

# This lake's a grab bag of fish

**B**ELLEVILLE, Ontario — These 250 folks could be at home, swilling beer in front of the TV and watching a brainless exhibition football game.

Instead, they're swilling beer in a tent next to Bob Tessier's R&D Tackle Shop, exercising their minds by inventing fishing lies and enjoying two great days of fishing in the world's greatest muskellunge waters.

I fished the last day of the John Miner Memorial Muskie

**ERIC  
SHARP**

*Outdoors*



Tournament with Capt. Don Miller, protege of the late and very great Mr. Musky himself, Homer LeBlanc, to whom this year's tournament was dedicated.

Miller apologizes because we catch only three fish, two under

the 40-inch limit and one 41-inch about 16 pounds. I point out that Lake St. Clair must be the only place where skippers apologize for a three-muskie day. That's a good week in most places.

Ten dead muskies hang on the rack. While some might decry killing any fish, let's keep it in perspective. That's 10 fish killed out of more than 300 caught in two days. Most legal keepers were released because the fishermen knew they wouldn't bump one of the top three. If all anglers practiced that level of conservation, we wouldn't have to worry about any species.

The tournament winner is a 50½-inch, 30-pound, 10-ounce beauty landed by Vic Cretu, 18, of Dearborn. He was fishing aboard Producer, owned by Vic Sr. Junior edged the old man, who was second with a 49½-inch that went 28-4. The six-angler

crew of Producer walked off with \$7,500 in prize money for a \$100 entry fee, not a bad return for two days' fun.

The wildest tally was recorded by Rod Rogas and the crew aboard Over N Under: 36 muskies Saturday and nine Sunday. That's like scoring the winning touchdown in the Super Bowl or throwing a no-hitter in the World Series. They'll probably never see another weekend like that, and it helped Rogas forget the seven stitches in his right hand where an ungrateful fish bit him while he was releasing it.

Trolling isn't my favorite fishing but it's the best for muskies. But other methods will take these freshwater barracuda. Shaw Grigsby, a pro in the Bassmaster Top 100 tournament in Lake St. Clair this week, asked me about a couple of strange, powerful fish he caught and released.

"They were like pike, but a lot more silvery, with dark patches on them and real big shoulders," he said. "They just tore up a couple lures. You should see the teeth marks in them."

When I ask how big they were, he holds a hand about pocket-high off the ground. I explain they must have been small muskies, and Grigsby shakes his head, grins and says, "This lake is an incredible fishery, isn't it?"

Yeah, it is, and no one knows it better than Capt. Bob Brunner, a guide who first saw its waters in 1939 and specializes in casting for muskies.

Brunner's clients have caught 51 muskies this season, about one a trip. He caught 61 last year and expects to better 70 this summer. That's a great average for "the fish of 1,000 casts."

"Now there are days you don't catch a fish, and others you catch three or four. My best day was seven," Brunner says, his face transformed by a dreamy grin of memory. "That's an amazing day when you're casting."

"This lake has more variety than any in the country," says Brunner, who wrote a guide book called "Fishing Lake St. Clair." He motions to the flat around us on Anchor Bay and says, "One day I caught 17 different species without leaving this flat."

I know he's right, because I've had similar days on this oversized pond, days when I couldn't wait to see what was on the end of that line. I've also had days when all I got was a sunburn.

But like the wise man said, that's why we call it fishing, not catching.

Call Miller at 1-313-429-9551,  
Brunner at 1-810-254-9209.