

Close Wins, Close Losses

Much like a stock broker, our job is to find value. As with every article, the trends we'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.

We use a touchdown or less as a base for our 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. We 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 Houston Texans had 2 close wins and 7 close losses finishing with -5 "net" close games. Conversely, the Pittsburgh Steelers had 7 close wins and 2 close losses finishing with +5 "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 20 years there have been 521 FBS teams in this category and 74.8% have had the same or better record the next year. As that number increases from two, the percentages improve. To illustrate, 91 teams from that same time span have had 4+ net close losses with 89.0% having the same or better record the following season.

We then looked at how college teams perform the season after having multiple net close wins. In the last 20 years, 544 teams have had 2+ net close wins, with 73.5% 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 99 of 108 times or 91.7%.

We were excited to translate this to the NFL. Originally we started using -2 or more net wins, but the results weren't overly illustrative in the NFL so we changed the baseline to -3 or more. Since 2008 there have been 84 teams that were -3 or more net close wins (more close losses than wins) with 70 having posted better or the same record (83.3%). The '19 Chargers and Bengals became just the 5th and 6th team over the last 12 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 123 times the last 12 seasons. Out of the 123 times, 80 times the team's record was weaker (65.0%) while being weaker or the same 84.6% of the time. Last year Houston came in with +5 net close wins, meaning they will have a 85% chance of having a weaker or the same record than '19. They went from 10-6 to 4-12 moving that mark up to 84.6% heading into 2021.

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 60 times with the teams record moving as expected 44 times (73.3%) and moving as expected or staying the same 45 times (75.0%).

Last 12 Years -3 or more Close Games

	Total Last 12 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	5	5	0	0	100.0%
-6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	5	5	0	0	100.0%
-5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	10	7	3	0	80.0%
-4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	30	23	6	1	79.3%
-3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	33	27	5	1	84.8%
-3 or More Net Close Games	84	68	14	2	83.3%

2020 Close Win

2020 Close Win	2020 Close Loss	2020 Net Close Games	Going Up
Atlanta	1	8	-7
Houston	2	7	-5
Cincinnati	1	5	-4
Jacksonville	1	5	-4
Carolina	3	6	-3
Washington	2	5	-3
Baltimore	2	4	-2
Denver	4	6	-2
Philadelphia	3	5	-2
San Francisco	1	3	-2
Dallas	3	4	-1
LA Chargers	5	6	-1
Miami	2	3	-1
New England	3	4	-1
Arizona	4	4	0
Detroit	4	4	0
Las Vegas	4	4	0
LA Rams	3	3	0
NY Jets	2	2	0
Tampa Bay	3	3	0
Green Bay	3	2	+1
Minnesota	5	4	+1
NY Giants	5	4	+1
Chicago	6	4	+2
Indianapolis	4	2	+2
New Orleans	5	3	+2
Buffalo	4	1	+3
Seattle	7	3	+4
Cleveland	7	2	+5
Pittsburgh	7	2	+5
Tennessee	7	2	+5
Kansas City	8	0	+8

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH -4 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '16-'19

Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Cincinnati '19	-7	+2.5
LA Chargers '19	-7	+2
San Diego '16	-7	+4
Cleveland '17	-6	+7.5
Philadelphia '16	-6	+6
Jacksonville '16	-5	+7
Carolina '18	-5	-2
Dallas '19	-5	-2
Detroit '19	-4	+1.5
Carolina '16	-4	+5
San Francisco '16	-4	+4
NY Giants '17	-4	+2
Baltimore '17	-4	+1
Tampa Bay '17	-4	0
Jacksonville '18	-4	+1
NY Giants '18	-4	-1
NY Jets '18	-4	+3

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH +4 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '16-'19

Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Oakland '16	+7	-6
Seattle '19	+7	+1
Houston '16	+6	-5
Miami '16	+6	-4
Carolina '17	+6	-4
Pittsburgh '17	+6	-3.5
Dallas '18	+6	-2
NY Giants '16	+5	-8
Dallas '16	+5	-4
LA Rams '18	+5	-4
New Orleans '19	+5	-1
Houston '19	+5	-6
Green Bay '19	+5	0
Baltimore '19	+4	-3
NY Jets '19	+4	-5
Arizona '17	+4	-5
LA Chargers '18	+4	-7
Miami '18	+4	-2
New Orleans '18	+4	0

Last 12 Years +2 or more Net Close Games

	Total Last 12 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	3	2	1	0	66.7%
+6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	7	6	1	0	85.7%
+5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	15	14	0	1	100.0%
+4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	20	15	1	4	95.0%
+3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	30	15	6	9	80.0%
+2 Net Close Games Previous Yr	47	28	10	9	78.7%
+2 or More Net Close Games	123	80	19	24	84.6%

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- Team pages for every NFL Team