

NFL 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 LA Chargers had 3 close wins and 8 close losses finishing with -5 "net" close games. Conversely, the Pittsburgh Steelers had 9 close wins and 2 close losses finishing with +7 "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 23 years there have been 616 FBS teams in this category and 75.8% have had the same or better record the next year. As that number increases from two, the percentages improve. To illustrate, 109 teams from that same time span have had 4+ net close losses with 89.0% 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, 649 teams have had 2+ net close wins, with 74% 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 118 times or 83.9% success rate.

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 103 teams that were -3 or more net close wins (more close losses than wins) with 83 having posted better or the same record (80.5%). Over the last 6 years teams that were -2 Net Losses improved or had the same record 18 of 24 times for a 75% success rate.

When looking at teams that were +2 or more net close games (more close wins than losses), it's occurred 152 times the last 15 seasons. **Out of the 152 times, 128 time the team was weaker or the same 84.2% of the time.** Last year Minnesota was off a season of +9 Net Close wins (a new record) and dropped from 13-4 to 7-10 last year. In the chart to the right I list the last 3 years and only Tennessee improved their record but it was because they played an extra game (11-5 to 12-5).

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 56 times with the teams record moving as expected 43 times (76.7%) and moving as expected or staying the same 49 times (87.5%).

Last 15 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	6	6	0	0	100.0%
-6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	5	5	0	0	100.0%
-5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	16	12	4	0	75.0%
-4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	32	25	6	1	81.2%
-3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	43	31	10	2	76.7%
-3 or More Net Close Games	103	80	20	3	80.5%

2023 Close Win
2023 Close Loss
2023 Net Close Games

Team	2023 Close Win	2023 Close Loss	2023 Net Close Games	Going Up
LA Chargers	3	8	-5	Going Up
Minnesota	4	8	-4	
New England	4	8	-4	
Arizona	2	5	-3	
Carolina	2	5	-3	
Chicago	2	5	-3	
San Fran	1	3	-2	
Tennessee	4	6	-2	
Washington	3	5	-2	
Atlanta	4	5	-1	
Baltimore	3	4	-1	
Green Bay	4	5	-1	
New Orleans	3	4	-1	
Tampa Bay	3	4	-1	
Buffalo	6	6	0	
Kansas City	4	4	0	
NY Jets	4	4	0	
Las Vegas	5	5	0	
LA Rams	4	4	0	
Dallas	3	2	+1	
Denver	5	4	+1	
Jacksonville	3	2	+1	
Miami	4	3	+1	
NY Giants	4	3	+1	
Cincinnati	5	3	+2	
Detroit	5	3	+2	
Seattle	6	4	+2	
Indianapolis	6	3	+3	
Cleveland	6	2	+4	
Houston	7	3	+4	
Philadelphia	7	3	+4	
Pittsburgh	9	2	+7	

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH -3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '21-'22

Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
'21	-5	+3
'22	-5	+4
'22	-5	+3
'22	-5	+2
'22	-3	0
'22	-3	+4
'21	-3	-2
'21	-3	+6
'21	-3	-.5
'21	-3	-4
'21	-3	+5
'21	-3	+2

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH +3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '20-'22

Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
'22	+9	-6
'20	+8	-2
'21	+6	-5
'21	+6	0
'20	+5	+1*
'20	+5	-3
'22	+5	-3
'21	+5	-4
'20	+5	-3
'22	+4	-5
'20	+4	-5
'22	+4	-3
'21	+4	0
'22	+3	-4
'21	+3	-7
'20	+3	-2

Last 15 Years +2 or more Net Close Games

	Total Last 15 Yrs	Weaker Next Yr	Stronger Next Yr	Same Next Yr	% WEAKER or Same Next Yr
+8 Net Close Games Previous Yr	3	2	0	1	100.0%
+7 Net Close Games Previous Yr	3	2	1	0	66.7%
+6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	9	8	1	0	88.9%
+5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	20	18	1	1	95.0%
+4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	24	18	1	5	95.8%
+3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	33	18	6	9	81.8%
+2 Net Close Games Previous Yr	60	36	14	10	76.6%
+3 or More Net Close Games	92	66	10	16	89.1%

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