

## **Graduation Day: Are you ready for the next level?**

By DJ Muller

Think back for a minute to when you were in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Do you remember Graduation Day, when your next step was to high school? Were you ready for what lied a head of you? At the time you probably thought that you knew it all, your parents knew nothing, and that you didn't even need high school. You felt very comfortable and confident in where you were in life. You, if you were like me in any way were saying, "OK, bring it on, this elementary school thing is getting old and boring fast." Although those weren't my exact words I'm sure, the feelings were there.

As a surfcaster, I feel at times we tumble into the same pitfall. We become satisfied with our accomplishments. We think that we have it all figured out. Surf fishing has become routine. Perhaps you are ready to advance. Surf casting can be so complex I can see people backing off and just settling into a comfort zone of sorts. You go to your favorite little hole, cast your offering out and then take it easy until the rod goes. Catch a fish or two and you are good to go. Doesn't sound too bad...does it? Or does it? Is that what your fishing experience has come to? A thoughtless process of going through motions? Lazy mornings or evenings watching the sun rise or fall? You have become very good at digging holes in front of your chair with your feet. While there is a huge unexplored and undiscovered world of surfcasting out there for you, which includes, hunting and scouting and calculating fish movements, the study of bait and predator habits, and then all the various ways to catch what you are after. "The other guys always catch the big fish." Sound familiar? If you are tired of routine monotonous fishing, you may be ready for the next level, to graduate to the next class of surfcasting. If you don't feel that you have stretched your skills and abilities recently and have not steadily improved since you started fishing the great white water, perhaps a graduation of sorts for you may be in order.

### **Where do you go from here?**

Fishing for striped bass is the glamorous type of surf fishing. For one reason, bass inhabit our waters just about all season long, they can be targeted in April all the way through until November or December, sometimes through Christmas and beyond. Other surf fish come and go, fluke, bluefish, weakfish, false albacore, and others, but the stripers holding power is what makes it a formable target. Secondly, they inhabit the shallow water which makes it an easy target for the surfcaster. They can hardly be found off the beach in deep water except maybe during migration periods when they are moving en masse.

### **Work on being multi-faceted.**

The next level for the surfcaster is to be multi-faceted, being able to be well versed in the numerous ways to catch fish, especially stripers. Let's cover the how, when and where of surfcasting, specifically for striped bass. Once you become proficient in catching bass you then should be able to catch any of the other fish that visit the skinny water.

### **How.**

Do you know what it is to live line? Can you fish live mullet, bunker, herring? Have you caught bass on live eels? Do you know how to work the water column with artificials, top to bottom? Can you soak the clam or bunker chunk when necessary?

To catch bass you need to be able to fish different techniques during different parts of the season. In the early spring it is worms and clams from the backwaters, then it is bass on herring and bunker in late spring, artificials and bait in June. Eels are good from late spring on through till late in the season, then maybe a little live mullet action in early fall and then back to bait and artificials for the fall migration. You should never get bored bass fishing.

### **When.**

Do you know when the best time to target bass is? No it is not on a blue bird day when the ocean is glassy and blue. Bass and other game fish in the area thrive in or like unsettled conditions and darkness. Not a natural time for humans to be enjoying the out-of-doors...unless he or she is a bassman. I associate my best bass experiences with times that have hard wind, driving rain, overcast skies, or darkness.

Tides also play an important roll whenever the question “When?” question is asked. Tides play a very big part into knowing when and where to fish, but it is relative to where you want to fish. For example sometimes jetties are better fished on a dropping tide, or at low tide during unsettled weather. Your favorite beach may be a bust a low tide because there is simply not enough water to flood the bar and trough. In the spring an outflow or outgoing tide may be better because the water is warmer thus turning the fish onto the feed.

### **Where.**

Learning where to fish is just as important as the how and when. Location, location, location is not just a real estate cliché you know. It means everything to the surf rat. There are many different places around where you can catch stripers: off bridges, bay waters, open beaches, rivers or canals, off jetties; all viable stripper holds, all worthy of learning. Two very important ingredients come into play here, and all are relative to these spots, structure and water movement. Find an area that contains these two important elements, and you have found a very good potential bass hold. Target these areas! If you don't, you are not making the best of your fishing time. If it is a long stretch of beach you decide to fish, without first having a good reason to fish it, good structure or good water movement, then you are not optimizing your time.

### **How to stretch yourself into becoming a better surfcaster.**

Just like school, you need to become a student. Reading books, doing research, surfing the net, reading the Fisherman, and studying your quarry is one good place to start. By doing these things you gain knowledge which is so important as a student.

Another great way to really expand your horizons is by joining a surfcasting striper club. Here you are now surrounded by guys that focus strictly on stripers from the beach. Many, with years and years of experience, and most are very willing to share their knowledge with others. Some, of course, will take their secrets to the grave with them, but I have found that most of the accomplished surfcasters are not possessive, they don't really need to be.

Another way, and the way you pull all of the knowledge gathering together, is by fishing. By fishing, or spending “time on the water“, you bring all your knowledge to life and apply it to yourself and your approach to fishing. You learn invaluable lessons this way, lessons a book or conversations will never teach you. There are many out there that have all the knowledge and can not be beat in conversation, they always have an answer, yet when it comes down to applying the knowledge they can not do it, kind of like many of the modern day cyber fishermen that inundate the striper websites.

Maybe this year will be your year to graduate. Push yourself and expand your surfcasting skills. I am always amazed by all there is to learn in this game we play called surfcasting. It is a big world with plenty to enjoy and learn. Learning is fun, challenging, and exciting. See you on the beach. The end.