SHOOTING HAND CONTROL OF THE JUMP SHOT: THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

By Robert Tilitz

The shooting hand controls the whole-body jump shots from start to finish. That's a good idea because the human hand is designed to control and to be controlled. The shooting hand's ultimate and decisive control of the whole-body jump shots consists of brushing hand action applied to the basketball toward the end of the extension of the shooting arm during the release. The brushing hand action fine-tunes distance, generates backspin for touch and slows velocity.

Off the dribble, brushing hand action requires a setup ballhandling routine. The shot preparation process starts with a firm and flexible double-whole-hand oppositional grip after the basketball is grabbed off the dribble. Next comes a bent-back half-hand semi-oppositional grip, which locates the shooting hand first on top of and then underneath the basketball. The relocation from on top to underneath occurs as the basketball is being raised to set up the shooting position for the start of the release. Besides facilitating the all-important brushing hand action, the semi-oppositional shooting grip must also secure the basketball, which is the most underrated aspect of the jump shot. Securing the basketball means hanging on to it during the athletic rigors of jumpshooting.

Once the whole-body semi-oppositional shooting grip is set up, shooting hand control of the whole-body jump shots starts off by leading the extension of the shooting arm straight into the arc of the jump shot. Then, toward the end of the extension of the shooting arm during the last stage of the release, the shooting hand brushes the basketball to exert its ultimate and decisive control over the whole-body jump shots. The brushing hand action starts with the shooting hand pointed backward via the underneath bent-back half-hand shooting grip. The brushing hand action starts from the forward ridge of the palm at the base of the fingers, and finishes with fingerpads and fingertips combination. If the flexibility of an individual jumpshooter allows for more than a half-hand shooting grip for more control, so much the better.

The shooting hand brushes the basketball in different ways for different purposes. Secondary power implementation, which fine-tunes distance and velocity, is a key determinant. There are two primary variations. One is the vigor of the brushing hand action. More vigor means more power. Less vigor means less power. The other is the type of contact that the brushing hand action makes with the basketball. Solid brush contact directed through the basketball means more power. Tangential brush contact that shaves the basketball means less power.

Backspin for touch is talked about though not well implemented outside the context of the whole-body jump shot theory. But fine-tuning distance and slowing velocity by means of tangential brushing hand action is very much exclusive to the whole-body jump shot technique. The implementation of tangential brushing hand action, the slow-down mechanism, is particularly important when shooting post-up jump shots because they must shave off more velocity than mid-range and long-range jump shots while maintaining maximum athleticism.

Given that Reggie Miller is the whole-body jump shot theory's #1 model for its elbow-out jump shot, it is somewhat ironic that one argument for the importance of slowing velocity with tangential brushing hand action entails a partial takedown of Miller. The irony is amplified by Miller, who advocates for fingertips control, pointing to his own jump shot as proof positive it works. Now, there is no disputing that Miller's low spin near-knuckleball jump shot was one of the best ever from mid-range and long-range. But despite his height, athleticism and elevated

release, Miller didn't shoot many post-up jump shots. Why was that? It is possible that Miller's fingertip control technique could not implement sufficient backspin by way of a tangential brush of the basketball to slow velocity, thereby making post-up jump shots a less attractive option. The problem with fingertips control is that the fingertips and the fingerpads are too small in terms of their surface area and too weak on their own to generate much backspin. As an alternative, the whole-body jump shot theory's tangential brushing hand action could have patched up the post-up hole in Miller's offensive game that his fingertips control technique might have caused. Furthermore, it is possible that brushing hand action could have made Miller an even better mid-range and long-range jumpshooter too.

In order to manage the brush of the basketball by the shooting hand action that controls the whole-body jump shots, you can use your imagination. Here's how. At the start of the brush of the basketball, imagine that a line or a wave of energy is stored across the forward ridge of the palm and the base of the fingers of the shooting hand. Then mentally connect this line or wave of energy to the basketball. As the shooting hand's brush of the basketball proceeds, further imagine that this stored line or wave of energy is flowing forward out of the shooting hand all the way to the fingerpads and the fingertips of the shooting hand. The idea is to maintain the mental connection between the crest of the flowing line or wave of energy and the basketball during the entire brush of the basketball by the shooting hand.

If the whole-body jump shot's shooting grip sets up with the shooting hand angled in and the shooting elbow consequently angled out, then the last stage of the brushing hand action by the angled-in shooting hand acquires a roughly balanced precision. As the basketball exits the diagonal brush by the angled-in shooting hand, the inherently uneven middle finger and ring finger line up with their fingerpads and fingertips roughly both parallel to the ground and equidistant from the basket. As a result, the ends of the middle finger and the ring finger become the shooting hand's built-in sight and range finder.

If the whole-body jump shot's shooting grip sets up with the shooting hand aligned with the basket, which aligns the shooting elbow with the basket, then the aligned brushing hand action heads straight toward the basket. The aligned brushing hand action uses one finger or a combination of fingers to act as primary runners or rails to guide the basketball out of the shooting hand and straight toward the basket. The recommendation here is to use the middle finger and the ring finger together because they form a sturdy, centrally located combination.

The shooting hand's brush of the basketball has the look of a super smooth wrist snap. But it most definitely is not a wrist snap. The shooting hand's brush of the basketball is the whole-body jump shot theory's replacement for the wrist snap, which is usually a primary power source. Brushing hand action is a control technique that is capable of producing secondary power, which is used mainly for fine-tuning distance.

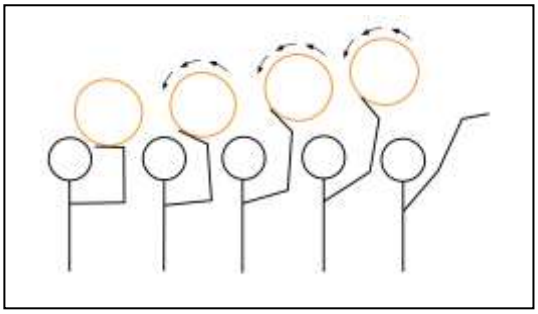
Neither the wrist snap nor brushing hand action work in isolation. The wrist snap teams with the forearm stroke to form the strokesnap release. Wrist snap lore says it is somehow supposed to both power and control the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot. But because it takes the combined simultaneous execution of the wrist snap and the forearm stroke to produce power, which is still often less than adequate, there is no practical way to separate out a control function for the wrist

snap. By contrast, brushing hand action tops off the whole-body jump shots' shooting-shoulder-centric release. The forward rotation of the shooting shoulder, the extension of the shooting arm including a stretched-out forearm stroke and the following brushing hand action encourage a division of labor. That means the shooting shoulder and the shooting arm produce power while the shooting hand by way brushing hand action is free to concentrate on control.

More trouble for the wrist snap derives from the out-front location of the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's shooting position for the start of the release. The out-front shooting position disconnects by distance the strokesnap release from the jumpshooter's body. As a result, the strokesnap release is denied access to the whole-body jump shot theory's big-muscle-based shooting techniques, chief among them being shooting shoulder involvement in the release. It is as if the wrist snap is doomed by structure.

That the wrist snap is too small and too weak to generate significant power is another problem. To a lesser degree, the same is true of the forearm stroke. Taken together they explain why the strokesnap release overcooks in pursuit of power at the cost of control.

The following diagram is meant to illustrate the simultaneous execution of the power and control functions of the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's release. In particular, the diagram is meant to show how the forearm stroke and the wrist snap are simultaneous and conjoined. The salient point is that the simultaneous execution of the power-oriented forearm stroke and the control-oriented wrist snap diminishes the ability of each to carry out their respective functions.

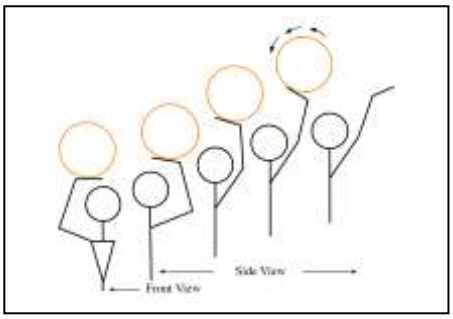


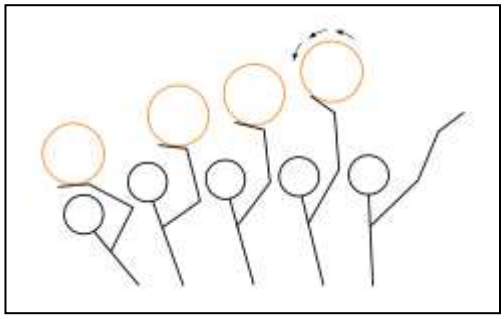
< The out-front setup of the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's shooting position disconnects by distance the strokesnap release and its wrist snap from the jumpshooter's body, which causes major athleticism and power problems. Once the release starts, the simultaneous execution of the wrist snap and the forearm stroke, which are structurally interfused, prevents the wrist snap from separating functionally to concentrate on control.

As an alternative, the whole-body jump shots' shooting-shoulder-centric release and its all-important concluding brushing hand action produce both abundant power and timely control. The below sequential diagrams are basically blueprints for whole-body athleticism, power and control. To begin with, starting the whole-body release from within the scope of the jumpshooter's body provides direct access to whole-body athleticism and whole-body power. For the whole-body elbow-out jump shot, the shooting position sets up close in front of the jumpshooter's forehead. For the whole-body reachback jump shot, the shooting position sets up one hand length back past the front of the jumpshooter's head. The initial close-to-the-body location of the hands and the arms causes the rollback and the resulting activation of the shooting shoulder as a source of and channel for whole-body athleticism and whole-body power, which is the key to whole-body jumpshooting. From close to the body to full extension, the maximized length of the whole-body release also benefits athleticism and power. The hand action that brushes the basketball, which is the ultimate and decisive means of control for the whole-body jump shots, starts toward the end of the whole-body release during the latter part of the extension

of the shooting arm. Starting the brushing hand action relatively late allows for a division of labor, which separates the shooting shoulder's and the shooting arm's athleticism and power functions from the shooting hand's control function.

The following diagrams are meant to illustrate a sequentially timed division of labor between the power and control functions of the whole-body jump shots' release. In particular, the diagrams are meant to show how brushing hand action punctuates the conclusion of the shooting arm extension part of the whole-body jump shots' release. The salient point is that the sequentially timed division of labor between the power-oriented big-muscle shooting arm extension and the control-oriented brushing hand action parts of the whole-body release enhances the ability of each to carry out their respective functions.





^ The athleticism and the power of the whole-body elbow-out on-the-rise release (L) and the whole-body reachback top-of-the-jump release (R) derive mainly from the forward rotation of the shooting shoulder and an extension of the shooting arm that is either an elbow-out straightstroke-push or a reachback straightstroke-pull. The concluding hand action that brushes the basketball is the ultimate and decisive control mechanism. See perfect brushing hand action via the release of several David Thompson free throws at about the six-minute mark of this David Thompson vs Julius Erving video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oT2m4zvd0M.

Now is an appropriate time to shoot down some shooting myths that are in part or in whole based on shooting hand fallacies. These myths are a subset of the legacy of illogic that basketball has bequeathed to those who are serious about either teaching or learning how to shoot a jump shot. These myths arise mainly from two sources. Some are essentially warmed over vestiges from basketball's pre-jump shot days. Others derive from the mistaken fundamentals of modern basketball orthodoxy, which is to say the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot theory.

The first myth is fingertips control of the jump shot. Before proceeding, however, to be fair it should be said that the believers in fingertips control probably mean to include the fingerpads along with the fingertips but because of careless inattention to detail neglect to. Whether that is true or not, the fingertips control myth traces back to the bygone days of basketball's old two-hand set shot era in which all ten fingerpads and fingertips were available by way of the two-hand set shot's shooting grip to serve as the means of control. The one-hand jump shot's shooting grip positions five fingerpads and fingertips to serve as the means of control. But the fact is that five fingerpads and fingertips are inadequate for the job, or to be more specific, too small and too weak for the job. The whole-body jump shot theory's bent-back, half-hand, underneath shooting grip and brushing hand action combination is the best possible replacement.

THE SHOOTING HAND

Although fingerpads and fingertips control of the jump shot is fundamentally inadequate as a primary control mechanism, it most certainly does play a role within the context of the whole-body jump shot theory's brushing hand action. When the shooting hand's brush of the basketball extends to the fingerpads and the fingertips, which is standard mid-range and long-range whole-body release technique, the fingerpads and the fingertips' last minute role is important but less than primary. When the basketball exits the brushing shooting hand before reaching the fingerpads and the fingertips, which is a frequent short-range whole-body release technique, the fingerpads and the fingertips are completely irrelevant.

The second myth is the belief that the basketball's seams are helpful for or even vital to the control of the jump shot. The belief in the importance of the seams to control of the jump shot is a kind of a corollary to the fingerpads and fingertips control axiom. Accordingly, for those who rely on the fingerpads and fingertips to control the jump shot, there is no doubt that the use of the seams to get a good grip on the basketball is desperately needed. Fortunately, the whole-body jump shot theory's brushing hand action reduces the seams to total irrelevancy. Finding the seams by chance during setup is no longer an issue. The whole-body jump shots' shooting grip sets up perfectly every time. No seams, no problem.

The third myth is the belief that big hands are bad for jumpshooting. Whole-body jump shot control through brushing hand action actually makes big hands an advantage.

The fourth myth is the ever growing misperceived need to speed the release of the jump shot. To begin with, it is and would be absolutely counterproductive to attempt to speed the release of a jump shot. Basketball, which advertises itself as the most athletic major sport, should know better than to try to speed up the release of the jump shot, its most important skill and its most athletic skill. When executed properly, the jump shot usually maxes out on speed, especially after the move or run-up. The maximization of speed is inherent to high-grade athleticism, which in the case of the jump shot includes not only the release but also the stop, the jump and the airborne setup. And it's all coordinated in concert. Consequently, to speed up one component would be to disrupt the whole.

If speeding the release of the jump shot is actually disruptive, then where does the preoccupation with speeding the release come from? Blame it on the erroneous terminology of the 3-point era. Plain and simple, the vast majority of NBA 3-point shots taken are not jump shots, but rather standing-start/stationary semi-jump shots, which get in the air because of the upward thrust of the overall effort to shoot, not a jump. That those NBA 3-point shots are called jump shots is a case of lazy and potentially harmful commentary. Harm occurs when a player's development is stunted because he or she is told they are shooting a jump shot when they are not. And because 3-point shooters are not shooting jump shots with the accompanying moves and run-ups to create space to shoot, the resulting standing-start/stationary semi-jump shots can be difficult to get off. So unathletic 3-point shots are big reason for the preoccupation with speeding the release.