



Kiriyama used Jackall's Wacky Jig and Flick Shake Worm at tournaments across the U.S., from the Mexico border to the Canadian waters of Lake Erie. "Versatility is its strong suit and lure action is the trump card," Kiriyama says. "From sight-fishing largemouths on Alabama reservoirs to hunting lunkers at California's Clear Lake, or working open-water structure in New York for smallmouth bass, the Wacky Jig and Flick Shake Worm can do it all. It particularly shines in tough fishing conditions, but it's also a way to tempt

big bass that seem to refuse standard lures."

In Minnesota, Ross Evans, a tackle rep and tournament angler, got the inside scoop and spent much of last summer working wacky jigs on Minnesota waters. His findings show their effectiveness extends to natural lakes. He also worked with designers at Big Bite Baits to develop worms and heads for this technique.

Wacky Tackle

Bait: Straight-tail worms are a natural for wacky-jigging, since shaking

imparts a lifelike writhing to the presentation. Jackall's Flick Shake Worm has a subtle curve at the head and tail, designed to create remarkable undulations. It comes in 4.8- and 5.8-inch versions, with generous salt content for added weight and flavor.

I've also had success with Berkley's Gulp! Wacky Crawler, a thin 5-inch worm. Gulp! substance is rubbery in texture, which creates fine action, too. Gulp's powerful flavor also is a plus in finesse situations, and this material resists tearing more than most plastisol-based baits. Nearly any finesse-style worm can work. Fukae has found success

Methods of the Finesse Master

Winning Angler of the Year on the FLW Tour in his first U.S. campaign in 2004, Shin Fukae is recognized in many circles as the most versatile finesse fisherman afloat. His expertise includes the wacky jig.

Unlike many practitioners, he uses it both as a fall bait and in a variety of horizontal retrieves. He suggests that a wacky jig is at its best when bass are either suspended or looking up, holding in depths from 5 to 15 feet.

When the bite turns extremely difficult, Fukae replaces his shakyhead worm with a wacky jig, using it as a slow-paced search bait as he probes key structural elements or cover objects including rocks and weed clumps. He feels it tempts bites from bass that refuse other approaches.

For the bulk of his fishing in reservoirs, Fukae uses a jighead with a fine wire or fiber weedguard. When working suspended bass, he also employs a jig with a silicone skirt, which slows its fall. Only in open conditions does he use an open-hook head.

In U.S. waters, Fukae typically spools 8-pound fluorocarbon, switching to 10-pound braid with a 10-foot leader of 8-pound fluoro in snaggy waters. In waters blessed with thick cover and giant bass, such as Florida and Texas waterways, he uses a St. Croix EC68MXF casting rod and Shimano Metanium Mg casting reel spooled with 14-pound mono.

When using a worm, he places a 1/4-inch piece of heat-shrink tubing in the middle, heating it with a lighter to shrink tightly around the worm. He inserts the jig hook through the tubing, increasing its durability.

He imparts various actions to a wacky jig, sometimes experimenting with cadence during a retrieve. Often, he casts and lets the jig fall on a semi-slack line while holding his rod between the 1 o'clock and 2 o'clock positions. If bass are suspended, he shakes his rod as the jig falls to elicit bites. But if fish are holding on bottom, he refrains from shaking until the lure lands, since shaking slows the fall, which in turn reduces efficiency.

Fukae also uses a wacky jig as a target lure in shallow water, casting and letting it fall, with bites often coming on its initial descent. If it reaches bottom untouched, he retrieves and casts again. To fish flats, points, and other expansive areas, he casts and begins a slow lift-drop horizontal retrieve as soon as the jig hits bottom. He tries to avoid contacting bottom after its initial descent, making the worm gently undulate about a foot above bottom.

When focusing on a key area such as a brushpile, he executes countless tiny twitches with his rod as he raises it from 1 to 2 o'clock; but when fishing broader areas, he executes more dramatic shakes. In either case, Fukae rarely fishes a wacky jig in water over 20 feet deep and opts for a 1/8-ounce head for such deep approaches. Strong wind can make a high rod position untenable with this light rig, and at times he must lower the rod to a 4 o'clock position, when he executes shakes with a side-to-side motion instead of a vertical one.

When bass roll or slap at topwater lures, but don't eat them, Fukae resorts to wacky-rigging a Castaic Baby Jerky J on a 1/16-ounce wacky jig. He retrieves it a few inches to a foot below the surface in an erratic swimming, gliding, and twitching motif meant to imitate a dying baitfish. Because hook placement on the left or right side can guide it sideways, he can work it underneath floating docks and overhanging willows. Fukae's diverse approaches offer a glimpse of the wacky jig's potential. It's not always the most effective or efficient way to catch bass but excels when you need a fish.

—Ned Kehde, Field Editor

