

YPP Defense Factor

By Phil Steele

The last 8 years the teams in the Boxes on this page in my FBS magazine are an amazing 182-47-34 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 (13.9 in '15, 13.87 '20, 14.1 '21, 13.9 '23, 14.3 '24).

Teams that had an extremely low YPP the previous year, usually have a weaker record the next season. The statistics are not as dominant as the high YPP, usually because there are some teams that benefit from turnovers on a yearly basis, keeping their YPP low. Still, according to the chart, teams whose YPP were less than 11.50 the previous year had either a weaker or the same record 72.9% of the time the next year. There are a lot of teams that fit into the category of under 13.54, so make sure you check out my blog on PhilSteele.com in late July for a complete listing.

This year I did five years of research for the FCS. I looked at the 2025 season based on 2024's YPP's I looked at the 2024 season based on 2023's YPP's. 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 25 years of research this FCS version has just five 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. As the chart below shows, if a team allows a defensive YPP of 11.60 or lower (meaning they gave up a lot of points, but not a lot of yds), **their record improved or was the same the next year 84.4% of the time. This past year there were 11 teams listed in the box and NINE improved their record, 2 had the same and ZERO had a weaker record!** Overall, teams that have a 13.44 Defensive YPP or lower the last 5 years have either had a stronger or same record 66.1% of the time. The numbers came out very similar but the top two categories were stronger than the third with 84.4% and 68.3% for the top two categories.

DEFENSIVE YPP PREVIOUS YEAR Last 5 years

PREVIOUS YEAR YPP	Happen Times Last 5 yrs	Stronger Record Next Year	Same Record Next Year	Weaker Record Next Year	Stronger Or Same Record Last 5 years
11.6 or lower	46	35	4	7	84.4%
11.61-12.44	79	44	10	25	68.3%
12.45-13.44	133	66	22	45	66.1%
13.44 or lower	258	145	36	77	70.1%

GOING UP: Here are the 11 teams that had the worst Defensive YPP in 2025 (11.6 or less was 9-0-2 in '25!):

Stetson (9.9), Miss Valley St (10.1), Portland St (10.5), East Texas A&M (10.6), NC A&T (10.7), Northwestern St (11.0), Valparaiso (11.1), Weber St (11.1), Campbell (11.5), Albany (11.5), Central Arkansas 11.6

Teams that allowed a lot of yards, but not a lot of points are generally considered bend but don't break D's. However, 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 41 FBS teams have had a Def YPP over 22.45 and those teams have had a weaker record 31 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. In '23 only one team fit into that category and that was Illinois which went from 8-5 to 5-7. The last 2 years the FBS box is 6-2. This year 17 teams had a defensive YPP of 16.85 or higher in '24 so check out philsteele.com in late July for a complete listing.

The FCS five year research shows teams that benefited from having a 18.5 YPP or higher had a weaker or the same record 76% 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) had the weaker or the same record 65.2% of the time. Last year there were 7 teams listed in the box and 5 had a weaker record while just 2 (28%) managed to improve their record. Last year there were 17 teams with a Defensive YPP of 16.15 or better and 14 had a weaker record with only 3 (18%) improving their record. Here is the data.

DEFENSIVE YPP PREVIOUS YEAR Last 5 years

PREV YEAR YPP	Happen Times Last 5 yrs	Weaker Record Next Yr	Same Record Next Yr	Stronger Record Next Yr	Weaker Or Same Record Last 5 years
18.5 or higher	29	20	2	7	75.8%
16.2-18.44	69	42	5	22	68.1%
15.17-16.15	115	61	9	45	60.6%
15.17 or higher	213	123	16	74	65.2%

GOING DOWN: Teams with the highest YPP in '25 (This box was 5-2 last year):

Wofford 20.3, Lehigh 20.0, Jackson St 19.1, Dayton, 18.4, Drake 18.3, Tarleton St 17.9, Yale 17.5
UTRGV 17.5, Alabama St 17.4, Montana St 17.3, Presbyterian 16.8