

FINDING VALUE IN THE YPG

by Phil Steele

If you've been reading my College Preview Magazine, you know that every year I look for teams that are much better than their final record would indicate, or those that are much weaker than the final standings would indicate based on the yards per game earned in league play. I only base statistics on league play in the NCAA because teams play non-conference slates of various degrees of difficulty, which affects their overall ypg (yards per game) for the season.

A prime example from 2007 was the Illinois Fighting Illini. I said they were a much stronger team than the final record indicated. The 2006 team was just 1-7 in B10 play, but actually outgained foes by 24 ypg in conference play, which was more indicative of a 5-3 team. Illinois was indeed underrated coming into 2007 and did not disappoint as they finished their season with a Rose Bowl appearance.

In the NFL I look at the entire season since there is more parity and the strength of schedule is fairly even. I devised a system that compares the net wins of a team from the previous season with the team's net yards per game (ypg) of the previous year. Since I needed some way to translate the ypg into net wins, I determined that every 10 net ypg (+ or -) for a team should translate into one net win (+) or loss (-). As an example: if a team outgained their foes by 320 yards on the year, they would have outgained foes by 20 ypg during the 16 game season, which would work out to an expected 9-7 season. Naturally, since this is a statistical formula based on yards, the numbers do not always transfer out to a true NFL type record. A team could have +0.3 net wins which, of course, cannot happen on field, but the ypg net wins is hypothetical so the numbers can vary.

I went back in the NFL to 2001 and compared what the ypg record would have been vs the actual net win total. Let's first look at the overrated teams from the previous year and how they fared the following season. The 2001 Bears graded out at -11.8 net wins with the ypg saying they should have been -1.8 wins (-17.75 ypg) and their actual record was 13-3, or +10 net wins. In 2002 Chicago plummeted to 4-12. Another team of note in this section is Philadelphia, which in 2004 was +10 net wins with a 13-3 record. They were only +31.5 ypg (+3.2 wins). That was a 6.8 net win difference and the Eagles had a losing record the next year. Another notable team is the 2003 KC Chiefs, which finished 13-3 (+10 net wins) but only outgained foes by 12.7 ypg (+1.3). They dropped by 6 net wins the next year to 7-9.

SINCE 2001 TMS WITH -4.7 OR MORE NET WINS			
Total	Weaker	Improved	Same
82	57 (69.5%)	13 (15.9%)	12 (14.6%)

Here are the teams that overachieved relative to their yards per game last year. These teams all finished 2018 with -4.7 or more net wins and have a 69.5% chance of having a weaker record this year.

GOING DOWN IN 2019					
Team	Diff	2018 (Wins)	YPG	Est record	
Miami	-8.1	7-9	(-2)	-101.2	-10.1 wins
New Orleans	-7.0	13-3	(+10)	+30.1	+3.0 wins
Cincinnati	-6.3	6-10	(-4)	-103.0	-10.3 wins
Kansas City	-6.0	12-4	(+8)	+20.1	+2.0 wins

This year, there are 4 teams with Miami on top with -8.1 net wins. The Dolphins were actually outgained by 101.2 ypg (-10.1 wins) LY despite their 7-9 record. With their -2 overall victories, Buffalo translates into a -8.1 difference.

From 2001 to 2012, many teams in the NFL were much stronger than their final record. The team that had the most glaring difference was the Cincinnati Bengals of 2002, who finished just 2-14 but were only outgained by 60 yards on the season or 3.8 ypg. Using my ypg system to determine their net wins for

Yards/16 Games	=	ypg	=	Net Wins	Record
-1280 yds	=	-80 ypg	=	-8 wins	4-12
-960 yds	=	-60 ypg	=	-6 wins	5-11
-640 yds	=	-40 ypg	=	-4 wins	6-10
-320 yds	=	-20 ypg	=	-2 wins	7-9
Even	=	0 net yds	=	0 wins	8-8
+320 yds	=	+20 ypg	=	2 wins	9-7
+640 yds	=	+40 ypg	=	4 wins	10-6
+960 yds	=	+60 ypg	=	6 wins	11-5
+1280 yds	=	+80 ypg	=	8 wins	12-4

A TEAM THAT IS EVEN IN YARDS SHOULD BE 8-8 OR 0 NET WINS. EVERY 160 NET YARDS OR 10 YPG FORMULATES INTO ONE WIN.

the season, the Bengals should have been -0.4. When subtracted from their -12 net wins, they were 11.6 net wins better than their actual record. The next year the Bengals actually showed that improvement on the field by gaining +6 net wins. Another example was the 2005 New Orleans Saints, who finished just 3-13 on the year or -10 net wins. The 2005 Saints actually outgained foes by 37 yards or 2.3 ypg. Using my ypg system, the Saints should basically have been an 8-8 team or +0.2 net wins. The difference between their actual net wins and the ypg net wins was 10.2. In 2006 the Saints were the most improved team in the NFL winning 7 more games! In 2008 the top team on this list was the Miami Dolphins. Miami was 1-15 in 2007 for -14 net wins despite being outgained by only 54.7 ypg (-5.5 wins). In 2008 they finished +10 net wins from the year prior and won the AFC East. In 2009 the top team was New Orleans. The Saints had been 8-8 in 2008 but outgained foes by 71.2 ypg which translates to +7.1 wins. In 2009 New Orleans had a dream season culminating in their first Super Bowl Championship. The 2010 article saw all 3 teams improve by a combined 10 wins. In the L4Y the "Going Up" list had 19 teams on it and 17 saw their record either improve or stay the same, including Houston in '14, who actually had one of the highest numbers ever in this category. They incredibly outgained their opponents by a combined 475 yards in 2013 (+29.7 YPG). That translates into a 9-7/10-6 type season but the Texans had the worst record in the NFL at 2-14 (-12 net wins) and in '14 went 9-7 or a +14 win differential.

SINCE 2001 TMS WITH +4.7 OR MORE NET WINS			
Total	Improved	Weaker	Same
81	64 (79.0%)	11 (13.6%)	6 (7.4%)

Here are this year's teams that were much better than LY's final record would indicate, and fall into the +4.7 net wins category in the ypg factor.

GOING UP IN 2019					
Team	Diff	2018 (Wins)	YPG	Est record	
San Francisco	+9.4	4-12	(-8)	+14.4	+1.4 wins
Tampa Bay	+9.2	5-11	(-6)	+32.3	+3.2 wins
Jacksonville	+7.5	5-11	(-6)	+15.3	+1.5 wins

This year there are 3 teams with San Francisco on top with +9.4 net wins. The 49ers went 4-12 despite outgaining their foes by 14.4 ypg. **COMPARING THE TOP OF BOTH CHARTS shows Miami with a 7-9 record, being outgained by -101.2 YPG, while the 49ers were 4-12, but actually outgained foes by 14.4 YPG on the year!**