

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 for that is there is far more parity in the NFL. In fact the difference between the best and worst NFL team is less than the difference between the best and worst team in most college football conferences.

First I will examine how teams fared after making a great improvement the previous year. I charted the NFL teams over the last 9 years 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-'10 there were 76 teams that improved their record by 3 wins or more from the previous season. Of those 76 teams only 11 had a better record, 8 were the same and 57 had a weaker record meaning that a team did not improve or had a weaker record 86% of the time. The biggest improvements prior to 2007 were made by the 2004 Pittsburgh Steelers, who improved by 9 net wins (6-10 to 15-1), and the 2004 SD Chargers, who improved by 8 net wins (4-12 to 12-4). In the season after their big improvement, the Steelers slid by 4 net wins (15-1 to 11-5) and SD by 3 net wins (12-4 to 9-7). Four years ago we had the largest improvement yet as Miami was coming of a 1-15 season. After being +10 net wins (11-5 in 2008) they fell back to 7-9 in 2009 finishing -4 net wins. Tampa Bay was +7 wins in 2010 (10-6) and was #1 on the list LY and as expected dropped to 4-12 (-6 wins).

In 2008 the chart was almost perfect. Nine teams made the list and only ONE improved their record and that was by 1 game. In 2009 six teams made the "Going Down" chart of which 5 had a weaker record and 1 that had the same record. LY 10 teams made the list and only one (Detroit) managed to improve their record. The top 3 teams all saw their wins dropped by a combined 14 wins last year!

Here are the NINE teams for 2011 that had their record improve by 3 net wins or more and these teams have a 75% chance of 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 the net wins I took the teams that had 3 or more net losses from the previous year and found that the numbers weren't quite as strong. By tweaking the chart to use teams that had 4 or more net losses from the previous season I got the results I wanted.

Since 2002 there have been 64 teams that have had 4 or more net losses from the previous year and 47 (73%) have had a better record. **Of the teams that had 6 net losses an amazing 21 out of 23 (91%) improved their record.** LY's results saw 5 of the 8 teams improve their record. Cincinnati and Carolina were on top of the chart with +6 losses and the Panthers went 6-10 LY which was +4 wins while the Bengals were +5 wins and made the playoffs at 9-7! Both now make my "Going Down" box this year.

Over the L4Y there have been 8 teams that were +6 or more in net wins from the previous year ("Going Down") and all 8 teams had weaker records by at least 2 games each. Last year there were 3 teams that fit the criteria. On the flip side in the last 4 seasons there have been a combined 11 teams that have had 6+ net losses from the previous year and 10 have improved. Obviously when teams improve a great deal they find themselves going from one list to the other. Baltimore was 5-11 and was a "Going Up" team in 2007 and improved to 11-5 so they made "Going Down" and did so finishing 9-7 in 2009. Cleveland was the opposite as they were on our "Going Down" list in 2008 after a 10-6 season. They went 4-12 and made our "Going Up" list in 2009 and improved.

Eight teams are listed in this article for a 2nd straight season. Cincinnati, Carolina, Denver and Arizona were on last year's "Going Up" and this year's "Going Down" while Tampa Bay and St Louis are the opposite. Detroit makes the "Going Down" list for a 2nd straight year and since 1997 only GB has done that (+4 wins '06 & +5 in '07) and they were -9 wins in 2008. Indy makes the "Going Up" list for a 2nd straight year which is also just the second time that's happened S/'97. Carolina was -4 losses in '09 & -6 in 2010 and finished the 2011 season at 6-10 which was +4 wins.

The combined lists go from a total of 18 teams in last years article to just 12 this year. Hopefully your favorite team is one of the 3 teams on the "Going Up" list giving them a 73% chance of a better record.

2011 teams that had 3 or more net wins from 2010:

San Francisco	+7 wins	Detroit	+4 wins
Cincinnati	+5 wins	Houston	+4 wins
Green Bay	+5 wins	Arizona	+3 wins
Carolina	+4 wins	Tennessee	+3 wins
Denver	+4 wins		

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2011 teams that had 4 or more net losses than the previous year:

Indianapolis	+8 losses
Tampa Bay	+6 losses
St Louis	+5 losses

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