Analytical Thinking In College Football

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I have found that when it comes to writing, you have to have
an analytical mind if you are going to be unbiased in what you are
sharing. I have found that it is wise to take the extra effort to
see both sides of the coin when it comes to writing on prison
issues.

This is important when it comes to writing about prison issues,
because often times, people get the idea that when inmates talk
about prison issues, it is the "sour grapes" idea; that we're just
"whining" because we are in prison. And granted, many times that
might appear to be the case.

But if I am going to get my point across that there are indeed
two sides to every story, I have to be able to see it from a
neutral perspective. To help me do that, I used a favorite hobby
of mine, college football, and writing.

In 2017, I decided to analyze all the college football games
in the FBS, or the formerly known Division I schools, of which are
about 120 schools. I looked at each game, and using only what I had
available, put together some simple facts and tried to come up with
my decision of who would win, by how much, and the total combined
score.

This takes time to do, which is part of the analytical pro-
cess. If you are going to make a valid point, you have to do the
homework to show that you are credible. Often times, especially
in prison writing, guys are too one-sided to be believable, even
if they are correct in what they say. It just seems hard to swallow
what they are saying if all you hear is one side of the argument.

Another problem is that in prison writing, some guys load up
on information, and forget the value of storytelling. We're not
computers; we don't normally accept facts if you drop a ton of
information on us. Tell us what it really means, who it relates to,
how it relates to them, and give it some flavor in writing style.
You still have to sell the story to the person, even if you are
correct in what you are saying.

So, I decided to use college football to help me sharpen my
skills in writing and making my arguments. To give you some idea
of how I did this, I want to use my picks from the 2017 college
football season, week 5, which was on the week of October 7th.

There were 57 games on the FBS schedule that week, some games
were on Thursday, some Friday, and of course, most on Saturday. I
took each game, using stats from last year and current scores of
each team, and did my best to predict a score, winner and the com-
bined total score, known as the "over/under". You'll see what I mean
as I give you a few examples. The first is the Air Force/Navy game:

Air Force/Navy: This has been a fierce rivalry; each winning
3 of the last 6. AF won last year 28-14, but Navy won 33-11 in 2015,
then AF 30-21 in 2014; guess who won in 2013...(Navy). Usually the

winner wins in double digits. AF lost 25 SRs- 16 on D, but Navy also
lost 25 SRs, so we're back to square one. Both avg. 34 a game, but
AF slightly more than Navy (28pts to 23). Yet AF's schedule has
been far toughter than Navy. Outside of VMI, AF's foes- Michigan,
New Mexico and SDSU, has a record of 12-2. Navy? 7-12. But the last
4 were won by the home team. That 1-3 record of AF might be delusional,
but I'm taking the trend. Home team is 4-0, so I'll go Navy- might
even be in double digits. Navy +7 (38-31) o/u 60. [48-45 Navy]

There's a lot of information there, but I needed it to help me
try to make the best decision I could. Remember, inmates don't have
access to the computer, so I was using the 2016 Phil Steele College
Football book, and previous scores of the teams up to week 6. Not
very much to go on, but if you look close enough, the answer is
there. Of the 57 games I did, I went back after the scores were
written, and highlighted facts that indicated who the winner was,
and why. Of the 57 games I did, only 2 didn't have highlights on
it. So for all the others, even if I was off, the analysis of the
game showed that the answer was there.

For example, in the Air Force/Navy game, I predicted that
Navy would win by 7 points, and the score would be 38-31. I also
predicted the score to be about 60. The actual score was 48-45,
Navy. I was off slightly in the points Navy would win by, but I
did predict the winner. I was way off with the total combined
score of 60, since it was 93... very rare in college football.

In my analysis, you saw that I mentioned that this was a
fierce rivalry, and the home team had won the last 4 meetings. I
missed it on several points, such as thinking that the winner would
win in double digits, but I had to look at what the facts were
telling me. The over/under (total combined score) is a mathematical
equation; simply the average total of both teams, so there wasn't
too much to change with it.

These techniques are important when writing about other issues
because it allows me to see both sides of the problem. When it
comes to prison writing, I have to be able to share with you some
of the things we are going through, but be fair enough to at least
TRY to share other sides. Many times it is hard to do, like when
it comes to prison abuse. Sometimes there is no defending the other
side, but I have to be mindful that even in situations like prison
abuse, society can still be biased to the inmate simply because of
the "sour grapes" idea. So, I have to find a way to appeal to their
sympathy, because even if the facts are there, you don't have to
accept it.

Let's look at another game I did: San Diego State University
vs. UNLV:

San Diego State U/UNLV: This one worries me. UNLV lost the
last 3, including the 26-7 in 2016. The total the last 3 years
was 112-38, a 37-13 average... that's 24 pts. So why am I worried?
SDSU is 5-0, avg. 30 and giving up 21... a 9 pt difference. I got
it at 8. UNLV scores 36 and gives up the same. The stats of 2017

say a close game, the overall records say otherwise. I'll be
cautious and take SDSU by a TD. SDSU +8 (34-26) o/u 59.
[41-10 SDSU]

In this one, the facts were there, but I was a little too
cautious, as I mentioned. The actual score was 41-10 SDSU, but I
thought it might be a lot closer. I had the winning team, and my
over/under was almost spot on, but I was off on the spread.

Yet, if you read the analysis, you'll see that I had the
answer. I said, "The total the last 3 years was 112-38, a 37-13
average... that's 24pts".

The actual score was 41-10, the last 3 years, the score
of this game averaged a 37-13 SDSU win. So, why didn't I take the
advice? Because other factors changed my mind. SDSU, even at 5-0,
was only winning by about 9 points; I just couldn't see them
blasting UNLV out, even though the trend clearly shwos that the
last 3 years, this would be the case.

Sometimes when you get a number of conflicting facts, you
will have to make a decision of which one appeals more to you. When
presented with what I had, I knew that SDSU won the last 3, and by
a good margin, But they were currently not beating anyone by that
margin, and UNLV was scoring a lot too. Remember, one fact I had
was that UNLV averages 36 points a game... but yet only scored
10 in this game. This was why I started out, "this one worries
me"...

To be sure, we don't always get it right, even when trying to
argue our point, but the idea is to try to be as fair in looking at
the facts. In prison writing, in order for m e to get my point
across, I have to try to be informative, unbiased and sometimes
entertaining to convince you of what I am trying to say. If I can
do that, then hopefully I can open some doors of understanding
about what goes on in the prisons, and create some communications
between the two sides of the wall.

Until then, I'll keep working at it... until next time....