Bowl season is off to a rousing start with three close games and four blowouts, including one that was quite unexpected. The NFL season is coming to a close with only homefield playoff implications left in the AFC and a crazy mess in the NFC. Personally, I'm glad to see football season winding down, as it's been one of the worst seasons for me in a few years. It seems that a lot of bettors I respect have had some difficulties this football season and they're looking to turn the page as well.

This week, I thought I would look at some New Year's Resolutions that I have for betting and ways that I can become a better bettor. I like to say that I learn something with every play I make, good or bad, whether it was something I missed in the line movement, an angle I missed one way or another, or just simply the ever-growing maturity needed to accept a loss that was or wasn't your fault. It's during the down years where we learn the most as bettors because we are forced to realize that something needs to change. It may not need to be a drastic overhaul, and tracking your bets is a good way to see if you did something differently or need to do something differently in the future.

First and foremost, I have to trust myself. More often than not, my knowledge of the teams is not what holds me back. What holds me back is not trusting myself and being scared off by line movement against me or the opinion of somebody I respect. Not all line movements are the result of a consensus opinion from the professionals. In fact, more frequently than you might expect, the pros will differ on a game and see things differently. It's a matter of self-esteem more than anything. There are always going to be people out there who know more than you do on a subject. But, just because they do, doesn't mean that they are always entirely correct.

Too many times this season I backed off of a play because of a dissenting opinion from somebody much more experienced than me. In some cases, I backed off a play and it kept me from a losing bet. Those feel good. It's the opposite side of the coin that feels terrible. If you are going to back off of a play because of a respected opinion, look at the why and not the what.

Don't let that opinion take you off a bet. Take a second, deeper look at a play and why you like it. If you still like it after evaluating it further, then trust yourself.

Second, I have to look harder at the opposite side of my bet. Like most bettors, I get fixated on one team or one side of the total and don't make a counter argument. Doing that can be a slippery slope and blind a bettor to something critical. It's not enough to make an argument for betting a team, you need to make an argument for betting against the other team. Or, you have to make an argument for betting ON the team you like. Then decide which argument is stronger.

Third, I need to stop getting so cute with my plays. Far too often, I try to extract value from the secondary conferences. It's not the worst strategy in the world, because those lines are truer. The public doesn't really bet those games, so line moves tend to be sharper in nature and easier to diagnose. But, I take it too far. Unless I have a really strong grasp on a Sun Belt or WAC game, I'm just coin-flipping. As we all know, we have to win 52.38% to simply break even. Flipping coins is not profitable. News is harder to come by for small schools and takes away valuable research time that could be used more wisely.

Fourth, I need to branch out more from college football. Making a profit in the NFL is very difficult. I have had success in the past with the NHL and I am going to focus a lot harder on baseball this season, especially since I've worked to grasp sabermetric concepts more. I need to use teasers in the NFL and do more college basketball and NBA work. Being multi-faceted in your approach can take the sting away from struggling in one sport. Predominantly betting one sport, and having a bad season in it, is really tough to handle.

These are just some thoughts that I've been having while suffering through a tough season. Every season has to be a learning experience, even to the most seasoned pros. Getting overconfident and taking things for granted – the trap I fell into this season – doesn't work. And I found that out the hard way. It's a grind. It has to stay one to be successful.

So, how about that notion of bowl motivation? Everybody makes a huge deal out of bowl motivation and probably overvalues it. Ball State had all of the motivation last week against UCF, a game I discussed in last week's article. One play changed the complexion of that game. Ball State's defense was flying around and had forced a 3rd-and-13 on the first drive and covered well on the third down play. Blake Bortles, UCF's QB, scrambled for a first down and they proceeded to push Ball State around for the remainder of the game. They should have been the more motivated team. They got trounced. I'm to the point where I don't value bowl

motivation at all. It’s an overblown angle.

How about the beating Fresno State took? A pedestrian 6-6 Conference USA team destroyed the Mountain West co-champion, despite being at a talent disadvantage. Two defensive touchdowns made the final score look a lot worse, but it was a truly pathetic performance from Fresno State. On paper, the game looked like a Fresno State blowout, yet it was the complete opposite. SMU scored 43 points and had just 15 first downs. That game may have been an anomaly, but that is why a paper breakdown just isn’t enough. Coaching played a huge role. June Jones had been there before. Tim DeRuyter had not. It showed.

The final week of the NFL should probably just be outright avoided from a betting perspective, especially with teams resting guys in various cases, other teams finishing off disappointing seasons, and some weather concerns. That doesn’t keep there from being some interesting angles this week. Teams fighting for playoff spots are playing against rivals, making for some spots where the underdog won’t just lay down and die. The Bears are looking to clinch the wild card, but have to go to Detroit to do it. The Giants have to beat the rival Eagles to have any shot at making the playoffs. Dallas and Washington play each other for the NFC East title in primetime. Green Bay needs to win in order to lock up homefield until the conference championship round, but they face a feisty Minnesota team who can clinch the wild card with a win.

The more difficult games to handicap are the ones featuring the league’s dregs. It’s important to look for some quotes from players on coaches that are on the hot seat. Teams who like their coach are more likely to go to battle for them. The Chiefs are incredibly awful and have gone through a lot over the last few weeks. Romeo Crennel and GM Scott Pioli have already been told that they will be fired. Will the players get up for that final game and give a max effort? Will the Chargers, who continuously underachieve under Norv Turner, come out hard against Oakland? Go find quotes from players and read between the lines.

Will the New Orleans Saints, used to deep playoff runs and Super Bowl appearances, care about finishing the year .500 or will they roll over at home against Carolina, who has won four out of five and has Cam Newton playing really well again?

All of this points to staying away and focusing on the myriad of bowl games left on the slate.

Good luck and pick winners.