Lobo basketball gets some tech support

By Jeremy Fowler
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His name is Noah and you won't find him on the Lobos' basketball roster.

This Noah has the perfect jump shot. And he isn't afraid to tell you.

In fact, that's his job.

The Noah Select is an innovative shooting machine that is expected to help rescue the University of New Mexico men's basketball team from its shooting woes of last season.

University of New Mexico men's basketball player Chad Toppert shoots free throws monitored by the Noah Select machine at the UNM basketball facility. The new equipment measures a player's arc on his shot and consistency in shooting form. (Erin Fredrichs/Tribune)

Noah from the the Old Testament once built the perfect ark for survival.

This Noah was resurrected in the form of a laptop to construct basketball arcs for the curve-shooting impaired. For a price.

You can have Noah for $5,000.

The Lobos - who finished last year's conference season seventh out of nine teams in 3-point field-goal percentage - forked over the dough this offseason to buy the technology that documents shooting angles better than any coach can.

This all-seeing computer can spew out the arc degree of any shot and

the depth of where it will land. It determines what should be done to change the arc and improve shooting percentages.

And it talks, too, telling the shooter the degree of his/her shot after every attempt.

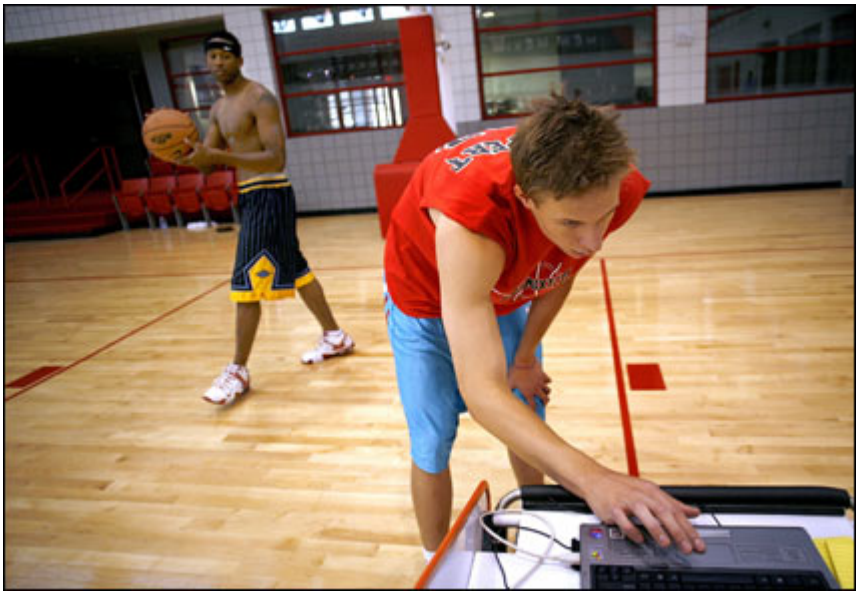
Lobos guard Chad Toppert said the machine will better UNM's 33-percent performance from beyond the arc during last season's 16-game conference season, 35 percent for the entire season.

UNM also ranked eighth out of nine teams in the Mountain West in free-throw percentage at 65 percent.

"This will definitely help our consistency and our shooting memory," said Toppert, who's used the machine all summer. "We were lower than where we should have been at last year."

UNM men's assistant Brad Soucie stumbled on Noah Select when sitting in on a tutorial for the women's team on how it works.

"He came back and said, `This could definitely help us,' " UNM men's coach Ritchie McKay said. "Now I've seen it at camps, I know what it does and it's going to be valuable for us."



Lobos guard J.R. Giddens (left) watches as teammate Chad Toppert fiddles with the Noah Select machine. The team's newest training equipment records the arc of a player's shot with a small video camera. Toppert's shot ranks high on the consistency scale. Giddens prefers not to use it. "I don't believe in that kind of stuff," Giddens said. "Michael Jordan didn't have to use that technology." (Erin Fredrichs/Tribune)

Noah has a proven track record, too. Prominent men's basketball programs like Gonzaga, Georgia Tech, Arizona, Kansas, Kentucky and

Louisville heed the wisdom of Noah.

Noah also advises the Los Angeles Clippers, Miami Heat and Dallas Mavericks of the NBA plus droves of high schools across the country.

"I've never seen a program that used it regularly and didn't improve shooting," said Alan Marty, the man who created Noah five years ago.

Marty's idea stemmed from watching his daughter's jump shot while playing high school ball.

Her shot was flat.

Noah's isn't.

Marty's goal was to find a product that provides arc feedback without physically intruding on drills or practices like numerous shooting gimmicks out there.

The conveniently small Noah is about 3 feet tall and looks like a professor's stand in a lecture hall.

A laptop built into the Noah tracks a shooter's session by video.

"Hopefully we'll have all of our players using this soon," assistant coach Scott Didrickson said.

UNM obtained Noah less than a month ago, but a handful of Lobos have experimented, including center Derek Oestreicher, forward Jeffrey Henfield and guards Toppert and Ryan Kersten.

Toppert is the highest-graded Lobo so far with an Expert III. The Noah has five categories - master, expert, maker, shooter and builder - with four levels within each.

The ideal arc is between 43-50 degrees.

The most consistent shooter recorded on Noah is former NBA All-Star Chris Mullin, who hit a Master IV (25 of 25 3-pointers made at the same arc).

McKay, a former guard at Seattle Pacific who still plays basketball regularly, said he's in the mid-expert range.

And he's not happy about it.

"The system is flawed," McKay said jokingly. "I can't understand the grading."

In the end, though, some prefer simplicity over science. UNM guard J.R.

Giddens said he's never used Noah Select.

"You just have to put the ball in the hoop," Giddens said.

If shooting was that easy, nobody would need Noah.

Still, Noah in the Old Testament built the ark without any computerized machinery.