

LANDING *the* LUNKER

Five Lessons Learned



by *Christian A. Shane*

photos by the author

It was the fifth consecutive night of attempts to hook and catch a trophy bass on a large pond in western Pennsylvania. On previous evenings, this particular fish had snapped my fishing line, stolen my lure and wrapped my lure around a log. My determination grew each night to learn some new tricks and refine some old techniques to catch this monster of a bass.



Frog Lure

Lesson 1—Match your tackle and line to the largest potential fish in your watershed.

On our first encounter, I was simply fishing my 4½-foot rod with 4-pound-test line on a matching reel. This fishing combo seemed appropriate for a relaxing evening of catching a few small bass. Little did I know that I would meet an opponent that night.

The first cast from shore produced a pounding hit as I watched a Largemouth Bass engulf a new frog lure and suddenly snap it off my line. As it dove into deeper waters, my jaw dropped at this creature's power. If I decided to tangle with this beast again, I needed to upgrade to stronger gear. Locating my 6-foot rod and reel outfit with 8-pound-test line, I resolved to get a better look at this fish and try to retrieve my lost lure.

Lesson 2—Tie and retie knots and test their strength.

The second night brought sight of the fish again, so I hurriedly tied on a hook and tried a live minnow. The first tug on my line proved that a bass of large size can easily pull a weak knot free. When I hooked into it again, my improved clinch knot (not as improved as it should have been) was no match as it snapped the line at the hook eye, leaving a curlicue of fishing line behind. Luckily, this time it was only able to get the hook and a sacrificial minnow.

Priding myself in usually tying quality knots, I was slightly intimidated by this bandit. I slowly and thoughtfully reworked the next improved clinch knot to wrap it around the hook eye and wet it before cinching it tight.



When casting, it's better to be in the water than in the branches.

Lesson 3—Check your line for kinks or frays before casting, and set your drag to appropriate levels.

On the third evening, I thought it was the night to finally land this fish. Once again, the strength of this bass proved otherwise. After chomping on a floating stickbait, it stripped the line out of the guides like a marlin on a run. I fumbled for my drag setting, but it was too swift. I didn't set the drag right, resulting in the hook not setting

properly. My line and lure lobbed back into a bush as he splashed away.

Lesson 4—Keep hooked bass on the surface and away from obstacles or obstructions.

Only after having the bass take my lure to the bottom and wrap the line around brush on the fourth night was the next lesson fully understood. After a few casts and the initial thrill of hooking the bass solidly, I didn't give attention to the impending doom of branches and logs beneath the water. The bass tangled the line around a log, unhooked itself and vanished. The wise fish had previously performed this sort of Houdini act. This lure wasn't coming back as it was snagged down deep.

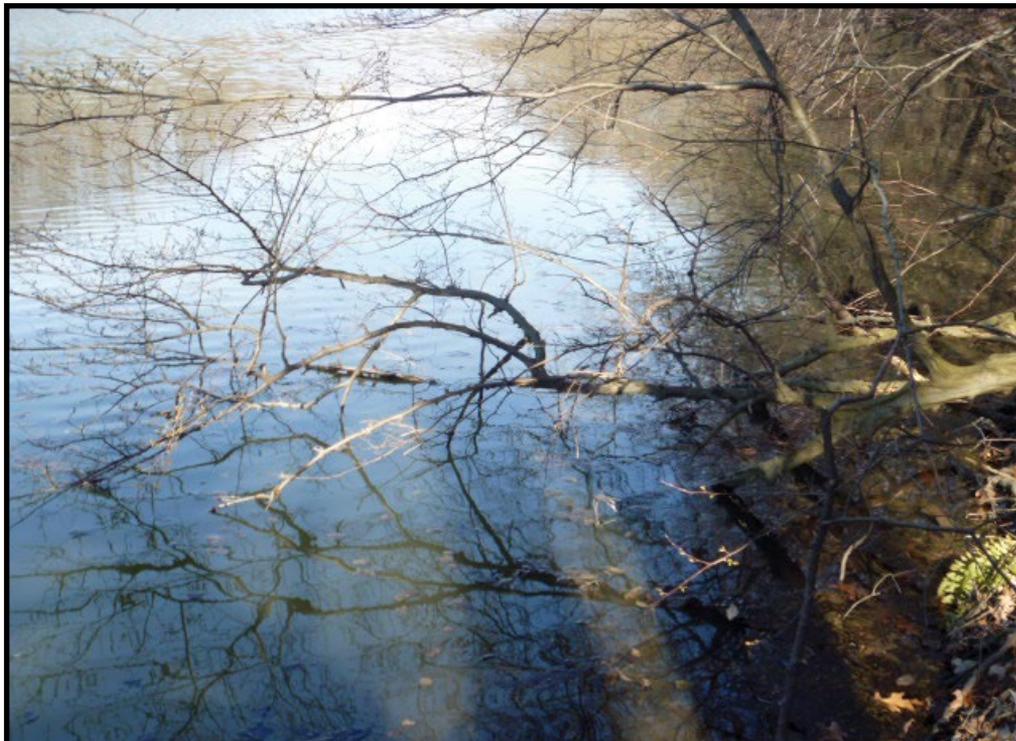
Lesson 5—Make the perfect cast at the right time and right spot.

On the fifth night, I had my rod ready, drag set and knots tight. Tonight, if I had another opportunity, I wasn't going to miss. Everything was set for the big catch. After scanning for the bass with a few errant casts, I spotted its silhouette as it slowly tailed off into the depths. The casts forewarned it, and I kicked myself as I experienced the last lesson.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end here. Later that evening, the magnificent fish was still willing. Using all that I observed and ascertained during the week, I finally

landed the massive 23-inch Largemouth Bass fishing a lure on the surface.

The excitement of the catch included a quick picture. Observing its massive jaw and remarkable camouflage, I held the formidable lunker in the water to regain its strength. Would it teach these fishing lessons to others? ☐



Keep hooked bass on the surface and away from obstacles or obstructions.