

Spring Muskie Musings

Contributed by Ted Hogue
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Before beginning this article, I would like to take a few moments and explain a little bit about myself and what motivates me as a writer. First of all, I do not feel that I have mastered muskie fishing or even come close. Like all good fishermen, I continue to learn each season. What I felt was gospel a few years ago, may reveal itself in new light this season. I am opinionated but listen and learn from other fishermen constantly.

A lot of fishing information presented to the angler, especially in newspapers, is based on interviews with fishermen, and bait and tackle shop owners. It would be better titled misinformation. My articles are strictly based on first hand knowledge, unless I specifically say otherwise.

My intention, as a writer, is to help guide you along in your pursuit of one of Americas premier game fish, and I welcome YOUR questions and suggestions.

The weather begins to break here in Southeastern Michigan, I become more and more anxious to hit the water in pursuit of my favorite game fish, muskie. It's still almost three months until the legal season opens, though, and that seems like a good slice of eternity. I ask myself what I can do to improve my fishing this year.

After lubricating reels, replacing lines, checking rod guides, sharpening hooks etc., it's time to develop a game plan for the upcoming season. A well thought out game plan, that is stuck to, can do a lot to better your fishing not only this season but also in seasons to come.

If you haven't already, obtain the best hydrographic maps of the water(s) you fish. Take a magnifying glass and scrutinize them intently, keeping in mind that what appears small on the map is actually much larger. What looks like a short distance is actually quite far. People who don't keep these things in mind are often overwhelmed when they hit the water. Last season I was looking for a hump which lies west of B85 on the Detroit River. In my mind it was only a few yards from the marker. In reality it was almost a tenth of a mile. I had forgotten to keep perspective when looking at my chart.

As you examine your charts, chances are very good that you will be able to identify prime areas that you have overlooked in the past. In the upcoming season, force yourself to try these new areas. Don't wait and try them when the fish aren't biting in your favorite spots, but when they are. That's the hard part. It is also one of the things that separates truly successful anglers from those who only have an occasional good day.

One of the worse traps a fisherman can fall into is becoming habitual in choice of fishing spots, and it's one of the easiest. It can happen without you realizing it. If you go fishing when the fish aren't biting in your favorite spot, and you have only a couple other places to turn to, you have fallen into this trap. Do not accept it, change!

The west side of Sugar Island, on the Detroit River, was an excellent walleye spot for years, and most fishermen did not have much difficulty boating a limit there. However it has gotten tougher in recent years. Not long ago, I began my fishing there one morning. It soon became apparent that whatever walleyes were there were few and far between. There were several other boats fishing the area and no one else was having much luck, either, so I left to try other areas. The "hole in the wall," the Livingston Channel, and others didn't produce any fish, but I finally located actively feeding fish in "Pickerel Alley." While returning with a nice limit of Walleye, I noticed the same boats still fishing by Sugar Island. Curious, I stopped to see if the fish had ever "turned on". They hadn't. When fishing is tough, by having more good spots to turn to, you will increase your success ratio dramatically.

Another good way to improve your season is to avoid being a "die hard". Sure you want to limit out on walleye or catch a trophy smallmouth, but don't blow on by that huge school of white bass busting minnows on the surface. Stop and cast a spoon their way. It may be the most fun you have all day! It is true that muskie fishing requires a level of sacrifice most anglers aren't willing to accept and that's why there aren't more of us. We DO have to pass by that school of feeding fish, but not always. I feel that in order to keep yourself fresh as a muskie fisherman, you need to take a break once in a while. And, beside that, muskie season opens June 7th on the Detroit River(American side. I'm not sure about Canada), and walleye and northern pike are open year 'round. I must say, though, it is hard to keep those muskie off my line while fishing for northern pike in the spring and early summer.

When you look at pictures in national magazines and watch fishing shows on television, it's a natural tendency to compare your fishing with that being shown. Keep in mind that, most often, those shows are being taped on the best available water for a specific species of fish. Do not set your expectations too high. On the Detroit River, a smallmouth bass has to be five pounds to be a real trophy. On another small stream or river, a two pound smallmouth may be just as much a trophy as that five pounder, and the angler who catches it has every right to be, and should be just as proud they

caught it.

On the Detroit River, our muskie grow faster than they do in more northerly waters, but they do not live nearly as long or attain the size of their cousins. A forty two inch musky from the Detroit River is as much a trophy as a fifty incher from Lake of the Woods. I still have my goal set at a fifty inch fish, but realize that it may never happen.

One of the things muskie "Pros" are fond of quoting is the number of "keeper" fish that they catch. In some parts of the country a legal musky is thirty two inches. In my neck of the woods, it's forty two inches. See the difference?

One of the best ways I can make the upcoming season memorable and worth while, is to take a novice fishing. By taking the time to show a new comer the ropes, you are likely to gain a friend and have the opportunity to pass on the ethics of sportsmanship that have become so vital to our sport. I have been able to experience the freshness of that first trophy fish through the eyes of others, and, let me tell you, it's a great feeling.

If you haven't already checked out TFN's discussion forums, you're missing out on some real fun and failing to gain some worthwhile knowledge. I guarantee you are in for some serious chuckles. Don't be a bystander, participate. The more the merrier!

My personal thanks to all those who make TFN the fine publication that it is.

Remember, as always, Catch-Photograph-Release. Provide a future fishery for the generations to come.

Ted - MUSKY FISHING ABOARD "THE CUDA"