

MIDWEST
OUTDOORS



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ILLINOIS

Section Two



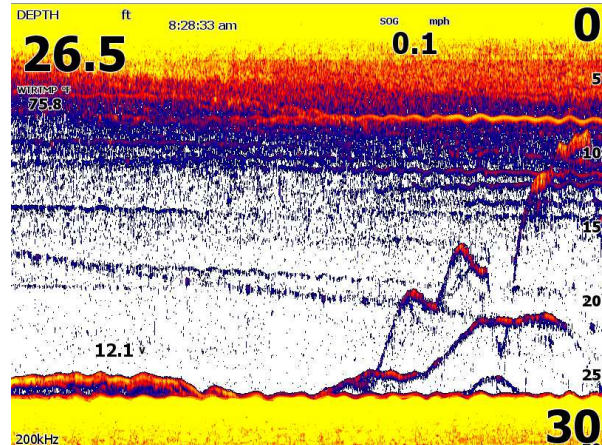
**BOAT CONTROL—
THE SECRET TO
DEEP-WATER FISHING**

Walt & Poppee's Tales from the Boat Shoppee !

Precision Boat Control with Mark O'Neill



Mark O'Neill with a monster Lake Geneva bass.



On the far right of the screen you can see the bass rising up to take the bait!

By Walt Matan

Whether you fish for Walleye, Pike, Smallmouth or any other gamefish, the steep drop-off is where the fish will be in the fall. This is where the baitfish and game fish are, and this is where you need to position your boat. Fish may move up shallow to feed in a flats area near this drop-off or they may suspend out deeper, but either way look for the sharpest drop-off areas of the lake and fish near them.

On a recent fall trip to Lake Geneva, I fished with WaterWerks pro staffer and guide Mark O'Neill. Mark is not your average guide, he fishes Lake Geneva almost exclusively for smallmouth bass and he educates anglers on proper use of electronics and boat control for structure fishing while fishing. You can learn out of his boat or he will show you the proper operation on your own boat. A trip with Mark is not about catching a million fish, but rather how to learn about the technology that is available to you to and catching big fish.

Lake Geneva is a structure fisherman's dream come true. Smallmouth bass have taken over the lake, they are excellent fighters and relate to the same drop-offs and weed edges that walleye use. O'Neill catches pike, muskie, largemouth and walleye while plying these depths, but the primary catch is smallies. If you book a trip with him, you will learn how to effectively ply the depths. You can use that same knowledge on prime walleye water lakes with similar characteristics of Lake Geneva.

Fall fishing can be rough. Wind, rain and temperature changes all make fishing difficult. No matter the conditions, fish have to eat, so weather changes don't affect them as much as in the summer. Grab yourself a Frabill FXE Stormsuit and you'll be ready for all conditions.

The secret to deep water fishing is precision boat control, of which Mark is a master. Precision boat control currently can best be achieved with a bowmount electric trolling motor. While I prefer the new Minnkota Terrova I-Link, Mark prefers the new Motorguide Xi5. The Xi5 trolling motor deploys easily, operates smoothly and has GPS in the head so it can lock on a spot as well as record and follow tracks. It has a wireless foot pedal as well as a wireless hand control and has the ability to lock on a position and jog in 5 foot increments precisely over structure. That's the feature that is really unique for the structure fisherman and is only available from Motorguide.

O'Neill fishes out of a Lund 1825 Pro Guide. From the back of the boat he is able to operate and monitor his Mercury 90 hp Big Tiller 4-Stroke as well as the Motorguide and the Lowrance units he uses. Mark's Lowrance electronics are all connected together using various network connections. His primary units are, on the back of the boat a Lowrance HDS-9 Touchscreen with Structure Scan and Lowrance HDS-8 Gen 2; and on the bow, a HDS-7 Gen 2 unit. Also included from Lowrance is their Sirius Weather, Link VHF radio, Point One, SonarHub and their SonicHub. He runs a variety of transducers off the transom of the boat and the Motorguide has a built in transducer for the HDS -7 on the bow.

Big fall smallies and walleye prefer large live bait. Large fatheads, chubs, small suckers and locally caught panfish are the best big fish bait. A Lindy rig inched along the dropoff is the most effective way to present it. O'Neill operates the Motorguide via the wireless hand control while staring at a GPS map of the Lake on one Lowrance unit and staring at the locator on the other. Some fish will lay belly to bottom, some are suspended. Mark has enough experience with Lowrance that he can tell different species by the shape of the arc. These units are so precise that we would spot a fish, lock onto it with GPS, troll the boat back over it again and catch it. We've often actually seen fish shoot up and grab the bait as it drops down. This is only achieved by customizing the setting and taking them out of the automatic settings that the factory provides.

So if you want to catch some bigger fish this fall, work the steep dropoffs and you might just catch that trophy fish of a lifetime! Or give Mark a call and book a trip. You'll be glad you did!

Check boats and gear we've talked about at the WaterWerks Marine Group. WaterWerks Boats of Naperville is easily found off of I-88, on rt. 59 in Warrenville/Naperville, or call 630-393-0100 or walt@waterwerks.com. The WaterWerks Group Flagship store is jammed full of great boats and accessories too and is located at 18660 S. Cicero Ave. in Country Club Hills, call 1-708-798-9700 or wayne@waterwerks.com for more information.

You can contact Mark O'Neill thru Facebook, his website www.structure-fishing.com or by phone at 773-330-9702.