

Big Bobbers

A Familiar Tactic's Resurrection Produces Bigger Bass
By Capt. Chris Gatley



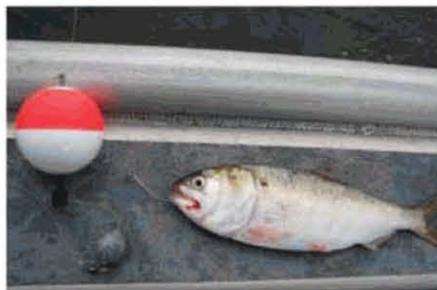
A COUPLE OF IRREFUTABLE FACTS HAVE DRIVEN MY efforts as a guide in the Northeast. The first says fishing conditions can change hourly, constantly forcing any fisherman to fine-tune his presentation and strategy. And the second is that there's usually a bite somewhere if you stop making excuses and go find it when conventional wisdom dictates, "They aren't biting yet."

One of the most versatile and productive tools I've learned to rely on to meet these challenges has its roots in the simplest bait-and-bobber approach. This basic theory modified for big fish in salt water has changed the way I approach a day on the water, and it's supercharged the kind of results I can provide for my clients.

The slip-float system applies to any type of live-bait fishing, in just about any depth of water, and it has yielded some of the best fish I've ever taken. This system has accounted for many of my 40-plus-pound stripers, including my first 50-pounder. This past season it accounted for more than half of my

total catch. The fact that it works in what used to be considered downtime only makes it more versatile.

With the slip-float system I have developed, I can deploy more lines at various depths and get the attention of suspended fish by placing baits precisely on their noses. My lines



Reduce Down Time! Slip float and live-bait rig (top) hit stripers where they live.

remain snag-free, and my baits stay in the strike zone longer. My customers' attention stays focused, and we get to watch the bite while simultaneously feeling it. The technique quite simply produces more fish.

Stripers, Case in Point

Here in the Northeast, striped bass are king. This popular game fish resides in and along shipping channels, around rock substructures rising to within 20 feet of the surface and scattered across featureless bottom that many believe to be no man's land. Live adult menhaden is the bait of choice, and most anglers target structure such as wrecks, while others drift live bait, hoping that fish will rise from the depths to feed. If you ask me, drifting aimlessly over deep water waiting for the magic hour when fish come to the surface to feed is insane. I would rather hunt down the reason why the bite is off. And the tool that helps me do that is big slip floats.

I use this system when, in the past, I typically would have fished — and lost — weighted rigs on the bottom. I have also found success while suspending my baits 20 to 35 feet down in 60 feet of water. Slip-float fishing would also serve well for tuna chunking and all shark applications requiring floats.

Getting the Rig Together

Float fishing began for me with live-baiting weakfish in Cape May, New Jersey, in the '80s. With this technique as a foundation, I adapted the same approach to bigger water and bigger fish. My initial striped bass bunker float was a tennis-ball-size plastic-foam float with a black peg. This slip-style float required a bobber stop, a short piece of Dacron nail-knotted around the main line that could be moved to match specific depths. Although effective, this nail knot slipped around, and my precise depth presentation wasn't so precise. Then I discovered the Redi Rig Release Float by Redi Rig Tackle in Northfield, Ohio (330-467-3849; www.redirig.com). Redi Rig offers floats of various sizes for saltwater

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anglers, right up to models big enough for shark and tuna fishing. For my striper and tuna needs, the S300 is the same size and buoyancy as my homemade float, but this one is rigged correctly.

The primary component of a Redi Rig Float is the post that runs through the middle, with a stainless-steel snap that attaches around the main line on one end and a spring-loaded pair of rubber stoppers on the other end. Press the top of the post and the stoppers separate so the main line can be trapped between them. The stoppers hold the line securely enough to stay in place with the liveliest baits in the strongest current, yet on the strike, these allow the line to pull free.

What's more, the post acts as a keel, which helps the bait drift smoothly. This keel effect allows the float to track true and clean in the current, offering the most natural of presentations.

I like to use a 4- to 6-ounce egg sinker on the main line, depending on wind, current flow and bait of choice. The weight rests on a premium swivel to which five feet of fluorocarbon leader and a circle hook have been attached.

With the float set to the proper depth on the main line, this rig keeps my live bunker riding above structure, on an intercept path with fish I have located on the finder. Fish suspended over massive deepwater flats continually fall for this presentation. The tactic excels in deep shipping channels with barge traffic. Stripers like the cover of the channel structure but don't care for the activity overhead. Cow striped bass tend to stay down amid the traffic. This system allows me to keep the bait at their level.

Lately, I have started using the same float setup on tuna, and it's producing very well. I especially like the fact that it relegates balloons, clips and rubber bands as tools of the past.

The use of a float is a specific technique that requires specific rigging in order to present your bait naturally; however, adapted to the situation and species at hand, the possibilities are as numerous as the waters you fish and the species you seek. Once the rig is set up to match the conditions, the control you gain with the specialized adjustable float and the tailored strategy

allows effective flat-lining of several live baits on the surface and two or three floats at specific depths. It's a surefire way to take your baits to the fish, and it definitely beats bidding your time waiting for them to come to you.

Some of the heaviest striped bass I've encountered have fallen victim to this tactic, while the lulls in my fishing have been greatly reduced. That this system works so well in the hard-fished Northeast is a pretty good recommendation that it should work for live-bait fishing anywhere. 

About the Author: Capt. Chris Galley operates Ardent Angler Guide Service, a full-time charter business in the Northeast. He's equally at home chasing striped bass around New York City as he is hunting the offshore grounds in search of tuna. Look for his cutting-edge tactics and fishing video at www.catchthebite.com. He can also be reached at 267-253-5290.

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