

THE LONG GAME

# NBA THREE POINTERS

AND WHY THEY'RE  
NOT THE PROBLEM

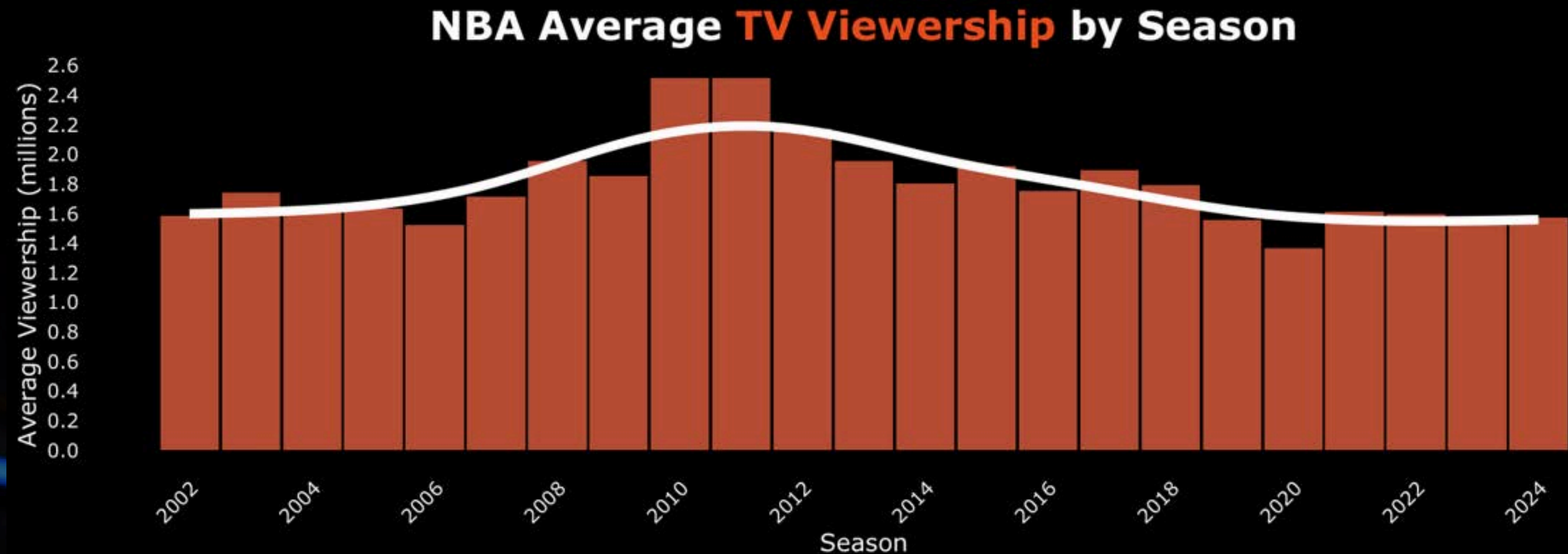


LAUREN MANIS | APRIL 2025



# THE NBA'S VIEWERSHIP PROBLEM

The NBA has experienced a noticeable decline in television ratings and overall viewership in recent years. Fans and critics have offered plenty of theories, but none has dominated the conversation—or taken more of the blame—than the league's growing reliance on the three-point shot.



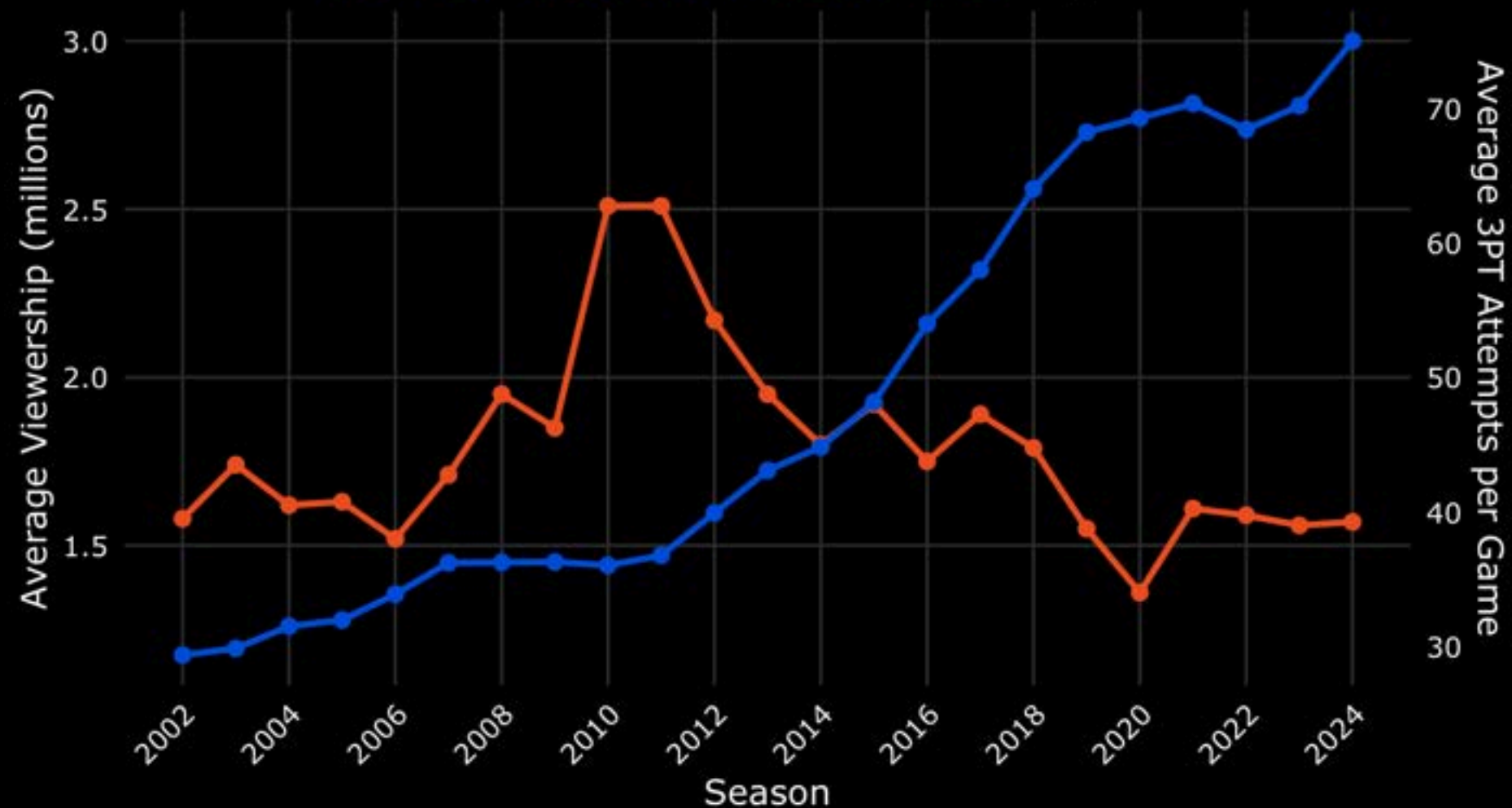
# THREE-POINT VOLUME IS HIGHER THAN EVER

Fans and critics have been quick to blame the NBA's declining viewership on one thing: **too many threes.**

And yes — it's true that viewership is down, and three-point attempts are at an all-time high.

**But the question remains: is the three-point shot really the problem?**

NBA Per-Game Average TV Viewership and Three-Point Attempts by Season





# THE PEOPLE VS. THE THREE-POINTER

## WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING



**USA TODAY Sports**

The games become too homogenous, robbing us of all the intricacies and skill that comes from good post play, a mid-range game or simply attacking someone at the rim and daring them to stop you.

**nbagoober13**

The Mid-Range Shot Is DEAD...Bring the mid-range shot back.

265K



**gianconners**

The amount of threes taken a game, no matter how many a team misses



**TOO MANY THREES**



**daviq.04**

Too much 3 point shooting they don't really run plays anymore

**Wes C**   
@WesClements22

[Low viewership has] to do with one thing, the product...3 point shooting contest nightly means more failure that fans have to watch...

**The Ringer**

Missed 3s Are Taking Over the NBA. Where Should the League Draw the Line?



# ***THE CASE AGAINST THREES***



***OFFENSES ALL  
LOOK THE SAME***



***MORE THREES,  
MORE MISSES***



***THE MID-RANGE  
HAS VANISHED***



# ***ITS TIME TO STOP BLAMING THREES***

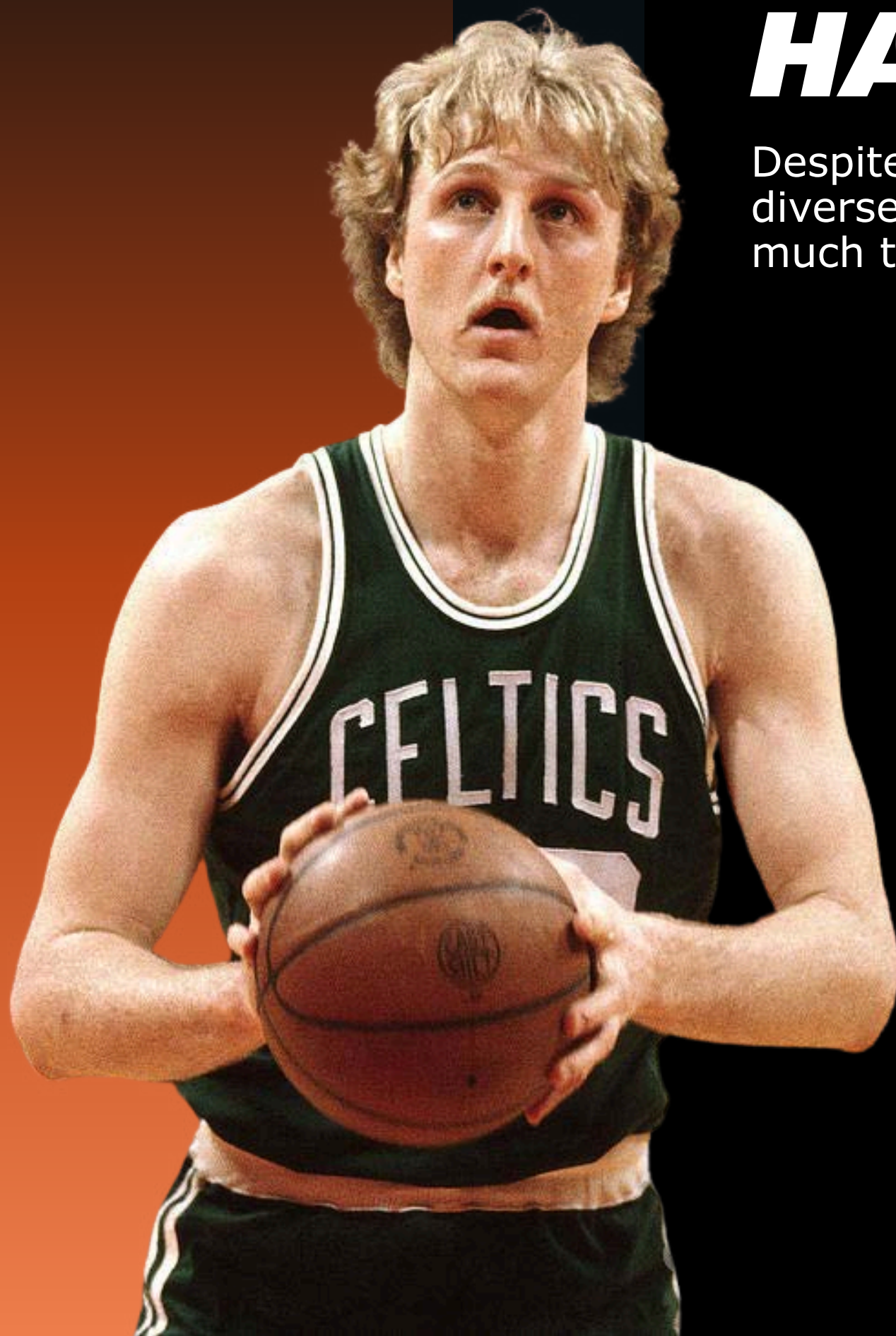
The three-point era has changed how teams play—but there's no evidence it's driving fans away. The most common complaints don't hold up under scrutiny, and the real reasons for "declining" viewership lie elsewhere.



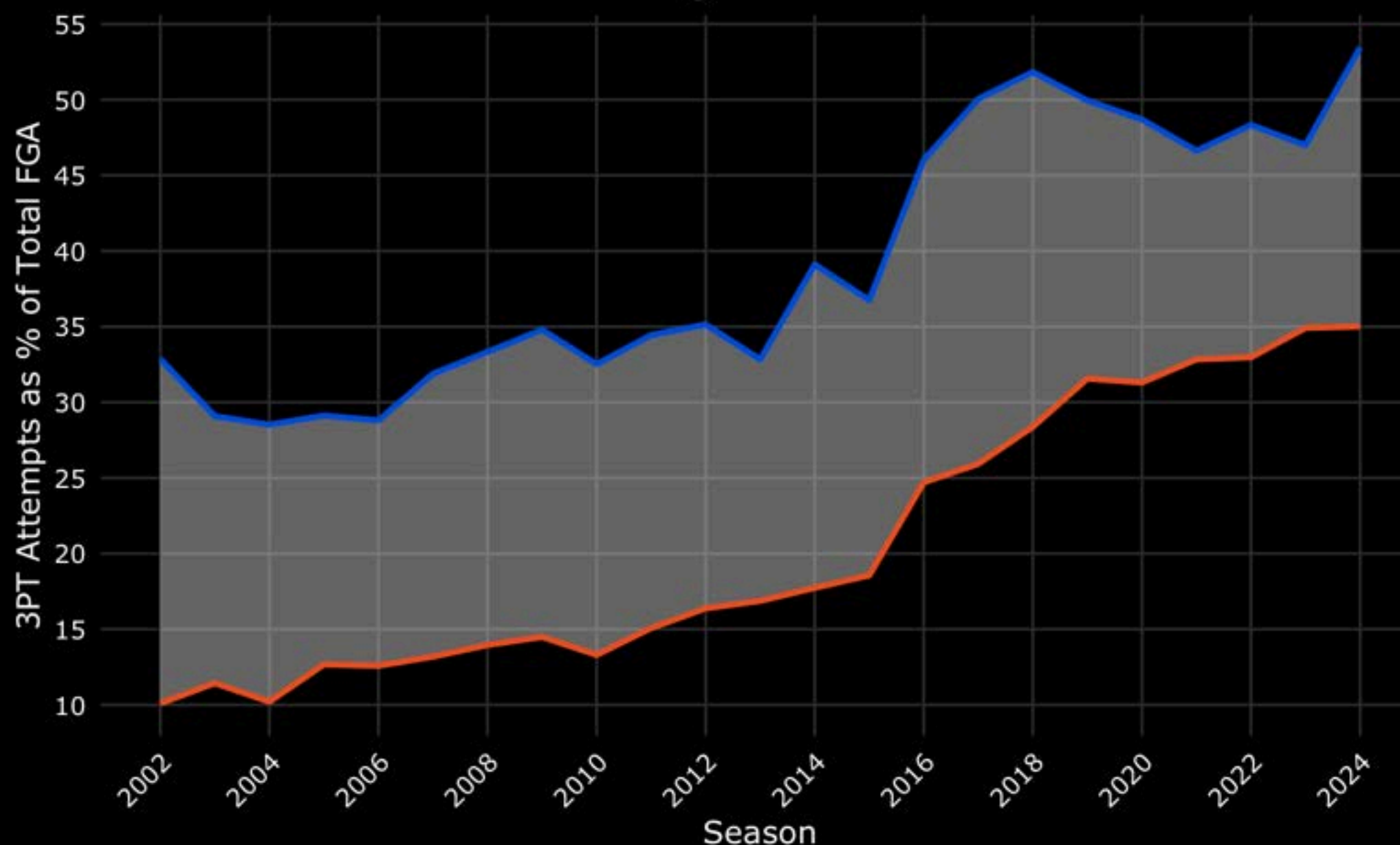


# ***OFFENSIVE STYLES HAVEN'T CONVERGED***

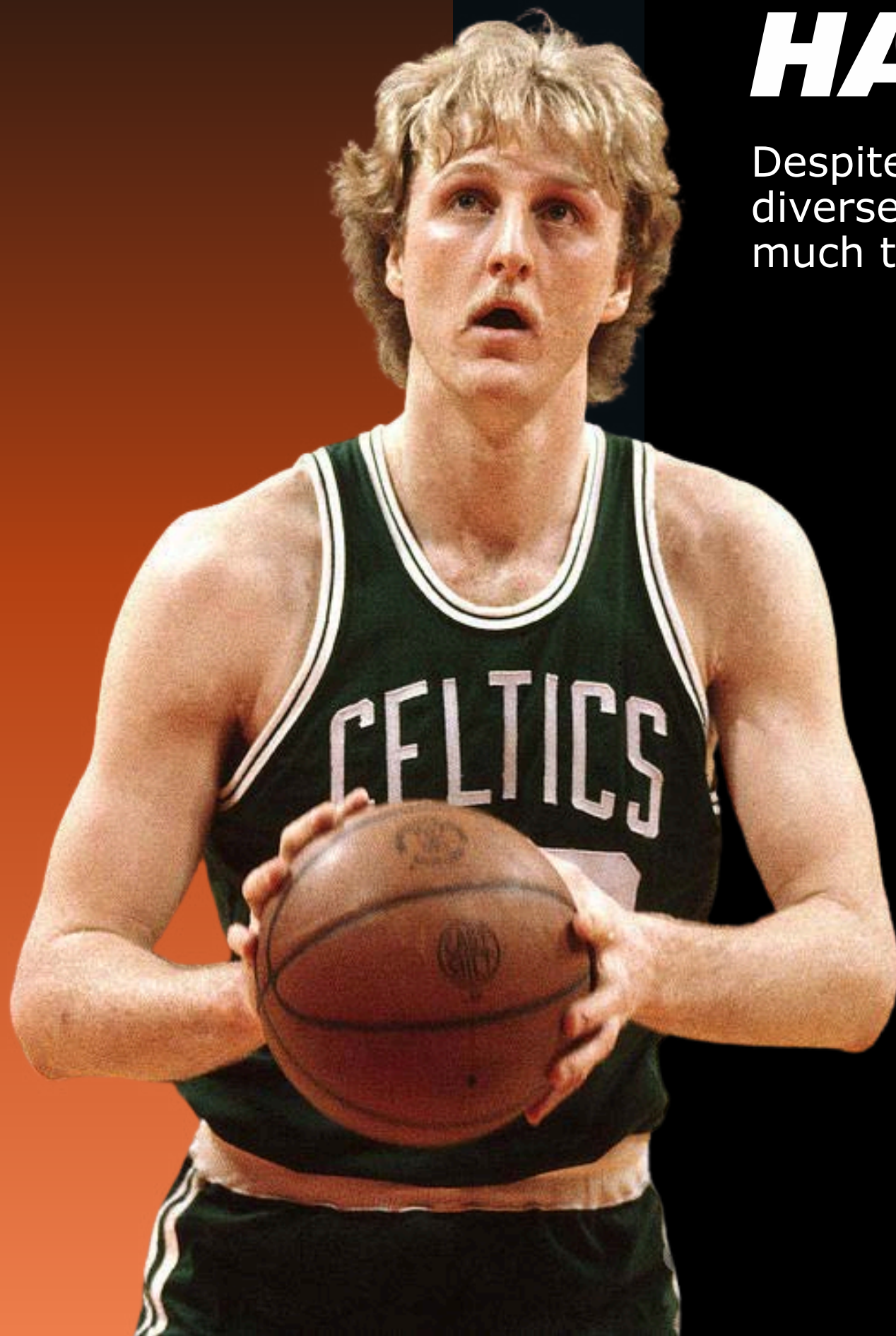
Despite a league-wide increase in three-point attempts, offensive styles remain diverse. While the overall trend is upward, teams still vary significantly in how much they rely on the three — and that **range is basically as wide as ever.**



## **Three-Point Shooting Variation Across Teams**







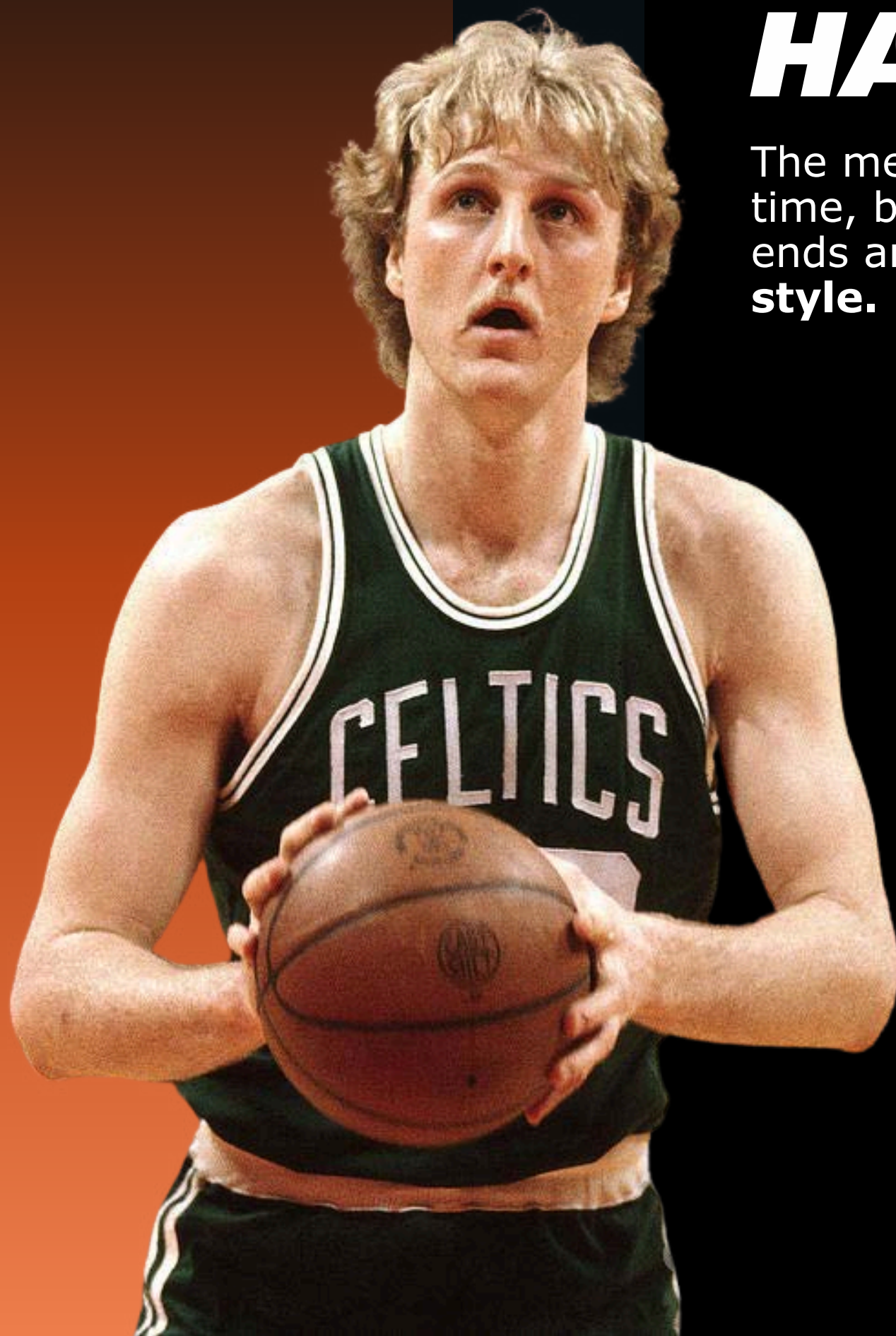
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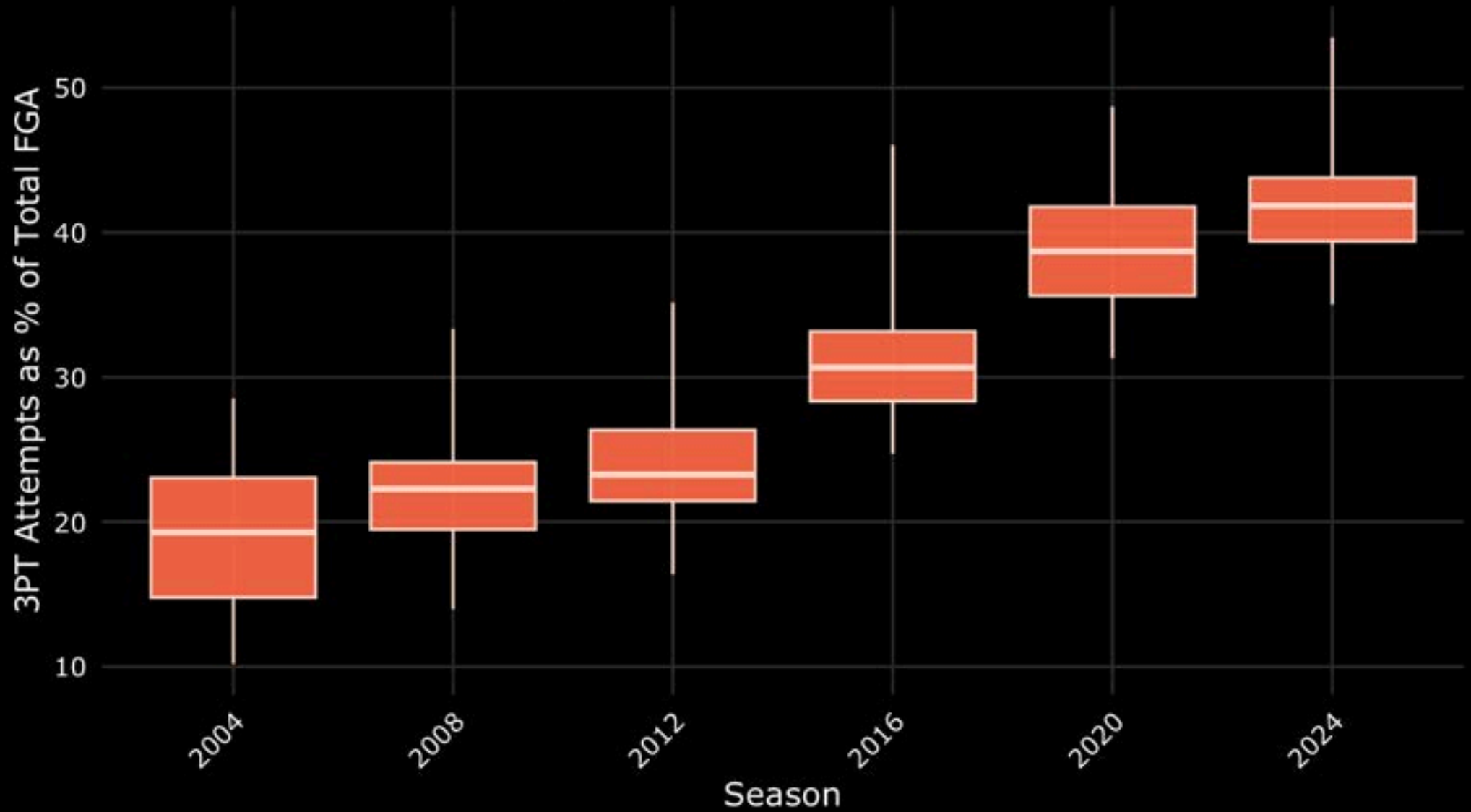




# OFFENSIVE STYLES HAVEN'T CONVERGED

The median and average share of three-point attempts have both increased over time, but the distribution across teams remains wide. Teams on the high and low ends are still just as far apart, showing there's **no single blueprint for offensive style**.

Distribution of Team 3PT Attempt Proportions Over Time





# ***PLAYERS ARE HITTING MORE SHOTS THEY'RE NOT JUST CHUCKING THREES***

**NBA Per-Game Average Field Goal  
Percentage Over Time**



**Efficiency has quietly improved over time.**

Despite the spike in three-point attempts, overall field goal percentage has trended upward — proving that modern shot selection hasn't made players less effective, just more strategic.





# PLAYERS ARE HITTING MORE SHOTS THEY'RE NOT JUST CHUCKING THREES

NBA Game Average **Shot Attempts** and  
**Missed Shots** by Season



Today's players aren't just shooting more — they're making more, too.

While total shot attempts have increased (including threes), overall efficiency hasn't suffered. **The slight rise in missed shots is simply due to more volume — not lower quality.**





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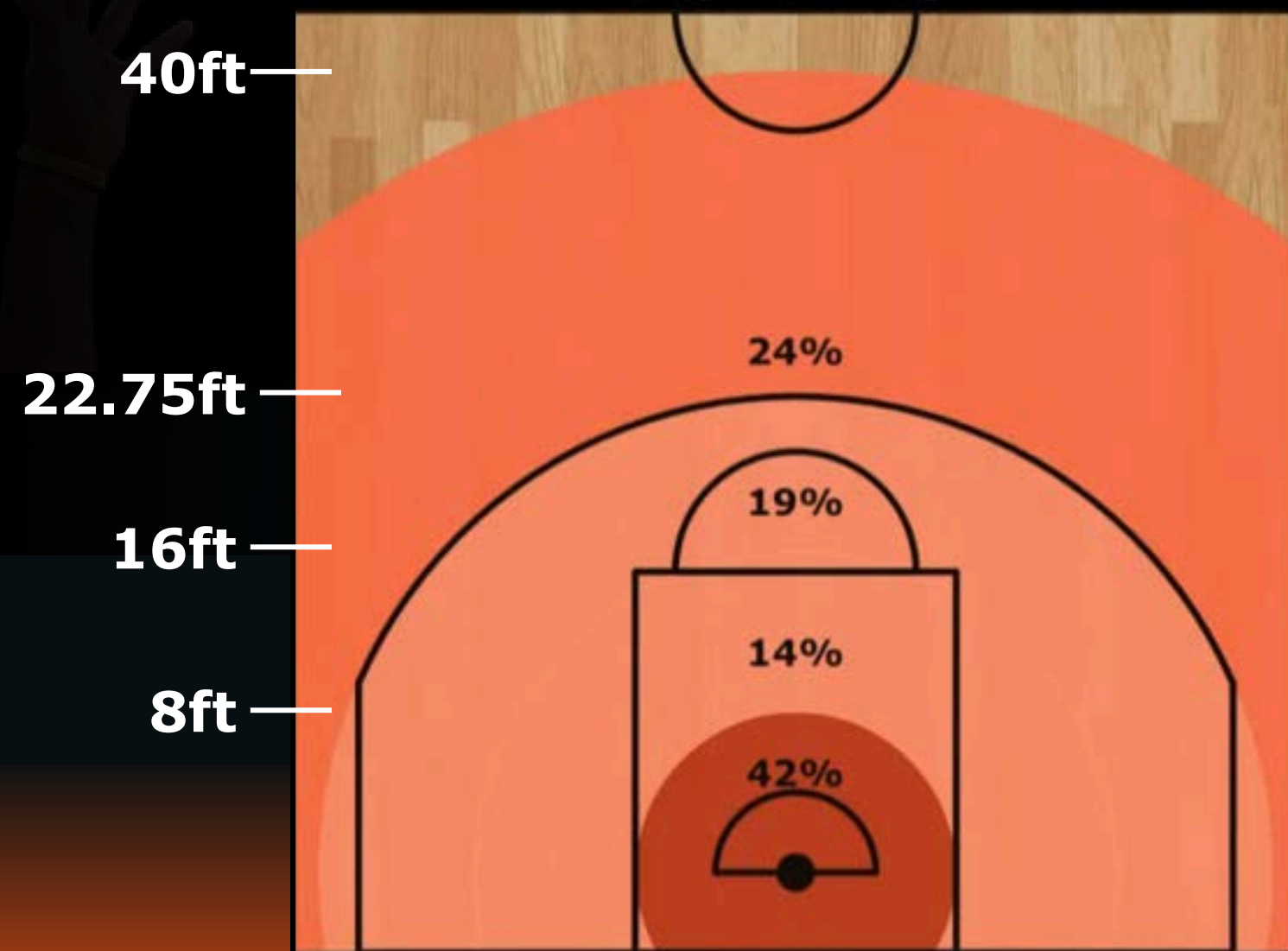




# ***THE MID-RANGE IS NOT DEAD THE ONLY CASUALTY IS THE LONG TWO***

## **Distribution of Total Shot Attempts by Distance**

**2012-13**

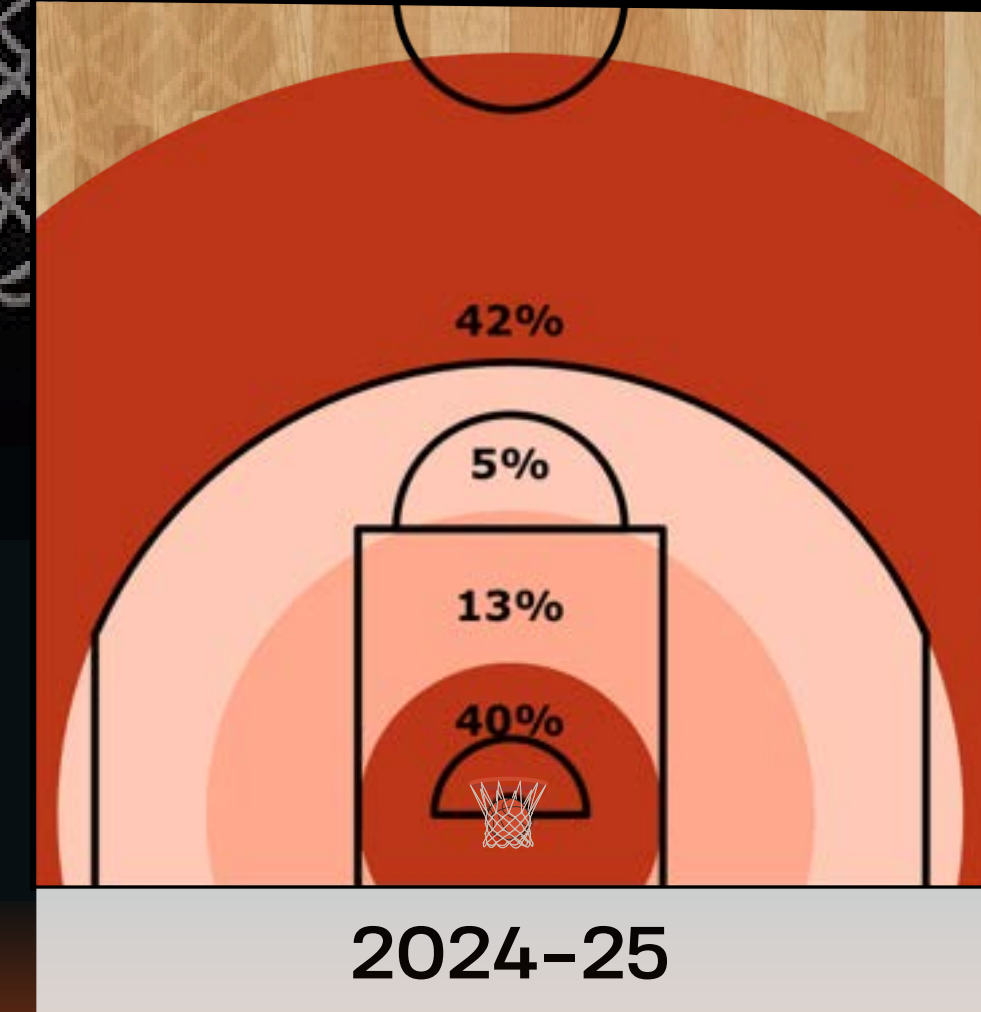
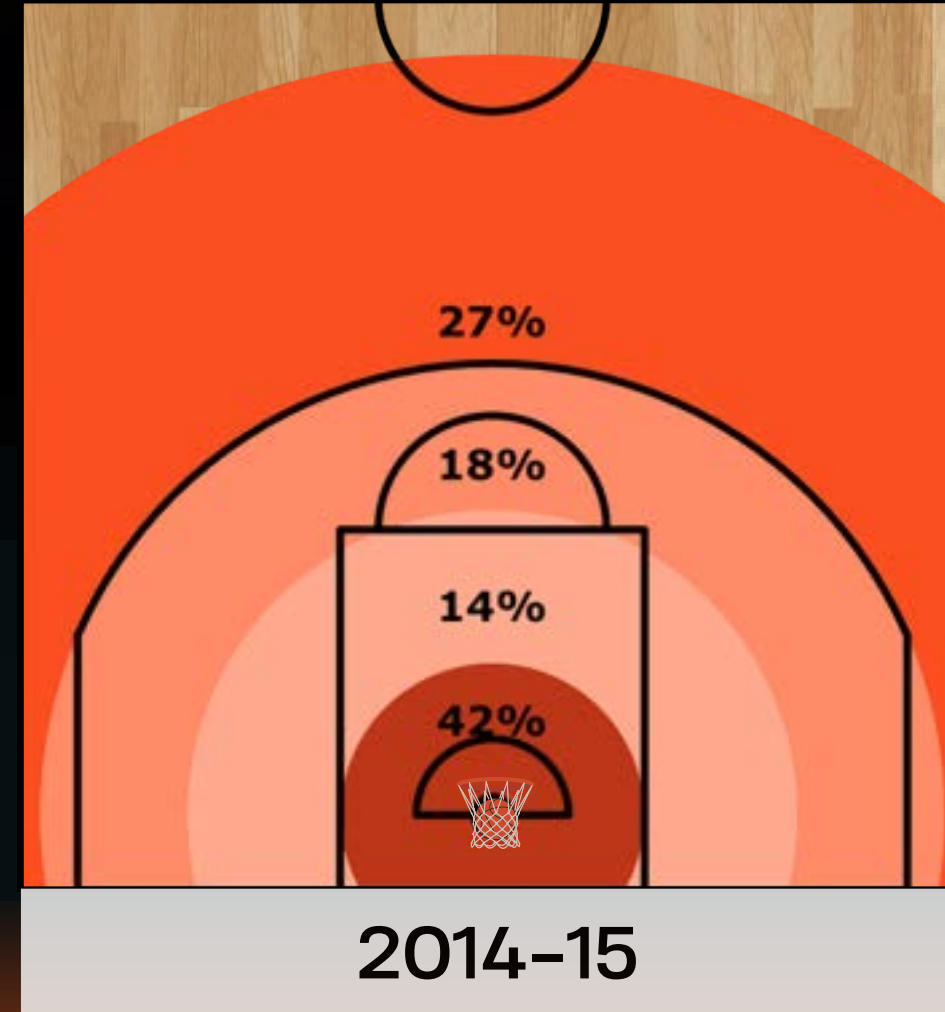
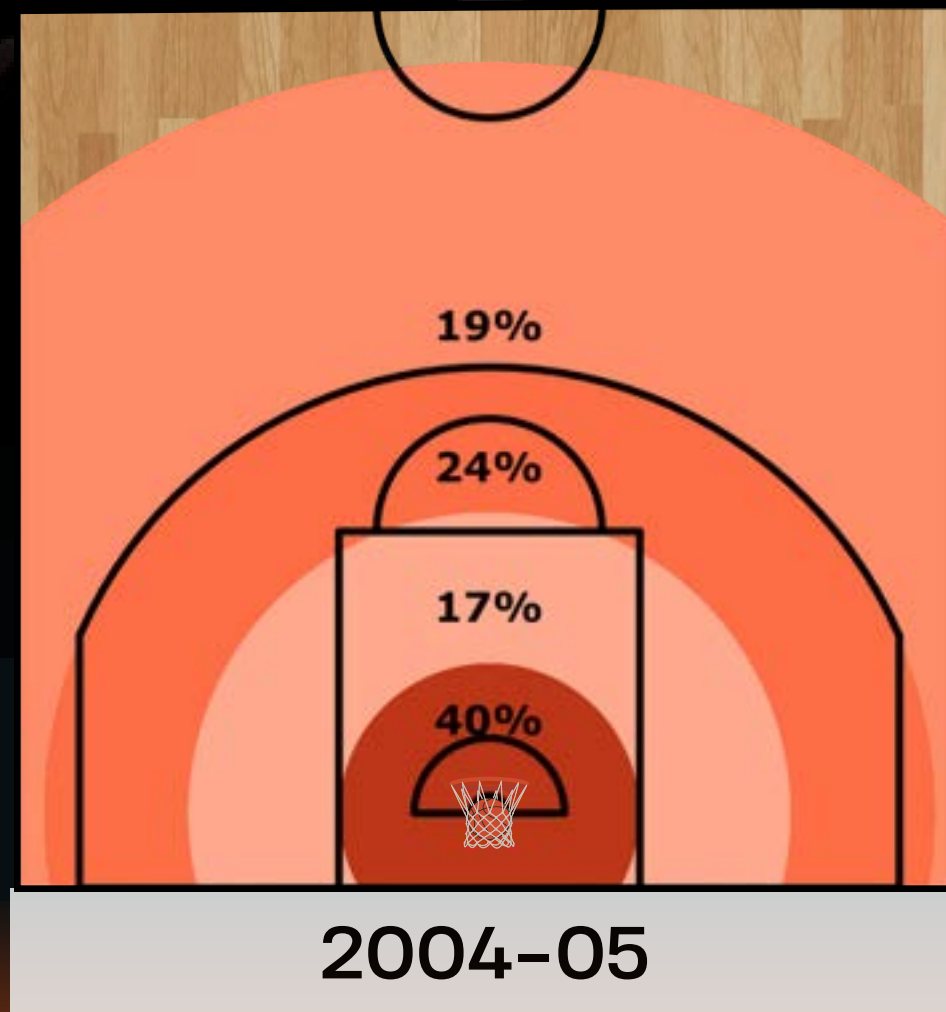


**Today's players are taking fewer low-efficiency long twos, replacing them with higher-value threes — not at the expense of short-range or mid-range shots.**

This isn't a war on the mid-range. This evolution in shot selection is about smarter decisions — not sacrificing excitement in the form of dunks, layups, etc.

# ***THE MID-RANGE IS NOT DEAD – THE ONLY CASUALTY IS THE LONG TWO***

Across all seasons, the volume of short and mid-range shots stays consistent. The only clear change is the fading of long twos (third ring) and the rise of three-point attempts (outer ring), shown by the shift in shading.





# ***THE CASE AGAINST THREES: DEBUNKED***

## ***OFFENSES ALL LOOK THE SAME***



Three-point attempts have increased across the league — but **offensive styles haven't converged**. Teams still **vary widely** in how much they rely on the three, and that gap is as wide as ever.

## ***MORE THREES, MORE MISSES***



Yes, players are taking more threes — but they're also **making more shots overall**. The rise in missed shots is simply due to more total attempts, not worse shooting.

## ***THE MID-RANGE HAS VANISHED***



Teams still take **just as many short-range and mid-range shots as they used to**. The only real shift has been replacing inefficient long twos with smarter three-point attempts.



# ***BEYOND THE THREE:***

## ***OTHER POSSIBLE REASONS FOR VIEWERSHIP DECLINE***

*If we're going to assign blame for declining viewership, it's time to look beyond the three-point shot. Here are a few factors that deserve more attention.*

**1**

### ***GAME FLOW & FOULS***

Frequent fouls and free throws slow down the game and disrupt its rhythm — something fans often cite as boring or frustrating. Have trends around frequency of fouls changed in the last few seasons?

**2**

### ***SHIFTS IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION***

Are fans truly losing interest — or just consuming the game differently? League Pass, TikTok, YouTube, and highlight-driven content may be changing how people engage with basketball, not whether they care.

**3**

### ***PLAYER AVAILABILITY***

Injuries and load management, especially among star players, may be dampening interest in regular-season games. When marquee names sit out, fan engagement and viewership can naturally suffer.





# ***THE THREE ISN'T THE PROBLEM. IT'S THE SCAPEGOAT.***

*Blaming the three-point shot is easy. While the rise of three-point shooting has absolutely changed the NBA, it is not the villain behind declining viewership.*

*If we want real answers — and real solutions — we have to dig deeper into the factors that shape fan experience and engagement.*



# ***NBA THREE POINTERS***

## ***AND WHY THEY'RE NOT THE PROBLEM***

*LET'S KEEP THE  
CONVERSATION GOING.*

[github.com/laurencmanis/NBA-Three-Pointers](https://github.com/laurencmanis/NBA-Three-Pointers)





# ***DATA SOURCES***



## **NBA Advanced Stats – Team Shooting by Distance**

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