

Ig-Night Your Walleye Ice Bite

As we begin to enter the months of January and February; the Walleye bite tends to become a bit spotty at best. The initial willful abandon that the fish show at first ice is long gone. This is due to the fact that they are no longer on a feeding binge, in preparation for the long winter. Typically, they have settled into a subsistence mode and feed just enough to maintain body reserves until they become more active, just prior to the spawn.

Now this doesn't mean that they cannot be enticed to bite. We just have to understand the nature of the fish and do some things that help to tilt the odds into our favor. Namely, fishing after sundown. Walleyes have a very distinct sight advantage over their prey in lowlight and dark conditions and instinctively capitalize on it, becoming most active long after sunset.

Not only is this the best period of the day to catch numbers of fish, they will also tend to be larger. The older more experienced females (bigger) fish are finely tuned to turning this benefit into an easy meal for themselves. The older and larger the fish, the more you will see this type of behavior displayed and typically later into the evening. They'll let the smaller males make their sundown forays into the shallows and come in once they have finished and darkness settles in.

You can be fishing in a likely location with little to no activity when the sun is high and once it begins to hit the tree tops you begin to see signs of life. This is not the time to take a small fish or two and then run for the ramp. The parade of taillights departing into the distance never ceases to amaze me. These anglers are leaving just when things are beginning to kick into gear. They either have strict orders not to be late for supper or are afraid of the dark. Regardless, this is prime time to have yourself organized and put forth maximum effort to capitalize on this window of opportunity. By doing so, you will often be rewarded with some of the biggest Walleyes you will catch during any season and have them mostly to yourself. Please remember to practice some common sense and release the large females as they truly guarantee the future of our sport.

The heart and sole of the system is well placed tip ups and large lively chubs. These fish are highly selective and prefer to take one big meal as opposed to chasing numerous small snacks. It just makes sense from an efficiency standpoint, maximum reward for the minimum energy expended. By large chubs, I'm referring to six inches being common, with eight or ten inches being an even better choice when hunting for mature trophy fish.

For terminal rigging, I employ a system that consists of 50 to 80 pound Gorilla braid for mainline tied to a snap swivel and attach a Pre-tied monofilament leader. This acts as a built in shock absorber and aids in low line visibility. I'll either go with a 6 foot piece of 10 or 12lb mono snelled to a Gamakatsu Walleye Wide Bend hook in size 2 or a Mack's Lures Glo Sparkling Tail leader. They feature a premium hook coupled with glowing plastic molded in and a tinsel type body. This serves to give the whole presentation a little more pizzazz, and at times can prove to be deadly. Weight the bait down with a number 4 split shot 12 to 18 inches above and set your depth from 1 to 3 feet off bottom.

Where we place our tip ups is highly critical to success. The more anglers fishing in your group the better, as this allows you to effectively cover all elements of a piece of structure. I like to place a couple just into the deepest water available and work from there into the first break and concentrate the majority of lines on top of the shallowest portion. By shallow we could be talking in just a couple of feet of water directly off shore. You can literally watch the fish progress from the depths to skinny water as you begin to get flags. Once the fish have arrived at your shallowest sets, the bite is on for good and should remain constant for some time.

Where your tip up bites occur will serve as good indicator as to where you should be concentrating your jigging efforts. Have holes pre-drilled at all depths and simply follow the fish in.

A tip for lure selection is to put down a sizable offering that can easily be seen, felt and or heard. The being seen can be accomplished with lures that offer glow capabilities and the heard part of the equation is best achieved by using lures with built in rattles. The being felt comes from water disturbance created during your jigging stroke. I have found glow to always be a positive and fish them 100% of the time. The

rattles can prove to extremely effective one night and actually spook fish the next. Pay careful attention to what your Vexilar or Aqua-View is telling you about their reactions and make a judgment call.

JB Lures Holie Angel fits the bill nicely, without being overpowering. It has an internal vent which produces a great deal of commotion when sharply lifted a foot or two and on the fall has an extremely seductive flutter. The quick lift gets the fishes attention and the dying/injured minnow action of its descent seals the deal. Tip your offerings with a minnow head for scent and confidence and your all set.

If you're still too stubborn to try your hand at the night bite, your missing out on the opportunity to turn an otherwise tough day of fishing into a great night of catching.

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