

Surfcasting for Fluke-Bala Style

By DJ Muller

After the fast paced action of chasing big bass and huge bunker schools up and down the coast at a fever pitch slows, and when the striper action finally moves out of our local waters it is a time when the surfcaster may have trouble adjusting to a relatively new-found tranquility of the summer surf. Fear not! No need to pack up until mid-September, (just scale down a bit perhaps.) The mighty fluke has made resurgence in the wash and has provided for some pretty serious action. No, it does not match the action of cow bass, but it does offer some great fishing until the bass move back into our waters come fall. While fishing my local haunts in July and August I often come across “flukers” and am always fascinated by their production. I too get a good number of bi-catch fluke while making my rounds at my normal bass spots on small plugs and shads intended for bass. Just last week when throwing a darter behind a black teaser in a shallow water rip, I was surprised when I had a nice keeper fluke hit the tail hook on the darter. I also had another decent sized fluke hit the teaser. Needless to say fluke are a very aggressive fish that are good in battle, fun to catch, and easy to fool when the right presentation is offered.

Ron Bala.

My very good friend and a veteran surfcasting sharpie, Ron Bala, loves the summer months when he targets fluke almost exclusively. “These are not incidental bi-catch fluke, I target these,” he says. As a striperman of course he is by no means disappointed if a bass happens to eat breakfast at Ron’s Diner for breakfast mind you.

The rig he uses for fluke also takes bass, of course. However he looks forward to the summer mornings when he plies the skinny waters looking for this gamey flatfish, biding his time until the linesides once again return to our waters in number.

Bala’s Brain.

Ron Bala’s brain never stops working! He is forever thinking up new teasers and lures to fool fish. His fish persuading inventions never cease to amaze me. “Here try this,” are the words most often spoke by Ron when we are discussing different approaches to persuading bass or in this case fluke. He is always coming up with something new to try. He pushes them off on me all the time, when I visit him at Fisherman’s Supply, where he works. His favorite set up is an all soft bait set-up. The 4” Tsunami Split Tail ahead of the 5” Split Tail. It is tied in the classic plug/teaser style, a barrel swivel with a 4” drop to a small duo-snap, then the teaser and another drop of about 12” again to a duo-snap, to the main plug. This he claims is the “go to” combo and is deadly on fluke. Surprisingly Ron says that the teaser takes the fish “85-90% of the time.”

The Presentation.

“Work the rips and the top of the bars,” Ron said to me, “if you think the water is too shallow...that is where you want to fish.” Don’t be scared of shallow water. Remember fluke lie in wait for their meals to come to them, seldom do they prowl for food. Their bodies are not made to constantly search for food, their bodies are made for ambush feeding. They hide, buried in the sand and wait for their meal. If there is water rushing over top of a bar, it is here that the water is skinniest, the bait still has to travel in this water. The narrowness of the water makes for an easy strike zone for the fluke. So target it!

The rips along side the jetties or open water rips sweep bait around and make a perfect situation on which fluke can concentrate their efforts.

“Constantly be moving!” Ron also explains, “When the fish are in, they are spread along the beach in various rips, holes, or bars. Cover the water, never staying in one place too long. Find where the fish are holding and sometimes you can get a bunch at one spot.

Ron also emphasizes that the lure has got to stay on the bottom at all times. Claiming the fact that fluke are aggressive feeders, he has caught a lot of fluke on Red Fins, Hellcats, and Yo-Zuri’s, although the small plastic swimmers, like small Bombers or Rebels, do take fish on occasion, Ron goes with metal or rubber when seeking out fluke. The plastic swimmer is almost not an option.

Another very important reminder that Ron gives is “don’t swim your lures like you would for bass, twitch them on the retrieve.” Keep your lure bouncing along the bottom, thus drawing the attention of the predator. The fluke will take care of the business from that point on.

The Right Time for Fluke.

I personally have seen a good number of good sized fluke come up in the late afternoon while the sun is beginning to drop, I have also either seen or caught fluke in the morning. Bala bass fishes in the dark and then at the hint of first light he switches over and targets fluke. He calls the time from first light until 8 a.m. the most productive time to catch fluke. Ron says, “at that time of the morning the fluke are right at your feet, you’d be surprised by how shallow the water is they swim in. The fluke begin to move out into deeper water as the sun rises higher.” This is what most surf fish do as they seek sanctuary in the deep quiet waters of the day.

Equipment-Wise.

While fluke-hunting, Bala arms himself with a 7’ or 8’ spinning rod with a matching reel, a Shimano Stradic 4000 works swell.

Getting back to his teaser rig, it is important that the teaser drop is of a higher pound test than that of the main leader. For example, if the main leader is 30 pound test, you want the teaser leader to be 40 pound test. I am not a big fluorocarbon user, but here may be an instance where you may want to use it. The extremely low visibility may be helpful in your quest for bagging a doormat.

The rig as mentioned can be and is interchangeable. Other than the split-tail on the teaser drop, it can also be tied with a simple bucktail or hackle teasers in various sizes and profiles, the main drop can also be tied with a small bucktail, metal, or shad instead of the rubber split-tail (see photo for options).

Come up with a combination that works for you, don’t just take my word for it! Just like any kind of fishing, use your head (similar to the way Bala does) and consider what it is the fish may like and then come up with an offering...see what you come up with. Bala never stops tweaking and playing with his presentations and you would be very surprised at the amount of fish he catches on any particular morning. See you out there.