

Terminal Tackle for Livebait Rigging

In last month's article, I outlined some basic guidelines for selecting a good rod and reel combination for live bait rigging Walleye's. I will now get down to the business end of things and give you some options concerning terminal tackle. 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 some of my ideas with you.

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 anglers 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.

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 easily be the difference between a very light bite and a fish in the well.

Attractors

It is hard to go wrong with the time honored and proven, single bead ahead of your hook. Gives the fish an "aiming point" and adds additional attraction to your live bait of choice. White or green glow beads are always a great option. Colored hooks also serve this purpose, with a red octopus style being particularly effective. I very seldom go with just a plain hook. The exception being highly pressured fish. In this case a small black hook with no attractor at all, may be your best bet.

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 and thus push your bait down instead of up. An ultra slow presentation is critical to getting the most from this presentation.

Another wrinkle is to use a Mack's Smile Blade. They are a thin mylar blade in a delta wing shape that rotates similar to a spinner. The difference being that they will turn at speeds as low as one quarter mph. Thus, you can have a slow and precise presentation with added triggering capabilities. I generally rig the glow bead and sometimes a float between the blade and hook. Don't be afraid to mix and match combinations until you come up with some personal favorites.

When we want or need to kick up the speed a bit and cover some ground, a spinner and live bait combination really shines. For the last couple of seasons, I have been using JB Lures Ventilator spinner blades. They build upon the qualities of a traditional spinner by incorporating two vents. This forces water through and over the top of the blade, creating additional turbulence. Coupled with rattle beads, you now have an exceptional lure that will call fish from a distance, with the live bait sealing the deal.

Leaders

I tie most of my own, with the exception of Gamakatsu's pre-packaged Walleye Snells that come with

a red extra wide gap hook and a molded glow bead. All on a six foot section of 8lb test. Works well as a base, as you can add additional attractors such as floats or shorten the length as needed.

The aforementioned 8lb test in a line such as Berkley's XL does a fine job because of the limp characteristics, allowing your bait to move freely, as it should. Anything heavier just dampens and reduces the inherent appeal. Mono also serves well as a shock absorber when using no stretch superbraids. Flourocarbon 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.

Connection

To attach the leader, I use a quality snap swivel which allows for effortless changes. 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 also ensures that your line will not become a twisted mess. Spro has a wide selection of quality products that are worth a serious look.

Weights and Attachment

Pretty straightforward. Traditional Bottom Bouncers work well in most circumstances. If you want the option to be able to feed line to the fish, a sliding sinker such as a Lindy weight should be deployed. 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. They allow you to concentrate on feeling for subtle bites without experiencing the aggravation of hanging up as often. It's a good idea to attach your sliding weights with a quick change type of system to allow you easily change as water depth or wind conditions warrant.

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 an Improved Cinch (12 to 14 works for me). It does not break rods. Loosen your drag a bit 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 and is further enhanced because you need less weight and line out. 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 for yourself.

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 the leader pops. Please don't try to break off by grabbing the line, the only thing that will be cut is your hands. You can now retrieve all of your terminal tackle, snap in a new leader and you're right back at 'em.

Conclusion

Perhaps you can incorporate a few of these ideas into your arsenal and boat a few more fish along the way. If you should have any questions or comments please feel free to contact me.

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