

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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Ready ... Action

Comfort, fish needed to keep kids fishing

By Dick Ellis



Hammer handle pike that keep the flags flying on Wisconsin's many "action lakes", says fishing expert Dave Sura, will keep kids interested in fishing. (Ellis)

Jeremy, my nephew Luke's lifelong friend, had made his resolutions as the sand slipped away on 2008; Jeremy would stop smoking, he would stop chewing tobacco, and he would exercise until he was once again in the physical shape befitting a mid-twenties something

know, someone's gotta get a trailer and a four-wheeler," Jeremy said. "Then we won't have to walk so far."

Some of the best laid plans go away faster than others. I hope...I resolve... as we begin another year

outdoorsman.

On New Year's Day, Luke and Jeremy worked their tip-ups on Long Lake near the Wisconsin-Minnesota border, running to numerous tripped flags over the course of the day but landing only one fish. In between the strikes, they played the angler's waiting game. Smoke rose from Jeremy's cigarettes. Splotches of Copenhagen decorated the ice here and there, tracking Jeremy's meanderings over a morning on the hardwater.

Finally, it was time to head in. Equipment gathered on the sled, they trudged and pulled toward the distant landing. "You

outside, to visit more Wisconsin counties, and use more sources of fishing and hunting expertise, to bring you more useful information for your own trips. I also will not smoke or chew... since I quit those things in 1988.

Sunday, January 4, I began that journey by heading south to Racine County's Browns Lake to meet fishing expert Dave Sura and gain his advice for introducing kids to fishing. He is a two-time division tournament winner for rainbow trout and coho salmon in Racine's annual Big Fish Bash originally established as Salmon-A-Rama, and a past winner of the Steelhead division in the Coho-Rama, with numerous top 10 finishes in each tournament.

Sura has fished for 30 year, his passion for angling influenced by his father and uncle Dan Sura, long-time writer and host for In-Fisherman Television and Magazine and current media specialist for Lindner's Angling Edge Network. Dave Sura is a past salmon and trout professional guide and host of Outdoor Insight Television, and current associate at Dick's Sporting Goods. He is a 6th grade science teacher in the Racine Unified School District. Of highest importance to this story, Dave is also a Daddy; Abby is his five year old gem being strategically brain-



Dave Sura arms commercially purchased and classic home-made tip-ups with shiners for an afternoon on the ice targeting pike and bass on Browns Lake near Burlington. (Ellis)

washed so that Daddy Dave is guaranteed a future fishing partner.

"Abby's face lights up when I have her out catching bluegill after bluegill on a hot summer day, like any kid," Sura said as we loaded the sled at the Browns Lake landing with augers, bait and tip-ups. "Ice fishing can be a great way to introduce kids to fishing too. Depending on the lake and the conditions though, it can also be a way



No snow, surface water and slick conditions make ice travel precarious on Browns Lake Sunday in Racine County for angler Dave Sura. (Ellis)



Another tip-up set, Dave Sura moves to set more medium shiners for pike and bass on Browns Lake. Sura says fast action and comfort, not the size of the fish is imperative to properly introducing young kids to fishing during the winter months. (Ellis)



Waiting too long without action while fishing will soon have young children bored, says fishing expert Dave Sura. Take kids out in comfortable conditions, on Wisconsin's many "starter" lakes known for fast action. (Ellis)

to scare them away. You want kids to catch fish and lots of them and it doesn't matter how big they are. You know kids...in fact you know me. We get bored. You don't want to wear out their batteries. You also want them to be comfortable. I'll bring Abby out here on a 35 to 40 degree day, with sunshine and little wind. But not today."

The 400-acre Browns Lake outside of Burlington Sunday was indeed not a place for comfort. In the wake of a cold-front, winds rose to a biting 30 miles per hour and temperatures dropped nine degrees toward the teens in just two hours despite our noon start. To make matters more difficult recent erratic weather conditions had taken away all snow cover but left more than an inch of standing water over much of the ice. If you fell on the unending sheet of glass without creepers strapped to your boots, the result would be a cold bath.

Browns Lake was chosen, however, as a perfect example of an "action lake", Sura said, ideal for introducing kids to fishing. Wisconsin is painted with 15,000 lakes over 72 counties. Regardless of your county of residence, a bit of research with your local DNR, a baitshop or the internet will provide you with the lakes close to you where tip-up flags

will fly or panfish will cooperate.

"Browns Lake has high numbers of bass and small pike," Sura said. "It's a good action lake, or what I call a starter lake. You can find these lakes where you can usually count on quite a few bites. Tuesday, in a short time we had nine flags and five northerns on the ice. Most of them are in the low to mid-20 inch class, but you're not looking for trophies. Just that action that will keep the kids interested."

We set up six tip-ups in a circle pattern over a weed flat in 10 feet of water adjacent to the lake's only significant structure, a 40 foot hole. Medium shiners not too big for the average Browns' predator were set above the weeds under three commercial tip-ups and three hand-made classics built in a machine shop by the Sura family in the 1960s for deep water assaults on the monster pike of Big Green Lake.

"17 pound mono is fine without steel leaders," Sura said. "Three of these tip-ups do have steel leaders but you don't need them when targeting hammer-handle pike."

tially had to wait for strikes. Hunkered down on pails doing our best to hide from the winds, I was very pleased with our decision to leave Abby and even my 14 year old Taylor home. Candidly, there was nothing fun or comfortable about staring at bent flags for 60 minutes. I was "this close" to smoking and chewing again, but I only had bubble gum cigarettes.

When the frenzy began though, the discomfort and effort of preparation, at least for adults, was well worth the wait. A dozen flags tripped over the next 45 minutes, and small fat pike and largemouth bass were temporarily yanked from their homes for a visit with the humans on the hardwater. We were so busy chasing flags that it was impossible to keep up with resetting bait and tip-ups. It was pure Wisconsin fun. The only thing missing was sunshine and mild temperatures.

"I was lucky when I was a kid fishing with my dad," Sura said. "We'd catch 20 to 30 fish a day on Big Green. We could count on at least one pike 35 to 40 inches every time out and even caught lake trout through the ice on dead bloater chubs. But don't tell me that Abby wouldn't feel the same way with a 22-inch pike on the line. That's what you're looking for with kids. This is a lake you can bring your daughter and she'll enjoy herself enough to want to come back again. In Wisconsin, these action lakes or starter lakes are out there." *OWO*