

Bass

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2020

THE
SEASON
BEGINS
NOW

MLF & FLW
KICK OFF
A NEW ERA





Proud Sponsor of the Tackle Warehouse FLW Pro Circuit

THE OFFICIAL TACKLE RETAILER OF FLW

Guaranteed Lowest Prices ■ Huge Selection ■ Fast Shipping ■ Great Customer Service

TACKLEWAREHOUSE.COM

1.800.300.4916 / info@tacklewarehouse.com



TACKLE WAREHOUSE

+



||

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2020 | VOLUME 19 | ISSUE 2

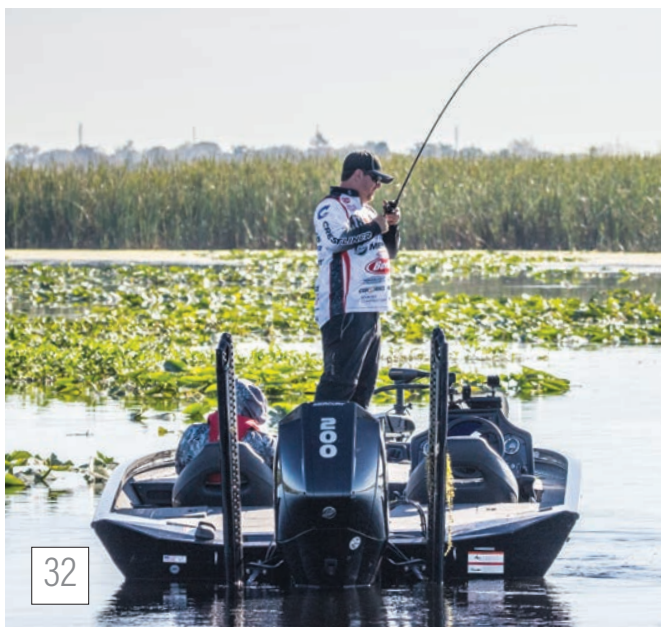


PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

32



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

44

FEATURES

DIGGING DITCHES 32
HOW TWO TOP PROS BREAK DOWN THESE VAGUE YET IMPORTANT STRUCTURES — *Sean Ostruszka*

GETTING TO KNOW LOWRANCE LIVESIGHT 38
HOW TO SET UP AND GET THE MOST OUT OF THE ELECTRONICS GIANT'S FORWARD-LOOKING, REAL-TIME SONAR — *Tyler Brinks*

EVERS' GREATEST ACT 44
OKLAHOMA PRO OVERCAME INCREDIBLE CHALLENGES – ON AND OFF THE WATER – DURING CAREER YEAR IN 2019 — *Joel Shangle*

SOUTHERN-FRIED BEDDING BRONZE 53
WHERE TO LOOK WHEN SOUTHERN SMALLMOUTHS HEAD TO SPAWN — *Sean Ostruszka*

UP FRONT

FIRST CAST — *Curtis Niedermier* 4
FISHING EXPOSED 6
SOLUNAR TABLES 10
SCREEN TIME 12
THE FRONT PAGE — *Edited by Justin Onslow* 14

COLUMNS

NEWELL'S NOTES — *Rob Newell* 20
BALOG ON BASS FISHING — *Joe Balog* 22
CONSERVATION — *TJ Maglio* 24
TACTICAL BASSIN — *Matt Allen and Tim Little* 28

THE JUICE

MAKING A CASE FOR SPECIALTY RODS — *Justin Onslow* 60
DUDLEY, THRIFT: NEW BEGINNINGS
ON FAMILIAR WATERS — *Joel Shangle* 64
REVIEW: PLANO EDGE TERMINAL BOX — *Matt Williams* 66
GEARING UP: NEW PRODUCTS FOR ANGLERS 68
Q&A: COLE FLOYD — *Sean Ostruszka* 72
THE BASS FEDERATION UPDATES 76
THE LAST CAST — *Justin Onslow* 80

ON THE COVER: JOSH DOUGLAS — PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

We reserve the right to refuse any material we feel is not in the best interest of MLFW, LLC, (DBA "FLW") and its members/subscribers. The items advertised herein are warranted by the advertiser. *Bass Fishing* is published six times per year by FLW, 30 Gamble Lane, Benton, KY 42025, 270.252.1000. Kathy Fennel, Executive Vice President and General Manager of FLW. Copyright 2020 by FLW. All rights reserved. None of the content of this publication may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Advertising rates available on request. We welcome manuscripts but will not be held responsible for loss of manuscripts, photos or other materials. All manuscripts should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Bass Fishing (ISSN 1543-6179) is published six times a year (February/March, April/May, June/July, August/September, October/November, December/January) by FLW, 30 Gamble Lane, Benton, KY 42025. Periodicals Postage Paid at Benton, KY, and at additional mailing office. Rates: one year (6 issues) \$25.00; two years (12 issues) \$50.00; three years (18 issues) \$75.00.

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

Printed in the U.S.A.



921 ProXP



INCLUDES all standard features of the 921 Pro XP
along with your **CHOICE** of custom colors
**PLUS: TWO HUMMINBIRD G3N HELIX 10'S | MINN KOTA ULTREX 112
MERCURY PROP | TWO 8' BLACK POWER-POLE® BLADES**

\$67,995*

with the Mercury 250
Pro XS Four Stroke

721 ProXP



INCLUDES all standard features of the 721 Pro XP
along with your **CHOICE** of custom colors
**PLUS: TWO HUMMINBIRD G3N HELIX 9'S | MERCURY PROP
4 X 10 CHARGER | TWO 8' BLACK POWER-POLE® BLADES**




\$59,995*

with the Mercury 250
Pro XS Four Stroke

Built by Anglers, for Anglers

Find your local Phoenix dealer at
phoenixbassboats.com

** Nationally-advertised price, does not include dealer prep, freight, taxes, registration and licenses and is for 2020 model year. Phoenix Boats reserves the right to make changes in products and pricing without prior notice. Dealer determines final price. Dual color deck, polyflake hull and gelcoat pinstripe upgrade fees will apply.

   /PhoenixBassBoats

FIRST CAST: CURTIS NIEDERMIER

READY FOR ANOTHER DECADE



Sometime in mid-December I was scrolling through Instagram and saw a post by FLW Senior Designer Matt Pace (@imattpace) with a beautiful photo of a full moon and this line of text: “The Cold Moon. The last full moon of the decade.”

The end of a decade ... I hadn't even realized. A few days later, the significance of the 2010s coming to a close set in while, motivated by Matt's post, I began assembling a list of FLW highlights from the last decade for a website article.

Wow, we accomplished a lot in 10 years. You should check out the article at FLWFishing.com and see for yourself.

Personally, I'm most proud of the fact that we simultaneously published 100 magazine issues in the last decade (hooray, print!) while also expanding our social media audience into the hundreds of thousands and streaming thousands of hours of live tournament coverage (digital rules!). I'm also happy to brag that FLW helped launch the careers of some of the sport's biggest stars in that time, which brings me to an interesting story from early on in the decade.

It was 2011 in Hot Springs, Ark., on the evening after the final day of the FLW Cup. I walked into the bar on the ground floor of the Embassy Suites and was greeted by David James, who, at the time, worked in the marketing department at Rapala, but has since passed away.

David invited me for a beer and asked if I wanted to join him in a few minutes for dinner downtown. He was going to be hosting a prospective pro-staff member and his family. That's not the sort of thing I would ordinarily partake in, but I figured it was a good chance to see a different side of the industry, so I accepted the offer and asked whom we'd be taking to dinner.

His answer: Jacob Wheeler.

Jacob, at the time, wasn't yet the mega-star we all know now. Still in his early 20s, he'd qualified for that Cup by winning the Bass Fishing League All-American, which had earned him an interview with Rapala and a spot on the cover of this magazine with the headline “The Next Superstar.” FLW and Rapala were both apparently on the right track with regard to Jacob's career prospects.

That evening Jacob showed up with his entire extended family, introduced them all and spent dinner talking fishing with the same fervor I've heard from him every time we've worked together since then. I don't think I could ever match his enthusiasm for bass fishing. That's one of the traits that has made him successful, and I'm sure it's one of the things David was hoping to see in him. They inked a deal a few weeks later.

The following August in Atlanta, Ga., I watched as Jacob, wearing a Rapala hat, was joined on stage by some of those same family members after being handed the FLW Cup trophy. Man, what a swift climb to the top.

Today, Jacob has won almost \$2 million and at press time was ranked No. 1 in the Bassfan World Rankings. And I can say I was there to witness a key moment in his career – a career that is barely a decade old.

Reflecting on the 2010s makes me wonder what's coming in the next 10 years. Who's the next Jacob Wheeler? What new bass fishing star will we be writing about when 2029 comes to a close?

Whoever it is, I hope our paths cross as they live out their story and I help to tell it.

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

Sr. Manager, Digital Editorial

Rachel Dubrovin

Sr. Manager, Digital Content Development

Josh Gassmann

Digital Content Editor

Ellise Verheyen

Digital Content Editor

Olivia Fissel

Staff Writer

Mason Prince



President and CEO

Jim Wilburn

Executive Vice President and General Manager, MLF

Don Rucks

Executive Vice President and General Manager, FLW

Kathy Fennel

Vice President, Controller

Tommy Boaz

Vice President of Marketing and Business Development, MLF

John Acosta

Vice President of Operations, FLW

Dave Washburn

Director of Account Services, FLW

Jenn Sonnek

LUCAS OIL

MARINE PRODUCTS



**Lubrication and Protection
for Extreme Marine Conditions.**



Lucas Oil Marine Products contain a special blend of additives that protect expensive engines and gear against moisture, rust and corrosion.



WILL NOT VOID MANUFACTURER'S WARRANTIES

LucasOil.com | 800.342.2512

PROUD SPONSOR OF







HOW A PHOENIX TAKES FLIGHT

The FLW staff knows how to host a great bass tournament, just like the folks at Phoenix Boats know how to build a great bass boat. In December, the two crews came together in the Phoenix manufacturing plant in Winchester, Tenn., to celebrate a new relationship that made Phoenix Boats the official bass boat of FLW. As well, the FLW staff was given the chance to see every step in the process of building a Phoenix, from laying in the fiberglass to joining the hull to the cap (shown here), wiring up depth finders and installing the last bit of hardware. It takes a hands-on, labor-intensive process to perfect every angler-friendly detail in a Phoenix, as each one is built to order for the customer, but the result is one of the finest rides on the water.

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA





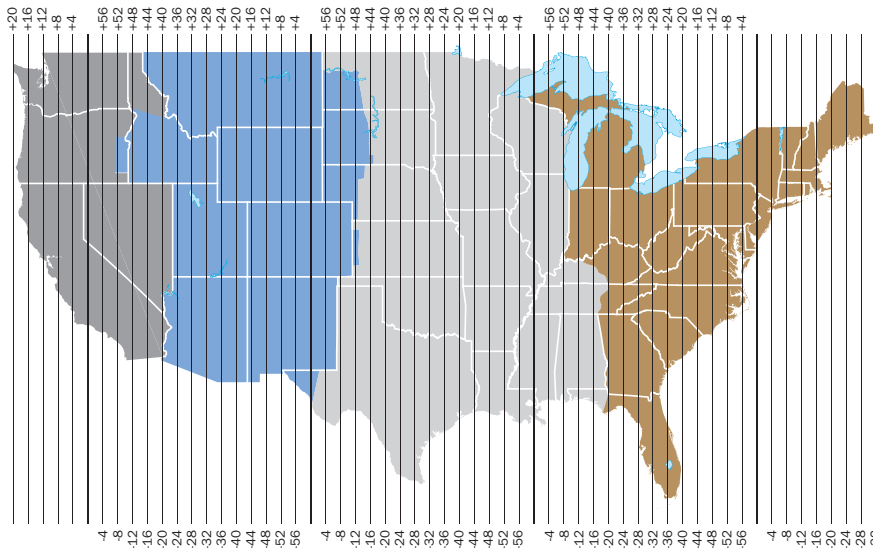
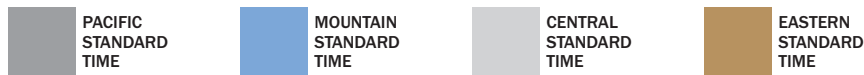
CHARTING NEW (BACK)WATERS

The winding back channels and sprawling backwaters of the Mississippi River near La Crosse, Wis., offered a stunning playing field for the Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour's top performers in 2019, who came to town last summer to contest the inaugural REDCREST presented by Venmo championship. Among the top 50 anglers who made the field was Zack Birge. The 28-year-old pro from Oklahoma led the Shotgun and Elimination rounds on days one and two, and put up the second-best weight in day four's Knockout Round, when this photo was taken. Unfortunately for Birge, like the Mississippi's powerful waters that flow south from La Crosse, the force that was Edwin Evers was too much to hold back. Evers ran away with the Championship Round on the final day to make history as the first-ever REDCREST winner. Birge, who won three times in his FLW career, finished a respectable fourth.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

SOLUNAR TABLES

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2020



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

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.

Be a Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit MARSHAL

Pick your favorite lake, ride along to learn from the world's best pros and win cash awards based on the combined weight of the pros you are paired with in the two-day opening round. As a Marshal, you will be treated to a VIP cookout and seminar with FLW pros on the Wednesday before your tournament, plus you'll get behind-the-scenes access throughout the event. You will also receive an exclusive Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Marshal jersey and play a vital role in live coverage of the tournament by verifying your pro's catch and relaying the information to FLW editors.

WIN \$2,500 And Learn From the Best



details: flwfishing.com/marshals

ANYWHERE IS POSSIBLE.



GRABBER™ X³



Mud, Dirt & Rock
Extreme Terrain

GRABBER™ A/T^X



Aggressive
All-Terrain

GRABBER™ APT



All-Weather
All-Purpose-Terrain



GENERAL TIRE

WWW.GENERALTIRE.COM



WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS

LIVE TOURNAMENT STREAMS

Feb. 7-12 - 2020 Bass Pro Tour Stage One @ Lake Eufaula
MLF NOW! Live Stream at MajorLeagueFishing.com or MyOutdoorTV

Feb. 22-23 - 2020 Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit @ Harris Chain
FLW Live at FLWFishing.com

Feb. 21-26 - 2020 Bass Pro Tour Stage Two @ Lake Okeechobee
MLF NOW! Live Stream at MajorLeagueFishing.com or MyOutdoorTV

March 13-18 - 2020 Bass Pro Tour Stage Three @ Lake Fork
MLF NOW! Live Stream at MajorLeagueFishing.com or MyOutdoorTV

March 21-22 - 2020 Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit @ Lake Martin
FLW Live at FLWFishing.com

TV BROADCASTS

Feb. 1 - 2020 Challenge Cup Sudden Death Round 2
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](http://OutdoorChannel)

Feb. 8 - 2020 Challenge Cup Championship
2-4 p.m. ET - [Outdoor Channel](http://OutdoorChannel)



DON'T FORGET TACKLE TUESDAY

If you're following FLW on social media, and you should be, don't forget to check out the FLW Facebook page every Tuesday to enter to win free tackle and prizes from our sponsors. All you have to do is fill out an entry to have a chance to win.

Visit facebook.com/flwfishing.

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



BECAUSE
MONSTERS
STILL KEEP
YOU UP
AT NIGHT



PLANO
EDGE

STAY SHARP.

Advanced tackle storage for obsessive anglers.



planomolding.com/edge    



TACKLE WAREHOUSE NAMED TITLE SPONSOR OF FLW PRO CIRCUIT

> **THE FLW PRO CIRCUIT** has a new name. In 2020, FLW's top-level tournament series will be called the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit after announcing its partnership with title sponsor Tackle Warehouse.

Now the official and exclusive fishing tackle retailer of FLW, Tackle Warehouse enters the fold as the namesake of FLW's most prestigious tournament trail, which will include 155 anglers in 2020. As part of the sponsorship agreement, Tackle Warehouse will receive exposure across all FLW platforms, including more than 235 tournaments, *Bass Fishing* magazine, FLWFishing.com and FLW Live. In addition, Tackle Warehouse will be the title sponsor of the FLW College Fishing School of the Year awards and the presenting sponsor of FLW High School Fishing Summer Camp.

Tackle Warehouse is bass fishing's leading online retailer that guarantees the lowest prices on fishing tackle from every top brand. For more information or to stock up for your next tournament, visit TackleWarehouse.com.



Be a Part of the FLW Marshal Program

2019 marked the inaugural season for the FLW Marshal program, which changed the way on-the-

water action is presented to bass fishing fans in real-time. With a marshal in nearly every boat, fish-catch reporting and photography were critical pieces of FLW's live coverage of FLW Tour events last season.

The FLW Marshal program is back in 2020, and with your help, it can be better than ever. The benefits of the Marshal program don't just extend to FLW as an

organization. Marshals have the opportunity to ride along with pros during tournaments at the highest level of professional fishing, with a front-row seat to every decision, every catch, heartbreak and elation. Marshals can learn - in real-time - just what it takes to catch fish in a high-pressure environment against some of the best anglers on the planet.

WHAT SOME OF LAST YEAR'S MARSHALS HAD TO SAY:

"He taught me more in that three hours than I've probably learned in 10 years." - Timmy Beight, on riding with Jordan Osborne during the 2019 Pro Circuit event on Sam Rayburn

"I have told about 50 people already. I told my bank president when I went in to deposit the check." - Dan Hughes, after winning the marshal contest at Lake Toho, which netted him \$2,500

"I would like to marshal again. The hundred dollars [entry fee] is well worth it. It's unbelievable how much

I learned out here. I don't know if they realize how much I learned from them."

- John Young, who won the marshal contest at Lake Chickamauga in 2019

MARSHAL DETAILS

The FLW Marshal program is a \$100 VIP experience that includes a cookout and fishing seminar with Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pros before each event, a marshal shirt by E3 Sport Apparel, and entry in the marshal contest, which pays \$2,500 to the winning marshal and cash prizes to the rest of the top 10 marshals (based on the two-day combined weights of their pro angler draws).

This is the opportunity of a lifetime for serious anglers, and it is only available to FLW members and subscribers who are at least 16 years old. Pick your favorite lake (or more than one), ride along to learn from the world's best pros and have the chance to win cash awards.

For more information about the FLW Marshal program, visit our website at FLWFishing.com/marshals.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



Berkley Sponsoring Big Bass

Big Bass payouts are a staple on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit. On days one and two of each tournament, the angler who weighs in the heaviest fish is awarded a cash bonus. At big-bass factories like Sam Rayburn and the Harris Chain, which are the first two

stops on the 2020 schedule, weighing in behemoths usually draws big cheers from the weigh-in crowd and fellow anglers alike.

In 2020, Berkley is sponsoring Big Bass for the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, and the payouts make chasing giants even more enticing. On days one and two of each Pro Circuit event, the winners of the Berkley Big Bass competition will receive \$500 each to go along with the admiration of the crowd and the envy of the competition.

FLW PRO ERIC JACKSON LAUNCHES APEX WATERCRAFT

> **FORMER OLYMPIAN** and four-time world champion whitewater kayaker Eric Jackson, who's now in his fifth year competing as a pro on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, recently announced that he's launched a new fishing kayak brand called Apex Watercraft.

The Tennessee pro previously established himself as an innovator in kayak design and manufacture during his tenure at Jackson Kayak. At Apex, Jackson says his goal is still to innovate, but to pursue a different track. While roto-molded fishing kayaks have gotten bigger, heavier and more complex, Apex kayaks will be manufactured from carbon fiber composite to be simpler, faster and easier to handle.

"I've decided to start this new venture as the sole owner, with the goal of making the fastest, lightest, quietest fishing kayaks ever made," says Jackson, 55, who plans to manufacture all of his new kayaks in Rock Island, Tenn.

Apex plans to support FLW this season through kayak raffles and other projects to benefit various youth and FLW Foundation causes. The company is on track to have prototype kayaks in the field by spring. Anyone interested in following its progress can visit apexwatercraft.com, or on social media search [@apexwatercraft](https://www.instagram.com/apexwatercraft).



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA



DANIEL FENNEL TO DIRECT PRO CIRCUIT

> **FLW RECENTLY ANNOUNCED** that Daniel Fennel had been promoted to senior director of tournament operations for the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit, FLW Series and Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine, which includes the duties of Pro Circuit tournament director. Bill Taylor, who served as tournament director for the FLW Tour from 2001 through 2019, has been promoted to senior director of operations, where he'll lend his expertise from more than two decades as a tournament director toward logistics, angler relations and event planning for all FLW circuits.

Fennel, 38, began his career with FLW in 2005, but as the son of FLW Executive Vice President and General Manager Kathy Fennel, he literally grew up within the FLW family, attending his first tournament before the age of 1. Daniel, an avid angler in his own right, advanced through the ranks from the customer service department to in-house tournament director and Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine tournament director before becoming the head of Bass Fishing League operations in 2011. Daniel also spent more than a decade on the FLW Tour event staff and emceed FLW Tour qualifying round weigh-ins since 2015.

In his new role, Daniel will oversee tournament operations for three of FLW's most popular circuits, while continuing to direct Bass Fishing League LBL and Music City division events. But his most visible role within the angling community will be directing the organization's highest-level tournament series as it transitions from the FLW Tour to the Pro Circuit.

"This is a whole new chapter for FLW," Daniel says about the launch of the new Pro Circuit. "We have an opportunity to show the world what FLW pros can do thanks to the expanded media coverage the Pro Circuit will enjoy this season. The pros are going to see that immediately, and they're really going to enjoy the ride. I'm expecting an unbelievable year."



PHOTO BY MATT PACE

FLW High School Fishing Summer Camp Registration Now Open

FLW announced recently that registration for the 2020 rendition of the FLW High School Fishing Summer Camp presented by Tackle Warehouse, which runs from July 22-24, is now open and will continue through June 30 or until all camp spots have been filled.

The camp, which is held on the beautiful Murray State University campus, with daily activities on the shores of Kentucky Lake, is the ultimate summer camp for serious high school anglers from grades 8 through 12, along with their parents, boat captains and coaches. Students will receive instruction from top professionals and industry executives to take their fishing and fishing-career readiness to the next level.

Adults have the option to drop off their students or stay throughout the camp and participate in special panel discussions aimed at identifying best practices to give your High School Fishing team the edge it needs to thrive.

Following camp, the FLW Foundation is hosting a benefit tournament on Kentucky Lake on Saturday, July 25, for campers who would like to put their newfound skills to the test while helping raise

money for the foundation's High School Fishing scholarship fund.

The tournament features two divisions – a boat division and a kayak division – and two campers will be selected to fish with an FLW pro. Participants in the tournament are eligible for thousands of dollars in cash prizes.

The camp fee is \$300 per student/adult. The FLW Foundation benefit tournament is optional, and the entry fee is \$200 per boat and \$100 per kayak. You do not need a boat to participate in camp, and parents are not required to attend.

For more information or to register, visit our website at FLWFishing.com/camp.



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

Pro Ryan Salzman Offering Chance at Mentorship Program

Second-year Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro Ryan Salzman knows how important it is to give back to the community and to stoke the fires of competitive fishing in the youth (and future) of the sport. To further both goals, the Alabama pro and full-time guide on Lake Guntersville is offering a chance for a lucky young angler to win a mentorship under Salzman's tutelage.

The mentorship is geared toward helping young anglers learn important skills related to the fishing industry – from catching fish to

the business side of the sport. Salzman also plans to document the experience on his YouTube channel (Alabama Bass Guide) so everyone can follow along and learn with the winner.

Salzman's mentorship program is available to high school anglers, and he'll choose a winner by March 1.

To enter for a chance to win, subscribe to Salzman's YouTube channel (required), and fill out the entry form that can be found on his website, alabamabassguide.com.



POLARIS GIVEAWAY DETAILS

> **JUST AS IT DID** last season, Polaris is teaming up with FLW in 2020 to give away a pair of ATVs and a UTV.

The winner of the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit Polaris Rookie of the Year award will receive a Polaris Ranger 1000 UTV (a \$12,999 value). Rookie of the Year is awarded to the top pro from the points standings after the seven Pro Circuit qualifiers (ties resolved by total weight) who has never fished a Pro Circuit or Bassmaster Elite Series tournament as a pro before this season.

In addition, Polaris will award two Sportsman 570 ATVs (valued at \$7,799 each) to contest winners. Any angler who enters a Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine or FLW Series event as either a boater/pro or a co-angler will automatically be entered to win a Polaris Sportsman 570, and the winner of the second Sportsman 570 will be chosen from a pool of entries from participants who fill out a BRC card at Phoenix Bass Fishing League and FLW Series tournaments or via the online entry form.

Check FLWFishing.com for more details.



CONSERVATION NEWS:

ASIAN CARP REPORTED IN CHICKAMAUGA

> **DESPITE WIDESPREAD EFFORTS** to keep invasive Asian carp species from spreading east through the Tennessee River system, it seems Lake Chickamauga may be next on the list of fisheries to be impacted by their presence.

On Jan. 10, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) received a report from a local angler of a silver carp jumping into his boat when he deployed his trolling motor. He encountered the fish near the Sequoyah Nuclear Plant, and stated he "saw 15 to 20 more fish near the surface" exhibiting a feeding behavior.

No other reports of Asian carp in Chickamauga have been made since the angler's account, but the TWRA urges the public to report any carp sightings in east Tennessee. Asian carp are not known to be fully established in the region yet.

Reports can be made by calling the nearest TWRA regional office, or by emailing ANS.TWRA@tn.gov.

RAILBLAZA®
HOLD EVERYTHING...

TRACLOADER
OVER 100+ ACCESSORIES TO CHOOSE FROM

TRACLOADER STARPORT TRACLOADER SIDEPORT TRACLOADER 45°

WWW.RAILBLAZA.COM
BOAT · KAYAK · ATV

POLARIS®

DRIVEN TO DO MORE™



RANGER®

Out here the days start before sunrise, and they don't end until the job is done. Polaris® RANGER® is born from a determination to never compromise; the passion and purpose which drives you, also drives us. Powerful, capable, comfortable – for 20-years strong, RANGER® is the most trusted utility side-by-side in the world.

WARNING: The Polaris® RANGER® can be hazardous to operate and is not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers must be at least 12 years old. Drivers and passengers should always wear helmets, eye protection, and seat belts. Always use cab nets or doors (as equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All drivers should take a safety training course. Call 800-342-3764 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails. Polaris® is a registered trademark of Polaris Industries Inc. ©2019 Polaris Industries Inc.

VISIT POLARISRANGER.COM

Progressive Casualty Ins. Co. & affiliates. Annual premium for a basic liability policy not available in all states. Prices vary based on how you buy. *Available with comprehensive and collision coverage.



There's a reason they say, Curse like a sailor.
That's why we offer basic plans starting at \$100 a year with options that won't depreciate your watercraft and accessories*:

1.800.PROGRESSIVE | PROGRESSIVE.COM **PROGRESSIVE**



ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER

THE FLURRIES AND FUNKS OF REAL-TIME SCORING

Live tournament coverage reveals previously unknown factors that affect fishing success

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.

Since the advent of real-time scoring in professional bass tournaments more than a decade ago, I've become a believer in the idea that bass go through daily flurries and funks of activity. Real-time scoring proves it. During each fishing day, there are periods when the bite is on lakewide, and, conversely, there are periods when feeding activity becomes anemic.

These sudden swings will sometimes even defy weather conditions, moon phases, or fish and game forecasts that "predict" when fish "should" bite. The crests and lulls in activity might last 15 minutes

or two hours. There might be several bursts during the day, or maybe just one. But the most amazing thing real-time scoring has revealed is that this phenomenon happens lakewide, and with that comes a whole new frontier of tournament strategy at the top levels of the sport.

I first experienced the daily ebb of the flurry and the funk several eons ago as a co-angler on the FLW Tour. Whenever the Tour would visit lakes with historical hot spots – Lake Okeechobee's north shore or the Mile Roads at St. Clair, for example – dozens of boats would fish around each other

all day. Back then, real-time scoring came in the form of other competitors hurriedly shuttling landing nets through the boat. Fishing would be lackluster for a while, and then, like a switch was flipped, everyone within sight would have a fish on at the same time. These miraculous fish-catch windows would last an hour or so before they slammed shut. In those days, we chalked up the crests and valleys to "waves" of fish "moving in" to those particular areas.

It wasn't until the early Toyota Texas Bass Classic (TTBC) events held more than a decade ago that real-time

scoring began to truly uncover the lakewide ebb and flow of tournament fishing days. In those events, marshals called in weights in real time on VHF radios. Pro anglers were the first to realize the daily radio traffic would sometimes go from quiet to an all-out five-alarm blaze in a matter of minutes. The intensive radio flurries would last 15 to 30 minutes before squelching back down to normal levels.

I remember having conversations with pros about this phenomenon following TTBC events, but I was still skeptical until I was given SCORETRACKER at the very first MLF Cup in 2011. Since then, I've spent thousands of hours with SCORETRACKER in my hand at MLF Select, Cup and Bass Pro Tour events, watching as fishing activity waxes and wanes throughout the day like coastal tides.

Sometimes, there are logical explanations for it. At the Bass Pro Tour event on Smith Lake in 2019, there is no doubt the flurries were tied to morning shad

spawns. Sometimes it's not so much the flurries that get my attention as do the sudden lulls. At Lake Conroe last year, the fish-catching pace was fairly consistent, but I remember several midday funks during the week where activity was nil for an hour or so - like every bass in the lake got the memo that the kitchen was closed.

For years in pro tournaments, anglers left the ramp, fished and weighed in, and no one really knew when they caught their fish. But now, with SCORETRACKER and other resources like the FLW Live Leaderboard, we can see, literally minute-to-minute, swings in fish activity. Because anglers on the Bass Pro Tour know when their competitors catch fish, they've already become adept at using real-time information to their benefit in tournament strategy. Pros such as Ott DeFoe, Jacob Wheeler, Jordan Lee and Michael Neal recognized SCORETRACKER's value immediately in the real-time scoring format. They learned pretty quickly that you

don't want to be running down the lake when the SCORETRACKER is blowing up. However, lulls provide a prime opportunity to explore new water or try other lures without getting behind.

Even some pros who did not take to SCORETRACKER immediately have learned to embrace it. Bass Pro Tour points champion Edwin Evers admits that initially he didn't care to hear SCORETRACKER updates in his ear every five minutes. Now, he can't get enough of it. He wants to know about any changes at all times because it provides valuable information about the overall fishing rhythm of the day.

One thing is for sure: Real-time scoring in tournaments represents another opportunity to learn about bass and their daily habits. In the coming years, we should be able to use the fish-catch data from these events to generate charts illustrating the definitive peaks and valleys in each fishing day to better understand the flurries and the funks. ■





PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

FLW TO BPT: SECRETS OF TOP PERFORMERS

How Michael Neal and Jeff Sprague cracked the Major League Fishing code

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.

The inception of the MLF Bass Pro Tour (BPT) changed the landscape of competitive bass fishing. It also changed the way many pros conduct business. Rather than focusing on five quality bites, the BPT awards points for every fish caught that weighs more than a pound. The change in format threw many big names for a loop when they first signed on.

That wasn't so for Jeff Sprague and Michael Neal. Both are former FLW Tour standouts who quickly made a name for themselves on the newly formed BPT, finishing second and fifth in the 2019 points race, respectively. What was their secret to instant success in this new world?

SPRAGUE GOES WITH THE FLOW

Jeff Sprague came out of the gate hot in 2019, recording three top-10 finishes in as many events. His lack of familiarity with the BPT and its early venues seems to have been an asset.

"I've always been a change-on-the-fly guy," Sprague says of his fishing style. "The BPT format pairs well with my style of fishing. I'm very easy to change if the fishery calls for it."

Sprague adds that little or no practice, as outlined in BPT competition rules, goes along with his method.

"I do zero research on a lake other than things like current water level and temperature," he adds. "Only what Mother Nature shows me. In practice, I

just look at water rather than fish it and pick it apart."

With no preconceived notions, Sprague stays flexible with every cast. He also warns against fishing history, which plagued him when he first started fishing professionally.

"I fell into the trap that I had to fish the way a fishery was wrote up," says Sprague, referring to fishing patterns based on previous tournament wins. "Ultimately, it was my demise, and I had to wash my hands of it. Looking back, these were previous patterns of catching fish.

"Now, my lack of knowledge and history is a true benefit."

It also serves as a SCORE-TRACKER smoke screen for when he hears the leaderboard lighting up with catches.

“A lot of anglers know each other’s style so well, and they change based on their belief of what others are doing,” Sprague says. “All too often, they’re completely wrong. I don’t have that experience or knowledge, and I don’t care to have it.”

NEAL JUST KEEPS MOVING

Michael Neal might be the only successful bass pro in history who didn’t come up beating the bank.

“I grew up fishing strictly offshore,” Neal says of his early days on Guntersville and Chickamauga. “I never honed my dock-skipping skills or my flipping. I’ve always been a cover-water type of guy.”

Though he’s now entirely capable of slowing down and fishing targets, Neal confirms he still enjoys a love affair with staying on the move. The approach of staying on the trolling motor and quickly covering water helps him stay in the game when he knows he needs to catch a lot of fish in a day.

“I look for high-percentage places to catch one or two fish,” Neal explains. “Concentrations [of fish] are not my main objective.”

Neal moves rapidly, relying on lipless crankbaits – like his favorite SPRO Aruku Shad – jerkbaits, swimbaits and crankbaits. Occasionally, a soft plastic comes out, but it’s usually a Big Bite Baits Fighting Frog behind a swing-head jig, allowing Neal to keep winding.

Limited BPT practice doesn’t allow Neal much time to uncover offshore haunts, so he continues to move quickly when he’s fishing up around the shoreline, never coming off the trolling motor. Four top-10 finishes were the result in 2019, including a top 10 at the RED-CREST championship.

Unlike Sprague, Neal had a bit of experience with the Major League Fishing format before 2019. He was a previous competitor on the MLF Selects. There, he quickly realized the need to come out swinging.

“It helped me more mentally than anything else,” he says. “A lot of guys don’t realize how fast it’s going to happen; how fast the SCORETRACKER lights up.”

The suddenness of action immediately knocks many competitors off their game. Neal’s fast-paced style, however, is often responsible for numerous catches in the first round and the confidence that comes with them.

PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN



Michael Neal swings one in on day six of the MLF Bass Pro Tour Stage One event at Lake Garcia in Kissimmee, Fla.

DANCE WITH THE DATE WHO BROUGHT YOU

Without question, Both Neal and Sprague find it incredibly important to stay true to their fishing styles and never waver based on the success of others.

“I’ve never had a good finish trying to fish someone else’s way,” Neal says. “There’s always some part of the lake that you can fish in a way you’re comfortable with, and that equals confidence.

“Even if I find a concentration of fish, I’m not going to camp on it,” he explains. “That’s just not what I do. I’ll put it in my rotation and hit it several times a day, but I’m going to keep moving. You have to keep that type of mindset to fish your way and never allow

yourself to get out of your comfort zone.”

Sprague has a similar attitude.

“All I can do is go fish what I prefer and try to beat the fish,” he says. “I’m still star-struck; I’m not going to lie. These guys are truly the best, but you need to put all that aside and just do what you do.”

It seems easy enough, but is it really? At least to Sprague and Neal it sure seems to be.

In 2019, both anglers proved that their individual fishing styles were strong enough to take on the road and adapt to any format. The results were immediate career milestones and prime seats at the BPT table. ■

YOUR SOURCE FOR PREMIUM FLUORESCENT LINE!

McCoy
American Made Since 1935

The light blue tint makes it easier to pick up off the water during the day!

Line glows under a blacklight... great for night fishing!

McCoy Fishing Line
CLEAR FLUORESCENT BLUE
www.mccoyfishingline.com

Advanced PSP Technology for Ultimate Performance

MCCOYFISHINGLINE.COM t 928-505-0435 f 928-505-0473

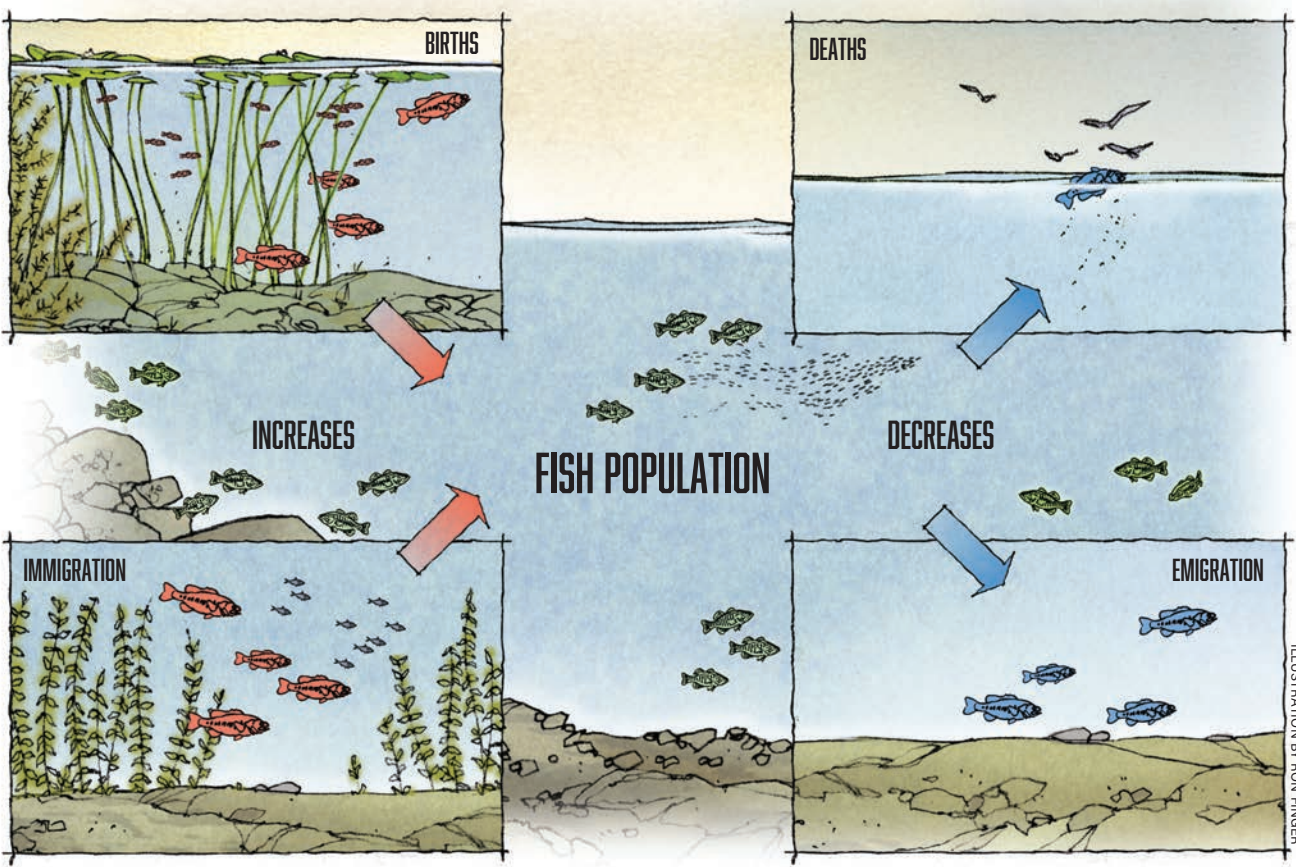


ILLUSTRATION BY RON FINGER

POPULATION DYNAMICS AND BASS FISHING

How to use the science of fisheries biology to catch bass

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.

As anglers, we tend to focus on the here and now. What lure is working best? How fast should I be working my bait? These are front-of-mind questions in our direct control while fishing, and properly manipulating the variables definitely leads to better catch rates, but only to a point. Inward-looking questions are only partly responsible for success. The other (and often biggest) factor in success on the water is the quality of the fishery you're on. You can't catch a fish if it

isn't swimming in the lake. For confirmation, just ask anyone who's tried to catch a 10-pound largemouth in Wisconsin. Sometimes big fish just don't live where you're fishing. What I'm referring to specifically are the macro-level factors that determine why some bodies of water consistently kick out 20-pound stringers, while other similar fisheries might struggle to produce a 10- to 12-pound bag. Which leads to different questions: What is the size structure of the population? How fast do bass grow

in that region? What baitfish live in that waterway? Macro factors responsible for answers to these questions include abundance and quality of habitat, available forage, angling and harvest pressure, geography, and many others. We'll dive deeper into each of these in future conservation articles. For this specific column, I want to address the way these factors influence the population metrics of the bass in a fishery. Science-types call this "population dynamics" - or, the study of a population of animals, its characteristics and how it grows (or shrinks) over time. Having a general understanding of the science behind population dynamics will not only help you appreciate why some fisheries are better or worse than others, but it will also help you catch more bass.



BASS MATH

Forgive me for momentarily bringing math into a bass fishing magazine, but one of the most basic ways scientists describe the stability of bass populations in any lake, river or pond is the BIDE Method (illustrated on the previous page), where the net population change is equal to the following:

(B)irths - (D)eaths +
(I)mmigrations - (E)migrations

Imagine there's a pond in your neighborhood with 100 bass living in it. Over a year, the pond experiences 50 births (B), 40 deaths (D), has 10 bass dumped in via a bucket from an adjacent pond (I) and loses 20 bass that swim down the creek outlet to the neighboring reservoir (E). The net change in this example would be zero, which biologists would call a stable population.

Although simplistic, this example accurately portrays the basic idea behind the study of population dynamics. The goal is to understand how a population responds to natural and human stimulus. The more complex the system, the more complicated the dynamics can get. Add in additional factors such as angler harvest, seasonal migration, and climate or geochemical changes and you can quickly understand why folks get college degrees to study this.

Imagine trying to describe the overall population status of a cosmopolitan species (one with worldwide distribution) such as Atlantic bluefin tuna, or smallmouth bass in a lake the size of Erie or Michigan. To do so, you'd need to bring in some additional concepts, some of which are detailed in the following:

RECRUITMENT

Biologists often use the term "recruitment" in lieu of "births" for fisheries studies, because counting the number of fish spawned is almost impossible due to the vast numbers of eggs fish produce. Because the majority of these fry will not survive, it makes more sense to talk about "recruitment," or the number of young that reach a specific measurable age. So, in the above pond example, although the 100 bass in the pond certainly dropped thousands of eggs, we only got 50 to measurable size, so that's the number used in the calculation.

LENGTH-AT-AGE

This is essentially a representation of a population's growth rate. By measuring a number of fish of a given species out of the same body of water, you can establish the average length of a population at specific ages. Compare that across several bodies of water and you can make management decisions.

Example: A 2-pound bass in Florida must be 3 or 4 years old, whereas a 2-pound bass in a Canadian Shield lake is probably closer to 7 or 8 years old. Even in a single region, habitat and forage availability can cause lakes or rivers in close proximity to have very different length-at-age numbers for the same species, which could be either good or bad, depending on your perspective and management goals.

STUNTING

When recruitment is high and resources (food and habitat) are limited, bass growth slows, resulting in decreased length-at-age. This creates a condition where

bass are abundant in number but smaller than normal for their age. Scientists call the condition "stunting," and it's fairly common across the country. Stunting happens most frequently in smaller ponds and lakes and can be combatted by increasing angler harvest or predation. You may have seen DNR managers remove the size or bag limit on a lake. It's a good bet they're trying to combat stunting.

CARRYING CAPACITY

In any system, whether a tiny pond or one of the Great Lakes, there are limited resources available. There's only so much suitable habitat and a specific amount of prey biomass. Carrying capacity is the theoretical maximum population size a specific

system can support.

Biologists use this number to help set harvest quotas, as well as make management decisions about size limits and closed or open season dates.

MAXIMUM SUSTAINED YIELD

This describes the theoretical largest harvest rate for a given species in a fishery that will allow the species to perpetuate indefinitely. By understanding growth rate and recruitment, and by having a rough approximation of the total population, biologists can estimate the amount of harvest the fishery can sustain. This is the calculation many regulators use to set quotas on commercial harvest as well as bag limits on recreational fisheries.



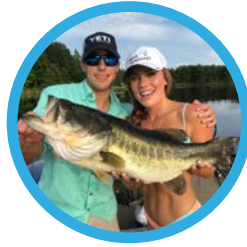
PHOTO COURTESY LEE MCLELLAN

HOW TO USE THIS KNOWLEDGE TO CATCH MORE (OR BIGGER) BASS

State DNRs and management organizations are publicly funded. Because of that, their data, reports and other information are all public record and available for angler research. Lots of reports are easily found on DNR websites. Spend some time reading harvest data, creel surveys, fisheries reports and other information on your local waters. Combing through this data can provide critical information to help you catch more and bigger bass. Look for which lakes have higher populations, higher length-at-age data and more. Many reports also include data on available forage species, which can help narrow down location and presentation info. ■

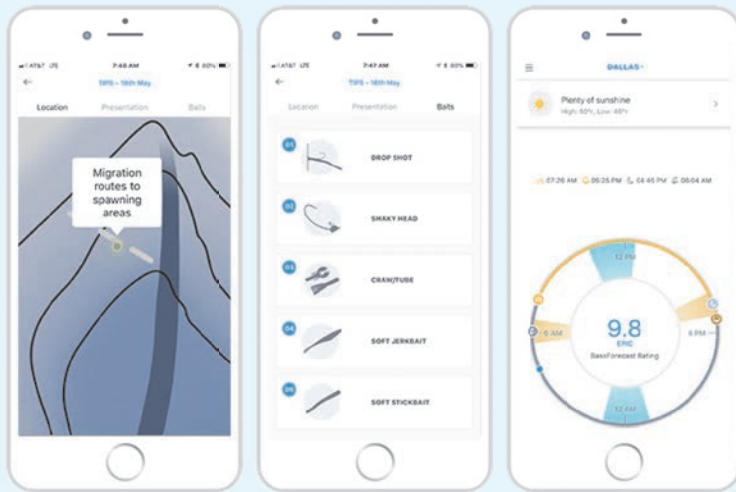
IT TOOK 8 ENGINEERS

4,000 hours to help these anglers catch their PB's



IT WILL TAKE YOU LESS

than 60 seconds per fishing trip to do what they did



- 🐟 Engineered exclusively for Bass
- 🐟 Monitors bass feeding activity levels up to 10 days ahead
- 🐟 Auto-adjusts to changing weather
- 🐟 Provides research based winning patterns & baits adjusted to location, bass season and bass activity rating
- 🐟 The world's most accurate GPS adjusted solunar data & peak feeding times

Field proven to increase catch rates over time
68% to 305%.

World's hottest & most reviewed bass fishing Mobile App. Over 7,000 App Store & Google Play Store reviews.

Super easy to use, just input your desired location & BassForecast does the rest.

Powered by  **AccuWeather** Most accurate weather company 3 years in a row. *source: Forecast Watch

DOWNLOAD NOW!
(*& make 2020 your best bass year ever!*)





FAVORITE

future of fishing

FAVORITEUSA.COM FAVORITE FISHING RODS FAVORITERODSUSA
FAVORITE RODS USA @FAVORITERODSUSA



PHOTO COURTESY MATT ALLEN

NOW'S THE TIME TO GET IN FRONT OF BIG PRESPAWN BASS

We've all been told that if you put in enough time on the water, you'll eventually catch a big bass. But what if there was a faster way to catch that "fish of a lifetime?"

Well, there is. There are simple adjustments you can make that will start putting bigger bass in the boat, and this is the best time of year to start.

February and March usher in the most extreme shift in bass behavior we see all year. Fish that were lethargically waiting for the end of winter on offshore structure are swimming toward the bank even as you read this. If you shift your mindset from "just going fishing" to "hunting for big bass," this is a great time to get results.

Bass start traveling toward their spawning grounds much earlier than we realize. As water temperatures around the country creep into the 50s, the prespawn period begins and bass start moving. During this period, the bass have two main drives: 1) to reach spawning areas quickly, and 2) to eat as much as possible along the way.

This extreme change from basic survival to voracious prespawn feeding gives you an opportunity to hook a huge bass at its peak weight. How are you going to do it? You're going to get ahead of the bass this year. Don't be the guy who finds out about the pattern after it's over. Go to the lake now, and let the bass come to you.

HIGHLAND RESERVOIRS

Bass in highland reservoirs hunker down on outside structure all winter. The bigger fish you're pursuing likely spent their winter on the ends of long tapering points and flats, using chunk rock and sheer edges to ambush prey. By this point in the year, these fish have already begun to travel back up the creek arms toward their spawning grounds. While traveling, they stop on secondary points in search of an easy meal.

As an angler, your first goal should be to catch any bass that will bite, because catching any bass, male or female, will give you clues about the whereabouts of the largest fish. Normally, the males move up

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.

first, and their location provides critical information. The females will hang a few points behind the males and linger for long periods on key structures.

It's important to know that the largest bass choose the points with the best structure or cover. If you find a series of points entering a creek arm, but only one has rock piles, brush or lay-down logs, that's the one that will hold bigger fish much longer than all the surrounding points.

The fish settle on these likely locations because they provide cover to feed. If the creek arms you're fishing have multiple points with desirable cover, assume the fish will use each one they come to. With this in mind, you can always stay ahead of them as they travel toward the back of the arm.

LOWLAND RESERVOIRS

Bass in lowland reservoirs tend to winter near the mouths of major creek arms. The bass choose areas where they can ambush roaming baitfish but remain clear of any main-river current. When these bass started their migration, they had a very clear path to the back of the spawning coves. Much like their cousins in highland reservoirs, lowland bass stop along secondary points. The primary difference is lowland reservoirs often have shallower bays, offering the bass offshore routes as well.

In shallower bays, the bigger fish will often follow the edges of the creek channel, stopping on major bends or humps along the way. A smaller group of fish will typically follow the shoreline, so be sure to check both paths. In either situation, larger females spend the most time on locations with steep edges and heavy cover.

Once you've caught a fish or two, it's time to work backward toward the mouth of the bay until you find the key structure that's holding the biggest fish. Take note of any likely spots in between, as the fish will subsequently use that area on their migration to the back of the bay.

NATURAL LAKES

Natural lakes provide a unique set of challenges. Bass in these environments winter in large groups. The schools can often be found on the edges of deep holes or on outside breaklines. Understanding their winter positioning is key to spring fishing success because you can figure out which way fish will go

by connecting a line from their winter haunt to the nearest spawning flat.

Bass in natural lakes often have less-defined paths to follow because shallow spawning grounds can be found all over the lake. They usually follow the most direct breakline along the shore, stopping on corners and depth changes to feed. In lakes with slow-tapering shorelines, the fish will use any contour change they find, and can even be found along transitions in bottom material such as rock to mud or mud to sand.

Again, the first goal is to catch any bass that will bite. This will help you gauge the depth where the fish are holding. From there, you can work out into deeper water in search of breaks and transitions where the larger bass will stack up.

SMALL LAKES AND PONDS

Bass in smaller fisheries behave very similarly to those in large lakes. In steep ponds that have a dam, the biggest fish winter in deep water adjacent to the dam. In natural lakes and ponds, the fish winter in the hollows out in the middle of the lake, lying flat on bottom with nothing around. Depending on the type of pond or lake you're on, it's safe to assume the fish will follow the path of either a highland reservoir or a natural lake as previously described.

Keep in mind you're fishing for smaller concentrations of fish using smaller structures. For example, a handful of big bass will gather on a single log on the bottom as they shift from the deep end to the shallow end of the pond. A laydown or a break wall might be the secondary point where fish collect. All the same behavioral rules apply; just on a smaller scale.

HOW TO CATCH THEM

Now that you know where to start your search for the biggest bass, you need the right tools. In our experience, the three lures that excel at targeting oversized bass in the prespawn are a soft swimbait, a glide bait and a jig. Knowing when to use each is the last piece of the puzzle.

Soft swimbait – The soft swimbait is the first bait to come into play in early spring. As soon as bass start the shift toward shallower water, they become susceptible to the swimbait. Baits with wedge-style tails and boot tails will work during this period as long as they are large – 6 to 10 inches long.

We catch the most fish by sitting in shallow water and casting a swimbait out

deep along likely secondary points. Let the bait fall all the way to the bottom, and then begin crawling the bait back uphill toward shore. Maintain constant bottom contact, and be ready anytime you feel your bait bump into cover. The biggest fish are ambush feeders and will often sit right against a key piece of structure.

When the bite comes, do not wait to set the hook. The biggest mistake you can make is hesitating. When you feel a clear "tick," set the hook like it's the biggest fish you've ever caught, because it might be.

Glide bait – The glide bait will come into play as the fish move into shallower water. Anything less than 10 to 12 feet deep is prime for a glide bait. We typically use one around visible cover.

A glide bait has a seductive side-to-side swim when retrieved at a steady speed, but the real magic happens when you give the reel handle a couple quick twitches. The bait will dart aggressively from side to side, eliciting a feeding response from any prowling bass. The advantage of the glide bait over the soft swimbait is its ability to "trigger" a feeding response at will.

Jig – Last is the jig. While we all dream about perfect prespawn conditions, the reality is that much of the country will be plagued by heavy storms in the coming weeks. When lakes are inundated with cold, muddy water, the swimbait bite will temporarily end. The less-prepared angler might head for home, but you predicted the changing conditions and are equipped with a jig.

Knowing most of the giant bass choose to hunker in place rather than retreat, the likely locations for a big bass become much smaller in our hypothetical scenario. Every large rock and piece of wood along your favorite secondary points, humps and breaks becomes a perfect target. Take your time, make repeat casts to each piece of cover, and you might be amazed at the size of bass that bite.

Big-bass fishing is a year-round pursuit, but the fish weigh the most in early spring. You can treat this year like any other, or you can begin hunting down the fish you dream of catching. Be strategic, pay attention to how the fish are moving and adjust your presentations to match. You have the ability to catch giant bass; it's time to head to the lake and make it happen. ■



**Trophies are good...
But Cold Hard Cash is Great**



2020 Registration Now Open

Sign up online | Use Berkley Baits | Get some cash!

With Berkley Cast for Cash, it doesn't matter if you are a seasoned pro or a weekend warrior. If you are fishing qualifying tournaments, you can win cash for using Berkley baits!

EXCLUSIVE Berkley Pro Pack with purchase of membership.



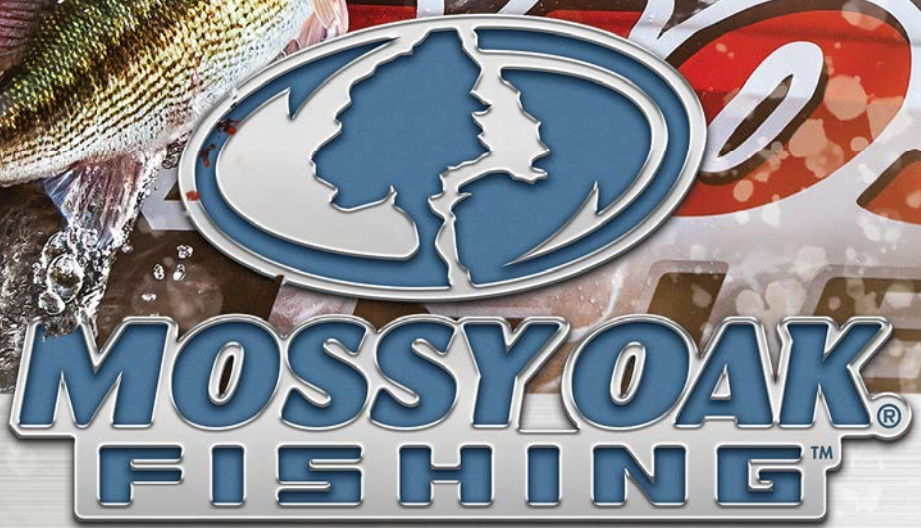
Cast for Cash

www.berkley-fishing.com/CastforCash

©2020 Pure Fishing, Inc.



HUNTING, FISHING
AND OUTDOORS
VIDEO ON YOUR
FAVORITE DEVICE.
ALWAYS FREE.
DOWNLOAD NOW.



**THE OFFICIAL PATTERN OF
TOURNAMENT BASS FISHING**



DIGG



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

ING DITCHES

How two top pros break down these vague yet important structures

By Sean Ostruszka

John Cox needs to look no further than his back yard to see how important ditches can be to bass. Like seemingly everyone in Florida, Cox has a pond in his backyard. And like seemingly every pond in Florida, the one behind Cox's house has giant bass in it.

Cox enjoys fishing for them, of course, but some of the real fun he has is in feeding them. He'll launch a small boat out on the pond and then dangle a bluegill above the water on a string or with his hand. You can imagine the rest.

In doing this, Cox started to notice something about how the bass ate the bluegills, and, more importantly, where he found the bass.

In order to launch his boat, he backs down on a trailer, and with no ramp, it didn't take long for his trailer tires to wear grooves in the soft sand bottom of the pond. The grooves don't look like much; just the width of his trailer tires and only stretching as far as needed to get his boat in the water.

Yet, they're sure something to the bass. "It's amazing how the fish will lie in those ditches," says Cox. "It's like they feel protected, but I also think they use them to ambush bait. I mean, if I hold the bluegill over an area away from the ditches, the bass will come up and look, but they'll rarely attack. You'll just have a couple nose up to it looking. If I dangle that bluegill over a ditch, it's almost guaranteed a bass will come up and eat your whole hand.

"That's how important ditches can be."



JOHN COX

"Whenever I catch a fish up shallow, I'll always make another cast back to the spot, because if that bass came from a ditch, you'll almost always catch another one right away."



TODD FAIRCLOTH

"I always tell people that fish follow the contour of the bottom. I don't care if you're fishing a giant grass flat. The grass is just cover. The fish will still move through it following the bottom."



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Ditches, drains, troughs, depressions – it doesn't really matter what you call them. All that matters is that you understand what they are and their importance when it comes to finding bass.

"Basically, they're veins of deeper water that run into or across a stretch of shallower water, usually on a point or a flat," says MLF Bass Pro Tour pro Todd Faircloth.

That may sound vague, but, in essence, describing ditches has to be vague because of the variety. For instance, a ditch in Florida might be a foot deeper than the rest of the surrounding area. In Texas, it could range from a couple feet to 15 feet deep, particularly if it's coming out of deep water. And, in the Carolinas, Faircloth has seen ditches in excess of 20 feet deep through a flat.

How they're created also differs. Some ditches are formed by years of

runoff from shore. Others are former creek beds. In Florida, a ditch can be created by boats running across a section of flat during a period of low water. Cox even once found a series of ditches in Texas that were created by ATVs when the lake had experienced a low-water period.

"You could actually see on the graph the race track they had created," he says.

No matter the depth or how they're created, ditches are key because they serve as highways for bass.

"I always tell people that fish follow the contour of the bottom," Faircloth explains. "I don't care if you're fishing a giant grass flat. The grass is just cover. The fish will still move through it following the bottom."

And that right there explains why ditches are so important. By finding a ditch, you've found a replenishing highway that bass will move along to get



Sometimes a ditch is as obvious as a void through a grass mat, or a steep drop-off in the middle of a reservoir creek. Other times, they're only subtle depressions.

from one point to another, regardless of the lake. Because of that fact, both pros figure at least 60 percent of tournaments are won on or around ditches, whether the anglers who won realized it or not.

FIRST-DITCH EFFORT

You know ditches are prime, under-realized structures. But how do you find something that might be as narrow as a yardage line on a flat the size of a football field?

According to the pros, it takes a lot of awareness and some trial and error.

Ditches coming out of deep water or on deeper flats can be easier to find thanks to modern electronics. Mapping chips have gotten so precise that some ditches actually appear right in the contour lines if you zoom in enough, but the ones that are usually tournament-winners are the ditches that are not marked. Faircloth admits

these are also the ones he usually finds by accident.

"Oftentimes, while running from one spot to another, I'll only go 40 mph," says Faircloth. "I can get a better reading on my graphs, and I'm always watching them, especially when crossing a flat. Then, if I see a sudden dip and rise, I'll swing the boat around immediately to better understand how it lays out to find the best spot."

Meanwhile, Cox has gotten really good at using his eyes to locate darker troughs of water up shallow, as that is often his first clue. When he won the FLW Tour event at Chickamauga last year, he did so targeting spawning bass in backwaters. Some of the bigger bass were bedding where the water appeared darker due to the depth. These little troughs or depressions have some of the same appeal as an actual ditch.

If his eyes can't spot anything different, Cox will use another tool that's about as simple as they come.

"In practice or on new lakes, you'll see me stick my rod in the water a lot," Cox explains. "I'll just fish around, and every so often I'll check the depth based on how many guides I can see on my rod, especially after I catch a fish. If I can see four guides, but then I suddenly can only see one, I'll perk up because I may have found something different."

And if you can't seem to find a ditch by doing those techniques, just let the fish tell you.

"Whenever I catch a fish up shallow, I'll always make another cast back to the spot, because if that bass came from a ditch, you'll almost always catch another one right away," Cox says. "Once that happens, I start really investigating and trying to figure out the ditch, because I know it's there."

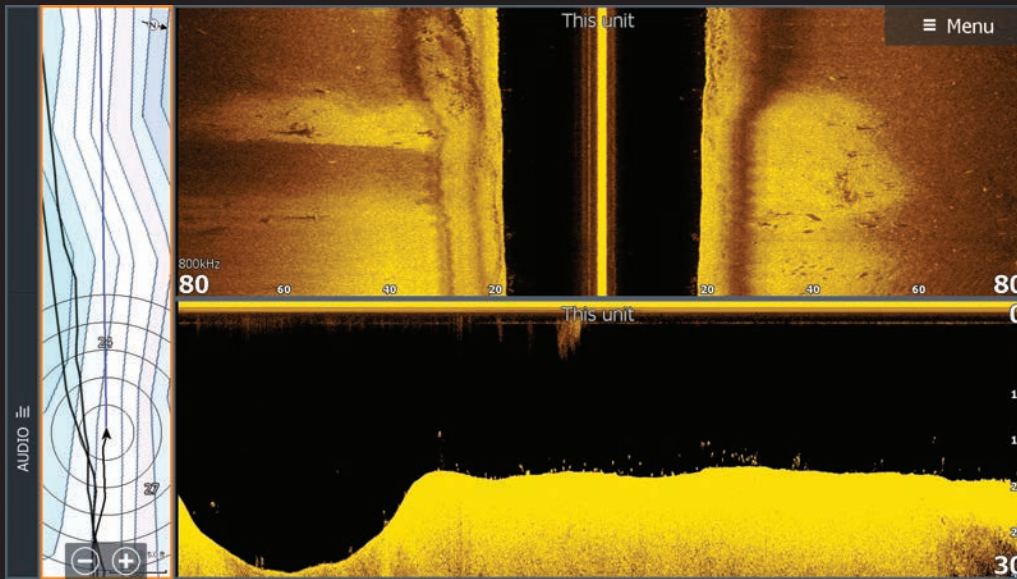


IMAGE COURTESY OF RYAN SALZMAN



Electronics reveal many ditches. Some are subtle, but others are obvious, like this one that drops off about 5 feet. Notice the bass set up on the top edge of the ditch.

FINDING THE JUICE

Regardless of whether a ditch is 10 feet long or a mile long, straighter than an arrow or with more turns than a mystery novel, every ditch has a prime spot on it.

“There’s usually a sweet spot or one cast that is the best cast,” says Faircloth. “And it’s usually something subtle; a slight turn or a hard spot or a piece of wood – something. But when you find it, it’s the juice.”

A prime example is a ditch Faircloth has been fishing since he was a teenager. The ditch is on a popular flat, but as it runs, it makes a slight dogleg left. It just so happens there’s a high spot right in the turn. Almost any time of year, Faircloth knows he can go to that spot and catch fish. During certain times of year, he can win tournaments there.

Cox has similar stories about finding subtle places along ditches where he can catch fish by making “the cast.”

“Once I find a ditch, I’m always going to be looking for ‘the cast,’” says Cox. “And it may change day to day. Sometimes it’s casting right down the ditch. Sometimes across. You play with it.

“The main thing is finding those little subtle things. I know that’s a lot, because ditches are hard to find on their own, but when you find the subtleties along these subtle structures, that’s when you really have something special.” ■



TODD FAIRCLOTH

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



JOHN COX

PHOTO BY LOOY WHITE



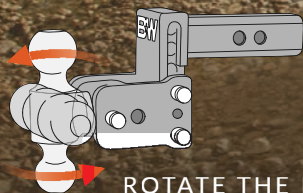
TOW & STOW[®]

THE ULTIMATE HITCH FOR EVERY ANGLER

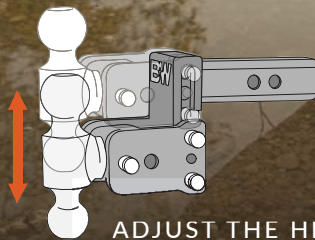
BWTrailerHitches.com



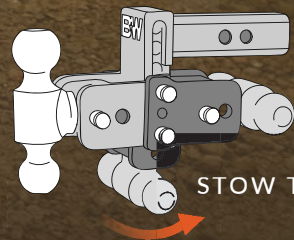
#TowingAdventure



ROTATE THE BALL

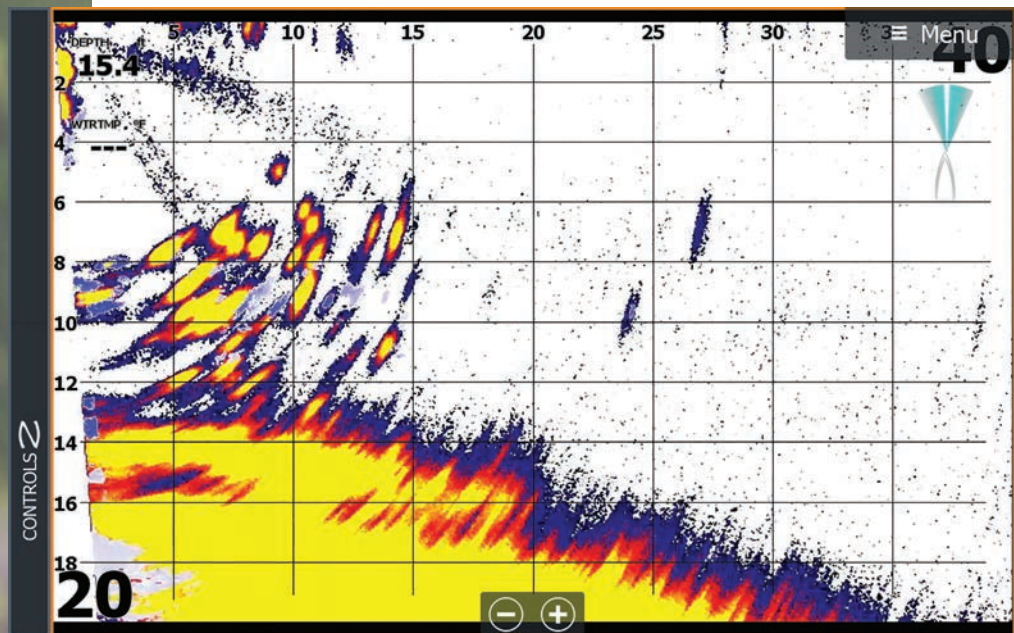


ADJUST THE HEIGHT



STOW THE HITCH





Getting to Know Lowrance LiveSight

How to set up and get the most out of the electronics giant's forward-looking, real-time sonar

By Tyler Brinks

Marine electronics continue to get better as more technologies are developed and implemented in modern fish-finding units. Moving from standard 2-D sonar to side-viewing sonar was the first wave, followed by high-definition down-looking sonar. Now, forward-looking sonar such as Lowrance LiveSight has arrived, and it's here to stay.

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE

WHAT IT DOES

LiveSight allows anglers to see what's happening live on their screen. Instead of standard sonar readings that ping downward and create an image based on the size and shape of objects below, LiveSight shows what's happening in real time. This makes it easier to view underwater movement and adds the ability to see what's in front of the boat.

Plus, with the option to pan in different directions by turning the trolling motor – the transducer is typically attached to the trolling motor's lower unit – the new technology allows anglers to see everything that's happening around them, in front of and below the boat. There are many benefits to this technology, but one of the most practical is the ability to see exactly where fish are in relation to the bottom or pieces of structure and cover. With that comes the ability to also view the reactions of fish to the lures you're offering.

HARDWARE AND EQUIPMENT

The newest version of Lowrance's HDS lineup is the HDS LIVE, which the company developed with the LiveSight transducer in mind. If you have that unit, it's as simple as mounting the transducer to your trolling motor and plugging it in. If you're running the previous version, the HDS Carbon, you'll need the Performance Sonar Interface from Lowrance.

The LiveSight transducer can be mounted in two different ways: forward-looking mode and down-looking mode. The forward-facing option is adjusted at an offset angle and is best suited for bow-mounted trolling motors. This option allows the user to see what's below and in front of the boat.

The second method is designed to be attached to the transom, below a trolling motor or thru-hull. Mounting it this way will show what's below the boat.

INSTALLING LIVESIGHT

Installing the LiveSight transducer is easy. Use two hose clamps to attach it to the trolling motor, then secure the cable around the trolling motor shaft with zip ties or electrical tape.

MLF Bass Pro Tour pro Luke Clausen was one of the first to learn

about the new product and was also one of the first to install LiveSight on his boat. He mounted a prototype version on an aluminum boat that he uses to fish around his house, and spent countless hours on the water learning the intricacies of this new technology.

Clausen estimates the install portion took 10 minutes, but the placement of the transducer on the trolling motor shaft was the most crucial part of the process. It took a little trial and error for him to get it right.

"You have to find the balance on your specific boat and trolling motor shaft to put it in the right spot," he says. "If it is mounted too high, it will not get the best picture. And when fishing rough water, it will come out of the water, and you won't be able to see anything at all.

"If it is mounted too low, the sonar cone will hit the top of the trolling motor, and you will see a line on your screen," he adds. "Another thing to consider is the shape of the trolling motor head, as they are all a little bit different depending on the brand and how old they are."

SETTING IT UP

LiveSight and all the Lowrance technologies come from the factory with default settings in place, but adjusting settings can help users get the best performance for specific conditions.

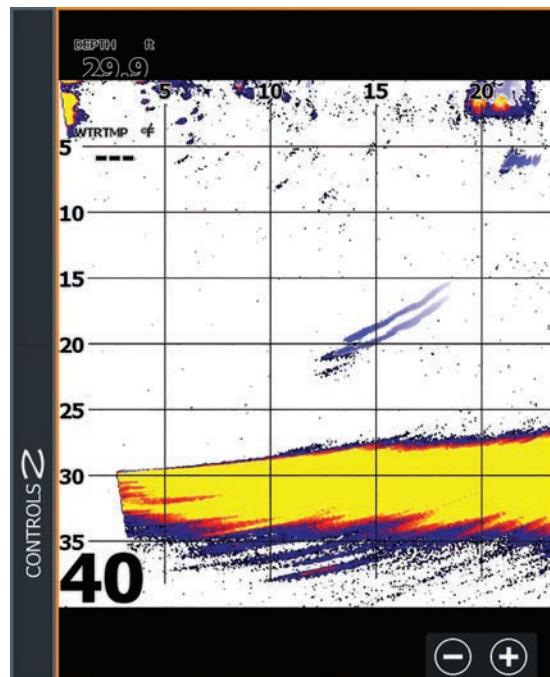
The first adjustment to make is changing the user mode from "auto" to "custom." From there, the significant adjustments you can make are forward/cross range, down range, sensitivity, surface clarity and noise rejection.

Cross Range

Cross range is also called forward range and is simply the distance forward that is shown on the screen. It's only available when in the forward-looking mode. Clausen sets cross range at 40 feet, which keeps the screen compact and stays within easy casting distance.

Down Range

Down range is the same setting as "range" on DownScan and 2-D sonar. The automatic setting is generally best and quickly adjusts for depth changes.



Sensitivity

The sensitivity setting ranges from zero to 100 percent. Clausen feels it's best to keep it high – about 95 percent – to make sure he doesn't miss something on his screen.

Surface Clarity

All of Lowrance's electronics have a surface clarity setting that helps to clear the top portion of the screen. Clausen adjusts it based on the conditions.

"I keep it set at medium most often, but in some instances I will set it to high," he explains. "That could be when there is pollen on the surface or if there is a heavy algae bloom."

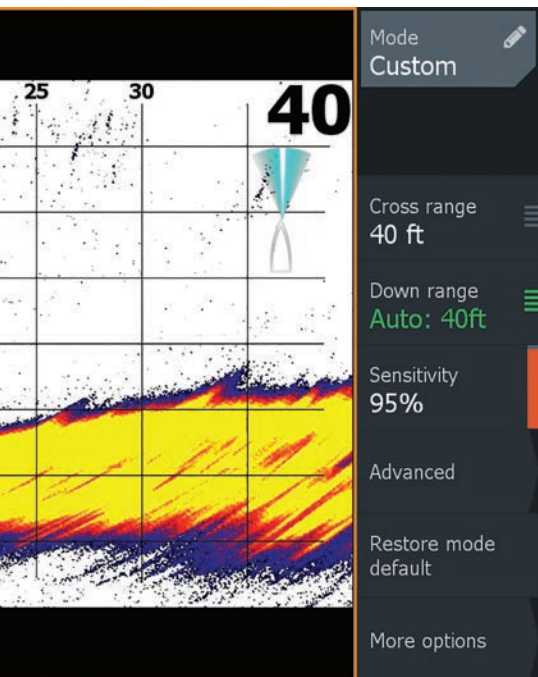
Noise Rejection

Noise rejection can reduce some of the clutter on the screen, but with it comes less sensitivity. It can be set at off, low, medium or high. Clausen prefers to keep it off for LiveSight – and all other sonar for that matter.

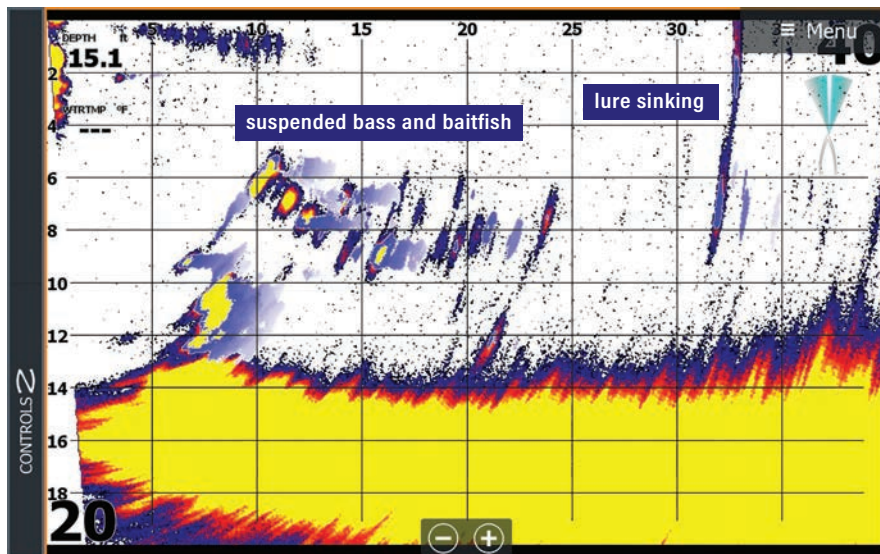
ADDITIONAL SETTINGS

Other ways to customize your settings include adjusting the color palette, adding a range grid and enabling target trails.

There are five color palette options. Two are "sonar style" palettes with white and black backgrounds that were developed for seeing fish moving in



Left: This image shows most of Clausen's preferred LiveSight settings. Below: This image shows a typical fishing scenario.



real-time, tracking lures and seeing how fish respond to your bait. The other three options are “structure style” and better for seeing structure details. Generally, however, color palette adjustments come down to personal preference and light conditions. It's best to experiment with it to find what works for you.

Clausen feels like the range grid is a must-have. He'll add it as an overlay grid that shows a series of lines and the corresponding distances. The grid helps him quickly determine the distance of fish and structure he sees on LiveSight.

The target trails setting (see below), when enabled, creates an afterglow on moving targets, somewhat like a vapor trail, that reduces in

intensity with time. It makes it easier to see the real-time movement of both bass and your lure.

THE LEARNING CURVE

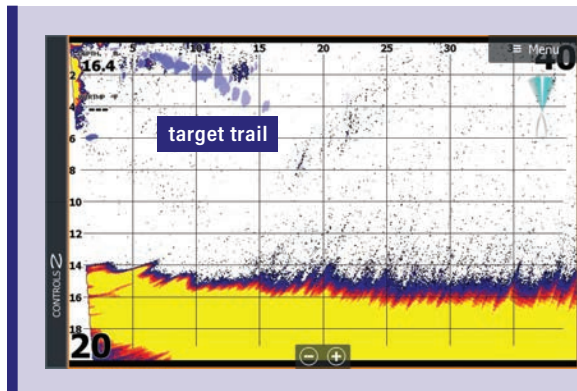
Like any new technology, there is a learning curve to begin to understand precisely what you're seeing. If you're comfortable interpreting what's shown on existing Lowrance technologies such as 2-D, StructureScan and DownScan, the process of learning LiveSight will be faster.

One of the steps is learning to gauge distance in front of the boat to make targeted presentations to what you see on the screen. The easiest way is to make short 10-, 20- and 30-foot casts and view your lure on the screen. Or try setting up in front of a

large stationary object such as a bridge piling and gauging the distance on the screen. The piling also helps to get a feel for the direction of the target, particularly if your trolling motor head doesn't have a directional arrow showing which way the lower unit and transducer are pointed.

Besides gauging distance and knowing where the transducer is pointing, the process of learning LiveSight is direct and can be understood in a few dedicated training trips. But like all parts of marine electronics, the more time you put into it, the greater the potential reward.

And with LiveSight, the ability to look in front and below the boat in real time will be a game changer in the way many anglers fish.



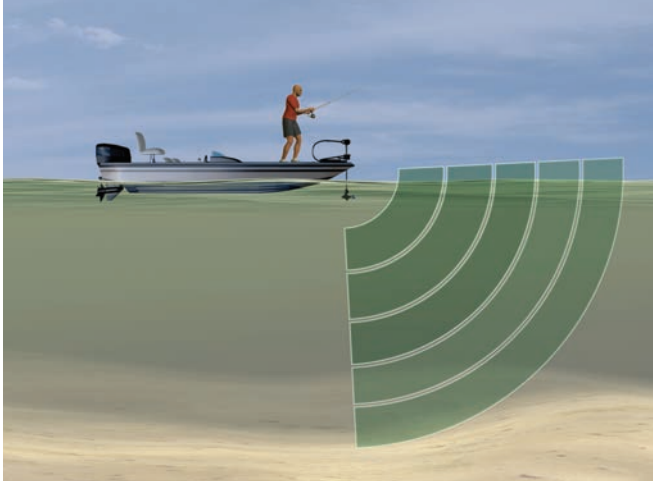
FISHING MOVING BAITS AND SUSPENDED BASS

When working a reaction bait such as a jerkbait directly in front of the boat, it's easy to see the lure in action. A blue trail (the target trail shown left) shows up behind the bait with each jerk of the rod.

Besides just seeing the lure work through the water, you can also see if fish are moving up to strike based on their target trail. If they rise toward the bait but do not commit, that could give you a clue that you need to change lure color, diving depth, the way you retrieve or shift lure type completely.

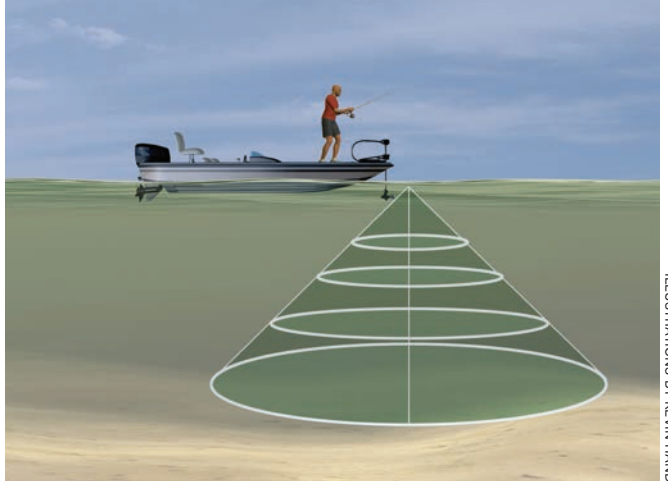
LOOKING AHEAD

In forward-looking mode, which will be the primary choice for bass anglers, the transducer signal projects out and down in front of the boat, covering about 90 degrees vertically and 40 degrees horizontally.

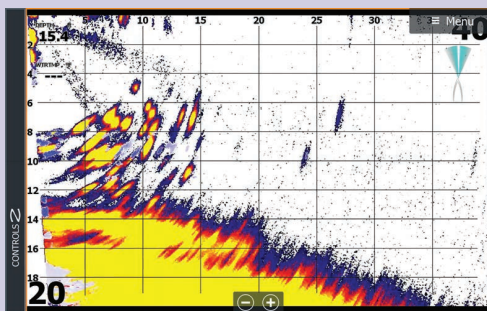


LOOKING DOWN

In down-looking mode, the transducer signal operates like the traditional sonar "cone," with a 90-degree front-to-back signal angle and 40 degrees side to side.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN HAND



LOCATING TARGETS

Like bass, anglers are always looking for a target to fish. It might be a school of baitfish or stationary target such as a brush pile or grass edge. "Swishing" the trolling motor back and forth while watching the LiveSight screen can help dial in for a perfect cast. ■

GHOST

LOWRANCE EST. 1957



QUIET BY NAME. **POWERFUL** BY DESIGN.

LOWRANCE

WWW.LOWRANCE.COM



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

EVERS' GREATEST ACT

By Joe Shangle

Oklahoma pro overcame incredible challenges – on and off the water – during career year in 2019

It's a question that causes MLF pro Edwin Evers to pause for a few beats before answering: **"Was 2019 your best season ever?"**

Considering a 22-year career that includes 13 major wins and more than \$3.6 million in tournament winnings – including one nine-month period from 2015 to 2016 during which he won two tour-level events, a major championship and more than a half-million dollars – the Oklahoman's hesitation is understandable.

"You know what?" Evers eventually answers. "Yes. I'd have to say that it was. 2019 was different than all the others for a lot of reasons, but I think it was my best year as a pro. It was definitely the most memorable."



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

EVERS UNSTOPPABLE

Viewed strictly by the numbers, Evers' 2019 campaign on the Bass Pro Tour was indeed one of the most impressive seasons in bass fishing history. He won a regular-season event, claimed the league's points (AOY) title and finished the year with a runaway win in REDCREST, the league's championship event (banking \$493,000 along the way).

He started the season with four consecutive top 10s, going second, first, fourth and seventh in events on the Kissimmee Chain, Lake Conroe, the lakes around Raleigh, N.C., and Lake Chickamauga, respectively – an average finish of fourth place. That was perhaps the greatest first half of a season in modern bass-fishing history.

Better, at least at the start, than in Denny Brauer's "season for the ages" in 1998 in which he won four

events but started with a 115th-place finish in the FLW season opener. Better than Kevin VanDam's other-worldly 2005 season, in which he finished the year with seven top 10s but finished 98th and 74th in the first two events.

"When somebody gets rolling like that, it's just a case of having a super, super high confidence level – you just know that you're going to catch them at your next spot," Evers says. "I don't know that you're aware of top 10s, but when you're fishing good, even if you make a mistake, you know you're going to overcome it. It's pretty hard to say 'I planned it that way,' because things usually don't go as planned. Most of the time you're 50/50 at best. The 2019 season was just a year that my 50/50 happened to be all the right decisions."

"What we witnessed with the first half of Edwin's 2019 season was truly

a once-in-a-lifetime moment in sports," says MLF analyst Marty Stone, who fished against Evers for several years on the Bassmaster Elite Series. "Here was a guy who was absolutely at the top of his game mentally and physically, with the maturity to understand and make the right decisions. That first half of the season, Edwin was almost flawless."

EXCELLENCE IN ADVERSITY

"If I don't answer right when you call, I'll call you right back. I'll probably be up on a ladder, working on the house," Evers tells a writer.

"Working on the house" is something he and his family – wife Tuesday, daughter Kylee and son Kade – have done a lot of since May 1, 2019, when a tornado ripped through northeast Oklahoma, taking the roof of Evers' house with it. Edwin



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

“There really wasn’t much I could do. Our family and friends had everything handled, and they just insisted that I go back and keep fishing.”

was competing in the Elimination Round of the Bass Pro Tour event on Smith Lake, Ala., at the time, and found out about the damage while running his boat to the launch after the competition day. Immediately after putting his boat on the trailer, Edwin started the 10-hour drive from Cullman, Ala., to his home in Talala, Okla.

He was quickly waved off by his wife and mother-in-law.

“There really wasn’t much I could do,” Edwin admits. “Our family and friends had everything handled, and they just insisted that I go back and keep fishing.”

He returned to Cullman to finish out the event, eventually finishing 16th. For the next two months, as torrential rains continued to soak the Sooner State, Edwin split his time between racing to save his home and fishing three more

Bass Pro Tour events in Missouri and Wisconsin.

The Evers’ home eventually succumbed to weather damage, resulting in a 100-percent loss and causing them to start construction on a brand-new house from the ground up, while living on the property in an RV.

Through it all, Edwin quietly went about the business of catching fish, sewing up the Bass Pro Tour Points Championship and following that up with a mind-boggling 45-pound victory in the final round of REDCREST.

“I’ve never seen anything quite like what Edwin did in 2019,” says Bass Fishing Hall of Famer Shaw Grigsby. “To be as good as he was, with all the things going on with his home – trying to just deal with ‘life’ things of losing a home – was pretty amazing. If anyone has shown that he’s ready to compete no matter what, it’s Edwin. I don’t think any of us were surprised.”

CONTINUING THE STRING OF SUCCESS

As Grigsby alludes, Evers' transcendent success in 2019 shouldn't have come as a shock to anyone.

The Mercury pro has fished almost exclusively at the highest tour levels in the sport since 2013 (he fished two B.A.S.S. Opens in 2014), dedicating himself instead to his organizations' highest-level tournaments. In that seven-season span from 2013 through 2019, Evers has collected the most wins (six) in competitions contested at those levels, has taken home two of the three major championships (REDCREST and the Bassmaster Classic) and has banked just shy of \$1.8 million in winnings (also the most of any tour-level pro in that time).

"I think you'd have to say that Edwin has been 'The Man' for the past several years," observes MLF pro Boyd Duckett. "One thing I can say for sure: If you let Edwin hang around and hang around in any event on any fishery, he's going to figure it out. That's one thing he does as good as anybody: He will find a way to win."

Per usual, the difference in good and great lies in the mental side of competitive bass fishing – confidence, decision making, the ability to deal with pressure. And all the

pundits agree: As physically gifted as Evers is as a bass angler, it's his psychological approach to the game that sets him apart.

"He's driven to perform in a different way than most people," adds Gary Klein, a 40-year veteran of pro bass fishing who's witnessed the best to ever compete. "I've spent a lot of time with Edwin over the years – he's been to my ranch, we've hunted together – and I've seen in him that he's always searching. He's never satisfied with less than his best.

"I'm sure you've heard this time and again, but Edwin has something in him that doesn't allow him to settle for less than his best. I know a lot of really good fishermen who will never be great – not because they don't have the ability, but because they lack the understanding of the effort and focus it takes to perform so well one season after another. Edwin is just never, ever happy with second place. If he's not at the top of the heap, he leaves the event thinking of ways to be better the next time."

PICKING BACK UP IN 2020

Thanks to Mother Nature, this season's prep has looked a little different than in years past.

"My boat shop has been taken over by clothes and furniture," Evers

says about his preparation for the 2020 season. "I'm a little in disarray. I mean, we're trying to build a house here, and it's a long ways from being done."

The months leading up to the 2020 season encompassed far and away Evers' busiest offseason ever. In addition to construction of the new house, the longtime pecan farmer also had a longer-than-usual pecan harvest due to residual water from the year's flooding. And the speaking, appearance and media requests, which Evers accommodated at a yeoman's pace, were higher than he'd ever experienced in his two-decade career.

Whether he's able to match his scorching early season pace from 2019 is yet to be seen, but the eight-event 2020 Bass Pro Tour regular season includes three fisheries (Lake Eufaula, Grand Lake and the St. Lawrence River) where Evers has won before, and one fishery (Lake Winnebago) where he enjoyed "the best day of smallmouth fishing of my entire life."

"I have a lot to be thankful for after last season, but my mind is on 2020," Evers says. "I'm excited about it. It's a great schedule, and the way we fish [in the MLF format] is as tough as anybody could ever imagine." ■



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

"I have a lot to be thankful for after last season, but my mind is on 2020."

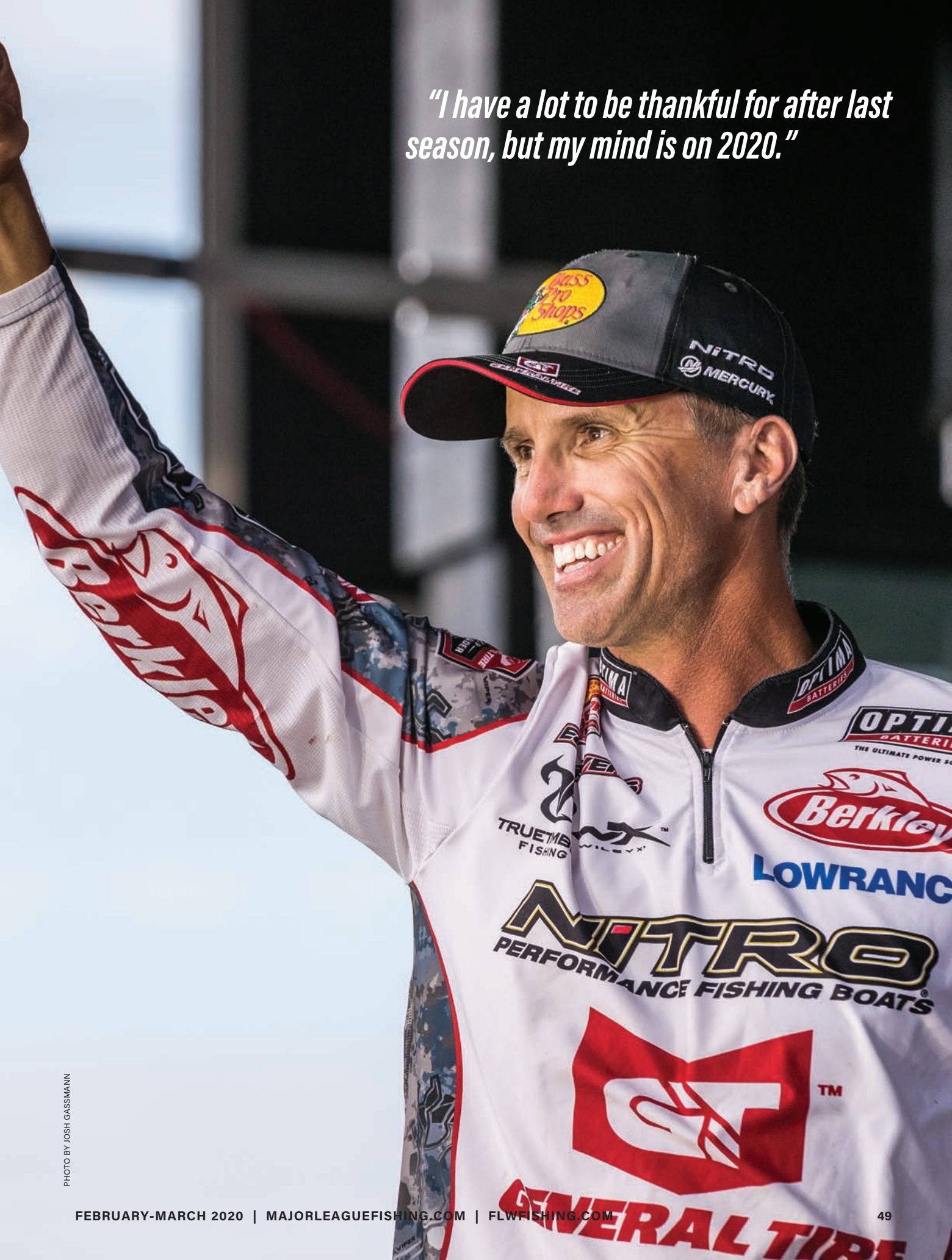



PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMANN

The East Tennessee

Fishing Show & Expo

JANUARY 21ST-24TH 2021
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

250+ VENDORS
FROM ALL ACROSS THE U.S.

ANGLER SEMINARS
FROM SOME OF THE TOP PROFESSIONALS

EVERYTHING FISHING
THE LATEST IN FISHING GEAR & MORE



DO YOU HAVE THE NEXT BIGGEST FISHING PRODUCT?

BRING IT!!!

WE ARE NOW ACCEPTING VENDORS FOR THE 2021 SHOW

WE BRING TOGETHER THE LARGEST SELECTION OF CUSTOM TACKLE, RODS, REELS, BOATS, APPAREL ELECTRONICS
AND EVERYTHING A FISHERMAN OR OUTDOORSMAN NEEDS!

- MORE INFORMATION -

PHONE: 865-801-1832

EASTTNFISHINGSHOW.COM

INFO@EASTTNFISHINGSHOW.COM



ONE. MORE. CAST.

*your springtime
jig arsenal*



Gary
YAMAMOTO
Custom Baits



OFFICIAL SPONSOR



www.baits.com



ATLAS AWARDS 2020

It's time to join the T-H Marine ATLAS AWARDS™ for the 2020 tournament season. Compete and win money just for having T-H Marine parts on your boat!

ONE YEAR MEMBERSHIP

\$29⁹⁹

1/1/2020 - 12/31/2020

A CHANCE TO WIN

\$1,180 CASH

OR

\$2,800 STORE CREDIT



Join now: thmarine.com/atlasawardsFLW



SOUTHERN-FRIED BEDDING BRONZE

Where to look when
Southern smallmouths
head to spawn

By Sean Ostruszka

Any time a tournament is a spawning beatdown, it's bound to get anglers' attention. Well, the 2019 FLW Tour event on Cherokee Lake certainly got the sport's attention, and perhaps in a way like no tournament before.

Sure, the weather conditions lined up perfectly, pushing waves of egg-laden bass to the bank, and the pros commenced a full-on blitzkrieg assault. At times, anglers were catching bass off beds like they were bluegills.

There's one catch that made this event unlike any before it, though: The pros weren't sight-fishing largemouths, as one might expect on a Southern reservoir. They were focused solely on spawning smallmouths.

That's not to say spawning smallmouths haven't come into play on Southern reservoirs before. Many tournaments in the Ozarks, Tennessee and Kentucky have seen anglers contend in tournaments by either focusing on, or at least supplementing, their bags with bedding brown fish. But those anglers were almost always in the minority. The sport simply hadn't seen spawning smallmouths come into play on a Southern reservoir on such a scale as this before. On Northern fisheries, sure. But not in the South.

Yet, as Cherokee exposed, many Southern reservoirs have some healthy smallmouth populations, and when conditions line up for the spawn, bronze bass can be tournament winners. And even if you're not fishing tournaments ...

"When the smallmouth go on beds and you can find them, it can get really, really fun," says MLF Bass Pro Tour pro Ott DeFoe.

The finding them part is the catch. So, here's where to look.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN DEFOE



UNDERSTANDING BRONZE SPAWNS

Because the vast majority of bed-fishing in the South is centered on largemouths, you're forgiven if you're not an expert in the ways of smallmouth bass during the spawn. And even if you are a Northern smallmouth expert, there are some distinct differences in how brown fish in the two regions do their thing.

"First off, smallmouth tend to spawn earlier than largemouth," says DeFoe. "And they can often be a lot more predictable. For instance, around where I live in Tennessee, they almost always spawn the second week of April every year. It's like clockwork."

If you're not as dialed in calendar-wise, water temperature is the best indicator. The "magic" temperature, according to Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit angler Derrick Snavelly, is 57 degrees.

"They'll really start spawning around 60 degrees, but often the really big ones move up first right when the water temperature hits 57 degrees," says Snavelly, who lived on Cherokee for a decade. "That's when you'll see those 5- and 6-pounders go to the bed. Then, the rest go soon after that."

Once they decide to go to spawn, they all seem to go at once.

"The big girls will all be out suspended, waiting for the temperature to get right, which is where that prespawn swimbait and jerkbait bite can be so good," says Snavelly. "The smaller males might get on the bank a bit earlier. But once it hits that number, I think the males go out and corral the females to the bank, and they do it quick."

There's one other key caveat to the smallmouth spawn compared to the largemouth: Smallmouth bass spawn deeper. They might be 5 feet or 15 feet, but it's deeper than a largemouth goes. Considering even the clearest Southern reservoirs often pale in comparison to the clarity of Northern natural lakes (plus the constant water-level fluctuations come spring), the odds of you actually catching a

glimpse of a smallmouth or even a bed are remote. Instead, to bed-fish for spawning smallmouths, you'll be doing it blind.

ROCK = GOOD

OK, you're on a lake like Cherokee or Dale Hollow and the water temp is right around 60 degrees. What next?

The obvious and easiest answer is to find rock, which really isn't hard on either fishery. But just like some sections of a weed bed can be better than others, not every stretch of rock is the same. You need to whittle down the options.

First and foremost, smallmouths in Southern reservoirs tend to seek out spawning spots that are out of the current and even out of wave action from wind and/or boats. Look for these areas first, and don't worry so much about depth to start.



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA



According to FLW pro Derrick Snavely, the biggest smallies start to move up when the water temperature reaches 57 degrees.



DERRICK SNAVELY



V&M J-Mag Worm on a BOSS Shakey Jig Head

Zoom UV Speed Craw

V&M Pork Pin on a BOSS Screw Cap Head

V&M Drop Shad

Zoom Super Fluke



OTT DEFOE



Bass Pro Shops Stik-O on a VMC Rugby Head

Rapala BX Waking Minnow

Bass Pro Shops Speed Shad

“THE BIG GIRLS WILL ALL BE OUT SUSPENDED, WAITING FOR THE TEMPERATURE TO GET RIGHT, WHICH IS WHERE THAT PRESPAWN SWIM-BAIT AND JERKBAIT BITE CAN BE SO GOOD.”

— Derrick Snavely

Creek arms are obvious starting points, and from there, both pros will start trying to dial in on the type of rock.

“A mix of pea gravel and golf-ball-sized rock is usually ideal,” says Snavely. “Maybe it has some clay and sand mixed in, but that smaller chunk rock is usually on the best spots.”

“Some of the lakes I fish have a black shell rock that, when you can find it, is always a great spot for a spawning smallmouth, especially if it has a large boulder or piece of cover near it. Whether it’s on a giant flat or on a small 45-degree bank, if there is a larger piece of cover nearby, you’re almost guaranteed to have a smallmouth on it.”

Both pros will often pick a prime-looking pocket and, starting out on the point, fish their way in with various baits. Snavely likes a Carolina rig with a Zoom UV Speed Craw or a Zoom

Super Fluke, while DeFoe is partial to a Rapala BX Balsa Waking Minnow or a Bass Pro Shops 3.8-inch Speed Shad swimbait on a 1/4-ounce jighead. Ultimately, the goal is to simply cover water, relying on the moving lures to illicit bites from aggressive smallmouths on beds, thus giving away their hidden locations.

Try not to focus too much on the bank’s topography, as doing so may cause you to miss some opportunities.

“Many guys are used to looking for those flatter banks, but smallmouth don’t really care about that as much,” says Snavely. “There are some vertical banks on Dale Hollow that have small stairsteps. They’ll often spawn on those tiny, vertical stairs if they have the right ingredients, and those are fish most guys will miss. Even fishing their way into a pocket, they’ll just skip over casting there.”



Once he catches a spawning smallie, Ott DeFoe swaps to finesse gear to milk more fish from the area.



MILK THE SPOT

Once you get a bite, whether or not you hook up, it's time for phase two: mop-up time.

"Once I get a bite, I immediately pick up a drop-shot or a Ned rig and fire right back to where I had the bite," says DeFoe. "Smallmouth are so aggressive when they get on beds that fish will come back and eat that small offering almost every time."

Here's where many anglers make another crucial mistake. After catching that fish, they'll get back on the trolling motor and continue working down the bank.

Don't do that.

"If there's one smallmouth on a bed, there's probably more there," says Snively. "So once I catch one, I'll sit in the same spot and cast around. Often, I'll catch three, four or five more fish without moving the boat. Sometimes you can catch as many as 15 without moving the boat very far."

And even once you think you've fished out a spot, you might not have. Be patient.

"I can't tell you how many times I was burned by this when I first really started targeting them," says Snively. "I'd catch a few and then the bite would go dead. So I'd leave, only for some guy to come in a little while

later and tear them up in the same exact spot.

"Smallmouth move up so quickly that many times the same spot will replenish, and quickly."

That's why DeFoe will often fish his way into a pocket, and if he locates an area with spawning smallmouths, he'll turn the boat around and fish his way out, making sure to go down the same stretch. The tactic not only allows the spot to potentially replenish, but it also presents his lures at different angles, allowing him to hit spots he might have missed on the first pass.

From there, it's rinse and repeat. Maybe the smallmouths in a given lake will be on those gravel flats, or perhaps on 45-degree chunk rock banks. Regardless, once you have an idea of what they're on, you should be able to replicate it throughout the lake when you find the right ingredients.

"Smallmouth are so aggressive when they get on beds and can be so predictable when you know what to look for; it's just a fun way to fish for them," says DeFoe. "The only problem is it's usually only a two-week window."

But, as the 2019 Cherokee event showed, inside those two weeks, the bronze fishing can rival that of anything up north. ■

THE FISHERIES

Before searching for bedding smallmouths on a Southern lake, it's best to pick the right lake. After all, while many Southern reservoirs have smallmouths in them, some are much more prolific smallmouth fisheries. So, real quick, here are some of the better Southern smallmouth fisheries.

- Dale Hollow (Ky. and Tenn.)
- Cherokee Lake (Tenn.)
- Fort Loudoun-Tellico (Tenn.)
- Watts Barr (Tenn.)
- Wilson Lake (Ala.)
- Beaver Lake (Ark.)
- Table Rock (Mo.)

We'd be remiss to not mention Pickwick Lake, too, as it's notorious for having some truly giant smallmouths in it. In fact, you might not have realized that four of the five largest state-record smallmouths have come from Southern fisheries.

Here are the top five:

1. Kentucky/Tennessee - 11-15 (Dale Hollow)
2. Alabama - 10-8 (Wheeler Dam tailwater)
3. North Carolina - 10-0 (Hiwassee Reservoir)
4. Ohio - 9-8 (Lake Erie)
5. South Carolina - 9-7 (Lake Jocassee)

LEW'S CUSTOM SPEED STICKS

COME THROUGH IN THE CLUTCH

CUSTOM SPEED STICKS \$149⁹⁹_{MSRP}



Featuring a G Clutch™ Handle System with Midas Touch™ technology – which allows direct contact with blank and zero barriers between the angler and the blank.



WWW.LEWWS.COM

GET READY FOR POWER THAT LASTS ALL DAY.

The new Power-Pole CHARGE is here. The first marine power management station that gives you the power to continually charge your batteries for a longer day on the water. The CHARGE does the work of three devices — a traditional battery charger, a charge-on-the-run and an emergency start system — all in one compact unit. CHARGE monitors power use and puts power where it's needed most — a feat no other battery-charger system can accomplish.

For complete details go to power-pole.com. Available now.

POWER-POLE®

CHARGE
MARINE POWER MANAGEMENT

powered by **C-MONSTER**
CONTROL SYSTEM 302



THE JUICE

TACKLE, TOURNAMENTS & TIPS

PHOTO BY JUSTIN ONSLOW

By Justin Onslow

Technological advancements in the bass fishing industry come in waves. Some are immediate. Others, like the advancements in the way fishing line is designed and produced, are slow and steady, pushing techniques and tackle into new eras over the course of years, or even decades.

Count rod design among the latter, though, not so curiously, technological advancements in fishing line and rod design have gone somewhat hand-in-hand.

Even a decade ago, monofilament fishing line still had a massive market share in the bass fishing industry. Being a high-stretch option, mono was the reason many anglers preferred rods with ample backbone and fast tips to drive hooksets home and keep fish pinned all the way to the boat. With high-stretch mono, heavier rods with faster actions made sense for a lot more techniques.

Now, with low-stretch fluorocarbon and braided line the overwhelming favorites for most tournament anglers' preferred techniques – an arsenal that grows with the ever-expanding lure market – technology and design elements of fishing rods have seen massive leaps in recent years, and the popularity and availability of myriad specialty rods is the result. Specialty rods have been around for a long time, but the market seems to now be flooded with models in every combination of length, power and action an angler could want.

"We've kind of learned over the last 10 or 15 years that with less stretch in your line and sharper hooks, you can get away with not having a stiffer rod," says the MLF Bass Pro Tour's Justin Atkins. "If you have a rod that has a lot of tip that loads up into that solid back wall, it drives that hook home. Your catch ratio goes way up, and your break-off ratio goes way down. It's a more efficient system."

Paired with the fact that rod-making technology has improved through the years, and with it the ability for companies to produce those rods at a smaller cost to customers, the options are almost literally endless when it comes to optimizing rod choices for each individual technique.

Gone are the days of carrying one rod model for half the lures in your boat.

MAKING SPECIALTY



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUJIRA

ALEX DAVIS' SWIMBAIT SECRET WEAPON

Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit veteran Alex Davis is part of Shimano's pro-staff, and he's played a big role in helping the company design rods that are perfect for some of the favorite techniques he employs. Among them is a Shimano Expride casting rod Davis exclusively turns to for throwing medium and large swimbaits in open water.

"It's a 7-7, so a little bit extra length for longer casts, and that rod's actually parabolic so you don't lose as many fish," he explains. "It's not like your traditional 80 percent backbone and 20 percent tip. You lose less fish with it."

Davis will often use a 7-foot, 2-inch fiberglass rod for some of those same swimbaits if he's fishing around grass – allowing him to more easily pop and twitch his rod tip to rip baits through the grass – but that specially designed Expride is his go-to for throwing a swimbait offshore around rock, ledges, brush and just about anything else not green and growing.

GETTING A CASE FOR QUALITY RODS

PHOTO BY PHOENIX MOORE



BRENT EHRLER'S FIBERGLASS CHATTERBAIT ROD

For MLF pro Brent Ehrler, there's only one way to go when it comes to throwing a ChatterBait.

"A lot of people don't realize that it's better to throw a glass rod when fishing a ChatterBait," he says. "You land more fish. People throw it on a graphite rod, and you miss or don't land fish because you're too quick to the punch. With a glass rod, it absorbs a lot of that strike, so you have more of a delayed response to setting the hook on the fish."

Ehrler's ChatterBait rod of choice is an offering from Daiwa – a 7-foot, 4-inch Tatula Elite Crankin'/Bladed Jig model that Ehrler himself helped design. It's a medium-heavy rod with parabolic action that allows the rod to bend deep into the blank to load up on the hookset and keep fish buttoned.

Ehrler was also very specific about grip length – 15 1/4 inches – when he was offering his design advice.

"Sometimes people make a grip length too long, which is great for reeling," he says. "You get that good leverage where you can put the butt of the rod in your ribs and get good leverage on the fish, but it's not good for skipping and target casting. I have that good balance between casting length, but leverage length as well. It's that happy medium."

As the rod description suggests, Ehrler will also use his ChatterBait rod for throwing small and medium-sized square-bill crankbaits, but you won't ever catch him throwing a ChatterBait on anything but his fiberglass Tatula Elite.

PHOTO BY JOSH GASSMAN



JUSTIN ATKINS' DROP-SHOT SPECIAL

When it comes to dropping straight down on fish below the boat, Atkins turns to one very specific rod that he doesn't really use for much else: a 6-foot, 10-inch, medium-light Abu Garcia Fantasista Premier spinning rod. He'll use the same (though slightly longer) model in a medium power for regular drop-shot applications, but the medium-light gets the call for one thing in particular.

"If I'm trying to drop on fish I'm seeing on my Humminbirds, I'm going to drop straight on those, and that's the rod I'm going to use," he says. "I like to pick up and feel those fish a little bit before I set the hook. That limber rod has a lot of tip. I can pick up and feel those fish without putting much pressure on them and then set the hook into them."

Turning to a medium-light rod also provides the added benefit of allowing Atkins to play those fish a little more easily when hooked, especially considering how little line is often out at the time of the hookset.

"Even though you're dropping straight down on them, if you're in 35 feet of water, that's not but 35 feet of line," he adds. "That's close to the boat if you're talking about a cast. I feel like having that rod that has some more play to it keeps you from breaking them off. Any time you're in close combat, a rod that has a little give is always good."



PHOTO BY JUSTIN ONSLOW

RYAN SALZMAN'S ONE-TWO PUNCH

Like Davis, Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit pro Ryan Salzman has a long, heavy-power rod he loves for throwing swimbaits: a 7-foot, 8-inch Cinister Rodz model with moderate to moderate-fast action and a ton of parabolic bend.

"It's really moderate, but it's still got a fast tip," he says. "It throws the 5-inch through the 9-inch [swimbait]. It'll throw it all. That's why it's so cool. It's heavy enough to throw those big ones, but it fishes to the bait it's throwing."

So much so that Salzman also likes to throw big spinnerbaits (3/4 to 1 ounce) on the same exact rod, especially in stained water.

The other specialty rod Salzman is most excited about is the rod he uses to throw walking topwater, which he says is a favorite of "every really good topwater Tennessee River fisherman."

That rod is a Redemption Rods Brent Anderson Custom Series Big Topwater model.

"It only has one thing tied on it, and that's a Spook," he says. "It's 7-foot, and it's not a medium, but it's not a medium-heavy. It's somewhere in the middle. It's a noodle where it needs to be, and it's stiff where it needs to be."

"It's the absolute best topwater rod ever made."



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUIRA

JOHN COX'S FINESSE POWER-FISHING GO-TO

John Cox makes his living fishing shallow, but staying away from deep water doesn't mean he's not versatile and adaptable. Cox is just as likely to throw a wacky rig as he is to pick up a frog or a swim jig.

As such, he's more than willing to turn to "finesse power-fishing" techniques when the conditions call for it. And for those applications, he keeps a couple shorter rods in his box, including a 6-foot, 10-inch, medium-power Abu Garcia Veracity.

"I'll throw my Berkley Choppo 90 on it. I'll throw the Berkley Spin Rocket. And I'll throw my 1/4-ounce traps all on that same rod," he says. "A lot of those baits are smaller. It allows me to be more precise with the casting. You can be so accurate with a 6-10."

When Cox is using those baits, he's usually casting to specific targets such as docks and laydowns. In those situations, precision is far more important than distance. The action of the rod also allows a little more delay in the hookset, which means fish are able to get a bait deep before the rod loads up.

"Having a shorter, softer rod, your hookset is going to be delayed a lot more than if you have it on a 7-6 or an 8-foot rod," Cox adds. "So your hookset timing when you feel that bite or see that bite is going to be better than if you had it on a stiffer, longer rod."

WHEN IT MAKES SENSE NOT TO SPECIALIZE

Specialization is a function of design. If a particular technique calls for specific design elements, modern technology has found a way to produce a rod to match. But what if versatility actually makes more sense?

For Ehrler, that tends to be the case when it comes to spinning rods.

"I'm probably known more for finesse-type stuff," he admits. "I would probably lean toward that because I think I've probably won a lot more money on that than other things, but I don't necessarily enjoy it."

Ehrler doesn't want to have three or four spinning rods on his deck, even if he's catching a lot of fish on spinning gear. Instead, he worked with Daiwa to create a spinning rod that can do it all – and do it well.

It's the Daiwa Tatula Elite Signature Series Dropshot rod, and despite the name, Ehrler doesn't stop at drop-shotting.

"We classify it as a drop-shot rod, but I also throw a shaky head and a wacky rig and a Neko rig and swimbaits on it," he says. "This one is the perfect action that is right in the middle that you can do everything with it."

"I used to carry three different actions of spinning rods. I'd carry a medium-light, a medium and a medium-heavy. It's the one rod that I use for everything now." ■

4WHP

4WHEELPARTS

YOUR #1 SOURCE FOR
EXPERT ADVICE AND INSTALLATION



**MAD
MAD
NESS
IN MARCH
SALES EVENT**

MONTH LONG SALE

**LOWEST PRICES
OF THE YEAR**



CHECK-OUT

**4WHP.COM
FOR MONTH-LONG
PROMOTIONS**

4WHP
4WHEELPARTS

SHOP ONLINE AT: 4WPCOM | FIND YOUR STORE AT: 4WPCOM/STORES | CALL: 800 284 9840



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

DUDLEY, THRIFT: NEW BEGINNINGS ON FAMILIAR WATERS

By Joel Shangle

As he looks over the top half of the 2020 Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour schedule, 2019 FLW Tour Angler of the Year David Dudley might as well be scanning a page out of his career record book.

Dudley has three top 10s on Lake Eufaula, the site of the 2020 Bass Pro Tour season opener (Feb. 7-12), plus four top 10s (including an FLW Tour win in 2007) on Lake Okeechobee, where MLF will compete just two weeks after Eufaula (Feb. 21-26).

It's the same for 2019 FLW Cup winner Bryan Thrift: FLW Series wins on both Eufaula and Okeechobee, and a total of nine top 10s on the two fisheries where both he and Dudley will begin their Bass Pro Tour careers.

For two anglers who are taking the plunge into a whole new way of doing business in 2020 – new competition structure, new schedule, new field of anglers to compete against – it seems logical that fishing the first lap of the season on familiar waters would ease their crossover into MLF and the “every scorable bass counts” format.

“At least I’ll know how to get to the ramps in the morning,” Thrift jokes.

Translating Success to Success

To say that Dudley and Thrift have been just “successful” in careers based on a five-fish-limit format is a gross understatement. Dudley is the only four-time winner of the FLW Tour Angler of the Year award, is the highest-earning pro in FLW history with more than \$3.8 million in winnings and sits at No. 2 on the list of all-time money winners in bass-fishing history with more than \$4 million in cumulative checks cashed.

Thrift has the second-most top-10 finishes as a boater in FLW history (64, behind only Andy Morgan’s 66), and trails only Dudley in career FLW winnings, with more than \$3 million.

Immediately upon agreeing in December to fish the Bass Pro Tour, both Thrift and Dudley were flagged as anglers to watch on Eufaula and Okeechobee (and, for that matter, the

entire season) by none other than Morgan, who had the third-best season (by winnings) of his 24-year career in 2019, his first year in the MLF format.

“I wouldn’t bet against either of those two on Eufaula or Okeechobee,” Morgan says. “I had some nerves starting out in 2019 – you just don’t know for sure until you put a rod in your hand – but I’m not nervous at all for either Dudley or Thrift. I’m nervous for the 78 of us fishing against them, because I know they’re going to catch ‘em. Eufaula, Okeechobee ... hell, everywhere we fish this year, you’ll have to worry about Dudley and Thrift.”

Ready to Roll

Thrift waves away the question he’s asked about adjusting his mindset heading into the Feb. 7 season opener on Eufaula, instead choosing to zero in on the same things he’s excelled at the previous 13 seasons he’s fished as a tour-level pro.

“Am I going to change the way I prepare for tournaments?” he asks rhetorically. “No, I don’t want to rush to change anything for the format. I’m not going to come out of the gate with the thought process that I need to change anything at all, really. I’m going to practice and prepare just like I always have, and adjust from there if I need to.”

Dudley goes one step further, lumping the eight fisheries on the 2020 Bass Pro Tour schedule into the body of the 300-plus events he’s fished as a pro.

“No matter if you’ve been to Eufaula or Okeechobee one time, 10 times or 20 times, you have to be able to think of them as brand new lakes,” Dudley says. “Every lake has to be a brand new lake. And that’s not just about the lake: You have to be open about techniques, and the time of year. You just let your instincts take over, no matter what the format is. You have to be able to erase your memory of how you did things a year ago or 10 years ago and keep your mind open, because as soon as you start to think about ‘history fish,’ you start to get into trouble.”



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

Stage One Eufaula

Though this magazine will probably arrive to readers about the time the Lake Eufaula Bass Pro Tour event is taking place, it's worth digging a little deeper into Thrift and Dudley's stats on the fishery.

In April 2005, Thrift cut the second of back-to-back winner's checks fishing as a co-angler in an FLW Series Southeastern Division event on Lake Eufaula. He finished second in FLW Tour tournaments there in 2010 and 2013, and won the Tour event held on Eufaula in mid-May of 2015, giving him a total of four first- or second-place finishes on this Chattahoochee River impoundment.

Format and time of year aside, Thrift admits that he feels good starting the 2020 season on the Alabama/Georgia border lake.

"I fish with a much clearer head there [at Eufaula] than I do most places," Thrift admits. "I feel like I jive with that lake real well. I get along with that lake real well in April and May; hard to say about February, but I think of Eufaula the same way I would a Santee Cooper or Gunter'sville: It's a lake with big fish, and I always enjoy fishing there. Everywhere I go there, I feel like I'm within a cast's reach of a 5-pounder."

Dudley earned one of his first 10 career top 10s at an FLW Series Southeastern Division tournament on Eufaula in late February 2001. He added fourth-place finishes in an FLW Series event on Eufaula in 2002 and an FLW Tour event on Eufaula in 2013, but each of those events was held one to three months later than the Feb. 7-12 Bass Pro Tour opener, a fact not lost on Dudley.

"I've never fished Eufaula that early in February," Dudley admits. "That's a real good example of not being able to judge a lake too much by its history. You have to judge it by what time of year you're fishing there, and whether you're comfortable fishing the techniques. Just knowing what I know about general techniques you'll catch fish on that time of year, I'm comfortable going into that event."

Stage Two Okeechobee

Dudley can trace his tournament history on Lake Okeechobee back to January 1997, when he cashed a check there in an FLW Tour event. He earned a third-place finish in a B.A.S.S. Invitational on Okeechobee in 2000, notched top

10s in 2002 and 2004, and then posted one of his nine career wins there in 2007 (FLW Tour).

Thrift claimed his first major career win on Okeechobee in 2006, exploiting a bladed jig before it was a known technique and putting two 8-pounders on the scale on the final day of an FLW Series Southeastern Division event there to beat Florida pro Bobby Lane by 5 ounces. It was the first time Thrift had seen the lake.

"Okeechobee is really hit-or-miss for me: I'm either top 20 or bottom 20," Thrift says. "I don't know how to explain that, other than you just have to relearn Okeechobee every time you go there. Nothing is ever the same. I'm glad we're fishing there in late February [Feb. 21-26]. We've fished it in January a lot. It can be hard to be consistent anywhere in Florida in January."

Ready to Play "The Game"

Both Dudley and Thrift have some experience in a weigh-on-the-water tournament format thanks to the former Toyota Texas Bass Classic, which was the forerunner of the MLF competition structure. Those events – in which fish catches were called in to tournament officials via two-way radios and cellphones – offered a taste of the real-time live scoring updates that MLF's SCORETRACKER provides on the Bass Pro Tour.

It's a wrinkle in the game that Dudley is looking forward to when he goes to work in 2020.

"The TTBC was the only time I've fished where you could hear the 'radio talk,' and I loved it," Dudley says. "Back then, they'd just call in an angler's number anytime we caught fish, but I memorized some of the guys' numbers. I wanted to know everything that was being reported. I told my marshal, 'Man, turn that volume up.' You have to play the whole game. If guys aren't playing the game with SCORETRACKER, they're not really in the game. I'm excited to play the game."

Dudley and Thrift are both gamers for sure. They've navigated numerous tournament formats with FLW in their careers, and have seen just about every scenario a tournament angler could have to deal with. And the one consistent thing about their careers that foreshadows a successful transition to the Bass Pro Tour is that they've always performed at a high level. There's no reason to doubt that'll change this season. ■



PLANO EDGE TERMINAL BOX

By Matt Williams

PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

Managing terminal tackle can be a frustrating exercise in patience without the right system to keep stuff organized and prevent hardware from going places it doesn't belong. It can be costly, too, particularly if a box leaches water and the moisture trapped inside corrodes a bunch of tackle. Plano's new EDGE Terminal box is designed to keep all of your terminal components tidy while providing advanced levels of moisture protection and easy access.

First Impression

It's obvious plenty of thought went into the design because it addresses all of the key aspects of terminal tackle storage: durability, organization, convenience, functionality, protection and moisture control.

I won't call it indestructible, but the box is made to

take some licks and provide years of use with marginal care. The clear lid and Rustructor-infused base, which has a chemical element in the plastic to help prevent rust, are fashioned from heavy-duty plastic with a series of cross ribs and reinforced edges to enhance rigidity. The lid and the one-handed latch pivot on stainless-steel pins for trouble-free operation. Five interior slots are fitted with 16 removable compartments: three padded weight boxes to securely hold tungsten or lead, and 13 boxes (in three sizes) with clear, snap-shut lids. Four of the latter are equipped with recessed dividers to prevent parts from slipping underneath. Each compartment has finger slots for easy removal.

Plano throws in four more dividers that are ventilated for airflow, along with a reusable Water Wick bag

housed in a ventilated plastic box.

In Action

If it's terminal and you can't find a spot for it here you probably don't need it for a day on the water. I loaded the box with weights and hooks of various styles and sizes, swivels, bobber stops, wobble heads, O-rings, beads, shaky heads and screw locks and still had room for more. All of the space is nice, but even sweeter is how efficient the system is at preventing tiny parts from swapping compartments – even when the box is bounced, flipped or turned upside down.

Getting in and out of the Edge might seem a little awkward at first because of the unique latch design, but once you learn the process, one-handed operation is a breeze. When locked down,



the latch cinches the lid snug against the O-ring to create a watertight seal. To quick-test the seal, I placed the box under a shower of water for 30 minutes. Not one drop found its way in.

Final Thoughts

Boaters and co-anglers will appreciate the organizational and functional features of this box. It provides gobs of room and keeps stuff tidy, but allows easy access without taking up much space. It's also the perfect fit for Plano's 3700-size Guide Series Tackle Bags, or for most bass boat storage lockers.

CLEAR LIDS:

Clear lids on the main box and 13 of the 16 interior boxes provide plain view of the contents inside.



ONE-HANDED LATCH:

The one-handed latch is easy to open and snugs the lid in place to create a watertight seal.



CONVENIENT INNER BOXES:

The removable interior boxes are small enough to stash in a shirt pocket for quick access to key components throughout the fishing day.



Performance Advice

1. The high-density pads inside the weight boxes are ribbed to cradle specific weight sizes. Make sure the weights don't exceed the width of the channels or the lid might not fully close, which can prevent the primary lid on the EDGE box from shutting tight.

Likewise, make sure lids on the interior compartments are fully closed at both ends. Listen for the click.

2. When closing the primary lid, make sure to apply even pressure to the latch so it secures at each end.

3. The removable compartments are small enough to fit in a shirt pocket, which is nice for fast access to technique-specific terminal tackle without having to waste time returning to the main box over and over. In the fall, folks at Plano hinted at plans to sell additional interior boxes, which would make swapping out what you need for a day easy.

HITS & MISSES

- + Lightweight
- + Durable
- + Watertight seal
- + Roomy
- + Removable compartments
- + One-handed latch
- A little pricey

>> ON THE WATER



More EDGE

The EDGE Terminal box is one of 10 units in the series, which earned Plano the Best of Tackle Management award at ICAST 2019. The series includes several specialty boxes for crankbaits of varied sizes, jigs, spinnerbaits, plastics and other essentials, along with standard boxes made in the same dimensions as some of the company's popular StowAway sizes.

DETAILS

Dimensions:
14x9x1 1/2 inches

Price:
\$49.99

Contact:
planomolding.com ■





5



1. LEW'S TOURNAMENT MP SPEED SPOOL LFS

With four gear ratios for righties and three for lefties, the Tournament MP series of reels covers the entire range of bass fishing applications. Every model weighs 7 ounces or less thanks to an aluminum frame and spool, which are capped with graphite end plates, and gears cut from hard anodized aluminum. Lew's firms up the 10-bearing reel with its P2 Super Pinion. Essentially, it keeps the gears aligned and minimizes wear for a long life of smooth action.

\$149.99 | lews.com

2. 10,000 FISH SUKOSHI BUG

Joining the ever-expanding world of Ned rig baits is the 2 1/2-inch Sukoshi Bug. Made of floating, highly durable Stretch-X Plastic, the bait's body flares slightly from its tip to a wider rear end, with ribbed sides and a half-dozen little "lobster leg" appendages.

\$5.29 for six | catchco.com

3. ZOOM HOLLOW BODY FROG

Zoom expands its topwater offerings with a new Hollow Body Frog. Built with a traditional collapsible body and custom double 5/0 Kona hooks, the Zoom iteration has two long multi-strand tails situated outside a shorter middle tail – a configuration that the company says makes the bait easier to walk. At 7/8 ounce and 3 1/2 inches long, it's a big bait bordering on "jumbo."

\$9.99 | zoombait.com

4. YAMAMOTO PADDLE TAIL ZAKO

Yamamoto's 4-inch Paddle Tail Zako is like the original Zako – body segments and all – but with a squared swimbait tail for more aggressive swimming action. Use it as a trailer on a ChatterBait, swim jig or spinnerbait, or on a plain jighead. A belly slit allows for easy weedless rigging, too.

\$6.49 for five | baits.com

5. UNDER ARMOUR VERGE 2.0 LOW GORE-TEX

Thanks to a GORE-TEX membrane, foam "pucks" in the sole and an EVA midsole, the Verge 2.0 offers waterproof, breathable performance with the comfort of a tennis shoe. Under Armour even added a Michelin Wild Gripper lug pattern sole, for a positive grip on wet surfaces. An above-the-ankle mid model sells for \$10 more.

\$155 | underarmour.com ■



**WORLD'S
GREATEST DEALS**

SAVINGS SUCCESS STORY #135

Because saving 40% on my hotel room means I can spend 40% more on tackle.



USE THE WORLD'S GREATEST DEALS APP OR GO TO WORLDSGREATESTDEALS.COM TO FIND YOUR SAVINGS.



NOT YET AN FLW MEMBER?

VISIT:

FLWFISHING.COM/MEMBERSHIP

FLW MEMBERS NOW HAVE INSTANT ACCESS TO WORLD'S GREATEST DEALS

World's Greatest Deals gives you instant access to save thousands of dollars where you live and on the go. Over 350,000 local & national discounts on dining, travel, automotive and more.

WHEREVER YOU CHASE FISH, WORLD'S GREATEST DEALS HAS SAVINGS FOR YOU

Book your hotel through World's Greatest Deals to save up to 20 - 40% on your hotel stay.

*compared to other online booking groups

ACTIVATE YOUR SAVINGS NOW:

WWW.FLWFISHING.COM/WGD OR WITH THE WORLD'S GREATEST DEALS APP

STRIKE KING TOUR GRADE LINE

OPTIMIZED FOR MAXIMUM FISHABILITY

“SIDEWINDER” SPOOLING TOOL · P2 PERFECT WINDING PROCESS
MADE FROM JAPANESE MATERIALS

Strike King has spent years working with the world's best anglers to test and calibrate this product. The result is quite simply, the most highly optimized fishing line available today. To ensure your line comes off the spool perfectly, we level wind every spool using our proprietary "P2 Perfect Wind" Process. Also, we have included our "SideWinder" line winding tool, which allows you to spool your reel with ease.



STRIKE KING TOUR GRADE LINE
AVAILABLE DECEMBER 2019



PROFILE: **COLE
FLOYD**
LEESBURG, OH



Cole Floyd is one of collegiate bass fishing's most decorated anglers, with multiple wins, including two national championships on his resume. During his time at powerhouse Bethel University, Floyd has also dominated the Phoenix Bass Fishing League LBL Division, winning three Angler of the Year awards in a row, and he's qualified for three FLW Series Championships. This year, he's joined the sport's top pros on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit.

We caught up with him in early December to learn about the past and talk about the future.

Q A

By Sean Ostruszka
PHOTO BY MATT PACE

There are many places we could start this interview - College Fishing, your recent Bass Fishing League Regional victory - but I have to ask: How does a guy from Leesburg, Ohio, win the LBL Division AOY three straight years?

Time on the water.

Kentucky Lake is six hours from Leesburg ...

Well, I live in Paris, Tenn., now.

Even still. You have 16 top 10s on Kentucky Lake in four years of fishing the LBL Division, FLW College Fishing and FLW Series tournaments.

Well, I've been down here for the last five years, and I fished my ass off dang near every day for the first two or three years when I got here to learn.

I grew up fishing the Ohio River and little lakes back home, but they don't compare to Kentucky Lake. You don't fish offshore in Ohio. It's all about fishing in a foot or less, burning the bank. So I knew I had to learn how to scan and find bars and ledges; all that stuff.

Seems you've gotten pretty good at it then?

I mean, I guess. People ask me all the time about it. I don't really like it all that much. I just do it because you have to in order to compete around here. Plus, I usually try and get away from everyone, and I've learned to look for off-the-wall places.

To be honest, I'd rather fish shallow. Though, most of the tournaments I've done well in I fished offshore.

So what brought you down to Tennessee?

College. I always wanted to do College Fishing and be on a team.

My dad, Steve, had always taken us down to fish Kentucky Lake my whole life. So we came down to check out Bethel University, because I knew they had a good team. It worked out. My parents actually bought a house down here, and that's where I'm staying.

So what's your degree in?

Uh ... business management.

That sounded confident ...

I know. It's one of those things when people ask I'm always like, "Oh, shoot ..."

Well, can't wait to ask this then: When are you graduating?

I couldn't tell you. Hopefully soon, because I'm already in my fifth year.

You're very diligent with your studies, I take it.

I just miss so much dang school because of fishing. Doing the College Fishing, the BFLs, Series; it's hard to keep up.

So if I asked the question of which you study for more, a tournament or a test, the answer would clearly be ... ?

You already know. It's a no-brainer.

To be honest, if it wasn't for College Fishing, I probably would have never gone to college. I'm surprised I've even made it this far. I'm glad I have, though, because College Fishing has helped me out a lot, getting my name out there and allowing me to communicate with people across the industry.

Well that's good, at least. So how are you going to finish that degree now being on the Pro Circuit?

I'm going to take a lot of online classes. Even thinking of doing some summer stuff. I need to get it finished up because my mom, Nikki, said I have to get it.

Not bad. Much warmer than being in Ohio.

Yeah, we're not fishing back home. I've never been there before. I've been to Toledo Bend, and I think they're similar. They're both friggin' gigantic, though. So I figure I need to go.

Plus, that's one heck of a drive. Might as well get acclimated to the less-glamorous side of being a pro fisherman right off the bat.

Yeah, it's like 14 hours from Ohio to Sam Rayburn.

How are you passing the time?

Fortunately, I've got my brother, Wyatt, and my buddy from Ohio, Jeremy Potts, with me so I have someone to talk to. Otherwise, I'd be really bored.

Any extra pressure driving down to pre-practice for your first major tournament?

Yeah. Kind of. There's a lot of money on the line now. So it's more like a job.

I really just want to start my season off good. I don't want to bomb and get all worked up and stuff. I want to get the ball rolling and keep it rolling.

How much does having a supportive, fishing dad like yours help with your chosen career?

Helps a lot.

Now, be honest, who is the better fisherman?

Oh, that's tough. I think it depends on the lake and time of year.

My dad grew up fishing the Ohio River, and he used to kick butt there. He's also the type who doesn't care about sonar. If he can't touch the bottom with his rod tip, you can count him out. But up shallow, I'm going to give it to him.

Take him away from the bank, though, and I've got him on that.

Looking at the schedule, any tournaments stick out as ones you're really excited for?

Hopefully, this one [Sam Rayburn]. I've never been, but I've always understood offshore grass fishing with traps [lipless crankbaits]. We won a college event on Seminole doing that one time where we had 28 pounds.

I'm hoping this tournament sets up like that — then I'll feel comfortable.

Any others?

I'm kind of looking forward to Cherokee, because I've been there a couple times and caught both small-mouth and largemouth there.

Then you look at the last two events on the Detroit River and St. Lawrence; those will just be fun fish-catching tournaments. You look at the whole schedule, and it's all exciting.

OK. So it's pretty clear fishing dominates your present and future. Do you do anything other than fish?

I picked up golf a couple years ago. I'm not any good, but I enjoy it. I'm also ate up with deer hunting.

Like, as bad as with fishing?

Yeah, kind of. I drive up [to Ohio] every Thursday, hunt Friday through Sunday, and then drive back on Monday.

I actually got my biggest deer this year. Scored 178 3/8.

If you had to pick fishing or hunting, you'd go with ...?

I don't know if I could pick.

You have to. The article demands it.

It really depends on the time of year. Right now, it's hunting season. So that's my focus, but come February I'll get the itch to go fishing again. And then around September I'll be back focused on hunting, though I usually have plenty of fishing left too.

Unfortunately? You sound like Andy Morgan - only fishing because you can't make a living hunting.

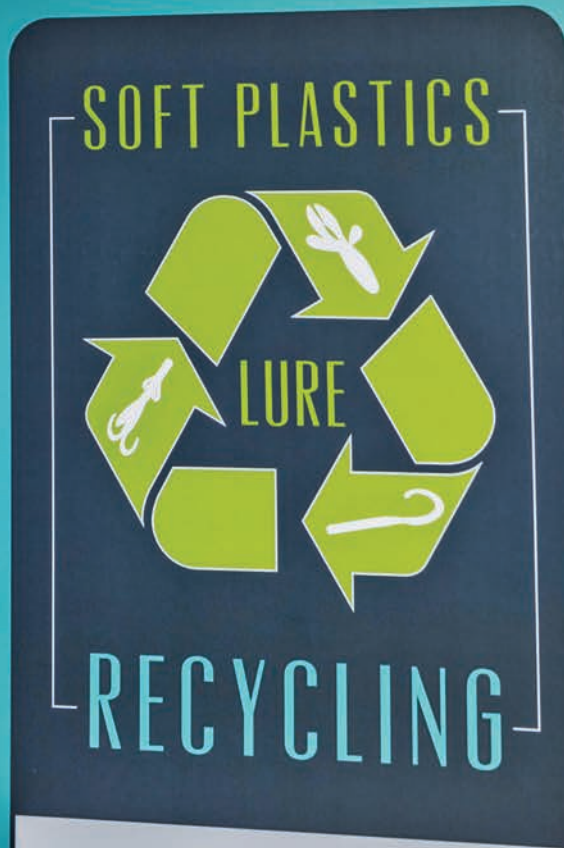
To be honest, if I could make a living hunting, I may never fish again. I just love it. ■



Fish Like a Pro. Pledge to PITCH IT.

Protect our lakes and rivers by recycling your worn-out soft-plastic baits at every FLW tournament. Just look for the FLW Foundation, Keep America Fishing Pitch It recycling container. It's a simple action with a big impact.

Visit pledgetopitchit.org
& FLWFishing.com/foundation



Connecting youth to their natural resources and promoting education, conservation and an active lifestyle.

LAKE HARTWELL

Where champions fish



Home Lake of FLW
Tour Champion
Brian Latimer



Home Lake of
Bassmaster Elite
Series™ Champion
Brandon Cobb

Named One of
7 Best Winter Fishing Destinations in the U.S.
by fishingbooker.com



VisitAnderson.com



WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION



FLW, TBF EXTEND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

FLW and The Bass Federation (TBF) recently announced a new strategic partnership. The agreement extends bass fishing's longest-running alliance between two pioneering organizations in service to grassroots anglers from coast to coast and around the world.

The renewed partnership between FLW and TBF will still include the opportunity for co-membership, while offering FLW tournament bids to an increased number of TBF anglers.

"We are proud to continue our longstanding relationship with FLW to provide more grassroots fishing opportunities for our TBF adult and student anglers alike," says Robert Cartlidge, TBF president. "Our members value the tradition of TBF and FLW working together."

"We are thrilled to announce our continued partnership with TBF," adds FLW Executive Vice President and General Manager Kathy Fennel. "Since 2006, we've worked more closely than any two organizations in the history of our sport, and we intend to strengthen that relationship under our new ownership for the benefit of all the anglers we serve."

TBF already offers its members great benefits, including TBF insurance coverage for all adult, junior and high school members, clubs, and affiliated circuits; more than 100 events each year, including 22 close-to-home National Semi-Finals events with 100 percent overall payback; the TBF National Championship, which has more than doubled its payout in the last five years; and more than 70

events for high school and junior anglers. Continuing the relationship with FLW allows TBF the flexibility to add even more FLW advancement contingencies for TBF adult members, without an increase in dues. It will also help recruit more and new anglers to fish FLW events, which makes it a win-win for both organizations and their members.

For 2020, TBF was able to offer Preston Craig his "Living the Dream" prize package for the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit season, including fully paid entry fees, use of a tow vehicle and Ranger boat, and travel stipends for each event. That was Craig's dream, and through the TBF and FLW partnership it is now his reality.

TBF and FLW, through the Student Angler Federation (SAF),

will continue to partner on the growth of the nation's original and largest High School Fishing program, which was founded in 2007. Currently, the SAF insures and sanctions thousands of high school clubs and dozens of high school trails that serve more than 35,000 participants annually. Participation in FLW and TBF High School Fishing tournaments is free to all SAF members, as SAF membership includes both TBF and FLW membership.

For more information about FLW membership or TBF, visit bassfederation.com/members/ or FLWFishing.com. ■



2019 TBF National Champion Preston Craig



RECRUITMENT 101: HAVE FUN

The Arizona Bass Federation is growing thanks to free fishing derby and open house

The Arizona Bass Federation came up with a unique way to recruit more members to its program with a free open house and fishing derby at Bartlett Lake on Sunday, Jan. 5.

"Anglers want to go fishing and have fun. That's what I want when I go fishing," says state president Loway Shammas. "So this event was all about fun and reaching out to the angling community in Arizona to actually show them what the Arizona Federation was all about and have fun doing it. There are a lot of newer anglers, and some of the ones who have been around awhile out there have lost touch with the Federation or do not know what we can offer today. So, we wanted



everyone to come and bring a friend, their wife and their kids and spend a day in the outdoors with us, so we could show them who we are and what the Federation has to offer."

The event was a success, with nearly 60 boats showing up to participate and plenty

of prizes given out. Anyone who signed up as a new member received a ticket into the end-of-season raffle for a new depth finder, and anyone who referred a friend who became a TBF member earned a raffle ticket. Custom Federation Angler spinning and casting rods, gift cards, a selection of soft and hard baits, shirts, polarized sunglasses and more were given away at the event.

The weigh-in was held at lunchtime, where participants enjoyed hot dogs with all the sides. In all, it was a great way to recruit new members to the Federation and to grow the Arizona chapter. ■



2020 TBF EVENTS GEARING UP, GOING STRONG

In 2020, The Bass Federation will continue to host its nationally recognized events, including the TBF National Championship, the TBF Junior World Championship, and the 11th annual High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship, as well as annual meetings with state leadership and more. TBF is also rolling out a new series of membership owner/appreciation events open to all members. Stay tuned to bassfederation.com for more details. A lot of good things are happening to and for TBF members nationwide.

Here are some highlights from what's coming.

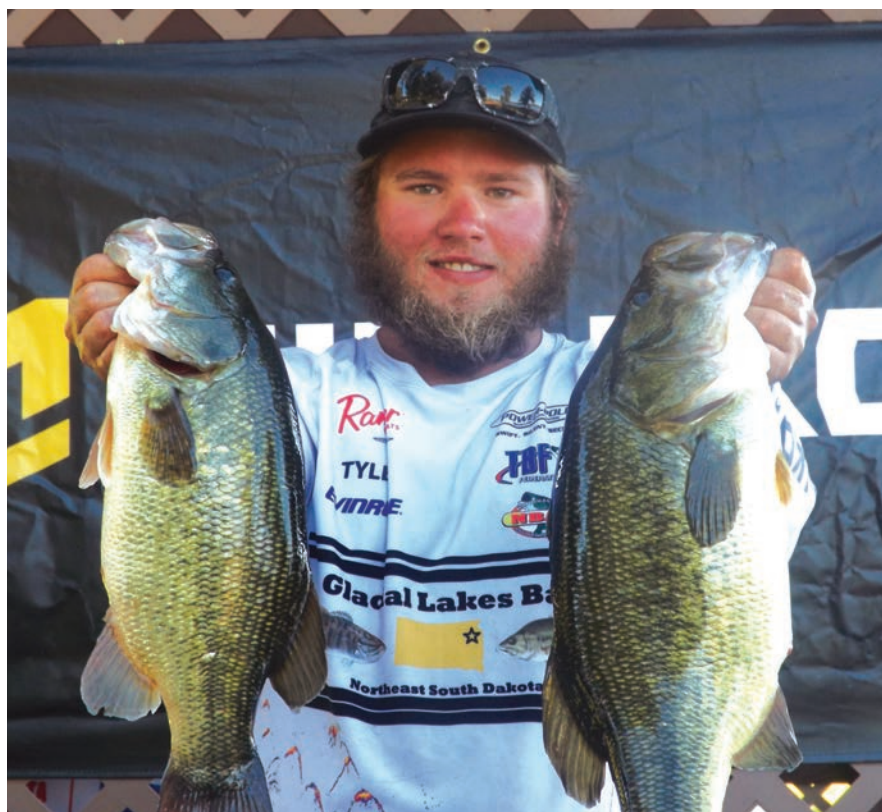
National Semi-Finals

The TBF National Semi-Finals schedule, which includes 22 districts, will kick off in May with the District 22 (Nevada and Utah) event on Lake Mead. Semi-Finals events run through November.



Top boaters and co-anglers from each state qualify to advance to the 2021 TBF National Championship for a chance to live their dream. Qualified anglers can earn a chance

at many partner events, both locally and nationally, including the Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine All-American or the FLW Series Championship.



National Championship

The 2020 TBF National Championship is scheduled for March 12-14 at Grand Lake in Grove, Okla. Nearly \$400,000 in cash and prizes are up for grabs. Daily weigh-ins will be streamed live from Wolf Creek Park at bassfederation.com at 3 p.m. CT.

NEW "Live YOUR Dream" Package

This season, all seven division champion boaters and co-anglers at the end of the National Championship earn multiple "Live YOUR Dream" advancement opportunities.

Each division champ earns a spot in the 2020 Phoenix Bass Fishing League presented by T-H Marine All-American. The top boater and co-angler advance to the FLW Series Championship. There will be additional local

advancement opportunities with paid entry fees. TBF anglers will also be eligible to win additional contingency prizes from national sponsors, with payouts to multiple winners. The champions on the boater and co-angler side will both win a boat to help them live their dream.

\$3 Million and Counting

The 11th annual High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship dual event is scheduled for June 23-27, 2020 on the Mississippi River in La Crosse, Wis. The scholarship offers and prize pool are still building, but the total value of what's available

to be won currently sits at almost \$3 million. Any Student Angler Federation (SAF) member can compete in the World Finals. National Championship competitors must qualify. Luckily, there's plenty of time to fish your way in.

To join SAF or sign up for an event, visit highschoolfishing.org. ■



Make Yourself Heard: If you have TBF news you'd like to share with FLW and TBF readers, please email Robert Carlidge at Robert@federationangler.com.

TBF DID YOU KNOW?

Bass Fishing History – TBF is the oldest and largest organized grassroots fishing, youth and conservation organization in North America.

Member-Owned – TBF is 100 percent owned by its members and is the only 100 percent member-owned organization in the entire fishing industry. Everything we do or earn goes back to TBF membership programs.

User Pay, User Benefit – TBF operates via a user pay, user benefit system, where adult dues support the adult program, junior dues support the junior program, high school dues support the high school program, conservation funds are used only for the conservation program, etc.

Insurance to Protect Members – TBF has offered an industry-leading, comprehensive insurance coverage program for all of its affiliated adult, junior and high school clubs since 1990. Funded entirely by a portion of each TBF member's dues, the insurance coverage offers very inexpensive peace of mind in a very litigious world. It's one more reason it pays to belong to TBF.

Volunteer-Led – TBF has a 100 percent volunteer leadership structure. Obviously, as a large organization,

TBF has excellent paid staff to conduct its day-to-day operations. However, all state and national officers and directors, including presidents and youth directors, plus the TBF national board members and national president and CEO, are all unpaid volunteers. Give them a well-deserved pat on the back sometime and lend a hand when you can, as they are working hard for you.

Longevity – TBF's volunteer leadership base is one reason the organization has been so successful for so many decades. In 50 years of service, TBF has always adapted, overcome and thrived, and it will continue to do so. Avoiding the overhead and layers of management salaries at local and national levels gives TBF a huge business advantage and makes it very financially stable for the long term.

Learn More About TBF

If you have a question or want to know something about TBF, which is YOUR organization, drop us a line at the national office via FAQ@bassfederation.com. Staff will answer you and might even print some of the questions here for all TBF members to see. Above all else, THANK YOU for being a member of The Bass Federation. ■

2020'S TOP 20-SOMETHINGS TO WATCH

In tournament bass fishing, there's no substitute for time on the water. But time on the water and age don't always coincide. Sometimes, like in the case of some of the top bass anglers under 30 on the Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit and MLF Bass Pro Tour, anglers might be wise (and talented) beyond their years.



Career FLW earnings: \$183,825
Career FLW top 10s: 11



2019 BPT standings: 4th
2019 BPT earnings: \$205,600

Both circuits feature budding superstars who haven't yet blown out 30 candles on a birthday cake. These 10 pros (five each from FLW and MLF) enter the new tournament season ahead of their fellow 20-somethings in career earnings on the FLW side, or, in the case of Bass Pro Tour anglers, fresh off successful first seasons that ranked them ahead of their peers in the final 2019 standings. ■

By Justin Onslow
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TYLER HOEBELHEINRICH

TOP-EARNING FLW 20-SOMETHINGS



Career FLW earnings: \$205,374
Career FLW top 10s: 9



Career FLW earnings: \$195,527
Career FLW top 10s: 6



Career FLW earnings: \$175,783
Career FLW top 10s: 3



Career FLW earnings: \$143,538
Career FLW top 10s: 20

MLF 20-SOMETHING POINTS LEADERS



2019 BPT standings: 5th
2019 BPT earnings: \$90,600



2019 BPT standings: 7th
2019 BPT earnings: \$152,800



2019 BPT standings: 8th
2019 BPT earnings: \$75,600



2019 BPT standings: 21st
2019 BPT earnings: \$36,000



GO | CONFIDENTLY

CAPTIVATE™

COLOR REDEFINED

OUR NEW CAPTIVATE™ LENSES FILTER LIGHT TO ENHANCE VISION WITH VIVID
DETAIL AND VIBRANT CONTRAST. ANSI-RATED, THEY OFFER MAXIMUM PROTECTION
AND CLARITY SO YOU CAN SEE CLEARLY — ABOVE AND BELOW THE WATER.

WX CONTEND



WX[®]
WILEY X

Revo[®]
ROCKET



ALLOWING
MORE CASTS
MORE WATER COVERED
MORE FISH

10.1:1 Gear Ratio, 41" Line Per Turn
Extreme Speed Low Profile Reel

 **Abu
Garcia[®]**

FOR LIFE™

© 2019 Pure Fishing, Inc.