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FINAL BOWLS . . . BCS CHAMPIONSHIP NBA & COLLEGE HOOPS NFL WILDCARDS!

It's Never Over Until It's Over

Has anyone actually heard Brett Favre emphatically state that he is retiring from professional football? Nobody should really believe the headlines such as, "Brett Favre Says He Played His Last Game After Watching Vikings' Loss," because there is no quote from Favre that says, "I have played my last game." And even then, you have Bill Parcells' book, "The Final Season: My Last Year as a Head Coach in the NFL," as an example of how fantastically self-centered, egomaniacal football personalities just do and say what they want to say whenever they want to, whether it's the truth or not. Parcells came back to coach again within three years after writing the book. Favre retired, cried because it was so sad (to him, not the Packers, who were secretly dancing), yet came back to screw two head coach coaches – Eric Mangini and Brad Childress -- within three seasons. The 2010 season is over, but nobody can say for sure that the last of this weirdo has been seen in uniform. Regardless, he'll manage to ruin an announcing booth in the future, you can bet on that. He'll find the best one (there aren't many good ones), and take it down.

More proof that wide receiver is the least important position in football:

The Bengals covered all their games in which Terrell Owens and Chad Ochocinco did not play. Owens had fair statistics this season: 72 catches, 983 yards, 9 TDs. He was seen encouraging teammates – as long as he was getting his. And while he was getting his, his team was losing because it had to get away from what it did to win last season, which was establish the run. Owens is all false hustle. His team is trailing and he's getting catches, so he runs around trying to motivate

everyone. If he's not getting catches, then he only moves his mouth to complain, whether the team is winning or losing.

What was the New England Patriots' record after they released supposedly great receiver Randy Moss, who makes incredible one-handed touchdown catches? Was it 9-1 SU, 7-3 ATS? Gee, how could that be, when Moss was such an incredible player for them? They even beat Minnesota, the team that picked him up, after the Vikings picked him up! Poor Brad Childress. Favre and Moss on the same offense for only a few weeks, and Childress was almost instant toast. Minnesota's record with Moss was 1-3 SU, 0-3-1 ATS. After Moss was booted out of Minnesota and picked up by Tennessee, the Titans went 1-7 SU, 3-6 ATS. Tennessee's head coach Jeff Fisher, the longest-tenured head coach in the NFL, was the subject of a team head honcho meeting immediately after the season's final game to decide whether they should fire him or not. Coach killers and team killers. That's what cranky wide receivers are, and wide receivers are a dime a dozen. Who made the miracle catch in the Super Bowl that extended the New York Giants game-winning drive that enabled Plaxico Burress to catch the game-winning touchdown pass from overrated Eli Manning a few minutes later? David Tyree. Where is Tyree now? Retired, at age 30. Couldn't make the team in 2009. Anyone could have made that catch. A receiver – any receiver -- needs an accurate quarterback with time to throw, which requires a good offensive line and a decent running game as a diversion to help get the receiver open. By the way, where is Burress now? In jail! Of course. Where else? Burress was the rare, difference-making wide receiver, but being an actual difference-maker on the field wasn't

his top priority in life. His top priority in life was being a general nuisance.

Just get a guy with good hands who will run a route as he is told. Any guy like that.

Bowl season continues, and the NFL post-season is here! Let the bad refereeing continue. Have you caught on to how the NFL reacts to teams that might have gotten screwed in an instant replay decision? There will be a penalty called against the team that might have been screwed, on the very next play, or the play after. For instance, Chicago Bears' DB Charles Tillman made an incredible, diving interception against Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers when the score was 3-0 Chicago last week. On a challenge by Green Bay, replay showed that maybe – maybe – a teeny tiny piece of the ball had hit the ground before Tillman had fully secured it. For some reason, the former Vice President of Officiating who calls in from his batcave on telecasts thought the call should be overturned. It wasn't. I thought to myself – "holding, against the Bears," coming up. Bingo! Holding, Bears. Pushed back 10 yards, it was enough for Jay Cutler to throw an interception on the next play (there are many things that can prompt a Jay Cutler interception), an interception that changed the momentum of the game and helped Green Bay come back to win and make the playoffs. Football is now the NBA. They have make-up calls that might not even need to be made.

Bobby Smith is Editor of Sports Reporter and sportsreporter.com, and author of the book, "How to Beat the Pro Football Points Spread." Order it at www.amazon.com

NFL FOOTBALL

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8

NEW ORLEANS over *SEATTLE by 11

When you need 16 points to win a game on your home field against an opponent with receivers nobody has heard of, who act as if a ball thrown their way is a surprise they can't handle (see St. Louis Rams at crunch time on the road), then you can win with Charlie Whitehurst. When you're playing an opposing offense that is piloted by Drew Brees, who burned the Seattle defense for 382 passing yards in November, you need Matt Hasselbeck, and with this Seattle team, he may not be enough. After the Saints beat the Seahawks 34-19 in New Orleans, Brees said, "Imagine if we can get all the weapons back." Brees completed passes to 10 different receivers in that game, without running backs Reggie Bush, Pierre Thomas and tight end Jeremy Shockey on the field. Even last Sunday, off a short week with post-season clinched, the Saints sat their top receiver Marques Colston, Shockey and Thomas. The loss to Tampa Bay was essentially meaningless to them, given that Atlanta had about a 98% of beating Carolina. The Saints, off an intentional "B" effort, are now a relatively rested team whose recently-noted "short-week" problems won't come into play against a Seattle team that played into the night on Sunday, and is coming off a hard-fought win against a division rival in what was essentially a playoff game. What often happens when a team comes off a hard-fought win against a division rival? It loses the next game. What New Orleans has to worry about is that their defense yielded 424 total yards to Seattle in that game. Afterwards, a Seattle lineman explained that Hasselbeck had regained some freedom from Pete Carroll's harness. "Matt works at his best with the tempo we've got and when he is able to control things at the line of scrimmage -- make checks and stuff. You hate living in the past, but when he was at his best, we did a lot of our plays with him making checks. That lets him explore some of the options that we don't see, that he sees." Interesting. Almost. Seattle's bunch of blowout defeats is the kind of thing that can create value on teams when they play home games later in the season. Interesting, almost. NEW ORLEANS, 31-20.

NY JETS over *INDIANAPOLIS by 2

A lot of people are making a big deal about the Colts recently getting their running backs healthy, having Dominic Rhodes in a posse now with Joseph Addai and Donald Brown. But since when are the Colts a running team? Indy rides Peyton Manning's arm, but he is throwing with lesser results than usual because of injuries that beset the receiving corps over the course of the season. Manning wrapped up the regular season with a 91.4 QB rating and 17 interceptions, his worst rating and highest interception count since 2002 (Jets' QB Mark Sanchez would love those numbers! But comparing quarterback numbers is apples and oranges.) The Jets have revenge for a 30-17 loss to the Colts in last season's AFC Championship Game. The Jets led the game 17-13 at the half, but head coach Rex Ryan appeared to get full of himself and called too many blitzes in the second half, blitzes that Manning burned. In the off-season, the Jets did some defensive re-structuring with the Colts and Manning specifically in mind. Cornerback Antonio Cromartie, pass rusher Jason Taylor and safety Brodney Pool were acquired veterans. Cromartie is a Manning-picker from way back with San Diego, and Taylor has been around the block more than a few times. Darrelle Revis is one of the best cover-corners in the league. With better man coverage, and slightly better pressure without blitzing as often, they are eligible -- not certain -- to do a better job in coverage this time around. Overplayed stat of the week will probably be this: against opposing defenses overseen by Ryan, the Colts are 6-1 SU and ATS if you don't include the infamous "Curtis Painter Game" that Indy tanked in the second half last season vs. the Jets when they rested their starters. Speaking of resting their starters, the Jets have to be ecstatic that so many of them didn't exert themselves and got a bye during last Sunday's 38-7 win against Buffalo, while the Colts' regulars were extended to the max in a 23-20 win against division rival Tennessee. What often happens after a team engages in a hard-fought win against a division rival? It loses the next game. The Jets can unleash rested running backs LaDainian Tomlinson and Shonn Greene. Don't forget that the latter was injured early in the second half of last season's AFC Title game defeat, and that Sanchez is a year more familiar with dangerous receiving targets Braylon Edwards and Dustin Keller, with Santonio Holmes now in the mix as well. NY JETS, 23-21.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9

BALTIMORE over *KANSAS CITY by 6

Rockin' Romeo Crennel, the Chiefs' defensive coordinator, has game-planned against the Ravens twice a year for a bunch of years with Cleveland and sometimes with New England, but the Ravens' overall passing game wasn't what it is now. The Chiefs have to figure out a way to contain a strong (although spotty this season) Baltimore rush offense, as well as the big arm of Joe Flacco looking for big chunks of yards to four receivers who average from 13 to 14.8 yards per catch -- Anquan Boldin, Derrick Mason, Todd Heap, T.J. Houshmanzadeh. Interestingly, Heap, the tight end, has the biggest average per reception. But a big, hidden edge in the passing game is running back Ray Rice, whose 8.8 yards per catch doesn't sound like much until you multiply it by his 63 catches. Flacco has made a nice progression in TD-INT: 14-12 as a rookie, 21-12 last season, 25-9 this season. Kansas City quarterback Matt Cassell doesn't stand up to Flacco on stats, but if the Chiefs can maintain their NFL-leading rushing average of 165 yards per game, the Kansas City can be in it with a chance to win it in the fourth quarter. However, that's a big if. Baltimore's run defense is yielding only 94 yards per game and rises to this kind of challenge -- shutting down an opposing offense that until proven otherwise, is a little too one-sided on the running game. If Cassell throws any pass somewhere over Dwayne Bowe, Ed Reed will be there to pick it off. Oh, that guy is so dangerous. The Chiefs played one of their worst offensive games of the season in last week's 31-10 loss to the Raiders, one day after offensive coordinator Charlie Weis accepted the same position at the University of Florida (where he'll ruin what Urban Meyer installed). Weis claims that the stinker was only a coincidence and that Florida won't be on his mind until the Chiefs are out of the playoffs. Whatever. But he'll need to pull a trick play or two out of the hat for this game if the running game isn't firing like it normally does. Jitterbug back Dexter McCaster hasn't been heard from since returning from an injury, but he is elusive on reverses and on kick returns. BALTIMORE, 19-13.

BEST BET

GREEN BAY over *PHILADELPHIA by 8

The Eagles are not a veteran team. The Packers were one of the youngest teams in the NFL a couple of years ago, but have matured into a plucky, resilient bunch. The big, 59-point outburst by Philadelphia against Washington in a Monday Night romp had everyone climbing over each other to proclaim the Eagles' offense as the most incredible thing that ever happened, and Michael Vick as the latest superhuman who, in reality, is not. Great talent, improved quarterback, and a tough guy to hold down in a one-game showdown, but not invincible. The Eagles come into this particular game off two losses, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but both were on this field, and defensive players kept getting injured. "Injuries Have Eagles Painted Into Corner," said a recent headline at Philly.com. In the story, defensive coordinator Sean McDermott had this to say: "I come from Jim Johnson's system. With so many new players, you can't just say, 'Hey, we've always run this blitz -- run this blitz.' Because those players don't know those blitzes. There's a period of acclimation that comes into play, so you want to get the players as comfortable as possible. "And the execution. It's great to come up with all of these different schemes and everything, but what can these players execute? A lot of these players are in their first games in the NFL. If you had veteran players, you can bank on them being comfortable in an NFL game and then they can execute whatever you draw up." While Philly has the NFC's most interceptions (23), they have also allowed 30 TD passes. Other than the Colts, the Eagles are allowing more points per game than anyone else in the post-season. When a defense that allows too many yards and points via the pass is playing against the pass offense of Aaron Rodgers and Green Bay, whose quick and strong receivers have the most yards after the catch in the NFL, the offense may not be able to outscore the other team when this other team, as listed on our Web Site's home page, has the NFL's best defensive points differential. Dom Capers' Green Bay defensive unit has yielded -6.3 points per game fewer than their opponents have scored. And they don't want to hear about defensive injuries, because they've posted that strong differential in the wake of many of them. What often happens when a team is off a hard-fought win against a division rival? They lose the next game. But in this case, we'll make an exception. GREEN BAY, 30-22.

NFL PAST PERFORMANCES JANUARY 8-9

This chart provides valuable information regarding recent meetings between these teams, including which week the game was played, who the QB's were and what happened in the games immediately before and after. V indicates road team, H is for home team.

yr	wk #	V score	H score	Visitor QB	Home QB	V OFF	V AHEAD	H OFF	H AHEAD	Notes
2010	11	SEA 19	NO 34	Hasselbeck	Brees	W ARI	L at KC	bye	W at DAL	Offenses got 424 and 494 yards in game that was actually closer than final score indicated.
2009	16	NYJ 29	IND 15	Sanchez	P. Manning	L Atl	W Cin	W Jax	L at Buf	The infamous "Curtis Painter Game" that Indy tanked in the second half for Jets' comeback.
2009	19	NYJ 17	IND 30	Sanchez	P. Manning	W at SD	--	W Bal	L N.O.	Colts out-first downed Jets 27-17, "won" second half 17-0. Jets' RB Greene injured 3Q.
2009	1	KC 24	BAL 38	Croyle	Flacco	--	L at Oak	--	W at SD	Godawful Brodie Croyle anchored KC offense that was outyarded 501-188 by Baltimore.
2010	1	GB 27	PHI 20	Rodgers	Kolb/Vick	--	W Buf	--	W at Det	Packers embarrassed Kolb, injured Kolb, Vick mounted too-little, too-late comeback try.

NFL FOOTBALL

AFC

Baltimore Ravens

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	13	at	NY Jets	2'	35'	10	9		W	W	U
9	19	at	Cincinnati	-3	39'	10	15		L	L	U
9	26	h	Cleveland	-11	37	24	17		W	L	U
10	3	at	Pittsburgh	1	34	17	14		W	W	U
10	10	h	Denver	-7	39'	31	17		W	W	0
10	17	at	New England	2'	45	20	23	1	L	L	U
10	24	h	Buffalo	-14	40'	37	34	1	W	L	0
11	7	h	Miami	-5	41	26	10		W	W	U
11	11	at	Atlanta	1'	42	21	26		L	L	0
11	21	at	Carolina	-11	37	37	13		W	W	0
11	28	h	Tampa Bay	-7'	42'	17	10		W	L	U
12	5	h	Pittsburgh	-3	39'	10	13		L	L	U
12	13	at	Houston	-3	46	34	28	1	W	W	0
12	19	h	New Orleans	-2	43'	30	24		W	W	0
12	26	at	Cleveland	-3'	49'	20	10		W	W	U
1	2	h	Cincinnati	-10	43'	13	7		W	L	U

Indianapolis Colts

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	12	at	Houston	-2'	47	24	34		L	L	0
9	19	h	NY Giants	-5	48'	38	14		W	W	0
9	26	at	Denver	-5'	47'	27	13		W	W	U
10	3	at	Jacksonville	-7	46	28	31		L	L	0
10	10	h	Kansas City	-7'	45'	19	9		W	W	U
10	17	at	Washington	-3	44'	27	24		W	T	0
11	1	h	Houston	-5'	50'	30	17		W	W	U
11	7	at	Philadelphia	3	46'	24	26		L	W	0
11	14	h	Cincinnati	-7	47	23	17		W	L	U
11	21	at	New England	3'	50'	28	31		L	W	0
11	28	h	San Diego	-2'	50	14	36		L	L	T
12	5	h	Dallas	-5'	47'	35	38	1	L	L	0
12	9	at	Tennessee	-3	44'	30	28		W	L	0
12	19	h	Jacksonville	-5'	48	34	24		W	W	0
12	26	at	Oakland	-3	47'	31	26		W	W	0
1	2	h	Tennessee	-9'	48	23	20		W	L	U

Kansas City Chiefs

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	13	h	San Diego	5	45	21	14		W	W	U
9	19	at	Cleveland	3	38'	16	14		W	W	U
9	26	h	San Francisco	3	37	31	10		W	W	0
10	10	at	Indianapolis	7'	45'	9	19		L	L	U
10	17	at	Houston	4'	44'	31	35		L	W	0
10	24	h	Jacksonville	-9	37'	42	20		W	W	0
10	31	h	Buffalo	-7	45	13	10	1	W	L	U
11	7	at	Oakland	1	40'	20	23		L	L	0
11	14	at	Denver	-1	44'	29	49		L	L	0
11	21	h	Arizona	-7'	44	31	13		W	W	T
11	28	at	Seattle	-2'	44'	42	24		W	W	0
12	5	h	Denver	-9	48'	10	6		W	L	U
12	12	at	San Diego	7	47	0	31		L	L	U
12	19	at	St. Louis	2	43	27	13		W	W	U
12	26	h	Tennessee	-5	43	34	14		W	W	0
1	2	h	Oakland	-3'	43'	10	31		L	L	U

New York Jets

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	13	h	Baltimore	-2'	35'	9	10		L	L	U
9	19	h	New England	3	38'	28	14		W	W	0
9	26	at	Miami	2'	35'	31	23		W	W	0
10	3	at	Buffalo	-5'	36.6	38	14		W	W	0
10	11	h	Minnesota	-4	38	29	20		W	W	0
10	17	at	Denver	-3'	43'	24	20		W	W	0
10	31	h	Green Bay	-6	41'	0	9		L	L	U
11	7	at	Detroit	-4	42	23	20	1	W	L	0
11	14	at	Cleveland	-3	38	26	20	1	W	W	0
11	21	h	Houston	-7	45	30	27		W	L	0
11	25	h	Cincinnati	-9	43	26	10		W	W	U
12	6	at	New England	3'	45	3	45		L	L	0
12	12	h	Miami	-5'	39'	6	10		L	L	U
12	19	at	Pittsburgh	4'	36	22	17		W	W	0
12	26	at	Chicago	2'	35'	34	38		L	L	0
1	2	h	Buffalo	-1'	39'	38	7		W	W	0

NFC

Green Bay Packers

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	12	at	Philadelphia	-3	47'	27	20		W	W	U
9	19	h	Buffalo	-13	43	34	7		W	W	U
9	27	at	Chicago	-3	46	17	20		L	L	U
10	3	h	Detroit	-14	45	28	26		W	L	0
10	10	at	Washington	-2'	45'	13	16	1	L	L	U
10	17	h	Miami	-3	44'	20	23	1	L	L	U
10	24	h	Minnesota	-2'	44	28	24		W	W	0
10	31	at	NY Jets	6	41'	9	0		W	W	U
11	7	h	Dallas	-7	45'	45	7		W	W	0
11	21	at	Minnesota	-3	44	31	3		W	W	U
11	28	at	Atlanta	1'	47'	17	20		L	L	U
12	5	h	San Francisco	-9	41	41	9		W	W	0
12	12	at	Detroit	-6'	46'	3	7		L	L	U
12	19	at	New England	13'	43'	27	31		L	W	0
12	26	h	NY Giants	-3	43	45	17		W	W	0
1	2	h	Chicago	-10	41'	10	3		W	L	U

New Orleans Saints

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	9	h	Minnesota	-5	48	14	9		W	T	U
9	20	at	San Francisco	-5'	44	25	22		W	L	0
9	26	h	Atlanta	-3'	49	24	27	1	L	L	0
10	3	h	Carolina	-13'	44'	16	14		W	L	U
10	10	at	Arizona	-6'	45	20	30		L	L	0
10	17	at	Tampa Bay	-4	44	31	6		W	W	U
10	24	h	Cleveland	-13	43'	17	30		L	L	0
10	31	h	Pittsburgh	-2	45	20	10		W	W	U
11	7	at	Carolina	-6'	41	34	3		W	W	U
11	21	h	Seattle	-11'	44	34	19		W	W	0
11	25	at	Dallas	-4'	50	30	27		W	L	0
12	5	at	Cincinnati	-7	44'	34	30		W	L	0
12	12	h	St. Louis	-9'	47	31	13		W	W	U
12	19	at	Baltimore	2	43'	24	30		L	L	0
12	27	at	Atlanta	2'	48'	17	14		W	W	U
1	2	h	Tampa Bay	-7	47	13	23		L	L	U

Philadelphia Eagles

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	12	h	Green Bay	3	47'	20	27		L	L	U
9	19	at	Detroit	-6'	41'	35	32		W	L	0
9	26	at	Jacksonville	-3	44'	28	3		W	W	U
10	3	h	Washington	-6	42'	12	17		L	L	U
10	10	at	San Francisco	3	38	27	24		W	W	0
10	17	h	Atlanta	-2	42'	31	17		W	W	0
10	24	at	Tennessee	3	42'	19	37		L	L	0
11	7	h	Indianapolis	-3	46'	26	24		W	L	0
11	15	at	Washington	-3	43	59	28		W	W	0
11	21	h	NY Giants	-3	48'	27	17		W	W	U
11	28	at	Chicago	-3	42	26	31		L	L	0
12	2	h	Houston	-8'	51	34	24		W	W	0
12	12	at	Dallas	-3'	50'	30	27		W	L	0
12	19	at	NY Giants	3	47	38	31		W	W	0
12	28	h	Minnesota	-14	39'	14	24		L	L	U
1	2	h	Dallas	-3	43'	13	14		L	L	U

Seattle Seahawks

MO	DAY	SITE	OPPONENT	LINE	TOT	PF	PA	O	SU	ATS	OU
9	12	h	San Francisco	3	37	31	6		W	W	T
9	19	at	Denver	3'	40	14	31		L	L	0
9	26	h	San Diego	5	44	27	20		W	W	0
10	3	at	St. Louis	-1	40	3	20		L	L	U
10	17	at	Chicago	6'	37'	23	20		W	W	0
10	24	h	Arizona	-7	40	22	10		W	W	U
10	31	at	Oakland	2	40	3	33		L	L	U
11	7	h	NY Giants	7	41	7	41		L	L	0
11	14	at	Arizona	3	41	36	18		W	W	0
11	21	at	New Orleans	11'	44	19	34		L	L	0
11	28	h	Kansas City	2'	44'	24	42		L	L	0
12	5	h	Carolina	-4'	40	31	14		W	W	0
12	12	at	San Francisco	5'	42	21	40		L	L	0
12	19	h	Atlanta	6	45'	18	34		L	L	0
12	26	at	Tampa Bay	6	44	15	38		L	L	0
1	2	h	St. Louis	3	41	16	6		W	W	U

COLLEGE HOOPS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6

RECOMMENDED

*CINCINNATI over XAVIER by 16

Both sides tee'd up for the city's Civil War, with Xavier giving way grudgingly to Florida in Gators' successful revenge bid on New Year's Eve, while Cincy took full advantage of Seton Hall (a Best Bet here, as well as a star-rated 'SR phone winner), winning with something left later that evening. This Musketeer edition was weakened when frosh G/F Jay Canty incurred a stress fracture in his right foot. Cincy may not be Final Four material, but Bearcats play together beautifully, and that clampdown defense covers a multitude of sins. CINCINNATI, 67-51.

VILLANOVA over *SOUTH FLORIDA by 4

Though it largely seemed due to UConn playing down to the competition, Bulls gave Kemba Walker a game in Hartford. Still not sold home dog's turned the corner, while remaining certain 'Cats still haven't, which we knew when we made Temple a *-rated winner against 'Nova, last Thursday. VILLANOVA, just 68-64.

*FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL over ARKANSAS STATE by 2

Red Wolves off huge quintuple-revenge win over Western Kentucky Saturday night, leaving door open for FIU. FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL, 66-64.

*FLORIDA ATLANTIC over SOUTH ALABAMA by 13

NORTH TEXAS over *MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE by 4

Blue Raiders trying to reload on the fly, and discovering it isn't easy. Bullsies of the Sun Belt, North Texas continues to ride high, and boast the multiple playmakers to prevail, though road margins seldom a certainty. NORTH TEXAS, 71-67.

*WESTERN KENTUCKY over DENVER by 15

Pioneers don't boast the caliber of material to take road advantage of Hilltoppers' all-too-frequent defensive lapses. WESTERN KENTUCKY, 74-59.

*LOUISIANA TECH over FRESNO STATE by 1

This can be a tough trip, but unwilling to grant any kind of margin to size-challenged Techies. LOUISIANA TECH, 64-63.

WRIGHT STATE over *ILLINOIS CHICAGO by 3

Wright failed to vault hefty number against Wisky-Green Bay at home over the weekend, confirming our cynicism about their reliability when asked to surpass tall numbers. Still, visitor material is superior to that of the Flames. This isn't any kind of crusade game for I-C, as Illinois was. WRIGHT STATE, 66-63.

BEST BET

DETROIT over *LOYOLA-CHICAGO by 7

Ramblers continue to perform with heart while not at full strength, but Titan lesser effort/big effort pattern could well prevail for Detroit, off bitter OT loss to Wisky-Milwaukee – at home! Believe in this Titan combination, as they ascend up the ladder, one step back – two steps forward! DETROIT, 68-61.

*UL-LAFAYETTE over TROY by 5

*ARIZONA STATE over STANFORD by 4

Sparky performing at consistent – subpar! – levels, though wouldn't hug Tree unless line were double-digit silly. ASU star Trent Lockett DNP in 22-point loss to Oregon State due to a sprained left big toe; check status. ARIZONA STATE, 62-58.

*WASHINGTON over OREGON by 22

Might be inclined to call for a Husky skate job in general vicinity of number, but occasion of home conference opener combined with remembrance of bizarre home loss to Ducks last time around should foster superior focus. WASHINGTON, 86-64.

SAINT MARYS CA over *LOYOLA MARYMOUNT by 9

*ILLINOIS over NORTHWESTERN by 6.

*PACIFIC over CAL POLY SLO by 8

CAL SANTA BARBARA over *UC DAVIS by 6

Prevailing class should tell in matchup Gauchos dominated last season. CAL SANTA BARBARA, 67-61.

*PEPPERDINE over SAN DIEGO by 13

Keion Bell should launch enough treys to establish comfortable margin in rare domination opportunity for Wave. PEPPERDINE, 69-56.

*WASHINGTON STATE over OREGON STATE by 16

*ARIZONA over CALIFORNIA by 14

SAN JOSE STATE over *BOISE STATE by 1

*HAWAII over IDAHO by 14

Serious, respectable road effort against conference power Utah State showed us more about Rainbow Warriors than anything they accomplished in their home-cooking tournament over the holidays, though UH will be happy to be home after no-show at Nevada. Hawaii actually enjoys rare physical advantages over this foe, and can't envision what Tater Tots are going to do about it. HAWAII, 74-60.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7

BEST BET

*BUTLER over CLEVELAND STATE by 15

Long-awaited clash between the prevailing class and the "now" quintet in the Horizon. Vikings may be hungrier, and have beefed up their depth, and Norris Cole should be healthy for this, but Butler's still Butler-wise with Shelvin Mack, despite Gordon Hayward's transition to the pros. Not the lock of old, but Butler knows how to win the end game, and reminds all and sundry who the boss is. BUTLER, 74-59.

NORTHERN IOWA over *INDIANA STATE by 3

WICHITA STATE over *ILLINOIS STATE by 8

*DRAKE over BRADLEY by 4

*MISSOURI STATE over EVANSVILLE by 15

Bears shoot the lights out when it matters. MISSOURI STATE, 68-53.

CREIGHTON over *SOUTHERN ILLINOIS by 4

Bluejay height should carry the day, as Kenny Lawton rules. CREIGHTON, 68-64.

*VALPARAISO over YOUNGSTOWN STATE by 13

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8

*GEORGETOWN over WEST VIRGINIA by 12

Hoyas should be back in stride after stretches of selfish play sank them at Notre Dame, and hangover carried to DePaul matchup before a sparse, dead crowd on New Year's. But Chris Wright woke up after halftime, and that was that. Recovery should carry over versus Huggy's underperforming Mounties, who must shoot the lights out from outside to have a chance. GEORGETOWN, 78-66.

SYRACUSE over *SETON HALL by 7

Orange may have enjoyed a season-altering moment when Jim Boeheim's decision to employ Rick Jackson at center proved the ignition key against Notre Dame. Meanwhile, Pirates are shooting worse than anyone in the Big East. SYRACUSE, 69-62.

*NORTHEASTERN over HOFSTRA by 6

Any side which can function at all inside will be able to cope with the Pride. NORTHEASTERN, 66-60.

NORTH CAROLINA over *VIRGINIA by 7

With leading Wahoo F Mike Scott again hors de combat vs. Iowa State with lingering ankle issues, even Will Sherrill's return from his broken right leg won't get us on home pup against Carolina, at this point. NORTH CAROLINA, 74-67.

*PENN STATE over MICHIGAN STATE by 2

Relative lack of size compared to previous Sparty editions, combined with MSU's sustained reluctance to mix it up in side, leaves them at least somewhat vulnerable to situations like this. Can't be bullish on Izzo until we see a breakout. PENN STATE, 63-61.

*OKLAHOMA STATE over KANSAS STATE by 3

Not in love with Cowboys by any stretch, but sustained point-guard issues combined with the suspension of Wildcats Jacob Pullen (scheduled back 1/3 against Savannah State) and Curtis Kelly (out until Texas Tech, January 15) leave us cautious. OKLAHOMA STATE, 68-65.

MISSOURI over *COLORADO by 1

We've upgraded Mizzou slightly in our figures, but remain curious to see how they respond in what's been a house of horrors for many highly-regarded Big XII outfits for years. Buffs rise to the occasion. MISSOURI, just 73-72.

*ARKANSAS over TENNESSEE by 1

Off latest Vol display of passive resistance against Cremins' College of Charleston bunch, would feel like a fool losing with either of these sides. Razorback F Marshawn Powell was just suspended, with no duration announced. ARKANSAS, 65-64.

*UL-MONROE over DENVER by 2

BAYLOR over *TEXAS TECH by 2

Bears have clearly devolved, thanks to the presence of too many selfish tramp athletes. Alas, due to Red Raiders' horrid defense, this isn't ideal spot to take advantage of the circumstances. BAYLOR, just 73-71.

*PITTSBURGH over MARQUETTE by 9

This is the last of the sustained home cooking for Panthers, for a while. Buzz (Curly) Williams has pieced together a serviceable combination for Golden Eagles – good enough to take out West Virginia. Tough to lay fat numbers to visitor, given their gameness and resilience. PITTSBURGH, just 75-66.

*OLD DOMINION over GEORGE MASON by 5

DETROIT over *ILLINOIS CHICAGO by 3

*NC STATE over WAKE FOREST by 17

Wolfpack got Tracy Smith back from arthroscopic knee surgery, and he responded with a 16-point night against San Diego. Though they hung in against exhausted Gonzaga, Deacons aren't much better than Diego. NC STATE, 74-57.

COLLEGE HOOPS

- *ARIZONA STATE over CALIFORNIA by 1
- *VIRGINIA TECH over FLORIDA STATE by 3
- *BYU over AIR FORCE by 21
- *TULANE over SMU by 9

BEST BET

- *TEXAS over CONNECTICUT by 16

You know UConn's having the short-term blues when Jim Calhoun had to play a zone (virtually unheard-of, for Calhoun) for more than ten minutes to bring Huskies back against South Florida. Texas, like USF, is a forward-laden scoring team, except they have more of them, slightly bigger and slightly better. TEXAS, 82-66.

- *DREXEL over DELAWARE by 14
 - *MEMPHIS over EAST CAROLINA by 15
- Possible confidence-builder for Tigers – and they need it. MEMPHIS, 73-58.

- *ST. BONAVENTURE over CHARLOTTE U by 9
 - UTAH STATE over *NEVADA by 14
 - HARVARD over *DARTMOUTH by 9
- Watch for Crimson reaction, off effort vs. Boston College. HARVARD, 64-55.
- *LOYOLA CHICAGO over WRIGHT STATE by 6
 - *BOSTON COLLEGE over GEORGIA TECH by 8
- Tech's effort against Richmond stands out as a fluke. BOSTON COLLEGE, 74-66.

- TEXAS A&M over *OKLAHOMA by 8
 - *ST. JOSEPHS over GEORGE WASHINGTON by 11
 - SAN DIEGO STATE over *UTAH by 19
 - KENTUCKY over *GEORGIA by 6
- Josh Harrelson broke out for 'Cats against Louisville – pleasant news for John Calipari, who can count on Brandon Knight, but is otherwise looking at a bench which isn't all that deep. KENTUCKY, 73-67.

- *MISSISSIPPI STATE over ALABAMA by 1
- BALL STATE over *NORTHERN ILLINOIS by 11

BEST BET

- *UAB over UTEP by 17

Happy to keep riding this train, as while Blazers sometimes take a while to settle into stride, they finish games with powerful determination on a consistent basis. Tim Floyd's bunch is a shade better than they look, as Floyd shows some mercy against the out-manned, but he's the guy holding the short straw, here. UAB, 75-58.

- RICHMOND over *LA SALLE by 7
 - CENTRAL FLORIDA over *HOUSTON by 14
 - VANDERBILT over *SOUTH CAROLINA by 7
- If Boston College can render this usually-tough home court of scant consequence, Vandy certainly can, with their multiple capable offensive threats and maturity. VANDERBILT, 76-69.
- LSU over *AUBURN by 6

- NEW MEXICO over *WYOMING by 11
- *GEORGIA STATE over TOWSON by 7
- *CLEMSON over MIAMI-FLORIDA by 3
- *WASHINGTON over OREGON STATE by 27
- *ARIZONA over STANFORD by 18
- *FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL over SOUTH ALABAMA by 3
- *FLORIDA ATLANTIC over ARKANSAS STATE by 11
- JAMES MADISON over *WILLIAM & MARY by 9
- VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH over *NC WILMINGTON by 3
- *LONG BEACH STATE over CAL IRVINE by 15
- *AKRON over KENT STATE by 4

Flashes aren't so deep that they can shrug off suspension of shooting guard Carlton Guyton without a whimper (check status). AKRON, 61-57.

- *TOLEDO over EASTERN MICHIGAN by 5

Not overly eager to lay big balloons with lower-run MAC outfit who shot a fat 12.5% from Tripleville against NC Wilma. TOLEDO, 65-60.

- SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI over *MARSHALL by 3
- *BUFFALO over BOWLING GREEN by 18

RECOMMENDED

- *NEBRASKA over IOWA STATE by 9

Just the kind of matchup in which Huskers will find way to win by meaningful margin, most likely by forcing Cyclone 3-ball shooters off their preferred launching spots. Lengthy Devaney Center-fuelled streak should carry over into winnable conference opener. NEBRASKA, 69-60.

- *ARKANSAS LITTLE ROCK over TROY by 13
- *WISCONSIN GREEN BAY over WISCONSIN MILWAUKEE by 6
- *NOTRE DAME over ST. JOHNS by 12
- PROVIDENCE over *RUTGERS by 3
- *UL-LAFAYETTE over MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE by 1
- SAINT MARY'S CA over *PEPPERDINE by 16
- *TULSA over RICE by 1
- *FLORIDA over MISSISSIPPI by 7
- *GONZAGA over PORTLAND by 7
- *NEW MEXICO STATE over FRESNO STATE by 6

Troy Gillenwater netted two dozen for Aggies against Boise State. Hoping we don't have to worry about further surprise no-shows from the lineup, for the moment. NEW MEXICO STATE, 67-61.

- *LOYOLA MARYMONT over SAN DIEGO by 13
- *PACIFIC over CAL SANTA BARBARA by 2
- *UC DAVIS over CAL POLY SLO by 3
- *UNLV over TCU by 16
- *CAL RIVERSIDE over CS FULLERTON by 5
- *SAN JOSE STATE over IDAHO by 9
- *WASHINGTON STATE over OREGON by 16
- *SANTA CLARA over SAN FRANCISCO by 6
- *HAWAII over BOISE STATE by 3

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9

- *OHIO STATE over MINNESOTA by 17
- *PURDUE over IOWA by 15
- *VILLANOVA over CINCINNATI by 1
- LOUISVILLE over *SOUTH FLORIDA by 6
- KANSAS over *MICHIGAN by 12

'Hawks get shot at youngest team in the Big 10, who've beaten nobody (filed prior to 1/2 Penn State affair) other than catching sleepy Clemson by surprise in the Big 10/ACC Challenge. KANSAS, 77-65.

- *TEMPLE over SAINT LOUIS by 17
- The Billikins beat themselves. TEMPLE, 68-51.
- *BUTLER over YOUNGSTOWN STATE by 16
- WESTERN MICHIGAN over *CENTRAL MICHIGAN by 3
- *OHIO over MIAMI OHIO by 6
- DAYTON over *MASSACHUSETTS by 1
- CLEVELAND STATE over *VALPARAISO by 2
- *SOUTHERN ILLINOIS over ILLINOIS STATE by 5
- CREIGHTON over *EVANSVILLE by 1
- INDIANA STATE over *DRAKE by 1

RECOMMENDED

- *RHODE ISLAND over XAVIER by 11

Rams have endured some peripheral injuries, but the senior heart/core of the club remains intact. Muskies continue to get nicked up, while maintaining their historic levels of underperformance outside the state of Ohio. This is the only regular-season shot Rhody gets at this name/rep A-10 foe, and they'll capitalize. The "now" team wrests control, and draws off. RHODE ISLAND, 77-66.

- *NORTHERN IOWA over BRADLEY by 14
- *NORTHWESTERN over INDIANA by 14
- *DUKE over MARYLAND by 19
- *WICHITA STATE over MISSOURI STATE by 4
- *USC over UCLA by 6

Bruin PG Lazeric Jones missed most of the second half in loss to Washington with an injury to the middle finger of his right hand. Jones will probably be good to go with a splint, but check status. USC, 68-62.

MONDAY, JANUARY 10

- NOTRE DAME over *MARQUETTE by 2

TUESDAY, JANUARY 11-12

Sports Reporter College Basketball forecasts and selections for Sports Reporter Online members, posted online at www.sportsreporter.com on game-day.

COLLEGE BOWLS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 4

SUGAR BOWL

Superdome – New Orleans, LA

OHIO STATE over ARKANSAS by 8 (33-25)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6

GO DADDY.COM BOWL

Ladd-Peebles Stadium – Mobile, AL

MIDDLE TENNESSEE over MIAMI-OH by 4

The RedHawks of Miami-OH have already made the largest improvement from last season to this season in college football, and topped it all off with a New York Jets over Baltimore Colts Super Bowl-size upset win in the MAC Championship Game. What do they have left to prove? That they can beat the Sun Belt's third-best team, a month later? That's not necessarily something anyone would go out of their way in a big way to get done. Miami's win in that title game came not-so-coincidentally close to the announcement that the opposing head coach, offensive and defensive coordinators were bolting that program. Draw your own conclusions about how that may have affected the preparation and outcome. While you're at it, draw your own conclusions about how Miami beat Temple in their prior game while Temple's head coach was talking to Miami-Florida and his coordinators were calling the moving companies. What goes around comes around. Miami-OH's coach and coordinators have said, "Our work is done here," after two seasons, and have bolted for Pitt (or so they thought, but that's another story altogether!). The RedHawks' championship season, for all intents and purposes, is history. But they have to play this game regardless, against an opponent whose season never got untracked after Middle Tennessee's #1 quarterback was suspended in September for four games in a bizarre online poker staking scenario. It's never too late to have a happy childhood, and Middle Tennessee gets a chance to put their turnover messes (-16) behind them and play some real football. Triple-threat quarterback Dwight Dasher (Run, Pass, Turnover) can best be compared to the Ohio U. quarterbacks who triple-threat their way past Miami by the score of 34-13 in October. MIDDLE TENNESSEE, 27-23.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7

COTTON BOWL

Cowboys Stadium -- Arlington, TX

TEXAS A&M over LSU by 3

LSU likes to recruit in Texas, but the reality is that they have only 13 players from the state on their roster. A&M has only 13 non-Texans on their team. So you think that the only game on the NCAA schedule being played in their state might be a big deal? LSU's strategy here will be the same as it was all year -- defense + special teams + running game = non-sexy victories. Coach Les Miles will look to play a field possession game and the Mad Hatter has proven tough in bowl games. The Tiger return game plus a weak A&M punting unit should help Miles accomplish his field position goals. That said -- his offense generally sputters and averaged only 64 offensive snaps per ball game. A&M won't make it any easier on 'em, as their defense gave up only 117 yards rushing per game. On the other sideline, the Aggies averaged 81 offensive plays per game due to their balanced attack and ability to convert 3rd downs. QB Tannehill is generally good with the football and his running game should open things up for the passing game. This will be close throughout with A&M's ability to move the chains in the 4th quarter setting them up to take the Cotton crown. TEXAS A&M, 26-23.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8

COMPASS BOWL

Legion Field – Birmingham, AL

PITTSBURGH over KENTUCKY by 5

Swan-singing head coaches are 2-0 SU, ATS so far this bowl season. Poor Dave Wannstedt of Pittsburgh replaced a head coach who went to the Fiesta Bowl (a BCS Bowl) and never got Pitt back to one, although the media repeatedly stated that he'd "turned the program around." Which is why you don't trust too many things you read. During his tenure, Pitt backers often benefitted from a refusal by bettors to back a Wannstedt-coached team, dating back to the Chicago Bears and Miami Dolphins (at times, they also did not benefit). Wacky Wannie's tenure at Pitt, however, yielded ATS results a lot better than most coaches who get fired: 38-29 ATS, including 14-7 ATS the last two seasons. Wannie's last wackiness is adapted from a tired but true coaching strategy: withholding the identity of the starting -- not quarterback -- head coach until just prior to game-day. Most feel that he'll show. When they aren't turning the ball over, Pitt has a nice, run-based, play-faking pass game, with a quarterback who could use more seasoning. Kentucky has a new defensive coordinator. Rick Minter is a solid football guy, but regarding the transition, head coach Joker Phillips says, "A lot of them are having a hard time with it." With Kentucky's senior QB Mike Hartline suspended, soph

Morgan Newton gets the call. "Last year when Morgan was out there and dropped back to throw, you knew there was a chance somebody's band was going to play," said a Kentucky assistant last week. "You just hoped it was your team's band and not the other team's band." PITTSBURGH, 28-23.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9

KRAFT FIGHT HUNGER BOWL

AT&T Park -- San Francisco, CA

BEST BET

BOSTON COLLEGE over NEVADA by 4

Those tuning in can expect to hear the "Nevada run vs. BC run D" tag line at least 100 times in the pre-game show. That is an important matchup, and we'll get to it, but equally important will be Boston College's generally inept offense moving the football and putting points on the board. The Golden Eagles are a run first, second, and third offense that leans on a huge offensive line. Nevada has been tough against the run, but consider the competition...much smaller, pass-oriented WAC teams. Given the Pack's ability to move the football, BC will ask their tailbacks to chew up grass and clock. Starting RB Harris might play after end-of-season knee surgery, but even if he doesn't, freshman Andre Williams went over 100 yards in the last two games...including a 42-carry performance against Syracuse. QB Chase Rettig also improved big-time as the season progressed and the bowl practice time will only help. The BC coaching staff has slowly opened up the playbook for Rettig and you can bet that Nevada will see some offensive plays for the first time this Sunday. Even if the offense stalls, Coach Spaz won't mind punting the ball and making Nevada drive long fields. Why? Because his defense is tough...cue the Nevada offense vs. BC defense tag: Boston College will certainly have their hands full with QB Kaepernick, RB Taua and the Wolfpack offense. It will help to have the best LB corps in the country. This BC D gave up just 80 yards per game on the ground -- good for #1 nationally. They did not give up more than 141 yards rushing in any one game this season, and while Nevada will likely top that mark, they won't come close to the average of 306 yards rushing per contest. Kaepernick can chuck it pretty well, too, and the BC secondary has been burned at times this year -- but they also have 19 picks and are aggressive to the football. The Boston College goal is simple on both sides of the football -- pop Nevada in the mouth early and see if they get off the mat. Historically, when teams smack the Pack, they wilt back into their corner and eventually throw in the towel (see Hawaii this year, SMU and Notre Dame last year, Maryland 2 years ago). History repeats itself this Sunday. BOSTON COLLEGE, 31-27.

MONDAY, JANUARY 10

BCS CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

University of Phoenix Stadium – Glendale, AZ

BEST BET

OREGON over AUBURN by 9

In the last 35 bowl games the Heisman Trophy winner has participated, bettors backing his team are 9-25-1 ATS. Bettors going against his team are 25-9-1 ATS. Cam Newton, the Heisman Trophy winner, plays quarterback for Auburn. Backing bowl favorites that go into their bowls off at least three straight point-spread covers would have resulted in 36-58-1 ATS over the last 20 years; 58-36-1 ATS for those playing against such a team, which in this case would be Auburn. Those historical numbers are interesting, but certainly not the be-all and end-all. There are multiple unit match-ups involved. Regarding the Auburn offense, an Associated Press sportswriter says: "The pace isn't as quick, but the Tigers pack more punch." That's also interesting, in that Oregon has out-yarded Auburn 538 to 498 yards per game and features the nation's leading running back, LaMichael James. With 21 rushing touchdowns at just 5'9", 185, the Oregon offense can get James home from anywhere on the field and three other running backs have scored 5-6 rushing TDs. Newton is the leading rushing TD-getter for Auburn, and along with his 28-6 TD-INT ratio and 67.1% completion rate, you have to wonder how Auburn can get by if something not good happens to his body during the game. As early as, say, the first quarter when quarterback Colt McCoy had to leave last season's title game for Texas? Banking too heavily on one guy can get you in trouble. If Newton plays the entire game, then Oregon's defense that is famous for bending and not breaking can make a stop or two here and there and pretty much say that it has done its job. Auburn's defense played against SEC offenses and Clemson that plodded along compared to Oregon: a range of 62 plays per game, to a high of 70 (Kentucky). They eked past Kentucky, 37-34. Theoretically, the 79 plays per game Quack Attack can squeeze two more scoring drives out of that 9-play difference. The Oregon defense has intercepted 20 passes to Auburn's 10. OREGON, 42-33.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6

OKLAHOMA over *DALLAS by 2

Dirk Nowitzki tweaked his knee, Caron Butler has gone down, and Shawn Marion is also hurting. The Mavs beat the Thunder 2 days after Christmas despite Dirk only playing 11 minutes, but Russell Westbrook had an off game. OKC is quietly running under the radar but need to pick it up on defense. They are on the bottom tier in points allowed. OKLAHOMA 92- 90

RECOMMENDED

DENVER over *SACRAMENTO by 11

Home, away, it doesn't matter, the Kings are just a bad team. Second year player Tyreke Evans has struggled and Californians have just played with zero discipline. They have been crushed by good teams and found ways to lose against other bad teams. Nuggets are third in the league in scoring while the Kings had only scored better than 5 teams to close out 2010. DENVER 110 - 99

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7

NEW JERSEY over *WASHINGTON by 1

Things looked bright for D.C. guys when they drafted high potential point John Wall, but the kid is slight and has been banged up most of the year. Nets have already played better than they did last season and they handled this team in mid-December when they controlled the glass. NEW JERSEY 99 - 98

SAN ANTONIO over *INDIANA by 2

Pacers could be rusty as they have not played in 5 days. It takes a lot of guts to change a successful team but that is what Coach Popovich did when he completely changed his offensive philosophy. The keys of the car have been taken away from Tim Duncan at this point and handed over to Tony Parker and Manu. What this will do in the long run is give Duncan the energy to dominate in the spring. SAN ANTONIO 105 - 103

CHICAGO over *PHILADELPHIA by 3

The way the Sixers performed in Chicago on 12/21 suggests they will be up against it even in Philly. In that crushing loss only two players scored double digits and they allowed Bulls to get 31 points off turnovers. The Bulls get to the line 25 times a game and what that does is not only give you free points, but it helps the defense before the other team can not get out in transition. CHICAGO 101 - 98

*BOSTON over TORONTO by 9

There is growing sentiment for Coach Rivers to be Coach of the Year. He has used duct tape and wise words to keep this veteran team not only afloat, but thriving. Now he has to get them to win without Kevin Garnett. Paul Pierce and Ray Allen have to step up. BOSTON 100 - 91

*ORLANDO over HOUSTON by 7

Nothing like a face lift to change a team in midstream. What Orlando got in the trade is instant offense from both Gilbert Arenas and Jason Richardson. With all those shooters, Dwight Howard has been able to easily find open men. ORLANDO 100 - 93

*MEMPHIS over UTAH by 2

Solid match up in the back court with Deron Williams and the improving Mike Conley going at it. Griz have had an up and down year but they have now found one of their keys and that is the fact they are a power team and have to play inside out. MEMPHIS 100 - 98

PORTLAND over *MINNESOTA by 2

Tough for the Trailblazers to get up every night with all the injuries but they beat this young Wolves team by 5 about 3 weeks ago despite losing the battle of the boards. Wesley Matthews is quickly becoming one of the best in the Northwest. PORTLAND 106 - 104

RECOMMENDED

MIAMI over *MILWAUKEE by 10

This is the first game of a 5-event trip for Heat and the team as a whole is coming together quicker than most thought with D. Wade able to glide to the hole at will and LeBron doing everything on the court. All the hype about the Heat surrounds the Big Three and the trade but the truth of the matter is that they defend and only the Celtics have allowed fewer points per game this year. MIAMI 103 - 93

NEW YORK over *PHOENIX by 1

Not sure there will be bad blood in the heart of Amar'e Stoudamire but he was not really taken care of by the Suns franchise and he may have that on his mind here. Phoenix got bigger with Marcin Gortat but that guy might be overwhelmed by the Gotham bigs. NEW YORK 109 - 108

CLEVELAND over *GOLDEN STATE by 3

This is a huge game for the Cavs as it will only get tougher with the Lakers, Jazz and Nuggets in wait. Warriors will try to run them out of the building but Cavs have veterans that can weather the storm. The Californians all too often are content to jack it up and watch Monta Ellis. They shoot 10 less free throws a game than the league leader. CLEVELAND 92-89

RECOMMENDED

*LOS ANGELES LAKERS over NEW ORLEANS by 14

The trouble the Lakers have had recently is no mirage. The positive for the homers is that they have started to show that chip on their collective shoulders and that's bad for any opponent. The key for the Lakers at this point is when Andrew Bynum gets close to 100%. When he starts and contributes, it allows Lamar Odom to take over the second unit and overwhelm teams. LOS ANGELES 111 - 97

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8

*CHARLOTTE over WASHINGTON by 7

One thing new Coach Paul Silas will likely try to instill in his team is toughness for as a player. Silas was a bull. He is on record saying he wants his team to run and they did just that in his first game putting up a winning 105 vs. the Pistons. CHARLOTTE 101 - 94

*NEW JERSEY over MILWAUKEE by 3

Brook Lopez is a nice block that the Nets can use to build this franchise and he only figures to get better. When Devin Harris is hot, the Nets are more than capable. This is a huge game for the Nets. They had to come back from D.C. last night and are almost in a must win situation with a 4-game West Coast swing on the immediate horizon. NEW JERSEY 99 - 96

RECOMMENDED

*ATLANTA over INDIANA by 12

The Pacers put most of the eggs in the Danny Granger basket and that guy can be inconsistent. Hawks handled this team at home despite the starting guards, Mike Bibby and Mo Evans, scoring 5 between them. ATLANTA 109 - 97

*DETROIT over PHILADELPHIA by 4

Two also rans in the East will likely bang hard in a brutal contest. Sixers were in the air last night after hosting the Bulls while Pistons have had 3 full days of rest since playing the Lakers at Staples Center in downtown L.A. Charlie Villanueva is the key to the Pistons at this point in the franchise's history. He brings energy to the arena and he can shoot as he is hitting 38% from 3-land. DETROIT 92-88

*CHICAGO over BOSTON by 2

It will be like old home week for Celtics as they meet their former coach but don't look for any sympathy from either squad. The teams split the first 2 tests this year and Rajon Rondo torched them with 19 dimes in the 12/3 beat. Celts had to host Toronto last night while Bulls were in Philly last night. CHICAGO 99 - 97

BEST BET

*OKLAHOMA CITY over MEMPHIS by 19

Memphis tries to get into the passing lanes disrupting the flow and then get out on the break but they hook a young team that can run with anybody and if the Griz gamble and don't come up with steals, it opens up the paint for interior passing. Would love to see Russell Westbrook try to get his other guys a bit more involved. OKLAHOMA 112 - 93

UTAH over *HOUSTON by 3

It's been a bad injury year for the Texans as the word is they may try to unload Yao Ming's big contract since it appears he could be finished. The Jazz compete every night and have a much more balanced concept. Rockets did well the end of 2010 but they were beating up on bad teams like the Kings, Clips and the Wizards. This is also a tough stretch for the Rockets as they were in Orlando last night, have to go to Boston in 48 hours, then host the Thunder. UTAH 100 - 97

ORLANDO over *DALLAS by 3

Two goliaths in the league pit skills here, with the revamped Magic playing very good of late. The key for the homers is if they can get to the hole and get Dwight Howard into foul trouble. It took Orlando a game or two to settle down but they put together a super stretch to close out the year winning 5 in a row with some quality wins to boot. They beat the Spurs and the Celtics in consecutive games and also handled the Knicks. ORLANDO 100 - 97

This Week In Football

schedule ▼ starting time EST ▼ power ratings ▼ scores the past 3 years ▼ opening las vegas line

PREVIOUS THREE SCORES: *home field advantage (-) no game played that year.

	VEGAS LINE	SR RATING	2009	2008	2007
Sugar Bowl at New Orleans, LA, Tuesday, January 4					
ARKANSAS	56.5	56.5	-	-	-
OHIO STATE 8:30	3.5	5.5	-	-	-
Go Daddy.com Bowl at Mobile, AL, Thursday, January 6					
MID TENNESSEE STATE	1	3	-	-	-
MIAMI OHIO 8:00	48.5	51	-	-	-
Cotton Bowl at Arlington, TX, Friday, January 7					
TEXAS A&M	49	48.5	-	-	-
L.S.U. 8:00	1	P	-	-	-
NFL Football, Saturday, January 8					
NEW ORLEANS	10.5	-	-	-	-
SEATTLE 4:30	45.5	-	-	-	-
N.Y. JETS	44.5	-	-	-	-
INDIANAPOLIS 8:20	3	-	-	-	-

	VEGAS LINE	SR RATING	2009	2008	2007
Compass Bowl at Birmingham, AL, Saturday, January 8					
KENTUCKY	52	49	-	-	-
PITTSBURGH 12:00	3	6.5	-	-	-
NFL Football, Sunday, January 9					
BALTIMORE	3	-	-	-	-
KANSAS CITY 1:00	41	-	-	-	-
GREE BAY	46	-	-	-	-
PHILADELPHIA 4:30	2.5	-	-	-	-
Fight Hunger Bowl at San Francisco, CA, Sunday, January 9					
BOSTON COLLEGE	55	60	-	-	-
NEVADA 9:00	7.5	3.5	-	-	-
BCS Championship at Glendale, AZ, Monday, January 10					
OREGON	74	76	-	-	-
AUBURN 8:30	2.5	P	-	-	-

NBA

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9

BEST BET

*TORONTO over SACRAMENTO by 15

The Canadians are undermanned on most nights, but they do match up decently with these Queens. Leandro Barbosa gives them a great spark off the pine. Very hard to take a positive stance about Sacramento. They only won 2 games in December. One was by a bucket against the questionable Grizzlies, the other was in a blowout at home vs. the Wizards when John Wall didn't play. TORONTO 104 - 89

*LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS over GOLDEN STATE by 3

L.A. is playing better. Baron Davis is in much better shape and they are worth the price of admission just to see Blake Griffin, the human pogo stick who is still learning how to play. The Warriors seldom defend and when they beat this team early in the year, Griffin was compromised by foul problems. As the curtain came down on 2010, there were some signs the Clips were improving. They won 5 of their last 7 in December with one loss coming to the powerful Jazz. LOS ANGELES 105-102

RECOMMENDED

*SAN ANTONIO over MINNESOTA by 18

This is the first of two straight with Wolves. Manu Ginobili had a bad game but Spurs still beat this team just over a month ago. The T'Wolves play poorly on the road and that probably won't change here. The few road victories this year mainly came against teams like Cleveland. The Wolves can rebound and they can score, but they don't stop anybody. They are dead last in the league giving up almost 110 a game. That just won't get it done. SAN ANTONIO 108-90

*PHOENIX over CLEVELAND by 9

Visitors have had a day to rest but still have 3 tough ones away before hosting this very Suns team. The playoff window appeared to be closing for the Suns but they added critical pieces in the recent trade and could still contend in June if new guy Marcin Gortat learns to pick and roll. PHOENIX 105 - 96

MIAMI over *PORTLAND by 2

The Rose Garden will be buzzing when the circus known as Bosh, James and Wade come to town but the versatility those three bring will be enough to send Northwesterners home sad. For all those naysayers, the Heat have responded. They were always a good defense team but now are even better at the wings and they had a December to die for as they only lost one game all month, and that was by a bucket to Dallas when Jason Terry went off. MIAMI 96 - 94

*DENVER over NEW ORLEANS by 7

Reverse the motive for homers as they lost the second game of the season in the Big Easy by a half dozen points. The reason for the beat was they didn't take care of the ball and hence, the Hornets got double the points, 28, off turnovers. Anybody else tired of the

Melodrama and the trade talk?; Everyday it seems there is a trade meter and no matter that the front office of the teammates say, it has to be a distraction. With all that said, Denver still has to be beaten as they put up 106 a game. DENVER 103 - 96

RECOMMENDED

*LOS ANGELES LAKERS over NEW YORK by 17

Tough stretch for the Knicks, as they still have Portland and Utah to visit on this adventure. If the L.A. bigs show up, and Andrew Bynum is back, Amar'e will have a hard time doing whatever he wants in the paint. The Knicks can be dangerous offensively, but none of Mike D'Antoni's teams play solid defense. The Lakers are showing some signs of age as Derrick Fisher has been struggling to score and Kobe may not quite be 100% but Ron Artest has been more involved in the offense. If one guy plays good for the Lakers and the others play their normal game, the Lakers usually win. That guy is Lamar Odom. LOS ANGELES 117 - 100

MONDAY, JANUARY 10

*CHARLOTTE over MEMPHIS by 1

This is the middle game of a short trip for the Griz as they look forward to getting to Motown. Tyrus Thomas not only can sky and get to the hole, but he is the enforcer for the Bobcats too. Boris Diaw is the key to Charlotte. When he plays well, they generally play great. The Bobcats have been given the green light to put it up but that also means that Stephen Jackson has to make quality decisions. Memphis had also better keep D. J. Augustin off the line as he is fourth in the league from the stripe. CHARLOTTE 101 - 100

*BOSTON over HOUSTON by 1

This is a rare one-game trip for Rockets who despite all the distractions, had a very good December. They won 10 of their first 13 of the month. Houston has a nice one-two punch at the point with Aaron Brooks playing his way back with offensive skills and Kyle Lowry locking down opponents. BOSTON 90 - 89

RECOMMENDED

*CHICAGO over DETROIT by 16

A pair of blue-collar squads go here as the Pistons have struggled all year. The Bulls fell asleep in Detroit the day after Christmas but came on big in OT to prevail. Carlos Boozer played well despite foul trouble. Much of the same mayhem should be the order of the day. Desire is a huge part of this game that gets under played most of the time but it always shows up on the boards. In this case, the Bull want the ball. They are leading the league in rebound margin while Detroit has only dismal Washington and soft Suns beat in that department. CHICAGO 115 -99

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11-12

NBA forecasts and selections on the Web for Sports Reporter Online members. Non-members can always sign up at www.sportsreporter.com