should be neck-and-neck between them and the Colts and +350 was too good to pass up.

Then, finally, a long-shot Super Bowl selection. Two and a half short years ago, the Falcons were a conservative play call or two from winning Super Bowl LI. Had they done so, I believe that instead of 40:1, the line would be more like 20:1. The offense is still loaded and the D is starting the year healthy. This season, my NFL account will be held through www.bet365.com and the line there currently shows 33:1 which still strikes me as good value... in case you’re predisposed to take a flyer.

Starting Balance: \$10,000

Final Result: \$15,050 +50.5%

Week 1

STARTING BALANCE: \$1,000

Wager 1% of portfolio: Derek Carr 66:1 to lead NFL in passing

Wager 11% of portfolio to win 10%: Pittsburgh Steelers/New England Patriots UNDER 51.5 points

Wager 3.15% of portfolio to win 3%: Oakland Raiders -1 versus Oakland Raiders

Wager 5.5% of portfolio to win 5%: Pittsburgh Steelers +6 versus New England Patriots

Let me take each of these selections one by one:

Last year, without any top-tier wide receivers, Derek Carr, finished 12th in yards passing in the NFL, and at 4,049 yards, was less than 1,100 yards behind leader Ben Roethlisberger. Now you're taking Antonio Brown away from Ben and giving him to Carr. That's simplistic: No question – but it struck me that fair odds would be in the 30:1 range... this is a long-shot, but one I feel very good about and even better about since I made it. Andrew Luck, seemingly a clear threat to throw for 5,000 yards, is no longer a factor.

The UNDER on Pittsburgh and New England is based on quantitative analysis, with an overlay of qualitative analysis factored in, making this a High Conviction wager. Last year, almost 69% of the games saw 51 points or fewer. 12/16 Patriot games saw 51 points or less: 11/16 Steeler games saw 51 points or less. And when the two teams played last year, the score was 17 – 10. That's the quantitative part.

Here's the qualitative part. New England goes into the season without Rob Gronkowski and that's a huge, huge loss. Gronk averaged – AVERAGED – 15.1 yards per catch which is unheard of at the tight end position. (By way of contrast, Julian Edelman has averaged 10.8 in his stellar career.) And I just don't think that the replacements, including Josh Gordon, are legitimate deep threats. New England will still move the ball, but it won't be in the chunks of previous years. On the other side of the ball, Pittsburgh is without Antonio Brown and my guess is that New England will do against Pittsburgh what they do with every team, and that's take away Pittsburgh's best weapon. I expect

Ju-Ju Smith-Schuster to be held in check which suggests a tight, low-scoring game... which is a nice segue into why I like Pittsburgh +6 very much.

New England has played in four of the past five Super Bowls. In February 2015, the Pats pulled a rabbit out of their hat with a goal-line interception. The next year, they started the season with a 7 point victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers. Two years later, it was another miraculous victory over the Falcons in February 2017, then they opened up their season with a 15 point loss at home against Kansas City. February 2018 saw a loss to Philadelphia and last year in Week One, the Pats won by 7 over Houston. Quite understandably, after a long, long previous season, New England just doesn't come out of the blocks too quickly. And factor in a Pittsburgh team that just keeps games close (9 – 6 – 1 last year with their six losses by, respectively: 5, 12, 7, 3, 3, 3) and this tells me that the game is very much in doubt and it will probably be decided by one score at most.

The final wager, taking Oakland over Denver, is a riskier wager: No question about that which is why I'm only suggesting a 3% wager. But here's my logic on taking Oakland. The team finished relatively strong last year which suggests to me, at least, that Jon Gruden is getting a handle on his team. I think that Oakland has the better QB, the better coach, and it's a home game.

Week 2

Beginning Balance: \$1,065 – up 6.5% YTD

Wager 5.5% of portfolio to win 5%: Seattle +4 versus Pittsburgh Steelers

Wager 5% of portfolio to win 6.25%: New Orleans +125 versus Los Angeles Rams.

Ending Balance: \$1,065 – up 6.5% YTD

Let me take each of these selections one by one: A great deal of attention is paid to Home Field Advantage – but something that no-one seems to talk about or note is “persistence”. What I mean by persistence is the following: Is there a correlation between success/failure in the previous week and success/failure the next game? And my research suggests that there is. Teams who won the previous week or lost the previous week are about 55% more likely to repeat (that is win again or lose again) the following week. Seattle won at home against Cincinnati in Week One and Pittsburgh lost in Week One against New England. This week, there are nine games which pit a Week One winner against a Week One loser:

- San Francisco (winner) at Cincinnati (loser)
- Los Angeles Chargers (winner) at Detroit (loser)
- Indianapolis (loser) at Tennessee (winner)
- New England (winner) at Miami (loser)
- Buffalo (winner) at New York Giants (loser)
- Seattle (winner) at Pittsburgh (loser)
- Dallas (winner) at Washington (loser)
- Arizona (loser) at Baltimore (winner)
- Philadelphia (winner) at Atlanta (winner)

I'll be watching how many of last week's winners repeat this week: If I had to pick a number, it would be 6/9 which is quite statistically strong. Back to Seattle/Pittsburgh. This alone would not lead me to make this wager. There are three decisive reasons why I like Seattle very much at +4:

- Seattle has the better quarterback
- Seattle has the better coach
- Seattle has a very strong tendency to keep games close

In the past two seasons, Seattle are 19 – 13 overall (59% winning percentage) and 9 – 7 on the road (56% winning percentage.) And here's the number of

points Seattle has lost by in those 13 games: 8, 6, 3, 3, 6, 35, 2, 3, 7, 2, 8, 5, 3. Seattle simply doesn't get blown out (with that one glaring exception.) And there's a very good reason for this: Russell Wilson. The guy is a flat-out winner and gamer and if you're giving me Wilson and Carroll and four points against a team that looked as flat as a pancake in Week One, I'm taking it. New Orleans/LA should be a coin-flip – I just don't buy the +125 juice for home field advantage.

Week 3

Opening Balance: \$1,112 – up 11.2%

Philadelphia Eagles +4.5 against Green Bay Packers, wagering \$33 to win \$30

New England/Buffalo OVER 42.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Here's the logic behind each of these selections:

The Eagles are 1 – 2 but could just as easily be 3 – 0. A dropped pass late against Atlanta meant a 24 – 40 loss (4 points) and myriad mistakes against the Detroit Lions led to a 27 – 24 loss (3 points). Meanwhile, Green Bay is winning close games: 7, 5 & 11 points. I would make Green Bay a slight favourite and think it is very likely that either way the game is decided by one score or less. If the game were Philadelphia +2.5 I'm not touching it – but I am at +4.5.

New England scored 33 points in Game 1, but only 3 points in the 4th quarter. New England scored 43 points in Game 2, with 21 in the 4th quarter. New England scored 30 points in Game 3, with zero in the fourth quarter. New England will score points: I feel confident about that. And if Buffalo can hold up its end (and they tend to put up points at home), then this one goes over 42.5 points by the end of the third quarter.

Week 4

Here are the four wagers that I recommend for this weekend:

Philadelphia +4.5 against Green Bay, wagering \$33 to win \$30

New England/Buffalo OVER 42.5 (The line at www.bet365.com now stands at 42 – so much the better!), wagering \$55 to win \$50 (5.5% to win 5%)

Jacksonville +3, +105 against Denver, wagering \$50 to win \$55 (5% of portfolio to win 5.5%)

Miami +700 against Los Angeles Chargers, wagering \$10 to win \$70 (1% of portfolio to win 7.0%)

ENDING BALANCE: \$1,129.50

Week 5

Hi Everyone:

Here are the selections for this week:

- Atlanta/Houston UNDER 49 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50
- Pittsburgh +160 against Baltimore, wagering \$20 to win \$32
- Green Bay +3.5 against Dallas, wagering \$33 to win \$30
- Arizona/Cincinnati UNDER 47.5 points, wagering \$110 to win \$100
- Oakland +200 against Chicago, wagering \$20 to win \$40

I will explain the rationale for these selections below – for anyone who is interested.

It's a reasonably small sample – 64 games – but so far in 2019 60.9% of the games have seen 48 points or fewer. Which suggests the UNDER as suggested by a naïve model. Then overly the fact that 3 out of 4 Texan games have seen fewer than 48 points, and 3 out of 4 Atlanta games have seen fewer than 48 points, and all of a sudden, the odds are really tilting towards the UNDER. Then I look at the health of the Atlanta offensive line (beat up like crazy) and the fact that Houston simply has to run the ball to protect Deshaun Watson, and there's the complete argument for the UNDER.

Pittsburgh/Baltimore should really be understood as a coin flip. But Pittsburgh is at home which is a lean to the Steelers, and Pittsburgh won last week while Baltimore lost, and I'm getting +160. I just can't say no to this one.

If the line on Dallas/Green Bay would have been +3, I would not have made this wager because history tells us that about 15% of games are decided by EXACTLY three points, and I'm not interested in pushes. I trust Aaron Rogers to keep the game close and I suspect that one score or less will decide it.

The UNDER on Arizona/Cincinnati is a game that I absolutely love. The naïve model says take the under. Cincinnati is without their two dynamic weapons: Green and Ross. If I had to bet the number of TDs scored by both teams, I would guess 4 and I think it's far more likely it would be UNDER that rather than OVER.

Oakland and Chicago are playing in London. The travel is so discombobulating that it makes these games a coin flip under normal

circumstances. But the Bears are playing with their second string QB and more significantly, the Raiders flew out right after their game on Sunday while the Bears are arriving today... I think the Bears could be badly jet-lagged and the fact that I'm getting +200...

Enjoy the games everyone!

Week 6

Opening Balance: \$1,014.50

Seattle +2.5 against Cleveland, wagering 5.5% to win 5%

New York Giants/New England Patriots UNDER 41 points, wagering 5.5% to win 5%

Miami Dolphins +3 against Washington, wagering \$20 to win \$20

Miami Dolphins +145 against Washington, wagering \$20 to win \$29

Pittsburgh Steelers +6.5 against LA Chargers, wagering \$33 to win \$30

Pittsburgh Steelers +235 against LA Chargers, wagering \$30 to win \$70.50

Closing Balance: \$1,110.00, +11.1% YTD

Week 7

Opening Balance: \$1,110.00 – up 11.1% YTD

Minnesota/Detroit OVER 44 points, wagering 11% to win 10%

Jacksonville/Cincinnati UNDER 44 points, wagering 11% to win 10%

Miami +16.5 against Buffalo, wagering 5.5% to win 5%

Oakland/Green Bay UNDER 47 points, wagering 5.5% to win 5%

When I originally e-mailed out the selections for Minnesota/Detroit and Jacksonville/Cincinnati, I described it as a “paired trade”. What I meant was that I recommended that you would enter two separate wagers, risking the same amount to achieve the same return. I have been “paper-trading” this strategy with reasonable success over the past couple of years, and decided to put the idea forward.

If someone asked me the following: How many more (or less) points will be scored in the Minnesota/Detroit game compared to the Jacksonville/Cincinnati game I would say 7.5 points. This season, the median point number is exactly 44 after 6 weeks of action and 92 games. I think that more than an above average number of points will be scored by Minnesota and Detroit. If you were watching the Monday night game (and I was), you saw a Detroit team that scored on six possessions and only punted four times. Minnesota put up 5 TDs against Philadelphia and also scored on six possessions, and punted only three times.

Jacksonville has been in some high-scoring games, but it has always been in response to the other side scoring first. I don't see the Bengals 26th ranked offense doing that. The Bengals have scored 17 points or fewer in four of six games and I see that continuing this week.

Buffalo is a sneaky good team – but the team's strength is on the defensive side of the ball. In 3/5 games, the Bills have scored 17 points or fewer. I think the Dolphins are good for at least 10 points... I see the Bills winning, but not covering.

47 points on Oakland/Green Bay seems absolutely inexplicable to me. 56% of

the games this season have seen 46 points or less. 3/5 Raider games have seen 46 points or less; 4/6 Packer games have seen 46 points or less. Injuries have eviscerated the receiving corps of the Packers and the Raiders have what appears to be the least explosive wide receiver group in the NFL. I don't see either team scoring 30 points, which means that the game will very likely see fewer than 47 points.

Closing Balance: \$1,205, +20.5%

Week 8

Opening Balance: \$1,205, +20.5%

LA Chargers +5.5 against Chicago, wagering \$33 to win \$30

Houston/Oakland UNDER 51.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Cleveland/New England UNDER 46 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Closing Balance: \$1,335.00, +33.5%

Week 9

Opening Balance: \$1,335.00, +33.5%

Chicago/Philadelphia UNDER 44 points, wagering \$33 (3.3% of portfolio) to win \$30 (3%)

Cleveland Browns -2.5 against Denver Broncos, wagering \$55 (5.5% of portfolio) to win \$50 (5%)

New England Patriot -3 against Baltimore Ravens, wagering \$55 (5.5% of portfolio) to win \$50 (5%)

Miami Dolphins +150 against New York Jets, wagering \$30 (3% of portfolio) to win \$45 (4.5%)

Closing Balance: \$1,300, +30.0%

Week 10

Opening Balance: \$1,300.00, +30.0%

Miami +10.5 against Indianapolis, wagering \$33 (3.3% of portfolio) to win \$30 (3%)

Pittsburgh +185 on Money Line against Los Angeles Rams, wagering \$50 (5%) to win \$92.50 (9.25%)

Kansas City, OVER 27 points team total, wagering \$31.50 (3.15%) to win \$30 (3%)

Seattle +220 on Money Line against San Francisco 49ers, wagering \$30 (3%) to win \$66 (6.6%)

Closing Balance: \$1,518.50, +51.85%

Week 11

Opening Balance: \$1,518.50, +51.85%

Pittsburgh Steelers Money Line +130 against Cleveland Browns, wagering \$60 (6% of portfolio) to win \$78 (7.8% of portfolio)

Miami Dolphins Money Line +240 against Buffalo Bills, wagering \$20 (2% of portfolio) to win \$48 (4.8% of portfolio)

Minnesota Vikings/Denver Broncos OVER 39.5 points, wagering \$55 (5.5% of portfolio) to win \$50 (5% of portfolio)

Closing Balance: \$1,488.50, +48.85%

Week 12

Opening Balance: \$1,488.50, +48.85%

Dallas Cowboys Money Line +220 against New England Patriots, wagering \$50 (5% of portfolio) to win \$110 (11.0%)

Green Bay Packers +145 against San Francisco 49ers, wagering \$50 (5% of portfolio) to win \$72.50 (7.25%)

Miami Dolphins +10.5 against the Cleveland Browns, wagering \$33 (3.3% of portfolio) to win \$30 (3.0%)

Washington Redskins Money Line +160 against Detroit Lions, wagering \$30 (3% of portfolio) to win \$48 (4.8%)

Closing Balance: \$1,403.50, +40.35%

Week 13

Opening Balance: \$1,403.50, +40.35%

Houston Texans +155 against New England, wagering \$50 to win \$77.50

Oakland/Kansas City UNDER 54.5, wagering \$60 to win \$50

Miami/Philadelphia UNDER 46 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Los Angeles Rams/Arizona Cardinals OVER 46.5, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Closing Balance: \$1,421.00, +42.1%

Week 14

Opening Balance: \$1,421.00, +42.1%

New Orleans -2.5 against San Francisco, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Pittsburgh/Arizona UNDER 43.5 points, wagering \$66 to win \$60

Detroit/Minnesota OVER 43.5 points, wagering \$66 to win \$60

New York Giants/Philadelphia UNDER 45.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Closing Balance: \$1,410, +41.1%

Week 15

Opening Balance: \$1,410.00, +41.1%

Miami/New York Giants UNDER 46.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Denver/Kansas City OVER 46 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Tampa Bay/Detroit UNDER 47.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Los Angeles Rams -1.5 against Dallas Cowboys, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Pittsburgh Steelers -2.0 against Buffalo Bills, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Cleveland/Arizona UNDER 48 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Indianapolis/New Orleans OVER 46.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Closing Balance: \$1,025.00, +2.5%

Week 16

Opening Balance: \$1,025.00, +2.5%

Houston/Tampa Bay UNDER 52.5 points, wagering \$165 to win \$150 (15%)

Houston -3 against Tampa Bay, wagering \$105 to win \$100

LA Rams/San Francisco OVER 45 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Green Bay +205 against Minnesota, wagering \$25 to win \$51.25

Cincinnati/Miami UNDER 46.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Closing Balance: \$1,221.25, +22.125%

Opening Balance: \$1,221.25, +22.125%

Miami +16.5 against New England, wagering \$55 to win \$50

New York Giants +175, wagering \$30 to win \$52.50

Philadelphia/New York Giants UNDER 44.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Arizona/Los Angeles OVER 45 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Washington/Dallas UNDER 45.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

San Francisco/Seattle OVER 45.5 points, wagering \$55 to win \$50

Closing Balance: \$1,231.25, +23.125%