



COLLEGE FOOTBALL WEEK 1

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL LANDSCAPE

WHAT BETTORS NEED TO KNOW THIS WEEK

Week 1 expands from the small opening card into the first full national board, and the marquee game is Clemson at No. 11 LSU in Baton Rouge. Clemson has named Christopher Vizzina its starting quarterback, while LSU begins the Lane Kiffin era with transfer Sam Leavitt. Clemson's defense remains the stabilizing unit after a disappointing 2025 season, making this a revealing early test for both programs. Clemson-LSU also carries unusual roster news into game week. LSU has added players who were recently in NFL camps, although at least one of those additions will not be eligible to play Saturday because of acclimatization requirements. Clemson enters with most of its roster available, but safety Polo Anderson and linebacker Joseph Roberto II are out for the season. Bettors should keep monitoring availability through kickoff. Because of this uncertainty as to eligibility of players, we will not be making a prediction in this newsletter. Later on in the week we will have a selection on this game as a [guaranteed college football pick](#).

San Jose State already has a game of evidence. The Spartans fell 42-26 at No. 14 USC, but quarterback Luke Weaver settled in after halftime and finished with 234 passing yards, two passing touchdowns and another score on the ground. That experience matters as San Jose State travels to Eastern Michigan, which opened with a 28-17 win over Sacramento St.

James Madison begins a new chapter under Billy Napier after last year's 12-win playoff season. The Dukes lost substantial production and have rebuilt heavily, while Liberty enters the opener with uncertainty at quarterback. This is a regional rivalry with a meaningful recent reference point: JMU beat Liberty 31-13 last season after controlling the second half.

Several Week 1 games feature major transition points rather than established continuity. Oklahoma State opens the Eric Morris era at Tulsa, Colorado State renews the Border War with Wyoming after being shut out 28-0 last season, and Memphis returns home after an encouraging 27-21 Week 0 win at UNLV. Early-season numbers demand extra attention to QB play, new systems and how quickly rebuilt rosters settle in.

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BEST BET

San Jose State + 3.5 over EASTERN MICHIGAN by 14

San Jose State has already been tested at a level Eastern Michigan has not seen yet, and that matters when taking more than a field goal. The Spartans were overwhelmed early at No. 14 USC, falling behind 28-0 at halftime, but the second half gave us a much better look at what this offense can become with Luke Weaver at quarterback. Weaver finished 21-of-32 for 234 yards and two touchdowns, added 42 rushing yards and another score, and helped San Jose State produce 23 fourth-quarter points. The comeback did not threaten USC, but it showed that the Spartans kept competing and found answers once Weaver settled into the game. Carson Clark and Jerry McClure each caught six passes, giving the new quarterback multiple dependable targets. San Jose State also protected the football reasonably well and committed only 15 penalty yards, useful signs for a rebuilt roster playing its first game together. Eastern Michigan deserves respect at home after opening with a 28-17 win over Sacramento State, and Chris Creighton's teams are rarely easy to dismiss in Ypsilanti. Still, the Eagles now face an opponent that has already played four quarters against a nationally ranked roster and should be better prepared for game speed. The concern for San Jose State is the defense, which allowed USC 505 yards and struggled badly before halftime. But Eastern Michigan does not bring USC's combination of quarterback play, line talent and explosive skill players. With the spread giving us more than a field goal, San Jose State does not need to dominate. If Weaver carries his second-half rhythm into this matchup and the Spartans avoid another slow start, they have a legitimate chance to win outright. We will gladly take the points in a game we expect to remain tight into the fourth quarter.

PROJECTED SCORE: San Jose State 35 Eastern Michigan 21

TAKE: San Jose State +3.5

BEST BET

JAMES MADISON – 6.5 over Liberty by 21 points

James Madison begins 2026 with more change than bettors normally like to see from a favorite, but the program's foundation and home-field setting still give the Dukes the stronger side of this matchup. Billy Napier takes over after JMU's historic 12-win season and playoff appearance, and the roster has been rebuilt aggressively after losing a large portion of last year's production. The quarterback competition has centered on J.C. Evans and Camden Coleman, and the new staff has emphasized execution and leadership rather than rushing the decision. That uncertainty is worth respecting, but Liberty has its own major question at the position. The Flames entered game week with Deshawn Purdie and Jaylen Henderson listed at the top of the projected depth chart, with veteran Ethan Vasko also in the room. That makes offensive consistency a concern for both sides in an opener where field position and defensive discipline could decide the first half. The matchup history favors James Madison. Last season the Dukes went to Liberty and won 31-13, turning a 10-10 halftime game into a decisive victory while holding the Flames to only 92 yards after intermission. JMU will not have the same personnel, but the program has repeatedly handled coaching and roster turnover without losing its physical identity. Bridgeforth Stadium should also be a significant advantage for Napier's debut. Liberty is capable of making this uncomfortable if its quarterback play stabilizes, but the Flames are coming off a 4-8 season and must prove they can handle JMU's pressure and depth for four quarters. We expect the Dukes to lean on their defense and running game early, allow the new offense to settle, and gradually create separation. Laying less than a touchdown gives us enough room for an opener that may start slowly before James Madison takes control in the second half.

PROJECTED SCORE: James Madison 38, Liberty 17

TAKE: James Madison -6.5 Final Score: James Madison 20-13

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BEST BET

OKLAHOMA STATE – 13.5 over Tulsa by 1 point

Tulsa is getting nearly two touchdowns at home in an in-state opener, and that is a large cushion for a matchup filled with uncertainty on the Oklahoma State side. The Cowboys begin the Eric Morris era with Drew Mestemaker at quarterback and a lineup that has been reshaped around a new coaching staff. Mestemaker has earned the job and has intriguing upside, while running back Caleb Hawkins gives Oklahoma State a legitimate weapon, but this is still the first live test of how quickly the new offense operates on the road. The Cowboys have also been sorting through offensive-line combinations, including competition at right tackle and the return timetable for Braydon Nelson. That matters against a Tulsa team that should be energized for Year 2 under Tre Lamb and will treat this as one of the biggest home games on the schedule. Tulsa has not been to a bowl since 2021, but Lamb's first season established a foundation and the Golden Hurricane now have more familiarity with his system. The key for the underdog is avoiding the kind of short fields that allow a more talented opponent to create an early avalanche. If Tulsa can protect the football, run efficiently enough to stay ahead of the chains and force Oklahoma State to drive the length of the field, the spread becomes difficult for the Cowboys to cover. Oklahoma State's defense has experience at linebacker and some promising pieces in the secondary, but the unit is also adjusting to a new structure and intends to rotate personnel up front. That can create early-season communication issues. We are not asking Tulsa to be the better team for twelve games; we are asking the Golden Hurricane to stay competitive for one afternoon at home against a rival breaking in a new staff and quarterback. The number gives us room for Oklahoma State to win by a touchdown or even ten points and still cash the ticket. In a game we expect to be much tighter than the market suggests, Tulsa plus the points is the play.

PROJECTED SCORE: Oklahoma State 27, Tulsa 26

TAKE: Tulsa +13.5 Final Score: Tulsa 24-10

BEST BET

COLORADO STATE – 3.5 over Wyoming by 21 points

Colorado State gets an immediate opportunity to erase one of the ugliest results of last season, and the setting is ideal for a strong response. Wyoming shut out the Rams 28-0 in Laramie last October, a result that will not need to be explained inside the Colorado State locker room. Now the Border War shifts to Fort Collins with the Rams laying only a little more than a field goal. Rivalry games deserve caution, but the personnel situation and home field favor Colorado State. Wyoming enters the season with significant quarterback concerns after losing Tait Hasselbeck to a season-ending knee injury, and the Cowboys are also without wide receiver Tanner Nystrom for the year. That puts added pressure on an offense that already needed to become more consistent. Colorado State, by contrast, enters game week without a significant injury listed and has the cleaner path to offensive stability. The Rams do not need to become explosive overnight to cover this number; they need to win the line of scrimmage, avoid turnovers and force Wyoming to sustain long drives with a reshuffled offense. The rivalry history also provides motivation on both sides. Colorado State won 24-10 in Fort Collins in 2024 before Wyoming answered with last year's shutout, so neither program needs a reminder of what this game means. The difference this time is that the Rams have the home crowd and the healthier quarterback situation. We expect Colorado State to test Wyoming's front with the run, use play action once the Cowboys begin committing extra bodies, and make the visitors play from behind. That is not the game script Wyoming wants with its current offensive questions. Defensively, the Rams must remain disciplined because rivalry games can turn on one busted assignment or special-teams play. But if Colorado State makes Wyoming earn every possession, the Cowboys may struggle to generate enough scoring to stay inside the number. With the line sitting at only -3.5, we see considerably more separation than a one-score finish and expect the Rams to take back the Bronze Boot convincingly.

PROJECTED SCORE: Colorado State 38, Wyoming 17

TAKE: Colorado State -3.5 Final Score: Colorado St 35-13

BEST BET

MEMPHIS – 10.5 over Arkansas State by 24 points

Memphis already has the most valuable thing an early-season favorite can possess: evidence that the new pieces can function under pressure. The Tigers went to UNLV in Week 0 and came away with a 27-21 victory, overcoming a difficult road environment and showing enough second-half strength to finish the job. That performance gives Memphis a meaningful preparation advantage over Arkansas State, which is opening its season in this matchup. The Tigers now return to Simmons Bank Liberty Stadium with a chance to build momentum rather than spend the week wondering how a rebuilt roster will respond when the lights come on. Quarterback Brendon Lewis gives Memphis experience and athletic ability at the position, and the offense has enough balance to avoid becoming one-dimensional. The biggest attraction here is the matchup against an Arkansas State defense that must deal with Memphis' tempo and depth for four quarters while its own offense tries to establish rhythm in a season opener. Arkansas State also enters without running back D. Spencer, who is expected to miss the season with a knee injury, reducing the Red Wolves' backfield options. Memphis has no significant injury listed entering the week. The series has also been favorable to the Tigers in recent meetings: Memphis won 37-3 in 2023, 44-32 in 2022, 55-50 in 2021 and 37-24 in 2020. Those games do not determine Saturday's result, but they reinforce how comfortable Memphis has been playing this opponent. Laying double digits always requires the favorite to keep attacking after gaining control, and that is the primary risk. Still, Memphis has already played a competitive game and should be sharper in situational football, substitutions and conditioning. We expect Arkansas State to have some early success while Memphis settles in, but the Tigers should create more possessions and begin separating once the game reaches the middle quarters. With the home crowd, a game already under its belt and the stronger overall roster, Memphis is positioned to turn a competitive first half into a comfortable Week 1 win.

PROJECTED SCORE: Memphis 38, Arkansas State 14

TAKE: Memphis -10.5 Final Score: Memphis 42-24

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CFB QUICK PICKS

UMass vs RUTGERS

Rutgers owns the deeper roster and should control the line of scrimmage at home. UMass faces a difficult task sustaining drives if it falls behind the chains. The number is enormous, but Rutgers has enough physical advantage to keep pressure on for four quarters.

TAKE: Rutgers -29.5 Final Score: UMass 37-21

Akron vs WAKE FOREST

Wake Forest has the home field and a substantial size advantage against an Akron team still trying to build consistency. The Demon Deacons should be able to dictate tempo with the run and create short fields. I expect Wake to pull away as depth becomes a factor.

TAKE: Wake Forest -24 Final Score: W Forest 38-16

Colorado vs GEORGIA TECH

Georgia Tech deserves to be favored at home, but Colorado is catching nearly a touchdown in a matchup that can stay possession-for-possession. The Buffaloes have enough athleticism to prevent the Yellow Jackets from simply leaning on the run all afternoon. One-score value points me to the dog.

TAKE: Colorado +6.5 Final Score: Colorado 14-13

UAB vs ILLINOIS

Illinois has the stronger front, deeper defense and the kind of physical offense that can wear down UAB. The Blazers need explosive plays to stay attached, but long third downs will be difficult against this defense. I expect Illinois to build separation steadily.

TAKE: Illinois -28 Final Score: Illinois 42-23

Toledo vs MICHIGAN STATE

Toledo enters a new coaching era but brings a head coach with a strong winning background and should not be intimidated by the trip. Michigan State has the talent edge, yet laying double digits against a capable MAC opponent is expensive. Toledo can keep this competitive into the second half.

TAKE: Toledo +10.5 Final Score: Michigan St 30-20

UTEP vs OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma has a major advantage in speed, depth and line play, and UTEP will struggle to protect if the Sooners create obvious passing situations. The concern is the huge spread, but Oklahoma has enough offensive firepower to score quickly and keep adding points. **TAKE: Oklahoma -41.5 Final Score: Oklahoma 51-0**

Miami vs STANFORD

Miami travels across the country but brings a decisive talent advantage. Stanford showed fight in Week 0, yet the Cardinal allowed Hawaii back into the game before finishing late. Miami should stress Stanford vertically and force the home team to chase points.

TAKE: Miami -24.5 Final Score: Miami 45-6

Fresno State vs USC

USC produced 505 yards in its opener and moved the ball consistently behind Jayden Maiava. Fresno State is a step up defensively from San Jose State, and this number requires four quarters of separation. I prefer the points with a visitor capable of scoring enough to avoid a runaway.

TAKE: Fresno State +22.5 Final Score: USC 39-0

Ohio vs NEBRASKA

Nebraska has the physical edge at home and should be able to dictate the game at the line of scrimmage. Ohio is well coached but enters a new head-coaching arrangement and faces a major jump in size and speed. I expect Nebraska to create separation after halftime.

TAKE: Nebraska -24 Final Score: Nebraska 49-21

Oregon State vs HOUSTON

Houston enters with high expectations and veteran quarterback Conner Weigman, but this spread asks the Cougars to dominate. Oregon State can shorten the game if it establishes the run and avoids turnovers. More than three touchdowns is enough to take the visitor.

TAKE: Oregon State +20.5 Final Score: Houston 33-20

Coastal Carolina vs WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia should control the trenches, but the Mountaineers are laying a large number against a Coastal Carolina team that can create tempo and manufacture possessions. If Coastal protects the football, it can score enough to stay inside the spread.

TAKE: Coastal Carolina +21.5 Final Score: WVU 31-24

East Carolina vs ALABAMA

Alabama has overwhelming roster depth, but the Tide are breaking in another new starting quarterback and may not need to push tempo for four quarters. East Carolina can play conservatively and shorten the game. The points are attractive in a season opener.

TAKE: East Carolina +28 Final Score: Alabama 48-10

North Texas vs INDIANA

Indiana has become one of the nation's most physical and efficient programs, but a spread above five touchdowns leaves almost no margin for a quiet quarter. North Texas can throw well enough to steal points after the game opens up. We will take the enormous cushion.

TAKE: North Texas +40.5 Final Score: Indiana 52-16

Ball State vs OHIO STATE

Ohio State owns a massive talent advantage at every level and should dominate field position from the opening quarter. Ball State will have difficulty sustaining drives against the Buckeyes' speed. Even with a huge number, Ohio State can create enough short **Final Score: Ohio St 56-3**

Miami (OH) vs PITTSBURGH

Pittsburgh has the stronger roster and home field, while Miami enters the season with a major QB loss already on the injury list. That makes sustained offense difficult against a physical Pitt front. I expect the Panthers to pull away in the middle quarters. **TAKE: Pittsburgh -16.5 Final Score: Pittsburgh 59-14**

Kent State vs SOUTH CAROLINA

Kent State improved last season but struggled badly when stepping up in class, and South Carolina has too much size and speed across the roster. The Gamecocks should control both lines and create short fields. I expect the talent gap to show quickly.

TAKE: South Carolina -36.5 Final Score: S Carolina 57-0

Tulane vs DUKE

Duke deserves to be favored at home, but Tulane has enough program stability and athleticism to keep this from becoming comfortable. The Green Wave can pressure the quarterback and create a lower-possession game. Nearly double digits is too much in a competitive matchup.

TAKE: Tulane +9.5 Final Score: Duke 17-3

Baylor vs Auburn

This neutral-site matchup should be more competitive than the spread suggests. Baylor has enough quarterback and skill talent to trade scores, while Auburn is still proving it can consistently finish drives. Taking more than a touchdown gives us valuable protection. Bears ATS history is poor.

TAKE: Baylor +7.5 Final Score: Auburn 17-16

Marshall vs PENN STATE

Penn State has a substantial depth and line-play advantage and should be able to dictate field position all afternoon. Marshall's challenge is finding enough explosive offense to prevent the Nittany Lions from stacking possessions. We expect Penn State to separate steadily.

TAKE: Penn State -24.5 Final Score: Penn St 45-0

Boston College vs CINCINNATI

Cincinnati has the home field, but Boston College brings enough physicality to make this a four-quarter game. The Eagles can shorten possessions with the run and keep the Bearcats from turning it into a track meet. More than a touchdown is attractive.

TAKE: Boston College +7.5 Final Score: Cincinnati 34-15

Boise State vs OREGON

Oregon has championship-level depth and the home crowd, and Boise State faces a major challenge matching speed on the perimeter. The Ducks should create explosive plays and force Boise to throw from behind. I expect Oregon to win comfortably.

TAKE: Oregon -24.5 Final Score: Oregon 34-27

Texas State vs TEXAS

Texas is far more talented, but the spread is over thirty points against a Texas State team capable of generating offense. The Bobcats do not need to threaten the upset; they need enough scoring to keep Texas from clearing a huge number.

TAKE: Texas - 30.5 Final Score: Texas 59-7

Northern Illinois vs IOWA

Iowa's defense and special teams should dominate field position, and Northern Illinois enters a transition season with a new conference and head coach. The Hawkeyes do not need offensive fireworks if the defense keeps creating short fields.

TAKE: Iowa -31.5 Final Score: Iowa 40-0

Missouri State vs TEXAS A&M

Texas A&M has the talent to dominate, but a forty-point spread creates value on the underdog if Missouri St can manufacture a few scoring drives. The Bears have enough experience to cover.

TAKE: Missouri State +40 Final Score: TAM 50-0

FIU vs SOUTH FLORIDA

South Florida has the stronger roster and should be able to play faster than FIU wants. The Bulls can create pressure without selling out and have enough offensive speed to turn short gains into explosive plays. I expect USF to control the second half and pull away.

TAKE: South Florida -13.5 Final Score: USF 19-9

Sam Houston vs TROY

Troy has the home field and the more reliable defensive profile, while Sam Houston faces a difficult task generating consistent offense. If Troy protects the football, the Trojans should control possession and wear down the visitors.

TAKE: Troy -16.5 Final Score: Troy 24-21

Western Michigan vs MICHIGAN

Michigan has a huge talent advantage, but the Broncos can play slowly enough to make a four-touchdown spread uncomfortable. Western Michigan's best path is to avoid turnovers and force long drives. We will take the points in a game Michigan should still win easily.

TAKE: Western Michigan +27.5 Final Score: Michigan 13-12

UL Monroe vs MISSISSIPPI STATE

Mississippi State should win the line of scrimmage, but laying close to thirty points requires offensive efficiency for four quarters. ULM can shorten the game and force the Bulldogs to earn every possession. The over sized number points me toward the dog.

TAKE: UL Monroe +29 Final Score: MSU 62-13

Clemson vs LSU

No newsletter pick due to eligibility uncertainty. Read LSU/Clemson on page 1.

TAKE: Guaranteed Pick: LSU – 10 Final Score: 51-10

Florida Atlantic vs FLORIDA

Florida has a major advantage in size and depth and should control the game at the line of scrimmage. FAU will have difficulty surviving obvious passing downs if the Gators get ahead early.

I expect Florida to keep pressure on and clear the number.

TAKE: Florida -26.5 Final Score: Florida 66-21

Central Michigan vs NEW MEXICO

New Mexico has the home field and should be the more settled team, while Central Michigan faces a long trip and a difficult opener. The Lobos can control tempo with the run and force CMU to chase points. I like the home favorite.

TAKE: New Mexico -10 Final Score: New Mexico 38-7

UNLV vs HAWAII

Both teams come off Week 0 losses, but Hawaii showed enough offensive life behind Micah Alejandro to make this a dangerous home underdog. UNLV struggled with protection against Memphis. In Honolulu, the points and home setting make Hawaii attractive.

TAKE: Hawaii +3 Final Score: UNLV 21-6

UCLA vs CALIFORNIA

This rivalry matchup looks close enough that home field can matter late. California should be able to keep UCLA from controlling the game on the ground, and the Bears have enough offensive balance to stay on schedule. I will take the small home dog.

TAKE: California +1.5 Final Score: UCLA 45-24

Yes, we know not all games are listed, but we removed all the games that showed no edge for you.

Western Kentucky vs NEVADA

Western Kentucky has the more dependable offensive identity and should be able to attack Nevada through the air. The Wolf Pack need to generate pressure without exposing the secondary. In a close number, I prefer the visitor's scoring ability.

TAKE: Western Kentucky -2.5 Final Score: Nevada 49-14

Washington State vs WASHINGTON

Washington owns the deeper roster and home field, but rivalry games can compress large talent gaps. Washington State can play aggressively with little pressure and needs only to avoid the early avalanche. More than three touchdowns is enough to take the Cougars.

TAKE: Washington State +23.5 Final Score:

Louisville vs Ole Miss

This neutral-site game should feature enough offense for Ole Miss to create separation. The Rebels have the more explosive roster and can force Louisville out of its preferred pace if they score early. We like Ole Miss to win by more than a touchdown.

TAKE: Ole Miss -7 Final Score:

Notre Dame vs Wisconsin

Notre Dame has the stronger roster and should control the line of scrimmage, but the neutral-site setting at Lambeau removes a true home edge. Wisconsin can shorten the game and make every possession valuable. Still, Notre Dame's depth should create late separation.

TAKE: Notre Dame -20.5 Final Score:

SMU vs FLORIDA STATE

Florida State gets this game at home and has enough defensive talent to make life difficult for SMU's passing game. The Seminoles do not need to dominate; they only need to stay within a field goal. In a matchup we see as essentially even, the home points are attractive.

TAKE: Florida State +3 Final Score:

CFB BEST BETS WENT 5-0 ATS

San Jose State + 3.5 • James Madison - 6.5
• Tulsa +13.5 • Colorado State -3 • Memphis -10

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