



The Tailing Loop

The Federation of Fly Fishers Newsletter for Casting Instructors
Spring 1996

REFLECTIONS ON TAKING THE MASTER CERTIFICATION TEST

by Macauley Lord

Last August in Montana, I was among the thirteen people who took (and the eleven who passed) the first Master Certification Test. That statistic makes it sound less difficult than it was. I worked for years on my casting and my teaching to be able to pass the test. But it was by studying what and how the luminaries in our sport teach that I really put myself in a position to be qualified as a Master Casting Instructor. Some thoughts on the test and my preparation for it follow.

As it should be, the Master Test is challenging. The first requirement of the casting performance portion is that you cast 90 feet. I'm not a powerful caster and for me, that is a LONG cast. I needed to make sure that I could throw a 90' cast on demand, without warm-up. I got very helpful advice from Governors Bruce Richards and Al Kyte: practice carrying the longest line possible in the air without shooting or hauling. This really makes you concentrate on getting maximum efficiency in your rod stroke. You can then build on that, so that when you add hauling (the test requires you to carry 70' of line in the air with hauling o.k.), you are building on a solid foundation.

Other aspects that I had to practice diligently were the 40' casts that called for placement of slack in various portions of the line/leader. I had seen Lefty Kreh do this in demonstrations before but it took me some practice before I could do them consistently. Also, my left curve cast was suspect and I struggled with it. I found it much easier to do as a left-handed positive curve than as a right-handed negative curve, but the moral for me was that the practice was a reward in and of itself. John Sherrill, who is also Master Certified and is the new FFF Assistant Vice-President for Casting, says with a smile, "I don't see how people can resist spending an hour a day just casting." Preparing for the test reminded me how much joy I find in simply making that line sail off the rod tip.

The oral questions on the test are comprehensive, to say the least. (There is no longer a written portion.) Among many other things, they require the candidate to really know how to teach at all levels of casting proficiency. You have

to know and clearly explain what the rod, hand and arm are doing in different types of casts, including bad casts, and be able to clearly explain this. It almost goes without saying that the more you teach, the more you learn. By taking every opportunity you can to teach novices and intermediate/advanced casters, you will hone your analytical skills and learn better ways to communicate helpful information to your students.

The watershed in my teaching career was my trip to the 1993 Conclave in Livingston. There, I spent three days observing and querying the deans of our profession as they taught casting. (It was a special pleasure to observe Jim Green teach, as I had learned so much about casting from a film he did years ago.) It was fascinating to observe the variety of approaches and teaching techniques they used. (I'll save the details for another article.) What I found reassuring was the consistency of their results. As Al Kyte said: "The rod must be loaded and unloaded—that's a matter of substance. How that's achieved is a matter of style." These teachers were all taking their students down slightly different paths; but they all converged at exactly the same place.

That trip to the 1993 Conclave cemented my desire to become the best casting instructor I could be. And all that I learned there went into preparing for the Master Test. The joy of the test was that the anticipation of it inspired me to summarize in my head so much of what I had learned, to practice it with a rod and to teach it to students. I highly recommend the process, with all its preparation and intangible rewards, to anyone who is considering it.

**THE ETHICAL ANGER:
THOUGHTS ON CASTING A FLY**
by Richard K. Stoll

It was like a flash went off in my head. Why had the obvious not occurred to me before? The two prime maxims that govern the foundation of still-water and stream fishing had eluded me all these years. The maxims were so simple that even the most novice of fly anglers should be able to discern these basics of fish behavior and how they directly relate to productive angling. But they had eluded me.

The other morning I was on the beach at Point no Point, a promontory jutting into north Puget Sound. I was planning to take a chance at getting into salmon. Lines of anglers were up to the tops of their chest waders in an attempt to get as far out into the Sound as possible. Buzz bomb throwers and fly flingers alike were making Herculean casts, which occasionally dangerously zinged past boats trolling the drop-off several hundred feet off shore.

A few dejected looking individuals with unstrung fly rods were nonchalantly loitering on the beach. The sullen looks on the faces of these novitiates indicated they were too embarrassed to fish among those with greater physical ability and long-standing angling expertise. How could they comfortably join the line-up wearing hip-waders extending only to mid-thigh or with woefully inadequate casting abilities? Not a chance in heaven did these pitiful individuals have amongst the far-flinging crowd of Arnold Schwarzeneggers, those construction workers, weight lifters, and marathon runners braving the depths in front of them.

Over the years I have observed this same phenomena on many other lakes, ponds, beaches and reservoirs. The first maxim popped into my head like an explosion.

*** Fish always position themselves at least three feet further than the absolute longest cast by the very best fly caster.**

In situations like the other morning at Point no Point any fish that is caught is purely incidental and, by the way, a very dumb fish at that.

If this was true for still waters, then what about rivers and streams? The question was as obvious as the answer. How many hundreds of times have I seen fly anglers lining Puget Sound and coastal rivers perilously wading as deep as cascading waters would allow, then casting to pockets next to the far bank?

The issue is complicated when anglers are lined up along both sides of a river. Which bank is the far bank? That is a matter of perspective and depends on the side of the river you are on. I once remember looking down a river where anglers lined both banks. Numerous fly lines were pulled taught across the river like telephone lines. They were all hooked together in the center by flies from opposing anglers on opposite sides of the river. Like at Point no Point, a contingent of novitiates were patiently observing from the banks, allowing the more competent to brave the depths.

The second maxim popped into my head even faster than the first.

*** Fish always position themselves along the far bank of any river, stream or creek.**

From the number of anglers I have seen behaving in this way, it is a wonder that I have not heretofore identified this most conventional of fishing wisdom.

Consider this thought. "Having so little time, we think we must fish the best looking spots where everyone else fishes because they must be good or no one else would fish them. This is false reasoning because we are relying on precedents established by easy fishing and in most cases, by anglers who have followed the established rules rather than the dictates of their own mends." From Trout by Ray Bergman.

This brings me to sound advice for both angling and life in general.

*** Wade a little shallower, cast a little shorter, and please do not step on the fish.**

This last thought is a product of a half century of casting a fly.

COMING

EVENTS

Basic Certification - May 18; Long Beach, CA; Contact Allan Rohrer (714) 756-9286

Basic & Master Certification - Southeast Council Conclave, Jacksonville, FL; June 13-15
Contact Fred Stevenson (205) 881-2754

Basic Certification - Smoky Mtn Fly Fishers event; Asheville, NC; June 22-23; Contact Bruce Harang (704) 299-3230

Basic & Master Certification - June 28-30; Northeast Council Conclave Conway, NH; Contact Richard Diamond (508) 879-1139

Basic & Master Certification - International Fly Fishing Show Conclave; August 6-10; Livingston, MT; Registration form in the Spring **Flyfisher**

During the Conclave there will be a Casting Instructor Roundtable - August 10; 8-9:30am

FROM THE EDITOR

Macauley Lord

Believe it or not, this marks the first edition of the Tailing Loop to be edited by a Certified Casting Instructor. To date, the entire publication (with the exception of the first issue) has sprung from the labor of Evelyn Taylor, at the FFF home office in Bozeman. She will continue to design and lay out each edition but she will now have a flycasting type, me, to bear the editorial load for her. Thank you, Evelyn, for continuing a job well done.

Some biographical data—My wife and I live in Brunswick, Maine, near some of the finest smallmouth bass and striped bass fishing on the continent. I've taught at the L. L. Bean Fly Fishing Schools as a core instructor since 1986 and was recently named Head Casting Instructor there. After being Master Certified at last August's Conclave, I was named to the Board of Governors for Casting Certification. As do the other Governors, I have a long-standing passion for teaching the essence and beauty of flycasting.

My personal approach to casting instruction is that, just as my students and I can always become better casters, I can always become a better casting instructor. I do that by practicing and teaching, by listening to the new ideas that come from my fellow L. L. Bean instructors, and by studying what the other Master instructors and Governors teach. I don't have all the right answers; I'm just trying to ask all the right questions. As always, we welcome your articles, letters and constructive comments.

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or email 74504.2605@compuserve.com

Also, feel free to e-mail me directly at:
macauley@mainelink.net

NEW ASSISTANT VP OF CASTING

John Sherrill (Jack) is a native of Louisville, Kentucky, a graduate of the University of Michigan, and is a licensed real estate broker. He currently lives in Arizona and plans to move to Colorado in the near future. Jack is now retired and spends his time creating bronze sculptures of wildlife and fly fishing. He is a Master Certified casting instructor and is looking forward to working with the casting program.

Ed. The Assistant VP of Casting is responsible for:

- Chairing the Executive Committee Casting of the BOG
- Operating the established program
- Insuring that FFF policies are followed
- Directing media relations for the program
- Directing assigned paid staff

BOARD OF GOVERNORS IS EXPANDED

The FFF is pleased to announce the appointment of 10 new members to the Board of Governors. These new appointments will help make the Casting Instructor Certification Program more accessible to the public. Following is a complete list of the Board of Governors:

* new members

Barry Beck
Pennsylvania
(717) 925-2392

Gary Borger
Wisconsin
(715) 842-4806

Al Buhr
Oregon
(503) 393-6965

Jon Cave *
Florida
(407) 349-2614

Leon Chandler
New York
(607) 756-2851

Dave Engerbretson
Idaho
(208) 882-1687

Chico Fernandez
Florida
(305) 596-4481

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Bob Jacklin *
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Tom Jindra *
Louisiana
(504) 392-7511

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(510) 631-0419

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Steve Rajeff
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(406) 961-4416

Doug Swisher
Florida (Nov-June)
(813) 793-7438

John Van Dalen *
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(517) 631-6873

Rod Walinchus *
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(406) 222-8054

WHEN 'COMMON SENSE' IS

by Bob McLaughlin

I haven't forgotten an adult Sunday school class twenty-five years ago where we were discussing the behaviors of the flower children and changes in the church. A middle-aged, generally up-tight lady called for moderation in all things. In response, a middle-aged man, with a gleam in his eye and a slight smile, declared, "But you can have too much of that too." I had to stifle my laughter.

I write this to modify Bob Krumm's approach in "Common Sense Fly Casting" in the Winter '96 Billing Loop. It's based upon too much moderation. I am concerned that we as instructors should teach casting techniques which are specific to the distances being cast. Mr. Krumm took to heart his father's advice that the person who can cast 30 feet accurately will "out-fish those guys casting 60 feet or more." I can assure you that if you only cast 30 feet, no matter how accurately, you can fish alongside me for days and probably never get a strike. I fish Puget Sound for searun cutthroat and coho and the rivers for steelhead. Even fishing our low-land lakes for rainbow often requires casts of 50 feet or more.

The point here is that we should not assume all of our students' casting will be done on small trout streams. If we teach a short casting arc ("stop your power at 11:00 o'clock"), we should qualify this immediately by saying that we are

teaching the basic casting stroke, that it is good for short to medium casts and that we will modify it for longer distances. I think that many instructors do not make this clear early on. Likewise with the statement "more power should go into the backcast than the forecast." This won't work in my fishing, nor that of many flyfishers.

I observed an instructor emphasize casting a very short line with split shot, "because the fish are right there", indicating about 20 feet. Yes, in nymphing the streams he fishes, they are. But he didn't explain that limitation. In small stream situations where delicacy is required, the short line, short casting arc and weaker forecast are called for. But let's qualify that with our students who may fish other places. If I go out and "think thirty feet" and "think short" per the Common Sense article I will be going out with a recipe for endless skunks. Over-emphasizing short can be as bad as over-emphasizing long.

Ed. In fairness, Bob Krumm's article included this qualifier: "Don't get me wrong there are fly fishing situations where long casts are a necessity, but most of the time long casts are not necessary."

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