



GEORGE POVEROMO(2)

# Freshen Up for Stripers

Five must-know chunking tricks. BY GEORGE POVEROMO

**CHUNKING APPEARS TO BE A SIMPLE TACTIC** for striped bass: Cut a bait in half, impale it on a hook, pitch it out with enough weight to hold bottom, and wait for a hungry bass to eat it. Granted, plenty of fish are caught by doing exactly that. But when you're gunning for a trophy striper or impressive numbers of them, chunking becomes much more scientific.

Captain Lou Grazioso (732.687.7673; [stripermania.net](http://stripermania.net)) is a knockout artist when it comes to catching big bass on the chunk — the Joe Frazier of the New Jersey bass world, if you will. He's not only a striped bass' worst nightmare on his home waters of Sandy Hook, New Jersey, but also at Virginia Beach, where he travels each winter in pursuit of monster bass. Lou has been at the chunking game a long time, and it's produced bass for him up to 52 pounds.

Little things make a big difference for Lou when he chunks for bass. He relies on the following five tricks when anchored up for trophy fish, and these five tips can improve anyone's catch ratio, regardless of where they chunk for big striped bass.

## FRESH BAIT

As elementary as it seems, fresh bait is crucial for chunking if you want to catch fish. It's so critical that Grazioso often takes live bunker with him and cuts them on site. On afternoon trips he replaces any live bunker left over from the morning's fishing with freshly-netted ones. "Even though those baits are alive, I know that a lot of their slime has come off in the livewell," he says. "That slime is critical because it holds so much scent. I'll cut a live bait

**FULL CIRCLE:** Trophy stripers are but one species that responds well to finely-honed chunking techniques — like cutting baits on an angle to maximize the scent (below).

on a 45-degree angle from its shoulder back to its vent and pitch it out. You now have fresh scent from the slime and blood of a bait that was just severed and a little kicking motion due to its reflexes. We call this the "wiggler," and it gives the impression that the bait was just severed by a bluefish,

a natural occurrence in a big bass' environment. This is the hot ticket to big bass and fast action."

When he's traveling or has a few long days of chunking ahead of him, he packs four or five live bunker in a sealed plastic bag. He then layers the

bags on ice. The thought here is that if he can't get live bunker, those he bagged will soak in their natural slime. It's a good alternative to live bunker.

## THE PRIME CUT

**AS MENTIONED EARLIER,** Grazioso slices his baits from the shoulder back, which he refers to as the "MAJA" cut, a tactic



taught to him by fellow Jersey Shore angler Tony Arcabascio. Compared to using just the head or rear third of a bunker, which smaller bass tend to engulf, the bigger baits soak unmolested by all but the larger bass (and, of course, bluefish). Think of it as a prime 32-ounce porterhouse steak waiting on a linebacker sized player to consume it.

Depending on the section of bait he's deploying, Grazioso hooks it either near the shoulder area (top section of bait) or the anus (lower section of bait) in virtually all conditions except a strong current. With the latter, the bait is hooked through both lips to prevent spinning.

#### REFINED TERMINAL TACKLE

##### GRAZIOSO USES IN-LINE CIRCLE HOOKS

exclusively, for two reasons: Set properly, circle hooks will drop fewer fish. Also, in-line versions are less apt to gut-hook bass.

The hot hook has been the Charlie Brown Circle from QuickRig Corporation

([quickrig.com/cbhooks\\_intro.html](http://quickrig.com/cbhooks_intro.html)).

Rather than run the hook sideways from one shoulder through the other, he sets the hook in-line. That is, he runs the point of the circle hook up into the head, into the cut, bringing it out in the middle of the head between the eyes. When hooking a bait near the anus, he runs the hook point into the cut and then out by the vent. In both cases, the hook lays straight and in line with the spine of the bait to prevent spinning. When a bass swallows a bait in "head-like" fashion, the hook is set up to grab. This lends a straight, efficient pull on the fish.

#### JIG THE CHUNK

**ANOTHER TOP TACTIC**, Grazioso often cuts a live bait on the spot, looking for that "wiggling" effect when it hits bottom. During their soak, he frequently jigs the chunks. He'll lift the rod from its holder, give it three short jerks and then set

the rod back in its holder. "I'm mimicking the way a just-severed bunker acts, which bass are keyed into," he says.

"Two things stick in my mind to this day that make me a firm believer in jiggling the chunks. Once I was reeling in a bluefish that just had its tail bitten off by another bluefish. I unhooked the fish and threw it over. It was wiggling as it sank, and a big bass ate it! The other incident occurred when we were fighting a big bluefin tuna and a shark ate most of it. The tuna came off the hook but was kicking and wiggling madly. And you know what? The shark ate the rest of it! I'm sold on adding a distressed action to your chunks to fool big bass."

#### SOLID CONNECTIONS

##### IN ADDITION TO USING THE LIGHTEST

**WEIGHTS** to reach and hold bottom and the lightest leaders to fool but still hold the fish, setting a circle hook requires a certain discipline.

Grazioso leaves his conventional reels in freespool with the clickers activated. Once the chunks settle and are soaking on bottom, he maintains taut lines, enabling him to read what's going on via the rod tips. For example, he can tell when bluefish are working on the baits and, of course, when a bass subtly picks up a chunk.

When line leaves the reel at a steady clip, he recommends simply engaging the drag and letting the fish set the hook by running off line. The rest comes naturally: Remove the outfit from its holder, lean into the fish and enjoy the fight! ~

## Spread the Love

**CHUNKING IS A FORM** of chumming that stimulates the natural feeding instincts of fish, whether they're hungry or not. And while chunking is big for striped bass, virtually all major game fish respond favorably to it — including tuna, dolphin, bluefish, snapper, grouper, redfish and tarpon. As simple as the concept seems, if you don't have the basics down, you'd be better served staying home and mowing the lawn.