(I usually type these, but I'm currently out of ribbon - JM)

August 25th 2019

To American Prison Writing Archive

Football, Prison, And Analyzing Arguments

I love writing, been doing it since the 4th or 5th grade. But having been here at USP Tucson over 5 years, and having written well over 1000 pages on essays and prison issues, I still have to work on my "craft".

To do that, I like using a hobby of mine - college football - to help me analyze an argument by writing out my thoughts of who might win what game, and by how much.

I'm probably the only person that does this at USP Tucson, not for gambling purposes, but to see things more clearly than merely a guess. I think it takes a unique skillset to have the patience to research, develop a path of thinking, see both sides, then write a compelling argument for a game - then see how close you came.

So, this year (2019), I picked up from the previous few years, and broke down every FBS college game, starting with the first two games, Florida vs Miami, and Arizona vs Hawaii.

Why is this important to me, in prison? First, its fun, second, I like to write; third, I love college sports, and fourth, it allows me to practice analyzing arguments concerning prison issues, in an attempt to make compelling arguments to those on the other side of the wall.

For example, Florida vs Miami. I knew Florida was ranked, Miami wasn't. So I figured Florida ought to be favored. But often times, that's not enough to go by, so I had to break it down: Florida was 10-3 last year, Miami 7-6. Florida won their bowl game by last year, Miami lost theirs. Miami lost 8 of their 9 losses away from home - this game is on neutral territory. These and other factors led me to

think Florida should be favored by. I had Florida winning 30-18. The end result; Florida did win, but close, 24-20.

Some intel I used threw me off, and I was subjective to think that Florida was that much better. Sometimes when you argue, you can use elements that may not add to the argument. In prison writing, I have to be mindful to not let emotions dictate the writing, unless that is the intention. You can be totally ticked off about an issue, and even be right, but emotions may prevent you from analyzing the argument correctly.

The second game was Arizona vs Hawaii. Most experts had Arizona by 11; I had it by 20; I just thought this team (from right here in Tucson), should be a lot better than their 5-9 record last year. Hawaii was 8-6, losing their bowl game, and had a super-soft schedule. They were 1-11 vs Power 5 conference teams (Arizona is in the Pac 12, a Power 5 conference), and Hawaii gives up a lot of points.

Yet, in my breakdown, I noted, "Other than beating hapless Oregon State on the road last year, AZ has lost 7 road trips... hmm".

There's an important fact I considered, but overruled. I also noted, "Hawaii loves to pass; AZ is terrible in pass defense, but I can't ignore the 1-11 record vs Power 5 conferences." I took Arizona to win by 20, a score of 42-22.

Then we listened to the game. I sat in my cell, with my cellie, amazed at how Arizona gave up SO many points. They lost 45-38! Most experts had Arizona winning, as I did, but the 2 facts I had concerning Arizona was dismissed, simply because I "felt" AZ was better - ugh.

I laugh at myself being wrong, but it forces me to go back and reevaluate what I missed. Often, as with the Hawaii/Arizona game, the answer was there; I chose other elements over it. In prison writing, it's not much different, but to make a compelling argument for my readers, I have to "sell" you the argument, using what info I have, to hopefully convince you to consider what inmates go through.

Well, may be more next time - more football games to analyze — Jh