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 Chicago had 3 close wins and 7 close losses finishing with -4 "net" close games. Conversely, the Minnesota Vikings had 8 close wins and 1 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 24 years there have been 646 FBS teams in this category and 75.6% have had the same or better record the next year. As that number increases from two, the percentages improve. To illustrate, 113 teams from that same time span have had 4+ net close losses with 89.3% 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, 682 teams have had 2+ net close wins, with 74.4% 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 119 of 139 times or 85.6% 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 88 having posted better or the same record (80.7%). Over the last 7 years teams that were -2 Net Losses improved or had the same record 19 of 27 times for a 73% 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 161 times, 133 time the team was weaker or the same 82.6% of the time**. In 2022 Minnesota was off a season of +9 Net Close wins (a new record) and dropped from 13-4 to 7-10 in 2023. Last year Cleveland had +4 Net Close wins in 2023 and went from 11-6 to just 3-14. In the chart to the right I list the last 4 years.

This year Kansas City sets a new record with +10 NET CLOSE WINS last year!!!

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 126 times with the teams record moving as expected 100 times (79.3%) and moving as expected or staying the same 111 times (88.7%).

Last 16 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	17	13	4	0	76.4%
-4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	34	26	6	2	84.6%
-3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	46	33	11	2	77.9%
-3 or More Net Close Games	109	84	21	4	80.7%

	2024 Close Win	2024 Close Loss	2024 Net Close Games
Jacksonville	3	10	-7
NY Giants	1	7	-6
Denver	1	6	-5
NY Jets	2	7	-5
Chicago	3	7	-4
San Francisco	2	6	-4
Cincinnati	4	7	-3
New England	3	6	-3
New Orleans	2	5	-3
Tampa Bay	2	5	-3
Tennessee	2	5	-3
Arizona	3	5	-2
Cleveland	3	4	-1
Dallas	4	5	-1
Las Vegas	3	4	-1
Baltimore	5	5	0
Green Bay	5	5	0
Miami	3	3	0
Pittsburgh	4	4	0
LA Chargers	4	4	0
Atlanta	6	5	1
Carolina	4	3	1
Buffalo	5	3	+2
Houston	6	3	+3
Indianapolis	7	4	+3
Seattle	6	2	+4
LA Rams	8	4	+4
Detroit	7	2	+5
Philadelphia	7	2	+5
Washington	8	2	+6
Minnesota	8	1	+7
Kansas City	10	0	+10

Going Up / *Going Down*

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH -3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '21-'23

	Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Buffalo	'21	-5	+3
Chicago	'22	-5	+4
Denver	'22	-5	+3
Oakland	'22	-5	+2
LA Chargers	'23	-5	+6
Minnesota	'23	-4	+7
New England	'23	-4	0
Arizona	'22	-3	0
Cleveland	'22	-3	+4
Denver	'21	-3	-2
Detroit	'21	-3	+6
Houston	'21	-3	-.5
Indianapolis	'21	-3	-4
Minnesota	'21	-3	+5
Seattle	'21	-3	+2
Arizona	'23	-3	+4
Carolina	'23	-3	+3
Chicago	'23	-3	-2

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

	Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Minnesota	'22	+9	-6
Kansas City	'20	+8	-2
Tampa Bay	'21	+6	-5
Pittsburgh	'21	+6	0
Tennessee	'20	+5	+1*
Pittsburgh	'20	+5	-3
Philadelphia	'22	+5	-3
Oakland	'21	+5	-4
Cleveland	'20	+5	-3
Tennessee	'22	+4	-5
Seattle	'20	+4	-5
Kansas City	'22	+4	-3
Atlanta	'21	+4	0
Washington	'22	+3	-4
LA Rams	'21	+3	-7
Buffalo	'20	+3	-2

Last 16 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	4	2	1	1	75.0%
+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	27	19	2	6	92.5%
+3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	34	19	6	9	82.3%
+2 Net Close Games Previous Yr	63	36	16	11	74.6%
+3 or More Net Close Games	97	68	11	18	88.6%