Making the Most Out of Electronics â€“ Fishing On the Edge

by Mike Iaconelli

To some anglers, electronics -- the type you'll find at the console and on the bow of any modern fishing boat -- can be a little confusing. Why? Because of the misnomer that is attached to them: "fish finders." I, like most everyone else, have heard this expression a million times and it still seems funny to me. If they found fish, like the term suggests, then why aren't we all catching our limits of huge fish every time we turn the thing on?
Mike Iaconelli is the 2006 Bass Angler of the Year and 2003 Bassmaster Classic champion. The truth is, electronics aren't necessarily used to find fish but to find structural breaks, rock piles or stumps that can help you locate fish. These high-tech electronics give you a pair of underwater eyes so that you can tell what the bottom of the fishery is like. It's not just a bowled out hole out there -- there are humps, drops, channel swings, points and isolated pockets of cover and that's what I am looking to find.Often times, when I'm slowly motor over a big flat area that is -- for example -- 8-feet deep, I am watching my electronics like a hawk waiting for the depth to drop to 10 or 11 feet and rise back up to eight feet. That tells me that there's a change in structure and contour. After I drop some marker buoys overboard to mark the spot of the transition, I'll start casting something like a Berkley Frenzy crankbait, maybe a Carolina rig with a Berkley Power Bait lizard or a heavy jig. These baits will come into contact with the bottom and let me know more about it. Also, these baits cover a lot of water so I can find out pretty quick whether or not there's a fish in the area that I can catch. When the time comes that I am using my electronics to find a fish, I'm still not necessarily looking for a bass. Mostly, I am looking for fish activity -- especially baitfish which show up as dark clouds on the electronics. If I see that the depth of the water is, for example, 25 feet and the bait fish are at 15 feet, then I know to focus my efforts in 15 feet of water since that is the depth where the feeding is taking place. Knowing that, I can drop shot a Gulp! sinking minnow or swim a Classic Power Jig at the right depth.This information is especially important this time of year as we approach winter and colder temperature throughout most of the country. In winter, bass are more lethargic and are most often found deep in the fishery's warmest water. So, I look on my electronics for deep water with vertical break areas, places where the channel swings to create depth.To catch more fish using your electronics, it's important to disregard this "fish finder" misnomer and not use it as a crutch. By using the equipment actively and searching for areas where fish should be, most often you won't actually have to see the fish to catch it.Berkley Pro Staffer Mike Iaconelli is the 2006 BASS Angler of the Year and the 2003 Bassmaster Classic champion.