

THE SEMI-SIDEWAYS JUMP SHOT: GOOD GOING WEAKSIDE, BAD GOING STRONGSIDE

By Robert Tilitz

The semi-sideways jump shot probably grew out of the semi-sideways posture that usually concludes weakside moves and run-ups. Even players hellbent on shooting an elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot must succumb to the shape-shifting physical forces that conclude weakside moves and run-ups. Any attempt to square the weakside semi-sideways shooting stance by rotating it back against the weakside momentum would drain the athleticism and the power out of the weakside move or run-up and tangle the release in counteracting techniques. When executed on its own terms, the semi-sideways jump shot works wonderfully well as a weakside-only specialist and reasonably well on straight-ahead pull-up jump shots. The semi-sideways jump shot far out-performs the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot on weakside and straight-ahead pull-ups. But the semi-sideways jump shot does not perform well on strongside pull-ups, with a worse and worse failure rate as the strongside angle away from the basket increases.

The semi-sideways jump shot is popular in terms of usage because before all else its weakside shape-shifting evolution locates it first in line as a replacement for the widely recommended but poorly performing elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot. The upside of the semi-sideways jump shot pertains only to its weakside incarnation, which is easy to set up off the weakside dribble and easy to shoot. Plus, it's got good athleticism and good power. The downside of the semi-sideways jump shot is its limited strongside capability. That's not exactly the description of a game-changing attack jump shot, but by comparison to the stiff, awkward and power deficient elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot it's an attractive package. Proof of the popularity of the semi-sideways jump shot is that some notable NBA players, such as Andrew Wiggins, Domantas Sabonis, RJ Barrett and Michael Porter Jr., have adopted it as their primary jump.



Left to Right, Andrew Wiggins, Domantas Sabonis, RJ Barrett and Michael Porter Jr.

Here's how the easy parts of the semi-sideways jump shot work. The first easy part is setting up the shooting grip off the dribble. The shooting grip setup starts when the off-hand grabs the weakside dribble and shifts the basketball toward the dominant side of the body. Next, the shooting hand drops down on top of the basketball to secure it with a two-hand semi-oppositional grip. When the shooting hand initially sets up on top of the basketball, it should apply a bent-back half-hand grip. That's the shooting grip. The second easy part is setting up the semi-sideways shooting position. The shooting position setup consists of raising the basketball to the shooting position. Raising the basketball to the shooting position automatically rotates it backward by half a turn, which sets up the underneath bent-back half-hand shooting

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grip. That's the shooting position for the weakside semi-sideways jump shot. The third easy part is shooting the semi-sideways jump shot. The release for the semi-sideways jump shot consists of an extension of the shooting arm including a stretched-out forearm stroke and brushing hand action to control the basketball. The semi-sideways jumpshooter can opt for either a straightstroke-push release or leveraged straightstroke-pull release.

The easy parts of the mid-range off the dribble weakside semi-sideways jump shot are also fast. Fast, of course, only adds to the popularity of the semi-sideways jump shot.

A careful look at the semi-sideways jump shot in action will reveal an elbow-out shooting position and an elbow-out release. The benefits that the semi-sideways jump shot gets from its elbow-out techniques do not equal those that they bring to the whole-body elbow-out jump shot, but they are significant nonetheless. The explanation for the differences is that the semi-sideways shooting stance allows the shooting shoulder only a limited role. Because the release of the semi-sideways jump shot heads out to the side, shooting shoulder involvement in the release cannot begin with a rollback. But to a certain extent the shooting shoulder can roll inward or upward before rotating into the release. It is not ideal whole-body shooting shoulder involvement but it does help athleticism, power and gun turret adjustability.

The semi-sideways jump shot does not work well off strongside moves or run-ups. The problem is structural as well as technical. The root of the problem is that the rotational length and duration of the square-in-the-air jump that would be required to set up and shoot a strongside semi-sideways jump shot off a strongside move or run-up is physically impractical, if not impossible. Here's why. The square-in-the-air jump starts after a two-step stop. The pivot of the first step and the step into the jump shot by the second step start the squaring process. However, it is during the square-in-the-air jump, which is powered by momentum from the footwork on the ground and the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release, that most of the squaring process takes place. The release should occur before the airborne square-up is complete in order to make use of the square-in-the-air rotation as a supplementary power source. The length of the square-in-the-air rotation is usually 20 or 30 degrees. 45 degrees and even more are doable, especially when gun turret adjustability is factored into the process. However, if the intent is to setup a strongside semi-sideways release, then the setup jump would need to continue rotating for about another 90 degrees. In other words, the setup rotational jump would have to rotate way past the point where it is squared in the air in order to line up the semi-sideways release. Forget about it. Well, you say, what about starting the release earlier in the rotation? That's possible, if the direction of the release shifts forward. But then the resulting jump shot would not be a semi-sideways jump shot, would it?

The incompatibility of the semi-sideways jump shot with strongside pull-up jump shots leaves semi-sideways jumpshooters with only one half of a jumpshooting game, the weakside half. To make matters worse, when compared with the strongside half, the weakside half is decidedly the wrong half. The comparison is based on athleticism, power and protection performance criteria.

Speaking of protection, it is a major problem for the semi-sideways jump shot. The protection problem is worst during the jump of a weakside semi-sideways jump shot when the basketball is exposed as it is being raised to the shooting position. The exposure occurs because the

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basketball is usually raised wholly or in part on the dominant side of the body, which is the weakside jumpshooter's side of the body that is closest to the on-ball defender.

The protection problem on weakside pull-ups appears to be a price that semi-sideways jumpshooters are willing to pay in exchange for its easy parts. To the extent that semi-sideways jumpshooters deal with their protection problem, it is mostly through reliance, make that over-reliance, on the all too popular weakside semi-sideways stepback jump shot and the off-the-dribble weakside fallaway jump shot. Weakside semi-sideways stepback jump shots take the attack out of the jump shot. Instead, weakside semi-sideways stepback jump shots specialize in iso-scoring, which admittedly they are very good at. But iso-scoring costs the teamwork that disruption of the defense brings by creating passing opportunities to open teammates. The off-the-dribble weakside fallaway jump shot routinely requires extreme off-balance athleticism, which inevitably lowers shooting percentages.

Long-range semi-sideways semi-jump shots do not work the same way that mid-range weakside semi-sideways pull-up jump shots work. Both are easy to shoot, but in different ways. The big difference is in the power production department. Mid-range weakside semi-sideways pull-up, stepback and fallaway jump shots barely involve the shooting shoulder in the release. The resulting shooting-shoulderless medium power works well enough at mid-range but strains at long-range. Long-range semi-sideways semi-jump shot's power is easy but inadvertent. The long-range semi-sideways semi-jump shot sets up with a backward twist of the upper body to open and to square the shoulders. The backward twist of the upper body inadvertently rolls the shooting shoulder back, engages it with the release mechanism and thereby activates it as a power source, while also adding some whole-body torque power. The rollback, engagement and activation of the shooting shoulder result in a big increase in power production capability when the shooting shoulder rotates forward during the release. While shooting shoulder involvement in the release does not athleticize the long-range semi-sideways semi-jump shot, it does add a degree of gun-turret adjustability to its release.

To summarize, there is no doubt that the semi-sideways jump shot is a viable and a popular jump shot. There are good reasons. From mid-range, it is easy to set up the weakside semi-sideways pull-up jump shot's shooting grip off the dribble, it is easy to set up its semi-sideways shooting position and it is easy to shoot. Plus, the mid-range off-the-dribble weakside semi-sideways jump shot has good, though sometimes overtaxing, athleticism. From long-range, the shooting-shoulder-centric release of the semi-sideways semi-jump shot produces significant easy power.