

THE WHOLE-BODY REACHUP JUMP SHOT: THE LESS REACHBACK, THE BETTER

By Robert Tilitz

The reachup jump shot is easy to execute but fragile. The easy part is the reachup release. The fragile part is the reachup release. The reachup release is easy because its reliance on heavy brushing hand action neatly tops off its on-the-rise, fully-extended reachup. The reachup release is fragile because of the disruptive tendency to reachback to supplement the hand action release. There are ways to supplement the hand action release, but a reachback is not one of them.

There are two different versions of the reachup jump shot. The differences materialize during the straight up, close to the body arm action that raises the basketball. The classic reachup jump shot, see Kawhi Leonard, raises the basketball straight up to a fully-extended reachup shooting position/set point before locating the shooting hand underneath the basketball. The early-under reachup jump shot, see Jalen Brunson, locates the shooting hand underneath the basketball during the reachup ascent to a fully-extended reachup release point.

The classic and the early-under reachup jump shots' different arm action setups for the release result in different advantages and disadvantages. The classic's straight-up, one-motion, on-the-rise raising arm action to the shooting position adds supplemental power by way of its upward momentum to the jump and, through a merge, to the release. The full upward extension also protects the release by elevating it to the max. However, the maximum rollup of the shooting shoulder largely precludes its forward rotation for release and square-in-the-air power.

The early-under's raising arm action without pause locates the shooting hand underneath the basketball during the reachup ascent. The result is an upwardly dynamic shooting position that transforms into a straightstroke-push release topped off by heavy brushing hand action. The straightstroke-push adds power for the release and, through its forward rotation of the shooting shoulder that powers square-in-the-air rotation, lateral and fallaway capabilities. Brunson shifts from classic reachup mode to early-under reachup mode when he needs more power for long-range 3-point shots or square-in-the-air rotatability for strongside lateral pull-up jump shots. However, the early-under reachup does sacrifice some vertical extension.

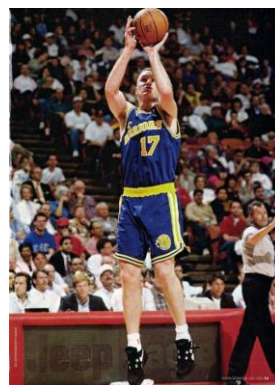
The reachup jump shot is a versatile offensive weapon. Alex English killed with his reachup at shallow mid-range. Patrick Ewing used his reachup to shoot over defenders on the inside. Chris Mullin seamlessly added long-range 3-point capability to his masterful mid-range reachup pull-up game. Richard Hamilton attacked the defense with his reachup at mid-range.



Alex English



Patrick Ewing



Chris Mullin



Richard Hamilton

THE WHOLE-BODY REACHUP JUMP SHOT

Dwyane Wade, Russell Westbrook, and James Harden are good but not great reachup jumpshooters. Wade's reachup jump shot often includes a reachback that disrupts the release and costs control. Westbrook occasionally shoots a very nice reachup pull-up jump shot, but he is prone to exceeding the reachup jump shot's built-in long-range and lateral limitations, leading to disruption of the reachup release. While Harden shoots plenty of 3-point reachup semi-jump shots and shoots them well, he is a lot less likely to pull up with an athletically dynamic, fully extended reachup jump shot off his drives, preferring to drive all the way to the basket.



Dwyane Wade

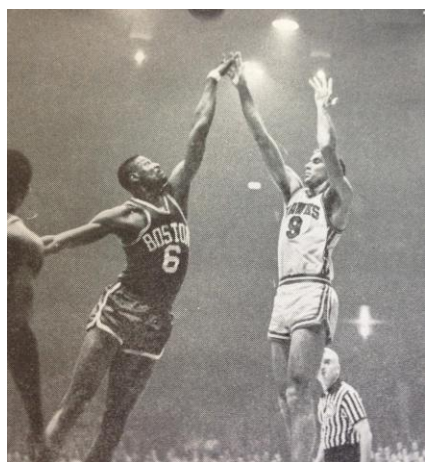


Russell Westbrook



James Harden

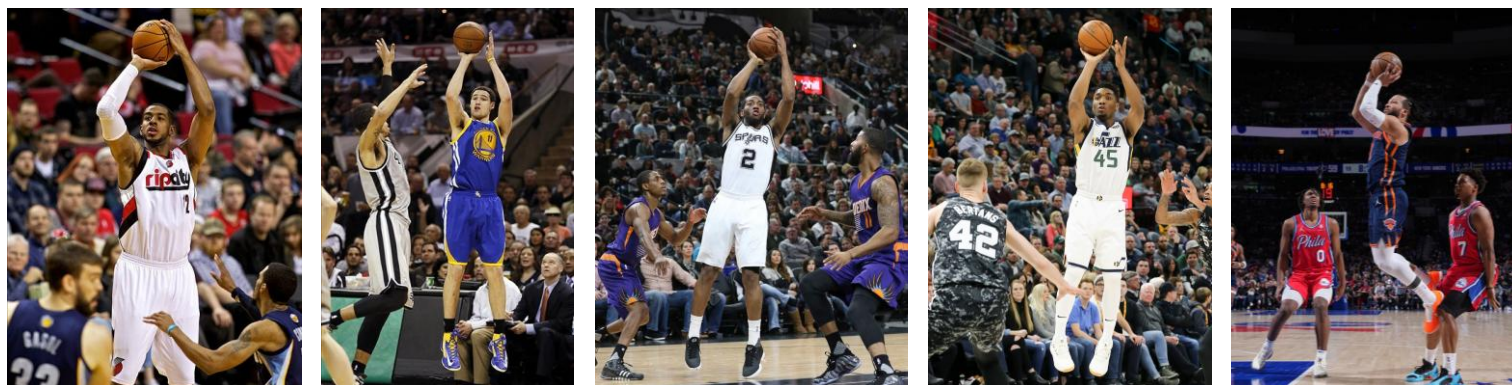
Earlier reachup jumpshooters were every bit as great as those that followed. Bob Pettit used his length, athleticism and fully extended reachup release to shoot over any and every defender. Calvin Murphy used his strength, quickness and fully extended reachup release to excel from mid-range. Louie Dampier and Fred Brown were effective at mid-range, but both were better known for their long-range shooting, which relied on whole-body supplementary power production techniques such as shooting on the rise and a one motion release. A significant number of reachup jumpshooters never master its long-range skillset.



From left, Bob Pettit, Calvin Murphy, Louie Dampier and Freddie Brown

THE WHOLE-BODY REACHUP JUMP SHOT

LaMarcus Aldridge, Klay Thompson, Kawhi Leonard, Donovan Mitchell and Jalen Brunson are present-day elite reachup jumpshooters. The last four have long-range capabilities because of their mastery of the reachup jump shot's supplementary power production techniques. Aldridge usually shot a variety of pull-up and fallaway reachup jump shots from within a two or three step radius of his preferred starting points at shallow and medium mid-range. But Aldridge was an infrequent 3-point shooter, which was probably because he never mastered the reachup jump shot's supplementary power production techniques. Thompson is dynamic and deadly with the reachup jump shot from all distances. Yet Thompson was for a time the third offensive option behind two superstar teammates, which led him to keep a good deal of his own offense under wraps. Leonard shoots the reachup jump shot with perfect form from all distances. But because he often faces defenses stacked against the to-the-basket pull-up moves that best suit the reachup jump shot, Leonard should counter by adding the strongside-laterally-oriented whole-body reachback jump shot to his offensive repertoire. Mitchell combines strongside reachup pull-up jump shots with relentless stop-and-go strongside drives for overpowering strongside shoot-drive offensive balance. Still, if Mitchell added jump shot diversity with the whole-body reachback jump shot, his strongside options would expand to include the mid-range lateral fallaway at moderate and extreme angles, which is basketball's #1 crunchtime weapon, and post-up fallaways. Brunson builds his point guard game around the strongside reachup pull-up jump shot and strongside stop-and-go drives while using the body-wedge protection of both as a battering ram to help create space to shoot and to pass. Brunson mixes the classic and the early-under reachup techniques to add a degree of unstoppable jump shot diversity to his game.



L to R, LaMarcus Aldridge, Klay Thompson, Kawhi Leonard, Donovan Mitchell, Jalen Brunson

In the WNBA, Elena Delle Donne shoots an outstanding reachup jump shot from short-, mid- and long-range. Just like Aldridge, Thompson, Leonard, Mitchell and Brunson, Delle Donne maintains her form by minimizing the reachback of the reachup jump shot. And just like Aldridge, Thompson, Leonard, Mitchell and Brunson, Delle Donne dominates the opposition at all distances with the reachup jump shot.

Based on the roster of reachup jumpshooters listed in this article, there can be no doubt that they are among the best in the history of basketball. Nevertheless, as a jump shot type, meaning a category of jump shot with a distinct technique, the reachup jump shot kind of flies under the radar.



Elena Delle Donne

THE WHOLE-BODY REACHUP JUMP SHOT

The whole-body jump shot theory's two primary full-fledged shooting shoulder-centric jump shots, the elbow-out and the reachback, are both better known than the reachup, although not for objective analytical reasons. In the not too distant past when the proscription against it was not as strong as it is today, the whole-body elbow-out jump shot counted among its number many of the greatest jumpshooters of all time. Nowadays, however, the whole-body elbow-out jump shot is a target of disdain and derision. Its critics always call it "chicken wing." Based on its power alone, "eagle wing" would be more like it. Despite the criticism a few, such as Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Jalen Williams, slip through and excel.

The whole-body reachback jump shot has been spared the insults directed at the whole-body elbow-out jump shot. That is probably because of the whole-body reachback jump shot's Jerry West to Michael Jordan to Kobe Bryant royal lineage. But besides standing back in awe of the efficiency and acrobatic beauty of the whole-body reachback jump shot, the usual suspects have little to nothing to say of substance concerning its techniques and offensive dominance, in particular its crunchtime dominance. Explain it? Teach it? Forget about it.

The whole-body reachup jump shot has stepped into the quality jump shot void created by the predominance of the widely supported but almost all wrong elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot to the extent that most of the best jumpshooters in the NBA today are reachup jumpshooters. That is not because the whole-body reachup jump shot is being explained and taught. The whole-body jump shot theory could do that, but it has been rejected by basketball's decision makers, despite basically begging for a tryout many times. Instead, the takeover by the whole-body reachup jump shot is likely because of its structural link to the disastrous elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot. The idea is simply that some of the players who are taught the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot and fail with the elbow-in-strokesnap jump shot then in desperation stretch it out reaching upward and effectively invent their own whole-body reachup jump shot.

That is a possible origin story for the whole-body reachup jump shot. Of more importance is developing a reliable fix for its disruptive reachback. At present, all the whole-body jump shot theory has to offer are descriptive how-to directions, nothing surefire. It's a tough nut to crack because the difference between those who do not reach back and those who do could be nothing more than a knack for maintaining the fluid upward flow of the reachup release.



Mikal Bridges

Current casualties of reachup release disruption by way of a reachback include Mikal Bridges and Cooper Flagg. Bridges is a well-rounded 3-and-D wing, whom the New York Knicks gave up five first round draft picks to acquire. But the reachback that disrupts his reachup release renders his jump shot inconsistent. Flagg arrived in the NBA as a certified beast, possessing the size, athleticism and ballhandling skills that seemed to destine him for basketball greatness. That is, provided the caliber of Flagg's jump shot can match that of his physical attributes. So far, Flagg's jump shot has not come close to matching his physical attributes because a reachback is disrupting his reachup release.



Cooper Flagg