New ZTout Strategies for 2023

Introduction

You may have noticed significant changes to the ZTout pages. This is an attempt to find some additional factors that can help in deciding if a bet is a good or bad one.

The Old ZTout System

This is in response to a significant drop in the efficiency of the raw ZTout calculated line I create using the old Pomeroy system. A number of years ago Pomeroy tweaked his system, adding in additional factors in his calculations. He did not publish these tweaks, so unlike his original system, I can't completely reproduce it. Curiously, the original system seemed to be a slightly better predictor for betting than the new system (reflected in the ZTout as the KenPom Fan Match or KenPomFM line) in picking a bet. This may simply be random noise, it's hard to tell.

The old and new Pomeroy systems are usually pretty close to the same line, but on occasion they are off by several points. I do not know why, other than there is obviously some other data he feeds into the system to cause the variance that I do not have.

What is certain is KenPom's line is not as good a predictor as it used to be (read https://www.espn.com/chalk/story/_/id/19045118/college-basketball-how-ken-pomeroy-former-weatherman-changed-cbb-betting-market). I am not sure why this is, except to say I suspect that the sports books and bettors in general have caught up -- everyone uses advanced metrics to select wagers so you are really back to eyeballing other factors to make a guess. There are no "soft lines" any more.

My original theory was based on what I call the "line difference."   Whatever system you use, whether it's AASM+HCA, KenPom, Sagarin, or one of the myriad others, you subtract the actual line from your favorite sportsbook from the predicted line of the system to get a line difference. The larger the line difference, the more you like that bet. Or so the theory goes.

You can sort the ZTout Best Bet page purely by line difference to "rank" the bets. The Best Bet scores adjust the line difference by some other factors (injuries, difference in juice from -110, etc.).

There are some obvious issues with this strategy. For one, if a team's star player is out, that can affect the game and create overly large and not to be trusted line differences. And, earlier in a season the data available to create the predicted line is not as extensive (smaller sample size), so the lines differences tend to be larger. Lastly, Home Court advantage can vary widely, and then disappears (or perhaps hurts a team with a high HCA) in the tournament when every team is playing at a neutral site.

I tried to mitigate the effect of injuries by adding the Injuries Adjustment to the Best Bet scores, but this is somewhat hard to do as I have no way of judging the value of a player. Losing a scrub who plays 4 minutes a night is not going to impact a team as much as losing a star player who plays 35 minutes. All I

can do is assign a value based on how new the injury is and how many injuries there are for a given game.

Another factor to consider in selecting best bests is that the line differences for O/U bets tend to be larger than the line differences for game (line) bets. This is why the ZTout pick a lot of Over/Unders as the best bets.

I thought about weighting this to even it out so there was more of a mixture, but the O/U bets actually outperform the line bets. So, I bet a lot of O/Us.

The 1st and 2nd half bets are deliberately scored much lower, as there is less data that goes into them (they are entirely calculated from my internal AASM+HCA system).

The New ZTout Best Bet Sheet

A few years ago, I added the ZCombo Line. This is just the average of KenPom Fan Match (i.e., the new system taken from his FanMatch page), Massey and Sagarin systems. However, the Best Bet sheet was still mostly tied to the old KenPom system and the ZCombo line was added as another sorting factor.

This year the ZCombo line seems to be outperforming the old KenPom system, at least for the "3 best bets" of the day parlays. Therefore, I decided to break the two systems apart. Which means that now you might see different "Best Bet" picks for the two systems for a given game.

For example, if you saw this on the regular sheet:

ZTout Home

Legend: *ZTout recommended bet for that Game (KenPom and Zcombo)* *ZTout recommended bet for that Game (KenPom)* *ZTout recommended bet for that Game (Zcombo)*

Line Source: *SB=SBRodds.com, CS=Caesars NV, BU=Betus, DK=DraftKings, AN=Action Network, FD=FanDuel, FB=FoxBET, MG=BetMGM, PB=PointsBet*

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	1.5000		
Predictions:	**O/U Predictions:**		
Pomeroy Pick: und Southern California (LD: 2.1364)	OU: 155.0-110/-110 DK		
PomFanM Pick: und Southern California (LD: 1.5000)	Pomeroy Total: 161.52	P	
AASM+HCA Pick: und Southern California (LD: 0.7267)	*Pom O/U Pick:* over	Z	
AASM+HCA 1stH Pick: fav Arizona (LD: 4.2370)	PomFanM Total: 159.00	2'	
AASM+HCA 2ndH Pick: und Southern California (LD: 3.4426)	PFM O/U Pick: over	P	
Z RPI Pick: und Southern California (LD: 2.0776)	DRating Total: 147.00	Z	
DRating Pick: fav Arizona (LD: 0.1000)	Drt O/U Pick: under	Z	
Massey Pick: und Southern California (LD: 0.5000)	Massey Total: 152.00		
Sagarin Pick: und Southern California (LD: 1.9600)	Msy O/U Pick: under	V	
Zcombo Pick: und Southern California (LD: 1.3200)	Sagarin Total: 149.02	A	
Pred. Trkr. Pick: und Southern California (LD: 0.9100)	Sag O/U Pick: under	A	
O.L. Pick: und Southern California (LD: 1.0000)	Zcombo Total: 153.34	A	
Other Lines Agree: 88.89%	Zcb O/U Pick: under	A	
	Other OU Lines Agree: 33.33%		

It would indicate that the original Pomeroy system was picking the over 155 as the "Best Bet" for the game, but the ZCombo system picked Arizona for the 1st half as the best bet.

If both systems liked the same best bet in a game, then there would be a single "Green" highlight.

You can sort the Best Bet Sheet by the ranking of games for either system (click on the "Best Bet Ranking Score" column header for KenPom, "ZC Best Bet Ranking Score" column header for ZCombo).

In addition, on the Best Bet page you may now see a Bet Description with two descriptions, like:

PM: UC Irvine-UC Riverside Over
+146.0-115/-105
ZC: UC Irvine-UC Riverside Under
+146.0-115/-105 ZC BEST BET

or

PM: Indiana St. -17.5-105
ZC: Evansville +17.5-115

This is simply showing you the same info as in the regular ZTout Game sheet – the bet will be different depending upon which system you like the best. I like the idea of the systems agreeing, so I would be unlikely to take that bet for a given game, or at least would bet it with a smaller wager. These "split decisions" tend to have smaller line differences so are judged to be more uncertain.

The New ZTout Variability Metrics

Beyond the line difference as an indicator of a bet's desirability, I began to wonder if we might measure the "consistency" or "variability" of the two teams playing, and if that might indicate a more or less likely outcome.

Pomeroy used to have a "Consistency" measurement, but got rid of it some years ago. Therefore, I added my own. It is simply the standard deviation of a team's average scoring margin (and not to be confused with Pomeroy's "Luck" measurement, which is something else).

For example, do you think the 2022-2023 CU Buffaloes are a consistent team? My eyeball test would say no – they beat highly ranked teams like Tennessee and Texas A&M by wide margins, but then lost to terrible teams like Cal. Sure enough, my consistency measurement bears this out – CU ranks 320th in consistency (scoring margin standard deviation).

New to the system are 4 new measurements:

- **ZCombo Line Standard Deviation** – the Standard deviation of the 3 composite KenPomFM, Sagarin and Massey predicted lines.

- **ZCombo O/U Standard Deviation** – the Standard deviation of the 3 composite KenPomFM, Sagarin and Massey score predictions.
- **2 Team Average Consistency** – this is just the sum of the above consistency measurement for the two opponents divided by two.
- **Prediction Tracker Standard Deviation** – the Prediction Tracker (http://www.thepredictiontracker.com/predbb.html) is a site that collects many different systems predictions and averages them to get an average line. It also computes the standard Deviation. So that is collected and displayed in the ZTout. I use it as a Sanity Check.

The New ZTOUT Best Bets Consistency Checklist

A new data sheet has been added to the ZTout daily sheet list – the *"ZTOUT Best Bets Consistency Checklist."* This checklist displays a sortable "checklist" grid of bet "variability factors" that can be used to help decide on a best bet.

The first seven columns are the same as the ones on the regular Best Bet sheet. The other factors it displays are:

- **Other Lines Agree?** – This is `Yes` if for line and O/U bets if 100% of the other lines agree. It will be `Most` if the other lines agree more than 80%. For 1st/2nd half bets, it will be `Most` if the 1st or 2nd half bet and opening line agree.
- **PM & ZC Agree?** – Set to `Yes` if KenPom and ZCombo both pick the same Best Bet
- **2 Team STD less than avg?** - If the 2 Team Standard Deviation is < the season average, it will be `Yes`
- **ZC STD less than avg?** – for ZCombo bets, if the ZCombo Line or O/U Standard Deviation is < the season average, the column will be marked `Yes`.
- **PDTR STD less than avg?** – If for game lines, the Prediction Tracker Standard Deviation is < the season average, the column will be marked with `Yes.`
- **No Injuries?** – If there are no injuries reported for a game, the column is marked `Yes.`

These data points are assigned a (somewhat arbitrary) weighting factor and added up to create the "Best Bet Consistency Score":

- **Base Score:** Start with 2.0 if it's a line or O/U bet, 1.0 if it's a 1st h or 2nd half bet (1st and 2nd have bets are calculated only on the AASM+HCA system, and are those scored lower in the Best Bet ranking systems).
- **ZC and PM the Same:** Add 0.5 if KenPom and ZCombo systems have the same Best Bet
- **Other Lines Agree:** For game or O/U Bets, add 1.00 if other lines agree 100%. Add 0.5 if other lines agree greater than 80%. For 1st half or 2nd half bets, add 0.5 if 100% (i.e., the opening line agrees)
- **2 Team Cons Avg less than avg:** Add 0.5 if the 2 Team Consistency Average is < the season average
- **PDTR STD less than avg:** Add 0.5 if the Prediction Tracker Standard Deviation is less than the season average. For O/U, 1st half or 2nd half bets, this is always blank (0.0).

- **ZC STD less than avg:** Add 0.5 if the ZCombo line or O/U Standard Deviation is less than the season average. For 1st half or 2nd half bets, this is always blank (0.0).
- **No Injuries:** Add 0.5 if there are no reported injuries for the team.

For a game bet, the maximum score is therefor 5.5. For an O/U bet, the maximum score is 5.0, and for 1st or 2nd half bets, the maximum score is 2.5.

The "Best Bet Consistency Score" is also shown as a sortable column on the regular Best Bet sheet.

Think of these standard deviation factors this way. The smaller the standard deviation of a value, the closer it is to the mean and, in this case, would be "more reliable".

So, for example, if the ZCombo Standard deviation was small, smaller than the average, it would mean the three systems would be closer to agreeing on what the predicted line or O/U should be.

The way I intend to use this checklist is as follows. I will still use the primary ranking from the KenPom and ZCombo Bet Scores on the regular Best Bet sheet. However, I will look at the matching line on the checklist to see the score, and the higher the variability score, the more confidence I might have in that bet.

BUT, this is an entirely untested theory, and there is a distinct possibility it is too coarse to be meaningful. So, use it at your own risk.