

A Shore Thing...

No boat, no problem with gamefish hungry

By Dick Ellis

The no-boat blues quickly turned to a hallelujah hymn of celebration Wednesday night when a shore thing turned into a shore bet during a rain-soaked, Wednesday night assault on Delavan Lake gamefish. Walleyes, bass and northern pike all sent big fish representatives to snap on the lures offered by Dave Sura and Bob Merriman of Racine and eighth grade anglers Michael Pletta and Blake Fox of Menomonee Falls during the first week of Wisconsin's inland fishing season. No boat? No problem.

An addiction to fishing doesn't always translate to a budget that allows the angler to purchase a boat. Dave Sura knows that purchase is somewhere on his horizon, but he has never let the wait stop him from landing big fish and lots of them fishing the harbors and tributaries of Lake Michigan and inland lakes that allow public

shore access. Often, the trips are made with long-time friend Merriman.

Sura was the perfect teacher to match with young anglers Pletta and Fox, who

also have the fishing bug but not always the opportunity to fish. Sura had made several successful trips to target crappies and bluegills from shore prior to the Wisconsin inland

fishing season, and was making the transition to focus on gamefish. Most often, he said, his success the last week in April on panfish in southern Wisconsin will be experienced a week or two later (now) in northern Wisconsin due to warming water temperature differences, which triggers spawn.

"I was fishing for crappies by a creek inlet on the north end of the lake," he said. "The sun beats on the water there and the southerly winds bring the warmest surface water to that end of the lake. Right now, (May 6), down here the bluegills are still in pre-spawn and the crappies are spawning or already in post-spawn. I kept about 20 of the bigger crappies taken from shore. The six or eight gills that I kept were between eight and nine inches. The gill fishing should pick up now. Crappies will spawn at 60 degrees and gills will spawn more like bass at between 62 and 65 degrees."



LEFT: Bob Merriman with the 38 inch pike taken from shore Wednesday night before releasing the fish back into Delavan Lake. RIGHT: Michael Pletta changes to his own rod and choice of lure and shows the results after just one cast on Delavan Lake during an evening-to-night shore outing targeting bass, walleye, pike and panfish.



Brian Williams wades in the water of Delavan Lake and fights a nice pike in the rain Wednesday evening to usher in the Wisconsin inland fishing season."



TOP: Before transitioning to gamefish, Dave Sura found willing crappies in southern Wisconsin the last week in April. Crappie and bluegill action should be peaking now in northern Wisconsin. BOTTOM: Blake Fox of Menomonee Falls breaks the ice and takes a nice bluegill from shore on Delavan Lake during the first week of Wisconsin's inland fishing season. RIGHT: Bob Merriman shows a just-legal 18-inch walleye taken from shore on Delavan Lake Wednesday night. Bass, pike, walleyes and panfish were all part of the catch and release in the rain during Wisconsin's first week of inland fishing

Sura found most success on the pannies armed with 2-inch Gulp Fish Fry in pink or chartreuse with a 1/32nd or 1/64th, uncollared jig-head on a four-pound fluorocarbon leader. The Wisconsin opener May 2nd allowed the transition to gamefish but the pannies remain a priority, especially for the frying pan.

"Normally in the south the crappie action will begin in mid-April with the gills about two weeks later. In the north crappies normally start in late April or early May with the gills following. Prime time in the north should be happening as people read this. Post spawn is a little harder for the shore fisherman than pre-spawn and spawn. In post-spawn, except for the males that stay to guard the nest the fish are migrating out to

deeper water where they find new weed growth."

Fox and Pletta joined Sura and Merriman Wednesday night while I worked the camera. With heavy rains blowing in from the west, we had the peninsula protecting the boat launch on Delavan to ourselves for shore fishing. Just two other anglers would eventually join us as we were battered by high winds and steady rain. The young anglers, despite being underdressed and unprepared for the storms, would not even entertain the idea of an early departure. They agreed to a trip back to the truck where Fox was fitted...or not so fitted...with a reporter's adult sweat-shirt.

Blake immediately found nice panfish but when the fish wouldn't cooperate with

Michael, he changed to his own rod and tackle box weapons and found a willing 18 inch largemouth on his first cast with spinner bait. Everyone caught fish but Merriman in particular would have a rare evening from shore.

Numerous small northern pike and bass would be taken and released by the Racine mail carrier before two walleyes in the 18 inch class stung crankbaits and offered a sign of something special yet to come. Soon after late arrival Brian Williams of Trevor caught and released a 33 inch pike at dusk, Merriman won a fight with a northern that stretched the tape to 38 inches. All the fish were released,

"We use stick baits from shore for walleyes, pike and bass," Sura said. "X-Raps are by far the best bait for shore

use because they have a weight-transfer system that allows the bait to be cast further than anything else. Bob caught those fish on perch-colored lures but we have also been using blue and silver and gobie-colored X-Raps. Swim baits like little paddle-tailed plastics also work well. What we use depends on the water clarity. When the water is dirty, throw bright colors. When it's clear, use more natural colors like green or blue."

When the skies cleared just before sunset a rainbow hung over us like an exclamation point on the evening's fishing. It said you don't always need a boat to experience very good fishing in Wisconsin; north or south.

Every once in a while, the shore thing is the shore bet. *OWO*