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To what extent have NBA offenses improved since 2000?

Currently, the NBA is amid an unprecedented offensive explosion. Night after night,

players are putting up absurd stat lines that the likes of which have never been seen before. Last

month, on December 27th, Luka Doncic put up 60 points, 21 rebounds, and 10 assists on 73.7%

true shooting, the first-ever 60-20-10 triple-double in NBA history. According to Basketball

Reference’s game score metric, this performance was good for the 5th best game in NBA history up to that point. Six days later, on January 2nd, Luka’s contest was bested by Donovan Mitchell, who put up 71 points, 8 rebounds, and 11 assists on 78.9% true shooting, making it the third-best NBA game of all time. To put Mitchell’s game into perspective, the only two statistically better games are Michael Jordan’s 69-point game and Kobe Bryant’s 81-point game, both legendary performances by arguably two of the greatest players of all time. These remarkable records no longer look untouchable and are a testament to the league’s improvement this past decade alone. The league’s offensive eruption can be explained by two main statistical categories: shooting efficiency metrics and points scored.

Shooting efficiency metrics consist of field goal percentage, free throw percentage, three-

point percentage, three-point attempts, and effective field goal percentage. Field goal percentage

are total shots made divided by attempts, free throws are the same but only free throws, three-point percentage is also the same but only three-pointers, and effective field goal percentage is 0.5 times three-pointers made plus field goals made all divided by field goal attempts (FGA +

0.5\*3PM) / FGA.

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Looking at these graphs, there is a clear increase in shooting efficiency over time except for 3P%, which has stayed relatively stable in the 2000s and 2010s. Usually, when there are more shot attempts, efficiency starts to dwindle. However, looking at these statistics, efficiency has stayed the same. Therefore, it can be argued that 3P% has become more efficient since there has been a significant uptick in 3PA yet 3P% has stayed approximately the same.

The two metrics that encapsulate points scored are points per game and offensive rating. Points per game is the average amount of points a team scores per game and offensive rating is the average amount of points a team scores per 100 possessions.

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As seen in both graphs there has been a steep increase of PPG and ORtg since the beginning of the 21st century. Due to improved shooting efficiency, the scoring capabilities in NBA offenses have soared, and in turn PPG and ORtg have improved as well.

To culminate, NBA offenses have improved significantly since 2000. This can be

attributed to two categories of statistics: shooting efficiency and points scored. Since 2000, the

NBA has become significantly better at shooting, proven by statistics such as FG%, FT%, 3P%,

3PA, and eFG%. This shooting improvement allows teams to be able to space the floor better

since defenders cannot sag off players at the three-point line. The results of improved shooting

offenses can thus be fortified by a steady increase of PPG and oRTG. The correlation between

the three-point revolution, with Steph Curry in 2015-2016, and drastic increases in PPG and

oRTG is no coincidence since every team has adopted that same winning model. Due the

emphasis on shooting, the NBA will continue to become increasingly more efficient as it is a crucial modern NBA skill.