THE ELEVATED-ELBOW-IN JUMP SHOT:
SMALL CHANGE, BIG IMPROVEMENT

By Robert Tilitz

The widely supported elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot is unathletic, power deficient and poorly protected. That's why the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot gets modified. One simple and successful modification raises the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's out-front, horizontally extended shooting elbow so the shooting position locates over the front of the head. That small change might not seem like much, but the newly formed elevated-elbow-in jump shot works much different and considerably better than the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot.

The over-the-front-of-the-head location of the elevated-elbow-in shooting position encourages a mini reachback. The elevated-elbow-in jump shot's mini reachback rolls the shooting shoulder back far enough to engage with the release mechanism and as a result activate as a source of whole-body athleticism and whole-body power. Once the rollback, engagement and activation setup sequence occurs, the subsequent forward rotation of the shooting shoulder serves as a primary power source for the release of the elevated-elbow-in jump shot. It is the shooting-shoulder-centric release that defines the elevated-elbow-in jump shot as a whole-body jump shot.

The elevated-elbow-in jump shot's shooting-shoulder-centric release adapts to both strongside-forward and strongside-lateral pull-up jump shot dynamics. The adaptability very much derives from the over-the-front-of-the-head elevated-elbow-in shooting position. Going strongside forward and moderate strongside lateral the shooting shoulder initiates a straightstroke-push. Going strongside lateral the shooting shoulder initiates a leveraged straightstroke-pull. For Rick Barry, it's a push from the shooting shoulder. For Mitch Richmond it's a pull. For Devin Booker and Jaylen Brown, it can be either a push or a pull, jump shot diversity-style.

Left to right, Rick Barry, Mitch Richmond, Devin Booker and Jaylen Brown

Frankly, the elevated-elbow-in jump shot can work with the shooting elbow angled in or angled out, much the same as the whole-body reachback jump shot can work both ways. That's because whether the shooting elbow is angled in or angled out, the mini reachback to the elevated-elbow-in jump shot's over-the-front-of-the-head shooting position will roll the shooting shoulder back far enough to engage with the release mechanism and thereby activate as a source of whole-body athleticism and whole-body power.

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The athleticism of the elevated-elbow-in jump shot benefits from its over-front-of-the-head shooting position in several ways. First, locating the shooting position back within the scope of the body streamlines the shooting stance. Second, the arm action that raises the basketball to the elevated-elbow-in jump shot's over-the-front-of-the-head shooting position also helps to power the jump of the jump shot. Third, the resulting healthy jump encourages forceful moves and run-ups to free up the jump shot because it is the jump that harnesses the horizontal momentum of the preceding move or run-up by redirecting it upward. Fourth, the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the elevated-elbow-in jump shot's release enables strongside pull-up capability because it partly powers both the release and the rotation of the square-in-the-air jump that many strongside pull-up jump shots require and all could use.

The power production capability of the elevated-elbow-in jump shot starts with the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release. At the same time that it partly powers the release, the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder also channels athleticism and power from the jump of the jump shot into the release. The other major parts of the elevated-elbow-in jump shot's release are the full extension of the shooting arm and its stretched-out forearm stroke. The brushing hand action that controls all whole-body jump shots by fine-tuning distance, generating backspin for touch and slowing velocity is a secondary source of power. When in straightstroke-push mode, the elevated-elbow-in jump shot gets supplementary power from the jump of the jump shot as a consequence of shooting on the rise. When in leveraged straightstroke-pull mode, the elevated-elbow-in jump shot gets supplementary power from a body-leverage sequence.

Protection is a plus for the elevated-elbow-in jump shot. Its over-the-front-of-the-head shooting position raises and draws back the start of the release by comparison to the low and out-front elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's shooting position, which is begging to be blocked. The elevated-elbow-in jump shot's over-the-front-of-the-head shooting position also enhances protection by boosting the jump of the jump shot, which includes a square-in-the-air powered by the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder on strongside pull-ups. Square-in-the-air capability enables the body-wedge protection that only comes with strongside pull-ups. Alternatively, the weakside-prone elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot exposes the basketball as it is being raised to the shooting position during its jump, which is why the weakside stepback is necessary and popular.

The elevated-elbow-in jump shot's over-the-front-of-the-head shooting position for the start of the release adapts equally well to both strongside-forward and strongside-lateral pull-up jump shot dynamics thereby opening the door to jump shot diversity. But opening the door does not guarantee jump shot diversity. It's a high-level set of skills, probably the highest, mastery of which is not common. Jump shot diversity usually consists of two different but tactically complementary jump shots combining to provide multi-pronged attack capability. The elevated-elbow-in jump shot, however, provides jump shot diversity in an all-in-one jump shot package.

Kevin Durant, the elevated-elbow-in jump shot's best advertisement, does use the duality of the elevated-elbow-in jump shot to achieve jump shot diversity. Durant did not arrive in the NBA with a polished multi-pronged strongside-forward and strongside-lateral tactically complementary elevated-elbow-in jump shot. It took some time to develop. But once he perfected his elevated-elbow-in jump shot, Durant became a true master of jump shot diversity. But strangely Durant is not a totally dedicated master.

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To explain Durant's perhaps subconscious resistance to pursuing consummate, consistent and thoroughly dominant jump shot diversity, it is necessary to go back to his early years in the NBA. That's when Durant's primary jump shot was the wrongside jump shot, which contributed to his then poor shot selection, mainly too many weakside jump shots and weakside stepbacks. Durant's early wrongside jump shot also slowed the development of his strongside attack-capable elevated-elbow-in jump shot.

Durant's present much more frequent strongside jumpshooting reflects his mastery of the elevated-elbow-in jump shot and its full range of options, which is his all-in-one ticket to jump shot diversity. However, the wrongside shooting stance remains a presence in Durant's jumpshooting game, perpetuating his still too frequent weakside jump shots. Durant even shoots free throws from a wrongside shooting stance. Because of Durant's obvious greatness as a shooter and a scorer, it can be daunting to argue against his regressive wrongside tendency. But from a strongside purist point of view, it looks like Durant's too frequent weakside jump shots and weakside stepbacks are a concession to and a vestige of the difficulty of creating space to shoot the wrongside jump shot. What's more, it looks like the wrongside jump shot has sapped some of the attack, disruption and playmaking that the strongside pull-up jump shot brings to Durant's jumpshooting game. As a result, a truckload of strongside-based individual and team benefits have gone unrealized. That's an awful lot to sacrifice in order to sustain a bad habit.

Kevin Durant, left and above