

## **THE JUMP OF THE JUMP SHOT: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT, LUKA?**

*By Robert Tilitz*

The jump shot revolutionized basketball. The jump shot consists of a previously unimagined blend of athleticism and basketball skills. The required athleticism is not exceptional. And the required basketball skills can be developed with practice by most good basketball players. The jump shot made it possible for a basketball player to create his or her own shot either one on one or within the context of teamwork. By introducing athletic creativity, the jump shot made basketball a beautiful game.

The 3-point shot also revolutionized basketball. But the revolution was predicated on a rule change. The idea was to incentivize long-range shooting in hopes of adding a little excitement to a stagnating game. Basketball was stagnating because it was unable to fulfill the promise of the jump shot by developing enough capable jumpshooters to satisfy the demand. However, the 3-point shot, which is not conducive to the jump of the jump shot because of the distance involved, does offer a negative lesson on the jump of the jump shot that could help swing the pendulum of trends back toward jumpshooting.

The lesson revolves around the keyword jump. It is not window dressing. The jump of the jump shot is supposed to be a vigorous, often an all-out effort. As incontrovertible as that statement might sound, it contradicts NBA 3-point shot reality. The vast majority of NBA 3-pointers are shot either from a standing start or off a stepback. Both standing-start and stepback 3-point shots get in the air because of the upward thrust of their shooting mechanics, not a jump. Therefore, most 3-point shots should be called semi-jump shots, not jump shots. But all 3-point shots are typically called jump shots.

All right, suppose most 3-point shots are not jump shots. What's the big deal? Why isn't calling standing-start and stepback 3-point shots a jump shot just be a minor semantic error? The answer is that calling standing-start and step back 3-point shots a jump shot occurs so frequently that it hammers home a fundamental misunderstanding of the jump shot, for all intents and purposes spreading confusion with each repetition. Worst case, it arrests the development of players who mistakenly think of themselves as jumpshooters. That could be why there are so many players, even great players such as Luka Doncic, who primarily shoot standing-start and stepback 3-point semi-jump shots to the exclusion of attacking mid-range off-the-dribble pull-up jump shots. With respect to the jump of the jump shot, Doncic is playing basketball on the cheap – investing no physical effort in the jump of the jump shot and apparently investing no practice time in the development of a jump shot.



Luka Doncic

Be that as it may, Doncic's success as a scorer and playmaker seems to argue: No jump shot, no problem. In fact, Doncic, along with LeBron James and James Harden, form a select group of big-bodied but still essentially mid-sized players who have achieved offensive dominance for the most part without an attacking pull-up jump shot. Their combination of elite athleticism,

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superior ballhandling, long-range semi-jump shots, driving and passing has proved highly effective. And of the three the best version of their attacking games belongs to Doncic, whose stop-and-start drives are considerably more versatile than the slashing drives of James and Harden. That's because every stop and every start present an opportunity to make something good happen, whereas slashing straight-line drives mostly result in only a one-time opportunity.

No jump in his jump shot, however, does mean no attacking pull-up game for Doncic. The same goes for James and Harden. The explanation is counterintuitive. Except for post-up jump shots, the primary purpose of the jump of the jump shot is not to elevate the start of the release over the reach of defenders. Instead, the primary purpose of the jump of the jump shot is to instantly harness the horizontal momentum of the preceding move or run-up by redirecting it upward. Even big-time jumpers benefit more from the instant pull-up ability derived from the jump of the jump shot than its verticality. So without the jump of the jump shot there is no pulling up and no access to the attacking pull-up game.

The jump of the jump shot's harness and redirection of momentum might not be obvious, but its impact is huge. In the case of Doncic, his jumpless jump shot does not mean no productivity but it does mean less productivity. Just imagine if Doncic could pull up off his stop-and-start drives with an attack jump shot. He would disrupt the defense by drawing the inside defenders out to confront the threat of his pull-up jump shot, which would enhance his driving and passing options. Players less gifted than Doncic need an attacking pull-up jump shot more than he does. Without one, many cannot do much more than work to get free at the 3-point line for a catch-and-shoot opportunity.

Another jump-of-the-jump-shot issue derives from differences between strongside and weakside jump shots. Strongside jump shots attack the defense. The strongside jump shot's attack capability to a great extent depends on its athletic square in the air, which provides body-wedge protection of the basketball during the jump of the jump shot. Weakside jump shots are quick-release specialists. But weakside jump shots expose the basketball as it is being raised to the shooting position during the jump of the jump shot, which often necessitates an off-balance fallaway jump or a stepback. Strongside jump shots, which must be whole-body to achieve attack mode, are therefore technically and tactically superior to weakside jump shots. To put it plainly, weakside jump shots are second-rate jump shots. And the jump of the weakside jump shot is second-rate too.

Even so, the weakside jump shot is popular mainly because it is easy to set up its shooting grip off the weakside dribble and easy to shoot. The ease of setting up the weakside jump shot's shooting grip also lays the foundation for a fast release. In order to keep up with the speed of the weakside jump shot's release, the jump of the weakside jump shot must speed up, which it does by making do with a minimal gather.

Although the jump of the weakside jump shot is fast, athleticism problems start to materialize at mid-range and beyond. Power and accuracy suffer as a result. To begin with, the weakside jump shot often evolves from a semi-sideways pull-up posture to a permanent semi-sideways shooting stance because any attempt to square up would rotate the release mechanism back away from the basket. With little to no gather and with no forward rotation toward the basket via a square in the

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air of the release mechanism, the jump of the weakside pull-up jump shot sort of hurtles unchecked away from the basket. The resulting weakside fallaway or weakside stepback release, which usually consists of much more shooting arm extension than shooting shoulder forward rotation, becomes increasingly power-deficient and inaccurate past medium mid-range because it cannot adequately counteract the combined force of the weakside move or run-up and the fallaway jump or the less physically demanding stepback jump. Just the same, many players, including great ones such as LeBron James, flock to it. The weakside jump shot, fallaway or stepback, is also the jump shot that Doncic shoots on those rare occasions when he shoots an actual jump shot. It is usually shot on the inside and at no more than medium mid-range, where the largely unchecked fallaway or stepback momentum of the weakside jump shot is manageable. For example, the post-up weakside fallaway jump shot was a staple of Wilt Chamberlain, the NBA's all-time single-season scoring leader. There are two main reasons for the popularity of the weakside jump shot. Besides being easy to set up and shoot, the weakside jump shot is popular by default because not many players can shoot a decent strongside off-the-dribble pull-up jump shot.



LeBron James

The jump of the strongside jump shot and the strongside jump shot itself are more complicated and more physically demanding than their weakside counterparts. But once competence with one of the whole-body jump shots is achieved, strongside physicality begins to become manageable. That's important because strongside physicality plays a big role in enhancing the techniques and the tactics of the strongside jump shot.

The jump of the strongside jump shot should start with a gather, which digs in to facilitate the jump of the jump shot's harness-by-redirection of the horizontal momentum of the preceding strongside move or run-up. That redirection transition is much more pronounced on the strongside than it is on the weakside. The strongside gather is part of the braking process for the preceding moves and run-ups. Then the strongside gather serves as a springboard for the jump of the strongside pull-up jump shot.

Despite the fact that it digs in, the strongside gather does not completely stop the momentum of the strongside moves and run-ups. Instead, the strongside gather slows the strongside momentum. Most of the final physical stop of the strongside horizontal momentum from the strongside moves and run-ups occurs when the jump of the strongside pull-up jump shot harnesses the strongside horizontal momentum and redirects it upward. The forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release of strongside whole-body pull-up jump shots tops off the momentum slowdown started by the gather and the momentum stop imposed by the harness-by-redirection jump of the jump shot. The forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release of strongside whole-body pull-up jump shots completes the momentum management process when it largely powers the square-in-the-air rotation of the jump that many strongside

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pull-up jump shots require and all could use. At the same time, the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder partly powers the release of the strongside pull-up jump shot. The forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release of strongside whole-body pull-up jump shots also generates coalescent centripetal force, which helps to maintain body control during the jump of the jump shot. That's especially true during the fallaway jump of the strongside lateral whole-body reachback pull-up and post-up jump shots.



Reggie Miller

The athleticism and the power of the jump of the jump shot are fully accessible only through strongside whole-body jump shots. The whole-body elbow-out jump shot is built on rotational dynamics sourced from the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during its on-the-rise whole-body release. It works best off straight-ahead and moderately angled strongside lateral moves and run-ups with a straight-up jump. Reggie Miller is a model. The whole-body reachback jump shot is built on rotational dynamics sourced from the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during its body-leveraged whole-body release. It works best going strongside lateral at moderate and extreme angles with a

fallaway jump. The routinely acrobatic strongside lateral whole-body reachback jump shot starts off with a setup reachback and a backward leaning fallaway jump, both of which are reversed by the body-leveraged reachback release. Its royal lineage runs from Jerry West to Michael Jordan to Kobe Bryant.



Michael Jordan

The merge of the jump of the whole-body jump shots and the release of the whole-body jump shots very much depends on the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release of the whole-body jump shots. To be specific, the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release of the whole-body jump shots channels the athleticism and the power of the jump of the jump of the whole-body jump shots into the release of the whole-body jump shots. The forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release of the whole-body jump shots is also the most prominent multipurpose whole-body shooting technique. The forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release of the whole-body jump shots also directly produces power both for the release of the whole-body jump shots and for the rotation of the square-in-the-air jump that many strongside pull-up jump shots require and all could use.

Another multipurpose whole-body jump shot technique is the arm action that raises the basketball to the shooting position. The arm action that raises the basketball also provides

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supplementary power for the jump of the jump shot. To get it right, the focus should be on using the arms to help power the jump of the jump shot, not on raising the basketball. As the raised basketball reaches the shooting position, the focus should then shift to shooting. Plus, for the whole-body elbow-out jump shot, the same arm action can supplement the power of the release by joining with it in one continuous motion. For the whole-body reachback jump shot, the same arm action takes the form of a reachback that generates backward momentum to help to power its fallaway aspect of its jump.

The jump of the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot, however, does not merge well with the elbow-in shooting stance and the strokesnap release. The problem is that the out-front elbow-in shooting stance and the out-front strokesnap release disconnect by distance from the jumpshooter's body and therefore from the jump of the jump shot. The result is multiple problems for the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot, which is generally the jump shot of choice in the NBA. One problem is that the out-front elbow-in shooting position and the out-front strokesnap release unstreamline the jumping posture of the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot, which curtails athleticism. A second problem is that a not very athletic jump disables the pull-up game, which depends on an energetic jump to harness the horizontal momentum of a preceding move or run-up by redirecting it upward. A third problem is that a not very athletic jump denies the power-deficient strokesnap release a potentially significant supplementary power source via shooting on the rise.

Even in conjunction with the whole-body jump shot techniques, sourcing the jump of the jump shot to supplement the athleticism and the power of the release is not foolproof. Lots can still go wrong. Various breakdowns can glitch up the jump of the jump shot, such as insufficient momentum from the preceding move or run-up, off-balance jumps, lazy jumps and leg fatigue, not to mention ballhandling miscues and good defense. That said, the whole-body jump shots' big-muscle shooting techniques are much, much better equipped than the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shots' power deficient strokesnap release to iron out the athleticism, power and accuracy problems that can result from jump-of-the-jump-shot irregularities. The benefit is a subtle step toward jump shot consistency.