

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 Jacksonville Jaguars had 2 close wins and 6 close losses finishing with -4 "net" close games. Conversely, the Dallas Cowboys 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 18 years there have been 455 FBS teams in this category and 77.1% have had the same or better record the next year. As that number increases from two, the percentages improve. To illustrate, 81 teams from that same time span have had 4+ net close losses with 88.9% 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 15 years, 479 teams have had 2+ net close wins, with 73.7% 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 83 of 98 times or 84.7%.

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 71 teams that were -3 or more net close wins (more close losses than wins) with 61 having posted better or the same record (85.9%). 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 107 times the last 10 seasons. Out of the 107 times, 70 times the team's record was weaker (65.4%) while being weaker or the same 85.0% of the time. In 2016 Houston and Miami both finished +6 net close wins & both finished with worse records in '17. This year Dallas comes in with +6 net close wins, meaning they will have a 83% chance of having a weaker record than '18.

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 41 times with the teams record moving as expected 31 times (75.6%) and moving as expected or staying the same 35 times (85.4%).

Last 10 Years -3 or more Close Games

	Total Last 10 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	5	5	0	0	100.0%
-5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	8	7	1	0	87.5%
-4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	26	20	5	1	80.8%
-3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	28	23	4	1	82.1%
-3 or More Net Close Games	71	59	10	2	85.9%

	2018 Close Win	2018 Close Loss	2018 Net Close Games	
Carolina	2	7	-5	Going Up
Jacksonville	2	6	-4	
NY Giants	4	8	-4	
NY Jets	1	5	-4	
Detroit	1	4	-3	
Tampa Bay	3	6	-3	

Arizona	2	4	-2
Baltimore	2	4	-2
Chicago	6	4	-2
Cincinnati	2	4	-2
Denver	4	6	-2
Green Bay	3	5	-2
San Francisco	3	5	-2
Atlanta	4	4	0
Buffalo	3	3	0
Cleveland	4	4	0
Minnesota	2	2	0
Philadelphia	6	6	0
Seattle	5	5	0
Houston	6	5	+1
Indianapolis	4	3	+1
Kansas City	5	4	+1
New England	3	2	+1
Tennessee	4	3	+1
Oakland	3	2	+1
Pittsburgh	6	5	+1

Washington	4	1	+3
LA Chargers	5	1	+4
Miami	5	1	+4
New Orleans	5	1	+4
LA Rams	6	1	+5
Dallas	8	2	+6

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH -3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '15-'17

Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
'16	-7	+4
'17	-6	+7.5
'16	-6	+6
'16	-5	+7
'15	-5	+5
'15	-5	+1
'15	-4	+9
'16	-4	+5
'16	-4	+4
'17	-4	+2
'17	-4	+1
'17	-4	0
'15	-4	-2
'17	-3	+7
'17	-3	+7
'17	-3	+6
'17	-3	+2
'15	-3	+0.5
'17	-3	-2

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH +3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '15-'17

Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
'16	+7	-6
'16	+6	-5
'16	+6	-4
'17	+6	-4
'17	+6	-3.5
'15	+6	-3
'15	+5	-9
'16	+5	-8
'16	+5	-4
'17	+4	-5
'15	+3	-5.5
'17	+3	-3
'17	+3	-0.5
'15	+3	0
'17	+3	0
'17	+3	+1

Last 10 Years +2 or more Net Close Games

	Total Last 10 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	6	5	1	0	83.3%
+5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	11	11	0	0	100.0%
+4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	15	11	1	3	93.3%
+3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	27	14	5	8	81.5%
+2 Net Close Games Previous Yr	45	27	9	9	80.0%
+2 or More Net Close Games	107	70	16	21	85.0%

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- Team pages for every NFL Team