Alfie Sees The 3

Lights senior Alfie Miller is a deadly 3-point shooter

By George Ferguson
February 5, 2014

To a basketball fan, to the casual observer, the 3-point shot happens in the blink of an eye. From the time a player lets go of the ball, to the time it reaches its destination, it looks like warp speed.

But Montana State University-Northern senior Alfie Miller sees and feels things much differently every time he lets go of one of his patented long-range jumpers. What happens in the blink of an eye for most of us, is a total process for the pure shooter from Seattle.

Miller, who transferred to Northern two years ago from Shoreline Community College has made 167 triples in his time with the Lights. And with every single one of them, he goes through the same process. Because that’s what being a great shooter is all about, repetition. Doing the same thing over, and over, and over again.

Taking and making a three might happen in the blink of an eye, but for Miller, there’s a whole lot more going on.

“When I’m open, and I know I’m going to take the shot, the first thing I do is try to make sure my legs are under me,” the 6-0 guard, who is currently Mount Rainier High School’s all-time leading scorer said. “To be a good shooter, you have to use your legs. I have to take off-balance shots sometimes, but the big thing is, I want to make sure I have good balance, and make sure my legs are set. From there, I just make sure I step into the shot. Again, make sure I use my legs. From that point on, I just let muscle memory take over. I just want to make sure my form is the exact same every time.”

Form is something Miller has worked doggedly at, basically from the first time he held a basketball. And he says it’s that work and making sure to keep the same form which leads to being a consistent shooter. That’s probably why Miller idolizes one of the most consistent 3-point shooters to ever play in the NBA, current Brooklyn Net Ray Allen. He also looks up to current Golden State sharp-shooter Steph Curry, but it was the time he spent, on his own, honing his skills as a shooter, as well as the help from his high school basketball coach, which turned Miller into not just a consistent 3-point shooter, but a deadly one.

“From the time I was young, whether it was just going to the park, or playing with my friends, I always worked on my shot,” Miller said. “I would shoot for hours by myself. And for a long time now, my form has been the same. My high school coach, Brian Johnson, he helped me a lot. He was at Seattle U. He worked with me a lot. Because of my height, he really helped me learn how to get set, and how to get shots off against more athletic and taller guys. He could always do that when he played, and he helped me a lot when I was coming up.
“And once you get the mechanics down, once you find that form, you just keep practicing it,” he continued. 
“Once I found my form, I knew every time I went to the gym, or picked up a ball, my shot was going to 
look the same. It’s all about practicing your shot. It’s all about reps.”

And the reps have paid off. Miller lit up the junior college ranks in Washington, before taking a year off from 
basketball. But once he arrived at Northern, the form he brought with him would become a weapon which 
helped lead the Lights to a third straight appearance in the NAIA national tournament. In his junior season, 
Miller came off the bench to average 11 points per game. He made 85 threes and shot an outstanding 44 
percent from beyond the arc.

But Miller also knew he could be even better. He worked tirelessly in the offseason, not just on his shot, but 
on his body. He lost weight and has become an even better player this season. So far in 2013-14, Miller 
leads the Lights with a 15 points per game average. He’s shooting 46 percent from beyond the arc, and 
with six games left in the Frontier Conference season, he’s already made 72 bombs, including 19 games in 
which he’s knocked in three or more. His career-best game is six made treys, which he did twice last 
season and has done once this year.

“Coming here last year, after taking a year off, I wasn’t sure I could even play at a four-year college,” 
Miller said. “But I had a pretty good season. But this summer, I worked a lot harder to get ready for my 
senior year. I wanted to be in better shape, and I worked really hard at that.

“Losing some weight has been a big help,” he added. “It’s helped me to get my shot off quicker, I’m more 
mobile now, and I can lose defenders more often. I can shoot off the catch quicker, and I think I can score 
in different ways. Now, defenses have to know I can shoot and score in multiple ways. I don’t think they 
can just guard me as a set shooter anymore.”

Indeed. Miller is playing and shooting at a high level. Hard work and repetition on his already accurate 3-
point shot got him to this point. But another factor, another little thing that goes into every shot is also 
responsible for the kind of shooter Miller is. That little thing is confidence. When Miller launches one of his 
arching 3-point shots, whether it actually goes in or not, at the moment of release, he believes in it, over, 
and over, and over again.

“For a shooter, confidence is a big thing,” he said. “At that moment, when you’re about to take the shot, 
you can’t second guess yourself.

“Every time I take a three, I think it’s going in,” he continued. “There are times when you just know it felt 
wrong and something was off, but pretty much, when I let it go, I think it’s going in. I just have that 
confidence and belief in myself.”

And why not have that belief? In his brief time at MSU-N, Miller has proven to be one of the best 3-point 
shooters in the Frontier. He’s proven that his name belongs alongside some of the great Northern 3-point 
shooters in recent history, players like Larry Morinia, Shaun Tatarka, Delvaughn Tinned, Chris Johnson and 
Travis Noble, guys who, like Miller, relentlessly worked to develop the 3-point shot as an ultimate weapon. 
Those guys, with the help of the 3-pointer, forever etched their names into Northern lore. And Miller is 
doing the same now.

“It’s humbling when you mention some of the guys who have played here before me,” Miller said. “There 
have been a lot of great shooters in this program. So it feels good to know I’ve been able to come here and 
play at this level too. Coach Huse gave me the opportunity, and I feel like I’ve made the most of it so far.

“To do the things we’ve been able to do here as a team,” he continued. “And to do some of the things I’ve 
been able to do, it’s a great accomplishment.”
Lance Wasson is the greatest 3-point shooter to ever wear a Northern uniform. He holds MSU-N records for career threes (259), threes in a season (104) and threes in a single game (12). Since Wasson’s great career in the early 1990s, the Lights have had their share of outstanding long-range bombers. And though hours of repeating the same shot, over, and over, and over again, Alfie Miller has joined that group.

For the last two winter’s, the air might have been cold outside the Armory Gymnasium, but time and time again, Miller has set the nets on the goals inside the Armory ablaze. And he does it in the blink of an eye. But for a pure shooter like Miller, all those threes are the culmination of a process which has taken a lifetime to perfect.

“You just have to practice your form, and keep practicing it until you’re consistent,” Miller said. “That’s what I’ve always wanted to be … a consistent shooter. Coach Huse tells us a saying by Bruce Lee, ‘I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks one time, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.’ That’s shooting. That’s the way you get consistent.”

Because of his dedication to his shooting, when Alfie Miller sees the three-ball, he’s definitely a man to be feared.