

SML Striper Fishing with Captain Chad – Tips for Fall & Spring

11/4/22 presentation by Captain Chad Gilmore to SMSC, recorded and transcribed by Jon A.

In the fall & spring conditions are changing so anglers need to be in tune with what's going on. For example, many creeks are more clear than normal this year, which in turn keeps the gizzard shad in deeper water, because they are filter feeders. So be observant ready for anything in fall & spring.

Planer Board Fishing

The boards are side specific, meaning they run on only one side of boat, left or right, depending on the design of the board. Some are color coded for port and starboard. Captain Todd Keith from Shad Taxi offers this tip: "Rubber clip to the rod tip". Start by placing live bait on hook. Then, grab the line above the leader, near the barrel swivel & bead (or swivel and egg sinker, if using one). Wrap the main line around and through the pigtail snap on the planer (these snaps work much better than plain snaps). Last step is to pinch the line clip open and place line between rubber pads. Line clip is toward the tip of the rod, with line clip rubber pads IN FRONT OF the metal pigtail swivel on the rod line.

Planers work best with bigger gizzard shad or bigger blueback herring, those 7+ inches or larger. They can take the hook through nose and the board pulling on them, while smaller baits and alewives quickly die if used with planer board. Fluorocarbon leaders are preferred with planer rigs because they are least visible. Above the bead and barrel swivel, regular monofilament works well as the main line. Chad does not use braid on planer boards, although some do (with heavier clips). For hooks, he uses only straight "J" hooks on the boards, never the "circle" hooks. He matches hook size to the bait size when possible.

For planers that are closest to the bank in shallow water, Chad uses no weight, so bait can swim naturally. He also runs biggest bait closes to bank, with smaller baits on the deeper lines that follow the first one. The distance from the bait to the planer board clip varies from 7' in shallow water close to bank to around 15' in deeper water. Easy way to measure out planer board line is just use one or two pulls of line from the tip of a 7' rod to the butt. The first planer board is given the most line and runs in shallow water. The second board is given less line and runs closer to the boat in slightly deeper water. Chad might use a light weight on this line, up to about 3/8 ounce egg sinker, to keep the bait lower in the water column. Of course, if unweighted lines are getting hit and weighted lines are not, taking off any sinkers also might improve results on the boards running in deeper water. His typical set up is 3 boards on shallow 'bank side' and two boards on deeper water 'channel side'. Distance from the boat to the board is 25-30' for the closest line.

Last note on planers is that they can also be used for running artificial baits, like a soft swim bait or hard stick bait, or even a small "Alabama rig" (mini version of full-blown umbrella rig). Speed for artificials is in the 1.0 to 2.0 mph range, depending on how they swim and look in the water at a given speed, with speed for live bait a bit slower, in the .6 to 1.2 miles per hour range.

Down-Line Bait Fishing

For fishing straight down off the boat with live bait and no planer boards, Chad uses circle hooks instead of J hooks, and mono line with fluoro leader. Down-line fishing uses smaller bait than planer boards, and

slower speeds of .3 to .75 mph, or just plain drifting. Chad keeps a few different circle and J hook sizes on the boat, to match up with bait being used on each line as much as possible.

The front down-lines (left and right) are rigged with the heaviest weight, typically at least 1 oz, sometimes as much as 2 oz. The middle lines are a bit lighter, and the back lines have the least weight of all. This keeps the baits in different parts of the water column and separated from each other by the boat forward motion. Eggs sinkers are preferred. *TIP #1: set up your down rods horizontal to the water, with the tip often close to or even in the water. When the rod is hit, LEAVE IT IN THE HOLDER, and wind down on the fish to set the hook.* This works well to set the hook. If fish hit an untended line, it will often set the circle hook itself by the loading of the rod tip and mono line.

When Chad combines the planer and down-line fishing techniques, he uses two down-lines on each side in the front of the boat (heaviest weight at the bow), then two planer boards in middle of the boat, and a light line off the back of the boat.

Back Line (aka, "the fun rod")

At back of boat and off the transom Chad switches from the 7' rods & level-wind line-counter reels for planer and down-line fishing to lighter 6' casting rods and spinning reels, and braid line. For bait fishing, he rigs these with braid line and fluorocarbon leader, a lighter weight (1/4 to 1/2 oz), and small to medium bait with circle hook to match bait size. This set up rides highest in the water column. Chad uses an Okuma reel with a two-setting drag. It is out 20-25 feet behind boat. When fish hit, the drag will allow bait to be taken via the lighter setting, until he flips the drag switch so the heavier drag will set the hook by loading up the rod tip and mono. The same effect is achieved with a level wind reel when drag lever is OPEN, and only click alarm is ON. When the line runs and the click alarm sounds, flip the drag lever CLOSED to set the circle hook.

Back Floats

Another option for fishing off transom is to use either circular back floats or oval direction floats. Directional floats function like a mini planer board and are specific to one side of the boat. Both types of floats work best with J hooks and mono/fluro line combo, and have rubber line clip toward the rod tip, with metal clip toward rod butt. A 'transom bait' can even be run as close as 10' from the main motor right on top.

Casting Rod

Keep at least one casting rod on board in case you see breaking fish. That is reserved for casting whatever soft swim bait or stick bait you prefer towards a breaking school, usually to one side or the other.

Putting it all together

Start by trying each of these techniques separately, especially if fishing by yourself, to get familiar with each one before combing them on a single outing. Then, once your trolling motor is in water, start by putting in the deeper/heavier front down-lines. Then do the planer boards, alternating the bank side and channel side. Last are the back lines and floats, riding highest in the water column. This will give you baits in multiple levels of the water column. Then each spread can be tailored to what is working best. Give it a try and have some fun!