As we get deeper and deeper into both the NFL and college football seasons, it becomes more difficult to find a betting edge over the oddsmakers. By this time, the oddsmakers have adjusted to the teams and have been setting their numbers accordingly. Most teams are in “what you see is what you get” mode and there aren’t going to be a whole lot of surprises. There will be upsets, no doubt. There will be teams that play flat and come away with a victory. There will even be times where a big underdog blows out a heavy favorite. But, finding these spots has gotten a lot tougher.

As the sportsbooks adjust, bettors need to do so as well. After so much time to do preseason research, set power ratings, and know the personnel, now is the time to really focus on changing your perceptions of teams. Are teams like the 0-4 New Orleans Saints as bad as they have shown? Is Rutgers as good as their 4-0 record would indicate? It’s important to isolate teams who have more talent than they’ve shown, because talent always shines at some point. Even lazy talent, which is now being pushed to the brink because the season is starting to hinge on wins and losses.

Let’s say you don’t know how to adjust your numbers but want to stay in the game. You keep getting frustrated looking at lines and totals and feeling like every number is exactly where it should be. Luckily, with offshore sportsbooks, your opportunities are endless. Last week, I talked about in-game wagering and the ability that a bettor has to guarantee profit or double up on a play at a better number. This week, we’ll look at prop bets.

Prop bets can be strong value plays without making a bet on a spread. Sometimes, a prop bet can replace or supplement a spread wager, with a better payout and less risk. It’s always important to find an edge wherever one can be found. Prop bets can do that. You can even find some plus money examples that allow you to have a lower winning percentage but still make money.

There are two kinds of prop bets, player prop bets and game prop bets. Prop bets are very popular come Super Bowl time, as bettors are scrambling to get their fill of football wagers before the football market closes until August. Most prop bets are yes or no, over or under, very simple wagers.

Currently, the Arizona Cardinals are -2 (total 39.5) against the St. Louis Rams. If you do not like that spread or total, there are other ways to bet on the game related to the spread and total. For example, let's say you are convinced that for the Rams to be in the game, Steven Jackson needs to have a good game. Currently, the over/under on his rushing yards is 62.5, with an over priced at -130. Regardless of if you believe the Rams can cover the spread or win the game, if you think that Steven Jackson can have success against the Cardinals defense, you can make this bet. Similarly, if you think the Rams will trail all game, but are afraid of betting the -2 and trusting the Cardinals, you can bet the under 62.5 at even money, expecting that Sam Bradford will throw a lot of passes.

Let's look at a stronger example pertaining to the spread/total. Let's say that you expect that the Rams will win the game. The Cardinals defense has allowed one rushing touchdown all season. If you think the Rams will win, which obviously means scoring more points than the Cardinals, wouldn't that mean that Sam Bradford will have to contribute? Currently, you can bet Bradford over 1.5 TD passes at Bovada at +150. Where the St. Louis moneyline is between +110 and +117 at most sportsbooks, you can bet that Bradford throwing two or more touchdown passes would help the Rams to victory. You could even lose the game, but still win the +150 if Bradford throws two touchdown passes. If your breakdown of the game tells you that the Rams need to score by passing the ball, wouldn't you rather have +150 than +110?

You can also bet game prop bets. Let's say you think that the Rams and Cardinals lack good skill players and will struggle in the red zone. Maybe you don't like to play lower totals like 39.5. Maybe you're afraid of a defensive touchdown or a bad turnover from two turnover-prone quarterbacks. You can look to play something like over 3.5 field goals at even money. It has more value than betting the under at -105 or -110, but still means essentially the same thing – a low-scoring game.

Most sportsbooks offer alternate spreads and totals as well, with bigger or smaller vigorish amounts. Let's say you find a line that's seriously off in your opinion. With props only available for the Thursday night game, I'll continue to use that as an example. As I said, the Cardinals are -2. What if you think the Rams are terrible? You can bet Cardinals -4.5 at +145. You can bet

Cardinals -7.5 at +200.

What about the flip side? What if you think the Cardinals are completely overachieving, hate Kevin Kolb at QB, and are worried about their run game? You could turn the spread around and bet St. Louis -3.5 at +160. Or, if you think the line is really off, you can play St. Louis -7.5 at +300.

If you think this game has the makings of a complete sleeper, full of punts with a couple of field goals sprinkled in, you can bet an alternate total. The under 33.5, six points off of the actual total, would pay +195.

If you monitor prop bets on games, you can find value. Personally, I made money over the last couple of years betting adjusted totals on unders in Browns games. Oddsmakers won't go too high or too low with a total, because it opens them up to one-way action. They don't want that.

Take the Seattle/Carolina game. Carolina has averaged 20 points over their first four games. Seattle is even less than that at 17.5. The total is 43.5. If they stay at their averages, the under 37.5 seems like a reasonable play with a far better payout. These situations are readily available if you train yourself to look for them.

You can always find some kind of edge, at least in your mind. At the end of the day, a handicapper's job is to make plays that he's confident in. Even the best are "wrong" 45% of the time, whether it's a bad read, a fluky play, or the game simply going in a different direction. But, you're wrong 100% of the time if you're making plays you don't stand behind.

Good luck and pick winners.