College football returns this week and that's a big deal for bettors as the preseason preparation is done and now is the time to try and reap the rewards. With one more NFL-less Sunday to endure, it's like back-to-back weeks of Christmas for sports bettors.

As I said in last week's column, sports betting has a language all its own, filled with words and terms that have different meanings in everyday life. Before you can make bets, you have to know what these words mean. It's not rocket science, but it's something that you have to grow accustomed to. It's certainly easier with the increase in offshore sports books where just a few clicks will make a wager for you. That being said, it's still important to be able to talk the talk before you walk the walk.

Football lines are going to look something like this:

Rot	Team	ML	Spread	Total
165	Miami OH	+1250	+22 ½ (-110)	o47.5 (-110)
166	Ohio State	-2000	-22 ½ (-110)	u47.5 (-110)

At sportsbooks, teams are known by their rotation number. That's what the 165 and 166 are. It's how sportsbooks designate the sport, the teams, and how they separate certain teams with matching names. For example, the Miami Hurricanes are 175 for their Week 1 game against

Boston College. The Miami Marlins are 956 on Tuesday night and 912 on Wednesday night. The Miami Dolphins, who play a preseason game on Wednesday night, are 105 for that game and 465 for their Week 1 matchup against the Houston Texans. If a bettor were to walk up to the window and say that they want to bet on Miami, that doesn't narrow it down. So, rotation numbers are assigned to teams to avoid confusion.

The teams are in the second column. The third column is the "moneyline", or "ML". This is a bet on who will win the game. The easiest way to think of moneylines is by separating the underdog, the team with the plus sign, and the favorite, the team with the minus sign. With underdogs, a $100 scale makes the most sense. A $100 bet on underdog Miami of Ohio to win the game would win $1,250. With favorites, think of it the opposite way. Whatever the minus value is, you would have to bet that much to win $100. So, you would have to bet $2,000 on Ohio State to win $100.

The fourth column is the spread. That's what most people who bet on football are focused on. The point spread was invented in the 1940s by a mathematician named Charles K. McNeil, who, coincidentally, was also a bookie. What the point spread effectively does is create a value that forces gamblers into a decision of how many points better one team is than the other. In turn, that helps to balance the amount of money wagered on each side, which is what books are always striving to achieve. In the case of the Miami (OH)/Ohio State game, the oddsmakers have decided to set that number at 22.5 points. In order for Ohio State to "cover the spread", their final total points would have to exceed Miami of Ohio's total points if 22.5 points were subtracted from the total. So, if Ohio State scored 45 points, their total points, with the spread, would be 22.5. If the game ended 45-21, Ohio State would cover the spread because they would win 22.5-21. On the other side, if the game ended 45-21 and you had bet on Miami (OH), you would lose 45-43.5. You apply the spread to whichever side you bet.

And finally, the last column is called the total. Some people refer to this as the "over/under". This is pretty self-explanatory. In the case of the Miami/Ohio State game, the oddsmakers have set the projected total combined points to be 47.5. You can either bet that the final score will add up to over 47.5 points or under 47.5 points. If the game ends 28-20, the total is over. If the game ends 24-20, the total is under.

With spreads and totals, something called "vigorish" is added to winning bets. Vigorish is also known as "vig" or "juice". Vigorish is also referred to as "cents". For example, -115 would be called "15 cents", because you're giving up 15 cents on the dollar. Essentially, the vigorish is a commission taken from each winning bet. If it weren't for vigorish, bookies and sportsbooks would not make much money. Every 50/50 result would be a net gain of zero if not for the

vigorish. The parenthetical value following the spread or the total is the vigorish. In most cases, the vigorish will be -110, which means that the bet pays 10 to 11. Just like the moneyline with a minus number, in order to win $100, you would have to bet $110. The sportsbook takes a 10% cut for taking your bet. The additional $10 is not “in play”, as in, you do not double your bet when you win. Say a sportsbook has exactly a 50/50 win-loss record over 100 separate $110 bets. The winners will win 50 $100 bets, or $5,000. The losers will lose 50 $110 bets, or $5,500. The sportsbook would have a net gain of $500.

Because of the vigorish, a flat bettor, somebody who bets the same amount on every game, would have to win 52.38% of his or her bets to simply break even, if each bet is made with 10% vigorish. Both the vigorish and the spread can change depending on bet patterns. If the sportsbook is getting a lot of action on Ohio State -22 ½, they can move the spread to -23 or change the vig from -110 to -115, adding an extra 5% commission onto the bet. At that point, somebody who wanted to play Ohio State -22 ½ would have to bet $115 to win $100.

Now you know how to read a line. The next step is interpreting it. With the NFL more so than the college game, key numbers are huge. Key numbers are an easy concept to understand. Think of how points are scored in football, generally, by threes and sevens. You’ll get the occasion two-point conversion, a safety, or a missed extra point, but, by and large, the scoring is done by threes and sevens. As a result, the key numbers in football are three, four, six, seven, and various combinations of those with double digit numbers. Key numbers become less and less relevant the higher they get.

In the NFL, final scores are a lot tighter, so the spreads are as well. You will never see a NFL spread in the 20s like you frequently see college football spreads. It’s important to know about a concept like key numbers because you can win yourself bets that you would push (tie) or lose if you wind up with a -7 or -7.5 instead of a -6 or -6.5.

Totals also have key numbers too. They always revolve around the denominations of points. In the NFL, most totals are between 35-52. College totals are rarely below 40 and sometimes go as high as 80. Totals like 42, 45, 48, 49, and 51 are key numbers because games have final scores like 28-14, 28-17, 31-17, 28-21, or 34-17.

With that in mind, let’s look at a few of the college football games this weekend to examine the concepts mentioned above.

Thursday

South Carolina (-7, -105) @ Vanderbilt; Total: 45: This is a prime example of key numbers. This line has fluctuated between South Carolina -7 and -6.5. If you like South Carolina, it would be in your best interest to take the -6.5, so that if they win by a touchdown, you win. If you like Vanderbilt, it would be in your best interest to either wait for a +7 or to have bet them when the line was at +7. Because you're laying (taking a favorite despite the points) the seven points, one sportsbook in particular will give you reduced vigorish if you're willing to bet on a key number. Books do this because they increase the vigorish on the side getting the points. Vigorish differences are usually done in increments of 10 cents. If one side is -115, the other side is -105. If one side is -120, the other side is even money or +100.

As far as 45 as a total, that is a key number. The game could end 24-21, 28-17, 35-10, 31-14, etc. That number opened at 46. So, if you wanted to bet under the total, it would have made sense to get your bet in before you lost a key number like 45. If you want to bet over the total, at least now a final score adding up to 45 is a push and not a loss.

With games that are close to key numbers like this one is, it's important to watch the market and see what it does. There are several websites out there, like SBROdds, Covers, Don Best Sports, or SportsInsights, where you can monitor the lines at all of the sportsbooks. If it looks like people are betting on Vanderbilt, and you like South Carolina, you can wait on that number to go down to -6. The opposite holds true if you like Vanderbilt and people appear to be betting on South Carolina.

Saturday

Notre Dame (-15.5) v. Navy (in Dublin, Ireland); Total: 56.5: This is an example of a line you will see early in college football season. Just like bettors are trying to accurately gauge teams, so are the sportsbooks. This line opened at -19 on August 2, and was immediately bet down to -17.5. Because of suspensions, Notre Dame's starting QB announcement, and possibly a lot of support for Navy's unconventional triple-option offense, this line has crossed the key number of 17. As stated above, key numbers do lose some of their relevance the higher they go. Nevertheless, you have lost 3.5 points on Navy since the number opened. You are getting what is called "the worst of the number" right now. This number could continue to go down, but, if it

doesn't, you would be settling for a bad number. Most bettors will tell you that settling for bad numbers is a losing proposition.

Washington (-15) v. San Diego State; Total: 60: Here's an interesting case of the market really dictating a line. The day that this line opened, it was -13.5 and moved to -14.5. Now, it sits at 15, which is what's called a "dead number". You may get the really rare 28-13 game, but, final scores almost never show a 15-point disparity. This line moved over the key number of 14 and still got bumped up to 15. If action is still coming in when the line moves above a key number, you can assume that the majority of bettors like Washington.

So, that's a small crash course into how to read the nuts and bolts of a line and then read into the line. Sports betting is a multi-layered, multi-faceted puzzle. There are so many variables to take into account. Some people bet solely on the value of the number. Some people break the game down position by position and look for an edge. Some people bet on an emotional approach, like a team's motivation factor, possible revenge (rematch after loss), or if next week's game holds more importance so a team may overlook this week's opponent.

There's no right or wrong approach. The only thing that matters is that you get there more than 53% of the time.