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COVER PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA



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VICE PRESIDENT, DIGITAL MEDIA & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF | *Joel Shangle*
MANAGING EDITOR | *Justin Onslow*
PRODUCTION MANAGER AND GRAPHIC DESIGNER | *Michelle Dowling*
LEAD DESIGNER AND ILLUSTRATOR | *Brandon Rowan*
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chris.bork@majorleaguefishing.com

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DIRECTOR OF ACCOUNT SERVICES | *Jenn Sonnek*
jenn.sonnek@majorleaguefishing.com

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“DO YOU LIKE BB GUNS?” MEMORIES OF A BASS FISHING ICON



The bass fishing world lost another icon in mid-May with the passing of Ray Scott, the former insurance salesman who – through the power of his endless creativity and salesmanship – ushered in the era of tournament bass fishing as we all know and love it today.

No matter which club, team or tournament trail you fish (or which organization’s patch you wear on your shoulder), if you fish for bass or compete in a bass tournament of any kind, rest assured that Mr. Ray’s influence can be felt in everything from the PFD that you wear to the aerated livewell in the back of your boat. Ray was rightfully known as an innovator, and his imagination and salesmanship (and chutzpah) seemingly knew no bounds, as so many people in the fishing world have shared since his passing.



But behind the boisterous, charismatic, consummate-showman personality that Ray brought to every public occasion, I found him to be an astoundingly interesting, funny, curious, kind man. I don’t remember exactly how or when he and I were introduced – it likely had something to do with the radio show I operated half a lifetime ago – but along about 2003 or 2004, Ray and I fell into a habit of semi-regular phone calls that would sometimes carry on for two hours.

Our chats would frequently reveal to me Ray Scott’s generous spirit. Midway through a conversation, Ray would holler: “Girls! Send Joel a copy of my book!” (meaning his 1981 book “Prospecting and Selling: From a Fishing Hole to a Pot of Gold”). Or “Girls! Send Joel a copy of that little red book!” (meaning “The Little Red Book of Selling”).

Four or five days later, a package would arrive from Ray Scott Outdoors. Ray was a gift-giver of his word.

I once told Ray that I had journeyed to Lunker Lodge on Lake Seminole to photograph the table where he, Jack Wingate and former Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin sat down in 1968 to create the first national bass-fishing organization. I mentioned the 1967 Heddon All-American Bass Invitational Tournament on Beaver Lake that Ray willed into existence – the forerunner of big-time bass tournaments as we know them today – and he asked me a seemingly random question: “Do you like BB guns?”

“Of course I like BB guns, Ray. Why?” I responded.

Soon thereafter, another gift arrived at my door: A 1967 Daisy BB gun with the inaugural All-American logo burned into the stock, right next to Ray Scott’s signature. I called Ray to thank him and learned that only 10 of those BB guns were ever produced. Ray had given two to his sons, one to bass-boat guru Earl Bentz, one to President George Bush and maybe a couple more people whose names escape me.

Ray Scott’s generosity and kindness meant a lot to me then, and I feel the significance of that BB gun more than ever now.

He was a pioneer, a bigger-than-life personality, and a dear friend to many. Ray Scott, you will be missed. Thank you.

JOEL SHANGLE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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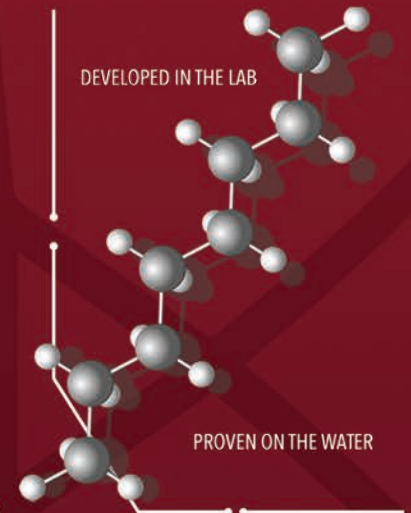
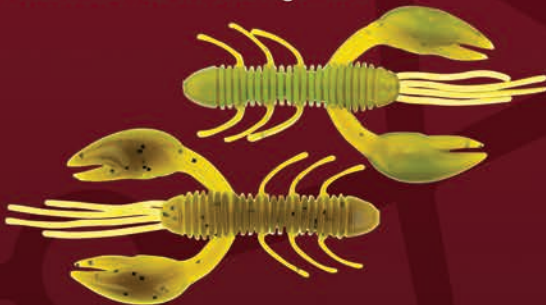
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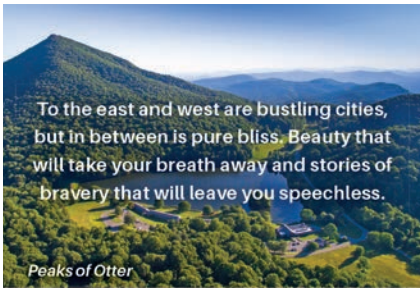


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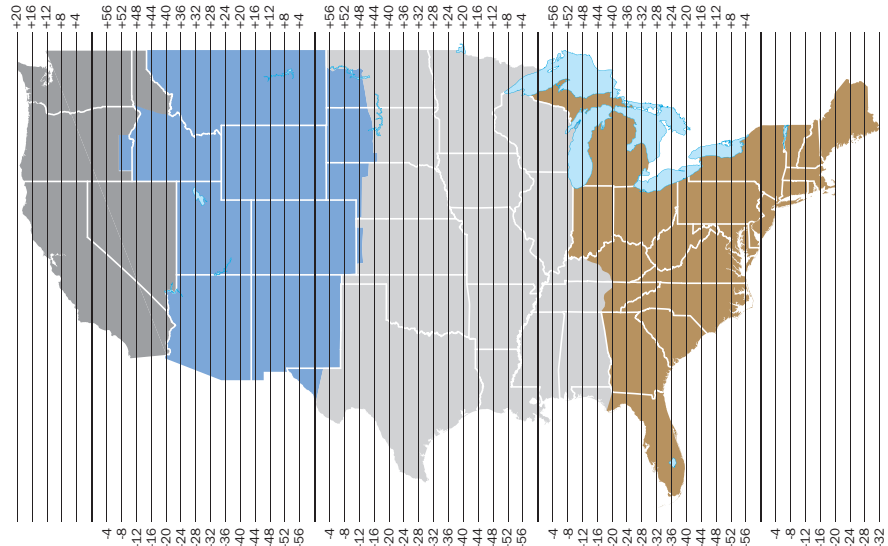
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SOLUNAR TABLES

JULY-AUGUST 2022

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



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

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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STRIKE KING CO-ANGLER PROGRAM: OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND IN 2022



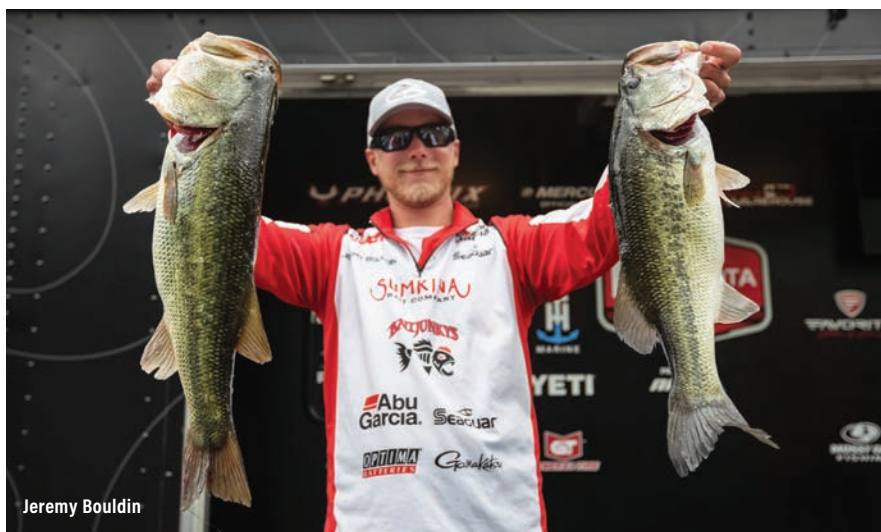
It's a little-disputed fact that the Strike King Co-Angler program – which provides cash rewards and high-level tournament access and experience to MLF anglers fishing the Phoenix Bass Fishing League Presented by T-H Marine and Toyota Series – is one of the best programs in tournament bass fishing.

It's certainly one of the fastest growing. After a record year for Strike King Co-Anglers in 2021 (Toyota Series co-angler participation rose 11 percent year-over-year while BFL entries were up 20 percent), the 2022 co-angler roll has continued through the midway point of the calendar with another 17-percent increase in unique anglers in the Toyota Series.

If you ask North Carolina Strike King Co-Angler Jeremy Bouldin, he'll tell you that the burgeoning number of co-anglers is warranted, and that fishing from the back of the boat (no matter what the level) is an option that every up-and-coming bass angler should explore.

"I'd recommend it to anybody who's trying to learn and move up the ladder in tournament bass fishing," said Bouldin. "It's a great steppingstone to get your feet wet. On the Toyota Series, where there's a pretty good number of guys fishing for a living, it gives you a chance to experience how these guys who do it for a living operate. (Fishing as a co-angler) makes sense."

In Bouldin's case in 2022, it's made a lot of sense. Fishing his first year as a Strike King Co-Angler at the Toyota Series level,



Jeremy Bouldin

PHOTOS BY COBI PELLEGRINO

the North Carolina angler picked up back-to-back wins in the Central Division, claiming the co-angler title at the Dale Hollow Lake event in late March and winning again at Lake Chickamauga in early May.

He finished third in the Central Division Strike King Co-Angler of the Year standings in his first year at that level – Alabama angler Randy Wiggins earned the \$2,000 bonus from Strike King for winning the division's C-AOY race – and qualified to fish the 2022 Toyota Series Championship on Lake Guntersville Nov. 3-5.

"I've been telling myself that I need to fish the Toyota Series as a boater, but I decided that I should fish it this year as a co-angler and see how it goes, for the experience as much as anything," Bouldin said. "I assumed it would be

like a big BFL, but it's a lot more than that. It takes a different mentality and mindset than fishing as a weekend angler. I can take that experience and what I've learned (in 2022) and go fish it as a boater next season."

THE STRIKE KING CO-ANGLER BENEFIT

Co-anglers competing in the six divisions of the Toyota Series and 24 divisions of Phoenix Bass Fishing League have earned points throughout the 2022 season toward the C-AOY standings in their respective divisions. Co-Angler of the Year winners in Toyota Series divisions take home \$2,000 apiece (courtesy of Strike King) while BFL C-AOY champs earn a \$500 bonus.

With more than 50 BFLs remaining on the 2022 schedule from June through October and a few Toyota Series events leading up to the November Championship still open, multiple opportunities exist for Strike King Co-Anglers.

Find entry information on the Toyota Series and Phoenix Bass Fishing League pages on the web at MajorLeagueFishing.com. ■



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BASING BASS SIZE STANDARDS ON SCIENCE

How MLF FMD research guides Bass Pro Tour's scorable bass minimums



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

Skeet Reese

Long before the schedule is announced for each Bass Pro Tour stage, the Major League Fishing Fisheries Management Division (FMD) in partnership with Berkley Labs has already analyzed data sets that contain hundreds of bass for each fishery the tour will visit. Our process starts by contacting the state fisheries biologist who manages each individual fishery and obtaining a raw data set from each fishery that contains the past several years of sampling data.

What we get back leads us down a unique road that ends with a recommendation to a committee that determines Minimum Scorable Bass weights for each Bass Pro Tour event.

THE BASELINE FOR DATA COLLECTION

It may surprise you to find out that there's no real national standard for how often a fishery is sampled or what types of data are collected. Instead, every state has individual plans and procedures statewide (or in a few cases, a plan for each individual fishery).

The primary sampling method state agencies use to collect black bass species is electrofishing. This is usually done using random plot generation on a map to select sites. Each site is then electrofished for a specific amount of time, collecting all fish species observed. In some fisheries, we also receive data that targets black bass over other species, or in locations that are determined in a non-random fashion.

The frequency of electrofishing for each fishery could be anything from twice a year to once every other year or longer. This is highly dependent on the management plan in place for the fishery and its popularity among anglers. For example, popular reservoirs like Lake Fork will be sampled more often than a lesser-known fishery. Regardless of random or non-random electrofishing, once a fish is caught by a sampling crew, data is collected for that fish. But, once again, what's collected varies from state to state. Lengths may be collected in millimeters, centimeters or inches, and weights may be in kilograms, grams, pounds or not collected at all.



Dustin Connell

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



Fletcher Shryock

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER SHANGLE



Andy Morgan

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

BREAKING DOWN THE DATA

As you can imagine with the Bass Pro Tour visiting half a dozen or more states annually, we receive very diverse data sets. No matter what data the state biologist provides, our process at the FMD desk is always the same.

First, we filter all the data by species – largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass are individually analyzed if they exist in the same fishery. Next, we must standardize length and weight, so we run the data set through formulas to give inches for length and total pounds for weight. Step three is to then sort the filtered data by length and remove all fish below legal size. For fisheries with a slot limit or special regulation, we'll typically use the statewide standard-length limits.

The data set may start out covering the past five years with 3,000 fish, but typically when we remove non-legal-sized fish, we quickly get down below 1,000 legal fish in the data set. At this point, we pause our data sorting and calculate the average weight of a barely legal fish, just to get a base line for what the absolute minimum a legal fish weighs.

The average weight of a 14-inch fish from one fishery to another may vary by as much as a quarter pound. For example, a 14-inch fish at Lake Fork was 1.31 pounds, but at Lake Palestine it was 1.42 pounds.

Once we have the data standardized, sorted and all non-legal fish removed, we then group the fish by weight in 1/4-pound increments. We calculate what percentage of legal fish in the data set fit into each weight class and finally total what percentage of the data set would be included if each weight class was the minimum scorable weight. We then replicate this for each species if that's needed.

For example, at Lake Fork, we started with a data set and filtered it down to 473 legal fish over 14 inches (which is the state regulation; not the slot limit used on the fishery). Of those legal fish, 90 percent were over 1 1/2 pounds, 70 percent were over 2 pounds, 62 percent were over 2 1/4 pounds, and 54 percent were over 2 1/2 pounds. This is the data we presented to the committee for selecting the Minimal Scorable Weight, along with a recommendation for exactly where we think the standard should be set for that fishery.

MAKING THE FINAL SCORABLE-BASS STANDARD

Other members of the abovementioned committee are anglers and league officials who might bring results from local tournament weigh-ins, their pre-practice experience, predictions on weather conditions or even our own SCORE-TRACKER® data from past events. The committee discusses our recommendations and compares this science-based approach to real-world experience to come up with the Minimum Scorable Weight. After one final vote, it's set and we move on to the next season.

The key is that this process is happening well before the schedule is even announced. The goal is to make a real-time minimum weight determination that holds the Bass Pro Tour anglers to a higher standard than most comparable events on a given body of water. Sometimes we get it right. Other times, unpredictable conditions make our standard set too high. Regardless, the Minimum Scorable Weight is one of the many ways the Bass Pro Tour maintains a very high level of competition, and the MLF Fisheries Management Division is happy to play a small role in making sure it's based in science. ■

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS

MLF NOW!

Live Stream at MajorLeagueFishing.com or MyOutdoorTV.com

June 16–19: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Toyota Stop 5 @ James River Presented by PowerStop Brakes

July 29–Aug. 1: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Covercraft Stop 6 @ Lake Champlain Presented by WileyX

Outdoor Channel — Saturdays 2–4 p.m. (ET)

June 11: Summit Cup Sudden Death Round 1

June 18: Summit Cup Sudden Death Round 2

June 25: Summit Cup Championship Round

Outdoor Channel — Saturdays 4–4:30 p.m. (ET)

June 11: MLF All Angles – Summit Cup Sudden Death Round 1

June 18: MLF All Angles – Summit Cup Sudden Death Round 2

June 25: MLF All Angles – Summit Cup Championship Round



PHOTO BY JOOY WHITE



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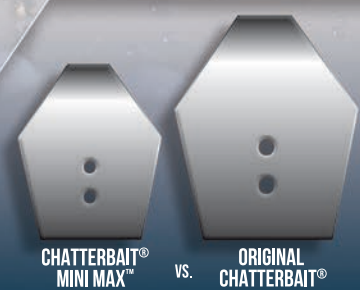
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Nearly 40 years of building a Hall of Fame career with credentials that include nine national wins, 20 trips to national championship events and close to \$2.5 million in career earnings has taken its toll on Major League Fishing pro Shaw Grigsby.

Putting in a virtually endless number of hours on the water and tacking on hundreds of thousands of miles towing a boat around the country is physically demanding. While the culmination of all those countless repetitions has given the Gainesville, Florida, pro the kind of discomfort from past injuries that hamper his response, they haven't dampened his drive.

At 66 years old, Grigsby is still touring the country, competing on the Bass Pro Tour and doing numerous personal appearances. A fan favorite due to his vibrant personality, strong faith and the 20-year run on his One More Cast television show, Grigsby still has the desire to perform at a high level and has sought remedies to the ailments that have prevented him from performing at peak operating levels.

One of the treatments he sought in 2021 was to repair damage to his thumb caused by years of pressing thumb bars on baitcasting reels, and the abuse of battling hard-fighting fish. Prior to the decision to go under the knife, Grigsby tried several options – including a variety of anti-inflammatory medications and CBD oil.

Grigsby had some considerations for the use of the CBD treatments.

"The first thing that was important to me was that it had no THC in it," he said. "I just don't want to be tied to the use of that type of product."

Shaw, Meet Revital Outdoors

Grigsby searched for a CBD treatment that worked for him, but it wasn't easy.

"I tried two or three different brands the past few years and didn't see much result," he said. "I was about to write off CBD products as

something that didn't work for me until I was introduced to Revital Outdoors at ICAST 2021."

Grigsby said he was introduced to the product by his friend Marcus Parker, and he decided to give it a try.

"Marcus told me that it was the cleanest, purest product that he had come across, so I did some research," he said. "I found out that they put their products through an intensive Nano Emulsification process to clean them and remove THC, so I looked further."

What he found was an incredibly pure product that made it worth trying.

"They gave me some and I started taking it right after ICAST," he said. "Then I went to our Bass Pro Tour event at Lake Champlain."

Meeting Grigsby's CBD Goals

The types of techniques and treatments for coping with soreness and injury can vary from person to person. For Grigsby, the treatment typically involved taking over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications and hoping they'd have an effect on the soreness – without any bad side effects.

One of Grigsby's key considerations: He's a heart patient who has had bypass surgery and has to watch his intake of food and medications that affect his blood pressure. Anti-inflammatory drugs can have that effect, so he would often take them only on competition days and deal with discomfort on off days.

Grigsby had begun his Revital Outdoors regimen prior to the Lake Champlain event, and partway through the event, he realized he wasn't taking his anti-inflammatories. The Revital Outdoors Softgels and gummies he was taking were not only helping relieve the discomfort but also helping him sleep better, which aids in recovery from strenuous activity.

He completed the season and continued his Revital Outdoors treatments all the way through surgery to repair his thumb in October of 2021.

Grigsby reported that while he can't necessarily credit the CBD oil with helping in the post-surgical recovery of his thumb, he said it's helped him with a separate issue his doctor found during surgery.

"While he was operating, he found that I had significant arthritis in my joint," Grigsby said. "I know that Revital Outdoors' products have helped me with that issue; allowing my body to heal from surgery without the added stress of the additional discomfort."

Grigsby's Go-To Products

Grigsby is a fan of Revital's CBD Softgels with Curcumin, CBD Cream – Unscented and CBD Gummies before bed.

In his "everyday" life off the water, Grigsby takes one of the CBD Softgels with Curcumin to help with mobility and discomfort. However, in the week leading up to a Bass Pro Tour event, he increases the daily intake to two of the Softgels through the competition days.

"I notice a difference in my ability to move and be competitive during an event by doing that," he said.

Grigsby uses the CBD Cream as a quick-help, topical solution when he's on the water, if he notices a particular area getting sore or fatigued.

"I don't use this every day, but when I'm needing a little fast relief, this really helps," he said. Finally, Grigsby has discovered the benefits of a solid night's sleep are vital to being competitive and takes the Revital Outdoors CBD Gummies before bed, which help him relax and sleep.

"Having a good night's sleep helps the body recover from stress, but it also helps with healing," Grigsby said. "We all have inflammation and discomfort, and sound sleep helps defeat that."

The Results

Grigsby readily states that he believes Revital Outdoors' product line is helping him in his career.

"At this point, I really feel like Revital Outdoors is a big part of me being competitive," he confirmed. "I'm still not quite 100 percent when it comes to my thumb, but it's making progress. If I were to be dealing with the amount of discomfort I was feeling prior to beginning my regimen on top of the thumb, I wouldn't be fishing this year."

"In fact, when looking at the issues I've dealt with over the past couple of years, I doubt that I would still be able to compete if I had not discovered Revital Outdoors." 🦄





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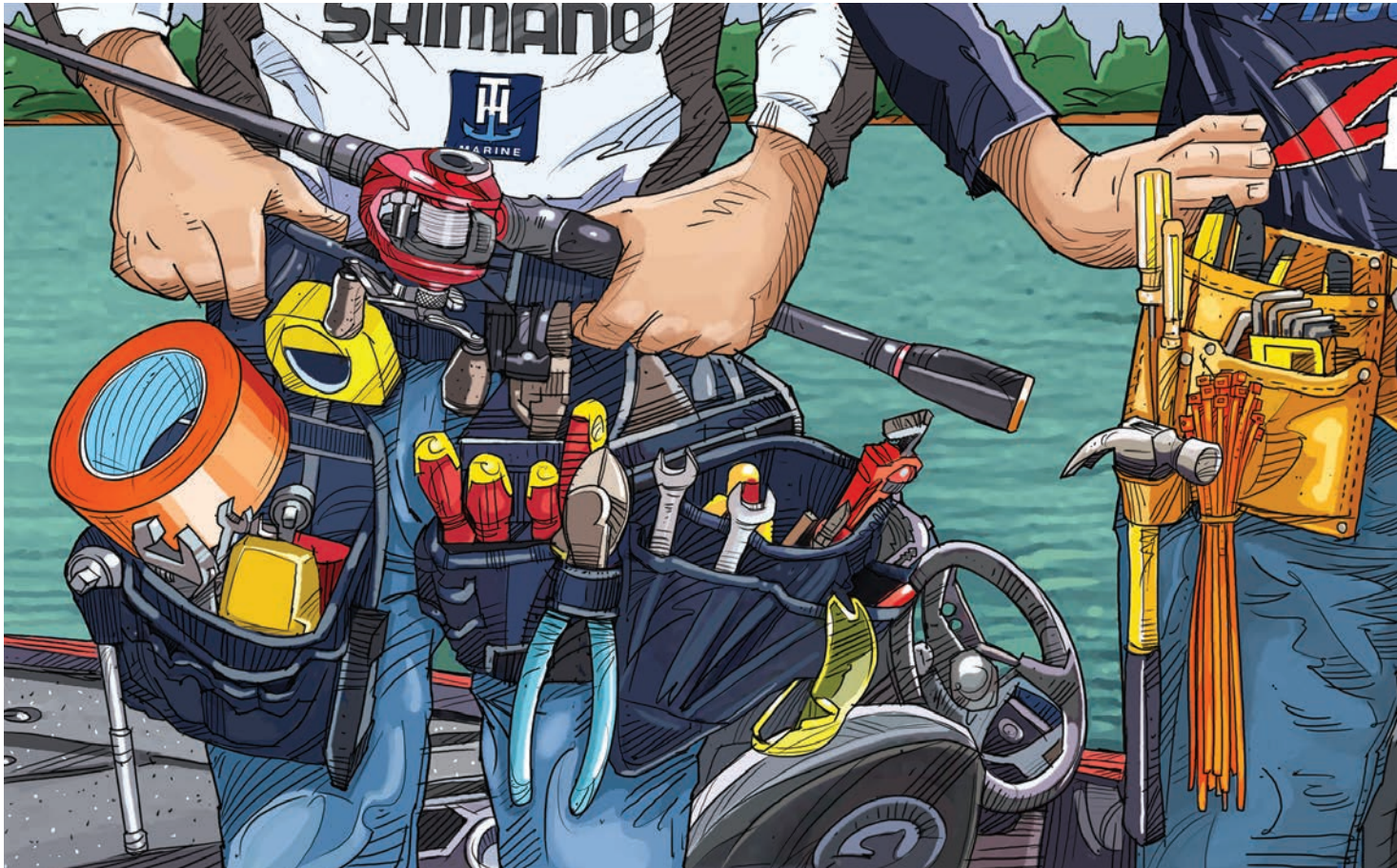
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TOOL TIME

It pays for professional bass anglers to think like a Boy Scout when it comes to repairs



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.

When it comes to the tools professional bass anglers use to do their job, there's a lot of attention given to rods, reels, line, lures and electronics. However, there's an entire class of other tools that pros use that are rarely talked about. These tools are used to fix anything from tires to wires. After all, tournament fishing is fertile ground for good old Murphy's Law: Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.

So, you might as well have some tools around for insurance.

MLF pros David Walker and Alex Davis have fished tournaments across the country for a combined total of some 40 years. Between the two of them, they've experienced just about every kind of marine malfunction or inadvertent incident imaginable.

Their advice for such mishaps? Carry plenty of tools.

"Carrying tools provides self-sufficiency," Walker says. "When you're traveling thousands of miles with a truck, trailer, boat and a camper, things will go wrong; that's just a fact. By carrying a few extra things, you're in a position to fix stuff so you're not left stranded on the water or on the road."

Davis strongly agrees.

"Just having a few tools and a handful of spare parts can go a long way in salvaging a tournament or practice day," Davis says. "It takes just a few minutes to fix things, if you have the right stuff to do it."

YOUR BASIC BOAT TOOLS

Both Walker and Davis carry far more tools in their trucks than in their boats. Expensive tools and the marine environment don't mix well. Plus, given the amount of tackle pros must carry these days, room

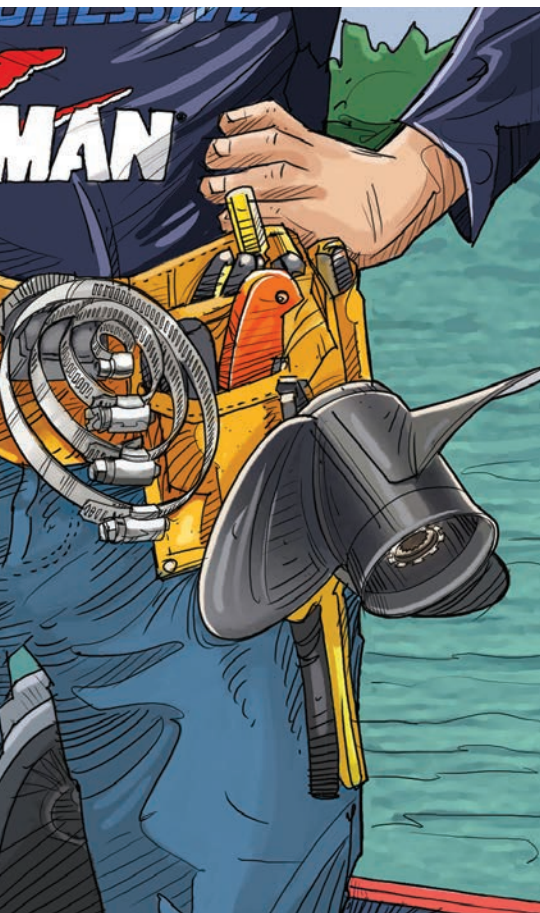


ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER

for tools in boats has been reduced. With that, Walker offers the bare minimum hardware needed for the boat.

"The most vulnerable components on the boat are the props, both on the outboard and trolling motor," Walker says. "Curling a prop or slinging a blade can leave you immobile; always carry a spare outboard prop and trolling motor prop in your boat and the tools to replace them with."

Walker's boat mainstays are an 18-inch breaking bar with 1 1/16-inch deep socket dedicated for the prop nut, needle-nose pliers for the cotter pin and a 4-by-4-inch block of wood as a prop stop to wedge between the prop and the lower unit when putting torque on the prop nut. He also carries a complete spare prop nut replacement set. If he drops any of the bolts, pins or washers in the water during replacement, he has backups for all.

Beyond that, Walker carries a pair of diagonal side cutters, a multi-tool featuring pliers with screwdrivers and

plenty of zip ties, duct tape or Gorilla Tape and electrical tape. He's also a big proponent of portable jumper boxes that will jump start the boat in the event of a dead battery.

Davis' boat tool list is a little more extensive. He carries two prop wrenches: an 18-inch breaking bar with a prop socket as well as a T-H Marine floating prop wrench. His toolbox in the boat includes screwdrivers, an assortment of pliers, a few basic socket sizes and all wrench sizes in the form of a "universal socket wrench," which includes up to four different sizes all on one wrench.

"With just three or four of those universal wrenches, I've got 12 to 16 sizes of metric and standard sizes covered," he says. "Also, I carry a complete set of Allen wrenches in the boat, which are critical these days."

In addition, Davis is adamant about carrying spare fuses for electronics, shallow-water anchors and jackplates. He also carries a healthy selection of electrical connectors like butt connectors, ring terminals and quick connectors. In addition, he has spare pump cartridges for his livewell and bilge pumps as well as extra hose clamps and zip ties.

"Any one of those things I just mentioned can fix something that is 'broken' in a matter of minutes," Davis says. "So many times it's not the device that's broken; it's a blown fuse or a broken terminal off a power wire, or a seized up pump cartridge. All big problems with simple fixes if you're prepared."

Davis even carries a spare 2D sonar puck with a cable clamp for his front graph. In the event of an accidental nicked or cut transducer cable, he can strap the 2D puck to the trolling motor, run the wire to his unit and at least have a depth reading again.

KEEPING THAT TOW VEHICLE ROLLING

When it comes to tools in the truck, both anglers are prepared with complete toolboxes with all sizes of wrenches, sockets, Allen wrenches, screwdrivers, vice grips, knives and box cutters. In addition, they carry cordless drills (including an assortment of bits and driver sizes), hydraulic jacks, tire irons, hammers, hacksaws and even heat guns for heat shrinking tubing for electrical repairs.

According to both pros, tires are the equipment that are most vulnerable to damage on tour. Since most pros have a total of eight tires per rig, it's only a matter of time before one gets punctured with a stray nail or screw.

"If I could only take a few tools with me in my truck, I would pick a tire plug kit (T-handles type), my 3-foot breaker bar for tire lug nuts, a hydraulic jack, vice grips and an electric air inflator," Walker says. "Being stuck on the side of a busy interstate with a flat is horrifying. In most cases, if you have one of those portable air inflators, you can pump air into the tire and at least limp to the safety of the next exit or gas station."

Many times, the nail or screw is visible and can be removed with a set of vice grips and quickly plugged with the plug kit without even jacking the vehicle up. Use a portable/cordless air inflator to put air back in the tire and you're rolling again.

For tires that need to be replaced with the spare, Walker says there's no substitute for a good mini hydraulic floor jack.

"Don't even bother with the mechanical jack that comes with the vehicle," Walker says. "Always carry a portable hydraulic floor jack in the truck. I promise you it will be worth it the very first time you have to use it. It's much faster and more secure."

Davis even carries a pre-assembled trailer hub kit in case one of his trailer bearings goes bad.

"The farther you travel, the more tools and spare stuff you need," Davis says. "If you mostly fish around home and have an issue, you can usually call a buddy to get out of a bind. But if you travel the Toyota Series or the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit and you're 1,000 miles from home in rural New York and get in a pinch, trust me, you'll be glad you have tools with you."

"You'd be surprised at how resourceful you can become with a pair of vice grips, some zip ties and duct tape when it comes to keeping something put together for just a few more miles," Walker says with a laugh. "Being able to limp back to shore or to the next exit is far better than just being outright stranded in the middle of nowhere." ■



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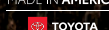
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

BOBBY HUMBLE

Lane's mindset, shallow-water roots were his keys to victory at REDCREST

It was pure magic. With just minutes to go in the defining tournament of his career, Bobby Lane did the unthinkable, catching a 2-pound bass to steal the REDCREST title from the best tournament bass fisherman in the world.

Exactly 2 pounds.

Possibly more dramatic than the fish catch was the tale of the scale. Twice it read 1-15. But Lane's third try was the charm, as the fish finally registered a scorable weight of 2 pounds even and was quickly released.

Lane's feat was epic. Largely ignoring the technological advancements that have overwhelmed our industry, Lane went to the bank and caught them old-school with a jig and a crankbait, the same way anglers have been catching bass on Grand Lake each spring for generations.

It was a typical move for our champion. Lane's career has been one built on principle - knowing where you came from and sticking to your guns.

Most of us are familiar with the story of the notorious Lane boys. Bobby and his brothers Chris and Arnie were always on the move as youngsters, exploring and fishing anything and everything central Florida had to offer, daylight 'til dark. All three still competitively fish, but Bobby's career had often been overshadowed by the accomplishments of Chris, the seven-time tour winner and former Bassmaster Classic champion.

Competitors know better. For years, I've heard many mention the name "Bobby Lane" when compiling their own list of best on tour, and his record backs it up.

Lane may be one of the most decorated anglers on tour without a championship win until now. He's no stranger to versatility; we've seen Lane pick up a spinning rod when he needs it, catching all species of bass in a variety of water depths.

But, it's shoreline junk fishing where Lane excels. Keeping himself in the game. And while Lane utilized all of his fishing talents to stay in contention, it was his mindset that won the big one.

BOBBY BEAT THE BANK (AND THE FIELD)

First, we must consider the venue – specifically, the conditions. Grand Lake O' the Cherokees is never easy, and the lake did all it could do to beat a bank fisherman during REDCREST.

Grand is full of floating boat docks, to the point where fishing a stretch of shoreline can be a logistical nightmare. Anglers targeting shallow cover must go in, out and around so many docks that it's feasible to spend more time trolling than casting. Such becomes quite the lesson in patience as the clock ticks down. The BPT format, with constant SCORETRACKER® updates, just adds to the anxiety.

Couple this with the rising water greeting the 2022 REDCREST field, which created two more obstacles: the inability for anglers to navigate under dock walkways and spend more time in productive areas, and an onslaught of dead leaves floating everywhere, fouling a high percentage of casts. Both worked against the bank beaters.

In all, this Grand Lake REDCREST may have been the most inefficient championship in history for a shallow-water angler.

Lane wouldn't let that bother him. Possibly credit to his Florida roots, Lane is used to cycling through long stretches of unproductive water in order to discover the juice. It's a typical scenario in the Sunshine State. But once a Lane boy finds the zone, look out.

Lane was wired for this type of tournament, to some degree. He went in with the ability and the patience to challenge the vastly more efficient open-water anglers. In all, it's likely that Lane's lures were in front of the fewest bass of any top competitor in the finals. Yet, somehow, he caught the most weight.

But it almost didn't happen, and may not have for any other angler.

BOBBY POSITIVE: OVERCOMING A BLUNDER

Midway through the final fishing day, Lane had a lapse of judgement. With a 4-pound bass securely hooked on his jig, Lane pressured the fish and tried a rushed boat flip, only to break his line. Fast forward about four hours, and Lane would find himself less than 2 pounds down with 10 minutes to go.

Surely, the earlier fish loss – one that Lane admitted was unquestionably preventable – weighed on his mind. He had let the championship slip away by his own hand.

"I had to mentally block all of that out of my head. I tried to erase that, and I did," Lane said.

It's a lesson in commitment. As a young man, Lane was nicknamed "Bobby Humble" by his dad. Through his father's guidance, he was taught to remain centered and wait his turn. To "be as humble as possible, no matter what situation you're in." He'd rely on that gameplan when he needed it most.

Lane had done the majority of his damage in Drowning Creek, specifically a stair-stepped section with deep-water access, allowing the bass to set up on a quick drop. Suckers for a crankbait, Lane had their number and could almost call his shot in earlier rounds.

But the final day brought a change. With warming conditions, the bass abandoned the hotspot and instead migrated shallower. Still patiently waiting, Lane took off after them.

"I knew I could still have a 20-pound third period in Drowning Creek; I just had to figure out where to do that," Lane said.

Earlier in the week, Lane noted a few shallower docks in the area, but hadn't investigated further. Open minded, he gave them a try, pitching his jig around any likely target, mostly in the shallowest section.

Moving quickly, Lane set into the fish that would essentially win the event for him, a surprise monster that ate his jig as he navigated around the back of a dock. An impossible fish to land; line draped across two sections of steel cable, Lane stayed focused, took his time when he needed it most, and humbly lip-locked the 6-pound monster. A few minutes later, he would catch the 2-pound squeaker to overtake Jacob Wheeler.

Astute fans would note Lane's message to the cameras in between the two fish catches, when he was still more than a pound down.

"We have six minutes to go. Plenty of time."

Thirty years of competition, heartache and near misses, comes down to six minutes. Six minutes for the biggest title of your life. One which should be in the bag, if not for a costly blunder.

Plenty of time for Bobby Humble. ■



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

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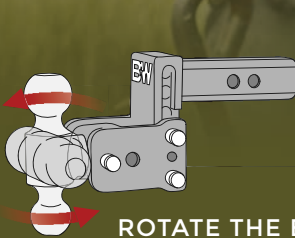




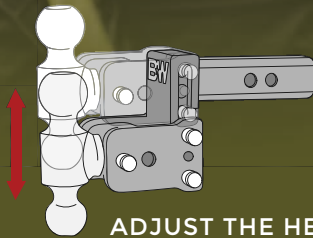
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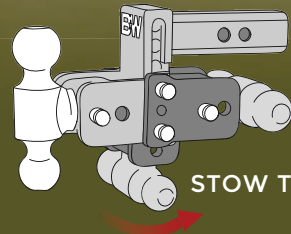
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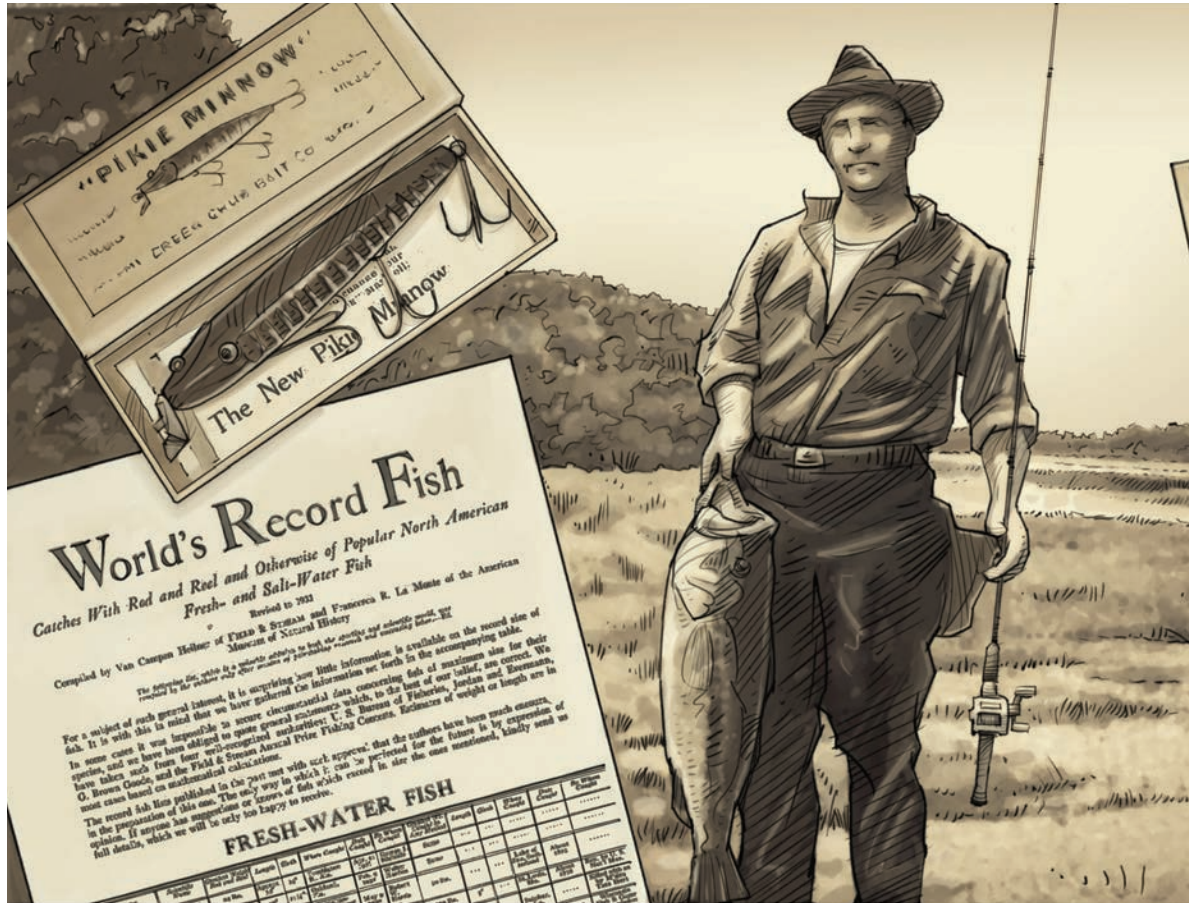
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BASS FISHING'S FIRST WORLD RECORD

The circumstances surrounding Fritz Friebel's 20-pound largemouth are still shrouded in legend



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.

These days, you can't watch a sporting event or competition of any kind without hearing terms like "world record" or "Olympic record," or "track record," or some such thing, but it hasn't always been like that, especially in bass fishing. Record keeping in the bass world got a bit of a late start, causing many (including me) to wonder what we may have missed in those early days.

I should start this piece by noting that true "sport fishing" – where the goal is to catch a fish deemed worthy of pursuit by "sporting means" – is relatively new as human endeavors go. Before the 19th Century, fishing was purely a subsistence activity. People generally did not go fishing for the pleasure of it. They may have enjoyed it, but the goal was clear: They were out to get food.

And the culinary aspect of fish was a big part of determining which species would be considered "sport fish" and which were merely trash. If the public liked the taste of a fish species, it was classified as a "game" or "sport" fish early on. If not, it was a "rough" fish, unworthy of the table or of pursuit by gentlemen (few women were anglers, and those who were generally did not make it public).

The largemouth bass had a bad reputation in the early days of sportfishing. In the mid 1800s, it was generally regarded as a low-class fish, living in dank, fetid waters, and tasting "muddy." If you were a sporting angler, you pursued trout. That opinion persisted well into the 20th Century in some areas.



ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MANFLIER

The attitude among anglers that you always eat what you catch persisted until about 60 years ago. Catch and release was essentially unheard of before that, and it started in the freshwater trout world, not among bass anglers. We didn't get on board with the concept of releasing fish alive so they could be caught again until the 1970s.

Of course, big fish have always impressed and always been noteworthy, but no one took up the burden of tracking and comparing such catches until the 1910s. That's when *Field & Stream* magazine started an annual big fish contest.

The *Field & Stream* contest ran from 1911 to 1977, and around about the 1920s, they began to realize they had accumulated quite a bit of data on big fish. Scanning their own lists of winners, they began to list "world records," and they crowned Fritz Friebel of Tampa, Florida, as the man to beat in the largemouth bass category.

TAKE OFF YOUR HATS TO FRITZ FRIEBEL

Friebel was an avid and talented angler - a traveling hardware salesman who carried his fishing tackle and some old clothes with him on the road so as not to miss any good opportunities. He didn't own a boat but would wade up to his armpits in search of bass.

Friebel's record catch is pretty well documented, but there are some questions. He reportedly caught the fish on Saturday, May 19, 1923, but years later, he said it actually happened on the next day.

"It was a Sunday morning when I should have been in church, and I had to call a grocer to open his store to get the fish weighed," he admitted.

Other reports maintain it was weighed on a postal scale. Either way, the scale was certified, and the fish measured 31 inches long and had a girth of 27 inches. When the scale settled on 20 pounds, 2 ounces, someone witnessing the weigh-in apparently accused Friebel of adding weight to the fish using lead sinkers.

That's when Friebel pulled out his pocketknife, slit the fish's belly open and suggested that someone reach inside to find out. There were no challengers after that.

When *Field & Stream* reported the catch in the September 1924 issue, declaring Friebel the winner of their 1923 contest, they laid it on thick:

Also in the Southern Large-mouth Black Bass Division, the world's record for large-mouth black bass was smashed into flinders. Take off your hats, fishermen all, to ... Mr. Fritz Friebel, world's record-holder, large-mouth black bass. Mr. Friebel smashes the previous world's record by 22 per cent, his amazing black bass weighing 20 pounds 2 ounces, against a former record weight for this class of fish of 16 1/2 pounds.

That 16 1/2-pound mark represents the next heaviest large-mouth entered in the *Field & Stream* contest to that point. Larger fish - much larger fish - were occasionally reported, including a 23-2 in 1884 and a 24-pounder in the mid 1800s.

A second question surrounding Friebel's catch was more critical than the date. Where did he catch the monster?

Initially, Friebel and the friends he was fishing with reported that the catch came from Moody Lake, just north of San Antonio, Florida, in Pasco County. You can see it from what's now I-75. In fact, it came from nearby and aptly named Big Fish Lake, now (and then) located on private property.

What is not the subject of controversy is the lure Friebel used. It was a Creek Chub No. 700 Straight Pikie Minnow. The company was so proud of the catch that it featured Friebel in its 1928 catalog, noting "The Black Bass Record has been Broken - Not Cracked or Bent, but Crushed, Torn Apart and Split Wide Open.... Please leap to your feet and throw your hats into the air. Rah, Rah! To Mr. Friebel and his black bass."

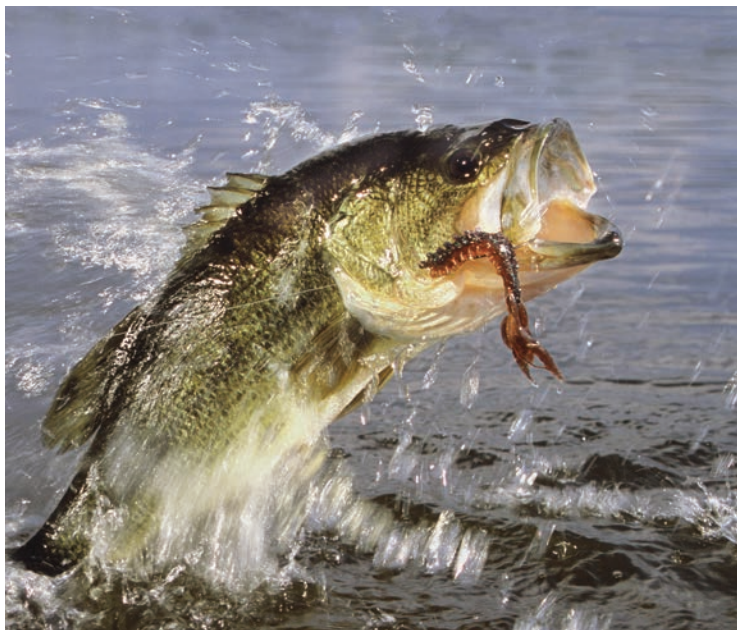
Friebel's bass may be the largest ever caught in Florida, but it's not the state record because a state biologist did not document the catch. No one thought about records in those days ... including the state. The only reason a lot of these catches were ever weighed at all was because of the *Field & Stream* contest and the chance to win \$50 or \$75 worth of merchandise.

Ultimately, the first recognized world record bass met the same fate as almost every other bass caught in that era. It was cooked and eaten. ■



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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.



NIGHT MOVES

Want to beat the heat (and crowds) this summer? Nocturnal bassin' might be for you.

School is out and temperatures are on the rise. If you're not off the lake by 10 a.m., there's no telling how much chaos you'll have to endure at the boat ramp just to get your boat safely out of the water. You might play bumper boats with a lady who's clearly frazzled while her husband screams directions from the window of their SUV. Perhaps a passing race boat will ring your ears, or worse, a cruiser might try to put your entire boat on the rocks while you get the truck.

Summer fishing brings a whole new level of havoc, and

frankly, it can be frustrating for us bass anglers.

So why are you out there? Why do you get up early, rush to the ramp, catch a few fish and then try to time your escape before the calamity arrives? It's passion. You have it, we have it, and it doesn't matter how bad that ramp gets; we're still going fishing.

Perhaps it's time to feed your passion in a different way. What if you could catch those fish and deal with none of the hassle?

Let's talk about venturing into the darkness. We all know big bass get caught at night.

We've seen the photos hanging on tackle shop pin boards since we were kids. So what's stopping you? Why aren't you out there catching big bass on a cool summer evening and returning to an empty ramp instead of playing bumper boats at the dock?

Perhaps you don't know where to start. Or maybe you're afraid you'll have to buy a whole new set of lures. Whatever is holding you back, it's time to let it go. There are so many misconceptions about night fishing, but we're about to set a few of them straight.

THE NIGHT BITE IS A GOOD BITE

I can tell you from personal experience that big bass feed at night. One of my earliest fishing memories is on the back of my dad's aluminum boat on a summer night. The clear "tick" of that 7-pounder biting a black 10-inch Power Worm is as clear today as it was when it happened. I've been blessed to catch countless big fish since that time. My largest night fish are two 12-pounders. One bit a jig and the other a swimbait. I've also had the pleasure of netting a 13-pounder and two 14-pounders for friends. It's truly remarkable the size of fish that feed at night.

The first aspect of night fishing you need to understand is that it's easier than fishing in the day. Sure, you can't really see what you're aiming at, and you'll occasionally put a bait in the trees, but once you learn to accept that annoyance, the actual fishing is easier. Bass tend to move shallower at night and they tend to be more aggressive. They're also almost never line shy. You can target them with a big black-and-blue spinnerbait or a big black worm. You can also pitch around the same drop-shot or shaky head you had tied on in the daylight. Those will catch them, too.

Night fishing doesn't require a whole new set of gear, and in most situations, it doesn't even require stocking up on different colors. Most of the misconceptions of night fishing are really just generalizations that have been presented as rules. If you're deep in the South, fishing in muddy water, a Colorado-bladed spinnerbait or a black jig will probably reign supreme. But if you're fishing a clear-water reservoir, you'll find that shaky heads, smaller plastics and even mid-sized crankbaits can be great options. The belief that you have to be throwing dark-colored lures to catch fish at night might be true in some muddy-water areas of the country, but it's not true everywhere.

As a general rule, the murkier the water, the more you want to follow the "traditional" approach to night fishing. Focus your attention on blacks, blues and junebug. The clearer the water, the more you can mix in traditional daytime colors like green pumpkin. Also, the phase of the moon will have a huge

impact on your color selection. I've found that the brighter the moon, the more success I have with white and chartreuse reaction baits (spinnerbait, crankbait, swim jig and the like). The darker the moon, the more I rely on dull, natural colors or dark colors.

Another hard-earned secret is that water color has a huge impact on what part of the month you want to fish. The muddier the water, the more I focus my fishing around the full moon. The clearer the water, the more I find success around the new moon. My theory is that bass hunting at night in muddy water are helped by the moon (increased visibility makes it easier to catch their prey) while bass in clear water hunt more effectively in total darkness (their prey is less likely to see the ambush coming). Whatever the reason, this correlation between moon phase and water color has played out countless times as we've fished all over the country.

EFFECTIVELY WORKING THE NIGHT SHIFT

Light is another major concern at night. This applies to both your lights while fishing and when navigating around the lake. While fishing, it's obvious you need enough light to tie your knots, but how much light is too much? Do you need to light your boat up with black lights until it looks like a UFO floating on the water? While some anglers rely heavily on black lights to help them detect bites and to illuminate the shore, my biggest catches have all come in total darkness.



That said, I do recommend wearing a headlamp or cheap clip-on light to help with landing fish and dealing with lures when needed. Just be mindful that a little light goes a long way. Bass are conditioned to boats and the presence of anglers in the daylight but may be more leery of your presence at night. A stray head lamp flashed across the shallows can be all it takes to alert the biggest, wariest bass of your presence.

When you first start navigating the lake at night, it can be very intimidating. I recommend taking small steps in the beginning. Launch close to where you want to fish, turn on your navigation lights and idle to the spots you're interested in fishing. Once you get comfortable in the dark, running on plane will begin to seem feasible. Many anglers rely on a handheld spotlight or light bar to aid in navigation, but I personally prefer to run without the added light. Once your eyes have adjusted to the darkness, seeing obstructions in the water is far easier than you'd imagine it to be. My trick for making longer runs is to use lights or skyline features on the opposing shoreline to keep track of my location, and of course I use GPS to ensure I'm on course.

As a final thought on the subject, my experience has shown little to no correlation between day fish and night fish behavior – meaning, just because you can't catch fish along a bank in the daytime doesn't mean you won't catch them there at night. Conversely, it's a grave mistake to think that because you can catch them on a certain spot or pattern at night that you should enter a daytime tournament and rely on that same area or pattern to produce. The sooner you learn to keep your day spots and night spots separate in your mind, the sooner you'll be able to build successful patterns without any confusion.

Night fishing is a fun way to beat the heat. It's also an excellent way to catch a monster bass in the summertime, far away from the crowds. It may be a little uncomfortable at first, but before long, you'll be casting into the darkness with confidence and reeling in fish without a second thought. If the boat ramp chaos is more than you can handle, don't hang it up for the summer – just turn to the dark for relief. ■

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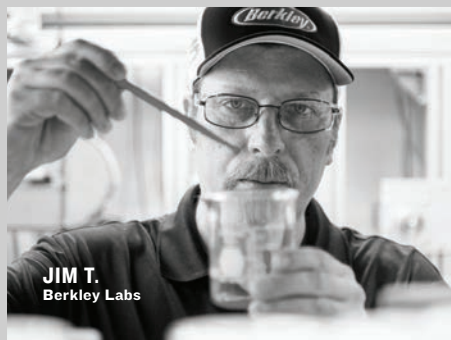


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**BOBBY LANE'S VICTORY AT REDCREST 2022
WAS A MATTER OF VERY PRECISE TIMING**

By Joel Shangle

PHOTO BY
GARRICK DIXON



REDCREST
BO
LANE



Bobby Lane's decision to fish shallow creeks helped secure his victory at REDCREST.

T

here are very few people who can identify to the second when their professional career (and life, for that matter) dramatically changed for the better.

Not so for Bobby Lane.

At precisely 3:46:45 p.m. CT on March 27, 2022, a Brecknell Electrosamson digital scale in the hands of MLF official Paul Brown settled on the number "2.0" – 2 pounds, 0 ounces – the minimum scorable weight for a Grand Lake, Oklahoma, bass to count in the Championship Round of Bass Pro Shops REDCREST 2022 Presented by Costa. Lane's life changed at that moment.

Although he would have to wait another 3 minutes and 15 seconds for the buzzer to sound on the final period and another agonizing 65 seconds after lines out before MLF Assistant Tournament Manager Mike Jinkins officially confirmed that SCORETRACK-ER® was finalized and that Lane was

the REDCREST champion by 1 pound, 3 ounces, the Florida pro's lifetime moment of truth came at 3:46:45 on March 27.

Here's how he arrived at that moment ...

THE LEADUP – MARCH 17-22

The journey from Lane's home in Lakeland, Florida, to the shores of Grand Lake O' the Cherokees in Grove, Oklahoma, is a long one: roughly 1,235 miles, which it takes a solid 18 or 19 hours to traverse. The trip winds through Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas, and as he and son Bobby III made the three-day drive, Lane was already in information-gathering mode.

"Driving through Mississippi and Arkansas before we got to Grand Lake, I told my son 'We need to look for little buddies,'" Lane said. "That's what we call the first buds you start to see on trees in the spring; they're our 'little buddies'. The dogwoods were already starting to bloom at that time, but the further we got out there toward

Oklahoma, the more we started to see the buds on all the bigger trees.

"That told me that it had probably been warm enough for a week or two for fish to start their prespawn migration to being up shallow and catchable on a shallow crankbait. I knew before I even got there that I wanted to throw a Berkley Frittside, a big spinnerbait and a jig. The more I saw the 'buddies,' the more confidence I got that this could be a decent tournament for me."

Lane was so confident in what the little buddies were telling him that he showed up for the first day of REDCREST practice in shorts and a dry-fit t-shirt, prepared to run nothing but early prespawn patterns. By noon he hadn't gotten a single bite cranking bridges and primary points. He moved a little shallower and was quickly rewarded with his first fish, and then picked up several more bites as he moved further back into Honey Creek, eventually finishing his day catching fish along the face of a wall in less than 6 feet of water.

Lane started the second day of practice in the back of Duck Creek, catching a handful of fish that weighed between 2 1/2 and 4 pounds before moving on to Horse Creek, which produced a pair of 5-pounders on the same pattern. By the end of the day, he knew he would wager his REDCREST chances on the backs of Drowning, Duck, Horse and Honey creeks and Woodward Hollow, and that an HD brown Frittside 5 would be his key bait.

"Two days of practice and I didn't catch a single fish on a spinnerbait, one fish on a jig and everything else on the brown Frittside – I was all-in on the Frittside," Lane admitted.

GAMEDAY(S) – MARCH 24-26

After a day off for pre-event kickoff activities, Lane's shallow-cranking pattern developed according to plan on Day 1 of REDCREST. He started the morning with a quick bite (a 2-9) in Duck Creek before moving to Drowning Creek, which quickly rewarded him with a 5-3 and a 4-4 in a two-minute span. He connected with a scorable fish in Horse Creek, a few more in Woodward Hollow, and finished his day with two fish just north of the Wolf Creek ramp. Lane finished the day in sixth place with eight fish for 26-12.

Lane entered Day 2 with a comfortable (12-pound) cushion on the 20th-place position, needing only a couple insurance fish to earn a spot in the Knockout Round. He didn't connect with anything in Drowning Creek or Horse Creek but then added a 2-0 and a 2-6 after a move to Woodward Hollow, virtually guaranteeing himself a spot in the Knockout Round. Lane added a couple more scorable large-mouth before the end of the day, finishing the two-day qualifying round in eighth place with 36-5.

More importantly, though, he'd sniffed out a potential change in the order of his daily creek run.

"I felt like I was hitting Drowning Creek too early; I needed to switch things up a little bit," Lane said.

The Knockout Round saw Lane run to Woodward Hollow at lines in; he quickly picked up a couple 2-pounders and then moved to Horse Creek, where he caught a 4-1 and a 3-13, which put him in good shape for a Top 5 finish in his group and a berth in the Championship Round. He dabbled a little more in Horse Creek

before finally moving to Drowning Creek where it was "Katy bar the door" (per Lane) as in the second period: He quickly added 3-6 and a 3-12 in a 10-minute span, and two more at the start of the third period that brought his total to 27-13 and temporarily gave him the lead.

Lane would eventually finish fourth in his Knockout Round, but even before the competition day was over, he had made his choice for Championship Sunday.

"At the moment that I caught my last fish in the Knockout Round, I told myself 'You do not need to leave Drowning Creek,'" Lane said. "These fish are moving in as the days go on and the water temperature goes up. You need to be in one area and fish it really hard.' That area was going to be Drowning Creek."



Bobby Lane in high spirits on the morning of his eventual victory.

COUNTDOWN TO 3:46:45 P.M. – MARCH 27

In the 16 years of tour-level competition before REDCREST, Lane had invested innumerable hours and sweat equity into becoming a versatile, well-rounded angler who could apply the best techniques possible to the messages that his natural God-given instincts and experience were telling him. Already a world-class power fisherman thanks to his tournament upbringing in Florida, Lane learned the ins and outs of finesse fishing and became just as comfortable with a spinning rod and shaky head in his hand as a flipping stick, 5/0 hook and 2 ounces of tungsten.

Lane leaned on all that valuable knowledge and skill in the final few hours of REDCREST.

He started the morning with a 3-3 Frittside bite just eight minutes into the competition (the first scorable fish of the Championship Round) and added another fish 90 minutes later. But even as he released that second fish, Lane could tell that a change was afoot. Fish were responding to the Frittside, but they weren't committing to it with the same ferocity as they had the previous three days. They were nipping at it rather than biting it, and several fish attacked the Frittside without even biting.

"I was cranking some really good areas and I had several fish just knock the fire out of the Frittside, but they weren't eating it – they were just slapping at it," Lane said. "In my years of fishing, I've found that when fish start slapping at a bait, you're either throwing the wrong color or they're starting to make their first move to the bank. I knew I had the right color, so something else was clearly changing. The water was way up and was getting warmer. I figured it was time to go back (to the back of the creek) and take a look."

Lane slid back to another pocket in Drowning Creek, picked up a jig rod with a 1/2-ounce green pumpkin jig and a green pumpkin Berkley PowerBait Meaty Chunk Jr. and began to pitch to laydowns, submerged logs, docks and individual pieces of brush that were out of the water earlier in the week but now underwater as Grand's waters rose.

He picked up a couple 2-pounders on the jig before the end of the second period, entering the final period 11 pounds out of the lead as Jacob Wheeler, Dustin Connell and Luke Clausen dueled for the top spot. But despite the double-digit deficit, Lane was now armed with the confidence that the winning fish had indeed moved shallow.

Lane caught fire in the final 90 minutes of competition, connecting with a 3-10 and a 6-3 on the same submerged log in a span of 4 minutes, hooking and losing a 4-pounder, and adding a 3-9 to climb to within 4-10 of Wheeler in the lead with 45 minutes to go. And while Wheeler, Clausen and Connell labored to reignite their jerkbait and crankbait bites as time ticked down,

Lane added three fish for 6-9 in the final 38 minutes of the final period on the Meaty Chunk Jr., including the 2-0 REDCREST winner at 3:46:45 p.m.

Lane finished the day with 10 fish for 29-14, followed by Clausen (28-11), Wheeler (28-4) and Connell (25-11).

Lane's joy in victory was heartfelt and, in his own words, "overwhelming and uncontrollable." Fans watching the MLF NOW! livestream closely may have noticed him trying to pull off the Berkley sweatshirt he was wearing (to no avail, his microphone was clipped to it) as he sweated out the minute between the final buzzer and confirmation of SCORETRACKER®.

"Man, I felt like I was on fire," Lane joked. "At the moment it was confirmed that I had won, I didn't know if I was going to pass out, throw up or just collapse right then and there. I just blurted it out: 'Madeline, (Lane's wife) I love

"WORDS CAN'T EVEN DESCRIBE WHAT THE EMOTIONS FELT LIKE IN THAT MOMENT; IT WAS AN INCREDIBLE FEELING."

you. Kids, your dad is the REDCREST champion! The words just flew out of my mouth. Words can't even describe what the emotions felt like in that moment; it was an incredible feeling."

THE AFTERMATH – MARCH 27 AND BEYOND

To the surprise of nobody who knows him, "Big Fish" Bobby has enthusiastically embraced the role of REDCREST champion like a bear would embrace a salmon.

In the weeks that followed Lane's win, the REDCREST trophy showed up in social media throughout the Sunshine State as he happily shuttled it around to restaurants, boat dealerships, etc., and showed it off to friends, fans, sponsors and complete strangers with equal enthusiasm. Lane appeared on podcasts and radio shows from throughout the country, sat down for dozens of interviews and returned phone calls and congratulatory texts from every single person who reached out to him (and judging by the celebratory reaction from the in-house crowd

that gathered at the REDCREST Expo to witness his winning moment, there were a lot of those).

"I lived through an amazing life event with the whole world watching; it just means the world to me and my family to have this opportunity – I'm humbled and really honored to be the champion," Lane admitted. "It solidifies everything that I've worked my ever-loving ass off for the past 16 years. I've heard the questions: 'Is Bobby ever going to win a major championship? He's been so close so many times but he hasn't won.' When we were in the final minutes (of REDCREST) and Wheeler was leading, I could hear people in my head saying 'Oh, we know how this story is going to unfold. Bobby is going to finish second again'.

"I can tell you that I was talking back to those voices: 'There's no way I'm letting that happen again.' But I guess over the years, I didn't win because maybe I wasn't ready to. Maybe it wasn't my time yet. This time, it was my time."

At precisely 3:46:45 p.m. CT on March 27, 2022 ... ■



Next to his family, an emotional Bobby Lane hoists up the \$300,000 winner's check at the 2022 REDCREST Expo.

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ROUNDING OUT THE REDCREST TOP 10

By Tyler Brinks

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



2. LUKE CLAUSEN Spokane, Washington Championship Round weight: 28-11 (8)

For one dazzling, action-packed moment as the final minutes ticked down in the Championship Round, it looked like Luke Clausen might become the first person in history to own the three biggest trophies in the sport: REDCREST, the Forrest Wood Cup and the Bassmaster Classic. Clausen – who won the Cup in 2004 and the Classic in 2006 – claimed the lead with three fish for 10-12 early in the final period, and then added a 4-2 with just 2 minutes remaining to nearly surpass Lane’s miraculous last-minute fish and steal the REDCREST championship.

Clausen was forced to search out new water each day of the event, but shallow crankbaits were his primary tools everywhere he went. He stuck with various flat-sided crankbaits, including the Jackall Bling 55 in natural crawfish colors.

“I never caught one deeper than 4 feet of water,” Clausen said. “I fished some main-lake pockets, but Horse Creek was my primary area. I focused on flatter banks close to deep water the first three fishing days and junked around the last day. I caught some on docks, riprap and standing timber.”

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



3. JACOB WHEELER Harrison, Tennessee Championship Round weight: 28-4 (8)

As is the case anytime a tournament is up for grabs and Jacob Wheeler is in the hunt, the Tennessee pro threatened to steal the show with a three-fish surge midway through the final period that catapulted him 10-8 up the leaderboard. Lane and Clausen eclipsed the defending Bass Pro Tour Angler of the Year, but Wheeler’s third-place finish marked the 16th time he’s finished in the Top 10 in the past 19 tour-level events he’s fished (an almost superhuman 84 percent).

Wheeler relied on forward-facing sonar and a jerkbait for most of the tournament and caught some shallow fish with a crankbait at times when he was in dirtier water.

“It was mostly the jerkbait, and I used four different jerkbaits, including the Rapala Shadow Rap Deep,” Wheeler said. “Some of the fish were out roaming and chasing bait, but most were on the isolated cover and hard places. The key depth was 6 to 12 feet, but the suspended fish were out deeper in the abyss.”

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



4. DUSTIN CONNELL Clanton, Alabama Championship Round weight: 25-14 (10)

Traditional stick-and-ball sports have their “big game players,” and it’s become quickly apparent that Dustin “Big Game” Connell shines when the pressure of REDCREST is on. The defending 2021 REDCREST champ stayed in the mix late into the final period of Championship Sunday thanks largely to his ability to connect with a jerkbait while watching his Lowrance ActiveTarget (just as he did in winning REDCREST on Lake Eufaula in 2021).

“I was concentrating on the shallow brush in 5 to 10 feet of water,” Connell said. “It was all staging fish inside of pockets, and the first third of each pocket was the best. The best places were on transition banks and flats leading into spawning areas.”

Connell focused on the middle and lower sections of the lake and utilized a handful of different jerkbaits depending on the depth and water color.

“I had four different jerkbaits rigged up: three regular-diving baits and a deeper one,” Connell said. “I used translucent baits in the clearest water and a chartreuse shad bait in the dirtier stuff.”



PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN

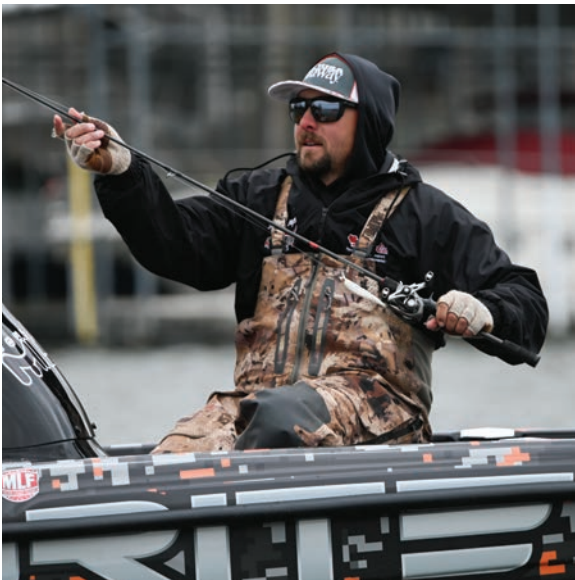


PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN

5. ANDY MONTGOMERY **Blacksburg, South Carolina** **Championship Round weight: 24-2 (6)**

Andy Montgomery was one of the few anglers who hovered close to the Wolf Creek launch throughout the tournament. Starting each day within site of the ramp, Montgomery was able to catch enough each day to advance through the first four without a definitive plan.

"It was a little scary each morning because I had no clue what I would do," Montgomery admitted. "That can be a good thing because you don't have any preconceived notions, and I did find a little pattern in the Knockout Round targeting shallow wood."

Montgomery was in the mix for the lead through the first two periods on Championship Sunday, putting together a 14-minute, three-fish surge in the noon hour that added nearly 13 pounds to his total. His bite died for most of the final period, though (although he added two 4-pounders in the waning minutes to jump into fifth place).

Montgomery caught fish on a Strike King Series 3 crankbait in the rootbeer color and a white spinnerbait, but a jig accounted for the majority of his weight throughout REDCREST.

"I used my Strike King Tour Grade Skipping Jig, took the skirt off, and added a round rubber skirt," he said. "It's brown with orange, and I like the rubber in cold water. My trailer was a green pumpkin Midsized Strike King Rage Bug."

6. ZACK BIRGE **Blanchard, Oklahoma** **Championship Round weight: 21-9 (8)**

Oklahoma pro Zack Birge was a pre-tournament favorite thanks to his familiarity with Grand Lake, and it turned out his knowledge of the lake served him well. Relying on a voluminous collection of waypoints and an encyclopedic understanding of Grand's nooks and crannies, Birge ran the lake and chased the right water conditions each day.

A gizzard shad Yo-Zuri 3DB Series 1.5 squarebill was his primary bait when he found the right water color.

"I was running a bunch of places that I know the fish should be going to spawn and stayed midlake because I have the most confidence in that part of the lake," Birge said. "I tried to play the water conditions and that was the biggest hiccup, trying to stay ahead of the dirty water from all of the mud coming down the lake. It was a curveball for me to try to stay in the cleaner water."

7. EDWIN EVERS **Talala, Oklahoma** **Championship Round weight: 16-13 (4)**

Another heavy favorite to win in his home state thanks in no small part to his Bassmaster Classic win on Grand in 2016, Edwin Evers put the rest of the field on notice on Day 1 with 39-11 before eventually finishing seventh.

The 2019 Bass Pro Tour Angler of the Year worked his way to his eighth career Top 10 in a major championship thanks to skillful use of a jerkbait and forward-facing sonar. Evers focused on the middle section of the lake and utilized a Berkley Stunna 112 jerkbait in stealth shad and Table Rock shad.

"It was a late-winter pattern and worked for fish that were staging before they spawn," Evers said. "I was fishing offshore brush piles in different depths. The shallow ones were 6 to 7 feet and some were a little deeper out in 15 feet."

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



8. JORDAN LEE Cullman, Alabama Championship Round weight: 16-12 (6)

Yet another angler who made hay with a jerkbait and live sonar, Jordan Lee got off to a slow start on Grand Lake before hitting his groove en route to a Top 10 finish. The 2020 Bass Pro Tour AOY connected with only three fish for 9 pounds on Day 1, but then exploded for 34-14 on Day 2 before winning his Knockout Round with 33-2.

The Alabama pro caught some fish shallow with a jig, but he made his big move when he committed to offshore brush piles the second day and racked up good numbers on the jerkbait.

"I was fishing flats and offshore brush with a jerkbait," Lee said. "I couldn't get bit on the bottom because the fish were all suspended over the brush, and I watched them eat on my Lowrance ActiveTarget."

Lee focused on the Horse Creek area; the magic depth was between 5 and 8 feet. To fool his bass, he used a mixture of different jerkbaits, including the Berkley Stunna in the hanky panky color.

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



9. BRYAN THRIFT Shelby, North Carolina Championship Round weight: 15-5 (6)

If you talked to Bryan Thrift after his second practice day on Grand Lake, you would've thought the North Carolina pro wouldn't score a single fish (yes, practice was that tough). But Thrift racked up an astonishing ninth Top 10 finish in the past 10 tour-level championships he's fished by keeping it simple: He threw a jerkbait while targeting bass feeding on baitfish.

"It's a perfect wintertime and early-spring scenario when you can find baitfish," Thrift said. "All of my fish came with a jerkbait, running the baitfish pattern. I saw balls of bait on my electronics and caught fish around those. They were thrashing and schooling on bait when the tournament started, but I had to look much harder as the tournament went on because the water level rose and scattered the baitfish."

Thrift used different jerkbaits and in various shad-imitating colors and focused on the lower end of the lake. He chose white and opaque colors for more stained water and translucent hues in the cleanest water.

"The water down there was a little clearer and more conducive to fishing a jerkbait," he explained. "Some of my fish were right on the bank and some were suspended over 40 feet of water. The biggest key was being in an area with a lot of bait."

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



10. MICHAEL NEAL Dayton, Tennessee Championship Round weight: 12-5 (5)

Michael Neal started off shallow and gradually worked his way offshore as conditions on Grand Lake changed throughout the week. The 2021 Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit AOY was second in his group after Day 1 thanks to some handy work with a crankbait, but shifted gears the rest of the tournament and went deeper as his fish left the bank.

"I stayed shallow the first day, cranking a crawfish-color Spro Little John MD, but that was on the end of a warming trend and the bite was going away," Neal admitted. "The water got colder, so I changed to targeting suspended bait runners with my forward-facing sonar."

As he did in finishing Stage Three on Smith Lake, Neal used a Big Bite Baits Swimmer Head with a 3.75-inch Big Bite Baits Jointed Jerk Minnow in baitfish patterns.

"I used a 1/8- to 3/8-ounce head depending on depth," Neal said. "It was all on the lower end of the lake because the water was cleaner. All the fish were in 10 to 25 feet of water and most of them were suspended 5 and 15 feet below the surface." ■



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Walking the dog and working the frog...
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their salt must master these techniques. Use this summer season and
these tips from top MLF pros to elevate your game.

BY MIKE PEHANICH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRANDON ROWAN



ournament bass fishing draws much of its fascination and excitement from its relentless evolution. New lures, tools and techniques freshen the game each season, keeping even the most skilled of pros on their toes.

Yet basic capabilities anchor the game, and few professional bass fishermen achieve consistent success without proficiency in a handful of staple techniques.

Here, four MLF pros share tips that will help raise your skills to a master's level and prepare you for some of the summer's hottest bass action.

BOBBY LANE: FLIPPIN' AND PITCHIN'

"There's never a bad time to have a flipping stick in your hand," says Bobby Lane, MLF's newest REDCREST winner. "You never know when water levels will raise or lower. You never know when you might come across junk to flip. I can't tell you how many times what I thought was working wasn't working anymore and I've scrapped my topwater, my crankbait, my swimbait or my wacky worm and said, 'Just go pitch a jig!' Those times have led to some of my best tournament comebacks."

Indeed, Lane leveraged his pitching and flipping skills on Championship Sunday for his March 2022 REDCREST win on Oklahoma's Grand Lake O' the Cherokees.

"It doesn't matter if it's January and snowing or summer, spring or fall," he says. "My flipping rig is my go-to, 100 percent."



Berkley PowerBait Flippin' Jig in Bama Craw with a Berkley PowerBait MaxScent Meaty Chunk in Watermelon.

Docks, laydowns and pollen mats are prime flipping and pitching targets, as are grass beds, lily pads, cattails and more. "Anything visible to the eye," sums Lane.

Flipping and pitching, of course, are sister techniques performed with a pointed underhand release directed with a fluid wrist and forearm movement.

Flipping is the short line version – a pendulum presentation, executed within a fixed radius determined by rod length and measure of line stripped from the reel by the off hand.

Pitching is a casting technique executed with a similar motion but with line coming off the reel in conventional manner. The angler controls the length and speed of presentation by thumbing the reel. With its broader reach, pitching comprises roughly 80 percent of Lane's combined pitching/flipping efforts.



(L to R) Berkley PowerBait MaxScent Creature Hawg in Green Pumpkin Party, Berkley PowerBait Boss Grub in Blue Fleck, and Berkley PowerBait The General in Black Blue Fleck.

In both styles of presentation, delivering the bait with a low trajectory is critical.

"Keep the bait low, almost parallel to the water, with little arc," advises the Lakeland, Florida, pro. "Control the bait with your thumb on the spool to slow the cast and ease entry. Aim for zero splash. The less splash you produce when your bait enters the water, the more fish you'll catch. Treat your bait as a stealthy creature slipping into a hole in the cover."

Time spent in practice will pay off big time on the water.

"I grew up pitching into a coffee cup sitting on our living room floor," Lane recalls. "I wanted to pitch so gently that when the jig landed in the bottom, you could barely hear it tap the porcelain. That's the difference between a good presentation and a beginner's."

TACKLE

Three Abu Garcia Fantasista X rods with Abu Garcia Revo ALX reels serve Lane's flipping and pitching needs. He employs both left-hand and right-hand Abu Garcia Revo ALX reels for the various tasks, pitching smaller baits and working lengthy laydowns, grass stretches or series of dock pilings with right-hand reels. He flips and pitches heavier baits (1/2-ounce and up) with left-hand reels.

"I can keep my bait in the water a lot more, cover the bank faster with a left-hand reel," Lane explains. "I can simply pitch, click the reel, lift up with my right hand, turn the handle and pitch again."

A 7-foot medium-heavy rod and right-hand ALX spooled with 15-pound-test Berkley Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon pitches 1/4- to 1/2-ounce jigs and weighted soft plastics.

A 7-foot, 6-inch medium-heavy rod with a left-hand ALX spooled with 50-pound-test SpiderWire DURA-4 braid flips baits from 3/8 to 1/2 ounce.

A 7-foot, 11-inch heavy-power flipping rod with a left-hand ALX spooled with 65-pound-test DURA-4 does the heavy lifting, flipping and pitching baits weighing up to two ounces in thick cover.

"I won't flip with fluorocarbon line," he says. "With weights over 1-ounce, I always go with 65-pound braid."



Pitching around heavy cover is a big-fish pattern for Bobby Lane.

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



"I'M REALLY ENJOYING THE NEW SPIDERWIRE DURA BRAID. IT REALLY HAS MY EYEBROWS RAISED."

BAIT SELECTION

Lane's pitching and flipping baits vary with the season. From December through March, jigs are his top choice. April through July are soft plastics months. From late summer through fall, he fishes a mix of jigs and soft plastics.

He prefers the recently released Berkley PowerBait jigs, designed by Gary Klein. The Berkley PowerBait Flippin' Jig, PowerBait Finesse Jig and PowerBait Heavy Cover Jig feature skirt

material impregnated with PowerBait scent. For trailers, he goes with PowerBait and MaxScent Meaty Chunk and Chunk Jr. soft plastics.

The Berkley MaxScent or PowerBait General on a 4/0 Fusion hook pegged to a Flat Out Tungsten bullet weight is another go-to combination. The PowerBait Boss Grub and MaxScent Creature Hawg fill out his flip/pitch arsenal.

TIPS

Lane recommends a moment's hesitation between strike and hookset for a higher hook-up ratio.

"It's like a frog bite," he says. "You want the fish to have the bait just a second. A lot of guys set the hook too fast. If you watched me at REDCREST, I say, 'There's a bite,' and I let the fish have it for just a second to make sure it's in his mouth, drop the rod to a 45-degree angle, then set the hook. With that hesitation, your hooking percentage goes up to 95 percent, maybe 98 percent."

LAST WORD

"I'm really enjoying the new SpiderWire DURA braid," says Lane. "It really has my eyebrows raised."

SCOTT SUGGS: WALKING THE DOG

Walking the dog is an artful topwater technique in which the bait dances to the rhythmic movement of a rod tip. Mastering this mesmerizing water waltz has become almost a rite of passage for bass anglers.

A variety of topwater baits can be made to walk. Classic “walkers,” however, trace their ancestry to cigar-shaped lures like the famed Heddon Zara Spook.

Walk-the-dog presentations draw some of the most explosive strikes in the angling world.

“I like to hold the rod down at about a 30-degree angle to start,” Suggs says. “I like to throw to the left and twitch my rod to the right. You have more room for action that way. I hardly ever twitch the rod down toward my feet. The more you can go left to right or right to left, the better off you are.”



Learning to walk a bait effectively and for extended duration is “mainly a matter of confidence,” Suggs believes. And nothing boosts confidence like getting bites from a well-executed presentation.

PRESENTATION

Suggs doesn't limit himself to a steady, even-paced walking action. He mixes varied cadences, pauses and actions until he has dialed in to the bass's preference.

“I start slow; I ‘slosh’ the bait to one side, wait and wiggle it for a one-two-three count, then work it the other way,” he explains. “The next cast, I may speed it up. By the time I'm done, I'm gliding it back and forth, left to right.”

When he's working a school of fish and he hooks a bass on the tail hook after a less than explosive strike, Suggs speeds his retrieve.

“I get it rocking so the fish has to dedicate to it,” he explains. “Usually, when I'm getting finicky bites, I'm working the bait too slow.”

One of his favorite maneuvers is deadly effective in the postspawn period as bass are guarding fry.

“I pop the rod hard and throw slack into the line,” he says. “I make it spin almost all the way around (180 degrees) so it's looking at its tail. I'm almost working the bait in place, keeping it within a foot square. I want to irritate the fish into striking – They crush it.”

TACKLE

Suggs employs the topwater model from the Lew's Signature Series rods lineup for most of his dog-walking chores. It's a 7-foot medium-power rod with fast action. Its short butt section keeps the handle from banging his forearm with the walking action.

A 7.5:1 Lew's baitcasting reel spooled with 15-pound-test Strike King Tour Grade monofilament line handles most applications; 20-pound test gets the job done when he's fishing near heavy cover.

Suggs upscales to a 7-foot, 1-inch heavy-power Skipping rod from the Lew's Signature Series when working magnum baits like the bulky 2-ounce Strike King KVD Mega Dawg.

“Braid gives you your best performance for long casts with the Mega



Strike King KVD Sexy Dawg
in Clear Sexy Shad.

“WALK-THE-DOG
PRESENTATIONS DRAW
SOME OF THE MOST
EXPLOSIVE STRIKES IN
THE ANGLING WORLD.”



(L to R) BOOYAH Pad Crasher in Leopard Frog, SPRO Bronzeye Frog 65 in Natural Red, and River2Sea Ish Monroe Phat Mat Daddy Frog in Yellow Head.

Dawg,” he says. “The bites can come so far out that you’ll need braid to set the hook.”

BAIT SELECTION

Size of the dog matters.

“In spring, I start with a smaller bait and go bigger as the weather warms,” Suggs details. “But then in August and going into fall, I start big and downsize my bait later as the season progresses. I always try to match the size of my bait to what the fish are feeding on.”

Suggs takes the Strike King KVD Sexy Dawg for these topwater strolls. The 5/8-ounce, 4.5-inch Sexy Dawg is the workhorse. The Sexy Dawg Jr., a 3/8-ounce bait and 3.75 inches long, serves best when bass are guarding fry or favoring smaller forage. When bass are feeding on larger forage and on blue herring lakes, he favors the 2-ounce, 6-inch Mega Dawg.

“I like the Mega because it causes commotion,” he says. “Often, you’re calling fish from 20 or 30 feet down. The louder and more erratic the action, the better.”

He keeps rods rigged with all three sizes on his deck in preparation for an open-water bite.

“When bass are up and feeding feverishly, it doesn’t matter which one you throw,” he explains. “But when they go back down and you’re trying to get them in singles again, I’ll go through all three of these baits to figure out the best size for that day. Their preference can be a different size from day to day.”

Suggs builds his color selection largely around shad colors, but prefers chrome, white and baits with flashes of chartreuse on clear-water lakes to draw fish from a distance.

TIPS

Smallmouth bass are suckers for a small walking bait during a mayfly hatch on northern lakes. Suggs colors a feathered treble tail hook brown or some other color resembling a mayfly to seal the deal.

He eschews snaps, split rings or any other terminal connection to his walking bait.

“A loop knot is all I ever use,” he says. “It allows the lure to make a full swing.”

LAST WORD

Fishermen too often limit their walking bait’s potential by sticking to a single retrieve.

“Don’t make it one dimensional,” Suggs advises. “Once you’ve learned the zig-zag retrieve, there are so many ways to go. These baits are so versatile.”

JORDAN LEE: FROGGING

Alabama’s Lake Guntersville is home waters to MLF star Jordan Lee. To him and many others, it’s “Froggin’ Heaven.”

“When I was 16, 17, and 18 and learning how to fish, we fished a lot of frog tournaments on Guntersville,” says Lee, whose star-studded career first found him under the limelight as a college champion at Auburn University. “Fishing hollow-bodied frogs is what I do a lot in summer and fall. It’s produced so many cool bites and some awesome memories.”



Frogging is not only fun, but effective says MLF pro Jordan Lee.

The “fun” dimension of frogging takes nothing from its effectiveness, as Lee’s tournament record can attest. On lakes with broad acres of matted grass, lily pads, duck grass or other thick cover, it’s often the best – if not the only – viable option.

“In the heavy grass on Guntersville, there’s often nothing else other than dipping a heavy weight through the mats that will catch them,” Lee explains.

PRESENTATION

Patience is the key to frogging. Yes, it’s hard to remain patient working a frog over heavy mats. And, true, Lee sometimes works his frog quickly when working broad stretches of cover just hunting for signs of active fish. But a lack of patience will lead to missed fish.

“My rule of thumb growing up was to fish a frog slowly,” he says. “When you know fish are around, work it slow and force the fish to bite. Call them up from the grass. You’ll get more bites and land more fish.”

His standard approach to heavy cover is a steady twitch retrieve that mimics the kicking, crawling or hopping motion of a frog or other creature working its way through the jungle. In open-water stretches and open pockets in cover, he may work his frog in a conventional walk-the-dog manner, keeping slack in the line with each stroke of the rod tip.

“I want the fish to show themselves; to roll or chase,” Lee says. “Once I know fish are around, I slow it down. Twitch, pause...twitch, pause. When

they hit it, you must be ready. That’s the hard part.”

Nerves fray easily in Frogland. With mats moving and water boiling, strikes are seen before they’re felt. All too often the angler rears back on a hook-set before the bass has a jaw lock on the frog. Patience, again, is paramount.

“When I see a blowup, I give a little hesitation,” Lee instructs. “I typically like to give the bass one second to eat it a little better. That split second is key. And when you feel you have him, keep the rod tip up and winch him in, keeping steady pressure.”

TACKLE

Equipment plays a big role in frogging success. Enter the fray with flimsy tackle or any weakness in rod or line and you’ll only elevate your frustration level.

Jordan Lee’s frogging rig consists of the 7-foot, 3-inch “Frog” rod from the Abu Garcia Jordan Lee Signature Series. He anchors that heavy-power, fast-action rod with an Abu Garcia Revo Premier 7.3:1 reel and 50-to 65-pound-test Berkley x9 Braid.

BAIT SELECTION

Lee’s array of frogs includes the SPRO Bronzeye 65, the BOOYAH Pad Crasher and the 3/4-ounce River2Sea Phat Mat Daddy frog designed by MLF frogging fanatic Ish Monroe.

He opts for popping-style frogs in more open water and scattered grass.

TIPS

“When I take the frog out of the pack, I squeeze it to see how soft the plastic is,” Lee says. “If the plastic is hard, I may put the bait in boiling water for about 15 seconds to soften it.”

Trim the skirt legs of the faux frog to a suitable length, depending on conditions and preference. Lee normally trims frog legs to “pinkie size,” sometimes as short as half an inch.

LAST WORD

“Frogging is something you have to commit to,” Lee preaches. “You may have to throw that frog for a couple hours before it comes alive.”

ANDY MONTGOMERY: DOCK SKIPPIN’

Dock skipping is a technique that helps put a bait into out-of-sight and seemingly out-of-reach places. Docks draw baitfish, and baitfish attract bass. Though docks are prime targets, the technique is equally well-suited to any condition featuring an overhang.



Andy Montgomery perfected his dock skipping technique with a jig and flat-bodied plastic trailer. For years, this combination reigned as his full-time skipping tool. In recent seasons, however, Montgomery has broadened his skipping arsenal to include a tailored buzzbait and a bladed jig. Though the jig likely remains his No. 1 skipping bait over the course of a year, the order of preference can change with the season or the conditions.

It takes dexterity and practice to skip a bait effectively and consistently. The cost of a failed cast is all too often a mighty backlash.

Andy executes the skip with a smooth, fluid sidearm delivery. As the bait touches the water, he sweeps his rod tip up, lengthening its upward rise as the bait reaches into the recesses of the stall or overhang. He likens the almost linear, low-to-the-water trajectory of the bait to the path of a perfectly skipped stone.

TACKLE

Montgomery’s technique has gained polish, but it hasn’t changed much over the years. He has, however, brought some welcome tackle upgrades to the game.

He employs the 7-foot, 1-inch heavy-power, fast-action Andy Montgomery Skipping Rod from the Lew’s Signature Series.

“I’m [6-foot-4], so the 7-foot, 1-inch rod is right for me,” he explains. “We have a 6-foot, 9-inch rod in the series, too. A short guy will want to use a shorter rod. It’s best to match rod length to your height.”



Strike King
Tour Grade
Skipping Jig in
Texas Craw.

Strike King
Rage Bug in
Texas Craw.

Bass anglers may find the Lew's Pro SP Skipping and Pitching Reel, one of several skip-enhancing innovations Montgomery has helped bring to market, the cure to their backlash nightmares.

"The reel is incredible," the Blacksburg, South Carolina pro says. "It has an adjustable ACB system to reduce backlash and maximize casting efficiency and a shallow spool that holds only 40 yards of 20-pound fluorocarbon to reduce those deep spool backlashes. It can help you learn to skip or make you a better skipper."

His line of choice is 20-pound-test Strike King CONTRA fluorocarbon.

BAIT SELECTION

"Typically, in summer, I can catch more fish on a winding bait like the Strike King Skipping Buzzbait or the Thunder Cricket," Montgomery says. "You can cover more water with them, and that ups your percentage of bites and fish caught. The jig is a slower presentation. I don't like to call them my No. 1, 2 and 3 skipping choices. They're more like my 1A, 1B and 1C."

Jig/trailer: Montgomery designed the Tour Grade Skipping Jig for Strike King with a flat-sided head so it would "skip like a skipping rock." Available in



Strike King Thunder
Cricket in Bluegill.

"THE FLAT BLADE AND SLEEK HEAD OF A BLADED JIG IS IDEAL FOR SKIPPING."

3/8- and 1/2-ounce sizes, it scuds the water to reach deep into dock stalls and beneath overhangs. His trailer of choice is the Strike King Rage Bug, a flat beaver-style bait with thin craw claw appendages. The compact tandem skips smoothly with minimum surface friction.

Buzzbait: Montgomery also designed the Strike King Skipping Buzzbait (also known as the "Skip'N Buzz") to access hard-to-reach places where buzzbaits rarely travel. It comes pre-rigged with a Strike King Rage Toad and a backup Rage Swimmer for a different look.

Bladed Jig: The flat blade and sleek head of a bladed jig are ideal for skipping. The Strike King Thunder Cricket is his bait of choice.

TIPS

Montgomery trims the skirts of his jigs by evenly spreading strands and trimming the tails behind the hook shank. This beauty parlor treatment actually aids skipping performance.

"The less drag I create on the water, the better the bait will skip," he explains.

LAST WORD

"Anything that creates shade becomes a magnet for bream, and bream draw bass," Montgomery concludes. "I think those bluegill love shade even more than bass do. If you see shade, it's probably a place for a skipping presentation." ■

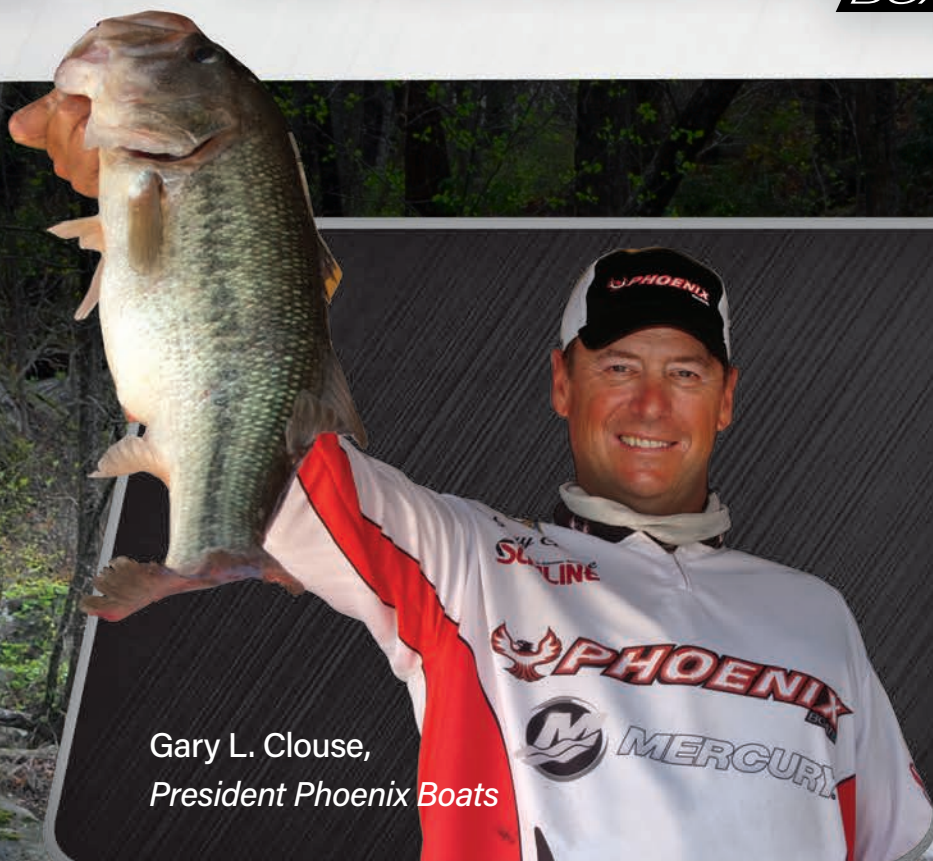


Strike King Skip'N Buzz in White.






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WHEN YOUR PASSION IS OBVIOUS

From our President, to our sales force, to our boat builders, we all live to fish. Whether it is a pro circuit event, a weekend tournament or spending time fishing with our family and friends, we truly love the sport. This passion has shaped our lives and it has likewise brought about many of the fishing features that you see on the Phoenix today. Our goal is to make every boat that goes out our door the best fishing platform it can be—in design, construction and performance. We love to fish as much as anyone and we believe it shows in every boat we build.



#builtbyanglersforanglers



MASTERS SERIES

FLIPPING

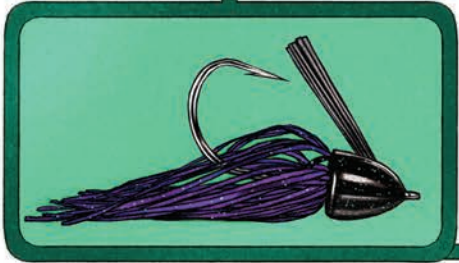
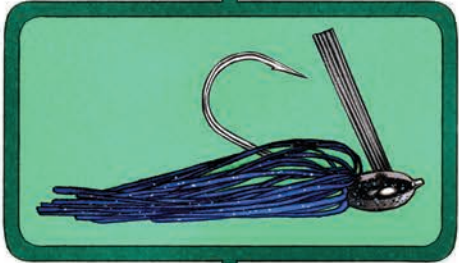
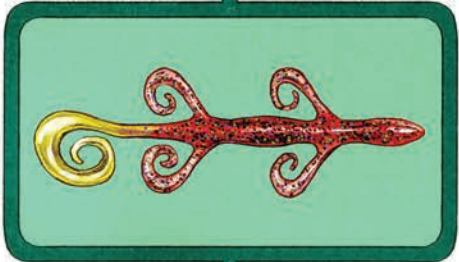
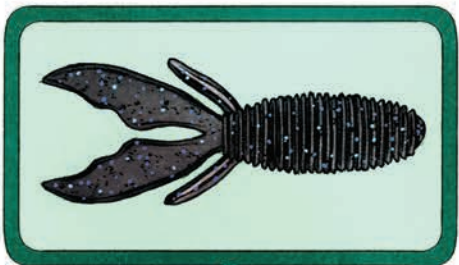
As told by Gary Klein

PHOTOS BY PHOENIX MOORE

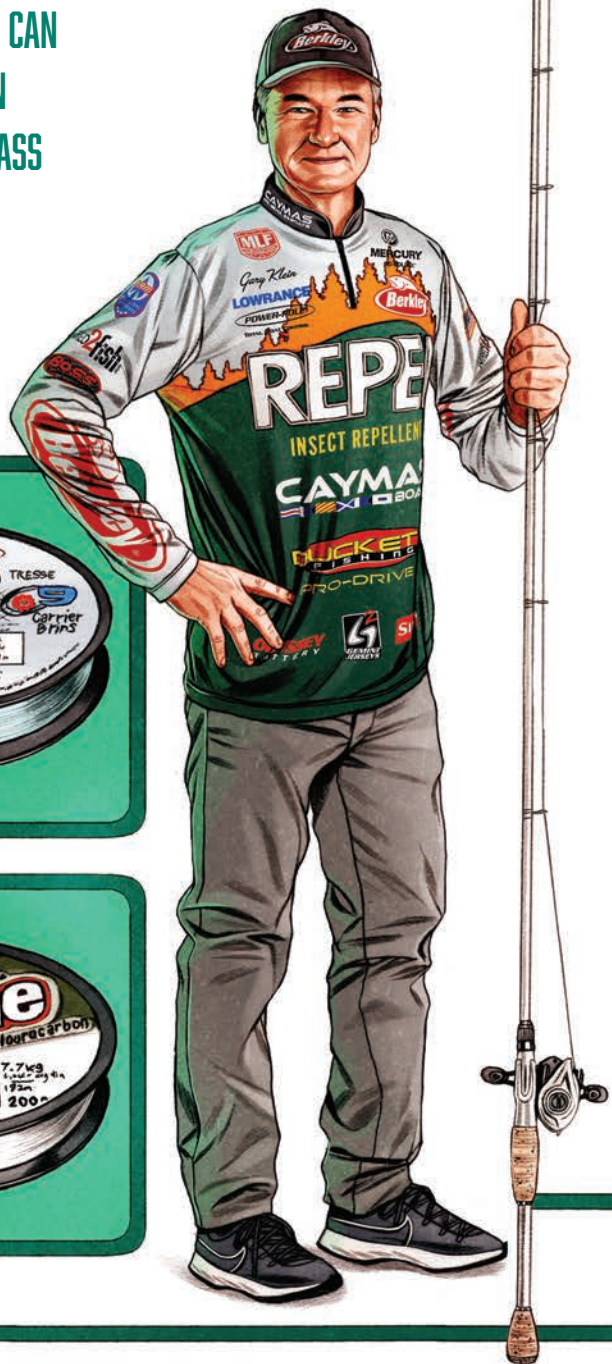
IN EVERY CRAFT, THERE IS A MASTER: AN ARTIST, PLAYER OR PERFORMER OF CONSUMMATE SKILL WHOSE WORK SERVES AS A MODEL OR IDEAL ...

When I was 15 years old, I had a summer job at a marina on Lake Oroville in California. That's where I met Dee Thomas - the man who invented flipping - and where I first saw competitive fishing. Dee took me under his wing and eventually taught me the flipping technique. That set me on a path to a career in tournament fishing, so it's no exaggeration to say that Dee and flipping changed my life. I wouldn't be where I am today or have the career I've enjoyed without them.





“WITH FLIPPING, I CAN OFTEN BE MORE IN TUNE WITH THE BASS AND THE PATTERN THAN WITH ANY OTHER METHOD.”

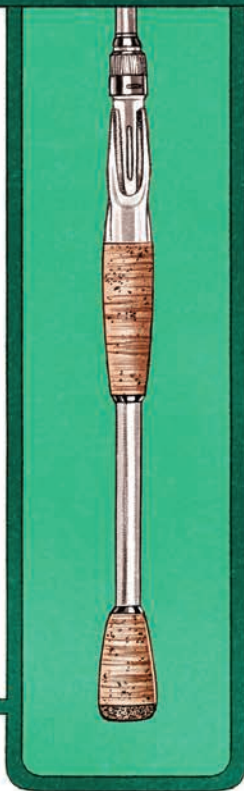
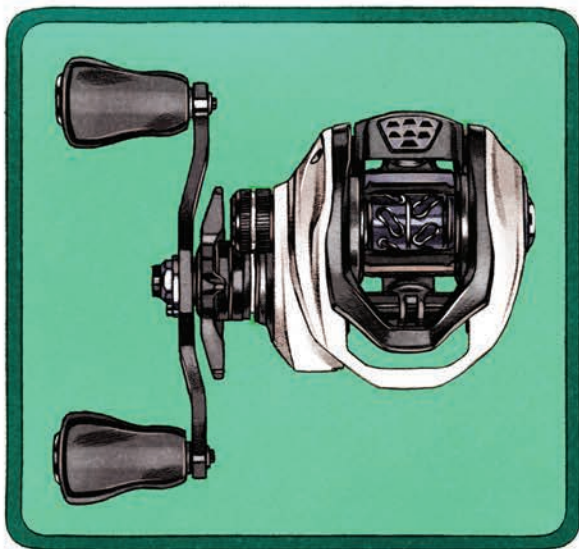


HISTORY

That first encounter with Dee was 1973, and at that time he hadn't yet fully developed the flipping method. He was using a method called "tule dipping" that used a 12-foot salt-water rod blank – no reel – to dabble a jig back in the reeds and vegetation of the California Delta. It was extremely effective because conventional equipment of that time was inadequate to handle the cover the bass were using.

But a lot of the other tournament anglers back then got tired of losing to Dee and felt that tule dipping was an unfair and unconventional advantage. They changed the rules on several tournament circuits to restrict rods to 8 feet and to require the use of reels. That forced Dee to change his methods, and he became even more effective with flipping.

I was extremely fortunate to come along at just that time. I was able to learn tule dipping, and I got to watch the



“WHEN YOU’RE DOING IT RIGHT, THE LURE STAYS LOW TO THE WATER, AND YOU USE THE ROD TIP AND YOUR LEFT HAND TO ENSURE A QUIET DELIVERY. THE BAIT LANDS WITH BARELY A RIPPLE.”

flipping method evolve. When Dee went east in 1975 to test his skills against the big names in tournament fishing, I was rooting him on as he won a national tournament on Bull Shoals Lake. That really put flipping in the spotlight. A few years later, I came east, and flipping was my primary tool and main method. It’s a shallow-water, heavy-cover, long-rod and fixed-line technique that completely revolutionized bass fishing.

HIGHLIGHTS

I hit the national tournament trail in 1979, when I was 21 years old. That year, I finished second to Roland Martin in the B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year race. I also won my first national tournament on Lake Powell, and I did it all flipping.

Back then, I only carried seven rods with me, and they were all Fenwick Flipping Stiks. I flipped almost exclusively, but if I needed to cast a spinnerbait or topwater lure, I did it with a 7-foot-6 Flipping Stik and my flipping gear. Since then, I’ve won two B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year titles, more than a dozen national tournaments and about \$3 million in tournament prize money. I didn’t do it all by flipping, but it’s also true that I couldn’t have done it *without* flipping.

WHEN

Flipping is a viable technique every day of the year. It’s a technique that utilizes a long rod (usually longer than 7 feet) and a fixed length of line to deliver a lure to shallow water targets with precision. The fact that the length of line you have out is fixed – the spool is not turning, like with pitching or casting – is an important part of what makes Flipping different from other short-line, heavy-cover techniques that anglers may know.

WHERE

If there are bass in shallow water – and there are always some fish in shallow water – it’s likely that they are active, feeding fish. The key to catching those fish is presentation, and flipping is the most precise and least intrusive way to present a lure to those fish. It’s as much a philosophy as it is a technique, and it all revolves around those three components: shallow water, feeding fish and a precise presentation.

TACKLE

Flipping gear has come a long way since the 1970s. Today, I do almost all my flipping with an 8-foot extra-heavy-action Duckett Fishing Gary Klein Pro Series casting rod and Duckett Fishing Paradigm casting reel (8.3:1 gear ratio) spooled with Berkley Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon line or Berkley x9 braid. The size of the line I use depends on things like the cover I’m fishing and the baits I’m using, but it could be as light as 10-pound-test or as heavy as 80-pound-test.

LURES

A lot of anglers think of flipping and pitching as techniques for jigs and soft plastic baits – and those are certainly the most common lures used with these techniques – but there are really no limits to the baits you can fish when flipping and pitching. I’ve had great days flipping a squarebill crankbait or spinnerbait. It all comes down to the best lure for the situation and the best method to present that lure. By keeping an open mind and letting the fish tell you what they want and how they want it, you’ll be more successful.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HOEWEILER



Recently, I've developed a line of jigs for Berkley with skirts that are infused with PowerBait – the same attractant that's been in many of their soft plastics for decades. The Berkley PowerBait Flipping Jig and PowerBait Heavy Cover Jig are two of my favorite lures and were specially designed to navigate heavy cover and thick vegetation. Sometimes I fish them without a trailer, but I'll often use one of the Berkley PowerBait or MaxScent soft plastics to give the lure some additional action or a different fall rate, depending on the conditions and what the fish are telling me.

Quite often, I flip soft plastics, like those same PowerBait and MaxScent lures – everything from worms and PowerBait Lizards to The General and creature- and craw-style baits like the Berkley PowerBait MaxScent Creature Hawg and PowerBait Bunker Hawg. Generally, they're Texas-rigged to come through the cover more easily, but I'll also fish them on a drop-shot or Tokyo rig, if I feel that's the best presentation.

THE BASICS

To flip right-handed (just reverse these instructions to flip left-handed), hold the rod in your right hand as though you're getting ready to cast it, and point the tip straight up. Put the reel in free-spool and use your left hand to hold the line between the reel and the first guide. Pull the line over to your left so there's about 6 to 10 feet of line stretched out between the reel and first guide. Now let out enough additional line so that your lure hangs down to about the level of the reel. Engage the reel so that it's no longer in free spool mode. That's the length of line you'll be working with, and it will determine the range of your flip.

To make the flip, lower your rod tip in front of you and swing the lure forward, toward your target. As the lure swings forward, simultaneously bring your left hand (still holding the line) back toward the rod, feeding line to the lure as you go. Take your left hand off the line only after it's reached its destination. It takes a while to get the hang of this.

When you're doing it right, the lure stays low to the water, and you use the rod tip and your left hand to ensure a quiet delivery. The bait lands with barely a ripple. If it splashes down, your left hand is out of sync, or the line has gone slack as you've swung the bait forward. Keep at it, and you'll become extremely accurate. Your presentation will be far quieter than with any other method.

If you're flipping a jig or worm, you'll want your rod to be above 9 o'clock (higher in deeper water) so you can follow the bait toward the bottom. A lot of strikes come on the initial fall.

The effective range of an experienced flipper is usually 18 to 22 feet or so. With pitching, it might be 35 feet or more, but a good flip is much quieter and less obtrusive than a pitch. If I can get close enough to a bass to flip to it, that's my preference.

BONUS

One issue I see with a lot of anglers who are flipping is that they're often out of control. At the end of the flip, they still have line in their left hand, or their rod is out of position to follow the bait down and set the hook. If you feel a bite and set the hook with line still in your hand, you're not going to get a good set, and you might slice your hand badly.

A lot of anglers will set the hook too soon when they're flipping. Our modern equipment is very light and extremely sensitive. Wait until you feel the weight of the fish before setting the hook.

One of the great advantages to flipping is that you're working so close to the fish that you can notice a lot more than anglers who are pitching or casting. When I'm flipping, I'm much more likely to discover the pattern within the pattern because I have a better point-of-view. I might see that the bass are holding on dock pilings that have baitfish feeding on algae, but not on the other pilings. That kind of detail can make me a lot more efficient and productive. With flipping, I can often be more in tune with the bass and the pattern than with any other method. ■



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Prototype vehicle shown with options.

Kevin Van Dam

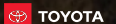
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THE JUICE

TECHNIQUES, TACKLE & TIPS





STRIKE KING CHICK MAGNET

By Matt Williams

PHOTOS BY BRANDON ROWAN

Here's a new look at an old-school crankbait originally whittled from balsa for MLF big stick Andy Morgan by legendary Tennessee lure maker Marion "Tip" Tipton. Longtime buds, Morgan and "Tip" held the hand-carved "24" crankbait close to the vest for more than two decades – and won a bundle with it – before giving Strike King the blessing to turn it into a modern workhorse with a sexy name.

Fittingly called the Chick Magnet, the 2022 ICAST Best Freshwater Hard Lure is built to get down and dirty in the shallows.

First Impressions

The 2 1/4-inch Chick Magnet is a squatty plug with a deep belly and wide

back that casts a large profile resembling a juvenile bluegill. Its plastic body is fitted with a thin circuit board bill, nose-anchored line tie and a pair of beefy, short-shank No. 4 trebles – one centered on the belly and one at the tail. A pair of stainless balls strategically placed inside the belly cavity add a little weight while creating a subtle rattle as it comes through the water column. It also features holographic eyes and detailed finishes that appear high in quality for a mass-production lure.

In Action

Matched with Berkley Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon, the plug ran true right out of the package. It quickly found its place in the water

column and went to work with an enticing thump that attracted some brutal strikes, including a legit 8- to 9-pounder that smashed it in muddy water during field testing at Lake Nacogdoches in eastern Texas. The bait will produce year-round but shines the brightest in cold to moderate water temps from late fall through spring, when banged off of stumps, lay-downs and docks or crawled across rock/gravel and shallow grass beds.

At 7/16 ounce, the bait casts extremely well and cuts the wind way better than you might expect for such a wide-bodied flat side. It's also buoyant enough to get itself out of trouble when given the chance.

Final Thoughts

Strike King designers brought their "A" game when they crafted the Chick Magnet. They had to, because Morgan vowed not to release it until it was right in every way. If you like to bang around rock, stumps, docks or even shallow grass, this is definitely a bait worth having on the deck when water temperatures are on the chilly side. It calls out the big ones in stained water or clear.

Applications

- Water depths of 4 to 6 feet
- Shines around rock/gravel, wood, docks or grass
- Muddy water or clear
- Cold to moderate water temperatures
- Ideal during prespawn, but can be effective throughout the year

TAIL THUMP:

The bait casts a large profile and delivers a tight swagger and solid tail thump, which should be a big plus for calling out fish in muddy water situations.



ROUNDED LIP:

Features a rounded circuit board lip that slices the water and helps it dive quickly and aggressively to its maximum range. The thin material isn't as rigid or prone to breakage as Lexan, but the edges of the lip will grind down with repeated contact with rock, gravel and other abrasive objects.



WEIGHT CHAMBER:

Comes with an internal weight chamber to optimize balance and enhance castability, even in windy conditions. The weights also produce a subtle rattling sound.



Performance Advice

- **Reel Selection:** It's usually best to throw the bait with a relatively slow- to moderate-speed reel like a 5.6:1 to 6.3:1. The slower gear ratio makes it easier to avoid overfishing the bait in chilly water while still allowing for faster retrieves as water temperatures warm and the fish become more aggressive and willing to chase.
- **Rod Selection:** As with any shallow crank, it's best to throw the Chick Magnet on a rod with a fairly soft tip to allow fish to eat the bait, but with enough backbone to wrestle big ones out of heavy cover. Rods in the 6-foot-10 to 7-foot range lend to accuracy when fishing tight to targets like stumps, laydowns and docks.
- **Line Size:** A good quality fluorocarbon like Berkley Trilene 100% or Gamma in 10- to 12-pound test will help maximize the action and diving depths, while providing good abrasion resistance. Switching to a larger diameter monofilament line will help "shallow up" the bait if need be.
- **Rod Angle:** You can alter diving depth by changing the angle of the rod tip and speed of the retrieve. Holding the rod tip at about 60-80 degrees (at 1 to 2 o'clock) in combination with a really slow retrieve will allow for crawling the bait over skinny water points or humps with minimal hang-ups.

>> MORE FROM STRIKE KING

In addition to the Chick Magnet, Strike King brought a number of other innovative products to the table this spring including: a family of high-performance braid, fluorocarbon and monofilament fishing lines (called CONTRA); a mid-size Rage Bug; a weedless Squadron jig head for swimbaits; a buzzbait built for skipping (called Skip'N Buzz); spinnerbait upgrades and a host of new colors in hard baits, bladed jigs and soft baits.

Check 'em out at strikeking.com/en/learn/2022-new-products.

HITS & MISSES

- + Casts well for a flatside
- + Stout hooks out of package
- + Big profile
- + Produces hard tail thump for calling fish out in muddy water
- + Durable circuit board bill
- + Dives quickly
- + Glances off rocks, stumps and hard objects
- + 13 colors to simulate target forage like crawfish and shad
- Lip grinds down after repeated contact with rock

DETAILS

Colors: 13

Weight: 7/16 ounce

Length: 2.25 inches

Depth Range: 4-6 feet

Hooks: Short shank No. 4

MSRP: \$9.99

Contact: strikeking.com ■

THE OTHER RIGS

There's more to rigs than Texas and Carolina.
These overlooked rigs shine when the usuals fail.

BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRANDON ROWAN



THE TOKYO RIG

YAMAMOTO LARGE FLAPPIN' HOG
Gooseberry Laminate

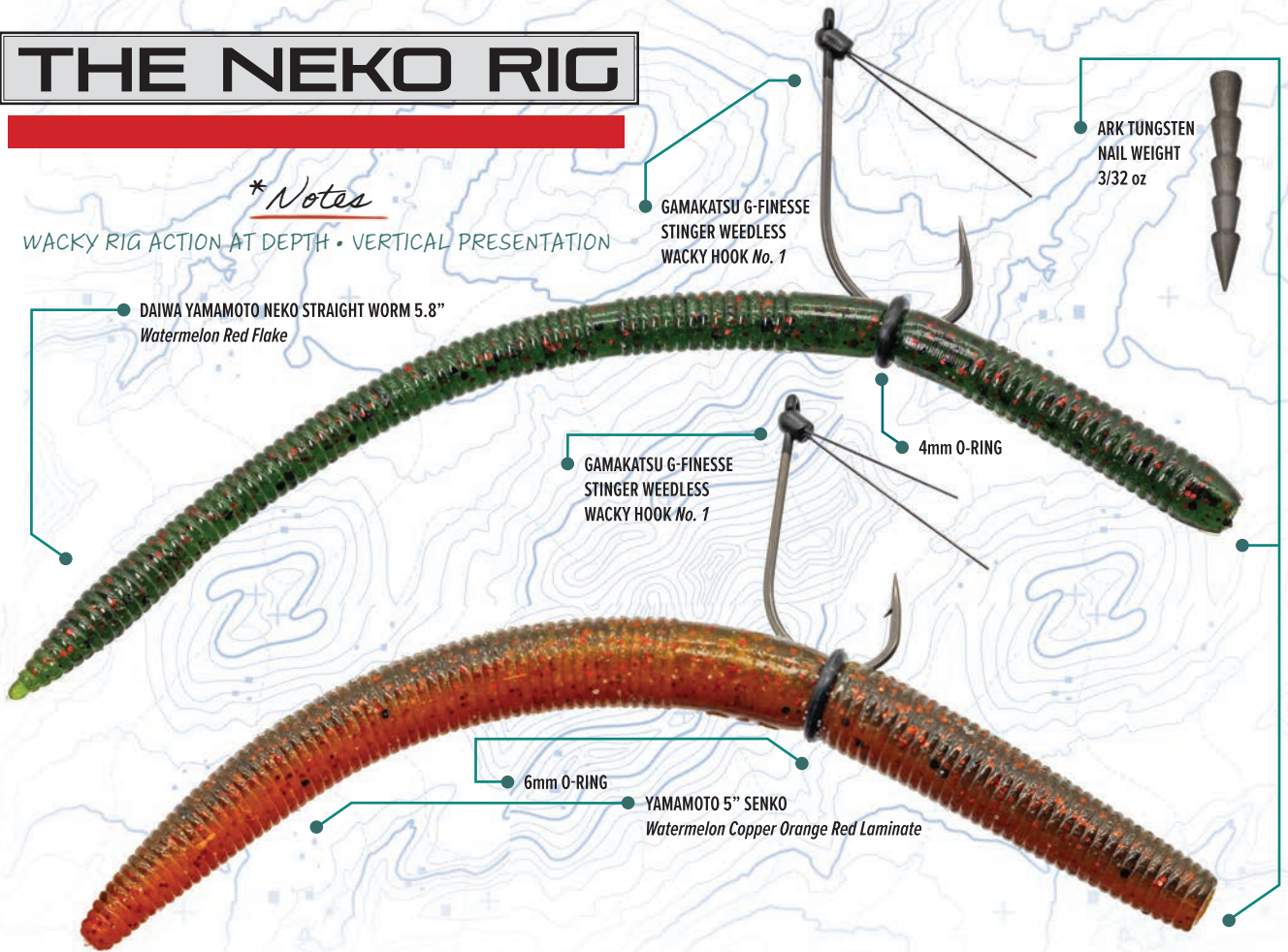
VMC TOKYO RIG
5/0

TUNGSTEN WORM WEIGHT
1/4 oz

THE NEKO RIG

**Notes*

WACKY RIG ACTION AT DEPTH • VERTICAL PRESENTATION



DAIWA YAMAMOTO NEKO STRAIGHT WORM 5.8"
Watermelon Red Flake

GAMAKATSU G-FINESSE
STINGER WEEDLESS
WACKY HOOK No. 1

ARK TUNGSTEN
NAIL WEIGHT
3/32 oz

GAMAKATSU G-FINESSE
STINGER WEEDLESS
WACKY HOOK No. 1

4mm O-RING

6mm O-RING

YAMAMOTO 5" SENKO
Watermelon Copper Orange Red Laminar

Texas, Carolina, Alabama, wacky – when it comes to “rigs,” these are the staples. You can throw in a drop-shot, too, though most have dropped the “rig” part of the name.

Five “rigs” that probably account for more the 95 percent of the ways anglers fish soft plastics day in and day out. That’s it.

But why is that?

The obvious answer is because even after decades, they’re still so damn effective.

But are they? Or are they effective simply because it’s mostly all we throw? And what if by switching things up, we might unlock something far more effective?

These are good questions to ask, as we all know that utilizing something that’s even a little different from the rest can have huge returns. They’re questions

**“IMAGINE A WACKY RIG,
BUT WITH THE ABILITY TO
BE FISHED AT ANY DEPTH.”**

pros ask all the time, and the answers have changed how we fish. Just look at pros like the late Aaron Martens (an early adopter of the drop-shot) and Brent Ehrler (an early adopter of the Neko rig; more on him in a bit), who both rode new rigs to ultimate success.

With that same curiosity in mind, we talked to a few pros about various “rigs” that are by no means new but are overlooked in various scenarios for the more-familiar “rigs.”

NEKO RIG

Imagine a wacky rig, but with the ability to be fished at any depth. That’s

what Japanese anglers did when they came up with the Neko rig, and it’s all Ehrler could imagine the first time he saw it.

While practicing for an event with long-time co-angler Hideki Maeda, Ehrler noticed his partner throwing something different. Knowing Maeda’s abilities for designing lures – he’s unofficially credited with designing the Reaction Innovations Vixen and Boze Sumo Frog, among others – Ehrler immediately took noticed and closely observed the new rig.

“I immediately liked that it fell like a shaky head, spiraling to the bottom when it falls, but once on bottom, it was a completely different action,” Ehrler says. “It was like a wacky rig on bottom. A shaky head you have to move forward to have any action. The Neko could stay in one spot and have a ton of action.”

That was all Ehrler needed to see, as he quickly adopted the rig, perfected

it, and went on to win hundreds of thousands of dollars on it with no one knowing what the heck it was.

By now you probably know what it is, but if you don't, take a stickbait, rig it wacky style and put a nail weight in one end. That's the basic gist. Ehrler, of course, has perfected it.

He'll use either a 5-inch Yamamoto Senko or a Daiwa Yamamoto Neko Straight Worm for either rig, with a rubber O-ring. On the Senko, he'll use either a No. 1 or 1/0 Gamakatsu G-Finesse Stinger Weedless Wacky Hook and on the Straight Worm, he'll use the same hook but in either No. 1 or No. 2 sizes. For his Neko rig, he'll add a 3/32-ounce Ark Tungsten nail weight, and he'll be sure to slide the O-ring down closer to the nail weight as opposed to in the center of the worm like he does on the wacky rig.

He uses a similar setup with both worms: 7-foot, 1-inch Daiwa Tatula Elite medium Dropshot rod, Daiwa Tatula reel, and 12-pound-test Sunline Xplasma Asegai braid to an 8-pound-test Sunline FC Sniper leader.

From there, it's just trial and error to see which worm does best.

"The Straight Worm falls slower on the Neko," Ehrler says. "So if the fish are suspended, I'll usually use that to allow it to hang in his face longer, and he'll usually eat in on the sink."

As for when to use it, Ehrler still prefers the wacky rig if he's fishing shallow (5 feet or less), as that allows it to hover and tempt bass best. But anything deeper than that, the Neko gets the call. He'll even choose it over a drop-shot many times when he feels the fish are truly bottom-oriented, feeding on crayfish.

"If I'm fishing vertically or if the fish are looking down to feed, the Neko rig pretty much is my go-to presentation," Ehrler says.

NED RIG

Few rigs make anglers roll their eyes more than the Ned rig, but as much as some anglers seem to loathe it, no one can argue its effectiveness. Something about that pudgy little offering on a mushroom head makes bass attack it like it's personally wronged their families.



However, the lure seems to have been pigeonholed into one solely for smallmouth or to catch numbers instead of big fish. Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro Grae Buck disagrees.

"I pick up a Ned rig over a Texas rig or shaky head whenever I need to finesse the fish even more to get more bites," Buck says. "The Z-Man TRD is only 2.75 inches. It's a tiny, tiny bait. So

they don't even have to be actively eating. They'll just go pick it up because it's so small. It's like a little snack for them."

And whether you're little or big, most of us can't help grabbing a little snack if it's just sitting in front of us. And that goes for all species of bass.

Buck has two different ways he likes to fish a Ned rig. The first is on a 1/5-ounce Z-Man Ned LockZ HD head, which he'll use when the fish are feeding on the bottom. However, if the fish are suspended and he's targeting them with forward-facing sonar, he goes with 1/16-ounce Hayabusa Brush Easy head, as it causes the rig to sink so slowly, most fish will just swim over and eat the snack before it ever gets close to the bottom.

**"IT'S INCREDIBLE HOW
THEY'LL JUST IMMEDIATELY
ATTACK IT."**

Regardless of the head, Buck throws a Ned rig on a Favorite Jackhammer 741 MH spinning rod, which helps with casting distance for such a light lure. He also spools up his Favorite Jackhammer 2500 reel with 15-pound-test Seaguar Smackdown braid to an 8-pound-test Seaguar Tatsu Fluorocarbon leader.

Now, as effective as this little snack can be at getting bites and how much more versatile it can be than anglers give credit, Buck admits it does have some limitations.

"It's definitely not great for skipping," Buck says. "And while it comes through rock decently well, it's not great in grass or around wood unless you're using one with a hook guard. And even then, because it's so small, it's usually best in more open-water situations where the fish can see it more easily."

Or, as one of the most underrated bed-fishing lures you'll find.

"[A fish on a bed] might not look at a Texas rig or even a drop-shot sometimes," Buck says. "That's when you throw in a Ned rig. It's incredible how they'll just immediately attack it."

TOKYO AND J-RIGS

Fishing rock piles on Clear Lake is not like the ones you fish on your home lake.

"Clear Lake has this volcanic rock that is really, really snaggy," says Cody Meyer. "I mean, it's so bad that you're constantly snagged throwing a football head and we used to try and float a 1/4-ounce jig above it, because if you touched it you were snagged."

That is, until Meyer started tossing the Owner J-Rig.

So, what is the Tokyo or J-Rig? Take a drop-shot; get rid of the "drop" line for either a wire with a weight on it (Tokyo) or just a bell sinker (J-Rig); and add an offset, wide-gap hook.

It doesn't look like much, but Meyer says it transformed his ability to fish those snaggy rocks and other cover.

"It comes through stuff so much better than a Texas rig," says Meyer, whose favorite size is a 1/4-ounce with a 5/0 hook. "That weight leads and allows the bait to sit horizontal behind. And when you're working the bait, the weight will move and clear itself. So, your bait is 10 times cleaner

coming through cover and hardly gets hung up."

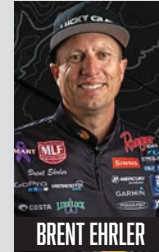
To clarify, Meyer is not punching or even flipping truly heavy vegetation with the rig (though, he has). He's more talking sparse hydrilla and milfoil, casting it out and dragging, shaking and popping it back to the boat while always keeping in contact with the bottom. The result is a different action than any Texas rig that also keeps the lure cleaner.

Same goes for rocks, where he'll drag it like a jig or sometimes put a small swimbait on it and slowly swim it, keeping contact with the rocks because he knows he won't get hung near as much.

In terms of gear, he'll go with a 7-foot, 3-inch Daiwa Tatula Elite Brent Ehrler rod and Daiwa Tatula Elite 7:1 reel spooled with Daiwa J-Fluoro Samurai. But he's tinkered plenty with the lures.

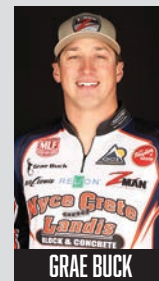
"I used to use strictly creature baits with it, but I've learned in places like Florida to use slender baits, too, like a Yamamoto Senko," says Meyer. "It gets in and out of the cover better and truly has such a different action that gets more bites." ■

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



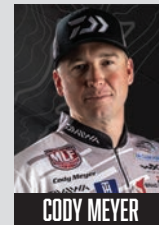
NEKO RIG

- **ROD**
7'1" Daiwa Tatula Elite Brent Ehrler - M (spinning)
- **REEL**
Daiwa Tatula
- **LINE**
12lb Sunline Xplasma Asegai braid to an 8lb Sunline FC Sniper leader



NED RIG

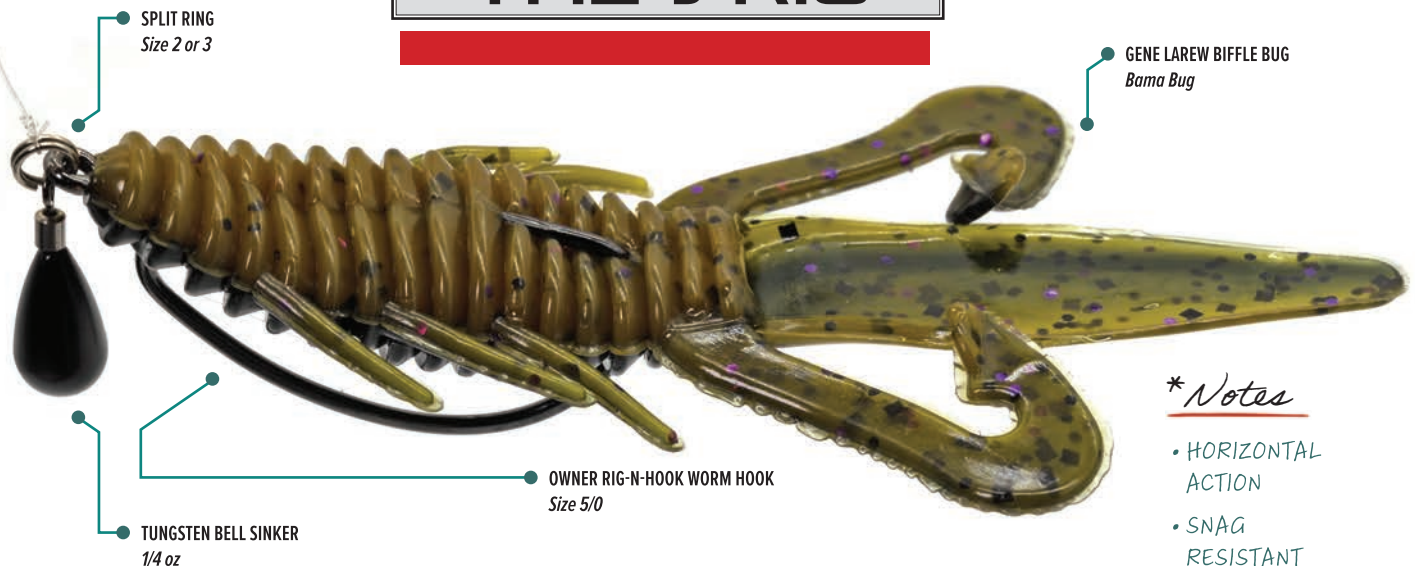
- **ROD**
Favorite Jackhammer 741 - MH (spinning)
- **REEL**
Favorite Jackhammer 2500
- **LINE**
15lb Seaguar Smackdown braid to an 8lb Seaguar Tatsu Fluorocarbon leader.



TOKYO/J-RIG

- **ROD**
7'3" Daiwa Tatula Elite Brent Ehrler - MH (casting)
- **REEL**
Daiwa Tatula Elite 7:1
- **LINE**
J-Fluoro Samurai

THE J-RIG



*Notes

- HORIZONTAL ACTION
- SNAG RESISTANT

1 STORM ORIGINAL DEEP WIGGLE WART

\$7.99 | rapala.com

The Wiggle Wart needs no introduction, but we'll give it one anyway: a fabled crankbait with aggressive, tantalizing action that flat-out catches big bass. It's hard to improve on that resumé.

Thankfully, Storm didn't have to improve the Wiggle Wart when it introduced the Deep Wiggle Wart. It simply created a deeper-running model with all the bass-catching power of the original that runs up to 20 feet deep (depending on line size and retrieve) and allows anglers to target fish in deeper depths than the original (7 to 12 feet).

The bait's wide wobble and aggressive hunting action are perfect for cold-water applications but can also be killer when fishing dirty and stained water in the summertime. With 25 colors to choose from at Tackle Warehouse, there simply isn't a bad time to wield this new iteration of a bass fishing classic.



phantom green crayfish

1



creek craw

2 BILL LEWIS MR-12

\$8.99 | rat-l-trap.com

The big brother to the MR-6, the MR-12 – developed by Bass Pro Tour star Mark Daniels Jr. – is a 3/4-ounce crankbait designed to cast a mile and probe depths from 12 to 15 feet for bass keying on a bait, with a tight shimmy and low-pitch knocking sound.

The MR-12 employs a weight-transfer system that, paired with slim sides and a tapered tail end, enables anglers to get the most out of every cast to keep the bait in the strike zone for as long as possible. It also features Mustad Triple Grip trebles and ultra-realistic eyes and gill plates, which equates to more bites and fewer lost fish.

At \$8.99 per bait with 12 stunning finishes to choose from, the MR-12 might just be the next go-to crankbait for mid- to deep-diving scenarios, especially in the summer months.



citrus shad

2



green gizzard shad

3 RAPALA OTT'S GARAGE TINY 4

\$9.49 | rapala.com

The beauty of summertime crankbait fishing is being able to find bass in the shallowest of water. For that task, you need a crankbait designed to run shallow – and run true – with the realistic look and feel of a baitfish or crawfish running for its life.

The Ott's Garage Tiny 4 from Rapala (and designed by Ott DeFoe) checks all the boxes. Where the Tiny 4 really shines is in "finesse" cranking scenarios thanks to its tight wobble and silent approach, all due to a masterfully crafted flat balsa body and a rounded circuit board bill.

Equipped with VMC Black Nickel 1X Strong Hybrid trebles and available in 19 enticing colors, there's nothing to not like about the latest creation from the flat-side master himself.

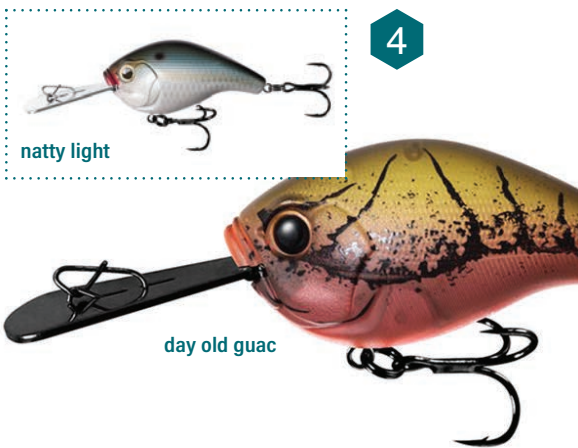


coosa special

3



red crawdad



4

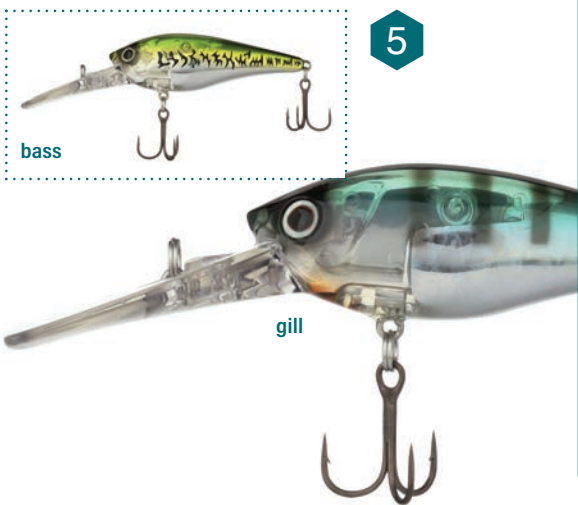
13 FISHING JABBER JAW DEEP

\$12.99 | 13fishing.com

The Jabber Jaw hybrid crankbait from 13 Fishing was as innovative as any crankbait we'd seen when it was released at ICAST 2020. A year later, 13 upped the ante with a deeper-running version of the Jabber Jaw called the Jabber Jaw Deep, designed to run 7 to 9 feet deep (as opposed to 3 to 5 feet for the original model).

A crankbait with some vibrating jig characteristics (thanks in large part to the pivoting metal lip), the Jabber Jaw line is the perfect crankbait for expanding what you can do with a square-bill. Now, you can also expand the depth at which you fish it.

The Jabber Jaw Deep is everything you could want in a loud, aggressive do-it-all crankbait. The icing on the cake: being able to throw one right out of the package thanks to ultra-sharp VMC trebles and impressive craw- and shad-imitating finishes.



5

SHIMANO WORLD CRANK FLASH BOOST

\$19.99 | tacklewarehouse.com

Shimano's Flash Boost – aptly named for the continuous flashing that resonates from suspended foil on micro springs inside the translucent bait – is an innovative idea that's simple (and simply brilliant).

The World Crank FB is designed to run between 10 and 12 feet with a large bill that also gives the bait a somewhat aggressive action. Fishing the bait with an erratic retrieve full of pauses allows the suspended foil inside the bait to continue wobbling as the World Crank stops, emitting a "flashing" signal meant to mimic a wounded baitfish.

Paired with "Scale Boost" (composite-pitch holograms for incredible realism) and "Jet Boost" (for increased casting distance), the World Crank could change the crankbait game in a flash.



6

6TH SENSE CRUSH XR

\$9.99 | 6thsensefishing.com

When you need something loud, boisterous and erratic to get a bass' attention, few shallow-running squarebills are as well-suited for the task as the 6th Sense Crush XR. The 1/2-ounce 50XR and 5/8-ounce 100XR make no bones about their purpose: If you tie one on, you're doing so with the intention of chasing monstrous reaction strikes in the shallows.

6th Sense built the Crush XR models around a few different concepts. First, a large rattle chamber full of BBs for maximum sound resonance. Next, "random reaction movement," which adds an element of fast twitches and erratic movement. Finally, 3D scales, gill plates and eyes for a realistic look – never a bad thing to have, even when chasing after quick reaction bites. ■

TAPPING INTO OFFSHORE GOLD



Advancements in electronics have opened up a whole new world to bass anglers. The offshore game isn't just about ledge fishing anymore.

By Tyler Brinks
PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

Over the past decade-plus, fishing offshore has become a staple as bass anglers have learned to take advantage of rapidly advancing technology to slide away from the bank in their search for new fish. The proliferation of offshore knowledge (and tech) has made waves in all levels of tournament fishing, from local clubs to the top level of the sport.

Bass Pro Tour anglers Bryan Thrift and Dakota Ebare are two tour-level pros who can catch them at any depth, but if they had their druthers, they'd choose to head offshore instead of beating the bank.

Thrift is one of the most decorated professional anglers alive, and one of his keys to success throughout his career has been fishing isolated offshore targets like brush piles (which is how he won the 2019 Forrest Wood Cup at Lake Hamilton). Thrift's approach at the majority of tournaments he fishes is to find hidden pieces of cover away from the bank with his electronics and dissect them with a surgeon's precision.

Ebare grew up fishing shallow water in southern Louisiana and became infatuated with offshore fishing because it was foreign to him. When he first ventured outside of his home region, it was all he wanted to do, and he's since become one of the best offshore anglers on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit and Bass Pro Tour.

Thrift and Ebare have vastly different approaches, but they follow some of the same rules and guidelines for utilizing technology to mine offshore "gold."

GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN

Just as marine electronics have advanced exponentially in recent years, so have bass anglers' skills at using them, according to Ebare. This has caused him to rethink the way he practices for tournaments, and what he looks for when venturing offshore.

"Everyone wants to get offshore now and use their electronics, and they've gotten pretty good at it because the tools we have now make it much easier to locate fish," he says. "The big schools of fish get found right away and the anglers know how to catch them now. That tends to break up the schools quickly, and fish are getting more pressured and educated. I believe this has made offshore bass more nomadic and willing to change areas if they sense too much fishing pressure."

Instead of searching for the mother lode or "mega-schools" that everyone was looking for on the Tennessee River ledges and other offshore meccas in years past, Ebare now looks for smaller groups of fish and isolated areas.

"The more popular offshore gets, the more it pays to go outside the box and find something that not everyone else is doing," Ebare adds. "That's true whether I'm fishing a ledge on the TVA lakes, fishing hard spots at Sam Rayburn or targeting deep timber on Lake Fork. I'm always looking for smaller groups of fish, pieces of isolated cover or places where there aren't a lot of boats out fishing or scanning with their electronics."

THE FORWARD-FACING SONAR REVOLUTION

It seems like just about every tournament trail across the country is now being impacted by the latest marine electronics technology to engulf the scene: forward-facing sonar. All of the three major manufacturers (Lowrance, Garmin, Humminbird) now have their versions, and the visibility of fish provided by live sonar has unquestionably altered the way some anglers fish.

"I feel like the power of a single spot or waypoint has been diminished with forward-facing sonar because now it's a live view and general areas are more important," Ebare explains. "Now, you just put the trolling motor down and fish and look at what's in front of you. It's an incredible technology because you can see everything under the water, but it takes time to understand it all, and nothing replaces spending time using it."

Ebare couldn't begin to estimate the amount of time he's spent looking at his Garmin Panoptix LiveScope, but he's settled on what he considers the correct forward range and depth range for his fishing style.

"I typically have my forward range set to between 75 and 100 feet at most, because that's a pretty long cast unless you're throwing a big crankbait or swimbait," he says. "I don't go out any further because you can't reach them and it starts to make it harder to make out what you're seeing."

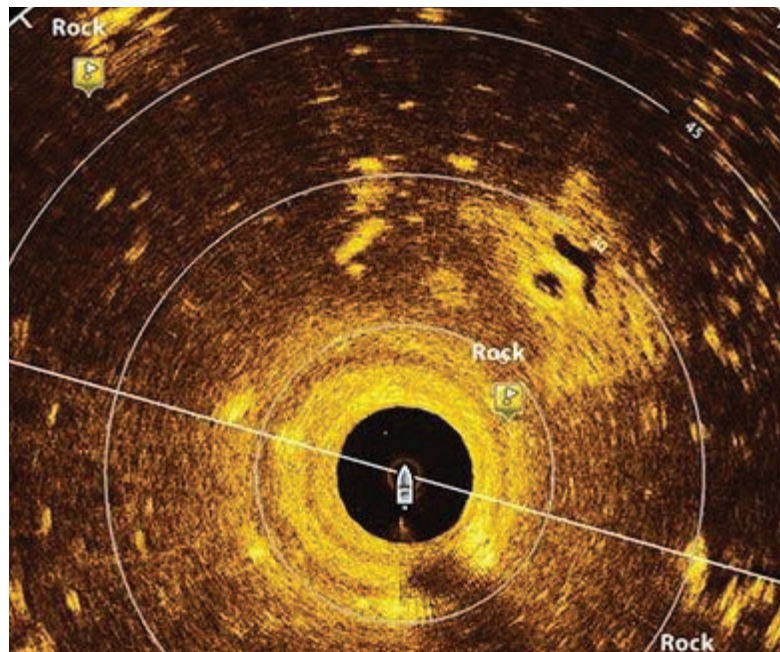
The depth range is an often-overlooked aspect when setting up forward-facing sonar. It can be left on automatic and the bottom will adjust based on the depth of the water the boat is sitting in. This can be helpful, but Ebare chooses to modify the depth range manually based on the depth.

"If I'm fishing 15 feet or less, I'll set the depth to 25 feet, and if I'm deeper, I'll set the range about 10 feet deeper than the water I'm fishing," Ebare says. "The reason is to keep it as consistent as possible so I get the best gauge on how big a

fish is. If the screen is blown up because the water is shallower, a 2-pounder will look like a whale. The adjustment will also fill up your screen and make it look more distorted, so keeping it consistent will lead to better clarity and allow you to gauge sizes better."

Thrift utilizes Humminbird Mega Live. In addition to locating fish, one of the biggest benefits he sees is locating hard-to-see structure.


"Mega Live has changed how I fish for bass that I see on my screen, but something that isn't talked about as much is how well it shows structure and cover," Thrift says. "Smaller stuff and PVC fish habitats are hard to make out on side imaging. Finding those smaller things is one of the best aspects of forward-facing sonar. If you line it up, you know exactly how far you need to cast."



Offshore 'miners' like Dakota Ebare use multiple tools to locate bass gold.



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



Using both 360-degree imaging and forward facing sonar together can rapidly speed up your learning curve about an area.

A 360-DEGREE VIEW

While forward-facing sonar has dominated the electronics discussion of the past several years, 360-degree imaging has plenty of fans, including both Ebare and Thrift.

Both say they couldn't live without it. Thrift says he'd pick it over forward-facing sonar if he could only use one. Ebare can't decide which one he'd rather have.

"The cool thing about 360 is that it's always working for you, no matter what depth you're fishing," Ebare says. "I use it to find scattered hydrilla out away from the boat when I'm flipping mats and also when I'm offshore looking for hard spots or rock veins. There isn't a right or wrong way to use it."

Thrift has learned that 360 technology works for him everywhere, and his two biggest pieces of advice are to find a color palette that works for you and to adjust the sensitivity as needed.

"I like the amber color palette personally, but you have to find the one that makes it easiest for you to make out what you're seeing," he says. "I don't adjust many other settings, except for the sensitivity. I'll bump it up when the bottom is softer and turn it down when fishing a hard bottom; those little adjustments will make a much clearer picture."

Ebare utilizes the technology the same way but credits it for speeding up his learning curve with forward-facing sonar.

"Using both (360 and live sonar) simultaneously makes everything make sense to me because you can see everything from different angles and see how a rock runs or the 'spider' stumps with all of the roots," he shares. "Everything comes together when you start to see different views and even helps for you understand standard 2D sonar and side scan much better."

Thrift has always paid extra attention to offshore brush piles, but rapid growth in electronics tech has given him an even better understanding of their potential.



Ebare exercises a common-sense approach to staying stealthy when fishing offshore.



PHOTO BY KORY SAVAGE

FISHING BRUSH PILES AND THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

Being stealthy, making as little noise as possible and accurate casts are givens when fishing shallow water, but Thrift takes the same approach when he's fishing offshore, too. For instance, when lining up to fish a brush pile or just about anywhere offshore, he sets the range of his Humminbird Mega Live and 360 imaging to 80 feet.

"That's roughly four boat lengths away and a pretty good distance for a cast, but it's far enough that you won't spook a fish," he says. "I line up to it and make the best cast I can; accuracy is crucial for your first presentation so you get the element of surprise. A bad cast hurts your chances of getting that reaction, and it can also pull fish away from the cover. In my experience, the more a fish has to chase your bait, the less likely you can get him to commit."

Ebare has a very similar outlook on how best to approach offshore targets, with some common-sense ways to help him line up for any piece of cover.

"It's simple, but always fishing into the wind is one of the easiest things you can do, and it helps boat positioning tremendously," he shares. "Offshore fish get pressured and become skittish when boats come too close, and most people don't stay far enough away. I try to stay as far back as possible to still be efficient with my casting."

For locating brush piles, Thrift uses the standard approach of side-scanning and utilizing other technologies available to him. He also mixes in some old-school thinking to speed up the process.

"The first clue is the type of fishery that you're on and most of the brush piles will normally be placed in predictable areas," he says. "On a lake with a lot of docks, they're usually dumped right under them; on a herring lake, brush piles are probably going to be on main-lake points close to deep water. These are the places I always look first, but nothing beats time behind the wheel idling and looking for them." ■

A REVELATION

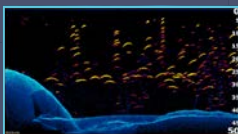
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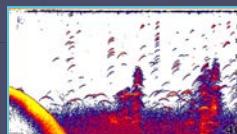
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PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER SHANGLE





YOUNG AT HEART

At 66 years young, legendary Bass Fishing Hall of Famer Shaw Grigsby has every excuse to spend his days fishing from the comfort of a pedestal seat on the front deck of his Triton, flipping and dragging and catching fish in whatever ways are least demanding for a body that's held up admirably after more than four decades of life on the road and on the water. He certainly could get away with eschewing sight fishing in favor of techniques that don't require incredible visual acuity and he wouldn't catch grief from a single soul if he were to prefer breaking off a quality keeper that had his line perched over a dock, instead of doing his best impression of a centerfielder laying out for a liner in the gap.

That's just not how Shaw Grigsby rolls.

At Bass Boat Technologies Stage Four at Lake of the Ozarks, the grizzled Florida vet with the most recognizable 'stache in bass fishing proved once more that age is only a number, and that fishing has a magical way of making us all feel young at heart. Grigsby led Group A on Qualifying Day 1 with 14 scorable bass for 37 pounds, 15 ounces, and he did much of that damage sight fishing around docks on the Ozarks impoundment. He edged out Alton Jones Sr. by just 11 ounces - 11 ounces he wouldn't have had if not for some age-defying flexibility and the fighting spirit to make every cast count.

Grigsby went on to finish 29th in the event, but he showed us all that on any given day, he can be as good once as he ever was - and as young, too.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



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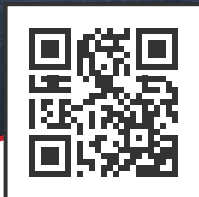
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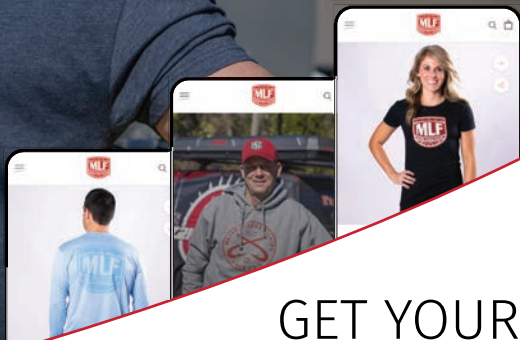
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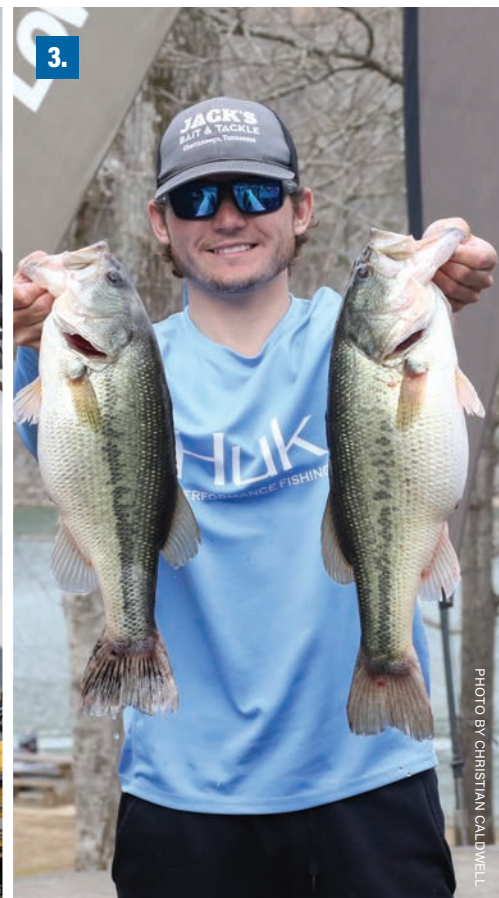


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1. BASS PRO TOUR BASS PRO SHOPS REDCREST 2022 PRESENTED BY COSTA

Grand Lake O' the Cherokees

March 23-27

Florida pro Bobby Lane earned the moniker "Big Fish Bobby" thanks to a career full of bragging-size bass. But in the waning moments of Bass Pro Shops REDCREST 2022 Presented by Costa, Lane ascended to a new nickname befitting a champion: "Big Time Bobby" has a nice ring to it, and it's accurate.

With time running out in the final period of the Bass Pro Tour championship on Grand Lake and Jacob Wheeler clinging to a precarious lead, Lane connected with a 2-pound largemouth that pushed him past Wheeler and Luke Clausen for a \$300,000 payday and the title of REDCREST champion.

Lane found himself in position to capitalize on the moment only after a savvy adjustment. He had spent the bulk of three competition days crank-

ing an HD brown Berkley Frittside 5 around bluffs and points, but picked up on a subtle change in the Championship Round as fish started to slap at the Frittside and his cranking bite faded. Out came a light flipping rod armed with a green pumpkin jig and a Berkley PowerBait Meaty Chunk Jr. as Lane made a beeline for isolated pieces of cover and individual docks in the backs of pockets.

Lane entered the final period of the Championship Round with an 11-pound deficit but ended the day with a 1-3 cushion over Clausen, 1-10 over Wheeler and the REDCREST championship. Now that's big time.

2. ABU GARCIA COLLEGE FISHING CHAMPIONSHIP PRESENTED BY LOWRANCE

Fort Gibson Lake

March 29-31

Earning East Texas Baptist University its first-ever fishing national championship among a storied history of success for the pro-

gram, the duo of Kaden Proffitt and Cason Ragsdale brought three quality limits to the scale over three days at Fort Gibson, making all the right adjustments to fish clean and squeeze as much as they could out of a stingy fishery.

Despite not having a single keeper at 10:30 on the final day, Proffitt and Ragsdale held it together enough to know they needed to slow down due to the cold, snowy conditions. Instead of continuing with ChatterBaits and squarebill crankbaits, they leaned more on soaking jigs in key areas where they knew fish were moving up to spawn. They were meticulous throughout the event, sometimes sitting on one-cast spots for 30 minutes or more to avoid missing out on a fish that could win them a championship.

Ultimately, 43-8 over three days was 3 pounds, 4 ounces more than they needed to lock up the prestigious title, berths to the 2022 Toyota Series Championship and a Phoenix boat worth \$33,500.

3. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. CENTRAL DIVISION

Dale Hollow Lake

March 31-April 2

Jack Daniel Williams was a model of consistency over three days on Dale Hollow during the penultimate event of the Central Division schedule. A rookie to the Toyota Series, Williams weighed in three bags of 21-plus pounds to notch the win and a \$71,500 check by less than two pounds over Cleveland, Tennessee's runner-up, Kevin Drake.

Williams relied on forward-facing sonar to do most of his damage throughout the three-day tournament, using his electronics to key in on schools of bait that held in various depths (depending on the weather) around points and steep drops. To catch his winning fish, Williams employed a Dale Hollow staple: a 3 1/2-inch swimbait on a 1/4-ounce swimbait head.

PHOTO BY COBI PELLERITO



PHOTO BY KORY SAVAK



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN



4. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. SOUTHERN DIVISION Santee Cooper Lake

April 7-9

Dangerous winds shortened the Southern Division event on Santee Cooper to just one day, giving Bryan Cook of Vance, South Carolina, his second MFL win on the fishery by virtue of a 28-pound, 9-ounce megabag. That stringer edged out that of Matt Wieteha by 3 pounds, 7 ounces.

Cook had multiple patterns in his arsenal (being a local with vast knowledge of the fishery) and all of those patterns aided him in catching his winning bag. First, Cook pitched around a wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko to target shallow prespawn fish and fill out a solid limit. Then, he turned to grass lines to flip up some upgrades with a Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver before finishing the job with a Terminator spinnerbait and a Z-Man/Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer.

5. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION Lake Texoma

April 7-9

Early April was an especially windy period across the country, and as was the case at Santee Cooper, Southwestern Division anglers only had one day of fishing to decide the Toyota Series event on Lake Texoma.

Days 1 and 2 were cancelled due to dangerous wind conditions – the first time the first two days of an event had ever been cancelled in MFL competition – meaning Day 3 was a winner-take-all full-field shootout. When the dust settled, Rick Harris of Del Rio, Texas, earned his first MFL win in 12 events with a bag of 21-13.

Harris was the last person who thought he'd win at about 11:30 when he still had zero keepers in his livewell. At that point, he made a move to a steep, rocky bank and added a couple quality fish on a spinnerbait and a homemade jig. He then moved

to some bedding fish he marked during practice, catching one before getting ready to head back to check-in. Instead of firing up the motor, Harris saw a bass under a dock walkway swirl on his jig, so he made another cast and caught a 2-pounder. One more cast later, he had its mate (a 6-11 female) in the box and a trophy waiting for him back at weigh-in.

6. BASS PRO TOUR GENERAL TIRE HEAVY HITTERS PRESENTED BY BASS PRO SHOPS

Lake Palestine

April 9-14

In the postgame interview after accepting the heavyweight belt and \$100,000 check that came with winning General Tire Heavy Hitters in East Texas, Tennessee pro Ott DeFoe joked about buying a second home in the Lone Star State. Based on his tournament winnings in Texas in the past two years alone, the DeFoes' second home could be a doozy.

DeFoe wrapped up his fourth win in Texas since 2020 by gritting out a four-fish day in the Championship Round. Fortunately, those four fish were all the right size: DeFoe finished with 16-6, just 12 ounces ahead of Justin Lucas with 15-10. Two of those fish (a 3-10 and a 4-10) came in the last 35 minutes of the day, propelling DeFoe from the bottom half of SCORETRACKER® to the win.

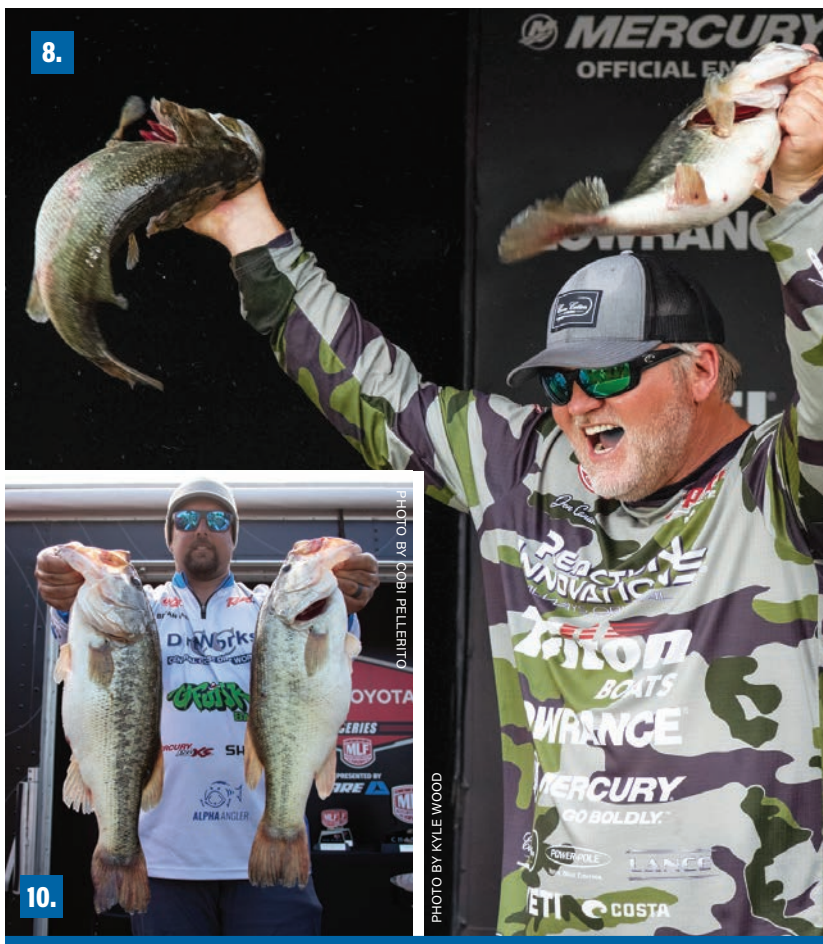
DeFoe spent the week sight fishing, using a 1-2 punch of a 4 1/2-inch swimbait on a Tokyo rig and a Texas-rigged Bass Pro Magnum Fin-Eke Worm follow-up to get them to bite.

7. BUILDERS FIRSTSOURCE PATRIOT CUP PRESENTED BY GUARANTEED RATE

Lewisville Lake, Eagle Mountain Lake, Lavon Lake

April 9-May 14

It's not often in MFL Cup competition that an angler truly dominates an event, but Stephen Browning did just that.



8.

PHOTO BY COBI PELLENTINO

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

10.

The Arkansas pro won his Elimination Round on Lewisville Lake with 13 fish for 23-4 and finished atop his Sudden Death Round on Eagle Mountain Lake with 17-14. It was more of the same in the Championship Round on Lavon Lake, where Browning put 17 fish on SCORETRACKER® for 44-5 to earn his first MLF Cup trophy.

And he did it with the bait that Browning has become synonymous with: a 3/8-ounce Z-man/Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer with a straight-tail trailer, which he threw around the abundant East Texas standing timber in Lavon.

8. TACKLE WAREHOUSE PRO CIRCUIT LITHIUM PROS STOP 3 PRESENTED BY COVERCRAFT
Pickwick Lake

April 21-24

Jon Canada notched his first MLF win and a \$101,000 payday

thanks to some smart decision-making and a lot of preparation for Pickwick Lake. On Day 1, the Helena, Alabama, pro employed a swim jig to catch 12 pounds, 13 ounces fishing around shallow grass and stumps. Finding little success with that same pattern early on Day 2, Canada quickly turned his attention to a stretch he idled and marked in pre-practice, and where he'd caught several quality bass in previous tournaments.

There, Canada caught one fish on a shaky head and decided a drop-shot might be the golden ticket from there on out. The stretch – an area near the Natchez Trace bridge containing several shallow bars full of stumps – was indeed money for Canada, who used Humminbird MEGA 360 and forward-facing sonar to pick fish off stumps with his Reaction Innovations Flirt Worm to total 50-4 over three days and eventually edge out Justin Lucas by 1 pound, 2 ounces.



9.

PHOTO BY KORY SAVAGE

9. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. PLAINS DIVISION
Grand Lake

April 28-30

Eleven ounces is all that separated Jeff Reynolds from second-place finisher Cade Alsbury – something Reynolds knows all about after having finished second to Rick Harris at Texoma just a few weeks prior. It was meant to be this time, though, as Reynolds rallied from sixth to first on the final day with an 18-pound, 3-ounce limit caught entirely from beds.

Reynolds, in earning his second Toyota Series win and fourth win of his MLF career, got off to a hot start to the tournament with 21-8 on Day 1 before stubbing his toe on Day 2 (14-7). Championship Saturday seemed like it might be more the same (Reynolds had an empty livewell at 10:30), but he landed on all the right beds from there on out, eventually

catching a 4 1/2-pounder with about 30 minutes left to seal the deal.

To earn his \$76,500 payday, Reynolds used his sharp eyesight and Texas-rigged Strike King Game Hawgs and Reaction Innovation Sweet Beavers to catch his winning fish.

10. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. WESTERN DIVISION
Clear Lake

April 28-30

Bryan Grier went against the grain in tallying 58-5 for the win at Clear Lake, opting to target deep prespawn fish in 10 to 14 feet of water while most of the rest of the field beat the bank to pick off spawning and postspawn fish. Ultimately, it was his consistency in the final two days that mattered most as Grier sacked limits of 20-plus-pounds both days (the only angler in the field to do so).



11.

11. BASS PRO TOUR BASS BOAT TECHNOLOGIES STAGE FOUR PRESENTED BY BASS CAT

Lake of the Ozarks

April 30-May 5

Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri, and Smith Lake, Alabama, are about eight hours apart as the crow flies. But as far as Bass Pro Tour pro Jesse Wiggins is concerned, the two fisheries are one and the same. Wiggins channeled a lifetime of knowledge about the spawning behavior of bass

in Smith Lake (his home lake) into a championship run in Bass Pro Tour Stage Four, applying some basic northern Alabama philosophies to Lake of the Ozarks.

While a good majority of the 80-man field sight fished on Lake of the Ozarks, Wiggins blind-casted a shaky head and cut-down 6.6-inch Jackall Flick Shake Worm to three key spawning areas that he fishes on Smith Lake in late spring: corners of docks, walkways and dock cables. While other competitors spent time working on individual fish, Wiggins simply cast to his three key areas of the plethora of docks he had marked in practice. If fish were present, they'd react to the bait. If not, Wiggins would simply roll on to the next dock.

The Alabama pro connected with 11 bass for 27 pounds, 11 ounces on the final day, outdistancing Dean Rojas by 2-7 to earn his fourth career win and his first victory at the Bass Pro Tour level.



12.

PHOTO BY KORY SAVAGE



13.

PHOTO BY COBI PELLERITO

12. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION Sam Rayburn Reservoir

May 4-6

Hayden Heck moved from California to Texas just a couple years ago in the hopes of pursuing a professional fishing career. It only took him three events to check off one major milestone in his quest: a Toyota Series victory - over none other than Texas fishing legend Keith Combs.

Heck had a solid Day 1 on Rayburn with 18-9 before plopping a 28-pound, 9-ounce mega-bag on the scale on Day 2. Unfortunately for Heck, Combs mirrored his success both days (19-6 and 28-11) and left Heck feeling like he'd need another massive bag on Day 3 to finally earn the win. Instead, Combs managed just 14-11 to Heck's 18-1, giving the latter a 2-pound, 7-ounce win he'll never forget.

The winning pattern was fairly simple: running multiple brush piles and points at the mouth of spawning areas where Heck could get on both prespawn and postspawn bass. For the task, he leaned on Garmin LiveScope and a Strike King 5XD as well as a drop-shot and a 6-inch swimbait.

13. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. CENTRAL DIVISION Lake Chickamauga

May 5-7

Matt Stanley put the new-for-this-season Toyota Series format to the test (with the final-day field increased from 10 anglers to 25) to catapult from 13th to first with the second-largest bag of the tournament on Championship Saturday. Only one limit from the 255-boat field was better than Stanley's 22-2 on Day 3, which he caught using forward-facing sonar and a Megabass



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

jerkbait, and which included a 6 1/2- and a 9-pounder.

While the jerkbait did all the heavy lifting on the final day, Stanley made the final 25 with a variety of baits and tactics, including a wacky-rigged stick bait fished in water as shallow as 10 inches. Throughout the event, the Alexandria, Tennessee, pro never fished any deeper than about 8 feet.

With the win, Stanley added a sixth victory to his MLF resume and \$60,000 to his career earnings.

14. TACKLE WAREHOUSE PRO CIRCUIT B&W TRAILER HITCHES STOP 4 PRESENTED BY A.R.E. Lake Gunterville

May 12-15

Weighing in 22-15 on the final day of competition, Bossier City,

Louisiana's Nick LeBrun took full advantage of zeroed weights on Championship Sunday to rally from sixth to first for a \$101,000 check and his first major win since taking down the Phoenix Bass Fishing League Presented by T-H Marine All-American in 2018.

LeBrun, who totaled 58-9 over three days before the final round, saved his best for last with 22-15 on Day 4 to top rookie Nick Hatfield by 2 pounds, 6 ounces. No one else in the Top 10 managed to crack the 20-pound mark on the final day.

LeBrun found his winning school on the final day of practice and went to work on that same school throughout the event with a 3/4-ounce V&M Mega Shakey Head tipped with a blue V&M J-Mag Worm – catching a 7-pounder on that setup to seal the deal on Championship Sunday.

15. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E. SOUTHERN DIVISION Harris Chain of Lakes

May 19-21

Locking through to Lake Griffin all three days, local stick Jonathan Semento – who has five Top 10s in the Phoenix Bass Fishing League Presented by T-H Marine on his resume – relied on his years of experience fishing the Harris Chain in identifying Griffin as the lake with the best chance to find the winning fish and relatively small crowds of competitors.

Semento got off to a slow start with 9-15 on Day 1 to find himself in 119th place. Instead of turning tail and salvaging some points elsewhere, he returned to Griffin on Day 2 to assemble a 24-pound, 15-ounce bag to vault into seventh before put-

ting together the biggest bag of the event on Day 3 (25-3) for a winning margin of 3 pounds, 12 ounces and a paycheck worth \$80,500.

To catch his winning fish, Semento targeted eelgrass in 4 to 6 feet of water with a pair of ChatterBaits (3/8- and 1/2-ounce) with Yamamoto Zako trailers. The problem wasn't as much getting them to bite as it was finding the fish in the first place. A couple weeks prior, Semento won a local event on Griffin with a 24-pound stringer. That same school of winning bass was still roaming Griffin's offshore haunts – just a couple hundred yards from where he previously knew them to be. Lack of fishing pressure on Griffin allowed Semento to take his time and bounce around until he was able to relocate the school and milk it for as much as he needed to claim the victory. ■

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By Tyler Brinks

Lake Champlain



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRANDON ROWAN

LAKE CHAMPLAIN

Heralded tournament destination has evolved over the years

The sixth and final stop of the 2022 Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit will visit Lake Champlain starting July 29. A week following that event, a full field of Toyota Series anglers will tackle the

New York/Vermont-border fishery. It's a testament to Champlain's popularity, as it's a repeat just about every summer on multiple bass fishing trails.

Even with all the attention, Champlain routinely kicks out

plenty of quality bass, both largemouth and smallmouth, and it's a favorite for traveling anglers from across the country.

With so much tournament history on the lake, especially during the summer months, it's

relatively easy to find information on fishing conditions and what it takes to win year after year. But Champlain has changed exponentially over the years, with smallmouth becoming more dominant in winning bags and largemouth playing less of a role in the outcome.

Two anglers who have made their names known in MLF events almost exclusively fishing Champlain are Vermont angler J.J. Judd and New York's Alec Morrison. Judd has a Phoenix Bass Fishing League triumph on the lake, finished in the Top 10 in last year's Toyota Series and has collected eight Top 10s in 17 MLF tournaments on Champlain. Morrison has three Top 5 finishes of his own on Champlain.

Both offered their insights on the fishery and its current state, how it has changed, and why.

ABOUT THE FISHERY

Lake Champlain is enormous, stretching north-south for more than 100 miles, with waters in New York, Vermont and Canada. The vast fishery offers virtually limitless room for anglers to roam, but a handful of traditionally productive locations tend to draw the most attention and fishing pressure.

The southern end of the lake is full of milfoil beds that are perfect for targeting largemouth around Ticonderoga (also known as "Ti"), and the Inland Sea on the northern end has become a smallmouth angler's dream. The miles between the two also provide ample water to catch healthy bass of either species.

Morrison is expecting better largemouth fishing this year because of the water levels on the lake, which began the spring already higher than they were last summer (with more water still to come from rain and snowmelt).

"The higher water years are always better for largemouth in milfoil and 'Ti' should be a factor again – it really hasn't been (a factor) in the last few years," Morrison said. "More anglers will probably try it down there this year and somebody will figure it out because there's more opportunity with higher water. The low water years are always dominated by smallmouth."

Morrison also believes the higher water levels will add to the potential productivity of docks throughout the lake.

"You can stick to docks with higher water and have success with largemouth, but that can be a grind," Morrison said. "You have to cover so many docks to run into enough big largemouth to have enough for a multi-day tournament."

Judd believes finding groups of big smallmouth is now the way to win on Lake Champlain. That's certainly what happened last year, with just about every major event win coming from one area: The Inland Sea.

"There was a 'magic hole' that everyone went to last year, and it accounted for all of the big wins," he said. "Finding a big group of fish like that is what it takes to win on Champlain. If someone can stumble onto something like that, they'll be hard to beat. There are plenty of places it could happen. It could be the Inland Sea again or somewhere on the main lake like around Rouses Point."

SUMMER PROGRESSION

According to Judd, late July and August are some of the best times to visit Champlain. He says it's far enough from the spawn to have the fish in a biting mood and stacked up in areas.

"There's still a small handful of bass spawning the first part of July, but by the time August rolls around, the fish are in a full-on summer pattern," Judd said. "The smallmouth will have had time to regroup from the spawn and be grouped up in 20 to 45 feet of water chasing smelt and alewives."

Morrison believes that July is the toughest month of the year, but August is the start of the best fishing of the year: fall.

"July is hard to get more than five big bites a day – the fish over 4 pounds you need to get to that 20-pound mark that it takes each day to win here," Morrison said. "Anglers tend to split up in the summer between shallower stuff for postspawn bass, and the rest stick to fishing deeper. Fishing deep is usually the way to go in July and August because you have fish coming to you instead of leaving the shallows. It continues to get better from there."

THE CHAMPLAIN SWITCH

For many years, smallmouth were the safe bet to get tournament checks, but

largemouth bass were the way to win. That's changed in the last five years, according to Judd. Now, smallmouth are the more reliable way to get a win.

"Smallmouth have become the dominant species and ticket to win all of the events here," Judd said. "There are so many schools of 4-pounders out there, and they've gotten bigger. Now with forward-facing sonar, there's no place for them to hide."

Morrison agrees with Judd and says that electronics have been the biggest reason for the switch.

"Everyone is now out there 'scoping' with forward-facing sonar and they've figured out how to catch those deep fish," he said. "Sticking to the offshore deal for smallmouth has become the way to win tournaments here in the summer."

Judd also believes that largemouth were mainly a non-factor last year because of the lower water level, but the number of largemouth in tournament-winning bags has been diminishing for years.

"I believe with so many fish being brought up to Plattsburgh (New York) for tournament weigh-ins, it's changed where the largemouth live because everyone has brought them up from 'Ti' for years," Judd said. "Overall, it seems like there are not as many largemouth as before, and they're more spread out now."

Judd also points to diminishing areas of milfoil, which used to be vast and full of largemouth in predictable places.

"There hasn't been as much grass the past few years, which led to the largemouth not being concentrated in small areas like they used to be," Judd said. "It was nothing to catch 50 largemouth in a big grass area down in 'Ti,' but the area didn't factor last season and Missisquoi Bay (Quebec) hasn't been good in years. Both of those areas always had the potential to win tournaments and accounted for some big wins over the years."

While the makeup of Lake Champlain has changed recently, it's still a premier fishery that consistently produces big bags. The shifting population mix is just one of the factors that anglers now have to account for when tackling the famed fishery. ■

PROFILE: **DEREK**
MUNDY
BROADDUS, TEXAS



If you've followed Major League Fishing tournaments on Sam Rayburn Reservoir over the last few years, you've likely seen the name Derek Mundy somewhere near the top of the leaderboard. In fact, you almost certainly saw it at the top of the Phoenix Bass Fishing League Presented by T-H Marine and Toyota Series results back in 2021 when he dropped monster bags of fish (40 pounds, 10 ounces in the BFL and 39-7 on Day 2 of the Toyota Series) in each event to claim wins from each circuit just a month apart.

Fast forward to 2022 and Mundy nearly defended his title on the Toyota Series event on Rayburn (finishing second to Glen Webb), and though he didn't drop any mammoth bags in that event, the Texas pro is quickly becoming a name to remember. Fishing just 15 events with MLF so far in his young career, the 33-year-old ace has five Top 10s – with two of them being wins. Weighing a few 10-pounders in those events (and a 13-10 behemoth during his 2021 victory in the Toyota Series on Rayburn – the third-largest bass ever weighed by a pro in Toyota Series history) Mundy is also making a name for himself as a guy whose supreme talent is to locate and catch Texas-sized bass in competition.

Q&A

By Kyle Wood
PHOTO BY KORY SAVAGE

You live in Broaddus, Texas, currently. Is that where you grew up?

Actually, up until about eighth grade, I grew up on the other side of the 147 bridge in Zavalla, Texas. I was really close to the lake there. I had a little ol' flatbottom with a little ol' 2-horsepower Suzuki on it. I made my rounds in it for a while. Then, in high school, I lived in Louisiana for a bit, close to that Red River area around Black Lake. I live in Broaddus now, and I'm close enough to the lake I can hear boats run down the lake.

It sounds like fishing has been in your blood since day one growing up that close to Rayburn.

Yes, sir. I don't know how early it was when I first got on the water, but I do know I was with my grandpa when he caught his biggest bass he ever caught. It was a 9.39 (pounder). I actually have it on the wall here at my

house. I was probably 2 or 3 years old when he caught it, but it was on Rayburn and he caught it on a Bomber Long A. I remember we used to get those for birthday and Christmas presents for several years. He made sure we didn't run out of them.

Tournament fishing in Texas is on another level it seems. Like, it seems as if it's something you're raised doing. Was that the case for you?

My dad and my stepdad fished some, but I've been in and out of them (tournaments) and earned a few plaques in the Little Anglers division of the now Sealy Outdoors tournaments. I've been in and out of them for as long as I could afford to do them.

What do you do for work then to help fuel your fishing addiction and pay for entry fees today?

I work on natural gas pipelines. There's been some years I haven't even got to fish on Rayburn because I've been gone out of state for work so much.

From a Toyota Series perspective, you're pretty new to them. Your first season fishing a full division was 2021, correct?

Yes. I just saved my money I've made over the years fishing tournaments and put it back towards improvements on my boat and different things, but it was also my entry fee money. Last year I had made enough over the years I figured I could pay a bigger entry fee and jump in and try them out.

Well, it worked out pretty well for you. That late winter or early prespawn timeframe seems to be something you're pretty dialed at. Is that your favorite time of year to fish?

If I had to only pick a certain stretch of the year, I'd say my favorite time to fish is actually September all the way through March. My biggest weakness is whenever they commit to spawn. But I really like the prespawn. And on Rayburn, one of the things I like about it is it's a totally different lake every year – like, the way I was catching them last year at that time was totally different than how I caught them this year.

You're right. Rayburn is a unique fishery because it can vary so much year to year. Do you think that's one of the reasons you've had success on that lake? Because you always have to be adapting?

No year is the same. For instance, my first bigger tournament I won that I found fish on my own and worked hard was in 2012. We caught a 30-pound bag on a Rat-L-Trap, and that particular spot I have yet to catch a fish over 3 pounds on it since. But that's what I like about Rayburn is having to put in the work, and I'm not scared to do it.

Speaking of changing, when you won that BFL at the beginning of January last year, did you fish for those same fish in the Toyota Series you won?

I actually started on that spot because there were still some there hanging out, but I had some other areas I wanted to hit. When I caught them in the BFL, I knew some people had seen me, and I wasn't going to get beat on my own deal, so I went up there and it didn't work. On Day 2 of that Toyota Series, I was one of the last boats out and I knew I couldn't beat people up to that spot, so I tried a new spot I only caught one fish off in practice and they were there.

Day 2 of that event is when you weighed 39-7, which included a gigantic fish. What's it like catching a 13-pounder in a tournament?

Man, with as quick as it all happens and you put it in the livewell, you don't really get to soak it up. I was just trying to get back in there and get the next one. I didn't really even realize that fish was that big. I knew she was big, but my focus was to get her unhooked and get back in there because there was a bunch of them there.

Being an offshore guy, you seem to fully embrace new electronics. Is that something you think gives you an edge when you pair that with your time on the water?

To be honest, I try to turn all my graphs off as much as I can during a tournament. Sometimes I can't do that, but I try to eliminate as much noise as I possibly can, because the very

biggest fish I've ever caught on Rayburn, it happened before they even knew I was around.

That's interesting. So stealth is a big key to catching big ones?

Oh, these fish know all of that stuff when it comes to noise and electronics hitting them. I don't have any confidence idling over fish and turning around and catching them. I figure I need to come back the next day. I can go up to a spot that I know has a 30-pound school on it and Spot-Lock about 80 feet from them and in about 10 minutes they'll all be gone if they're big ones. I even try to ease up to a waypoint and make as many casts as I can before I hit Spot-Lock. I'll build momentum up with the trolling motor on high and coast to where I can cast at the school and try to make as many as I can before I Spot-Lock.

Man, you probably love it when you see guys slamming compartments in their boats or rolling into a shallow spot on plane, huh?

One of my biggest pet peeves is like 'trap fishing when somebody gets grass on their bait and then slaps the water with it. It freaks me out. I've had to tell partners to stop because it gets me so bad. But stuff like that is why I think people have spent their whole life fishing and never caught one over 10 pounds. That fish knew they were there.

How many fish over 10 pounds have you caught?

I've never added them up, but I'm in the neighborhood of 11 or 12, I think. And tournament fishing is really the only time I fish, so most of those have been caught in tournaments.

You seem happy with your work and tournament balance now, but do you ever want to try and take the next step in your fishing career and go pro?

If the cards were laid out right, I'd try it if I could do it without putting myself in a bind and wouldn't get in a situation where I couldn't provide for my family. It'd be pretty neat to fish at professional level, but I'm content with doing what I'm doing now. ■

(After a forward-facing sonar Q&A session...)
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HIGH SCHOOL WORLD FINALS AND NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP READY FOR PICWICK



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUJURA

Pickwick Lake

Millions of dollars in scholarships and prizes will be up for grabs in late June at the 13th Annual High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship on Pickwick Lake, one of the signature event pairings in The Bass Federation's (TBF) annual tournament schedule.

Qualifications for the World Finals are open to any Student Angler Federation (SAF) member in the world. The National Championship, on the other hands, features the top 10 percent of qualifying high school teams from all

SAF-sanctioned events nationwide, including MLF Open events. The "Natty" has its own set of prizes and scholarships that will top the \$500,000 mark.

PICKWICK READY FOR ACTION

Pickwick Lake is the fourth-largest impoundment of the Tennessee River, covering more than 43,000 acres, and is one of the most heralded tournament bass fisheries in the country. Combine its size with its prolific population of bass

and Pickwick is the perfect candidate to host the biggest high school fishing event in the world, according to TBF President Robert Cartlidge.

"It's a great venue for an event of this size," Cartlidge said. "There'll be about 1,200 competitors this year, and we expect more than 3,000 people in total to attend this event. When we were in Anderson, South Carolina, in 2021, the location where we held the weigh-in seated 3,300 people. Our spectators filled that up and then some. We expect more of the same this year."

High school anglers from all over the world will compete in the 2022 World Finals, including teams from Canada, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Domestically, teams that qualified for the National Championship will also automatically be entered into the World Finals, giving them the potential to perhaps win two major events in one weekend.

The two events take place concurrently on the same body of water, but that wasn't always the case.

"The National Championship and World Finals used to be two separate events," Cartlidge explained. "The parents of the student anglers voted to combine the events to avoid having to take two separate weeks off during the summer. It also benefits anglers who can't fish qualifying events for the National Championship. Instead of missing the event

altogether, they're able to enter the World Finals pool and still compete, even though they missed out on National Championship qualification."

The World Finals/National Championship is a four-day event that begins on Wednesday, June 22. The 2022 National Champions will be decided on Friday, June 24 – that team will then join the other top 31 teams in the world for the World Finals on Saturday, June 25. The team with the most weight at the end of Saturday will claim the title of World Finals Champion and a big part of an overall college scholarship and prize pool totaling more than \$3 million.

ANNUAL MEETINGS IMPORTANT FOR TBF'S FUTURE

Before the High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship get underway, there'll be some business to take care of for TBF state presidents and tournament directors. While TBF runs like a well-oiled machine come tournament time, it's the hard work and planning accomplished at these meetings that keeps the nation's largest grassroots tournament circuit running smoothly.

"This year we'll have state presidents and state tournament directors come in and have three days of meetings about how we can continue to improve TBF," Cartlidge said. "These meetings are where we set general directions – rules, tournaments, fish care and more – for the next year and years to come."

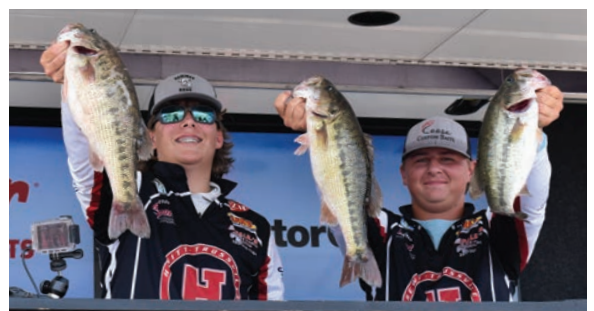
In 2023, the various state youth directors will join the state presidents for the meetings (the youth directors and tournament directors alternate their attendance every year).

These meetings aren't just to advise the state representatives. Cartlidge says that a major goal of these meetings is for the state federations to also educate the TBF Board of Directors about improvements that can be made on a larger scale.

"Each state federation owns one share of the TBF company, so these meetings are to inform shareholders of our policies and to get their input on how we can continue to grow at a national level," Cartlidge said. "The Board of Directors and I have a list of things that we bring to the table, but we leave the floor open to any and every state to be heard with their ideas. It's an important part of what we do."



2021 High School World Champions Carson Underwood and Andrew Jones.



REBOUNDED KENTUCKY LAKE TO HOST JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Kentucky Lake will play host to the TBF Junior World Championship beginning July 27. Cartlidge estimates between 60 and 75 boats will compete this summer in Paris, Tennessee. The winning team will earn a \$10,000 scholarship and prizes.

Cartlidge admits that Kentucky Lake has endured a lull in recent years, but he, the TBF staff and others believe that the fishery is on the upswing.

"The fishery at Kentucky Lake is coming back from a few down years," Cartlidge said. "The local anglers that fish Kentucky Lake every day are giving us great feedback that the lake just keeps getting better with time. We wanted to highlight that lake and to show that it's coming back, and it deserves to host top-tier events like this one."

The Junior Angler Program was started by four state federations in 1994 and has since grown to a massive nationwide operation. The format of the World Championship was changed in 2021 by popular demand, and now gives more teams a chance to compete as well as more days competing.

"There used to be only one team of anglers 16 years old or younger that was allowed to compete from each state," Cartlidge said. "Now we allow students eighth grade and under to compete and the top 10 percent of teams from

each state can compete. For example, if a state has 30 junior teams, the top three teams in that state qualify. If there's 50 teams, the top five qualify, and so on."

Each team will consist of two anglers and a boat captain, and all competitors will be allowed to fish out of their own boat. Practice days are July 25 and 26 with the three-day competition running from July 27-29.



2021 Junior World Champions Cullum Brown and Dylan Sorrells.

An advertisement for Bully Dog. The top left features the Bully Dog logo, which is a white bulldog head on a red background, with the words "BULLY DOG" in white. Below the logo is a photograph of a black pickup truck with a boat on a trailer. The truck is covered in a camouflage pattern and has "FAVORITE" written on the side. The boat is also covered in a camouflage pattern. The background is a dark, textured red. At the bottom, there is a red banner with white text that reads "SAVE 20% on a Tuning Device with code MLF22 @bullydog.com".

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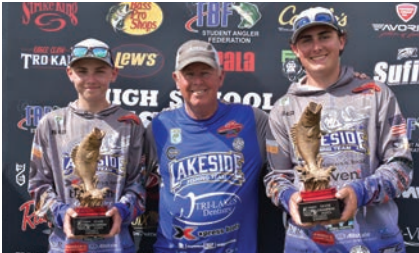
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Trey Richardson and Beau Richardson
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INDIANA | PATOKA LAKE

Kaden Raichel and Chandler Marcille
Scottsburg High School
19 pounds, 14 ounces



KENTUCKY | LAKE CUMBERLAND

Kendall Neal and Dylan Southwood
Wayne County Cardinals
15 pounds, 14 ounces



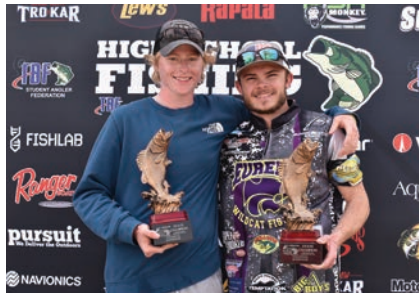
LOUISIANA | CADDO LAKE

Alexis Virgillito and Taylor Bacot
Parkway High School
30 pounds, 3 ounces



MISSOURI | TABLE ROCK LAKE

Brent Ryan and Grant Priesmeyer
Eureka Wildcat Fishing Team
11 pounds, 15 ounces



MISSISSIPPI | TENN-TOM WATERWAY

Ayden Gideon and Anna Pearson
Upper Tombigbee Student Anglers
13 pounds, 9 ounces



NORTH CAROLINA | JORDAN LAKE

Owen Jenkins and Logan Russell
Chatuge Anglers
16 pounds, 12 ounces



NEW JERSEY | POTOMAC RIVER

Kyle Gilson and Ty Crispin
New Breed Bassers
9 pounds, 10 ounces



NEVADA | LAKE MOHAVE

Colten Hartgroves and Rylan Garrett
Boulder City Bass Club
10 pounds, 14 ounces



OKLAHOMA | SARDIS LAKE

Magnum Morris and Hayden Curliss
Hartshorne Miners
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TENNESSEE | KENTUCKY LAKE

Braden Wilson and Ross Wilson
Scotts Hill High School
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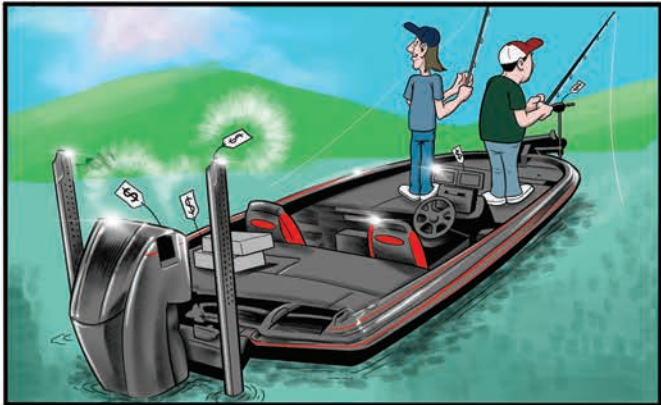
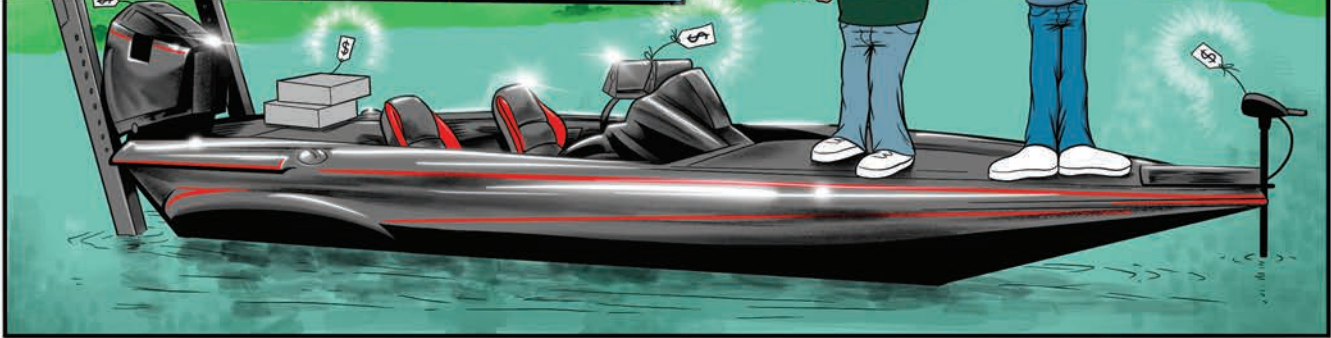
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