

The Serious Tackle Box

Experienced Fishing Advice To
Make Fishing Great Again

With Chris Gonzales

Tuna Fishing Simplified

Winter ... when tuna are the primary target species for many fishing in our offshore Gulf waters. Casting topwater poppers, hard and soft-bodied swimbait along with speed and butterfly-type jigs are a route taken by most. There's another way ... there always is using "Carolina rigging" and for more simplification, a nose-hooked sardine--Tuna Fishing Simplified is what this piece is all about.

A Carolina rig, with its slip weight above the swivel and leader, is the easy way to go as opposed to casting the options previously mentioned. It's as simple as it gets and has worked for many years but is underused when targeting yellowfin and blackfin tuna. The slip weights generally used are in the one-half to two-ounce size range, depending upon the strength of the current and depth of the tuna. Since most of this type of fishing will be done while on overnight trips; listen to the captain for what depth the tuna is being marked. Adjusting the slip weight size gets your bait presentation into the strike zone.

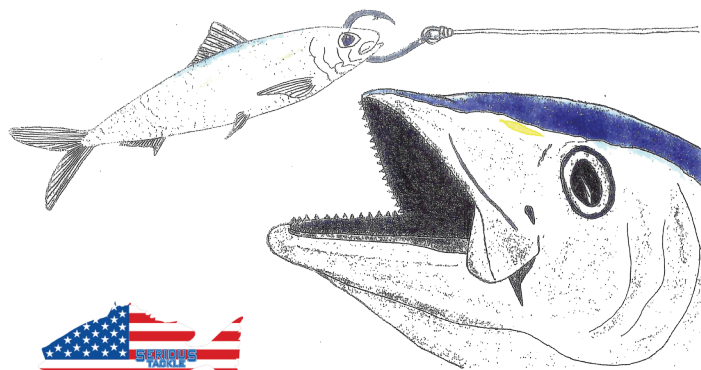
Old or "seasoned" slip weights and their dull surface are preferred so as not to give off a distracting flash ... stealth is best. If your slip weights are shiny, do as I do and spray paint them flat gray.

Beyond the swivel of your choice is the leader of 80 to 130 lb. Seaguar Fluorocarbon. It is the mono I have used as leader material for years; one reason is simple; their leader-spoiled mono is 10% to 25% thinner than other brands I've taken the time to measure. For instance, their 60 lb. is about 10% thinner than others; 130 lb. is about 25% thinner. If it's thinner, it's that much harder for a tuna to see ... stealth again. Five to seven feet swivel-to-hook gets the job done.

Hook sizes for circle or "J" hooks are roughly about the size of a quarter across or smaller, personal preference, the bend area. A non-slip mono loop knot at the hook works for all the reasons outlined in my piece in the last issue, especially with a circle hook, or use your knot of choice. All that hook needs now is a Spanish sardine of about 5 to



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6 inches nose-hooked on it. Circles also should be inline and not offset. An option for fishing this rig is to eliminate the slip weight if the tuna has appeared in the near-surface area.

When fishing any of the rigs described, drift your sardine out the "edge of the light" at a minimum, especially when fishing shallow and 175 to 200 ft., at a maximum. Give the sardine a "rod tip twitch" every thirty seconds or so as it drifts out. This gives a death twitch but alive look to your sardine. The sardine's flash, plus vibration at the twitch also is a strike attractor. When using a sardine, in particular, the wind-back after a long drift should be done with rhythmic half-turns of the reel handle combined with occasional rod tip twitches. This gives more of that alive but injured look to the sardine.

These rigging and fishing methods will give the chance of a high success rate when fishing for yellowfin or blackfin tuna to just about anyone out there. It's not magic, just logically simple rigging that works and has shown up on recent overnight trips again. There are party boats and charter boats across the Gulf Coast that offer these trips. Check local websites

for availability and timing. Recently, some anglers have had some of that recent success, such as this pair of fishermen; one was from the Texas panhandle, the other from Oklahoma; neither had been fishing offshore before, much less tuna fishing. Using boat-supplied tackle and Carolina-rigged Spanish sardines, one had a 65 pounder and the other brought three yellowfins to gaff from 55 to 70 pounds. The next trip produced yellowfin for a couple of guys who make very few tuna trips, with 60 and 65-pound yellowfins taken again on Carolina-rigged Spanish sardines; the following trip had one of them with a 70-pounder, again Carolina-rigged Spanish sardines did the trick. While these yellowfins aren't monsters, they are representative of the norm, the heaviest is a 131 pounder others on various long-range party boats out of Texas I've heard of have gone 137 pounds using either Carolina rigged or freelined Spanish sardines. Trips are usually 30, 36, or 48 hours. The overnight party boat operations in Texas that I'm most familiar with are out of Galveston and Port Aransas and will do a great job of putting you on yellowfin and blackfin tuna.

If you have heard of the difficulty associated with most tuna fishing, the approach outlined eliminates a lot of that difficulty. Boat-supplied tackle is sufficient to handle some of the tuna taken on these over-nighters since the yellowfins usually range from 50 to 70 lbs. Those going, say 90 to 100 lbs. would be a handful but not impossible to

bring to gaff. Big blackfins from 25 to nearly 40 lbs. are also taken at times using this rigging and blackfin are always going to be the majority of the tuna taken. Serious Tackle can set you up with the right gear. So before your next long-range Tuna trip, stop by and see what I can help you with.

The bottom line is that using Carolina rigged or freelined sardines for yellowfin or blackfin tuna definitely makes Tuna Fishing Simplified. Get out there and put these methods to work, your catch of a lifetime is out there in our Gulf, waiting to make your day or night!

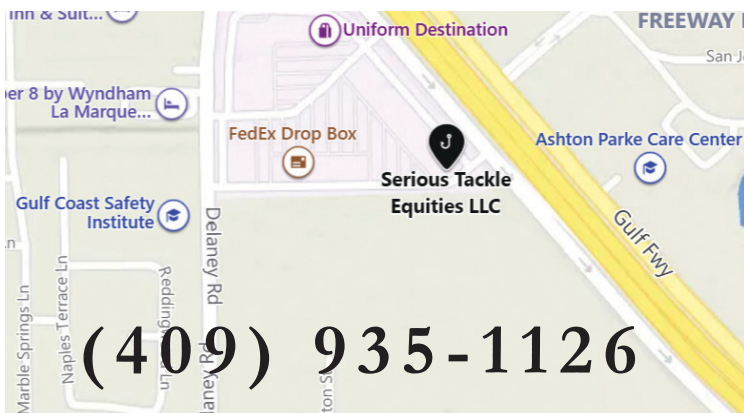
If you have any questions, stop by Serious Tackle or email me at

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