

Live Bait Rigging Tackle in Detail

Livebait rigging is by far my favorite method for catching walleyes. It will therefore come as no surprise, that when appropriate, I spend the majority of my time using and refining this system. In doing so, I have developed some very definite preferences for using each of the following components. While I am sure you may be partial to what you're currently using, if you will keep an open mind I would like to share my ideas with you. I'll also give you specific reasons of why I have come to rely on each and every one of them. Perhaps you can incorporate a few of these into your own system and put more fish in the boat.

Hooks

Easily the most overlooked and under appreciated piece of tackle that any of us use. After all of the time, effort and expense we expend trying to get our bait in front of fish it still amazes me how many still use inferior hooks. It's quite simple, if you can't have a reasonable expectation of sinking the hook into fish flesh how would you ever expect to get the fish into the boat? If you're not using premium hooks, I guarantee you that by making the switch you will more than double your catch rate. I know some of you still get sticker shock at a three or four dollar pack of hooks but when put in perspective, it's the least expensive thing you'll do over the course of a days fishing.

My nod goes to Gamakatsu. I have been using them for years with great success. While there are a few super sharp hooks on the market I feel Gamakatsu's are a notch above the rest. Run one across your thumbnail and you'll see what I mean. For livebait rigging their Walleye Wide Bend is unsurpassed. Fine wire, with a wide gap, that really bites. This can be the difference between a very light bite and a fish in the well.

Attractors

It is generally a good idea to go with some form of an attractor ahead of your hook. There are numerous options available and I will only list the few that I have found to work most consistently for me. This may be in the wrong category but colored or glow hooks are your first choice. I very seldom go with just a plain hook. The exception being highly pressured fish. In this case a black hook with no attractor at all may be your best presentation. Small colored or glow beads are next in line. Let your imagination run wild here and see what works best for you on the waters you fish. The last couple of years my favorite has been a soft glow bead, which I order out of Hagen's in Mitchell, SD. They also have an added benefit of providing a little buoyancy to your bait. Floats are your next consideration. There are a vast amount to choose from, with a small white oval float being my go to when things get really tough. Keep in mind that more than a super slow presentation will actually have the opposite effect we're looking for with floats. Speed will cause increased water pressure thus pushing the float down instead of up. Another wrinkle is to use a Mack's Smile Blade. You can go super slow while still turning the blade for added attraction. I generally rig the glow bead mentioned earlier between the blade and hook. Don't be afraid to mix and match combinations until you come up with some personal favorites.

Leaders

I tie all of my own, which keeps me from guessing what the quality of the line and hook may or may not be in many cases. Berkley XL does a fine job because of the limp characteristics while still maintaining reasonable abrasion resistance. This allows the bait to move freely, as it should. Mono also serves well as a shock absorber. Fluorocarbon doesn't provide for this and in my opinion, because it sinks I feel it subdues your bait's natural action and drags it along bottom. Six pound will do nicely in most instances. You can go a bit lighter or heavier as conditions warrant. As a rule I tie my leaders six feet long and start from there. If you want to shorten up, just trim some and make a new loop, takes only seconds. Keep a few extra long ones around or tie them up in the boat as needed.

Connection

To attach the leader I use a swivel and snap. Each of us has favorites for the snap or may prefer barrel swivels without a snap. Use the smallest you can handle so as not to interfere with bait action. The most important thing here is not to skimp on quality. Look at any bait shop and you will find 95% of the connections to be of inferior quality (junk). Do the right thing and spend a couple of extra pennies to make sure that you don't practice catch and release half the way to the boat. This will also insure that your line will not be a twisted mess. Spro has a number of products that work quite well and I have found them to be very reliable.

Weights and Attachment

Pretty straightforward in most circumstances. The Lindy weight is the one most widely used and will work fine in almost all situations. You may want to go to a bullet type when working through weeds. The use of a Pencil or Slip Bouncer is an option that a lot of folks don't use often enough. Gets you through rocks better than a traditional Lindy and it allows your bait to ride a little higher above the snags. It excels for a dead rod option, often outfishing the one the human is so diligently working. Go with a little more weight and stay as vertical as possible to prevent snags, throw it in the rod holder and let it do its thing. The way I attach my weight of choice is with a Sunrise Spring Clip. It is a spring coil with a wire clevis for attaching your weight. Going heavier or lighter takes only seconds as well as changing from a Lindy to Pencil Bouncer. One of the best features is that if your weight does snag, simply apply steady pressure and most of the time the wire will let the weight loose. All you have to do is grab a new weight and you're back in the water, no need to re tie. They can be hard to find but well worth it as they'll make you a much more versatile rigger while never having to re tie for each weight or style change.

Main Line

This is likely the most hotly debated item we use. I use 100% Fireline. I realize this may be taboo to some of the old timers out there, but please hear me out. First of all clear your mind and forget everything you've been told or read about superlines. Knots are not a problem. Never ever had one fail. Use a Palomar or more wraps

with a Cinch (12 to 14 works for me). It does not break rods. Loosen your drag and forget the Jimmy Houston hooksets. Remember the premium hooks? All that is needed is a snap of the wrist. Sharp hooks and no stretch will do the rest. The lack of stretch also telegraphs every thing that is going on below you. Bottom composition, bait action, debris, perch, etc. can all be easily felt with Fireline. This simply can't be said for Mono no matter what rod you are using. With Fireline, you can actually feel more with a run of the mill rod that you ever would with the most expensive rod and Mono. Don't believe me? Try it. You can also get by with considerably less weight and line out, further enhancing feel and control. Once your fish is on, simply keep the rod tip up and reel it in. No need for all of this pumping and reeling down business. The pound test I go to is 10/4. The four pound diameter slices through the water while you have a line that is nearly unbreakable. If you do snag the best way to break off is to point the rod at the snag and hold your reel spool until it breaks. Please don't try to break off by grabbing the line, the only thing that will be cut is your hands. This will allow you to break your leader while maintaining the rest of your Terminal Tackle. Reel up and snap in a new leader and you're right back at em. Some may be hesitant to try Fireline due to cost. While it may be two or three times the price you are used to paying for Mono it is actually a much better value in the long run. It can easily be used for a couple of seasons. No need to constantly replace as with the coily stiff mess that Mono can quickly become. Occasionally cut off ten feet or so and you're all set. If you are really value minded you can even wind the Fireline from one reel onto another after a year or so and have fresh line on the outside of the reel you wound it on to. I know there are some of you out there who may disagree but I see no advantage whatsoever to use Mono for rigging now that we have all of the attributes that Fireline offers.

Rods

Your rod is the most critical part of the equation and this is not the place to skimp. A little more investment here will lead to greater pleasure and more fish. There are several good high end rods on the market today to choose from and they are an absolute joy to handle. While most of the Lifetime Warranties are no longer available, Fenwick still offers it on their Techna AV line and they are hands down my pick as the best rods out there. The Warranty adds to your value for plunking down the extra dollars for quality. The lightness, strength and most important sensitivity are unequalled. Without a doubt, under tough bite conditions this will lead to more hookups. Do yourself a favor this year and pick one up and see for yourself. Selecting the right action is imperative. This is not a do all rod. It is a tool used for a specific purpose and that is too present livebait. You'll want a rod that has a fast tip to detect subtle pickups with just enough flex in the final eight to ten inches to not give away your presence. Models in the Techna line that achieve this balance are the medium fast and light fast in 6'6" or 7'0" models. Go with the light action for shallow water and lighter weights and the medium for deep water and heavier weights. My personal preference for the rod I hold is the 6'6" in light fast for use with Lindy's or light Pencil Bouncers and the 7'0" in either light or medium action for my dead rod depending on the amount of weight I'm using.

Reels

The advances in reel design over the past decade has been incredible. All of the major manufacturers have very smooth and reliable models to choose from. Please don't get caught up in the gazillion bearing hype. While more bearings in theory makes for a smoother reel it really comes down to quality and tolerances. You can have a reel with ten bearings and sloppy tolerances that won't be near the reel with three or four bearings and tight tolerance. A smooth steady drag is a major consideration in choosing your reel. A good way to judge this is to roll on several feet of line and pull it out under various settings. It should come off the spool continuously without any jerkiness, hesitation or change in tension. After you've found a model with a good drag the next

thing to check for is Instant Anti Reverse. There is no room for error here. There should be absolutely no play whatsoever in the reel handle. If there is put it back and continue your search. Play translates into the spool having to turn to a locked position before there is any pressure placed on the line and ultimately the fish. When I set the hook I want every bit of movement transferred down the line to the hook and into the fishes jaw. You'll catch a lot more fish by paying attention to this detail. If you've done the work of getting in the right location and are using a good presentation you just as well reward yourself by sticking the fish. The most common mistake in my eyes is that most people use a reel that is far too large for the task at hand. Let's break this down into what we want our reel to do. That is to hold line and to reliably recover that line and our fish. I have never been "spooled" by a Walleye or any other fish for that matter. Nor have I had a fish that I couldn't reel in due to a lack of power. In reality the rod is what wears the fish down. Keep the tip up and let the fish work the rod and your drag, he'll tire soon enough and you can bring him in. A 1000 series size from most companies is more than adequate for the job.

Probably the most important consideration for most of us is price. I firmly believe in using the best equipment money can buy but when it comes to reels there can be a lot of overkill. Most reels from a reputable manufacturer in the sixty to one hundred dollar range will suit your needs very nicely.

The model that has been a workhorse for me the past several season is the Symetree from Shimano in the 1000 size. It has all of the qualities I've previously mentioned and at a reasonable price. (Around ninety dollars) I have several that have been used extremely hard and are just as smooth and reliable as when they came out of the box.

Conclusion

I hope what I've written here doesn't come off as being too commercial. Yes, I am Sponsored by some, but not all of the Companies mentioned. I do appreciated it and thank them for it. Rest assured, Sponsored or not I simply wouldn't use anything that I didn't feel was the best means available to help me in my pursuit of landing fish. I sincerely hope that you will consider some of my views and implement them for yourself. In the process, I hope you become more successful in your own angling.

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