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1972-2021

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DECEMBER-JANUARY 2022

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MARINE



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# GO | CONFIDENTLY

Jacob Wheeler / Photo: MLF

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## UNTIL WE SEE YOU AGAIN

They say that there are multiple stages of grief, and that those stages are the most intense when a person is mourning the loss of someone they love. As has so frequently been the case since around 7 p.m. PST on Thursday, Nov. 4 – the moment we all got the news that Aaron Martens had passed after an 18-month battle with brain cancer – all of those stages seem to be competing for attention inside my brain, my gut and my heart.

Aaron's untimely passing at the age of 49 – untimely in that Aaron was 100 percent the healthiest, most wellness-conscious person I ever knew – didn't come as a surprise, unfortunately. We had known for months that the final outcome of Aaron's glioblastoma (that awful-sounding name given to one of the most merciless forms of cancer) would not be good, and that we would all eventually have to deal with that moment when our beloved friend was called home.

But that moment struck most of us as though we didn't even know that Aaron was sick. It felt like a physical punch in the gut.

I don't know where you were or what you were doing when you heard that Aaron Martens had passed away, but I sat down right where I stood in the living room and cried. Aaron was a dear friend – a man who would start every conversation with “Heeeeey, bro” and end most of them (especially in the past 18 months) with some form of “I love you” – and it's been impossible to overcome the sorrow and weight of his loss ever since.

I don't expect that to change soon.

But that's as far as I'll take that thought today, because Aaron could simply not stand the thought of a friend (or *anyone*, for that matter) suffering on his behalf. Aaron was a man of joy. He laughed and smiled easily, and took great delight in lending a helping hand, and in making people happy.

In the days immediately following his passing, I reached out to some of the people who knew him best, simply to hear their memories and share thoughts of Aaron. I asked multiple, multiple people “What's your best memory of Aaron Martens?”, and every single person was effusive in their praise of him as a kind, caring, honest, loving person.

I heard plenty of talk about his otherworldly skill as a bass fisherman – rightfully so, because Aaron was perhaps the most astoundingly talented angler the world has ever known – but anyone who ever spent any time around him in person remembers him most vividly for the sweet, goofy, genuine soul that he was. I heard endless stories of simple kindnesses that Aaron bestowed on people, seemingly every day of his life.

If you didn't feel well, Aaron called you to make sure you were okay. If you needed *anything* – a battery cable, a spare propeller, a pair of sunglasses, a hat, a beer, \$100, the literal shirt off his back (I saw him give his shirt to somebody at a tournament in Louisiana) – and Aaron had it in his possession, he would give it to you and not accept “No thank you” as an answer.

And even as we learn to adjust to life on Earth without Aaron Martens, he continues to give generously. His spirit and love of life are out there to witness with just the click of a mouse. His knowledge can be found in these pages, and in thousands upon thousands more.

Hey, bro. I love you, too. Until we see you again.



JOEL SHANGLE, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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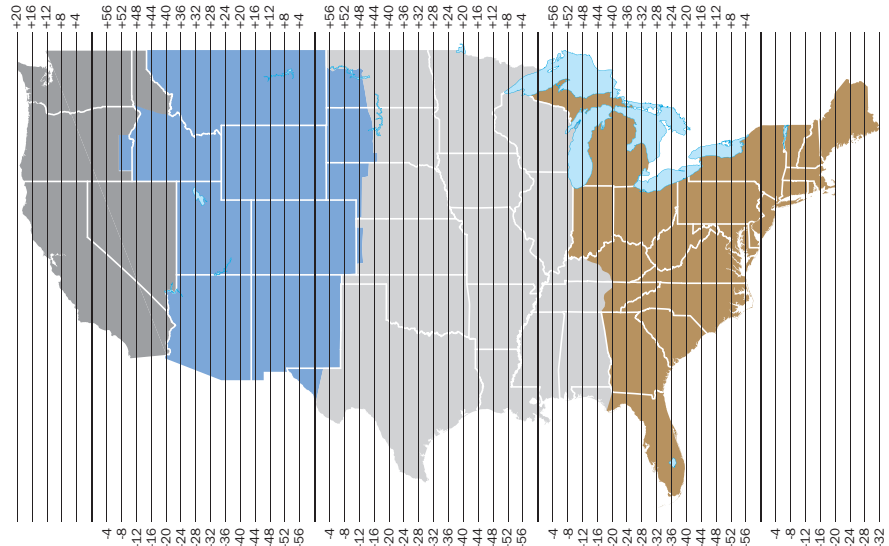
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## SOLUNAR TABLES

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2022

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



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

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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## EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

To learn is to adapt, grow and thrive

### THE PAST THREE ISSUES, WE'VE DEVOTED THIS SPACE

to a deeper dive into the Major League Fishing Fisheries Management Division's (FMD) four pillars of focus.

First, we covered the subject of fisheries enhancement, which included an overview of why improving habitat is a fundamental part of our conservation focus (plus a look at our 2021 artificial habitat projects in North Carolina and Tennessee). The next issue we looked at our current and future emphasis on research, specifically how we use the angler data from the Bass Pro Tour events and our DNA collection for the MLF Lunker Bass Initiative. Finally, in the last issue, we tackled the evolution of fish care and the different components of handling a fish from both the angler's and the league's perspective.

We'll finish the series by looking at our educational pillar.

### DRIVEN BY THE DESIRE TO LEARN

A core characteristic of successful anglers is a desire to constantly learn and improve. MLF, being an angler-driven league, understands this desire and focuses on providing educational resources to all our fans. Education really is the core of the content available at MajorLeagueFishing.com, within each issue of *Bass Fishing* magazine, and in our television and live stream products.

As we planned the launch of the Fisheries Management Division, we knew we would devote a large part of our focus to creating educational material and opportunities. Luckily for us, we had the chance to test out some of our ideas well before the FMD existed.

In the inaugural season of the Bass Pro Tour at Stage Six on Table Rock Lake, we hosted a three-day conservation-themed booth where fans – specifically young anglers – got to experience firsthand our immersive educational opportunities. We had four stations at this booth devoted to external fish anatomy, black bass identification, spotting where zebra

mussel larva can live on a boat and paddlefish management.

The kids were given handouts designed specifically for them and they were then free to explore each one of the activities to learn and ask questions from our volunteers. Volunteering at this booth were our MLF staff and anglers, along with four biologists from Missouri Department of Conservation.

Adults entering the booth were able to meet one-on-one with their local MDC biologist and discuss Table Rock Lake management strategies.

Fast-forward to today and we see this as our model for future in-person MLF events. It allows us to be part of the process of helping kids become engaged in building a passion for our fisheries resources while also allowing our fans the ability to interact at the local level with the professionals that manage the fisheries within their area.





You'll also get insight into how tournament angling plays a role in their decision making. We even ask questions about fish stocking, vegetation control, current issues and get a few fishing tips. These interviews are a lot of fun for us to do and lead to some interesting conversations. We think you'll enjoy getting to know all the local biologists over the coming years.

## ONLINE EDUCATION LIBRARY BEING BUILT

Our upcoming online content will be built in a similar manner, with interactive elements and angler input. Our first digital educational series will be the MLF Anglers Guide to Aquatic Plants. In this series, the MLF FMD staff teams up with Kelly Jordon, Cliff Crochet, Shaw Grigsby, Fletcher Shryock, Josh Bertrand and Gary Klein. As a group we look at an individual plant species. We discuss how to identify it, what names we use for it, how it grows, how it reproduces, how fish use it and how our anglers fish it.

With each page of the guide, you'll find several pictures, a map dedicated to the plant's current known distribution in the U.S. and a link to our MLF FMD iNaturalist page for that plant. On the iNaturalist page, you can find where other users have identified this plant in an interactive map. As we continue to publish more plants, the hope is that we eventually cover everything you might encounter at your local fishery and become better able to use it to be successful.

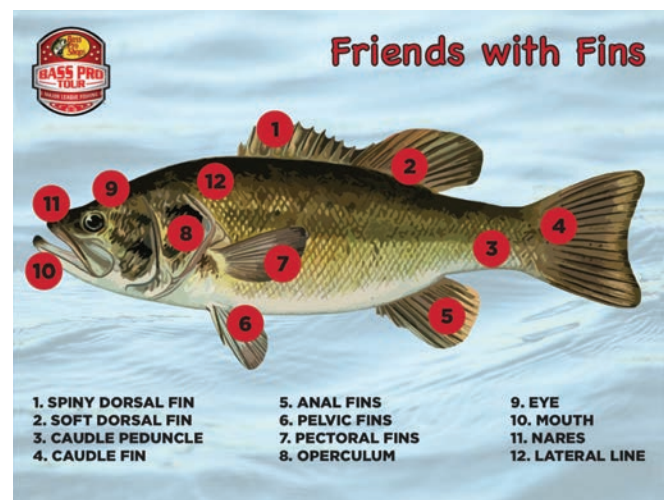
Another digital series spawned from our interactive booths is the MLF "Meet Your Biologist" interviews. In this series, we'll interview the biologists who manage the historic fisheries in the U.S. For us, it's a way to provide you with insight into the people behind the management of our favorite waterbodies.

If you ever thought you might want to become a fisheries biologist, this interview series will allow you to see exactly the path each biologist took to their current role. You'll also get insight into their responsibilities as a biologist and the scope of their current work. For anglers interested in the management of a fishery, you'll learn how often biologists survey and what techniques they use.

All the educational content specifically created for the MLF FMD will live on the Fisheries Management Division section of MajorLeagueFishing.com, where you'll find these reoccurring pieces along with articles covering fish identification, fisheries management techniques, fish-care tips, exotic species and tournament data.

We're devoted to ensuring our fans have the resources to become the most knowledgeable stewards possible, so look for regular content updates.

Now that we've completed the deep dive into all four pillars of the MLF FMD, this column will be devoted primarily to covering the FMD's most recent work, upcoming opportunities with us and current events in fisheries management across the U.S. ■





# CO-ANGLER OF THE YEAR

## Strike King Co-Angler Program Was a Winner in 2021

**T**he Strike King Co-Angler program kicked off on Jan. 2, 2021 with the first Phoenix Bass Fishing League Presented by T-H Marine event of the season, on Sam Rayburn Reservoir in Texas. Over 21,000 total co-angler entries later and it's safe to say that the program was a rousing success.

Co-anglers all over the country competed in the multiple divisions of the Toyota Series and Phoenix Bass Fishing League, earning points all season long toward AOY standings in their respective divisions. After a full season of events, there are seven Strike King Co-Anglers of the Year in the Toyota Series to go along with 24 in the Phoenix Bass Fishing League from the various divisions.

Co-Angler of the Year winners in the Toyota Series took home \$2,000 apiece while BFL winners enjoyed a \$500 bonus each for their successful seasons.

"The co-angler side is such a great part of this sport," says Strike King Marketing Manager Tom Brewbaker. "I'm sure Strike King baits and line helped land more than few key fish for co-angling champions this year, so we loved being a part of the reward for an incredible season."

### A record year for back-of-the-boat anglers

Record numbers of anglers from across the country competed as Strike King Co-Anglers in 2021, many of them for the first time ever. Toyota Series co-angler participation was up 11 percent while BFL total entries were up 20 percent.

That sheer volume of opportunity is perhaps the most important benefit that the Strike King Co-Angler Program provides to everyday anglers who wish to pursue their vari-

ous goals in tournament bass fishing. After such a successful 2021 season, Strike King and MLF will continue to partner and grow the Co-Angler Program even further in 2022.

"Co-angling is the gateway to competitive bass fishing for those without a boat or anyone who's looking to learn more and improve as an angler while potentially cashing a check at the same time," Brewbaker says. "I remember Kevin VanDam telling me that fishing with as many different people as possible is one of the best ways to improve as an angler because you get a chance to see a variety of techniques from someone else's perspective. What better way to do that than by fishing as a co-angler? We're excited to partner with MLF on this award again next year."

### STRIKE KING CO-ANGLER HIGHLIGHTS Parsons picks up big co-angler payday at Toyota Series Championship

It definitely wasn't a fast-and-furious bite on Pickwick Lake for the Toyota Series Championship in late October, but Arkansas co-angler Scott Parsons worked every ounce out of a tough fishery and emerged with the Strike King Co-Angler title. Parsons weighed in 12 fish for 35 pounds, 8 ounces in three days to secure a brand-new Phoenix 518 Pro bass boat.

Parsons had never fished on Pickwick before and wasn't quite sure what to expect. Thanks to a long drive and some friendly advice, he was able to get the inkling of an idea of how to attack the Tennessee River fishery.

"My buddy, Jason Sandidge, lived on Pickwick 30 years ago and hasn't fished it since," Parsons said. "He clued me in a little bit on what to do and we drove up here together

openminded. I don't normally fish grass, but I fished Sam Rayburn back in the spring and it kind of clued me in to how to fish it and what to do. I just threw a spinnerbait and a ChatterBait all day long."

Parsons weighed three fish on the final day of competition, but his kicker was nearly 6 pounds, bringing his total weight to 12-12 on the day. Parsons ended up beating second-place co-angler Daniel Lutz by 1-15 to secure the victory and the brand-new Phoenix boat. While he was still in celebration mode, Parsons took the time to give thanks to his home lake back in northwest Arkansas.

"Beaver Lake isn't my favorite lake," admitted the 36-year-old co-angler. "But some people say that if you can fish Beaver, you can fish anywhere. That has played in some of my career in learning how to fish a drop-shot, shaky head and a spinnerbait. It's helped me out throughout the years and helped me in this tournament."

### Buswell makes All-American history

It takes plenty of skill and determination to win just one Phoenix Bass Fishing League All-American title, so imagine how much hard work goes into winning a second – especially when the angler in question is the first to ever do it from the back of the boat.

Daniel Buswell Jr. added to his trophy case back in June by winning the BFL All-American on Douglas Lake, his second All-American win. Buswell won his first All-American in 2013 at Nickajack Lake while he was also fishing as a Strike King Co-Angler. That's pretty impressive considering he started fishing competitively in 2011.

Buswell claimed a \$50,000 check but is waiting to turn fishing into a full-time professional until he can win a boat of his own, though the Georgia native believes that he's learned more than enough during his time as a co-angler to make the full-time jump.

"I went in and I won it (in 2013), my first full year, but now I realize how hard it is to get here again and to win it again," Buswell said. "This time it means so much more, really. I never fished bass tournaments until 2011. I came in halfway through the season and then fished in 2012 and came to the All-American and now I just have so much more experience, and I used everything I've learned to win this one."



PHOTOS BY JODY WHITE

Buswell connected with 34 pounds, 2 ounces in three days, beating Rod Mackinnon III by 2-15 to claim the All-American co-angler title. Buswell was unable to win his new boat in the Toyota Series Championship however, finishing in 26th place. Still, it seems like only a matter of time before we hear Buswell's name being called out with the boaters during the weigh-ins in BFL and Toyota Series events. ■

## 2021 Strike King Co-Angler of the Year Winners



### TOYOTA SERIES

**Central**  
Chris Graham

**Northern**  
Sakae Ushio

**Plains**  
Rob Crane

**Southern**  
John Stahl

**Southwestern**  
Mike Power

**Western**  
Colby Huntze

**Wild Card**  
Keith Honeycutt

### PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE

**Arkie**  
Todd Christen

**Bama**  
Kane Harper

**Buckeye**  
James Ross

**Bulldog**  
Will Thomas

**Choo Choo**  
Jason Henson

**Cowboy**  
Ryker Holmes

**Gator**  
Justin Brown

**Great Lakes**  
Alan Bernicky

**Hoosier**  
Andy Vance

**Illini**  
Ryan Murphy

**LBL**  
John Dunn

**Michigan**  
Kristian Dus

**Mississippi**  
Scott Kirk

**Mountain**  
Travis Lloyd

**Music City**  
Christopher Stites Jr.

**North Carolina**  
Frank White

**Northeast**  
Charles Peart

**Okie**  
Jake Hess

**Ozark**  
Chris Bunk

**Piedmont**  
Dylan Gray

**Savannah River**  
Corey Yaden

**Shenandoah**  
David Williams

**South Carolina**  
Brennan Gunther

**Volunteer**  
Justin Goodman

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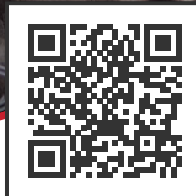
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Perhaps the best part of the program is you don't have to win your Toyota Bonus Buck-supported event to cash in. You simply have to be the highest-finishing eligible participant in your event, which includes trails ranging from the MLF Bass Pro Tour, Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, Toyota Series, Phoenix Bass Fishing League, many top level team trails, TBF, and walleye events too.

Highly likeable MLF Bass Pro Tour angler Mark Daniels Jr. has long exemplified an angler's ability to capitalize on the cash payouts of Toyota Bonus Bucks, while fully believing in his Tundra's towing and safety qualities.


"I've bought three Tundras and I can't imagine why a hardcore tournament angler would buy any other brand. It's a pulling machine that's super safe and reliable too, and Toyota does so much for our sport that I've always wanted to show mutual support," Daniels says. "Plus, it's the only truck that pays you a cash bonus if you do well in your tournament. Man, Toyota Bonus Bucks is just an awesome program for anglers!"

MLF pro Edwin Evers says he's lost count of the number of Toyota Tundras he's purchased over the years. He thinks it's six or seven, but whatever the case, aside from all the Bonus Bucks money he's won over the years, he's also grateful for the horsepower, safety and stopping power his Tundras provide.

"What I love most about a Toyota Tundra is what I call 'the go and the stop' — that 381-horsepower engine has a ton of towing power, but a Tundra also has huge oversized brakes to stop 4,000 pounds of boat and motor — not to mention how much weight in fishing tackle and other equipment I'm carrying," Evers says.

"Everybody thinks about towing power when they're buying a truck, but you really need to think about whether the truck you're buying has the braking system necessary to stop what you're towing in a safe way," he adds.

MDJ and Evers are both excited about the special Trail Edition Tundras, Tacomas and 4Runners that are currently available. They feature lockable bed storage compartments to keep your gear safe and dry, plus refined front grilles and unique dark gray TRD Off Road wheels for a true look of authenticity no matter what tournament or outdoor adventure you're headed to.

To make sure you're registered to win Toyota Bonus Bucks, simply own or lease a 2017 or newer Toyota Truck, sign up free for Bonus Bucks and be the highest-finishing registered participant in one of the many tournaments supported by the program. To learn more and get signed up, please visit [toyotafishing.com](http://toyotafishing.com). Have questions about the program, or need assistance? Email: [bonusbucks@dynamicssponsorships.com](mailto:bonusbucks@dynamicssponsorships.com); or call (918) 742-6424 and ask for Kendell or Chip and they will help you get signed up. 



Mark Daniels Jr.  
MLF Pro/Toyota Bonus Bucks Participant



Edwin Evers  
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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

As a freelance writer and photographer, **Rob Newell** has been reporting on fishing tournaments for 20 years, finding the stories between fish and angler to be a stretched line of heroes, heartache, triumph, torture, inspiration and exasperation.

# PROVISIONS FOR PRO VISION

Before you can unlock the secrets of modern electronics, you need to know how to properly rig them up

**T**he revolution of big screens and forward-facing sonar in bass boats has ushered in a new era of fishing technology that is here to stay. Professional anglers have made these new technologies look like fish-finding magic in a box.

Terms such as “scoping,” “beaming,” “scanning,” “forward-facing” and “pro vision” have all been used to describe this new ability to “see” underwater out in front of the boat. Nowadays, modern-day tournament bass boats usually come rigged for these new electronics. But what if you wanted to put this new forward-looking vision on an older boat or perhaps a smaller aluminum rig?

I recently went down this road and learned that pairing this genre of high-powered electronics with older or smaller crafts requires the provisions of proper power, positioning and protection.

Modern units are not the LCR machines of yesteryear, where you simply tapped into a 12-volt wire, strapped a “puck” transducer to the trolling motor foot and were in the fish finding business. Consequently, when I recently upgraded electronics on a 12-year-old, 18-foot boat with a 90 HP, I made some mistakes that could have easily been prevented with some basic knowledge. After a few phone calls to the best electronics experts in the world, I learned a lot about the perquisites needed to join the modern era of electronics with an older boat.

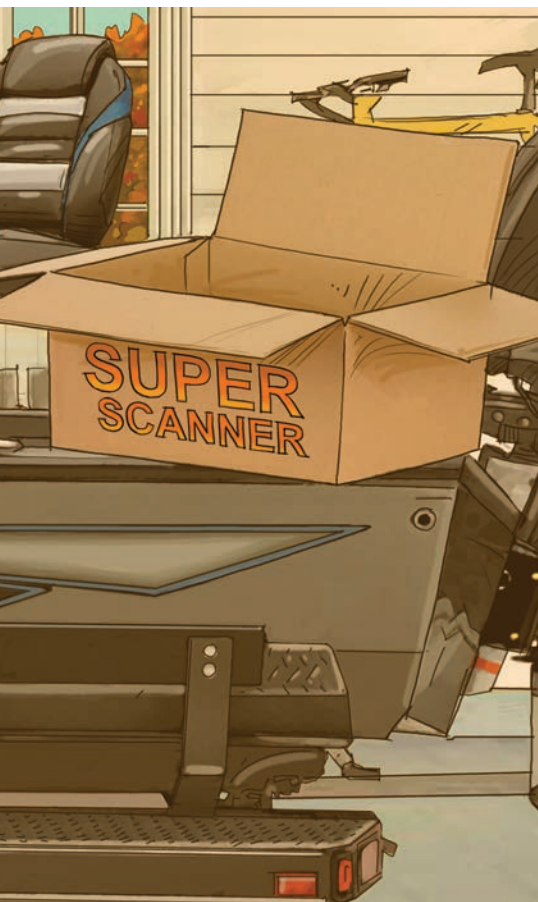


ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER

## POWER REQUIREMENTS

The new breed of electronics requires more power than their ancestor units did. The bigger screens, processors and transducers collectively pull more current, which requires a proper power infrastructure. I learned this the hard way: On my first outing with my big-time electronics, the screens were wrought with interference, the units cut off every time I cranked the boat and eventually drained my battery.

To be clear, none these issues were the electronics' fault; they were mine. I simply had no clue about having the proper power and pathways to run these units correctly. To put it more accurately, trying to splice power off my front navigation lights with 14-gauge wire from a group 24 battery was an epic fail (Hey, I never claimed to be an electrical engineer).

Every pro I spoke with said I needed to upsize to a group 31 marine battery to assure proper power for everything, including ample cranking power, pumps, shallow-water anchors, accessories and

multiple big-screen electronics that run all day. Replacing the group 24 battery with a bigger 31 was not an option for me due to the size of the group 31.

I did find I could squeeze a group 27 marine battery into the bilge area and it did the trick. Again, this is a smaller boat, just as some of you may own. I'm running just two big screens with very few accessories and a midsize outboard. The group 27 battery almost doubled my cold cranking amps and amp hour reserve capacity compared to the group 24.

## CLEAN POWER

In older boats and smaller, economical aluminums, you might have a single 12-gauge wire running to the console or bow, which then splits off multiple ways to run all sorts of pumps, gauges, radios, etc. Trust me, adding your high-end electronics into this scenario is a bad idea.

To perform at their best, these bigger electronics should be served with their own source of "clean power" with a dedicated pathway straight to the battery. In terms of wire size, all pros I spoke with agreed that 8- or 10-gauge marine-grade wire has plenty of capacity to run a big screen unit. Once I ran 10 AWG directly to each of my electronics from a group 27 battery, the performance of the electronics improved drastically.

## SUPER-DUPER 'DUCERS

Another thing that surprised me about the new electronics were the high-powered transducers that come with them. Any of the transducers that have forward-looking capability need their own power wire and/or transducer box to run them. I did not know this.

When running new power wires for the front unit, go ahead and run another set of wires just for the forward-facing transducer. The power box (supplied by the manufacturer) should be installed somewhere in the boat that is out of the weather, yet accessible, like in a rod locker under the front deck. Depending on the brand, some forward-facing sonar transducers do not require a power box, but still require power to the transducer. The point is, you should run clean power to the transducer as well as each unit for the best performance.

These new transducers also come with proprietary brackets that must be installed correctly (usually on the trolling motor) and then tweaked to get the beam at the correct angle relative to your trolling motor position. This takes some time to dial in to make sure you're casting accurately to the objects and/or fish on the screen. I practiced with visible dock pilings for a couple days to get this right.

Finally, be extremely careful in routing the transducer cord. If you cut or severely bind the cable, there is no replacing the cable; you must replace the whole transducer, which is very expensive. With that, several pros recommended taping the transducer cord the entire length of the trolling motor shaft with a double layer of electrical tape instead of using zip ties. Tape provides the best security and protection for the cord without the risk of binding it with zip ties.

## FUSES AND SWITCHES

All pros advised using an in-line fuse on each power wire running to the electronics for protection. In addition, several suggested installing a dedicated master power switch (like a Perko or Blue Seas switch) between the battery and the power wires to make sure no electronics are leaching any current from the battery during storage. Many contemporary bass boats already have a large-gauge master switch installed, and some pros admitted tapping into blank terminals on this master switch to power all their electronics without incident.

A couple of clean-power purists suggested that the master switch or power busses on older boats already have too many electrical accessories drawing from it and therefore does not constitute true clean power. In that case, they recommended installing a master switch just for the electronics, thereby giving all the electronics and the transducer their own power and switch; this is the route I took and it works great.

If you've been considering adding these new forward-facing fish finders to your older or smaller boat but were unsure about doing it, trust me: If I can do it, you can do it. Just make sure you start with the provisions of proper power, pathways and protection, and you too can experience provision from your own boat. ■

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PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

## WINNING FORMULAS

Sometimes it's necessary to imitate the best of the best to catch more fish



### 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.

**W**inning *Lures of the Pros* – for years, a popular headline used by manufacturers to distinguish their brand from others. The thinking, of course, is based on the theory that a “winning bait” is somehow better than the others; proof coming in the form of pounds.

There is some truth in this logic. To a professional tournament angler, using any lure other than the best is simply unthinkable. Catch rate influences bottom line.

So what are today's winning lures, and what makes them so magical? How have these baits evolved, and what trends might we see in the near future?

Let's dig in.

Possibly no other format demonstrates the effectiveness of a bass fishing lure better than MLF Bass Pro Tour competition. Here, the best anglers in the world are given little time to practice, and no ability to discuss a game plan with their counterparts. It's truly man vs. fish.

For that reason, most BPT champions rely on several lures to cycle through vast amounts of water. In addition, as each scorable bass counts in the total, Bass Pro Tour pros find it necessary to change things up and keep the bass biting, not unlike weekend anglers.

Using the eight-event regular season in 2021, I catalogued all winning baits. Crankbaits topped the list.

### THE CASE FOR CRANKBAITS

As a primary category lure, it's hard not to think of a major bass fishing milestone that didn't include crankbaits. While recent years have seen the rise of other methods, in 2021, anglers got back to chunking and winding and won on a diverse collection of fisheries doing just that. From Ott DeFoe at Rayburn to Kevin VanDam at Chickamauga, wrapping up with Michael Neal at Lake St. Clair, crankbaits caught all species of bass in all seasons.

Looking more in-depth, we're seeing an evolution of mid-range lures – something the crankbait market has needed. Prior to this, most effective crankbaits were specialty models. We had the deep- and ultra-deep divers, and very advanced shallow squarebill models, but not a lot of options in between.

We're now seeing more attention and development given to baits running in the 4- to 8-foot depth ranges. DeFoe's notoriety – and the investment by brands like Rapala, Spro, 13 Fishing and more – have opened up the mid-depth market and put baits in our hands that cast better and run true at various speeds. Look for this trend to continue, proven by the world of high-speed tournament angling.

### THE CHATTER ABOUT BLADED JIGS

Bladed jigs placed nearly as high in the win column, continuing to perform well on tour, as they have for the past several seasons. Much like crankbaits, the ChatterBait and its counterparts perform under a wide variety of water types and catch all forms of bass.

Originally dubbed a "grass bait," bladed jigs are now a go-to pick for anglers plying brush piles and flooded trees. The lures skip exceptionally well, making them the perfect choice for boat docks, and ingenious anglers are using heavier weights to probe deep ledges and offshore structure. A quick peek at the Z-Man website lists 17 different ChatterBait models now available. Truly, this lure is a household name in bass fishing and also now qualifies as a category bait.

We're also seeing a lot of lure mods, and that's sure to continue. Weights and blade sizes were first to change, now accompanied by blade shape and material changes. I look for this to continue, as manufacturers get a better understanding of what makes a bladed jig so good. We may see some major revisions of body style, as well, allowing us to crank a bunch of products cleanly through cover.

In the long run, I think there will be a bladed lure built for all levels of the water column.



Z-Man/Evergreen  
ChatterBait  
Jack Hammers

PHOTO COURTESY Z-MAN FISHING PRODUCTS



Big Bite Baits  
Smallie Smashers

Googan Baits  
Rattlin' Neds

### PLASTIC IS STILL A PLAYER

Drop-shot plastics still can't be beat for Northern smallmouth. It was no surprise when all three final tournament locations – the St. Lawrence, Champlain and Lake St. Clair – featured drop-shot anglers in the winner's circle. Other finesse rigs are filling in, too. Neko rigs have proven to be the real deal, and Jacob Wheeler pulled out a Tokyo rig to catch bedding smallmouth on the St. Lawrence.

Such presents a way to use heavier tackle, a nice option given today's oversized bronzebacks. I see this trend continuing most. Personally, while spending hundreds of days on Lake St. Clair a decade ago, I found ways to convince mega smallies to eat lures fished on big line and oversized casting gear. It made for a far more effective fight.

The Bass Pro Tour's top performers list also includes a worm rig that had been waning in popularity: the wacky worm. I remember a time when this rig caught just about as many tournament bass as any other soft plastic method, especially in the spring. But touring pros stepped away from wacky worm fishing, most likely with the advent of the stick worm. Today, we're seeing a renaissance of sort in the weightless worm rig.

Now, just like years ago, the thing gets bit. A wacky worm has proven to be a great way for BPT anglers to milk a spot for a few more scoreables, and hooked fish rarely come off and can be easily landed by hand.

Other types of plastic worms played a heavy role this year, for sure. The old-school Texas rig was credited twice, as were Ned rigs.

It's funny how popular bass fishing lures seem to always live at both ends of the spectrum in terms of complexity. One minute, we're drooling

over the most realistic, hand-painted baits that exactly mimic baitfish; the next, we're dragging around plastic that looks like leftover scraps from the Worm Bin.





PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

filled a niche when schools of bass needed a new look. And two types of hair jigs popped into winning profiles.

Haired lures have always fascinated me since I first served witness to their effectiveness on cold-water smallmouth. Much like the previously mentioned Ned rig, there's just something about the shimmy. We've also seen interest in warm-water largemouth fishing with hair jigs, as competitors find over-sized models effective for structure fishing, especially when big gizzard shad are cruising.

Always the student, DeFoe dug one out this season to help his cause at Lake Fork.

Jacob Wheeler, this season's AOY, added a marabou model to his arsenal at the St. Lawrence. Here's another example of an effective lure that has flown under the radar until recently, thanks to tour pros picking up the habit. Marabou jigs have been all the rage in Canadian events for years – again, cool water and jumbo smallmouth factoring in. We'll certainly see more marabou tied on the rods of the pros each year when they head north, and an expansion of those lures in tackle stores as a result.

Diversity. That's the best word to sum up today's winning lures of the pros. As tournament formats continue to change, and more anglers are exposed to the best tactics through online programming, it will be necessary to mix things up in order to fool more fish. With more pieces to the puzzle, the possibilities are endless. ■

But no one can deny the effectiveness of the simple Ned rig, something Ned Kehde himself has been claiming for years. When faced with a difficult bite or cold water, extremely subtle movements can trigger bass to feed. Today's super-plastic baits offer a new dimension in this type of fishing, as the lures quiver more readily. I'd look for a large amount of expansion there – turning these new materials into irresistible motion-makers.

Try to hold one still, and you'll recognize my thought process.

### OTHER KEY PLAYERS

The remaining lures on my list played a lesser role in wins, but a role, nonetheless. Jerkbait, topwaters and wake baits

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## OUR FAVORITE INVASIVE SPECIES

Largemouth are everywhere, but where did they come from?



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ken Duke** has been writing about all aspects of bass fishing for 40 years. When he's not reading about, writing about, thinking about or talking about bass fishing, he's usually bass fishing.

**I** love everything about bass fishing. I love the experience. I love the gear. I love the competition. I love the biology. I love the camaraderie. But most of all, I love the history. That's where it all comes together for me. The fact that you're reading this column tells me you share that passion.

Welcome.

This installment of "Bass History" goes way back – almost back to the U.S. Civil War and the middle of the 19th Century. It does not go as far back as the bass itself, but it might as well for our purposes.

You may know that the largemouth bass is the most widely distributed freshwater fish on the planet. Only the brown trout comes close. Today, the largemouth can be found in 49 of the 50 United States (and one was caught in Alaska a

few years back, but that's a different story). The largemouth is also in Canada, Mexico, South America, Africa, Europe and Asia. The only two continents that don't have largemouths are Antarctica and Oceania.

But if you look at a map of the *native* range of the largemouth bass – where they started and were first discovered by man – the area is considerably smaller. When bass were first identified, they lived only in the southern and central U.S. Now they're practically everywhere

Ever wonder how they got there?

Well, they didn't walk ... or even swim, for the most part. They were brought in by men and stocked. A principal figure in that effort was Spencer Fullerton Baird, and if you've never heard of him, I'm not surprised.



## AMERICA'S FIRST FISH COMMISSIONER

Baird was born in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1823 and was fascinated by nature as a young boy. His thirst for knowledge was unquenchable, and he was ambitious – an overachiever by almost any standard. Baird graduated from prestigious Dickinson College with both bachelor's and master's degrees before he was 18 years old.

As a young man, he became an accomplished scientist – an ornithologist (birds), ichthyologist (fish), and herpetologist (reptiles and amphibians) – who went to work for the government and used his skills to advance science and nature on a national level.

Baird became the first curator at the Smithsonian Institution in 1850, at the age of just 27. He was personally responsible for creating the museum program there, and he pushed for its focus to be on natural history. In 1871, President Ulysses Grant appointed him the first Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries for the U.S. Fish Commission. He was tasked with stocking American streams and lakes with food fish.

If that seems like an unusual directive, put yourself in the position of mid-19th Century leaders. At the time, large numbers of settlers were moving west. Fish stockings would provide an additional source of food and recreation.

So Baird had his Fish Commission staff fill barrels with bass, salmon and other fish and load them onto railroad cars. When the trains would stop to take on water or passengers, the barrels would be emptied into nearby lakes and streams, many of which never held those fish before. As you might imagine, some of the waters were completely unsuited to the fish being stocked.

## YOU HAVE “BUCKET BIOLOGISTS” TO THANK

Today, of course, such an effort would never happen. It would be condemned as spreading invasive species, and Baird and his staff would be branded “bucket biologists” of the worst kind. It wouldn't help that his motives were more bureaucratic than altruistic.

Even then, Baird was criticized for putting fish in places where they might not thrive. He didn't care. In a letter to an underling who questioned the practice of stocking salmon eggs in waters where they almost certainly could not survive, Baird – ever the ambitious bureaucrat – wrote, “It makes no difference what is done with the salmon eggs. The object is to introduce them into as many states as possible and have credit with Congress accordingly. If they are there, they are there, and we can so swear, and that is the end of it.”

We'll never know how many salmon eggs or fish survived the stockings, but we know some did. Largemouth bass proved particularly resilient. Baird also shipped shad and striped bass all the way across North America to be released into the Pacific, where both are now well-established.

And he didn't stop with North American fish. Since carp were popular in Europe, Baird thought they would be a hit in the U.S., too. After all, they were easy to raise, prolific and a cheap source of protein. Americans would love them!

He was so effective at generating interest among Washington's power elite that nearly every congressman in the country jumped at the chance to send free carp to constituents. If these “trash” fish seem to be everywhere today, we have Baird and our 19th Century congressmen to thank for it.

Baird served the U.S. Fish Commission and the Smithsonian with great distinction for many years. But in November of 1885, his diary began to list serious health problems – heart issues, headaches, leg pain, urinary difficulties. The ailments progressed until his doctors demanded that he stop work for at least a year beginning in May of 1887. He took his family to the Adirondack Mountains, and his health seemed to be improving, but by summer things took a bad turn and Baird died in August, likely from heart disease. He was 64 years old.

Although he was one of America's greatest naturalists and his impact on the fishing world has been immeasurable, there's no evidence that Baird caught even one bass in his lifetime. Nevertheless, it's a pretty good bet that everyone reading this has caught bass that wouldn't have been there without Baird.

History ultimately judges us all, and Spencer Fullerton Baird may get mixed reviews because of his methods. What's indisputable is that he was a key architect in the history of our sport, and I don't think he should be judged by what we know or merely believe today.

The problem with judging “then” by the standards of “now” is that it prevents us from understanding history. ■

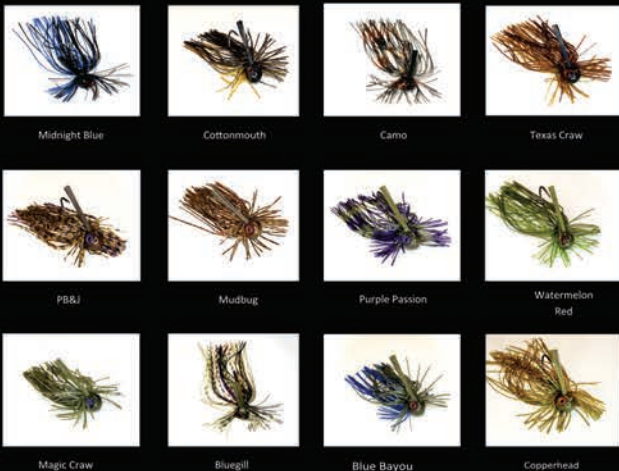
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## TRADING THE BIG MOTOR FOR BIG OPPORTUNITIES

We think kayak fishing is great, and here's why



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Matt Allen and Tim Little** are well-known big-bass experts who own Tactical Bassin, a website and social media channels dedicated to educating the public about bass fishing.



Over the last few years, as we've traveled around the country with our bass boats in tow, we've noticed more and more fishing kayaks out on the open road. It's not uncommon to share the parking lot at any boat ramp with multiple kayak trailers, and we're seeing substantially more fishing kayaks out on the water than ever before.

The momentous growth of kayak fishing is undeniable. With more and more anglers vacating the shoreline and venturing out to the open water in their kayaks, it's easy to see that kayak fishing is a great addition to the sport of bass fishing and a terrific way for people to expand on their passion for catching fish.

We certainly think it's great.

Like the majority of beginner anglers, Matt and I both

started out as bank anglers. We quickly graduated to float tubes and small aluminum boats – anything to get us out on the water and away from the shoreline.

Today, even with our fully rigged bass boats equipped with the latest and greatest accessories, we sometimes find ourselves choosing to fish out of our kayaks. Don't get me wrong: We love zipping around the lake from spot to spot, breaking down a fishery in our bass boats, but there's something to be said for the advantages of fishing out of a smaller, stealthier platform.

I don't know how to explain it other than that kayak fishing brings me back to my roots and reminds me of my beginnings in bass fishing. There's something about slowing down and enjoying God's creation, trad-

ing in the torque of my 250-horsepower motor for the slight hum of the trolling motor or the serene sound of my paddle hitting the water. It reminds me of the good ol' days.

Knowing I can't run 70 mph across the lake to my next fishing spot allows me to really focus on the area I'm fishing. Sometimes simplifying bass fishing just results in more success. Limiting the amount of tackle you bring and simplifying your gear gives you less options to think about and more time to focus on actually fishing. If you're a bass boat owner like me but haven't tried kayak fishing, you should. You might be surprised by how much you love it.

Today's kayaks are more stable and more advanced than ever. If you ever get a chance to check out some of the tourna-

ment-rigged kayaks at the boat ramp, take advantage. Matt and I both fish out of the Old Town Sportsman Autopilot kayaks. They come fish finder-ready and are equipped with Minn Kota autopilot trolling motors with built-in GPS and Spot-Lock. With that kind of technology at work, I don't feel like I'm at a disadvantage fishing out of my kayak compared to my bass boat. Obviously you lose the ability to run all over the lake with every rod and reel you own at your fingertips, but I believe there are three key advantages to fishing out of a kayak that far outweigh the speed and storage disadvantages.

### ADVANTAGE #1: ACCESSIBILITY

The first major advantage afforded to those bass fishing out of a kayak is accessibility – accessibility to parts of the lake you can't get to in a larger boat and accessibility to fisheries that are “no motor” or “trolling motor-only” lakes.

This time of year, a lot of fisheries have already dropped the water level down to winter pool to help prevent future flooding from winter storms. This eliminates a lot of backwater access, and there are places on the lake that you simply can't access in larger boats until spring. Matt and I recently launched our Old Town kayaks and went fishing upriver. We motored and paddled our way upriver to access parts we never could have accessed this time of the year in our big boats. In fishing kayaks, low water accessibility is only limited by your determination and imagination.

Equally as important, some of your favorite launch ramps around the lake may be un-launchable due to the low water levels. The good news is that solo-launching a kayak is extremely easy and can be done from almost anywhere. You don't need water on your favorite launch ramp to get out on the lake and you can still access your favorite spots year-round. Also, I've seen more and more trolling motor-only lakes popping up. Traveling to these fisheries with an easily portable fishing platform is really convenient. Gaining access to fisheries or areas of a lake that other anglers can't is a no-brainer for me.

Who doesn't want to fish unpressured areas of a lake that other anglers can't?

### ADVANTAGE #2: AFFORDABILITY

Like nearly everything else, the cost to go fishing these days has gotten more and more expensive. Whether it's skyrocketing gas prices, increased launch fees or the cost of a new or used boat, bass fishing has simply gotten more pricey as a whole.

From beginner to advanced, there are kayaks for all anglers' budgets and experience level. Once you have your kayak and gear, there's very little additional expense to get out on the water and catch fish. Traveling to and from the lake can be a lot less expensive without having to tow a 20-foot boat back and forth. Think about all the money saved on boat gas and maintenance. A kayak is a very cost-effective way to get out on the water and fish on a budget – leaving more cash in your wallet for new tackle and gear.

### ADVANTAGE #3: SLOWING DOWN

Many times when we're fishing in our bass boats, I'm often thinking about my next move or adjustment. When I eliminate the thought of running around the lake in search of more fish, it forces me to focus more on the area I'm currently fishing, and in turn, I feel like I fish the area more meticulously. You'd be surprised at the little nuances you observe when you're totally focused on the area you're fishing and not distracted by the thought of running to another location. I believe because of this reason alone that I'm a better fisherman today.

Whether a standalone segment of bass fishing or as a steppingstone to the world of big boats and big motors, kayak fishing is great for the sport of bass fishing. It allows anglers of all budgets and experience levels to get out on the water and hone their skills. ■



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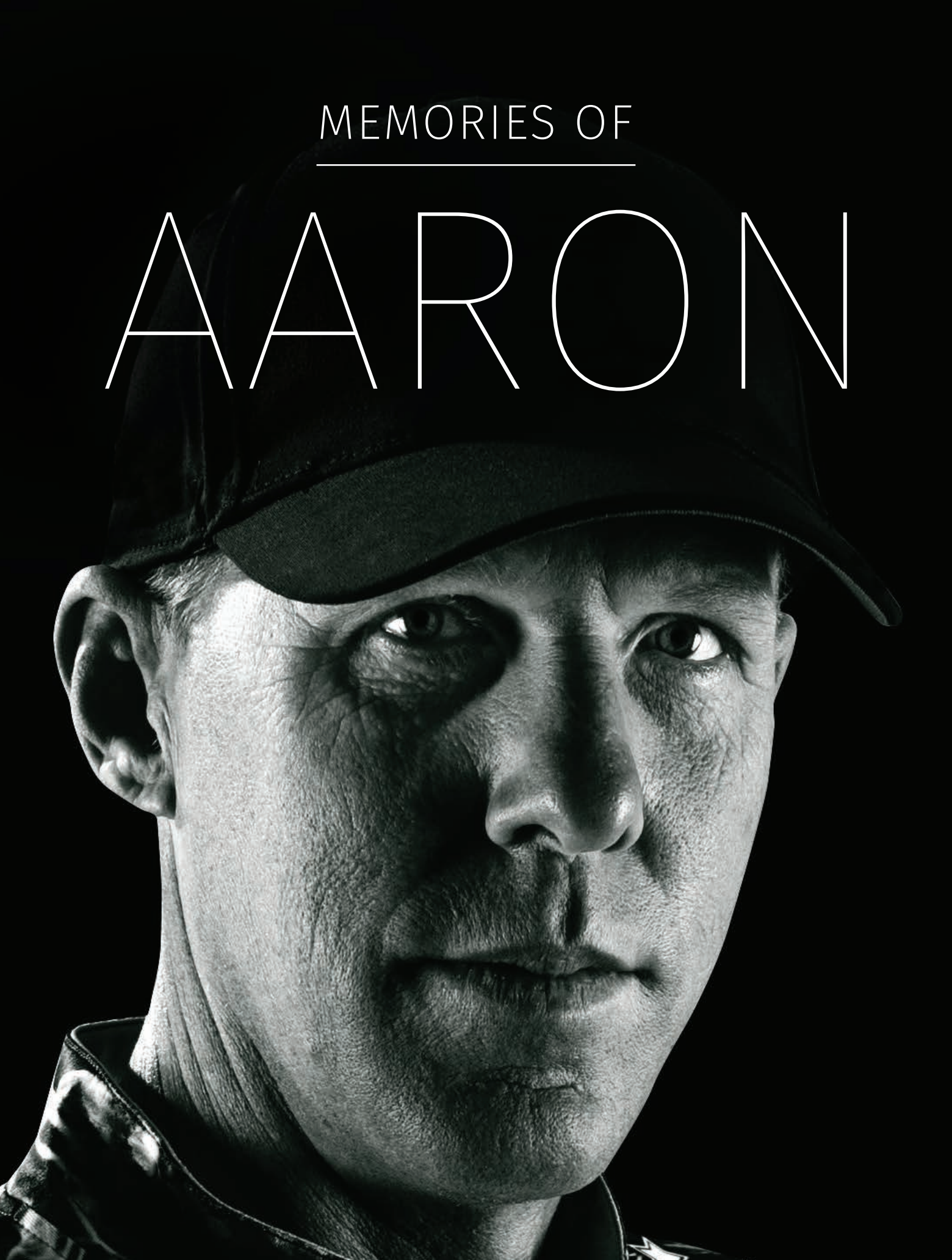
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MEMORIES OF

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# AARON



Aaron Martens will rightfully be celebrated as one of the most talented, creative tournament bass fishermen the world has ever seen. His nickname – “The Natural” – is fitting of an angler who seemed instinctually connected to the craft he excelled at. But his fishing achievements aside, Aaron’s greatest characteristics – the spirit and joy of life that made him such a dear friend to many – will be what many will remember the most.

*By Joel Shangle and Dave Landahl*

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

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*Aaron had an infectious laugh and personality. You couldn't help but like him. He was one of the most genuinely good people you could ever meet. It won't be the same (without him).*

– **Brent Ehrler, MLF pro**

*Aaron was one of the nicest and most sincere people you'll ever meet.*

– **Byron Velvick, former MLF pro**

*Everybody will tell you that Aaron had a huge heart, and that's totally true. He didn't have a bad bone in his body.*

– **Brett Hite, MLF pro**

In the days and weeks following Aaron’s passing on Nov. 4, 2021, condolences, expressions of grief and fond memories of him flowed from all corners of the world. We heard stories of his youth and early career, when he and his mother Carol competed in team tournaments around their home in Southern California. We heard of small kindnesses he shared with people, seemingly on a daily basis. We heard about his unique, lovable, sometimes-quirky personality.

Everyone, it seemed, has an Aaron story. And there’s a theme: Aaron Martens was a one-of-a-kind talent, a pioneer in his chosen sport and a difference-maker to the people who met him.

Aaron's nickname — "The Natural" — was especially fitting: he was instinctually connected to his craft.



## 'PEOPLE FIRST' KINDNESS

*I have (so many) good memories of and stories about Aaron — he was just an amazing man and a wonderful friend. He touched a lot of people. He was fierce in competition — when it came to fishing, Aaron wanted to win — but outside of that, he was 'people first' and one of the kindest, most caring people in the world.*

— John Murray, MLF pro

The splash came from a distance, easily mistakable for a dozen other sounds that you might expect to hear in a busy marina in Maryland. Aaron had just won a tournament on Chesapeake Bay and was deep in detailed conversation about the pattern and baits he had used to claim the trophy.

Almost immediately upon hearing the splash, though, Aaron had his trolling motor down and was hustling toward the source of the commotion: a young boy — maybe 10 years old — had been so excited to spot his hero Aaron Martens from across the marina that he had literally walked right off the 15-foot-high dock and fallen into the water.

The boy clearly couldn't swim, but by sheer fortune had landed right next to a piling, which he managed to desperately latch onto as he tried to tread water.

"Hold on little bro, hold on, I'm coming to help you," Aaron assured the boy.

And help he did, somehow threading his 21-foot Phoenix through a mess of cables, crossbeams and pilings to get the nose of his boat close enough to reach his hand out to the boy and pull him onto his front deck. The whole scene unfolded in seconds. Aaron had responded so quickly that nobody else in the marina even had time to react.

The boy was understandably upset but also so thrilled to meet Aaron that he forgot within seconds that he had just escaped mortal danger.

"Oh no, where are my glasses? I lost my glasses! Umm, can I have an autograph?" he blurted.

Aaron, of course, gave him an autograph. And a hat, a shirt and a couple packs of baits, and then trolled back under the dock to try to find the boy's lost glasses.

"That's Aaron," Murray says simply when he's told the story. "He was there for you, no matter what. You know how when people drive alone at night, they want someone to talk to? I have so many friends who tell me 'Aaron was that guy I called when I was driving through the night.'"

"You could call Aaron and he'd talk and listen to you for hours — he knew and understood the long nights of driving thousands of miles. I'm always amazed at how many people tell me that. Aaron was a great listener, and he really cared about people."

*"I have so many good memories of Aaron from competing with and being around him for 30 years. Aaron was always nice and always happy. He never tried to get anything from you — he cared about his own thing, not what you were doing. Aaron had a pure, natural fishing instinct. His perception of what was going on in the water and how to get a fish to bite was absolutely amazing."*

— Skeet Reese, MLF pro

“ I remember Aaron winning on a drop-shot in 1998 or 1999, and I started paying attention to him after that. Then, he moved to Alabama from California – that was really an influential reason why I looked at moving there. Watching him dominate in the early 2000s with a spinning rod really impacted my fishing. It was always on my mind to use my West Coast knowledge at the pro level. Watching him succeed gave me a lot of confidence that I could. He was just an incredible guy. ”

— Justin Lucas, MLF pro

## SHARING & GENEROSITY

*My mom and brother lived in Oroville, and BASS was having an open tournament on Lake Oroville in 1999. Well, Aaron won that event, and it was so obvious that he was doing something totally different than what the rest of us were doing. He was catching fish out of 80 to 100 feet of water.*

*I waited at his boat tied to the dock as they finished the awards presentation, waiting for Aaron, and he was kind enough to spend an hour with me that afternoon: “This is a drop-shot, dude!” He showed me the worms, the hooks, the rigging and explained how to fish it. And then he gathered up everything he had laying around his boat and gave them to me. He gave me the worms, the weights, the hooks ... everything.*

*My very first cast ever with a drop-shot the next morning was a 3 1/2-pound spotted bass, caught on the things that Aaron gave me. I’ll never, ever forget that. But Aaron was like this to everybody: He genuinely wanted to help you. He’d spend an hour with you trying to show you how to build the perfect spinnerbait. That was just Aaron’s nature.*

— Gary Klein, Bass Fishing Hall-of-Famer

Klein’s drop-shot story is one that many Western anglers who fished with Aaron in the late 1990s and early 2000s are familiar with, but only one example of his intrinsic generosity and eagerness to share. Oh, he could be fiercely protective of locations and his fishing space, but his willingness to lend a helping hand to literally anybody – even in the heat of competition – is the stuff of legend.

“He was just selfless and generous,” says Ish Monroe, who fished with Aaron from the time they were teens. “I remember a tournament on Pickwick Lake where both of us made a long run to fish a marina by the bridge where a lot of the tournaments on that lake are held. I wasn’t catching anything there and Aaron was just whacking them. He tells me ‘Dude, you gotta do this,’ and literally gave me the bait he was using. He didn’t care that I was fishing against him; he just wanted to look out for his fellow man.”

Although Aaron was an astoundingly diverse angler who excelled at everything from punching to cranking, his career success and West Coast upbringing will forever link him to finesse techniques – specifically the drop-shot. American anglers first learned of the “down-shot” (or “lucky rig”) in 1998 when Lucky Craft Lures creator Seiji Kato shared his then-little-known dropper setup at a tournament at Elephant Butte Reservoir in New Mexico.

Aaron finished three places behind Kato at that tournament, and immediately glommed onto the down-shot as a tool for catching fish when and where they simply wouldn’t bite using the finesse technique of the time (shaking a worm). He would go on to win tournaments throughout the country on various iterations of the drop-shot, sharing the technique en masse to a generation of anglers.

“As far as being a pioneer of finesse fishing, Aaron is in a category by himself,” says Skeet Reese, another of Aaron’s closest, oldest friends. “He’ll be forever known for that. Aaron could fish it all, but he was the greatest finesse fisherman in the history of our sport. People know about the drop-shot because of Aaron Martens.”

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE





## COURAGE & INSPIRATION

*I knew Aaron since my rookie year in 2003. There were only a few stars who went out of their way to make me feel welcome, and he was one of them. We were friends ever since, but over this last year after Aaron's diagnosis, I really got to know him, and it changed my life forever. We talked about God and Heaven almost every day.*

*I tried to put myself in his shoes as we talked, but I just couldn't. He was at peace with whatever the Lord's will was, but also very confident in beating (cancer). I've never seen anyone as strong and as open as he was in the face of such a horrible physical situation. I wanted to help him, but it ended up that Aaron helped me instead. It's (just) how he was."*

— Dave Lefebre, MLF pro

The voice on the phone was a familiar one, happy and mellow, with its recognizable Southern California drawl: "Hey bro, how's it going?"

This was how Aaron greeted people more often than not, with a simple "hey bro" and an inquiry about their wellbeing. But as was sometimes the case in the months following Aaron's diagnosis with glioblastoma – an especially aggressive form of brain cancer – that fact that he was even answering the phone was remarkable.

"I'm getting chemo today. Say hello to the nice nurse who's helping me," Aaron said. "I think I'm on three different kinds of chemo now. I hear that's a lot."

He didn't say it nonchalantly, but matter-of-factly, describing the effects of his treatment, and the regimen of diet, exercise, prayer and positive thinking that he adhered to throughout his illness. He was annoyed at the discomfort but accepting of it – about like the rest of us would accept the pain of a sprained ankle.

Aaron's physical discomfort was much, much more severe, of course. Shortly after the conversation mentioned above, a photo appeared on social media of Aaron lying flat on his back on the front deck of his boat at Lake Chickamauga during a Bass Pro Tour event, a rod in his hand. Aaron was too sick and weak from chemo to stand, but he continued casting and reeling, refusing to stop fishing.

Two months later, Aaron finished 33rd at the Bass Pro Tour event on Lake Champlain. And, as was typical of Aaron, he was selfless that week in New York, choosing to share words of inspiration for other people instead of dwelling on his own condition.

"Why be negative? Why not be positive and just live life to the fullest?" Aaron asked. "With all these people pulling for me, it just makes me want to keep going more than ever. I'm still fighting the fight. If I can beat this, maybe I can show people some hope and be the inspiration that doctors tell me I am."

*Aaron showed unwavering faith. It was soothing and calming to me. He was steadfast (in his faith) and didn't waver one bit. It was comforting to me to know that Aaron knew he was going to Heaven. As challenging as everything was for him him battling his cancer, he remained such a good, caring person. His faith allowed him to never give up, in fishing or in his life.*

— Kevin VanDam, MLF pro

*"I got to spend time in Aaron's beloved tackle and trophy rooms, and it showed me how the rest of us anglers were just playing checkers. Aaron had always been playing chess. I loved getting to see a more intimate side of his brilliance, where a lot of his magic happened, in that tackle room at home. Looking at his sketchbooks, you could see his tremendous knowledge of fishing – he was just at another level. He truly was 1,000 percent committed to bass fishing. I try to simplify things, and Aaron just kept expanding. How his mind worked was amazing. My mind would explode trying to keep track of his tackle. Things like that made him incredible."*

— Brent Chapman, MLF pro

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# FROM ITALY TO ALABAMA

**JACOPO GALLELLI GIVES IT ALL FOR ANGLING**

*IN THE TOURNAMENT FISHING WORLD, THERE'S A TRUISM YOU'LL OFTEN HEAR FROM SUCCESSFUL PROS: DON'T LEAVE FISH TO FIND FISH. FOR JACOPO GALLELLI AND HIS DREAM OF BECOMING THE FIRST-EVER EUROPEAN TOURING PROFESSIONAL, THERE WAS NO OTHER OPTION.*

---

*By Joe Sills*

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

It started with a line. There was no rod, no reel; just line, a hook and a grub. A fishing trip that would take Jacopo Gallelli on a journey of 5,000 miles and 39 years began without even a reel, in the sunflower-speckled fields and rolling hills of Tuscany. There, a young Gallelli would walk the banks of Lago di Chiusi with his two older brothers, Clelio and Duccio.

The more experienced anglers would cast spinning reels. Jacopo would patiently toss a line into the water, hauling sunfish to shore with his fingertips.

"It's a place that is fixed in my mind," Gallelli says. "Lake Chiusi is gorgeous. It's filled with wheat fields and vineyards, with cypress and hills. It's the place where I caught my first fish."

That first catch became a seminal moment in Gallelli's story. It was the moment the sport hooked him for life. There, on the shores of Lake Chiusi, he immediately proclaimed that he would become a fisherman one day.



Scenes from Italia: Gallelli fishing as a child (top) and with his son Lapo, in front of the Ponte Vecchio in Florence.



A bass roughly this size, caught on the River Arno in Italy, inspired Gallelli's dedication to bass fishing.

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

## FROM FIRST FISH TO FANATIC

Instantly, the urge to fish became all-consuming. In the classroom at his elementary school, Gallelli bent his will toward fishing. Guessing that fishermen didn't need to know much about writing, he tried to focus exclusively on math in order to help him count them. In fact, it was only after his mother told him that he would have to learn to write to apply for a fishing license that he began to take the written word seriously.

On the water, the Gallelli brothers began to perfect the art of angling on Lake Chiusi.

"I learned how to use a pole and a bobber to catch perch and white fish," Gallelli recalls. "Then, we discovered that we could use better baits to catch more bass and pike. We would dip a net in the grass to capture freshwater shrimp and tadpoles that we could use for bigger fish."

By age 12, Gallelli was becoming an adept bass angler. He traded Lake Chiusi for the River Arno – the ancient, rippling pulse of Tuscany that careens through his hometown of Florence before winding past a series of flood control works designed by Leonardo Da Vinci and colliding with the Mediterranean Sea some 150 miles from its source. One afternoon on the Arno, the bass fishing bug that bit during childhood sunk its teeth in for life.

"I'll never forget that bass," Gallelli says. "I had caught many bass before that one, but this was the big one, a 5-pounder."

The bona fide lunker sealed Gallelli's future as an angler. He spent the ensuing years competing in local tournaments in Italy, where Gallelli says the bass fishing lifestyle paints a striking contrast to any in North America.

"My family home is in the center of Florence in the historical area," he says. "There, everything is completely the opposite. There is no parking. All the cars are very small. The streets are narrow, and you cannot have a garage to store a boat. Most families do not own houses; they live in apartments that are six or seven floors. Outside, there are small trees and green spaces filled with lots of monuments, churches and restaurants. It's very busy."

***"I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT BASS. I HAD CAUGHT MANY BASS BEFORE THAT ONE, BUT THIS WAS THE BIG ONE, A 5-POUNDER."***

In Italy, Gallelli enjoyed the fruits of city life. Dozens of restaurants were just minutes away on foot. Clothing, markets and parks were at his family's doorstep, as they had been for hundreds of years. And that's important to understand. It's important to understand the history of Florence to fully comprehend what the determined angler knew he would be giving up to pursue his dream.

By plucking a 5-pound bass out of the Arno, Gallelli unlocked dreams of even bigger bass. In Europe, catching bigger bass typically means a journey across an ocean to

swap the Old World for the New World. To live his dream, Gallelli would have to leave behind the city of Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Dante, Vespucci and the Medicis. He would sail away from its cobblestone streets and Renaissance skyline. And most of all, he would have to leave his family.

## PURSUING THE DREAM

Fifteen years later, Gallelli would find himself doing just that, launching his career on the Tennessee River, fatefully blasting off at Pickwick Lake from the town of Florence, Alabama at the 2018 B.A.S.S. Nation Championship.

Gallelli placed third in the event. That was good enough to qualify for the Knoxville-based 2019 Bassmaster Classic, won by Major League Fishing superstar Ott DeFoe. He finished just 49th in Knoxville, but the experience was enough to convince Gallelli he could compete at the highest level in the United States. It was enough to push him to leave Italy for a full tournament season, fishing Phoenix Bass Fishing League events and Bassmaster Opens in a bid to qualify for the top tier of professional angling circuits.

That leap of faith both battered and thrilled him. Gallelli's inaugural season stateside was a rollercoaster of finishes from 40th to 115th, shaped by completely new waterways and the learning curve presented by new species of bass (with spotted bass and smallmouth being noticeably absent from Italian fisheries).

Gallelli notched two Top 10s in the Toyota Series during his sophomore season in 2020, which coincided with a worldwide pandemic that he says only served to widen the distance between he and his family and friends in Italy.

"Last year, the hardest part was to be alone, to be alone with your thoughts," he explains. "When you're alone, you are always with your thoughts. Some of those can be sad, and you have nobody there that can bring you another point of view or pick you up. Luckily, I have some good friends that I heard from on the phone that could help me. Some of them are Italian, but some are American, too."

Gallelli says those Americans include other anglers, marshals and tournament officials that he's met on his fledgling journey. To a person, he says they are rooting for him. To a person, he says Americans have been eager to help.

"That is what I love about America," he beams. "Everyone wants to be my friend. Everybody very much appreciates what they do, and they have an admiration for my dreams. They hear my story and they fight for me. In Italy, people can be envious of my dream."

## 2021: FROM LOW TO HIGH

Through 2021, travel restrictions between the United States and European Union meant that Gallelli had no chance to see his family during the tournament season. Weathering lonely nights, breakdowns and bad days on the

Gallelli's 2021 season was highlighted by a final day flurry on the Potomac River that resulted in a Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit trophy.



water, he leaned on the phone lines and his new American friends for support. But after a poor showing at Lake Eufaula, Gallelli says he was close to giving up completely.

"I did very bad there," he recalls. "I was not having a great season, and I honestly felt after that result that I was probably out of the championship race, which was my entire goal for the season."

***"I KNOW IT WILL BE TOUGH. I AM COMPETING AMONG SOME OF THE BEST ANGLERS IN THE WORLD, BUT I WANT TO STEP UP AGAIN."***

Rallied by allies on two continents, Gallelli scored his biggest win to date with an impressive win at the Potomac River in the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit in June. That victory was followed by a podium finish at the next Bass Pro Tour event on Lake Champlain, where bass fishing's Italian Stallion held on to second place – one spot ahead of DeFoe and one behind Jacob Wheeler – after suffering an equipment failure on the final day of competition.

He's used the proceeds of those victories, along with hard-earned sponsorships, to purchase a camper for the upcoming 2022 tournament season. In a few weeks, Gallelli will return to the United States with reinforcements.

In 2022, Gallelli will have his girlfriend, Federica, and dog, Jago, by his side. They'll arrive as a complete package with dreams set on catching enough bass to eventually buy a house in America. For now, however, it's life on the highway.

"I saw many people camping in my travels," Gallelli says. "Brett Hite, Takahiro Omori and a lot of other people I have met on the trail have a Lance camper. I have no experience camping, but I understand that camping is the way to do it, so I am going to learn. I'm going to have to learn how to build a campfire, all of that."

To haul the camper, Gallelli has gone full-on American and readied an arsenal of pro-level tournament equipment at a makeshift base in Wetumpka, Alabama. There, a new Ford F-350, Phoenix 921 Elite and the camper await.

The goal? A Bass Pro Tour invitation.

"I know it will be tough," he admits. "I am competing among some of the best anglers in the world, but I want to step up again. If I can get in the Top 10 consistently and advance to the Bass Pro Tour, even if I don't win as much money, I will be very happy."

This year, Gallelli hopes his childhood dreams will continue to pay off. For almost 40 years, he's focused his entire will on becoming a professional fisherman. He's followed the pledge of a young boy across oceans, to foreign lands and over foreign waters. He's paid his dues alongside his older brothers and fellow countrymen in Italy and among local knowledge-laden competitors in the United States. Through it all, the determined fisherman from Tuscany has held his own.

Now, as American highways carry his closest family along for the ride, he's betting it all on becoming Europe's first top-tier professional bass fisherman.

"There is no plan B," he says. "Plan B is dying." ■



PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

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# MASTERS

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IN EVERY CRAFT, THERE IS A MASTER: AN ARTIST, PLAYER OR PERFORMER OF CONSUMMATE SKILL WHOSE WORK SERVES AS A MODEL OR IDEAL ...

*As told by Tommy Biffle*

PHOTOS BY PHOENIX MOORE

**I**'ve always been a jig fisherman, but most of my career I spent flipping and pitching skirted jigs to shallow-water cover. It wasn't until 2009 that a friend of mine, Earl Collins, showed me a jig he designed. It was the first swing head jig I ever saw, and he told me about the fish he was catching on it.

I was pretty skeptical because it didn't look like any jig I had ever used. There was no skirt, and the hook wasn't fixed inside the head, so the bait swung back and forth when it hit cover. Also, Earl was fishing it with a 6-inch plastic worm, so it had a different action. It wasn't until about a year later that I finally tied one on and started experimenting with it.



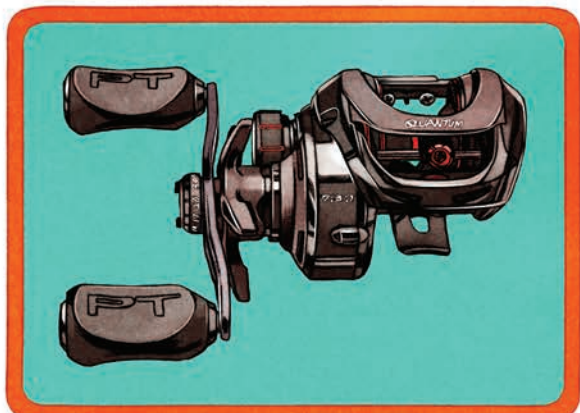
The first thing I did was change out the worm for a craw-style bait to get that crawdad look. I was practicing for a tournament on Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia and caught four 4-pound bass on consecutive casts. I haven't put it down since. There's just nothing like it for covering water and catching numbers of quality fish.

That swing head jig eventually became the Gene Larew Biffle HardHead. It's made in five weights from 3/16 to 1

ounce. About 80 percent of my fishing is done with that HardHead and a soft plastic bait I designed for Gene Larew called the "Biffle Bug." When you rig the Biffle Bug on the HardHead and start working it through cover, it looks like a crawdad trying to get away from a bass.

I call it "Buggin!"

It's an amazing combination that catches largemouths, smallmouths and spots from coast to coast and border to



border. About the only place I don't throw it is around mucky bottoms with no cover, but there usually aren't any bass in those places anyway.

## HIGHLIGHTS

I won a couple tournaments almost immediately after I gave the swing head a try. The bass had never seen anything

like it, and they'd never heard anything like it, either – banging around in the rocks.

I've won tournaments on the HardHead and Biffle Bug in Oklahoma, Tennessee, Wisconsin, on rivers and on lakes. I haven't found a body of water where it won't work.

## WHEN

I have the most success with the HardHead and Biffle Bug in the spring through the fall. For it to work, all you really need is bass that are holding shallow enough that you can reach them, and it's best if they're around some kind of cover, like rocks or brush ... but grass can be great, too. Some of the biggest bass I've ever caught Buggin' came from grass cover in Florida.

Ultimately, the swing head jig is a year-round bait. You just have to adjust for cover and conditions like water color and temperature.

## WHERE

The best place to throw the swing head is around cover like rocks and brush on banks that slope at about 45 degrees or less. If it's any steeper, it's harder to maintain bottom contact, especially if you're just getting started.

In grass – especially grass that's not extremely thick or matted – the Bug is a very different look for bass. It comes through vegetation well, but when it gets hung up a little and pulls free, it's like fishing a lipless crankbait. The bait pops out and the bass grab it.

## TACKLE

When I'm Buggin', I consider my tackle to be part of a system that's all working together to get me more bites and put more fish in the boat. I've refined my gear to the point that I very rarely adjust any part of it, no matter where I'm fishing.

It starts with 20-pound-test Sunline Shooter. It's a fluorocarbon line that really holds up in rock, brush, and other cover, plus it casts well, so I can cover a lot of water.

My rod is a heavy casting model – a 7-foot, 6-inch Quantum Smoke S3. It's a flipping rod. I'm better able to feel that HardHead bouncing through the cover on a heavy rod, and it gives me the power I need to make a good hookset.

The reel is a Quantum Smoke S3 with a 7.3:1 gear ratio. It casts well, and the speed is just right for finding the pace to keep the bait in contact with the bottom.

## LURES

As I said, about 80 percent of my overall fishing is done with a Gene Larew Biffle HardHead and Larew Biffle Bug. Even though the HardHead comes in five sizes, about 75 percent of my Buggin' is with the 7/16-ounce model. It has a 4/0 hook that's a perfect fit for my 4.25-inch Biffle Bug.

When I'm not using the 7/16-ounce HardHead, I'm usually throwing the 11/16-ounce version. It makes more racket bouncing through cover than lighter models, and sometimes that's what the bass want. I'll use a lighter HardHead in really shallow water or in grass cover.



The Bug comes in more than 40 colors, but my favorites are Sooner Run and Smoke Silver. One or the other seems to work well no matter where I'm fishing. I've won more money on Sooner Run, but Smoke Silver seems to be more versatile.

I try to match my color choice to the conditions. I like more translucent colors (like Sooner Run) in clear water, and darker colors (like Smoke Silver) in dark or stained water.

Once in a while, if the fishing's very tough, I'll swap out the Biffle Bug for a YUM Dinger. It has a subtle action that's sometimes what they want.

## BASICS

There's really no "wrong" way to fish a swing head jig – as long as you're catching fish – but my Buggin' technique will allow you to cover a lot of water and catch more quality fish than any other method I've used.

The first obstacle for most anglers who are new to the swing head jig is to think of it almost like a squarebill crankbait rather than a jig. You're not going to be lifting and dropping your rod tip or dragging the lure like you might with a regular jig. You're going to be cranking it, and you want to be reeling it as fast as you can while keeping it in contact with the bottom. That's what gives the bait action.

I generally keep my boat parallel to the bank and make long quartering casts. Then I let my Bug sink to the bottom, and I start reeling. If I feel it hit rocks or brush or other cover with every turn of the handle or so, I know I'm in good contact with the bottom.

Strikes can range from hard hits to simply losing contact with the bait and seeing your line

move off. When that happens, sweep your rod hard to the side, like you're setting the hook with a crankbait or jerkbait ... only harder. Since the bait has a single hook, you usually get good hook penetration.

If you find that your bait is losing contact with the bottom, slow down or go to a heavier head. If you're getting hung up a lot, speed up or go to a lighter head.

When the water's warm, the faster you can reel the bait and still keep it in contact with the bottom, the better the bass seem to like it. In cold water, you may have to slow down to match their metabolism.

## BONUS

To get the most out of your swing head jigs, you have to keep the bait in contact with the bottom

or with cover. This can be tough on steeper banks, so you shouldn't hesitate to go up in head weight. Using a 7/16-ounce head might be great much of the time, but if the bottom slopes off really quickly, don't give up on them. Just change to something heavier, like 11/16- or even a full ounce.

I also like to use scent with my baits. I think it makes a difference. It's why I added a hollow pocket to my design for the Biffle Bug. It holds scent really well. My favorite is Gene Larew Biffle Bug Juice. It's a crawfish gel that's been enhanced with garlic.

The hollow pocket on the Biffle Bug is not only great for scent, but it's also the perfect place to add a rattle to the lure. I don't do that when I'm fishing rock because the head of the bait banging around the bottom makes enough noise, but adding a rattle when you're fishing around grass will sometimes make a big difference. ■



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

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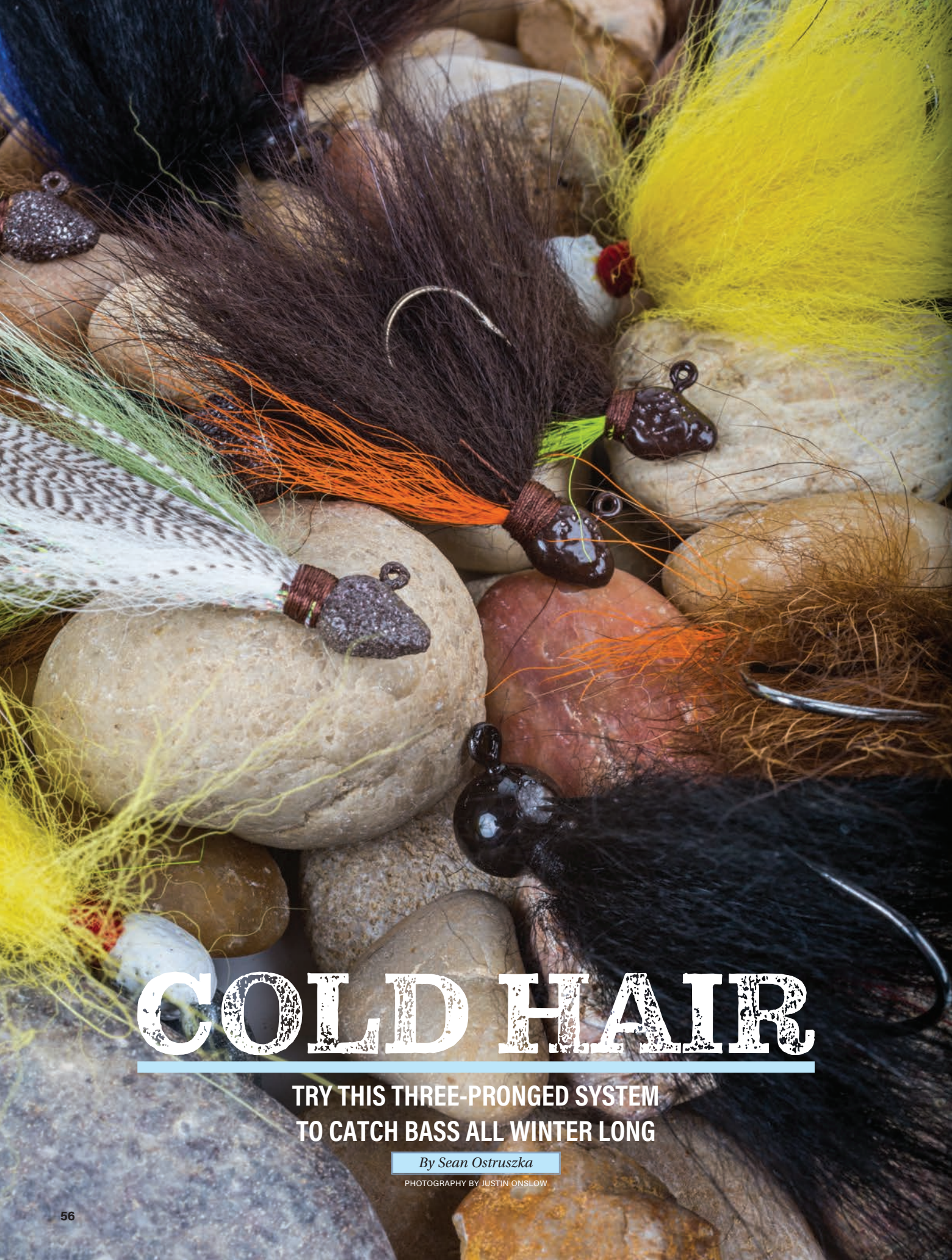
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# THE JUICE

TECHNIQUES,  
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PHOTO BY ROBERTA ISUURA



# COLD HAIR

TRY THIS THREE-PRONGED SYSTEM  
TO CATCH BASS ALL WINTER LONG

*By Sean Ostruszka*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN ONSLOW



***“THEY’LL MAKE YOUR  
WHOLE ROD JUMP IN YOUR  
HANDS SOMETIMES.”***

— Wally Kilpatrick

*“I thought you said this  
wouldn’t work here...”*

**S**tanley Dunn could barely bring himself to look in the direction of the statement. To be fair, few anglers can when such a statement is directed toward them. There’s not much gray area in its implication: You were wrong.

Then again, as he reached into the net to pull out yet another quality bass for his fishing partner, Dunn shouldn’t have been surprised. A student shouldn’t tell a master like Wally Kilpatrick something won’t work. It rarely turns out well.

And Kilpatrick truly is a master.

That’s why Dunn called him in the first place. He wanted to learn how to fish hair in the winter.

The owner of Yank-Um Custom Tackle, Kilpatrick is one the best with the techniques his company has become best known for: floating flies, aspirin-head hair jigs and micro hair jigs. Every winter, anglers around lakes like Dale Hollow, Cumberland, Tims Ford, Center Hill and other clear-water fisheries in Tennessee and Kentucky



## BIRD’S EYE VIEWS

**ELECTRONICS HAVE MADE** finding schools of baitfish easier than ever, but even if you’re terrible with your electronics, Mother Nature has your back.

“I often look for where the loons are in a creek,” says Kilpatrick. “They’ll always give away where the shad are located.”

Kilpatrick remembers the day he got clued in on them. He’d used his electronics to find the baitfish midway back in a creek in the morning, and he caught fish there before leaving to check another place. But when he came back, he idled all over the midsection of the creek but couldn’t find the baitfish.

“Then I noticed all the loons were near the mouth of the creek,” Kilpatrick says. “So I idled there, and that’s where the baitfish had moved.”

Sometimes the more primitive methods can be best when contemporary techniques fail you. And sometimes straying from the beaten path – and turning to tiny hair offerings – is all you need to turn a bad day into a bonanza when the water gets cold and the bite gets tough.

buy out stores of his diminutive jigs and flies.

So, seeing as Tims Ford is not all too far from Lake Chickamauga – where Kilpatrick calls home – Dunn assumed that’s where they’d go to learn the technique. Kilpatrick had other plans.

“I said ‘Let’s just do it here on Chick,’” Kilpatrick says. “He said ‘There’s no way it’d work on a lake like that.’”

With that, the lesson had begun, and a short time later they were launching in Soddy Creek. They never even got on pad, idling until Kilpatrick found what he wanted. Kilpatrick then made five casts, had five “takedowns” of his floating fly and landed four fish over 5 pounds. The “you were wrong” statement came shortly thereafter.

Then again, it’s a pretty good assumption most people would have been (and continue to be) wrong about the effectiveness of these offerings. Yet, as Kilpatrick showed Dunn and even anglers like Toyota Series pro Todd Hollowell, these lures will catch bass all through the winter months, often better than whatever you’re using on more lakes than you imagine.



Yank-Um Custom Tackle Floating Fly

## CLEAR AND COLD

Alabama rigs, jerkbaits, blade baits, spider jigs – when it comes to winter offerings, these are what most people turn to. Hollowell is among them in many instances on the lakes near his home in Indiana for one key reason.

“The lakes by me are too dirty [for hair jigs and flies],” Hollowell says. “These are small, slow offerings the fish need to be able to see.”

So then how did Kilpatrick put on his lesson on a lake like Chickamauga, which has the classic Tennessee River green tint that one could hardly consider clear water?

“It was all about location,” Kilpatrick explains. “Soddy Creek is known as the clearest creek on Chickamauga, and since it was the winter, it was even clearer.”

“I’d say you need at least 4 or 5 feet of visibility for the techniques to work, with more obviously being better. But with how precise you can be now with electronics, 5 feet is enough.”

He had more than enough of that in Soddy Creek that day, and he also had another necessity: water below 55 degrees (it was 51 degrees that day).

That magic double-nickel number is Kilpatrick’s cue to start digging out the floating flies, as that’s often the cue for baitfish to start schooling up in deep water. Considering these techniques are not ones to cover water, Kilpatrick wants the baitfish schooled tight so he can be as precise as possible with his offerings.

Precision often also means being extra precise with where the baitfish are located.

“When I enter a creek, I set my side-scanning sonar at 60 feet and idle around for bait balls,” Kilpatrick says. “Once I find some, I then switch to down-scanning sonar to look for the closest structure to the bait. Usually, it’s nooks and crannies on secondary points midway back in creeks. It could even be a transition from gravel to clay. Whatever it is, if it has deep water nearby (30 feet or more), that’s the spot.”

From there, it’s just a matter of which offering to throw and, just as important, how to throw it.

## FLOATING FLY

- **Water temperature:** 40-55 degrees
- **Setup:** 8-foot Yank-Um Custom Tackle medium-light spinning rod, Lew’s MC spinning reel, 5-pound-test K9 Crappie Braid to a three-way swivel, with the weighted bobber attached to one end of the swivel and a 10-foot leader of 6-pound-test K9 Clear Fluorocarbon tied to a 1/16-ounce Yank-Um Custom Tackle Floating Fly
- **Presentation:** Imagine a tiny gnat buzzing and dancing right in your face. Regardless of how much patience you have, at some point you’re going to snap and swat at that thing. It’s just too annoying.

That’s exactly the mindset behind a floating fly. Let it sit in a bass’ face long enough and he’s going to eat it.

Kilpatrick will set his boat right on the edge of deep water off the structure he’s fishing, casting as far as he can. Once the lure hits the water, it’s going to take a while to get to the bottom (it’s only 1/16-ounce after all). Fortunately, the bobber will lay on its side the entire descent, finally tipping up only once the jig is at the end of the leader.

From there, Kilpatrick uses his rod tip to twitch the bobber VERY subtly to try and almost walk it like you would a walk-the-dog topwater lure. He’ll twitch it a couple times and then let it sit at a dead stop for 10 to 15 seconds before “walking” the bobber ever so slowly forward.

“It probably takes me five minutes to retrieve each cast,” Kilpatrick explains. “But the fish can eat that fly at the beginning of the cast or almost right next to the boat. You just need to really watch that bobber when it’s stopped, because they always eat it on the stop. Even a 7-pounder will take it down slowly like a bream bite.”

In terms of colors, if he’s just fishing for smallmouth, he’ll go with a shad imitator – the flank feather off a mallard is cream colored with black bars, making it Kilpatrick’s favorite shad color. However, if there’s a mix of green and brown bass, he’ll switch to a crayfish color – the olive orange and brown hairs from an artic fox are his favorite, as they move even better than traditional bucktail hair and far more than synthetic hair.

In terms of why he starts with the floating fly over the others is twofold: It seems to work better with slightly warmer water temperatures, and it also seems to catch bigger fish.

## ASPIRIN-HEAD HAIR JIG

- **Water temperature:** 32-52 degrees
- **Setup:** 7-foot, 6-inch Yank-Um Custom Tackle medium-light spinning rod, Lew's MC spinning reel, 5-pound-test K9 Crappie Braid to a 10-foot leader of 6-pound-test K9 Clear Fluorocarbon tied to a 3/16-ounce Yank-Um Custom Tackle Aspirin Head Jig
- **Presentation:** Winter is usually a time for subtle presentations, but even cold bass sometimes need to be forced into biting.

That's where the aspirin head comes in.

While the floating fly targets fish that are suspended or willing to come up off the bottom to eat something, the aspirin head is designed to be fished on the bottom for fish too cold and lethargic to even suspend.

Fortunately, this jig is slightly heavier than the floating fly, but after casting it out, you'll still want to watch your line to see when it goes limp, indicating it's on the bottom. From there, the retrieve is actually more aggressive than you might think.

"It's a double-pop retrieve," Kilpatrick instructs. "You do a quick, short pop followed with a longer pop-pull before letting it fall back to the bottom on a tight line. They'll usually eat it on the fall, and when they do, you'll know. You won't just see your line jump. They'll make your whole rod jump in your hands sometimes."

As for colors, even Kilpatrick laughs.

"Bright yellow," he says. "It doesn't resemble anything, and if it's warmer than 52 degrees they won't touch it, but as soon as it gets to be 52 degrees or colder, they fire on it."



Yank-Um Custom Tackle Micro Hair Jig



Yank-Um Custom Tackle  
Aspirin-Head Hair Jig

## MICRO HAIR JIG

- **Water temperature:** 32-45 degrees
- **Setup:** 7-foot, 6-inch Yank-Um Custom Tackle medium-light spinning rod, Lew's MC spinning reel, 5-pound-test K9 Crappie Braid to a 10-foot leader of 6-pound-test K9 Clear Fluorocarbon tied to a 1/16-ounce Yank-Um Custom Tackle Crappie Hair Jig
- **Presentation:** Take everything you do with the aspirin-head jig and apply it to the micro jig, with one key caveat.

"When the fishing is so tough they won't eat the aspirin head, especially when it gets really cold, that's when this micro jig shines," Kilpatrick says.

Where the aspirin-head may be 2 3/4 inches long, this micro jig is 3/8 to 1/2 inch in length. Which brings back the "buzzing gnat" aspect of the floating fly, but in a more aggressive presentation that can still elicit reaction strikes.

Two things to note with this presentation are that because the jig is so tiny and light, both Hollowell and Kilpatrick admit it takes a lot of practice to be efficient, especially with cold hands in winter.

Still, if you can get it down, don't let the small presentation fool you. Hollowell says he can't count how many 5-pounders he's caught on it, and Kilpatrick has seen smallmouth in excess of 7 pounds fall victim to the itty-bitty offering.

That said, neither it nor the other two techniques mentioned here are ones you'll load the boat with. Sure, there are days you'll catch more than 20 fish in a day, but all of them tend to be more about catching quality over quantity.

Just don't tell Kilpatrick it won't work. ■

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# NEW YEAR, NEW GEAR!

**T**he holiday season and turn of the calendar from 2021 to 2022 seems like a great excuse (er, reason) to load up for the fishing season ahead. Here's a hearty list of recommendations from several MLF pros and *Bass Fishing* magazine's editorial staff on must-have new gear for 2022.

One of the most efficient, effective ways to get connected with the latest and greatest gear to add to your bass-fishing arsenal is to survey the pros who have already been fishing that gear (successfully!) in recent months. For this year's annual gear guide, we sought out several Bass Pro Tour and Pro Circuit pros for advice on the new rods, reels, line, baits, etc., that they've crash-tested in 2021. Keep this guide handy when you next surf over to [tacklewarehouse.com](https://www.tacklewarehouse.com) or head into your local tackle shop.

**MLF** = PRO PICK

## HARD BAITS

THE HARD BAIT category covers the water column from literally top to bottom, and the following list of baits follows suit:

You'll find some new topwater options, some shallow divers and medium divers, and a handful of baits that are at their best digging into/dragging along the bottom.



### BERKLEY CHOPPO 75 **MLF**

I love the Choppo in the new 75 size - it's just so short and fat, the bass have to have it. The plastic tail displaces a ton of water, even when you're reeling it slowly. I also love that this bait comes with Fusion19 treble hooks, probably the best treble hooks on the market in my opinion.

*\$10.99 at TW / [berkley-fishing.com](http://berkley-fishing.com)*

— Bobby Lane, MLF pro



### BERKLEY STUNNA **MLF**

This is one of the best jerkbaits I've ever seen. It already comes with Berkley Fusion19 treble hooks on it, so there's no need to change the hooks. You don't need a lot of flashy colors with this bait. The Stunna has amazing castability and a slow sink, making it my favorite jerkbait for cold-water situations.

*\$14.99 at TW / [berkley-fishing.com](http://berkley-fishing.com)*

— Edwin Evers, MLF pro



### YO-ZURI 3DB 1.5 MR **MLF**

I can never have enough of these crankbaits - there's always fish that live shallow, and this is one of the best baits to cover water, any time of the year. The paint is on the inside instead of painted on the outside, so no matter how many docks you bang it off of, the paint stays true.

*\$7.49 at TW / [yo-zuri.com](http://yo-zuri.com)*

— Zack Birge, MLF pro



### STRIKE KING CHICK MAGNET **MLF**

The ol' Chick Magnet: this bait comes straight from the hills of East Tennessee, and it's one that I was a little bit cautious about letting out there. You know how we are about our flat-sided crankbaits in East Tennessee, there's probably a thousand different crankbaits being built in a thousand home garages all over East Tennessee. The Chick Magnet actually came from an old bait that we fished on Lake Chickamauga for years called the '24' - it's a flat-sided bait with a circuit-board bill, so it has a little harder wobble and a pretty aggressive dive. When that water is cold and maybe has a little color or even dirty water, fish will really bite this bait.

*\$9.99 at TW / [strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)*

— Andy Morgan, MLF pro



### Z-MAN CHATTERBAIT MINIMAX AND BIG BLADE CHATTERBAIT

Z-Man's ChatterBait lineup continues to expand as anglers find new ways to fish a bladed jig. Now, there's a model for nearly every application with the introduction of the MiniMax and Big Blade models that are suited for both ends of the spectrum: both subtle and maximum thump.

*\$8.99 for MiniMax; \$11.99 for Big Blade at TW / [zmanfishing.com](http://zmanfishing.com)*

— The Editors



### RAPALA OTT'S GARAGE TINY 4 **MLF**

The OG Series was a series of baits that I've wanted or needed for a long time, and Tiny is the next in the line. It's a small-profile, circuit-board-bill, flat-sided bait that dives 4 feet and has an action very similar to a Shad Rap but with a little bit different profile.

*\$8.99 at TW / [rapala.com](http://rapala.com)*

— Ott DeFoe, MLF pro



### STRIKE KING HYBRID HUNTER

Available in two sizes (3 and 3 1/2 inches) that cover everything from 2 to 5 feet, the Hybrid Hunter from Strike King is as effective as it is unique thanks to its unconventional bill shape, which creates erratic deflection off cover. MLF pro Dakota Ebare used the Hybrid Hunter at the 2021 Toyota Series Championship on Pickwick Lake en route to an eighth-place finish and swears by its unique action for fishing everything from shallow hard bottoms to grass.

*\$8.99 for all models at TW / [strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)*

— The Editors



### BILL LEWIS MR-12 **MLF**

This is the big brother to the MR-6 crankbait: the new MR-12 dives to 12 feet as opposed to the normal 6 feet. The MR-12 has a weight-transfer system that allows you to cast it a mile, along with great action while it's in the water.

*\$8.99 at TW / [rat-l-trap.com](http://rat-l-trap.com)*

— Mark Daniels Jr., MLF pro



**BERKLEY POWERBAIT AGENT E** 

Of course, I have to throw in the bait I helped design, because it's a bait that bass have never seen before. Anytime you can show a bass a bait they've never seen before, your catch rate goes through the roof. This bait truly represents a goby, bluegill or crawdad. I feel like we made this bait absolutely perfect: From the fiber weed guard to the hook to the rattle to the hard nose - along with the Powerbait scent and the paint jobs - I just have a ton of confidence in this bait.

\$10.99 at TW / [berkley-fishing.com](http://berkley-fishing.com)

— Edwin Evers, MLF pro

**SOFT BAITS**

**LET'S BE HONEST** about this: You're probably going to catch more fish this year on soft plastics than anything else.

Thankfully, manufacturers continue to develop shapes, scents, colors and sizes that compel you to try them (and fish to bite them!). Here are the soft baits we're betting on in 2022.



**STRIKE KING MIDSIZE RAGE BUG** 

The Rage Bug is arguably one of Strike King's best plastic shapes, and with the Midsize we now have the Rage Bug in four sizes, from a 3-inch size up to the Magnum Rage bug in 4.5 inches. This new 3.38-inch Midsize is a more subtle size that's great for smallmouth fishing.

\$5.99 at TW / [strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)

— Kevin VanDam, MLF pro



**13 FISHING LUNCH BUG**

Sometimes simple is best, and simple is what you get in the design of the 13 Fishing Lunch Bug. With a slender, cylindrical body (making it exceptionally weedless for flipping and punching) and two large appendages for moving water and imitating one of a bass' favorite lunch items, the Lunch Bug packs a big punch in a small, simple package. Available in 10 colors.

\$5.99 at TW / [13fishing.com](http://13fishing.com)

— The Editors



**SAVAGE GEAR PULSE TAIL LB SWIMBAIT**

Available in 12 hyper-realistic colors, the 5 1/2-inch Savage Gear Pulse line-through bluegill swimbaits were designed from 3D imaging of real bluegills and use materials perfectly suited to match the movement of the real thing. The line-through design is perfect for keeping fish pinned given the weight of the bait (3 ounces for the slow-sinking model, 3 1/3 for the moderate) and come in at an attractive \$15.99 at TW.

[savage-gear.com](http://savage-gear.com)

— The Editors



**SPRO BRONZEYE POPPING FROG 40** 

We came out with the Popping Frog 70 in 2020, but the Popping Frog 40 went in the other direction. This is a great little bait for ponds, smaller rivers and streams - it's a low profile (frog). It's more of a spinning rod application: 15-pound braid where you can get some distance and good hook-up ratios.

\$8.39 at TW / [tacklewarehouse.com/SPRO](http://tacklewarehouse.com/SPRO)

— Dean Rojas, MLF pro



**BERKLEY POWERBAIT MAXSCENT FLAT WORM (4.25 INCH)** 

A MaxScent version of the Flat Worm, one of the best soft plastic baits I've ever used to catch smallmouth and largemouth: I'm in. I made Heavy Hitters thanks to the 4.25-inch Flat Worm: it caught me a 5-pound, 5-ounce smallmouth on Lake St. Clair in the final event of 2021.

\$6.99 at TW / [berkley-fishing.com](http://berkley-fishing.com)

— Bobby Lane, MLF pro



**GOOGAN BAITS DART** 

I was able to win a tournament on the Dart this year. It's a soft-plastic jerkbait that comes in a variety of shad colors and it's been awesome for my soft jerkbait needs as well as a ChatterBait trailer. It's been a very versatile bait for me and the green pumpkin purple color, new for this year, has been a staple for me.

\$5.99 at TW / [googansquad.com](http://googansquad.com)

— Matt Becker, MLF pro



**Z-MAN HELLA CRAWZ** 

I had a big hand in developing this bait with Z-Man and I believe it's one of the best all-around soft plastics you can buy. It's a great bait for pitching and flipping, but it also works wonders as a jig trailer. Whatever you want to do with a craw-style bait, this thing can do.

\$4.49 at TW / [zmanfishing.com](http://zmanfishing.com)

— Mark Daniels Jr., MLF pro

**MLF** = PRO PICK

## TERMINAL TACKLE & JIGS

**THERE'S NOT A TOUR-LEVEL PRO** in the world who takes terminal tackle or jigs for granted, and neither should you. These are two of the smallest, most basic components of our gear list, but the following collection of jigs and terminal gear can be H-U-G-E players in your success in 2022.



### STRIKE KING WEEDLESS SQUADRON HEAD

The original Squadron Head by Strike King became an instant must-have for swimbait anglers around the country when it came out in 2012, but the new Weedless Squadron Head expands this jighead's versatility even more. A heavy-duty fiber brush guard allows you to fish swimbaits and various other plastics through heavy cover more effectively, all while maintaining the best qualities of the original design (60-degree line tie, wide-gap black nickel hook, etc.)

\$5.49 at TW / [strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)

— The Editors



### GAMAKATSU G-FINESSE COVER NEKO HOOK

Designed by MLF pro Shin Fukae, the Cover Neko Hook offers a line-twist-free (and more weedless) solution for the Neko rig. The no-twist function is provided by a premium swivel attached to the hook eye. This also allows you to Texas-rig a worm but still fish it like a Neko, so you're able to work through brush, laydowns, timber, grass, etc., more efficiently. The hook is a shiner-style, straight-eye hook in sizes 1 to 2/0 (perfect for Neko-size baits). The hook includes a 90-degree wire keeper to lock plastics into place.

\$7.99 at TW / [gamakatsuusa.com](http://gamakatsuusa.com)

— The Editors



### BERKLEY JIGS

Many anglers (ourselves included) wondered when Berkley would answer the bell with a lineup of jigs, and late 2021 saw the delivery of a whole squad of PowerBait-infused jigs to tackle store pegs. Berkley's Finesse, Swim, Flipping, Heavy Cover, Skippin' and Football jigs are all constructed on Fusion19 jig hooks and highlighted by a punch of PowerBait in the silicone skirts. The jighead designs are the product of exhaustive testing and tweaking by MLF pros Gary Klein and Bobby Lane, two of the best jig fishermen in the world. Each jig style comes in a unique palette of colors to match the application.

\$4.99 at TW / [berkley-fishing.com](http://berkley-fishing.com)

— The Editors



### EPIC BAITS JIGS **MLF**

It's a unique style, almost a little rounder than a normal football jig. It has a strong hook, a good bait keeper and just the right amount of flex in the weed guard. I've had good luck keeping fish pegged. It's an all-around great-quality jig. That's Epic Baits' thing. They don't cut corners.

\$4.99 at TW / [epicbaitsfishing.com](http://epicbaitsfishing.com)

— Matt Becker, MLF pro



### VMC CROSSOVER RINGS **MLF**

This is the next level up from using O-rings to get more out of your soft plastic worms. The Crossover Ring has revolutionized the way that I wacky- or Neko-rig my baits. This ring allows you to rig your bait perpendicular or parallel to the hook, which is a game changer.

\$4.49 at TW /

[tacklewarehouse.com/VMC/catpage-VMC](http://tacklewarehouse.com/VMC/catpage-VMC)

— Jacob Wheeler, MLF pro



### BRUISER BAITS TUNGSTEN NED HEAD

Step up your Ned rig game in 2022 with some tungsten Ned heads, like the newest offering from Bruiser Baits that comes standard with a flat-black finish that's guaranteed to never chip or crack. Bruiser Baits' tungsten Ned heads are molded to a Mustad Ultra Point hook and utilize a solid wire bait keeper. Available in sizes from 1/10 to 1/6 ounce with options for 1/0 and 2/0 hooks.

\$5.59-\$6.19 at TW / [bruiserbaits.com](http://bruiserbaits.com)

— The Editors



### 6TH SENSE CAROLINA PRE-RIG

Save the time and hassle of rigging up Carolina rigs with the new Carolina Pre-Rig from 6th Sense. Everything you need in one quick-to-connect setup, the Carolina Pre-Rig is built with durable, flexible wire and comes available in 1/2, 3/4 and 1 ounces in both lead and tungsten.

\$3.99 (lead); \$6.99 (tungsten) at TW /

[6thsensefishing.com](http://6thsensefishing.com)

— The Editors



## SPIDERWIRE DURABRAID

Braided line is all about strength and abrasion resistance, and the early read on Spiderwire's newly redesigned DuraBraid is that it provides both. It's at the top of the charts for strength in the four-carrier braid category, but its abrasion resistance is off the charts. The new DuraBraid is 25 percent tougher than competitive braided lines, according to the manufacturer, so it's designed to stand up to the wear and tear of rocks, stumps, docks and the thickest vegetation you'll flip, pitch or cast it into. Just like its predecessor (DuraBraid 4), the new DuraBraid provides excellent castability as well. Available in moss green in seven line tests from 10 to 80 pounds.

From \$13.99 / [spiderwire.com](http://spiderwire.com)

— The Editors



## STRIKE KING CONTRA MLF

I've used CONTRA and I like it a lot. I tested it out a bunch this year and I use it in tournament situations. I truly believe in it. It's a little bulkier line than normal, but that helps with durability. I love flipping and I really put that stuff to the test. It holds up.

\$8.99 to \$79.99 at TW / [strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)

— Cole Floyd, MLF pro



## YO-ZURI T-7 PREMIUM FLUOROCARBON MLF

This is the fluorocarbon line I use all the time. The quality of T-7 Premium is second to none — you can trust that the line strength on the package is what it says it is.

\$17.99 to \$29.99 at TW / [yo-zuri.com](http://yo-zuri.com)

— Zack Birge, MLF pro



## SPIDERWIRE STEALTH SMOOTH8 DUAL SPOOL

Spiderwire's nifty new Stealth Smooth8 Dual Spool pairs a 125-yard filler spool of 8- to 20-pound Stealth Smooth8 braid with a 25-yard leader spool of 8- to 12-pound Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon. The fluoro spool locks into place inside the Spiderwire, providing an extremely handy braid-to-fluoro package.

\$15.99 / [tacklewarehouse.com/Spiderwire](http://tacklewarehouse.com/Spiderwire)

— The Editors



## RAPALA COMPACT LINE REMOVER

If you fish a lot, you know the importance of adding fresh line to your reels. Rapala makes that task a lot quicker and easier with their compact line remover, which measures in at just 5 inches and runs on a pair of AA batteries that power a motor capable of stripping 6 inches of line per second.

\$22.99 at TW / [rapala.com](http://rapala.com)

— The Editors

## LINE & LINE ACCESSORIES

ADVANCEMENTS IN ROD AND REEL technology have brought similar gains in fishing line. Rightfully so: You have rods and baits designed for very specific, detailed applications, and it only makes sense that your line should be equally matched.



## SEAGUAR BASIX MLF

Basix is good fluorocarbon at a better price point. It's still super strong, soft and casts well. It's quality at a great price. Great knot strength. Invisible underwater. It has all the qualities of a higher-dollar fluorocarbon. At the end of the day, it's just not going to break the bank.

\$9.99 at TW / [seaguar.com](http://seaguar.com)

— Dakota Ebare, MLF pro



## SEAGUAR TACTX MLF

TactX is a lot cheaper than the typical braid. It has a camo multicolor strand weaved in so it blends in and fish can't see it as well. It's a super-strong four-strand braid, which helps reduce backlashes and cutting into the reel. It's a nice, round braid, and a round braid casts better. No stretch, cuts through vegetation just like every other braid but it's a better value than most.

\$16.99 to \$31.99 at TW / [seaguar.com](http://seaguar.com)

— Dakota Ebare, MLF pro



## SUFIX 131 BRAID MLF

This is a 13-carrier braid, which makes it super smooth and round on your reel. This is some of the best punching line you can buy and can be super slick on your spinning reels. This is the best of the best in my opinion.

\$16.99 to \$31.99 / [tacklewarehouse.com/Sufix](http://tacklewarehouse.com/Sufix)

— Jacob Wheeler, MLF pro

MLF = PRO PICK

## RODS

IF THERE'S ONE CATEGORY of bass gear that sparks the heartiest debate, it's rods. Understandably so: The rod is the one component of your fishing arsenal that you're in direct physical contact with on every single cast you make. Most anglers have their favorite manufacturers, and most are undeniably picky about actions, power, length and the like. Here are our can't-miss rods for the 2022 season.



### G. LOOMIS NRX+

G. Loomis has long been ahead of the curve when it comes to technique-specific rods, so when they rolled out the NRX+ in 2021, the bass fishing world took notice. Improving on the original NRX lineup – a staple of high-end quality on the rod market – the new NRX+ series features 16 casting and 12 spinning models that take the technique-specific game to an entirely new level. **\$595 to \$625 at TW / [gloomis.com](http://gloomis.com)**  
— The Editors

### DUCKETT JACOB WHEELER SIGNATURE SERIES

The biggest misconception with fishing rods is that you have to have a \$300 or \$400 rod to do the job right, and that's just not the case. I fish with my signature series rods every day and they're under \$150 for both casting and spinning. That's all the proof you need that expensive doesn't always mean better. **\$139 at TW / [duckettfishing.com](http://duckettfishing.com)**  
— Jacob Wheeler, MLF pro



## FAVORITE FISHING SIGNATURE SERIES

With a stable of pros that can claim multiple Angler of the Year titles, a REDCREST trophy and millions of dollars in tournament winnings, Favorite Fishing went with its strengths in 2021 with their new Signature Series of rods built to fit the likes of Andy Morgan, Dustin Connell, Zack Birge, Mark Daniels Jr., Jon VanDam and Brian Latimer. For example: Morgan's 7-foot-6 Pro Battle rod – also nicknamed The Goat Flipping Stick – is built on a durable, lightweight 36-ton Japanese Toray blank that's both sensitive enough to feel every bite and strong enough to horse a big largemouth out of the kind of heavy cover that Morgan loves to flip. **\$149 to \$349 at TW / [favoriteusa.com](http://favoriteusa.com)**  
— The Editors



### FITZGERALD COMPOSITE SERIES

We put a lot of time and thought into the blank design of the Composite Series to build the ultimate moving-bait rod. It's a proprietary mix of S-glass and graphite: glass in the tip section, blending to graphite. That gives you the flex to make a long cast and lets the fish really get ahold of it; the blend into the graphite from the tip to the butt section gives you the power to fight the fish. **\$189.99 at TW / [fitzgeraldrods.com](http://fitzgeraldrods.com)**  
— Trevor Fitzgerald, MLF pro



### ABU GARCIA VERITAS TOURNAMENT

These are the rods that I use every day on the Bass Pro Tour, and I think they're some of the best rods you can buy for the price you're getting them. These rods come in six different sizes from 6-foot-10 all the way to 7-11 so any bait or scenario you find yourself in, there's a Veritas rod you can depend on. **\$169 to \$185 at TW / [abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)**  
— Bobby Lane, MLF pro



### ST. CROIX VICTORY SERIES

St. Croix went all out on the Victory Series of casting and spinning rods, and the results speak for themselves: This series of 24 technique-specific rods (16 casting, eight spinning) starts out with super high-modulus SCIII+ graphite blanks coupled with the Wisconsin company's Fortified Resin bonding technology, and then piles on the "awesome" with extra-high-quality guides, reel seats and handles. Lots to like here, Victory is definitely worth a look. **\$180 to \$260 at TW / [stcroixrods.com](http://stcroixrods.com)**  
— The Editors



### ABU GARCIA JORDAN LEE SERIES

I'm pretty proud of these rods. They're affordable, they're going to last you a long time, and they have all the actions and components that I like for specific techniques. There are 14 different rods – 12 casting, two spinning – and they're all under \$100. It's pretty awesome to put a quality rod in your hands at that price point. **\$89.95 at TW / [abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)**  
— Jordan Lee, MLF pro

## DAIWA BALLISTIC MQ LT

Daiwa's popular Ballistic spinning reel gets a hearty upgrade with the new Ballistic MQ LT, which is engineered around a new frame/body material - Monocoque Zaiion (the "MQ") - that makes the Ballistic lighter, less susceptible to torque/flex and more durable. The lighter body allows for larger Digigear gearing, which produces an upgrade in cranking power, smoothness and durability while also allowing for higher gear ratios than other reels of the same size and weight. The Ballistic MQ LT is Magsealed, Daiwa's internal-protection process that prevents water intrusion and guarantees smooth, long-lasting quality. Bottom line: a high-quality reel that will perform for years to come.

\$229.99 at TW / [daiwa.us](http://daiwa.us)

— The Editors



## REELS

**THE RIGHT REEL** is the foundation of every gear system you fish, no matter the technique. All the right baits, line, hooks and rods in the world aren't worth much if the workhorse of the system - the gear that actually *brings the fish to the boat* - isn't up to the task. These are the reels we'll depend on in 2022.



## ABU GARCIA ZENON

The Abu Garcia Zenon is the kind of spinning reel you keep in your arsenal for decades, which alone makes it worth the high-end price of about \$520. Factor in the weight (4.9 ounces for the 200-size option), the smooth drag and 10+1 bearings and the Zenon absolutely lives up to the hype. Spend now, save later.

\$519.95 at TW / [abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

— The Editors



## LEW'S HYPERMAG MAGNESIUM SPINNING

Lew's new flagship spinning reel was introduced at ICAST 2021 and arrives hot on tackle store shelves even as you read this. The Hypermag Magnesium spinning model borrows the dependable name of its casting cousin, but on a lightweight, strong magnesium body. Its 11 ball bearings and forged main gear guarantee smooth, powerful performance.

\$159.99 at TW / [lews.com](http://lews.com)

— The Editors



## FITZGERALD FX8



The FX8 has a very strong, lightweight graphite frame and a deep aluminum spool that holds plenty of line, and an all-metal handle so there's no flexing or torquing. It has eight ball bearings and makes 16 pounds of drag - there's just a lot of performance in this reel for a very affordable price.

\$129.99 at TW / [fitzgeraldrods.com](http://fitzgeraldrods.com)

— Trevor Fitzgerald, MLF pro



## 13 FISHING ORIGIN F1

Florida-based 13 Fishing went hard in the paint in the under-\$100 price range in 2021, with several new spinning and casting reels that provide excellent quality at legitimately great prices. The Origin F1 is the most notable entry into the price range, with seven ball bearings and a quality Venti 20-pound six-disc carbon drag system. Lots of good here for around \$70.

\$69.99 at TW / [13fishing.com](http://13fishing.com)

— The Editors



## DUCKETT PARADIGM SB



If you have an angler in your life that's looking to get into bass fishing - or even just looking to expand their arsenal - this reel is perfect for them. It's not too pricey and you'll be more than happy with the quality: eight ball bearings, lightweight, durable body; I recommend this reel to people all the time.

\$99 at TW / [duckettfishing.com](http://duckettfishing.com)

— Jacob Wheeler, MLF pro



## SHIMANO CURADO MGL 150

The new Curado MGL 150 from Shimano was designed with one thing in mind - versatility. The lightest-weight Curado ever made, the MGL 150's MagnumLite spool and precision gearing offer unparalleled smoothness and casting ability, and 13 pounds of drag paired with an aluminum HAGANE body make it a reel you can use to chase even the biggest bass. Available in three gear ratios in both left- and right-hand retrieves.

\$199.99 at TW / [fish.shimano.com](http://fish.shimano.com)

— The Editors

MLF = PRO PICK

## MISCELLANEOUS GEAR

UNLIKE BASEBALL, where you can play the game with literally two items – a stick and a ball – the game of catching bass usually requires a gear list that's above and beyond a rod and reel. As you contemplate the fishing year ahead, here are several items that will improve your time on the water.



### PLANO STOWALL UTILITY BAG MLF

I'm always looking for better ways to store things on my boat, and the new StowAll bags that Plano came out with in 2021 have solved a big problem for me – when you use volumes of soft plastics like I do and keep them in the packages they come in, it just takes up a lot of space. The StowAlls allow me to keep a lot of baits in one bag, and I can stuff it just about anywhere. It doesn't need a specific compartment.

\$6.99 to \$8.99 at TW / [plano.com](http://plano.com)

— Kevin VanDam, MLF pro



### LUMINOX LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLE

The Leatherback Sea Turtle is a 39mm watch with a carbon compound case. The face is made with tempered scratch-resistant crystal and is water resistant up to 100 meters. Also comes with self-powered illumination to read time no matter how dark it is before those early-morning takeoffs.

\$295 / [luminox.com](http://luminox.com)

— The Editors



### GRUNDENS SEAKNIT BOAT SHOE MLF

You probably don't think too much about your shoes when you're fishing, but you should. I've been wearing the SeaKnit all year, and it's hands down the best boat shoe I've ever worn. Just like most other people, I've always worn sneakers or court shoes or flip-flops when I'm fishing, but the SeaKnit has replaced all that. It's incredibly comfortable and it's a slip-on, so you can slip it on and off easy when you're putting on or taking off rain gear. It has a non-slip sole which is obviously important, and it has way more heel stability than a regular running shoe.

\$109.99 at TW / [grundens.com](http://grundens.com)

— Skeet Reese, MLF pro



### YETI BACKPACKS, DUFFELS AND LUGGAGE

With YETI, you know you're getting rugged construction in a waterproof, durable, stylish package. Now, you can add YETI backpacks, duffels and soft suitcases to your repertoire to store and carry everything from everyday carry to long trips. YETI's luggage lineup varies from 22-liter backpacks to 100-liter waterproof duffels and everything in between.

\$150 to \$450 at TW / [yeti.com](http://yeti.com)

— The Editors



### WILEY X KINGPIN MLF

I always had trouble finding sunglasses that could fit my face, but then Wiley X came out with the Kingpin series and I found one that works perfectly. They're my favorite sunglasses by far and with a variety of lenses for different light conditions. I can make out my targets that much easier.

\$140 / [MajorLeagueFishing.com](http://MajorLeagueFishing.com)

— Mark Daniels Jr., MLF pro



### ATG BY WRANGLER

ATG by Wrangler is a collection of everyday outdoor apparel that'll keep you dry and comfortable in all conditions. Try the Men's Mix Material Shirt, the Men's Performance Sun Shirt or the Men's Synthetic Utility Pants to complete your outdoor look.

\$39 to \$49 / [wrangler.com](http://wrangler.com)

— The Editors

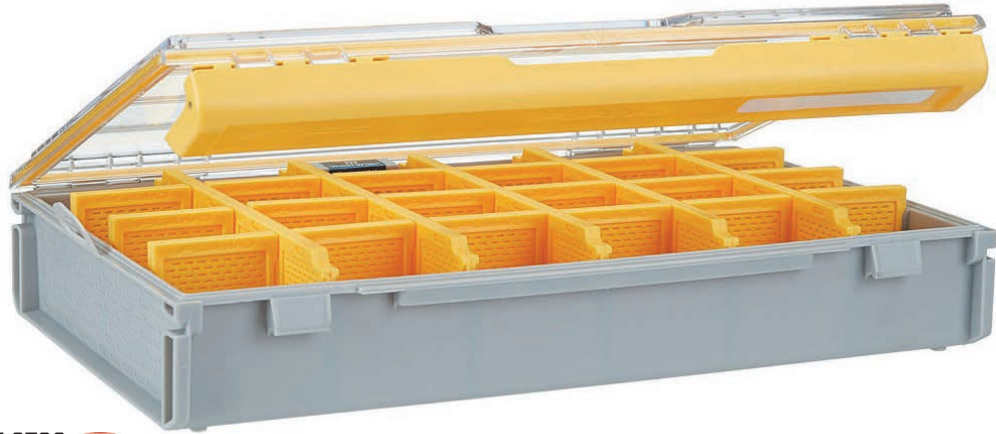


### TACKLE WAREHOUSE GIFT CARD MLF

You can get anything from Tackle Warehouse. That's where I get all my tackle, like a lot of people do. Their customer service is so freaking good. On Monday if I order my tackle, I know for a fact it'll be there on Wednesday in time for the tournament on Thursday. Hands down the best out there

Various prices at TW / [tacklewarehouse.com](http://tacklewarehouse.com)

— Dakota Ebare, MLF pro



## PLANO EDGE FLEX 3700

Plano changed things up in the storage category when they came out with the EDGE Series in 2020, but the new Flex Series gives you a whole different level of customization for your own needs. The EDGE 3700 takes the simple 3700-sized box - the foundation of my tackle system - adds a little extra depth and then gives me the ability to set the internal configuration with its divider system. I could set it for jerkbaits, squarebills, really anything I want. Everybody has slightly different ideas and needs for tackle storage. The sky's the limit with these boxes.

\$44.97 at TW / [plano.com](http://plano.com)

— Kevin VanDam, MLF pro



### MLF SHOP

The MLF Shop is the only place to get MLF-branded apparel, headwear and great deals on accessories from MLF partners like Luminox and Brecknell. New arrivals in the Shop for winter include the Featherlight Stretch Fishing Shirt - a blend of comfort and performance in a button-down long-sleeve - and new hats, stickers and Luminox watches.

Misc. prices / [shopMLF.com](http://shopMLF.com)

— The Editors



### T-H MARINE TACKLE TITAN TRAVELBOSS

T-H Marine engineered the TravelBoss by pulling together a number of features including a pair of built-in slotted rod holders, two rows of accessory loops, room for multiple tackle trays, a spacious and insulated cooler and four side pockets.

\$179.99 at TW / [thmarinesupplies.com](http://thmarinesupplies.com)

— The Editors



### MLF CHAMPION'S CLUB

There's a lot to be said for "pro knowledge" and a membership to the MLF Champion's Club connects you with that PLUS premium, pro-approved lures. Each month you receive five to six premium baits, in-depth how-to videos with MLF pros, exclusive discount codes and access to interactive webinars with Bass Pro Tour champions.

\$29.99 a month / [MajorLeagueFishing.com](http://MajorLeagueFishing.com)

— The Editors



### CHAMPION 2500-WATT DUAL FUEL INVERTER

This Champion model is one of the lightest 2500-watt inverters in the industry, with a 79cc Dual Fuel engine that allows it to run on gasoline or propane (you get 11.5 hours out of a full tank of gasoline and 34 hours out of a 20-pound bottle of propane). The optional parallel kit (sold separately) allows you to integrate two inverters, plus the kit has a standard 30A RV outlet and a 120V 30A locking outlet.

\$579 to \$599 / [championpowerequipment.com](http://championpowerequipment.com)

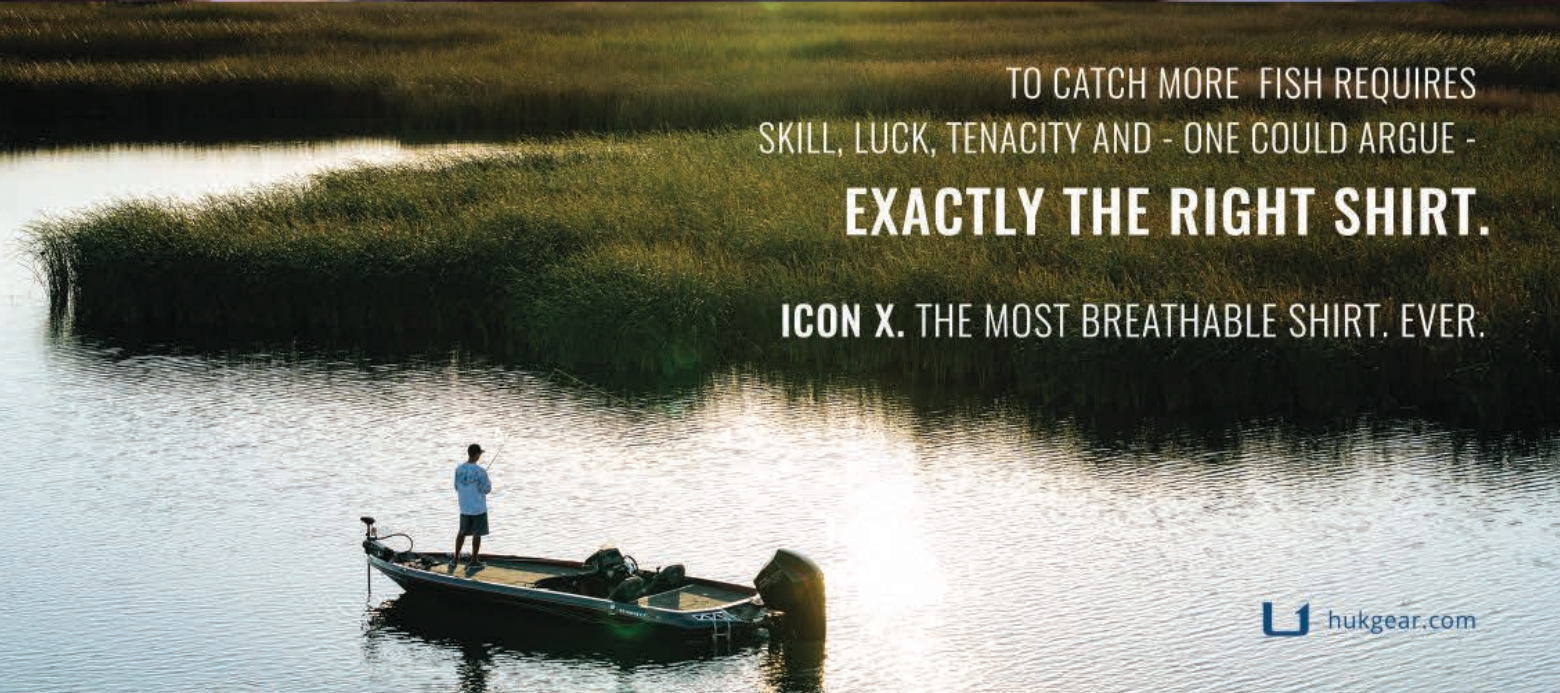
— The Editors

# Huk



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SKILL, LUCK, TENACITY AND - ONE COULD ARGUE -  
**EXACTLY THE RIGHT SHIRT.**

**ICON X. THE MOST BREATHABLE SHIRT. EVER.**





TOYOTA



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*Kevin Van Dam*

Team Toyota Angler

**THE POWERFUL TOYOTA TUNDRA – KVD’S TRUCK OF CHOICE.** One of the greatest bass fisherman of all time demands peak performance from himself and his rig. The Toyota Tundra consistently earns Kevin VanDam’s praise and trust with a 5.7L V8, up to 10,200 towing capacity, and massive braking power. The 2018 Bass Fishing Hall of Famer puts it bluntly, “It’s the best tow-vehicle I’ve ever owned.” Find out more at [Toyota.com/Tundra](http://Toyota.com/Tundra).

Vehicle shown with options. Vehicle shown is a special project car, modified with non-genuine Toyota parts and accessories. Modifications with these non-genuine parts or accessories will void the factory warranty, may negatively impact vehicle performance and safety, and may not be street legal. Before towing, confirm your vehicle and trailer are compatible, hooked up, loaded properly and that you have any necessary additional equipment. Do not exceed any Weight Ratings and follow all instructions in your Owner’s Manual. The maximum you can tow depends on base curb weight plus the total weight of any cargo, occupants, and added vehicle equipment. “Added vehicle equipment” includes additional standard / optional equipment and accessories added by the manufacturer, dealers, and / or vehicle owners. The only way to be certain of your vehicle’s curb weight is to weigh your vehicle without passengers or cargo. Calculated with new SAE J2807 method. Vehicle loaned to paid talent. Trademarks shown are those of their respective owners. \*Assembled in Texas with U.S. and globally sourced parts. ©2021 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. Inc.



TOYOTA

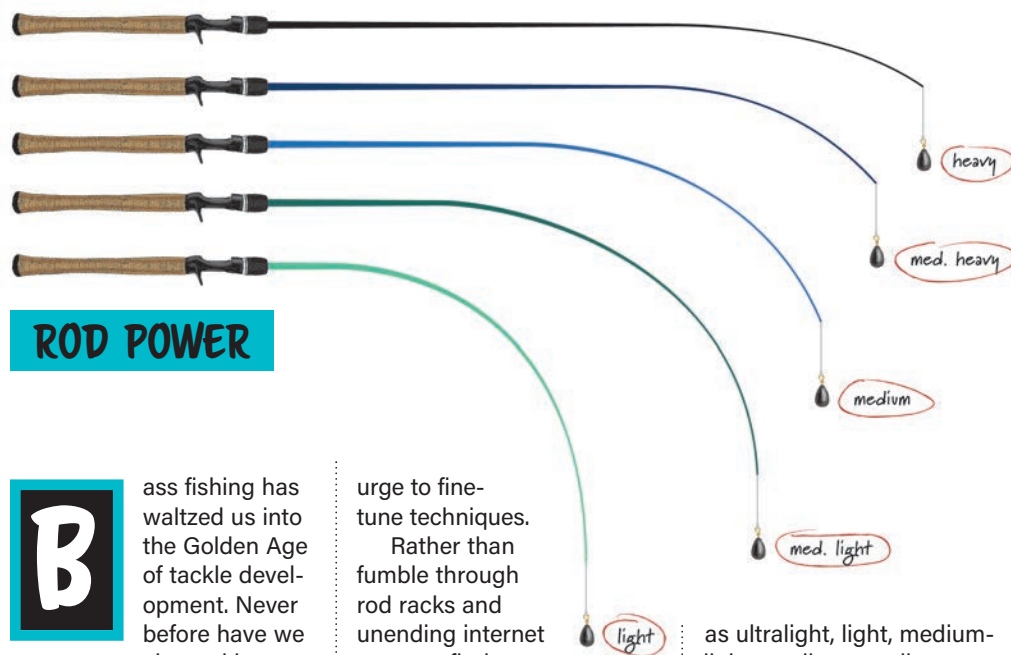
\*Assembled in Texas with U.S. and globally sourced parts.

# AN AVID ANGLER'S CHEAT SHEET FOR ROD SELECTION

No need to hunt for Cliff's Notes or sneak a cross-eyed peek at your fishing buddy's gear to find a rod that passes the test. Draw from these insider tips for matching tackle to technique before you make your next rod purchase.

By Mike Pehanich

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRANDON ROWAN



## ROD POWER

**B**ass fishing has waltzed us into the Golden Age of tackle development. Never before have we seen a more dogged hunt for lighter, stronger, more sensitive materials and components to sate the modern angler's wants and needs. Never before has so much thought and energy gone into tackle design, especially that of fishing rods.

But nothing has contributed more to the staggering proliferation of rod options than the angler's

urge to fine-tune techniques.

Rather than fumble through rod racks and unending internet quest to find your next "Mr. Right Rod," let this cheat sheet shortcut your hunt.

## FUNDAMENTAL RULES

First, understand the difference between "power" and "action," two critical and often-confused terms. "Power" refers to the amount of force or pressure it takes to flex a rod. Rod manufacturers classify rods

as ultralight, light, medium-light, medium, medium-heavy, heavy and, in some cases, extra heavy. Lure size and target species often dictate "power" selection.

"Action," often the hair-splitting difference in tailoring rod to technique, refers to a rod's taper and bend. A "fast" action rod tapers quickly into a firm, minimally yielding portion of the rod blank. An "extra fast" rod has even more rapid tip taper.

"Moderate" and "slow" action rods taper slowly into the butt section to form a broad arc or "parabolic bend" when flexed. Subdivided action categories like "extra fast," "moderate-fast" and "moderate-slow" further specialize rods.

"As a general rule, the slower the application, the faster the action you want in the rod," says Justin Poe, director of fishing rods for Pure Fishing. "That may seem a little counterintuitive, but with a slow application like dragging a worm or crawling a jig, you want faster action in the rod."

Rods with faster action tend to offer better sensitivity and better feel for bait movement. Faster actions often enhance ability to read bottom content such as rock, gravel, vegetation, mud or brush, and to detect light strikes.

"It's rare to hop a jig or jump a worm and have the fish hit on the way up," Poe explains. "Most of those hits come on a slack line."

Fast action rods also translate the angler's response more quickly to drive a hook home or steer a stubborn fish.

"Reaction bait" techniques refer to those employing baits that have built-in action and are worked fast or with near constant winding even with slow-roll or slow down retrieves. These techniques generally call for "moderate" action rods to allow the fish to take the lure fully ahead of the hook-set response and to absorb the bass's jumps, runs and lunges.

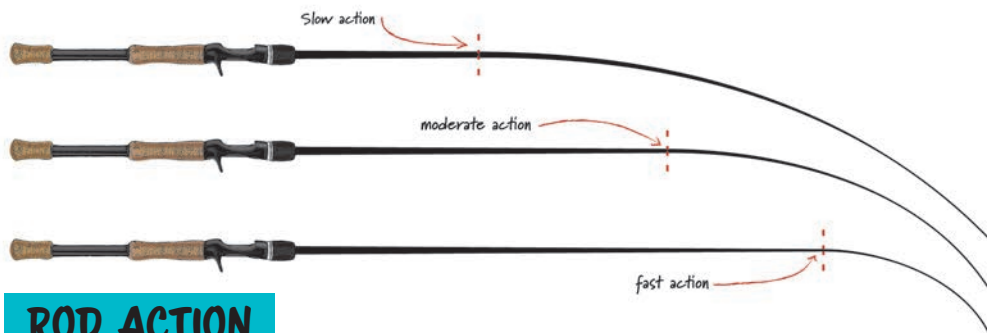
## FROGGING PARADIGM

No technique illustrates the importance of well-matched tackle components

better than fishing hollow-body frogs. Launching a faux frog into heavy vegetation with a whippy rod and 10-pound monofilament line leaves little chance of a successful hook-up, let alone dragging a bass wrapped in 10 pounds of milfoil to the boat.

Bobby Lane has transformed the toe-to-toe slop brawl that most of us know as “frogging” into a fine art, often skipping frogs under thick overhanging tree limbs and walking them in place with a deft rod tip action that draws strikes deep beneath the canopies.

Tools enable talent, explains Lane, who keeps two Abu Garcia Veritas Tournament series casting rods on his deck to work two styles of frog – a popping frog and a walking frog.



## ROD ACTION

A supple rod tip enables Lane to make long and accurate casts and to walk his frog with tantalizing action. A broomstick won't suffice.

“A fast or super-fast tip allows you to keep that frog in the strike zone longer,” he explains.

Lane completes his frogging tackle with an Abu Garcia Revo X (8:1 gear ratio) reel spooled with 50-pound-test moss green Spiderwire Ultracast line.

Lucas employs two 7-foot spinning rods from the Abu Garcia Fantasista X series: the medium power, fast action model for open hook presentations and the medium-heavy model for Texas-rigged plastics.

Strikes tend to be subtle when drop-shotting. Sensitivity is a drop-shot rod's most valued virtue. Lucas credits the Powerlux 500 resin system in the rods for their added strength and sensitivity.

With the drop-shot suspended below the lure, a fast-tip rod imparts action to the bait with little effort. Lucas fishes the medium power rod when he's fishing an open size 2 drop-shot hook. When he shifts to a Texas-rigged worm, the extra power of the medium-heavy rod helps drive a 1/0 worm hook home.

Lucas's reel of choice is the 30 size Abu Garcia Zenon reel. He uses 6-pound-test Berkley X5 Crystal Line on the medium rod; 8-pound-test on the medium-heavy. Leader material is 8- or 10-pound-test Berkley Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon.

## JIG VS. RIG

Jig rods are workhorse tools and often the most versatile rods on the boat.

“The 7-foot, 3-inch rod is the key length with the American angler right now,” says Bob Brown, head of product development for Lew's.

Jig fishing, shallow and deep, has accounted for much of that popularity.

According to Brown, pitching has replaced flipping as the dominant short-line



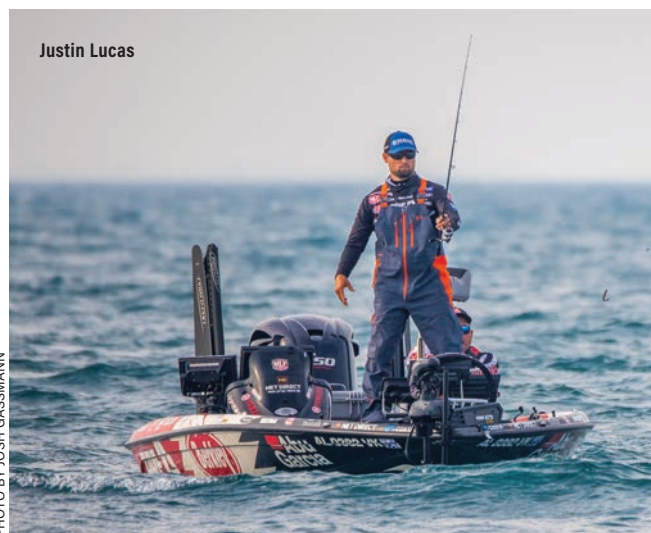
Bobby Lane

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

“I can make more accurate casts and skip a frog easier under docks and laydowns with the 7-foot medium-heavy, fast action rod,” he says. “If I see thick grass or lily pads, I know I'll have to make long casts and horse fish out with the 7-3 heavy rod.”

## DROP-SHOTS

“I have a drop-shot tied on almost everywhere I go,” says MLF pro Justin Lucas. “It doesn't matter if I'm fishing largemouth, smallmouth or spotted bass. It's a technique that typically works everywhere.”



Justin Lucas

PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN

technique. Anglers have gone to lighter and shorter rods to enhance accuracy.

"Actually, the football jig and pitching rod have become kind of the same rod," he explains. "The 7-foot medium-heavy fast action rod was what everyone fished a worm and jig on. Now they've moved to a 7-3, and they use that same fast tip, medium-heavy rod for pitching. The extra three inches of length give you more leverage. It is absolutely perfect for a football jig, too."



Jeff Sprague

Size matters in football and in the sport's namesake jig realm, too, where wide lure weight differentials come into play. The tackle used to fish a 1/2-ounce football jig with plastic trailer might be overmatched with a one- or 1 1/2-ounce jig worked in deep water or heavy wind or current.

Three medium-heavy rods handle MLF pro Jeff Sprague's jig chores.

"My 7-2 and 7-4 rods are a little more limber and parabolic," Sprague says. "I use them for lighter and shallower applications and depths to 20 feet. If I'm fish-

ing deeper than 20 feet, I'll go to the 7-6."

Lew's will launch a Jeff Sprague signature line of rods including these three models late in the 2021 season through Walmart stores.

Many anglers use the same rod for jig and Carolina rig fishing, though Mark Rose's rods are similar – but different.

"Football jig and Carolina rig fishing both require long bomb casts and being able to set the hook in deep water with long line, a 4/0 or 5/0 hook, and chunk of

plastic," Rose explains. "Fishermen lose lots of fish because they aren't getting a good enough hookset."

Rose designed both a 7-2 jig/worm rod and a 7-foot, 4 1/2-inch rod (listed at 7-5) made specifically with the Carolina rig in mind for the "Ledge Series" rods in the Custom Pro line and Team Lew's Signature Series rods. Rose sought "more backbone" in both designs.

His Carolina rig rod addressed the challenges posed by the rig's heavy sliding weight and tailing leader and bait.

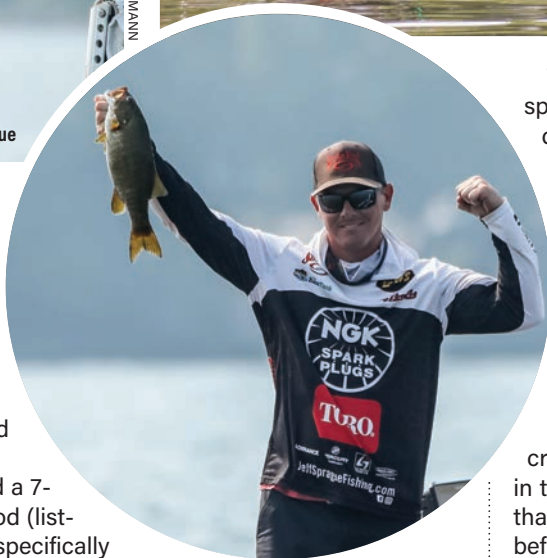
"The extra three inches in the rod enable you to make that lasso-like cast with a long leader to get the weight and bait moving for the launch," he says.

## CRANKBAIT CONUNDRUM

Competing schools of tackle logic divide crankbait aficionados into two camps: one prioritizing a delayed hookset and getting the fish into the boat; the other to "reading the wiggle" and heightening the crankbait's "search bait" potential.



Mark Rose



His Carolina rig tackle includes a lightweight Lew's Hypermag reel (7.5:1) with 17-pound-test Seaguar Tatsu fluorocarbon main line and 15-pound-test leader.

Today's crankbait rods span and straddle the divide. Rods with high fiberglass composition stress forgiveness. Those high in graphite composition heighten sensitivity. Most cranking rods today are a composite mix of both materials.

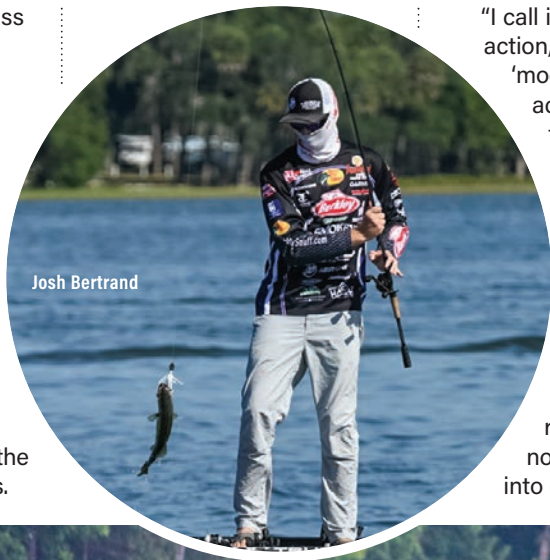
Why the divide? Blame the bass. It creates a vortex, sucking in the bait in such a manner that we often feel the strike before the fish has closed its jaws on the bait. A highly responsive and sensitive rod or tackle combination frequently leads to a premature hookset or a lure ripped free from a jaw. Factor in crankbait weight

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

PHOTOS BY JOSH GASSMAN

and bulk, too. It gives bass leverage during head shakes and leaps.

Fiberglass returned to the rod-making scene in recent years to address these issues. The duller "feel" and slower responsiveness of glass allows the fish more time to mouth the bait. Fashioned into a rod with moderate action (or "parabolic bend"), glass facilitates long casts and cushions the impact of runs and jumps.



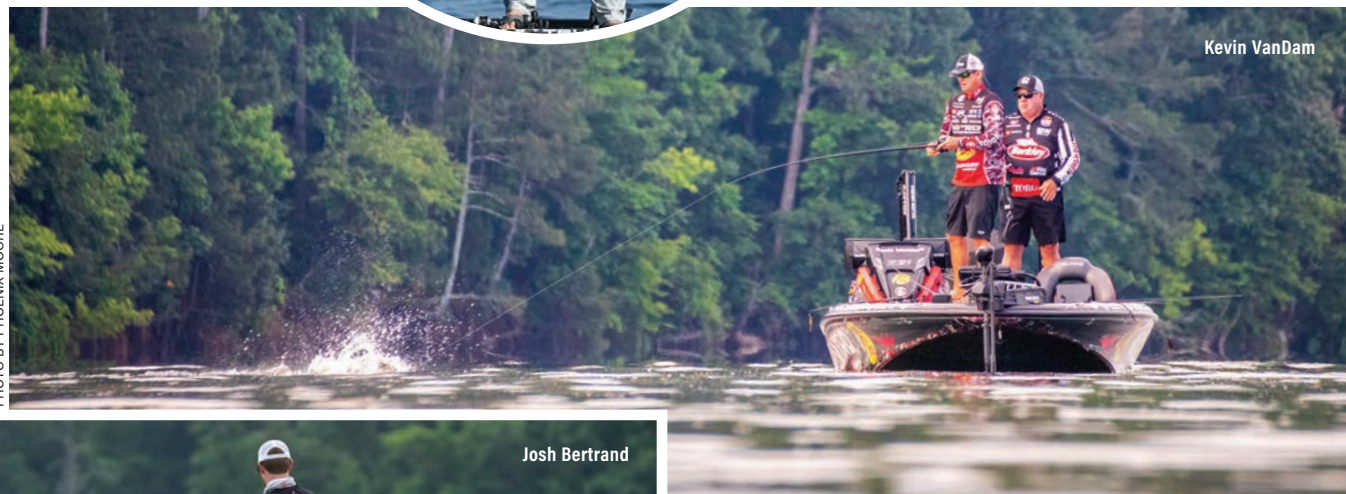
Josh Bertrand

"I call it 'moderate' action, but it's really 'moderate-moderate' action – slower than a regular moderate," Poe explains. "The rod tip will bend almost a full guide further down toward the handle, which gives you better reaction time to not pull the hooks into cover."

not bulky like a fiberglass rod," he says.

"Crankbait fishing is different for everyone," says Brown, who has developed crankbait rod lines on both ends of the spectrum for MLF pros Mark Rose and Kevin VanDam, among others. VanDam likes the forgiveness of glass (IM8 graphite/glass composite) in the crankbait rods in his Lew's KVD series.

"I like an all graphite cranking rod – no glass at all," counters Rose, whose



Kevin VanDam

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



Josh Bertrand

PHOTOS BY GARRICK DIXON

Crankbaits range in depth, action and size to compound the challenge of tackle selection. There's a big difference between cranking shallow squarebills and long-billed bottom-digging baits in depths of 20 to 25 feet or more.

A shorter rod favors casting accuracy near shallow cover, notes Poe. Softer, slower rods with "moderate" action, such as the rods in the Abu Garcia IKE Delay series, can keep an angler from burying a squarebill into logs, stumps and brush.

Deep-diving crankbaits call for different tools.

Josh Bertrand opts for a 7-11 heavy power rod in the Abu Garcia Veritas Winch Crankbait series.

"It's a composite rod with enough backbone and the perfect tip so that you can launch a long cast with all your body weight," he says. "Yet when the fish is hooked, it's parabolic."

Experience drives his preferences. He says graphite crankbait rods have cost him too many fish. The fiberglass/graphite mix in the Winch series offers the advantages of both glass and graphite. "It fishes light, more like graphite..."

7-11, moderate-fast, medium-heavy crankbait designs come in both the Team Lew's Ledge Series and Team Lew's Signature Series. "I want to feel that crankbait, to know if I have a leaf on the bait or if I hooked a mussel deep. If that bait is not working right, I won't catch a fish."

Different strokes for different folks, in other words.

While there are subtleties to every approach for selecting the right rod and pairing it with the right technique, there are reasons for each selection – all the more reason to study up before making your next rod purchase. ■



# HUK ICON X LIGHTWEIGHT JACKET

By Matt Williams  
PHOTOS BY BRANDON ROWAN

If you're shopping for a light-duty outer layer that's big on comfort and protection, the Icon X lightweight jacket has you covered. Icon X is Huk's newest line of outerwear and insulating layers designed to provide anglers with a variety of options for staying warm and dry in changing weather conditions.

## First Impressions

The Icon X jacket is designed for tackling light (and some medium-duty) applications in style. Fashioned from 91 percent polyester and 9 percent spandex, the jacket rides just below the belt line and is equipped with five pockets, including a pair of zippered hand warmer pockets, two roomy chest pockets and a zippered rear storage pocket. Other features include an articulated hood with an elastic draw string, back/under sleeve perforation panels to enhance breathability, a high-rise collar with draw strings and reflective trim.

## In Action

My jacket arrived just in time for fall and it was the perfect match for

the pleasant weather that eventually rolled into eastern Texas right along with it. We saw crisp morning lows in the 40s a couple times in late October. Paired with a long sleeve bottom layer, the wind-resistant shell did a great job of keeping me comfortable on lengthy boat rides at high speed. As fit goes, the hood conforms nicely to the head with a cap or toboggan in the mix while the high-rise collar helps prevent air from getting in around the neck with the zipper fully deployed. The roomy rear storage pocket is a nice addition; just don't stick snacks, sunglasses or anything else in there that might inadvertently get crushed against a seat cushion.

## Final Thoughts

Though it's hardly a match for downpours or frigid temperatures, this is a jacket you can trust to keep you cozy in mild weather when there's just enough nip and/or moisture in the air that a hoodie might not cut it. It comes in assorted colors that will mix and

match with jeans or fishing pants. The black blends nicely with Huk's Grand Banks or Icon X Superior bibs.

## Performance Advice

As with all outerwear, periodic cleaning may be needed to keep the jacket looking good and odor free. Huk recommends cold washing with like colors and hang drying or tumble drying on a low setting.

## Applications

- Good for crisp, damp or drizzly conditions when a heavier jacket might be too much.
- Wear it as top layer to help block brisk winds.

## DETAILS

Sizes: 6  
Water/Wind Resistant: Yes  
Machine Washable: Yes  
MSRP: \$120.00 (3XL \$130)  
Contact: [hukgear.com](http://hukgear.com).

## PERFORATED PANELS:

Designed with perforated panels across the back and under the sleeve that allow the jacket to breathe while still offering protection from wind and damp air.



## ZIPPER AND REFLECTIVE TRIM:

Each zipper is equipped with an ergonomic pull tab and reflective trim is fashioned so you are easily seen under the glow of headlights.



## ARTICULATED HOOD:

The articulated hood conforms nicely over the head and is equipped with a quick release elastic drawstring (at the back) to create a snug fit. You can cinch the collar drawstrings for an even better seal; the collar releases are inside the fabric.



## HITS & MISSES

- + Articulated hood with drawstring
- + High collar with drawstrings
- + Good breathability
- + Stretches to prevent binding
- + Abundant pocket space
- + Reflective trim
- + Color variety
- Non-adjustable cuffs

## >> ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

The Icon X family of outerwear features a variety of other jackets and vests engineered to keep you comfortable while providing optimum protection from the elements in all sorts of weather conditions ranging from mild to nasty. Stylish in design and high in quality, the outer jacket lineup includes the heavier-duty Superior 3L Shell and Superior Hybrid along with the lighter-weight Puffy jacket/vest and Soft Shell jacket/vest that can utilized as non-restrictive insulating layers or worn alone. All are available in assorted sizes, colors and affordably priced between \$100 and \$210. ■

Soft Shell jacket



Superior Hybrid



Superior 3L Shell



Puffy vest





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## THE WONDER OF YOUTH

**I**f you're a fan of bass fishing, you probably have memories of fish catches that predate memories of almost anything else. Each of those fish we fondly recollect grows in size and significance with each passing year. The bluegills and perch and crappie we caught and touched (or refused to touch) had to have been state records. The 12-inch largemouth that wasn't big enough to net became 15 inches and 18 and 24 as our hippocampus gave ground to the powerful force known as nostalgia and allowed us to be absolutely convinced that once upon a time our first fish was bigger than we could stretch our arms.

Of course, these days, there's photographic evidence of everything, thanks to the advent of smart phones. Still, our youngest generation should never be robbed of one of the oldest and most virtuous traditions of our sport: fish stories.

Hopefully Willow Miller, decades from now (and in defiance of photographic evidence to the contrary), will still recall a fish her dad, B.J., caught that was bigger than her.

However she remembers the fish pictured here, there's no denying the unbridled joy and excitement on her face. And while B.J. may have hoped for better than 7 pounds that day as he prepared to weigh in for the Toyota Series Championship at Pickwick Lake, he can always hang his hat on the fact that it only took one fish to make his 21-month-old daughter light up with excitement and create a memory she'll never forget.

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

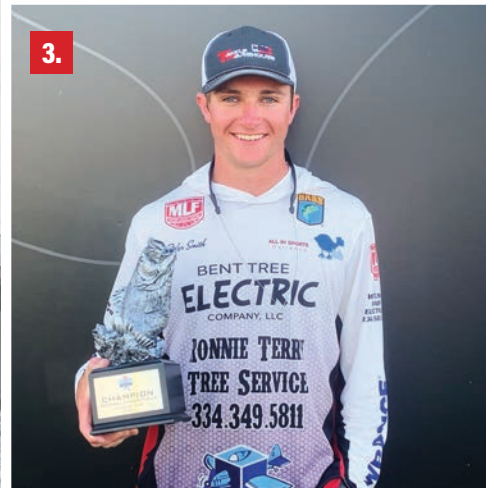


PHOTO BY SEAN O'SHEA

**1. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. WESTERN DIVISION**  
**Lake Havasu**

September 23-25

Andrew Loberg is quickly making a name for himself as one of the best young anglers in the sport, evidenced by his back-to-back Toyota Series Western Division wins on the California Delta in early August and at Lake Havasu in late September.

In the latter win, Loberg had to really work for his bites, as Havasu was fishing stingy amid blazing heat and fluctuating water levels. He opted to settle down in a grassy quarter-mile stretch at the northern end of the lake.

Loberg relied on a Rapala DT16 throughout the tournament and on the final day, he put the largest bag of the tournament on the scale (21-11) for the win and a \$24,119 payday.

**2. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE REGION 1 REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP**  
**Norfolk Lake**

October 7-9

While Brad Kell had been to Norfolk Lake in the past, those previous trips had been for chasing trout or half-day bass fishing excursions. In order to string together enough quality to win a three-day tournament, he needed to make some decisions on the fly.

One of those decisions involved eschewing the topwater bite on his second day of practice for brush piles, and that choice paid off to the tune of a couple mega-schools that produced 15 keepers over three days for a 34-pound, 15-ounce total that earned him \$60,000 in cash and prizes.

Kell targeted his fish in 13 to 22 feet of water with Strike King 6XDs and 10XDs as well as a spinnerbait, jig and a 5-inch swimbait.

Despite "culling the wrong fish twice" on the final day, Kell managed to replace the 1-7 that was in his livewell with a 2 1/2-pounder that ended up giving him enough weight to edge out Connor Cunningham by about 2 1/2 pounds.

**3. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE REGION 2 REGIONAL**  
**Wheeler Lake**

October 7-9

Tyler Smith used a two-pronged approach to tally 43 pounds and clinch the Regional win at Wheeler Lake. With just a couple days to practice and very limited experience on Wheeler, Smith decided to stay

upriver all tournament and take his chances. Instead, he ultimately made a run further south when the water color in his area turned muddy after some heavy rains.

There, Smith fished some "obvious stuff" until he found a shell bed on a ledge that appeared to be holding some quality fish. He went on to add some quality to his livewell on that shell bed (which sat in about 12 feet of water) on Day 1 and proceeded to milk that area throughout the event, running upriver later on Days 2 and 3 before returning to his honey hole on the final day to catch what would ultimately be the winning fish.

Smith weighed in a healthy mix of smallmouth, largemouth and spots, and though he only managed to land four keepers on Day 1, consecutive limits on the final two days were enough to clinch the victory and the \$60,000 top prize by 3 pounds, 10 ounces.



**4. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE**  
**REGION 3 REGIONAL**  
**Lake Murray**  
*October 14-16*

Johnathan Crossland suspected the offshore bite at Lake Murray would be the key to victory when he practiced for the BFL Regional. His commitment to that bite wavered during practice, though, as the water had come up and seemed to have pulled a lot of fish to the bank. Still, by the time Day 1 rolled around, Crossland knew the conditions were once again right to catch them offshore.

Going with his gut, Crossland plied brush piles, drops and points in about 20 feet of water from Buffalo Creek to the dam to manage five, six and six bites, respectively, throughout the event. He fished clean and made the most of his opportunities,

tallying 43 pounds, 12 ounces for the \$61,500 victory (which included contingency bonuses).

Crossland relied on a Castaic Cowboy walking bait to call up fish from the depths for all of his keepers.

**5. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE**  
**REGION 4 REGIONAL**  
**Potomac River Presented by THE BASS UNIVERSITY TV**  
*October 14-16*

Sometimes a frog is all you need. That certainly was the case for Jarrett Martin in securing the win and a \$62,500 payday (including contingency bonuses) at the Regional on the Potomac River.

Martin committed to Pohick Creek for the majority of the event, keying in on tide changes to take advantage of feeding windows when



bass would readily respond to his Spro Bronzeye 65 and BOOYAH Pad Crasher frogs.

On Day 3, though, things got hairy. Martin's ultra-productive 100-yard stretch of grass went cold as his fish had moved around in the creek. It was at that point that Martin's co-angler, John Martin, mentioned having caught some fish in Mattawoman Creek the day before.

The pair ended up running to Mattawoman where Jarrett added a 4- and 3-pounder to finish the day with a 13-ounce margin of victory.

**6. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE**  
**REGION 5 REGIONAL**  
**St. Johns River**  
*October 21-23*

When you catch 33 pounds, 12 ounces on Day 1 in any five-fish-limit

event, the pressure sure seems to lessen. For David Lowery, his first-day mega-bag at the Region 5 Regional on the St. Johns River was enough to allow him to just fish around the following two days and amass 62-15 for a \$68,000 victory (including a \$7,000 Phoenix contingency bonus).

Following what Lowery admits was a pretty poor practice, the Milledgeville, Georgia boater stuck to his guns and relied on topwater offerings all week — a Spro Bronzeye Poppin Frog and a Big Bite Baits Tour Toad Buzzbait — which resulted in eight key bites on Day 1, all of which he managed to land.

Lowery didn't stray far from takeoff throughout the tournament, remaining "within sight of the boat ramp" most of the time. He says he also caught some key fish on Day 2 and 3 on seawalls just north of Lake George.



**7. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE REGION 6 REGIONAL Lake Ouachita**

October 21-23

Kevin Brown has been fishing Lakes Ouachita and Hamilton for “20 to 30 years,” so winning on one lake to have a chance at winning on the other (after receiving an automatic bid to the All-American on Lake Hamilton in 2022) was his ultimate goal in the BFL Regional Championship for Region 6.

Brown checked the first box with an impressive showing in late October, weighing in 15 keepers for 40-13 to outpace second-place finisher Mike Brueggen by more than 7 pounds. He did so by virtue of a Yum Yumbrella Flash Mob Jr. tipped with Yum Pulse swimbaits and a War Eagle finesse jig, which he fished on channel swings in 23 to 28 feet of water that featured some brush and rock.

Throughout the event, Brown totally ignored the bank, opting instead for about 30 offshore spots

that were holding fish. Each spot was a little different, though, with some fish setting up on the bottom and others suspending above structure and cover.

**8. TOYOTA SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP PRESENTED BY GUARANTEED RATE Pickwick Lake**

October 28-30

Brent Crow, who guides on Pickwick Lake, had a pretty good idea of what he wanted to do to secure a win on his home lake when the Toyota Series Championship began — plying the tailrace waters below the Wilson Dam — but it became apparent pretty quickly that the fast-moving current wasn’t going to be conducive in weighing in the winning bags.

Instead, Crow called an audible and moved closer to the Natchez Trace Bridge on Days 1 and 2 to tally just enough to make the Top 10 (by virtue of a tiebreaker over Randy Blaukat), though he was still in 10th place entering Day 3 with a ton of work to do.

Fortunately for Crow, conditions finally lined up to put in some real work at the Wilson Dam tailrace. With the Tennessee Valley Authority only pulling 35,000 cubic feet per second the morning of the final day, Crow ran to his honey hole and put on a clinic, hooking up on nearly every cast for an hour.

When the dust had settled, Crow brought 23-1 to the scales on the final day to tally 52-2 for the event to hoist the winner’s trophy and a \$247,500 check that included a \$35,000 Phoenix bonus and other contingencies.

**9. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE WILD CARD Fort Loudoun and Tellico Lakes**

November 5-6

Despite weighing in just five keepers over two days of competition, Ryan Deal found the right quality at the right times to take down the \$5,076 top prize and a berth in the 2022 All-American with a 1-pound, 1-ounce slim margin of

victory in the Phoenix Bass Fishing League Presented by T-H Marine Wild Card event on Fort Loudoun and Tellico Lakes in Lenoir City, Tennessee.

Deal knew the fishing would be tough after one day of practice on Tellico, so he changed gears and decided to go find some current. He ran upriver after that, spending both tournament days running up the Tennessee River, past Knoxville, and into the French Broad and Holston Rivers where he was able to target smallmouth that eclipsed the 18-inch minimum for keeping.

There, Deal probed current breaks with a 1/2-ounce Lunker Lure Rattleback Flipping Jig paired with a Zoom Super Chunk Jr. on 20-pound-test fluorocarbon line due to the size of the fish he was targeting and the jagged, rocky shoreline they were often set up on.

Depending on the ferocity of the current — which dictated where the smallmouth were setting up — Deal either swam his jig or let it get down deep, often needing 30 or 40 casts at each spot to get the bites he needed. ■

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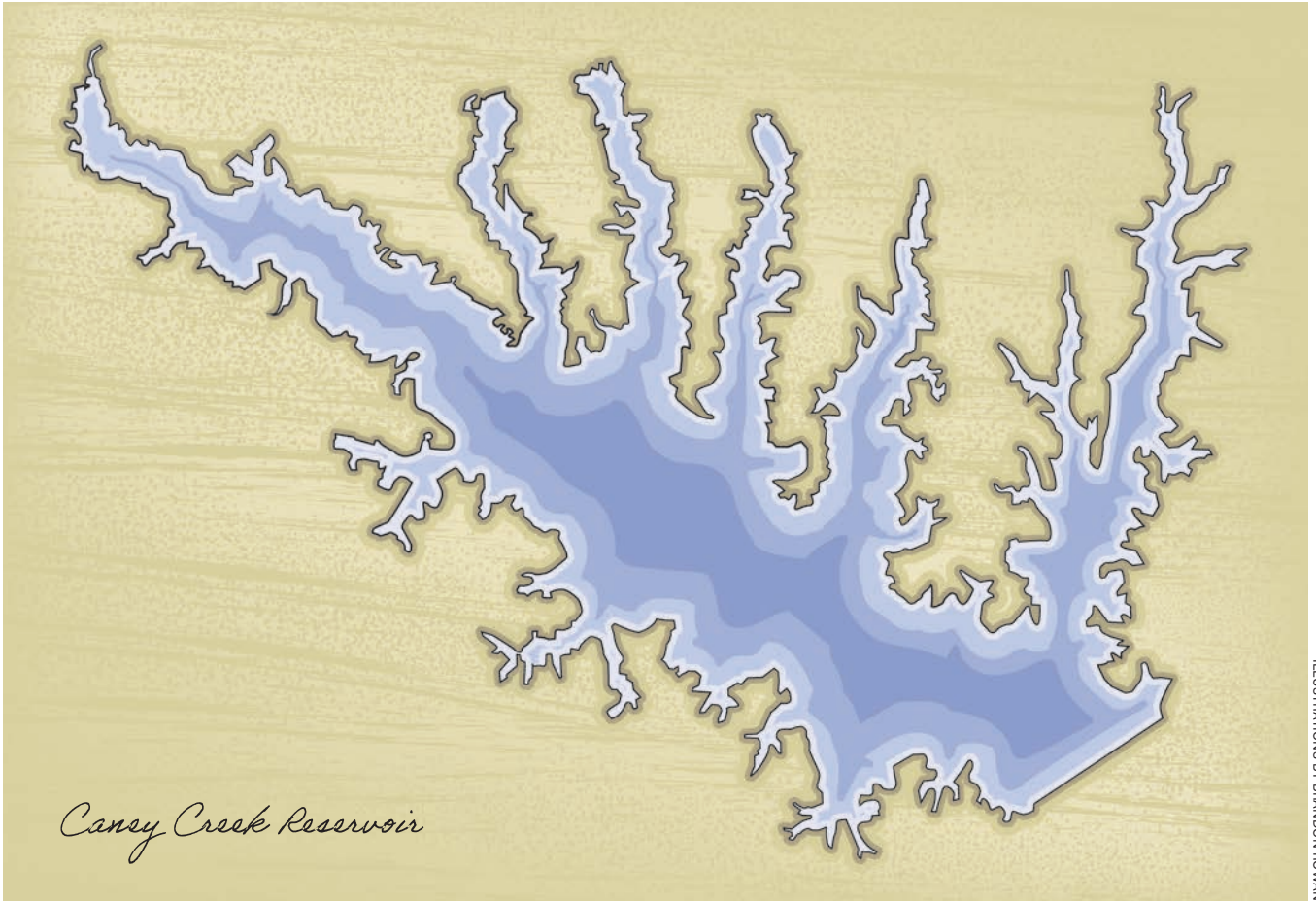
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## LOUISIANA'S CANEY CREEK, LAKE D'ARBONNE, BUSSEY BRAKE

What to expect when the Bass Pro Tour kicks off 2022 season



By Tyler Brinks

**T**he 2022 Bass Pro Tour schedule features several bodies of water that are unfamiliar to most of the country's tournament-fishing crowd. And the least-known among those fisheries are the three bodies of water near West Monroe, Louisiana, that will serve as the playing field for the kickoff of the BPT season: Caney Creek Reservoir, Lake D'Arbonne and Bussey Brake.

Each of these fisheries offer the potential for giant large-mouth, according to Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit angler Tyler Stewart, who lives within a half-hour drive of all three.

"That event will produce good fishing on all three, and

the timing couldn't be any better for big fish," Stewart says. "There's no guarantee that we'll see 10-pounders caught, but I'd be willing to bet that we see some. The whole area has been fishing great for the past three years – I caught four double-digit fish in 2021 and my dad caught three. I'm looking forward to seeing how this event plays out."

Stewart offered a preview of the three lakes in play and what he expects from each of them when the 2022 Bass Pro Tour starts the new season.

### CANEY CREEK RESERVOIR

Likely the most well-known of the three fisheries, Caney Creek has explosive

big-fish potential. At roughly 5,000 acres, the lake was created when a dam was built on Caney Creek in 1986. The early 1990s were the first heyday for the lake, which produced the current Louisiana state record, a 15.97-pound brute caught in 1994.

Stewart admits that Caney Creek's early days were indeed excellent, but insists that the previous three years on this fishery have been almost as good.

"All of the state records were coming out of there in the '90s, and then the grass went away, but it's grown up again in the last three years and it's fishing good for big ones," he explains. "Even

small, weekday-evening tournaments are taking big weights to win. These are all three-fish-limit tournaments, and it takes anywhere from 23 to 27 pounds to win a three-hour tournament with 10 boats."

In addition to big-bass potential, Caney Creek offers great diversity in how anglers can catch fish it, especially early in the year. Shallow-water anglers will find success in the grass and possibly around docks.

"The place is full of hydrilla, but it also has quite a bit of offshore structure like creek channels, points and humps," he says. "It's a lake that you can win a tournament in 3 feet of water or out in 25 feet that time of year. I'm anxious to see which strategy wins."

"It's still a great fishery and is full of stumps, cypress trees, standing timber and some docks. It's almost like there's too much cover and it can be hard to navigate and try to pinpoint where the fish are at times. I don't know how to describe it; it just fishes a lot different than the other two lakes."

Stewart also says D'Arbonne has less vegetation than Caney Creek and Bussey Brake and doesn't have the same big-fish potential.



## LAKE D'ARBONNE

Pronounced "dar-BONE," Lake D'Arbonne is a roughly 15,000-acre lake developed in the early 1960s and is the biggest of the three lakes. It's a quality fishery, but Stewart believes it will be the biggest challenge at Stage One due to its size and abundance of cover.

"It could either be really good or really tough; it's a lake where you could go all day without a bite, or you could land on them and catch them all day long," Stewart says. "There's more of what I'd consider 'dead water' than the other two lakes – not that it isn't fishable water, it's just that certain areas are really good and hold most of the fish.

"It's not a lake with a lot of 7- to 10-pounders like the others," he explains. "But it's got plenty of 4s in there. I think the field will have the best success with ChatterBaits, spinnerbaits, lipless crankbaits and flipping.

## BUSSEY BRAKE

The Championship Round will be held on 2,200-acre Bussey Brake Lake. While it's a small body of water, it's home to giant bass. In March 2021, Stewart landed his personal best from the lake, a 12.74-pound tank – the largest bass on record from the fishery.

The new Bussey Brake was developed through a lengthy renovation project after it was donated in 2010 by International Paper. It was developed

as a trophy fishery and made part of a Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Wildlife Management area. The process included draining the lake and starting over with the addition of Florida-strain largemouth. Those improvements to the lake helped create a big-bass factory and the state implemented special regulations allowing only one bass over 16 inches to be retained to keep it that way.

After roughly a decade of being closed, the lake is back up and running, kicking out big bass.

"It's a very fertile lake with lots of big ones, and I have no doubt that someone will break my record soon," Stewart says. "It's a small lake, but it's nothing but willow bushes, stumps and grass. You could catch a fish anywhere on the lake."

With so much cover, Stewart says it could also be challenging to navigate.

"You have to use the boat lanes and can't just run around anywhere," he says. "It's full of places for the fish to hide, and I'm not sure what the best techniques will be. It could be several things and should be a true prespawn deal with fish in shallow water. I think we'll see guys having success with spinnerbaits, ChatterBaits and flipping." ■

PROFILE: **BRENT CROW**  
HARTSELLE, ALABAMA



*Brent Crow has had a lot of good days on the water, but none more memorable than the final day of the Toyota Series Championship on Pickwick Lake. The fishing guide and former FLW Tour pro put together over 23 pounds of smallmouths that day to move from 10th to first to pocket \$247,500 for the win. Making the final-day cut via a tiebreaker with Randy Blaukat, Crow had a magical final day and perfect conditions for a wake bait in the Wilson Dam tailrace for just a few hours that morning – a few hours he'll never forget.*

## Q&A

By Jody White  
PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

**That final morning was pretty intense. While nobody else was catching anything, (MLF reporter) Kyle Wood was texting the group chat with an update about a 4-pounder like every minute.**

There's a lot of different words to describe that hour. "Chaotic" was the first one that came to mind. "Magical" is another. And it really couldn't have happened at a better time.

It was just chaos. I either caught one or hooked one briefly and it got off or had a big swirl or a blow-up every cast for an hour. The best I can remember, the first one I caught was almost 5 (pounds), then I had a 4 1/2, and then a 6, and then a couple of 3s. I wasn't even putting cull tags on them – and normally I do, but when they're that big, you ain't gotta cull them.

**The key to that morning was the current running at only 35,000 CFS, which hadn't been the case all tournament. Did you expect that to happen?**

I was so frustrated. I knew what could happen – what would happen – if the conditions got right. That was the whole reason I fished the trail to try to make the championship, because I knew that if the conditions were right, they were going to have to beat me. [The conditions] weren't right all fall, in

practice they weren't, the first two days of the tournament they weren't, but somehow, I don't know who's controlling the dam and releases at the TVA, but there were two hours on Saturday that I could have caught them like that.

If that would have happened Day 1, Day 2 and Day 3, I'm pretty confident I would've had close to 70 pounds. Thank goodness it happened on Day 3, because that was all I needed.

**You burned about 45 minutes of that stretch on the run from Counce to the Wilson Dam, but you pretty much started exactly on the right spot, right?**

There's three or four places I could do that, but it just so happened I pulled up to the one place and I didn't have to go to the other places. My co-angler said, 'How many do you think are here?' and I said, 'All of them.' I got an hour of perfect conditions. I don't think I've ever sat at one spot like that and got that many bites. It couldn't have come at a better time.

**A lot of times it seems like a swim-bait is the deal in those tailraces, not a topwater. Why did you pick up the wake bait?**

I've caught more fish up there on a swimbait than anything. If the swimbait bite is on, I want a lot of current. They were up there the whole time; everybody in the tournament went up in practice and they didn't bite. I went up there every day and they just wouldn't bite. It wasn't like they weren't up there because they didn't swim up to that spot overnight. But what happened with the lower current was the water level dropped. I think I had my boat in 3 1/2 or 4 feet of water the whole time.

**Coming from 10th to first on your home water on the final day is pretty epic. How does being the champ feel?**

I don't think that I've had anything but a smile on my face since (then). I haven't spent a dime, and I don't have plans to buy anything, other than I think I'm going to replace my grill. I've heard from so many people - friends, co-anglers, my clients - everybody has reached out to tell me congratulations. It's been cool to hear from so many people. Some of my friends are more excited about it than I am.

**You guide on the Tennessee River and have been fishing the tailraces for a long time. How did you get so into it?**

I've done it almost my entire fishing life. When I was young, going with my neighbor before I had a boat, we used to drift live bait in the fall below Wheeler Dam and Wilson Dam. When you're catching big smallmouth, it doesn't matter if it's on live bait or topwater or whatever, it's awesome. And we're blessed to have two of the best smallmouth lakes in the country in Wilson and Pickwick. As I started guiding, that's just always been some of the most fun fishing you can do. I don't think there's anything like catching 5- and 6-pound smallmouth. I'd rather catch a 5- or 6-pound smallmouth than a 10-pound largemouth any day.

**What's the best you've seen it below the dams?**

I had a day yesterday that was unbelievable. My client and I were just giggling like schoolgirls. I'm really fortunate to be where I am, because the fishing below those dams is special. When it turns on, it is just unbelievable.

I've caught several (6-pound smallies), but they're mostly like 6-even, 6-2. I caught a 6.54 one year. We call the place "Smallie World" sometimes. When it's Smallie World, it's unbelievable. In one week, my boat record got broken three times. Somebody caught a 6-5, the next client caught a 6-6, and the next one caught a 6-8. It was just craziness.

**How does the final day of the Toyota Series Championship stack up?**

It's obviously first. Really, it's the best hour, I think. For a full day, it doesn't even compare, because they only bit for an hour. I caught three 6-pounders one day. A lot of times you catch largemouth up there, and I've had days where you catch 25 pounds of largemouth the first 30 minutes of the day. But overall, taking everything into consideration, it's the best day ever.

**What's the secret to getting good in the current there? It seems like the kind of fishing that's hard for the uninitiated to pick up.**

For me, it's been experience. I'm way better today than I was five years

ago and way, way better than I was 10 years ago. You can have a place, whether it be a hump or a gravel bar or a point, and there's a group of fish there basically all the time, but they're never in the same place. It depends on the amount of flow and the water level, and experience and experimentation helps you find them. Garmin LiveScope helps a lot, but sometimes they're so tight to the bottom you can look and not see any.

What I do in the fall with live bait has helped me so much with current fishing. You can read and watch videos and think you understand, but in the last few years, I've really learned a lot more about it. It's a lot easier with live bait because then they bite all the time. If you have a theory, and you drop a shad down there, they bite it and confirm your theory.

**The people-watching below the dams is great. You've got all sorts trying to catch fish, and the way everyone drifts around must lend itself to some craziness. What's the wildest thing you've ever seen?**

We were drifting (below Wheeler Dam) one day, and there's a guy in a Bass Tracker, maybe 70 years old. This guy is sitting up on the front edge of his seat, and probably his daughter with him. We pulled up nearby to make a drift, and he's bowed up and winching on something.

It was hot. It was September, and he's just pulling his rod like he's fighting a whale. We were on the edge of the current, so we fish slowly by him, and I'm looking, and looking, and he's hung up. We go by, and he's like, "Boy it's a biggun!" and I say, "Looks like it!" He's working hard - like, hard.

We drift way down, and come back, and it's like 15 minutes later and he's still doing it. The girl runs up and hands him a bottle of water and he takes one hand off the rod and takes a big swig and then starts fighting again. At this point, I'm not going to tell him; he's obviously enjoying this way too much and I'm not gonna spoil it for him.

Well, we drift way down - I swear it's 30 minutes - and we come back up and he's still there fighting. I'll never forget that. ■

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## IT'S TIME TO UPDATE YOUR TBF MEMBERSHIP FOR 2022



**A**s the calendar inches closer and closer to 2022, it's time to think about renewing your 2022 The Bass Federation (TBF) membership.

The \$50 TBF National Adult membership for 2022 includes full TBF benefits such as member and club insurance, multiple advancement opportunities through your local TBF-affiliated club, State Federation and more. To fish your home-state events, you must be a member of a local TBF-affiliated fishing club.

"This membership is one of the best deals in bass fishing," says TBF President Robert Cartlidge. "Your \$50 in membership dues gets you access to local events as well as the ability to qualify and fish your district's Semi-Final event and a chance to fish in the National Championship."

Your TBF membership also gets you a subscription to the digital version of *Bass Fishing* magazine as well as all subscriber benefits. Those benefits include the industry's best and lowest-discounted rates on an MLF competitor membership if you choose to upgrade your MLF membership to a competitor's level for All-American and Toyota Series advancement opportunities.

While the competition aspect is one of the more popular features of TBF membership, Cartlidge says he's extremely proud of the avenues that TBF provides its members to connect with young anglers and participate in conservation initiatives.

"I've been a TBF member since 1984, and to see this organization grow into what it is today is amazing," he says. "All of our members over the years have gotten involved with TBF because they love to fish, they want to support conservation, and they want to support our youth programs. As our membership numbers grow, so does our ability to help more people and kids get to enjoy fishing."

### YOUTH AND STUDENT ANGLER FEDERATION

Adults aren't the only ones with TBF memberships available. The TBF Junior membership is only \$25 a year for national dues. Junior membership provides the opportunity for kids in eighth grade and younger to fish the junior programs in their state federation. Youth membership includes the advancement opportunity to qualify from state junior programs to the TBF Junior World Championship to compete for college scholarships and a championship title.

Just like the Junior membership, the Student Angler Federation membership is \$25. The membership includes a full competitor membership, digital access to *Bass Fishing* magazine, and an MLF High School membership. High school membership gives students many opportunities to fish your state's SAF High School State Championship and any SAF or MLF Open, as well as any Challenge tournament events.

To open a new membership or renew your current membership, visit [BassFederation.com](http://BassFederation.com).

# BOATERS, CO-ANGLERS FINISH NATIONAL SEMI-FINALS

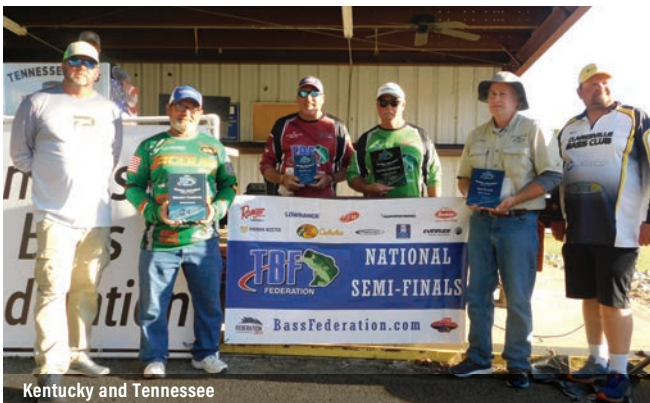
TBF's National Semi-Final events send the top boaters and co-anglers from each state/district to the National Championship. Below is a list of the 2022 advancing anglers from recent TBF National Semi-Finals.

- DISTRICT 1 – Florida and Georgia's Semi-Final was held at Lake Lanier in Georgia on October 9. Paul Christian (GA) and Raymond Trudeau (FL) will be advancing to the National Championship as boaters while Don Oliver (GA) and Clinton Thad Lacinak (FL) will head there as co-anglers.



Florida and Georgia

- DISTRICT 3 – Kentucky and Tennessee anglers fished on Oct. 16 at Kentucky Lake. Joey Rumsey (TN) and Brian Martin (TN) will represent the Volunteer state as angler/co-angler while Bill Buckner (KY) and Lincoln Bowen (KY) will represent Kentucky.



Kentucky and Tennessee

- DISTRICT 4 – The Alabama and Mississippi event was fished on Sardis Lake on October 16 with Andy Lockhart (MS) and Walker Whitworth (AL) advancing as boaters, and Drew Gideon (MS) and Blake Hollingsworth (AL) joining them as co-anglers.

- DISTRICT 5 – Louisiana and Texas hit the water on Toledo Bend Reservoir on Sept. 25. James Biggs (TX) and Joshua Moore (LA) will be the boaters for the district, with Frank Ducote (LA) and Jerry Biggs (TX) as the top co-anglers.

- DISTRICT 7 – Kansas and Missouri anglers took on Wilson Lake for their Semi-Final. Chris Brimager (KS) and Brad Tyer (MO) were the top boaters while Gary Martin (MO) and Ryder Mains (KS) will represent the co-anglers.



Kansas and Missouri

- DISTRICT 8 – Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota completed District 8's Semi-Final on Lake Okoboji. Jordan Hirt (NE) and Chad Schwan (SD) were the winning anglers with Scott Blaesi (NE) and Adam Hutmacher (SD) representing the co-anglers for their respective states.

- DISTRICT 9 – Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin fished their Semi-Final on Sturgeon Bay in Wisconsin. Scott Bonema (MN) and Larry Hildebrandt (WI) will represent their states as boaters, with Max Stawinoga (WI) and David Little (MN) as co-anglers.

- DISTRICT 10 – Illinois and Indiana competed on Pool 19 of the Upper Mississippi River. James Anderson (IL) and George Seymour (IN) were the top boaters for their states while Willmer Morris (IN) and Sean Ricker (IL) were the top co-anglers.



Illinois and Indiana

- DISTRICT 11 – Michigan and Ohio competed on the lower Detroit River. Troy Stokes (MI) and Richard Carter (OH) will fish in the National Championship as boaters. Tavian Thomas (OH) and Jason Klingaman (MI) will be the co-anglers for the two states.

- DISTRICT 12 – Virginia and West Virginia held their Semi-Final on Sutton Lake. John Christopher II (WV) and Larry Kempler (VA) were the winning boaters. Jason Suter (WV) and Ryan Hachez (VA) will be the co-anglers.

- DISTRICT 13 – DC, Delaware and Maryland fished on the Potomac River Oct. 2-3. Frank Arthur (MD), Craig Morris (DE) and Ken Melton (DC) are the three advancing boaters. Kyle Shirkey (DE), Chris Grimes (DC), Paul Badders (MD) advance as co-anglers from the district.

- DISTRICT 15 – Connecticut, New Jersey and Rhode Island fished on the St. Lawrence River around Thousand Islands. Jeremy Sadowski (RI), Matthew Marinelli (CT), and Kevin Albright (NJ) are the three boaters advancing while Nick Angiulo (NJ), Mike Talaga (CT) and Gary Rondeau (RI) are the three co-anglers.

- DISTRICT 17 – John Levesque (NH) and Dave Cousins (ME) will represent Maine and New Hampshire's district as boaters and Peter Owen (NH) and Eric Low (ME) will be the co-anglers in the National Championship. The Semi-Final was fished on Lake Winnepesaukee.



Maine and New Hampshire

- DISTRICT 18 – Oregon and Washington's derby took place on Tenmile Lake in early October. Todd Woolard (OR) and Chris Lambert (WA) will represent the district as boaters. Hernandez Ruffin (WA) and Dane Lawrence (OR) will be the representing co-anglers for the two states.



Oregon and Washington

- DISTRICT 19 – Idaho and Montana's competition took place on the Noxon Reservoir. Randy Siemens (MT) and Jason Fuller (ID) advance as boaters while Guy Blahus (ID) and Hunter Dahnke (MT) will be the two co-anglers.

## HIGH SCHOOL STATE CHAMPIONSHIP WINNERS

### Idaho State Championship

Oct. 10 – CJ Strike Reservoir  
**Haden Ryza and Dallon Hoskins**  
 12 pounds, 2 ounces



Idaho

### New York State Championship

Sept. 12 – Mohawk River  
**Taylor Marcel and Matthew Campbell**  
 13 pounds, 8 ounces



Washington

### Washington State Championship

Sept. 18 – Lake Tapps  
**Morgan Rowe and Kyle Watts**  
 6 pounds, 9 ounces

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2021 TBF SEASON

It was quite a year for The Bass Federation in 2021, with countless winners crowned in close-to-home events, checks cashed and dreams fulfilled. Every season starts with thousands of anglers and co-anglers of all ages vying for a shot at either the Federation National Championship, the High School Fishing National Championship and World Finals, and the Junior World Championship.

### NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2021 TBF Federation National Championship took place in March at the Red River in Louisiana. Delaware angler Mike Morris got the win after catching a limit for three straight days for 42 pounds, 3 ounces. Morris earned a \$20,000 prize, a brand-new Ranger Z520 boat, and other prizes. Joshua Moore won the National Championship on the co-angler side with 36-7. He also earned \$20,000 along with several other prizes. The 2022 Federation National Championship will be held on Lake Conroe starting on February 27.

### HIGH SCHOOL WORLD FINALS & NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Fast-forward to late June, and the 12th Annual High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship on Lake Hartwell in South Carolina. The Pennsylvania team of Gerald Brumbaugh and Hunter Klotz took home the U.S. National Championship with nine bass for 28-3. Both anglers received a \$5,000 scholarship to the college of their choosing.

As for the World Finals, the Alabama team of Andrew Jones and Carson Underwood caught a three-bass limit of 10-9 to win by 9 ounces. Those anglers also won scholarship money as well as multiple other prizes to continue to live out their fishing dreams. The 2022 High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship will take place on Pickwick Lake and Wilson Lake in Florence, Alabama beginning on June 22.

### JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Dylan Sorreles and Cullum Brown from Texas took home the 2021 Junior World Championship from Quad Cities, Illinois in July. The two youngsters from Texas beat out 39 other teams made up of student anglers in eighth grade or younger. The team was awarded with scholarship money and other prizes to take home with them.

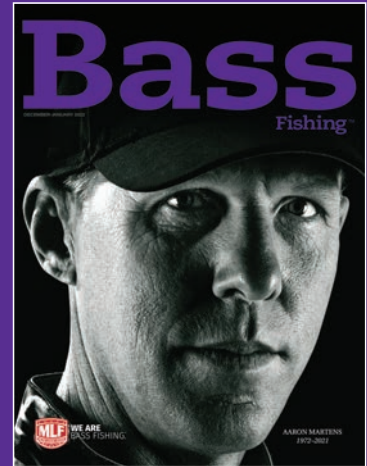
Congratulations to all of this year's winners as we look forward to another exciting season in 2022.

## ABOUT THE BASS FEDERATION

**THE BASS FEDERATION INC., (TBF)** is a member of the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame. TBF is owned by those we serve, and dedicated to the sport of fishing. The Federation is the largest and oldest organized grassroots fishing, youth and conservation organization. TBF, our affiliated state federations and their member clubs conduct more than 20,000 events each year and have provided a foundation for the entire bass fishing industry for more than 50 years. TBF founded the Student Angler Federation and the National High School Fishing program in 2007 to promote clean family fun and education through fishing, and are proud partners in fishing with MLF. Visit [bassfederation.com](http://bassfederation.com) or [highschoolfishing.org](http://highschoolfishing.org) and "LIKE US" on Facebook.

**Contact TBF:** Send us your club stories. If you have a question or want to know more about TBF, which is YOUR organization, drop us a line at [FAQ@bassfederation.com](mailto:FAQ@bassfederation.com). Above all else, thank you for being a member of The Bass Federation. ■

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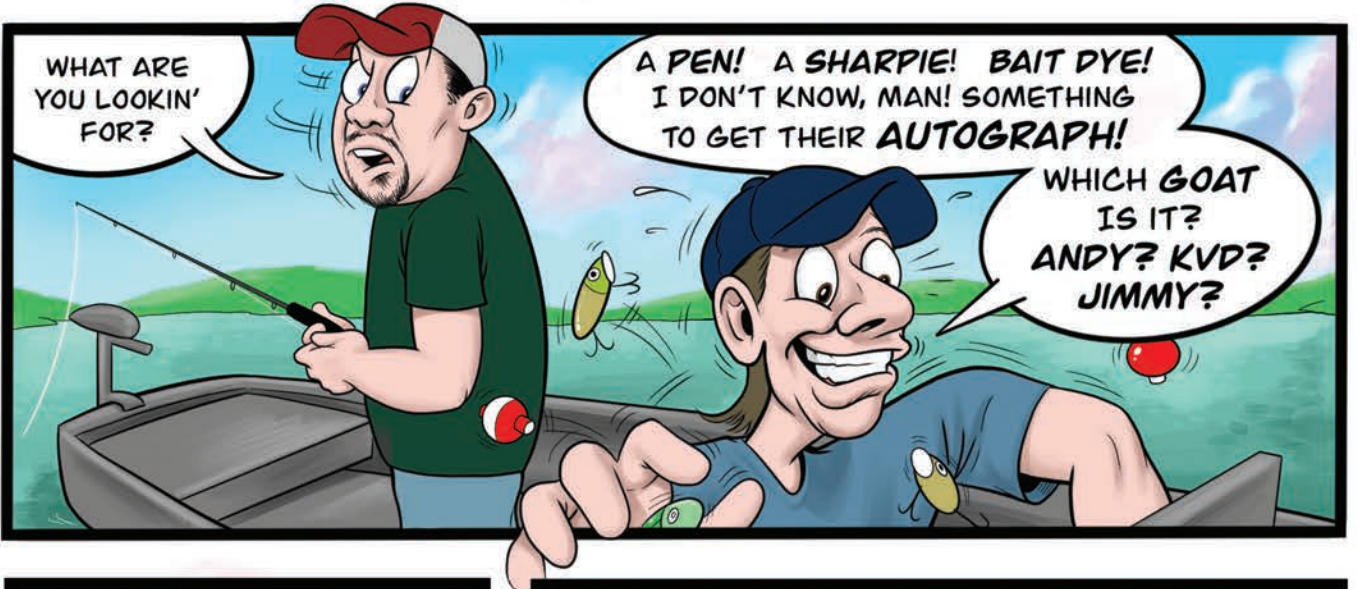
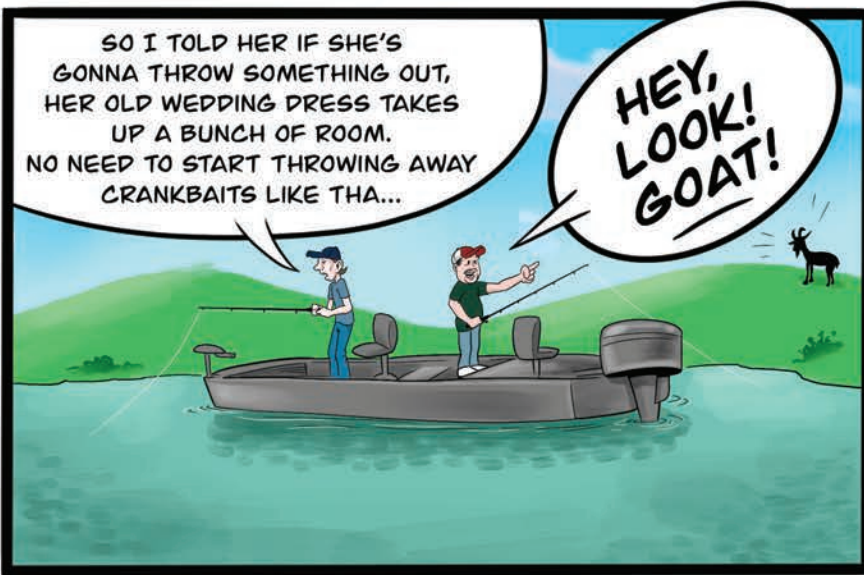
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