

Buy and Sell: NFL Edition

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In the dog days of summer and over three months removed from NFL football, Odds Shark has released and refined their win total projections for each NFL team. Historically, these preseason estimates have been conservative yet accurate forecasts of how the upcoming season plays out. Of course the totals typically hover in the range of 6 to 10 wins regardless of how good or bad a team will actually play in order to account for the unpredictable nature of injuries or breakout stars. That being said, I believe there are a few clear cut cases where Vegas missed the mark and failed to peg the realistic output for a handful of teams for the 2019 season.

Whether it was buying too much into free agency acquisitions or simply forgetting the consistent excellence displayed in previous years, there are definitely some win total projections Odds Shark whiffed on. Although my knowledge on the intricacies of sports betting are limited, I am able to pick out an underestimated team and dissect an overhyped team based on a few key factors. These include strength of schedule, trust in the QB/Coach combo, and the track record of a team's past exceeding or falling short of expectations. It is easy to view each season as a clean slate that wipes out past performances, yet the experience and culture of a team carries over whether they like it or not. Even though the Patriots and Browns rosters have fluctuated greatly over the last fifteen seasons, I don't think it should be ignored that New England has won their division 14 times during the span while Cleveland has finished dead last in theirs 12 times.

Buy Low: The Overachievers



Houston Texans- 8.5 projected wins: After quietly logging 11 wins and winning their division in 2018, I am surprised the expectations are so low for the Texans next season. The biggest reason behind this is the hype surrounding the Colts after their late season surge, but I feel that the rest of the division will be weak enough to offset this concern. Even if Houston doesn't win the AFC South in 2019, it is very likely they will win at least 9 games as they have 4 of the last 5 seasons. Especially considering DeShaun Watson is healthy and has another year of experience under his belt, I don't see this team regressing 3 games worse than their 2018 campaign.

Dallas Cowboys- 8.5 projected wins: Just north up I-45 from the Houston, I see the Dallas Cowboys in a situation almost identical to that of their Lone Star State neighbors. Like the Houston Texans, Dallas is coming off double digit wins in 2018, but is threatened by a team with a higher ceiling, in this case the Philadelphia Eagles. In addition to this, Dallas has also surpassed 9 wins 4 of the last 5 seasons, so it's very realistic they will do so again. With the rest of the division grooming rookie QBs and benefitting from the easiest schedule to open the season in the entire league, I believe 9 wins to be the floor for Dak Prescott and the Dallas Cowboys.

Pittsburgh Steelers- 8.5 projected wins: Sticking with the theme of buying into teams with 8.5 projected wins, I believe the Steelers are the most obvious team to exceed expectations. Even with the departures of Le'Veon Bell and Antonio Brown, this roster is loaded with playmakers on both sides of the ball. On top of this, Ben Roethlisberger led the league in passing yards last season, and is showing no signs of slowing down despite climbing in age. Also, it should not be ignored that Mike Tomlin has never logged a season below .500 since taking over as head coach in 2007, and I don't see any reason for that to change in 2019.

Sell High: The Underachievers



Jacksonville Jaguars- 8 projected wins: Moving on from Blake Bortles was definitely a step in the right direction for this team, but they are still light years away from recreating the magic they found in 2017. Overpaying for Nick Foles (who I really like) shows that the front office really doesn't know what it's doing going forward. Their defense lacks the experience and character it possessed the past couple years, and Jalen Ramsey has created more noise with his mouth than his play on the field. With Fournette's health concerns and an underwhelming receiving corps, don't expect the former Super Bowl MVP to carry this team like he did the Eagles in the past.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers- 6.5 projected wins: The hiring of Bruce Arians was a smart move in a last chance effort to spark to career of Jameis Winston, however I believe this year will cement his status as a draft bust. As for the rest of this offense, Mike Evans is the only player that wouldn't easily fit in on a Junior Varsity high school team. The team has shown efforts to bolster their defense with the additions of Ndamukong Suh and Devin White, but this unit is still far from making up for their abysmal offense. In all honesty, I believe there is a greater chance for this team to earn the first overall draft pick than to win 7 games in 2019.

Cleveland Browns- 9 projected wins: It truly stuns me that the large majority of NFL fans have dismissed the reputation of this team throughout the last two decades as a dumpster fire and injected the Browns in Super Bowl discussions. This team is one year removed from a 1-31 stretch and finished 3rd in their own division last year. The fact that this team signed an injury prone Odell Beckham Jr. does not elevate this team from the ashes of Loserville, and I expect them to remain citizens at least one more year. Realistically, this team can expect somewhere in the ballpark of 6-7 wins as their young core endures growing pains and a brutal schedule.