



Fighting big fish on stand-up tackle is not a matter of size or strength.

# The STAND-UP

Success comes from having the right gear and understanding how to use it.

# ROUTINE

BY GARY CAPUTI

**L**ine crackled off the reel as the first bluefin of the morning grabbed the deep bait and hit the road at full speed. The rod went to Donny, one of two young state troopers who were fishing with us that morning. His muscular six-foot-three, 225-pound frame was already fitted with a belt and back harness, but Donny had no real experience with the gear and it showed. Despite helpful coaching from the crew, he made little headway against the fish. After 20 minutes he was begging his equally brawny and inexperienced partner to take over.

It didn't take long for the fish to wear down the second trooper, who, like the first, was putting more hurt on himself than on his finned opponent. The contest went on for



**Proper stand-up techniques take the fight to the fish, and preserve the angler's strength.**

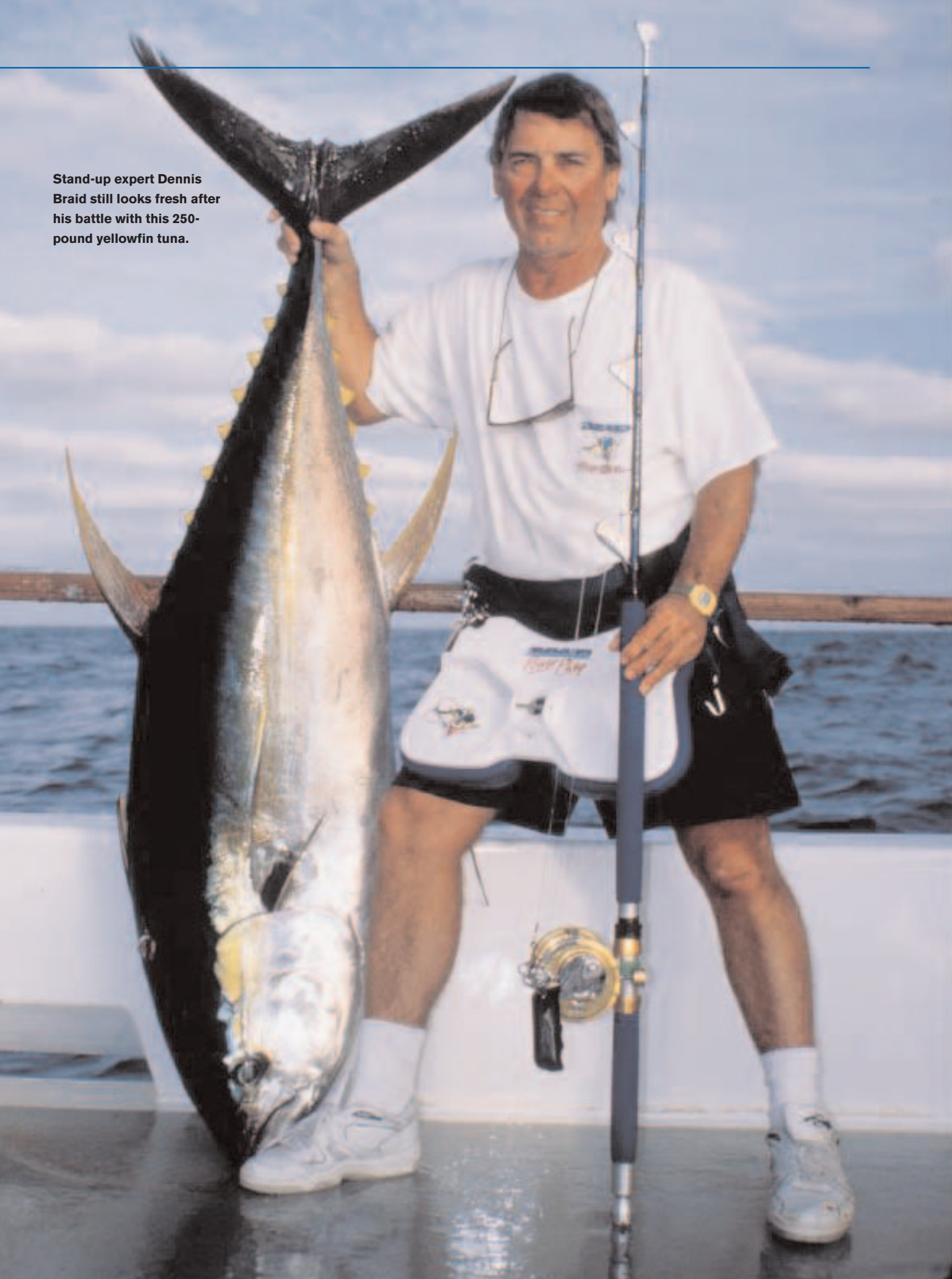
too long, with the fish finally coming to gaff after the rod had changed hands a third time. The tuna's weight was estimated at 75 pounds.

The next fish went to Alberto, a considerably smaller but very experienced angler. After clipping his reel to the lightweight harness, he braced his knees against the transom coaming and settled into a crouch as the fish sprinted off. When the run stopped, Alberto immediately began pumping, using the

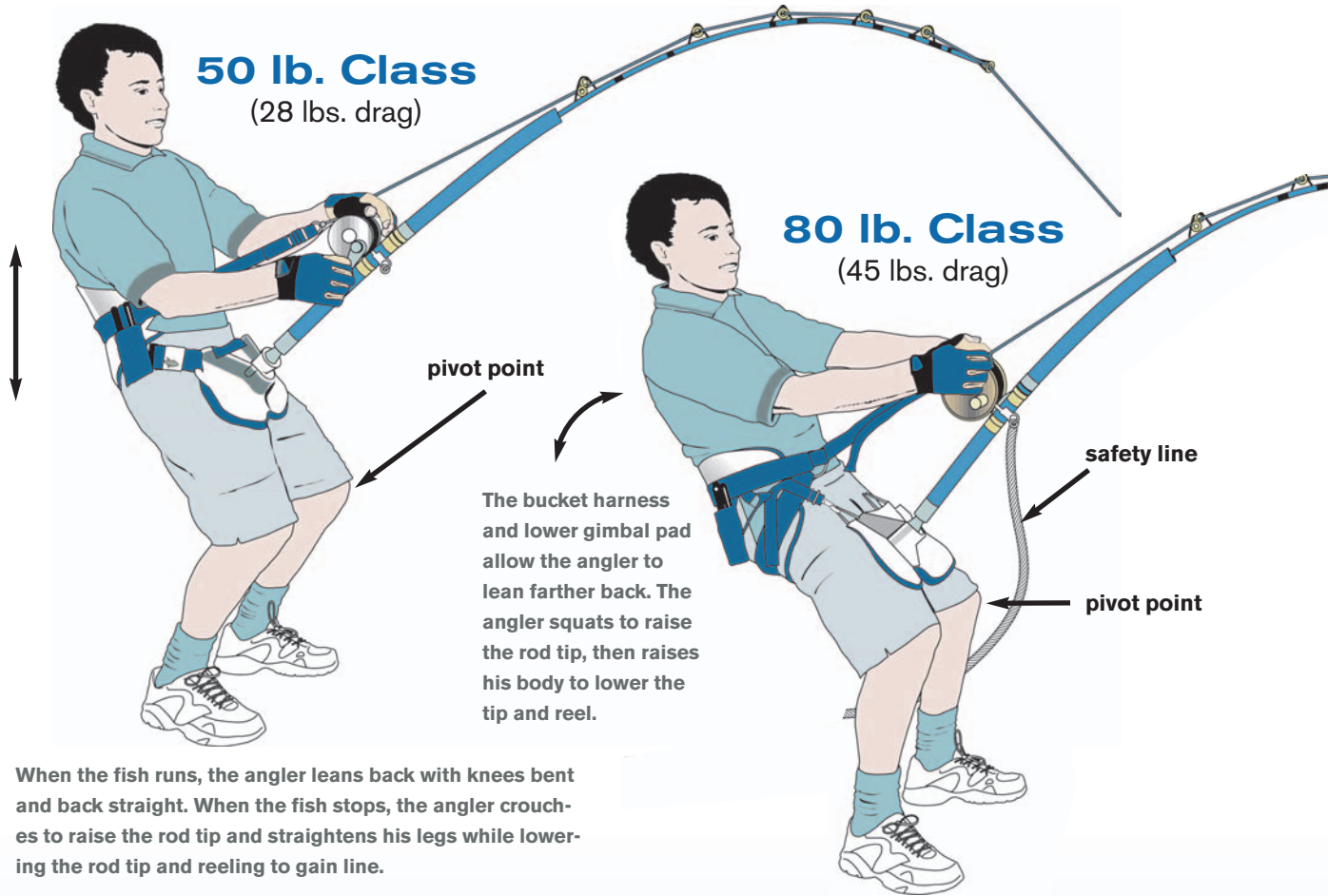
weight of his body to raise the rod. He kept one hand on the reel handle to gain line each time he dropped the rod tip; his other hand rested on top of the reel frame for balance and to level the line. Each time the fish ran, Alberto pushed the drag a little farther past strike and leaned back

photos this spread by Dennis Erard

**Stand-up expert Dennis Braid still looks fresh after his battle with this 250-pound yellowfin tuna.**



# Playing the Angles



When the fish runs, the angler leans back with knees bent and back straight. When the fish stops, the angler crouches to raise the rod tip and straightens his legs while lowering the rod tip and reeling to gain line.

**T**he key to using stand-up gear is understanding the proper way to use your body to pressure the fish in accordance with the class of tackle. Remember, each system has a slightly different pivot point and angle of pull so you can maximize your ability to use your weight as a balance against drag pressure.

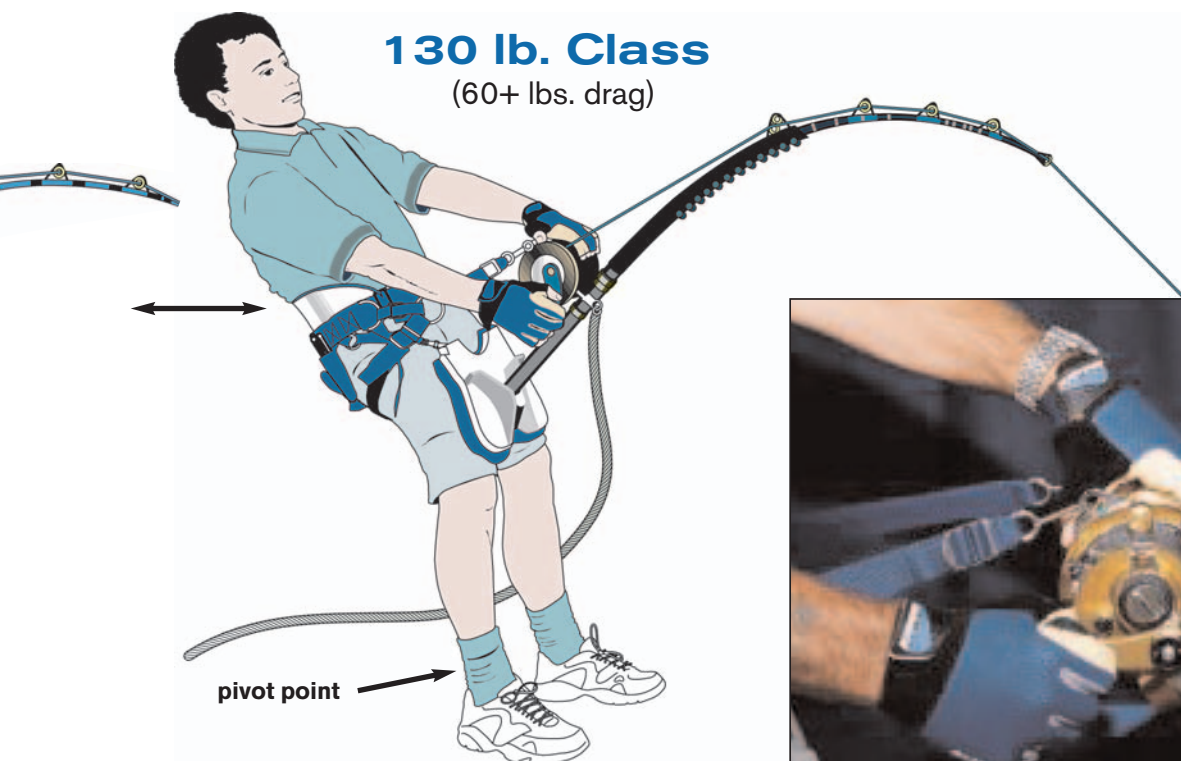
With 50-pound tackle, the pivot point – where you lean back from a fully vertical position to apply resistance – is at the knees. When the fish is running, lean back with your knees bent and your back relatively straight. The reel should be almost directly above your knees and in the same vertical plane. Your hands should be on the reel and your body weight should be balanced against the pressure of the fish. No effort should be exerted during a run. When the fish stops, crouch slightly to lift the rod tip and gain line. To put line on the reel, raise yourself by straightening your legs while lowering the rod tip as you reel down. The entire movement of the rod tip should be from about 15 degrees above horizontal to 45 degrees, and the rod should always be “loaded” to eliminate slack line.

With 80-pound test, the pivot point remains at the knees, but you can lean back farther during a run to accommodate the increased drag. This requires little effort because of the lower pulling point of the bucket harness, which now sits at your hips instead of above your waist. The reel position should be above your thighs and slightly behind the vertical plane of your feet and knees due to the lower position of the gimbal pad and the shorter rod. One hand should be on the reel handle, while the other should be grasping the top frame member to aid your balance and to level line during retrieval. When the run stops, pump the rod by squatting slightly and leaning back to raise the tip, then raise your body and turn the reel handle to take up line.

With 130-pound tackle, the pivot point is completely different. You should lean back from your ankles with your knees almost straight and the reel well behind the vertical plane of your feet. The gimbal belt is even lower, as is the pulling point on the reel straps. When the fish runs, you should lean well back against the drag. To feel comfortable in this position you must have complete confidence in your



Proper stand-up technique is all about angles and physics. Different classes of tackle and their attendant drag settings make it necessary to adopt different stances when fighting fish. Wearing the proper harness and belt system for each tackle class will help you stay more comfortable during the battle and put maximum pressure on your quarry.



With 130-pound tackle, the angler leans back from the ankles, keeping his knees nearly straight. To gain line, the angler moves toward a vertical position and takes a couple of turns on the reel. He then resumes pressure by leaning back.

line, knots and crimps. Grip the reel with both hands, which allows you to use both your lower- and upper-body weight to raise the rod tip when you pump and achieve greater balance when leaning back against a run. To gain line, move back toward the vertical plane and take a turn or two of the handle.

Full-fingered fishing gloves, such as those made by Bluewater Designs, are recommended for all three line classes, and are a necessity with 80- and 130-pound gear. The gloves will protect your fingers as you wind line onto the reel or as line is peeling off during a run, as well as help you keep a better grip on the reel and rod.

Regardless of line class, never try to gain more line by raising the rod tip higher than 45 degrees. You'll rarely gain more line this way, but you *will* tire yourself out faster. Instead, settle into a rhythmic, rise-and-fall motion to keep the fish moving toward you. Again, you're not trying to pick up yards of line with each pump, just a foot or two. By using your body weight, you can stay comfortable and rested while maximizing pressure on the fish. — Gary Caputi



The angler should keep both hands on the reel during battle. Fishing gloves should be worn for protection against line burns and blisters.

against the strain. When the fish stopped, he gained line by pumping the rod with an easy, practiced cadence. The fish tired quickly and was on its side, ready for the gaff, in less than 15 minutes. It was well over 100 pounds.

The above anecdote illustrates a simple point: It's not size or strength that beats a tuna, or any other large, powerful fish, it's having the right gear and knowing how to use it. And with today's high-tech tackle and modern belt-and-harness systems, you can beat much bigger fish than ever before, regardless of your size — and without killing yourself in the process.

## West Coast Origins

Stand-up gear was developed on the West Coast for long-range fishing, where anglers had to fight large tuna from a stationary vessel. Early fish-fighting tools included leather rod cups and shoulder harnesses, which weren't very efficient or comfortable when it came to battling a 300-pound yellowfin. Innovators soon set out to develop a better system, among them Dennis Braid.

Braid is founder and owner of Braid Products, a company that manufactures a complete line of stand-up belts and harnesses. He is also an avid stand-up angler who has taken

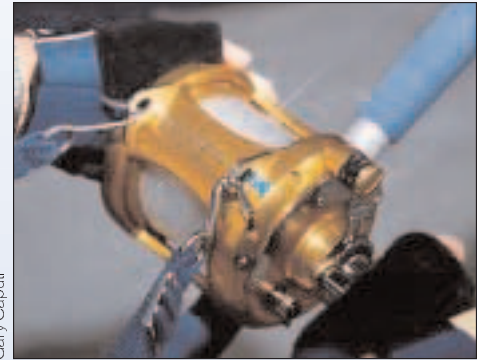
# Safety First!

**F**ighting a big fish on heavy stand-up tackle from the deck of a pitching boat is a challenge. To help maintain balance, Dennis Braid sets himself up in a corner of the cockpit with his knees pressed against the cockpit coaming while the skipper maneuvers the boat. If Braid has to move about the cockpit to follow a fish, he does so carefully and gets his knees back against the coaming quickly.

Braid also strongly recommends the use of two items that will prevent the angler from being pulled overboard.

These consist of a safety line attached to the metal loop on the reel strap, and quick-release reel clips on the harness. The safety line stops the rod from being pulled overboard without hindering the angler's ability to extricate himself, while the quick-release clips make it easier to disengage from the reel.

"Never clip a safety line to the back of the angler's harness," Braid stresses in no uncertain terms. "That can do more harm than good. If an angler is pulled overboard with a rope attached to his body, he is now a link in a very tight chain. The fish is creating tremendous strain on the rod and reel. The rod and reel are attached to the harness, which is pulling on the angler, who is pulling on the safety line attached to his back and making it nearly impossible to free himself. It's downright dangerous. If the safety line is attached to the reel and the angler loses his footing or even goes over the side, he can free himself quickly and hold onto the safety line until he can be helped back aboard." – Gary Caputi



Gary Caputi

**Quick-release clips such as these are easier to remove in an emergency than typical "dog clips."**



Damon Sacco

**Braid is all smiles after boating this 605-pound giant bluefin tuna off Cape Cod, Massachusetts.**

thousands of tuna, including 95 fish over 200 pounds. His remarkable record includes a 328-pound yellowfin, a 310-pound bigeye, and dozens of giant bluefins, including a fish weighing more than 600 pounds that he brought to gaff in under 20 minutes. When it comes to stand-up tackle and techniques, he is an undisputed expert.

During two days of discussion and demonstration at his shop in Palmdale, California, Braid explained in detail the stand-up systems he uses with 50-, 80- and 130-pound line, the differences in technique for each, and the proper strategy for fighting large tuna. He feels that anyone with the right gear can beat a big fish in a reasonable amount of

time and with far less effort than he or she ever imagined.

"Fighting big tuna on your feet is a matter of balance," Braid says. "It takes matched gear that works with the angler so he can balance his or her body weight against the power of the fish." Selecting the right components is the key to achieving that balance, and Braid points out that different line classes require different tackle and techniques to accomplish the task. Here's how he sets up his stand-up system by line class. The gear he uses in the following is naturally made by Braid Products, but similar equipment is offered by other manufacturers.

For 50-pound line, Braid uses his company's Baja Belt,

which positions the rod gimbal at the very top of his thighs, and a light-weight kidney harness (Braid Model 30500) that sits above the hips. When the angler crouches into a fighting position, he is pulling on the reel straps from just above the waist. A relatively soft, 5' 9" to six-foot rod is used, as brute lifting power is not required. The rod's length and soft action make it more forgiving, which protects the lighter line under stress.

Braid recommends two-speed reels for all stand-up applications. For 50-pound line he likes models such as the Penn 30VSW, Penn Formula 15KG, Shimano Tiagra TI30SLRS or Shimano TLD30-II, but adds that there are many quality reels to choose from. "Unlike ten or 15 years ago, there are many good reels on the market today," Braid says, shaking his head. "It's tough to recommend one over another."

For 80-pound line, Braid uses a Brute Buster bucket harness, which features one strap that rides above the hips and another that rides below the rump, plus a gimbal pad on drop straps (Model 30975). With the reel straps properly adjusted, this harness pulls from the hips. The gimbal pad sits above mid-thigh, with the reel slightly behind the vertical plane when applying against a run. Recommended rod length is around 5 1/2 feet and the action is faster and stiffer than the 50. Reel size increases to include models such as the Penn 70VSW or 24KG, or the Shimano Tiagra 50SLR or 80.

With the step up to 130-pound line, everything is taken to the extreme to increase the angler's ability to comfortably apply over 60 pounds of drag. Braid switches to the PowerPlay bucket harness, which can be adjusted to shift the pulling point on the reel straps even lower. The matching gimbal pad also attaches via drop straps, but is worn mid-thigh or slightly lower, and moves the reel to a position well behind the vertical plane when pulling against maximum drag. This setup moves the center of gravity to work with the lower pivot point that's created when the angler leans well back against the increased drag pressure. Rod length is even shorter at 4 1/2 feet, with an even stiffer action. The reel should be an 80 or 80W model.

## Setting Drags & Fighting Strategy

No matter what class of tackle you choose, don't wait for a hook-up to adjust your gear. Put on the harness system, place the rod in the belt gimbal, and attach the harness straps to the reel lugs. Now stand straight up and adjust the length of the reel straps so the rod rests at a 15-degree angle above the horizontal plane. Set in this manner, you will not have to lift the rod tip above 45 degrees when pumping a fish, which causes you to lose lifting power and tire yourself.

Always set the drag with the rod locked in the harness and someone holding the drag scale down and away from you. Warm up the drag washers by pulling line against the drag for a minute or so before beginning the setting

## Average Drag Settings

Tackle	Pre-Strike (25-30%)	Strike (35-40%)	Full (50-55%)
<b>50-pound class</b>	15 pounds	20 pounds	28 pounds
<b>80-pound class</b>	23 pounds	30 pounds	42 pounds
<b>130-pound class</b>	35 pounds	45 pounds	65 pounds

process, and be sure to measure the drag with the rod under load.

Regardless of line class, Braid sets his drag at three distinct preset locations. The first position is "pre-strike," which he locates as a finger's width between the lever knob and the "strike" stop. The exact

location can be marked with a piece of colored electrical tape for visual reference. He sets the "pre-strike" drag at between 25 and 30 percent of the line's breaking strength, which usually puts "strike" at 35 to 40 percent and "full" at 50 to 55 percent. To beat big tuna, it's critical to be able to apply maximum drag. The exact values can vary, but the table above provides average settings.

This system works with the two simple rules Braid lives by when fighting big tuna.

**Rule Number 1:** The line should always be moving. "If the fish isn't pulling drag, you should be pumping," he stresses. "The line should never be idle, so the fish never gets a rest, but you do when the fish is running."

**Rule Number 2:** The closer the fish, the heavier the drag. "A typical fight with a tuna starts with the drag set at pre-strike on the first run," Braid explains. "Let the fish take line while you balance against the drag with your knees resting against the gunwale. When the run ends, push the drag to strike and pump. When the fish makes its second run, sit back and enjoy the ride. When it stops, push the drag a little past strike and go back to work. Don't back off on the drag, and try to keep the fish coming towards you. If it runs again, push the drag to full and make the fish work for every yard of line. If you pressure any tuna in this manner, the fight will almost always end the same way, with the fish on its side next to the boat in a matter of minutes, not hours. Even large bluefins can be beaten quickly on stand-up gear with a skipper who knows how to handle the boat and an angler who uses the right tackle and this simple strategy." ~



Braid uses a three-stage drag setting to increase pressure on the fish while conserving his energy for gaining line.