FLY-CASTING

with JOAN SALVATO WULFF

illustrated by Gordon Allen

The Back Cast Power Snap

The POWER SNAP is the focal point, *i.e.* the most important part, of the cast, backward or forward. It determines *exactly* what the path of the fly line will be. If you are casting a very short line, the power snap can actually be the whole stroke; but with a longer line, the stroke consists of two parts: 1) the LOADING move—to get the line moving, and 2) the POWER SNAP—which follows and ends the stroke.

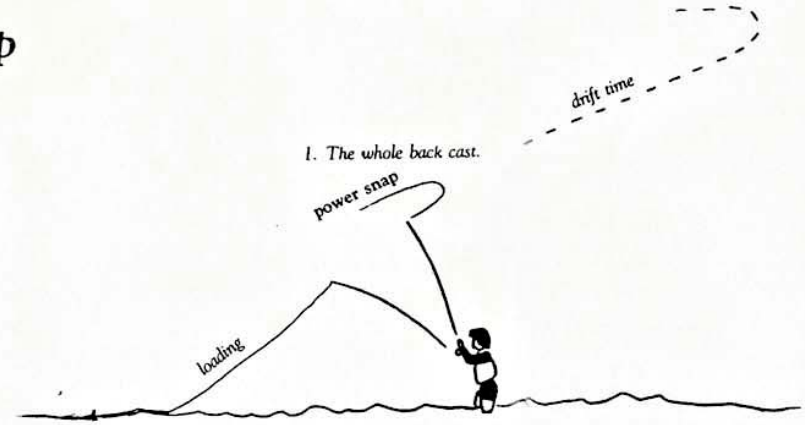
As explained in "The First Move" (March/April '82), taking a backcast off the water will show both parts of the backcast stroke very easily (see figure 1). Start with the rod tip low on the water and all the slack taken out of the line. The initial lifting of the rod makes the tip bend under the weight of the line (loading). When the line is lifted free but the leader and fly are still on the water, the loading move changes to the power snap. The power snap takes the leader and fly off the water and then the backcast stroke is finished. *DRIFT TIME* follows, while the line unrolls.

Because the power snap is so important I have analyzed it in different ways.

The Rod Tip The initial lifting/moving of the rod makes the tip bend under the weight of the line, for the loading move. The power snap, which follows, is an acceleration to a stop. This acceleration causes the already bent tip to reach its maximum load, and the stop causes the tip to spring to the back side of the rod, taking a portion of the line with it—to form the beginning of the backward loop. The tip will vibrate (oscillate) a little, but my mental picture of what happens at the end of the power snap is shown in Figure 2.

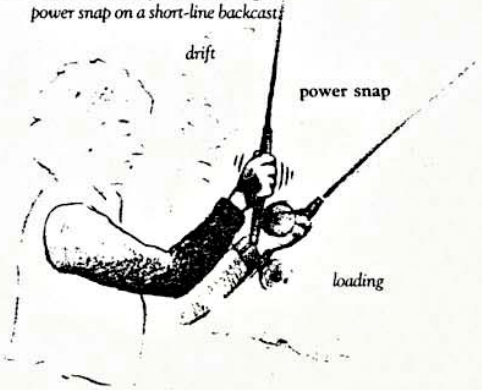
The Casting Arm To start the backcast your arm should be relaxed, wrist limp, elbow bent. Hold the end of the rod butt (with the reel) against the underside of your wrist and forearm. Lift your bent arm, the rod and the line as one unit on the loading move. Then, when only the leader and fly are still on the water, make a dramatic backward move of the forearm and hand (like a backward THRUST!) just long enough to take the fly out of the water—and then STOP DEAD! It's hard to say which happens first; they really happen together: the stopping of the forearm and hand coincide with the fly's coming out of the water. It's over in an instant because, compared to the line, the leader and fly have no weight.

As seen in Figure 3, in a short-line cast the forearm will not move very much during the power snap and the wrist will break only a little. The reel and rod butt will come away from the forearm an inch or two. The elbow will have come up (actually your whole arm will lift) about an inch to keep the path of rod and line on an inclined plane.

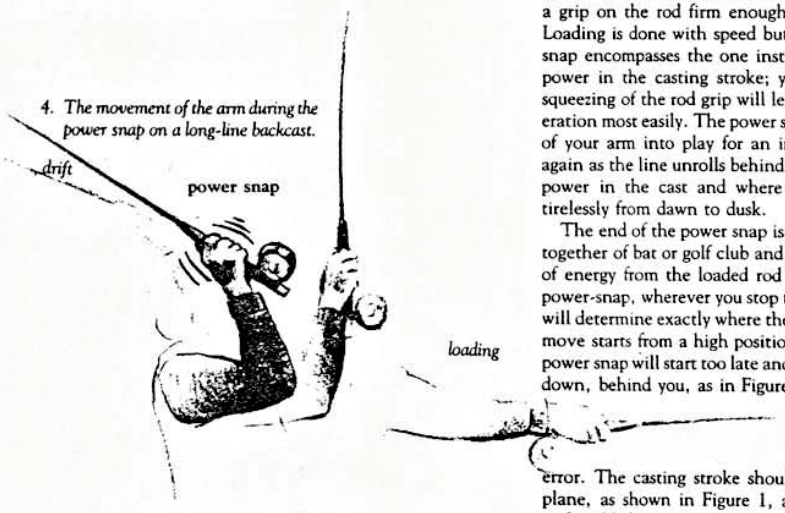


1. *The whole back cast.*

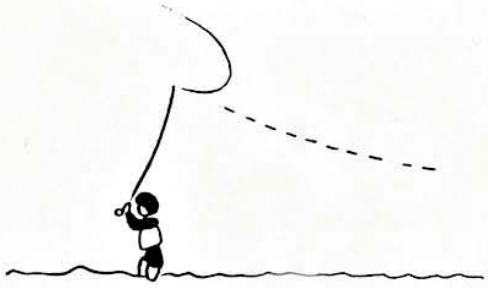
2. *The sudden stop at the end of the power snap causes the rod tip to flip over and form the beginning of the backward loop.*



3. *The movement of the arm during the power snap on a short-line backcast.*



4. *The movement of the arm during the power snap on a long-line backcast.*



5. *The result of a power snap that is started with the rod tip too high. The line will unroll far too low.*

Figure 4 is a long-line backcast. The rod tip is much farther back at the end of the loading move, and the forearm comes right to the upper arm on the power snap. If you think of the words "muscle-to-muscle" it will help keep everything in line. Notice that the whole power-snap motion is in line with the shoulder. This is a basic discipline for vertical casting, but it can be altered when necessary (because of equipment or physical circumstances). Even if the rod tip is tilted outward, the elbow should stay close to the body and the muscle-to-muscle position is still valid. Body motion—leaning forward to start, leaning backward to finish—will make a long-line pickup easier. (I have not used it in this illustration.) I have used a left-hand haul to make the pickup easier. The principle remains the same with the haul and/or body motion: low start, *lift* the line, *snap* the leader and fly. The loading move is relatively long and the power snap is as short as possible.

Power Your arm and hand should start the backcast with a grip on the rod firm enough only to move the weight. Loading is done with speed but no real power. The power snap encompasses the one instant of maximum speed *and* power in the casting stroke; you will find that a sudden squeezing of the rod grip will let you "dead-stop" the acceleration most easily. The power snap brings all of the muscles of your arm into play for an instant, and then you relax again as the line unrolls behind you. Knowing where to use power in the cast and where to relax will let you cast tirelessly from dawn to dusk.

The end of the power snap is an instant, like the coming together of bat or golf club and ball. It's an instant transfer of energy from the loaded rod to the line. Wherever you power-snap, wherever you stop the rod in the casting plane, will determine exactly where the line will go. If your loading move starts from a high position instead of a low one, the power snap will start too late and the loop will form pointing down, behind you, as in Figure 5. This is a very common error. The casting stroke should be made on an inclined plane, as shown in Figure 1, and the power snap should end at 90 degrees to that line.

Fly-casting is difficult to learn from the printed word. As you read, look for clues that give you mental pictures, such as Figures 1 and 2. The "muscle-to-muscle" clue is something you can feel, and will easily remember. Fly-casting is also the only sport in which you must use as much force backward as forward. We don't naturally have good backward-throwing muscles. We have to work at it, and a good backcast power snap may take time to develop.

The power snap ends the casting stroke and forms the backward loop. You then have a choice; you may hold that rod position—dead-stopped—while the line unrolls, or you may DRIFT, to follow through or reposition for the forward cast. □