

JUMP SHOT NEWS AND NOTES: SEEKING TRUTH, COURTING CONTROVERSY

By Robert Tilitz

All JUMP SHOT NEWS AND NOTES (JSNN) commentary derives the principles of my whole-body jump shot theory applied to various basketball topics.

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, including fans, media and 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 stationary/standing-start 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, there is no statistic that really elevates Towns above the ever-growing crowd of competent stationary/standing-start 3-point specialists other than 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 common 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.

See later KAT installment.

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6/1/2024 – What about Wembanyama? – If the preceding installment sounded like an argument against the stretch-4 and the stretch-5, you've got that right. The opposition, however, is not absolute. All-around shooting skills are always useful. The opposition is to primary focus on long-range, 3-point shooting by power forwards and centers. Yes, there are many exceptions. Many would evolve from the players' individual skillsets. For example, if a small forward, such as Bernard King, is the team's best post-up player, then spacing requirements would dictate sending the power forward or center to long-range. which means space needs to be cleared for the post-up small forward to operate close to the basket. Under most circumstances, however, 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 a danger that the stretch-4 and the stretch-5 obsessed NBA will encourage Wembanyama to commit to the stretch game.

That would be a waste of talent. To JSNN, 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.

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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 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 JSNN's belief 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.

See later Wembanyama installment.

7/6/2024 – 2/2025 – Mikal Bridges Trade: The Knicks Paid for More Than They Are Getting – JSNN's objection 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.

JSNN's objection 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.

JSNN's opinion 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. JSNN's suspicion is that the

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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.

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, three relatively recent rotation-type Knick castoffs, Luke Kornet, 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. Plus, the Knicks did not do especially well with the players received as compensation.

As a life-long New Yorker and on-again off-again Knicks fan, my hope 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.

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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, JSNN's opinion is that the Big 3 plan was seriously flawed to begin with. In hindsight, the age of the roster, the talent on 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.

2/2025 – Jalen Green: Showing Signs of Progress – Actually, progress does not do Jalen Green justice. Major progress is more like it. But there is still significant room for more improvement.

Until recently, Green was a poster boy for the cradle grip jump shot by way of this website's cradle grip jump shot article. That is not the case anymore. Green was removed from the cradle grip article because he no longer shoots a cradle grip jump shot. Good for Green.

First, a bit of background on the cradle grip jump shot, Green's in particular. The cradle grip jump shot is powerful, which explains why it has caught on during the 3-point era. Green's was powerful. 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

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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.

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 cradle grip 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. JSNN's thinking 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 still more improvement. I call it jump shot diversity. To me it 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 is a concept that exists only within the context of the whole-body jump shot theory. Jump shot diversity consists of one player's mastery of two or more different whole-body jump shots with different techniques that result in different specialties. When the different techniques/specialties are tactically complementary, they therefore provide multi-pronged jump shot attack capability that covers most jumpshooting contingencies. Kyrie Irving is Exhibit A. At present, there are no other examples.

In practical terms, for Green to acquire jump shot diversity, he must learn how to shoot a whole-body reachback jump shot, which gives strongside lateral capability at moderate and extreme angles. Combined with the forward/to-the-basket whole-body elbow-out jump shot, the two tactically complementary strongside attack-capable whole-body jump shots would almost always give Green the upper hand against the defense. Strongside is vital to the pull-up jump shot equation because it provides the protection and enables the athleticism, both in large part through the square-in-the-air, that are necessary to attack the defense with the jump shot.

2/2025 – Karl-Anthony Towns: On the Attack – The first installment of JSNN took Karl-Anthony Towns to task for shooting too many long-range 3-point shots during the 2024 playoffs. At that point, the fans, media and JSNN were all piling on Towns for not doing more to capitalize on his size and athleticism.

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To his credit, Towns did not pout or shirk responsibility. Instead, Towns reversed his offensive game on a dime. Tactically, that meant Towns started driving to the basket more often. The change brought about improved offensive performance by Towns and his team the Minnesota Timberwolves, which salvaged a win, avoiding a sweep.

During the off-season, Towns was traded to the New York Knicks. The good news for the Knicks and their fans is that Towns has not reverted to the long-range 3-point heavy offensive game he featured prior to last year's playoff awakening. Quite the opposite, if anything Towns has stepped up the aggressive style of play that elevated his post-epiphany production in the playoffs last year. His 3-point shots are down and his scoring is up. His rebounds are at a career high. Plus, Towns has shown himself to be an outstanding ballhandler and an exceptional passer. Along with his multifaceted skills, Towns has added physical strength to the Knicks.

The just described upgrades to Towns' offensive game have more to do with jump shot tactics than jump shot techniques. In fact, JSNN sees no upgrade in Towns' jump shot techniques. But JSNN does see the need for an upgrade of Towns' jump shot techniques.

It's not that Towns' hole card, which is his stationary/standing-start long-range 3-point shot, is not holding its own. To the contrary, shooting fewer 3-point shots has paid off in the highest 3-point shooting percentage of Towns' career. You see, number of 3-point shot attempts aside, stationary/standing-start 3-point shots are something that Towns' elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot technique can handle. That's not the case when it comes to off-the-dribble mid-range and post-up jump shots. The problem is that the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's out-front, horizontally extended and basket aligned elbow-in shooting position is anti-athletic and poorly protected.

In response to his off-the-dribble mid-range and post-up shortcomings, Towns tends to shoot too many weakside fallaways and weakside stepbacks, which are frequently the last resort for poor jumpshooters. Because there are so many elbow-in-strokesnap poor jumpshooters, the weakside fallaway and especially the weakside stepback are popular jump shots. But Towns and all the others are dealing from weakness, not strength. To make matters worse, the weakside fallaway and the weakside stepback are off-balance, low-percentage jump shots. In addition, any and all weakside moves substantially shut down the passing game, which Towns excels at.

The elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's athleticism problem occurs because its elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's out-front, horizontally extended and basket aligned elbow-in shooting position distances disconnects by distance the strokesnap release from the jumpshooter's body, which, of course, is the source of athleticism. The elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's protection problem occurs because its elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot's out-front, horizontally extended and basket aligned elbow-in shooting position is vulnerable to reach-ins.

So, despite his many outstanding attributes, which include athleticism, size, strength, great hands and top-of-the-line ballhandling and passing skills, Towns does not have much of a mid-range pull-up or post-up jumpshooting game. Towns is therefore like an elegant and sumptuous dinner served with everything but the main course. Fortunately, the remedy is fast and easy. The whole-body jump shots, which excel at mid-range pull-up and post-up jump shots, can be learned fast because they are based on easy to learn and easy to execute big-muscle shooting techniques.

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Plus, the whole-body jump shots' setup fundamentals generally override the resistant muscle memory of preexisting failed jump shots.

2/2025 – Victor Wembanyama: Elbow-out No More – JSNN admits to disappointment because of what appears to be the evolution or perhaps the intentional change of Wembanyama's jump shot away from a whole-body elbow-out technique. And JSNN further admits that regardless of whether Wembanyama permanently adopts his current whole-body elevated-elbow-in technique or, ouch, adopts some variation of the prevailing but almost all wrong elbow-in-strokesnap technique, he will still probably end up being one of basketball's all-time great players because of his awesome combination of size, athleticism and all-around skills. No problem.

Parenthetically, JSNN does not concede that Wembanyama's improved second year offensive statistics are proof or even an indication that his newly changed jump shot is better than his previous whole-body elbow-out jump shot. To JSNN, the much more likely explanations for Wembanyama's improved second year offensive statistics are physical maturation and the experiential lessons learned from his first year of NBA competition.

But there is no denying that Wembanyama's second year offensive statistics are better than those of his first year. Sophomore slump? No way. Also, the Spur's win-loss record this year is better than last year's at the same stage of the season. So, JSNN, what then is the problem?

The problem is twofold. One part hurts me. The other part hurts Wembanyama. The part of the problem that hurts me results from the young Frenchman's removal from my unofficial roster of whole-body elbow-out jumpshooters. You can be sure that for me it had been exhilarating when I first saw the pictures and tapes that indicated Wembanyama was a whole-body elbow-out jumpshooter. The reason is that the whole-body elbow-out jump shot is the star of my whole-body jump shot theory based on technical and tactical considerations. What owner would not want potentially the world's greatest on his team? But when subsequent pictures and tapes indicated that Wembanyama's jump shot technique was moving away from the whole-body elbow-out jump shot, intellectual integrity canceled the connection. Bye-bye bragging rights.

The part of the problem caused by his evolution away from the whole-body elbow-out jump shot technique that hurts Wembanyama results in the loss of a significant degree of jump shot capability. Even if Wembanyama settles in as a whole-body elevated-elbow-in jumpshooter, there will be a significant decline in jump shot capability compared to that of the whole-body elbow-out jump shot. If Wembanyama evolves toward, be it on his own or through coaching, the prevailing elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot technique, JSNN is optimistic that his brushing hand action, as evidenced by heavy backspin, will insulate him from the worst of it. Please note that brushing hand action is a staple whole-body jump shot technique.

At this point, 2/2025, Wembanyama is still a whole-body jumpshooter by way of the whole-body elevated-elbow-in jump shot. But because the whole-body elevated-elbow-in jump shot uses less shooting shoulder than the whole-body elbow-out jump shot, its capability drops off in every jump shot performance category. Most importantly, by replacing the whole-body elbow-out jump shot with the whole-body elevated-elbow-in jump shot, Wembanyama will lose a degree of jump shot protection, which will hurt his post-up jump shot capability.

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Is JSNN carrying on about a distinction without a difference? After all, there are quite a few good to great elevated-elbow-in jumpshooters. Kevin Durant is one of the great ones. However, in the estimation of JSNN, Durant would be an even better jumpshooter, especially a better post-up jumpshooter, if he shot either a whole-body elbow-out jump shot or a whole-body reachback jump shot or both, jump shot diversity-style. Full shooting shoulder involvement in the jump shot is the difference maker. For a more detailed explanation, see the whole-body elevated-elbow-in jump shot article on the WHOLE-BODY page of this website.

JSNN also worries whether Wembanyama's offensive development is in good hands with the San Antonio Spurs. JSNN believes that the Spurs badly botched the great Tim Duncan's offensive development. To be clear, the reference is not to Duncan's career. Duncan had a great career. But despite top-tier athleticism and ballhandling, Duncan never developed a dominant post-up jumpshooting game under the Spurs. Even Duncan's free throw, which always looked rushed and brick-hard, was a bit of a mess. So JSNN has no confidence in the Spurs being stewards of Wembanyama's jump shot development.

2/2025 – *The Indiana Fever and NaLyssa Smith Part Ways: Shortsighted or Necessary?* – First off, the Fever's stated reason for trading NaLyssa Smith is fiction. Subpar production during Smith's third year and seeking more team speed along with 3-point shooting do not justify giving up on size and athleticism and potential. Generally speaking, basketball teams covet the combination of size and athleticism. Therefore, the Fever's explanation for trading Smith just plain does not ring true. You can bet on that because the compensation the Fever received in return for Smith did equate to her open market value.

Was it personal? Because the standards for acceptable behavior in men's and women's professional basketball are not exactly canonization high and because nothing has showed up on the police blotter, it is likely that the Fever did not trade Smith for personal reasons.

Without being privy to any inside information, JSNN suspects that Smith somehow communicated unhappiness with the Fever's new Caitlin Clark-centric identity. The fact that after the trade Smith sounded off against the Fever for what she felt had been a lack of belief in and proper use of her ability is not evidence that she was discordant before the trade. Upon rejection via a trade, players often and understandably react emotionally, saying things not truly reflective of their pre-trade state of mind. The Fever knows that. More likely the Fever conflated Smith's decline in production playing alongside Clark as lack of enthusiasm for the new Clark-centric direction of team. If that was the case, the Fever probably felt boxed in, probably felt it had little choice but to trade Smith.

But that is not what the Fever said. If in fact the Fever did feel boxed in by what they thought was Smith's lack of commitment, it would be hard to blame the franchise for keeping their true motive to themselves. The Fever was dealing with a complicated situation. The WNBA had become a hotbed of controversy. Undercurrents of sociological and political discontent swirled everywhere in the WNBA, especially around the Indiana Fever. Although blessed with the good fortune of signing the most marketable player in the history of the WNBA in the person of

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Caitlin Clark, many, maybe a majority, of the WNBA's players figuratively formed a circular firing squad with Clark and the Fever at the center.

Playing it safe, in the politically correct sense, was probably in the best interests of the Fever and all of the individuals involved, from management to coaches to players. After all, everybody's business was basketball, not socio-political controversy. Evidently, Fever president Kelly Krauskopf seemed to think that the relationship between the team and the player could not be salvaged. Therefore, Fever traded Smith during the off-season.

As for NaLyssa Smith, it is possible that she provoked the trade from the Fever with declining enthusiasm more so than declining performance. If so, Smith forfeited the chance to cornerstone a WNBA power. Smith, however, lucked out big-time landing with the Las Vegas Aces and contributing to their 2025 WNBA championship on her second stop after the Fever. Time will tell if Smith makes the most of her good fortune and settles in next to A'ga Wilson with the Aces or ends up moving on as a marketable player but a perpetual rental piece.

Admittedly, to this point, JSNN's evaluation of the Fever-Smith breakup has not broken much if any new ground. That's because the commentary was based on speculation about the thinking that drove the decision making. In other words, speculation about conventional thinking in the world of professional basketball. That's about to change. Going forward, JSNN's commentary will be based on what could have been done if basketball in general, not just the Indiana Fever in particular, had a working knowledge of the jump shot and how to teach it.

To begin with, JSNN sees the Fever and Smith affair as a basketball problem, not a business problem. Most importantly, through reference to the whole-body jump shot theory, JSNN has an optimistic belief that all basketball problems that stem from poor shooting ability, as so many basketball problems do, have an easy and expeditious solution waiting in the wings by way of my whole-body jump shot theory. Therefore, Smith's frustration with her limited role in the Fever's offense, which was an open wound that the WNBA's socio-political turmoil infected, was actually a missed opportunity for the player and the team to bond and to improve.

What the Fever should have done was to work with Smith to improve her problematic reachback jump shot so she could expand her role on offense. JSNN is optimistic that improvement was eminently doable because it knows that the whole-body jump shot theory's teaching techniques for a proper whole-body reachback jump shot can work fast, like in a half hour or hour, and because of belief in Smith's talent. JSNN figures that an improvement would have satisfied Smith and the Fever and brought out the baller in Smith, making her ready, willing, able and anxious to contribute to the Fever. And because Smith is a bona fide grade-A physical talent, adding shotmaking to her capabilities improves the Fever immeasurably.

I sent Ms. Krauskopf a letter saying basically the same thing, though I have no idea if it reached her desk. In other words, I pitched my whole-body jump shot theory to the Fever, same as I have tried to do with most of the teams in the NBA. Can you say R&D? As expected, the Fever did not accept my offer of free jump shot instruction. As expected, the Fever did not even reply.

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JSNN does not mean to single out the Fever for a lack of an R&D type of curiosity about a new jump shot theory. As stated, most NBA teams have turned down my offers of free instruction for roster or non-roster players to put my whole-body jump shot theory to the test. Still, given the Fever's high level of talent on the one hand and lack of success on the other, their rejection is particularly disappointing. I mean I addressed Caitlin Clark and Kelsey Mitchell's lack of a mid-range pull-up jump shot and Aliyah Boston's lack of a post-up jump shot, but still received no response. What I did hear was news reports that the Fever is going for more long-range 3-point shooting, getting smaller and getting faster. R&D? Jump shot instruction? Forget about it.

Two last words. 1. Yes, JSNN believes that both the WNBA and the NBA are by and large incompetent at jump shot instruction. The decline of the mid-range jump shot is proof. With respect to why basketball is the only major sport that is very much clueless about its primary skill's bio-mechanics, JSNN blames the NBA, which is basketball's world leader. JSNN believes that the NBA is either unaware of or content to ignore its jump shot problem as long as the money keeps rolling in. 2. No, JSNN does not believe that WNBA and NBA incompetency at jump shot instruction derives from their shooting coaches. JSNN believes that the reason WNBA and NBA shooting coaches cannot teach how to shoot the jump shot is because they have for years, for basketball generations been handed a toolbox with a jump shot theory that is, despite being all but officially endorsed by the NBA, almost all wrong.

6/2025 – And the Winner of the 2025 NBA Championship Finals Is...the Whole-Body Elbow-Out Jump Shot – The Oklahoma City Thunder won the 2025 NBA Championship Finals on the strength of the whole-body elbow-out mid-range jump shot. Elbow-out Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder to wins in three Finals games. And elbow-out Jalen Williams led the Thunder to victory in one Finals game. Otherwise, the 2025 Finals mostly featured too many long-range, stationary/standing-start 3-point shooters clanging away more or less even-steven.

As the primary, or perhaps more likely the sole, advocate for the whole-body elbow-out jump shot by way of my whole-body jump shot theory, nothing could have pleased me more. That's because the whole-body elbow-out mid-range off-the-dribble pull-up jump shot is the star of my whole-body jump shot theory. The West/Jordan/Bryant whole-body reachback jump is equally effective. But the whole-body elbow-out jump shot is more important because it is forward/to-the-basket oriented and therefore better suited for the way that most players play as opposed to the laterally oriented whole-body reachback jump shot.

Prior to the Thunder winning the 2025 NBA Championship Finals, the elbow-out jump shot was scorned and ridiculed by the so-called experts, despite the long list of great whole-body elbow-out jumpshooters. It seems that the glaring contradiction between elbow-out form and the prevailing jump shot theory, what I call the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot theory, is too much for the experts to handle. But now that elbow-out SAG has won everything from the scoring title to the regular-season MVP to the Finals MVP to the NBA championship itself, maybe NBA executives, coaches, players, agents and journalists will begin to revise their thinking. You know, everybody loves a winner.

In terms of what's good for the NBA in particular and basketball in general, an about-face on thinking about the whole-body elbow-out jump shot cannot come soon enough. The reason is

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that the prevailing elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot, which is all but officially endorsed by the NBA, has to a great extent both killed off the mid-range pull-up jump shot and replaced it with the stationary/standing-start 3-point shot. The resulting 3-point revolution is fizzling before our eyes. That's because the inherently unathletic stationary/standing-start 3-point shot is a dud in the excitement and fan-appeal departments, especially by comparison to the mid-range pull-up jump shot's dynamic blend of athleticism and skill.

Critics have taken note. Regression, back to the bad old days of long-range set shot shooting is a common complaint. Boring, to put it plainly, is another common complaint.

But the elbow-in-strokesnap crowd is not giving up ground easily. They continue to stress squaring up and pointing the shooting elbow at the basket, athleticism and protection be damned. And they continue to glorify the weak and difficult to control wrist snap in combination with fingertips control, despite needing a seam to secure the grip and to latch onto some leverage.

Waiting in the wings to replace the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot is not only the whole-body elbow-out jump shot but also the other whole-body jump shots, which include the reachback, the reachup and the elevated-elbow-in. Each one of the whole-body jump shots has already made a significant impact on basketball. But the impact has been by way of various individual whole-body jumpshooters, not systematic replacement of the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot.

In summary, the chances of a crucial course correction, meaning the systematic replacement of the failed elbow-in-strokesnap jump, in the near future are at present perhaps a bit better because opposing facts are becoming more and more undeniable. There is the fact that the mid-range pull-up jump shot is a difficult proposition with the elbow-in-strokesnap technique because of athleticism and protection issues. There is the fact that the stationary/standing-start 3-point shot, which is the only viable application of the elbow-in-strokesnap technique, is a marketing loser. And there is the fact that the continued superb performance of whole-body elbow-out SAG could create a trend independent of any arguments for or against a particular jump shot technique. The whole-body jump shot theory too could play a role, no make that a major role, in basketball's much needed next revolution by explaining why SAG and the small army of other randomly occurring whole-body jumpshooters are so successful.

11/2025 – Aliyah Boston: Can Aliyah Ever Equal A'ja? – Aliyah Boston shoots an elbow-in-push shot, which is basically a common modified version of the widely recommended but almost all wrong elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot. The elbow-in-push shot is athletically and attack limited but good on accuracy and power. JSNN was able to determine that Boston is an elbow-in-push shooter only after watching an online video of her shooting at a practice session with a coach. The online video was necessary because Boston does not shoot her elbow-in-push shot very often during games, except for free throws.

Most likely Boston does not shoot her elbow-in-push shot very often during games because the spacing in her preferred low-post location is too cramped to get it off. The problem is that the head-high or lower and out-front shooting position for the start of the elbow-in-push release is vulnerable to defenders reaching in and easy to block. Even at mid-range the spacing is still cramped, which is why mid-range elbow-in-push jumpshooters, such as Anthony Davis and

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Jordan Clarkson, are big on the stepback. Long-range is more or less the last resort for many elbow-in-push shooters, such as Bradley Beal and Caitlin Clark, because that is where there is less defensive pressure. Which means nothing to Boston, who clearly prefers to mix it up in the low post with her clever assortment of ambidextrous body-wedge moves and drives.

Nevertheless, what Boston shows when she does shoot her elbow-in-push shot during games is excellent accuracy and power. The online video referred to earlier shows the same thing. What that tells JSNN is not that Boston should shoot more elbow-in-push shots. Instead, JSNN sees great hands and a great eye ready to be combined with whole-body jump shot techniques that work in the low post and beyond. The combination could possibly right away make Boston a legitimate rival to A'ja Wilson for WNBA dominance.

Full disclosure: I've been into the Indiana Fever on and off since they drafted Kelsey Mitchell with the second overall pick in the 2018 WNBA draft. In fact, I started to follow Mitchell late in her collegiate career at Ohio State. My interest in Mitchell was based on her use of a whole-body elbow-out jump shot to fuel her prolific scoring.

However, my interest in Mitchell and the Fever waned when a closer look revealed that she was a cradle-grip whole-body elbow-out jumpshooter. The cradle-grip's exposed and weak hold on the basketball tends to eliminate the mid-range pull-up from the jumpshooter's game. In other words, I saw Mitchell as a female version of Jamal Murray who is a great stationary/standing-start and stepback 3-point shooter, great ballhandler and great driver but not much of a strongside mid-range pullup jumpshooter because of his cradle-grip. And sure enough, although both Mitchell and Murray can attack the defense to a certain extent with their penetration and drives, neither flat-out dominates the defense with a strongside mid-range pull-up jump shot.

Then along came Caitlin Clark with the first overall pick of the 2024 WNBA draft and my interest in the Indiana Fever was revived. You can see my complimentary but constructively critical evaluation of Clark on the Whole-Body page of this website. Furthermore, in the course of my research on Clark, I discovered that the Fever had not been wasting their time since I last checked in. NaLyssa Smith was selected with the second overall pick in the 2022 WNBA draft. And Aliyah Boston was selected with the first overall pick in the 2023 WNBA draft.

My conclusion, the obvious conclusion, was that the Fever has corralled a ton of talent, to put it mildly. Complementary talent too. True, all four of the big stars were imperfect players. But I saw a path to improvement for each of the four stars by way of my whole-body jump shot theory. With no expectation of a response, I wrote two letters to Kelly Krauskopf, president of the Indiana Fever, itemizing my thoughts on the players and volunteering my services. As expected, my letters and offers did not get a reply.

So be it. But in the meantime, the Fever has been making a mess of things. Clark, Boston and Mitchell are stagnating. At a high level, but still stagnating. Mitchell and Clark have yet to develop a strongside mid-range pull-up jump shot. In the case of Clark, her point guard game is begging for strongside penetration pull-up disruption of the defense. Besides creating premium passing opportunities, a strongside penetration pull-up that shifted the focal point of Clark's offense away from long-range would very much mitigate her shot selection, field goal percentage

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and turnover problems. As for Boston, she acts allergic to post-up jumpshooting. Of course, all three have considerable talent. But because their collective talent has not yet produced a championship or anything close it, the Fever's management and coaching of that talent must be called into question.

Especially egregious was the Fever giving up on Smith. Whatever issues Smith presented, none outweighed her potential by way of her size and athleticism. Smith's play as a starter with the Las Vegas Aces during their 2025 championship run proved she could be a valuable contributor on a winning team. By contrast, it appears that the Fever simply gave up on Smith. Whether that is true or not, what the Fever gave away in Smith is not easily replaced. The loss of Smith will look even worse if her reachback jump shot gets fixed and weaponized. If such an improvement does occur, the Fever will have even more egg on their face.

PS I am confident that if the whole-body jump shot theory's teaching methods and shooting techniques were applied to NaLyssa Smith's problematic reachback jump shot, then the fix would get done and get done fast.