THE SEMI-SIDEWAYS JUMP SHOT:
GOOD GOING WEAKSIDE, BAD GOING STRONGSIDE

By Robert Tilitz

The semi-sideways jump shot probably grew out of the semi-sideways posture that usually concludes weakside moves and run-ups. Indeed, as a result of the shape-shifting physical forces that conclude weakside moves and run-ups, the semi-sideways jump shot is very much the de facto default weakside jump shot. The semi-sideways jump shot works wonderfully well on weakside jump shots and reasonably well on straight-ahead jump shots. The semi-sideways jump shot far out-performs the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot on weakside and straight-ahead pull-ups. But the semi-sideways jump shot does not perform well on strongside pull-ups.

The semi-sideways jump shot is popular in terms of usage mostly because its weakside shape-shifting evolution is a fluid replacement for the widely recommended but poorly performing elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot. The upside of the semi-sideways jump shot pertains only to its various weakside versions. The upside of the semi-sideways jump shot is first and foremost that it is easy to set up off the weakside dribble and easy to shoot. Plus, it's got good athleticism and good power. The downside of the semi-sideways jump shot is its limited strongside capability. That's not exactly the description of a game-changing attack jump shot, but by comparison to the stiff, awkward and power deficient elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot it's a considerable improvement. Proof of the popularity and the viability of the semi-sideways jump shot is that some notable NBA players, such as Andrew Wiggins, Domantas Sabonis, RJ Barrett and Michael Porter Jr., use it as their primary jump.

Left to Right, Andrew Wiggins, Domantas Sabonis, RJ Barrett and Michael Porter Jr.

Here's how the easy setup of the semi-sideways jump shot works. The first part is setting up the precursor to the shooting grip off the dribble. It starts when the off-hand grabs the weakside dribble and shifts the basketball toward the dominant side of the body. Next, the shooting hand drops down on top of the basketball to secure it with a two-hand semi-oppositional grip. When the shooting hand initially sets up on top of the basketball, it should apply a bent-back half-hand grip. First part, done. The second part is the simultaneous setup of the semi-sideways jump shot's shooting position for the start of the release and the semi-sideways jump shot's shooting grip. The shooting position setup consists of raising the basketball to the shooting position, nothing more nothing less. The shooting grip setup occurs automatically during the setup of the shooting position. Raising the basketball to the shooting position automatically rotates it backward by half a turn, which relocates the shooting hand from on top to underneath the basketball. Second and final part, done. Once the shooting hand is located underneath the

basketball, the underneath bent-back half-hand shooting grip is fully formed and set up. The shooting hand should remain bent back throughout the setup. The shooting hand should not remove itself from the basketball or shift in any way after it initially sets up on top of it following the off-hand grab of the weakside dribble until the release begins.

After the easy setup of its shooting position and shooting grip, it is just as easy to shoot the semi-sideways jump shot. That is, provided the semi-sideways jumpshooter opts for whole-body release techniques, as opposed to the widely recommended strokesnap. Not only is the whole-body version of the semi-sideways jump shot easy to shoot, it also has good athleticism and good power. The whole-body release for the semi-sideways jump shot consists of an extension of the shooting arm including a stretched-out forearm stroke and brushing hand action to control the basketball. Whole-body semi-sideways jumpshooters can opt for either a straightstroke-push release or leveraged straightstroke-pull release. If the semi-sideways jumpshooter opts for the strokesnap release, then the usual elbow-in-strokesnap stiffness and power deficiency result.

The weakside semi-sideways jump shot can partially access whole-body release techniques because it sets up with the shooting elbow angled out to the side. It is not classic or correct whole-body elbow-out form because the ensuing release heads out more to the side than forward. But the weakside semi-sideways elbow-out setup allows, even encourages, a partial rollback of the shooting shoulder, which sets up shooting shoulder rotation during the release whole-body style. The benefits that the weakside semi-sideways jump shot gets from whole-body elbow-out techniques by no means equal those of the whole-body elbow-out jump shot, but they are significant nonetheless, especially by comparison to elbow-in-strokesnap standards.

If the dynamics that arise from shape-shifting weakside momentum account for the use and resulting popularity of the semi-sideways pull-up jump shot, what then accounts for the use and the popularity of the stationary/ standing-start semi-sideways jump shot? One explanation could be that the favorable experience with the weakside semi-sideways pull-up jump shot fosters an inclination to semi-sideways-style whenever possible. Another explanation could be that the semi-sideways jump shot's out to the side, in line with the out-angled shooting elbow release is sufficiently shooting-elbow-centric to appeal to those to whom shooting elbow alignment with the basket is crucial, i.e., the elbow-in-strokesnap crowd.

Weakside semi-sideways jump shots, however, do have a significant protection problem. The weakside semi-sideways jump shot is afflicted with the same protection problem that is common to all weakside jump shots. The weakside jump shot protection problem occurs after the weakside dribble is grabbed by the off-hand and the ballhandling shifts to the dominant side of the jumpshooter's body, the side closest to the defender, which exposes the basketball. Squaring in the air off a weakside move or run-up instead of setting up a semi-sideways shooting stance is not an option. Any attempt to square the weakside semi-sideways shooting stance by rotating it back against the weakside momentum would drain the athleticism and the power out of the weakside move or run-up and tangle the release in clashing dynamics.

The weakside jump shot protection problem is at its worst, that is, the exposure of the basketball is at its worst, as the basketball is being raised to the shooting position during the jump of the jump shot. The exposure occurs because the basketball is usually raised wholly or in part on the

dominant side of the body, which is the weakside jumpshooter's side of the body that is closest to the on-ball defender and therefore exceedingly vulnerable to defensive pressure.

The weakside jump shot protection problem appears to be a price that weakside semi-sideways jumpshooters are willing to pay for the semi-sideways jump shot's overall superiority to the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot. To be specific, the weakside semi-sideways jump shot's shooting grip and shooting position are easy to set up and, as a result, it is easy to shoot. Also, the weakside semi-sideways jump shot has good athleticism and good power. To the extent that weakside semi-sideways jumpshooters deal with their protection problem, it is mostly through reliance on weakside stepback and weakside fallaway jump shots, both of which are often off-balance and low percentage affairs. Plus, weakside stepbacks and weakside fallaways are mainly iso-scoring tools, which does not do much for teamwork. But weakside semi-sideways stepback and fallaway jump shots are in spite of their serious shortcomings a lot better than anything that the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot has to offer.

Semi-sideways jump shots are poor at strongside pull-up jumpshooting largely because their square-in-the-air jump would require an approximate 120 degrees midair rotation to set up the semi-sideways shooting position off a strongside move or run-up. Such a square-in-the-air jump, most of which would actually end up rotating back against the momentum of the strongside move or run-up, is all but physically impossible. By comparison, the midair rotation necessary to square up whole-body jump shots off strongside moves or run-ups usually ranges from 20 to 30 degrees. The semi-sideways jump shot is therefore mostly limited to weakside pull-ups, stepbacks and fallaways or straight-ahead pull-ups.

Lack of strongside pull-up capability is a troublesome mark against the semi-sideways jump shot. Without strongside square-in-the-air athleticism and strongside built-in body wedge protection, weakside oriented semi-sideways jumpshooters avoid the middle of the defense. As a consequence, semi-sideways jumpshooters seldom attack the defense with the jump shot. That's not a fatal jumpshooting flaw. For example, weakside jump shots are popular with primary scorers because the weakside shooting grip is easy to set up, which is conducive to shooting the basketball and sometimes shooting it well. Take note, however, that weakside primary scorers are primarily iso-scorers who are neither passing threats nor disruptors of the defense. The bottom line is that without strongside capability, weakside oriented semi-sideways jumpshooters are left with one half of a jumpshooting game. To make matters worse, based on athleticism, power and protection criteria, it is the wrong half.