

Kathryn laying out line
in the Bahamas.

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“Sport” Fishing’s Injured Reserve

WHAT A CATCH! HOST FIGHTS HER I.R. STATUS

By Kathryn Maroun

As a professional fisher and fishing show host (What A Catch! on the Outdoor Life Network), I am constantly being asked about fishing as a sport and if it is indeed a “sport.” Over the years, fishing has been labeled as “lazy” and “inactive.” A “sit around and wait” activity. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Fishing is very active and involves a lot of repetitive motion, endurance and balance. In fact, I would call

fishing a “high-intensity” sport. In fishing, you are lifting and moving—using your whole body and mind for hours at a time. Because of this, fishing can cause injury and actually be quite dangerous.

I know because I have had an injury to my double-haul arm over the last couple of years that has changed both my outlook on fishing and life forever. In 2004 I fell while snowboarding and ended up breaking my left wrist.

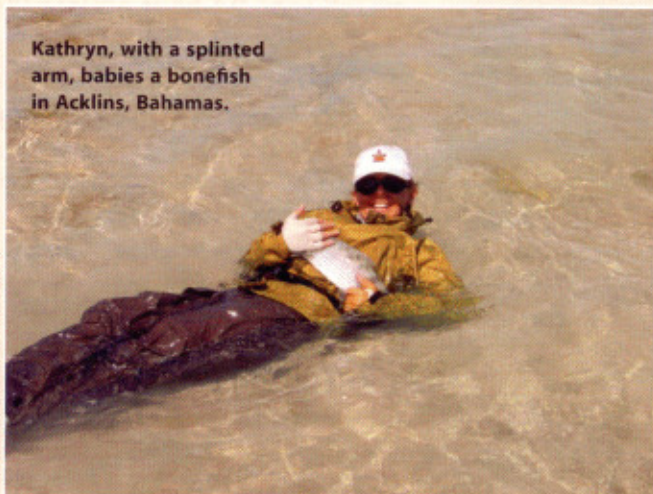
“Kathryn shattered her left wrist in four places, involving the joint itself,” according to Dr. Lionel Brown, a hand surgeon and friend at the Hand Center of West Connecticut (www.hand-center.com). My first thought was of course, fishing, and I asked him if there was a cast he could make that would still allow me to fish.

Unfortunately, once I got to his offices in Connecticut he told me the injury was worse than I had thought and needed surgery. “The next day we were able to insert a special computer generated reconstructive plate under the muscles of her distal forearm, essentially eliminating the fracture,” Dr. Brown remembers.

I was back fishing three weeks later. With my surgeon at my side, and my hand in a splint, I was out bonefishing in Acklins, Bahamas.

Then, in June 2006, while fishing in the North West

Kathryn, with a splinted arm, babies a bonefish in Acklins, Bahamas.



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Territories of Canada for giant pike "the Wolf of the North" I heard a "pop" in my left wrist and my fingers went limp. I immediately called Dr. Brown and got on the next plane out to see him. He told me that the repetitive strain on my tendons from fishing and having the tendons rub across the bone of my original fracture had ruptured them. I had re-injured my already damaged arm and it would require more surgery.

"We removed the original plate, removed the inflamed tissues on the back of her hand, and transferred her torn and tattered tendon to an adjacent one. All went well, and Kathryn is now in a fancy splint with pulleys and rubber bands. She'll have six to twelve weeks of recuperation and therapy before we let her use her hand—no fishing after three weeks this time, but the prognosis for full recovery is excellent."

I was devastated. "But what about my planned trip dry fly fishing for Atlantic salmon ("the leaper") in Quebec?" Not going to happen.

Six to twelve weeks?! I can't remember the last time I went that long without fishing. Not only because I love the sport, but because it's my job as well. At the time, I couldn't possibly imagine spending six weeks not fishing. But then I started to think of the upside of this injury. Maybe this was my chance to take a step back, to relax (which I haven't done in years) and to look at fishing in a different way.

Before, when I got to a location I was so excited to fish that I would jump right in. Now, since I need to take the time, I am able to study the waters and take time to watch for rises and read the surrounding area. I can bring my net to take samples of the vegetation in the water and turn over rocks to see what bugs are underneath. I can watch the fish's behavior and observe other fishers and their techniques. Watching other people fish is not something I get to do very much, but when I do, I am able to pick up a lot. I really have the chance to take in all the parts of fishing and just enjoy being on the water.

I still feel that I need to be the one to make the cast, set the hook, fight the fish and catch it in order for it to count and be "mine." What I didn't know, is that I would enjoy watching someone else catch fish almost as much. Now, not able to be in the water in the same way (i.e. aggressive fast-paced fishing and long lines), I am learning new skills and using all my senses; I am listening, watching and waiting more.

Because so many parts of the body are used in fishing, there are many ways in which you can injure yourself. You can throw your back out fighting a fish, you can strain your legs and calves from carrying heavy



Kathryn enjoying a pain-free day in South Africa.

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gear and hiking to a pool over rocks and pebbles that are like marbles, you can get tennis elbow, as well as many other injuries.

Dr. Brown has seen and treated a wide range of injuries resulting from fishing. "Fishing, in general, can be dangerous and very hard on the body. I often see and treat fishers with a large variety of fishing-related disorders. Trauma, tendonitis (wrist and elbow), carpal tunnel syndrome, rotator cuff injuries of the shoulder, muscle tears and strains, joint injuries of the thumbs, trigger fingers, tuberculosis marinum and fungal infections, just to name a few."

The most important thing when fishing is to be properly prepared and to stay within your capabilities. If you are just beginning to fish, don't choose a location that takes lots of hiking to get to; you will end up fatigued and sore and you won't enjoy your fishing. Understand your limits and always warm up before fishing (like any sport). Enjoy your day! Pick a type of fish



Kathryn and Lionel Brown at the Hand Center of Western Connecticut after the second surgery.

and location that match your ability. If you have a back injury, fishing for trout is better than sailfish. If you have difficulty standing in a boat, then wading for bonefish is better for you than fishing for them on a flats boat.

The other thing many people don't realize is that fishing requires you to be fit and have proper conditioning. It is a physical workout to be out fishing all day, and so, like any sport, training and exercise are needed if you want to be good at it. I work with a personal trainer to make sure that my body is in the best shape possible when I go on week-long trips to places like Mongolia, Brazil, or Iceland. I want to be in top shape so I don't have to sit on the sidelines. I want to be in the game—"big game"—how about marlin? After catching a nine-foot marlin, your body feels like it's been in a car wreck!

Fishing is also a mental workout. Competitive fishing pushes you to your limits both physically and mentally. At the same time it requires you to clear your mind and be patient. It is a Zen sport. This is also why fish-

ing can be therapeutic.

Casting for Recovery (www.castingforrecovery.com) uses fishing as a way to get women with breast cancer out into nature while trying fly-fishing. It is a non-profit charity that takes women on retreats across North America and teaches them to fly-fish. It is not only a bonding experience for the women, but the muscles used in fly-fishing are the same ones that can be affected with breast cancer, and therefore, fly-fishing is excellent therapy.

So, here I am at the peak of fishing season with only one arm and nothing I can do about it. I have deadlines for my show, trips I had planned and I have Casting for Recovery retreats I am attending as a casting instructor and leader. Fishing is a sport for life. I can enjoy all that fishing brings. With this injury, I have been challenged to look at fishing in a new way and be happy for the little victories. I have realized the little ones are just as meaningful.

Fishing for me has always been more than just catching fish, it is about the people you are with, the places; it is about the journey, not how many fish you catch.

This is the summer I learn to double-haul with my toes! Tight Lines! ————

For more information about What A Catch visit www.whata-catch.net. For more information about Casting For Recovery visit www.castingforrecovery.com



Kathryn preparing to release a gray ghost in the Bahamas.