



photo: Jeff Woleslagle

ICING

BIG BASS

by Jeff Woleslagle

We moved the sled onto the ice shortly after daybreak filled with anticipation. After drilling several holes to locate the edge of some shallow weed beds that had been covered by hard water, we enjoyed a cup of coffee from the Thermos and went to work rigging the tip-ups. A medium shiner was hooked through the back with one of the three hooks from a size 12 treble hook, and just enough line was let off the spool to keep the lively baitfish slightly above the weeds. Before we even had three tip-ups out, we had our first flag go up. When I got to the hole, the line, which had been steadily peeling from the underwater spool, had just started to slow its progress. I reached down and slowly pulled the slack out before giving the braid a sharp tug to drive the hook home. I knew immediately that I was into a good fish. After several runs, I hoisted a 3-pound Largemouth Bass onto the ice. The action proved to be steady all morning and into the early

afternoon. By the time we were ready to pack it in for the day, we had landed 10 bass ranging in size from about 1½ pounds to some real beauties at close to 4 pounds, plus six Chain Pickerel.

Many anglers don't specifically target bass in the winter, but there are certainly days when it can be well worth the effort. Often, I like to try to key in on bass with tip-ups while I target panfish with a jigging rod. If the bass are really active, I will tie a dropper rig onto my jigging rod and catch bass with it as well. What I mean by "dropper rig" is that I will fish a small tear drop jig, usually baited with a wax worm or spike. I will tie a size 16 treble hook about 8- to 10-inches below the jig and take a lively Fathead Minnow and hook it near the tail. With this rig, I am appealing to panfish such as Bluegills and Yellow Perch, which may be attracted to the tiny tear drop jig by the frantic action of the

minnow, and I am very likely to catch crappies and bass on the minnow itself. I prefer a larger offering on my tip-ups and usually select medium shiners. I keep my tip-ups spooled with 20-pound-test braid as my backing to which I tie a small black-barrel swivel. Then, I attach a leader of 3- to 4-feet of 8-pound-test fluorocarbon. I prefer size 10 and 12 treble hooks, and I like to hook the shiners in front of the dorsal fin but below the spine, so they maintain action in the water. If the bait is too lively, I often attach a small splitshot about 12 inches above the hook to keep the baitfish in the strike zone.

Most of the bass that I catch through the ice are associated with weed beds. If I can find a defined weed edge and maybe a few holes in the weeds, I know that I am in the right area to start fishing. A flasher unit can be extremely helpful for not only locating the weed edges but keying in on the right depth. Once I catch a bass through the ice, I pay close attention to the depth it came from, how close or far from the weed edge it was or if it was in the weed bed itself. That first fish can often clue you in on what areas will be productive for that day. It is not uncommon to catch multiple bass from the same hole, but be prepared to drill many holes to locate them. If they don't produce within 30 minutes, I usually start to look shallower or deeper until I locate fish.

Don't be afraid to fish the shallow side of weed beds. I have caught large bass through the ice in water as shallow as 5 feet. Bass aren't as active as trout and other cold and coolwater fishes under the ice, and I have often found little flurries of action. They have reduced feeding periods in the winter, so it isn't uncommon to find better fishing later in



photo-Jeff Woleslage

A flasher unit can be a big help in locating not only fish but weed beds and weed edges.

the morning after the sun is up. Most of the big bass that I have caught through the ice come during periods of stable weather or a warming trend.

If you have been dreaming of the big bass of summer, they are still out there, and they can be caught. By targeting weeds and experimenting with different depths, you can find them and ice some big bass this winter. ☐



photo-Carl Haensel

This nice bass came through the ice near a weed bed.