

# The Serious Tackle Box

With Chris Gonzales

## Diamond Jigs and Other Hardbodies

**The year 2000 marked** the tenth anniversary of my fishing for blackfin tuna at deepwater rigs south of Galveston. The first couple of years, I freelined cigarfish or fished them on a sow rig when the tuna was deep. While this was productive, I wanted to try some diamond jigs. I started casting 6 or 8 oz. chrome Diamond jigs made by Bead Mfg. Co. The change upped my decked blackfin tuna at least 3 to 1 over the cigarfish!

Using diamond jigs on blackfin tuna is mostly nighttime fishing since they seem to congregate around these well-lit structures that make their prey easier to see. They are also caught around anchored shrimp boats in the daytime, and this is sight fishing at its best for blackfin. The problem at times is that bonito are there with the blackfin - you just have to pull your baits/jigs away from the bonito to get to the blackfin.

The oil and gas platforms that I've fished most are in 300 to around 1,000 feet of water. For the most part, the blackfin is from near the surface to about 300 feet down. The routine is usually to cast to the outer edge of the light and let the jig sink. Tuna on the edge of darkness and below can feel the sinking jig's vibrations, see its flash and silhouette - all or any one of these inputs can trigger a strike. Hits on the sink are common; count your jig down, this will help to get you back into the "strike zone" on your next cast. If no strikes occur on the sink, retrieve your jig with either an upsweep-pause-drop-upsweep rod motion or just wind it in as fast as you can. All of these methods work; it's just a matter of finding the depth and retrieve motion the blackfin want.

I've used the word "strike" several times, and that's what you'll get occasionally. Mostly, the pick-up of the Diamond jig will be much less dramatic. Any line slack or deviation from the normal "sinking/wobbling" feeling of your Diamond jig, and a blackfin is probably eating it! Wind any slack in fast, then, and only then, strike hard; a blackfin most likely has the jig in its mouth and is swimming toward you. Unless the tuna is self-hooked, it will quickly drop the jig - you must not hesitate - react with a fast hook setting rod sweep after removing the line slack or your tuna will be gone. Blackfin tuna mostly run to 30# with an occasional brute a bit over that. Using a castable, smooth drag reel with a 500-yard capacity of 65#

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braid, mounted on a 6'6" 30-40# fast action rod will handle the job.

While Diamond jigs take tuna, they also work well on amberjack. Using them on amberjack brought out a weakness in the standard Bead Diamond jigs that always showed up with blackfin, too. The standard treble hook Diamond jigs have is a Mustad hook with a cut eye; this open eye is squeezed closed after it's through the jigeye. That type of hook is on these jigs for a purpose. These Diamond jigs are designed to fish for cod or pollock at or near the bottom. Pollock, in particular, like a rocky bottom; jig near the bottom and you occasionally get hung up. A hard pull and you break the hook eye, but you get the jig back. Another hook is put on and you're back in business.

While that's all well and good in the Northeast or anytime you regularly hook the bottom, it causes problems when Diamond jigging for blackfin tuna or amberjack. Whether it's high drag settings, angle of the hook in the tuna's mouth (that results in a twisting, side pull), the phase of the moon or whatever - the fact is, the original, cut eye treble hooks do break at times.

## Diamond Jigs and Other Hardbodies



### DIAMOND TREBLE JIG

MODIFICATIONS FOR INCREASED  
STRENGTH & FISHABILITY

SAMPO BALL BEARING  
SWIVEL, 150-200#



TIE LINE/LEADER TO THE  
SPLIT RING 180 DEG.  
FROM SPLIT. TYING TO  
SPLIT RING INCREASES  
"FLUTTER" ON THE SINK,  
BALL BEARING SWIVEL  
UPS IT AGAIN.

ROSKO SPLIT RINGS, SIZE 8 (80#)

MUSTAD 7794B 3X STRONG  
TREBLE HOOK  
3/0 ON 4 OZ., 4/0 ON 6 OZ.  
5/0 ON 8 OZ.

DIAMOND CIRCLE JIG  
MODIFICATIONS FOR INCREASED  
STRIKES & HOOKHOLDING POWER



SIZE 8-ROSKO SPLIT RINGS-SIZE 9 OR 10

MUSTAD 39960 ST  
CIRCLE HOOK,  
14/0 ON 4 & 6 OZ.,  
16/0 ON 8 OZ.

To get around this problem, I replace the original treble hook with a similar-sized 3x strong #7994B Mustad which has been sharpened first and then attached to the jig with a stainless split ring. See the illustration for a clear view of this modification, plus some others. I started making this hook change out years ago with my custom Diamond jigs Islander's and Serious and coincidentally, a year or so later, the Bead Co. started making a Diamond jig with this hook/split ring configuration. They are called "Diamond Jig For Rigs With Heavy Duty Split Ring and Treble Hook", "an increasingly popular weapon for Gulf Coast anglers fishing oil rigs for amberjack and other large, strong deepwater fish". I guess the solution to the problem was obvious to someone besides me. While these are available, so are the ones with the cut eye trebles; making this modification to them could save your catch from being the one that got away.

Another Diamond jig modification that I've used successfully for many years in amberjack fishing in particular is to change out the original treble hook for a circle hook and curly tail. The illustration shows a Mustad 39960, but you can use an appropriately sized one from another manufacturer. The holding power of the hook is its obvious advantage, plus the added motion that the curly tail gives. Using a circle hook requires some getting used to - like in bottom fishing, you can't "set" this hook - it has to set itself. When the strike is felt, give a second for the line to tighten, then wind. Circle hooks hold like no other

style and are especially good on head shakers like amberjack who could use the jig's weight to help throw the hook. Vary the jig's retrieval speed, the faster and more erratic seems to get the best results on amberjack. "Hot Red" is another finish besides chrome that works well on amberjack, it sort of looks like one of their favorite meals, vermilion snapper.

If you fish these diamond jig variations and the "other hardbodies" for the species mentioned and as described, hang on! They will get eaten; each of them can be a predator's worst nightmare.

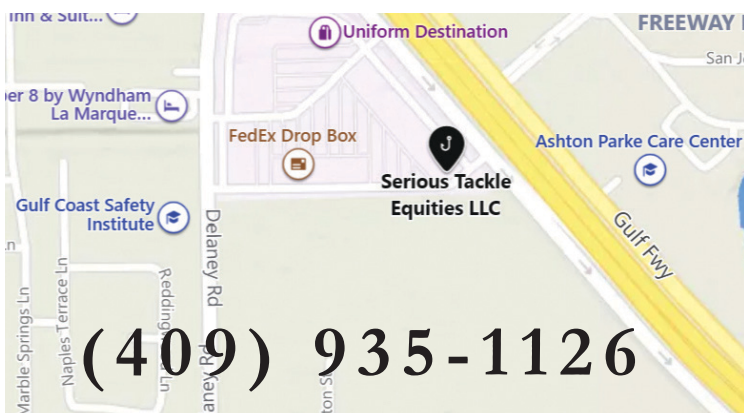
If you have any questions, stop by Serious Tackle or email me at

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