

**IN-DEPTH
ANGLING**

THE WACKY JIGHEAD TECHNIQUE

by Steve Magnelia with input from Will Chiao

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WACKY WHAT?

When I first heard of the wacky jighead technique from Japan I was very skeptical to say the least. I knew the technique had accounted for a **Bassmaster Elite Series** co-angler win on Lake Amistad, but it still didn't sway me to purchase any of the jigheads or try the technique.

Here was a high priced tungsten Japanese jighead that was supposed to work magic on finicky fish. "One snag and there goes \$2" was the first thing that came to mind!

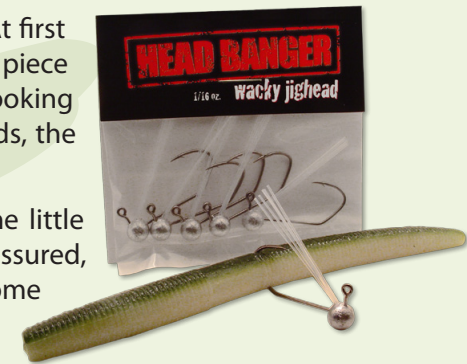
After using this technique over the last two years and working this past year with lure designer Will Chiao to design our own model, I'm not feeling so skeptical anymore. I can honestly say this technique is the *real deal* and there really is some special magic imparted to a piece of plastic when a properly designed jighead is used with this technique. **What are some considerations you should think about when purchasing and using the wacky jighead?**

THE JIGHEAD

As with most fishing tackle that actually works, **it's all about the design**. At first glance it looks like a generic leadhead jighead hooked in the middle of any piece of plastic would accomplish the same thing. However, when you really start looking at how our head, **The Head Banger**, and the two most popular Japanese heads, the Jackall and Zappu, are designed there is a little more to it.

One thing about Japanese lure designers is they pay close attention to all the little details. Almost all the waterbodies in Japan are small and the fish are highly pressured, so little details can make the difference between catching fish and going home skunked. When the bite is off or the fish are heavily pressured, as is often the case, we face the same problem here in the US.

The biggest design modification, and the one that every American company's head we've looked at doesn't get, is the **weight placement on the hook**. The lead should be off-center, with most of the weight under the shank of the hook and away from the center of the bait itself.



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Why is the placement of the weight important? Think of a pendulum on a clock. Center the pendulum weight and the arm swings back and forth in a nice symmetrical fashion. Get the weight off-center and the clock cabinet will start to shake. Get it way off center and the cabinet will start to walk across the floor, before the pendulum itself runs out of energy and the clock eventually stops ticking.

Predators in general are always looking for food that takes the least energy to catch. Prey that moves erratically is often injured and erratic movement signals something that may be injured and is easier to catch. Erratic motion in any bass bait is always a plus.

When we were making prototypes of the **Amistad Tackle Head Banger** I accidentally made some up with the weight centered on the hook and gave them to Will to test. His response, after watching them fall in a test tank, was that the irregular rocking action on the fall was drastically diminished. I moved the weight back under the shank, like earlier prototypes, and the irregular action was back.

“Add some slight rod tip shaking, or a very subtle palsy-type motion, on a semi-slack line to the built-in rocking action and you have a piece of plastic that actually looks like it is squirming.”

If the fish are particularly tight-lipped, simply let the jighead do the work and let the bait fall on a slack line.

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THE WEEDGUARD

When we designed the Head Banger we were completely dissatisfied with the wire weedguard offered on the Japanese heads. The wire guard almost all manufacturers use is for ease of manufacturing, not because it does anything for the angler on the water. In our experience the heads with the wire weedguard snagged everything in sight and the wire broke after a few fish. Not much sense in that.

The five-strand fiber weedguard in **The Head Banger** is custom made especially for us and offers superior protection around wood, weeds, docks cross beams, etc. The jighead can usually be finessed through a brush pile by simply shaking it through very gently.



“The custom fiber weedguard also helps prevent a thicker soft plastic from covering the hook point when skipping it around docks and other cover, ensuring you get a clean hook set.”

We kept the number of strands down to five to retain the finesse profile of the head, but this still offers the jighead a high degree of protection from snags. The only other major manufacturer we know of with a fiber weedguard uses a large number of strands which we believe kills the action of the bait on the fall, takes away from the finesse profile of the head, and reduces the effortless hook set that **The Head Banger** offers.

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THE HOOK

Some of the wacky jighead designs we have seen use a heavy wire long-shank jig hook. A heavy wire hook is great in some circumstances, like pulling fish out of heavy cover with braided line. The hook doesn't bend when a lot of pressure is exerted to get the fish out from cover.

A bigger problem when using finesse gear is when a heavy wire hook doesn't penetrate the fishes' mouth. The fish invariably comes up and spits the hook out before it ever has a chance to bend it, as the hook never penetrated the fish's mouth in the first place.

Compare the force required to nail a railroad spike or a finishing nail into a piece of wood. Which one requires less force? When using light line, a fine wire hook penetrates easily. With **The Head Banger** we recommend just reeling to set the hook, or using a sweep hook set.



“The hook will literally *set itself* in the corner or top of the fish's mouth with *minimal effort*”

Because you're using light line, you want to know that the hook will bite and penetrate with the slightest pressure. Lighten up on your drag or back-reel to keep pressure on the fish and you won't have any problems with big fish bending the hook.

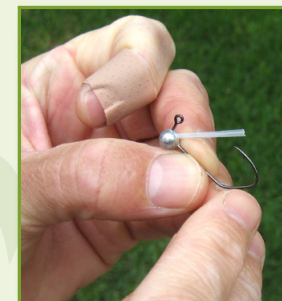
What about the length and bend of the hook? A short shank hook is the best, which is why **The Head Banger** and the Japanese brands use it.

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In our testing we found that when we increased the distance between the bait and the head we decreased the writhing action of the bait as it fell and as it was worked on the bottom. Approximately an inch, possibly why the Japanese call these jigheads "Inchi", gave us the best action.

The bend of the hook is also important for holding the bait in the correct position. With a symmetrical round-bend hook the bait has the opportunity to move all around the bend, eventually tearing a larger hole in the plastic, thus decreasing the action from shaking.

The Matzuo sickle hook in **The Head Banger** has a small angular bend in the main bend of the hook that keeps the plastic in perfect position. If you look closely at the Zappu version you will see that the bend in the hook is not perfectly symmetrical for this same reason.



THE TECHNIQUE

Fishing this bait is simple, which is why so many that have tried it like it so much. Many of the bites come on the fall. This is a great technique for suspended fish around docks. As the jighead and bait fall the plastic and jighead head rock all the way to the bottom ([Click here to watch a video of the bait in action](#)). Add some light shaking with the rod tip and the bait looks more like it is squirming.

Many anglers work the bait all the way back to the boat lightly shaking the rod tip as the bait moves along the bottom. It is really pretty simple and is much like the shakey head technique.

The Head Banger is not just limited to these scenarios. Throw it to schooling fish that are on the "jumps". If you are only catching the small fish, try letting the bait fall on slack line a little further through the school and watch your line!

Fishing in rivers or areas where there is current? Cast up current and let the bait drift back. This is an excellent alternative to a regular wacky rig that simply washes by the fish or cover too quickly without ever achieving proper depth.

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Weed lines are another great situation to work **The Head Banger**. Parallel these grass lines with a bit more shaking to get the fishes' attention. One additional tip to use often is snapping the bait off of the bottom after it has settled or when done with the retrieve. After a few quick snaps, then let the bait fall again. If there's a fish watching it, there's a good chance he'll crush it as it falls!

The technique isn't for every situation. It can be a slow technique if you are trying to cover water. I use it a lot around docks by skipping it under the dock, letting it sink and then picking it up and skipping it somewhere else. Basically looking for bites on the drop, and not really working it at all, other than some light shaking on the fall.

The other situations where I'll use the technique is if I'm on a structure spot or brushpile and the fish have stopped biting. This little bait has worked magic on fish that stopped biting, or were there but wouldn't bite traditional offerings.

BAITS & RIGGING

Two baits have emerged as our favorites. The **original Senko** is an excellent choice. The bait shakes and shimmy's like no other stick bait as it rocks to the bottom. Soft Senko knock offs are also very good, but stay away from the harder Senko knock-offs as the action is severely decreased. If the fish are not committing to the bait, consider downsizing to a four inch Senko. Often times, the slower fall is all that is needed to trigger the bite.



The **Jackall Flick Shake** worm is also an excellent choice because it has bends and a flat side that enhance the action when shaking. The downside of these two baits is the high price. There are an endless number of straight tailed worms that also provide good action on the fall. I have had good luck with worms originally designed for shake head fishing.

Other baits that have proven successful are the **Zoom Magnum Finesse and Trick** worms. These baits do not fall as fast as a Senko, but still offer the bulk when you want a bigger profile. These slower falling baits can be the answer when fishing very skinny water or over the tops of submerged grass beds.



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No matter what bait you use, one thing to remember when rigging the bait is to:

- **Hook the bait in the exact center (bend it in half to find the center)**
- **Keep the rounded body of the worm down and the flat side up as it falls**

With a Senko it makes little difference how you rig it (as long as it's hooked in the middle) because the bait is symmetrical. With baits that have a tapered body, insert the hook where the weight of the worm is distributed evenly.

One other tip you might want to try is using a loop knot for attaching the jighead to your line. Jay Zapp, a former fishing guide from Southern Illinois, who has had great success using the wacky jighead technique, told me he felt like this greatly enhanced the action of the bait when shaking. He recommends the [King Sling loop knot](#) which is a fairly easy knot to tie.

As far as colors, I stick with watermelon and green pumpkin hues in clear water and white hues in stained water.

“One of the best bites I’ve had using this technique was using a *pearl silver flake Senko* around docks when the shad were spawning. It was a bite on almost every cast!”

When the fish are really eating the Head Banger, color may not matter as much. Sometimes, a color that does not match the hatch can be the ticket. I have yet to see a bubble gum colored fish or worm, but there are times when the fish will annihilate it.

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RODS REELS & LINE

I mainly usually use **medium** and **medium-heavy spinning rods** and a high capacity spinning reel loaded with 10 pound Berkley Fireline, which is heavier than what a lot of people use for finesse techniques. Will Chiao and Jay Zapp both recommend lighter action rods.

Will favors a **medium-light to medium action rod**. He explains, "A rod with a very fast tip can cause you to pull the bait towards you instead of shaking it in place as it falls. The slower/softer tip allows for longer casts that will not tear the bait, as well as being able to throw the lighter finesse worms. There is also a tendency to put a lot of pressure on a bigger fish with a heavier action rod, which can cause the fish to tear the hook out or even break light line."

If the water is ultra-clear I'll add a 10-15 pound fluorocarbon leader to the Fireline. The 10 pound Fireline is so thin I often forego the leader. Drag from heavy line kills the action and anything heavier than 10 pound line is probably not going to work as well. Braid and other superlines allow you to detect bites from a long distance, in deep water, and breezy conditions. The telltale "tick" is transmitted instantly back to the angler and allows an effortless hook set. Both Will and I recommend braid or braid and a fluorocarbon leader.

For **ultra finesse**, 4-6 pound straight fluorocarbon line is also excellent. Jay Zapp tells me he fishes the jighead with 4-6 pound fluorocarbon and a light action spinning outfit. He has landed largemouth up to 9 pounds on this rig, and almost every other freshwater fish that swims (e.g. – smallmouth bass, walleye, drum), and some salt water species (redfish and flounder) in the brackish rivers of Southern Alabama.

[Gamma](#) just came out with a new finesse fluorocarbon line called Touch, which was developed in conjunction with Kota Kiyama, one of the best finesse fisherman on the BASS Elite series. It is an excellent choice for the drop shot and wacky jighead techniques.

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TROUBLESHOOTING

You will go through a lot of baits when using this technique. Bass of all sizes will bite this thing and they often come to the surface and throw the plastic off the jighead. Be prepared to use a lot of plastic. I have used a small piece of 3/8 inch shrink tubing ([Click here to watch a video explaining this simple technique](#)) on the bait and that helps with the number of baits lost, but you'll eventually tear the bait at the shrink tubing, or allow a hole in the shrink tubing where the hook goes through.

Be prepared to lose some fish, especially around docks. Some days I get them all in, including the big ones. Other days I lose some, which is frustrating.

“I take solace in the fact that I may have never have gotten the bite in the first place if I wasn't using this rig.”

When you are fishing light line around docks it is going to happen. Missing fish can be a problem when first learning to use the rig as well. **Remember** to use a simple sweep set or just let the fish load up and reel to tighten the line. Once the fish has eaten the bait, it usually won't drop it. Don't get in a rush and use a hard, snapping hook set. This simply pops the bait out of the fishes' mouth!

One other frustrating thing that will happen, especially with a Senko is that the plastic will swing around and actually cover the hook. The weedguard certainly helps prevent some of this, but it will still occasionally happen. This can cause you to lose fish. A thinner worm like the smaller Jackall Flick Shake worms will help with this.

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THE REAL DEAL

The wacky jighead is definitely **the real deal**. In Japan it has surpassed the drop shot in popularity for good reason; it is extremely effective, easy to use, and you can easily change the plastic bait to match the conditions.

Unfortunately, many anglers in the U.S. have failed to embrace finesse techniques. The good news is that on some bodies of water *the fish won't have seen this technique*, giving you the edge to catch more fish.

I love power fishing, but I always have finesse gear ready when I can't catch them on the heavy stuff . Next time they aren't biting, pull out a spinning rod and give this technique a try. **It has saved the day for me on many occasions.**



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