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Hot Hand Bonus Opportunity

As we talked about in our first class meeting for the semester, we were introduced to the article about cognitive biases in sports, specifically the "hot hand bias," in the article from the "Scientific American," written by Samuel McNerney. In this article, psychologists Tom Gilovich, Amos Tversky, and Robert Vallone found during their research on the Philadelphia 76ers for the 1980-81 season that each shot a player takes is actually independent of the outcome of the previous shot they took (McNerney 2024). This was extremely surprising to me and I almost didn't want to accept it when I first learned about this. Growing up playing any sport, whether football, baseball, or basketball, I always heard teammates telling me I was "hot," and I'd also say this to teammates. We would say these things because someone could have an off game previously, but after they break that streak and then play extremely well, it seemed to just make sense. To me, it all seems like an internal mental battle within each athlete. Once they start making shots, they become more confident, and in turn start making more shots, whether it's continuous or just throughout the game multiple times. A recent example of this is Tyrese Haliburton's playoff run this past NBA season. More specifically, when he started 3/3 on 3-pointers at the very start of game 7 of the NBA Finals. I was and still am absolutely convinced that the Pacers would have won that game if he didn't suffer such a horrible injury. Although I still feel this way, I may need to change my way of thinking and take into account what I now know as cognitive bias. Who knows what would've happened had he stayed healthy, and if he would've kept shooting the way he did since I now understand that each shot is independent of the previous one. In contrast, an article from the University of Pittsburgh takes the stance that basketball's "hot hand" phenomenon is very real. In their most recent study in 2022, they found that some players do end up getting "hot" consistently and make more shots following two shots made consecutively (Pittwire 2022). On the other hand, when they looked at players as a whole, they found that when a player makes more shots after making consecutive shots, they are likely to conform back to the normal shooting average by missing the next shot (Pittwire 2022). They then follow up by stating that the "hot hand" does exist, but it is rather rare. This analysis makes more sense to me from my past in sport and just how I think, but it also confuses me as to how certain players can get hot and players as a whole don't support this claim by players reverting back to the normal shooting average. All in all, I have always thought the "hot hand" is a reality in sport, and may continue to do so without

realizing it out of habit, but I now hope to stop myself when doing so and really looking in real time during games at if this "hot hand bias" is a reality, or completely flawed and biased.

Works Cited

“Basketball’s ‘Hot Hand’ Phenomenon Is Real, Says This Pitt Computer Scientist.” *University of Pittsburgh*, 23 Mar. 2022,
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