

When a team loses a close game, many times one of the primary reasons is missed free throws. The Dallas Mavericks Analytics Department* elected to subjectively define a close game as every game where the two competing teams were within 3 points of each other with one minute or less to play in the fourth quarter. In all NBA regular season and playoff games from 2012 to 2017, those close games occurred the following number of times:

Regular seasons	Games	Percentage
2012-13	393 of 1,229	32%
2013-14	391 of 1,230	31.8%
2014-15	390 of 1,230	31.7%
2015-16	389 of 1,230	31.6%
2016-17	370 of 1,230	30.1%
Average	1,933 of 6,149	31.4%

Playoffs	Games	Percentage
2012-13	26 of 85	30.7%
2013-14	35 of 89	39.3%
2014-15	26 of 81	32.1%
2015-16	26 of 86	29.1%
2016-17	19 of 79	24.0%
Average	132 of 420	31.4%

An unusually high percentage of close games occurred in the 2010-11 season, the year the Mavericks won the NBA Championship. In the playoffs that year, 34 of the 81 playoff games were close (42%). Also, free throws became more important as the teams progressed, with 24% in round two, 40% in round three and 50% in the NBA finals. In that Championship year, the Dallas Mavericks shot 77.7% in the regular season and 80.9% in the playoffs.

The 2015-2017 NCAA Division I college games were also analyzed. There was an even higher percentage of close games at the college level, and those calculations don't take into account the fact that many of the missed free throws were the first on a 1 and 1 scoring opportunity.

Regular seasons	Games	Percentage
2015-16	1,682 of 5,149	32.7%
2016-17	1,725 of 5,338	32.3%
Average	3,407 of 10,487	32.5%
NCAA 64 team playoffs	Games	Percentage
2015-16	54 of 143	37.8%
2016-17	42 of 138	30.4%
Average	96 of 281	34.2%

***NBA and NCAA free throw statistics by James Brocato, Dallas Mavericks**