

# TURNOVERS = TURNAROUND by PHIL STEELE

Turnovers can have a big impact on games and on a team's season. They can also lead to many misleading final scores.

Every year in my College Football Preview, I write an article entitled "Turnovers = Turnaround," and it describes how teams that have good fortune one year (plus double-digit turnovers) usually have a weaker record the next season. It also shows how teams that suffer misfortune (-10 or more TO's) usually have a much better record the next year. In the article, I go over many examples of how turnovers can have an impact on the college game.

Turnovers have the same impact on the pro game. The NFL record for TO's in a playoff game is 9 and that occurred in Super Bowl XXVII. Buffalo out FD'd Dallas, but of course was dominated on the scoreboard 52-17.

One of the best examples happened to the Steelers in 2002. The Steelers dominated the Texans with an amazing 24-3 FD and 422-47 yardage edge. As you would expect, the game was a rout with a final score of 24-6. Surprisingly, the team with just 47 yards (Houston) won! The difference was special teams and Pittsburgh's -4 TO margin.

Turnovers can not only make a difference in a game, but can make the difference between a winning and losing season and here are some NFL teams that were plus double-digit turnovers one year and saw their records plummet the next season:

No one can doubt that good fortune smiled on the **Chicago Bears in 2001**. They were below-average statistically (#27 off, #15 def) yet led the NFL in fewest points allowed. Chicago also benefitted from two late interception returns for TD's to win games that appeared lost. Overall they were +13 in the turnover column and they finished the reg season 13-3. The next year they were -7 in TO's and "Da Bears" finished just 4-12.

In 2003, six teams made my "going down" list including BOTH Super Bowl participants (TB and OAK) and those two BOTH missed the playoffs and had losing records! Kansas City, Tennessee and San Francisco were the 3 others on the list and after going a combined 32-16 (67%) they were just 14-34 (29%) in 2003 for 18 fewer wins.

In 2017, three teams made the list, Kansas City (12-4 to 10-6), Oakland (12-4 to 6-10) and New England (14-2 to 13-3) all three teams had weaker records the next season.

In 2022 four teams made the list with Dallas having the same record and Green Bay and Tampa both falling from 13-4 to 8-9, and Indianapolis going from 9-8 to 4-12.

IN 2023 two teams had +11 or more TO's the previous year and Philadelphia and San Fran both had a weaker record.

Last year six teams had benefitted from +10 TO's or more in 2023 and NONE had a better record in 2024 with San Fran taking the biggest drop going from 12-5 to 6-11.

Teams that benefitted from double digit turnovers rarely get a repeat of that good fortune. I have proven this in the college game. Here are the results since 1991 (adjusted to 11 to account for more games).

## COLLEGE TEAMS WITH +10 OR MORE TO'S

Total	Weaker	Improved	Same
517	377 (73%)	141 (27%)	44 (8%)

I figured that the NFL would not show as much of a turnaround, but was actually surprised to see the NFL has had MORE turnarounds. First of all, the NFL season is 16 (now 17) games long as opposed to 12-14 for college. With the extra NFL games, I raised the criteria from double-digit TO's to plus or minus 11 turnovers, or .75 per game. Here are the results from the last 27 years.

## SINCE 1991 NFL TEAMS WITH +11 OR MORE TO'S

Total	Weaker	Improved	Same
121	86 (71%)	19 (16%)	16 (13%)

This trend has been even better when I trim it down

to just the last 14 years. Here is the record for teams that had benefitted from +11 TO's or more over the last 14 years.

## NFL TEAMS WITH +12 OR MORE TO'S THE LAST 14 YEARS

Total	Weaker	Improved	Same
69	51 (74%)	9 (13%)	9 (13%)

## GOING DOWN?



Buffalo +24  
Pittsburgh +16  
LA Chargers +12  
Minnesota +12  
Green Bay +12  
(Philadelphia +11)

Let's take a look at some teams who had terrible luck (lots of turnovers) in one year then drastically improved the next year without those turnovers.

The **1996 NY Jets** were a league low -20 in TO's and not so amazingly, they were just 1-15. The 1997 season brought in the disciplinarian coaching style of Bill Parcells and the team's TO margin improved greatly going from -20 to +3. Did this have an impact on their win total? The 1997 Jets not only improved by EIGHT games in the win column, but finished with a winning record at 9-7!! Now that's a Turnovers=Turnaround story.

In 2006, two teams came off seasons in which they finished -24 in TO's. New Orleans was coming off a disastrous 3-13 season. In 2006 they were +7 in TO's and they posted a 7 game turnaround finishing 10-6. The Packers also benefitted from improving to +4 in turnovers with an 8-8 record in '06 after going 4-12 in 2005.

In 2018, Cleveland (0-16) was off -25 in TO's and improved to 7-8, and Houston (4-12) off -12 in TO's improved to 11-5!

In 2019 San Fran was off a -25 TO year and went from 4-12 to 13-3. In 2021 Jacksonville was -20 in TO's and 3-14 the next year 2022 they went 9-8.

Last year Washington was at the top of this list as they were -14 in TO's in 2023 and they went from 4-13 to 12-5! Minnesota was -12 in TO's in 2023 and 7-10 and last year improved to +12 and 14-3! Last year there were 8 teams coming off a season of -9 TO's or more and only one had a weaker record in 2024.

As I previously stated, if a team received bad breaks the year before, they will usually be heading for better fortune the following year. Here are the relevant numbers for college football dating back to 1991.

## COLLEGE TEAMS WITH -10 OR MORE TO'S

Total	Improved	Weaker	Same
416	278 (67%)	94 (22%)	44 (11%)

Once again the NFL game yielded very close percentages to college. I made the adjustment to -12 or more TO's and here are the results from the last 26 years.

## SINCE 1991 NFL TEAMS WITH -12 OR MORE TO'S

Total	Improved	Weaker	Same
123	85 (69%)	23 (19%)	15 (12%)

While I've given you numerous examples of teams that have improved and were much weaker because of turnovers, the Ravens were the poster child for this article. From 2004-'08 they rotated seasons with a positive and negative double-digit TO margin.

Year	TO's	Record	Result
'04	+11	9-7	
'05	-10	6-10	-3 net wins
'06	+15	13-3	+7 net wins
'07	-17	5-11	-8 net wins
'08	+13	11-5	+6 net win.

Since 2018 the results have been tremendous with 24 teams in that span having -12 TO's or more the previous year and only TWO improving their record and 83% having a better record the next year!

## SINCE 2018 NFL TEAMS WITH -12 OR MORE TO'S

Total	Weaker	Improved	Same
24	2 (8.3%)	20 (83.4%)	2 (8.3%)

Here are this years teams that make my Going Up Box after being -12 Turnovers or more last year.

## GOING UP?

Cleveland -22  
Las Vegas -16  
Tennessee -16  
Jacksonville -15



Keep checking **PhilSteele.com** for weekly articles as I'll be including many more interesting notes that I hope will make your football season more enjoyable.

Team	2024 TO Edge	2023 TO Edge	2024 Turnover Edge	2023 TO Edge
NY Jets	-2			
New Orleans	-2			
Arizona	-3			
Dallas	-4			
Indianapolis	-4			
Miami	-5			
Tampa Bay	-5			
Carolina	-5			
Atlanta	-6			
Seattle	-7			
NY Giants	-8			
San Francisco	-10			
New England	-11			
Jacksonville	-15			
Tennessee	-16			
Las Vegas	-16			
Cleveland	-22			
Buffalo	+24			
Pittsburgh	+16			
Green Bay	+12			
LA Chargers	+12			
Minnesota	+12			
Philadelphia	+11			
Houston	+10			
Chicago	+8			
Detroit	+7			
Baltimore	+6			
Denver	+6			
LA Rams	+6			
Kansas City	+6			
Cincinnati	+3			
Washington	+1			