



Bass Fishing Jersey Style

By Chris Smith
Fisheries Biologist

Photos courtesy of Mike Iaconelli

New Jersey resident and professional bass angler Mike Iaconelli transformed the bass fishing world, break-dancing his way into stardom after winning the Bassmaster Classic in 2003. Iaconelli humbly began his fishing career in 1992 competing in local club and Federation tournaments. However, he quickly emerged as one of the most recognized anglers on the professional tour today. The transformation from successful amateur angler to Bass Fishing Superstar occurred following his win at the Federation National Championship in 1999. During the first few years on the tour, Mike conformed to what was “acceptable”. Yet the humble, laid back, soft-spoken

attitude of most bass fishing professionals just didn't work for Iaconelli. He often had to hide his emotions and keep his passion for the sport inside. This all changed overnight with his Championship win when his now famous “Never Give Up” soliloquy resonated for miles on the Louisiana Bayou, drawing the attention of sponsors, bass anglers, groupies, and kids that think he's cool. His over zealous celebrations are often imitated but never duplicated. Only one bass angler has the passion, personality, and vocal chords to be able to celebrate like Mike Iaconelli.

Like many anglers Iaconelli began fishing at an early age. In a recent conversation with Mike, he recounts his mom showing him pictures of himself fishing, at about the age of two. "Fishing was always a big part of the family. Family vacations with my grandfather, uncle, and my mom were often centered around fishing." Iaconelli admits that he always had a passion for fishing but it wasn't until he joined his first bass club "Top Rod Bassmasters", while attending college at Rowan University, that he really got into tournament angling. Iaconelli says that he was always competitive in sports and tournament bass fishing seemed to have the best of both worlds. Iaconelli did not intend to become a professional angler, majoring in public relations and advertising while in college. However, his talent and marketability have launched him into a very successful career.

As an angler and a fisheries biologist it is interesting to speak with others who are passionate about the fisheries resources of New Jersey. Mike Iaconelli is one of these individuals. After six months on the road competing in bass tournaments, attending sponsor commitments, and logging thousands of frequent flyer miles, Iaconelli had a few minutes to spare while preparing tackle for the 2005 Bassmaster Classic in Pittsburgh. I was able to ask him some questions about bass fishing in his Home State and his opinion of fisheries management in New Jersey.

CS: What are your five favorite public bass lakes in New Jersey?

MI: My five favorite public bass lakes in New Jersey would have to be Manasquan Reservoir, Assunpink Lake, Newton Lake, Cooper River Lake and Rainbow Lake. These are just awesome lakes. (He also favors two private lakes in New Jersey for bass fishing: Alloway Lake and Pallatine Lake.)

CS: What are your thoughts on Trophy Bass Regulations?

MI: I'm completely supportive of Trophy Bass Regulations and would like to see more lakes managed this way. Like many bass anglers, I was apprehensive when the program was initiated, but now I believe it's one of the best programs that ever happened ... Hands down Assunpink Lake is one of the best big-fish lakes in the state. It's the only lake that I know of that I can catch a five pound bass every time I go there ... Ten years ago, when I was still fishing local club tournaments at Parvin Lake, I would catch a lot of bass 12 to 13 inches. Ten years of Trophy Bass Regulations have made three- to four-pound bass very abundant.

CS: When is your favorite time of year to fish in New Jersey?

MI: Pre-spawn, definitely. Late March and early April is the best time of year to catch really big bass.

CS: What are a couple of lures you would recommend for a beginning angler who wants to start bass fishing?

MI: The number one lure I would recommend is a plastic worm. This bait is extremely versatile. When I was young and started bass fishing the shallow waters of South Jersey, I would use a weightless Texas-rigged plastic worm all the time. Sometimes I would put small split shot in front of the worm, if I wanted my worm to sink a little deeper. I could slide the split shot up the line about a foot and have a mini-Carolina rig or I could push the weight up tight to the head of the worm for fishing around thick cover. It's a great versatile rig that anglers of all skill levels can fish.

When I was working at Dick's Sporting Goods, I often got asked what lures to buy, and I would often suggest using a spinnerbait. The simple safety-pin-style spinnerbait is a lure that everyone can fish. You just chuck it out and reel it in, and it's going to catch bass. It imitates small shad and min-

nnows that the bass feed on.

The third lure that I would recommend is a topwater lure. Zara spoons, pop-Rs, and buzzbaits are all good baits. These are visual baits, which is good for a beginning angler. You don't have to imagine what the bait is doing below the surface because you can see exactly what it is doing. When you twitch the rod tip, you can see how it moves. Topwaters are very easy to use. If an angler gets a bite and catches a fish on a topwater, they're hooked for life! This is the most exciting technique there is!

CS: How can anglers become more successful?

MI: The one thing that I can tell anglers that will make them more successful is the importance of fishing around cover. When I was growing up, I avoided cover like it was the plague. I didn't want to get my lure stuck. Now I can't stress enough the importance of fishing around cover. This doesn't necessarily mean the traditional cover types of grass, wood and rock. This means any type of object that a bass can relate to such as concrete, tires or bridges. Don't be afraid to throw your lure near stuff in the water.

CS: Do you feel that being from New Jersey has helped or hindered your fishing career?

MI: You know, I actually get asked this question a lot. People often ask, how did you get into bass fishing being from New Jersey? I tell them about the great diversity of habitats and kinds of lakes and river systems that we have in New Jersey. With so many different waterbodies so close together, New Jersey is an excellent place to learn bass-fishing skills. We have ponds, lakes, reservoirs, rivers, clear water, stained water and muddy water. New Jersey has so much to offer.

Fishing here taught me versatility, which allows me to be able to compete on the tour. When I went to the Potomac River in Maryland for the first time, it was similar to fishing the Delaware River. When I went to Kerr Reservoir in Virginia and flipped bushes, it was just like going to Almonesson Lake. When I went to Lake Toho in Florida for the first time, I said, Wow! This looks just like Union Lake.

CS: How can New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife improve bass fishing in New Jersey?

MI: I believe there are four specific areas to target that will help the bass fishing in New Jersey. Fish ladders are great for developing a better bass fishery. Fish ladders are primarily constructed for the purpose of increasing spawning area for migratory fish such as river herring and American shad. The secondary benefit is they enhance the forage base and ultimately increase the growth rates of predator game species. Cooper River Lake has significantly benefited from the addition of a fish ladder.

Improving or maintaining habitat in the form of vegetation or brush piles also helps the bass fishing. Lakes that are void of cover would benefit from the addition of brush piles. Lakes with good habitat should be maintained. Lake Associations often try to kill all the vegetation, which devastates the bass population.

Lakes with high fishing pressure, population density, and harvest rates could be stocked more regularly with bass to supplement the existing fishery. While fishing a tournament in February 2005 on Lay Lake, Alabama, every angler in the tournament was given a bag of fingerling bass in the morning at the start of the tournament. We released the bass at the first spot we stopped at in the morning. This was really cool being able to help the fishery by stocking fish.

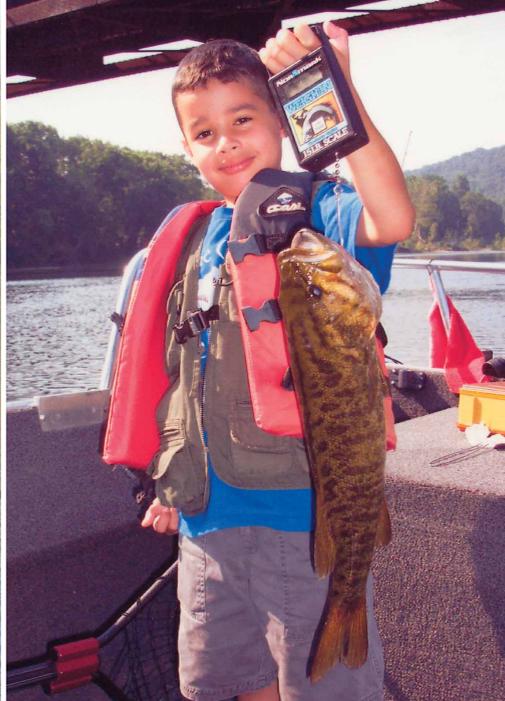
Providing additional access to shoreline anglers, not just constructing

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Walleye, Delaware River

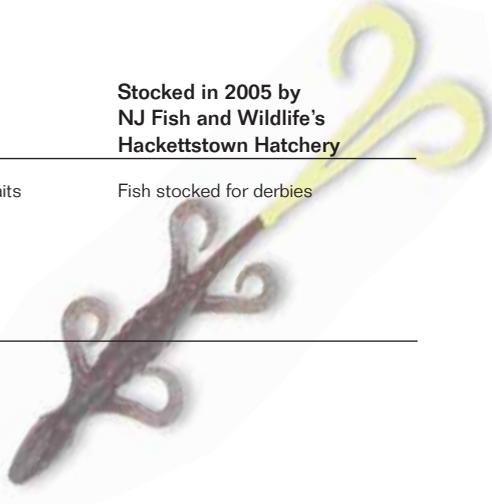


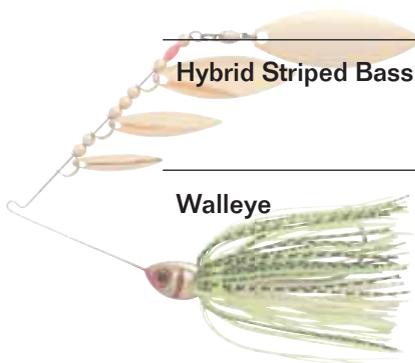
Smallmouth Bass, Delaware River



Hybrid Striped Bass, Lake Hopatcong

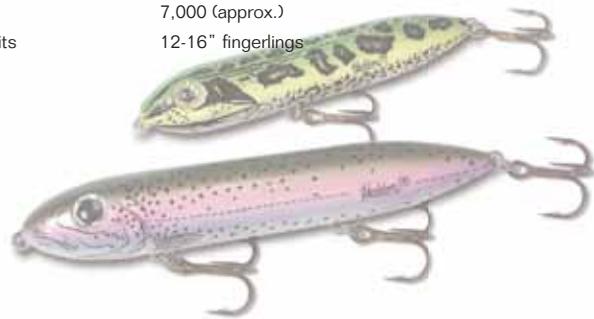
Fishing Hotspots & How to Lure Them In!

Species	Hotspots	Lures and Baits	Stocked in 2005 by NJ Fish and Wildlife's Hackettstown Hatchery
Largemouth Bass	Assunpink Lake	Soft Plastic Creature Baits	Fish stocked for derbies
	Manasquan Reservoir	Lizards, Worms, Tubes	
	Parvin Lake	Crankbaits	
	Rainbow Lake	Spinnerbaits	
	Swartwood Lake		
Smallmouth Bass	Clinton Reservoir	Topwater Lures	
	Echo Lake Reservoir	Greenpumpkin Tube	
	Merrill Creek Reservoir	Chartreuse Spinnerbait	
	Oak Ridge Reservoir	Suspending Jerkbait	
	Round Valley Reservoir		
Hybrid Striped Bass	Lake Hopatcong	Drift Herring and Shiners	65,548
	Manasquan Reservoir	Crankbaits/Rattletraps	4" fingerlings
	Spruce Run Reservoir	Stickbaits	
Walleye	Canistear Reservoir	Spinner Blade Worm Harness	282,111
	Delaware River	Crankbaits	2" fingerlings
	Greenwood Lake	Lead Head Jig Tipped with Fathead	35,000 (approx.)
	Lake Hopatcong	Nightcrawlers and Leeches	
	Monksville Reservoir		
	Swartwood Lake		





Species	Hotspots	Lures and Baits	Stocked in 2005 by NJ Fish and Wildlife's Hackettstown Hatchery
Northern Pike	Budd Lake	Floating Large Shiners with Bobber	27,959
	Cranberry Lake	Large Spinnerbaits	6" fingerlings
	Farrington Lake	Large Spinners	
	Passaic River		
	Pompton Lake Spruce Run Reservoir		
Tiger Muskellunge	Delaware River	Large Crankbaits	3,500 (approx.)
	Furnace Lake	Large Jerkbait	10" fingerlings
	Greenwood Lake	Spinnerbaits	
	Little Swartswood Lake Manasquan Reservoir	Bucktails	
Muskellunge	Delaware River	Large Crankbaits	10,000 (approx.)
	Echo Lake Reservoir	Large Jerkbait	10" fingerlings
	Greenwood Lake	Large Spinnerbaits	
	Lake Hopatcong	Bucktails	
	Mercer Lake Monksville Reservoir Mountain Lake		
Channel Catfish	Assunpink Lake	Chicken Liver	38,500 (approx.)
	Cooper River Lake	Nightcrawlers and Leeches	7" fingerlings
	Furnace Lake	Cut Bait/Fish	
	Lake Hopatcong	Hot Dogs	7,000 (approx.)
	Lower Delaware River	Commercial Stink Baits	12-16" fingerlings
	Manasquan Reservoir Mary Elmer Lake Rising Sun Lake Stone Tavern Lake		



Tiger Muskie

Muskellunge, Lake Hopatcong

