

Fish of 10,000 Casts?

Action from 22 opening day muskies shreds reputation

By Dick Ellis

With 40 inches of killing machine in close pursuit, the Lip Ripper twitch bait cut the clear water of Pewaukee Lake on its journey back to the Ranger. The perch lure was shining in a custom paint job administered by the careful brush strokes of five-year old Andrew Kubiak in a suburban Milwaukee garage during the winter months. Bright sunshine danced off the bait as the musky closed on its meal until nose and jaws nearly rubbed treble hook. Andrew's daddy, John Kubiak initiated the habitual figure-8 of the musky veteran attempting to trigger a strike.

"I really just made a large circle with the bait and the musky stayed right on it," Kubiak said. "During the second circle I thought I saw him slowly open its mouth and come down on the bait. He didn't crush it and I didn't even feel it. But I thought I better set the hook...right now."

Good move. The fish "went nuts" when Kubiak offered his sharp "hello" but, we're pleased to report, the detainee's lobbying efforts for immediate release were futile. Kubiak and Rod Grimme of Pewaukee brought the musky to net, measured it at a highly re-

spectable 39 inches, took photos and on their own terms, granted the eventual pardon. It's a multi-step ritual that the musky addicts were becoming very familiar with over one opening day on the premiere 2493 acre southern Wisconsin water known for big fish and lots of them.

Fish of 10,000 casts? Grimme and Kubiak caught seven muskies; including three legal fish at 34, 37 and 39 inches, and raised 15 other muskies for a stunning day on the water with 22 different fish seen.

"This was our tenth opening day fishing Pewaukee Lake," said Kubiak. Our best day before this was three undersized fish. Over those openers we averaged maybe two fish caught with a big fish of 34 inches and the average musky about 32 inches."

After years of perfecting their home-made lure design, Kubiak and Grimme had founded the Lip Ripper Tackle Company before selling the business several years ago. On Pewaukee, they worked the five-inch twitch baits and six-inch undertaker jerk baits to stir up the activity.

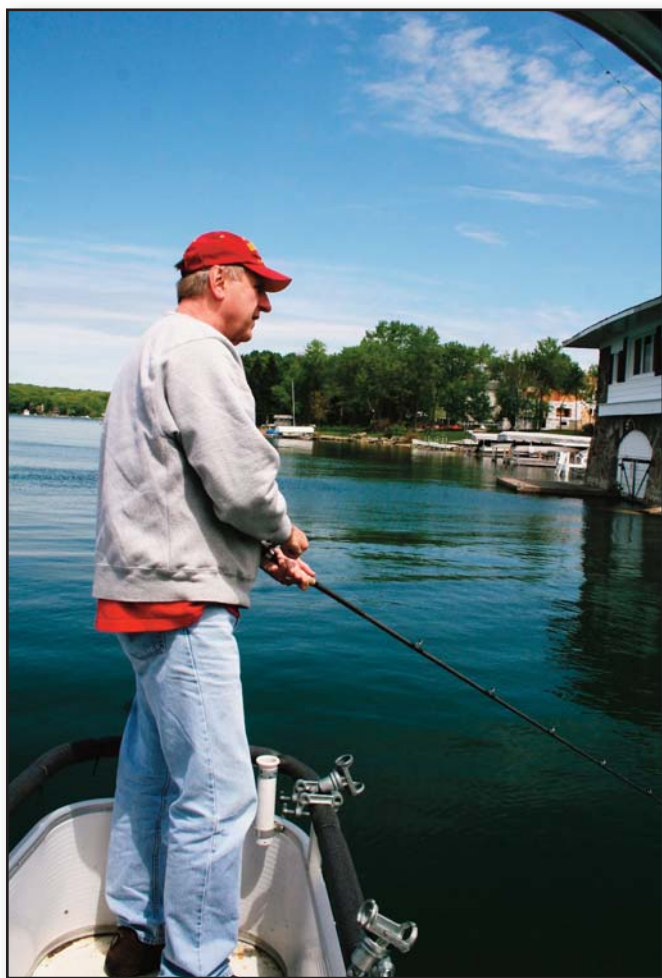
"It was a typical opening morning with chilly temperatures



John Kubiak poses for a shot with his 39 inch opening day musky taken on Pewaukee Lake before releasing the fish to fight again.



Rod Grimme holds a 37 inch musky prior to release on Pewaukee Lake opening day. Grimme and John Kubiak of New Berlin caught seven muskies to 39 inches and raised 15 other muskies during an extraordinary day of fishing the 2493 acre southern Wisconsin water



Jay Kasner of Delafield works a bait through the clear water of Pewaukee Lake for muskies on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend. During the five-plus hour hunt with five active muskies seen, Kasner raised one approximately 40-inch fish that followed five consecutive casts to the boat but would not strike.

in the forties when we got out at about 5:30," Kubiak said "Water temperatures were in the mid-50s and we started to hit the spots where we had success on other opening days. There was below average fishing pressure. We weren't fishing on top of anyone."

"We made one pass on the west end and raised four fish in four to six feet of water with clumps of emerging weeds. We did catch one 32 inch musky in Taylor's Bay (on the northeast side of the lake), but five of the seven fish came on the west end in shallow weedy areas with warmer water."

Kubiak is my brother-in-law.

Knowing that a family wedding in Stevens Point would intrude on our traditional musky fishing in Vilas County during the musky season opener in northern Wisconsin the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, I returned to Pewaukee Lake on Friday, May 22 with friends Mark Sankey and Jay Kasner. The southern Wisconsin musky season south of highway 10 opens with the inland fishing season the first Saturday in May.

(A survey question or two to the reader begs to be asked. Should it be legal to be married on any Wisconsin hunting or fishing opener, which in effect forces family members to attend an

event not nearly as important? And, should something called the "couples shower" be legal, again, forcing mostly men to miss precious field time for wine sipping, gift opening and quiet banter instead of casting, chewing and not taking showers? If you fall for the latter, in one reporter's respectful opinion, label yourself a girlie-man and move to Illinois)

Sankey lives on Pewaukee Lake and fishes from Big Ed, a small pontoon boat that was owned by his late father. The boat helped Sankey catch and release about 70 muskies in 2008. He had taken and released five legal fish with a large musky of 39 inches when we headed out on Memorial Friday. The fish had fallen in shallow water holding occasional pods of cabbage weeds on spinner baits, husky jerks and Slammer twitch baits produced by Bill Schwartz.

"The small fish are typically very active early on Pewaukee," Sankey said. "The big fish are still laying low after spawning. When you see them in the shallows, they're beat up and scarred. They're worn out and need a couple weeks to recuperate."

In cold front conditions dropping temperatures 20 degrees with rain and stiff east winds after hot and humid weather and predominant westerly winds, we turned our attention to a protected Rocky Point. No action during the first two hours of our assault and last two hours didn't take away from a beautiful 90 minutes in warming temperature and clearing skies when we raised five different fish. Kasner, of Delafield, raised the same curious 40-inch class musky on five consecutive casts. None of the tricks of the trade, including figure-8's, changing baits, and returning to the scene of the interested fish after a 30 minute delay could trigger a hit. But the show was well worth the time and effort.

"The zebra mussels have really made the water clear on Pewaukee," Sankey said. "You can see these fish coming. Now they call this the Aquarium. It can be quite a show."

Written in respectful memory of our fallen service men and women and their families. Thank you for the opportunity to do what we choose. *OWO*



Just a small part of a musky man's arsenal hangs from the front of Mark Sankey's boat during a Memorial Day weekend assault on southern Wisconsin's Pewaukee Lake.