

Sunday, March 18

2 Star Best Bet

****Georgetown (-4) over NC State**

Georgetown was a Best Bet winner for me on Friday against Belmont and the Hoyas are worth another play today. NC State played well in the ACC tournament but their 5 game spread winning streak actually sets the Wolfpack up in a negative 37-100-3 ATS situation and my rating favor Georgetown by 6 ½ points (with a total of 131 ½ points) and I get 5 ½ if I use games since January only. Either way, the line is too low and the situation favors the Hoyas. I'll take Georgetown in a 2-Star Best Bet at -5 points or less.

2 Star Best Bet

****Florida (-14 ½) over Norfolk State**

Norfolk State pulled off the biggest NCAA upset since at least 1991, winning as a 21 ½ point underdog against #2 seeded Missouri. It certainly helped to make 53% from beyond the 3-point arc (10 of 19), especially for a team that has made only 31.8% of their 3-point attempts for the season (against bad competition) and I don't expect Norfolk to be so lucky again. Teams that win an NCAA Tournament game as an underdog of 10 points or more are just 7-17-1 ATS as underdogs in their next game, including 0-9-1 ATS since 2001 and Norfolk State also applies to a very negative 1-23 ATS round 2 situation. Florida is not great defensively (89th in compensated defensive efficiency), but Norfolk State is 210th in the nation in compensated offensive efficiency and the Gators' super efficient offense (3rd best in the nation) will score with ease against a Norfolk defense that is worse than average on a national scale (they rank 178th in comp defense). Florida struggled against better defensive teams this season but the Gators played relatively better against worse defensive teams, which is a positive for them today. My ratings favor Florida by 18 ½ points using all games (with a total of 143 points), and by 15 ½ points even with a big favorite letdown factor built in. Missouri may have taken Norfolk State lightly, but the Gators certainly won't be after what happened on Friday. I'll take Florida in a 2-Star Best Bet at -16 points or less.

Opinion

North Carolina (-8 ½) over Creighton

It's still uncertain if North Carolina star John Henson will be able to play and he makes a big difference. The line on this game suggests that Henson is not expected to play, as my ratings favor the Tarheels by 11 ½ points if he does and by 7 ½ points if he doesn't play (with a total of 161 points). Teams playing in their home state are 132-89-3 ATS in the NCAA Tourney and the Tarheels apply to a 55-24-1 ATS subset of that angle. North Carolina also applies to a 47-15-1 ATS round 2 situation that is 9-0 ATS when applying to teams playing in their own state. The situation certainly favors North Carolina and the line is pretty fair even if Henson doesn't play. I'll consider North Carolina a Strong Opinion in this game.

Opinion

Xavier (-4) over Lehigh

Xavier underperformed during the season and the Musketeers are still just 11-19-2 ATS after their first round upset of Notre Dame. Teams with bad spread records are actually good bets in the first couple of rounds of the NCAA Tournament and Xavier applies to a 41-13 ATS situation that is based on that premise. Lehigh's win over Duke was aided by Duke's 6 for 26 3-point shooting, but the Mountain Hawks are a pretty good team with a star guard in C.J. McCollum. Xavier's Tu Holloway has been known to step up to a challenge, so I expect him to be fired up to face McCollum and Xavier does have more talent. My ratings favor the Musketeers by 3.2 points (with a total of 144 points), so the line is pretty fair, and the Musketeers should win by more than that if they play up to their talent level (that situation about playing on bad point spread teams suggests that they will). I'll lean with Xavier at -4 or less and I'd consider the Musketeers a Strong Opinion at -3 or less.

Opinion

Michigan State (-7) vs. St. Louis

My ratings favor Michigan State by 6 ½ points (with a total of 123 points) and there are situations going both ways in this game. I'll pass.

Opinion

Cincinnati (+2) over Florida State

Florida State is a bit overrated due to their impressive showing in the ACC Tournament and the Seminoles barely survived their first round game against St. Bonaventure. Cincinnati, meanwhile, is a bit under the radar even though the Bearcats are on a 7-1 ATS run. My ratings favor Florida State by just ½ a point (with a total of 129 points) and I'll lean with Cincinnati at +2 or more.

Opinion

South Florida (-2) over Ohio

South Florida is the best defensive team in the nation right now, as the Bulls really turned it on defensively after being blasted by their coach after give up 50% shooting in a 30 point loss at Georgetown on February 4th. In 12 games since then the Bulls have allowed opponents to make just 33.7% of their shots while going 9-3 ATS, which is even more remarkable considering the tough Big East schedule that they faced in addition to two NCAA tournament teams (Cal and Temple). Ohio failed to cover the spread in all 3 of their MAC Tournament wins but they beat Michigan soundly on Friday and the Bobcats are 20-7 ATS as an underdog the last couple years, as teams with good turnover margins tend to be good in that role. This game will probably come down to turnovers, as Ohio averages a +4 in turnover margin while South Florida averages a -3 in turnovers. Being -6 or -7 in turnovers should be expected for USF in this game and they'll probably win with that turnover margin, but getting around negative double-digits in turnovers would be a problem. My ratings favor South Florida by 2 points in this game (with a total of 115 points), but I'd favor the Bulls by 5 points if they continue to play defense at the level they have the last 12 games and USF applies to a 25-1 ATS round 2 situation while Ohio applies to a negative 11-37-1 ATS round 2 situation. It all comes down to the turnovers, as USF will win easily if they can take care of the ball at a reasonable level. I'll consider South Florida a Strong Opinion at -3 points or less based on the strong situation.

Opinion

Kansas (-8) over Purdue

Purdue is now 24-1-1 ATS after a loss of 9 points or more with their win over St. Mary's, but the Boilermakers have been 3 points worse than their overall rating this season in games following a victory (just 4-9 ATS after winning and covering). Purdue also applies to a negative 9-30 ATS round 2 situation, so I expect a letdown from the Boilermakers today. I'm just going to lean with Kansas in this game, however, as my ratings favor the Jayhawks by just 7 ½ points (with a total of 141 points) and the Boilermakers match up well in this game since they take and make a lot of 3-pointers (22 per game at 37.6%) and Kansas' defensive weakness is defending the 3-point arc (34.2% is barely better than the 34.3% national average while their 39.9% 2-point defense is #2 in the nation). I'll lean with Kansas at -8 or less.