

Close Wins, Close Losses by Phil Steele

Much like a stock broker, my job is to find value. As with every article, the trends I've discovered in college football translate well to the NFL and it is no different when a professional team is coming off a season with multiple net close wins or net close losses.

I use a touchdown or less as a base for my calculation of a "close" win or loss, because if a team won or lost by a touchdown or less, they were usually just one play away from a different outcome. There are instances in which a game would be added or deleted. An example is if a team trailed by 13 points and scored a td on the final play, they were never within "one play" of winning. I also use the term "net" close games, which takes the close wins minus the close losses for a final "net" number. As an example, last year the Chicago Bears had 2 close wins and 5 close losses finishing with -3 "net" close games. Conversely, the Pittsburgh Steelers had 8 close wins and 2 close losses finishing with +6 "net" close games.

In the FBS, when a team had 2+ net close losses, they were more fortunate in the following season. In fact, in the last 17 years there have been 427 FBS teams in this category and 76.8% have had the same or better record the next year. As that number increases from two, the percentages improve. To illustrate, 77 teams from that same time span have had 4+ net close losses with 88.3% having the same or better record the following season.

I then looked at how college teams perform the season after having multiple net close wins. In the last 14 years, 448 teams have had 2+ net close wins, with 74.5% having the same or weaker record in the following season. The more net close wins a team had, the higher chance of a weaker record: teams with 4+ close wins have had a weaker or the same record 78 of 91 times or 85.7%.

I was excited to translate this to the NFL. Originally I started using -2 or more net wins, but the results weren't overly illustrative in the NFL so I changed the baseline to -3 or more. Since 2008 there have been 62 teams that were -3 or more net close wins (more close losses than wins) with 53 having posted better or the same record (85.5%). The '16 Chargers became just the 4th team over the last 10 seasons to have -7 or more net close games.

When looking at teams that were +2 or more net close games (more close wins than losses), it's occurred 95 times the last 9 seasons. Out of the 95 times, 62 times the team's record was weaker (65.3%) while being weaker or the same 85.3% of the time. In 2016 Houston and Miami both finished +6 net close wins & both finished with worse records LY. This year Carolina and Pittsburgh come in with +6 net close wins, meaning they will have a 75% chance of having a weaker record than '17.

When you look at both categories, those teams with +4 or -4 net close games have a noticeable jump in the success rate. Combined, it has happened 37 times with the teams record moving as expected 28 times (75.7%) and moving as expected or staying the same 31 times (83.8%).

Last 9 Years -3 or more Close Games

	Total Last 9 Years	Stronger Next Year	Weaker Next Year	Same Next Year	% BETTER or Same Next Yr
-8 Net Close Games Previous Yr	1	1	0	0	100.0%
-7 Net Close Games Previous Yr	3	3	0	0	100.0%
-6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	4	4	0	0	100.0%
-5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	8	7	1	0	87.5%
-4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	23	18	5	0	78.3%
-3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	23	19	3	1	87.0%
-3 or More Net Close Games	62	52	9	1	85.5%

	2017 Close Win	2017 Close Loss	2017 Net Close Games	
Cleveland	0	6	-6	Going Up
Baltimore	1	5	-4	
NY Giants	1	5	-4	
Tampa Bay	3	7	-4	
Chicago	2	5	-3	
Houston	1	4	-3	
Indianapolis	3	6	-3	
Kansas City	2	5	-3	
San Francisco	2	5	-3	
New Orleans	1	3	-2	

NY Jets	3	5	-2
Denver	2	3	-1
Detroit	3	4	-1
Jacksonville	2	3	-1
LA Chargers	3	4	-1
Seattle	4	5	-1
Cincinnati	4	4	0
Dallas	2	2	0
Minnesota	3	2	+1
Oakland	4	3	+1

Atlanta	6	4	+2	Going Down
New England	4	2	+2	
Philadelphia	4	2	+2	
LA Rams	4	2	+2	
Tennessee	6	4	+2	
Buffalo	5	2	+3	
Green Bay	5	2	+3	
Miami	5	2	+3	
Washington	4	1	+3	
Arizona	6	2	+4	

Carolina	7	1	+6
Pittsburgh	8	2	+6

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH -3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '14-'16

Team	Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Tampa Bay	'14	-8	+4
San Diego	'16	-7	+4
Philadelphia	'16	-6	+6
Jacksonville	'16	-5	+7
NY Giants	'15	-5	+5
San Diego	'15	-5	+1
Cleveland	'15	-4	-2
Dallas	'15	-4	+9
Carolina	'16	-4	+5
San Francisco	'16	-4	+4
Chicago	'14	-4	+1
Seattle	'15	-3	+0.5
NY Jets	'14	-3	+6
Oakland	'14	-3	+4
Tennessee	'14	-3	+1
NY Giants	'14	-3	0

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH +3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '14-'16

Team	Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Oakland	'16	+7	-6
Houston	'16	+6	-5
Miami	'16	+6	-4
Denver	'15	+6	-3
Carolina	'15	+5	-9
NY Giants	'16	+5	-8
Dallas	'16	+5	-4
Detroit	'14	+5	-4
Green Bay	'14	+5	-2
San Francisco	'14	+4	-3
Arizona	'15	+3	-5.5
Indianapolis	'15	+3	0
Dallas	'14	+3	-8
San Diego	'14	+3	-5
Denver	'14	+3	0
New England	'14	+3	0
Arizona	'14	+3	+2

Last 9 Years +2 or more Net Close Games

	Total Last 9 Yrs	Weaker Next Yr	Stronger Next Yr	Same Next Yr	% WEAKER or Same Next Yr
+8 Net Close Games Previous Yr	1	0	0	1	100.0%
+7 Net Close Games Previous Yr	2	2	0	0	100.0%
+6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	4	3	1	0	75.0%
+5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	11	11	0	0	100.0%
+4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	14	10	1	3	92.9%
+3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	23	12	4	7	82.6%
+2 Net Close Games Previous Yr	40	24	8	8	80.0%
+2 or More Net Close Games	95	62	14	19	85.3%

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