

With our dataset in mind, across all positions, how extensive is the "Sophomore Slump" or lack thereof on NFL players following their rookie season? Further, as an overarching question, does a "Sophomore Slump" exist and can its impact be felt more heavily in specific NFL positions?

There are many factors to consider when both predicting when a slump may occur and how to quantify a slump itself

A player's college experience and, relatedly, draft position, impacts rookie and subsequent season performance

P1 said that "I think NFL position would make a big difference, as well as how successful the player was in college prior to playing in the NFL due to the availability of game tape on the player."

P3 was the only individual to discuss the impact of draft position around player performance, which was interesting. This likely again ties into the importance of star power and how media and fans focus on certain players and/or positions more than others.

In Sophomore Slumps noted by P2, the provided examples were of players from prominent colleges and universities. Surprisingly, it seems as though smaller school players transitioning to the professional level, do have an initial advantage due to their relative anonymity.

In addition to statistics, an eye test may also be needed to assess slumps in addition to assessing off-the-field character

While P1 did not believe an "eye test" should be considered in these types of investigations, P2 and P3 did believe they were important when assessing a slump. Particularly, it will be important to understand how statistics are calculated in the 2nd quarter of their games or blowouts, for example, when the game is already "over".

P1 did provide examples of Sophomore Slumps from his time coaching, but it was clear from the descriptions of the slumps that performance typically improved after the slump year. Downward slumps typically don't continue and the athletes is able to make the necessary adjustments to again be successful.

P2 raised a very important point in that there isn't one metric to evaluate Sophomore Slumps. This is important to consider that should a slump be associated with poor team performance, fewer positive season statistics, etc. when developing a quantitative analysis.

P2 and P3 also consider off the field issues as part of a Sophomore Slump. This would be a very important component to consider if there was a quantitative analysis as an additional variable to account for.

External factors play a large role in impacting player performance following their rookie season

Talent influxes can also result in fewer opportunities to meet prior year performance marks

P3 focused on many external causes that can cause slumps, such as new players and talent coming in that are younger and fresher and could take time away from older players. Additionally, coaching changes are common, as well, and the coaches may view a player's role differently or prefer others to accomplish their generation.

P3 cited last President's successful rookie season with the Cowboys followed by a disappointing sophomore campaign, stemming from poor performance of teammates, again raising the issue importance of a team and system surrounding a particular player and their developmental stage.

P3, similarly to others, focused an example of a Sophomore Slump from this season's Devonta Smith. While the player is still at a fairly high level, season stats were down due to the signing of a top player at the same position, an external factor driving down the slumping player's production.

Injuries following a successful season are a major factor in whether a slump will occur

P1 said that "the biggest contributors for a Sophomore Slump was injury, followed by complacency and lack of motivation."

P3 said that "injuries really contribute to Sophomore Slumps, as well. When the game becomes more physical and faster more injuries can happen and obviously an injury can really set back a promising, young player."

Coaching and team structure are factors out of a player's control that significantly impact year to year performance

P2 said that "sustainable player growth requires luck, the right attitude, and strong team support."

P1 said that "coaching and structure have a large impact on how successful an athlete is in the short and long term and how likely they would be to fall into a Sophomore Slump."

P3 said that "stuff like injuries, new talent, new coaches, new schemes, and adjustments around leagues are not something a player can control and play a major role in slumps."

P3 also noted another player slumping due to team culture. When the player was traded from a relaxed, losing culture to a perennial championship team, he flourished within the new system.

P1, as a former coach himself, focused on the importance of coaching and how critical it is for consistent and deliberate player growth.

The Sophomore Slump is a phenomenon seen in high-level college and professional sports

While there were disagreements between P1, P2, and P3 around the prevalence of slumps in the NFL, P1 noting: odds of players may feel a substantial slump versus P2 expecting 1-2 every season. For example there was a strong belief across all three that the Sophomore Slump is an existing phenomenon in the NFL.

P3 "The sophomore slump probably isn't real, because we wouldn't have what I call P3 doesn't exist on some level. We really hear about it with quarterbacks, running backs, wide receivers because it is more vulnerable with them. You don't hear about it as much with a lineman or a defensive player because they don't just get injured."

P3 doesn't think Sophomore Slumps are super common but do occur every season where players are unable to build off their rookie season momentum or are figured out by the rest of the league through more focused game planning.

P3 believed Sophomore Slumps are common not only in the NFL, but across all sports with a common cause being coaching. Coaching may be team training combined with a mental block because of the excitement and pressure brought by the successful rookie season can also impact a player's sophomore campaign.

P3 said that "in the case where there might not be as ton of footage on a player, he'll have a very successful rookie season. Then, the league will "figure" him out and now it's on the player to adjust back moving forward."

Internal factors play a large role in impacting player performance following their rookie season

P3 said that "a Sophomore Slump is mostly external unless the player themselves is actually not doing the work. The player's commitment is obviously internal

P1 noted another player who had an amazing first year after turning professional. However, the subsequent years were not as successful and were driven by changes in training and lifestyle stemming from being a professional athlete in the spotlight.

The NFL has specific positions that, due to their star power potential, are more prone to slumps than others

P1 believed that wide receiver, quarterback and cornerback would be NFL positions that prone to slumps due to the star power of the position and the attention that opposing coaches pay to their spots. Better team preparation would increase the likelihood of a slump.

P1, P2, and P3 all agreed that there are no slump proof positions in the NFL and that a combination of internal and external factors can plague any player or position.

Media bias likely impacts public perception around slump prevalence across NFL positions

P3's examples of Sophomore Slumps typically were about quarterbacks. This may point to just the star power of certain positions impacting public perception of which positions are most prone to slumping.

An interesting note around media bias was raised by P3. Similarly to the public's bias, the media likely has a focus on the star positions like quarterbacks, as well, which would impact perception around how certain positions are prone to slumps year over year.

Similarly, P2 then also noted that the most disruptive positions may be offensive or defensive line, but the public or media's inability to notice performance due to knowledge gaps or a lack of media focus may be driving the perception around Sophomore Slumps incorrectly.