



Summer Lovin' –

Making the NFL Preseason Profitable

Part 1 of 2

By Hansel Wei

With NFL football right around the corner, it seems like a great time to take a look at preseason betting. Many people feel that because the games “don’t matter,” the preseason is unpredictable and risky. This could not be further from the truth. There are numerous wagering opportunities with preseason football; you just need to know where to look. With a few games out of the way, there’s been time to establish and reinforce trends, but there are still exhibition games ahead, which will hopefully allow you to turn the suggestions offered in this two-part article into a nice profit in the next few weeks.

So, should you look at the preseason as just another NFL game when assessing odds? Absolutely not. It’s the same game of football, but what makes winners and losers in the preseason could not be further from the factors that affect the regular season. The big mistake novice bettors make is confusing a good regular season team with a good preseason team. As it turns out, there is minimal correlation; in fact, it’s often the opposite. Teams that are expected to have a big regular season often hold back during the preseason for fear of injury. Take the Philadelphia Eagles. Over the last six years they have been one of the NFL’s most successful regular season teams, but in that span, Andy Reid hasn’t had a single winning preseason. Coming off their 2003 Super Bowl win, the New England Patriots went 1-3 SU and ATS in the 2004 preseason. Indianapolis put up the best regular season record in the league last year, and did so coming off a 0-5 preseason. The San Francisco 49ers went undefeated in preseason play and proceeded to post the worst regular season record in the league. What I’m saying is, take your overall impression of a team and throw it out the window when you want to bet on the preseason.

Know Your Players. If you’ve been reading my articles for a while, you’ll know that I’m big into research—the same holds true for preseason betting, in any sport. If you can find out what the player rotation is going to be—not just who’s going to start—you’ll have a big advantage, since the starters may not even play a full quarter. Make sure you know who the key starters are for each team. Does the team rely on an aging core of veterans who are simply trying not to get injured, or are their starters young, hungry kids who have something to prove? After the starters leave, will the second team get the bulk of the snaps, or will it be the third or fourth players on the depth chart? Are these players walk-ons with no experience, or seasoned AFL, NFL Europe, or CFL veterans? These are

the kind of details that make the difference between a nice cover and a lost bet. Take special notice of what the quarterback rotation will be. I feel much more confident betting on a team where two QBs are fighting for the starting role than a team with one stud and no one behind him. Bad quarterbacks or quarterbacks with little motivation beyond not getting injured are liable to settle for field goals when they could press for touchdowns or throw key interceptions that lead to sure-fire covers turning into lost cash.

Know Your Coaches. Make sure you are aware of who's pacing the sidelines. Some coaches really emphasize setting a winning tone from Day 1, whereas other coaches couldn't be bothered if they lost every game, so long as they are confident in their roster when the regular season begins. Mike Shanahan of the Broncos, for example, is 14-7 ATS in the preseason in the last five years, including an 8-3 ATS record on the road. He likes to notify his players that every game counts, and lazy play will not be tolerated, even in the preseason. Mike Holmgren, on the other hand, couldn't care less how his Seattle Seahawks play in exhibition games. What he cares about is tinkering with his roster, and sorting out the depth chart for the regular season. Preseason bettors need to be wary of coaches who have been successful for several years in a row. They tend to be more willing to relax during the first few exhibition games, and, because they know things will be alright in the regular season, lack the sense of urgency that helps bettors pick up easy wins in the preseason.

Following up on this point, make sure you investigate which coaches want to win *this game*. There are a ton of factors that contribute to a coach having higher motivation to win a preseason game. Look for coaches whose teams have lost a couple preseason games on the road—often, they will feel added pressure to step up their team's play when they return home to please the hometown fans. Is a team coming off a disastrous season? Look for such coaches to try to set a winning tone from the start, by trying harder in preseason games where the other team may not put up much of a fight. Most importantly, look for first time head coaches. This unique preseason angle is one of the most reliable winners in sports, and it makes complete sense: new coaches generally take over losing teams (it's rare to need a new coach after a winning season), and losing teams tend to be undervalued in exhibition play, since the public tends to remember a team's performance the previous season, and betting lines are based on public opinion. In addition, new coaches have something to prove, to the team's owners, to the fans, to the players, and to the rest of the league. The numbers speak for themselves: NFL coaches joining a new team went 20-11 ATS in the preseason from 2003-2005, good enough for 65% winners.

In the second part of this article, I'll talk about knowing your teams and knowing your situations, and analyzing what makes certain preseason games such strong bets.

Until next time, do yourself a favor...

Keep Doing Things Hansel's Wei.