

OLD AND NEW STYLE WINNING PERCENTAGES

by Andy Piascik

In 1972, the National Football League changed the way it calculates winning percentages. Where prior to that ties were disregarded, beginning that year tie games were instead counted as half a win and half a loss. So while the 1971 Chiefs finished with a 10-3-1 record and a winning percentage of .769 (10 divided by 13), the 1972 Raiders finished with the same record and a winning percentage of .750 (10.5 divided by 14).

The change was a sound one, as a tie is really more half a win and half a loss than a game not played. To cite one admittedly extreme hypothetical example that was possible under the old system, a team with a 1-0-13 record would have finished ahead of a team with a 13-1 record. Under the new system, such a team would finish not with a 1.000 winning percentage, but one of .536 that far more accurately reflects its season.

Are there situations where the final standings would have been different had the new style been in use beginning in 1920? Yes, there were five such occasions, most recently in 1949. That year, these were the final standings in the NFL's Western Division:

<u>Team</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>PCT.</u>
Los Angeles Rams	8	2	2	.800
Chicago Bears	9	3	0	.750
Chicago Cardinals	6	5	1	.545
Detroit Lions	4	8	0	.333
Green Bay Packers	2	10	0	.167

The Rams won the division and went on to play the Eagles in the Championship Game. Had the current method of calculation been in use, the Rams would have finished with a .750 winning percentage (9 divided by 12) and would have had to play a playoff with the Bears.

The situation was similar in 1935 when the Lions finished 7-3-2 and the Packers 8-4 in the West. Under the old system, Detroit's winning percentage was .700; under the new one it would have been .667, the same as Green Bay's, necessitating a playoff.

Not surprisingly, the other three instances are all from before the two division format was established in 1933. That's mainly because (1) games then were generally very low-scoring, resulting in a far higher percentage of ties than in later eras; (2) all teams (20 or more from 1924-26) were grouped together with no divisions, a situation where there's a greater likelihood that two or more teams will be logjammed at the top of the standings; and (3) teams played different numbers of games, sometimes drastically so, another scenario that tends toward a greater number of similar but slightly different final records.

Here are the other seasons, with the new-style winning percentages in parenthesis:

<u>1925 - Team</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>PCT.</u>
Chicago Cardinals	11	2	1	.846 (.821)
Pottsville Maroons	10	2	0	.833 (.833)

<u>1930 - Team</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>PCT.</u>
Green Bay Packers	10	3	1	.769 (.750)
New York Giants	13	4	0	.750 (.750)

<u>1932 - Team</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>PCT.</u>
Chicago Bears	6	1	6	.857 (.692)
Portsmouth Spartans	6	1	4	.857 (.727)
Green Bay Packers	10	3	1	.769 (.750)

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The tie atop the standings between the Bears and Spartans in 1932 brought about the first playoff game in pro football, one of the most famous games in history. That playoff led in part to the introduction the following year of the NFL Championship Game. The standings here are as they were at the end of the regular season. The official final standings reflect the result of that playoff and thus have the Bears at 7-1-6 and the Spartans at 6-2-4.

Pottsville was ruled ineligible for the championship before the end of the 1925 season so the difference in that case is moot. A hypothetical Green Bay championship in 1932 would have been the Packers' fourth in a row - provided they had beaten the Giants in 1930 in their hypothetical playoff game.

The NFL's 1963 Eastern Conference race was one year when a weird winning percentage situation almost arose. Entering the final day of the season that year, the standings of the top four teams were as follows:

<u>Team</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>PCT.</u>
New York Giants	10	3	0	.769
Pittsburgh Steelers	7	3	3	.700
Cleveland Browns	9	4	0	.692
St. Louis Cardinals	9	4	0	.692

The Giants and Steelers closed the season with a game against each other. For that reason, Cleveland and St. Louis were already mathematically eliminated because they would have remained behind the New York-Pittsburgh winner even with victories. Had the Giants and Steelers played a tie, the best the Browns and Cardinals could have done was finish half a game behind New York.

Had the Steelers beaten the Giants, they would have won the conference title on the basis of a .727 winning percentage (8-3-3). With a loss, the Giants would have finished 10-4 (.714) in a second place tie with the Browns, who did, in fact, close the season with a victory (the Cardinals lost their finale).

If the current rule had been in force, however, the picture would have been very different. In that scenario, the Steelers would have been the odd team out entering the final day, as their 7-3-3 record would have translated into a .654 winning percentage (8 1/2 divided by 13). Even with a win, Pittsburgh would not have been able to surpass .714, as 8-3-3 under the new rules comes out to .679 (9 1/2 divided by 14).

Cleveland and St. Louis, on the other hand, would still have been alive entering the final week, and either could have gained a tie for first with a victory and a Pittsburgh win over New York. Had the Giants lost and both the Browns and Cardinals won, the result would have been a three-way tie and the teams would have engaged in two weeks worth of playoffs, with the survivor moving on to play for the championship. As things turned out, New York won the showdown with the Steelers 33-17 and finished atop the East.

Overtime for regular season games was introduced in the NFL two years after the new style way of calculating winning percentages. As a result, tie games are rare. With far fewer ties, no situation has arisen since the 1972 change in which a team that finished ahead of another wouldn't have under the old rules.

There were numerous occasions before 1972 where the order in which teams drafted would have been different had the current rule been in force. One that stands out is 1938. Under the new system, the 6-3-2 Giants would have had the same .636 winning percentage as the 7-4 Lions and Packers. But because New York's winning percentage was calculated to be .667, they missed a chance to win a coin toss for a higher slot and thus drafted after Detroit and Green Bay.

In the first round, the Lions selected Alex Wojciechowicz with the sixth pick, the Packers picked Cecil Isbell with the seventh, and the Giants picked fullback George Karamatic with the eighth. New York traded Karamatic to the Redskins and he played just one season in the NFL.

Isbell, by contrast, was a top NFL quarterback in an abbreviated five year career and guided the Packers to an NFL championship in 1939 - over the Giants. New Jersey native Wojciechowicz was very popular in New York City while playing at Fordham University. He played 13 years and was a mainstay on a chief New York rival, the Eagles, during their glory years of the late 1940's. With Mel Hein holding down the center spot, perhaps the Giants wouldn't have drafted Wojciechowicz anyway. But under the old rules, they never had a chance at either him or Isbell.

VIKINGS MISS VALHALLA

By Timothy Holland

The history of the Minnesota Vikings began as an original member of the American Football League in 1959. But when Minnesota ownership heard that the NFL would expand into the Minneapolis-St. Paul area they backed out of their agreement with the AFL and became an NFL franchise in 1961. It is a decision that the AFL (later to become the AFC) would make them pay dearly for in four Super Bowls from 1969 to 1976.

In the final AFL-NFL world's championship game after the 1969 season, the Kansas City Chiefs, owned by AFL founder Lamar Hunt, crushed the Vikings to win Super Bowl IV, 23-7. After the leagues merged in 1970, the Vikings would go on to play in Super Bowls VIII, IX, and XI losing them all to the Miami Dolphins, Pittsburgh Steelers (an original NFL team that switched to the AFC after the merger), and Oakland Raiders in that order. Not only that, but in losing by scores of 24-7, 16-6, and 32-14, the Vikings set records for Super Bowl offensive ineptitude that may never be matched.

In their four Super Bowl appearances the Vikings would score a total of 34 points. An unbelievable total when you consider that the Washington Redskins scored 35 points in one quarter against the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XXII.

The Vikings did not score a single point in the first half of all four games and scored two touchdowns in a game only once. They did not throw a touchdown pass until the third quarter of Super Bowl XI, their fifteenth quarter of Super Bowl play. And they never made a field goal in any of them. In Super Bowl IX their offense failed to score and gave up the first safety in Super Bowl history.

The special teams outscored them when they recovered a blocked punt in the end zone. For that matter, the Pittsburgh Steeler defense outscored them in that game. Needless to say, the Vikings never led at any time in any of their Super Bowl appearances.

Maybe that was the real reason why they opted out of the AFL back in 1960. They knew that the competition would be too tough.