

About Pro Football Insights

From Milkshakes to Algorithms

You can just think of **Pro Football Insights** as a “tout service,” an entity which offers a handful of picks during each week of the NFL season (but for free all season in this case), but it is more nuanced than that.

Here is my story.

The **Pro Football Insights** journey started over 50 years ago, when I was a young boy growing up in Louisville, Kentucky. I was absolutely passionate about football – playing it, training for it, watching it, reading about it, talking about it, and as it turned out a bit later, handicapping it, betting it, and writing about it. I still am, except for the training and playing parts.

It started with milkshakes.

Every week, fifteen minutes before kickoff of Monday Night Football, the home phone would ring and my Mom would yell, “That’s your Uncle Bobby, pick up the phone!” I already knew it was Uncle Bobby, as I always eagerly awaited his dependable Monday call during the NFL season. Uncle Bobby would ring me to discuss that night’s game and we would pick our teams. Even at a young age, I did my homework, reading the game preview in the local morning rag and analyzing the point spread provided in the back of the paper. In retrospect, I had no idea what I was doing.

He always let me pick first, and he usually won, which upon reflection, was my very first handicapping lesson. That is, the most obvious handicapping choice is often the wrong one. Even though I first learned this as a young boy losing milkshakes to my Uncle (truth is, he always paid for the post-game milkshakes we enjoyed together), this very basic “decision making error” or “cognitive bias,” and many more like it, would become increasingly fascinating to me. In a sense, it helped shape my ultimate education and career. More on that later.

This brings me to the **Pro Football Insights** brand and what it means. Every aspect was chosen with care and explains why this is much more than a “tout service”. Please indulge me.

Pro Football: I love (and wager on) college football, horse racing, and other sports as well, but in handicapping, focus is important. I will provide weekly insights on one sport – NFL Football.

Insights: I do not believe that you should take my picks and just bet them. Do your homework before you review my picks. **Pro Football Insights** is just one piece of your puzzle. Your picks are yours and it’s your money after all, you need to own what you do with it.

The Three Gears: Yes, I use an algorithm to aid my handicapping that I have been working on for years. I started developing it long ago before these statistical models were even called algorithms. Why? The main reason is that handicapping is complicated and the human brain does not have the ability to effectively weigh more than a few variables at one time. There is a cognitive capacity issue which limits us. This is why computer-assisted

mathematical modeling is helpful, it can discern patterns that are not evident to the human eye. However, more important than having the statistical know-how to build and run an algorithm, is understanding the variables that should be considered in the model in the first place. One could say that having a good “theory” (knowing which variables to include in the model) is much more important than the sophistication of the statistical techniques used to better understand the relationships of the variables.

This is where the three gears come in. After dozens of years handicapping NFL games and statistical model development with increasing sophistication and accuracy, I came to believe there are three major categories of variables that need to be considered to accurately predict success in NFL games:

- Football Statistics – measures of football performance efficiency and effectiveness (offense, defense, special teams, coaching, etc.). Who has the strengths to exploit the weaknesses of the other team?
- Betting Market Factors – basic measures of the handicapping context or “market” (opening line, line movement, public bets, public money, etc.). What are the market dynamics telling you about where the value lies?
- Handicapper Decision Making Errors – there are many (overvaluing favorites, overvaluing home teams, overvaluing the best teams from the year prior, overvaluing teams on a hot streak, overvaluing “public teams”, etc.) What handicapper cognitive errors can be exploited?

I am not saying that all of the above examples are included in my algorithm (that will stay proprietary after all), I am just sharing that my model includes variables from these three categories. Since these variables all interact with each other, the gear metaphor is relevant. Taken together, I have found they can be effective in predicting which teams are more likely to cover wagers and which are less likely.

The Human Head: Yes, that is a man’s head. This is not because I am misogynistic; rather, it is a male head because I possess a man’s head! All are invited to subscribe to **Pro Football Insights**.

The Color of the Logo: Two reasons. It was my favorite color when I was a young boy losing milkshakes and it still is. It is also the color of the college where I completed my undergraduate education and where I played college football – so it is near and dear to my heart.

A Little Bit About Me (aka “Doc”)

I will end with the least important part, which is a tad about me (call me Doc). The three gears of **Pro Football Insights** represent the tenants of my mathematical model, but they also represent three passions of my life:

- I love football and played it for thirteen years, from fourth grade through four years of college. I wasn’t talented enough to play pro football, but I certainly love it. And not superficially watching a game, but really watching it and understanding it.

- I love the psychology of decision making and behavioral economics. I love psychology so much that I earned one bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a Ph.D. in different areas of psychology. Overkill, I know, but I was into it and it was more fun at the time than getting a real job. I met my wife of 28 years in graduate school too, so the benefits were many.
- I love research methodology and statistics. I know, dork alert. I have always enjoyed math and found it relatively easy in school. Numbers make more sense to me than words or pictures, always have. Artificial intelligence now makes data management and data analytics even easier. That means more time to think about theories to test and less time in the weeds of data operations. I wish I had access to AI in college and graduate school.

There you have it. I hope you enjoy **Pro Football Insights** and find it valuable. Feel free to email me at doc@profootballinsights.com to share your thoughts. Let's have some fun together.

Doc