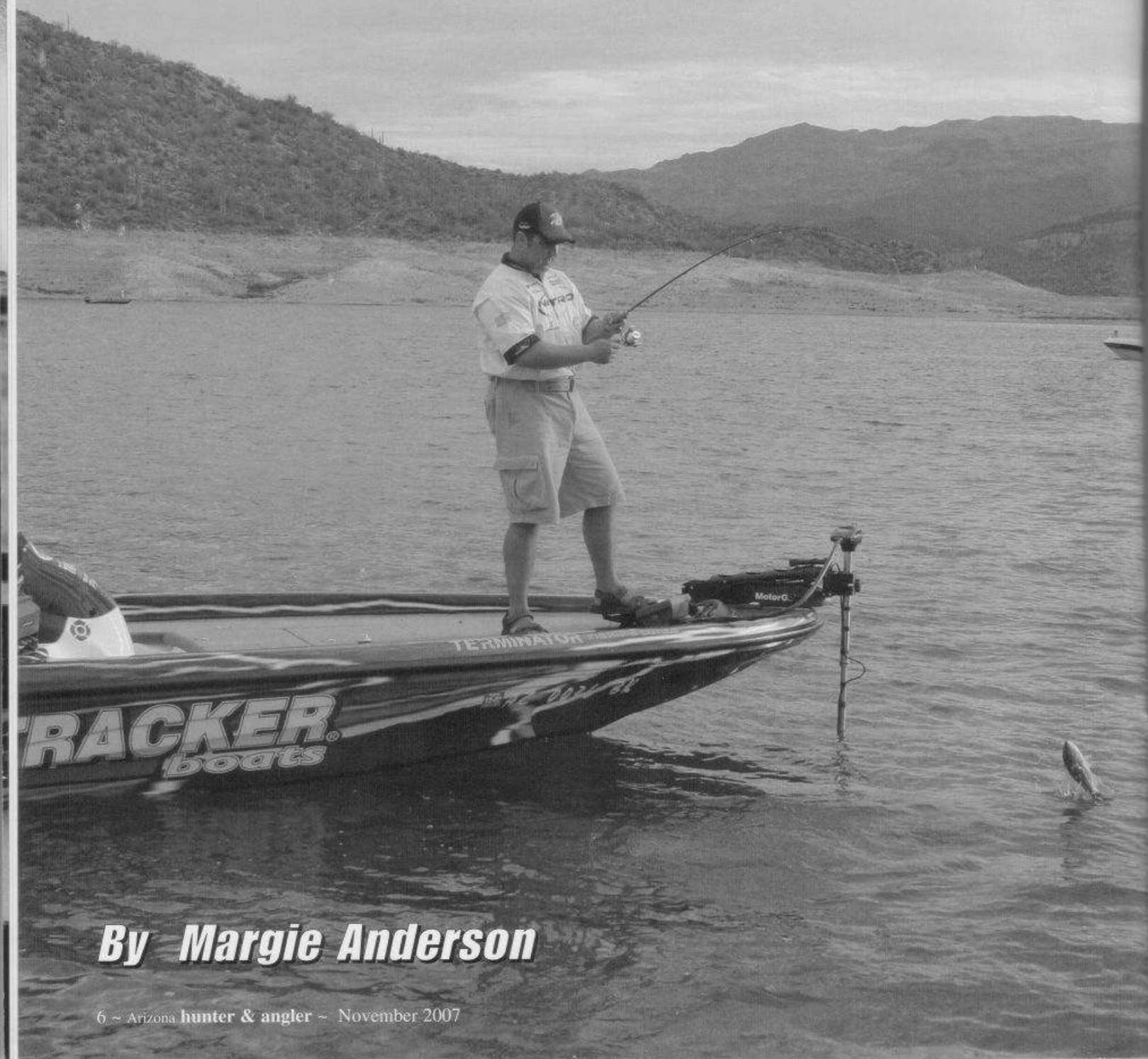


# Fall Bass Smorgasbord



*By Margie Anderson*

**A**llStar Bass tournament angler Matt Shura of Gilbert has been fishing since he was a kid, and at one point held the state record for biggest largemouth bass ever caught in Arizona.

In the fall, bass are much less finicky than in the summer, so Shura keeps a variety of baits tied on. He offers the fish a veritable smorgasbord, which usually includes a split-shot worm, a jig'n'pig, and some kind of topwater offering.

## SPLIT-SHOT RIG

"When I was in junior high, I met Floyd Preas at Nevitz Marine," Shura says. "At the time, all I had in my tackle box was a Rapala Shad Rap. Floyd taught me how to split-shot and I've been catching fish on it ever since."

A split-shot rig is one of Shura's go-to baits. "It's just consistently good," he explains, "especially for filling out a limit."

On very steep banks, a drop-shot rig is faster, but for the most part Shura loves to fish split-shot rigs whenever he can. They are particularly effective on blustery days, because you can feel the worm real well despite the wind. In water from five to twenty-five feet deep, the split-shot rig is king. If the fish are deeper than that, he usually switches to a Carolina rig.

The key to split-shotting is boat control, says Shura. You have to stay over the fish and move at the right speed to be successful. Most of the time, if you're not catching fish and you can see them down there, you're probably going too fast. "Hand a split-shot rig to a newbie and he'll outfish you," says Shura. "Beginners just hang on to the rod and relax, and that's what it takes."

Shura's lure of choice on a split-shot rig is a Robo Worm. On the tank during his seminars at Bass Pro Shops in Mesa, bass latch on to the Robo Worm and stay on, even without a hook. He also sprays his worms with Bang.

Shura's split-shot rig is simple. He pinches a size 4 Water Gremlin split-shot onto 8-pound-test monofilament and ties on a size 1 Rebarb hook. That's it; he's ready to go. Bass Pro Shops Excel mono line lets the worms float up, which is key in split-shotting.

While he's dragging his rig, he constantly keeps an eye on the depthfinder. If he is seeing fish and not getting bit, he slows down until he just about can't

stand it. That usually does the trick. The bite is often a tiny "tap tap tap", but you have to wait to feel the pressure before setting the hook. A simple sweep and reel is all it takes to set the hook with good line and sharp hooks.

Shura's split-shot rod is a 6-foot, 6-inch medium-action spinning rod. He has caught 6- and 7-pound bass on split-shot rigs, but also plenty of limit-fillers. Keeping contact with the bottom is important and with such light weights, that means going slow and easy. He likes to feel every rock and bush and he can feel the weight climbing trees and falling back down.

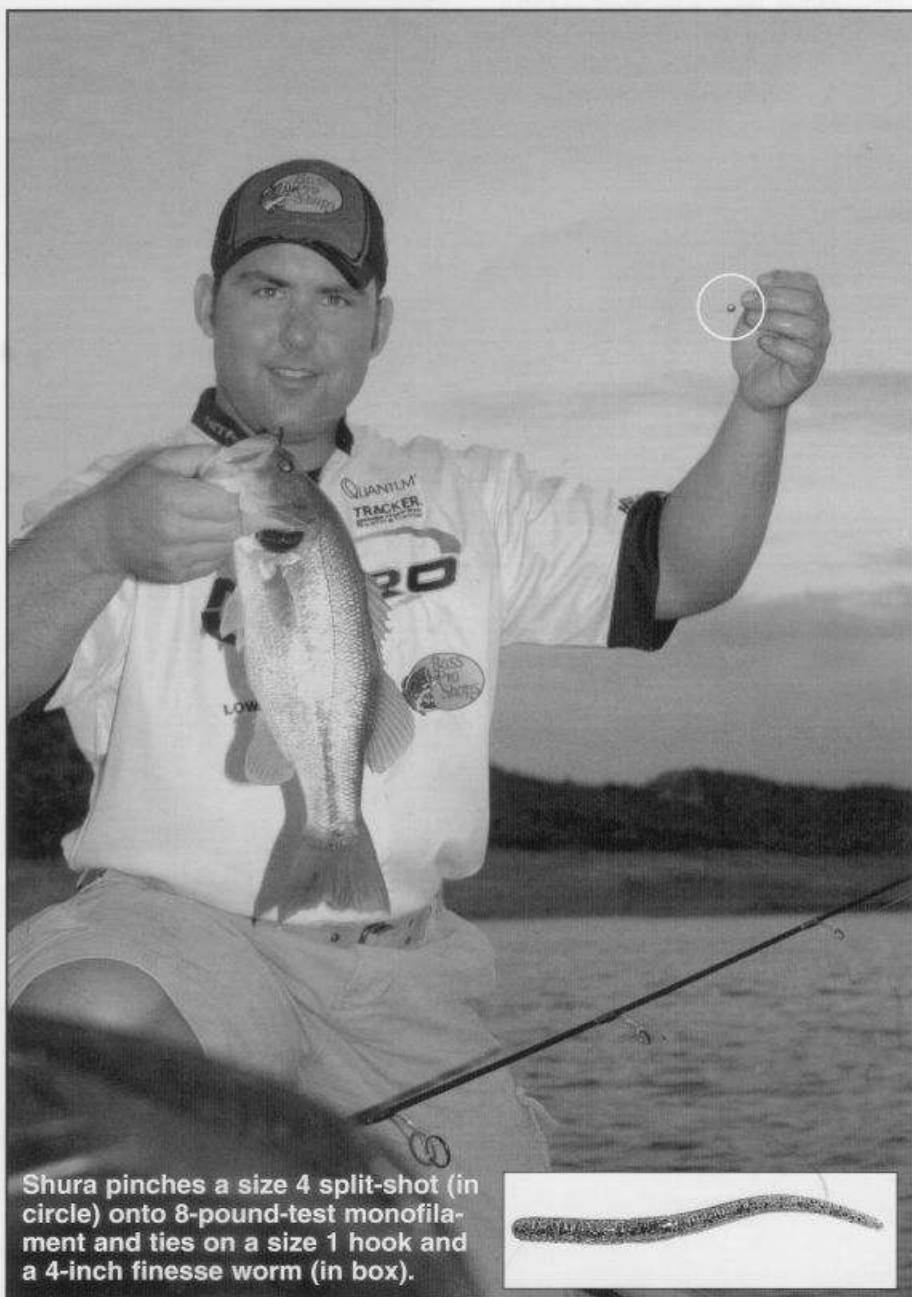
When your jig or worm rig hits a tree or rock and you pull it to the top, give it

some slack line so that when it falls over the other side, it goes straight down and stays close to the structure. On a taut line, the lure will pendulum out from the structure and miss any fish that are hugging the bottom of the structure.

You can feed line, move the rod closer, or move your boat closer. Whatever it takes, keeping that lure right next to the structure will mean more fish in the boat.

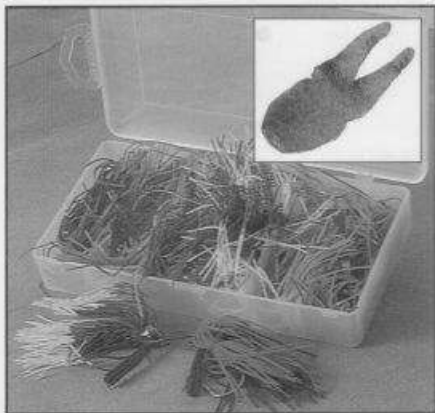
## JIG'N'PIG

"I like a jig and pig combo," Shura says. "Not many people throw them around here, and they really catch fish."



Shura pinches a size 4 split-shot (in circle) onto 8-pound-test monofilament and ties on a size 1 hook and a 4-inch finesse worm (in box).

His favorite is a Jack Lewis jig with an Uncle Josh pork. In water up to fifteen feet, he fishes a 3/8-ounce jig; deeper than that, he goes to a 1/2-ounce.

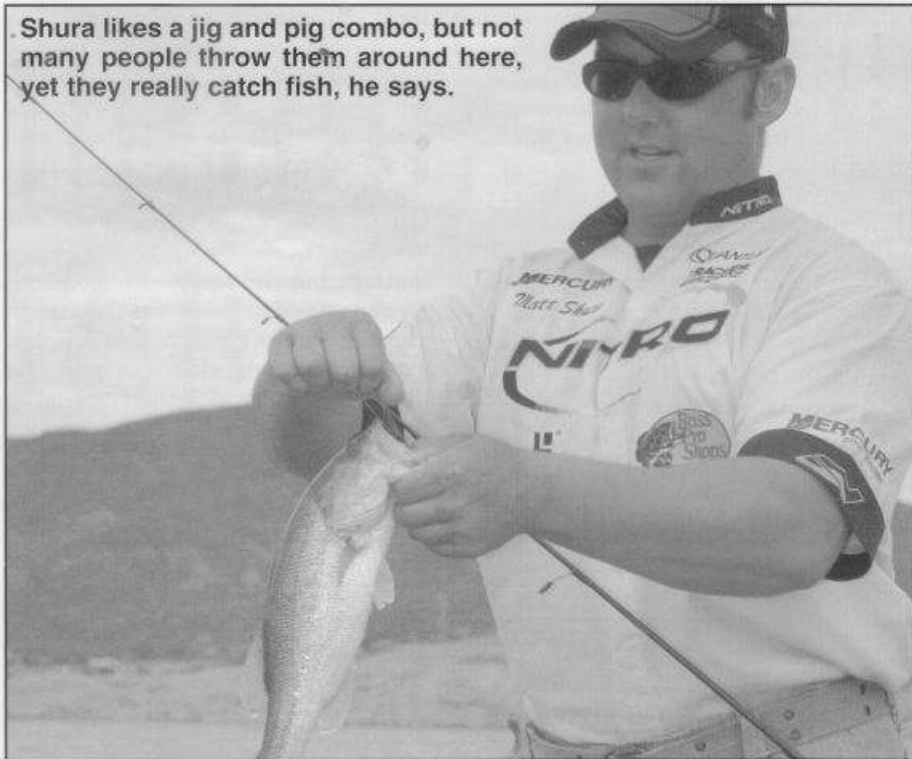


Shura likes areas with mud and rock. When you drag a jig over the mud and hit a rock, that's when the fish bite, he says. Rockpiles away from shore are another favorite type of structure.

"If you're not getting bit dragging downhill, move up and fish uphill, especially in winter," urges Shura. "It's deadly!"

As with most lures, your choice of equipment is extremely important. You need a good strong rod with plenty of backbone, preferably six feet long or longer. The rod needs to be able to whip

Shura likes a jig and pig combo, but not many people throw them around here, yet they really catch fish, he says.



the line up hard and fast enough to slam the hook through the bony mouth of a big bass, and long enough that swinging it one way or another will keep the line tight while you fight the fish.

A long handle on the rod is nice

because you can rest it against your body while you hold on in front of the reel, which gives you extra leverage.

A fast reel with a gear ratio of 6 to 1 or faster is a necessity. Once you set the hook, you need to keep that line tight. If you give a fish any slack, he can throw the hook easily because the weight of the jig head gives the fish an advantage. A fast reel will let you keep up with the bass.

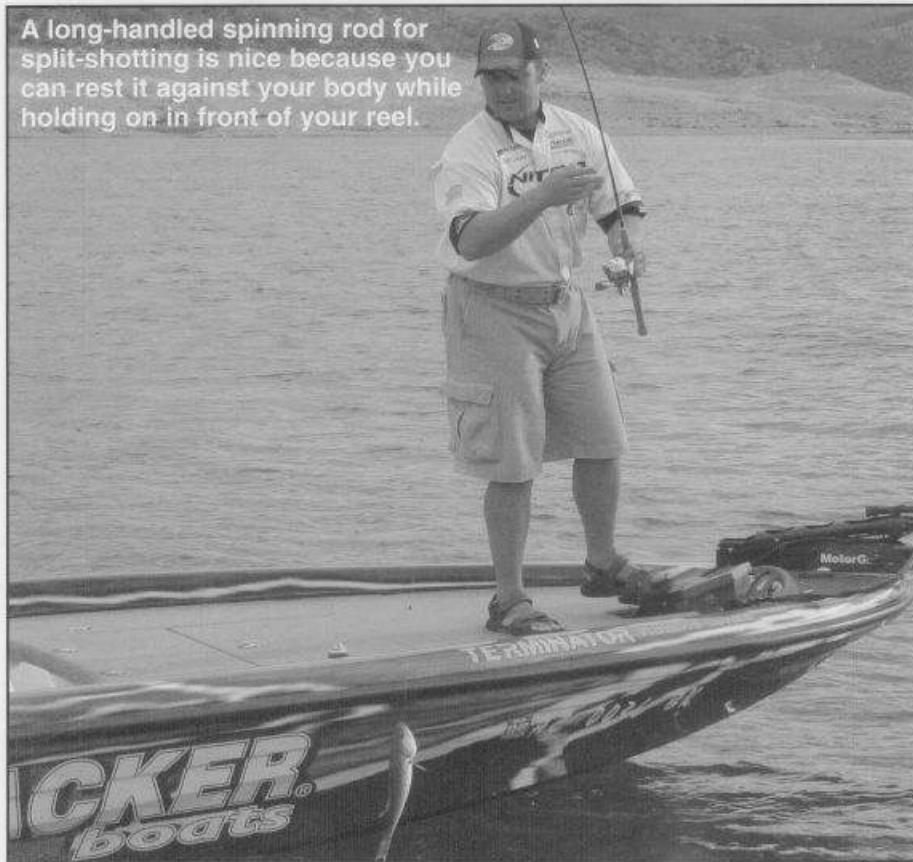
Once you make the cast, leave the reel in free spool and allow line to peel off freely until the jig hits bottom. Watch the line. Often big bass will take the lure while it is falling, so keep your eye out for twitches or sideways movement in the line. Once the jig hits bottom, engage the reel and start working it.

If you are fishing a bluff, give the rod a couple of up and down twitches, not much, just enough to make the jig hop a bit. Keep the line taut so you can detect any differences in how the jig feels when you move it. If nothing happens, drag it to the edge and let it fall to the next ledge. Then hop it again.

A bass may just take it while it is falling, so if the lure feels any different at all when you start to hop it, set the hook hard. If it isn't a fish, you haven't lost anything, you just start over.

When you drag a jig, the key is to get contact with as much structure as you can. After the lure hits bottom, engage the reel and get the line taut. Keep the rod tip low. This will give you more

A long-handled spinning rod for split-shotting is nice because you can rest it against your body while holding on in front of your reel.



room to swing when you detect a bite and help you get a better hookset.

Don't just let the boat drag the jig or you will miss a lot of bites. You need to become accustomed to the way the jig feels, because any difference may mean a fish. Pull the jig along the bottom with the rod, and then take up the slack with the reel. When you start pulling again, if the jig feels heavier or has "disappeared", set the hook.

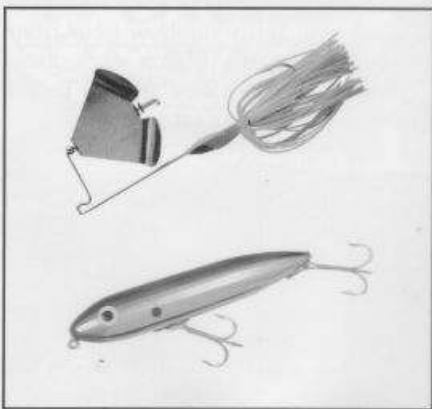
When you are dragging a jig, the bass sometimes attack it viciously, smacking it hard and fast. Other times, they just pick it up softly and all you feel is a sudden absence of weight. Bass may smack the jig to kill it, like they do a crawdad, then come back and pick it up.

It takes practice to fish a jig well. When you first start, you may miss a lot of fish. In fact, you may not even know you've been bit. But after a while you will start to know what is happening to the lure by the feel, and this is when jig fishing really starts to pay off.

## TOPWATER VARIETY

"When the water cools off at the end of summer the fish start moving around more and feeding more during the day," Shura says. He likes to fish topwater lures first thing in the morning.

A big Zara Spook is one lure he has a ton of confidence in, so he throws it a lot. Autumn is also a good time for



Ricos, and when dragonflies are out and about he likes buzzbaits.

You can throw a Spook or a buzzbait a long way on even a heavy rod, but a Rico requires a bit of finesse. Skeeter/Yamaha bass pro Zell Rowland relies heavily on topwater lures, and he has been in the money 106 times on the BASS Masters circuit. He has designed a topwater rod for All-Star Rods. Rowland says that a topwater rod should have an extremely light-action



Photo by Harry Morgan

**Matt Shura with his state record 15.86-pound largemouth bass caught in 1991 from Canyon Lake.**

tip, then progress down the rod to light, medium-light, medium, then finally heavy. This kind of rod loads perfectly, he says.

If your rod loads correctly and your

hooks are sharp, you don't even have to set the hook on a topwater fish. Just start reeling and it will hook itself. The light action of a good topwater rod lets the fish get the bait under the surface and into his mouth.

Rowland uses two different reels for topwater — a high-speed reel for spring and summer, and a low-speed reel for fall and winter. The low-speed reel makes it harder to fish the bait too fast — a common mistake.

Shura sticks to monofilament line for topwater lures. Braid doesn't have the stretch that it takes to let the fish eat the lure, and fluorocarbon tends to sink the baits. He likes Bass Pro Shops Excel Line; it's priced right and works perfectly for him.

The key to being a good angler is versatility, and fall is the perfect time of year to practice with a smorgasbord of lures.



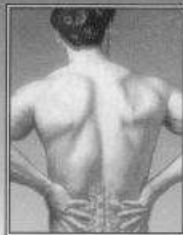
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