



## The most widely bet SB ever (maybe)

February 1, 2010

I have six more days to get ready. I am studying the play-by-plays of all 18 games for both Super Bowl teams. I am looking for trends: When is Drew Brees most likely to throw a pick? How often does each team gain first downs? What percentage of their drives end in field goals?

Come Sunday, I will *not* make a play on the winner of the Super Bowl. I don't want my head to be clouded, because I will be hanging at the M Resort outside Las Vegas with my buddy Matt and sports bet handicapper Teddy Covers, betting on just about every play of the game. And I don't want to root against my bet.

In the fall I wrote about the M's new in-game wagering option. The place has a handheld device, and from your seat you can make plays as the game progresses.

Some of the options: Will the current drive yield a first down? Or will the current drive result in a punt, field goal, touchdown or interception/fumble? Cantor Gaming, which developed the system, has math geniuses who wrote algorithms calculating the odds of such events as the game is played. They are changing constantly depending on the situation. And this past year, Cantor estimates, in-game wagering accounted for 5 percent of all sports betting in Nevada. In Europe, where sports betting is more widely accepted than in the U.S., mobile betting has been available for three years. In 2007, it accounted for \$1 billion in bets. This year, its estimated total is \$8.9 billion.

I will record every bet I make so I can give a final tally on my efforts in next Monday's column. Matt will handle the device and punch in the bets while I take notes. Covers will make sure I don't hock my plane ticket home for a few more bets.

Whether I play a side or not, I will be part of what may be the most widely bet Super Bowl ever. How high will the total amount go? \$90 million? \$100 million? I did a bunch of radio interviews this past week about betting on the Super Bowl, and that was one of the most frequent questions asked.

Well, there are two ways to answer that question.

One is how much will be bet illegally with bookies, online, at party pools and between friends. (My buddy Richard bet me dinner for eight -- our two families combined -- from the best pizza place in northern New Jersey and took the Saints straight-up.) Honestly, that number is impossible to tally.

Second option: How much will be bet legally in Nevada? Last year it was a healthy \$81.5 million, according to the Nevada Gaming Control Board. I think that was partially because the Pittsburgh Steelers are the most public of public teams. Everyone who knows football knows the Steelers. And anyone who bets on a Super Bowl is inclined to bet Pittsburgh.

But this year, I think the Indianapolis Colts and the New Orleans Saints can match or beat last year's total. No two teams in the NFL have garnered more attention from bettors this season.

Every week, squares have been betting on them to cover. Throw in Colts quarterback Peyton Manning -- arguably as famous and playing as well as any football player ever -- and the national feel-good story of the Saints, and just about all 100 million people watching the game will feel comfortable enough to put down at least a dollar or two.

Which way will they bet?

Well, as I wrote last week, the line opened at Colts minus-3½ and was at Colts minus-5½ before Monday morning. It moved up to Colts minus-6 by the middle of last week and since then has come back down to 5½. All of this is based on moves wise guys have made. They loved the Colts at minus-3½, but the closer that line gets to a touchdown, the more they find value in the Saints.

"Honestly," handicapper Erin Rynning e-mailed me last week, "I just bought some plus-6 because I don't see a six-point difference between these two teams. That is a ton of points in the NFL." Another wise guy I know put it this way: "I bought the Saints big, real big, at plus-6." I know that, for him, real big hovers around the six-figure range.

But us squares aren't going to bet the Saints. No sirree. This game will go back up to Colts minus-6 or even minus-6½ by Sunday. Manning has been so masterful this season that he is in the head of not only the Saints but also every person heading to Costco to buy some ribs and pies the size of hubcaps for his Super Bowl party. By Sunday, bets will be pouring in on the Colts. And they should. The Colts have been brilliant this season, going 12-5-1 against the spread, and two of those losses were in the last two weeks of the season, when they rested their starters. The Saints, meanwhile, not so much. They've gone 3-9 since starting the season 6-0. As pro sports gambler Fezzik told me with about three weeks left in the season, "There is no money to be made on the Saints anymore."

And yeah, Fezzik likes the Colts, at least on the money line. "You only bet against Peyton Manning if it's snowy, cold or windy," he told me. "I'll take my chances in Miami."