

VSIN **PRO**

FOOTBALL CONTEST

BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION



CONTEST PLAYBOOK

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR FOOTBALL BETTING CONTESTS

Circa | SPORTS
MILLION VII
PRO FOOTBALL CONTEST

Circa | SPORTS
SURVIVOR
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VSIN

Greetings and salutations!

I'm Adam Burke, the Managing Editor of [VSIN.com](https://vsin.com), and on behalf of all of us here at the VSIN, I'd like to wish you good luck in this year's Circa contests.



We want VSIN to be your source for Circa contest news.

That starts with this guide to contest strategies and advice from VSIN's experts and will continue throughout the contest season.

If you are not familiar with VSIN, we have a 24/7 channel, broadcasting live from the Circa sportsbook, and a website [VSIN.com](https://vsin.com) to share betting tips, tools, picks and predictions to help you become a better bettor and contest player.

VSIN is available across many platforms:

- SiriusXM Channel 158
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- Regional sports networks and more than 350 local radio stations

One program you definitely will want to catch: The Million and Survivor consensus selections are revealed on VSIN's Football Contest Show on Saturday nights (9-10 p.m. ET). We also interview top contest players about their strategies.

As VSIN co-founder Brent Musburger says, "Cashing tickets is what it's all about." And we'd like nothing more than to see you at the awards ceremony in January.

Adam Burke
Managing Editor, VSIN.com
aburke@vsin.com
[@SkatingTripods](https://twitter.com/SkatingTripods) on X

VSIN STAFF/CONTRIBUTORS

COVER: James Coleman
LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Matt Devine
MANAGING EDITOR: Adam Burke

SENIOR EDITOR: Zachary Cohen
WRITER: Dave Tuley

ALL ODDS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

MAKE YOUR MONEY WITH CIRCA MILLIONS



BY ADAM BURKE

The Circa Million is an NFL Pick 'Em contest with five picks per week over the 18 weeks of the NFL season. The lines come out on Thursday morning and do not move, so every contestant has the same set of point spreads available to them. That is a very important point because it can dictate your strategy from the start or as the season goes along.

Keep that in mind as you read along. There are only 90 points possible in this contest - one point for a win, a half-point for a push, and zero points for a loss. That means that the margin for error is very thin in the quest to cash in the world's most recognizable NFL point spread contest.

In the history of Circa Million, which dates back to 2019, the winning point totals going from 2024 to 2019:

2024: 62 (60-26-4, 69.8%)
2023: 62.5 (62-27-1, 69.7%)
2022: 61.5 (59-26-4-1, 69.4%)
2021: 63 (63-27, 70%)
2020: 57 (56-27-2, 67.5%)
2019: 58.5 (57-25-3, 69.5%)

In 2019 and 2020, the season only had 17 weeks instead of the 18 it has now, so that's why the point totals are lower, but the win rate is still pretty similar. Making the money is going to require 65% or better. Like I said, the margin for error is very thin.

Here are some potential contest strategies for the Circa Million:

PLAY THE "STALE" LINES

This is a really popular contest strategy. The NFL betting market is the most efficient one there is, so line moves should be taken seriously. If a contest line is -2.5 and the betting market line is -3.5, that creates a really good opportunity to take a favorable position in a contest setting because 3 is such an important number. The same is true of a number like 7, if a line is +7.5 in a contest and moves to +7 or +6.5.

Sometimes you'll get an even more obvious example like when a quarterback gets hurt on Friday or is ruled out. For example, if Patrick

Mahomes were to be ruled out in Week 1, the Chargers would flip to a favorite. If that announcement came down on Friday, it would be really hard not to take Los Angeles with that much line value. Those opportunities will come up throughout the season for sure.

FADE THE CONSENSUS

A lot of people believe that the public is largely flipping coins when it comes to betting. They're going to win 50% of the time and lose 50% of the time. If you can isolate the sides that will be the most popular from a groupthink standpoint in a contest, it could be good to go against those teams.

It can create a two-point swing in a contest where there are a finite number of picks and a set number of chances to earn points. In something like the Circa Million, the maximum number of picks is 90, so these potential two-point swings can be extremely valuable. In larger contest pools, like this one, this could be a more useful strategy because there is more incentive in being creative and different because you can't just follow the masses and win all the same games they do and lose all the same games they do.

PLAY ONLY HALF-POINT LINES

There is a lot of game theory that goes into contest participation. One element of that mindset is to only play games where a push is not possible. A push isn't a loss, but it isn't a win either. In Circa Million, a push is worth a half-point. There is often more equity in taking the chance at full points, which can be guaranteed by playing games that have a half-point line and cannot tie.

The reason for this is what I mentioned above. In larger pools with a lot of entrants, a half-point isn't going to get you very far because others are also getting a half-point for being on the other side. Also, you'll get jumped by people who are getting full points. Sure, you'll move ahead of people that got zero points on games, but the juice isn't always worth the squeeze.

It is also important to point out that the time of year matters with these contests. If you need to jump over a lot of people later in the year, taking more chances is essential. That might mean picking some bad teams or playing only half-point lines in the spirit of game theory.

BE MINDFUL OF THE QUARTER PRIZES

One of the best characteristics of Circa Million is that you have a chance to make money in smaller segments of the contest, even if your season-long record is not very good. The season is broken into four quarters (Weeks 1-4, 5-9, 10-13, 14-18) and the prizes for cashing in a quarter are very lucrative. Stay locked in, even if the season isn't going the way that you want it. You might still be able to salvage something by getting hot for four or five weeks across 20 or 25 picks.

CIRCA MILLIONS STRATEGIES

PLAY THE "STALE" LINES

FADE THE CONSENSUS

PLAY ONLY HALF-POINT LINES

BE MINDFUL OF THE QUARTER PRIZES

CEMENT YOUR CIRCA SURVIVOR LEGACY

BY ADAM BURKE



Survivor contests have really increased in popularity over the last few seasons because the concept is really simple. Just pick a team to win every week, but once you use them, you lose them. Some Survivor pools have wrinkles and Circa Survivor is absolutely one of them. I'll get to that in a second, but first, some additional context into Survivor contests.

As simple as the concept itself is, the execution is not. Big favorites can and will lose and we'll see more than a few take out large swaths of the Survivor field during the upcoming season. One of the benefits of the Circa Survivor is that contestants are allowed to have as many entries as they want, so you can spread out your exposure and have the opportunity to advance with multiple entries on multiple teams or not get knocked out completely because you happened to pick the big favorite that went down.

Here are some potential strategies for Circa Survivor:

CREATE A BLUEPRINT FOR THE SEASON

I cannot stress this point enough. There is no guarantee that you get to Week 6, Week 8, Week 12, Week 15, or the end, but if you do get to a certain point, you want to make sure that you have good options available.

Some contestants like to have the entire year planned out because you can only use each team once. That might mean staying away from division games or having to use a road team, so you study the schedule to find the best options on a weekly basis. Contestants will start with, say, Kansas City and find the game where they are going to be the largest favorite. At first glance, that looks like Week 7 at home against the Raiders or Week 12 at home against the Colts.

However, this is the main wrinkle of the Circa Survivor. "Thanksgiving" and "Christmas" are their own "weeks". So you have to win those two "weeks" in the Circa Survivor in addition to the 18 scheduled NFL weeks. The Chiefs play on BOTH Thanksgiving and Christmas. It is imperative to plan for the holidays. Thanksgiving does include an extra game on Black Friday, but there are only eight teams at your disposal for that week and six teams at your disposal for Christmas.

Injuries and other things happen, so you would like to keep as many of those teams available as possible.

But even independent of the holiday weeks, you still want to plan ahead. Is there a week with limited big favorites later in the season? For example, in Week 9, the only "safe" picks look like the Packers at home against the Panthers and the Rams at home against the Saints. Well, if you use one or both of those teams prior to that point, you might end up being pushed into a short favorite as opposed to a favorite of more than a touchdown.

When my partner Marc Goldberg (Spooky Express) and I made it to the final 15 entries in 2023, we didn't take a single road team. It was a personal preference, but we also structured our available teams accordingly to not have to trust a team playing away from home.

JUST GO 1-0

The other primary option is to just try to go 1-0 for 18 straight weeks and take whatever the best pick is that week and not worry about saving a team for later. What difference does it make if the Texans will be -13 against the Raiders in Week 16 if you don't make it that far? Why save a team if you need them right now?

The other advantage to this mindset is that holding off on the Texans until Week 16 is all well and good, but what if CJ Stroud gets injured or if the Texans don't really need to play anybody that week because of the playoff picture?

The only game that matters is the one coming up that weekend. Somebody could always get hurt or something could happen that makes a team much more attractive than they would have looked at the start of the season. A team you were unlikely to use suddenly becomes an option due to injuries, a coaching change, a QB change. The NFL season is very fluid.

Also, you have to pick 20 of the 32 teams to win, so being able to "sneak" a lesser opponent through could create a huge advantage. That's true of both the 20-0 mindset and the 1-0 mindset, but sometimes it's easier to make that call while living in the present. On the other hand, you could get caught on a week where there aren't many big

favorites and have to take a weak team because you didn't plan accordingly, as mentioned above.

AVOID THE MOST POPULAR PICKS?

Back in 2023, the Circa Survivor contest lost 34.2% of the field after the Bengals lost in Week 1 to the Patriots. That was 4,895 entries that didn't even get a single win. Nearly 80% of the field that season was out by the end of Week 4. Nothing is a lock.

Upsets do happen. In fact, 32 double-digit favorites have lost since the start of the 2016 season. Yes, 240 of them have won, per the KillerSports database, but you don't want to be on #33 or #34 this season. There have been 124 favorites of a touchdown or more that have lost in that span.

In the last 272 games with a double-digit favorite, the underdog has won outright about 12% of the time. Some Survivor players will shy away from the most obvious pick in hopes that the team slips up and goes down and a large chunk of the field gets eliminated. Not only could that mean staying alive while others falter, but it could also mean saving that team for a future game when there are tougher decisions on the board.

There is risk involved to say the least, but the reward could be really nice, especially if you like another team nearly as much. There is risk in each and every one of these strategies and a hybrid approach is probably the way to go, including whatever strategy you or your entry partners would like to implement.

It takes perfection to cash in Survivor. While that absolutely includes a degree of luck, you can also set yourself up for success as much as possible.

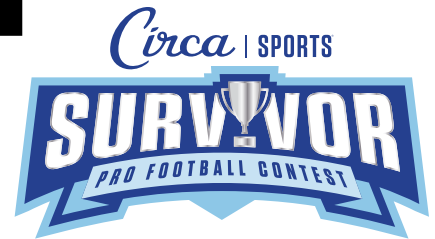
CIRCA SURVIVOR STRATEGIES

CREATE A BLUEPRINT FOR THE SEASON

JUST GO 1-0

AVOID THE MOST POPULAR PICKS?

2025 CIRCA SURVIVOR A BLUEPRINT FOR ALL 20 WEEKS



BY ADAM BURKE

When all 272 games for the 2025 NFL season were officially announced in mid-May, my mind immediately went to the Circa Survivor contest. There is no such thing as a lock in sports betting, so there is risk attached to every single pick, including the biggest favorite or the logical choice in the context of Survivor. But, there are outcomes that are more likely to happen than others.

While the goal in Survivor is to go 1-0 every week, the ultimate goal is to go 20-0, as Circa Survivor has the two large wrinkles of Thanksgiving/Black Friday and Christmas as their own "weeks". The premise behind a Survivor contest is easy, right? Just pick a team to win their game. But, the execution is the hard part because being able to use each team only once means having a plan of attack for the entirety of the season.

The NFL is very fluid, especially when it comes to injuries, so even the best-laid plans can go awry, not only in the days leading up to the game, but during the game itself. Nevertheless, it is an interesting exercise to plot out a course. My partner Marc Goldberg and I made it to the final 13 during the 2023 installment of Circa Survivor and that's exactly what we did before the season, keeping one main thing in mind - save as many teams as you can for the holiday games.

The Thanksgiving slate has the Packers, Lions, Chiefs, Cowboys, Bengals, Ravens, Bears, and Eagles, while the Christmas slate has the Cowboys, Commanders, Lions, Vikings, Broncos, and Chiefs. The three common teams are the Cowboys, Lions, and Chiefs, so that adds an extra dimension of planning.

Before looking at a week-by-week gameplan, let's talk about the Survivor teams to pick on this season.

SURVIVOR TEAMS TO PICK AGAINST

Like I said, plans don't always work out and 27 of the 32 teams were plus or minus 1.5 games off of their season win total odds last season and 21 of those teams were plus or minus 2.5 games or more. So, there will be surprises, but what generally isn't all that surprising is that the bad teams are typically bad.

Cleveland Browns

At time of writing, the Browns were +400 at DraftKings for the fewest wins. Whether Joe Flacco, Kenny Pickett, Dillon Gabriel, or Shedeur Sanders start games, the Browns certainly look like one of the league's bottom-feeders and could be a very valuable team to pick against, especially if they start really poorly and Kevin Stefanski's seat gets hot as the organization looks for a scapegoat.

New Orleans Saints

Tyler Shough? Spencer Rattler? Jake Haener? Are any of these quarterbacks going to worry you? Will any of them have the ability to win a game in the second half or fourth quarter? They'll probably be an underdog in at least 15 of their 17 games and were +425 for fewest wins.

New York Giants

Russell Wilson and the Giants may be catching points in all 17 games and absolutely need a QB of the future in the 2026 NFL Draft. Given the brutal start to the schedule, this is a team likely to be demoralized early and often.

Tennessee Titans

No. 1 overall pick Cam Ward could inject some immediate life into the Titans, but it could also be Will Levis at the start. While there are some talented individual players, this was a 3-14 team last season that still needs a lot of work.

Whether or not you plot a course in similar fashion to this or just focus on the present instead of the future, the most important piece of information to remember from this exercise is to be extremely aware of the holiday games because you'll want multiple options for arguably the two biggest potential landmines that the unique Circa Survivor rules have to offer.

All picks as of May 21 and the spreads subject to change.





WEEK 1

BRONCOS (-7.5) VS. TITANS

Whether this game is started by Cam Ward or Will Levis, drawing what could very well be the league's top defense in Week 1 is a tough task. Furthermore, this is a Week 1 game in elevation, so there will be a lot of players attempting to get into game shape. There are other spots to take the Broncos, but I think going against a rookie QB or Levis in the first week is the best of them.

One quick note: Theoretically, if you don't max out your entries, you can take the Eagles on Thursday and rebuy if they don't win, but the Eagles are also a holiday team.

CONSIDERATIONS

Eagles (-7) vs. Cowboys (TNF)
Patriots (-3.5) vs. Raiders
Commanders (-7.5) vs. Giants

USED

Broncos



WEEK 3

SEAHAWKS (-6.5) OVER SAINTS


This might not be a rookie QB in his first road start, depending on how everything shakes out with the New Orleans position battle, but it is still the first road game for the Saints and it is a long way from home against a Seahawks squad that is stacked at the skill positions. This is a big test for Kellen Moore and the staff and a great spot to use the Seahawks on a week with fairly limited options.

CONSIDERATIONS

Bills (-8.5) over Dolphins (TNF)
Buccaneers (-7.5) over Jets
Commanders (-7.5) over Raiders

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks



WEEK 2

CARDINALS (-4.5) OVER PANTHERS


The Cardinals are not the biggest favorite in Week 2. Far from it, in fact. However, this is Carolina's second consecutive road game and a long trip out to the desert. Arizona is a team that I am very high on heading into Jonathan Gannon's third season and I also feel like the Panthers are a good team to catch early in the year in case they struggle to find a rhythm coming out of the preseason.

CONSIDERATIONS

Bengals (-5.5) over Jaguars
Cowboys (-4.5) over Giants
Ravens (-12.5) over Browns
49ers (-7) over Saints

USED

Broncos, Cardinals



WEEK 4

TEXANS (-6) OVER TITANS

Something worth keeping in mind as you go through the Circa Survivor selection process is that you'll need to use 20 of the 32 teams to make it to the end. So, that sometimes means bypassing the biggest favorite and looking to sneak a team through. I don't think the Texans fully apply in that context here, but it is important here in my mind to save the Bills and Lions, even though they are probably double-digit favorites.

CONSIDERATIONS

Bills (-12.5) over Saints; Lions (-10.5) over Browns; Rams (-6.5) over Colts; Dolphins (-5.5) over Jets

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans



WEEK 5

VIKINGS (-7) OVER BROWNS

We have a unique situation here, as the Vikings are playing a second straight week in Europe and the Browns are not. Minnesota is a decidedly better team than Cleveland to begin with, but the Europe factor adds in another layer. The Browns play in Detroit the week prior and will travel to London later in the week. The Europe games can have a higher level of variance just because of the nature of the travel and the game, but this one seems more projectable.

This is also the first week with byes, which cuts down the number of available teams.

CONSIDERATIONS

Colts (-1.5) over Raiders
Cardinals (-5.5) over Titans
Ravens (-7.5) over Texans
Bills (-8.5) over Patriots

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings



WEEK 7

CHARGERS (-6) OVER COLTS

While the Chargers are unlikely to be the biggest favorite of the week, this is a pretty good spot to back them given the difficulty of their schedule. They play the Chiefs, Raiders, Broncos, Giants, Commanders, and Dolphins prior to this, with the opener in Brazil and games in Vegas, New Jersey, and South Florida, so their "easiest" games are on the road. The schedule lightens up here in what amounts to a must-win type of spot against a Colts team making its second long trip to Los Angeles (Rams in Week 4).

CONSIDERATIONS

Bears (-7.5) over Saints
Chiefs (-9.5) over Raiders
Jets (-1.5) over Panthers
Broncos (-7.5) over Giants
49ers (-6.5) over Falcons

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers

STEELERS (-6.5) OVER BROWNS

The Steelers get a chance to kick their hated rivals while they are down here. This is a third straight game away from home for Cleveland and Pittsburgh is off of the bye. Judging by Pittsburgh's schedule, this should be their highest game from a win probability standpoint. The spread indicates that and so does the spot, with the Browns coming back from London and the Steelers well-rested. Remember - we have to take at least 20 different teams, so even if a team is projected to be mediocre, you still want to find spots to use them.

CONSIDERATIONS

Eagles (-7) over Giants (TNF)
Broncos (-6.5) over Jets (London)
Raiders (-3) over Titans

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers

PATRIOTS (-5.5) OVER BROWNS

Welp, let's pick on the Browns again. The bye week - and a badly needed one at that - is the following week for Cleveland. This will be their fourth road game in five weeks and sixth in the first eight weeks of the season. It is the first game back in Foxboro for the Patriots in nearly a month, as they play road games in Weeks 5-7, so this is a "get right" type of game at home against a bad opponent and arguably the Patriots' best spot for a Survivor pick. They do play the Jets in Week 11, but it is a Thursday Night Football game.

CONSIDERATIONS

Bengals (-7.5) over Jets
Eagles (-10.5) over Giants
Colts (-3.5) over Titans

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots

WEEK 6



WEEK 8





WEEK 9

RAMS (-9.5) OVER SAINTS

This is a pretty ugly and limited week for Survivor contestants. Four teams are on a bye and, as mentioned, the Browns are one of them. The Jets are also idle, along with the Eagles and Buccaneers, so two teams you'd like to go against and two teams you'd probably think of using. But, the Saints should be a great team to go against as well. The Rams are off of the bye after playing in London in Week 7 and the Saints will be eight weeks into whatever their season holds. And it probably won't be good.

CONSIDERATIONS

Packers (-7.5) over Panthers
Raiders (-1.5) over Jaguars

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams



WEEK 11

PACKERS (-4.5) OVER GIANTS

Hold your breath. Hold your nose. Hold a loved one. Hold something. Week 11 is messy. Early lines had the Packers -4.5 on the road against the Giants, which was tied for the fourth-highest line of the week. The Patriots (Jets), Bills (Bucs), and Ravens (Browns) were the only bigger favorites when putting this together. As I outlined above, losing is in the Giants' best interest this season and this one fits the bill to me. The Packers are on a short week and play all three NFC North rivals over the next three weeks, so the spot is scary, but I think the risk is worth it.

I'd prefer to save the Bills, need the Ravens for Thanksgiving, and already used the Patriots.

CONSIDERATIONS

Patriots (-5.5) over Jets (TNF)
Falcons (-3) over Panthers
Ravens (-8.5) over Browns

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers

BEARS (-5.5) OVER GIANTS

The holiday games have been a consideration for me every week up until this point and I've stayed away from them. But, this is a spot where I am interested in one. Even if Jalen Hurts (and others) were to be hurt for the Black Friday game, I still wouldn't have too much interest in backing the Bears on the road against the Eagles. I wouldn't call this a layup against the Giants, but maybe a somewhat contested 8-footer. It is a good spot for the Bears to rally before the schedule toughens up again and it is a third road game in four weeks and a fourth in six weeks for the Giants.

CONSIDERATIONS

Broncos (-6.5) over Raiders (TNF)
Jets (-2.5) over Browns
Panthers (-4.5) over Saints
Texans (-3.5) over Jaguars

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears

49ERS (-7) OVER PANTHERS

This is the week before Thanksgiving, which is very important to point out. As you will see, the best considerations are the Lions, Chiefs, and Ravens, who all play on Turkey Day. Like I said from the jump, you want as many holiday options as possible. This is Monday Night Football, so a stressful wait could be in the cards, but it is a back-to-back road spot for a Carolina team that doesn't have its bye until Week 14. It will be just the second game not played at 1 p.m. ET (Week 2) for them. While the 49ers have a late bye as well, so they'll be playing a 12th straight game, they won't have gone further than Glendale since Week 9.

CONSIDERATIONS

Lions (-8.5) over Giants
Chiefs (-9.5) over Colts
Ravens (-11.5) over Jets
Raiders (-3.5) over Browns

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers

WEEK 10



WEEK 12





THANKSGIVING

RAVENS (-5.5) OVER BENGALS

Pretty simple here. There are four games up for discussion - Packers at Lions, Chiefs at Cowboys, Bengals at Ravens, and Bears at Eagles. The Eagles were the biggest of the favorites at the time of this exercise, but I'm saving them for later. Maybe that's a mistake, to "save a team for later" this deep in the competition, but Baltimore feels the safest with a division game at home on a short week.

CONSIDERATIONS

Chiefs (-5.5) over Cowboys
Eagles (-7) over Bears

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens



WEEK 14

BUCCANEERS (-9.5) OVER SAINTS

There is quite a pattern here, eh? This is the fourth time picking against the Saints. The Browns have been a victim three times thus far. Those teams will luck into some wins at some point. You just hope they're not when you're against them. This is a great spot for the Bucs. They're in the midst of three straight home games and will have already played the Saints on the road, so they'll have all the film they need with the far superior roster. It will be their biggest favorite role (barring injury) and a great pick to have at this stage of the game, especially because the pickings are pretty slim this week.

CONSIDERATIONS

Ravens (-8.5) over Steelers
Browns (-1.5) over Titans
Chiefs (-6.5) over Texans

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens, Dolphins, Buccaneers

DOLPHINS (-6) OVER SAINTS

Admittedly, I have no idea what kind of state the Dolphins will be in by this point. Does Mike McDaniel still have a job? Are the playoffs a possibility? Is Tua Tagovailoa still upright? There are going to be decisions that you wrestle with and second-guessing is inevitable, win or lose. All of the other best Week 13 options were selected to get to this point, but this is absolutely a game that Miami should win and unquestionably the best time to take them. Remember - you're going to need 20 teams to win for you in order to cash and not all of them will be enjoyable sweats.

CONSIDERATIONS

49ers (-6) over Browns
Chargers (-6.5) over Raiders
Patriots (-3) over Giants

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens, Dolphins

WEEK 13



EAGLES (-10.5) OVER RAIDERS

A long trip east for a December 14 game for the dome-dwelling Raiders seems potentially problematic. By this point, the Raiders could also be positioning themselves for the NFL Draft, as they'll have just played the Chargers and Broncos. This game should matter a lot to the Eagles. They are on a short week after coming back from Los Angeles for Monday Night Football, but that's a minor concern to me. We've also gotten the holiday concern out of the way for the Eagles since they are not part of the Christmas slate.

CONSIDERATIONS

Bears (-7) over Browns
Jaguars (-4.5) over Jets
49ers (-7.5) over Titans
Seahawks (-3.5) over Colts

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens, Dolphins, Buccaneers, Eagles

WEEK 15





WEEK 16

BILLS (-8.5) OVER BROWNS

Just the second road team on the list so far. There are home teams that could apply here, too, but the Bills should have something to play for and the Browns shouldn't, other than pride. Who knows how dysfunctional the organization will be by this point, but I have to think one of Dillon Gabriel or Shedeur Sanders is starting this game. They'll have to evaluate one or both of them. I think I'm okay with Josh Allen over one of those dudes, away game or not.

CONSIDERATIONS

Chiefs (-7) over Titans
Ravens (-8.5) over Patriots
Broncos (-5.5) over Jaguars
Lions (-6) over Steelers

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens, Dolphins, Buccaneers, Eagles, Bills



WEEK 17

BENGALS (-3.5) OVER CARDINALS

Let me tell you...Week 17 is AWFUL. Like extremely awful. At the time I wrote this up (May 20), the biggest Saturday/Sunday/Monday favorite in Week 17 was -3.5. Injuries will obviously alter the market, but at least I still have Joe Burrow against a Cardinals crew forced to play outside on December 28. There is also a chance that this game is flexed to Saturday, so it could be a short week for the desert dwellers to fly all the way to the Rust Belt.

CONSIDERATIONS

Raiders (-2.5) over Giants
Titans (-3.5) over Saints

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens, Dolphins, Buccaneers, Eagles, Bills, Commanders, Bengals

COMMANDERS (-5.5) OVER COWBOYS

There are only three games here, so there are just six teams to pick from. Because Christmas falls on a Thursday, we just get a tripleheader. You notice, though, that both the Lions and the Chiefs - the two other favorites - are still available here. Having options for the holiday games is critical. Even though it's Week 17 and you'd love to use them earlier, if you get to this point, you can't get shut out. As far as the Commanders, I've been holding them for this spot and have to go with it.

CONSIDERATIONS

Chiefs (-5.5) over Broncos

USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens, Dolphins, Buccaneers, Eagles, Bills, Commanders

CHRISTMAS



CHIEFS (-6) OVER RAIDERS

Initially, I was saving the Bills for here (Jets) over the Chiefs, but this is a rare year in which Kansas City may have to play everybody in Week 18 because of the strength of the AFC West. Projecting Week 18 this far in advance is probably a meaningless exercise, as we'll have a ton of moving parts. There are likely to be a lot of strong options. Bengals over the Browns comes to mind. But, I'd rather trust the Bengals in Week 17 than the Raiders or Titans, at least as of now and take a third and final road team to finish it off.

CONSIDERATIONS

Bengals (-8.5) over Browns
Bills (-9.5) over Jets

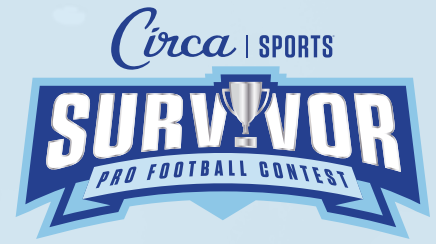
USED

Broncos, Cardinals, Seahawks, Texans, Vikings, Steelers, Chargers, Patriots, Rams, Bears, Packers, 49ers, Ravens, Dolphins, Buccaneers, Eagles, Bills, Commanders, Bengals, Chiefs

WEEK 18



THE HISTORY OF CIRCA SURVIVOR



BY DAVE TULEY

Do you remember the scene in *Back to the Future* when Doc Brown said, "Here's a red-letter day in the history of science – November 5, 1955" and showed Marty McFly the flux capacitor that makes time travel possible? Well, let me take you back to April 22, 2019, because I think of that date when it comes to the Circa football contests.

Derek Stevens had invited me and a handful of other local reporters to a suite at his Golden Gate Hotel in downtown Las Vegas to announce he was starting his own independent sportsbook called Circa Sports. The Circa Resort & Casino was just a vacant lot across Fremont Street on the former site of the Las Vegas Club Hotel & Casino, the Glitter Gulch strip club and a tiny slot casino called Mermaids that I remember most for the deep-fried Twinkies. He said Circa Sports would launch in a small, but state-of-the-art, sportsbook at the Golden Gate on June 1, with another book to open later in June at the D, his other downtown hotel at the time.

Stevens told us how he was a lifelong gambler (just like he does in current TV ads) and was building a sportsbook like one he would want to play at, one that dealt fair odds and gave bettors bang for their buck in a fun atmosphere. But he really perked up when telling us about his plan for a new handicapping contest, the Circa Sports Million, with a guaranteed first-place prize of \$1 million (hence the name) and a blue blazer to the champion. "I know what it's like to have a future bet to win a million dollars," Stevens said, "and I want to give our customers that thrill to make life-changing money."

The overall guarantee for Circa Sports Million I in 2019 was \$1.5 million (there was no Circa Survivor that first year). The Westgate SuperContest was the longest-established high-end football contest in town since 1989 and had fought off many competitors, coming off a record 3,123 entries in 2018. The SuperContest had a \$1,500 entry fee back then, and Stevens decided to go with a \$1,000 entry fee and no rake (while the Westgate had an 8% rake at the time). That proved to be just as important a selling point to contest players as the guarantee.

Entries started slow, as expected, for a new contest, and many people here were expecting there to be an overlay as Stevens needed 1,500 entries to make his nut. However, he advertised heavily and word of mouth certainly helped and they passed the guarantee on the Wednesday before the start of the NFL season. By the time registration closed on Saturday, Sept. 7, they hit a grand total of 1,875 with the additional \$375,000 going to the "quarter prizes," another added feature of Circa Sports Million.

It was an exciting time for football contests here in Vegas as the 2019 SuperContest still set another record with 3,328 entries despite the

new competition. You know the saying: a rising tide raises all ships.

Circa Sports certainly had the momentum heading into 2020, but most people at the time felt it would still take a few years for them to bypass the SuperContest as the biggest contest in town, and certainly not until 2021, the first full NFL season at the new Circa Resort, which still wasn't planned to open until late 2020.

So, Stevens forged ahead and announced on February 26, 2020 (very early for Vegas football contests), that the guarantee for Circa Sports Million II would double to \$3 million with the same guaranteed \$1 million first-place prize. Furthermore, he was adding Circa Survivor, which would have the same \$1,000 entry fee and a guaranteed prize pool of \$1 million. He also took the bold step of opening registrations on March 6 in advance of the annual huge crowds who would always come to Vegas for March Madness.

It seemed like a no-brainer – and then the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all Vegas hotels on March 17, and they didn't reopen until June 3. Circa Sports did some sign-ups at the valet drive-through outside the Golden Gate (with social distancing), but otherwise, everything was shut down for two and a half months, and many people wondered if Stevens would rescind the guarantees.

But he didn't. He said he wanted Circa Sports and the contests to help bring customers back to Vegas and kept Million and Survivor at \$3 million and \$1 million, respectively. Stevens was rewarded as an unbelievable 3,148 entries were bought for Circa Sports Million II, making it the second-biggest football contest field in Vegas history (behind the previous year's SuperContest). The Westgate only drew 1,172 entries as more customers were drawn by the guarantee and no-rake. In addition, Circa Survivor I drew 1,390 entries to also blow away its guarantee for a first-year prize of \$1,390,000 that ended up having 35 winners (there was only a 17-week NFL schedule that first season of Circa Survivor and only one added "Thanksgiving Week" for 18 total picks).

So, it only took Stevens two seasons to bypass the Westgate in the number of entries before the new Circa Resort opened in December 2020, and then it was full speed ahead with entries now being taken at the new sportsbook.

The guarantee for Circa Sports Million III in 2021 was \$4 million and they made it with a new record of 4,087 entries with the champion being Tony Gordon of Atascadero, Calif., using the alias Durbify (and my proxy client), who still holds the mark for best record at 63-27 ATS (70%) in the NFL's first 18-week schedule. Stevens had seen how even more popular his Survivor contest was becoming and increased the guarantee to \$6 million for Circa Survivor II.

This time it cost him as there were only 4,080 entries and Stevens had to pony up the \$1.92 million overlay, but it was clear that Survivor was turning into a monster that would easily bypass the Million the next year, especially after only five Survivors went 20-0 with the addition of a "Christmas Week."

In 2022, Stevens guaranteed \$6 for Circa Sports Million IV, and it drew another record 4,691 entries, but again fell short as he had to pay out a \$1.309 million overlay. But the big news was that he again guaranteed \$6 million for Circa Survivor III, and this time he hit it with 6,133 entries and a \$6.133 million prize pool, both records for any Vegas football contest. There was also a record set for winning payout as only two entrants – using the aliases BROWNA and JED – completed the season a perfect 20-0 to collect \$3.065 million apiece (though there was a chop involved with the other contestant that made it to the final Sunday, THE ENEMY WITHIN, but that's the official winning amount for the sake of the contest). That certainly opened a lot of people's eyes to how lucrative the Circa Survivor contest could be.

In 2023, Stevens guaranteed another \$6 million for Million and \$8 million for Survivor. Circa Sports Million V attracted another new record with 5,274 entries (but just a \$726,000 overlay for Stevens to pay this time), and Circa Survivor IV also set a record with 9,267 entries. This time, there were four winners (LAJONESER, Indiana Jet, CIRCUS MASTER and JAX JAGS), collecting \$2,316,750 apiece. Last year, the guarantees were \$6 million for Million but boosted to an aggressive \$10 million for Survivor.

Circa Million VI drew 5,817 entries to again fall short of its guarantee with an overlay of \$183,000, which ties back to what Stevens said back at that April 22, 2019, press conference about giving value to bettors, so I've never heard him express any regrets about any of the overlays he's had to pay. In fact, I asked him one time if he would advertise more to try to get more entries, and he said, "I could spend more on ads, but I'd probably be losing the same amount of money, so I'd rather have that go to our customers."

Circa Survivor V drew a whopping 14,266 entries, blowing away all projections, for a \$14.266 million prize pool, obviously both records. As has been the case in most years, there was a ton of early-season carnage and only eight made it to the finish line, collecting \$1.78 million apiece (though the \$2.3 million in 2023 stands as that record).

How high will the prize pools be this year and in the future? Only time will tell, but Stevens has already promised to push the envelope with new record guarantees this season.

Bring on 2025.