

On the Water: Carolina rigs for pre-spawn, spawning bass

by *Larry_Nixon*

If it hasn't already begun to happen where you live, then over the next few months, the water in your favorite fishery will begin to warm up and all the bass will instinctively begin to think about reproducing. They will begin to move into shallow-water staging areas (shallow water warms more quickly than deep water does) to forage after a long winter before moving up on to bedding areas. Larry Nixon is a former Bassmaster Classic champion with more than \$1.5 million in career earnings on the BASS Tour. Currently fishing the FLW Tour, Nixon lives in Bee Branch, Ark.

Granted, these bass behaviors will be affected by the region of the country where you fish: lower latitudes with warmer weather are already seeing bass in the spawn; northern anglers won't see these behaviors until the May/June timeframe. This time of year is very popular with bass anglers because of the opportunities to catch big, hungry fish. There are a lot of ways to do it, but one of the most effective ways to catching bass during this time of year, a way that is less affected by springtime's ever-changing weather, is using a Carolina rig. A Carolina rig is a bass fishing basic. I try to keep my Carolina rigging simple: I use basically the same line, rods, reels and baits for most situations. I know it works well shallow or deep, ultra clear water or stained and I know it works all year long. A lot of people think of a Carolina rig as a post-spawn, summertime technique, but it can work during this time of year, too. The rig works well because it keeps the bait on or near the bottom better than any method out there and it covers lots of ground. When bass are relating to the bottom they will eat a Carolina rig. When they aren't relating to the bottom of the lake try something else, a C-rig just won't work. Because bass are moving shallow with the warming of the water, that means they are relating to the bottom. You can use a Carolina rig in staging areas during pre-spawn, by targeting transition areas near spawning flats. Once the fish have moved up on to the beds - whether spawning has started or not - the Carolina rig is a great alternative to sight fishing, especially when wind or cloud cover prevents you from seeing the fish on the bed. I thread a 3/4-ounce sinker on my main line, then a bead and then I use a Trilene knot to tie on a swivel. Then I tie on a leader (about 3-feet long) and attach a hook designed for rigging. For my main line I use 10-pound Berkley FireLine and 20-pound Berkley Vanish for a leader. The main line needs to be tough and low stretch; the leader needs to be invisible to the fish. These lines do just that. I use two different baits, Berkley Gulp! and PowerBait. It's all about the scent and how it's dispersed in the water. If a fish gets near the bait, it will instantly recognize it as something to eat and trigger an impulse to grab it and hold on. Both of these baits give out more scent than anything else out there and it causes the fish to hang on longer, which leads to more hook sets and more fish in the boat. For this time of the year, the two baits I use are the 4-inch Gulp! Sinking Minnow and the 4-inch PowerBait Power Lizard in green pumpkin or white (these baits are colors mimic prey that bass will be feeding on during this time of the year as well as the kind of predators that might be raiding their beds in search of eggs). I switch baits and colors and let the fish tell me which to use. I always use a tungsten sinker. Being more dense it stays on the bottom better and sends more distinct vibrations up the line so I can tell more about what's going on down there. I feel the rocks, gravel, logs or whatever and after time you will know instantly the bottom composition. I use a bead to protect the knot but I make sure of two things: first, the bead needs to be made of plastic (glass breaks easily in the rocks); and second, the bead needs a hole in it large enough to go over the knot. Sometimes I vary the leader length. Heavy cover and shallow water requires a shorter leader. Hang-ups are less frequent and when I hit a stump or other cover I know the bait is close by and to get myself ready to react. I try to always use a sweeping, side-arm hook set. I use a seven-foot Fenwick Techna AV medium-heavy rod. It feels good to me for a Carolina rig rod. Long enough to take all the slack out of my line to set the hook and sensitive enough to feel the bottom and the bites. I use an Abu Garcia REVO STX high-speed reel, it's the best one I've ever used for any fishing technique. Remember that with a Carolina rig, you're actually fishing the sinker (not the bait), since that is what you will feel making contact with the bottom. The sinker controls everything. The Sinking Minnow or the Power Lizard just hangs around and does nothing except follow the sinker. The weight of the sinker controls the fall speed, the crawling or swimming action, and the bottom-bouncing attraction. The sinker

makes noise on hard bottoms, and puffs up clouds of silt on soft bottoms. The next few months will see many anglers across the nation enjoying some of the best fishing of the year. There's lots of ways to do it, but sometimes sight fishing for the spawning and pre-spawn bass just won't work. With a Carolina rig, novice and pro anglers alike will be dragging in these rigs in, two feet at a time, right through the heart of some big-bass water.

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