

Thompson: Stephen Curry's consistency is key to his shot

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Ask Stephen Curry what's the key to his renowned outside shot, and his answer comes matter-of-factly.

"Shooting it the same way every time," he said recently, between bites of french fries at his favorite Orinda joint.

He makes it sound so simple.

Though relatively small in size -- he's 6-foot-3, 185 pounds -- Curry has become one of the most formidable offensive players in the NBA. His primary weapon is an ability to shoot that will go down in history.

He's already considered the best shooter in the game, the ambassador for reviving a lost art. No doubt, shooting it the same way every time is a chief component of his success.

But what distinguishes the Warriors' star is the great form he's repeating. It's such a sight to behold, reputed shooters are in awe of Curry. It's how he's the record holder for most 3-pointers in a season (272) and owner of the third-highest 3-point percentage in NBA history (43.9 percent).

"Best shooter to ever play," scoring champion Kevin Durant said.

Curry is a walking clinic. Bolstered by intangibles that come with being the son of a great shooter, his stroke is textbook.

Accurate gauge

Curry is unique in his ability to assess a shot. It happens instantaneously: A calculation occurs to tell him what angle to shoot the ball and how much strength he needs to put behind it.

Perhaps these equations are memorized, but the variables -- where he is on the court, how far he is from the basket, how much time he has to get the shot off -- are fluid and require expertise to gauge accurately.

"That's how you know he's putting in the work," said NBA TV analyst Dennis Scott, a formidable 3-point shooter in his day. "All those years at NBA shootarounds and getting up shots. All the shots he has practiced in his life. You can tell the amount of time he's put into developing his shot."

Curry is adept at deciphering how to shoot from every spot on the floor. This skill is best illustrated in his pull-up 3-pointers in transition -- even from the wing, where angles can get tricky -- and when he hits shots with defenders draped all over him.

"You can't defend that," Miami guard Mario Chalmers said after Curry lit up the Heat for 36 points, including eight 3-pointers, last month.

Low lift

Jump shooters use a lot of legs when getting their shot off. Those types, such as former Warriors 3-point record holder Jason Richardson, rise high off the ground and shoot the ball at their peak. This gives them a clearer look at the basket, a rhythm to their mechanics -- and it makes their shot difficult to block.

Curry is no jump shooter. He hardly leaves the hardwood.

This works to his advantage late in games because even when tired, he still can maintain his form. For jump shooters, tired legs usually equal bricks.

Quick gather

What impresses experts most about Curry is his ability to make various kinds of shots. He's not just a spot-up shooter. He can catch-and-shoot. He can shoot off the dribble. He can shoot on the run, in transition, going to his left or his right.

One of the reasons for Curry's versatility as a shooter is his minimalist form. He is supremely efficient from the moment he decides to shoot to the moment the ball is at its release point.

He doesn't have a windup. He doesn't have a hitch. He's doesn't have a weak hand to slow him up. His process is so compact, he is ready to shoot almost instantaneously, even off the dribble.

"I don't think I drilled it, but you have to practice it," said Curry's father, Dell, who shot 40.2 percent from 3-point range in 16 NBA seasons. "Being not the fastest guy, not being able to jump over anybody, you've got to be able to get it off when the defender is on you. And that's getting it off quicker."

High release

The summer between his freshman and sophomore years at Charlotte Christian Academy in North Carolina, Curry's shot was under construction. His father had his eldest son change his release point.

As a kid, Stephen Curry didn't have the strength to shoot traditionally. Like many youngsters, he had to squat, build up momentum, and sort of push the ball from his waist. As he got older, and stronger, his shot didn't change much. He was still chucking from his waist.

"I was a good shooter, but I got my shot blocked a lot," Curry said.

Dell taught Stephen how to shoot from over his head, and he made it second nature by killing him with drill after drill.

It took months for the younger Curry to get it down. He described it as one of the worst summers of his youth. The first few weeks, he couldn't make a shot outside the paint.

"I was at basketball camp and people were like, 'Why is he even here?' " Stephen Curry recalled with a smile. "It looked like I didn't even know how to play. Eventually, it started to click."

Because Curry releases on his way up and not at his apex, his outside shot is incredibly difficult to block.

The higher release point also gives him more arc on his shot. Higher arc, in essence, makes the rim a bigger target.

Elbow in

Like many adolescents, Curry worked on his form by tossing balled-up socks at the ceiling while lying on his back in his room. He focused on the same spot but added a degree of difficulty.

"I didn't want it to hit the ceiling," Curry said. "I practiced getting it as close as possible without touching."

Such drills helped him develop the tactic of keeping his elbow in. Many players are solid shooters with elbows out, including greats such as Reggie Miller and Tim Hardaway. But for Curry, keeping his elbow in continues the theme of efficiency that characterizes his mechanics.

It simplifies his release, which helps him get off the shot faster -- crucial since he is only 6-foot-3. It also gives him control over the ball and helps him aim. This is why he can shoot well from multiple angles and positions, and from deep -- because he can consistently keep the ball on a straight line.

Touch

If there was anything genetically passed down from father to son, helping Stephen Curry become such a dynamic shooter, it's touch.

An intangible rarely explained, it is a vital part of being a good shooter. Touch is the skill of altering the trajectory and speed of the ball. It's the ability to shoot it a bit softer to get it just over the front of the rim. Or to shoot it a little bit harder to make it bank perfectly off the glass. Or to loft it a little bit higher to get over the outstretched arm of a shot blocker. Or giving it a certain spin.

"You can't teach that," Dell Curry said. "That's one of those things where you've either got it or you don't."

Stephen Curry's got it.

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