

SUPERSTITIONS OF MUSKY PROS

To start, never bring a banana if you're going fishing with these guys ...

By Spencer Berman, Field Editor

With their lucky hats, lucky shirts and lucky lures, fishermen are a superstitious group. Such crazy quirks give us confidence, but musky fishermen take this nuttiness to a whole other level.

In my career I have seen some extremely strange superstitions exhibited by both clients and pros. Some of these superstitions are traditional and their origins reach back hundreds of years. A good example is probably the most common boating superstition of all — NO BANANAS on board! This superstition goes back several hundreds of years to the days when wooden ships would sail banana clusters across the seas. When the primary cargos of these ships were bananas it was common for the crew members to randomly become sick and die. It was soon realized that the death rate amongst the crew aboard banana boats was far more than ships carrying other cargo. This abundance of deaths aboard banana boats resulted in the sailors beginning to think that the bananas aboard the boats were bad luck or cursed. In actuality, banana clusters are known to harbor a variety of extremely poisonous reptiles and spiders, including the banana spider. The spider's venom can be deadly to humans without modern treatment. The venom is a paralytic, which is suspected to have added to the myth because the victims aboard would be unable to communicate what had happened to them once the venom had taken effect.

Three hundred plus years later this superstition is still possibly the most followed. Many freshwater and saltwater captains ban the fruit, with some even going so far as banning banana bread, Banana Republic clothes, Banana Boat sunscreen, etc.

During my career I have found myself becoming more and more superstitious. I started out with a lucky shirt and hat and

have now developed several pretty strict superstition-based rules. The first one, the one to which I most strongly adhere, is the no-banana rule. For the first five or so years of my guiding career I told my clients I would prefer if they didn't bring them on board, I didn't flat-out refuse to take them. In those years I had four major boat/motor problems that required major repairs, all of which happened to take place on days when my clients had brought bananas.

My string of suspicious luck culminated one June day — the last day I ever had a banana onboard.

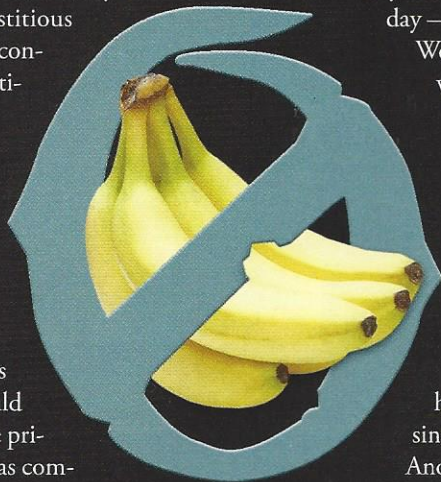
We started out with my clients showing up with six bananas in their cooler, and they told me it was their only food for the day.

In the banana-caused mayhem that ensued, we broke a rod, snapped off a musky in a giant line tangle, lost a net and then blew my motor midway through the day. As we putted along with the kicker for 10 miles back to the launch, I opened their cooler and chucked out the remaining bananas. I have not allowed a banana in the boat since.

Another strange superstition of mine is my selection of hats. Normally I have three hats in a rotation at a time. If we have a good day on the water then that same hat gets to fish another day. If not, it's on to the next one in the lineup. If a hat seems to show no luck and is consistently producing bad days, it is retired and a new hat enters the lineup.

The last superstition I am willing to share concerns using suckers as bait. I believe the suckers which are named by the anglers using them seem much more appealing to hungry muskies. It therefore became a rule that all suckers must be named when they went in the water. During my college years we took it a step further and started naming all the suckers after ex-girlfriends, particularly ones with whom the relationship ended badly. If a sucker got eaten, the new sucker that took its place on the line would not be renamed but would rather be called the same name with the post text "the Second."

Now it is time to move on to some of the top guides and musky anglers. I have included their areas of expertise and — despite their superstitions — would urge you to look them up.





This musky "double" in author Spencer Berman's boat never would have occurred had someone brought a banana for lunch. No way, no how. And others in this panel would agree.

Superstitions Of The Musky Pros

Capt. Chris Taurisano, T-Bone Guide Service, operating in northern Illinois and southeast Wisconsin:

"One of the weird superstitions I have is that, when I am trolling I want all my linecounters on an odd number. It will drive me crazy to have a reel that is not in sync. We've had some great days while our rods were on odd numbers and it has stuck. Another weird one I have is if I have a bad day of fishing, I won't

wear those same clothes together out fishing again."

Steve Heiting, Managing Editor of Musky Hunter magazine:

"What I have learned is to never count a musky before it's caught. The Musky Gods really don't like this. In the University of Esox Musky Schools, I will not hang a new fish chart on the wall until the existing chart is

completely filled. I could work ahead and put up multiple charts for the sake of convenience, but I won't.

"Along the same lines, never, ever, tell someone they're going to catch a musky just because it's moving fast behind their bait. A few years ago a 50-incher was closing fast on Jim Saric's Cowgirl and I said 'You're going to catch that one,' and as soon as I said it the fish darted off, never to be seen again. Thankfully, the bad juju was short-lived because later that day I got a bigger one off the same spot.

"One final thing is I always pick up trash I find floating on the water. Not only is it the right thing to do, but I believe the Musky Gods will reward me for the good deed."

Bob Turgeon, former Minnesota musky guide and Musky Hunter writer:

"I don't so much have superstition rules in the boat, but I do have one very strange superstition story. After one very long day on the water during which we had boated a 50-incher I passed out on the couch that night fully dressed in the clothes I had fished in. I woke up the next day and rushed out to the boat not having changed. That day we caught another 50-incher. I feared that changing might end the streak and didn't want to take any chances. I ended up spending nine smelly days on the water in that same outfit before a 49 $\frac{3}{4}$ -incher broke the streak and I finally got to change."

Capt. Jeff Van Remortel of WDH guide service in northern Wisconsin:

"During the fishing season, it's all about the 'lucky hat.' I will wear the same hat until the luck wears out, then switch it up. During waterfowl season, it's lucky T-shirts. If we have a good hunt, I will wear the same shirt until the mojo wears off. During this past musky season it was all about the Lax Reproductions hat. The Superman shirt took top honors during the fall duck season.

"And never bring a banana in my boat. It will be disposed of with extreme prejudice. Last year I saw further proof involving this evil fruit. I was out with a client and after hours of fishing we had nothing going when my customer pulls out a banana. With about an hour left of the day she disposed of the nasty yellow fruit and proceeded to boat a beast a half-hour later."

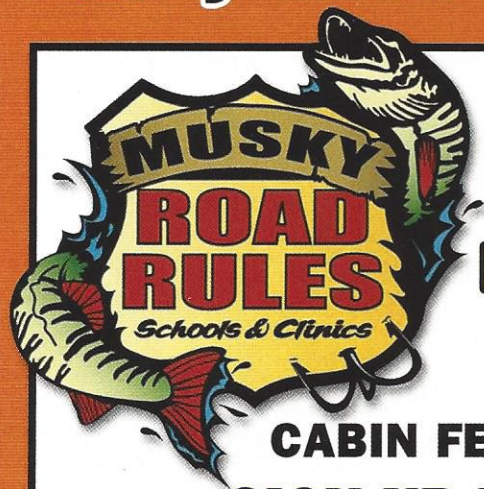
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Jim Saric, host of "The Musky Hunter" TV show and former owner of *Musky Hunter* magazine

"Years ago, when I fished tournaments, I got wrapped up in superstitions. It started by having to eat cheese pizza the night before a tournament. Of course there was also my favorite Ranger hat that I had to wear on the first day of every tournament, but never the second. I avoided black cats, ladders, hitting birds or any animal with my car, etc. I didn't want anything that would give me a bad mojo. If there was someone whose boat or car was broken down on the water or roadside, if I didn't help them, I was sure I was doomed. I had to follow a strict pre-tournament routine; otherwise I knew bad things would happen.

"Finally, about 15 years ago, I exorcised all of my superstitions. I decided to get rid of them all. I tossed out my favorite hat and tournament shirt, and dared to eat a different evening meal! Amazingly, we survived and did well in the event. Since then, I really don't have any superstitions, and eat anything I want, including bananas in the boat. Having said all that I do keep a horseshoe in my boat ... but that's another story!"

John Hoyer, multi species tournament angler. Follow him at Hoyer Fishing on Facebook, or @johnhoyerfish on Instagram:

"All of my superstitions revolve around trash. I religiously recycle. If I have bottles in my truck or boat, I don't throw them in the garbage, I bring them home to be recycled. If

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not I am convinced I will have bad luck on the water.

"Another classic one that Capt. Ben Olsen and I determined a long time ago was to take the boat off plane for any type of floating garbage and go get it. We literally look for it while on the water constantly and will go out of our way to pick it up. We found that more times than not once we pick up something out of the lake we ended up catching a musky

right after!"

Ryan McMahon, guide in the Twin Cities Metro area and greater Minnesota:

"Aside from many little quirks like sharpening hooks obsessively, always hooking my bait to my rod the same way, having the trolling motor resting in the same position while traveling, I became aware of a little su-

perstition that I had developed while livebait fishing with suckers. I realized that I would always look away for a quick moment right when the client would tighten up on the hookset. I'd usually time it so I would be bending over to grab the net right at this moment. I think this was partially an instinctive move to turn away just in case an empty sucker harness came flying back at my eyeballs, but for the most part it was an 'I can hardly watch' moment for me.

"You work so hard to get the bite, you have a fish on but you don't have the fish hooked just yet. As the guide, all the responsibility is on me as far as when to set the hook and how to instruct the client to do so. This is the one time in musky fishing where you do have time to collect yourself and actually make some calculated moves. So, after getting everything lined up just right, I would give the green light and turn my back and hope for the best!"

"After many repetitions of doing this with my back turned I finally realized that in order to give clients feedback on their hooksets I'd have to be a man and face the music — or the hookset, in this case. I've gotten better about watching and critiquing, but every time somebody rears back and slams one in my boat my heart skips a beat and I fight the urge to turn away for a split second."

Steve Herbeck, legendary musky guide:

I sent several messages to Steve about this article in hope of getting something in writing back from him to include. After several attempts Steve finally admitted to me his big superstition can't be revealed. This unwillingness to tell anyone is part of the superstition itself ... your guess is as good as mine!

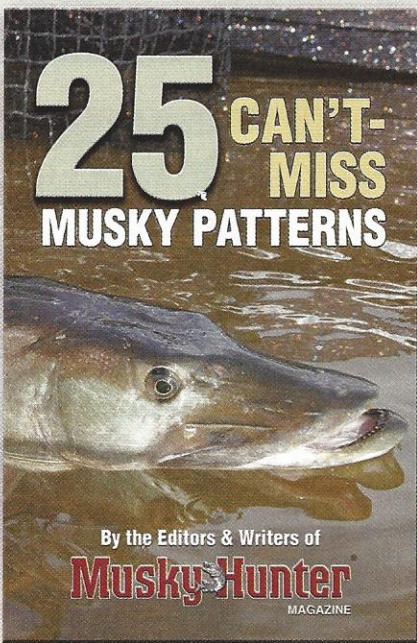
Capt. Brett Alexander of Alexander's Sport Fishing operating on Green Bay, Wisconsin:

"My biggest superstition is to always be positive. In my opinion, good things on the water don't happen to people who aren't expecting them to happen. Even when we are trolling it seems like the fish know not to bite the lures if my clients are singing the blues.

"Another one I never believed started with one group of clients who used to flick a penny at each of our trolling rods. If the penny missed, that rod wasn't going to be getting any bites that day. However, the first trolling rod that got hit by the penny would be getting

Great book from Musky Hunter

CAN'T-MISS



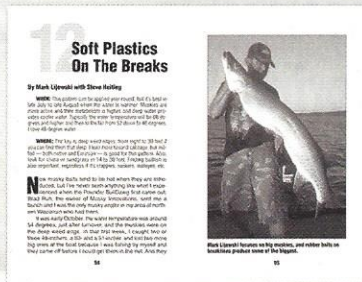
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bit soon. This same group of clients has fished with me for years, and nearly without fault this superstition has come true each time! Now when things get tough I find myself looking for some pennies."

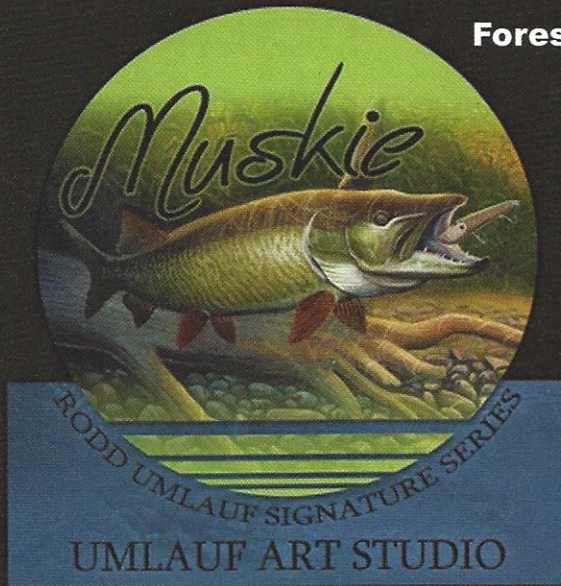
Whether you believe in superstitions or that evil lawmaker named Murphy, some quirks are almost a prerequisite to being a musky angler. Who knows if it's the added time that musky fishermen have between fish compared to other species or something else, but it that we definitely are some of the strangest. Either way, hopefully whatever superstitions you embrace will give you the confidence you need to put that next big musky in the boat.

For more about Field Editor Spencer Berman, visit spencersanglingadu.com



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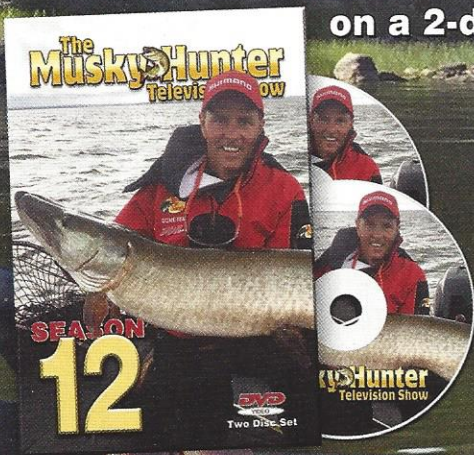
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