Super Bowl Prediction Analysis

DSC 680 Project 2 Draft

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# Business Problem

The NFL is a business, and the players and coaches make a lot of money, with salaries ranging depending on position and years of experience. For teams that make it to the Super Bowl, there is additional income that goes to both the winning and losing teams.

To be one of the two teams in the Super Bowl, it is important to understand what really impacts a team’s chances of making it. Then using past and current season statistics, chances of making it to the Super Bowl can determined and teams can focus on weak points to increase their chances of making it to and winning the Super Bowl.

# Background

The Super Bowl started in 1966 when the NFL Commissioner and the owner of the AFL’s Kansas City Chiefs negotiated a merger agreement stating the two leagues, National Football League (NFL) and American Football League (AFL), would formally join together in 1970 but until then, the two champions from the two leagues would play head-to-head in a “Super Bowl”.

Unlike other major sporting games (such as in MLB and NBA), whose viewership is largely dependent on who is playing or what big stars are in the game, the Super Bowl is not affected by these factors. Year over year, the Super Bowl has millions of viewers regardless of who makes it into the big game.

The purpose of this project is to predict which two teams will make it into the Super Bowl. While the two teams in the game do not really change how many people will watch the game, it is still a major question that comes up every year with many different businesses and sources producing algorithms to predict not only who will make it to the Super Bowl but who will win.

Part of the question this project aims to answer is not only who will make the Super Bowl or win the Super Bowl but also determine which factors greatly influence the teams that make it.

# Data Explanation

Data for this project came from two sources, NFL.com and pro-football-referece.com. Using Python and the package pandas, I used read\_html to pull data from the two sites for each team.

For the NFL data I had to pull data from every team, year available (1970 through 2021), for each team type (offense, defense, and special teams) and statistic types (ie. passing, rushing, fumbles, field goals, etc.). For each year there is a single row for each team; I concatenated each statistic onto the team’s data frame for that year then appended the year data frame to the main data frame. Once the entire data frame was constructed, I exported it to CSV to have a historical record of the data since it seems the date range available shifts by one year every time a new season year is added.

For the Pro Football Reference data, I had to read data for each team for each year, but only from one table on the site – the Schedule & Game Results. I added the team table to a current year data frame then appended the current year data frame to a main data frame then exported the main data frame to a CSV.

To prepare the data, I renamed the values in the Team column in the imported NFL data source so the two sources matched – the NFL name duplicated the Team Name (ex. Bills Bills). I removed unneeded columns from both sources and then created a new data frame to summarize the statistics in the Pro Football Reference dataset so there would only be one row per year per team to match the already summarized data frame from NFL.

From there, I was able to merge the two data frames and start exploring the data.

## NFL Data

Imported data has 1528 rows and 178 columns, several of which have been removed. Remaining are listed below. The date range of the NFL data is from 1970 through 2021.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Column | Description |
| Team | NFL Team Name |
| off\_passing\_Att | Offensive Passing Attempts |
| off\_passing\_Cmp | Offensive Passing Completions |
| off\_passing\_Cmp % | Offensive Passing Completion Percentage |
| off\_passing\_Yds/Att | Offensive Passing Yards per Attempts (avg) |
| off\_passing\_Pass Yds | Offensive Passing Yards |
| off\_passing\_TD | Offensive Passing Touchdown passes |
| off\_passing\_INT | Offensive Passing Interceptions Thrown |
| off\_passing\_Rate | Offensive Passing Rate |
| off\_passing\_Lng | Offensive Passing Longest Run |
| off\_passing\_Sck | Offensive Passing Sacks |
| off\_passing\_SckY | Offensive Passing Sack Yards Lost |
| off\_rushing\_Att | Offensive Rushing Attempts |
| off\_rushing\_Rush Yds | Offensive Rushing Yards |
| off\_rushing\_YPC | Offensive Rushing Yards Per Carry |
| off\_rushing\_TD | Offensive Rushing Touchdowns |
| off\_rushing\_Lng | Offensive Rushing Longest Completed Pass |
| off\_rushing\_Rush FUM | Offensive Rushing Fumbles |
| off\_receiving\_Rec | Offensive Receiving Receptions |
| off\_receiving\_Yds | Offensive Receiving Yards |
| off\_receiving\_Yds/Rec | Offensive Receiving Yards per Reception |
| off\_receiving\_TD | Offensive Receiving Touchdowns |
| off\_receiving\_Lng | Offensive Receiving Longest Reception |
| off\_receiving\_Rec FUM | Offensive Receiving Fumbles |
| off\_scoring\_Rsh TD | Offensive Scoring Rush Touchdowns |
| off\_scoring\_Rec TD | Offensive Scoring Receiving Touchdowns |
| off\_scoring\_Tot TD | Offensive Scoring Total Touchdowns |
| off\_scoring\_2-PT | Offensive Scoring 2-point Conversions |
| def\_passing\_Att | Defensive Passing Attempts |
| def\_passing\_Cmp | Defensive Passing Completions |
| def\_passing\_Cmp % | Defensive Passing Completion Percentage |
| def\_passing\_Yds/Att | Defensive Yards per Attempt |
| def\_passing\_Yds | Defensive Passing Intercepted Returned Yards |
| def\_passing\_TD | Defensive Passing Interception Touchdowns |
| def\_passing\_INT | Defensive Passing Interceptions |
| def\_passing\_Rate | Defensive Passing Rate |
| def\_passing\_Lng | Defensive Passing Longest Interception Returned |
| def\_passing\_Sck | Defensive Passing Total Sacks |
| def\_rushing\_Att | Defensive Rushing Attempts |
| def\_rushing\_Rush Yds | Defensive Rushing Yards |
| def\_rushing\_YPC | Defensive Rushing Yards per Carry |
| def\_rushing\_TD | Defensive Rushing Touchdowns |
| def\_rushing\_Lng | Defensive Rushing Longest Interceptions Returned |
| def\_rushing\_Rush FUM | Defensive Rushing Fumbles |
| def\_receiving\_Rec | Defensive Receiving Receptions |
| def\_receiving\_Yds | Defensive Receiving Yards |
| def\_receiving\_Yds/Rec | Defensive Receiving Yards per Reception |
| def\_receiving\_TD | Defensive Receiving Touchdowns |
| def\_receiving\_Lng | Defensive Receiving Longest Interception Returned |
| def\_receiving\_Rec FUM | Defensive Receiving Fumbles |
| def\_receiving\_PDef | Defensive Receiving Pass Defended |
| def\_scoring\_FR TD | Defensive Scoring Forced Fumble and Recovery that lead to Touchdown |
| def\_scoring\_SFTY | Defensive Scoring Safety |
| def\_scoring\_INT TD | Defensive Scoring Interceptions that Lead to Touchdown |
| def\_tackles\_Sck | Defensive Tackles Sacks |
| def\_tackles\_Comb | Defensive Tackles Combined Tackles |
| def\_tackles\_Asst | Defensive Tackles Assisted Tackles |
| def\_tackles\_Solo | Defensive Tackles Unassisted Tackles |
| def\_fumbles\_FF | Defensive Forced Fumbles |
| def\_fumbles\_FR | Defensive Forcred Fumbles and Recovery |
| def\_fumbles\_FR TD | Defensive Forced Fumble and Recovery that Lead to Touchdown |
| def\_fumbles\_Rec TD | Defensive Fumbles Reception Touchdowns |
| def\_fumbles\_Rec FUM | Defensive Reception Fumbles |
| def\_fumbles\_Rush FUM | Defensive Rush Fumbles |
| def\_interceptions\_INT | Defensive Interceptions |
| def\_interceptions\_INT TD | Defensive Interceptions that Lead to Touchdown |
| def\_interceptions\_INT Yds | Defensive Interception Yards Gained |
| def\_interceptions\_Lng | Defensive Longest Interception |
| Year | Year/Season |

## Pro Football Reference Data

There are 1381 rows with 36 features, two of which are target variables, depending on what is being predicted (make the Super Bowl or win the Super Bowl). The date range for the Pro Football Reference data is from 1976 through 2021.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Column | Descriptions |
| Team | NFL Team Name |
| Year | Year/Season |
| num\_wins | Number of Wins for the season (incl playoff games) |
| num\_losses | Number of Losses for the season (incl playoff games) |
| min\_win\_score | Minimum score that resulted in a win |
| max\_win\_score | Maximum score that resulted in a win |
| avg\_win\_score | Average score that resulted in win |
| min\_lose\_score | Minimum score that resulted in a loss |
| max\_lose\_score | Maximum score that resulted in a loss |
| avg\_lose\_score | Average score that resulted in a loss |
| min\_win\_off\_pass\_yds | Minimum offensive passing yards that resulted in a win |
| max\_win\_off\_pass\_yds | Maximum offensive passing yards that resulted in a win |
| avg\_win\_off\_pass\_yds | Average offensive passing yards that resulted in a win |
| min\_win\_off\_rush\_yds | Minimum offensive rushing yards that resulted in a win |
| max\_win\_off\_rush\_yds | Maximum offensive rushing yards that resulted in a win |
| avg\_win\_off\_rush\_yds | Average offensive rushing yards that resulted in a win |
| min\_win\_def\_pass\_yds | Minimum defensive passing yards that resulted in a win |
| max\_win\_def\_pass\_yds | Maximum defensive passing yards that resulted in a win |
| avg\_win\_def\_pass\_yds | Average defensive passing yards that resulted in a win |
| min\_win\_def\_rush\_yds | Minimum defensive rushing yards that resulted in a win |
| max\_win\_def\_rush\_yds | Maximum defensive rushing yards that resulted in a win |
| avg\_win\_def\_rush\_yds | Average defensive rushing yards that resulted in a win |
| min\_lose\_off\_pass\_yds | Minimum offensive passing yards that resulted in a loss |
| max\_lose\_off\_pass\_yds | Maximum offensive passing yards that resulted in a loss |
| avg\_lose\_off\_pass\_yds | Average offensive passing yards that resulted in a loss |
| min\_lose\_off\_rush\_yds | Minimum offensive rushing yards that resulted in a loss |
| max\_lose\_off\_rush\_yds | Maximum offensive rushing yards that resulted in a loss |
| avg\_lose\_off\_rush\_yds | Average offensive rushing yards that resulted in a loss |
| min\_lose\_def\_pass\_yds | Minimum defensive passing yards that resulted in a loss |
| max\_lose\_def\_pass\_yds | Maximum defensive passing yards that resulted in a loss |
| avg\_lose\_def\_pass\_yds | Average defensive passing yards that resulted in a loss |
| min\_lose\_def\_rush\_yds | Minimum defensive rushing yards that resulted in a loss |
| max\_lose\_def\_rush\_yds | Maximum defensive rushing yards that resulted in a loss |
| avg\_lose\_def\_rush\_yds | Average defensive rushing yards that resulted in a loss |
| SuperBowl | T/F, whether the team made it to the Super Bowl |
| SuperBowlWinner | T/F, whether the team won the Super Bowl |

The two datasets are related on column Team.

# Methods

For this project I used web scraping to retrieve data on the NFL teams since 1970 from nfl.com and data since 1976 from pro-football-reference.com. I removed columns from the data sets I didn’t need, aggregated the Pro Football Reference data to summarize game statistics (number of wins/losses, min/max/mean score, etc), and then joined the two datasets on Team and Year.

TODO

I will attempt to train and test three models for this project: Logistic Regression, Random Forest and Support-Vector Machine. Unlike other projects have typically outputted a single prediction (True or False, or some numeric prediction), the predictions for this project will output the top two teams predicted to make it to the playoffs. I am still figuring out exactly how to do this and what it will really look like – it might be a list of all teams and their likelihood or percent favoritism for the big game.

If I have time or if I can set up my project as I code properly, I would like to build my model behind a client application that can accept inputs and/or a file upload of current season statistics so predictions can be made with new input data.

# Analysis

TODO

# Conclusion

TODO

# Assumptions

There are a few assumptions made to accomplish this project. First, I do not consider home games versus away games. Also, I do not compare scores per game or stats/scores between teams that have played. All the data is summarized to represent how each team did overall per season.

# Limitations

TODO

# Challenges

The first challenge in this project was collecting the data. Not only did I have to pull data from two sources, I had to filter and summarize the data and join the two datasets for analysis. I had some challenges getting a summarized data frame of the pro football reference data.

Another challenge I had was working with so many features – this is the first project I have worked on that has had more than 25 features.

Lastly, a third challenge is figuring out how to create a model that will answer the question “who will play in the Super Bowl” instead of “who will win”. I have never had more than one output for a model.

# Future Uses/Additional Applications

The initial goal of this project was to predict who will play in the Super Bowl. Other applications could also be to predict who would win the Super Bowl. You might even be able to use this data to predict who will win a particular game, however that might require using some of the game data I removed.

# Recommendations

Because there are a lot of features in the dataset, it would be nice to have a front-end interface for either inputting data needed to make a prediction. Alternatively, the front-end could allow an upload of a file that contains either the data as is or that can be parsed and aggregated if needed in a way that the data could be used as input for the model.

# Implementation Plan

The implementation plan for this project involves a few steps:

1. Yearly, we can retrain and tune the model with new data from the two sites (NFL and Pro Football Reference)
2. New functions would need to be created in order to have a systematic way of taking in and formatting new data to be used in training the model
3. A front-end would be created to upload data for predictions and the backend would run model predictions
4. New functions would need to be put in place to handle the inputted data, whether that be manual entries or a file upload.

# Ethical Assessment

I was initially concerned with if I was going to be able to scrape the data from the two sites I used. I reviewed their policies but had some difficulty understanding some of the wording. On the Pro Football Reference site, they encourage people to pull the data themselves, so that added some reassurances.

Other than that, there is no player data so there is no personal information at risk of causing any ethical issues. Also, because this type of analysis is done every year by multiple different people/companies/businesses, and the predictions made cannot inherently change the outcomes of games played, I don’t see any ethical concerns of this project and analysis.