

Minnesota State Tournament Scoring Averages Over the Years

Everyone knows that basketball scoring increased at every level—high school, college, professional—from the very beginning through the 1960s or thereabouts. Then, scoring declined as the rulesmakers allowed the defense to become vastly more physical than had been the case in the good old days. Then, with the introduction of the 3-point shot in the 1980s, scoring began a slow but inexorable increase.

The Minnesota state high school tournament reflects these broad trends quite well though it is true that, if you look closely enough, they also add nuance to our understanding of the historical trends in our game. The following analysis and discussion reflects championship round games (only) right from the very beginning in 1913 and continuing right through the present (2023).

Single Class Era

Year	Average Score	Comments
1913	34-21	<p>With an average score of 29-16, the Northfield era (1913-1922) featured higher scores than would be seen again until the mid-1930s. There were many weak teams and mismatches, so the average margin was in double digits eight of the ten years.</p> <p>But, it's also true that many teams did not have coaches and, left to their own devices, boys generally chose to run, jump and shoot the ball. As a result, Mountain Lake defeated Red Wing 49-28 in 1913, and Stillwater hammered Aitkin 57-11 in 1914. Scores like these would not be seen again for many years.</p>
1914	32-15	
1915	31-20	
1916	28-16	
1917	25-13	
1918	29-14	
1919	28-14	
1920	20-12	
1921	26-17	
1922	30-20	
1923	24-14	<p>By the early to mid-1920s, most high schools had hired a trained coach, and the coaches slowed things down. After a score, the ball was put back in play with a center jump. If you could dominate those center jumps, you could almost aspire to shut out your opponent. So, the coaches emphasized ball control and defense. After 1922, the tournament average score for winning teams did not return to 30+ until 1934.</p> <p>Gaylord defeated Gilbert 13-9 in the 1926 final, and Red Wing defeated Mpls. North 16-13 as late as the 1933 final. This was “the dead ball era,” analogous to baseball’s so-called Dead Ball Era before the home run became popular in the 1920s.</p>
1924	24-13	
1925	21-11	
1926	20-12	
1927	26-14	
1928	25-16	
1929	23-18	

1930	25-14	
1931	21-13	
1932	23-14	
1933	25-17	
1934	31-20	<p>The center jump after every basket was eliminated in 1937. You could no longer aspire to deny your opponent possession of the ball and to shut out your opponents. You would have to outscore them. Over the next several years, the fast break, the jump shot and the low post all appeared. But, even before the elimination of the center jump in the fall of 1937, scoring reached a new record level in March of 1937. The fact is that people had gotten tired of the slow pace of play that predominated from 1920 to 1937, and scores had already begun to rise. They didn't just stumble into a more active game after eliminating the center jump. They eliminated the center jump because they wanted more action.</p> <p>Mpls. Edison scored 62 points in a 1937 game. Average scores for the 2 teams reached new records again in 1938 and 1942.</p> <p>Still, as late as 1940, shooting percentages hovered around 20 percent.</p>
1935	31-26	
1936	30-25	
1937	36-23	
1938	35-29	
1939	34-24	
1940	33-29	
1941	36-26	
1942	40-26	
1943	38-30	
1944	46-36	<p>6-9 Jim McIntyre shot better than 50 percent. 20 percent wasn't going to cut it anymore. Virginia scored 79 points in a 1944 game.</p>
1945	46-37	
1946	53-39	<p>Lynd introduced the fast break in 1946. In just a decade, the average score increased from 55 points (30-25) for both teams to 92 points (53-39). Losing teams in 1946 scored 39 points per game, 9 more points than winning teams ten years before.</p>
1947	43-37	<p>Now, there were fewer weak teams and fewer blowouts. 1954 saw the closest tournament ever with an average margin of just 2 points.</p> <p>Shooting percentages increased from 21 percent in 1940 to 42 percent in 1953. In just 17 years, winning scores more than doubled from 30 to 65 points! The average for 2 teams passed the 100-point threshold for the first time in 1951. Within 2 years, it exploded to 118 points and in 3 more years to 131.</p>
1948	42-23	
1949	48-38	
1950	47-38	
1951	57-47	
1952	55-45	
1953	65-53	
1954	52-50	
1955	66-54	<p>Only once before 1955 did winning teams average more than 60 points. Only once from 1955 to 1972 did they average less. The increase from 1948 to 1955 was 24 points.</p>
1956	73-58	<p>Minneapolis Roosevelt defeated Blue Earth 101-54 in the final. It would be another 10 years before the 1956 average score of 131 points would be exceeded, and then just by one point.</p>
1957	69-60	<p>Before 1957, only 3 times had the winners averaged 60 points. Now, teams were losing with 60 points.</p>
1958	65-60	

1959	58-51	Wayzata won with 57, 55 and 55 points. Ten years from now, everybody would be playing like Wayzata.
1960	60-51	
1961	65-53	
1962	64-58	
1963	69-60	Fast-breaking Cloquet scored 87, 87 and 74 points.
1964	69-57	
1965	66-57	
1966	71-61	132 points for both teams was a new record.
1967	69-58	
1968	79-58	Moorhead scored 107 points, Edina scored 91. 79 points per game for the winners and 137 points for both teams both remain the all-time high to this day (for all games), 55 years later. (Class A teams averaged 143 points per game in 1997.)
1969	61-51	
1970	71-55	The winners averaged 70+ points for the fourth time. This would not happen again until 2008. The average margin was 16 points during Edina's 3-peat, the highest 3-year average ever.

The Two-Class Era

Year	Class A Average Score	Class AA Average Score	Overall Average Score	Comments
1971	67-58	67-57	67-57	
1972	66-55	61-52	63-53	
1973	61-47	58-49	59-48	This was the first time that winners and losers averaged less than 60 and 50 points, respectively, since 1952.
1974	55-46	61-53	58-49	
1975	53-50	55-48	54-49	
1976	66-56	58-47	62-51	
1977	62-50	62-52	62-51	
1978	57-43	48-44	52-43	First time under 100 total points since 1950. Two teams would again average less than 100 total points in 1983. Then, thank goodness, it never happened again.
1979	61-47	69-53	65-50	
1980	59-54	61-53	60-53	With an average margin of 9 points per game, the 1980s saw the closest games since the 1930s. This was largely because the games were relatively low-scoring affairs. At 58-49, the 1980s
1981	58-48	58-46	58-47	

1982	56-47	60-49	58-48	saw the lowest average scores since the 1940s. So, in 1986, the rulesmakers adopted the 3-point shot, in an effort to stretch the defense. It first appeared in the Minnesota state tournament in 1988.
1983	53-44	53-43	53-43	
1984	54-51	54-44	54-47	
1985	55-46	64-53	59-49	
1986	58-46	52-47	55-46	
1987	61-52	54-46	57-49	
1988	69-57	61-53	65-55	The first 5 years of the 3-point shot: Teams made an average of 3.5 3s per game by shooting 32 percent. Scoring averages were 55-47 the 5 years before the 3, and 62-52 the first 5 years of the 3. 7 points of the 12-point increase in scoring came off the three. The other 5 indicated a slightly faster pace and/or better 2-point shooting.
1989	63-48	62-55	62-51	
1990	63-51	58-47	60-49	
1991	61-55	61-52	61-53	
1992	61-51	60-51	60-51	
1993	52-46	60-50	56-48	In the next 4 years (years 6 through 9) of 3-point shooting, teams increased their makes just from 3.5 to 4 while their shooting percentage remained at 32 percent.
1994	62-51	66-58	64-54	
1995	62-51 in the Sweet Sixteen			The 4-class average score was under 120 points every single year of the 2-class era except for the first year in 1971. Previously it had been more than 120 from 1955 to 1958, and from 1962 to 1971.
1996	63-54 in the Sweet Sixteen			

Four-Class Era

Year	Class AAAA Average	Class AAA Average	Class AA Average	Class A Average	Overall Average Score	Comments
1997	62-53	60-47	65-53	78-65	66-54	Wabasso 117 Red Lake 113. Also, a record 10 3-pointers per game (2 teams). The Class A average of 143 points was an all-time record but the 4-class average was just 120.
1998	65-59	61-47	59-50	65-51	62-52	
1999	66-52	62-49	62-48	62-51	63-50	With 32 teams, there are more mismatches. At 13 and 14 (in 1999 and 2000), these are the highest average margins in consecutive years since 1918-1919.
2000	66-54	70-54	58-42	62-51	64-50	
2001	69-55	66-53	53-37	55-44	61-48	
2002	55-45	65-49	54-51	57-49	58-48	
2003	65-56	59-49	58-44	66-53	62-50	

2004	65-49	57-47	61-46	56-45	60-47	
2005	55-44	59-48	61-44	61-51	61-47	
2006	68-55	64-48	71-56	64-58	67-54	
2007	68-59	60-47	60-50	70-57	64-54	
2008	70-58	69-52	69-57	73-50	70-54	The first 70-point year since 1970. The tradeoff is blowouts. The 16-point margin ties for 3rd most ever.
2009	59-44	73-59	67-51	62-51	65-51	
2010	67-55	69-54	63-56	64-54	66-55	
2011	71-57	69-61	53-45	66-55	65-55	
2012	69-60	64-53	70-53	62-53	64-54	
2013	75-59	66-53	64-53	70-53	69-54	75 points in Class AAAA is the 2 nd most ever in any class. 25 years after the introduction of the 3-pointer, teams doubled the number of 3s made in 1998 to 10.5 but still made just 33 percent. The real revolution was in 2-pointers, where teams were now shooting 53 percent.
2014	62-55	68-48	65-55	74-59	67-54	
2015	69-56	69-59	68-54	70-52	69-55	
2016	72-57	66-54	72-62	63-43	68-54	
2017	68-57	71-55	64-50	75-50	69-53	75-50 in Class A is the biggest margin ever in any class. 75 points ties for 2 nd most ever in any class.
2018	70-56	75-64	71-53	67-50	71-56	
2019	70-47	75-58	70-50	62-47	69-50	At 67-54, the 2010s are the 2 nd highest-scoring decade after the 1960s (good thing!), but 19 points (in 2019) is the 2 nd widest average margin ever after 1968 (79-58) (bad thing).
2021	64-52	77-57	66-51	67-55	68-53	From 2013 to 2021—and with the exception of 2019—the average scores have been stable at about 69-54 or a 15-point margin for each championship round game. From 1913 to 2007 the average margin of victory was 15 points or more 5 times, or once every 19 years. Since then, the average margin of victory was 15 points or more 6 times, or once every

						2 years, almost 10 times more frequently than before. The rulesmakers didn't say anything about wanting more blowouts, but that's definitely what they've achieved.
2022	62-45	71-53	63-55	64-56	65-52	
2023	78-66	70-58	70-59	60-49	69-58	The Class AAAA total of 144 is the highest ever for a single class, while the average total score of 127 points ties for the highest of the 21 st century and is 10 points below the all-time record. Winners shot 54% on 2s and 35% on 3s. Losers shot 44% and 28%. Winners outscored losers by 10 points on 2s, and broke even on 3s and FT.

Summary: The 3-Pointer

Just in case you haven't read all of the details above, here's what they say.

- Since about 2006, scoring has pretty much stabilized at around 120 points per game for 2 teams. This is of course higher than most historical eras, but below the highest scoring era from about the late 1950s to 1971. During the era of the rise of basketball scoring, these are scores that were fairly typical from about 1955 to 1965. In the 1960s, scoring was a little bit higher than it is today.
- With 4 classes and 32 state tournament teams, there are now many more blowouts than there have been since the very early days of the tournament. So, the average margin of victory is at or near an all-time high, consistently around 15 points.
- The 3-point shot was introduced in the 1980s with the objective of getting more scoring and more action into the game. The number of 3-pointers made per team per game has increased very slowly from about 3 from 1988 through the mid-'90s to about 6 to 6.5 per team today. They're scoring about 6 more points per game than what they would be scoring on the same number of field goals if they were all still just 2-pointers.
- But, overall teams are now scoring about 10 more points per team per game than they did before the 3-pointer, from an average of about 100-105 points per game (for both teams) in the 1980s to now 120-125. 6 of those 10 extra points are coming on 3s, the other 4 on a higher 2-point shooting percentage. In the old days before the 3, a shooting percentage of 50 percent was very good, anything above that was very, very good. 45 percent was very acceptable. The fact is that the 3-pointer has indeed stretched the defense to the point now where good times are consistently making 55 percent of the 2s or more.
- But, of course, the measure of success back in the 1980s was to get back to the Golden Age of the late-1950s to 1971 when teams were scoring 130-140 points between them, at least sometimes. That hasn't happened except in certain rare cases like 1997, 2008, 2013, 2017 and 2023.
- But, the fact is that teams are taking and making approximately the same number of FG as before. Again, the objective of the 3-pointer was to inject more action into the game, not just more scoring. It has injected more scoring. Has it injected more action?
- So, to be clear, here at least is the shooting performance from the 2023 state tournament.

All winners (all 4 classes) averaged 19-of-35 2s (54%); losers averaged 14-of-32 2s (44%)
 Winners averaged 6-of-17 3s (35 %); losers averaged 6-of-21 3s (28.5%)
 Winners averaged 12-of-18 FT (67%); losers averaged 10-of-15 FT (67%)

In 2023, at least, games were won and lost on 2-point field goals. The 3-pointers were even. The free throws were almost even. The total number of possessions and shots was about even, meaning that offensive rebounds plus or minus turnovers were about even. The only thing that was not about even was 2-point field goals.

- But, the other thing that was not quite even was the total number of possessions and shots from, say, 1968 to 2023. The game in 1968 featured more shots and a faster pace than the game of 2023. Oh, and the margin of victory is much bigger today but that is not the fault of the 3-pointer.