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### Player Comparison – Jason Kidd and Russell Westbrook

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Both point guards have California roots and left Pac-10 schools following their sophomore seasons. Both can carve up defenses with their uncanny ability to find the open man. But the similarities between Dallas' Jason Kidd and Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook seemingly end there.

Hoping his 17th season in the league continues with a Western Conference finals victory over the Thunder, Kidd will no doubt stick with the pass-first mentality that has made him so successful. Westbrook, on the other hand, might want to think about employing more of Kidd's approach in a postseason where he's been criticized for shooting too much if OKC is going to move onto the NBA finals.

Drafted out of Cal by the Mavericks when Westbrook was just five years old, the 38-year-old Kidd again ranked among the league's best in assists this season with 8.2 per game – just .017 more than Westbrook, the former UCLA star.

Going head-to-head in three matchups this season, Kidd got the upper hand, winning twice in Oklahoma City while dropping a Dirk Nowitzki-less matchup in Big D. And while Westbrook's numbers on the surface look impressive – 14.3 points and 8.7 assists in those three games compared to Kidd's 6.0 and 9.7 – a deeper analysis reinforces reputation.

J-Kidd prefers to swing the ball and find the open man while Westbrook likes to penetrate and use his athleticism to attack the rim. You don't need next-generation player tracking to tell you that, but you do

need it to tabulate the quantifiable evidence: The Mavs PG dribbled the ball an average of 3.5 times in his 296 touches against OKC compared to an average of 5.2 dribbles for the Thunder's third-year point guard in those matchups.

While Westbrook "touched" the ball far fewer times (78.3) than Kidd (98.7) in those three games, he actually held the ball an average of 4.8 seconds per touch, 1.5 more than the Mavs veteran.

For all that time of possession, the strong defensive backcourt of Kidd, Jason Terry and DeShawn Stevenson did a stalwart job of limiting Westbrook in finishing, cutting his points per touch down by a third (to .18) of what it was (.27) in the 47 total games that were tracked during the season. Similarly, Westbrook's scoring average in those three games (14.3) was 7.6 points off his average (21.9) for the season.

Kidd was also inefficient scoring-wise against the Thunder, scoring .06 points per touch – .02 fewer than his season average in 47 tracked contests – and shooting 23.3 percent, including 4 of 20 from 3-point range. But that's not his game. When Nowitzki was sidelined with a sprained right knee in the Jan. 6 matchup and the team needed everyone to pick up the scoring load, Kidd stayed true to form, taking just seven shots in a 99-95 loss and going scoreless despite touching the ball 98 times.

Westbrook, on the other hand, was the league's second-highest scoring point guard behind MVP Derrick Rose and saw a giant green light when two-time reigning scoring champ Kevin Durant was sidelined for four games with an injury. Westbrook shot 22.5 times per game in those contests – 5.6 more than his season average.

Westbrook's penchant to shoot has never been more evident, or criticized, than during this postseason. And for good reason. He has a team-high 243 field-goal attempts (three more than Durant) and the Thunder are 2-4 when he hoists more than 20 shots. Yet OKC improved to 6-0 when he takes 20 shots or fewer with its 105-90 Game 7 victory over Memphis on Sunday.

Even though he went just 4 of 12 from the field, Westbrook more than offset a subpar shooting afternoon by deferring to Durant and finishing with 14 points, a playoff career-high 14 assists and 10 boards.

Thunder coach Scott Brooks has tried to deflect the "He shoots too much" criticism aimed at his point guard in the opening two rounds, but Oklahoma City will likely need more Game 7-type efforts from Westbrook if they're going to represent the West in the finals.

That could be a challenge against a Mavs team that has held Portland and the Lakers to 88.0 points per game on 44.0 percent shooting in the postseason. But if the Thunder can get past Kidd and the Mavs, it will likely be the result of a real changing of the guard... and his name is Westbrook.