

The Loop

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CASTING TIP by *Tim Rajeff*

This casting tip involves the parts of your body and arm that are used to ‘hit’ the cast. Remember that in every cast there is an optimum stroke length and stroke aggressiveness to match the caster’s equipment and physique. Every time I read a tip in a magazine whether casting, golf, etc., the writer assumes the reader already has a solid background in biomechanics, mechanical engineering and is fluent in Latin. The truth is many teachers can describe a simple motion or action in a complex and confusing way. Just for fun try to describe all the motions and actions you need to take two steps. It might go like this: Start with the muscles in your hip, which you use to pull on your thigh, which in turn causes your quads to lift and swing your knee up while allowing your foot to extend out in front of you in a smooth acceleration...etc. This is hard isn’t it? When I attempt to describe the actions and motions used to cast a fly rod, please forgive my assumptions and complexity of my descriptions.

I would like to review two forms used by great casters, many of whom use different strokes. Hopefully you can relate to one of the casting styles described below and pick out something that will help you. Keep in mind that it is best to examine your body type and your favorite casting motion to know if you are an explosive caster or a long stroke/smooth caster. Mr. Harvey Pennic, a famous golf instructor, would tell his students, “If you are going to try to copy the swing of someone make sure they have the same build as you.” I recommend the same thing for casting a fly rod.

The aggressive caster who likes to use an explosive burst of acceleration, will generally do better using little or no wrist in their cast. The explosive caster likes a stiffer rod. There is considerably more leverage against a person’s hand and arm when they use a stiffer rod. The concept of a fly rod being a lever is something instructors talk about and isn’t important for everyone to understand. Just remember that a stiffer rod is harder

to accelerate than a softer rod. Imagine trying to swing a hammer with a handle that is twice as long as a normal handle. It would be difficult and it would require more strength. To swing a long hammer you would be better off using no wrist or locking the wrist. A stiffer rod acts like a longer lever, which will require more strength and a more aggressive stroke to get the speed needed to cast a line. To effectively cast a stiff rod, a caster must work harder making a shorter stroke. This is the short twitch muscle person. They are able to reach their target using a short stroke. Since the wrist is the weakest link in the casting stroke of most people, it should be used sparingly when casting a stiff rod.

The opposite of the aggressive caster is the smooth, long stroke caster, whose rod travels farther back and farther forward during the cast. They prefer rods that bend more and act like a shorter lever. The softer rod is easier to accelerate so many people who use softer rods can take advantage of their wrist speed. The wrist snap is most people’s fastest twitch muscle movement. Every major league pitcher relies on the wrist snap at the end of their motion to add the final speed to their throws. A flycaster can also add their final speed or acceleration using the wrist. If the rod is too stiff your wrist will not be strong enough and may cause casting problems and bad loops. If the rod is softer it will not be too hard to snap the wrist at the end of the casting stroke.

Try making some casts using mostly wrist and some using almost no wrist. Repeat the experiment with a stiff rod and a soft rod to help identify which style best suits your body type.

It might have been fate or merely chance but Tim was born within a couple of miles of the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club in San Francisco. Like a child who grew up near the finest opera house in the world, casting and fishing have made a permanent mark on Tim and like a distant melody is always on his mind. This tip was originally written for www.rajeffsports.com

In Memoriam Dave Engerbretson 1936-2003

The FFF and Casting Board of Governors lost a valued member when Dave Engerbretson died of complications from diabetes and heart failure. He was 67.

Dave was a retired professor from Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. He taught anatomy, exercise science and fly fishing, but he is best known for his passion for fly fishing.

Dave joined the FFF in the 1960s while still a graduate student and served for many years on the Casting Board of Governors.

His accomplishments were many and you could say the ultimate fly fisherman's resume:

- * Conducted his own fly fishing schools in Montana.
- * Commercial fly tyer for Orvis.
- * Photographer
- * Licenced fishing guide on many famous waters.
- * Author of book "Tight Lines, Bright Water" which is a collection of essays on how-to and where-to on fly fishing.
- * Editor-at-large for *Fly Fisherman* magazine.
- * Equipment designer
- * Consultant to several major fly fishing companies.
- * Bamboo rod builder.
- * Commentator on PBS "Fly-Tying: An Anglers Art".
He starred with LeRoy Hyatt who tied the flies while Dave explained their use.
- * Contributing editor to the Virtual Fly Shop, Cabela's Guidebooks, and Lefty's World.
- * He also wrote on fly fishing for Field & Stream, Sports Afield and Backpacking Journal.

In 2002, Dave Engerbretson was awarded the Charles E. Brooks Memorial Life Award from the FFF for his many years of teaching and writing about fly fishing and fly tying. He will be missed by all of us.

John Randolph of *Fly Fisherman* writes:

Dave Engerbretson was my friend and mentor. When I first met him and we fished the Madison River in Yellowstone Park in 1978, I was so impressed with his casting (and fishing) that I asked him to be the Western Editor of Fly Fisherman magazine. Dave was a natural athlete, one who made fly casting look like effortless fluid motion. His loops were tight; there were no line energy waves in his casts; and he almost never threw tailing loops despite the lengths of his casts. He was, in other words, poetry in motion, the iconic image that we want our casting students to emulate.

In a recent submission (his last) to Fly Fisherman Dave described what it is like to hit the groove in fly casting. He explained that there are times when the accomplished caster finds that sweet spot when casting reaches its highest fulfillment and the caster, like a musician grooving on a piece of music, reaches the Tenth Level, the spiritual plane of performance. Then he experiences the consummate joy of our sport and his soul sings. I believe that Dave is still enjoying that sweet spot. And his soul is singing.

