

The Loop

*The Federation of Fly Fishers Journal for Certified Casting Instructors
Summer 2003*

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Kids, Hula Hoops, and Casting Games: What Children Have Taught Us About Teaching Flycasting

By Rick Williams, Joy Knickrehm, and Dan Rhodes

Each summer for the last five years our fly shop, The Idaho Angler, has sponsored a 2½-day youth summer camp, where we teach children ages 10 to 15 the fundamentals of flycasting and fly fishing. We typically work with 10 students and three FFF Certified Casting Instructors. We spend the first half-day going through a crash fly fishing course, focusing primarily on casting mechanics and knot tying. We follow this with day trips to a warmwater fishery and a trout fishery. The exciting and rewarding challenge of teaching children the fundamentals of flycasting, required us to learn or invent an approach which differs from techniques used with adult beginning students. An unexpected benefit of our youth program has been the incorporation of many of our ‘kid’ tactics into our adult teaching program and enthusiastic response from our adult students.

First and foremost, children teach an instructor how to teach quickly and efficiently. Kids have little patience with talking and explanations-----they want action. They want to *do* something! Consequently, we’ve learned to keep our introductions and explanations short and the activities varied. As a result, we move the students through a whole series of activities on about a 20-minute rotation: setting up their rods and reels, casting with a Fly-O, knot tying, casting exercises, casting games, and a snack break. Over the course of our summer camps, we’ve settled on two indispensable tools that help keep kids engaged and challenged-----the Fly-O and hula hoops.

To introduce the basic casting stroke and demonstrate loop shapes we use a short rod (~4 ft.)

and yarn fly-line combination, either the Wulff Fly-O or a short rod and line combinations of our own design. The Wulff Fly-O works well indoors and outdoors when there is no wind; however, the light flex rod and soft wind-resistant yarn line is difficult for a beginner to effectively cast in the wind.

Consequently, we’ve designed our own yarn rods that are more effective in an outdoor setting. We use the top section of soft to moderate flex rods in the 6-7 weight range with 17-20 feet of 3-strand medium weight macramé yarn. Handles are optional. We make a tapered line by cutting two strands of the 3-strand yarn. One strand is cut four feet from the end and a second strand is cut seven feet from the end. The loose ends at the cut points are taped to the main line using electrical tape. Tape is also applied to the single strand end leaving about 3-4” of yarn free to dissipate the casting energy and avoid a ‘pop’ as the line turns over. This creates a tapered line with about 12 feet of 3-strand, 3 feet of 2-strand, and 4 feet of 1-strand.

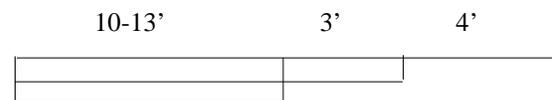


Figure 1

Each student is assisted as he or she practices the basic pick up and lay down casts and false casting with the yarn rod. We work primarily on getting them to cast with the line in a single plane, and to achieve

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Book Review

By Hans Weilenmann

Nature of Fly Casting – A Modular Approach

By Jason Borger

(Published by Shadow Caster Press, 2001;

www.jasonborger.com)

296 pp; softcover; ISBN 0-9711570-0-6

In *Nature of Fly Casting* author Jason Borger sets himself an ambitious task. Any author of a book, which is to serve as an instructional text on a subject requiring muscle coordination and fine motor skills, is faced with a number of substantial obstacles to overcome. I was very interested to read how Jason Borger would tackle these issues in *Nature of Fly Casting*.

The approach selected, indeed the major premise on which the book is built, is that the full array of casting motions can be broken down into component parts, or modules, which in turn may be broken down into smaller modules. In the author's words:

"The Modular Approach is really a text-enhanced symbolic language for the reading and writing of fly casting."..... "It can be applied universally, not just to this book. Learning the language is easy, but you first need to think of every core skill in fly casting and line handling as a separate module."

Once the modules are defined, they may be plugged together in a variety of ways (parallel and/or sequential) to achieve a specific casting skill, similar to the way nouns and verbs are joined to form a complete and flowing sentence. The minor premise is that individual modules, once understood and practiced, may be used and reused in various combinations to expand on the angler's casting arsenal and skills set. Supported by the modular concept the author covers in detail a wide range of casts, such as the roll cast, single and double spey casts, the reach cast, and line control skills, such as various hauling techniques, aerial and water mends, and others.

How well does this format work? I believe this will very much depend on the individual reader. The nearly 300 page book is laid out in a very structured manner, and the physical format is with an open spine which allows the book to lie flat and remain open, allowing execution of the pantomime exercises without the book closing on the reader. The text is supported with a large number of line drawings by the author and some graphs. There are no photographs, which may be seen as a disadvantage by more visually oriented

readers. The drawings complement the text very well, adding a strong visual reinforcement. The caster depicted is obviously modelled after Jason's dad, Gary, and their common compact casting style. This makes for consistency in the drawings, but is perhaps somewhat restrictive. The text recognizes this and makes clear that there are a wide variety of alternative casting styles which the reader may find more suitable to their physique and abilities.

Reading the chapters in a sequential order is recommended by the author to get the best understanding and, since most chapters will build on material from preceding chapters, this is good advice.

Modules and Small Modules are introduced and explained, often with associated illustrations, and concluded with a module summary. This generally takes the form of briefly placing the Small Module into context, following with an explanation, and concluding with a Module summary. Here is a sample of how one of the shorter Small Module sections starts off:

"The Pause Module (SM) —The pause between the Overhead Backcast Module and the Overhead Forward Cast Module is a vital one. Indeed, the pause between any aerialized backcast and forward cast modules is a vital one. The Pause Module is the time when the line aerialized by the backcast is allowed to unroll behind the caster so it can be cast forward."... "Ideally, the line should reach its maximum rear extension (just finished unrolling) at exactly the same moment that Phase One of the forward cast is begun."

One of the major difficulties faced by authors of instructional texts is the lack of real-time feedback from the reader. Personal casting instruction, such as a casting clinic, provides the instructor with feedback on whether a student connects with the explanations or examples. This opportunity to restructure the delivery for better understanding of the topic is necessarily missing from any text. In *Nature of Fly Casting* Jason Borger attempts to address this issue by utilizing the alternate phrasings and explanations of a wide range of other casting instructors, such as Bruce Richards, Mel Krieger, Joan Wulff, and Simon Gawesworth, complementing his own explanation.

While there is a sprinkling of dry, often self-deprecating humor, throughout the text, this is also very much a self-study book. The text is a mixture of semi-

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The Wrist Lock

By Denise Maxwell

During our many years of teaching students to flycast and fly fish, the most common mistake we observe in our flycasting classes is ‘breaking the wrist’ or bending the wrist. This common mistake causes the tip of the rod to follow a circular path instead of a straight line path. Consequently, the student finds it difficult to form an effective loop which will travel in the intended direction.

We always teach our students to cast the fast and easy way so we came up with this teaching aid we call the wrist lock. This device enables you to ‘lock’ the end of the rod to the wrist so the casting student gets the correct feel of the cast. At the end of the class, we give the wrist lock to each student to take away. This does two things. First, it is a reminder and second, it can be used to practice the cast and regain the correct feel.

The required materials are readily available from fabric stores or outdoor stores, such as REI:

- 16” of 1” wide webbing
- 1” slide
- 4” of 3/4” velcro

As you can see from Figure 1, the webbing is threaded through the two ends of the slide (Figure 3) to create a loop. This is where the end of the rod goes. It is important to put it on the very end of the rod otherwise ‘wristing’ can still occur.

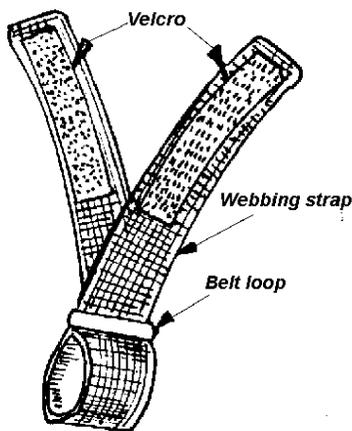


Figure 1: The Wrist Lock

Illustration by Mike Maxwell

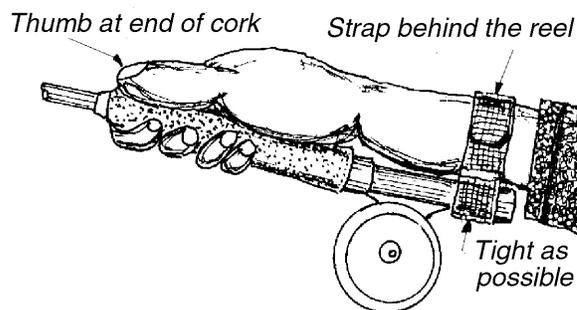


Figure 2: How it works

Illustration by Mike Maxwell

The velcro is sewed to the end of the webbing on opposite sides so that it will fasten when looped around the wrist. If you have a caster with large arms, add a couple of inches to the webbing and longer velcro and you have an extra large size. If you are teaching children or women with small arms, you can make some smaller ones either by taking a couple of inches off the webbing or making the velcro longer.



Figure 3: 1” slide

The thumb should rest at a comfortable spot towards the end of the cork with the thumb on top. When the cast is made, the caster cannot open the wrist unless a small amount of movement is desired. This enables the student to get the correct feel of the cast.

Although we don’t recommend fishing with it, the device can be worn if the reel retrieve is on the opposite side from the casting hand.

Please feel free to use this teaching tool. We have always encouraged others to use it and have given it away freely for over twenty years. It can be a very successful teaching tool.

*Denise Maxwell is a Casting Board of Governor member and Coeditor of **The Loop**. She has taught casting for over twenty-five years with her husband, Mike.*

Kids, Hula Hoops and Casting Games

By Rick Williams, Joy Knickrehm, and Dan Rhodes
(continued from page 1)

control over their loop shape; they usually master this quickly. The first of our casting games uses a large hula hoop. One instructor holds the hula hoop vertically at arm's length and another instructor demonstrates how to cast a narrow loop into and through the hula hoop. We also show them how a large wide loop won't penetrate the hula hoop opening and then challenge them to cast narrow loops through the hula hoop. They take to this kind of challenge eagerly.

Large and small hula hoops are used throughout the rest of our casting instruction and for both accuracy and distance exercises. One of the most effective casting games we've created is depicted in Figure 2. It uses three hula hoops (open circles) to create five casting positions (black squares), that require seven different casts (arrowed lines). This particular set up allows five students to cast at the same time without interfering with each other. Casting stations 1-3 each require a single cast to the corresponding hula hoop, while stations 4 and 5 require casts to two different hoops each.

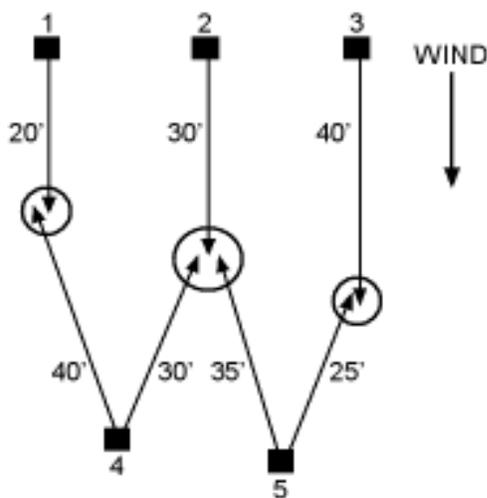


Figure 2

The object of the game is for the student to cast a yarn fly from each casting station into one or two hula hoops, counting the number of casts it takes them to land their fly inside the hoop. Students work through the five casting stations and end up with a final score equal to the number of casts it took them to pass through the casting course. Once students work through

the course, they are usually eager to go through it one or more times to improve their game score. In this set up, a score of 7 is the lowest possible. In our experience, scores in the teens are excellent scores, while beginning students frequently start with scores of 30-50+, giving them lots of room for improvement and encouraging them to work through the course again and again to improve their score.

Even a light wind can make the casting course much more challenging and as an instructor, one can set up the course to teach wind casting skills. For intermediate or advanced students, the course could be set up cross wind in order to teach cross hand casting or to encourage ambidextrous casting. For beginners, it's best to set it up aligned with the wind, so casting stations 1-3 are relatively easy downwind casts. Stations 4 and 5, which require casting into the wind, become significantly harder. However, this offers a great opportunity to teach various techniques for casting into and under the wind. In last summer's youth camp, we showed kids how to cast into and across wind before using the casting course, but it didn't seem to connect with them until we started the casting game. They had an easy time with stations 1-3, but couldn't complete stations 4 and 5 on the course, without applying the wind casting lessons. Consequently, we stopped the game, repeated the demonstration of how to cast into wind, and then watched and helped the kids master the wind techniques.

Variations on casting exercises or games with hula hoops are endless. For example, we also use two hula hoops to teach students how to shoot line. One hoop is placed out in front of the student at a comfortable casting distance (30-40', depending upon the student's ability) with the second hoop placed 7'-15' further out. The student is asked to drop the fly into the nearest hoop and then on the very next cast, shoot line and drop the yarn fly into the second hoop.

Finally, it's important to make the casting games fun for the kids (and the adults). It's easy to make them too challenging, which discourages students. Don't be afraid to stop the exercise or game, and modify the design right on the spot if you see it is too hard and no one is succeeding. If you do it right, everyone will have a great time and learn a lot about casting.

The authors are owners or employees of the Idaho Angler in Boise, Idaho. Rick Williams is a Master Casting Instructor. Joy Knickrehm and Dan Rhodes are Certified Casting Instructors.

From the Editors: Denise and Liz

It's hard to believe that we have wrapped up another issue of The Loop. This job is very satisfying when we have such great articles from our readers. Please keep them coming. For those of you that have been putting off writing that article, now is a great time to get started. If you have ideas for an article or questions for other instructors, send your suggestions to the editors. Sharing our teaching experiences--good and bad, tips, and tricks not only provides interesting reading; it encourages us to be better instructors.

Your current editors, with help from past editors and Julie Nelson, are gathering and compiling all back issues of The Loop into an electronic archive to which future issues of The Loop will be added. Much of the valuable information found in The Loop can not be found elsewhere and should be available to our instructors.

Remember, we are still looking for some great new graphics to use in The Loop.

Book Review

By Hans Weilenmann (continued from page 2)

scientific phrasing and more down to earth expansion on the subject covered, but Jason Borger presents his case in a very articulate manner.

Although the book lacks the photography sequences of teaching texts such as Ed Jaworowski's *The Cast* and the convincing easy going conversational approach of Mel Krieger's *The Essence of Fly Casting*, *Nature of Fly Casting* drills down deep as well as wide by sharing with the reader the underlying fundamentals, the foundation on which casting skills are built.

The spirit of the book is defined very succinctly by the author when he states, "How do you spell fly casting? C-O-N-T-R-O-L. Control is the key word in all of fly casting."

While the *Nature of Fly Casting* spans the full breadth of casting skills and casts to cover all likely conditions, it is not a book for everyone. The text is geared toward serious students of casting - those with a tendency to ask the 'why' questions - and it should be considered a 'must read' for present and aspiring casting instructors. Personally I enjoyed the book very much.

Hans Weilenmann is a FFF-Europe Certified Master Casting Instructor and a member of the FFF-Europe program Advisory Board. He is keenly interested in all matters related to casting technique, as well as coaching methodology.

The Conclave

When you receive this issue of The Loop, the Conclave will be around the corner. We hope that many of you will be attending this year and showing your support for our organization. The conclave is an excellent opportunity to polish your skills, either by testing with different Master Instructors and Casting Board of Governors or attending the many superb workshops and seminars put on by our enormously talented members.

If you will be in Idaho Falls early in the week, don't forget that Masters are invited and encouraged to attend the CBOG meeting as observers.

Have a great time at the Conclave!

*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:

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COMING EVENTS

Pre-registration is REQUIRED

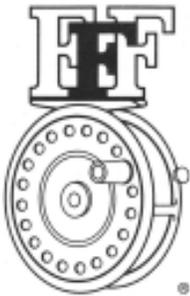
Contact Julie Nelson at 406-585-7592

Schedule subject to change

- **Idaho Falls, Idaho** - August 4-9: 2003 FFF Fly Fishing Show and Conclave
Tuesday, August 5 - CBOG Meeting - Masters invited to observe
- **Freeport, Maine** - LLBean 2-day workshop & certification with Macauley Lord.
Contact Craig Uecker to preregister at 800-341-4341, ext 22666.
Dates for 2003: April 5-6, April 12-13, August 2-3, and August 23-24
- **South Padre Island, Texas** - October 23-26; 2003 International Women Fly Fishers Festival
FFF Instructor Certification. Contact Julie Nelson to preregister.

Congratulations to our new Master Instructors

Way Yin - Bellingham, WA
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Gordon Hill - Big Pine Key, FL



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