

# 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.

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 (-17.8 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. In 2023 Minnesota was the poster team for this article. They won so many close games in 2022 and went 13-4 despite being outgained by 31 ypg! That rated them a -11.7 last year and as you would expect they dropped down to 7-10 despite actually outgaining their foes by 15 ypg.

When I wrote this article in 2018 only 17% of the teams that had a -4.7 or higher improved. From 2019-25 it has been even stronger with teams at -4.7 or higher occurring 31 times and only 4 times (13%) did a team improve their record with 4 teams having the same record and 23 having a weaker record for an **87% success rate!** Last year six teams made the box and 4 had a weaker record including Kansas City, Minnesota and Detroit who went from a combined 44-7 to 24-27 overall. the box went 4-1-1.

| 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.**

subtracted from their -16 net wins, they were +14.1 net wins better than their actual record. The next year the Browns actually showed that improvement on the field by winning 7 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. In 2018 teams that were +4.7 in the YPG had a better or the same record 85.9% of the time the next year. **Over the last 8 years it is even stronger with 32 teams qualifying and 25 having a stronger record, 3 the same and only 4 with a weaker record for a 88% success rate!**

## SINCE 2001 TMS WITH +4.7 OR MORE NET WINS

| Total | Improved | Weaker   | Same   |
|-------|----------|----------|--------|
| 109   | 86 (79%) | 15 (13%) | 9 (8%) |

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.

This chart has had amazing success the last six years of research. I

## GOING UP IN 2026

| Team        | Diff | 2025 (Wins) | YPG | Est record |
|-------------|------|-------------|-----|------------|
| Arizona     | +7.8 | 3-14 (-11)  | -32 | -3.2 wins  |
| Kansas City | +6.9 | 6-11 (-5)   | +19 | +1.9 wins  |
| NY Giants   | +6.4 | 4-13 (-9)   | -26 | -2.6 wins  |
| New Orleans | +6.4 | 6-11 (-5)   | +14 | -1.4 wins  |
| Cleveland   | +4.8 | 5-12 (-7)   | -22 | -2.2 wins  |

took a look at teams that rated as little as +0.9 the last 7 years and there were 102 teams in that category. Of the 102 teams, 67 had a stronger record the next year, 8 had the same record and just 27 had a weaker record for a strong 73.5% success rate even going down to that low level. On the flip side teams that rated -1.3 or more had a weaker record 61 times, the same record 19 times and just 26 times improved their record for a success rate of 75.4%! Here is the complete list for 2026.

| Team        | Diff | Team         | Diff | Team          | Diff |
|-------------|------|--------------|------|---------------|------|
| Arizona     | +7.8 | Buffalo      | +1.3 | Houston       | -2.0 |
| Kansas City | +6.9 | Indianapolis | +0.6 | Carolina      | -2.2 |
| NY Giants   | +6.4 | Washington   | +0.5 | New England   | -2.6 |
| New Orleans | +6.4 | Green Bay    | +0.1 | Chicago       | -4.3 |
| Cleveland   | +4.8 | LA Chargers  | -0.1 | Seattle       | -4.4 |
| Las Vegas   | +3.7 | Cincinnati   | -0.2 | Denver        | -4.6 |
| Dallas      | +3.5 | LA Rams      | -0.3 | Philadelphia  | -5.3 |
| Detroit     | +3.1 | Tampa Bay    | -0.7 | Jacksonville  | -5.6 |
| Tennessee   | +2.4 | Baltimore    | -1.2 | San Francisco | -5.9 |
| NY Jets     | +1.8 | Minnesota    | -1.8 | Pittsburgh    | -8.1 |
| Atlanta     | +1.6 | Miami        | -1.8 |               |      |

## SINCE 2001 TMS WITH -4.7 OR MORE NET WINS

| Total | Weaker   | Improved   | Same       |
|-------|----------|------------|------------|
| 115   | 77 (67%) | 20 (17.3%) | 18 (15.6%) |

Here are the teams that overachieved relative to their yards per game last year. These teams all finished 2025 with -4.7 or more net wins and have a 67% chance of having a weaker record this year.

This year, there are 4 teams that qualify and I list them in the box below along with two teams that almost qualified in Denver and Seattle. The top 4 teams have only have a 17% chance of improving their record.

## GOING DOWN IN 2026

| Team         | Diff | 2025 (Wins) | YPG | Est record |
|--------------|------|-------------|-----|------------|
| Pittsburgh   | -8.1 | 10-7 (+3)   | -51 | -5.1 wins  |
| San Fran     | -5.9 | 12-5 (+7)   | +11 | +1.1 wins  |
| Jacksonville | -5.6 | 13-4 (+9)   | +34 | +3.4 wins  |
| Philadelphia | -5.3 | 11-6 (+5)   | -3  | -0.3 wins  |
| Denver       | -4.6 | 14-3 (+11)  | +64 | +6.4 wins  |
| Seattle      | -4.4 | 14-3 (+11)  | +66 | +6.6 wins  |

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 Cleveland Browns of 2017, who finished 0-16 but were only outgained by 309 yards on the season or -19 ypg. Using my ypg system to determine their net wins for the season, the Browns should have been -1.9. When