**Bakopolus, Adam: Data Extraction 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: Attestation**

I have completed three sessions of interviews, each of at least 30 minutes in duration, according to my interview protocol.”

**Prompt 3: Affinity Notes (quotations)**

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

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 “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.”

P2 said that “the positions that receive lots of preparation and teams strategizing around them (classically QB) will be at higher risk of Sophomore Slumps due to higher burden of external factors.”

P2 said that “position heavily influences sophomore slump in the NFL (and all sports). A lot of the slump is dependent on how OTHER players study you, so the positions with more film evidence and that are of greater focus are going to be more heavily affected (e.g. QB).”

P2 said that “the NFL also has the problem of substantial team preparation against opposing players. For a QB, teams can figure out that the player responds poorly to blitzes, or is easy to flush from the pocket, or for a WR maybe a player deals poorly with an aggressive press from a DB – accentuating flaws and making a slump very likely.”

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, but 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.”

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 said that “in the case where there might not be a ton of footage on a guy, 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.”

**Prompt 4: Affinity Notes (paraphrased)**

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.

P2 believes Sophomore Slumps are common not only in the NFL but across all sports, with a common cause being overtraining. Additionally, over training combined with a mental block because of the excitement and promise brought by the successful rookie season can also impact a player’s sophomore campaign.

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 gameplan.

P3 noted Dak Prescott’s successful rookie season with the Cowboys followed by a disappointing sophomore campaign, stemming from poor performance of teammates, again making clear the importance of a team and system surrounding a particular player and their likelihood to slump.

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.

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 believed that wide receiver, quarterback and cornerback would be NFL positions most prone to slumps due to the 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.

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.

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

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

**Prompt 5: Affinity Notes (insights)**

While there were disagreements between P1, P2, and P3 around the prevalence of slumps in the NFL (P1 noting ~60% of players may hit a substantial slump versus P3 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.

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 spirals typically don’t continue and the athlete is able to make the necessary adjustments to again be successful.

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 when statistics are achieved (in the 4th quarter of close games or blowouts, for example, when the game is already “over”).

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 all 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.

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 quarterback, as well, which would impact perception around how certain positions are prone to slumps year over year.

Similarly, P3 then also noted that the most slump-prone positions may be offensive or defensive line, 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.

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.