Another football season is in the books and it's a tough time of year for bettors. With just hockey and basketball on the nightly slate, making money becomes difficult. Hockey is a moneyline sport, so a 3-3 night could still be a profitable one, and basketball seems to be a very up-and-down sport to bet. The lines are getting tighter at this point in the season as well, as the books have a good handle on the teams and some teams are clearly just playing out the string.

At this point in the year, the best thing to do is get extremely selective and make spot plays. Spot plays, if you'll remember from previous articles, are games where you as a bettor should be able to isolate a team that isn't going to give a max effort. In all three sports in play right now, NHL, NBA, and college basketball, the season schedule should start to take its toll. The NHL players are past the point where the season is fresh and new and the condensed schedule is creating some excellent spots to bet. The NBA season has just over 30 games to go for most teams and some teams will definitely be prone to take a night off here and there. In college basketball, the higher-ranked road teams are having a lot of trouble picking up wins in hostile environments, a lot of them coming out flat and not withstanding the home underdog's initial push.

It's important to realize that the oddsmakers are going to know when and where these spots exist, so you will have to decide if paying the extra points on the line is in your best interest. For a refresher, here are some spots to look for:

Look-ahead spot: In basketball, you'll find these more often than not. On Friday night, the Los Angeles Lakers, who are in shambles, take on the pathetic Charlotte Bobcats. The Lakers are not playing with any momentum right now and could come out very flat against a team that is decidedly less talented.

On Sunday, the Lakers go to Miami to play the Heat in a nationally televised game. It's hard to envision the Lakers giving a max effort against a lesser team when they have had this game with Miami circled for quite a while.

For one from the ice, the Anaheim Ducks, who have been one of the biggest surprises of the season so far, play in Dallas on Friday night. They'll have a quick turnaround and play Saturday in St. Louis, in a matchup of two of the Western Conference's best teams. The Ducks and Stars are a division rival, so it's not that they won't be up for this game, but with a measuring stick game on Saturday, it might not be their best effort.

Letdown spot: On Friday, the Detroit Pistons host the San Antonio Spurs. With the Pistons eight games out of a playoff spot, it seems unlikely that they will factor in the race. But, a game at home against the Spurs could bring out some additional fans and could give the Pistons a good opportunity to get a quality win in front of the home crowd. On Saturday, they play the second of a back-to-back in Milwaukee. Milwaukee has a lot to play for, currently in a tie for the seventh seed in the Eastern Conference. They'll smell blood in the water against the Pistons, who are 5-18 on the road and off a game against a very formidable opponent.

In this case, you would expect a strong effort from the Pistons against the Spurs. If they win or lose a close game, you could get a little bit of value on Milwaukee, who will be well-rested and playing with a little more motivation.

Take Charlotte on Saturday. After hosting the Lakers on Friday night, they have to head to Philadelphia after the game. With a lottery pick in play for the Bobcats, it's hard to imagine they care much about Saturday's game. It'll be hard to lay a sizable number with a bad 76ers team, but the spot is terrible for Charlotte.

As these things pertain to college basketball, the best place to find these situational plays is in the major conferences. Isolate teams who are in a very tough stretch in their schedule and taking on formidable opponents. Take Ohio State as an example. After a very difficult loss to Michigan in overtime, Ohio State hosts Indiana on Sunday. After that, they play Northwestern at home on Thursday. Then, the Buckeyes go to Wisconsin and host Minnesota and Michigan State in their next three conference games. Northwestern is a middle of the pack team and easily the worst of the five teams the Buckeyes play in the next five games. Ohio State has been a very strong home team this season, posting a 12-1 mark. The line might be inflated a little bit, while Ohio State has every reason to play down to their opponent. Northwestern could

stay within the number all game long.

As an example of a game that already happened, Providence beat Cincinnati 54-50 on Wednesday night. Cincinnati hosts Pittsburgh on Saturday. The Big East schedule is a grind, and the Bearcats have played close games with the ranked teams and played down to the lesser competition in the conference. Providence won outright as a 4.5-point underdog. Expect that in conferences like the ACC, Big East, and Big 10, where teams like Maryland, Providence, and Iowa can contend because the schedule takes so much out of the good teams.

Looking ahead to circle spots like this is essential. You can come up with a number in your mind that you like and bet it if the spread allows you to. That's one of the things I don't like about betting the winter sports. You really have to look in advance to find the right spots to play. I'm pretty busy, so it's hard to do that, but it's essential to being a good handicapper in those sports. That's why the professional sports bettors have to work so hard at their craft. They're looking days in advance, before lines are even released, to find plays that they like.

My suggestion to you at this time of year would be to limit your overall number of plays and isolate plays with teams, specifically favorites, in bad spots. You can almost always find one on a given night and that's the way to exploit the sportsbooks after football season.