

Big Fish



Adam Momirov

Adam Momirov has been catching walleyes since he learned to walk. His father first took him fishing as a youngster on Berlin Lake near Alliance, OH, not far from his current home in Minerva, OH, in search of the elusive fish species.

“They’re kind of hard to catch, but they are really good eating fish,” Momirov, a member of Alliance Branch 297 with five years of mail delivery under his belt, said. “It stuck with me.”

The walleye is a long, thin freshwater fish with a white belly and a gold back crossed with black bands. It can grow as long as three feet and weigh more than 20 pounds. Their range stretches from the Arctic to the Great Lakes and areas further south. Walleye boat-fishing season lasts year-round, except when ice intrudes.

The dual characteristics of being delicious but also challenging to catch have made walleye a favorite sport fish, and Momirov kept fishing them. He now is a top walleye fisherman with several fishing tournament successes under his belt, including a few first-place finishes.

Momirov competed in his first walleye tournament when he was 20 years old. He’s 35 now, and competes in five to eight tournaments a year. That’s a lot of fish caught.

Walleye are plentiful but shy, so tournaments take a full day of searching for and catching the fish. “Normally, they are eight-hour tournaments from start to finish,” Momirov said. On a large lake, the fish can range for miles, so travel time on a boat is a factor. “I’ve driven an hour one-way on a boat to get to a fishing spot,” he said, “so that cut our fishing time to six hours.”

The carrier’s fishing success has won him trophies, cash prizes and sponsorships from fishing equipment companies. He is the tournament director for Walleye Madness, an Ohio fishing group second in membership only to a group in Wisconsin. As a leader in the group, Momirov sets up tournaments, promotes the sport and teaches new generations how to fish, often at seminars he gives at boat shows.

Walleye Madness typically hosts four tournaments a year, two on Lake Erie and two on smaller inland lakes. Each tournament involves between 30 and 50 competing boats, each with a two-person team of anglers. The teams spend the day finding the fish and then catching the largest they can.

After eight hours on the water, each team submits its five largest catches to be weighed. The combined weight of those five is the team’s score. A sepa-

rate award goes to the competitor with the largest single fish of the day. Momirov has won the “largest fish” award enough times that he has earned the nickname “Big Fish Adam.” The largest walleye Momirov has caught weighed a little more than 13 pounds, though he bagged that one ice-fishing rather than in a competition.

The carrier has participated in one national walleye tournament held on Lake Erie, in 2017. The annual national walleye tournament typically attracts up to 250 teams and is nationally televised.

Momirov enjoys the challenge of finding walleye. “You really have to put some strategy into it,” he said. “Walleye are very finicky fish. They can be found in a foot of water one day and 50 feet the next day. They’re known as the fish of here today, gone tomorrow.”

Like other competitors, Momirov sometimes goes “pre-fishing” before a tournament to locate the best fishing areas.

“If a tournament is on Sunday, sometimes we’ll fish for a solid week straight, and try to locate where the largest fish are at on that body of water,” the carrier said. “They obvi-

ously are fish—they swim; they move; patterns change.”

At the end of a tournament, competitors bring their catch to a scale on shore, where the fish are weighed to determine the winners. Most of the fish are either thrown back in the water or end up on a dinner table—and sometimes they inspire the next generation of anglers among the spectators.

“Most of the time we release them,” Momirov said, “Occasionally, we’ll find a family on the side of the shoreline that’s close to the weigh-in and ask them if they want the fish, and nine times out of 10, they say, ‘absolutely.’ I’ve seen so many times where a kid is just staring into the cooler at the biggest walleye he’s ever seen and that kid will remember that, and say, ‘Hey, dad or mom, I want to catch one like that.’ ”

Momirov attributes his fishing success to experience. “It’s time on the water,” he said. “It’s never-ending, the learning experience.”

Catching a bounty of delicious fish—a species that goes for \$20 a pound in a grocery store—and the joy of sharing them with friends and family, make Momirov’s sport even more enjoyable to him.

Momirov with some of his winning catches



“You’re always going to have dinner,” he said. Momirov has a freezer just for saving fish. “I save them up throughout the year and then I’ll have a fish fry and invite friends and family over. It’s kind of what it’s all about.” **PR**

The walleye, also called the yellow pike, is a freshwater fish native to most of Canada and to the Northern United States.

