

SUPERSIZE OR DOWNSIZE

Featuring B.A.S.S. Elite Series Pro Rick Morris

Those hailing from the baby boomer generation and before, remember when a hamburger was just a hamburger. There was no option to supersize your meal at the drive-through window. As appetites grew bigger and wallets fatter, the demand for chunkier burgers and a mountain of fries grew. As a result, companies seized the opportunity to provide their customers a full meal deal in one order, thus the birth of supersizing. And, fast food junkies aren't the only ones wanting a bigger bang for their bite. Nature has programmed bass to instinctively understand the ratio of calories spent versus calories gained, and for big bass that means a big meal attained with little energy is their equivalent of a supersized meal deal. Bassmaster Elite Series pro Rick Morris shares his thoughts on how to take advantage of the oftentimes gluttonous nature of hefty and hungry bass.

I think big bass are opportunists," Morris began. "They're like coyotes. They'll eat whatever they can get, whether it's a frog, baby swallow or a mouse. It didn't get big by just eating small forage all the time."

Morris recalled an Elite Series event on the St. Lawrence River in 2018 when he made the Top-10 by totally parting from the crowd, the majority of which were finesse fishing with drop shots and light line.

"I placed 6th in that tournament by Carolina rigging," he said. "I was catching over 20 pounds a day using a 3/4-ounce weight, a 4-foot leader and a full-size lizard, all on 14-pound line and in clear water."

Morris had banner days the first and third day of the

tournament, but the second day proved to be more of a challenge as he only had five bites. But, those five bites tipped the scales at over 24 pounds. The key to his placement was that the larger bait, the larger weight, the heavier line and his RPM Okeechobee Flipping Stick were in complete contrast to presentations made by the rest of the field. As a result, his showing the bass something different paid off with a handsome check.

WHEN TO SUPERSIZE

Morris favors first light as the prime time to capitalize on peak feeding activity. His theory is that bass often move to the bank during the night and inevitably there will be a few stragglers left over as the sun rises. As daylight increases,



the bass stay aggressive in order to gorge themselves before everything else wakes up and the lake begins to buzz with what is to them, foreign activity.

"First thing in the morning, I like to run a fast pattern," the Elite Series pro said. "I'm going to power fish with a big Booyah Buzzbait or a big 3/4-ounce War Eagle Spinnerbait, or even a Whopper Plopper. I want something where I can put the trolling motor on high and go. If I use a jig, I'm going full size with a 3/4-ounce and I'm going to fish it Alabama style, which is a swim and stroke retrieve. Sometimes the bite lasts an hour, sometimes it's two or three hours and if it's a rainy day, it can be all day long."

Unlike many pros who name water clarity as their primary consideration when selecting a presentation, Morris first considers weather, current and time of day.

"The more wind and current you have, the bigger baits you can use," he said. "Just because the water is clear doesn't mean you can't power fish in low-light conditions."

PICKING THE RIGHT PRESENTATION

In order to be successful in the hunt, one must first know their quarry. As these pros encounter different lakes in all corners of our country, they find many diverse scenarios, especially as far as the number and the size of bass present. Some lakes are well-known big largemouth factories. Others hold populations of smallmouth or spotted bass. Some are crystal clear highland reservoirs, and others are weed-choked swamps.

"Let's say I'm on a lake that has spotted bass and

largemouth," Morris said. "If I'm tournament fishing, I want to get a few big bites during the day, so I'm most likely focusing on largemouth. For that reason, I'm going to use a bigger bait."

Morris doesn't necessarily limit himself to the match-the-hatch theory unless there's a shad spawn in progress. He knows bigger bass often feed on larger forage such as bluegill.

"If I'm going to win a tournament, I'm going to need those one or two key big bites," he said. "If I can get away with pitching a big 3/4-ounce Booyah Boo Jig underneath a dock, then that's what I'm going to do."

Morris is also a fan of swimbaits, both to catch big fish and also to reveal where a big one might be living.



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"Big swimbaits like the 3:16 Rising Son and the Osprey are great baits to locate bass," he said. "It pulls big fish to you, especially off of the beds. You see this monster bass following your bait, and even if it turns and goes back, you can still waypoint that spot and come back later with something else."

When vegetation or overhangs are abundant, Morris goes to a Stanley Ribbit Frog.

"I like the Ribbit Frog because it makes a lot of noise," he said. "It's a big bait and I can fish it on 65-pound

Gamma Braid with a big number 6 or 7 hook."

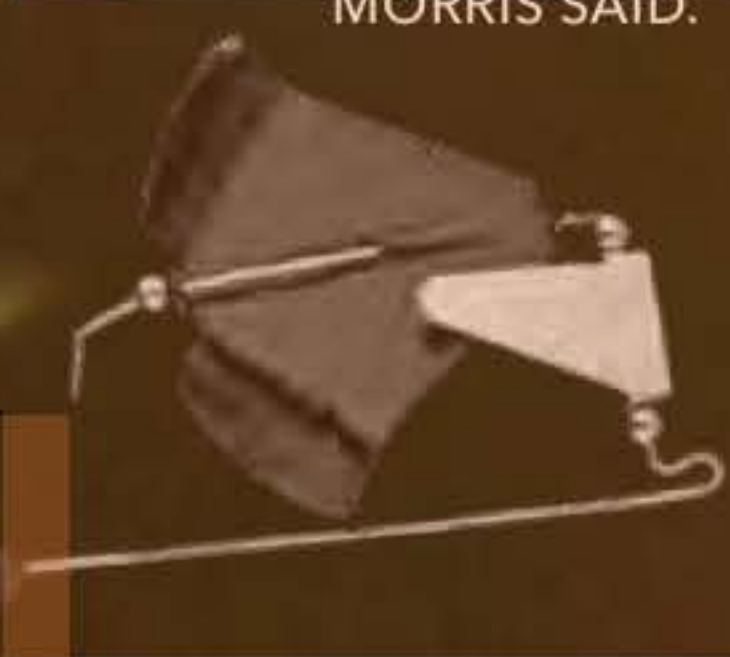
Morris acknowledges that the frog won't draw a large number of bites, but the ones that do commit will usually be hefty.

Windy summer days can be conducive to a crankbait bite, and on those occasions, Morris gets after them with a Norman DD22 or a Bomber Fat Free Shad.

BY ROB BRYANT



"I'M GOING TO POWER FISH FIRST THING IN THE MORNING WITH A BIG BOOYAH BUZZBAIT OR A BIG 3/4-OUNCE WAR EAGLE SPINNERBAIT," MORRIS SAID.



"Last year I fished the Toyota Texas BassFest and my plan was to throw a deep crankbait on my RPM Okeechobee Special rod, which is basically a flipping stick," Morris said. "The first fish I caught was a 6 1/2-pounder. Thirty minutes later I hooked a 7-pounder that I lost next to the boat. Those two crankbaits are definitely big-fish baits."

Morris gave credence to this theory a few years back on Kentucky Lake, weighing in 89 pounds of bass in four tournament days, all caught off of Tennessee River ledges on a Bomber Fat Free Shad or a Norman DD22.

WHEN TO DOWNSIZE

"Obviously, if you have clean, clear water and it's the middle of the day, you have to downsize," Morris said. "If there's boat traffic everywhere and the fishing pressure is through the roof, then the fish are on alert and so now is when you go to the finesse techniques."

Water clarity and weather also play in the decision to downsize. Clear water, calm conditions and bright sunlight make line more visible as well as anything unnatural about a bait, such as multiple sets of treble hooks swinging away.

Morris refers back to the swimbait scenario as an example of when to downsize.

"A situation where you have a big bass following the swimbait back to the boat off of a bed can be great time to then turn around and pick them off with a Texas rig or wacky-rigged stick bait," he said. "I keep both oversize and finesse-size baits in my boat all the time."

DOWNSIZED PRESENTATIONS

The Elite Series pro's go-to finesse bait is a Get Bit Stick.

"You have to have one in your boat at all times," he said.

"You can be on a crankbait school, or any other kind of bite for that matter, and when they shut down, you can always pick off a few more fish with a stick bait."

Morris will use a 1/4-ounce weight and Texas rig the Stick, or if the water is shallow and clear, he'll wacky rig it, especially if he's skipping it under docks."

The Elite pro next lists the Neko rig, which basically adds weight to a wacky-rigged Stick, allowing it to probe deeper into the water column with a slightly faster descent.

"I like to rig it with the nail in the head and the hook in line with the bait, so rather than a sideways wacky, it's a vertical type wacky and it roots and digs on the bottom," Morris said. "Something else I've gotten into recently is Texas rigging the Neko rig. The best thing I could find for that is a slider head. A

lot of people think it's just another Texas-rigged worm, but it's not. It has a totally different fall."

Morris has also encountered times when the stick bait is too bulky, at which point he turns to a Get Bit Trick Shake, which is a 6-inch slender profile worm.

"When the fish get really picky, the slender profile can make a difference," he said. "I've had times when I couldn't get a bite unless I went to the skinny worm."

Morris also fishes the Trick Shake on a shakyhead and finds it especially effective when skipping it under docks.

EQUIPMENT

"A lot of the rods in my boat are the RPM 7-foot, 11-inch Okeechobee Specials," Morris said. "They are so parabolic they can be used for so many different things, such as Carolina rigs, fishing big spinnerbaits, chatterbaits, frogs, and deep crankbaits." The term parabolic measures the bow of the rod and how it bends throughout its length.

Morris pairs his rods with either 20-pound Gamma Fluorocarbon or 65-pound Gamma Braid.



BIG SWIMBAITS LIKE THE 3:16 RISING SON AND THE OSPREY ARE GREAT BAITS TO LOCATE BASS FOLLOWING YOUR BAIT, AND EVEN IF IT TURNS AND GOES BACK, YOU CAN STILL WAYPOINT THAT SPOT AND COME BACK LATER WITH SOMETHING ELSE.



Next, Morris uses a 7-foot, 6-inch RPM Flipping and Pitching Special because it has a little more action.

"This rod has a 70/30 tip and I use it for squarebills and topwaters," he said. "I typically will use 16-pound Gamma Fluorocarbon on it, and use it for most of my treble hook baits or if I'm casting a stick bait. It's still a little beefed up, but it's not a broomstick. I use these two rods for the lion's share of my power fishing."

For finesse fishing, Morris taps his signature RPM xRod, which is a 7-foot, 2-inch spinning rod that comes in a medium-light, medium and medium-plus action to cover his light-line presentations.

"I also use a 7-foot, 6-inch medium-heavy spinning rod with a big spinning reel spooled with 20-pound braid for schooling fish," he said. "You can cast across a parking lot with it. It's going to outcast anybody with a baitcaster."

Since Morris guides quite a bit, this outfit is perfect for people not yet schooled on baitcasting skills as it is stout enough to fish a Carolina rig, a jig or sling a spinnerbait.

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Rick Morris hails from Bracey, Virginia where he lives with his daughter (Sabrina). Morris has amassed over \$1 million dollars in career earnings with one major tournament win, three second-place finishes (including the 2006 Bassmaster Classic on Lake Toho), and 23 Top-10 finishes. Morris also owns his own signature series rod company—RPM Custom Rods—which can be found at www.rpmfishing.com. When not on the water, the 58-year-old pro enjoys golf and hunting. **BAM**