

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 Kansas City had 1 close wins and 9 close losses finishing with -8 "net" close games. Conversely, the Denver Broncos 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 25 years there have been 682 FBS teams in this category and 75.3% have had the same or better record the next year. As that number increases from two, the percentages improve. To illustrate, 117 teams from that same time span have had 4+ net close losses with 88.9% 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 25 years, 711 teams have had 2+ net close wins, with 74.5% 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 126 of 147 times or 85.7% 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 120 teams that were -3 or more net close wins (more close losses than wins) with 91 having posted better or the same record (80.0%). Over the last 8 years teams that were -2 Net Losses improved or had the same record 27 of 38 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 170 times the last 17 seasons. **Out of the 170 times, 140 time the team was weaker or the same 87.5% 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. In '24 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. Last year **Kansas City set a new record with +10 NET CLOSE WINS in '24 and dropped from 15-2 to 6-11!!!**

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 139 times with the teams record moving as expected 110 times (79.7%) and moving as expected or staying the same 121 times (87%).

Last 17 Years -3 or more Close Games

	Total Last 16 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	7	7	0	0	100.0%
-6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	6	6	0	0	100.0%
-5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	19	14	5	0	73.7%
-4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	36	28	6	2	83.3%
-3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	51	35	13	3	74.5%
-3 or More Net Close Games	120	91	24	5	80.0%

2025
Close
Win

2025
Close
Loss

2025
Net Close
Games

BEST OF THE BEST TEAMS WITH -3 OR MORE CLOSE GAMES FROM '22-'24

	2025 Close Win	2025 Close Loss	2025 Net Close Games
Kansas City	1	9	-8
Arizona	2	8	-6
NY Giants	1	6	-5
Washington	1	5	-4
Baltimore	1	4	-3
Cleveland	3	6	-3
Detroit	2	5	-3
Indianapolis	3	6	-3
New Orleans	2	5	-3
Las Vegas	2	5	-3
Cincinnati	3	5	-2
NY Jets	3	5	-2
LA Rams	4	5	-1
Tennessee	2	3	-1
Atlanta	5	5	0
Green Bay	4	4	0
Tampa Bay	6	6	0
Miami	4	3	+1
Minnesota	3	2	+1
Seattle	4	3	+1

Going Up

	Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Jacksonville	'24	-7	+9
NY Giants	'24	-6	+1
Chicago	'22	-5	+4
Denver	'22	-5	+3
Oakland	'22	-5	+2
Denver	'24	-5	+4
NY Jets	'24	-5	-2
LA Chargers	'23	-5	+6
Chicago	'24	-4	+6
San Fran	'24	-4	+6
Minnesota	'23	-4	+7
New England	'23	-4	0
Arizona	'22	-3	0
Cleveland	'22	-3	+4
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-'24

	2025 Close Win	2025 Close Loss	2025 Net Close Games
Buffalo	5	3	+2
Dallas	4	2	+2
Houston	6	4	+2
Chicaco	7	4	+3
Pittsburgh	6	3	+3
Carolina	7	3	+4
Jacksonville	6	2	+4
New England	7	3	+4
Philadelphia	8	4	+4
LA Chargers	6	2	+4
San Francisco	5	1	+4
Denver	9	2	+7

Going Down

	Year	Close Games	Wins Next Yr
Kansas City	'24	+10	-9
Minnesota	'22	+9	-6
Kansas City	'20	+8	-2
Minnesota	'24	+7	-5
Tampa Bay	'21	+6	-5
Pittsburgh	'21	+6	0
Washington	'24	+6	-7
Pittsburgh	'20	+5	-3
Philadelphia	'22	+5	-3
Oakland	'21	+5	-4
Cleveland	'20	+5	-3
Philadelphia	'24	+5	-3
Detroit	'24	+5	-6
Tennessee	'22	+4	-5
Seattle	'20	+4	-5
Kansas City	'22	+4	-3

Last 17 Years +2 or more Net Close Games

	Total Last 16 Yrs	Weaker Next Yr	Stronger Next Yr	Same Next Yr	% WEAKER or Same Next Yr
+8 Net Close Games Previous Yr	4	3	0	1	100.0%
+7 Net Close Games Previous Yr	5	3	1	1	80.0%
+6 Net Close Games Previous Yr	10	9	1	0	90.0%
+5 Net Close Games Previous Yr	22	20	1	1	95.4%
+4 Net Close Games Previous Yr	29	19	4	6	89.4%
+3 Net Close Games Previous Yr	36	19	7	10	83.0%
+2 Net Close Games Previous Yr	64	37	16	11	76.2%
+3 or More Net Close Games	106	73	14	19	87.5%

PHILSTEELE.COM

- Last 29 Years Matchups For Every Game
- Weekly NCAA Box Scores
- Projected Conference Standings
- Projected Non-Conf Standings
- Weekly Injury Updates
- NCAA & NFL Power Ratings
- Pass Efficiency Defense Rankings
- Special Teams Ratings
- Bowl Projections Updated Weekly

**LOADED
WITH
INFO YOU
WOULDN'T FIND
ANYWHERE
ELSE!**

- Individual Offensive Game-by-Game Stats
- Starters Lost - Updated Every Week
- Mid & Post Season All-Conf/American Tms
- Future Schedules
- Phil's Daily Blog
- Links to College & NFL team websites plus all the major newspapers.
- Team pages for every FBS/FCS Team
- Team pages for every NFL Team