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FEBRUARY-MARCH 2021

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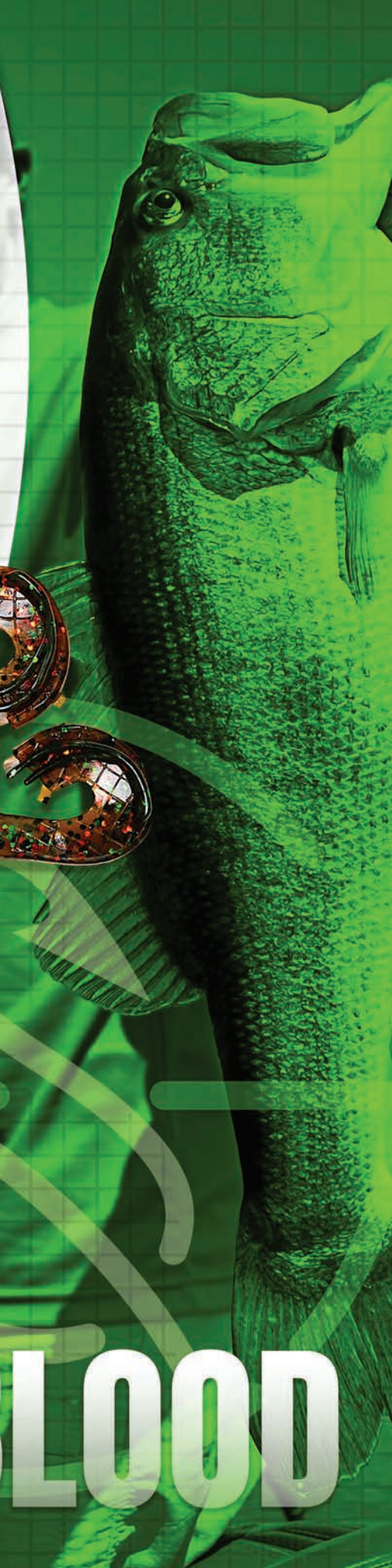
Krackin Craw 3"



Trench Hawg 4.65"



GOOGAN BAIT'S  
NEW BLOOD



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MARINE



## WELCOMING A NEW SEASON

**W**hile this February-March issue is the first issue of *Bass Fishing* you're receiving in 2021, it's also the first we've produced since the jubilant passing of 2020 – a year we'll all remember and one many wish to forget. With the new year comes a new fishing season, and I want to offer something to think about as we dive into a new season of catching fish, perhaps to replace the New Year's Resolutions you made more than a month ago that now may be as forgotten as half the lures at the bottom of your tackle box.

As difficult as 2020 was, it was a year that reminded us all how challenging life can be, and how important it is to stick together – to care for one another, to lend a helping hand, to put aside our own wants to make sure our neighbor and our fishing buddies, our closest friends and even total strangers have what they need.

In 2021, let's all resolve – truly resolve – to be stewards of the sport of bass fishing and examples of the kind of humanity the sport so often embodies. Let's resolve to be less contentious and more conscientious. Less selfish and more generous. And let's try to remember the people and the things that made us all fall in love with the pursuit of our favorite fish so we can be that catalyst for others.

The 2021 tournament season is already under way. In many ways, life is going on as it always has. The sun rises, the sun sets. Repeat as many times as possible. It's what we do between dawn and dusk, though, that will truly define what 2021 can be.

This year marks the first time many of you will be fishing under the Major League Fishing umbrella. That's a big change on its face, but the heart and soul of MLF and the former FLW brand is unchanged. The people who weigh your fish and call your number at boat check and take your calls at the MLF offices are the same wonderful people who were doing the same things in 2020. The only thing that's changed is the logo on their shirt.

If you're an angler who will fish any of the six MLF circuits in 2021, things aren't going to change for you all that much, but you know a change has taken place. It's ineffable, yet abundantly clear. In the same way, understand that whatever changes you choose to make this year don't have to be monumental to have an impact on the people around you and the sport you love.

Instead of celebrating the passing of 2020, it's time to revel in the start of a new chapter we get to write together. New seasons are new beginnings, and while the beginning of our fishing adventures may have started years or decades ago, this is a great time to get back to what made us all love the sport: the camaraderie, the adventure and the shared passion for chasing around green and brown fish.

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JUSTIN ONSLOW, MANAGING EDITOR



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## THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE

---

**W**hen the general public thinks about fishing, many probably envision straw hats and sunshine, a cooler on the dock next to a person in a folding chair exhibiting all the symptoms of pure bliss. Fishing can be that, sure, but if you're reading this magazine, chances are good that you've seen the other side of the coin, too.

The fact is this: Tournament bass anglers are a different breed. We live by the creed of the United States Postal Service. "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night..." When there are fish to be caught, checks to be cashed and titles to be won, anglers will brave just about anything Mother Nature can possibly dream up.

We may not always like it - Who wouldn't prefer fishing in a t-shirt instead of insulated rain gear? - but we don't get to choose what weather we want when tournament day rolls around. And when you're fishing for big money and a big title - like this anonymous co-angler waiting for his pro at the Toyota Series Championship on Lake Cumberland - pouring rain and biting cold are just a couple more obstacles to overcome.

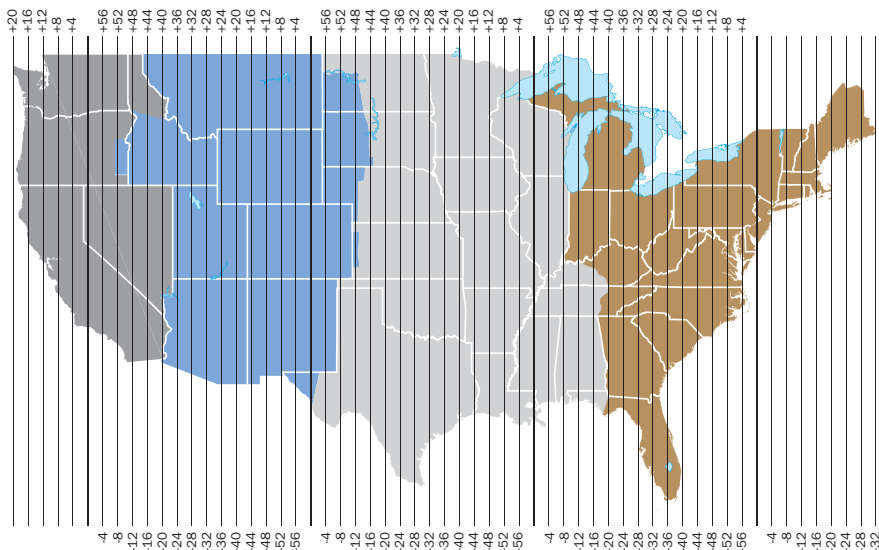
When it comes down to it, we play this sport for the love of the game. No amount of wind and rain and bone-chilling cold can take away from the exhilaration of a bite or the elation of a giant at the bottom of the landing net. And if you don't believe us, just ask anyone who's ever won a bass fishing tournament how cold their hands felt when they hoisted the trophy in the air.

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

# SOLUNAR TABLES

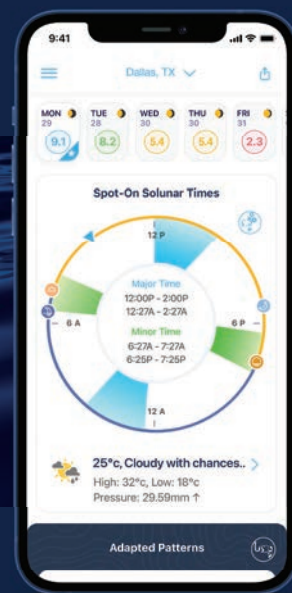
FEBRUARY-MARCH 2021

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



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

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# BASS FISHING HALL OF FAME ADDS 6 BOARD MEMBERS

All-Volunteer Board Dedicated to Celebrating, Promoting And Preserving the Sport of Bass Fishing



> **THE BASS FISHING HALL OF FAME** added six members to its Board of Directors to begin serving a three-year term in January 2021, leading the organization into its next steps of growth on the heels of a highly successful recent effort to expand and increase the Hall's outreach and impact.

**Todd Ceisner** has been associate publisher of *In-Fisherman* since January 2020. Prior to that, he spent eight years as editor of BassFan.com, chronicling the tournament side of the sport on a daily basis. Before working in the fishing industry, he covered high school and college sports for daily newspapers in central New York and central Pennsylvania.

**Kathy Fennel** is the executive vice president and general manager of Major League Fishing in Benton, Kentucky. Fennel oversees day-to-day operations for the world's largest lineup of bass tournaments, making sure the organization continues to provide prestigious, well-organized events which participants, fans, hosts and sponsors are proud to be a part of. Fennel is a 2015 inductee into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame and a member of the USAngling board of directors and the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) board of directors.

**Matt Pangrac** has been involved in the professional bass fishing industry since graduating from the University of Oklahoma in 2008, where he was a founding member of the Sooner Bass Anglers collegiate fishing team. He started his own media company, 71 Media L.L.C., and worked as a beat writer for the PAA Tournament Series and Toyota Texas Bass Classic. He also freelanced for both B.A.S.S. and FLW, served as the lead contact for professional team management for all Pure Fishing bass pros during the 2013 and 2014 seasons through Blue Heron Communications, and worked as an FLW LIVE analyst during the 2019 FLW Tour season.

**Tim Price** has worked in the fishing industry for 29 years and is currently the Freshwater Field Promotions Manager for Johnson Outdoors Marine Electronics Group. As part of his duties, Price manages all of the freshwater team of some of the best professional anglers in the world for Minn Kota, Humminbird and Cannon, along with tournament sponsorships and numerous other marketing functions for the brands.

**Clifton Rutledge**, a former member of the board, returns for another term.

He's a proven industry leader and executive with over 35 years of experience in numerous restaurant companies throughout the U.S. Prior to joining GameIQ, Clifton was COO at Jack's Restaurants, President and CEO at Bojangles's Chicken and Biscuits and COO and Senior Vice President at Whataburger Restaurants LLC, and VP of Operations at KFC.

**Bruce Stanton** has worked at PRADCO Fishing in Fort Smith, Ark., since 1996. He began his career there in public relations and eventually became Vice President and General Manager in 2002. The company has expanded greatly under his leadership due to several successful organic brand launches, including YUM and BOOYAH, and several acquisitions, including Lindy, Bandit, Bobby Garland, Gene Larew, War Eagle and Norman Lures. Bruce served on the American Sportfishing Association's Board of Directors from 2007-2008 and was also the Industry Liaison for the Outdoor Writers Association of America in 1999-2000.

"This is an impressive group, and we are thrilled to have every one of them," said Bass Fishing Hall of Fame President John Mazurkiewicz. "Each of our new board members bring a distinct skill set to assist us in our mission of celebrating, promoting and preserving the sport of bass fishing. We are an all-volunteer 'working board,' and we pride ourselves on the fact that our leadership encompasses all of the major tours, media outlets and sectors of the industry."

The Bass Fishing Hall of Fame is a nonprofit organization led by a volunteer board of directors and is dedicated to celebrating, promoting and preserving the sport of bass fishing. Since 2017, the Hall's inductees and memorabilia representing the history of bass fishing have been showcased in Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife Museum and Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri, where it has rapidly become a popular destination.

For more information about the Hall, its mission, and to become a supporting member, visit [BassFishingHOF.com](http://BassFishingHOF.com) or contact BFHOF executive director Barbara Bowman at [bbowman@BassFishingHOF.com](mailto:bbowman@BassFishingHOF.com).



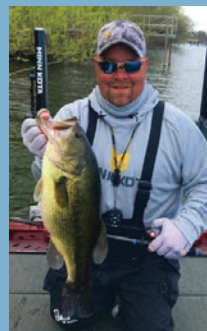
TODD CEISNER



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MATT PANGRAC



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## 2021 WILEY X COLLEGE FACEOFF Schedule Set

Dates have been announced for the 2021 Wiley X College Faceoff series, which provides college anglers live tournament experience in Major League Fishing's SCORETRACKER® format. The four Faceoffs in 2021 are single-day tournaments that are contested the day after Abu Garcia College Fishing events at Lake Guntersville, Alabama; Lake of the Pines, Texas; the Mississippi River in Wisconsin; and Michigan's Detroit River.

Sponsor prizes will be awarded to top finishers, and giveaways provided to the 20 qualifiers of each Wiley X College Faceoff.

### SCHEDULE:

**Wiley X College Faceoff - Lake Guntersville, AL: April 24**

College Fishing Qualifier: Lake Guntersville - April 23

Boat Ramp: Guntersville State Park

**Wiley X College Faceoff - Lake of the Pines, TX: June 12**

College Fishing Qualifier: Lake of the Pines - June 11

Boat Ramp: Lakeside Park

**Wiley X College Faceoff - Miss River, WI: July 31**

College Fishing Qualifier: Miss River - July 30

Boat Ramp: Copeland & Clinton

**Wiley X College Faceoff - Detroit River, MI: August 21**

College Fishing Qualifier: Detroit River - August 20

Boat Ramp: Elizabeth Park

### >> EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Single-day tournament using live SCORETRACKER® format
- Occurs the day after a MLF BIG5 collegiate competition on Saturday on the same body of water. This will occur on the same day as the High School Fishing Open tournament.
- MLF BIG5 competition from the day prior will determine the 10 competitors for the Wiley X College Faceoff
- Sponsor prizes awarded to top finishers and giveaways provided to qualifiers
- The top two teams (four anglers) from the top five schools in the standings will fish in the ten-boat College Faceoff field the following day (20 anglers total).

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# STRIKE KING CO-ANGLER OF THE YEAR PROGRAM NEW FOR 2021

## > SOMETIMES THE MOST INTERESTING VIEW IS FROM THE BACK OF THE BOAT.

The MLF BIG5 has a storied history of providing anglers of all experience levels the opportunity to compete in national, regional and local-level bass tournaments through the biggest co-angler program in the world.

No boat? No problem, as roughly 6,500 individual Strike King co-anglers will attest in a typical year on the Toyota Series and Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine circuits.

It's an opportunity that several Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit and Bass Pro Tour pros have taken advantage of (and eventually used as a springboard to their professional careers): 2018 FLW Tour Angler of the Year Mark Rose, Jeff Sprague, Andy Montgomery, Justin Lucas and Michael Neal all started their careers fishing as co-anglers at the regional level.

"My experience as a co-angler was absolutely great – I thoroughly enjoyed my time fishing out of the back of the boat," said Sprague, a Strike King pro who fished as a co-angler in the Southwestern Division of the Toyota Series in 2010, and on the then-FLW Tour in 2011, 2012 and 2013. "I got to meet a lot of great anglers who I learned from every single day, and who I also aspired to be like someday. That experience was worth every penny I spent. You can't put a price on the amount of knowledge that I got from the pros I fished with."

## STRIKE KING CO-ANGLER OF THE YEAR PROGRAM

Thanks to a sponsorship arrangement that's new to the MLF BIG5 in 2021, the **Strike King Co-Angler program** will recognize and reward the accomplishments and fish-catching abilities of the most successful anglers fishing out of the back of the boat on the Toyota Series and the Phoenix Bass Fishing League.

Angler of the Year winners in all six divisions of the Toyota Series and all 24 divisions of the Bass Fishing League will receive bonuses of \$2,000 and

\$500, respectively, and recognition as the Strike King Co-Angler of the Year. In addition, the Strike King Co-Angler of the Year races will be documented and promoted throughout the season on the Toyota Series and BFL circuit pages on MajorLeagueFishing.com, in press releases, and here in the pages of *Bass Fishing* magazine.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

"Those co-anglers are an important part of our sport," said Mark Copley, Strike King's director of pro staff and media relations. "You talk to guys like Mark Rose – one of the most successful professional anglers in the world – and they'll tell you how important that co-angler opportunity was for them when they started out. The Strike King co-angler program is a great way for more people to participate in tournament bass fishing, and to just learn how to be better anglers."

## GAINING KNOWLEDGE IN THE BACK OF THE BOAT

Sprague will attest to the opportunity to learn and grow as a co-angler. The Texas pro fished 25 events as a co-angler, earning two top 10s in the Toyota Series Southwestern Division, and four top 10s on the FLW Tour (including an eighth-place finish at the 2013 Forrest Wood Cup on the Red River in Louisiana). He was paired with a diverse roll call of high-level pros ranging from Randall Tharp to Brent Ehrler, and soaked in the knowledge of every boater he fished with in regional competition as well.

"You learn from every [pro] you get in the boat with," Sprague advised. "It doesn't matter if it's a seasoned veteran or a guy who's fishing his first year in the Toyota Series, you can take something away from each one of those experiences and help you build or expand a solid foundation.

"Ehrler is a great example: I learned a lot just being in the boat with him for a day, just his mentality and the way he analyzed everything. Being from east Texas and having an approach that I was comfortable with, to get into the boat with a guy from the West Coast who would pick up a lighter line and catch fish in dirty water, I had never seen before. That was an eye-opening experience for me, and it darn sure benefitted me as an angler."

Sprague claimed Co-Angler of the Year honors in 2013, the winnings from which encouraged him to compete as a full-time tour-level pro the year after. But as is often the case with first-time co-anglers jumping into BFL and Toyota Series competition, he had simple expectations when he competed in his first Toyota Series tournament on Falcon Lake in 2010.

"I just fished local tournaments here around home (Point, Texas), and was just okay," Sprague said. "I wasn't great around the house, but I was learning – I was interested in expanding my knowledge by going to other lakes. I was able to learn new things and expand on some things that I already knew, bring that all back home and win locally. That started to fuel my fire to think 'You know, I think I can pursue this.'" ■

# WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS

## MLF NOW!

Live Stream at [MajorLeagueFishing.com](http://MajorLeagueFishing.com) or [MyOutdoorTV.com](http://MyOutdoorTV.com)

Feb. 11-14 — Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit @ Lake Okeechobee Presented by 13 Fishing

Feb. 21-25 — REDCREST 2021 @ Lake Palestine

March 11-14 — Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit @ Lewis Smith Lake Presented by Covercraft

March 21-26 — Bass Pro Tour Stage One @ Sam Raybrun Reservoir

## TV BROADCASTS

2-4 p.m. (ET) — Outdoor Channel

Saturday, Feb. 6 — 2021 Challenge Cup Championship Round

Saturday, Feb. 13 — 2021 Heritage Cup Elimination Round 1

Saturday, Feb. 20 — 2021 Heritage Cup Elimination Round 2

Saturday, Feb. 27 — 2021 Heritage Cup Elimination Round 3

Saturday, March 6 — 2021 Heritage Cup Sudden Death Round 1

Saturday, March 13 — 2021 Heritage Cup Sudden Death Round 2

Saturday, March 20 — 2021 Heritage Cup Championship Round

Saturday, March 27 — 2021 Challenge/Heritage Cup Major League Lessons



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

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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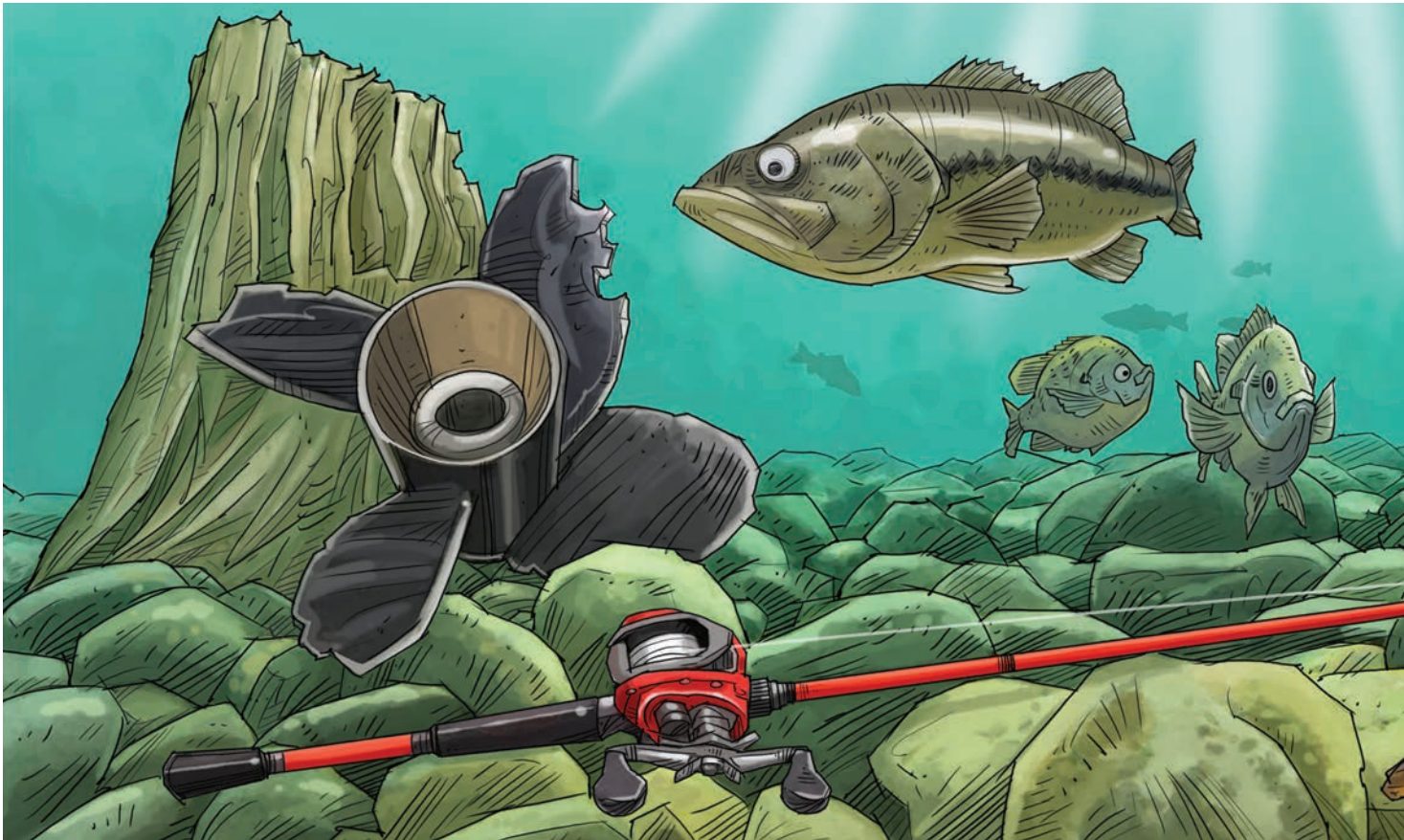
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# ANGLING INEVITABLES

To err is human, and to fish is to err



## 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.

**B**ack in school, years ago, I took physics and chemistry classes. I studied myriad scientific laws in those classes – Newton’s Laws, Boyle’s Law, Kepler’s Law – but it wasn’t until I got into the real world that I discovered the one that best applied to me: Murphy’s Law, which plainly states that anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

As it turns out, fishing can be fertile ground for Murphy’s Law to rear its ugly head. Fish long enough and perfect storms of circumstance will form. In the moment, these incidents can be terrifying or embarrassing, but all are considered rites of passage in the

fishing world; experiencing them is what earns you a seat at the story-telling table with your buddies. You can try to avoid them, but be forewarned: These are angling inevitables.

If you’ve been doing it long enough, one or all of these befuddling occurrences have come up in conversation over a round of drinks. If you’re just starting out or have been fortunate enough to avoid these follies so far... well, just know it won’t be like that forever.

## PAINFUL PERFORATION

We shudder at the thought of it, but eventually it’s going to happen. It usually occurs in the form of a hook in the hand

while trying to unpin a fish. A 12-inch bass thrashing trebles around like a whirling dervish is the usual suspect.

The whole thing happens so fast that you likely don’t notice it initially. But when your brain catches up to your eyes and the reality sets in that a treble hook is buried in your own flesh, you might squeal like a baby. Not that I would know.

In most cases, your predicament looks far worse than it really is. I’ve experienced it several times, and hook removal is usually completely painless. If you’ve not had the pleasure of being hooked, watch a few YouTube videos on how to remove a hook with a



ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER

piece of fishing line. Once you see how easy and (mostly) painless the procedure is, it'll greatly reduce the horror when it happens. And it will happen.

## DEEP SIX A CELL PHONE

Do whatever you want to prevent it. Lock it in a compartment, wear Bluetooth headphones, duct-tape it to your arm – it doesn't matter. Eventually, the inevitable will happen: an urgent text, one peek at social media, taking a selfie with a giant gator or looking at Google Earth. Then, one slip of the fingers leads to a bumbling, fumbling moment frozen in time, followed by a desperate, empty grab and... splash. Gasp. Gone.

Even if you drop it clearly inside the boat, it's amazing how much bounce a cell phone can have. Of the four phones I've flushed, two were dropped within the confines of the boat but hit the console, which redirected the trajectory sideways and into the drink.

Watching your phone fluttering 20 feet to the bottom is an accurate parallel to the realization that you've just been

cut off from the rest of the world. Nowadays, I always carry an iPad in the boat. Not only does it serve as a backup communication device, but Google Earth looks much better on it, too.

## ROD OVERBOARD

Like cell phones, rods get their fair share of dunkings. In the modern era of having 20 rods on the deck, it's a given that some are destined to get wet. I've watched pros spend 30 minutes of a tournament day dredging the bottom for an escapee rod. Ironically, it's not always the rod and reel they want back but the lure on the other end, especially when it's a one-of-a-kind custom crankbait crafted by the late, great Ed Chambers.

## STUFFING A WAVE

There's nothing quite as humiliating and downright shocking as spearing a wave. It's literally like doing a face plant into a cold pool with your clothes on. The first time I did it, I got stripped of a front flasher and a pair of sunglasses (right off my head) and inhaled half a gallon of

water in a half a second. To see the floor of the boat flooded up to your knees is also shocking. This too can initially look a lot worse than it really is (hopefully).

Swallow your pride. Shake off like a dog. Then turn the boat 90 degrees to run troughs parallel to the waves to buy the bilges some time to empty the boat. Most spearing issues come from being in too big a hurry. When running big water, go slow, then go slower and navigate one wave at a time. If you're lucky, you won't need to change your clothes back at the truck.

## HIGH AND DRY AND DISAPPOINTED

Running a 3,000-pound boat aground is going to leave a few scratches on the hull, but it's the bruises to the ego that make this inevitable folly so painful. When your entire boat is high and dry on a flat or a bar, you're a 20-foot billboard to all passersby: *Got Rope?*

When you step out and the water barely covers your socks, your stomach will turn. The first time I went all-terrain with my boat, I was convinced it'd be stuck there forever, marooned as a mud-flat marker, reminding the whole world that Rob Newell was incapable of navigating a bass boat.

Again, it's an occurrence that usually looks way worse than it really is. You'll need either extra manpower to push the bow around or another boat with a tow strap to pull it off (or a couple hours of rising tide) – whichever comes first. It's always a good idea to have a yearly membership to a 24/7 marine towing service like Boat Tow U.S. Trust me on that one.

## BARREN BOXES

I know it sounds totally impossible: How could anyone go fishing without their rods? But when you open your rod locker to the dismay of total emptiness, you'll understand. You'll feel the tinge of remorse and embarrassment. You'll feel my pain.

It might only be one rod you forgot to bring, but it'll be the rod brought inside to respool and retie with your best lure for the tournament that begins in 15 minutes. The good news is that the next time you go fishing, your rod (or rods) will be still be leaning in the corner, rigged and ready to go, and you're not likely to forget them again. ■



Bobby Lane

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



Chris Lane

PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ



Arnie Lane

PHOTO BY BRETT CARLSON

## GROWING UP A LANE

In fishing, as in life, family is everything



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

**W**hat would it be like to grow up in a family in which everything revolved around bass fishing? To get the itch as a young man and run with it, grabbing the obsession and never letting go. A household filled with sibling rivalry and stories of the ones that got away.

To find out, we can only ask the Lanes.

Chris, Bobby and Arnie Lane are the result of an unbridled love of tournament bass fishing, beginning in the wilds of Florida where the boys were left to be boys. It was the mid 1980s, and the Lane brothers – each just a year or so apart in age – were entering their teens with a sense of adventure and a passion for the outdoors. Growing up in Lakeland, the three were close to dozens of famed waters filled with big bass.

“It gave us the opportunity to walk or ride our bikes anywhere and fish,” Chris recalls. Later, “it was a jon boat strapped to the top of an old BMW, headed to a pit somewhere,” remembers Bobby.

### “EAT, SLEEP, FISH, BUT WITH NO SLEEP”

Each of the three boys equally credits their father, Robert – also known as “Big Bob” – and grandfather, Bill McLain, for introducing them to the outdoors. The bass fishing bug hit hard.

“It was eat, sleep, fish, but with no sleep,” according to Arnie. “We just couldn’t wait to wake up and go.”

Despite jumping in with both feet, there was no luxurious path to a fishing career for the trio.

“It was no silver spoon,” Arnie continues. “It was all hard work.”

Bobby confirms that bass fishing trips were treated as rewards for good behavior. “Keep your grades up,” his parents would say “and you can go to Kissimmee next weekend.”

In any case, the boys all agree that their brotherly predicament likely allowed them room to roam.

“There were three of us,” Chris says, “so our parents would just let us go anywhere.”

## THE COMPETITION BUG BITES HARD

As the boys grew, so did their competitive desire to outdo each other. Naturally, such behavior filtered into their biggest passion.

"The competition was intense," Chris adds. "We'd all be in the boat together, and the guy in the front had to move to the back once he caught a fish. We rotated that way all day."

Eventually, a champ was crowned, but not without some serious contention from the other two.

After some time beating up on each other, the boys decided to test their skills against others. Local tournaments were a good place to start. With the three Lanes all working "real jobs" during the week, teams were selected for the weekend derbies, with the primary goal of winning enough cash to buy some gear and fish again. Remember, this was a time before high school or college fishing, and the only thing the Lane boys knew about pro fishermen was what they saw on TV. At the time, tournaments were treated more as cash games.

"For us, fishing was just a way of having fun – nothing more," Chris recalls.

The boys toyed around a bit with college, but none made much out of it, too busy working in the real world and at a family business.

"There was no thought that we needed to go to college to get a business degree to go fishing," Arnie laughs.

Each just focused on their immediate future, and fishing more, and larger tournaments. Entering a BFL event, however, opened Chris' eyes to a bigger picture.

## MAKING BASS FISHING A LIVING

Chris' first BFL – a 2000 Gator Division tournament on Lake Okeechobee – allowed him a new sense of freedom, fishing as an individual rather than in a team environment.

"I fell in love with that feeling of controlling my own destiny," he recounts.

Still, as each of the Lane brothers continued to succeed, none were starry-eyed with the thought of going pro. As Arnie relates, advancing "came the original way. It evolved as a living, more or less, by how much money you made, to see if you could afford the next tournament."

Bobby qualified for the All-American in 2003, an event that would forever change his destiny. Working in lawn care at the time, his weeklong vacation resulted in a third-place finish at the tournament, and a check for \$10,000.

"I came home and immediately sold my business," he says. "I was done working."

Arnie would also qualify for the All-American in 2005, but never went all-in with a fishing career.

"I watched my brothers go through it, and that's what they want to do," he explains. "It takes someone special that can handle the travel, and I'm a bit more of a homebody. I'm just at a different point in my life."

A decade-and-a-half later, Arnie continues to be a major player in the local tournament scene around Florida.

## A CAREER THAT ALMOST NEVER WAS

Chris has won the most titles of the three, possibly due to his brothers' early coaching. But, typical of the Lane model, his triumphant career was almost not to be.

After a number of poor finishes in 2006, Chris contemplated throwing in the towel on his tournament hobby. But a Southern Open was coming to Okeechobee.

"I wasn't even going to fish because I only had one day to practice" Chris remembers.

Evidently, one day was enough; he went on to win the tournament and \$71,000 in winnings from a new boat plus cash.

"That level of payment was more than I made all year working full-time," he recalls.

Thus, the pro fishing career of Chris Lane was launched.

Possibly no other family has made more money fishing bass tournaments than the Lane brothers. Yet, none of the three ever considered their approach any more than the usual brotherly competition early on. Perhaps that's their secret.

The only thing worse than losing is losing to a sibling; it's an ingrained rivalry unlike any other. And, in the case of the Lanes, that rivalry was a championship recipe.

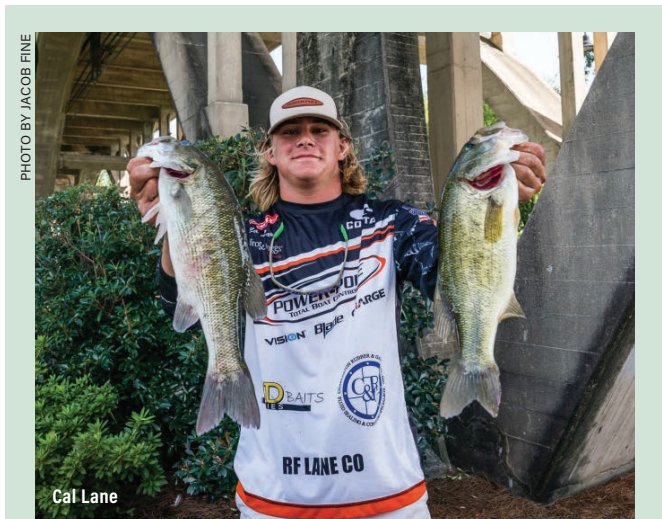


PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

Cal Lane

## LANE LINEAGE

The Lane family bass lineage runs deep, now in its fourth generation. Chris Lane's son, Cal, recently qualified for the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, where he will be competing on occasion with dad and uncle Bobby. At 18 years of age, Cal has decided to forgo thoughts of college and turn pro right out of high school.

While his path parallels the Lane model, his fishing methods are unique. A product of the new generation of pros, Cal uses modern sonar to his advantage, and has grown accustomed to TVA lakes and offshore fishing. Conversely, Bobby insists he and Chis always try to "stick to the roots – little technology and fishing the bank." It will be interesting to see who comes out ahead in the ongoing family contest. ■

# THE HYDRODYNAMICS OF A BASS

To get better at catching bass, you first have to understand how they're built to move

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT PACE

**B**y most credible accounts, there are roughly 30,000 species of fish on this planet, with more being discovered each year. Within that cohort you'll find fish of all shapes, sizes, colors and temperaments. From the miniscule dwarf pygmy goby (sexually mature at a whopping 0.35 inches) to the massive 15-ton whale shark, fish are truly amazing creatures.

Despite all that variability, most fish share a pretty similar body plan and swim mechanics using the propulsive force of specialized appendages called fins, laid out in a similar fashion across most species.

## BODY SHAPE

You can learn a lot about how a fish lives just by looking at its body shape. Longer and narrower (think tuna, sailfish, mackerel) is best for speed and open-water roaming; shorter and more vertically compressed (think bluegills, crappies, angelfish, pompano) is ideal for rapid maneuvering and quick turns. Bass body shape speaks to their versatility. They're streamlined and sleek, capable of cruising and effectively chasing down shad in open water, but they're also vertically compressed enough to make quick turns and rapid direction changes - which comes in handy chasing bream through a pad field.

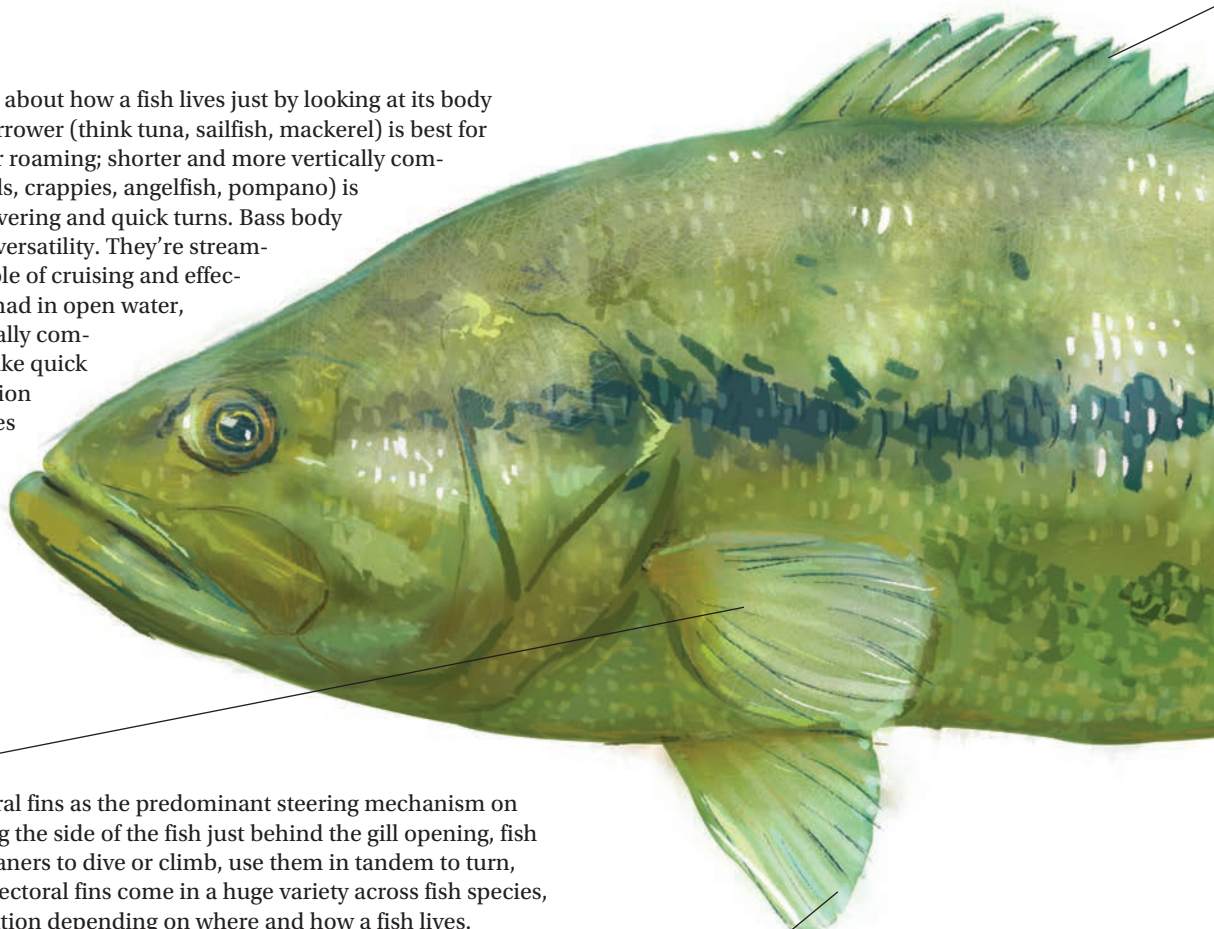
## PECTORAL FINS

Think of the pectoral fins as the predominant steering mechanism on most fish. Found along the side of the fish just behind the gill opening, fish use pectoral fins as planers to dive or climb, use them in tandem to turn, and also to back up. Pectoral fins come in a huge variety across fish species, with tons of specialization depending on where and how a fish lives.

Flying fish, for example, use extremely large and specialized pectoral fins to glide through the air for up to 150 feet to escape predators. Rays and skates also use heavily modified pectoral fins for swimming - using them like wings to move about. In bass, the pectoral fins are the primary fine-movement thrusters. Watch a bass just hanging out, and their pectoral fins are constantly making fine adjustments to keep them stationary or move them in small precise ways (perhaps keeping a close eye on a school of bait-fish or your shimmying trick worm).

As for our favorite fish species, the black basses (largemouth, spotted bass and smallmouth), physically they're rather unremarkable. They're not particularly big, fast or aggressive. Heck, as handsome as the brown mottling is on the back of a bruiser smallmouth, bass are quite drab when put against some of the eye-popping colors found on just about any reef in the Caribbean.

It's that "everyman" quality about bass that makes them special, and it also makes them a great analogue for a discussion on how fish use their fins to swim, as well as a deep dive into the way their fins lay out and how they use them to feed.



## PELVIC FINS

In bass, the pelvic fins are the pair of fins located on their ventral (bottom) surface, just behind the head. They're used primarily for precision movements and slight adjustments in position. You can see a bass' pelvic fins working often when they're looking at a lure that landed on their bed.


## REDUCING FRICTION

If you've spent much time in the water at all, you know exactly how heavy and hard it is to move through the water. Aside from fins and all the other morphological adaptations that fish have to help them swim, they also make it easier on themselves by producing a slime coat that actually reduces the coefficient of friction in the water, making it easier for them to swim.

Yes, that slime coat that we try to protect during catch-and-release fishing plays a major role in how easily fish move about their environment. A recent study looked at a number of fish species and found that their slime coats reduced hydrodynamic friction of water between 57 and 63 percent.


You may recall from the Summer Olympics a few years back that there were actually special swimming suits designed to emulate this by reducing the coefficient of friction on the swimmers. Alas, the International Olympic Committee banded together to ban them right before the games.

### DORSAL FIN



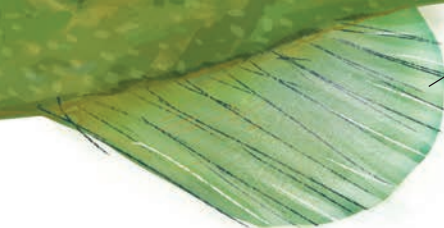
Running along the top of almost all fishes' backs, the dorsal fin is used by most species of fish as a stabilizing fin to prevent roll. However, fish also use the dorsal fin to increase their lateral surface for cutting tighter turns. Dorsal fins can also have markings used in coloration displays to improve mating success and many other specializations. Bass actually have a split dorsal fin; and if you watch bass feed on camera, they typically keep their front dorsal fin tucked in tight along their back to reduce drag while swimming until they strike or need to make a quick turn, at which point it flares.

### CAUDAL FIN



Commonly called the tail, the caudal fin is the primary propulsion unit for most species of fish. The tail also tells a lot about a fish species' habits. Flatter and wider tails are used for low-end torque and maneuverability, while narrow and deeply forked tails create less turbulence and more efficient swimming, which in turn creates speed and endurance. Bass tails are just slightly forked, which is perfect for their generalist lifestyle. Fast enough to get around pretty much anywhere, they need to be able to move fast without sacrificing the ability to maneuver. ■

### ANAL FIN



Similar to the dorsal fin, the anal fin is predominantly a stabilizing rudder, preventing roll by offering a stabilizing force to offset the dorsal fin. Some species have no anal fins, and others have multiple. In bass, this fin is mostly for stabilization and roll prevention, and if you watch a bass swim, this fin moves the least.



### 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.



PHOTO BY TACTICAL BASSIN



**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.



## MOVING EAST

The big swimbait craze is no longer just a “West Coast thing”

**S**wimbait fishing is here to stay.

Oversized baits that were once considered a novelty, designed to catch giant trout-fed bass in Southern California ponds, have proved their worth from coast to coast. Many anglers have accepted these baits and recognize how effective they can be at catching fish in their area. Even with this acceptance, most still struggle to produce results themselves.

The first step is recognizing these big baits will (and do) work, but it’s something entirely different to find consistent success close to home. Having spent considerable time with these baits all over the country,

we’ve noticed trends with big swimbait fishing that will help you get more bites – often of the “giant” variety.

Simply put, swimbaits will catch fish on your lake. If you have any doubts, it’s time to set them aside. Big fish eat smaller fish, they eat injured fish, they eat anything they want because they’re a dominant predator. That doesn’t change because you live in New York or Texas or South Dakota. With that knowledge and a few clues provided by your previous fishing experiences, you should be able to fish these baits with confidence.

To begin, let’s apply some basic rules.

### MATCH THE HATCH

First, you need to figure out what fish your bass are eating. If they’re targeting bluegill, a 14-inch glide bait fished in open water probably isn’t your best option. Second, if your bass are eating baitfish that grow to a relatively small maximum size of 3 to 6 inches, you need to adapt accordingly and fish a maximum bait size of 6 or 7 inches. Third, if the prey species grow in excess of 6 to 8 inches, bigger will almost always be better. One common mistake new swimbait anglers make is fishing the “medium size” baits.

And the final piece of the puzzle: How clear is the water where you’re targeting these fish?

## CLEAR WATER DRAWING POWER

There are some subtle, yet important, nuances we've noticed while traveling around the country that you can apply to your fishing on just about any body of water. For instance, trout-pattern swimbaits work almost anywhere – whether or not there are trout in the body of water. It's a complex color pattern that imitates a variety of prey species. If your bass are bluegill eaters, they will eat a bluegill bait much better, but many will still fall for a trout offering. The same applies to shad eaters, shiner eaters, perch eaters, etc.

The clearer the water, the larger the baits you should be throwing. Most beginner swimbait anglers reach for 5- to 6-inch soft swimbaits and unknowingly hurt their chances of getting bit. Bigger swimbaits have incredible drawing power, much like an umbrella rig can have. Fish will swim 5, 10, 15, or even 25 feet just to look at a large swimbait in clear water. The larger the bait, the larger the drawing power.

Instead of starting out with a small bait, we like to pick up an 8- to 12-inch glide bait like a Baitsanity Explorer Glide and fish it high in the water column, paying close attention to the area 5 to 10 feet behind the bait.

You'd be amazed at what comes up to have a look at these baits. From giant smallmouth on Lake Michigan to huge largemouth and spotted bass on lakes throughout the Midwest, the size of fish that rise up out of the depths of these fisheries not known for producing size would blow your mind. Most of the time, these fish don't strike the huge baits – they only follow it to the boat – but they've given up their position.

Once you know where these fish are positioned, the rest becomes very simple. We like to give the fish a short 15- to 20-minute break, then come back with a different bait tied on. The first style we throw is a 6- to 8-inch glide bait like a River2Sea S-Waver or G-Ratt Sneaky Pete. These baits represent a generic baitfish profile and have the ability to draw a reaction strike when fished in the middle of the water column, combining a slow, methodical swim with aggressive reel twitches to elicit a feeding response.

The second option is a soft bait that imitates an appropriate forage species and can be fished slowly near the bottom. Depending on the species we're imitating, we might be throwing a Savage Gear Bluegill, a Huddleston Deluxe Trout, an 8-inch Megabass MagDraft or any number of similar baits. With



Savage Gear  
Bluegill

soft baits, the proper technique is to fish them slowly and methodically near the bottom in hopes of drawing a feeding response.

If fish are positioned in a way that allows you to get behind them, it's ideal to swim the bait from open water directly into their position. Make one or two of your best casts, and if you don't get bit, leave the area. Continuing to pepper the water with cast after cast will not help your cause; it's better to leave and return again later.

## WHEN THE RULES CHANGE

If you live near a fishery with murky water, the game changes entirely. While the fish are perfectly capable of hunting down a large bait in open water, it's not their primary means of hunting. The murkier the water, the more likely it is that the bass are ambushing prey around cover. In warmer water, this will be shallow cover, but in the colder months, they'll be around deeper structure.

When the bass are up around cover, the 6- to 7-inch baits are your best bet. Focusing in on baits like the S-Waver 168, the Bull Shad, or a Jackall Gantarel will allow you to trigger a feeding response through a combination of steady reeling and hard twitches. This is about as far away as you can get from the "trout-fed" origins of big swimbait fishing, and it happens to be our favorite way to catch big swimbait fish.



Megabass MagDraft

Slinging 12-inch baits off the ends of long, tapering points in clear water is effective, but it's not always fun. Pitching a small glide behind a dock, twitching it as it reaches the last piling, then trying to keep a hold of the rod as a giant bass massacres your swimbait in close quarters – now that's fun.

The downside of murky water is that you can no longer see followers. There will rarely be a sign that a big fish followed, so you need to make your best presentation the first time. While you're handicapped by the water clarity, you actually gain a huge advantage overall. The murkier the water, the more likely it is that fish are tight against cover. You don't have to see the fish to know exactly where they're positioning. Treat every piece of cover as if it has a fish sitting beside it and you'll get way more bites than you'd ever get in a clear-water fishery.

The final piece of the puzzle is what to do in a murky water fishery when the bass go deeper in winter. We're not going to sugarcoat it for you: This is when you're going to put in work for your bites. The method is very simple, but it requires a time commitment to be successful. However, when the bite comes, it will likely be the biggest bass of your life.

As these bass retreat back down into the depths, they'll spend a lot of their time around rock structure. If none is available, they'll pull out to any available deep-water cover. We switch to slow bottom-crawling baits like a Scottsboro, Osprey, Trash Fish or Huddleston in these scenarios. Cast around the deepest edge of the cover and slowly crawl the



Jackall Gantarel

bait on bottom. Let it climb up, over and through the rocks. Many of the bites will come when the bait begins to hang up in the cover. Right before you think you're getting snagged you'll feel that tell-tale "tick" of a big bass inhaling your big offering.

Swimbait fishing works, and it's here to stay. You need to understand how to apply it to your fisheries throughout the year, because if you don't, someone else will. Giant bass eat other fish, and swimbaits are a very easy way to get those fish to bite. Fish with confidence, apply our methods, and you'll find success no matter where you are in the country.



Basstrix Fat Minnow

We've been blessed to catch quite a few giant bass with swimbaits over the years. Before we even met, Tim and I both caught our personal best bass on a Huddleston Deluxe 8-inch swimbait. Tim's 15-pounder was one of the first swimbait fish he'd ever caught. It didn't take years of practice or even clear water. He took a quality bait, went to likely locations on a lake with big fish in it, cast across likely points and capitalized perfectly on the fish of a lifetime. The bass was feeding in the muddy water of a wind-blown point, and when presented with a giant meal in the shallows, it attacked.

Matt's 17-pounder came while paralleling a point leading into a marina. The lake received occasional trout stockings and the fish knew to target trout in the clear water. The giant bite came after many years of swimbait fishing, but when it finally came, no amount of practice could have prepared anyone for the chaos that ensued. Any perceived skills were gone, and it was man versus beast all the way to the net.

We grew up targeting big bass in the famed fisheries of the West, but upon arriving in the South, we've been happily surprised by the similarities. So many anglers get caught up in the belief that clear water and stocked trout are keys to success, and that simply isn't true. Adapting your lure selection to match the water color and forage species is all it takes to find success on any fishery.

Probably the biggest misconception of all is that only big fish eat swimbaits. It doesn't matter if your lake is full of 2-pound bass or 10-pound bass – bass eat other fish. Don't be afraid to throw a 6-inch to 10-inch bait anywhere in the country. Swimbaits have such immense drawing power that targeting fish with them is actually very simple. If you make casts in likely areas and follow our advice, it's a matter of time before fish of all sizes will quite literally come to you. ■

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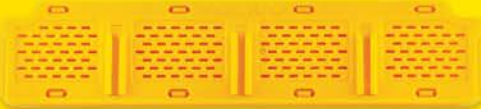
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6 ea.



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# EDGE

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**BASS PRO TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP**


**REDCRES**



# REDCREST 2021: THE “MYSTERY LAKE” CONCEPT IS ALIVE AND WELL AT LAKE PALESTINE

*By Joel Shangle*

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL ALLEN



**S**omewhere in Mingus, Texas there exists a yellow note pad with the words “mystery lake” jotted in the careful script of Hall of Fame angler Gary Klein. On the handwritten list - right below “live scoring,” “catch, weigh, release” and “every legal fish counts,” - the ideal of an unknown fishery was one of the tenets of Major League Fishing when Klein and a small group created the MLF framework in 2009.

Fast forward to December of 2020 - when MLF announced that REDCREST 2021 (the championship of the 2020 Bass Pro Tour season) would move from Grand Lake O' the Cherokees, Oklahoma to a virtually unknown lake in east Texas - and it became clear that the mystery-lake concept is still alive and kicking.

Come Feb. 21-25, when REDCREST is contested and the eventual winner claims a \$300,000 payday and the second-ever silver-and-red REDCREST trophy, the bass world will learn all it'll ever need to know about Lake Palestine.

Mysteries revealed.

## A NEUTRAL PLAYING FIELD

Chances are, most of you have no knowledge of Lake Palestine, a 25,000-acre impoundment of the Neches River system that flows north to south for 18 miles through parts of Anderson, Cherokee, Henderson and Smith counties, roughly 110 miles east of Dallas.

And judging by the results of a quick text survey conducted in January, before Palestine went off-limits for pre-practice, the lion's share of the 40-angler REDCREST field didn't know a lick about it, either.

**Wesley Strader:** "Never even seen or heard of it."

**Bryan Thrift:** "Totally new, never even heard of it until it was announced."

**Bobby Lane:** "It'll all be brand new to me!"

**Josh Bertrand:** "I know nothing about (Palestine) other than what's available online."

**Edwin Evers:** "I think I was there one time in sixth or seventh grade."

It's just a matter of angler geography that many of the fisheries where REDCREST-level championships have historically been held – Lake Hartwell, Lake Guntersville, Lake Ouachita, Grand Lake, Lake Murray, to name a few – provide some amount of home-lake familiarity for at least one angler in the field (and sometimes multiple anglers).

Top-tier tournament venues tend to breed or attract top-level pros – nine Bass Pro Tour pros live within an hour of Guntersville, six live within 60 miles of Chickamauga, etc. – so truly "neutral playing fields" are hard to come by for championships of REDCREST magnitude.

But the 370-mile shift due south from Grand to Palestine not only placed the tournament in a milder east Texas climate zone – temperatures in Flint are roughly 10 degrees higher on average than northeast Oklahoma in mid-February – it shifted the 40-man roster into high gear doing research and pre-practice. Only three anglers in the field of

40 – Texans Jeff Sprague, Alton Jones and Todd Faircloth – have ever fished Lake Palestine and neither Jones nor Faircloth have wet a line there in roughly 20 years.

"I'm actually pretty pumped that hardly anybody in the field really knows (Lake Palestine)," Dustin Connell admitted in early January as he was driving to Flint to scout the lake. "This reminds me a little of those lakes in North Carolina that we fished (Bass Pro Tour Stage Three in 2019, in Raleigh). We didn't know much about those lakes. We all just went out there and figured it out on the fly, and that's what I expect with (Palestine). It reminds me of an MLF Cup event, where we just pull up to the place and fish."

That won't be entirely accurate by the Feb. 21-25 tournament dates, since a stout percentage of the field scouted Palestine before it went off limits late January – you may have seen photos on social media of Kevin VanDam catching largemouth in an odd Texas snowstorm.

But while the field won't be totally in the dark when it rolls out of the Villages Marina in Flint for the first official day of REDCREST practice, it'll still be a mission of discovery.

And what they discover will probably delight them.

## NO "SLEEPER" IN THESE PARTS

"Palestine has bass from end to end," Sprague said bluntly. "It's a phenomenal lake; there are a lot of quality, big fish in that lake. There are lots of fish in the upper 7s and 8s, and we'll see some double-digit fish caught. I've heard it referred to as a 'sleeper,' but it's no sleeper around here. It's an avid tournament lake for local organizations. If you're not catching 28 to 30 pounds (in a five-fish tournament), you're not winning"

Results of local events bear Sprague out. Winning weights in Media Bass five-fish team tournaments held in February on Palestine from 2016 to 2020 range from 25 pounds to just over 32 pounds, with big-fish weights from 8 1/2 to 10 3/4 pounds.



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

Lake Palestine's north end is loaded with stereotypical east Texas standing timber.



PHOTO BY PHOENIX WOODRIF

Digging further back into Palestine's tournament history reveals more five-fish bags of 30-plus pounds in February. The lake record – a 13.22-pound behemoth caught on a Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw by Casey Laughlin – came during a Media Bass tournament in early February of 2014.

"Pretty much any tournament from 1990 until now, if you fish Lake Palestine in January or February and the wind isn't blowing 100 mph, you better have close to 30 pounds," said MLF pro Kelly Jordon, who lives a block away from Palestine. "The last team tournament I fished here in the late 1990s, my team had 27 pounds and we came in fourth. The weights went 32 (pounds), 32, 29, and we were fourth with 27. It just has that east Texas 'thing': Palestine grows bass like crazy, and it's full of fish."

### HOW WILL PALESTINE FISH? BIG

As he idled around Palestine during a pre-practice day, Jacob Wheeler was quickly reminded of another well-known Texas tournament lake: "This place reminds me a lot of Lake Conroe," Wheeler said. "It looks like a classic east Texas lake. I see timber, docks, plenty of grass. The first thing I think of is Conroe."

Jordon agrees with Wheeler's assessment, but with a nod to Palestine's fish population.

"Palestine does look a lot like Lake Conroe, but there are more (fish)," he said. "You'd have to say that historically, the best largemouth cover is on the northern half of the lake, above the Highway 155 bridge – the dynamic thing about Palestine, though, is that every now and then, somebody will win on the main lake on boat docks, or in the smaller creeks that don't get a lot of pressure. The whole lake fishes. In (the MLF) format, the sky's the limit. I think these guys are going to smash 'em."

**“ PALESTINE HAS BASS FROM END TO END. IT'S A PHENOMENAL LAKE; THERE ARE A LOT OF QUALITY, BIG FISH IN THAT LAKE. ”**

— Jeff Sprague



## LAKE PALESTINE LAYOUT

Lake Palestine was created in 1962 with the construction of Blackburn Crossing Dam on the Neches River. The lake covers 25,560 acres at full pool, stretching 18 miles from the mouth of the Neches east of the town of Chandler, to the Neches' out-flow north of Highway 175 near the town of Cuney.

The reservoir runs almost perfectly north/south through parts of Anderson, Cherokee, Henderson, and Smith counties, and features 135 miles of shoreline that is dotted with docks, seawalls, and various other man-made cover.

Multiple creeks feed Palestine on its upper end above Highway 155, including Kickapoo Creek, Indian Creek, Flat Creek and Caney Creek; further down the lake, the Highsaw, Ledbetter, Cobb Creek and Saline Creek arms offer more fishable water on the lower end.

The lake is riddled with stereotypical east Texas standing timber on the upper end – "It's treacherous and there are no marked boat lanes; these guys will have to do their homework," Jordan warns – but it has a diversity of cover and structure that will allow it to fish big for the 40-boat field that'll compete the first two days.

That diversity should suit a variety of strengths.

"People might show up to Palestine with the idea that fish will be caught with one technique or the other, but they'll find that bass live from the dam to the furthest northern end of that lake," Sprague said. "They're going to find everything from offshore roadbeds to shallow, muddy water with vegetation. It has a lot of bridges, a lot of standing timber and rock.

"There's a lot of bank grasses, creek channels, shallow humps ... really just about everything you could ever ask for. The water by the dam is super clear, but you can run up to the northern end where it's basically mud. I think it's going to fit everybody's style and really spread the field out. I don't look for us to catch 30 bass a day, but we'll catch plenty, and they'll be quality fish."

## BUILDING THE WINNING GAME PLAN

Evers pulled off the ultimate "honey hole" dream in the Championship Round of REDCREST 2019 out of La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Berkley pro doggedly maneuvered his way into an out-of-the-way backwater on Pool 7 on the Upper Mississippi River on the final day and decimated the rest of the field with 63 fish for 85 pounds, 6 ounces.

Evers won by more than 44 pounds.

That same potential for a remote creek extravaganza also exists at Palestine, but the ticking of the game clock and the pressure of SCORETRACKER® pose the everyday risk/reward question of the REDCREST format, in which every fish over 2 pounds will be scorable.

"How willing is a guy going to be to be running over stumps and breaking props, or idling somewhere for an hour, only to find that the water is blown out when he gets there?" Connell asked. "Without even looking at the upper end of the lake, I already know it's a mine field. I know that these guys will go as far back into those creeks as a boat has ever been – that's just what these guys do.

"But what's the risk versus reward of idling forever in practice to find some out-of-the-way spot versus finding places where you can move around better, and 'hodge-podge'? If you want to go somewhere completely off the wall and you don't find anything, you end up losing time and find yourself hoping: 'Well, man, I hope I can find something now.' To me, that's the worst scenario."



Palestine has plenty of places for REDCREST anglers to find their own hidden honey hole.



PHOTO BY GARRETT DIXON

# REDCREST NEED TO KNOW

**WHAT**  
REDCREST 2021  
Bass Pro Tour  
Championship

**WHEN**  
Feb. 21-25

**WHERE**  
Lake Palestine  
Flint, Texas

**MINIMUM  
WEIGHT**  
2 pounds or  
over counts

**PAYOUT**  
Champion  
\$300,000

**FORMAT**  
The full field of 40 anglers competes the first two days (Qualifying Days 1 and 2). The top 20 anglers advance to two 10-man Knockout Rounds, where weights are zeroed. The five anglers with the heaviest weight in each Knockout Round advance to the Championship Round, where weights are again zeroed. The angler with the heaviest single-day weight in the Championship Round is the REDCREST champion.

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### North or South?

Generally speaking, the **northern end** of Palestine is the most productive section of the lake in the early months of the year. It heats up quicker and has myriad backwaters to probe, which is especially helpful for pre-spawn fishing. Still, recent years have shown that quantity and quality can be had from **north to south** and everywhere in between.

### Timber!

The northern end of Palestine is littered with stereotypical east Texas **standing timber** that can make navigation downright treacherous. Running areas with standing timber can be nerve-racking, but there are some **big rewards** to be had, too. Those areas are goldmines for big Texas largemouth.

### Deep-Water Docks

Shooting docks for crappie is fairly popular on Palestine. Likewise, **running docks** for big bass can be ultra-productive all year long, especially if they're relatively close to some deep water. As big females start to move up, it's not uncommon for them to pause their migration to feed and rest up next to dock pilings and other **man-made structure**.

### Sunken Treasure

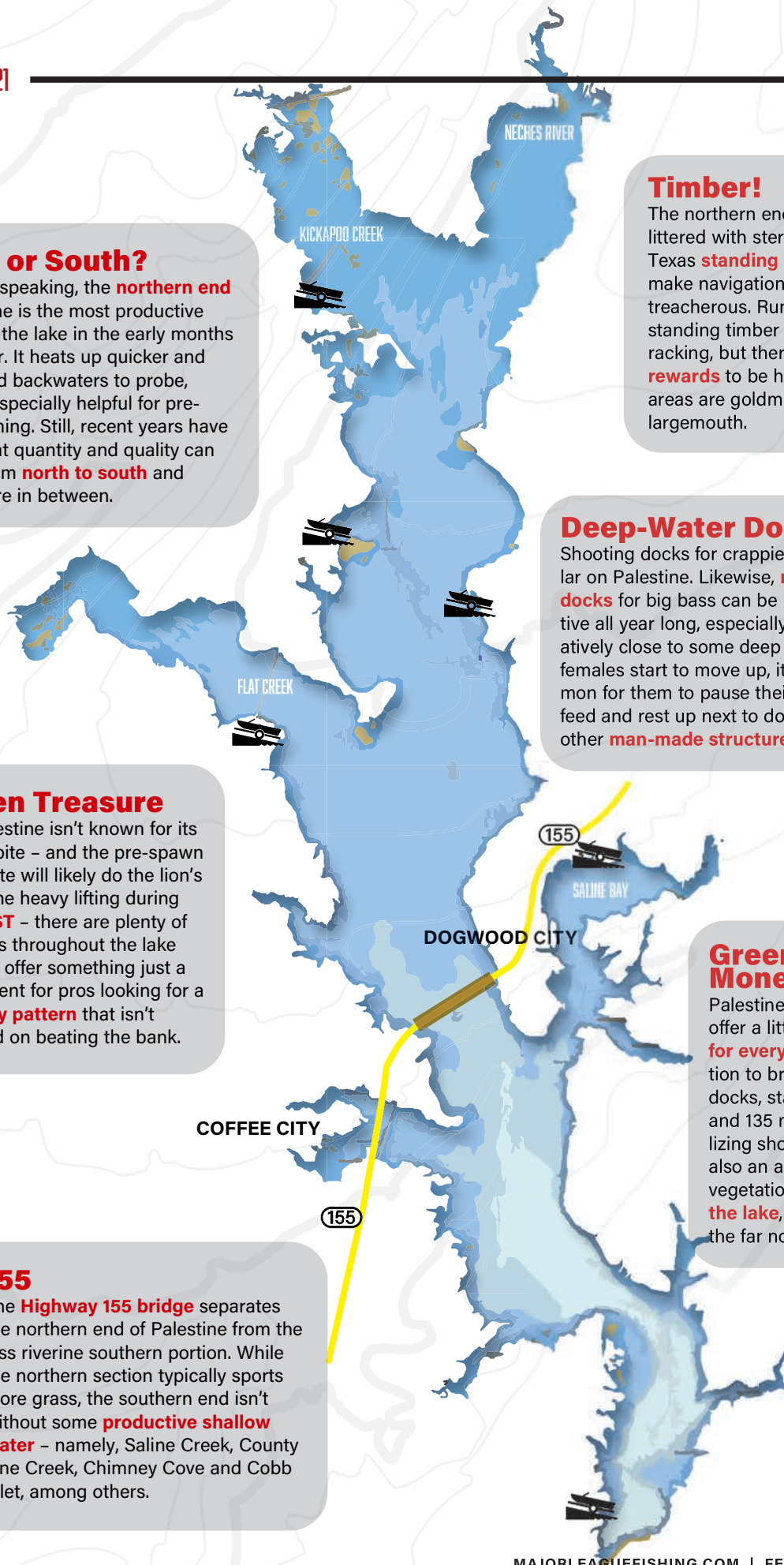
While Palestine isn't known for its **offshore** bite – and the pre-spawn shallow bite will likely do the lion's share of the heavy lifting during **REDCREST** – there are plenty of brush piles throughout the lake that could offer something just a little different for pros looking for a **secondary pattern** that isn't predicated on beating the bank.

### Green Like Money

Palestine really does offer a little **something for everyone**. In addition to brush piles, docks, standing timber and 135 miles of tantalizing shoreline, there's also an abundance of vegetation **throughout the lake**, especially at the far northern end.

### 155

The **Highway 155 bridge** separates the northern end of Palestine from the less riverine southern portion. While the northern section typically sports more grass, the southern end isn't without some **productive shallow water** – namely, Saline Creek, County Line Creek, Chimney Cove and Cobb Inlet, among others.



# PALESTINE BY THE NUMBERS

**4**

Number of MLF Bass Pro Tour pros from Texas competing in REDCREST 2021 (Alton Jones, Alton Jones Jr., Todd Faircloth and Jeff Sprague). Palestine is similar in a lot of ways to the other big-bass factories that proliferate the Lone Star State, so all four should be pretty familiar with what the fishery has to offer.

**13.22**

Weight (in pounds) of the lake-record largemouth, caught by Casey Lee Laughlin on a Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw on February 1, 2014. That bass measured 26 1/4 inches long.

**16**

Average depth (in feet) of Lake Palestine. Featuring tons of standing timber, hydrilla and floating and emergent vegetation, there likely won't be many bass caught offshore during REDCREST. Palestine is a dream destination for anglers hoping to run into a double-digit largemouth fishing shallow cover and structure.

**40.08**

Reported largest five-bass limit on Palestine, caught by Billy Ferguson and Sonny Booth in a Media Bass tournament in 2013. That limit included a 13.14-pounder, which stood as the lake record largemouth for less than a year.

**41.56**

Winning weight (10 fish) for Rob and Mike Burns, who won the Texas Team Trail Championship on Palestine in June of 2015. Given the quality of fish Palestine holds, it won't be a surprise to see someone shatter the 100-pound mark on any given day during REDCREST, especially given the timing of the event when pre-spawn fish should be chock-full of eggs.

**98.50**

Weight (in pounds) of the state-record flathead catfish, caught on Lake Palestine on December 2, 1998 by James Laster, who hauled in the behemoth on a crappie jig tipped with a minnow. Everything really is bigger in Texas.

**135**

Miles of shoreline on Lake Palestine. The 18-mile-long impoundment of the Neches River system runs north to south with a maximum width of about 4 miles and a maximum depth of 58 feet.

**155**

As in the Highway 155 bridge, which "separates" the lake into two sections. Generally, the late-winter and early-spring fishing is better to the shallower north end of the lake, which sports a ton of standing timber that can make navigation treacherous. The upper end warms first and has produced the two largest bass out of Palestine that have been officially weighed.

**345**

Elevation above sea level of Lake Palestine. Dammed up for industrial, recreational and municipal purposes, lake levels rarely fluctuate more than a couple feet.

**1986**

The year the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department enacted a 14-inch minimum limit for keeper largemouth, which began a major turnaround for Palestine. Once Florida-strain largemouth started getting stocked in 2004, the lake that was once the crown jewel of Texas bass fishing began its ascent to being perhaps Texas' best hidden gem.

**5,720**

Length (in feet) of the Blackburn Crossing Dam, an earth dam 75 feet in height at the south end of Lake Palestine. The dam holds back water from the Neches River and Kickapoo Creek.

**25,560**

Surface area (in acres) of Lake Palestine. That's plenty of room for REDCREST competitors to find something all to themselves each day of the event. ■

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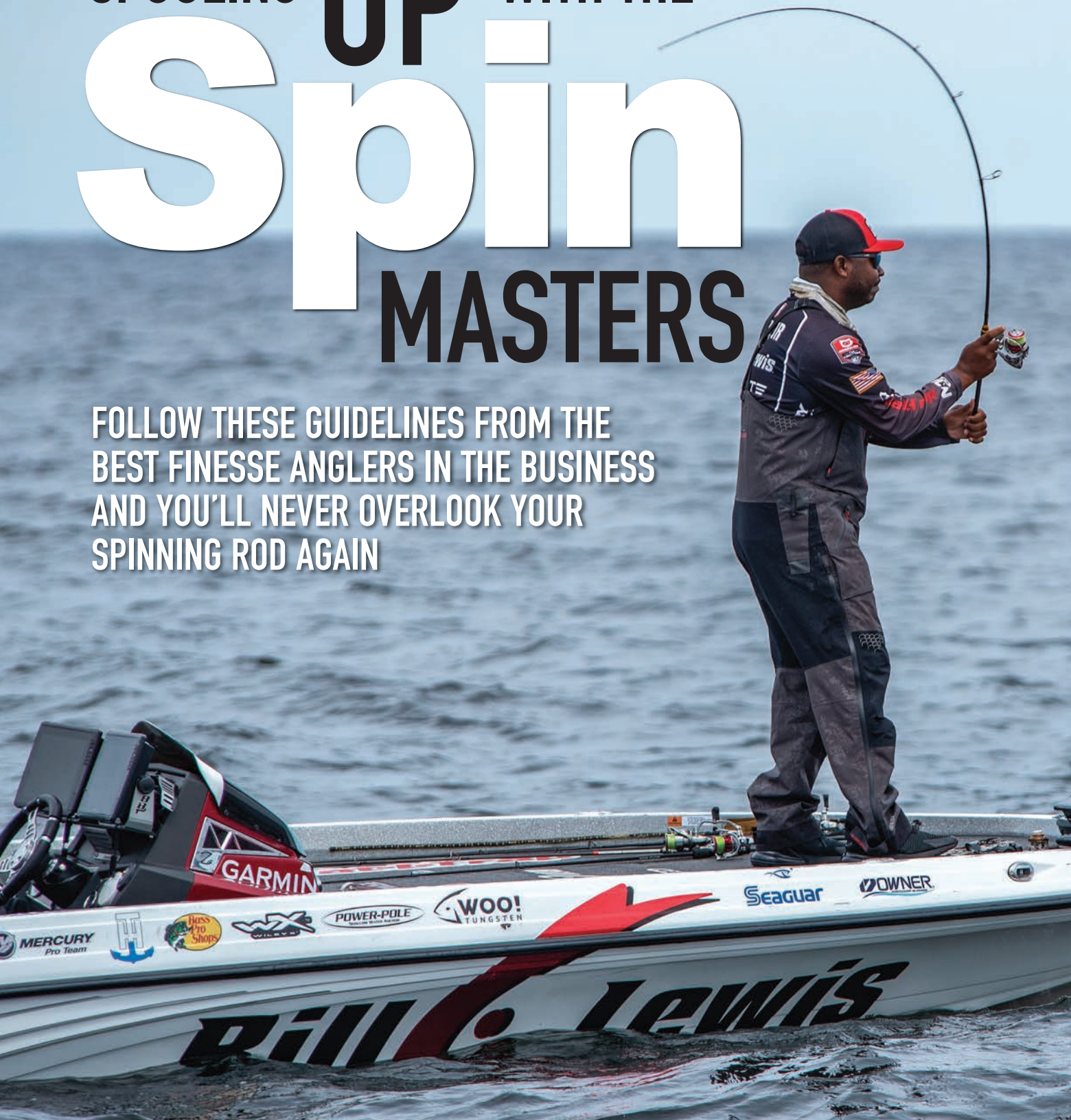


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**T**hese days, having a solid finesse game is a necessary part of surviving the cast-for-cash circuits and tours of competitive bass fishing. Casting gear usually gets credited with big single-day catches, but to be consistent over multiple days across a variety of fisheries requires the versatility of spinning tackle.

Some anglers, however, dodge spinning gear at all costs. To them, the words “light line” mean wind knots fluttering through the guides. They would rather jump off a bridge than to fish the pilings of it with micro reels and “fairy wands.” Given all of the different lines and knots needed to make finesse spinning gear function properly, the spinning reel has acquired a reputation for being tedious, complex and slow.

It doesn't have to be that way. Due to advancements in spinning reels, braided lines and the evolution of better knots, spinning gear is far easier to use than it was 10 years ago. The hardest part about using a spinning reel is spooling one up for the first time. If done correctly, they're as trouble-free to use as any baitcaster.

To get a complete breakdown of how to properly prepare spinning gear for battle, we enlisted the help of five of the top spinning reel experts in the sport: Brent Ehler, Cody Meyer, Justin Lucas, Mark Daniels Jr. and Josh Bertrand.

This panel agreed to field specific questions about spinning reel prep, from the correct backing to main-line to leaders to knots. These are their go-to combinations for most finesse applications including drop-shots, shaky heads, Ned rigs, Neko rigs and small swimbaits.

“I'd say 80 percent of my finesse fishing is done with the exact same setup – rod, reel, line, leader,” Bertrand says. “There are still a couple of niche techniques that I'll use different lines or reel ratios for, but mostly it's one setup that does it all.”

The rest of the panel echoed Bertrand's thoughts. They each have a go-to combo that covers 80 to 90 percent of their finesse fishing during a season. Here's a closer look at how the spin masters spool up.



PHOTO BY GARRICK COON



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

Justin Lucas

## REEL REVOLUTIONS

Over the last decade, there have been drastic improvements in spinning reels in terms of reduced weight, increased reel ratio and better drag systems. With that, pros have been able to increase the size of their spinning reels. Years ago, finesse fishing called for little 1500- or 2000-size reels. Nowadays, these pros have all moved up to at least a 3000-size reel.

Lucas and Bertrand both prefer Abu Garcia's Revo MGX 30 reels for most of their finesse fishing. Daniels uses a Bass Pro Shops Johnny Morris Platinum 3000 as his go-to. Team Daiwa members Meyer and Ehrler both rely on the Tatula LT: Meyer uses the 3000 while Ehrler even goes a size bigger to the 4000 for a majority of his finesse work.

According to the specifications of these reels, they're similar in size and weight. The MGXs and the Tatulas weigh in at just 6 to 7 ounces, while the Bass Pro Shops 3000 is 9 ounces. All the reels sport at least a 6.0:1 gear ratio and take up between 33 and 39 inches of line per reel turn. Their line capacity for 10-pound-test braid is between 140 and 200 yards.

Even with finesse techniques, Ehrler finds bigger reels to be advantageous in terms of better casting distance, fewer wind knots and better overall control when fighting fish. He wants the biggest reel he can get away with.

"We used to use small reels because they were lighter," Ehrler explains. "These days, the bigger Tatula LT reels weigh only 6 or 7 ounces – that's amazing. It essentially allows me to use a bigger reel without paying a price for increased weight."

Meyer finds increased reel ratios to be the biggest improvement in modern reels.

"The highest spinning reel ratios used to be 4.8:1 or 5.0:1," he says. "That's like a snail compared to the Tatulas' 6.2:1 ratios. Now I can reel up line to make another drop so much faster. Also, I can now catch up to fish in two turns of the handle when setting the hook."

Meyer also likes the improved drag systems on the new generation of reels.

"I used to be a back-reeler when fighting a fish because I didn't trust the drag," he says. "Daiwa's drag system made me a believer in drag – back-reeling is a thing of the past."

Bertrand touts the drag of the MGX as being exceptionally precise.

"I set my drag to slip just a little on the initial sweep set, when I'm applying the most pressure," he says. "I can leave the drag set right at that point and it's consistent; it slips at that exact same pressure point every time."

## BACKING BEFORE BRAID

If you plan to put braided line on a spinning reel as the main line, spooling it up with backing first is a must.

"The problem with spooling pure straight braid to a brand-new reel spool is it's prone to slip and spin on the spool," Meyer says.

Daniels knows exactly what Meyer is talking about.

"I spooled up 200 yards of new braid on a spinning reel once and it slipped around and around on the spool," Daniels recalls. "I thought my drag was slipping, but it was my braid. It couldn't find any grip on the spool."

Most of the panel prefers using either fluorocarbon or monofilament in the 8- to 15-pound-test range for backing. It can initially be tied directly onto the spool using a simple overhand knot with a few extra twists. Once the backing "grabs" the spool, it will self-tighten. Meyer believes it takes at least 50 to 75 feet to create a reliable bonding base for the braid. Some anglers even spool up as much as 50 to 60 yards to fill deeper spools with backing.



Cody Meyer

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



Brent Ehrler

As examples, Lucas uses 15-pound-test Berkley Big Game monofilament and fills about half the spool with backing while Meyer will spool on about 50 feet of 10-pound-test fluorocarbon as backing.

"The backing doesn't have to be anything expensive; old mono will do," Daniels adds. "It just acts like a binding agent, helping the braided line find footing and get traction so it won't slip. Once you spool up 100 to 150 yards of braid over it, the backing will never be seen until you re-spool again."

## BRAID IS BEST

Once solid backing is laid down as a base, spooling on the main line is next. In terms of fusing the backing to the main line, nearly any simple fusion knot will do: uni-to-uni, blood knot or Alberto. As Daniels points out, this union will be so far down the spool that it will likely never get tested; a fish would have to strip the drag 100 yards before getting to the knot.

When it comes to choice of main line, the panel is unanimous that braided line on a spinning reel is the only way to go. The attributes of a high-quality braid far outweigh the other options of fluorocarbon or monofilament as the primary fishing line.

On the lighter end, both Lucas and Bertrand mostly spool up with Berkley X5 8-pound-test braid. Meyer's go-to is a 10-pound-test Daiwa J-Braid (X-8). Ehrler prefers 12-pound-test Sunline XPlasma (X-8). Daniels is on the heavier end with Seaguar Smackdown (X-8) in 15-pound-test.

While preferences in pound tests and strand number (X number) varies a bit, hi-vis line color is a must for this crew. Whether it's Berkley's crystal white, Sunline's light green, Seaguar's flash green or Daiwa's chartreuse, being able to see the main line at all times is a critical component of the

finesse game. The hi-vis colors turn the lines into veritable strike detectors as the "tick" from a bite is more noticeable.

Also, being able to see the line helps keep track of the bait at all times.

"Hi-vis line is a huge help in watching the bait sink and hitting the bottom," Meyer explains. "If it's 30 feet and the bait stops at 15 feet, a fish probably got it. With a dark line on a cloudy day, I might miss that cue. With hi-vis line, you can see your line falling and know immediately when something isn't right."

"It's an overall orientation thing for me," Lucas says. "I want to know where my line is at all times. Wind and current can blow your line around in funny directions, and if I can't see it, I'm not sure where my bait is or what it's doing."

In terms of actually spooling the braid on, there are many different theories on how it should be done. Some lay the new spool flat on its side with the label up; others say it should spooled up clockwise. Ehrler spools braid onto his spinning rods just like he would a bait-caster, with the spool vertical and the new line coming off the top.

"Just pinch it between your thumb and forefinger to create tension so it spools on tight," he advises.

Daniels has spooled on new braid just about every way possible. No matter how you put in on, he suggests pulling about 50 to 100 yards of braid off the freshly spooled reel into the yard or parking lot and reeling it back in between your fingers to eliminate any twists that occurred during the spooling procedure.

As for how much main line to put on the spool, the perfect amount for each pro falls somewhere between 1/16 to 1/8 inch from the rim of the spool. Put on too much line and wind knots will occur; however, if the gap is 3/16 to 1/4 inch or more, casting distance becomes compromised.

The good news about braid is that once you have it spooled on, it can last for years. These pros will often go an entire season or two before changing the braid. Most say it's the attrition of hundreds of reties on the braid's length rather than physical wear that eventually forces a re-spooling of new braid.

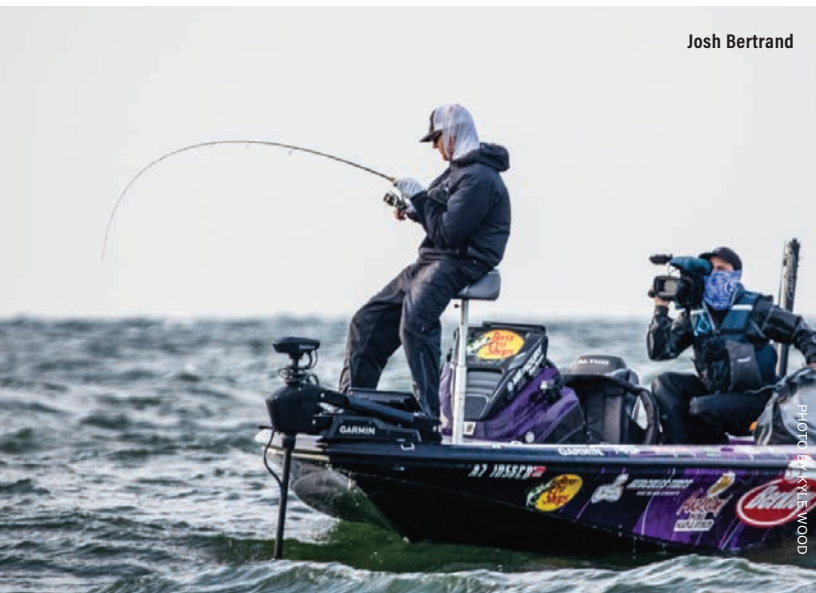
"I like to have a pretty full spool on the reel," Meyer says. "Once that gap between the braid and spool rim grows to about 3/16 of an inch, I change it."

## LEADERS AND LENGTHS

As for leaders, the panel again reaches common ground on their go-to leader size for finesse fishing with spinning tackle: fluorocarbon in 8-pound-test. This may vary with conditions, but all start with that.

"The leader is the most adjustable component in the spinning gear system," Daniels says. "I start with 8-pound-test Seaguar Gold Label, but if the water is dirty or I'm fishing a wacky rig around heavy cover, I have no problem going to 10- or even 12-pound test."

Ehrler's go-to leader line is Sunline Sniper; Meyer employs Daiwa J Fluoro Samurai; Lucas and Bertrand stick to Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon.



Josh Bertrand

Where things get tricky with these pros is when the discussion turns to leader lengths.

Meyer employs the longest leader of about 15 to 20 feet to get some separation between the lure and his chartreuse main line.

Lucas' rule of thumb is the clearer the water, the longer the leader, varying in length anywhere from 7 to 12 feet, while Ehrler keeps his leaders in the 10-foot range.

Daniels and Bertrand both favor leaders 7 to 8 feet for different reasons. Daniels likes to keep stretch to a minimum in his spinning setup, so going with shorter leaders helps limit stretch and loss of hook-setting power. While most of the panel doesn't mind reeling the fusion knot into the reel with each cast, Bertrand wants his fusion knot outside the reel.

"I just don't like reeling my knot up into the spool," Bertrand says. "I want my fusion knot on the outside of the reel above my trigger finger. I want to grab braid with my trigger finger for a cast, not leader."

Also, fresh leaders are a must. The entire panel admitted to being relentless leader changers during tournaments, retying all leaders at least once a day and even more than that on rods getting heavy use in a day.

"If my leader gets too short or I feel like it's been compromised in any way from contact with cover, I'm changing it," Daniels says. "Sometimes multiple times a day."

Ehrler will change leaders at least once a day, even on rods that didn't get used.

"I like a fresh start no matter if I used it or not the previous day," Ehrler says. "A fresh leader and knot gives me confidence."

## NOW FOR KNOTS

The most important link in the spinning equation is the fusion knot connecting the main line and the leader. Among five of the best spinning anglers in the business, there are only two knots considered for this critical union: the FG and the Alberto knot. Of the two, the FG knot is considered stronger and thinner. The FG casts through the guides better and reels onto the spool better for those who like to use

longer leaders. The tradeoff, however, is that the FG is a much more tedious knot to tie, especially with a 20-knot wind rocking the boat.

Ehrler and Daniels are FG loyalists; it's the only fusion knot they tie. Lucas and Bertrand, however, are bigger fans of the Alberto, claiming it's easy to tie, strong and has never given them any problems. Meyer splits the difference by saying the FG is undoubtedly the best union knot, period. When he's rigging tackle before a tournament and has the time, he always ties an FG. However, if he's in the heat of battle and needs to tie on a new leader, he'll fall back on the Alberto for its expediency.

Finally, as for tying lures to the leader, the Palomar is still the most popular knot. Bertrand and Lucas will mix in a San Diego jam knot for lures that require harder hooksets, and Daniels prefers a Miller knot for most of his terminal connections.

All told, setting up a tour-level spinning outfit requires four knots and three different lengths of line. At first it sounds complex and tedious, but by following the suggestions from these spin masters, spinning gear can be a friend instead of a foe.

## SPINNING GURUS' SETUPS

Want a Tour-level spinning combo that can handle most finesse fishing applications? Here are the go-to setups for each of the spinning specialists who contributed to this article.

### JOSH BERTAND

Rod: Abu Garcia Fantasisa Premier, 7' medium action  
 Reel: Abu Garcia Revo MGX 30  
 Braid: Berkley X5, 8-pound-test, crystal  
 Leader: Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon, 8-pound-test

### MARK DANIELS, JR.

Rod: Favorite Fishing Sick Stick, 7'1" medium-heavy action  
 Reel: Bass Pro Shops Platinum Johnny Morris Signature Series 3000  
 Braid: Seaguar Smackdown, 15-pound-test, flash green  
 Leader: Seaguar Gold Label, 8-pound-test

### BRENT EHRLER

Rod: Daiwa Tatula Elite, Brent Ehrler Series Drop Shot, 7'1"  
 Reel: Tatula LT 4000  
 Braid: Sunline XPlasma, 12-pound-test, light green  
 Leader: Sunline Sniper, 8-pound-test

### JUSTIN LUCAS

Rod: Abu Garcia Fantasisa Premier, 7' medium action  
 Reel: Abu Garcia Revo MGX 30  
 Braid: Berkley X5, 8-pound-test, crystal  
 Leader: Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon, 8-pound-test

### CODY MEYER

Rod: Daiwa Tatula Elite, Cody Meyer Versatile, 7'4"  
 Reel: Tatula LT 3000  
 Braid: Daiwa J-Braid, 10-pound-test, chartreuse  
 Leader: Daiwa J-Fluoro Samurai, 8-pound-test. ■



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## COMING TO AMERICA

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### WHAT IT TAKES TO CHASE A DREAM THAT STARTED 6,000 MILES AWAY

*By Sean Ostruszka*

**O**ne has achieved it. The other is chasing it. Both left behind everything - family, culture, language, familiar comforts - in pursuit of it.

Neither doubted their decisions. They didn't doubt because of their drive, their passion. They had goals and weren't going to let fear block them from attaining them. Or maybe they didn't doubt because, literally and figuratively, they couldn't afford to once they made the move.

Either way, there's no room for doubt for Japanese anglers looking to become professional anglers in the United States. There wasn't when Takahiro Omori did it back in 1992. There's still none for up-and-coming anglers like Takayuki Koike.





PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

## MAKING IT FAR FROM HOME

Trying to become a professional angler is a major risk on its own, let alone trying to do it from another country where you don't have any experience on the fisheries, connections to lean on or even speak the language. Yet, it can be done.

Omori is a Bassmaster Classic champion and is approaching the \$3 million mark in career winnings. Shinichi Fukae has an FLW Angler of the Year title to his name (in his 2004 rookie season, no less). Norio Tanabe became the first Japanese angler to win a major tournament back in 1993, and since, Ben Matsubu, Kotaro Kiriya and Morizo Shimizu have, as well.

Koike is hoping to join this list, having completed his first season of the Toyota Series Plains Division in 2020. He did remarkably well, finishing fourth in the standings, making a top 10 and qualifying for the Toyota Series Championship.

Yet, as Omori can attest, one season doesn't make a career. This game is about survival, especially for Japanese anglers who have risked so much to play it. He'd know. He's been doing it longer and better than anyone else from Japan.

"It's hard [to make the jump from Japan to the U.S. to become a professional angler]," says Omori. "There are many anglers back in Japan with potential, but then you have to deliver on that potential just to qualify for the tour. And making it on the tour is 10 times more difficult than just qualifying.

"I've been fortunate, but many others haven't."



Takayuki Koike completed his first season of the Toyota Series Plains Division in 2020, qualifying for the Toyota Series Championship.

PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

## REFLECTIONS OF PAST AND PRESENT

At first glance, there really should be no comparing Omori and Koike other than they both hail from the same island on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

Omori is a successful 50-year-old seasoned veteran. He has a championship title, seven more major victories and has earned more than \$2.7 million in his 25-plus-year career.

Koike is a 35-year-old unknown with four tournaments total to his resume stateside and \$5,497 in earnings.

In other words, Koike is far more successful ... at least, at this stage in his career. Seriously, it's true.

Omori began fishing events in 1992 as a co-angler to learn the ropes. In his first tournament, he finished 304th. You read that right - 304th. He didn't top 256th in any of his next three events. It wasn't until a year later, in his fifth tournament, that he cashed his first check, finishing eighth to earn \$3,800.

Koike's fourth event was his worst, his first bomb, which unfortunately came at the Toyota Series Championship. Prior to that, though, he'd finished 36th, 10th and 21st in his first three events. Pretty impressive, especially considering numerous top-level pros fish in that division.

But, again, it's hard to compare the two. After all, Omori came to America with nothing more than \$2,000, a tackle box, a couple rods, a suitcase full of clothes and the vague idea of what tournament bass fishing truly was from reading the Japanese fishing magazine *BASSER*.

"I had no info," Omori recalls. "All I had was what I read in magazines, so once I started fishing, I was basically guessing. I didn't even have GPS. I was using paper maps to try and find the boat ramps.

"Now, you can be in Japan, get on the internet and watch GoPro footage of a guy fishing. You can watch a livestream during a tournament and hear a pro explain a technique. That really helps jumpstart someone to get them here."

Koike agrees that the internet was a huge factor in allowing him to make the move to the U.S. Yet, it had more to do about logistics than fishing.

"The internet is used for all different kinds of activities, such as searching for words you don't understand and communicating, looking at maps on Google Earth, checking hotel reservations, eating places, weather," Koike says. "Due to COVID-19, it was difficult to go to the U.S. in 2020. The internet solves all the accommodation arrangements and work."

Still, even in this digital age, it was magazines that introduced Koike to the concept of bass fishing, similarly to Omori.

"I discovered a magazine advertisement contained information about the holding of a high school tournament," says Koike. "No one taught me how to participate in the tournament, so I started without knowing anything. I didn't even understand the meaning of 'livewell.'"

That's hardly the only similar experience the two share. Despite all the advancements and changes in the nearly 30 years separating the start of their careers, many of the experiences and challenges Omori faced then are the same Koike faces now.

The language barrier is an obvious one - Omori took English courses at Texas Wesleyan University when he moved to the U.S., while Koike appreciates "Americans trying to understand my poor English. They talk to me in a way that I can understand while I try to master English."

Money is another. Omori laughs now at the idea of trying to start a fishing career with only \$2,000 like he did.

"Having financial support is a must now," he says. "You spend \$80,000 on a boat and \$50,000 on a truck to pull it. Another \$30,000 in entry fees. You need some sort of financial support."

Fortunately for Koike, sponsor SDG Marine helped him out tremendously when it came to him pursuing his dream, even helping him rent a house in the U.S.

And, above all, there's one similarity that stands out the most for both; one that may be the biggest challenge.

"No one (I know) is here," says Koike. "I'm fishing alone."



PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

## AN OCEAN OF DETERMINATION

Every dream needs a starting point. Koike's was an email address.

He'd known he wanted to become a professional angler for years, even writing it as his future career for his elementary school yearbook at age 12, despite not being "conscious of America." But it wasn't until he was a teenager that the dream became a goal.

"When I am 15 years old, I created the email address of Americandream601123," says Koike. "I have been using this address for 20 years since then. It's my starting point."

For Omori, the magazine articles and chance encounters in Japan with the likes of Gary Yamamoto, Rick Clunn and Denny Brauer fueled the dream. But his living in a small tent on an island on Lake Kawaguchi so he could fish every day is what served as his starting point.

Once taking those different – yet significant – steps, they both officially set out on the paths to their same goal: becoming professional anglers in America. Even then, they had to proceed with tact.

"Nothing happened just by thinking," says Koike. "It was necessary to act specifically."

With no safety net once making the move to the U.S., Japanese anglers have to be even more deliberate than their American counterparts. They have to be more thorough. They have to have a plan.

Omori famously created a 15-year plan before ever fishing a single tournament in the U.S.

"If I look back at this plan now, it was always in the back of my mind like some kind of force," Omori explains. "Because of that plan, incredible things were happening in real life."

Still, the best-laid plans can all be undone without the determination to execute them and overcome obstacles. And rest assured, there have been plenty of obstacles for both Omori and Koike.

## MEETING THE CHALLENGES

Besides trying to move to the U.S. amidst a pandemic, Koike has to go back to Japan regularly because of ESTA restrictions. As for Omori, he lived in a borrowed 1985 Chevy Suburban for the first three years he lived in the U.S. and admits he never made any profit fishing for the first decade of his career.

"To [make the move from Japan to chase this dream], you have to do it because you love to fish," Omori says. "It has to be a passion; in your DNA. You have to be able to stay positive no matter what, so you don't want to give up when you're broke down on the side of a highway traveling to the next tournament after bombing the last one."

Aside from the economics and logistics, Omori feels this point of determination (or lack thereof) is the biggest driver behind why more anglers from Japan don't make the transition. They have the competitive drive and talent potential, and they want to prove themselves at the highest level. But it takes something more to go out on such an unstable branch with no safety net below.

It's something Koike feels he has, and it's why he came over; why he's looking to follow in the footsteps of his heroes like Omori and Fukae.

"Thanks to them opening the way for me, I feel that I am now able to challenge myself in America," Koike admits. "I respect them very much. Their performance in America has always excited Japanese bass anglers.

"My goal is to win Angler of the Year and big titles. However, they are not the ultimate goals. Make a name for myself and make it in the fishing business. That might be the ultimate goal. I have a moderate sense of tension and fun. I'm not afraid." ■



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



PHOTO BY JACOB FINE



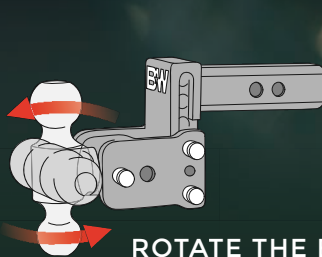
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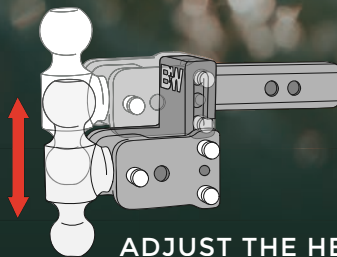
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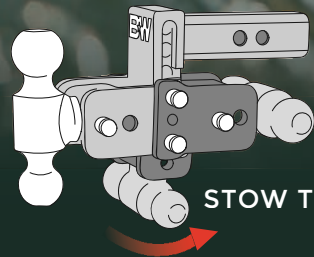
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# ROOKIES AND NOT-SO-ROOKIES

## FRESH (AND REFRESHED) FACES TO WATCH ON THE PRO CIRCUIT IN 2021

By Joel Shangle

**E**very new season on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit brings about a fresh set of storylines, along with the potential for intrigue and suspense.

Who are the Angler of the Year hopefuls? Who will have a breakout season? Who will hoist the winner's trophies? Which fisheries will over-perform and provide mega-bags that become future magazine covers?

But there are also several "stories within the story" as the Pro Circuit ramps up this month with tournaments at Lake Okeechobee and Smith Lake, and one of the most interesting sub-stories involves some fresh faces ... and a couple of RE-freshed faces.



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER



Cal Lane enters his rookie season with his sights set on topping his dad (Chris) and uncle (Bobby).

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



## THE PROSPECT

According to our resident BIG5 tournament scouting department – i.e. website managing editor and confessed tournament super-geek Jody White – Missouri pro Cody Huff is the dictionary definition of “multi-tool prospect” and an angler to watch in the Rookie of the Year race in 2021.

Looking at Huff’s tournament resume in 2020 alone, it’s hard to argue with that scouting report: Huff started his season with back-to-back wins on Toledo Bend in a span of eight days (a Bassmaster College Series event and the Toyota Series Southwestern Division opener), and then added another champion’s trophy in November (the Toyota Series Plains Division finale on Table Rock Lake) to bookend his season.

Huff earned a check at the 2020 Bassmaster Classic (he finished 24th), had five top 10s in his Abu Garcia College Fishing career at Bethel University, and can claim fellow Ava, Missouri, resident Rick Clunn as a friend and occasional fishing partner (“Rick and I talk on the phone maybe once a week; he’s a pretty good guy to bounce things off of,” Huff deadpans).

## CODY HUFF AVA, MISSOURI

But a little deeper dive into the “how” of his qualification into the Pro Circuit hints at why Huff should be a freshman to watch in 2021 (and could be a sneaky-good pick at Smith Lake, Lake Murray, and the St. Lawrence River).

Huff zeroed in on suspended fish as they moved between creeks and main-river channels at Toledo Bend, relying on live sonar to follow schools moving into creeks the first two days, then tracking them back out as they moved into deeper water on the final day.

He made similar adjustments at Table Rock, targeting suspended largemouth in 50 to 100 feet of water the first two days, then catching nothing but shallow-suspending smallmouth on a small swimbait on the final day, when the shad moved out of the handful of areas he had caught his fish.

“All the shad on that third day ended up being suspended really high, 10 feet or less,” Huff says. “I went out into the middle of a creek where the shad were, and for some reason, there was nothing but 3-pound smallmouth there. They were all singles and doubles, no big schools, so I had to see them a long ways away and snipe them. You had to make a perfect cast and bring it right over their heads, and they’d blow up on it. I was watching them all on LiveScope – I didn’t catch a single fish all week that I didn’t see eat the bait (on live sonar).”

Huff’s grasp of live sonar – plus his ability to decipher what’s he’s seeing and make the adjustments on the fly – is part of the reason why Pro Circuit pro Grae Buck also tabbed him as his ROY pick.

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUJURA



## COAST-TO-COAST INFLUENCE

Tournament bass fishing rosters are pretty heavily dominated by anglers living in the Southern “Bass States” (Arkansas, Alabama, Tennessee, etc.), but don’t discount the pros from the far eastern and western fringes of the country.

Oregonian Jacob Wall made a splash on the Pro Circuit coming out of the West Coast – he finished fifth in AOY standings his sophomore season in 2020 – and we have our eyes on Virginia’s Cody Pike and Western Division pro Tai Au as rookies who might merit some extra attention in the 2021 season.

## TAI AU GLENDALE, ARIZONA

Au put together a strong season in 2020 to qualify into the Pro Circuit, sacking up 26-1 on Day 1 en route to a win at Havasu and staging another 26-pound surge on the final day at Clear Lake to win there as well. Au added a 10th-place finish at the Delta in between to claim the Western Division AOY.

Pike qualified into the Pro Circuit after a spirited AOY battle in the Toyota Series Eastern Division with two veterans (David Williams and Todd Walters) who have a combined 76 top 10s to their credit. Pike finished sixth at Hartwell, ninth on the Potomac River and 10th at Lake Norman to complete a stout Toyota Series season. He also claimed a BFL win on the Potomac for good measure.

PHOTO BY JROB NEWELL



## CODY PIKE POWHATAN, VIRGINIA

# CAL LANE

## GUNTERSVILLE, ALABAMA



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMEIER

### FAMILY BUSINESS

Among the handful of bass-fishing families that made their marks in tournament bass fishing, it would be hard to argue against "Lane" and "Hibdon" being among the most respected surnames in the sport – just shy of \$7.2 million in career winnings between the two families tells you all you need to know about their bass-catching bloodlines.

With the addition of Cal Lane and Lawson Hibdon to the Pro Circuit roster – Hibdon qualified in through the Plains Division, Lane via the Southeastern Division – don't be shocked if/when that number gets even bigger.

Hibdon will compete head-to-head with his dad Dion, a Forrest Wood Cup and Bassmaster Classic champion who will reenter tour-level competition after a five-year absence (more on this later). Lane will be in the same Pro Circuit field as his dad Chris (a Classic champ) and uncle Bobby (a General Tire World Champion), both of whom are fishing both the Bass Pro Tour and the Pro Circuit.

Hibdon has competed in the Ozark Division of the Phoenix Bass Fishing League for eight years – starting as a

boater when he was 18 – and fished three seasons (2011, 2012 and 2015) on the FLW Tour as a co-angler. He qualified for the Forrest Wood Cup in 2015 and has 35 BIG5 tournaments under his belt heading into the 2021 season.

Lane, the youngest-ever qualifier for the Pro Circuit (he was 18 when he qualified), went all-in right out of high school, fishing both the Choo Choo BFLs and Southeastern Division of the Toyota Series in 2020, with the full intent of qualifying for the tour.

"The Toyota Series is no joke: You're fishing at somebody's home body of water everywhere you go, and when you're able to travel around and put together the kinds of seasons that Cal and Lawson did to qualify for the Pro Circuit, you've really accomplished something," says MLF BIG5 Senior Director of Tournament Operations Daniel Fennel. "There's never been a person born named 'Lane' or 'Hibdon' that didn't have fishing ability, judging by what those families have shown us. (Cal and Lawson) both look like they come by their ability naturally, and they've sure had some incredible mentors to help them prepare to compete at this level."



PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

# LAWSON HIBDON

## VERSAILLES, MISSOURI

The tournament results from Jacopo Gallelli's first full season fishing the Toyota Series are impressive enough to put him on the list of potential rookie-class newsmakers in 2021 – Gallelli was fourth in AOY standings in the Southern Division and sixth in the Southwestern Division in 2020, making him a double qualifier into the Pro Circuit.

He also earned two top 10s along the way (sixth on the St. John's River, eighth at Fort Gibson Lake).

But the distance from his home that Gallelli will fish his first Pro Circuit makes his story all the more interesting: 5,048 miles, the distance between Florence, Italy (where Gallelli was born and raised) and Clewiston, Florida, where he'll start his tour-level career in February.

Gallelli made a splash in 2018 when he qualified for the Bassmaster Classic

"To double qualify was pretty awesome; I'm very much excited," Gallelli said as he watched his boat being wrapped for the season. "It's a life goal for me. I used to live right in the middle of Florence, so I've said that I was born on the wrong side of the ocean. I was in the right place to be an artist or teacher of history, but not to be a bass fisherman."

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN



### INTERNATIONAL FLAVOR

# JACOPO GALLELLI

## FLORENCE, ITALY



## LARRY NIXON QUITMAN, ARKANSAS

With more than 760 tour-level events, 158 top 10s, two Classic trophies, one Forrest Wood Cup and \$5.3 million in career winnings between them in their storied careers, Larry Nixon and Dion Hibdon are the polar opposites of the terms “rookie” and “freshman” as the 2021 Pro Circuit schedule kicks off at Lake Okeechobee and Smith Lake in February and March.

But Nixon being one year removed from surgeries that cost him the 2020 season and Hibdon prepping for his first tour-level season since 2015, you can accurately say that there’s some “new” in these grey-bearded faces.

Nixon enters the 2021 schedule (his 43rd year as a pro) at a self-assessed “70 or 80 percent” following procedures in 2020 on his casting shoulder and elbow, and has simple goals for the year ahead: “I want to make the TITLE. I’d like to make the championship and have a decent year.”

Don’t be surprised if Nixon’s “decent year” is more than decent, by most standards.

“Don’t count Larry Nixon out just because he had surgery,” says BIG5 Senior Director of Operations Bill Taylor,

who has known Nixon since the late 1970s. “When you’re talking about what it means to fish as a professional, Larry just epitomizes what it’s about. He brings so much to the table, with the integrity to how he goes about his business. I’m glad to have him back.”

Hibdon’s return to the circuit was a longer time coming, a fact that the 2000 Forrest Wood Cup champion candidly attributes to the malaise that struck him after the illness and death of his dad, the legendary Guido Hibdon, in March of 2018.

“We needed to take a couple years after we lost my dad to ‘get right’ again,” Hibdon says. “The year after he died, I don’t think I could’ve fished. I just had no desire to go. Most people are close to their dads, but I can say without a doubt that my dad was my best friend. I needed that time away, and I don’t regret taking it at all. Now, was it good for me (as an angler)? I don’t know. I guess we’ll see. If anything, I think I’m a little more footloose and versatile than I used to be. But I can tell you this: I’m excited about the whole shooting match.”



## DION HIBDON VERSAILLES, MISSOURI

# THE REST OF THE ROOKIE FIELD

**Shannon Abbott** of Oceanside, Calif., recorded two top-20 finishes in Western Division Toyota Series competition in 2020. **Jason Blair** of West Palm Beach, Fla., finished second at the St. Johns River to earn his spot through the Southern Division. **Mark Blevins** of Palatka, Fla., led the Southern Division AOY after two events in 2020 en route to earning his spot in the Pro Circuit.

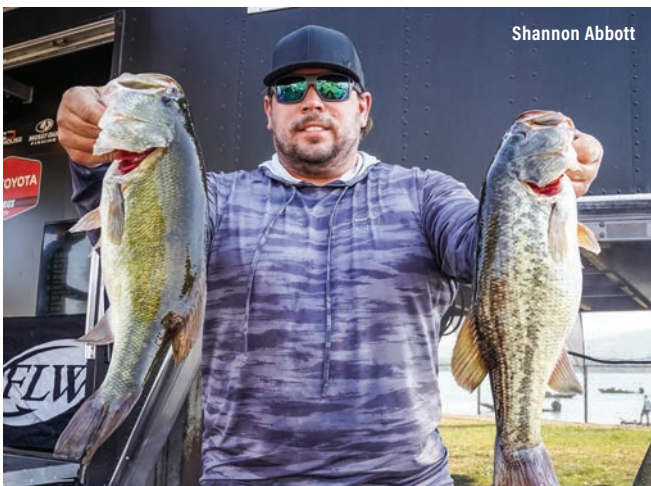


PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

**Josh Bragg** of Jacksonville, Ala., finished fourth in the Southeastern Division in 2020, and is an angler to watch anytime tournaments hit Alabama waters. **Josh Butler** of Hayden, Ala., earned two top-10 finishes in the Toyota Series Southeastern Division, and also won AOY in the BFL Choo Choo Division. **Justin Cooper** of Zwolle, La., piled up three top 5s in BFL Cowboy Division AOY races before finishing second in the Toyota Series Southwestern Division in 2020. **Trevor Fitzgerald** of Belleview, Fla., won the Toyota Series event on the St. Johns River and claimed the Southern Division AOY.



PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

**Grant Galloway** of Houka, Miss., enters the 2021 Pro Circuit with 58 MLF events already under his belt, qualifying up through the Central Division. **Clabion Johns** of Social Circle, Ga., fished multiple BFL divisions in 2020, qualifying for the Pro Circuit via the Toyota Series Southeastern Division. **Takayuki Koike** of Ohtsu, Japan, earned a fourth-place AOY finish in the Central Division, including a top 10 at Lake of the Ozarks.

**Jason Lieblong** of Conway, Ark., put up impressive numbers in 2020: A win at Dardanelle and second at Table Rock earned him a Plains Division AOY and a Pro Circuit bid. **Jim Neece Jr.** of Bristol, Tenn., earned a win at Lake Chickamauga to qualify through the Central Division.

**Kevin Riney** of Jonesboro, Ark., qualified in through the Plains Division, earning a 12th-place finish in the Toyota Series Championship.

**Ricky Robinson** of Greenback, Tenn., eked out a three-point AOY win in the Central Division thanks to top 10s at Pickwick and Chickamauga. **Chase Serafin** of White Lake, Mich., earned three top 10s in the Northern Division to push him to the AOY title and a Pro Circuit qualification. **Troy Stokes** of Brownstown, Mich., qualified out of the Northern Division with a pair of top-10 finishes. **Scott Towry** of Lawrenceburg, Tenn., has competed in nearly 150 MLF events – including two All-Americans – and qualified in through the Southeastern Division.



PHOTO BY COBI PELLEGRINO

**Todd Walters** of Kernersville, N. C. finished second to Pro Circuit veteran David Williams for the Eastern Division AOY, but his resume includes five wins and a second-place showing at the 2016 All-American. **Joe Wieberg** of Freeburg, Mo., qualified in out of the Plains Division (his second Toyota Series AOY top 10 in three years). **Jason Wilson** of Lincolnton, N.C., finished fifth in AOY in the Eastern Division to qualify for the Pro Circuit. **Steve York** of Bronson, Mich., qualified for the Pro Circuit via the Northern Division. ■



NEVER GIVE UP

### Mark Daniels Jr.

Since fishing the wind-blown shores of San Francisco Bay as a youngster – for fun and for dinner – Mark Daniels Jr. dreamed of competing against the world's best tournament anglers. After earning a degree in 2006 from Tuskegee University, Daniels made a commitment to compete hard on the tournament trail for five years. Now he's fishing against the best on the MLF Bass Pro Tour. His climb to the top was fueled by three words: Never give up. "You have to disregard the naysayers and never give up, always follow your passion."

[MercuryMarine.com/ProXS](http://MercuryMarine.com/ProXS)



Daniels runs a Ranger® Z520L powered by a Mercury® 250 Pro XS®



# MASTERS

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

*As told by Skeet Reese*

PHOTOS BY CHRIS SHANGLE

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**T**he “Masters Series” is a new feature of *MLF Bass Fishing* that features a recognized expert – the master of the craft – and a technique he’s become closely identified with after great success at the highest levels of the sport. With this series, we bring you the best bass-catching methods from the most talented experts, as told in their own words.

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# S SERIES





## HISTORY

I started using big, soft-bodied swimbaits in the late 1980s, when they were just starting to catch on in California. Guys were using them to agitate big female bass during the spawn.

It was amazing how the bass reacted to 12- and 15-inch lures that were invading their beds. Sometimes they'd attack the bait, and you'd catch them on it, but more often they'd just reveal themselves, so you could go back and catch them with something else later.

That particular technique was a closely guarded secret for a long time. Guys kept it hidden in their rod lockers, but it eventually got out when the spotlight of national tournaments was put on it.

In the early 2000s, I realized that smaller swimbaits could be just as effective on waters with smaller bass or in places where bass were targeting smaller baitfish. That realization opened up a lot of possibilities for me as an angler, and it eventually led to the explosion of swimbaits in the tackle industry.

Today, I regularly use swimbaits ranging from just 2 or 3 inches to over 12 inches in length, but I especially love the larger swimbaits — 5 inches and up. For me, there's just nothing like a big swimbait bite. You just know it's going to be a good fish.

## HIGHLIGHTS

One of the first big wins I ever had was on Clear Lake in California, and my catch was anchored by a 9-pound bass that hit a 12-inch swimbait. Later, I won tour-level tournaments using big — though not as big — soft-bodied swimbaits on Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia in 2010 and on Lake Guntersville in Alabama in 2015. They've been an important part of my arsenal for a long time now, all across the country.



## WHEN

When anglers ask me when they should fish a soft-bodied swimbait, I usually tell them, "Whenever they're biting a soft-bodied swimbait!" Swimbaits can be great at any time, but they're especially effective from the pre-spawn through the post-spawn.

## WHERE

Pre-spawn to post-spawn, I'm generally targeting water less than 10 feet deep near spawning areas. Three or more feet of visibility is ideal, but it's not critical. You'll get (and be able to notice) a lot more followers when the water's clear, but I'll throw a swimbait even when visibility is as little as 6 to 12 inches.

## THE BASICS

Generally, a slow, steady retrieve is best for these big swimbaits, but conditions vary, and you'll want to experiment until you start getting bites. Quite often, I'll "pop" or snap my rod tip to make the lure move quickly and erratically. That sometimes triggers a strike.

If your boat's moving or drifting while you're fishing a swimbait, there's a tendency for a bow to form between your rod tip and the lure. That bow or sag in your line can cause your bait to swim in an unnatural way rather than in a straight line, plus it cuts down on your sensitivity and ability to get a good hookset. You want to eliminate that bow as much as possible and to keep a tight line between your rod tip and the bait.

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*"THERE'S JUST NOTHING LIKE A BIG SWIMBAIT BITE. YOU JUST KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE A BIG FISH."*

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One way to do that is to watch out for unnecessary boat movement or to change the angle of your casts to allow for that movement. It also helps to point your rod directly at the lure as you retrieve it. You'll get a lot more strikes if your swimbait moves naturally.

Ultimately, a big swimbait is just a tool, like any other lure in your tackle box. They may be more expensive than some of your other lures, but you can't let that stop you from putting them where fish live.

I regularly fish an 8-inch swimbait in places where most anglers would only cast a hollow-bodied frog, and I'll skip that same swimbait 40 feet up under a boat dock where bass have never seen a lure like it.

If you fish a swimbait like you're afraid to lose it, you're not going to have the kind of success you're looking for – and you just might lose it anyway. These lures are tools designed to get a bite or to reveal the presence of a big fish. If you're not using them like tools, you're missing a great opportunity and a lot of big fish.



## ADVANCED

As a general rule, you don't want to fish the big soft-bodied swimbaits by positioning your boat in deep water and casting to shallow water. Too much of your retrieve is out of the strike zone when you do that. You generally want to keep the bait near the bottom, and that's harder when you retrieve from shallow water to deep water. You have to slow your retrieve way down or even stop it to regain contact with the bottom.

That's why I prefer to position my boat in shallower water and cast to deep water or to fish parallel to the shoreline across water that's likely to be about the same depth. When you fish uphill (deep to shallow), it's much easier to control your depth and to keep your bait near the bottom.

There's a lot more to fishing big soft-bodied swimbaits than most anglers realize, but, as with most other bass fishing techniques, it all starts with proper boat positioning. Put yourself in the right position to make a good presentation before you make that first cast.



## TACKLE

Choosing the right gear for soft-bodied swimbait fishing has everything to do with the hook (or hooks) on your swimbait. If your bait has a single jig-style hook coming out of the top of the bait, like the Huddleston Deluxe, you need a heavier-action rod to drive the hook into the mouth of a big bass. For that, I like a 7-foot, 6-inch heavy-action rod and 20- or 25-pound-test Berkley Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon line.

If I'm using a swimbait with one or more treble hooks, like the Osprey Talon Inline, I want a softer rod with a more parabolic action that's more forgiving and that stays loaded up to keep pressure on the trebles. I use a 7-foot, 6-inch medium-heavy-action rod and 20-pound-test Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon.

I want something with a large line capacity in a 150 or 200 size for my reel. I use the Abu Garcia REVO Toro Beast in the 6.2:1 gear ratio. It's an intermediate speed, so I can easily speed up or slow down and still maintain a comfortable retrieve cadence.

*"THERE'S A LOT MORE TO FISHING BIG SOFT-BODIED SWIMBAITS THAN MOST ANGLERS REALIZE ..."*

## LURES

You can classify most soft-bodied swimbaits by their tail style. I mostly use boot-tails and paddle-tails. A boot-tail (like the Huddleston Deluxe) has a lot of thump, works well at slow speeds and is my choice in cold water. A paddle-tail (like the Basstrix or Osprey) is good at faster speeds.

Some of my favorite soft-bodied swimbaits are the Berkley PowerBait Sick Fish (4- and 5.5-inch), the Berkley PowerBait Hollow Belly (6-inch), the Basstrix (7-inch), the Osprey (7- and 9-inch), and the Huddleston (8-inch). ■





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# THE JUICE

TACKLE, TOURNAMENTS & TIPS



PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN



**1. TOYOTA SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP Lake Cumberland**

December 3-5, 2020

Ironton Ohio's **Chris Malone** came out of semi-retirement from competitive bass fishing in 2020 to fish the Toyota Series Central Division, in part because of his love for the fishery hosting the Toyota Series Championship: Lake Cumberland in southern Kentucky. With a top 10 at Dale Hollow a month prior, Malone made the cut to fish the no-entry-fee title event on his favorite lake, though it's unlikely he knew exactly how much he'd come to love Cumberland by the end of weigh-in on December 5.

Malone, who spent a lot of time preparing for the event with friend and 2021 Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro Ryan Davidson (against whom he competed in the Championship), had to dedicate some serious focus to Cumberland's wintertime bass population - having never really spent as much time chasing the lake's green and brown fish in frigid conditions.

What Malone settled on was a pattern predicated on suspended bass along Cumberland's steep, rocky shoreline. He used an unorthodox bait for the task: a 1/2-ounce Bad Boy Baits tail spinner, which he flipped toward the bank, letting it fall past the unsuspecting smallmouth that were hanging out overtop their deep-water winter haunts. The result was 41 pounds over three days and a \$247,500 payday.

**2. Cameron Lineback**  
*Mount Airy, NC*

For a couple days, Cameron Lineback made hay targeting "do-nothing" stretches of transitional bank on the main lake, but things went south on Championship Saturday when Lineback's primary areas dried up.

With time - and any hopes of winning - running out, Lineback ran back toward takeoff and into Pitman Creek, just a minute or two from boat check. There, in about 30 minutes, the North Carolina pro sacked up double-digit bass, four of which were keepers that filled out his limit and netted him a \$60,000 check. Every

fish he weighed in throughout the tournament came on a crystal craw Luhr-Jensen Speed Trap.

**3. Drew Boggs**  
*Lebanon, TN*

After securing a top 10 at Dale Hollow in the Central Division finale - a tournament in which he ran way upriver to escape the crowd - Boggs decided to try to replicate his success on Cumberland doing much of the same. Trekking up the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River, in the opposite direction from takeoff than most of the field ran, Boggs slung around a Strike King KVD 1.5 square bill to land his 37-4 for the event and take home a \$30,000 check.

Boggs' third-place finish was his 52nd top-10 showing in MLF BIG5 competition.

**4. Dakota Ebare**  
*Denham Springs, LA*

Like Malone, Dakota Ebare relied on something a little different to catch his fish at Cumberland. The Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro

(now entering his third professional season) opted to do his damage at the lower end of the lake with a Carolina rig in hand, which he tipped with a Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw.

To earn his \$35,000 check (which included contingency bonuses), Ebare specifically targeted the second and third points within the creeks on the lower end, and more specifically the points that "stair-stepped" down and featured a lot of big chunk rock and boulders.

**5. Eric Olliverson**  
*Lampe, MO*

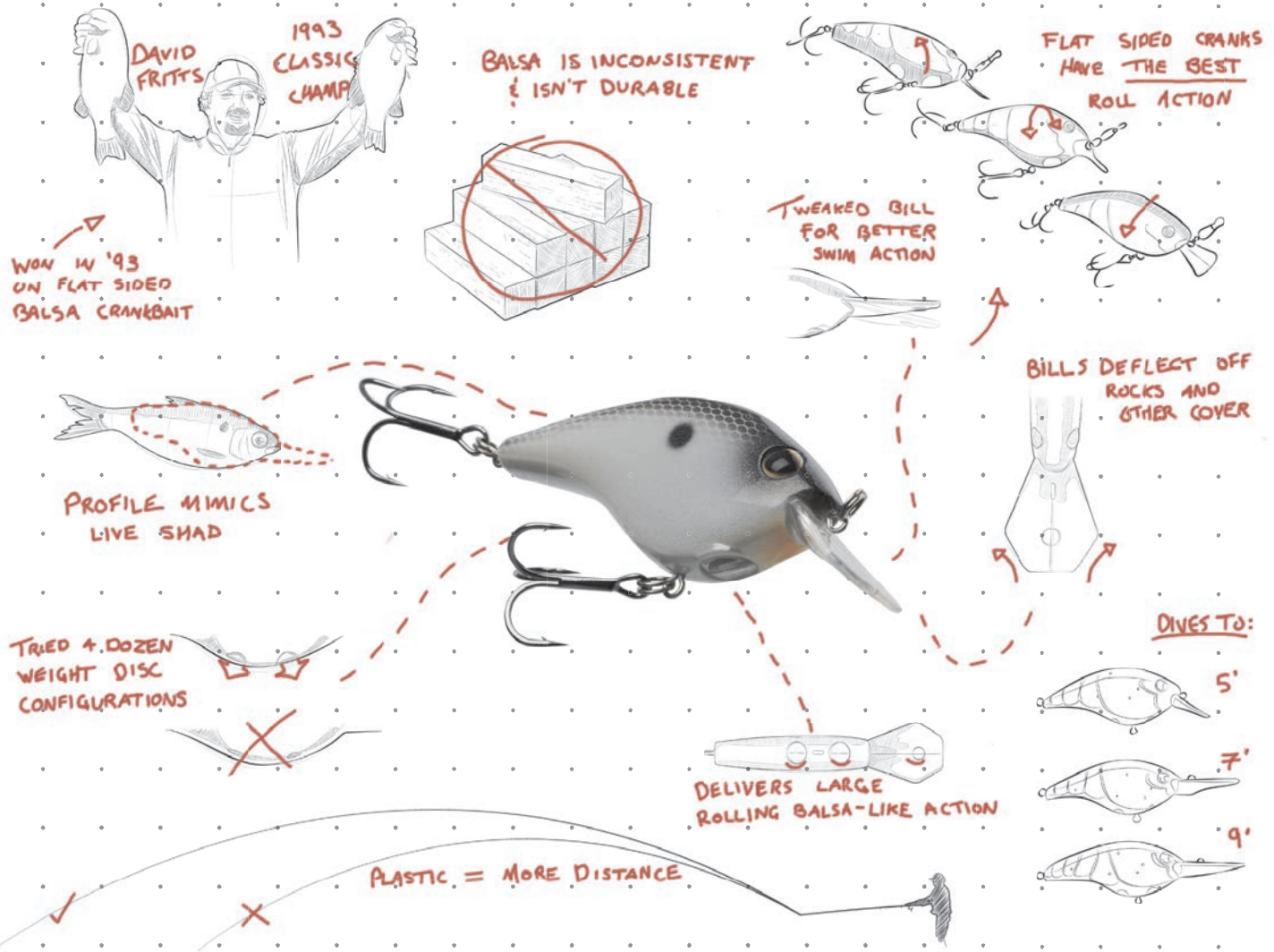
Eric Olliverson spent his tournaments targeting transition banks in the mid-lake area, paying special attention to water color and clarity. Any area that had stained water was key, especially if it also had transitions with small indentations in the shoreline.

Olliverson employed a handful of different reaction baits to catch his fish, including a 6th Sense Curve 55 crankbait, a Z-Man/Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer and a pair of 3/4- and 1-ounce spinnerbaits. ■



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## ABU GARCIA WINCH CASTING ROD

By Matt Williams

PHOTOS BY PHOENIX MOORE

**A**bu Garcia's newest technique-specific rod lineup is designed primarily with crankbait fishing in mind, but the Winch series also includes a bladed jig model that works equally well with several other reaction baits, including large topwaters and even lipless baits.

### First Impression

It's obvious that plenty of forethought went into the design of this rod to enhance sensitivity, versatility, power, balance and comfort, while maintaining the time-tested quality for which the Abu Garcia brand is famous. Light in the hand (at just 5.5 ounces), the 7-foot, 5-inch graphite composite stick is built with a fast tip that gives way to a parabolic-yet-powerful action farther down the blank. It's saddled with 11 stainless guides (counting the tip) and durable Zirconium inserts to cradle the line, a Fuji reel seat and split grips fashioned from premium cork and EVA foam. It also features a handsome charcoal finish with white pinstriping and flashy red accents.

### In Action

I played around with the rod for the better part of two months last fall, and the verdict is in: This rod is everything it's cracked up to be – and more.

In addition to bladed jigs and magnum topwaters like the Berkley Cane Walker and Choppo or Heddon Super Spook, I used it to toss swim jigs, 5- and 6-inch paddle tail swimbaits and 1/2- to 3/4-ounce spinnerbaits. Though some may prefer a shorter rod for casting reaction baits tight to targets, this is a good quality rod you can use to cover plenty of territory with a wide range of lures in situations where precision and accuracy aren't major factors.

Here are some key observations:

**Fast Tip/Length:** The fast tip isn't "crankbait soft," but it still has plenty of flex to help deliver long casts, work big surface plugs effectively and "feed" the bait to the fish. Matched with a smooth baitcaster and 30- to 40-pound-test braid, you can sail a Cane Walker or Choppo a country mile with this rod.

**Power:** The medium-heavy power provides sufficient backbone for good hooksets with single-hook reaction

baits on long casts with no-stretch fluorocarbon or braided lines, while the 7-foot, 5-inch length improves casting and adds leverage for battling large fish around grass and other heavy cover.

**Sensitivity:** The rod's lightweight graphite composite construction lends to all-day fishing comfort while magnifying sensitivity so you can maintain good contact with moving baits and detect subtle strikes.

### Final Thoughts

If you're looking for one rod to effectively cover multiple techniques, this one is worth a look. Moderately priced at \$149.95, the Winch delivers many of the same qualities you might expect to find in a custom rod with a higher price tag.

### Performance Advice

**Reel Choices:** For optimum performance, every specialty rod should be mounted with a quality reel suited for the task. I love the Revo family, but I elected to check out Abu Garcia's all-new Zata LP baitcaster for this instead. The reel's 7.1:1 gear ratio is well-suited for a variety of applications, casts

## GRAPHITE COMPOSITE:

Designed from graphite composite for optimum sensitivity with a fast tip for launching long casts; plenty of power for solid hooksets and good control using a variety of single-hook reaction baits.



## FUJI REEL SEAT:

Outfitted with a premium Fuji reel seat, high quality cork/EVA foam grips and stainless guides that'll take some abuse.



smooth as silk and has a super low profile. It's built with gutsy Duragear brass gearing, a 20-pound drag and Infini braking with 27 clickable settings for precision tuning. The drab olive finish and red highlights coordinate nicely with the rod's color scheme.

**Try Some Braid:** Fill your reel spool with mid-size braid like 30- or 40-pound-test Berkley X9 and you can chuck a big topwater a mile with this rod – a big key in really clear water or when targeting schooling fish. The flex of the tip allows for working the bait and feeding it to fish, while no-stretch braid improves long range hook-ups. For topwater applications, a monofilament leader can help avoid trebles getting wrapped in the line and also reduce line visibility near your bait.

## Applications

- Designed primarily for throwing bladed jigs and large topwaters like the Berkley Cane Walker or Choppo.
- A great multi-purpose rod that also does a good job with swim jigs, spinnerbaits, medium-size swimbaits and even lipless crankbaits.

## HITS LIST

- + Fast tip and good length for launching long casts
- + Backbone to drive single hooks home
- + Quality components
- + Lightweight (5.5 ounces)
- + Well balanced
- + Multi-purpose performer
- + Mid-range price point

## DETAILS

**Length:** 7-foot-5-inches

**Power:** Medium-Heavy with fast tip

**Handle:** 15 3/4 inches

**Material:** Graphite Composite

**Bait Sizes:** 1/4 to 1 ounce

**Line Recommendation:** 12- to 20-pound test

**Guides:** 10+Tip, Stainless/zirconium inserts

**Grip:** Cork/EVA foam

**Hook Keeper:** Yes

**MSRP:** \$149.95

**Contact:** [abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

## >> FAMILY MEMBERS

The Winch Series is an eight-member family with varied powers, actions and lengths designed primarily for throwing a wide range of treble-hooked lures. Besides the Bladed Jig/Topwater model, the series includes six other casting models and a spinning model. All carry the same price tag of \$149.95.

- 6'10" Medium: jerkbaits
- 7'0" Medium: shallow crankbaits
- 7'0" Medium-Heavy: squarebills and flat-sided crankbaits
- 7'6" Medium-Heavy: mid-diving crankbaits
- 7'11" Medium-Heavy: deep-diving crankbaits
- 7'11" Heavy: magnum crankbaits
- 7'2" Spinning, Medium-Light: spybaits ■



1



3



4





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### 4. BERKLEY FLICKER SHAD HD SHALLOW

Building on the wildly successful Flicker Shad series, Berkley introduced the HD Shallow version to give anglers a shad-profile bait with the same enticing side roll and flash as the rest of the lineup, but with a shallower running depth to ensure big bass have nowhere to hide. Designed with a dynamic internal weight system for long and accurate casts, the Flicker Shad HD Shallow is perfectly tuned and ready to rock out of the package. Comes standard with extra-sharp Berkley Fusion19 hooks in 2-inch (1/6-ounce) and 3-inch (2/7-ounce) models with running depths between 2 and 6 feet. **\$4.12 | [berkley-fishing.com](http://berkley-fishing.com)**

### 5. FRABILL TROPHY HAUL BEAR CLAW

It's hard to improve on net technology, but Frabill certainly hit on something new and exciting with its Trophy Haul Bear Claw net. Designed to be operated with just one hand (perfect for solo fishing trips, kayakers and anyone else who needs to net fish with one hand while keeping a rod firmly in the other), the Trophy Haul Bear Claw gives anglers a perfect platform for total control while scooping up big fish. The unique yoke system is attached to a folding support bar for easy storage. Equipped with a 14-by-18-inch hoop for landing most freshwater species. **\$79.99 | [frabill.com](http://frabill.com)**

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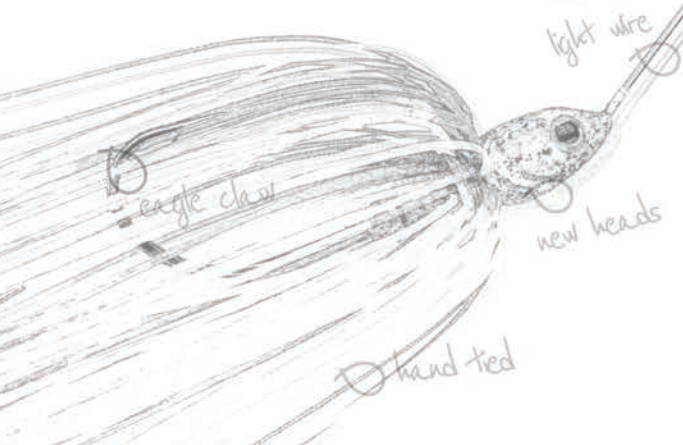
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PROFILE: **CHRIS MALONE**  
IRONTON, OHIO



*If there was a better feel-good story from the 2020 Toyota Series season than Chris Malone's Toyota Series Championship win on Lake Cumberland in early December, we haven't found it yet.*

*Malone, who stepped away from competitive bass fishing several years ago - having last fished an FLW event in 2007 - made the title event through the Central Division and secured a chance to fish his favorite lake in the country, just a few hours from his home in Ironton, Ohio. Cumberland just happens to be where Malone and his wife somewhat recently purchased what Malone has called his "early retirement gift."*

*The rest is almost a Cinderella story. The humble owner of Malone's Marine (a Phoenix dealership in Ironton) used the knowledge and experience he garnered preparing for the event with his friend and 2021 Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro Ryan Davison to top the field and take home almost a quarter of a million dollars.*

# Q&A

By Justin Onslow  
PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

**It's been over a month since you took down a \$247,500 prize on Lake Cumberland. At the time, you told me it might take a little while for it to really sink in. Is it that time yet?**

I mean, it has sunk in, no doubt. You still get the heebie-jeebies just talking about it. It was definitely a special occasion, a special time. I'm blessed to have the opportunity to do that for sure.

**You weren't sure about your plans for fishing competitively in 2021. With that money in the bank and your Phoenix dealership chugging right along, do you think you'll take a crack at defending your newly minted title this season?**

I'm looking at some dates. The fishing this year just doesn't line up what I fished last year as far as timing. It's just bad timing with a couple tournaments in the middle of the week in the spring. It's hard for me to get away from the dealership, but there's a good chance I might run down to fish Dale Hollow and maybe even jump into the Northern Division this year and try to qualify for the championship through the Northerns.

**Have you fished many of the lakes that are on the Northern schedule this year?**

I've fished all of them. Nice lakes. A little bit of a longer drive for me, for sure, but I've fished all the Northern schedule before.

**What's changed for you since that fateful few days on Cumberland? Other than your bank account, of course.**

A little bit of demands on my time. I really wasn't prepared for the time and questions and podcasts and things of that nature. But nothing's changed much. I'm still going to work every day,

and every day I'm not going to work I'm trying to come down to Cumberland or Dale Hollow and try to catch bass. It hasn't changed a whole lot, but it has been a gift, that's for sure.

**Do you enjoy doing the podcasts and the interviews and talking to people or is it kind of weird for you?**

The podcasts and stuff are great. I'm not the best public speaker, but when I can sit in my own chair and talk through the phone or the computer, it's great. I did one with [MLF Editors] Jody White and Kyle Wood and I did one with BassFan. Those guys are professionals.

**Have you been fishing Cumberland much since the Toyota Series Championship?**

I fished there almost the entire week from Christmas to New Year's. I went down the day after Christmas and stayed until a couple days after New Year's and fished almost every day in that time. I caught some really good fish.

**It's your favorite lake, right? Is there a close second?**

Dale Hollow. Dale Hollow is a pretty special place. That's where I originally wanted to look for a retirement home, but it's just a little undeveloped for my wife. She likes being in the Somerset and Burnside [Kentucky] area, and there's a little bit more to do. Cumberland and Dale Hollow are both special places to me, though.

**You have a special relationship with Cumberland for sure. And speaking of relationships, your friendship with Ryan Davidson was a big talking point when you won the Championship.**

He's about the only person I can find as dumb as I am to come out here

in the wintertime for us to catch bass. He showed me an awful lot about wintertime fishing. Chris Malone doesn't win the Championship without help from Ryan Davidson. He's going to get his this year [on the Pro Circuit]. I've lost a little bit of that drive. He's got it. I'm going to sit back and watch him come up and collect some big checks.

**So you'll be living a little vicariously through him.**

Absolutely. I'll put the pressure on him after the first day if he ain't got 'em.

**How's the house? Is the dream of that being your retirement home getting a little closer to being a reality?**

I wouldn't say retirement's any time soon, but I will say a less-hour work week is definitely on the horizon. I'm definitely going to spend a bunch of time fishing. We were there for a week over Christmas and on Dale Hollow for three or four days this week, and I have a championship tournament on Cumberland in about two more weeks. We're getting use out of it, that's for sure, but as far as retirement, I don't see that any time soon. There will be some Mondays and Fridays that I definitely won't be around the shop, though.

**When that time comes, what's retirement going to look like for Chris Malone? Other than fishing a bunch, of course.**

That's about it (laughs). I'll be on the shores of Lake Cumberland and doing a lot of fishing. I've been down here for about a year and a half. We found a couple circuits and fished down here all winter. That's the good thing about Cumberland. There's competitive fishing year-round and I don't have that around the house. ■

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2020 TBF National Championship winner Lance Freeman.

## 2021 TBF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP READY TO ROLL ON RED RIVER

Depending on when you read this, The Bass Federation will have either: 1) Just made another grassroots angler’s dream come true with a \$130,000 “Living Your Dream” prize package; or 2) Made final preparations for one of the longest-running, most prestigious, lucrative amateur bass tournaments in the world.

How lucrative? Nearly \$400,000 in total cash and prizes.

The 2021 Bass Federation National Championship – which runs March 11-13 on the Red River out of Shreveport, Louisiana – brings 102 of the country’s best grassroots anglers and co-anglers to the Pelican State with the same goal: to make their mark on a fishery that returns to the TBF Championship schedule for the first time since 1999.

“The Bass Federation National Championship is the premier event we host every year,” says TBF President Robert Cartledge. “We’ll have anglers from every state in the United States, plus some anglers from Canada. This is an event that these competitors have been working hard to make for a long time.”

With a slate of more than 20,000 events divided across seven major geographic areas in the U.S. and Canada – and a membership base more than 30,000 strong – it has taken months of effort and hustle (and a lot of fish catching) to trim the TBF field down to the championship field of boaters and co-anglers representing the 50 different states, as well as Canada. The TBF National Semi-Final events were held throughout the second half of 2020 on close-to-home lakes for the competing anglers.

After the districts finished their respective tournaments, 51 boaters and 51 co-anglers qualified for the Federation Championship.

### A HISTORICAL GRASSROOTS CHAMPIONSHIP

The Bass Federation National Championship has been contested since 1968, making it one of longest-running events in the bass fishing world. The winner of this tournament takes home the top “Living Your Dream” prize, which

includes a brand-new Ranger boat as well as a cash prize of \$125,000 for the top angler and \$35,000 for the winning co-angler.

To go along with those prizes, the top seven anglers and top seven co-anglers will all receive an automatic bid to fish in the MLF BIG5 Phoenix Bass Fishing League All-American. The winning angler and co-angler also get an automatic bid to fish in the MLF BIG5 Toyota Series Championship.

"This really is *the* grassroots feeder system in the industry," Cartlidge says. "This championship is really a steppingstone to make it to the pros for those that want it. If they don't have desires to turn pro, this is still an event that very few people get to go to, and it's difficult to get this far. The anglers realize that and enjoy every moment of it."

## READY FOR THE RED RIVER

Heading into the Championship, the competition waters – Pools 3, 4 and 5 of the Red River out of Shreveport – are on a significant rebound following a down cycle due to flooding, according to Cartlidge. Consecutive years of inordinately high water in the early 2010s had caused the fishing on the Red River to dip in quality. But following recent years of rebound on the fishery, Cartlidge is assured that the fishing will be excellent when TBF anglers

show up to northwest Louisiana for the 2021 Championship.

"The size and the numbers of fish are for sure rebounding over the last few years," Cartlidge explains. "We expect it to take about 15 pounds a day to win the tournament, based on some events we saw there last year. I'm sure there will be plenty of limits caught, and those limits will probably have to be full of 3-pounders to win."

Spring arrives a little earlier in Louisiana than it does elsewhere in the country, so Cartlidge expects there to be warmer temperatures and some pre-spawn largemouth when anglers arrive for practice in early March.

"Fish might not be in full pre-spawn mode when we get there, but they'll be around their nests for sure," Cartlidge predicts. "Your typical sight fisherman is going to be able to perform well, depending on how clear or muddy the water is at that time. In some of those oxbows and back river channels, I wouldn't be surprised if those fish are already on the beds when we show up."

Practice for the 2021 TBF National Championship runs March 8-10, with competition kicking off March 11 and continuing through the crowning of a new champion on March 13.

You can follow the 2021 TBF National Championship at BassFederation.com throughout the tournament for the latest standings and coverage.



2020 TBF National Championship winning co-angler Derick Pendleton.



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# MARK DANIELS JR.: STILL LIVING HIS TBF DREAM



There's not one distinct path to the rank of professional angler. For some, it can be quick – like in the cases of Jordan Lee and Jacob Wheeler. For others, becoming a pro takes a little more time.

Major League Fishing's Mark Daniels Jr. always had dreams of becoming a pro when he was younger, but those dreams took a back seat for a few years while he worked as an agriculture biologist back home in California. He was 32 years old and loved bass fishing, but had yet to find a way to take a crack at living out his dream. That's where The Bass Federation came into play.

"I fished in TBF events since I was 16 years old," Daniels recalls. "I always liked fishing in TBF events because they offered a guy who works 9-to-5 Monday through Friday a true tournament experience on the weekends at a very low cost. I fished in those events until I got to college; I took five years off, then went right back to it once I graduated. I definitely didn't become a pro overnight. It took a lot of grinding in those weekend tournaments to get to where I am."

## THE DREAM COMES TRUE

Daniels was able to continue working in agriculture after college while taking advantage of local TBF tournaments during his free time, which included qualifying for the 2013 TBF National Championship on Grand Lake in Oklahoma. Little did Daniels know how much that tournament was going to change his life.

"Going into that tournament, I was really just a weekend warrior," Daniels says. "I fought my way up to qualify for the National Championship and get my shot at becoming a pro. I knew what was at stake for me if I won that tournament and what winning could do for my future as a fisherman."

A win in the National Championship would earn Daniels a "Living the Dream" prize package which included a brand-new Ranger boat, a new Chevrolet Suburban, entry fees paid into the (at the time) FLW Tour, and \$500 in travel expenses for each event he fished on the Tour. Needless to say, it would be a great way to get his professional career started.

Daniels used a second-day five-fish limit of 24 pounds, 10 ounces to help secure his National Championship win. He then used his "Living the Dream" prize package to catapult him into a career as a full-time professional angler and has added three pro-level wins to his resume since joining the ranks in 2013.

Now entering his third season as an angler on the MLF Bass Pro Tour, Daniels looks back at his time fishing TBF events with fond memories of how he got his start. He says his story of success isn't the only one. Daniels encourages others to take the leap of faith and take advantage of the opportunities that TBF provides for anglers.

"I will forever be grateful for TBF and the opportunity they gave me," Daniels says. "I wouldn't be where I am today without TBF, in all honesty. I encourage other anglers who are looking to try and make it to the pro level to never lose sight of the goal and always believe in yourself."



# 2021 TBF HIGH SCHOOL STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS ON TAP

As the weather slowly begins to warm up, so does The Bass Federation Student Angler Federation schedule. Students pay a \$25 membership fee that also gives students an MLF High School membership.

"We never charge these kids an entry fee to enter any of these Federation or MLF High School tournaments," Cartlidge says. "We don't hand out cash prizes, but there are still plenty of valuable prizes to be won. High school needs to be about learning and having fun in the outdoors, so that's what we try to focus on."

For any state champion who is 16 years old or older, TBF will pay their entry fees, adult membership TBF fees and give them a co-angler spot in the TBF National Semi-Finals for their home state. The 48 state champions (47 states and one Canadian champion) all earn a trip to the High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship. In 2020, TBF awarded more than \$3.2 million in college scholarships and prizes to student anglers in the High School Fishing World Finals.

## TBF SAF HIGH SCHOOL UPCOMING SCHEDULE:

**ALABAMA** – SAF State Championship, Feb. 13  
Neely Henry Lake

**ARKANSAS** – SAF State Championship, March 7  
DeGray Lake

**ARIZONA** – SAF State Championship, March 27  
Lake Martinez

**FLORIDA** – MLF High School Open, Feb 13  
Harris Chain

**GEORGIA** – SAF Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's Earlybird Open Challenge, Feb. 6 at Clarks Hill; SAF State Championship, Feb. 28 at Lake Lanier

**KANSAS** — SAF State Championship, April 24  
Melvern Lake

**KENTUCKY** – SAF State Championship, March 27  
Lake Cumberland

**LOUISIANA** – SAF State Championship, March 14  
Red River

**MISSOURI** – MLF High School Open, March 27  
Rock Lake

**MISSISSIPPI** – SAF State Championship, March 21  
Pickwick Lake

**NORTH CAROLINA** – SAF State Championship, April 17  
High Rock Lake

**SOUTH CAROLINA** – SAF State Championship and Open Challenge, Feb. 20 at Lake Hartwell

**TENNESSEE** – SAF State Championship, April 3  
Lake Chickamauga

**TEXAS** – SAF State Championship, Feb. 13 at Sam Rayburn; MLF High School Open, April 17 at Lake Somerville

**UTAH** – SAF State Championship, April 24  
Sand Hollow Reservoir

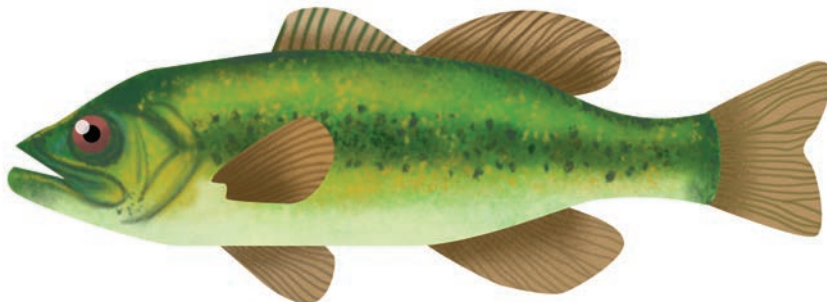
**VIRGINIA** – SAF State Championship, April 17  
South Holston

## ABOUT THE BASS FEDERATION

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

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

# BASS



# TRANSLATIONS

## LET'S TRANSLATE BASS FISHING TO PLAIN OL' ENGLISH, SHALL WE?

By Ken Duke

**W**hether you're new to the sport of bass fishing or have been at it for decades, you know that things are not always as they seem. Just as the watery world of bass can be confusing, so too is our unique lingo.

Luckily, help is here. In this edition of "Last Cast," I'm going to demystify some key phrases that bass anglers use every day. They don't always mean what you think.

### PHRASE NO. 1

#### "DUDE, YOU'RE ON MY SPOT!"

This is a phrase most commonly used by an angler who has just seen you catch a fish – probably a good one. You may be certain that they've never actually fished the area before, but it looks like it has a lot of potential ... especially since you're catching them on nearly every cast.

If you don't relinquish the spot to the affronted angler (and, of course, you should never relinquish the spot to him under any circumstances), his next move will be to lock in the waypoint on his electronics so he can find it again when you're not around. Your best play here is to remind him that it's a public lake and that you didn't see his name on the spot when you arrived.

### PHRASE NO. 2

#### "I JUST GOT HERE."

This is what unsuccessful anglers say when you ask if they've caught any fish. It's too painful to simply say "No," so a lot of folks say this instead.

The truth is that this angler has been on the water for many hours, but the only action he's seen came when his line tangled in his trolling motor prop and he stepped on the foot pad. Apart from a sunburn, a wicked case of carpal tunnel and a backlash that would rival the Gordian knot, he has nothing to show for his efforts.





### PHRASE NO. 3

## “MY BEST FISH WENT A LITTLE LESS THAN 8 POUNDS.”

Anytime someone describes their catch as “a little less than...,” it means “a lot less than....” A fish that was “a little less than 8 pounds” is likely also less than 4 pounds and maybe even less than 2 pounds. In extreme circumstances, it might not even be a legal, scoreable bass.

And don't be fooled by terms like “good one,” “huge” or “giant.” These terms are relative to the number and size of the fish caught that day as well as the angler's grip on reality. For several years I had a tournament partner who would yell, “It's a big one! Get the net!” before he even set the hook or felt the weight of the fish.

Bass anglers can be wildly optimistic. It's part of our charm.

### PHRASE NO. 4

## “WE'RE JUST OUT FUN FISHING.”

The anglers who tell you this are definitely entered in a tournament and have yet to catch a keeper. That they can say this with a straight face while wearing tournament jerseys and making 15 casts a minute is evidence of just how audacious bass anglers can be.

Do not argue with these guys. They're probably in such a state of denial that they believe tournament fishing is “relaxing.” If they start talking about “getting back to nature” while staring at their \$10,000 sonar unit, ease away slowly.

### PHRASE NO. 5

## “WE GOT ON THE PATTERN LATE.”

This is a common line spoken by unsuccessful tournament anglers who show up to the weigh-in just to see how miserably they failed. By “got on the pattern,” they mean they saw the tournament winners catching fish. By “late” they mean they saw them on their way back to the ramp to put their boat on the trailer. That's when they passed the winners, still whacking 'em not far from the launch.

You can count on these guys to be on that spot at the next derby. Fortunately, the bass will have relocated by then, and these anglers will still be “just about” to get on the right pattern.

### PHRASE NO. 6

## “I LOST A GOOD ONE THAT WOULD HAVE MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE.”

If you've ever fished a tournament or even attended a weigh-in, you've heard this one ... many times. It's actually the introduction to the story of how they lost the fish — through no fault of their own, of course.

Next, they're going to tell you that the fish zipped when any normal bass would have zagged, that their co-angler or partner knocked it off with the net, that the fish surged at the last second and pulled free or that a split ring mysteriously broke, allowing the fish to get away. No operator error here. In bass fishing, there almost never is. ■





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