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PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

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WELCOME BACK, SOLUNAR TABLES



I read a lot of magazines. Yeah, you're probably not surprised. Usually, the first thing I read is the editor's column in the front of the book. It's fun to see what's on the mind of other folks doing the same kind of work as me, and sometimes they share background about a particular article or project that teaches me a lesson in magazine production.

And sometimes, I totally ignore the lesson.

An example: Back before I had this job, I read a column in a major outdoor magazine by an editor who was leaving his position. I don't remember why he was leaving, but I recall him sharing that one of the biggest mistakes he made during his tenure was dropping the solunar chart from the magazine. Apparently, readers responded with a greater degree of vitriol than he ever could have anticipated, and he quickly brought it back.

Like I said, I ignore some lessons. In the Winter 2019 issue of *FLW Bass Fishing*, I cut our version of the chart, called "Solunar Tables." I did it because we had limited space, and I felt we had other content that was more valuable to our readers and deserved some extra real estate.

I guess I was wrong.

We don't get a lot of feedback – good or bad – from our subscribers (please, send more), but I received a number of phone calls and emails from concerned readers wondering why the "Solunar Tables" were gone and if they were coming back.

Several readers told me they'd stop subscribing if I didn't bring them back. One gentleman claimed he doesn't even fish. He only subscribes because the solunar info we source is apparently the best available. Go figure.

Honestly, I didn't get it. A solunar chart is supposed to predict the best times to go hunting and fishing based on the location of the sun and moon relative to the critters' locations, but I've always believed the best time to go is whenever you can. Full moon, half moon, waxing crescent – OK, sure. Is the lake frozen? If not, let's go. Moon phase wasn't something I took into consideration.

Until now, that is.

The response to dropping "Solunar Tables" has me wondering what I'm missing. Could I be catching more bass if I studied the chart? Should I be carving out blocks of time to spend on the lake based on the major and minor activity periods?

No, really, I'm asking.

If you have experience using our "Solunar Tables" to catch more fish, or you incorporate sun and moon location into your bass fishing repertoire in any way, write to me with some detail on how it works for you. You can email it to curtis.niedermier@flwfishing.com with "solunar advice" in the subject line. Keep your text to less than 300 words, and include your name and address. I'll save a page or two in an upcoming issue to publish the best advice. If yours makes the cut, I'll send you some tackle.

I've learned my lesson with regard to publishing the "Solunar Tables," and I'm happy to report they're back. You can find them on page 12. Now, I'm hoping you can teach me another lesson: how to use the information in the tables to catch more bass.

Curtis Niedermier, Editor-in-Chief

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YOUNG SAM ON BIG SAM

One fish can make all the difference between winning and losing, elation and agony, a lost season and a springboard to bigger things. FLW Tour rookie Sam George, who learned what one big fish can do to kickstart a season on day one at Sam Rayburn Reservoir, is well on his way to finding out how it feels to win on professional bass fishing's biggest stage.

The 23-year-old Alabama native had never fished a four-day tournament prior to the season opener on Sam Rayburn. Perhaps Young Sam and Big Sam were simpatico those four days, as the latter gave George one "magic little place" devoid of grass but full of big bass, providing him with a good portion of his 28 pounds, 5 ounces of fish on day one and 67-10 for the tournament.

George finished the season opener tied with Tour veterans Jordan Osborne (seventh) and Tom Redington (eighth) at 67-10, though the tiebreaker pushed the young gun to ninth and a \$15,000 payday – not a bad start to a career, especially when it comes with the sheer exhilaration of a behemoth 9-pound, 3-ounce bucketmouth and a giant smile.

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

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FLW Cups Honored as Champions Of Economic Impact in Sports Tourism

The November/December 2018 issue of *Sports Destination Management* magazine recognized the 2017 and 2018 FLW Cups among its Champions of Economic Impact in Sports Tourism.

The 2017 Cup in Columbia, S.C., was honored in the mid-market category. According to the event host, Capital City/Lake Murray Country Regional Tourism Board, the average visitor spend was tracked at \$304.12 per person. More than 68,000 spectators attended this event.

Visit Hot Springs and the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism hosted the 2018 FLW Cup in Hot Springs, Ark. It was included in the small-market category. More than 66,000 fans and anglers attended, generating a total economic impact of more than \$24.4 million.

Other notable champions among 36 events recognized in four categories were the 2018 NCAA Final Four in San Antonio, Texas, the 2018 NFL Draft in Dallas, Texas, and the PGA's Honda Classic in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

According to the article: "All these winners represent the most notable success stories and illustrate quantifiable results from each of the event-destination partnerships. Working together, these event organizers and host destinations achieved outstanding economic impact, an exceptional experience for athletes and spectators, media attention to the destination, and much more."

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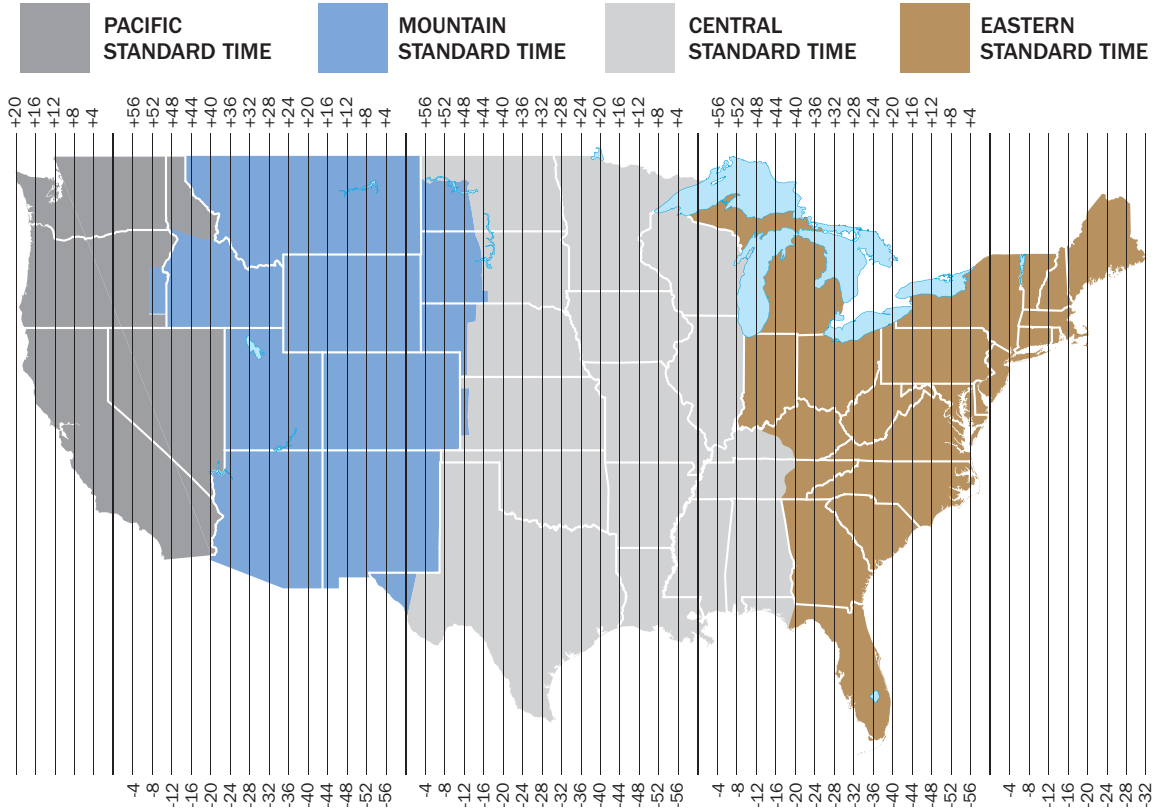
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SOLUNAR TABLES

APRIL, MAY, JUNE 2019



| APR. Date | Day | AM | | PM | | Moon Phases | MAY Date | Day | AM | | PM | | Moon Phases | JUNE Date | Day | AM | | PM | | Moon Phases |
|-----------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|----------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|-----------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| | | Minor | Major | Minor | Major | | | | Minor | Major | Minor | Major | | | | Minor | Major | | | |
| 1 | Mon | 2:05 | 8:05 | 2:15 | 8:30 | | 1 | Wed | 2:05 | 8:10 | 2:20 | 8:30 | | 1 | Sat | 2:50 | 8:55 | 3:05 | 9:20 | |
| 2 | Tue | 2:45 | 8:45 | 2:55 | 9:10 | | 2 | Thu | 2:45 | 8:50 | 3:00 | 9:10 | | 2 | Sun | 3:55 | 9:45 | 3:55 | 10:10 | |
| 3 | Wed | 3:25 | 9:25 | 3:35 | 9:50 | | 3 | Fri | 3:25 | 9:30 | 3:40 | 9:50 | | 3 | Mon | 4:25 | 10:30 | 4:40 | 11:00 | ☉ |
| 4 | Thu | 4:05 | 10:05 | 4:15 | 10:25 | | 4 | Sat | 4:05 | 10:10 | 4:20 | 10:35 | ☀ | 4 | Tue | 5:15 | 11:35 | 5:45 | —:— | ☉ |
| 5 | Fri | 4:40 | 10:45 | 4:55 | 11:05 | ☀ | 5 | Sun | 4:50 | 11:00 | 5:10 | 11:25 | | 5 | Wed | 6:15 | 12:05 | 6:50 | 12:35 | |
| 6 | Sat | 5:20 | 11:30 | 5:40 | —:— | | 6 | Mon | 5:40 | 11:55 | 6:05 | —:— | | 6 | Thu | 7:20 | 1:10 | 7:55 | 1:40 | |
| 7 | Sun | 6:10 | 12:00 | 6:40 | 12:25 | | 7 | Tue | 6:35 | 12:25 | 7:10 | 12:55 | | 7 | Fri | 8:25 | 2:15 | 9:00 | 2:45 | |
| 8 | Mon | 7:00 | 12:50 | 7:30 | 1:15 | | 8 | Wed | 7:35 | 1:25 | 8:10 | 1:55 | | 8 | Sat | 9:25 | 3:15 | 10:00 | 3:45 | |
| 9 | Tue | 7:55 | 1:45 | 8:25 | 2:10 | | 9 | Thu | 8:30 | 2:20 | 9:05 | 2:50 | | 9 | Sun | 10:20 | 4:10 | 10:55 | 4:40 | |
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| 16 | Tue | 2:05 | 8:10 | 2:20 | 8:40 | | 16 | Thu | 2:30 | 8:35 | 2:50 | 9:00 | | 16 | Sun | 3:40 | 9:50 | 4:00 | 10:15 | |
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| 26 | Fri | 10:50 | 4:40 | 11:20 | 5:05 | ☾ | 26 | Sun | 11:05 | 4:55 | 11:35 | 5:20 | ☾ | 26 | Wed | 11:50 | 5:40 | —:— | 6:00 | |
| 27 | Sat | 11:40 | 5:30 | —:— | 5:50 | | 27 | Mon | 11:45 | 5:35 | —:— | 6:00 | | 27 | Thu | 12:15 | 6:15 | 12:25 | 6:40 | |
| 28 | Sun | 12:05 | 6:10 | 12:20 | 6:35 | | 28 | Tue | 12:15 | 6:15 | 12:25 | 6:35 | | 28 | Fri | 12:55 | 6:55 | 1:05 | 7:20 | |
| 29 | Mon | 12:50 | 6:50 | 1:00 | 7:15 | | 29 | Wed | 12:50 | 6:55 | 1:05 | 7:15 | | 29 | Sat | 1:35 | 7:40 | 1:50 | 8:05 | |
| 30 | Tue | 1:30 | 7:30 | 1:40 | 7:50 | | 30 | Thu | 1:30 | 7:35 | 1:45 | 7:55 | | 30 | Sun | 2:20 | 8:30 | 2:40 | 8:55 | |
| | | | | | | | 31 | Fri | 2:10 | 8:15 | 2:25 | 8:35 | | | | | | | | |

SOLUNAR TABLES® are designed to forecast the daily active feeding periods of fish. They are formulated from the position of the earth in relation to the sun and moon. The major periods last for approximately 2 to 3 1/2 hours, and the minor periods last for approximately 3/4 to 1 1/2 hours. To determine the start of major and minor times for your area, find the bold time-zone rule on the map. If you are located in the area left of the time-zone rule, add the number (in minutes) at the top to the corresponding time on the chart. If you are located in the area right of the time-zone rule, subtract the number (in minutes) at the bottom from the corresponding time on the chart. Add one hour to all times during daylight saving time.

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Edited by
Justin Onslow



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Big Bass

Martin wowed at the Tour's first stop of the 2019 season with a 9-pound, 12-ounce behemoth on day one at Sam Rayburn Reservoir, tied for biggest bass that day. But the Clewiston, Fla., native is no stranger to big bass, and, believe it or not, he hauled in a largemouth more than 2 pounds heavier than that last November. In his "My Biggest Bass Ever!! - I Broke My Record!" video, Martin walks his viewers through catching a bass weighing 12.14 pounds - his new personal best bass.

Worldwide Attention

With more than 800,000 followers combined between Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, Scott Martin (and the Scott Martin Challenge) boasts the largest social media following of any angler on the FLW Tour. His affinity for relevant, interesting and entertaining social media content has made Martin one of the most popular and recognizable anglers on the planet.

To put Martin's social media clout into perspective, lakes for all eight FLW Tour stops this year (including Lake Hamilton for the FLW Cup and 328,960-acre Lake Champlain) combine for 622,640 acres of water. That's a massive total compared to almost anything in the fishing world, save for Martin's base of avid followers.

Put another way: If his audience were its own country, it would be larger than the population of each of the world's 69 smallest countries.

Martin by The Numbers

7: Number of top-10 FLW Cup finishes

8: Number of FLW Tour wins to Martin's name

18: Number of FLW Cup appearances by Martin, including a win at Lake Ouachita in 2011

39: Career top-10 finishes for Martin in FLW competition, including Costa FLW Series events

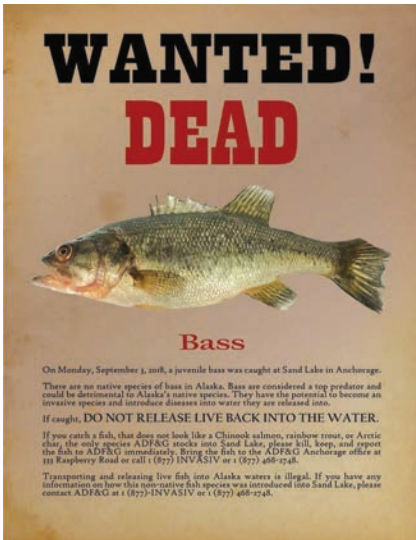
\$2,840,620: Martin's career earnings with FLW

Big Views

Martin's presence on YouTube is about more than growing his own brand. He's also playing a big role in growing the sport of bass fishing. Oddly enough, his most viewed videos in the last six months have nothing to do with hunting big bass, though. Far and away the most viewed video, called "Found Sunken Crime Scene While Fishing - Cops Called," had amassed more than 3.4 million views at the time of this publication, followed by "Didn't Expect That! Fishing 1000 ft. Deep - Man Card Revoked" with almost three-quarters of a million views.



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



One Man's Treasure Is Another Man's Invasive Species

Largemouth bass – and really most species of bass – are among the most sought-after game fish in North America, but not every part of the continent, nor every state in the U.S., has native populations of bass. In Alaska, for instance, bass are very much an invasive species that can threaten the native populations of other fish such as trout, salmon and Arctic char.

While the appeal of having bass in Alaskan waters is fairly obvious, they aren't meant to live there, and their inclusion in the foreign habitat could have devastating effects on the ecosystem. That was never really a problem until Sept. 3, 2018, when an angler landed a largemouth bass in the waters of Sand Lake near Anchorage.

Biologists have been on the hunt for additional specimens to determine whether more bass have been introduced into Sand Lake and if they could be reproducing. It's unclear how the fish was introduced into Alaskan waters, but the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is asking any angler that catches a largemouth bass to not release the fish back into the water. The agency is promoting the effort with posters showing a bass and the headline "WANTED! DEAD."



Big Sam Beatdown

The FLW Tour season opener on Sam Rayburn Reservoir was a big-fish bonanza. Terry Bolton secured his first-ever Tour victory with a 91-pound, 3-ounce four-day total, including a massive 33-9 stringer on day three. The top four finishers all tallied totals of 80-plus-pounds.

All told, **pros weighed in 4,375 pounds, 12 ounces of fish**, to say nothing of the thousands of smaller fish thrown back. That's equivalent to the weight of two fully equipped Ranger Z521L bass boats with an angler aboard each.



Fishing License Sales On the Decline In Minnesota

2018 marked the worst year for fishing license sales in Minnesota since 2013, and the decline is somewhat troubling for those who are intent on seeing the sport grow. According to the Minnesota DNR, the state sold just 805,242 fishing licenses through the weekend after July 4, which was down about 41,000 from that same period in 2017.

Interestingly – and possibly correspondingly – fishing license prices increased in Minnesota in 2018 for the first time since 2013, from \$22 to \$25 for a resident license. Whether the reduction in license sales is a result of the price increase or some other factor related to angling participation is unclear, but it's an issue many states are keen on examining.

Modern Fish Act Gives Boost to Recreational Saltwater Fishing Industry

On Dec. 31, 2018, the Modern Fish Act made its way through the final stages of legislation and was signed into law by President Donald Trump, giving a boost to recreational saltwater fishing in the U.S.

According to the American Sportfishing Association, the Modern Fish Act makes important distinctions between recreational and commercial fishery use and will give federal managers the resources they need to "improve access and promote conservation," which will in turn promote better fishing for recreational saltwater anglers.

The bill was first introduced in April 2017 and took more than a year and a half to become law.

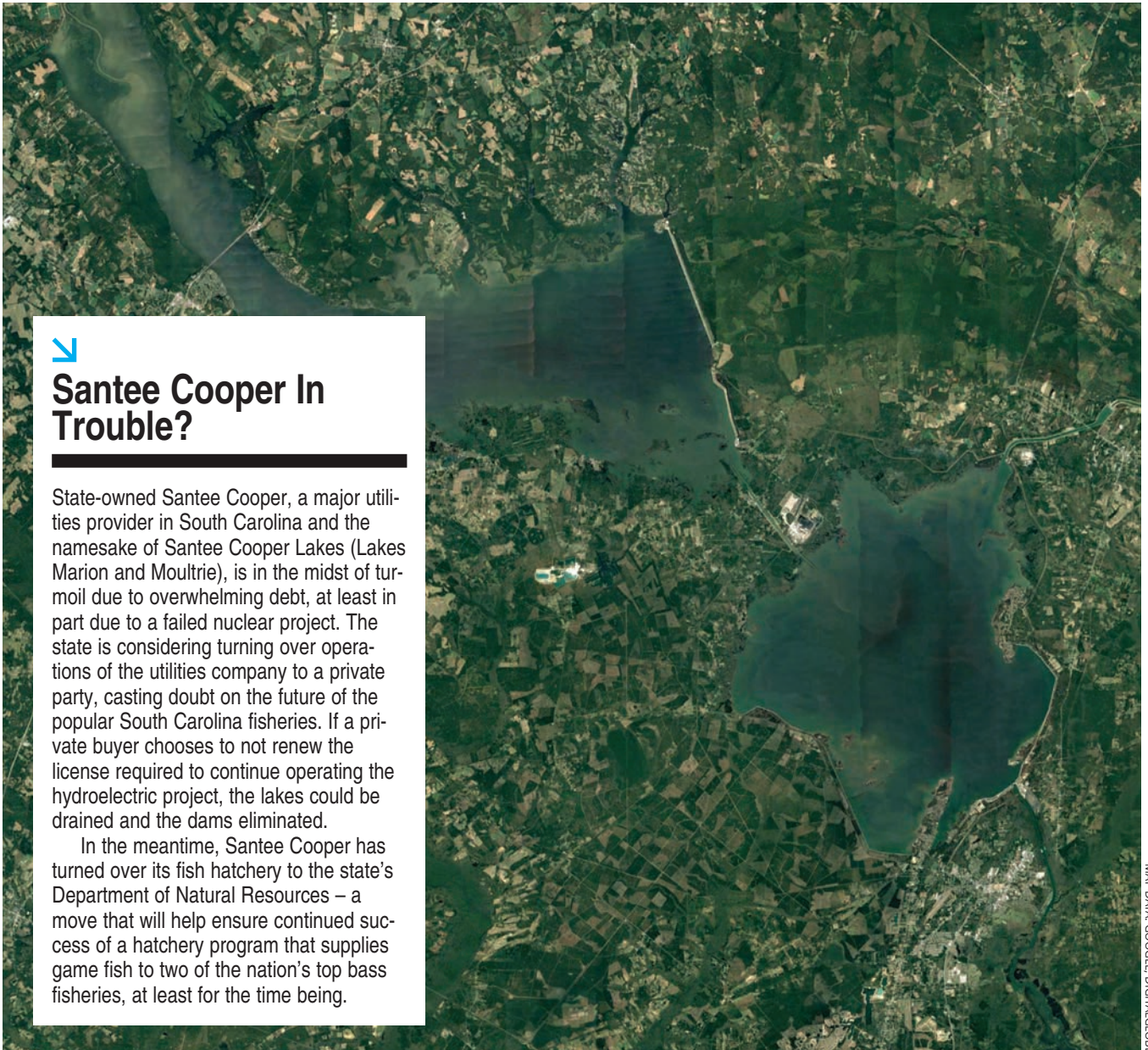


PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

Thrift Never Stops

Thrift's consecutive limits streak now stands at 70, and he's now cleared more than \$2.5 million in career earnings in 13 years as a Tour pro.

Oh yeah, and he happens to be third in Angler of the Year points through two events with his eyes on yet another crown.



MAP DATA: GOOGLE, DIGITALGLOBE

Santee Cooper In Trouble?

State-owned Santee Cooper, a major utilities provider in South Carolina and the namesake of Santee Cooper Lakes (Lakes Marion and Moultrie), is in the midst of turmoil due to overwhelming debt, at least in part due to a failed nuclear project. The state is considering turning over operations of the utilities company to a private party, casting doubt on the future of the popular South Carolina fisheries. If a private buyer chooses to not renew the license required to continue operating the hydroelectric project, the lakes could be drained and the dams eliminated.

In the meantime, Santee Cooper has turned over its fish hatchery to the state's Department of Natural Resources – a move that will help ensure continued success of a hatchery program that supplies game fish to two of the nation's top bass fisheries, at least for the time being.

↓ Tour Breakdown

Despite having 34 rookies on the FLW Tour this season, the 2019 field is the oldest by average age in the history of the Tour at just under 44 years. Gary Yamamoto (75) is the oldest angler on Tour, while Bailey Boutries (19 at the start of the season) represents the other end of the spectrum. The average number of pros under the age of 30 on Tour in its 24-year existence is 24.5, while the 2019 field boasts 26 pros under the age of 30.



GARY YAMAMOTO



BAILEY BOUTRIES



↓ PETA Calls for End To Boy Scouts Merit Badges

On Sept. 17, 2018, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) called on the Boy Scouts of America to eliminate its Fishing and Fly Fishing merit badges in favor of more “eco- and animal-friendly accomplishments.”

Both merit badges outline requirements for Boy Scouts to learn the importance of catch-and-release fishing, Leave No Trace fundamentals and good sportsmanship. The organization has taken no action following PETA’s demand.

Boy Scouts of America isn’t PETA’s first foray into attempting to curb the sport of fishing. The organization created Fish Amnesty Day in 1997 to “remind people that animals should be respected, not killed for fun.”



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER

↓ Living the Dream

The Bass Federation Living the Dream winner and 2019 FLW Tour pro Austin Wilson has enough money banked – including entry fees paid for as part of the Living the Dream package – to live in hotels most of the season, but he’s thinking big. So big, in fact, that in order to save for his dream of fishing the FLW Tour again next year, he’s living small, out of his truck and sleeping in his boat all season long. It’s a matter of thriftiness and not necessity, and he has a few tips for making it all work.

1. “Make sure you have a nice warm sleeping bag for those cold nights,” he says. A sleeping pad and an extra sleeping bag for additional padding never hurt either.
2. Find a good place to do some laundry. Wilson found a campground near Lake Toho where he could set up camp for a couple days to do wash and dry the many clothes he packed for the season-long camping trip.
3. Make your money count. Wilson has multiple coolers he keeps filled with ice and groceries so he’s not spending a lot of money on individual meals. He does most of his cooking on a propane heater, which doubles as a heat source for those cool nights. ■


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TOUR LIFE

HOW TO BE A BETTER COMPETITOR, FROM THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

WHAT'S INSIDE:

The love/hate relationship that is Aaron Britt

Don't get punked: How to deal with intimidation

TOURNAMENT-WINNING TECHNIQUES FROM THE FLW TRAILS



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUIURA

PROFILE: AARON BRITT

Understanding the love/hate relationship that is the California pro

By Sean Ostruszka

There's no middle ground. You either love Aaron Britt, or you hate him. And honestly, he doesn't care which camp you're in.

That might seem blunt or harsh or arrogant, because it is all those things; because Britt is all those things. He's a 32-year-old who curses frequently, never holds his tongue, refers to himself as "Legit Britt" and wears his emotions on his sleeves, which happen to cover a tapestry of tattoos.

By his accounts he eats and breathes bass fishing, and his one and only goal is to be the best fisherman in the sport, "period, because I know I can be."

Basically, in a sport whose traditions venerate the old-guard model of modesty and quiet confidence, he's the polar opposite. He's everything the sport loathes. In fact, based on what you've read thus far, you might even loathe him, too.

If you do, that's OK. The California pro is used to people making snap judgements about him. As he says, when you're "so vibrant, so passionate and so emotional" as he is, you're an easy target for judgement. But he wants to stand out; to be different.

All he asks is that if you are going to judge him, actually get to know him before you do.

"I'm about as straight and honest as they come," says Britt. "I am who I am, and I like who I am. Yet, people misunderstand me.

"I don't mind, though. I understand, being who I am, it's a tougher price to pay. Some people get me. Some don't. You can't expect everyone to understand."

THE ART OF FISHING

His neck, his knuckles, his forearms – Britt's canvas of tattoos is extensive, which only helps him play the role of West Coast punk in many people's minds.

"People see the tattoos, and they immediately frown upon them and me," Britt says. "They don't even bother to read them. They should, because every one of them is important to me."

There's the garden of roses on his left forearm and hand. There's the pocket watch on the back of his right hand. A lock and his birth year on his right wrist. A heart with the word "Mom" on his left hand.

And then there are the others; the ones where he professes his passions and mantras.

"My knuckles say 'Stay True' because that's what I always want to be, every day," Britt says. "And on each finger is a fish jumping."

He has the Star of David prominently displayed because "I'm Jewish, and I'm proud of my religion."

His right forearm features a giant bass with the word "Addicted," and in among the roses on his left forearm is "Chase Your Dreams." He also has "Never Give Up" inscribed on his neck.

"I chose places for those tattoos because I wanted people to see them," Britt says. "They're important to me. I want people to see what drives me every day; what I'm all about."

As noted, some people get him, and some don't. One who does is Michael Iaconelli, which should come as little surprise. Iaconelli pioneered the persona of being too brash and bold for the sport. It got him intense notoriety and intense scrutiny, and to this day, despite all of Iaconelli's success in pro fishing, many still consider him an outcast.

The two have shared the boat on a number of occasions, and Iaconelli's message to Britt has stayed the same.

"He gets it," Britt says. "He gets what it's like to be this passionate about fishing, and he has tried to teach me there's a fine line that I'm still learning. But there's a reason people call me the 'West Coast Iaconelli.' I take it as a compliment."

STIRRING EMOTIONS

If you couldn't tell, Britt is an emotional guy. Then again, you probably would be, too, if you had Tourette syndrome, ADHD and an impulse disorder.

Trying to keep all those issues under control on a daily basis is not easy, and obviously, they get the better of him at times, resulting in bluntness and outbursts of emotion, which some fans noticed when Britt was on *FLW Live* at Lake Toho.

Just ask him what it's like to be a professional fisherman. "Stressful! But I wouldn't want to do anything else."

Or ask him about his one and only MMA fight; one which has gone down in infamy for ending in a double knockout 14 seconds in. "Unbelievable! I just

thank God it didn't go longer. My cardio sucked."

Or about him being disqualified from the Lake Lanier event for violating FLW's no-information rule during the off-limits period. "It damn near brought me to tears. No info was exchanged, but I made a mistake so it's my fault."

That episode still stirs plenty of emotional reactions from Britt, though most of them are positive now.

"I had so many pros reach out after," Britt says. "Guys like Jason Reyes and Cody Meyer and John Cox. It gave me a warm feeling to know guys like that were there for me."

"I wanted to play baseball, but that all changed when I was 16 and my dad, Ron, and I went on a guided trip to Clear Lake."

Keeping calm is, by his own admission, one of the biggest hurdles Britt feels he needs to work on to become the angler he wants to be. In his mind, "it's what separates the men from the boys."

Hence the constant reminders inscribed on his body.

You might wonder why Britt would choose such a mental sport to begin with, what with him "starting out in an emotional hole." Ask him that, and suddenly he gets calm. His tone changes. And the man who has trouble focusing suddenly focuses with remarkable precision.

"I wanted to play baseball, but that all changed when I was 16 and my dad, Ron, and I went on a guided trip to Clear Lake," Britt says. "I can close my eyes and still picture everything about those two days."

As he tells it, he and his dad hired local guide Dave Majestic to take them fishing on a lake they'd lived little more than an hour from his entire life, yet had never fished before.

"I remember him [Majestic] coming down the bank to meet us at the dock while tossing a spinnerbait. I remember getting out on the lake and seeing the lake; the docks and reeds and rocks. It was like out of a video game. We must've caught 300 fish pitching Senkos, which I thought was ridiculous at the time.

"I was so dumb. I was working that Senko like crazy because that's obviously what you had to do, in my mind. I caught some fish doing it my way, but eventually I learned."

Britt remembers coming home from that trip with a focus that he'd never experienced before.

"I had to be the best fisherman," Britt says. "I wasn't going to settle for anything less. Right then and there I knew I loved this sport too much to ever stop."

That passion clearly hasn't waned 16 years later, and neither have some of the same bad habits.

So go ahead and judge Britt.

Say he's too loud. Frown on his tattoos. Call him a punk.

Or say he's passionate. Admire his tattooed mantras. Call him determined for working through all of his issues.

Whichever side you land on, there is no middle ground.

"Either you like me or you don't," says Britt. "If you like me, stick around. If you don't, leave." ■

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THE INTIMIDATION FACTOR

By Clark Reehm

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



We'd all like to think tournament fishing is a gentleman's sport built on respect and courtesy.

The truth of the matter is this: It's a sport of alpha personalities who all want to win every time they hit the water. A guy may be really laid back off the water, but in the boat, he won't hesitate to step on your neck. When you're dealing with that many alphas all vying for the largest slice of the same pie, you're going to get people who try to dominate or intimidate others. It's just human nature.

It's been that way as long as I've been in the sport, and it happens in every tournament and at every level.

I remember the first and only time I got "punked" by a legendary pro who used his stature to intimidate me. He didn't yell. He didn't even say a word. We were fishing the same small area, and when I started to idle to a new section of it, he jumped behind his console and idled faster than me, hopping in front and positioning his boat in a way that sent a clear message: "This is mine." I was new and didn't know how to handle the situation, and, unfortunately, I conceded to his aggressiveness.

When it comes down to it, intimidation is just a matter of how aggressive an angler is willing to be toward another to gain an advantage. That

leaves the second angler with three choices: be aggressive back, put up with it or concede.

It used to be that you would see a lot more of the third option, particularly from new anglers, when confronted by an aggressive veteran. If you were already insecure and intimidated by their mere presence, when they started to throw their weight around, your natural inclination was to fold.

There's been quite a shift in recent years, which has been both good and bad.

The bad side is when intimidating behaviors start to happen and we see more aggressive behavior in return.

The new wave of anglers often fishes against some very stiff competition at the Costa FLW Series level, and by the time they're ready to fish the FLW Tour they're not afraid of a guy like Bryan Thrift or Scott Martin. The new guys know they're good anglers, and they don't see top-flight pros as untouchable gods, but as equal competitors. If a situation arises, they see no reason to back down.

Additionally, they've come up in an age in which more run-ins on the water are televised or publicized. When I first started, you never heard the dirty stories of pros getting into altercations on the water, so when it happened to me, I was shocked. These days, a quick YouTube search

reveals no shortage of videos of pros having run-ins with one another.

You won't see guys screaming and cussing at one another in those videos, but make no mistake, one side clearly tries to intimidate the other, with the other not backing down. The result, typically, is a ton of passive-aggressive hostility, which is usually how the behavior shows itself on the water.

The Jason Lambert-Randy Haynes situation at Kentucky Lake in 2018 is a prime example. Two Tennessee River studs were fishing the same spot. Neither raised his voice, but both were quite passive-aggressive with words and actions.

Now that those altercations have been publicized, when anglers at the lower levels encounter this type of thing on the water, in my opinion, they're more comfortable being aggressive back, for better or worse.

Fortunately, while guys might not always handle themselves as well as they used to in these situations, I can honestly say you don't see attempted intimidation nearly as much as you used to.

More and more anglers are working together. We all have the same mapping chips. We know a lot of the same spots. We understand that, more likely than not, we'll be sharing water or spots. There's no need to be so protective or to try to punk someone into leaving your area; just work together to share the spot so it benefits you both.

And in no situation is it OK to get physical with another angler, or take a minor effort at intimidation and turn it into a truly awful, angry confrontation. It's against the rules, and it's not good for the sport to cross the line.

At the end of the day, your entry fee is worth the same as his. He doesn't get a discount because he has more trophies in his case. Remember that and keep a cool head, and intimidation won't ever be an issue. However, if I'm in your area ... please get out of my way! ■



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COSTA FLW SERIES | LAKE AMISTAD – Jan. 3-5, 2019



➤ **Ray Hanselman, Del Rio, Texas** **38lbs**



Winning Pattern

With day one cancelled due to bad weather, Ray Hanselman stepped on the gas on day two en route to weighing in 25-15 – the same amount as runner-up Tyson Patrick’s two-day total. Hanselman blew away the field on his home lake by camping on a grass-lined ditch in the mouth of a prominent spawning area. On day two, he cast a Strike King 5XD to high spots in the grass, but during the post-frontal conditions of day three Hanselman had to pluck them off the bottom. He used the crankbait, a suspending jerkbait fished with 10-second pauses and a drop-shot with a Strike King KVD Dream Shot. His 38-pound total was more than 12 pounds better than second place.



FLW TOUR | SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR – Jan. 10-13, 2019



➤ **Terry Bolton, Benton, Ky.** **91lbs, 3oz**



Winning Pattern

Bolstered by a 33-pound, 9-ounce effort on day two, Terry Bolton earned his first FLW Tour win primarily by fishing a trio of Rapala DT Series crankbaits, but he also tossed a 3/4-ounce white Accent spinnerbait and a Carolina-rigged 5-inch green pumpkin Zoom Lizard. Bolton keyed on bare spots along the inside grass line in the mornings, then slid out to the outside edge on the end of drains where prespawn bass were grouped up 15 to 18 feet deep.



COSTA FLW SERIES | LAKE OKEECHOBEE – Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2019

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUJURA



Nick Thliveros, St. Augustine, Fla. 46lbs 1oz

TOP BAIT(S)



Winning Pattern

Cold, dirty, low water forced Nick Thliveros to seek out a nontraditional winning area for Okeechobee in the spring. He ran into a canal between Henry Creek and the J&S area and caught prespawn fish by cranking a Lucky Craft silent square-bill over riprap. Thliveros had another rock spot near the ramp he also cranked. By day three, however, an adjustment was in order. The young pro ran to the Monkey Box and flipped for spawners and schooling fish with a Nichols jig with a Strike King Rage Craw trailer and a Texas-rigged Bitters Salty Sling (finesse worm) with a 1/32-ounce weight.



FLW TOUR | LAKE TOHO – Feb. 7-10, 2019

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



Buddy Gross, Chickamauga, Ga. 85lbs, 12oz

TOP BAIT(S)



Winning Pattern

One spot at the south end of Lake Toho turned out 19 of the 20 keepers that Buddy Gross weighed. On the surface, the spot showed as a V-shaped notch in a grass mat that jutted 50 yards into the mat and opened up about 30 yards wide. On the lake floor, two open lanes coursed through the grass in 7 feet of water. Prespawn and postspawn bass were positioned on grass clumps spread out in between. Gross caught almost all of his tournament fish by rotating between a 5-inch Scottsboro Tackle Co. Swimbait on a 3/8-ounce, 8/0 Owner Beast Flashy Swimmer and a homemade 1/2-ounce white swim jig with a 4-inch Scottsboro Swimbait trailer. He used a black and blue jig with a Zoom Z-Craw to find his fish in practice. ■

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WHAT'S INSIDE:

Balog dishes on the secrets of shiner fishing

How to dissect flooded cover with spinnerbaits

BREAKING DOWN SWIMMING WORMS WITH JOHN COX

Cause and effect of harmful algal blooms

The right way to add electronics to kayaks



BALOG'S BIG BASS QUEST



JOE BALOG

Joe Balog is an accomplished tournament fisherman from the Upper Midwest who relocated to Florida to scratch his lifelong itch to chase trophy largemouths.

PHOTOS BY MILLENNIUM PROMOTIONS, INC.

HOW TO CATCH GIANTS WITH SHINERS

For generations, bass anglers across North America have flocked to Florida for a shot at a fish of a lifetime. I, too, got the bug early, making repeated trips as a youngster with my dad, and later moving to the Sunshine State to pursue some of the country's biggest bass. Over time, I've followed the pursuits of many of the area's best big-bass fishermen, from obsessive loaners to successful guides.

In recent years, likely no Florida professional has fulfilled the dreams of more vagabond bassers than Capt. Sean Rush of Salt Springs. Primarily focusing his efforts on famed Rodman Reservoir near Ocala, Rush has hoisted hundreds of double-digit monsters over his gunwales, topped by four certified bass surpassing 13 pounds caught by his clients.

To the untrained eye, Rush's approach and those of just about every Florida trophy hunter appear very simplistic and similar: Grab a livewell full of big, frisky shiners, find a good-looking weedline to hoist them toward and wait it out. Further investigation proves Rush's methods are far from ordinary, and his attention to detail often exceeds that of his competitors.

Born to be a Guide

Rush has bass fishing in his bloodline. His grandfather, Gene Moore, was an

early guide on Rodman, and by age 18, Rush was guiding too. However, even after working 300 days a year for more than three decades, Rush is still a student of the game.

"I still learn something every day, a new hole, or a new drop-off," he says. "As much as I've been on Rodman, I bet I know less than half of what's out there."

It should be known that Rush's chosen stomping grounds are unique, to say the least. Impounded in 1968, Rodman still has large sections that were never cleared of timber, and it features the winding turns of the Oklawaha River channel, as well as acres of floating and rooted vegetation. It's been said that a bass angler could fish Rodman his whole life and never cast to the same tree twice.

Rush breaks things down systematically to locate lunker bass.

"A lot of it is visual," he says. "I like to find a mix of things."

Keying on the heaviest cover in the lake, Rush looks for areas where numerous types of floating cover come together. The primary vegetation types are water lettuce, hyacinth and pennywort, but mixed cover offers the best concentrations of multiple forage types, drawing panfish, shiners and bass to the area. In addition, Rush believes the biggest bass like to get up under horizontal cover and feed using bold, dark ambush points.

Treat Big Bass Like Big Bucks

To target giant bass living deep within, Rush employs the ancient art of Florida shiner fishing. Here, large live baits are fished either in place on floats, against the cover's edge or by free-lining beneath the mats. Before a single cast is made, however, Rush takes every step possible to begin his hunt undetected.

Fishing from a camouflaged aluminum boat, every move Rush makes is based on stealth. He eases into his fishing areas by trolling motor, where custom lead anchors – featuring drab, brown lines – are deployed quietly, far from the edge of the cover.

"Big bass are like a big buck," Rush explains. "They're just a little bit smarter than all the rest."

Rush is insistent that his careful approach increases the odds for a double-digit fish. In addition, his sneaky forays occasionally turn up a new fishing location.

"Big bass can be visible, if you're quiet," Rush adds.

He says he's often seen giants basking in the sun on the edge of cover, then returned later to catch them.

Once in place, Rush deploys tackle to match his approach. His rods are heavy-power muskie sticks; his hook a stout plain-shank, offset-point 4/0 Eagle Claw 84a. Rush's line choice, however, comes as somewhat of a surprise. Despite fishing the heaviest vegetation in bass fishing, he uses 20-pound-test green mono instead of braid.

"The fish see the braid, no doubt," Rush insists. Even in the thickest of cover, he believes using braid reduces his number of bites. "It's little subtle differences like that that make a difference with a big fish."

All About Shiners



Rush's bait choice requires a level of understanding. Two principles drastically affect an angler's chances of success when shiner fishing: 1) the quality of the bait, and 2) an in-tune understanding of its actions.

Regarding quality, an extensive process takes place before shiners ever see a bait shop. They must be collected from the wild, meticulously handled and cared for, and properly cured (a process whereby captive bait evacuates its bowels).

Having properly cured and cared for shiners is so important that many big-bass hunters resort to catching their own bait before each outing. Rush relies on several partners to ensure he has the best bait available, and often hand-picks each individual shiner from his supplier. A high-quality, strong shiner will exhibit a light gray color in the tank, and will be free of any fungus or fin damage. In addition, Rush selects shiners around 8 inches long, which is not gigantic by Florida standards. He feels that shiners of that

size are easiest to control and manipulate within cover. On board, Rush keeps shiners active with an aftermarket air diffuser, rather than a tradition livewell recirc pump.

Mat Dissection

With the tanks full, Rush dissects heavy mats systematically. Lines featuring small, natural-colored floats and shiners hooked through the back under the dorsal fin stake out the edge of the cover. A single bait is enticed to swim under the mat with no float at all. The technique is called free-lining, where a tail-hooked shiner is deployed to the edge of the grass. The shiner is then coaxed into swimming up under the mat using a blend of light tugging and "weighing the line" to get the shiner to swim against the resistance of the angler pulling him from behind.

"I get to fish that a lot of other guys can't," Rush explains. "It's an art form of getting a shiner in there."

With an intimate knowledge of the reactions of shiners around big bass, Rush can quickly gauge a spot's potential, often finding one particular hole or territory within a large area of cover that's holding a school of fish.

"From so many decades of doing it, I can read the bait better," he says.

Here, my experience agrees. Even after hundreds of hours working with wild shiners in the heaviest of cover, I subtly get better at coercing them deeper each time out, without consciously noticing my improvement. After years of experience, a good shiner fisherman can tell exactly what lies beneath a mat within just a few minutes of reconnaissance with a healthy baitfish. A calm shiner swimming steadily indicates few or no predator fish in the area. In the presence of big bass, however, that same bait will kick erratically, attempting to get out of harm's way.

In clear lakes, I've watched bass pursue wild shiners several times. My field-testing assures that the cat-and-mouse game seems to excite big bass, almost making them strike out of anger.

Rush's wealth of experience allows him to communicate with his bait, keeping his clients in the neighborhood of giant bass throughout the day. A hot spot is immediately identifiable. Once things cool down, Rush gets back on the trolling motor and seeks new territory.

An open mind and attention to detail, combined with vast amounts of time on the water, equate to more big bass coming into Rush's boat.

"A lot of guides are better entertainers than me, or funnier, or have bigger personalities," Rush says. "I'm just a results-oriented guy."

And it's results, not jokes, that ultimately end up in the record books. ■





PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

CLOSE-QUARTERS SPINNERBAIT FISHING

HOW TO SLING BLADES ACCURATELY AND EFFECTIVELY WHEN THE WATER IS IN THE BUSHES

The spinnerbait enjoyed a good old-fashioned revival in 2018 thanks to a couple of high-profile events that landed just on the cusp of the spawn. The most prominent showcase for the classic “blade” was the FLW Tour event at Lake Cumberland, where a pre-tournament deluge left many anglers little choice but to bushwhack their way into flooded brush and trees. Even though Bryan Thrift won the derby by catching smallmouths offshore, many of the top 10, including Indiana pro Allen Boyd, who finished runner-up, relied on spinnerbaits in the woods to earn their paychecks.

When to Bust out the Blade

High visibility can kill the spinnerbait bite in flooded cover, so Boyd won't pick it up in gin-clear water or on flat-calm days. Without chop or stain, he thinks a swim jig is a better tool.

Seasons also factor in. At Cumberland, the largemouth bass were moving up in numbers toward spawning areas, but the spawn hadn't fully begun (though Boyd thinks a few were spawning by the weekend).

“At Cumberland it was so perfect for that spinnerbait deal. I really felt like I could have run about any flat pockets – well, flat for Cumberland – and caught them doing what I was doing. There were so many fish up,” he says.

“As they get more locked down and start to get on the beds they'll kind of turn off of the spinnerbait. You'll have to go with the swim jig or start flipping some sort of bottom bait to get them to react.”

Find the Pattern

Spinnerbait patterns are twofold in flooded cover. You need to figure out where bass are within the lake (spawning flats, main-lake pockets, staging areas in creeks, lower or upper end, etc.) as well as what type of cover they prefer.

Some of the clues to finding bass within a body of water come from the season, local history and water temperature. For dialing in on cover types, Boyd tries to cover water quickly.

“Every fish you catch will tell you something,” he says. “Sometimes they're on the bushy stuff; sometimes on the harder trees. Sometimes they're on outside trees; sometimes inside trees. One time in a spring tournament on a local lake, I got on a pattern where every bite I had was on a maple tree. I didn't throw to any other type of tree.”

Keys to Success: Stealth and Efficiency

Success in the trees is all about making as many good casts as possible. A good cast is accurate and stealthy, which is why Boyd prefers a roll-cast whenever possible.

He keeps his spinnerbait close to the water's surface and feathers the spool before touchdown to avoid a splash. A short 6-foot, 9-inch G. Loomis SBR 812 Spinnerbait rod makes roll-casting easier.

Reducing the distance from target is helpful for accuracy, too, but there's a tricky balance involved.

"I personally don't like to be really far away from my targets," Boyd says. "Sometimes I find myself getting a little too close and maybe spooking the fish. But from fishing the [Ohio] river, I've learned that when you're fishing that type of cover your chance of getting the fish out and in the livewell is a whole lot better when you're close."

Target Tactics

The No. 1 rule for throwing a spinnerbait around flooded cover is to keep the bait as close to the wood as possible.

"If you can hit some limbs on the way that's even better," says Boyd. "It's similar to how you fish a crankbait. You want it deflecting to draw that bite."

Second best to actually deflecting off the wood is to impart an "artificial deflection" by popping the rod tip to cause the blades to flare.

"Sometimes that fish sees the spinnerbait go by at the same old steady retrieve, and it doesn't draw that reaction bite from him. When you pop the spinnerbait, a lot of times that'll get him to come out and eat it."

Boyd also caters his presentation to the specific cover type in front of him.

Laydowns – On the approach, Boyd makes a cast or two across the end of a laydown until his boat advances far enough that he can close the angle and cast right along each side of the trunk.

"If I have a bunch of laydowns to fish then I'll make one cast to each side of the laydown and go to the next one. If it's a really isolated deal and I think there's a fish on that piece of cover I'll make multiple casts to each side of that laydown."

Bushes and standing trees – Boyd first casts across the front of a bush or tree on his approach. Once past it, he turns and slings a cast back behind the tree. Effectively, he's able to fish both sides on one pass without slowing down.

Get Creative

Efficiency, accuracy and persistence lead to results in the "bass woods." The best way to improve is to spend more time doing it and learning to pattern bass on a lake-wide scale and within a particular section of cover. Then you have to master the skill of casting a spinnerbait where other anglers can't. Boyd can pull off tricky maneuvers like hooking his line under a limb to direct the bait farther back into cover, or backhanding a roll-cast.

The end result – hopefully – is a classic bass lure right in the home of a big largemouth.

Choosing Spinnerbaits

Boyd admits he "uses lots of different spinnerbaits." At Cumberland, he fished a 1/2-ounce War Eagle with a white and chartreuse skirt, a chartreuse back blade and a white front blade. He sort of "stumbled" on that particular pattern in practice when he made a few experimental casts with the painted blades and wound up catching a 6-pounder. These days, most of his spinnerbaits are made by Indiana-based Red Dirt Bait Co., which builds spinnerbaits with "tunable" titanium wire that Boyd says lasts longer than stainless but can still be tuned to run straight.

For flooded cover, he breaks down spinnerbait selection based on several key features

Blade style – Boyd's go-to in high water is a double-Colorado. The size and lift afforded by the blades let him bring the bait by a piece of cover very slowly. If he wants to fish deeper but keep it slow, he'll swap to a big single Colorado. In clear water he opts for a double-willow arrangement, which allows him to increase retrieve speed.

Blade colors – Gold in dirty water, silver in clear is Boyd's best strategy. He also experiments with one of each color on tandem spinnerbaits. Painted blades are reserved for heavy fishing pressure or muddy water, but they don't get a lot of use by the Indiana pro.

Skirt color – Boyd keeps it simple: white in clear water and chartreuse or another bright color in stained water.

Head size – On the Ohio River, where 12-inchers earn checks, Boyd likes a 3/8-ounce spinnerbait. Otherwise, he usually opts for a 1/2-ounce bait. ■



Red Dirt Bait Co. spinnerbaits

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PHOTO BY JOEY WHITE

BREAKING DOWN SWIMMING WORMS

THIS SIMPLE TECHNIQUE HELPS JOHN COX CASH MORE CHECKS WHEN OTHER APPROACHES WASH OUT

By Matt Williams

It's no secret John Cox of DeBary, Fla., is among the best skinny-water bass anglers on the planet. Ask, and he'll tell you he is way more comfortable playing in the dirt – or real close to it – than in water too deep to touch bottom with his rod tip.

"I grew up fishing in ponds, canals and stuff like that," Cox says. "I'll fish deep if I have to, but 7 feet or less is where I make my living. It's what I like to do."

Cox is a power fisherman by trade who has banged out some really big checks and top finishes using all sorts of methods ranging from flipping jigs to winding swimbaits and tossing square-bills and frogs. But when the bite turns tough, as it so often does toward the end of multi-day events with large fields, he's always quick to reach for a swimming worm.

"It has saved me more than once when my other patterns played out for one reason or another," Cox says. "I'll have one rigged in every tournament. It's not something that I will usually start with, but I've finished with it a bunch of times."

Learning to wind a worm the way Cox does might save some of your outings too.

Where and When

Cox honed his swimming-worm skills on the shallow, grassy waters of Florida, but he has also used it to exploit bass on lakes and rivers in other parts of the country. The technique will work year-round, but it shines especially bright during the spring months when fished in relation to shallow vegetation, flooded bushes, stumps, laydowns, docks and other types of shoreline cover.

"It works best around grass and pads, but they will also come off of wood to get it," Cox adds. "The main thing I look for in either situation is pretty clear water. If you've got a foot or more of visibility, you can catch 'em swimming a worm."

Worm Choices

Just about any worm can swim, but those with some signature swag in the caboose tend to get the most play. The most popular worm for swimming is probably the Zoom Ultra Vibe

Speed Worm, which features a U-shaped tail that creates a distinctive buzz on the surface and an enticing vibration as it moves through the water column beneath the surface.

A new offering Cox is excited about is the Berkley PowerBait Wind Up. The 7-inch worm is designed with a meaty ribbed body that tapers down to a hard-thumping, boot-style tail – the kind found on many swimbaits – that wags side-to-side when in motion. He used it to finish second at the February FLW Tour stop on Lake Toho.

"The sound it makes when buzzed on the surface is totally unique from traditional swimming worms," Cox says. "My guess is the sound and vibration are different beneath the surface, too. The Ultra Vibe is still going to work, but the Wind Up is going to give fish an entirely different look and sound. I think it will replace some of the other swimming worms. For me, it already has."

Cox says he prefers the Wind Up during springtime warming trends when water temperatures are above 60 degrees and the fish are on an aggressive feed.

"It's a big-fish bait that works really well on the surface or when fished up in the water column over grass and other cover," he says. "I'm also anxious to do some experimenting with it once the fish get on out on the ledges at Kentucky Lake."

Another staple in Cox's swimming-worm arsenal is the classic 10-inch Berkley PowerBait Power Worm. He says its ribbon tail gets the nod in high-pressure situations or when water temperatures are lower than 60 degrees.

"That's when I want something I can just slow-reel across the bottom with a more subtle, finesse-type presentation," Cox says. "The curl tail works great for that."

Rigging Options

1. Weight or no weight – Cox weights his rig based on how high in the water column he wants the bait to run and how quickly he wants to retrieve it.

Going weightless makes it simple to buzz the worm on the surface, an approach that he says can pay off around topped vegetation such as pads or hydrilla, where he'll target holes or small lanes in the canopy.

He'll peg a small tungsten weight ahead of the worm whenever he wants it to run beneath the surface over submerged grass or wood on a slow-to-fast retrieve. His go-to weight

is 1/16 ounce, but he'll go as heavy as 3/16 ounce if the fish are aggressive and want a faster retrieve.

"The heavier the weight, the faster I can reel it and keep it at a certain depth," Cox adds. "You can reel it four times as fast with a 3/16-ounce weight as you can with a 1/16-ounce weight and keep it running right under the surface. The weight also allows you to kill it and let it fall around holes and other targets, or if you see a fish waking behind it. Oftentimes that will trigger the strike."

2. Line and hook choices – Cox will use 20- to 50-pound-test Berkley x5 Braid with the Wind Up around scattered to heavy vegetation. He prefers Berkley Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon around docks and wood, in really clear water, or when slow-reeling the ribbon-tail worm close to bottom.

His hook choice with the boot tail is a 4/0 or 5/0 wide-gap Berkley Fusion19. A 3/0 straight-shank offset gets the call with the Power Worm, and he Tex-poses both hook styles for optimum penetration.

Reel Ratios, Rod Actions and Hooksets

Rounding out Cox's swimming-worm system is a reel geared to provide the proper retrieve speed and a rod built to deliver a solid hookset

when a bass gobbles up the moving bait. His preferences vary with worm style.

Ribbon-tail worms – Cox prefers a 6.4:1 Abu Garcia Revo matched with a Mud Hole MHX-MB903 medium-heavy rod. He says the slower gear ratio helps him creep the bait along bottom while the 7 1/2-foot rod aids in gathering excess line quickly before making a sweeping hookset.

The Wind Up – Cox opts for a faster 8.0:1 retrieve speed or the Revo Rocket, which retrieves line at a 10.1:1 ratio, for retrieving the boot tail on the surface or through the upper water column. His rod of choice is a Mud Hole NEPS86HF. The shorter 7-foot, 2-inch rod helps with accuracy while the faster reel swallows up excess line quickly.

Cox adds that most strikes on the Wind Up will cause some sort of visible surface commotion.

"When I see that," he says, "I'll usually pause and let the fish swim with it a second or two before reeling down and setting the hook. It's sort of like fishing a frog."

In summary, swimming a worm doesn't work 100 percent of the time, but it will sometimes produce when other stuff fails.

"Anytime you are around fish they'll eat it," Cox says. "It's a good way to get paid, for sure." ■



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HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS

THEIR CAUSE AND EFFECT ON LAKE ERIE

By TJ Maglio

Nestled in the heart of the Rust Belt, Lake Erie is one of the most storied lakes in the country. From hosting one of the most important naval battles of the War of 1812, to the \$34 billion in shipped goods that traverse its waters each year, it is truly a “Great” lake.

In case you haven’t heard, there are a couple bass living in it as well.

Part of that storied history is Lake Erie’s role as a bellwether for environmental controversy.

In 1969, *Time* magazine likened the lake and its tributaries to “convenient, free sewers.” Later that year, the Cuyahoga River, which flows through Cleveland and into Lake Erie, famously caught on fire, spurring an onslaught

of national media attention. This public outcry drove the passage of some of the most landmark environmental legislation in history, including the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Since that low point, and through the combined impact of those laws and the efforts of federal, state, and local authorities, community organizations, and sportsman groups, Lake Erie has rebounded and is home to a multi-billion-dollar tourism industry.

As with every success story though, there are constant challenges – the most recent of which is an uptick in unsightly and sometimes unhealthy algal blooms

throughout Erie's Western Basin. These blooms can release high levels of toxins, which can cause gastrointestinal issues, respiratory symptoms and other health issues for residents and tourists. They can also impact dissolved oxygen and other water quality metrics that affect the fishery.

Good Algae, Bad Algae or Both?

Algae are simple, microscopic organisms present in almost all natural waterbodies. They use photosynthesis to derive their energy from the sun like a plant and range in size from microscopic to the 50-meter-tall giant kelp forests found throughout the ocean.

An important part of every healthy ecosystem, algae are the primary food source for zooplankton, as well as many baitfish species. This makes some algae vital, as they form the foundation for a healthy food chain.

In a classic example of too much of a good thing, algae of many species can experience rapid growth events, or "blooms," when conditions are right. These blooms range from benign to unsightly to downright toxic, depending on the species of alga and other mitigating factors. These events occur naturally all over the world, but human impact can exacerbate their frequency or severity. Some famous examples of these events are the "red tides" in the Gulf of Mexico and the bioluminescent algal blooms off the coast of southern California.

The huge blooms in Lake Erie are caused by an algal species called *Microcystis aeruginosa*, which produces a toxin called microcystin as it dies. High levels of certain microcystins have been linked to respiratory infections, skin rashes and liver damage in humans, as well as similar harm to fish and other aquatic animals.

Too Much of a Good Thing

Most researchers believe the root cause of the algal blooms in Lake Erie is elevated levels of phosphorus in the water, caused by runoff from agricultural (non-point source) and industrial sources. The algae need phosphorus to grow, so when phosphorus levels are elevated, there is no limit to the amount of algae that can grow.

Phosphorus is a common component of agricultural fertilizers, household chemicals and road salt. When it rains, excess phosphorus enters the storm systems, creeks and rivers. In addition to the high nutrient levels, other factors such as calm water, high temperatures and low current flow (all frequently found around Lake Erie in July and August) create the perfect conditions for a bloom.

Fishery Impact

Although the blooms are unsightly and somewhat toxic to people as well as fish, the good news is that most experts have seen minimal impact as yet to the Lake Erie fishery as a whole, and even less to the smallmouth bass fishery specifically.

Despite the lack of evidence that the blooms actually affect the fish, they definitely impact the industry, as

anglers have less interest in fishing (and beachgoers have less interest in visiting) during a bloom, which negatively impacts tourism and economic impact to the region.

What Can Anglers Do?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has a wealth of information on the harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie, with a dedicated webpage that includes information on how you can help reduce the blooms, as well as tracking and prediction information to help understand where the blooms will occur and how to avoid them. Go to tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/hab/lakeerie.html to learn more.

Also, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a dedicated website that covers how you can reduce nutrient pollution at the residential level, which can be found at epa.gov/nutrientpollution/what-you-can-do.

Finally, the NOAA has a site with current aerial photography of the lake, so you can see where the bloom is heaviest. Visit coastwatch.glerl.noaa.gov/modis/modis.php?region=e to get current info this summer.

FISHING DURING A BLOOM

Mike Simonton, a fishing guide and former FLW pro, has been fishing Lake Erie's Western Basin for years, and he's no stranger to dealing with the unsightly algal blooms.

"It's disgusting," he says. "It's like driving through pea soup. It really takes away from the enjoyment of a day on the water, so really the best thing you can do is avoid it."

Fortunately for anglers, though, Simonton thinks that the bloom is more of a detriment to the anglers than the bass.

"There are lots of guys that still catch a lot of fish right in it. It's just not the most enjoyable experience," he says.

The reason is that, in his experience, the thickest part of the bloom is on the surface, so bass (and other species that relate closely to the bottom) are less affected.

"You'll see it when you drive your boat through it," Simonton explains. "As the waves of green wash past your boat the water underneath them is way clearer. You don't need to make any drastic lure or color changes for that same reason. To the bass, it's probably just a little darker on the bottom."

Simonton recommends the following tips for fishing Lake Erie in the summer:

1. Check the NOAA website. It provides updates on where the bloom is the worst and uses weather data to predict where it will be worst.
2. Keep it out of your mind. The fish will likely be less affected than you.
3. Try to capitalize on the morning bite, as the bite usually gets tougher during the day. ■

ADDING ELECTRONICS TO KAYAKS

TIPS AND ADVICE FOR BRINGING FISH-FINDING CAPABILITY TO A SMALL CRAFT

By Matt Ball
PHOTO BY CHRIS FUNK



Technology such as GPS mapping and sonar are being utilized on more kayaks to bolster offshore capabilities. As a result, it's not uncommon to see bass boats and kayaks finding and fishing the same open-water ledges, weedbeds, and other cover and structure.

If you're interested in adding a fish finder to your kayak, here are a few things to consider.

Types of Electronics

The types of electronics units an angler can run on a kayak are really limitless, but space, method of propulsion and mounting options must be considered when deciding what is best for you.

StructureScan is becoming more and more popular with kayak anglers due to the increased use of pedal drives and electric motors. It can still be used while paddling, but it's not nearly as convenient because side-scanning sonar requires a minimum speed and consistent propulsion to get an effective reading.

Screen size and available real estate in your kayak are other considerations. There needs to be enough room to paddle or pedal without the screen interfering, but the screen needs to be large enough to return good images.

Mounting Options

Accessory-mounting tracks (known as gear tracks) built into kayaks are more popular than ever and make it easy to mount a fish finder. If your kayak doesn't come with tracks, you should probably consider installing them. They're very handy, though there are other electronics-mounting options available, too.

There are many mounts on the market that are compatible with the most common track systems, allowing expensive electronics to be repositioned or easily removed for transport, security or just getting them out of the way when not needed.

YakAttack, RAM Mounts and RAILBLAZA all offer mounting brackets for most popular fish-finder units on the market. YakAttack also makes an all-in-one unit called the CellBlok that might be just the ticket for some kayak anglers. It mounts on a gear track and provides a location to install a sonar unit and transducer arm, plus it holds a battery and all the cables in one removable package.

Transducer Mounting

There are inherent challenges to effectively mounting a transducer on a kayak. For a removable option, the YakAttack SwitchBlade is a good choice. It has an articulated arm that deploys over the side of the kayak, making it possible to mount any size transducer to any kayak with a gear track. This is a great option for anglers wanting to run StructureScan as well as for anglers who might not want to permanently mount a transducer and run wires on their kayak.

Many kayak manufacturers, including Jackson Kayak, now mold a recess for a transducer into the hull of the kayak. Others, such as Bonafide, Wilderness Systems and Feelfree, offer removable pods for mounting the entire unit. You could also mount the transducer inside the kayak and shoot through the hull, but this setup doesn't allow for StructureScan, and it skews temperature readings significantly.

Battery

There are a lot of battery options for kayak anglers. Lithium batteries save weight and offer higher performance than lead acid batteries, but they cost much more. I still believe the tradeoff is worth it.

You need to size your battery for your specific electronics unit. How long you plan to be on the water before recharging will dictate the amp hour (AH) requirements for the battery. By checking your fish finder's draw you can do a simple calculation to determine how big your battery needs to be. The larger units will require more capable batteries for all-day use. If you have questions, you'll want to consult with the electronics and/or battery manufacturer.

As an example, I run a Lowrance Elite-9 Ti on my kayak. It's listed to draw about 0.9 amps per hour. I paired it with a NOCQUA 10AH lithium battery and can safely get eight hours of operation with the screen brightness up and a lot of StructureScan use.

Dakota Lithium Battery is another good source for power. It makes a nice waterproof battery box for the kayak that incorporates features such as USB charging ports for your cellphone and cameras.

All in all, adding a fish finder to your kayak is a good investment that can dramatically increase your success on open water. ■

Matt Ball is the 2016 Kayak Bass Fishing National Champion and one of the top-ranked kayak anglers in the country. He spends the year traveling the tournament trail and serving as an ambassador to the sport.

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WHAT'S INSIDE:

PRODUCT REVIEW:
BERKLEY CHOPPO 120

5 new lures worth throwing
this spring

How sound really affects a
presentation

PHOTO BY MATT PACE



BERKLEY CHOPPO 120

By Matt Williams
PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

Berkley recently introduced a dozen new topwater baits to fill a number of categories, and I was anxious to see how their chunk-and-wind version of a plopping-style bait called the Choppo stacked up against the competition.

What I found was a large-profile bait built around a proven concept with a few twists and tweaks meant to amplify the sound, shower more spray and optimize the balance. All this in a big-fish lure of good quality that's sold for a reasonable price.

First Impression

The two-piece Choppo resembles a large minnow of some sort. Its main body has a mostly flat back and sides with a tapered nose, big 3-D eyes, and a barrel-shaped midsection that accommodates a series of belly weights enclosed by two small chambers.

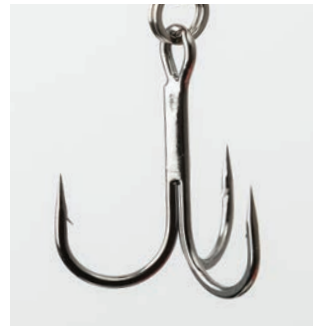
Its cone-shaped tail is equipped with a massive propeller made of super-rigid plastic material. Berkley claims the hard-plastic prop won't warp or lose its shape should your topwater box get left out in the hot sun by mistake, but I didn't go so far as to test its durability by casting in into riprap or a dock post.

Bump the prop with a forefinger and the entire tail section spins free and easy on a stainless shaft. Berkley equipped the Choppo 120 with No. 2 Fusion19 1X black-nickel trebles.

In Action

Berkley didn't reinvent the wheel with the Choppo, but it did make a few tweaks to a topwater style that already has a very rich history of success. In addition to great castability afforded by the bait's size – 1 ounce – the first thing I noticed was how easily the bait got up and running.

One or two cranks with the reel handle had the big propeller churning the surface with a signature *plop-plop-plop* that I could hear from 50 yards away and a distinctive thump that could be felt all the way to the rod tip.



While the Choppo's acoustics weren't significantly different than other similar chunk-and-wind models, the tune was noticeably deeper, louder and more pronounced than what the fish have been dancing to over the last few years. It's also balanced for many speeds.

Final Thoughts

Sometimes just a subtle difference in sound or action between lure brands can make a significant difference in the number of strikes you'll get from one day to the next. To wit: The Z-Man/Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer thumps a little harder than a stock ChatterBait. The XCalibur One Knocker makes a different sound than a Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap. The Choppo, in my opinion, produced a deeper plopping sound, created a little more spray and ran truer at high speeds than a River2Sea Whopper Plopper. The verdict: If you're a fan of boisterous surface plugs known to call fish from a distance, the all-new Choppo 120 is well worth a look. It doesn't need to replace your Whopper Ploppers entirely, but you could call it another valuable tool in the toolbox.

BIG, RIGID PROPELLER:

The prop is designed with a deep cup and wide surface area that deliver a unique variation of the plopping sound.



SIZE AND SHAPE FOR DISTANCE:

At 1 ounce, with a streamlined design, the Choppo soars on the cast.

BELLY CHAMBERS:

A pair of belly weight chambers were strategically placed in front of and behind the front treble to optimize balance and prevent the lure from rolling on its side on fast retrieves. Six weights create a muffled rattling sound as they bang around inside.



Performance Advice

The Choppo 120 is prone to elicit violent strikes from large fish, so it's a good idea to throw it on 40- to 50-pound-test braided line, particularly in shallow situations around scattered grass, stumps, bushes and docks.

It's hard to go wrong with a 7 1/2-foot, medium-heavy or even a heavy-power frog rod with a fast tip for launching casts around scattered shoreline cover or open water. A reel with a 7:1 gear ratio allows for working the bait at varied speeds. Some anglers might prefer a faster reel when covering vast flats with isolated targets to save time between casts.

HITS & MISSES

- + Affordable price point
- + Large, rigid propeller
- + Signature plopping sound
- + Casts well
- + Good color selection
- + Simple to use
- + High-quality hooks
- + Runs true at any speed
- Grasses and small weeds occasionally wrap in the seam between the body and tail.

DETAILS

Price:
\$9.99

Length:
120mm
(about 4 3/4 inches)

Weight:
1 ounce

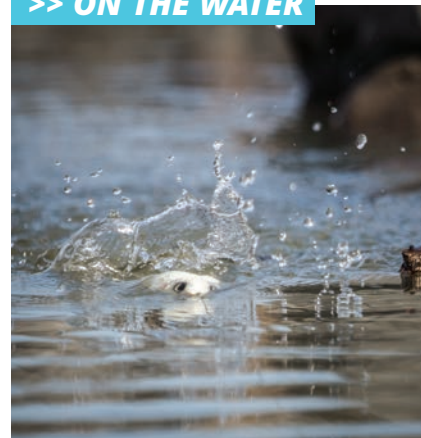
Hooks:
No. 2 Berkley Fusion19
1X trebles

Contact:
berkley-fishing.com ■

APPLICATIONS

- Use it when fan-casting shallow flats, blitzing along shorelines with scattered cover or bombing open water from spring through fall.
- It can be especially productive during the postspawn, when bass are guarding fry or patrolling bream beds, as well as in the fall when bass are eating big gizzard shad.
- The 1-ounce weight of the bait allows for extremely long casts that can sometimes be critical in clear water.
- It's a good choice on lakes where big bass are fairly abundant.

>> ON THE WATER







7



1. NuTECH LURES ELITE SPINJIG

The modular design pairs NuTech's dual-weed-guard grass jig with a detachable wire arm and one or two spinner blades. Either blade can be changed on the tandem model. The combination of parallel arms and an articulated head offers several advantages: It never needs tuning, runs true even with a bent wire, vibrates at slower speeds than normal spinnerbaits and provides a ton of feedback up the line. It's available in 3/8, 1/2, 3/4 and 1 ounce.

\$9.99 for a single blade; \$10.99 for tandem | nutechlures.com

2. BAGLEY PRO SUNNY B TWIN SPIN

At 3 inches long, the Pro Sunny B Twin Spin is that perfect "bass candy" size that shallow bass will clobber when they're prowling for bedding bream or holed up around wood or grass. Big front and rear props churn the surface when twitched or fished on a straight retrieve.

\$8.99 to \$9.99 | bagleybait.com

3. BAGLEY FLAT Balsa B

The Flat Balsa B is similar in size to the Balsa B2, only flatter, subtler and better suited for cooler water. It was designed to climb through limbs and to be fished with a variety of retrieves.

\$8.99 to \$9.99 | bagleybait.com

4. SCOTTSBORO TACKLE COMPANY LINE THROUGH SWIMBAIT

This line-thru-style swimbait that's based on Scottsboro's popular standard model is likely to be a shallow-water big-fish hammer. FLW Tour pro Alex Davis helped with the prototyping process to make sure it has the right body roll and tail kick. It comes in 5- and 6-inch versions.

\$11.99 | scottsborotacklecompany.com

5. MOLIX SUPERNATO FROG

Flanged 2-inch-long legs connect to the 2 1/2-inch Supernato floating frog body by a spring-like screw, while two short wires keep everything aligned. A straight retrieve sets the legs in motion.

\$12.75 | molix.com/en/

6. V&M VERTICAL SHAD

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WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

DIGGING DEEPER INTO HOW SOUND IMPACTS A LURE'S PRESENTATION

It was one of the weirdest things. Yet, it also made sense.

I was chatting with a friend and fellow lure designer one day, swapping stories about different things we'd experienced while tinkering with lures. He shared with me a story about a lipless crankbait he'd helped design for a prominent company.

They were testing rattles in the prototypes, messing with various metals, sizes and numbers of the bearings to get different sounds. Then, something strange happened.

As my friend described, they had some prototypes that worked perfectly and caught a ton of fish. The only problem was, the only fish they caught were crappie. They changed colors ... crappie. They switched spots ... crappie. They swapped presentations ... crappie. The things were the best dinner-catchers since worms, but they weren't worth worms to a bass fisherman.

So, they tried a different metal that created a different sound. The result? Go to the previous paragraph and replace "crappie" with "bass." The lure was a hit, all because of a slightly different sound.

On the face of it, that doesn't make any sense. Why would one rattle pitch sound

like a 100-decibel death metal concert to a bass and the other a dinner bell?

My friend, having a fisheries biology degree, figured it had to do with what the bass were eating at the time. Shad, crayfish, bluegills – they all make noise, and, just as importantly, they all make unique noises under the water. So, one pitch might've sounded like a minnow or something the crappie were eating, while the other may have sounded like a shad or crayfish, which made the bass perk up and take notice.

All that to say: Sound matters when it comes to fishing lures, which is obvious to most bass fishermen. But how important is it, and how do you dial in sound for the best results? I've heard of anglers spending more than \$100 on an older model of a particular topwater lure because of claims that it's louder than the modern version, or buying out a store of a particular crankbait, then keeping only the ones with the "right" rattling pitch before tossing the rest.

It seems ludicrous. Then again, when you hear stories like what I outlined at the start, you kind of get it. Sometimes, sound is THAT important. Here are a few



SEAN OSTRUSZKA

Sean Ostruszka is a lure designer whose baits have been sold by various tackle companies. He's also a freak for tackle details.

key points to keep in mind when it comes to finding the right sound.

Matching the Hatch

Bass listen and use their lateral lines to locate prey all the time, and those senses are especially important in low-light or dingy conditions. It only makes sense to try to match a lure's sound to the forage's sound.

What exactly does a shad or crayfish sound like? It's tough to say, and you don't really need to know the specifics in many cases. Like what my lure-designer friend did at the start, it's important to keep testing until the bass in your lake let you know what they like. Even when you're already on a good pattern, you can still learn more. For instance, if you're catching them on a "standard" lipless crankbait, swap to a bait with a single knocker-type rattle and see what happens.

Noise Makers

No matter how "silent" a lure claims to be, chances are it's almost always making noise. Hooks clanging against the body of a crankbait,

weights hitting against the hook eye on a Texas rig, the weight ticking rocks as you shake a drop-shot – they all make noise.

You can't really control some of those variables, but some you can. Those are the ones you should experiment with. A lure will sound entirely different if the rattles are made of tungsten instead of steel, or if it has a one-knocker instead of multiple tiny rattles.

You can also control sound by changing bait types within a category. Topwater is a good example. There will be days when the gurgle of a buzzbait is going to outperform the plop of a plopper-style topwater. Even different metals in a buzzbait will create different sounds when the blades smack the water.

Listen to the Music

Once you determine fruitful sound patterns, they'll probably carry over on most bodies of water, even if the fisheries are not 100 percent the same.

This not only counts for rattles, but also lures such as poppers that

come in a lot of varieties. A popper that splashes tends to be better around bass eating shad because the splashes of water hitting the surface sound like feeding baitfish, while a popper that makes a loud "bloop" sound is better around bluegill-eating bass because it better mimics the popping noises bluegills make while eating at the surface.

There are exceptions to every rule in fishing, but, generally, once you've determined sound patterns for various forage types, they usually carry across bodies of water.

Be Willing to Change

Bass are moody. There will be days when a loud, obnoxious bait is a turn-on for bass, but on other days they practically run from it. You need to consider their overall activity level based on the season and conditions and realize that, many times, why fish want one thing and not the other isn't easy to pinpoint. Try different things, but don't limit your exploration to only colors and bait types. The sound a lure makes is a critical part of the package too. ■

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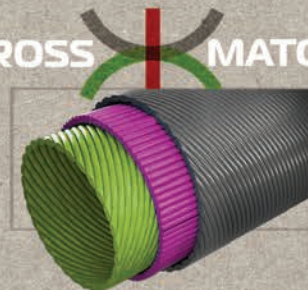
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PHOTO BY MATT PAGE

FLW pro Casey Smith has won with the Keitech from the Midwest to the Potomac River, and he's used it from Champlain to Florida.



THE KEITECH

FLW PRO CASEY SMITH REVEALS HIS SYSTEM FOR MAXIMIZING SUCCESS WITH THE SWING IMPACT FAT

By Curtis Niedermier

The Keitech Swing Impact FAT joined the list of pro fishing's go-to lure choices pretty quietly. Even though it's won hundreds of thousands of dollars in the last few seasons, there was no sudden explosion onto the pro tours.

Probably, that's because the overall swimbait category isn't new. There was no race to snatch it up like there was with ChatterBaits and magnum casting spoons, which were entirely new classes of lures when they busted onto the scene. There was no monumental win or AOY title, like with the Basstrix. Heck, there was no American pro willing to talk about it, even though we saw glimpses of Keitechs in tournament TV shows and live streams. It was supposedly a secret, even though its popularity was growing.

Also, for some time, a Keitech was viewed as just what you use to bait up an umbrella rig. That's all changed. Savvy bass catchers realized that what works in a cluster on a rig also works really well alone on a jighead. And as a trailer. And on a weedless rig. And on a football head. And several other ways.

The Swing Impact FAT is now a known entity; a staple on the pro trails because it works. There are also a lot of options available to anglers. When you combine all the sizes and colors, you have a collection of swimbaits to cover just about any scenario.

If you fish for money, or you just like to catch bass, you need to learn the ins and outs of the Swing Impact FAT.



ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

The Swing Impact FAT is a solid swimbait made of very soft, pliable plastic that thins out in the rear where the flat paddle tail connects. Ribs line the sides, and hook-alignment slots in the back and belly help with rigging.



PHOTO BY ROB MATSURA

A Classification

The Keitech has a middle-of-the-road action. It's a different style of action than, say, a hollow-body swimbait.

"If you use a hollow-body swimbait the whole body shimmies side to side, almost like a lipless crankbait," says FLW pro Casey Smith. "With a Keitech bait, the main body of the bait stays still. It's just the tail that's wagging. There are different tail wags between the FAT Swing and the regular Swing and even the Easy Shiner."

Forgiveness And Versatility

The Keitech is known for being very forgiving, meaning your hook can be a tad off and it'll still swim without rolling. It can also be rigged many ways, freeing you up to carry fewer swimbaits to accommodate more terminal tackle and presentations.

A Slow (or Fast) Starter

According to Smith, the Swing Impact FAT starts swimming instantly while sinking or as soon as you start the retrieve. It kicks at slow speeds and doesn't blow out when burning.

Smith's Suggested Uses

Because of the bulbous body of the Swing Impact FAT, its action is concentrated back toward the tail. It's a versatile bait that Smith uses a variety of ways.

1. On a jighead

Throw it on anything from a 1/16-ounce ball-head jig with a light-wire hook to a beefy 1-ounce or heavier head with a gaff in it.

2. On a weighted belly hook

Smith won at the Potomac River in 2016 by throwing a 4.8-inch Keitech Swing Impact FAT rigged on a 6/0 wide-gap screw-lock swimbait hook with a 1/4-ounce belly weight. His winning technique was winding it as slowly as possible until it hung in the grass, then knocking it out using a half-turn of the reel handle and a short rod-tip pop. The rig works around docks, wood, grass, brush or any other shallow cover.

3. On a belly hook with blade

In Florida lakes with tannic water or just about anywhere with shallow stained water, Smith uses a swimbait hook with a belly blade to increase flash. This is the same hook Buddy Gross used with a Scottsboro Tackle Co. Swimbait to win at Lake Toho in February.

"In the past guys used a hollow body because it has that little bit of vibration," Smith says. "I'm using the FAT Swing Impact but with a blade on it to have that extra attracting quality."

4. On a buzzbait

Ditch the skirt and swap in a swimbait for a cool topwater presentation.

5. On a football head

Smith is big on this cold-water finesse technique. He rigs a 2.8 on a 1/4-ounce tungsten Keitech Super Football Head (he cuts off the weedguard) and crawls it along bottom or swims it just off the bottom. It works especially well when smallmouths are bunched up in deep water late in the year.

6. On a drop-shot

Nose-hooking a 2.8 on a drop-shot is getting "sneaky popular" in Smith's region. Drop it, swim it, drag it in current or use it to bed-fish smallmouths. They'll eat it on the first drop.





PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

Dialing In

The greatest range of applications within the Keitech family lies in fishing the Swing Impact FAT on an open jighead. It's a seemingly simple technique with a lot of nuance in its mastery.

The Single Swimmer Presentation

The first thing Smith does when he picks up a Swing Impact FAT on a jighead is sink it in the lake and count how long it takes to hit bottom. The sink rate becomes his reference point for every subsequent cast, whether fishing on bottom or suspended off it.

"If I'm in 10 feet and it takes eight seconds to get down there, and I'm going to fish in 20 feet during the day, I'll adjust my count accordingly," he says. "Every cast is counted down every time."

The next step is controlling the bait's rise during the retrieve. Smith says the bait could come up as much as a few feet, depending on several factors, so when he's winding Smith pauses his retrieve about one-third of the way back and again two-thirds of the way back to let the bait

sink (the sudden change also triggers bites) back into the target zone.

How long he has to let it pause is heavily influenced by tackle.

"You have to be careful of your line and weight, almost like a crankbait," Smith says. "If you're trying to reach 20 feet and throwing a 6XD, it makes a big difference if you have 12-pound line or 17-pound line.

"It's the same thing with a swimbait. Experience and testing will let you know how far off the bottom that bait is getting, how much rise it has with bigger line size and stuff like that."

The jig's line-tie angle is important too, which is why Smith is adamant that his jigheads be made with a 90-degree eye and not a 60-degree eye. A 90-degree eye keeps the bait level as it swims, which cuts down on the rise.

"I swear you can use the same weight in a 90-degree and 60-degree, and you'll notice an extra second that it has to fall or maybe a foot more that it has to sink [during the pauses in the retrieve] when using a 60-degree," Smith explains.

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FAT Combos

Smith relies on a couple standard Swing Impact FAT-jig-head combos that would make good starting points for anyone new to the swimbait.

He throws a 2.8 FAT on a 3/16- or 1/4-ounce ball-head jig that he pours around a 3/0 Gamakatsu 604 hook. That combo is fished with a 7-foot or 7-2, medium-heavy spinning rod with enough backbone to launch a long cast. He pairs 15-pound-test Seaguar braid with 6- or 8-pound-test Seaguar fluorocarbon leader.

"I'll use that same setup to fish a 1/2-ounce football head when I'm dragging it on Erie," Smith adds.

The next step up is his favorite "all-around, all-year" setup: a 3.8 FAT with a 1/4- to 1/2-ounce ball-head jig poured on a 4/0 Gamakatsu 604 hook. He usually throws it on a 6.3:1 baitcaster with a 7-3 or 7-6, medium-heavy rod and 12-pound-test fluorocarbon.

"I'll use 15 if needed, but I usually try to get down to 12 if structure and hangups will let me get away with it," Smith adds. "I have that 3.8 on all the time, but it's generally for a smallmouth lake. As soon as I get to a largemouth lake, I'll consider going to the 4.8 or 5.8. That's bait dependent. I'm not going to throw the 5.8 in a lake with a bunch of little tiny minnows."



Finesse With Footballs

Rigging a small Keitech on a football head has big potential. Smith's primary tactic is to slowly wind it along bottom on deep structure in winter when smallmouths are grouped together.

For that scenario, he likes the Keitech Super Football

Head, which is a compact tungsten jig with a short hook that matches up well with a 2.8-inch Swing Impact FAT.

"I'll even drop it straight down like on a Damiki rig. It's the same thing," he says. "That's one of the best parts of that 2.8 on a jighead is you can throw it out and wind it, and if you see one straight down you can reel it in and drop it straight down and fish it either on the bottom or off bottom. It's two baits in one."

"You can even use it where you'd use a hair jig or Ned rig, where there are shallow, spooky fish," Smith adds. "You can cast it or even slow-hop it, almost drifting or floating it along like you would a marabou jig."

If you want to use a bigger hook on a heavier jighead, you'll need to step up the swimbait size, otherwise the longer hook would hinder the bait's action. In that case, you're migrating away from finesse and would need to adjust tackle, too.

Sling It

There are many great swimbaits to choose from, and some outshine the Keitech in specific situations. You should definitely have a variety in the boat. Still, if you want a versatile swimbait that will catch bass just about anywhere, test out Smith's advice and fill a couple Planos with his favorite swimbaits.

SWING IMPACT 4"



EASY SHINER 4"



THE OTHER KEITECHS

The Keitech family of swimbaits also includes the regular Swing Impact and the Easy Shiner.

The Swing Impact is similar to the Swing Impact FAT, with a ribbed body, but it has a narrower, more worm-like profile. It has what Smith calls a "full-body action," meaning the tail wag extends farther up the body than what's exhibited by the FAT model.

He likes the Swing Impact on the outside wires of an umbrella rig because the thin body doesn't cause as much drag. It's also a great trailer.

"I've noticed a lot of guys using the Swing Impact FAT on ChatterBaits and swim jigs, and to me that bigger body impedes the action of the bait," he says. "Whereas with the Swing Impact, the ChatterBait gives the trailer action, and that's what you want."

The Easy Shiner's action is mostly in the tail, so it's very subtle. Smith uses the 3- and 4-inch versions as finesse baits very early and late in the year when the water temperature is 45 degrees or less. It's also a subtle trailer that Smith occasionally uses in cold water. ■

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MATT ALLEN ON

GLIDE

Matt Allen and his fishing partner, Tim Little, are well-known big-bass specialists from California who publicize their fishing techniques at TacticalBassin.com and YouTube.com/tacticalbassin.

BAITS

THE "TACTICAL BASSIN" EXPERT BREAKS DOWN A BIG-BASS BAIT THAT HAS TOURNAMENT APPLICATIONS, TOO

Glide baits have blurred the line between the average angler and the trophy guy. The old rules about giant rods and fishing for days between bites are gone; glide baits changed all that. They're putting huge fish in the boat for weekend warriors, tournament pros and big-bass specialists alike. If you enjoy power fishing with a crankbait or jerkbait, you're a glide bait fisherman in the making.

Glide baits represent a wide range of single-jointed swimbaits. They come in a variety of sizes, shapes and patterns, but the marked similarities between all include a single joint, no lip, and a slow, rolling "S" action on a steady retrieve.

The Advantage of the Glide

A glide bait's combination of size and action creates incredible drawing power. Even in the smaller 5- to 6-inch offerings, a glide bait can pull bass 10 to 20 feet in clear water to examine the lure. A traditional lure often attracts fish from a few feet away, but an angler with a glide in hand is effectively fishing a larger section of the water. Tournament anglers know covering water is key to finding the right fish. Why not fish a 10- to 20-foot-wide zone on every cast?

The second advantage is the size of fish that take notice when a glide bait swims past. Plenty of 1- and 2-pounders are willing to swipe at one, but glide baits can also draw out the biggest fish from the depths. If you've ever wondered how big the biggest fish in your lake really are, spend a few days fishing with a glide bait, and chances are they'll rise up and show themselves.

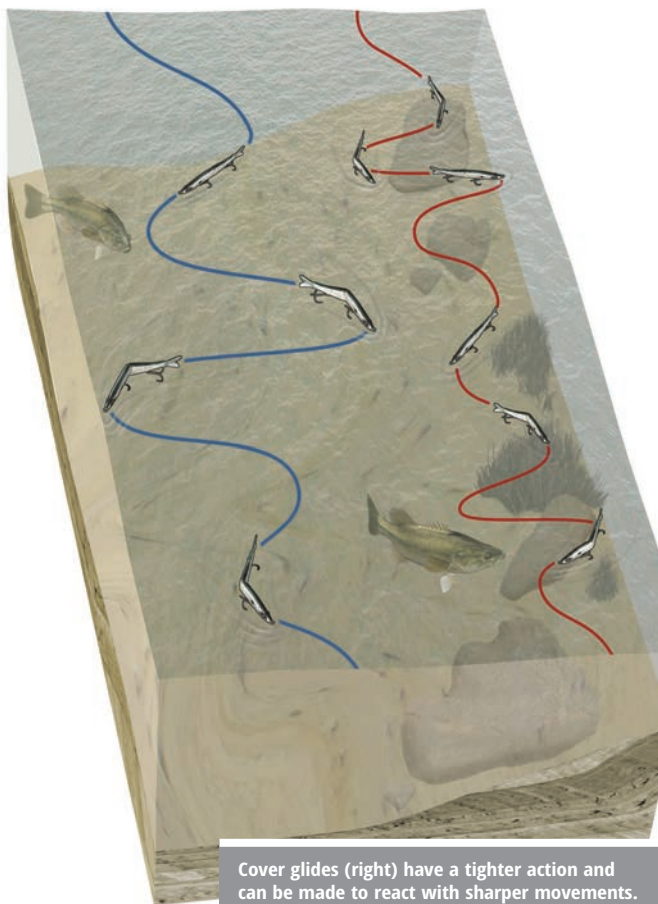


PHOTOS BY TACTICAL BASSIN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN HAND

While attracting giant fish from a broad area is a great advantage, the real magic behind the glide is its ability to trigger a feeding response. It stands in contrast to most big swimbaits, which have the inherent downside of attracting followers without getting a bite. Seeing giant bass loses its appeal when they fail to bite time and time again. The glide solves this with its ability to get reactive.

Choosing Glide Baits

Glides should be broken into two very separate categories: "cover glides" and "open-water glides." Understanding which style fits your fishing is going to save you a lot of time and money.



Cover glides (right) have a tighter action and can be made to react with sharper movements. Open-water glides swing out with big, lazy arcs.

1. Cover Glides

Cover glides are marked by tight actions and aggressive movements. The River2Sea S-Waver 168 dominates this category with the Gan Craft 178 and a handful of custom brands working as well. Cover glides follow an S-motion when swam slowly and steadily, but may only move 6 to 18 inches from side to side on a slow retrieve. This results in a very reactive bait that stays in the strike zone longer than open-water glides. What makes this style so special is that you can pitch it around cover.

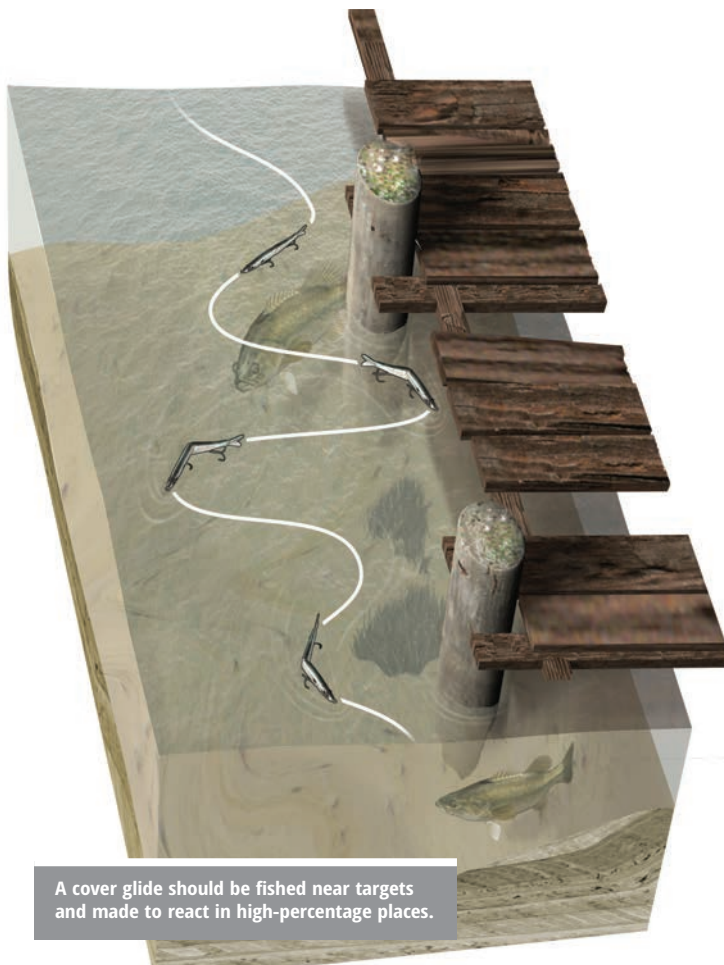
Put an S-Waver 168 on your favorite jig rod (I prefer a Shimano Expride 7-foot, 2-inch, heavy rod paired with a Shimano Tranx 200HG reel, 65-pound-test braided line and 8 feet of 20-pound-test mono for the leader) and pitch it along a dock piling or other piece of shallow

cover. Begin a slow, steady retrieve until you reach the cover. When the bait is at the closest point to the cover, give it two short snaps with the reel handle. On the business end of the line, that bait is going to break its methodical cadence and make a quick left and right dart. If there is a bass waiting for the opportunity to ambush, you're about to experience the power of a cover glide.

Because cover glides have tight actions, they tend to make very erratic movements when twitched. It's very easy to "overwork" these baits and cause them to roll or blow out. To avoid overworking, there are a variety of retrieves to employ when you can't see the sweet spots along the shore.

If I could only choose one retrieve when I'm not targeting specific cover it would be the slow-roll and twitch. Begin by casting out the bait and starting a slow to moderate retrieve. Make four to eight turns of the handle. Use four in shallow water and eight in deeper water. This allows the fish time to approach the bait. Next, give two quick twitches with the rod tip as if walking a top-water. There is no need to pause after the twitches; simply make another four to eight handle turns and repeat. The idea is to mesmerize the bass with the slow methodical swim, then trigger them with the quick twitches.

The bite will almost always come as soon as the second twitch is completed. My belief is that the first



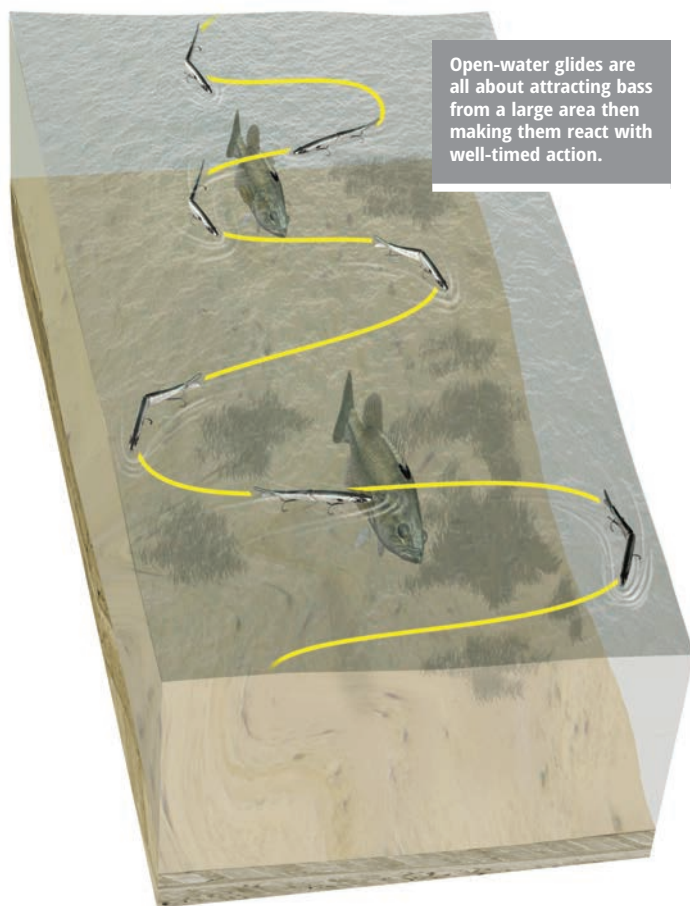
A cover glide should be fished near targets and made to react in high-percentage places.

twitch causes the bait to dart sideways, leaving the bait and the bass “looking” at each other. The bass’ cover is now blown, and the next twitch is its only chance to strike before letting the “baitfish” flee. If the bass chooses not to strike, it will almost always vanish back to the depths. Still, this is the single best way to end the follower frustration.

2. Open-Water Glides

Open-water glides are the baits you might have been expecting to see in this article. Nearly all 8- to 12-inch baits that cost more than a boat payment will fall into this category, but there are some great budget options as well. The Roman Made Mother, Baitsanity Explorer, Gan Craft 230, S-Waver 200, and Deps Slide Swimmer 250 are all great examples of open-water glide baits.

These baits will require a dedicated swimbait rod (I prefer the G. Loomis IMX-PRO 966C SWBR paired with a Shimano Tranx 300HG, 80-pound-test braided line and 8 feet of 30-pound-test mono leader) to fish them



effectively. Lighter equipment can be made to work, but these baits are heavy, and proper equipment will relieve the strain on your body and gear.

This category is marked by a very wide, lazy glide. The baits can often move 3 to 5 feet in either direction at very slow speeds, and a properly timed twitch can send them farther still. This action creates an enormous drawing power that will pull huge fish up from virtually any depth. The key to success with this method, however, is visibility, and open-water glides achieve their maximum effectiveness in clear, open water.

The wide glide of these larger offerings makes them inherently more difficult to twitch effectively. They do not have the tight darting action of the smaller cover glides and instead will create long, slow glides when pulled or twitched. They're more difficult to master than their smaller cousins, but once you've dialed in the cadence, you can cause the bait to slowly glide off to the side on cue.

Triggering a feeding response with an open-water glide is all about timing. Wear polarized sunglasses at all times, and focus on constantly studying the water 5 to 20 feet behind your bait. Most bass will simply appear as a faint shadow in the water until right before they ambush. Spotting them during the ambush is too late; you must study the water for faint approaching shadows. Most “biters” will approach with speed rather than lagging behind at a set distance. If you can spot biters before they reach the bait, you have an excellent chance of catching them.

The key in open water is to let the fish get close to the bait before twitching the rod. Without a piece of cover to help corner the lure, the bass is much more hesitant to strike without a perfect angle. Twitch too soon and the bass will have to reset and approach from a different direction. Wait too long and the bass will see the boat. Ideally, wait until the bass is 2 to 4 feet behind the bait and give the bait a single slow twitch. This will cause the bait to drift off to the side and present a perfect target. If the bass comes closer but doesn't strike, give it one more slow twitch and cross your fingers. This back-and-forth is not for the faint of heart, as we could be talking about you dancing with the largest bass you've ever encountered. If she strikes, you're in for a wild ride, and if she turns away, you know exactly where to try on your next outing.

If fish aren't following or can't be seen because of the conditions, wind the bait with eight to 10 cranks of the reel, and then give it a couple twitches. The extra cranks gives bass time to track it from across a flat or a bigger structure.

Glides should be broken into two very separate categories: “cover glides” and “open-water glides.” Understanding which style fits your fishing is going to save you a lot of time and money.

Keep in mind that you can catch fish by casting out a glide bait and simply reeling it back to the boat. Plenty of giant bass have been caught this way. The magic of the glide, however, is its “triggering effect” when twitched and worked properly.

Choosing the Best Color

This part of fishing a glide bait is pretty simple. Visibility is much more important than a specific color. Focus on bold colors like yellow, white, bluegill or bone before trying ghost colors. The action of the lure will trigger the strike. Getting the bass’ attention in the first place is the trick. Select the boldness of the color by how far you think you need to move the fish. If you’re fishing clear open water and hoping to pull the fish 20 or 30 feet, a bright, bold color is best. The same is true in murky water, even when only moving the fish a few feet. Conversely, fishing specific cover targets in clear water can be done with a ghost pattern, as the fish only need to move a foot or two to strike.

If you were only going to choose one, it should be a bold color. Focus on action rather than matching a specific baitfish. As an example, our favorite color in the S-Waver is “lite trout” (shown below, bottom right). Don’t let the “trout” fool you. This is a yellow bait, but we’ve seen success from California to Michigan to Mexico while using it. It does not seem to matter what the natural forage is; this bait can be seen from a distance and consistently triggers giant bites.

Time of Day and Weather

These are key factors when targeting big bass. Traditionally, low-light and pre-front conditions are the favorite times for targeting big bass. This is true with glides as well, but there are two exceptions.

Clear, open-water gliding (fishing over long tapering points, humps, deep breaks, etc.) is best during the brightest part of a sunny day when the fish can silhouette the bait to the surface. You’ll tend to have more followers than biters, as they can see extremely well under these conditions, but it’s also when the biggest fish are willing to hunt.

When the bass are using shallow cover is the second exception. If bass are relying on the shadows of cover to ambush smaller glides in the shallows, you’ll find your best success in late morning or early afternoon when the shadows are long but sunlight is still present.

Under both circumstances, bass are present all day but very clearly have a preferred feeding time. If you factor these critical times into your day of fishing, you can be on the best spots at the best times.

The learning curve on a glide bait is much shorter than many traditional offerings. Dedicate yourself to the bait for a few days and you’ll be proficient at choosing targets, drawing out fish, converting followers and catching big ones. Glide baits are catching small and giant bass alike, all over the globe. They will work in your local lakes, so get out there and give one a try. ■

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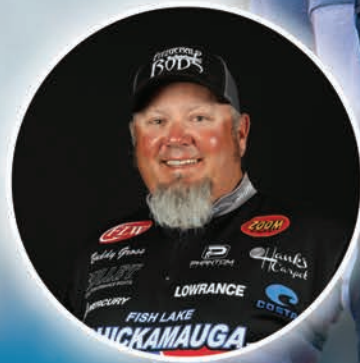
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WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION



TBF STATE FEDERATION SPOTLIGHT: NEW HAMPSHIRE

Opportunities to grow and improve the quality and value of a membership for The Bass Federation members at the state level are nearly endless, according to New Hampshire Bass Federation (TBFNH) President Joshua Ledbetter and Treasurer Killian Kilroy. That's been their focus of late, as TBFNH advances into year three of an enhancement plan that began with a fundamental goal of focusing on membership to drive camaraderie and participation. The project began with a query of members.

"The New Hampshire eBoard worked diligently to ensure all the membership voices were heard," says Ledbetter. "Then it was simply a matter of exhibiting those wishes in the actions that we take."

The state's calendar now is packed full of great events, upgrades and fun. Here's a rundown of some recent and upcoming projects.

2019 Banquet

The chapter marked the end of the 2018 season and the start of the 2019 campaign in February with its second-annual TBFNH banquet. The event sold out, and participation doubled from the first event once word spread of the great food, fishing stories, prizes and awards. The banquet also provided an opportunity to recognize TBFNH members with special awards and top

anglers with plaques and trophies. Some sponsors set up displays, conducted giveaways and offered discounts for purchases made at the event.

"Winter Classic"

Kilroy says that, during long New Hampshire winters, he and other members grew tired of having to sit inside and simply watch other anglers compete on television, imagining they were somewhere warmer fishing themselves. They decided to do something about it in 2018 with the inaugural TBFNH "Winter Classic" state tournament on Lake Okeechobee. It took nearly 24 hours for most New Hampshire club members to drive to the Big O, but that wasn't enough to keep them away. Sixteen anglers were brave enough to make that trip to the inaugural event, however, registration for the 2019 "Winter Classic" on Lake Chickamauga in April has already doubled last year's numbers.

Chickamauga is on fire right now, and contestants have high hopes of landing a giant while the lakes in New England are still covered in ice. Regardless of the outcome on the water, the friendships and experience will last forever.

"The hardest part of these events is the drive home, knowing that the flip-flops have to go back into storage," Kilroy adds.

Custom Tournament Trailer

Spring 2019 will see TBFNH take ownership of a new custom tournament trailer that was manufactured in New Hampshire. It's complete with a concession-style door, 60-inch flat-screen TV to display a live leaderboard, custom vinyl wrap designed by a TBF member and more. The new equipment will not only elevate the chapter as an organization, but, says Kilroy, is a testament to the chapter's growth and the dedicated members of TBFNH who worked hard two years in a row to sell raffle tickets and willingly increased dues by \$5 a year to fund the capital improvement.

Maine Partnership

Another new fun event grew out of the TBF National Semi-Finals and TBFNH's relationship with partner state Maine. New Hampshire and Maine chapters have teamed up to co-host the Lobster Open. Historically, Maine has conducted a tournament with a lobster bake as its annual fundraiser. The two TBF state chapters teamed up to grow the tournament and provide both states' memberships with an additional opportunity to strengthen friendships and make new ones. It'll also set the stage for the highly competitive District 17 TBF National Semi-Finals, which is the more serious fishing side of the partnership. The National

Semi-Finals event determines who advances to the TBF National Championship and which state wins bragging rights.

The goal is to have some fun and focus on membership to drive participation, which has been the foundation for New Hampshire's growth.

Evaluating Growth

One year into the enhancement plan, the TBFNH eBoard conducted an anonymous membership survey that covered dues, bodies of water to fish and more, plus an open feedback section. The results were powerful. TBFNH was on course, but it was clear there were several areas for improvement, which became the catalyst for the new recent activities.

To anyone interested in growing their own chapters at the state level, TBFNH officers suggest that you continually look to improve processes and find ways to measure the results to create value for the organization. And, most of all, people want to have some fun, so get out of the "old habits" and try something bold and new. It's working in New Hampshire, and it can work for any state.

For information about the New Hampshire Bass Federation, or to keep up with all that they are doing, go to nhbassfederation.com.

New Hampshire Bass Federation Treasurer Killian Kilroy says the key to chapter growth has been focusing on increasing fun activities and engaging members in more projects.

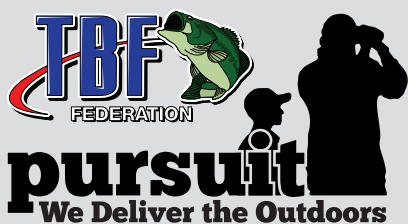


TBF RENEWS CONTRACT WITH PURSUIT CHANNEL

The Bass Federation and the Pursuit Channel are teaming up again in 2019 to roll out 26 weeks of *Federation Angler TV* programming covering grassroots Federation events. The show airs weekly (four broadcasts per week) from January through June, starting on Tuesday nights at 8 p.m. ET, and anchors the Ranger Boats/Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's fishing block.

Notable events included this year are the 2018 TBF National Championship, the ninth-annual High School Fishing World Finals and High School Fishing National Championship, the 2018 TBF Junior World Championship presented by FLW, and the 2018 Minnesota High School State Championship. Additional airtimes are Tuesday at 11 p.m. ET, Friday at 7 a.m. ET and Saturday at 8 a.m. ET. Check out the entire *Federation Angler TV* schedule under the media link at bassfederation.com.

TBF is also looking for future *Federation Angler TV* stars, including youth or high school clubs to feature in youth-oriented episodes, and adult club/Federation projects to feature. Contact TBF if you think your club or state federation should be highlighted.



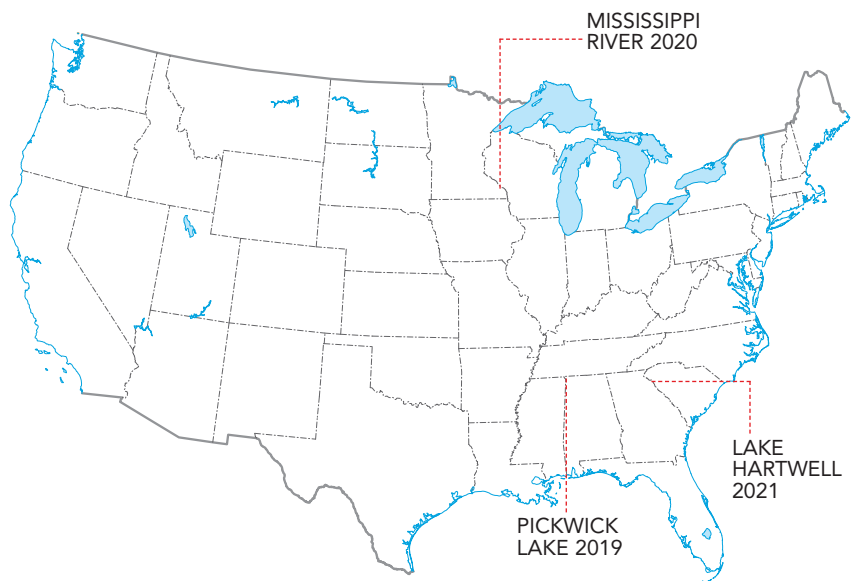
Chad Champy (left) and Kyler McKie won the 2018 High School Fishing National Championship on Pickwick Lake.

PHOTO BY SHANE DURANCE

2020 AND 2021 WORLD FINALS, CHAMPIONSHIP LOCATIONS

In 2018, 392 teams attended the ninth-annual TBF/FLW Student Angler Federation High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship at Pickwick Lake. The 2019 World Finals and National Championship will return to Pickwick Lake and Wilson Lake. If it's anything like last year's event, there'll be throngs of industry vendors, sponsors, families and local spectators packed into McFarland Park for daily weigh-ins.

In 2020, the dual event will head north to the Mississippi River at La Crosse, Wis., and then in 2021 it'll visit Lake Hartwell on the border of South Carolina and Georgia.





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TBF ROLLS OUT HIGH SCHOOL LIVING THE DREAM PACKAGE

Each year since The Bass Federation founded the national High School Fishing movement and launched the Student Angler Federation (SAF), high school anglers have had only \$25 annual dues, which covers TBF and FLW memberships and allows members to fish any TBF or FLW High School Fishing events nationwide with no entry fee.

TBF is once again upping the bar and providing more for SAF High School Fishing members with the High School State Champions TBF Living the Dream package, which was voted into place by TBF state presidents as a means to start transitioning high school anglers into the adult program ranks.

The new Living the Dream package is open to high school state champions that are 16 years of age or older. It includes a fully-paid TBF adult/FLW competitor membership and a spot in the angler's home region TBF adult National Semi-Finals event as a co-angler.

From there, high school anglers could qualify for the TBF National Championship, then to the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American. If they can earn a boater's spot at the National Championship via their TBF National Semi-Finals they could advance through the system all the way to the FLW Cup.

The new high school iteration of the Living the Dream program is another way TBF is striving to grow competitive fishing for young people and set up greater opportunities beyond high school.

"Under all TBF programs – Adult, Junior and High School – all membership fees do not cross over," says TBF President Robert Cartledge. "Everything we do is user pay/user benefit. That is to say that Adult membership dues only support Adult programs, Junior dues only support Junior programs and High School dues only support High School programs. To expand them, they have to grow. Thankfully, due to the work at the local grass-roots level, all our programs are growing steadily and doing well."

The 2019 season is in full swing now with teams in the South already participating in state championships for the Living the Dream opportunities. There are a lot of other opportunities and plenty of support available for high school anglers as well. TBF and FLW provided more than \$200,000 in college scholarships and prizes to high school anglers in 2018, all with no entry fees.

Check out highschoolfishing.org to learn more about the Student Angler Federation and High School Fishing. ■

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JORDAN OSBORNE

LONGVIEW, TEXAS

By Curtis Niedermier

What's life like in Longview, Texas?

It's good. When I'm not on the road fishing, I own a pawnshop and sporting goods store. Part of that sporting goods mix is largely made up of fishing tackle – basically fishing tackle and firearms. When I'm home, I try not to work any more than I have to, but I do spend a pretty good bit of time up there.

I actually don't really fish a whole lot when I'm home. Maybe an occasional trip to (Lake of the) Pines or one of the little power plant lakes here. And I mix in golf. I find that I stay really busy.

What's the weirdest item ever brought in or sold at your store?

We had someone bring in a colonoscopy scope. I was like, *What the hell? Where do I even begin with this thing?*

We try to take anything that we can resell, but one of the processes that we go through when taking any piece of merchandise is we test it. I thought, *How do I even make sure this thing works? What is it worth? Is there a market for it?* It was really an odd situation. Not to mention, what was somebody doing with this thing?

That's been about 10 years ago. We did take it, and I believe we did sell it. I was gone that particular day we sold it, but I think the guy who bought it had a small practice that he was just starting up at the time.

Would you ever host a reality TV pawnshop show?

No. Absolutely not. I don't want any part of it.

As we saw at the Tour opener, Rayburn is ridiculously good. Did you grow up fishing there?

No, I'm two hours away from there, and you probably don't know this, but I've only been in the tournament game for six years. So growing up I had no

tournament experience. I just grew up on the golf course fishing ponds, and that was about it. I've always fished, but I never fished reservoirs out of a bass boat.

Once I got older and financially things got better, I decided I wanted to try my hand at bass fishing and tournament fishing, so I bought a boat and started in it. I did the club thing for a few years then did it (fish the Tour) as a co-angler.

Did you mostly learn about bass fishing alone? Or did you have any mentors?

I really went at it by myself. Jim Tutt, being from Longview himself, helped me out some. We had a long ride back from Lake Eufaula the year I fished as a co-angler. I was maybe 17th in the standings, and Jim asked me, "What are you going to do if you finish in the top 10?" I said, "What are you talking about?" "You're qualified to fish as a boater." I said, "Yeah, I realize that, but I don't know if one year after doing the co-angler thing that'd be a good idea. I was thinking after maybe two years." He said, "But next year you might finish 13th and not qualify."

That kind of got the wheels turning. I've always looked up to Jim for some guidance and knowledge. But, all in all, it's mostly been me alone. He kind of helped talk me into it.

Your first two seasons on the FLW Tour were a little rough, but last year you made the Cup, and this season you started off with a top-10 finish. What's changed?

I've had that question asked a lot. I think it's a little bit of everything. It's a little bit of confidence. It's a little bit of experience. It's a little bit of learning how to take three days and be as efficient as you can with them in practice.

During the tournaments I've found myself evolving as an angler. I feel like



PHOTO BY KYLE MOOD

I have more confidence in the decisions I make, and I'll make a lot more decisions than I used to. I used to get narrow-minded with my fishing, and I think I've gotten a little more open-minded. I'm in the zone, and I'm trusting my gut and don't really question myself as much.

I still continue to learn different techniques across the country, but I'm still very, very raw. I think the fact that I've not fished very long means I'm not stuck in my ways. I'm willing to learn and try something new. I think that's played big for me.

What did people think when you first told them you were going to try fishing professionally?

It was a mixed bag. When I went down to the local boat dealer and told him what I was wanting to do – I was trying to approach him for a team deal – you could tell he had been burned too many times. He told me more than likely you're going to fail. I had that told to me by several people.

I think people that knew me knew that it wasn't going to be a one-and-done type thing for me. Because I'm so competitive, historically, anything I've picked up I've always stuck with until I've gotten pretty good at it. I lettered in basketball and tennis as well as golf and baseball in high school. When I pick up something new I don't stop until I've reached my full potential, and I knew that's what was going to happen with me in fishing. Those guys that told me I wasn't going to do it, that was free motivation. ■



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