

Lesson learned – use what works

On a recent Lake Geneva fishing trip with Mark O'Neill from Lowrance, I learned the answers to a couple of questions that had been confusing to me: Is it better to catch a lot of fish or bigger fish? Is there any reason to avoid the use of live bait?

More or bigger is a choice everyone has to make for themselves.

I definitely fall into the bigger fish category and so does O'Neill. We elected to fish deep water for big smallmouths at about 28 feet deep. Mark knew the big bronzebacks would be deep and the little guys would be much shallower.

We got a dozen fish ranging from 18 to 21 inches by working the depths. We might have gotten three times as many largemouths by flipping to docks. We finished the day much happier with fish that many consider to be trophies than we would have been with a high number count.

Sometimes you have to make a decision and then try to fish the spots that hold your targets. Big fish seem to school together and they school in places that the small fish avoid. If you want big fish, you have to locate the big-fish water.

As far as live bait is concerned, I now say that you should do whatever is working. I am an artificial bait guy for the most part. I don't mean to be an elitist, but sometimes I used to feel that live bait made fishing too easy. My snobishness says that fishing with artificials is harder to do.

Phooey! I learned a lesson on this Geneva trip. Use what works. I'd rather spend my day catching fish using live bait when the conditions make for tough fishing than working on my suntan casting a lure all day at fish that have no interest in attacking it.

Virtually everyone uses minnows for spring crappies. The pro walleye tournaments allow the use of live bait. Catfish anglers use crawlers and chicken livers, don't they? What ice fisherman doesn't use spikes or waxworms?



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Nope. There is nothing amateur or unethical about live bait. For that matter, I now know that the really good fishermen are the ones who know what kind of live bait is going to be successful on a specific species under the conditions they face.

By the way, O'Neill and I had our Geneva success using smallish perch that we caught on worms before we went after the bass. We used live bait to catch our bass bait and then used the live bait we caught to catch our bass.