**Bakopolus, Adam: Affinity Wall Submission**

**Prompt 1: Data Set Description and Broad Question**

The data set contains basic demographic information about all NFL players, past and present, such as name, birth date, college, position, years played, etc. In addition to demographic information, there are additional tabs that track the relevant NFL season stats for each of these players for their position. Quarterbacks, for example, have data tracking their passing yards, touchdowns, interceptions, passer rating, etc., while defensive safeties have data tracking tackles, interceptions, and sacks. Together, this information easily would allow a data user to trend player performance throughout their NFL career. With this 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?

**Prompt 2: Affinity Wall**

Link to Miro Board: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVPLSgRWI=/>

JPG embedded:

**Prompt 3: Initial Outline**

1. The Sophomore Slump is a phenomenon seen in high-level college and professional sports
   1. While there were disagreements between the 3 interviewees around the prevalence of slumps in the NFL, there was a strong belief that the Sophomore Slump is an existing phenomenon
   2. Sophomore Slumps 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
2. There are many factors to consider when both predicting when a slump may occur and how to quantify a slump itself
   1. A players’ college experience and, relatedly, draft position, impacts rookie and subsequent season performance
      1. Success at the college level would lead to a greater availability of game tape on the player and could impact performance at the next level as a more known commodity
      2. Draft position could also affect player performance as more heralded players will likely receive greater attention their rookie seasons as opposed to late-round or undrafted players
      3. Lastly, players from prominent colleges and universities may fair worse than smaller school players transitioning to the professional level due to their lack of anonymity
   2. In addition to statistics, an eye test may also be needed to assess slumps in addition to assessing off-the-field character
      1. Eye tests would be an important metric to consider when evaluating slumps, as it will be important to understand when statistics are achieved (e.g., in the 4th quarter of close games or blowouts, when the game is already over)
      2. There isn’t one metric to evaluate Sophomore Slumps and it’s important to consider whether a slump should be considered when there’s poor team performance, for example, when developing a quantitative analysis
      3. Off-the-field issues and character concerns also would be a very important component to consider if there was a quantitative analysis to perform, as well
3. External factors play a large role in impacting player performance following their rookie season
   1. Talent influxes can result in fewer opportunities to meet prior year performance marks
      1. Situations where younger and fresher players take time away from older players is a definite external factor to consider
      2. Dak Prescott’s successful rookie season was followed by a disappointing sophomore campaign, stemming from poor performance of teammates
      3. Devonta Smith’s sophomore campaign has season decreased stats due to the signing of a top player at the same position
   2. Injuries following a successful season are a major factor in whether a slump will occur in the sophomore season
      1. Injury, followed by complacency and lack of motivation, are major contributors that can lead to a slump
   3. Coaching and team structure are factors out of a player’s control that significantly impact year to year performance
      1. Strong team support is critical in sustaining player growth
      2. Coaching and team structure significantly impact player success in both the short and long term
      3. Relatedly, team culture can result in slumps. There was a s scenario noted where a player was traded from a relaxed, losing culture to a perennial championship team and flourished within the new system
      4. Consistent and deliberate player growth is unachievable without proper coaching
   4. The NFL relies on game film review to find player weaknesses to exploit in future years and games
      1. Sophomore Slumps will be more prevalent for players in positions that teams often strategize specifically against, quarterbacks being the biggest example
      2. More generally, position will greatly impact Sophomore Slumps and how frequently other players study your prior performances
      3. Players with less footage may be more likely to have a successful rookie season but the league may e able to figure the player out in the future, leading to a slump or the need for the player to adjust to the implemented strategy
4. Internal factors also play a role in impacting player performance following their rookie season
   1. While slumps were noted by the interviewees to be mainly driven by external factors, player commitment was a common internal driver that was discussed
   2. Similarly, changes in training and lifestyle stemming from being a professional athlete in the spotlight may also be an internal driver that could lead to poor sophomore performance
5. The NFL has specific positions that, due to their star power potential, are more prone to slumps than others
   1. Interviews commonly called out the wide receiver, quarterback, and cornerback positions as the most prone to slumps due to star power of the position and the attention that opposing coaches pay to these spots. Better team preparation would increase the likelihood of a slump
   2. All interviewees 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
6. Media bias likely impacts public perception around slump prevalence across NFL positions
   1. Many examples of slumps detailed the quarterback position. This may point to just the star power of certain positions impacting public perception of which positions are most prone to slumping
   2. 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 quarterback, as well, which would impact perception around how certain positions are prone to slumps year over year
   3. It may be possible that the most slump-prone positions may be OL or DL, but the public or media’s inability to assess performance due to knowledge gaps or a lack of media focus may be shifting the perception around Sophomore Slumps incorrectly