

15-2801(L)

15-2805 (Con)

United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE MANAGEMENT COUNCIL,
PLAINTIFF-COUNTER-DEFENDANT-APPELLANT

AND

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE, DEFENDANT-APPELLANT

v.

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE PLAYERS ASSOCIATION,
ON ITS OWN BEHALF AND ON BEHALF OF TOM BRADY,
DEFENDANT-COUNTER-CLAIMANT-APPELLEE

AND

TOM BRADY, COUNTER-CLAIMANT-APPELLEE

ON APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK, NOS. 15-5916, 15-5982

**BRIEF OF PROFESSORS OF PHYSICS AND ENGINEERING
AS AMICI CURIAE IN SUPPORT OF APPELLEES' PETITION FOR
PANEL REHEARING OR REHEARING EN BANC, BY**

[cover continued on next page]

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERESTS OF <i>AMICI CURIAE</i>	1
SUMMARY	1
ARGUMENT	2
I. FOOTBALLS LOSE PRESSURE NATURALLY IN COLD WEATHER.....	2
II. THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC PROOF OF TAMPERING.	3
III. “DEFLATED” FOOTBALLS ARE A REGULAR FEATURE OF THE NFL.....	6
CONCLUSION	8
CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE	
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE	
ADDENDUM A	1a
ADDENDUM B.....	1b

INTERESTS OF *AMICI CURIAE*

Amici are professors of engineering and physics. *See* Addendum A (listing and describing background of each). They have an interest in ensuring that laws of physics are applied with scientific integrity in legal proceedings. *Amici* have sought leave to file this brief, and all parties consent to its filing.¹

SUMMARY

Although sensationalized in the press, it was no surprise to any scientist that the Patriots' footballs lost pressure during the AFC Championship. As the league's reports recognize (JA208), so-called "deflation" happens naturally when any closed vessel, such as a football, moves from a warm environment to a cold one. This is not tampering. It is science. And it pervades the NFL. Games routinely are played with footballs that fall below the league's minimum pressure requirement.

The question in the arbitration therefore was whether there was an increment of *additional* pressure loss in the Patriots' footballs (as small as 0.14 of a psig) beyond the drop that occurred naturally.² The Commissioner concluded there was. But he relied on analysis that admittedly was "dependent upon assumptions" about missing data – assumptions that had a "material impact on the ultimate conclusion"

¹ No party's counsel authored this brief in whole or in part. No party, no counsel for any party, and no person other than *amici curiae* or their counsel contributed money that was intended to fund preparation or submission of this brief. Fed. R. App. P. 29(c)(5)(A)-(C).

² Psig denotes pound per square inch gauge, a standard pressure measurement.

(JA250; JA108) and that if adjusted in reasonable ways, would show no additional pressure drop at all. Thus his ruling was not based on scientific proof, but rather on scientifically-worded surmise. Indeed there is *no* scientific proof of wrongdoing.

As scientists, we submit that this is the context in which the Commissioner's ruling must be reviewed. This context appears missing from the majority opinion. *See Slip op.* 5. It strikes us as scientifically unsound to base a punitive ruling on a supposed increment of a few tenths of a psig, when assumptions are used to determine that such an increment even exists. Courts should not be powerless to consider the absence of scientific proof when a proceeding is so interlaced with laws of science. We support the petition for rehearing.

ARGUMENT

I. Footballs lose pressure naturally in cold weather.

The NFL requires game balls to be set, pre-game, from 12.5 to 13.5 psig. But as a matter of physics, when a vessel of air – such as a football – moves from a warm environment to a colder one, its pressure decreases. Pressure is defined as force per unit area. As the temperature of a fixed-volume vessel of gas is reduced, the average velocity of the molecules inside the vessel decreases, resulting in a proportional decrease in the magnitude of the force that the molecules of gas exert on the vessel's walls.³ Scientists call this proportionality the Ideal Gas Law. It is natural, inevitable, and not subject to debate. The league itself acknowledges that a

³ Car tires, for instance, lose around 1.0 psig for every 10 degree temperature drop.

pressure drop is a “natural result of footballs moving from a relatively warm environment such as a locker room to a colder environment such as a playing field” and is “consistent with basic scientific principles.” JA104; JA208.

While the league understands this now, it apparently did not know before this case that footballs lose pressure naturally. JA1007-08. It announced its investigation seemingly unaware of the Ideal Gas Law or its impact.

II. There is no scientific proof of tampering.

The Ideal Gas Law resulted in a significant reduction of pressure in the Patriots’ footballs. This drop occurred naturally. The league now recognizes this. Its own reports state that the Ideal Gas Law accounted for a loss of as much as 1.18 psig (a reduction from 12.5 to 11.32 psig). *See* JA208; JA290.

The league’s accusation against Mr. Brady therefore was *not* that he was responsible for all or even most of the pressure loss. It was that he was responsible for an increment of additional pressure loss beyond that which occurred naturally. The league, again, acknowledges this. JA104 (pressure loss cannot be “explained *completely* by basic scientific principles”); SPA45 (“the deflation ... cannot be *fully* explained by environmental factors or scientific principles”) (emphasis added).

Strikingly, the Commissioner does not identify the size of this additional increment of pressure loss that he attributes to Mr. Brady. Obscured in one of the league’s reports, however, is an analysis that indicates that it was as tiny as 0.14 of

a psig and no larger than 0.53 psig. JA308-09.⁴ To us as scientists, an increment of pressure loss as tiny as 0.14 psig is too small to constitute proof of tampering. It is well within any reasonable margin of error, based on our assessment of the league's measurements. JA270-78.⁵

The very existence of *any* increment, moreover, was divined through assumption. The data necessary for any bona fide scientific analysis was never collected. The league, yet again, recognizes this. It states that its analysis is “dependent upon assumptions and information that is not certain.” JA250. These assumptions and uncertainties relate to critical variables necessary to determine the nature of the pressure loss. Indeed, the league states that “varying the applicable assumptions can have a material impact on the ultimate conclusions.” JA108.⁶

⁴ Two gauges were available to test the footballs pre-game. There is no record of which one was used. If the “logo” gauge was used, the league states the pressure of the footballs at halftime should have been no lower than 11.35 psig. JA309. The actual footballs under this gauge, per the league's “master gauge” analysis, were on average 11.21 psig. JA308. This leaves an increment of 0.14 psig. If the “non-logo” gauge was used, the league states the pressure of the footballs at halftime should have been as high as 11.62 psig. *Id.* The actual footballs under this gauge, per the league's “master gauge” analysis, were on average 11.09 psig. *Id.* This leaves a high-end increment, in the league's view, of 0.53 psig.

⁵ There is imprecision in inexpensive gauges, and the halftime testing “was not performed...under ideal circumstances for forensic data collection.” JA165 n.42.

⁶ The league states that it has identified no “credible environmental or physical factors that completely accounts for the additional loss in air pressure.” JA250. But this statement itself contains qualifications like “based on all of the information provided to us” and “within the range of game characteristics most likely to have

For example, in asserting that the additional increment could have been as low as 0.14 psig, the league assumed a locker room temperature of 67 °F when the footballs were tested pre-game. JA308-09. But elsewhere in its analysis, it assumed that the temperature, in the same room at the same time, was 71 °F. JA307. It simply switched the assumption. Had the league used its 71 degree assumption consistently, then the 0.14 psig increment changes to -0.06 psig.⁷ The alleged deflation becomes non-existent.

Likewise, in asserting that the increment could be as high as 0.53 psig, the league assumed the referee used a particular gauge. The referee told the league, however, that his “best recollection” was that he used a different gauge. JA147. That gauge shows smaller increments of additional pressure loss. JA308-09.⁸

If these two assumptions were changed to be consistent with the temperature assumption made elsewhere and with the information provided by the referee, the increment of pressure loss beyond the drop which occurred naturally is as low as

occurred.” *Id.* The report later states that these “parameters” of what was likely were set by league counsel. JA297.

⁷ Due to the Ideal Gas Law, a starting temperature of 4 degrees higher in the locker room leads to a further reduction in the on-field pressure by 0.20 psig.

⁸ The assertion that the increment could be as high as 0.53 psig relies on many other assumptions too. For instance, while acknowledging that wetness causes greater pressure drops (JA293), it assumes the impact of the wetness on the field can be replicated by spraying footballs “occasionally” with a “household spray bottle” in a laboratory. JA306. Likewise, it assumes that the officials let the balls warm back up in the locker room for four minutes before testing them. JA308.

zero. At most it would be a mere 0.13 psig (well within the margin of error), even before addressing other issues in the league's analysis. Had the league made these two different assumptions alone, the results would have vindicated Mr. Brady.

We provide this analysis to explain what the "science" used by the league is not. It most assuredly is not scientific *proof* that the Patriots' footballs lost pressure beyond the drop caused naturally by the Ideal Gas Law. Rather it is a malleable and subjective analysis based on a host of assumptions – selected to some degree by league counsel (JA297) – that if varied in any number of reasonable ways, lead to the conclusion that all deflation occurred naturally. There is no scientific proof of tampering.

III. "Deflated" footballs are a regular feature of the NFL.

Indeed for decades, NFL games have been routinely played with underinflated balls due to the Ideal Gas Law. For any game where the field temperature is 20 or more degrees lower than the locker room where the footballs were tested, footballs will naturally "deflate" below the league minimum of 12.5 psig. If footballs initially are set lower than the 13.5 psig maximum, as the Patriots' footballs were, even much smaller temperature differences will result in natural deflation below 12.5 psig.

Amici have obtained data on the field temperatures for over 10,000 outdoor NFL games dating back to 1960. If one assumes a 70 degree locker room and 13.0

psig balls and then applies the reported game temperatures, approximately 61% of the games would have featured footballs that descended below the permitted range. *See* Addendum B. Assuming that footballs were set initially at the lower end of the permitted range where the Patriots' footballs were set (12.5 psig), approximately 82% of the games would have featured footballs that descended below the permitted range. *Id.* Even assuming footballs were set initially at the high end of the range (13.5 psig), approximately 38% of the games still would have featured footballs that descended below the permitted range. *Id.*

Not surprisingly in light of physics, in the game at issue here, *both* teams' footballs were underinflated by halftime. Indeed, the league's own graphs show that the Colts' footballs, which the referee stated were set pre-game at 13.0 psig, would have measured approximately 11.8 psig at the time they left the field (before they heated back up in the locker room and were then measured). *See* JA300-01; JA303; JA305; JA310-11. Due to the Ideal Gas Law, they fell below the league's minimum requirement of 12.5 psig even though they initially were set above it.

League rules permit this. While they require the pressure of the footballs to be tested *before* the game, they require no testing or re-inflation *during* the game – even though it is inevitable under the Ideal Gas Law that the pressure of the footballs will drop well below the league minimum during cold weather games. JA127-28. The point is not that “tampering” is allowed. It is that a reduction of

pressure in footballs, below the league minimum, occurs naturally and regularly in the NFL without any correction by the league. Any review of the league's ruling must be framed by these scientific facts.

CONCLUSION

As professors, we cannot fathom how it is permissible to impose punishment for the possibility of a negligible increment of pressure loss, when underinflated footballs are common to NFL games, when laws of physics cause much larger pressure drops, and when the very possibility of an additional increment of pressure loss was generated from assumptions of the league's choosing rather than data. In the name of science, we support the petition for rehearing.

May 24, 2016

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

I hereby certify the foregoing BRIEF OF PROFESSORS OF PHYSICS AND ENGINEERING AS *AMICI CURIAE* IN SUPPORT OF APPELLEES, complies with the typeface requirements of Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 32(a)(5) and the type style requirements of Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 32(a)(6) because this brief has been prepared in a proportionally spaced typeface using Microsoft Word 2007 in 14-point Times New Roman font. Further, this amicus brief complies with the limitation on length set by Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure 29(d) and 35(b)(2).

May 24, 2016

/s/ Eric R. Delinsky
Eric R. Delinsky

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that, on May 24, 2016, I caused an electronic copy of the Brief of Professors of Physics and Engineering as *Amici Curiae* to be filed with the Clerk of Court using the ECF system, and thereby served upon all counsel appearing in this case.

/s/ Eric R. Delinsky
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ADDENDUM A

LIST OF AMICI

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ADDENDUM B

Game Temperatures

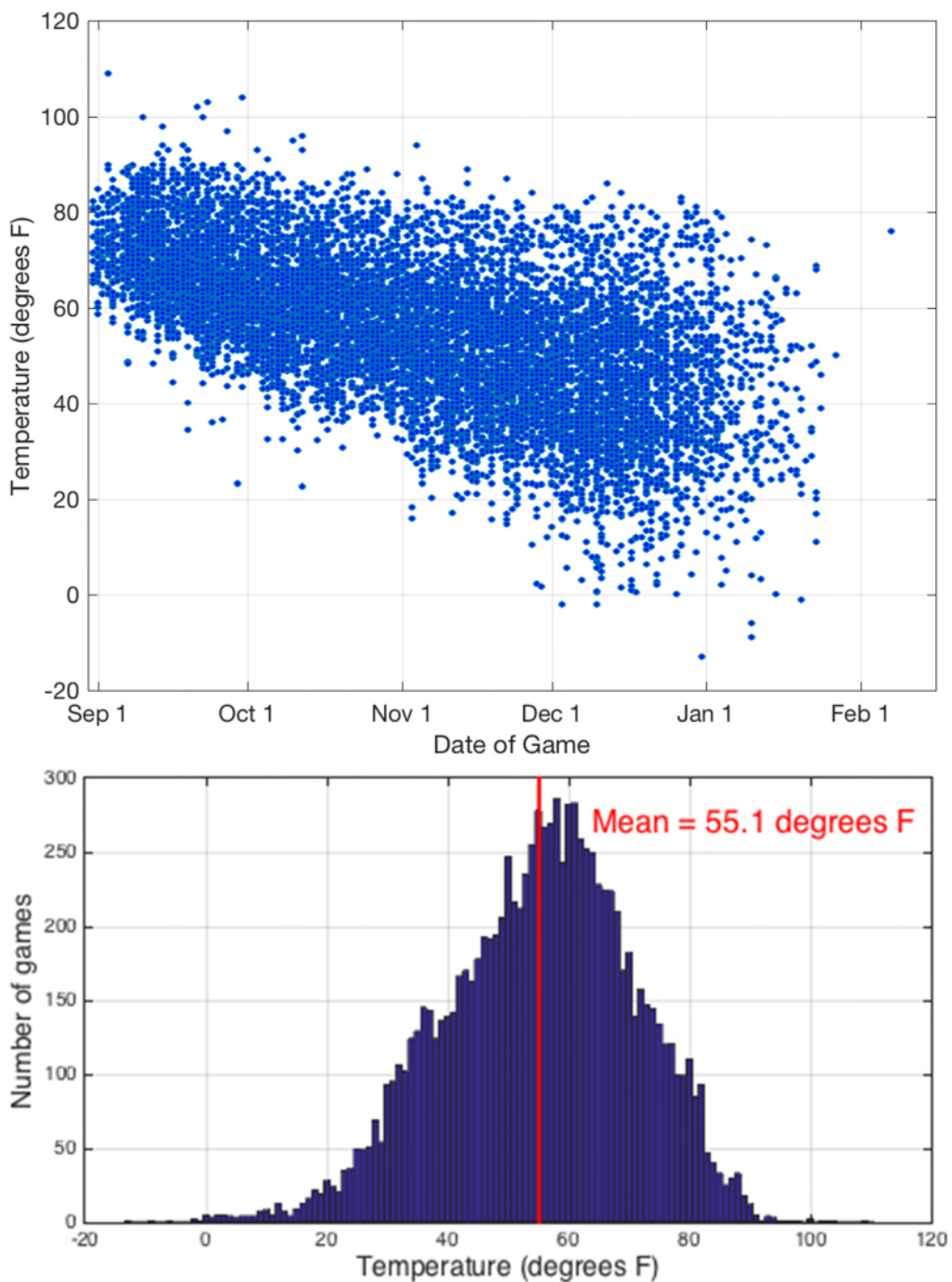


Figure 1. Scatter plot (top) and histogram (bottom) for the game temperatures of 10,307 NFL games played outdoors from 1960 to 2016. Games in stadiums with a dome or retractable roof are omitted.

Source: http://www.pro-football-reference.com/play-index/tgl_finder.cgi

Assuming 12.5 psig Starting Pressure

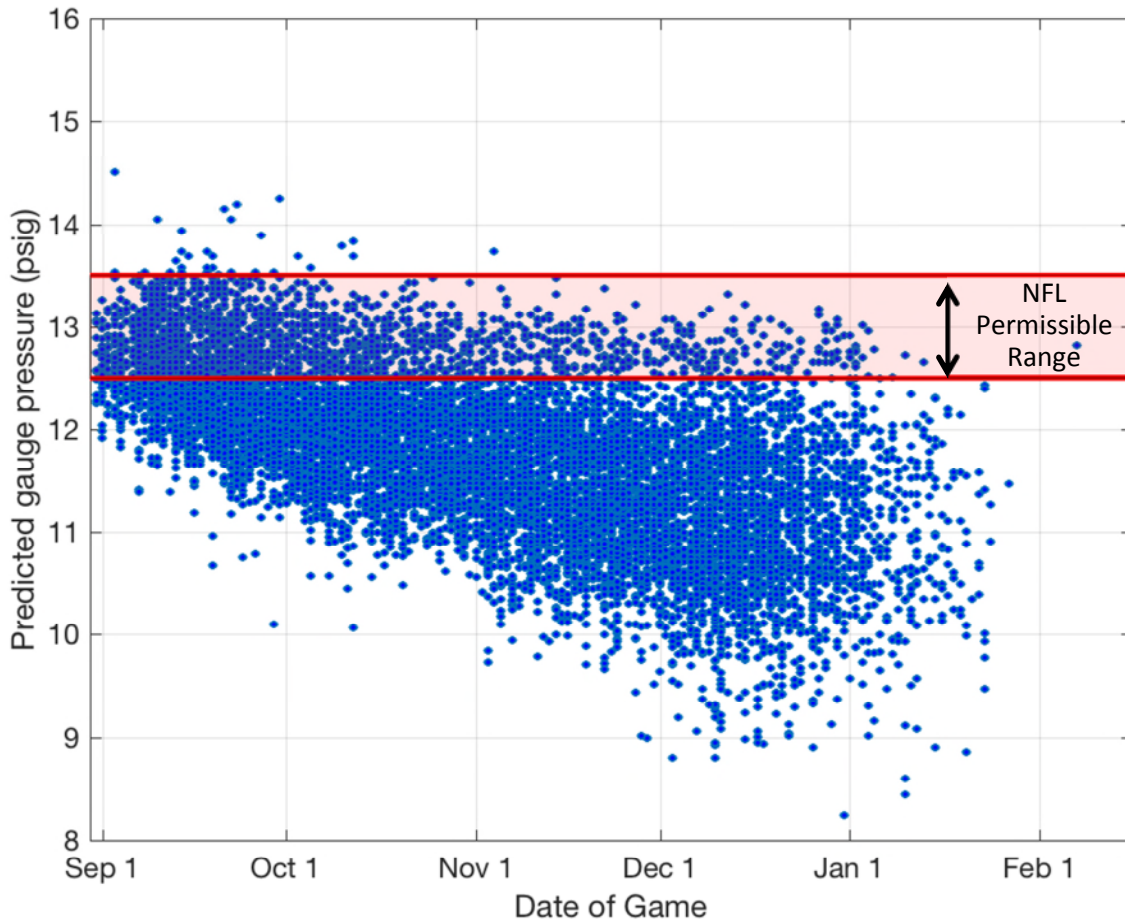


Figure 2. Predicted pressure levels of footballs using the historical game temperatures plotted in Figure 1, assuming pre-game inflation to 12.5 psig in a 70 degree Fahrenheit locker room. The shaded region indicates the 12.5 psig to 13.5 psig pre-game range required by the NFL. 82.1% of the games have a predicted on-field ball pressure below 12.5 psig, 17.6% of the games have a predicted on-field pressure within the 12.5 psig to 13.5 psig range, and 0.3% of the games have a predicted on-field ball pressure above 13.5 psig.

Note: psig denotes “pounds per square inch gauge,” indicating a pressure measured relative to atmospheric pressure. Atmospheric pressure is assumed to be 14.7 pounds per square inch for these computations.

Assuming 13.0 psig Starting Pressure

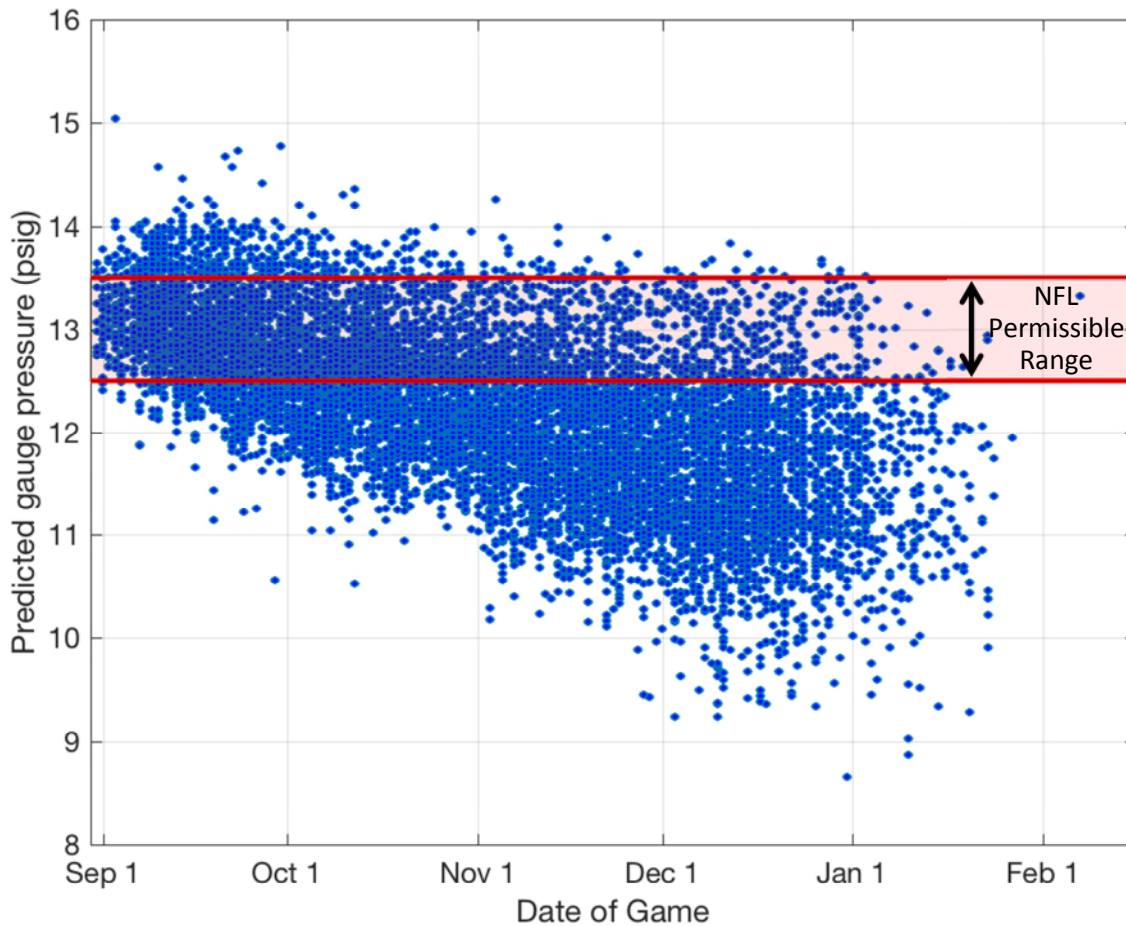


Figure 3: Predicted pressure levels of footballs using the historical game temperatures plotted in Figure 1, assuming pre-game inflation to 13.0 psig in a 70 degree Fahrenheit locker room. 61.0% of the games have a predicted on-field ball pressure below 12.5 psig, 33.7% of the games have a predicted on-field pressure within the 12.5 psig to 13.5 psig range, and 5.3% of the games have a predicted on-field ball pressure above 13.5 psig.

Assuming 13.5 psig Starting Pressure

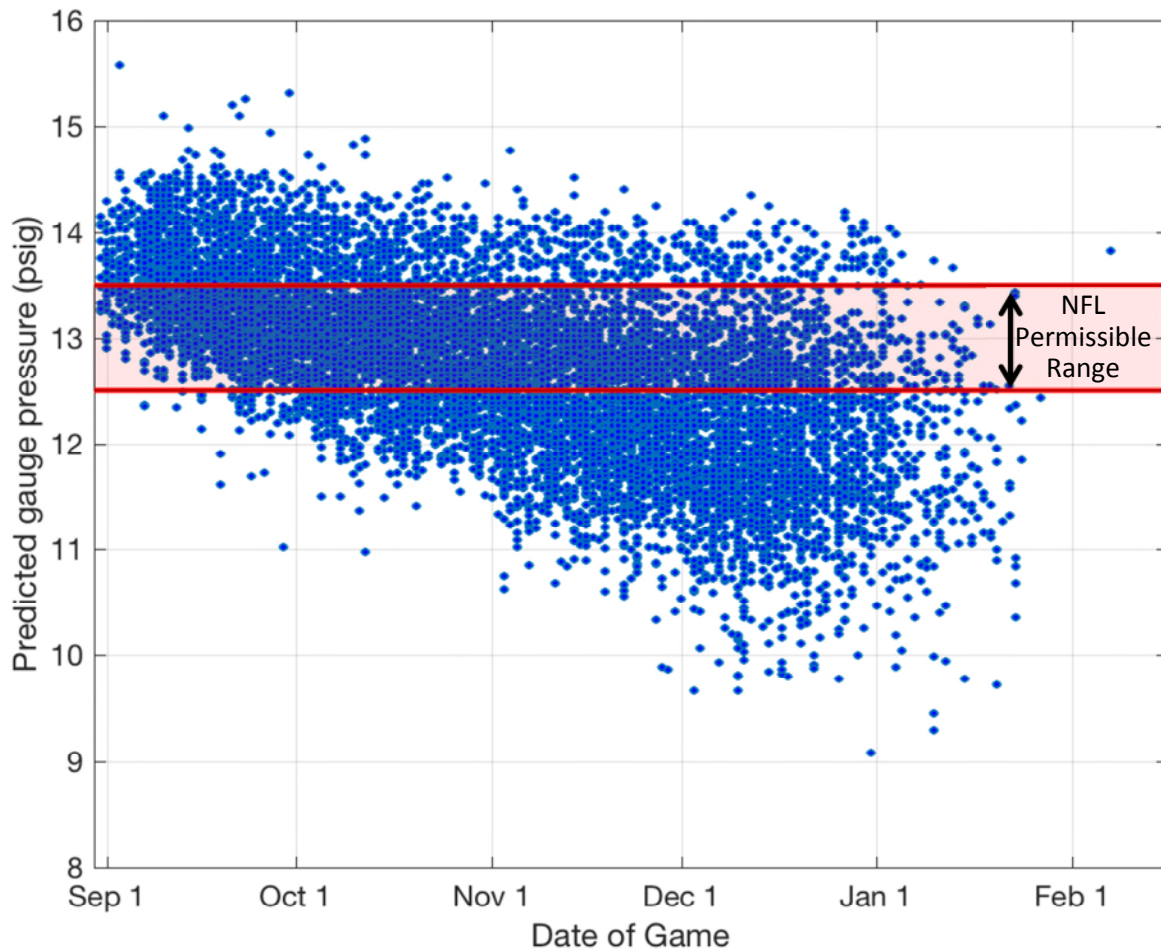


Figure 4: Predicted pressure levels of footballs using the historical game temperatures plotted in Figure 1, assuming pre-game inflation to 13.5 psig in a 70 degree Fahrenheit locker room. 38.2% of the games have a predicted on-field ball pressure below 12.5 psig, 44.7% of the games have a predicted on-field pressure within the 12.5 psig to 13.5 psig range, and 17.1% of the games have a predicted on-field ball pressure above 13.5 psig.