

SLIPPING AND SLIDING

By Phil Steele

In my College Preview Magazine each year I devise many different formulas which look at teams that had good or bad fortune the previous year. The charts usually show those teams which had the good fortune generally do not have the same results the following season. I call this method "Slipping and Sliding." As I noted the last few years in the Turnovers=Turnaround article, results have been even stronger for the NFL than they have for college football. The reason is that there is far more parity in the NFL. In fact, the difference between the best and worst team in the entire NFL is more narrow than the difference between the best and worst team within most college football conferences.

First, I examined how teams fared after making a great improvement the previous year. I charted the NFL teams and noted which teams made the biggest improvement in their record from the previous season. As I expected, the teams that made the biggest improvement generally slide back some the following year. In the NFL from 2002-'12 there were 93 teams that improved their record by 3 wins or more from the previous season. Of those 93 teams only 16 had a better record, 10 had the same record and 67 had a weaker record, meaning that a team did not improve or had a weaker record 82.8% of the time. The 2004 Steelers & Chargers had the biggest improvements from early in my research. Pittsburgh went from 6-10 to 15-1 (+9 wins) while San Diego went from 4-12 to 12-4 (+8 wins). In the season after their big improvement, the Steelers slid by 4 wins (15-1 to 11-5) and the Chargers by 3 wins (12-4 to 9-7). Six years ago was the largest improvement to date as Miami was coming off a 1-15 season and went 11-5 in '08 (+10 wins). They slid back to 7-9 the next season (-4 wins). Tampa Bay was +7 wins from '09 to '10, was #1 on the list and as expected dropped to 4-12 (-6 wins).

Looking at the article's performance over the last few seasons, in 2011 ten teams made the "Going Down" chart and only one managed to improve their record. In '12, nine teams made the "Going Down" list, while only 5 had a weaker record, it's not too shabby when the "worst" season is 56%. In '13, 7 of the 8 teams listed saw their record either stay the same or get weaker. In '14 four of the six teams on the list had a worse or same record, led by Carolina and New Orleans with declines of 4.5 and 4 wins, respectively. In '15 **ALL SEVEN** teams on the list saw their records get worse or stay the same. In '16, 4 of the 6 teams listed saw their record take a decline. LY 7 of the 8 teams listed saw their records get worse or stay the same led by the Dallas Cowboys who dropped from 13-3 to 9-7 (-4 wins).

Since 2008 there have been a total of 73 teams that had 3 or more wins compared to the previous season. Of those teams, 60 have seen their record drop or remain the same. Looking at the "Going Down" box to the right, there are 8 teams from 2017 that had their record improve by 3 wins or more and thus have an 82.2% chance of having the same or a weaker record this year.

Generally these charts are a two-way street and it has been just as good of an indicator going in the opposite direction. As I did with teams that showed a 3+ game improvement, I took the teams that had 3+ fewer wins from the previous year and found that the numbers weren't quite as strong as I would have liked. By tweaking the chart to use teams that had a decrease of 4 or more wins from the previous season, I got the results I was seeking.

Since 2002 there have been 92 teams whose win total dropped by 4 or more from the previous year and 68 (73.9%) have had a better record the following year. Of the teams that had a weaker record by 6 or more wins, an amazing 30 out of 32 (93.8%) improved their record. LY 4 teams made the list and 3 teams improved with the NY Jets remaining the same. TY there are 8 teams that make the list.

Since 2006, there have been 21 teams on the "Going Down" list that were +6 or more in wins from the previous year and 17 of those 21 teams had weaker records by an average of 4.4 wins. On the flip side, there have been a combined 22 teams on the "Going Up" list in the last 8 seasons whose record has fallen by 6 or more wins from the previous year and 21 of those have improved. Obviously when teams improve a great deal, they find themselves going from one list to the other.

Here are all the teams since 2006 that have either improved or worsened by 6 or more wins. Combined, these two scenarios are 38-1-4 (97.4%)!

Teams s/'06 that were: -6 or more wins

2013	Houston	2	-10	+7
2017	Carolina	6	-9	+5
2013	Atlanta	4	-9	+2
2007	Baltimore	5	-8	+6
2016	Dallas	4	-8	+9
2011	Indianapolis	2	-8	+9
2008	Detroit	0	-7	+2
2008	Green Bay	6	-7	+5
2006	Tampa Bay	4	-7	+5
2013	Washington	3	-7	+1
2012	New Orleans	7	-6	+4
2012	Detroit	4	-6	+3
2010	Minnesota	6	-6	-3
2008	Cleveland	4	-6	+1
2008	Seattle	4	-6	+1
2007	Chicago	7	-6	+2
2008	Jacksonville	5	-6	+2
2011	Tampa Bay	4	-6	+3
2010	Carolina	2	-6	+4
2010	Cincinnati	4	-6	+5
2007	NY Jets	4	-6	+5
2009	Tampa Bay	3	-6	+7

Going Up

2017 teams with 4 or FEWER wins than 2016. These teams have had an improved record 73.9% of the time.

NYG	-8 wins
OAK	-6 wins
HOU	-5 wins
DAL	-4 wins
DEN	-4 wins
IND	-4 wins
MIA	-4 wins
TB	-4 wins

Going Down

2017 teams that had 3 or MORE wins from 2016. These teams have seen their record drop or remain the same 82.2% of the time.

JAX	+7 wins
LAR	+7 wins
PHI	+6 wins
CAR	+5 wins
MIN	+5 wins
LAC	+4 wins
NO	+4 wins
SF	+4 wins

Teams s/'06 that were: +6 or more wins

2008	Miami	11	+10	-4
2013	Kansas City	11	+9	-2
2017	Dallas	13	+9	-4
2014	Seattle	12	+9	-2
2012	Indianapolis	11	+9	0
2016	Carolina	15	+8	-9
2012	Minnesota	10	+7	-5.5
2006	Baltimore	13	+7	-8
2010	Tampa Bay	10	+7	-6
2006	New Orleans	10	+7	-3
2008	Atlanta	11	+7	-2
2011	San Fran	13	+7	-1.5
2014	Houston	9	+7	0
2007	Cleveland	10	+6	-6
2016	NY Jets	10	+6	-5
2006	NY Jets	10	+6	-6
2010	St. Louis	7	+6	-5
2010	Kansas City	10	+6	-3
2008	Baltimore	11	+6	-2
2013	Philadelphia	10	+6	0
2017	Tennessee	9	+6	0

TY 6 teams make this article for a 2nd straight season. Carolina was on last year's "Going Up" list and are on this year's "Going Down" list, while 5 (DAL, NYG, OAK, MIA & TB) took the opposite path. By comparison, here are some recent teams who have made the same list in consecutive years & how they have done

DENVER	4-12 ('10)	8-8 (+4 '11)	13-3 (+5 '12)	13-3 (0 '13)
DETROIT	2-14 ('09)	6-10 (+4 '10)	10-6 (+4 '11)	4-12 (-6 wins '12!)
INDIANAPOLIS	14-2 ('09)	10-6 (-4 '10)	2-14 (-8 '11)	11-5 (+9 wins '12!)
HOUSTON	12-4 ('12)	2-14 (-10 '13)	9-7 (+7 '14)	9-7 (0 '15)

The combined lists go from a total of 12 teams in last year's article to 16 this year. Hopefully your favorite team is one of the 8 teams on the "Going Up" list, giving them a 73.9% chance at a better record!