

Match Fishing Magic



by

Tony Rixon

Published by
Anglox Publications
Bristol

Online Digital Publishers
All enquiries info@anglox.com

© Copyright 2007 – Tony Rixon & Anglox Publications – All Rights Reserved

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	3
In The Beginning	4
All my Christmases	
Much ado about nothing	
The glorious 16 th and beyond	
The first day of the rest of my life	
Poetry in motion	
Here endeth the first lesson	
Getting it right next time	
It's life...but not as we know it	
The Apprentice	15
A matchman is born	
Staying calm under pressure	
Hit me with your rhythm stick	
The reckoning	
Time for reflection	
Getting my kit out	
Making Sense of it All	22
Sorting the men from the boys	
Action stations!	
How was it for you?	
It's not about the taking part it's all about winning!	
The day before the morning after	

**The fine art of clock watching
Some like it hot
Luvvly chubbly
Pigs might fly
Sectioned!
And top rod on the day is...**

Time to Get Serious 37

**Tears and tantrums
Chit chat and match talk
National heroes
Summing up and moving on
Taking it to the next level**

Match Fishing Magic 44

**Doing the ton?
It's easy as 1, 2, 3
Thoughts to ponder
Tony's tip shop**

An Interview with Tony Rixon 53

Acknowledgements 61

Introduction



Let me first say, this book is not my biography, and neither is it an adventurous fictional novel. It will most likely never be made into a blockbuster movie, and it will definitely never be noted as a work of literary genius. It's simply a story, a manual and an information guide based on my personal experiences as a match angler on the South West match circuit.

This book consists of 3 parts. A beginning, a middle and not quite the end. The first part of this book is a story about my first experience at the waters edge culminating in the capture of my very first freshwater fish.

Part two is centred around my angling experiences from schoolboy through to my adolescent years. During these tender years, my accumulation of knowledge, gained from reading about the thoughts and experiences of some of the greatest anglers of our time, has accounted for my compulsive obsessive behaviour syndrome (COBS), to which there is no known cure.

The symptoms are quite easy to recognise. Those afflicted are drawn to the water's edge, at least twice weekly. They talk incessantly about fishing, fishing and fishing. And they devote all their time, money and energy into fishing.

This deep down passion was to be the foundation on which I would build and develop the all-round skills and mindset necessary to move upwards and onwards within this 'gentle' sport.

The final part, although far from over, walks you through my initiation into the world of match fishing and my 'meteoric' rise to fame. (Okay, 'mediocre' then.☺).

Any match anglers facing the prospect of a grueling match this coming Sunday might want to go to this section straight away and leave the initial stuff for when you're more in the mood for reminiscing.

I'm going to tell you everything that I know. I won't leave anything out. Except maybe a few bad hair day photos.

Enjoy!

In The Beginning



Like most anglers today, I first started fishing as a boy of about 9 or 10 years old. Some of my school friends had experienced the 'joys of fishing' and delighted in telling me just about every single imaginable detail about their trips to the local river or some nearby lake. They made it sound so 'magical', that I knew I just had to find out for myself exactly what it was that I was apparently missing.

As weeks went by, my friends continued to enlighten me with enchanting stories about all the different species they had caught, together with tales of the 'ones that got away'. Their enthusiasm was infectious, and although at times I tried to appear uninterested, mainly due to sheer envy, I was riveted to their story-telling and hung on every word.

I can clearly remember, like it was yesterday, one warm September day, more than 30 years ago. It was the dreaded first day back at school after the long summer holidays. And, after listening to the highlights of yet more fishing adventures, starring my intrepid classmates, I'd made my mind up.

I was going to have to beg, steal or borrow some fishing gear from someone and somehow, so I could join my mates at the waterside.

But it wasn't until some months later that I was to realise my dream of owning my first fishing rod and all the necessary accessories. I had previously asked, or rather pestered, my mum and dad about having some fishing tackle for Christmas and, for a bit of peace, they had agreed.

It was also quite convenient having a birthday in January, as birthday and Christmas was very often combined, which meant I could have that little extra at Christmas. On this occasion, I took full advantage of this opportunity. I went to the local fishing tackle shop, had a good look round, and told the man behind the counter that I wanted to buy a whole load of tackle for Christmas, but I didn't know what to choose.

At the time, there were a number of people in the shop so he just handed me a catalogue and said take a look in there. I think it was a '*Bennett's of Sheffield*' catalogue. I know there were a lot of different types of rods, reels and other bits and pieces, and I was at a loss as to what I needed.

I showed it to my dad, who knew a little about fishing, as he had wet a line when he was a youngster. We sat there and thumbed through the pages, marking the items I would need, but agreed that it would probably be best to order the main items, being a rod and reel, from the catalogue, then buy the other bits from the tackle shop.

I also took the catalogue into school and showed my mates the rod and reel I was going to get for Christmas. I can remember them pointing at the small images and saying, "don't get that rod get this one", and "don't get that reel get that one there". Funny thing is, many people have been saying that to me ever since!

All my Christmases

As Christmas approached I was getting more and more excited about the prospect of owning my first rod and reel, but that soon turned to a kind of melancholy disappointment when my dad said I wouldn't be going fishing until the weather got warmer. I then inquisitively asked, "Well, when will that be? March? April? May?" His reply was "we'll just have to wait and see".

Nevertheless, with Christmas only days away, I was more excited than ever. Then the big day came.

In some respects it's good to know what you're getting for Christmas but even better when you don't know. The long and well-wrapped tube was the first to be opened and I just couldn't contain myself. I put it together straight away, all 10 feet of it, and was waving it around the front room like a samurai warrior.

As ornaments crashed to the floor, my mum shouted at me to take it apart and put it away, while my dad just put his head in his hands, probably thinking, "oh no! What have I done?" When I think back, it was almost as bad as buying your kid a drum for Christmas.

I was always a good boy, and still am, so I did what I was told. On opening the rest of my presents, I could see that like a jig-saw puzzle, all the pieces were coming together. I had a reel, which was better known then as spinning reel. I can't remember the exact model. I think it might have been a *Black Prince*.

Next, I unwrapped a pack of assorted floats, followed by some *Mustad* hooks of various sizes, some shot or weights as I called them, a spool of 10lb test monofilament, at least that's what it said on the label, and some other strange instruments. I think one of them was a disgorger and one was an aluminium bait box. Other bits included coffin leger weights and float rubbers. It was all fascinating stuff.

Much ado about nothing

So, there I was. I had everything I needed to go and catch fish, only I was going to have to wait months before I could get amongst the action. Can you imagine how frustrating that was?

It was small consolation however, that my school friends were also not allowed to go during the cold wet winter months. So all we could do was talk about it, which we did constantly.

As days turned to weeks and weeks into months, I had found other things to occupy my free time. But as the weather became noticeably warmer, which was around late March, I started to pester my dad into taking me on my first fishing trip. After all, it had been more than 3 months since Christmas, and that seemed more like 3 years for me at that age.

He said he would go to the tackle shop on Saturday, buy some bait and that we would go to a place he knew on the Sunday. Right! This was going to be it then I thought. But alas, it was not to be.

My dad hadn't been fishing since he was a boy and had forgotten about one important little detail. The 'Close Season'. He came back from the tackle shop empty handed, having been informed by the shop owner that coarse fishing was off the menu until June 16th. He tried his

best to explain to me the reasons for a close season, but I wasn't really interested.

The thought of having to wait a further 3 months was like having a prison sentence increased, just as you thought you were going to be let out. I was beginning to think about selling my new and unused tackle and buying a Bristol Rovers football strip instead. But I was persuaded by my mum to be patient. "Patience makes a good fisherman" she said.

Well, I had no choice but to sit it out.

As June 16th seemed so far away, I decided I would just forget about the whole thing and concentrate on something else.

The glorious 16th and beyond

Time waits for no man and before I knew it, the 16th of June was only a few days away. I must admit by this time the overwhelming enthusiasm I first displayed more than 6 months previous, had now been dampened by time and several disappointments.

The 16th fell on a weekday and I was at school. So it didn't really have much of an impact on my life then. Unlike thousands of seasoned anglers up and down the country, who were looking forward to hanging up their paint brushes and gardening tools for another 9 months.

Although, the weather was warm and the fishing season was now open, I didn't ask my dad to take me fishing. I just waited until he said it was time. I suppose I didn't want to have to deal with any further disappointments. Then a few days later, I remember it was a Friday evening, he said those magic words. "Tony, you and me are going fishing on Sunday"

At last! I thought this day would never come. And although I was excited, deep down inside, I just took it all in my stride. I asked him where we were going to go and he replied "Emborough Pond at Ston Easton in Somerset" I didn't have a clue where that was but it sounded good to me.

I remember asking him about what we would catch and how big the fish might be. I'd often heard other kids at school talking about hooking really big fish that almost pulled them in, so I was a little

apprehensive. Dad soon put my fears to rest when he said that we would only catch small fish, if anything at all.

We had to be up at 7.30am so it was an early Saturday night for me. I couldn't wait to get to bed but thoughts of catching something filled me with eager anticipation, and kept me awake most of the night. I must have dozed off at some point because I remember waking at about 6am to the sound of the milkman delivering our daily pintas.

I wanted to get up and get ready right then but thought it better to wait until I heard dad get up. I didn't want to give him any reason to call the whole thing off.

The first day of the rest of my life

I heard dad get up so I quickly jumped out of bed, got dressed and hurried down to the kitchen. I had already eaten my breakfast of cornflakes, downed a glass of milk and had my coat on before he had time to brew a cup of tea. He told me to load my tackle and wait in the car, while he made some sandwiches and a flask.

About 20 minutes later mum and dad came out the house, got into the car and we were on our way. Mum always drove and was a very careful, albeit slow driver.

Ston Easton is about 25 miles from where I used to live and it took us about 35-40 minutes to arrive at the ponds. Dad told me the ponds held perch, roach, rudd, bream and carp but at that time I didn't know the difference between a sprat and a mackerel. I just wanted to catch something.....anything!

Emborough pond was a day ticket venue holding plenty of averaged sized carp but more noted as a good tench water. During the day, someone would come round to collect money from anglers on the bank. It wasn't long after we had arrived that the bailiff came round to us. My dad explained that it was my first time fishing and that he was just showing me what to do. As I was only about ten at the time, I think the cost for the day, for a junior was about 25p.

Dad began to set up the 'weapon of mass destruction', reminding me of the time I set it up in the front room at Christmas and broke some treasured ornaments. It was okay to laugh about it now he said.

Looking back, I suppose we weren't very well prepared, as we were yet to put the line onto the reel. After numerous attempts to tie the line to the reel spool, we managed to get most of it on. I watched with a kind of bewilderment as dad threaded the line through the rod rings, and then attached a little float. It was a porcupine quill, which are virtually impossible to buy these days.

The hooks we had were eyed and of various sizes and I think the smallest must have been a size 8 or 10. The line was very thick by today's standards and dad chose a hook size with an eye large enough to be able to thread the line through.

When the hook was tied on, he fixed a couple of shot on the line. One was set about 6 inches (15cm) from the hook and the other about 12 inches (30cm). I would say they were probably about the size of a BB. The depth was set at about 3 feet and choice of bait was maggots and bread. I can remember him putting about 6 or 7 maggots on the hook, holding it up in front of me and saying something about it looking like an octopus.

He then said to watch carefully as he prepared to cast. He opened the bail arm, pulled out some line with his left hand, and while still holding the line, swung the rod round to the side and cast out into the water. He then handed the rod to me.

We sat on the dry grassy bank with our eyes totally fixated on the slim red tipped float, which was only half cocked and at the mercy of the breeze and the undertow. After about 10 minutes my dad told me to reel in and cast again.

As I was reeling in, and watching the bail arm spin round I didn't notice that the float was heading straight for the top rod ring. Somehow it went through the top ring and my line and hook spun around the tip causing an almighty tangle. After about 10 minutes untangling, during which I had to endure a lecture from dad, I was ready to make my very first cast.

Poetry in motion

I was doing everything he said. I opened the bail arm, pulled out some line, moved the rod to my left hand side, then swing it round, let go of the line and....whoops.....another tangle. This 'muppet show' went on for some time. Tangle after tangle followed by hook caught in my

jacket followed by hook caught in the grass. This wasn't as easy as I had first thought.

It was a good half hour before I finally got the end tackle to land in the water and we sat down and waited. The float started dancing around side to side like it was possessed and I asked my dad whether I should pull it in. He told me to wait until it went right under.....but it never did. Eventually it stopped moving altogether.

After some time, I reeled it in only to find a few shreds of limp and lifeless skin left on the hook. "I think I might have had a bite dad" I said. He agreed.

I tried putting some maggots on the hook myself this time, and you could almost hear them screaming in agony as I plunged the sharpened point right through the middle of them. This is a messy job I thought as juice squirmed out all over my hands. Funny how they didn't wriggle very much after that.

After a couple more aborted casts, I was again sitting and watching the float twitching this way and that, moving side to side and up and down. But it just wouldn't go under. I couldn't understand it. Dad then said I should reel in, put some fresh bait on the hook and try again. Only this time if the float started to move around I was to pull it in as quick as I could.

Six more unfortunate maggots were selected for death by impalement and after a couple of 'practice' casts my float landed in the water. Within seconds the float was showing signs of convulsive behaviour, and I pulled it out as quick as I could. I had to quickly duck as I saw the porcupine quill flying at me like a bolt from a crossbow. Luckily it landed in the grass behind me.

Sensing that I was about to kill myself or seriously injure some unsuspecting innocent bystander, my dad took over for a while, again showing me how I should gently cast and how I should strike.

Eventually I was let loose again. But I soon became aware that an insane and crazy pattern was beginning to emerge. Two tangles to every successful cast, a 'birds nest' every other strike followed by a deadly fly past. This wasn't as much fun as I had expected.

I tried several times to put some bread on the hook but it kept falling off, to the delight of a raft of ducks which had gathered just behind me.

As the day wore on I began to master the side swing cast and realised it was all in the 'flick'. But by now it was time to pack up and go home. Noticing the grin on his face, I think dad was relieved it was all over. My only thought was..... when would I be going again? Me and those fish had some unfinished business.

Here endeth the first lesson

There were 3 or 4 other anglers on the pond, all much older and obviously very experienced. One in particular had been catching fish regularly all day. After we had packed up, we walked around the pond to see this man and asked how he was doing. My dad told him that it was my first time and that he wasn't a very experienced tutor, having only 'dabbled' as a kid.

He told us that this pond was mainly a good tench water, but he preferred to fish for the smaller fish as they were completely ignored by the big fish anglers.

We watched this young man for about half an hour as he caught fish after fish. He showed us the depth at which we should set the float, where to place the shot on the line and what size hook we should use. He also showed us how and where to hook a maggot, which not only helped to prolong its life, it was more enticing to the fish.

He explained his overhead casting technique and suggested that I practice it over and over until I got it right. I was spellbound as I watched him in action. I learned more in just 30 minutes than I had during the whole day.

As we made our way to the car, dad said we would come again the following Sunday. As far as I was concerned it just couldn't come soon enough.

On the Saturday, before our next outing, I went with my dad to the tackle shop, which was near the centre of town. After buying a few pence worth of maggots, some smaller hooks and some thinner line, my dad asked the shopkeeper if he knew Emborough pond, and what did he think was the best way to fish it. I listened intently as he began to explain how he would try numerous methods.

Not much of it made any sense to me. Eyed hooks? Spade end hooks? Peacocks and porcupines? Swingtips? Groundbait? Bombs? Drilled bullets? It sounded like he was describing a battle plan. Then it suddenly dawned on me.....he was!

This was a battle. A battle of wits. It was us against them.

Getting it right next time

That evening we replaced the now much knotted and kinked line on my reel with the much softer 3.2lb breaking strain *Bayer Perlon*.

We talked about our 'battle plan' until we were both brimming with confidence. This was serious stuff. Tomorrow was going to be the big day. The weapons were ready and we had plenty of ammo. A decisive victory was within our grasp. But would the fish fall for our cunning ambush?

Well, at approximately 07.30 hours we would find out.

Meanwhile it was off to bed to dream of the possible outcome.

I awoke at around 6am, just as I had the week before. I got up, got dressed and went into the kitchen. I put the kettle on for dad while I rustled up some breakfast. While I was loading the fishing tackle into the car, dad had come down stairs to see what all the noise was about. He thought someone had broken into the house.

Over the years, I've learned to master the art of escaping from the house on a Sunday morning completely unnoticed, just like Houdini.

After I received a good ear bending for waking half the neighbourhood, we were ready to get moving. I sat quietly in the car and looked out of the window at the blue sky. Dad was still a bit annoyed with me so I thought it best if I didn't say too much. I knew he'd get over it as the day moved on.

Poor mum was getting tired of these early starts and I'm sure she wished that dad had learned to drive.

We arrived at Emborough pond just before 8am and there was no one else in sight. I thought it might be a good idea if we fished in the same spot as the friendly angler who was catching all the fish the previous

week. Dad agreed then told me to set everything up myself and he would watch me, ensuring I was doing it right. Thinking back, it was a case of the blind leading the blind.

I got on fine but couldn't figure out how to tie a hook to the line. Dad showed me how to tie a knot, which was a simple but effective 'Granny Knot. The hook was a size 14 as opposed to the size 8 we used the week before. I gently nipped on 3 maggots, like the angler had showed us and I set the float at around 4 feet deep.

I wasn't quite ready to try overhead casting, so I cast the line out using the trusty side cast method. Dad watched and gently nodded his head from side to side, as I untangled the line from around the tip of the rod. After 3 or 4 attempts, float, hook, line and sinkers finally penetrated the water.

This time I had brought a little fold-away stool and dad was sitting in a folding garden chair. Mum was sound asleep in the car, bless her. I had even brought a pair of sunglasses and a hat. We were so much more organised than the previous Sunday.

Dad began reading the Sunday paper, while I concentrated on the red tip of the float. About 15 or 20 minutes had gone by and there was no sign of life. I reeled in and inspected the hook only to find nothing there. No bait? What could this mean? Did I miss a bite? I baited the hook again and managed to cleanly cast out first time. Wow! I thought. I'm getting good at this.

It's life...but not as we know it

Just as the float settled into its upright position, it disappeared under the surface. Although I saw it happen, I couldn't believe it and by the time I decided to strike, it had come back up again. I reeled in as quickly as I could shouting "I had a bite!" "Dad, I think I had a bite!"

My dad inspected the lifeless maggots and confirmed my suspicions. As I re-baited the hook I was trembling with excitement. Hence another feeble attempt at casting, which resulted in my dad having to stretch out over the water's edge and free the hook from a small overhanging branch.

Eventually, a near perfect cast put the float a few feet away from a large clump of reeds. Within a few minutes it sailed away and I

immediately responded with an instinctive and very firm strike. The rod tip arched and I could feel the juddering pull of a fish.

Y E A H!

Dad almost fell out of his chair as my panic-stricken scream echoed around the countryside. "I've got one! Dad I've got one!" I shouted. Dad was only about 6 feet away and was quickly at my side, telling me to calm down and reel it in slowly. His advice came thick and fast. "Keep it away from the reeds.....hold the rod up.....don't lose it" He was just as excited as I was.

A few more turns of the reel and there it was, on the surface, fins extended. A beautiful striped specimen of about 6 ounces. I raised the rod and lifted it clean out of the water. I had over wound the reel and couldn't reach it, so dad scrambled to catch it as it swung around his head. I quickly placed the rod on the ground and rushed to get a closer look.

"Let me see it.....let me hold it please" I shrieked. Dad unhooked it and handed it to me, saying "watch out for the spines on its back". I remember the feel of its rough scales as I looked right into its terrified yellow eyes.



As I admired its colours of green and yellow with black stripes and orange fins, I asked my dad what sort of fish it was. He said it was a perch. At that moment, its large mouth opened wide and I dropped it. For a brief moment I thought it was going to bite me.

Dad picked it up and held it up in front of me with two hands. I remember thinking how much smaller it looked in his big hands. "Well done!" he said. "But we'll have to put it back now". I wanted to keep it. I wanted to take it home and show everyone, but dad was right. It had to go back to where it belonged.

I quickly ran over to show mum who was equally impressed, then slowly made my way to the waters edge. I gently dropped it into the water and as I watched it swim away, I felt a great loss.

The Apprentice



Well, that was how it all began. Many of you who started out at a similar age, perhaps 30 or 40 years ago might be able to associate your own experiences with that of mine.

The next stage of my early angling career is what I consider to be my apprenticeship. Over the next 6 years I was to discover a whole new world of angling. There was just so much to learn and I was one very eager and willing student.

Having caught my first ever coarse fish, a perch, I wanted to catch a lot more fish. The sheer thrill and exhilaration of catching a fish literally had me hooked. But before that I wanted to know about all the other species of freshwater fish. Not only their names, but their haunts and habitats, their distribution, their ultimate weights.....everything.

I joined a local library and the maximum books you could borrow then was three. Mine were always about fishing. The Mr Crabtree adventures had me spell-bound and anything written by Benny Ashurst, Richard Walker and Jack Hargreaves was a treasure.

Over the years I read just about every book in my local library about coarse fishing, sea fishing and game fishing. Some I read more than once and many were often returned late, costing me a small fortune in fines. I still think of some of the terms in those old books like the name for maggots then was gentiles and for casters it was chrysalis.

I think I used to get on everyone's nerves at times because fishing was the only thing I would ever talk about, unless I was reading about it of course. Then there was and still is the angling weeklies.

My favourite day of the week was Wednesday because on that special day, the *Angling Times* and *Angler's Mail* was published. I used to get them delivered to ensure I didn't miss anything. I would read them word for word, from front to back and from back to front. Nothing escaped my eagle eyes, including all the ads. I would never throw them out either. I was building up a massive reference library of my own.

There were still many aspects of the sport that I didn't fully understand, like ground-baiting and loose feeding. But all this was to become clear later as I began putting into practice everything I had learned from the books that I was so fervently reading. If there had been such a thing as an A-Level in angling, I'm sure I would have passed with flying colours.

During the rest of my school days, I would go fishing whenever I could. Saturdays, Sundays, evenings and just about every other day during school holidays. I had the proverbial 'bug'. I was an angling 'junkie'. The only real problem I had was getting someone to take me. Mum and dad didn't always have the time so I worked on neighbours, uncles and anyone else the family knew who had a car.

A matchman is born

As I got older, (I was now about 12 or 13) some of my school friend's dads would take a few of us together. Leaving us at a pond or river and collecting us later. I suppose fishing alongside my friends is how I first became a competitive angler. Trying to catch more fish than anyone else became much more fun and gave us a purpose, a goal and a reason to catch.

We are all competitive by nature, so this seemed like a natural thing to do. But it was soon to become a very serious pastime. By now most of us was reading the angling papers regularly, and we were all aware that some of the best anglers in the country were matchmen. These anglers would compete against each other over a given time period, and the angler with the heaviest weight of fish at the end of the competition would win a pot of money.

Hmmm! Not much has changed then?

At one of our daily meetings in the school playground, where incidentally the subject of fishing was top of the agenda, we decided we would organise a fishing competition at Bell Farm, on the river Chew at Woolard, near Bristol. This was a day-ticket water, costing about 50p, and on which all of us had fished a few times before.

We put the word out, amongst the school's angling fraternity, that a match was to be held on the coming Sunday. Everyone would be responsible for making their own travel arrangements, fishing times would be 10am till 4pm, and the pool would be 50p. The lucky winner would take the pot.

By Friday afternoon, we had 6 names. At 8.30 am on the Sunday morning, 4 including myself had turned up. There was £2.00 in the pool and everyone was confident of winning. We all had something to prove, we all wanted to be the best and we all wanted to win the money.

We put 4 small pieces of paper, numbered 1 to 4, into a hat and each of us drew a number. Whoever drew number 1, could go off and choose their own swim, number 2 would go next and so on. It was what we would now call a 'walk off'.

I drew number 2 and headed straight for a bend, which had an overhanging willow tree on the far side. The branches were dangling in the water and I decided I would fish right in front of them. I had read much about overhanging trees and the security they provided for fish of all species.

As each of us had only one rod, it took no more than about 15 minutes to get tackled up. So, instead of waiting until 10am we unanimously agreed that if everyone was ready, then we should get started.

The river Chew is a narrow, slow moving river and averages about 3 feet in depth. It holds small chub, roach, perch, dace, bleak, gudgeon, minnows and trout. All was fair game today. My choice of baits was maggots and worms. But I also had some cheese sandwiches, so there was another 2 possibilities if things got really tough.

Staying calm under pressure

I had set up a quill float, and my first few underarm casts towards the overhanging branches fell a bit short as I was very conscious of the possibility of hooking them and losing my tackle. My terminal tackle that is. Eventually, I was able to judge the distance more precisely and my presentation was becoming more accurate.

I had been fishing for about 20 minutes when my float indicated the first sign of life. The float dipped and I responded with a firm strike. A short struggle ensued and I was soon lifting a small roach of about 3 ounces out the water and swinging it to hand. It was a good 10 minutes before I was into my next one, which was of a similar size.

As I was fishing on a bend, I could only see one of my adversaries, who was on peg 1, and from what I could see he was catching a fish

virtually every cast. The effect this had on my concentration was evident. I started to speed up my actions of feeding and casting only to end up doing what I had been trying to avoid all morning. Yes, casting right into an overhanging tree branch.

No matter how much I pulled and tugged, my hook, line and float were well and truly fixed. I was going to have to pull for a break. I reeled in as far as I could, closed my eyes and walked backwards up the bank. A loud snap, which sounded like a Christmas cracker being pulled, penetrated the still air and was greeted by rowdy cheers and incessant laughter.

My reaction was to shout some Anglo-Saxon words at them, which translates something like, "intercourse off, you bunch of fatherless children". Yes, even at the juvenile age of thirteen I was well versed in the fine art of retaliatory vocabulary.

Within five or ten minutes I was back in action, but during the time I had been fumbling about, everyone else had been catching. As I tried to settle into a rhythm of casting, feeding, striking and swinging fish to hand, a horribly frightening and unsettling thought came into my head. What if I was last? I would never live it down.

Just then one of my 'friends' came over to see how I was getting on. I remember him saying something about it just being a friendly competition and he wasn't too bothered if he won or not. He said it was more important to enjoy yourself. Such wise words from one so young and words I've never to this day forgotten. As he walked away I felt reassuringly calm, and I began to concentrate more on what it was I was supposed to be doing. Enjoying myself!

Hit me with your rhythm stick

During the next couple of hours of our competition, I caught small fish consistently. I fed a few maggots every cast, I was casting to exactly the same area every time, but more importantly I was doing it all in an unhurried and calm fashion. I remember counting in my head. Feed, one, two, three, four.....Cast, one, two, three, four.....Strike, one, two, three, four.

I had discovered the perfect rhythm method (steady!). It was simple, it was easy, but best of all it was fun.

I wasn't sure why it was working as well as it did, and I didn't have a clue why all of a sudden the bites stopped completely. It was like someone had flicked a switch. No matter what I did next, I just couldn't buy a bite.

I put my rod down and walked over to see my mate on peg 1. I had been watching him throughout the day and I knew he had been catching almost continually. Funny thing was, the same thing had happened to him. Bites had just dried up instantly. I asked him how much he thought he had caught and he said about 5lbs, I said I had only caught about 3lb (I lied).

I walked over to check on the other two and both said that they were not getting bites. It seemed like the whole river had just shut up shop.

With only about half hour to go, I decided to put a small brandling on the hook to see if that would make a difference. 10 minutes later I was into a 'bonus' fish. It was a trout of about 8 ounces and it fought like a real warrior. As everything counted in this match, it was more than welcome.

Then the shout of "all out" followed by numerous wolf whistles signaled the end of the event. Next would come the moment of truth.

The reckoning

We all quickly packed away our kit and it was decided that we would weigh our catches in order from 1 to 4. The only scales we had then was a *Little Sampson* spring balance, which weighed up to 7lbs. For a weigh net we used a large polythene bag, which was, I think, a laundry bag.

As my mate on peg 1 slowly pulled his 5 feet long keepnet from the water, the expressions on our faces said it all. We were impressed. Initially it looked as though he had hundreds of small silver 'sprats' splashing around in the bottom of his net, but as the net cleared the water it didn't look quite so impressive.

As he up-ended his net into the weighing bag, fish were falling out all over the grass and we all scrambled to collect them. I placed the bag handles over the hook of the scales and we all gathered round. The pointer indicated 4 pounds and 12 ounces. His catch was made up of mainly small roach and dace, which averaged about 2 ounces, but he did have about 50 of them.

I was sure that I had been beaten, saying I didn't have anywhere as near as much as that. The small fish were all tipped back into the water and most swam away instantly. Two or three feigned death and floated away on the surface, giving a little kick of the tail every now and then.

We walked over to my peg and I pulled up my net. I could instantly see that despite my bonus trout and some slightly larger roach, I was not going to beat 4lbs 12ozs. As the last fish slid from my net and into the bag, the scales showed 4 pounds 2 ounces. A disappointing grin appeared on my face. I emptied the bag into the river and watched as all the fish disappeared from view.

The usual teasing, joking and repartee was now at fever pitch as we made our way to peg 3. "How much have you got then?" We all enquired "I've only got about half of what Tony had" came the reply. Sure enough, when we weighed catch number 3 it amounted to 2 pounds 7 ounces. More banter followed as we made our way to peg 4.

My mate on peg 4 was well known for bragging and lying. As he slowly raised his keepnet, he said he had about nine pounds. However, when he lifted his net clear of the water we could see it was just another one of his delusions. The scales said 3 pounds 13 ounces.

Time for reflection

Well, that was it. My participation in my very first competition for prestige, kudos and monetary rewards was over. It was time to reflect on the day's events and wonder at what I could have done to change the course of history.

This 'friendly' knock-about between me and my mates was the first of many both on the river Chew and on Emborough pond. Some I won and some I lost. But I hated losing, so I began to read more, ask more and observe more of what was happening all around me.

I began to experiment with different methods. Wagglers fishing at various depths and legering in all its forms. At every opportunity I had, on any water, I would try something different. It was usually something simple like a different float, or a different bait. But the most noticeable difference was, the more I practiced, the better I got.

I began to keep a record of all my fishing outings including, dates, venues, weather conditions, depth of water, fish caught, baits, and methods used. I must admit that sometimes it was very useful, at other times it was as useful as fishing on the moon. However, it always made interesting reading.

Later I began to keep a more detailed log of all my fishing sessions. When I returned home after each match, I would write down as much as I could remember about the day. The most important aspect of my log was the summing up section. What could I have done differently?

This information became very important later on, because instead of thinking about what I could have done at the end of a match, I began to think about things I could do differently at the beginning or during a match.

As my competitive spirit grew ever stronger, I also began to concentrate on my casting techniques. Accurate casting was and still is an important factor in bait presentation on rivers and lakes. So I practiced casting at every opportunity.

Getting my kit out

I was always getting teased for 'getting my kit out' and 'playing with my tackle'. In my house you'd often hear the call, "Mum!...Tony's got his rod out again" And yes it was true. I was always playing with it. Especially on a Saturday afternoon as I prepared everything for the next day.

After returning from the tackle shop with my half pint of maggots, I would get all my fishing tackle together and set it up in the garden. One of my favourite pastimes would be to place a plant pot at one end of the garden, set up my rod, reel and put a float and some shot on the line, then practice my casting.

The idea was to get as close the pot as possible without hitting it. Sometimes I'd put a leger weight on and practice casting right into the pot. I could quite easily spend hours doing this on a Saturday afternoon. It was even more fun when my mates came round. We would take it in turns to see who could get the closest to the pot. It was 'best out of three', and with a little wager on the side of course.

If I wasn't casting around in the garden, I would be taking my reels apart in the front room, cleaning them, oiling them, greasing the cogs

and bearings and putting them back together. Other times I would be learning how to tie knots, whip hooks and even tie flies. I would also make new floats from lengths of peacock quill, bought from the tackle shop, and paint them in all kinds of wonderful fluorescent colours.

I even tried using my mum's nail varnish, but we won't go in to that. 😊

Unlike a lot of kids today, I was never bored. And with so many books and magazines on the subject, if I wasn't fishing, I was reading about it. My appetite for fishing information was insatiable.

Making Sense of it All



Soon after I turned 15, I bought a permit to fish various waters controlled by Bathampton Angler's Association. I was now in a position to try out, what was for me, 'virgin' waters. There was also the opportunity to get involved in the social side of the organisation, which was quite useful in meeting other more experienced anglers.

The jewel in the crown of Bathampton's waters was and still is Huntstrete Lake. It was here that I caught my first ever carp. It was a mirror of about 8 pounds and represented a real landmark in my angling career. The lake is well known for producing quality carp and tench. Today, Huntstrete comprises of 3 lakes, the additional 2 being financed by a generous lottery grant.

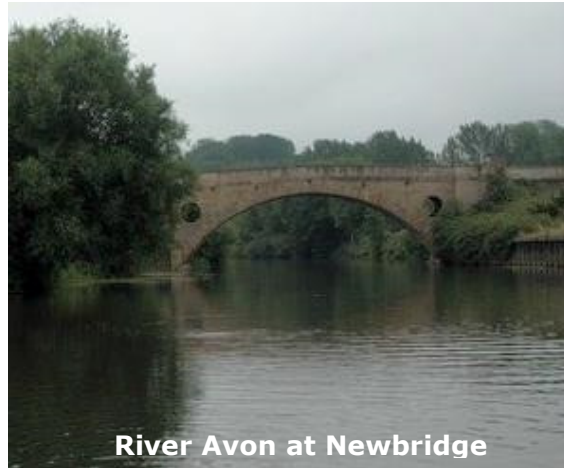
I spent many a happy hour on Hunstrete Lake and it's where I began to learn much about the behaviour and feeding habits of carp.



Another Bathampton controlled water, which was often in the news for producing good match weights, is the river Avon at Newbridge. I used to walk the one and a half miles to the number 339 bus stop, carrying all my tackle, to get the bus from Bristol to Bath. But it was worth it. I think it was probably here that I really mastered the art of

waggler fishing. The river is quite wide and deep, so long accurate casting is paramount.

Being able to fish on the river Avon at Newbridge was pure heaven. I often read the local reports in the angling press, in which Newbridge very often featured, mostly because of big weights of bream. Matches were often won on certain pegs with high double figure nets of bream. But if the bream didn't show, you could always rely on a good bag of roach.



Roach fishing on this stretch of the river is a joy, as steady feeding will bring them right up in the water, ensuring a bumper catch and a very satisfying day's sport. It was not uncommon to catch 20 or 25 pounds of beautiful redfins on a good day.

Now that I had my Bathampton permit, I could go out anytime and try out any number of pegs on this popular match length, all the time learning from my own experiences and from other 'recognised' anglers who also regularly fished here.

Sorting the men from the boys

It was on the river Avon at Newbridge that I first took part in a 'real' competition. I was just 15 years old. I bought a ticket from the tackle shop together with 2 pints of bronze maggots, which seemed to be the 'in' bait at the time, and a pint of casters. I asked the shop owner to tell me everything he knew about the river, including who would most likely be fishing the match. Some well known names were banded about and I was keen to show them what I could do.

On the morning of the match, I couldn't believe how nervous I was. And I must admit that I was a little overwhelmed by the sight of all the experienced older guys, many with huge wicker seat baskets and canvas rolled-up holdalls. The waxed jacket seemed to be part of the 'uniform' and I can remember thinking I would have to get one if I was to fit in.

Like everyone else at the draw I wanted to pull one of the hot bream pegs, instead I got peg 27, which was a long way off the noted bream hotspots. I wasn't too put out as I had fished this swim before and had caught a netful of good quality roach. As I had no hope of winning the match from this peg, my aim was to beat the guys either side of me. I thought if I could do that, then I will have achieved something. I still think the same way today.

After I had set everything up I walked the bank a short way and got talking to some of the other anglers. I couldn't help casting my eagle eye over their gear, to see what floats they had set up, what depth they were set at and what baits they had. There was one particular thing I noticed. All of these guys had 3 rods set up. One with a stick float, one with a waggler and one with a maggot or groundbait feeder.

I only had a waggler and feeder rod, so another float rod was quickly added to my birthday wish list.

With 10 minutes to go before the 'all in' whistle, I walked back to my peg and settled down on my sturdy *Efgeeco* seat box. The weather was warm, with broken cloud and a slight downstream wind. The problem with a downstream wind when waggler fishing, is the further you cast out the more of a bow you will have to deal with when mending the line.

Even if you sink the line quickly, the reel line tends to run ahead of the float causing the float to move faster than normal through the swim.

To counteract this problem it's always best to allow more line to flow into the river and be prepared to strike upwards as hard as you can to 1. Recover the loose line, and 2. To set the hook. Obviously the further you cast out the worse the problem of control can be.

I had decided to fish down the middle with a fairly long peacock waggler float, which took the equivalent of about 5 BB shot. The depth was set at 10 feet and the float was locked in place by 4 BBs. I had placed 1 shot above the float a 2 below. About half way between float and hook I placed a number 1, and about half way between this shot and hook I pinched on a number 4. On the hook length I fixed a single size 10 about 8 inches from the hook.

On the start whistle I catapulted a half a pouch full of bronze maggots about half way across the river and about 12-15 feet upstream. I then waited a minute before repeating this action. I then cast my waggler

to a point about two thirds the way across the river, and slightly upstream of where I was sitting, whipped the rod tip into the water to sink the line and quickly reeled in to position my float at the half way mark.

With my line sunk beneath the surface and with my reel's bail arm open, I controlled the pace of my float by releasing line with my forefinger held against the spool. Anyone who has perfected this method will know exactly what I'm talking about.

For everyone else, it's something you have to practice over and over. And it's something you can only do on moving water.

Action stations!

Within about 10 minutes I was into my first fish. It was a roach of about 4 ounces. I continued to fish in exactly the same way for the next 90 minutes, when I noticed I was getting bites on the drop. The float wasn't settling in the water. Instead it was almost stopping dead in its tracks, and on inspection the single maggot was reduced to a shadow of its former self.

It was now time to shallow up and present the bait at a level at which the fish were feeding. I moved my float 2 feet down the line towards the hook and adjusted the shotted pattern. On the next cast I was into a slightly better stamp of fish. A roach of around 12 ounces. But soon after I was getting more bites on the drop so shallowed up again by another 2 feet.

The fish now started coming thick and fast. One a chuck, with the odd one falling off on the inbound swing. I started to introduce a few casters and tried a caster on the hook. This was readily accepted and the quality of fish stepped up a gear. Everything I was catching now was between 8 and 12 ounces.

If I put a maggot on the hook, I would catch a roach of around 4 ounces. I was learning fast, and decided to feed and fish caster only from there on.

With about 2 hours left, the wind picked up, making presentation much more difficult. It also severely affected my catch rate. I was missing bite after bite and only connecting with about 1 in 5. I needed a plan B. If you haven't got a plan B, the next best thing is to see what other people are doing and maybe do the same.

From my position at the bottom of the bank, and with tall undergrowth swaying in the wind I couldn't really see the anglers either side of me. I needed to stretch my legs anyway, so I got up and walked over to the angler who was positioned downstream to my right. After enquiring how he was getting on, to which he replied he was catching a few small roach, I noticed he was using an 'Avon' type float fixed top and bottom.

The shot was set out 'shirt button' style, which means the shot were set at equal intervals about 12 inches apart. I noticed how he cast the float out underarm, then held it in position for a moment or two before letting it trot down the river at a steady and controlled pace. I'd seen enough.

I got back to my peg and hastily changed my float over to an 'Avon'. An 'Avon' is a balsa bodied float, which can take quite a lot of shot. In this case mine was a 7 BB, with shot spread out at 15 inch intervals along the line towards the hook length. I then placed a single number 6 'dropper' about 8 inches from the hook.

It was around about this time that the well-known and highly respected matchman Mervin 'Topper' Haskins was refining his devastatingly effective crow-quill Avon float, better known as the 'topper' float. With shot bulked right down the line you could make this float 'sail' across the air almost reaching the far bank. It's a very time consuming job making these floats but here was a man who was and still is totally dedicated to the sport.

I believe polystyrene has now replaced the balsa wood due to rising costs. However, crows everywhere should take note: the actual quill of a crow's feather is still the preferred stem.

How I digress.....back to the fishing.....

I hadn't put any bait in now for the best part of 20 minutes, so I sent half a pouch of casters slightly up stream and cast my float amongst them. I did this for about 6 casts before the float dipped slightly then sailed away from sight. A firm strike brought a 6 ounce roach to hand followed by at least a dozen more before the final whistle.

I was very happy with my performance and more importantly I enjoyed every minute. I reckoned I had about 12 pounds in the net.

Not enough to win but hopefully enough to see off the competition either side of me.

How was it for you?

We all started clambering up the bank with rods, seat boxes, bank sticks and bait boxes. On top of the bank everyone was asking each other how they'd got on. It's amazing how many people lie about their catches even at the end of a match. What's the point in saying "I've only got about five pounds", knowing full well you've probably got double that?

I can understand saying it during a match, as a way to put your competition at ease, but it's pointless at the end. Perhaps it's just modesty.

As soon as I had packed all my kit away, I went to the end of the section and joined a few others who were waiting to watch the scalesman at work. His catch was weighed in first, assisted by one of the other anglers. An 8lb 8oz net was a good start and at that point he was a clear section winner.

Some of the other anglers began to ask each other if they thought their catch would beat it, some immediately said "no", one or two said, "doubt it" and some said "I don't think so". Some were telling the truth and some were obviously being modest. The next two anglers including one who was fishing immediately to my left weighed in 6lbs plus each.

It was now my turn to trouble the scalesman. As I pulled my net clear of the water, the almighty splashing sound which followed, had given away my secrets. I had 8lbs 8 oz to beat and I watched the dial on the scales pull round to 13lbs 10 oz, I was one happy young man. But had I done enough to win the section?

Peg 26 to my right, produced 10lbs 4oz of roach, and I had achieved my goal of beating the anglers either side of me. These guys were seasoned matchmen, and I almost felt quite humble, but the feeling soon passed. Pegs 25, 24 and 23 all returned less than 7lbs, so at this point I was getting a little excited.

That feeling didn't last long either as the angler on peg 22 hauled out a very impressive 16lbs 6oz, beating me by almost 3 pounds. Peg 21

wasn't drawn or maybe the angler went home early. Either way there was no one there to be weighed.

So, second in my section wasn't at all bad for my first real open match. And it gave me the confidence to fish more matches. Next time I was going to set my sights on one of the big Bristol & West opens, which were being held on the 'Crane', Swineford, Jackie Whites and Chequers sections of the river Avon at Keynsham, virtually every week.

It's not about the taking part it's all about winning!

Everything was now beginning to fall into place and come together, the things I had learned in the books together with my personal experiences and observations of other anglers was all beginning to make sense. For the first time I truly realised that fishing was much more than a sport. It was an art, and the tools you needed to be creative were instinct, awareness and innovation.

These traits are not easy to acquire. They come with persistently wanting to improve your skills through endless practice and pure trial and error. It's the same for any sports person regardless of the sport. It could be motor racing, football, swimming or even darts, the more you practice, the more proficient you will become.

Now, you've probably heard it said that in competition, it's not the winning that matters, it's the taking part. Well, that's total rubbish. Why take part in any competition if you don't intend to at least try and win?

For me, every competition is about winning. Match fishing is all I do. I hardly ever go pleasure fishing because I just can't see the point. I thrive on competition, and I'm absolutely certain that taking part in competitions is what it takes to make any good angler, a better angler.

Over the next couple of months, I competed in some of the largest open matches in the area. These were 150 to 200 peg sell out events organised by the Bristol & West of England Federation of Anglers, and were sometimes sponsored by household name companies such as Bacofoil.

I was now 16 and my confidence was growing rapidly. I knew it would only be a matter of time before I took the walk of honour and collected the spoils, as I had witnessed so many others do in the last 9 months.

The day before the morning after

The year is 1977, the month is September, the venue is the river Avon between Swineford and Keynsham and the forthcoming event is a Bristol & West open.

I hadn't long started work at my first job, working as a sales clerk for a local builder's merchant. It was not exactly a job to die for but it paid well enough to keep my array of fishing tackle up to date and financed my bait requirements, match entrance tickets and the occasional amber coloured bevvy.

On the Saturday before, I visited the tackle shop (*Veal's Fishing Tackle*), as usual, collected my ammunition requirements for the following day and spent about half an hour talking to some of the staff and customers about the match ahead. (Hmmm...I wonder who else might hang around a tackle shop like a pitiful homeless orphan on a Saturday afternoon?)

Tackle shops are a bit like sweet shops for underprivileged kids who have no money. They can't afford to buy anything but at least they can look around at all the jars and wish.

That Saturday evening I tied about 20 hooks of various sizes to suitable line strengths and made sure everything else I was likely to use was in good condition and packed in their rightful places. I can't believe how some people can turn up for a match and leave behind vital equipment and bait. What must they be thinking?

The last thing I wanted to be doing on a Sunday morning was checking that I had everything I needed, so I always run through my checklist before I go to bed. Now all I had to do in the morning was get my breakfast, make a flask of coffee and take all my gear outside to the front of the house and wait for my lift.

The fine art of clock watching

The alarm went off at 6.50am and I didn't hesitate. I was up and scurrying around the house within minutes. I don't know what it is about a Sunday morning, but for some reason time seems to pass at double speed. It's like being in a different dimension. I always allow

myself at least an hour to get ready, but no sooner am I out of bed and having a coffee and 40 minutes have flown by.

My mate would be calling round to pick me up at 8 o'clock and he was always on time. With 10 minutes to go and counting, I started to bring my kit from the garden shed to the front of the house, stopping momentarily to take in the freshness of the morning air. Looking around at the soft blue sky, with the sun just peeking over the horizon, I was briefly filled with one of those 'good to be alive' feelings.

Moments later I snapped out of my daydream and checked my watch. As I did, my 'chauffeur' pulled up alongside my kit, which was piled up on the pavement. I acknowledged his arrival with a wave and quickly went inside to grab my coat.

As we loaded the car, we chatted about the weather and speculated about the day ahead. Then we got on our way. It would be about 20 minutes drive to the Keynsham Marina car park, where the draw was to be held, and it was always good to get there early and join in the banter with the other anglers.

Although the draw would be at 9am, we sometimes had to queue for as long as 20 minutes to enter the pools, so it was wise to get there early. Fishing would be from 10am to 3pm. (Okay, so most of you might already know all this. But it doesn't hurt to remind some of you, as there's always one who turns up after the draw ☺)

A loud whistle followed by a shout of "listen up!" signalled the pre draw rundown of rules and regs relating to car parking and pegging. "Anyone drawn at Swineford should park on the grass verge and NOT on the road. Peg one is on the outfall. Anyone drawn at the Crane should park here, but sensibly please, and do NOT park in front of the cottages. Anyone drawn at Jackie Whites, park at Londonderry Farm".

Most of the regular anglers who attended these matches had heard this speech many times, and were already familiar with the parking arrangements. Needless to say, they took little notice of the organiser's words and carried on chatting and joking, which sometimes made it difficult for others to hear what was being said.

Some like it hot

Some of the well-known 'hot' pegs along this stretch of water had distinctive names like, 'The Brook', 'The Beech', 'The New Fence',

'Bread Point', 'The Boy's Hole' (a most unfortunate name and one that wouldn't get bounded around much these days for obvious reasons). Then there was, 'The Blockhouse', 'The Lone Tree' and 'The Bay'. These names would mean very little to anyone who had travelled far and wide to be at this match.

What would you do if you were faced with this situation? You've just drawn a flyer and you don't know anything about the peg. Would you ask one of the locals? "Hey mate, is it a bream peg or a chub peg? Are they down the middle or over the far side?" What ever answer you got would you truly believe it? With £150 at stake, I'll leave you to ponder that one.

Meanwhile, as we all scrambled to pick our peg numbers out of the draw bag, just about everyone wanted to know where everyone else had drawn. Obviously everyone wanted to know who had drawn any of the 'hot' pegs. This pre draw and post draw ritual preceded every match.....and still does today. And another thing that will never change is 'the luck of the draw'. Let's face it. What's especially true on a river is a match could very easily be won at the draw.

That's exactly what I believed when I drew 'The Blockhouse' at Jackie Whites. If you know that you've drawn a good peg, because good catches have come from that peg in the past, then you either feel confident of being in with a chance or you feel under pressure because you're expected to return a good weight.

(I think I felt quietly confident. But on the other hand.....)

This particular swim is called 'The Blockhouse' simply because there is a small brick-built building opposite the peg. And access to the swim is down some very convenient brick built steps. Everyone who knows this particular peg, either through personal experience or from past results, knows that it contains a good head of chub, or 'dogs' as we used to call them, which could go up to around 4lb.

Conditions were perfect, and if they were in a feeding mood, I could expect to plunder 20-30lbs of fish. This would certainly be a good return on the day and would possibly put me in the frame (top five), but if the bream were to show on some of the known bream pegs, the best I could hope for would be a section win. Still, numerous matches had been won from here, so it deserved its 'hot' peg status.

Luvvly chubbly

My choice of baits for this swim would be maggots and casters. The 10lb of groundbait I'd lugged with me would be staying put in my bag. The river here flows from left to right and with no real rain to speak of during the last 4 weeks the flow was fairly slow. A little more colour in the water would have been better, but at least the lack of it would hamper the boys on the bream pegs.

My two lines of attack would be a waggler at about three quarters the way across, cast just upstream of my position, and a maggot feeder, which would go in at the end of the swim. The waggler was to be my first choice.

Preferred bait in these conditions is a single caster presented on a size 18 spade end to a 2.2lb hook length. Mainline is 3.2lb *Bayer Perlon*. The depth of my selected peacock float would initially be set at around 5 feet.

My choice of feeder is a block-end, carrying a half ounce strip of lead and fixed 'paternoster' style on a fixed loop of 4 lb *Maxima* main line. My choice of hook is a size 16 forged spade end tied to a 2.8lb hook length about 30 inches (about 75 cms) long.

On the 'all in' whistle, I catapulted about 20 casters about 10–12 feet upstream then cast my float directly opposite my position. Within 10 minutes I was into a good fish. It was a chub of around two and a half pounds, which was quickly subdued and netted.

It was at least 15 minutes before I was into another fish of about the same size, only this one had well prepared plans of escape. As we tussled for a few minutes, and I thought I had it beat, it made a last gasp attempt for freedom by diving down amongst the nearside vegetation. The line went taught and I could no longer feel any thumping resistance.

I slackened the line and waited, hoping it would be lulled into a false sense of security, but after about 3 or 4 minutes I decided to pile on the pressure. As I pulled my rod high and backwards over my head, I could feel something giving way to the pressure. Then slowly, a large black and jagged tree branch broke the surface. I scrambled down the bank and pulled it out by hand.

My eyes followed the line down to the hook, which was securely embedded in the main stem of the branch. I'll never know to this day how a chub can transfer a hook from its mouth to an underwater snag, then disappear without a single trace. It's uncanny.

After about 20 minutes of feeding and casting along the same line, I decided to put a maggot on the hook. The float had only just settled when it shot out of view. My instinctive strike buried the hook firmly into another good fish, but this time I was more determined to hang on to it. I kept steady pressure on all the way to the landing net, and another prisoner was temporarily incarcerated.

Pigs might fly

Feeding caster and fishing bronze maggot on the hook was proving to be a deadly method on this glorious day. By now I had 6 chub in the net, which were between 2 and 3lbs each, and with only around 2 hours of the match gone. But as you probably know, anything can happen in fishing. And it did.

Three, four, five trots down the swim and nothing. Fifteen minutes later and still nothing. I decided to switch back to caster on the hook and immediately caught a small roach, followed by three more. But each cast brought the anticipation and expectation of hitting into another big chub.

For the next 40 minutes or so, I fished deeper, then shallower, dropped the feed rate, upped the feed rate, started feeding maggot, then fished maggot over maggot, caster over maggot, caster over caster and maggot over caster, until I completely lost the plot!

Had the chub gone or what? It was time to go walkies.

I walked downstream to another well-known peg in this section known as 'The Cow Drink'. Quality bream had been caught here recently and this was the one to watch today. "Any bream?" I enquired. "Nope, just small roach" came the reply. Hmmm, if the bream weren't feeding here perhaps they wouldn't feed on all the other bream pegs I thought.....and hoped.

I wandered by a few more anglers, stopping briefly to cast an inquisitive eye over what they were doing, then made my way back to my peg. I tried a couple of trots down with the float and nothing, so

the float rod was propped against the steps and I reached for the feeder rod.

I picked out 2 plump maggots and baited the hook. I then crammed as many maggots into the feeder as possible, and slammed on the lid. Towards the end of the swim was an overhanging tree and I placed the feeder just short of its wavering branches. Within seconds the rod tip registered a steady series of firm pulls, but the replying strike didn't connect with anything.

A couple more casts of the 'plastic pig' and the same thing happened. I thought this was strange because I noticed that the bait was undamaged. What was going on? How could I get bites yet the bait was untouched? Could they...? I had a strange idea that the fish were sucking the maggots clean out of the feeder, so I shortened the tail (hook length) to about 9 inches (about 22cms).

On the very next cast, I was just tightening the line when the tip arched round and I was in. I could tell by the slow heavy thump that this was a very good fish, so I took my time and kept the pressure constant. I played it out in mid river where I thought there was much less chance of it finding a snag and its ticket to freedom.

After a few minutes I applied a little more pressure and forced it to the surface, where I could see it was well over 3lbs. Keeping its head up high I slipped the landing net beneath it before it realised it had nowhere else to go and the game was up.

This was my best fish of the day and the best chub I had caught for a long time. After a quick admiring glance the sentiment was over and I dropped it safely into my keepnet. I then nervously re-baited the hook and cast the feeder to the same spot expecting the same result. This time I was quickly into a much smaller fish of about a pound.

Then with less than half an hour before the final whistle another hefty fish lunged at my bait and yet another battle ensued. It was another good chub of around three and a half pounds, which ducked and dived all the way to the net and then some. Somehow, it managed to dive under my waiting landing net then headed out towards the place from whence it had come. It didn't want to play this game anymore, it wanted to go home.

And home it went.

The hook pulled out and sprung into the nearside vegetation, which lined the steep embankment to my right. As I spent precious minutes in a futile attempt to free it, the whistle was blown, followed by several more and the shouts of "all out!"

Sectioned!

As I began to pack away my kit I was trying to remember how many fish I had caught during the session and work out approximately how much weight I might have. I knew I had 8 chub and that one was well over 3lbs but also one was only perhaps a pound. The others were around two and half pounds each. I also had some roach, but I couldn't remember how many.

The one thing I was certain about was that the two lost chub would have given me at least a further 6lb!

By the time the scalesman had got to me he had weighed in 8 of the other anglers in my section of 10, and the best weight so far was 12 pounds 14 ounces. I knew I had more than that, but eagerly raised my keepnet, tipped the contents into the weigh net and waited for confirmation. "Take some out" said the scalesman. "These scales only weigh up to 14lbs and you've got well over that".

I pulled out 3 hefty chub, placed them back into my keepnet and the scales were raised. "Thirteeen poundssss.... one ounce" came the verdict. He gave me the net and I emptied it back into the river. I then placed the 3 waiting chub into the weigh net and handed it to him. He placed the net on the hook of the scales and said, "Eight poundssss...12". A quick totting up confirmed my total weight was 21lbs 13 oz.

"Well done kid, that'll get you in the frame today", the scalesman said as he walked towards the final angler in the section. The last angler to be weighed had only six pounds of small roach. I was obviously feeling quite chuffed knowing that I had at least secured a guaranteed section win.

We all started to make our way across the fields and towards the car park. Some of the anglers asked me what baits I had caught my fish on and I also enquired how they had fared.

And top rod on the day is...

Back at the car park, I waited for my mate to arrive. He had drawn peg 6 at Swineford, which often produced bream, chub and even the occasional carp was known to have been hooked and lost there. Meanwhile in the car park, some anglers were congregating in small groups and talking generally about the day, whilst others were loading their cars.

My mate arrived and as soon as he got out of the car we were asking each other the same question. He had caught twelve and a half pounds of small chub and roach and said that he heard that someone had caught some bream, but he wasn't sure from which area. He added that he had also heard that someone else had caught some good chub from 'The Beech'. Evidently no one was really sure who had caught what and from where.

The results team, who were sat in their now heavily surrounded car, were busily working out the section wins and the top five places, from the results recorded on the weigh boards.

Then shouts of "Who weighed section 41 to 50?" rang out above the chat and banter. "He's not back yet!" Came the reply.

Eventually, this poor guy who had one of the longest walks to his peg came trudging into the car park, panting and sweating. To his relief he was immediately relieved of a set of scales and the all-important weigh board.

Ten minutes passed and the results duo emerged from their car clutching the list of beneficiaries. "Alright everyone, we have the results! Anyone who has made it into the top five won't get a section payout. The money will go to the next weight, so they'll take the section by default" was the message conveyed to the restless crowd.

The section winners names were read out first and we all applauded as they stepped up to collect their £10 consolation prizes. Next, in reverse order came the names of the top five. In fifth place with 13lbs 4oz is....In fourth place with 13lbs 15oz is.....In third place with 15lbs 11oz is.....In second place with 17lbs 9oz is.... And top rod on the day is.....

I heard my name being called before it was even called out.....Tony Rixon with 21lbs 13 oz (Who?). Although I couldn't hold back a big

smiley grin, I felt quite embarrassed about collecting my winnings. I don't why, but it hasn't bothered me since.

This was my first **ever** real match win and £150 was equivalent to 5 week's wages! I was on a high for weeks after. Winning undoubtedly gives you an adrenaline rush and it's what match fishing is all about.

Winning matches only makes the whole business of match fishing, make sense. It's why we do it. It's our applause, our recognition and our very reason for being.

Time to Get Serious



I fished several more matches after this one but only managed to win a section before the round of Christmas matches started.

Most active clubs at that time organised a well prepared and usually well attended Christmas match. Prizes always consisted of seasonal fare and was usually topped of by a bumper Christmas hamper. To enter any of these competitions, the only stipulation was that you had to be a member of the club.

I didn't want to miss out on any of the seasonal fun and cheer, so I joined the Portcullis angling club, the Flowerpot angling club and the City of Bristol angling club. I made sure I'd be able to take part in at least one of the festive fishing frolics, which just happened to be the Portcullis Christmas match.

This was to be held on the Crane section of the Bristol Avon and I think about 40 plus anglers were expected to compete. On the day of the match it was icy cold. I had drawn a 'plum' peg in the first field, which meant I didn't have to walk too far plus I had a good chance of catching something.

The swim I had drawn was very deep, about 14 or 15 feet, which is exactly where you would expect the fish to be in such cold weather. A small maggot feeder was all that I needed to catch fish steadily

throughout the day. I won't go into too much detail about how the day panned out, except to say I won this one and mum was very pleased with the hamper.

I'm not so sure the other anglers were that impressed considering I had only joined the club a few weeks previous.

Over the next 18 months, I began to get more involved in team fishing. The winter leagues were tough and the competition was as fierce as I'd ever known. It's one thing fishing for yourself in an open, but you really have it all to do when you're fishing under a well respected team banner. No one wants to let their side down.

Tears and tantrums

The most popular league in the South West at this time, was the appropriately named South West Winter League. It consisted mainly of some of the top Bristol clubs of the day and one or two from the Swindon and Gloucester areas.

Another popular league in the West Country at the time was the West Wilts Winter League, which was run on much the same format.

Now we're talking 12 teams of 12 anglers in these leagues, and there were waiting lists! It's hard to even imagine these days, which is a shame, because winter league fishing is in a class all on its own. It's probably second only to the Nationals in terms of overall competitiveness.

I think I probably learned more about competition fishing during my days in the winter leagues than at any other time in my fishing career. Why? Here's why.....

You're fishing at the hardest possible time of the year, and most often the rivers are in full flood and pushing through like an express train from bank to bank. The water would be chocolate brown and the best you could hope for would be a few inches of slack water tight to the inside bank.

At other times, there might have been weeks of heavy frosts and the river would be gin clear. To make matters worse it could be a very sunny day. And no matter what.....you HAD to catch fish or face the wrath of your team mates.

I have seen grown men cry after enduring five hours of frustration under these conditions. And I've witnessed absolute jubilation from anglers who caught a one ounce gudgeon in the dying minutes of a contest. There's nothing else like it.

Over the next few years I was committed to fishing the leagues although under various banners. First the Flowerpot club, then later the City of Bristol and eventually Bristol Matchgroup. I had also managed to ditch my dead end job and got behind the counter at Veal's Fishing Tackle, the oldest fishing tackle supplier in Bristol.

Chit chat and match talk

Angling had now become all consuming. I was working in a well-known tackle shop so got to talk to many experienced anglers every day. I was also fishing leagues and opens every weekend and sometimes during the week. On reflection, I would say that match fishing generally had reached its peak at this stage.

Some of the benefits of fishing the leagues were the pre-match meetings, in which we would sit in a bar and discuss the outcomes of previous matches and talk tactics for forthcoming events. Apart from giving us an excuse to get out and have a beer with like-minded mates, it could also be quite enlightening.

It's good to talk, especially with highly experienced and dedicated anglers. In this game you could never know too much. The problem was sometimes remembering everything, when you were actually on the bank and in full battle.

For what its worth, here's a few tips for the few remaining winter leaguers. If you're faced with a flooded and heavily coloured river, almost bank high and flowing at a torrential pace, consider these options.

Look for the tiniest slither of slack water on the inside. After running the reel line through your rod rings, tie a small loop in your main line and loop it into the eye of a swiveled bomb. Now tie or shorten a ready tied hook length to between 4 and 6 inches including a small loop, which should also be looped into the eye of the swivel. This rig is now fixed and NOT running.

Put a single maggot or a small piece of worm on the hook and lower it gently into the slack. Wait for about 5 minutes then pull it in. Do this a number of times and chances are you will pick up a small gudgeon or roach, which will have hooked itself. It's points that count so if you're desperate this is worth a go.

If you have quite a bit of slack in front of you, then you can try using a block-end feeder instead of a straight lead, but make sure the feeder stays put. You don't want loose feed running all over the river. For the same reason don't ever loose feed in these conditions unless.....

You try another little trick. When the river is highly coloured, the least mud particles will be in the top layer of water. This is more evident as the river fines down. In these conditions some fish especially dace and bleak will rise to within inches of the surface to escape the silt.

Set up a 3-4 BB stick float rig and fish 12-18 inches deep with a single maggot on a size 20 hook. Feed a couple of maggots each cast and ensure your bait is amongst them. Hold the float back occasionally so the bait rises. This will sometimes entice a bite. You won't win the match with these methods, but at least you'll increase your chances of catching.

Once you have caught something you can go back to chucking a feeder out into the flow and hoping for the best or lob out a straight lead rig with a fat juicy lobworm on the hook. During a winter league match, do whatever it takes in these 'unfishable' conditions, because the main thing is to get a fish. Fish make points and points make prizes!

National heroes

I joined Bristol Match Group when I was 18 and fished for them for a number of years. I wouldn't say that we totally dominated the leagues but we were always right up there with the best of them. In the early 1980s Bristol Match Group had reached its peak after being promoted into division 1 of the NFA Nationals.

The Nationals were truly enormous events and momentous occasions, in terms of organisation and logistics. With 5 divisions involved, they required a whole army of officials, organisers and volunteers plus hoards of transportation.

One of the most amazing sights for me was seeing the endless queue of anglers who fancied their chances against the bookies. Most were given odds of something like 200/1 or 300/1, so you couldn't really blame them for putting a tenner on themselves. And the Nationals only come around once a year.

I have to say that rubbing shoulders with some of the big name anglers like Ivan Marks and Kevin Ashurst was an honour. Only a few years previous I could never have imagined fishing alongside these legends. The Nationals offered every ordinary dedicated angler a real opportunity of making a name for themselves.

Today, these events, although still important, are a mere shadow of their predecessors. It's a sign of the times, which is something I'll look at later in this book.

Over the next few years I was to grace the ranks and represent other National teams like Icemech and Bristol Amalgamation, the latter consisting mainly of Silver Dace Angling Club members. In general, most of the anglers I fished with in both the Winter Leagues and Nationals came from the same hard core group. And many are still very active within the match circuit to this day.

I won't dwell too much on Nationals as they are major annual events and not really part of the match fishing scene in general, which is where I want to lead you next.

Summing up and moving on

So far I have described, very briefly, how I became involved in fishing and how I progressed into the world of match fishing, right up to National level. The 1980s were very hectic but exciting years for me. I had made a lot of friends in many angling circles, and despite what anyone might say, most are still good friends to this day.

In 1983 I was very fortunate to be offered the job as manager of Avon Angling, a small tackle shop situated in East Bristol. Many would say I have the perfect job, and I'd have to agree. I really couldn't see myself doing anything else now or in the future.

Over the next few years, I continued to fish for Bristol Match Group in the Winter League and also competed in many opens both on rivers and more increasingly on lakes. During this time I chalked up many

wins, section wins and other payout positions and was sponsored by a variety of companies within the tackle trade.



Tony 'at work'

Soon after Bristol Match Group disbanded, I began to organise small competitions on the Bristol Docks, which was controlled by the City of Bristol Angling Club. At first these matches were fished on Sundays in the day time, but as the docks are situated very close to the centre of the city, there was always far too many people mulling around. They were later switched to the evenings and became known as the Starlight Series.

Basically, this was night fishing, which added another dimension to my overall match fishing experiences. The matches drew a lot of interest and were always well attended.

A year or two later, I started to concentrate more on lake fishing. There are now a number of very good lakes within 90 minutes drive of Bristol, and best of all they are very well suited to match fishing for obvious reasons. They have ample and easy car parking, they offer easy access to the pegs and they are well stocked with what fishing is all about.....fish!

However, some were quite obviously pure commercial money making ventures with very little regard to fish welfare. They would hold back

to back contests 7 days a week and my conscience began to trouble me. So I don't go to these particular places anymore.

Taking it to the next level

There are now many good fisheries in the South West area that are well managed and very well cared for. Over the years I must have tried them all. Some have become my firm favourites, and not necessarily because I have been quite successful on them, but because I consider them to be very fair venues.

One of the obvious advantages for everyone fishing a match on a well stocked lake is that the fish are there. They can't go anywhere like they can and quite often do on a river, but of course they can refuse to feed if they want.

Today, I consider an ideal match lake to have a good head of carp and an equally good stock of silver fish, which is any fish other than carp.

The lakes in this area which fit these criteria are, Landsend Farm Fisheries, Viaduct Fisheries, Avalon Fisheries, and Fishponds House. If you don't mind the drive, there's also Stafford Moor. However, Landsend Farm is without a doubt my number one choice and it's where you'll find me most Sundays.

The next section of this book is concerned with match fishing on the above mentioned lakes and other similar venues. I'm going to tell you how I, for many years have consistently won matches on these lakes, and sometimes against all odds.

Everything I have ever learned about match fishing has been generalized and condensed into the next section of this book, and I hope that you will learn something from my experiences.

I want to take you to the next level in your own personal fishing experience and help you get the most from your bank side pursuits.

Everything I am about to reveal is exactly how I would approach a typical lake match today. These methods and techniques have earned me thousands of pounds in winnings over the past few years and there's absolutely no reason why they shouldn't help do the same for you.

If you like winning matches, and who doesn't, this next chapter is for you.

But before I start, I want you to know that you should read it carefully and try to grasp the very basic principles of my techniques. Some of what I say may be easy to read but unless you really think about what I'm actually saying, you will miss the point entirely.

Match Fishing Magic



Although I have fished many matches on many lakes during the past 10-15 years, I'm going to start by describing a typical match fishing event similar to one where I have finished as overall winner. This could be on any of the lakes I have previously mentioned because the tactics used would be very similar.

If we look at a typical match lake, it would hold carp of between 1lb and say 20lbs. It would also have a combined stock of bream, tench, roach, rudd and skimmers. It will have an average depth of about 4 feet and an island, usually in the middle. Let's say there are 40 pegs.

Most people will have fished a lake like this or at least be able to picture a lake similar to this description somewhere.

The number one target species is always going to be the carp, but, there are times when the carp will not really be up for it, so you must be prepared to target the other inhabitants also.

If we take the time of year to be September, then we're somewhere between the warmer feeding frenzy months of spring and summer and the harder colder months of winter. So if you now have this picture in your head...

...let's begin.

Doing the ton?

Breakdown: My tackle and baits

Pole: Mosella Xedion 16 metre

Pole Elastic: Size 16 hollow

Pole floats: 4x10 to 1gm

Rods: Carbon Active & Maver Reactolite

Reels: Daiwa GTR

Lines: Mosella – 012 to 0.20 diameter

Hooks: Kamasan, Xedion & Preston Innovations sizes 18 to 12

Floats: Peacock wagglers & polystyrene or small balsa

Baits: 6 pints 8mm coarse pellets
1-200 drilled pellets for hair-rigging
2 pints casters
2 pints of maggots
2 tins of sweetcorn
1Kilo tub of dendrobenas

Groundbait: 50/50 fishmeal and an all-round mix

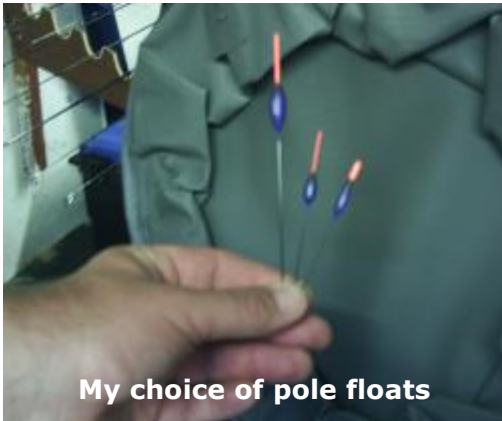
On the question of tackle, it is always down to the individual angler to decide on what equipment is most suited to him. A good all-round angler should be able to catch just as well on any make or model of rod or pole, just as long as it is up to the job

The 40 peg match is a sell out and everyone arrives early for the draw. There's always a few who have to walk around the lake beforehand then come back and tell everyone that the carp are moving. Yes of course they are, but just wait until the whistle goes.



My choice of wagglers

As the draw progresses, everyone begins walking to their pegs. Now imagine the effect this must have on the fish in the lake. An army of 40 anglers stomping all round the bank and every one of them in full view of any cruising carp. It's bound to be just a little unsettling wouldn't you think? I often hear some anglers say, they get used to it, but the truth is, if they are used to it then they will also know what to expect next.



Nowadays, on almost all mixed fisheries you have to use 2 keepnets during a match, one for carp and one for silver fish. So in goes 80 keepnets. If I was a fish I would be getting very nervous now, as this surely signifies that something bad is going to happen.

Next, everyone begins to go quiet just before the all-in whistle. If you spend the next few minutes looking over the surface of the water, take note. Are fish still cruising around or does it appear lifeless? If they are moving about that's obviously a good sign and you should target them with slow falling baits and fish at about half the water depth.

On the other hand, if there's no disturbance on the water's surface then assume the fish have gone to ground or hugging the sides of the island. In this case, set your pole or waggler up for fishing hard on the bottom and tight to the island. And I mean tight. Literally within inches of the bank or vegetation.

If there's any wind and the surface has a ripple, then the fish may feel more confident about feeding in open water. The next thing to consider before the match starts is your feeding lines. Always try and decide these before you start and stick to them at all costs. Basically, think about a maximum of 3 lines of attack.

It's easy as 1, 2, 3

1. An inside line. Carp love to rummage around the banks of lakes and that includes right under your feet. In a match you will have the edge over your competitors if you have a wide gap between you and the next angler. It doesn't matter which side, but if you can, choose the side with the widest gap. In some cases all the anglers may agree to fish the inside left of their pegs, in which case you don't have a choice.

2. A pole line. If you can't reach the island with your pole, then fish at a comfortable distance of say 9-11 metres. It doesn't matter that you will be out in open water. What will matter is that you must concentrate on bringing fish to you and to keep them there.

3. A waggler line. If you can accurately reach the island with a waggler, then this should be your next line of attack. Remember that quite often the water will be very shallow at the edge of an island. Maybe only 12-15 inches in some cases.

If you can easily reach the island with your pole, then 2 feed lines may be sufficient. But always have at least 2. You will invariably need a plan B to fall back on should bites dry up on your main line of attack.

So, let's assume you've drawn a peg where you can't reach the island with your pole. (Notice I'm not taking the easy option scenario). And you've picked out your 3 lines of attack. There's a slight ripple on the surface but you can't see any fish moving about, and the whistle is just about to go. Here's what I would do.

On the 'all in' whistle, put a handful of coarse pellets into your chosen margin swim. Keep them fairly tight to one area. Next, cup in a quarter pot full of pellets on your pole line.



My choice of reel line

Next, cast out towards the island and using your float as a marker, fire out a dozen pellets. It's best to keep the feed to a minimum until you can gauge how well the fish are responding. Remember! Once you've put your loose feed in you can't take it out, so easy does it to start.

In any case, it's important to use your catapult to keep a few pellets trickling in on both your pole and waggler lines. This will entice any cruising fish into your swim, attracted by the bait falling through the water.

I prefer to use a hair rigged pellet rather than a banded pellet because quite often you can catch 3, 4 or even 5 fish on the same bait before it disintegrates. This can help save precious time.

Now the good thing about fishing a lake is you can see other anglers all around you, so keep a close eye on what they're doing. If you spot someone catching steadily and you're not, don't be stubborn, change tactics. But if that method is not working for you, then go back and carry on with the method that you feel most comfortable with.

Now, let's say that you haven't had a bite within 20 minutes of fishing the waggler. Put it down and pick up your pole. Fish your pole line at full depth to start and don't forget to keep feeding the waggler line. If you're not catching within 15 minutes on the pole line then try coming up in the water. But do it gradually. Say 6 inches at a time.

Obviously, if you're catching on either method, then stick with it and try to capitalise on it. Steady feeding should keep them interested but be sure to **lower** your bait into the exact spot that you have just been feeding. Now, if there are fish in your swim you'll see the tell-tale signs, which might not necessarily mean your float going under.

Look out for movements of the float as the fish brush against your line. If this happens, then shallow up even more. Also, if you foul hook a fish or hook a fish in the lower lip, this is a definite sign that fish are feeding up in the water, so again shallow up.

Ideally, you want to get fish feeding up in the water and competing for your loose feed. This will ensure a maximum catch rate. And don't forget to keep feeding the swim while you're playing a fish. You don't want them wandering off into the next anglers peg.

If these two methods are not working then you have your inside line to fall back on, but you need to give it at least an hour before trying it, and don't give it too much time. Allow 10 minutes maximum, then put in another handful of pellets and go back on one of the other lines. Who ever said match fishing was easy?



be the only answer. My preferred feeder line is *Manic Impact*. It has just enough stretch to cope with the heftiest specimen.

I don't often use a feeder for match fishing any water with a good head of carp, but sometimes nothing else will work especially in colder weather. If you are faced with a situation where the water is very cold and fish might be reluctant to move around much, then a small maggot feeder with a single maggot or caster on the hook might

Thoughts to ponder

Now things to remember are, always consider the actual conditions which will determine your approach and set up. Fish respond differently depending on the water temperature. So in winter feed less

and fish on or near the bottom. Use lighter lines and smaller hooks. They will also likely to be further out where the water is deeper.

In warmer weather they will be closer in and they will be more likely to feed freely, so be prepared to put in a lot of bait, but develop a pattern. Say a handful of pellets every cast or every other cast.

The pole is almost always quicker than rod and line so choose this method as your first line of attack. The key to catching more fish than the anglers around you is to get them in quicker, so make sure your kit is up to the job.

Some baits work better at certain times of the year. For example, pellet and casters work very well during the spring and summer. Chopped worm works well in the autumn months and corn and meat work better in winter, especially for margin fishing. I wouldn't recommend using hemp as loose feed, although carp seem to go crazy for it. I think they can become so preoccupied with eating it and ignore everything else.

There are times when fishing for silver fish will out perform the carp approach. The decision to target silver fish only, should depend on the quantity and quality of fish in the lake. If the lake holds a good head of bream to say 5 pounds, and good skimmers to around the pound mark, then this could be a viable option. It's much easier and quicker to land a 5lb bream than it is to land a 5lb carp.

If you want to target the easier option, and if groundbait is allowed, mix a 50/50 fishmeal and sweet black groundbait. You will probably only be allowed to cup it into your swim, so put it in at regular intervals, same as you might do on a canal.



Set your float rig so that your bait is lying on the bottom. Imagine that your hook is lying flat with 2-3 inches of line lying on the bottom. This is the best presentation for bream and skimmers.

Whichever way you decide to go, always keep a close watch on others around you. Don't think about copying them unless they appear to be 'bagging', and only if their swim is similar to yours. Here's what I mean. Someone might be fishing a waggler out in open water because they have no choice. The island might be too far to reach or if they did

try to reach it, they would be encroaching into another anglers swim. But they are catching.

If you have an island out in front of you and within easy reach of the pole or waggler, then there's no point in falling short to fish the open water just because someone else is catching that way. The two swims are very different, so need to be fished differently. In most cases fishing to the island will outscore fishing in open water every time.

Another thing to remember is that fish will very often come close in to the nearside bank. If one of the pegs next to you isn't drawn, or you find yourself in a corner, with a lot of room between you and the next angler, then you will have a very good chance of hitting a few bonus fish. In some cases you could even win a match by fishing an inside line only.



My choice of hooks

Here's some things to remember about fishing an inside line. Put some feed in at the start. This could be pellets or casters in the warmer months or corn or meat in colder conditions. Leave it for about an hour before trying it. Set your float rig to

full depth and gently drop it in the margin over the loose feed.

I've caught many big double figure fish this way, so it might be a good idea to beef up the tackle for margin fishing. As soon as you hook a fish try to get it out into open water as quick as you can. And don't forget to put some more feed in soon after hooking a fish and while you're playing it.

Tony's tip shop

(No, I'm not referring to the sate of my tackle shop!)

Sometimes, the only problem anglers have during a match is not being able to catch fish. Yes, an obvious statement I know, but what do you do in a situation where others are catching and you can't buy a bite? It's frustrating alright, but worse than that is you could start to develop an inferiority complex then your confidence is knocked for six.

Here's a few things you could try.

You're feeding regularly and you can see the tell-tale signs that fish are feeding in your swim. Or you have a gut feeling that they are there, even if you can't see them. They are obviously taking the loose feed but totally ignoring your hook bait.

- Stop feeding so your hook bait is more visible to them.
- Try lowering your rig into the swim very slowly.
- Try fishing slightly away from your main feed area.
- Try moving all the shot up to the bottom your float to ensure a slow sinking bait.
- Try putting on a big target bait such as paste or cat meat.

You might be surprised at how effective these suggestions can be.



Next tip: For some strange reason carp are very curious creatures and will sometimes respond to noise. I mean noise in the water and not on the bank. You can lob out a big lump of groundbait laced with particles

of loose feed, wrap it all around a method feeder and send it crashing into the water. Most fish will scarper in sheer terror. But carp will come and inspect it and settle down to feast on the offering.

Something to try if all else is failing, is to gently tap the surface of the water with the tip of your pole. The curious ones will quite often come over to see what's going on and have a snack on your hook bait while they check it out. I don't use this method as it is banned on most of the venues I fish. It's always best to check the fishery rules first.

Next tip: In cold and windy weather, fish will most likely be feeding on the bottom but due to the wind, there will also be quite a tow on the water. If you were to loose feed in front of you it could end up reaching the lake bed 2 or 3 metres away and you wouldn't know.



To ensure the feed is exactly where your baited hook is, mould some fishmeal groundbait tightly around the hook bait to the size of a golf ball. Then slowly lower it into your swim and wait.

Initially, this method will pick up all species of fish but the carp will usually bully them out of the way to get at the free offerings.

Next tip: Cup your bait in and keep it tight. But search

out your swim and try to locate where the fish are feeding. When you do find them, concentrate fishing in this spot but keep feeding the area you started to feed even though this could be some distance from where you're catching.

Next tip: This is one that most anglers start but very often give up on. KEEP A DIARY. If you keep a diary listing all of the matches you fish, technically you could win a match before the 'all in' whistle has been blown.

Make a note of the date, the precise weather conditions, the venue, the number of anglers competing, the peg you are on, the depth, the baits you use, the species of fish you catch.....everything! Include the winning weights, your own weight, what the winner caught, what method he used and on what bait.

Write down everything you can remember. Do it as soon as you get home after a match while it's still fresh in your mind. Eventually, you'll have a great reference collection, which will come in very useful for every match you fish. Think this might give you an edge? You can count on it!

Imagine if you had 200-300 entries to look back on right before your very next match.

Finally, it's very important to enjoy your fishing. So do whatever it takes to make the day easy and enjoyable. Fish the methods that most suit you and don't try to emulate other anglers. Work on your own system, tactics, techniques and strategies. That's how you'll get ahead of the pack.

An Interview with Tony Rixon



This book came about as a result of an interview I gave to my publishers, Anglox Publications, who are digital online publishers based in Bristol. You might find it interesting as I reveal more about my thoughts on the future of the sport, plus some sound advice. Here's an edited version.

AP: Tony, at what age did you first start fishing and tell me about your first experience. Who took you, your first ever fish, and where was it.

TR: I was about 9 or 10 and I went with my dad to Emborough Pond in Wells, Somerset. Although my dad had done some fishing when he was a kid, he wasn't really interested in it, but I nagged him to take me and eventually he gave in.

It was a long time before I caught anything. Probably because I was using all the wrong kind of tackle like 20 lb line and big hooks.

It was only after I got advice from the tackle shop and other people who knew about fishing that I caught my first ever fish, which was a perch.

AP: Was there a defining moment, which made you decide that fishing was going to be a major part of your life? Did you catch a large fish or a lot of fish?

TR: After I caught the perch I wanted to go all the time. Weekends, summer holidays and every chance I had. So you could say it all started there. I'll always be grateful to that little perch

AP: Tony, when did you first join a fishing club and what club was it? Also, who were your influences and role models at that time?

TR: I didn't really get involved in a club proper until I was asked to fish for Bristol Match Group. I had joined Flowerpot A.A and Portcullis A.A, but just so that I could fish a few of their matches. Match anglers that I looked up to were Kevin Ashurst and Ivan Marks because they were always in the news and were always catching fish. Locally I had great respect for anglers like Mike Jones, Melvin Holbrook and Topper Haskins.

AP: At that time what was your ambition as an angler? Did you want to catch a specimen fish or win a big match?

TR: All I wanted to do was catch lots of fish. I didn't care where it was as long as I was fishing. I guess competition amongst school friends brought out the competitive side, but I didn't see myself as a match angler when I was 13 or 14. It all happened later, after I bought a permit to fish Bathampton's waters.

AP: Out of interest Tony, are you married and what does your family think of your angling obsession?

TR: Yes I've been married for 23 years now. My wife's name is Judith and I have 3 children. It took a few years to get her trained and now she's accepted it. I'd be the first to admit that anglers can be quite selfish, but luckily she has her own interests, like dog shows.

AP: What's your view on the future of river fishing?

TR: I think the real decline in river fishing was probably down to foot and mouth disease. Anglers couldn't get on the rivers so instead they fished on lakes. Most then decided to stay on them. I don't think river fishing will ever die out completely. In fact there appears to be more anglers going back to the rivers for a change.

AP: In your opinion, what makes a good match angler?

TR: Thinking anglers will always fare better. Anglers who are prepared to change tactics to suit the varying conditions, and fish differently to everyone else can give themselves the edge.

With most matches, you have to judge the situation as the day goes on, and it's as well to keep an open mind as to how any venue is going to fish. You should recognise and fish to your own strengths. That's always the best way to fish. It's also important to know what's going on around you during a match. Realise that one of the most important aspects of successful match fishing is bait presentation.

AP: What to date has been your best achievement in match fishing?

TR: Being able to continually catch fish. I've won and framed in many matches over the years so it's an accumulative thing. My best individual win was the Shillingmore Festival, where I picked up over £600. But it doesn't matter to me what size the match is or how big the payout is, as long as I enjoy my day.

AP: Tell me your thoughts about predominantly carp inhabited match lakes. Is the attraction just about catching lots of fish, and would you say it's the future of angling?

TR: Anything that gets anglers on the bank has to be a good thing. It also encourages new blood into the sport because there's much more chance that they will catch. Because of well managed lakes, I've seen a lot more kids coming into the sport, and even their parents are taking much more of an interest.

The attraction is a combination of things like easy car parking, easy access and easy fishing. What more could you want? Although I don't think river fishing or pleasure fishing will decline much more, I'm certain that the future of match fishing generally lies with lake fishing, especially when you consider that river clubs are in decline and lake clubs are thriving.

AP: What was the best season you ever had in terms of match winnings?

TR: Firstly, I should say that I'm more motivated by the actual competition rather than money. It was all about the money I'd be hot-footing it all over the country fishing only the big money matches. The best season I had was probably about 3-4 years ago. I got it cracked before anyone else did, so dominated the match scene for a couple of years.

Now other anglers have caught up, so competition is quite fierce. But, that just makes everyone try even harder and become more innovative, which results in everyone getting better.

AP: What is your favourite venue now? And what is your favourite venue of all time?

TR: Landsend Farm Fisheries at Wedmore is probably my favourite venue now and of all time because it's very fair. You can win from any peg and the results are always very close. Another reason I would choose Landsend is because it's well stocked, and as a business it's very well run.

AP: What is your preferred method of fishing? Pole, waggler or feeder?

TR: The pole is faster, but waggler is without doubt my favourite method by far. Maybe it's because I was brought up on a river.

AP: How do you prepare for a match? Do you find out about form beforehand, and will you make a conscious decision to fish a certain way or wait until you see the venue?

TR: The only real preparation I do is prepare the end tackle before I fish a match and fill up the car. I'll tie hooks and hair rigs and spend quite some time drilling pellets. I almost always prepare pole rigs at the waterside because I think it's important to have fresh rigs on the day. I wouldn't trust a rig that's been wrapped on a pole winder for a

month. Not only will the line be kinked, but the hook could possibly be blunt or even rusty.

I make sure I have all the baits I need to cover all possible scenarios. Beforehand, I'll generally ask around to find out how the water's fishing and maybe phone the fishery. But I'll always consider the actual conditions on the day and that will determine the way I set up.

AP: Tell me about the methods you would use for match fishing on predominantly carp inhabited waters. How much do the various venues differ and how will that determine your approach?

TR: I'll always target the fish in the same way but different waters warrant different approaches. For example, Viaduct Fisheries and Landsend Farm are very different in nature, so I'll take into consideration the type of lake bed, the depth of water and the bank cover etc. It's a good thing to fish on a variety of venues because the experiences will help you to improve.

At Viaduct you must try to catch up in the water, so feed a little at first then gauge response. Remember, you can always put it in but can't take it out. You might catch a few on the bottom at first, but then watch for liners. That's the time to start moving up in the water and gradually up the feed. On most carp waters I will always start with pellet feed but casters will also work well. Generally, I'll start on the pole, then move onto the waggler later.

AP: Are there any particular methods or baits that have worked consistently well?

TR: Casters will work every time and for all species. If I had only one choice of bait it would be casters. They work particularly well during colder months. As for other baits, I would choose pellet during the warm months, but sometimes it can be virtually impossible to catch on it. So chopped worm will come into play. I've won matches fishing chopped worm, especially when a mixed bag was needed.

In my experience, coarse pellets are best as they're easy for the fish to digest. Some fishmeal pellets are actually bad for fish. I'll use micros up to 11mm but more often I'll use 6-8mm. I prefer to use a hair rig is because the pellet will stay on longer. With banded pellet you will have to change each time you catch or after every bite.

Corn or meat can work very well in winter especially in margin swims. I don't like using paste baits. I used to say, paste is for playdough professionals, bread's for toast and worms are for blackbirds. But worm does seem to work when other baits don't. Generally, I don't like using hemp but it can sometimes help if you're resigned to fishing in the margins. The problem I have experienced with it is the carp end up becoming completely preoccupied with it.

Contrary to popular belief, I don't use any special baits. I just use baits that I know fish like. Actually we don't really know what fish like, we can only assume. Some carp will eat just about anything including dead rancid maggots, whilst barbel like sour baits like sour hemp.

Cat meat is a very messy bait to use and silver fish will whittle it away in no time so I don't bother with it. It's probably okay for big fish in winter, but pellets are better for catching more.

On these types of mixed fisheries, groundbaiting can be more effective in the winter months especially for silver fish. When it's colder I might use groundbait instead of loose fed pellets.

AP: Tell me about tactics you might adopt during a competition. Would you stick to a game plan or do what others are doing if they were catching?

TR: You need to know what methods and baits work and use them instead of trying everything. Always be prepared to change rigs if necessary to keep ahead of the game. Generally keep everything as simple as possible. If I had a £1 for every time I heard anglers say at the end of a match "If only I had done it this way", I'd be a rich man. So, think! And try the things you should be doing during the match, instead of regretting not doing them afterwards.

AP: What would you say it is that makes you a successful angler? Is it a combination of skills like knowledge, experience and watercraft?

TR: Think about it! Think about everything that's going on around you and try to picture what's going on under the surface of the water. Don't be a sheep, try different things. Something that works for someone may not necessarily work for you. That's how I think. I'll always try to work out my own methods, regardless of how extreme they may appear.

I always tell people how to catch fish and how I catch them. Of course knowledge, experience and watercraft is important. Next time you go to the swimming baths put your head under water and you'll hear people shouting. Fish are much more sensitive to noise, so bear that in mind. Skylining spells the death knell. Ask any barbel angler about the importance of staying out of the skyline. To fish, you are a predator!!

AP: What hints and tips can you give us about preparing for and competing in a match?

TR: The main thing is to keep everything simple. Take casters, pellets, corn and meat baits with you. I've caught bigger fish on small baits, so bait size doesn't always have to match fish size. Some carp can literally Hoover up a couple of pints of pellets in a couple of minutes. On a warm day when fish are feeding, I could get through about 8 pints. But feed sensibly especially if fish are there.

It's important to try and understand what's going on below the water. Take notice of how fish are hooked. If they're hooked in the bottom lip it means you're catching them on the drop so shallow up. Ideally they should be hooked in the top lip or in the corner of the mouth.

During a match, look around you and see what others are doing. If they're catching and you're not, then change tactics. Don't be afraid to ask what people are doing. But sometimes it's best to try and work out your own methods and develop your own style.

The best preparation is to practice in advance on similar waters that will have a lot of anglers, so it resembles match conditions. Most waters will always respond differently during a match, than they would if you were just pleasure fishing, due to the pressure.

Be confident and always fish to your strengths. If waggler fishing is your preferred method then fish that way. Don't make it harder for yourself by fishing styles that don't suit you, just because other people fish that way

AP: Do you still have ambitions as a match angler?

TR: To just keep winning. It's getting harder but then that's half the fun. I enjoy a challenge. I've never had any wild ambitions to fish for England or anything like that. That style of fishing is far too structured and disciplined. I prefer to be able to pick and choose my methods rather than have to work to a rigid game plan

AP: How do you see the future of angling generally?

TR: The fishing scene looks very healthy with lots of choice and lots of fish to catch. The tackle trade is being hit though, by the import of cheap imitations from Asia, which usually end being sold at car boot sales.

AP: Do you think you will ever retire from fishing?

TR: Never! My missus thinks I need psychiatric help, but no, some anglers are in their 70s and still going strong, so I'll carry on for as long as possible.

AP: What would you say to new or young anglers coming into the sport?

TR: Practice as much as possible. New and young anglers should come along to matches and watch. It's probably the best way to learn. Ask match winners how they caught their fish and what baits they used. Talk to your friendly tackle shop owner and ask advice. Young people should make enquiries with clubs in their area to see if they can take part in matches for the experience.

Read modern angling books and the angling press. Put the games console down and pick up a fishing rod instead. Most of these games only teach kids to be violent. They need to get out in the fresh air and have a good time.

AP: Okay, well thanks Tony. Any plans to write another book?

TR: Well, over the years I've seen a lot of very funny things happen in this sport, so I'm considering writing a sequel. Just can't think of a title at the moment. Wonder if anyone has any suggestions?



Not Quite The End

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to **Roy Garland** for supplying all the photos of Tony Rixon in action, for both this publication and the website.

Production editor - **Bill Knight**

Published by **Anglox Publications**, 182 Sturminster Road, Bristol,
BS14 8AR – Telephone: 01275 837577
Online digital publishing and copywriting

Email: info@anglox.com
www.anglox.com

Promotional web design www.tonyrixon.co.uk by Anglox

This book is dedicated to **Judith Rixon** beloved and devoted wife of Tony.

Without her long-standing patience and understanding, this book may never have seen the light of day.

© Copyright 2007- Tony Rixon & Anglox Publications – All Rights Reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the author and publishers.