



A GRIT HOCKEY RESEARCH REPORT

# YOUR KID'S FAVOURITE SHOT IS DISAPPEARING IN THE NHL

**NHL Shot Selection, 2008–09 to 2025–26**

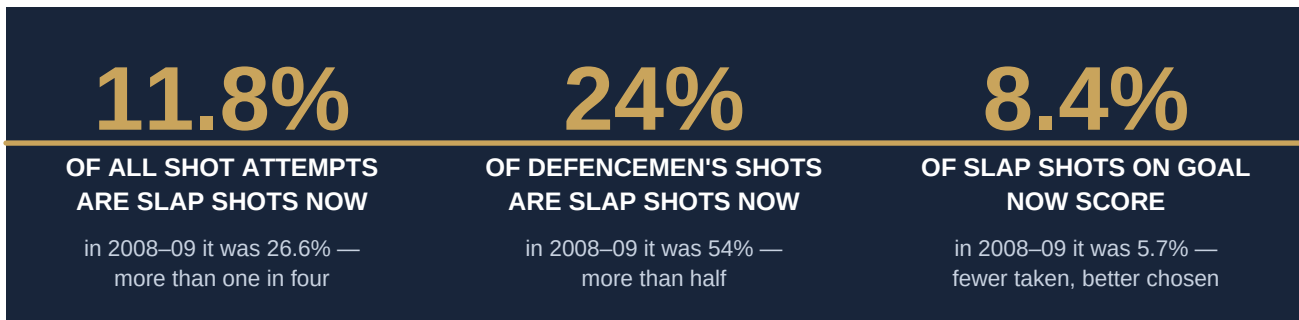
Nearly every young player learns the slap shot early. NHL teams, meanwhile, are taking it less often. We read the league's shot log — eighteen seasons, more than 1.8 million attempts — and measured how often the slap shot is still used, who still uses it, and what has taken its place. Here is what the record shows, and what your kid should practice instead.

NHL regular seasons 2008–09 through 2025–26  
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## START HERE

## The three numbers

*The league keeps a log of every shot: what kind it was, where it came from, whether it went in. Shot-type labels are assigned by the official scorers, season after season. We read all of it — more than 1.8 million attempts across 18 full regular seasons, 21,607 games — and tracked one number through time: the share of attempts taken with a slap shot.*



The decline was gradual, season after season, for nearly two decades — 26.6%, 22.0%, 18.3%, 14.8%, 11.8% — until the shot that once defined a power play became roughly one attempt in nine. And the third number matters: the slap shots that remain are scoring **better** than the ones that disappeared. This is not a shot that stopped working. It is a shot the sport learned to use selectively.

Blocked shots are not in this record at all — the source data logs shots on goal and misses only — so read every share here as “of attempts that weren’t blocked.” The caveats page is honest about the rest.

***The wind-up has not vanished. It has been narrowed — to the situations where it still pays.***

## THE RECORD

## How we counted

This is a different instrument from our hand-counted game studies. The NHL's play-by-play log records every shot attempt with a shot-type label — slap, wrist, snap, backhand, tip, deflection, wrap-around — assigned by the league's official scorers, plus the shooter's position, the shot's location, and the strength state. We compiled the full season shot files from 2008–09 through 2025–26: **1,831,808 attempts across 21,607 games**, all regular season, shootouts excluded.

### The base

Our headline base is every attempt that wasn't blocked — shots on goal plus shots that missed the net. Blocked shots are not in the source files at all (the vocabulary is shot, goal, miss), so they sit outside every percentage in this report. Shares are shares of the unblocked attempts. We cross-checked the shot-type field for structural breaks across seasons and found none — the decline is a smooth slope, not a scorer-redefinition cliff. About one percent of recent-season attempts lack a type label; a sensitivity check moves the headline by about a tenth of a point, in either direction.

### What the record can and cannot show

The log does not flag one-timers — the signature slap shot of the modern power play — so we cannot separate them from stationary wind-ups. It records position and distance, which lets us study defencemen and the point region honestly. Empty-net attempts are in the base (they are real attempts, and few); five games are missing across three seasons. Full details, formulas, and every season's row live in the open data table kept with this report.

***Read the caveats on page 9 before you quote any of this. They are part of the finding, and we put them in big print on purpose.***

## THE DECLINE

## Eighteen seasons of decline

*No single season marks the change. The slap shot's share of attempts fell steadily across all eighteen seasons in the record.*

|         |                                       |                |
|---------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 2008–09 | 26.6% of all attempts were slap shots | 15.2% of goals |
| 2012–13 | 22.0% of all attempts were slap shots | 13.6% of goals |
| 2016–17 | 18.3% of all attempts were slap shots | 11.6% of goals |
| 2020–21 | 14.8% of all attempts were slap shots | 10.2% of goals |
| 2025–26 | 11.8% of all attempts were slap shots | 8.0% of goals  |

The slope is nearly unbroken — through lockouts, through a pandemic shortened season, through changing rosters and rules. And the goals fell with the attempts: slap shots scored 15.2% of the league's goals in 2008–09 and 8.0% last season. This is not fashion. When a behaviour declines this smoothly for eighteen years across every team in the league, it is selection: coaches and players keep finding that the wind-up costs more than it buys.

What replaced it is not the wrist shot — the wrister's share barely moved (about 43% then, about 43% now). The replacement is the **snapshot**: 14.6% of attempts in 2008–09, 24.8% last season. The snap is quicker off the blade, no wind-up, off either foot.

***Eighteen seasons, no cliff — a steady decline, until taking a slap shot became the unusual choice.***

## THE POSITION

## The defenceman's shot changed

*The slap shot was always a defenceman's shot first — the point blast through traffic, the one-timer off the draw. If it is fading anywhere, it is fading from the point. And that is exactly where the record shows it.*

In 2008–09, **54% of everything a defenceman attempted was a slap shot** — more than half. Last season it was 24%. Forwards fell too (16.5% to 7.1%), but the defenceman's decline is the story: the point man gave up the wind-up first and fastest.

The point itself tells the same story from the other side. Of attempts taken from the point region — beyond the tops of the circles, about 44 feet and out — 59% were slap shots in 2008–09. Now it is 26.5%. The point shot did not disappear: defencemen still shoot from there. They just shoot **wristers and snappers** now. And the slap shots that remain come from closer in — the average distance fell from 50.5 feet to 47.4 feet — because the long wind-up from the blue line is the first shot a modern coach tells his defenceman to stop taking.

The picture is precise: the point is still a shooting position, but it is no longer a slapping position. The modern point shot is a quick release through traffic, aimed at sticks, skates, and tips — not a wind-up aimed at the net.

***The position that used the slap shot most is the position that reduced it most.***

## EFFICIENCY

## Fewer — but better

*Here is the part that makes the story honest instead of simple: as the slap shot halved in volume, it got **better at scoring**.*

Of slap shots that reached the net, 5.7% scored in 2008–09. Last season, 8.4% did. On the same on-goal base, the snapshot converts 12.3% and the wrist shot 10.1% — both also up over the era. The whole league shoots more efficiently than it did eighteen years ago, and the slap shot kept pace with that rise while taking half as many swings.

The explanation is selection, not magic. The slap shot the league abandoned was the low-percentage one: the long, slow wind-up from distance, announced to everyone in the building, arriving at a set goalie through a set defence. What remains is the high-percentage slap shot — closer in, off movement, off a feed, often with the goalie still moving. The sport did not discover that the slap shot doesn't work. It discovered which slap shots work, and stopped taking the others.

***That is why “the slap shot is gone” would be the wrong conclusion from this data. It has not disappeared. It has narrowed to the situations where it works — a specialist's shot, taken less often and in better spots. Page 7 shows where it is still used.***

## WHERE IT REMAINS

## Where the slap shot still holds its share

*One place in the sport still takes slap shots at nearly the old rate: the power play. Last season, **19.2% of power-play attempts were slap shots** — against 10.6% at even strength and 5.2% shorthanded. On the man advantage the slap shot is still used in the traditional way: a set play, a stationary shooter, a seam pass, and a goalie who has to respect the pass first. It is the one formation in hockey where the slap shot's advantages — time and a moving puck — are built in.*

The specialists' leaderboard is short. In 2025–26, Darren Raddysh scored 16 slap-shot goals — the most in the league — on 165 attempts. Evan Bouchard took 143. And third on the attempts list, at age forty, was Alex Ovechkin, with 106 — the greatest goal scorer of the era still using the shot regularly. The season before, Kevin Fiala led with 11 slap-shot goals, and Ovechkin was in the top ten too. The slap shot's future is a narrower role — power-play weapon, one-timer flank — held by a shrinking group of specialists.

A caution the record forces on us: the log does not flag one-timers as such. Everything about the power-play refuge is *consistent* with a one-timer story — set plays, stationary shooters, Raddysh and Ovechkin on their flanks — but the data cannot prove which of those slap shots were one-timers and which were stationary wind-ups. The pattern is real; the mechanism is our best reading of it, stated as one.

***The slap shot has not disappeared from the NHL. It has settled into a defined role: the power-play specialist shot.***

## THE TAKEAWAY

## What this means for your kid

*Nothing here says the slap shot is forbidden. But the league's record is blunt about where practice time should go: the shot your kid winds up for in the driveway is the shot the sport uses least — and the shot that replaced it is faster, not harder.*

- **Release beats wind-up.** The snapshot went from 14.6% to 24.8% of all attempts while the slap shot fell. That is the modern shooting curriculum in one fact: get the puck off the blade fast, off either foot, with no tell. The drill that matters is not the hardest shot — it is the quickest release under pressure.
- **Teach deception, not just power.** The slap shots that remain convert better because they arrive with the goalie moving. A shot's value is release speed plus disguise: change the angle, hide the release, shoot off the pass. Nobody at the top level is scouting radar-gun numbers from minor hockey.
- **Defencemen: walk the line, then wrist it.** The point shot remains a quick wrister or snapper through traffic — aimed at sticks, skates, and tips, not at the net's far corner. Practice lateral walks along the blue line, getting shots off in stride and through the first layer. The long wind-up from the blue line is the shot the league stopped taking first.
- **Keep the slap shot as a specialty, not a foundation.** On the power play, with time and a set feed, the slap shot still earns its keep — that is where the specialists play. Learn it for the flank and the one-timer setup. Build the other 90% of the shooting game on the snapshot and the wrist shot.
- **Watch where the shot comes from, not how hard it looks.** Slap shots moved about three feet closer on average over the era. The lesson travels: proximity and traffic beat velocity. A quick shot from the hash marks outperforms a bomb from the point — in the league's record and in your kid's game.

The encouraging part: this is a trainable story. Release speed, deception, shooting in stride, shooting through screens — these are skills, not gifts, and every one of them shows up in the league's record as a shot type that is rising. The game is not asking young shooters to be something rarer. It is asking them to be something quicker.

## BEFORE YOU QUOTE US

# The caveats — in big print, on purpose

*This report counts more than a million shots, so its caveats are about what was counted, not how many. A finding you can't caveat is a finding you shouldn't trust.*

**READ THIS PAGE BEFORE YOU QUOTE THE COVER**

- 1. Blocked shots are not in the record.** The source files log shots on goal and misses only — there is no blocked-shot event in the vocabulary. Every share in this report is a share of attempts that were not blocked, not of all attempts. If the slap shot is blocked at a different rate than other shots (plausible — wind-ups give defenders time), the true shares would shift.
- 2. Shot types are assigned by people.** Official scorers in each arena label each attempt slap, wrist, snap, backhand, tip, deflection, or wrap-around. There is no league-published definition or cross-arena calibration, and a hard snapper from a defenceman could be one scorer's slap shot. The series shows no structural break across 18 seasons, which argues the labels are stable — but they are judgements, not measurements.
- 3. About one percent of recent attempts have no type label.** In the last two seasons roughly 1% of attempts lack a shot-type entry (excluding them moves the headline share by about a tenth of a percentage point). A different decimal, not a different story — but the decimals in this report are not exact to the last tenth.
- 4. The record has no one-timer flag.** The signature slap shot of the modern power play cannot be separated from a stationary wind-up in this data. The power-play refuge is a real pattern; reading it as a one-timer story is our best interpretation of it, and we state it as one.
- 5. Empty-net attempts are included.** They are real attempts and few in number; removing them moves the headline by a rounding error. Shortened seasons (the 2012–13 lockout, the two COVID seasons) are included — shares, not totals, are what we compare across years, so shorter seasons still count fairly.
- 6. Five games are missing across three seasons.** The source files lack five regular-season games' worth of rows (about one game in every 4,300). Goal flags, event types, and coordinates were validated across the full set with zero mismatches.
- 7. The efficiency rise is partly selection.** When we say the remaining slap shot scores better, part of that is that the abandoned attempts were the low-percentage ones. A shot type that only gets taken in good spots will look good on a conversion chart — that is the finding, stated carefully.
- 8. 2026–27 is excluded.** The season in progress at the time of the count (134 games) was left out of every trend. All figures run 2008–09 through 2025–26.
- 9. The data is the league's, via MoneyPuck.** Season shot files are compiled from the NHL's play-by-play record; our aggregation is independent and every figure was recomputed from the downloaded files. If a better source of shot-type data appears, this report's numbers should be re-tested against it — and corrected in public if they are wrong.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

# The wind-up is no longer the default. The quick release is.

Eighteen seasons of the league's record, and the verdict is not that the slap shot never works — it is that the sport learned, season by season, when not to use it. The defenceman's wind-up became the snapshot. The point blast became a wrister through traffic. What remains is the specialist's slap shot: power-play flank, time and space, a goalie who has to respect the pass first. Teach your kid the shot the game actually rewards — fast off the blade, deceptive, off either foot — and let the wind-up be what it is now: a tool for the power play, and the most fun shot in the driveway. At GRIT, we prepare kids for where the game is going. Not where it was.

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Method and full caveats: pages 3 and 9 of this report. Data: NHL regular-season play-by-play, 2008–09 through 2025–26, compiled via MoneyPuck season shot files — 1,831,808 unblocked attempts across 21,607 games, shootouts excluded; per-season table kept with the report. Companion reports: the five-game backward-skating study and “Do NHL Players Stick to Their Positions?” (hand-counted from game film).

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