BracketBusters are happening this weekend and it's a perfect time to try and take advantage of some lines that may be off. Unlike conference play, the books are trying to set lines for games featuring teams that have not, in most cases, played each other recently. The teams were paired together and scheduled as matchups that *should* be close, because the teams are relatively equal and from conferences of similar strength. But, as always, if you look beneath the surface, there are going to be opportunities of value.

For one thing, understand that these games don't mean the same to both teams. A team who is on the bubble for an at-large berth to the NCAA Tournament will need this game more than a team that is solidly in the field and just needs another resume-padding victory. Also, watch for this to be a look-ahead or letdown spot for certain teams. Obviously, BracketBusters is made up of teams who aren't from the power conferences, because those teams are going to get postseason bids anyway. Teams who have a big conference game on the horizon, like Akron and Ohio, may be looking ahead at a game that will mean more in the grand scheme of things.

The two big Friday night BracketBuster matchups are Akron hosting North Dakota State and Long Beach State hosting Stephen F. Austin. Akron has an enormous matchup on the horizon with Ohio next Wednesday night. North Dakota State is a decent opponent, but not a team that will make or break their tournament resume. While they do need a win, since they only have two top-100 RPI wins this season, they may not cover the number. At time of writing, BetOnline is the only book with a posted number and they have Akron as a 6.5-point favorite. That number is a little lower than I expected, which should tell you something right off the bat.

North Dakota State is not a bad team, necessarily, ranked 83rd in the RPI rankings. But, they are just 7-6 on the road and are just 4-3 in their last seven games. They win with defense, holding their opponents to just 55.8 points per game. In other words, they're a very difficult team to blow out because they play great team defense. The Summit League has a very wide gap between the good teams and the bad teams, so the best way to approach NDSU is to look at

how they fared against the top of the conference. It's not good. So, the line here is just 6.5 against a team on a 17-game win streak, with one home loss? Seems fishy, no?

The Stephen F. Austin at Long Beach State game is very intriguing. The Lumberjacks have played nobody this season. They are 22-3 and have played the 313th-ranked schedule in the country. Long Beach State, on the other hand, is ranked below SFA in RPI and is 0-6 against top-100 RPI teams. Their schedule is 165th, despite playing at Arizona, Ohio State, Syracuse, UCLA and hosting North Carolina. They lost all of those games by 15 or more points.

Long Beach State is definitely the more battle-tested team and has been in this situation before. They're just a two-point home favorite in this game. This looks to be a spot where Stephen F. Austin is getting too good of a number because of their record. All three of their losses have come on the road and their reputation is based on one top 50 win over Oklahoma.

Both of these lines look off, but for different reasons.

No lines are posted yet, but let's take a look at Saturday and focus on a 1 p.m. tip-off between Pacific and Western Michigan. For Pacific, this game starts at 10 a.m. on their schedule. They have left California three times all season for a road game. In those three road games, they beat Xavier and lost to Gonzaga and Hawaii. They are just 2-8 on the road this season, while Western Michigan is 10-1 at home.

The Broncos have struggled when they have stepped up in class. Up until their back-to-back losses to Ball State and Bowling Green, the Broncos were a top-100 RPI team. This is a chance for them to beat a quality opponent outside of their conference and get some confidence back before they face Toledo in what could decide the MAC West Division championship on Wednesday night.

It's hard to imagine the Tigers ready to play at 10 a.m. on Saturday and falling behind early may make it hard for them to cover.

Not only are these BracketBusters games exciting, but they're a good team to get a look at

teams that might be pulling upsets in the tournament. The Creightons, St. Mary's, and Wichita States of college basketball will be on display and on national television. Don't read too much into one game, but you can get information on these teams and see how they do in the spotlight. Every time you get a chance to scout for a potential future wager, you should take it. These teams are the ones that will be trendy picks come March and if you can isolate them as good or bad teams to bet on, you could give yourself an advantage.