

# Jedi of the jumper could teach LeBron

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The Johnny Appleseed of jump shots is on the road as we speak, spreading his simple gift to the world, even if the world isn't always ready to receive.

Take LeBron James, for instance. A recent discovery has been made about James, the NBA's teen wonder who recently graduated high school. He can't shoot. On mid-range jump shots, James has the deft touch of a grizzly bear trained to repair watches with a mallet.

Man, would the Johnny Appleseed of jump shots -- his name is Tom Nordland -- love to get his hands on LeBron. Explain to him why he shouldn't be cranking the ball so far back, waiting until the top of his jump to release the ball. Show him how he is greatly complicating one of nature's simplest movements.

It pains Nordland to watch most NBA guys shoot. The pure jump shot is a lost art, like cave painting. It's been pushed aside by the power game, lack of good shot coaching, apathy.

Baseball pitchers and hitters continually tinker with their form. Most NBA guys work on their facial hair more than they work on improving their jumper.

A few NBA players have a pure stroke, Nordland says. Dirk Nowitzki, Steve Nash. Doug Christie and Mike Bibby, at times.

But to watch what Chris Webber tries to pass off as a jumper, or to ponder Erick Dampier's release point, is horrifying.

Nordland can help them. It's easy! But they don't hear him.

He worked with Dale Davis some years back. After about eight sessions, Davis went from a 46.5 percent free-throw shooter to 61.8 the next season. That's huge. Davis paid Nordland \$5,000 and stopped returning his calls.

Nordland worked briefly with ex-Stanford star Kate Starbird, and she credited him with re-inventing her faulty J and reviving her pro career.

He worked with Dampier a couple of times: "I helped him a lot. He never thanked me, never called back. He got better, then he slowly lost it."

What drives Nordland crazy is that it's so simple. The jump shot isn't like the golf swing, which he also teaches and which has more moving parts than the Rockettes.

Maybe that's what scares the NBA players away -- they don't understand how it could be so simple.

Kids listen, so Nordland takes his gift to them, one gym at a time. Clinics for coaches, clinics for kids. He's a missionary. He didn't choose the work, it chose him.

Nordland was born with a golden arm. As a kid he practiced shooting, relentlessly, and made himself a prep superstar. In 1957, he scored 27 points per game and led his Minnesota high school team to the state championship.

He was a shy, insecure, skinny kid, but give him a shot from 18, and he was cool and graceful as a hood ornament, because he had the secret of the J.

Then he lost it. He went to Stanford to play ball, mysteriously lost his shot and spent three years on Howie Dallmar's bench.

Nordland played rec ball for another 14 years, with his iffy J, then quit the game.

At age 50, working at Apple Computer Inc. in Cupertino, Nordland wandered onto the company court, took a few shots, couldn't miss. In an instant it all came flooding back. The prodigal jump shot, decades in the wilderness, had come home to papa.

Nordland recognized the old feeling, only this time he broke it down, analyzed it, captured it like a lepidopterist bottling a rare butterfly.

When Apple laid him off four years later, that was Nordland's summons to his life's mission.

He wrote a pamphlet, made a video, started a Web site ([swish22.com](http://swish22.com)) and hit the pavement.

Clueless kids walk into his clinic in the morning, hoisting jump shots like they're trying to throw suitcases onto the top bunk. By lunchtime, they're swishing 15-footers with their eyes closed.

The main deal: Catch the up force (or as Nordland trademarked it, UpForce). The jump, the ball hoist and the release are one smooth upward piece.

There's a Zen component, though Nordland says, "It's more like non- thinking."

Or as he says in his video, "Trust yourself. Let it fly!"

Hey, it worked for Dumbo.

Nordland works nonstop, hyperspeed, because he's 64, and he doesn't have forever to teach the world to shoot. He would still love to work with NBA players, or a team, to give his method a higher visibility. But he's happiest working with children and their coaches.

"I can use basketball shooting as a way to reach kids' heads, teach them life skills," Nordland says. "They're learning hard work, concentration, focus, a different level of self-motivation. If you learn to shoot a jump shot, you learn how to learn."

Kids, hell. What about me? I want to do what Nordland says on his video: "Discover the great shooter within each of you."

The great shooter within me has, over the years, eluded many search-and-rescue parties. He appears in public as often as Elvis. But after a short Nordland clinic, I'm confident that if I can find two good surgeons, plastic and knee, I can be a decent high school player.

Then I'll skip college . . .

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