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NFL PLAYOFFS! NBA & COLLEGE HOOPS

Justice Is Finally Served

You might remember the Michigan vs. Seton Hall NCAA Championship Game of 1989. Seton Hall led by a point with a few seconds remaining. Michigan guard Rumeal Robinson was dribbling, and as a defender avoided contact, Robinson did not continue to the hoop. He passed to a teammate on the wing. Referee John Clougherty whistled a foul on the Seton Hall defender who hadn't committed a foul, when the offensive player didn't even take a shot. Incompetent fool? Crook? Puppet? Nobody knows. Robinson sank the bogus free throws, Michigan led by one, Seton Hall then missed a prayer shot, and Michigan won the National Championship. It was a sham.

You always hear about how "student-athletes" learn important lessons during their days in college, but you never hear about the fake lessons they learn that go on to haunt them, and others. The lessons about how you can cheat to get ahead, or benefit by somebody else cheating, like a coach, referee or a teammate. Last week, Robinson was sentenced to 6.5 years in jail for financial fraud, including bank bribery, wire fraud, conspiracy to commit bank fraud and making a false statement to a financial institution. According to prosecutors, Robinson schemed between 2004-05 to borrow more than \$700,000 from an Iowa bank, with the help of a loan officer. He claimed the money was for a business, but instead he bought a condo, cars, and furniture.

Naturally, John Clougherty went on to become the ACC's Supervisor of Officials. Of course! Who knows how many hidden shams he has helped perpetrate in that role. Somewhere, there is a creature in a red suit with a pitchfork waiting for him, and for referees like Todd Geerling, who several weeks ago called an unsportsmanlike

conduct penalty on the Kansas State player (for briefly saluting a section of Kansas State fans) that created a near-impossible two-point conversion try from 18 yards out that was unsuccessful, preventing K-State from taking their bowl game to overtime against Syracuse. Geerling actually had the nerve to say, "Wrong choice, buddy!" to the player, as if he was watching and waiting for one little thing that he could somehow justify into an infraction by bending the rule-book, in order to get his jollies. Wouldn't want to be that guy when the world gets even with him.

Nice weekend!

The only football loss for our Premier Players' game-day starred-release players last Friday through Sunday was New Orleans against Seattle. Otherwise, LSU, U. Pittsburgh, New York Jets and Under, Baltimore Ravens and Under, Green Bay Packers, and Boston College were all winners vs. the spread, for 8-1. The New Orleans game put me in a bad mood, but only because there is nothing worse than listening to goofball announcers in a game you won't be winning. My "bad announcer radar" was turned on before the Saints started blowing it. "Reggie Bush drops what probably was a sure touchdown pass," said the color commentator prior to New Orleans taking a 3-0 lead. How can something be "probably sure"? What planet do these guys get dropped in from?

The play-by-play announcer kept calling New Orleans "the defending Super Bowl champions," or a version of that phrase. "A 14-point lead for the Seahawks...over the champs!" What a dolt. New Orleans stopped being the champs at opening kickoff, Week 1, Thursday night vs. Minnesota. There is no such thing as a "defending champion." It's a bull--t term intended to hype an event. This was the new, next season, with no connection at all to last season.

In the fourth quarter while trailing, Saints' quarterback Drew Brees waved off the punt team, and the play-by-play announcer -- who used to ruin Breeders' Cup telecasts for NBC -- put words in Brees' mouth: "We're the defending champions, says Brees, we're going for it on 4th and inches!" Well, New Orleans didn't earn their championship by converting 4th and inches. Who is the last guy you'd give it to on a critical 4th and inches? The overrated, overpaid dancing running back called Reggie Bush -- another crooked collegian, by the way. Which is why they had to give it to Julius Jones instead, who, naturally, didn't get it, because he is Julius Jones, and not Drew Brees converting a first down on a 1st, 2nd or 3rd down pass to a receiver.

Then the play-by-play announcer said this: "Will history be made today? The defending Super Bowl champion has never lost a playoff game when leading by at least 10-0." Shut up! Shut up, you fool! History is the French freaking Revolution. Not sports trivia! It's not even trivia! It's a mere partial score in a NFL post-season game. They play 11 of them a year!

Seattle led New Orleans 41-30 with 3:30 remaining: The play-by-play announcer then said: "No defending champ has won an NFL post-season game since 2004, New England..." In other words, none of this Seattle in-game hype should have been as surprising as you've been trying to tell everyone it is, Mr. Clown Announcer, because five straight teams in New Orleans' current situation had lost! So, just shut up! Shut up! Call the play-by-play, then zip it!

Bobby Smith is Editor of Sports Reporter and sportsreporter.com, and author of "How to Beat the Pro Football Points Spread," the nation's #1 selling sports betting book. Order it at www.amazon.com.

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 | 0 |
| 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 |
| 1 | 9 | at | Kansas City | +3 | 41 | 30 | 7 | | W | W | U |

New England Patriots

| MO | DAY | SITE | OPPONENT | LINE | TOT | PF | PA | O | SU | ATS | OU |
|----|-----|------|--------------|-------|------|----|----|---|----|-----|----|
| 9 | 12 | h | Cincinnati | -4.5 | 44.5 | 38 | 24 | | W | W | 0 |
| 9 | 19 | at | NY Jets | -3 | 38.5 | 14 | 28 | | L | L | 0 |
| 9 | 26 | h | Buffalo | -14.5 | 42.5 | 38 | 30 | | W | L | 0 |
| 10 | 4 | at | Miami | -1 | 46.5 | 41 | 14 | | W | W | 0 |
| 10 | 17 | h | Baltimore | -2.5 | 45 | 23 | 20 | 1 | W | W | U |
| 10 | 24 | at | San Diego | 2.5 | 48 | 23 | 20 | | W | W | U |
| 10 | 31 | h | Minnesota | -4.5 | 44 | 28 | 18 | | W | W | 0 |
| 11 | 7 | at | Cleveland | -4.5 | 43.5 | 14 | 34 | | L | L | 0 |
| 11 | 14 | at | Pittsburgh | 5 | 45 | 39 | 26 | | W | W | 0 |
| 11 | 21 | h | Indianapolis | -3.5 | 50.5 | 31 | 28 | | W | L | 0 |
| 11 | 25 | at | Detroit | -7 | 51 | 45 | 24 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 6 | h | NY Jets | -3.5 | 45 | 45 | 3 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 12 | at | Chicago | -3 | 41 | 36 | 7 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 19 | h | Green Bay | -13.5 | 43.5 | 31 | 27 | | W | L | 0 |
| 12 | 26 | at | Buffalo | -9 | 44.5 | 34 | 3 | | W | W | U |
| 1 | 2 | h | Miami | -6 | 43.5 | 38 | 7 | | W | W | 0 |

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 |
| 1 | 8 | at | Indianapolis | +2 | 45 | 17 | 16 | | W | W | U |

Pittsburgh Steelers

| MO | DAY | SITE | OPPONENT | LINE | TOT | PF | PA | O | SU | ATS | OU |
|----|-----|------|-------------|------|------|----|----|---|----|-----|----|
| 9 | 12 | h | Atlanta | 2.5 | 37.5 | 15 | 9 | 1 | W | W | U |
| 9 | 19 | at | Tennessee | 5.5 | 37 | 19 | 11 | | W | W | U |
| 9 | 26 | at | Tampa Bay | -2.5 | 33 | 38 | 13 | | W | W | 0 |
| 10 | 3 | h | Baltimore | -1 | 34 | 14 | 17 | | L | L | U |
| 10 | 17 | h | Cleveland | -14 | 37 | 28 | 10 | | W | W | 0 |
| 10 | 24 | at | Miami | -3 | 41 | 23 | 22 | | W | L | 0 |
| 10 | 31 | at | New Orleans | 2 | 45 | 10 | 20 | | L | L | U |
| 11 | 8 | at | Cincinnati | -4.5 | 41.5 | 27 | 21 | | W | W | 0 |
| 11 | 14 | h | New England | -5 | 45 | 26 | 39 | | L | L | 0 |
| 11 | 21 | h | Oakland | -7 | 41 | 35 | 3 | | W | W | U |
| 11 | 28 | at | Buffalo | -7.5 | 44 | 19 | 16 | 1 | W | L | U |
| 12 | 5 | at | Baltimore | 3 | 39.5 | 13 | 10 | | W | W | U |
| 12 | 12 | h | Cincinnati | -8.5 | 39.5 | 23 | 7 | | W | W | U |
| 12 | 19 | h | NY Jets | -4.5 | 36 | 17 | 22 | | L | L | 0 |
| 12 | 23 | h | Carolina | -14 | 37 | 27 | 3 | | W | W | U |
| 1 | 2 | at | Cleveland | -5.5 | 37.5 | 41 | 9 | | W | W | 0 |

NFC Playoff, Saturday, January 15

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------|-----|---|---|---|
| BALTIMORE | 36.5 | 35 | - | - | - |
| PITTSBURGH 4:30 | 3.5 | 4.5 | - | - | - |

AFC Playoff, Saturday, January 15

| | | | | | |
|--------------|------|----|---|---|---|
| GREEN BAY | 45.5 | 48 | - | - | - |
| ATLANTA 8:20 | 1 | P | - | - | - |

NFC Atlanta Falcons

| MO | DAY | SITE | OPPONENT | LINE | TOT | PF | PA | O | SU | ATS | OU |
|----|-----|------|---------------|-------|------|----|----|---|----|-----|----|
| 9 | 12 | at | Pittsburgh | -2.5 | 37.5 | 9 | 15 | 1 | L | L | U |
| 9 | 19 | h | Arizona | -6.5 | 43 | 41 | 7 | | W | W | 0 |
| 9 | 26 | at | New Orleans | 3.5 | 49 | 27 | 24 | 1 | W | W | 0 |
| 10 | 3 | h | San Francisco | -7 | 42.5 | 16 | 14 | | W | L | U |
| 10 | 10 | at | Cleveland | -3 | 41 | 20 | 10 | | W | W | U |
| 10 | 17 | at | Philadelphia | 2 | 42.5 | 17 | 31 | | L | L | 0 |
| 10 | 24 | h | Cincinnati | -3.5 | 43.5 | 39 | 32 | | W | W | 0 |
| 11 | 7 | h | Tampa Bay | -8.5 | 44.5 | 27 | 21 | | W | L | 0 |
| 11 | 11 | h | Baltimore | -1.5 | 44 | 26 | 21 | | W | W | 0 |
| 11 | 21 | at | St. Louis | -3 | 42.5 | 34 | 17 | | W | W | 0 |
| 11 | 28 | h | Green Bay | -1.5 | 47.5 | 20 | 17 | | W | W | U |
| 12 | 5 | at | Tampa Bay | -3 | 43.5 | 28 | 24 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 12 | at | Carolina | -7.5 | 42 | 31 | 10 | | W | W | U |
| 12 | 19 | at | Seattle | -6 | 45.5 | 34 | 18 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 27 | h | New Orleans | -2.5 | 48.5 | 14 | 17 | | L | L | U |
| 1 | 2 | h | Carolina | -14.5 | 41 | 31 | 10 | | W | W | T |

Chicago Bears

| MO | DAY | SITE | OPPONENT | LINE | TOT | PF | PA | O | SU | ATS | OU |
|----|-----|------|--------------|------|------|----|----|---|----|-----|----|
| 9 | 12 | h | Detroit | -6.5 | 43 | 19 | 14 | | W | L | U |
| 9 | 19 | at | Dallas | 7 | 40.5 | 27 | 20 | | W | W | 0 |
| 9 | 27 | h | Green Bay | 3 | 46 | 20 | 17 | | W | W | U |
| 10 | 3 | at | NY Giants | 3.5 | 44 | 3 | 17 | | L | L | U |
| 10 | 10 | at | Carolina | -1 | 33 | 23 | 6 | | W | W | U |
| 10 | 17 | h | Seattle | -6.5 | 37.5 | 20 | 23 | | L | L | 0 |
| 10 | 24 | h | Washington | -3 | 40 | 14 | 17 | | L | L | U |
| 11 | 7 | at | Buffalo | -3 | 41 | 22 | 19 | | W | T | T |
| 11 | 14 | h | Minnesota | 1.5 | 40.5 | 27 | 13 | | W | W | U |
| 11 | 18 | at | Miami | 1.5 | 39 | 16 | 0 | | W | W | U |
| 11 | 28 | h | Philadelphia | 3 | 42 | 31 | 26 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 5 | at | Detroit | -3.5 | 43 | 24 | 20 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 12 | h | New England | 3 | 41 | 7 | 36 | | L | L | 0 |
| 12 | 20 | at | Minnesota | -7 | 34 | 40 | 14 | | W | W | 0 |
| 12 | 26 | h | NY Jets | -2.5 | 35.5 | 38 | 34 | | W | W | 0 |
| 1 | 2 | at | Green Bay | 9.5 | 41.5 | 3 | 10 | | L | W | U |

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 |
| 1 | 9 | at | Philadelphia | +2 | 47 | 21 | 16 | | W | W | 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 |
| 1 | 8 | h | New Orleans | 3 | 45 | 41 | 36 | | W | W | |

NFL FOOTBALL

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15

*PITTSBURGH over BALTIMORE by 6

Three things scare you about betting against Pittsburgh: a) the defense gets turnovers and sets the offense up in good field position, b) the offense takes care of the ball and, supported by a defense so solid, is rarely in panic mode via a 2-score scoreboard deficit, c) Ben Roethlisberger sidesteps sacks and keeps plays alive. For all their ferocity, there is a certain calmness that seems to surround the Steelers and lulls the viewer who might have a bet against them into a false sense of security that the Steelers won't suddenly make a game-changing defensive play like a sack-fumble or interception, or a big pass play from out of the blue, that beats the bet. And then – bam! – they do. In the last eight meetings between these AFC North rivals, the underdog is 5-2-1 ATS, but seven of the eight games landed within 0-6 points from the spread. Baltimore quarterback Joe Flacco has yet to look outstanding in seven outings vs. the Steelers. The Ravens' 2-5 SU record vs. Pittsburgh when Flacco starts shows both wins coming when Pittsburgh was without the services of Roethlisberger – last season with rookie Dennis Dixon operating less than half the offensive playbook, and this season with the different limitations of veteran Charlie Batch. The Ravens were only good enough to win each of those games by 3 points, with the winning margin delivered very, very late.

The Ravens acquired veteran receivers T.J. Houshmandzadeh and Anquan Boldin in the off-season. "I feel like we can pick and choose what we want to do now," says RB Ray Rice. "It's not going into a game plan saying we've got to script 25 or 30 plays for [me]. I think we can go into a game plan letting Joe do his thing, and when we need to run it and we need to make plays, we get the ball in the hands of our playmakers." Well, not so fast. We'll have to let Flacco first prove that he can get the ball into the right hands against Pittsburgh without mucking it up at some point along the way. PITTSBURGH, 20-14.

BEST BET

GREEN BAY over *ATLANTA by 10

At the conclusion of their Week 13 regular season meeting, after the Falcons had improved their record to 9-2 SU and Green Bay fell to 7-4 SU in a 20-17 game won in the final :09, Falcons receiver Roddy White said: "I have no plans of going to Lambeau Field in January. I plan on staying right here and sleeping in my own bed in the playoffs." Ah, but the football field is not a bed. You don't lay on it. You play on it. Home field is only one advantage. What if the visitor has more advantages? What if the Packers get the ball first and score, instead of the way it was in the first meeting, when Atlanta took 5:29 for 11 offensive snaps and got a 38-yard field goal? What if the Falcons can't cut it finely enough to score a touchdown on the last play of the first half, at the end of a 14-play, 80-yard drive in 7:29, the drive that followed Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers' infamous lost fumble at the Falcons' goal line?

Going into Green Bay's "Best Bet" win at Philadelphia last Sunday, the world was saying, "Oh, the Packers can't run the ball." Then, naturally, the Packers showed a very effective Paul Hornung-Jim Taylor-Elijah Pitts backfield and gained 138 rushing yards against the Eagles. This has to be giving Atlanta's defense some worries because the Falcons surrendered 418 yards to the Packers' offense in the first meeting, 341 through the air, despite the fact that Green Bay wasn't in panic mode and never trailed by more than a TD. In fact, both Packers' touchdowns in the Week 13 game at Atlanta came on snaps with 5-receiver sets.

Atlanta's 19-2 SU home record with Matt Ryan as the starting quarterback can be this week's faulty, apples-and-oranges hat-hanger fake stat. As noted prior to the win by New Orleans on this field a few weeks ago, the Falcons last three games here have been won with :32, and :09 seconds left, and then lost. Ryan completed more than 90% of his passes against the Packers in Week 12 on throws of 14 yards or shorter. Atlanta averaged 26 points per game this season, but the Packers held them to 20 points in their dome. Mike McCarthy has to like his chances of out-scoring them this time around because the Dom Capers-coordinated defense – as mentioned repeatedly here recently -- continues to hold opposing teams to substantially fewer points than their scoring average. The Eagles were getting 27.5 ppg but scored only 16 against the Packers. GREEN BAY, 30-20.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 16

*CHICAGO over SEATTLE by 7

The last time these teams met in the playoffs was the season in which the Bears eventually went to the Super Bowl vs. Indianapolis, and we can remember a Sports Reporter Midweek Update Best Bet winner on Seattle as a +7.5 road underdog in that game, which the Seahawks lost by 3 points in overtime. The Chicago defensive players were very worried going into that game because Matt Hasselbeck and the in-rhythm, quick-pass West Coast offense was a tough match-up for their Cover-2 defense that has been the Bears' staple during the Lovie Smith regime. Although Cover-2 was designed to combat West Coast offenses when they were in their heyday, it was more of a contain thing, not a shutdown, and the scheme favored by Chicago leaves a lot of soft zones open that can be exploited by experienced quarterbacks with accurate arms, like Hasselbeck.

Of course, it helps to have a running game to support the pass, especially when you're playing in the northern Midwest near a lake in January. The Seahawks really don't have much of a running game. Marshawn Lynch looked like a superstar late in a ballgame against a Saints' defense known more for hitting and stripping than it is for tackling. The Bears defensive players are not Matadors. When they hit, they usually make it stick. But still, you really have to worry about laying two scores with the Bears, despite going against Pete the Cheat and the Seahawks team we've loved to dislike, normally with good results. Pete the Cheat is such a liar that his decree of "we're going to run the ball and play great defense" has morphed into the opposite, where Seattle now passes the ball and plays lousy defense. But the teams have met once in each of the last two seasons. Seattle's offense out-snapped Chicago's 75-57 last season, 71-59 this season, and out-gained the Bears by 28 and 46 total yards in those games. A +10 underdog that can hog the football (Chicago's defense allowed 23 pass completions per game this season, fourth-most in the NFL) seems like a high-percentage play to cover the spread, all other things being close to equal. With the Bears, all other things usually favor them, with Devin Hester returns, blocked kicks and the like. But those things are never guarantees, and the sack count in Seattle's Week 6 win this season was 6-0, favoring Seattle. Chicago QB Jay Cutler losing -44 yards on those takedowns. Clearly, the Bears have some work to do. CHICAGO, 27-20.

*NEW ENGLAND over NY JETS by 3

The 45-3 Monday Night Football blowout win by the Patriots over the Jets in Week 13 sticks in the mind of many football followers and bettors. "How do the Jets make up enough of that 42-point gap?" At the risk of sounding slightly hostile, we'll answer a question with a question: Wouldn't the Pats have been better served to bust out all those relatively new, quick-hitting offensive wrinkles in this game, instead of giving the Jets' defense an embarrassing sampling of it in November?

In the nationally televised blowout defeat, the Jets' defense got caught in Rex Ryan's least favorite image -- flat-footed -- but at least their defensive staff and personnel have tape of the carnage to help them be on their toes for it this time around. They also have time to get their safeties straightened out after Jim Leonard -- still absent -- was a very late scratch that week due to an injury suffered in practice. Leonard was the defensive captain and called most of that unit's signals, a possible hidden cause for that night's breakdown.

Coming off a string of regular-season blowout victories, the Patriots seem set up for a similar run to the Super Bowl like they were in 2007 -- when they were 0-2 ATS in the AFC playoff games against Jacksonville and San Diego before losing the Super Bowl outright as -12 chalk. We've always said that after the New England franchise adopted an offensive identity, Bill Belichick's value as a post-season betting tool was lost. You wanted him as an underdog with a great defense against hyped offenses, not as the leader of the team with the hyped offense, sent off as the favorite against better defenses, while his own defense has some problems getting off the field. With their one-and-done home loss vs. Baltimore in the playoffs last season, Belichick backers are on a 0-4 ATS run in the post-season. The Patriots have a ridiculously over-the-top Turnover Ratio of +27 this season. The Jets are +4. They say turnovers are worth four points, which would give New England a difference of 23 x 4 = 92, which, divided by 16 games is 5.75 points per game. If the Jets can play them even in turnovers -- not a given, but not impossible -- then, theoretically, the Patriots are overvalued by nearly six points. NEW ENGLAND, 23-20.

NFL PAST PERFORMANCES JANUARY 15-16

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 | 2 | NE 14 | NYJ 28 | Brady | Sanchez | W Cin | W Buf | L Bal | W at Mia | Jets win off short week, shutting out NE in 2nd half. Pats, 2.6 ypc, 2 INTs by Brady. |
| 2010 | 13 | NYJ 3 | NE 45 | Sanchez | Brady | W BUF | BYE | W at Det | W at Chi | NE offense, Moss gone, romps from the start w/ 405 yards. 3 INTs by Sanchez. |
| 2010 | 12 | PIT 13 | BAL 10 | Rothlisbrgr | Flacco | W at Buf | W Cin | W TB | W at Hou | Neither offense gained 300 yards. Polomalu INT set up Steelers' lone TD, winning score. |
| 2010 | 4 | BAL 17 | PIT 14 | Flacco | Batch | W Cle | W Den | W at TB | Bye | Final game of Big Ben suspension. Flacco TD pass to T.J. Housh with 0:32 remaining wins it. |
| 2010 | 12 | GB 17 | ATL 20 | Rodgers | Ryan | W at Min | W SF | W at StL | W at TB | GB out-gained 'em 418-294, gained 7.1 yards per play. Rodgers fumble at ATL 1 a huge boner. |
| 2010 | 14 | SEA 23 | CHI 20 | Hasselbeck | Cutler | Bye | W Ari | W at Car | L Was | Cutler sacked 6 times for -42 yards, Hasselbeck not sacked! 71-59 play count favors SEA. |

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13

***RICHMOND over RHODE ISLAND by 7**
BUFFALO over *MIAMI OHIO by 1
PURDUE over *MINNESOTA by 3

It now appears that Tubby may have channeled his Goofs into peaking too early. Though we're sure Minny will have their moments at home this season, not sold this will prove to be one of them, as hot as the Boilers are running. PURDUE, 69-66.

***WEST VIRGINIA over PROVIDENCE by 9**
***DREXEL over OLD DOMINION by 1**

Tough split between what may be the top two Colonials on raw figures. Dragons have one legitimate win this season – which is one more than Monarchs can currently boast – but this figures very, very close. DREXEL, 64-63.

***WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE over ILLINOIS CHICAGO by 11**
***WISCONSIN-GREEN BAY over LOYOLA CHICAGO by 5**

Given Ramblers' slow injury-influenced deterioration, must lean meaningfully to home side. WISCONSIN-GREEN BAY, 68-63.

FLORIDA ATLANTIC over *MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE by 3
Blue Raiders markedly underperforming, which leaves door wide-open for Owls to swoop down for road win, if they're on their game. FLORIDA ATLANTIC, 67-64.

***ARKANSAS-LITTLE ROCK over UL-MONROE by 12**
***NORTH TEXAS over FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL by 15**
WESTERN KENTUCKY over *TROY by 3

Trojans' HC Don Maestri missed first game in forever when he missed Arky-Little Rock tilt with minor illness, but should be back for this, and WKU always potential fade material, given their defense. WESTERN KENTUCKY, just 76-73.

***ARKANSAS STATE over UL-LAFAYETTE by 9**
***LOUISIANA TECH over SAN JOSE STATE by 1**
UCLA over *OREGON STATE by 3
***MISSISSIPPI over MISSISSIPPI STATE by 16**

Renardo Sidney's return to active duty for Bulldogs was offensively pathetic, as MSU got blistered by Alabama – in Starkville! Dee Bost's return was nothing to write home about, either. And Rick Stansbury's kvetching about the officials is nothing but blowing smoke. MISSISSIPPI, 76-60.

***GONZAGA over PEPPERDINE by 17**

This is one of those classic cases which look easy, but you'd be best advised not to try to run away with this hot stove, even if wearing asbestos gloves. Check status of Mathis Monninghoff's aching ankle for home side, if you persist in seeking involvement. In-and-out Wave sparkplug Keion Bell sat out his third straight, against St. Mary's. We don't like guessing games. GONZAGA, 77-60.

BEST BET

***NEW MEXICO STATE over HAWAII by 17**

Aggie stud Troy Gillenwater is back in stroke, and so long as Gillenwater remains racing sound, NMS is going to remain a tough out at home in conference. New coach Gib Arnold had warmed Hawaii up, but WAC play sees them stone-cold, and this physical matchup is unfavorable for visitors. NEW MEXICO STATE, 79-62.

***NORTH CAROLINA over VIRGINIA TECH by 9**

Though shorthanded, Hokies extracted their revenge on Seminoles – a big game for Tech, since last year's loss in that matchup was probably the straw which kept them away from the '10 Dance. That score settled, only one way to go. NORTH CAROLINA, 74-65.

***CAL SANTA BARBARA over CAL IRVINE by 13**
***CS NORTHRIDGE over CAL RIVERSIDE by 1**
***CAL POLY SLO over CS FULLERTON by 10**

It can be an adventure to cover double digits when you seldom score 60 points. CAL POLY SLO, 57-47.

SANTA CLARA over *SAN DIEGO by 9
WASHINGTON over *STANFORD by 5

Huskies playing right through recent injury issues, but you know Cardinal will play smarter, and will at least make effort to box out properly. WASHINGTON, 78-73.

UTAH STATE over *BOISE STATE by 3
USC over *OREGON by 5

WASHINGTON STATE over *CALIFORNIA by 2

Coogs remain a sticky wicket, since (a) Klay Thompson is marvelous but, conversely (b) other than Reggie Moore, his helping hands are willing but simply not strong enough to boost WSU to the next level, consistently. WASHINGTON STATE, 66-64.

***SAINT MARYS CA over SAN FRANCISCO by 19**
***PORTLAND over LOYOLA MARYMOUNT by 15**

FRIDAY, JANUARY 14

***WRIGHT STATE over VALPARAISO by 1**

RECOMMENDED

***DETROIT over BUTLER by 3**

With six days off since their cruising, narrow road triumph over UIC Flames (and with one eye on this), Detroit grasps its chance to take out the conference strawbosses. Butler had last Sunday's buffer with Youngstown State to work off the effects of their rout of Cleveland State, but as solid as Butler remains, Titans are hungrier, and are capable of staging this palace coup – so long as they take care of the ball. DETROIT, 66-63.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15

***LOUISVILLE over MARQUETTE by 2**

Based on our suspicion that the 'Ville/Nova leadin to this won't alter much of anything, envision that Rick's troops could be vulnerable to Golden Eagles' relentless inside thrusts, at likely market prices. LOUISVILLE, 74-72

***SYRACUSE over CINCINNATI by 7**

BEST BET

MARSHALL over *MEMPHIS by 7

What would the price have been on this two months ago, given the absurd hype surrounding the grotesquely-young Tigers early-on? With a couple of key pieces having fled the scene, you're now left with a raft of freshmen, excepting senior Will Coleman and junior Wes Witherspoon. After his narrow escape against East Carolina, Memphis HC Josh Pastner said, "I don't want to keep winning like this. It's not healthy." Maybe a bad loss like this might focus your callow charges, coach. MARSHALL, 73-66.

GEORGETOWN over *RUTGERS by 10

The Big East road has not been kind to the Hoyas, but this dog won't hunt, as G-Town rains them in from hither and yon. This isn't Providence. GEORGETOWN, 74-64.

***VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH over NORTHEASTERN by 12**

Northeastern needs a healthy Chase Allen, and badly. VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH, 76-64.

TEMPLE over *DUQUESNE by 3

VANDERBILT over *TENNESSEE by 4

The market continues to overrate the Vols' capabilities, given the chaos currently permeating the program, which could be accelerated by Bruce Pearl's absences from the bench for the next skein of SEC contests. VANDERBILT, 79-75.

***MASSACHUSETTS over LA SALLE by 5 (Springfield, MA)**

RECOMMENDED

***TEXAS A&M over MISSOURI by 8**

Quite certain that Tigers are sore distressed that they can't play all of their conference games in Columbia, but it's twue, it's twue, and if long-term Mizzou doormat Colorado can take out Bengals (another nifty SR Premier *-rated winner!), the defensively-stalwart Aggies can do the same. TEXAS A&M, 76-68.

***VILLANOVA over MARYLAND by 7**

***MICHIGAN STATE over NORTHWESTERN by 7**

***KANSAS STATE over TEXAS TECH 18**

This is the appointed day of return for ex-UConn'er Curtis Kelly, suspended by K-State along with Jacob Pullen earlier this season. Given state of visitors' defense, this should prove a feel-good occasion. KANSAS STATE, 76-68.

***COLORADO over OKLAHOMA STATE by 2**

Cowboys caught Kansas State shorthanded, and though we suspect OSU would have won without any outside aid, the officiating converted a potential close call into a cakewalk. Could well-devolve into lost week for visitor. COLORADO, 69-67.

***ARKANSAS over ALABAMA by 6**

***FLORIDA over SOUTH CAROLINA by 13**

Gators have polished their act neatly, in past few weeks. FLORIDA, 71-58.

***GEORGE MASON over GEORGIA STATE by 11**

***DUKE over VIRGINIA by 22**

***SAINT LOUIS over ST. JOSEPHS by 2**

Billikens finally get PG Kwamian Mitchell back, re-admitted and eligible to play. His presence will help. C Willie Reed's also been readmitted, though still suspended from athletic combat. SAINT LOUIS, 61-59.

CONNECTICUT over *DEPAUL by 12

Expect UConn to return to earth, somewhat, off shocking second consecutive application of Longhorn abuse! CONNECTICUT, just 74-62.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

*KANSAS over NEBRASKA by 20

Huskers have enjoyed sustained run of home-cooking success against lesser lights. Now, reality intrudes, and the awakening figures to be emphatically rude. KANSAS, 84-64.

HARVARD over *GEORGE WASHINGTON by 7

YALE over *BROWN by 1

*WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE over LOYOLA CHICAGO by 1

*BALL STATE over CENTRAL MICHIGAN by 16

*ARIZONA over ARIZONA STATE by 14

*SMU over HOUSTON by 1

BEST BET

*WISCONSIN over ILLINOIS by 15

In the ultimate style clash within the Big 10, you can count on the Badgers imposing their will in terms of game conduct, and you may be certain Illini won't enjoy it, a little bit. Bruce Weber's kids want to run wild and free. That is not happening! Poor babies. WISCONSIN, 74-59.

*WYOMING over UTAH by 2

*TEXAS over OKLAHOMA by 18

OLD DOMINION over *HOFSTRA by 2.

*MISSISSIPPI over GEORGIA by 3

DELAWARE over *TOWSON by 2

*FLORIDA STATE over NC STATE by 7

*KENTUCKY over LSU by 22

The Tigers figure to be markedly slowed, given injury misfortunes. KENTUCKY, 80-58.

*NORTHERN ILLINOIS over TOLEDO by 9

Rockets better off than they were two months ago, but still eligible to throw the epic no-show. NORTHERN ILLINOIS, 60-51.

TULANE over *EAST CAROLINA by 1

CENTRAL FLORIDA over *SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI by 4

UCLA over *OREGON by 6

Wounded Ducks not aided by Joevan Catron and Jeremy Jacob looking at minimum minutes. UCLA, 64-58.

*OHIO STATE over PENN STATE by 16

There will be multiple, saner spots to use TheOSU than here. OHIO STATE, 74-58.

*IOWA STATE over BAYLOR by 6

Check status of Cyclones' Jordan Railey's "indefinite" suspension. IOWA STATE, 75-69.

*MIAMI FLORIDA over BOSTON COLLEGE by 1

One reason you have to seriously-consider Eagles on the road is their seasoned maturity. There IS no next year, for these guys. MIAMI FLORIDA, 66-65.

UNLV over *AIR FORCE by 7

SAN DIEGO STATE over *NEW MEXICO by 9

The Pit? So? Venue doesn't figure to bother relentless Aztecs, who're giving everyone else indigestion. Altitude hindered Kawhi Leonard at Utah, but no such issue, here. SAN DIEGO STATE, 76-67.

*DENVER over FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL by 8

Pioneers are the devil to beat at this altitude in conference, when up against this caliber of competition. DENVER, 64-56.

*ILLINOIS STATE over EVANSVILLE by 3

*OHIO over KENT STATE by 1

Without resolution of Carlton Guyton's indefinite suspension, it is tough to get all lovey-dovey with the visiting Flashes. OHIO, 66-65.

CLEVELAND STATE over *YOUNGSTOWN STATE by 13

*COLUMBIA over CORNELL by 8

DREXEL over *WILLIAM & MARY by 13

*PITTSBURGH over SETON HALL by 16

As always, check Hall's list of walking wounded. PITTSBURGH, 78-62.

*JAMES MADISON over NC WILMINGTON by 12

Jimmy Mad's been running hot. JAMES MADISON, 70-58.

*CHARLOTTE U over FORDHAM by 7

*VIRGINIA TECH over WAKE FOREST by 17

DAYTON over *XAVIER by 2

Muskie injury woes open the door. DAYTON, 69-67.

FLORIDA ATLANTIC over *WESTERN KENTUCKY by 2

It's taken awhile for the overration of Hilltoppers to be properly tweaked, as soft defense continues to take WKU down. FLORIDA ATLANTIC, 75-73.

MICHIGAN over *INDIANA by 3

... only because we rate UM's near-term potential superior to Hoosiers, who remains at least another year away from any measure of sustained redemption. MICHIGAN, 64-61.

NORTH TEXAS over *TROY by 7

RECOMMENDED

UAB over *TULSA by 6

When Mike Davis says "Go" in the second half, Blazers should nail Golden Hurricane to the eight h pole, and win going away. Tulsa guard play continues to concern. UAB, 77-71

*WISCONSIN GREEN BAY over ILLINOIS CHICAGO by 8

*NORTHERN IOWA over SOUTHERN ILLINOIS by 11

WICHITA STATE over *DRAKE by 10

WASHINGTON STATE over *STANFORD by 2

*ARKANSAS STATE over MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE by 3

*SOUTH ALABAMA over UL-MONROE by 9

*GONZAGA over LOYOLA MARYMOUNT by 18

*LOUISIANA TECH over HAWAII by 3

*ARKANSAS LITTLE ROCK over UL-LAFAYETTE by 10

SAN FRANCISCO over *SAN DIEGO by 6

*UTEP over RICE by 13

*NEW MEXICO STATE over SAN JOSE STATE by 5

*COLORADO STATE over TCU by 11

*CAL POLY SLO over CAL IRVINE by 8

*CAL SANTA BARBARA over CAL RIVERSIDE by 15

*PORTLAND over PEPPERDINE by 18

*BOISE STATE over NEVADA by 14

USC over *OREGON STATE by 6

*SAINT MARYS CA over SANTA CLARA by 18

*LONG BEACH STATE over PACIFIC by 7

UTAH STATE over *FRESNO STATE by 8

SUNDAY, JANUARY 16

*SOUTH FLORIDA over PROVIDENCE by 1

*ST. JOHNS over NOTRE DAME by 1

*DETROIT over VALPARAISO by 4

*INDIANA STATE over CREIGHTON by 2

*WESTERN MICHIGAN over EASTERN MICHIGAN by 15

MIAMI-OHIO over *BOWLING GREEN by 1

*BUFFALO over AKRON by 5

*MISSISSIPPI STATE over AUBURN by 8

*RHODE ISLAND over ST. BONAVENTURE by 8

*WEST VIRGINIA over PURDUE by 1

*MINNESOTA over IOWA by 11

BUTLER over *WRIGHT STATE by 3

NORTH CAROLINA over *GEORGIA TECH by 8

RECOMMENDED

MISSOURI STATE over *BRADLEY by 16

Bears deploy a more exuberant offense than the Missouri Valley's used to seeing. Braves barely aided by home crowd which knows bad product when they see it. MISSOURI STATE, 76-60.

WASHINGTON over *CALIFORNIA by 6

MONDAY, JANUARY 17

*CONNECTICUT over VILLANOVA by 6

*MISSOURI over KANSAS STATE by 10

Cocky Tigers were shown how the other half live when they visited Colorado last weekend (another nice *-rated winner for SR), but expect they'll subsequently enjoy a more pleasant evening against the 'Huskers, and now catch Wildcats with their non-Top-25-worthy back-court. K-State's better than they showed when four of their guys fouled out in Stillwater, but this is not the place for the early-season #3 to get well. MISSOURI, 79-69.

*PITTSBURGH over SYRACUSE by 6

Weak lean to Panthers, because of their steady well-roundedness, against Orange outfit whose offense continues to gives us pause. PITTSBURGH, 68-62.

KANSAS over *BAYLOR by 10

*FRESNO STATE over IDAHO by 5

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18-19

Sports Reporter College Basketball forecasts and selections exclusively for Sports Reporter Online members, posted on game-day afternoon in the member area at www.sportsreporter.com

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13

ORLANDO over *OKLAHOMA CITY by 1

This could be a tough game for OKC. They had to come in from Houston last night and are looking at a mini Western road trip to come. OKC also has the Lakers, Denver and the wait-ing. Orlando has been a flat-out scoring machine of late. ORLANDO 104 - 103

RECOMMENDED

*MINNESOTA over WASHINGTON by 11

Although Minnesota failed to get to ten wins after their first 35 games of the year, they have played teams tough. They got within 3 of the Celts, lost by a bucket to the Nuggets and made the Jazz perform when they outscored them in 3 of 4 quarters a couple of days before Christmas. Wizards have roster and internal problems. MINNESOTA 101 - 90

MIAMI over *DENVER by 1

Heat had to play the Clips last night, still have to go to NoCal and the Windy City and it's never easy playing here. On the other hand, Miami only lost 2 games from November 27 to January 4 and both were to Dallas. Denver went into a little funk around Christmas but Carmelo Anthony was missing at times because of a death in the family.

MIAMI 105 -104

FRIDAY, JANUARY 14

DETROIT over *TORONTO by 1

These are two squads already just playing out the string. Neither team will be around in the spring so things can get testy in the locker rooms. Two days before the year ended, the Raptors beat Dallas, but the Mavs didn't have their best player. The Pistons forced 23 turnovers when they won in Canada last month. DETROIT 98 - 97

*PHILADELPHIA over MILWAUKEE by 3

The Bucks have gotten it together this year only in spurts. They have been banged up and just have not shot well. Bucks are dead last in points scored. At least the Sixers play hard and Jrue Holiday is really coming into his own of late, being more aggressive. PHILADELPHIA 92- 89

CHICAGO over *INDIANA by 3

Last home game for the Pacers before heading for a four-game Western swing. They were blown out by the Bulls in mid-December when they lost the war of the glass and were defend-ed well from the perimeter. Bulls look solid beating Celts last week behind cagey Derrick Rose. CHICAGO 103 - 100

RECOMMENDED

*NEW YORK over SACRAMENTO by 2

[Sacramento, plus the points.] Homers are fresh from playing back to back in Utah and Phoenix and they had the Spurs, Lakers and Suns before that. The Kings have had 24 hours to rest after being in Beantown. They are inexperienced but they can board, as they out-rebounded the Suns almost 2 weeks ago by 28. NEW YORK 102-100

*BOSTON over CHARLOTTE by 8

The aging roster has not hurt the Celts on the defensive side as they are the best in the busi-ness. They lost a little mojo when Kevin Garnett went down but when you think of it, Glen Davis could probably start for about 25 teams in the Association. The Celts spanked this team by over 30 points early this season. BOSTON 95 -87

*SAN ANTONIO over DALLAS by 3

Dallas suffered a huge blow the other day when it was announced that Caron Butler was out of the year. He was shooting 43% from the 3-point line and at times was able to take over games. If the Mavs move Shawn Marion into the starting line-up, he will be playing out of position and he can't shoot like Butler could. SAN ANTONIO 105 - 102

*HOUSTON over NEW ORLEANS by 2

Back in the day the personal word about Coach Rick Adelman was that he was horrible. The guys used to call him Adelbrain but he has done a great job with the Rockets as a players' coach and guys put out for him. This is a different Rockets team that lost to Hornets early in the year. Yao Ming played in that loss. HOUSTON 103 - 101

BEST BET

*UTAH over CLEVELAND by 22

The Cleveland owner talked about the bad karma that was supposed to follow Lebron to Miami, but the bad karma stayed in the cold confines of Ohio. Sure, they have been banged up a bit, but there is just no direction on the team. Cavs have had 48 hours to rest after facing the Lakers but they have a look ahead tomorrow to the Denver game. UTAH 110-88

PORTLAND over *PHOENIX by 2

It is just very hard to take a positive stance about the Suns. The word soft doesn't begin to tell the story about their defense, or lack thereof. They give up nearly 108.5 points a game and only the Wolves are worse as a team on that end of the floor. PORTLAND 92- 90

*GOLDEN STATE over LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS by 4

Baron Davis is playing well for the Clips but the feeling is his heart is not close to being there. Their best weapon is the fact Blake Griffin has an engine that fires on all 8 cylinders at all times. Warriors get the nod because they have more reliable scorers. GOLDEN STATE 105-101

*LOS ANGELES LAKERS over NEW JERSEY by 10

The Nets could not contain this team in Jersey just over a month ago. One of the main rea-sons they lost is they could not stop L.A. from getting to the line. Despite a key piece for L.A., Lamar Odom, being in foul trouble, the defending champs controlled the first and final stan-zas. LOS ANGLÉS 100-90

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15

RECOMMENDED

TORONTO over *WASHINGTON by 8

This is a big game for the Raptors as they have four much tougher opponents on the road waiting in the wings. Neither one of these teams play defense. Toronto is a bit more potent offensively despite shooting less than 32% from the 3-point line. It what figures to be an up and down game, the Raptors were only outscored in one period in a blowout win vs. Wizards in the December opener and they killed the Wiz on the board that day, too. TORONTO 110 - 102

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***ATLANTA over HOUSTON by 7**

One of the best things that new Coach Larry Drew instilled into the Hawks is if they want to get to the promised land, they have to play both ends of the floor. It has showed so far as going into the first week of the money they were allowing less than 95 points, better than even San Antonio. ATLANTA 105 - 98

NEW ORLEANS over *CHARLOTTE by 2

Chris Paul has adopted the style of Michael Jordan, the wise MJ that finally used his teammates. Paul generally tries to get everybody else involved before looking for his own shot. The Hornets have been a bit up and down this year but one thing that have improved on is defense, as they only trail Boston in points given up. NEW ORLEANS 96-94

***DETROIT over SACRAMENTO by 6**

You have an angry, veteran home team in the most blue-collar town in America in the Motown against a team that has struggled all year and plays with passion only at times. This is the third game of a room service run for the Kings and they had to fly last night after running around Madison Square Garden. DETROIT 92 - 86

DALLAS over *MEMPHIS by 3

The Griz beat this team in the second game of the season but Dallas just didn't take care of the rock as they gave it up 18 times. Mavs blew them out in Memphis by 14 the other time they met this season. DALLAS 100 - 97

***CHICAGO over MIAMI by 2**

Settle in early for this war. The Bulls know that if they are going to survive in the post season, they may have to go through South Beach. This is the last game of a 7-event road run for the Heat. CHICAGO 97 - 95

ORLANDO over *MINNESOTA by 5

The early returns from the huge Magic trade have been extremely positive. They have picked it up on offense and if Jason Richardson gets hot, he is almost unstoppable. Even Hedo Turkoglu has been finding his way with a triple/double already. ORLANDO 101 - 96

BEST BET

***DENVER over CLEVELAND by 22**

Dangerous back to back here for the Cavaliers after having to tussle in Salt Lake last night. The sneaky thing about the Nuggets is they have no problem getting to the line and that helps to stop opponents from building up a head of steam. Expect the Nuggets to attempt to bury this team early as they have a little trip to San Antonio coming up directly after the game. DENVER 112 - 90

***PORTLAND over NEW JERSEY by 10**

Coach Avery Johnson has done well and is teaching every day but his Nets team is lacking in talent. They have a future, but it may only materialize when they eventually move to Brooklyn. The Blazers had to play in Phoenix last night but they have four soft games in next five coming up. PORTLAND 97-87

SUNDAY, JANUARY 16

LOS ANGELES LAKERS over *LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS by 8

Believe it or not the Clips have played the champs pretty tight of late. They won 2 of the last 5 and only were beaten by a point in early December. L.A. has rallied around Ron Artest of late. LOS ANGELES LAKERS 104 - 96

RECOMMENDED

***SAN ANTONIO over DENVER by 14**

Tough stretch here for the visitors. They had the lowly Cavs last night but have two huge games coming up vs. the Lakers and the Thunder. Coach Popovich is nothing short of a genius as he always seems to know what buttons to push. The best thing about Manu Ginobili is that he wears his heart on his sleeve and his will to win is completely evident. SAN ANTONIO 114 - 100

MONDAY, JANUARY 17

UTAH over *WASHINGTON by 4

Lots of day games today! Including this 1 pm, ET tip-off. But nothing fazes this Jazz team. They showed early in the year that they thrive on the road. In Utah's first extended road trip of the year, they went 4 for 4 including wins in a back to back against Miami and then Orlando. UTAH 99 - 95

BEST BET

***NEW YORK over PHOENIX by 21**

Just 10 days ago, the Knicks undressed Suns in Phoenix by 25 when 6 guys got double figures. This is an afternoon game, so body clock swing goes to the homers, who were taking the worst of it when they whipped Phoenix butt. Coach Mike D'Antonio still has a few friends in Phoenix and knows how they want to play vs. how they can play with the roster that has been juggled way too much in too short a time. The Knicks lead the league in scoring at 107 per game, and ranking only 28th in team defense is okay in this match-up because the Suns rank 29th, better only than Minnesota. NEW YORK 118 - 98

CHICAGO over *MEMPHIS by 1

This could be a war down low with Marc Gasol banging hard against the likes of Carlos Boozer. The key to the game could be the backcourt as Derrick Rose should be able to run circles around young and improving Griz point Mike Conley. Griz have had some internal problems of late too. CHICAGO 95 - 94

***PHILADELPHIA over CHARLOTTE by 5**

Sixers have this last host game before hitting the road to Orlando, then playing this squad again in 72 hours. Philly beat the Suns and Denver on a recent trip and played the Lakers tough too. They have to cut down their tendency to jack up shots from long range and are playing hard for Coach Collins. PHILADELPHIA 93 - 88

***NEW ORLEANS over TORONTO by 9**

Hornets have had a day to rest since playing a back-to-back and flying in from North Carolina. They are underrated down low with Jersey guy David West one tough cookie and Emeka Okafor playing very efficiently. This is the second game of road run for Raptors and it only gets tougher from here. NEW ORLEANS 99- 90

***HOUSTON over MILWAUKEE by 5**

The Rockets are in the top 5 in scoring in the league while the Bucks are dead last. The Rockets Chase Budinger was hurt with an ankle early in the year but he is getting there and he can flat-out score. HOUSTON 103 - 98

INDIANA over *LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS by 1

Big game for visitors as they have 3 more on the road before the Magic awaits for them at home. This is the game they know they have to get. There are very few quality wins the Clips have this year and they have beaten the Kings and the Minnesotas of the world but have had hard times with the upper echelon. INDIANA 100 - 99

***DETROIT over DALLAS by 1**

Dallas has to have guys step up after they lost Caron Butler. What a loss like that does to a team is it weakens the rotation and new roles are defined. Jason Terry may have to be more potent for the Mavericks to continue to play well. DETROIT 91 - 90

RECOMMENDED

***ATLANTA over SACRAMENTO by 19**

The injury to Joe Johnson has been a blessing in disguise. It has made everybody else closer and it's never good to depend on just one guy. Josh Smith is the engine of the Hawks as he not only can explode offensively, but he leads the team in steals and blocks. Kings had 24 hours to rest since coming from Detroit. ATLANTA 112 - 93

***GOLDEN STATE over NEW JERSEY by 5**

The California kids are a long way from being a force because they just don't stop anybody. They are in the top 10 in points scored, but that becomes meaningless against good teams. The good news, the Nets are not a good team. GOLDEN STATE 102 - 97

***BOSTON over ORLANDO by 5**

When Rajon Rondo is dishing at his best, the Celts are extremely tough. BOSTON 94 - 89

***PORTLAND over MINNESOTA by 10**

The positive the Blazer fans can take away from the injury to Brandon Roy is the fact it has opened up a spot for Wesley Matthews. He is the leading shooter from long range on the team, is wily beyond his youth and he can get to the line too. PORTLAND 107 -97

***LOS ANGELES LAKERS over OKLAHOMA by 6**

Would like to see the Thunder playing better defense and they will have to if they want to go far in the spring. They have been giving up 101 a game and that puts them in the bottom third of the league. The malaise in Laker land could be shaken up here as they know the Thunder gave them all they could handle in the playoffs last year. Back up Thunder point Eric Maynor is serviceable. LOS ANGELES 100 - 94

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19-20

Sports Reporter NBA forecasts and selections posted on the Web on game-day afternoon, exclusively for Sports Reporter Online members.

