

# **Optimove Insight Analysis of NFL 2025–2026 Planned v. Actual NFL Wagering Intentions Through the Wild Card Round**

# Contents

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Executive Summary.....</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Detailed Results.....</b>   | <b>4</b> |
| <b>Regular Season, As Expected – Wild Card,<br/>Not So Much.....</b>             | <b>4</b> |
| <b>Bettors Say They Want Make Live Bets;<br/>But Primarily Bet Pre-Game.....</b> | <b>5</b> |
| <b>Intent Matches Reality: Multi Bets Lead the Way.....</b>                      | <b>6</b> |
| <b>Where the Money Really Sits: Smaller Bets,<br/>More Often.....</b>            | <b>7</b> |
| <b>Conclusion – Why Positionless Marketing Matters ..</b>                        | <b>8</b> |

## Executive Summary

This analysis compares what **NFL bettors said they planned to bet before the 2025–26 season** with **what they actually did through the end of the Wild Card round**, using observed behavior from nearly **4.0 million bettors** alongside a **pre-season survey of 425 bettors**. The results show that while high-level intentions broadly align with reality, bettors consistently overestimate how often, how live, and how much they will bet, especially once the season is underway.

**The regular season remains the backbone of NFL betting.** Both stated intent and actual behavior confirm that most wagering activity is anchored there, accounting for roughly three-quarters of all bets. However, interest in fringe periods is overstated. Pre-season betting and Wild Card betting both sound appealing in theory, but actual participation is far lower than expected. In particular, nearly half of surveyed bettors anticipated betting during Wild Card, yet real activity through that round is closer to one-sixth of bettors, underscoring that playoff “excitement” does not automatically translate into betting volume when the window is short.

**Live betting is consistently over-promised and under-delivered.** While bettors express strong interest in live wagering before the season, actual behavior skews heavily toward pre-game bets. That said, many bettors blend behaviors in practice, moving between pre-game and live depending on context. This suggests opportunity lies less in converting bettors to “live-only” and more in designing experiences that fluidly support both.

**Bet structure shows the strongest alignment between intent and reality.** Multi-leg bets, particularly parlays, dominate both planned and actual behavior. This confirms that bettors’ appetite for higher-engagement, multi-outcome tickets is real and durable. As the playoff slate narrows, this preference is likely to shift toward same-game parlays rather than traditional multi-game builds.

**The largest disconnect appears in stake size.** Bettors systematically overestimate how much they expect to wager. In reality, small bets placed frequently dominate observed behavior, with low-stake wagers far more common than survey responses suggest. While \$11–\$50 emerges as the true “default” stake band, higher stakes are significantly rarer in practice than bettors predict before the season.

**Looking ahead, intensity, not volume, is likely to define the later playoff rounds.** As the number of games shrinks, total betting volume may not rival the regular season, but engagement among remaining bettors typically deepens. This often manifests as more bets per game, greater use of live betting moments, and heavier reliance on parlays rather than larger single-ticket stakes.

## Bottom line:

NFL bettors are directionally honest about *how* they want to bet, but consistently optimistic about *how much* and *how often* they will do so. For operators, the opportunity lies in recognizing where intent reliably converts (regular season, parlays, pre-game betting) and where friction emerges (live betting adoption, playoff participation, higher stakes). Designing experiences that emphasize intensity, flexibility, and frequent low-stake engagement is likely to outperform strategies built on assumed playoff spikes or inflated stake expectations.

## Detailed Results:

This report compares the following:

1. **Actual Bets** of 3,991,737 NFL bettors covering the 2025/26 NFL season through the end of the Wild Card round; and
2. **Planned Bets** of 425 NFL Bettors surveyed before the start of the season.

## Regular Season, As Expected – Wild Card, Not So Much

This chart compares what NFL bettors said they were most likely to bet on (planned bets) versus bets in the 2025/26 season (actual betting behavior) through the end of Wild Card round.

### A few things jump out immediately:

- The regular season is the clear anchor in both datasets. Survey respondents before the start of the season overwhelmingly pointed to the regular season as their primary betting period (73%), and real behavior supports that as (75%) of observed betting activity happened during the regular season.
- Pre-season betting is meaningfully lower in reality than in stated intent. While 33% of survey respondents said they'd be likely to bet in the pre-season, real activity through our benchmark is closer to ~10%. Bottom line: pre-season sounds appealing in theory, but far fewer people follow through once games start.
- Wild Card interest is overestimated in the survey before the season. The survey suggests nearly half of bettors (48%) expected to bet during Wild Card, but real behavior in our data is much lower (~15%). That gap is a big signal that "high-stakes playoff excitement" doesn't automatically translate to volume, especially when the round is short and concentrated.

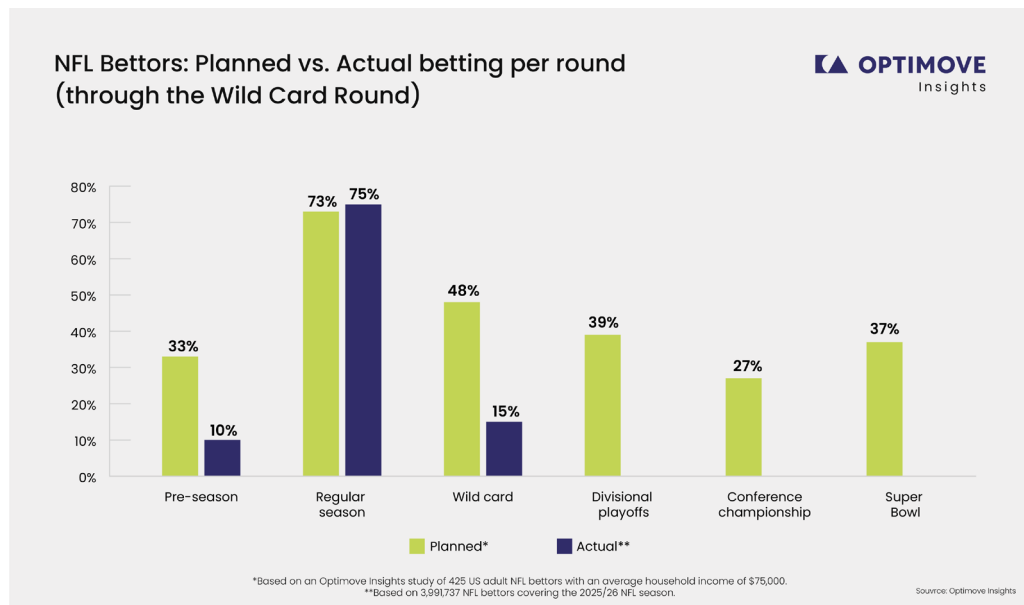
### What we'd expect to see next:

- Because this analysis only includes activity through Wild Card, the later playoff rounds are reported the survey before the NFL season start.

Based on how betting typically behaves as stakes rise, we expect a concentration effect – Fewer days, bigger moments: The Divisional Round, Conference Championships, and Super Bowl have fewer games, so raw volume may not match the regular season but attention is higher, which often shows up as more bets per game, higher average stake, and heavier live-betting mix.

- A “late-stage spike” among engaged bettors: Even if overall volume stays lower than the regular season, the bettors who remain active tend to be more committed, which can make the later rounds disproportionately valuable from a revenue and engagement perspective.

**If the regular season is where breadth happens, the next rounds are where intensity can show up.**



## Bettors Say They Want Make Live Bets; But Primarily Bet Pre-Game

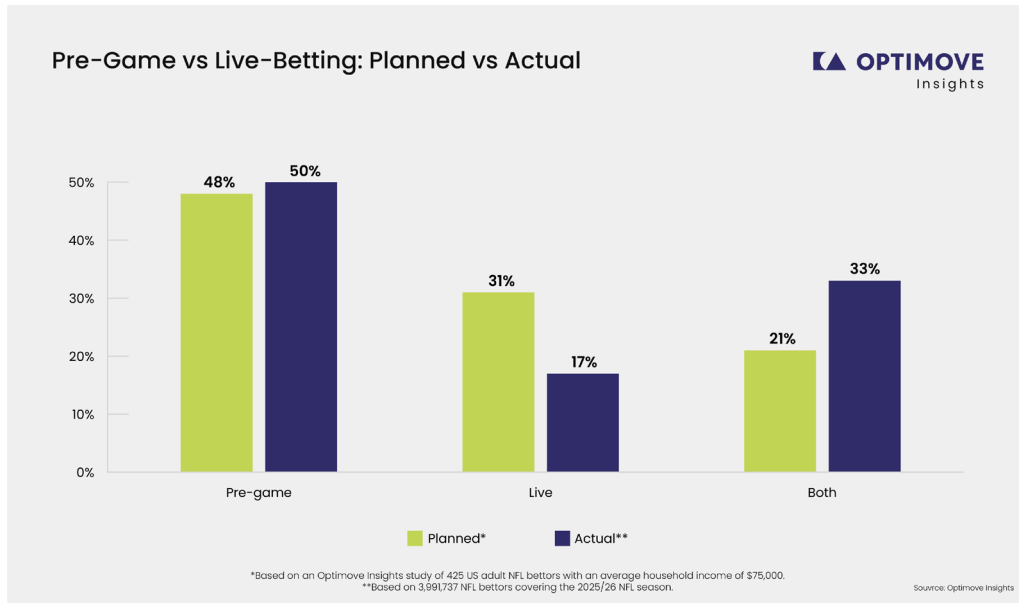
This chart compares stated preference (survey before the season start) with observed behavior across three types of bets: 1) pre-game, 2) live, and 3) both.

Here’s what stands out:

- **Pre-game betting is executed as planned.** Nearly half of respondents said they typically prefer pre-game (48%), and real behavior comes in slightly higher at 50%. That’s a strong alignment between intent and reality. Pre-game betting remains the default mode for most bettors.
- **Live betting is the biggest gap between planned and actual betting.** In the survey, 31% said they planned live betting, but in practice only 17% did.
- **“Both” is under claimed but over delivered.** Only 21% said they have no preference and do both (pre-game and live), yet actual behavior suggests 33% of bettors mix pre-game and live. So even if bettors identify with one style, many still shift modes depending on context.

**What we’d expect to see next:**

- As the NFL season progresses, this mix between live and pre-game betting can change: Later playoff rounds tend to be more “appointment viewing,” which can naturally lift live betting, especially in close games and high-profile matchups.
- Even if the share of “live only” bettors remain modest, we’d expect live engagement to deepen as games become must watch events.



**Intent Matches Reality: Multi Bets Lead the Way**

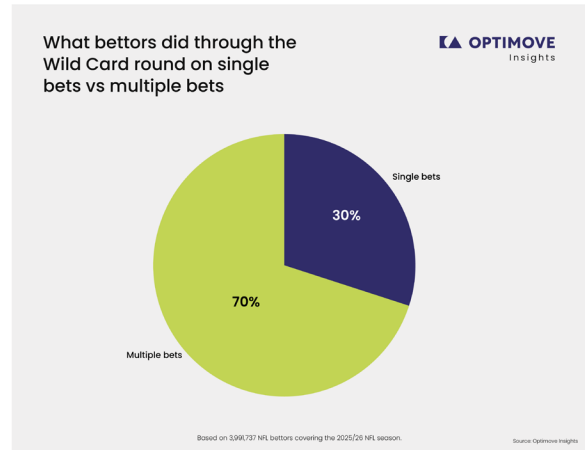
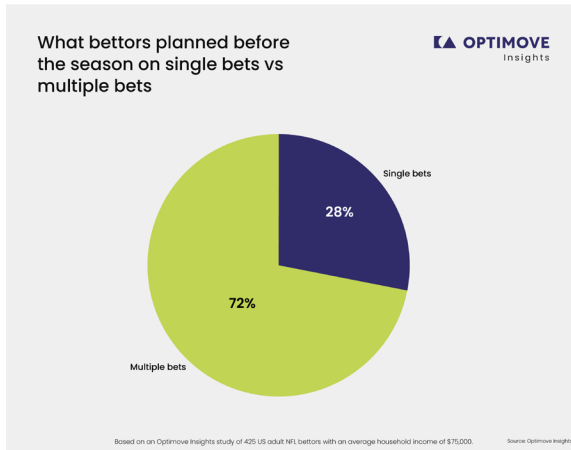
Next, we analyzed how bettors build their tickets: single bets versus multi-leg parlays, comparing survey intent with actual behavior through the end of the Wild Card round.

**Unlike other comparisons, this shows minimal gap between what bettors said and what they actually did:**

- **Multi bets (parlays)** dominate in both views. The survey shows 72% planning to primarily place multi bets, and real behavior comes in almost the same at 70%.
- **Single bets** are only slightly higher in reality. Actual betting shows 30% single vs. 28% in the survey .

**What we’d expect to see next:**

- Fewer games = fewer traditional parlays. With a smaller slate, multi-game parlays become harder to build.
- More Same-Game Parlays. Bettors who want multi legs still have a clear outlet: stacking outcomes within one matchup.



## Where the Money Really Sits: Smaller Bets, More Often

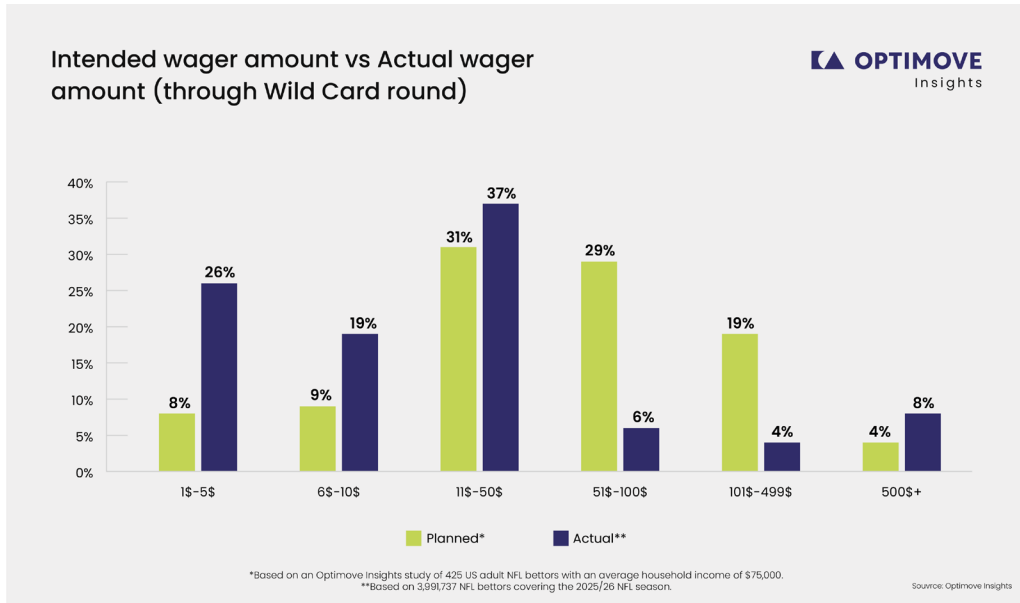
Finally, we compared what bettors said they typically wager in the survey with what we actually observed in the data through the end of the Wild Card round. The pattern is hard to miss: **real-world stakes tend to come in lower than the amounts people anticipated before the season.**

- Low-stake bets over-index in real behavior. In the data, \$1–\$5 (26%) and \$6–\$10 (19%) make up a much larger share than in the survey before the season (8% and 9%, respectively). In practice, bettors place far more “small” bets than they thought.
- The survey overestimates mid-to-higher stakes. The biggest mismatch is in the \$51–\$100 range: 29% in survey responses vs. only 6% in actual observed behavior. The same pattern shows up again at \$101–\$499 (19% survey vs. 4% actual).
- The center of gravity shifts downward. Both sources revealed that \$11–\$50 is the most common range, but actual bets in the data lean even more into it (37% actual vs. 31% survey), suggesting \$11–50 is the “true default” stake band.

### What we’d expect to see next:

As the playoffs continue, we may likely see:

- **More casual bettors enter**, which can lower the average stake among those who remain active (lots of people place a bet on the Super Bowl who are “one and done” players)
- As the number of games shrinks, so many bettors may keep stakes conservative and instead express confidence via more legs (parlays) rather than bigger single-ticket amounts.



## Conclusion – Why Positionless Marketing Matters

The gap between planned intent and real betting behavior underscores a core reality: **player preferences are situational and dynamic**, not fixed before the season begins. Bettors shift when they engage, how they bet, and how much they wager based on context, momentum, and the moment.

Meeting players in those moments requires marketing teams to act with speed, flexibility, and precision. That’s where Positionless Marketing becomes essential. By removing dependencies on fixed roles, long planning cycles, and manual handoffs, Positionless Marketing empowers teams to respond immediately to real player behavior, not pre-season assumptions.

Instead of relying on static campaigns built around predicted intent, Positionless Marketing enables marketers to continuously adapt messaging, offers, and journeys as preferences reveal themselves in real time. This ability to move at the player’s speed (and adjust to actual behavior as it unfolds) is what allows operators to stay relevant, personalized, and effective throughout the season.

In an environment where intent rarely matches reality, Positionless Marketing is what turns insight into action at exactly the right moment.

## About Optimove

Optimove is the creator of Positionless Marketing and the #1 Player Engagement Solution for iGaming and sports betting operators. Positionless Marketing frees marketing teams from the limitations of fixed roles, giving every marketer the power to execute any marketing task instantly and independently. Positionless Marketing has been proven to improve campaign efficiency by 88%, allowing marketing teams to create more personalized engagement with existing customers.

For two years running, Optimove has been positioned as a Visionary in Gartner's Magic Quadrant for Multichannel Marketing Hubs, recognized for its AI-driven decisioning, prescriptive insights, and proven ability to orchestrate thousands of personalized campaigns in real time across channels. AI-led marketing is a hallmark of Optimove's visionary leadership.

By embedding AI directly into its platform as early as 2012, Optimove paved the way for today's Positionless Marketing standard. Its Positionless Marketing Platform includes Optimove Engage and Orchestrate for cross-channel campaign decisioning and orchestration; Optimove Personalize, a digital personalization engine; and Optimove Gamify, a loyalty and gamification platform.

Today, its comprehensive AI-powered suite is at the leading edge of empowering marketers to streamline workflows from Insight to Creation and through Optimization. Optimove provides industry-specific and use-case solutions for leading consumer brands globally.

## About Optimove Insights

Optimove Insights is the analytical and research arm of Optimove, dedicated to providing valuable industry insights and data-driven research to empower B2C businesses.