

# Learn From

By Spencer Berman, Contributing Writer

Last summer I was fishing on Lake St. Clair with a new client, and we were both casting big rubber baits — he a big Medussa, myself a Pounder BullDawg. After a couple hours I had caught three muskies and my client one. At that point he asked if he should switch from the Medussa to a Pounder, but I suggested that he stay with the Medussa but fish it in a manner similar to how I was retrieving the Pounder.

The retrieve that was working for me required that I work the rod very hard with a lot of direction changes on the pulls, rather than a standard pull-pause retrieve. On that day it just seemed to be what the muskies wanted. After I demonstrated the technique, we both started catching fish pretty evenly. The day was capped when my client caught his first 50-incher.

That evening my client asked me how I had learned all the tricks to fishing rubber baits. After thinking about it, I answered that I had only figured out small pieces of the technique myself but had learned most of it by watching two different guys, both of whom are easily the best shallow and deep rubber fishermen I have ever met. From Dennis Lappen I learned Shallow BullDawg applications and from Mark Lijewski I acquired deep edge and open water applications. Hours of experience since have added to the knowledge base that I learned from these anglers when I was a teenager.

This concept of learning different practices from other skilled anglers is something that I have used to become a better fisherman. I think every musky fisherman can benefit from similar observations of accomplished anglers.

There is no better way to learn a technique and gain confidence in it than to model yourself after the anglers who are known for that particular skill. The first major challenge is figuring out which professional, guide, TV host or talented weekend warrior from whom you want to learn. Look for the areas in the musky world where that technique is most used and then see who in that area is leading the way. For example, big water trolling on Lake St. Clair, short-line trolling in Kentucky, deep edge rubber fishing in Wisconsin, and bucktail fishing in Minnesota. In each of these areas the techniques have been refined and mastered over time and repetition. It stands to reason the anglers who stand out on their designated waters are going to be the best in the world at their respective technique. Therefore, they are the ones to seek out.

## Deep Edge Rubber

As a young musky fisherman, I fished with some of the best anglers in the world. What I tried to do in each of these situations was to learn what each angler's skill set was and then base my own application of that given technique on what I learned from that angler. For example, when I was 17, I fished with Mark Lijewski, who basically rewrote the rules on deep



# n The Best

***If you truly want to learn a technique, go to where it's popular among musky fishermen, and then fish with the best of the best***

The author's clients, Chris and Keith Barton, release a musky doubleheader caught on big plastics.

# MUSKY STRATEGY



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### Learn From The Best

edge and suspended muskies in Wisconsin using big rubber lures, specifically BullDawgs. For a while, he dominated northern Wisconsin tournament circuits.

Mark taught me to use my graphs to determine the edge of the cabbage or milfoil and then to additionally look for the deeper sandgrass edge. Once you pinpoint these, he told me to pull out about 30 to 40 feet and cast inward. By having a good understanding of how all the different layers of weeds lay out you will be able to precisely target the deep edge and catch the bigger fish. Other concepts that I learned from Mark was to look for specific weed densities and, most importantly, the presence of baitfish in those weeds. By using good electronics, such as Humminbirds 360-Imaging and Side Imaging, you can learn which of the weeds have enough room for baitfish and muskies to maneuver through. This concept of learning from the best not only cut down dramatically on my learning curve of this technique, but ensured that I was working with the top information available.

In addition to learning to fish big rubber from Mark, I was also able to take away a lot of information about targeting open water muskies. He was the first person to point out how to really read a graph — not to just look for balls of baitfish or muskies in open water, but to use that information to calculate percentages and the likelihood of getting a strike, as well as fish attitudes and level of aggression. By using graphs to determine how close muskies are positioned to their food, as well as how tightly the baitfish are balled up, you can determine these points.

The bottom line here is that in the state of Wisconsin, open water and deep edge fishing is a way of life. The layout of the lakes and the baitfish that inhabit them dictate this, and it is up to us to use that to our advantage and adapt to it. The hugely disproportional amount of tournament victories that can be attributed to this technique speaks to its effectiveness in not only Wisconsin but around the musky range.

### Trolling

One of the most common questions I

am asked by clients while trolling is why I use monofilament line. My answer is to ask them a question: where have anglers been trolling open water for muskies the longest? The answer is the St. Lawrence River and Lake St. Clair. In both areas the top musky trollers all use monofilament because its stretch — nearly seven feet per 100 feet — works like a rubber band to keep constant pressure on a fish while fighting it.

Another key point that I have learned from top musky trollers is the difference in trolling lure actions. On St. Clair, the muskies tend to eat smaller lures in the summer, typically 5 to 6½ inches long, such as Custom X Furys and St. Clair Bait Company's Crazy 8's. On the St. Lawrence, it seems that larger lures tend to come into play, often the big Jake and Believer from Drifter Tackle. While on the surface it may appear that the muskies simply prefer different lures sizes, when you ask expert trollers you get a different story.

On St Clair in the summer, the muskies seem to prefer the great side-to-side "hunting" action that smaller lures can achieve. They not only move with a wobble but also kick out left and right, which seems to be the key to triggering strikes. On the St. Lawrence, a bigger, floppier wobble seems to be the ticket.

Top trollers such as Jason Quintano from Fins and Grins Charters on St. Clair, and Rich Clarke from Sign Man Charters on the St. Lawrence, are experts at setting up trolling spreads, depth control, fighting fish, etc. and they are perfect people to learn from.

### Big Bucktails

Another prime example of these concepts draws our attention to Minnesota and the emergence of the Cowgirl. This revolutionary musky lure was the hottest thing going for a number of years, but as more anglers began to use it and fish became educated to it, you started to see its effectiveness begin to decline. As a result, the top Minnesota anglers began to come up with new, creative ways to keep catching muskies.

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we saw a huge push toward longer rods and figure-8 muskies. After that the anglers began to do very well on double-13's and double-8's rather than double-10's, simply because they had a slightly different vibration the fish had not yet felt.

We need to learn from the example set by these top bucktail fishermen and focus on other concepts. Use longer rods to perform great figure-8's, and try bucktails with double-8's and 13's blades rather than 10's to get that slightly different vibration. By mimicking such elite anglers' bucktail applications, you will not only become a better angler but will ultimately catch more fish.

Musky fishing, like any other sport, has many different styles and techniques for its followers to learn. Although everyone has their own opinions there are always going to be certain guys who simply seem to be ahead of the curve. Therefore, whenever you want to learn a new concept in musky fishing, do a little research. Check with buddies, go online and find out where in the musky range anglers

have been doing that technique the longest. From there, look at the anglers who have risen to the top with that technique. Often, your job will be made easier because the anglers' names will have become synonymous with that style of fishing, such as Steve Herbeck and livebait fishing, Gregg Thomas and short-line trolling, Mark Lijewski and rubber baits, etc. Learn what these anglers do so well and what their concepts are. Use references such as DVDs, tournament results, TV shows or, if they guide, hire them for a day. Use what you learn to construct your own approach and you will have a short road to success.

*Author Spencer Berman is a full-time captain on Lake St Clair and the Detroit River. For more about Spencer, visit [www.spencersanglingadu.com](http://www.spencersanglingadu.com)*



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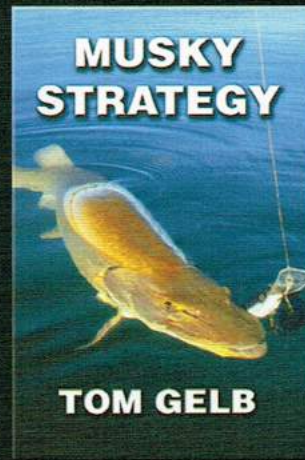
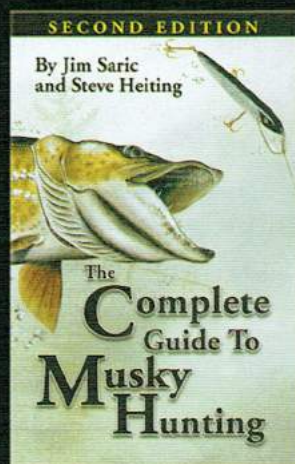
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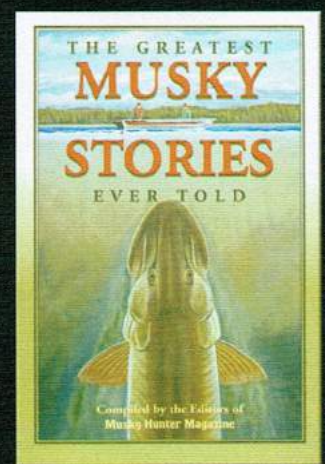
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