



# The Tailing Loop

*The Federation of Fly Fishers Newsletter for Casting Instructors*  
*Summer 1996*

## GOVERNORS: WHAT THEY TEACH AND HOW THEY TEACH IT

*by Macauley Lord*

The 1993 FFF Conclave provided me with my first chance to observe the teaching techniques of the luminaries in the field of casting instruction; it was a great learning experience for me. What follows is my synopsis of what and how they taught [with an apology for my errors of observation or interpretation]. Also, I include notes from a symposium on teaching techniques. Though the event took place three years ago, I doubt that time has appreciably changed any of the ideas that follow.

**Mel Krieger:** "Casting is beautiful!" In his three-hour advanced classes, Mel stresses mostly fundamentals. He starts by talking about proper hand-arm position—his elbow is relaxed at his side and his hand is in close to his body ("That's where you are strongest", he says)—and he stresses that the elbow must remain low, except in distance casting. When he makes casts of less than 30 feet, his upper arm is motionless. His first exercise for advanced casters is the tip cast, during which only the tip of the rod is loaded. Then comes the midsection cast—here the midsection loads as the rod moves through a longer arc—for casting about 30'. For the butt [distance] cast he stresses that the elbow should remain fixed at a 90 degree angle. The rod is elevated on the backcast to roughly 1:00 by simply raising the elbow. The forward cast involves pulling the elbow back down again. This drives the loop along the water surface and tends to slam the fly down. Mel says that this is a good exercise for distance casting. In a fishing situation, he would simply change the plane that the rod moves in.

He likes the idea of pulling the rod by always leading with the elbow. For double hauling, he urges students to use a 30 foot type III sinking head on a 20 lb. memory-less mono running line. He recommends that the head be one line weight heavier than specified by the rod. He starts beginners with a pantomime of the proper hand-arm position and then of the basic cast. He then teaches the roll cast on water. Then, back to the lawn for the tip cast followed by the midsection cast. He reiterates the proper hand-arm po-

sition and the importance of the elbow always being bent. He then has students false cast. Pickup—three false casts—laydown, all on the lawn. He only has students look back at the line when absolutely necessary and never has them look at the rod tip. ("It's good for bird watching"). In short, he doesn't like them to look at the line for timing; he'd rather they "sense it" or have their instructor watch it for them.

**Joan Wulff:** "Everything comes down to efficiency." In a class for intermediate casters, she stresses that the wrist, forearm and upper arm should all be in line (moving in the same plane). To get distance, she says to raise the upper arm instead of moving it out to the side. She emphasizes that it's essential to bend the wrist so that the rod butt is at a 45 degree angle to the forearm at the backcast stop. At the end of the forward cast, this angle should be 0 degree. She says the forearm moves the rod into position for the power snap, which the wrist then completes. As a guide, bring the thumb to the forehead on the backcast and roll cast. In the backhand rollcast, keep your hand in the same position as in the other casts; don't tilt your arm across your body. "It's weak", she says. She says that your hand is always higher at the end of the backcast than at the end of the forward cast and that the elbow should always be bent (except in very long casts). The power snap should occur as soon as the leader begins to come off the water and should be of very short duration. And, "during the power snap, the forearm and wrist move within one another: it's not just one or the other, it's both together." Her backcast stop hits a brick wall at between 12:45 and 1:00. She says, "Be very stingy with your backcast. Casting well requires lots of little disciplines".

As for tackle, she says a beginner's rod shouldn't weigh more than 3 oz. She also urges her students to mark their fly lines at the 30, 40 and 50 foot lengths.

**Jim Green:** "If you can't make a short cast, how can you make a long cast?" In his beginner's class, after teaching students to pantomime the casting stroke first with no

rod and then an unrigged rod, he starts them off with 30' of line on the lawn. Even at that distance, he teaches students to elevate their elbow on the backcast. After about 30 minutes of pickup-laydown, he has his students start false casting.

**Steve Rajeff:** [These ideas came from a different fly fishing event. I asked Steve what he would teach beginners in a 30-minute lesson and how he handled the breaking-the-wrist issue.] He starts novices with 10 minutes of roll casting, then 10 of pickup and laydown and then, if they're ready, false casting. He does not talk about the wrist unless his students have a problem with it.

**1993 Symposium of the FFF Casting Certification Board of Governors:** Mel Krieger, Joan Wulff, Jim Green, **Doug Swisher** and **Al Kyte** all teach novices to cast the rod repeatedly with no line strung through the guides, thereby building muscle memory. [Mel and Jim have them start with no rod, just their hand and arm in a pantomime.] **Leon Chandler**, along with all of the above, starts his novices on the lawn because they learn faster there. Mel says to tell frustrated students that the learning curve has ups and downs but its general trend is upward. Al and Joan recommend that both novices and advanced casters practice with their off hand. It not only rests their dominant hand, it often helps to teach the dominant hand better technique. People often cast better, technically, with their off hand than with their dominant hand. For distance casting, Al suggests practicing by false casting with a fixed long line (no hauling). Al also brought up the importance of style vs. substance. "The rod must be loaded and unloaded—that's a matter of substance. How that's achieved is a matter of style."

## NEW MASTER CERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS

Congratulations to the following Master Certified Instructors who have passed the test in 1996!

Ray Bianco, *Washington*  
Kenneth Callaway, *Texas*  
Peter Caverhill, *British Columbia*  
David Diaz, *Alabama*  
Floyd Franke, *New York*  
Richard Hyland, *Florida*  
Kevin Kurz, *Kansas*  
Rene Larriviere, Jr., *Louisiana*  
Jack Montague, *Florida*  
Landon Morris, *Iowa*  
Peter Morrison, *British Columbia*  
Bob Pelzl, *New Mexico*  
Robert Stehwiien, *New Mexico*  
Stan Sugerman, *Rhode Island*  
Wanda Taylor, *South Carolina*  
Russell Tharin, *Florida*  
Tom Tripi, *Louisiana*  
Tony Weaver, *Alaska*  
Robert von Raesfeld, *California*

## IS IT THE ART OF FLY FISHING OR FLY CASTING?

by Gary Todd

Do we as casting instructors put too much emphasis on casting just to show that we can cast long distances? Through the years I have been instructing, I have adopted several techniques that I feel have helped my students achieve a good casting style and have helped them learn to enjoy the art of fly fishing as they become more proficient at this sport. When I am doing a class, I try not to put the emphasis on just casting, as I feel that tends to lose their attention. I tend to put the emphasis on presentation and accuracy, casting no more than 35 or 40 feet of line while aiming at targets. All the casting is done with floating lines as they are easier to work. Rod length is determined by the individual, but I recommend a 9 foot rod because I feel that it has an advantage over the shorter rods. This is apparent when float tubing. The longer rod helps the novice with a higher back cast, keeping the line in the air and not in the water.

This is one of the techniques I use in my class. I have the students sit on the ground as if they were in a float tube and have them cast at a target. This puts them into the realm that they are going to be in. Remember, long casts look impressive but some times the quarry we are after is just a few feet away.

### The Tailing Loop

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*The Tailing Loop* is the quarterly publication of the FFF Board of Governors for Certified Casting Instructors.

Annual renewal dues are \$25.

## HOW GOOD DO WE HAVE TO BE?

" 'I thought I had to be perfect.' Where did so many of us get that notion? Did we get it from parents who hoped we would make up for all the empty spaces in their own lives? From teachers who took for granted everything we did right and focused on our every mistake? From religious leaders who told us the story of how Adam and Eve broke one rule and were punished forever? Do women get that message of perfection from movies and fashion ads, from actresses and models with figures they can't hope to match? Do men get it from relentless pressure to sell more, to earn more, and a society that makes fun of the losers in the Super Bowl for being only the second best football team in the world?"

by Harold S. Kushner

Do all of our students have to cast 75 feet or more?

*submitted by Mel Krieger*

### COMING EVENTS

Basic Certification - October 4; Southern Council Conclave; Mountain Home, AR; contact Tom Jindra (504) 392-7511 or tjindra@aol.com

Basic & Master Certification will be offered at the following shows; contact Evelyn Taylor to pre-register (406) 585-7592:

January 3-5, Portland, OR - International Sportsmen's Expo  
January 15-19, Denver, CO - Denver Sportsmen's Show  
January 29 - Feb 2, San Mateo, CA - International Sportsmen's Expo  
February 5-9, Seattle, WA - International Sportsmen's Expo  
February 19-23, Denver, CO - International Sportsmen's Expo

Basic & Master Certification - May 1-3; Southeast Council Conclave; Pensacola, FL; contact Tom Jindra (504) 392-7511

### *Editor's Corner*

The 1996 Conclave was a casting instructor's dream. You could watch the best instructors on the continent cast, teach, discuss, and debate fly casting. With all their workshops, with certifying Basic and Master Instructors, and with professional commitments, some had pretty busy schedules. But there was also time to share ideas. At next year's Conclave, I hope we'll see more opportunity for all levels of instructors to engage in the kind of give-and-take that helps each of us, no matter how skilled we are at our craft, to do it better.

To those of you who have provided helpful comments about *The Tailing Loop*, thank you! If you want something from this journal that you are not getting, please let me know. If you noticed that I wrote much of this issue and you don't want it to happen again, please do something about it. If you have a neat teaching technique, share it with the rest of us by writing an article. If you just have a comment about an article, particularly a dissenting opinion, I urge you to submit it.

### RENEWING YOUR CERTIFICATION

A renewal notice is sent to you annually based on when you first certified. If for some reason you don't receive one or misplace it, you can find your renewal date in the top right hand corner of the mailing label on this newsletter. Please contact Evelyn Taylor at (406) 585-7592 if you haven't received a renewal notice by your expiration date.

Included with your renewal notice is a survey. We are working on a new survey for 1997 and would love your input! What do you want to know about your fellow instructors, teaching practices, etc.? Please send your feedback to the FFF National Office.

Don't forget! FFF membership is now a requirement for all participants in the Casting Instructor Certification Program.

## "WATCH YOUR BACKCAST"?

by Macauley Lord

In *Fly Casting Strategies*, Joan Wulff wrote, "It is nearly impossible to cast in a vertical plane and watch your backcast." I wish I had read this when I first started teaching casting because it could have saved my students some frustration. There is a lot of conventional wisdom in fly casting instruction, and to my mind, some of it is counterproductive. "Watch your backcast" is just one of the mantras that I occasionally hear repeated, especially by less-experienced instructors. With more opportunities to watch their students respond to this instruction, they might see what I have seen: students squinting at some point way up the rod (what do they learn from that?), looking at some point behind the tip as the backcast starts to unroll (ditto), or teetering because the aforementioned actions disoriented them. Even if a novice is able to watch his backcast, he isn't really trained yet to know what he is looking for.

For students whose rods tip too far back, there are a number of fixes. They can look at their thumb position or at the butt of the rod just above their thumb to assure that the stop position is proper. One instructor

at this year's Conclave said the following to students to assure a good stop position: "Hitchhike to heaven (thumb pointed up), not down the road (thumb pointed back)." Or for students who cast in the purely vertical plane, one technique is to have them bring the rod butt to their hat brim, which acts as a backstop. It's Pavlovian and effective.

For students who have timing problems, the corrections can be fairly simple. If your student is either delaying or rushing his forward cast, you can prompt him to start the forward cast sooner or hold him back from starting the forward cast too soon. Asking the student to watch the loop behind him and adjust the timing of the forward stroke accordingly is, again, asking the nearly impossible. If you think the student would benefit from it, you could have him tip the rod over and cast in the horizontal plane and observe both casts as though watching a tennis match from the net. This way the student can, in Joan Wulff's words, "get the whole picture".

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