



THE

Fisherman

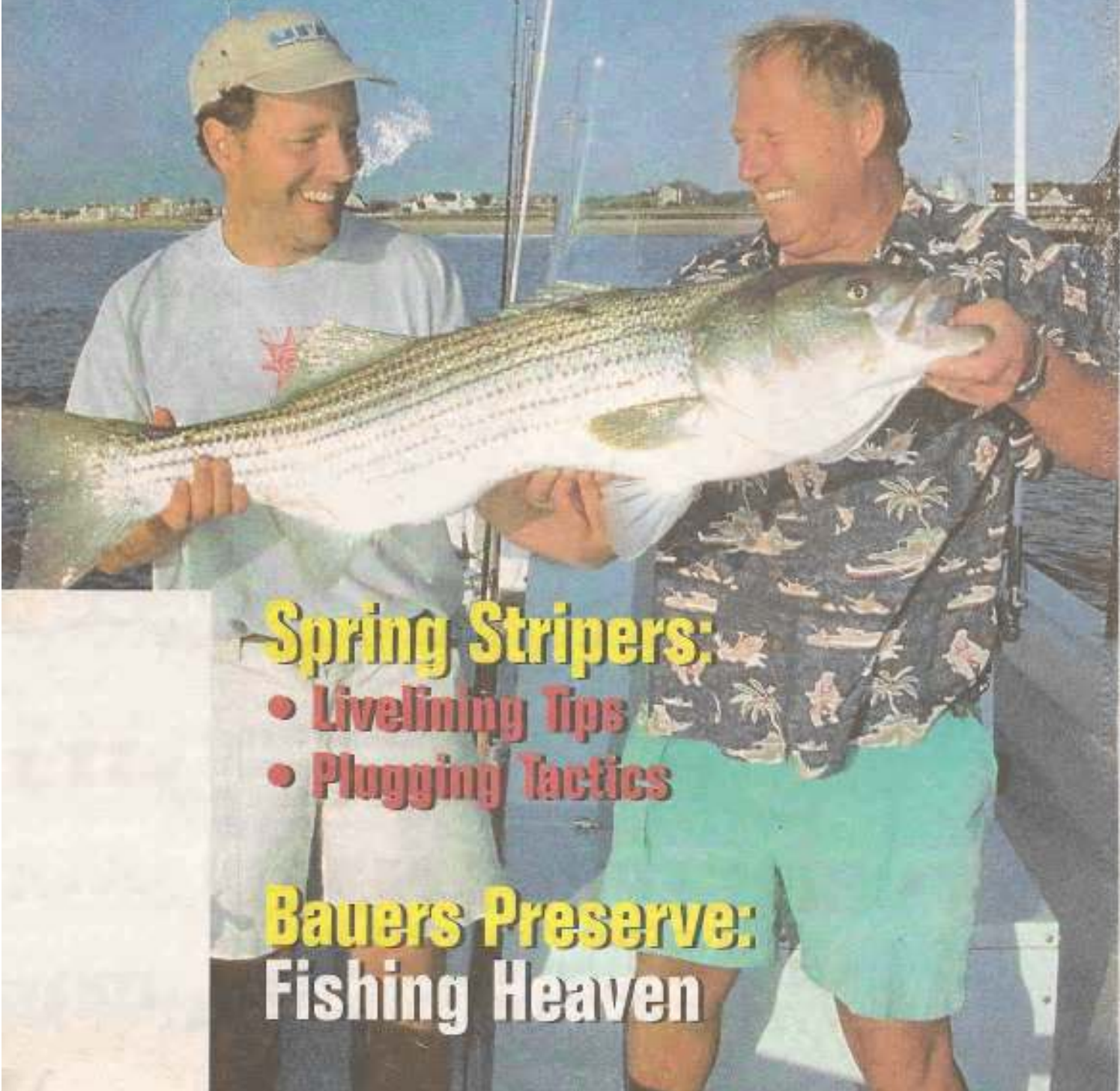
WIN
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DREAMBOAT FISHING CONTEST

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Top Time On The Reefs



Spring Stripers:

- Liveling Tips
- Plugging Tactics

Bauers Preserve: Fishing Heaven

back in black

Author with a nice-size tog taken off one of New Jersey's inshore artificial reefs in 30 feet of water depth.

A man with glasses and a white t-shirt is smiling and holding a large, dark-colored fish horizontally in front of him. The background is a body of water.

spring tog
by carlos bastos jr.

I love fishing for blackfish! To me, they are the grouper of the northeast: Strong enough to put a serious bend in your rod and at the same time they are great to eat. After spending a few months cleaning up all my gear and then getting my boat ready for the new season, blackfish in the spring come at a good time for coastal fishermen who are eager to "get back in business."

time to go

I will usually start fishing for blacks as soon as the water temperature reaches 49 or 50 degrees. Depending on the weather, that could be sometime in April and certainly by mid May. One important thing that I want to point out is to try to avoid fishing around the full moon during the spring. In the beginning of the season, with the water being a bit on the cold side, the full moon brings on strong currents, which does not help the already lethargic blackfish into biting.

rocky hideouts

I do most of my fishing for blackfish on rocky ledges or small rock piles. I tend to fish the smaller pieces of structure because I feel that blackfish congregate in larger schools around these tight spots. They are harder to find and tougher to anchor on but definitely worth the trouble. I'd rather pull up the anchor a half dozen times than sit there and get no bites.

When it comes to fishing for blackfish during the spring, I also prefer to fish the shallower spots because I think they warm up a lot quicker. I can fish spots in 30 feet and come up with a good catch while this stubborn friend of mine insists on fishing in 50 feet and winds up working very hard just to catch a few fish.

There are also times when I'll anchor up on a piece and they don't bite right away. Those early season blackfish are downright lazy so you need to give them some time to react to the smell of your baits.

I like to start my blackfish season at the Sandy Hook Reef. I have found that this area produces big numbers of fish during the spring because there are many nooks and crannies for the blackfish to hide out. Finding rough bottom at the reef is not a problem. Further south, the Shrewsbury Rocks offers another large stretch of rocky ledges and big boulders.

If you want to fish even further to the south there is the rocky bottom off the old Long Branch pier. As soon as your loran gets to the "43614" line, start looking for structure on the bottom with your fish finder. If most of your fishing is done further south, you might want to give one of the many artificial reefs there a try. A good chart will help you find the rocky locations plus many charts have the loran

coordinates for the artificial reefs. I have also found that charts like the Captain Vic's Charts and Captain Segull's charts show some real good wreck fishing areas.

bait & tackle

I like to have green crabs and fresh skimmer clams for bait on my boat. A lot of times during the spring, the blacks will show a preference for the clam. Some people say it's because their mouths are soft after the winter.

A medium action rod with a conventional reel loaded with 30-pound line will handle any blackfish encountered in our waters. Because I stick to the shallower water, I will use my lighter outfit. My 7-foot graphite rod with my Shimano TLD 5 and I'm all set for a day of blackfishing.

My rig consists of a single 2/0 hook snelled on an 18-inch piece of 30-pound leader. I simply run that hook through a small dropper loop on my main line. If I am fishing a spot that is not too "sticky", I'll sometimes use a two-hook rig. This rig is made by using a 36-inch piece of leader and snelling one 2/0 hook on one end and then making a small loop on the other end. Then a dropper loop is made half way up from the hook and another 2/0 hook is put on that. You also run this rig through a small dropper loop on your main line.

anchoring tips

On my boat, I have two anchors and both have 6 feet of chain and 250 feet of anchor line. I will usually start out by using just one anchor until I see how the boat is laying over the structure. If I have to use both anchors, one is set into the wind and the other into the current. Another good reason for carrying a pair of anchors is to save the day when one of them gets hung up in the structure and has to be cut off.

When approaching my loran numbers, I get my buoy marker ready and throw it overboard as soon as I see the bottom piece on my colorscope; or when the coordinates match the ones for that spot, whichever event comes first. After checking the position of my buoy, I'll then swing my boat around and take it into the current. In the shallow water I'll usually go about 40 or 50 yards past the marker and drop the anchor. The only way to successfully anchor your boat on a rockpile, wreck or reef is to practice a lot. It might get frustrating but it'll pay off in the long run.

Blackfish has become a well-recognized fish in the last 10 years or so. Some fishermen like them because they fight and taste great and the new breed of fishermen want them for their monetary value, which is steadily increasing. Whatever your reason is, tie up a few rigs and head to your nearest wreck or rockpile. Chances are they'll be waiting!



Shimano TLD-5, a stout rod, plenty of sinkers and hooks, and some extra leader make it "must have" stuff.