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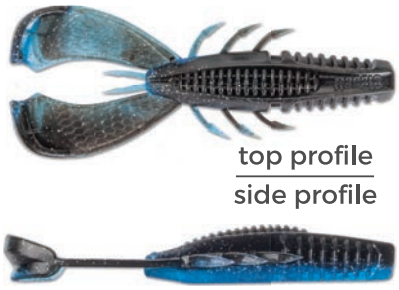
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## WALTZING DOWN MEMORY LANE

Once you become of a certain age, I think it's impossible not to succumb to nostalgia occasionally. Who among us hasn't thought back wistfully to times when politics were less combative, there were no social media platforms to serve, and a gallon of gas was 79 cents (yes, younger readers, there was a time when you could fill up your boat and truck for less than \$20!)?

I certainly have to admit to some nostalgic daydreaming in the recent couple of months (or maybe I've just leaned into a heightened appreciation of history). I suppose that's partly due to celebrating another birthday, but it's mostly due to fortuitous timing in my workflow, which allowed me to witness a handful of things that brought back fond memories of simpler times.

The first was at the Major League Fishing offices in Benton, Kentucky, where videographer Chris S. and I spent the day working on a mini-documentary on Kathy Fennel, MLF's Executive Vice President and General Manager. To simply walk the halls of MLF headquarters is a bit of a study of bass-fishing history – with its walls lined with photos of champions of bygone days and thoughtful recognitions of Forrest L. Wood and other history makers, MLF's mothership is always awash with nostalgia.

This particular visit, though, was even more special. Kathy, as you may know, started her career in the bass fishing world in 1982, when she went to work as an office assistant at Operation Bass, the forerunner of FLW. She has since become one of the most respected and universally appreciated members of the bass community through four-plus decades of tireless, selfless service to bass anglers throughout the country.

Kathy is also an appreciator of history. As Chris and I started setting up lights and rearranging her office for the shoot, Kathy pointed us to the items on her tables that she had brought out “just in case you guys wanted to see these.” Oh boy, did we ever. Kathy's collection included the original tin sign from the Operation Bass office in nearby Gilbertsville; her staff jackets from 1980s-era All-Americans; photos and sleeves of slides that dated back to tournaments four decades in the past; etc.

We left that day with a few hundred slides and several issues of *Cast Magazine* tucked under our arms (if you ever want to take a trip down memory lane, look through the pages of a bass magazine from the 1990s).

As fortune would have it, that same documentary project also took Chris and I to Springfield, Missouri, and the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame, where Kathy is already inducted, and the subject of one of this issue's feature stories – Alfred Williams – will be inducted in late September. If you're an appreciator of the story of “how we got here” as a bass-tournament community and in need of some history, there's no better place to spend the day than the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium (where the BFHOF is housed).

As you peruse this issue of *MLF Bass Fishing* magazine, you'll notice that it's a hearty mix of history/nostalgia and looking forward. Joe Balog's column on “The end of the specialist?” will strike a chord with you Gen Xers; Mitchell Forde's feature on Deanna Moreno and Rachel Uribe will inspire you forward-thinkers. I hope you get a little something out of all of it!

JOEL SHANGLE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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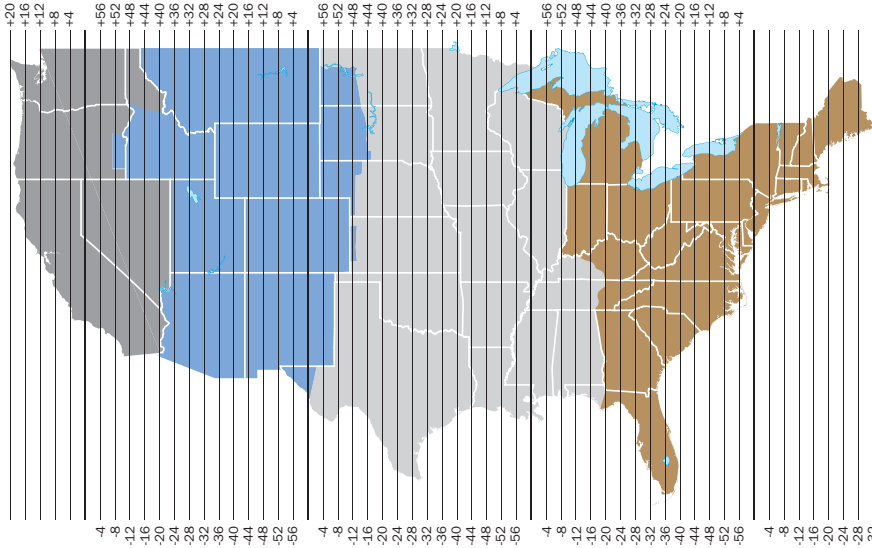
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# SOLUNAR TABLES

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2024

PACIFIC STANDARD TIME  
 MOUNTAIN STANDARD TIME  
 CENTRAL STANDARD TIME  
 EASTERN STANDARD TIME



SEPT. Date	Day	AM Minor	AM Major	PM Minor	PM Major	Moon Phases	OCT. Date	Day	AM Minor	AM Major	PM Minor	PM Major	Moon Phases
1	Sun	3:25	9:30	3:40	9:55		1	Tue	3:30	9:30	3:40	9:50	
2	Mon	4:10	10:10	4:20	10:30		2	Wed	4:05	10:05	4:15	10:25	☀
3	Tue	4:45	10:50	5:00	11:05	☀	3	Thu	4:40	10:50	5:00	11:10	
4	Wed	5:20	11:30	5:40	11:55		4	Fri	5:25	11:35	5:45	11:55	
5	Thu	6:10	--:--	6:30	12:15		5	Sat	6:10	--:--	6:35	12:20	
6	Fri	6:45	12:35	7:10	12:55		6	Sun	6:55	12:45	7:25	1:10	
7	Sat	7:30	1:20	7:55	1:40		7	Mon	7:45	1:35	8:15	2:00	
8	Sun	8:15	2:05	8:45	2:30		8	Tue	8:40	2:30	9:15	3:00	
9	Mon	9:05	2:55	9:35	3:20		9	Wed	9:45	3:35	10:10	3:55	
10	Tue	10:00	3:50	10:30	4:15		10	Thu	10:40	4:30	11:10	4:55	☾
11	Wed	10:55	4:45	11:25	5:10	☾	11	Fri	11:30	5:20	--:--	5:50	
12	Thu	11:45	5:35	--:--	6:05		12	Sat	12:05	6:10	12:20	6:40	
13	Fri	12:20	6:30	12:40	7:00		13	Sun	12:55	7:00	1:10	7:30	
14	Sat	1:15	7:25	1:35	7:55		14	Mon	1:45	7:50	2:00	8:15	
15	Sun	2:10	8:20	2:30	8:45		15	Tue	2:30	8:35	2:45	9:00	
16	Mon	3:00	9:10	3:20	9:35		16	Wed	3:15	9:25	3:35	9:50	
17	Tue	3:50	9:55	4:05	10:20		17	Thu	4:05	10:10	4:20	10:40	☀
18	Wed	4:35	10:45	4:55	11:10	☀	18	Fri	4:55	11:10	5:20	11:45	
19	Thu	5:25	11:40	5:50	--:--		19	Sat	6:00	--:--	6:30	12:15	
20	Fri	6:20	12:10	6:55	12:40		20	Sun	7:00	12:50	7:35	1:20	
21	Sat	7:20	1:10	7:55	1:40		21	Mon	8:05	1:55	8:40	2:25	
22	Sun	8:25	2:15	9:00	2:45		22	Tue	9:10	3:00	9:45	3:30	
23	Mon	9:30	3:20	10:05	3:50		23	Wed	10:15	4:05	10:50	4:35	
24	Tue	10:30	4:20	11:05	4:50	☾	24	Thu	11:10	5:00	11:40	5:25	☾
25	Wed	11:25	5:15	11:55	5:40		25	Fri	11:55	5:45	--:--	6:10	
26	Thu	--:--	6:05	12:15	6:35		26	Sat	12:25	6:30	12:40	6:50	
27	Fri	12:50	6:55	1:05	7:20		27	Sun	1:05	7:05	1:15	7:25	
28	Sat	1:35	7:40	1:50	8:00		28	Mon	1:40	7:40	1:50	8:00	
29	Sun	2:15	8:15	2:25	8:40		29	Tue	2:15	8:15	2:25	8:35	
30	Mon	2:55	8:55	3:05	9:15		30	Wed	2:50	8:55	3:05	9:10	
							31	Thu	3:25	9:30	3:40	9:50	

SOLUNAR TABLES® are designed to forecast the daily active feeding periods of fish. They are formulated from the position of the earth in relation to the sun and moon.

The major periods last for approximately 2 to 3 1/2 hours, and the minor periods last for approximately 3/4 to 1 1/2 hours. To determine the start of major and minor times for your area, find the bold time-zone rule on the map. If you are located in the area left of the time-zone rule, add the number (in minutes) at the top to the corresponding time on the chart. If you are located in the area right of the time-zone rule, subtract the number (in minutes) at the bottom from the corresponding time on the chart. Add one hour to all times during daylight saving time.

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# DISPELLING MISCONCEPTIONS: IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT (SELECTIVE) BASS HARVEST



By Steven Bardin

There's been a rumbling among fisheries biologists for the past decade — something we've been discussing behind closed doors, writing research papers on and noting in our management reports. It's reached a boiling point where you as an angler are now hearing about it on podcasts, seeing it in social media posts and maybe noticing it in your state agency regulations. The issue in question is: Are we harvesting enough bass?

For some of us, this might seem like a crazy question; harvesting bass might sound sacrilegious. But lake managers have been seeing an alarming trend over the past 20 years due to a lack of bass harvest, and many are starting to ring the bell of concern. Let's unpack the whole harvest and regulation issue and discuss why you should be participating in these conversations.

## REGULATIONS REQUIRE HARVEST

To start with, you must know about the four primary regulation types: minimum length limits, maximum length limits, harvest slot limits and protected slot limits. Each of these are designed to reach a specific goal. However, they only work if anglers participate by removing the designated fish.

A minimum length limit and a protected slot limit are the two most popular and the ones you are likely familiar with.

**MINIMUM LENGTH GUIDELINES:** These limits allow for the harvest of a designated number of fish above a certain length. This is the form of almost all statewide regulations and is usually written as something like this: "An angler can harvest five black bass with a length of 14 inches or greater."

By design, this regulation allows for the maximum number of fish in the population to reach a specific size, usually tied to reproductive maturity. The idea is to get fish to spawn once or twice before they're removed from the fishery. Over a long period of time, these regulations will inevitably lead to a fishery having a significant population of fish with a lower individual weight but maximize the potential for anglers to catch fish each trip.

**SLOT LIMITS:** The second-most popular regulation is a protected slot, where fish can be harvested below a certain length or above another length. This is often created with a rider that an angler can only have one fish over the protected slot. A protected slot would read something like this: "An angler can harvest five black bass with lengths below 16 inches and above 20 inches, with only one fish exceeding 20 inches."

These regulations are often used in fisheries that are classified as trophy fisheries — I'm thinking Lake Fork in Texas or Dale Hollow in Tennessee. The idea is to allow harvest at a smaller size where you have a high density of fish, protect

the reproductive size class and eventually allow for the harvest of a trophy-sized fish once it reaches an age where it's in the latter stages of life.

The other two regulation types are more often used in private lake management, where harvest can occur and be controlled by limiting angler access. These regulations are designed to push fisheries to maximize their carrying capacity of larger fish.

**MAXIMUM LENGTH LIMITS:** The maximum length limit allows for the harvest of fish below a certain length and then creates lifetime protection for fish once they reach a specific size. This type of regulation would sound like, "An angler can harvest five fish under 18 inches." This regulation does assume that the fishery can grow a portion of the population beyond the harvestable size, which is not always the case.

**HARVEST SLOT REGULATIONS:** The last type of regulation is a harvest slot. This is likely the least used but offers the most benefits for new or recovering fisheries, where juvenile fish need to be protected and few trophy fish exist. The harvest slot prevents harvest below a specific length and above another but provides anglers the opportunity to take fish within a window.

This is often a temporary regulation, and the window changes over time, widening based on the maturation of the population. A harvest slot might sound like this: "An angler can harvest five black bass between 10 and 16 inches in length."

.....  
***"CATCH AND RELEASE IS ESSENTIAL TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT FISHERIES, BUT HARVEST IS ALSO A MANAGEMENT TOOL THAT AT ONE TIME HELPED FISHERIES IMPROVE."***  
.....

## HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The problem with all these regulation types is that they assume anglers are harvesting fish, and that simply is not the case today. Black bass anglers as a group do not harvest bass at a meaningful level — that's a fact that every agency can see in their creel surveys. This fact has become so evident that you're seeing some states making harvest regulations changes that liberalize harvest.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation announced in 2022 that there would be no more statewide minimum length limit and that anglers can harvest six black bass, with one above 16 inches. Florida has a similar regulation, allowing anglers to keep five black bass of any length with only one over 16 inches. Louisiana has an even bigger

10-fish-per-day creel with no length limit for black bass. Northern states have not opened regulations up as much, but they do acknowledge that catch-and-release angling is the common practice for black bass anglers on their websites and in reports.

Catch and release is essential to preserve and protect fisheries, but harvest is also a management tool that at one time helped fisheries improve. The truth is, across all states and fisheries, regulations today are no longer effective in improving or modifying a bass population due to lack of participation. Without harvest of any kind, we're left facing a complex issue of how fisheries managers modify a fish population to maximize its potential.

This brings us to what bass fishermen — and more specifically tournament bass fishermen — should do to participate in improving our fisheries.

First, let's be crystal clear that catch and release is an essential part of preserving bass populations and improving the chances for fish to reach a trophy size. When you catch a larger-than-average fish — in your lake, maybe this is a 3- to 5-pounder — you should treat that fish with excellent care, minimizing its time out of the water, limiting its contact with your body, boat, and other rough surfaces, and you absolutely should release that fish. If you want to catch more of that size class, you should likely be supporting and participating in a harvest of smaller-than-average fish — something like 10 to 14 inches.

By removing a percentage of those fish, you in theory allow for the remaining fish of the same size class to absorb the resources you just saved. This may not feel important, but consider that it takes 10 pounds of forage in a year to grow a bass 1 additional pound. If we are talking about 12-inch bass consuming 2.5- to 3-inch sunfish, then 10 pounds of forage is about 500 sunfish per year per fish you remove.

Supporting regulations that allow for the harvest of smaller fish while protecting larger fish puts tournament competitors in a tough spot, as anglers want to put the biggest fish of their day in the livewell to weigh it in. This means you either need to adopt a catch, weigh, and immediate release format or apply for a tournament exemption with your state agency to allow for your event to place bass in livewells outside of the regulations.

Both are excellent ways your tournament can support and improve your fishery. The first provides the opportunity to minimize post-tournament mortality of larger fish, and the second allows you to share data with your state agency about the bass population. MLF does the latter all the time by collecting data for every fish caught during Bass Pro Tour

and Tackle Warehouse Invationals events and providing it to state agencies.

One final question you may have is, if harvest is so important and delayed mortality from tournaments does occur, then isn't that a good thing? But remember, most of us are trying to weigh in our biggest fish, and losing those fish is not good harvest practice. Those are the fish we're trying to protect. So, in almost all cases, tournament mortality is not helpful for managing a fish population.

As a bass fisherman and a tournament angler, I urge you to do three things: First, go to your state agency's website and pull the last lake management report for your favorite fishery. Read it and see if you find verbiage that discusses a lack of harvest or lack of change in the fish population over the past decade.

Second, contact your local agency biologist and ask when the next public meeting about regulations will occur so you can see the presentation of their data. I attended one such meeting last month in Louisiana where we heard this exact story — a fishery isn't improving, and regulations don't seem to help.



Finally, start watching for content to learn more about this subject. It's all over social media and YouTube, with biologists from across the country emerging as voices for changing the bass fishing culture. I did a longform interview that covers this and several other topics with Tyler Anderson that you can find on his YouTube channel, TylersReelFishing.

If you need more information or help, email me, and let's chat about your fishery. I'll happily put you in contact with your local biologist.

*Steven.Bardin@majorleaguefishing.com.* ■

# navigating peace of mind

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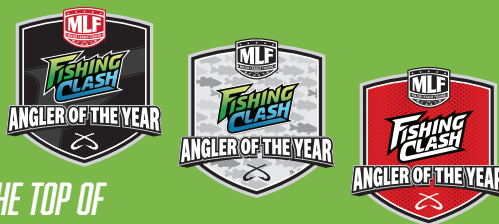
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# 'YOUTH MOVEMENT' REFLECTED IN FISHING CLASH ANGLER OF THE YEAR RACES

SEVERAL FIRST- AND SECOND-YEAR PROS HAVE TAKEN UP RESIDENCE NEAR THE TOP OF THE STANDINGS FOR BOTH THE BASS PRO TOUR AND TACKLE WAREHOUSE INVITATIONALS



By Mitchell Forde

It's trophy season, with tournament trails of all levels wrapping up or soon scheduled to complete their seasons. By the time this issue arrives in readers' mailboxes, the winner of the Fishing Clash Angler of the Year award will have been crowned for the Bass Pro Tour. As of this writing, however, one event remains, and the top spot is still up for grabs.

We'll have full coverage of the conclusion at MajorLeagueFishing.com. But that's not the only AOY trophy that comes with cash from Fishing Clash. Rookie Alec Morrison took home \$50,000 for the Tackle Warehouse Invationals title, continuing a theme across both of MLF's top tours of newcomers making their presence felt.

## GILL LEADS WAVE OF BUDDING BPT PROS

On the Bass Pro Tour, it's looking like there will be nothing new about the AOY winner. Jacob Wheeler needs only to make the Knockout Round at the St. Lawrence River — something he's done in 12 of his past 13 BPT events — to claim his third points crown in four years.

However, if Wheeler surprises everyone and stumbles, rookie Drew Gill is one of the anglers who could be positioned to take advantage. Gill, who has enjoyed a stupendous season with wins on both the Bass Pro Tour and Invationals trails, has become one of the faces of the youth revolution sweeping professional bass fishing. He's already banked over \$385,000 in winnings and heads to the St. Lawrence fourth in the AOY standings for the BPT, tops among a stout crop of rookies. Marshall Robinson (15th) and Martin Villa (17th) are also among the top 20.



Drew Gill

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

Add in second-year competitors and the numbers get more impressive. Nick LeBrun has enjoyed a breakout campaign during his sophomore season and sits fifth in the points. Reigning AOY winner Matt Becker is 10th, while Spencer Shuffield is 12th. In all, that's six of the top 17 anglers who are in their first or second season on the top tour — proof that the future is bright.



Alec Morrison

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

## ROOKIES RULE ON THE INVATIONALS

Speaking of future stars, the top of the Invationals standings were also stacked with youngsters. Thanks to his second-place finish at the season finale on the Detroit River, Morrison edged fellow rookie Jake Lawrence by 17 points to win both the Angler of the Year and Polaris Rookie of the Year titles.

Despite competing on only two of the six fisheries that comprised the 2024 slate before this year, the 25-year-old Morrison put together a nearly flawless campaign. He made all six final-day cuts and racked up four Top 10s, finishing fourth or better three times. Add in Lawrence and Marshall Hughes, who finished fifth in the points, and three of the five anglers who earned invitations to join the Bass Pro Tour in 2025 did so in their debut Invationals campaign.

There appears to be plenty more young talent waiting in the wings, too. Each of the top nine anglers in the final standings were fishing either their first or second season on a national tour.

## TOYOTA SERIES WINNERS CASH IN

Fishing Clash has already handed out some AOY cash this year. The points title in each division of the Toyota Series Presented by Phoenix Boats will come with an extra \$5,000. With three of the six divisions done with competition, here's a look at who took the crown in each.

❖ Continuing the rookie theme, Matt O'Connell claimed the AOY win in his first season fishing the loaded Central Division. A force to be reckoned with at the BFL level for a few years, O'Connell started his Toyota Series career with a bang, finishing second out of 260 boats on Lake Guntersville in February. He added a 15th-place finish at Smith Lake then a 13th-place showing on Lake Chickamauga. For good measure, he continued the momentum with a runner-up finish at the Phoenix Bass Fishing League All-American Presented by T-H Marine (for the second year in a row), bringing his 2024 earnings tally to nearly \$70,000.

❖ After finishing fourth in the Southwestern Division opener on Sam Rayburn then second on Toledo Bend, Cole Moore appeared to have a stranglehold on the AOY race. Victory seemed even more sure when he made the Top 25 cut — only two anglers remained mathematically alive to surpass him. However, after catching just one keeper for 3-4 on Day 3, he had to sweat out the rest of weigh-in. Turns out, that lone keeper was worth \$5,000, as Moore topped Levi Thibodaux by a single point.



❖ There was nothing nerve wracking about the finish in the Western Division points race. Cristian Melton sealed a dominant season in style, winning the season finale on the California Delta by nearly 5 pounds and driving home with a pair of titles. Melton finished fifth at Clear Lake and second at Lake Havasu before breaking through for his first professional win. ■

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## TV BROADCASTS

### Discovery Channel — Saturdays 7-9 a.m. (ET)

- Sept. 7: General Tires Heavy Hitters Presented by Bass Pro Shops Knockout Round @ Kissimmee Chain
- Sept. 14: General Tires Heavy Hitters Presented by Bass Pro Shops Championship Round @ Kissimmee Chain
- Sept. 21: Suzuki Stage Two Presented by Fenwick Knockout Round @ Santee Cooper
- Sept. 28: Suzuki Stage Two Presented by Fenwick Championship Round @ Santee Cooper
- Oct. 5: PowerStop Brakes Stage Three Presented by Mercury Knockout Round @ Dale Hollow
- Oct. 6: PowerStop Brakes Stage Three Presented by Mercury Championship Round @ Dale Hollow
- Oct. 12: MillerTech Batteries Stage Four Presented by REDCON1 Knockout Round @ Lake Eufaula
- Oct. 19: MillerTech Batteries Stage Four Presented by REDCON1 Championship Round @ Lake Eufaula
- Oct. 26: U.S. Air Force Stage Five Presented by WIX Filters Championship Round @ Chowan River

### CBS Sports — Saturdays 9 a.m. (ET)

- Oct. 5: Tackle Warehouse Invitationals Stop 1 Presented by Power-Pole MOVE @ Sam Rayburn
- Oct. 12: Tackle Warehouse Invitationals Stop 2 Presented by Suzuki @ West Point Lake
- Oct. 19: Tackle Warehouse Invitationals Stop 3 Presented by Phoenix Boats @ Kentucky Lake
- Oct. 26: Tackle Warehouse Invitationals Stop 4 Presented by E3 Sports Apparel @ Lake Eufaula

*The broadcast schedules are for episode premieres. Complete schedules are available online.*

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## THE END OF THE SPECIALISTS? Upcoming retirements will signify the end of an era for certain techniques

**W**ith a noticeable transition occurring in the sport of bass fishing over the decades, we've seen a natural evolution of the tournament angler. While the transformation of the high-level bass pro has been occurring for some time – slowly at first – the change has escalated rapidly with the advent of forward-facing sonar.

Explosive expansions in technology and techniques have resulted in a need for diversification like we've never seen in the past. Gone are the days of technique specialists. Replacing them are anglers who have mastered more efficient systems and found new ways to trick bass that have seem the same old baits year after year.

But what are we losing? With many household-name champions now aging toward retirement, will we ever again see masters of specific techniques? By the end of this decade, professional bass fishing will have lost many of the greatest to ever play the game as some present and future Hall of Fame anglers retire. Many can be accurately lauded as the best ever with certain techniques.

### KEVIN VANDAM

#### THE CONSUMMATE POWER FISHERMAN

With the 2023 retirement of Michigan pro Kevin VanDam from tournament competition came an end to a legendary chapter in bass fishing. VanDam's tournament resume will likely never be eclipsed, nor will his dedication to his power-fishing style.

Sure, today's best on tour can still crank and wind when necessary. But VanDam made the art of power fishing work. Looking back on his 26 major-tour-level wins and eight Angler of the Year seasons, only a handful of times did VanDam rely on anything but a cast-and-retrieve lure for his victories. Of those few where he didn't flat-out cast and retrieve – I'm think-

ing of a Bassmaster Classic victory in Louisiana – VanDam power-fished with a heavy flipping rig to ensure no down time.

Somewhere in KVD's basement is a giant box filled with dis-integrated baitcast reels. With finesse tactics dominating more and more today, the time has seemingly passed for VanDam's run-and-gun style to produce such sustained success.

### SHAW GRIGSBY

#### THE ORIGINAL SIGHT-FISHING MAESTRO

For those who have fished with Grigsby, the story is always the same: You can't believe what this guy can see. Rightfully known as one of the best sight-fishermen ever, Grigsby made a career mostly off this skill. His nine BASS wins occurred in either Texas, Florida or Georgia – places where he showcased his dominance when big female bass came to bed.

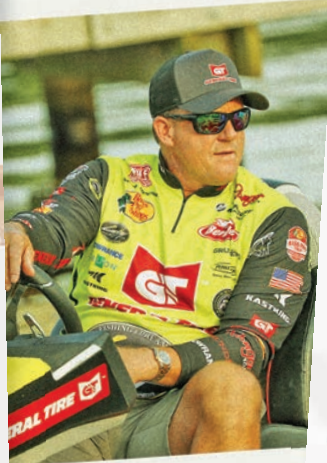
These days, many know Grigsby as much or more for his television presence and lure design contributions. But, while a few of today's pros can still be called sight-fishing specialists, everyone in the 1990s and early 2000s knew Grigsby was THE angler to beat whenever bass could be spotted on spawning beds during the spring.

### MARK DAVIS

#### THE EARLY OFFSHORE EXPERT

It's anybody's guess how long Hall of Famer Mark Davis will compete, though recent injuries would lead one to believe that retirement is within sight for the Arkansas angler. When he exits the sport, Davis will take with him one of the best offshore resumes in the game – compiled during a time when fishing off the bank was relatively obscure.

While deep cranking gave rise to more anglers venturing away from shore, Davis did most of his early work with a Carolina rig, the old ball-and-chain revealing places where he could settle in



and pluck a limit of fish. Davis has been remarkably consistent throughout his 40-year career, and his vast experience could still point him in the direction of a win if his body holds up. However, it's doubtful that Davis' methodical style of feeling his way around offshore will ever earn the AOY titles it once did.

## LARRY NIXON

### THE WORM-WIGGLING LEGEND

Larry Nixon announced his retirement at the end of last year, taking a face off the Mt. Rushmore of active tournament anglers. Nixon joins VanDam and just a handful of others as the most recognizable competitive bass fishermen in history. Even today, it's hard for me to think of competitive bass fishing without the name Larry Nixon crossing my mind.

With Nixon's departure went his knowledge of and dominance with the plastic worm (the old-school Texas rig, capable of catching a bass in a mud puddle). While Nixon credited a variety of other lures for propelling him to millionaire status, the worm did the bulk of the lifting for the Arkansas native. Later in his career, Nixon harnessed the power of the spinning rod, which helped him in the game when his ailing body could no longer flip and pitch.

## SKEET REESE

### POWER WITH A SWIMBAIT SIDE HUSTLE

Posting his first Bass Pro Tour win in late June, Californian Skeet Reese doesn't appear to be settling into retirement anytime soon. However, the 55-year-old acknowledged after his triumph on the James River that his career is a lot closer to its end than its beginning. When he does decide to hang up his sticks, Reese will leave behind a power-fishing track record exceeded only by VanDam with a swimbait side hustle we'll likely never see again.

Fans will remember Reese for his willingness to push the capabilities of big rubber baits – especially early in his career, when throwing what looked like musky lures received strange looks from other competitors. His 2015 win on Lake Guntersville with a big Basstrix hollow-belly – relatively new to the national scene at the time – might be the most well-known

example, but his comfort with oversized swimbaits goes all the way back to the late 1980s in California.

Today, Reese is known more as a power cranker, a box of squarebills always close by. His win on the James River showcased his comfort and skill with a squarebill, regardless of the venue. On and off the water, Reese dances to the beat of his own drum, something uncommon in today's group of pros.

## ANDY MORGAN

### THE ALPHA-CLASS FLIPPER AND PITCHER

Tennessee pro Andy Morgan has made no reference to retiring and faces no known physical ailments. But at 53 years old and with a passion and vested business interest in hunting, it's doubtful we'll witness Morgan grow old on tour.

Whenever he leaves the sport, Morgan will take a hearty chunk of the art of flipping and pitching with him. Few others still rely on short-line tactics to the extent that Morgan does, and it's been posited that he may be the greatest caster in bass fishing, especially around boat docks. At one time in the not-too-distant past, Morgan was joined by several other flipping specialists, but now he's truly one of the last of his flipping/pitching kind.

We're entering an age of spinning rod masters, anglers determined to catch every bass they see on screen and skilled enough to come pretty darn close to doing so. With this new trend comes less cast and retrieve, more seek and destroy.

As the sport changes, the old-school styles that used to dominate will likely depart with the last of the specialists. Often imitated but never duplicated, they remain the true masters of their crafts, and whenever each decides to walk away from national competition, he will be missed. ■



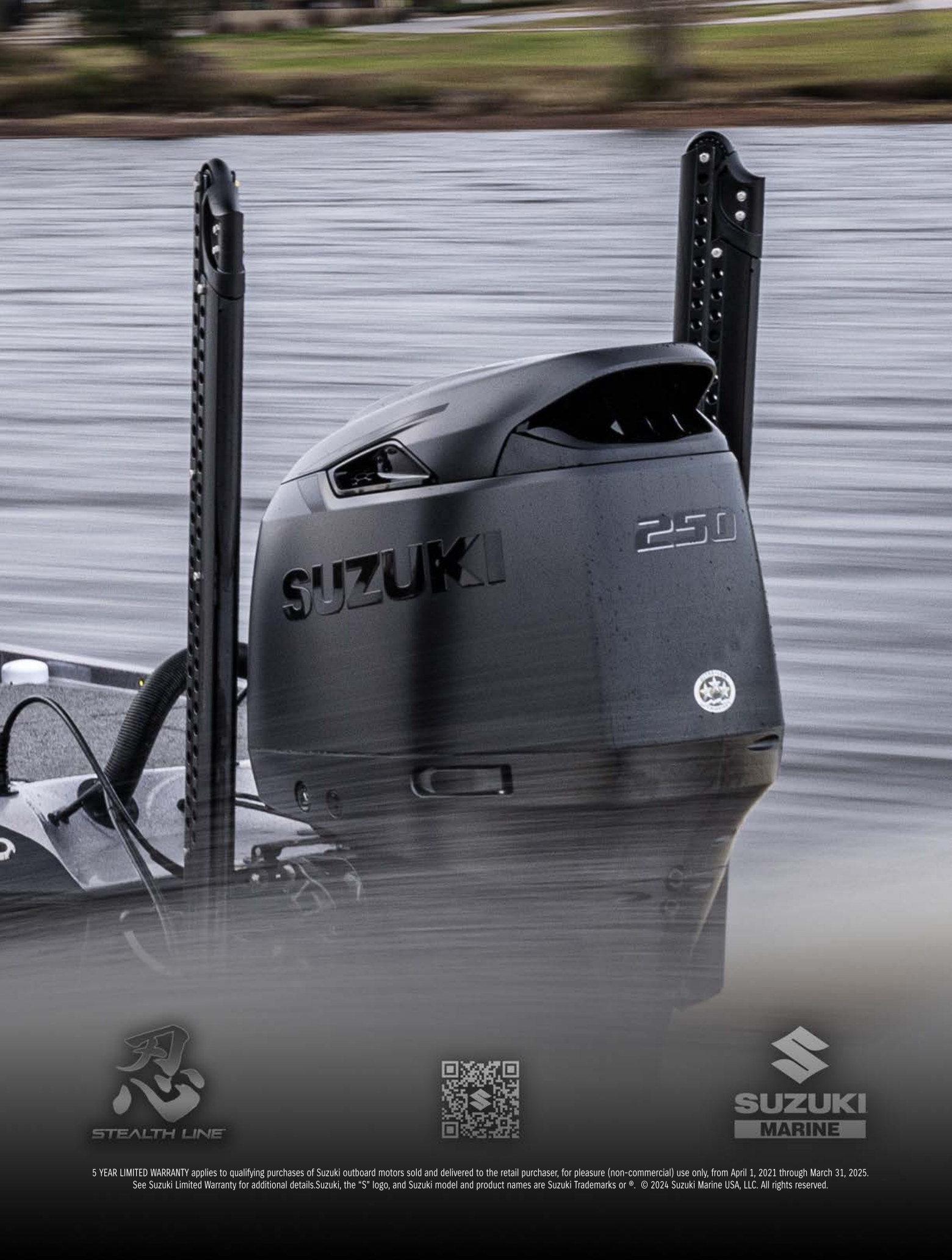
### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more than 20 years, **Joe Balog** has made his living in the fishing industry on and off the water. A successful tournament angler from the Great Lakes region, Balog now lives in Florida, where he continues to work in product design, marketing and outdoor media when he's not chasing trophy largemouth.



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PHOTO BY BRANDON ROWAN

## KNOCK IT OFF!

When 'copycat lures' are more than just copycats



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

If it's creative, national award-winning writer **Sean Ostruszka** is all about it. He combines mad ingenuity with 20 years of knowledge and experience in the fishing business to design lures for professional anglers and top brands in the bass industry.

“Eh, it’s just another knockoff.”

There may be no more derogatory statement about a lure than this one. Sure, if the lure doesn’t swim right or casts like a straw, there are plenty of colorful ways to say it’s junk. But to call a lure a “knockoff,” that carries a stigma.

It’s a term that implies the lure is not as good as the original. It’s also an insult to the company that produced it, suggesting the company isn’t innovative and just trying to copy others to make a dollar.

Considering this magazine issue will arrive in mailboxes shortly after ICAST 2024 — the industry’s new-product showcase — it felt important to address the issue of knockoffs. Attending ICAST means hearing the term A LOT. Full disclosure, I’ve said it plenty of times myself while there.

To explain, let me ask you a couple questions.

First, what’s the last original lure idea?

I’ll argue there hasn’t been one in decades, if not longer. That’s not a shot at lure companies;

it’s just reality. To quote Mark Twain, “There is no such thing as an original idea.”

While we all like to think we’re creative and have original thoughts and ideas, the truth is everything builds off something else. You may create an original concept, but that concept stems from somewhere.

Take the Z-Man ChatterBait. It was a truly innovative product when it hit the scene, and it’s still fooling bass today. But it built off the existing ideas of a skirted jig and a blade that vibrates underneath the water — things that had been around for decades. For whatever reason, no one had ever thought to combine the two until Ron Davis did it.

The Yamamoto Senko is another example. It might be the most copied lure in history. And yet, you could argue it’s not exactly original. Gary Yamamoto modeled it after the pen he was holding when he was trying to design a lure. The con-

cept of a lure that looked like a pen was unique, yes. But soft-plastic worms are FAR from original, and I don't think I need to explain that pens aren't, either.

I'm absolutely not trying to insult Ron Davis or Gary Yamamoto here; their innovations have caught countless bass through the years. But once you get rid of the idea that everything has to be "original" for it to be worth praise or purchase, it brings up another question: Why are knockoffs bad?

I'm not talking in a business sense. That's a debate to be settled elsewhere. I'm talking in terms of catching fish.

Do we see some "new" baits each year that are simply poor versions of an original? Yes. But I'd argue that, more often, newer versions actually improve on the original.

Let's look back at the ChatterBait. Because of Z-Man's patents, it hasn't been copied much by other companies. However, a handful of vibrating jigs have hit the market in the interim, like the Strike King Thunder Cricket and Berkley Slobberknocker. Regardless of whether you view either as better than the original ChatterBait, you have to acknowledge that both offer different sounds/actions. As a result of their differences, each excels in various scenarios — just ask anyone who has thrown the Slobberknocker around wood or hard cover.

The Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver is another bait that has been imitated again and again. A few have been blatant copies. In fact, I remember having a conversation with one of the industry's largest soft-plastic mold producers about how, a few weeks after the Sweet Beaver hit the market, a company came to them about producing a "new" soft-plastic design. It

didn't take the mold producer much effort to realize the "new" lure wasn't new ... the company forgot to get rid of the "Sweet Beaver" wording on the tails in the design.

But there have been some positive new versions that may even perform better. Take the Missile Baits D Bomb, with its ribbed body and oversized flappers that definitely move more water than a Sweet Beaver. Or the Strike King Rage Bug, which has a similar, Beaver-style body with the addition of multiple kicking appendages. Are either better? Again, debatable. But they're different enough to warrant use in different situations.

And that last point about different situations is key.

You see, every lure is a tool, and every tool has a time and place. Some tools are more versatile than others, while others are very specific.

No lure may illustrate this more than crankbaits, as no angler would go out on the water with just one crankbait. They'd have a bunch to hit different depths and have different actions. They may have a few go-to crankbaits, sure, but they'll also have ones that may not get used often but excel when the water gets dirty or after a cold front or if they're fishing wood instead of rock.

So, while looking at all the new tackle that was released at ICAST this year, it's okay if you notice a lot of lures that look similar to others already on the market. Try not to just lump them all in as "knockoffs," and instead dig deeper to see if there's something different about them that may have a time and place to help you.

And if not, go ahead and utter the sentence at the beginning of this column and move on. ■

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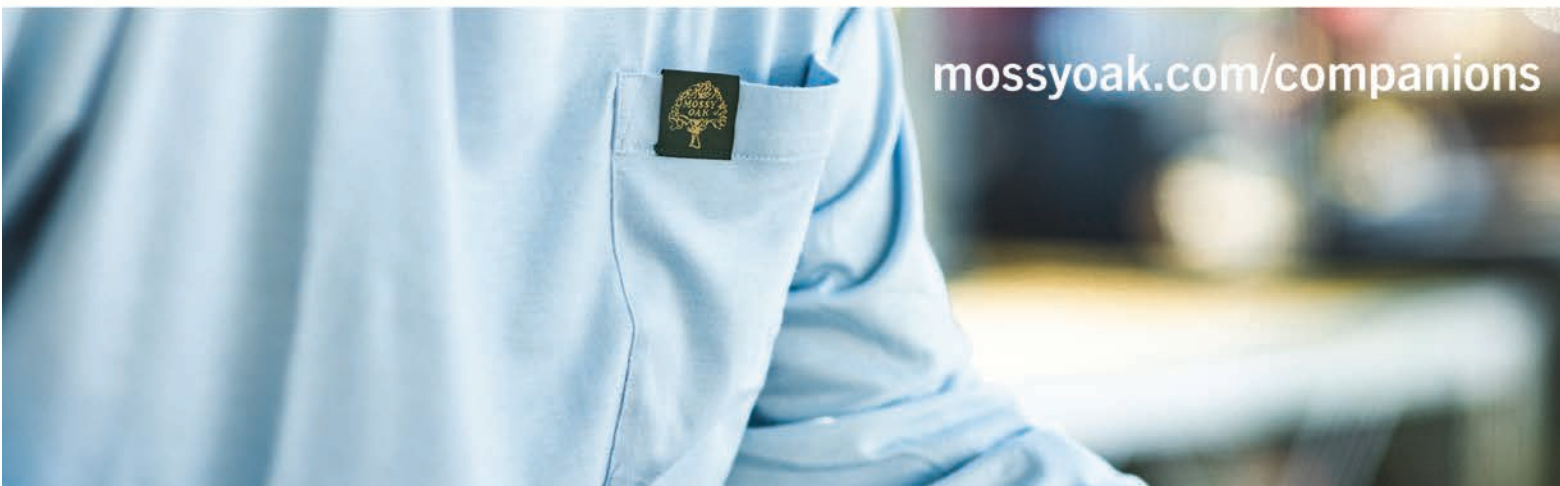
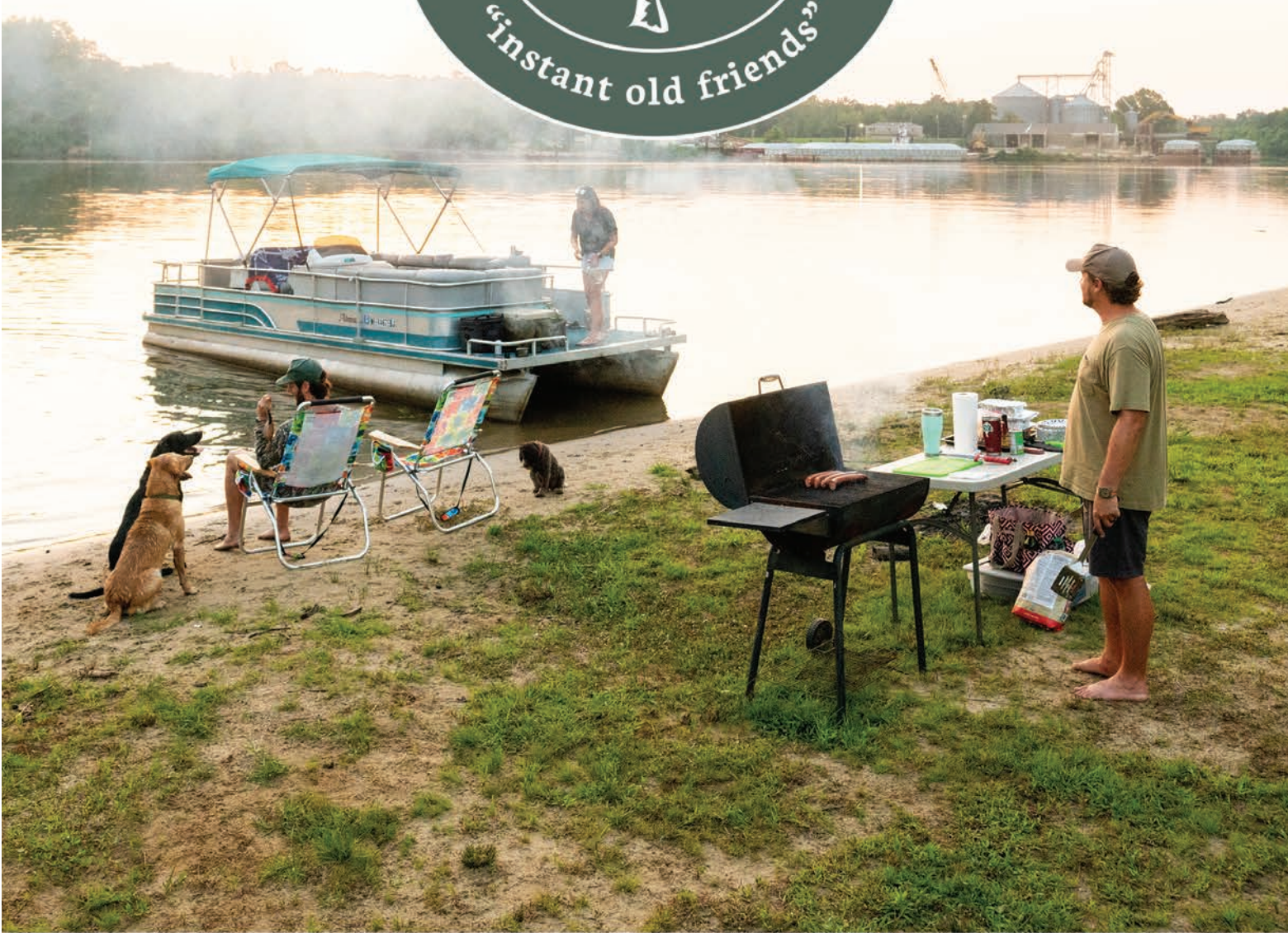
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# BEAT THE HEAT

## FOR SUMMER BASS



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



(Bass hate this one simple trick)

**BERKLEY CHOPPO**  
COLOR: MAVERICK

**CHOP 'EM SHALLOW**  
MLF pro Bobby Lane finds summer bass by targeting shady shallows with topwaters like the Berkley Choppo.

By Michael Pehanich

### Sluggish bass? Too hot to fish? Nonsense! Take these tips from top pros to siphon a hot bite from the summer heat

**M**ost anglers dread the August/September doldrums of late summer. Hot temperatures can make them sluggish and moody – the anglers, that is – and they often project their misery onto their quarry. So, why endure the heat to chase fish reluctant to bite?

Bass are cold-blooded creatures whose body temperatures adjust to the water surrounding them. During the heat and sun of late summer, they gravitate toward locations that fulfill primary needs. Even in conditions outside the

comfort zone of their species, they will do what they can do to survive or thrive, making them predictable to target.

“Bass are looking for comfort, cover and food at this time of year,” says Bass Fishing Hall of Famer Mark Davis, no stranger to Arkansas heat or summertime bass fishing.

He fashions his warm-weather strategies accordingly.

Shallow, deep and in between, summer bass are there for your taking. Here’s how pros in the know play it cool during the summer heat.

### BOBBY LANE: THE WAY I LIKE TO FISH

Florida native Bobby Lane has deep roots in the Southern power fishing tradition, so perhaps it shouldn’t come as a surprise that he likes to stay shallow all summer long.

“We all like the offshore bite, but my favorite thing to do to beat the heat of summer is to catch them dirt shallow,” says Lane.

North to south, he treats all lakes the same during the heart of the summer heat. As schools of offshore bass face mounting angling pressure, many of those fish join the segment of the bass population that has taken up residence around the banks. That migration plays to his strength and pretty much dictates his late summer motto: “I go shallow while others are going deep.”

“When bass start getting caught offshore, they move back to the bank because they are more comfortable there,” explains Lane.

His target areas are not necessarily the backs of creeks and other shallow reaches that teemed with bass in spring. He looks primarily to main-lake shallows – stretches rich with docks, rock, vegetation and wood.

Lane concentrates on shaded areas, first covering water with a black, bone or MF bluegill-colored Berkley Choppo, a popper-style bait. When the sun

YAMAMOTO ICHI WORM  
COLOR: JUNE BUG

forces fish to stick more tightly to cover, he works the shade of docks, laydowns, matted vegetation and trees with the Berkley Swamp Lord – a hollow-body frog of Lane's own design – in both conventional and popping varieties. His flipping stick also sees lots of action. Top bait choice is the Berkley PowerBait MaxScent Creature Hawg.

Hate the heat if you must, but Lane finds plenty to love about late summer.

"I am fishing the way I like to fish, looking for big bites in ways that produce some of the most exciting strikes," says Lane. "I want to fish shallow, fish like a man, get those big explosive strikes!"

*Tip: "Try to figure where the bass are positioning – near the current, on the flat banks, on the steeper banks."*



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

## MARK DAVIS: FIND THE THERMOCLINE

According to Davis, the biggest factor when it comes to late summer bass fishing is the thermocline. That applies not only to highland reservoirs like his home waterway, Lake Ouachita, but countless waters across the country.

The term "thermocline" refers to the line of demarcation between a warmer, upper layer of water (epilimnion) that is rich with dissolved oxygen and a dense, oxygen-depleted, cold layer (hypolimnion) at the lowest depth levels during summer stratification. Bass and the forage species they dine on spend little or no time below the thermocline. That narrows the target depth range considerably.

Thermocline patterns will differ on varying types of fisheries. Bass may take up ambush positions in the

shallows, or they might suspend over deep water above the thermocline. Once a mystery, suspended fish have become easier targets for anglers well-schooled in forward-facing sonar technology.

"Today, we can see those fish and present baits to them," says Davis. "But they can still get finicky."

When fishing water with some stain to it, Davis reaches first for a reaction lure like a crankbait.

"Whether I am fishing 3- to 6-foot depths or in that 15- to 20-foot depth zone, I am fishing fast, deflecting off cover," he says.

He calls jiggling spoons and flutter spoons "good companions" to his crankbaits.

"I fish the spoon fast, too – jerking

it, then letting it fall of its own free will," he adds. "If you inhibit the fall, the spoon won't do its job."

Big, 10-inch worms fished behind light weights provide a slow-down option. The curly-tailed Yamamoto Ichi Worm coupled with a ¼-ounce bullet weight is Davis' favorite summer worm. He switches to a heavier weight if he senses the fish prefer a faster presentation.

*Tip: Be alert to signs of current or water movement in the form of wind, runoff or dam discharge. Moving water is often cooler and more oxygenated, which attracts summer bass.*

## ALTON JONES: A HIGH-LOW APPROACH TO ISOLATED COVER

They know heat in Texas, homeland of venerable MLF pro Alton Jones Sr.

They also know bass. As water temperatures rise and the thermocline builds, the Lone Star State's legendary

A Texas native, Alton Jones knows how to track down bass during the hottest time of the year.

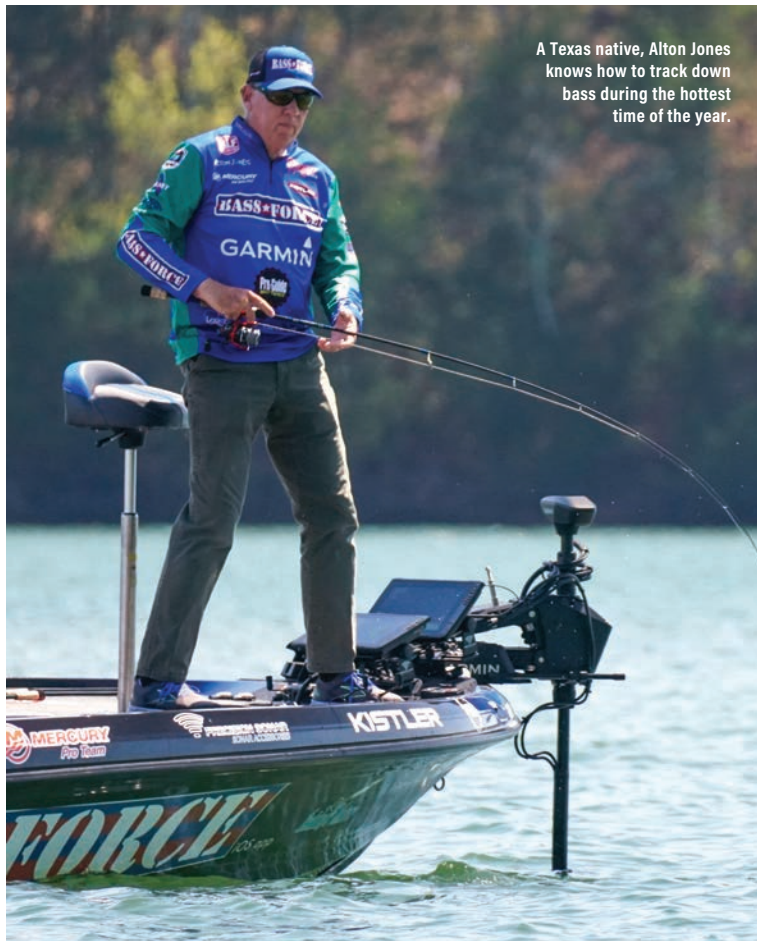


PHOTO BY TYLER BRINKS

**"I ALMOST ALWAYS TARGET THAT UPPER LAYER OF WATER, WHETHER IT'S SHALLOW OR DEEP."**



**ERRATIC WINNER**

The Vision 110 is a favorite for MLF pro Alton Jones Sr. when conditions are favorable for forward-facing sonar.

lunkers have to go somewhere. By late summer, that zone typically lies within 8 to 12 feet of the water's surface.

"In late July through August, those mega-schools of bass in deep water break up, and the bass transition back shallow," says Jones, who competes on the Bass Pro Tour alongside a successful son of the same name.

Moving "shallow" doesn't necessarily mean moving shoreward, however. Some bass will occupy open water in the middle of a lake; others will move to shoreline cover.

"I almost always target that upper layer of water, whether it's shallow or deep," says Jones.

He takes a parallel approach to each group – a high-low strategy centered around isolated, fish-holding habitat. Brushpiles and similarly dis-

tinct cover located on flats, points and other prime bottom structure are typical offshore targets. Jones notes that they are easily detected with forward-facing sonar and sidescan.

Key late summer habitat has two defining characteristics: isolation and vertical elevation.

"I'm not looking for a lot of brushpiles in a pack," stresses Jones. "I want to find isolated brushpiles, so if there are two bass on that point, I don't have to fish 20 brushpiles to find them. And I want water above that brush – not 4 feet, but at least 5 or 6 or 7 feet. Vertical elevation is important. Isolation is important."

He may catch multiple bass off an isolated brushpile at this time of year, but taking one or two at time is more typical during this doldrum period. He

takes a "milk run" approach, making stops at a series of prime locations, often repeating that run three or four times in one day.

Lure selection is broad. First choice is a moving bait – typically a crankbait, though a jerkbait (the Megabass Vision 110 is a favorite) frequently gets the call when forward-facing sonar is in play. His presentation is erratic, punctuated with plenty of stop-and-go. Next up is a 5-inch Deps Sakamata Shad on a jig-head, then a slower, bottom-related presentation like a Texas-rigged worm, jig or drop-shot. He may cycle through several or even all of those options at each stop.

As August advances, Jones' attention turns to the shallows. Again, he looks for isolated cover, now in stained water less than 5 feet deep. By late

## OTT DEFOE: PLAY IT COOL

"DURING THE AUGUST HEAT, you can be competitive fishing shallow," says Ott DeFoe, MLF star from Blaine, Tennessee. And that's fine by him.

Two "Cs" direct his late summer strategies— *current* and *cooler* water.

"Typically, my fishing revolves around current, whether it is a creek or river system," says DeFoe. "A spot with just a little current can make a difference. Multiple options are better. Any place with cooler water – and not necessarily *cold* – is likely to hold more oxygen and more active fish, too."

DeFoe's favorite locations are off the beaten track. He may follow a big bay back to where it necks down to a creek entrance, then to where it gets deeper again.

"Maybe it is silted in a bit, and as you follow it further, you find a defined channel with some wood," says DeFoe, fleshing out his summer scenario. "You will see a water temperature change there, and it tends to hold baitfish and create a productive zone."

Such areas are often rich with fish-holding cover – undercut banks, logs, patches of grass, stumps, assorted growth and deadfalls.

DeFoe keeps his late summer bait arsenal simple, generally keeping four styles of baits at the ready:



**\* PRO TIP:**  
Look for any part of the system where the water is a little cooler and baitfish are present.

**Shallow crankbait** – First choice for late summer comes from Ott's Garage – the Rapala OG Tiny 4, a flat-sided crankbait with a 4-foot depth range. "The shad from the spring spawn are still small at this time," explains DeFoe. "The OG Tiny is a smaller, more subtle imitator. With its tight wiggle, it can sneak up on a bass until it finds it in its face. It's a natural bait, not like a big crankbait that it can sense from a long ways off. The bait deflects off cover well, too."

**Small buzzbait** – Topwater presentations often shine far back in creek arms where cover and shade are plentiful and the water is fairly clean. A downsized buzzbait of 1/4 or even 1/8 ounce is DeFoe's choice in these

narrowed confines. "I feel these fish have seen big baits all season long, and that bait with smaller blades and a smaller profile is more productive."

**Frog** – Largemouth lying in wait around thick cover and overhanging tree limbs can be suckers for a hollow-bodied frog. "If there's grass, the area becomes that much better," says DeFoe. He likes the Terminator Walking Frog.

**Plastic worm** – A Texas-rigged or drop-shot worm is a summer standout almost anywhere. Ott's workhorse is a Bass Pro Magnum Fin-Eke Worm. He opts for a drop-shot rig with a short, 8- to 10-inch leader and 1/8- to 3/16-ounce dropper weight when conditions call for finesse.

Finding current is key for Mark Daniels Jr. during the summer months. Bass feed in the flowing water, which is several degrees cooler. Daniels looks to shad imitations during this time.



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

August, he's looking for docks in water no deeper than 3 feet.

"There's no such thing as too shallow at this time," says Jones. "I mean it. I have caught bass with their backs out of the water. Access to deep water is not important now. You have to think outside the box."

"Isolated" is again his watchword when scouting for cover.

"I am looking for the right piece of cover – a laydown, an isolated clump of weed, an isolated rock pile or boulder or a dock," says Jones.

Buzzbaits, jigs, Texas-rigged worms and frogs are favored tools.

"I have found a weird buzzbait pattern on one lake with Illinois pondweed (a cabbage-type plant from the potamogeton family)," says Jones. "I wake them up with a buzzbait. Then, I present them a worm. It works."

*Tip: "There's no such thing as water temperature that's too hot," says Jones. "I have caught bass in 107-degree power plant discharge water. Oxygen level is more important. The hotter the water gets, the shallower bass have to go."*



## MARK DANIELS JR.: 'CURRENT' THINKING

Moving water is often key to unlocking the late summer bass bite. Not only does current feature higher oxygen levels, it activates bass and baitfish alike. With the legendary Coosa River and its impounded waters near his Alabama home, Mark Daniels Jr. lets "current thinking" guide his hot weather strategy.

Moving water may measure a few degrees cooler than water in flat calm conditions, and Daniels is quick to take advantage of even slightly lower water temperatures.

"My first key in late summer is to get on the lake as early as I can to take maximum advantage of lower water temperatures," he says. "Afternoon water temperatures in my area can top 90 degrees at times. I want to maxi-

mize my time fishing lower water temperatures, even if they are only in the 85- to 87-degree range. Temps of 83 to 85 degrees can be ideal."

Once the sun gets up and temperatures climb, current is the next best thing. The Coosa River and its reservoirs, formed by seven Alabama Power dams, offer no shortage of it. Alabama Power and other power companies typically list their generating schedules online. Daniels advises anglers to tune in and adjust their schedules to these run times.

"The moment they pull current, you will want to be on the water," he says. "Your best plan is to become familiar with the bite window on these lakes, to be on the best places when the current reaches the fish. These are the periods when bass are most aggressive and feeding best."

Prime locations include bottom cover such as boulders, wood and rock piles. They provide ambush points for the predators as schools of baitfish activate.

"My presentations at this time are highly shad oriented," says Daniels. "Bass will hit crawfish and bluegill imitations, but they can ambush shad easily, so all my presentations relate to shad."

Daniels' topwater arsenal includes walking-style baits like the Heddon Zara Spook family, the Reaction Innovations Vixen and the Paycheck Baits Repo Man. Subsurface offerings include weightless, fluke-style baits and compact swimbaits in the 2.5- to 4-inch range.

"The fish are ambushing, looking up," says Daniels. "I will let the fluke drift around boulders and let the current sweep it by the bass. I let the swimbait crawl over the rock and drop on the fish on the backside."

*Tip: Play the bite window. Be on the best spot at the best times. And match the hatch.*

## DREW GILL: TAPPING THE CURIOSITY BITE

The Bass Pro Tour got an eye-popping look at the potential of Drew Gill early in this 2024 season. The rookie from Mount Carmel, Illinois, notched four top-five finishes in his first five BPT events, including a win on North Carolina's Chowan River.

The cerebral young angler takes a fresh approach to late-summer angling.

"It's extremely easy to pressure fish that have occupied an area for three or

four months," says Gill, who sits fourth in the Fishing Clash Angler of the Year standings as of this writing. "Fish that get pressured get pretty intelligent. That's why triggering the curiosity bite is so important this time of year."

Fish grow wise and cautious under a continuous bombardment of familiar baits. Gill's solution is to show them something different, something that whets their curiosity.

To take on heavily pressured, hot-water largemouth, he arms himself with big baits – specifically, oversized topwaters and glide baits. Big baits attract bass' attention through their size and prominence, but also in their relative uniqueness – they contrast with baits fish have seen all season.

He keys in on high-percentage targets – a point, a flat, a ledge, a brushpile or an area or feature that a big bass is likely to relate to for an extended period. Favorite baits for triggering the curiosity bite include walking baits like the Zara Spook, Strike King Sexy Dawg and Reaction Innovations Vixen as well as wake baits like the Bomber Long A and Wesley's Old School Vee 'W' Wake Bait. The side-to-side sway and trailing V-wake of the latter mesmerizes bass. Gill adds a wrinkle to his presentation.

"I reel consistently until I have that bass's attention, then I give it pulls so that it slithers and stops," he says.

His favorite glide bait is the Biggs Custom B-1 Glide Bait, which he presents with a slow but erratic retrieve.

"It's methodical, but I'm not moving the bait at a consistent pace," says Gill. "Chop, stop, chop, longer stop. ... I am moving the bait erratically for short bursts, letting it glide. The movement is very hard, but I am trying to give the fish time to approach the bait in between."



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



At the leading edge of today's wave of young, tech-talented pros, Gill employs forward-facing sonar in just about all of his bass fishing, and his late summer target excursions are no exception.

"When I am playing the curiosity bite," he says, "I want the fish as tight as possible to my bait before I move it."

*Tip: Summer smallmouth are suckers for speed. Try a fast presentation to entice them to bite.* ■

## TOYOTA AND THE GOAT

Long before Kevin VanDam was labeled pro bass fishing’s greatest of all time, aka “The GOAT,” he was best known as the highly competitive skinny kid from Kalamazoo — and even back then, he was driving a Toyota T100.

“Fans who have been around a while may remember a time in the mid-1990s when the Tracker Marine team all towed their boats with Toyotas. So, not only have I been towing with a Tundra for a long time, but the powerhouse relationship between Bass Pro Shops and Toyota has been in place for decades, too,” VanDam said.

The ability to count on Toyota to keep him and his family safe plays a huge role in the fact that the VanDams and their extended family own enough Toyota vehicles to fill up a boat ramp parking lot.

“My nephew Jonathon, my sons, Jackson and Nicholas, and several of the ladies in our family all bought and drive Toyotas. We appreciate their quality, first and foremost, but equally as much, we appreciate the fact no automaker in the world gives as much to bass fishing as Toyota. Period,” VanDam emphasized.

KVD announced his retirement from professional tournament competition in 2023, but his consistency on the water qualified him to compete in two final events in 2024, including General Tires Heavy Hitters on the Kissimmee Chain in Florida.

It was there the GOAT put an exclamation point on his unparalleled competitive fishing career. He caught the biggest bass of the Championship Round, which awarded VanDam a \$100,000 prize and deserved walk-off celebration on his last day as a tournament angler. VanDam has achieved just about every accolade in bass fishing, but he had never caught a single fish worth \$100,000 until the last hours of his illustrious career.

He may not be competing anymore, but don’t expect him to slow down much. KVD is currently filming a brand-new television show, “The VanDam Experience,” that will air on The Outdoor Channel in 2025, where VanDam will continue to educate and entertain fishing fans for years to come.

More than 30 years after the skinny kid from Kalamazoo was towing with a Toyota T100, his 33 seasons as a pro are indeed incomparable. Eight Angler of the Year titles, four Bassmaster Classic victories, 29 pro tournament wins and nearly \$8 million in prize money, including his swan-song \$100K bass: It’s a career that will likely never be surpassed, and certainly not with the level of class and loyalty VanDam has showcased every mile of the journey. ■



Kevin VanDam — the GOAT and long-time Toyota Fishing Team Pro/Toyota Truck Owner



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Deanna Moreno waited until the camera boat arrived to catch her biggest bass of Day 3 at the California Delta.

PHOTOS BY JOHN ZEDULLA



Moreno made her first victory look easy, topping 40 pounds over three days and winning by 4-5.

# History Made

Deanna Moreno and Rachel Uribe made history with their 1-2 finish at the California Delta

By Mitchell Forde

**I**n the 24 hours since she'd taken over the top spot of the Strike King co-angler standings on the California Delta, Deanna Moreno had been "super nervous." Across 18 years of bass fishing and eight competing in Toyota Series Presented by Phoenix Boats events, she'd imagined what it might be like to lift a trophy, and as she climbed onto the stage at Big Break Marina in Oakley, California, on June 7, she knew she finally had the fish in her weigh bag to do so.

And yet, a small part of Moreno wasn't so sure she wanted to win. That's because waiting for her on stage as the current co-angler leader was Rachel Uribe.

The two women, both nurses, have grown close during their years competing against one another in the Western Division Presented by Tackle Warehouse. Plus, Moreno knew that Uribe had come agonizingly close to capturing her first win and the Phoenix Boats prize package that comes with it in the past, with five prior top-five finishes.

"Actually, it's funny, because I kind of wanted Rachel to win," Moreno said with a chuckle. "I hate to say it, now that I know, I wouldn't have taken the first place. I kind of really wanted Rachel to win, because she said if she won that boat, she was going to go as a pro."

While it was Moreno who secured the victory with a 13-pound, 1-ounce limit, which boosted her three-day total to 40-15, the two women combined to make Major League Fishing history. Moreno became the third woman ever to win a Toyota Series event, the first since 2001 and the first ever in the Western Division. And with Uribe's runner-up showing, they became the first pair of women to finish first and second at any MLF/FLW event.

"I'm honored to be on the stage with her," Moreno said, "and super excited that I got first, too."



Alongside her faithful companion, Marco, Rachel Uribe logged her sixth top-five finish in MLF competition.

## TWO WOMEN'S TOURNEY JOURNEYS

That Moreno's historic breakthrough came on the Delta was fitting. She and her husband, Mike, live about 30 minutes away from the tidal river system and do most of their bass fishing there. Before her win, the fishery had played host to many of the "aha" moments and maddening days that comprise any fishing journey.

Moreno took up bass fishing upon marrying Mike in 2006. He taught her everything, starting with the basics, like how to use a baitcast rod and reel. She remembers one outing on the Delta around 2007 when the learning curve felt insurmountable.

"I get this big backlash, and I go, 'Okay, I'm done. I can't do this,'" Moreno said. "So, I put myself in a timeout, had a cold beer, and then went back out and started doing it again. (Mike) really had a lot of patience, and he really encouraged me, 'You got this, you can do it.'"

some hurdles that resulted from being among the few women on the water. Uribe remembers a few snide remarks, like male anglers asking if she'd packed her nail polish in her pink tackle bag. Both try to avoid using the bathroom while on the water, which Deanna takes a calculated approach to her diet and hydration.

The best solution, she's found, is to be as prepared as possible.

"It makes it a little difficult when you're a female," Deanna said. "I do have to prep more, I feel, than the guys do. The guys that we hang around with, they know I eat clean during tour-



PHOTO BY JOHN ZEOLLA



Deanna Moreno credits her husband, Mike, for getting her into tournament fishing and teaching her the ropes.

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA



Rachel Uribe got her start competing alongside her father, Joe Uribe, and her brother, Joe Uribe Jr.

Eventually, Moreno progressed to more advanced skills like flipping and pitching (she and Mike would practice with targets in their backyard pool) and matching baits to cover and conditions. The two started fishing team tournaments together, and in 2013, Mike convinced Deanna to enter her first tournament as a co-angler with the California Bass Federation. She made her Toyota Series debut in 2017 and started fishing the full Western Division schedule in 2020.

Uribe's introduction to tournament fishing also came via family, albeit at an earlier age. She remembers first "getting the fishing bug" targeting trout from crystal-clear streams during summer vacations as a kid. Eventually, she joined her father, Joe Uribe, and her brother, Joe Uribe Jr., in team bass tournaments. When her brother joined the FLW Tour Western Circuit in 2007, she traveled and practiced with him, doing the same for Toyota Series competitions.

For the most part, Deanna Moreno and Rachel Uribe found the fishing community welcoming. But there were

name time. They all go out to dinner; Deanna is stuck back at the house eating a sandwich before 5. I know to hydrate very well the day before, and usually, when I fish, I don't eat or drink anything when I'm on the boat. So, there are some restrictions as a female, but you have to prepare."

They've also had to endure the challenges that all co-anglers face — namely, the luck of the pairing draw.

After a frustrating 2023 season that saw her zero at Lake Havasu and fish alongside some inexperienced boaters on the Delta,

Deanna got so frustrated that she vowed to never compete on the latter fishery again.

"She was just beside herself," Mike Moreno said. "She had a few rough weeks, not catching fish, drew some guys that have never been here before. And the Delta — catching fish is one thing, running the tides, understanding the wind, understanding the grass, the vegetation — there's just so many variables when you fish the Delta as opposed to a lake. She said, 'I'm not doing the Delta anymore.'"

Overall, both Moreno and Uribe said they've had overwhelmingly positive experiences with their male boaters, forming enduring friendships. And Moreno's luck came back

around this year, when she returned to the Delta and drew three boaters who finished among the Top 10.

"I've got to shout out to my pros," she said. "I couldn't have done it without them. They were all awesome to fish with."

## MAKING THE WINNING ADJUSTMENTS

On paper, Moreno made her march to the winner's circle look easy. She sat in second place after sacking up 15 pounds on Day 1, then took the lead with 12-14 on Day 2. Her final tally of 40-15 would have placed 18th on the boater side.

But it took perseverance and a few key adjustments to generate the winning bites, as she caught most of her weight on a different bait each day.

A few hours into the first competition day, she hadn't caught a keeper yet, while her boater had already filled his limit. Moreno willed herself to stay calm, reminding herself that the outgoing tide should improve the bite. Her patience paid off with a frenzy that produced five keepers in about five minutes then a 6-2 kicker not long after, all of which ate a Roboworm on a drop-shot. Day 2 started similarly slow. This

"I had four little ones and then a nice one, and I was like, okay, I've got all day to upgrade here," she said. "It did calm the nerves a little bit."

The upgrade she needed arrived right about the same time as the boat containing MLF photographer John Zeolla. Zeolla snapped a sequence of photos showing Moreno fighting and landing her biggest fish of the day, a 3.8-pound largemouth. When Melton scooped the bass with the net, Moreno pumped her fist into the air, the adrenaline etched across her face.

At that point, Moreno knew she'd put herself in a strong position to win. However, Mike, who was competing as a boater (even though he admitted his "mind was elsewhere" all day), had no way of knowing how his wife's day had unfolded. A nervous Deanna wouldn't even meet his eye in the weigh-in line, so he didn't have any indication she'd won until she placed her bag on the scale. Mike joined her on stage for an emotional embrace.

"I just remember hanging on to her, thinking my knees could go out at any given second," Mike said. "I was so proud of her, so excited. I'm like, here I am a grown man in front of all these guys; thank God for sunglasses. I'm sitting here just welling up with tears."

Uribe overcame a slow bite and some boat issues on Day 3 to put together a solid limit of 11-2. Of all the close calls in her career, being able to congratulate Deanna on stage made this one the least painful.

"It couldn't happen to a better person," Uribe said. "I'm glad, because we finally have a female out there that won. Just to bring that to the industry was a huge momentum moment, for sure."



PHOTO BY JOHN ZEOLLA

time, Deanna adjusted by picking up a walking topwater, which drew some savage strikes.

Uribe never found a flurry on Day 1. She caught just three keepers but made up for it with quality, totaling 10-10. A 14-14 sack on Day 2 vaulted her to second place. Like Moreno, she caught her fish on a drop-shot the first day, then switched to topwater on Day 2, opting for a popper.

Before blastoff on Day 3, both women were feeling the nerves. Mercifully for Moreno, she didn't have to wait as long for the action to pick up. In the boat with pro winner Cristian Melton, their starting spot produced a limit for each of them, including an 8-12 beast for Melton. Having five fish in the livewell calmed Moreno down.



PHOTO BY JOHN ZEOLLA

## 'GO OUT THERE AND DO IT'

Moreno's trophy and oversized Phoenix Boats certificate now sit on the Moreno family mantle. Mike noted with a chuckle that not a day has gone by since her triumph without his wife taking a moment to admire them.

"She says the same thing every day: 'I can't believe it, I can't believe it,'" Mike said. "She really is still just as excited today as she was that first day."

Just as meaningful as the hardware has been the outpouring from other anglers. Moreno's Facebook account has been "blowing up" since the win, both with messages of congratulations and women she's never met asking for advice about how to get into tournament fishing. Mike said he had no idea how many women were interested in entering tournaments but, for one reason or another, hadn't taken the plunge.

"I've gotten messages from females just asking, 'I'm interested, how did you do it? What do I need to do?'" Moreno said. "I said, you just need to go out and do it. MLF has a great circuit. Pair up with a pro and register. ... Just learn from them, just watch what they're doing. That's basically what I was telling most of the females that have reached out to me: You just need to go out there and do it."

Uribe — who also competes in kayak tournaments and confirmed that she plans to take her career to the next level as a boater once she wins as a co-angler — had a similar message, urging women interested in competing to reach out to her with any questions and not to let perceived obstacles get in the way of pursuing their passion.

"Fish don't know what nationality, what sex you are, and they don't care," Uribe said. "It's not a sport where there's endurance or physicality or anything like that. ... If it's something that you're interested in and something that you want to do, just go out there and do it."

"Whether it be male, female, whatever the case is, old, young, just to go out there and chase your dream."



PHOTO BY JOHN ZEOLLA



PHOTO BY JOHN ZEOLLA

## MLF'S FEMALE FIRSTS

March 23, 1996 – With a 10th-place finish on Lake Seminole, **Pam Martin-Wells** became the first and only woman to finish in the Top 10 as a pro at an FLW Tour event.



Pam Martin-Wells

March 1, 1998 – Wanda Rucker broke through as the first ever female winner of an MLF/FLW tournament with her co-angler victory at the Red Man (now Phoenix Bass Fishing League) Gator Division event on Lake Okeechobee.



Nobie LeBert

Feb. 13, 1999 – **Nobie LeBert** became the first woman to win a Stren (now Toyota) Series event when she stacked up 42-13 across three days at Toledo Bend, enough to top the co-angler standings. She would add a BFL victory on the fishery in 2003.



Renee Hensley

Nov. 9, 2001 – **Renee Hensley** earned the first win for a woman in a national competition when she prevailed on the co-angler side at the Toyota Series Championship on Pickwick Lake with 14-9 over three days.



Judy Israel

Feb. 13, 2004 – **Judy Israel** became the first (and only) female winner on the FLW Tour when she totaled 17-8 to top the co-angler division on the Atchafalaya Basin.



Belinda Lewis

May 29, 2009 – **Belinda Lewis** broke a barrier as the first woman to compete in the BFL All-American, having qualified through the Bama Division. Lewis finished 43rd among co-anglers, then said yes to an onstage proposal from her now-husband, Scott Towry.



Melinda Mize

Oct. 27, 2020 – **Melinda Mize** topped a BFL Regional Championship on Table Rock Lake, becoming the first woman ever to do so. Mize sacked up 22-4 across three days to win the co-angler competition by more than 4 pounds.



Fallon Clepper

June 24, 2022 – Texas high-schooler **Fallon Clepper** became the first female angler to win the Abu Garcia High School Fishing National Championship when she and partner Wyatt Ford bagged 39-9 in three days on Pickwick Lake.

June 7, 2024 – Deanna Moreno and Rachel Uribe became the first female duo to claim the top two places in any MLF competition. Previously, two women had finished among the Top 10 only one other time at the Toyota Series level, when Emily McLeod took second and Trudy Noechel seventh at a 2011 Northern Division event on Lake Champlain. ■



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## CELEBRATING A TOURNAMENT

# TRAILBLAZER

*This September, Alfred Williams will become the first African American inducted into the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame*

*By Charity Muehlenweg*

**I**t's early summer of 1953, and Saturday mornings can't come fast enough for Alfred Williams. Every week, the 6-year-old Williams wakes up early and mills around the house, hoping for an invite on a fishing adventure with Grandma. He's in charge of carrying her bucket and keeping the snakes away during their outings, a big job for such a little guy.

"Grandma smoked a pipe, and she'd get that pipe lit and settled in the corner of her mouth and sit so quiet and so content, and I'd just watch her," Williams said. "I wasn't fishing much back in those days; I was just watching. Waiting. Learning."

Williams would look back on those tranquil moments as some of his first lessons in navigating an uncertain world with quiet grace and his first glimpses into the sport he'd grow to love for the next 70 years.

***"WHAT HAPPENED NEXT WAS A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR THE WILLIAMSES AND AND A TURNING POINT IN BASS FISHING HISTORY."***

Williams was born on April 9, 1947, in Jackson, Mississippi, where he spent his youth with a cane pole in hand alongside friends and family.

"Fishing was a way to bring people together in a time of racial tension," he said. "There were groups of every race fishing down on the river. We always had a good time, but we weren't fishing for sport — we were fishing to put food on the table."

But the hook had been set. By age 10, Williams was fishing anywhere and everywhere he could with anyone who would take him. By 14, he could often be seen on the banks of the Pearl River, alone or with friends.



Williams embraces his wife of 53 years, Gracie, and expresses his thanks for her "unwavering support" through the years.

Williams had no idea that he was embarking on a journey that would see him become the first African American to qualify for the Bassmaster Classic in 1983 and, in September 2024, the first African American to be inducted into the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame.

## NAVIGATING AN UNCERTAIN LANDSCAPE

In March of 1970, Williams returned from a tour of duty in Vietnam. After three long years in the military without touching a rod, he immediately hopped on a boat to go crappie fishing with a friend and felt the excitement course through his veins as his love for the sport came rushing back.

That was it for Williams. He bought a little boat with a 50-horsepower outboard and spent the next three years bass fishing every

chance he could get. In 1973, he strolled into a Woolco department store and bought a Raycraft bass boat for \$529.

"I couldn't get that boat on the water fast enough," Williams said. "I brought it back home, took the motor off the little runabout boat I had and put it on the bass boat. We picked the boat up from Woolco at 9 a.m. and were out on Ross Barnett Reservoir by 2 p.m. that afternoon."

Williams fished his first local bass tournament in 1975, during the beginning of the post-Civil Rights Movement era. Although racial desegregation had been mandated by federal law and court rulings in the 1950s and '60s, the process of integration was extremely slow and, in many cases, painful. Barriers between races continued to exist across the South, especially in Jackson.

"I went into a store and saw an application for the Have a Heart Bass



Williams enjoyed success on all levels, including wins at the BFL and Series levels.



Williams shows off his trophy after winning \$20,000 cash and a new Ranger 519VS Comanche bass boat in 2003 as the winner of the FLW EverStart Series Central Division season opener on Sam Rayburn Reservoir.

PHOTO BY JEFF SCHROEDER



Williams discusses his catch with celebrity guest Roland Martin in 1987 after leading day one of the Rogers-Dingus Barnett Open bass tournament.

ters and death threats for beating a white man's mark. It was also not long after the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 and his mother, Alberta King, in 1974.

"We were a little nervous about it all," Williams admitted. "My wife, Gracie, and I were raised in the South and just knew how things were back then. But just hearing the tournament director say how glad they would be for us to come eased our nerves a bit."

Williams excitedly rigged his tackle and got geared up, then he and Gracie dressed to the nines and headed to the pre-tournament banquet.

"Back then, there was a banquet the night before every tournament, and those banquets were huge social gatherings," Williams said. "We walked into our first banquet at this fancy, exclusive restaurant — there must have been 400 to 500 people in there — and when we walked through the door, you could have heard a pin drop. Everyone stopped what they were doing and just stared at us. We looked around and saw an empty table and found a seat."

What happened next was a pivotal moment for the Williamses and a turning point in bass fishing history.

"We had barely gotten seated when a well-dressed white gentleman walked up to our table," Williams said. "We watched him approach with a little apprehension, and he said, 'You don't know me, but I see you catching fish behind my house out on the [Ross

Classic, and I really wanted to fish that tournament," Williams explained. "So, I looked over the application and thought about it for a while, then called the number to talk to the tournament director.

"I said, 'Listen, I'm calling about this tournament, and I really want to fish this event,' and he said they'd be happy to have me. I said, 'Well, look, I'm Black — do you guys have any problems with me fishing this event?'

"I won't ever forget his response," Williams continued. "He said, 'You are absolutely welcome. This tournament is for the Heart Association, and it's for everybody. If you want to fish it, send your application in, and if anybody says anything to you about fishing it, you call me. We want you to fish.'

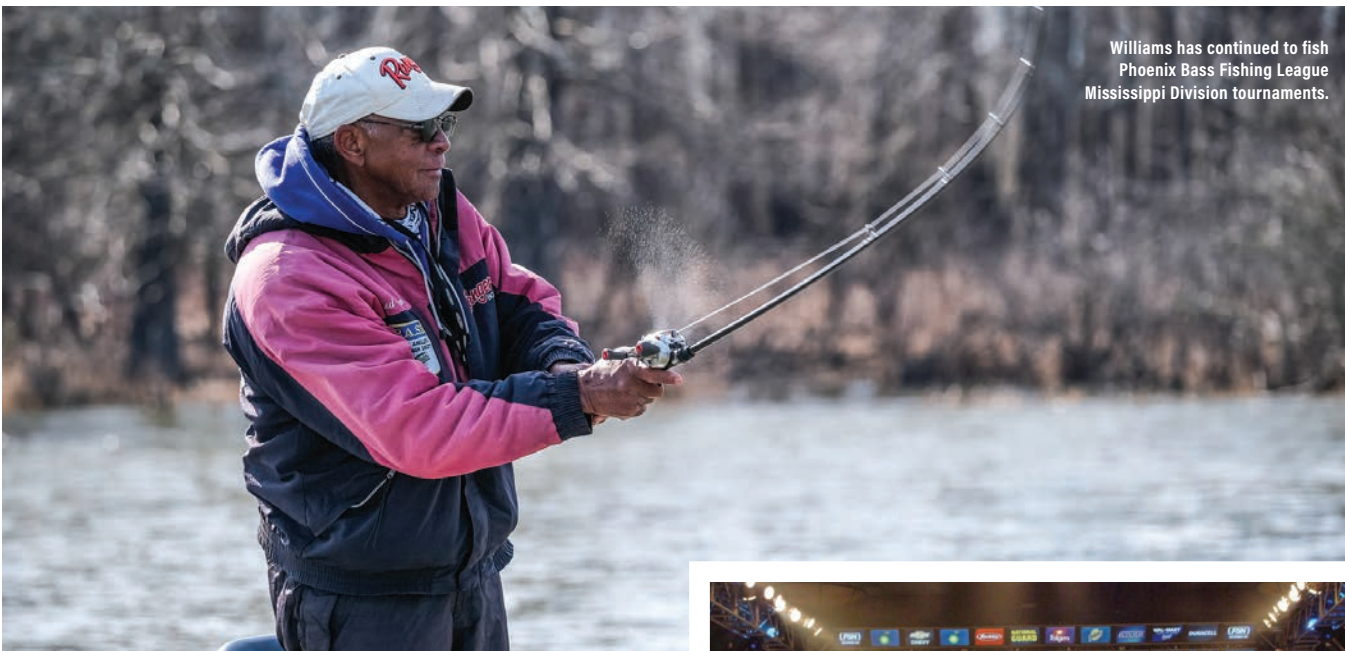
***"THOSE TRANQUIL MOMENTS WOULD PROVE PIVOTAL FOR WILLIAMS AS HE LEARNED TO NAVIGATE AN UNCERTAIN WORLD WITH QUIET GRACE AND GOT HIS FIRST GLIMPSE INTO A SPORT HE WOULD GROW TO LOVE FOR THE NEXT 70 YEARS."***

"If he'd wavered or said it might be a problem, I wasn't going to worry about it; I just wasn't going to fish it. But he assured me that we were more than welcome."

Although Williams speaks about the racial inequality of those times with grace, his first brush with the world of tournament bass fishing came around the same time Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth's home run record and received hundreds of thousands of hate mail let-

Barnett] reservoir all the time. My wife and I would be honored if y'all would come over and sit at our table and have dinner with us.' And of course we did, and that broke the ice.

"He was the general manager for a well-known car dealer and was on television commercials and well respected. Everyone in the room went back to talking and socializing, and from that day on, he and I were really, really good friends up until he passed away."



Williams has continued to fish Phoenix Bass Fishing League Mississippi Division tournaments.

While racial inequality was still prevalent in the '70s and '80s, Williams said he and Gracie found not only acceptance but respect, friendship and camaraderie in the bass-fishing community. The couple has never dealt with any open racial discrimination over the nearly 50 years Williams has been in the sport.

"It was just a feeling of relief, honestly, being free to do what I loved," Williams said. "After that, I just felt accepted."

"That was my first tournament and my first response from the bass-fishing community, and I was absolutely hooked," Williams said. "I'd proven myself and shown that I knew what I was doing, and I couldn't wait to get back out there for the next tournament a couple weeks later."

Williams began fishing tournaments with B.A.S.S. and Operation Bass — which later became FLW, then Major League Fishing — in 1983 and has fished a total of 98 tournaments with B.A.S.S. and 178 with MLF over the past 41 years, winning four events and earning numerous Top 10s. Williams fished professionally with B.A.S.S. from 1987-2003 and with FLW from 1997-1998 and 2004-2008. To this day, he enjoys fishing the occasional Phoenix Bass Fishing League tournament in the Mississippi Division.

None of the bass clubs in Mississippi in the '70s and '80s had African American members, so Williams and his fellow Black anglers fished in their own club.

"Back then, all the bass clubs were full, and there were only three or four tournaments each spring; they didn't



Williams among a group of his contemporaries.

have one every weekend like we do now," Williams said. "We had a few white guys start joining our club in the late '70s, early '80s. We won a state tournament in 1983, which qualified me for the state team. We then fished a divisional tournament and won, and as the top team member, I qualified for the 1983 Bassmaster Classic."

Williams was the first African American angler to qualify for the Classic, which was being held on the Ohio River that year, a fishery Williams had never visited. In fact, the Mississippi native had only fished on Ross Barnett up to that point.

"My boat was parked with Hank Parker on one side and Rick Clunn on the other side," Williams said. "I just couldn't believe it at the time. I still can't believe it today."

Williams said the whole experience was something he'll never forget — from being chauffeured around town,



Williams showcases plaques from the 1983 Bassmaster Classic and his fifth-place finish at the 1988 Tennessee Invitational.

## MAKING CLASSIC HISTORY

Williams drew avid hunter, fisherman and NFL running back Perry Lee Dunn in that first event. He finished 33rd, only a few places from making a check.

***“WHILE WILLIAMS DIDN'T CREATE THE FROG, HE'S BEEN CREDITED FOR HELPING PUT IT ON THE MAP AND PIONEERING THE MODERN-DAY FROG EXPERIENCE.”***



dining out at every meal with the whole Classic entourage and being catered to throughout the entire event. He finished 10th out of 42 competitors, ahead of Parker, Clunn, Denny Brauer and Roland Martin — no small feat for his first major tournament, especially on a new body of water.

“Things really started happening for me after that time,” Williams said. “Beating so many of the guys that I’d read about in Bassmaster Magazine, I felt such a sense of accomplishment. It was amazing and really gave me the confidence and determination to continue pursuing my dream.”

Williams received numerous congratulations after the Classic, including encouraging words from Paul Elias, who advised him to talk to Ranger Boats founder Forrest L. Wood about competing professionally.

“I spoke with Forrest, thanking him for letting me use the boat during the Classic and giving me the opportunity to fish,” Williams said. “I told him I really wanted to get into tournament fishing more and asked if there was anything he could do to help me get started. He told me to write him a letter when I got back home.”

Williams wrote the letter, and Wood and Ranger endorsed him and provided his tournament boat for the next 28 years.

“I can’t thank Forrest enough for that opportunity and for supplying me with a state-of-the-art boat all those years to follow my passion,” Williams

said. “The first tournament I ever won was the Dr. Pepper Open back in 1978. I took home a check for \$2,500, which was a huge payday in the late ‘70s. But knowing my boat was taken care of each year was a huge blessing.”

### **INNOVATING AND INSPIRING**

Fast forward to 2024, and the bass-fishing community is celebrating yet another milestone with Williams and his family. On September 26, he’ll be the first African American inducted into the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame.

Mark Daniels Jr., an African American pro who competes on the Bass Pro Tour, met Williams through a mutual friend back in 2015, and the two became fast friends. However, Daniels said he’s been looking up to Alfred long before that first meeting.

“I was ate up with fishing from a young age, and you just never saw anyone who was African American fishing professionally, so I was really inspired by Alfred,” Daniels said. “I belonged to a bass club, and we had some African American weekend warriors, but no pros.”

Daniels expressed the importance for aspiring anglers to see professional anglers that they can identify with but also said that Williams’ influence on the sport runs much deeper than the color of his skin.

“Every time the water temp gets above 55 degrees, we can’t wait to fish topwater and throw a frog, and every time I throw a frog, I think of Alfred,”

Daniels said. “Regular, hollow-body frogs came out many years ago with semi-hard plastic legs. Alfred had the inclination to cut off the plastic legs, then cut the skirt off a spinnerbait and push the spinnerbait skirt through the holes on the frog, so it now has spinnerbait-style legs as opposed to hard legs.”

While Williams didn’t create the frog, he’s been credited for helping put it on the map and pioneering the modern-day frog experience. He was also among the first anglers to add weight to his favorite Snag Proof models to make them ride lower in the water, dramatically improving his hooksets, as well as adding a rattle chamber to the belly to draw more strikes. Snag Proof incorporated some of Williams’ frog modifications in certain tournament models of its frogs.

“You see those types of frogs everywhere now,” Daniels said. “From the highest-end baits made in Japan to all the American-made baits and everything in between, every hollow-body frog has skirted legs, and that is literally Alfred’s design. That blows my mind.”

“There’s always somebody that takes that first step and breaks the mold, and Alfred is that guy. He’s truly a pioneer in our sport. One can only imagine how apprehensive he was when he first started out, yet he overcame all of that and had a very successful career as a tournament angler. I’m very proud of him and his accomplishments and am happy to call him a friend.”



A self-described "family man," Williams is pictured boating with three of his grandchildren — Ethan, Akira and his second grandchild, Xavier, who now tags along with his grandpa on fishing adventures.

## 'A PIONEER IN OUR INDUSTRY'

Williams' success over the years has attracted more African American anglers, helping open the door for the likes of Daniels, Ish Monroe, Brian Latimer and others. But his impact and his legacy have extended throughout the entire bass world, as evidenced by the outpouring of support since the Hall of Fame announced him among its 2024 class.

Dudley Salers is a lifelong friend of Williams who's competed with him for over 50 years. Salers and Williams fished the former Red Man Trail (now known as the Phoenix Bass Fishing League) together in the 1970s but never let their competitive nature come before their friendship.

"I have a lot of respect for Alfred and am proud to call him my friend. He's just a genuinely nice person and treats everyone with respect," said the 83-year-old Salers. "He called to tell me he'd been nominated, and I was so happy for him. I told him it's an honor just to be nominated, but when they selected him, I was thrilled. Alfred's had a lot of success in his lifetime and a lot of opportunities that could have changed him, but he's never let it go to his head. He's just always been the same old Alfred."

That sentiment is shared throughout the bass community. Bill Taylor, the longest-tenured tournament director in

MLF history, said he started watching Williams when he fished for Bassmaster in the '70s, not realizing at the time that he was watching history in the making.

"I watched him his first few years, then followed him on the Red Man Trail, but I didn't meet him until the late '80s when he was fishing the BFLs," Taylor said. "I took a liking to Alfred because he was a great angler and was very well respected. His wife, Gracie, traveled with him on tour, and they were just a lovely couple. Everyone loved him.

"Alfred inspired a lot of people throughout his lifetime and continues to inspire today. I grew up in the '50s and '60s and saw firsthand the racial tension throughout the country. Race was never brought up the entire time I worked with Alfred, but I admire him deeply for getting involved in professional fishing when he did, because it had to have been a challenge."

***"IF YOU BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, THEN YOU AREN'T GOING TO BE DEPENDENT ON ANYBODY ELSE TO SHOW YOU THE WAY."***

Williams said after everything he's experienced in his lifetime, being inducted into the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame is just icing on the cake.

"I feel very, very honored," he said. "I want to thank all the people who not only supported me but believed in me. I'm just overwhelmed, really, to be the first African American inducted into the Hall of Fame. There can only be one 'first,' and it truly means a lot to me to be the first."

Kathy Fennel, MLF Executive Vice President and General Manager, had only been on the bass-fishing scene for one year when the Mississippi Division of the Red Man Trail was launched in 1983. Fennel was the tournament administrator assigned to that division and remembers Williams' start fondly.

"Alfred was a fierce competitor but was such a gentleman and always extremely professional," Fennel said. "From the moment we met, I was

impressed by his demeanor and the way he presented himself. He was — and still is — a pioneer in our industry and a great representative for his sponsors."

Fennel was inducted into the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame in 2022 and serves as a member of the Hall of Fame board. She's excited about Williams' induction and feels it's been a long time coming.

"It makes me very proud to see the Hall of Fame recognize Alfred for his accomplishments," Fennel said. "Beyond his ability as a competitor and his longevity in the sport, he has a unique opportunity to influence a larger audience that hasn't been as engaged in professional tournament fishing, and we're honored to be a part of his story."

Williams doesn't take that sentiment or the responsibility it requires lightly.

"I'm just so thankful that I was able to accomplish these feats and have individuals follow me and my journey over the years," Williams said. "All the Black anglers who have fished with me over the past 40-something years have thanked me for my influence and accomplishments. I feel fortunate to be the one that it happened to all those years ago."

But success like Williams' doesn't just happen. It comes from a lot of hard work and not being afraid to step out and take chances. It requires respect, grace and trust — all hallmarks of Williams' life story, a story that's far from over.

"At 77, I still fish tournaments almost every weekend, and I would still be out on tour, but I finally decided enough's enough," Williams said, laughing. "I've enjoyed every minute of it. When I started fishing tournaments, I wasn't thinking about trying to qualify for the Classic or where I was going to be later in life. I was just focused on fishing the tournament in front of me."

Williams said that was the key to his longevity in the sport, but even more than that, perseverance and success in everyday life.

"Always put yourself in a position to do well in whatever you do in life," Williams said. "If you believe in yourself, then you aren't going to be dependent on anybody else to show you the way." ■

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PHOTO BY ROB MATSUJIRA



## RAPALA OG DEEP TINY 7 CRANKBAIT

By Matt Williams  
PHOTOS COURTESY RAPALA

Just when you thought the Ott's Garage lineup of crankbaits by Rapala couldn't get any fuller, along comes the Deep Tiny 7 to fill a mid-range void. Designed by four-time Bass Pro Tour winner and 2019 Bassmaster Classic champion Ott DeFoe, the OG Deep Tiny 7 is DeFoe's answer for tempting lethargic bass holding around the 7-foot depth range. While it can work anytime bass are eating smaller forage, the thin-sided bait shines especially bright when water temperatures are on the chilly side.

### First Impression

At first glance, the Deep Tiny 7 bears a striking resemblance to the shallower-diving Tiny 4. It's built around the same 2 1/4-inch balsa wood body and

weighs 5/16 ounce but packs a longer, wider circuit board bill and a slightly extended line tie that help it dig a little deeper in the water column.

The bait comes in 19 attractive colors, including a pair of region-specific patterns called Coosa Special and Bream. We checked out baits in several other colors — Classic Craw, Citrus Shad and Chartreuse Rootbeer Craw — and the paint schemes are top notch. Rapala didn't scrimp on other components, either. The sticky sharp No. 5 VMC black nickel short-shank hooks attach using stainless split rings that are built to last.

### In Action

DeFoe says it took some tinkering to achieve the

proper balance, action and diving depth he wanted out of the Deep Tiny 7, and he definitely got it right. Fished on 12-pound fluorocarbon, the bait dives at a steep angle and gets to the strike zone quickly. Better yet, it traverses cover like a 4X4 and features a tight but subtle wiggle that is 100% silent.

I didn't get my hands on the bait until June, but after seeing and feeling it in action, I can't wait until Texas water temperatures take a dip this winter. That's when flatsides are prone to ring the bell the loudest.

It's a slow riser: Rapala lists the Deep Tiny 7 as a "floater," but don't expect it to work itself out of trouble near as easily as a more buoyant, round body like the OG Rocco. The bait is fitted

with an internal weight strategically placed to optimize balance, get the bait down in the water column and aid with casting.

Stop the retrieve in mid-stream and the Deep Tiny 7 almost seems to achieve neutral buoyancy for a second or so before lazily rising toward the surface. It'll eventually get there, but it takes a while. I witnessed this behavior in a swimming pool before heading to the lake.

The benefit of the slow rise is that it makes it simple to keep bait down in the strike zone, whether it's fished stop-and-go or crawled along at a snail's pace. This trait is sure to play well in the live sonar game.

Anglers just need to remember to stay in contact

## CIRCUIT BOARD BILL:

Features a long, wide circuit board bill and extended line tie that make the bait dive quickly, deflect off cover really well and give it a unique action. A strategically placed internal weight helps keep the bait down in the water column and aids with casting.



## BALSA BAIT:

The balsa bait is 100% silent, allowing for a natural, quiet presentation ideal in high-pressure situations.



## PREMIUM HOOKS:

Comes stock with premium VMC Hybrid No. 5 short-shank treble hooks.



with the bait and be mindful of what it's doing at all times, especially around submerged brush. Otherwise, you might find yourself reaching for a lure knocker more often than preferred.

## Final Thoughts

Building on success of the Tiny 4, the Deep Tiny 7 is designed to get at those lunkers that might be hanging out a little farther down in the water column. Whether probing around rock, docks, gravel points, steep slopes, stump fields or submerged vegetation, this is a crankin' plug you should keep close.

As quality goes, you'll be hard pressed to find a mass production balsa bait for probing the mid-range window that

offers more in the way of top-notch components, premium finishes and fish-catching prowess than this one does. It comes with an affordable price point, too.

## Performance Tips

> The bait will reach its maximum diving depth on 12-pound fluorocarbon. Switching to a heavier line, monofilament line or raising the rod tip angle in combination with a slower retrieve will shallow it up some.

> It's generally a good idea to fish the OG Tiny Deep 7 on a reel with a slower gear ratio — something in the 5:1 or 6:1 range — especially in cold water, when bass are more lethargic and less willing to chase.

> Throw it on a medium-power rod with a forgiving tip to help prevent ripping the trebles free before the fish have a chance to eat it. A moderate tip will also load up on the backswing and help with castability.

> The bait rises very slowly when idle. This helps it stay down in the strike zone well enough that forward-facing sonar junkies can use it to finesse suspended bass.

## Applications

> Works year-round, but shines brightest in late fall, winter and early spring when water temperatures are cool

- > Around rock
- > Around stumps
- > Around docks
- > Submerged grass
- > Suspended bass

## HITS

- + Balsa body
- + Circuit board bill
- + Realistic color patterns
- + Premium hooks, split rings
- + Silent
- + Traverses cover well
- + Finesse-like swagger
- + Tracks true
- + Shad profile

## DETAILS

**Dives:** 7 feet (on 12-pound fluorocarbon)

**Length:** 2 1/4 inches

**Weight:** 5/16 ounce

**Construction:** Premium balsa with circuit board bill

**Action:** Tight wiggle/finesse

**Hooks:** No. 5 VMC Black Nickel 1X Hybrid Short Shank

**Colors:** 19

**Rattles:** No

**MSRP:** \$11.59

**Contact:** rapala.com ■

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It takes a different mindset to win championship events in the fall. Alabama pro Jesse Wiggins changes up his whole tournament focus, starting on Day 1 of practice.

## HOW TO WIN YOUR BFL REGIONAL, SUPER TOURNAMENT OR TEAM-TRAIL CHAMPIONSHIP

### Wiggins, Lawyer offer their proven tactics for succeeding in early fall tournaments

By Tyler Brinks

**I**f you're a tournament angler, you fish all year for this: Fall is generally the setting for most of the big-money events of the season. Everything from Phoenix Bass Fishing League two-day Super Tournaments and Regionals to team trail championships are held in September and October. The fishing is also typically more challenging than it's been all season, and the stakes are simultaneously the highest.

According to Bass Pro Tour pros Jeremy Lawyer and Jesse Wiggins, having a shot to win at these early fall events takes a different mindset. And they would know: Lawyer and

Wiggins both started their climbs through the fishing ranks by competing in local events and BFLs in Alabama and Missouri (while working fulltime jobs during the week) on their way to forging professional careers. Both offered valuable insight into what it takes to shine in your biggest tournaments of the year.

### FORGET ABOUT THE POINTS

Lawyer won the 2016 BFL All-American and qualified for the event six times. So, it should come as no surprise he has excelled in BFL Regionals, racking up nine Top 10s mainly because of a changed mindset.

"Throughout the year, all you're thinking about is making that Regional," Lawyer said. "Points are always in the back of your mind, and you do whatever you have to do to fill your limit. At the Regional, though, you can throw that all out of

# “MOST PEOPLE DON’T REALIZE HOW IMPORTANT BLUEGILL ARE THIS TIME OF YEAR, ESPECIALLY FOR THE BIG BASS,”

the window because just cashing a check – say finishing 12th or something at that event – sucks, because they only take the top six guys to the All-American. It’s all about making (the Regional), or that whole season is for naught, and that’s always been my mindset.”

Wiggins has also qualified for the All-American and enjoyed plenty of success in end-of-season events in his home state of Alabama. He subscribes to a similar shift in thinking for any multi-day championship.

“You don’t have to worry about points (at championship events); you’re not just trying to get a limit,” Wiggins said. “In any of those big events, you try to win, because they pay the most or get you to the All-American. For those events, my practice was always different: You have to write off anything that can’t win it for you.”

## EXPECT TOUGH FISHING

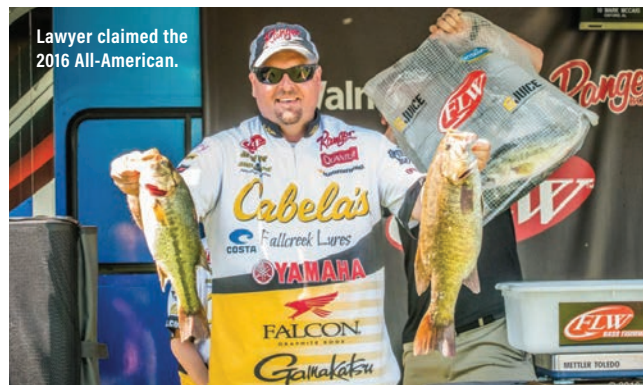
Fall fishing has always been known to be a little trickier than the rest of the year, primarily because the summer heat has taken its toll and water levels are typically at their lowest. It can be a challenging time to fish for bass, but that opens up the possibility of doing well just by catching an above-average limit every day.

“Fishing is tough that time of year, but it’s going to be tough on everyone,” Lawyer reasoned. “When it’s like that, it would be easy to try to downsize to get a small limit. But most of the time, just catching a limit doesn’t make a difference, because the guys who win swing a little harder and are focused on catching big ones.

Jeremy Lawyer leans heavily on baits that he knows will get slightly bigger bites in late summer/early fall tournaments



PHOTO BY TYLER BRINKS



“I almost always spent my practice time trying to find a bite or technique that would get me a few bigger bites to put me in a position to win. That’s always how I looked at any championship tournament ”

Lawyer believes that shallow water offers some of the best chances at bigger fish in September.

“I think the majority of fish want to come shallow in the fall, and Dion Hibdon always told me that it’s better to be fishing where they’re going and not where they’ve been,” he said. “There are some exceptions, but I believe shallow water gives you your best chance.”

Wiggins employs a similar outlook. He’s also learned to have a short memory during fall events.



The early fall bite is often focused around shad, but Wiggins asserts that bigger fish focus on bluegill and other panfish.

"When it's tough and you get one bite in practice, it's not always a good idea to go back to that area in the tournament, unless it's a really productive stretch," he said. "You may have just caught that one fish around there, and you'd be better off running new water that looks similar. You're taking a chance you may not catch them, but you're also taking the chance to win. Running fresh areas is how I always played it, because eventually, you'll run into another fish that will bite."

## FOCUS ON BIG-BASS BAITS AND BAITFISH

Both Lawyer and Wiggins agree that bait selection is critical for catching the larger fish required to win Regionals and team-trail championships. Each favors proven big-fish lures.

"In almost every fall event I've ever done well in, I stuck with a handful of baits," Lawyer said. "A couple of them, like a vibrating jig and squarebill crankbait, will get that bigger bass but can also be a limit-filler. A vibrating jig is a perfect fall bait because you'll still catch numbers, but it can bail you out and help you catch a kicker."

Two others baits that Lawyer has learned tend to produce bigger-than-average bites are a jig and walking topwater or buzzbait.

"Those are always players late in the year, no doubt," Lawyer said. "They may be baits that you only throw a handful of times in the day, like walking that bait over a point or throwing a buzzbait behind a dock when it looks right. You won't get many bites with them, but those bites will be difference-makers when you do."

Wiggins typically turns to topwater baits in the fall because of their efficiency in addition to their tendency to fool bigger-than-average bass.

"Topwater is always a deal to catch big fish, and 80% of the time for me, that's a buzzbait going down the bank," he said. "I'll also mix in a plopper-style topwater or walking bait, but the key is covering a lot of water. You've got to cover some ground this time of year."

The annual migration of shad to the creeks and shallow water is always a focus for fall fishing, but Wiggins says the presence of bluegill can be even more critical.

"Most people don't realize how important bluegill are this time of year, especially for the big bass," he said. "Bass are out there chasing shad in the middle of the lake, but a lot of the biggest bass will be up shallow, in the shade, where those bluegill like to hang out. Running shade is a huge deal."

Lawyer echoed Wiggins' statement and said that, for him, bluegill-eating bass supersede the shad feast.

"Most of the time during those Super Tournaments and Regionals, the bigger fish are focused on the perch," he said, referencing all sunfish. "If I got in an area during practice and saw a bunch of them, I kept note of those places."

## THE FORWARD-FACING SONAR EFFECT


The one caveat to any modern fishing discussion is forward-facing sonar, which has to be factored into all tournament strategies nowadays. Both Wiggins and Lawyer agree that it could play a role in winning year-end tournaments, but it's far from a guarantee.

"Forward-facing sonar can be so dominant that you must always keep it in your mind, but most of it will come down to the fishery," Wiggins said. "Some lakes, it'll 100% be the deal during the fall, and some lakes it's not. The only way to know is to try it during practice and see if using it to catch big ones is easier than going down the bank."

Lawyer also advised to keep FFS as an option, but not to live and die by it.

"The biggest thing is the body of water and how it sets up," he said. "On somewhere like Grand Lake in Oklahoma, you'll need to stay on the bank. If you're fishing Lake Hartwell in South Carolina, you can 'Scope all day and never come to the bank."

Whether it's a club championship among buddies or a season-ending event with a prized boat on the line, you want to win this fall. Doing so will require a different mindset, a focus on the right lures and a willingness to take some risks. ■



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## TAKE THESE NEW REELS FOR A SPIN

By Mitchell Forde

Not too long ago, you might have caught some tour-level pros sneering at the thought of using spinning tackle. Today, any angler who doesn't have a handful of spinning rods on the front deck at just about every event is simply behind the times.

The proliferation of forward-facing sonar and effects of fishing pressure have made precise, finesse presentations more

important than ever. As a result, more anglers are turning to spinning tackle more often. Once the Bass Pro Tour wraps up its 2024 season on the St. Lawrence River, the tally will almost assuredly stand at six of nine event winners having caught most of their weight with spinning rods.

Whether you're one of those anglers who's been hesitant to embrace spinning gear or an early

adopter of the finesse movement who's looking to upgrade equipment, you're in luck. With more pros relying on spinning tackle to tangle with big bass, manufacturers have been hustling to create better tools for the technique. Thus, a wave of new or improved spinning reels hit the market at ICAST in July. Here's a rundown of six new reels and the attributes that make each stand out.

### 1 ABU GARCIA MAX ELITE

\$99.99 | [abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

The Abu Garcia Max family got a new member at ICAST. The completely redesigned Max ELITE brings several features from Abu Garcia's popular Revo and Zenon lines to a significantly lower price point. The Max ELITE features the same asymmetric design, V-rotor and V-spool as the aforementioned lineups, allowing for a compact, lightweight profile that winds smoothly with minimal effort. It still packs plenty of punch in terms of features, though, with a lightweight carbon handle and Abu Garcia's Rocket spool lip and line management system, which help prevent wind knots. Set to hit the market in September, it will be available in four sizes: 2000, 2500, 3000 and 4000.



### 2 SEVIN GF SERIES SPINNING REEL

\$110.00 | [sevinreels.com](http://sevinreels.com)

St. Croix made a splashy entry into the reel game last year with its SEVIN GS and GX families. Now, the company is adding to its spinning reel offerings with the GF series. Like the GF baitcast lineup, the spinning versions are designed to offer budget-friendly reels that outperform their price. They feature the same drag stacks, gears and S-curve slow oscillation systems (which aid with line management) as the pricier GS and GX offerings. Their carbon fiber/polymer construction makes them impressively light — the 2000 and 2500 sizes come in at less than 8 ounces — yet still plenty strong, with maximum drag topping out at 22 pounds. Slated to become available for purchase Sept. 1, the GF series offers five size models: 750, 1000, 2000, 2500, 3000.



**3**

### 13 FISHING AXUM COMPETITION

\$139.99 | [rapala.com](https://www.rapala.com)

One of two new spinning reels released by 13 Fishing last year, the Axum Competition is the more high-end option of the pair. Its highlight is the Competition Drag system, which is designed to always be smooth even at low settings and provides a maximum drag of 15 pounds. Plus, with a 6.2:1 gear ratio, the reel allows anglers to retrieve baits faster than most other spinning rods. The Axum Competition line features three sizes of spinning reel, and for those who don't mind a little bit more weight, the Ascent Competition series offers the same three sizes at \$40 less.

**4**

### SHIMANO VANFORD A

\$249.99 | [fish.shimano.com](https://www.fish.shimano.com)

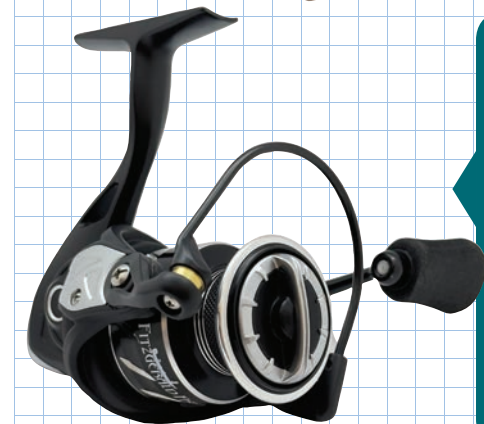
One of Shimano's many popular spinning reel offerings just got an upgrade. The new Vanford A offers quicker start-and-stop ability than its predecessor. Made from Shimano's proprietary C14+ material, it's super light, with the 2500 and 3000 sizes both weighing less than 6.5 ounces. Features include InfinityXross technology, which enhances winding efficiency, and Infinity Drive, which reduces contact between the spool shaft and pinion gear for a smoother feel. Lastly, the DuraCross drag system offers increased durability. The Vanford A will be available in six sizes.

**5**

### LEW'S CUSTOM PRO

\$139.99 | [lews.com](https://www.lews.com)

Lew's has refreshed several of its existing spinning reels, including the Speed Spin, Speed Spin CRX, Custom and Custom Pro lineups. The new versions were built to be lighter, have smoother drag systems and more free-flowing handles. The Custom Pro will feature a machined aluminum drive gear that is designed for durability and the same hybrid carbon drag system that has helped make the Custom Lite spinning reel so popular. It also features a double-anodized spool that is crafted so braided line won't slip and built to withstand high amounts of pressure. The Custom Pro will

**6**

### FITZGERALD FISHING STUNNER

\$169.99 | [fitzgeraldrods.com](https://www.fitzgeraldrods.com)

Another redesign of an already popular reel, Fitzgerald Fishing crafted its new Stunner to be even tougher. Fitting given the company's Florida roots, the new Stunner utilizes a durable aluminum frame and premium components that are rated for saltwater, making this a reel that can be relied on for both bass and inshore species like redfish. Along with its nine ball bearings and 6.1:1 gear ratio, it features an advanced carbon fiber drag system that will deliver smooth stopping power up to 17 pounds. It's only available in the 3000 size, but that should suit the needs of most anglers. ■



# UNLEASH THE DAWG

NEW GRAVEL DAWG 10



NEW GRAVEL DAWG 8



Delivering a wide wobble action in a 1.5 profile, Strike King's Gravel Dawg 8 and 10 grinds through rock, wood, and grass better than any medium-diving crankbait in its class. Strike King pros Todd Castledine and Kevin VanDam worked diligently to design the ideal, "go to" crankbait for anglers across the country. The Gravel Dawg 10 features new crawl patterns in addition to some of Strike King's most famous colors.

**AVAILABLE IN 16 COLORS**



SCAN TO LEARN MORE



# TOURNAMENTS



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA





## A PROPER VICTORY SHOWER

**M**ost of you are probably accustomed to seeing a major win on the tournament bass scene being punctuated by a shower of confetti or some other form of onstage fireworks. However, doesn't it seem appropriate that a performance like the one that Kyle Cortiana put together at the Toyota Series Northern Division tournament on Lake Champlain ended with a more fishy kind of exclamation point?

Cortiana had logged an impressive 12 Top 10s in multiple MLF circuits – the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, Toyota Series and Phoenix Bass Fishing League – and built a reputation over the past few years as one of the best in the country at Northern fisheries like Lake Champlain. The first big win, though, had escaped the Oklahoma pro ... until the middle of June on Champlain. Cortiana rang up 64 pounds, 1 ounce over three days to outdistance Drew Gill by 11 ounces. That performance earned Cortiana his first MLF champion's trophy and a celebratory shower for him, wife, Miranda, and Marshall (courtesy of Gill). MLF photographer Jody White was on hand to capture perhaps the most epic trophy celebration moment ever!

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE





## WHEN 'EASY' ISN'T QUITE THAT EASY

**I**f you were to look at New York pro Alec Morrison's raw statistics from the final stop on the 2024 Tackle Warehouse Invationals presented by Phoenix Boats circuit, you'd probably guess that the TWI rookie enjoyed a walk in the park on the Detroit River and surrounding waters. Morrison bagged up 66 pounds, 12 ounces of Lake St. Clair smallmouth, a cool 22-pound average and good enough for second place behind Keith Carson.

Morrison left Elizabeth Park in Trenton, Michigan, after the dust settled with a pretty memorable haul. He earned \$50,000 for his second-place finish at Stop 6 and another \$50,000 for wrapping up the Fishing Clash Angler of the Year award for the Invationals. For good measure, he also claimed a certificate for a Polaris Ranger ORV for winning the circuit's Rookie of the Year award, an automatic berth in REDCREST 2025 on Lake Guntersville, Alabama, and an invitation to fish the MLF Bass Pro Tour.

Easy going, right? Not quite.

Morrison started the week trailing Jake Lawrence in the AOY race by 6 points, making for a razor thin margin of error on a fishery where errors tend to be unforgiving. However, Morrison quickly lost that margin thanks to a culling mistake that cost him 2 pounds. After placing a limit-filling smallmouth in his Phoenix livewell in the first hours of Day 1, Morrison went back to casting ... only to be struck by the realization that he had forgotten to cull, leaving him with six fish in the livewell, a violation of MLF rules. Morrison realized his mistake, self-reported it to the tournament director, and fished in frustrated agony the rest of the day as he thought about the 2-pound penalty such an infraction incurs.

Fortunately for Morrison, he caught 'em. His Day 1 bag of 22-14 left him a scant 1 ounce behind Carson, and his Day 2 haul of 23-6 put him in the lead going into the final day. Morrison struggled a little on Championship Sunday, though, taking until around noon to fill his five-fish limit, losing a few fish, and expressing a high level of frustration on the *MLFNOW!* livestream. All's well that ends well, though, as Morrison eventually completed a "Monte Haul" week on the Detroit River.

Just remember, though: just because it looks easy doesn't mean it is easy.

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

# NEW-LOOK GENERAL TIRE TEAM SERIES

*KICKS OFF IN AUGUST  
WITH LIVESTREAM FROM  
ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA*



The 2024 General Tire Team Series will be livestreamed in the fall and will showcase intriguing fisheries around the country (including some yet-to-be-announced locations with big-fish potential).

## Four-event series will mirror team trails nationwide with pairs of pros fishing from the same boat

By Mitchell Forde

**O**ne of the few feelings better than boating a big bass on tournament day is celebrating such a catch with a teammate. That camaraderie has made two-person team tournaments one of the most popular forms of competitive fishing across

the country, from high school and college circuits to bass clubs everywhere.

However, rarely have the top touring pros paired up and shared boats while competing against one another. Until now.

Major League Fishing announced a revamped General Tire Team Series that will see Bass Pro Tour anglers partner with one another to compete against other two-man teams, much like the buddy tournaments populated by anglers across the nation.

"It's the most relatable way to fish," 2022 Team Series champion Jacob Wheeler said of the new format. "Literally

Teamwork is the name of the game in any team competition, and defending Team Series champions Wesley Strader and Scott Suggs already have ample experience working together.



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

what got me started bass fishing is team tournaments, weeknight tournaments with your buddies. That's some of the most fun fishing."

The 2024 Team Series will take place across four Cup events this fall. Twenty-four teams of two anglers apiece have been formed, with 12 teams set to compete in each Cup event. All four events will be streamed live on *MLFNOW!* at MajorLeagueFishing.com, MyOutdoorTV and Rumble, and then broadcast on Outdoor Channel in 2025.

## ANGLERS PICK THEIR PARTNERS

The 2024 Team Series schedule will start shortly after the conclusion of the Bass Pro Tour regular season, with the Challenge Cup taking place Aug. 25-30 in Erie, Pennsylvania. The 12 teams that don't compete in the Challenge Cup will contend for the Heritage Cup Sept. 15-20.

***"THE TEAMS WILL BE SEEDED AND SLOTTED INTO BRACKETS BASED ON THEIR COMBINED ANGLER OF THE YEAR STANDING."***

Teams for those two events were determined just like they are in bass clubs across the country — by the competitors. A draft was held in May, when the top 24 anglers in the Fishing Clash Angler of the Year race after Stage Four selected their partners in order of the standings.

Owning the first pick thanks to his points lead, Wheeler selected Dustin Connell. While that might not come as a surprise given the tight friendship between the pair, having two anglers who combined to win each of the first four events of the 2024 season in the same boat is sure to turn some heads.

## CHALLENGE CUP AUGUST 25-30 2024

- Top 2 teams from Elimination Round advance.
- Top 2 teams from Knockout Round advance.
- Highest weight in Championship Round wins.

SPONSOR	TEAM	ELIMINATION
	NICK LEBRUN RANDY HOWELL	LEBRUN/HOWELL
	COLE FLOYD ANDY MORGAN	FLOYD/MORGAN
	DREW GILL MATT STEFAN	GILL/STEFAN
	RON NELSON KEITH CARSON	NELSON/CARSON 8/25/24
	MATT BECKER SPENCER SHUFFIELD	BECKER/SHUFFIELD
	DEAN ROJAS MICHAEL NEAL	ROJAS/NEAL
	ADRIAN AVENA MARK DANIELS JR.	AVENA/DANIELS JR. 8/26/24
	ANTHONY GAGLIARDI STEPHEN BROWNING	GAGLIARDI/BROWNING
	JACOB WHEELER DUSTIN CONNELL	WHEELER/CONNELL
	JACOB WALL BOBBY LANE	WALL/B LANE 8/27/24
	LUKE CLAUSEN JOHN HUNTER	CLAUSEN/HUNTER
	WESLEY STRADER SCOTT SUGGS	STRADER/SUGGS

### KNOCKOUT

8/28/24

8/29/24

### CHAMPIONSHIP

8/30/24

"We've fished the USA Bass tournaments together as a team several times, we've fished week-night tournaments with each other," Wheeler said of Connell. "So, out of anybody in the field, I've had the most experience fishing with Dustin, and so knowing that we can work together, that's what it's all about. It's going to be a lot of fun. I'm going to have to deal with some shenanigans. But, overall, I'm beyond excited."

Among the teams Wheeler and Connell will face in the Challenge Cup are Wesley Strader and Scott Suggs, who are reuniting after comprising two-thirds of the winning team at the 2023 Team Series Championship. In the Heritage Cup, we'll see two different father-son duos take the water: Alton Jones and Alton Jones Jr. as well as Marshall and Marty Robinson. Following Stage Seven, another draft will be held to

***"THAT'S GOING TO BE A REALLY COOL DEAL, TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GOING ON THAT GIVEN DAY, FIGURING OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING, AND THEN ULTIMATELY GOING OUT THERE AND TRUSTING YOUR TEAMMATE."***

determine the fields for the Patriot Cup (Oct. 24-29) and Summit Cup (Nov. 17-22), with the top 24 AOY finishers once again serving as captains.

One of the fascinating dynamics of the new format will be seeing how anglers who are used to commanding their own vessels and making their own decisions work together. Strader believes he and Suggs have an advantage in that department because they've not only competed alongside one another in the 2023 Team Series

but fished out of the same boat enough times to know which is better suited to take the lead in given situations.

"It's good to fish with someone that you're familiar with, you've fished with, and you know their quirks, you know how they're thinking and how they're not thinking," Strader said. "And we've fished enough together to know which one

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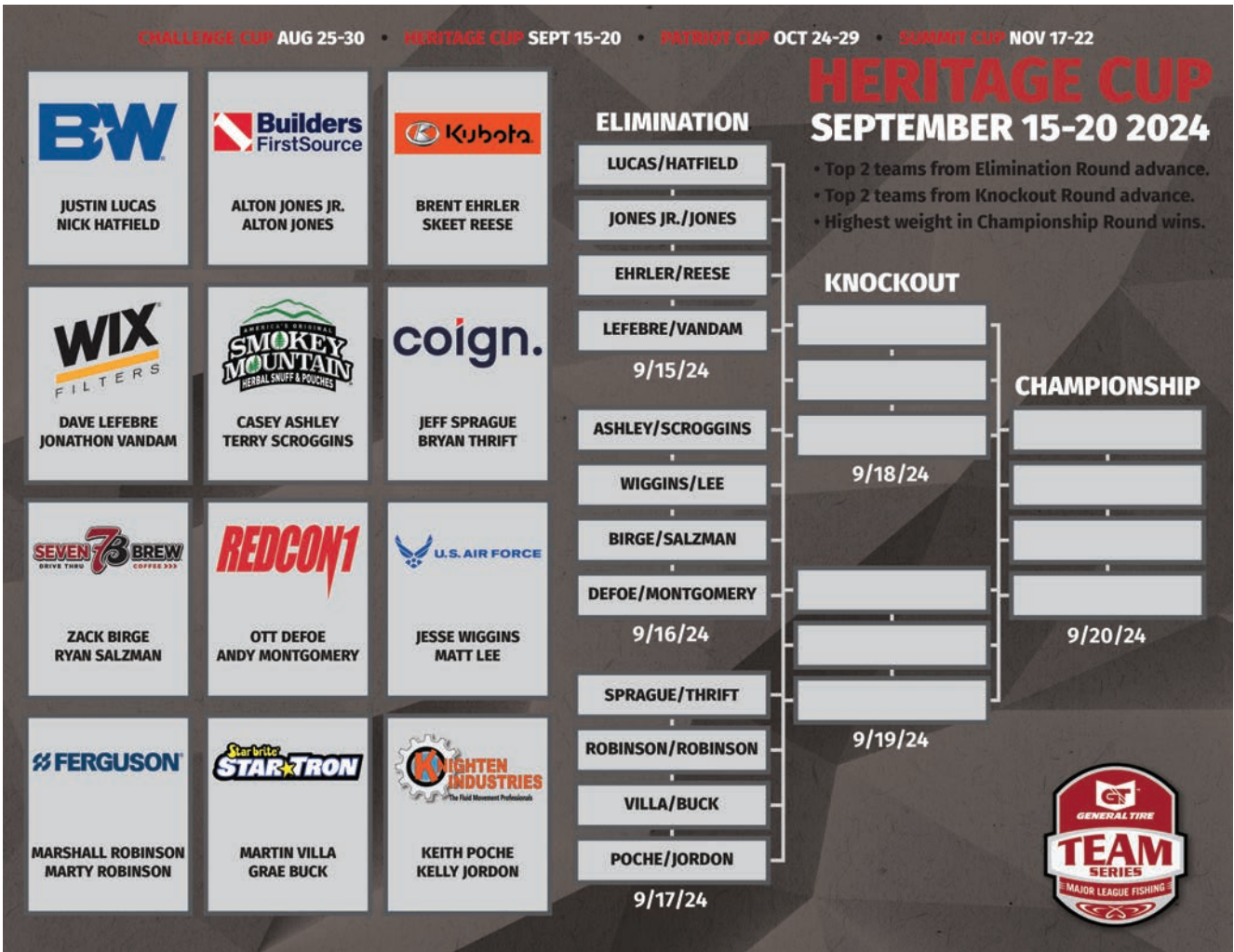
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is good at certain things and the mindset of one and the mindset of the other, how they think.”

## SPRINKLING IN SOME MLF FLAVOR

The teams will be seeded and slotted into brackets based on their combined Angler of the Year standing. Each Cup event will open with a three-day Elimination Round. Four teams will take the water each day, with the two highest finishers advancing to the Knockout Round.

The Knockout Round will span two days, with three teams competing each day. The last-place team will be eliminated. That will leave four teams to vie for victory in the one-day Championship Round.

The winning duo will take home \$20,000 per angler. Every angler competing in a Cup event will earn at least \$4,500, with the payout increasing for each round they advance. In all, MLF will award \$180,750 at each event for a total of \$723,000 across the entire Team Series.

Of course, the competitions will be contested under MLF’s every-fish-counts format with live scoring provided by SCORETRACKER®, so anglers and viewers will know

where teams stand in relation to one another at all times. MLF is also maintaining another staple of its Cup events by not revealing which body of water anglers will be fishing until the morning of competition.

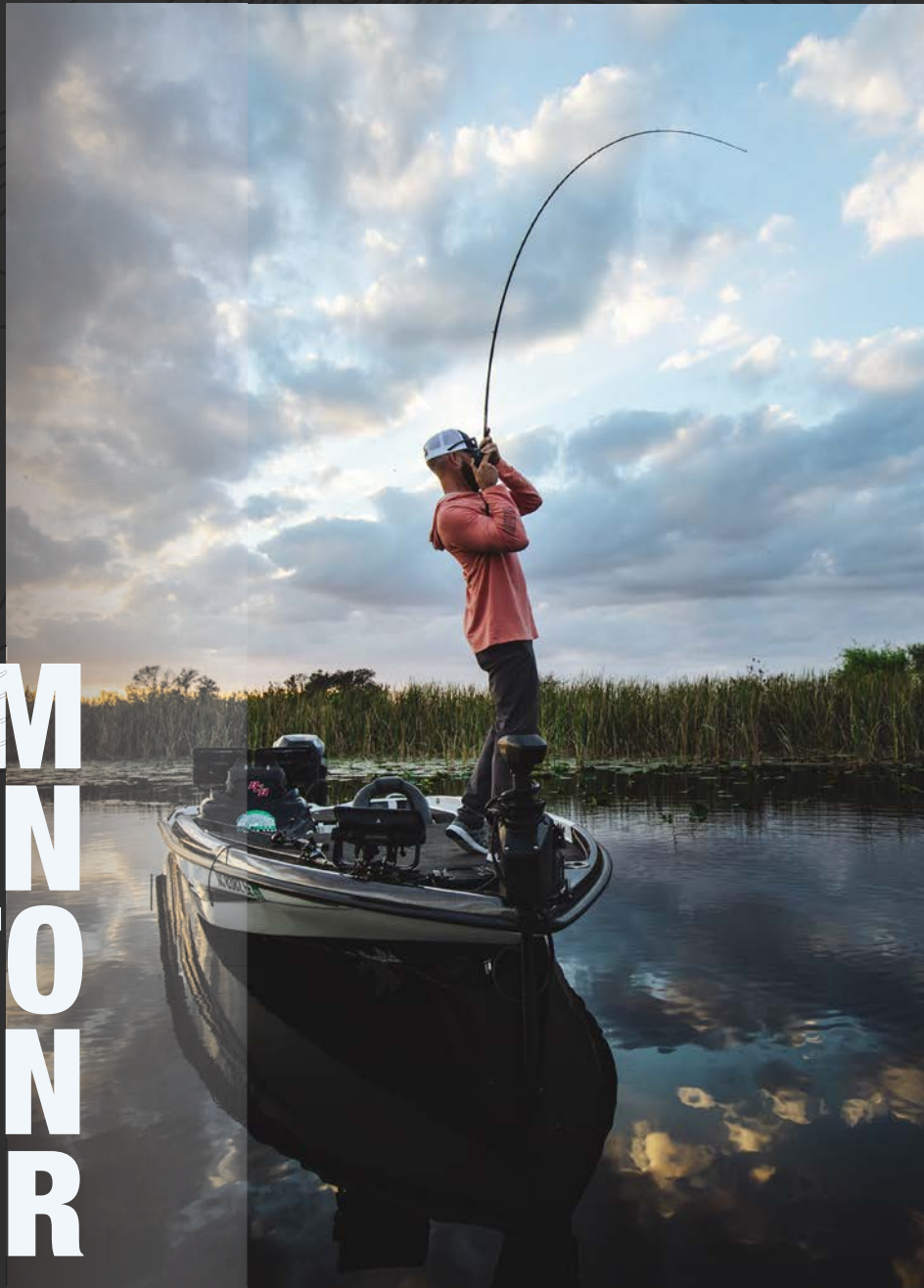
Strader believes that element of unknown – combined with the fact that teams will no longer be able to deploy boats to three separate areas of the lake like they did in previous Team Series competitions – will offer viewers a unique window into how pros break down new water and make decisions in real time.

“You’re not going to be able to be in three separate boats to break the water down in sections,” Strader said. “Now, you’re going to have to concentrate on an area, and if it ain’t working, move to another area sight unseen just on a gut feeling. So, that’s the thing that’s going to add a new twist to it.”

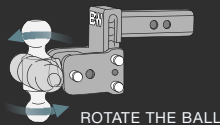
“The whole thing with this is you’re dialing in a body of water together,” Wheeler added. “That’s going to be a really cool deal, trying to figure out what’s going on that given day, figuring out what’s happening, and then ultimately going out there and trusting your teammate.” ■



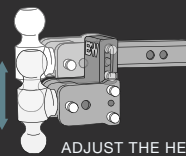
# FROM OPEN ROAD TO OPEN WATER



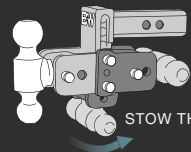
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**1. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY PHOENIX BOATS NORTHERN DIVISION**  
Potomac River

June 5-7

Even though he traveled a long way from his home in Jacksonville, Florida, Michael Catt felt right at home fishing the Potomac River. Noting its similarities to the St. John's River, he used his tidal expertise to find two spots that reloaded each day and produced all his winning weight.

Avoiding the popular main-river grass flats and instead venturing into the back of a creek, Catt targeted a grass line with a drop-shot and a stretch of bank that featured several laydowns with a Texas rig. The combination produced 20-1 on Day 1, which had him 1 ounce off the lead, then 17-4 on Day 2 and 16-8 on Day 3. His 53-13 total topped Spike Stoker by 3-0, earning him \$44,500.

**2. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY PHOENIX BOATS WESTERN DIVISION PRESENTED BY TACKLE WAREHOUSE**  
California Delta

June 5-7

Cristian Melton came to the California Delta with his sights set on protecting his Fishing Clash Angler of the Year points lead. Not only did he accomplish that, he left the Western Division finale with his first pro win and a check worth \$22,866.

Melton caught most of his 18-10 Day 1 bag in one stretch of the San Joaquin River, but the fish weren't biting there on Day 2. Exploring new water nearby, he found a protected zone that was "teeming with life." The magic spot produced the 22-0 limit that gave him the lead on Day 2, then an 8-12 kicker on the final morning, which anchored a 20-13 bag. His 61-7 total topped Christian Ostrander by nearly 5 pounds.

**3. BASS PRO TOUR U.S. AIR FORCE STAGE FIVE PRESENTED BY WIX FILTERS**  
Chowan River

June 4-9

Drew Gill's rapid ascent took him to the mountaintop in his fifth Bass Pro Tour event. The 22-year-old rookie figured out the mysterious Chowan River better than any of his competitors, totaling 58-14 during the Championship Round to win by 14 pounds.

Gill, who had three previous top-five finishes in his first four BPT events, admitted he didn't think he was on the fish to win. But a midday stop on an offshore flat dotted with fallen cypress trees and other wood cover produced more than 30 pounds in less than two hours, giving him a lead he wouldn't relinquish. All of Gill's 22 scorable bass during the Championship Round ate a drop-shot.

**4. TACKLE WAREHOUSE INVATIONALS STOP 5 PRESENTED BY SUZUKI MARINE**  
Lake Champlain

June 15-17

High winds forced the cancellation of the final day on Lake Champlain, but Jacob Walker only needed two days on the water to claim his first national win in convincing fashion.

The Alabama native found the Alburg Passage loaded with small-mouth bass and devoid of other competitors, making for an epic bite — he said he could have caught 100 smallmouth per day if he wanted to. Walker used forward-facing sonar and a jighead minnow to target postspawn bass ambushing schools of alewives. He claimed the lead with 21-4 on Day 1, then added 21-1 to top Nick Hatfield by 2 pounds. The victory earned him \$80,000 and a berth in REDCREST 2025.

PHOTO BY CDSI PELENTI

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

PHOTO BY JON ZEOLA

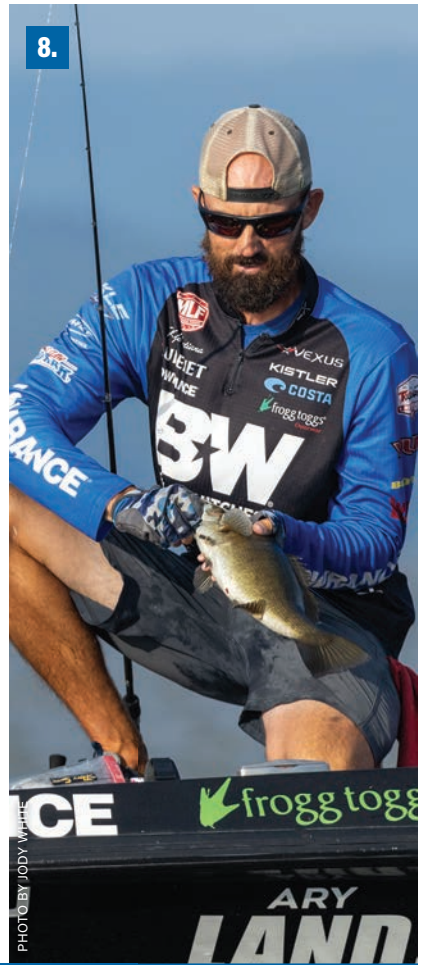
PHOTO BY ROB MATSUJIRA



5.



7.



8.



6.

PHOTO BY GARICK DIXON

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

**5. ABU GARCIA HIGH SCHOOL FISHING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP**  
**Lake Hartwell**

June 19-21

Trent Carey and Josh Kauffman bested 249 of the top high school teams in the country on Lake Hartwell to earn the national title. The Pennsylvania duo had competed on Hartwell in the 2021 National Championship, and they used that knowledge to mark a trove of off-shore waypoints, which they cycled through each day.

Carey and Kauffman got off to a strong start with a three-fish limit of 12-1, which had them in second place. They took the lead with 8-10 on Day 2, then sealed the deal with 9-3, topping the runner-up tandem by 1-4. They each earned \$5,000 in college scholarship funds plus entry into the Toyota Series Championship as co-anglers.

**6. GENERAL TIRE TEAM SERIES BASS PRO SHOPS CHAMPIONSHIP PRESENTED BY B&W TRAILER HITCHES**

**Orange Lake, Lake Santa Fe, Rodman Reservoir, Lochloosa Lake**  
May 11-June 22

Matt Becker, Wesley Strader and Scott Suggs of team Knighten became the second ever winners of the General Tire Team Series. Across four matches in Florida, they first won their Elimination Round match, then finished second in their semifinal. That meant they had to stave off elimination in the Wild Card Round, where they edged team Sqwincher by 11-6.

They rode that momentum into the final on Lochloosa Lake. Becker led the way, boating 18 scorable bass for 34-5, mostly on a jerkbait. Strader added 19-2, while Suggs chipped in 18-14. The trio each earned \$100,000 for the win.

**7. BASS PRO TOUR GENERAL TIRE STAGE SIX PRESENTED BY O'REILLY AUTO PARTS**

**James River**  
June 25-30

On his 55th birthday, Skeet Reese got the best present of his life: his long-awaited first Bass Pro Tour trophy and the \$100,000 paycheck that comes with it.

Like most of the field, the Bass Fishing Hall of Famer started the event in the Chickahominy River but decided to avoid the crowd during the Knockout and Championship Rounds. Starting Championship Sunday near the mouth of the Appomattox River, Reese amassed nearly 30 pounds during Period 1. From there, he ran the tide and slowly but steadily added to his total, bringing it to 54-3, which proved enough to hold off a hard-charging Jeff Sprague by 3-11.

**8. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY PHOENIX BOATS NORTHERN DIVISION**  
**Lake Champlain**

July 11-13

After several near misses through the years, Kyle Cortiana finally broke through for his first professional win. The Oklahoma native has spent a lot of time chasing northern smallmouth in recent years, and it finally paid off on Lake Champlain, where his 64-1 three-day total topped a loaded field.

Fishing shallow on Day 1, Cortiana sacked up 20-0, which (incredibly) had him tied for 27th. He jumped to fourth with the biggest bag of Day 2, 22-3. Returning to the same offshore area near Mallets Bay on Day 3, he used a Yum FF Sonar Minnow to catch smallmouth ambushing baitfish around a mud-line. His 21-14 limit sealed the victory and earned him \$40,000. ■

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PROFILE: **PAUL MARKS JR.**  
CUMMING, GEORGIA



Looking back on his brief professional career, it's obvious that growing up in a fishing family on Lake Lanier was a recipe for success for Georgia pro Paul Marks Jr. The 23-year-old winner of the 2024 BFL All-American was only 24 events into his MLF career when we sat down with him for this issue's Q&A, but those two dozen tournaments have been a study in astounding success: Marks has five MLF champions' trophies, 15 Top 10s and just shy of \$285,000 in tournament winnings to his credit across the Abu Garcia High School, Phoenix Bass Fishing League, Toyota Series and Tackle Warehouse Invitationals circuits.

As he prepared for a fall schedule that includes a mixed bag of regional tournaments (and as much duck hunting as he can manage), Marks shared a few thoughts about his home lake, growing up in a tackle shop, and how both prepared him for his current success.

## Q&A

By Matt Naber  
PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

**You're still pretty fresh off of winning the 2024 BFL All-American on Cherokee Lake in Tennessee. You've had a little time for it to soak in, but how does it feel to be known for the rest of your career as "All-American champion Paul Marks Jr.?"**

I'm pretty young, so to win it is pretty cool. I feel like the All-American is an institution in the bass fishing tournament world, so to win it is going to help my career for the next several years.

**There are only a few anglers in history who can describe this feeling, but do you remember the exact feeling - and the thoughts going through your head - when Chris Jones announced you as the All-American winner?**

My mind was racing a million miles per hour. I've thought about fishing my whole life, and it came down to that day, and I was lucky enough to win it. It was cool to win something that big after training my entire life for it. I won a Regional BFL last fall (at Lake Eufaula), and it felt like that but times 10 better.

**You won the All-American fishing points that pointed into either current or wind with a 3.8-inch Zoom Z-Swim on a 3/8- or 1/4-ounce jighead 2 to 3 feet above rocks of various sizes. You were really the only angler who stayed consistent with your weights. Do you know what it was about your pattern that made it so successful?**

During the first day of practice, I caught some really nice ones doing that; then the rest of practice, I rode around doing the same stuff. Then in the early part of the tournament, I caught everything in different spots. Later on, I caught some on some random spots I hadn't fished the first day. Then on the last day, I combined it all together.

**To date, you've collected 15 Top-10 finishes plus five wins in 24 MLF events (dating back to high school in 2018-19). That means you're in the Top 10 62.5% of the time and you win 20.8% of the time. Those are mind-blowing stats. Can you put your finger on some things that have contributed to that amount of success in such a short time?**

I've fished since I could walk, and Dad took me to tournaments and traveled all over the country. I'm fortunate to have learned what I learned at such a young age, whether it's fishing the ocean or fishing lakes all over the place. My dad and Mark Hardin took me fishing or went with me on the

road, and they taught me a lot, like how to stay calm and stay focused.

**Do you think you do anything differently than other anglers that helps you achieve these stats? How would you describe your fishing style?**

I don't know, not that I know of. I'm kind of a finesse power fisherman with bigger line sizes.

**Your dad, Paul Sr., owns Oakwood Bait & Tackle near Lake Lanier, so you've basically grown up around fishing, fishing tackle and one of the best spotted-bass lakes in the world. What are some key things you learned while growing up in that environment?**

[Lake Lanier] is big water with off-shore fishing, and when forward-facing sonar came out, I was the first one on the lake using it. I've been using it since 2018, and Lanier is the place to learn it. Emil Wagner and Matt O'Connell are also from Lanier. We don't fish together, but we see each other all the time. We were mostly just competitors, and I guess we're friends now, too.

**You've been fishing since you were 3 years old with your dad. Are there any memories as a kid that stand out as key moments that pushed you in the direction of being a professional bass angler?**

Not really. I always liked to catch the biggest thing I could wherever I go. I try to catch big stuff. The biggest one was a grouper around 500 pounds, somewhere around there, down in Florida in May 2020. You use a rope and really big lines to catch ones that big; I used a 20-pound jack crevalle (as bait).

**You made the High School National Championship your freshman year fishing for North Forsyth High School and then fished some more Nattys after that. Did you have any thoughts as a high schooler that you wanted to be a professional bass angler?**

I actually fished the National Championship all four years. At the

time, I didn't really think about being a pro. It all just happened while fishing some BFLs. I had success around the house, and I did the Savannah River Division and won the points there, then Regionals in Alabama, and then won the All-American - it all just happened so fast, it feels like it happened in a snap of the fingers. Now I fish all the time. I was just doing it all for fun, and now it's turned into this. I love fishing. I don't watch anything on YouTube or anything that has to do with fishing, I just love to go fishing.

**Lake Lanier is on pretty much everybody's spotted-bass bucket list these days. Do you think it's the best spotted-bass fishery in the country? And how has that fishery changed in your lifetime?**

Yeah, there's nowhere close to it, and it takes 20 to 23 pounds of spotted bass all year round (to win tournaments). They have gotten bigger the last few years, but forward-facing sonar has helped, too, and there's not really any secret spots anymore. But the fish have definitely gotten bigger the last few years, and nobody knows the answer to that.

**Beside Lanier, where is your favorite place to fish and why?**

That's a tough one, but it would be the Great Lakes - [whatever is] the next place I go to on the Great Lakes. I like going to new places on the Great Lakes where the fish have never seen a lure, like out in the middle somewhere where they've never seen baits or anything.

**Looking at the long term, you're only 23 years old, which is an age where most people are just figuring out what they're going to do for a living. What are some of your long-term goals in the bass world, and do you have a game plan for getting there (or are you just taking it one tournament at a time)?**

I'm just trying to catch as many fish as I can and get as many sponsors as possible so that it makes sense financially to keep doing it. ■



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## PENNSYLVANIA’S CAREY AND KAUFFMAN, KENTUCKY’S ALFREY AND COLEMAN TAKE HOME TROPHIES AT HIGH SCHOOL FISHING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP AND WORLD FINALS

437 teams vied for more than \$3 million in scholarships and prizes on Lake Hartwell

From June 19-22, the top high school anglers from across the country converged on one of the nation’s most famous tournament fisheries, South Carolina’s Lake Hartwell, for the pinnacle of the high school fishing season.

For the eighth year in a row, the Abu Garcia High School Fishing National Championship was held concurrently with the Student Angler Federation’s World Finals. Despite warm weather, Hartwell’s healthy bass population showed out, and the unique, dual-event format again attracted a huge turnout and delivered high drama during weigh-ins.

The Pennsylvania duo of Trent Carey and Josh Kauffman triumphed in the three-day National Championship. Then, after weights were zeroed, Kentuckians Bryce Alfrey and Elijah Coleman prevailed in a thrilling final day of the World Finals

### CAREY, KAUFFMAN CLOSED OUT HIGH SCHOOL CAREERS ON TOP

On one hand, Carey and Kauffman knew how difficult it would be to best a 249-boat National Championship field. As Carey said on the weigh-in stage, “that just doesn’t happen; you don’t get these opportunities.”

Yet, as the recently graduated seniors made the drive south to Lake Hartwell, they had a feeling they could contend for the crown.

Carey and Kauffman not only pulled it off but did so in fairly convincing fashion. The duo sat second after Day 1, moved into the lead on Day 2 and slammed the door with a three-bass limit weighing 9 pounds, 3 ounces on Day 3. That brought their total to 29-15, 1-4 ahead of Lanier High School’s Angel Cornejo and Bryson Dover and more than 3 pounds clear of three other Georgia duos.

For the win, Carey and Kauffman earned \$5,000 apiece in scholarship



On Championship Friday, while most of the field reported a slower bite, Carey and Kauffman arrived at their starting spot to find fish actively feeding. While Carey said their bite wasn't necessarily fast and furious, it didn't take too long to put a limit similar to the previous day in the livewell. Then, around noon, Carey caught a 2 3/4-pounder, which culled a 2-pounder. At that point, the teammates started to believe they might actually be crowned national champs.

"Whenever we caught that one, we both just kind of looked at each other, and we were like, 'dude, I got a

money plus entry into the Toyota Series Championship on Wheeler Lake in November, where they will compete as co-anglers.

"I wish I could put it into words, but I can't comprehend that we just did this," Carey said shortly after posing with the trophy. "It feels amazing that all the hard work paid off."

Carey and Kauffman's optimism about contending on Hartwell sprang from the last time the famed fishery hosted the National Championship and World Finals, in 2021. Freshmen at the time, they finished 13th in the World Finals and fell in love with the lake. They returned to fish it every summer since.

The knowledge gained during those trips proved invaluable. The teammates arrived at Hartwell with a sizable stash of offshore waypoints, then added more during practice. With more than 400 total boats on the water all three days, having so many spots at their disposal came in handy.

"With a 400-plus boat field out here, there are people on a lot of spots 24/7," Kauffman said. "So, running down the lake, you're like, 'Oh, they're there, they're there. Oh, this spot is open.' So, just having a large amount of spots to fish really helped. Just running waypoint after waypoint after waypoint all day long, eventually



ran into the right ones at the right time when they're schooling, actively feeding."

Carey and Kauffman spent all their time offshore targeting brush and humps, catching a mix of largemouth and spotted bass. They used "traditional herring baits," rotating between a chrome Sebile Magic Swimmer, a flutter spoon and a rising bait. They only weighed one bass that ate a fluke, but the Hartwell staple produced their biggest fish of the week, a 4-11 spot on Day 1.

That fish anchored a 12-2 opening-day bag, the third-biggest limit of the event. Despite losing a "giant" when a treble hook pulled off a split ring, they added 8-10 on Day 2 and climbed into the lead.

feeling," Carey said. "I'm always the most nervous person, the most down person, 'we're never going to win.' And we kind of just looked at each other, and we're like, this feels right. This feels like it might happen."

After capping their high school careers in style, Carey and Kauffman both plan to continue fishing competitively. Carey will join the accomplished bass fishing team at Lander University in the fall, while Kauffman plans to keep competing in the Phoenix Bass Fishing League. Topping such a stout field will send both off with a shot of confidence.

"It's a huge jumpstart to any career winning a tournament of this caliber, winning a tournament with this number of boats," Carey said.

## HIGH SCHOOL FISHING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP TOP 10:

- Trent Carey, Josh Kauffman / Fishaholics (PA) / 29-15
- Angel Cornejo, Bryson Dover / Lanier High School Longhorns (GA) / 28-11
- Reese Mutter, Charles Roberts / South Forsyth High School War Eagles (GA) / 26-11
- Carter Cunningham, Landon Glander / Dawson County Tigers (GA) / 26-10
- Noah Dzyuba, Lane Parker / Cherokee Anglers (GA) / 25-11
- Walker Larue, Joe Vaulton / Alcoa Fishing Team (TN) / 25-7
- Dash Dawson, James Murphy Jr. / Gilbert Christian (AZ) / 24-15
- Brody Holliman, Aiden King / Shelby County Wildcats (AL) / 24-7
- Cullum Brown, Dylan Sorrells / Highland Park (TX) / 24-6
- Micah Osborne, Luke Stewart / Clay County High School Panthers (WV) / 24-4

## ALFREY, COLEMAN WIN WORLD FINALS BY 2 OUNCES

Every team competing in the National Championship also had a spot in the 15th annual World Finals, which was open to all SAF members. In all, 437 teams comprised the World Finals field, with more than \$3 million worth of scholarship funds and prizes up for grabs across the two events.

Two different times, 2 ounces made the difference for Alfrey and Coleman on their way to taking the top spot.

Alfrey and Coleman took advantage of the unique World Finals format by getting better as the event progressed and picking the perfect time to have their best day. They sat in the middle of the pack with a total of 9-11 after the first two days. But, with weights zeroed for Day 3, they bagged 8-7 — just enough to earn them the 20th and final qualifying spot from the Semifinals and Second

Chance rounds. They would be joined on Championship Saturday by the Top 10 from the National Championship plus the winner of the “Lucky Dog” random drawing.

With weights zeroing once again, Alfrey and Coleman took advantage of the opportunity in a major way, sacking 13-0 — the second-biggest limit of the week across both the World Finals and National Championship. They would need every bit of it, as Louisiana’s Bennett Fontenot and Braxton Speyrer — the final team to weigh in — dropped a big bag on the scale that settled at 12-14.

For the victory, Alfrey and Coleman earned several scholarship offers from powerhouse college programs like Drury University, Simpson University and

## WORLD FINALS TOP 10:

- Bryce Alfrey, Elijah Coleman / Central KY Bass (KY) / 13-0
- Bennett Fontenot, Braxton Speyrer / Port Barre Red Devils (LA) / 12-14
- Angel Cornejo, Bryson Dover / Lanier Longhorns (GA) / 11-14
- Bill Gaines, Owen Wiggins / Cartersville High School (GA) / 10-13
- Degan Dougherty, Wyatt Massey / Arizona Bassmasters (AZ) / 9-11
- Reese Mutter, Charles Roberts / South Forsyth War Eagles (GA) / 9-6
- Carter Cunningham, Landon Glander / Dawson County Tigers (GA) / 9-3
- Brody Kellum, Carson Thompson / Franklin County Lions (GA) / 8-11
- Cullum Brown, Dylan Sorrells / Highland Park (TX) / 8-6
- Hudson Howell, Logan Parker / Cherokee Warriors (GA) / 8-6

Kentucky Christian, as well as \$6,000 each in scholarship money from The Bass Federation. All of the Top 10 teams received prizes donated by SAF sponsors. ■



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# SAF HIGH SCHOOL FISHING STATE CHAMPIONS



▲ **Colorado / Pueblo Reservoir**  
Kai Rayner, Ryan Steinhoff  
Colorado Jr. Bass Club  
11 pounds, 6 ounces



▲ **Hawaii / Waia Reservoir**  
Cassius Olson, Tyler Tumpap  
Hawaii HS Bass Fishing  
6 pounds, 3 ounces



▲ **Idaho / Cascade Lake**  
Walker Sawyer, Chase Galyardt  
Idaho Student Anglers  
16.32 pounds

▼ **Minnesota / Clearwater Lake**  
Blake Bussen, Blake Meyers  
Cambridge Isanti Bluejackets  
18 pounds, 1 ounce



▼ **Ohio / Alum Creek**  
Brooks Hibbitt, Noah Wingo  
Hartleys Hawgs  
16 pounds, 1 ounce



▼ **Oregon / Siltcoos Lake**  
Tov Balter, Drew Janke Jr.  
Scappoose Indians  
17.29 pounds



▲ **Pennsylvania / Cayuga Lake**  
Ty Magargle, Brady Gunkle  
Wildcat Fishing Team  
25.35 pounds



▲ **South Dakota / Lake Kameska**  
Max Flatten, Samuel Spies  
Glacial Lakes Bass  
14 pounds, 10 ounces



▲ **Wisconsin / Big Green Lake**  
Colton Koss, Jayce Stetzer  
Melrose Mendoro  
14.28 pounds. ■

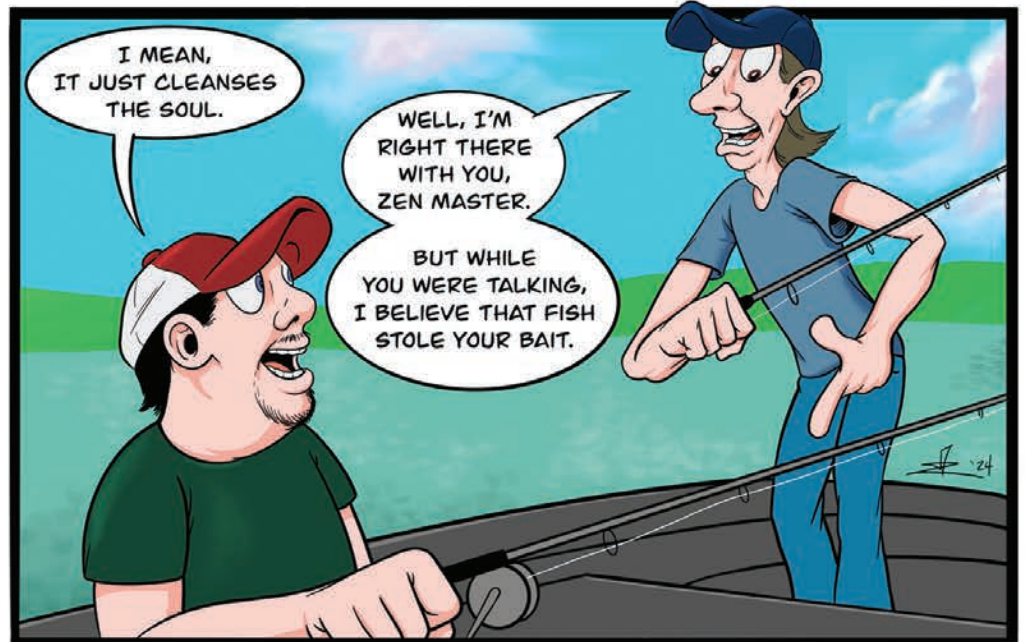
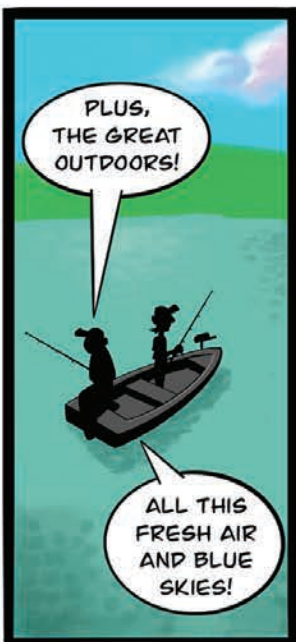
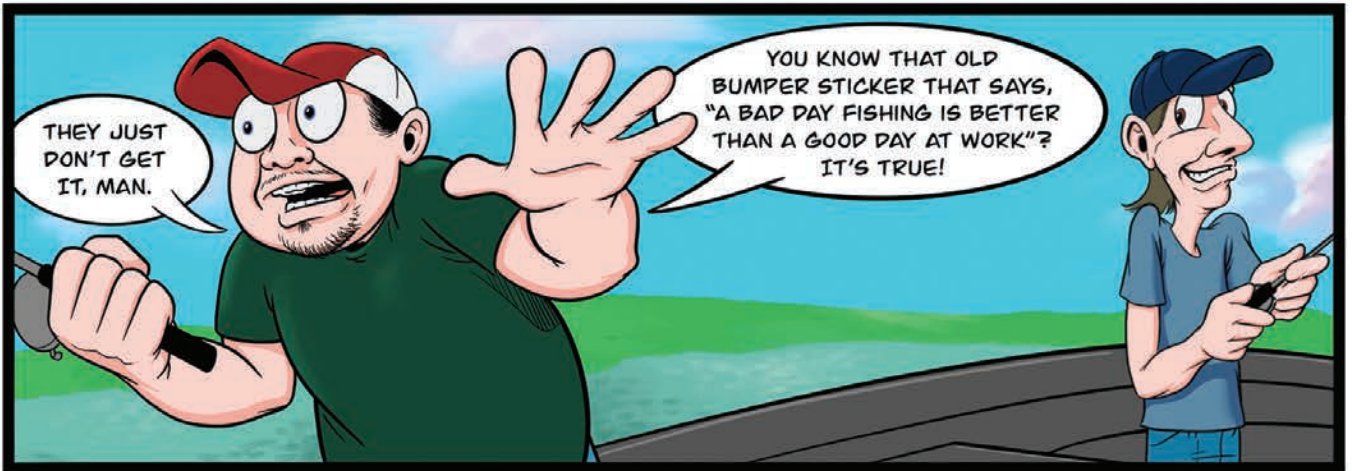
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