

How Close are NFL Games Really?

A data-driven look at one-score vs multi-score NFL games from 2015–2024

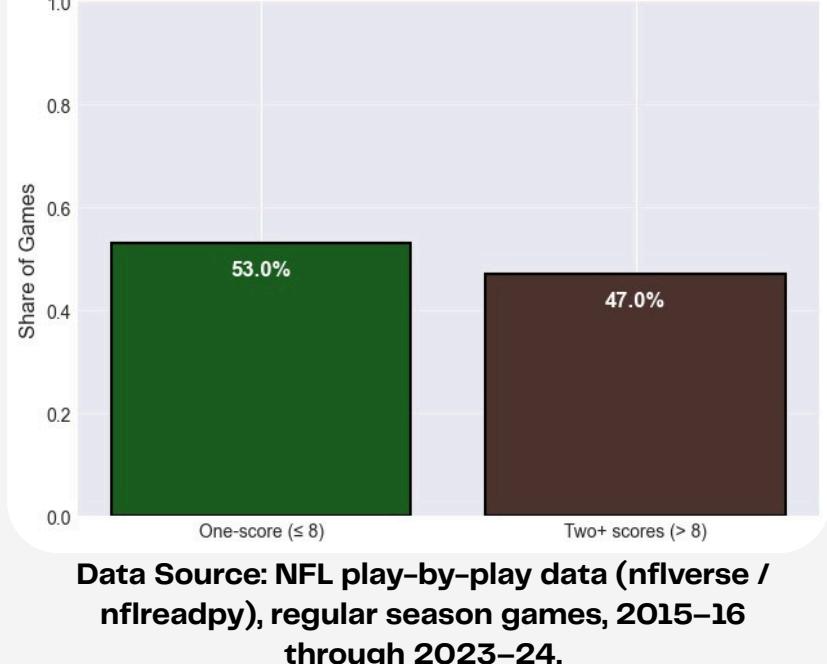
Most NFL Games Come Down to One Score

53.0%

of NFL games were decided by one score (8 points or fewer).

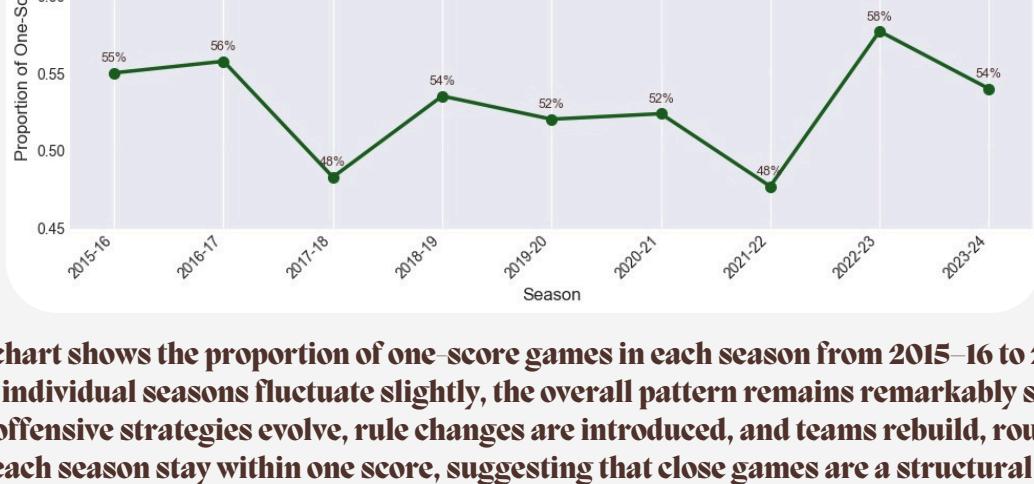
The bar chart compares the proportion of one-score games to games decided by more than one score. While blowouts do occur, they are less common than close finishes, showing that competitive balance is not the exception in the NFL, it is the norm.

This pattern reflects league mechanisms such as the draft order, salary cap, and schedule balancing, all designed to prevent sustained dominance by a few teams.



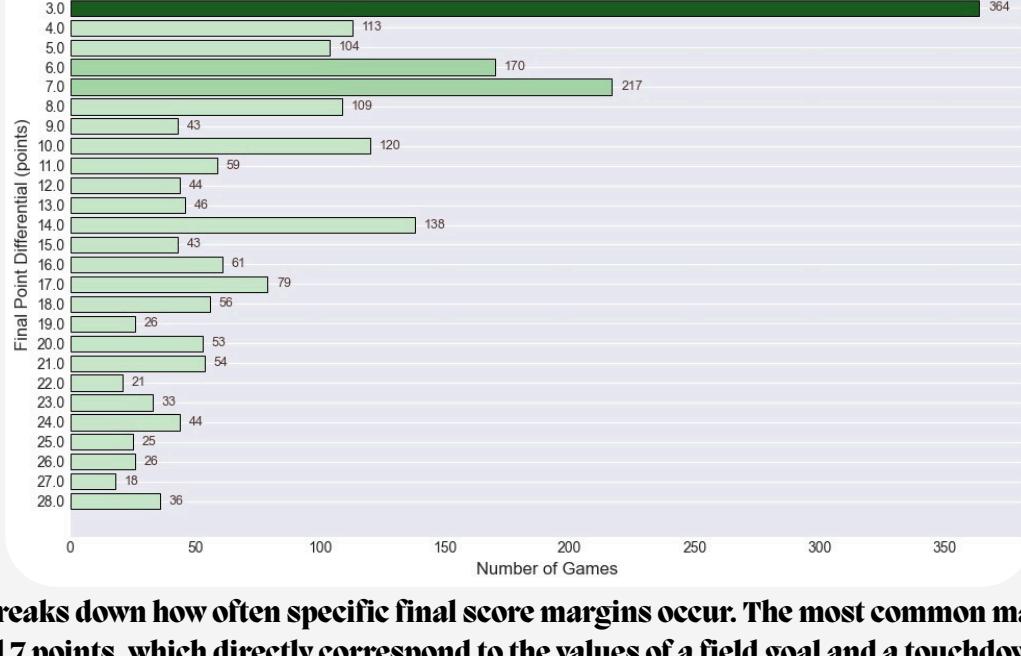
Data Source: NFL play-by-play data (nflverse / nflreadpy), regular season games, 2015–16 through 2023–24.

Close Games Aren't a Fluke – They're the Norm



The line chart shows the proportion of one-score games in each season from 2015–16 to 2023–24. While individual seasons fluctuate slightly, the overall pattern remains remarkably stable. Even as offensive strategies evolve, rule changes are introduced, and teams rebuild, roughly half of all games each season stay within one score, suggesting that close games are a structural feature of the league rather than a temporary trend.

Some Score Margins Happen Far More Than Others



This chart breaks down how often specific final score margins occur. The most common margins are 3 and 7 points, which directly correspond to the values of a field goal and a touchdown. This highlights how NFL scoring rules shape game outcomes. Because points are scored in discrete chunks, many games naturally cluster around these key margins, especially when teams are evenly matched.

Uncertainty & Limitations

- Only regular-season games are included (playoffs excluded).
- Final score margin does not capture when the game was close (e.g., late vs early).
- Rule changes and season length changes may slightly affect comparisons across years.