

## **JUMP SHOT NEWS AND NOTES: SEEKING TRUTH, COURTING CONTROVERSY**

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*Upgrades and Downgrades refer to observed jump shot improvements or deteriorations for players cited in this ongoing article or anywhere else on the Power Shooting website.*

**5/31/2024 – KAT's Comfort Zone vs Winning** – When the chips were down, when substance mattered more than style, when winning was on the line during the Minnesota Timberwolves 2024 playoff series against the Dallas Mavericks, Karl-Anthony Towns faced criticism like never before. Critics, both the fans and the talking heads, had finally come to understand that Towns' long-range-based offensive game did not maximize his offensive efficiency.

The criticism of Towns' offense focused on his apparent preference for long-range shooting over shooting from closer to the basket, which is where his combination of superior size and skills was likely to be most effective. It's not that Towns is a bad long-range shooter. Everybody agrees that Towns is a good standing-start/stationary 3-point shooter, maybe even the greatest long-range big man shooter of all time as he himself has proclaimed. But despite his good stats from long-range, the only statistic that distinguishes Towns from the ever-growing number of competent standing-start/stationary 3-point specialists is his height.

When the criticism crescendoed during the playoffs, Towns responded by increasing his drives to the basket and decreasing his 3-point shooting. The result was a noticeable improvement in the efficiency of Towns' offense. The critics were pleased. The Timberwolves even managed to avoid a sweep with a game four win. Problem solved? No. More changes are required.

Although Towns' shift in emphasis from shooting to driving was a step in the right direction, it still located the start of his offense on the outside. Getting to the basket saps energy and risks mistakes. The opinion here, therefore, is that Towns should cut out the middleman, so to speak, and start his offense in the low post, where his superior size and skills combo is more of an instant winner. Problem solved? No again. For Towns to maximize his offense, an even bigger and more important change still needs to be implemented.

Sorry to say, KAT fans, what needs to go is Towns' elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot. The good results that Towns gets with his elbow-in-strokesnap semi-jump shot from long-range mostly depend on the absence of defensive pressure, which is readily available at long-range. The absence of defensive pressure is more than fundamental to the appeal of long-range shooting, it is the primary attraction. That's true for most long-range shooters, but especially true for elbow-in-strokesnap shooters because their out-front, horizontally extended and basket aligned elbow-in shooting position for the start of the release needs distance from the defender to work well, which to a great extent precludes getting off a good shot from mid-range on in.

If learning how to shoot a legitimate post-up jump shot seems like a reach too far for Towns at this advanced stage of his NBA career, it's not. The whole-body jump shots can be learned fast because they are based on easy to learn and easy to execute big-muscle shooting techniques. Plus, the whole-body jump shots' setup fundamentals generally override the resistant muscle memory of preexisting failed jump shots.

**6/1/2024 – What about Wembanyama?** – If the preceding installment sounded like an argument against the stretch-4 and the stretch-5, you got that right. The opposition, however, is not

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absolute. All-around shooting skills are always appreciated and useful. Instead, the opposition is actually to primary focus on long-range shooting by power forwards and centers. Yes, special circumstances could create an exception to the common sense rule of locating power forwards and centers close to the basket. For example, perhaps a small forward, such as Bernard King, is the team's best post-up player, which means space needs to be cleared for the post-up small forward to operate close to the basket. But that's the exception. Under most circumstances, building an offense around stretch-4s and stretch-5s is not optimal.

Karl-Anthony Towns is one example of a stretch-4 and the stretch-5. There are notable others. Joel Embiid, Philadelphia's process man, has stubbornly stuck to the stretch motif without much reward in the win column. The 76ers have imported a new crew to relieve Embiid of primary offensive responsibility. Can Embiid take a hint? Kristaps Porzingis used to be part of the argument for the stretch-4 and the stretch-5. Now Porzingis is part of the counter argument. When Porzingis moved his offense closer to the basket to provide offensive balance for the perimeter-oriented 2023-24 Boston Celtics, the team went on to lead the NBA in wins and then win the championship. Could it be that the tide has turned against the stretch-4 and the stretch-5? Could be if winning has anything to do with it.

Could be if defense has anything to do with it as well. The emphasis on stretch-4s and stretch-5s has shrunk both positions because the smaller 4s and 5s were better shooters. Another reason was that coaches wanted smaller 4s and 5s to chase shooters on the perimeter. But the shrinking 4s and 5s defending the perimeter opened the floodgates for the non-shooting layup specialists of the world. That's another anti stretch-4 and stretch-5 argument.

Then along comes Victor Wembanyama. The young Frenchman could alter the stretch-4 and the stretch-5 argument in a big way. To begin with, Wembanyama shoots a whole-body elbow-out jump shot. Thus equipped, Wembanyama has a jump shot adaptable to all circumstances: long-range, mid-range, post-up, off-the-dribble strongside and weakside, straight up or falling away. So Wembanyama could pump new life into the stretch-5 while not neglecting the big man's traditional roles. That's great, but there is definite danger that the stretch-4 and the stretch-5 obsessed NBA will infect Wembanyama with long-range 3-point fever.

That would be a waste of talent. To this observer, it is not an exaggeration to compare Wembanyama's athleticism with the stretchability of Allen Iverson. High praise because Iverson was one of basketball's all-time best athletes, but warranted. And to top it off, Wembanyama is a heads-up player, meaning he sees the court, and is also an excellent ballhandler and passer. All that adds up to at least an all-around offensive game, if not a strict emphasis on inside play.

But what if Wembanyama does go long-range crazy? Well, the dude is so great, he could probably get away with it, at least to a greater extent than the other stretch-4s and stretch-5s have done. Would championships be obtainable? Probably yes. But the reason would not be Wembanyama tilting the scales with long-range shooting. The key factor would more likely be Wembanyama's anticipated overwhelming defensive prowess.

The real question then is whether Wembanyama's projected winning, domination and championships are likely more certain and more numerous if he builds his offense close to the

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basket instead of at long-range or even at mid-range. Not to diminish the spectacle of a seven foot plus basketball player amazing with his all-court skills and abilities, but the belief here is that Wembanyama's winningest future runs through the low post.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, that is for Wembanyama not for the opposition, if the young Frenchman were to add the sky hook to his post-up arsenal. Are offers to teach Wembanyama how to shoot the sky hook piling up? Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the master of the sky hook, tried many times to teach it. But Abdul-Jabbar never succeeded in teaching the sky hook to a skill level anywhere close to his own. And outside of Abdul-Jabbar, it appears that few have even tried to teach how to shoot the sky hook.

Well, that is about to change if I get the opportunity. I've written an article that analyzes Abdul-Jabbar's sky hook techniques and unlocks the sky hook's secrets. However, as befits the discovery of dormant super weapon technology, the sky hook's performance formula is currently top secret. Once Wembanyama and/or some other worthy NBA center shows an interest, I'd be very glad to instruct based on my sky hook theories, putting them to the test.

One last word on the sky hook is in order. Although the sky hook was once the most dominant post-up weapon, its dominance depends on its use by a towering center. That's because the sky hook, although the most athletic version of the hook shot, mostly gains its advantage through positioning. For all other players, the whole-body post-up jump shots are the best available ticket to post-up domination. That's because the whole-body post-up jump shots mostly gain their advantage through athleticism.

**7/6/2024 – 2/2025 – Mikal Bridges Trade: The Knicks Paid for More Than They Are Getting –**  
The objection here is not to the price, six #1 draft choices and some good additional players, exorbitant though it may be. If the Knicks got their man, i.e., a first rate, in-his-prime shooter-scorer, then the deal is acceptable.

The objection here is to Bridges' jump shot technique. Bridges shoots a whole-body reachup jump shot, same as many of the best jumpshooters in the NBA including Kawhi Leonard, Donovan Mitchell and Jalen Brunson. But the whole-body reachup jump shot is fragile because its relatively weak hand action release mechanism depends on an easily disrupted one-motion merge with the reachup for supplementary power. Bridges' problem is that he is too often prone to topping off the whole-body reachup jump shot's reachup with a reachback that disrupts the flow of the one-motion merge and ends up costing athleticism, power and accuracy.

The opinion here is that Bridges' performance the past few years reflects an unsettled resolution of the reachup jump shot's fragility issues. As a secondary option in Phoenix, Bridges was a model of consistency because catch-and-shoot did not aggravate a reachback disruption. Upon arrival in Brooklyn, 2/23, Bridges went on a roll, showing his upside potential for the remainder of the season. But the following year, Bridges' efficiency declined. The suspicion here is that the volume athletic shooting asked of Bridges brought out the reachback that disrupted his reachup jump shot. As a result, you could say that Bridges shot his way out of Brooklyn.

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At present with the Knicks, Bridges has rediscovered some of his Phoenix consistency. That's good. But is that what the Knicks really want and need? The price the Knicks paid for Bridges in their off-season trade would seem to say they expect more than medium production.

Aside from these criticisms and the price paid, Bridges has been far from a disaster. Medium production is not nothing. Medium production is a lot better than some of these basketball players who disappear before your eyes. Plus, the dude does play defense.

The Knicks would be in bad shape without Bridges' medium productivity. That's partly because the Knicks have carelessly traded away young and talented players who could have bolstered their undermanned bench and rotation. For example, two recent Knick castoffs, Obi Toppin and Quentin Grimes, are performing well for new teams, providing offensive production that the Knicks could certainly use. It makes the Knicks look heedless of potential and development. What makes the hurt worse is who the Knicks received for Toppin and Grimes.

As a life-long New Yorker and on-again off-again Knicks fan, the hope here is that Bridges can get it together and recapture his initial Brooklyn success. What will it take? Good coaching based on informed attention to detail. We'll see if the Knicks can deliver.

**10/2024 – 12/2024 – Jared McCain Separates from the Pack** – In his brief, injury-shortened rookie year, Jaren McCain showed himself to be the best jumpshooter in his draft class and the best jumpshooter on his team, the Philadelphia 76ers.

Not surprisingly, McCain is a whole-body jumpshooter, specifically a whole-body reachup jumpshooter. But unlike Mikal Bridges, the subject of the immediately preceding installment, McCain's whole-body reachup jump shot is not plagued by a reachback. No, McCain's reachup is smooth as silk. In other words, McCain's reachup to the shooting position for the start of the release merges in one continuous motion with the whole-body reachup jump shot's hand action release mechanism. Furthermore, McCain is one of those whole-body reachup jumpshooters, like Klay Thompson, Kawhi Leonard and Donovan Mitchell for example, who can handle long-range jump shots with no problem.

The ability to adapt the whole-body reachup jump shot to long-range is based on the one continuous motion seamless merge of the reachup with the release. The upward arm action of the reachup provides supplementary power that reinforces the whole-body reachup jump shot's relatively weak hand action release mechanism. Long-range whole-body reachup jumpshooters also obtain more supplementary power for their release by way of shooting on the rise.

**2024/25 – Fixing the Phoenix Suns** – The plan was for a Big 3 to carry the Phoenix Suns into championship contention. So far, at about mid-season, the plan has failed. Two of the three, Kevin Durant and Devin Booker, are having good years, holding up their end of the bargain. The third member of the Big 3, Bradley Beal, is suffering on-again off-again health problems as he has in the recent past and is therefore unable to perform up to optimistic expectations.

Rather than scapegoat Beal and his injuries for the failure of the Suns, the opinion here is that the Big 3 plan was seriously flawed to begin with. In hindsight, the age of the roster, the talent on

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the roster and the depth of the roster are all problems. But according to the opinion here, the Sun's worst problem is lack of diversified skills on the roster. In particular, the Big 3 duplicated each other's skill sets. To be more specific, the Suns lack a post-up offensive presence.

What to do? Maybe trade for Zion Williamson. Good idea. But do the Suns have the requisite players, draft choices and finances to pull off such a trade? All that is above my pay grade. I'm in the jump shot business. For fun, let me propose a jump shot solution to the Suns' post-up problem. The proposal is for Kevin Durant to be converted into a dominant post-up jumpshooter. Not Booker, not Beal. No, the 6 ft 11 in Durant is my choice.

But it is not a matter of simply snapping your fingers and instantly converting Durant into a post-up jumpshooter. There would be complications based on the optimal blend of jump shot techniques and jump shot tactics. To begin with, Durant is a whole-body elevated-elbow-in jumpshooter. True, the elevated-elbow-in is a whole-body jump shot and Durant works wonders with it at mid-range and long-range. But because the whole-body elevated-elbow-in jump shot uses less shooting shoulder involvement than the other whole-body jump shots it is the least physical in terms of athleticism and the elevation of the shooting position for the start of the release, both of which clearly benefit the post-up jump shot.

So, in order to maximize his post-up jump shot capability, it would be beholden on Durant to learn how to shoot a whole-body elbow-out jump shot or a whole-body reachback jump shot or preferably both. I am confident that Durant could easily learn the whole-body elbow-out and reachback jump shots within one week or less, but, as I said, it's a complication. Not at all an insurmountable complication, but a complication.

**2/4/2025 – Upgrade: Jalen Green** – Actually, upgrade does not do Jalen Green justice. Major upgrade is more like it. But there is still room for more improvement.

Not too long ago, Green was a poster boy for the cradle grip jump shot. This website's cradle grip jump shot article featured Green as an example. The cradle grip jump shot is powerful, which explains why it has caught on during the 3-point era. Cradle grip jump shot accuracy is possible. Green's, not so much. Cradle grip jump shot athleticism is difficult. So much so that cradle grip jump shot limitations squashed Green's world-class athleticism, which is hard to do.

It is a different story now. Green has become a whole-body elbow-out jumpshooter. Green's transformation depended on replacing the cradle grip with the whole-body jump shot theory's standard semi-oppositional shooting grip, which locates the off-hand slightly more than halfway toward the front of the basketball. The semi-oppositional shooting grip secures the basketball during the athletic rigors of jumpshooting. Green's transformation also depended on retaining the angled-in shooting hand and the angled-out shooting elbow that the cradle grip encourages. With respect to the release of his new whole-body elbow-out jump shot, Green added a straightstroke-push release, parallel extension and brushing hand action toward the end of the shooting arm's straightstroke-push. Whether Green's transformation into a whole-body elbow-out jumpshooter was by design or by evolution is unknown here.

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At present, mid-season 2024/25, despite significantly improved jump shot athleticism and accuracy, Green continues to shoot the same high number of long-range 3-pointers as before his transformation. Mentality probably plays a role. That is to say, Green has probably not yet broken completely free of his cradlegrip tendency to shoot a preponderance of long-range 3-point shots. But Green's high number of long-range 3-point shots also results from a technical issue. To be specific, Green's straightstroke-push release heads out and up, which is a release technique best suited for long-range 3-point shots. If Green were to add an up-and-out straightstroke-push release to his whole-body elbow-out toolbox, he would acquire the capability to shoot over defenders in close quarters at mid-range and on the inside. The thinking here is that once Green gets a taste of the dominance he could exert at mid-range and closer to the basket with pull-ups and post-ups, he would more frequently opt for that mode of attack.

There is also a larger scale technical change to Green's jumpshooting game that would add another level and great improvement. I call it jump shot diversity, which, according to my whole-body jump shot theory, embodies the highest level of jump shot skill, and also the rarest. I am confident that Green could reach it. And I am confident that I can teach it to Green. Plus, I could teach it fast, like within one week.

Jump shot diversity usually consists of the use of two different whole-body jump shots with different tactical specialties that are tactically complementary when combined and thereby provide multi-pronged attack capability that covers most jumpshooting contingencies. For jump shot diversity to work, the jumpshooter must master two or more whole-body jump shots. See Kyrie Irving. In practical terms, for jump shot diversity to work for Green, he must learn how to shoot a whole-body reachback jump shot. Green's whole-body elbow-out jump shot would handle to-the-basket moderately angled strongside pull-ups. Green's whole-body reachback jump shot would handle strongside lateral pull-ups at moderate and extreme angles. Thus equipped with two tactically complementary whole-body jump shots, Green would almost always be capable of attacking the defense with a strongside pull-up jump shot. Strongside is vital to the pull-up jump shot equation because it enables the athleticism and provides the protection that are necessary to attack the defense with the jump shot.