THE CRADLEGRIP JUMP SHOT: EASY POWER, LIMITED ATHLETICISM

By Robert Tilitz

The cradlegrip jump shot uses a non-oppositional, off-hand-back-behind-the-basketball shooting grip. The cradlegrip, which first forms during the gather for the jump of the jump shot and continues through to the establishment of the shooting position and the start of the release, does not protect or secure the basketball well enough for the cradlegrip jump shot to work as an attack jump shot. The cradlegrip's poor protection results from out-front exposure of the basketball as it is raised to the shooting position. The cradlegrip's poor security starts during the jump of the jump shot, which results in the cradlegrip jump shot's low-energy jump. The cradlegrip's poor security continues during the release by way of early separation and no parallel extension. Early separation leads to a completely unsecured one-handed release that needs to go slow to maintain minimal control of the basketball. No parallel extension contributes to the ongoing loss of body control, balance and athleticism. In a signature move during the release, the cradlegip uselessly flares the off hand out to the side with its palm facing the basket.

The cradlegrip's built-in poor protection and poor security of the basketball deny the dynamic athleticism that attack jump shots require. Poor protection fosters deferential stepback jump shots. Poor security first occurs early on when the non-oppositional cradlegrip has trouble simply hanging on to the basketball as it is being raised to the shooting position. The effect is to hold down the jump of the jump shot by curtailing the vigor of the raising arm action's upward thrust that helps to power the jump of the jump shot. Using the arm action that raises the basketball to the shooting position to help power the jump of the jump shot should be a fundamental technique for all action jump shots and is of course standard operating procedure for the whole-body jump shots.

The poor security of the cradlegrip very much defines the cradlegrip jump shot. To begin with, in lieu of a good grip on the basketball the cradlegrip becomes a bit of a two-hand balancing act. In order to maintain the balancing act, the cradlegrip jump shot must go slow, which of course hurts athleticism. Then there is the cradlegrip jump shot's permanent backward lean, which is spontaneously induced by the cradlegrip to reinforce its balancing act. Too bad but at the same time the permanent backward lean further damages the cradlegrip jump shot's athleticism. Plus, little to no jump shot athleticism means that the athleticism of the preceding moves or run-ups must be minimal.

The athletic liabilities of the cradlegrip jump shot are offset, at least partially, by its mini-reachback, which sets up its shooting position for the start of the release. It's a mini-reachback because the cradlegrip's back-behind-the-basketball location of the off hand blocks a full reachback. The mini-reachback results in a rollback of the shooting shoulder that increases power production capability by setting up a subsequent forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release. The cradlegrip mini-reachback does not adversely impact cradlegrip jump shot power even though it cuts down the ensuing forward rotation of the shooting shoulder. Another mini-reachback related asset is the cradlegrip jump shot's elevated and farther back shooting position for protection.

Shooting shoulder involvement in the release adds a quasi-whole-body dimension to the cradlegrip jump shot that goes beyond adding power. For example, when the shooting shoulder is a primary power source, the shooting hand can quit the power business and instead concentrate on control. But make no mistake, although the cradlegrip jump shot gains whole-body power

through shooting shoulder involvement in the release, it does not gain whole-body athleticism. As a result, the marriage of the cradlegrip and whole-body power works mainly on standing-start/stationary long-range semi-jump shots, not highly athletic mid-range pull-up jump shots.

Because of its abundant power and despite its poor athleticism, the cradlegrip jump shot is very popular and will probably grow more so in the present 3-point era. Abundant shooting-shoulder-sourced power is the reason that standing-start cradlegrip semi-jump shots work well from long-range. Poor athleticism is the reason that the cradlegrip jump shot is mostly used for weakside jump shots, especially weakside stepbacks, and seldom used for strongside pull-up jump shots. That adds up to a jump shot skillset almost completely devoid of any element of attack. Still, its usage rate says that the cradlegrip jump shot has a market. Just the same, the opinion here is that the cradlegrip trend is bad for basketball, though admittedly not nearly as bad as the NBA-favored but power deficient and athletically flatlined elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot.

There are actually several different versions of the cradlegrip jump shot. But most cradlegrip jump shots tend towards a whole-body elbow-out structure. That's probably because an in-angle of the cradlegrip's shooting hand, which angles the shooting elbow out, enhances the balance function of the cradlegrip by matching the in-angle of the cradlegrip's off hand. If, however, a player has an overriding elbow-in reachback tendency, the cradlegrip jump shot can accommodate and adapt.

Kelsey Mitchell

Jalen Green

Kelsey Mitchell and Jalen Green are among the prominent current players who mainly shoot elbow-out cradlegrip long-range semi-jump shots and elbow-out cradlegrip weakside jump shots. Neither Mitchell nor Green capitalize on their athleticism by regularly shooting strongside pull-ups from mid-range and the middle of the defense. That means they also forfeit strongside body-wedge protection. The defer-to-the-defense weakside stepback jump shot is the closest that Mitchell and Green get to using their marvelous athleticism to attack the defense with the jump shot. Look, it is understood that both Mitchell and Green are physically gifted and productive players. The argument made here, however, is simply that Mitchell and Green would be much more productive if they could shoot an attacking strongside whole-body pull-up jump shot.

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Marc Gasol

Blake Griffin

The whole-body reachup jump shot and its straight-up jump work best as either a to-the-basket pull-up jump shot or a face-up post-up jump shot. The reachup jump shot also works on post-up fallaway jump shots, provided there is minimal reachback. The bottom line is that the reachup jump shot and reaching back to set up the shooting position for the start of the release do not mix well – the greater the reachback the greater the reachup failure rate. The main problem is that reaching back disrupts the reachup jump shot's straight-up one-motion release, cutting out the whole-body component and leaving only hand action or, much worse, a strokesnap. So not surprisingly, the cradlegrip's mini-reachback spells trouble for the reachup jump shot. As a result, reachup cradlegrip jumpshooters, such as Marc Gasol on the inside and Blake Griffin at mid-range, usually succumb to the backward momentum of the cradlegrip's mini-reachback and only shoot anti-whole-body weakside fallaways and weakside stepbacks.

Hakeem Olajuwon

Dirk Nowitzki

Those who can attack with the cradlegrip are few and far between. Two of the best at it were elbow-out cradlegrip Hakeem Olajuwon and reachback cradlegrip Dirk Nowitzki. They attacked the defense with weakside fallaways and weakside stepbacks on the inside and at shallow mid-range. They were able to mitigate the cradlegrip's protection and grip security problems because their weakside fallaways and weakside stepbacks created separation by way of rare big-man agility and skill. Although Olajuwon and Nowitzki did not attack the defense head-on, they did initiate their weakside fallaways and weakside stepbacks in the attack zone fairly close to the basket. So what's to complain about? Not much. As an aside, the opinion here is that in the attack zone Olaguwon's elbow-out cradlegrip jump shot was a better shot than Nowitzki's

reachback cradlegrip jump shot because of obvious body control issues, which surely affect the ease of shooting and, consequently, jump shot control and shooting percentages. Nowitzki's not inconsiderable consolation is that he was the far better long-range shooter.



Larry Bird supplemented his staple long-range and post-up non-oppositional cradlegrip with a semi-oppositional shooting grip at mid-range to achieve jump shot diversity.

There is another way to squeeze some attack out of the cradlegrip jump shot. Not directly, but through jump shot diversity, in which the cradlegrip jump shot can play a part. Jump shot diversity consists of one player mastering two different jump shots with different but tactically complementary specialties. Kyrie Irving by way of the whole-body reachback and the whole-body reachup jump shots and Kevin Durant by way of the whole-body all-in-one-package elevated-elbow-in jump shot are modern jump shot diversity masters. That means they have multi-pronged jump shot attack capability. In other word, they have an attack jump shot ready for almost every jump shot contingency. Accordingly, Larry Bird is the cradlegrip jump shot diversity master who stands out most. Bird was an all-court shotmaker based in large part on his ability to supplement his staple long-range and post-up non-oppositional cradlegrip with a semi-oppositional shooting grip for mid-range whole-body reachup pull-up jump shots.


Jeff Teague


Victor Oladipo

The cradlegrip can be applied to the unathletic and power deficient elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot, which is the NBA's unofficial favorite. But the usual cradlegrip induced rollback and subsequent forward rotation of the shooting shoulder during the release is largely blocked by the out-front elbow-in shooting position. So any cradlegrip gain in athleticism and power is minimal. That's not a good outcome for elbow-in-strokesnap cradlegrip jumpshooters like Jeff

Teague and Victor Oladipo. Just the same, Teague and Oladipo are not scrubs. Both were first round draft choices, are big and strong for their position and have had long and productive NBA careers. But if Teague and Oladipo had a decent more dynamic jump shot, they could have accomplished much more.

Nikola Jokic

Jamal Murray

Less egregious but still problematic modified versions of the cradlegrip are fairly common. The modified cradlegrip's improvements mainly result from a small forward shift of the off-hand-back part of the cradlegrip to better secure the shooting grip. But the off hand still separates much too early from the basketball during the release, which costs strongside athleticism, especially squaring in the air. The reachback cradlegrip of Nikola Jokic and the elbow-out cradlegrip of Jamal Murray illustrate the modified cradlegrip. Jokic's wheeling and dealing cradlegrip inside post-up game, however, is comparable to those of Bird, Olajuwon and Nowitzki because it achieves the attack capability that eludes cradlegrippers at mid-range and long-range. But Murray is basically limited to standing-start/stationary 3-point shots and weakside stepbacks by his elbow-out cradlegrip jump shot, although his first-rate ballhandling and driving capabilities do provide some relief. With that said, the opinion here is that a semi-oppositional shooting grip and an elbow-out whole-body straightstroke-push release would transform Murray from a hot and cold long-range bomber to a consistently dominant mid-range strongside pull-up jumpshooter and playmaker. Such a change would not be difficult. The hardest part is learning how to set up the whole-body elbow-out jump shot's required semi-oppositional shooting grip with the shooting hand angled in and the shooting elbow angled out, which could take days to weeks maybe a month. From there, it's good to go because the whole-body jump shot's setup fundamentals go a long way toward shaping the ensuing form and release.