ShoresteinSays.com 2020 - NFL Week 1

"The Money Zone": Games that have a "Calculated vs. Actual" difference of between 2 and 6 points are considered The Money Zone. Since 2015, games that fall within this tier have hit ~55% on a sample of over 600 games. I consider games in this tier to have a statistical advantage in the long run. This is a completely objective calculation that does not account for injuries, roster changes, weather etc. However, I believe the smartest investment is to make small bets on each one of these games and slowly increase them over time if you are successful.

2020 Week 1					
Away	Home	Calculated Spread	Actual Spread	Calculated vs Actual	Projected Winner ATS
Indianapolis	Jacksonville	(4.70)	7.50	12.20	Jacksonville
Cleveland	Baltimore	(17.83)	(8.50)	9.33	Baltimore
Arizona	San Francisco	(15.73)	(7.00)	8.73	San Francisco
Las Vegas	Carolina	(2.13)	3.00	5.13	Carolina
Miami	New England	(11.60)	(6.50)	5.10	New England
Seattle	Atlanta	5.47	1.50	3.97	Seattle
Philadelphia	Washington	2.23	6.00	3.77	Washington
Dallas	LA Rams	(0.77)	3.00	3.77	LA Rams
Tennessee	Denver	1.47	(1.50)	2.97	Tennessee
Pittsburgh	NY Giants	6.30	4.00	2.30	Pittsburgh
Chicago	Detroit	(0.03)	(2.00)	1.97	Chicago
LA Chargers	Cincinnati	1.20	3.00	1.80	Cincinnati
Green Bay	Minnesota	(4.93)	(3.50)	1.43	Minnesota
Houston	Kansas City	(10.80)	(10.00)	0.80	Kansas City
NY Jets	Buffalo	(5.97)	(6.50)	0.53	NY Jets
Tampa Bay	New Orleans	(3.57)	(4.00)	0.43	Tampa Bay

The Week 1 Money Zone picks are New England, Carolina, Seattle, Washington, LA Rams, Tennessee, & Pittsburgh

"Shorestein Says" Picks of the Week: Each week I select between 3-5 of my favorite games and do additional analysis on them. I've highlighted the "Shorestein Says" picks of the week in yellow. Read below for my in-depth analysis.

Las Vegas @ Carolina +3: I like the Panthers a lot as underdogs in the home opener. Carolina has been a great September team over the past several seasons, especially in the comfort of their own stadium. While it's difficult to gauge how valuable home field will be in the Covid era with reduced fan capacity, I like the changes that they've made as an organization regardless.

It was clearly time to move on from Cam Newton, and I think they've brought in a much more steady, safer option in Teddy Bridgewater. Last season, the Panthers were a disaster when it came to ball control and ball security. At 2.2 TO's per game, only the Buccaneers were worse at 2.6/game. I think the focus for Bridgewater will be to get the ball to McCaffery early and often, and generate catches for the quick footed receivers. The Raiders are a perfect opponent to draw if you're looking to get your passing game off on the right foot. Here's a look at how the Raiders have performed in the most critical pass defense categories, not just last season, but over the past 3 seasons:

Raiders Porous Pass Defense			
Year	Passer Rating Defense	Yards / Att	Sack %
2019	103.80 (31st)	7.8 (31st)	5.73% (25th)
2018	101.00 (29th)	8.0 (32nd)	2.64% (32nd)
2017	101.80 (30th)	7.3 (28th)	5.53% (24th)

For the last 3 seasons, this chart simply tells you that the Raiders can't generate pressure, and they can't cover anyone either. I will never buy on a team as a road favorite that has performed this poorly defending the pass.

Carolina's largest problem last season was unquestionably its run defense. They were gashed at almost 5.2 yards per carry in 2019 which was dead last in the NFL. While this is certainly a concern for me going against the Raiders physical offensive line, I think they've made moves to address the problem. They spent their first 2 draft picks on a nose tackle and at defensive end, in attempt to stop the bleeding.

I think there's far too much confidence on the Raiders, and there is too much disrespect on the Panthers. I'd expect Carolina to come out motivated under their new coach and new offense.

Tampa Bay +3.5 @ New Orleans: I'm not typically the type to say that one player can completely change a team's entire outlook, but when that player is the best player in the history of the sport, it's hard not to see it. I think Tom Brady is on a mission this year. He was let go by the Patriots, but I think what's even crazier was that essentially the whole league passed on him as well. I've seen him do it his entire career, but he will play with an attitude that we haven't seen in years.

The even scarier part is how much talent he has around him on offense. Evans, Godwin, and Gronkowski are far and away better targets than what he had to work with last season. I think this offense will be a juggernaut in 2020 and I think the revenge tour starts in New Orleans. Even with Jameis Winston, this offense piled up yardage a year ago. Clearly, his biggest issue was taking care of the ball.

I believe New Orleans' championship window is closing. They've arguably been the best team in football for the better part of 2 seasons, but I think their devastating playoff losses will undoubtedly put an emotional drain on them this season. It is very rare to see teams get so close to the Super Bowl and recover in the following year.

Even with an inferior roster, the Bucs have played New Orleans tough in the dome over the past few seasons. Notably, they have carved up the Saints' defense in the dome:

Bucs Performances in New Orleans			
Year	Result	Passer Rating	Yards/ Att
2019	48-40 (W)	156.20	14.89
2018	31-24 (L)	104.60	7.90

I think Tampa's defense has quietly improved. Shaq Barrett emerged as a pass rusher last year, that they desperately needed. He is joined by Ndamukong Suh, Vita Vea, and Jason Pierre-Paul to round out a pretty strong defensive line. This unit was outstanding against the run in 2019 with a league best 3.3

yards per carry. I think run defense is vital in slowing down the Saints offense which methodically chews up time and picks up 1st downs.

If you are a past reader, you've probably seen me write at least 5+ articles on how embarrassing the Tampa Bay pass defense has been, but I don't think that's the case anymore. Even last year the secondary showed signs of improvement as they improved to 90.0 in passer rating defense which put them in the middle of the pack. I think if they can just be an average secondary, the ceiling for this team is very high and you will not see them as FG+ dogs for the rest of the season.

Pittsburgh -4 @ NY Giants: The Steelers could make a strong case that they were the best defense in the NFL a season ago. The problem was that they had no consistency at quarterback. All reports out of Pittsburgh are that Big Ben is in probably the best shape of his professional career and that he looks good. I think this could get really ugly for Daniel Jones and the Giants. Only the Panthers and Bucs turned the ball over more times than the Giants in 2019, and no team forced more turnovers than Pittsburgh. I think the Steelers front 7 is ferocious and that will lead to a ton of problems for Daniel Jones. Pittsburgh led the NFL last year with a sack % of 9.51%, and the Giants could potentially be starting two rookie tackles.

Pittsburgh has a lot of work to do to get the offense back to what it looked like in the Antonio Brown days, but I think they have the personnel to do it. Getting the Giants first should be a soft landing as they ranked 30th in points allowed a season ago and seemed to spend all their draft capital on offensive line help. I think Ben will have all night to throw and he should get back in a rhythm with Ju Ju Smith-Schuster who had a monster season the last time they played together. I'd also like to see more from the Steelers running game. They still have a very talented offensive line, but got almost no running production or efficiency last year. I think it will be helpful to have a capable QB back at the helm so defenses can no longer cheat against the run.

Pittsburgh has far more talent than the Giants. I think they should roll in this Monday Night opener.

Seattle -1.5 @ Atlanta: I think in this matchup you have one team that perpetually overachieves in Seattle, and you have an Atlanta team that disappoints with the talent that it has year over year. I really don't think there will be any fluctuations in these trends as both rosters/coaching staffs were largely left intact. Specifically, in this matchup I think Seattle's running game should overwhelm Atlanta's undersized front seven. While Seattle's over commitment to the run is at times frustrating, I think it will serve them well to pound the ball continuously on an Atlanta team that has struggled in run defense for the past several seasons. Reports on Chris Carson's health appear to be all positive, so I'd think the Seahawks would make him the workhorse from week 1. When they do decide to throw, Russell Wilson should have all day as Atlanta ranked 30th in the league in sack % at just under 5%. DK Metcalf should continue to grow as a second year play maker, and I think the addition of Greg Olsen will be helpful in the midrange passing game. The Wilson/Lockett connection should remain one of the most lethal in the NFL.

I really think it's the same old story for the Falcons offense. Reading the roster on paper makes your eyes pop, but when you actually watch it play out, they leave you wanting more every time. Ryan never looks confident in the pocket, and it seems like their all world receivers are never put in the best position to be successful.

Coming into 2019, I was very down on the Seahawks defense, but I think they are in a much better spot in 2020. They also struggle against the run, but Atlanta is not the type of team that will exploit that weakness. Despite that minor weakness, I think the addition of Jamal Adams will be a huge upgrade. He has proven himself as a disruptive playmaker, and Pete Carroll has shown what he can scheme up when he's working with talented safeties.

Overall, Seattle remains the much better option in terms of efficiency statistics:

2019 Efficiency: Seattle vs. Atlanta					
Team	**Passer Rating**	**Defensive Passer Rating**	**Turnover Margin**	**Yards / Point Margin**	**Red Zone Off**
Atlanta	93.80 (12th)	96.9 (24th)	-.3(25th)	-1.7 (24th)	51.67% (25th)
Seattle	105.50 (4th)	86.70 (10th)	+.7(4th)	.30 (14th)	64.62% (5th)

There's a reason why one team makes the playoffs year in and year out, while the other sits at home.

Random Thoughts:

- I like the Rams in the Sunday Nightcap. I see Dallas and LA as virtually identical teams in terms of what they do well. I see no reason why they should be underdogs at home.

- It will be very exciting to see the Patriots in the post Brady era. I wanted to pull the trigger on them over the Dolphins, but I still think there are too many question marks given how much roster turnover they've had on the defense.

- Tennessee is an intriguing Money Zone pick, but I've historically avoided betting against Denver in September. There are lots of trends that validate that idea over the years.

- I like the Jets getting over a TD at Buffalo. I'm not sold on the Buffalo hype. Great defenses need to be paired with efficient quarterback play for a team to have any long term success. Josh Allen hasn't been anything close to efficient in his young career.

- Indy is laying a gigantic number to Jacksonville on the road. The perception of Jax is that they are tanking the season. I think week one should give us a good indication either way.

- Baltimore is also laying a big number to a divisional foe in Cleveland who they have struggled with at times. I think Baltimore could come out of the gate shaky given how last season ended.

- I'd expect to see a lot of rusty football. No preseason, no fans… This will be interesting to see how things look to start.

Good Luck Everyone!

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