



The betting world can be cruel. The best in the world hit 55-56% of the time and the greatest approach 60%. That means that they're wrong 40-45% of the time. Bad luck, bad bounces, turnovers, late injuries, all of these things can turn what seems like a great bet into a loser. A handicapper has to train his mind to focus on the long-term and know that variance is just part of the game.

That's not easy. Sometimes, it's just a snowball effect, where every turnover goes against you and you're getting absolutely no breaks. Periods of time that seem to go on forever. Under bets are screwed by pick sixes and blown coverages. Over bets are ruined by red zone turnovers. Every team you back loses the turnover battle.

One of the strongest weapons that a handicapper has is his mindset. "Scared money don't make money" is something a lot of gamblers like to say. Betting without confidence can become a real slippery slope. You start to chase. You step out of your comfort zone and bet on teams and games that you are unfamiliar with. You over-extend yourself with the night games, making late wagers trying to recoup some of the day's losses.

We've all been there. Maybe not with gambling, but with anything else. Whether it's a matter of ego or just outright desperation, the mind fools us into thinking we can make a bad situation better by doing more, when doing less is actually the answer. Bad stretches are inevitable in betting. A great week can immediately be erased by the week from hell. The best thing to do there is to simply go back to basics. Focus on your strengths. Back teams that you know and teams that are going to give a maximum effort every time they touch the field.

It's at this point where you can try to get away with simply capping situations. Is it a letdown spot? Is it a look-ahead spot? Is it a sandwich spot? Is there a travel scenario that seems

unfavorable? It may not even be something where you have to break down individual matchups of wide receiver vs. defensive back, offensive line vs. defensive line, or compare and contrast the special teams. It could be something as simple as playing the common sense percentages. A team playing against an inferior opponent with a marquee game the following week is unlikely to give a maximum effort. The line may already reflect that situation, but even still, there could be value in that number.

Another issue that plagues bettors during a bad stretch is trying to get too cute. Looking to find spots where a bad team might cover or a spot to fade a public darling even though they seem to be the right side. I've fallen into that trap at times and it's one of those things where you spend the rest of the night kicking yourself in the ass when that team fails to cover. It's a confidence thing. It's almost like a hand of poker. Everybody wants to make the "hero call", a play where a hand that has no business winning is able to beat a straight bluff. In the back of the player's mind, he knows that there's very little chance that his pocket 10s will hold up against a board full of face cards and a player who has bet aggressively. But, that one play, that hero call, commands respect. When it wins, you're either a lucky idiot or a brilliant mind. Betting on bad teams is that same way. Generally, they're going to lose and not cover, your proverbial 10s crushed by a set of kings. It's that stroke of the ego that a lack of confidence so badly needs.

Betting takes maturity and discipline, both of which are learned over time, no matter how old you are and no matter how long you've been betting. Even the best are susceptible to periods of hesitation, second-guessing, and frustration. How you handle those situations is how you become a good handicapper. It's not about falling off the horse and lying on the ground. It's about falling off the horse, dusting yourself off, and taking the horse on an easier path. Work your way back to the harder route when you're confident that you can handle it.

Frankly, this week's column could be more for my own psyche. Sometimes, we simply need a reminder of what the end goal is. Betting is a long-term proposition. Being 58% one year does not guarantee success the following year. Similarly, being 46% one year does not indicate that the future will be as bleak.

The overused cliché in sports is to say that something is a marathon and not a sprint. While that's true, some people may prefer to look at everything as a series of sprints grouped together to form a marathon. Call it variance, call it dumb luck, call it whatever you want when you're winning – hell, call it a good read – but know that short-term fortune does not equal long-term success. On the flip side, short-term struggles do not equal long-term failure.

The first and only goal in that situation is to get back to what works. Get back to the basics. Get back to the win column. You're never as good or bad as your last bet. Confidence is king in the world of sports betting. Find yours and you'll find winners.