



# Cold Front Smallmouth



Cold fronts top the list as the reason for poor fishing. When the average angler hits the water after a cold front, seldom will you see a smile on their face. In fact, I have even encountered anglers who refuse to fish after a cold front. Being in the guide business, this is not an option. While dealing with cold fronts is never easy, experience has taught me that catching fish after a front is not impossible. With a bit of patience and knowledge most anglers should be able to avoid getting skunked after a cold front.

Smallmouth bass are notorious for slowing down after a cold front passes, especially in clear water natural lakes. Anglers may have no trouble locating smallmouth, but boating them is a different matter. However, while this is no time to catch large numbers of smallmouth, some of the largest smallmouth I have caught have come after a cold front. Now after a cold front passes I prefer to target large smallmouth.

When dealing with cold fronts it is important to choose the proper water for the time of year you are fishing. Spring cold fronts can be the most difficult to deal with. Often a cold front will occur after several days of warming. With water temperature on the rise both panfish and predator fish begin to move into the shallows. A severe front will drop the water temperature and move some predator fish back to deep water.

For many anglers, spring cold fronts are something we have to learn to live with. The Spring of 2001 was no exception. The first few weeks, we experienced exceptional smallmouth action. The water temperature was on the rise and smallmouth were where they were supposed to be. Not only did smallmouth seem to be everywhere, but they seemed to be hitting anything we threw at them. Unfortunately, this phenomenal fishing was about to change.

In mid-May we were hit with a horrendous cold front that seemed to last for 2 weeks. I will never forget these two weeks with both the wind and cold weather almost driving me over the edge. As I stated in my first chapter, falling water temperatures are never good in the spring. What will make matters worse is the high winds that accompany a major cold front. Smallmouth are holding tight to cover and you need to drop the bait literally right on their head. Mix in a 20 mile per hour northwest wind and finessing these fish can be almost impossible.

Even with these tough conditions you can catch smallmouth consistently, but patience and persistence are the key. First off, you need to condition yourself mentally to accept the tough bite. Don't head out on the water with a negative attitude but expect to put in your time. Make this the ultimate challenge and convince yourself you are going to catch fish.

Look for post frontal bass to be most active during mid-day when the water is the warmest. Don't waste time getting on the water too early. At sunrise bass will hold so tight to cover even the best electronics may miss them. However, by

mid morning the water temp may rise a few degrees and stimulate the bass. On many occasions I watched anglers pound the water early in the day and put the boat on the trailer when the fish start to bite.

Sitting on a spot is far more productive than the run and gun approach. The odds are slim you are going to find any active fish, so you will need to locate fish and work them. With the exception of live bait the most productive presentation is a grub. Any good angler will be able to change their presentation quickly and adapt to the conditions. Often just changing your presentation slightly will trigger more strikes. No bait is more deadly and will allow the angler to adapt to a spring cold front, than a grub. I have caught post frontal smallmouth on grubs on all types of water.

I start using grubs as soon as I hit the water. The ideal spring cold front grub is small and has limited action. The body of the grub should be slender and have a short, flat curly tail. Your retrieve should be slow and direct with an occasional drop. The slow retrieve will attract the bass but the slow fall on the pause of the retrieve will trigger the strike. This is the same retrieve I use when walleye fishing in spring with a jig and minnow.

The type of jighead you use is critical when fishing grubs, especially in the cold water of spring. Darter head style jigheads are the only jigheads I recommend. A darter head jig has a pointed head and a long shank with an oversized hook. The long hook shank allows the grub to sit horizontally and the oversized hook will maximize your hook set.



**Darter Head Jigs**



**4" Grub**



**3" Grub**

I will use three inch grubs in both clear and stained water. In clear and slightly stained water my preferred colors are pumpkin, green pumpkin, watermelon and black. If the water is heavily stained my favorite color is white. Many anglers prefer chartreuse in stained water but I feel white has more contrast and more resembles baitfish.

Tubes are also effective and no smallmouth angler should ever head on the water without them. Using too big again do nothing. Do this a few more times, and make a cast to another part of the crib. If you don't connect with a big smallmouth, let out enough anchor line to drift the back of the boat over the edge of the crib. Next, rig up another rod with a four inch finesse worm wacky style. Place a split shot about two feet above the hook. The weight will drop before the worm but, a big smallmouth will often hammer the worm. If no strike is detected, raise your rod to the 11:00 o'clock position and let the worm drop. This method has resulted in many big smallmouth over the years. A leech or crawler fished in the same manner may be the deadliest presentation of all.

Each year I see many anglers lose lots of fish because they have the wrong type of equipment. When choosing a rod for grub or tube fishing, I use a six foot six or a seven foot medium-light action rod. The rod should have a fast tip to detect the slightest strike but plenty of power to get a hookset. If you use a rod that is too light you will not be able to get a good hookset. Too stiff a rod and you will not detect a slight pick up. Whether you choose a six foot six rod or a seven foot rod is an individual preference. I use either a Lamiglas XPS 703 or a Lamiglas XS 661.

Fishing after a cold front is never easy, you just need to prepare yourself.