

WINNING THE TURNOVER BATTLE = WINS

"It's a fact that if you don't turn the ball over the chances of your team winning are a lot higher than if you turn the ball over," says Minnesota Vikings quarterback **DAUNTE CULPEPER**. He's right. This past year, teams that won the turnover battle posted an incredible 166-40 (.806) record – the third out of the past four years that the league-wide winning percentage was above .800 for teams that turned the ball over fewer times than their opponents.

A fumble recovery or an interception by the defense does not just represent an extra possession for your ballclub; it is one less opportunity your opponent has to score.

"To win in the NFL is very simple," says Baltimore Ravens linebacker **RAY LEWIS**, who has caused his fair share of turnovers. "If you don't turn the ball over, you win."

There is no statistic to explain the shift in momentum after a turnover. It's huge. If a team squanders opportunity after opportunity – especially down towards the red zone – it can eat away at the confidence of the offense and demoralize the defense, which is left with the responsibility of trying to stop an invigorated opponent.

"Turnover differential is the number one factor in winning games," says former Cowboys and Dolphins head coach **JIMMY JOHNSON**.

Though coaches at every level stress the importance of turnovers on a daily basis, it's just too important *not* to emphasize.

"You have to work on it and talk about it and sell it and players have to get it done," says Kansas City Chiefs head coach **DICK VERMEIL**. "But it's a difference maker in this league."

Records of teams that won the turnover battle in the past 10 seasons:

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>WIN PCT.</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>WIN PCT.</u>
1994	134	42	0	.761	1999	157	46	0	.773
1995	150	40	0	.789	2000	171	41	0	.807
1996	153	40	0	.793	2001	142	56	0	.717
1997	149	40	2	.785	2002	174	38	1	.819
1998	150	44	0	.773	2003	166	40	0	.806
TOTALS						1,546	427	3	.784



TO WIN, YOU'VE GOTTA CONVERT

Coaches like Seattle's **MIKE HOLMGREN** always stress the importance of being able to convert third downs.

"That is a key statistic in any game, next to turnovers," says Holmgren, whose Seahawks led the league in 2003 with a 46.8 third-down conversion rate.

The numbers speak for themselves. Of all the teams in the NFL to convert at least 40 percent of their third down opportunities, only one squad – the San Francisco 49ers (7-9) – posted a winning percentage below .500. Six of the 10 teams converting at a rate of 40 percent advanced to the playoffs, while Minnesota missed a playoff berth on the final play of its season.

"The third-down plays, those are clutch," says New Orleans Saints wide receiver **JEROME PATHON**, whose team ranked third among the league's best on third down conversions in 2003. "You have to convert in this league to be a good offense."

It is also noteworthy that all six quarterbacks to play in this year's Pro Bowl – **MARC BULGER** (Rams), **DAUNTE CULPEPPER** (Vikings), **TRENT GREEN** (Chiefs), **PEYTON MANNING** (Colts), **STEVE MC NAIR** (Titans) and **MATT HASSELBECK** (Seahawks) – played on teams that ranked in the top 10 in third-down conversion percentage.

Following is a chart of the NFL teams that converted 40 percent or better on third down last season:

<u>TEAM</u>	<u>THIRD DOWN PCT.</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>WIN PCT.</u>
Seattle Seahawks	46.8	10	6	.625
Minnesota Vikings	46.6	9	7	.562
New Orleans Saints	46.3	8	8	.500
Cincinnati Bengals	44.7	8	8	.500
St. Louis Rams	42.6	12	4	.750
Indianapolis Colts	41.9	12	4	.750
Kansas City Chiefs	41.8	13	3	.812
Green Bay Packers	41.1	10	6	.625
Tennessee Titans	40.8	12	4	.750
San Francisco 49ers	40.0	7	9	.438