

Finesse Presentations for Pre-spawn River Smallmouth



When the water temperature is in the low to mid-forties, my go-to presentation is a three-inch finesse tube. It can be a light bite so the smaller slimer tube is more desirable. When you feel a strike be patient and wait a few seconds before setting the hook. As far as color is concerned, stick with watermelon red, green pumpkin and green pumpkin with gold or copper flake. I prefer to rig the tube on a jighead even though I am pitching the tube tight to wood cover. Rigging the tube weedless might result in less snags but the exposed hook of the tube jig will result in better hooksets. I will often use as light a jighead as possible enabling the tube to slowly fall and even flutter along the edge of the wood. Also, crawl the tube along the bottom with an occasional pause. The longer you pause the tube the higher your success rate will be. It is the pause that will trigger the strike.

Finesse jigs are another option under a tough bite when you need a smaller bait and a stealthy presentation. The cone-shaped head is perfect for throwing around rock, rubble and wood. Avoid pitching the finesse jig into the wood itself and concentrate on the surrounding rock. I usually use a 1/4-ounce jig but will go smaller or

larger depending on the depth of the water. Add a small plastic trailer to the jig and crawl it along the bottom with an occasional short hop. Another tactic I use is to let the jig pause after I hop it and twitch my wrist a few times allowing the finesse jig to quiver with a side to side action. This tactic has resulted in many a lunker smallmouth. I use a six foot six medium or medium light action Grandt spinning rod with 8-pound test fluorocarbon.

I have been using grubs since I started fishing and people ask me if I still use them due to all the new innovations. Yes, I still use grubs but only under tough conditions. I feel that there are better presentations to use under most situations. However, in cold water under tough conditions grubs will save the day for me and my clients.

I still remember one day when grubs were the only presentation that worked. We were fishing a rock ledge on a steep shoreline about 100 yards downstream from a prime spawning area. As I approached the ledge, I noticed a load of fish on my locator suspending off the rock ledge in 8 feet of water and positioned my boat downstream behind a rock outcropping. I positioned my boat parallel to the ledge within casting range of the fish and kept my foot on the trolling motor. Keep in mind this was before trolling motors had spot-lock. This was a tough spot to fish since we were in the current and the bottom was flat rock, making it impossible to anchor.

My clients continued to cast the crankbaits they were using but to no avail. I told one of my clients to grab the box that contained the grubs, tie on a 1/4-ounce leadhead jig and one guy use a white grub and the other a green pumpkin grub. It took several casts until eventually they got the grub to the desired depth and the rest was history. We quickly determined that white was the color. My clients landed about 16 smallmouth in a variety of sizes. They were on their own since I had all I could do to hold the boat in the exact spot. Therefore, I appreciate spot-lock and remotes with my trolling motor. Nowadays, holding the boat on the spot can be done with ease. Heck, now I can even get in an occasional cast.

Vertical jigging with a leadhead jig and grub is a presentation that I have used successfully when smallmouth appear to have lockjaw after a cold front. After a cold front, some smallmouth will stack up in a hole to avoid the current and refuse to move vertically or horizontally. The size of the leadhead is important and depends on the current and depth of the water. Once you locate fish with your electronics, position your boat with the bow of the boat into the current. With spot lock on your trolling motor this can be easily done. Next, drop your jig rigged with a small 3-inch grub and let it sit on the bottom a few seconds. Twitch your wrist raising the grub about 6-8 inches and let the jig drop. Wait a few seconds to allow the jig to hit bottom and repeat. This sharp twitch and pause will trigger strikes. A slower rise and drop presentation is less effective. You need to make bottom contact. Use a six foot six or seven foot medium-light Grandt Rod and spool your reel with 8-pound Fluorocarbon line. Fluorocarbon line is superior for this presentation than mono or braid since it responds quicker to the twitch and helps the jig. In the old days all we had was monofilament line and while it did work fine, I had nothing with which to compare it.

