

The Loop

The Federation of Fly Fishers Journal for Certified Casting Instructors
Fall 2003

CASTING TIP by Tim Rajeff

This casting tip involves the parts of your body and arm that are used to 'hit' the cast. Remember that in every cast there is an optimum stroke length and stroke aggressiveness to match the caster's equipment and physique. Every time I read a tip in a magazine whether casting, golf, etc., the writer assumes the reader already has a solid background in biomechanics, mechanical engineering and is fluent in Latin. The truth is many teachers can describe a simple motion or action in a complex and confusing way. Just for fun try to describe all the motions and actions you need to take two steps. It might go like this: Start with the muscles in your hip, which you use to pull on your thigh, which in turn causes your quads to lift and swing your knee up while allowing your foot to extend out in front of you in a smooth acceleration...etc. This is hard isn't it? When I attempt to describe the actions and motions used to cast a fly rod, please forgive my assumptions and complexity of my descriptions.

I would like to review two forms used by great casters, many of whom use different strokes. Hopefully you can relate to one of the casting styles described below and pick out something that will help you. Keep in mind that it is best to examine your body type and your favorite casting motion to know if you are an explosive caster or a long stroke/smooth caster. Mr. Harvey Pennic, a famous golf instructor, would tell his students, "If you are going to try to copy the swing of someone make sure they have the same build as you." I recommend the same thing for casting a fly rod.

The aggressive caster who likes to use an explosive burst of acceleration, will generally do better using little or no wrist in their cast. The explosive caster likes a stiffer rod. There is considerably more leverage against a person's hand and arm when they use a stiffer rod. The concept of a fly rod being a lever is something instructors talk about and isn't important for everyone to understand. Just remember that a stiffer rod is harder

to accelerate than a softer rod. Imagine trying to swing a hammer with a handle that is twice as long as a normal handle. It would be difficult and it would require more strength. To swing a long hammer you would be better off using no wrist or locking the wrist. A stiffer rod acts like a longer lever, which will require more strength and a more aggressive stroke to get the speed needed to cast a line. To effectively cast a stiff rod, a caster must work harder making a shorter stroke. This is the short twitch muscle person. They are able to reach their target using a short stroke. Since the wrist is the weakest link in the casting stroke of most people, it should be used sparingly when casting a stiff rod.

The opposite of the aggressive caster is the smooth, long stroke caster, whose rod travels farther back and farther forward during the cast. They prefer rods that bend more and act like a shorter lever. The softer rod is easier to accelerate so many people who use softer rods can take advantage of their wrist speed. The wrist snap is most people's fastest twitch muscle movement. Every major league pitcher relies on the wrist snap at the end of their motion to add the final speed to their throws. A flycaster can also add their final speed or acceleration using the wrist. If the rod is too stiff your wrist will not be strong enough and may cause casting problems and bad loops. If the rod is softer it will not be too hard to snap the wrist at the end of the casting stroke.

Try making some casts using mostly wrist and some using almost no wrist. Repeat the experiment with a stiff rod and a soft rod to help identify which style best suits your body type.

It might have been fate or merely chance but Tim was born within a couple of miles of the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club in San Francisco. Like a child who grew up near the finest opera house in the world, casting and fishing have made a permanent mark on Tim and like a distant melody is always on his mind. This tip was originally written for www.rajeffsports.com

In Memoriam Dave Engerbretson 1936-2003

The FFF and Casting Board of Governors lost a valued member when Dave Engerbretson died of complications from diabetes and heart failure. He was 67.

Dave was a retired professor from Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. He taught anatomy, exercise science and fly fishing, but he is best known for his passion for fly fishing.

Dave joined the FFF in the 1960s while still a graduate student and served for many years on the Casting Board of Governors.

His accomplishments were many and you could say the ultimate fly fisherman's resume:

- * Conducted his own fly fishing schools in Montana.
- * Commercial fly tyer for Orvis.
- * Photographer
- * Licenced fishing guide on many famous waters.
- * Author of book "Tight Lines, Bright Water" which is a collection of essays on how-to and where-to on fly fishing.
- * Editor-at-large for *Fly Fisherman* magazine.
- * Equipment designer
- * Consultant to several major fly fishing companies.
- * Bamboo rod builder.
- * Commentator on PBS "Fly-Tying: An Anglers Art".
He starred with LeRoy Hyatt who tied the flies while Dave explained their use.
- * Contributing editor to the Virtual Fly Shop, Cabela's Guidebooks, and Lefty's World.
- * He also wrote on fly fishing for Field & Stream, Sports Afield and Backpacking Journal.

In 2002, Dave Engerbretson was awarded the Charles E. Brooks Memorial Life Award from the FFF for his many years of teaching and writing about fly fishing and fly tying. He will be missed by all of us.

John Randolph of *Fly Fisherman* writes:

Dave Engerbretson was my friend and mentor. When I first met him and we fished the Madison River in Yellowstone Park in 1978, I was so impressed with his casting (and fishing) that I asked him to be the Western Editor of Fly Fisherman magazine. Dave was a natural athlete, one who made fly casting look like effortless fluid motion. His loops were tight; there were no line energy waves in his casts; and he almost never threw tailing loops despite the lengths of his casts. He was, in other words, poetry in motion, the iconic image that we want our casting students to emulate.

In a recent submission (his last) to Fly Fisherman Dave described what it is like to hit the groove in fly casting. He explained that there are times when the accomplished caster finds that sweet spot when casting reaches its highest fulfillment and the caster, like a musician grooving on a piece of music, reaches the Tenth Level, the spiritual plane of performance. Then he experiences the consummate joy of our sport and his soul sings. I believe that Dave is still enjoying that sweet spot. And his soul is singing.



The Good Loops System

Text and Illustrations By Harry Merritt

Flycasting is counterintuitive; you must *stop* the rod to make the line go. In other sports, such as golf, tennis, spin or bait casting, baseball or just throwing a rock, the natural motion is a vigorous movement of the whole arm and shoulder, a snap of the wrist and a powerful follow through. This is the way you have thrown or hit things since you were a small child. Unfortunately the above sequence will produce a poor fly rod cast. The more vigor you apply, the worse the cast will be.

I have taught flycasting for many years and there are parts of the cast that are easy to explain; however one sequence of motions of the cast has always been difficult to teach and difficult to learn. Most of our great fly fishing experts and teachers cannot even agree on a name for the motion. Some call it "Speed Up and Stop," some a "Whump," or "Power Snap," or "Pop Stop," or "ALE", etc. Even though these experts can't agree on a name they would all agree that it is the heart of the cast without which a good cast is impossible. It is the smooth acceleration of the fly rod followed by a quick stop of the rod that forms the loop, which imparts the energy to the fly line and thus to the target, with the most efficiency and with the least effort. On this we all can agree.

The Good Loops System uses a special device (Figure 1) that will assist the instructor and the student in the teaching and learning of good loop formation. The system consists of a throwing tube that is affixed to the tip of a fly rod from which a small projectile is thrown. No fly line is needed. The throwing tubes come in four different weights to simulate the weight of a 3-weight, 6-weight, 8-weight, and 10-weight fly line. The projectile can be compared to a golfer's "bucket of balls" on the practice range. When the caster makes the proper acceleration and stop, which produces a good loop, the projectile will fly through the air in a beautiful arc and in a straight line toward the target. If the motion is poor and one that produces a big loop, the projectile will fall in front of the caster. If the casting is too abrupt and produces a tailing loop, the projectile will slam into the ground behind the caster.

The Good Loops System is unforgiving of a poor cast and will misbehave if the cast is not made with the proper motion. When learning flycasting in the traditional way with a fly line, a cast which produces a fair loop may satisfy the student, who thinks he or she understands the art of loop formation.

If they continue to practice in this manner, they may never find the "sweet spot" which is the heart of the casting stroke. Indeed most casters I see on the stream are only fair casters and will never reach their potential with their present stroke. With the Good Loops System there is no "fair" cast. Since there is no fly line to smooth out the mistakes, the projectile will accentuate the errors of the caster.

The Good Loops System was developed as an aid in the teaching of flycasting. It will not replace the need for good instruction in the basic fundamentals of the cast. It will not teach the pick-up and lay down nor the pause sequence between the back cast and the fly. Good Loops does only one thing and that is to introduce the caster to that special micro second in which the heart of the cast occurs and which has been the most elusive part of the cast to master.

As many of you know, the Boy Scouts of America has added a Fly Fishing Merit Badge to their program. Recently I have been active teaching and testing of young scouts prior to receiving this award. During a recent practice session I introduced the class to the Good Loops System and (continued on Page 4)

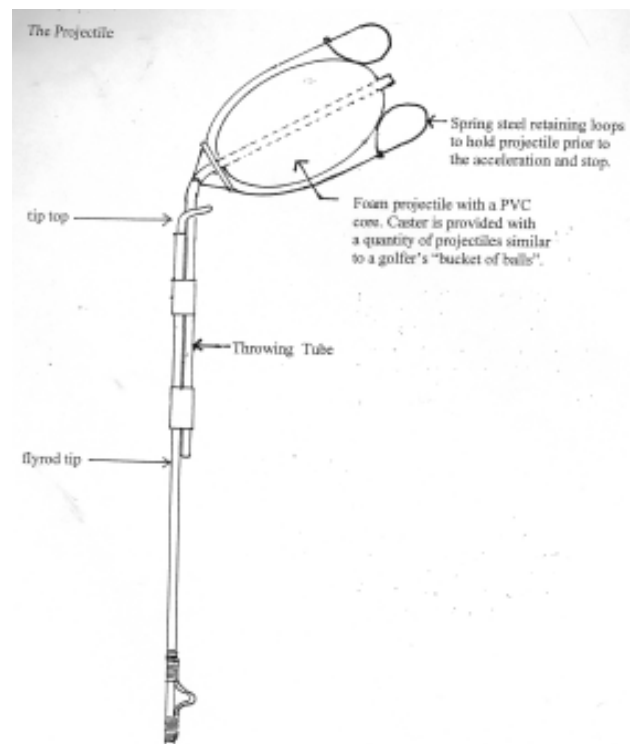


Figure 1

The Good Loops System, By Harry Merritt (Continued from page 3)

instead of concentrating on loop formation, the session quickly deteriorated into a contest of who could throw the projectile farther. The results of this contest were quite unexpected.

The harder the scouts cast the projectile the less distance it went. The biggest and strongest scouts did the poorest. Their casts either went straight up in the air or slammed into the ground. Several of the smaller scouts

with less physical strength, were out-casting their stronger friends, much to the dismay of the larger scouts, and to the glee of the smaller. And to make things worse, one of the scout's younger sister asked if she could try and after several tries, made the longest cast of the day. Her cast was greeted with complete silence. I couldn't have written a better script.

After this embarrassing debacle, "smooth and easy"

was the drill and if you were going to win this game, concentrate on your smooth acceleration and stop. The connection between throwing the projectile and casting a fly rod had been made. Their fly rod casts improved; however I am still trying to wean them away from the game of "throw the projectile."

Harry Merritt is a Certified Casting Instructor from Beals Island, Maine, an architect, and a Professor Emeritus of Architecture at the University of Florida. The Good Loops System is a patent pending casting aid.

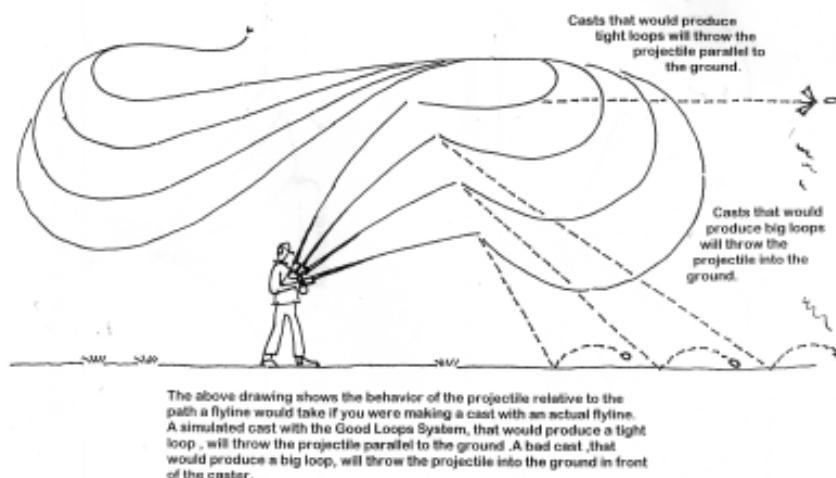


Figure 2

Two Handed Instructor Certification Program Update

By Bill Gammel

As Chairman of the Spey Committee, I am writing to present the current status of the Spey Casting Committee's work. We have created a test and temporary study guide for what will be the *Two-Handed Casting Instructor Certification Program*. A year of hard work by committee members has resulted in a program recommended by a majority of the group. Every member of the group agrees with the majority of the material presented. However, the dissenting votes revolve around 3 or 4 issues. The majority of the group feels that this is a tough, yet very main stream test of modern two-handed flycasting. The test is 95% done and will be ready to give sometime this year.

There is a temporary study guide which will be available soon. The full study guide is our project for this year. It should include a glossary of terms, a list of the essentials of speycasting, a description of a generic speycast and a recommended reading and viewing list.

There are, however, several questions that must be addressed and they are as follows: Who is eligible to take the test? Where are the tests going to be given? Who will administer the tests?

The test will be ready soon, yet that does not mean that testing will then be available to everyone all over the country. Testing sites will be a problem. The number of testers that feel qualified to give this test is limited. Therefore, this first year the test will be given at limited venues. The testing will be more available as we go along.

For general practice you should know that the required casts are as follows: *Overhead, roll cast, switch cast or forward spey, single spey, double spey, snake roll, and snap T*. The questions are heavily weighted toward explain and demonstrate type questions and the format of the test will mimic the format of the current one-handed Masters test. More information will be available soon.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MASTER INSTRUCTORS

My family remembers when I disappeared to study for the Master Instructor Certification Test. When they did locate me they soon realized I was better left alone. Some experiences of the preparation process I remember and other parts I choose to forget. I don't remember, as some colleagues suggest, that I conducted my business from the park, where I practiced—fly rod in one hand and cell phone in the other. I vaguely recall being surprised that I hadn't noticed it was snowing during one of many afternoon casting sessions with Master Instructor and mentor Don Simonson. However, I distinctly remember the snap of my rod breaking as I hastily shoved it into its case, after dark and only two weeks before the exam.

It would be a rare Master who doesn't have similar stories to tell. Most have spent a great deal of time and effort preparing for the Master Certification Test. It is no wonder—the test is rigorous. At the Board of Governors (BOG) meeting in Idaho Falls, Chairman Floyd Franke made it clear why the test must be tough—the Board of Governors relies heavily on Master Instructors to administer the certification program.

Underscoring this reliance on Master Instructors, the BOG voted to allow Master Instructors to be certified by two BOGs or one BOG and two Master Instructors. In the later case the Board of Governor will chair the committee and all three examiners must agree on the passing of a candidate. This decision certainly gives Master Instructors valuable experience in the testing process and broadens the resources available for examiners.

For the second year, Master Instructors have been invited to attend the Board of Governors annual meeting at the International Conclave. It is clear that the board regards the Master Instructors as an important part of the whole casting program. The following Master Instructors attended the meeting and many volunteered to work on committees with members of the Board of Governors: Floyd Dean, Katherine Hart, Gordon Hill, Dan McCrimmon, John Reid, Don Simonson, Mike Perusse, Marilyn Vitale, Liz Watson and Rick Williams. The hard work of the Board of Governors does not go unnoticed at these meetings, nor does the importance of input from Master Instructors. The Master Study Guide is a great example of the collaborative work of one Master Instructor, Dusty Sprague, and members of the Board of Governors.

After you pass any milestone and particularly the Master Certification test there is that 'whew' moment, but soon afterward new challenges present themselves. As a Master Instructor you are encouraged and challenged to accept your position in the casting certification program. Julie Nelson, our Program Coordinator, has circulated a list of upcoming test sites. Masters, look this over and see where you can help with testing in the coming year. Your hard work has gained you Master Certification, new casting and teaching challenges, and has also placed you in a vital role in the FFF Casting Instructor Certification Program.

Liz Watson

From the Editors: Denise and Liz

The E-Loop is Coming! If you would like to receive your copy of *The Loop* electronically, e-mail your current e-mail address to Julie Nelson by November 15th. Julie will notify you when *The Loop* is available for downloading.

Our thanks to Floyd Franke for his four years of service as Chairman of the Board of Governors.

Congratulations to Tom Jindra who has been elected as the next Chairman of the Board of Governors. Tom was FFF President from 1996-1999.

We would like to thank our Program Coordinator, Julie Nelson for her continued hard work and help with the production of *The Loop*.

Thanks to each of you who contributed to *The Loop* over the past year. We expect to receive many more high quality submissions in the coming year.

Cheers,
Denise and Liz

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You can have a link from your FFF website listing to your own e-mail address. Contact Julie Nelson.

We welcome your submissions via e-mail or disk. Please attach a short (1-3 sentences) instructor biographical statement, including your location and Certification level. Please indicate whether or not you are willing to allow your submission's possible re-publication on the Program's web site. Any illustrations should be in TIFF format. *The Loop* reserves the right to decline any submission for any reason, and to edit any submission. All submissions should be sent to the National Office:

FFF Casting Instructor Certification Program

P.O. Box 1595

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E-mail: *castingcert@fedflyfishers.org*

Web: *www.fedflyfishers.org/castingcert.shtml*

The Loop is a quarterly publication of the FFF Board of Governors for Casting Instructor Certification.

COMING EVENTS

Pre-registration is REQUIRED

- Contact Julie Nelson at 406-585-7592
- *Schedule subject to change*

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- **Freeport, Maine** - LL Bean 2 day Workshop and Certification with Macauley Lord. Contact Craig Uecker to preregister at 1-800-341-4341 x 27558.
 - **Los Angeles, CA** - Jan. 8-11 - ISE Show. Testing at the Long Beach Casting Club.
 - **Denver, CO** - Jan. 9-11 - TFFS Show.
 - **College Park, MD** - Jan. 10-11 - TFFS Show.
 - **Marlborough, MA** - Jan. 16-18 - TFFS Show.
 - **Denver, CO** - Jan. 22-25 - ISE Show.
 - **Somerset, NJ** - Jan. 23-25 - TFFS Show.
 - **San Mateo, CA** - Jan. 28-Feb.1 - ISE Show.
 - **Vancouver, B.C.** - Jan. 30-Feb. 1 - Western Canada FF Expo
 - **Portland, OR** - Feb. 4-8 - OL
 - **Calgary, AB** - Feb. 6-8 - Western Canada FF Expo
 - **Phoenix, AZ** - Feb. 19-22 - ISE
-

Congratulations to our new Master Instructor

Paul Arden - Essex, England

Welcome to our new Board of Governors for 2002 and 2003

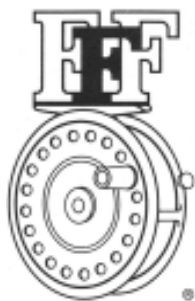
Randy Swisher

Simon Gawesworth

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FEDERATION OF FLY FISHERS

Fly Casting Instructor Certification Program

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Bozeman, MT 59771

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