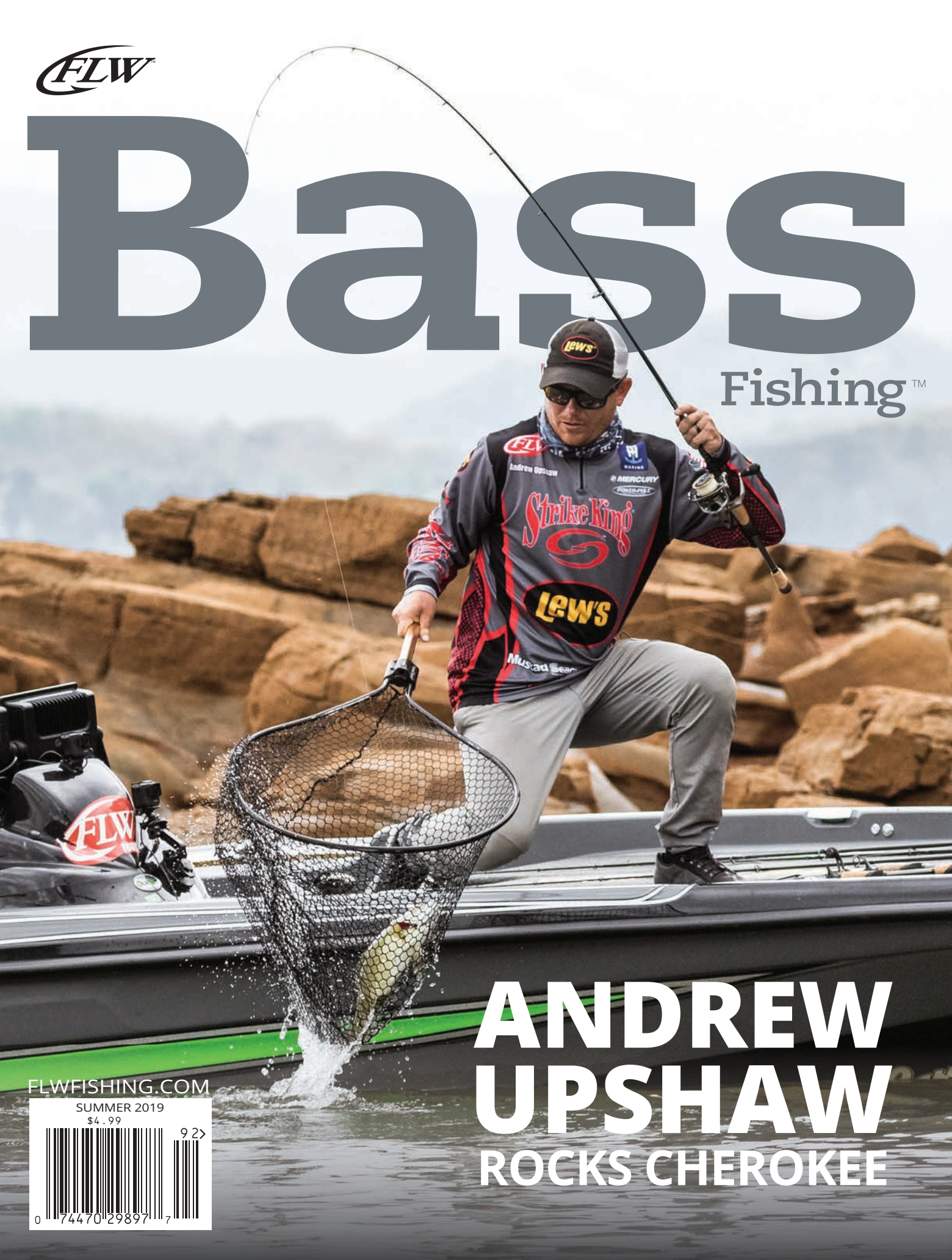




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PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

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## HONORING IRWIN JACOBS



"Enjoy the attention while you have it."

That's what some said when Irwin Jacobs purchased Operation Bass in 1996, alluding to a misguided belief that bass fishing was a shiny new toy for the self-made entrepreneur who, at the time, was better known for his Wall Street exploits than for reshaping professional bass fishing as we know it. They believed the shine would fade, and Mr. Jacobs would move on to the next big thing. Boy, were they wrong.

On April 10, 2019, our sport lost a titan and his beloved wife, Alexandra. But the shine never faded. Mr. Jacobs never lost interest in the sport that he so dramatically reshaped or FLW, which lives on as his legacy. Today, FLW shines brighter than ever, and everyone who casts a line in a bass tournament, drives a bass boat or simply enjoys watching live on-the-water bass tournament coverage owes something to Mr. Jacobs.

From sponsor-wrapped boats and trucks, record payouts and live on-the-water coverage to fantasy fishing and a complete hierarchy of tournaments serving anglers from high school students through top professionals, literally around the world, Mr. Jacobs led the way. He set the standard by which everything in our sport is judged today.

While he is often portrayed as a tough businessman, which he was, Mr. Jacobs would be more accurately described as a family man. This is something that I witnessed firsthand. For Mr. Jacobs, family came first, and that included his employees and the customers they serve. FLW's family culture is no accident. It is a direct reflection of Mr. Jacobs and his values. He respected hard work and those who did it, no matter their station in life.

As we wind down the 2019 FLW Tour season with an Angler of the Year and Rookie of the Year race for the ages and head into a historic FLW Cup in Hot Springs, we honor Mr. Jacobs by continuing to build on his accomplishments to ensure that the next 23 years of tournament bass fishing shine as brightly as the last 23.

Please keep Mr. Jacobs' daughter, Trish Blake, FLW president of marketing, and the entire Jacobs family in your prayers.

Sincerely,

Kathy Fennel  
President, Operations Division

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**FISHING EXPOSED**  
CHEROKEE LAKE — APRIL 12, 2019





## CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

**S**ometimes it seems like smallmouth bass leap just to show off. This acrobatic brown bass certainly put on a show in front of the camera after Wes Logan hooked her on the second day of competition at Cherokee Lake in April. The leap was almost as remarkable as the quality of the bass fishing on the east Tennessee reservoir, which impressed everyone involved as smallmouth after smallmouth bit pros' finesse offerings. Altogether, the tournament catch totaled 1,767 bass in four days. Logan caught a quality 15-pound, 13-ounce limit on day two and finished 89th.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



**YOUTH CONTINGENCY**

↘ **FLW, ABU GARCIA AND BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA LAUNCH YOUTH CONTINGENCY**

FLW, Abu Garcia and Boy Scouts of America (BSA) recently launched a contingency program that will award an Abu Garcia Black Max Low Profile reel to the highest-finishing current or former Scout in each YETI FLW College Fishing tournament, Bass Pro Shops FLW High School Fishing Open and the High School Fishing National Championship. Contact your tournament director for eligibility information.



↘ **GLENN BROWNE, 1976-2019**

Former FLW Tour pro Glenn Browne lost his battle with cancer on May 28. The Citrus Springs, Fla., angler was



considered one of the best flippers and pitchers on Tour, and a premier power fisherman. He won four FLW tournaments and qualified for the FLW Cup six times in his career. Browne, who wed his wife, Melissa, in January, was 43.

↘ **FLW, KAYAK BASS FISHING PARTNER UP**

In May, 23-year-old Michigan student Bogdan Korostetskyi became the first winner of a joint bass tournament between FLW and Kayak Bass Fishing (KBF) when he tallied a two-day total of 174.25 inches on Nickajack Lake in the Dee Zee FLW/KBF Kayak Open presented by YakAttack. The top 100 anglers at the Open qualified for the FLW/KBF Kayak Cup to be held in Hot Springs, Ark., in conjunction with the FLW Cup this August. For more information, visit [FLWFishing.com/kayak](http://FLWFishing.com/kayak) or [KayakBassFishing.com/FLW](http://KayakBassFishing.com/FLW).



↘ **S. 47 BECOMES LAW**

On March 12, President Donald Trump signed into law S. 47, the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act, which, among other things, expands hunting and fishing access and conserves key habitat that hunters and anglers enjoy. Among the highlights of the bill for anglers is a provision calling for federal agencies to develop plans to reduce or eliminate invasive species such as Asian carp and permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

↘ **POLARIS®**

**NAMED TITLE SPONSOR OF ROOKIE OF THE YEAR AWARD**

Polaris will deliver a Sportsman 570 ATV to the FLW Tour Rookie of the Year as part of its new title sponsorship of the annual award. There are 34 rookies among the FLW Tour ranks in 2019. The ROY race will be settled at the end of June at Lake Champlain.



Sportsman 570 ATV

↘ **FLW ADDS TWO NEW PARTNERS**

In April, Zimbabwe and Namibia were added to the FLW International Division, bringing the total number of participating countries to 10. Anglers in each country can participate in a tournament series with the chance to qualify for the Costa FLW Series Championship beginning this season. There will also be a High School Fishing series in Zimbabwe, where youth anglers can qualify for the FLW/TBF High School Fishing World Finals.



↘ **DARRELL LOWRANCE, 1938-2019**

Industry pioneer Darrell Lowrance passed away on March 16 at age 80. Lowrance, who founded Lowrance Electronics and guided the brand for more than four decades, was one of the earliest sponsors of professional bass fishing organizations and aligned his company with Operation Bass, the precursor to FLW, in its first season in 1980. ■



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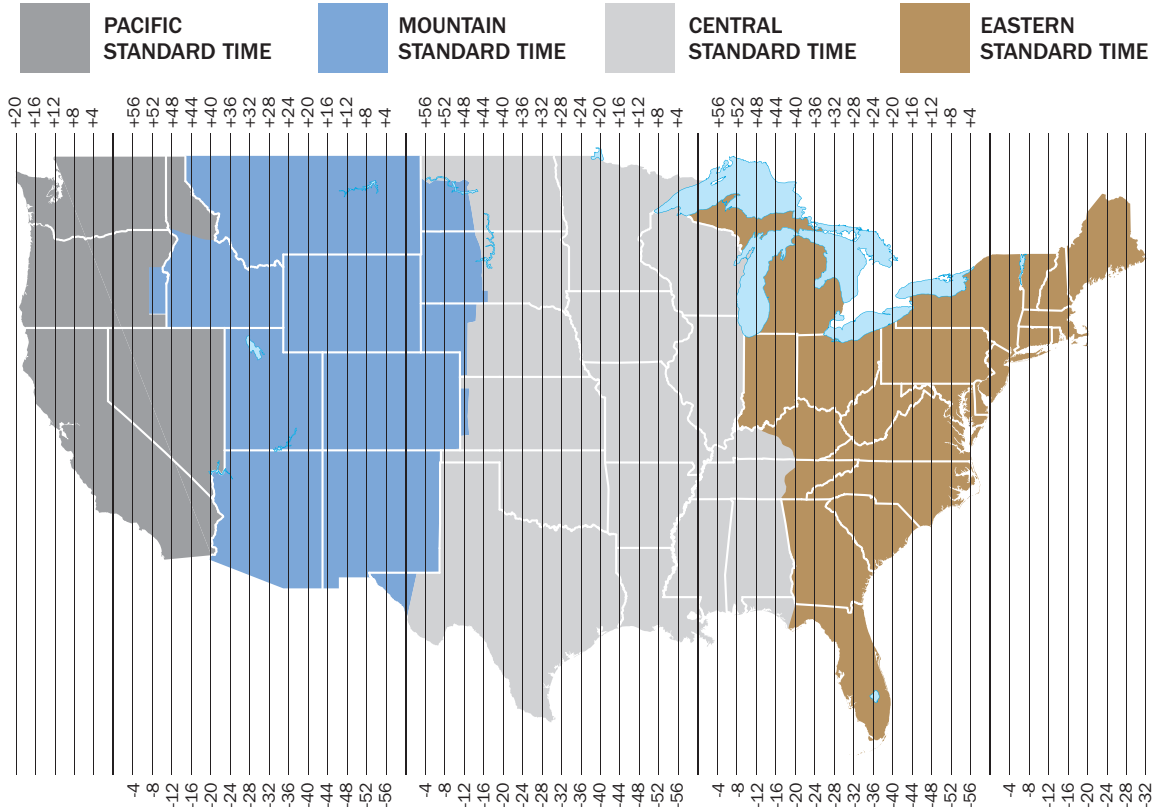


**YETI** BUILT FOR THE WILD.



# SOLUNAR TABLES

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 2019



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

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

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PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

# BRYAN THRIFT: FLW'S CLEANUP HITTER

AGE: 39 | HOMETOWN: SHELBY, N.C. | YEARS ON TOUR: 13 | FLW WINS (ALL CIRCUITS): 10 | FLW TOP 10s (ALL CIRCUITS): 64 | CAREER EARNINGS: \$2,587,037

**F**rom May 5, 2016, to March 8, 2019, Bryan Thrift set a mark that may never be topped – unless Thrift himself can do it again. With 71 consecutive five-fish limits across FLW Tour events, the six-time Tour winner and former Angler of the Year established himself as the ultimate Iron Man.

Like Cal Ripken Jr. making 2,632 consecutive starts or Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hit streak, Thrift set the bar so high that we'll likely be holding it up as perhaps the most incredible feat in bass fishing history unless someone manages to top it.

Here's a by-the-numbers look at Thrift's streak to put it in perspective.\*

\*Stats accurate as of early June.

**3** Number of FLW Cup champions during Thrift's streak (Clent Davis, Justin Atkins, John Cox).

**10** Number of top-10 finishes Thrift amassed on Tour during his streak. He stands as the all-time leader in top 10s on Tour with 41 (64 across all FLW competition as both boater and co-angler) in just 13 years.

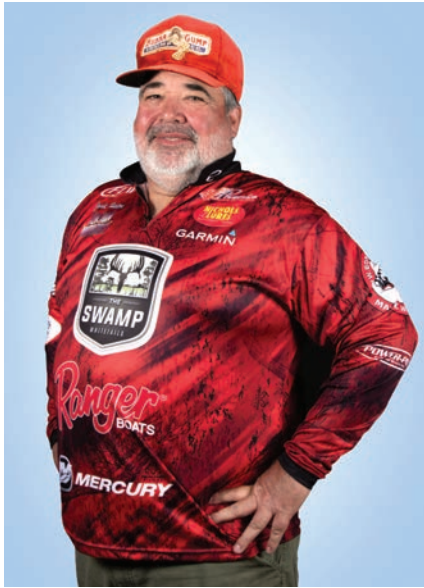
**20** Number of (non-consecutive) limits Thrift caught in Costa FLW Series Southeastern Division competition during his Tour limit streak.

**\$0.94** Value of a current U.S. dollar in 2016, when Thrift's streak began, adjusted for inflation.

**\$659.09** Closing price of a share of Amazon stock the day Thrift's streak began. The day it ended, Amazon closed at \$1,620.80.

**1,072** Number of pounds in Thrift's 71 record-setting limits. That's an average of more than 15 pounds per bag.

**247,600,000** Estimated increase in world population in the nearly three years Thrift's streak lasted.



## Walking the Line

Ask any great angler what brand of fishing line they have spooled up at any given time and you'll probably hear "Sunline" come up more often than not. Sunline is so popular that the company produces enough fishing line yearly to wrap around the earth 34 times (roughly 269,000 miles), according to sales manager Mike Valster. That's approximately 550 tons of line, or the weight of about 571 Ranger Z521L bass boats stacked on top of each other.



## The Forrest Gump Of Fishing

Jamie Horton's path through professional bass fishing is worthy of some Hollywood treatment. The 52-year-old FLW Tour pro has seen just about everything there is to see. Here's a breakdown of Horton's career accomplishments to date:

54 B.A.S.S. tournaments fished, including two Bassmaster Classic appearances, and \$193,686.87 in winnings on the circuit

83 FLW tournaments fished (between FLW Tour, Costa FLW Series and T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League levels), including two FLW Cup appearances and \$223,143 in winnings

2007 BFL All-American appearance (25th place)

2007 The Bass Federation (TBF) National Championship appearance (third place)

31 career top 10s between B.A.S.S. and FLW competition (including a ninth-place finish at Grand Lake this year)

2011 B.A.S.S. Federation National Champion (punching his ticket to the 2012 Classic)



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

## Cortiana and the Camel

Third-year FLW Tour pro Kyle Cortiana didn't have the best of luck at the Grand Lake FLW Tour event, but he did contribute to one heck of a photo. Pictured, Cortiana smooches Claude the camel at the weigh-in expo during the event.

The owner of Claude, Josh Mathias, is a friend of Cortiana's and sponsors the Tour pro via Greenleaf Lawn, LLC. Mathias brought Claude to the event, and we're all glad he did – probably none more than Cortiana himself.

Bradford Beavers



PHOTO BY HAROLD SMITH

Grae Buck



PHOTO BY GRAE BUCK

## Splash Bass

The FLW Tour stop at Cherokee Lake featured some serious drama on the weigh-in stage, but it was the on-the-water drama (or comedy, depending on your perspective) that made for some great viewing.

On day two of the event, Bradford Beavers had a fish hung up. Knowing every ounce counts in this game, the rookie went in after his fish.

Not to be outdone, second-place finisher Grae Buck played cat-and-mouse with the same bedding fish all day long on day three. After losing it once, he hooked the fish again, only to see it come unbuttoned right next to the boat. Buck reached out to try to grab the fish before it could escape, but he found himself under water instead. Buck came back later and eventually managed to get that same fish in his livewell.

Both anglers got their fish – and a great story to tell – in the end.

## Colossal Catch

On April 22, Zachary Sutterfield (left) caught the fish of several lifetimes. The Durant, Okla., bow fisherman hauled in an alligator gar that weighed approximately 170 pounds and measured 6 feet, 9 inches in length.

While it's not the biggest alligator gar to come from Oklahoma waters (254 pounds, snagged by Paul Easley from Lake Texoma in 2015), a 170-pounder is nothing to sneeze at. The prehistoric beasts can live upward of 50 years, and it's safe to say the one Sutterfield caught was no baby.

...an alligator gar that weighed approximately 170 pounds and measured 6 feet, 9 inches in length.



PHOTO COURTESY OF OKLAHOMA GAME WARDEN TERRY HALE (BRYAN COUNTY)



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PHOTO BY COLIN MOORE

## North Dakota: Not Just for Hunting

North Dakota doesn't get much love in the bass fishing world, but there's plenty to like about fishing in the Roughrider State. Just ask all the anglers who spent \$787.8 million in total expenditures during the 2017-18 fishing season.

Per a North Dakota Game and Fish report, anglers and hunters accounted for \$974.4 million in total expenditures related to the activities, \$127.6 million of which came from non-residents of the state.

All told, hunting and fishing contributed about \$2.1 billion in economic input for the state during that period. It's safe to say the outdoor recreation industry is alive and well in North Dakota, a state with a population of just 760,077 as of 2018.

To put it in perspective, the \$846.8 million in total hunting and fishing expenditures by North Dakota residents equates to \$1,114.09 per resident. Considering many residents don't fish or hunt, that number is undoubtedly much higher, on average, for the residents who do.



PHOTO BY DAVID A. BROWN

## Bury Me in My Boat

Glory Boats ([gloryboats.com](http://gloryboats.com)) doesn't want any die-hard anglers to go to the big-bass haven in the sky without being well equipped for the trip. The company manufactures caskets shaped like fishing boats, and it doesn't pull any punches.

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## The Rise of High School Fishing

Fishing is a burgeoning sport among high school students. Sure, many older anglers started fishing in their youth, but organized tournament fishing hasn't been available to teens for all that long. As such, high school fishing clubs are still in their infancy.

FLW, B.A.S.S., the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF) and the Student Angler Federation (SAF) recently conducted a study on the growth opportunities and economic impact of high school fishing clubs. Here's a glimpse at what the study found:

On average, members of high school fishing clubs spend almost double that of non-members on tackle per year (\$658 vs. \$332).

High School Fishing clubs help advance fishing skills, with students rating their skill level at 5.6 on a scale of 1-10 prior to joining a team, and 7.7 after participating on a team for a season.

42 percent took a friend on their very first fishing trip.

74 percent of club members fish 20 or more times per year.

Participants cited "fun" and "competition" as primary motivating factors in participation.

92 percent of members are very likely to purchase tackle in the next six months.

If you'd like to help out a high school angler or club with a tackle donation or by serving as a boat captain, contact FLW National Youth Director Scott Ellison at [scott.ellison@flwfishing.com](mailto:scott.ellison@flwfishing.com). ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF TVA

## Dinosaurs in the Tennessee River

Lake sturgeon are classified as endangered in 18 states, including Tennessee. They're still present in Tennessee's lakes and rivers, but scientists from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute have been undergoing decades-long steps to reintroduce a large population back into one of the fish's native habitats.

In April, 89 15-inch-long lake sturgeon were released into the Tennessee River near Chattanooga. Each fish was held at the institute longer than normal so biologists could study and better understand the effects of the tagging process. The fish were then released (with tracking tags) with the help of students from the Chattanooga Girls Leadership Academy.

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# FISHING

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## WHAT'S INSIDE:

James Niggemeyer's pursuit of his inner belief

### WHY YOU SHOULD THROW JERKBAITS IN THE POSTSPAWN

4 ways to catch more bass on Ned rigs

The ethics of sharing water in tournaments

How one man caught more than 600 10-pound bass

The bad (and good?) of invasive species

Milk crate hacks for kayaks

Tournament-winning tactics from the Tour and Series



PHOTO BY ROBI MATSUURA

# A LEAP OF FAITH

James Niggemeyer's continued pursuit of his inner belief

By Sean Ostruszka

**F**aith can be a tough thing to explain. It spans so many realms, be it belief in a religion, confidence in a person or trust in a particular organization.

Yet, try to describe faith. Show someone the tangible, concrete thing you can hold in your hand and say, "Ah, this is faith."

You can't. It's something inside; a belief, feeling or something you simply can't describe.

Still, most people have faith in something. FLW Tour pro James Niggemeyer sure does. Faith has shaped many facets of his life and continues to, even as he ventures down a new path in his professional fishing career.

"When I look back on my life, where I have come from, and where God has taken me, I'm so thankful," Niggemeyer says.

## Faith in Himself

When Niggemeyer first met his wife, Sandy, he tried to explain to her the idea of being a professional fisherman. James might as well have been explaining astrophysics.

"She was like, 'Huh?'" he jokes. "She was like most people who don't follow the sport. She kept asking, 'How does that work?' And for good reason. Most people don't understand it."

Only making matters a little tougher was James trying to explain all he'd been through to try and pursue this unfamiliar career.

Here he was, a 31-year-old fishing guide who worked at a tackle shop. While born and raised in Southern California, he'd moved to Texas the year prior to try his hand as a professional fisherman, and in that time he'd lived in a fifth-wheel camper, on a friend's couch, in a living space over a barn and even in a warehouse. Worse, he hadn't really done much to actually achieve his dream.

"I fished tournaments here or there, but I hadn't really seen any huge success," James admits. "It's funny now, but at the time, I'm explaining this to her, and I have no proof I could actually do it. I couldn't prove it. I just always had this belief in me that somehow, some way I could do it."

## Faith in God

Niggemeyer says he was raised with a genuine belief in God, but for most of his young life, "the evidence of His presence was nowhere to be found."

"I did things my way," says Niggemeyer, "and if it was good for me then I would try to rationalize it."

When he moved to Texas, a friend invited him to play some co-ed softball that doubled as a singles Bible study. Looking back, Niggemeyer admits what initially drew him to learn more about the study was selfishness.

"I had seen the success that many Christians had as professional bass anglers," Niggemeyer says. "I wanted to be blessed with that success, too."

Selfishness quickly turned to selflessness, though, as Niggemeyer's faith matured. Steadily, he devoted himself more and more to God, giving more of himself. Niggemeyer also started seeing other positive changes. He met Sandy. His guiding business grew. He started cashing some checks in tournaments.

Then it all came to fruition in 2005, when he won the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League Regional on Lake Ouachita.

"That's when it all came together," James says. "God had become more real to me than ever before in my life. By then I had a real relationship with God."

## Faith in an Organization

Two years after his BFL Regional victory, Niggemeyer officially realized his dream by fishing the Bassmaster Elite Series.

For 11 years, he paved a path of consistency, earning five top 10s and 14 top 20s, including two at the Bassmaster Classic. Yet, as good as things were at the start, his performances began to taper off in 2016 and 2017, with him eventually not requalifying for the Elite Series after the 2017 season.

Undeterred, Niggemeyer made the switch to FLW and immediately saw resurgence in his career. He earned a spot in the FLW Cup in his rookie season and finished second.

Once again, by the offseason, Niggemeyer had to call on his faith.

"I got an invitation to go back and fish the Elite Series," Niggemeyer says. "So, really, I had two great choices: Stay with FLW, or go back to B.A.S.S."

Niggemeyer says the decision on where to fish in 2019 was about the only thing he thought of for weeks. Then, a few days before the deadline to make his decision, he and Sandy sat down on their bed and prayed.

"There was no 'aha' moment," James says. "We both just had a strong feeling FLW was the direction to go."

"We'd had such a wonderful experience with FLW," he says. "I'd had great experiences in my 11 years at B.A.S.S., too, but we both felt it was time for a new direction, a new path for my career. I'm excited about it, and I have faith we made the right decision."

## Faith in the Future

As mentioned, there's nothing tangible about faith; no guarantees.

Niggemeyer knows that as much as anyone. Yet, his faith is stronger than ever with regard to his career and future, and it might be summed up by one of his favorite Bible verses, Matthew 6:33.

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* ■



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## JERKBAITS AFTER THE PRESPAWN

5 WAYS TO USE SUSPENDING BAITS DURING EVERY SEASON

By Matt Williams

**J**erkbaits have developed a rich history of exploiting staging bass in late winter and early spring, but some pros have learned that prespawn isn't the only time when the rhythmic dance of a hard-body minnow can help you add some big weight to the livewell.

Here are five more situations in which the *twitch-twitch-pause* of a jerkbait might bring out the mean streak in headhunting largemouths:

### 1. Blind-Casting Beds

Once bass lock on beds, many anglers lay down the hard baits and reach for a soft plastic or jig that can be bumped slowly across bottom to light the defensive fuse of territorial spawning fish. According to FLW Tour pro Kurt Dove of Del Rio, Texas, a jerkbait can be equally effective on bedding bass at times, but he's not using it for sight-fishing.

"A jerkbait is a weapon that a lot of anglers don't take into consideration when bass are on beds, but it is actually a really good choice provided the water is fairly clear," Dove explains. "It isn't your typical hard bait that you just wind through an area. You can manipulate the action of the jerkbait – specifically a suspending jerkbait – to make it move fast or really slow. I'll use it a lot when blind-casting over flats or areas where I suspect there are fish spawning that I can't visually see."

Rather than twitching the bait aggressively, Dove employs two or three short twitches to emit a little life in the lure before killing it for three to four seconds at a time. He controls the diving depth with an upward or downward angle of his rod tip.

"When you pause the jerkbait around a bed, the fish will react to it the same way they do when they try to chase a bream or other predator away from the area," he adds. "It's big-profile bait that simulates a bluegill or some other baitfish that the bass will see as a potential threat. They'll dart over and whack it."

### 2. Topwater Time and Shad Spawns

As water temperatures begin nudging the upper 60s and low 70s in late spring and early summer, aggressive postspawn bass are prone to launch into strong feeding binges. The feeding sprees might center on early morning shad spawns or roving pods of baitfish that gravitate to points and other structure and cover once the sun gets up.

Dove says topwaters always get plenty of play in these situations, but experience has taught him it's always a good idea to keep a jerkbait handy as well.

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

"It's a different way to approach those fish that are feeding heavily after the spawn in zero to 10 feet and really chasing the bait," he says. "The neat thing about a jerkbait is it allows you to cover a lot of water and find those places where the shad are spawning, be it around grass, rocks or hard spots on shallow flats. These are the same places where you can catch them on top, but a jerkbait might catch you a few more fish that won't rise on a topwater for one reason or another."

Dove likes to start out working the bait with a fairly aggressive cadence using a couple of quick twitches on a slack line, followed by a one- to two-second pause, but he's always mindful of how the fish are reacting.

"You have to keep an open mind with jerkbaits and adjust your cadence to find the one the fish want," he says. "It can change over the course of the day."

### 3. Schooling Bass

FLW Tour pro Casey Scanlon of Lake Ozark, Mo., has so much confidence in subsurface jerkbaits that he keeps one tied on all year long.

One of Scanlon's favorite times to tempt bass with a jerkbait is when they are actively chasing or schooling on baitfish at the surface from summer through fall. The action frequently occurs over large flats with deep water nearby, near big channel swings or around the perimeter of floating docks.

"Schooling action can happen just about anywhere," he says. "It's a situation where they'll also bite topwater, but they might bite a jerkbait better. You won't miss near as many fish on a jerkbait, either. A lot of times they'll hook themselves even if they swipe at it and don't eat it."

Scanlon points out that a jerkbait will sometimes catch the bigger fish in a schooling situation, too, thanks to its ability to dive beneath the fray.

"The bigger fish sometimes trail along down there beneath the smaller fish that are surfacing," he explains. "They'll 'sit down' to get the easier pickings – the wounded or dying baitfish the others sometimes leave behind."



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUJURA

### 4. Dock-Fishing

Scanlon says the jerkbait has year-round potential on any lake that has an abundance of boat docks, particularly the large, floating-style slips like those often provided by lakeside marinas.

"Bass won't leave those types of docks," he says. "There's always food and cover around. You may just have to adjust to different areas around the docks with the season of the year. Go shallower during spring and deeper in the summer."

Scanlon generally begins dissecting a dock by working his jerkbait parallel with the deeper, shadier corners.

"I'll also keep an eye out for any extras they can suspend around like anchor cables, brush piles or maybe a tree that somebody has strung up to the side of the dock," he adds. "It doesn't take much to attract a few fish."

### 5. Deep Brush

On clear-water Savannah River impoundments such as lakes Hartwell, Keowee and Russell, FLW Tour pro Brian Latimer of Belmont, S.C., says anglers frequently use topwater lures throughout much of the summer to call bass to the surface from underwater brush piles – some as deep as 35 feet. Then, for whatever reason, the surface bite begins to wane once September rolls around.

"The fish are still relating to the deep brush piles, but for some reason they get off the topwater and you have to use some kind of reaction bait to draw them up," he says. "That's when a suspending jerkbait can really shine. They'll come up and grab it 6 to 7 feet beneath the surface."

Latimer says employing the proper retrieve is important for the jerkbait to produce over the deep, gin-clear depths.

"This is warm-water, clear-water jerkbaiting," he says. "The fish are going to be pretty aggressive, so I like to work the bait as fast and erratically as I can to maximize the flash and create those reaction strikes without giving them opportunity to get a good look at it. That is really important in super-clear water." ■

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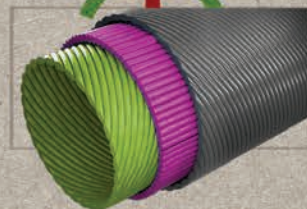
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PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

## GET AHEAD WITH NED

PRO-LEVEL TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING SUCCESS WITH THIS SEEMINGLY SIMPLE FINESSE RIG



*By Curtis Niedermier*

It'd be hard to overcomplicate a Ned rig when it's nothing more than a little worm on a little jighead.

Then again, it'd be a shame to oversimplify the rig, too.

After all, like anything that'll catch a bass, there are pro-level methods for getting the most out of the Ned rig.

### When to Ned

Pro Andrew Upshaw considers the Ned rig and drop-shot to be his two most valuable finesse options. Deciding which one to throw depends on the scenario.

"If the bottom has a little more of a dirt composition or a softer bottom, I really turn to the Ned rig," Upshaw says. "If I feel like the Ned rig is going to get lost on the bottom, like if there are little pebbles or rocks, I'll turn to the drop-shot. I like the bait to sit above that stuff."

Upshaw also classifies the Ned rig as a must-throw on spotted bass and smallmouth fisheries, for catching both numbers and size. On true

trophy largemouth lakes, he might throw it, but usually as a last resort.

"I just think a drop-shot catches bigger ones, in my opinion," he adds.

### Think Bed-Fishing

Even if you don't throw a Ned rig on a bed, you should act like you're bed-fishing when you use it.

"I really like a drag-and-dead-stick presentation," Upshaw says. "I'll lift and shake it, but I really lift it slow. In my mind, the Ned rig is so small that if there's a bass right there, the faster I fish it through there the less likely it is he's going to eat it. If I fish it through there slow, he's going to eat it every time."

### Light Head, Heavy Worm

Lighter is usually better, says Upshaw. He uses a 1/10-ounce head for general shallow bank fishing. On steep banks, or for fishing a little deeper, he moves up to 1/6 or 1/8 ounce. Ledges or deep drops get 3/16 or 1/4 ounce.

"At that point, I'm not as much worried about the drop of the bait as I am getting to the bottom where the fish are," Upshaw says. "In shallow water I get quite a few bites on the drop, especially in clear water."

The lighter the head, the more subtle the slow-falling action. The tradeoff is less bottom feel and more difficult casting.

### Upshaw's Ned Rig Setup

Upshaw fishes a Ned rig on a 6-foot, 11-inch, medium-power, extra-fast-action Team Lew's Custom Pro Speed Stick Series Dock Sniper rod with a 3,000-size Team Lew's Custom Pro Speed Spin Series reel. The large arbor on the reel helps reduce wind knots in 15-pound-test Seaguar Smackdown braid. To the braid, he attaches a long 6-pound-test Seaguar InvizX leader.

Upshaw makes casting easier with a heavier worm. His favorite is a 4-inch Strike King KVD Perfect Plastics Ocho cut down to 3 inches (he likes green pumpkin with the tail dyed chartreuse). The Ocho doesn't last as long as some other plastic formulations that are popular, but the salt content makes it heavy, and distributes the weight of the rigged worm more evenly for what he thinks is a more natural sinking presentation.

The pro has fished a Ned rig as deep as 35 feet. The key at that depth is to make an accurate cast and fish even slower so the bait stays down in the strike zone.

### Use it as a Search Bait

Some baits are classified as "search baits" because they can be fished hard and fast on a straight retrieve. The Ned rig qualifies, because, if you put it in front of a bass, the fish is probably going to bite, and you can cast the rig to a lot of potential fish-holding targets in a short amount of time.

"If I'm searching with a Ned rig, I'm bombing the longest cast possible out in front of me," Upshaw says. "I'll have my trolling motor pretty high. When the bait lands, I'll pick up the slack, move it a little bit, drag it a

bit, reel up and make another cast. In that small amount of time I keep it on the bottom and move it really slow. Especially on lakes that have docks and other targets, you don't have to move it a whole lot."

## Upshaw's Favorite Ned Heads

**1. Z-Man Finesse ShroomZ Weedless** - This is his choice for shallow water. The only time he opts for the model without a weedguard is in wide-open water, like a sandy flat on St. Clair.

**2. Gene Larew Ned Rig Pighead** - Upshaw really likes the 1/8-ounce model for fishing through rocks, and it has a bigger hook for targeting a larger class of bass.

**3. Cumberland Pro Lures Ned Head** - A long, light-wire hook is perfect for getting hook penetration in deep water with light line. It also comes in sizes up to 1/4 ounce for fishing deep.



Z-Man Finesse ShroomZ Weedless



Gene Larew Ned Rig Pighead



Cumberland Pro Lures Ned Head

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# HOW CLOSE IS TOO CLOSE?

DISCUSSING PROTOCOL FOR SHARING WATER IN TOURNAMENTS

By Jim Tutt

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA



**L**ike it or not, dealing with crowds is part of tournament fishing. We all share water, and we all need to handle encounters with other anglers in a way that's fair and respectful.

After more than 20 years on the FLW Tour, the best rule I can think of for dealing with these situations is the Golden Rule: Treat others as you'd like to be treated.

Yet, I understand we all see things differently. We're all guided by a different set of morals and values. Sometimes the lines are blurry.

Maybe I can clear them up a little.

First off, good tournament anglers are always prepared with a back-up plan in the event they have to share water, but sharing water doesn't mean you can't do well in a tournament. There's nobody who fishes like you, and what you're doing might catch fish other anglers can't. To me, it's not the end of the world to fish behind someone else (I've caught a lot of fish that way).

I also think it's OK to make your case to another competitor if you think that person has moved in on you unfairly. No one has to be a pushover. However, it's pointless to get angry and overly defensive of an area or to try and run someone off aggressively. Egos and personalities

are part of this sport, and some people will always try to get in your head by refusing to concede a spot, even if it's obvious they're in the wrong. My advice: Take the high road, stay calm and try to work it out. If that doesn't work, beat 'em at the scale, which is where it really matters.

Along those lines, I believe communication is the best way to prevent any sort of negative encounter. If you find another angler in your best pocket, ask what part of it they're fishing. They might only be working one stretch, and you can both fish there without getting in each other's way. Or you might be able to work things out some other way.

Just be honest. If you fished there in practice or previously in the tournament, say so. If you didn't, don't lie about it. It's never OK to move in on someone just because you know that angler is catching fish on a spot.

When I find company in a spot I'm planning to fish, I first consider the circumstances. Is it a single dock, point or brush pile only big enough for one angler? If so, I'm gone, but I could still come back to it. An angler might try to tell you not to fish it later, that it's "his spot," but no one owns it. If you found it fairly, fish it.

If I'm running a pattern, I might move on to the next spot, or to the

other side of the creek. I could allow a fair buffer between us so I'm not cutting the other boat off, but not giving up the area entirely. A 100-yard buffer or half-dozen docks is minimum. More is better.

Sight-fishing derbies can get interesting. Here's the most important rule: If you're parked on a bed in a good-looking pocket, you don't have claim over all the other beds in that pocket.

And then there's ledge fishing. Nowadays, you have to concede that you'll eventually need to share a ledge. Talk it out. Rotate. Fish side-by-side if you have to. It's part of it. We all find the same schools.

Timing also comes into play. On day one of a tournament, the entire lake is wide open. I'll fish anywhere. After that, I might consider where I am in the standings.

Some folks think we all need to bow out of the way when the leader rolls in. That's not necessarily the case. If I'm way out of cut range, I'll certainly give a wide berth, and I'd never roll into a pocket just because I saw the leader there the day before. But if I've got a shot at making the cut, and it's a spot I fished earlier in the event, I have as much right to fish there as the first-place pro.

One last thing I think is important is how you treat your buddies versus the rest of the competition. If you're sitting on a ledge, you can't let your buddies come in and get on those fish, but not let someone else in. That kind of collusion is almost hole-sitting, which is against the rules in a lot of tournaments. Likewise, if I let you in on day one, don't crowd me out on day two. Play it fair.

I guess the best advice I can leave you with is to talk it out. Even when I don't need to, I'll usually ask, "Hey, do you care if I fish here?" It's the friendly thing to do, and it's what I'd want to hear from someone who pulled up by me. And that, after all, is how you live out the Golden Rule. ■



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# 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.

PHOTO BY JOE BALOG

## PORTER HALL, BIG-BASS JUNKIE

A TROPHY BASS HUNTER REVEALS A STRATEGY THAT WORKS

**B**ehind the headlines, there's a quiet subculture among big-bass anglers. Far removed from social media shares and braggin' boards, there's a dedicated group of lunker hunters who pursue the biggest bass in the world as a personal quest; one that may be impossible to fulfill, as a bigger score is always around the corner.

If these men ever formed an empire, Porter Hall would be their king.

A self-admitted big-bass junkie, Hall has chased trophy largemouths all across the country and into Cuba, dating back to 1967, when he caught his first 10-pound fish on a massive homemade Jitterbug in the darkness of night.

Since that time, Hall's meticulous records document 610 double-digit bass that have passed over his gunwales, with 40 eclipsing the 13-pound mark. His biggest to date is an 18.35-pound monster caught in Lake Casitas.

Hall's life story is one of giant bass addiction. As a young man, he lived in a tent in the Ocala National Forest – the site of Florida's big-bass dominance in the 1970s – and later found himself in California during the world-record craze of the 1990s, where catching a 15-pounder "sealed the deal to renew the lease" on a rental property that led to a seven-year stay.

In the early part of this century, Hall migrated to Mississippi, site of many newly built or restored bodies of water

with aggressive Florida-strain stockings. There, he and a few select friends racked up incredible big-bass totals, including once landing 40 double-digit bass in 19 days.

"I know it sounds crazy," Hall says, "but 10- and 11-pounders were no big thing."

Now that he's back in Florida where it all began, Hall continues to explore new territories and utilize off-the-wall techniques for catching the biggest bass in any given lake. As both a fan and a friend of Hall, I've been fortunate to spend a considerable amount of time with him during his pursuit, and I find myself learning from each outing.

## Finding Big-Bass Potential

The first important aspect of Hall's fishing is his method for selecting a body of water with big-bass potential. Previously proven lakes get a lot of his attention, and he's tracked the most productive fisheries through more than 40 years of meticulous recordkeeping.

Whether it's because of gene pool, geographic location or a mix of unknown factors, Hall believes certain bodies of water simply have what it takes to produce huge bass. Big-bass fans can immediately name several – Stick Marsh, Castaic, Fork – but Hall pays more attention to discreet, smaller waters. There, away from endless dock talk and throngs of tourist anglers, Hall has a better shot at an unsuspecting monster.

Other waterway considerations include those restored by habitat work, drawdowns or draining, especially five to seven years after they've been stocked with Florida-strain bass. The initial growth of those first fish in the nutrient-rich, restored waters – sometimes referred to as the “new lake effect” – is key. Frequently, as Hall reports, “it’s a one-shot deal for those super monsters.”

Hall then evaluates fishing pressure and determines how he can get away from it. Early on in his trophy-hunting quest, Hall’s method was easy: He went where others wouldn’t or couldn’t. Fishing primarily from very small crafts capable of accessing remote ponds, Hall would often drag his boat across dry ground to reach virgin water. That was the case when his guide party boated Hall’s biggest Florida bass, a 16.3-pound monster he caught following a blustery winter front.

Times have changed, however, and Hall’s new frontier looks a little different.

## A New Approach to Pressure

Unfished waters are harder to find. In order to adapt, Hall goes against the grain, fishing in places and with methods most others won’t.

For example, Hall long ago got away from the standard practice of fishing shoreline weed edges in Florida, which is so common with others who target lunkers.

“It’s like waiting in line to catch a big fish,” he says.

Instead, research and fieldwork led him offshore, where he believes giant bass spend most of their time. Scientific research might prove him right.

For several years, Hall has been part of a study conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), where a number of double-digit bass have been planted with acoustic transmitters and tracked in a deep, natural lake. So far, the findings have surprised even veteran scientists. The majority of the fish spend a great deal of time suspended over open water, later taking off on migrations across much of the lake. The migrations are believed to be feeding binges.

Much of Hall’s fishing solidifies the theory. During his stint in California, for example, it was common for Hall to spend hours anchored on a deep, subtle structure with no action, waiting to be interrupted by the single strike of a giant. Deep-water trolling with jointed plugs (Hall is credited with being the second person to ever troll the famed AC Plug, behind only the lure’s creator, Allen Cole) produced similar results.

“We’d troll 15 miles a day and get one or two strikes, total,” Hall says.

My review of his logbooks confirms: Often, Hall and his party would score a marginal catch one day, followed by several monsters the next, using the same baits on the same spots.

“One of the key strategies,” Hall adds, “is being patient and waiting for the fish to come to you.”

It goes against the grain of today’s tournament-driven tactics, where speed dominates the sport and anglers race from spot to spot. However, on numerous occasions when fishing with Hall, I have marveled at his persistence in deep-water sanctuaries, as we again and again presented our baits until, finally, a giant would strike. It’s as if Hall can sense when he’s in the presence of extraordinary bass.

## Dialing in Out Deep

Determining the best place to concentrate fishing effort begins with a basic understanding of the body of water, obtained through both map and depth-finder study. Water clarity is the first variable. Most lakes Hall targets are fairly clear, allowing bass to thrive in depths exceeding 20 feet. Structural elements such as deep points, humps, ridges and pinch points between islands are strong places to begin the search. The presence of brush is a no-brainer, and even very subtle, deep moss and weedbeds offer something different that a big fish can relate to.

From here, Hall wants to see activity of any type on his graph. With modern electronics, it’s very possible to spot individual large targets, though the presence of baitfish and schools of small panfish are just as important. My Aqua-Vu underwater camera observations of many of Hall’s offshore hot spots nearly always confirm the presence of small bluegills and crappie.

The bulk of Hall’s efforts today center on various methods of fishing live bait in deep water, but the principle remains solid regardless of what’s tied on the end of the line. Long periods without action will be interrupted when an activity zone is established, and catching bass of any size can clue an offshore angler into the potential. More often than not, the presence of small bass confirms Hall is on the right path, and it’s just a matter of timing, or fine-tuning the area, before a big fish will come along.

Again, my personal experience fishing both live and artificial bait confirms this trait. Often, a lure change or adjusted casting angle is all that’s necessary to trigger the strike of an exceptional fish. The knowledge to do so is obtained only through experimentation and patience. Trophy bass require everything to line up perfectly, and feeding activity and timing can be the biggest variables. I’ve concluded that, as anglers driven by speed, we frequently fish right past the fish of a lifetime.

In the end, it’s Hall’s willingness to experiment and adapt that keeps his record books growing.

“I’m always looking to get away from educated fish,” he explains. “I’d rather try a bad idea and fail than do what everybody else is doing.” ■





# INVASIVE SPECIES ... IT'S COMPLICATED

FOR SOME NON-NATIVES, THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO THE ARGUMENT

By TJ Maglio

**P**olitics and personal opinion aside, it's clear invasive species constitute one of the biggest issues in fishing right now. From Asian carp to gobies and everything in between, the vast majority of fisheries are impacted in some way by invasive, or non-native, species.

What is an "impact," though?

The most common definition of the word is "a strong effect, influence or impression of a stimulus on a system."

There are no value statements like "good" or "bad" in that definition. An impact is simply change in response to an input. The attachment of value (moral or otherwise) to that change is an entirely human component, and one entirely dependent on perspective.

Although a little overt, that study of semantics is important because it exemplifies the current invasive species issues we deal with as citizens, conservationists and bass fishermen, where an issue viewed as a benefit by one interest group might be seen as a detriment by another.

Take a classic: Eurasian water milfoil.

Introduced in the 1940s, milfoil quickly spread through waterways from coast to coast, choking out native aquatic plants, reducing invertebrate biodiversity and clogging up public beaches. If you're a fisheries

biologist, municipality manager, lakefront homeowner or power plant operator, you might be (understandably) against the spread of this noxious plant.

However, years of empirical evidence by anglers have shown that largemouth bass thrive in milfoil lakes, and it's more than coincidence that some of the absolute best bass factories in the country are overrun with the stuff.

In this case, it's easy to see how something can clearly have a negative impact to some and a positive impact to others.

When looking at invasive species impacts, it's important to try to be unselfish, because we as anglers are just one small part in a whole group of resource utilizers. That's the rub for wildlife officials. How do you address invasive species issues when you have valued utilizers clamoring from both ends of the spectrum?

This column's purpose isn't to decide or promote a certain management strategy for any individual invasive, but rather to highlight the different perspectives on several common invasives and hopefully spark meaningful discourse between resource managers, consumptive resource utilizers (anglers and hunters) and non-consumptive utilizers (boaters, wildlife watchers, etc.).

## Round Goby (*Neogobius melanostomus*)

**How it got here:** A small, bottom-dwelling fish native to the Black and Caspian seas, the round goby is believed to have been transported to the Great Lakes in the 1980s in the ballast water of freighters coming from Europe. First recorded in 1990, the Round Goby has quickly spread throughout the Great Lakes watershed as well as many inland lakes across the Upper Midwest.

**The bad:** Gobies are extremely aggressive, and studies have shown native fish diversity is severely decreased in areas where round gobies are abundant. They have also been shown to negatively impact nest success of small-mouth bass and other native fish species.

**The good:** Gobies are an extremely abundant and nutritious food source for many predatory populations, including bass, walleyes, and even non-fishes such as the Lake Erie water snake and double crested cormorant. The abundance of gobies has improved growth rates (length-at-age) of predatory fish species, as well as improved the recreational fishery for many anglers.

PHOTO BY D. JUDE, UNIV. OF MICH.



## Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*)

**How it got here:** Similar to the goby, the zebra mussel is also native to the Black Sea, and was brought over in ballast water in the late 1980s. It's a small, prolific mussel about the size of your pinky nail, with a distinctive zebra stripe shell pattern and a razor-sharp edge.

**The bad:** Zebra mussels are notorious for explosive growth that damages and fouls industrial equipment such as intake and exhaust pipes, navigational buoys, docks, and pilings. They also have profound ecosystem impacts, like severely decreased phytoplankton biomass, reduced populations of some fish species from nutrient-poor water, and increased bio-availability of pollutants such as PCBs and mercury.

**The good:** In short, they clear up the water. Zebra mussels have spread through much of the eastern part of the country, and many infested lakes feature much clearer and cleaner water after their introduction, which can enhance fisheries for some species of game fish and improve aesthetics for recreational and pleasure boaters.

PHOTO BY M. QUIGLEY, GLERL

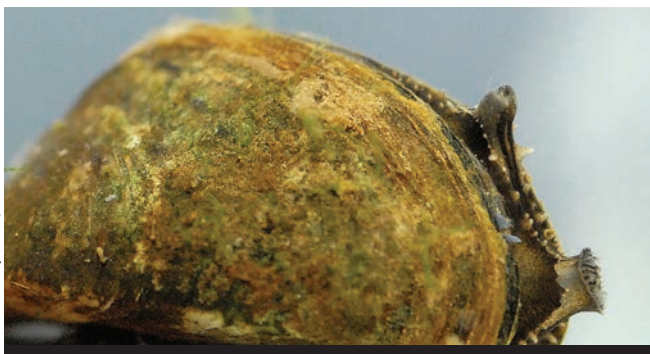


PHOTO BY FLW

## Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

**How it got here:** Native to South America, the water hyacinth was introduced to the U.S. in the 1800s by ornamental gardeners, as it's a very attractive free-floating plant with beautiful purple flowers. It's a popular aquarium plant and is sold in many greenhouses.

**The bad:** Water hyacinth grows in vast, dense mats on the surface, which decrease light penetration and reduce both animal and plant diversity. Hyacinth mats also decrease dissolved oxygen and alter nutrient and turbidity conditions. They can create physical problems by clogging up docks, marinas, dams and other navigational structures.

**The good:** Hyacinth mats create overhead cover, which can (in moderation) increase available cover for young-of-the-year fish, as well as game fish and panfish species.

PHOTO BY MARYLAND DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES



## Northern Snakehead (*Channa argus*)

**How it got here:** Native to China, Russia and Korea, the northern snakehead was introduced to U.S. waters in the late 1990s by illegal release from aquariums and live food markets. In the early 2000s, there was a memorable "frankenfish" frenzy, as various media outlets reported frightening stories of the projected spread of the voracious feeder.

**The bad:** Northern snakeheads compete with native populations for food and habitat. Studies have shown that their diets significantly overlap with the largemouth bass in most areas of their establishment, and the fish can lead to reduced abundance of many native species such as bowfin.

**The good:** Northern snakehead have created thriving niche fisheries in many waters in which they have established themselves. They are extremely aggressive, hard fighters and willingly attack many of the same lures you'd use bass fishing. They are also considered excellent table fare. Many anglers are starting to target them specifically as a food fish. ■

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

# LAKE CHICKAMAUGA

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# THE EVOLUTION OF THE MILK CRATE

SMART ACCESSORIES FOR IMPROVING ON THE OLD STANDBY

By Joe Balog

Since the beginning of modern fishing kayak design, users have relied on milk crates to store much of their gear. It makes sense, as obtaining a crate is usually easy and inexpensive, the units are incredibly rugged and they fit multiple popular Plano Stowaway tackle boxes (a standard 12-inch milk crate holds seven Plano 3600 boxes). Milk crates also fit flawlessly atop most sit-on-top fishing kayaks.

As a few kayak accessory companies attempt to move away from the milk crate model, most stick close by, instead designing aftermarket accessories for the crates themselves.

The biggest challenge to utilizing a simple milk crate is its wide-open design, allowing everything contained to be fully exposed to the elements – or possibly sinking if the kayak overturns. A few manufacturers have designed a truly waterproof, covered crate system (Jackson Kayak's JKrate is one of the nicest), while others offer lids for standard crates, as well as those of their own design.

Simple milk crates also lack any framework or form to keep small items from falling to the bottom of the crate. Hobie solves this problem with its H-Crate, which features recessed mounting points similar to a pegboard, as well as a track system that can handle everything from rod holders to small utility tubs.

As the longtime industry leader in tackle storage, it's not surprising Plano has also entered the kayak organization market, now offering both the Soft Crate, a soft-sided milk crate system with attachments for its most popular gear boxes, and a unique V-Crate unit. Unlike any other system on the market, the V-Crate is a hard, weatherproof box that holds a bunch of gear below the main center box and adds quick access to two 3700 boxes on each side.

In addition to these revolutionary pieces, a number of manufacturers produce simple nylon and fabric pouches and accessories for use with a standard milk crate (check out the Milk Crate Buddy from Austin Kayak), allowing anglers organization and quick access to items like pliers, maps, rain gear and lunch. Many contain water-resistant gear pouches and D-rings for accessories.

Adding rod tubes is the most basic milk crate modification, which can be easily achieved for just a few bucks by attaching PVC tubes inside or around the edge to store rods vertically. Commercial options are also available.

And, going to the extreme, YakGear offers its Cratowell – a kit designed to transform a standard milk crate into a functional livewell.

Any of these commercially available products can transform a simple milk crate into a better tackle-storage system, or replace it entirely with a milk crate-inspired alternative. But there's always the DIY route, too, as is popular among kayak anglers who attach all manner of storage systems using cable ties, bungee cords and other hardware. Really, it's up to you to personalize the system. The crate provides the foundation, and your imagination and specific fishing needs fill in the rest. ■

Jackson Kayak  
JKrate



Hobie H-Crate



Plano V-Crate



Austin Kayak  
Milk Crate  
Buddy



YakGear  
Cratowell



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LAKE MEAD — Feb. 28-March 2

34lbs, 12oz



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORE

▶ **Tim Klinger, Boulder City, Nev.**

WINNING PATTERN

In what was a very challenging, low-weight event, Klinger backed up two consistent days with a 15-pound, 4-ounce final limit for the win. He did it by targeting willow trees, salt cedars and any other brush up the Overton arm where largemouths were staging to spawn. Klinger flipped a 1/2-ounce Beast Coast Tungsten jig with a Super Pork Bubba Frog trailer and fished a white 3/4-ounce War Eagle spinnerbait.



LAKE SEMINOLE — March 7-10

80lbs, 15oz



PHOTO BY JACOB FINE

▶ **Brian Latimer, Belton, S.C.**

WINNING PATTERN

Latimer cranked a Bill Lewis MR-6 crankbait up the Flint River for his day-one weight, then relied heavily on flipping shallow grass – mostly hydrilla – on a main-river flat in the Flint where prespawn bass were staging. The bulk of his catch came on a Z-Man Palmetto BugZ Texas-rigged with a 1/2-ounce weight, though a few day-three keepers bit a wacky rig.



LAKE CHICKAMAUGA — March 21-23

68lbs, 8oz



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORE

▶ **Brent Butler, Vonore, Tenn.**

WINNING PATTERN

Blasting 37 pounds, 5 ounces on day two was the highlight of Butler's win, which came thanks to a variety of patterns: lipless crankbaits up shallow on day one, umbrella rigs and jerkbaits on day two, and a combination of all three plus a swimbait on day three. His most productive options included a Super G Lures umbrella rig with Keitech Swing Impact FAT 4.3 swimbaits and a Lucky Craft Flash Minnow 100.



GRAND LAKE — March 28-31

62lbs, 12oz



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

▶ **Jeremy Lawyer, Sarcxie, Mo.**

WINNING PATTERN

To get his win (via tiebreaker with Michael Matthee), Lawyer cycled through spinnerbaits by a number of makers, including Freedom Tackle and Nichols Lures, and frequently swapped Hildebrandt blades of different size, shape and finish. Most of his skirts were chartreuse and white. Lawyer slow-rolled the baits under the backs of docks with walkways over 7 to 10 feet of water from Honey Creek to the dam.



## KENTUCKY LAKE — April 4-6

44lbs, 2oz



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMAYER

### ▶ Jake Morris, McKee, Ky.

WINNING PATTERN

One 75-yard stretch of a creek bend behind Goat Island in the Little River arm of Lake Barkley produced all of Morris' winning catch. Targeting a steep shoreline that dropped to 4 to 6 feet and an adjacent flatter stretch with laydowns, Morris slow-rolled a Stan Sloan's Zorro Baits Aggravator spinnerbait with a chartreuse skirt, Colorado and willow-leaf blades, and a white Zoom Fat Albert Grub trailer.



## CHEROKEE LAKE — April 11-14

67lbs, 10oz



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

### ▶ Andrew Upshaw, Tulsa, Okla.

WINNING PATTERN

Upshaw dialed in on spawning smallmouths on the shorelines of main-lake islands. The fish set up on steep-dropping banks with slight turns and large boulders. He pitched behind the boulders with a wacky-rigged 4-inch green pumpkin Strike King Ocho. On the final day, in the final hour, he secured the win with a secondary pattern of throwing a 3 1/4-inch ghost shad Strike King Rage Swimmer on a 1/4-ounce head to a large rock pile alongside a point.



## SANTEE COOPER — April 25-27

54lbs, 9oz



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

### ▶ Bradford Beavers, Summerville, S.C.

WINNING PATTERN

With day two canceled due to high winds, Beavers weighed in bookend limits of 31 pounds, 2 ounces and 23-7 to win. He caught spawning bass on cypress trees in lakes Marion and Moultrie, though the latter was his preferred area, and he repeatedly skipped a wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko to key trees. On the final day, he also caught some morning fish around a shad spawn using a 1/4-ounce Eye Strike Texas Eye Jighead with a Keitech Swing Impact FAT trailer.



## LAKE CHICKAMAUGA — May 2-5

83lbs, 9oz



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

### ▶ John Cox, DeBary, Fla.

WINNING PATTERN

Hitting some key cypress trees in the final minutes boosted Cox from third to first in heroic fashion. Prior to that, he bed-fished and blind-casted around spawning sloughs using a wacky-rigged 6-inch Berkley PowerBait MaxScent The General in the baby bass color and a white Dirty Jigs Swim Jig with a matching Berkley PowerBait MaxScent Meaty Chunk trailer. Cox targeted sawgrass, cypress trees, lay-downs and any other shallow banks that felt right. ■



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# GEAR

PRODUCTS AND INSIGHT TO HELP YOU CATCH FISH



## WHAT'S INSIDE:

### SHIMANO'S LATEST DIGITAL CONTROL REEL IS A HIT

Sweet new baits for summer bass

How to choose the right insurance plan for your boat



## SHIMANO CURADO DC 150HG

By Matt Williams  
PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

To build the Curado DC, Shimano started with the finest attributes found in its most popular workhorse reel, then added a self-energizing Intelligent Digital Control (I-DC) braking concept previously available in a few other models with significantly higher price points. The result is an affordable reel that's truly a pleasure to fish with.

### First Impression

Though the Curado DC is not the lightest reel in my rod locker (7.8 ounces), it's the most intelligent.

The reel is built around a small microcomputer system called I-DC4 (4 for four modes) that's fitted to the inner wall of the removable side plate within a sealed housing. The unit monitors spool speed and makes automatic braking corrections every one-thousandth of a second to help reduce the risk of

backlash and maximize casting distance without the need to constantly thumb the spool.

An external dial controls the magnetic braking system with four modes that work in unison with a standard spool tension adjustment knob. Mode 1 is for maximum distance in calm conditions. Mode 2 is for managing braided line. Mode 3 is for fluorocarbon/mono line. Mode 4 is for windy conditions, skipping or beginners.

The reel features a host of other premium technologies, all housed inside a rigid metal body.

### In Action

I focused most of my attention on the microcomputer's functionality and performance to determine if the reel is everything it's marketed to be.

In short, it is.

Adjusting the Digital Control is as simple as

turning the dial to the preferred mode. Just make sure the spool tension knob is properly adjusted for the weight of the bait, otherwise the Digital Control won't function properly. The lower the number, the less spool tension needed.

The No. 1 setting opens the brakes wide open and allows for bombing long casts with pretty heavy baits when conditions are right. Modes 2 and 3 are recommended for use with specific line types and lighter lures, but these are only general guidelines. My advice is to experiment, regardless of line type, to see which produces the best results.

I was particularly impressed with Mode 4. It's the most restrictive setting, and as hard as I tried, I couldn't make the reel backlash in this setting. I even made repeated attempts by firing a 3/8-ounce spinnerbait into the

side of my house without touching the spool. Then, with no additional adjustments, I turned the opposite direction and launched consistent 32-yard casts on 15-pound-test fluorocarbon. Try that with a traditional baitcaster.

### Final Thoughts

Before the Curado DC, my only experience with Shimano's Digital Control technology was the 2006 introduction of its first low-profile DC baitcaster, the \$650 Calais 4x8 200DC. I'm still pretty fond of that 9.8-ounce reel, but I like the more compact, lower-priced Curado DC better.

This isn't a cheap reel, but it's hardly a gimmick. The user-friendly electronic braking system doesn't completely eliminate the risk of backlash, but it is something that anglers of all skill levels can benefit from.

## CLICKABLE EXTERNAL DIAL:

Located at the top front of the side plate, the dial allows for easily selecting one of four settings for the braking system. A fifth (zero) setting releases the side plate for access to the spool.



## HAGANE BODY:

The rigid HAGANE Body features a gunmetal finish accented by an anodized green handle, star drag and spool with the gear ratio stamped on the face.

## I-DC4 MICRO-COMPUTER:

The fully sealed I-DC4 system constantly monitors and controls the speed of the line spool to reduce backlashing and overruns while improving casting distance, accuracy and control.

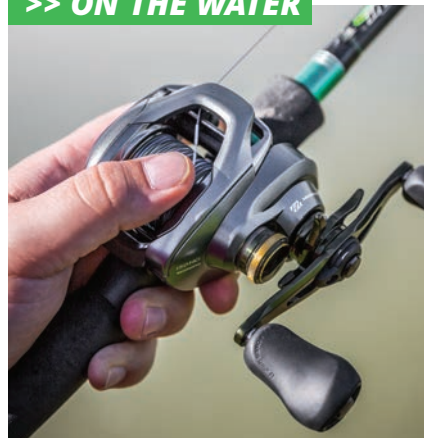


## Performance Advice

It's always best to choose a reel with a gear ratio that's best suited for the primary techniques for which it will be used. The DC150HG's 7.4:1 ratio splits the seam between the three available ratios and is a good all-around choice for a wide range of applications. Gathering 31 inches of line per crank, it'll eat up slack line quickly when needed, or you can slow it down enough to work a plethora of other baits effectively.

*A note: As useful as the I-DC4 is for curbing backlash, it's crucial that the spool tension knob be dialed in correctly in order for the system to function properly.*

## >> ON THE WATER



## HITS & MISSES

- + User-friendly I-DC4 magnetic braking system to reduce backlashing
- + Easy-to-use four-mode braking adjustment dial
- + A lot of reel for the money
- + Super-low profile
- + Ergonomically pleasing
- + Various gear ratios available
- + Durable pinion gears, bearings and body design
- Less line capacity than its non-DC brother, the Curado 200K

## DETAILS

**Price:**  
\$249.99

**Weight:**  
7.8 ounces (7.9 on the high-speed XG)

**Gear Ratios:**  
6.2:1, 7.4:1 (reviewed), 8.5:1

**Left and Right Retrieve:**  
Yes

**Spool Capacity:**  
90 yards of 14-pound-test mono

**Contact:**  
fish.shimano.com

## APPLICATIONS

- The anti-backlash component is sure to build confidence in beginners while improving casting efficiency for advanced anglers with less need for thumbing the spool.
- The No. 4 braking mode is ideal for skipping applications and is also useful when casting into stiff winds with lightweight lures. ■

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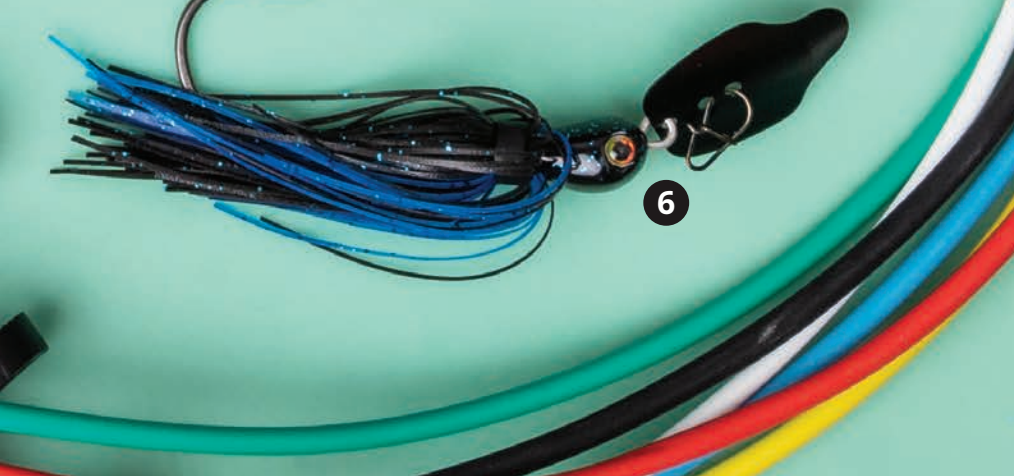
**\$119.99 | [denalirods.com](http://denalirods.com)**



### 4. PLANO RUSTRICTOR

Plano infused all the plastic in its Rustriector series Stowaway boxes with rust-stopping compound. When a box is closed, it fills with Vapor Corrosion Inhibitor (VCI) ions that prevent corrosion without imparting any negative scent. The series includes seven popular Stowaway configurations.

**\$5.99 to \$14.99 | [planomolding.com](http://planomolding.com)**



### 5. SPRO WAMEKU SHAD 70

“Wameku” translates loosely to “loud” in Japanese. It’s a fitting name for this 3/4-ounce lipless bait, which features a high-pitch knocking sound. Two line-tie positions let the user customize the presentation.

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The Thunder Cricket is a premium vibrating jig that features a heavy-duty wire eye, quality hook and snap, and a combo wire and lead barb bait keeper. It comes in 10 colors in 3/8, 1/2, 5/8 and 3/4 ounce.

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## BOAT INSURANCE ADVICE

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT AND YOUR GEAR

*By Joe Balog*  
PHOTO BY MATT PACE

**A**s boat owners, we all carry insurance, but are we really covered? When we find out, will it be too late? Boat insurance is shrouded in mystery, as coverage terms often come down to a matter of opinion. Let's unlock the secrets.

Jose Garza is the perfect person to better explain the ins and outs of insuring a bass boat. A Great Lakes guide and former FLW tournament competitor, Garza's day job is insurance sales and service for AAA in Michigan. The job affords him a view from both sides of the fence.

### Liability

Garza advises boat owners to check regulations regarding coverage. Some states, for example, require a

minimum amount of liability insurance for licensed captains, guides, or those fishing or boating for hire. In addition, competitive anglers might be regulated by tournament trails, boat and motor sponsors, or supporting dealers (FLW requires Tour pros to have a minimum of \$300,000 in liability coverage).

A million-dollar policy is a realistic level of coverage. In the event that a boat operator is deemed responsible for the injury of another, running up a million-dollar lawsuit isn't out of the realm of possibility.

### Don't Underinsure

In terms of day-to-day practicality, Garza insists many of our policies are still lacking.

"In the event of a boat insurance claim," Garza says, "most people would be severely underinsured."

He insists that, in the case of tournament bass fishermen, the biggest discrepancy lies in the amount and value of equipment within a rig. Most personnel working for insurance companies don't know much about boats, especially tournament bass boats, says Garza, and they expect equipment within a boat to be worth a few hundred dollars, tops.

Considering rods, reels and lures alone, many bass anglers carry tens of thousands of dollars worth of goodies in their compartments. In the event of a theft, those items must be covered by a rider on a policy.

A rider is a provision that adds to the coverage of a policy for specific items. In the case of most bass boat policies, anything easily removed from a boat must be supported by a rider to obtain coverage. Boat owners would be best to figure out the cost of replacing most of the boat's gear, and work with the insurer to make sure it's covered.

Discrepancies often exist for those items that are attached to the boat but can still be quickly removed, or equipment installed as an after-market part. A depth finder is a good example, especially if mounted on a quick-release bracket. On-board chargers and shallow-water anchors can also be questionable.

"Some [insurance] companies only cover items that are factory installed. Others cover add-ons, but only if they can't be quickly detached," Garza says, stressing that each individual policy can be unique. When discussing coverage with an agent, he says, "Ask as

many questions as possible, and write down the answers. Don't take your insurance agent's word as gospel. Do the research."

## Preparation for Claims

To avoid disputes before a claim happens, Garza advises taking photos of your boat when fully loaded for a trip or tournament to more accurately gauge the amount of equipment carried in its compartments. Taking it one step further, record the number of tackle boxes, and provide your insurer with an estimate of the number and value of lures, as well as rods, reels, rain gear and any other significant items. If something happens, you'll have a record of what was in the boat.

## Additions

In addition to liability and equipment add-on coverage, most marine policies offer uninsured boater coverage (a must to be truly protected), as well as separate trailer coverage.

It's important not to shortchange yourself here, as more trailer claims are reported than boat claims thanks to trailer-backing rookies in parking lots.

Also consider an on-the-water towing addition to your policy, which often only adds a few dollars to the premium. Just educate yourself to the exact coverage levels first, as well as the availability of towboats on your home waters.

## Get Expert Help

Garza's strongest recommendation is to seek out an expert.

"I'd recommend going through a company that specializes in your lifestyle," he says.

Examples include United Marine Underwriters or Charter Lakes Marine Insurance. These companies, Garza claims, offer far better and more comprehensive insurance than those specializing in home or auto insurance, which might only occasionally dip their toes into boat policies. ■

The advertisement features a black fishing jersey with a camouflage pattern and blue accents on the sleeves. The jersey is covered in logos for various brands: ELY, Abu Garcia, Berkley, MINN KOTA, EVINRUDE E-TEC, and PRYM1 CAMO. To the right of the jersey is the E3 Sport Apparel logo, which consists of a stylized red and black 'E3' inside an oval. Below the logo is the text 'E3 Sport Apparel'. The slogan 'Anglers are Athletes' is written in a large, bold, italicized font. At the bottom of the advertisement is the website 'E3SPORT.COM' in a bold, italicized font.

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# 🏆 ALL ABOUT THE CUP

## Who's In

**52** pros will qualify to fish the 2019 FLW Tour. In the event a pro double-qualifies or forfeits his spot at the Cup, additional invites will be extended to the top finishers on the 2019 FLW Tour.

Here's how they can make it to Hot Springs:

- 40** - The top pros from the 2019 FLW Tour
- 1** - The 2018 FLW Tour Angler of the Year
- 1** - The 2018 FLW Cup winner
- 6** - The top pro from each of the Costa FLW Series divisions (Southeastern, Central, Southwestern, Northern, Western and International) at the 2018 FLW Series Championship
- 2** - Both members of the YETI FLW College Fishing National Championship winning team
- 1** - The 2019 T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American boater winner
- 1** - The 2019 The Bass Federation National Championship boater winner



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMAYER



PHOTO BY ANDY HASEGON

## Important Times and Places

### Takeoff

6:30 a.m. CT  
Andrew Hulsey Fish Hatchery, 350 Fish Hatchery Road  
Hot Springs

### Weigh-in

5:30 p.m. CT  
Bank OZK Arena, 134 Convention Blvd.  
Hot Springs

### FLW Expo

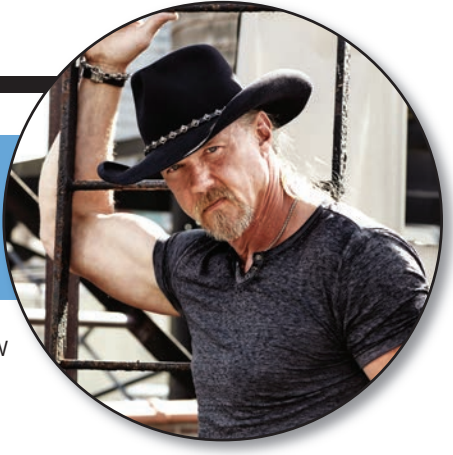
10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. CT  
Hot Springs Convention Center, 134 Convention Blvd.  
Hot Springs

# 6 Reasons To Attend the Cup

**1. You could win a Ranger bass boat or Jackson fishing kayak –** Anyone can enter on site, but you must be present at the final two weigh-ins for a chance to win.

**2. You can party at a live country concert from Trace Adkins –** The Louisiana native will perform a free concert live at 4 p.m. on the FLW Cup stage before the final weigh-in on Sunday.

**3. You can buy the latest ICAST tackle releases –** The FLW Expo is the first major consumer tackle show after ICAST, where the latest and greatest tackle is unveiled to the world.



**4. You might meet your favorite FLW pros –** No fishing organization allows more fan access to its top stars than FLW. Come get autographs, snap selfies or chat up your heroes.



**5. You can eat great food and hear great music –** Eat slow-cooked meats prepared by the best competition cookers while listening to live music at the Bass & BBQ Festival.



**6. You can learn how to fish from the top pros –** Sit in on a pro fishing seminar from FLW greats such as Jimmy Houston at the FLW Expo.

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# 🏆 A LOOK AT THE CUP PLAYING FIELD

## LAKE HAMILTON, HOT SPRINGS, ARK.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN HAND

### LAKE STATS

Surface acres: 7,460  
Shoreline miles: 198  
Span: *about 18 miles*  
Average depth: 26 feet  
Maximum depth: 60 feet  
Year completed: 1932

### THE UPPER END

*The Ouachita River flows in from the northwest through a narrow stretch in the lake that's mostly devoid of docks. Other upstream tributaries are more similar to the lower end.*

Ouachita River



**KEY FEATURE:  
BRUSH PILES**  
*Local crappie and bass anglers have lined the reservoir with brush.*

### SCHOOLERS

*This region of Arkansas is known for its summertime schoolers. The surface activity usually peaks in June and July, but they'll still be busting come August.*



**KEY FEATURE:  
BANK GRASS**  
*Water willow grass could attract some forage and bass.*



**KEY FEATURE:  
SEAWALLS AND  
RIPRAP**  
*Rock and concrete structures lining deep banks can be especially good in the summer.*

Hot Springs

**KEY FEATURE:  
DOCKS**

*Hamilton is packed full of docks. Many have brush piles and lights that attract bait and predator fish, and some homeowners feed fish at their docks, which attracts even more interest from the entire food chain.*



270

270

**SPECIES IN PLAY**

*Spotted bass - "Kentuckies" won't outweigh largemouths individually, but they'll bolster some bags for sure.*

*Largemouth bass - A touch of Florida-strain genetics helps produce some trophy largemouths.*

Oaklawn Racetrack

Entergy Park

Garvan Woodland Gardens

Electric Island

**THE LOWER END**

*Docks, points, pockets and more docks comprise the lower end. This area will swallow most of the field.*

Lake Hamilton

TAKEOFF SITE:  
Andrew Hulsey  
Fish Hatchery

**KEY FEATURE:  
THE DAM**

*Entergy Corporation owns Lake Hamilton. If the power company is generating at the dam, which it should be in August, the fishing is usually better.*



# THIS IS MY ARKANSAS ADVENTURE

We look forward to welcoming fans  
and participants to Lake Hamilton  
for the 2019 FLW Cup



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HOT SPRINGS



LAKE CATHERINE

LAKE HAMILTON



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# WHAT TO EXPECT AT LAKE HAMILTON

Even though Lake Hamilton is only 7,200 surface acres, it fishes plenty big enough for 52 pros thanks to miles of shoreline and more docks and brush piles than a bass angler could fish in a season.

Most of the patterns will focus on those targets, says Lake Hamilton local George Cochran, who won the 2005 FLW Cup on his home lake. He also predicts a few other typical summertime strategies will be in play.

According to Cochran, Hamilton is brimming with bass, and three-hour night tournaments regularly require 18 pounds to win in the summertime. Daytime fishing is much tougher, as bass clam up and refuse to bite, plus anglers have to deal with heavy boat traffic on the well-populated lake.

The silver lining is a typical strong morning bite in the first two or so hours and some surprisingly large bass (fish approaching double-digits) that call Lake Hamilton home.

"The difference between a lot of winners and others is you have to be so focused to catch them when it's slow fishing, and you can't lose very many fish because every fish is going to be priceless," Cochran says. "The one that's going to win the tournament is going to get on something, and he's going to be focused and hungry to win. You've got to really want to win bad like I always did."



## Probable Baits and Patterns



### 1. DOCK-FISHING

Buzzbaits in the morning, frogs in the middle of the day, and swimbaits, jigs and finesse plastics at any time will catch fish on the myriad docks.

### 2. BRUSH PILES

A crankbait, under-spin or swimbait reeled over brush might work early, but once the fishing pressure sets in, it'll probably take a big worm worked slowly through the brush to get bites.

### 3. BANK GRASS

A little bit of bank grass could attract enough baitfish to hold some bass, especially in the morning or if boat traffic stirs up the water.

### 4. SCHOOLING FISH





Catching schoolers with topwater and under-spins is unpredictable, but could produce big bags early.

### 5. RIPRAP AND SEAWALLS

Hard cover and structure on the shoreline, particularly if the water's a little deeper next to it, can be targeted successfully with topwater, drop-shots and jigs.

# Picks and Predictions

Occasionally an FLW Cup plays out exactly how most folks predict. But that's rare. Most of the time, the Cup is full of twists, turns and the kind of heroic, unexpected performances that go down in history. We asked a few FLW experts to offer their predictions for the usual subjects, and something a little more bold.

	WHO WINS	WHAT WINS	BOLD PREDICTIONS
<b>CURTIS NIEDERMIER</b> FLW editor-in-chief	<b>JEREMY LAWYER</b> He's fishing better than ever and is an expert at fishing docks, brush and clear water.	<b>Morning topwater</b> My bet is the winning fish come in the first 90 minutes each day.	We have a wire-to-wire champ that wins big. 
<b>TODD HOLLOWELL</b> FLW Live co-host and former Tour pro	<b>BRYAN THRIFT</b> His junk-fishing and fly-by-the-seat-of-his-pants fishing style are likely the exact ingredients needed to win.	<b>Morning schooling bite and afternoon dock bite</b> The pro who has a backup pattern will take over the lead and finish at the front of the pack.	Grassroots-level qualifiers will advance to day three. FLW has the strongest grassroots-level anglers in the world, and they'll show up.
<b>JOE OPAGER</b> FLW director of public relations	<b>JOHN COX</b> He's just had arguably the best season of his career and is the best in the world with topwater baits and finding secluded water that he has all to himself.	<b>Frogs and buzz baits</b> They just get big bites. 	Hot Springs shatters FLW attendance records, and the 2019 FLW Cup and Expo becomes the highest-attended FLW event in history.
<b>JUSTIN ONSLOW</b> FLW associate editor	<b>BRADFORD BEAVERS</b> I have a good feeling about Beavers, who's having one heck of a rookie season. 	<b>Dock-fishing</b> The winning fish are going to be pulled from under and behind docks with finesse baits and flipping rigs.	I'd bet more than one of the biggest names of the sport finishes in the top 10. Give me John Cox, Bryan Thrift and David Dudley in the top five this year.
<b>PETER T</b> FLW Live co-host and former Tour pro	<b>BRYAN THRIFT</b> He's versatile and can go from deep to shallow quickly. This event may require a combination of patterns to win.	<b>Crankbaits and topwater</b> In open water, a mid-depth crankbait will catch fish. Topwater will work for schoolers and up shallow.	We'll see at least one 6- to 7-pound fish. 

## 6. POINTS AND STRUCTURE

Natural structure should hold a few fish. Carolina rigs and drop-shots are probably the best bet.

## 7. SHALLOW JUNK

Running and gunning any and every bit of shallow cover has worked in August Cups before. Frogs, jigs, Texas rigs, finesse worms – the whole lot is in play with this one.

## 8. THE UNKNOWN

Cochran credits the fact that no one else was on the same pattern as him as a big part of why he dominated on the final day in 2005. There could be another unknown this year. Perhaps a pattern far up the Ouachita River, or some unknown honeyhole in the back of a cove, or a bream-based pattern will be it.

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## 🏆 RECALLING THE 2005 CUP



It was hotter than usual in July 2005. George Cochran remembers it well.

Then again, how could he forget?

"Gentleman George" found himself in a unique position that summer – fishing for a world championship on his home lake. Cochran didn't grow up on Hamilton, but he'd moved his family there some years earlier to be close to great fishing in the three reservoirs – Hamilton, Ouachita and DeGray – in the Hot Springs, Ark., area.

A father of three, Cochran saw life on Lake Hamilton as an easy way to introduce his two sons, David and John, to bass fishing. Preparing himself for the 2005 FLW Cup was an unexpected side benefit.

"Since I lived there, the best time to take my kids out was at night, and we'd fish around dock lights and stuff, but we'd also fish about two hours in the morning in the hot summertime before the traffic got bad," he recalls. "I'd have these boys with me, and we'd be throwing worms and stuff."

Cochran recalled those experiences when Cup practice rolled around.

"I remembered the best bank for fishing topwaters right at daylight. It's a true story; in practice I tried fishing deep because I thought it was going to be won on brush piles. I did that for two days in practice and never caught a keeper. The third day ... I kicked their butt that third day. I tied on a topwater bait and went down a bank where me and the boys had caught a bunch of bass five years before. I caught a bunch on that little bitty Baby Chug Bug. I thought I could catch a limit in the mornings."

One of Cochran's early bass fishing mentors had introduced him to the subtleties of topwater fishing, and the

pro relied on the lessons he'd learned to quickly dial in a pattern targeting banks that were a little deeper (4 to 5 feet of water) alongside riprap and seawalls.

"I was using 10-pound line and a medium-light rod where I could throw it a long way," Cochran says of his micro-topwater approach. "I'd work it real slow at first, and if they didn't hit it I'd go real fast with it, making it spit like a minnow that was running away. They'd hit it in that first 6 inches. They'd hit it like a buzzbait."

Once the tournament was underway, the champ had his best areas to himself, and his weights improved each day. On day four, with weights zeroed, Cochran weighed in 10 pounds, 3 ounces, easily beating runner-up Chad Grigsby, who had 6-7.

"All through my tournament career I never had a tournament I could win on topwater," Cochran recalls. "In that tournament, it was four days, and three of the days I caught them on topwater. There was only one day that I didn't catch them good on topwater. I won that on a topwater bait, and basically won it in the first two hours every day."

For the Arkansas pro, the 2005 FLW Cup was his third bass fishing world championship. He'd previously won the Bassmaster Classic in 1987 and 1996, before transitioning to fish with FLW.

While the '87 Classic provided a boost in sponsorship and notoriety, and the '96 win solidified him as a legend in the sport, the 2005 Cup win stands out for other reasons, and not just the \$500,000 payday.

"I was at home. I had all my family there, all my friends there," Cochran says. "It was an extremely special tournament for me." ■

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# BRUSH it off

*By Sean Ostruszka*

STRAIGHT TALK AND TRUTHS  
ABOUT BRUSH PILE FISHING



PHOTO BY KLEWOOD

**A**re you tired of reading the same old article about how to fish brush piles? So is David Dudley. Like, *really* tired of it.

"There's so much misinformation out there about brush piles because guys say things that sound good," Dudley says. "Yeah, it may sound good, but it's not true."

When Dudley gets passionate on a topic and opens up about it, it's best to listen, because not only will it often be spot on, it will often be brutally honest.

Decades of planting brush piles and fishing them have taught him about how great (or just as often, useless) they can be depending on the situation.

"I've quit [planting brush piles]," Dudley admits. "I used to put in all these brush piles thinking I was creating these special spots. Most of the time it was a waste of time."

Let the honesty commence.

## Are They Actually Good?

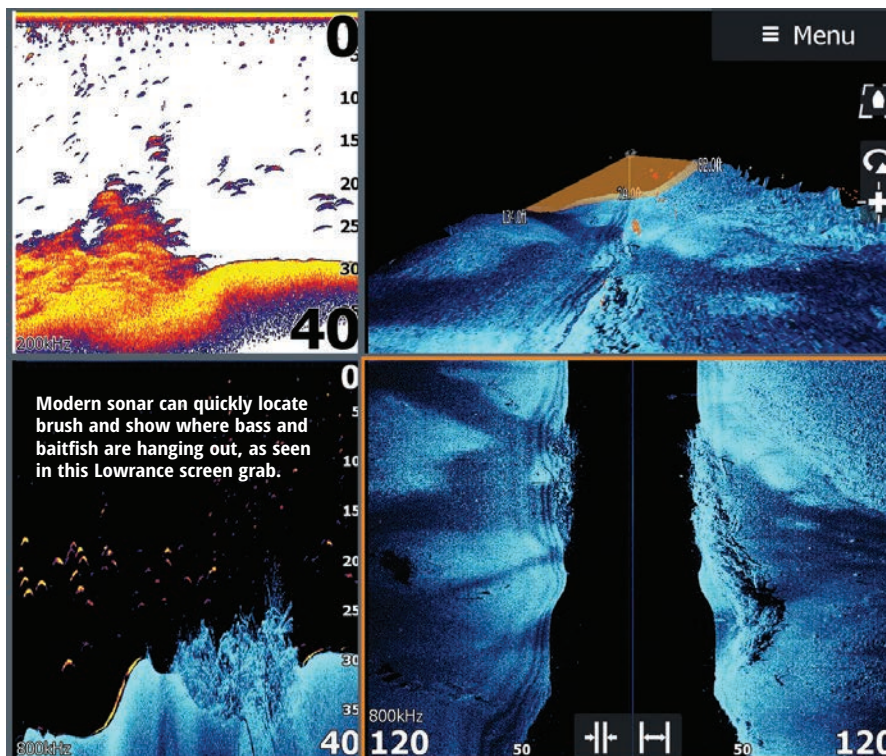
The above question might seem like it has an obvious answer. Brush piles are prime cover that attract baitfish and bass alike, right? Anglers plant them, fish them and win tournaments from them, right?

"They can be," says Dudley. "But it's hard to beat natural cover."

The natural stuff to which Dudley is referring is actually cover and structure – points, boulders, shell beds, channel swings, rock piles – basically, stuff that's been there since the creation of the lake or has evolved as the lake has evolved. A brush pile might be "natural" in that it might be a tree cut right from the shore, but brush piles are still fabricated by anglers.

"Look, say you find a brush pile sitting perfectly right on the end of a point with a channel swing," Dudley explains. "Well, some guy obviously planned that, thinking, 'If I put this brush here, I'll go from getting five bites to 10.' That's not the way it works. What made that spot good was the natural cover already there. Putting the brush pile there probably won't make the spot better, and it may make it worse."

"Now, if you have some random bare spot, and you put a brush pile



on it, then it may actually attract bass to it because there was nothing to really attract them before."

Just because you find or plant some brush on a prime location doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be the best brush pile you can fish in a given day. It's often those obscure, off-the-beaten-path brush piles that are actually good. Of course, that's assuming you've answered the next question.

## Which Species?

If you're going to start game-planning for fishing brush piles, it's best if you figure out which species of bass you're targeting.

"Brush-pile fishing is species-related," says Dudley. "Where brush piles really play a role in tournaments is with spotted bass."

But wait, didn't Clent Davis win the 2018 FLW Cup from brush piles with largemouths? Yes, but that's because of how he game-planned for them.

According to Dudley, what a brush pile is to a bass is the same as a refrigerator to a human: It's a place bass can hang out and grab food that lives around (bluegills and crap-pie) or swims by (shad) whenever he wants.

Some humans are more willing to share their food than others. Bass are no different.

Spotted bass like to share. As such, you'll very often find a whole school of spotted bass in and around one piece of brush, taking turns on whatever baitfish are hanging around.

That's not usually true of large-mouths. According to Dudley, largemouths tend not to school on brush piles like their spotted bass cousins.

"If you're targeting spotted bass, you may only need a few brush piles, because they'll have a whole school of fish in each one," Dudley says. "But for largemouth, you better have a lot of brush piles to run, because it's usually a one-fish deal."

That was the case in the previously mentioned Cup win, as Davis cycled through dozens of brush piles each day, picking off one big one here or there.

If you want a good way to think of brush-pile fishing for largemouths, equate it to fishing shallow stumps. You usually only catch one good one from each stump. If you hit a stump again later in the day, it could replenish and another bass might move on it, but even then, it's probably just another one-catch-and-done scenario.

## Bass Piles

What makes a good brush pile? "Bass," says Dudley.

He's not being flippant. He's being honest and to-the-point.

With modern electronics, finding a brush pile is easier, and it's possible to see if a kicker largemouth or school of spots has taken up residence in it. When Dudley is actually looking for brush piles, he scans

offshore areas in various depths, looking for bass to show up on his screen. Once he's seen and marked a few, he'll start to develop a pattern based on which brush piles at a given depth seem to be holding the bass he's seeking.

That pattern might be on primo brush piles on the very tips of prime points that are holding largemouths, or it could be targeting the obscure

ones in 12 to 15 feet of water near channel swings. Simply let your electronics show you the bass and let the bass tell you where to continue looking.

After all, it's the bass that make the brush piles good, not the other way around. A smart approach to fishing brush is one where an angler weighs all options to catch the heaviest stringer.

## Brush Pile Lure Selection

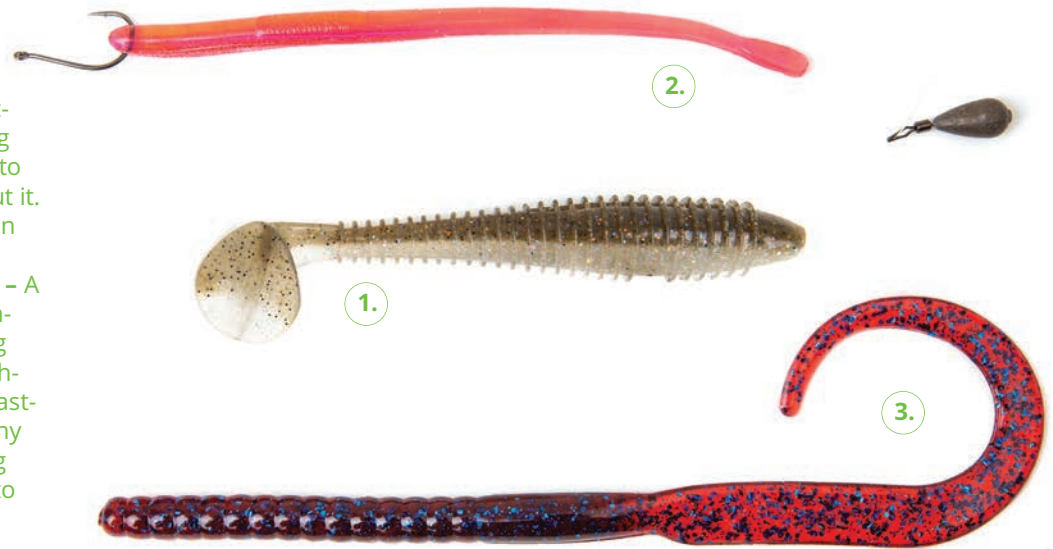
Don't overthink bait selection. A brush pile is a feeding spot. Bass are usually there to eat, or at least thinking about it. Dudley boils his bait selection down to three lures.

**1. Paddle-tail swimbait** – A soft-plastic paddle-tail swimbait such as a Keitech Swing Impact FAT is a deadly brush-pile lure. Dudley suggests casting off the deeper side of any piece of brush and counting the bait down just enough to get close to the brush pile.

"You don't need to get it within an inch," he says. "A bass will usually swim out to eat it, especially spots. So, as an example, maybe count it down 10 seconds. Then next cast, count 12 seconds. Then 15. Just don't count it down so long you get hung."

**2. Drop-shot** – If a bass isn't willing to swim out to chase a swimbait, get a little closer and fire a drop-shot out to the sides of the brush pile. It doesn't need to be in the brush, where it could get hung and spook the fish. Just get it close and tease him to come out.

**3. Big worm** – While spotted bass will come out to eat a lure, largemouths sometimes require you to bring it to them on a platter. A big Texas-rigged worm is great for slipping in and around brush, and is often a big enough meal to tempt a lazy bass into biting. ■



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# WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION



## CRAIG CROWNED TBF NATIONAL CHAMPION

Tennessee Preston Craig bested all the other state champions from The Bass Federation who traveled from across the U.S. and Canada to compete on the legendary waters of Kentucky Lake in Paris, Tenn., in April at the TBF National Championship. His three-day total of 50.04 pounds was nearly 10 pounds better than the next closest boater, earning Craig the \$120,000 "Living the Dream" prize package. The package includes paid entry fees on the FLW Tour next season, plus a travel stipend, use of a tow vehicle and a wrapped Ranger bass boat. Craig also earned a spot in the 2019 FLW Cup.

That's just part of a record National Championship payout valued at more than \$400,000 that was apportioned to the top finishers from a field of 102 boaters and co-anglers. Among the prizes, the top seven boaters and co-anglers – representative of each TBF division – qualified for the 2019 T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American.

Craig, who's understandably excited to fish the FLW Tour in 2020, says a positive attitude and intense focus helped him claim the top spot.

"I just kept it in my head, 'I've got to keep grinding,'" he says. "'I've got to keep fishing.'"

"I told my camera guy after finishing my limit, 'I think I've got it.' Luckily, it happened. I got the right bites, and it's an amazing feeling. It's a lot of work to get here, and finishing my limit, that was a weight lifted off. That was it."



Preston Craig won the 2019 TBF National Championship by nearly 10 pounds on Kentucky Lake.

## FUCHS WINS TBF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP CO-ANGLER TITLE



Indiana co-angler John Fuchs, representing the Northern Division, earned the TBF National Championship title from the back of the boat. He took home a \$30,000 "Living the Dream" prize package, which includes a \$20,000 check and fully paid entry fees into the Costa FLW Series division of his choosing.

A three-day total of 28.05 pounds earned Fuchs the win. Afterward, he told the weigh-in crowd he was just thinking about calling his wife and talking to his twin 12-year-old boys to celebrate his win.

"My wife might be crying, she is so happy for me," Fuchs told the crowd. "Last night, she told me, no matter what happens, I'm always going to be a winner in her eyes.

"My 12-year-old boys, they look up to me. I don't know what I'd do without them."

For complete results and a full recap, visit [BassFederation.com](http://BassFederation.com).

## HIGH SCHOOL FISHING WORLD FINALS, NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP REACH NEW HEIGHTS

A total prize pool of about \$2.7 million was at stake when the top high school anglers competed on Pickwick Lake in Florence, Ala., for the Student Angler Federation High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship dual event June 19-22. (Note: The event was held just after press time. A complete recap will be in the Fall 2019 issue.)

The dual tournaments, which comprise High School Fishing's premier event, included about 400 teams from across the U.S. and Canada – and as far away as Zimbabwe.

"Sadly, most of the fishing world gave little notice when we founded SAF and the national high school program in 2007," says TBF President and CEO Robert Cartlidge. "Company after company responded with little or no interest. However, it was such a passion for the Federation, so we took on a 'build it and they will come' mantra. In 2010, we launched the first High School Fishing World Finals event, and the rest, as they say, is history."

Ranger Boats, Pure Fishing, TBF and FLW partnered together in 2011 to roll out state championships in dozens of states, and by 2012, there was an SAF State Championship or an FLW Open offered in every continental U.S. state and one in Canada. Additional sponsors such as Evinrude, Lowrance, Lew's and Cabela's joined in to help propel the growth.

"While it's true TBF had a vision and pursued it relentlessly, without these partners it never would have reached the heights it has, and we're nowhere near finished," Cartlidge adds. "We are still expanding and growing rapidly. In fact, in the coming year, under the SAF umbrella of affiliated and sanctioned events led by TBF and FLW, nationwide, more than 40,000 participants will spend a day on the water in a High School Fishing event. We're very proud of that."

This year, SAF welcomed an ever-growing list of industry partners and colleges now stepping up to see this dream come to fruition. Bethel University offered scholarships to World Finals anglers from the start. In nine years, Bethel is approaching nearly \$1 million in total scholarship offers to SAF anglers. This year, Bethel offered up two scholarships worth \$96,000.

For 2019, Kentucky Christian University, located in Grayson, Ky., and its head bass fishing coach Brian Slone pledged \$1 million in college scholarships to be divided among top finishers at the World Finals. And Simpson University in Redding, Calif., got on board to offer \$1.5 million in scholarships to top finishers, primarily from from Western states.

That's in addition to annual commitments from long-time national supporters, FLW scholarships, TBF/SAF scholarships, more than \$10,000 in gift cards, electronics, laptops, televisions, kayaks, and a host of other prizes and gifts.

"While this may well be the richest prize pool ever offered for a single bass fishing championship event, that is not what makes it a valuable event," says Cartlidge. "In our minds, as far as TBF and our partners in fishing at FLW are concerned, what makes this the richest payback has nothing to do with the dollar amount. It's because of the more than 60 top-notch educational scholarships that students will have a chance to earn degrees with. Those educations are worth more than any dollar amount anyone can put on it.

"That is what this program is all about – education through fishing," Cartlidge adds. "We as an industry cannot thank KCU, Bethel University, Simpson University and all the other partners and sponsors enough for their support of our young anglers."

# HIGH SCHOOL FISHING STATE CHAMPIONSHIP ACTION CONTINUES

Virginia – Lake Gaston – March 2; Peyton Brown and Ryan Shelton – Franklin County High School

Georgia – Lake Lanier – March 3; Mason McCoy and Marshall Harrelson – Mount Paran Christian



Georgia winners Marshall Harrelson (left) and Mason McCoy.



Kentucky victors Jesse York (left) and Kyle Roy.

Kentucky – Lake Cumberland – March 30; Kyle Roy and Jesse York – Russell County High School

Mississippi – Fulton Tenn-Tom Waterway – March 30; Dalton Smith and Hayze Hutzel – Basstactics

South Carolina – Santee Cooper – Feb. 16; James Schneider and Shelton Shealy – Batesburg-Leesville High School

Utah – Sand Hollow Lake – March 23; Trace Palmer and Kooper King – Salem Hills High School

Missouri – Lake of the Ozarks – March 17; Colin Ames and Ryder Hall – Bolivar High School

Louisiana – Toledo Bend – March 24; Sam Acosta and Christopher Capdeboscq – Northlake Christian High School

Kansas – Melvern Lake – March 30; Matthew Gerber and Garret Torres – Lenexa/Overland Park High School



Oklahoma champs Cole Kilpatrick (left) and Todd McKinley.

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Illinois – Clinton Lake – April 7; Al Segers and Justin Roberts – Marion High School

Arizona – Lake Havasu – April 13; Nicklaus Romero and Isaiah Rios – Prescott/Paradise Valley High School

Tennessee – Kentucky Lake – May 4; Conner Terry and Matthew Cummings – Obion County High School

West Virginia – Sutton Lake – May 4; Patrick Ferrell and Cruize Carico – Liberty High School

Nevada – Lake Mead – May 5; Corey Williams and Carter Doren – Boulder City Bass Club

New Hampshire – Lake Winnisquam – May 5; Tanner Graves and Tanner Marshall – Keene High School

Oklahoma – Lake Eufaula – May 5; Todd McKinley and Cole Kilpatrick – Mannford High School



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## 2019 JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP HEADS TO NORTH LITTLE ROCK



Illinois anglers Trey McKinney (right) and James Baker won the 2018 TBF Junior World Championship in Arkansas.

The 2019 Junior World Championship (JWC) has been scheduled for Aug. 8-10 on the Arkansas River in North Little Rock, Ark. It will be held in conjunction with the 2019 FLW Cup on Lake Hamilton in nearby Hot Springs, Ark.

The 2019 JWC will be a two-person team event for anglers under 15 years of age as of Aug. 31, 2019. The full field will compete for two days, with the tournament concluding on a third and final cut day consisting of the top performers from each TBF division. Teams will fish out of their own boats using their own boat captains.

"We are excited to host the TBF Junior World Championship in North Little Rock," says Erica Goss, sales manager for the North Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau. "We're ready to show off not only the great fishing on the Arkansas River, but also the great hospitality North Little Rock has to offer."

Besides all the excitement of the competition, an added benefit of the North Little Rock area is proximity to amenities. The JWC boat yard and weigh-ins will be near Wyndham Riverfront, the riverside host hotel. Anglers can stock up at a large Bass Pro Shops. Plus, North Little Rock is close enough to attend the FLW Cup Expo and weigh-ins at Bank OZK Arena in Hot Springs after the juniors weigh in. Family, state presidents and state federation officers will also appreciate the Clinton National Airport.

"We're happy to be returning to the state of Arkansas and to the North Little Rock area, specifically," says TBF President and CEO Robert Cartlidge. "We received some feedback from multiple families last year that a close airport would benefit moms, dads and other family members who would like to fly in to watch their kids weigh in but cannot drive and stay all week

long. Additionally, we hold our annual state Federation leadership meetings with all the state Federation officers at this event, and many of them fly in. With excellent fishing on the Arkansas River in August, North Little Rock fits the bill to a tee."

The junior program was started in 1994 by four state Federations and has grown into a program that cultivates the future of the sport. It is dedicated to young anglers discovering their love for fishing and the great outdoors.

In fact, many of today's top professional bass anglers started in the TBF Junior World Championship circle when they were young, including Jacob Wheeler (2006), Shane LeHew (2007 champ) and Justin Atkins (2008).

For more information about JWC rules, results and past winners, visit [BassFederation.com](http://BassFederation.com). ■





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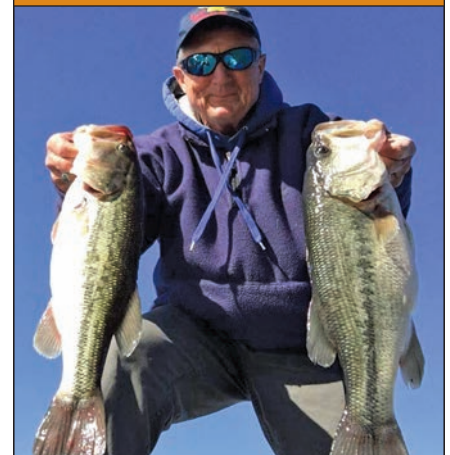
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# GRAE BUCK

HARLEYSVILLE, PA.

By Curtis Niedermier

## Living close to Philadelphia, have you always had an interest in the outdoors?

Absolutely. I've always been outside. I love it outside, and traveling. My wife and I go to national parks every summer and do a bunch of fishing, and we're always outside.

## Do you have a favorite national park?

Yellowstone and Grand Teton. We went out there last summer for 10 days, and we hiked way too many miles and fished a ton. I taught myself how to fly-fish, so that was cool.

## Wait, I thought everyone in Pennsylvania fly-fished for trout, and you just learned to do it?

That's a lie. I guess I fly-fished once when I was 16. We went to a dude ranch, and that was actually in Colorado. I had a guide show me how to do it there. And then last year was the first year I did it since then. I went to Penn State, and we had all those great trout creeks up there. But I always just took an ultra-light spinning rod and a jerkbait and caught brown trout that way. I guess I'd done too much smallie fishing.

## Isn't that cheating?

Oh yeah, absolutely. You got a lot of dirty looks from the guys there.

## So your wife fishes too? What's her name?

Jess. Yeah, she fished at Penn State with me.

## What's the dynamic like when you two are in the boat together?

She usually lets me kind of do my thing, and she just picks fish off as we go. She's very good with a tube. She likes smallmouth fishing. She's not a largemouth fan at all. She wants to catch numbers; she doesn't want to try and catch one big one.

## On the subject of smallmouths, do you consider yourself a smallmouth specialist?

Um ... I prefer it. I didn't grow up doing it. I didn't start doing it until I got my first bass boat when I was at Penn State.

## You certainly caught the smallies well at Cherokee. What was it like being in contention to win the final day?

It's hard to explain. At the time when the tournament was going on, I knew I was doing well that last day. But I didn't realistically think I had a shot at winning it until I came in and my travel partner, Matt Becker, told me. I guess he had looked at the coverage when we got in and saw that I was leading at that point. And then I saw my wife there, and she was jumping up and down all excited, and my parents were there. So that's what got me nervous at that point that I realistically had a shot at it.

## You seemed so comfortable on FLW Live that I wonder if you might one day want to host your own TV or internet fishing show.

I'd be all for it. I think it'd be fun. It's funny because sometimes, when I do a seminar or something, I talk really fast. I get really nervous when I do it. But when I'm fishing, I kind of get into the moment of it, and I explain exactly what's going on. I think I kind of calm down a little bit. So I think it was a great life experience having the camera guy with me for *Live*. And I think it's going to help with every part of my career, kind of settling me down, giving me the confidence that I can catch the fish and can actually promote myself at the same time.

## How is it that you always stay so positive? You're always smiling.

I just love fishing. I would go fishing every single day if I could.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

## You have to get mad once in a while, right?

I got mad when I lost that fish for the third time that day [at Cherokee]. I'm sure you saw that.

I'm not an angry person. It would take a lot. I could tell you a story ...

## Please do.

I've played hockey since I was 4 years old, and I played through college and still play men's league hockey. I've gotten in some pushing matches and stuff, but two years ago I got in the first fight I was ever in.

## What happened?

There was like a minute left in the game. I was standing in front of the net. We were trying to, I believe, tie the game up. And he cross-checked me in the back real hard and kind of took me out. I got up, and I don't know what I said to him, but he got fired up, and he dropped his gloves with me.

I was all about it. I threw my gloves down, and I hit him three times. I got him once in the head. The second time I got him in the nose, and that's when he kind of ducked, and I hit him the third time and he went down on the ice and I kind of landed on him. I kept it classy. I didn't hit him when he was on the ice. I skated away. I've become buddies with that guy actually.

## Could fishing benefit from a little fist-i-cuffs and a penalty box?

Yeah, definitely. When we get on these ledges, or down on Aquia Creek on the Potomac, you should be able to fight for your space. ■

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