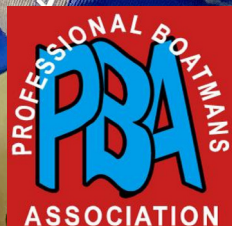


BLUEFIN TUNA TRAINING MODULE STAND UP AND FIGHT



PRODUCED BY THE UKBFTA
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE ANGLING TRUST AND THE PBA



THE STAND UP FIGHT TECHNIQUE

INTRODUCTION

Atlantic bluefin tuna are a true 'bucket list' target species for many saltwater anglers, and we are incredibly fortunate to enjoy a seasonal presence in UK waters of fish ranging from 100-200lbs up to 700-800lbs.

The average size of these iconic fish across each season since their arrival in numbers in 2016 is around 200-250lbs. Fish in excess of 700lb have been recorded.

They provide a serious physical challenge for anglers and can 'break' physically and emotionally anglers who are not prepared mentally, physically, and equipped with the right gear and techniques.

An increasing number of UK charter vessels are responding to this new fishing opportunity and equipping their vessels with fighting chairs to tackle these fish. Others choose to fit reinforced gunwhale/transom rod holders and rods/reels that allow anglers to 'fight' their fish from that position.



However, for many charter vessels, and the vast majority of private recreational vessels, fighting bluefin 'stand-up' will be the default technique. It is for many the pinnacle of their fishing exploits to go 'toe-to-toe' with a 300-400lb bluefin in their home waters...

Prior to and during the English CHART program, dozens of skippers and crew, equipping and coaching hundreds of anglers through fighting these fish boatside have shown it is entirely possible to do this in a manner that is safe for the angler, and reduces incidental and post release mortality rates to a couple of percent or even lower.

To maintain the reputation we have built in CHART, we need to understand what the keys to that success have been, and continue that process in the recreational fishery.

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

- Equip yourself with the right gear, understand how to use it.
- Develop good technique, it beats brute strength every time.
- Work as a team, angler, crew, skipper, all have a key role to play.

If you tick all these boxes you will become a super efficient fish fighting machine, with more fish to the boat, in better condition, lower mortality, safer anglers, and a lot more fun all round.

So what is 'stand-up'?

It is crucial to understand that stand-up is NOT just about the use of a butt pad, some form of harness, and standing up pulling on a fish. That may have served many anglers previously when fighting the pre bluefin target species in UK waters, (Porbeagle sharks excepted!).

Stand-up is a whole system, a technique that incorporates specialist harnesses, specific designs of rod/reel, and technique that optimises every part of that gear and the anglers own physiology.

Getting the gear, set-up and technique right will be the difference between an experience to remember, sensible fight times and a healthy fish to swim away, and a broken angler, hours long fight and much higher mortality risks. Before we get into that, let's have a short look at the history of stand-up.



THE HISTORY: MARSHA BIERMAN AND DENNIS BRAID

MARSHA BIERMAN CHANGES THE FISHING WORLD

In the late 1980's a keen American big game angler, Marsha Bierman, determined that there might be a better way to fight large billfish that did not depend so much on brute strength.

Over a period of a few seasons she developed a style of fighting fish that used lighter, less powerful rods than previously used out of fighting chairs or in old school



butt pads and shoulder harnesses.

The 'pelvic tilt' tilt, illustrated in the images below, allowed her to raise and lower the rod tip, without the use of her upper body muscles, and instead relied primarily upon her lower body muscle groups.

Using this revolutionary technique, Marsha stunned the fishing world when in 3/1991 she brought boatside a 1,270lb Pacific blue marlin. This capture changed totally what big game skippers and anglers deemed possible outside of a fighting chair.

Marsha had to incorporate the then 'state of the art' tackle but visionaries like Dennis Braid were already working on revolutionary gear to respond to the advent of a new offshore tuna fishery in California.

Heavy parabolic rods and primitive harnesses were a poor match for tuna up to 400lb being encountered offshore in a new fishery.

Dennis really drove development of stand-up fighting technique with a range of specially designed belts, harnesses and pads. That offshore fishery, and the exploits

of the likes of Marsha Bierman across the globe spurred a whole wave of redesign from tackle manufacturers.

We now had access to shorter, lighter rods with faster actions, reels with multiple gear ratios including a 'low' gear for 'slug it out bruisers' like bluefin. Line development saw low maintenance super braids including versatile hollow core. Dennis designed large 'rod plates' worn low on the thighs and large 'sit in' bucket harnesses to really shift the workload for anglers.

Dennis Braid

Australian born Dennis Braid was a passionate fisherman. Leaving behind his racing car building career he turned his engineering skills to saltwater fishing gear, setting up Braid tackle in the early 1980's with a new range of lures and new design of rod belt. Braid products went on to become one of the most innovative and recognised names in big game fishing.



FIGHT TIMES

INTRODUCTION

Every part of this armoury of innovative gear when combined provided a significant MECHANICAL ADVANTAGE for the angler, allowing feats of angling never before possible for everyday anglers.

This Braid Products catalogue has a great introduction covering the development of stand-up gear in response to that California bluefin fishery.

<https://playactionbraid.com/braid.pdf>

Our fishery, emerging out of the blue from 2016, mirrors the discovery and development of the California bluefin fishery in the 1990's, the offshore Carolina's bluefin fishery in the late 1990s/early 2000s.

We are beneficiaries of all the work done by visionaries like Marsha and Dennis, and enjoy a range of perfectly designed gear to allow us to go toe to toe with giant bluefin just miles from our shores across the UK's Western waters.



So how do we do it?

Let's remind ourselves of the key features of stand-up.

- Uses modern, purpose designed lightweight, efficient rods, reels and lines.
- These improve your mechanical advantage markedly versus 'old school' kit.
- Transfers the workload to your biggest muscle groups.
- Uses a fighting technique that brings all of the benefits together.
- Turns you into a super efficient fish fighting machine!

What it ISN'T.

Even after eight years (as of early 2024) of bluefin tuna in UK waters we STILL see gear and techniques that are outdated and inefficient. For instance:

- Kidney/shoulder harnesses.
- Small butt pads in the groin.
- Anglers using their arms to apply the primary effort.
- Big sweeps of the rod.
- Super heavy rods/reels.
- The right harnesses fitted incorrectly.

FIGHT TIMES

The widespread use of large spreader bars in CHART led to subdued fights and 'short' fight times. Average fight times over several years were around 20-25 minutes, with some very short encounters of 10-15 minutes.

In a recreational fishery, the metrics of success are different. Anglers may want to focus on the 'experience' of 1-2 harder fighting fish, rather than large numbers 'wound in'.

Where does this leave us re the 'appropriate' fight times in a CRRF?

Experience of CHART fish caught on single lures, skirted deadbaits etc, as well as pre CHART bycatch, do provide some reference points.

Each fish is different, and we have a wide range of expertise in the CRRF, but we also did amongst skippers in the first couple years of CHART, and anglers throughout the three years.

It is difficult to pin down what 'the right' fight times should be, but we think some frame of reference for what is possible, is worth putting out there.

Fishing stand-up, (the majority of fights), on adequate rods/reels, ('50-80' or '80 class' rods, 50W or 80W reels), with the right harness/pad setup correctly, good angler technique and a good skipper on the helm), we would suggest you should be aiming to achieve the following.

Sub 200lb fish, less than 30 minutes

200-350lb fish, less than 45 minutes

350-500lb fish, less than 60 minutes

500-600lb fish, less than 90 minutes.

These are a very rough, aspirational guide. The key point is that if you are consistently spending an hour on 200-250lb fish, or 90mins+ on 350-400lb fish, something needs to be addressed.

THE SCIENCE

A QUICK BIT OF SCIENCE

At the heart of true, effective stand-up is the right harness and pad, correctly fitted and used...

Getting these three correct transforms the nature of the rod as a lever, significantly improving the mechanical advantage, and transfers the workload to the biggest muscles in your body, your quads.

No, no, no....

The extent and angle of force through the small pad is going to hurt, a lot. The Effort is all coming from the arms and back. For the geeks, this is a 3rd class lever, (load, effort, fulcrum), about as inefficient as you can get.



Still no...

The shoulder harness may provide some respite for the arms, and aid a little in applying force, but cue a lot of back and shoulder pain... The pad will still drive upwards under pressure, and the rod is still an inefficient 3rd class lever



The wrong pad, or harness, will force the workload onto the arms, force the pad up into the stomach and generally not allow you to exert effective pressure on the fish.

The correct 'sit-in' harness, when worn correctly, improves the efficiency of the rod, uses the right muscles and allows the angler to really apply effective pressure on the fish.

Close, but no cigar....

We now have a proper 'sit in' harness and rod plate, but (as is too common still) worn too high. The effort to lift the rod tip will still come from the arms and backwards lean. It is still a 3rd class lever and an inefficient use of the right gear.



Bingo....

The harness worn low allows a squat, using the quads, to generate the rod tip lift and then wind back down on the fish as we straighten up again. For the geeks, the fulcrum has shifted to the reel turning this into a 1st class lever, much more efficient... Even better with a bent butt rod.



THE GEAR

THE GEAR

So we have a sense of the basic set-up, but before we dig into the technique, we'll look at what constitutes the 'right gear' in a bit more detail.

Harness and pad/plate.

These are at the heart of stand-up. The general characteristics of an appropriate set are:

A 'sit-in' or 'bucket style' harness that is wide, soft and adjustable. Some models come in different sizes for different size anglers.

The straps to adjust the fitting should be easy to adjust whilst worn and under pressure from a fish, and the reel straps similarly easily adjustable and with strong, easy to use clips to connect to the lugs on your 50W or 80W reel.

The pad/plate should be wide, to be able to be worn low, the bottom just above the knees, with a non slip back.

The gimbal or pin should be strongly constructed and be able to fit No2 and no4 size butt ends allowing a good range of up/down motion, but not too much side to side. The following makes and models of harness/pad are the most commonly used.

Alutecnos:

Stand up fighting belt/plate and fighting harness 'the pro'. One of the largest and best padded combinations. Optional kit allows the pad to be clipped directly to the harness to obviate the need for the belt. Very well made.



AFTCO:

Clarion xl fighting belt and maxforce XH harness. This harness is the one of lighter, 'sleeker' designs but very effective. The pin fitting on the pad has a lip at the top that does slightly restrict the vertical movement of bent butt rods. AFTCO can also supply drop straps to attach the pad directly to the harness



Braid:

Braid brute buster belt/pad and brute buster harness. One of the heavier designs but incredibly robust and easy to clean.

Again an option of straps to clip the pad to the harness and remove the need for the belt



Black magic.

Equaliser and twin pro pad, and harness. The pad belt can be worn alone and the pad clipped on when required. The equaliser only works properly with straight butt rods.

You will need either the separately available adapter, or the 'twin pro' pad to use bent butt rods. The pad/belt and harness are available in small, medium and large sizes.



Rods/reels.

As covered elsewhere, the optimal rod/reel combination to fight bluefin stand-up out of a harness such as the above is a shortish, (6'-6" 6"), fast action, bent butt rod, of '50-80' or '80' class, coupled with a 50W or 80W two speed lever drag reel spooled with at least 800 yards of line.



Miscellaneous.

Gloves. You may want to invest in a good set of 'fighting gloves' such as Pelagic's 'battle glove' which will protect you when 'palming' the spool or when cranking that handle hundreds of times in a fight. These are not the same as 'leadering gloves'.

Safety straps.

It is prudent to have safety straps to secure rod/reel to the vessel, (which also secure the angler to the vessel once they are clipped into the rod/reel). They should be a reasonable length to allow a bit of movement and have easy to release clips to move around the deck.



SETTING UP A HARNESS

SETTING UP A HARNESS

It is important to set the harness up properly for the angler fighting the fish. This should be done well before you get a strike, preferably before you leave port.

A proper stand-up harness (see some options above) has a lower and upper component. The key when wearing it is for the 'weight' from the rod/reel pressure to go through your hips, NOT your lower back.



This requires the upper pad to sit pretty low on your back, and the lower pad to sit down across or below your 'glutes' (butt...)



If the harness is fitted too high it will

- 1) Put the load from the fish through your lower back, not your hips, which will, after a short while, become painful.
- 2) The harness will gradually slide up your back, such that the 'squat, stand, wind' will not work and you'll start to have to use your arms and your back, not your much stronger quads to move the rod tip.

The harness needs to be tight on the angler. DON'T test fit it in heavy outer clothing if you then intend to fight the fish in a t-shirt....

You may still need to adjust the harness once you get into a fight as the pressure really loads, but these should be small adjustments on the straps only.

Re the pad/plate. If the pad is held on a separate belt, again adjust that belt so it is almost uncomfortably tight. You do not want it slipping under pressure.

Re the height, if either on a belt or drop straps from the harness, you want to set the pad low on your thighs,

Ensure your anglers/crew know how the gear goes on and adjusts. You do not want to be wasting time getting into the gear when a fish is running and you need to get to work.

We have seen anglers try to put on harnesses back to front, inside out and upside down. Have a dedicated member of the crew/team of anglers tasked with helping the angler get into the gear as soon as you get a strike.

Reel straps

Typically when the angler first clips into the rod the fish will be some distance away and you want the strap length to be set such that the rod will sit at 45-65 degrees or so. The angle of the rod, as determined by those traps, will need to be adjusted during the fight, maybe several times.

When the fish is 'up and down' under the vessel, they will need to be lengthened, if the fish moves away again they will need to be shortened.

Time spent sizing the harness/pad ahead of deploying gear is time well spent. It may still slip and slide a bit under pressure but if you get it right adjustments needed in the fight will be minimal, and the gear will work as designed, not just as a resting pad for your rod/reel.

STAND UP TECHNIQUES

Stand-up technique.

The beauty of stand-up done right is that it places the workload onto your lower body, your quads and calf muscles. Your quads are the biggest muscle group in your body.

If you have the harness/pad set up correctly, you will not need to use your upper back or arms for any real heavy work.

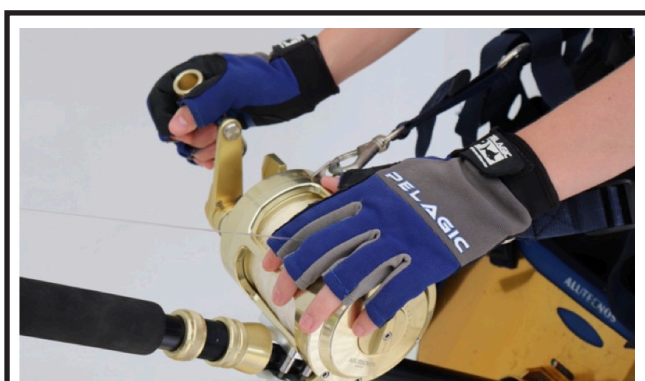
Squat, stand, wind.

The basic technique is simple, it is getting the rhythm going that some anglers struggle with, (those ones who probably can't dance either!?).

First rule is to try and keep your upper body vertical above the line of your hips. If the harness is set at the right height this is easy to maintain. If the harness is too high you can find yourself doubled over forwards and struggling to straighten back up under the load of a big fish.... So, a straight back, do not lean forwards or back to try and move the rod angle.

Do not use your arms. Again, a difficult habit for some to break.

Simply, from a fairly upright stance, already with the fish under some pressure and the rod partly or fully loaded, simply squat down a foot keeping your upper body



In the fight, keep your left hand on top of the reel cage.

This stabilises the reel from side to side wobble.

It allows you to lay line evenly across the spool in retrieve.

In the event of a break-off or pulled hook, your hand will keep the rod from whipping back into your face requiring expensive dental surgery or worse.

upright. The mechanics of the rod/harness/pad set up will simply raise the rod tip and bring the fish in/up, (assuming your drag is set correctly).

With rod now elevated, simply slowly come back up out of the squat and as the rod tip dips back down simultaneously turn on the reel handle to regain line. The pressure on the reel spool/gears/handle will be lessened in that movement and you can regain line when you otherwise might not be able to simply wind against the weight of the fish.

You may be able to get 2-3 turns, you may only be able to get 1 or even a half. If you are under a lot of pressure from a big fish, (maybe in a pinwheel), try to end each reel handle turn with your hand at '1 o'clock'. This allows you to 'push down' on the handle when you try to turn it under heavy resistance.

Also don't forget that if you really need assistance regaining line, you have a low gear option on your reel.

Squat, stand/wind, squat, stand/wind. It's not rocket science. Get a rhythm of short pumps going and even with a few turns each squat you will begin to win.

So that is 'stand-up'.

Get it right and couple it with a good helmsman, and you will have great, safe, sport and good welfare outcomes for the fish.

Get the right gear, set it up right, develop good technique....

You will find a video of the harnessing up and squat, stand/wind, squat technique on the UKBFTA 'resources' page.

Produced by the UK Bluefin Tuna Association in partnership with The Angling Trust and the Professional Boatman's Association



www.ukbfta.co.uk
www.anglingtrust.net