

#1 EIGHTEEN 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 that 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 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 starting 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 News-weekly, 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. Now, 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 18 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 PAC 12, which has both North and South division (wow, that makes sense). I have added the two divisions together in the chart below to take up less space.

	Conf Record	Conf Standing	Phil Steele's Forecast	PS Prediction Missed By
North				
Stanford	8-1	1	1.5	.5
Oregon	7-2	2	1.5	.5
Washington St	6-3	3	4.5	1.5
California	4-5	4t	3	1
Washington	4-5	4t	4.5	0
Oregon St	0-9	6	6	0

	Conf Record	Conf Standing	Phil Steele's Forecast	PS Prediction Missed By
South				
USC	6-3	1t	1	0
Utah	6-3	1t	4.5	2.5
UCLA	5-4	3	2	1
Arizona St	4-5	4	3	1
Arizona	3-6	5	4.5	.5
Colorado	1-8	6	6	0

Total pts from PAC 12 NORTH : 3.5

Total pts from PAC 12 SOUTH: 5

Total Points from PAC 12 Conference: 8.5

STASSEN 2015 POINT TOTALS FOR THE PAC12

Publication & Total Points	Phil Steele	Athlon	Lindy's	GamePlan	USA Today	The Sporting News	Gold Sheet	Football Outsiders	College Football Poll	Total Points
Stanford	.5	1	1	1	.5	1	1	1	1	8
Oregon	.5	1	1	1	.5	1	1	1	1	8
Washington St	1.5	2	2	2	2.5	3	1	3	2	19
California	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	5
Washington	0	1	0	0	.5	1	0	1	1	4.5
Oregon St	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
USC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Utah	2.5	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	25.5
UCLA	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	2	8
Arizona St	1	2	2	2	1.5	0	3	1	2	14.5
Arizona	.5	1	2	0	2.5	2	1	1	1	11
Colorado	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL POINTS	8.5	11	13	9	13	13	11	15	14	107.5

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.

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



Jared Goff - California
 2015 Pass Eff Rating: 161.3
 Led PAC 12 in Passing Yards & Pass TDs LY

THE MOST ACCURATE PRESEASON MAGAZINE THE LAST 18 YEARS!

Publication	TOTAL	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
Phil Steele	2480	131	135	119	137	148	126	140	136	148	153	133	125	155	153	148	130	143	120
Athlon	2546	133	151	138	134	154	119	144	141	135	158	134	147	149	144	162	134	149	120
Lindy's	2574	141	145	132	139	151	115	151	168	137	171	129	148	149	150	155	124	152	117
GamePlan	2594	133	147	130	147	147	121	132	141	145	174	157	145	141	154	165	132	157	126
USA Today	2642	146	137	143	162	158	108	142	136	142	175	145	147	153	155	175	140	152	127
The Sporting News	2648	153	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	140	170	145	133	146	131	173	135	155	124
Gold Sheet	2663	139	156	126	154	170	121	160	143	154	179	129	130	153	155	175	140	152	127
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	2667	135	170	139	154	150	133	133	139	151	174	145	148	157	155	177	125	158	124
Street & Smith	2671	153	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	150	168	139	143	147	155	180	136	138	119
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	2697	135	170	148	154	154	109	148	159	145	172	148	151	153	159	177	136	152	127
Media Polls	2698	145	143	140	152	170	132	148	149	150	175	145	147	153	155	175	140	152	127
College Football News	2708	155	148	148	154	170	133	146	161	152	175	145	127	150	162	180	125	152	127
Football Outsiders	2710	148	166	146	145	141	153	144	149	150	175	145	147	153	155	175	140	152	127
College Football Poll	2761	162	175	125	168	179	148	139	146	150	175	145	147	153	155	175	140	152	127

* Record was not available on site, so an average score of all ranked services was used. Street & Smith merged with The Sporting News in 2008. Used Sporting News Scorebook. Numbers that include a .5 were rounded up.

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 18 years (1998-2015) in the category of Prediction Accuracy. The accompanying table shows the complete results.

THE LAST 3 YEARS!

THE LAST 5 YEARS!

Last 3 Years 2013-2015					
Magazine	Rank	Score	2015	2014	2013
Phil Steele	1	384'	131	134'	119
Game Plan	2	410	133	147	130
Lindy's	3	418	141	145	132
Gold Sheet	4	421	139	156	126
Athlon	5	422	133	151	138
USA Today	6	425	145'	137	142'
Media Polls	7	427'	145	143	139'
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	8	444	135	170	139
College Football News	9	452	153	151	148
The Sporting News	10	452	153	151	148
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	11	453	135	170	148
Football Outsiders	12	460	148	166	146
College Football Poll	13	461'	161'	175	125

Last 5 Years 2011-2015							
Magazine	Rank	Score	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Phil Steele	1	669'	131	134'	119	137	148
GamePlan	2	704	133	147	130	147	147
Lindy's	3	708	141	145	132	139	151
Athlon	4	710	133	151	138	134	154
USA Today	5	744'	145'	137	142'	161'	158
Gold Sheet	6	745	139	156	126	154	170
Football Outsiders	7	746	148	166	146	145	141
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	8	748	135	170	139	154	150
Media Polls	9	749'	145	143	139'	152	170
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	10	761	135	170	148	154	154
The Sporting News	11	767	153	151	148	141	174
College Football News	12	774'	155	148	147'	154	170
College Football Poll	13	808'	161'	175	125	168	179



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 two 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 18 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 now find 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. For my season the MOST IMPORTANT prediction is the magazine accuracy one!

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 put 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 99.2% 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 2006-2015												
Magazine	Rank	Total Score	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Phil Steele	1	1,371	131	134'	119	137	148	125'	140	135'	147'	153
Athlon	2	1,407	133	151	138	134	154	119	144	141	135	158
GamePlan	3	1,417	133	147	130	147	147	121	132	141	145	174
USA Today	4	1,447'	145'	137	142'	161'	158	108	142	136	142	175
Lindy's	5	1,450	144	145	132	139	151	115	151	168	137	171
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	6	1,477'	135	170	139	154	150	133	133	139	150'	174
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	7	1,494	135	170	148	154	154	109	148	159	145	172
Gold Sheet	8	1,502	139	156	126	154	170	121	160	143	154	179
Media Polls	9	1,503'	145	143	139'	152	170	132	148	149	150	175
The Sporting News	10	1,506	153	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	140	170
Football Outsiders	12	1,516	148	166	146	145	141	152'	143'	149	150	175
College Football News	13	1,540	155	148	147'	154	170	132'	145'	160'	152	175
College Football Poll	14	1,566'	161'	175	125	168	179	148	139	146	150	175

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 year as readers can use both.

In wrapping it 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 128 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 19 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.