

THE LOOP

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Casting Elbow

by Gordon Hill

I have noted painful elbows in a number of very good casters over the last few years. As an orthopedic surgeon, I recognize this as a kind of “tennis elbow” or lateral epicondylitis. This is an inflammation of the tissues about the bony ridge on the outer side of the elbow, where the extensor muscles of the forearm attach. It can, however, occur on the inner side of the elbow. Generally, it is a self-limited condition which usually disappears even without treatment, and almost never gets to the point of requiring surgery. For the more painful and persistent cases steroid injections are sometimes effective. Anti-inflammatory medications rarely help.

My brief non-medical observations:

- 1) I get it during the winter when doing a lot of distance casting with full sinking lines.
- 2) It tends to occur in casters who hold the cork grip too tight and for the majority of the casting stroke----not just at the point of maximum load.

3) We see it more frequently in casters who use the low elbow, off-vertical Lefty Kreh style.

4) It is much more common in casters who have recently started casting with heavy or long single handed rods.

5) Dennis Grant has a wealth of experience in Spey and double-handed rod casting. In a conversation with him I got the impression that he hasn't seen this problem with these casters.

6) One of the best fly fishermen in our fishing club, had chronic “tennis elbow” for years. It would recur by either casting heavy Clousers or going above a 9', 9-weight rod. It was such a problem, despite multiple injections and periods of rest, that I considered operating on him a few years ago. By modifying his style, going to lighter tackle, and giving up the practice of ‘hero casts,’ he got over it.

7) I used to have the problem when I would use my dominant right hand to hold the rod while fighting a large fish for an hour or more. I started hav-

(Continued on Page 2)

ing the problem in my other elbow when holding the rod in my left hand for long fish playing. That problem was solved by switching hands frequently. I now hold the grip with my dominant hand while the fish is running and switch to the other hand while pumping or reeling.

One of the reasons “casting elbow” is more common when casters use sinking lines and heavy flies, is that the pick-up for the backcast is more difficult. Instead of retrieving closer, the caster tries to pick up from a bit too far out. That puts a heavy strain on the involved extensor muscles. It’s much better for the caster to either start with the fly closer to him and the tip of the rod right down at the water and extended forward and/or to use a rollcast pick-up or even two of them to get the fly up near the surface, before executing the backcast.

I’ve witnessed the sudden emergence of this problem at Montauk during a blitz, when the flyfisher strikes blues, stripers, and albacore using a sudden rod-strike instead of a repeated strip strike. One of the advantages of what we’ve called the albie retrieve is that it’s a rapid two handed retrieve done with the rod handle tucked under the dominant arm. The strike is done with the other hand---like a haul. The fish is already on the run by the time the rod is returned to the hand thus minimizing elbow stress.

While performing the “thrust cast”(Lefty Kreh wind

cast) one can injure the elbow too. It’s a very different injury mechanism caused by the sudden almost explosive extension of the joint at the stop. That injury is much more common in new inexperienced casters. For this reason, I don’t teach it except to more seasoned and well-controlled, advanced students.

All this experience has led me to some suggestions for those who are troubled by this problem:

- 1) Be fully aware of a tendency to hold the grip tightly during any part of the stroke except for the point of maximum load at the end of the stroke on *both* the backcast and the forward cast.
- 2) Rest the arm soon after the pain appears, if you can.
- 3) Consider a trial of an alternate casting style
- 4) Drop down at least two tackle system weights
- 5) Learn to cast with your non-dominant hand. All good instructors should learn this. It drives us back to elementary basics, makes us think as we cast, humbles us and gives true empathy for the new casting student.
- 6) I have even thought of having the caster try the use of light two-handed tackle. Not necessarily Spey technique, but overhead straight line two-handed casting.
- 7) A “tennis elbow strap” is an effective binder. It’s available at some pharmacies and surgical supply stores.

Gordon Hill is a retired orthopedic surgeon from Big Pine Key, Florida. Gordy is a member of the Board of Governors.

The Essence of a Fly Cast

By Mel Krieger

All flycasting, no matter how descriptive and analytical the directions and teachings may be, must finally conclude kinesthetically, and the only way to learn this unique feel of casting a long weighted line with a flexible rod is to experience it; not unlike the learning process of riding a bicycle for the first time. Convincing or inspiring the learner to jump on the bike and go for it may well be the ultimate instructional mode. Casting a fly is identical, and again like riding a bike, virtually every person who is not severely handicapped can learn the timing and feel of fly casting simply by casting.

There is of course a place for other instruction even in this basic learning cycle that may help the learner focus his or her efforts and hasten that learning process. That would include analogies, visuals and key words and phrases, techniques that are also used for intermediate and advanced fly casters. Although most of these instructional tools are valid and useful to the learner, there are times when they can actually inhibit learning and possibly lead to serious casting faults.

The following are some common examples.

* “Throwing a ball” is an excellent analogy for communicating the athleticism and fluidity of a natural throwing motion. It can, however lead to the use of too much wrist movement and a throwing motion that fails to utilize the bending and unbending of a fly rod.

* Words like “whump,” “snap,” “flick,” “flip” and “pop” are commonly used to convey the feeling of bending (loading) and unbending a fly rod. Again, they are mostly good words, but often misconstrued to indicate a too-quick loading and unloading of the fly rod, resulting in a dip of the fly rod tip and tailing loops. Spelling whump with two or three U s - “whuuump” or possibly “snaap” might be better, especially for longer casts.

* Phrases like “accelerate to a stop,” “speed up and stop” and “start slow and end fast” are common instructional tools that accurately depict the tip of the rod during a casting stroke. Many learners however, attempt to emulate those slow to fast directions with their casting hand, often with poor results. A more useful instructional phrase might be “a smooth even hand movement to a stop.”

The result will actually be the rod tip accelerating throughout the casting stroke.

* Another common phrase that has almost become a mantra in fly casting is “Applying power too early in the casting stroke results in a tailing loop.”

That statement is basically incorrect. It is possible to apply maximum power in the beginning of a casting stroke. The key is that you must maintain or increase the rod bend throughout the stroke. The real culprit in this tailing loop concept is UNLOADING THE ROD TOO SOON!!!

Let’s look more closely at a flycasting stroke. The first step in all flycasting strokes is “bending the rod.” Significant movement of the line only takes place after the rod bend. Starting a casting stroke too slowly or, for that matter, too quickly commonly results in a poor rod bend and an inefficient cast.

DO NOT START A CASTING STROKE SLOWLY.

DO NOT START QUICKLY.

START STRONG - BEND THE ROD.

A better description of a casting stroke might be:

“BEND THE ROD AND SLING THE LINE.”

Or *“BEND THE ROD AND ACCELERATE TO A STOP”*

Or whatever words work for you following *“BEND THE ROD AND ———.”*

Casting the fly line from the water and changing the back and forth direction of the line help to start the casting stroke with good rod bend. Notice that many casters make their best backcast from the water. That’s because the friction of the water puts a decided bend in the fly rod early in the casting stroke!

A roll cast however requires a more forceful rod bend as it does not have the loading advantage of a water pickup or an aerialized line.

And now to one of the most elemental and important aspects of a flycasting stroke, often overlooked by both experienced casters and even instructors.

It is a PULL THROUGH motion ——— the casting hand preceding the rod tip through most of the casting stroke - the turnover and stop only at the conclusion of the casting stroke. A PUSH THROUGH motion in the casting stroke has the rod even or ahead of the casting

(Continued on Page 4)

hand – somewhat akin to a punching motion. While it is possible to cast reasonably well with this pushing motion, especially with the stiff powerful fly rods that are currently popular, the PULL THROUGH casting stroke is superior for all fly rods and all casts.

Some analogies might be useful to more fully understand this concept. Imagine a brick on the end of the line. A hard PUSH THROUGH motion will very likely break the rod, while a pulling motion could easily move the heavy weight. Imagine a three-foot length of rope pulled through to smack a waist high board. Pulling the rope through could break the board while pushing the rope would be futile.

A biomechanical company working with Olympic athletes and professional baseball teams concluded that the closest athletic event to a distance flycast would be a javelin throw.

Try this. Lay out 70 or so feet of fly line on a lawn behind you, fly rod pointing to the fly, and throw a javelin turning the rod over only at the very end of the throw, an extreme PULL THROUGH casting stroke. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Now try the same cast pushing the rod through the casting stroke. I am sure you will find a significant reduction in the speed of the line and very likely a tailing loop.

Shorter casts are more subtle utilizing a fairly short pulling motion at the beginning of the cast. Many instructors teach a “pulling down” with the caster’s elbow or hand during the casting stroke, resulting in an excellent “pull through” movement.

Longer casts however, require pulling on a more horizontal plane; the longest casts usually on the same plane as the projected forward cast.

Think of starting all flycasting strokes with this pulling motion. Combine this pulling motion with a good rod bend and your almost assured of an efficient cast. “The quintessence of learning is doing!” Good luck.

Mel Krieger is a member of the Casting Board of Governors. He really doesn't need any introduction but among his activities, he teaches flycasting, flyfishing, travels to fish and speak as well as writing many books and articles.

Casting Quiz

- 1) **True/False** Contrary to what was once believed, researchers now know that the haul only increases line speed and does not contribute to the loading (bending) of the rod.
- 2) **True/False** The drift technique is an effective technique employed after a backcast to extend the stroke length on the subsequent forward cast.
- 3) In a Roll or Spey Cast what is the relationship between the D loop and the Anchor to the target?
 - a. Only the anchor needs to be in line with the target.
 - b. Only the D loop needs to be in line with the target.
 - c. Both the anchor and the D loop should be in line with the target.
 - d. None of the above.
- 4) What are two important causes of a concave path of the rod tip?
- 5) What is the relationship of the length of line to be cast and the length of the haul?
- 6) **True/False** The size of the loop during the cast is determined by how far the rod tip deviates from a straight line path.
- 7) **True/False** Triangular taper lines are excellent for windy conditions because the fly line can retain a great deal of energy with its progressively smaller taper toward the end of the fly line.
- 8) **True/False** To keep your line tight it is best to move the rod forward when the backcast is unrolling.

Master Instructor Eric Sherar suggested including quiz questions in The Loop. Thanks to Master Instructors Brian Ellis, Frank LoPresti, and Eric Sherar for preparing this quiz.

Ever Upward: The Spey-O

By John Breslin

As with all aspects of life, flycasting instruction must advance or stagnate. So I invented the Spey-O. Necessity was the mother of invention. As I have been doing a lot of teaching of speycasting lately, I needed a better tool. My standard 4-foot Fly-O rod was insufficient to demonstrate the spey motions.

As with all great scientific advances in the modern world, the Spey-O rests on the shoulders of those who have come before. First there was the Fly-O, invented by Joan Wulff. Then there was the Mel-O, invented by himself and named by Mac Lord. Now, the Spey-O is here for all of you to use in your speycasting instruction gigs.

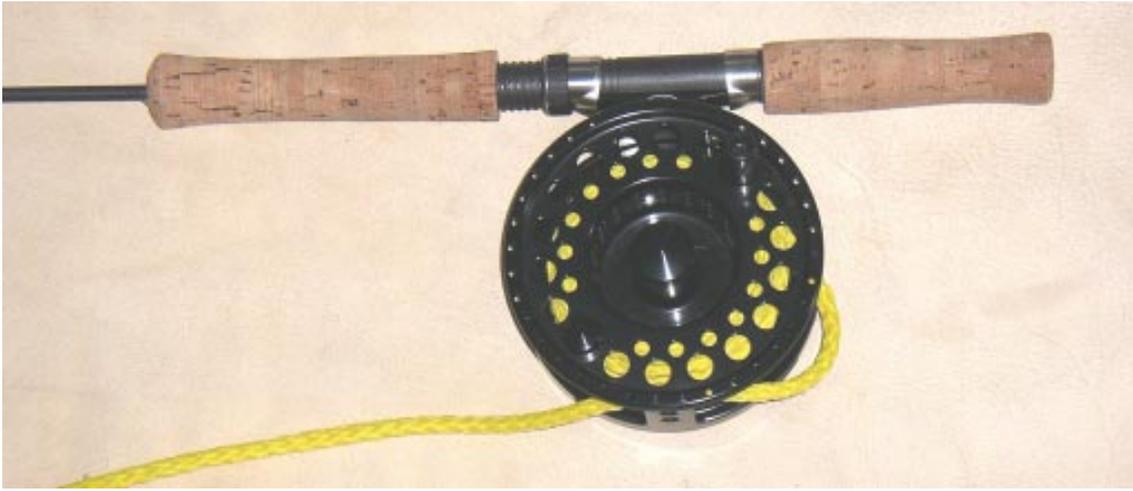


The Spey-O Line is just a modified Mel-O line. I use 25 feet of “line” of macrame cord, with the standard 4 feet of heavy yarn as “leader” whipfinished to the line. The colour scheme is important to me. The line cord is bright yellow, and the standard heavyweight day-glo orange yarn is what I find best for the leader. With these colours, the setup is visible against just about any indoor or outdoor background.

The real key is the Spey-O Rod. I built the Spey-O Rod from a 5-foot spinning rod blank, fairly lightweight. A 4 inch plastic reel seat (about \$2.50 grade) was installed between an upper grip of 6 inches and a lower grip of 4 inches both made of reject cork from a rod builder. Three # 5 snakes were used, nothing fancy, as shooting line was not envisioned with this tool. The tiptop has a large loop. Guide spacing was by the eyeball method, starting with the “stripper” one foot above the top of the upper grip.

(Continued on Page 6)

(Continued from Page 5)



I have found it essential to use a reel – a large one - with the Spey-O for realism in demonstrating hand movements in the speycasting moves. The Spey-O Line is spooled on an old large-arbour reel that was lying about in my gear.

In use as an instructing tool, I have found the Spey-O a most useful device. First I use it indoors in my standard beginning class session to demonstrate various moves used in the speycasting strokes. Then, on moving to the casting field, I can carry it along the line of students to mimic their individual mistakes quite vividly for them or I put it in the student's hands for analysis purposes. When I put the students in the water, spaced out on the stream, I can use the Spey-O from the bank for further individual demonstration of perceived casting flaws while the student stays in position in the stream. One just has to be careful not to get the Spey-O line in the water.

There you have it – the Spey-O.

I hope you find it as useful as I have. During this year's conclave, I showed the Spey-O to Al Buhr during my THCI exam to demonstrate my teaching methods, and he thought it was a marked improvement over what else is available. Any comments or improvements are welcomed. No patents pending, so build away, if you want one. Email me at: grzlyhkl@jxbreslin.com

John Breslin is certified by the FFF CICP as a master flycasting instructor, and teaches flycasting with both single-handed and two-handed rod. He guides flyfishing trips to his family home in Co. Donegal, Ireland.

From The Editors

*We extend our deepest sympathies to Denise on the death of her husband, Mike Maxwell. Mike was a long time contributor to the world of casting and two-handed casting. Mike wrote one of the most extensive texts on spey fishing, **The Art & Science of Spey fishing**, Flyfishers Arte & Publishing, 1994. He certainly will be missed. Our thoughts are with you, Denise.*

It was great to see so many of you at the Conclave in West Yellowstone in August. Several Master Instructors attended the Board of Governors meeting: Eric Sherar, Bruce Williams, Chuck Robinson, Marilyn Vitale, Mike Peruse, John Reed, Don Simonson, Dan McCrimmon, Al Crise, Frank LoPresti, Way Yin, Brian Ellis, Dan Wright, and Art Mazzier.



Answers to the Casting Quiz

(From page 4)

1. False
2. True
3. c
4. narrow casting arc for the length of line, creep and/or erratic application of power
5. Long cast/long haul; short cast/short haul
6. True
7. False
8. False

Many of these Master Instructors are working as committee members with the Board of Governors. Their contributions are very important to the work of the Casting Board of Governors.

Please note the Casting Quiz on page four. This quiz was prepared by three of our Master Instructors. They hope to make you think with their questions and perhaps encourage some Certified Instructors to prepare for the Masters examination.

Eric Sherar, Frank LoPresti, and Brian Ellis have more questions for future Loop editions. Please let the Editors know what you think of this addition and feel free to submit some of your own Casting Quiz questions.

Cheers,
Your Editors,
Denise Maxwell and Liz Watson

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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 for 2004

Pre-registration is REQUIRED

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

Freeport, Maine—L.L. Bean 2-Day Test Preparation Workshop and Teaching Workshop with Macauley Lord.
To register please call (888-552-3261).

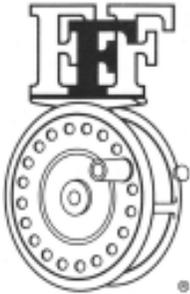
Denver, CO - The Fly Fishing Show, Jan. 7-9, Pre-register by 12/31/04. Instructor & Master

College Park, MD - The Fly Fishing Show, Jan 15-16, Pre-register by 1/7/05. Instructor

Contact Julie Nelson at (406) 585-7592 for pre-registration (A \$50 test fee for Certified Instructor or \$100 test fee for Masters is required to pre-register)

Congratulations to new Master Casting Instructors

Bill Hassan - Medway, MA
Michael Kelly - Glenwood Springs, Co
Bob Middo - Redondo Beach, CA



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