



# Antonio Gates Hall of Fame Case

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## Introduction

Antonio Gates initially entered the NFL from Kent State University originally as a basketball player looking to go pro in the NBA. He went to the Los Angeles/San Diego Chargers as an undrafted free agent in 2003 after switching from basketball to football.

He came into the NFL as a TE who was a much more prominent receiving TE than a blocking TE with a build of 6'4", 260 pounds. As a mainly receiving TE, he amassed 11,841 yards, 116 touchdowns, and 955 receptions in his playing career.

Antonio Gates was not selected to the Hall of Fame on his first ballot in 2024. We argue that Antonio Gates should have been the NFL's second first ballot HOF TE, the first being Tony Gonzalez. His impact on not only the TE position but also the receiving position has transformed the game. Similarly, his touchdown heavy accomplishments highlight his revolutionizing of TEs as serious red zone threats and the impact he had on the Charger's win percentage.

## Career Accomplishments

Individual Achievements:

8x Pro Bowl

3x All-Pro

Records:

1st in TE career TDs (116)

1st in TE multi-TD games (21)

3rd in TE career receptions (955)

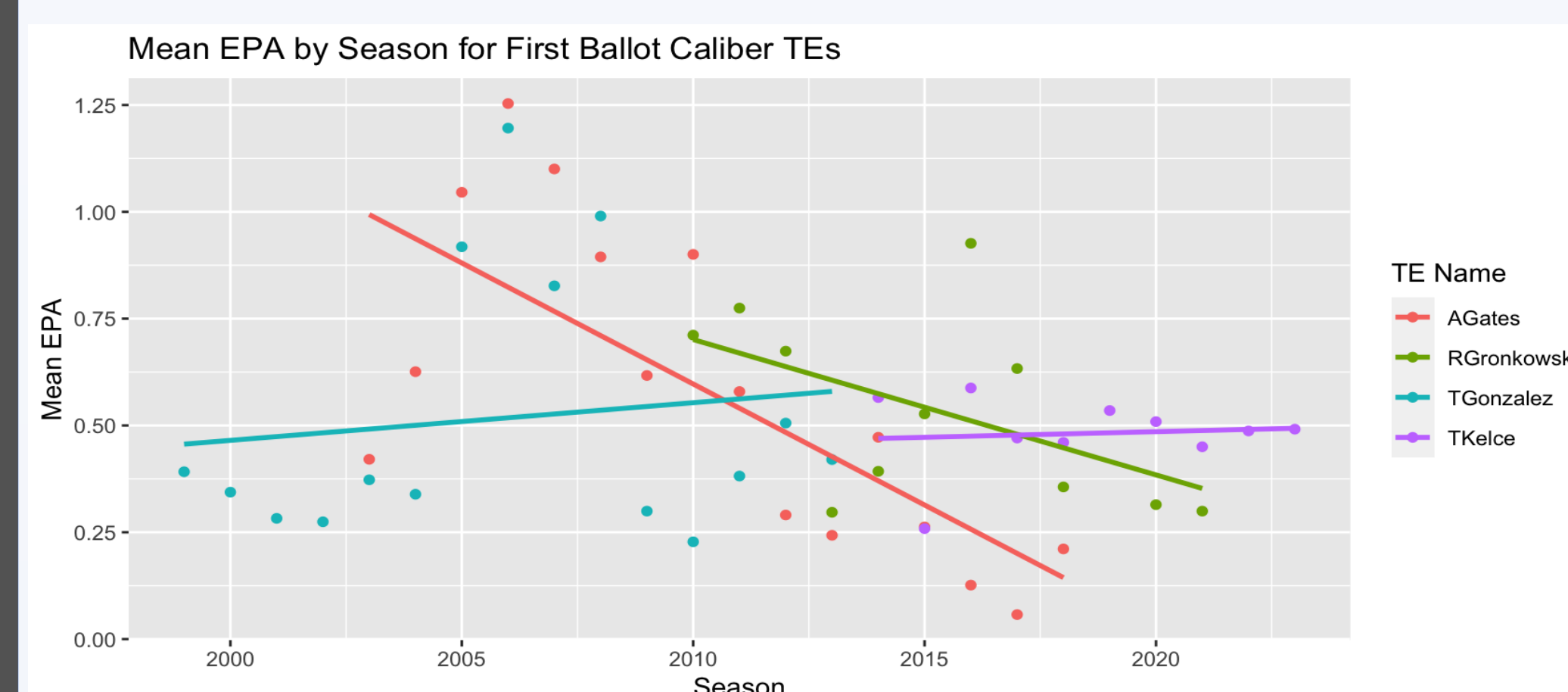
3rd in TE career yards (11,841)

Played his entire 15 year career with the Chargers

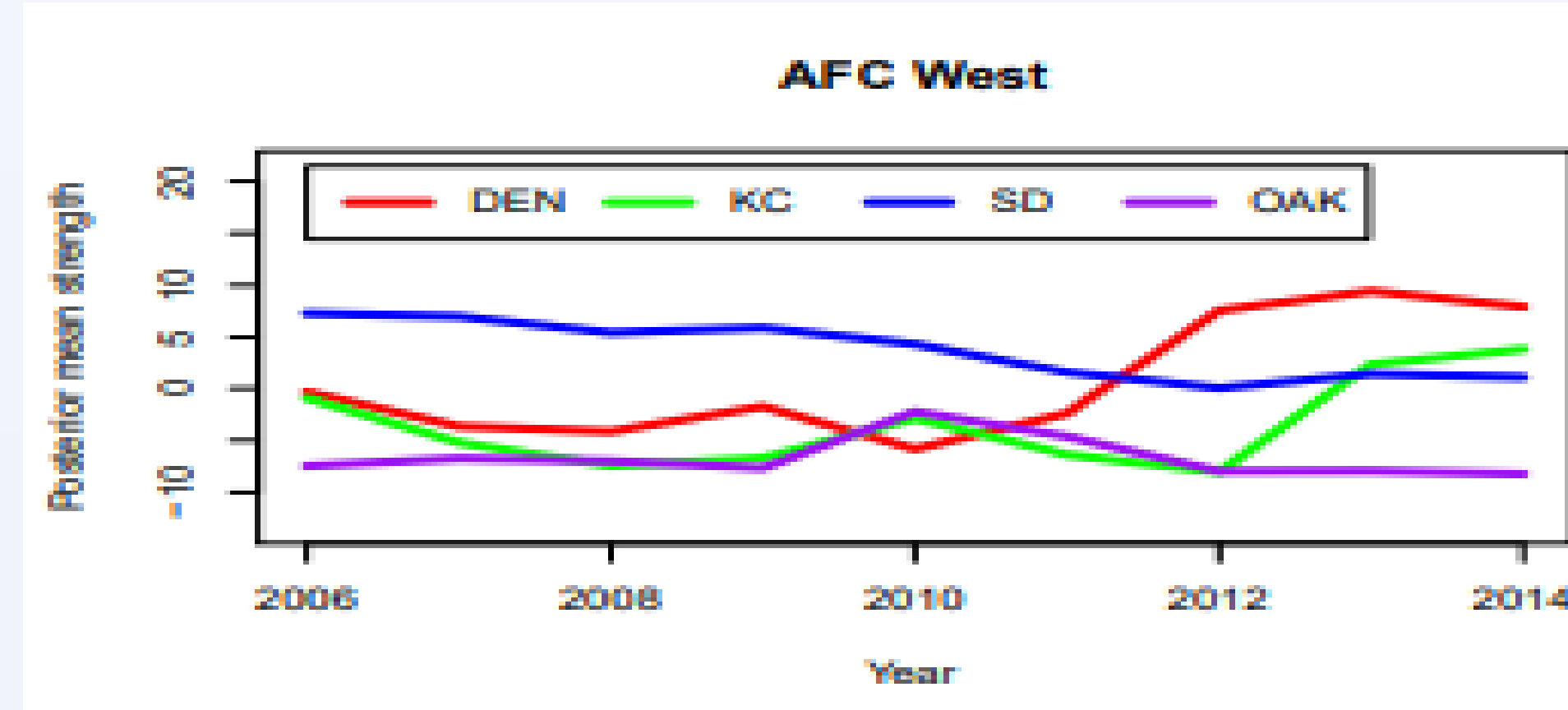
131-105 win/loss record in his career

## Gate's Dominant Prime

Antonio Gates had one of the most dominant primes of a TE in terms of Mean EPA during his playing career. He eclipsed 0.5 EPA in 8 seasons of his career. The next closest TEs to reach this mark are Gronk and Tony Gonzalez who reached it in 5 seasons of their careers, both regarded as the best TEs of all time. Gate's steeper fall off can be attributed to his lengthy playing career, where he started in over 5 games only once in his last 4 seasons.



## The Impact of Gates with the Chargers



San Diego Chargers 1.08 2.65

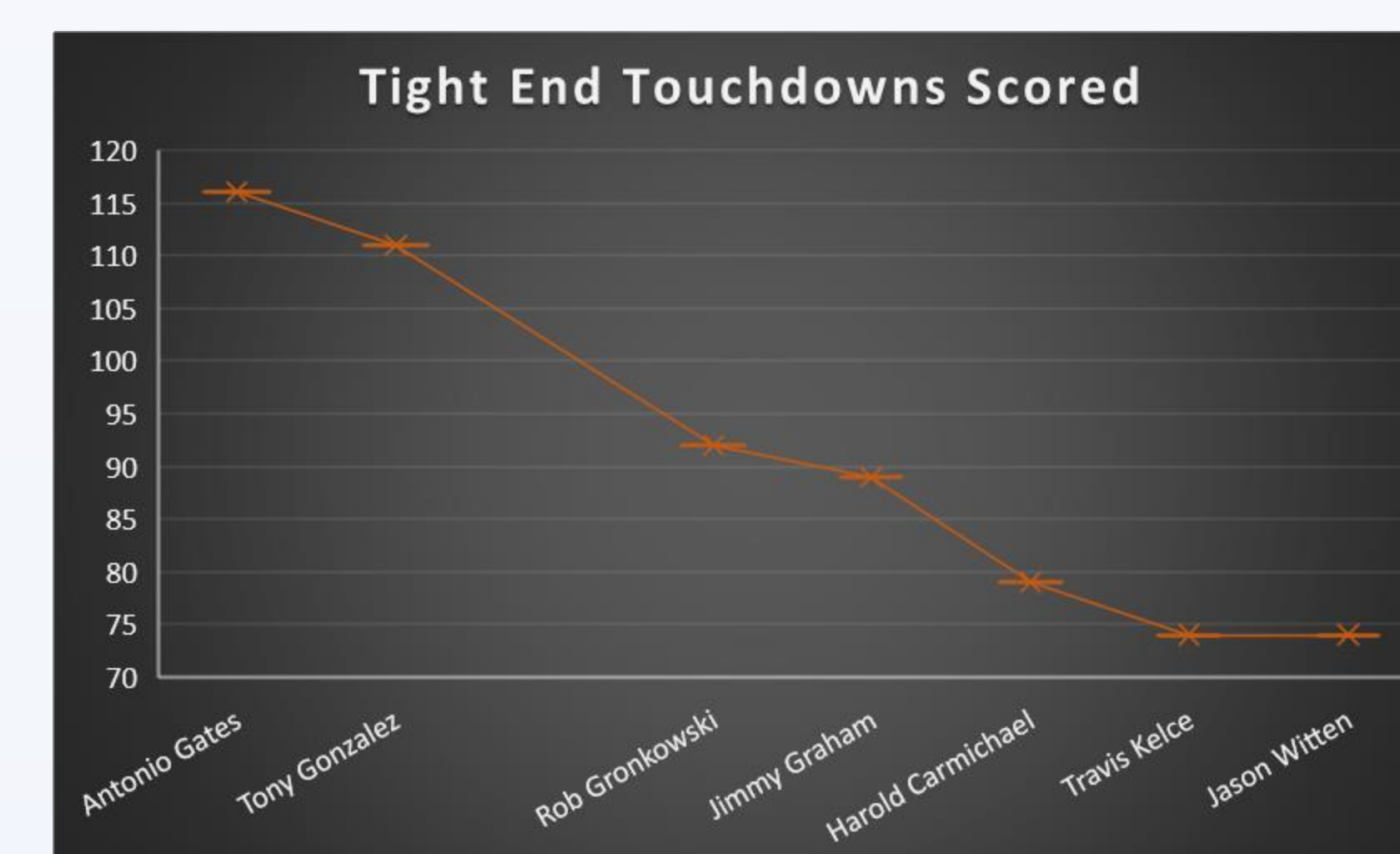
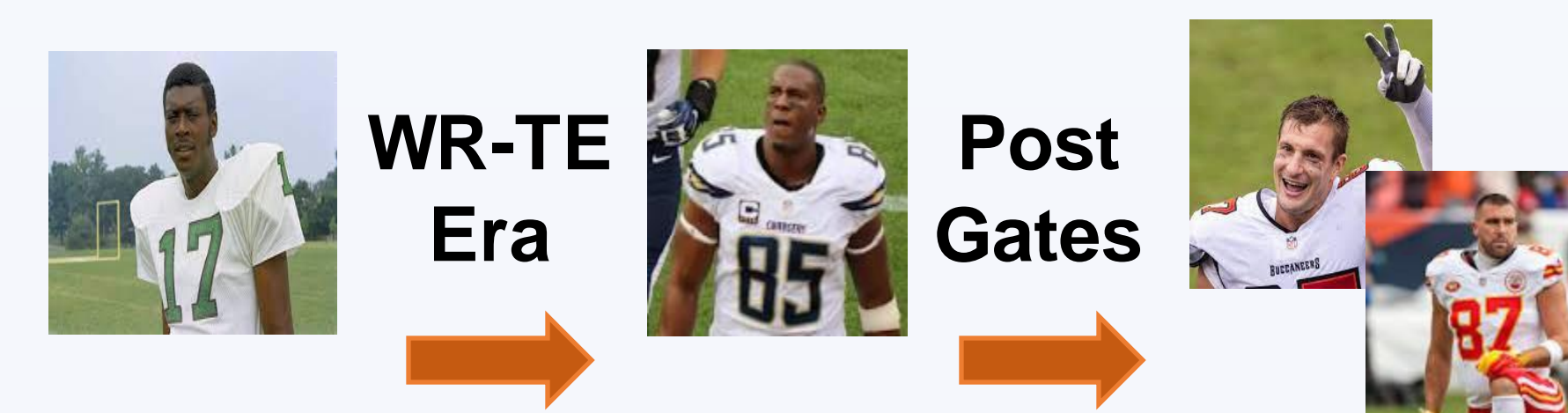
Posterior mean team strengths from a Bayesian dynamic model (Glickman and Stern).

$$L(\theta_1, \dots, \theta_T, \sigma^2, \tau^2, \rho \mid y_1, \dots, y_T)$$

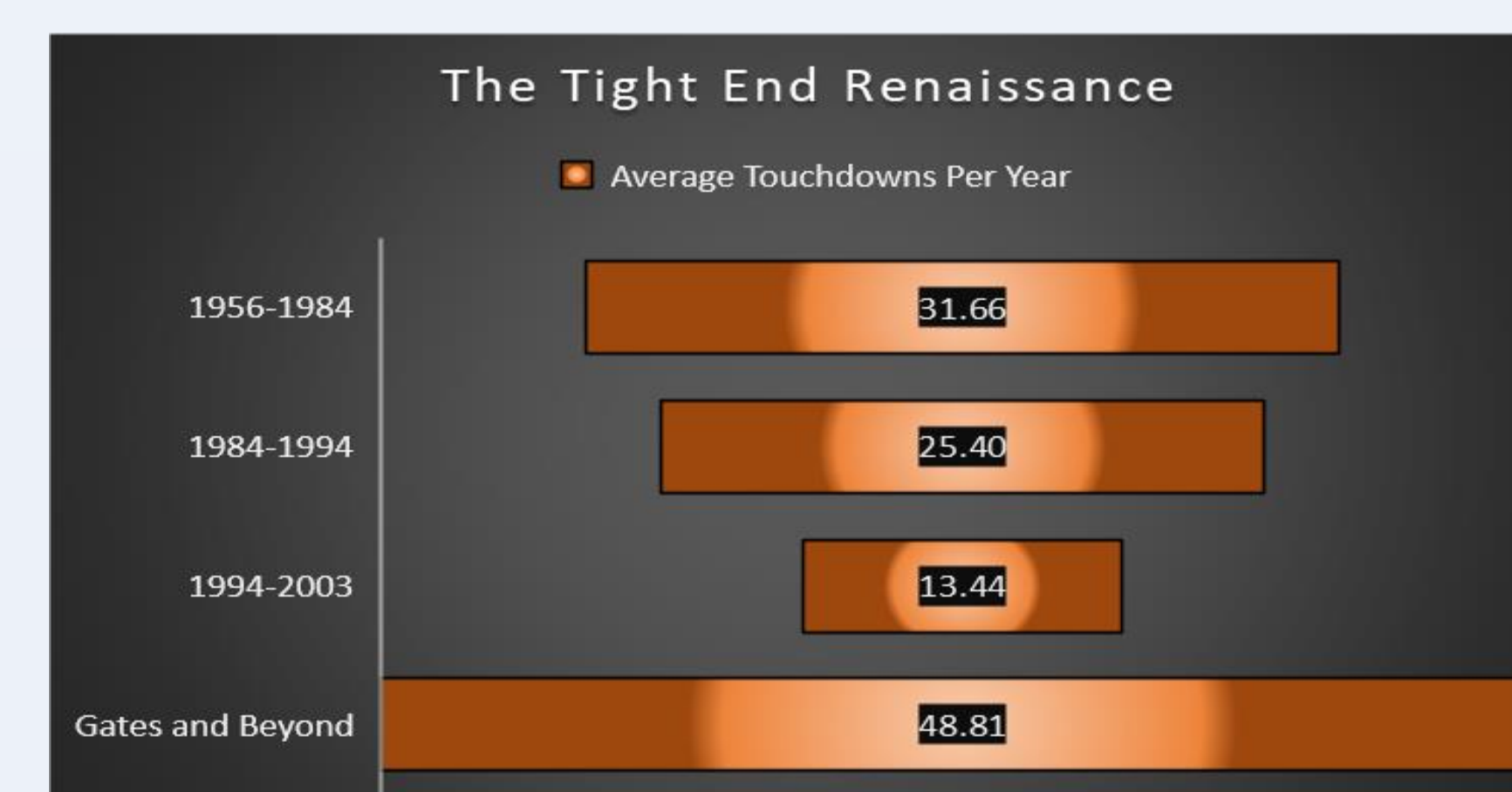
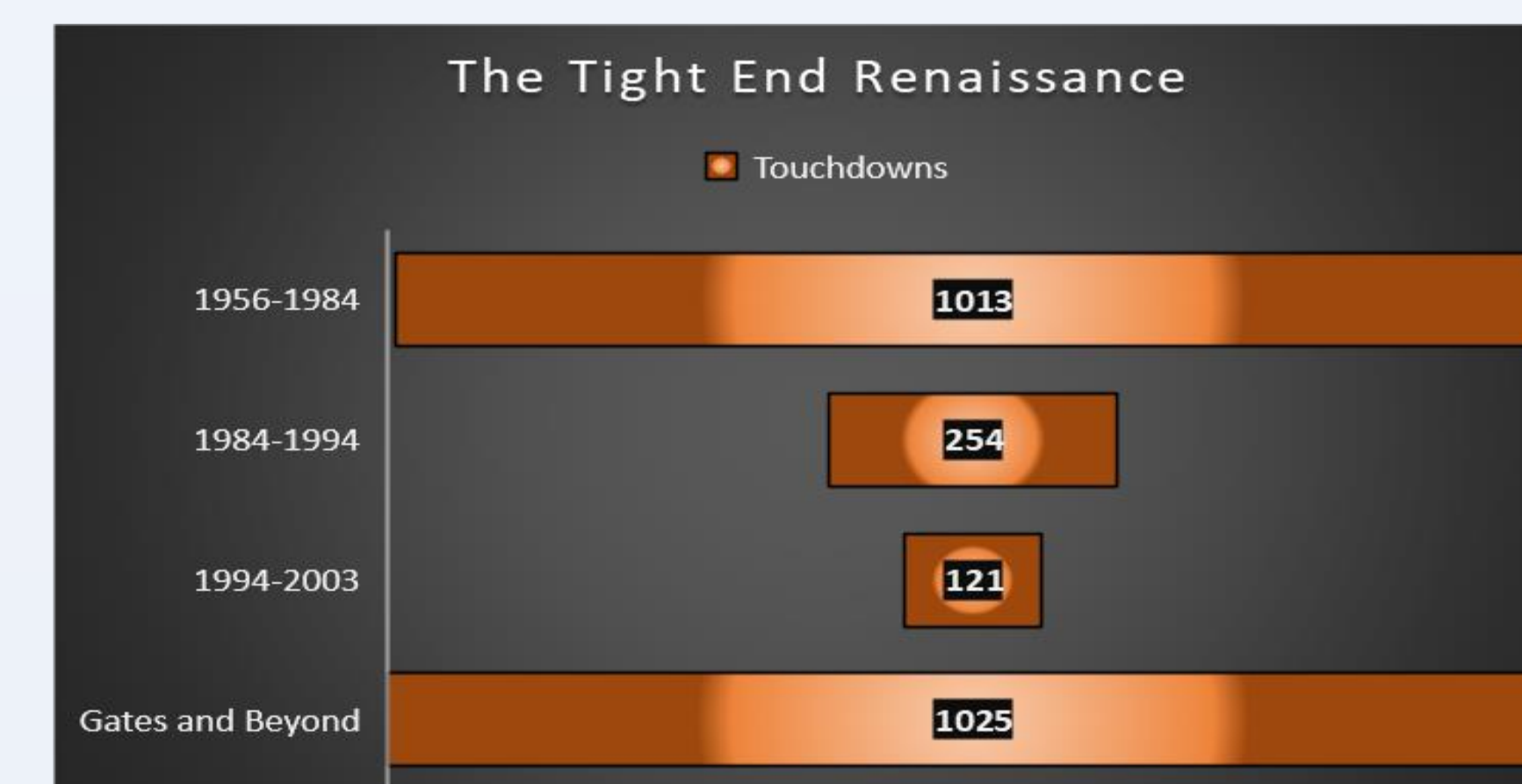
An additional area we researched was the strength of the Chargers while Gates was in his prime. This model from a paper titled "Estimating team strength in the NFL" calculated posterior means (the higher, the better) using a Bayesian dynamic linear model. This accounted for mostly endogenous factors such as score difference for games, player-level, and innovations in strength over time. Moving forward, it is clear the strength of the Chargers and Gates were correlated, but we would want to further use strength of innovation to identify a tangible impact he had on the team's success.

## The Tight End Renaissance

Early in the NFL, which we grouped as 1956 to 1984, the line between designation of wide receiver and tight end was blurred. Many of the touchdowns came from dual-position players like Harold Carmichael. Throughout our analysis, we saw that the 1956 to 1984 had a lot of TE-WR's scoring in the 40-50 range, skewing the total higher. Now, it seems we have star players scoring 50+ consistently.



Antonio Gates created a tight end renaissance in the NFL, transforming the position akin to that of a receiver. His impact can be seen in the trend of touchdowns among tight ends. From 1984 to 2003, roughly 10-20% of touchdowns by tight ends were scored in the NFL compared to before 1984 and after Gates. The trend is even more pronounced when taking the average touchdowns per year for these periods. Antonio Gates' style of play has influenced teams such as the Chiefs with Kelce in their high-powered offense and countless others.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, Antonio Gates' undeniable influence on revolutionizing the tight end position as the ultimate red zone threat, coupled with his dominant prime and significant impact on the Chargers' success, makes a compelling case for his first-ballot Hall of Fame induction. Gates not only redefined the role of tight ends with his exceptional skills and versatility, but his ability to consistently be a game-changing force in the red zone set a new standard for the position. His contributions were not only statistically impressive but also translated into crucial victories for the Chargers. Antonio Gates unquestionably stands as a pioneer and a dominant force in the history of the tight end position, solidifying his deserving place in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

## References

- <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/>
- Nflreadr pbp data
- Glickman, Mark, and Hal Stern. *Estimating Team Strength in the NFL*, [www.glicko.net/research/nfl-chapter.pdf](http://www.glicko.net/research/nfl-chapter.pdf).