

## Adaptive Caster by Dave Cleaves

### Don't Forget the Line Hand for Better Casting

*"The line hand plays an important role in fly casting...in really long casts, the left (line) hand will be as busy as the rod hand...line-hand control is half the battle in making a talented caster."*

*-- A.J. McClane. The Practical Fly Fisherman. 1953. (pg 33)*

We sometimes take the line hand for granted in fly casting. But the work of the line hand influences every aspect of our connection with the fish – casting, presentation, line management, striking, and playing the fish. (*Line hand* refers to the hand, arm, and shoulder of the caster's non-rod side). Line-hand adjustments influence the loop through the management of slack, line speed, and interference/support of how we align and make the casting stroke with the rod hand. The rod and line hand have separate functions and must work together. When they don't, we have problems.

We should not neglect the line hand and we may have to focus on improving our line hand movements if they are the source of casting problems. Line-hand problems can show up in poor loops but be mistaken for problems with the rod hand's basic stroke. For example unintentional curves (usually to the line hand side) on long casts are sometimes caused by hauling with the line hand aggressively out to the side – an issue of taking/giving (releasing) and tracking.

Functions of the line hand in conjunction with the rod hand include:

- Positioning for the cast (pick up)
- Managing slack before, during, and after the stroke
- Changing line length being casted
- Supplementing the stroke through line speed – (hauling)
- Retrieving the fly
- Striking and playing fish

These functions are served by three fundamental line-hand skills—holding, giving, and taking line.

#### Holding and organizing line

- Maintaining tension on the line during casting, fishing, and playing fish
- Holding loose line off the water or the deck and keeping it organized and out of the way as it moves in and out of the *casting system*
- Moving the line to and from the "control point" finger on the rod hand

#### Taking in Line—the Essence of the Hauling Motion

Off the reel, off the water, retrieving the fly (stripping, hand twist, other), taking up slack, striking and playing fish. This is a companion skill to giving line in changing line length. Taking in line includes starting the line in motion as well as changing the speed at which it is taken in. This is the essence of the hauling motion.

## Giving Line Back

Where? On the shoot at the end of the stroke and when creating mends in the air or on the water. This is a key skill that often needs work on timing and a feel for the moving line and distance. The classic mistake is to release line too early on the shoot, too late on aerial mends. To change the length of the cast we use this skill to shoot, false cast different lengths of line, and get enough line outside the rod tip to start a cast.

Line-hand skills should be developed at first separately from the rod-hand skills and then right along with the stroking movements of the rod hand. We should develop the feel for the line hand's direct influence on the line and understand its role in the work of casting and fishing. If things are working for us, fine. Don't try to fix the unbroken. But as we stretch our skills and start to false cast different lengths of line, mend, and haul, we may need special attention to how well we are working our line hand. We can have bad habits, ground in by hours of fishing, so it might be wise to get some supervised practice under the watchful eye of an instructor.

*Dave Cleaves of North Potomac is an IFFF-certified fly-casting instructor (CI, MCI), who teaches fly casting and guides in Maryland. Dave is retired from the US Forest Service and has worked for Trout & About (Phil Gay) and the LL Bean Outdoor Discovery schools. He is a member of the Seneca Valley Trout Unlimited Chapter.*