



SADSAA

COURSE MANNUAL SAILFISH



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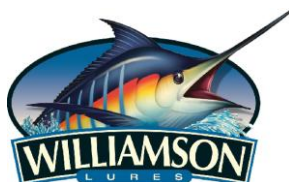


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I am extremely proud to be associated with this Sailfish Coaching Course being presented and run by SADSAA prior and during the Sailfish Interprovincial that is being hosted by Northern Deep Sea Angling Association in Sodwana Bay.

This stems from an initiative that was promoted by SASCOC (South African Sport Commission and Olympic Committee) to increase the opportunities of our angling teams to achieve more medals when competing at international competitions. They realised that the best way to achieve these objectives was to improve coaching from ground level all the way through to international levels and as a result SADSAA through SASACC became a signatory to the Willing- Ready- Able (WRA) program launched by SASCOC.

This program is a long term one, which started in 2012 and will run through to 2018. All of you who are participating in this program should feel extremely proud that you are amongst the first in angling to be involved and I'm sure that you will enjoy and prove that the future benefits and the results achieved in the years to come were the correct ones for all of us to follow.

As an added bonus you have one of the most enthusiastic and dedicated professional course leaders that you could ever wish to have and I know that you will enjoy and learn from his presentations off and on the water.

Here's wishing you all a great tournament with tight lines for everyone.

Geoff Wanvig
SADSAA Vice- President



Sailfish have been close to my heart the past 12 years, and I have made every effort possible to learn as much possible about this specie, and to put it back into practice. This said - all man's best made plans are not always successful, yet with enough practice and belief in yourself and in your team's efforts the chances of success will increase with every tournament. I have been very fortunate to learn from highly skilled anglers, skippers and deck hands and with this course I would like to give a little back to all the new up and coming anglers what I have learned.

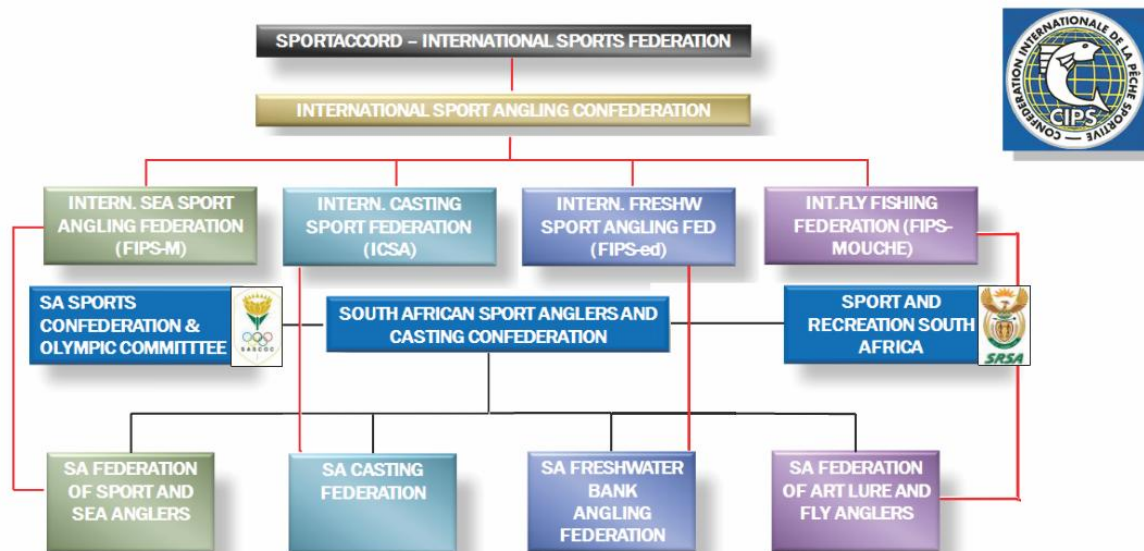
This course main emphasis will be leaning towards the new 2012 SADSAA rule introduced in Light Tackle Billfish Tournaments – (105 points) for using circle hooks. Circle hooks are the only permissible hook to use in ILTTA (International Light Tackle Tournament Association) tournaments, and as SADSAA is a member of the ILTTA, it is our responsibility to introduce our anglers to this angling application.

I would like to thank Mr Mike Buyskes from Northern Deep Sea Angling Association who had the vision to endorse and give his and their committees support towards this course. Thank you to the sponsors without whom this course might have been impossible – Lowrance, Boating International, Mercury and Club Marine Insurance for the use of the coaching boat LOWARANCE. Iland Lures and Williamson Lures, VMC Hooks, and Sufix Leader Line. I hope you find these products work as well as they have worked for me in the past.

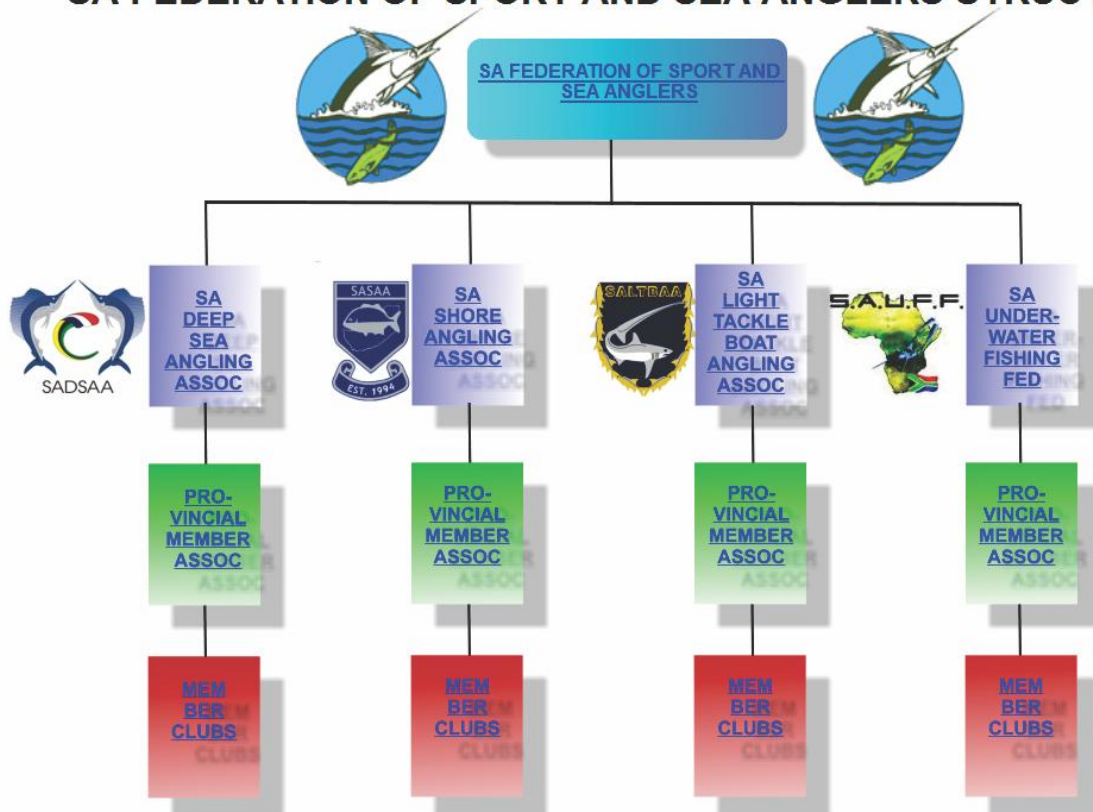


Paul Borchers
SADSAA Development Officer
SADSAA Coaching Co-Ordinator

World Angling Structures and where SADSAA fits in:



SA FEDERATION OF SPORT AND SEA ANGLERS STRUCTURE





Atlantic sailfish (*Istiophorus albicans*).

Indo-Pacific sailfish (*Istiophorus platypterus*).

Exhilarating is a word used to describe the sailfish gymnastics as it leaps from the water, head shaking, creating spray before it plunges back beneath the depths. Its' mid air antics are however short lived, as it expends most of its energy in the initial run. Sailfish are amongst the great sport fish of the world, and recover remarkably well after capture and proper release. This said, ALL sailfish should be released

The two main sub-species of sailfish - Atlantic and Indo-Pacific (that are generally larger) - range throughout the warm and temperate parts of the world's oceans. The indo-pacific species are found in our waters and mainly caught from the Transkei coast right up the African east coast and again on the African west coast from Angola northwards. In South Africa the best regions to target this species is on the Zululand coast, specifically the St.Lucia, Cape Vidal and Sodwana Bay areas.

Sailfish are blue to gray in colour with white underbellies. They get their name from their spectacular dorsal fin. These powerful, streamlined beasts can grow to 3 meters, but rarely exceed 90 kilograms. They are members of the billfish family, and as such, have an upper jaw that juts out well beyond their lower jaw and forms a distinctive spear. Individual sailfish have been clocked at speeds of up to 110 km/h, which is the highest speed reliably reported in a fish. The sail is normally kept folded down and to the side when swimming, but it may be raised when the sailfish feels threatened or excited, making the fish appear much larger than it actually is. This tactic has also been observed during feeding, when a group of sailfish use their sails to "herd" a school of fish or squid.

Targeting Sailfish

Targeting sailfish can be somewhat of a hit and miss affair. Whilst fishing for other species like king mackerel, or trolling for other gamefish species like dorado, yellowfin tuna or wahoo, sailfish are sometimes unintentionally caught. This said, over the past 20 years a lot of knowledge has been acquired on how to specifically target this species in our waters. Anglers travelling abroad to the America's and Kenya, where this species is more prolific, have brought back valuable techniques, and targeting them is now no longer a secret. Targeting techniques differ somewhat, but the basic principles stay the same. This includes trolling with stripbaits and halfbeaks placed in a trolling spread behind the boat in known hotspot sailfish grounds. Sailfish can be found in water depths of 20 – 500m of water, but more commonly caught in 20 – 60m of water along underwater ledges and upwellings as well as amongst baitfish schools on or below the surface.

Tackle Requirements



Reels

The angler only needs to use fairly light reels suitable for 8kg to 10kg line classes to capture this billfish, however the drag settings on lever drag reels must be smooth and properly checked before fishing due to this fish's long initial runs and its tendency to jump. The reel's spool capability must also be able to hold at least 500m of 10kg IGFA rated line and at least a 3m leader without obstructing the overhead frame. Fast retrieve gear ratio reels in the 5.2 to 6.1 gear ratios are these days a better choice, mainly to retrieve as much "belly line" in the water line after a hook –up when the fish or boat changes direction. Where circle hooks or single J-hook rigged halfbeaks are employed, the faster gear ratio reels is a must, due to "drop back" and retrieval of the baits.

Drag Settings

Sailfish are known for their long first runs; therefore as the line decrease the drag will increase. With the lever pushed up to the strike position – set the drag at 33.3%, or (3.3kg). The "sunset" setting should not exceed 6kg.

Rods

Medium to Medium/Heavy: 6.6 ft. to 7ft. game fish rods with gimbals in the 20lb to 30lb line class rods are the norm. The length helps to take-up some shock impact when the fish jumps or suddenly darts away on another run, as well as assist in steering the fish next to the boat before leadering the fish.

Line

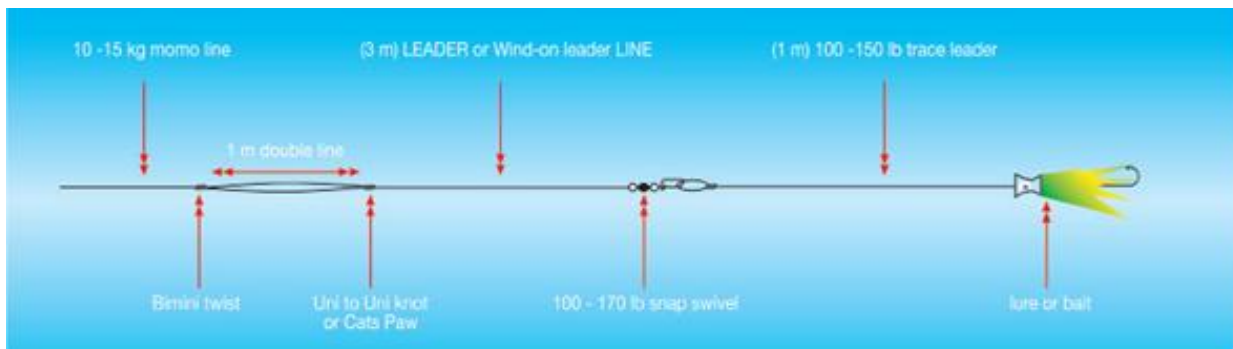
Line is always a bit of a controversial subject as to which line is better or more consistent over each manufacturer's claims. Us as competitive 10kg anglers will use IGFA rated lines, which has to break below or on the test rating on the spool. It is good practice to change or check the line for defects before each tournament as well as after a prolonged fight. Always ensure that your line is checked prior to the first day of a tournament on a certified line testing machine for test strength. Many an angler have been disqualified due to line testing above the rating on the spool.

Leaders and Snap -Swivels

3m monofilament or fluorocarbon leaders in the 80lbs – 120lbs test classes are the norm. The wind-on- leader option is these days preferred over tying Yuacatan or double figure eight knots directly to the double line. This said these knots correctly tied are still better than a poorly made wind-on-leader. Small snap swivels in lbs. test classes from 80lbs – 150lbs are preferred over bulkier un-tested swivels. Use the uni-knot to tie the leader to the swivels or use a knot-tying tool to tie a perfect – "gryp knot" or hangman's noose. Ensure that there is a bit of play (loop) between the leader and swivel.

End trace leader or "bite trace"

1m to 1.5m abrasive resistant monofilament or fluorocarbon leader material in the 100lbs to 130lbs are adequate. It is not necessary to use piano wire or multi-strand wire. To tie the loop to the top part of the swivel use the perfection loop knot or the Kenya loop – nail knot. These loop knots do not slip! It is not necessary to use chafe tubing. To attach the J-hooks at the bottom use the knots as described above in – Leaders to snap swivels. To attach circle hooks, snell the hook. (see knots further down in this manual)



Typical IGFA complaint set-up with double J-hooks



Typical IGFA complaint circle hook set-up



Tip: To keep the halfbeak rigged with the X-knot swimming deeper and in a straight line on the flat line. Cut a 4.5" squid skirt shorter and insert a 1oz barrel weight into the head cavity. Run the 3m leader through the barrel sinker and then only attach the snap swivel.

Hooks

(1) The difference between Circle and J-hooks:

The rigging method with circle hooks are quite a bit different to what we are accustomed to rigging our baits with two pro-rigged 6/0 or 7/0 hooks with either a strip of belly shine or halfbeak. Circle hooks have been around for thousands of years. The earliest versions were made of whale bone and other materials, yet our mindset tells us it will not work. If applied correctly and mastered, the hook up rate is the same or even better than J-hooks with the added bonus – a better survival rate than gut or throat hooked fish. The intent behind releasing a fish is that it survives, as unharmed as possible, after release. A fish that has swallowed the bait with a J hook is likely to either be gut-hooked, or damaged internally by the hook as it makes its way out of the body when the angler applies pressure with the rod or reel. This fish is most likely history.

There are a number of important differences to understand between the use of J hooks and circle hooks. The point of the barb of the circle hook is pointed towards the shank of the hook and is not exposed along the lateral path of travel like the J hook. The J hook is designed to snag anything along its path of travel, while the circle hook is designed to snag in one place and one place only: the corner of the mouth. The use of circle hooks involves forgetting almost everything about baiting and hooking fish.

Circle hooks used in International sailfish tournaments are wide gaped non-offset 7/0 – 9/0 hooks designed to optimise the hook-up rate on live and dead baits or stripbaits. Offset circle hooks have a barb that is slightly offset along the lateral line of the hook, which makes it exposed and prone to snag inside the fish, defeating the purpose of circle hooks in the first place, which is to hook the fish in the corner of the mouth. These hooks are then snelled onto 1m to 1.5m length of 100lb fluorocarbon leader with a small perfection loop knot on the other side to attach the snap swivel to.



9/0 VMC Tournament Circle snelled hook with 100lbs Fluorocarbon

Single or double pro-rigged J hooks have been the standard for many years. The single 7/0 or 8/0 big game hooks are still used today to rig a halfbeak or Panama Belly Bait as a swim or skip bait on the flat lines or lightly set on the riggers. However in Kenya the pro-rig double 5/0 – 7/0 salmon swash (long point – wide gaped) hooks are the norm. This set up rigged at 180, or 90 degree angles is best suited for strip baits made of the belly shine of a gamefish.



6/0 Salmon Swash hooks rigged 90 and 180 degrees.



Lures and Lure Colours

Generally lure sizes range from 3” inch long “flat head” (better suited for single – j-hooks or circle hooks) up to 7” in to use with double – J-hooks. The average being: 5” in either concave heads or flat heads. It is advisable to trim the stock standard plastic lures (that is usually too long) skirts a bit shorter in order to show as much of the halfbeak or the strip’s shine. There is always a debate between the better lure “softie” heads versus “metal” heads. In my opinion each

one has its place. The larger diameter metal heads (up to 30mm dia.) is better suited on the “Japan” or “shot gun” line and on windy – rough sea condition days to track straight. The smaller diameter metal (up to 17mm dia.) heads makes great short rigger or flat lines. Concave plastic heads (up to 30mm dia.) also works well with a “softie bird” in front on the “Japan” as it gives a bit of drag to make the lure track true on rough or windy days. They also perform well on the long riggers. Flat head softies (up to 17mm dia.) works best on the flat lines and on the short riggers.

Productive fish catching lure colours may vary worldwide, but certain colours or combination of colours definitely are more productive than others. This said if the lure colour is “hot”, but the lure does not swim right or in the wrong position it is worthless irrespective of how good it may be. Try to keep it simple, and purchase plain one colour or simple two tone colour combinations (dark over light). A bit of flash foil inserts in some types of lures may prove successful on the day when the plain colours are not attracting the fish.

The time of the day which colour to swim is somewhat of a mystery. The general rule is dark colours early morning or on dark days, however good results have been achieved with dark lures on a bright days especially Purple/Black. The main emphasis as described above – make sure the lure swims right. If you suspect the strip bait or halfbeak is “washed out”, then change it immediately. The term “wash-out” refers to the bait in the case of a halfbeak – broken or torn stomach that causes it to bloat, and in a strip bait – the strip is now loose due to the cotton or wool unravelling. It is good practice not to leave any lure in the spread longer than 45minutes to an hour maximum before checking it. I change lures every 60 minutes and check them every 30 minutes for “wash – out”. Always ensure that you have a minimum of 8 to 10 rigged lures with strip baits or halfbeaks ready in your cooler box before you go out to sea. Rig these as soon as you can in the afternoon and keep them cooled, (not frozen) in a cardboard box with some “course” salt in the fridge.

Top single tone colours.

- (1) Pink
- (2) Purple
- (3) Black
- (4) White or Pearl
- (5) Chartreuse or luminous
- (6) Blue
- (7) Red

Top combination colours

- (1) Pink/white
- (2) Pink/Blue
- (3) Pink/Purple
- (4) Purple/Black
- (5) Green/Yellow Luminous Chartreuse
- (6) Black/Red
- (7) Blue/White
- (8) White/Red



Iland Outrider (flat head)



Iland Seastar (concave head)



Mold Craft Little Chugger



Williamson Sailfish Softie

Soft plastic and Wooden Birds



These ‘winged’ teasers are added in front of the lure to act as a little teaser to bring fish in to the lure. Popular sizes are from 3 to 5 inches long and colour choice should match the lure colour for maximum effectiveness. The teaser birds work especially well on the “Japan/shot gun’ line, set far out in the back of the spread. They act like a teaser as well as giving the lure a bit of ‘surface drag’ on the water, keeping the lure down on the water and tracking true without jumping out and cart wheeling especially on windy or rough days. Teaser birds may also be used in front of long rigged lures set out on the outriggers. They are preferably used with lures rigged with double hooks and strip baits and not with single hook rigged halfbeaks set from the outriggers or flatlines, where free spooling the bait may be required to set the hook. The reason for this is because these “birds” float and do not sink back naturally with the free spooled bait.

Teasers



Pulling teasers behind the boat are an essential part of the set-up to target sailfish successfully. The boat is essentially the best teaser to raise sailfish from deeper in the water column, or from further away. By adding teasers behind or below the boat creates an extension to the water disturbance which will raise and excite the sailfish into a striking mode. Sailfish teasers includes surface teasers and sub-surface dredge bars. A good teaser will keep the fish’s attention for a period of time by staying behind it, or even striking the teaser trying to eat it.

(1) Surface Teasers



Tandem Squid Teaser



Spreader bar Ballyhoo Surface Teaser

Surface teasers can be made from a variety of materials ranging from CD's, shiny plates and mirrors, hook-less trolling lures, plastic squids and wooded trolling "birds", and real halfbeaks and squids. Teasers are rigged either in tandem behind each other, or attached in formation from stainless steel surface spreader bars. The teasers are usually attached to cord line that is securely tied somewhere on the boat's transom, or run through a ceramic ring or stainless steel cleat in the centre of the outriggers and then joined to either. A word of advice – spreader bars work very well, however they do tangle easily and it requires an experienced crew to set them or remove them quickly when a sailfish strikes a lure. Bring surface teasers in closer to the boat in rough seas and strong wind conditions or remove one to avoid it tangling with lures set close to the teasers.

After many years of experimenting and seeing and experiencing what works there are two types of sailfish teasers that is easy to operate and definitely stands out among the rest.

The first type is four to five rubber squids (9" – 12") with wings and tentacles intact and set-up as a daisy chain approximately 60cm to 1 m apart. A 10" to 12" hook less lure with a cup face to create more splash and action is then added to the back of the last squid in the chain also at the same distance as described above. A 12" wooden bird may also be attached to the front of the chain, however this is only employed when there is a strong wind present or choppy sea conditions to keep the "chain" running straight. This squid teaser is usually run from both sides of the outriggers a 1/3 of the way up and 15m to 30m behind the boat. Squid colours and lures in this chain that work best are shades of pink, yellows, dark colours and natural shades.



The second type of sailfish teaser has a more “aggressive” function and especially suited for the angler on the flat line fishing with a circle hook. The idea behind this type is to draw the fish right up to the boat and then to quickly remove it and either flick a pitch bait or reel the closest lure up to where this teaser used to be. These teasers are pulled right from the back corners of the gunwales from shortened rods and reels spooled with 200lbs dacron. The teasers consist of one wooden 10inch to 14inch wooden bird with a large 10” to 14” slant or flat face lure attached via a big snap swivel 1.5m to 3m behind the bird. Slant faced lures ride the wave face better than concave heads when it is pulled close to the boat on the third wave from the boat. The colour choices here are also very similar to the daisy chain lures, the only difference really comes into the frequency in the time the lures are changed throughout the day. Darker colours are used early in the morning and after the midday sun have passed. Lighter colours are used towards and during the midday periods predominantly in shades of yellow, orange, green and blue and again in red over black, black and purple or green and orange combinations. The distance is set with the lure running on the face of the third or fourth wave back from the transom.

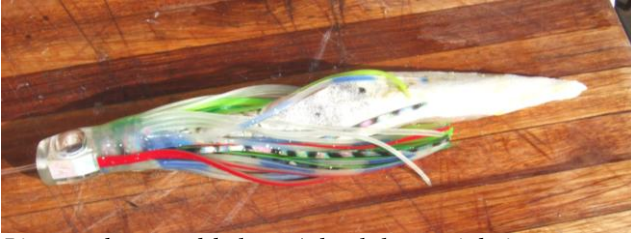
The flat line bait is placed just behind or just inside these teasers and the angler may move his bait closer or further to these teasers. Once a fish is drawn to the boat and stay on the teaser, the angler reels the bait right in front of the wooden bird on the teaser. The teaser is then quickly reel in and pulled completely out of the water whilst the angler free spool the bait back to the lit-up fish that is searching for the teasers that have been removed. If done correctly the fish will grab hold of the bait and move off with it.



(2) Dredge Bars



Dredge bars are used to create an artificial bait ball below the surface, to create a school of bait fish or squid following or hiding away from predators close to the boat. A dredge bar consists of a single bar or two cross bars with a heavy weight in the centre to keep it below the surface. Rigged to these bars are between 6 and 15 rubber ballyhoos or squids. Dredge bars are more difficult to set and retrieve than surface teasers, especially if there are more than 9 squids or ballyhoos attached. Dredge bars are commonly run from the transom or from the downrigger with or without a weighted ball. Dredge bars may be used in conjunction with one surface teaser on the opposite side of the boat.



Picture above and below: A hook-less stripbait or cross stitched ballyhoo may be attached inside the lure to attract fish and provide extra flash and scent.



BAIT RIGGING – J HOOKS

Strip Bait, Kenya-Style

Strip baits are a must in Kenyan waters, and every charter boat captain in this region stresses their importance that the taste and smell of fish flesh turns on the sailfish to attack the bait with greater ferocity."

While it's true that bellyshine off any gamefish is good, there is no doubt that certain species produce a more preferable strip that, after decades of experience, has been shown to be more appealing to the sailfish and marlin in Kenyan waters than that of other fish. The top-three gamefish for this purpose are kawakawa (little eastern tuna), small yellowfin tuna and dorado.



(1) Lay the gamefish on its side. Using a sharp filleting knife, cut it from the anal fin right up the middle, until you reach the aft side of its pectoral fins. It's best to get the bellyshine off a fish less than 8 kg (17 1/2 pounds). If you get a yellowfin tuna over that weight, although it will be kept for an emergency, it becomes more difficult to make a small, thin strip bait.



(2) On each side of these fins, cut up to the gill plate. Remove the fish's guts, leaving the clean cavity.



(3) Following the inside of the bellyshine inner membrane, cut to meet the original cut at the gill plate.



(4) After removing the first strip, repeat on the opposite side of the gamefish's belly, thus providing two perfect bellyshines.



(5) Once the two basic shines are extracted and placed on the cutting board, a sharp knife is used to trim each shine into one or two strip baits so that, as seen in the photo, the harder end that comes from the area just between the gill plates is included in each strip bait. The reason for this is that one can secure it more firmly to the leader knot and top eye of the front hook.



(6) The most important part is placing the top hook. Remember, it must be pushed through the strip from the membrane side and out through the skin side. Carefully measure where this hook is to be set so you are left with sufficient forward bellyshine to tie it onto the eye of the hook and leader knot. The trailing hook should then end up standing proud of the membrane strip.



(7) Now take a 600 mm (about 24 inch) length of tying material and tie one end onto the shank of the trailing hook. This is vitally important, as it sets the action of the eventual bait and prevents the bait from spinning. Take note that it is essential to use the correct thread or binding material to ensure the finished strip is 100 percent perfect. While waxed thread is sometimes used, none of the crews in Kenya recommend it. They use a white thread that is used for the industrial sewing of grain bags. While it's easily and cheaply available in shops in Kenya, it is hard to find in South Africa. Crochet cotton is a fair substitute.



(8) Hold the trailing hook firmly in position and commence a tight wind, up toward the lead hook. As you will see in the finished strip, this bind holds the strip in position, holds the trailing hook upright and cups the strip, giving it more rigidity. This ensures the strip will have a longer trolling life. It also provides the aft tail section with a degree of support to stop it from having too much action. A lot of action shortens the life of the strip, as it will wash out or break off.



(9) The next photos show how to bind the strip in place, using closer and closer binds as you get toward the end of the strip. This last stage of binding is very important: The entire strength and durability of the strip is reliant on how it's tapered off and tightly bound to ensure it holds fast, and it doesn't allow water to wash through it. Tie off with two tight overhand hand knots and trim the tag.



(10) One has to emphasise that although this procedure of preparing the strip bait may look easy, this is definitely not the case. To get it right, one needs a lot of practice. Cut your own bellyshines, tie the strip onto a tandem hook rig, and

then, even if it looks great, put it into the water alongside your craft, pull it in the clear water not affected by prop wash, and watch how it swims. It must swim straight, with no tendency to spin, and with only the aft “tail” providing a bit of action.

Single hook Skip bait or Swim bait.

This is the most common way to rig halfbeaks (ballyhoo) worldwide. This bait will “skip” on the surface and it makes an excellent ‘flat line’ bait. Adding a lure over the bait will again make an excellent surface swim bait.



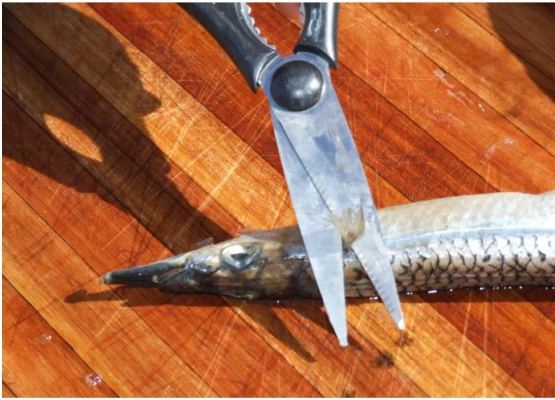
(1) The trace consists of a 1m length of 60 – 120lb leader with a loop on one side to attach a swivel. Tied or crimped to the other end of the leader line is a single 7/0 or 8/0 big game welded eye hook - depending on the bait size. Also attached to the hook's eye is a 30cm length of soft copper wire.



(2) Start of by preparing the bait. Begin by scaling the bait – this adds a bit of extra shine to the bait.



(3) If you are not adding a lure to the bait, the bill may be left long, but for the lure to slide right up to the bait's head it is better to trim the bill shorter to fit within the lure's head.



(4) Cut the pectoral fins off – this aids by helping the bait from spinning.



(5) Next flex the bait repeatedly, then with your thumb push hard up against the backbone to loosen the muscles and break the bone. Next push along the stomach area removing any stomach contents through the anal vent.



(6) With a knife point, or hollow tube remove the eyes. This prevents the eyes from bulging out, causing the bait to swim erratically, as well as aiding in the rigging process with copper wire



(7) Place the bait on its back, and open the gill plate and insert the hook point as shown.



(8) Flex the bait to one side and continue pushing the hook point as far back as possible till the hook's eye is nestled inside the gillplate as shown. Exit the hook point directly in the middle as shown.



(9) Now take the copper wire and push through the eye socket and around the bottom of the head and pull tight. This will ensure the hook's eye is pulled up tightly in the gill cavity.



(10) Repeat the previous step and then wrap the wire around the top of the head twice.



(11) Push the wire through the eye socket again. Thread the copper wire's tag end into a closed bait needle and push the needle up from the bottom jaw and completely out through the top jaw as shown.



(12) Unhook the tag end of the copper wire from the bait needle and pull the leader line towards the tip of the bill. Finish by wrapping the copper tightly around the leader line and the bill from where the copper wire exited and down to the tip of the bill. Trim excess copper wire.

The Split Bill Swimming Bait

This rig is basically the same as the skip bait previous with two changes that makes the halfbeak swim below the surface just like a Rapala. It makes an excellent 'flat line' bait, especially in rough conditions where the other skip baits tend to cartwheel rather than 'skip'. Start by selecting a halfbeak with a broader than normal bill. Prepare the bait the same as a skip bait by scaling, flexing the body and removing the eyes.



(1) Before tying the leader to the hook eye, slide a P1 to P3 weight egg type sinker (the same type used in bass fishing) up the leader line as shown.



(2) Cut the bill squarely at a right angle about 2/3's of the way from the tip.



(3) With a knife find the groove in the middle of the bill, and split the bill in half, stopping about 4mm from the base of the bill.



(4) Insert the hook point and exit exactly as in a skip bait rig. Slide the sinker right up to the knot or crimp and push tightly up underneath the gills. Secure the gills and head as in a skip bait with the copper wire. Tightly wrap the wire twice around the short un-split bill as shown and then stop.



(5) Pull the leader through the split in the bill up to the two wraps of copper wire and pull tight. Start the next wrap of copper wire in front of the leader all the way to the tip of the bill.



(6) Trim any excess copper wire. The leader pulling the bait from this angle plus the added chin weight combined will cause the bait to swim down, rather than skip on the surface.

Multi-strand Sliding Trace

The trace consists of a 40cm – 1m length of 49 Strand uncoated multi-strand wire with a loop crimped one end. If using a shorter piece of this wire it may be attached via an Albright knot to a length of mono trace leader. Two 7/0 short shank salmon swash type hooks. One of these hooks is threaded through the eye with the wire. Place a small tube of heatshrink around the shank to keep the hook flush-up against the wire. Next slide a round sleeve crimp in front of the hook eye, and wrap a 40cm length of copper wire behind and then in front of this sleeve leaving a 20 to 30cm tag-end protruding. Lightly crimp the sleeve – the sleeve must still be able to move up or down the wire under a bit of pulling pressure. Carefully study the picture of the trace below.





(1) Using an open ended needle hook the wire loop onto it and thread the needle from inside the gills through to the anal vent and out.



(2) Slide the loop through the eye of the unattached hook and over the point to engage the back hook.



(3) Carefully thread the hook back into the vent.



(4) Thread the front hook into the gill cavity and out, in the same manner as with a skip bait, and tension the cable between the hooks. Ensure the tension is not too tight.



(5) Slide the locking tube with copper wire into place underneath the mouth parts, and thread the copper wire up through the mouth parts and pull forward.



(6) Once the wire has been pulled forward, start to wind the copper wire tightly back up the bill as shown.



(7) Add a sailfish lure over the baits head to aid its swimming.

BAIT RIGGING – CIRCLE HOOKS



Rigged ballyhoo on drip tray on ice.

The X –Knot

This is a fairly simple yet effective way to pre-rig the ballyhoo ready to use on the flat line, or next to the teasers from the riggers.



(1) Remove the eyes of the ballyhoo and cut the bill short to just in front of the upper mouth. Scale the bait to add extra flash. Squeeze out the stomach content. Pinch the back bone between thumb and forefinger loosening the muscles – which will make the bait more flexible and lively in the water.



(2) Cut a 1m length of heavy wax thread. Fold in half and thread through a ¼ to ½ oz. egg sinker weight. Slide the loop side of the wax thread over the head. Pull the gills open and thread each side of the loop under the gill plates. Push the sinker in underneath the gill opening.



(3) Make an overhand knot with both strands of the wax thread. Place the knot over the top beak and pull down on both the strands. The knot will slip all the way down until the knot firmly close the top beak. An easy way to perform this procedure is to bite one strand with your teeth, and pull with one hand on the other strand. This leaves one hand free to guide the knot exactly in the centre of the top beak. Make another overhand knot and pull down to secure the first over hand knot.



(4) Seen from underneath – if the above step was performed correctly the sinker will be secured snugly up and within the gill cavity underneath the head.



(5) Take one of the wax strands and pull over the head and thread through an eye socket. Do the same with the other strand in the opposite direction through the socket.



(6) Place the ballyhoo on its back and make another overhand knot with the two wax thread strands. Pull down on the strands and let the knot slip up behind the sinker on the body side. Make another overhand knot and pull down to the first knot securing the knot. Trim the tag ends of the wax strands.



(7) With all the above steps done correctly, and all knots secured, a clear figure X should be seen on the top of the beak. This X-knot prevents water from entering the bait which may cause it to bloat and wash out prematurely.



(8) The final step is to insert the point of a pre-rigged circle hook underneath the X. The hook shank should lie flat against the beak.



The final ballyhoo swimbait rigged with an X-knot



A soft trimmed squid skirt may be slipped over the head to provide a bit more flash and action.

Placing a lure or skirt in front of the bait using the X-Knot

The trimmed (shortened) lure or skirt provides a bit more surface action on the outriggers next to the far teasers.



(1) Without an egg sinker make the X-knot, but do not trim the tag ends on the final steps



(2) Take the two leftover strands and make an overhand knot in front of the top beak.



(3) Turn the bait on its back and make another two overhand knots and pull the knot up underneath the bottom bill.



(4) Pull both strands through a small flat face lure or octopus skirt. The diameter of the lure must be smaller or than the gape of the circle hook on its widest part. In this picture a softie lure was cut down to $\frac{1}{2}$ its original length.



(5) Make a double overhand knot with both wax thread strands. Place the hook shank in the between the opening of the strands.



(7) Pull on both strands and let the knot slip up tight against the bend of the hook. This will also push the lure tight up against the bill of the bait. Trim the tag ends.

Securing the baits head to the body

When billfish are “short biting” or striking the bait with its bill, without actually grabbing it and moving off, the body in most cases will break away from the head. This can be greatly reduced by securing the head to the body. In most cases the fish will then see the bait is still intact after a short strike and will possibly have another go at it.



(1) Make and finish an X-knot. Take a 60cm length of wax thread and push one end through an open ended bait needle. Push the needle in behind the gill plate underneath the backbone of the ballyhoo. Pull the needle and wax through the other side of the bait. Leave a 15cm tag end on the side of where the needle entered.



(2) Pull the wax thread over the back and push the needle into the bait approximately 3cm down the body. Pull through and repeat the steps three more times. Notice that the wax strands are sewn to the back at 45 degree angles to the bait.



(3) With the last thread sewn, pull the thread over the back and push the needle and thread through the same hole. Cross stitch back towards the head of the bait going through every hole up to the first stitch. If done correctly a few figure X's would have formed over the back of the bait.



(4) Lie the bait on its side. Take the top wax strand pull through the opposite eye socket. Turn the bait around and do the same with the opposite wax strand. Both strands are now exiting on opposite sides of the sockets.



(5) Make an over hand knot with both strands and pull on the strands letting the knot slip tightly down underneath the gills. Make another overhand knot securing the first knot. Trim the tag ends or leave long and make two more knots towards the tip of the bill if using a lure in front of the bait.



(6) The finished bait with the head secured to the body. The circle hook may now be inserted underneath the X-knot, or a lure or octopus squid skirt placed in front of the bait if the wax strands were left long.



The quick rig.

This bait is very easy to rig and is especially useful when the action is fast and there is no time to rig the bait with wax thread.



(1) Secure a 20cm to 30cm length of fairly stiff copper wire to one end of a cheap crane swivel. The size of the swivel depends on the diameter of the circle hook used. Check by inserting a suitable circle hook through the eye of the swivel. The hook point and barb should just go through with a tiny bit of play between hook shank and swivel. A 90lb Centro crane swivel and a VMC 7358 Tournament Circle 8/0 or 9/0 is a perfect match. To start push the copper wire through the lure head. Push the wire from underneath the bottom bill and up and through the middle of the top beak.



(2) Pull on the copper wire till the swivel pulls up tight against the lure head causing the lure to sit tight against the bill. Pull the copper wire over the head and insert through the eye socket. Pull tight.



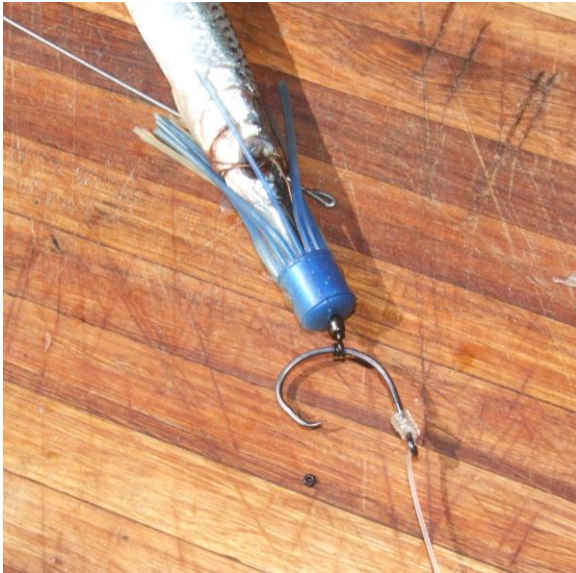
(3) Pull the copper wire underneath the head to close the gill plates. Pull tight.



(4) Push the copper wire through both of the gill plates. A bait needle may help if the copper wire is fairly limp. Pull tight.



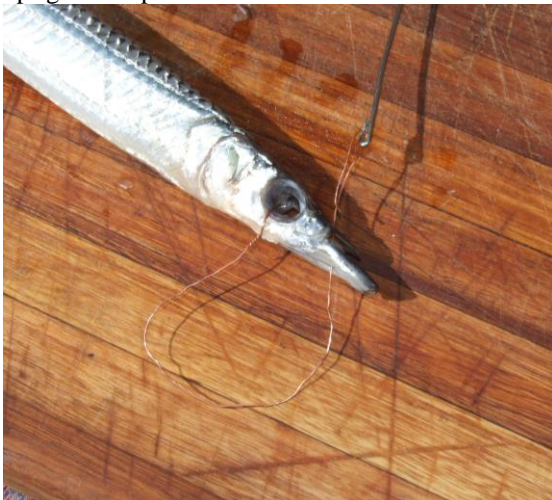
(5) Push the copper wire through the eye socket and pull tight and around the bottom of the head. Finish by wrapping the wire tightly up towards the tip of the bill. Trim the tag end.



(6) Push the hook into the eye of the swivel. To secure the hook pull one or two small 3mm diameter rubber grommets over the point and push up towards the bend of the hook. The grommets will prevent the hook from slipping out of the swivels eye.

Securing the circle hook to the top of the baits head.

This is an easier way than the Guatamala rig that takes a bit of practice to perfect. Some anglers prefer the hook to sit upright on top of the head.



(1) Push a 20cm to 30cm length copper wire through the eye socket. Close off one end tightly underneath the head closing the gill plates. Using an open ended needle push the needle from underneath the bottom bill up and through the middle of the top of the mouth. Pull tight.



(2) Push the needle back through the same hole and out through the bottom forming a loop with the copper wire.



(3) Take a pre-rigged circle hook and insert into the wire loop. Pull the copper wire tight to close the loop.



(4) Run the wire through the eye socket and wrap tightly over the hook shank and back through the socket. Wrap the wire towards the eye of the hook. Push the wire through the eye of the hook and wrap tightly back towards the head. Ensure the hook sits proud at a 90 degree angle to the head. Use as is or slip a shortened 6 inch squid skirt over the head. The body may also be secured to the head.

The Stitched Rig

The Stitched Rig is the toughest of the three in more ways than one. Not only is it a bit of a bear to tie, but the resulting rig stands up great to repeated sailfish attacks -- bringing the san cocho factor way down. That being said, there are a lot of little steps in this rig, and it's easy to screw up.

This is also the only rig featured that attaches the hook directly to the bait, which is probably another reason why it stays together a bit better. By wrapping the floss underneath the hook a couple of times, it builds up a little buffer space between the bait and the hook, keeping it from turning around and fouling in the bait.



1. You'll need rigging floss, a 4-inch needle and a hook snelled to the leader.



2. Cut a 22-inch section of rigging floss and attach it to the shank of the hook with a double clove hitch, leaving a short end about 6 inches long and a long tag end of about 18 inches. Clip the ballyhoo's bill short, right at the base of the bill.



3. Thread both tag ends of the floss through the eye of a 4-inch-long needle and pass it through the center of the bait's head between the front of the eye sockets and the bait's upper lip. Pull all the way through, and then pull the short tag end out of the needle - leaving the long tag in the eye. Pull the hook down tight to the bait's head.



4. Pass the short end through the eye socket, and then go through the opposite side with the long end still in the needle.



5. Pull the two ends tight and tie off below the eye socket



6. Now, using the needle with the long tag end, pass the floss around the front of the hook and over the bait's mouth to hold it shut. Now pass the needle through the gill plate about where the lateral line would be.



7. Go all the way through and out the other side. Now go through the bait's back two more times toward the pectoral fin, and then back toward the head, making two crisscrosses.



8. Pass the floss back in front of the hook while it's still on the needle.



9. Now pass the needle through the gill plate hole one more time and pull tight.



10. Pass both of the remaining tag ends through the eye sockets, above the strands crossing the eye cavity. Pull tight and tie off under the bait's chin.



10. The finished rig is built like a tank

The Wire Loop Rig

The whole rig is built from a single 18-inch piece of copper wire. This rig also enjoys the advantage of being very bait-box friendly, since you don't attach the hook and leader until you're ready to use it. This allows you to make several dozen of the baits ahead of time without having to worry about keeping all the leaders from tangling in the cooler. In pictures 4, 5 and 6 below, we show an optional way to make the rig that closes the throat area a little better by running the wire through the bait's eyes. (The original version that I first saw didn't do this, but it worked just fine.)

The only downside I could see to using this rig is that it might be a little fragile on the bite - especially if you're not using the best bait.



1. Start with an 18-inch section of copper rigging wire and a circle hook that matches the size of your bait. Make a small loop in the wire around the shank of the hook, sizing the loop so you have just enough space in the loop to clear the barb. Twist the wire with a mini haywire to finish the loop.



3. Clip off the ballyhoo's bill, leaving about a quarter of an inch. Position the loop underneath the remaining stub so that the loop just peaks out from under the bill. Pass the other end of the wire up through the ballyhoo's throat and out through the crease in its upper

lip.



4. If you want to close the ballyhoo's throat a bit better, run the wire back around the bill, and after coming up from the underside, pass the wire through the eye socket



5. Again, pass the wire back underneath the bait's body and lift the gill plate with your thumb. Pass the wire behind the gill and pull it up tight under the throat area with a little tug.



6. Run the wire over the top of the ballyhoo's head and pass it behind the gill plate on that side. Snug up the wire by pulling it toward the front



7. Once you've got the wire tight, bend it over and pass the tag end back down through the ballyhoo's lip, using the same hole you came up through in step 3. Pull the wire down tight to secure the mouth.



8. Coming from underneath, start wrapping the wire down the bill just like closing up a traditional pin rig



9. Finish with a couple of tight wraps at the end of the beak to keep everything tight.



10. When you're ready to fish the bait, simply slide the hook - already attached to your leader with a crimped loop or snell - through the tiny wire loop.

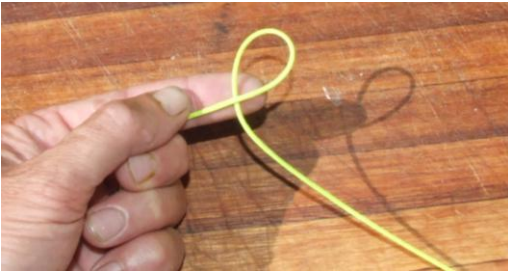


KNOTS

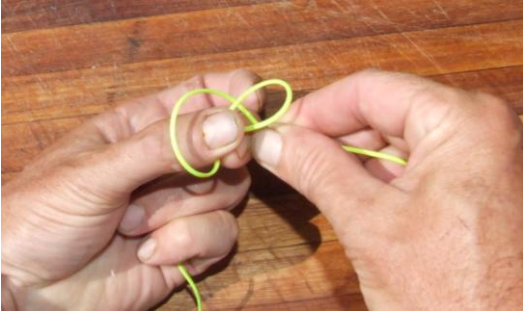
Perfection Loop

To make a small slip proof loop on the bite trace leader (80lbs to 150lbs) to connect to a snap swivel. Used with 100lbs Fluorocarbon it is easy to tie, very small and 100% slip proof. To remember the steps I call it the UNDER, OVER, MIDDLE and PULL steps.





(1) UNDER - Start by forming a small loop with a 15cm tag end running behind the standing line.



(2) OVER - Hold the line where it cross over between thumb and forefinger of the left hand. Take the tag end and pull over the left thumb and behind the cross over.



(3) Pull the tag end up tight against the thumb.



(4) MIDDLE - Take the tag end and pull it back between the crossover and the left thumb.



(5) Pinch it between the thumb and index finger.



(7) Slip the loop off the left thumb.



(8) PULL – Pull this loop through the bigger loop.



(9) Keep pulling till a knot starts forming.



(10) Place the loop over another finger or something secure like a hook or knot puller and pull tight on the standing line. Whilst pulling on the standing line, pull on the tag end with a pair of pliers to secure the knot.



(11) Trim the tag end.

Snelling a circle hook

Essentially this is not a knot, but rather a secure way to run line wraps around the shank of a circle hook that becomes tighter as you pull on the standing part of the line. This is the best way to secure line to a circle hook.





(1) To start cut a required length of mono or fluorocarbon. In the picture above 200lb dacron is used for the demonstration. Loop the line with a tag end pointing to opposite sides.



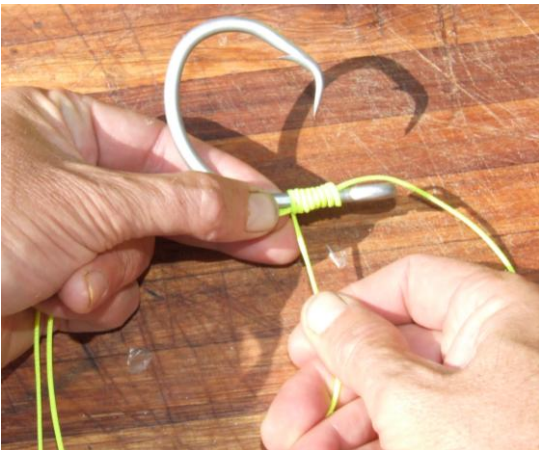
(2) Hold the top part of the loop. This is the lines closest to the hook on picture #1 above. Leave a short 5cm to 10cm tag end on the right side. This tag will eventually form the standing line when finished.



(3) Hold the hook and the top part of the loop with the hook above the line in the left hand. Hold the strand on the right of the big loop.



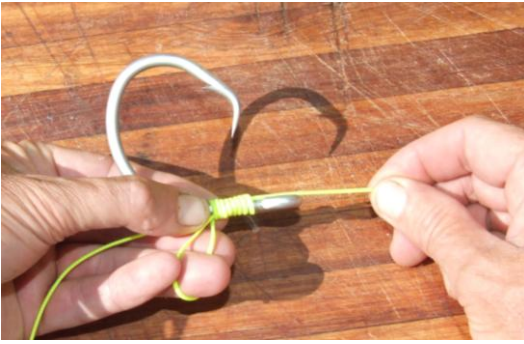
(4) Start wrapping the big loop around the line underneath the hook and around the shank, from the eye to the point. These wraps must be tight and close to each other without crossing each other.



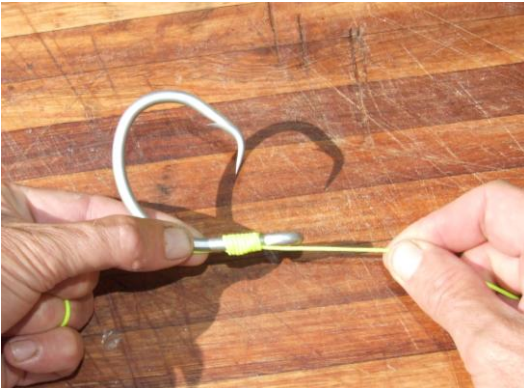
(5) Continue wrapping 5 to 8 times. The larger the diameter the less wraps needed.



(6) Place two fingers of the left hand inside the big loop and start pulling on the short tag strand on the right.



(7) Continue pulling. The big loop will become smaller as you pull. The two fingers inside the loop will help to unwind the twists forming in the loop. The larger the diameter of the line used - the less twists in the loop.



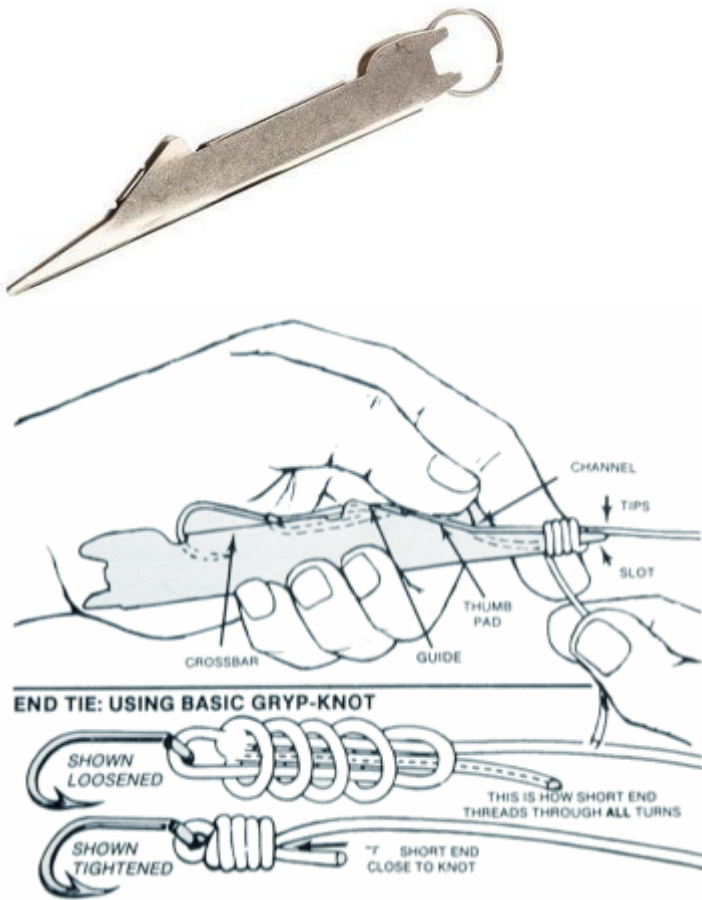
(8) Once the loop is out, pull tight on both standing and tag end to secure the snell to the shank. The snell must be as close as possible to the eye of the hook.



(9) Trim the tag end and push the standing line through the eye of the hook exiting on the point side of the hook. For a circle hook to work effectively the line must exit towards the point.

"Gryp Knot" or Hangman's Noose

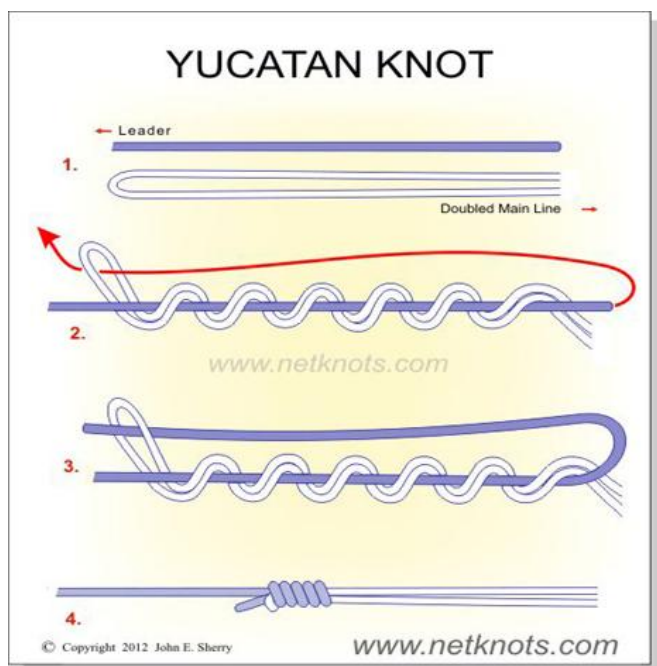
Probably the most secure knot to tie swivels or hooks to the leader. This knot is the only knot that Kenyan deck hands will use. They call it the "Kenya Loop Nail knot". The way they tie takes a fair bit of practice. For this reason the tie-fast knot tyer simplifies the knot tenfold.



- (1) Run the leader through the eye of a swivel or knot leaving approximately 9" of tag end.
- (2) Hook the point of the hook into the slot at the back of tool.
- (3) Place both the tag and the standing line into the slot on the front.
- (4) Wrap the tag end starting at the tip of the tool, 5 or 6 turns around the channel.
- (5) Insert the tag into the slot behind the wraps.
- (6) Grip the tag end that is protruding out in tip of the tool.
- (7) With one firm pull – pull the tag. The loops formed around the channel will slide off.
- (8) Slide the knot down the leader to the required length from the hook. Pull hard on the tag to seat the knot. And trim the tag end.

Yucatan Knot

Invented in Mexico – this knot is perfect to tie the 10kg double line to the leader.



- (1) Lay leader and doubled main line from reel parallel to each other. Doubled main line is often created with a Bimini Twist for this knot.
- (2) Wrap doubled line around leader 4 to six times if using mono or fluorocarbon, 10 to 15 times if using braid.
- (3) Now feed end of leader through loop at end of doubled line.
- (4) Pull doubled line and leader in opposite directions to tighten knot. Note that although the wraps were made with the doubled line, when the knot is pulled tight the leader will wrap onto the doubled line.

Outrigger/centre rigger clips

Setting outrigger lines into the clips are basically the same as fishing for other billfish species, but the bait and the hooks used determine the clip setting strength. Below are examples of proven clips, and all of them can be adjusted to set either to a harder or lighter release tension. Single and circle hooks settings have to be a lot lighter because of the angling technique where the fish strike and then have to be fed, before the angler can strike or reeling in with circle hooks. With double hooks in most cases the tension setting may be a set a lot harder, although this is only a guideline.



Pictured above: 1. Captain Harry' Outrigger Clip, 2. Malin's Blacks Clip, 3. Rupps Outrigger Clip and 4. Aftco's Roller Troller. All of the above outrigger clips are suited for sailfishing. Remember to keep the clip settings light, or wrap and attach a #28 to 32 rubber band first to the line and then to the clips



Trolling Speed

An average of 1800 to 2400 RPM (6- 9 knots) on both motors are generally maintained, however this is not cast in stone. Factors like wind and sea current speed, the general ocean condition and the bait or lures used in the spread ultimately determine the trolling speed. In flat seas with little current the trolling speed may be higher than in rough sea conditions, strong winds and sea currents. The ultimate test is to have baits and lures perform to their maximum – this means that baits, should swim or skip, and lures should dive, smoke and come-up before diving again.

Lures and baits must look alive, yet they must not tumble and cartwheel. If this occurs tap an RPM or 2 down on the throttle and up again when they look “dead-in-the-water”.

Trolling speed must also be altered when trolling into strong currents, or trolling in rough seas. Up the trolling speed going into the current and tap down in a following rough sea. An experienced skipper and wide awake crew knows when to alter the trolling speed to make the lures in the spread work effectively a 100% of the time.

The Trolling Spread

Placing an effective spread formation behind the boat and knowing which bait or lure to place where it best performs at what trolling speed is very important. There are numerous ways throughout the world to set an effective spread in their sailfish angling grounds, but let’s specifically see what works best in Southern Africa and in Kenya.

The trolling spread is determined by a couple of factors. The boat size and equipment and accessories on the boat, sea and wind conditions, as well as in the crews experience to set the lures.

It makes sense that on a sport fisher type boat rigged with outriggers, centre-riggers and downriggers, the spread will differ completely from a small ski-boat without any of the above accessories. However it is still practical to set-up an effective spread and still catch sailfish with little or no accessories. Sea and wind conditions also alter the trolling spread. In flat seas with none or hardly any wind it is practical to set more lures in the spread and make them perform effectively. In rough seas with wind it is very difficult to keep light sailfish lures from tangling and performing well, therefore less lures will be set, or the lures will be pulled closer to the boat.

Lastly the crews experience also comes into play. An experienced crew knows which lure or bait to place where, and also knows how to check each lures performance, irrespective of sea conditions and therefore more lures can be placed in the spread. This said it is better to rather place less lures in the spread than too many, in case of a strike on the other rods and the other rods have to be cleared, as well as the possibility that too many lures may tangle with each other.

As a general guideline - a small ski-boat without the above mentioned accessories 4 and a maximum of 5 lures is a practical spread. A ski-boat up to 24ft with outriggers 6 to 8 lures is practical, and on sport fishers up to 12 lures may still be possible to set in the trolling spread. Under SADSAA rules – only rods per angler. ILTTA – 1 rod per angler.

Setting the spread

Once you have decided which pattern to use, start placing the lures out in sequence. This is done in such a manner as not to have lures tangling with each other, or with the surface teasers, and also that the lures are set to the desired distances behind the boat. For an inexperienced crew it is best done with the boat going forward in a straight line with one or two crew members letting the lines out, with lures attached, behind the boat. A third person standing up on the boats gunwale, or if fishing on a bigger boat or sport fisher sitting or standing on the tower overseeing the distance of each lure.

(A) The first lure to place is the ‘Japan or shot gun’ lure. Once out to the desired distance clip the line to the outrigger clip and send it up the centre rigger or place the rod directly in the centre up on the T-top, and set the reel drag.

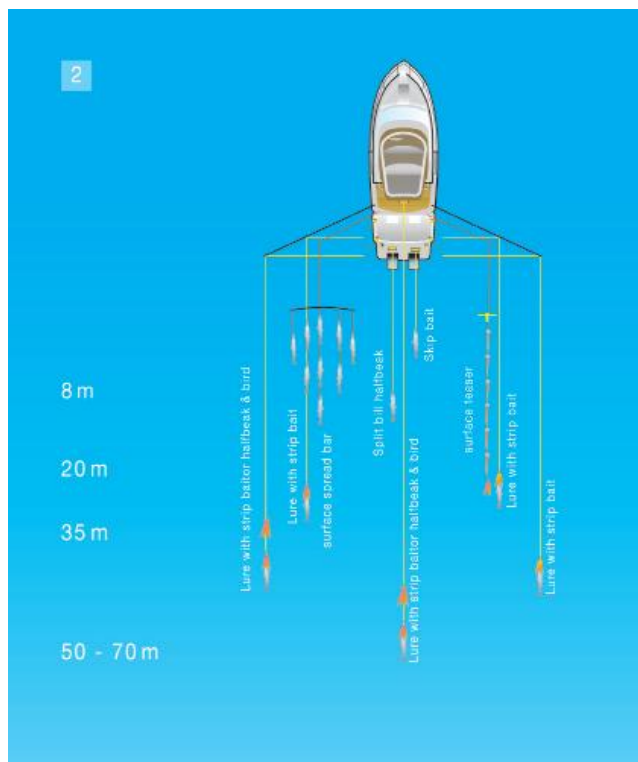
(B) The next two to four lures running from the outriggers are a bit more tricky to set. You have to establish the distance to place the lures behind the boat, and if using surface teasers how close behind the teasers they must run without tangling. First let out the lures that will run through the top of the outriggers. This is called long rigged lures or commonly known as the “long rigger”. Clip the lines in and send it up the outriggers to the top and place the rods in the gunwale rod holders. If you have a double outrigger line arrangement let the next set of lures and do not clip into the outrigger till the teasers are out behind the boat. This way you will be able to adjust the lures/bait distances behind the teasers and not have them tangling with the teaser. Once you have done this clip the lines in and send up the outrigger.

(C) The last to set is the “flat lines” – these are the baits, usually halfbeaks that are running directly from the transom trolling board and close to the boat. Flat line baits are kept fairly close to the boat where they skip or swim. Often sailfish avoid all the other lures set out in the spread further back, and hone in to the teaser or the boat. If excited enough it will strike the flat line, and at other times the flat line baits need to free spooled back into the spread and then reeled back to get it to strike at the bait. Setting the flatlines is fairly simple.

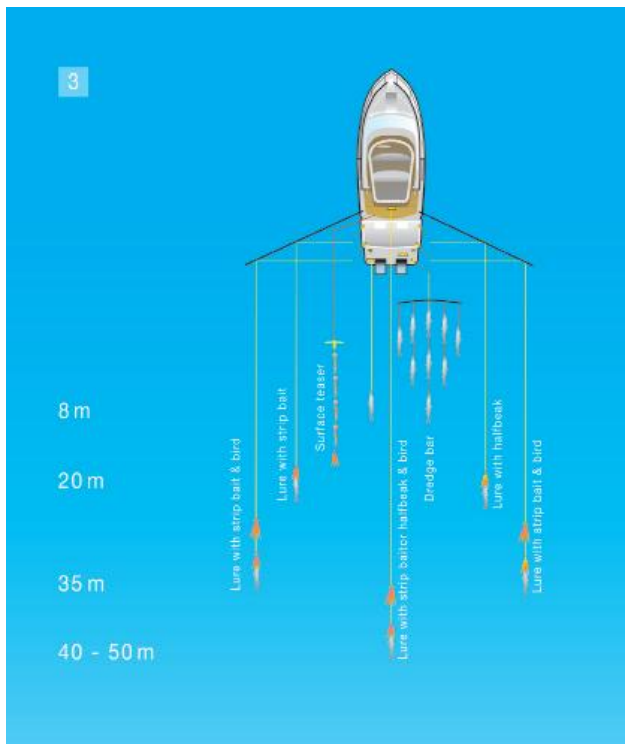
The angler lets out line to approximately 2-3 meters behind the teaser, or if a second flatline is deployed from 4 – 6 meters close behind the boat between the teasers, for those sailfish that come right up to the boat. Once the angler has placed the baits the reel lever drag is set to just above ‘free spool’ or on free spool with the ratchet clicker on.

The rod is then placed in a horizontal rod holder on the transom trolling board. Alternatively and probably a better option for inexperienced anglers is to create a ‘back drop’ – once the bait is placed, grab the line from the tip of the rod and pull it back to the reel seat.

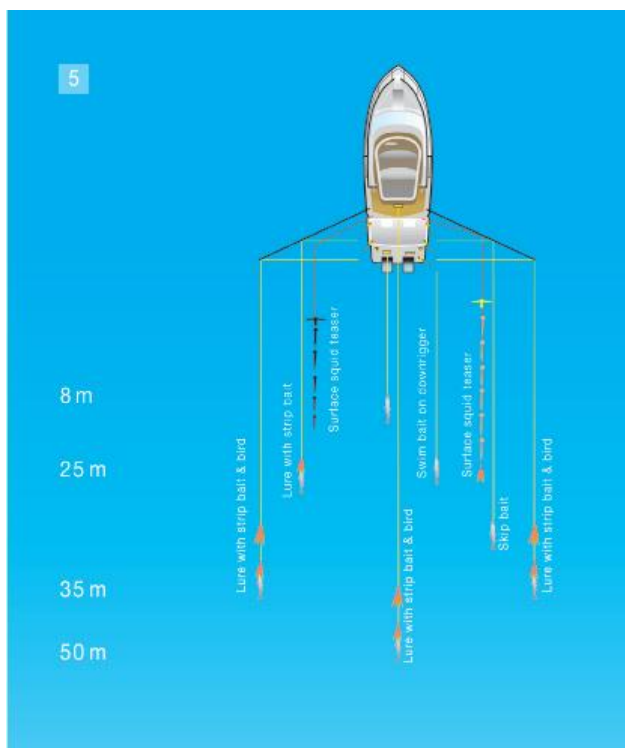
Tie a thumb size rubber band to the line and then slide the band over the reel handle or over one of the other rod holders on the transom board. Set the drag also to just above free spool, or on free spool with the ratchet clicker on.



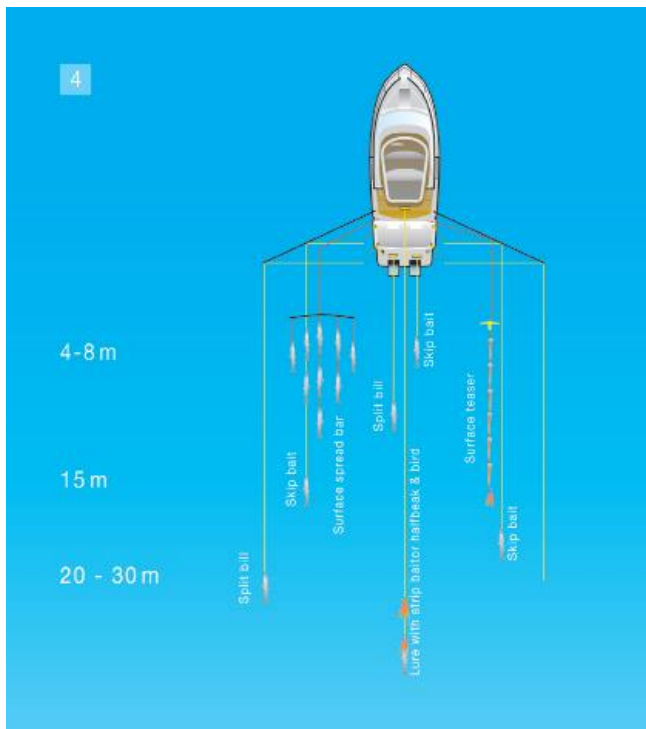
1 - 6 lures on boat with outriggers, two surface teasers or one dredge teaser. This spread works well in South Africa and Mozambique in calm seas and light to moderate strength wind conditions.



2 - 6 lures on boat with outriggers and 1 surface teaser and 1 dredge teaser. This spread works well in South Africa and Mozambique in slight to fairly rough sea and stronger wind conditions. Should the sea further deteriorate and the lures are tangling with each other or with the surface teaser, bring the lures in closer to the boat, or remove two lures or the surface teaser from the spread pattern.

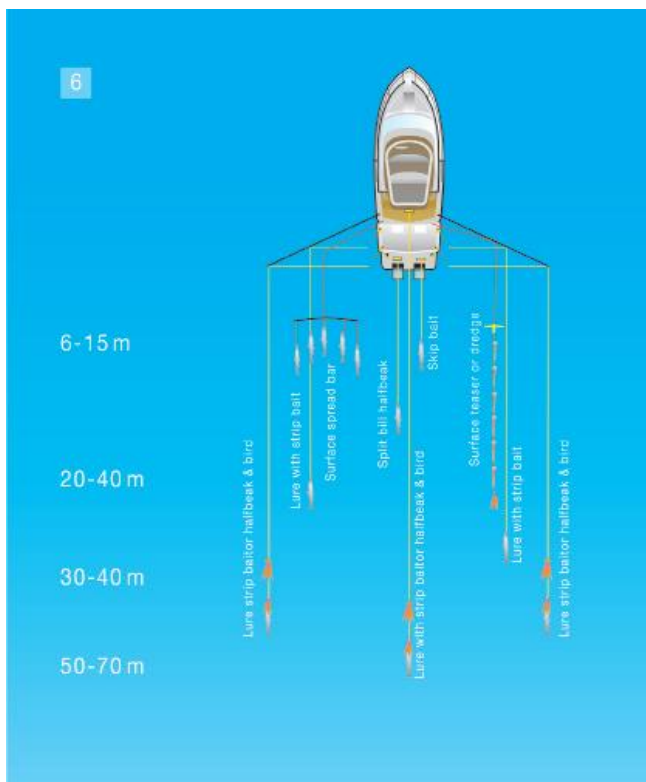


6 lures on boat with outriggers – Kenya trolling spread without halfbeaks. This spread exclusively uses strip baits, although a halfbeak may be incorporated in this spread.

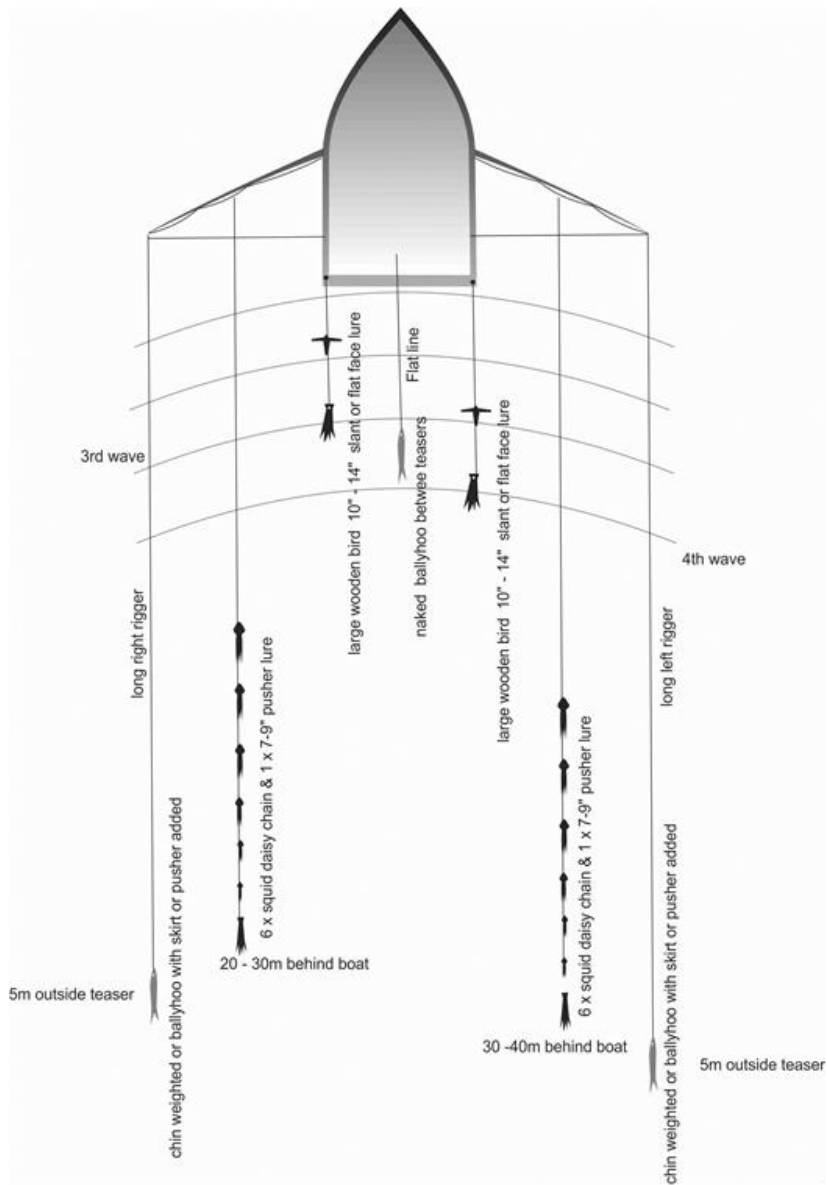


6 lures on boat with outriggers and downrigger – pattern 3

This spread works well when using circle hooks, or when sailfish or pods of sailfish are visibly or repeatedly coming up onto lures and bait on the surface.



8 – 12 lure spread set-up on sport fisher type boats. This spread is better suited on bigger boats where the lures or bait can be spread over a bigger surface area with more hands on deck to clear rods on a strike. The three patterns described in 2,3, 4 and 5 may be used with additional rods in this spread.

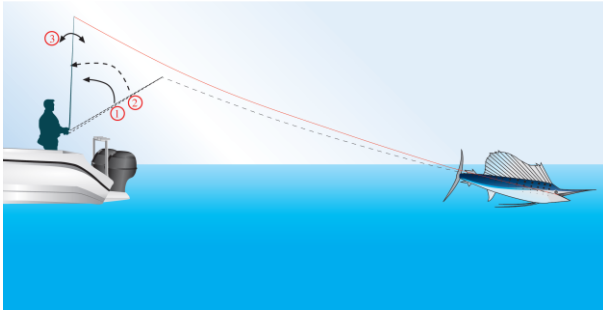


ILTTA Spread – 1 rod per angler rotating every ½ an hour to new position.

The angling technique.

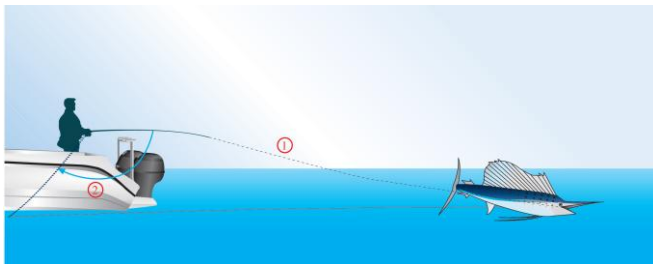
With sailfish this is everything. A sailfish will follow the lure, follow it and play 'cat-and-mouse' with it, or strike the lure at speed creating an instant hook-up. A lot of others factors also have to be considered. The reels drag settings, the tension on the outrigger clip and the mood that the fish is in.

Following are a few guidelines – although not cast in stone.



A sailfish strike at full speed on a double hook on a relatively tight set outrigger clip with the reel drag set on 'strike'. The speed of the sailfish striking the lure and pulling the line out of the rigger is usually enough for an instant hook-up driving the hooks home.

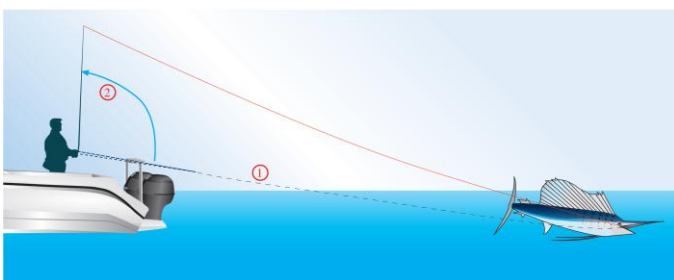
(1) The angler simply has to take the rod out of the holder, (2) (3) lift it up and lightly strike once or twice to ensure the hook is set before fighting commences.



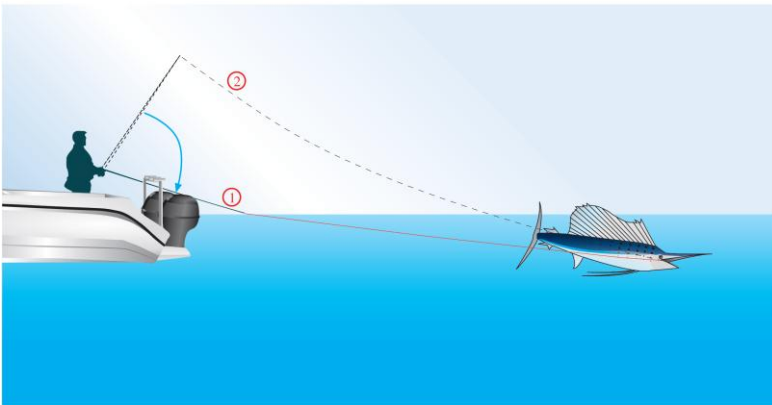
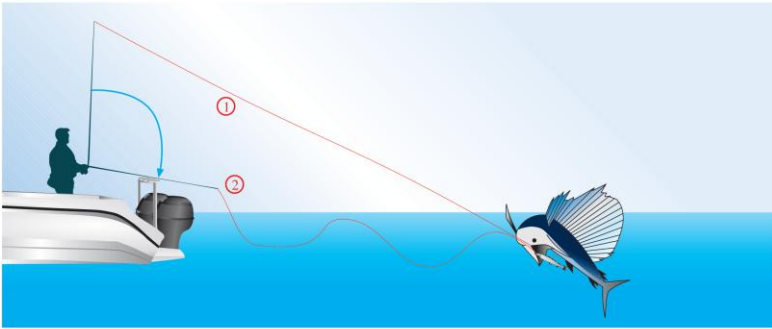
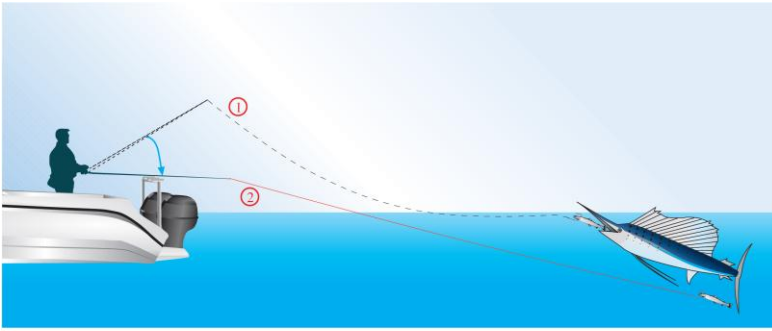
A sailfish strike at full speed on a double hook on a relatively light set outrigger clip or on a 'flatline' with the reel drag set to 10% or less.

The fish will pull the line out from the rigger clip or break the rubber band, but it is hardly enough to get an instant hook-set.

(1) It is necessary to lift the rod out from the rod holder, (2) keeping it horizontally to the side of the running fish whilst quickly adjusting the reel drag.



(1) When the fish pulls the rod tip towards it and the line becomes tight, (2) lift the rod and strike to set the hook.



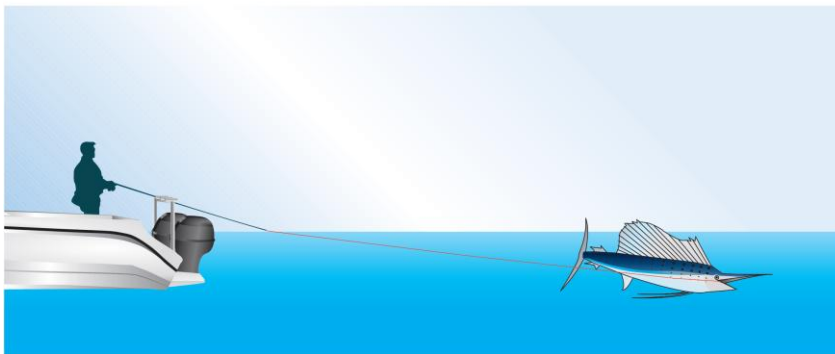
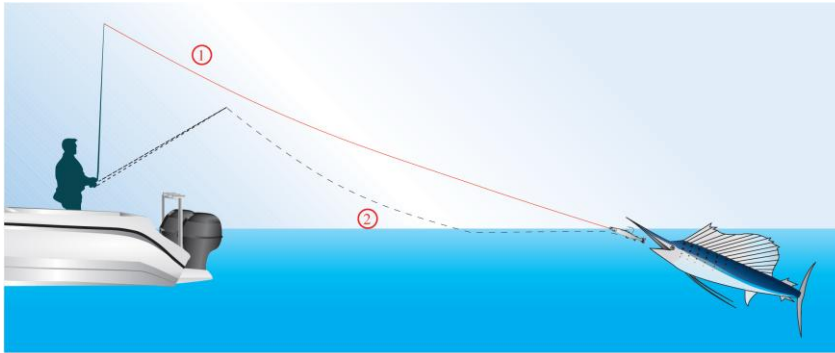
The following or cat and mouse fish:

Pictures Top:

(Pic1-top) Lift the rod out of the rod holder, reel in any slack line to the outrigger and jerk the line free from the outrigger clip. (Pic 2- top) The line will have some drop back as it falls on the water and in some cases it might be enough for the fish to strike

Middle pictures: The angler will then have to do two things, either drop the bait back to the following or toying fish, or Pic (2-Top) free spooling the bait/lure back in the spread and then engage.

Bottom Pictures: If it is not enticed to strike yet, point the rod towards the following fish whilst placing the reel completely in 'free spool'. Keep your thumb on the spool just enough for it not to overwind. If it is not enticed yet, tighten up the reel drag and reel the lure/bait back into the spread where the fish is seen or last seen the free spool again. If it takes the bait whilst free spooling wait for the line to tension as the fish is moving off with the bait/lure, or wait for the bait/lure to suddenly stop before tightening the reels drag and striking.



A sailfish on a circle hook.

(1) The angler holds the rod high, (2) only dropping it to present the bait when the billfish has taken it into its mouth. The main criterion is actually very simple. Crank don't Yank. With a circle hook, the angler drops the bait back to the fish for a relatively short count, i.e. one thousand and one, up to one thousand and six. The reel must be completely in freespool with the "clicker" off. The left thumb must apply just enough pressure on the reel to prevent overwind when the fish starts speeding off. The rod must also be pointed at the fish and the rod tip as close as possible to the water to allow the line to come off the reel as freely as possible.

This allows the fish to start swallowing the bait. The drag is then smoothly pushed up to the "strike" position. NO motion must be made to set the hook with the reel handle or with the rod. The only way the circle hook can work is if it travels slowly. Once the drag is set, the forward motion of the boat will begin to pull the bait out of the fish. If the bait is moving slowly, the circle hook will pivot at the corner of the mouth and hook the fish there. Any overt movement of the rod tip or reel at this stage will pull the bait out too fast for the hook to pivot and set. Only when the line becomes very tight the angler may commence the fight. Circle hooks radically reduce the incidence of a foul-hooked fish. The J hook, if it fails to snag anywhere inside the fish, will often hook the fish elsewhere on the body, such as on the shoulder, in the dorsal fin, somewhere on the face (the eye socket is a common area to foul-hook), on the belly. The exposed point of the hook makes it prone to snag practically anywhere. The design of the circle hook on the other hand, with the semi-protected point, makes it less prone to damage the fish.