

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

By Robert Tilitz

The push-off shot is an athleticized version of the whole-body jump shot theory's previously referenced squat shot. The push-off shot gained prominence as the jump shot declined and was at least partly replaced by the 3-point shot as basketball's most important skill. The push-off shot probably evolved into existence and gained prominence because it could facilitate both volume shooting from long-range 3-point distance and some shot creation at mid-range.

First, consider the push-off shot's antecedent, the squat shot, which is named after its shooting stance. The squat shot shooting stance features a bit of a squat, firmly and widely planted feet and a low-starting head-high shooting position for the start of the release. The squat shot shooting stance is not athletic. As a result, it is difficult to set up off the dribble and it is not conducive to a good jump. Predictably, the squat shot is a stationary shot.



Jerry Lucas

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



Magic Johnson

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

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

The squat shot's low-starting and low-finishing straightstroke-push release has good power and, with hand action, good accuracy and good touch. The squat shot's release works especially well for free throws and standing-start 3-point shots. Because the squat shot's release is vulnerable to defensive pressure and because the squat shot kills the jump of the jump shot, which is necessary for pull-up jump shots because it harnesses the horizontal momentum of the preceding move or run-up by redirecting it upward, the squat shot is basically stuck in one place.

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

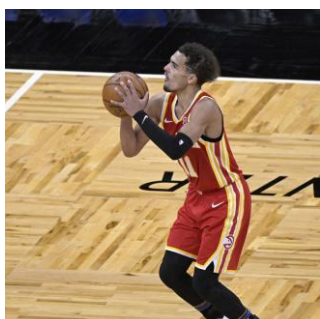
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Credit Jeremy Lin with trying to athleticize the squat shot. Lin's famous Linsanity momentarily revived a moribund New York Knicks franchise. But over the course of time, Lin's stock dropped because his moderately athleticized squat shot proved to be no more than a second-rate jump shot that could not keep up with his dynamic floor game. The big problem with Lin's jump shot was that it retained the squat shot's out-to-the-side shooting position, which removed the shooting shoulder from the release. Lin's all-arm release had good power but without shooting shoulder involvement was unable to generate square-in-the-air rotation or to merge the jump of the jump shot with the release for maximized athleticism and power.



Jeremy Lin

The push-off shot athleticized the squat shot. In so doing, the push-off shot distanced itself from its shot-type antecedent, the squat shot, to the extent that it actually more closely resembles the whole-body jump shots in terms of both shooting techniques and athleticism. Having said that, the push-off shot still has little to no jump. Just like the squat shot, the push-off shot does get off the ground and into the air, but from the overall upward effort that goes into its release, not a jump. Two of the leading push-off shooters are Trae Young and Tyrese Maxey.



Trae Young

The push-off shot athleticized the squat shot by way of two major structural changes. One replaced the squat shot's squat shooting stance with a forward lean. The other shifted the squat shot's head-high, shooting shoulder-aligned release mechanism inward to close in front on the dominant side of the body. The forward lean streamlined the push-off shot's shooting stance, which sets up a whole-body-style athleticized merge of push-off momentum and the release. The



Tyrese Maxey

inward shift located the head-high push-off release mechanism within the scope of the shooter's body, which sets up whole-body-style big-muscle release techniques. In particular, the shift rolled the shooting shoulder back to activate for whole-body athleticism and whole-body power. The rollback activates the shooting shoulder as both a direct source power and also as a dynamic channel through which the athleticism and the power of the push-off flows into the release.

Push-off shot athleticism consists of good shot creation off forward run-up, stepback and sidestep mobility. Push-off shot creation off lateral run-ups is not so good. The primary athletic limitations of the push-off shot are obvious. With little to no jump and with a low-start and low-finish release, push-off shooters find it difficult to create the significant separation they need to get off a good shot against tight mid-range defenses. Same as with the squat shot, one reason that the push-off shot has little to no jump is that the arm action that raises the basketball to the head-high shooting position for its low-starting release is so short that it does not build up enough upward momentum to help power a jump. Young and Maxey combine the mobility of the push-off shot with their own athleticism and ballhandling to elevate their point guard games to a workable if not outstanding disruptive, make-it-happen playmaking level.