



The Tailing Loop

The Federation of Fly Fishers Newsletter for Casting Instructors
Fall 1995

KEEP IT SIMPLE!

by Leon Chandler

I am bothered with the knowledge that a lot of folks out there are not fishing with a fly rod because of the perception that the skills required to cast a fly line are too complex for them to possibly learn. I think this unfortunate atmosphere has been created by well-meaning "experts" who are oftentimes inclined to get carried away with their own expertise and talk and write in a manner that has a way of intimidating the novice beginner. As FFF Certified Casting Instructors, oftentimes the first important step is to put the student at ease by explaining that all the experts once began as novices and developing casting skills is a learning process - one step at a time. If the student is a golfer, it is unlikely he or she shot par the first time out. Neither can they expect to become expert fly fishers at the very beginning. But for many of us, hitting a golf ball straight and long is a heck of a lot more difficult than casting a fly line far enough to catch fish.

My experience has been that most beginning fly fishing students already have some angling experience, probably as a result of fishing with either an open-face or closed-face spinning reel. Therefore, I feel my first obligation is to make certain they understand the differences in the technique of casting a weighted spinning lure versus that of casting an almost weightless artificial fly. They should comprehend that with a spinning rod, the weight and momentum of the lure *pulls* the line off the spool of the reel. However, because the almost weightless artificial fly is not heavy enough to cast with a spinning rod - in fly casting, we use a completely different principle, and that is to cast the *line*. Wherever we cast the *line*, the fly is sure to follow. Forget about the fly - concentrate on what the *line* is doing.

To help them better understand, I emphasize that the line is, in effect, an *elongated weight* and in order to cast the elongated weight, we must do things substantially different than when we are casting the concentrated weight of a spinning lure. The similarity is we are still casting weight and this leads to emphasizing the importance of the backcast and how vital it is to make the back-cast with enough force to allow it to straighten out behind - thus getting the weight of the line in position to load or 'cock' the rod. When the

back cast is in proper position to load the rod, then it is only a matter of timing to make the forward thrust and to deliver the fly to the imaginary target.

I have found that at this point, the most difficult thing is to get the student to understand the importance of *making the rod tip control the line* - both on the back cast and the forward thrust. Most have a tendency to want to wave the entire rod, resulting in a wide loop that doesn't go anywhere. I ask them to imagine there is an apple impaled on the rod tip and to imagine they are trying to "flip" it off - both to the back and to the front. I will place my hand over theirs on the rod grip and emphasize making the rod tip "flip" the line back then forward. Once they get the feel of this action, they are well on their way.

Don't let beginners try to handle too much line. Forty feet is enough. Secure the line around the reel so they can't strip out more. Too much line really messes up their timing. I prefer the first basic instruction to be on grass - away from the distraction of attempting to pick line off water. And at this point, I want them to merely pick up, throw a straight back cast, then lay down. Turn students sideways, tell them to look back at the back cast - if it is high, straight and level, fine. If not, they must correct something in their stroke. They must learn to get the back cast in position to use the weight of the line against the rod.

If water is available, the next step is to teach the roll cast. Because it is easy, it gives them a sense of accomplishment and diverts attention from the tension of trying to make the line behave in the air. For the roll cast, the line must be drawn back slowly until it drapes behind the rod - then with a sharp, tip-action thrust, the line will roll out. And they are so pleased they were able to do it - usually on the first, second or third try. Then I like to have them alternate upon command - a few pick up and lay downs, then a few roll casts, a few more pick-ups, then a few more roll casts until they feel comfortable and fully understand the importance of making the rod tip direct the line where they want it to go.

These are the first easy steps in introducing a novice to the intriguing world of fly fishing. Everything else fol-

lows these very basic principles. Make sure the student is comfortable with these basics before moving on to the more complicated maneuvers, such as false casting, line control, picking line off the water, smooth presentation, etc.

I usually recommend to beginners that they practice on still water for bluegill or other panfish. With just the pick up and lay down, and the roll cast, they can present small cork popping bugs or simple wet flies far enough and well enough to catch fish. With panfish, they will improve casting skills, learn hook setting, landing fish - even small ones. But the most important of all, they will have fun. And that's what our sport is all about!

Remember - KEEP IT SIMPLE!

HELP!!!

The supply of articles for the Tailing Loop is almost dry. We desperately need more articles, teaching tips and anecdotes for the next edition. Please send to:

John Seidel
325 N. Pine
Townsend, MT 59644

Topics requested by readers: "More articles on teaching methods. Teaching is a separate skill from casting."

"...an in depth performance article regarding how line tapers affect casting (ie. bass bug vs nymph vs steelhead vs shooting head...)"

CLUB OUTING

by John Hogg

Our club, the Granite Bay Flycasters, is located on Folsom Lake near Sacramento, and last summer our president asked me to conduct a clinic for "intermediate" casters.

Because our members' casting skills vary widely, and are not necessarily in direct relation to their fishing expertise, I was concerned about any skills categorization as intermediate, advanced, expert, etc. So the clinic was titled "Advancing Your Casting" and the only prerequisite was that participants have some previous casting experience and the desire to improve their current skills.

We selected two Wednesday evenings, from 6:30pm to dark and were fortunate enough to have use of an irrigation pond belonging to one of our members.

Because we had some feedback from our Novices clinic that different instructors were giving students conflicting advice, I conducted a Coaches meeting in advance to establish some ground rules that would assure continuity.

First, I presented a written agenda and schedule, which after a few excellent suggestions was subsequently modified and agreed to by all. Second, I requested that coaches not carry their own rod while working with their group. It is too easy to say, "Here, do it like this," rather than trying to analyze casters' problems and explain it to them so that they can make the adjustment. Finally, we did a walk-through of the agenda to make sure that each presentation covered the points we wanted to make.

At the beginning of the first session, I asked each of the casters to explain what aspect of their casting they wanted to improve. The one mentioned the most was "Consistency" followed by "Distance".

The format of the clinic was to introduce a cast to the entire group with a demonstration and discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the cast and a technical dissection of each movement of the cast. When it came to the demonstrations, I felt it was important to demonstrate the cast at a normal, easy-to-handle distance within the capabilities of the participants. I deliberately refrained from making casts at distances designed to impress rather than inform.

After the central presentation which lasting about 20 minutes, each coach took their 3 or 4 casters and worked with them on that cast for about 30 minutes. Following that, the groups again came together to discuss what they had done, and then the next cast was introduced. Over the course of the two evenings, we covered the Roll Cast, the Pickup Laydown, the False Cast and Shooting Line, and the Double Haul in this manner.

I would like to say that "The Essentials of Fly Casting" booklet published by the FFF, as well as Mel Krieger's teaching suggestions were invaluable in the preparation for this clinic.

SIMPLE IS BEST

by Carl Blackledge

In teaching casting to beginners, I use a very different approach than most casting instructors. This method is extra fast and easy, and it gives beginners an immediate frame of reference.

First, my students and I go to a place where there is a building with a long, low, horizontal roof line. A school yard or athletic field works especially well. Telephone lines in the distance provide a good alternative reference point. Next, I demonstrate a perfect, parallel casting plane for them, which is also the same plane as the long, low roof line I mentioned. Before they start casting, I stress the point of keeping the fly line parallel to that roof line. Then I go over a few other quick points, such as maintaining a firm wrist, stopping the rod quickly, and watching that loop develop.

Now the students get their rods, strip off approximately 30 feet of line, and begin casting with no other instruction, always using that horizontal roof line as the constant mirror image of their desired results. At this point you will notice students start to self-correct their casting strokes, while developing muscle memory and self-confidence quickly. They also understand most of the casting terminology much easier after casting than before.

In my experience, this technique has produced the fastest results with the most students, in comparison with other techniques. It also works well as a fly casting exercise for the more advanced student, or anyone who wants to develop greater precision in casting.

FFF MEMBERSHIP IN 1996

On January 1, 1996, membership in the Federation of Fly Fishers will be a requirement for all participants in the Casting Instructor Certification program. As a non-profit educational organization, the FFF created the program as

an educational service to our members and the general public. As a membership based organization, the Federation works at the grass roots level to perpetuate the artistry, history and technique of fly casting, fly tying, rod building, etc. Rather than isolate participants in the Casting Certification Program from the organization by merely providing a certificate, it is our goal to strengthen the fly fishing community by uniting program participants through FFF membership. By networking this program through our local clubs and regional councils we also want to increase communication between casting instructors, our membership and the general public as a result.

Membership is a commonly accepted condition of participation in most professional certification and licensing procedures. We believe that FFF membership offers an additional enhancing benefit to program participants. FFF membership offers the opportunity to share, learn and grow within the sport of fly fishing. This is the overall goal of the Federation. It stands to reason therefore, that the programs and activities of the FFF should be supportive of this overall mission and the organizational structure which supports it.

COMING EVENTS

Basic Certification - February 17-18, 1996; Annual Meeting & Fly Fishing Show, Des Moines, Iowa; Contact Mike Brown (515) 255-9056 or Jene Hughes (515) 282-4217

The following conclaves may or may not have casting certification:

Mid Atlantic Council Conclave, York, PA; Nov. 10-11

Southwest Council Conclave, March 16-17

Western Rocky Mtn Conclave, Billings, MT; April 20

Southeast Council Conclave, Jacksonville, FL; June 23-24

DIARY OF A DISCOURAGED FLY FISHING GUIDE

by Captain Rodney Smith

Date: March 21, 1995: sunny skies, calm wind and clear water. It's happening again, and no one knows that it's happening but me; nevertheless, it's happening. And I'm discouraged. Of course you would never know it from looking at my smiling face. Oh yes, I'm even acting like I'm enjoying myself (and this adds to my frustration), pointing to brute, user friendly, red drum (some over forty pounds) crawling in slow motion over white sand flats that are submerged under less than two feet of clean water. These fish are begging to be caught. But to sum it all up....once again I've been cursed by.....fly anglers over prepared up to the moment of casting.

And these fly anglers, clothed in tarpon wear fit for a Miami wedding, are equipped with the very best tackle provided by the leaders of the fly fishing industry. First I'm impressed, then a little envious, and then I question myself; how long has it been since this outfit has been cast?

As a guide, is it my place to ask my clients to pick up the fly rod and practice? Should I preach mental and

physical preparedness? How do you tell someone that is paying your day's wages that he or she better concentrate?

We, as fly casting instructors, must be prepared to teach more than the basic 10:00 to 2:00 maneuvers with the fly rod. We must relay a message that there's more to the art of fly fishing than just buying the best stuff. We must let our students know that practicing their casting skills at least several times a week and at best every-day is needed for vast improvement. They will also need to study the principles of casting, stripping line and setting hook, all this and more. Point your students in the right direction (not always with their backs to the wind), and give them a sense of desire to learn to cast with accuracy and purpose. Try your best to reenact a hands-on fishing experience while standing on dry ground. Let them know the way you feel with your fly rod in hand. We as fly casting instructors must, above all else, try to convince our students to cast and fish with confidence. If we have confidence in our teaching, our students will have confidence in their fly fishing.

Live, breathe and dream.....Fly Fishing!!

Federation of Fly Fishers
Casting Instructor Certification
P.O. Box 1595
Bozeman, MT 59771

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