

SLIPPING AND SLIDING

By Phil Steele

In my College Preview Magazine each year I devise many different formulas which look at teams that had good or bad fortune the previous year. The charts usually show those teams which had the good fortune generally do not have the same results the following season. I call this method "Slipping and Sliding." As I noted the last few years in the Turnovers=Turnaround article, results have been even stronger for the NFL than they have for college football. The reason is that there is far more parity in the NFL. In fact, the difference between the best and worst team in the entire NFL is more narrow than the difference between the best and worst team within most college football conferences.

First, I examined how teams fared after making a great improvement the previous year. I charted the NFL teams and noted which teams made the biggest improvement in their record from the previous season. As I expected, the teams that made the biggest improvement generally slide back some the following year. In the NFL from 2002-'12 there were 93 teams that improved their record by 3 wins or more from the previous season. Of those 93 teams only 16 had a better record, 10 had the same record and 67 had a weaker record, meaning that a team did not improve or had a weaker record 82.8% of the time. The 2004 Steelers went from 6-10 to 15-1 (+9 wins) while the 2004 Chargers went from 4-12 to 12-4 (+8 wins). In the season after their big improvement, the Steelers slid by 4 wins (15-1 to 11-5) and the Chargers by 3 wins (12-4 to 9-7). Six years ago was the largest improvement to date as Miami was coming off a 1-15 season and went 11-5 in '08 (+10 wins). They slid back to 7-9 the next season (-4 wins).

Since 2008 there have been a total of 130 teams that had +3 or more wins compared to the previous season. Of those teams, 103 (79.2%) have seen their record drop or remain the same (7 of 8 last year). Looking at the "Going Down" box to the right, there are 7 teams from 2025 that had their record improve by 3 wins or more and thus have an 79.2% chance of having the same or a weaker record this year.

Generally these charts are a two-way street and it has been just as good of an indicator going in the opposite direction. As I did with teams that showed a 3+ game improvement, I took the teams that had 3 or more fewer wins from the previous year and found that the numbers weren't quite as strong as I would have liked. Last year there were 9 teams with 3 more losses than in '23 and 6 improved, with 2 weaker and one the same. By tweaking the chart to use teams that had a decrease of 4 or more wins from the previous season, I got the results I was seeking.

Since 2002 there have been 136 teams whose win total dropped by 4 or more from the previous year and 101 (74.2%) have had a better record the following year. Of the teams that had a weaker record by 6 or more wins, an amazing 38 out of 42 (90.4%) improved their record.

Since 2018, there have been 58 teams on the "Going Down" list that were +3 or more in wins from the previous year and only 15 of them managed to improve their record for a 74.1% success rate. Since 2018 there have been 44 teams that had their record drop by 4 wins or more the previous year and only 6 of those teams had a weaker record the next year so 38 of the 44 improved or had the same record for a 86.3% success rate! **The box to the right shows 27 teams that were -5 or more wins from the previous year and only two had a weaker record the next year (92.5%!).** There are 27 teams since 2018 that have made the +5 or more win box and only TWO were able to improve their record.

It is rare for a team to make the the same list in consecutive years. It has only happened 8 times in the last 7 years and previously all 7 times the teams had the desired effect But last year Detroit became the first to buck that trend and were +3 a third straight year!!!!. As shown to the right Detroit has gone from 3 wins in 2021 to 9 in 2022, 12 in '23 and 15 in '24!! . Ironically back in 2012 they were coming off a similar situation and plummeted from 10 to 4 wins. Last year Detroit dropped to 9 (-6) .

Teams since '18 that were: -5 or more wins

		Prev Yr	+/-
2018	NY Giants	3	-8 +2
2025	Cleveland	3	-8 +2
2023	LA Rams	5	-7 +5
2021	San Fran	6	-7 +2
2020	LA Chargers	5	-7 +2
2023	Arizona	4	-7 0
2018	Oakland	6	-6 -2
2025	San Fran	6	-6 +6
2021	Houston	4	-6 0
2024	Minnesota	7	-6 +7
2025	Dallas	7	-5 +5
2025	Jacksonville	4	-5 +9
2023	Tennessee	7	-5 -1
2023	Tampa Bay	8	-5 +1
2022	Seattle	7	-5 +2
2021	Philadelphia	4	-5 +5
2021	NY Jets	2	-5 +2
2021	New England	7	-5 +3
2019	Minnesota	8	-5 +2
2019	Jacksonville	5	-5 +1
2021	Jacksonville	1	-5 +2
2023	Indianapolis	4	-5 +5
2018	Houston	4	-5 +7
2023	Green Bay	8	-5 +1
2019	Arizona	3	-5 +2
2024	LA Chargers	5	-5 +6
2024	Carolina	2	-5 +3

Teams since '18 that were: +5 or more wins

2020	San Fran	13	+9 -7
2024	Washington	13	+8 -7
2019	Chicago	12	+7 -4
2019	Cleveland	7	+7 -1
2020	Green Bay	13	+7 0
2019	Houston	11	+7 -1
2024	Minnesota	14	+7 -5
2018	Jacksonville	10	+7 -5
2024	Houston	10	+7 0
2024	LA Chargers	11	+6 0
2022	Cincinnati	10	+6 +2
2022	Dallas	12	+6 0
2023	Detroit	9	+6 +3
2019	Indianapolis	10	+6 -3
2023	Jacksonville	9	+6 0
2018	Philadelphia	13	+6 -4
2018	Carolina	11	+5 -4
2021	Cleveland	11	+5 -3
2021	Miami	10	+5 -1
2023	Minnesota	13	+5 -6
2018	Minnesota	13	+5 -5
2023	NY Giants	9	+5 -3
2023	Philadelphia	14	+5 -3
2022	Philadelphia	9	+5 +5
2024	LA Rams	10	+5 0
2024	Indianapolis	9	+5 -1

Going Up

2025 teams with 4 or FEWER wins than 2024. These teams have had an improved record 80% of the time.

KCITY	-9 wins
WASH	-7 wins
DET	-6 wins
ARIZ	-5 wins
MINN	-5 wins
BALT	-4 wins
CINC	-3 wins
PHILA	-3 wins

Going Down

Teams that had 3 or MORE wins in 2025 than 2024. These teams have seen their record drop or remain the same 79% of the time.

NENG	+10 wins
JAX	+9 wins
SF	+6 wins
CHIC	+6 wins
SEA	+4 wins
DEN	+4 wins
CAR	+3 wins

DETROIT
2-14 ('09)
10-6 (+4 '11)

6-10 (+4 '10)
4-12 (-6 wins '12)

Arizona

14-2 ('09)

10-6 (-4 '10)

2-14 (-8 '11)

11-5 (+9 wins '12)

Arizona

5-10 ('19)

8-8 (+3 '20)

11-6 (+3 '11)

4-13 (-7 wins '22)

Chargers

5-11 ('19)

9-7 (+4 '20)

12-4 (+3 '21)

5-11 (-7 wins '19)

DETROIT

3-13 ('21)

9-8 (+6 '22)

12-5 (+3 '23)

15-2 (+3 '24)