

Change Your Thinking

New Techniques for Erie 'Eyes

by
Captain Mark Martin

This one is going to really open your eyes! I know it will, because I fish walleyes for a living, and this one blew me away. It's the story of my earlier exploits at the Professional Walleye Trail 1st qualifier tournament at Lake Erie during May of 1998 and what I learned then will stay with me forever. My gained knowledge will help me and there is no doubt that it can help you too!

In order to fully understand what I learned, you need to know the history behind the thought process that went into this experience. Walleyes were virtually everywhere during the pre-tournament fishing back in '98, but most were small with very few large fish being caught. The weather was incredibly stable with water clarity at a very good level. The thing was, from

Port Clinton, the home of the PWT event, the farther west you went, the dingier the water became. The farther east you ventured, eventually

landed you in crystal clear water.

I had made a decision to fish the areas during the tournament that

I'd worked over all week long. I was fishing for fish over deeper water in the clear sections and trying to boat the fish I was marking on my depthfinder. I was fishing Northland Rock Runner Spinner rigs behind Mr. Walleye Boards. My average trolling speed in my Lund Pro V was between 1.1 and 1.8 mph. I would speed up to make the Northland Rock Runners rise up the water column to fish that I was marking higher, and slow down to make them fall down to fish I was running deeper. This is one of my favorite tricks known as swinging the baits on the pendulum. I was having decent success during pre-fishing and regarded the pattern I was on to be worthy of competing for the win. One of my keys was to be fishing with Berkley's Gary Roach 7'10"



Lake Erie year after year continues to produce trophy walleyes from all areas of the lake.

flipping stick as the planer board rod teamed with 20lb. Berkley Fireline. As other anglers were complaining all week of losing fish, the Fireline was keeping nearly every fish I hooked on the bait all the way to the boat.

By the time day one of the tournament started, the weather held, and I started to fish the patterns I had fine tuned for these conditions. I started just as I had all week, by fishing for the fish I could mark on the Lowrance depthfinder. It was a huge mistake, but I wouldn't learn that until the day was over. What had actually happened is that the fish I was marking were fish that had retreated from feeding near the surface. You see, all those tournament boats had come screaming right over their heads and virtually gave them a case of lockjaw. They were all over my Eagle screen, but nothing I could do would seem to make them bite (that might sound a bit familiar to many of you!).

I made the move to spots two and three, both in the dirtier water, and met the same fate, no fish in the box. With 45 minutes left to fish in the day, I decided to make the run for gin clear water and whammo!!!, three quick fish. Well, the bad news first. After the first days weigh in, I stood in a miserable 88th place. The good news was that there were two days left, on a body of water than can produce numbers of monster fish, and I had just put a very big piece of the jigsaw puzzle into place, clear water.

I hit the clear water right away on day two and managed to boat

several fish, enough to keep my interest, but nothing to get too excited about. I was still marking plenty of fish on my Lowrance at the deeper depths of 30-50 feet, and was working those marks over pretty hard. During the middle of the day, something instinctual clicked inside me and I reached over and flipped on the Lowrance In-Dash Flasher. I just about couldn't believe my eyes! Lots and lots of fish way up high in the water column near the surface. My LCR couldn't read them because I had the gain turned up high to read deep fish and the resulting surface clutter masked them. If I turned the gain down, then there wasn't enough power to mark them. The only way to see them was with the Lowrance flasher unit.

Immediately, I pulled in two Mr. Walleye boards and re-rigged the rods with 1 ½ oz (lighter) Northland Rock Runner Bottom Bouncers with Northland Float n Spin Crawler harness' with #3 and #4 blades and reset the lines with only 30 feet of line out instead of the previous 60 feet. Immediately after setting the two rods out, I swung around to see how the board looked in the water and one of the boards went shooting back as if it was launched out of a cannon. We grabbed the rod, began fighting the fish, and woosh!, the other shallow board took off scooting backwards. I'd found 'em, and now were going to give 'em what for!

These fish were all in the top 10 feet of water. During the rest of the afternoon, the wind was building and the lake was getting

rougher, and consequently dirtier. I had speeds kicked all the way up to 1.8 mph, and was still whacking those big walleyes like they were going out of style. There was one very, no, INCREDIBLY, disturbing thing I was noticing about these fish though..... They all needed to be fizzed. For those of you who don't know what fizzing is, it is the process of sticking an open hypodermic needle in the fishes bladder to let out excess air that builds up from bringing fish out of extremely deep water. The problem was, these fish were coming 2 to 10 feet down, not from 30 to 50 feet like typical fish that need to be fizzed.

It didn't take me long to figure out what was happening! These fish were the same fish I was marking down in deep water. They were way down there, looking towards the surface for baitfish. They were trying to run all the way up to the surface, pick up an easy meal, and run back down to look for the next surface oriented appetizer. They wouldn't bit the baits I was presenting at their level, but if I put it 20, 30, 40 or even 50 feet above their head, they would run up and smack it! That's why their air bladders needed fizzing when I caught them.

There was one very distinct key to fishing these fish with this pattern, and that was clear water. Remember I said that the waves were building and dirtying the water. Well, anglers that stayed in their spots, even after they lost their water clarity, had their fish shut off. By constantly moving east, the direction of clear water, I was able to continue to fish this

same pattern for the next day and a half.

The result of figuring this out led to a huge jump in my standings after day two, all the way up to 54th place. Until we figured the pattern, we'd boated two keeper fish in a whole morning of fishing. Over the last couple hours of day two my amateur partner and I boated 25 more fish, which helped vault me up the standings and gave me reason to smile for the upcoming last day.

Day three dawned ugly. Big winds, and big waves. I knew the pattern I needed to fish, and new all I need do is travel east far enough to encounter clear water and begin fishing again. The problem was, the wind and waves made it nearly impossible to maintain a proper speed to present baits for most people.

I however, had a brilliant piece of equipment that I knew was going to be the cats meow. I would travel in the direction of the waves, and put my 9.9 hp Mariner 4 stroke kicker motor in reverse to slow my progress. The problem with this process, is that it is nearly impossible to steer your boat, and you could easily get swamped if you get sideways in the wrong wave. I, however, simply engaged the TR-1 autopilot on my kicker, and then I could concentrate on fishing. We were able to maintain exact course, hold proper speed, and whack and stack 47 walleyes on day three. By having the remote control to the TR-1 right on my belt, I was able to make course and speed adjustments from anywhere in the boat, and never

lose any fishing time. I was able to even get going slower than fishermen using traditional drift sock techniques.

So there it is, the eye opener. Walleyes that travel huge distances vertically to hit baits near the surface. Finding out that my Flasher is just as important to my arsenal of weapons as my state of the art LCR depthfinder. Figuring out another tremendous use (as happens quite often these days), for my TR-1 autopilot that makes me a much better fisherman. It was all a learning experience, and fortunately enough for me, advanced me from 88th after the first day, all the way up to cash a check in 20th place by the end of the last day. I'll be taking these lessons with me for as long as walleyes stretch my string. I hope you can too! I'll see you on the water!

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Coordinates in minutes and seconds

West Side Reef #1 (west end)

41 30' 09"N 081 45' 36"W

West Side Reef #1 (east end)

41 30' 08"N 081 45' 34"W

Approximate Length: 220 Ft; Depth: 36'

West Side Reef #2 (west end)

41 30' 00"N 081 45' 26"W

West Side Reef #2 (east end)

41 29' 57"N 081 45' 21"W

Approximate Length: 495'; Depth: 32'

East Side Reef (west end)

41 35' 34"N 081 33' 51"W

East Side Reef (east end)

41 35' 56"N 081 33' 46"W

Approximate Length: 450'; Depth: 32'

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