

Anchor-Centric Spey Casting

Part II: Adding Distance

By Zack Williams

In “Anchor-Centric Spey Casting: A Primer” (Fall, 2016 Issue), I made the argument that the only necessity to making a good Spey cast is a good anchor. I believe that the importance of mimicking other casters specific body mechanics has been over valued in much of the modern Spey casting instruction. By focusing on making a good and consistent anchor, I believe that most casters can develop their own style, becoming competent and successful at their craft and have a lifetime of enjoyment from Spey casting and fishing.

However, some people (myself included) may aspire for more out of their casting. Clearly, some casts go further than others. Why can Travis Johnson cast 200’, when with the same anchor the average caster can only cast 80’? Good question, indeed. After a few years of flailing around in the presence of Travis and others at Spey O’ Rama, I began to stop merely mimicking their motions and tried to get to the essence of why. At the same time I was testing my theories on the anchor and knew that if those theories didn’t hold true there, then they simply weren’t true at all.

Through these observations, I solidified my belief in the absolute importance of the anchor and developed my own theories on the keys to distance casting. The following are my thoughts on why Travis (Not his thoughts) and others may be capable of casting upwards of 200’ and what you can do to improve your casting distance.

In keeping with my argument that the key to a good cast is a good anchor, we are going to start there. Many casters, when faced with wind or trying for more distance lose sight of this and everything falls apart. Whether making a 60’ cast or a 160’ cast, we are going to

use the same anchor. Consistency is key, you want to eliminate as many variables in your casting stroke as possible. We want to develop muscle memory in making the same setup and anchor over and over.

With a good understanding of the anchor and how to make a good one, we are ready to start making a couple of adjustments that will allow us more distance when we need it. These adjusts will be incorporated into every one of those setups and anchors whether casting 60' or trying to bomb it. We are creating a setup that is easily repeatable and allows us the power when we need it. I am a firm believer that there are many more similarities between single hand and Spey casting than most people wish to admit. In this instance, the answer to distance in both single and Spey casting corresponds to casting stroke length. Simply put, the longer the rod tip travels on the forward stroke, the longer the cast's potential. If you have made a good anchor (which means the line is under tension in a d-loop behind you), when you begin the forward stroke the rod will be pulling against the weight of the line. The longer the rod tip pulls against the weight of this line, the deeper the rod will bend. The deeper the rod bends the more energy it will create when it unloads into the forward cast.

Unfortunately, lengthening our forward cast is not as simple as saying abracadabra and bingo. In order to create casting stroke length in a Spey cast we are going to have to get our rod in the proper position (flatter or lower on the clock face) at the completion of the anchor set (right when we are about to start the forward cast) while still creating that good anchor. (If you want to test this theory, watch some videos of Travis and other top casters at Spey O' Rama to see how flat their rod is behind them at the start of the forward stroke.)

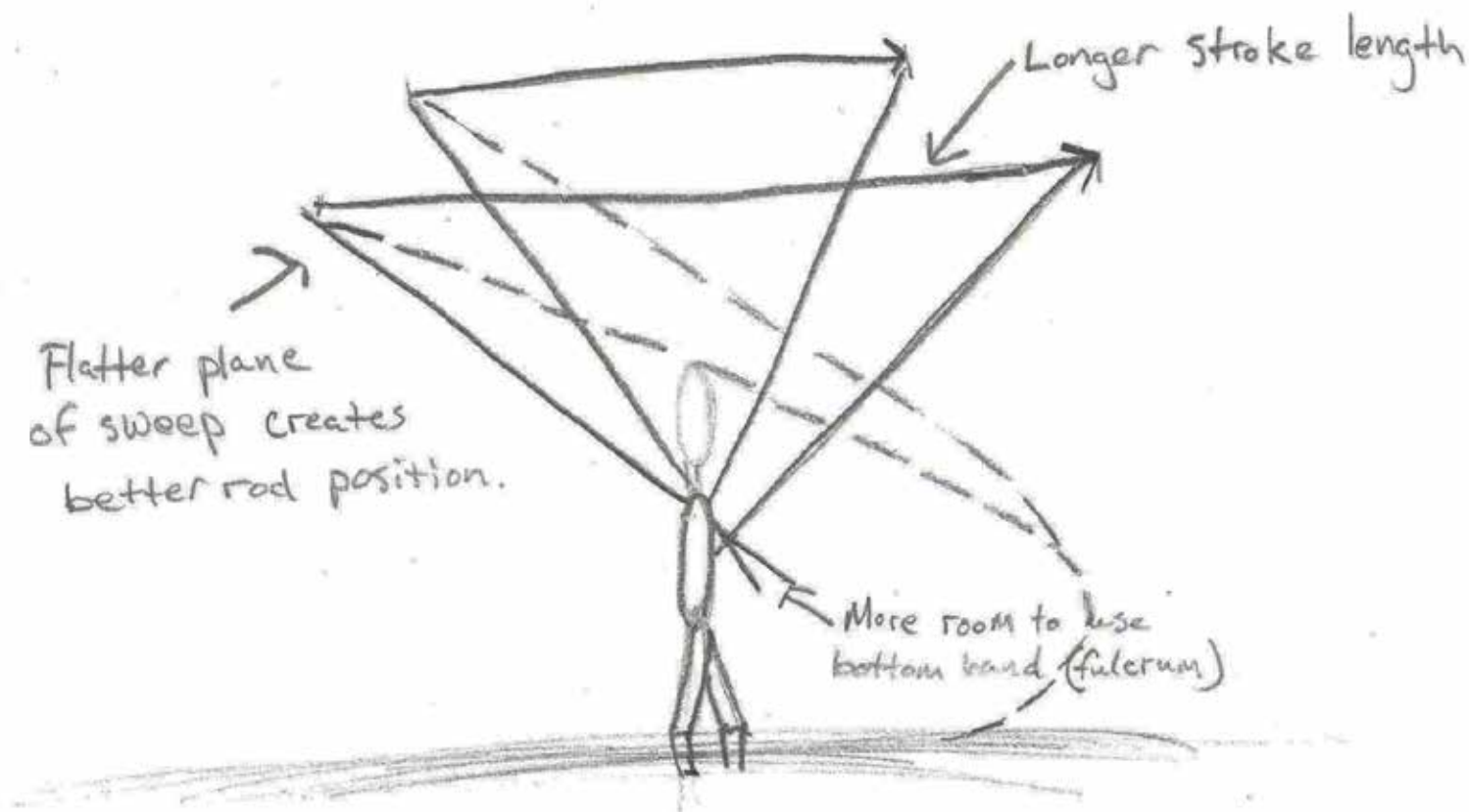
If you read the previous article that I wrote, you remember that a good anchor must have the rod tip ascending on a level plane (no dips or upward thrusts) during the sweep phase. And we must have the energy directed opposite our target. To create a longer stroke and have more potential

distance, we are going to concern ourselves with the plane of the sweep to get in that proper position.

We simply want to sweep the rod in a flatter (still ascending) plane. If we do this properly (see drawing), at the completion of the sweep the rod will be at a much flatter angle behind us (think 9:30 on the clock face instead of 10 or higher). For every small bit flatter we can get the rod behind us, while still maintaining the anchor, we will add 2x that much length to the forward cast because that distance will be added on both the back and front ends of our stroke. A change from 10:30 to 9:30 in rod position will essentially double our stroke length and rod load!

It should be noted that we are not going to add more power by rapidly speeding up the sweep. A lot of common casting instruction I have witnessed refers to turning D-Loops into V-Loops by thrusting the line backwards to cast further. It may be true that some energy put into the sweep (d-loop formation) can create energy in the forward result. The problem is we have added another variable to the cast! We want to eliminate variables so that we can cast consistently. So, to reiterate, we want to create a sweep that makes a good anchor consistently and creates a flatter rod position behind us. Again, the perfect sweep ascends at a nice shallow angle. The power put into this is simply the amount of power needed to place our anchor in the correct position, nice and flat on the water. No more, no less. Work to do it in the same manner every time whether the cast is 60' or a 160'.

Now we are ready for the forward cast. Our rod position should be flatter behind us at this point. That alone will add some smooth distance. The second addition we can add to really get things cooking is bottom hand. Most everyone who has Spey casted has heard "Use your bottom hand." But, why? When we use our bottom hand on the forward stroke we change how the rod works. The rod now becomes a lever. By pulling with the bottom hand and using the top hand as a guide/fulcrum point, we will gain full mechanical advantage of this



Another crappy drawing: The things to note here are how a flatter sweep will finish with more rod angle behind you. This creates the opportunity for a longer forward stroke and gives your bottom hand more clearance to be used.

absurdly long lever that is a Spey rod. So how do we do that? Let's back up to that sweep again. The nice flat sweep has hopefully already put us in a better position to use the bottom hand on the forward stroke. If we want to try to improve on this even further, we can work on pushing the bottom hand out during the sweep which will create more room to pull on the forward cast. The tricky part is we must be careful to keep the rod tip ascending on that level plane. If we combine a push of the bottom hand and a guiding motion of the top hand during the sweep, we can bring the rod around on a nice, shallow ascending plane, accomplishing both of our goals (flatter rod position and more bottom hand clearance from our body).

Don't be afraid to practice your sweep without doing a forward cast. Stop after

the sweep and check how flat your rod is behind you and where your bottom hand is. Verify you have a good anchor still.

Now we are ready for that killer forward cast. We are going to pull with the bottom hand to power and use the top hand to guide the rod tip down the target line (same direction as your anchor is pointing). My goal is to power the cast with 100% smooth power from the bottom hand. The top hand can and is moving in the direction of the target (the guide) but it is never pushing or attempting to add power.

The goal, again, is to learn to sweep the rod on a flatter plane for every anchor and cast we make. Eliminate the variables and do this as consistently as possible. The forward cast is where we will then control our distance. For a nice smooth 60' cast,

give it a nice easy pull of the bottom hand. For a 100' cast, give it a little more pull, still trying to stay nice and smooth. If things fall apart, you are going too hard and abruptly, smooth it out again.

For most of us, casting 150' or more will be as difficult as hitting consistent 300 yard drives or shooting like Steph Curry but I believe that by keeping to these simple elements we all can add some power to our cast. First, make a good anchor consistently. Then, learn to gradually lengthen your casting stroke by flattening the plane of the sweep. Then finally, work on adding the bottom hand. Don't be afraid to experiment. If it doesn't work, break it down into steps and try something new. Develop your own style and let em' rip.

