

The do-nothing bobber rig catches fish

Jigging presentations and the various lures used with those presentations get most of the attention when catching fish through the ice is discussed.

That attention is certainly deserved as jigging methods and jigging lures catch lots of fish through the ice. The last couple years, however, the importance of minnows presented in a “do nothing” fashion under bobbers has been obvious to this angler and my fishing partners.

The past two winters I have spent lots of hours fishing for winter crappies. Small jigging spoons and tungsten jigs tipped with various baits have certainly been productive. However,



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as the seasons have progressed, crappie minnows fished on small, plain hooks have produced better than jigs and spoons on most trips.

As winter progresses, the crappies that are left have not only seen a variety of jigged lures but are also those that are a bit more wary and often require more subtle, natural appearances to trigger a bite. Those fish are the ones that can, at least

at times, be tempted into eating a minnow presented on a hook.

Additionally, last winter on a trip to Red Lake where walleyes were the target, spoons and glide baits jigged aggressively produced many fish. However, some fish, particularly several during the middle of the day, were caught on minnows fished below bobbers.

These mid-day walleyes, like the mid-winter crappies, weren't as aggressive and so jigs were less appealing. Nevertheless, minnows struggling in their faces were a bit too tempting for some, even when the walleyes weren't actively feeding.

While bobbers

fished for crappies and walleyes are often considered “do nothing” rigs, there are some things that make these simple presentations more appealing to the fish and even more effective.

First, both small jigs and plain hooks with split shot weights added above work for presenting minnows below bobbers. For me, I often favor a plain hook as I think this is the ultimate in a subtle, natural presentation.

Also, when baiting minnows on those hooks, I prefer lightly impaling the hook under the skin and behind the bait's dorsal fin. A lightly hooked minnow will stay lively and swim

better which is often more appealing to the fish.

Even when a minnow does swim well, I still like to change it out regularly as a tired minnow may not be as appealing to the fish as a fresh, more lively offering is.

Finally, the use of the right bobber is important. I prefer using Ice Buster Bobbers.

These feature a slip bobber design which works great for precisely presenting a bait at a chosen depth and they make fish landing easy too. Plus, the Ice Busters can be trimmed so that they barely float and are super sensitive.

A barely floating bobber is a better fish

catcher because it easily slides under the water making it less prone to spook a wary fish than it's bigger, more buoyant counterpart is.

Don't forget to add a “do nothing” bobber line to your arsenal utilizing some of the suggestions just offered. Some days, that addition will add a fish or two to your catch, while on others it might mean the difference between a few fish and no fish.

As always, good luck on the ice and remember to include a youngster in your next outdoors adventure.

Mike Frisch hosts the popular Fishing the Midwest TV series. Visit www.fishingthemidwest.com for more “fishy” stuff.

SPORTS

HOSKINS

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shelter and found housing there,” Hardy said of her family's move from Chicago almost 10 years ago. “By me being in a shelter, you have to do a housing search. My name came up for Alexandria housing. That's how we ended up in Alexandria. I came here because my name came up on the waitlist to receive an apartment.”

Hardy was admittedly nervous about the move from a bigger city to a smaller community like Alexandria, but she said Kristen adjusted quickly. Both her and Hoskins said it's a move that has been good for them.

Hoskins was a 6th-grader when Jay and Jenny Steffensmeier moved from southwest Minnesota to Alexandria with their four kids — Drew, Carter, Bralyn and Ayden. Carter and Kristen were in the same grade and almost immediately hit it off.

“Me and Carter were boys in middle school when he moved here,” Hoskins said. “I ain't going to lie. He was good at basketball. I was a little jealous. I was like, ‘Who is this kid?’ We just built a relationship over the school year, and he knew my home life wasn't the best. He talked to his mom and said, ‘Mom, can this kid Kristen stay with us for a little bit.’”

Hoskins does not have a relationship with his father.

“Sometimes I question it, but I've come a long way without him, so I'm just blessed,” he said.

As his friendship with Carter grew as young kids, Hoskins was spending more and more time at the Steffensmeiers' home.

“They were so supportive,” Hardy said. “He needed that extra support. I was a single mom struggling, working two jobs. They were very helpful making sure he completed his tasks and getting to and from school. Sometimes he missed the bus, so they've been a big part of his life. I'm grateful for them.”

A young kid with a big heart

The Steffensmeiers obtained legal guardianship of Hoskins during a period through school where he moved in with them for multiple years.

Kristen and Carter were always together, and Jay and Jenny quickly saw a young kid in Kristen with a big heart who needed a little extra guidance.

“Him and Carter had become very close,” Jenny said. “The more he was over, the more he needed just a



Eric Morken / Alexandria Echo Press

Alexandria's Carter Steffensmeier, left, and Kristen Hoskins walk off the court together after the Class AAA boys state basketball championship game on April 10, 2021. The two have been friends since the Steffensmeier family moved to Alexandria when Carter was in 6th grade and both have gone on to help the Cardinals to big seasons in both basketball and football in recent years.

little more structure. His mom was doing everything she could, and we just felt God's calling that it was the right thing to do. Somebody just needed a little bit more help, and we're thankful that his mom was trusting enough that we could co-parent with her.”

Hoskins does not hesitate to call the Steffensmeiers a second family when asked to describe his relationship with them.

“It was absolutely crazy,” Hoskins said of Jay and Jenny welcoming him into their home. “Just moving from Chicago and Minneapolis, I ain't used to stuff like that. I'm like, ‘Wow. Why is this family trying to help me out so much?’ This was way before I was good at sports. They took me in as just a kid. That means a lot to me. More than an athlete in their eyes.”

As a senior now, Hoskins is back living with his mom. He calls Kenyatta his world.

“Without her, without the guidance none of it is possible,” he said. “She's a

blessing from God.”

'He's the best athlete we've ever had'

The word “blessing” is one Hoskins has used a lot over the years to describe his ascension in athletics at Alexandria. His friendship with Carter goes far beyond sports, but the two grew together in both football and basketball to help the Cardinals accomplish big things.

They were both starters and impact players on the basketball team last winter that finished as the Class AAA state runner-up. They are at the center of another team ranked fourth in state and off to a 4-0 start this winter.

The same can be said in football after they helped the Cardinals to the state tournament this past fall season.

Steffensmeier, a two-year starter at quarterback, threw for 2,541 yards and 25 touchdowns. Fifteen of those touchdowns went to Hoskins, who finished 2021 with 1,185 yards on 83 receptions.

Steffensmeier is second in Alexandria program history in both yards thrown (3,579) and passing touchdowns (35).

Hoskins, who made his varsity debut late in his freshman season, set Alexandria receiving marks that look impossible to break. His 222 career receptions are 134 more than the second all-time mark of 88. His 3,052 yards and 37 receiving touchdowns also shattered the previous school records of 1,237 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Hoskins' career receiving numbers put him second all-time in state history in catches, fifth in yards and sixth in receiving touchdowns.

“In terms of athleticism, he's the best athlete we've ever had in our program,” Alexandria offensive coordinator Russ Hinrichs said. “In terms of his skills, the things he can do and how much he's improved from the time he was a freshman to now. From his route running, to his blocking, everything he does

within our offense. Skill-position-player wise, I think he's the best we've ever had. That's a credit to him. He set high goals for himself and what he wanted to achieve.”

Big things in the Big Ten

Hinrichs believes Hoskins can go to the Gophers and make an immediate impact on special teams with his return ability aided by his speed. Hoskins was hand-timed before his senior season during an Alexandria practice with a 4.27-second 40-yard dash.

“From a receiver standpoint, he's going to get the best coaching,” Hinrichs said. “I see at the college level him being one of those inside slot receiver type guys. He has the speed and he is strong. He is physical, and physically built. For him, it will just be redefining that route running and offensively picking up on their scheme. They have really good coaches, and he loves it down there. He's going to fit right in.”

Anyone who has watched Hoskins grow into an upperclassman at the high school level knows he loves to compete and does not lack confidence. At about 5-feet, 10-inches, there were times he doubted as a young kid if he could play at the Big Ten level. Not anymore after being around the players more since making a verbal commitment to Minnesota in February.

“I'm 100% confident right now,” Hoskins said. “I look at the players, and I think that's me too. I feel pretty good. I want to be a big impact on special teams. I'm sure they'll get me in some jet sweeps, some screens, so it's all going to be good.”

Hoskins does not want to be just a player on the roster for the Gophers.

“Just be successful,” he said of his ultimate goals with the program. “I want to be someone in life. Be successful.”

Hoskins flashed a big smile with friends and family by his side as his mother put the final signature on his paperwork to officially become a Gopher on Wednesday.

It was the next step in a journey that took hard work by Hoskins himself and the help and support from many people around him.

“He's just been very special to our family,” Jay Steffensmeier said as he fought back tears. “He's got a big heart. He's easy to love. He's been a big part of our lives. We're just super proud of what he's accomplished and where he's come from and what he's going to accomplish going forward.”

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