Monday, January 8, 2024

WASHINGTON HUSKIES @ MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

Game Time: 7:30pm ET

Selection: Washington Huskies +4.5

Last season, under OC Ryan Grubb's direction, the Huskies ranked first in the country in passing yards (376.7) and first downs (27.4) per game, while also topping the nation for third-down conversions (57%) as well as completions of 10 yards or more (182). As a result, the GOAT, Nick Saban, went after Grubb to lure him to Alabama with a potential $2M+ contract. Grubb turned him down, as well as the opportunity to go to Texas A&M, to stay at Washington and build a National Championship contender. After witnessing Alabama's mindboggling final play call in the OT loss to Michigan on New Year's Day, Saban could have used Ryan Grubb on the sidelines! With Grubb remaining at Washington, head coach Kalen DeBoer has built a powerhouse team this season and led the Huskies to the National Title game.

DeBoer was OC for Indiana in 2019. The Hoosiers averaged 433.2 yards per game under DeBoer, ranking third in the Big Ten for the season. After a stint at Fresno, he was hired to be the head coach for Washington in late 2021. In two years in the Pac-12, DeBoer has gone 25-2 but over the course of his head coaching career, he is an incredible 104-11 and the holder of three NAIA championships. DeBoer is far from a household name, but he is one of the best coaches in all of college football. Further proof has been his leading of the Huskies to the spot they find themselves in on Monday night.

Once again Washington comes into a big game disrespected. This was no more apparent than when they faced Oregon and were 9.5 point underdog despite their 11-0 undefeated record. The Huskies played with a chip on their shoulders and they defeated Bo Nix and Oregon 34-31.

It's hard to fault either team as they come into this title game with a combined record of 28-0. Often an overlooked aspect, special teams can play a decisive role in championship matchups. The Huskies have excelled in this phase of the game, whether it be in the form of reliable placekicking, effective punting, or game-changing returns. Winning the battle of field position and potentially capitalizing on special teams plays could be a game-changer for Washington. The special teams of Michigan, on the other hand, was a disaster in the playoff game vs. Alabama as there were multiple mistakes throughout the game. This could easily be the difference in a game between two teams of very close ability.

Washington's offensive arsenal is not limited to just one or two playmakers. They have skill players across the board, from explosive wide receivers to elusive running backs. This versatility allows the Huskies to keep defenses on their toes. The ability to spread the ball around and create mismatches will be a key asset in their quest for the championship. The Huskies boast a dynamic and experienced quarterback in Michael Penix, Jr. who has been a catalyst for their offensive success. Whether through precise passing or extending plays with his legs, the Washington signal-caller has demonstrated poise and playmaking ability. His leadership on the field, combined with a diverse set of offensive weapons, gives the Huskies the

flexibility to attack defenses in multiple ways. As Oregon (-9.5) and Texas (-4.5) found out, Washington has been difficult to stop all year long.

The Michigan Wolverines, led by elite head coach Jim Harbaugh, have had a great year with a 14-0 record. With a solid offense and a tenacious defense, Michigan has bulldozed its way through the Big Ten competition, leaving a trail of victories in its wake. However, a big reason that Michigan is favored by over a field goal in this game is due to name recognition and the belief that the Big Ten is a superior conference. The results of the 2nd through 4th best B1G teams (Ohio State, Penn State and Iowa) tell a different story this bowl season. We expect Washington to go toe-to-toe with Michigan from the start and make for a great title game. Take the points.