



The Lunker *Fred Metarko*

# Lamoka Lunker

It was a tough day to be in a fishing tournament on New York's Lamoka Lake. The rain came down all day, really hard at times, and the wind was blowing strong throughout the morning.

The fisherman with me that day was Skip, a member of our bass club. Early on he caught a fish, and, when he went to measure it, called me over to get my opinion about whether it would pass our club's length requirement of twelve and one-fourth inches. We agreed that it was really close but would measure. It then slipped loose from his grip and flip-flopped across the back of the boat with Skip close behind. But the fish escaped back into the lake. With his legal fish gone, he would end up fishless for the rest of the day.

The day improved weather-wise as the tournament continued, but the fish weren't cooperating. We tried quite a few places and ended up on the far end of the lake fishing along the bank around docks. People were talking to us, asking if we were in a tournament and what we were fishing for. We get asked a lot these questions. Many people vacation at these places and don't know much about the fish in the lake or how big they can get. Most everyone is really nice, but we do run into people who think they own the lake and don't want anyone fishing anywhere near their dock or boat.

Tim, another club member, was fishing towards us through the area and said he wasn't doing so good either, and, kidding, said he had left them for us.

We continued past the docks to an area with some lily pads. The pads were really thick and had weeds mixed in. I was using a green pumpkin-color creature bait. I made a long cast, and, as the lure hit the water, I immediately had a strike. We knew it was a big fish by the swirl it made as it inhaled the lure. The fish jumped a couple times and then was caught up on the pads. I couldn't budge it, so we had to go through the mess to get it. We couldn't get closer with the trolling motor because it was all clogged with weeds and lily pads, and I didn't want to take time to pull the motor up and try to clean all the junk from the prop. Skip pushed the boat along with the landing net handle; all the while I kept pressure on the fish as it was splashing wildly about. Skip tried but couldn't get the net under the fish because the pads were too thick and strong. We finally inched close enough for Skip to reach out to try to lip it (grab it by the mouth). He was hanging from the side of the boat (practically by his toes) with the net between him and the boat. To lip the fish he had to first clear lily pads from its mouth. He brought the fish in the boat, handed it to me and said, "Here's the fish. What happened to the net?" The net had fallen in the water

and sank to the bottom. This was a new net, in use for the first time. We could see it lying there because it was all shiny and new. Skip rolled his sleeve as far as possible and reached in up to his shoulder to retrieve it. His whole arm and coat sleeve were soaked. The net, all muddy and covered with weeds, ended up on the boat deck.

During all the action, three people were watching us from the shore and dock. They clapped and shouted when I held the fish up to show them. That was the only legal fish I caught all day.

On the way to weighing in, everyone was asking how I made out. I said, "Just one fish."

Joe, who placed first for the tournament, had weighed in and had the lunker so far. His wife, Gale, fished with him. She was putting the boat cover on their boat and watched as I pulled the fish out of the livewell. She said, "Oh, damn, there goes Joe's lunker."


After everyone weighed in and the results were announced, Skip was telling everyone the whole story blow by blow. I don't know how many times he told it. They kept calling me Mr. Lunker and Lunker Man. They kept shaking my hand and rubbing my arm saying, "Maybe some luck will rub off on me."

I don't catch the most fish, but I do haul in some of the biggest. The best part of all is that this one fish ended up being the 4.35-pound lunker for the tournament. I caught the lunker in seven out of the nine tournaments that year.

I can't believe it!

*The Lunker is a member of the Tioga County Bass Anglers (www.tiogacountybassanglers.com). Contact him at lunker@mountainbomemag.com.*

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