

Bass

APRIL-MAY 2020

Fishing™



Forrest L. Wood

1932-2020



TOYOTA

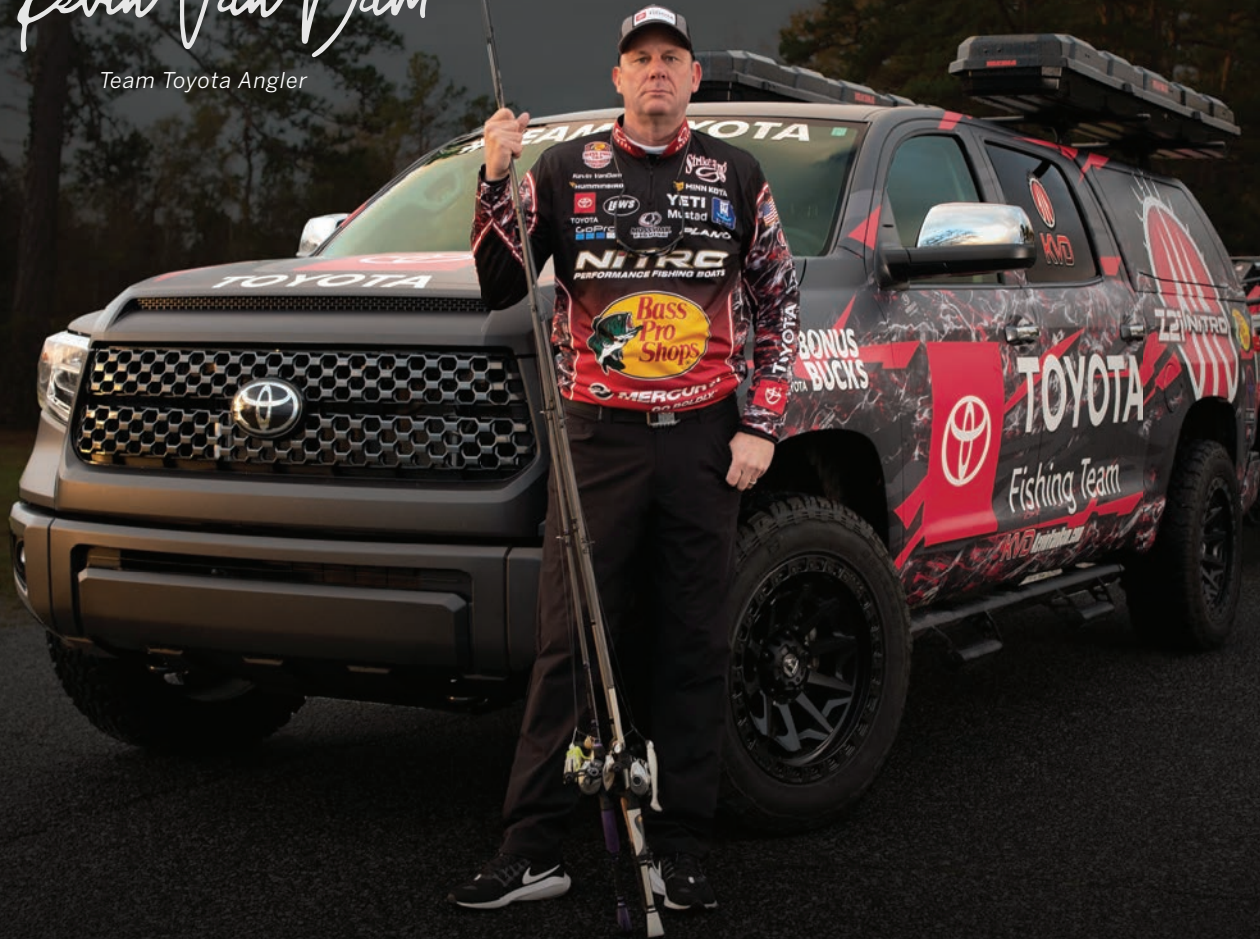
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BATTLE TESTED.

Kevin Van Dam

Team Toyota Angler



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ON THE COVER: FORREST L. WOOD — PHOTO BY SHANE DURRANCE

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FIRST CAST: CURTIS NIEDERMIER



AIMING FOR NORMALCY

Like everyone else in this country, I've spent the last few weeks thinking about COVID-19 and trying not to let those thoughts turn to worry. It's difficult. This is a scary situation, especially if you or your loved ones fall into one of the high-risk categories, and even if you're perfectly healthy but simply want to be able to buy groceries without feeling like you need an N95 respirator and don't want to see your 401(k) nosedive into the cellar.

I'm not smart enough to predict what will be the long-lasting impacts of the pandemic, but in the short term, COVID-19 is having a big impact on tournament schedules. In mid-March, FLW decided to postpone about three weekends' worth of tournaments (through April 5) and MLF postponed Stage Four of the Bass Pro Tour in order to minimize the possibility of exposure to staff and anglers and to help slow the virus' spread.

The announced changes were met with a range of responses from fans of bass fishing. Some thought we weren't doing enough. Some felt it was the right call. And others were outraged that the organizations would even consider a temporary halt to tournament fishing. Frankly, we couldn't win.

A few of the comments I heard from folks in the latter group were very emotionally charged, which is a polite way of saying they were downright mean. I guess I can understand the emotion, but not the reaction. Personally, I'll never fault MLF or FLW for wanting to protect the staff, anglers and fans. Fishing is important, but the health and well-being of Americans is more important.

If you're upset, all I can ask for is patience. MLF and FLW want to be hosting bass tournaments as much or more as anglers want to be fishing them and fans want to be following along.

I don't know when tournaments will be rescheduled. I don't know when we'll start fishing again. Even if I thought I knew, it wouldn't do any good to print it in this magazine because from the time we ship this issue to the printer on March 26 to the day it reaches your mailbox, a lot of things will have changed around the world. I'd only be delivering old news. There's no point in that.

What I can deliver to you here is the same thing we always try to bring our readers: a quality magazine full of bass fishing content. I bet there are a lot of magazines out there that are dedicating huge chunks of real estate to covering COVID-19, toilet paper shortages and all. We're not going to do that.

We'll update you when it's appropriate, and probably when it's all over we'll report on the pandemic's impact on the industry. But right now, what's important to us is what's important to you: finding some sense of normalcy in abnormal times.

I hope you enjoy the tournament recaps, how-to articles, product reviews, features, profiles and other great content that's in this issue of *Bass Fishing* magazine just like it is in every issue of *Bass Fishing* magazine. Stay home, read it and think about bass fishing as much as you can. Maybe this magazine can offer a little respite from all the bad news in the world.

In the meantime, please be safe until we can all come together again to catch 'em, weigh 'em and pay 'em at tournaments across the world.

CURTIS NIEDERMIER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Bass Fishing Magazine

Editor-in-Chief

Curtis Niedermier

Production Manager/ Graphic Designer

Michelle Dowling

Associate Editor

Justin Onslow

Senior Designer/Illustrator

Matt Pace

Field Editor

Matt Williams

FLWFishing.com

Senior Editor

Kyle Wood

Digital Editor

Jody White

Staff Videographer/ Photographer

Rob Matsuura

MajorLeagueFishing.com

Sr. Director, Digital Media

Joel Shangle

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THE GREATEST CATCH EVER?

Some have dubbed Adrian Avena's "execution" while landing a key 4-pounder during the Knockout Round of the MLF Bass Pro Tour B&W Trailer Hitches Stage One presented by Power-Pole as the greatest catch ever. While that's debatable, a video called "Avena Jumping in for a Bass," which shows the events play out, certainly is one of the wildest clips to ever hit the internet from a bass tournament.

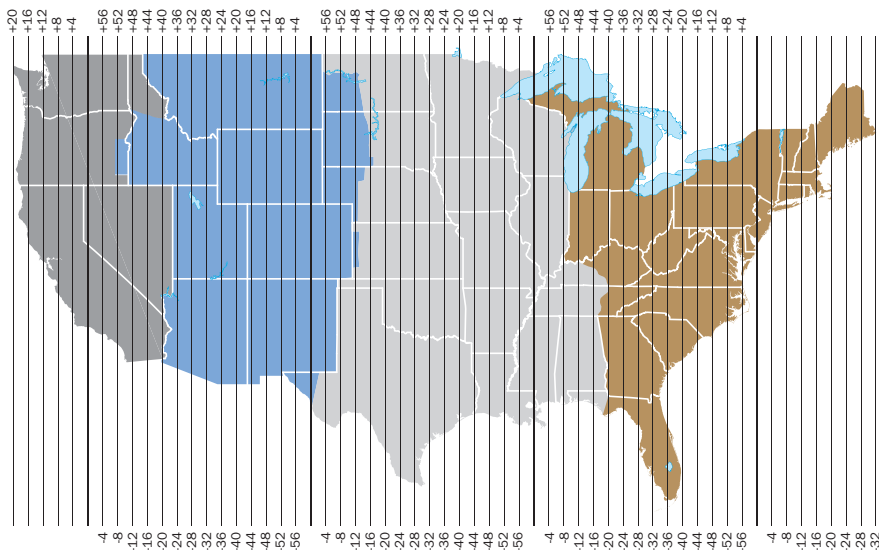
In the video, Avena hooks the fish with a spinnerbait and hangs it in a brush pile that tops out about 7 feet deep in Lake Eufaula. After a brief debate with himself about whether or not to jump in after it, the New Jersey pro removes his jersey and plunges into the 55-degree water. Eventually - and probably slightly by accident - he's able to work the fish loose with his feet and pull it up to hand.

"All my buddies bust my butt all the time because I've got, like, 4-inch toes, but we just got me one," he says, fish finally in hand.

Though leaving the boat cost him a three-minute penalty, Avena was able to make the Championship Round thanks to that catch, and he'll forever be linked to one of tournament bass fishing's wildest scenes.

You can see the video and judge for yourself where the catch rates at [YouTube.com/MajorLeagueFishing](https://www.youtube.com/MajorLeagueFishing).

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



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

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

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

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WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS

LIVE TOURNAMENT STREAMS

April 23-26 – Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit @ Lake Hartwell
FLW Live at FLWFishing.com

April 24-29 – Bass Pro Tour Phoenix Boats Stage Five presented by Mercury @ Grand Lake
MLF NOW! Live Stream at MajorLeagueFishing.com or MyOutdoorTV

May 14-17 – Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit @ Lake Dardanelle
FLW Live at FLWFishing.com

May 16-20 – Heavy Hitters presented by Venmo @ Kissimmee Chain
MLF NOW! Live Stream at MajorLeagueFishing.com or MyOutdoorTV

TV BROADCASTS

April 4 – Patriot Cup Elimination Round 1
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

April 11 – Patriot Cup Elimination Round 2
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

April 18 – Patriot Cup Elimination Round 3
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

April 25 – Patriot Cup Sudden Death Round 1
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

May 2 – Patriot Cup Sudden Death Round 2
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

May 9 – Patriot Cup Championship
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

May 16 – Summit Cup Elimination Round 1
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

May 23 – Summit Cup Elimination Round 2
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

May 30 – Summit Cup Elimination Round 3
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](#)

STAND BY FOR SCHEDULE CHANGES

On March 17, FLW issued a statement that it was immediately postponing all tournaments through April 5 in order to help slow the spread of COVID-19. The change excluded the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit on Lake Martin, where anglers had already assembled for the tournament. The May 7-9 Toyota Series tournament at Neely Henry was also postponed due to scheduling issues. Also in March, MLF postponed Bass Pro Tour Stage Four in Raleigh, N.C.

At press time, the only tournament to be rescheduled was the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit event at Cherokee Lake, which will now be held June 11-14. Due to the speed at which the COVID-19 crisis has developed and the ever-changing landscape of efforts to combat its spread, however, it wasn't clear at press time what the course of action would be beyond April 5. The best way to stay up to speed is to check FLWFishing.com and MajorLeagueFishing.com and to follow both organizations on social media.



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

Don't forget to follow MLF & FLW on social media





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Pro XS Four Stroke



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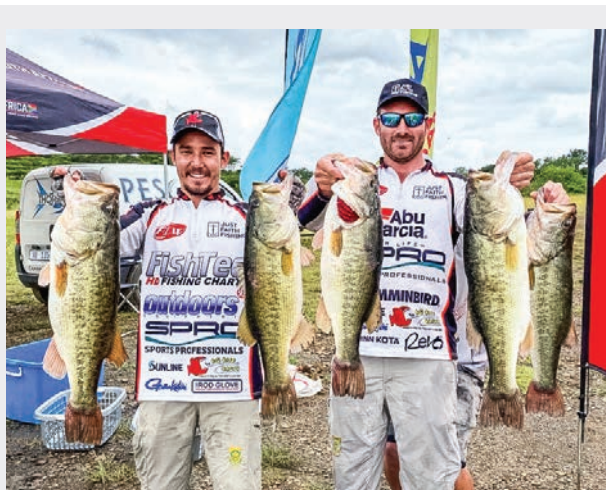


> IN EARLY FEBRUARY, FLW and MLF finalized an agreement with Abu Garcia to make the legendary fishing brand the title sponsor of the FLW College Fishing circuit, now called Abu Garcia College Fishing presented by YETI.

"Abu Garcia is an iconic brand known for their quality and reliability," said Kathy Fennel, FLW executive vice president and general manager. "Their products are a favorite among our fans and anglers, and we are proud to announce our association with such a powerful brand."

"Abu Garcia's sponsorship of FLW College Fishing is yet another way for us to support bass fishing at grassroots levels, ensuring these talented collegiate anglers have a venue in which to compete," said Abu Garcia Vice President of Marketing Jon Schlosser. "College bass fishing provides an important next step in the angling careers of so many junior anglers, whether they go on to fish for a living or simply for fun. We're proud to be associated with organizations that bring anglers into the sport and keep them there."

The successful Berkley & Abu Garcia Student Angler Program will also continue for high school and college tournament anglers. The contingency program offers high school and college anglers across the United States product and team jersey discounts and the opportunity to be mentored by a Pure Fishing pro angler.



GIANTS ABROAD

> **FLW'S INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS** feature hundreds of anglers all fishing for a chance to compete in the 2020 Toyota Series Championship on Lake Cumberland this fall, but that's not to say fishing opportunities abroad are inferior to what we have to offer in the U.S. In fact, giant bags of giant bass can be pretty common around the globe. Look no further than the FLW South Africa KZN Region Cast-for-Cash tournament held on Albert Falls Dam in February.

Robbie Olivier (left) and Neels Beneke of Team Gamakatsu Outdoors 365 won the Cast-for-Cash event with a one-day total of 17.25kg, or 38.03 pounds of massive green fish. Each of the top four teams weighed in at least 22 pounds, with second place going to Marc Meyer and Oliver Field with a five-fish limit of 25.39 pounds.

Last fall, it took 101.83 pounds over three days to win the 2019 FLW Zimbabwe Championship with the full field averaging nearly 29 pounds per bag. In other words, maybe consider busting out your passport for your next big fishing trip.

Outboard Sales Reach 13-Year High

According to the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA), outboard sales in the U.S. have nearly reached pre-recession levels after a continuous eight-year increase, culminating with a 13-year high in 2019.

Per the 2019 U.S. Recreational Boating Statistical Abstract, outboard engines of 200 horsepower or higher accounted for 27 percent of sales in 2019.



Link up for More Toyota Series Opportunities

FLW is now offering opportunities to ensure a spot in Toyota Series events in 2020. When registering for a tournament, pros and co-anglers can link together to guarantee a spot in the event. That means no more wait-lists, and no more postponing travel and tournament plans. If you link, you're in.

Similar to the process for linked entry to Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine tournaments, when registering for a Toyota Series tournament, either online or over the phone, pros have the option to provide a link to a co-angler,

and co-anglers have the option to provide a link to a pro. You'll need to provide your linking partner's name and FLW member ID at registration time. And the partner must not already be confirmed in the tournament.

Once your partner registers and verifies, you're both in. It's as simple as that.

To register to fish in the Toyota Series, visit shop.FLWFishing.com/collections/Toyota-Series, or call 270.252.1000.



High School Fishing

presented by **Favorite Fishing**

FLW recently announced the addition of Favorite Fishing as its presenting sponsor for High School Fishing. High School Fishing presented by Favorite is a two-person, team-event circuit open to students in grades 7-12 who are part of any SAF-affiliated high school club in the United States.

The top 10 percent of each FLW High School Fishing, TBF State Championship and TBF Challenge tournament held prior to June 8, 2020, will advance to the 2020 High School Fishing National Championship held in conjunction with the High School Fishing World Finals June 23-27 on the Mississippi River in La Crosse, Wis. New for 2020, the members of the winning team (two anglers) at the National Championship will also advance to the 2020 Toyota Series Championship to compete as co-anglers and fish for the top prize of a new Phoenix bass boat, in addition to each receiving a \$5,000 scholarship to a school of their choice.

Teams can register at FLWFishing.com or by calling 270.252.1000. There is no entry fee for high school anglers to compete in any FLW or TBF High School Fishing tournament, however, both anglers must be a member of the Student Angler Federation (SAF). The \$25 SAF membership fee includes membership to both FLW and TBF and eligibility to fish any Student Angler Federation tournament. Membership can be easily purchased at FLWFishing.com or HighSchoolFishing.org.



Presented By



GEORGIA SANCTIONS HIGH SCHOOL BASS FISHING



In early March, FLW announced a fifth state to sanction high school bass fishing. Georgia, joining Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi, has partnered with FLW and The Bass Federation (TBF) to make bass fishing an officially sanctioned high school sport starting in fall 2020.

Bass fishing is a co-ed sport allowing young men and women to compete side-by-side. There is no designated season, thus allowing students to compete year-round in both Georgia High School Association (GHSA)-sanctioned events and non-sanctioned tournaments. GHSA competition comprises four State Qualifying tournaments held in different areas of the state beginning in January of each year, with the State Championship to be held in March or April. The schedule will be published every July or August of the new school year.

For more information, visit ghsa.net/bass-fishing.

WILEY X PARTNERS WITH FLW

> In February, FLW announced a multi-year sponsorship agreement with Wiley X, one of the most trusted brands in the world for safety eyewear, high-performance sunglasses and optical and protective sports eyewear for youth.

With the partnership, Wiley X also becomes the title sponsor of the FLW High School Fishing Camp, which will be held July 22-24 at Murray State University in Murray, Ky., and features activities and instruction on Kentucky Lake. Registration is now open and can be found at FLWFishing.com/camp.

Additionally, Wiley X has been named the presenting sponsor of the new Major League Fishing (MLF) College Faceoff events. These events will give Abu Garcia College Fishing presented by YETI anglers the opportunity to compete against their peers using MLF's exciting catch-weight-immediate-release format and will be held in conjunction with stops on the 2020 MLF Bass Pro Tour.

MORE ON COLLEGE FACEOFFS

Twenty teams will qualify to fish each Wiley X MLF College Faceoff event. Qualification will be determined by combining the Tackle Warehouse School of the Year points earned by the top two teams from each school at select Abu Garcia College Fishing presented by YETI tournaments. The 10 schools with the most combined points will send their top two teams to the Faceoff, where they'll compete for great prizes and swag from Major League Fishing and select sponsors. The total one-day combined weight of the two teams from each school in the Faceoffs will comprise the final standings. Competition waters will be in proximity to the host cities, with exact fishery details revealed to tournament anglers before the start of each event.

Stay tuned to FLWFishing.com and MajorLeagueFishing.com for updated schedules.



Presented By



HEAVY HITTERS

This May, Major League Fishing is rolling out a new tournament for the Bass Pro Tour's heaviest hitters. The tournament, aptly named "Heavy Hitters," is now one of nine events on the BPT schedule and will take place on the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes May 16-20.

A first of its kind, Heavy Hitters presented by Venmo boasts nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in payouts and will feature 30 BPT anglers. Qualification is based on the cumulative weight of the single largest fish caught by each angler during each of the first five stops. The top 30 based on resulting five-fish weight will punch their tickets to Florida for the mid-May showdown.

The five-day event will parallel REDCREST and feature a full-field Shotgun Round on day one and a full-field Elimination Round on day two. From there, the top 20 heaviest hitters are divided into two groups of 10 for the Knockout Round on days three and four, with the top five anglers in each Knockout Round competing in the top 10 on the final day's Championship Round.

The full field of 30 anglers will receive a minimum payout of \$6,000, and the tournament winner will earn \$100,000. In addition to the championship purse, anglers will have the opportunity to earn a daily bonus for their biggest bass of the day based on the following graduating scale: day one \$25,000; day two \$25,000; day three \$50,000; day four \$50,000; day five (Championship Round) \$100,000. The five-day payout totals \$745,000.



Outdoor Participation Up Slightly

According to a recent study by the Outdoor Foundation, almost half the U.S. population didn't venture outdoors for recreation even a single time in 2018. In all, only about 20 percent of Americans did once-a-week outdoor recreational activities, and Americans went on roughly 1 billion fewer outdoor outings in 2018 than they did in 2008. Even more alarmingly, the amount of annual outdoor outings for children dropped 15 percent from 2012 to 2018.

On the bright side, the Outdoor Foundation's 2018 report (covering 2017) indicated a slight uptick in outdoors participation from Americans age 6 and older.

The numbers are sobering for outdoor enthusiasts, but there's a silver lining in the 2018 report: Adults who were introduced to the outdoors as children were more likely to

participate in outdoor activities than those who were not. That seems obvious, but it also underlines the importance of getting children involved in outdoor activities at an early age.

FLW'S COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS

FLW understands the importance of youth participation in outdoor activities, especially fishing. During one of many community outreach efforts FLW undertakes each year, Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pros visited with the Teen Sportfishing Association in February in conjunction with the Pro Circuit event presented by Bad Boy Mowers on the Harris Chain of Lakes.

Charles Sim, Billy Hines, Jimmy Reese and Blake Smith all took the time to meet with high school student anglers in the area and spend the evening with the future of the sport in the hopes that continued participation from youth anglers will keep generation after generation outside fishing and passing down their passion to the next in line.



Asian Carp Quick Hits

Fighting the good fight – As Asian carp continue their march through U.S. waterways, conservation groups in the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basin regions are fighting harder than ever to keep the foreign invaders at bay.

In March, the National Wildlife Federation and 13 affiliate organizations sent a collaborative letter to the House Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development and the House Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to request continued support in the fight.

As part of the request, the groups ask that Congress continue to provide financial assistance to a number of programs and agencies for funding of control, removal and research initiatives like the Brandon Road Lock and Dam – a construction plan to create an effective barrier that could keep Asian carp from making a new home in the Great Lakes.

Science is the answer – Sam Erickson is a 25-year-old researcher at the University of Minnesota College of Biological Sciences. His latest project might just be the ticket for eradicating Asian carp from U.S. waterways.

Erickson is working on a way to use genetic engineering to create a new breed of carp that can effectively kill off Asian carp eggs with their seminal fluid. Instead of fertilizing eggs, the genetically altered carp would kill the eggs that might otherwise hatch into yet another batch of harmful invasive fish.

To start, Erickson is using common carp in a controlled laboratory setting to do DNA editing in the hopes that one day the process can be used to eradicate wild Asian carp without risk of harming other species.

Turn to page 36 to read more about the battle against Asian carp in Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley.

QUALITY AND QUANTITY

MLF and FLW pros put on some impressive displays in mid-March at the Bass Pro Tour event at Lake Fork and Lake Athens and the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit event at Lake Martin. However, they were performances of different sorts.

On the first day of the Bass Pro Tour General Tire Stage Three presented by TrueTimber at Lake Fork, Jason Christie caught a pair of giant bass – a 9-pound, 2-ounce fish and a 10-4, which set a new Bass Pro Tour record for largest fish ever scored.

The very next day, Justin Atkins one-upped Christie with a 10-8 bass that now stands as the record.

“I sure hope it lasts a little while,” Atkins said that day. “This place just has gigantic fish, and they are moving up to spawn by the minute. I hope the record holds up for more than just a day.”

It stands for now, even though a handful of other pros threatened Atkins’ record with fish in excess of 9 pounds.



Here are the largest fish caught during Stage Three, which took place for five days on Lake Fork before shifting to Lake Athens for the Championship Round:

- 10-8 – Justin Atkins
- 10-4 – Jason Christie
- 9-15 – Randall Tharp
- 9-9 – Keith Poche
- 9-8 – Bryan Thrift
- 9-6 – Ott DeFoe (Lake Athens)
- 9-5 – Brandon Coulter
- 9-2 – Jason Christie
- 9-0 – Dustin Connell

In Alabama, FLW’s top pros didn’t catch as many real giants when they

squared off on Lake Martin, but they caught just about everything else. In the first two days of fishing, the 150-angler field caught 299 limits. Actually, they caught 300, but David Wootton failed to notice that one of his keepers escaped his weigh bag while he was exiting his boat on day two, and he wound up weighing in only four keepers.

Big fish, lots of fish – whatever it is you prefer to see in a bass fishing tournament, it was on display in March. You can read more about Ott DeFoe’s win at the Bass Pro Tour Stage Three on page 64. The Lake Martin Pro Circuit event will be featured in the next issue. ■



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

HUNT THE BOTTOM

CHATTERBAIT CFL
BLADED FOOTBALL JIG



Z MAN

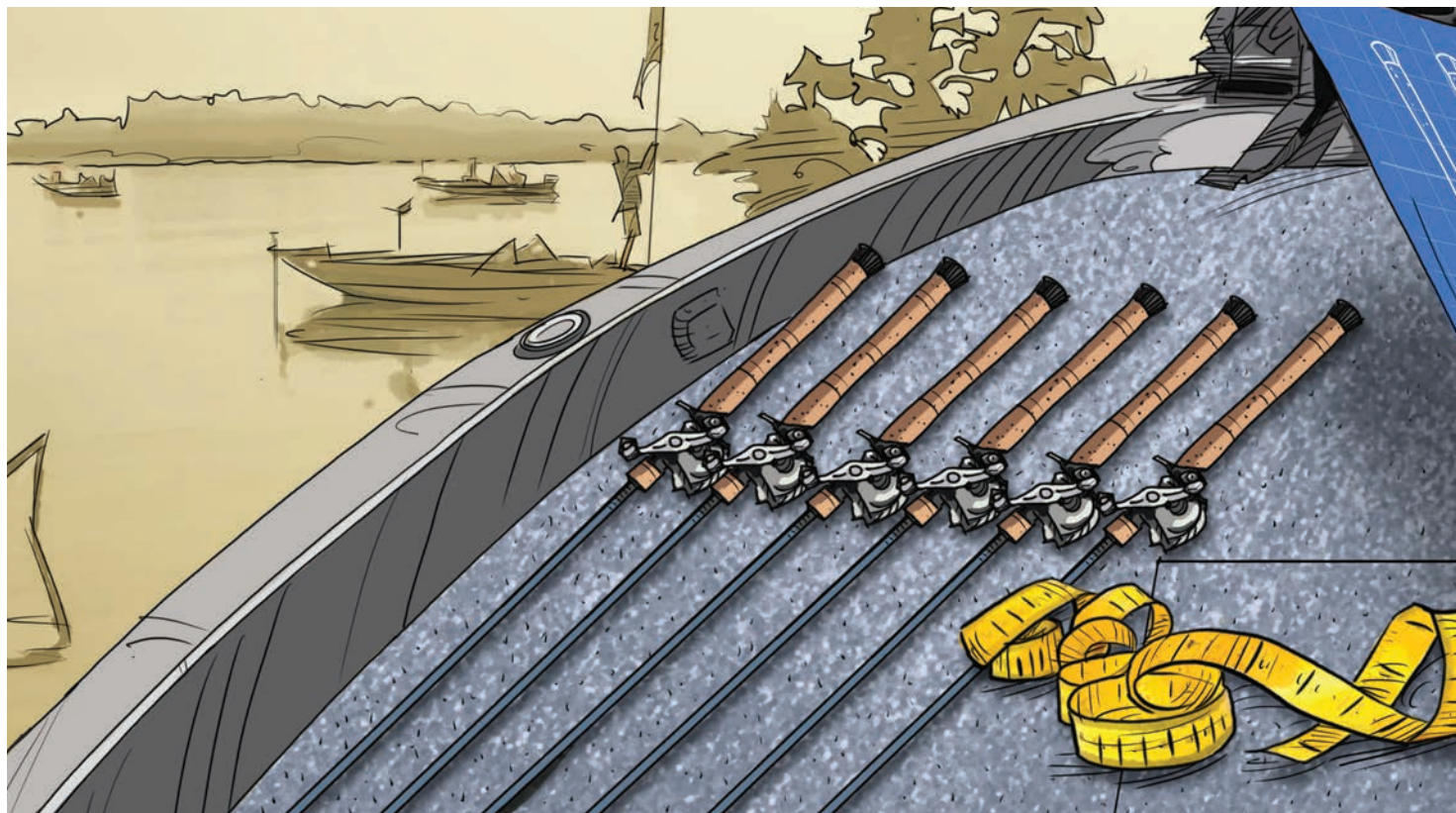
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- Unique design prevents bait from rising to the surface, even on fast retrieves
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POLE POSITION

Obsessive? Excessive? Every pro has their own way of arranging their rods



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a freelance writer and photographer, **Rob Newell** has been reporting on fish and 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.

I've covered bass tournaments for 25 years, and I'd be willing to bet that in the last 20 seasons, the average number of rods used by tournament anglers during a day of fishing has probably doubled.

I can remember back in the 1990s, when, if you had more than seven or eight rods out on the deck, it was considered excessive. When the number of rods on the deck approached the dozen mark, there were even some rumblings among pros about needing rules to limit how many rods are allowed out at any given time – almost like regulating how many players can be on the field.

These days, no one even blinks at the amount of graphite

and glass piled over the gunwales of pros' bass boats. The competition is now so fierce that every lure needs to be tied on and ready to fire in order to cut down on retying time.

With that, the efficiency of rod arrangement on the deck has become a hot topic. Apparently, there is a method to rod management madness, and many anglers have their own playbook for how the "pole position" on the deck should work. I discovered this one morning while watching Michael Neal meticulously lay his weapons of war on the deck.

"Those are the rods I'm going to start with and will probably use the most," Neal said, pointing to the rods arranged neatly on the port-side deck.

"It's first string on the port and second string on the starboard. In fact, the rod I think I'll make my first cast with is on the port side, closest to the center of the boat. I want my starter to be closest to me."

Neal's comfort level for the number of Denali Rods on the deck is eight to 10. He went on to explain that he also always keeps his spinning rods together on one side or the other.

"Spinning rods and casting rods don't play nice with each other when combined," he says. "To keep them from tangling, I try to keep the spinning rods grouped together at all times and away from casting rods."

With Neal's comments, I became curious about other pros' quirky rod arrangements.

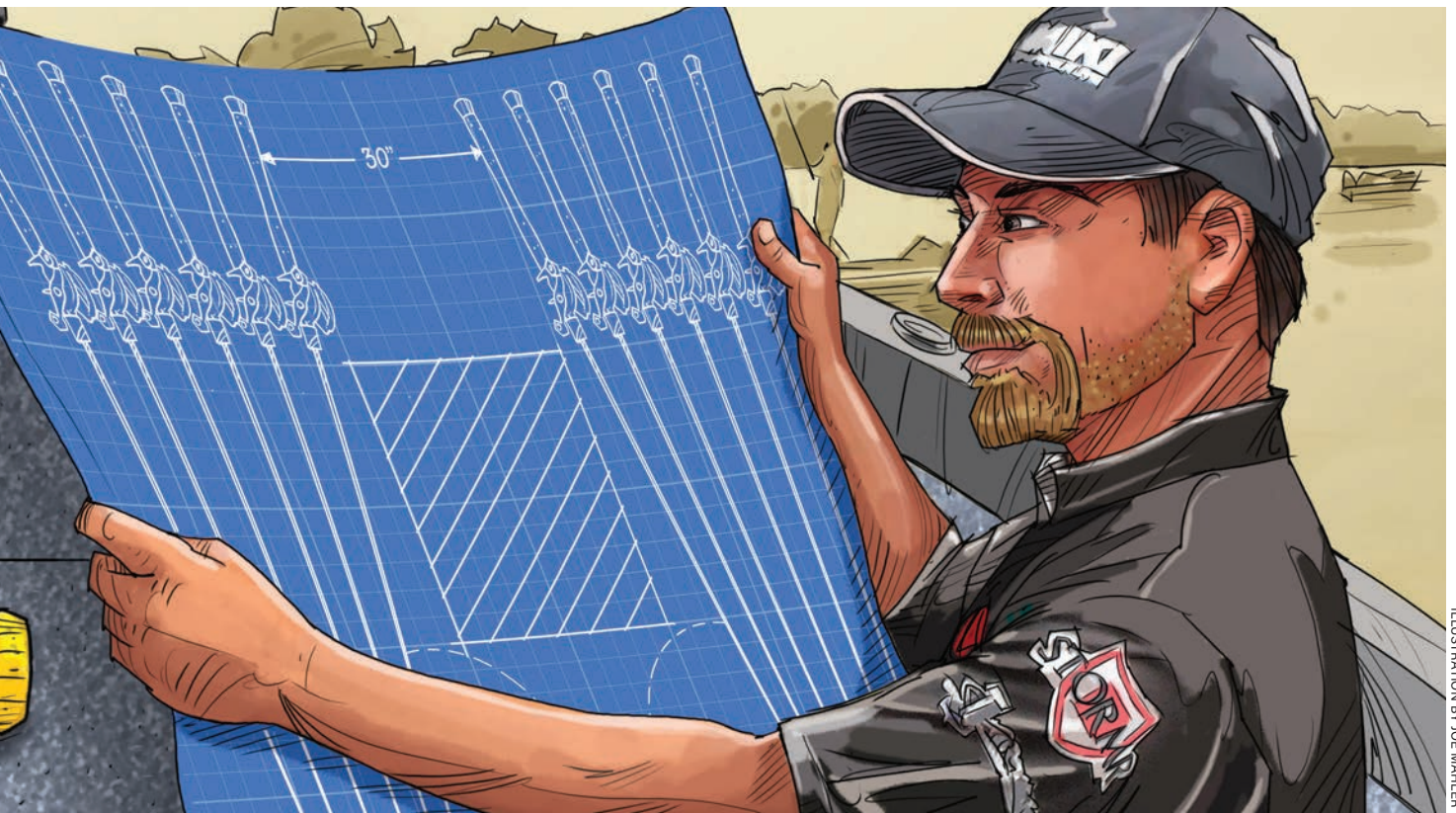


ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER

Zack Birge has a pretty definitive playbook for his Favorite Fishing rods.

“Power on the port and spinning on the starboard,” says Birge. “Generally, I’ll have six to eight power combos on the port side for casting and winding and any spinning, flipping or follow-up type baits on the starboard side. Twelve rods total is my comfort zone.”

Mark Daniels Jr. follows Birge’s strategy for his Favorite rods as well.

“It’s faster-moving, reaction baits on the port and slower-moving and finesse baits on the starboard,” says MDJ.

“At least that’s the way the day begins, anyway,” he says, laughing. “When I start digging out extra rods, they can get a little jumbled. Having 20 out at one time is the limit for me.”

When it comes to arranging his Abu Garcias on the deck, Justin Lucas goes by rod length.

“I tend to keep all my longer rods – anything over 7 feet, like flipping sticks or longer swimbait rods – on the passenger side [port],” Lucas says. “Spinning rods and any rods 7 feet or under typically go on the driver’s side due to the console.”

Lucas likes to keep his deck as clear as possible, preferring to only have four or five rods out at a time if he can help it.

Ott DeFoe’s preferred number of rods on the deck at any time also is five, which he opts to put all on the starboard side to keep the port side clear.

“If I go over five rods on the deck, I’ll start splitting them up between sides,” he says. “For some reason, I like all treble-hook lures on one side and all single-hook lures on the other side.”

In contrast to Lucas and DeFoe, Jacob Wheeler likes a lot of rods on the deck. He keeps roughly 18 to 20 Duckett Fishing rods out during practice and then cuts back to 10 to 15 rods during the tournament.

“Having a lot of rods on the deck is like a security blanket to me,” Wheeler explains. “I’ll put rods out that I know I probably won’t even use, just to have rods on the deck.”

Though Wheeler does not necessarily divide his rods up between the two sides, the ones he uses the most during the day will be closest to him, and the benchwarmers are pushed out to the sides.

Bryan Thrift has a simple rule for the arrangement of his Fitzgerald Fishing rods on his deck: Shallow, bank-running lures go on the port side, and deeper, off-shore stuff goes on the starboard side. The arrangement is set up for an extreme level of efficiency.

“I do it that way so I only have to unstrap and strap one side when running and gunning shallow stuff,” explains Thrift, who’s always looking for an advantage. “Unstrapping two sides just to make a couple of casts is a waste of time.”

Thrift keeps the longest rods farthest to the outside and the shortest rods to the inside.

“That’s really more about keeping the long-handled rods out along the gunwale and the short-handled rods to the interior to free up room around me.”

Thrift adds that his comfort zone is usually between 14 and 18 rods on the deck at any time. Though, when asked if the number of rods has to be an even number, Thrift claims he’s not that obsessed.

“Nope. In fact, having exactly 13 rods on the deck is just fine with me.” ■



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

DAKOTA EBARE: DERBY DAY, EVERY DAY

Texas pro's strategy for improving as a tournament angler is to never stop competing



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 largemouths.

Fun fishing is a foreign concept to Dakota Ebare. Never is there a time to relax and toss out a line on his day off ... because he has so few of them. For the second year in a row, he'll somehow balance a schedule of about 20 major competitions during a 10-month period. Each day on the water is one of specific direction, whether he's practicing, competing or heading to the next event.

That level of dedication leads to lessons few anglers will ever learn about the subtleties of competitive bass tournaments. Let's dive into Ebare's obsession.

BAPTISM BY REPEATED FIRE

At just 27 years old, Dakota Ebare's maturity seems to

exceed his years. That was evident before he was even out of high school.

"I managed my finances, even building my credit since I was 17 years old, so that I could afford to buy a boat," Ebare says.

College marketing classes also taught Ebare the proper ways to build a portfolio and solicit sponsors. He says his strong suit in that area is "pure dedication and not taking no for an answer."

Once out of college, Ebare fished multiple divisions of the Toyota Series for two seasons before moving to the FLW Tour in 2019. In his rookie year, he somehow managed to juggle an unheard-of schedule, competing in 10 Series

events along with a full Tour load. Yet he still qualified for each championship and banked more than \$100,000 in earnings.

The concept for this direction began in 2017.

"When I watched Jordan Lee win the Classic, it opened my eyes to the fact that I had the opportunity to chase this dream," Ebare says.

From that point on, all of Ebare's fishing decisions have been dedicated to the business of being a pro angler. Immediately, he moved from Stephenville, Texas, to Sam Rayburn Reservoir, where he could fish year-round, and he immersed himself in a culture totally revolving around bass fishing. He applied a similar

strategy up north, too. Prior to competing in the 2018 Series event on Lake Champlain, he had never fished big Northern waters for smallmouths, so to grasp the associated foreign fishing tactics, Ebare spent the summer on Champlain honing his skills, which paid dividends on repeat trips.

Then in 2019, he made his boldest move toward success in professional fishing through unwavering dedication toward competition. By remaining always in "tournament mode," there's no time for him to adopt anything but a "tournament mentality."

"Making decisions; it's what separates the best from the rest," he adds. "Bryan Thrift is better at making decisions than anyone else. The only way to get a grasp on that is to go and do it."

That's why, in 2019 and 2020, all of Ebare's efforts have been dedicated strictly to competition, unlike some of his early "training" on Rayburn and Champlain.

"Most pros travel to one, maybe two events a month. I'm traveling to three, so I need to be able to retain information fast," says Ebare, who believes such a baptism by fire has forced him to advance more quickly in the sport than many other competitors. "I've come very far in the last five years, due totally to time on the water in competition."

DEALING WITH LOGISTICS

While fishing so many tournaments might sound like a logistical nightmare, according to Ebare, there's actually a logistical advantage: Bouncing from tournament to tournament results in less back-and-forth travel, and actually reduces overall drive time. Ebare has a handle on the planning.

"I look at the schedules and prepare a flow chart for the most logical travel from one event to the next," he says.

Occasionally, an early-season event will help Ebare prepare for a tournament scheduled for later in the season on the same body of water, which was the case last year at Lake Chickamauga, where Ebare competed in both the Series in late March and FLW Tour in May.

Finally, Ebare's system is one based on business sense.

"I also need to pay my bills," he says. "If I go practice on a lake and don't fish a tournament, I have no chance to recover my investment."

The mentality of focusing on return on investment is one Ebare thinks many pros don't consider, but that he believes is imperative to his success.

RETURN ON (FISHING) INVESTMENT

Though ROI is usually measured financially, Ebare argues the return can also be one of knowledge, used later to push farther ahead.

For instance, last season, Ebare committed to a grueling schedule, and he came out the other side with a much better game plan for handling vital equipment preparation.

"Tackle management was one thing that held me back; I learned that immediately," he says. "I found out through trial and error how to do that better, and be more prepared for anything, because I had no extra time to prepare.

"I also learned how to be more efficient, how to pack and how to be comfortable on the road."

Ebare's journey also taught him how to operate within a manageable range of techniques and tackle.

"I've worked hard to be as versatile as I can be, but I found it's important to keep it simple," he says. "Don't over-think it. You don't need 12 colors of every plastic in your boat."

ANOTHER MARATHON

During 2020, Ebare plans to continue full steam ahead. His tentative schedule includes 11 Toyota Series events in four divisions, as well as the seven regular-season stops on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit. He might even fish a couple of Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine tournaments.

Does he ever tire of the non-stop action? Whatever happened to kicking back on the lake with buddies?

"I just love competing and challenging myself," says Ebare. "And anytime I have the opportunity to do that, I will." ■

An extended stay up north helped Ebare learn open-water smallmouth fishing.



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



PHOTO BY ERIC ENGBRETSON

FINDING BASS PART 1: HABITAT QUALITY

The first step in locating bass is assessing structure and cover



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.

In the last column, I dug into high-level population factors that impact the relative quality of a bass fishery and how to understand why certain lakes and rivers consistently produce more or better bass than others.

As insightful as that conversation is, not all of us have the flexibility to choose from fisheries all across the country. Most of us focus on a handful of lakes, rivers or ponds in our immediate vicinity.

Step one in catching bass in your local fishing hole is finding

the fish, which means thinking less about population dynamics as a whole and focusing more on the various factors that may cause a bass to hang out in an area at a specific moment in time. In other words, by answering the simple question: Where are the bass in this lake today?

The three most important factors are 1) habitat, 2) food abundance and availability, and 3) competition. In this column, we'll focus on habitat. Forage availability and competition will be covered in upcoming issues.

HABITAT GENERALISTS

If you can glean anything from the proliferation of black bass across the country, it's that they are textbook habitat generalists. From heavily vegetated cypress swamps in the South, to deep, rocky reservoirs out west, bass can survive and thrive in just about any habitat.

But on any given day, where are they?

The answer isn't clear, and it's certainly not static. You can catch a bass in 30 feet of water on a rock pile, and then ease up shallow and pick one off a

dock post on the same day. They don't all use the same type of habitat at the same time, and what's ideal for one bass could be less ideal for another.

That being said, an understanding of how to describe available habitat in your local fishing holes, and an appreciation of how it interacts with the water quality and prey abundance, allows you to up your odds of locating more bass in a given day.

COVER VS. STRUCTURE

When talking about bass habitat, it's important to get the terminology correct. One of the most common misunderstandings occurs when anglers use the words cover and structure interchangeably. They are not the same thing, and understanding the difference is key to being able to accurately and effectively describe and analyze habitat.

A piece of structure is anything that stands out – it affects the macro shape of the shoreline or bottom. Points, humps, reefs, break lines, creek channels, drains, ditches and saddles are all pieces of structure.

Cover is anything that a bass can hide in or on, patrol, or otherwise hang out around that may or may not be located on a piece of structure. Think rocks, logs, docks, lily pads, laydowns, brush piles, fish attractors and even non-permanent things such as shade lines or baitfish balls.

Once you know how to categorize fishable cover and structure, you can start to inventory what's in your local fisheries. From there, we turn to research and experience on the water to start to understand how bass use the

cover and structure in different seasons and conditions.

WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS

There have been numerous studies about how bass use cover, where they live in a body of water and how much traveling they do. Not surprisingly, most of this data identifies trends that you're already subconsciously exploiting just about every time you're on the water. For instance, studies have shown that when vegetation is abundant, bass tend to use it preferentially. When coarse woody debris such as laydowns, logs and flooded timber is available, you're more likely to encounter a bass than when it's not present. Rocky areas attract more bass than non-rocky, similarly shaped structure.

This type of critical thinking, though illustrated with well-known examples, helps to show how understanding cover and structure – the habitat – can narrow down a fishery to its highest-percent-age areas.

Although much of this research falls in line with what anglers experience, there is also data showing some more unexpected habitat-related observations that might help anglers in certain situations:

- A study at Missouri's Table Rock Lake found that bass selected boat docks as cover at twice the rate of natural woody debris. Interestingly, another study found that docks aren't nearly as likely to hold a bass in a shallow, vegetated Florida lake.

- Although a major positive indicator of bass presence, too much vegetation can also be a deterrent, as one study found that bass are more effective at feeding and

more commonly found in looser vegetation than dense vegetation.

- Across multiple studies, bass of all species predominantly spend the majority of their time shallower than 25 feet regardless of the season. Those same studies also showed that spotted and smallmouth bass often choose habitat in slightly deeper water than largemouth bass.

TYING IT TOGETHER

So, you understand the difference between structure and cover, you're thinking critically about what's available in your local lakes or rivers, and you're considering both seasonal and regional paradigms. Now you're on the right track.

In the next column, we'll tie habitat to another important factor in finding bass: the availability of prey species.



HSI: HABITAT SUITABILITY INDEX

As with most facets of wildlife interaction, scientists have created a way to numerically measure the relative suitability of habitat for any given species. It's called the Habitat Suitability Index (HSI), and it serves as a way to describe the relative quality of a particular habitat against others based upon a predetermined set of factors.

HSI is measured on a scale of zero to one, with measurement of zero being a habitat completely unsuitable for life, and a measurement of one being ideal in every aspect. Depending on the number of factors chosen, measuring habitat suitability can be simple or very complex. For example, if you only considered dissolved oxygen, you'd measure suitability simply by whether there is enough oxygen for a bass to live – and then map it across a waterbody.

If you add in factors such as water temperature, depth, water clarity, and presence or absence of prey, and take measurements of all these details at numerous points around a lake, you could use that data to create a "map" of the most suitable places for a bass or any other species to hang out. Many DNR scientists create and use HSI data during the course of their management research.

Check your local DNR office's public records to see if you can find detailed habitat analysis for the lakes you most commonly fish. ■



PHOTO COURTESY TACTICAL BASSIN

YOU DON'T HAVE TO SEE TO BELIEVE

The biggest bass of the year can be caught around the spawn, but you don't always have to sight-fish to catch them



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

A fishing guide and conservation officer, respectively, **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.



Fishing during the spawn can provide some of the most heart-pounding, mind-blowing and overall rewarding outings of the entire season. This is the best time of year to see some of the largest bass where you live. It's also one of your best opportunities to catch a new personal best, and maybe even a fish of a lifetime.

When anglers talk about fishing the spawn, they usually talk about sight-fishing or bed-fishing, and the full moons in April and May certainly are prime times for targeting bass by eye. But that doesn't have to be the only way to target big fish. We have a few additional techniques to share with you to help you catch more bass during the spawn without sight-fishing, because you don't

always have to see to believe when it comes to springtime fishing.

FIND SPAWNING AREAS

To properly understand how to target big bass during the spawn, you must first understand their movements. On most bodies of water, the north end of the lake warms up first because of the sun shining in the southern sky, so that's a great starting point early on.

When we head out on the lake, we look for shallow spawning bays close to main-lake points. Shallow bays and coves that are protected from the wind and harsh afternoon shadows are key areas. This type of cove is where you will most likely find the first wave of spawning fish on beds.

LOCATE SUBTLE TRANSITIONS

Although bed-fishing is a large part of our fishing this time of year, we've caught some of our largest bass without ever seeing them until they are in the net. One of the most productive techniques is fan-casting in spawning bays. We drop the trolling motor and scour the shallows, meticulously looking for subtle anomalies that will hopefully produce the next double-digit bass.

You might assume we just look for the obvious cleared-out beds or nests, but that isn't the case. The biggest bass are usually the weariest. As they transition and move from the depths up into the shallows, they utilize whatever cover and concealment they can find. They'll use the obvious rock, wood, small depressions or

shade lines, but one of the most overlooked forms of concealment is depth.

The next time you find yourself scouring the shallows, find the contour line where the bottom is no longer visible. You can usually find it by looking for a color change in the water. Giants lurk in this area, just out of sight.

CATCH GIANTS

The first bait we turn to this time of year is a glide bait, which has quickly worked its way into our year-round arsenal for one very important reason: drawing power.

The drawing power of a 6- to 12-inch glide bait is unmatched, and it's highly effective in this situation. When a glide bait nonchalantly swims overhead, even the most weary bass slip up, and they might reveal themselves, or, even better, they might eat. Whether it's a lunker lurking in a shade line, a big ol' bass lingering in a laydown or a giant sitting just out of sight on a contour line, some of the largest bass will reveal themselves to a glide bait.

When bass don't fully commit, follow up with a 5- to 7-inch weightless stick bait rigged wacky or Texas style. The

stick bait is a silent killer. Its slow, subtle shimmy and fall are perfect for large, skittish bass. You should use it as a follow-up lure, but also blind-cast it to contour changes and along the line where you lose visibility to the bottom. There is definitely something special about an unobtrusive bait, so don't head to the lake without it.

The final style of bait we recommend is a topwater, which can be fished in the same area as the glide bait and soft stick bait. Anytime you can be the first angler to present a proven bait to a bass, you have a good chance of catching it, and this early in the season, it's possible that the fish in your local waters haven't seen a topwater presentation since late last fall.

Depending on the area we're fishing, we select one of three topwater baits. Our first choice is a 6- to 8-inch wake bait. Much like the glide bait, a big wake bait's profile and slow, lazy action make it an easy meal right before spawning. The second topwater bait we use is a walking-style bait. For targeting a laydown or shade line, the walking bait's tight, side-to-side action combined with the obnoxious rattle is often the final

straw to get that big bass to commit. The other primary topwater bait we use is a frog. Depending on the fishery and the vegetation around where the bass spawn, a frog on braided line might provide the perfect combination of finesse and power to pull the biggest spawners out of heavy cover.

The combination of a lumbering glide bait, slow-falling stick bait and topwater action consistently fools giant bass this time of year. You just need to embrace the fact that you don't always have to see the fish first to load the boat.

FISH CARE IS CRUCIAL AROUND THE SPAWN

Let's all remember to practice proper fish care. The weeks encompassing the spawn comprise the most delicate time of year for large female bass. The spawning process takes its toll on the overall health of the fish, leaving them susceptible to stress and predation. We want to protect them and preserve our fisheries for future generations to enjoy. So, remember, when you catch your new personal best or a fish of a lifetime, get your pictures and measurements quickly. Then safely release her to be caught another day. ■

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————— *The Man That Was* —————

Forrest L. Wood

Hank Parker pays tribute to fishing's greatest gentleman, Forrest L. Wood, who passed away in January at age 87

By Hank Parker with Joe Sills

My two friends had never been in the same place at once. Though we'd been members of a hunting club in Texas for years, Forrest Wood and Dale Earnhardt – the men I was closest to – hadn't actually met. In the winter of 1988, that put me in an uncomfortable place. I was protective with Forrest, the kindest and most generous man I'd ever met. I didn't want Earnhardt, "the Intimidator," to make him feel less than.

I still remember flying down to the property with Dale in his plane and telling him, "Look, Dale, I know you're a big deal and all, but I promise you're nowhere near as big a deal as Forrest Wood, so don't go in there cocky and not be humble around Mr. Wood. I mean, you better be on your best behavior, or you and me are going to have it out."

Dale just laughed, which made me more nervous. I didn't know if he got it.

A few hours later, I'd find out that he did, as the pair wandered off into the woods without me, laughing and chatting like they'd known each other for ages. Forrest Wood had that effect on people. He didn't care a thing about racing, but he did care about people. Whether he'd just met you or he'd known you forever, Forrest genuinely cared about you. It was his special gift.



I first met Forrest in 1975. Back then, I was just a kid going to the Ranger Boats factory to give him feedback, quite honestly, on some things I didn't like about his 1776 SUPER-A, which was his brand-new boat model. I thought the boats were too heavy. I thought they had too many features bass fishermen didn't really need, and I kind of expected the owner of the company to dislike me as soon as I told him, straight up, how it was.

I thought all of those things because I hadn't met Forrest yet; I didn't know about the special effect he had on people.

By the time I left Ranger that day, I was convinced that Forrest had made all the right calls on that build. I couldn't believe how nice, how humble and how willing he was to accept recommendations from a kid. It was amazing how cordial he was to me. After meeting with Forrest and learning why they did what they did, he totally changed my mind.

In a few years, he'd help totally change my life.

The following season, I won Angler of the Year on the National Bass Association (NBA) trail. Back then, B.A.S.S. had a 150-horsepower limit on outboards, and I was running a 175, so I was fishing the NBA and the American Bass Association (ABA) instead. This was very early in my career. I was borrowing money on short-term bank notes to pay entry fees and just starting to win a few things. After I won that Angler of the Year, I got a letter in the mail from Forrest congratulating me on winning the championship.

The letter basically said, "Congratulations on winning Angler of the Year. Everyone here at Ranger Boats has been watching, and we are so proud of you."

I was amazed, because I had no idea Forrest even remembered who I was.

Then, in 1978, I won the NBA Angler of the Year again, and I also qualified for the Bassmaster Classic for the first time on Ross Barnett Reservoir down in Mississippi. Forrest walked up to me at that Classic and congratulated me on the



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

Forrest was a champion of youth fishing programs. Working alongside Hank Parker and others, he helped to introduce thousands of kids to the outdoors.

NBA championship again. He asked me what it was like.

"Forrest, it's kind of bittersweet," I told him.

Startled, he looked at me.

"How could it be better?" he asked.

So I explained that winning the NBA championship meant my entry fees for the next season would be paid. That was a big deal to me, because I was just sort of becoming financially independent. But in order to get my fees paid, I had to run a boat also awarded to me for winning that title. And that boat - well, it wasn't a Ranger. I relayed this to Forrest, and he looked at me with a grin.

"I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll put you in a Ranger boat and make sure those fees are paid on the Ranger end," he said. Then, he shook my hand.

I about fainted.

That was the end of it. There was no contract. There was a handshake, and that was it. The next week, a lady named Mildred Stewart called me

and asked what model boat I wanted and what color I wanted it in. If that wasn't enough, I found out that Forrest had not only paid my NBA entry fees, but my fees for the ABA and B.A.S.S. as well.

There are legends in the South from the 1950s and '60s. They date back to the days when Elvis Presley — who was always at his heart a poor boy from Tupelo, Miss. — would ride the streets of Memphis on his Harley or walk through the avenues of whatever city he happened to be playing that night. Inevitably, the stories start with a chance encounter Presley would have with someone less fortunate and end with "the King" giving someone a Cadillac.

I'm here to tell you that there may be many stories like that about Forrest Wood, too.

Forrest was not a braggadocios man, but he did great things for other people. Over the years, I came to learn this not because he'd tell me about his deeds, but because I'd start to carefully put puzzle pieces together.

PHOTO COURTESY NINA WOOD



"The Ranger Man" was legendary in the country for his business acumen, but also his style of business. He truly cared about his customers and the people he worked with.

In the '90s, I put together a name-sake fishing tournament for kids on Lake Seminole, down in Florida. I called Forrest one day and asked him if I could buy a boat at a discounted price to give away as first place for that tournament. He asked me what the tournament was about.

"Panama City Christian School doesn't have any funds to grow their fishing program, and they asked me to help them," I said.

He asked me how many people were in the tournament and where the proceeds were going, and then asked where I wanted the boat shipped. He never gave me a price, because there wasn't one. For the next seven years, I got a note asking when we wanted the boat delivered.

On one occasion, Forrest, his wife, Nina, and I were floating the White River. It was a tough morning, and for several hours none of us had gotten a bite. About midday, Forrest and Nina asked to pull over and have a picnic on the shore. Now, I'd learned in my life not to pull up on someone's bank

unless you know it's OK, so I asked Forrest if he was sure. He looked at me, pointed at a seemingly random spot on the shore, and said, "That place will do fine. It's ours."

About that time, Nina had a bite. Then Forrest had a bite. Then Nina caught another one. Then I had a bite, and before we could ever get to our lunch spot, we were hauling in fish after fish. I bet an hour passed before the bite died down and I ever thought about lunch again.

When I realized I'd forgotten about the two hungry passengers on the boat, I started apologizing profusely to Forrest and Nina.

"Forrest," I said, "I am so sorry. I forgot about that picnic. I don't know when we'll find another spot."

The river was flowing fast that day – probably around 11 or 12 mph – and we'd long ago blown by the plot of land where he'd told me to pull out. It would have been difficult to cover several miles back upriver to the spot. However, to my genuine surprise, Forrest just pointed at

another spot and said, "That's all right. Just pull up right there. This is still mine."

I don't think Forrest was buying land for himself. In fact, I have always guessed that Forrest bought land that he didn't really want and didn't really need so other people could use it. I don't know that to be true, but I have heard secondhand that it is.

When I think about Forrest, I think a lot about the other people he's helped over the years. I think about myself and the tremendous amount of encouragement and assistance he gave me during a pivotal point in my career. I think about the kids fishing tournament down on Lake Seminole. I think about a time when The Bass Federation was in turmoil, divided between B.A.S.S. and FLW. Forrest never chose a side in that debate. He wrote a letter to the Federation saying he'd stick beside them in whatever they chose to do. He did that because he believed in their youth and state programs; believed in growing the sport.



PHOTO COURTESY NINA WOOD

“BUT MOST OF ALL, WHEN I THINK ABOUT FORREST, I THINK ABOUT NINA.”

Forrest received a lot of credit for his accomplishments over the years, but he never accomplished anything alone. His wife, Nina, was by his side in everything he did.

But most of all, when I think about Forrest, I think about Nina. Forrest and Nina were inseparable. They were so compatible, and I learned so much about life from their relationship.

When Forrest was hunting with the boys, he'd always talk about Nina. He would notice things in Texas that were not common in Arkansas, and he would always want to go take a picture of them to take home to Nina. It was so important to him to go get a photo of that green jay, for instance, so that Nina could see it. It wasn't about killing a deer. It was about experiencing the moment and having an appreciation for all of the aspects of the outdoors. Then, it was about bringing some of them home for her.

There's a hill up there in the Ozarks, a spot high on Forrest's ranch where he and Nina would take a horse-drawn buggy up to picnic. I don't know how long they'd been doing that, but I know they'd probably been enjoying views like that since they met in the late 1940s. Not long ago, I asked Forrest to show me that spot; he'd talked about it often while we were hunting.

He agreed.

One day, the three of us went up to his hill overlooking the White River. The view was just as he'd said. It was one of those awe-inspiring panoramas that stretches on forever. In the valley below, you could just make out the silver sliver of river snaking its way through the trees. In the distance, you could see another beautiful hill almost untouched by human hands.

"This is really spectacular," I told Forrest. "About the only thing that could mess you up is if someone bought that land on the other hill and started to build on it."

To which he replied very humbly, "Thank you, Hank. It's been a blessing to us. You don't have to worry about that, though. That hill is ours, too."

I like to think that Forrest probably purchased that land for Nina. It was another one of his gifts to other people. That slice, that hill, that view—are all hers.

There will never be another Forrest Wood. My great friend was a joy to know. It was my privilege to grow with he and Nina, to experience so much of the country and environment that they will both be forever connected to. In the sport of bass

fishing, few people will ever equal the impact that Forrest and Nina have had. Few people will ever be able to fill his or her boots.

Forrest was there in the early days of professional bass fishing. He was sitting at the table with Ray Scott, often providing the backing to turn a visionary's dreams into reality. As the sport grew, Forrest walked alongside it.

He helped lead the push into youth fishing, often driving overnight to and from Flippin, just to meet and speak to children at fishing events. He helped foster the evolution of the sport by lending his name to FLW, and he always glowed, red-faced, as I introduced him to present the Forrest Wood Cup for more than two decades.

In a way, Forrest Wood will always be associated with the color red – red for Ranger, red for FLW and red for the blushing face that he'd shake at me whenever he walked off of that stage. Forrest never did like the spotlight, but he sure did love to shine a light for the rest of the world.

Maybe Dale Earnhardt said it best: "Mr. Wood sure is a cool guy. He's everything you said he was and more."

Yes, Dale, he was. ■



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T I D A L S T R A T

Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro Bradley Dortch and Toyota Series pro Wayne Vaughan have both put in plenty of time on tidal waters. For Vaughan, it's been on the James and Potomac rivers, which dump into Chesapeake Bay. Farther south, Dortch has plied the waters of the Tensaw River and the Mobile Delta on the Gulf Coast of Alabama. From the two of them, we pulled out eight tips that will help you make the most of your time on tidal waters.



8 TIPS FROM A PAIR OF TIDAL HAMMERS ON THE EAST AND GULF COASTS

By Jody White
PHOTOS BY JODY WHITE

E G L E S





Flipping is one of Bradley Dortch's favorite ways to catch tidal hawgs.

1. RECOGNIZE THE SPAWN IS DIFFERENT

It's common knowledge that the lower stages of an outgoing and incoming tide are the best for fishing on tidal waters, but Vaughan says you can throw that wisdom out the window during the spawn.

"When the water is up, it allows them to get on cypress trees and marsh banks, and it puts some water over their heads," he says. "What happens when the tide drops out is that there's so little water that their bed remains wet, but the fish are so spooky you can't even get close enough to them to make a long cast."

Vaughan thinks that at low tide bass will actually pull off their beds and sit near them in water just deep enough for them to be comfortable. Then, when the water rises back up, they'll pull up and guard the nests again.

"In springtime, generally speaking, the higher the water the better the fishing," says Vaughan, "because they're trying to be as shallow as they can be, but still have a little water there on the low tide."

2. NEVER PASS UP A DUCK BLIND

Especially on the waters of the lower Tensas Delta, where hard cover can be tough to find, Dortch says you should never drive past a duck blind.

"If you see one, you better fish it," he says. "A lot of those lower bays and delta areas have duck blinds. It's off the wall, and it gives them some hard cover to get on. It's pretty obvious to fish, and if you're the first guy to fish it, you usually catch a good one off it."

Because duck blinds are usually pretty snaggy, Dortch typically starts by pitching a Texas-rigged soft plastic like a Berkley PowerBait Pit Boss, Bunker Hawg, Rocket Craw or Change Up – something with a lot of tentacles that can move water and imitate a crab or a shrimp. His secondary bait is a Jenko Fishing CD Squarebill Crankbait or a Bandit Series 200 that he can run along the sides and corners.

"I work outside in," he adds. "A lot of them are built in a U shape, where they pull the boat in the middle of them, so I usually hit the corners, and I've caught a lot of fish right in the middle of it where they put the boat."

3. DON'T OVERLOOK CYPRESS TREES

Cypress trees are a pretty common piece of cover in a lot of tidal systems, but on the James and the Chickahominy rivers, they're a constant for the bass.

"There's a population of bass that always live on cypress trees," says Vaughan. "They look pitiful in the summer; they're the poorest things. I don't even know how they survive, but they live up there. There are fish that live on them their whole life. That's what they prefer, but guys nowadays have really drifted away from fishing cypress trees outside of the spawn."



Vaughan says that because there's more grass in the tidal systems in his region than there used to be, more anglers are concentrating on the greens. It's with good reason, but it doesn't mean the cypress trees don't have fish.

"I've always been able to go behind people on cypress trees and catch fish," Vaughan adds. "The way a cypress tree grows, they see the trunk of the tree, and they flip or cast to that. The thing is, the root system of a cypress tree is giant. The knees are 10 feet off that tree.

"In the springtime they can be anywhere on the tree. After the spawn, when they're feeding, if you look at the cypress tree and can see where the current is breaking, nine times out of 10 that's where they are. In the summer, when it's hot, you want to be fishing trees that are right there in the main creek; somewhere that's got plenty of current running by."

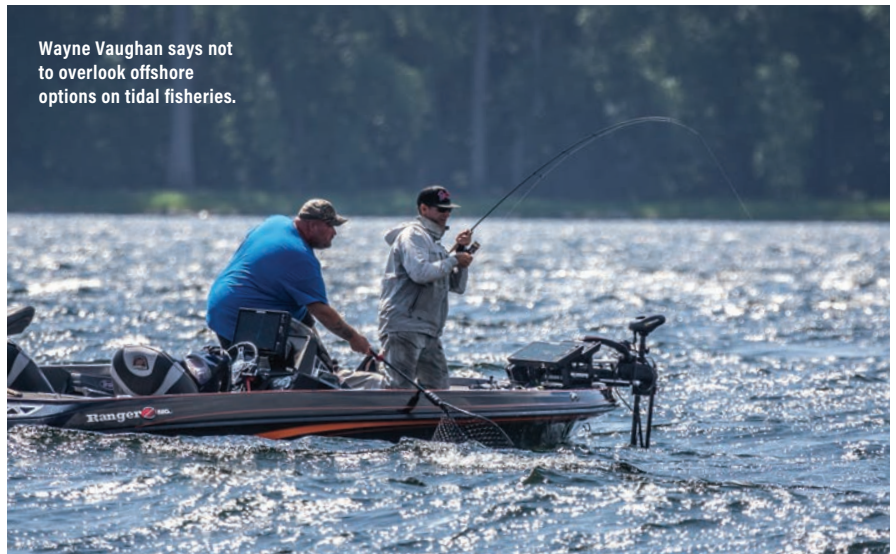
Early in the season, Vaughan likes to start with a square-bill or a spinnerbait around the cypress trees. Then, as the spawn progresses, he might mix in a Yamamoto Senko. Later in the summer, he'll start attacking the trees with a Zoom Brush Hog, a crankbait and a jig.

4. KEEP IT SMALL AND NATURAL

Tidal systems seem to lend themselves to oddball and old-school baits more than other places. Though Dortch doesn't dive too much into that, he's still got some unique preferences.

"I don't throw any real big baits," says Dortch. "You don't catch a lot of real big fish in tidal places, but bait-wise, I stick with a compact spinnerbait and a 1/4-ounce buzzbait and a small square-bill. I don't throw anything gigantic."

Wayne Vaughan says not to overlook offshore options on tidal fisheries.



Dortch says a buzzbait is always good on tidal water for some reason. He's caught them buzzing from the Potomac and the James to the Mobile Delta. He also loves a Zoom Speed Worm, a chartreuse and white spinnerbait, and a craw or crab-colored square-bill. His worms and flipping baits are mostly black and blue and junebug. Following the forage is good as well. In the fall, when there are a lot of shrimp in the river, Dortch will actually use a Berkley Gulp! Shrimp (new penny color) on a 1/8-ounce swimbait head.

Perhaps his most off-the-wall bait at home is an old-school Hildebrandt Snagless Sally in-line spinner.

"When they're eating crabs, which they always are, something that looks like a crab is good," says Dortch. "A Snagless Sally with a black, blue and purple skirt with a white twin-tail trailer with the tips dyed orange looks just like a crab swimming sideways."

5. USE HIGH TIDE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Because low tide tends to concentrate bass, it's traditionally the best tide for catching fish. But, there are ways that both Dortch and Vaughan like to approach the high tide – the last few hours of incoming and the first few hours of outgoing – that can put the odds in their favor.

"In some of your shallow bays, those fish bite better on a high tide," says Dortch. "Whereas, in your deeper creeks, they bite better on a low tide. I like the shallow bays on the last hour of an incoming tide and the first hour

of an outgoing tide. You can get your boat in there, you're a little quieter and those fish have been waiting to move into the real shallow stuff that they can't even get to on low tide."

Keeping in mind that most spots in a tidal system are very dependent on the tide, Dortch makes sure he's in the right creeks at the right water levels.

"There was a bay I caught them in on the James River that a lot of people were in, but they didn't go and practice in there at the right time," says Dortch. "They went in and checked it out and tried it, but I waited until the tide was high, which is when I knew we'd be able to fish it during the tournament. I went in there and fished it and found fish, and some other guys that fished it in practice when it was low didn't even get a bite."

Interestingly, Vaughan and Dortch have somewhat divergent theories about cover during high tide. While Dortch likes to use high tide to access shallow, grassy places, Vaughan does the opposite. He looks for vertical cover such as trees, duck blinds and docks, because the fish can move up and down on the cover where he targets them, as opposed to spreading out through the area.

6. CONSIDER OFFSHORE OPTIONS

Fishing offshore isn't really done much in tidal areas, but there are a few scenarios in which it can play.

According to Vaughan, most of the bass in tidal fisheries live in less than 10 feet of water all the time, and the

particular nature of the rivers reinforces that. On a lake, there might be a lot of productive water from 2 to 30 feet deep, but on rivers, there tends to be a very sharp transition from good water to a 20-foot-deep channel that isn't productive.

Vaughan's two summertime off-shore patterns are cranking hard spots and shell and fishing brush.

He'll usually target hard spots on the outside edges of flats in perhaps 5 feet of water before they drop into the abyss of the river. Greenway Flats on the Potomac is a good example. There are lots of hard patches and shell bars that can sometimes produce crankbait fish.

More commonly, Vaughan will target planted brush or snags and woody debris that's submerged.

"The fish don't get on brush until July. They're going to start getting on that brush when that water temperature starts to get on up there," says Vaughan. "It's a lower tide deal. It pulls the bait out off the flat. You always put your brush in the mouth of a creek, on a bend or on the edge of a drop, where it falls down into 5 or 6 feet of water."

Vaughan fishes tidal brush just like you'd fish it anywhere else, with the only adjustment being that it's generally shallower. First, he fires a crankbait in for a few casts. Then, he hits it with a worm. After that, he moves to the next pile.

7. DON'T BE AFRAID TO RUN

Tidal waters can be truly gigantic playing fields. As such, tournament anglers have made some huge runs in tidewater events. According to Dortch, the best reason to crank up and run is to find the conditions you want.

Running the tide (following the high or low water in or out) is common practice on a river like the James, but Dortch will sometimes run out of the tides altogether.

"When you get a neap tide [see sidebar] the fish usually don't feed very good at all," says Dortch. "That's a time you pack your boat full of gas, run until you get away from the tide and get into the river where there's steady current."

The other scenario in which Dortch runs a long way is when he wants to find better seasonal conditions.

"In the summer, when it gets really hot on the Delta, we'll run up the river

almost to the first lock and dam," says Dortch. "The water temperatures are lower, you have a constant flow of water and the fish seem to bite a lot better."

"In the spring, we run 40 miles south to the bay," he adds. "There are real shallow, black mud bays, and the water in them will be 15 degrees warmer than it is in the river or deeper, shady creeks. The fish in them will spawn way before fish that are just 20 miles up the river."

8. KNOW THE TIDE

Entirely understanding and predicting the tide is hard for the most seasoned tidal anglers, but the better you understand the tides, what affects them and how they affect the fishery, the more you can anticipate possible changes. Fish in tidal systems don't bite well all the time, and being in the right place at the right time is critical for success. That's why Dortch is adamant about carefully noting the tide during practice and the tournament.

"You may go in a place in practice, catch them and think it's the best place on Earth," says Dortch. "But if you run down there right off the bat in

the tournament and it's not the same tide, you might not catch them. That's what hurts a lot of people. Yeah, the fish are still there, but they really don't bite until you get to a certain point."

Both pros also believe the wind is an overlooked factor.

"We see it all the time," says Vaughan. "A really strong east wind will push the water in from the ocean and the Chesapeake Bay into the tributary. If you get a west wind, it will blow it all out toward the ocean."

On the Gulf Coast, a strong south wind will keep the tide high and push water in, while a north wind will flush water out into the Gulf.

"Last year, when we were fishing the Potomac [Toyota Series event], the wind switched from practice to the tournament," adds Vaughan. "The water was really high in practice, and it dropped way out during the tournament. When the water was up, if you could find a mat, you could get a bite under that sucker. Then, when the wind switched, it pulled all that water out from under them, and they just weren't the same. When the water was supposed to be high, it wasn't even halfway up." ■

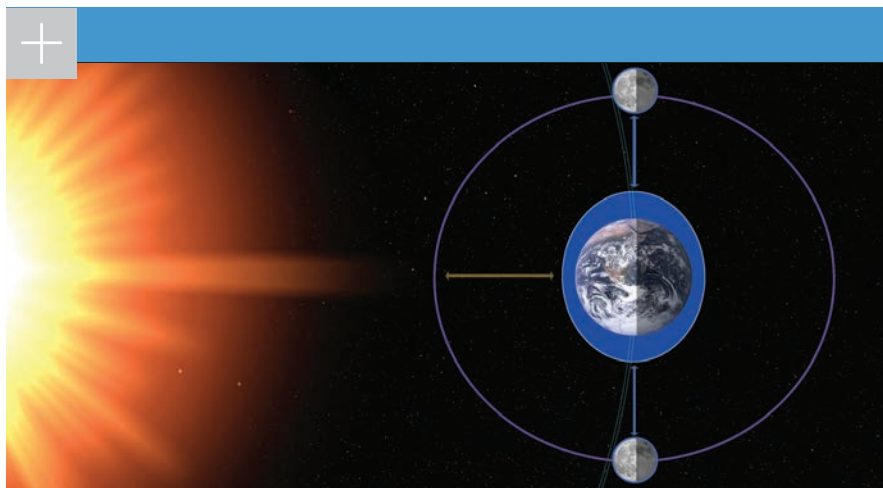


ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN HAND

WHAT'S A NEAP TIDE?

A neap tide occurs when the moon is at a right angle to the sun. Then, the bulge of the ocean is pulled in two directions by the sun and moon's gravity, resulting in a tide with an abnormally small swing. Neap tides occur twice in each lunar month (the amount of time it takes the moon to orbit Earth, or a little more than 29 days) during the first and third quarter moon phases, or when the moon appears to be half full.

The opposite of a neap tide is a spring tide, when the moon is directly in line with the sun, either between the Earth and sun (new moon) or on the backside of the Earth (full moon). During a spring tide, the tidal swings are exaggerated because of the combined gravitational pull of the sun and moon on the oceans' waters.



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IT'S PERSONAL

By Justin Onslow
PHOTOS BY JUSTIN ONSLOW

**For Lance Freeman,
the Asian carp crisis
hit home – and he's
hitting back**

Ask any angler about their favorite lake, river or pond, and they'll likely tell you something similar. In most cases, it's the body of water they grew up fishing. It's where a family member or friend taught them how to spool a reel and soak a worm. It's home.

For many in western Kentucky and Tennessee, that body of water – or bodies of water – is Kentucky Lake and neighboring Lake Barkley. The sister reservoirs created by damming the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, respectively, are home for countless anglers and a booming source of industry in the region, from tourism and boating to commercial and sport fishing.

They're also home to countless fish that aren't supposed to be there.

The Asian carp crisis is well-documented by now, but perhaps it's not documented as well as it should be considering how strong a foothold the invasive carp species have gotten in U.S. waterways. Bighead carp and silver carp – the two main targets of widespread efforts for control and eradication – were introduced into the Mississippi River system by mistake and have migrated into the Ohio, Tennessee and other major rivers.

It's a mistake that everyone is now paying for. It's a mistake Lance Freeman wants to remedy, thousands of pounds at a time.

GROUND ZERO: LAKE BARKLEY

"If there's a chance to stop these fish, we're going to find out on this lake."

Those are the words of Freeman, a 24-year-old Eddyville, Ky., native who has spent his entire life on Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley. In the beginning, it was fishing for bream, bass and catfish with family members. Then, it was guiding for crappie and bass for spending money.

Now, it's pulling thousands of pounds of Asian carp from the lake every day. And it's personal.

"It's personal to me," he says. "It's like somebody breaking into your home and ruining everything."

Freeman, who fished on Murray State's bass fishing team en route to a civil engineering degree, is a bass fisherman at heart. He won the 2020 The Bass Federation (TBF) National Championship in March, and like so many others, it was Kentucky and Barkley that nurtured his passion for the sport. It's for that reason that Freeman decided to eschew his degree – for now, anyway – to take up arms against the carp invasion.

Equipped with a fleet of six boats, seven employees and thousands of feet of gill nets, Freeman takes to the water as often as he can to chip away at the problem that just won't go away.

BY THE NUMBERS

Freeman is a commercial carp fisherman, who also contracts with the state of Kentucky to harvest Asian carp from the Ohio River and other waterways affected by the carp crisis. When he's not doing contract work – or spending rare free time bass fishing – he's spending most of his time on Lake Barkley, which Freeman points to as the true hotbed of big Asian carp inundating two of the South's best bass lakes.

His best monthly harvest was 218,000 pounds of carp – or 109 tons of biomass. In one day alone, Freeman and his crew once harvested 21,000 pounds. The truly shocking thing is that two or three days after they harvest their fish, the spots at which they harvest replenish with entirely new groups of carp.

Despite making money from harvesting and selling his catches,

Lance Freeman, 24, operates a commercial fishing business that specializes in netting invasive Asian carp.



Freeman would prefer never having to spend another day dropping and pulling in gill nets filled with thousands of pounds of fish. He'd prefer the supply run dry altogether.

It's not as if commercial carp fishing isn't profitable. Freeman often receives a base of 8 to 16 cents per pound at the market along with subsidies from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife that wants Asian carp removed from local waterways. It's far from nothing considering 15,000 pounds is a fairly average day.

But it's not all about the money for Freeman. He could be doing so many other things with a college degree and a penchant for catching bass. If the well were to run dry, he'd be more than happy about it.

FINDING FISH

"It's a whole lot different than bass fishing, that's for sure," Freeman says of chasing after Asian carp. "These things are 10 times more adaptive than anything else."

And therein lies one of the biggest problems when dissecting the impact of Asian carp. It's not just the sheer numbers, which can't be understated, but also the fact that the fish seem to be as intelligent and adaptable as any species Freeman has ever encountered.

Freeman's process for finding and harvesting schools of carp starts with side-imaging in well-known bays and on points where they regularly find huge schools of fish. From there, he and his crew – it often takes multiple boats to successfully wrangle a school – use their motors to get the school riled up and the carp moving closer together. The nets come out, and that's when the fun begins.

"It's like herding cattle," Freeman says. "The biggest thing is speed. You've got to be quick to get around them. They know exactly what's going on."

Riding around, toward and over their nets, Freeman and his crew corral the fish and use the acoustic disruption of their motors to coerce the carp into swimming toward the trap. Asian carp, and in particular silver carp, which



Using gill nets and multiple boats to “herd” their quarry, Freeman and crew can catch thousands of pounds of carp in a day.

make up 99 percent of Freeman’s catch, are notoriously skittish when it comes to the sound of boat motors. It’s what makes them so dangerous for boaters, and it’s what makes them easy to move around seemingly at will.

When the proverbial dust settles and enough fish have been successfully herded toward the gill nets, it’s time to start the hard work.

ONE FISH AT A TIME

“People don’t understand how many fish are in here,” Freeman says between heaves of the net, pulling in several feet – and fish – at a time. “Just the biomass of all these fish.”

The results of the process are hard to believe until you’ve seen them first-hand. With every few feet of net Freeman pulls out of the water, there’s usually at least one Asian carp wedged within it, and each fish regularly weighs between 5 and 10 pounds. It’s a workout, to be sure, and the hull of Freeman’s 26-foot aluminum boat fills up surprisingly quickly.

Every once in a while, Freeman retrieves part of his net with a hole in it. “These fish are so intelligent,” he says. “If there’s a hole in the net, they’ll find it.”

So much so that there’s almost always a big fish wedged in the net directly next to one of those holes. Freeman believes those fish swim along the net looking for a gap, identify one and do their best to hit it. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn’t.

Some spots produce thousands of pounds, which he can harvest with the help of his crew in just an hour or two. Those same spots will replenish in days, and it’s back to square one. Another day on the water, another paycheck, another difference made.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

“Every day is a game to me,” Freeman explains. “Just like bass fishing. There’s so much going into it every day with the conditions.”

Freeman’s background as a tournament bass angler certainly aids in his finding success as a commercial fisherman. As with bass, carp are susceptible to the conditions, from weather and water temperature to wind and water levels. Finding them, while not inherently difficult with the right electronics, often comes down to experience both as a bass angler and as a commercial fisherman.

Freeman’s experience is also his passion. He’s a bass angler through and through, which is why the impact of Asian carp on Kentucky and Barkley has been so deeply personal for him.

“I want to make a difference on the lakes that raised me,” he says. “I paid for college on this lake through bass fishing. This is theoretically all I’ve ever known.

“I want my lake back. I feel like every day when I’m out here, I’m doing something that’s important. When we

get these fish stopped – when, not if – we can get a lake back that’s enjoyable to come to and full of fish.”

But does it matter? Is Freeman really making a difference by harvesting 10,000 or 20,000 pounds one day and finding that many fish again in the same area just a few days later?

“I feel like I am making a difference,” says Freeman, acknowledging the uphill battle. “I took this to heart, and I enjoy every day.

“I know every day when I go out there I’m making the most difference I can make, and in that I feel like I’m giving back to what made me who I am today.”

That may seem like a contradiction – taking pleasure in an endeavor that seems endless – but Freeman truly believes in what he’s doing, and he knows that every ton of Asian carp he pulls from the lake is a ton of fish that won’t be able to reproduce, or perhaps move into a new fishery and populate there.

There’s also anecdotal evidence to support Freeman’s optimism.

“I think we’re making a difference,” he repeats. “There’s more bait here [the upper end of Lake Barkley]; actual bait balls.”

Because the carp feed on plankton, it’s often the shad population that suffers first when the carp population swells, as shad have to compete with the invasive population for their food source. When the baitfish population begins to dwindle, the population of



bass and other sport fish that rely on shad and other native fishes for food can be impacted.

On Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley, many anglers have noted the absence of those bait balls in recent years. Freeman, who still makes it a point to fish for bass on his home waters, is among those who saw the baitfish population potentially increase last season, if only a little.

AN UPHILL BATTLE

The problems facing those attempting to combat the Asian carp population in U.S. waterways are many. For one, environmental conditions are impossible to change, and the flooding that occurred around Kentucky and Barkley in the spring of 2015 is a good example of that. With prolonged high water levels at that time, Asian carp eggs – fluvial eggs that need consistent current to remain up in the water column to survive – flourished, and it resulted in the mass of fish in the lakes today.

Freeman says Asian carp need certain water conditions to spawn – conditions that were more than met in 2015 – and that’s why he’s seeing so many fish in the 6-plus-pound range with each harvest.

“They’re four-and-a-half,” Freeman quips when asked how old he thinks the carp are in a recent harvest. “They all spawned in that high water in 2015.”

Freeman acknowledges that it’s going to take avoiding those kinds of massive water fluctuations to ensure the Asian carp in Kentucky and Barkley don’t have another banner spawn. And that might be crucial in efforts to eradicate them entirely, which isn’t necessarily an obtainable goal.

“To completely eradicate an entire species is pretty hard to do, especially with so many of them in our rivers,” he says. “They have so much water to move

up and down in. In the rivers, they’re here, but in our reservoirs, we have a fighting chance at resisting them.”

In addition to environmental factors, there’s the simple fact that commercial carp fishing needs to be profitable to ensure participation. No one is going to lose money buying boats, nets and supplies and filling gas tanks to take a loss.

“Our biggest problem down here is an unreliable market,” Freeman says. “We used to have to drive 45 minutes to an hour to market. Now we have one close.”

That’s great for Freeman and other Kentucky- and Barkley-based fishermen, but there are many others who have to spend money on gas to get to and from the market, to say nothing of what it takes to keep harvests cold and fresh getting there. Markets aren’t going to buy spoiled fish.

Then there’s the fact that gill-netting doesn’t exactly have a positive connotation in the conservation world, a reputation that really isn’t warranted when considering Freeman’s process.

“Gill nets get a bad rap, but these fish [bass caught accidentally] aren’t out of the water very long,” he says.

The nets are in the water long enough to trap the fish – sometimes less than an hour – and the fish are harvested immediately. Bycatch is rare.

Austin Gruner, who has worked with Freeman for a few months, has seen maybe 10 bass caught in their nets in that time. Bycaught fish are almost always returned to the water fully healthy. The negative environmental impact of what Freeman and his crew are doing is nil.

THE ENDGAME

“It’s going to take a combination of several things to catch them down to a level it’s not such a problem,” Freeman says of the carp. “As far as economic tourism and things like that, that’s

where we need to focus on trying to get these things out: for the sport fish, the tourism industry, safety for boaters. Those are the biggest reasons we need to target them.”

At just 24, Freeman is still old enough to remember when Kentucky and Barkley were bass fishing meccas. A banner day then and a banner day now are not the same.

“Kentucky Lake would spoil you as a kid,” he recalls. “I remember going out there and having 200-fish days and they all being 3- to 5-pounders. You’d catch 40 or 50 fish a day and be sad about it sometimes.”

Though the carp certainly aren’t the only factor at blame for the downturn in bass fishing (untimely water-level fluctuations, reduced grass growth and other factors have also contributed), learning to control and minimize their population is a major hurdle in getting back the Kentucky Lake Freeman remembers. That’s the lake Freeman wants back. It’s his vision for a better future for Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley.

“Those lakes are my home. That’s where I grew up. That’s what I knew,” he reminisces.

For now, the home Freeman knew and the one he has aren’t necessarily one and the same. But he’s doing his best. He’s doing what many have called for – the removal of Asian carp from Kentucky and Barkley – one day at a time. For him, it’s not just about making a living; it’s about making a true difference.

“As much as a 12-year-old kid can cut his teeth, I learned everything I learned from these lakes,” he adds. “That is my home. To have something come in here and completely throw it for a loop is so tragic to watch. That’s why it’s personal to me.” ■



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Wellspring of Bass

Natural springs, if you can find them, can contribute to incredible fishing

By Curtis Niedermier

Scattered throughout the hills and hollows of southern Appalachia, one of the region's most valuable resources trickles out of the ground. It flows down rocky draws and wells up in underground caverns. It even seeps from the very bedrock. And it's been sustaining life for folks in the area for generations.

It's water, obviously, and it reaches the surface through a network of springs that have attracted humans since they first settled the region.

In some parts of the country, but especially throughout the Tennessee Valley, tournament anglers guard the location of freshwater springs that trickle or flow into their local lakes and reservoirs (from under the surface or above) because, at certain times of year and in certain conditions, those springs can contribute to incredible fishing. One Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro from Alabama says the springs he fishes on the Tennessee River are the last remaining secrets in bass fishing. Another from Tennessee claims he'll talk about any topic in bass fishing, but he won't go into detail on how he finds springs.

In other regions, fishing a spring is much less secretive. And, regardless, finding a spring is by no means a sure bet to catch a big bag of fish. However, it could be.

Exactly how springs fit into a fishing game plan varies quite a bit from region to region and season to season. Just knowing that they're there and understanding how they might benefit you is a good first step toward building your own spring-fed fishing secrets. So we dug into it with anyone willing to talk.

Spring Basics

The main reasons why springs are worth finding are pretty straightforward. First, spring water tends to flow out at a consistent temperature year-round, which can create a localized pocket of cool water in the summer and warm water in the winter, and that attracts baitfish and bass. On some fisheries, bass will spawn near springs before they will in other areas because of the higher water temperature and, in some cases, clear water, which allows the sun to penetrate to the nest. A spring might also provide needed oxygenation or current, which are always attractive to fish. In places where spring-fed creeks and ponds are very clear, grass grows faster and attracts bass, too.

While the secretive nature of fishing springs in the Tennessee Valley is a fun subject to discuss, the fact is, freshwater springs that affect fishing opportunities are found throughout the country. In the West, springs feed coldwater fisheries that support great trout fishing.

On Lake Erie, in cold winters when enough ice forms to fish hard water, springs create dangerous thin ice where they bubble up from the bottom.

The Ozarks are famous for springs. Some are so large that where they flow into a river, the fishery transforms from warmwater to coldwater – from small-mouth water to trout water.

Florida's cool spring-fed ponds and rivers are equally famous, not only for bass fishing, but for tourists who pay to snorkel in the gin-clear waters and teenagers looking to escape the summer's heat with a dip in a cool pool.

There's enough variation that there aren't many rules of thumb, and how you find and fish springs depends on where you're fishing.

How to Find Springs

The easiest way to find a spring is to be lucky enough to know someone who can show you one. But we aren't always so fortunate. For the rest of us, finding them requires some recon.

The methods for researching springs outlined below nearly all require one key final step: an in-person follow-up on the water. That's about the only reliable way to verify what's there.

1. Find obvious springs

Some springs are very well known and frequented by anglers. Missouri's Greer Spring, for instance, is a National Natural Landmark and the 10th largest spring in the world. It's so large that where it flows into the Eleven Point River, the river doubles in size and transitions from a warmwater fishery to a coldwater trout fishery (though targeting smallmouths below this type of spring in winter can be a good strategy).

Denny Brauer, who began his career in Missouri, now enjoys semi-retirement from his home on Lake Amistad in south Texas, where Goodenough Spring is a local landmark. It was a popular swimming hole before the Rio Grande was dammed. Now underwater, Goodenough is marked by a buoy.

"Millions of gallons of water come out of it," Brauer says. "It sits in pretty deep water; about 40 feet, depending on

lake level. You can see the turbulence on the surface.

"Obviously, it's a community hole, but stripers, white bass and some large-mouths will get around it."

Springs like these are easy to find with a little bit of internet research.

2. Check maps and other references

Smaller springs, while less obvious, might still be marked on a map chip or paper fishing map. Start by finding creek arms with the word "spring" in the name. It's no guarantee there'll be fresh inflow, but there could be.

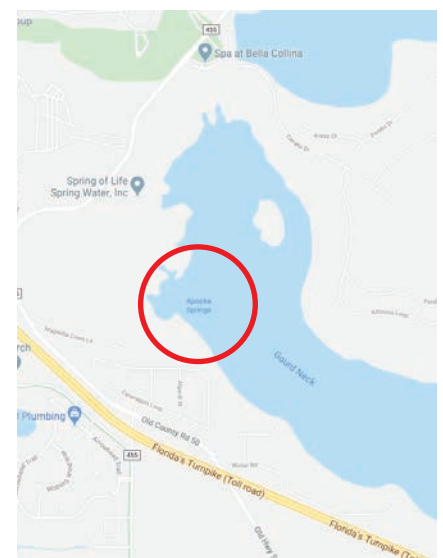
On the St. Johns River and Lake George, for instance, there are several springs marked in creeks on most fishing maps. Arkansas pro Billy McCaghren figured out the potential of one such creek on an early season pre-practice trip to the St. Johns with no prior knowledge of the spring.

"It actually tells you on the map that's what it is, so I just went in there. They had a boat launch there," he says. "The water was in the 60s out on the river, but in that spring it was 70. There were fish everywhere in there.

"It's a pretty large area," he adds. "Actually, it's a creek, and in the back of it is a big pond, and that's where the spring was."

Google Maps is another good source. Many springs are labeled, or you can find nearby landmarks with "spring" in the name, and from there track down a spring that flows into the lake.

In some regions, there are also maps that identify springs by watershed or



county, publications from local water districts, geological research papers regarding springs, written histories of communities around reservoirs and maps made before a lake was impounded. Available online, these resources could lead you to a new fishing hole.

3. Search Google Earth

Google Earth is a valuable tool for scouting tournament waters, and it can reveal springs, too.

Start by scanning for unusual variations in water clarity – a clear patch where there otherwise should be dirty water, or some sediment buildup in a clear creek (springs sometimes force silt to the surface). Even if it's not a spring, you might have found a drain that's worth remembering next time the area gets a heavy rain.

Check the original creek beds in the backs of large pockets for streams of clear water flowing in. Pay close attention to grass beds, too. An obvious hole in the grass could be a deep or shallow spot, but it could also be created by a spring.

Be sure to scan through historical images as you search. Some years have more or less grass growth that better reveal springs, or water levels might vary based on precipitation around the time an image was taken. On drawdown reservoirs, in particular, wintertime imagery can reveal cracks, divots, drains or (sometimes very obvious) holes along exposed flats and shorelines.

An hour spent scanning Google Earth could provide enough leads to fill an afternoon scouting mission on the lake.

4. Pay attention on the water

By far, finding springs while on the water is the most effective way, but it's by no means efficient. Many springs are found by anglers who simply stumble upon them.

Usually, the first clue is a water temperature change. That's how McCaghren found his favorite springs at Grand Lake in Oklahoma.

"The ones at Grand I found just going up a creek and paying attention to the water temperature," he says. "When I've really keyed on them is when it's really cold. The water will be warmer there.

"If it's really cold and you come across some warmer water, there has to



Is the area indicated a pond or a spring? We can't say without checking in person, but the satellite images taken at different water levels suggest it's worth checking out.

be a reason. And, naturally, the fish will be concentrated there. It's the same difference in the summer. You can almost overlook it if you just idle through a place and see it's piled full of bait."

Tennessee pro Brad Knight looks for water temperature changes, too, but also other clues: a patch of clear water in a murky creek, cloudy water in a clear bay, a slick patch on a rippled surface or a ring of bubbles rising up.

"You can hunt for them and find them," says Knight. "It's just about

studying and time on the water looking, because there's no real type of thing that makes you think, 'Oh, this looks like it'd be a good place for a spring.' There are still some trade secrets that I'm not willing to give up, but you've got some obvious visual clues.

"I went by one the other day. I was showing some guys, and I said, 'I can show you a spring you've driven by a million times and have no idea.' They said there was no way. So I drove them up to it and showed them. This was in

the middle of the channel, and you could see a big ol' circle with a water-color difference and bubbles coming out of it."

Keep an eye out also for above-water springs. They might flow from a crack or crevice, seep from a bluff wall or simply roll down a hillside.

"We've got some [at Amistad] that come in just trickling out of the side of the banks," Brauer says. "They're like mini-waterfalls coming in. We've got some that run full time. Whether they're a waterfall or coming in underwater depends on the lake level.

"Anytime you've got a current situation coming into a body of water, it's always going to attract baitfish. Even though those are not big areas, you can a lot of times catch a limit off them."

5. Scan with electronics

Some of the real masters at finding springs find most of them with electronics. Or they use the electronics to dial in a spring's location and any nearby structure.

"A lot of times, especially as the water gets full on the Tennessee River, you can't see them [visually]," says Knight. "But in your side-scan you'll see

a weird-looking round spot or some kind of big crevice."

In Florida, pro Tim Frederick finds springs the same way, though usually by chance. He says there's usually hard sand around them, but the source of the spring can be very obvious.

"You can graph over it with 2-D sonar, and you're going to see it. It looks like a vein. You'll go over a hole, and it'll go to a softer bottom. It'll go way down on your screen, like the bottom will drop out of it."

Fish the Area, Fish the Spot

On the Tennessee River, Knight says there are times he can park in a spot and hammer fish by casting directly to the source of a spring, which might be the size of a truck bed – give or take.

"Whenever you catch so many out of a little hole like that, I wonder about some kind of aquifer, or some type of underwater tunnel that could be connected, like some secret, magic bass world," says Knight. "I get off in some weird thoughts about it sometimes because you might be sitting there, and it's 2 feet deep on this huge 10-acre flat, and there's one spring that's the size of a pickup truck bed, and

you catch 30 or 40 bass out of it. Where do they come from? How are they not just stacked and you see fins and tails sticking out of the water?"

On other reservoirs, springs bubble up into deep holes big enough to park in the middle and cast around. A drop-off or grass edge near the spring could be good. Or the effects of the spring might make an entire pocket productive.

"At Grand, I just kind of fish the area," says McCaghren. "They're not big, but the fish are still set up there. They'll be on the little points or rock changes. Nowadays, they're on docks, but when I started fishing them there was about a third as many docks."

In Florida, spring fishing can be very area-driven, too. FLW pro Brandon McMillan has enjoyed some successful outings on the Harris Chain around New Years, taking advantage of spring-fed canals where bass move up early to spawn.

"They're pretty much community holes," he says. "They're the ones that are gin-clear, and they stay relatively the same temp."

McMillan figures the canals are home to a solid population of resident

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fish and can be productive all year, but they're great targets in the early season. You just have to game plan for the amount of pressure those fish will get.

"They're easy to see," McMillan says of the bass in those canals. "You better have your act together if you're going to fish in there because everybody can see them.

"You've got flow. You've got bait. They really don't have a need to leave. The problem is, everybody kind of knows it. They're the most educated bass on the Harris Chain."

Lake Apopka, also on the Harris Chain, is home to a large spring that Frederick has fished over the years.

"It comes into play in the summertime, for sure," he says. "At the same time, if we have a cold front that lasts a couple weeks, and the water temp is in the 50s, you can go to those springs and the water temp is still in the 70s. In Apopka, the area impacted by that spring is probably 200 yards by 200 yards. It's a circle. That's actually a pretty big one."

Big, small, obvious or not, springs add an interesting element to a bass fishing strategy. They might have little influence

on success outside of a very narrow window of time, or they might be so valuable that it pays to guard them at all costs. But to find out, first you have to locate the source of the flow, then investigate what sort of opportunities bubble up with it. ■

Brad Knight says it's not easy to go out hunting for springs, but he's always got his eye out for them when on the water.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

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TREBLE TROUBLE

Getting treble-hook lures in and out of snaggy situations

By Sean Ostruszka

“I specialize in putting treble-hook lures in places others can’t reach.”

Many top anglers have their specialties – ledge fishing, punching mats, sight-fishing – but the one Nick LeBrun hangs his hat on, which he alluded to on stage at the 2018 Phoenix Bass Fishing League All-American, is pretty unique.

There are so many techniques designed to effortlessly get in and out of the snaggiest cover with little issue. Fishing around stumps or brush? Use a Texas rig. Docks? Swim jigs will do the trick. There are even weedless or single-hook versions of almost every topwater imaginable, designed for the sole purpose of getting lures in places where anything with an exposed hook is bound to get hung.

Why throw treble-hook lures there in the first place?

“What happens when fish get conditioned and won’t bite a Texas rig pitched to stumps, or they’ve already seen 10 buzzbaits zip over their heads behind a dock?” asks the second-year Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro.

And therein lies the problem.

If every other angler can only use the same lures to reach covered fish, being able to get something different in there – say, something with treble hooks – is going to give you an advantage no other angler will have.

That’s exactly what LeBrun had at the 2018 All-American on Cross Lake, and he used his advantage to not just earn a \$100,000 paycheck, but also parlay it into a full-fledged fishing career.

Here’s a look at why and how LeBrun and a few other top pros get treble hooks in places few dare.

CRANKING STUMPS WITH LeBRUN

The Key: Cast Length



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

When LeBrun won the All-American on Louisiana's Cross Lake cranking stumps, it really wasn't much of a surprise. He'd figured out and mastered the technique just 20 miles up the road on Caddo Lake.

The reason he figured out the pattern was out of sheer necessity. He needed a way to catch fish living around cypress trees and stumps that didn't want to bite a Texas rig.

"If fish don't want to bite, you need to get them to react," explains LeBrun. "That's what that crankbait does. They don't want to bite; they're just reacting when it deflects."

Deflecting square-bills – like a **Bill Lewis SB-57** – off stumps has

long been a popular technique, but doing it off cypress tree roots and "knees" takes it to another level. If you think an isolated stump is snaggy, try the countless and sporadic knobs around every cypress tree.

That's where cast length comes into play.

"There is a certain distance you have to cast past a tree with every crankbait where it will deflect more often than get hung," says LeBrun. "I'm not smart enough to know why, but I think it has to do with it deflecting better on the initial descent as opposed to when it levels off."

For instance, LeBrun will often only cast 8 to 10 feet past a tree. The shortened distance allows him more

control of the lure's path and results in far fewer hang-ups.

As you can imagine, the goal is to make the crankbait hit and deflect off the tree root, prompting a bass to eat solely out of instinct and not out of hunger. Because the fish is striking out of surprise, though, poor hookups are a reality. LeBrun makes sure to find a happy medium in retrieve speed – fast enough so it will still deflect and not get hung, yet slow enough to still give a fish time to react and eat the lure.

"It's such a small window for that bass to eat in," adds LeBrun.

"Imagine a mousetrap. If you pull something across it too fast, even if the trap catches it, it may not catch it well. Same thing with this. You're going to lose fish doing it simply because they don't eat the lure well.

"Two things I do to help this are switch out all my treble hooks to **Hayabusa TBL930 treble hooks** and use a 7-foot Fitzgerald Fishing Bryan Thrift Square Bill rod, which has enough tip to not pull out the hooks."



CRANKING DOCKS WITH STRADER

The Key: Reel Setup

PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ



More likely than not, your dock-fishing arsenal looks remarkably similar to every other angler's – except maybe Wesley Strader's.

Sure, he uses jigs, soft plastics and spinnerbaits like everyone else, but he also incorporates a crankbait for a key reason.

"It's different," says Strader.

"When they're seeing that other stuff repeatedly, and you throw in a crankbait with its different vibration, it gets them to perk up. Plus, you can get the reaction bite. I'm almost always trying to hit it off posts."

Still, getting a crankbait beneath a dock, particularly one that's low to the water, can be daunting. Strader has two ways of doing it.

The first is to have two different rods with the same crankbait. His favorites are Wesley's Secret or **Strader's Pooh crankbaits by PH Custom Lures**.

He tunes them to run slightly out of tune in opposite directions (Strader marks his rod with either yellow or red tape to indicate the

direction each is tuned). Doing this allows him to make a cast alongside a dock and still get it to run beneath the structure, particularly to hit corner posts.

From there, it all comes down to the reel and setting it up properly to sling a roll-cast tight to the water and under the dock.

"You need to take all the brakes off your reel so there's no tension on the spool," says Strader, who uses a Team Lew's Pro TI Speed Spool reel with a Powell Endurance 6104 CB Glass rod. "That's the only way to keep the crankbait low to the water when making roll-casts."

"You're going to backlash, especially when you first start trying it. I probably would get 20 a day when I first started, and I still get some if I'm not paying attention, clanging it off a dock. But like anything else, you need to commit to it and not cut it off because you hit a dock on your third cast."

Practice often, because if you can master it, you'll have a tool few others are using.



PLOPPING DOCKS WITH WATSON

The Key: The Right Rod



PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

It's not that James Watson necessarily wants to do it, but, sometimes, the fish simply will eat a **River2Sea Whopper Plopper** better than a buzzbait.

"Let's face it, I can maneuver my Tackle HD buzzbait around docks a lot easier than a Plopper," says Watson. "But as you're going down the bank, you can determine if the fish want one over the other on a given day. If they want the Plopper, then you need to get it in there."

He'll employ this technique on docks around the country from August to Thanksgiving, and the scenarios can be endless. Around where he lives in the Ozarks,

Watson encounters docks that seem to have as many cables as they have boat slips. And treble hooks love cables.

That's where having the right rod is essential, not only for getting the lure in but also getting it out.

"Most people use short rods when fishing around docks," says Watson. "I like a long one, like the 7-foot, 8-inch Cashion JW Ploppin rod, because it allows me to not just cast over cables but also reach high enough over them to help get my lure back."

Getting a Plopper back over a cable is a challenge, but a long rod makes it far easier. Plus, while fishing around all those cables, at some

point you're going to get bit, and having the extra reach of that long rod makes it easier to lift fish up and over them.

"Using a shorter rod, I've seen plenty of times where the back hook of that Plopper gets caught on the cable as guys try to lift in a fish," says Watson. "Then you have a real mess."

Two other keys are the right line – Watson uses 65-pound-test Maxima braid on a Bass Pro Shops Johnny Morris Platinum Signature 8.3:1 reel – and the right mindset.

"Pro DeZigns in Missouri has been wrapping my boats for years, and they've absolutely saved them because some guys are not willing to do a little fiberglass touch-up," says Watson. "Guys like me are. You have to be bold enough to try and put your bait in places others won't. Sometimes that means dinging up your boat or tying it up to go in and retrieve your lure."

"The payoff is often a really big bass that no one else was ever going to catch." ■



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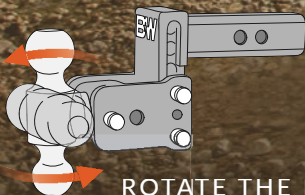
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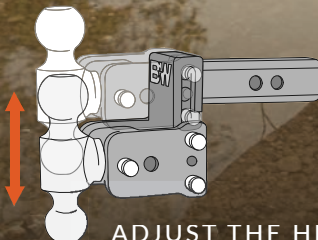
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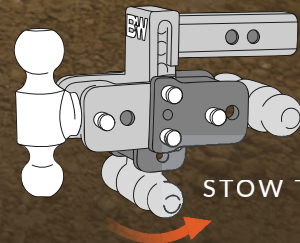
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HOW TO MAKE A **BUZZBAIT SQUEAK**

The secret to putting more fish in the boat with a buzzbait

By Jody White

PHOTOS BY JODY WHITE

Bradley Dortch knows the value of a buzzbait, and he says it is particularly key on rivers all across the country.

"They just catch fish on rivers," says Dortch. "If you go back and look anywhere, whether it's Hackney at the Cup on Three Rivers, or the Tensaw River and Alabama River; it's just a given they like it on river systems. Not that you can't go to Toho and catch them on it, because I know some guys that have caught big ones on it. And I've caught some big ones on it. But it seems like on a river they eat it better than anywhere else."

One of the key aspects of buzzbait fishing is the sound, and Dortch modifies his with a file and some pliers to get the most squeak he can.

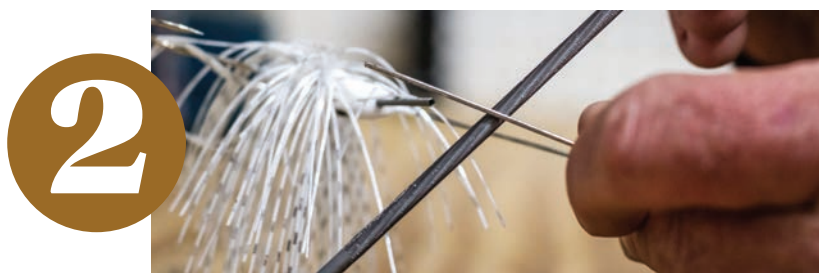
"I'll do it on all buzzbaits - I don't care," says Dortch. "The more it squeaks, the better it is. It seems like it catches bigger fish. There's definitely something to it."



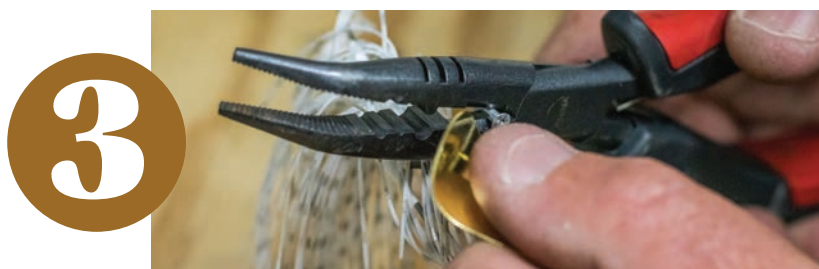
STEP-BY-STEP



Dortch starts by removing the blade and the rivet. Then, using a chainsaw file, he roughs up the back of the blade and the front of the rivet where they will rub against each other.



Next, he roughs up the wire of the buzzbait where the blade rides.



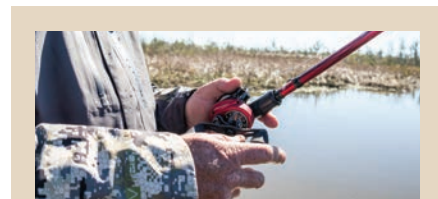
After putting the bait back together, Dortch crimps the rivet on the wire so it can't spin, which creates maximum squeak.

THE SETUP

Dortch modifies every buzzbait he uses so they squeak, and he mostly uses three baits: the Jenko Offspring, the Coosa Custom Baits Clacker and the Lunker Lure Buzzbait.

In clear and sunny conditions, Dortch uses chartreuse and white or just plain white. He opts for black in overcast conditions. Blade colors vary, too: silver in clean water and gold in dirtier water.

Dortch will sometimes use a trailer hook, depending on how well the fish seem to be taking the bait and how thick the cover is. When he uses a soft-plastic trailer, he typically sticks with a standard Zoom Split Tail in chartreuse or white.



KEEP IT SLOW

"I try to reel it as slow as I can reel it, but keep it up on top," Dortch says of his buzzbait presentation. "I reel it fast enough to make the blades turn and keep it up. I don't ever burn it. A big thing is making sure that your bait doesn't sink when you throw. You want it to be coming to you as soon as it hits. Most times, you're throwing it upside the bank, and your best cover is right there as soon as it hits."

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PHOTO BY JUSTIN ONSLOW

TIM FREDERICK'S SECRET WEAPON FOR CATCHING SHALLOW BASS IN FLORIDA

One part **prop bait**, one part **popper**: It'll put a bunch of fish in the livewell

By Justin Onslow

Tim Frederick is an expert Florida bass angler. A fifth-year pro on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, Frederick – who hails from Leesburg, Fla. – has a Pro Circuit win to his name on Okeechobee and finished 25th in the second event of the 2020 Pro Circuit season on the Harris Chain of Lakes in February. When it comes to fishing in Florida, he's got plenty of tricks up his sleeve for weighing in big bags.

One of those tricks involves a bait many know of, but few probably understand its full potential: the prop bait.

Frederick used to use the Smithwick version of the bait – the original Devil's Horse – but the company discontinued his favorite color, and Frederick was forced to split a bulk order with a buddy, Larry Petty, just to get some in the "spotted ape" color (a flashy mix of greens, oranges and blacks) they both liked.

"Smithwick made it, and it was good," Frederick says. "They quit making it, and you had to order 700 of them to get that color."

Petty taught Frederick a lot about how to set up and fish the bait, and so the duo decided it might be time to branch out a bit. Luckily, they had another friend named Bryan Heaberlin, who, as it turns out, is pretty good at making custom baits.

"He [Heaberlin] started making them, and he's pretty crafty – he makes all kinds of baits," Frederick says. "He buys the wood, and he's got a lathe. He trims them down, he sands them, he paints them. He's become really good with an airbrush, so he's matched all the colors perfectly, and he's created his own colors, which work really well."

With a friend who had the ability to make one of Frederick's favorite baits, the 50-year-old pro had an avenue for customization he never had with the Smithwick version.

Bluegills and Beds

"To modify it to get the sound Larry and I like, we don't put a front prop on it, and we turn the back prop backward, so it spits water and makes the sound like a bluegill popping in a pad field," Frederick explains. "That's just what works for us."

Frederick's applications for the bait all involve mimicking the sound of

panfish "popping" or "spitting." It's a sound you've probably heard when fishing around shallow grass, and it's a sound that often alerts nearby bass to the presence of fish that could be either food or foe.

"The bluegill is the natural enemy of the bass during the spawn because they eat the bass eggs," Frederick adds. "It just mimics the bluegill."

During the spawn, bass can be ultra-aggressive toward any number of predatory fish that could pillage their beds. With his prop bait of choice, Frederick is effectively forcing bass into being territorial and aggressive and ending up with a mouthful of hooks.

The Setup

Heaberlin customizes Frederick's prop bait to very exacting specifications, including length (4 1/2 inches) and hardware. Frederick likes the Mustad KVD Elite Triple Grip short-shank hooks Heaberlin attaches to split rings – a departure from the Smithwick version, which uses screwed-on connectors that need to be removed entirely to add split rings or swap out hooks.

In addition, Frederick wants his Devil's Horse imitator to float a very specific way.

"You want it to sit in the water not level, but just a little weighted in the back," he says.

From there, it's all about the one backward prop that somehow mimics

bluegill sounds perhaps better than any other topwater.

"I like it a little bit more subtle without the prop [in the front], plus your line will get wrapped around that one in the front. So, this way, I get the sound of two props with one prop by turning the back one backward."

How to Use It

The applications for the Devil's Horse – and Frederick's custom version, especially – are many. In addition to fishing it around bedding bass, he also likes to target areas that might be holding fry-guarders and around big mats and pad fields.

"Anywhere with hydrilla and stuff like that around it works really well," he says. "If you've got a big mat, you can parallel the mat, and it will actually call them out from under the mat to eat it."

Frederick will even use the prop bait in place of a walking topwater around schooling fish, though he prefers his custom model to have a white feather on the tail for that task to give those schooling fish something flashy to target.

"Louisiana, Florida, even on [Lake] Seminole – I crush them on Seminole on that thing," he says.

In Action

For Frederick's most common application – fishing around shallow beds – it's all about presentation. It's not a bait Frederick ever wants to burn across the surface.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN ONSLOW

“You can do shorter pops with it where you’re not moving the bait as far,” Frederick explains of his one-prop setup. “You want to keep that bait in the strike zone, and you can do that with that single prop.”

When the bait lands on any given cast, Frederick waits until the ripples dissipate before ever moving his bait. He wants subtlety and finesse, and he wants that bait around any potential bedding bass as long as possible.

He pops the bait with short rod twitches, one twitch at a time, and then waits. In many cases, the slow presentation allows bass to come to the surface and simply suck the bait down, which promotes better hookups than a reckless surface strike and results in fewer lost fish.

Frederick is also exacting about his equipment. He’ll use either a 7-foot, 2-inch, medium-heavy rod or a 7-foot, medium-heavy rod depending on how precise he needs to be with his cast, and he’s a proponent of using monofilament line as opposed to braid or braid-to-leader.

While the Devil’s Horse and Frederick’s favorite custom version aren’t the largest topwater baits, they’re not just small-fish offerings. Even outside of Florida, big bass will key in on the popping, water-spewing prop bait.

“It doesn’t discriminate,” Frederick says of the prop bait’s appeal. “It catches

giants – 10-, 11-pounders – as well as 14-, 15-inchers.”

Custom version or original, there are plenty of ways to modify a prop bait like the Devil’s Horse to make it do exactly what you want it to do – catch fish. Take Frederick’s advice if you want to catch a few more giants, especially in Florida around the spawn. ■



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

A fishing boat on water with a fisherman holding a fish. The boat has 'FRANK' and 'SCOSCHE' written on it. Text overlays include 'SOLSTRALE HOODIE SUN SHIRT', 'WE ARE FISHING', and 'WWW.GRUNDENS.COM'. A large vertical logo 'GRUNDENS' is on the right.

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9 HOT BAITS FOR SPRING

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Bass anglers celebrate the arrival of spring every year like kids celebrate Christmas, and rightly so. It's the season when tournaments kick off, the weather starts to turn favorable and bass start chewing.

That doesn't mean the fishing is easy, however. Spring is a season of transition, when bass can be caught from deep structure to the bank. The best way to stay on 'em is to be prepared with tackle for fishing in any conditions, around every type of cover and structure, and over a wide range of applications.

To that effect, the experts at Tackle Warehouse assembled a roster of go-to options that every bass angler ought to have the first time they back the boat into the water this spring.

1. CREATURE BAITS

Creature baits come in an endless variety of styles for many applications, including flippin,' pitchin,' as a jig trailer, Carolina rigging, Texas rigging and on a shaky head.

Our recommendations:

Strike King Rage Bug

Falcon Lake Craw



Reaction Innovations Spicy Beaver

Blank Check



Missile Baits D Bomb

Green Pumpkin Red



2. NED WORMS

These little worms pack a big impact. Ned rigs are great for post-frontal conditions and pressured bass.

Our recommendations:

Z-Man Finesse TRD

TW Delta Green
Pumpkin



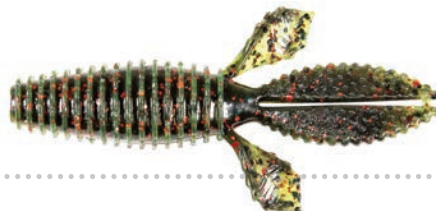
Roboworm Ned Worm

TW Black Blue
Pumpkin



Z-Man Finesse TRD BugZ

California Craw



3. PADDLE-TAIL SWIMBAITS

From 2 inches to 10 inches, there is a paddle tail in the size and color to match the hatch. Whether fished weedless around submergent grass, on a jighead or on an umbrella rig, a paddle tail will catch anything that swims.

Our recommendations:



Keitech Swing Impact FAT

TW Black, Blue and
Green Pumpkin



Reaction Innovations Skinny Dipper

Bad Sexy Shad



Yamamoto Swim Senko

Baby Bass

4. PROP BAITS

Nothing gets the blood boiling in a big bass quite like a prop bait. Fish it slowly around bedding bream or bass and watch them come unglued. It's one of the most exciting baits to fish in the spring.

Our recommendations:

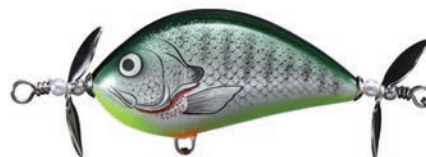
Smithwick Devil's Horse

Silver Shiner



Bagley Pro Sunny B Twin Spin

Chartreuse Bluegill



River2Sea Whopper Plopper

TW Bluegill



5. SWIM JIGS

Simple and versatile, a swim jig can be fished in countless ways around many types of cover and structure. The right swim jig and trailer can mimic anything that swims in your lake so mix and match trailers to get the most out of the bait.

Our recommendations:

Lethal Weapon II
Coleslaw



Strike King Hack Attack Heavy Cover
Blue Craw



Megabass Uoze Swimmer
Smoke Shad



6. WEIGHTLESS WORMS

A weightless worm fishes with an unthreatening presentation for spooky or pressured bass and will catch them in all phases of the spawn. A weightless worm will get lots of bites, and also trick the biggest fish in the lake.

Our recommendations:

Yamamoto Senko
Green Pumpkin
Amber Laminate



Berkley PowerBait MaxScent The General
Junebug



Strike King KVD Perfect Plastic Ocho
Moon Juice



9. LIPLISS CRANKBAITS

A lipless crankbait has evolved into a year-round tool for many anglers. Tick one over the top of the grass. Slow-roll it in ditches or over points. Yo-Yo one around docks.

Our recommendations:



Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap
Red Craw



Lucky Craft LV500
American Shad



Strike King Red Eye Shad Tungsten 2 Tap
Natural Bream

7. RIP BAITS

With the unique ability to go from lightning speed to a dead stop in the water column, a rip bait is the ultimate tool for capitalizing on the natural curiosity, aggression and impulsiveness of bass. A rip bait is a deadly tool for big springtime largemouths, smallies and spots.

Our recommendations:

Lucky Craft Pointer Minnow
Ghost Threadfin Shad



Megabass Ito Vision 110+2
Elegy Bone



Smithwick Rattlin Rogue
Chrome Black Back OB



8. BLADED JIGS

The bladed jig is a spawn-time big-bass catcher that can be magic around grass. It does a superb job of mimicking big bass' favorite meals: shad, bluegills and crawfish.

Our recommendations:



Scan the code to shop for these baits at TackleWarehouse.com.



Z-Man Original ChatterBait
Okeechobee Craw



Terminator Shuddering Bait
Nest Robber



Z-Man/Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer
Ghost Green Gizzard Shad



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

1.



PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ

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1. MLF BASS PRO TOUR B&W TRAILER HITCHES STAGE ONE PRESENTED BY POWER-POLE Lake Eufaula

Feb. 7-12, 2020

Decision-making wins major tournaments, as Jacob Wheeler's second career Bass Pro Tour victory illustrates. At Lake Eufaula, the Tennessee pro qualified for the Championship Round by targeting offshore brush with Rapala DT14 and DT16 crankbaits in Caribbean shad and a 1/2-ounce black and blue jig with a Googan Baits Bandito Bug trailer, but he knew a change was in order when he encountered falling, much dirtier water the final day. Rather than flee his offshore brush like many other competitors did, Wheeler stuck with that pattern, moved a little tighter to the bank, and traded out his crankbaits and jig for a big thumping 1-ounce Accent Fishing Products Jacob

Wheeler River Special Select Series spinnerbait in the spot remover color.

It turned out to be the perfect play call for the conditions, as Wheeler went on a tear midday and accumulated a dominant winning margin of more than 27 pounds.

2. MLF BASS PRO TOUR FAVORITE FISHING STAGE TWO PRESENTED BY BASS CAT Lake Okeechobee

Feb. 21-26, 2020

A Period 3 charge during the Championship Round in which Jacob Powroznik landed eight bass for nearly 30 pounds was the difference-maker at Lake Okeechobee, earning the Virginia pro his second Bass Pro Tour victory. He weighed a total of 15 bass for 49-11 and was more than 11 pounds ahead by day's end.

Powroznik ground out the win from a 300-yard-long stretch nicknamed "the pass"

near Buckhead Ridge. Bass were spawning within holes in eelgrass beds with a suitable hard bottom substrate.

Staying back from bulrushes was a key, says Powroznik. The eelgrass near the rushes was too "choked up" and thick for his presentation, which was a classic in Florida: winding swimming worms (from four brands mostly in junebug) rigged on a 6/0 Mustad Extra Wide Gap hook and a 3/16-ounce Elite Tungsten weight.

3. MLF BASS PRO TOUR GENERAL TIRE STAGE THREE PRESENTED BY TRUETIMBER Lake Fork/Lake Athens

March 13-18, 2020

In the final hour of the Championship Round on Lake Athens, Ott DeFoe rocketed from fifth place to first place and a 28-pound margin of victory in one of

the more impressive finishes in Bass Pro Tour history.

DeFoe located the eventual winning spot under a bridge using side-view electronics. Getting the fish to bite at first was difficult, but once he caught one, the school ignited and it was lights out for his competition. The Tennessee pro scored bass on a variety of baits, including a jerkbait, topwater and bucktail jig, but a Rapala DT10 in a soon-to-be-released color called Bigg's shad is what sealed the deal, also producing a 9-pound, 6-ounce bass.

In the earlier rounds, which were held at Lake Fork, DeFoe targeted spawners by sight-fishing or blind-casting with a bubble gum Bass Pro Shops Fin-Eke Worm on a VMC Weedless Neko Hook or a 5-inch swimbait on a 5/0 VMC Tokyo Rig with a 1/4-ounce Swagger Tungsten sinker.



PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN

4.

4. MLF LUCAS OIL CHALLENGE CUP PRESENTED BY B&W TRAILER HITCHES
Bull Shoals Lake

June 9-14, 2019

With a nearly endless amount of flooded cover in Bull Shoals due to the lake being high, Jeff Sprague quickly discerned that certain stretches of bank were crucial to catching multiple fish in each general area. His first day, that meant tapered banks 1 to 6 feet deep with clean water, which he picked apart with a 1/2-ounce Strike King Tour Grade Buzzbait with a Strike King KVD Gurgle Toad trailer.

In his Sudden Death Round on a different section of the lake, Sprague focused on bare spots with exposed rock between bushes. He moved off the bank just slightly, keying on bream and the small packs of bass feeding on them. Sprague stuck with the same patterns

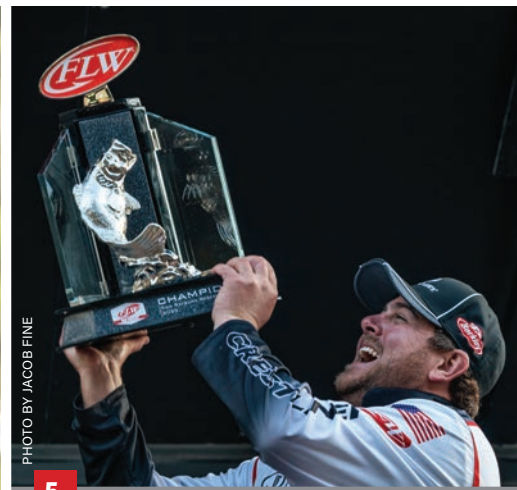


PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

5.



PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

in the Championship Round, but made one crucial move offshore when he spotted fish schooling in 25 to 30 feet of water.

In addition to the buzzbait, Sprague threw a 3/8-ounce Strike King Thunder Cricket with a Strike King Blade Minnow trailer.

5. TACKLE WAREHOUSE PRO CIRCUIT
Sam Rayburn Reservoir

Jan. 23-26, 2020

John Cox made it look easy the first two days at Sam Rayburn when he camped along a bridge and fired repeated casts with a No. 5 Berkley Frittside crankbait in the lone ranger and ghost morning dawn colors to a single high spot of sand and rock rimmed with hydrilla. The spot had enough fish for Cox to retain the lead for two days.

By day three, the spot had run dry, and Cox was

forced to scramble. He fished at least 100 places over the next two days, targeting lay-downs, grass, rocky points – anything up shallow that looked good – and was able to piecemeal his way to a wire-to-wire win.

A clutch move to a pair of trees located an hour up the lake produced the final three keepers on a black-and-blue Tackle Warehouse-exclusive Z-Man ChatterBait Custom with a Berkley PowerBait Grass Pig trailer that secured Cox's win in the waning minutes of the tournament.

6. TACKLE WAREHOUSE PRO CIRCUIT PRESENTED BY BAD BOY MOWERS
Harris Chain of Lakes

Feb. 20-23, 2020

Consistency wins bass tournaments more often than not, but Laramy Strickland's victory at the Harris Chain was as much about capitalizing on

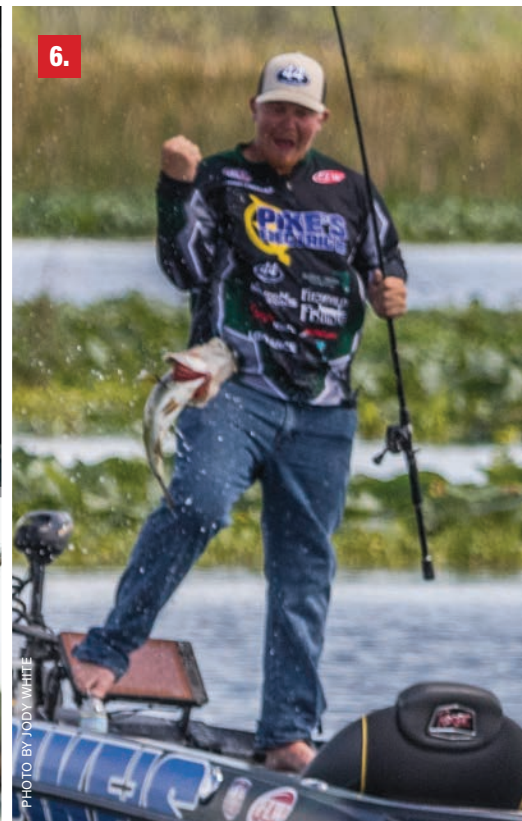


PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

6.

opportunity as it was three days of steady action. The local pro caught 14-10 on day one in perfect spring-time conditions for Florida. The field sat out Friday due to unsafe weather, and Strickland shocked everyone with 31-6 on Saturday to jump ahead of the field. He then closed with 15-4 on Sunday.

Strickland's entire game plan centered on preparing for the cold front. He camped in an area of Lake Griffin where he knew bass were setting up to spawn. The front pushed them up under mats alongside reed clumps, where he was able to punch through with a Texas-rigged Reaction Innovations Spicy Beaver with either a 1- or 2-ounce weight. He also worked a Reaction Innovations Machete Worm pegged with a 1/16-ounce weight for swimming and burning through the grass.

1.



PHOTO BY FLOA MATSUURA

2.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN OMSLOW

3.



PHOTO BY RICHARD SIMMS

**1. TOYOTA SERIES
SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION
Toledo Bend**

Jan. 30-Feb. 1, 2020

Cody Huff used a classic Ozark strategy for catching bass at Toledo Bend, where he won by jigging a 7/8-ounce War Eagle Jiggin' Spoon for suspended fish in deep water. Most of Huff's fish were 15 to 30 feet down in 40 to 70 feet of water.

Wintry conditions made his job a little tougher, as bass Huff was able to catch partway back in the creeks the first two days slid out near the main channel by day three. Once he relocated them, Huff carefully "video-gamed" the fish on his electronics, watching them rise up to eat and expertly playing them with a vertical presentation below the boat.

What made the difference for Huff was his ability to remain on the trail of wandering bait balls and the

schools of bass feeding on them, despite fluctuating conditions that had everything on the move. He used his electronics to spot and stalk the school each day, covering areas from the bank to the main river channel.

**2. TOYOTA SERIES
SOUTHERN DIVISION
St. Johns River**

Feb. 13-15, 2020

Getting away from pressure was a key factor in Trevor Fitzgerald's winning strategy at the St. Johns River, where he squeezed through some shallow water (which likely kept other pros out) to access a prespawn staging area in the south end of Lake George.

Fitzgerald's winning spot was a depression where bass had holed up in advance of the spawn. With unstable weather conditions that had fish indecisively pushing up and moving off,

rather than committing wholly to spawning on the bank, it was a perfect staging area for big bass to bunch up.

Slowing down with a shaky head tipped with a Reaction Innovations Pocket Rocket in black and blue and dragging a black and blue Reaction Innovations Machete Worm was a critical move to get finicky fish that were "biting funny" to hook up. Other than his ditch, Fitzgerald ran a few other areas, but found it necessary to hit new water each day. His final-day limit of 19-8 was easily the best of the day and secured the victory.

**3. TOYOTA SERIES
CENTRAL DIVISION
Lake Chickamauga**

Feb. 27-29, 2020

Jim Neece Jr. strung together three great days of fishing to earn the victory

at Chickamauga. He weighed in limits of 18 pounds or more all three days, including a day three-leading 20 pounds, 9 ounces for a 57-5 tournament total and the win.

Neece spent the tournament rotating through a trio of points and breaks on the main river channel. On the final day, due to a drop in water level, he had to adjust and fish a little shallower. Otherwise, he enjoyed the benefits of stable fishing.

The Tennessee pro started practice with an umbrella rig, but it wasn't producing how he'd hoped it would, so he made the switch to a Zoom Swimmer in chartreuse and blue and used that setup exclusively throughout the entire week, rigged on an 8:1 gear ratio reel to keep his swimbait moving in the current the way his fish wanted it.

4.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BIBBE

4. TOYOTA SERIES EASTERN DIVISION Lake Hartwell

March 3-5, 2020

Fishing wasn't easy on Lake Hartwell's stained, high waters, but MLF Bass Pro Tour pro and South Carolina local Marty Robinson wasn't fazed. He led wire-to-wire and capped off the tournament with a limit of 11-10 on the final day to earn the victory by a 1 1/2-pound margin.

While Robinson was looking forward to hammering on some Hartwell spotted bass, he didn't complain when he brought 21-1 worth of largemouths to the scale on day one. From there, it was just a matter of adjusting to the everchanging weather conditions and maintaining the lead.

Robinson began each day targeting ditches stacked with herring and bass ready to feed on

5.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

them. Later in the day, he moved back into creeks to target secondary points. For both approaches, Robinson employed a Buckeye Lures Su-Spin under-spin and a Buckeye Lures G-Man Ballin' Out jig tipped with a Zoom Creepy Crawler.

5. TOYOTA SERIES SOUTHERN DIVISION Lake Okeechobee

March 12-14, 2020

Sometimes one type of cover is the key to locking down a victory, and that was certainly the case for Brandon Medlock at Okeechobee. For three days, he targeted reeds on Big O – working outside edges at times and flipping deeper into the cover at others. He also targeted some isolated reeds in deeper water just past the main reed edge on day two. Working the many

reeds Okeechobee has to offer, the now three-time Toyota Series winner (all on Okeechobee) put together two really solid days of fishing (21-7 on day two and 19-4 on day three) to weigh in 54-4 total for the victory.

For the task, Medlock employed a medley of different trailers on his 3/8-, 1/2- and 3/4-ounce Medlock Double Guard Flipping Jigs (in black and blue), from a Riot Baits Little Fuzzy to a Zoom Big Salty Chunk and Zoom Super Speed Craw.

6. TOYOTA SERIES WESTERN DIVISION Lake Havasu

March 12-14, 2020

On day one at Havasu, it looked like the tournament would be a full-on bed-fishing slugfest, led by eventual champ Tai Au, who caught a massive 26-pound, 1-ounce

6.

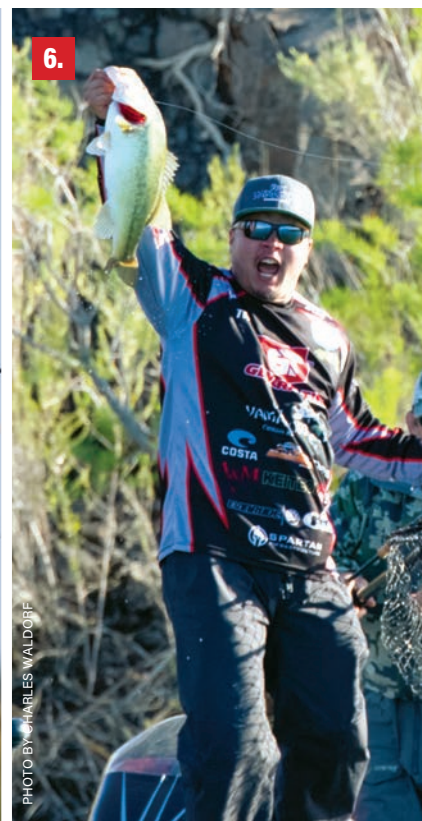


PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

opening limit by sight-fishing for four of his five keepers. Like so often happens in a spawn tournament, fishing pressure took its toll quickly. Plus, heavy rains Thursday evening followed by a steady southerly wind, a high-pressure system and a temperature drop on Friday pushed bass off the bank.

Au never panicked. On day two, he finesse fished in the morning, then waited patiently for the barometric pressure to fall to mix in a reaction bait – a Z-Man/ Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer with a Yamamoto Zako Paddle Tail trailer. Mostly, though, he junk-fished in areas with tules where he found good-quality largemouths during practice. Day three was more junk-fishing.

Au's arsenal also included a Texas-rigged Yamamoto Flappin' Hog for flipping, a Yamamoto Senko and a Daiwa Yamamoto Neko Fat.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



PHOTO BY KYLIE WOOD



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

1. ABU GARCIA COLLEGE FISHING PRESENTED BY YETI NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP PRESENTED BY LOWRANCE Harris Chain

Feb. 26-28, 2020

Hank Harrison and Ethan LeGare of Stephen F. Austin University weighed in the biggest bag of the day when it mattered most, sacking up 20 pounds, 8 ounces on day three of the Abu Garcia College Fishing presented by YETI National Championship presented by Lowrance on the Harris Chain for a 56-5 total, a new Phoenix 518 Pro bass boat with a 115-horsepower Suzuki outboard and qualification into the 2020 Toyota Series Championship.

The duo struggled with the conditions on day two, as much of the field did throughout the tournament on a Harris Chain that was

fishing a little finicky thanks to some unstable weather conditions. But after weighing in just 13-14 that day, Harrison and LeGare rebounded and shot all the way from sixth to first by targeting a trio of offshore grass flats that were holding waves of fish moving in and out of their spawning bays.

With grass flats on Lake Eustis, Lake Dora and Lake Beauclair, the eventual champions rode their offshore bite through the warm weather on day one with moving baits such as a 6th Sense square-bill and 6th Sense Provoke jerkbait. As a cold front moved in and slowed the bite, though, they had to mix things up and slow down. They adjusted with split-shot rigs and Texas rigs equipped with a watermelon red Zoom Salty Super Fluke or a

soft-plastic stick worm in California 420 with gold fleck. Harrison and LeGare also mixed in a Carolina rig and a drop-shot on day three to finish the job.

"[Day two], having 13-14, we adjusted positively, but not enough," Harrison says. "We were going into [day three] sitting in sixth place, and we knew we needed a bag, so we went out today with that mindset.

"Every single day, whether we were fishing fast or slow, we had to find the cast. We were moving around these points trying to find the cast. We just had to go fishing and pick our spots apart."

Making the right cast on their grass flats was crucial, as was their decision-making in the waning hours of the final tournament day.

With just 15 minutes left,

the duo decided to stop on its spot in Eustis on the way back to weigh-in. LeGare picked up the drop-shot and landed two keepers in that span – the second being what proved to be their winning kicker with just a couple minutes left to fish.

"The key this week was keeping our heads down and slowing down and adapting," LeGare says. "We knew we had the areas to do well in this tournament; we just had to pick them apart, and today we did that. We didn't give up, and we fished until the last second."

In addition to the new bass boat, Harrison and LeGare also earned their spot as pros in the 2020 Toyota Series Championship on Lake Cumberland on Nov. 5 for a shot at the \$200,000 top prize. ■

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13 FISHING TRASH PANDA POPPIN' FROG

By Matt Williams

PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

Florida-based 13 Fishing has built a reputation for its regular delivery of cutting-edge bass fishing products. Its new Trash Panda Poppin' Frog follows the innovative tradition with a series of cool design features aimed at enhancing performance while addressing water intrusion, which is a common issue with many hollow frogs.

First Impression

I've seen a bunch of popping frogs over the years, and this one comes with some cool unique and functional cosmetic features.

Its flat butt tapers down at a slight angle. Designers say this improves hookup ratios by helping the body collapse when a bass eats it.

The frog's legs are made with an even split between rounded rubber stands and Flashabou, a synthetic material that spreads out on the surface and creates a unique sparkle when light hits it.

Reducing water intrusion was also a big priority 13 Fishing addressed in a couple ways. The most obvious is a heat-shrink wrap around the hooks that helps close off the hook-shank gap on the underside. On many frogs, this bottom hole lets water in but also acts as a "blowhole" to squeeze water out. The Trash Panda has a pin-sized blowhole strategically placed on its back to further reduce seepage because it rarely contacts the water.

While many manufacturers mount an external weight near the butt, the weight on 13's frog is fully concealed inside. A quick dissection of the body reveals a lead weight that molds around the upper portion of the hook shank to create even balance nose to tail.

Finally, at 2.95 inches, it's not an overly large bait, but the plump midsection creates a big target profile that moves a lot of water.

In Action

Looks can sometimes be deceiving, but that's not the case here. In fact, there isn't much not to like about this popping frog.

At 9/16 ounce, the bait sails like a flat rock and is quick to right itself with a twitch or two should it land upside down in slop or on top of a pad.

The concave nose spits, chugs and hurls water like other premium popping toads, yet it doesn't produce a lot of forward motion due to the bait's level stance. The "stay put" trait should be useful for tormenting reluctant bass around brush.

The bait also walks fairly well with the proper cadence. It'll dance straight out of the box, but trimming about an inch off the legs seems to allow for a more consistent side-to-side action.

As durability goes, the thin-walled body is tough enough to take a beating, yet

supple enough to collapse and expose the magnum 4/0 frog hooks when a fish bites.

I'd like to say the hookup ratio was significantly greater than with other hollow-body frogs, but, in my experience, it was closer to par. A few missed strikes come with the territory in frog fishing.

Like with most frogs, the seal around the hooks isn't 100 percent watertight, but you won't find it necessary to drain the Trash Panda nearly as often as some other models.

Final Thoughts

There's an army of good popping frogs on the market, and the Trash Panda is certainly worthy of a spot in your arsenal. It seems to be well designed with some unique features, including water-intrusion barriers, an interior weight and a hook that's built for bear. It's versatile, too, so it can be popped, skipped or walked effectively around shallow cover of all kinds.

HEAT SHRINK:

The hook shank is neatly wrapped with heat-shrink tubing where it enters the frog's belly to create a snug fit that helps prevent water from seeping into the body cavity. A small blowhole on the back lets air escape when the frog compresses, and drains any water that gets in.



HYBRID LEGS:

The legs are made from round rubber and strands of Flashabou material that fan out on the surface and reflect sunlight while adding a little buoyancy.



Performance Advice

Action - Experiment with different cadences. Try multiple pops with long pauses or fewer pops with shorter pauses. The best cadence can vary from one day to the next.

Look - Stick with the basic colors: black in low light or overcast skies, white in sunny conditions or around shad, and bluegill patterns to imitate small sunfish.

Tackle - Standard frog gear applies, including heavy braided line, a medium-heavy or heavy rod, and a high-speed reel.

Hooks - If hooking up becomes a problem, try bending the hooks up and out a little or adding a Lake Fork Frog Tail trailer hook.

Applications

- Fish it around shallow grass clumps, pads, docks, bushes or other cover.
- Pause and twitch it in isolated holes in hydrilla, hay grass or pads.
- Skip it beneath docks or overhanging trees.
- Throw it around bream beds or during a shad spawn.

HITS & MISSES

- + Works for multiple presentations
- + Well-balanced
- + Great castability
- + Very durable
- + Resists water intrusion

- Pricey

>> ON THE WATER



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

Another Frog Option

The company's launch of the Trash Panda Poppin' Frog came with a simultaneous introduction of a walking model. It relies on the same design features to help minimize the amount of water that gets into the body cavity.

DETAILS

Colors: 10

Weight: 9/16 ounce

Length: 2.95 inches

Hook Size: 4/0

MSRP: \$12.99

Contact: 13fishing.com ■



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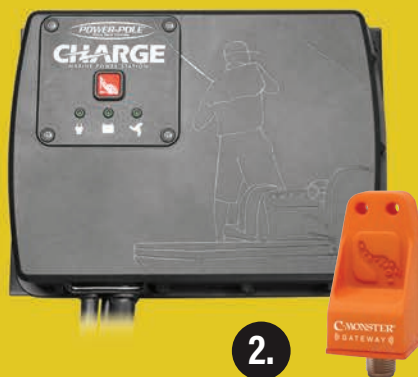
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1. GRUNDENS BUOY X GORE-TEX BIB AND JACKET

Grundens is known for its rugged rainwear, and the new Buoy X line-up is just that, but thanks to three-layer GORE-TEX it's also breathable, light and suited for the active style of fishing favored by avid bass anglers. Grundens added fishing-friendly features such as hand-warmer pockets, neoprene cuffs and a multi-adjustable hood on the jacket. The bibs have zippers on the legs and front (for easily getting them on and off), a removable belt, heavy-duty buckles and a reinforced hem. The jacket comes in three colors, sizes small-3X, for \$479.99 to \$499.99. Bibs are available in two colors and the same sizes for \$449.99 to \$469.99.

grundens.com

2. POWER-POLE CHARGE AND GATEWAY

When it comes to assuring ample power in a bass boat, there's not much that Power-Pole's CHARGE Marine Power Management Station can't do. The device refuels and maintains batteries like a traditional charger, but can also charge on the run from the alternator or jump-start the motor. Power-Pole designed the CHARGE to be a "bi-directional power management system," meaning it's able to transfer power from one battery to another. Best of all, you can monitor and control the entire system from a smartphone, Power-Pole VISION or compatible Lowrance units by adding a C-Monster GATEWAY, which connects everything using the C-Monster 2.0 network. \$1,399.99 for the CHARGE; \$119.99 for the GATEWAY

power-pole.com

3. BERKLEY SPY

Developed with MLF pro Josh Bertrand, the Berkley SPY comes with the option for two sink rates. The standard model (fast sink; 1/3 ounce), which Bertrand describes as a more "traditional" spybait, sinks at about 1 foot per second, making it easy to count down and ideal for most open-water small-mouth and spotted bass scenarios. The slow-sink version (1/4 ounce) can be fished in 5 feet or less at a slow retrieve speed to maintain the subtle shimmy bass love. Both versions sink with a soft side-to-side wobble and measure 2 3/4 inches long. \$10.49

berkley-fishing.com

4. FAVORITE SOLEUS XCS

Favorite's new Soleus XCS is big and small in all the right places. The 105mm handle stretches out wide toward its thick EVA foam knobs, giving it the feel of an oversized reel, yet the entire thing weighs just 6.4 ounces thanks to a slim and trim body, with sloping contours that fit the hand nicely and a flat "deck" on top to rest the thumb while working your lure. Performance features include a saltwater-proof finish, centrifugal braking system, 10+1 bearings, two spool bearings, an aluminum frame with carbon side plates, and a dial for recording line size and type. It comes in three colors, each in left- and right-hand versions, in 6.6:1, 7.3:1 and 8.1:1 gear ratios. \$179.99

favoriteusa.com



5.

5. WILEY X CAPTIVATE POLARIZED SUNGLASSES

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Available on a variety of frames and styles, the new Wiley X CAPTIVATE lenses deliver a new level of performance in active eyewear by separating and enhancing colors in the visual spectrum. The lenses filter out light where blue, green and red merge, thus enhancing the clarity of those individual colors by allowing in more of the light that's easy for your eyes to see. They also filter out what Wiley X calls "bad" blue light, or the blue light with shorter wavelengths and higher frequencies. These bad blues create haze that distorts distant objects. Filtering them out helps clarify the wearer's view at a distance and enhances depth perception.

Lens colors within the series are choreographed for various outdoor activities, and the Wiley X website can help wearers dial in the right choice. All lenses meet or exceed ANSI Z87.1 industrial safety standards for impact resistance, are polarized and have been treated with a smooth, oleophobic coating that sheds dust and moisture. Prices vary.

The model shown is the Gravity with Kryptok Neptune frames, a Climate Control gasket that shrouds the eyes and green mirror CAPTIVATE lenses. They retail for \$190.

wileyx.com

ADAPT

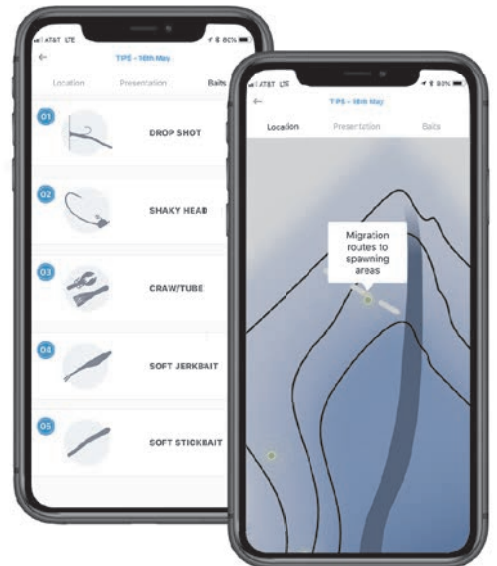
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PROFILE: **JORDAN**
LEE
CULLMAN, AL



There's not a tournament bass angler in the world who doesn't want some of whatever MLF pro Jordan Lee is cookin.' The 28-year-old Alabamian has been a tour-level pro for only five years, but his accomplishments are already worthy of a solid (borderline Hall of Fame) career: back-to-back Bassmaster Classic titles, the champion's trophy in the first MLF Bass Pro Tour event ever contested, tournament winnings approaching \$1.5 million and one of the highest top-10 percentages in the history of the sport.

We caught up with Lee in between practice days for a Bass Pro Tour event at Lake Okeechobee to dig a little deeper into some of the things that make this easygoing wunderkind such a handful once competition starts.

QA

By Joel Shangle
PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN

I hear you referred to as a "natural" quite a bit: "Oh, that Jordan Lee, he's just a natural." I'm sure you've heard it plenty, too, but do you think that's accurate? Or even fair? Because "natural" almost sounds like it's easy for you.

(laughing) If people ever got in my boat with me during a tournament, they'd see just how much of a natural I'm not. I work hard at it, just like everybody out here. Even if somebody has some natural abilities, man, you have to try hard all the time to compete against these guys, or you'll get beat bad nine times out of 10.

It seems pretty accurate to say that you have some level of natural ability, though. It's unusual for somebody in their mid-20s to be as successful as you have been, specifically against competition that can be called "the best in the world."

I think I'm just a pretty good judge of when I'm around good water. I can usually tell pretty quick if I'm in a good spot. I can get a few bites and feel it out a little. So sometimes I feel like I can read the water good, and sometimes I feel like I make one or two good decisions during a tournament that may change that tournament for me.

It's not anything crazy, though, like I get this feeling that tells me exactly where I need to be, or what I need to be throwing. Whenever I have good tournaments, it's because my decision-making is good. I've decided that I need to make a 45-minute run back down to a spot, and it turns out to be the right decision. But I think you can say that about everybody who does good in a tournament. The decisions are usually what make you win or lose.

In the big events you've won, did you think you were going to win them early, or not until late?

Most of my wins, I hadn't really thought I was going to win going into the tournament. That's usually how it works for me: It just kinda happens. I never have all these offshore juice holes like Jacob Wheeler. I can't ever predict that I might win. Most of the time, I'm like, "Oh, this is good." I'll find a place halfway into the tournament, and that turns out to be the difference-maker.

You've mentioned before that you fish your best when you're just making it up as you go, true?

That's true, for the most part. I kinda have to be "feeling it" for me to be comfortable in a spot. If I get to a spot, set the trolling motor down and am not feeling it, I have to move. I'm not very good at just staying around a spot and grinding it out if it just doesn't feel right.

You're pretty well known as being easygoing and hard to rattle. Do you ever get spun out?

I don't know about "spun out." I don't think I've ever gotten so flustered that I'm spun out. I can definitely rush sometimes when I'm trying to find fish in a hurry, but to me there's a difference between being spun out, and just trying to find them fast. I probably look spun out sometimes if you follow me for a full tournament day and I'm trying to find fish fast. I probably look like a mess.

You're getting ready to fish an event in Florida. Didn't you fish your first major, post-college event there a month before your first Bassmaster Classic in 2014?

I sure did. That was at Toho.

And you didn't do great, if I recall.

No I did not. I did pretty terrible: 110th or something, I think (it was actually 105th).

But then five years later, you won the first-ever Bass Pro Tour event on basically the same body of water. How do you explain that progression from the 100s to winning just a few years later, against a pretty stacked field?

I don't know how to explain that, but it was a big learning curve to figure out how to catch 'em in Florida. It's just so hard to figure out what the fish relate to down here. Places like Okeechobee and Kissimmee, everything all looks the same when you first start fishing there. It all looks good, and it's overwhelming. A place like Okeechobee; you have this huge lake, and it's not like you can go out and just fish down any ol' grass line and catch fish. You have to be in perfect water, which might be just a 50-yard stretch. There are some key ingredients that go into a good area in Florida, but it's pretty hard to know all that when you're from out of town.

So how/when did you start to get over that "overwhelmed" feeling?

Every time you fish a lake, you learn something new. I just started to pick up on things every time I came back to Florida. Now, I'm no expert, but I learned

on Kissimmee that any kind of submergent grass is real important because it cleans up the water and fish relate to it a lot. I had to learn to look for that grass, and how to fish it right. The fish just act so different here in Florida. You have to figure out how they react to the weather, what baits you can catch 'em on – all of those things that are different here than anywhere else.

Are there any other well-known fisheries where you've had a steep learning curve?

Oh yeah, lots of them. Lake St. Clair is one of those. It's a phenomenal place to fish, but the first time I fished it, I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I hadn't talked to anybody and really didn't have anybody to "show me the way," so I got there and felt like I was on the moon. That one was confusing for me. Even as phenomenal as that lake is, it has its own kind of conditions where you have to know what to look for. I've only fished it maybe two or three times total, but I understand it a lot more than I did the first time.

What do you think you're really good at, technique-wise?

Oh, man, as far as techniques go, I've done good in tournaments a lot of different ways. I've done good flipping, throwing a ChatterBait. I feel like I can kind of do everything decent. I like to think that I'm good at spring tournaments, when fish are shallow on beds. I think you have to be diverse these days. Maybe 20 years ago you could be really great at one technique and win some money, but, man, if you can't fish all kinds of different techniques now, it's tough to keep up.

All right, then what are you NOT good at?

I don't love flipping a big jig. It's kinda intimidating to me to have to flip a 1-ounce jig. I've just never done it much. And big, giant swimbaits. I don't think I own anything bigger than 6 inches long. I could never throw one of those in a tournament. Heck, even fun fishing, I don't know what I'm doing with those big swimbaits. ■

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Editor's note: Upcoming tournament dates and qualification metrics described here are subject to change due to the evolving COVID-19 situation in the United States. The information here is as accurate as possible as of press time in March.



FREEMAN AND PENDLETON CROWNED TBF 2020 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

GRAND LAKE PLAYED HOST TO THE EVENT, WHICH BOASTED MORE THAN \$380,000 IN RECORD-BREAKING PRIZE POOL

The Bass Federation's top anglers from across the United States and Canada traveled to Grand Lake O' the Cherokees in Grove, Okla., for the 2020 TBF National Championship. More than 100 TBF anglers set their sights on the titles, which included lucrative "Living YOUR Dream" boater and co-angler champion prize packages, sponsor contingencies, cash and other prizes – a \$380,000-plus payout overall.

Kentucky's Lance Freeman won the boater division with five-fish limits all three tournament days: 14-14, 19-8 and 19-15, respectively. His winning total was 54-5.

"It's truly a blessing," says Freeman. "From the second cast this morning to the last, it's been a wild ride. I am blessed beyond belief. On my way to Oklahoma, I had this feeling. It's an unrealistic, surreal, God feeling that something was going to go

my way. Practice was tough, but then the first tournament day, everything went right. The whole week to here, it was just like tunnel vision."

Freeman was awarded the "Living YOUR Dream" boater prize package valued at more than \$125,000, including a 2020 Ranger Z520L with a 250-hp Evinrude outboard, Power-Poles, Minn Kota trolling motor, Lowrance electronics, T-H Marine accessories and a custom Ranger trailer.

The package also included \$20,000 cash, \$5,000 in entry fees into an affiliated circuit of his choosing, entry into the Toyota Series Championship, a reserved slot in the 2021 Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit and a berth in the 2020 Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine All-American, travel and housing stipends, and a clothing package.

"Today [the final day] was a miracle," Freeman adds. "On the last cast of the day, I was just fishing stuff that looked good around Elk River, even though I caught most of my fish on the south end of the lake and caught the great

big fish there. It was about 6, 6-1/2 pounds. It's like, you look, and it's the 10 seconds of eternity you have. One of those moments, the sun was shining on you. I'm speechless in so many ways and so thankful for you guys."

Freeman and TBF President and CEO Robert Cartledge spoke on stage about the caliber of anglers that stands the test over and over again, the kind of angler Freeman is and the style he's displayed since he got into bass fishing more than 13 years ago when he started fishing TBF's junior program.

He fishes his strengths and stresses fishing the way you like – and most of all, having fun doing it. It's a style he still puts in play today.

"I'm not the big guy wearing the jersey around," he says. "I'm just a boy that likes to go fishing. I had a blast with all of my co-anglers. Every day, it was about having some fun and fishing; making the most of every moment. Today, we caught our limits about 20 seconds apart around 9 a.m., and then we were just sitting there having the time of our lives in the pouring rain."

Freeman joins the ranks of TBF success stories across the nation. He started in TBF's junior program at 11 years old and still remembers his first TBF tournament. Freeman also advanced to the TBF Junior World Championship. Now, 13 years later, he holds the title of TBF National Champion.

"For the first time in my life, I think I'm speechless," he adds. "Thank you so much, TBF. I grew up with this sport, and I love this sport for what it is – fishing. To look out in the crowd and see the people that literally brought me up in the same organization, to be sitting right there, the guys who took me out fishing when I was little – words cannot describe that feeling."

Winning co-angler Derick Pendleton led the event from start to finish, celebrating his birthday by catching the biggest bag of day one with 20 pounds, 5 ounces. On day two, he added two fish for 4-2 and capped it off with another five-bass limit for 11-15 to bring his tournament-winning total to 36-6.

"It's been phenomenal," says Pendleton. "I had a great day on the water today. I struggled yesterday; I'm not going to lie. I was so nervous only having an 8-ounce lead coming into today [the final day]. I didn't know where it was going to land me, but day three was more like the first

day out there for me, condition-wise. I had a limit by 8:57 a.m., and I was culling by 9 o'clock. We caught fish all day."

Pendleton was awarded the 2020 "Living YOUR Dream" co-angler prize package, valued at more than \$33,000. The package includes \$20,000 cash, a \$500 Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's gift card, a Power-Pole gift certificate, a Minn Kota trolling motor, a clothing package and entry into the Toyota Series Championship. Pendleton also received a berth in the 2020 Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine All-American with travel and housing stipends, plus \$5,000 of paid entry fees into the affiliated circuit of his choosing.

"It's literally living the dream. This is a dream for me to do this," he adds. "TBF gave me this opportunity, and it is just incredible. I'll be pulling into Indiana around 3 o'clock in the morning, and I don't care. Everybody will know I'm home. No matter what, I'm not passing this opportunity up. It's a dream I've always wanted, and I'm going to live it how I want to right now."

Pendleton represents Indiana's Hoosier Hawg Hunters and the TBF Northern Division. He's already making plans to fish the All-American.

For the first time in event history, Ranger Cup contingencies were also

awarded to the top five Ranger Cup-qualified TBF boaters (\$2,500, \$2,000, \$1,500, \$1,000 and \$500) and the top five TBF co-anglers (\$2,000, \$1,250, \$750, \$500 and \$250).

The top Ranger Cup-qualified boater was Sam Heckman from Pueblo, Colo., with a tournament total of 35-14.

"I got five bites today, and I caught all five," Heckman says. "I just love what TBF does for everybody, especially the juniors and high schoolers. I run the Southern County Junior Bass Club. I'm hoping they're watching this and one day they can be here doing the same thing I'm doing right now. What TBF provides for us, the platform they give us, we wouldn't have the opportunity we do without their support and the staff."

The top Ranger Cup-qualified co-angler was Mel Marchese, representing the Northwest Division. Marchese had a tournament total of 22-11.

"This is a dream. Thirty years and I've finally made it," Marchese says. "Everyone out there, just keep trying. Thirty years and it can happen. Someday it will all come together."

The top boaters and co-anglers from all seven divisions also earned a trip to the All-American, including travel and housing stipends, for a chance at the \$100,000 top boater prize and \$50,000 top co-angler prize.



TBF Division Winners

The top boater and co-angler from each division qualified for the All-American. They are (L-R, boaters in back; co-anglers in front): Central Division - Blake Wilson (Ark.) and Samuel Jenkins (La.), Southern Division - Lance Freeman (Ky.) and Craig Middleton (Ky.), Southwest Division - Sam Heckman (Colo.) and Kerry Harris (Calif.), Mid-Atlantic Division - Chris Fiore (Va.) and Andrew Wiley (Md.), Northern Division - David Schneider Jr. (Ind.) and Derick Pendleton (Ind.), Northwest Division Loren Torok (Ida.) and Mel Marchese (Wash.) and Eastern Division - Keith Cleary (Conn.) and Jeffrey Perron (N.H.)

50 YEARS IN THE FEDERATION

ST. JOHNS BASS ANGLERS CLUB CELEBRATES TBF GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

The St. Johns Bass Anglers, based out of Jacksonville, Fla., was founded in 1970 as the 19th federated club in the nation. In April, the club will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

St. Johns Bass Anglers got in at the ground floor of the grassroots Federation of anglers by being the first club to organize in the state of Florida.

On April 21, 1970, U.S. Secret Service agent Dick Hulcher and Jacksonville-area lawyer Gene Loftin, along with four other anglers, sent out an application to become what was then a B.A.S.S.-affiliated club. The founding members promoted the club and built its membership base to 50 anglers, which was no small feat considering membership was by invitation only at the time.

Loftin, who is still active in the club today, crafted the constitution, bylaws and club rules that drew accolades from TBF leadership. They still stand as the club's solid foundation today.

The constitution also provided stipulations for youth participation. The first young angler to join the club at age 16 was Peter Thliveros, who went on to become a legend of professional bass fishing. Thliveros has seven B.A.S.S. wins to his name



and has qualified for 13 Bassmaster Classics. He was also the FLW Tour Angler of the Year in 1996 and the 2003 Ranger Cup Champion.

Another former junior member was Jerry Shawver, the 2003 TBF National Champion. Several former and current members have fished their way to state championships and the National Semi-Finals, including Jason Stake, who represented the St. Johns Bass Anglers in the 2020 TBF National Championship.

Congratulations to the St. Johns Bass Anglers club, and thank you from everyone in the Federation family for your commitment to TBF's grassroots mission.

TBF CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE EARLY DAYS

Before starting The Bass Federation National Championship, the Federation had what was called The Bass Federation Chapter Team Championship. Each state Federation (referred to as a Federation "chapter" back then) held qualifying events to determine its six-person team, which would head to the TBF Chapter Team Championship each year.

Many of those early events included some of bass fishing's most successful anglers. Here are some notables from the early 1970s. In the next issue, we'll highlight TBF Chapter Team Championships from 1977-1980.

1973 – Federation member Wendell Mann won the 1973 TBF Chapter Team Championship on Pickwick Lake. His winning weight was 42 pounds, and he won \$1,940 for his team, as well as a 1973 Ranger boat. There were only 20 anglers in the 1973 event, but it included names such as Woo Daves, Billy Phillips, Don Buffalo and RA Agnew.

1974 – Federation member Charlie Campbell won the 1974 TBF Chapter Team Championship with 55 pounds, 15 ounces on Table Rock Lake. Participation in that event soared to 144 anglers.

1975 – Federation member Sonny Lee bested the 192-angler field to win the 1975 TBF Chapter Team Championship with a winning weight of 30-8 on Clarks Hill Reservoir. Other notable competitors included Charlie Campbell, Babe Winkelman, Don Buffalo, Ken Cook and 1973 winner Wendell Mann.

1976 – Federation member Don Buffalo claimed the title from the 198-angler field fishing on Oklahoma's Lake Texoma. That field also included Jack Chancellor, Babe Winkelman, Charlie Campbell, Billy Phillips, Charlie Hoover, Harold Dees, Robert Evans and Woo Daves.

STUDENT ANGLER FEDERATION

HIGH SCHOOL FISHING

TBF WORLD FINALS



11TH ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL FISHING WORLD FINALS AND NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP: THE MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR PRIZE POOL IS STILL GROWING

Registration is open for the 11th annual High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship, scheduled for June 23-27 on the Mississippi River in La Crosse, Wis. Registration is open to all SAF members worldwide.

The prize pool and scholarship money available for this year's dual event already exceed \$3 million. Visit highschoolfishing.org for more information.

2020 HIGH SCHOOL STATE EVENTS KICK OFF

SAF Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's Early Bird Open

Jan. 25 – Clarks Hill

Brooks Anderson and Avery Hammock
Marietta Bass Masters
13 pounds, 10 ounces



Louisiana State Championship

Feb. 16 – Toledo Bend

Matthew Nesbit and Tripp Bowman
Haughton HS Lip Rippers
17 pounds, 5 ounces



Arkansas State Championship

March 8 – Lake Dardanelle

Masen Wade and Cody Ostendorf
Central Arkansas Flippin' Outcasts
19 pounds, 9 ounces



Florida State Championship

Feb. 1 – Harris Chain

Matthew Alderman and Grady Johnson
Osceola Anglers
15 pounds, 9 ounces



South Carolina State Championship

Feb. 22 – Lake Hartwell

Chance Konrad and Mark Kershaw
YCHSA
15 pounds, 10 ounces



Texas State Championship

Feb. 1 – Lake O' the Pines

Neal Covington and Ty Kennedy
Hallsville Bobcats
17 pounds, 15 ounces



Georgia State Championship

March 1 – Lake Lanier

Jake Holley and Sam Holley
Jackson Co. High School
17 pounds, 13 ounces



RAISING THE STAKES

The Bass Federation National Championship's total payout was \$50,000 back in 2005, but payouts grew steadily in the subsequent years, hitting \$200,000 in 2015. Due to the success of the TBF National Semi-Finals program, started in 2016, that number almost doubled in 2020, when the National Championship paid out more than \$380,000 in cash prizes and awards.

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. Above all else, thank you for being a member of The Bass Federation.



April 3-4 LHSAA State Bass Fishing Championship

Sept. 25-26 Fishers of Men Berkley Team Series
District 6 Championship

Oct 16-18 Kayak Bass Fishing Challenge
Series Championship



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BASS FISHING ACCORDING TO DAROLD GLEASON

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO THE TACKLE WAREHOUSE PRO CIRCUIT ROOKIE'S COLORFUL ON-THE-WATER LINGO

By Justin Onslow

Darold Gleason (noun): A different cat. A guy you can't help but root for. A friend you just haven't met yet.

Gleason is a Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit rookie with a personality bigger than his home body of water. He's a guide on Toledo Bend, a former teacher, a husband and a joker. A few minutes talking with Gleason – or just watching him on FLW Live – and you'll notice a guy who just has fun catching fish.

"I compete better by acting like a fool and having a good time and not letting the stresses come to the forefront," he says of his devil-may-care personality on the water. "It helps me concentrate."

The fun Gleason has always had on the water has produced some colorful vernacular that has seeped into his everyday fishing terminology. If you watched him on FLW Live at Sam Rayburn, you were probably exposed to some terms you've never heard before – because they're unique to Gleason's own bass fishing dictionary.

"PUT THE BUNNY IN THE BOX!"

When Gleason is amped after an important catch, it's common to hear him shout the above expression with gusto. At first glance, it's an odd expression with very little context, but it makes a whole lot more sense when you understand its inception.

"I'm a Con Air fan. That's exactly where it came from. It's one of my favorite old movies," Gleason says. "My father-in-law has a camp house on Toledo Bend. That was kind of where the guys would all hang out for the weekend. We usually didn't have great choices for what we watched on TV. One of those Friday nights, old classic Con Air comes on, and it was just born.

"The next day when I was fishing a tournament doing good, I couldn't even tell you who was fishing with me that day, I just know that we caught a good one, and I turned and looked at him and said, 'Put the bunny in the box,' and it just stuck. It was horrible how Nicolas Cage's accent was in that movie, and so that, for an old Southern redneck, just stuck."

Gleason is smart enough to know how to capitalize on a good opportunity, too. He's selling "#oceanpony" and "Put the bunny in the box" T-shirts on his website, gleasonfishingcourses.com.



SAY WHAT? GLEASONISMS

OCEAN PONY: A giant bass. A donkey, pig or toad.

In Gleason's words: "Down here in Toledo Bend country where I'm from, you're talking a 7-plus-pounder, and usually we don't break it out unless it's a 9- or 10-pounder. Depending on where you're fishing at, let's say, for instance, I'm at Dardanelle later this year, and I catch a 6-pounder, I'm going to call it an ocean pony."

MINI OCEAN PONY: An ocean pony-in-training.

In Gleason's words: "Down here, that's a 4- or 5-pounder. It's a good one."

PICKLES: Run-of-the-mill, cookie-cutter small keepers.

In Gleason's words: "A bunch of 15-inch fish. I call them pickles because they're about the size of a dill pickle."

OONICORN: Alternately, unicorn. A special fish.

In Gleason's words: "A unicorn is kind of like a last Hail Mary great big fish. That one special fish that comes at a time that you don't expect it. My niece says 'oonicorn' instead of 'unicorns.' That's something I've called my wife through the years. I call her a unicorn, because there's no other like her."

REEF DONKEY: A specific type of ocean pony.

In Gleason's words: "One of my buddies started calling them that when you catch a big one offshore."

DREAM CRUSHER: Another specific type of ocean pony, but in a sad way.

In Gleason's words: "The big one that got away, or the big one you're looking at on a bed that won't play."

DOUBLE-SPLASH RIG: A Carolina rig.

FIVE-SPLASH RIG: An umbrella rig.

SNUGGLE STRUGGLE: A grind.

In Gleason's words: "That comes from watching MMA with buddies: when those guys just kind of grapple and roll around for the whole fight and it looks like a snuggle struggle. That's what we call it when the fishing's a grind." ■



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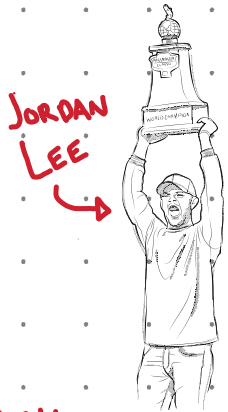
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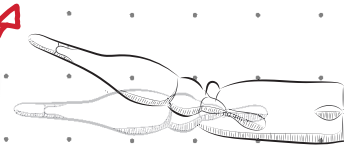
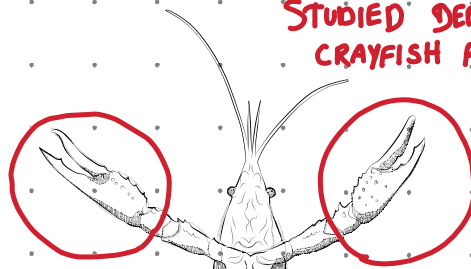


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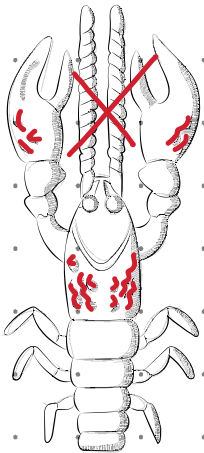


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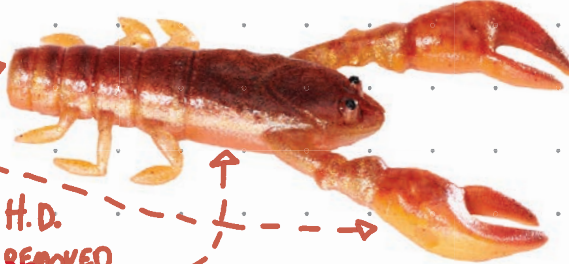
STUDIED DEFENSIVE CRAYFISH POSTURE



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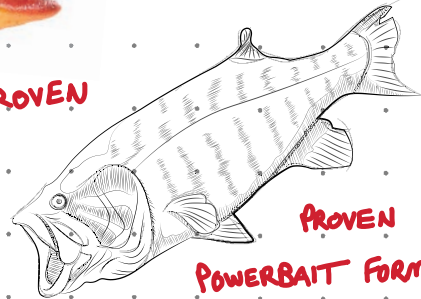


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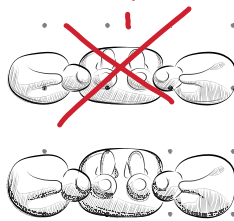
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