While watching a fishing show recently, I heard world champion B.A.S.S. angler Kevin Van Dam make some interesting comments about fishing line. "I'm often asked the question: 'What's the best fishing line?'" the accomplished pro said. His answer piqued my interest in a couple of different ways. "More and more, I find myself using fluorocarbon line," he said.

Mr. Van Dam correctly pointed to the low stretch and high sensitivity of fluorocarbon line as two of the attributes which make it such a good choice. The line also becomes nearly invisible in the water. "So I'm confident the fish can't see it when I'm fishing clear water."

He went out to clarify his answer further by saying he much prefers braided line over the fluorocarbon when he's pitching jigs into deep water and/or heavy cover. He notes these lines have the lowest elasticity and highest sensitivity, also that they are nearly unbreakable. All these attributes prove advantageous when fish are hooked amidst gnarled vegetation and must be wrestled free of the tangles. Mostly, bass anglers use heavy braided lines for this drill, often 40 or even 50 lb. test.

Last, he asserted the usefulness of monofilament for a specific application. "When throwing topwaters, you ***must*** use monofilament, because it's the only line that floats. Sinking lines like fluorocarbon and braid drag the nose of floating lures downward, inhibiting presentations."

Several thoughts came to mind as I mulled over the expert's comments. These thoughts made me question the lines and rigging methods I and most all other veteran coastal anglers use, one which incorporates a braided main line and a leader of less visible line, either monofilament or fluorocarbon. First of all, I wondered if we as coastal anglers shouldn't consider switching to fluorocarbon as a main line and eliminate the need for a leader.

The problem with such a plan would be the lack of capacity of our lightweight reels to hold enough line of the "proper strength" to work right. I simply can't advocate going back to tying lures directly onto lines with strengths in the 10 or 12 lb. test range, nor can I recommend using reels which will hold enough 20 lb. test fluorocarbon to perform correctly. Maybe lines in the 14-16 lb. test range would be heavy enough to prevent the trouts' teeth from breaking them, but even lines of those diameters will too quickly fill the spools of reels weighing less than 7 ounces, which I find best for me.

I suppose one could use a lighter fluorocarbon main line and attach a heavier leader to it, similar to the way we now use braid with a leader. But fluorocarbon is less sensitive than braid, a consequence I seen no reason to accept, given no concurrent advantageous reality.

His comments also caused me to mull over one other major issue, the idea that braided lines, because they sink, inhibit creative and effective presentations with topwaters. When thinking about this, I remembered several instances when people using braided main lines tied directly onto their plugs or with a Qucikee Swirl or other similar device had trouble with the noses of their topwaters digging down under the surface when retrieved.

Bass pros probably perceive a bigger problem associated with the use of braid in this area, due to the fact they are usually using thicker, heavier line than we as coastal anglers use. 50 lb. test braid surely creates more of an issue than 20 lb.. When the extra weight of a swivel is added to the end of a sinking line to eliminate the "need" for a clear leader, anglers not only fail to acknowledge the useful role of the clear leader in preventing fish in clear water from striking, they also probably cause problems for themselves when using floating plugs.

Both these consequences render the idea of tying braided line directly onto a lure or using it in conjunction with a swivel and without a length of clear leader unacceptable to me. Furthermore, when braided line is tied directly onto plugs carrying multiple treble hooks, it often becomes tangled in the lead hook, providing another reason not to rig up in this manner.

For the record, I experienced no reduced capacity to work topwaters properly (meaning effectively and creatively) when I switched from mono to braid several years ago. In thinking about why this is so, I've reached a couple more important conclusions. One relates to differences between mine and the typical bass angler's reality. For one thing, I wade almost all the time, so I work my lures back to me while holding my rodtip upwards, at an angle. This reduces the amount of line laying on (or in) the water, minimizing the effect the sinking line would have on the presentation of a floating plug. Bass anglers largely fish from a boat, often pointing their rodtip down at the water while working a topwater, placing more of the line "in" the water. Additionally, the lighter braided line I use, as compared to what a bass angler typically would, further minimizes this effect of the sinking line, since the lighter line sinks slower than a heavier one would.

While talking to my friend Jason King about all these things, I reached another epiphany of sorts. He said he observes a big difference in the way his lures (Spook Juniors and even Corkies) work when he uses a fluorocarbon leader of 25 lb. test as compared to when he uses 15 lb.. His preference for tying his braided main line directly to the leader without the aid of a swivel allows him to use a leader which starts off about 5 or 6 feet before it's reduced by cutting and retying. He says a long 25 lb. fluorocarbon leader noticeably pulls down on the heads of the plugs, making them harder to work "correctly".

I now realize my preference for a monofilament leader, albeit one shorter than what Jason and many other coastal angler's use, might actually benefit my presentations in a way I hadn't considered previously. I typically use green 20 lb. Berkely Big Game as a leader, and attach it to the braided main line through the use of a size 10 black barrel swivel. The buoyancy of the monofilament probably offsets the sinking effect of the light braided line, rendering the whole issue of braided lines inhibiting the effectiveness of topwaters obsolete.

Taken as a whole, the conclusions I reached verify what I already believed about my choice of lines and rigging method. They work best for me. I can't justify using fluorocarbon as a main line without a leader, because doing so would require me to use a larger, heavier reel, and I can't do that. I now believe more than ever in the usefulness of monofilament as a leader in place of the more widely-preferred fluorocarbon; since mono floats, it helps offset the potentially negative effect of the sinking braid when floating plugs are deployed.

Jason intends to stick with fluorocarbon for use as a leader, citing the line's lower visibility level in clear waters as the reason he prefers it over monofilament. I contend the difference in the ability of the fish to see fluorocarbon vs. green monofilament is tiny, not something I find significant enough to offset these other issues.

I will continue to rig up the way I have for years, because I know using a "clear" leader improves the chances for getting strikes some of the time. Mono is the right leader line for me, because I find it easier to tie in foolproof knots when compared to fluorocarbon, and I

now believe it helps me keep the noses of my topwaters up, allowing them to bob and weave more enticingly.