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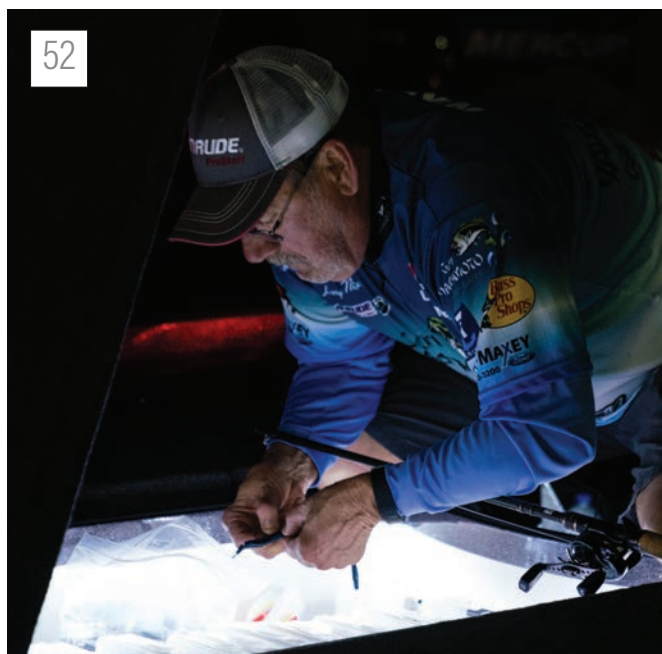


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Bass Fishing (ISSN 1543-6179) is published six times a year (February/March, April/May, June/July, August/September, October/November, December/January) by MLF, 30 Gamble Lane, Benton, KY 42025. Periodicals Postage Paid at Benton, KY, and at additional mailing office. Rates: one year (6 issues) \$10.00; two years (12 issues) \$20.00; three years (18 issues) \$30.00.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Bass Fishing*, 30 Gamble Lane, Benton, KY 42025. For questions regarding your subscription call 270.252.1000 Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. CT.

Printed in the U.S.A.

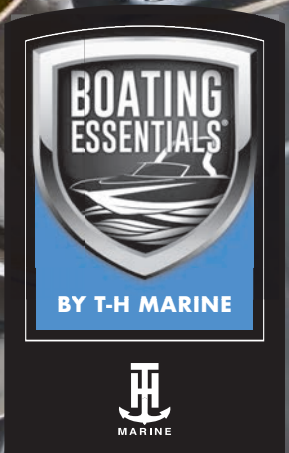
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THE LEARNING SEASON NEVER ENDS

If you dig deep enough into this “Back to (Bass) School” issue of *MLF Bass Fishing* magazine, you’ll come to one of the best quotes about bass fishing that you’ll ever hear: “There’s nothing more fun to me than getting a new lure or new technique and making it work.”

That’s a quote in Joe Balog’s column on page 29 from MLF pro Mark Davis, a 35-year veteran of the tour-level tournament scene. If there’s anybody in the game of bass fishing who you could rightly excuse for not enthusiastically embracing the steep education curve that’s currently happening in the sport, it would be Davis. He’s been catching fish for a living since he earned \$80 on his first day as a crappie guide on Lake Hamilton, Arkansas at the age of 13. He’s banked over \$2.5 million, won three Angler of the Year awards and is a proud member of the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame.



Davis knows a thing or two about catching fish in “old-school” ways. He’s made an admirable living and sent his kids off to college thanks to simple, tried-and-true things like plastic worms, spinnerbaits and gut instinct. I’m almost certain that if ever there was a professional bass tour where the anglers were given just a rowboat, two rods and a one-tray Plano tackle box to fish with, Mark Davis would find and catch bass faster than anybody.

Yet despite his acumen, experience and skill with multiple techniques, Mark Davis has been a star pupil in “bass school” over the past 20-plus years.

Although his brain is unquestionably jam-packed with knowledge and information about these little green and brown finned creatures we’re all obsessed with, Mark wakes up every morning eager to learn just a little more. It doesn’t hurt that his twin sons, Hunter and Fisher (both 20 years old and in college), took to bass fishing like ducks to water, and fished their way up through the TBF youth and high school ranks with the eager, open minds of youth.

“Those two have kept my mind ‘young’ and open – they learn so much so fast, a little bit of that must’ve rubbed off on me,” Davis once told me.

If you read a little further into Balog’s column, you’ll see another quote from Davis, addressing the steep learning curve of forward-facing sonar and similar technology: “It doesn’t come natural to me; I’m definitely challenged when it comes to technology. I’ve had to work at it, but without a doubt you have to embrace technology.”

That extremely honest quote speaks to Davis’ dedication to the process of learning, and I think it perfectly sums up what the *Bass Fishing* magazine crew strived for while putting this issue together. We’re all eager learners ourselves. And while learning isn’t always easy, it’s darn sure worth it when you see dividends!

As you flip the pages of this issue, I urge you to absorb the lessons that veterans and experts like Larry Nixon, Mark Davis, Cody Meyer, Skeet Reese, Jason Lambert, John Cox, Anthony Gagliardi, Troy Morrow, T.J. Maglio, Rob Newell, Matt Allen and Tim Little are teaching. We’ve all enjoyed filling our brains with new information this issue. I hope you enjoy it, too!

JOEL SHANGLE, EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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VITTORIA!

Victory might not sound the same in Italian, but it sure sounds pretty sweet.

Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit rookie Jacopo Gallelli, the first European to fish as a professional bass angler in the United States, didn't take long to prove he's got what it takes to compete state-side with his win at the Potomac River in June. After turning in some marginal finishes in the first four events of the season, the Italian pro put it all together for four days on the famed tidal fishery en route to a \$135,000 check, which included a \$35,000 Phoenix bonus, and a place in the history books.

Gallelli brings a certain passion to his bass fishing, which you can clearly see in this photo by Kyle Wood taken on Day 4 of the Federal Ammunition Stop 5 Presented by Lucas Oil. Gallelli shot from sixth to first with his 20-pound final-round assault that included this quality kicker and a whole lot of shouting. It's hard to not get a little fired up when you're blazing trails and cashing checks.

Bravissimo, Jacopo.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD





IN YOUR FACE

If you were to sum up MLF pro Jacob Wheeler's most important characteristics as a tournament bass angler, it would be pretty hard to beat this photo taken by MLF photographer Garrick Dixon on New York's St. Lawrence River.

You're probably well aware of Wheeler's domination in that Bass Pro Tour event in June - he shattered multiple MLF records en route to his second BPT win of the season - but you might not fully appreciate the level of bulldog determination (and willingness to endure discomfort) required of Wheeler to locate his winning fish, and then to catch them using the technique he employed that week.

Wheeler started each tournament morning running further upriver than the rest of the field, and fishing in the roughest, most wind-blown spots he could locate because he knew that those areas received very little pressure.

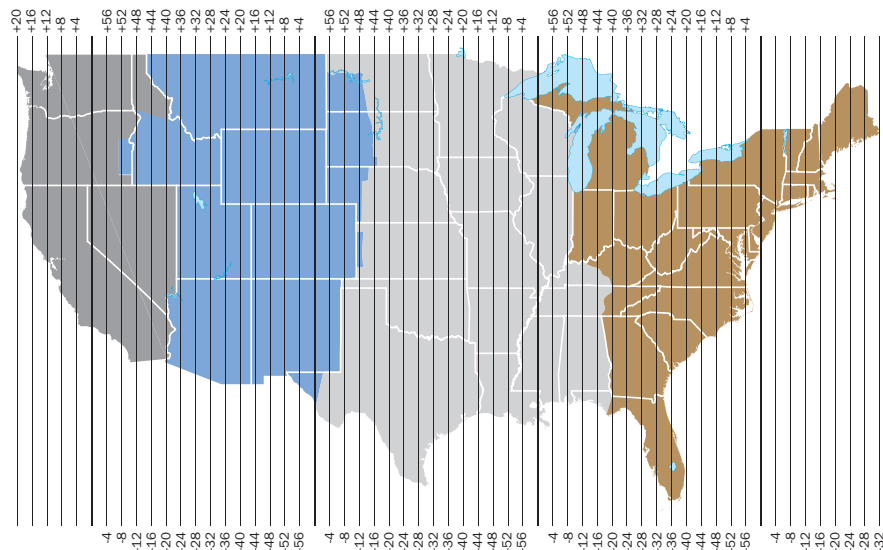
He then committed to hours on end hunched over his front deck with a flogger in hand, being bounced around and pummeled by waves while he scoped out bedding smallmouth. The results speak for themselves: Wheeler weighed 351 pounds, 1 ounce of smallmouth in three days, earning his fourth Bass Pro Tour trophy (and mad respect for his win-at-all-costs, championship mindset).

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



SOLUNAR TABLES

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2021



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

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

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

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TITLE TIME ON UPPER MISSISSIPPI

EXPECT A TWO-SPECIES SLUGFEST AT 2021 PRO CIRCUIT CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT

By *Mason Prince*

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

The Upper Mississippi River has long been known as one of the best bass tournament fisheries in the country. What it may lack in Florida- or Texas-sized monster bass, it makes up for in sheer quantity of both largemouth and smallmouth. For the second year in a row, the Pro Circuit is heading to La Crosse, Wisconsin to take on three pools – 7, 8 and 9 – of the Mighty Mississippi, this time for a \$200,000 payday at the August 17-22 Tackle Warehouse TITLE Presented by Mercury.

Because of its prolific MLF tournament history, there'll be plenty of Mississippi River knowledge spread among the 50 pros competing in the August championship event. However, none of the qualifying pros have ever experienced the big river in the 2021 TITLE format: a six-day, five-fish-limit tournament where the field is broken into groups of 25 and weights are zeroed as the competition rounds progress (see sidebar).



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HARD COVER OR VEGETATION? WHY NOT BOTH?

Tournament takeoff is out of Veterans Freedom Park in La Crosse – on the upper third of Pool 8 – but the field has the option to fish any of the three pools. That's a lot of water for just 25 anglers fishing in each group, which means endless possibilities when it comes to exploiting productive hard cover and vegetation.

Edwin Evers won REDCREST 2019 out of La Crosse focusing on the backs of creeks, primarily targeting laydowns. That pattern might come into play again in the TITLE, but it's far from the only way to win.

"There's going to be guys that have success on the wing dams on the main river for sure," Evers says. "The duckweed and backwater grass are going to play a key role in deciding this one as well. There's also guys who'll find them on shell beds and boat docks. All of these targets can and will come into play."

Pro Circuit analyst Marty Stone echoes Evers' prediction that a multitude of patterns and targets could hold the winning fish come the end of August.

"There's always guys that do well on hard cover like rocks, laydowns, wing dams and docks," Stone says. "Then there's the guys who do well fishing vegetation like milfoil, hydrilla, duckweed, lily pads and coontail. I think if a guy can find a way to not just rely on just hard cover or vegetation, but mix in both, he'll have the best chance to win."

LARGEMOUTH OR SMALLMOUTH COULD GET YOU A WIN

Pro Circuit veteran Tom Monsoor is a seven-time winner on the Upper Mississippi River, with all seven wins coming in August or September. Although he didn't qualify for the 2021 TITLE, Monsoor is excited for what should be a two-species slugfest on his home fishery.

The Wisconsin native won those tournaments — including the 2020 Pro Circuit Super Tournament — fishing for both largemouth and smallmouth, and advises that both species have the potential to earn an angler a large check in the TITLE's late-August time frame.

"I think guys can easily fish for both smallmouth and largemouth and be successful," Monsoor posits. "If the water is low, which it currently is, I expect the smallmouth out on the main river to be a big player. Someone can find some really good smallmouth out there and win with just those."

Monsoor says 20-pound bags can be caught during the TITLE's August window, but expects for the winner to leave with an average of about 15 pounds per day. Stone agrees that there are some bigger bags available in Pools 7, 8 and 9, but predicts that consistently weighing bags over 16 pounds will be a tall task.

"So much will be changing (on the river) the time of year we're getting there, and the weather is always a factor in a six-day event," Stone says. "That's why I think 14 to 15 pounds a day can get you pretty darn close to a win. Fish management is going to be a key in this one."

THE 2021 TITLE COMPETITION FORMAT

The 2021 Tackle Warehouse TITLE Presented by Mercury will feature a competition format that combines elements of both the Pro Circuit regular-season event format and the 2020 TITLE/Bass Pro Tour formats. Here are the need-to-know facts about the 2021 TITLE format:

- Unlike the 2020 TITLE at Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin – where every fish over 1 pound counted – this year's Pro Circuit championship event will be based around a **daily five-fish limit**. Anglers will weigh in daily at Veterans Freedom Park in La Crosse.
- The field of 50 will be broken into two groups of 25 (Group A and B), which will compete in **two qualifying days apiece**. The Top 10 weights from each group will advance.
- The individual anglers with the heaviest two-day weights from each group will skip the Knockout Round and advance **straight to the Championship Round**.
- The 18 remaining anglers' weights will be zeroed for the Knockout Round, and **the eight anglers with the heaviest one-day weights** in knockout competition will advance to the final day.
- At the end of competition in the Championship Round, **the angler with the heaviest five-fish weight will be crowned the 2021 TITLE champion**.



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

Tournaments on the Upper Mississippi can be won on either smallmouth or largemouth.

All three fishable pools on the Upper Mississippi are loaded with frogging water as well as plenty of rock, wood and docks.

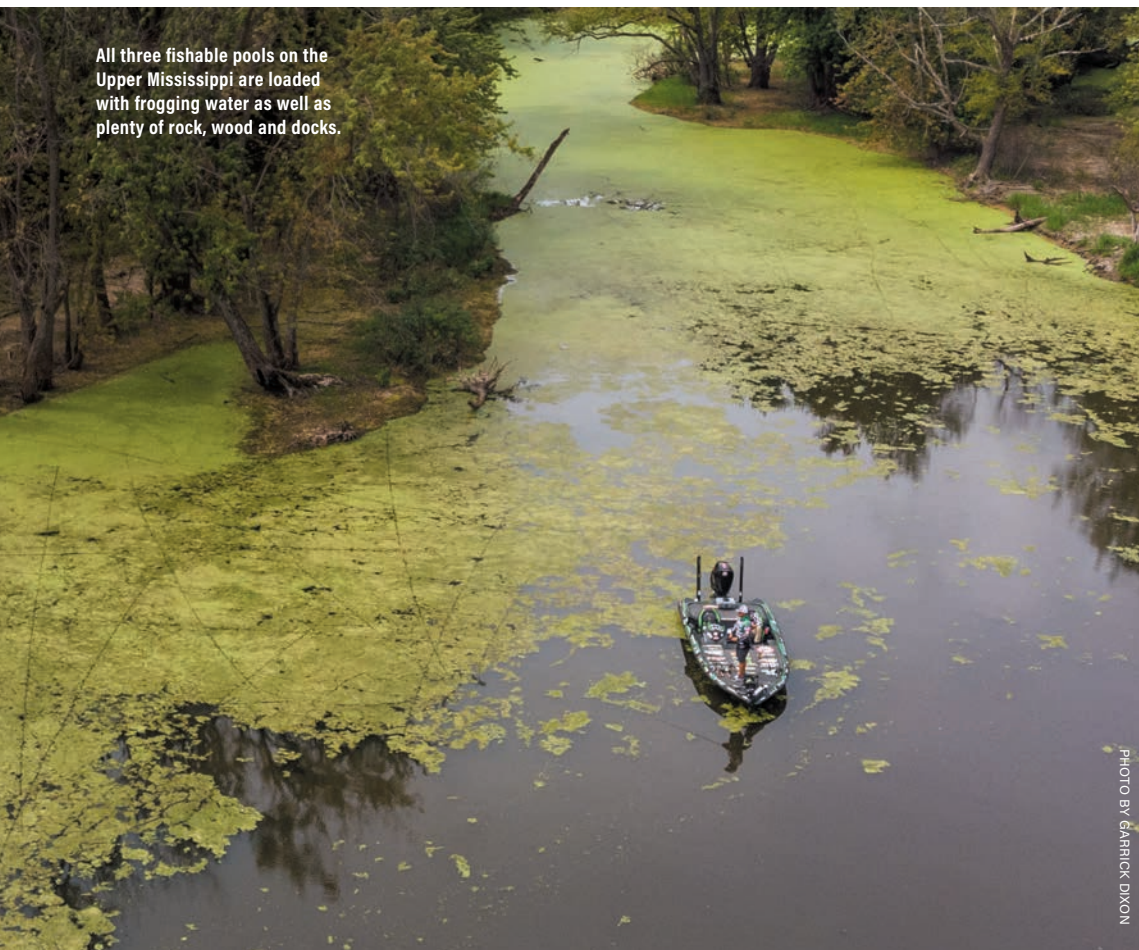


PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

BAITS: IF YOU'VE GOT IT, THEY'LL BITE IT

While the rest of the country is still battling through the dog days of summer in mid-August, the Badger State frequently feels the onset of early-fall cooling by around the middle of the month, with nighttime lows typically dipping into the mid-50s. Monsoor believes there will be plenty of bait thanks to an early shad spawn, and Stone thinks the river's bass population will be in feeding mode.

"We're getting there during a time of transition," Stone says. "It'll start feeling like fall, and those fish are going to start acting that way as well. Because these fish have such a small window to feed up for the winter, this is the time where they really eat well. It's setting up to be a shallow fisherman's dream."

When Evers won in La Crosse in 2019, his focus was mainly on largemouth. The 2019 Bass Pro Tour Angler of the Year has a few baits in mind for shallow-lurking largemouth.

"A frog is going to be a big player up there when looking for largemouth," Evers says. "A deep-diving crankbait will play a role as well. Some others that come to mind are a football jig and a Carolina rig. I always caught them flipping a black Berkley Pit Boss through some vegetation."

Monsoor agrees with Evers' assessment of the baits and tactics that will be in play.

"I think a swim jig is something every guy should have tied on or they might as well not come," Monsoor, a swim jig master, says with a chuckle. "They'll be able to catch them on everything, though. Whatever a guy thinks his strength is, that's how he'll be able to catch them."

As for the smallmouth, Evers has some ideas about them as well.

"I would bet on a Ned rig or a topwater to do some damage," he explains. "A topwater bait is such a strong bait to catch those aggressive smallmouth up there. A walking-style bait could crush them, and it could be even more effective if you're able to find some current."

3

6.69

7

20

24.44

26

1937

111K

2021 TITLE BY THE NUMBERS

The number of pools the 50 pros competing in the 2021 TITLE will be allowed to fish. Pools 7, 8 and 9 are all loaded with fish, and each pool offers something a little different as far as cover, structure and current. Takeoff and weigh-in is at Veterans Freedom Park in La Crosse (Pool 8).

The weight (in pounds) of the biggest bass caught during MLF competition on the Upper Mississippi. The fish was caught by Tony Seiler in 2018 at a Phoenix Bass Fishing League event. There have also been three more bass weighed in over 6 pounds during BFLs out of La Crosse.

Since 1998, there have been seven four-day events on the Upper Mississippi River between the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit and the Toyota Series. Local hammer Tom Monsoor won two of those seven events, his latest in 2020 with a four-day total weight of 54-10. Bryan Schmitt boasted the heaviest four-day weight of those contests with 61-6 in 2017. Other winners include Davy Hite in 1998 with 43-15, Jeff Ritter in 2004, Fred Roumbanis in 2005 and Dan Morehead in 2006.

The number of minutes (on average) it takes to get through a lock on the Upper Mississippi River, according to former winner Fred Roumbanis. The Arkansas pro recalls having to wait nearly three hours for a barge to pass through in front of him during his win in 2005. Timing will be of the utmost importance for those anglers who choose to lock to Pools 7 or 9.

The heaviest five-fish limit (in pounds) caught in MLF competition on the Upper Mississippi River, weighed-in during a Pro Circuit event in May of 1999. While there hasn't been a BIG5 event held out of La Crosse in August, Jimmy Johnson did catch a bag weighing 20-4 during a Toyota Series event in September of 2014.

Tom Monsoor has 26 Top 10 finishes on the Upper Mississippi River and has won on his home body of water seven times. His most recent success came in 2020 with his win in the Super Tournament, followed shortly thereafter by a fifth-place finish in a BFL just a month-and-a-half later. However, the master of the swim jig won't be participating in the TITLE event after missing out on qualification — good news for the rest of the field.

The year the dams at Pools 7, 8 and 9 were placed in operation. All three locks and dams were given a facelift beginning in 1989.

The surface area (in acres) of the three competition pools combined. That's more than enough room for the 25 anglers in each group to spread out for the six-day event. ■





MLF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT DIVISION PROJECTS WELL UNDERWAY

HOW DO WE CONTINUE TO GROW

trophy-sized bass in aging fisheries?

What are the impacts of an increase in angling pressure on fisheries? What can we do to stop the spread of invasive exotic species?

These questions and so many more are everyday coffee talk for biologists across the country. The Major League Fishing Fisheries Management Division (FMD) has tasked itself with helping answer these questions through both independent research and collaboration with state agencies. In this issue, we're going to break down our second FMD pillar, "Research," and provide you with a behind-the-scenes look into our current projects and future areas of interest.

MLF LUNKER BASS INITIATIVE - DNA SAMPLING

Our pilot project and the one you may be most familiar with is the MLF Lunker Bass Initiative. At its core, this project is a way for us to gather DNA samples from largemouth bass across the country and look for trends in their genetic composition. We decided to target fish weighing 7 pounds or more ("Major League Lunkers"), as this is a threshold where we can ensure the fish are all females and that they have the potential to continue to grow into trophy-sized fish.

Traditionally, DNA is collected from a fish by taking either a small fin clip or scale samples. For our process, we wanted to take a minimally invasive approach that's also extremely quick to complement the catch, weigh, immediate-release format of the Bass Pro Tour. Luckily, Auburn University's Aquatic DNA lab had the technology available for us to do a simple mucus swab from the mouth of the fish. When you watch a Bass Pro Tour event, what you see is after a fish over 7 pounds is weighed, the angler takes possession of the

fish, the official then uncaps a mouth swab and swabs the fish's tongue for about 10 seconds. These samples are then collected and shipped to a lab for analysis.

The results from these samples provide us with the number of genetic markers each fish has that correlate to Florida, Northern and hybrid genetics. We also get a complete breakdown of the genotype sequencing.

Our hope is that with enough samples we can answer three basic questions: 1) Where do Florida genetics currently exist in the U.S.? 2) Is there any correlation between geographic location, Florida-strain percentage and 7-plus-pound growth? 3) Finally, are there any trends to indicate the genetics that determine the overall growth potential of an individual fish?

With this data, we believe we can make much stronger stocking decisions and possibly selectively breed for trophy genetics based on the eventual location the fish will be stocked.

The first fish ever sampled for this project was Bryan Thrift's 7-pound, 1-ounce fish caught Feb. 22, 2021 during REDCREST on Lake Eufaula. Since that time, we've collected samples from 46 fish in five states and 10 fisheries. Although it's way too soon to start drawing any conclusions, we're very excited about the potential of the results we're already seeing. In the coming years, we have plans to expand this sampling beyond the Bass Pro Tour. Expect to see it at Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit events in 2022 and eventually at all BIG5 events where we have an official MLF release boat and staff.

OUR BASS PRO TOUR DATA COLLECTION

Most anglers are not aware that currently your state's fisheries biologist likely spends several hours each year combing the internet for tournament results on the fisheries they manage. They look for results from larger events like the Pro Circuit all the way down to any local club event or weekday night tournament. This tournament data can be useful for the biologist to validate their survey results, fill in holes in their data for difficult-to-survey fish and help them understand the value of the fishery.

The challenge with using tournament data is that the biologist must infer individual fish weight because the weights that are reported are (typically) five-fish bag weights. The Bass Pro Tour, therefore, can provide invaluable information about a fishery because every fish is weighed and verified by both the angler and official.

The data we collect doesn't end with the fish weight. If you've signed up for SCORETRACKER® Insider, you've seen a taste of what types of other data the officials collect on the Bass Pro Tour. For those of you who haven't looked at this feature: When an angler catches a scorable fish, the official



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

enters the species, weight, bait type, area of the lake, cover type and depth range. SCORETRACKER® also internally records the time.

These extra pieces of data are extremely important and something very beneficial for fisheries managers. It allows us to quantify the average number of fish caught per angling hour and find trends in the location of fish, as well as provide fisheries managers a way to make better decisions on future habitat restoration projects. MLF has collected this type of data from the very first MLF Cup event held at Lake Amistad in 2011. In total across all the MLF Cups, Bass Pro Tour and special events, we've collected data from 61 events in 17 states.

FUTURE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Although we've barely scratched the surface of the potential of the MLF Lunker Initiative or the dozens of questions we can answer with the SCORETRACKER® data, we're already planning more research projects. One will be happening during the Bass Pro Tour Carparts.com Stage Seven at Lake St. Clair.

This is a collaboration with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Michigan State University Aquatic Animal Health Lab, who are studying smallmouth bass lesions. Our anglers will help to collect live fish with visible lesions, and our officials, along with the SCORETRACKER® data, will help us determine the percentage of fish caught with lesions throughout the event. Michigan State University will then take our live fish and test the lesions to determine their cause. Of course, we hope to find the cause and the fre-



quency to then come up with solutions to mitigate the issue long-term.

The FMD has already begun working on our 2022 plans to continue expanding our research, and we'll be tackling issues such as invasive species, determining the best way to quantify the success of habitat projects and answering some of fisheries management's most difficult questions. Stay tuned for much more in the future.

To follow our results or to find out about how to get involved in one of our projects, you can visit the Fisheries Management Division page (MajorLeagueFishing.com/fisheries-management-division/) on the Major League Fishing website. Go to the MLF home page, click the ellipses and scroll down to the Fisheries Management Division tab. There you will find not just our research information, but several reoccurring educational features, project updates and more. ■

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WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS

MLF NOW!

Live Stream at MajorLeagueFishing.com or MyOutdoorTV.com

Aug. 17-22: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit TITLE Presented by Mercury @ Mississippi River

Sept. 10-15: Bass Pro Tour Carparts.com Stage Seven Presented by Covercraft @ Lake St. Clair

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TV BROADCASTS

Sportsman Channel — Wednesdays 10 a.m. (ET)

Aug. 18: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Grundéns Stop 4 @ Lake Eufaula Presented by A.R.E.

Aug. 25: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Federal Ammunition Stop 5 @ Potomac River Presented by Lucas Oil

Sept. 1: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Stop 6 @ St. Lawrence River Presented by Googan Baits

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

Aug. 22: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Grundéns Stop 4 @ Lake Eufaula Presented by A.R.E.

Aug. 29: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Federal Ammunition Stop 5 @ Potomac River Presented by Lucas Oil

Sept. 5: Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Stop 6 @ St. Lawrence River Presented by Googan Baits

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

Aug. 14: General Tire Heavy Hitters @ Shearon Harris Reservoir Presented by Bass Pro Shops Knockout Round

Aug. 21: General Tire Heavy Hitters @ Shearon Harris Reservoir Presented by Bass Pro Shops Championship Round

Aug. 28: Toro Stage One @ Sam Rayburn Reservoir Presented by Power-Pole Knockout Round

Sept. 4: Toro Stage One @ Sam Rayburn Reservoir Presented by Power-Pole Championship Round

Sept. 11: Berkley Stage Two @ Lake Travis Presented by Mercury Knockout Round

Sept. 18: Berkley Stage Two at Lake Travis Presented by Mercury Championship Round

Sept. 25: Favorite Fishing Stage Three @ Harris Chain of Lakes Presented by Bass Cat Boats Knockout Round

The broadcast schedules are for episode premieres. Most shows will re-air on Outdoor Channel and/or Sportsman Channel. Complete schedules are available online.

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WINNING PRACTICE

With modern rules, the line between practice and competition is a little blurry



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.

There's an old adage in professional fishing that says, "There's no such thing as winning practice." It's a saying that stems from pros who brag about catching a lot of fish during practice, but come tournament time, they're a little light when weigh-in rolls around.

It's a fair statement. In my time covering tournaments, I've never seen a pro hold up a check on stage that read:

**To: WINNER OF PRACTICE
AMOUNT: \$100,000**

Or did they?

The whole process of tournament "practice" has evolved drastically over the last 30 years. One thing that amazes me about top professional bass anglers in the modern era is the speed at which they break down such huge bodies of water in such a short amount of time.

PRACTICE OF THE PAST

Back in the day, some tournament trails were pretty generous with their allotted official practice period. At one time

there were even unlimited practice periods at the national level. Pros could fish a lake for a couple weeks before a tournament if they desired. In general, though, three to four days of official practice has been the standard.

Given the length of the practice period, the pace of practice was more casual. Practice fishing consisted of actually, well, fishing - for hours and hours. Sometimes an entire day would be committed to fishing in just one creek.



The idea of practice back then was to find a productive area and tinker around with different lures, figuring out exactly what they would bite, even though the start of competition was still days away. There was plenty of time in practice to change lures, re-rig rods and make repeated passes in the same stretches to see how many more bites an area would produce. Also, there was a lot of the “going back to check to see if my fish are still there” mentality.

These days on the Bass Pro Tour and the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, practice is an all-out bassing blitzkrieg. The top pros in the sport will literally cover 30 to 40 miles of a lake in a single day. It’s stunning how quickly they can separate the wheat from the chaff on the fly. Not only are they forced to practice faster, they now have a much more powerful set of tools to crunch lakes down.

REDEFINING ‘PRACTICE TIME’

Since its inception, Major League Fishing has leaned toward a less-is-more philosophy on tournament practice. MLF instituted a “no practice” policy at the first Cup back in 2011. While the Cups are still no-practice events, the Bass Pro Tour and the Pro Circuit both have implemented two days of official practice, which is shorter than conventional practice periods.

That’s just two days to practice on places like Okeechobee, Rayburn, Champlain, the Potomac River, or even Lake St. Clair. The cutting down on available practice hours have forced pros to be on their “A game” when it comes to maximizing time management in practice.

SHRINKING A LAKE

Obviously, lakes haven’t physically gotten smaller, but boats have gotten bigger, horsepower is higher, trolling motors are more powerful and modern electronics with digital mapping have become the modern-day miracles to crunching down big bodies of water quickly.

Given today’s advancements, pros will make a 50-mile hot lap around a lake in half a practice day. The body of knowledge on popular tournament lakes is so extensive, pros often know exactly what they’re looking for before they even get to the lakes. Researching past tournament coverage provides ideas of what the fish should be doing. Those ideas are then laid over digital mapping and Google Earth at home to form a sort of blueprint to search the lake. By the time a pro’s boat hits the water for practice, they usually have a very solid idea on where they want to look and what they want to find.

HIGH-SPEED SAMPLING

Nowadays, practice has evolved into a high-speed sampling of the water conditions rather than an intensive needling under the water. Pros will literally run the lake checking water temperature, water color, clarity, availability of cover, vegetation growth and local fishing pressure. There’s a lot of graphing

and scanning over places they’ve earmarked from digital mapping study. Sometimes a rod is not picked up until noon, if at all.

When a rod is picked up, it’s not about catching fish – it’s more about searching, feeling and probing to determine the quality of the cover, especially when vegetation is involved. Search baits are primary weapons in covering a lot of water and provoking bites or getting fish to show themselves. Vibrating jigs, rattling lipless crankbaits, spinnerbaits, buzzbaits, Whopper Poppers and even wake baits are all the star players of keeping the blistering practice pace.

Getting a bite or two usually means pulling the trolling motor up to keep on moving. The object is to stay on the move, keep a low-pressure profile, evaluate water and find threads of high potential. Pros have learned that actually pulling on those threads to see what’s there is best reserved for tournament hours. That’s when they’ll actually spend more time refining a pattern, mining an area (or “dialing it in”) during tournament hours when uncovering a mother lode counts the most.

MIXING PRACTICE AND COMPETITION

These days, the most valuable fish to find are ones discovered during the tournament. They’re the most current fish and, in all likelihood, they’re unpressured and untapped. Finding a wrinkle in conditions that creates a new window – new wind, clearing water, warmer afternoon, the first cloudy day of the week, a new shad spawn, sudden current generation – these are where tournaments are won. With that in mind, more practice is done during actual tournament hours than ever before. This is especially true in the Bass Pro Tour, where pros get big leads over the cut line and can essentially earn a free pass to practice and size up new water during the competition.

Given all this, the line between practice hours and competition hours gets increasingly blurred. No such thing as winning practice? Think again. ■

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ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER

THE SECRETS TO STAYING IN THE GAME

Pro bass fishing veterans offer competitive advice



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.

Professional sports are always changing. Tournament bass fishing is certainly no exception - in fact, it may be the rule.

Our beloved pastime sees more major shifts in terms of equipment, strategy and performance than any other. Recognize how much has changed recently with the advent of GPS-based trolling motors, the expansion of finesse techniques, space-age sonar and an infinite number of new lures.

About the only thing that hasn't changed over the years are many of the players; there's a contingent of anglers who remain competitive after decades of fishing. Despite overwhelming odds and the most aggressive competition the sport has ever seen, a few veterans have learned how to adapt - and excel - in this young man's game. Today, we uncover their secrets.

LARRY NIXON: THE IRON MAN

Everyone knows Larry Nixon. Young anglers admire "The General," the old guard idolizes him. There's never been a more long-term, dominant player in our sport. Nixon's career began in 1977, yet he's remained incredibly competitive,

qualifying and requalifying for championships en route to 18 professional wins and more than \$3.5 million in earnings across multiple professional circuits.

Fans of the sport will also recognize Nixon's publicized plague of fishing-related injuries and resulting surgeries. Now, at 70 years old, his strategy has changed.

"I need to save myself for what I got," Nixon says of his decision to limit competition only to the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit.

The six-event schedule allows for less stress on his body in a tournament season. In addition,



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

Nixon has been careful to modify his fishing methods – possibly the most drastic step in his pursuit for even more longevity.

“I figure out how to catch him when he’s eating,” Nixon says. “There are lures and methods that trigger big fish. It’s big rods and moving baits and you’ve got to sling them all day long, and I can’t do that.”

“I’ve acquired more spinning gear. It’s easier on the body, and I can catch more bass with light line and place well in the tournament.”

Nixon’s strategy has transformed into one of targeting quantity over quality, but there’s more to it than that.

“What ticks me off the most is that my favorite baits were always those big power lures: spinnerbaits, cranks, big traps. They helped me eliminate water in practice.”

Now, conversely, Nixon relies more on experience.

“No lake is ever the same place twice, but I’m going to fish in areas that I know fish live in,” he explains. “That’s the main advantage I have over the kids – experience.”

Nixon’s secret, then, lies in his knowledge of productive water, choice of high-percentage lures and efficient use of his time.

“I burn less gas than anyone out there,” he adds.

But there’s one more factor that’s possibly overlooked by other veterans: Nixon’s continued desire to expand his approach. He’s always experimenting with new lures, something he credits to a close friend.

“My good friend, Greg Scott, researches and keeps up with things that haven’t hit the market yet,” Nixon says. “By the time something gets out, I’ve already worked on it through his help.”



SKEET REESE: FOREVER YOUNG

It may surprise many fans to know that Skeet Reese is 52 years old. It did me. Now approaching 25 years at the top levels of pro fishing, Reese has excelled when others taper off. His 2021 season got off to a quick start with a win on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit at Lake Okeechobee and continued with a couple more Top 10s in the first four events of the season.

Reese fights off Father Time with a vigorous exercise program, even while he’s on the road. It’s not uncommon for him to put in 10 miles jogging throughout a tournament week, and he packs a jump rope in his truck.

In terms of fishing, Reese’s competitive secret lies in versatility. His career highlights contain wins fishing everything from deep-water finesse baits to shallow-water swimbaits, a result of his upbringing in the sport.

“It’s my California roots,” he says. “Early on, I learned everything from flipping and frogging to split-shots and drop-shots. From the bank to 80 feet of water.”

True, Reese’s exposure to the unique fisheries of the West likely contributed to him becoming “one of the original versatile guys on Tour,” but he continues to adapt.

“You have to be accepting of change; I think some guys have a problem with that,” he says. “It’s common to live in the past with your fishing. The key is not to do that.”

Such open-mindedness keeps Reese relevant today and always searching for emerging patterns.

He’s also using more gear.

“I went from 10 or 12 rods rigged up to as many as 25 today,” he adds. “Things have expanded substantially in terms of techniques. We’ve educated the angler over the history of our sport and they’re learning faster than ever.”

PHOTO BY COBI PELLERITO



MARK DAVIS: A STUDENT FOR LIFE

“There’s nothing more fun to me than getting a new lure or new technique and making it work,” says veteran pro Mark Davis.

Imagine still feeling that way after fishing competitively for 35 years straight. That sums up Davis.

An offshore specialist since day one, Davis has always been open to trying new things. Today, that includes forward-facing sonar, despite the initial drawbacks of the steep learning curve.

“It doesn’t come natural to me; I’m definitely challenged when it comes to technology,” he admits. “I’ve had to work at it, but without a doubt you have to embrace technology.”

When it comes to “video game fishing,” Davis points out an overlooked advantage.

“You find out how fish are reacting to your presentation, and I’m finding out many bass are lure-shy,” he explains. “It (the sonar) helps to quickly narrow down bait selection.”

While the latest gadgets allow Davis to see underwater, nothing beats time on the water for learning more.

“I fish every day after the season ends until I start deer hunting” he says. “Every day. And I fish a bunch with my son – he’s at the college level now – and that keeps me fresh on a lot of things.”

Davis also credits his return to fifth-wheel camping for a recent bump in performance, landing him in contention in many 2021 Bass Pro Tour events.

“My wife is back on the road with me again,” Davis says. “Having her along and working with her as a team, it’s invaluable. I’m getting good rest again.”

And it shows.

For our three chosen veterans, the secrets behind continued high performance include keeping an open mind, staying fresh and still loving the game. After all, age is only a number, but bass fishing can make us all kids again. ■

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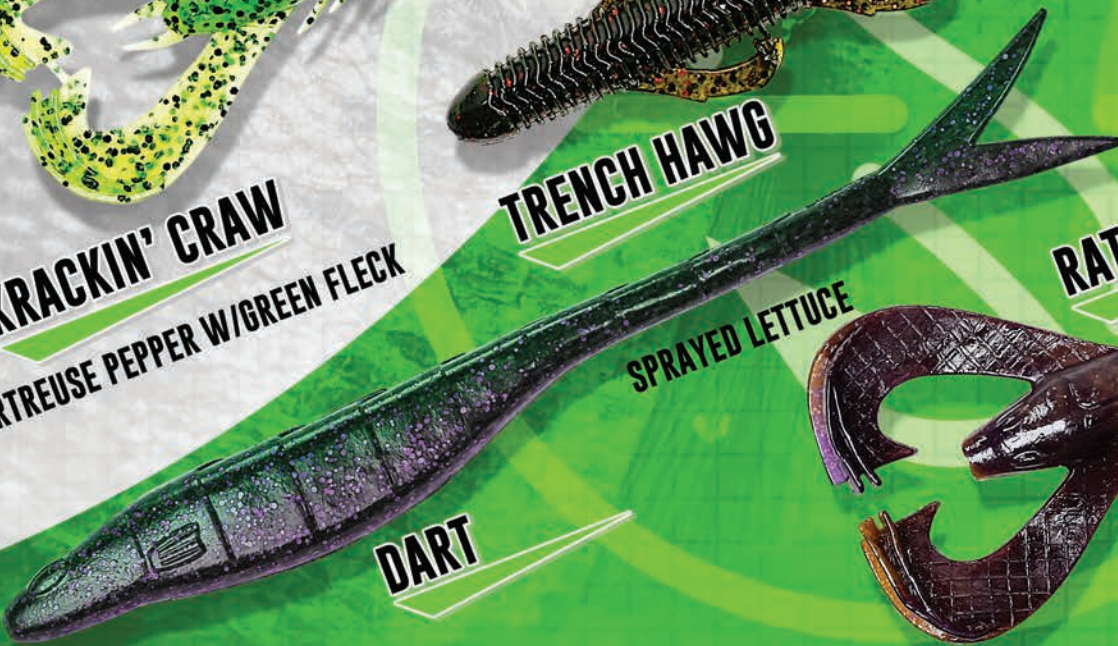
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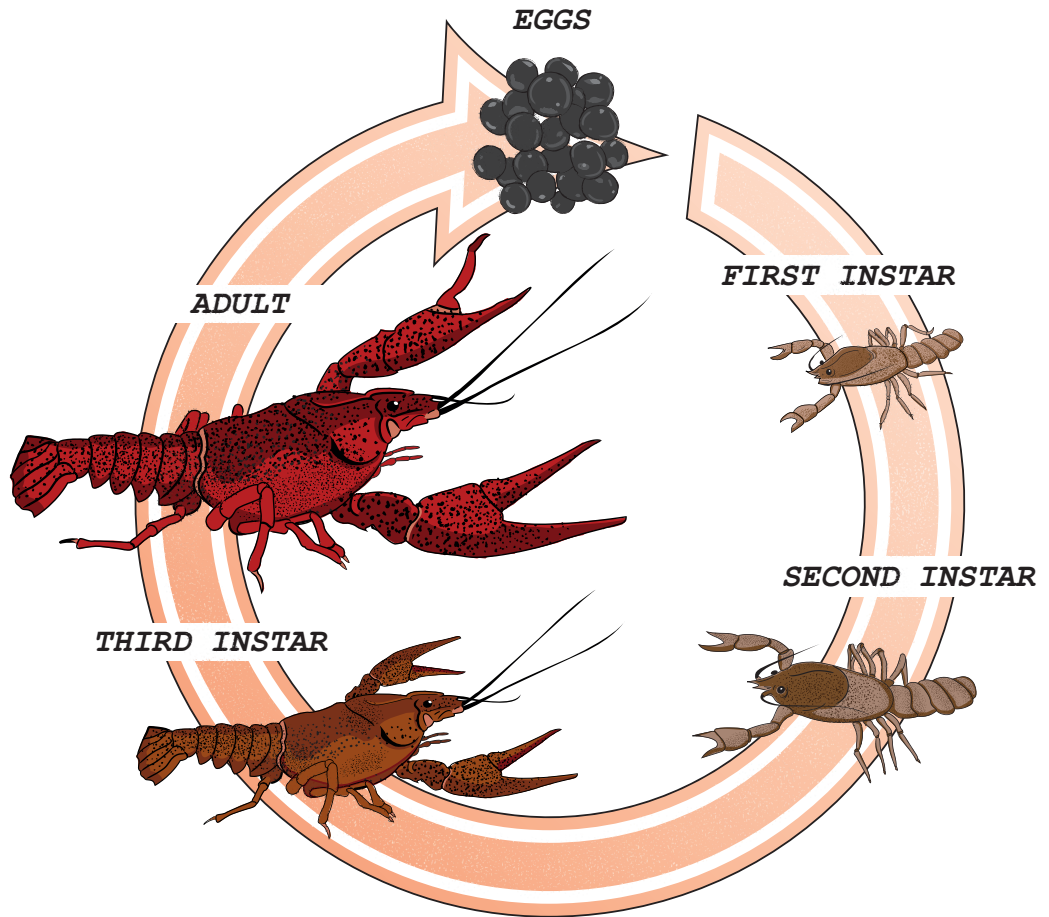
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RATTLIN' CHUNK

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A FIELD GUIDE TO CRAWFISH

Here's how bass anglers can take advantage of a bass' favorite meal

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRANDON ROWAN



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TJ Maglio is a tournament angler and outdoor writer based in Minnesota. He has a degree in wildlife ecology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has also worked professionally as a wildlife biologist and environmental consultant.

With over 350 species native to the United States, crawfish are possibly the most cosmopolitan of bass' prey species. Crawfish are found in pretty much every ditch, creek, river, lake or mud puddle – and it's a good bet that whatever water you call home, crawfish make up a large portion of the bass diet.

This isn't lost on bass anglers or tackle manufacturers. We spend an awful lot of effort as anglers trying to make our baits mimic them, and there's a whole segment of the industry dedicated to pumping out plastics, jigs, tubes and crankbaits designed to look like, behave like and sometimes even smell like crawfish.

But aside from how much bass like to eat them, most bass anglers know very little about how crawfish live their lives.

More knowledge means more bass in the livewell, so we've decided to take a closer look at the biology and life history of the crawfish,

understanding that knowing more about the crawfish life cycle doesn't just make you a hit at cocktail parties – it will also help you catch more and bigger bass.

ANNUAL LIFE CYCLE

Depending on the species, most crawfish mate between fall and early spring. Females secrete a substance that adheres their eggs to the underside of the tail (you may have seen this if you've spent any time trapping crawfish for bait). The female carries the eggs there for two to 20 weeks until hatching. Once hatched, offspring stay with the mother through a few "moltings" when they're anatomically able to forage on their own. These progressive stages are referred to as "instars." At this point, crawfish begin life on their own. Voracious feeders, most crawfish reach adult size in just three or four months.

FISHING TIP: In late spring, there's an abundance of small young-of-the-year crawfish; try starting the year with smaller craw-style baits and increase in size as the summer progresses into fall. This process mimics the natural progression of the crawfish life cycle and will get you more bites.

HABITAT

Part of the reason for the widespread success of crawfish is their ability to adapt to a wide variety of habitats. Some prefer rocky, cold-water substrates and others can handle brackish, mucky, estuarine environments. Similarly, crawfish can easily feed on both plant and animal matter, and many species are skilled burrowers.

The one thing that many crawfish are sensitive to, though, is water quality. Most species do best in clean, non-polluted waters. Several are on state endangered species lists. Water quality improvements in the last 30 to 40 years have improved crawfish abundance and distribution in many parts of the country.

FISHING TIP: When looking for a crawfish bite, don't just assume rocks. There are many species of crawfish that seek out and thrive in dense vegetation. If you need to see for yourself this summer, go dredge up a big clump of weeds and flip through it. There will more than likely be a few crawfish in it. Craws are excellent baits to flip in milfoil, cabbage and hydrilla, as well as for trailers on ChatterBaits and swim jigs. Slim-profile craws also make excellent compact punching baits.

LOCOMOTION

Crawfish have two main methods for moving around. When foraging or going about their normal business, they walk slowly using three pairs of legs found along the sides of their body. Although their legs get them around, it's their tail that serves as the afterburner, so if a crawfish needs to flee from a predator, it

hops off the bottom, flapping its tail rapidly, scooting away backwards (something familiar to anyone who's tried to catch a crawfish with their hands).

FISHING TIP: Match the fleeing motion by imparting a stop-start action on any bottom-dragging bait. Whether it's "hopping" a jig, snapping a tube or stop-starting a crankbait, just concentrate on doing something different. These speed changes look a lot like a crawfish trying to boogie and can trigger strikes when other retrieves aren't working.

CRAWFISH SENSES

Crawfish have poor visual detail but detect light and dark well (if you're trying to catch crawfish by hand, watch what happens when your shadow goes over them). They also have well-developed antennae and are extremely sensitive to both movement and vibration and have a well-developed sense of smell.

FISHING TIP: Don't cut your jig skirts all the way across. Trimming a jig skirt makes a more compact and realistic profile at times. When trimming, consider leaving a couple strands at their original length. It provides the appearance of antennae - a more natural look overall.

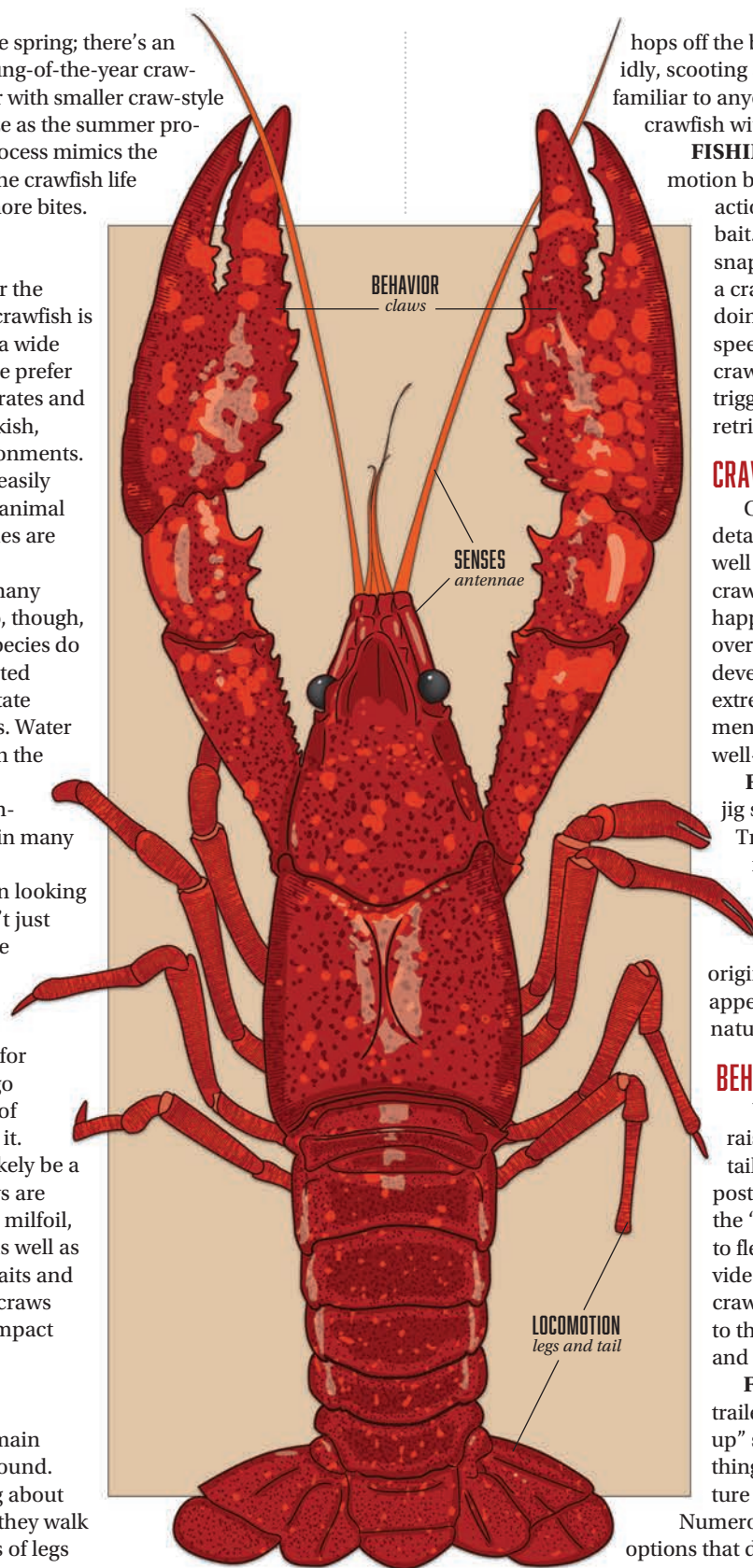
BEHAVIOR

When threatened, crawfish raise their claws and tuck their tail in, creating both a defensive posture and a way of prepping the "big motor" in case they have to flee. There are some cool videos on the internet that show crawfish responding defensively to the presence of both humans and bass.

FISHING TIP: Choose jig trailers that float or use "stand-up" style jig heads. Both these things impart the "claws up" posture of a crawfish on defense.

Numerous manufacturers have options that do this in their lineups.

Although not important in all situations, in clear water or around pressured fish, paying attention to things like this will absolutely get you more bites. ■



Tackle Warehouse Pro Picks for Fall Bassin'



Jared Lintner

Water temps are dropping, baitfish and shad are migrating to the back of the creeks or living around the existing vegetation. Make sure to look for the healthiest grass. If you don't have grass, key on the deeper creek channel bends and pockets.

Brabec Baby Double Buzz Buzzbaits

Draws big bites this time of year when fished with a slow to medium retrieve near channel swings adjacent to flats in major creeks.

Tip – Black is my No. 1 choice. Use a big trailer to keep the bait up so you can fish it slower.



Jackall TN 70

Mimics dying shad/baitfish in back of creeks and pockets. Fish near any type of healthy vegetation.

Tip – Try different retrieves such as burning it or using the lift-and-drop technique.



Jackall Mikey Wakebait

Focus on creek channel swings with rock, wood or stumps and fish with a popping or snapping action.

Tip – Keep rod tip high and fish slow, use monofilament, like Sunline Supernatural.



Justin Lucas

Fall fishing to me is all about finding the baitfish and really paying attention to what size they are. This is the time of year I focus on topwater, crankbaits, swimbaits and spinnerbaits.

Berkley Choppo

The Choppo is the bait of choice if I'm fishing closer to the bank and need to cover a ton of water. It'll work almost anywhere in the fall.

Tip – Because there are three sizes, you can pick the size that best imitates whatever baitfish are present.



Berkley Frittside Crankbait

This is hands down my favorite crankbait that I have ever thrown. It's very easy to cast, has incredible action and flat out catches bass. It imitates shad perfectly.

Tip – Use the smaller 5 Jr. size if you want to catch more fish and match smaller shad. Use the ghost morning dawn color if you're fishing clear water.



Berkley MaxScent Flatworm

No secret this is potentially the best smallmouth bait ever made. If you're fishing for smallmouth in the fall, you better have this tied on!

Tip – Personally, I only use three colors: green pumpkin, black and smoke with black and purple flake. I like green pumpkin the majority of the time, black when it's low light and smoke with purple and black when it's super clear.



Mark Menendez

Fall fishing locations are primarily dictated by baitfish, and bass will follow the baitfish buffet. Wind will always favor the angler as it positions bass to ambush their meal.

Strike King KVD Magnum Squarebill

Focus on laydowns on creek channel swings with the 4.0 size. The oversized profile attracts larger bass.

Tip – Use 17-pound Seaguar AbrasX and deflect it off cover to create strikes. 1/0 heavy, roundbend Gamakatsu treble hooks help move large bass from the cover.



Strike King Rage Tail Grub

When shad migrate to backs of creeks and bass are feeding heavily on shad, oftentimes bass will ignore an angler's offerings.

Tip – Rig a 4" Hot Chartreuse Rage Grub on a 1/8 - 1/4 Tour Grade jig head and cast directly into the schooling action giving a totally different presentation as the bass are so focused on shad.



Strike King Tour Grade Buzzbait

Make repetitive casts to isolated cover in creek-backs using a Tour Grade Buzzbait.

Tip – For less aggressive bass remove skirt and use white ZToo jerkbait.





Brent Ehrler

In the fall, in most reservoirs, the fish tend to stay on the main lake. On lakes with lots of creeks, they migrate toward the backs of those creeks.

Lucky Craft Gunfish 115 and 95

Fish school up to feed heavily and put on weight prior to the winter cool down. Fish the 95 for actively schooling fish and use the 115 for covering water looking for active fish or wolf packs.

Tip – I always change out my hooks to Gamakatsu G-Finesse MH trebles & put a feather treble on the back.



Lucky Craft Slender Pointer 112

Fish love a jerkbait in the fall and it's a great bait for covering water. I fish main lake points, flats and bluff walls. You just have to let the lake dictate where they'll be.

Tip – I like to fish it pretty fast. Lots of twitches. I always use a Gamakatsu round bend treble on my jerkbaits.



Lucky Craft LC Squarebill 1.5

This is one of my favorite fall baits. Rock or wood are always good for this crank. Main lake is great, creeks as well. Rock is by far my favorite place to crank.

Tip – Make sure the 1.5 is hitting the target you're fishing. You want the bait deflecting off wood or rock at all times.



Luke Clausen

My primary weapons used in fall are lures that I can fish quickly and efficiently while I search for active fish.

Z-Man SlingBladez Double Willow Spinnerbait

It works everywhere in the fall when bass are feeding on baitfish and gearing up for the winter.

Tip – Experiment with your trailers for better action. One of my favorites is the Z-Man Swimmin' Trout Trick Swim bait.



Jackall Deracoup Tail Spinner

This lure works great in the fall as the water cools down, and still works into winter.

Tip – Fish it with a lift-and-drop so the blade can vibrate as it rises. Most bites will happen as the bait is falling, so use a high-visibility braided line to detect bites.



Dirty Jigs

Luke Clausen

Compact Pitchin' Jig

It's well-suited for finesse flipping around docks and laydowns.

Tip – Add a TRD BugZ from Z-Man as a trailer for a compact profile.



Cody Meyer

The water starts cooling down and the fish will be grouped up. Typically fish will be on the main lake and begin migrating to the back of major creek arms. I generally target main lake points, secondary points, and work my way to the very back of the creek.

Evergreen SB (Shower Blows)

I love this bait in the fall! Fish are schooling up and feeding on shad, threadfin and herring this time of year. I prefer the 105 size and the new 77.7 size.

Tip – I start fishing the main-lake points near deep water. Use natural colors like half mirror Wakasagi or blue back herring.



Yamamoto Shad Shape Worm

Drop-shot baby bass and natural shad colors on the main lake or secondary points.

Tip – Must have when you see one on the graph to drop on or the fish slide out to deeper water.



Evergreen Flat Force

I love to fish this bait around wood/riprap in the very back of pockets. It's a great bait to throw after the topwater bite ends.

Tip – I like fishing it on bigger fluorocarbon (18-20) and fishing it fast to draw reaction strikes.





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.



SIMPLIFY TODAY'S ADVANCED ELECTRONICS

Tips and tricks for getting ahead of the technology curve to catch more fish

PHOTOS COURTESY TACTICAL BASSIN

Simplifying today's electronics might seem like a bit of an oxymoron, especially when you consider the tech packed into what's bolted on bass boats these days. As anglers, we're always looking for the next new thing to help us catch more fish. Maybe it's a new rod and reel combo, a new bait or the latest and greatest in fish finder technology. Recent advancements in sonar technology have a lot of anglers wanting to add more and more electronics options to their boats, but honestly, what good is all this technology if you don't know how to use it properly?

Firstly - and this is important - don't go broke buying your electronics. If you're in

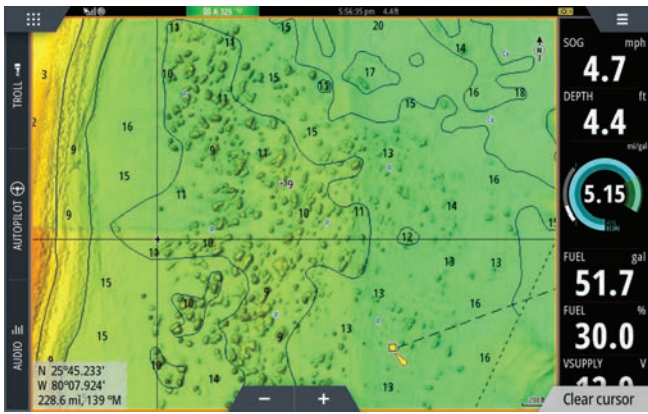
the market for a new fish finder, buy only the nicest electronics you can afford. Most marine electronics companies these days make it easy to link multiple units and to network them so you can add another unit later if you so choose.

For years, we ran with two fish finders on our boats - one at the console and one at the bow. Recently, we've added a second unit at the console for a very specific purpose: mapping. Traveling tens of thousands of miles per year around the country to fish, we rely on our electronics a lot, not just to find fish or key locations to fish but to safely navigate waterways we aren't familiar with. As such, we wanted a

screen specifically for mapping so we could safely navigate each fishery.

For the second unit at the console, we typically run a split-screen with side imaging, down imaging, and 2D sonar. The unit at the bow is networked to the two units at the console so they can communicate and share waypoints and information off the other transducers. Usually, the unit at the bow is set up on a split screen and split between mapping (used for 2D sonar) and down imaging.

Now that you have a picture of how our boats are set up and why that works for us, let's talk about a few tips that will help you out on the water.



Mapping

MAPPING

Getting a good map card for your electronics is a must. Having an accurate chart for your lake will save you hours (if not days) of idle time behind the wheel. Map chips show you precise contour lines and make it much easier to locate key waypoints and break down your fishery. The base maps that come preloaded on fish finders are decent but have nowhere near the detail of a good aftermarket map card like Humminbird's Lakemaster PLUS and Lowrance's C-MAP.

ADJUST CHART ORIENTATION

The first thing we adjust on our map is the chart orientation. Chart orientation adjusts the way the chart is displayed and refreshes as the boat moves. Most units out of the box have the orientation set to "North Up." This means that no matter what direction the boat is heading, the map always shows compass north at the top of the screen, and the boat icon turns on the screen as the boat turns.

We always switch our map orientation to "Heading Up." This adjusts the map so that it rotates to whatever direction the boat is pointing. The boat icon stays centered and the map rotates to show you the direction you're heading. We've found that this little adjustment makes it a lot easier to drive to specific areas or waypoints. This setting adjustment is usually found in the navigation settings.



Heading up orientation

ADJUST WATER LEVEL OFFSET

One of the first things we do after launching the boat in a new lake is to cross-check our sonar depth readout to the depth labeled on the chart. A lot of lakes have tremendous



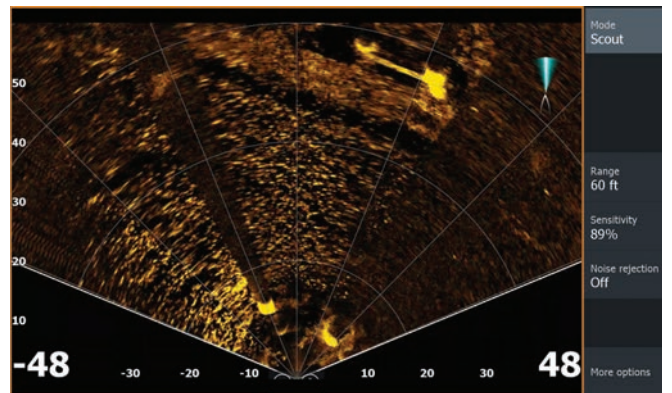
water level fluctuations, and this means that, most likely, the depth labeled on your chart is often incorrect.

That's bad news for two obvious reasons: Number one, safety. You don't want to be in a situation where your chart is telling you the water is 15 feet deep but your lake is 13 feet below full pool. This could lead to serious safety issues. Number two, fishing. If you're targeting fish in a certain depth range, you need your chart to be accurate.

This is an easy adjustment to make if your chart allows it. Compare your current depth to what it shows the depth should be on your chart. If your chart says that the depth should be 15 feet but your sonar says there's 10 feet of water beneath the boat, you need to set your water level offset to -5 feet. That will adjust the chart to show current water levels over the entire lake. Remember to reset the water level offset to zero when you go to a new body of water.

SONAR

Sonar is an amazing tool for showing you what's going on below the surface. With the ability to shoot transducer beams out the side and in front of the boat, fish are finding it harder to hide from modern electronics-wielding anglers. Although factory settings on today's fish finders are pretty good out of the box, a couple quick and easy adjustments will make your picture clearer and your fish more findable.



Forward-facing sonar

DON'T BE AFRAID OF CHANGE

Without going too deep into the details of adjusting the settings on your electronics, the sensitivity and contrast settings are something you absolutely need to tweak. Experiment with those settings until you find the levels you like the best. If you mess up your picture, "Restore Default Settings" is a do-over.

The truth is, we should always be slightly adjusting our sensitivity settings. Depending on water clarity, pollen or algae levels in the water, you need to adjust your sensitivity and contrast to get the best picture possible.

On our graphs, there's another setting that helps out with this as well. "Water Column Sensitivity" lets you adjust the sonar sensitivity in the water column while maintaining the same sensitivity on the bottom. This helps with clearing up the water column and making suspended fish stand out on your units.

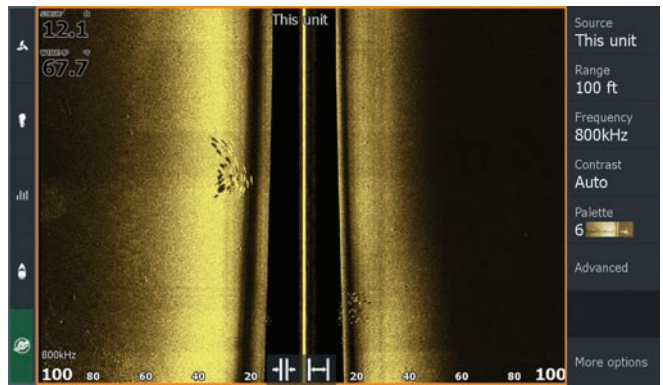
To get a clear picture with little to no cloudiness, slightly adjust your sensitivity, contrast and water column sensitivity. We like to start with our sensitivity at 10 (or 50 percent). On our graphs, the sensitivity is on a scale of 1 to 20. We turn our contrast up to 2 and our water column sensitivity to -2. Remember, if you don't like this view, restore to your default settings and you'll be right back where you started.

YOU'RE NOT SCANNING WHAT YOU THINK YOU ARE

Side imaging has changed the way anglers break down fisheries and dial in key locations. Used alongside mapping, we can idle over areas that look good to us on the map and see what's going on below the surface. We can see if there are any fish or pieces of structure or cover that we need to fish.

One thing a lot of anglers are unaware of is that the distance they have their side imaging set to scan is not the actual distance they're scanning. If you're side imaging 100 feet left and 100 feet right of your boat and you're idling over 25 feet of water, you need to subtract the depth of the water you're idling over. This comes into play when you're side imaging large flats and you want to grid the flat out. Make sure the distance that you're scanning minus the water depth is greater than your grid line on your chart. You don't want to miss a school of fish or a key rock pile because you thought you were covering enough distance with your side imaging.

We understand that a very small percentage of anglers get to be on the water all the time to dial in and tweak their gear to get the best out of their electronics. If you're a weekend warrior or a seasoned tournament pro but still have a 40-hour work week, time on the water is limited. Hopefully, these tips will help simplify your electronics and give you the confidence to dial in your gear quickly. Remember, fish finders are tools for anglers to help shorten the search for bass, but they can't replace fishing instincts. Don't get too wrapped up in what you're seeing on the screen and miss what's going on around you. ■



Side imaging

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A LESSON IN COXENOMICS\$

HOW (AND WHY) JOHN COX HAS SUCCEEDED
IN HIS THREE-TOUR MISSION

By Joel Shangle | PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA



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THE HIGHS & LOWS of John Cox's crazy 2021 season

NOVEMBER 2020

Cox ponders the possibility of fishing three major tours. It seems like a good/bad idea.

MARCH 2021

Cox cashes \$140,000 in checks in one month and wins the Pro Circuit event at Smith Lake. On schedule for a \$1.12 million year!

MARCH 2021

Cox finishes 79th at Pickwick, drives 10 hours overnight, finishes 61st at Sam Rayburn. Cox is very tired.

JUNE 2021

Cox finds the rhythm again, racking up over \$80,000 in winnings after Neely Henry. Momentum is a good thing!

FEBRUARY 2021

Cox takes on \$115,000 in entry fees, \$60,000 of it due in February/March. He regrets his accounting.

MAY 2021

Cox finishes 96th at Neely Henry just four days after finishing fifth at Lake Travis. Cox is now tired AND mad.



If you've followed the career of MLF pro John Cox, you're well aware that almost nothing he does is "by the book".

From the moment the happy-go-lucky, self-admitted "fish bum" burst onto the national tournament-fishing scene in 2011 with a win on the Red River in Louisiana – a tournament in which he squeezed his 17-foot aluminum boat through a 30-foot drainage pipe to reach his winning fish – Cox has gone about the business of catching bass for a living in truly unconventional ways.

He nearly won the 2015 FLW Tour Angler of the Year award fishing out of a 19-foot aluminum boat that had no depth finder. He claimed the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup after finagling his tin boat into backwater nooks and crannies on Wheeler Lake that had surely never seen another human being previously. He pulled into the parking lot of Day 1 of the 2020 Tackle Warehouse TITL on Sturgeon Bay after driving all night to get there, backed his boat into a fishery he had never seen before, and promptly finished third in the event.

So in November of 2020, when Cox announced that he would be fishing

three major professional tournament circuits in 2021 – the MLF Bass Pro Tour, Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit and Bassmaster Elite Series – very few people in the fishing world batted an eye.

"Oh, that's just John being John."

THE BEST-LAID PLANS

Somewhere in the Cox household in DeBary, Florida exists a well-marked calendar and a notepad upon which Cox began to lay out his 2021 tournament plans. On the heels of a 2020 season in which he banked just over \$288,000 in tournament winnings fishing 16 total events on two major tours – the Pro Circuit and Elite Series – Cox was confident in his ability to find and catch fish (and cash checks) on a heavy tournament schedule with truncated practice.

He had already committed to fish the seven-event Bass Pro Tour and six-event Pro Circuit (with the possibility of making the TITL and four MLF Cup events to boot), but as Cox surveyed the three schedules side-by-side and started to mentally put the puzzle pieces together, the glimmer of a three-tour schedule began to take shape.

"I don't know if I thought it was a good idea, honestly, but the more I looked at all the schedules the more I liked them," Cox admits. "Sam Rayburn, Chickamauga, Smith, Harris Chain, St. Johns River, St. Lawrence River ... there were just so many good tournaments. When I put it all on a calendar, they kinda followed each other – if I wanted to just go straight from one tournament to another to another without really practicing. The more I looked at it, the more I realized that I really wanted to test it and see if it was possible to pull it off without practice."

COXENOMICS 1: THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS

Of the things that John Cox does well in life, by his own brutally honest admission, "Accounting is not one of them." For starters, one might suspect that Cox and wife Melissa would tally up the entry and participation fees for the three leagues' 2021 seasons – a \$115,000 bill – and get cold feet. But in typical Cox glass-half-full fashion, the entry expense didn't even slow him down when he pitched the idea to his family.

"The goal of the job is to make money, so I mostly thought about how much I could make if I fished well," Cox says. "I didn't think about the (entry fee) number much until payments were due – \$30,000 was due in February and I think another \$30,000 in March. That's when it really set in how much that amount was. Sponsor money doesn't come up front – you get that quarterly or monthly – so Melissa and I had to just make it work.

"That took me back to the days when I first started fishing the FLW Tour and I had to beg (tournament director) Bill Taylor for a couple of extra days to pay my entries. I actually felt kinda good about it. It was a big gamble to put that much money up, but I was fishing good and didn't spend too much time worrying about it."

COXENOMICS 2: FLYING BY THE SEAT OF YOUR PANTS

You can scan Cox's tournament notepad front to back and not find a single word about travel plans. No hotel bookings, no itineraries for Airbnbs, no flight reservations, no estimates on fuel costs. With the exception of a handful of tournaments where they share a house rental with fellow Pro Circuit angler Tom Redington, John and Melissa fly by the seat of their pants when it comes to tournament travel.

They usually stay in hotels, which Melissa frequently books on Expedia while they're driving to each tournament city. They do it that way for two reasons: because they never really know when John will be finished with one tournament to leave for the next, and because that's just the way John has always traveled.

"It doesn't make much sense to book anything in advance, so we kinda just *go with it*," Cox admits. "Most of

the tournaments this year were sort of in the same areas (of the country), so we've just bounced from one spot to the next. We don't even know when we're going to get to a tournament, and sometimes you'll get there and there won't be enough parking or power. A few hours before we get there, Melissa will get on Expedia and really scope it out. We can't really do Airbnbs because, well, Airbnbs involves planning to be there awhile."

that are so tangled up you'd have to cut them out with a knife."

COXENOMICS 4: LESSONS LEARNED

Cox's goal heading into the 2021 season was to cash at least a \$10,000 check at each event. He started the 2021 campaign like a house afire, cashing \$40,000 worth of checks on the St. Johns and Tennessee rivers, and then claiming a championship trophy (and



A day in the life of the Cox family in 2021.

PHOTOS BY CHRIS NEAL

COXENOMICS 3: DESIGNED FOR ECONOMY

Cox has banked nearly \$2 million in tournament winnings in his career by sticking with techniques that universally catch bass. He catches an estimated 90 percent of his fish flipping or Ned-rigging/drop-shotting/swimming/etc., a Berkley The General, Magnum Bottom Hopper, Jerk Shad, Meaty Chunk, Lil' General or Lil' Trooper; the remaining 10 percent come on a hodgepodge of frogs, crankbaits and various other topwaters.

While other anglers might feel compelled to pack every rod and tackle box they own into a boat and truck bound for 24 different fisheries in eight different states, Cox's tackle management is a study in economy.

"I visually see over 90 percent of the fish I catch," Cox says. "It's always shallow for me – it's a Texas-rigged or weightless The General, a Jerk Shad, a swim jig with a Meaty Chunk on back, that sort of thing. Smallmouth is all drop-shot or Ned rigs with Berkley plastics. I really never threw crankbaits until I won on Sam Rayburn (in 2020). I really don't need a bunch of different gear. I left Florida in February, had all the same stuff in the boat until we hit the smallmouth swing (in June), and then took everything out except spinning rods and a few baitcasters

\$100,500 payday) at the Smith Lake Pro Circuit tournament in mid-March.

But the schedule bit him for the first time shortly thereafter.

Cox finished 79th at Pickwick Lake six days later after a forgettable first day where he caught one fish for 3-9.

"I was just exhausted at Pickwick," Cox admits. "I'd actually had a couple of days off between Smith and Pickwick, but I had put so much mental energy into winning at Smith that I was still dead tired. I made some terrible decisions that first day ... just *terrible*. My brain was tired, I guess."

Cox rallied with 13-5 on Day 2, but almost as soon as he walked off the stage, he jumped into the truck with Melissa to start the 561-mile drive from Florence, Alabama, to Brookeland, Texas, the site of Bass Pro Tour Stage One on Sam Rayburn Reservoir. Nearly 10 hours (and multiple Red Bulls and McDonald's Frappes) later, the Coxes pulled up to the tournament staging area on the south end of Rayburn, 90 minutes before John was to meet his MLF official and cameraman.

He took an hourlong nap, picked up his official and shooter, and launched onto Rayburn for his first-ever day of competition on the Bass Pro Tour.

The day started well – Cox caught a 3-1 almost immediately – but then unraveled when he decided to put his boat back on the trailer and drive to a spot way up the Angelina River, where he won the 2020 Pro Circuit tournament on Sam Rayburn. Upon arriving after a 60-minute drive, Cox discovered that his honey hole was fenced off and unfishable – a fact that he would've known if he had practiced for the tournament.

"Man, that day really slapped me in the face," Cox says. "I was so confident because I had won there, but I really tried to do too much – especially without practicing. Right then and there I realized that I had to change the way I fished and practiced. I can't just go run stuff."

"The tournaments I've done the best, I've picked a small area, fished it really thoroughly the first day, and then expanded on it the next day. My practices are really short when I get them. I know now that I can't get too crazy trying to look at multiple (areas). If I fish with no practice, I can't be making those dumb, big moves."

"I DON'T KNOW IF I'LL EVER DO IT AGAIN, BUT, MAN, WHAT AN EXPERIENCE."



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

COXENOMICS 5: PLAYING OUT THE SEASON

Cox hit one more speed bump in May with a 96th-place finish at Neely Henry (just two days after he cashed a \$30,000 Top 5 check at Bass Pro Tour Stage Two on Lake Travis), but appeared to hit a consistent groove on the back stretch of the season. He rang up nearly \$81,000 in winnings between Mother's Day and the Fourth of July, settled into the Top 20 in Bass Pro Tour AOY/REDCREST 2022 standings, put himself in strong position to fish at least one MLF Cup in the fall, and climbed into the Top 30 for 2022 Heavy Hitters qualification. He's had his family along for much of his three-tour walkabout – either flying them in for distant tournaments or having them tag along on shorter drives ("shorter" being under 10 hours in Cox's vernacular) – and already deemed the season a success with three more regular-season tournaments remaining as of this writing.

"I knew going in that just to survive (the season) would be a win," Cox jokes. "But I think we're doing good. I wanted to do better in some of those tournaments and I know I missed on a few opportunities, but overall, I think the season went quite well. At the end of it all, if we can break even when Melissa and I tally up all the entries and expenses and subtract that from the winnings – and then keep the sponsor money – I'll consider it a good year. Hopefully I'll have qualified for a Cup or two, made REDCREST and Heavy Hitters and maybe made a couple more Top 10s."

"I didn't think my family would go for it when I sprung the schedule idea on them, but they all said, 'Do it, do it!'. At that point, I kinda *had* to do it. I got pretty tired a few times and thought, 'Maybe I'm crazy' a few times, but it's also been a lot of fun. I don't know if I'll ever do it again, but, man, what an experience." ■

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MLF PROS DISH ON WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM SUMMER SCHOOLERS

By Mike Pehanich

Unlike your sons and daughters, bass seem to love summer schools.

After their postspawn recovery, bass of all species school up gradually. On impoundments graced with large populations of schooling baitfish like blueback herring and various shad species, schooling habits can lead to some of the most exciting fishing of the year, ranging from giant largemouth slamming swimbaits on deep structure to schools of spotted bass cooking up a baitfish boil at the surface.

Electronics have added depth and dimension to our understanding. Side- and forward-scanning capabilities enable us to pinpoint structure and observe both bass and baitfish activity in real time and with increasingly lifelike clarity.

Here's what five MLF pros have learned from the schooling experience, and how they've managed to convert those discoveries into hooked fish.

FROM WOLF PACKS TO HUNGRY SCHOOLS

Summer schooling starts to gain momentum in July on Anthony Gagliardi's home waters in the Southeast. Threadfin shad and blueback herring are buffet favorites for largemouth on Lake Murray and the largemouth and spotted bass populations of Hartwell, Russell and the Savannah River impoundments.

"The fish group in small wolf packs initially. Those fish tend to move, and the action is sporadic," says Gagliardi, whose resume includes both a Forrest Wood Cup (2014) and FLW Tour Angler of the Year (2006) award. "But as the season enters August and fall, the fish group up more. They relate to breaks and suspend over brush and cane piles and become more accessible."

Spots will occupy a wide depth range.

"Spotted bass can navigate the water column from 50 feet to the surface way better than largemouth," Gagliardi says. "They can work the depths better. They don't seem to mind the pressure changes as much as the largemouth, which tends to suspend closer to the surface."

Electronics have opened his underwater eyes to bass behavior in ways seldom imagined before.

"The Garmin LiveScope has taught me a lot in a short amount of time about how fish gather on these spots and how active they can be," Gagliardi explains. "I don't waste as much time now on inactive fish. Before, you had to rely on the bite for much of your information. With LiveScope, you see fish respond whether or not you get a bite. It has taught me a ton."

Bass suspend often in summer. Suspended fish pose a formidable challenge, and Gagliardi seldom targets them. Still, he's learned much from observing their behavior.

On Table Rock Lake, he watched groups of bass follow his bait to the boat before retreating to a location 40 feet or more from where they were initially.

"The LiveScope showed that," Gagliardi says. "It allows you to make the precise cast to the school as often as possible, which is important because once you've disturbed a school and pulled them off the spot where they've set up, they're harder to catch. If they're relating to a brushpile, they sit motionless a lot. If a school of shad passes overhead, they break and feed. When they're done chasing, they hunker back down close to where they were, but not necessarily in the same place."

Gizzard shad relate closely to the lake bottom. Schools of bass sitting in ambush over brushpiles are likely targeting threadfin shad or blueback herring.

"I've seen bass herding threadfin one minute, then coming up again 10 minutes later to herd herring," he says. "They probably prefer herring, but they aren't going to discriminate if a ball of shad comes by."

When bass are feasting on high-riding baitfish, Gagliardi opts for topwater walking baits like the Berkley Cane Walker or J-Walker or a Berkley PowerBait Jerk Shad fished close to the surface.



Berkley Cane Walker



"All my presentations are fast," he says.

He bases his bait selection and approach on what his electronics tell him.

"The 10- to 12-foot zone is the transition line," Gagliardi adds. "Below that, bass aren't going to come up for a topwater lure. If they're deeper, I'll likely go after them with a drop-shot rigged with a Berkley PowerBait Bottom Hopper or other straight tail worm."



Anthony Gagliardi prefers to speed up his presentation to get schoolers to bite.

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



For Mark Rose, patience is a virtue when fish move deep in the late summer/early fall.

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

'BASS ARE LIKE DUCKS'

Mark Rose learned ledge bass behavior on the fabled Tennessee River reservoirs. Bass, he noted, ease out to key locations following their postspawn recovery. And they aren't necessarily in a hurry.

"They gather on bars and river ledges. Every day more and more fish gang up," says the FLW 2018 Tour Angler of the Year from Wynne, Arkansas. "They sit in eddies, on breaks in the river channels, on stumps and gravel bars."

The schooling reminds him of a fall waterfowl gathering.

"They're kind of like ducks," Rose explains. "You put out decoys and five or six ducks come. If you don't mess with them, more keep coming. But once you start to catch some, they — like ducks — start to split up."

These river bass feed heavily on gizzard and threadfin (yellowtail) shad.

"But for those tournament-winning fish on the Tennessee River, the primary forage is gizzard shad," Rose asserts.

Gizzard are the magnum members of the shad clan, and Rose mimics them with lures like the 5.5-inch Strike King Sexy Spoon matched to bait size or a Strike King Pro-Model crankbait matched to depth.

"Another favorite is a 3/4- or 1-ounce football jig trailed with a Strike King Rage Craw," he says. "When fish don't seem to be hitting the football jig but I feel they are in the area, I won't leave without snapping the jig a few times or lifting the jig high and letting it fall. Time and time again, hopping it high off the bottom is how they want it. They eat it on the way down."

Rounding out Rose's offerings to ledge schoolers are 5- to 6-inch swimbaits on a heavy Squadron Jighead or Scrounger head, a swinghead jig with a Strike King Rage Bug and an 8-inch Strike King Bullworm.

"I also like a 3/4-ounce white bucktail hair jig," he adds. "Just hold the rod at about the 10 o'clock position and reel fast three times. Don't drop the rod. Just let the jig pendulum down on a slack line."

Jig with Strike King Rage Craw



Strike King Rage Bug



SPOTTED BASS & THE OFFSHORE

Lanier, Smith and Hartwell are known for their strong spotted bass/blueback herring connection. Unlocking their secrets has added to Cody Meyer's reputation as one of fishing's foremost authorities on spotted bass.

"Spotted bass really live offshore the whole time," says Meyer, whose catch list of oversized California spots has buttressed his reputation. "They can school 200 or 300 feet from structure, or just 50 feet. But when it comes to spots feeding on herring, the best schooling action is over structure, over those brushpiles and cane piles made from bamboo."

Meyer hunts for prime structure in practice, making sure he can pinpoint their location come tournament time.

"Your first cast over brushpiles is crucial," he says, stressing his reliance on his Garmin electronics. "If a cast is too far from the piles, it'll pull fish off the piles and they will scatter. It'll take a while for them to regroup. With LiveScope, I know exactly where the pile is, and I can bring the bait directly over it. That's a big deal. In summertime, bass really hunker down in the piles waiting for herring to pass over them. In the early morning or at night, they might school anywhere, but after that, the key is pretty much brush or cane piles."

Surface lures sparkle when spotted bass and blueback herring converge.

"On herring lakes, you can catch fish on topwater baits all day," Meyer says. "Herring really gravitate to that high sun. On overcast summer days, it's harder to catch them on top."

He approaches spotted bass differently on lakes without bluebacks, singling out Oroville and Shasta in California.

"Those fish tend not to get on structure as much," Meyer says. "You may find a point or an offshore island a good place to start, but spotted bass on these lakes are more nomadic."

His favorite topwater lures are the Evergreen Shower Blows (SB) 125, a pencil popper-style bait, and the Evergreen Justine (JT), a stealthy rattle-free walk-the-dog bait. A clear-bodied version of the Evergreen One's Bug is another favorite.

"I always have a topwater on deck when I'm fishing a spotted bass lake, just in case they come up schooling," Meyer admits. "Even if I'm drop-shotting brush piles."

"In summertime, bass really hunker down in the piles waiting for herring to pass over them. In the early morning or at night, they might school anywhere, but after that, the key is pretty much brush or cane piles."



Cody Meyer relies heavily on topwater baits for schooling spotted bass.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



Evergreen Justine



Troy Morrow prefers to downsize his baits when fish school in the fall.

PHOTO BY JOEY WHITE

“Most of the fish transition from herring to a diet of small threadfin shad. They take quantity over quality. You just have to downsize your bait going into fall.”

THE KEY IS THE CAST

Jason Lambert’s impressive record on Tennessee River reservoirs includes a record-setting 101-pound, 9-ounce total weight at a 2018 FLW Tour Event on Kentucky Lake.

The pro from Michie, Tennessee, prides himself on his ability to locate prime structure on main river and secondary channels.

“Current is a big factor on the Tennessee River (ledges),” he says. “Bass are sitting in one spot in giant schools, in ambush positions where there’s a current break, waiting for bait to come to them. When it happens, it’s a feeding frenzy.”

Creek intersections with the main river channel, island heads, channel bends and other elements comprise prime schooling structure. Depths at these locations can vary from 10 feet to more than 30 feet.

Ledge bass are shad eaters, chowing down on threadfin or the larger gizzard shad. Lambert carefully scouts prospective hot spots with his electronics, making the most of features like SideVu and ClearVu.

His detailed observations have enabled him to refine his approach to offshore bass.

“I honestly hardly ever stop to fish for ledge bass unless they’re sitting a certain way,” he explains. “I want them to be in contact with the bottom and in what we call ‘attack formation’ — linked to the bottom, aligned with the current. The fish tell you pretty quickly how to catch them. It isn’t always the same bait, but it is always the same cast. Once they start biting, you have to replicate that cast over and over because they want that bait coming in the same direction.”

A bass’ predatory nature stokes its competitive fire. The sight of one bass feeding goads others to follow — a habit that can break up a school. Bass may move several hundred yards in a day and shift to structure at a different depth.

“On Chickamauga, I caught fish in the morning at 24 feet, then caught them in the afternoon at 32 feet,” he says.

Favorite baits for ledge bass include the Duel Hardcore crankbait series, Castaic Jerky J soft plastics and the 8-inch Castaic Heavy Metal Flutter Spoon.

How do you keep from pulling bass off structure?

“There’s something I do a little different from everybody else,” he says. “But that’s one thing I’d rather not talk about.” ■

THINK ‘SMALL’ FOR THE FALL TRANSITION

Troy Morrow has learned to think “small” as summer bends into fall. Adjusting to a late-season menu shift from blueback herring to threadfin shad earns him extra bites.

“Bass start to transition to a more open-water bite in fall,” says Morrow, who makes his home in Eastanollee, Georgia. “Most of the fish transition from herring to a diet of small threadfin shad. They take quantity over quality. You just have to downsize your bait going into fall.”

Savannah River reservoirs vary in character. Clark’s Hill, for example, features expansive flats and long, tapering points, while Hartwell cuts through steeper terrain and boasts more rocky structure. On both types of waters, brush and cane piles host major bass congregations before bass start roaming at summer’s end.

“Blueback is a colder-water fish, so it can get elusive in late summer,” Morrow says. “That’s why bass then lean more toward threadfin shad, a smaller bait. They’re more available during that summer-to-fall transition. Threadfin like hot water and will be up in the water column. Bluebacks are deep then, seldom near the surface.”

He recalls a late season bite on Clark’s Hill when schooling bass were gorging on tiny threadfin. Baits the size of your thumbnail can be hard to cast. Morrow answers that challenge with his own little trick.

“I can take a bait like a Heddon Super Spook Junior — a decent-sized little bait — but go to a clear version of it with a feather (treble hook) on the end,” he says. “It still looks like that smaller bait because all they really see is that little feather.”



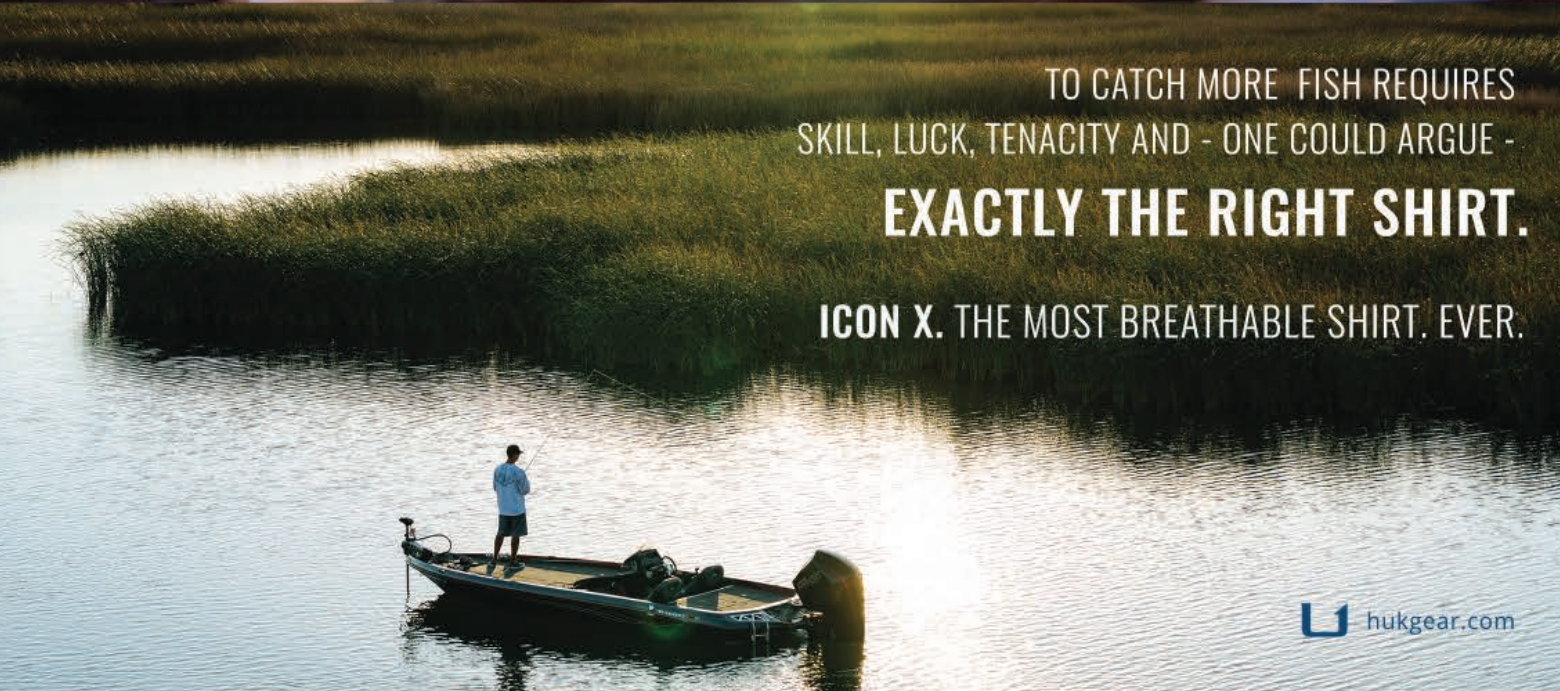
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THE TEXAS RIG

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As told by Larry Nixon

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

I probably saw my first Texas-rigged worm in the late 1960s or early '70s in Arkansas, but I'd been fishing a worm on a jighead for several years before that. When I saw the Texas rig and that self-weedless design, I thought it was the answer to bass fishing! You could throw it anywhere you wanted to throw it, and it opened up a whole new world to bass anglers.

In 1969 or 1970, after my second year of college, I heard they needed bass guides on Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn reservoirs in Texas. I went down there to guide, and we were catching 100 bass a day on Texas-rigged worms — mostly Creme Scoundrels back then.

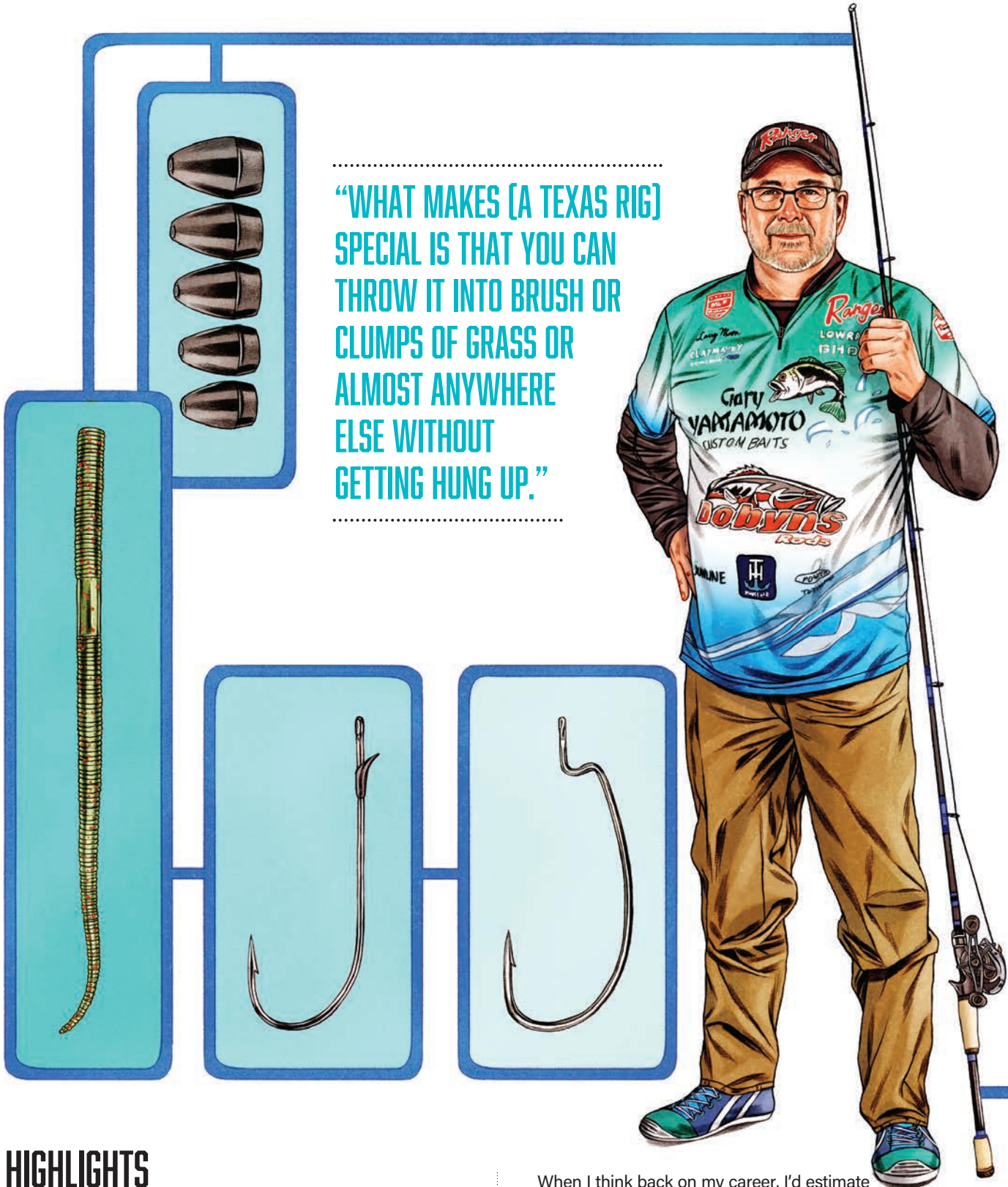


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“WHAT MAKES (A TEXAS RIG) SPECIAL IS THAT YOU CAN THROW IT INTO BRUSH OR CLUMPS OF GRASS OR ALMOST ANYWHERE ELSE WITHOUT GETTING HUNG UP.”

HIGHLIGHTS

In 1990, I won a big tournament on the Harris Chain of Lakes in Florida. It paid well over \$100,000 for first place, and I won it by fishing a Texas rig in grass. No other bait could have come through that cover as well, so the Texas rig was essential to my success there and in a lot more of my wins, too.

When I think back on my career, I'd estimate that about 70 percent of my tournament winnings have come from fishing soft plastics, and I'm certainly not alone on that. Just about every professional angler who's had any success can point to the Texas-rigged worm as being a key bait at one time or another.

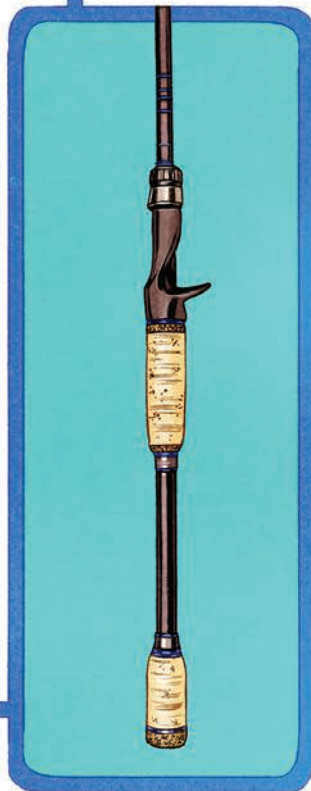


ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HOEWEILER

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**“THERE’S JUST NO
 TIME OF YEAR
 THAT A BASS
 WON’T BITE A
 WORM, SO IT’S
 ALWAYS IN MY
 ARSENAL.”**

WHEN

Across the country, generally, the Texas rig is best from April through June, but it’s truly a great year-round bait that you can rig up in a ton of different situations. There’s just no time of year that a bass won’t bite a worm, so it’s always in my arsenal in one form or another.

WHERE

The Texas rig is made for cover. What makes it special is that you can throw it into brush or clumps of grass or almost anywhere else without getting hung up. Of course, you can throw it in open water, too, but it really shines in cover.

TACKLE

I use Sunline Sniper fluorocarbon for my worm fishing. Fourteen- or 15-pound-test is about average. Occasionally, I’ll drop down to 10- or 12-pound in clear water with light cover, and I’ll go up to 17-, 20-, or even 25-pound-test in dingy water or extremely heavy cover.

I do most of my worm fishing with a Dobyns Champion XP 683C. That’s a 6-foot-8 medium-heavy casting rod. If I need to go heavier, I use the Champion XP 705C; it’s a mag-heavy 7-foot model. These rods are shorter than a lot of anglers use, but I find the shorter length helps me keep my bait in the cone of the bow transducer and also keeps me from lifting the bait too much off the bottom when I work it. That can be really important.

My reel is a Bass Pro Shops Johnny Morris Signature bait-caster with a 6.8:1 gear ratio. There are faster versions of that same reel, but I like the power I get with that speed.

LURES

My all-around pick for a Texas-rigged plastic worm would have to be a 6- or 7-inch straight-tail model. That style is very versatile, and that size has probably been responsible for more of the bass I’ve caught on a worm than any other. My favorite is the 6.75-inch Yamamoto Long Pro Senko.

I’ll often use a ribbontail worm around grass, and I like a white, yellow or orange tail for that application. A cut-tail worm is a winding-type bait that I use when I want to cover a lot of water or I’m trying to locate bass. I don’t fish a paddletail worm much anymore.

When it comes to colors, I probably use green pumpkin about 50 percent of the time. It works just about everywhere. I carry six or seven colors in each of those worm styles. In addition to green pumpkin, my other favorite colors are watermelon red, junebug, purple, red shad (particularly in Florida) and red bug or black neon (in dark water).

I’m picky about my worm hooks, and I really like a thin-diameter wire hook. Diameter is everything when it comes to hook penetration. My favorite Texas rig hooks for worms up to about 7 inches are the straight-shank Roboworm ReBarbs in 3/0 and 4/0. For larger worms, I use the Gamakatsu G-Finesse Hybrid Worm Hook in 2/0 all the way up to 6/0. The G-Finesse has a wider gap that handles bigger, thicker worms well.

My slip sinkers range from 1/8- and 3/16-ounce for shallow water and up to 3/8-ounce or so for deeper water. Probably 50 to 60 percent of my Texas rigging is done with a 1/4-ounce tungsten sinker. After years and years of experience, I know what that 1/4-ounce sinker feels like at virtually any depth and coming through any kind of cover. Getting dialed in with your gear is a real key to understanding what your lure is doing at all times.

Texas rig master Larry Nixon estimates that 70 percent of his career wins have come on plastic worms.



THE BASICS

Worm fishing is all about putting the lure in the cover where bass live and allowing it to fall. You'll get most of your bites when the lure is falling, and you need your bait to fall on a slack line. If your worm falls on a tight line, it will look less natural, trigger fewer strikes and pendulum back toward you as it drops. This will cut your strikes by 50 percent.

Speed of the fall is everything when you're worm fishing. Sometimes you need a slow fall to get bites, and you need to go with a light slip sinker. Other times you need a fast fall to generate a reaction strike, and you need to use a heavy weight. That's one of those determinations you have to make on the water each day. I generally hold my rod at about the 10 o'clock position and slowly crawl or gently hop the worm by lifting the rod to about 11 o'clock. When the worm contacts cover, shake it over limbs or grass and let it freefall on a completely slack line. Sometimes, you might have to peel line off your reel to make that happen, but it'll get you a lot more

strikes. Most strikes come on the fall, but if the worm gets back to the bottom without being eaten, shake it a few times on a semi-slack line before crawling or hopping it again.

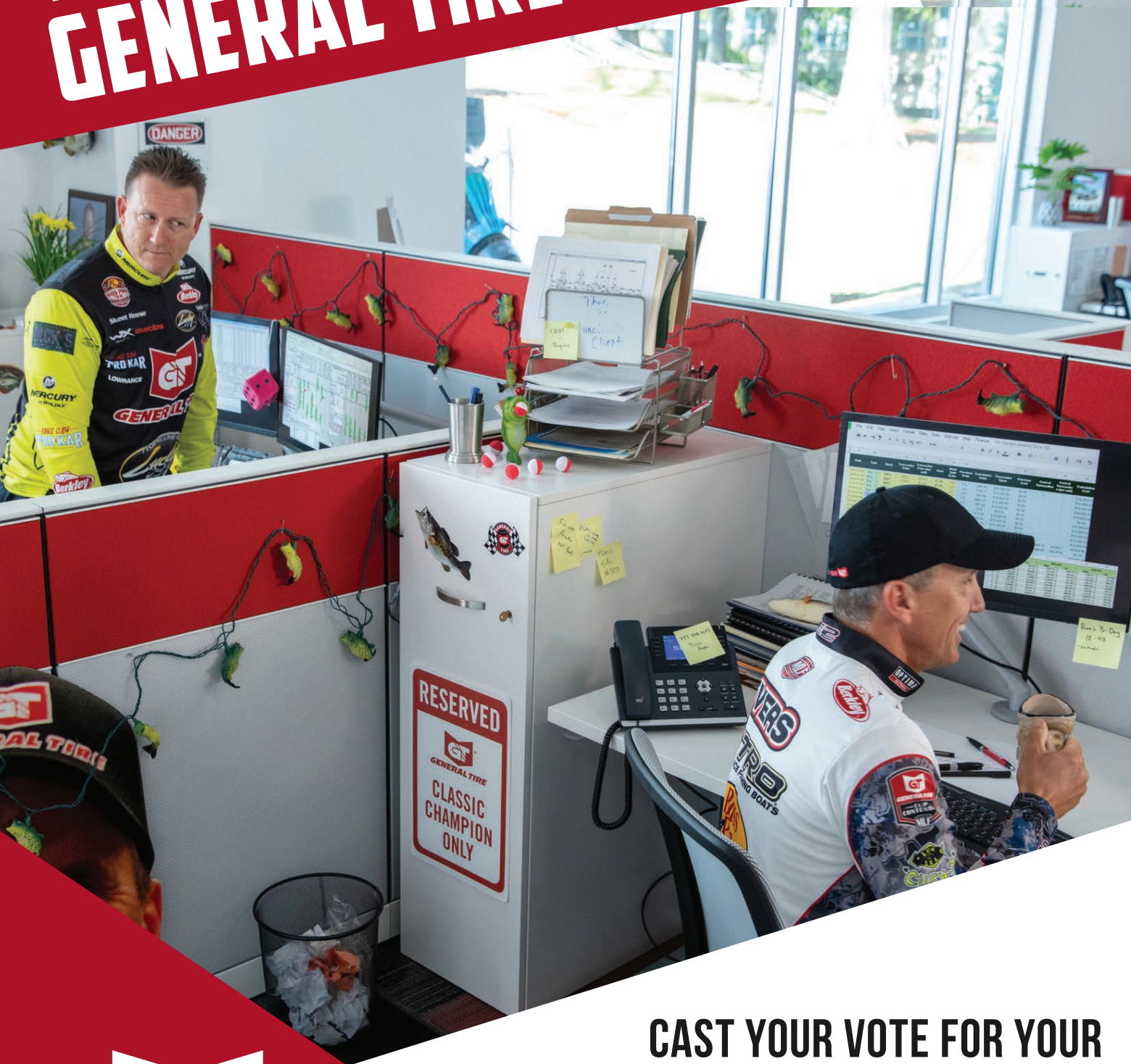
When I feel a bite, I drop the rod as I take up the slack, and I use a "pull" set. It really doesn't take much to set the hook if you have the right gear. Thin-diameter hooks, quality fluorocarbon line and a strong, sensitive rod will get the job done.

BONUS

The Texas rig is one of the greatest tools we have for fishing heavy cover, but I use the lightest line I think I can get away with because I know it will get me more bites.

Yes, I'll probably lose some fish by using 14-pound-test line where other anglers would use 20, but I'm confident that I can overcome those lost fish by getting more bites. More bites equal more bass, and that's good whether you're fishing a tournament or fishing for fun! ■

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1. WILEY X SUMMIT CUP PRESENTED BY B&W TRAILER HITCHES

Lake Murray
May 15-Jun 19

If you were to hand-pick a lineup of Carolina hammers to win a bass tournament on Lake Murray, your All-Star team darn sure better include Marty Robinson. The South Carolina pro has collected four MLF wins and multiple Top 10s in his home state, and when the Summit Cup field arrived at a heavily stained, stingy Lake Murray for the first of five rain-soaked days of competition, Robinson became an instant favorite.

Robinson caught his biggest fish of the week — a 6-pounder — in his first Elimination Round, slipped through the Sudden Death Rounds and then connected with 22-15 on 11 fish in the final round to outdistance Bryan Thrift by 5 pounds.

Robinson mixed it up with a 1/2-ounce Buckeye Lures jig and flat-sided crankbait, covering as much water as possible in the Big Saluda arm of Lake Murray. The win was Robinson's first in an MLF Cup.

2. BASS PRO TOUR FAVORITE FISHING STAGE THREE PRESENTED BY BASS CAT BOATS

Harris Chain of Lakes
May 21-26

To say Bass Pro Tour angler Ott DeFoe is "on a hot streak" would be an egregious understatement. Heading into the third tournament of the 2021 BPT regular-season schedule — on the Harris Chain of Lakes in central Florida — the Tennessee pro had logged two Bass Pro Tour wins and an MLF Cup victory in the previous 18 months (including a win at Sam Rayburn just two months prior).

So when DeFoe went to work on a series of docks on Lake Harris with a prototype Terminator swim jig and a Rapala OG Slim crankbait in the Championship Round of Stage Three, it should've come as no surprise that he would end the day with 27 pounds more than the nearest competitor. DeFoe caught 30 scorable largemouth for 73 pounds, 14 ounces to Bobby Lane's 46-13 and Brent Chapman's 45-7, one of the largest margins if victory in MLF history.

The win put DeFoe in the driver's seat for the 2021 Bass Pro Tour Angler of the Year award, and set the stage for a good old-fashioned donnybrook with Jacob Wheeler and Brent Ehrler over the second half of the BPT season.

3. PHOENIX BASS FISHING LEAGUE PRESENTED BY T-H MARINE ALL-AMERICAN

Douglas Lake presented by TINCUP Whiskey
June 3-5

Brant Grimm secured his place in the history books with his win in the 2021 All-American, and he did so fishing his home waters of Douglas Lake in eastern Tennessee.

Grimm, a general contractor, lives less than an hour from both Cherokee and Douglas lakes. He qualified for the All-American on Cherokee before setting his sights on a tremendous fishery in Douglas Lake that was fishing a little stingy by the time the grassroots championship rolled around.

While much of the field was spending most of its time up shallow — a stark contrast to how

many summertime tournaments are often won on the mountain reservoir — Grimm was upriver fishing offshore drop-offs near main-river channel swings with a Strike King 6XD, which allowed him to weigh in 46-9 over three days for the \$100,000 check and title of All-American champion.

4. BASS PRO TOUR B&W TRAILER HITCHES STAGE FOUR PRESENTED BY ATG X WRANGLER

Lake Chickamauga
June 4-9

If there's a better tournament resume on the Tennessee River than Kevin VanDam's, we have yet to see it. And thanks in part to a 30-minute fish-catching blitzkrieg in the final period of Stage Four on Lake Chickamauga, the G.O.A.T. can add "Bass Pro Tour Champion" to his resume.

VanDam entered the tournament with a great deal of confidence (and, admittedly, a chip on his shoulder after failing to capitalize on what he considered a can't-miss winning pattern on Sam



PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN

Rayburn two months earlier). He cruised through the qualifying rounds, had the heaviest weight in the Knockout Round, and then racked up 70-1 on the final day to fend off Jacob Wheeler (63-7) and Jason Lambert (59-8).

And he did it cranking a Strike King Series 5 and a 5XD over a shell bar at the mouth of a creek, grinding his plugs along the bottom in 5 to 13 feet of water. The win was VanDam's 26th, catapulting him just shy of the \$7 million mark in career winnings.

5. ABU GARCIA COLLEGE FISHING PRESENTED BY YETI

WILEY X COLLEGE FACEOFF Lake O' the Pines

June 12

There are blowouts and then there's what the Stephen F. Austin University duo of Hunter Muncrief and River Lee did to the rest of the field in the second Wiley X College Faceoff of the 2021 season at Lake O' The Pines.

Keying in on a point that featured shell beds and potentially

bedding bream, Muncrief and Lee used 6th Sense Cloud 9 C-10 crankbaits to blast 24 bass for 70 pounds, 12 ounces and an absolutely dominant 45-pound, 14-ounce margin of victory over second-place finishers Austin Johnson and Karson Hamilton of Arkansas Tech University.

When the flurries stopped and the crankbait was no longer doing the trick, Muncrief and Lee switched to a Carolina rig tipped with a 6th Sense Flush and also spent a little time flipping bushes up shallow, though that one point did almost all the damage in the one-day event.

6. TACKLE WAREHOUSE PRO CIRCUIT PRESENTED BY BAD BOY MOWERS FEDERAL AMMUNITION STOP 5 Potomac River Presented by Lucas Oil

June 17 - 20

Italian angler Jacopo Gallelli made waves when he became the first European to compete professionally in the United States with his inclusion on the Tackle

Warehouse Pro Circuit this season. While Gallelli had already made a name for himself by double-qualifying from the Southern and Southwestern Divisions of the Toyota Series in 2020, it's a big leap to the national touring circuit — one that requires learning a lot of new fisheries, techniques and skills.

That learning curve resulted in finishes no better than 57th in the first four events of the season, but at the Potomac River in June, Gallelli proved he's studying up when he leapt from sixth to first on the final day of competition with a 20-pound bag full of fish. It was a win full of fiery emotion that signified Gallelli's true arrival on the biggest stage.

To secure his tournament-best Day 4 bag, Gallelli primarily leaned on a 1/2-ounce Z-Man/Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer in a section of Potomac Creek that featured grass that made a 45-degree turn, resulting in an eddy and a nice hangout for big Potomac River largemouth. The result: a \$135,000 check (including a \$35,000 Phoenix contingency bonus) and a trophy he'll proudly show off when he returns home to Italy.

7. BASS PRO TOUR GENERAL TIRE STAGE FIVE PRESENTED BY BERKLEY St. Lawrence River

June 25-30

As the youngest winner of the BFL All-American and the Forrest Wood Cup (he was 20 and 21, respectively), Jacob Wheeler has made a career out of doing things faster (and better) than anyone. So it came as no surprise when the Tennessee pro claimed Bass Pro Tour Stage Five on the St. Lawrence River to become the first ever four-time winner on MLF's highest-level circuit.

What came as a shock is how thoroughly Wheeler dominated on the big drainage of Lake Ontario. He shattered the single-day weight record with 165 pounds, 1 ounce of smallmouth on Day 1 of the event, and then broke the league's Championship Round record with 129 pounds on the final day to beat Jeff Sprague by nearly 30 pounds.

Wheeler did it all with a flogger in one hand and a drop-shot rod in the other, catching the majority of his weight by dropping a Googan Baits Rattlin' Ned on bedding smallmouth.

8. U.S. ARMY HIGH SCHOOL FISHING PRESENTED BY FAVORITE FISHING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Lake Hartwell

June 30-July 3

Jerry Brumbaugh and Hunter Klotz of Central High School in Martinsburg, Pennsylvania topped a field of over 250 boats to take home the top \$10,000 top prize at the U.S. Army High School Fishing National Championship on Lake Hartwell. In addition, the duo received several scholarship offers and a pair of spots as Strike King co-anglers in the Toyota Series Championship this fall.

Brumbaugh and Klotz weighed in a three-fish limit of 9-3 on Day 1, tied for seventh place entering the second day of competition. Another limit of 10-2 moved them into second place for the final round, at which point, things got tough.

While much of the field was beating the bank, Brumbaugh and Klotz stuck to their guns — running cane piles using forward-facing sonar to suss out fish willing to bite their Sebile Magic Swimmers.

The childhood friends stayed the course and trusted their game plan, at least enough to weigh in a limit good for 9-9 (28-13 total) to secure the win.

9. TOYOTA SERIES PRESENTED BY A.R.E.

NORTHERN DIVISION

Lake Champlain

July 15-17

Auburn, New Hampshire's Stephen Estes is definitely no stranger to tournaments held on Lake Champlain. All seven events he's fished with MLF have come on Champlain and seven was his lucky number in mid-July when he finally secured his first win.

Estes did all his damage with his Lowrance ActiveTarget system, focusing on fish in just a few key areas. One area in particular — his best spot — didn't look like much on a map, but it was loaded with bait and big, aggressive smallmouth. Fishing 35 to 40 feet of water, Estes relied on a drop-shot from Hawg Pours Hand Made Bass Baits called the Hawg Teaser to weigh in 61-3 for the three-day tournament.

With the win, Estes earned a \$44,000 check and the satisfaction of knowing he bested some true hammers in Bass Pro Tour superstar Bryan Thrift (sixth) and Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pros Matt Becker (second), Dakota Ebare (fourth) and Kyle Hall (fifth), as well as a handful of local studs like Bryan Labelle (third) and JJ Judd (eighth). ■



PHOTO BY HUNTER RUD



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

Wheeler Lake

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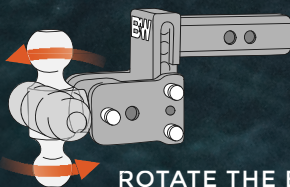
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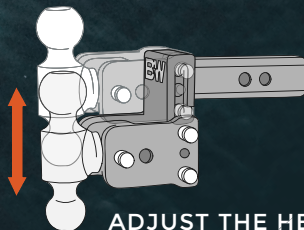
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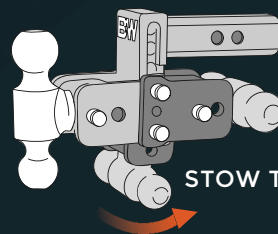
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#TOWINGADVENTURE



PHOTOS BY BRANDON ROWAN

B&W TOW AND STOW HITCH

By Matt Williams

Whether you're trailering 2 miles or 2,000, it's always wise to have a high-quality hitch on your truck or SUV so the rig rides level and secure. B&W Trailer Hitches has the hook-up in the Tow and Stow, a heavy-duty drop hitch available in varied finishes and sizes with a range of height adjustments and a rotating ball assembly that allows for towing multiple trailers without swapping balls.

First Impression

One look and it's plain to see this is a beast of a hitch that Kansas-based B&W spared no expense in building. Made from premium U.S. carbon steel, the hitch is designed with a host of cool features that were carefully considered and precision-machined to optimize functionality, durability, convenience and user-friendly operation while providing a beefy, custom look. It's available in chrome or a durable two E-coat and powder-coat finish that improves corrosion protection.

In Action

I've been using static drop hitches and interchangeable trailer balls to accommodate a stable of boat and utility

trailers for decades, but the Tow and Stow is rock-solid proof that there's a better way. The convenience factor ranks at the top of the list of things to love about this hitch. It's like having multiple hitches with varied drops or rises and as many as three ball sizes all in one.

The swing arm adjusts up or down in 1-inch increments by removing two stainless pins, while swapping balls is as simple as removing a single pin and rotating the ball assembly to the proper size; no more busted knuckles or filthy hands from breaking loose rusty nuts with cumbersome wrenches. To stow it out of the way, just remove the adjustment pins and rotate the hitch under the vehicle bumper and replace the pins. It's best to stow with the bald face of the ball assembly facing down to optimize ground clearance.

Final Thoughts

The folks at B&W aren't kidding around when they claim the Tow and Stow is the last hitch you'll ever need.

I pull multiple trailer styles with different coupler sizes using a 3/4-ton 4x4 equipped with tall tires — sometimes with a Capri overhead camper in the

bed. The TS20049B (7-inch drop/7.5 inch, tri-ball model) allows for pulling every trailer I own without the hassle of changing out balls or swapping to a different drop hitch to achieve a level ride. The convenience and quality easily justify the \$329 price.

Performance Advice

- Stow the hitch beneath the bumper when not in use to avoid banging your shins or dragging the hitch on unlevel ground.
- Periodic cleaning and lubing of the pins using white lithium grease promotes smooth operation and prevents corrosion.
- Protect your investment from theft by securing it to the receiver hitch with a locking device.
- Always make sure the ball is adjusted to the proper height so the trailer tows level.
- Select a shank size that fits your receiver hitch without a reducer sleeve. A reducer sleeve will cut down on towing capacity, plus it could allow for movement or "slop" that can cause noise and possible wear on the pins.

SWING ARM:

The swing arm adjusts up or down in 1-inch increments using two stainless pins. This allows for precision height adjustments to ensure the trailer rides level for optimum weight distribution, handling and fuel mileage. The hitch can be used in an inverted position if you need additional height.



PIVOT PIN:

When the hitch is not in use, the ball assembly and swing arm can be rotated on a stainless pivot pin and stowed beneath the vehicle's bumper, providing optimal clearance and a tidy look. The pivot pin is static, so it prevents theft of the swing arm even when the two adjustment pins are removed.



ROTATING TRI-BALL:

A rotating tri-ball assembly makes it a snap to switch ball sizes to accommodate different trailer couplers. Simply remove the pin, rotate to the proper ball size and resecure the pin.



Applications

- Can be swapped between tow vehicles with the same size receiver hitch.
- Tri-ball assembly allows for towing trailers with different coupler sizes without changing balls.
- Use it inverted to get additional height.
- Swing arm adjusts up or down to achieve proper ride height.

>> ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

MultiPro Tow and Stow: In addition to their standard Tow and Stow models, B&W offers a unit designed exclusively for use with GM vehicles equipped with MultiPro tailgates. The hitch is specially machined to provide sufficient clearance so the tailgate's inner gate/step are fully functional with a dual or tri-ball assembly in the stowed position. It's available in black powdercoat with a 2-inch shank (2.5-inch drop/3.5-inch rise) and a 2.5-inch shank (7-inch drop/7.5-inch rise). MSRP \$319.00 - \$369.00.

Hitches and More: America's favorite hitch maker isn't just about heavy-duty hook-ups for bumper pulls, goosenecks and fifth wheels. B&W also manufactures locking devices, products for motorcycle trailering and a wide range of farm/ranch equipment.

HITS & MISSES

- + Made in America
- + Heavy-duty, rigid design
- + Three shank sizes
- + Four drop/rise sizes
- + Easy to adjust height
- + Quick-switch rotating ball assembly
- + Pull multiple trailers with different coupler sizes using one ball mount
- + Stainless pins with non-slip knobs for easy removal and neat appearance
- + Anti-theft design
- Pricey compared to standard drop hitch

DETAILS

- Finishes:** 3 (black powder coat, chrome and browning)
- Shank Sizes:** Vary with finish. 3 inch, 2.5 inch and 2 inch (black powder coat)
- Ball Options:** 2 ball and 3 ball
- Hitch Construction:** U.S. Carbon Steel
- Pins:** Stainless Steel
- Lock Available:** Yes
- MSRP:** \$199.00 to \$369.00
- Contact:** bwtrailerhitches.com. ■



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Man overboard
monitoring



Theft Deterrent
functionality



Distress Message
capability



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The 1st Mate Marine Safety and Security System puts confidence in the palm of your hand with overboard alerts, distress messaging and theft-deterrent functionality. Utilizing wireless communication between wearable fobs, an engine hub and your mobile device, the 1st Mate system combines boat safety with convenience while providing a safe alternative to the traditional mechanical emergency stop switch and lanyard.

Product details and compatibility info at [1stMate.com](https://www.1stmate.com)





1. BERKLEY AGENT E SWIMBAITS

2019 Bass Pro Tour Angler of the Year Edwin Evers worked with the scientists at Berkley to design the new PowerBait Agent E swimbait, an offering molded with a flat bottom that features an ultra-low center of gravity and internal weight that causes it to hug the bottom like a skirted jig on a slow retrieve. The bait comes with an integrated fluorocarbon hook keeper designed to be invisible to bass and sheds the nastiest grass and debris while remaining easily collapsible on the strike. Agent E comes in four different sizes ranging from 2.25 inches (3/8 ounce) to 3.75 inches (1 ounce). Available for \$6.99 and \$7.99 at berkleyfishing.com

2. WILEY X CLIMB

The new Wiley X Climb sunglasses are built for safety and visibility, with crystal-clear optical clarity thanks to Captivate polarized lens options, and ANSI-rated construction that protects against high-mass and high-velocity impact (hello, punching weights). The Climb's comfortable, durable high-wrap frame blocks unwanted peripheral light and comes in three color options — matte grey, gloss tortoise and matte black. The Climb is also available for prescription lenses. Available for \$90.00 at wileyx.com

3. ABU GARCIA JORDAN LEE RODS

After dominating the Bass Pro Tour in 2020 with his Heavy Hitters and Angler of the Year championships, Jordan Lee worked with Abu Garcia to create new rods tailored to his specific standards. The 14 technique-specific rods in the Jordan Lee lineup — 12 baitcasting and two spinning — are constructed on lightweight, balanced 30-ton graphite blanks with Winn split-grips and custom-designed reel seats that further enhance sensitivity (and comfort for all-day casting and reeling). Abu Garcia's Robotically Optimized Casting System guide train helps maximize casting distance, while stainless-steel guides with zirconium inserts supply durability and smooth casting and reeling. Available for \$89.95 at abugarcia.com

4. PLANO STOWALLS

Looking for a convenient storage option for soft plastics and other bulky items like phones, wallets and sunglasses? Look no further than the new Plano Stowall pouches. The transparent design of the Stowall pouches allow for easy identification of contents, while a waterproof zip closure keeps those contents dry. The pouches come in two sizes — 3600 and 3700 — and allow anglers to customize storage inside their other Plano storage bins and tackle systems. Available for \$6.99 for the 3600 and \$9.99 for the 3700 at planomolding.com

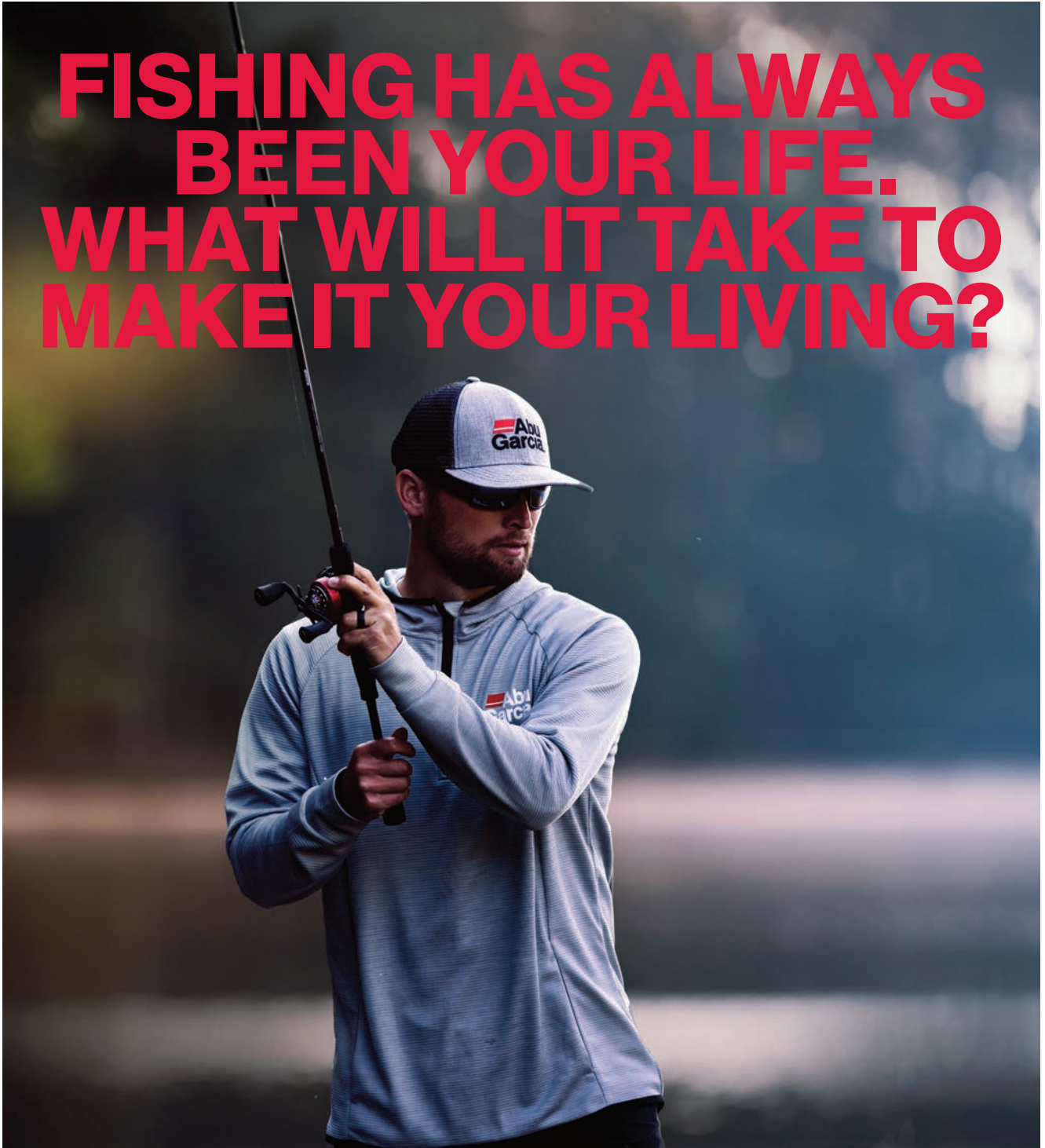


5. STRIKE KING CONTRA SERIES

Strike King's new CONTRA series of fishing lines provides three things that anglers of all levels demand: performance, durability and exceptional value/affordability. Available in multiple test weights, CONTRA Braid, Monofilament and Fluorocarbon are all engineered with performance-grade properties. CONTRA Braid is woven with premium fibers for durability, strength and sensitivity, and is notable for its castability and handling on both spinning and casting gear. CONTRA Monofilament's extrusion process produces a supple mono with excellent strength and sensitivity, while the fluorocarbon delivers sensitivity, next-level abrasion resistance and incredible handling characteristics, in addition to being particularly resistant to deterioration from exposure to UV light – which translates to longer life on the water. Monofilament comes in 200- and 1000-yard spools ranging from 6- to 20-pound test. Fluorocarbon spools are available in 330- and 1,000-yard spools ranging from 6- to 20-pound test and Braid is available in 150- and 330-yard spools with the line rating from 8- to 65-pound test in both green and hi-vis yellow. ■



FISHING HAS ALWAYS BEEN YOUR LIFE. WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO MAKE IT YOUR LIVING?



Going pro requires an insatiable drive to put fish in the boat as well as having the gear that can help make that happen. With a proprietary resin technology that increases rod break strength without adding weight, and a custom designed reel seat for hypersensitivity and comfort, the Veritas[®] Tournament rod can help turn lifelong hobbies into full blown careers.

FISH TO WIN



BASS FISHING TECHNOLOGY

YOU NEED TO LEARN



POWER MANAGEMENT

LITHIUM BATTERY

GET SMARTER WITH ELECTRONICS, MAPS, TROLLING MOTORS TO CATCH MORE FISH

By Tyler Brinks

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER SHANGLE

Like everything else in the world, the technology of bass fishing has advanced at warp speed. The tools available to the contemporary angler are far superior to what was available just 10, five, even three years ago.

While it's true that the most simplistic approaches to fishing will still catch fish, learning the newest technologies will significantly increase your chances of success on the water.

These technologies include forward-facing sonar, advanced trolling motors and enhanced mapping options, which all allow anglers to be infinitely more efficient. Lithium batteries and power management systems are additional breakthroughs that will keep those tools running longer, and more efficiently.

Understanding the benefits of and embracing new technology will undoubtedly lead to more fish catches and better productivity. Translation: Study up and catch more fish!

TROLLING MOTOR 2.0

FORWARD-FACING SONAR

ENHANCED MAPPING

Sonar technology made a giant leap with forward-facing live sonar like Lowrance ActiveTarget — technology every bass angler should try to learn.



FORWARD-FACING SONAR

The learning curve starts with technology that many consider the most significant recent breakthrough in bass fishing: forward-facing sonar, such as Lowrance ActiveTarget and Garmin Panoptix LiveScope. This technology has rapidly (and dramatically) changed the way anglers target bass, especially suspended fish and those clinging to offshore cover and structure.

The ability to see what's on both sides of the boat was a breakthrough with side-scanning sonar, but seeing what's in front of the boat in real time gives you the complete picture. It provides details about what's happening all the way around the boat and delivers never-before-seen insight into fish behavior as they react to your lures.

Bass Pro Tour pro Skeet Reese, who has run Lowrance ActiveTarget on his boat since it was introduced in the fall of 2020, says thorough knowledge of forward-facing live sonar is an invaluable tool for locating bass and gauging their mood.

"[ActiveTarget] makes it much easier to see where the fish are, obviously, but you can also clearly see how active they are by how fast they move and

how they react to your lures," he says. "That tells you right away whether it's worth your time to fish for them."

Reese can easily recall a tournament situation in which ActiveTarget saved the day.

"At Lake Chickamauga, I had located a school of fish in practice, and when I returned for the tournament, they were nowhere to be found," he says. "I used my ActiveTarget to pan around and relocated them, as they had slid up on the ridge in much shallower water. That put me right back on the fish. If I'd idled around looking for them, I probably would have spooked them."

MAP CARDS & ENHANCED MAPPING

The trusty paper maps of old still provide great information, but ultra-detailed electronic mapping cards are the way to go for today's bass angler. They show dramatically more detail, they can be enhanced and updated through ever-evolving mapping methods and they're much easier to use while on a boat than paper maps.

Mapping cards include technology that offers even more benefits than

simply finding your spot. One of those benefits is the ability to highlight different sections of the water column, a feature that's available from all of the major brands with their brand-specific mapping cards.

Real-world use of depth shading allows anglers to highlight different segments of the water column with unique colors. It also allows for quickly scanning for a specific depth zone that's holding fish and makes finding offshore humps, ridges and points easier as they stand out better with color.

Reese utilizes the custom depth shading feature on his Lowrance units with C-MAP.

"Being able to shade different depth zones is key," he asserts. "From a safety standpoint, it makes it easier to navigate new waters. For fishing, it's so easy to find areas and depths to target — it just makes me much more efficient on the water."

TROLLING MOTOR TECH

Trolling motor technology has boomed in recent years, with the most considerable improvement being built-in GPS that automatically keeps the

boat in place with no effort required from the user. All the major trolling motor manufacturers now have this feature, which has made boat positioning (even when fishing in the wind) much less aggravating.

In addition to better boat positioning, trolling motors have also become more efficient and powerful. With less battery draw, the added speed helps anglers cover more water; trolling motors are also significantly stealthier thanks to brushless technology in motors like the Lowrance Ghost.

With electronics manufacturers like Lowrance and Garmin now getting into the trolling motor game, anglers can integrate their same-brand electronics and front-of-the-boat propulsion seamlessly for a better experience.

LITHIUM BATTERIES

Until fairly recently, there were only a handful of options for marine batteries, all in the form of lead-acid batteries. And then came lithium, drastically changing the boat charging game.

“WITH THE ADDITION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY ON YOUR BASS BOAT COMES A NEED FOR MORE ROBUST POWER.”

While lithium-ion batteries cost substantially more than traditional batteries, they're worth a look for serious bass anglers. They're celebrated for their durability and longevity and many offer much more extended warranties than other battery types.

There are now countless companies producing lithium batteries for marine use and they all include the benefit of more power while also saving weight in the boat.

Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro Miles Burghoff made the switch to lithium and runs three 12-volt, 100-amp-hour Battle Born Batteries for his 36-volt trolling motor setup while using an AGM battery as his cranking battery.

“People talk about weight reduction and power, but there's another benefit that really jumps out to me,” Burghoff

posits. “That's the fact that the power is more consistent throughout the day, meaning they'll be just as strong after a long day of fishing as they were when you launched the boat. Lead-acid and AGM batteries slowly die down throughout the day and you have to turn up the trolling motor speed to keep up.”

Those factors used to influence how Burghoff fished in tournament situations.

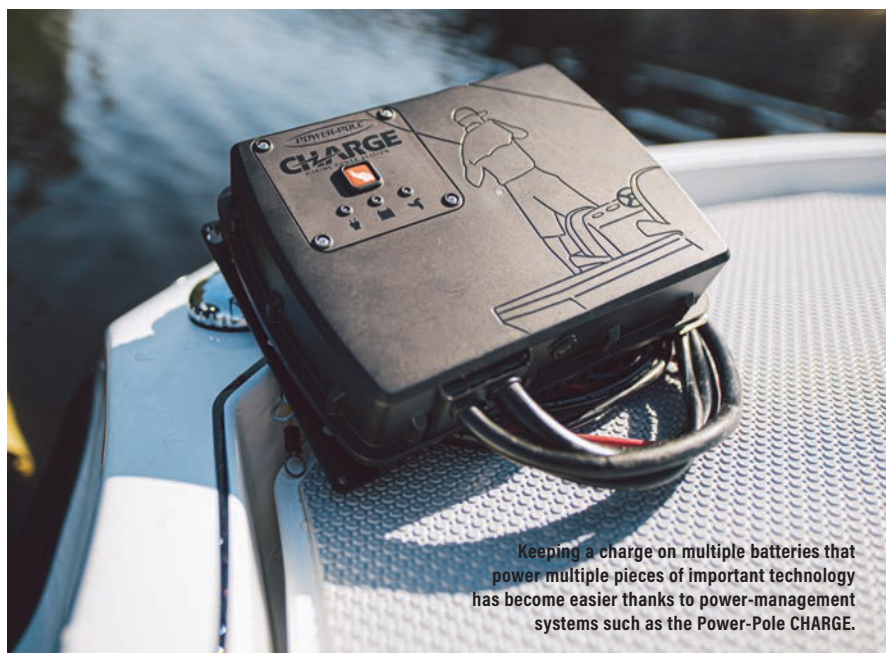
“When I was living in Florida, all of my days fishing on Lake Okeechobee always ended with me fighting to get through the grass at the end of the day because my batteries were exhausted,” he says. “Now, you have the consistent power all day long with lithium and you can go right through the grass at full speed at the end of the day. It's the same thing when fishing heavy current.”

CHARGE is essentially three devices in one. It serves as the battery charger, features an emergency jump starter, and helps to conserve battery power by sharing the load among all connected batteries.

Another built-in feature is the ability to charge on the go, as the CHARGE system is constantly charging anytime the outboard is running. And while operating the C-Monster mobile app, anglers get a real-time update of battery levels while also controlling the emergency start feature.

Burghoff is a big fan of the system and has had no issues with batteries since installing one.

“In my younger days, I was always worried about dead batteries at the end of the day,” he admits. “That's no longer a worry for me with lithium bat-



Keeping a charge on multiple batteries that power multiple pieces of important technology has become easier thanks to power-management systems such as the Power-Pole CHARGE.

POWER-MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

With the addition of new technology on your bass boat comes a need for more robust power (and management thereof). Electronics units are brighter with more powerful processors and more transducers are constantly running. That doesn't even take into account the multiple units many anglers now run.

Consequently, power-management systems like Power-Pole CHARGE are required learning for the well-educated bass angler.

teries and CHARGE. It charges my batteries on the water every time I run and make my little milk run of spots. Then, at night, I plug it in to top them off and it takes no time at all.”

The Power-Pole CHARGE works with all types of batteries, even for anglers who use a mix of different batteries, as Burghoff does.

“It's the best solution for charging both lithium and AGM batteries,” he says. “Everything works seamlessly, and I'll never have to worry about running out of juice again.” ■

REVIEW: NATIVE WATERCRAFT SLAYER PROPEL MAX 10

A BANG-FOR-YOUR-BUCK MASTERPIECE IN A SWEET LITTLE PACKAGE

By Justin Onslow

In the fishing industry – from rods and reels to tackle, boat electronics and batteries – there tends to be a pricing sweet spot. Spend too little and you'll likely be buying a replacement long before you intended. Spend too much and you might be shelling out your hard-earned cash for features you don't need or potentially even want.



✓ HITS

- + Perfect price point for the functionality and features
- + Rod and tackle storage leaves nothing to be desired
- + 701 Series Propel Pedal Drive is a breeze to use
- + Electronics mounting options eliminate need for drilling lots of holes
- + Molded-in compartments, rubberized handles and upgraded latches are premium features
- + Lightweight, stable and reasonably maneuverable

✗ MISSES

- Limited in-hull dry storage
- Removing pedal drive hatch bungees can be a little cumbersome

DETAILS

Price: \$2,499
Length: 10'
Width: 34.15"
Fitted Weight: 75 pounds
Capacity: 400 pounds
Contact: nativewatercraft.com

MLF pro Jordan Lee hooked up while fishing on the Slayer Propel Max 10.



PHOTO BY TREVOR SOCIETY

That's especially true in the ever-expanding fishing kayak market, as more and more manufacturers seek to capitalize on the rapid growth in demand to get a piece of the market share. To be fair, most premium offerings these days are absolutely worth the money, but it's still sometimes hard to find exactly what you want and need for exactly what you feel comfortable spending.

North Carolina-based kayak juggernaut Native Watercraft has been in the fishing kayak game long

enough to have established itself firmly within the upper echelon of manufacturers offering an attractive blend of quality and value. With the Slayer Propel Max 10, new for 2021 and retailing at \$2,499, Native may have put an arrow directly in the bullseye of the sweet spot.

I had an opportunity to put the Max 10 through its paces recently, testing the updated version of the original Slayer Propel 10 on a few different waterbody types on some of my favorite nearby fisheries. Here's what I found.

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN FLOYD



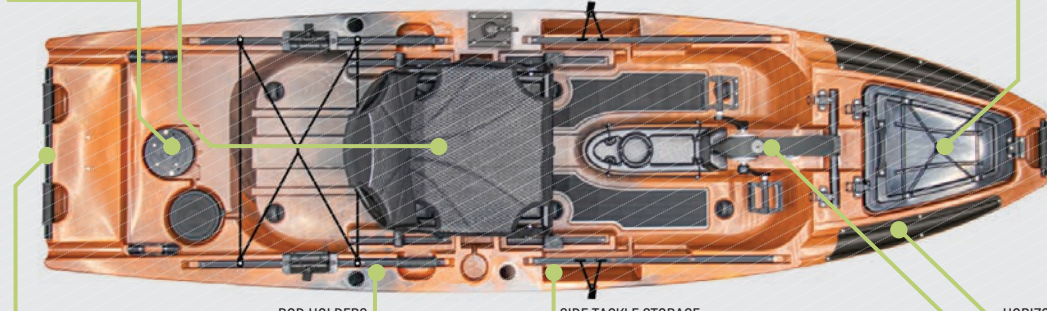
ELEVATED SEAT WITH STORAGE



BOW HATCH (BATTERY STORAGE/TRANSDUCER ACCESS)

SLAYER PROPEL MAX 10 FEATURES

UPGRADED RUDDER



ROD HOLDERS

SIDE TACKLE STORAGE

HORIZONTAL ROD STORAGE

POWER-POLE READY AND UPGRADED BMX HANDLES

701 SERIES PROPEL DRIVE



GEARING UP



An under-seat storage tray provides quick access to tackle on the Propel Max 10.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN ONSLOW

UPPING THE ANTE

The original Slayer Propel 10 has long been a favorite of serious kayak anglers, and especially those who want top-of-the-line features in a compact package. Ten-foot boats tend to occupy their own sweet spot when it comes to storability, ease of transport and stability, though they often come up short in the features department due simply to a lack of deck space.

Straight out of the protective packaging, it quickly became clear to me that Native has been hard at work designing a fishing platform that packs every bell and whistle into every square inch of the 10-foot Propel Max 10 hull.

Using the original Slayer Propel 10 as a rough outline, Native seems to have made a point to give their new "Max" offering zero wasted space. They've instead filled it with more rod and tackle storage options, from an under-seat storage tray that can fit a couple Plano boxes and a handful of soft plastics packages to UV-resistant ABS rod tip protectors along both sides of the bow for horizontal rod storage. There's also a pair of molded-in Plano storage compartments on both sides of the hull just in front of the adjustable seat and two rear-facing vertical rod holders, as well as one forward-facing molded-in rod holder for quick accessibility when on the move or retying a rod.

One small watertight storage hatch was also added to the stern near the rudder system, though it's not quite big enough to fit much inside. Still, it's not

in the way of anything and could come in handy for storage of small items you'd prefer to keep dry.

Perhaps the most exciting of all the upgrades to the Slayer Propel 10 platform are the features Native included to limit the need for major aftermarket upgrades you often see kayak anglers make – usually out of necessity. At the bow, there's a roto-molded hatch that houses both an in-hull dry storage compartment and a battery storage compartment with a through-hull transducer wiring scupper that allows for direct wiring access to the recessed transducer mounting area beneath the bow. More on that and a few other key upgrades in just a bit.

IN ACTION

At just 75 pounds out of the box and 97 pounds rigged up with seat and Propel Pedal Drive attached, the Max 10 is among the more manageable 10-foot kayaks for single-person loading and unloading. I'm no world-class body-builder, but I didn't have any issues hoisting the kayak on the roof of my Jeep for transport to and from the ramp. Pickup truck owners shouldn't even break a sweat getting it in and out of the bed.

Native also sells (separately) a Sidekick onboard wheel system for \$229 that's a breeze to install and makes transportation that much easier. I was able to rig up all my tackle and gear in the parking lot and then simply wheel the whole thing down to the water in one trip.

I tested the Max 10 on a fairly large Tennessee reservoir, one of its feeder rivers close to my house and an even smaller 700-yard stretch of creek that's so shallow in some spots that the creek's dried up at both ends this time of year. I wanted to test the kayak in both the skinniest of water and some larger-water scenarios.

As fate would have it, I got the big water I was asking for on my first trip when I got to the reservoir and wind was blowing 15 mph (sustained) with gusts upwards of 20. Even in the protected creek arm where I put in, the lake was full of rollers that immediately put the Max 10's stability, tracking and 701 Series Propel Pedal Drive power to the test.

Shorter boats tend to not track as well as their longer counterparts, so I wasn't too surprised by the marginal maneuverability in heavy winds, though making quick turns at top speed was a breeze. The pedal drive tested out more than adequately, and new integrated paddle storage clips made gaining access to my paddle in ultra-shallow water simple enough while allowing me to stow it out of the way when it wasn't needed.

Despite having eight rods and several boxes of tackle placed strategically around me – and amidst the rollers and gusting wind – I performed several stability tests in open water by standing up and moving my weight around various parts of the boat. At 34.15 inches

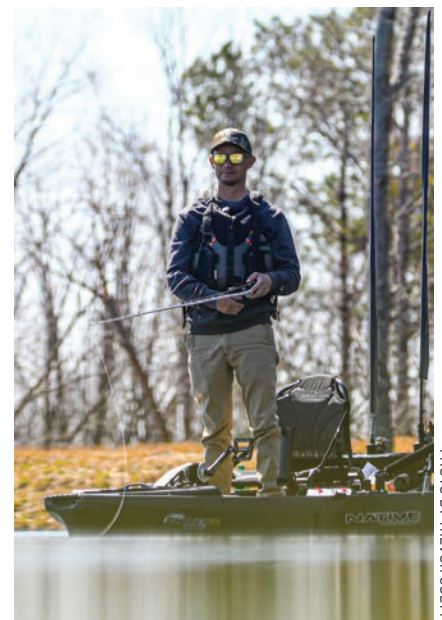


PHOTO BY TRENOR SOCIETY

wide, the Max 10 proved stable enough for me to feel comfortable standing and casting while getting jostled around by waves.

Subsequent trips to small water-bodies proved much easier, and I'd have no qualms with spending hours on my feet sight-fishing or flipping cover in normal conditions.

In skinny water, the Max 10 performed as well as any other kayak I've used – perhaps even better than most when it comes to extracting the pedal drive from the water to avoid subsurface rocks and other obstacles. Lifting the pedal drive is as simple as removing the covering hatch, depressing the prop indexer to align the prop with the opening in the hull and titling the whole unit forward in a few seconds. The only cumbersome part of the process is unclipping the bungees that hold the hatch in place to get to the indexer.

Those extra seconds could be invaluable if you're drifting toward rocks or shallow hard bottom and you need to remove the propel drive in a hurry, though I was impressed with the heavy-duty anodized aluminum construction of the drive and wasn't too worried about beating up or breaking the unit should I run afoul of a rock or two.

Two other nice features of the Propel Pedal Drive are the hands-free reverse function (simply pedal backwards) and the integrated weed guard on the prop, which doesn't necessarily make the prop totally weedless but instead protects the bearing from aquatic vegetation getting wrapped up as the prop turns.

While there wasn't anything revolutionary about the way the Max 10 functioned on my trio of testing trips, there also wasn't anything I particularly disliked. In fact, the functionality of all the design features (from the rod and tackle storage to integrated transducer mounting) was downright pleasant.

AFTER THE FACT

Even just a few years ago, there were very few kayaks on the market that didn't require drilling some holes to customize with lights, electronics, anchoring systems and extra dry storage. Most serious kayak anglers end up pouring hundreds (and sometimes

thousands) of dollars into aftermarket upgrades and modifications to attach transducers and large electronics units, Power-Pole Micros and the like.

Native did a wonderful job with the Max 10 in that respect.

As previously mentioned, the segmented bow storage at the hatch has a compartment specifically designed to house a battery to run your electronics or even an electric motor. The scupper hole within the hatch is rigged to run wires from the storage compartment through the hull to a recessed area for mounting a transducer, protected by a skeg molded to the hull.



In front of the seating area below the accessories tracks is a pair of electronics panels that are meant to be used for switches, plugs and anything else you choose to wire in – including Power-Pole up/down buttons, which might be especially handy if used in conjunction with another terrific feature Native included on the Max 10.

At the stern, there's a pair of pre-drilled holes designed explicitly for mounting Power-Pole Micros. You can also use that mounting area for a

trolling motor or electric boat drive like a Torqeedo Ultralight 403, without the need for adding a bunch of new holes yourself.

Everything about the Max 10 screams "customizability," which should absolutely appeal to the kayak DIYer and to those who don't want to spend thousands on aftermarket upgrades at the local kayak shop.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The original Slayer Propel 10 retails for \$2,099, and Native put way more than \$400 worth of new features and upgrades into the Max 10. All five carrying handles (two stern, one bow and one each starboard and port) have been redesigned with rubberized BMX grips instead of the prior-generation foam handles that haven't always held up to years of use.

The under-seat storage is a revelation when it comes to retying swiftly or gaining access to a quick snack. The molded-in rod holders and integrated horizontal rod storage make wielding a full arsenal of sticks easier than ever. And the aforementioned electronics panels, battery compartment, Power-Pole mounting area and transducer recess almost completely eliminate the need to spend hours and dollars on modifications.

Even the molded-in cupholder (a required feature for me and my coffee mug) and compartments for pliers and Plano boxes illustrate Native's forethought in the Max 10's design and desire to give anglers everything they need every day on the water without having to spend more money for aftermarket upgrades.

Try as I might, I had a hard time finding much I disliked about the Max 10 throughout the review process. It might be nice to have a little more in-hull dry storage and some extra room behind the seat for both a kayak crate and a small cooler (I had to leave my cooler at the dock in favor of a crate loaded with other fishing essentials), but it's hard to complain when all that potential storage space was instead utilized for all the accoutrements a kayak angler could need.

The verdict: The Max 10 is a sweet little kayak that hits the sweet spot for price, features and functionality. And it's not too hard on the eyes, either. ■

***"THE MAX 10 IS
A SWEET LITTLE
KAYAK THAT
HITS THE SWEET
SPOT FOR PRICE,
FEATURES AND
FUNCTIONALITY."***

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PROFILE: **BRANT GRIMM**
CHURCH HILL, TENNESSEE



For three days in June on Douglas Lake, Brant Grimm lived a waking dream. A local to Douglas and neighboring Cherokee Lake, Grimm got to fish his home waters for an opportunity to win \$100,000 and his spot in the history books as an All-American champion.

In three days, the former Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro put 46 pounds, 9 ounces on the scales, edging out Leslie Brandenburg by less than 2 pounds for the victory and the glory. Now, a couple months removed from that fateful tournament, Grimm is pondering a future that could include a return to the national level sooner rather than later.

Whatever he decides, though, the general contractor from Church Hill, Tennessee can hang his hat on joining an elite fraternity of anglers lucky enough to hold an All-American champion's trophy above their heads.

Q&A

By Justin Onslow
PHOTOS BY ROB MATSUURA

At the All-American, after you hoisted the winner's trophy and your \$100,000 check, I asked you how long you thought it'd take for it all to sink in. What's the verdict? Has the reality really hit you now?

It has. Reality's hit me. It really took me a couple weeks before I didn't have to wake up every morning and pinch myself.

During that same interview, I asked you about the prospects of you returning to the Pro Circuit. You didn't seem too big on the idea at the time, but you told Jody White and Kyle Wood on the MLF podcast recently that maybe you were leaning a little more in that direction.

I am. I mean, obviously, anybody that wins the All-American, that's part of the thought process – that you're going to take the next step and try it. I'm definitely considering it and thinking about it more and trying to reach out to some potential sponsors.

You already had a taste of that life on the Pro Circuit in 2019. Maybe trying again after already having that experience would make it easier to adjust.

It definitely would make it easier. It would make it a lot easier. It was tough on me that year. I didn't have any running mates; I was by myself. I didn't have anybody to share information with. I think I could have a different go at it and enjoy it a little more a second time around.

It's a big leap going from local tournaments on fisheries you know pretty well to going to the national level and fishing new waters.

It is. It's a big leap. It's totally different. It's not even comparable. It takes a big team to be able to get that done. It takes a lot of help.

I guess we'll just have to see what happens. In the meantime, let's talk more about your All-American win. How has life changed for you since your victory? Other than having a bigger bank account, of course.

I feel a little more respected as a fisherman. Until you win a big event, I feel like people sometimes maybe question whether you can get it done or not, and when you do get it done, it definitely gives you a little more respect with your peers.

You don't strike me as a guy who craves the attention of interviews and articles and podcasts. Do you enjoy doing those things or have you at least gotten a little more used to the spotlight?

I'm getting a little more used to it. I don't particularly enjoy it just because I'm not necessarily one to brag. I try to be humble and let my fish do the bragging for me.

You fished the All-American out of a fairly old - though really cool - boat. Any plans on springing for something a little newer and perhaps something aligned with contingency bonuses in the future?

I think if I were to make the leap (to the Pro Circuit), I would definitely have to get a different boat with some

contingency potential. I would certainly miss this boat. It suits me. It fishes well and I won the All-American out of it. But I think you'd be crazy to make that commitment and not have a Phoenix. You're leaving a lot of money on the line if you were to win.

How pumped are you for the Toyota Series Championship? No pressure, but winning a pair of championships in the same calendar year would be pretty epic.

I just don't even think... I'm not going to say it's not possible, and I'm not counting myself out, but I don't know Pickwick like I know Douglas. I'm obviously going to try and have fun at it, but I don't see myself being a contender. I'm just being honest. I don't have a lot of experience there, and I'm just going to do my best, have fun and see what happens.

Have you been fishing Pickwick at all in preparation? What are your plans for practice?

I haven't been down there yet. I do plan on spending a couple weekends trying to familiarize myself with the place a little bit. I don't think it'll do a lot of good to be there now, so I'm just kind of waiting until a little bit closer to the time and spending as much time as I can on the lake closer to the event.

We know a lot about Brant Grimm the All-American-winning angler. What's Brant Grimm the person do for fun when he's not out catching bass and cashing checks?

Well, honestly, if I'm not taking time to fish, I'm usually with my son at his baseball games or I'm at work. I work a lot. I work long hours. I'm a general contractor. Fishing is the fun. Other than that, I'm working trying to make a dollar.

What kind of projects do you work on as a general contractor?

I do light commercial and mostly residential. I do a lot of additions and a lot of high-end kitchen and bathroom remodels. I've built new houses, but it's not necessarily my forte. I can oversee and manage and build anything. I'm a

Tennessee state-licensed contractor, but I mainly have a little niche in the residential remodeling and additions side of things.

How's business been the last year or so amidst the pandemic?

It's been good, actually. I think lumber prices have recently hurt me a little bit, but business has been good. People are still spending money. I think people have stayed home and they've realized they've needed some projects done more than they realized when they've been at work 50, 60 hours a week.

You received a bottle of TINCUP whiskey when you won the All-American. Is it still sitting on a shelf for all to see or did you find something more enjoyable to do with it?

It's sitting on the shelf. I don't think I'm going to crack it open. Maybe 10 years or so whenever I don't feel like still fishing maybe I'll crack it open and reminisce.

Speaking of drinks, after the All-American the MLF tournament coverage crew ran into you at a restaurant and you offered to buy us all a drink. I just wanted to say thanks again for doing that. That was a super nice gesture.

Dude, you're welcome. You all do a fantastic job. All the photos and everything, you all really did a great job. You make us look like celebrities. ■



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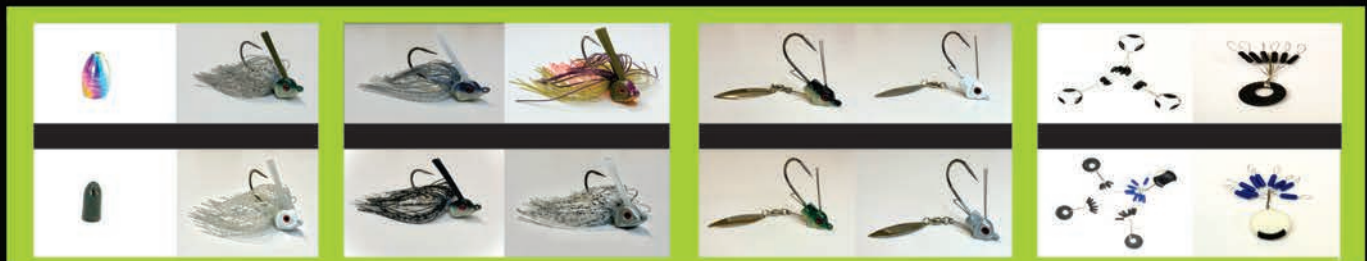
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JONES, UNDERWOOD CLAIM HIGH SCHOOL FISHING WORLD FINALS

Alabama team
outpaces nearly
400 boats to
claim SAF title



The first weekend of July was a great four-day weekend on Lake Hartwell, South Carolina for Andrew Jones and Carson Underwood. The two high school anglers from Hewitt-Trussville High School in Alabama showed up to the TBF High School Fishing World Finals as teammates and left as World Champions (and with numerous scholarship opportunities from both TBF and various universities).

Jones and Underwood – representing the Hewitt-Trussville High School Huskies – won it all by putting three

fish for 10 pounds, 9 ounces on the scale on Day 4 of the High School Fishing World Finals. With weights zeroed on the final day, the team edged out the Madison County Red Raiders team of Will Hart and Logan Fisher – the same duo that knocked them off of the hot seat on Day 3 – who weighed an even 10 pounds.

For the win, the Huskies took home a number of lucrative scholarship offers from top college teams, including a \$128,000 offer from Drury University, a \$120,000 offer from

Simpson University, a \$90,000 offer from Kentucky Christian University and a \$56,000 offer from Bethel University. In addition, TBF is offering \$12,000 in “backup” scholarship assistance to any college of their choosing.

“Never in a million years did I think I would have a scholarship offer to Bethel University for fishing,” said Jones, a 16-year-old rising junior. “But here we are.”

“I still don’t believe where I’m at,” added Underwood, a 15-year-old rising sophomore.

HOW THEY GOT IT DONE

Jones and Underwood have been fishing together since middle school. Leaning on the guidance of their parents, they've forged a path from the outskirts of Birmingham, Alabama to one of the pinnacles of high school bass fishing. After placing fourth in the National Championship on July 2, they were rewarded for a week of perseverance when weight totals were reset to zero for the TBF World Finals. This time, the area they'd had middling success in all week finally paid off.

"I feel like today they really bit better," said Jones after his final day of competition. "The other days, we didn't have a limit until 10:00 a.m. Saturday morning, we pulled up to the same spot that we've been starting at all week and they were biting. We got three on the board really fast. From there, I thought we had a really good chance to win."

"It felt amazing," said Underwood. "It feels like all of the hard work we've put into this all week really paid off."

To boat their winning bag, the Huskies relied on a duo of topwater baits – the Sebile Majic Swimmer and an Evergreen Shower Blows – that coerced the bass to come up and get it from 20 to 25 feet of water.

"We were burning topwaters over them," Jones confirmed. "You had to burn it fast, and it had to be over that depth. Anything deeper and you couldn't call them up. Anything shallower and they seemed to get spooked."

When it was all said and done, Jones and Underwood outpaced a field of nearly 400 boats, with competition from as far away as California, Arizona, Utah and Zimbabwe; not to mention numerous local teams from South Carolina and Georgia who know how to manage Hartwell in the heat of July. Now, the two high school anglers with plenty of career left will have their pick of collegiate fishing opportunities. They'll also be able to add their names to the list of legendary anglers who've taken home top honors on a historic South Carolina fishery. ■

SAF World Finals Top 10 Teams

- 1. Hewitt-Trussville High School Huskies**
Andrew Jones and Carson Underwood – 10-9
- 2. Madison County Red Raiders**
Will Hart and Logan Fisher – 10-0
- 3. Osceola Anglers**
Grady Johnson and Dawson Turner – 9-8
- 4. Lake Havasu High School Knights**
Zachary and Brandon Verbrugge – 8-15
- 5. Alhambra High School Bulldogs**
Luke Beaty and Emmett Gargaro – 8-9
- 5. Louisa Bass Club**
Jacob Lycans and Nick Giompalo – 8-9
- 7. Madison County Red Raiders**
Levi Seagraves and Blake Hooper – 8-7
- 7. Lumpkin County High School Indians**
Cooper McDonald and Jake Barrett – 8-7
- 9. Clarks Hill Youth Fishing Team**
Brayden Batchelor and Evan Gonsalves – 8-5
- 10. Hartleys Hawgs**
Nathan Fiant and Brett Hill – 8-2

BRUMBAUGH AND KLOTZ WIN HIGH SCHOOL FISHING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

The day before Jones and Underwood took home the World Championship, they finished fourth to Pennsylvania high schoolers Jerry Brumbaugh and Hunter Klotz. The team from Central High School in Martinsburg, Pennsylvania won the High School Fishing National Championship with three three-fish limits totaling 28-13.



Tallying 9-9 on the final day, Brumbaugh and Klotz edged out Will Hart and Logan Fisher of the Madison County Red Raiders, who weighed 26-15 for second place. For the win, Brumbaugh and Klotz took home \$10,000, berths as Strike King co-anglers in the lucrative Toyota Series Championship and several scholarships offers from colleges with fishing teams.

"It was a grind out there," Klotz said. "We learned that when it gets tough, you don't always need to change things up. You just keep grinding and grinding and grinding, because there isn't one perfect thing you need to do." ■

National Championship Top 10 Teams

- 1. Central High School Dragons**
Jerry Brumbaugh and Hunter Klotz – 28-13
- 2. Madison County Red Raiders**
Will Hart and Logan Fisher – 26-15
- 3. South Forsyth High School War Eagles**
Jacob Rogers and William Ayscue – 25-10
- 4. Hewitt Trussville Huskies**
Andrew Jones and Carson Underwood – 25-6
- 5. Clarks Hill Youth Fishing Team**
Brayden Batchelor and Evan Gonsalves – 24-0
- 6. Madison County Red Raiders**
Levi Seagraves and Blake Hooper – 23-8
- 7. Lumpkin County High School Indians**
Cooper McDonald and Jake Barrett – 21-15
- 8. Alhambra High School Bulldogs**
Luke Beaty and Emmett Gargaro – 21-9
- 9. NCA Fishing**
Lane King and Coleman Phillips – 21-8
- 10. Hartleys Hawgs**
Nathan Fiant and Brett Hill – 17-10 (9)

2021 HIGH SCHOOL STATE EVENT RESULTS

Colorado State Championship

June 27 – Lake Pueblo

Cody Miller and Dillon Robertshaw

8 pounds, 8 ounces



Colorado

Iowa State Championship

May 22 – Prairie Rose Lake

Cooper Jipsen and Dylan Comes

Southwest Iowa Fishing Team

11 pounds, 13 ounces



Iowa

Indiana State Championship

June 5 – Brookville Lake

Drake Brown and Connor Tonkel

Angola High School Hornets

10 Pounds



Indiana

Minnesota State Championship

July 13 – Lake Waconia

Mason Doucette and Max Hubbard

Becker Bass Team

18 pounds, 12 ounces

Nebraska State Championship

June 5 – Red Willow Reservoir

Cole Graham and Canyon Cosick

McCook Bison

20 pounds, 10 ounces



Nebraska

Ohio State Championship

May 22 – Delaware Lake

Aiden Reed and Dylan Behrmann

Cincinnati Youth Bass

14 pounds



Ohio

Oregon State Championship

June 5 – Hood River

Josh Buller and Conner Chase

Thurston Colts

13 pounds, 4 ounces



Oregon

South Dakota State Championship

June 6 – Big Stone Lake

Grant Guburd, Nolan Guburd and

Harry Ladner

Deuel Cardinals

21 pounds, 1 ounce

Utah State Championship

June 5 – Big Sand Wash Reservoir

Parker Stewart, BT Vogelsberg and

Brent Daybell

Utah Young Gunz

18 pounds, 4 ounces

Wisconsin State Championship

May 23 – Lake Winnebago

Tucker Cory and Mason Hetzel

Amherst High School

13 pounds, 7 ounces

West Virginia State Championship

May 29 – Sutton Lake

Riley Hendricks and Wesley Allen

Hurrican Redskins

10 pounds, 15 ounces. ■

2021 NATIONAL SEMI FINALS UNDERWAY

With 23 tournaments spread from East Coast to West, the 2021 TBF National Semi Finals cover a full slate of tournaments that are affordable and easily accessible for every amateur angler in the country. There's one National Semi Final held in almost every 500-mile circle across the country, which means that anglers need only travel as far as a neighboring state every other year (in most cases) to fish one.

Top individual boaters and co-anglers for each district advance to the 2022 Federation National Championship.

The 2021 National Semi Final schedule got underway in early summer and will continue through fall as teams battle to qualify for the championship. Most of the events occur in early fall, but here are the results so far in 2021:

DISTRICT 6 Arkansas/Oklahoma

June 19-20 at Lake Milwood, AR

Boaters: Stephen Tyson (31.03/Arkansas), Dean Matts (23.42/Oklahoma)

Co-Anglers: Jeff Stephenson (18.24/Arkansas), Shawn Lewis (15.29/Oklahoma)

DISTRICT 22 Nevada/Utah

June 5-6 at Starvation Reservoir, UT

Boaters: Tucker Cappela (23.96/Utah), Jesse Ortega (18.74/Nevada)

Co-Anglers: James McGaughey (16.54/Nevada), Tyler Ivie (15.61/Utah) ■

Here's a look at the High School Championship Events in Aug. and Sept.:

NORTH DAKOTA

SAF North Dakota State Championship
Aug. 14 at Lake Audubon

MICHIGAN

MLF High School Michigan Open
Aug. 21 at Detroit River

NEW YORK

SAF New York State Championship
Sept. 12 at Mohawk River

WASHINGTON

SAF Washington State Championship
Sept. 18 at Lake Tapps

ARIZONA

MLF High School Arizona Open
Sept. 26 at Lake Havasu. ■



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OLD DOGS, NEW TRICKS

When I was a kid, bass fishing was different. Back when I was getting into the sport, you picked it up from other anglers, read about it in books and outdoor magazines and maybe watched a television show or two. Bass boats were 15 or 16 feet long, the most powerful outboard boasted 150 horsepower and the fastest reel on the market had a 3.5:1 gear ratio – but if you added the aftermarket “high-speed” gears, you could get it to 5:1.

One of the first things anglers were taught was that you didn’t need to make a long cast to catch bass. If you could hit a pie plate at 30 feet or so, you were good to go.

And 30 feet was a good number if you were using the equipment we had in the 1970s. Rods were mostly in the 5 1/2- to 6-foot range. They had “pistol” grips, so two-handed casting was nearly impossible. Reels had few ball bearings, and lures weren’t terribly aerodynamic. A “weight transfer system” was something you did so your buddy didn’t fall out of the jonboat if you made a sudden move.

In the early 1970s, catch-and-release was a less tasty alternative to catch-batter-and-fry, and it was very new to the bass world – a practice that started among trout anglers but would soon spread like wildfire through bass fishing and beyond. Today, many biologists have told me that we should be eating more fish, that catch-and-release is too common. Nevertheless, I still release almost everything I catch, and I bet you do, too.

When I was a young angler, Zoom was a soft plastics lure company in rural Georgia, about to take the fishing world by storm. It was not a video conferencing system. In 1985, if someone had told me I would be on a Zoom call, I’d be planning my order of plastic worms, not thinking about putting on a clean shirt so I’d be more presentable.

Back then, all the experts agreed that 10 percent of the fishermen caught 90 percent of the bass. Today, with so much education and technology, I’m certain it’s closer to 50 percent of the anglers catching 90 percent of the bass.

That’s basically a good thing, I suppose.

In the ‘70s, if you had forward-facing sonar, it meant your boat was listing very far to one side. You needed to redistribute some weight before you capsized. And if you wanted to see a fish track your lure, you had to be in very clear water, not staring at a monitor.

Pure fishing meant there would be no interruptions. I grew up on a farm with lots of cows. My fishing pond and creek doubled as their water supply. Cows were a constant threat to my attempts at pure fishing, pure hunting and just about anything else worth pursuing.

Way back when, a Power-Pole was a heavy action rod – one you could use to push the jonboat away from the bank – and a shallow-water anchor system meant that you had run aground. Many is the time that I had to explain that my running aground on a mud flat was simply an early effort at shallow-water anchoring and not simply bad navigation.

We even had a version of “Spot-Lock.” That’s what I used to keep my dog on the bank while I waded Big Creek for bass, bluegills and some sort of perch that we called “Eisenhowers.” Keeping my black Labrador out of the water was always a challenge, and no, his name was not “Spot.” He was Bubba. Maybe it should have been called “Bubba-Lock.”

When I was getting started, the most famous bass angler in the world was Bill Dance. Today, it’s ... well, that hasn’t changed. It’s still Bill Dance, and he’s still wearing the same cap. Only difference is that instead of a single TV show, he’s got multiple TV shows and YouTube channels and a Facebook page and an Instagram account, and so do hundreds of other bass pros and experts looking to make a name for themselves.

It’s a different world.

Yes, bass fishing is different today. But the bass are the same. And they’ll still be the same when I make my last cast. There’s something comforting in that. ■



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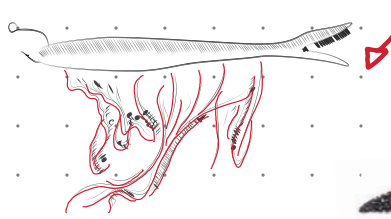
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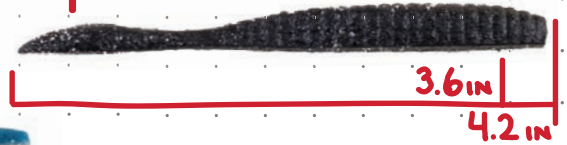
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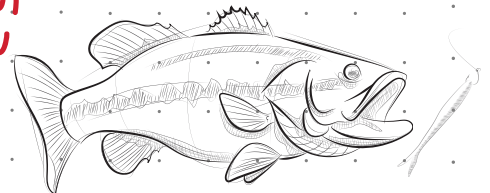
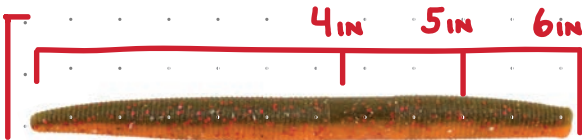


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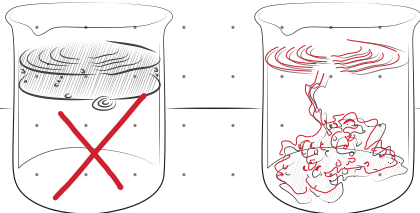
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