

BT Quick Tip

Carolina Substitutes

EXPERTS: Terry Scroggins, Matt Reed

The dynamic duo for tapping offshore structure has long been a deep diving crankbait and a Carolina rig. It remains a deadly combination, but Terry Scroggins and Matt Reed are just a few of many Elite Series pros who are substituting 10-inch worms and football jigs for the Carolina rig.

This isn't to say that they've abandoned the Carolina rig altogether. They're simply looking for that professional edge.

Scroggins won his first BASS tournament with a Carolina rigged finesse worm when he fished the Florida Eastern Open in December 2001 on the St. Johns River. Dragging the rig over shell bars 3 to 9 feet deep produced the winning weight of 40 pounds, 13 ounces over a tough three-day event. He finished more than 8 pounds ahead of second place.

The Florida pro still slings a Carolina rig when he's in search mode because the heavy 1-ounce sinker covers the bottom fast and helps him feel rocks, stumps, gravel, brush and other bass cover.

And he also relies on a Carolina rig when he's targeting waters where heavy bass are scarce. By matching the rig with a Yum 4-inch Houdini Worm, Scroggins often boats limits of keeper fish.

"The Carolina rig gets you numbers of bites," Scroggins said. "It's not so good for catching big fish."

So he digs for the big 10-inch worm.

THE BIG EDGE

A 10-inch worm rigged Texas style (weedless) gets the call when Scroggins targets a fishery known for its big bass. He works over a given piece of structure with a crankbait first because it catches the more aggressive big bass. Then he follows up with a 10-inch worm to pick off bass that need a more subtle presentation. However, Scroggins uses the big worm only after he's located the sweet spot on a point, ledge or some other structure with a crankbait or a Carolina rig.

"I need to know the bass are there before I throw the 10-inch worm," Scroggins explained. "It's a slow way to fish, but it generates bigger bites than a Carolina rig does."

Scroggins dotes on the 10-inch Paddle Worm he designed for Yum Bait Co. It's called Big Show in honor of Scroggins' nickname. The first 4 inches of the worm is fat, while the section leading to the wide paddle tail is narrow.

"The tail of that worm floats up like a cork. I like to work it really slowly on the bottom because any water

current makes that tail move constantly."

When he wants to show bass a faster retrieve or cover more water, Scroggins opts for a 10-inch rib-bontail worm. It doesn't have the action at rest that the paddle tail has, but it comes to life when it's moving.

Scroggins generally fishes both types of worms in the 12- to 25-foot depth range. He reasons that a big worm is easier for bass to find in the dark depths, and that it's less intimidating to bass in deep water than in the shallows. Also, Scroggins reserves the big worms for May through September, when bass are active and feeding offshore.

Depending on the depth and wind conditions, Scroggins rigs a 10-inch worm with a free-sliding 1/4- to 3/8-ounce bullet sinker. A straight shank 5/0 hook is tied to 16- or 20-pound Gamma Fluorocarbon line, which runs through the guides of a 7-foot Castaway heavy action worm rod. Scroggins prefers a high speed baitcasting reel that has a large spool, such as the Shimano Curado 200 series.

After he makes a long cast to deep structure, Scroggins wants enough line left on the spool to ensure a fast retrieve speed.

FOOTBALL JIG

Scroggins also fishes a football jig in place of a Carolina rig, as does Matt Reed of Madisonville, Texas. A Booyah 3/4-ounce football jig helped Reed finish second at last year's Bassmaster Elite Series event at Grand Lake. Reed finished with 63 pounds, 14 ounces, and he was basically alternating between crankbaits and the football jig. The latter, he said, accounted for his important kicker bass.

Like a Carolina rig, a football jig can be dragged quickly over the bottom while providing excellent feedback. One advantage with the football jig is that it catches bigger bass. Also, it gives you more retrieve options than a Carolina rig.

"You'll get more bites on a Carolina rig, but the football jig generally catches bigger bass," Reed said.

"And you can drag, hop and rip a football jig to trigger reaction bites. It's a totally different presentation."

Reed claims that the football head jig excels on rock, pea gravel and sand bottoms, and that it works fairly well in wood cover. However, its wide head makes it impossible to fish through grass.

On the shallow side of 20 feet, Reed opts for a 1/2-ounce football jig. The 3/4-ounce size is his main player in deeper water. He dresses the jig with a skirt, which he trims close to the hook's bend, and threads a 4-inch Yum Muy Twintail Grub on the hook's shank.

"I don't like my jig to be bulky," Reed said. "I often bite that grub off a little bit so the tail doesn't hang too far below the skirt."

Reed serves up football jigs with a Bass Pro 7-foot Pro Qualifier Rod (medium action) matched with a Johnny Morris 6.4:1 baitcasting reel spooled with 10- or 12-pound-test Bass Pro XPS Fluorocarbon line in crystal clear water and 14-pound-test when the water has a little more color.

Many fishermen have trouble landing bass on a football jig, a problem Reed himself has had to address. Rather than "slam" the hook home with a hard hook set, it's better to "reel the line tight and lean into them," he cautioned.

"When you set the hook hard, a football jig pops their mouth open."



Once Scroggins has pinpointed a good bass location and probed it with a crankbait, he uses a Texas rigged worm to catch bigger bass.

Photo by Mark Hicks