

# TURNOVERS = TURNAROUND by PHIL STEELE

Turnovers can have a big impact on games and on a team's season. They can also lead to many misleading final scores.

Every year in my College Football Preview, I write an article entitled "Turnovers = Turnaround," and it describes how teams that have good fortune one year (plus double-digit turnovers) usually have a weaker record the next season. It also shows how teams that suffer misfortune (-10 or more TO's) usually have a much better record the next year. In the article, I go over many examples of how turnovers can have an impact on the college game.

Turnovers have the same impact on the pro game. The NFL record for TO's in a playoff game is 9 and that occurred in Super Bowl XXVII. Buffalo out FD'd Dallas, but of course was dominated on the scoreboard 52-17.

One of the best examples happened to the Steelers in 2002. The Steelers dominated the Texans with an amazing 24-3 FD and 422-47 yardage edge. As you would expect the game was a rout with a final score of 24-6. Surprisingly, the team with just 47 yards (Houston) won! The difference was special teams and Pittsburgh's -4 TO margin.

In 2014 Houston had massive 420-216 yd and 27-15 FD edges over St Louis. Like the Pittsburgh/Houston example above, the stats say the game should have been a rout and it was 38-13. Shockingly, though, it was the Rams who came away with the win as they had a +4 TO margin incl 2 defensive return TD's.

LY Arizona had 348-296 yd & 25-16 FD edges over Buffalo. The Bills, however were +4 in TO's & won 33-18.

Turnovers can not only make a difference in a game, but can make the difference between a winning and losing season and here are some NFL teams that were plus double-digit turnovers one year and saw their records plummet the next season:

The **1997 Kansas City Chiefs** only outgained foes by an average of 19 ypg over the course of the season, but finished with an outstanding 13-3 record. As a good comparison, the 2001 Pittsburgh Steelers were 13-3 and outgained their foes by an average of 110 ypg! The reason the Chiefs were so successful, despite being far from dominant, had to do with being +12 in TO's. The next year while Kansas City was still on the positive side they were just +1 TO's and dropped to just 7-9.

The **1998 Atlanta Falcons** did the "Dirty Bird" dance all the way to the Super Bowl, finishing the regular season with a 14-2 record. The Falcons were very fortunate as they were +20 in TO's en route to their super season. The next year featured a startling turnaround in the TO column as they plummeted to -17 (37 net TO difference) and it also featured a startling turnaround in the win column, as they fell to just 5-11.

No one can doubt that good fortune smiled on the **Chicago Bears in 2001**. They were below-average statistically (#27 off, #15 def) yet led the NFL in fewest points allowed. Chicago also benefitted from two late interception returns for TD's in win games that appeared lost. Overall they were +13 in the turnover column and they finished the reg season 13-3. The next year they were -7 in TO's and "Da Bears" finished just 4-12.

In **2003**, six teams made my "going down" list including BOTH Super Bowl participants (TB and OAK) and those two BOTH missed the playoffs and had losing records! Kansas City, Tennessee and San Francisco were the 3 others on the list and after going a combined 32-16 (67%) they were just 14-34 (29%) in 2003 for 18 fewer wins.

More recently, in **2012** there were 3 teams that made the list in SF (+28 TO's), GB (+24) and NE (+17). While all 3 made the playoffs each saw their record drop with the Packers going from 15-1 to 11-5.

In **2013**, 7 teams made the list and of the 7, five saw their record get weaker, one stayed the same and only one improved their record (Seattle).

In **2014**, 5 teams made the list. Three had worse records, including San Francisco (from 12-4 to 8-8) while two stayed the same (Philadelphia and Indianapolis).

In **2015**, there were just 3 teams on the list but one was the defending Super Bowl champion Patriots. Two (NE & HOU) had the same records, while GB was worse (12-4 to 10-6).

In **2016**, there were just two teams that fell into the category in the Panthers and the Chiefs. While the Chiefs surprisingly moved their record from 11-5 to 12-4 in Andy Reid's ball-control offense, the defending NFC Champ Panthers dropped all the way down to 6-10 (15-1 in '15).

**This year** there are just 3 teams that fit that criteria in previously mentioned Kansas City (12-4), Oakland (12-4) & New England (14-2).

## GOING DOWN?

Kansas City +16

Oakland +16

New England +12

Teams that benefitted from double digit turnovers rarely get a repeat of that good fortune. I have proven this in the college game. Here are the results since 1991 (adjusted to 11 to account for more games).

COLLEGE TEAMS WITH +11 OR MORE TO'S			
Total Weaker	Improved	Same	
358	232 (64.8%)	83 (23.2%)	43 (12.0%)

I figured that the NFL would not show as much of a turnaround, but was actually surprised to see the NFL has had MORE turnarounds. First of all, the NFL season is 16 games long as opposed to 12-14 for college. With the extra NFL games, I upped the criteria from double-digit TO's to plus or minus 12 turnovers, or .75 per game. Here are the results from the last 25 years.

SINCE 1991 NFL TEAMS WITH +12 OR MORE TO'S			
Total Weaker	Improved	Same	
90	65 (72.2%)	13 (14.4%)	12 (13.3%)

NFL TEAMS WITH +12 OR MORE TO'S THE L10Y			
Total Weaker	Improved	Same	
39	31 (79.4%)	3 (7.7%)	5 (12.8%)

Let's take a look at some teams who had terrible luck (lots of turnovers) in one year then drastically improved the next year without those turnovers.

The **1996 NY Jets** were a league low -20 in TO's and not so amazingly they were just 1-15. The 1997 season brought in the disciplinarian coaching style of Bill Parcells and the team's TO margin improved greatly going from -20 to +3. Did this have an impact on their win total? The 1997 Jets not only improved by EIGHT games in the win column, but finished with a winning record at 9-7!! Now that's a Turnovers=Turnaround story.

After the '09 season, 4 teams made my **2010** "Going Up" list with St Louis improving by 6 wins, Detroit by 4, Oakland by 3 & Cleveland remained the same.

The **2011** article was certainly abnormal as both Miami and Jacksonville saw their records drop from 2010 (both HC's let go) while Buffalo improved their win total by 2.

In **2012** seven teams were -12 or more TO's with Tampa Bay on top of the chart coming off a -16 TO season. The Bucs improved by 3 wins and were one of four overall that improved.

In **2013**, 7 teams appeared in my "Going Up" box and 4 improved their record incl the before mentioned Chiefs and Eagles while 3 stayed the same.

Five teams appeared on my list in **2014**. As mentioned earlier, Houston improved significantly, while Detroit and Minnesota both improved. On the other hand, the TO=turnaround system did not reach the Big Apple as both the Giants and Jets actually had worse records.

In **2015**, just three teams made the list: Oakland (3-13), Washington (4-12) and New Orleans (7-9),

none of which were on either list prior to last year. The Raiders & Redskins improved, while the Saints stayed the same.

**Last year**, again just 3 teams are on the list: Dallas (4-12), Baltimore (5-11) & Tennessee (3-13). All 3 improved their record by a combined 18 games!

**This year** there are 4 teams that fit the criteria in the NY Jets (5-11), Chicago (3-13), Jacksonville (3-13) & Cleveland (1-15).

## GOING UP?

NY Jets -20

Chicago -20

Jacksonville -16

Cleveland -12

As I previously stated, if a team received bad breaks the year before, they will usually be heading for better fortune the following year. Here are the relevant numbers for college football dating back to 1991.

COLLEGE TEAMS WITH -10 OR MORE TO'S			
Total Weaker	Improved	Same	
302	61 (20.2%)	205 (67.9%)	36 (11.9%)

Once again I was very surprised the NFL game yielded even higher percentages. I again made the adjustment to -12 or more TO's and here are the results from the last 23 years.

SINCE 1991 NFL TEAMS WITH -12 OR MORE TO'S			
Total Weaker	Improved	Same	
95	20 (21.5%)	63 (67.7%)	12 (12.9%)

While I've given you numerous examples of teams that have improved and were much weaker because of turnovers, the Ravens have been the poster child for this article. From 2004-'08 they rotated seasons with a positive and negative double-digit TO margin.

'04	+11	TO's	9-7		
'05	-10	TO's	6-10	-3	net wins
'06	+15	TO's	13-3	+7	net wins
'07	-17	TO's	5-11	-8	net wins
'08	+13	TO's	11-5	+6	net win

Keep checking [PhilSteele.com](http://PhilSteele.com) for weekly articles as I'll be including many more interesting notes that I hope will make your football season more enjoyable.

Team	2016 TO Edge		Team	2016 TO Edge
Kansas City	+16	2016 TURNOVER EDGE	Tennessee	0
Oakland	+16		Arizona	0
New England	+12		Washington	0
Atlanta	+11		Detroit	-1
Minnesota	+11		NY Giants	-2
Green Bay	+8		Carolina	-2
Philadelphia	+6		New Orleans	-3
Buffalo	+6		San Francisco	-5
Dallas	+5		Indianapolis	-5
Pittsburgh	+5		Houston	-7
Baltimore	+5	LA Chargers	-7	
Cincinnati	+3	LA Rams	-11	
Denver	+2	Cleveland	-12	
Tampa Bay	+2	Jacksonville	-16	
Miami	+2	Chicago	-20	
Seattle	+1	NY Jets	-20	