

THE PUSH-OFF SHOT: STREAMLINED AND MOBILE, BUT NO JUMP

By Robert Tilitz

The push-off shot is an athleticized version of what the whole-body jump shot theory previously called the squat shot. The name change followed changes in basketball that probably caused the changes in the squat shot. The changes in basketball were the decline of the mid-range pull-up jump shot and the resulting rule change that created the value-added 3-point shot. The push-off shot probably evolved into existence as a means to facilitate volume 3-point shooting.

First, consider the antecedent. The squat shot is named after its shooting stance. The squat shot shooting stance features a just-above-the-shoulder shooting position for the start of the release, firmly planted feet and a semi-squat posture. The squat shot shooting stance is not athletic. It is difficult to set up the squat shot shooting stance from off the dribble. And it is difficult to jump out of the squat shot shooting stance. The squat shot is a stiff and stationary shot.



Jerry Lucas

Old-fashioned is an apt description of the squat shot. But two of the greatest modern basketball players of all time, Jerry Lucas and Magic Johnson, shot the squat shot. Both Lucas and Johnson made the most of the squat shot in terms of power, accuracy and touch. But the squat shot's shooting stance and release squashed the potential athleticism of their jump shots.



Magic Johnson

The squat shot does get off the ground, but not with a jump. The squat shot's elevation mainly results from the upward effort that goes into shooting it. That effort consists of a push off the ground by the legs combined with a straightstroke-push release. The leg power used to push off the ground supplements the power of the squat shot's release.

One reason that the squat shot has no jump is that the arm action that raises the basketball to its low just-above-the-shoulder, elbow-in shooting position for the start of the release is so short that it does not build up enough upward momentum to help power a jump. A second reason is that the squat shot's shooting position locates out to the side, outside the scope of the shooter's body. That means the squat shot's release is disconnected by distance from the shooter's body, which of course is the source of jump shot athleticism. A third reason is that out-to-the-side location of the squat shot's release removes the shooting shoulder from the release, which shuts down the channel by which the jump and the release of the jump shot merge.

The squat shot's low-starting and low-finishing straightstroke-push release has good power and, with hand action, good accuracy and good touch. The squat shot's release works well for free throws and stationary open shots from mid-range and long-range. But the squat shot's release is vulnerable to defensive pressure. And because the squat shot kills the jump of the jump shot, which is necessary for pull-up jump shots because it harnesses the horizontal momentum of the preceding move or run-up by redirecting it upward, the squat shot is stuck in one place.

The squat shot has been compared to shot putting. But those who make the comparison probably don't know much about tossing the shot. The squat shot's stationary elbow-in release bears little resemblance to shot putting's dynamic elbow-out release.

THE SQUAT SHOT

Credit Jeremy Lin with attempting to transform the squat shot. Lin once brought a momentary spark of life called Linsanity to what had been for decades a moribund New York Knicks franchise. But over the course of time, Lin's stock dropped because his moderately athleticized squat shot proved to be no more than a second-rate jump shot that could not keep up with his dynamic floor game. Still, Lin gave it a good try. The big problem with Lin's jump shot was that it retained the squat shot's out-to-the-side shooting position, which removed the shooting shoulder from the release and thereby prevented a coordinated merge of the jump and the release. Lin's all-arm release was plenty powerful but unathletic.



Jeremy Lin

The push-off shot has also athleticized the squat shot in terms of mobility. But the push-off shot still has no jump. Just like the squat shot, the push-off shot does get in the air, but from the upward effort that goes into shooting, not a jump. Nevertheless, the two leading push-off shotmakers, Trae Young and Tyrese Maxey, have attained all-star status.



Trae Young

The push-off shot achieves its athleticism because of its streamlined shooting stance and because the momentum from preceding moves or run-ups can therefore channel into the push-off release. There are two keys to the streamlining of the push-off shot. The first is the forward lean of the push-off shot's shooting stance. The second is the shift of the push-off shot's shooting



Tyrese Maxey

position for the start of the release toward the middle of the body, though still on the dominant side. The shift locates its shooting position within the scope of the jumpshooter's body, which is the source of jump shot athleticism. The shift also rolls the shooting shoulder back, which activates it as a power source for the release and as a channel for the power of the push-off.

The primary limitation of the push-off jump shot is obvious. Without much of a jump and with a low-start/low-finish release, the push-off shot needs fairly significant separation from the defender to succeed as an attack shot. Same as with the squat shot, one reason that the push-off jump shot has no jump is that the arm action that raises the basketball to its low just-above-the-shoulder shooting position for the start of the release is so short that it does not build up enough upward momentum to help power a jump. The mobility of the push-off jump shot partly compensates for its lack of a significant jump by giving Young and Maxey the ability to create shots, which fuels their offense and combines with their athleticism and ballhandling to elevate their point guard games to the high-grade disruptive, make-it-happen level.