



An Introduction to Betting the NFL

By Hansel Wei

Football is the biggest draw for GoSportsbet.com and all other sportsbooks, at least in North America. Billions of dollars exchange hands, and my goal as the GoSportsBet expert columnist is to get you a slice of that pie. This article will introduce you to some important concepts in football wagering that you might not have been aware of before.

Key Numbers - Football can be a numbers game, but some numbers are more important than others. Football is scored in relatively obscure point values; 3 points for a field goal, 7 for a touchdown, and with the possibility of 2 points (safeties), missed touchdown conversions (6 pts instead of 7), and two-point conversions (8 pts instead of 7). Because of this, some margins of victory are more common than others. These are called **key numbers**.

3 and **7** are called “major key numbers.” 27% of NFL games in 2001 were decided by either a field goal or a touchdown. 1, 4, 6, 10, 13, and 14 also occur with some frequency, and are called “minor key numbers.” When key numbers are included in point spreads, bookies get worried, because it opens up the possibility for sides and middles. In a hypothetical game between the New England Patriots and the Pittsburgh Steelers, imagine an opening line of Patriots -2.5. If the line was bet up to -3, someone who bet on the Patriots early in the week and then bet on the Steelers later in the week could hypothetically win on the Pats and push on the Steelers if the Pats won by three, and if the line reached -3.5, a bettor could potentially win both bets (the Patriots win by more than 2.5, and the Steelers lose by less than 3.5). Sportsbooks will try to avoid key numbers wherever possible. If you have access to early lines, and early betting trends indicate that bookies may have no choice but to post a line spanning a key number, look to exploit this situation.

Halftime Wagering - One aspect to betting pro football that many people are unaware of is halftime betting. In football and basketball, many bookmakers offer odds on the scores in the second half only. Because lines are available only from near the end of the first half until the beginning of the second half, this type of betting is much different from other varieties of sports wagering.

First, why bookies do it: unlike regular games, because time is of the essence, bettors cannot shop for lines or handicap the games based on anything other than what they have seen in the first half. If the bookmaker sets a good line for the second half, he will get even betting on both sides and make money off the vig.

Second, why you should bet at halftime: it’s fun. Putting in a halftime bet can add excitement to a game you otherwise would care absolutely nothing about. A good halftime bet can make up what you lose on the full game, or it can increase your

winnings. You have seen the two teams play and can gauge which team has been hurt by injuries or who has the momentum. The bookmakers can't watch every game, and if you see something they've missed when setting the line, you may have a potentially-valuable opportunity on your hands.

In the end, halftime betting comes down to the advantage of having seen one half of play versus the disadvantage of not being able to shop for lines. There is a good chance that you've been watching a game much more closely than the bookmaker has though, and if you pick your spots, halftime betting can provide tidy payouts.

Home-team Advantage / Road Disadvantage - Over the long run, home-field advantage has *on average* been demonstrated to be worth about 2.5 points. When analyzing games, it's a safe bet to factor in 2.5 points in the home team's favor unless you have good reason not to. If a team consistently has poor fan turnouts, or the fans are fickle and quickly turn against their team, this number can be changed. Keep track of how well teams have been doing at home versus on the road, and use these trends to predict how heavily home-field advantage and road disadvantage should be weighted in upcoming games.

Home Dogs Have Their Day - When a home team is the underdog in a matchup, they are bound to hear about it all week leading up to the game, from coaches, media, and countless other sources. Thus, the emotional stake in the games is very high. Teams get fired up for a game when they feel disrespected. Also, because they are not expected to win, they often play more relaxed, enjoy the game, and turn in a good performance.

Finally, perhaps what is most striking about situations where the home team is the underdog is the rate at which people gamble on the road favorite. One sportsbook reported that in 95% of games where the home team was the underdog, more action was booked on the road favorite! When bettors play a trend 95% of the time, there will always be value betting the other side of the trend.

While there is often good reason for favoring road teams, the combination of the home-team advantage, extra emotional factors, and betting trends should convince you to at least look hard for home dogs when weighing up which games to bet.

Summary - As you begin wagering on sports, remember that the times you *should* bet are a fraction of the times you *could* bet. Bettable games are the games where you feel a mistake has been made when setting the line and one team is actually stronger than the line would suggest. Because sportsbooks tend to be very good at what they do, these bettable games don't come along very often. Hopefully my articles will prepare you so that you'll be ready to jump when they do.

Until next time, do yourself a favor...

Keep doing things Hansel's Wei.