

THOSE NEW RECORDS: WHAT DO THEY PROVE?

By David Shapiro

[Editor's note: David Shapiro wrote this article in 1979 and, because it deals with team records and new ones are set each football season, the figures in the chart are obsolete and become more so with each year. Nevertheless, the method and principles Shapiro used are still valid and throw light on the constantly hyped records of today.]

I won't go into how I feel about sports media hyping; that would be like asking the current head of the W.C.T.U. how she feels about the consumption of alcohol. But the constant pounding today by the sports media is reminiscent of a Hollywood campaign of a couple of decades ago centered around the self-serving claim that "Movies are better than ever!" In this case the runners are better than ever, the passers are better than ever, the kickers are better than ever, the game is better than ever, etc. etc. etc.

Maybe. But let's look at just one aspect of the situation - - team offensive records. The table at the end of this article reflects the following procedure:

1. All the offensive team seasonal data of an absolute nature (total yards gained rushing, total number of punts, total number of penalties, etc.) were recast on the basis of the same number of games per year, regardless of the number actually played, essentially on a per game basis. The data of a relative nature (average yards gained per passing attempt, average yards gained per punt return, etc.) were not modified since number of games played per season would not be relevant statistically or arithmetically when dealing with ratios. All the results involving data of a relative nature were identified in the table with asterisks.

2. The data for each team for each offensive statistical category were processed to determine which has withstood the assaults of only, say, 10 years.

There are probably many weighting procedures one could justifiably use in a case such as this. I chose to use one derived (philosophically, anyway) from the area of mechanics -- force is equal to weight times length of lever arm (or some such wording). The last section of the table (Recapitulation) concentrates all the records of the thirties in the year 1936, all records of the the year in which the highest (or lowest where appropriate) occurred, that year then being designated as the record year -- e.g. the year in which each team's record for each of the offensive statistical categories was set. Where the high (or low) for a specific team in a specific category occurred in more than one year, the earliest year was designated as the year of record since tying a record is not breaking it.

The bulk of the table deals with percentage distribution. For example, of the 28 team records involving total first downs, none was set between 1933 and 1939 that has not been broken since, 7.14% of those set in the forties have still not been exceeded, 17.86% of those set in the fifties have still not been broken, etc.

As is usually my attitude, I try to refrain from imposing my own conclusions on others; I much prefer to present the mechanics and the findings and let others interpret the work as they choose. However, I'd like to point to two elements of the table which I find particularly interesting: what happens to the results when one eliminates from consideration all records involving the field goal and what happens when one weights the data (as he must, considering the number of years each team has been in existence).

When one eliminates from consideration all records relating to the field goal, the decade of the thirties loses 2 records; the forties, 0; the fifties, 7; the sixties, 28; and the seventies, 47.

In order for the table to make sense, some weighting procedure had to be devised and utilized for two reasons at least: most of the teams currently in existence began to play after 1959 (it would be impossible for any of their team records to predate that year) and a record that has lasted, say, 40 years, should be given more weight in terms of impact or importance than one which has withstood the assaults of only, say ten years. There are probably many weighting procedures one could justifiably use in a case such as this. I chose to use one derived (philosophically, anyway) from the area of mechanics -- force is equal to weight times length of lever arm (oe some such wording). The last section of the table (Recapitulation) concentrates all the records of the thirties in the year 1936, all the records of the forties in the year 1944.5, etc. The lever arm for each decade was obtained by calculating the number of years between the midpoint of each decade and 1978, the last year for which we have any team records. The force for each decade was obtained by multiplying the two.

On an unweighted basis, the decade of the seventies accounted for 38.9% of all the records. After weighting, that decade accounted for only 11.45%.

Is football really better than ever?

**PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY DECADE
OF PRO FOOTBALL OFFENSIVE TEAM RECORDS**

	33-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-78
First Downs					
Total	0.00	7.14	17.86	25.00	50.00
by Rushing	0.00	7.14	21.43	10.71	60.71
by Passing	0.00	0.00	25.00	50.00	25.00
by Penalties	0.00	10.71	7.14	28.57	53.57
Rushing					
Attempts	10.71	7.14	14.29	0.00	67.86
Yards	3.57	14.29	14.29	10.71	57.14
*Avg Yards/Attempt	3.57	3.57	17.86	42.86	32.14
Touchdowns	3.57	21.43	7.14	21.43	46.43
Passing					
Attempts	0.00	0.00	32.14	46.43	21.43
Completions	0.00	0.00	21.43	42.86	35.71
*Completion %	0.00	3.57	10.71	14.29	71.43
Gross Yards	0.00	3.57	25.00	53.57	17.86
*Average Yds/Attempt	3.57	7.14	7.14	50.00	32.14
*Average Yards/Comp.	7.14	14.29	10.71	50.00	17.86
Times Tkled Passing	0.00	0.00	0.00	60.71	39.29
Yards Lost Passing	0.00	0.00	10.71	57.14	32.14
Net Yards	0.00	0.00	21.43	57.14	21.43
Touchdowns	0.00	10.71	17.86	50.00	21.43
Passes Intercepted	3.57	14.29	25.00	42.86	14.29
*% Att.Inter. (lowest)	0.00	0.00	0.00	32.14	67.86
Punts					
Number	7.14	17.86	7.14	21.43	46.43
*Avg Yards/Punt	0.00	7.14	7.14	64.29	21.43
Punt Returns					
Number	0.00	7.14	25.00	3.57	64.29
Yards	0.00	32.14	7.14	10.71	50.00
*Avg Yds/Punt Return	0.00	35.71	3.57	28.57	32.14
Touchdowns	0.00	14.29	25.00	35.71	25.00
Kickoff Returns					
Number	0.00	3.57	14.29	53.57	28.57
Yards	0.00	3.57	14.29	53.57	28.57
*Avg Yds/Kickoff Ret.	0.00	3.57	7.14	50.00	39.29
Touchdowns	0.00	14.29	17.86	46.43	21.43
Interception Returns					
Number	3.57	17.86	17.86	42.86	17.86
Yards	0.00	17.86	14.29	35.71	32.14
*Avg Yds/Int. Return	0.00	3.57	3.57	35.71	57.14
Touchdowns	0.00	21.43	7.14	50.00	21.43
Penalties					
Number	0.00	21.43	10.71	3.57	64.29
Yards	0.00	14.29	21.43	14.29	50.00

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Fumbles

Number	7.14	25.00	7.14	21.43	39.29
Number Lost	0.00	17.86	17.86	28.57	35.71

Points

Total	0.00	14.29	7.14	50.00	28.57
PAT Att. (Kicking)	0.00	17.86	14.29	39.29	28.57
PAT's Made (Kicking)	0.00	17.86	10.71	35.71	35.71
FG Attempts	3.57	0.00	7.14	46.43	42.86
FG's Made	0.00	0.00	7.14	35.71	57.14
*% FG Attempts Made	3.57	0.00	10.71	17.86	67.86
Safeties	3.57	14.29	7.14	42.86	32.14

Recapitulation

All Records, Number	18	131	168	452	491
AllRecords, %	1.43	10.40	13.33	35.87	38.97

Absolute Records, Num.	13	109	146	344	368
AbsoluteRecords, %	1.33	11.12	14.90	35.10	37.55
*Relative Records, Num.	5	22	22	108	123
*Relative Records, %	1.79	7.86	7.86	38.57	43.93

Exclusive of FG Records

Number	16	131	161	424	444
%	1.36	11.14	13.69	36.05	37.76

WeightedDistribution

Midpoint of Decade	1936	1944.5	1954.5	1964.5	1974
1978 - Midpoint	42.0	33.5	23.5	13.5	4.0
Number x ('78-Mid.)	756.0	4388.5	3948.0	6102.0	1964.0
%	4.41	25.58	23.01	35.56	11.45