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Tuesday, August 23rd, 2011 at 6:15 pm | 4 responses

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Sport Science's 'Smart' Basketball

ESPN's Sport Science analyzes players' shots with new data.



by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

The ESPN show [Sport Science](#) seems to have an answer for every athletic situation. Want to know the strength of New England Patriots quarterback Ryan Mallet's arm? He can churn out 65 mph fastballs with a football. Interested to understand the G-forces produced by NASCAR drivers? They can experience up to 3Gs of acceleration on certain turns at Bristol Motor Speedway in Tennessee. Now, Sport Science has turned its study of physics in sports to how a basketball travels from a player's hands to the basket.

In partnering with a manufacturer that produces a motion sensor-equipped basketball called the '9450' – Sport Science wouldn't reveal the name of the manufacturer – Sport Science can now measure a ball's spin rate, its shot trajectory and the velocity by which the ball travels from the shot release to the hoop.

"We refer to it as a 'smart' basketball where it actually knows the difference between dribbling and holding the ball and shooting the ball and when to start calculating that time," said John Brenkus, the host of Sport Science who is Co-CEO of BASE Productions, which produces the program.

The timeline for the 9450 basketball's development goes back several years. Sport Science once tried to incorporate motion sensors into a football, but their internalized effort to do so created a football that was affected too much by the sensors' weight. They turned to an outside vendor for a basketball when the 9450's manufacturer approached them about their basketball's technology. Sport Science has been using the ball for several months.

"[The basketball] is calibrated exactly the same [as a normal one]. The sensors don't affect the weight whatsoever," Brenkus said.

Sport Science noted that [Joe Johnson](#) and [Kevin Love](#) are players who've recently filmed yet-to-be-aired segments with the basketball. Rookies such as Derrick Williams, Kawhi Leonard (seen in the photo above) and Brandon Knight have also used the ball during segments at Sport Science's studios in Burbank, Calif. While

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Brenkus said NBA players are too skilled to consider changing their mechanics based on Sport Science's findings, the collected data is valuable to Brenkus and his staff. Take spin rate, for example.

"The reason why spin rate is important is because it affects the percentage that a ball has of going in once it makes contact with the backboard or the rim," Brenkus said.

The shot trajectory, or launch angle, helps determine how flat or how arched a player's shot is. Shot velocity and even the number of dribbles a basketball withstands can be calculated. The latter calculation isn't one Sport Science has documented; it can eventually be used if the staff wants to discover how efficiently players move with the basketball. (A mentioning of this led Brenkus to tell a story of their segment with [John Wall](#). Brenkus was impressed. "It's difficult to understand that [Wall] is nearly as fast dribbling a basketball as he is running without the basketball," he said.)

Brenkus said the 9450 basketball does what it's supposed to do; in other words, there isn't a lot of room for it to evolve. Where there might be an evolution is by combining the ball with motion-capture technology all over the body to record, in real-time, every movement a player makes. That might be a couple years away.

The 9450 ball could end up as a product sold in retail stores, Brenkus added. Yet that remains a possibility that should be viewed with skepticism. How expensive would that be to produce and, therefore, to sell? And how does the average high school or college player who wants to use the data to improve go about collecting and organizing that information? For now, this 'smart' basketball looks as if its value is best utilized by the Sports Science crew.

Image courtesy of Sport Science

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4 Responses to "Sport Science's 'Smart' Basketball"

[nbc](#) Posted: Aug.23 at 6:25 pm

This manufacturer needs to hit me up with a donation of this ball. I need to doctor my jumper, sh*ts been inconsistent.

[94Fifty CEO](#) Posted: Aug.23 at 8:14 pm

Company is called 94Fifty. It is far more advanced than ESPN let on and is already selling to teams in four continents. <http://www.94fifty.com>.

[Andy](#) Posted: Aug.23 at 8:31 pm

You can find out more about this ball by searching for 94Fifty.

[Kyle Stack](#) Posted: Aug.23 at 8:40 pm

There you go...thanks guys.

Comments

<input type="text" value="Kyle Stack"/>	Name (required)
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