JE: P1

JS: P2

NH: P3

\*I personally feel there is definitely a sophomore slump that many players experience. As with all things in life, it is not universal, but I’d guess >60% experience a substantial sophomore slump.

\*I don’t think the sophomore slump is super common, but I think it happens to one or two players every season.

\*\*Most guys show us who they are their rookie year, and sometimes they don’t build off that momentum or the league figures them out. So while I feel like we usually hear about one or two players who are not building off success from the previous season, the sophomore slump affects a small minority of players.

The sophomore slump probably does exist, because we wouldn’t know what it was if it doesn’t exist on some level. We mostly hear about it with quarterbacks, running backs, wide receivers because it is more noticeable with them. You don’t hear about it as much with a lineman or a defensive player because they don’t put up points.

\*\*\*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 thus positions with more film evidence and that are of greater focus are going to be more heavily affected (e.g. QB).

Very familiar. I would define sophomore slump as a phenomena that the majority of promising rookie players in most sports experience at the professional (or elite collegiate) level. After an exciting and promising rookie season, players either do not progress/improve at all, or get worse for the sophomore season.

Ugh, how could you do this to me. You know I hate data. However, I do like sports statistics. A sophomore slump occurs when a player has a strong rookie showing and then digress in their sophomore season.

My biggest personal slump was during my junior year of college. Other teammates had slumps in sophomore, junior or senior year (and freshman year, though I would not consider a first year a slump, just a slow start). There were a variety of causes (including those listed below). Most improved but not all (addressed three points below).

I don’t really remember seeing any sophomore slumps in college. I feel like what happened more was players started their freshman year and then got benched for a more talented player. I can’t really recall seeing actual regression.

\*\*In track/XC, the etiology of sophomore slumps is different than many other sports, but is remains common here too. The most common reason for a sophomore slump, in my experience in track, is due to over training combined with a mental block because of the excitement and promise of the rookie season. For example, a long jumper on our team came close to a school record his freshman year. He then jumped almost a full foot shorter during the entire sophomore campaign and faced multiple injuries throughout the year.

\*\*New talent comes in and they are fresh. Coaching changes could happen as well and the new players coming in are the new coach’s players.

\*\*\*I think injuries really contribute 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.

\*\*\*The biggest contributor was injury, followed by complacency/lack of motivation.

As sort of alluded to above, in track, slumps are usually caused by a mental block and overtraining – often with injuries involved

\*\*\*I think 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. All they can hope to do is adjust, which is an internal factor.

There were both internal and external factors – the main external factor was injury, the main internal factor was complacency.

\*In many cases, these slumps were not during sophomore year. However, performance did typically improve after the slump year. In cases where the downward spiral continued another year, there the athlete usually would not continue their career and choose to pursue other interests.

People usually recover by their junior year, once they’re entrenched in the system and the team or they quit in my experience. And once you’re in the system you’re in the system, especially in a sport like soccer where the team is relatively small and team chemistry is important. They may not necessarily go back to starting, but they’ll come off the bench or they’ll become a locker room staple that’s critical to the team.

I expect so. Phenomena like a sophomore slump don’t become a common discussion in the media with some evidence of it.

I did recruiting for college runners and looked did opposition research on other teams.

I definitely use similar datasets during fantasy football draft prep and am key to avoid players with breakout performances in the first 1-3 rounds because of this risk. A key example is Dak Prescott, who during his sophomore season I avoided drafting because of this reason despite loving his performance during his rookies year.

I was hoping to predict the entries for track and field championship meets and project the expected team scores for the meet. Consistency, scoring potential.

I would expect a lot of players go up and down year to year. It’s just the law of randomness that some years will be better than others and some changes will be extreme enough to count as a slump or as a “breakout” year.

I do not know the specific football stats that would be akin to the baseball analogy above, but that in most exciting rookie campaigns the headliner stat is superior (due to some element of luck) than the more detailed stats. This is due to media coverage and just overall trends of what could make an otherwise inexperienced player exceed the performance of seasoned and talented veterans

Yes, I would think that there are instances of sophomore slumps.

\*\*\*Definitely. Beyond the mental and training/injury reasons described in track (which certainly apply here too), NFL also has the problem of substantial team preparation against opposing players. Thus, 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. As most young players have flaws, a well prepped opposing team, as virtually all NFL teams are, will accentuate the flaws and make a slump very likely.

\*\*\*I think the position would make a big difference, as well as how successful the player was in college prior to playing in the NFL.

\*Definitely the less that is known about a player before their rookie year, the more likely the sophomore slump will occur for both the luck reasons for a successful rookie season AND due to lack of team knowledge about a player.

Devonta Smith right now. Record breaking rookie season, candidate for offensive rookie of the year and this year has screwed me over in fantasy multiple weeks.

Devonta Smith is a Heisman winner who had a spectacular rookie year. And now I like in a permanent state of angry with him because he has not had a touchdown in weeks.

\*\*It is AJ Brown’s fault. He is getting all the touches that Devonta used to get.

Cole Hocker, an Olympic competitor in the 1500m. He had an amazing freshman year and turned professional. His “sophomore” year was his first professional year and it was not very successful.

\*\*Dak Prescott had a very good rookie season a few years ago with the Cowboys, with a surprising 13-3 record (bolstered by a particularly strong performance from rookie RB Elliott too), minimal interceptions, and >3500 yards passing and >20 touchdowns. His sophomore season, Elliott was suspended for 1/3 of the season, but Dak notably threw many more interceptions while throwing for fewer yards despite more attempts and a playbook designed for him.

\*\*Changes in training and lifestyle and other adjustments stemming from changing from a college runner to a professional runner.

Combination of factors – there were injuries and suspensions that affected the offense overall, but the majority of the slump I personally feel to have been due to better team preparation against Dak and a struggle to integrate a more advanced offensive attack (i.e. he may have tried to take too big a step forward bolstered with confidence from a rookie season that led to increased errors in his second season).

I would expect the external factors made a bigger difference, especially training and coaching as Hocker made the change to a professional runner.

I think most slumps are caused by external factors and most improvement is caused by external factors too – but bolstered by good internal factors

\*\*\*Sustainable player growth requires luck, the right attitude, and strong team support.

Combination of factors, but luck and minimal prep by opposing teams has a lot to do with it! Injuries too (e.g. David Johnson)

I hope they get better. If they’ve reached the NFL level they’re exception athletes who are coachable and adaptable and usually bounce back.

A good off season, maybe a trade to a new team. I feel like you hear of a lot of guys who get traded and then end up having good careers. Sometimes you just need a coaching scheme that’s going to put you first.

The future years more often improve, sometimes approaching the sensational rookie season and sometimes surpassing it after a few years.

I know Saquon Barkley had a tough few years and that was mostly due to injury. This year he is healthy, he is the number one option, and has a head coach who is a good coach, so I feel like those factors all really contribute. I think the reason there could have been a fast turnaround there is the lack of injuries and the new coach, so maybe if a player is going through a difficult stretch because of organizational issues it can be solved by either a new organization or their organization making necessary changes.

Consistency in training.

Both the slump and improvement were more driven by internal factors.

\*\*Not football, but I know with Andrew Wiggins it was a culture and work thing. He had been on a basketball team with a relaxed, losing culture, and then was traded to a perennial championship team and it was a massive culture change and he flourished. So it could be culture,

it could be a trade for a running back or a wide receiver where they become the number one target again. It could be a coaching scheme that suits the player’s strengths. However, I am not sure that this would only apply to young players. The football players who I think of are rarely second year players. I feel like they’re in year five or six.

Many of the things that allowed for the original success were adjusted following the that success and those adjustments lead to a decline.

I think sprinters suffer more often from slumps than other event groups.

\*My immediate impression is quarterbacks, but I can’t think of a quarterback with a sophomore slump. They’re usually first year busts. Football focuses a ton on quarterbacks and I feel like it’s a big deal when a quarterback sucks.

\*\*WR, QB, CB1 – due to better team prep

RB – due somewhat to team prep, but also due to increased predilection for injuries after a full NFL Season (e.g. David Johnson)

\*\*I do not think any events would be slump-proof. However, the throwing events should be the least likely to slump; they are less reliant on health and peaking and more to do with strength and especially technique.

\*\*Not slump-PROOF but safeties, kickers, and linemen

\*\*Nothing is slump proof. People can suck regardless of sport or position. All those factors I listed out above can happen to anyone regardless of what position they play in and no position can guard against those factors.

I think big contributors are events with a strong mental component (such as high jump and pole vault) and events where properly managing training load and peaking correctly are vital (such as distance running)

\*\*\*The positions that receive lots of preparation and team strategizing around (classically QB) will be at higher risk due to higher burden of external factors

Media attention, pressure, and having a target on your back from the rest of the league.

In running, all events can be separated from the others.

Maybe kickers? Otherwise not really in the NFL*.*

No, at the end of the day, sports involve a lot of external factors. Maybe a running back or a safety or a cornerback could be decoupled a little.

Certainly QBs will be the highest profile for every team. Thus, slumps will be more likely to be predicted and reported upon.

\*My suspicion is that there is a media bias for sophomore slumps based on offensive players because that is so easy to quantify for one player, so I suspect it’s going to be more about offensive players and yards and touchdowns.

\*In football the quarterback is everything. Everyone is hyper focused on them constantly, so sophomore slumps around quarterbacks are probably given more attention than anyone else, including a star RB or WR.

\*Draft position for sure, whether the player was a first round draft pick, for example, solely because that makes them more noticeable to us and the media and fans pay more attention to them.

\*Absolutely! My Dak example above is very flawed – there were injuries, he was without Elliott for many games that year, and the defense was different. The biggest indicator of his slump was the poor record (plus like 3x more INT), and a team’s record is much more than 1 player yet I firmly blame dak for a lot of it.

In track and field, you cannot control for who you race against. If you end up consistently being matched up against the best, you will not place as well as you would have if the competition were weaker. However, times can often be compared year to year.

Yes definitely. When the media only focuses on certain stuff then that’s all you’re going to focus on too unless you dig into the data.

Slumps after a lot of success are way more interesting for talking heads than saying “this guy is still performing at a high level” unless it is a record breaking level.

On a global scale, eliminating teams with injuries or suspensions in other star players, teams with big turnover year to year, etc. For an individual player, look at stats that are slightly more individual (e.g. % completion to an individual player or catches/target for a WR rather than total yards).

More data on the player, which would be hard for a sophomore slump and maybe an analysis of the O-line?

An eye-test can be important to contextualize statistics, but relying too much on an eye-test is not a robust measure to determine real change year to year.

Of course. Looking at game winning drives, game losing drives, first quarter stats, etc.

\*I’m big into the eye test because that’s what I’ve been going off of for twenty years.

I define a slump to be athletic, so I would not count those as part of the slump. However, I think “character concerns” or “off the field issues” could lead to an athletic slump.

\*YES!!! Being a successful professional athlete is HARD. Year to year success is luck, but as the saying goes, luck is most common among the most prepared!

\*Definitely. If a guy is going through it or is just not putting in the work that could totally change his performance. Additionally, too much pressure could cause problems.

No, I believe once an athlete achieves a certain level, that level should be considered their new baseline/expectation.

\*\*\*Maybe, because in that case there might not be a ton of footage on the guy and then the league figured him out and now it’s on him to adjust back.

No – regression to the mean is common. If you are unexpectedly great, your next season is more likely to slump because of regression to the mean and better team prep. This is a slump and, IMO, one of the best examples of a rationale for why they happen.

That LSU championship team from 2019 has been wildly successful in the NFL. And I feel like a lot of the Alabama guys doing okay. They’re not slump proof, but they have good careers.

\*\*If we knew that, nobody would slump again! But overall, I would say that a coaching focus on consistent and deliberate growth, injury avoidance, and continued athlete motivation would all limit the chance of slumping.

Hard work, good coaching, coachability, a smart GM, and people in his corner to help make a change and advocate for him (like a good agent)

Luck, good team support (i.e. the sole rookie star is more likely to slump than a rookie added to a great team), high profile before pro career, history of long success

Age. Did the guy redshirt? Did he stay a couple extra years? How have the extra covid years affected some of these guys entering the league at 25, 26 rather than 21, 22. Whether transferring impacts a player at all.

\*\*\*Yes, coaching and structure have a large impact on how successful an athlete is in the short and long term.