

#1 SEVENTEEN STRAIGHT YEARS!

BY PHIL STEELE

Growing up as a kid, I never liked to play for fun. In every sport I played in the backyard with my brothers or a neighbor, I always kept score. No sense of playing a game if you didn't keep score and have a winner and a loser right?

The same goes for me in the magazine business. Everyone can claim to be most accurate but how would you know unless you kept score? Last year, 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 year and say they were the best but that is using your own judgment. 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 judge's 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 and there is 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 Newsweekly, Jim Feist, Inside Sports, Athlon and Lindy's.

His 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 tms 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 put in. For every spot you missed a prediction by, you were given a point. You picked each team for a spot and each team finished in a certain spot.

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 and was 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 so 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, 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 that 1998 year I am very pleased to say that my magazine has been the most accurate magazine over that 17 year span.

Here is an example from this past season, so you see exactly how the scoring is done. Let's take a look at the Mountain West, which has both a Mountain and West division (wow, that makes sense). I have added the two divisions together in the chart to take up less space.

West	Conf Record	Conf Standing	Phil Steele's Forecast	PS Prediction Missed By
Fresno St	5-3	1(tie)	1	0
San Diego St	5-3	1(tie)	2.5	.5
Nevada	4-4	3	2.5	.5
Hawai'i	3-5	4	5	1
San Jose St	2-6	5	4	1
UNLV	1-7	6	6	0

Total pts from West Division: 3

Mountain	Conf Record	Conf Standing	Phil Steele's Forecast	PS Prediction Missed By
Boise St	7-1	1	1	0
Colorado St	6-2	2 (tie)	3	0
Utah St	6-2	2 (tie)	2	0
Air Force	5-3	4	4	0
New Mexico	2-6	5 (tie)	5	0
Wyoming	2-6	5 (tie)	5	0

Total pts from Mountain Division: 0

Total pts from Mountain West Conference: 3

STASSEN 2014 POINT TOTALS FOR THE MW

Publication & Total Points	Phil Steele	Athlon	The Sporting News	Lindy's	CPA Rankings	GamePlan	CFB News	USA Today	Total Points
Fresno St	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
San Diego St	.5	1	1	0	1	0	1	.5	5
Nevada	.5	1	2	0	1	1	2	.5	8
Hawai'i	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	15
San Jose St	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	5
UNLV	0	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	11
Boise St	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Colorado St	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.5	.5
Utah St	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Air Force	0	1	1	2	1	1	0	.5	6.5
New Mexico	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wyoming	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	5
TOTAL POINTS	3	8	9	9	8	8	7	6	58

Back in 1998 my magazine had a full cover glossy cover but the inside was black and white newsprint much like a newspaper. The type even then was very small as I always tried to cram as much information in it as possible and the abbreviations are 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 was now up to 288 pages with very little white space in the magazine and the small type and abbreviation theme continued.

In 2004 preseason.stassen.com started to include some websites into the competition. That first couple of years the websites were places like College Football News and the CNN/SI website. As the years continued more and more have joined and during this past year there were 22 different places monitored and only 7 of them were magazines. Now adding websites like this is not exactly fair.

1998 - THE MOST ACCURATE MAGAZINE

1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 & 2014 combined

2014 - THE MOST ACCURATE MAGAZINE

THE MOST ACCURATE PRESEASON MAGAZINE THE LAST 17 YEARS!

Publication	TOTAL	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
Phil Steele	2,349	135	119	137	148	126	140	136	148	153	133	125	155	153	148	130	143	120
Wrathell's CPA Rankings	2,422	143	129	142	157	130	138	137	141	171	144	155	139	146	155	119	149	127
Lindy's	2,433	145	132	139	151	115	151	168	137	171	129	148	149	150	155	124	152	117
GamePlan	2,461	147	130	147	147	121	132	141	145	174	157	145	141	154	165	132	157	126
College Football News	2,555	148	148	154	170	133	146	161	152	175	145	127	150	162	180	125	152	127
Athlon	2,413	151	138	134	154	119	144	141	135	158	134	147	149	144	162	134	149	120
The Sporting News	2,495	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	140	170	145	133	146	131	173	135	155	124
Street & Smith	2,518	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	150	168	139	143	147	155	180	136	138	119
Gold Sheet	2,524	156	126	154*	170*	121	160	143	154	179	129	130	153	155	175	140	152	127
Sports Illustrated (CNN/SI)	2,535	173*	139	154*	150	133	133	139	151	174	145	148	157	155	177	125	158	124
ATS Consultants	2,568	173*	148*	154*	170*	115	145	149	149	162	135	161	168	148	159	147	158	127
Blue Ribbon/ESPN	2,565	173*	148*	154	154	109	148	159	145	172	148	151	153	159	177	136	152	127
Jim Feist	2,552	173*	148*	154*	170*	132	148	146	150	175	145	147	141	148	162	129	162	122

* 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.

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 17 years (1998-2014) in the category of Prediction Accuracy. The accompanying table shows the complete results.

First of all, many of them come up during the month of August with one site coming up the first day of football season this past year. They do not have to 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 the preseason magazines which come out in June so we are basically showing them our cards in advance. They also can get all the latest deletions from rosters and sometimes late additions. I would hardly call these preseason predictions as many come out the week of the first games! Still my record has held up well against them. This past year came right down to the wire but fortunately when the dust settled it was ANOTHER #1 TITLE, another #1 finish over 3 years, another #1 finish over 5 years and another #1 finish over 10 years (see charts in this column).

For over the last decade plus I do my preseason radio circuit and during the course of the year I do enjoy interacting with fans on close to 400 radio shows. You can now find me on the various ESPN stations (ESPN, ESPN2 and ESPNU) and I actually take time out to drive to the TV studio once a week to do shows live and on tape. 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 spent the entire 6 months on a heavy deadline working 65 to 100 hours a week (mostly on the higher end). 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 is 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 500-1000 words per team or for some of those web sites, just a prediction and very few words.

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 or telling me 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 together the entire 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 write each of the 128 team previews 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 life 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 18 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 and I never play for fun, I play to win.

THE LAST 3 YEARS!

Last 3 Years 2012-2014					
Magazine	Rank	Score	2014	2013	2012
Phil Steele	1	390'	134'	119	137
Compu-Picks	2	404	144	128	132
Cap Heresy	3	406	139	120	147
CPA Rankings	4	414	143	129	142
Lindy's	5	416	145	132	139
Arena Fanatic	6	421'	145'	134	142
Athlon	7	423	151	138	134
GamePlan	8	424	147	130	147
Compuhatteratings.com	9	425	149	135	141
McIllece Sports	10	427	136	132	159
Media Polls	11	434'	143	139'	152
The Sporting News	12	440	151	148	141
USA Today	13	441	137	142'	161'
College Football Matrix	14	456'	155'	155	146
Football Outsiders	15	457	166	146	145
College Football Poll	16	468	175	125	168

THE LAST 5 YEARS!

Last 5 Years 2010-2014						
Magazine	Rnk	Score	2014	2013	2012	2011 2010
Phil Steele	1	664	134'	119	137	148 125'
Lindy's	2	682	145	132	139	151 115
GamePlan	3	692	147	130	147	147 121
Athlon	4	696	151	138	134	154 119
compuhatteratings.com	5	697	149	135	141	146 126
CPA Rankings	6	701	143	129	142	157 130
USA Today	7	707	137	142	161'	158 108
The Sporting News	8	739	151	148	141	174 125
Football Outsiders	9	750'	166	146	145	141 152'
College Football Poll	10	795	175	125	168	179 148

AND...THE LAST 10 YEARS!

Last 10 Years 2005-2014												
Magazine	Rank	Total Score	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Phil Steele	1	1,373	134'	119	137	148	125'	140	135'	147'	153	132
Athlon	2	1,408	151	138	134	154	119	144	141	135	158	134
CPA Rankings	3	1,430'	143	129	142	157	130	137'	136'	141	170'	144
Lindy's	4	1,438	145	132	139	151	115	151	168	137	171	129
GamePlan	5	1,441	147	130	147	147	121	132	141	145	174	157
The Sporting News	6	1,498	151	148	141	174	125	150	154	140	170	145