



There's No Wrong Rajeff



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On a summer day in Maine about fifteen years ago, I was attending an FFF Certified Instructor Preparation workshop given by Macauley Lord at LL Bean. The property on which the school was located is called the Fogg House and has a converted farmhouse for classes and long concrete casting pools, like those on the West coast. Tall dark green pines flanked the long pools on the forest side.

You could see the bright fly lines in flight beautifully against the green curtain. Macauley said, you've got a gift for distance casting and I'd like to recommend a coach on the West coast. He could help you realize your potential, if you're interested. I was over forty and past my athletic prime but I did want to cast as far as possible with shooting heads for New England striper fishing. I know no one here had accomplished as much as the casters of California and the Pacific Northwest.

Mac said, contact Chris Korich out in Oakland, Ca. I've never met him but my good friend Tim Rajeff says he's the best coach. Tim, Chris and Tim's brother Steve grew up together casting at the Golden Gate Angling and Casting Club. If you can't get Chris, Tim or his brother Steve, might help you out. Steve is currently Senior Rod Designer at Gloomis and Tim started his own company in 2001, Rajeff Sports. He owns Echo Fly Rods and distributes Airflo Line in North America. Tim had already withdrawn from competitive casting by that time I met Mac.

I emailed Chris and waited for a response. Well, after a year or so of waiting for one, and after leaving voice and email messages, I called Tim. Tim was very nice and offered to coach me in Vancouver, Washington. We set a date and I made reservations to travel 3,000 miles each way to cast with Tim for the day. He still holds the ACA record of scoring 300 in All Accuracy Flies; a perfect 100 in all three accuracy events at the Nationals!

When I got off the plane, anxious to meet Tim and get started, I turned on my cell phone and called the office of Rajeff Sports. Jarrod, Sales Manager, answered the phone and I asked for Tim. Jared said, Tim's in Wales at Airflo. He paused and continued, stay put and I'll call you back. We hung up and I started to feel very disappointed after traveling all day. My phone rang and the deep voice on the other end said, Hi John, this is Steve Rajeff. I'm going to come pick you up in my white Ford van in about a half hour. Don't worry. It was as if I had booked a light saber lesson with Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi showed-up instead! There's no "wrong" Rajeff brother to get a lesson from. I felt energized with the prospect of learning from Steve.

Steve was busy at work at GLoomis when this happened and took the afternoon off to cover for his younger brother. I knew Steve was the most famous tournament caster in the world and had the public reputation as being strong and less outgoing than his brother. Steve picked me up in his white $\frac{3}{4}$ ton Fishmobile and took me to a park in front of some high-tension lines. When I got to see Steve in the flesh, he was a couple inches taller than me, had more muscle, bigger bones and longer arms and fingers. If Steve and I put our elbows on the table as if to arm wrestle, his fingers tips would be four inches above mine! I brought no rods but Steve had three wrapped in a beach towel that he told me doubles as a place to lay line so it won't tangle when shooting it.

He had an ACA Angler's Fly outfit, a One-Hand Distance outfit and a Salmon-Fly, or Two-Hand Fly Distance outfit. He started off going over the required technique when casting high-density tournament heads with mono shooting line. The One-Hand and Two-Hand outfits had thick holding line tied to the heads, followed by thinner shooting line. This way, holding onto the holding line will prevent breaking the lighter shooting-line upon maximum hauling or acceleration.

He demonstrated each then let me try, except for Salmon-Fly. He cast 170; I cast 140. He cast 200; I cast 150. The most important thing he taught me

was to use an efficient, compact stroke with good tracking. The straightness of the cast is more important than power. He said, speed will come later. If you cast 170ft. of fly line and it lands in a heap only reaching 130ft, your cast will be beaten by a 150 ft. cast that unrolls straight away! He did however put a full bend in the extra-stiff blanks.

The second most remarkable thing I witnessed, was Steve launching the Salmon-Fly outfit and accidentally casting over the high-tension wires 220 feet away at the end of the field! Even though the graphite rod is a conductor of electricity, the line didn't transmit the current to the blank, thank goodness. I latter found out why he didn't let me try casting it. I think he didn't want me messing-up his line or injuring myself with it, which I would have. That outfit uses a 53ft., 120gram head. The leader and head will injure a caster like a whip. When we were done, Steve wrapped up his neat outfits and we started off toward my motel. He didn't have time to have a beer afterward but I was so glad he was able to fit this it into his schedule.

Besides being a good brother to Tim and being generous to a stranger, Steve was interested in recruiting more people to take up his favorite sport and get involved. We talked about tournament casting in America and how it could be better promoted and run. I told Steve I had some ideas and fishing industry and media contacts and would see what I could do. Steve dropped me off at my motel and I got to sample some local microbrewery products and raw oysters that night and flew back in the morning with a lot to think about.

After I returned home, I received an apologetic email from Tim and he offered to make it up to me in January at The Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, NJ. Tim had a booth there and was willing to step-out to cast with me. I went to the show and visited his booth. He had a #8 rod with a floating shooting head as a starter. As we walked through the show with the rod, Tim stopped and introduced me to a few of his industry friends.

It was a cold day with old snow on the lawn of the Garden State Exhibition Center where we were casting. He ran through and demonstrated the proper stroke for the ACA event, Angler's Fly Distance. Jim Green of Washington State created this event for steelhead anglers in the Pacific Northwest who used similar tackle and heads. Tim also reinforced the important of good tracking and used the side of the building to demonstrate continuous contact with its surface with his index finger, throughout the casting stroke.

It was my turn to cast and I had to get used to the short head and straight tracking. A full floating line has much more stability provided by the heavier running line than this head and thin shooting-line. The flight of a full line self-corrects to a remarkable degree. We cast another time at the show but this time it was together in front of everyone at the indoor pool. It was the first time I had an audience and it gave me some stage fright.

Steve still competes in the old ACA casting games and has been a nearly unstoppable victor for over forty years. I think if Steve didn't personally design the ACA distance blanks and make them available to ACA at his company's manufacturing cost, we wouldn't have any to use. This busy guy fishes as much as his business schedule allows.

Steve has looked after me and has given me some of my most important introductions and endorsements in fly fishing. He's also been a supporter and advocate of the change I've brought within the American Casting Association. The first years I competed at the ACA Nationals, Steve was my Ghillie (line tender and coach) and taught me an appreciable amount.

The first time I went out with Steve to an ACA dinner get-together at the Nationals must have been 2003, and I asked him, was it all right to order a cocktail with this group? I wanted to leave a good impression with the members. Steve grinned and said, "We used to be casters with a drinking problem; now we're drinkers with a casting problem." We both brought a drink back to the table after the ice was broken, so to speak.

I see Steve every year he goes to the Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, NJ and together we attend dinners and socialize with exhibitors, media and friends. At the end of the show, I usually drop him off at the airport on my way home and say good-bye until we meet again in various cities at the ACA Nationals and elsewhere. Some years I use my Suburban, other times he rents a car, or has his van. Steve likes to listen to standard big band jazz and played a trumpet in school. Steve doesn't mind me playing music from some early blues-rock but cringes when I play Hendrix or Zeppelin. We usually seek out good seafood or authentic barbecue.

A few years ago, Steve included me in a fishing trip when he visited a client and friend in my home state. Steve got to experience some New England striped bass fishing for the first time and we had a blast! The fishing hasn't been as good here since. This year, Steve wrote a generous endorsement

on the jacket of my first casting book and it was an honor to receive it. His brother Tim has invited me out to visit but I haven't taken him up on it, yet. Since I became involved in running ACA back in 2005, Tim generously offered to warehouse and fulfill orders for Official ACA Supplies at Rajeff Sports. He wanted to do this for free, just to help our organization. He's always donated items I've requested for conservation fundraisers too. I spent a day hanging with Tim at his booth at the 2011 Spey-O-Rama, in San Francisco where I was invited to be a casting judge. Since I was a caster, spent eight years as an executive for the ACA and supported competitive Spey casting, Tim called me a "tournament junkie". Tim, once an internationally competitive caster, moved-on to other challenges and interests.

Steve and Tim Rajeff have very different personalities and goals. I would characterize them both as being very generous, with a lot of humility. They started-out competing together in tournament casting but have chosen different professional paths along the same river. Steve is happy designing for an existing company and Tim likes being an entrepreneur. One thing for sure, they both love fly fishing and casting. Tim and Steve actually got back together at the GGACC casting pools this summer and competed against each other for fun. Tim cast as well as he did thirty years ago. I have always enjoyed my time with Steve and Tim and working on projects with them.