

# Innagural Wal-Mart RCL Walleye Circuit Event is a Success

Pro angler Jim Klick, 51, of White Bear Lake, MN, landed \$50,000 and a Mercury-powered Lund boat Saturday on Lake Erie after weighing in five walleyes that registered 40 pounds, 12 ounces. His partner, co-angler Cecil



**First place winner Jim Klick (right) with his trophy and his check for 50,000.**

Newman, 50, of River Rouge, Mich., reeled in \$15,000 for the catch in the first tournament of the new \$2.9 million Wal-Mart RCL Walleye Circuit—the world's most lucrative walleye fishing series. Western Lake Erie (Port Clinton) played host to the April 11-14th event.

“It doesn't get any better than this,” said Klick, whose best tournament showing prior to the Wal-Mart RCL Walleye Circuit was a fourth place finish worth

\$7,500. “This is some kind of first class operation. There are people everywhere, and the parking lot is full of boats. This is cool.”

The pair's impressive catch was the result of trolling crankbaits behind planner boards in clear water off Kelly Island, which is located about 12 miles east, northeast of the tournament's starting point at Catawba Island State Park.

“When I was paired with Jim on Wednesday, he told me that if he ever wins one of these (tournaments) he's going to retire,” said Newman, whose best tournament showing prior to Saturday was a third place finish worth \$1,800. “I told him, ‘Mister, I sure hope to see you retire.’ This is fantastic. The RCL is definitely the way to go.”

Klick and Newman qualified for the final round of 12 teams in eighth place after landing four walleyes weighing 23 pounds, 3 ounces Friday.

Competition began Wednesday with 154 anglers from 15 states taking off from Catawba Island State Park. After an impressive opening day in which 25 teams weighed in five-walleye limits that tipped the scales to 40 pounds or more, day two of competition was canceled due to high winds. Competition resumed on Friday

with only the top 60 anglers in each division left in the hunt. The field was cut again to the top 12 anglers in each division after Friday's weigh-in. Weights were cleared for all anglers on Friday and Saturday.



**Second place finisher, Ronnie Rhodes claimed 30,000 in prize money.**

Pro Ronnie Rhodes finished second and collected \$30,000 with five walleyes weighing 37 pounds, 5 ounces. His co-angler, Joe Struna of La Salle, Ill., received \$10,000. Pro Sam Anderson of Eagan, Minn., and co-angler Dexter Adams of Lima, Ohio, finished third with four walleyes weighing 34 pounds, 4 ounces. Anderson won \$25,000 and Adams collected \$7,500.

Rounding out the top five were pro Christ Peters of Kimball, Minn.,

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# Fall Tactics for Walleyes

by  
**Ted Takasaki with Scott Richardson**

**T**oo bad for the fair-weather fishermen who have already put their boats away. Some of the best fishing of the year is just ahead. The shorter days and cooler water of late fall mean gamefish, like walleyes, go on a last feeding binge before freeze up when their metabolism slows for winter. Feeding fish are vulnerable fish. As a result, late fall can be the best time of the year to catch a trophy.

Walleyes begin moving to deep-water structure as the water cools down. Fish can be as far down as 25 to 50 feet or more on the steep, hard-bottom drop-offs next to points, humps and islands. Often, they can be found on the spots-on-a-spot that are the sharpest breaks nearest the deepest water available.

As always, start with the fastest tactic that works to nab active walleyes. Don't rule

out trolling crankbaits as a tactic even though water is cold. Trolling is still the best way to cover water

fast to locate active pods of fish. Tournament anglers have shown time and time again it works even when it's cold enough to snow.

Once a school is located, rig or jig to catch even more fish that may be in a neutral mood at the time.

## Cold-water trolling

Many trollers resort to snap weights in the summer to take crankbaits deeper than they are designed to go. But, leadcore is more common in spring and fall to accomplish the same goal. There's no need in cold water to spread lines with planer boards to search for widely scattered walleyes as you do in warm water. Fish gather in schools tighter to structure in cold water. By long-line trolling with leadcore, you can get lures down deep and right behind the boats which will allow you to follow the breaklines more precisely. Crankbaits are in



**Fall Trophy Walleyes are there for the taking for those anglers willing to bundle up, do some searching and try a variety of techniques.**

the strike zone more as a result, and that equals more fish. In addition, cranks behind leadcore have a more subtle action, which works better in cold water than snap weights.

Start with a longer, medium-action rod to help absorb some of the shock of a strike on no-stretch, leadcore. Use 18-pound test leadcore line. Strip the Dacron back from the lead core middle and tie on a small #12 barrel swivel. Add an 8 to 10 foot leader of 10 to 12 pound monofilament, like Stren's Super Tough. Some people prefer to use no-stretch braided line for the leader. But, if you do that, make certain you set your drag very loosely. Fish can tear free from hooks if you don't allow some "give" in your tackle somewhere. Tie on a snap or ball-bearing snap swivel and you are set to go.

Ask at local bait shops to find areas of the lake that are producing. Don't be surprised if the best locations are in deep water near the mouths of feeder rivers and creeks that the walleyes will migrate up to spawn in spring.

Check the lake map for sharper drop-offs at the right depth that are likely to produce. Travel to one, and chart the break by following the contour and graphing it on your GPS. Or, drop marker buoys on the fingers extending from the structure and the inside turns where fish might lurk. Look for schools of baitfish and even larger marks that might signal walleyes below. Use an Aqua-Vu fish cam to confirm the presence of walleyes. Try a variety of lures to start.

Bomber 24A's are a good start. Shad Raps and Lindy Shadlings are likely to produce. Try Thundersticks if you have them. Remember, it's the leadcore that takes the crankbait to the bottom, not the crankbait's design. That means you can use anything you think might work, and that even includes shallow running floaters.

Stick with subtle wobblers in colder water instead of the more erratic ones. Keep in mind, larger profiled lures may be best because baitfish have grown bigger by this time and the fish are looking to fatten up for the winter. Use metallic colors for bright sunny days. Try bright, fluorescent colors like firetiger and chartreuse for dingy water. Change up often until you find something that works.

When you are ready, go to the beginning of the trolling pass you have laid out, lower the bait so it travels just off the bottom and use the gasoline kicker motor to move slowly ahead, 1.5- to 2 mph. Vary the speed to see what the fish want. But, remember, leadcore has greater water resistance than monofilament. The faster you go, the higher the bait rises. The slower you go, the deeper it dives. Stay in the strike zone as you follow the shape of the breakline as precisely as you can. Watch the end of your rod tip. Check your bait for hooks fouled with debris when you see the tip stop vibrating.

Mark the location with your GPS when you connect with active walleyes. Stay with the trolling tactic as long as it works. You'll cover more water and catch more fish by concentrating on the active

ones. When the action slows down, change tactics by slowing down your presentation by resorting to Lindy rigging or jigging.

### **Rigging for fall**

Livebait often works when nothing else will do. Lindy rigs or NO-SNAGG rigs are the most natural way to reach deep fish.

Weight can be changed to reach various depths. Use enough lead to keep a 45-degree angle between your line and the water's surface while staying in touch with the bottom.

Use a Lindy Rattling NO-SNAGG rig to help walleyes find the bait in deep water where light is dim or when water clarity is poor.

Try 8-pound MagnaThin to the swivel. Start with a 4-foot leader. Lengthen it or try lighter line for finicky fish. Other modifications can be made to adapt live-bait rigs to conditions. For example, shorten the leader and/or switch to a NO-SNAGG hook to decrease hang-ups. Add a colored bead above the hook as an attractor. Try a colored hook. Vary presentations with your partner to let the fish tell you what they want.

Return to those spots where you caught fish while trolling. Focus on the transition areas between hard and soft bottoms on sharp breaks that drop to deep water.

Use big bait for the same reason as before - baitfish have had a season to grow. Imitate them by using big chubs up to 5 inches long. Hook them through the mouth to move

along the bottom faster. To provoke strikes, try tail-hooking them to cause the bait to struggle more. But, move more slowly when you present the bait in that way.

Use the bottom-tracking, or zoom, feature of your electronics to target specific fish that you will hover over.

**Jigging in autumn**

Vertical jigging is another effective way to target walleyes holding tight to deep structure. A 3/8th-ounce Fuzz-E-Grub will reach down to 30 feet and more when the wind isn't blowing. You'll need more weight than that in order to go deeper than that. A 5/8th-ounce Jumbo Fuzz-E-Grub, or even a 1-ounce, is a good choice. Bigger jigs may be good to try even in shallower water because they imitate the bigger profiles of big baitfish. Larger profiles provoke strikes from big walleyes looking for an easy meal.

Experiment with colors like white, smoke, orange/yellow, and glow. Let fish tell you what they want.

The Fuzz-E-Grub comes with a plastic body that sports a marabou tail that holds scent products longer. Don't be afraid to change them out to try twister tails and even plastic lizards.

Resort to stinger hooks when necessary. Cold water equals short bites at times. A stinger also helps to get a hook into a fish's mouth when you use the heavier jigs a walleye can't inhale easily.

If state law allows, jig with one rod and put a dead stick in the rod

holder using a NO-SNAGG sinker, a NO-SNAGG hook and a big chub.

Fishing heats up as fall turns to winter. Bundle up and try for a trophy.

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(\$20,000) and co-angler David Gilbert of Decorah, Iowa, (\$6,000) with five walleyes weighing 33 pounds, 7 ounces; and pro James Myszkewicz of Burlington, Wis., (\$15,000) and co-angler Karl Elsher Sr. of Cortland, N.Y., (\$5,000) with five walleyes weighing 33 pounds, 3 ounces.

Run by Operation Walleye and named after retail giant Wal-Mart and boat manufacturers Ranger, Crestliner and Lund, the \$2.9 million Wal-Mart RCL Walleye Circuit features four regular season tournaments each with a \$390,750 purse and a championship with a \$1.4 million purse. The second tournament was held May 9-12 on the Mississippi River in La Crosse, Wis., followed by events on Saginaw Bay in Bay City, Mich., June 13-16 and Devils Lake in Devils Lake, N.D., Sept. 5-8.

After the four regular season tournaments, 200 pros and 200 co-anglers will compete in the Wal-Mart RCL Walleye Championship for a top award of up to \$400,000 in the Pro Division and \$150,000 in the Co-Angler Division. The championship will be held on the Fox River and Green Bay in Green Bay, Wis., Oct. 2-6. Green Bay

hosted the inaugural Wal-Mart RCL Championship last year when Scott Glorvigen of Grand Rapids, Minn., won \$300,000 and instantly joined the sport's top all-time money winners.

Entry fees for each regular season tournament are \$1,250 for pros and \$500 for co-anglers.

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# Suspended Fall Walleyes

by  
Mark Martin

In fall, walleyes can be anywhere—say, six inches under the surface in 80 feet of water or tight to bottom in 10 feet. Sound challenging? It can be, unless you know how walleyes drift off of structure and suspend in the vicinity of bait. Finding them is a looking game with quality electronics; catching them is a straining game with planer boards, spinners and crankbaits. The pattern holds true wherever you are, from Great Lakes to inland waters, and wherever walleyes are chasing baitfish. Which, it turns out, is everywhere.

## The Baiting Game

The bait connection betrays the walleye's presence. In fall, when walleyes ramp up their feeding before winter, the fish will never be far from food. On the Great Lakes, you might see enormous pods of one- to three-inch gizzard shad skittering on the surface or

as big blobs on a locator. Shiners and the like herd up as well on inland waters, and predators are never far behind.

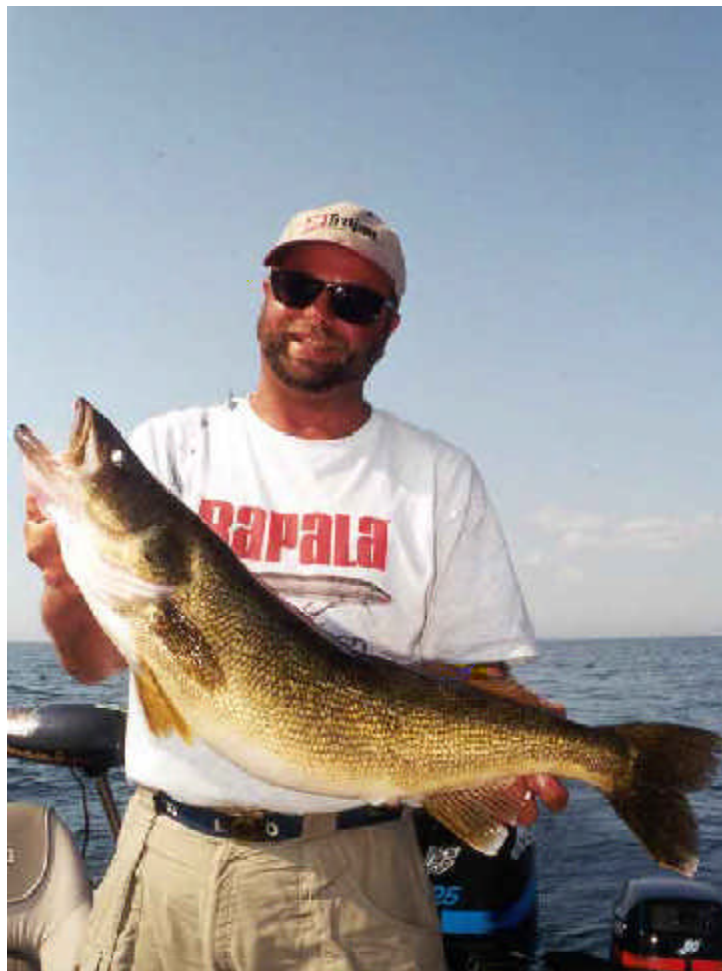
How do you find them? Start looking for structure on a map and then with electronics. Points,

humps and weed edges are all fair game. But when you look with a quality locator that pinpoints fish and bait, such as Lowrance's LCX 15MT, the key is to veer away from the structure and look over open water. If you've seen fish on structure at a certain level—15 feet, for instance—you can bet they'll be at that same depth over open water, from hundreds of yards to half a mile away from the structure. Walleyes will do this day and night. The most important thing to remember is not to glue yourself to structure—the walleyes will wander away from it if bait is present.

## Search Mode

The best way to enter into search mode is to start trolling. This way you can cover water and zigzag to find fish. It would be far too time-consuming to jig or live-bait rig. Trolling, on the other hand, spreads lines to the sides of the boat and behind it—the better to cover a swath of water at different depths.

I always try to maximize my efforts with the most rods possible



**Walleyes can sometimes be easier to find in the fall than in summer and spring. If you find the baitfish, chances are good that walleyes will be there too.**



and the greatest coverage. Enter planer boards, the handy devices that veer lines away from the boat. With them, you can run more rods without tangling and pull lures through more territory. My new favorites for boards are from Church Tackle, which now makes smaller, more manageable models that still track well away from the boat. The TX-6, which is about the size of a deck of cards, is great for pulling crankbaits or spinners with snap weights of up to one ounce. Anything heavier will sink the board. Even small fish or a piece of weed will sink it, which is a big help when you're trying to keep your lures clean. A large fish will sink the little board like a bobber—something I love to see. With the TX-12, which is twice the size of the TX-6, you can get away with weight to two ounces, which you might need for deep spinnering.

Which brings us to my two favorite offerings in fall. While few people fish spinners after summertime, the reliable crawler harness keeps working through October and even into November. You can boost up a size or two with your spinners in fall to tempt more big fish. If, for instance, you were using No. 2 blades in summer, you now might want to try Nos. 4 and 5. The heavier thrum is often just what the walleyes want when they're starting to feed with gusto before winter. And since baitfish, more than bugs, are the main course of fall walleyes, try Northland's holographic blades. They come in silver shiner, gold shiner, golden perch and more colors to mimic baitfish.

By November, though, I normally

start switching to crankbaits. You can move them faster and cover more water (2.0 or 2.3 mph for cranks vs. 1.1 mph for crawlers), and since the fish are so keyed on baitfish, cranks will often do the job even better. Experiment with cranks and crawlers to find out. For the lures themselves, it's hard to beat Rapala Husky Jerks (in shallow and deep-running versions), Tail Dancers and Shad Raps. Again, match the colors to the prevalent baitfish and conditions—silvers around shiners and shad, brighter fluorescents in darker or stained water. You can trick out your lures with additional color with holoform tap from WTP, formerly known as Witchcraft. Add a strip of silver or glow to the lure's sides, something that's particularly effective at night.

If the structure is particularly steep or difficult to follow, you might want to try leadcore. I like it if I'm on a break that twists and turns and I'd have too much line out with boards. Even in 45 feet of water, you can often get down to the fish zone with 75 to 85 feet of line out.

For rods, I use two models by Berkley in the Lightning Rod Signature Series. One is the 7-foot, 10-inch offering. It has a heavier tip that will handle heavier snap weights. If, however, I'm using lighter weights or crankbaits, I switch to the 8-foot, 6-inch model, which has a more limber tip that tends not to tear out hooks. Still, you can get away with weights up to four ounces (say, if you're bottom bouncing next summer) or heavy-pulling cranks.

More than anything, targeting fall

walleyes is a matter of perspective. While it's easy and familiar to stay close to structure, that's not always where the fish are. Open your mind to the possibility of roamers and suspenders, and then go looking for them. They could be half a mile away from your favorite reef or hump. But you'll never know unless you try it.

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