

The Denver Revitalization of Russell Westbrook



With the NBA's regular season drawing to a close, there is finally enough data to assess how players performed throughout the year. While many critics suggested Russell Westbrook was officially "done" after joining Denver—his fifth team in just six seasons—the 9-time All-Star has successfully transformed his style of play.

Despite the challenge of sharing the floor with stars like Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray, who both require specific rhythms to be effective, Westbrook has carved out a vital role. Because Denver is a smaller market and Westbrook often comes off the bench, his comeback has largely flown under the radar, but his evolution deserves recognition.

Note: All data and rankings are current as of April 8, 2025.

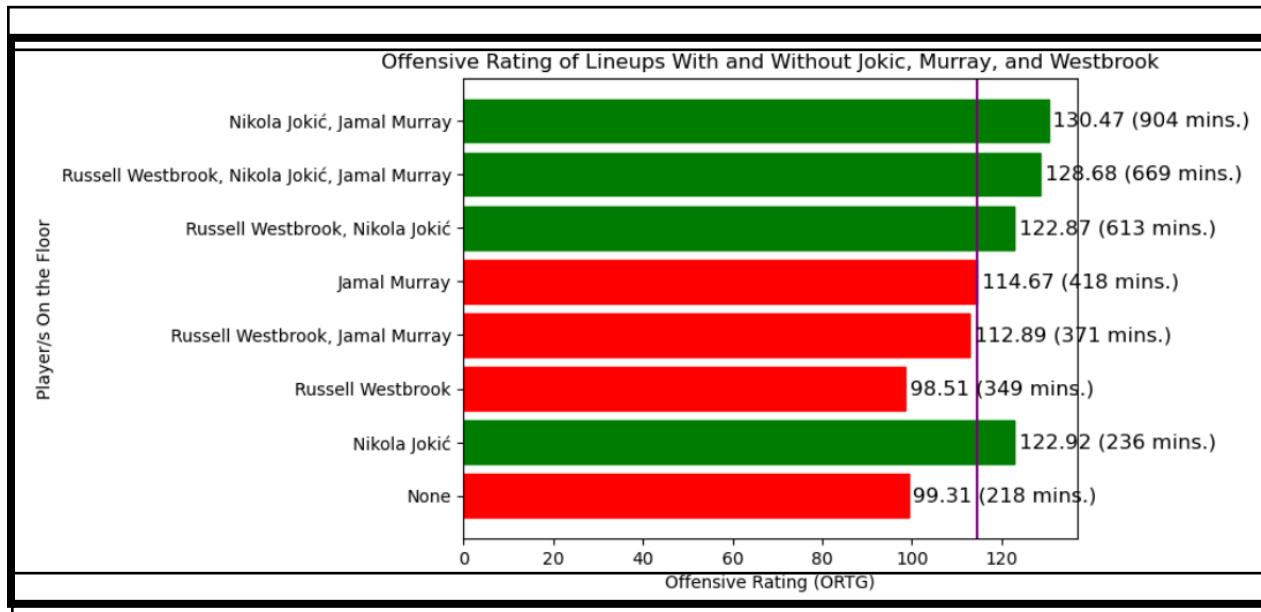
Impact on Team Success

To understand Westbrook's value, we must first look at how the Denver Nuggets perform when he is on the hardwood.

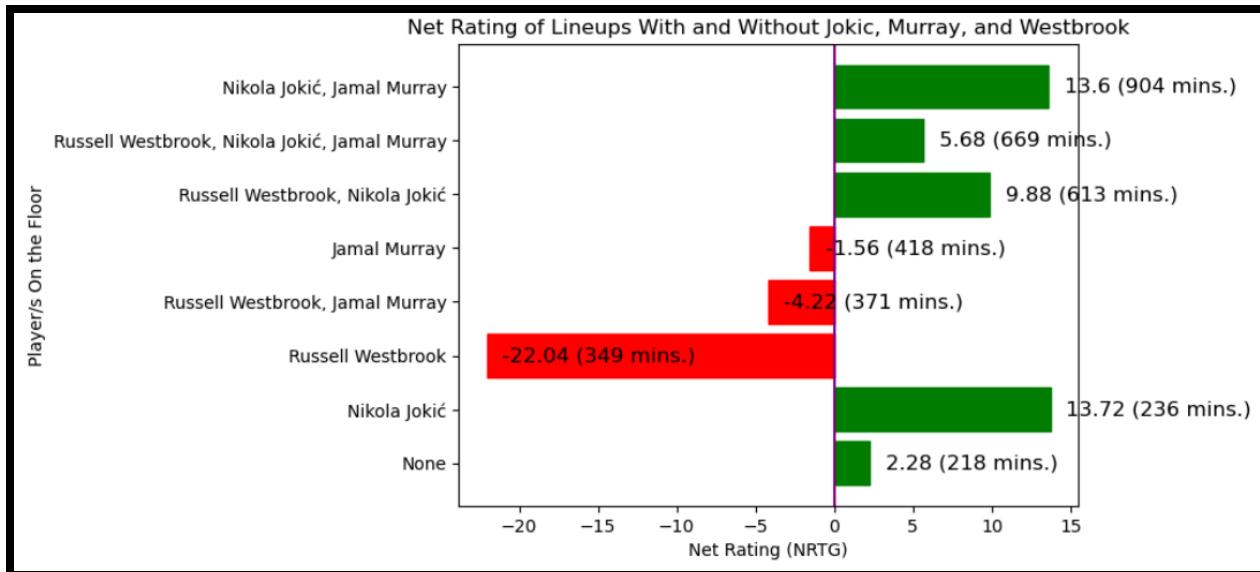
Lineup Performance Analysis

There were initial concerns regarding [how Westbrook would mesh with Jokic and Murray](#). However, the data reveals a positive fit:

- **Multi-Star Synergy:** When Westbrook, Jokic, and Murray play together, the team maintains a high offensive rating of 128.68 (+14 above league average) and a net rating of 5.68.
- **The Jokic Connection:** In lineups featuring only Westbrook and Jokic, the offensive rating is 122.87 with an impressive net rating of 9.88.
- **Above Average:** Most combinations involving Westbrook exceed the league average offensive rating of 114.60.



While lineups featuring Westbrook *without* the other stars show a low offensive rating (98.51), this is largely due to Denver's lack of consistent secondary creators. Historically, the Nuggets have struggled in minutes without Murray or Jokic, posting a [-7.84 net rating](#) over the last five years.



Collective Team Improvements

Westbrook's signature athleticism and playmaking have directly influenced Denver's statistical profile. Below is a comparison of team rankings from last season to this season:

Improvements in rim-shot making

Statistic	2023-2024 Rank	2024-2025 Rank
Rim Shot Making	29th	2nd
Assisted FG%	6th	2nd
Transition Shot Making	25th	4th
High Value Assists Per 75 Possessions	4th	2nd

(via bball-index.com)

Definitions

- *Rim shot making*: Team finishing at the rim relative to expected shot quality.
- *High-value assists*: Assists leading to threes, shots at the rim, and free throws.

These improvements indicate that Westbrook has contributed meaningfully to key areas of Denver's offense. Individually, he is finishing at the rim at a career-best 64.7% on 7.5 attempts per 100 possessions, the second-lowest frequency of his career.

That said, several other factors also influence these jumps. Nikola Jokić remains one of the league's most efficient interior scorers, converting 72.0% of his shots at the rim on 7.9 attempts per 100 possessions (68th percentile among centers). Christian Braun has also taken a major leap in a new starting role, increasing from 20.2 minutes per game and four starts last season to 33.8 minutes and 73 starts this year. He is finishing 71.8% of his rim attempts on 7.7 tries per 100 possessions—nearly matching Jokić.

Additionally, Denver has dramatically increased its pace, rising from 97.43 possessions per game (26th) last season to 100.75 (6th) this year.

Not all frontcourt contributors have improved, however. Aaron Gordon, who takes 47% of his shots at the rim, is having the worst interior-finishing season of his career at 63.6% (28th percentile among power forwards). Despite playing only 47 of 75 games and fewer minutes than last season, his decline has hurt Denver's rim efficiency.

Even with these mixed factors, the addition of Westbrook—an aggressive downhill attacker—has clearly bolstered Denver's interior scoring profile alongside Jokić and Braun.

Why Denver is a Better Fit Than Los Angeles

Jamal Murray represents the type of star Westbrook has often played with: an isolation scorer and pick-and-roll ball handler. Jokić, by contrast, operates as a creation hub. He uses post-ups not only to score but also to draw defenders and create opportunities for others.

Denver's offense is built around constant movement, cutting, spacing, and quick decision-making. Although not a fast-break-heavy team, the Nuggets excel in the half court by methodically breaking down defenses. This environment allows Westbrook to thrive as both a cutter and a secondary playmaker.

His previous stops in Los Angeles presented the opposite conditions. Both the Lakers and Clippers featured multiple ball-dominant stars, limited spacing, and minimal off-ball movement.

With the Lakers, LeBron James and Anthony Davis were below-average three-point shooters, and Westbrook was frequently stationed in the corner despite being an unreliable shooter himself. Defenders sagged off him, clogging driving lanes. According to BBall Index, the 2021–22 Lakers ranked:

- 28th in catch-and-shoot three-point shooting talent
- 26th in catch-and-shoot shot making
- 26th in assisted shooting talent

The 2022–23 Lakers ranked 25th in overall three-point shooting talent and 27th in catch-and-shoot efficiency. In short, Westbrook's fit was poor, and the roster construction around shooting was worse—yet he became the primary scapegoat.

Definitions of Statistics from above paragraph (via bball-index.com):

- **3-Point Shot Making:** Shooting ability given the difficulty of shots based on data for openness, self-creation, and player movement before the shot
- **3-Point Shooting Talent:** Combination of BBall-index's shooting statistics (shot-making, quality, self-creation) that captures 3-point shooting ability in a neutral environment

With the Clippers, his role improved slightly—setting screens, rebounding, and pushing the pace—but their offense still revolved around isolations for Kawhi Leonard, Paul George, and later James Harden. Westbrook again spent long stretches off the ball with defenders ignoring him. Injuries to the stars further limited postseason success.

Despite strong shot-creation rankings, the 2022–23 Clippers were 22nd in overall shot quality and 21st in isolation efficiency.

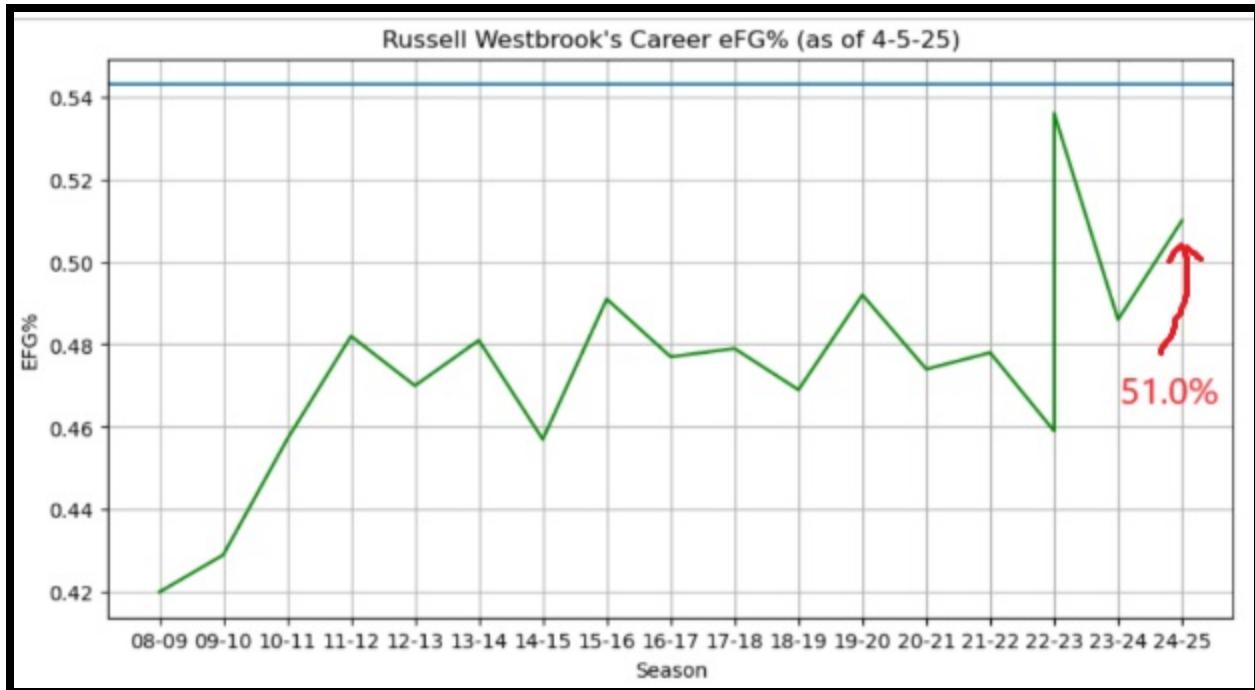
Individual Offensive Profile

Statistically, Westbrook has shown growth compared to his previous season:

Season	Age	Team	Lg	Pos	G	GS	MP	FG	FGA	...	ORB	DRB	TRB	AST	STL	BLK	TOV	PF	PTS	Awards	
13	2021-22	33	LAL	NBA	PG	78	78	34.3	7.0	15.8	...	1.4	6.0	7.4	7.1	1.0	0.3	3.8	3.0	18.5	NaN
15	2022-23	34	LAL	NBA	PG	52	3	28.7	5.8	14.0	...	1.1	5.0	6.2	7.5	1.0	0.4	3.5	2.3	15.9	NaN
16	2022-23	34	LAC	NBA	PG	21	21	30.2	6.1	12.5	...	1.4	3.4	4.9	7.6	1.1	0.5	3.4	2.0	15.8	NaN
17	2023-24	35	LAC	NBA	PG	68	11	22.5	4.4	9.8	...	1.4	3.7	5.0	4.5	1.1	0.3	2.1	1.8	11.1	6MOY-7
18	2024-25	36	DEN	NBA	PG	71	36	28.2	5.0	11.2	...	1.4	3.6	5.0	6.2	1.5	0.5	3.3	2.5	13.3	NaN

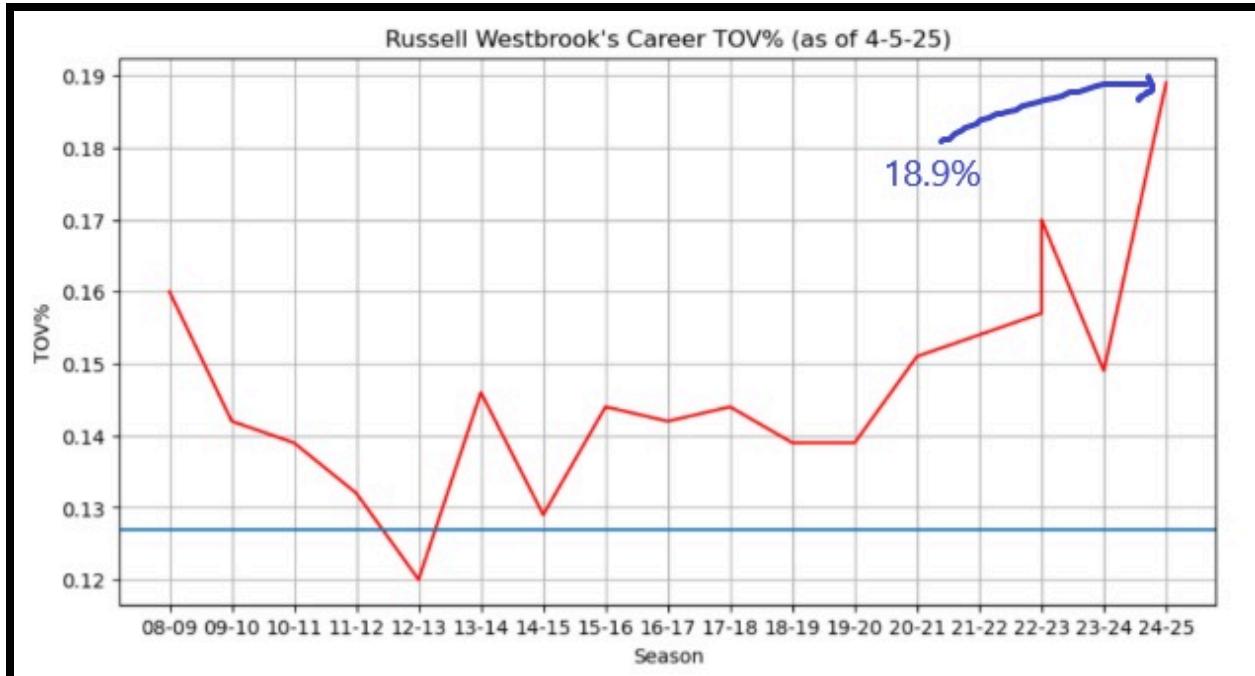
Because Russell Westbrook contributes far more on the offensive end than on defense, this section focuses exclusively on his offensive development and impact with the Denver Nuggets.

Looking first at traditional statistics (as of April 8, 2025), Westbrook has improved in most areas compared to last season. He is averaging 2.2 more points per game and 1.7 more assists, despite attempting only 1.2 additional field goals and playing just 5.7 more minutes per game. However, data from [nbarapm.com](#) shows that his points per 75 possessions have actually declined by 1.1, from 17.9 to 16.8. This suggests that although his box-score numbers have increased, his offensive role has expanded and he is using more possessions with slightly lower efficiency.



In addition, the line chart above indicates that Westbrook is posting the second-best effective field-goal percentage of his career at 51.0%. While this still falls below the current league average of 54.3%, it represents a meaningful improvement for a player long criticized as an “inefficient shot-chucker.”

On the negative side, the chart below shows that Westbrook is recording the highest turnover percentage of his career at 18.9%. This is well above the league average of 12.7%, translating to 4.1 turnovers per 75 possessions.



According to nbarapm.com, Westbrook's creation-adjusted turnover rate (cTOV%) is 13.8% per 75 possessions, placing him in the 2nd percentile among point guards. His scoring turnover percentage (sTOV%) is 8.1%, which ranks in the 19th percentile at his position.

These figures require context. Westbrook has started nearly 50% of Denver's games and regularly plays heavy minutes at the beginning of games. His scoring responsibilities increased substantially late in the season when Jamal Murray missed time with a hamstring injury, including six of Denver's final eight games. Because Westbrook has started more games with the Nuggets than he did in either of his previous two seasons, the rise in his turnover rates can largely be explained by Denver relying on him more heavily than the Lakers or Clippers did.

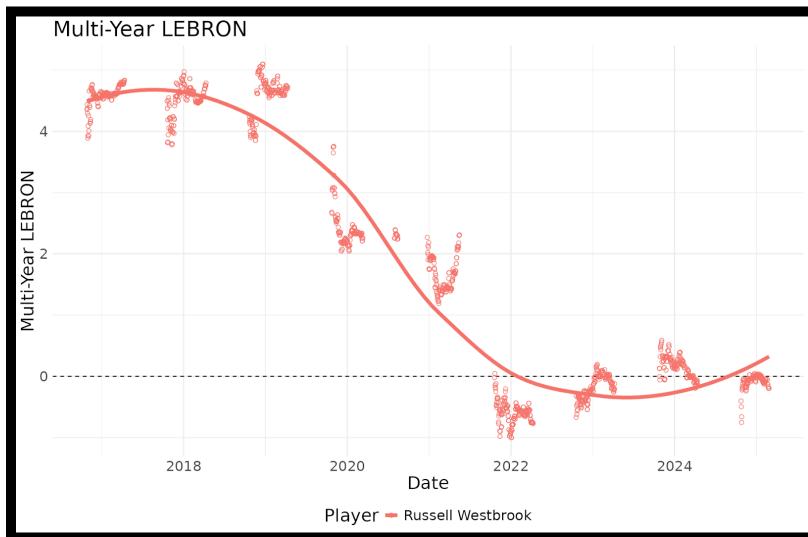
For comparison, his turnover numbers in recent seasons were:

- 2024 Clippers: 3.4 TOV per 75 possessions (14th percentile), 6.7% sTOV% (39th percentile), 11.4% cTOV% (14th percentile)
- 2023 Clippers/Lakers: 4.2 TOV per 75 possessions (10th percentile), 7.6% sTOV% (24th percentile), 12.0% cTOV% (12th percentile)
Note: no statistics available for separate stints
- 2022 Lakers: 4.0 TOV per 75 possessions (15th percentile), 7.4% sTOV% (24th percentile), 12.1% cTOV% (15th percentile)

Definitions:

- **Creation-Adjusted Turnover Rate (*cTOV%*):** the frequency with which a player turns the ball over relative to the difficulty of their offensive workload.
- **Scoring Turnover Percentage (*sTOV%*):** how often a player commits a turnover on scoring possessions, excluding passing.

The graph below also displays Westbrook's LEBRON rating over time. His impact metric dropped into negative territory beginning in 2022, but rebounded into positive values in late 2024 and early 2025—roughly coinciding with his arrival in Denver. This indicates a meaningful improvement in overall impact compared to his seasons with the Lakers and Clippers, particularly notable for a player in his late 30s.



How Does He Compare to Other 35–37 Year Old Players?

Despite widespread belief that his best years are behind him, Westbrook compares favorably to many other shot creators in his age range. The chart from bball-index.com shows the offensive (O-LEBRON) and defensive (D-LEBRON) impact of players aged 35 to 37 whose primary offensive role is classified as “shot creator.” Westbrook is 36 this season, so this range provides a more reliable sample.

Although he is not comparable to LeBron James, who has exceeded all expectations for longevity, Westbrook does not fall into the bottom-left region of the chart—where players with strongly negative offensive and defensive impact cluster—as some fans might assume. In fact, he performs similarly to or better than players such as Carmelo Anthony, Joe Johnson, and

Chauncey Billups during their later seasons, indicating that he still has meaningful productivity left.

Conclusion

While Russell Westbrook is no longer the MVP-level force he once was with the Oklahoma City Thunder, his season in Denver demonstrates that he remains far from finished. He has disproven claims that he is completely past his prime and has continued to provide real value on a team with championship aspirations. Moreover, he has a legitimate opportunity to remove himself from the short list of eight NBA players who won an MVP but never captured a title—this time as a genuine contributor to a contending roster.