

#1 NINETEEN STRAIGHT YEARS!

BY PHIL STEELE

Growing up as a kid, I never liked to play "just for the fun of it." In every sport I played in the backyard with my brothers or the neighbors, I always kept score. Is there any sense of playing a game if you can't determine who the winner is?

The same goes for me in the magazine business. Everyone can claim to be most accurate, but how would you know unless you keep score? In 2014, for example, I could point out that I projected 3 of the 4 teams that actually made it to the inaugural playoffs. I also had TCU as my Most Improved Team in the country and they went from 4-8, to almost crashing the playoff party. A lot of other magazines could pick out their best accomplishments for the season and say they were the best, but that is using your own interpretation. I am not a big fan of diving or gymnastic competitions because it all depends on how a judge decides to score the performer. I have watched many events where I thought someone did better, but the judges' grade disagreed. That is why I like football, basketball, baseball, hockey, etc as there is a specific way to score and a specific way to total the points.

Fortunately for the college football magazine industry, a smart man named Chris Stassen came up with a scoring format for magazine accuracy which involves no judgement, just a score and total points with only one way to score. He started rating magazine accuracy waaaay back in 1993. How long ago was that? I did not even have a College Football Preview! His first year he judged the accuracy of Street & Smith, Petersen's, Game Plan, Lee Corso's, NCAA Preview, Football Action, The Sporting News, C&PF Newsweekly, Jim Feist, Inside Sports, Athlon and Lindy's.

Stassen's scoring method was simple and to the point. If you picked a team to finish 3rd in its division and it finished 1st, you missed by 2 spots and are given 2 points. If you picked a team 2nd and they finished 2nd you received 0 points. If 2 or more teams have identical records they can count for either spot (ex: 2 teams tie for 2nd, they can count as 2nd or 3rd). Just like in golf, the low score wins and much like all the major sports there was no question how the scoring was done. It was an exact science with no opinions. I put out my first magazine back in 1995 and I did not win the title that year. First of all, I did not even realize this website was around (the internet was not very big back then) and Chris had a clause that if you did not predict a conference you were given penalty points. Well, the first year I had 88 teams with 2 full pages each in the magazine and did not predict the MAC or the Big West so was therefore given penalty points. Same deal in 1996 and 1997. When I finally stumbled upon the site (stassen.com), I was shocked to see that my magazine was rated low in the magazine accuracy category. After figuring out why, I adapted and added those conferences' forecasts (and all the teams) to my 1998 magazine. That year the top magazines were Lindy's, Street & Smith, Athlon, Football Action, Phil Steele, Sporting News, Sports Illustrated, Football News, Game Plan, Bob Griese,

Playboy, Dick Butkus and Preview Sports. You will notice on the next page that since 1998 I am very pleased to say that my magazine has been the most accurate magazine over that 19 year span since predicting all the conferences.

Here is an example from this past season, so you see exactly how the scoring is done. Let's take a look at the Sun Belt.

	Conf Record	Conf Standing	Phil Steele's Forecast	PS Prediction Missed By
Appalachian St	7-1	1t	1.5	0
Arkansas St	7-1	1t	1.5	0
Troy	6-2	3t	5	1
Idaho	6-2	3t	7	3
Louisiana	5-3	5	4	1
Georgia Southern	4-4	6	3	3
ULM	3-5	7	10	3
South Alabama	2-6	8t	7	1
Georgia St	2-6	8t	7	1
New Mexico St	2-6	8t	9	0
Texas St	0-8	11	11	0

Total Points from Sun Belt Conference: 13

STASSEN 2016 POINT TOTALS FOR THE Sun Belt

Publication & Total Points	Phil Steele	Athlon	Lindy's	Game Plan	USA Today	The Sporting News	Gold Sheet	Total Points
Appalachian State	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arkansas State	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Troy	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Idaho	3	4	3	4	2	3	5	24
Louisiana	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	4
Georgia Southern	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	23
ULM	3	4	4	4	3	4	1	23
South Alabama	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	4
Georgia State	1	2	4	2	1	2	3	15
New Mexico State	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Texas State	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	6
TOTAL POINTS	13	15	17	15	14	15	16	105

Back in 1998 my magazine had a full color glossy cover but the inside was black and white newsprint. The type even then was very small, as I always tried to cram as much information in as possible and the abbreviations were not what they are today. I remember someone describing it as me selling the magazines out of the trunk of my car. The good news was as long as I got one into someone's hands they used it all year long and had to have it the next year. That 1998 magazine had 192 pages. Finally, in 2001, I went to full color glossy pages and had 288 pages with very little white space in the magazine but the small type and abbreviation theme continued.

In the 2004 preseason, stassen.com started to include several websites into the competition. Those first couple of years the websites included College Football News and the CNN/SI website. As the years continued, more and more have joined and during this past year out of 21 different publications & websites monitored only 7 of them were magazines. These websites have some unfair advantages.



GLENN SMITH
Georgia State

1998 - 2016 MOST ACCURATE MAGAZINE
1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004,
2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011,
2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 COMBINED
19 YEARS - MOST ACCURATE MAGAZINE

THE MOST ACCURATE PRESEASON MAGAZINE THE LAST 19 YEARS!

Publication	TOTAL	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
Phil Steele	2626	148	131	134'	119	137	148	125'	140	135'	147	153	133	125	155	153	148	130	143	120
Athlon	2683	137	133	151	138	134	154	119	144	141	135	158	134	147	149	144	162	134	149	120
Lindy's	2722	148	141	145	132	139	151	115	151	168	137	171	129	148	149	150	155	124	152	117
GamePlan	2743	149	133	147	130	147	147	121	132	141	145	174	157	145	141	154	165	132	157	126
USA Today	2785'	144	145'	137	142'	161'	158	108	142	136	142	175	145	147	153	155	175	140	152	127
Gold Sheet	2795	148	139	156	126	154	154	121	160	143	154	179	129	130	153	155	175	140	152	127
The Sporting News	2795	147	153	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	140	170	145	133	146	131	173	135	155	124
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	2806'	155	135	155	139	154	150	133	133	139	150'	174	145	148	157	155	177	125	158	124
Street & Smith	2818	147	153	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	150	168	139	143	147	155	180	136	138	119
Media Polls	2830'	149	145	143	139'	152	154	132	148	149	150	175	145	147	153	155	175	140	152	127
College Football News	2840'	155	155	148	147'	148	154	132'	145'	160'	152	175	145	127	149'	162	180	125	152	127
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	2849'	146	135	155	170	154	154	109	148	159	145	172	147'	151	153	159	177	136	152	127
Football Outsiders	2865	155	148	166	146	145	141	152'	143'	149	150	175	145	147	153	155	175	140	152	127

The Stassen site is so complete that it keeps tabulations of how the magazines have fared in each of the past seasons and also has charts based on the past 3, 5 and 10 years. It even has an all-time chart which rates just the 4 magazines that have been around from 1993-2012. Steele's magazine did not get placed on the all-time list because it was not around until 1995. It did, however, come up #1 overall in the past 19 years (1998-2016) in the category of Prediction Accuracy. The accompanying table shows the complete results.

THE LAST 3 YEARS!

Last 3 Years 2014-2016					
Magazine	Rank	Score	2016	2015	2014
Phil Steele	1	413'	148	131	134'
Athlon	2	421	137	133	151
USA Today	3	426'	144	145'	137
GamePlan	4	429	149	133	147
Lindy's	5	434	148	141	145
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	6	436	146	135	155
Media Polls	7	437	149	145	143
Gold Sheet	8	443	148	139	156
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	9	445	155	135	155
The Sporting News	10	451	147	153	151
Street & Smith	10	451	147	153	151
College Football News	12	458	155	155	148
Football Outsiders	13	469	155	148	166

THE LAST 5 YEARS!

Last 5 Years 2012-2016							
Magazine	Rank	Score	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Phil Steele	1	669'	148	131	134'	119	137
Athlon	2	693	137	133	151	138	134
Lindy's	3	705	148	141	145	132	139
GamePlan	4	706	149	133	147	130	147
Gold Sheet	5	723	148	139	156	126	154
Media Polls	6	728'	149	145	143	139'	152
USA Today	7	730'	144	145'	137	142'	161'
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	8	738	155	135	155	139	154
The Sporting News	9	740	147	153	151	148	141
Street & Smith	9	740	147	153	151	148	141
College Football News	11	753'	155	155	148	147'	148
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	12	760	146	135	155	170	154
Football Outsiders	12	760	155	148	166	146	145



First of all, many of them come up during the month of August with one site coming up the first day of football season the past three seasons! That is NOT a preseason preview if it comes up the day of the first games! These sites do not provide a lot of information as they are not producing a product to sell and compete on the newsstands. On top of that, by coming up in August they get to read all of the preseason magazines which come out in June, so we are basically showing them our cards in advance. They also get all the latest deletions from rosters and sometimes late additions. I would hardly call these *preseason* predictions. Still, my record has held up well against them and even though I can not include all of these websites in the lists on the right, I am #1 over 3 years, #1 over 5 years, #1 over 10 years, #1 over 19 years!

For over the last decade plus, I do my preseason radio circuit and during the course of the year I enjoy interacting with fans on close to 400 radio shows. You can hear me on the various ESPN stations (ESPN, ESPN2 and ESPNU) shot directly from my office so I do not have to drive to the local TV studios. I have a newsletter that I put out weekly called "Inside the Pressbox" and do a dozen or so weekly shows with predictions. You can also catch my "Strong as Steele" podcast again this year starting in the preseason. For my season the MOST IMPORTANT prediction is the magazine accuracy!

I also take great pride in putting out a magazine that so many people use. I start writing the magazine the Sunday after Thanksgiving and finish it the end of May and spend the entire six months on a heavy deadline, working 65 to 100 hours a week. I have a great staff that also puts a lot of time and effort into the magazine. If it was just about the accuracy of the predictions that would be one thing, but I really like the fact that once someone gets the magazine in their hands, they need to have it as their reference tool the entire year. We proof each page 4 to 5 times and I feel the information and stats that are in the magazine are about 99.3% accurate.

Now that Twitter is so popular, more and more people are abbreviating, so my style of writing is becoming easier and easier to figure out. I usually write about 3,500 words on each team and then chop it down to about 2,000 while the competition usually has 500-1,000 words per team or for some of those websites, just a prediction and very few words.

AND...THE LAST 10 YEARS!

Last 10 Years 2007-2016												
Magazine	Rank	Total Score	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Phil Steele	1	1366	148	131	134'	119	137	148	125'	140	135'	147'
Athlon	2	1386	137	133	151	138	134	154	119	144	141	135
GamePlan	3	1392	149	133	147	130	147	147	121	132	141	145
USA Today	4	1416'	144	145'	137	142'	161'	158	108	142	136	142
Lindy's	5	1427	148	141	145	132	139	151	115	151	168	137
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	6	1443'	155	135	155	139	154	150	133	133	139	150'
Gold Sheet	7	1455	148	139	156	126	154	154	121	160	143	154
Media Polls	8	1461'	149	145	143	139'	152	154	132	148	149	150
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	9	1475	146	135	155	170	154	154	109	148	159	145
The Sporting News	10	1483	147	153	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	140
Street & Smith	11	1493	147	153	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	150
Football Outsiders	12	1496	155	148	166	146	145	141	152'	143'	149	150
College Football News	13	1498	155	155	148	147'	148	154	132'	145'	160'	152

I know from doing radio shows, being on the FWAA Awards committee and talking to writers, that the magazine is used often during the year and the two biggest compliments I get is someone calling it their "Football Bible" and hearing that their edition is dog eared and torn apart by the end of the year. Now that we have the magazine on an easy to use app (see inside front cover) that should help keep some of the magazines in better condition throughout the year as readers can use both.

In wrapping up, I just wanted you to know that this college preview is basically all I work on the entire year. I still go through each of the 130 team previews at least twice myself and you can follow along the magazines progress on Twitter @philsteele042. I take the predictions in the magazine **very seriously** and have very little free time away from working on football, but it is a labor of love. Hopefully next year when you read this article, I will be #1 over the last 20 years and as I said, the most important predictions I make all year are tied to winning the magazine title, something I take a lot of pride in. I never play "just for the fun of it," I play to win.