THE CUPGRIP JUMP SHOT: LONG ON POWER BUT SHORT ON CONTROL

By Robert Tilitz

The cupgrip shooting grip shares a semi-convex look with cupping the dribble, which is a one-hand technique used to secure the basketball after grabbing the dribble on the way to shooting a layup or making a pass. Cupping bends the hand full-flex forward to press the basketball against the inside of the wrist. The shooting cupgrip does not go that far. The shooting cupgrip bends only slightly forward at setup. What it does not do at setup is bend backward whole-body-jump-shot-style. Instead, the shooting cupgrip basically forms a rather stiff approximate straight angle with the forearm, doing away with any setup backward bend by the shooting hand. The cupgrip's semi-convex look takes shape when the shooting hand's fingers curl up behind the basketball. Tim Duncan and DeMarcus Cousins well illustrate the cupgrip jump shot.

Tim Duncan

DeMarcus Cousins

The shooting cupgrip's stiff straight-angle construction stiffens both the shooting stance and the release. The stiff straight-angle construction of the shooting cupgrip encourages a mini reachback in order to facilitate an up-and-out release. During the release, the shooting cupgrip's stiff straight-angle construction cuts short the extension of the shooting arm, limits the stretch of the forearm stroke and more than halves the action-arc of the hand action or wrist snap that concludes the release. In the case of the cupgrip jump shot, the wrist snap is a difficult option because of the halved action arc. The worst consequences of the stiff straight-angle construction of the cupgrip jump shot's release are athleticism and control problems.

The cupgrip jump shot's power problem is too much, not too little. The explanation for the cupgrip jump shot's excessive power is the shooting cupgrip itself, which turbocharges the release. The shooting cupgrip's turbocharge is difficult to control on short-range and mid-range jump shots. But from long-range, the semi-convex cupgrip resembles and performs like jai alai's ultra-powerful. The cupgrip acquires its cesta-like semi-convex structure when the shooting hand's fingers curl behind the basketball for grip enhancement. The semi-convex shooting cupgrip hooks the basketball toward the end of the brushing hand action, which redirects the basketball with added acceleration. Good for power. Not good for control.

Here's how the turbocharge works. Think of the cupgrip's stiff straight-angle construction as a runway where difficult-to-control power and velocity build up. Then, toward the end of the cupgrip release, the curled fingers hook/redirect the basketball centrifugally, which produces more difficult-to-control power and velocity, as opposed to the whole-body staple brushing hand

action that fine-tunes distance and sometimes slows velocity while generating backspin for touch. The cupgrip's centrifugal power parallels that produced by the semi-convex cesta. Despite its excesses, too much power and too little control, the cupgrip's cesta-like power probably accounts for most of the cupgrip jump shot's not insignificant popularity.

Cupgrip jumpshooters who attempt to control the jump shot with brushing hand action prior to the centrifugal hook/redirection of the basketball by the shooting cupgrip's curled fingers are hurt by having less available shooting hand surface area to work with. On post-up and mid-range jump shots, the cupgrip jump shot's control problem reveals itself in the flight of the basketball propelled by the release of the jump shot. For Duncan and Cousins, the flight of their rare post-up and mid-range jump shots was generally too hard and too fast. To make matters worse, the stiff straight-angle construction of the cupgrip jump shot's shooting stance and release does not merge well with the jump of the jump shot, which of course hinders connecting the cupgrip jump shot with fluid and athletic moves and run-ups.

Because the shooting cupgrip's stiff straight-angle construction encourages a mini reachback, the cupgrip jump shot's shooting position locates where it is possible to transition into either a forward-oriented straightstroke-push release or a laterally-oriented leveraged straightstroke-pull release. That's jump shot diversity by way of the cupgrip jump shot. It's not the smoothest, most dynamic form of jump shot diversity, but it's one of the cupgrip jump shot's few assets. Andre Iguodala varied the release of his mid-range cupgrip jump shots and his long-range standing-start cupgrip semi-jump shots. According to the dictates of the moment, Iguodala shot cupgrip jump shots and semi-jump shots with either a straightstroke-push or a leveraged straightstroke-pull release. That's good work, but it's a far cry from the multipronged attack capability that defines jump shot diversity at its highest level.

Left, Andre Iguodala combines shooting a cupgrip straightstroke-push release jump shot with a straight-up jump. Right, Iguodala combines shooting a cupgrip leveraged straightstroke-pull release semi-jump shot with a backward lean.