

THE BEST WEEKLY FISHING REPORTS FOR YOUR AREA SINCE 1973

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THE FISHERMAN

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HUGE
SAVINGS

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BASS & FLOUNDER
seasons begin!

RUTGERS
SPOTLIGHT

WEIRD
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WORLD FISHING
AND OUTDOOR EXPO

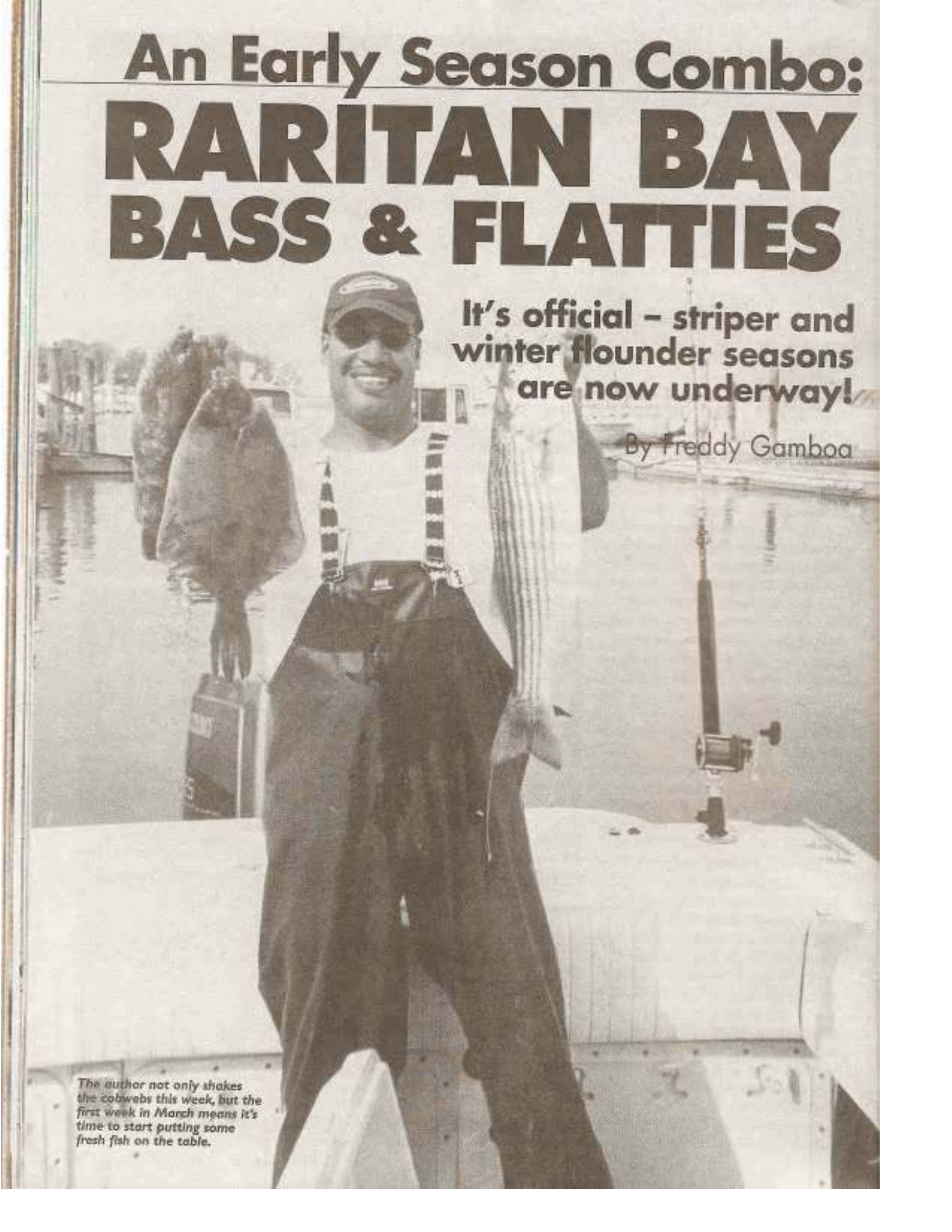
March 3-6 | SUFFERN, NY

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An Early Season Combo: **RARITAN BAY BASS & FLATTIES**

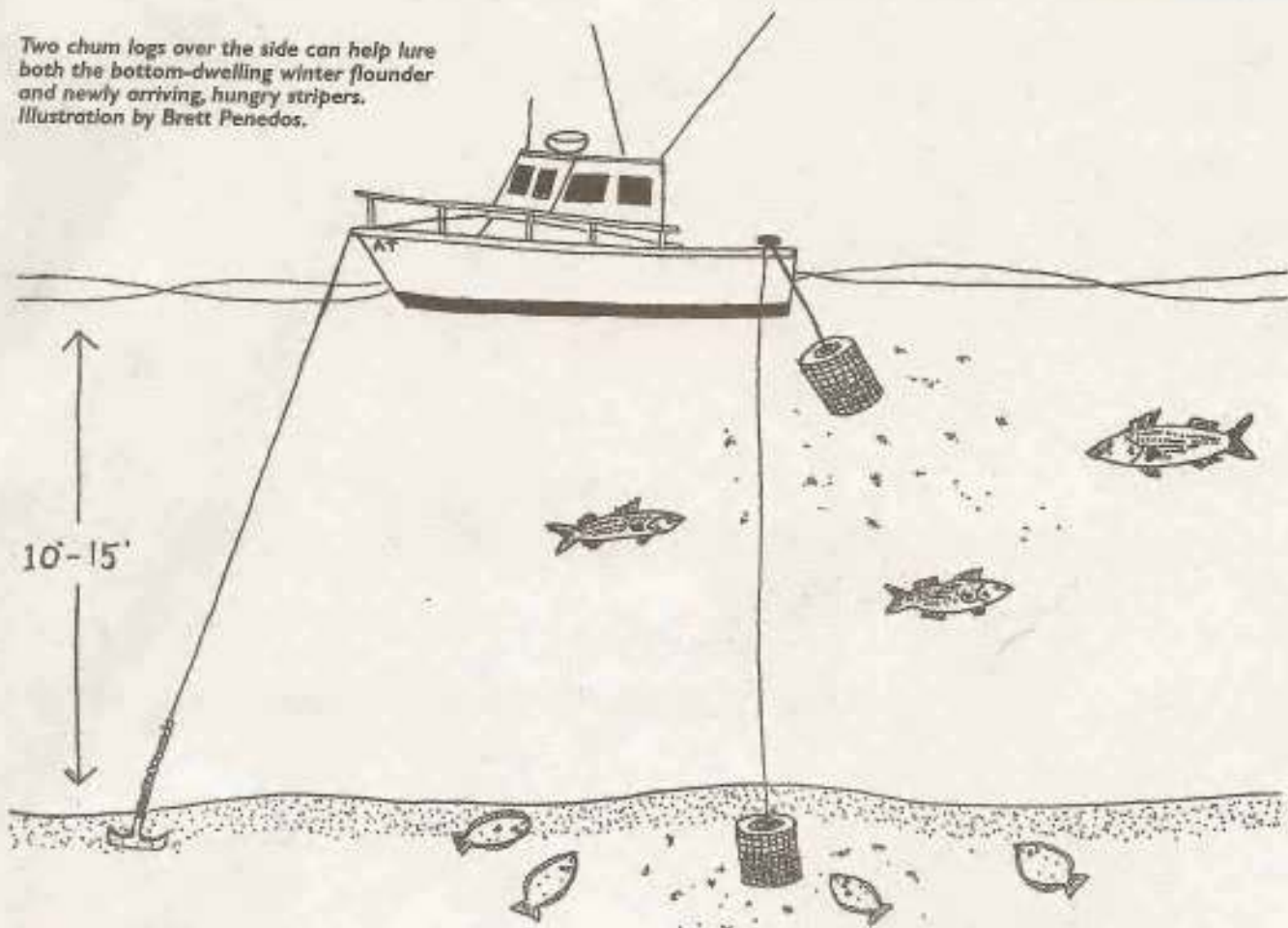
**It's official - striper and
winter flounder seasons
are now underway!**

By Freddy Gamboa

A black and white photograph of a man standing on a boat. He is wearing a dark baseball cap, sunglasses, a white t-shirt, and dark overalls with suspenders. He is smiling and holding two large fish, one in each hand. The fish in his right hand is a winter flounder, and the one in his left is a striped bass. The background shows a body of water and some structures in the distance.

*The author not only shakes
the cobwebs this week, but the
first week in March means it's
time to start putting some
fresh fish on the table.*

Two chum logs over the side can help lure both the bottom-dwelling winter flounder and newly arriving, hungry stripers.
Illustration by Brett Penedos.



By the time most of you read this article, a large portion of you will have experienced serious bouts of cabin fever. Rather than wait for the schools of menhaden followed by stripers, blues and weaks, there is another alternative. It's the first week of March, and time to wet a line and break the ice (no pun intended) on the first fish of 2005.

DOUBLE UP ON BASS & WINTER FLOUNDER

As of March 1, I start preparing for my first trip. I begin by following the weekly weather forecasts looking for a string of sunny days with no rain. The reasoning behind these forecasts is that the sustained sunny days will penetrate the water column and warm the mud flats. Also, no rain in the forecast keeps cold rainwater runoff from lowering the water temperature.

The locations I tend to concentrate my efforts will be vast expanses of mud flats, which will have adjacent feeder rivers or creeks. Lastly, I'll watch the tide charts of where I will be fishing. I will fish only certain parts of the tide, namely high slack water, through the outgoing tide until low water slack, which coincides with the middle part of the day when the sun is strongest. There are several reasons why I prefer this portion of the tide. The midday sun has warmed the mud flats for a fair amount of time, thus allowing the inflow of cold bay and ocean water a

winter flounder regs

Until the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's arbitrary rulings on winter flounder take effect sometime later this year, the current limits on winter flounder — 11-inch minimum, no bag limit and an open season from March 1 through May 31 — will remain in place.

chance to warm on the shallow mud flats. Secondly, the water in the rivers and creeks will gradually warm due to the exposed channel mud edges and grass/weed beds that attract sunlight. Finally, receding waters allow sunlight to penetrate the water column raising the water temperature significantly.

Some of the spots that I fish that possess all these attributes are the back end of Raritan Bay, namely Union, Cliffwood and Morgan beaches. Productive areas which tend to be a bit deeper but that still produce provided that there is ample sunlight are Keyport Harbor and Princess Bay.

RIGGING UP

For my fishing rigs, I tend to fish fairly light tackle since my primary targets are school-size stripers and flounder. For linesiders, my rig consists of a Shimano Compre 6-1/2 footer paired with a Shimano Corvalus 400 spooled with 30-pound Spiderwire. For flounder, I use a 6-foot rod paired with a Corvalus 300 spooled with 20-pound Spiderwire.

Striper terminal rigging is a black nylon fish-finder sleeve on my main line stopped by 35-pound Spro power swivel attached to 3 feet of Seaguar fluorocarbon leader ending with a 3/0 Gamakatsu bleeding red circle hook. For flounder I use a three-way swivel to a double dropper loop with two Chestertown flounder hooks dressed with yellow Mister Twister grubs.

COMBO FISHING TECHNIQUES

As detailed earlier, my first job is to have a succession of sunny days, secondly the portion of the tide I want to fish has to be to mid or later part of the day. If these conditions have come together, I begin looking for a place to fish. The key is to find the right water temperature, at this time of the year

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For bass, 3 feet of flouro ending with a 3/0 hook on a fish-finder rig does the trick, while a couple of Chestertown flounder hooks dressed with yellow Mister Twister grubs works for flotties.



at least low 50s, which is at least 5 degrees warmer than the rest of the bay. I tend to look for mud flats with humps and ledges, which have an adjacent river or creek spilling onto the flats. Once located on the preferred spot, I will anchor up-tide of the spot in 10 to 15 feet of water, which drops into slightly deeper water.

My next step is to place two chum pots in the water, one tied directly to the stern cleat right below the water surface, which consists of clam bellies. The second chum pot will be placed on the bottom underneath the boat, which consists of flounder logs spiced with cracked mussels. At this point I will cast the striper rigs 30 feet and 60 feet behind the boat and the rods will be placed in the stern rod-holders. Since the rigs have fish-finder rigs and circle hooks, the stripers tend to inhale the clam baits and hook themselves in the corner of the mouth.

Flounder rigs are tipped with either sandworms or bloodworms and are fished directly under the boat in a jiggling fashion. If the current is running adequately and the water temperature is right, you should begin getting hits within half an hour. If an hour passes and there are no hits I will try to find warmer water. This is where you need to be very cautious, as finding water means heading into shallower water with a receding tide, which can lead to inadvertent beaching. Be sure to watch your depth gauge.

The past three seasons I have found schoolie stripers as early as March 10 along Cliffwood Beach. Hopefully, by utilizing these methods you can cure the dreaded cabin fever by getting an early start to your fishing season, which from the looks of the calendar, is now upon us!