



Tuesday, December 16

#199 Troy vs #200 Jacksonville State (Veterans Bowl in Montgomery, Alabama)

GoldSheet's Projected Score: Troy 27 - Jacksonville State 24

Analysis: Both teams are coming off losses in their respective conference championship games as Troy fell to James Madison in the Sun Belt while Jacksonville State dropped a home game against Kennesaw State in Conference USA.

Even though they had a couple extra days to rest and prep for this one after playing last Friday, the Gamecocks have not had a true bye week since October 22. This will essentially be Jacksonville State's seventh-straight week with a game. Troy had a bye in November, so the Trojans may have a little more pep in their step.

Troy's starting QB Goose Crowder was knocked out of the conference championship game with a leg injury and was seen on crutches after the game. Back-up QB Tucker Kilcrease saw plenty of playing time this season and actually had a better completion percentage and yards per attempt, so there shouldn't be too big of a drop-off if Crowder does not play.

The key name to keep an eye on for Jacksonville State is running back Cam Cook, who was a workhorse for the Gamecocks this season. Cook ran for 1,659 yards on 5.6 yards per carry with 16 touchdowns and was named the Conference USA Most Valuable Player this season. As we go to print on Friday, there are no indications that Cook plans to sit out of this game, but as we know in college football in the year 2025, a lot can change.

This game is going to offer a fascinating look at just how big of a gap there is between the Sun Belt and Conference USA. Per Jeff Sagarin's college football ratings (which combines both FBS and FCS teams), the Gamecocks played the No. 142 schedule in the country. Akron and Buffalo are the only two FBS-level teams to play a weaker schedule.

Assuming Cook plays for the Gamecocks, we are interested in the over in this contest. Like we mentioned, the difference between Crowder and Kilcrease is minimal and Kilcrease probably adds a little bit more variance (through big plays, turnovers, etc.) into the contest. When he was the starter in the middle of the season, Troy's games saw plenty of points: 55 in a win over South Alabama; 89 in a win over Texas State; 51 in a win over UL-Monroe; 58 in a win over Louisiana.

On the other side, Troy's defense is much better against the pass compared to the run, and Jacksonville State just wants to run the ball. The Gamecocks should have success in that department as James Madison just ran for 318 yards against the Trojans last week.

Recommendation: Over 46.5