LIVE TO FISH!

FALL 2020

“BIG” JIM McLAUGHLIN

FULL SPECTRUM FOR PANFISH

TUBMAN’S TIPS & TECHNIQUES

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SPECIAL ICE FISHING PREVIEW

FALL MUSKY SOLUTIONS

LESSONS LEARNED

WALLEYES FALL INTO A PATTERN

FALL INTO A PATTERN

FISH!

Plus More Great “Stuff” Inside!
A wise man once noted that the day you think you know everything is the day you start falling behind. For as long as I have been fishing, I am shocked at the end of the season when I take stock of the lessons I have learned or reinforced. So, what were the salient pieces of the puzzle that fell into place this year?

The fish factor is the most outstanding, and tackle makers will hate me for repeatedly saying this, but an ounce of biology is worth a pound of tackle. When husky lake trout, for example, are scooting up through soupy warm (22° C / 72° F) water to devour juicy mayflies emerging by the millions out of the soft muddy bottom, you better not be trolling giant plugs behind downriggers in 100 feet of water adjacent to rock structures.

But I experienced it again this year, as did several readers who saw lake trout breaching the surface beside their boats in the early summer sun. Fish that were... not supposed to be there.

As I explained to one reader, however, it is no different than running to your vehicle in the winter without wearing a jacket. Spending 30 seconds in warm water is inconsequential to even the coldest water-loving trout, if it means a belly full of champagne and caviar.

The lesson was further cemented when I enjoyed a dream-like day fishing on a small lake ravaged by a forest fire. If you listened carefully, you could hear the big-winged ants chewing on the blackened jack pine and black spruce trees, reducing them to sawdust. But the offshore wind was blowing countless numbers of bugs into the water where the trout were gulping them up like kids munching on popcorn.

When I cleaned a small fish for shore lunch, I discovered so many ants stuffed inside its stomach I was astonished. It was a heaping handful that reinforced the message that responding to on-the-water conditions will reap you so many fishy rewards.

SO, WILL BEING AN ISOLATIONIST

The biggest bass, walleye, pike and muskies that we caught this year came from isolated “one fish” locations. Totally imperceptible structures and tiny pieces of cover. It is a trend that is picking up speed as we become ever more proficient with mega-imaging CHIRP technology that lets us down image, side image and view 2D sonar at the same time.

Everyone can find massive main lake rock piles and farm-size beds of cabbage. They still attract fish, but you typically catch the biggest and the best from secluded locations. Like the half-submerged boulder in the otherwise second rate-looking bay from which came charging the biggest muskie I have seen in years. She had her nose positioned inches behind my bucktail, but alas, she didn’t follow my frantic figure eight at the side of the boat, veering away instead like a jumbo jet altering its course in mid-flight. She haunts me in my dreams.

She also woke me up to another hard-learned lesson: we’ve conditioned the fish to avoid our lures. I was casting on Lake of the Woods, one of the planets most intensively fished muskie waters. Hyped-up (Continued on page 4.)
Fishing, or Watersports?

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Favourite Fall Techniques, Walleyes Fall Into A Pattern, photo: Brian "Bro"
Brosdahl, Lessons Learned, photo: Gord Pyzer; Fall Musky Solutions, photo:
Jim Saric, Special Ice Fishing Preview, photo : courtesy of Clam Outdoors.

Nothing Trumps the Weather
Are solunar based fishing apps helpful? I carefully logged my
catches this year to satisfy my curiosity and was surprised
by the correlation. Especially, when the app predicted tough
fishing. But what became crystal clear is that the local weather
trumps everything else. When it is ideal, it can turn a predicted
door day into a pretty good one. On the other hand, when
the weather is bad and the app forecasts dismal fishing, the
results are typically brutal.

Lessons learned.

About the Author –
Gord Pyzer:
Sixty-two
time National
Communications
Award Winner,
Four time Gold Medal Winner; National Magazine Awards 2009 Inductee,
Canadian, Angler Hall of Fame, Fishing Editor; Outdoor Canada
Magazine, Field Editor; In-Fisherman Magazine & Television, Co-Host,
In-Fisherman Ice Fishing Guide, Television, Co-Host, The Real Fishing
Radio Show, Host, Fish Talk with “The Doc”, Outdoor Journal Radio &
President, Canadian Angling Adventures Ltd.
There are definitely some things about fall fishing that I really love – the fishing is top-notch for most species; the shoreline colours are spectacular and I actually enjoy the cool weather. Because of the Bassmaster Elite Series schedule this year, which has been stretched into the fall to make up some of the cancelled events from earlier this spring I am going to be on the road for much of October and early November. I’m glad that we’re going to get to fish these tournaments but part of me is a little bit disappointed that I’m not going to be at home in Sunset Country for the last part of the season.

Every year since I was a little kid I have spent many days in the boat right up until freeze-up and I’ve made countless good memories. Many of my biggest Sunset Country fish have been landed in the fall. My best musky, largemouth, smallmouth and crappie were all caught between Labour Day and freeze up. Here are a few of my top fall fishing tips to hopefully help you put a few more fish in the boat.

Use Those Electronics

Most fish species move to generally deeper water in the fall where they are easy to find on your electronics units. I run Humminbird Helix 10 and Solix 10 units on my boat as well as an Aqua-Vu underwater camera mounted on the console. Regardless of which species I am targeting, I use sonar to look for fish (smallmouth, walleye and crappie), the presence of baitfish (pike and musky) or even vegetation (coontail for largemouths).

Sometimes it takes some patience to find what I am looking for but it often pays off to spend some extra time behind the wheel before actually starting to fish. You are just able to cover so much more water and find a school of fish, increasing the odds that you are going to catch both numbers and likely, bigger fish.

I would not even consider dropping in the line in the water for walleyes, crappies or smallmouths, which will all be found in deeper water during this time frame until I find them first. Walleyes and smallmouths will be around some form of structure, while crappies will probably be found over mud flats. You want to see the big schools of bait around the reef structures or neck-down areas you fish for toothy critters and when I am looking for largemouths, I want to find rocks with lush, green coontail growing around them.

The problem we are seeing now on Lake of the Woods is the invasive rusty crayfish is literally wiping out much of the vegetation in the lake. It seems to be having the most negative impact on largemouth bass who evidently rely on the vegetation.
WHEN TOP BASS PROS COME TOGETHER, IDEAS ON A WHITEBOARD BECOME REALITY:
G. Loomis adds 10 more IMX-PRO technique-specific bass rods to its lineup of tournament-quality rods, purposely built for the techniques that make anglers successful on the water. The new IMX-PRO rods include models designed for bladed jigs, paddle tail swimbaits, finesse baits, lipless crankbaits and for fishing ledges, so you have the tools needed to cover more tasks on the water.
FEEL CONNECTED.
to flourish. There are bays on the lake that were full of beautiful weeds, where we had really, really good largemouth fishing ten years ago and those areas are now cleared of any weeds and it’s almost impossible to even catch a largemouth anymore. It’s pretty disappointing. Most species are eating these crayfish and doing well, including walleyes and smallmouths but they have literally decimated the weeds in many areas.

The Aqua-Vu comes in handy to verify what your electronics are telling you. Sometimes it’s species identification if you are marking fish but can’t get them bite, other times it’s nice to drop the camera down and see what the fish are relating to – it could be a boulder, a log, a patch of sand. It is a great tool to help interpret what your electronics are telling you. I use mine a lot and have some fun with it.

**Toss an Umbrella Rig**

Over the past few years I have mentioned using umbrella rigs in the fall for smallmouths. They are a proven bait for catching big bass but the fun part of throwing them on main lake humps and points is that trophy walleye, big pike and even musky will take a run at them as well.

Umbrella rigs do a great job emulating a school of baitfish. I like to use a rig with blades on the arms and I use swimbait between 3.5 – 5.5 inches. Over the past couple of years I have started using the Z-Man Diesel Minnow swimbaits. Their durability is nice when you are catching a bunch of fish and the baits are all nice and straight out of the package so they swim perfectly.

In Ontario, we are allowed to use four hooks on one line. Most umbrella rigs come with five arms so on the fifth arm of the rig, I’ll actually cut the hook off the bait so one of them is considered a dummy bait.

If I am fishing 15-20 feet of water I’ll use five 1/4 ounce jigs on my rig and for water between 20 and 30 feet, I’ll put a couple of 3/8 ounce jigs on the bottom arms and use 1/4 ounce jigs for the top three. G. Loomis makes an umbrella rig rod in their IMX-PRO and NRX line ups. These are heavy duty rods capable of handling these over-sized rigs and they make fishing them all day very comfortable. I like a Shimano Curado 200 reel, which has a bigger spool for handling the 20-lb. fluorocarbon I like to throw them on.

My first experience with an umbrella rig in a tournament came with my pal Mike Reid. We had one tied on a rod not long after they (Continued on page 10.)
became popular several years back. I had caught a couple of small bass on it in practice but on the second day of the three day tournament Mike threw it out on a windy point and caught a pair of four pound smallmouths at the same time, it was incredible. We caught several other big fish in the tournament on an umbrella rig and since then I always have one tied on in the fall.

**Drop a Drop-Shot**

At the other end of the presentation spectrum is a drop-shot rig that will produce really well for bass but other species like walleye and crappie as well. Consisting of a weight tied to the bottom of the line and then a hook tied into the line about 12”-24” above the weight (with a palomar knot). We will attach a variety of soft plastics to the hook but if you prefer to use live bait you can attach some meat to the hook as well.

In the fall I’m going to be using minnow imitating plastics, adjusting the size of the bait to the fish that I’m chasing and the size of the forage that I think the fish are focused on. For bass and big walleyes I might use a larger four or five inch jerk shad type bait but for crappies or pressured bass and walleye I might use a smaller two to three inch bait.

I’m predominately using Z-Man Elaztech baits on my drop-shot rigs because the plastic is buoyant causing it to sit horizontal in the water and look more realistic. Some of my favourite baits are the Finesse ShadZ, 3.75” SteakZ and the Jerk ShadZ baits. G. Loomis makes rods in all of their line-ups designed for drop-shotting with light actions so you don’t tear the small hooks out of the fishes mouth. If I could give you one tip for drop shot fishing, use a small, light wire hook that will help your presentation look more lifelike. I’m usually using #1 or #2 hooks most of the time. These are small hooks which makes the light action rods mandatory if you want to avoid losing fish.

Avoid the temptation to shake the heck out of your rod when you’re fishing a drop-shot. Get the bait to the bottom and drag it along, imparting some light shakes every once in a while. I almost always use a 3/8 oz weight that is heavy, but I want the bait to get down to the bottom quickly and not waste any time.

Fall offers some of the best fishing of the year and we have a long winter ahead of us so layer up, dress warm and get out there. Trust your electronics to show you the fish and you will enjoy those last few trips in the boat.

**Editor’s Note:** Jeff Gustafson grew up on the shores of Lake of the Woods in Kenora, Ontario. He has made his living in the fishing community since he was a teenager as a tournament angler, guide, outdoor writer and fishing promoter. In 2019 he is competing on the Bassmaster Elite Series in addition to competing in several events in Ontario. You can find him on social media at @gussyoutdoors and on his website at: www.gussyoutdoors.com.
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Many years ago, the first jigs used for walleyes were transplants from the saltwater market, sporting feathers and hair to form pre-tied baitfish imitating bodies. These spurred an assortment of other feathered, bucktail and marabou jigs manufactured and sold by northern tackle companies specifically for the walleye market. Eventually, jigs with soft plastic bodies entered the walleye arena, broadening mix-and-match jighead/body shape/colour/action component options for catching walleyes.

Whereas early jigging advocates for bass fished jigs plain, just as they came out of the package, early walleye enthusiasts unanimously felt the need to spice jigs up by adding a minnow to the mix. Typically, they poked the hook point up through the minnow’s bottom jaw and out the top of the head, killing the minnow but providing the attractiveness of scent, taste and profile to vertical jigging presentations.

For decades, it was ingrained into the psyche of walleye anglers that jigging was a slow, methodical presentation that excelled during the cold-water periods of spring and fall, as well during the intervening winter/ice fishing season. Lift-drop-pause. Lift-drop-pause. All day long.

The thing is, it worked – and still does today. And it provided a faster-moving option than traditional livebait rigging with a live minnow, which was typically fished even slower, relying more on tempting bites than triggering strikes. But it was almost like fishing in slow motion, making it difficult to cover water quickly and effectively to locate schools of fish.

Truth be told, even way back in the day, I always fished both jigs and rigs a lot faster than most anglers – at least until I found the fish. Then, it was fine to slow down, zero in on their location and depth, and put the hurt on ‘em. But first you had to find ‘em before you could catch ‘em.

Fast-forward to today, and you not only have a lot more soft plastic body dressings for jigs, but a new, more mobile and aggressive mentality when it comes to catching walleyes. Jigging is no longer limited to the slow, meticulous lift-drop anymore. In fact, it’s become downright fierce in snapping/falling jig motions, as well as swifter horizontal boat movement and retrieves to more rapidly cover water, locate walleyes and trigger strikes.

**Modern Tools of the Trade**

**Jigs** – Jigs are the quintessential walleye presentation, effective at all depths, cast, trolled or vertically,
jigged. Adjusting head shape and weight, varying component dressing and potentially sweetening the deal by tipping the jig with a minnow, piece of nightcrawler or leech provide an infinite array of presentation options. When it comes to fall deep water fishing, vertical lift-drops or upward snaps and pauses allow a range of subtle to swift triggering motions. Keep in mind that the bulkier the dressing, the slower the lure will tend to fall on the drop. The smaller and sleeker the combo, the more radical the motion.

**Tip:** After completing an upward lift or snap, follow the lure back down with your rod tip, with the line taut but not tight, to maintain feel and sense strikes on the drop.

**Jigging Rapalas** – Perhaps the biggest breakthrough in walleye fishing in recent years is the use of Jigging Rapalas, once considered strictly as ice fishing lures, for open-water vertical jigging and casting retrieves. Their wildly erratic motions trigger strikes like nothing else, particularly when you impart some horizontal motion to them via casting or trolling. However, they still excel for deep vertical jigging with a snap-and-pause rod tip motion. And because they are dense and heavy, you can fish them very effectively in deep water.

**Note:** Always tie a barrel swivel inline about 1/16-inch above the lure to minimize line twist. Also, because they descend so quickly on the drop, you may not feel the strike. Instead, you suddenly sense weight on your next upward snap. Fish on!

**Rattling Crankbaits** – Once considered chiefly cast/retrieve lures for bass, rattlebaits excel for walleyes when cast above weed tops and stump flats. They also turned out to be very effective for vertical jigging in deep water. Loud and proud, they send out intense rattles and vibrations. And to many anglers’ surprise, they are deadly ice fishing lures when you need to attract fish from a distance. Pump them up and down a few times, then pause to allow fish to zero in on the lure. Follow them down on the drop, just like jigs.

**Bladebaits** – Formerly the province of river anglers fishing deep holes below dams, blade baits are making inroads into open-water walleye angling as well. Impart a similar upward snap/pause as you do with Jigging Raps. Be sure to attach your line via a snap through the back of the lure.

The Rap-V Blade is a sleeker modern take on traditional bladebaits used by walleye anglers when vertically jigging below dams on major rivers.

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**About the Author**
Al Lindner ranks among the most renowned leaders in the fishing industry. Averaging about 180 days a year on the water, Al is hailed as one of the world’s best all-around anglers. Al’s long and honoured career as an author, syndicated radio & TV fishing show host, video producer, fishing guide, tackle manufacturer, lecturer and champion tournament angler has spanned 35 years of the most revolutionary years in sportfishing.
No matter if Spring, Summer, Fall or Winter, this fish recipe is one of my absolute favourites! Char is very similar to salmon and trout, they all eat the same and can adapt to a multitude of flavours and presentations. My only suggestion is don’t cook it well done! Char cooked to “Medium” will completely melt in your mouth, and best of all, it’s a very healthy fish.

If char is not available, use salmon or trout with the skin removed or better yet, remove the scales for a beautiful crispy skin.

I stumbled across a brand-new seasoning that paired perfectly with the char. This Chef was impressed with the layers of flavour, click on the active link below to see all the varieties.

BLACKENED CHAR, CUCUMBER, MANGO & MINT SALAD

Yield: 4 Servings

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 5 x 150 gram Char Portions
- Char Blue Spice Rub ([https://www.charblue.com/](https://www.charblue.com/))
- Canola Oil

**CUCUMBER AND MANGO SALAD:**

- 1/2 Mango, **cut into thin strips**
- 16 Cucumber Slices, **thinly sliced**
- 125 ml Yellow or Green Zucchini Strips (use vegetable peeler)
- 8 Mint Leaves, **finely chopped**
- 3 TBS Mirin (sweet rice wine vinegar)
- 80ml Plain Yogurt
- Kosher Salt & Pepper

**GARNISH:** 1 Lemon, **cut into wedges**

**DIRECTIONS:**

Prepare salad before cooking the char. Add all salad ingredients in a mixing bowl, check seasoning and chill.

Using a cast iron pan, set heat to high. Sprinkle spice rub on both sides of the char. Add canola oil to pan, then immediately seasoned char, skin side down. Sear for 1 minute on each side then place in BBQ or oven set to 350°F. Cook till an internal temperature of 135°F, it won’t take long!

When char is finished, serve with chilled salad and serve with some roasted potatoes and lemon.

Cheers!

*Editor’s Note:* Avid outdoors person, competitive angler, 2-time gold medal winning chef at the Culinary World Olympics and educator Cameron Tait truly loves being in the outdoors. Cameron is an active member of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation, Walleye Anglers Assoc. of Manitoba, Central Walleye Trail and on the Pro Staff team for Alumacraft / Suzuki and Minn Kota / Humminbird. When not pursuing his passion for the outdoors, Certified Chef du Cuisine Cameron can be found surrounded by mouth watering food.
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Rods & Reels
It’s nice enough to golf, it’s nice enough to go fishing”. That’s my comeback when asked to go golfing. Of course, fishing is my obsession. But, it was golfing that actually taught me a huge lesson with respect to rod and reel fundamentals.

I was just a kid, maybe 10, when I was first given permission to ride my bike in to town for golfing with my friends. Having no golf clubs of my own, I had to beg my big brother, Dave, for his, which wasn’t easy. He finally agreed to lend me his 3-iron and insisted, “This club is all you need”. After roughing out a terrible score, sprinkled with a steady diet of sarcasm and ridicule from my pals, I quickly learned that I needed more than one club to properly play the game! – Ok, golfers don’t get it either.

As adults, even technically-sound golfing buddies, fail to recognize this relationship between golf and fishing. They believe all that is needed for fishing success is just one, good, rod and reel. No surprise, their expectations of themselves are as dismal, on the water, as mine golfing. They thrill to think that they might get “lucky” and land “the big one”.

Fact or Fiction?
Confession... for many, many years, I did a lot of friends a huge disservice. I would take them shopping and prescribe the middle-of-the-road, 6’6”, Medium Action spinning rod rated for 6-12 pound line. The matching 2000 or 3000 size spinning reel would be spooled with #8 monofilament line. My horrible advice, passing this outfit off as “the one”, was awful and ignorant. Despite legitimately doing my best to honestly help them with their purchase, I now realize the above “just right” combo was, in fact, either “just over” or “just under” powered for the fullest spectrum of multi-species angling opportunities.

My opinion has completely changed since then. It doesn’t matter how expensive, sensitive, exotic, unique or indestructible the sales person might say, have you believing in “the one” outfit, it simply does not exist. I can’t stress enough, anyone who wants to catch more fish and have more fun must have more than one outfit.

Golf Club to Fishing Rod Comparisons – Not convinced? Let’s go back to golf clubs and these proposed equivalent rod and reel outfits:

Driver vs Baitcaster Combo
The Driver is a club used for power and distance. The fishing equivalent would be a baitcasting, trolling or casting outfit used for large lures, heavy line and big fish.

An example of one such combo would be Hall-of-Fame Angler, Gord Pyzer’s current musky casting outfit. His 13Fishing Concept A3 baitcasting is a high-speed power winch. Coupled with his 8 foot, 13Fishing Omen Black OB3C8H-SB rod, strung with #80 Sufix 832 Braided line, Gord can launch one pound lures and tame Lake of the Woods dragons!

Flatfaced Irons vs Medium-Heavy Spinning Combo
These clubs are for medium distance drives out onto the fairway... bulk duty. Fishing wise, an example of this would be a medium-heavy spinning or baitcasting outfit with reasonably heavy line for a wider array of lure size and fishing techniques. The Fate Black series from 13Fishing, which I call it the “Green Stick Series”, is akin to iron duty. The distinctively green, graphite blank is crisp to the touch, responsive to the feel of a fish strike.
loads well and is a pleasure to fight fish on. My FTB2S71MH is the Medium-Heavy spinning outfit. I fish #20 pound test, SUFIX 832 Braided line on the matching 30 Series Creed reel.

**Pitching Wedge vs Medium-Light Spinning Combo**

These clubs are used to finesse the golf ball into key, tight areas near the hole. A comparable rod & reel combination would be a Medium-Light spinning outfit that handles a wide-array of line & technique applications. However, this outfit is for lighter line and slightly more-specialized lures & tactics. Another “Green Stick” I like is the FTB2S610ML, Fate Black, Medium-Light rod. It covers the #4 monofilament, ultralight techniques I use for perch, panfish on up to #6 or #8 monofilament finesse walleye & bass techniques.

**Putter vs Ultra-Light Combo**

Golfers obsess over their “short-game” and cherish their Putters. The Ultra-Light spinning rod and reel combo, mine being the 13Fishing,

During tough conditions, experienced anglers know downsizing baits and line size can help them still scratch out a fish or two. The obsessed ultralight angler refuses to use anything else for panfish or stocked trout and relishes the opportunity to cross paths with any incidental big fish. My 13Fishing rod is longer than most ultralights on the market. It is superb for bobber fishing as well as fighting bigger fish. The extra length increases sweep and leverage. This 2-piece, 7 foot option is easily stowed in a rod tube when not in use.

Ultra-Light, forgiving rods are key for feel and hook set precision when, for example, drop shot fishing for perch and walleye in deeper water.

**Good New for Anglers**

When guiding for G&S Marina Outfitters on famed Last Mountain Lake in Saskatchewan, I pack a Driver, Iron, Wedge and Putter for every one of my guests. That’s right, I have a (Continued on page 20.)
baitcaster/trolling outfit for heavy lead and lure applications. I have a Medium-Heavy spinning outfit for a wide application of lures and techniques. I have a Medium-Light spinning outfit for finesse applications and techniques and, finally, a slip bobber outfit (when applicable) for very picky, spot-on-spot finesse situations. That means my usual three-guest party equates to 12 outfits! Excessive? Maybe. But, believe me, the extra effort to organize and stow the tackle is greatly rewarded with more and bigger fish and the best possible experience for my guests.

So, what is the good news? Well, truth be told, I feel you can cheat with two of these four outfits and be on top of angling situation 90% of the time!

The Dynamic Duet: Empowered Harmony. You may have your own brands that you are loyal to. That is terrific! My intention for this article is to give you a starting reference point. So, above, I’ve included 13Fishing product numbers so that you can look them up online and use their specs to cross reference your favourite brands.

The Dynamic Duet consists of the Medium-Light and the Medium-Heavy combos. Their overlap of line test, varying from #4 monofilament to #20 braid, makes the antiquated mentality of the Medium Powered, option, obsolete.

Most people of Just Fishing Nation chase walleye, pike and panfish with a few stocked trout, lakers and muskies in the mix. So many species, so many techniques... let us count the ways! “Deadly Dozen” Doable with the “Dynamic Duet”

Medium-Light Applications:
1) Small-to-medium sized spoons or spinners such as the Blue Fox Strobe spoons and Vibrax spinners for everything that swims.
2) Ultra-Light crankbaits, such as the Rapala Ultralight Rippin Rap, cast on light line for many, many species.
3) Live bait rigging such as jumbo leeches fished on a single #8 Gamakatsu Octopus hook to catch many species of fish, in particular, giant walleye and smallmouth bass.
4) Bobber rigs with ultralight jigs and live bait such as the VMC Lighted slip bobber for nighttime or daytime panfish, walleye and bass.
5) Finesse jiggings such as ReelBait Flasher jigs baited with plastics or natural baits... best “catch-all” of all time!
6) Drop Shot fishing with a Gamakatsu Swivel-Shot hook and VMC tungsten drop shot weights another “catch-all” tactic.

Plus, Medium-Heavy Applications:
7) Swimbait and other big plastics including 5” Big Hammer swimbait and 3.5”-5.5” Storm (Continued on page 22.)
With a transducer built right into the motor, you get crystal clear Humminbird® MEGA Down Imaging® and a clean, protected look. So put a bird in your motor – and more fish on your line.
Double Trouble continued from page 8.

You can make it peck into the sand, mud and detritus looking exactly like it would be. When you lower it to the line tie positioned where the dorsal fin is above it and come charging in when the dinner bell rings.

To worry about it when you’re fishing a modern-day tandem rig.

And to note the preference often changes. But you never have to worry about it when you’re fishing a modern-day tandem rig.

Carp and catfish, for example.

Add to this, top techniques of your own. See these tactics in action on my YouTube channel: youtube.com/matitysgetfishing! Believe me, your success and fun will quadruple by adding a second fishing outfit to your arsenal. Get “The Duet” first. Then, add an Ultra-Light combo for more precision trolling and heavy casting applications for really big fish.

Seriously, just do it... The next time I see you on the water, you’ll thank me and possibly shout out, “Hey Jeff... If it’s nice enough to golf, it’s nice enough to go fishing!”

About the Author: Jeff Matity
A Fishing Industry Professional for nearly 30 years as a Fishing Guide & Promotional Staffer, with Bachelor’s Degrees in both Science & Education, Jeff uses this training in his job as a Fisheries Professional & Outdoor Educator (specializing in fishing via family business, GetFishing.ca) to reach out to anyone interested in learning about fish.
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Detail-oriented anglers who pay attention to the size and shape of a presentation are often rewarded with better catches on ice. “Matching the hatch” is a good rule of thumb year round, but it is especially critical for fussy fish in clear, icy waters. This is one perspective when it comes to bait profile. Another reality is that upsizing and using a large, sometimes gaudy, bait can help get the attention of trophies and apex predators. From dainty baits, to realistic decoys, to big lures, the ability of a presentation’s profile to attract and trigger fish should always be in the forefront of the modern ice-angler’s mind.

RIGHT PROFILE = MORE BITES

According to Minnesota guide, Brian “Bro” Brosdahl (http://brosguideservice.com/), the silhouette and shape of a bait are fundamental strike triggers. The fussier the fish, the increasingly critical these factors can become for coaxing hits.

“The days when fish are aggressive you can stick anything down the hole and they’ll bite it, but then there are the other times when getting the bait sized right is very important and you need to match the hatch,” Brosdahl said.

Speaking to bull bluegills, slab crappie, and portly perch - subjects near to Bro’s heart – he encourages anglers to stock their boxes with “true to shape” plastics for tough bite scenarios. For instance, the thin, wispy tail of a bloodworm (Chironomidae larva) is an important foodstuff for panfish, walleye and whitefish in winter.

To replicate this menu item, he reaches for either his namesake Impulse Bro’s Bloodworm or Impulse Skeleton Minnow soft-baits by Northland Fishing Tackle. When fish are dining on nymphs, Northland’s realistic mayfly or stone fly plastics get the nod. Yet, these examples just scratch the surface of his collection.

“We don’t know everything that swims in every lake,” Brosdahl said. “There’s insect life that has’t been classified yet, as well as bloodsuckers, freshwater shrimp, crayfish, a parade of minnows from young-of-the-year gamefish to shiner, dace, sucker, red horse, small pike, tiny largemouth bass, (and) little smallmouth.”

The headline here, folks, is regardless of the species, anglers who carry a good assortment of hard- and soft-plastic baits in varying shapes, sizes, and colours are better able to cater to the fishes’ dietary and daily preferences. And, that equates to attracting more fish and triggering more strikes.

A CASE FOR UPSIZING

While realistically decoying forage is effective, especially for inactive and neutral fish, upsizing can also work at times. This is a subject Walt Matan, lure designer with Custom Jigs & Spins, has spent a good amount of time researching.

“After spending hundreds of hours watching how bluegill and other fish react to ice jigs using the Aqua-Vu camera, I noticed that adding larger pieces of plastic to jigs tends to keep the smaller fish away,” Matan said.

One of his more potent creations is the Tungsten Bug. With a profile akin to a medieval weapon, this presentation smashes big panfish. The first step is sliding a Custom Jigs & Spins Nuclear Ant Legs on a Chekai jig, followed by a Wedgee finesse tail to complete the package. “I also noted that a jig that rides at a 30- to 45-degree angle, like the Chekai and the Majmun tungsten jigs, had a better hooking percentage than a true horizontal jig,” Matan said. “The key is to keep the plastic riding near horizontal, so that when you jig it, it undulates and attracts.”

Using a bulky bait to weed out smaller fish and appeal to larger ones is always worth trying. This strategy paid last winter for my friends and I on a small, pothole lake. The crappie in the system are some of the most elusive I’ve encountered and I gain grey hairs each winter from pursuing them.

A PROFILE PERSPECTIVE FROM TONY BOSHOULD

Chicago based ice guide Tony Boshold (http://www.tony-boshold.com/ice-guide) is a firm believer in the power of profile (and colour) to be a deal-breaker for getting fish to commit.

“More often than not, pecking fish need something different,” said the two-time North American Ice Fishing Circuit Champ and World Ice Fishing gold medalist. “They are liking your movement enough to taste it and peck but [are] not suicidal. Changing through Little-Atom and VMC plastics’ profiles and colours is a quick and easy way to change attitudes... a simple colour or size change can be magical. Taking the size of jig down from a 5 to a 4 mm or a 1/16 to a 1/32 may be all they need to effectively eat it given the conditions.”
Most outings require an ultra-finesse approach using a thin plastic and tungsten jig to coax bites from fish roaming deep flats. One exception, it seems, is when crappie are grouped tightly together. Then upsizing stimulates the big ones. Using a bigger bait also helped attract big fish from a distance. Last year several 15-inchers hit the ice thanks to a Rapala Slab Rap.

COLOUR CONSIDERATIONS

The importance of getting profile right is a fact not lost on Dave Chong, one of Canada’s top competitive anglers. Chong spends much of his hard-water season on giant Lake Simcoe, where the invasive round goby is forage for many predators. “Whitefish are definitely feeding on gobies,” Chong said. “Same with jumbo perch.”

Chong finds a 2.5-inch tube is a reliable goby stand-in. While its shape is one factor, using a green pumpkin tube with hints of purple is critical for decoying a goby in Simcoe’s gin-clear water.

In a similar vein, Brosdahl recommends using a properly portioned lure with a barred paint finish to replicate the look of young-of-the-year yellow perch, a food source walleye and other predators are hard-wired to eat.

Colour considerations extend beyond “matching the hatch,” however, as Brosdahl notes fish see colours differently in varying degrees of water clarity. Lighting conditions also influence a fish’s vision. As such, colour is a factor in how well fish see a lure’s shape and silhouette. “Purple can be really hot in stained lakes and black is a great colour, even at night,” Brosdahl said. “Now, change to a clear or an aqua-blue lake that has a Caribbean look to it, and I’d be experimenting with bright colours or even blues. Then, of course, in tannic stained water mettalsics and mettalsics in colour are good because their refractivity is really nice... you’ve got to remember that what separates one guy sitting on the ice from another is the number of colours he brings.”

SETTING THE STAGE

Anglers also need be aware of how the position of bait in the water column will influence what a fish sees. Take presenting dead-bait for trophy northern pike. I’ve seen many instances when setting a quick-strike rig halfway up, if not higher, in the water column catches the majority of the fish. This seems especially true in shallow water. It is probable that a dead-bait higher in the water column is more visible.

Part of the reason why is likely because a pike positioned below the bait, and looking up, is better able to detect the bait’s silhouette as it contrasts the bright sheet of ice overhead. It is similar to why “up-viewing” is so effective when using an underwater camera. Looking up displays a fish’s dark shape distinctly against the white ice, more so than when down- or side-viewing against a darker background.

A fish’s ability to detect objects overhead is something Brosdahl emphasizes when jigging. Many times he’s seen this detail make or break an angler’s panfish outing. “During cold fronts it’s vitally important to slowly fish down to fish,” Brosdahl said. “They see the silhouette coming and even in darker water they’re aware of something coming down. They use all their senses, so fishing from the bottom of the hole to a fish is vitally important to trigger strikes.”

When fish are aggressive or in stained water, Brosdahl concedes bombing a bait to mid-depth and then starting the jigging sequence is acceptable. But, anglers are wise to experiment because, as he puts it, “not every fish needs a meteorite.”

Bait size, shape, and colour are important factors for attracting fish and triggering bites, but so too is the way an angler presents the package in the water column. Apply the profile perspectives offered here and you’re in for a stellar season on the ice.
As the days get shorter and the nights cooler, autumn is rapidly approaching! In fact there has already been a few frost warnings up here in the Great White North. Although we’re still planning on getting several more open water outings in as the fall can provide some of the best fishing of the year, our thoughts do wander to the hard water season. On those nasty blustery fall days, sometimes your time may be better spent preparing for the up-coming ice season.

The first matter that I would like to address is your ice fishing clothing. Especially during early & late ice fishing excursions, it is very important to wear a floater type suit! Safety should always be #1 when venturing out on the ice and we’ll address other safety equipment later in this article! For many years now I’ve had to endure floater suits that definitely didn’t add to my enjoyment out on the ice.

First, it was a 1 piece suit, which made me feel like the Michelin Man! And if you encountered a beautiful warm day, you had to unzip it and fold it down around your waist as to not totally melt! When I decided that I had enough of that, I graduated to a 2 piece floater suit and was happy to be able to take on my jacket on those warm sunny winter days. Although the suits were well made, I found them to be stiff and often after a long day on the ice, my body was sore & achy the next day. Of course, age may have something to do with that as well LOL!

Well last year at the Canadian Ice Fishing Expo in Barrie, I was approached by Striker to try out one of their StrikerIce suits. I had heard nothing but good things about this brand from good friends, Pete Garnier & Ashley Rae. I took a look at the line-up and was impressed with the fact that they had a number of different options including youth & women’s models! And each model incorporated the same amount of their Sureflote® Flotation Assistance Technology. The variation is primarily in the amount of Thermadex® Insulation and obviously the fit in the women’s & youth models. Even though these suits are not certified as PDF’s by both the Canadian or US Coast Guard, that really only comes into play if you’re wearing it in the boat during late open water seasons. Just make sure that you have an approved PDF on board and you’ll be fine. Major League bass pro David Lefebre who is also an avid ice angler did a great product review and test during one of his YouTube videos, check it out here – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDr97cRat28

One of the first things that you’ll notice about the StrikerIce suits is that ice anglers had a lot of input in their designs. From magnetic storm closures, removable hand wipe towels, heavy duty knee & butt padding, adjustable inseams on the bibs and so many more features that make this ultimate ice fishing suit! But the feature that I love the most (other than the adjustable inseams for us vertically challenged people) is the comfort of the suit, I was not sore one day after ice fishing last season. It is lightweight, flexible and ergonomically designed to allow you to move freely with as little effort as possible. Definitely the best flotation suit that I’ve ever owned! Being warm, dry and comfortable out on the ice is an integral part of an enjoyable day out there on the ice. Striker also has all the accessories as well from footwear, headwear, face coverings, hoodies, gloves etc. check out their line-up at www.strikerbrands.com.

As I stated previously, safety should always be priority #1 whenever venturing out on the ice! There are a number of must have items that you should always have with you. The first is a pair of ice picks in case you ever end up going through the ice. The HT Retractable Polar Ice Picks are my go-to’s here! I love the fact that the points retract so you’re not constantly getting jabbed or caught on something. The key to having ice picks is to wear them as they will do you little good if they’re in your bag when you go through!

Early and late glare ice can be extremely slippery when there is little or no snow on top of it! It is very important to wear cleats while on the ice to ensure that no mishaps happen to you. Although regular ice cleats can be a hassle on the ice, they provide stability and surefootedness on glare ice and I don’t have to worry about losing one somewhere on the ice. Boots like Korkers with their interchangeable soles are great as well but at a substantially higher cost.

Approaching each ice season, there is often the debate about when it was time to go to electric as far as a power auger is concerned! In my opinion there should be no debate, electric is the definitely the way to go! With the improvement in lithium-ion batteries, the power and the number of holes that can be achieved on a single charge is incredible with electric products. The two augers that I used the most last season were the Strikemaster Lithium 40V 10” Ice Auger and the 8” HT E-Drill Ice Auger paired with a Milwaukee 18V Fuel Hammer Drill on a Clam Auger Drill Plate. These both run on lithium batteries and are brushless so they are super quiet and energy efficient. I was not able to drain a battery on either one of these setups during a full day of ice fishing! – www.clamoutdoors.com/pages/augers. Both units powered through ice easily and quickly. When we were Whitefish/Lake Trout fishing last year, it was very impressive how quickly that the Strikemaster Lithium 40V cut 10” holes. We were running & gunning quite a bit and there was plenty of juice left on the battery at the end of the day! There was almost no reason to carry a spare battery but we did anyway. Here is a great review by Jay Siemens on the Strikemaster unit – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stj5f58LYY!

Check out our HT E-Drill demo at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DylwrAv5ZQ. With electric augers the batteries charge up rapidly

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**By Dave Chong**

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and you no longer have to pull-start your auger, add oil to the gas, endure the smell of gas in your vehicle or the fumes in an enclosed space like a fish hut, etc. The number of holes that you can drill with 1 battery is more than sufficient for a full day of fishing. Perhaps the only advantage that gas powered augers have is their price point and I’m honestly not sure if manufacturers are just getting rid of them as I do believe that the writing is on the wall! – www.htice.com

Equipment-wise, I am truly surprised at the number of people who ice fishing without a fishfinder of some sort. Without some type of eyes beneath the ice, you’re fishing blind and trust me, I don’t like to fish blind. You have access to units as simple and affordable as a Garmin Striker 4 portable unit, which my brother has been using for the last couple of years and he loves it! You can also go to the other extreme and invest in a Garmin PanOptix Live Scope setup! Everyone has seen how much of an impact that forward scanning sonar can have on the professional bass circuits. A sonar unit or an underwater camera will help you locate fish and that is definitely the first step to catching more fish! – https://www.buy.garmin.com/en-CA/CA/cOnTheWater-c14501-p1.html

Every ice angler should have the Navionics Boating app on their phone or mobile device! I strongly believe that this is the best value that is available to us in fishing! Make sure that your subscription is current and if not get it updated so that you have the latest charts and have access to advanced features like Color Shaded Fishing Ranges. The app is a great tool for planning your trip or day on the ice. Your one subscription can be shared across your devices no matter what platform they’re on. Another great tool to help you fish and stay on fish. – www.navionics.com/fish/apps/navionics-boating

Tackle & gear organization is another aspect that I prioritize so obviously this is a good time to start packing up my ice fishing totes. Or if you were too lazy to do it last spring (like many of us), unpack & repack your bags! For quite a few years, I had 2 main totes, the HT Deneveu Creek Tackle Tote which has a large compartment and 2 side compartments and the larger Polar Fire Extreme Tackle Tote. My HT bag is used for my Perch & Panfish gear and the Polar Fire is used for my Lake Trout, Whitefish & Walleye gear because of its ability to handle rods up to 43”! The Polar Fire case also has multiple side pockets/compartments for more tackle.

The latest storage/carrying case that has caught my eye is the Striker Transporter. Although larger, this case can be worn like a backpack or easily strapped to your sled/ATV! Roomy and hard-sided, there is plenty of room for tackle and easy access to everything. This appears to be the ultimate carrying case for the avid ice angler, I’m looking forward to loading one up soon!

It’s always a great idea to change your line at least once a season minimum! You should always start a new ice season with fresh line. For you light line enthusiasts the Sunline FC Ice Premium & Yo-Zuri Topknot Ice Fishing line are both top quality fluorocarbon lines worthy trying. If you’re more into braid then the Power Pro Ice-Tec is a great coated braid to prevent ice build-up. After spooling any new line, I always like to treat it with some KVD Line & Lure Conditioner. This product helps make fluorocarbon much more supple & manageable, especially on spinning reels. If you retreat your line with it on the ice, I find that it also helps reduce ice build-up when fishing outdoors on those cold winter days. – www.sunlineamerica.com/shop/fluorocarbon-fishing-line/, www.powerpro.com/content/powerpro/northamerica/us/en/homepage/PDRP-ICE-TEC.html, www.lineandlure.com

Check your lures and replace any hooks that may have started rusting! Take out any spoons that might be tarnished and clean them up with a bit of metal polish! Review your tackle selection and see what you might need to top up on! Again, if the past summer has taught us anything is that you should buy the tackle you want or need whenever you see it at your local retailer because if they run out, who knows when it will be back in stock! Stock up on your favourite Slab Grabbers and other ice fishing gear. Think about what you might want to try and experiment with this up-coming ice season. It’s a great time to plan before the demand on gear goes crazy! – www.mcgathshooks.com

For me, I’m looking forward to a full season of perch fishing with the Yo-Zuri Rattl’N Vibe Mini. This is a 1.5/8” 3/16 oz. lipless that is great for not only perch but also Walleye fishing. Of course, Yo-Zuri also has a full line-up of Rattl’N Vibes in three larger sizes (2.1/8” 3/8oz. – 2 1/2” 5/8oz. – 3” 3/4oz.) with some awesome colours for Lake Trout, Pike etc. One of the great things about the Yo-Zuri lures is that not only are they top quality but they come with beautiful black nickel hooks that don’t need to be replaced. – www.yo-zuri.com

Another great looking lipless lure is EuroTackle’s Z-Viber, which is offered in 5 different sizes. Definitely going to give these a try this year, they’ve been super-hot on the ice scene! EuroTackle also has some cool unique looking plastics like their Gamma Scud, Crazy Critter & Fat Assassin that will probably find their way into my ice box. – www.eurotackle.net

Don’t forget to add a tube of Liquid Mayhem to your ice bag. Often anglers forget about using scent during the ice season but there will be days when the bite is tough that scent can make all the difference in the world. The great thing about Liquid Mayhem is that it’s a gel scent that has great adhesive properties, you can apply to a spoon such as your Slab Grabbers and it will remain on there for a long time. My favourites for ice fishing are the Shad, Garlic Minnow & Garlic Crawfish scents. – www.liquidmayhem.com

Speaking about ice boxes, The Bass Mafia Ice Boxes are not designed strictly for ice fishing but because they made with a transparent & super tough material, they are perfect as they can be banged around and you don’t have to worry about them breaking. The 1800 size has been a god-send for me in helping me manage my terminal tackle, both on open water and during the ice season. They come with the maximum number of dividers so you can easily customize each box to your liking! They do come in a higher price point but since you don’t have to worry about replacing them when they break... They are also available in 3600 & 3700 sizes. – www.mafiaoutdoors.com/products/ice-box-1800

Anyway, I hope that I’ve given you enough work to prepare for the up-coming ice season. Treat yourself to some new tackle in these Covid times and in the meantime, please stay safe and keep well!! Until we see you on the hard water...

Fish Hard! Dream Big! – www.lineandlure.com

David Chong is widely recognized as one of Canada’s top competitive tournament anglers. He is also an avid multi species angler and is a strong advocate for affordable, accessible angling for all! David loves sharing his vast fishing knowledge and stories with anglers of all ages, beginners and pros alike!

Editor’s Note

Fish Hard! Dream Big!
Full Spectrum for PANFISH

By: Jason Mitchell

The presentation spectrum can run from extremely finesse to aggressive. Small subtle vertical jigs like the CPT Half Ant size 10 paired with 1-lb. Frost Fluorocarbon are deadly when panfish need finesse. The presentation typically begins with much lighter line. Usually 1- or 2-pound mono or fluorocarbon (I find myself using a lot of Fluorocarbon when dropping down to light line but get your knots wet) balanced with much smaller profile jigs. Examples for jigs might be a size 10 CPT Half Ant or a size 16 CPT Drop Jig.

A hard lesson I have had to relearn many times myself, however, is to never make up my mind before I get on the ice. I cannot assume anything and go through a process of elimination as I work through spots and presentations. There is also something to be said for zigging when everybody else is zagging. If most anglers are fishing aggressively over basins or holes with, for example, large tungsten horizontal jig profiles and large plastics, a great play can often be to use finesse when not many anglers are doing it. On the flip side, if people are focusing on small profile, vertical tear drop style jigs tipped with live bait like wax worms relying on finesse to catch fish... power fishing with more aggressive presentations gives the fish a different look.

Some situations or days will bode well for finesse. Another day or situation might bode well for more aggressive presentations on the spectrum. Finesse might be a tiny CPT Half Ant tipped with a waxworm below one-pound mono. Aggressive might be a CPT Pinhead Minnow or CPT Drop XL rigged with a Maki Jamei below 3- or 4-pound mono or even braid.

What we so often see however in our travels is how many anglers will simply get into a rut from past success. Many ice anglers tend to be in one camp or the other. In my humble opinion, one of the worst things we can do as anglers is believe this spectrum of presentations is a contest where one specific presentation trumps another. Rewire your thought process to understand that these different presentations truly complement each other. Aggressive approaches compliment finesse and vice versa. If you are a finesse angler, learn to fish more aggressively. Have that arrow in your quiver. If you like to power fish and fish aggressively, also learn how to use finesse. Round yourself out as an angler and you will be much more dangerous on the ice.

Finesse Fishing

On the finesse end of the spectrum, the presentation typically begins with much lighter line. Usually 1- or 2-pound mono or fluorocarbon (I find myself using a lot of Fluorocarbon when dropping down to light line but get your knots wet) balanced with much smaller profile jigs. Examples for jigs might be a size 10 CPT Half Ant or a size 16 CPT Drop Jig.

As a rule of thumb, vertical jigs like the Half Ant fish much smaller and subtler because there is much less profile for the fish to see as the fish looks up at the jig. On the toughest bites, live bait like Eurolarvae or waxworms often trump soft plastics, but not always. Finesse bites often demand that the presentation be delicate where the jig simply floats in the water without spinning or turning. On tough bites, the jig often has to get worked down to the fish from much higher in the water column and the fish often have a low ceiling... meaning that the fish won’t rise in the water column to chase. There are definitely times where you must rely on finesse to get bit.

On the flip side, you often catch fewer fish by relying on finesse. For example, on a good bite... fish cannot see or feel your presentation far away so you might contact fewer fish. More can and will go wrong over the course of a day when using one- or two-pound mono. You must be much more careful with your knots, for example, when tying a loop knot with one-pound mono. It’s much easier to break off fish when setting the hook or wrapping up on...
a transducer. You will have to reach over and grab each good fish at the hole versus lifting fish out of the water to your hand. Small jigs often get inhaled much deeper so unhooking fish and getting back down into the water takes more time. Finesse can simply save your day or ruin your day, depending on the day.

**Get Aggressive**

The power fishing mentality incorporates more aggressive presentations, like larger horizontal tungsten and soft plastic combinations, spoons like the CPT Pinhead Minnow or horizontal swim lures like the Tikka Minnow. The magic is often simply breaking down more water at faster speeds. With these larger, heavier presentations, you can also sometimes get away with much heavier line like 3- or 4-pound mono or fluorocarbon or in some cases even braid with a fluorocarbon or mono leader, particularly when using spoons or horizontal swim lures. You are not only fishing fast through water but also using a presentation profile that fish can find from much farther away. With aggressive presentations, anglers can pull fish up higher in the water column if fish are willing to chase.

Fishing high and big, well above the mass of fish, is a proven big-fish strategy for plucking the largest panfish out of a school. Fishing high and big typically produces some of the largest crappie we catch each winter. The reasons are simple. The biggest fish are often more comfortable leaving the security of the school to chase prey. The biggest fish are also much better predators and simply swim faster than the smaller fish so the big fish often beat the small fish to the presentation. Aggressive presentations often get the nod from us whenever we must simply find fish by getting away from crowds and sample a lot of water.

**Combine the Two**

The other very real reality is that an aggressive presentation spectrum is a moving target. We might find fish or eliminate water where there are no fish with aggressive presentations. There are days when you can keep pounding on fish through the day with aggressive presentations after fish are found but there are also many days when you simply find fish by being aggressive and after the first few easy fish... we catch more fish by falling back on finesse.

Time of day can also have a bearing on the presentation spectrum. Early and late in the day can sometimes be more conducive for fishing aggressively but finesse might be required during the middle of the day when the sun gets high overhead. As a rule of thumb, rely on aggressive presentations when first finding fish but recognize that the longer you sit on fish, the more finesse is required.

Break out finesse as you wear out your welcome. We sometimes see this transgression in a single day or sometimes you will see the transgression over multiple days. After you find fish and catch fish, the fishing will ultimately get tougher as you remove fish because there are fewer fish competing. When the fishing does get tougher, you have a choice to make: find new fish or scale down to finesse to catch the fish that are left.

On some very heavily pressured fisheries, you might have to start with finesse and end with finesse. If you can be the first angler to land on a pod of fish, though, you can often find and catch fish with aggressive presentations. This might surprise some anglers who believe finesse is the only way to catch panfish on certain waters. If, however, you are going to use aggressive presentations on heavily fished lakes, you better be on first ice ahead of the crowds, last ice after the crowds or find some wrinkle or location that the crowds are missing. An example might be fishing shallow weed flats when 90 percent of the other anglers are out over a basin or hole. Fishing the deep abyss when everybody else is hunkered over shallow weeds. Go back to zigging when everybody else is zagging.

(Continued on page 32.)
When we look at the entire presentational spectrum ranging from extreme finesse to extremely aggressive presentations, most anglers would be well served to broaden their own confidence with these different tools. There are a lot of analogies like adding another arrow in the quiver or having more tools in your toolbox, but versatility simply often catches more fish. If you can be confident, flexible and adaptable with a wider range of presentations, I believe that most ice anglers can be much more dangerous regardless of whether they do a lot of traveling to fish a variety of water or simply targeting one specific fishery. Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of different presentation strategies can make you a much better ice angler.

(continued from page 31.)

Editor's Note: Jason Mitchell, of Devils Lake, ND., is a professional angler and guide who also hosts the “Jason Mitchell Outdoors” television show. He guides with the famous “Perch Patrol” on Devils Lake in the winter. www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com

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Location... Location... Location...

The steps to follow in locating fish under the ice is no easy task. Anglers heading out on lakes with little or no ice fishing pressure are in for some plain old hard work. Few anglers relish the challenge of finding fish on a new lake. Most prefer “following the crowds” and let their eyes be their fish finders. To some, going from one group of anglers to another is their form of “recon”. If you ice fish, you may not want to join the crowd or at some time you will be faced with the challenge of being the only angler on the ice, so here are a few tips to remember the next time it happens to you and you want to find fish.

Your first step is to understand the kind of water you are going to fish. This will mean getting a lake map and looking at the types of structure you have available to you at this time of year. Remember, your ability to travel on a lake may be limited to foot power or poor ice conditions may limit the areas you can reach safely. It is always a good idea to know the roads and the various winter access points that surround any given lake.

When it comes to finding fish, every time you try to make rules as to where you SHOULD find fish, the rules change. Like catching sunfish at night, many would agree that sunfish don’t bite at night, but in some lakes, you don’t catch the really big ones until the sun goes down... go figure. Here are a few good guidelines to use to begin your search, simply because you will need to start someplace. The more you learn by fishing, the more you can refine the rules that govern the lake you are on that day.

Walleyes love deep, hard bottom areas. Crappies and perch love waters of over 30 feet with a super soft bottom, and sunfish love to hang off steep weedy break lines. Finding the right fish holding elements for the fish you are after is fairly easy with a lake map. If the lake has one deep hole, then you would start there for crappie. If a lake is a maze of structure, then it is best to break the lake into small regions that you can work without getting too confused. Your first goal on most lakes is to establish the edge of the weed line. Most winter lakes get far clearer then they do in the summer, and some of the biggest sunfish in the lake move into the old weed line for protection from predators. Checking the edge of the weed line is even better if you are near a point or inside turn where the deep water comes closest to shore.

Courtesy of: www.vexilar.com
The ability to endure sub-zero temps, grind through sixteen inches of ice, then wait patiently for a strike, requires a highly motivated angler. Thankfully, advancements in technology like imaging electronics, GPS, and thermal ice shelters allow anglers to comfortably focus on being effective. Similarly, advancements in materials technology provided our design team the opportunity to push rod performance to the next level. These actions represent the pinnacle of performance. Lightweight and scary-sensitive, even the lightest bite feels like freight train. It may be cold, but that is all forgotten when you have this stick in your hot hands.

FEEL CONNECTED.
When my grandson Liam was two years old, he would stand on my lap and help me steer the boat. He is 18-years old now, taller than I am and reigns in 225 horses as we weave through the 14,000 island tangle called Lake of the Woods. And me – I am sitting in the passenger seat taking life easy.

It is the same thing in the winter when we snowmachine into the backcountry in pursuit of walleye, lake trout, black crappies, yellow perch, whitefish and pike. If we were to break down and were required to spend the night in the bush, I can’t think of another person I’d rather rely upon.

He starts the shore lunch fire without matches, knows how to build an emergency shelter in freezing temperatures, ties superb knots and casts a baitcasting outfit more accurately than 90-percent of the adults. As for using the sonar units, GPS chart plotter and electric trolling motors, well, let’s not even go there.

Thirty years ago, I benefited from a similar relationship with the young kid down the street. Jeff Gustafson has since grown up to become not only one of the best bass anglers on the continent, but more importantly, a model citizen.

I like to think I’ve played a small role in helping shape the two angling monsters, but at the same time, watching Jeff and Liam evolve has taught me plenty. I say this because most of what I have read and heard over the years about teaching kids how to fish is unadulterated fluff.

Here is the most important thing I have learned. Don’t treat them as kids. Sitting your young’uns in a boat for hours waiting for a bobber to go under is as exciting as watching paint dry. So, don’t inflict the punishment on them.

I’ll never forget smiling every time a young “Gussy” hoped into the boat wearing a Snoopy life jacket, clutching a quiver of rods in one hand and a multi-tier tackle box in the other. Even when we were fishing for bottom hugging walleyes that were primed to be picked off with a jig and minnow, if Jeff had 35 lures stuffed into his tackle box trays, I can assure you that by nights end, all 35 lures were wet.

When I look back on it now, it is why the kid from Kenora is so versatile and tearing up the bass circuit.

So why do we insist that youngsters not cast in the boat, especially with baitcasting reels?

As any fly fisher will tell you, and as every kid knows intuitively, casting is half the fun of fishing. It is also routinely the best way to catch fish, so show them how do it properly, wearing sunglasses, and then get out of the way.

At the same time, cater to your kid’s preferences. It is a funny thing, but in my Northwestern Ontario neck of the woods, where we find walleye, lake trout, northern pike and smallmouth bass in abundance, largemouth bass are an exotic species, relegated to a select few locations.

Yet, for some strange reason, both Jeff and Liam immediately gravitated to the big green fish. I think part of the reason is because we target them...
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Even today, Liam will flip, pitch, punch mats and frog for largemouth in spots where the chance of catching one is about the same as winning the lottery. But he loves to do it, as Jeff did before him, so why would I deny him the pleasure? And you know what is going to happen when he finally does get into good largemouth bass habitat.

Ditto, playing with all of the high-tech tools that grace our boats these days.

What? You won’t let your eight-year-old touch your sonar unit or chart plotter?

Listen, before you can open up the manual to check if they’re doing it properly, they’ll be setting the pages to split screen, saving your favourite profiles, renaming waypoints, programming I-paths and linking up everything via Ethernet.

A smartphone’s dumb compared to these fun fishing toys. So, take a deep breath, stop treating them like kids and they’ll love you for it.
LureMaking.com has everything you need to make your own professional spinners, including a huge selection of spinner blades, brass bodies, clevises, wire shafts, and treble hooks.

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3. Slide clevis and blade onto wire shaft and form end loop. (see luremaking.com for simple wire bending techniques using needle nose pliers)

Select your spinner components.

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Over the past two decades I've fished with nearly thirty guides across North America. Redfish and snook in Florida, stripers in Kentucky, salmon in Alaska, muskies in North Western Ontario and the Ottawa Valley, long nose gar in Eastern Ontario, and trophy walleye on the Bay of Quinte have all been pursued with various guides. I've learned a lot from many of these specialists and have developed long term friendships with a few.

The guiding profession is a tough way to make a living. Days start well before picking up a customer at the dock and last much longer than when the client steps out of the boat. For a guide, every day comes with the pressure of having to produce fish regardless of conditions. The lifestyle of a guide isn't for everyone. (If you want to discover what it’s really like being a guide, read The Guiding Life in the 2018 summer issue of Just Fishing.)

My experiences being guided have run the gamut from exceptional to poor, with the majority scattered somewhere in between. I have experienced stellar days when fishing was well below average. I have also been left wanting when catching fish involved simply hitting the water with a cast. While the majority of the guides I’ve hired have done a solid job for me, only a select few have excelled.

Knowing that not all guides are created equal begs the following question – what differentiates an elite guide from the rest? Is it their ability to catch fish? Teach new skills and tactics about different bait presentations? Explain how water temperatures and weather conditions affect fishing? Yes, it’s all of the above. But, there’s much more involved in guiding than the “technical” side of fishing.

The Core of the Guiding Business

Guides are in the service business. The very best understand that in any marketplace, the only true competitive advantage is customer service. Elite guiding businesses are anchored on three bedrock service principles. First, every customer has unique needs and expectations. Next, only the customer can assess value for dollar, and what value means differs from customer to customer. Finally, meeting customer expectations is not the ultimate goal – exceeding them is. The exceptional guide invests as much time understanding customer needs as on perfecting fishing tactics.

To emphasize this point, here are two contrasting personal experiences I have had when being guided for muskies.

The first occurred on a traditional Canadian shield lake in late September, a difficult time to target muskies on many systems. Expansive summer ranges begin to be break down at this time of year. Fish are constantly on the move before setting up in fall locations. Simply put, the bite can be tough. On my day with a local guide we contacted a half dozen fish and caught a beautiful musky in the 25-27 pound range. Sounds pretty successful, right? Wrong! When we arrived at our first spot, my guide jumped out of the driver’s seat and claimed the front deck as his own. Right off the jump, I was at a major disadvantage. The program involved making accurate casts to large boulders on rocky shorelines and shallow reefs. The guide’s bait was always the first bait through key ambush spots while my casts were into used water. Needless to say, the guide caught our one and only musky. To top off a completely unsatisfying day on the water, when we got back to the dock, my guide provided what he thought was constructive criticism on some of my bait choices during the day. Perhaps his intentions were good but his timing was lousy. So was paying him $500 to net his fish!

The second instance involved a day with legendary musky guide, Marc Thorpe. In eight hours fishing with Marc, my musky IQ skyrocketed. I learned many tactics I could confidently transfer to my home waters. Marc shared his expertise on musky behaviour and productive patterns in certain weather conditions and at specific times of the season. This PhD level instruction has paid off for me more times than I can count since. During the day, Marc made a total of four casts, all to show me how to improve my ability to work a glide bait. How many fish did we catch that day? One... and it was a five pound pike. For me as a customer though, it was a day of exceptional value.

The Customer Experience

For any customer regardless of their fishing background, a day with a guide is an experience. And, it is up to the guide to create the kind of experience is more than just catching fish.

(Continued on page 42.)
experience that the customer wants. Does the client simply want to catch a bunch of fish or to land a trophy? Learn a specific presentation like how to drag tubes jigs in deep water for smallmouth or how to fish suspended walleye? Become more skilled with boat control or using electronics? Every customer will have personal objectives. Some may not be directly related to fishing. It's very possible that a leisurely day on the water seeing birds and wildlife and having a relaxing shore lunch is equally as important to a customer as catching a boat load of fish.

Discovering what the customer wants to achieve and experience occurs before the key is turned in the boat. Only then can a guide customize the day to meet client needs. One guide who excels at this is Shimano Field Staffer Rob “RJ” Jackson. Jackson is an extremely popular multi species guide in Eastern Ontario. His clients rave about their days on the water with him. Given his philosophy about guiding, it’s no wonder. “Guiding is all about giving the client the kind of day they want. If the person wants to catch numbers regardless of size, I tailor the day around that goal. If it’s a trophy hunt, I select water systems and tactics that put my customer in the best possible position to land the fish of a lifetime”.

(Continued on page 42.)
Welcome Aboard

The old expression that you only have one chance to make a good first impression is very true in the guiding profession. A well organized, clean guide boat that looks like it just came out of a marina showroom says something to a customer. So does one that resembles a construction site. Having fished out of both I can assure you that my overall experience of being guided is influenced by my first look at where I’m going to be for 8 or 10 hours.

The initial ten or 15 minutes at dock side is also a critical time to set the tone for the day. Greg Amiel of Fishing4Tails is a master at this. His spacious, comfortable LUND is immaculate. Customers are shown where all safety equipment is stored and how to use it in case of an emergency. In conversation, Amiel quickly assesses his guest’s competence with tackle and gear and their overall experience being on the water. The latter is important. Seasoned anglers will be completely comfortable flying across the lake at 60 miles an hour. For inexperienced boaters, this can be a terrifying way to start their day.

Setting The Customer Up For Success

Virtually every guide I’ve hired has been an excellent angler, well versed in a wide variety of presentations. Having fished for decades, I have most often, been familiar with the programs and tactics guides have recommended. But, not every customer is an accomplished angler. Some have fished but a few times and some, not at all. In these cases, it is a disservice to expect a client

Rob “RJ” Jackson guided the author on gar outing.

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to make accurate casts to isolated targets in shallow, snag filled water or competently rip jerk baits in a fish attracting cadence. The upper echelon guide matches the day’s fishing tactics to a customer’s experience and skill level. Live bait under a slip bobber, vertical jigging, trolling, or simply chucking and winding a spinner bait are better options for a novice angler. The objective is simple – have customers catch fish. It doesn’t matter how.

I once heard a guide telling a group of buddies that a customer had broken a rod during the day’s charter. When someone empathized, the guide laughed and said “It doesn’t matter. The rod was a cheap piece of junk. I never give rookies good gear”. I made a mental note to never recommend that guide. Handing an inexperienced customer a $600 rod is an expensive disaster waiting to happen but outfitting them with a combo found in a bargain bin is insulting. There are many good quality, mid-price range rods and reels that will help a novice angler cast competently, feel a bite and set the hook. Amiel, for example, uses Loomis E6X trolling rods when targeting trophy walleye on the Bay of Quinte in late fall. These rods don’t break the bank and are excellent tools for anglers at all levels.

A Hot Button Topic – Should A Guide Fish?

Some guides believe that they are being paid to go fishing. In my opinion, this entitled belief flies in the face of delivering optimum customer service. Most people hire a guide to catch fish, not to see the guide catch fish. Yes, a customer can certainly benefit from watching a guide demonstrate how to fish a specific technique. But, once the customer is reasonably competent with the presentation, the guide’s rod should go back in the locker. Paying hard earned money to net the guide’s fish is like ordering an expensive meal in a restaurant, then having the chef sit at your table and eat half of it.

Some of the very best guides I have hired have asked me whether I wanted them to fish. I have said both yes and no depending on the situation. When the goal of the day is to catch a bunch of three to five pound walleye, I have no problem with my guide joining in on the action. Conversely, if my mission is to land a 50 inch musky or a six pound smallmouth, I do not want to be competing with a guide when the day will likely only offer one opportunity at a trophy fish.

I’ve heard every theory in the book from guides who want to fish. No matter how articulate the argument though, it is not about the guide catching fish. It is always about the client being successful. The best advice I can offer a guide about this topic is to ask each customer their preference about who should fish and to respect that decision. After all, the customer is paying the bill.
So Many Spots, So Little Time

Every guide has favourite areas to fish, ones that produce fish for customers. Over time though, relying on the same go-to spots become a guide’s worst nightmare. Ultimately, the guide’s customers pay the price. Science has proven that fish can be programmed to avoid objects and sounds associated with previous bad experiences, like getting a mouthful of hooks. The daily “ping” of sonar units, the noise and vibration of trolling motors, and an endless parade of baits can cause fish to either shut down or relocate.

One guide I questioned about this explained the dilemma. “I have to produce fish for my clients or they won’t book me again and won’t recommend me to their friends. So, I fish the same series of spots where I’ve been successful in the past. I can’t afford to explore new areas that may not pay off.”

Many guides have very few off days during the season, and as much as they love to fish, there are always chores to do, gear to repair and phone calls to return. And, a day or two of complete rest on the couch is always appealing for a hard working guide.

An elite guide though, is always exploring their water system to find the next go-to spots.

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This means burning a lot of gas and putting in many unpaid hours. One such guide is Darcy Cox who owns Tank Industries on Lake of the Woods. Cox specializes in targeting trophy muskies. Having hired Cox a number of times I can attest that he’s one of the best in the business. On one trip with Cox, my buddy landed his first 50 inch musky on a spot that

Cox had earmarked for us, one he had recently found on a rare day he wasn’t booked.

**Being The Standard**

Because many of their customers look up to them, upper echelon guides know they occupy a position of influence. And, the best of the best take this very seriously. They set the example for environmental stewardship and responsible resource management. They also represent their communities with class, enriching the guiding experience for customers interested in local history and folk lore. The best guides are stellar representatives of their boat and tackle sponsors, never overhyping product and sounding like a walking infomercial.

Most of all, gold standard guides excel as service providers. Every time the elite guide says “welcome aboard”, their priority is to create an experience that the customer will remember for all the right reasons for a long time.
Walleyes and other species know when fall arrives both by the decreasing amounts of daylight and also from the drop in water temperatures. They instinctively know winter is coming and they have to change locations and put on the feed bag before winter arrives.

Walleyes and other species will begin to move out of the shallows and gather into larger schools before winter arrives. By the time fall rolls around, deep water access and complex structures are what the fish want, with everything they need provided for them in a specific location.

Fish don’t want to make long feeding movements in the fall or during the winter. They want to move around the same structure and find both feeding areas and resting areas all in the same general location. My Humminbird Helix 12 3GSI is critical to my guiding success all year, but when the fish move deep in the fall, sonar is even more important for finding fish and the right types of habitat.

I like a Gamakatsu #2 or #4 wide gap light wire hook. Sometimes it is necessary to clip the line on a deeply hooked fish, so I don’t want a heavy wire hook or a saltwater hook because they take too long to dissolve. I often use a plain dark colored hook with no beads or if I want to get fancy, I will use a coloured hook or add a single bead to the set-up. Usually an orange, red, pink or glow bead.

I use 8-lb. test Sunline fluorocarbon leaders with the minnow rigs, with a 4 or 6 pound test leader if the lake has very clear water or if I am fishing heavy pressured fish or during a tournament, when an extra bite or two can be huge.

I like the St. Croix Legend Elite 7 1/2 foot medium action rods to give me a good hook set, but St. Croix has several price points for rods and all of them are top notch, so everyone can have one to suit their budget. I spool the reel with 10lb. Sunline SX1 Braid and use a 1/4 to 1/2 ounce Northland rock runner sinkers, depending on how deep I am fishing.

Leeches are another important bait in the fall. Once the leeches get tough to find in the bait stores, the walleyes seem to crave them over most other baits. Walleyes can’t count the last time I checked, so if the leeches are small, you can use two or use a double hook rig to make the leeches look larger.

Night crawlers can be a player late in the season too, so don’t hesitate to try different baits when a school of walleyes stops biting. It can mean an extra fish or two, which can help whether I am guiding or fishing a tournament.

(Continued on page 47.)
Fall 2019

Fall 2019

If I am using a jig, I will use a 6’ 3’’ St. Croix medium light action Legend Elite with 10 pound test Sunline SX1 braid with an 8 pound test Sunline fluorocarbon leader. I use a Northland Stand-up Fireball long shank jig in 1/4 ounce with a larger minnow. I may also use a round head long shank Fireball or an RZ jig, depending on what conditions I am fishing.

The weather late in the fall is very unpredictable, so anglers have to be on short notice and take advantage of the opportunities as they happen.

Good Luck Fishing Anglers, Fish On ‘Bro

About the Author: Brian “Bro” Brosdahl, is a fishing guide and promoter. One of the most recognized and respected anglers in North America – Bro, as he’s known, is a multispecies angler best known for his influence on the sport of ice fishing. He can be booked for guided trips at: bbro@paulbunyan.net or brosguideservice.com

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CLAYTON, N.Y. —

His home waters were off-limits this week, but that didn’t stop Canadian standout Chris Johnston from winning the SiteOne Bassmaster Elite at St. Lawrence River with a whopping four-day total of 20 smallmouth bass that weighed 97 pounds, 8 ounces. The first Canadian to claim an Elite title, Johnston was the only competitor to break 20 pounds each day. Hailing from Peterborough, Ontario, he placed second on Day 1 with 27-0 and held that position for two more days with weights of 24-12 and 23-0.

Entering Championship Sunday a little more than 2 pounds off the lead, Johnston added a final limit of 22-12 to surge ahead of Connecticut pro Paul Mueller and win by a margin of 1-10. Mueller had led the event all three days going into the final round. “This has been a crazy year fishing-wise for me; I had two of the worst tournaments probably in my career and to bounce back and win on the St. Lawrence, of all places, is just incredible,” said Johnston, who finished 71st and 59th in the first two Elite Series events this year. “I’ve watched Bassmaster my whole life and even if you’d asked me three or four years ago, I didn’t think I’d be here in this position. It’s been surreal. I can’t even describe how cool it feels.”

Throughout the week, Johnston used several baits, including a tube, a Ned rig and a black hair jig. On Sunday, he caught his fish on a drop shot with a green pumpkin Berkley Flat Worm. He needed a 3/8-ounce tungsten weight for proper presentations on Lake Ontario, where steady 6-foot waves made everything more difficult than it had been the three previous days.

The first two days saw Johnston plucking early keepers from a rocky point inside the river and then moving out to fish Lake Ontario rockpiles in 20 to 40 feet. On Saturday and Sunday, he did the majority of his work in the Great Lake. The tournament’s first three days offered mostly calm conditions, but Sunday saw strong southwest winds, which created conditions so rough that many anglers who qualified for the Championship round elected to stay in the safer confines of the St. Lawrence River. A lifetime of experience told Johnston Lake Ontario held his best opportunity to catch a winning bag, so he committed to one key area with several rockpiles in 20 to 50 feet of water along a 500-yard stretch. “The biggest thing with the weather is just getting to your spot,” Johnston said of his safety-conscious navigation. “Once I got there, I just went upwind and drifted into the spot and then held on the spot as long as I could. Then I’d blow off the spot and do another drift.”

In 2019, Johnston experienced the inverse of this year’s finish, leading the St. Lawrence event for three days before settling for the runner-up position. “Finishing second last year makes this win all that much sweeter,” Johnston said. “I can’t wait to get home and celebrate with family and friends.” Johnston earned $102,000 for his victory.

Mueller finished in second place with 95-14. After leading the event for three days, he found the rough waters of Lake Ontario less generous. In the Championship round, he added 18-15 to his previous weights of 27-1, 25-1 and 24-13. He targeted rockpiles and rock breaks in 17 to 21 feet and caught all of his fish on a drop shot with a Berkley Flat Worm in the natural shad color. Uncertain of how long it would take him to run back through the rough water to the weigh-in site, Mueller left the lake around 1:45 p.m. and ended up with time to fish the river. “Honestly, I think I feel like I left too early because I didn’t know how rough it was going to be,” Mueller said. “I felt like everything else I did today was flawless. I should have pushed it to the max, but I had no idea how long it was going to take to get back and that’s just inexperience on a body of water with that type of wind.” Mueller’s second prize earnings came to $27,000. He will also take home $3,000 for being the highest-placing entrant in the Toyota Bonus Bucks program. Brock Mosley of Collinsville, Miss., finished third with 84-2. His daily weights were 24-2, 19-13, 20-4 and 19-15.

Celebrating the birth of his second child on Wednesday, Mosley bucked the overwhelming smallmouth-heavy trend and targeted St. Lawrence’s robust, but largely overlooked, largemouth population around residential docks and flat rock shoals. “I caught all of my fish on a 3/8-ounce green pumpkin Z-Man Jack Hammer ChatterBait because I could cover a lot of water,” Mosley said. “That was the key. I had to cover a lot of water to run into a good one. “I used a couple of different trailers so I could fish an area with one trailer and then go back through it with a different trailer. I ended up catching a few smallmouth, too, but I caught them fishing for largemouth.”

Mueller won the race for Phoenix Boats Big Bass of the week with his 7-13 smallmouth. The bass, which he described as the “fish of a lifetime,” was just 7 ounces shy of the New York state record and is believed to be the largest smallmouth ever caught in a B.A.S.S. event.

The tournament was hosted by Jefferson County in cooperation with the Village of Clayton and the 1000 Islands Clayton Chamber of Commerce. 2020 SiteOne Bassmaster Elite At St. Lawrence River Title Sponsor: SiteOne 2020 Bassmaster Elite Series Platinum Sponsor: Toyota. 2020 Bassmaster Elite Series Premier Sponsors: Abu Garcia, Berkley, Humminbird, Mercury, Minn Kota, Nitro Boats, Power-Pole, Ranger Boats, Skeeter Boats, Talon, Yamaha

About B.A.S.S: B.A.S.S. is the worldwide authority on bass fishing and keeper of the culture of the sport, providing cutting edge content on bass fishing whenever, wherever and however bass fishing fans want to use it. Headquartered in Birmingham, Ala., the 515,000-member organization’s fully integrated media platforms include the industry’s leading magazines (Bassmaster and B.A.S.S. Times), website (Bassmaster.com), television show (The Bassmasters on ESPN2 and The Pursuit Channel), radio show (Bassmaster Radio), social media programs and events. For more than 50 years, B.A.S.S. has been dedicated to access, conservation and youth fishing.

(Continued on page 49)
ME & MY GUIDE DOG

Makings of a CNIB
Guide Dog

Lawrence Gunther is North America’s only blind professional angler, host of the Blue Fish Radio podcast, inventor of the Blind Fishing Boat, and founder of the recreational fishing conservation movement Blue Fish Canada. He’s also on the search for his next CNIB guide dog partnership.

Lawrence is helping the CNIB Guide Dog Program to train guide dogs that are comfortable guiding blind people in the outdoors. With over 33 years of guide dog use experience as an outdoor enthusiast, Lawrence and the CNIB produced ten videos documenting his work with their trainers and seven young guide dog trainees as they tackle everything from snow shoeing to canoeing.

The videos have just now begun to be released. In Episode 1 of Makings of a Guide Dog, we learn more about his quest to find a compatible match that suits his active lifestyle. In episode #8, one of these young guide dog graduates and is selected as Lawrence’s next guide dog. When it’s all over, each dog will be matched with his next guide dog partner. (Please note: Filming took place before the COVID-19 pandemic.)

“Big” Jim challenges you to pick which of the seven young guide dog trainees will become Lawrence’s next guide dog. Send your votes to info@justfishing.ca. The winner’s name will be drawn from the correct entries to receive a prize package including a Shimano rod/reel combo and assorted tackle. (Entries must be received by November 30th, 2020)

Guide Dog Trainees include: 1) Sherman, a male Yellow Labrador; 2) Dunstan, a male Yellow Labrador & brother to Sherman; 3) Daisy, a female Yellow Labrador; 4) Piper, a male Golden Retriever; 5) Lewis, a male Black Labrador / Golden Retriever mix; 6) Vincent, a male Black Labrador / Golden Retriever mix & brother to 7) Marion, a female Black/Brindle Labrador Retriever mix;

Follow the link below to watch the 10-part CNIB video series over the next ten weeks as Lawrence works with the trainers and pups on everything from ice fishing to canoeing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aqC0JQKmU

To make a donation to the CNIB Guide Dog Program visit: https://cnib.ca

Editors Note: Lawrence Gunther with his previous guide dog Moby.
Early fall can be feast or famine for musky anglers. It can be one of the most difficult times of the year to catch muskies, but it seems like once you find the fish, they are in bunches and really easy to catch. Part of this is that early fall is really a time of transition. As water is cooling and the water temperatures are slowly declining, muskies tend to move. Part of this occurs as the summer home range of the muskies breaks down, as turnover occurs. Muskies tend to roam more, frequenting different depths and often a variety of more spots. Hence the difficulty in locating muskies at this time.

On the flip side, as the water cools, some muskies that suspend during the summer start moving shallow and that concentrates muskies in shallow weeds, rocks and sand. So, once you find the muskies in early fall, it is a sure bet you have found a good-size group of fish, and really need to spend some time on the spot. I focus my efforts in early fall on shallow, thick, weed flats and weed edges; shallow, sandy shorelines; shallow rocks; and hard bottom edges adjacent to large food shelves.

When fishing these areas, although a run and gun approach can produce fish in early fall, the many cold fronts and unstable weather typical of fall, can make this style of fishing much less effective, when compared with summer. In fact, you might use a run and gun style of fishing in August and be successful, only to find that same approach only produces limited results in September or early October. I find that you need to slow down your boat speed and be more thorough at this time of the season. You’ll be fishing fewer spots each day in fall, but less running and more time fishing get the job done.

There’s lots of great lures that can be effective in early fall. As the water temperatures drop from 65-58 topwater fishing can be incredible. You’ll find muskies chasing topwater on top of shallow rocks, in shallow sand and on weed flats. So, don’t be afraid to make bomb casts across shallow cover. I use the Shimano 9’ MH SKIXX rod and can cast a topwater to the farthest destinations. Be sure and fish the lure slow, and occasionally use your reel to speed up and slow down the lure to change the sound of the plop made by the rotating tail. When a musky engages the topwater, I typically reel faster a few cranks and then return to my normal speed. I try and make the musky swim faster to catch up to the lure. Once the musky catches up to the bait if it doesn’t eat it, I give it a little speed and try and get the fish swimming faster. This approach tends to excite muskies and if they don’t hit away from the boat, you can catch them by taking the topwater underwater and executing a figure 8 at boatside.

Bucktails get the nod in fall as well. I really like the new Musky Frenzy Stagger bucktails as they combine multiple blade sizes and styles to create a unique vibration. For example the Stagger 10/10 combines a #10 Colorado blade with a #10 Indiana blade. This produces a distinctly different sound and vibration. I also really like the Stagger 8/9 blade at this time of year. Muskies have been chasing bucktails all summer and utilizing bucktails with a slightly different sound and vibration gives you an edge. Like topwater, I’ll fish the bucktails around any type of cover: weeds, rocks and sand. Keep the bait moving and execute a large figure 8 at boatside. The Shimano SKIXX 9’6” rod allows you to make huge figure 8s and is a big advantage at trigging muskies at boatside.

Last, but certainly not least are big soft plastics for fall. The Medussa has taken the musky world by storm and is accounting for more and more giant muskies each year. I fish the lure like a jerkbait in that I use a pull/pause retrieve.

(Continued on page 51.)
however, I use much longer sweeps of the rod. A Medussa is simply a heavy jig, but the three tails moving around is a musky’s face are pretty difficult for them to resist. In fall, I like to run my soft plastics deeper, so I use a lower speed Shimano Trax 400 spooled with 80 pound test PowerPro SSV2. This slightly lower gear ratio (5.8:1) allows me to slow down and run the lure deeper. A Medussa is a great tool for fishing around weed edges and deeper breaklines. If the fish are not using the shallow cover, I always move to the outer edge and the breakline and someone in my boat is always fishing a big soft plastic.

Early fall is a challenging time of year, as the fish may be migrating, and the weather can become unstable with fall cold fronts. However, the muskies are using more traditional shallow water spots. Take advantage of the situation and don’t throw the same lures everyone else is casting. Try placing a topwater in shallow spots others can’t reach, using a bucktail with different blade types, and a big soft plastic along the deep edges. Remain versatile and you’ll be able to show off some trophy musky photos this fall!

Editor’s Note: Jim Saric is an American professional angler, best known as the publisher, editor and owner of Musky Hunter Magazine, (https://www.muskyhunter.com) the largest musky fishing publication in North America. He is the Host and Executive Producer of The Musky Hunter television series, the first television show ever dedicated solely to the hard-to-catch musky.
**REPORT**

**FALL TRANSITION WALLEYE LOCATIONS & PRESENTATIONS – BRETT MCCOMAS**

This issue’s Target Walleye is a jammed full of fall-transition walleye fishing tips! Some new, some old, all relevant and timely to help you track down fish on your local waters – and catch ‘em!

**SNAP-JIGGING PLASTICS FOR SHALLOW FALL WALLEYES**

Snap-jigging has taken off in the walleye world over the last 4-5 years (thx Al!). It’s a fun way to catch ‘em and really good at pulling bigger bites, especially in the fall. I tracked down walleye nut Will Pappenfus to get the down-low on this bite ‘cuz it’s a big part of his fall rotation… and he’s clearly been putting it to good use. Full write-up here on TargetWalleye.com, few excerpts below:

**LOCATION:** “It’s definitely more of a shallow-water deal… usually less than 10’. A lot of guys go deep in the fall, but if you can find green weeds (cabbage or coontail) in 4–7’ there’s going to be fish and bait hanging around.

“Aside from weeds, I like to look for wind-blown points, stuff with rocks or gravel in 4–10’. Don’t necessarily need deep water nearby… Fish roam around more in the fall than people think, so finding the bait is key.”

**GEAR:** “A 1/4-oz Northland Current Cutter Jig is my go-to. The longer shank and bait-keeper seem to keep the plastic pinned better than most jigs. Dress the jig with either an Impulse Core Swimbait or an AuthentX Pulse-R Paddle Tail. I usually stick with natural colors (shiner, smelt) unless the water is really stirred up, then I’ll switch to something brighter (chartreuse & pinks).” “Plastics ‘cuz they stay on the jig a lot better than live bait… allows me to fish faster and be more aggressive until I find a pod of fish. “As far as rods go, I like a 6’ 8” M XF-action stick… that quicker action allows you to get more snap out of the jig. 10-lb braid to a 10-lb fluorocarbon leader – the leader doesn’t have to be long, 2-3’ max… fluoro because it has less stretch and visibility than mono.”

**RETRIEVE:** “Long casts… I want that jig as far away from the boat as possible. Once it hits the water, I’m letting it sink to the bottom before I do anything – bottom contact is key.

“Make a quick snap, then let it sit on the bottom for few seconds… a lot of times fish will be following the bait, so that 1- or 2-second pause is when they eat it. “If they don’t eat it on the bottom, usually that quick snap will get a reaction bite out of fish and they’ll eat it on the fall.

“Position the boat so you can fish the edge of the structure. A lot of times fish won’t be up in the weeds or rocks, but hanging right outside of ’em waiting to ambush.”

**CAME Across this Rick Olson write-up deep within the Fishing Minnesota archives. Timely stuff – make sure you understand it! “As water temps reach their summer high, a layering process occurs… an upper warmer layer and a lower cooler layer – separated by a quickly changing narrow band known as the thermocline.

“Some lakes are so shallow and windswept that they may never thermocline, like Mille Lacs... The big lake circulates every time you get a decent wind, and the temperature remains relatively consistent from top to bottom...

“It’s not just the fact that a lake will turn over that causes tough fishing conditions... more likely due to the rapidly-dropping water temps. The body temperature of a fish is subject to its environment – rapid changes in water temp can shut fish down... it may take some time for their body to adjust.”

“The turnover usually coincides with the first hard frost of fall, but not always. Some years the change is so gradual that it becomes difficult to pin down. One of the indicators to look for is water temperature.

“When surface temps drop into the lower 60s and upper 50s, you can figure you’re in the turnover zone. Walleye activity can range from bad to good depending on how quickly water temps cool off. A gradual slide can make for better fishing...

“Late summer and early fall can be one of the best times to work the shallow rocks with Rapala Shad Raps... the most effective crankbait... (Continued on page 53.)
for working shallow structure there is... perfect fish-attracting wiggle and some great fall colours like ‘fire tiger’ and ‘crawdad.’

“Another option, would be avoiding the negative effects of the turnover by trying to find a lake that hasn’t turned yet, or one that already has and had a week or 2 to settle down. The first ones to go are the shallow lakes as they have less mass and cool quicker... There may be as much as 2 weeks difference – or more – as to when it all begins and ends.”

**BASE YOUR FALL CRANKS ON WATER TEMPERATURE**

Hey fall trollers – water temps are finally starting to dip! Instead of tying on any ol’ crankbait, did you know you can use water temp to tell you which exact styles to run.

Brad Hawthorne’s logged a zillion hours pulling cranks in the fall, so it’s the first thing I asked him about when I had the chance to hop in his boat:

He always starts early fall with #5 Rapala Shad Raps ‘cuz they’ve caught more fish than any other bait in his boat...especially while water temps are 60-65°F. Bump up to a #6 or #7 as temps reach the lower end of that scale.

Once the water hits 57-62°F – and the weather is cooperating – he’ll put on BIG ol’ bent-lip #9 Shallow Shad Raps. Everything is going shallow and putting the feedbag on, including perch this size.

Original Jointed Minnows are one of his favourite overlooked fall trolling baits when temps are in the 50-57°F range and fish are on the chew. They run 5-7’ outta the package, but Brad will pinch on a small splitshot up above the bait to get ’em down to the 8-10’ range.

Frigid temps: Original Floaters are tough to beat. Brad’s caught fish on ’em in water as cold as 42 degrees. #PolarPlungeStatus More details straight from Mr. Fall Cranky himself in this video. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLYu8tPpv8U)

**FALL WALLEYES LOVE SAND**

This can be a frustrating time of year to track down a limit of tasties. Fish are on the move, but they’ll be migrating to predictable areas and eventually schooling up hard.

Ted Takasaki, Scott Richardson and Greg Bohn combined forces to give us and Yoda some fall-transition secrets. Full write-up archived here, few excerpts below:

“Baitfish will only stay in weeds as long as they’re very green. Once weeds start to die off... baitfish and walleyes start to leave those shallow-water weed areas.

“If you’re fishing summer spots and they aren’t there, start fishing the sand. As the transition is getting underway, it’s still common to find walleyes in 15’ or less.

“They start to move out to more open-water areas at first... sliding out around deep water: sandbars that come out from shore and drop to deeper water, sand flats, sand points and sand humps.

“Walleyes begin to move deeper as water temps drop toward turnover (begins at 62°F or so). Instead of looking for fish to be on top of structures, look deeper.

“They will be in spots like the sharper breaks or on mid-lake humps that top out at perhaps 20’, rather than 15’, or in holes in soft-bottom flats where depth drops from 15’ to 20’.

“Walleyes become more selective about where they stage. They generally locate on a spot-on-a-spot. For example, if they’re on a mid-lake hump with scattered boulders, they will be on the boulders. If all rock, look for the patch of sand. If all sand, look for the rockpile.

“Because more and more walleyes show up on these few spots, more and more of the lake holds no fish. It’s easy to be skunked if you don’t pay attention to subtle differences on the structure.”

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