



The School of Fish

by Duane Ryks

When the going gets tough, bobber up.

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Versatile. That word describes the best walleye anglers I know. No one method is going to work consistently to catch fish throughout the season. When the going gets tough, smart walleye anglers change tactics. Sometimes the best option is to bobber up.

It is funny how many casual anglers think bobber fishing isn't sophisticated enough to lower themselves to apply the technique, while the pros do. Professional walleye tournament anglers fishing Devils Lake, North Dakota, and Mille Lacs Lake, Minnesota, have pulled down some mighty nice checks over the past number of years fishing with bobbers.

There are times when walleyes are located in places that don't allow any other method. Other times, weather conditions make boat control nearly impossible, and bobbers save the day.

The Bobber Rig.

Most anglers have read or heard about slip bobbers. Basically, a slip bobber is used with some sort of bobber stop. Most anglers use the braided line knots that come pre-tied on a small tube. Some anglers use a small bead between the stop and bobber. The sliding bobber stop allows you to adjust your depth and fish a bobber in deep water.

Slip bobbers come in a wide variety of sizes and colors. There are lighted bobbers that come in handy for low light, or the night bite. Match your bobber selection to conditions. Usually smaller is better, especially in windy conditions. I prefer slip bobbers that have a weight on the underside that make them easier to cast in the wind. The bobber tips upright when it hits the water allowing the line to slide through easily.

Another trick I sometimes employ, if I want to keep the depth fixed; is to use a small piece of rubber band for a bobber stop. Make a small loop in your line, pass a small

piece of rubber band through the loop and pull it tight. It will not slide down when you reel up a fish.

Most anglers use a split shot weight above the hook. The amount of weight to use is often determined by the depth you are fishing. I like to use a small jig at the end of the line. For years, I have used a small rattle jig. The combination of bright color and sound call fish to your bait.



Slip bobbers come in all shapes and sizes. Choose the smallest one for conditions. Most anglers use pre-tied slip knots and a small bead above the bobber. Couple the setup with a small jig for attraction.

Bait.

I prefer fishing with live leeches on bobber rigs. They will swim and move around more than crawlers. Crawlers will work, but instead of gobbling them on the hook, try hooking them once through the collar.

During the shiner spawning period, I fish with shiners. Try hooking them along side their dorsal fin with the hook pointing forward. This is a little winter fishing tip I learned years ago that has improved my hooking ratio.

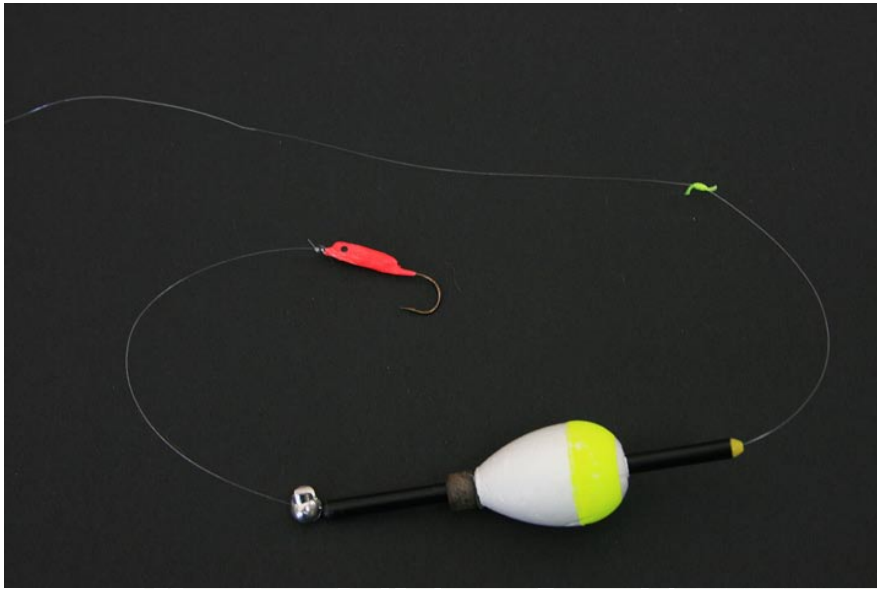
Equipment.

I like to use at least a 7-foot spinning rod with a fast tip. The longer rod not only helps cast a little further, but also

provides more control of a fish at the boat. A long rod will also allow you to flip your rig under-handed on windy days.

Patterns.

Wood. Bobber rigs excel when walleyes are tucked in wood. There are many reservoirs and small flooded lakes that are lined with trees and stumps. Anglers sometimes tie their boats to the trees and fish right in the branches. Pay close attention to your bobber in this situation. It is



This is the setup I use most often. Notice the weight on the underside of the bobber. This makes the bobber cast further and tip upright when it hits the water so the line slides through easily. At the end of the line is attached a bright colored rattle jig.

very critical to get walleyes up and out quickly so they don't tangle in the wood. I keep my line fairly tight to the bobber at all times. As soon as you see the float go under, start reeling. Once you feel the weight of the fish you can get a better hook-set.

Windy days. Another good pattern is fishing bobbers on shallow weed points, rock piles, or reefs on windy days. I prefer to anchor along side the structure rather than on top.

Keep your casts low and cast into the wind. With a longer rod I usually flip the rig out underhanded. Let the wind carry your bobber rig over the top and down the side of the structure. In windy conditions it is difficult to keep from getting a bow in your line. When the bobber goes down, start reeling quickly to pick up the loose line. Usually, this method will be enough to bury the hook.

Night fishing. Switch to a lighted bobber for low light or nighttime. A number of companies are making small glow sticks that attach to a regular slip bobber with a rubber clip. Anchor on top of a shallow hump or underwater rock pile. Walleyes move up to feed on top of these structures under low light conditions. For many years, Spicer, located on Green Lake, has held a street dance during the 4th of July Weekend. We anchor on top of a rock hump close to town and enjoy the music while catching fish.

Early season shiner bite. In most Minnesota lakes, spottail shiners spawn in shallow water in the early spring. During the day, the shiners will tuck into the weeds. Hungry walleyes will prowl around and through the weeds under bright light conditions looking for a meal. I have caught many walleyes on gin-clear Canadian lakes in shallow water during the middle of the day. The best weeds to look for are emerging cabbage weeds. The broad leaves provide shade for the minnows and walleyes. Look for pockets in the weeds.

Bobber fishing can be a waiting game. Keep moving your bobber rig around to locate fish. Try setting the bobber stop at different depths. Walleyes can be found just about anywhere in the water column. Watching a bobber quickly sink under is one of the most exciting moments in fishing for me. The wait is often rewarded with some dandy walleyes on days when nothing else is working.

To learn this, and other rigging methods more quickly, schedule a guided fishing trip this season.