

Game 6: The Legacy of Klay Thompson

Investigating one of the most infamous nicknames in the modern NBA

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Introduction

In the fallout of the 2024 Play-In game between the Warriors and the Kings, Klay Thompson gained a paradoxical label. Klay, a man with 4 rings and a nickname gained after a legendary playoff performance, was now the subject of ruthless online slander. How can a man dubbed "Game 6 Klay" be considered a choker? Is he no longer worthy of the moniker?

Nicknames Are Earned

To reiterate, Klay Thompson has 4 championship rings. I point that out because he doesn't like to mention it. Jokes aside, Klay was an indispensable part of 4 title teams. One of the years where the Warriors didn't win was where he earned the nickname "Game 6 Klay." It must be true if it's on his basketball reference page.



Klay Thompson


Klay Alexander Thompson • [Twitter: KlayThompson](#) • [Instagram: klaythompson](#)

(Big Smokey, Killa Klay, Game 6 Klay, The Electrician, Sea Captain)

Position: Shooting Guard and Small Forward • **Shoots:** Right

6-6, 215lb (198cm, 97kg)

Team: [Dallas Mavericks](#)

Born: [February 8, 1990](#) (Age: 34-273d) in Los Angeles, [California](#) 

Down 3-2, [Game 6 in Oklahoma City](#): Klay scores 41 points with 11 threes, including 19 in the 4th to outscore the Thunder team. Each three was more demoralizing than the last. Considering the off-season that followed with a certain former MVP defecting to Golden State, one could argue that Klay had one of the more consequential performances in recent NBA history¹ [1].

At this point, Klay was already established. He came into Game 6 averaging 25.5 points per game on 45/42/89² shooting splits in the playoffs, keeping Golden State

¹As much as I struggle justifying the citation of Draymond Green, I agree with his point. I believe that if the Thunder advance to the Finals, and especially if they won, then it would not have made as much sense for Durant to sign with the Warriors. Obviously, they would have played better "winning" basketball than the isolation-heavy Thunder, but the stench of conceding a series after holding a three games to one lead is likely what pushed Durant to make the decision. Someone can only try to win a championship with Russell Westbrook so many times before they snap.

²For future reference, the order of shooting splits is field-goal percentage, three-point percentage, and free-throw percentage

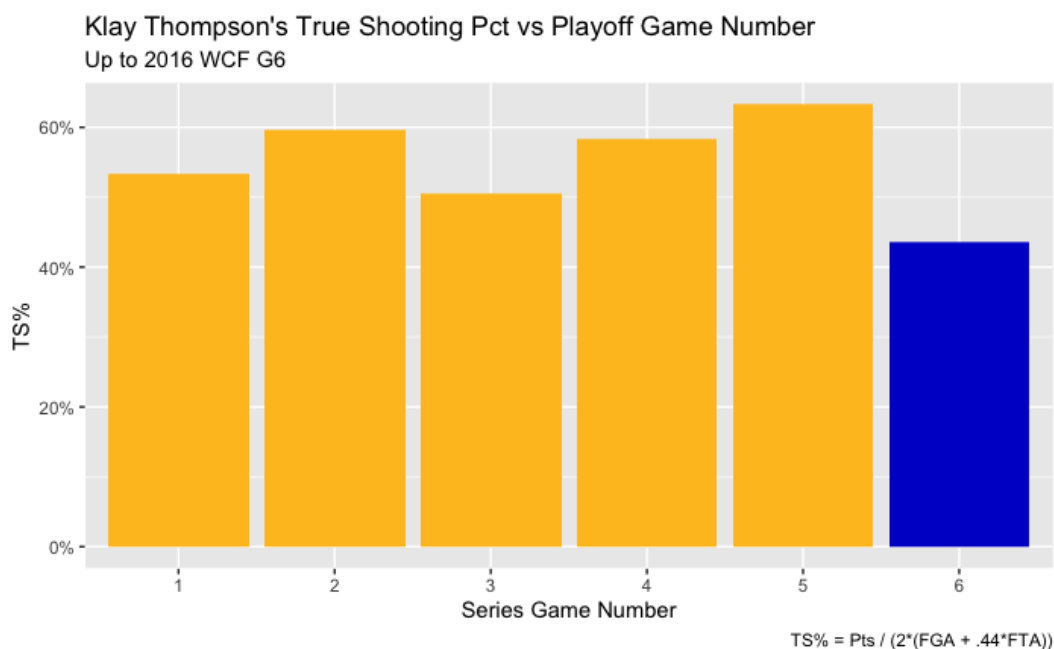
afloat with Curry missing time and clearly still hurting. Plus he was a 2-time All-Star, 2-time All-NBA and he received an MVP vote in 2015.

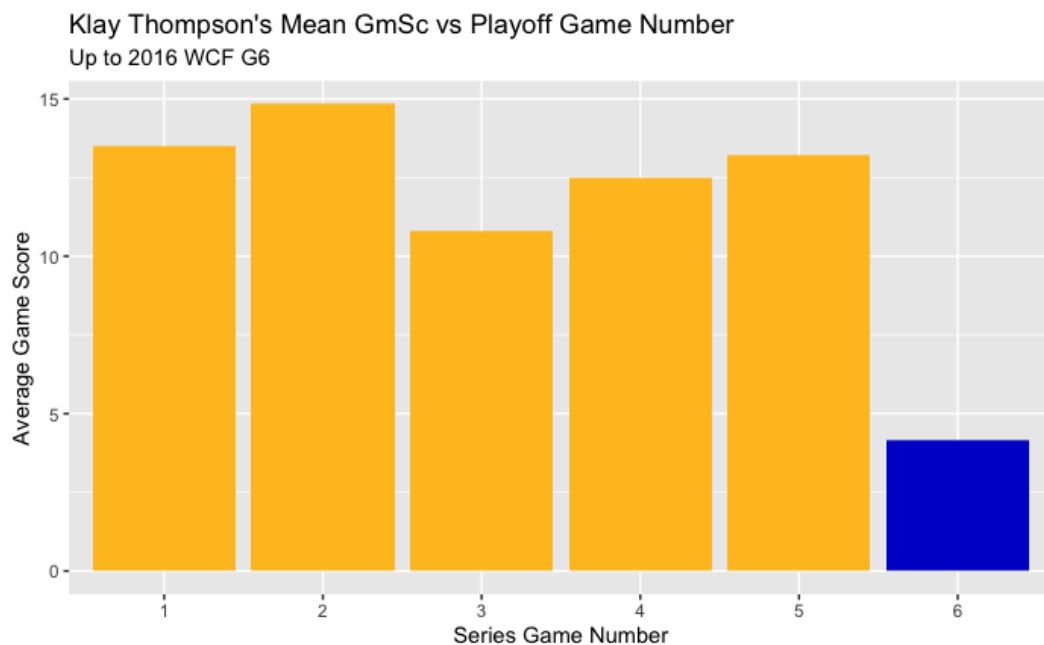
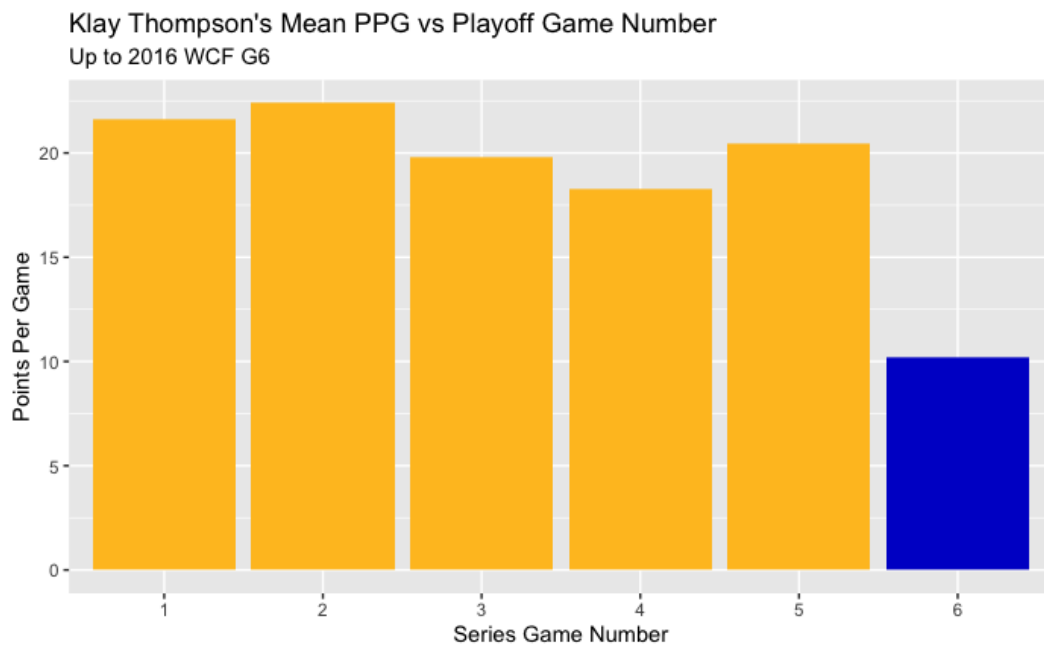
Rank	Player	Age	Tm	Voting			
				First	Pts Won	Pts Max	Share
1	Stephen Curry	26	GSW	100	1198	1300	0.922
2	James Harden	25	HOU	25	936	1300	0.720
3	LeBron James	30	CLE	5	552	1300	0.425
4	Russell Westbrook	26	OKC	0	352	1300	0.271
5	Anthony Davis	21	NOP	0	203	1300	0.156
6	Chris Paul	29	LAC	0	124	1300	0.095
7	LaMarcus Aldridge	29	POR	0	6	1300	0.005
8T	Marc Gasol	30	MEM	0	3	1300	0.002
8T	Blake Griffin	25	LAC	0	3	1300	0.002
10T	Tim Duncan	38	SAS	0	1	1300	0.001
10T	Kawhi Leonard	23	SAS	0	1	1300	0.001
10T	Klay Thompson	24	GSW	0	1	1300	0.001

This game caused Klay's status to explode, and he became known as "Game 6 Klay." He was already known for his heaters, scoring 37 in a quarter last year, but now he was something more. A boogeyman, a killer who could come into opposing arenas in the most high-stakes situations and rip a city's heart out.

One-Hit Wonder?

Was Klay known for his Game 6 magic before? Not really. In the five Game 6's before, Klay averaged 10.2 pts and shot 33.9% from the field and 31.8% from downtown. In fact, by several metrics (TS%, PPG and Game Score), Game 6's were Klay's weakest playoff games up until that point.





Note Klay played in Games 1-4 ten times, Game 5 ten times, and Game 6 five times. He also averaged 37 minutes across all the games. He played in only one Game 7 at that point, so it isn't on the chart, but in Klay's one game 7, he scored 15 points, posted a 55 TS% and had a 12.3 Game Score, all still higher than his Game 6 averages.

What Have You Done For Me Lately?

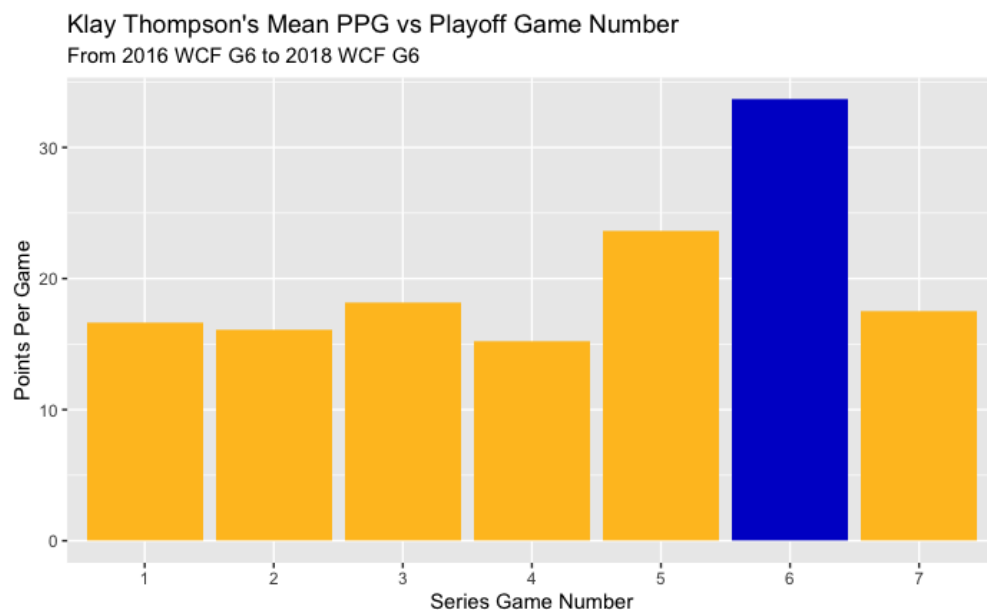
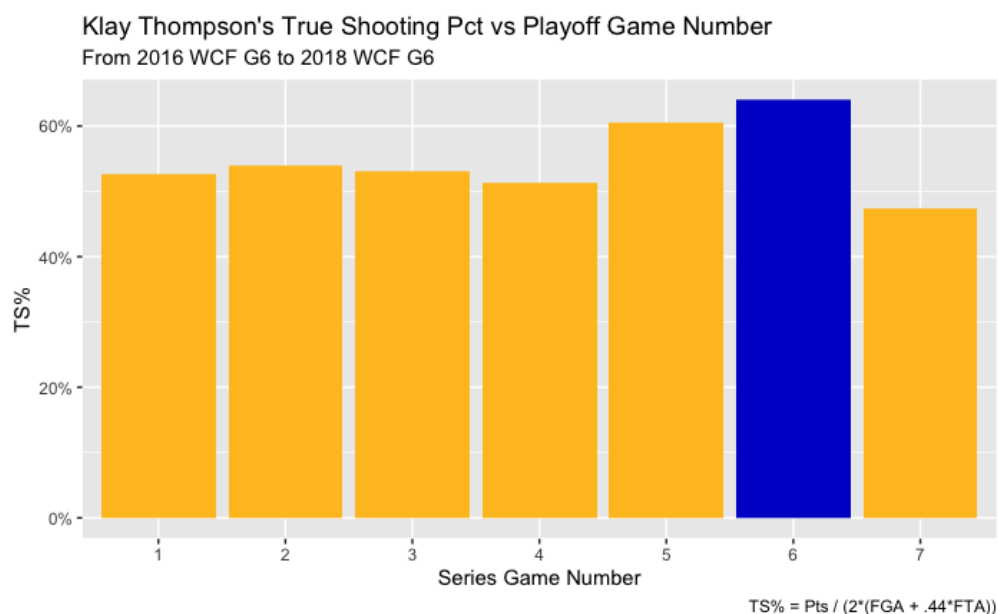
The combination of Klay's Game 6 performance and the Warriors' unfortunate collapse paved the way for Kevin Durant to come to town, and thus, there was no Game 6 Klay appearance for nearly two years. The Warriors lost one game in the entire 2017

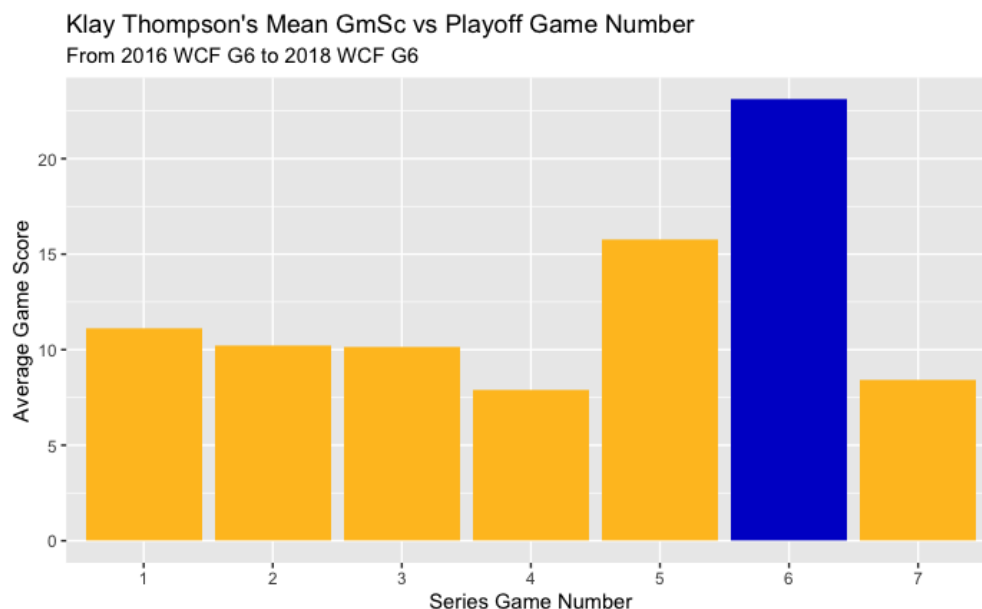
postseason; such is the life of a team with that Big Four all in their prime.

Golden State cruised by a Kawhi-less Spurs team and a Pelicans team fresh off of embarrassing Portland. They met their first real competition in the Rockets, where they had an intense, classic, yet infamous 7-game series. And when does Klay have his [best game](#) of the series?

35 points. 9 threes. 4 steals. No Chris Paul. No chance. Well, the Rockets actually held an early 17-point lead, and were up ten at half. But being outscored 64-25 in the second half quelled any chance of the Rockets clinching. Klay made 7 threes in the second half, as the Splash Bros took over.

At this point, Game 6 Klay was undeniable. This is the second occurrence when the Dubs were down 3-2 and he goes nuclear to bury a team's hopes of clinching. Another game where Klay goes unconscious in the second half. To show this new Game 6 dominance, here are the same graphs from before with this new time frame.





The 2019 Warriors were more of a soap opera, and they were also more vulnerable. The core was older, the depth was at its worst, and fatigue was undoubtedly a factor—this could potentially be the fifth straight year where the Warriors would be playing into June. This was the most resistance the Warriors had faced in the playoffs since 2016.

The Warriors played three Game 6s in 2019. The first came in the first round against the pesky Clippers; Golden State had gone 16-2 in Round 1 from 2015-18, and yet they were entrenched in a dog fight with the eight-seed Clippers. Los Angeles pushed the series to 6. What would Klay do against them on their home floor?

Well, here's the thing. That game was the Kevin Durant game. He had been hearing about Clippers guard and notorious irritant Patrick Beverley was "under his skin;" it's pretty funny to think about now. Durant came out and scored 38 in the first half, and 50 points total. Klay only took ten shots as the Warriors let Durant cook. Mentioning this game is an excuse to post the [highlights](#) and this [post-game interview](#) with Lou Williams and Beverley.

The next round presented the Dubs with another Game 6, this one against an albeit weaker Rockets team, but without Durant after he injured his calf in Game 5. Again, the Warriors would be headed into a road arena. This game is, again, more defined by a teammate. Steph Curry exploded for 33 points, including some ridiculous threes to burn the Rockets.

However, what made this game so shocking to watch live was the first half. Steph had zero points at the half, and yet it was a tie game. How? Klay Thompson. He had 21 points and 5 threes to keep the Warriors in the game, and Steph took over in fourth quarter. Klay only had 3 points in the fourth quarter, and yet, they were so crucial. [Here they are...](#)

Klay didn't have a fourth quarter explosion, but just a dagger three to bury the Rockets and advance to the next round. After Portland participated in the conference finals, the Warriors entered the Finals matched up against the Raptors. No Durant, a one-legged DeMarcus Cousins was back after a torn quad, and the Dubs were on the road this time. The Warriors got desperate, rushing Durant back, who promptly tore his Achilles tendon in Game 5, but they still forced a Game 6.

The game had the makings of a Game 6 Klay performance. The Warriors were down early, but had taken the lead in the 3rd. With over 3 minutes left, Klay drilled a 3 to give the Dubs a 4-point lead. He now had 10 in the quarter and 28 in the game. The building was exploding.

Then it happened. Klay got fouled on a drive and his knee gave. He was helped off the floor by teammates down the tunnel, as a devastated Steph Curry paced on the court. Silence had swept over the usually raucous Golden State crowd. Until..

He returned. Like Willis Reed in the '70 Finals; like Paul Pierce with a fresh pair of pants. Klay returned to the floor to take his free throws, since he wouldn't be eligible to continue playing if he didn't. The crowd exploded; speculation of a torn ACL had already consumed everyone watching, and yet, here he stood.

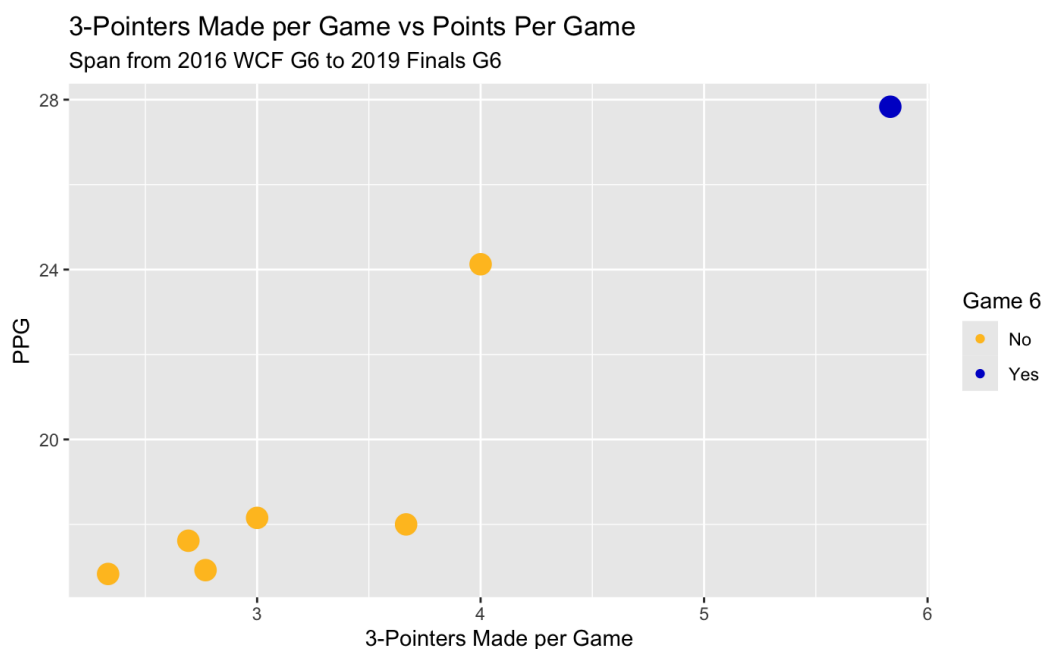
Klay was dubbed Game 6 because of a performance, but this act defines "Game 6 Klay." He's a paragon of accountability, a killer, an ever-reliable staple of a dynasty. When the Warriors' backs were against the wall, when Steph or Durant were struggling or injured, he always came through.

Klay wouldn't return to the game, but this moment was not any less special. However, Klay's injury, along with Durant's injury, plus his impending departure, signaled the end of this iteration of the Warriors. Doubt became commonplace. Could the Warriors recapture the magic of the 2015 core? Would Klay be the same?

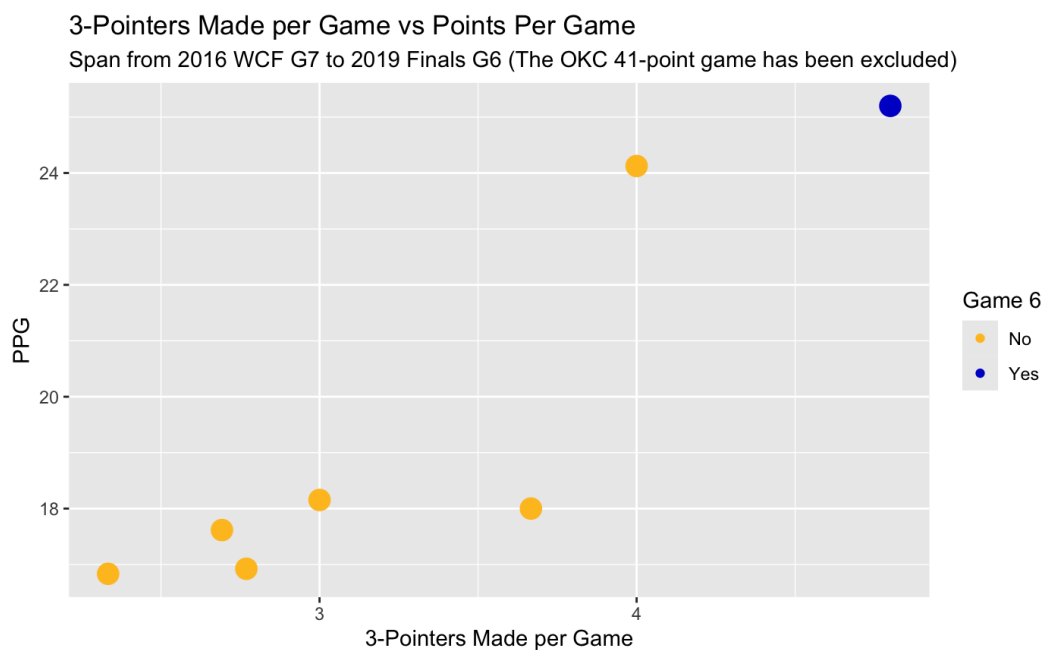
The Fallout

The torn ACL kept Klay out for 2020, and a brutal torn achilles kept him out for all of 2021 and over half of the 2022 season. There was now even more doubt if Klay would be anywhere near the same player.

From the original Game 6 game to the clinching game of the 2019 Finals, Klay played in six Game 6's. It always felt that when that game approached, Klay had a barrage of backbreaking 3s loaded in the chamber (if not him, then one of his teammates). Here's a graph showing Klay's points and 3s per game during that span.



If there's any question that the 41-point performance against the Thunder is significantly skewing the averages, here's the same graph without that game included. The other dot that is even within proximity of Game 6 is Game 5; Klay's Game 5 averages were the only ones that touched his Game 6 efforts, but the level of notoriety isn't close.



References

- [1] Mutoni, Marcel. "Draymond Green: 'No Chance' Warriors Sign Kevin Durant if OKC Reaches NBA Finals." *Slam*, 27 July 2016, [link](#).

[2]