With just three football games left this betting season, it's time to be looking at alternative sports to bet. The return of the NHL could be a big moneymaker for bettors this season, with a condensed schedule featuring a lot of back-to-back games and games with teams that are extremely familiar with each other. Basketball is a very up and down game full of bad beats and a lot of tight numbers. In hockey, moneyline parlays and total bets are the ways most bettors approach the sport, but I have an alternative for you to look into.

But, first, let's start with the conference championship games. The NFC Championship Game features a team that blew a 27-7 lead at home in the fourth quarter to a team having to travel back to the east coast for the second straight week against a team who start-to-finish looked like the better team in their home win. The Atlanta Falcons were helped by Pete Carroll's timeout to "freeze" Matt Bryant in escaping with a 30-28 victory. The San Francisco 49ers had their way with the Green Bay Packers and Colin Kaepernick shined in his first NFL playoff start.

Despite being at home, where they are now 8-1 on the season, the Falcons are a 3.5 or four point underdog this week against the Niners. The number opened at 3.5 and has received fairly balanced action. Matt Ryan shook off some playoff demons to have a nice game last weekend, but the enormous edge in this game is the coaching edge. Mike Smith of the Falcons has made some questionable decisions all year long and nearly allowed the Seahawks to erase a three-score deficit for the win last week. Not only did he call a timeout with 13 seconds left for Matt Bryant's kick, allowing the Seahawks a chance at the Hail Mary that was intercepted to end the game, but he also failed to go for two in a critical spot that would have been the difference in the game had Bryant not gotten another shot.

On the other sideline, since his move from Stanford to San Francisco, Jim Harbaugh has been a great coach, getting both Alex Smith and Colin Kaepernick to succeed, while helping construct one of the game's elite defenses. Frankly, Harbaugh, in a very short time, has become one of the premier coaches in the NFL.

That being said, and the fact that the 49ers are playing much better than the Falcons, this line would scare me as a bettor. With homefield likely accounting for a couple of points, this line on a neutral field would be SF -6 and above a touchdown in San Francisco. I'm not sure that they are that much better than the Falcons. The line, to me, appears to be begging you to take the 49ers, which is always scary. Like I've said in these columns before, every line tells a story and you have to figure out what it is. Sharper offshore books like The Greek and Pinnacle are holding steady at SF -3.5, while the public books are hanging -4 and one is even hanging a -5. Big money bettors appear split on this game, or even leaning towards Atlanta.

In the AFC title game, the Baltimore Ravens survived over the Denver Broncos and will head out on the road again this week to take on the New England Patriots. The Patriots had little difficulty dispatching the Houston Texans last week and are an eight-point favorite over the Ravens. Joe Flacco only completed 18 of his 34 passes, but big plays were the name of the game as he threw for over 330 yards and three TDs. Tom Brady was good, as he usually is in the playoffs at home. This game has seen some money come in on Baltimore in a rematch of last year's AFC Championship Game, which the Pats won 23-20. Five of the last six meetings between these two teams have fallen within six points or less, so the high line is pretty indicative of what the oddsmakers think of both teams.

With a line over a touchdown in a game of this magnitude, the Ravens seem like an auto-play. The Patriots are a very good team, but Baltimore's offense has been surprisingly good in the playoffs and their defense still has a lot of playmakers. The Ravens certainly won't be shy to go into Foxboro, having done it a lot over the last few seasons.

Weather could play a factor as it's expected to be windy with temperatures dropping into the 20s throughout the game. Both quarterbacks are used to those conditions, but Baltimore needs more of a home run threat in its passing game while the Patriots use a lot of short, quick throws. If it is windy, the Patriots' pass attack is better equipped to handle the wind, so that's something to consider for this Sunday's game.

On to hockey for a minute. Parlaying moneylines seems to be the thing for bettors to do with hockey and it can certainly be profitable. Home teams have an advantage in the NHL because they get the last line change and can match up how they want. Home teams won 55% of their games during the 2011-2012 season. Generally speaking, the home team will be favored in most NHL games. A 55% chance of winning is a moneyline of -122.

But, how about an alternative to hockey betting called the “-1”? In hockey, the two “side” bets are the moneyline and the puckline. The puckline is a -1.5 bet, hoping that the team wins by 2 or more. These are almost always plus money bets. In the NHL last season, 24.4% of games went to overtime. That doesn’t even include one-goal games that end in regulation. The puckline, while attractive because of the plus money payout, is not a good wager in most instances.

Instead, you can try this play, the “-1”. Here’s the way it works. You make a bet on the moneyline. Let’s say that you want to bet $110 on a team that is -110. The payout for winning that bet would be $100. So, you have bet $110 on that team to win straight up. But, let’s say you think there’s a chance that they win by two or more. The way to create a -1 line is to wager as much on the puckline as you would win from the moneyline bet. So, if a team is -110, and their puckline is +250, you can bet $100 to win $250. If the team wins by two or more, you would win $350 on a $210 bet, or, roughly, +166. If the team wins by one, your entire bet would push. You would win the moneyline bet, but lose the puckline, for a net gain of zero.

Obviously you can do variations of this, where you might be one-half or one-quarter on the puckline for a little extra-added incentive, while still coming out with some profit for the team winning by one. It’s a way to enhance your possible winnings, while still covering your ass in the event of a one-goal or overtime victory.

Good luck and pick winners!