

YPP Defense Factor

By Phil Steele

The last 6 years the teams in the Boxes on this page are an amazing 133-27-26 doing what the charts expected either Going Up or Going Down! Metrics, Metrics, Metrics. I put this article in for the first time in 2004 & it continues to be an accurate forecaster of whether a team will record will finish with a stronger or weaker record the next year. First of all, let me explain what YPP is exactly. A YPP is simply yards per point. An offense is more efficient when their YPP is a lower number. If a team had an offensive YPP of 10.0, that would mean for every 200 yards gained, they scored 20 points. Meanwhile, if they had an offensive YPP of 20.0, then for every 200 yards gained, they only scored 10 points. Defenses want to have a higher YPP. Inverting the same thought, if a team allowed 200 yards and had a 20.0 YPP, that means they would allow just 10 points for every 200 yards the opposition traveled, whereas a 10.0 YPP would be 20 points for every 200 yards allowed. When I started this research in 1990, the average YPP for a team was 15.44. With all the rule changes slanted to the offense, it is no surprise that the median has dropped significantly since then (13.87 in '20, 14.1 '21, 13.9 '23).

This year I did three years of research for the FCS. I looked at the 2023 season based on 2022's YPP's. I did the 2022 season based on the 2021 YPP numbers. I skipped 2021 as it would have been based on the wacky Fall/Spring season of 2020 and I also skipped the unusual and disruptive 2020 season. The next year I used was 2019 and that was based on 2018's results. Therefore unlike the FBS version which has 23 years of research this FCS version has just 3 years but the numbers were similar.

Now, let's take a look at the teams under the Defensive YPP that were not so fortunate last year. In the FBS if a team allows a defensive YPP of 11.27 or lower (meaning they gave up a lot of points, but not a lot of yds), their record improves or is the same the next year 78.4% of the time. Overall, teams that have a 13.54 Defensive YPP or lower since 1990 have either had a stronger or same record 70% of the time. The numbers came out very similar but the top two categories were stronger than the third with 79% and 69.4% for the top two.

DEFENSIVE YPP PREVIOUS YEAR SINCE 1990	PREV YEAR YPP	Happen Times S/1990	Stronger Record Next Yr	Same Record Next Yr	Weaker Record Next Yr	Stronger Or Same Record S/1990
	11.6 or lower	33	25	1	7	78.8%
	11.61-12.44	49	28	6	15	69.4%
	12.45-13.3	70	35	8	27	61.4%
13.3 or lower	152	88	15	49	67.8%	

GOING UP: Here are the 12 teams that had the worst Defensive YPP in 2023:
 Western Illinois (10.3), Cal Poly (10.4), Hampton (11.5), Texas Southern (11.6), McNeese St (11.7), Robert Morris (11.8), Delaware St (11.8), Northwestern St (11.8), Stetson (11.9), Gardner Webb (11.9), Duquesne (12.0), Stony Brook (12.0)

Teams that allowed a lot of yards, but not a lot of points are generally considered bend but don't break D's. However, FBS teams whose Defensive YPP was 16.85 or greater have a weaker or the same record the following year 67.8% of the time. Since 1990 only 39 teams have had a Def YPP over 22.45 and those teams have had a weaker record 30 times. In 2019, the top seven teams in this box from 2018 all had weaker records, the top nine teams in Defensive YPP in 2019 all had weaker records in 2020! In 2021 the box had 4 teams and all 4 had weaker records. Last year only one team fit into that category and that was Illinois which went from 8-5 to 5-7. This year 20 FBS teams had a defensive YPP of 16.85 or higher in '23

The FCS three year research shows teams that benefitted from having a 18.5 YPP or higher had a weaker or the same record 74% of the time. I widened the next two categories from the FBS version due to the limited amount of data but teams that had a defensive YPP of 15.17 or higher (gave up less points than the yards called for) only improved their record 35.9% of the time. Here is the data.

DEFENSIVE YPP PREVIOUS YEAR SINCE 1990	PREV YEAR YPP	Happen Times S/1990	Weaker Record Next Yr	Same Record Next Yr	Stronger Record Next Yr	Weaker Or Same Record S/1990
	18.5 or higher	23	15	2	6	73.9%
	16.2-18.44	41	23	3	15	63.4%
	15.17-16.15	92	50	7	35	62.0%
15.17 or higher	156	88	12	56	64.1%	

GOING DOWN: Teams with the highest YPP in '23:
 South Dakota St (27.8), Alabama St (18.5), Montana (18.3), South Dakota (18.3), Butler 18.2, Columbia 17.8