

The Mullet Stroke

By Jonathan Phillips
Special Correspondent

Don't ask me why, but it ain't like it was a couple of years ago. With the mullet, I mean.

A few years back the Neuse River this time of year was so full of jumping mullet that nobody, not even guys like me for whom actually catching a fish is a minor miracle, could avoid nabbing a few if they went after them.

It's not that easy now.

Either there just aren't as many mullet in the Neuse and other area rivers now (most likely) or there are just as many, but they don't jump any more (less likely).

At any rate, I can no longer catch a mullet. The reduced number of jumping mullet has made my particular fishing techniques obsolete.

Mullet, anyone?

I never had much patience with a hook and line. If the turtles don't get my bait, the little fish do, and after a few hours of feeding \$3.59 a pound shrimp to 25 cent a pound fish and dime-a-dozen turtles, I get frustrated.

But mullet fishing was a different story.

Then I could take my 12-foot Sears and Roebuck lightweight aluminum jonboat with the peeling green paint, tie up to a piling, and wait for the mullets to jump by.

With a slightly warped but still sound Slazenger tennis racket, I could swat the fish into the boat as they jumped past.

On a good day I could fill the boat with jumping mullet, each with a tennis racket burn on the gills.

Skeptics

Of course, there are those who are skeptical of this particular fishing technique.

There was this lawyer in Havelock who fishes nets in the Neuse.

"I've caught mullets in my net," he said, "and when a mullet gets scared he tenses up and becomes very hard. I don't think you could swat them in the boat without breaking your racket."

Shows what a Havelock shyster knows. You just gotta have a smooth stroke and use a little backspin.

Other than that, the only major problem is smacking a mullet out of bounds, into somebody else's boat.

Mullet elbow

The Colonel wanted to try this method of fishing, but he is also a tennis player, and wanted to know if mullet-swatting would ruin his tennis stroke.

I have no idea, since I don't play tennis, but I do recommend a wood racket with nylon strings, though I have seen metal rackets used effectively. No gut strings, however; they can't take the moisture of repeated contact with wet fish.

There are problems, however.

For one thing, toward the end of the summer mullet get smart and don't jump when they see you out with your racket. The thing to do then is dress up in white shorts, a white alligator shirt and a floppy hat. That way they think you're really on your way to play tennis and don't get scared.

The other problem is the dreaded "mullet elbow", a soreness which sets in after prolonged mullet swatting. I've never had this problem, since my small boat gets full and sinks before I've ever swatted enough mullet to get a case of mullet elbow.

To serve mullet

Don't get the impression that I am the world's top-ranked mullet-swatter. I learned from an old hermit who lives in an abandoned duck blind on Chocowinity Bay.

This old coot is so skillful that he can swat a mullet into the back of a 22-foot workboat--with a 30-year old Wilson racket--with enough backspin to make it bounce off the deck and into a cooler up in the bow.

Compared to a genius like that, I'm still a rookie. Why, until a year ago I still didn't know if "serving mullet" meant putting cooked fish on the table, or tossing live ones into the air and smacking them into a competitor's boat.

And with the current mullet shortage, it doesn't seem as though I'll get the chance to improve any. Guess I'll just have to get into a different racket.

It Pays To Advertise

I Remember

By LELA BARROW



Remembering

Since writing the article about pull candy and settin-up with the dead, your Publisher of Highlights has been asking for another article on settin-up. You know he is an educated man but he had to ask me what settin-up was. Well, to tell the truth I didn't know either till I went off to teach school. You learn a lot when you go away from home to teach, some good-some bad. It all goes with learning.

Times have changed. In my day, as a child, you didn't go to town to buy a coffin unless you had plenty of money. For miles around people went to Mr. Spencer Roach's to have it made. They told him what they could pay for one. He and Uncle Mike made the coffin and the box out of wood; if they wanted the coffin pretty, Mama and Aunt Lizzie Roach took white cloth and lined it and made ruffles with hamburg trimming. Years later, 1903 maybe, people could go to Ayden or Grifton and buy caskets or cheap coffins. 1910 a copper lined casket cost us \$150.00 (no vault). How much now?

Oh well-we didn't have funeral homes close by-we didn't have our graves dug for us-cars and drivers furnished to take the family, all of which has to be included with vault and casket-means a funeral has to be expensive.

Now settin-up in Vanceboro is called "Visiting 7 to 9", when friends have the opportunity to visit with the family of the deceased and see the corpse. Other places it is called "the Wake". People who have visited up North tell me they really have a party, eating, drinking and dancing. Many people attending the Wake. This happened down South-an old woman, who was a devout Christian, loved and served her Lord and lived uprightly-died-her children said there was not going to be any frolic or carry ons at the Wake for Mama. The visitors came and sat all night, very quiet and respectful for which the family were thankful. Next morning, after the visitors had all gone home, a member of the family opened the back door to find the yard full of empty beer bottles-all of their carefulness and talking had "Gone With The Wind".

Back to my teaching days 1907-every teacher was required to spend a night in the home of children during the school term. The night came I was supposed to visit this home, and the room I would have to sleep in was the ghost room. The people of the community gladly told me every ghost story about this house and vowed it was true. "Miss Lela, aren't you scared to go?" "No, I'm not scared." One of my school girls went with me-she asked me how was I going to fasten the door so the ghost couldn't open it and come in at twelve o'clock as he did every night. I told her not to worry-I locked the door and propped it with a stool chair. How many, that reads this article, believe in ghosts?

Not long after this a member of the family died, and I had to go sit up all night. There was a roomfull of friends very quiet, talking just above a whisper. When someone told something funny we almost laughed, in a whisper. Someone went out to look around and walk-he came and announced "daylight is busting open"-glad news to a sleepy bunch to know daylight was coming. We had never heard the way he expressed it, and we had to laugh at him.

God has made His world in such orderly fashion Scripture tells us if a man dies, he shall live again, Christ exemplified it with His resurrection.

Theatre Under The Stars

Summertime is outdoor drama time in North Carolina. Plan now to visit one of the state's fine outdoor productions, most of which play during June, July, and August. They range from the thrilling story of "The Lost Colony," of Roanoke Island to the tragedy of the Cherokee Indians, told beautifully in "Unto These Hills." Ticket prices are reasonable, theatres are attractive, and evenings at the theatres make ideal family entertainment. They also add up to a surprisingly large fraction of the state's tourist dollar, year after year. Call the Theatre Arts Section of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources in Raleigh for details, (919) 733-2111.

Unemployment Insurance Overpayment

RALEIGH-The North Carolina Employment Security Commission (ESC) recovered \$239,290.32 in unemployment insurance overpayments during April 1982 according to figures released today by the commission.

Ron Hawks, supervisor of ESC's Benefit Payment Control Unit said, "As very poor economic conditions continue, there appear to be increased incidents of fraud particularly in the larger metropolitan areas where a greater number of benefit payments are made."

In April the unit investigated 460 persons who have claimed or currently are claiming unemployment insurance benefits. The investigations showed 219 (48 percent) were overpaid \$44,677.00. The commission classified 72 cases as fraud and 147 as non-fraud. Fraud cases are classified as such when a claimant is proved to have knowingly made a false statement on a claim which resulted in overpayments. Non-fraud overpayments result generally from unintentional filing errors with which fraudulent intent cannot be associated.

During April, 74 persons were tried in state courts on charges of unemployment insurance fraud. All 74 were convicted.

Guilty verdicts were rendered in 25 of the state's 100 counties. Anson, Beaufort, Bladen, Granville, Hoke, Johnston, Sampson, Tyrrell and Wilson each had one guilty verdict. Chowan, Nash, Rowan and Stanly each had two. Buncombe, Columbus, Guilford and Wake each had three. Gaston County had four guilty verdicts. Cumberland, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, Robeson and Rockingham had five. Forsyth had six and Durham County had ten guilty verdicts.

"We will continue our efforts to identify, investigate and prosecute recipients who violate the provisions of the Employment Security Law," said Hawks.

Looking For A 'Fishy' Story?

The Tar Heel state offers fishermen a wide variety of fishing opportunities and hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians engage in the sport, from the trout streams of the mountains, to the streams, lakes and farm ponds in the Piedmont and coastal plains where largemouth bass, stripers and bream can be found in abundance. The folks in the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission may not tell you where the best places to fish are, but they'll be glad to fill you in on more information about fishing in the state. Contact Tom Taylor at (919) 733-7123.

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