

shortest field goal in nfl history

Shortest Field Goal in NFL History: The Story Behind the Quickest Kick

shortest field goal in nfl history might sound like a quirky trivia question for football fans, but it's actually a fascinating piece of NFL lore that highlights how even the smallest plays can carry unique stories. While most fans tend to focus on those dramatic 50-yard or longer field goals that swing games, the shortest kicks have their own charm and significance. Let's dive into the details about this record-holding feat, explore the circumstances behind these ultra-short field goals, and understand why they matter in the grand scheme of the game.

What Exactly Constitutes the Shortest Field Goal in NFL History?

When we talk about the shortest field goal in NFL history, it's important to clarify the parameters. A field goal's length is measured from the line of scrimmage to the goalposts, plus the 7 yards the holder is behind the line during the kick. The shortest successful field goal in the NFL was an astonishingly brief 9 yards. Yes, you read that right—just 9 yards between the line of scrimmage and the goalposts.

This record-setting kick was executed by **Tom Dempsey** of the New Orleans Saints in 1970, though it might surprise some that this isn't the most common record associated with him. Actually, the 9-yard field goal record dates back to a different player and game, and we'll get to that shortly.

How Do 9-Yard Field Goals Happen?

A 9-yard field goal might seem almost automatic, but it happens only under very specific conditions:

- The offense is pinned extremely close to the opponent's end zone.
- A team faces a fourth down and chooses to attempt a field goal instead of a touchdown or a punt.
- The ball is snapped around the 2-yard line (given the 7-yard snap to the holder plus the distance to the goal line).

Often, these short field goals occur when a team stalls right before scoring a touchdown and decides to take the guaranteed points. In some cases, weather or field conditions might influence the choice to take the sure points rather than risk a turnover.

The Players Behind the Shortest Field Goal Records

While many NFL fans remember Tom Dempsey for his legendary 63-yard field goal in 1970, the shortest field goal record has its own set of players. The actual shortest field goal ever recorded in an NFL game was a 9-yard kick by **Steven Hauschka** of the Seattle Seahawks in 2015. This

happened when the Seahawks were just 2 yards from the goal line, and the kick successfully put three points on the board.

Steven Hauschka's 9-Yard Field Goal

On October 4, 2015, during a game against the San Francisco 49ers, Hauschka nailed a 9-yard field goal in the first quarter. It was a straightforward kick, but it etched his name in the NFL record books for the shortest successful field goal made in a game situation. The play was a reminder that every point counts, no matter how short or long the attempt.

Other Notable Short Field Goals

There have been several other short field goals—typically in the 10 to 12-yard range—that have come close to the 9-yard mark. Kickers like Adam Vinatieri, Justin Tucker, and Greg Zuerlein have all made short-range field goals that helped their teams secure wins in tight games. While these aren't the absolute shortest, they demonstrate that kickers must be ready for any situation, from long bombs to chip shots.

Why Do Teams Attempt Such Short Field Goals?

You might wonder why a team would bother attempting a field goal when they're so close to the end zone. After all, it seems easier to just run or pass for a touchdown in those situations. Here are some reasons why coaches opt for these short kicks:

- **Game Strategy:** Sometimes, taking the guaranteed three points is wiser than risking a turnover on downs or a blocked play.
- **Clock Management:** Late in games, securing points quickly can be crucial for maintaining a lead or closing the gap.
- **Field Position and Weather:** Conditions such as wind, rain, or a slippery field might influence the decision to kick rather than attempt a touchdown.
- **Offensive Struggles:** If the offense is struggling in the red zone, coaches might prefer to get points on the board rather than risk no points at all.

Understanding these factors helps put the shortest field goal in NFL history into context—it's not just about the kick's distance, but the strategy and pressure behind it.

The Mechanics of a Short Field Goal Attempt

While a 9-yard field goal might seem like a no-brainer, executing it flawlessly requires skill and precision. The kicker must maintain focus because the margin for error is small. Here's what goes into making a successful short field goal:

1. **Snap and Hold:** The snap has to be clean and quick, with the holder placing the ball perfectly on the ground.
2. **Kicker's Approach:** Unlike longer field goals where power is vital, short kicks rely heavily on accuracy and timing.
3. **Blocking:** The offensive line must prevent defenders from breaking through and blocking the kick.
4. **Environmental Awareness:** Even a short kick can be tricky with wind gusts, rain, or a noisy stadium affecting concentration.

The kicker's mental preparation and technique are just as important as physical ability, regardless of the kick's length.

Fun Facts and Trivia About Short Field Goals

For those who love NFL trivia, the shortest field goal in NFL history offers some cool tidbits:

- Some kickers have made multiple successful field goals inside 15 yards, showcasing their reliability under pressure.
- In rare cases, a field goal can be attempted from the 1-yard line but is often ruled as a touchdown if the ball crosses the plane.
- Field goals shorter than 20 yards often boast a near-perfect success rate, but they still require nerves of steel.
- The NFL record for the longest field goal (64 yards) contrasts sharply with these tiny attempts, highlighting the sport's range of kicking challenges.

These facts deepen appreciation for the kicking game's nuances and the range of skills required.

How Short Field Goals Impact the Game

It's easy to overlook short field goals, but they can influence a game's momentum and final outcome significantly. Here's how:

- **Momentum Shift:** Scoring even three points in a tight game can boost a team's confidence and deflate the opponent.
- **Psychological Effect:** Knowing a kicker can reliably nail short kicks eases pressure on the offense.
- **Scoreboard Pressure:** In close games, every point matters, and a short field goal can be the difference between a win and a loss.
- **Time Management:** Quick field goals help teams control the clock and dictate the game's pace.

These impacts emphasize that, no matter the distance, field goals are a critical part of football strategy.

Tips for Aspiring Kickers Inspired by the Shortest Field Goals

If you're an aspiring kicker or just curious about what it takes to be effective in short-range field goals, here are some valuable tips inspired by the pros:

- **Practice Accuracy Over Power:** For short kicks, focus on precision and consistent ball contact.
- **Stay Mentally Sharp:** The pressure might be less on short kicks, but concentration is key to avoid mistakes.
- **Work on Snap and Hold Timing:** The best kickers have seamless coordination with their holders.
- **Visualize Success:** Mental rehearsal can improve confidence and execution during games.
- **Adapt to Conditions:** Learn to kick under various weather and field situations to build versatility.

Mastering these elements can help kickers make the most of every opportunity, whether it's a 9-yard chip shot or a 50-yard bomb.

The shortest field goal in NFL history might not grab headlines like a game-winning 60-yard kick, but it's a testament to the precision and strategy that make football so captivating. Every point counts, and these seemingly simple plays often carry stories of skill, nerves, and split-second

decisions that shape the outcome of the game. Next time you watch a kicker line up for what looks like an easy field goal, remember the rich history and significance behind even the shortest attempts in NFL history.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the shortest field goal in NFL history?

The shortest field goal in NFL history is a 9-yard field goal.

Who kicked the shortest field goal in NFL history?

The shortest field goal was kicked by Bill Gramatica of the Arizona Cardinals in 2001.

When was the shortest field goal in NFL history made?

The shortest field goal was made during the 2001 NFL season.

How is the length of a field goal measured in the NFL?

The length of a field goal is measured from the line of scrimmage to the goalposts, plus 10 yards for the end zone and 7 yards for the snap hold distance.

Can a field goal shorter than 9 yards be attempted in the NFL?

No, because the line of scrimmage cannot be closer than the 1-yard line for a field goal attempt, making 9 yards the practical shortest distance including hold and end zone.

Are there any notable very short field goals in NFL playoff history?

Yes, there have been short field goals around 12 yards attempted and made in playoff games, but none shorter than the 9-yard record in regular season history.

Additional Resources

Shortest Field Goal in NFL History: An Analytical Review

Shortest field goal in NFL history is a fascinating topic that sheds light on one of the most unique occurrences in professional football. Field goals are a critical component of scoring in the NFL, usually ranging from moderate to long distances, testing the accuracy and leg strength of kickers. However, the shortest successful field goal in NFL history stands out as an anomaly, reflecting situational strategy, game dynamics, and sometimes the quirks of the sport itself. This article explores the background, context, and implications of the shortest field goal ever recorded in the NFL, providing a comprehensive understanding of this rare feat.

The Context Behind the Shortest Field Goal in NFL History

Field goals in the NFL typically span anywhere from 20 to over 60 yards, depending on the game situation and kicker capability. The shortest field goal in NFL history, however, is officially recorded at just 9 yards. This remarkable statistic is not often discussed but offers intriguing insights into the nuances of NFL gameplay.

The kick was executed by Tom Dempsey of the New Orleans Saints on November 8, 1970, against the Detroit Lions. While Dempsey is more famously known for his 63-yard field goal—a record that stood for over four decades—his shortest field goal is less celebrated but equally interesting. A 9-yard field goal essentially means the ball was snapped from the 1-yard line, and the kicker successfully converted the attempt.

Understanding why such a short field goal occurs requires examining the specific game scenarios, including field position, time remaining, and strategic decisions by coaches and players.

How Is the Field Goal Distance Calculated?

The NFL calculates field goal distances by adding 17 yards to the line of scrimmage: 10 yards for the end zone and roughly 7 yards for the snap placement behind the line. Therefore, a 9-yard field goal implies the line of scrimmage was at the 1-yard line. This extremely short distance indicates the offense was very close to the opponent's end zone but opted to kick rather than attempt a touchdown.

Situations warranting such a short field goal are rare, often involving:

- Game clock running down, requiring guaranteed points
- Down and distance scenarios unfavorable for a conventional run or pass play
- Conditions where a field goal is safer or strategically advantageous

Historical Instances and Comparisons

While the 9-yard field goal is the official record for the shortest in NFL history, there have been other attempts near this distance, some successful, others missed. These short-range attempts usually happen at the end of a half or game, where teams opt for guaranteed points over riskier plays.

Tom Dempsey's 9-yard field goal is notable because it contrasts sharply with his 63-yard kick, highlighting the versatility and pressure involved in different kicking situations. By comparison, the longest field goal in NFL history is 66 yards, kicked by Justin Tucker in 2021, demonstrating the

wide spectrum of field goal distances.

Interestingly, some kickers have missed field goals from very short distances, underscoring that even the shortest attempts carry pressure and require precise execution.

Strategic Implications of Short Field Goals

Choosing to attempt a very short field goal can seem counterintuitive given the proximity to the end zone. However, coaches sometimes prefer this option due to:

- Risk management: Avoiding potential turnovers on downs
- Securing points in tight games
- Weather or field conditions making short passes or runs less reliable
- Confidence in the kicker's abilities

These factors contribute to the decision-making process, making the shortest field goal an intriguing example of game theory in NFL football.

The Mechanics Behind Executing a Short Field Goal

Kicking from extremely short distances imposes unique challenges. Unlike longer field goals where kickers focus on power and trajectory, short field goals demand precision and control.

Execution Nuances

- **Foot placement:** Kickers must adjust their steps and strike to avoid overshooting the ball, which could result in a blocked or missed attempt.
- **Timing:** The snap and hold must be flawless given the proximity to the defensive line.
- **Defensive pressure:** Short field goals often occur near the line of scrimmage, increasing the likelihood of blocks or rushes.

These elements mean that even a 9-yard field goal requires focused skill and coordination.

Pros and Cons of Attempting the Shortest Field Goal

- **Pros:** Secures points, maintains momentum, avoids turnover risks.
- **Cons:** Potential for blocked kicks, less dramatic impact than touchdowns, possible loss of downs.

The decision ultimately rests on the game's context and team strategy.

Impact on NFL Records and Culture

The shortest field goal in NFL history, while less glamorous than long-distance kicks, holds a unique place in the annals of the sport. It exemplifies the precision and situational awareness necessary at the professional level. Moreover, it reminds fans and analysts that football success is not just about spectacular plays but also about calculated, sometimes conservative, choices that secure victory.

Players like Tom Dempsey have contributed to this legacy by demonstrating that kicking in the NFL requires both power and finesse. Such records, whether longest or shortest, enrich the narrative of the game and highlight the diverse skills involved.

In essence, the shortest field goal in NFL history underscores the multifaceted nature of football scoring and strategy, offering insights into how even minimal distances can carry significant weight in the final outcome of a game.

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