

HOW BASKETBALL IS EVOLVING INTO A BINARY GAME: DUNK OR BOMB

Recent evolutions on the use of the three point shot in the NBA, Euroleague and the Belgian EuroMillions Basketball League

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Basketball is an ever evolving sport. Since the success of the Golden State Warriors in the NBA over the last seasons, the number of three point attempts are rising exponentially. The Warriors have in Steph Curry and Klay Thompson two of the all-time best shooters who have extended every notion of *shooting range* almost up to half court. Last year, the Houston Rockets with James Harden finished the season taking more threes than two point shots! Whether this crazy amount of threes is a justified shot selection, is pure mathematics. Whenever you hit those shots at a percentage that is *high enough*, it is a good shot because it results in 3 instead of 2 points. And the combination of *more focus on shooting, better coaching* and *transforming player profiles* makes that the percentage of hitting three point shots is going up in the NBA, despite the higher volume in shots. Nowadays, in a regular NBA game, almost all shots are either lay-ups/dunks or either three point shots. Older players like Chris Paul and Dwayne Wade seem to be some of the last survivors of a so-called *mid-range game*. And the fans ... they seem to *LOVE* it, since the NBA keeps expanding its global popularity worldwide.

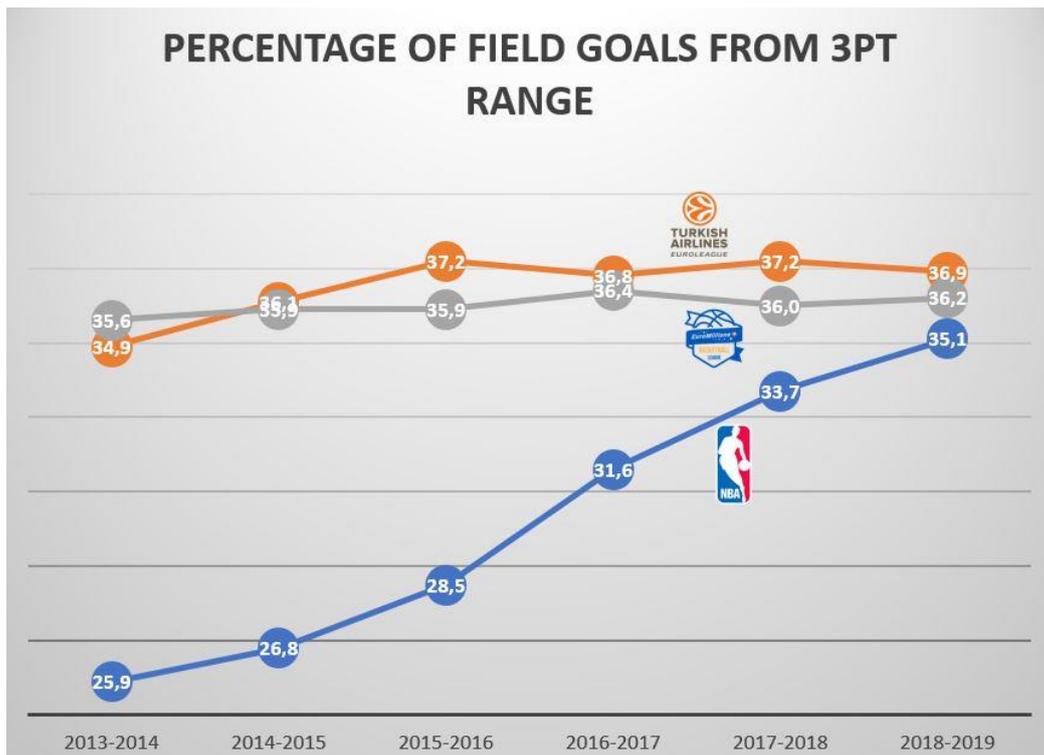
The idea prioritize 'high percentage shots' is not new though. Already in 1993, Vance Walberg (former NBA assistant coach) was founder in 1997 of the *Dribble Drive Motion Offense*. The slogan behind this offensive scheme was "*We like threepointers, but we love lay-ups*". The offense became more popular when John Calipari used it successfully in NCAA basketball.

Recent days, all records concerning threepointers in the NBA are simply exploding. Steph Curry made more threes in two (!) seasons than one of the best all-time shooters – Larry Bird – in his whole career. (*You might want to read that last sentence a a-second time before it sinks in.*) While the 2m13 tall Brooke Lopez was 0/7 from three combined over his first 6 seasons in the NBA, he made already 110 threes (at 37,9%) halfway this current NBA season. And he's far from being the only big man to hit the three. It has become the standard.



*Vance Walberg and me
(Philadelphia 2013)*

Often one sees that trends in the NBA are copied to the domestic basketball leagues worldwide. Therefore, let's have a look to the use of three point shot in our own Belgian EuroMillions Basketball League. While the number of 3pt shots has raised dramatically over the last years in the NBA, the use in the EMBL has been more or less steady at a level which even today is ... slightly higher than the NBA! The following data show the frequency of the three point shot in the NBA, Euroleague and EuroMillions League over the past six seasons:



Percentage of field goals taken behind the arc in the NBA (blue), Euroleague (orange) and Belgium D1 (gray) over recent years

3PT SHOOTING PERCENTAGE			
	NBA	Euroleague	BEL D1
2013-2014	36,0	35,8	34,7
2014-2015	35,0	35,4	35,4
2015-2016	35,4	35,8	37,5
2016-2017	35,8	37,1	35,4
2017-2018	36,2	37,5	36,9
2018-2019	35,3	38,0	34,7

PERCENTAGE FIELD GOALS FROM 3PT			
	NBA	Euroleague	BEL D1
2013-2014	25,9	34,9	35,6
2014-2015	26,8	36,1	35,9
2015-2016	28,5	37,2	35,9
2016-2017	31,6	36,8	36,4
2017-2018	33,7	37,2	36,0
2018-2019	35,1	36,9	36,2

This current '18-'19 season, 36,2% of all field goals in Belgium are taken behind the 3pt arc, while it is 35,1% in the NBA. If we look at the highest level in European basketball, we see the same trend. In this Euroleague competition 36,9% of all shots this season are from three.

And the shooting percentages? Well, they are comparable. In this current season, the success rate behind the arc in Belgium is 34,7%, while 35,3% in the NBA. Here, one has to say that in Belgium, according to the FIBA rules, the three point line is 50 cm closer to the basket than in the NBA. It is no coincidence that we see so many threes from the corner, since the three point line there is 20 cm closer to the basket compared to the top of the key.

If we compare the use of the three point shot between the teams in our league, we see huge differences. Kangoeroes Mechelen is the team that takes proportionally the most three points shots. More than 45% of their shots are from behind the arc. Leuven Bears takes the fewest threes, only 23% of their field goals, which seems justified since they also have the weakest shooting percentage from three (28%).

At first sight, Antwerp Giants seems to find the most optimal balance in their shot selection, since they take +40% of their shots from deep (ranked 3rd) at the 2nd highest percentage of the league (40,7%). The injury of key inside threat Moses Kingsley and the remarkable improvement from 3 of Vanwijn since his arrival in Antwerp are key factors in this shot selection.

The Belgian team with the highest 3pt% is Basic-Fit Brussels (41,7%), while they take proportionally the 3rd least three point shots of all teams.

	TEAM	% FG from 3	3pt%
1	Kangoeroes Mechelen	45,5	34,5
2	Limburg United	43,2	37,4
3	Antwerp Giants	40,5	40,7
4	Liège Basket	37,1	29,5
5	Spirou Charleroi	34,4	30,0
6	Belfius Mons-Hainaut	34,1	37,8
7	Okapi Aalstar	34,0	30,5
8	Basic-Fit Brussels	32,4	41,7
9	Filou Oostende	32,1	29,2
10	Leuven Bears	23,2	28,1

The use and success of the three point shot in the Belgian EuroMillions League (2018-2019)

There is however one big difference between the NBA and our EMBL. In the NBA we find the teams that take proportionally the most threes high in the rankings, while in Belgium Kangoeroes Mechelen and Limburg United are respectively ranked 6th and 7th out of 10 teams. The leader of the championship so far, Filou Oostende, take the 2nd fewest threes of all teams... Of course, the shot selection of a team is only one aspect of a basketball game. Later on this season, I will focus more on other keys in offense and defense to explain the success or failure of the Belgian teams.

Additional read: Clinic notes of my recent clinic on the use of advanced basketball stats as a coach can be found [here](#).

Author



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He has been coaching at the highest level in The Netherlands (BSW Weert), France (Arras women) and Belgium (DBC Houthalen women). As a FIBA-instructor, he shared his knowledge in Qatar, Tunisia, Albania and spent two months in the coaching staff of NCAA1 St-Joseph's Hawks.

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