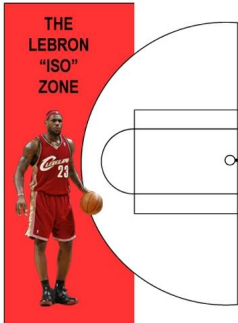


LeBron's Iso's: Good or Bad?

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Tuesday, February 16 2010 9:11 PM - Last Updated Thursday, February 18 2010 11:05 AM

Every time LeBron James sets up in his personal "Le-Iso" zone (see illustration below), Cavalier fans tend to shudder. "Nothing good can come of this," we tend to think.



Our fear goes way back to April 30, 2008, when the Cavaliers were up 87-82 with 1:37 left on the clock in Game 5 of a first-round playoff series against visiting Washington. Cavs head coach Mike Brown called the same play -- the "LeBron iso" -- four times in a row.

First play: LeBron launches a wild three from 27 feet with a hand in his face. Second play: LeBron drives the lane and passes to Boobie Gibson, who also fails to hit a three. Third play: LeBron swings the ball around the horn, and Joe Smith misses a two. Fourth play, with 3.9 seconds left, trailing 88-87 now: LeBron drives the lane trying to draw a foul. No deal. Cavs lose, and the fans go berserk.

Today, however, we find that not only has LeBron come a long way, but so have the Cavs. Thanks to the results of a recent unscientific study, the Le-Iso (dribble-dribble-drive, or dribble-dribble-shoot) appears to be a valuable and relatively efficient part of the team's 2009-2010 offense.

For the uninitiated, the "Le-Iso" is a play that starts with LeBron in possession of the ball above the foul line extended (on the wings) or above the three-point arc, as the illustration shows. For the purpose of this study, we did not include plays where LeBron receives the ball in the mid- to low post. Nor did we include instances when one of the big men (Shaquille O'Neal, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, J.J. Hickson or Anderson Varejao) comes way out to set a high screen. Here, we've defined isos (isolation plays) as limited to occasions when the other four Cavaliers on the court stand around and pretty much just watch what LeBron does with the ball (also known as "LeBron on Five").

Admittedly, this study was undertaken during a portion of the schedule when the Cavaliers were not facing top-notch competition day in and day out, and most of the games were at Quicken Loans Arena, where the Cavs' success is unmatched and where their shooters tend to feel

LeBron's Iso's: Good or Bad?

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Tuesday, February 16 2010 9:11 PM - Last Updated Thursday, February 18 2010 11:05 AM

more comfortable. But the nine-game sample nonetheless was large enough to allow us to come to some valid conclusions about the value of LeBron's "iso" plays.

John Hollinger of ESPN.com provides an "[offensive efficiency](#)" ranking for each of the NBA teams, which is how many points a team scores per 100 possessions. This statistic proves especially helpful in determining the efficiency of LeBron's "iso" possessions compared to the team's overall offensive efficiency.

Here's the verdict: Cavs 109.0 points per 100 possessions; LeBron-Iso 117.3 points per 100 possessions. Which means that those Le-Iso's are *not* a waste of offensive possessions as many fans believe, but are a viable option that the Cavs (and *only* the Cavs, given LeBron's level of excellence) can exercise.

In the recent games we studied (all Cavalier victories), LeBron went into his "iso" mode 75 times. They ranged in frequency from no times against Memphis to 16 times against Oklahoma City. Those 75 possessions resulted in 88 points, for an efficiency rating of 117.3, a full eight points better than the team's overall offensive efficiency. Here's a breakdown by type of play:

| LE-ISOS | No. | Plays | Points | Off. Eff. |
|--------------------|-----|-------|--------|-----------|
| Three-point jacks | 11 | 24 | 218.2 | |
| Drives-and-dishes | 10 | 19 | 190.0 | |
| Drives-and-lay-ups | 18 | 17 | 94.4 | |
| Two-point shots | 35 | 28 | 80.0 | |
| Turnovers | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | |

As you can see, when LeBron throws up a three-point shot from the iso area, he is extremely efficient. As a matter of fact, in the games surveyed, he hit 8 of 11 three-pointers (72.7%). But that, as most devoted basketball fans would realize, doesn't necessarily mean that he should sit back and jack all day, every day. Exercising his high basketball IQ, LeBron usually tries long-range bombs only at the end of a quarter or when the opportunity otherwise presents itself -- that is, when the defender gives him ample space to get off the shot without a hand in his face.

LeBron's Iso's: Good or Bad?

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Tuesday, February 16 2010 9:11 PM - Last Updated Thursday, February 18 2010 11:05 AM

When LeBron drives to the hoop and then dishes off, his teammates have been very cooperative during this stretch of games. They've hit 5 of 8 open threes (62.5%) and 2 of 2 open twos (100%), good for 19 points in 10 attempts.

When LeBron drives to the hoop and attempts a field goal, he's not been near as successful as intuition might have you believe. As a matter of fact, in this sample, he drove to the basket 18 times and did not make a field goal! He was fouled 10 times and converted 17 of 20 free throws (85%). He officially was credited with five field goal attempts, making none, and he committed three turnovers. Thanks to a high free-throw percentage, his offensive efficiency when he went to the hoop was 94.4 -- not bad, but 0-for-5 doesn't help his FG%.

Finally, LeBron is at his worst when he starts to drive and then pulls up and tries a mid-range jumper. Of the 35 chances ranging in distance from 15 to 23 feet, he hit 14 shots for 28 points. And he was not fouled in the act of shooting at all. That's 40 percent shooting, about 11 points off his overall season FG% -- and less than Boobie can stick from three-point range.

Because of LeBron's success when he's dominating possession of the rock, opposing coaches might decide to double-team him more in the playoffs, especially if the Cavs are going into the Le-Iso mode more often than is advisable. The saving grace to having a deeper roster this year is that LeBron has proven that he's smart enough to pass out of the double-teams, and his teammates this year are skillful enough to put their own points on the board. It's no coincidence that LeBron is racking up more assists this year than ever before.

So what can be learned from this exercise? Next time you see the Le-Iso, don't have a conniption. It's all part of the game, and a very valuable part of the Cavaliers' game at that. But remember, too, April 30, 2008: When it comes to the Le-Iso, you probably *can* have too much of a good thing -- especially in the playoffs when those hard double-teams come.