

The Serious Tackle Box

*Experienced Fishing Advice To
Make Fishing Great Again*

With Chris Gonzales

Serious Rigging of Soft Baits

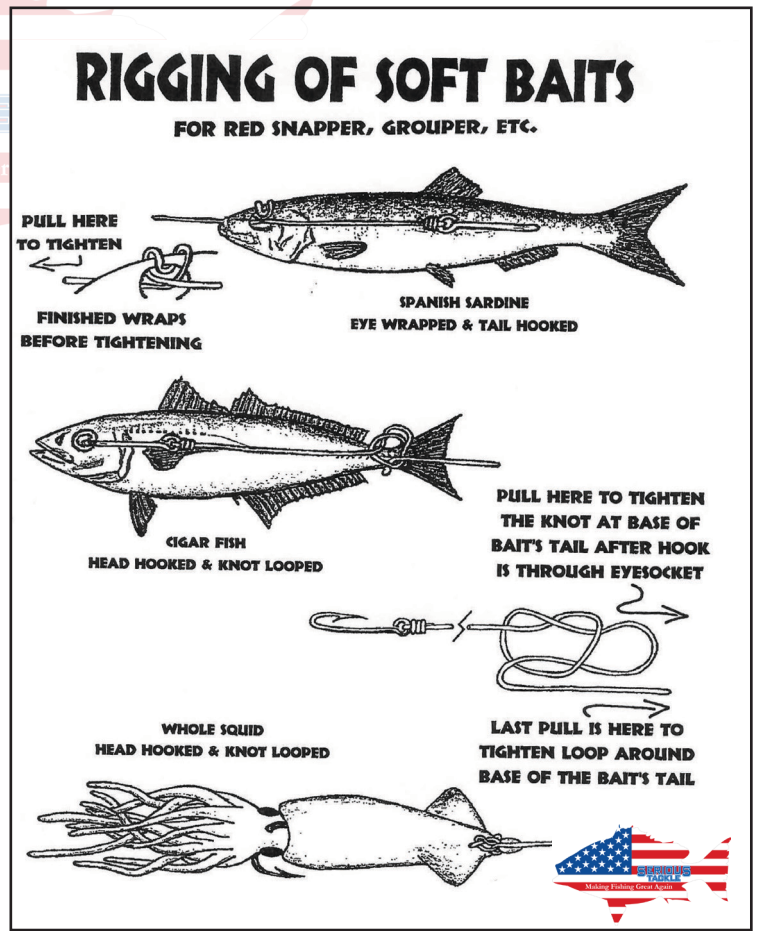
One of the prime offshore baits that red snapper, ling, kingfish, etc. fishermen are having to pay a much higher price for these days is the cigarfish. They're around, but anywhere from \$25 to \$30 for a 5# box. The alternate choice is Spanish sardines. They are readily available at about \$15 to \$20 for a 5# box.

The ones I've been using are shiny, fat, and about 6 to 6 1/2 inches long. There are drawbacks as well as several advantages besides the price. The drawbacks are that they get very soft after they've been thawed a while and whatever hits them can get the bait off the hook pretty easily. I'll explain how to rig them to give you a better chance at a hookup instead of another lost bait. The sardine's advantages are that they're big, shiny, and soft. That soft flesh can be used to your advantage. Proper rigging allows you to hide the hook deeper in the body of the bait and still get a solid hookset.

I rig Spanish sardines several ways but the two that I use the most are with the hook in the head or near the tail. See the illustration for a clear look at what I'm about to describe. Let's look at the upper bait; I run the mono leader through the right eye socket pulling it out the left side about six inches. With my left thumb and forefinger, I pinch the mono against both sides of the body just behind the eye sockets. Next pass the mono around the upper side of the head and through the eye sockets two more times, working forward with each wrap. When this is completed, place the hook in the mid-body or farther back. With the hook in place, adjust the length as needed to give a little slack in the mono from the hook to the sardine's eye socket.

Then pull the three wraps snugly around the bait's head. When done properly, the wraps absorb the pull instead of the hook, this allows the bait to lay straight and look natural as you let the line out. The hook is closer to the outer end of the sardine for an increased hookup probability. Those snug wraps through the eye sockets also help to hold these soft baits together for a possible second strike if the first one misses.

Here's a hint that's not in the drawing: when using Spanish sardines with a wire leader for wahoo or kingfish, pass the hook and leader through the bait's mouth and out the gill plate. Insert the hook in the sardine's body from the bottom, laying the hook shank parallel to the bait's belly. When rigged this way, the hook is taking the pull as the line is played out. Since the sardine's spine moves easier from side to side than it does up and down, the vertical hook placement results in less bending of the bait's body, making it spin less. This makes the bait look more natural and the rearward hook placement will make for better hooksets on "tail-biters".



The bottom drawings illustrate what I call "tail-knot rigging" on a cigarfish and whole squid. This places the hook at the head of the bait, making a head-first swallow and hookup more probable. Make the knot as drawn and it will untie itself without kinking or breaking when the line comes tight. Don't forget to leave a little slack in the mono from the tail knot to the hook for the same reasons as in the Spanish sardine rig. This rigging works best on 50 to 125-pound mono, depending on its stiffness. Make the knot as shown, looping and tightening around the base of the bait's tail with the hook at the bait's head. This application works very well with relatively soft Spanish sardines but also will work with any soft-tailed bait such as sand trout, croakers, piggies, and the illustrated whole squid. On the whole 5-7" squid, I run the hook and leader through the body from its outer end and hook through the head between its eyes.

Rigging soft baits such as Spanish sardines through the head only, like you would the firmer cigarfish will result in fewer hookups. Allowing the snapper or kingfish to bite the tail off and come back for a second strike on the head section of the bait won't work as well with Spanish sardines since they tend to pull off the hook more easily. These sardines when only hooked through the head need to be "fed" to the predator fish longer on a virtually slack line. If you don't, they will just pull the bait off with no hookup.

Using Spanish sardines is a matter of adapting to what you have to work with.

Try these rigging methods and I'm sure you'll be satisfied with the results. With attention to detail and a little practice, you'll be surprised at the ease of tying these rigs as well as the positive results.

If you have any questions, stop by Serious Tackle or email me at chris@serioustackle.com



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