

A NEWFOUND PURPOSE OF THE JUMP SHOT: AS IMPORTANT AS ELEVATION

By Robert Tilitz

Since its invention, basketball has steadily grown in popularity with players and fans. No doubt advances in media technology have been a big factor. But improvements in the skills of the game have also played a major role in basketball's growth. Most importantly, the introduction of the jump shot, far and away the most important skill in basketball, raised the athleticism and consequently the appeal of the game to higher and higher levels.

The jump shot makes it possible to create opportunities to shoot the basketball that are advantageous to the jumpshooter and to his or her team. When rising above the defense, the jump shot's ability to create opportunities to shoot is on full display. But rising above the defense is not the full story when it comes to the shot creation ability of the jump shot.

So, besides the elevation of the release, what else about the jump shot is indispensable to creating opportunities to shoot? What other purpose does the jump shot serve? My whole-body jump shot theory provides the definitive answer. In fact, there are no other answers to consider, right or wrong, because there are no individuals or entities in basketball other than the whole-body jump shot theory, a basketball outsider no less, that have raised the question.

As the details and the importance of the answer will make clear, the situation reeks of ignorance and neglect with respect to knowledge of the jump shot. Actually, jump shot ignorance and neglect extend beyond the specific question about jump shot purpose and apply to all aspects of the jump shot. That's on the NBA and the rest of basketball's powers that be.

Please excuse a brief delay of the newfound jump shot purpose answer in order to run through a few of the very much related profound consequences of pervasive jump shot ignorance and neglect. A bit of background paves the way. As the jump shot emerged, growing from rare to required in the 1960s and the 1970s, the way that offense was played in basketball evolved from slow and calculated to fast and spontaneous. Judging by participation and viewing, the players and the fans loved the quantitative increase and the qualitative improvement of the faster action.

In the 21st century, however, basketball's athleticism and action have slowed down to a certain extent. The jump shot gradually grew less common relative to basketball's growth. There were simply not enough good to great jumpshooters to meet the demand.

Rookies entering the NBA, for example, frequently struggle on offense when awesome NBA defenders shut down the easy scoring opportunities available at lower levels of competition. Most of the time, the rookies' jump shots are to blame. Off-seasons are dedicated to jump shot improvement. But significant progress seldom occurs. What is the cause of the problem? Many coaches point to the players. The players are left to their own devices. It's a mess.

With TV ratings trending downward, the prevailing jump shot model, which the whole-body jump theory calls the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot, has largely escaped scrutiny. Instead, the NBA and organized basketball worldwide have effectively turned to a pre-existing rule for salvation. Although it was not originally intended to be a revolutionary addition to the game, the 1979-80 enacted 3-point shot became the new tactical focal point of so-called modern basketball. Still, there remains the question of whether the players and the fans will buy in?

JUMP SHOT PURPOSE

Emphasis on the 3-point shot was intended to stir up the excitement that the old-fashioned two-hand set shot lacked and that the jump shot generated. With little more to work with than added scoreboard value, basketball's 3-point rebrand has also often involved some fast talking. In particular, basketball has attempted to sell the 3-point shot as a jump shot.

That's a tough sell when the standing-start one-handed shot with off-hand shooting grip securement has become the standard 3-point shot. On the plus side, the standing-start one-handed shot is easy to teach and easy to learn. That's because the athletic requirements of the standing-start one-handed shot are not much greater than those of a free throw. But a long-range jump shot it is not. Legitimate standing-start jumpshooters who can take it out to twenty feet or more are few and far between. Of those, the vote here goes to David Thompson as the best.

Those who define the standing-start one-handed 3-point shot as jump shot are dealing in delusion and/or deception. Their misleading argument is that the standing-start 3-point shot, or what the whole-body jump shot theory calls a semi-jump shot, is a true jump shot because it gets in the air. The response here is that the thrust of the upward effort that goes into shooting the long-range standing-start 3-point shot is what gets it airborne, not a jump.

Despite the hype calling 3-point shooting skills elite and the misinformation calling the standing-start 3-point shot a jump shot, significant rumblings of discontent have mounted over the years. In a 2015 interview, Walt "Clyde" Frazier called the 3-point shot both a blessing that entertained and a curse that undermined fundamentals, especially the mid-range pull-up jump shot and inside passing. In 2025 commentary, Shaquille O'Neal went further, stating that the 3-point revolution has ruined the game by making it boring and repetitive.

Frazier and O'Neal expressed their opinions. The following is fact. The antidote to the dull sameness of the 3-point game decried by Shaq is the jump shot. Take as a test case the 3-point revolution itself. One player and only one player consistently injects excitement into the 3-point game. That player is Stephen Curry. What sets Curry apart from the multitude of 3-point specialists is that his repertoire vastly exceeds the long-range standing-start one-handed semi-jump shot. Although he can shoot the long-range standing-start semi-jump shot as well as anybody, it is Curry's various types of off-the-dribble long-range pull-up jump shots, such as strongside, weakside, forward, lateral, straight-up and falling away, that fascinate the fans.

Which returns the discussion to the newfound purpose of the jump shot. Along with the elevation of the release, the shot creation ability of the jump shot depends on the jump of the jump shot harnessing the horizontal momentum of the preceding move or run-up by redirecting it upward. As a result, jumpshooters can virtually instantly pull up off moves and run-ups that create space to shoot. Even big-time jumpers benefit as much and sometimes more from the instant pull-up enabled by the jump of the jump shot as they do from its verticality.

The moral of the story is that at present there is important stuff still not widely understood about the jump shot. That stuff includes jump shot types, techniques and tactics. The whole-body jump shot theory can fill those gaps. What needs to go is slavish devotion to the failed elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot, which denies access to all the really good stuff that the jump shot can do.