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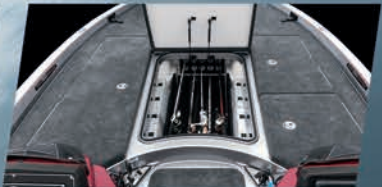
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COVER PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

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*FLW Bass Fishing* (ISSN 1543-6179) is published eight times per year (January, February/March, April, May/June, July, August/September, October, November/December) by FLW, 30 Gamble Lane, Benton, KY 42025. Periodicals Postage Paid at Benton, KY, and at additional mailing office. Rates: one year (8 issues) \$25.00; two years (16 issues) \$50.00; three years (24 issues) \$75.00.

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

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## SPOILED ROTTEN AND LOVING IT

As a kid, I always had more than I needed and most of what I wanted. That's called being spoiled.

To this day, I'm still spoiled, particularly when it comes to fishing.

Don't judge me. You're spoiled, too. As bass fishermen, we all are because we're living in a time of incredible opportunity, information sharing and technology.

Here's an example that supports my point:

In a recent article I reviewed, writer Tyler Brinks listed Mark Rose's preferred tackle for deep-diving crankbaits – the line, the rod and the reel. While reading it, I realized there isn't an item on Rose's list that isn't nearly technically perfect for deep cranking, and every component is far superior to the tackle being used just a couple decades ago.

More importantly, Rose isn't even using "premium" gear. His choices fall into the middle price range among modern rods and reels – stuff most of us could afford.

I know there's someone out there reading this who insists his old Abu Garcia Ambassador or original Lew's Speed Spool is just as capable as today's Revo or BB1, and if that person is you, I suggest that, respectfully, you might be a little too nostalgic. What we have today delivers far greater performance, and your trigger grip rod doesn't compare.

That we have the opportunity to fish with equipment of this quality – the same stuff the pros use – on a budget is one example of why we're all so spoiled. But there's more to the story.

In the article, Brinks details Rose's technique for accurately targeting bass deeper than 30 feet. The Arkansas pro reveals a few trade secrets that others in his trade might not even know. It's a very valuable lesson that you can read about in the next issue of *FLW Bass Fishing*, and all it took on Brinks' part was a phone call to Rose.

Eleven years ago, when I started at FLW, we'd never have gotten that kind of info out of a pro so easily. Back then, we had to stay so far away during tournaments that on-the-water photography required a giant 3-foot-long lens that we toted in its own roller case. Today, when one of our photographers happens upon a pro during a tournament, the photographer is as likely to climb in the boat (by invitation and without any complaints) as he is to shoot from a distance.

The nearly unlimited access we have nowadays is the reason we manage to get so many great tournament photos for *FLWFishing.com*. It's how we were able to capture this issue's cover photo of Scott Martin on Lake Okeechobee. And it's why we're able to consistently deliver so much fishing information through all of FLW's media channels.

We owe a lot of the credit for the increased media access to the internet, the popularity of GoPro cameras and projects such as *FLW Live*, which home in on bass pros like the all-seeing eye. It's inevitable that their fishing secrets will be revealed. They know it and can't fight it anymore, so instead, today's pros embrace it and dish out information like crazy. Fishing fans learn every detail, and the pros reap the reward of better opportunities to promote their sponsors and support their fans.

The situation is a win-win that I especially appreciate, because it helps me in my job and my fishing. I'm very thankful for that. I'm also very spoiled because of it. We all are.

**Curtis Niedermier, Editor-in-Chief**

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**FISHING EXPOSED**  
LAKE HARRIS — FEBRUARY 25, 2018





## A REAL PRO

---

Professional bass fishermen often fish like their lives depend on it, but we all know that's an exaggeration.

For this osprey, which was photographed by Charles Waldorf at Lake Harris in February, fishing success really is critical to survival.

Waldorf didn't see whether the bird caught the bass in its talons while the fish was alive, or if it plucked an expired bass from the lake surface, but the scene on the limb was certainly one of the most memorable "catches" he photographed all week.

"It was day four," recalls Waldorf. "I had mentioned to my boat driver I had never seen a wild gator. He said there was a spot by launch where we might get lucky and see one. This was right on the other side of the Venetian [Gardens] island, by takeoff, as we were rolling in. We looked up and saw this guy perched on that limb, going to town on that bass. Way better than a gator."

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



## It Has Been a Rough Start to 2018



**O**n Jan. 4 we lost 38-year-old Nik Kayler of Apopka, Fla., when the boat he was in, driven by pro Bill Kisiah of Slidell, La., encountered rough water, struck a wave and Kayler was swept overboard during the Costa FLW Series season opener on Lake Okeechobee. Adding to the heart-break, Kayler's body was not recovered until six days later following an exhaustive search. It is a tragedy without equal in the history of our sport.

On Jan. 25, at the FLW Tour season opener on Lake Okeechobee, the boats driven by Andy Young of Mound, Minn., (accompanied by co-angler James Bianchi of Rush, N.Y.) and William Campbell of Middlesboro, Ky., (accompanied by co-angler Lee Frye of Brooksville, Fla.) collided at the end of a boat lane near Moonshine Bay. Young and Bianchi were ejected from their boat but were able to return to it after Young's mandatory ignition-shutoff device disengaged the engine. Both boats returned under their own power, and only Young required medical attention upon his return to the ramp. It could have been much worse.

Then, on March 2, two boats at the Costa FLW Series on Lake Seminole were involved in a low-speed collision that sent co-angler Jim Topmiller of Orlando, Fla., to the hospital with serious injuries. Pro Adam Slupczynski of Marietta, Ga., was in the boat with Topmiller. The other boat was operated by pro Frank Clark of Port Saint Joe, Fla., accompanied by co-angler Anthony Hunt of Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Conditions were clear with a 12-mph wind.

Our sport is not inherently dangerous, and the statistics bear that out with relatively few on-the-water accidents despite more than 53,000 competitors spending nearly half a million hours combined in FLW competition each year. Kayler's death was the first in FLW competition since 2010 when Freddy McCrory of Eupora, Miss., was killed after the boat he was in, driven by David Young of Mayfield, Ky., was struck by another boat from a different tournament during a BFL Regional on Lake Barkley.

Still, any injury or fatality is unacceptable.

Tournament directors monitor weather and water conditions to ensure safety. Anglers are required to wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices anytime their combustion engine is running, and drivers must have an emergency ignition-shutoff device securely attached to their body. Safe boating must be observed at all times, and boat operation in an unsafe or unsportsmanlike manner is grounds for disqualification. But tournament rules and tournament directors can only ensure on-the-water safety to a point. Safety is ultimately the individual and collective responsibility of every competitor on the water. It has to be the top priority. No bass is worth injury to yourself or anyone else.

While the majority of states require completion of a boating safety course for some segment of the boating community, almost all offer exemptions based on age or nonresident status. Safety, however, should not be optional. I encourage every FLW angler to complete a state-approved boating safety course. The BoatUS Foundation offers free courses at boat-us.org. It's a simple step that could save your life.

Know your limitations, and the limitations of your equipment. Modern boat and engine construction combined with new advanced electronics should make boating safer than ever. Just because you know your exact location, have every contour line at your fingertips and your boat can withstand immense punishment, does not mean that you are invincible. Don't tempt fate by putting yourself and your co-angler in unnecessary danger. Your boat is a shield to protect you from the unexpected, not a chariot designed to carry you into battle with the elements.

Don't drive distracted. Multiple 16-inch monitors might help you navigate and find fish, but they won't help you avoid a collision with another boat. Only diligent observation of your surroundings will keep you safe. You would never text while driving an automobile. Don't let your electronics be a distraction when driving a boat.

Safety is our top priority. It should be yours, too. Please honor Nik Kayler's memory every time you go on the water by ensuring your safe return to the FLW family.

Sincerely,

Kathy Fennel  
President, Operations Division

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## FLW LAUNCHES NEW BENEFIT PROGRAM

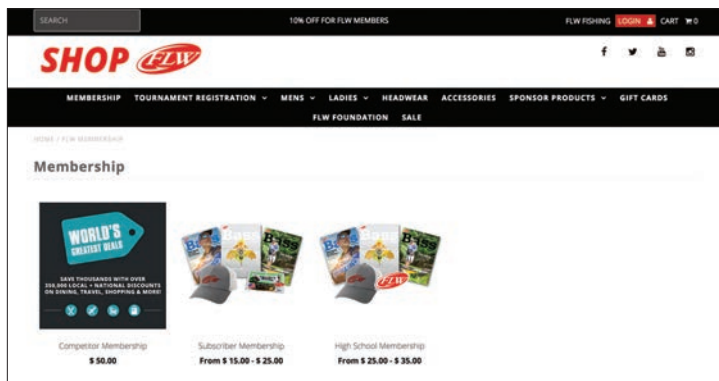
Save thousands of dollars just for being an FLW competitor member

Fifty bucks can save you thousands of dollars per year if you sign up for an FLW competitor membership and enroll in FLW's latest member benefit program – World's Greatest Deals Powered by FLW.

The program provides discounts to more than 350,000 local and national vendors. Here's how it works.

### 1. Join FLW

World's Greatest Deals is available free to FLW competitor members. A competitor membership costs \$50 per year. If you're already a competitor member, you're qualified. If not, call FLW at 270.252.1000, or visit [shop.FLWFishing.com](http://shop.FLWFishing.com) to join or upgrade.



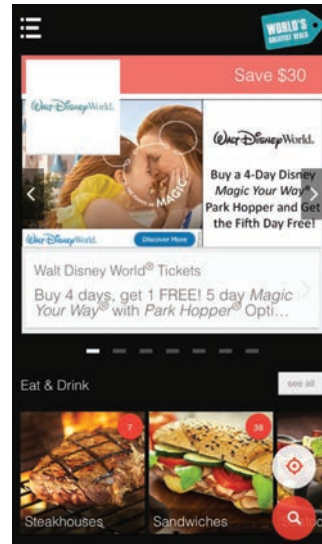
### 2. Register for WGD

Go to [FLWFishing.com](http://FLWFishing.com) and click on the World's Greatest Deals banner at the top to register for the program using your FLW member number. Or just type in [FLWFishing.com/wgd](http://FLWFishing.com/wgd) to get started.



### 3. Download the App or Log In

Once you're registered, World's Greatest Deals can be accessed through a web browser, but the most convenient way is through the app for iPhone or Android. Search for it in your phone's app store.



### 4. Search for Deals

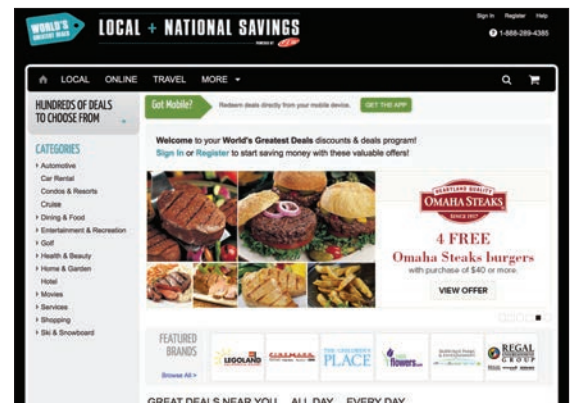
World's Greatest Deals compiles exclusive discounts for both local and national vendors for categories including dining, grocery, entertainment, wellness, travel and recreation, auto and fuel, home and garden, hotels, health and beauty, and gifts. Retailers and brands such as Apple, Holiday Inn, Redbox, Advance Auto Parts, AVIS, Walt Disney World and thousands more participate in the program.

Search any area of the country to find deals near home or when you're on the road. The app can even utilize a phone's GPS capabilities to find nearby savings opportunities.

Savings coupons can be printed off or used digitally, depending on the vendor.

When used regularly, World's Greatest Deals can save you thousands of dollars per year – \$1,500 to \$5,000 per user. It's great for travelling tournament anglers to find deals on hotels, meals and groceries, but there are plenty of local deals, too.

Visit [FLWFishing.com/wgd](http://FLWFishing.com/wgd) for more details, or call FLW at 270.252.1000 to chat with a customer service representative to learn more about how much you can save.



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## NIK KAYLER HONORED AT FLW TOUR OPENER

A flare and a man-overboard signal were part of a special pre-tournament ceremony conducted by FLW to honor late co-angler Nik Kayler prior to the day-one takeoff of the FLW Tour event at Lake Okeechobee. Kayler, 38, drowned in the lake when he was swept overboard in rough water at the Costa FLW Series Southeastern Division opener a couple of weeks prior.

FLW also recognized Kayler and his family with a moment of silence and accepted donations for Nik Kayler memorial wristbands at registration for both the Tour event at Okeechobee and the Costa FLW Series event on Lake Seminole. Funds raised for the Kayler family totaled \$8,250.

Kayler leaves behind a wife, Kelly, and daughter, Caralee. To make a donation to support the family, visit [gofundme.com/nik-kayler](http://gofundme.com/nik-kayler).



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

## SIMMS SPONSORS BIG BASS PROGRAM

**SIMMS**

Catching a big bass can earn you a big check if you sign up to fish FLW Tour events as a co-angler this season. Outdoor apparel company Simms Fishing is sponsoring the Simms Big Bass award for all regular-season Tour events. It pays \$500 for the biggest bass on the pro side during each of the first two days of competition, and \$250 for co-anglers. Get the details about Simms' line of products at [SimmsFishing.com](http://SimmsFishing.com).

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## Mercury, Berkley/Abu Garcia Back with FLW

Two past partners of FLW have re-joined the fold for the 2018 season. Mercury Marine is once again an official engine sponsor. The company will administer its Mercury Bonus Bucks contingency program for qualified owners in FLW tournaments, and kicks off its new Go With 5, five-year extended warranty program in conjunction with the sponsorship. Find more info at MercuryMarine.com.

Pure Fishing is also back, with its Berkley and Abu Garcia brands, which recently announced that they were adding 14 FLW Tour anglers to their pro-staffs. The deal, among other arrangements, will include the opportunity to win product samples via the FLW Member Giveaway program. Visit abugarcia.com or Berkley-Fishing.com for more.





PHOTOS BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER

## Martins Win Gold at PanAm Bass Fishing Championship

By David A. Brown

**P**yeongChang, Sochi, Vancouver – all logical sites for Winter Olympics, principally for their abundance of snow. Equally, Lake Okeechobee – with its warm winter climate and ample sunshine – offered an ideal and productive setting for the first ever PanAmerican Black Bass Championship, held Feb. 7-8 at Roland and Mary Ann Martin's Marina & Resort in Clewiston, Fla.

Organized to promote the goal of making bass fishing an Olympic sport, the event was part of a larger effort by the Confederation Internationale de la Peche Sportive (CIPS) and sanctioned

by the PanAmerican Sportfishing Delegation. The latter awarded hosting honors to USA Bass, a branch of United States Angling Confederation (U.S. Angling), to which FLW is providing logistical assistance.

The championship event involved 22 two-person teams, five of which wore Team USA jerseys. Canada took eight, Mexico six and Costa Rica completed the field with three teams. Anglers fished for daily five-bass limits, with winners determined by the heaviest two-day weight. Gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded for individual team and overall national team performance.

Among the notable participants were three past Forrest Wood Cup champions – FLW Tour pros John Cox, Scott Martin and David Dudley – along with nine-time Bassmaster Angler of the Year Roland Martin, Canadian fishing star Bob Izumi, and Mexican TV fishing personality Richie Gonzalez.

At final tally, Scott Martin and Roland Martin won the individual team gold medal with 15.51 kg, or about 34 pounds, 3 ounces, while leading Team USA to the country gold. After placing 10th on day one with 11 pounds, the father-son duo roared back with a day-two limit of 23-3 – the

tournament's biggest catch, which included a 7-3 beauty that won the Big Bass trophy.

Spending most of their time in the Monkey Box on the lake's west side, the Martins targeted reed heads with Yamamoto Senkos and D Shads on 5/0 offset Trokar hooks. Slow, stealthy presentations were the key to tempting spawners in 3 1/2 feet of water.

Team USA placed four teams in the top 10. Joining the Martins were silver medalists Cox and Keith Carson, Dudley and Mark Schlarb in seventh, and Shirley Crain and Michelle Jalaba in eighth.

Taking the silver medal among countries, Team Canada also had four top-10 teams, led by third-place finishers Cole Bailey and Bruce Leeson, who earned the individual team bronze medal.

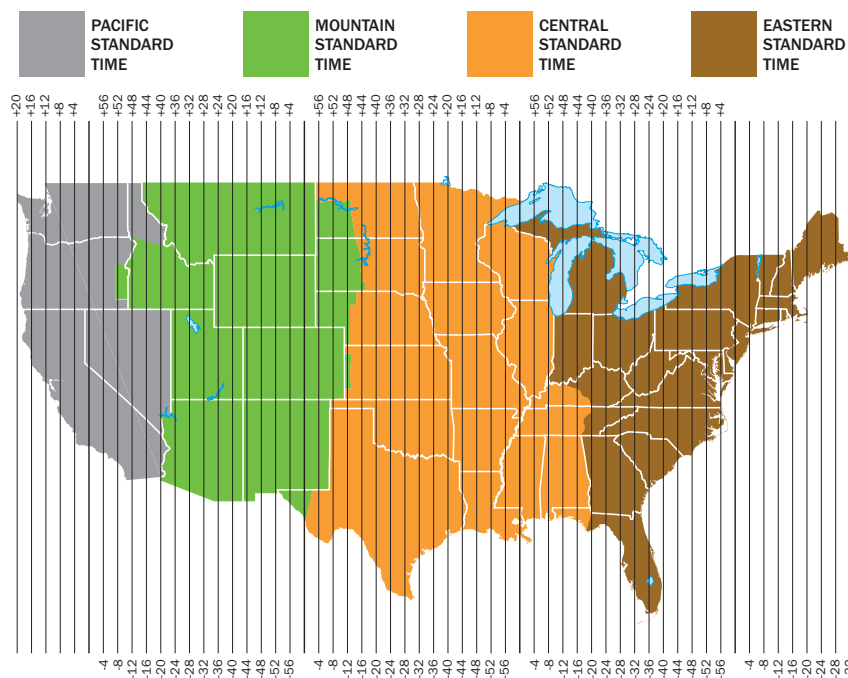
Perhaps most notably, Costa Rica – the tournament's only represented nation where black bass aren't present – placed two teams in the top 10 and earned the overall bronze medal. Carlos Cabero and Henry Marin led the Costa Rican contingent with a fourth-place finish.

"I'm so excited by how the sport is growing," says Scott Martin, who also competed in the 2017 Black Bass World Championship on South Africa's Vaal River in October. "With the growth of high school and college fishing, and with all these countries supporting and promoting it, I think now is the perfect time to make bass fishing an Olympic sport.

"I look back at history and there's never been another time when we've had such an opportunity for this. I think it can happen." ■



## SOLUNAR TABLE APRIL 2018



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

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 of 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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# ROB NEWELL

## Bass Fishing Skills Are Universal

.....

I once made a bold claim in front of a group of fishermen at a sport show: "Bass anglers are the best anglers."

Some immediately took exception to my assertion.

Those who stalk tarpon on a fly chuckled. My friend who wades streams to drift "nymphs" in the current cringed. And my walleye buddy rolled his eyes.

They all contend that the talent needed to land their quarry is far more "refined" than "clunking a bass over the head with a jig."

OK, I get it. Perhaps catching a 12-inch bass on a 1-ounce jig might seem a bit of overkill, but my point was more that the skill set and knowledge required to catch freshwater bass on a consistent basis is more comprehensive than what is needed to catch other species of fish. I would even add that once someone becomes a proficient bass angler, he or she then possesses the basic skills needed to pursue any fish on earth. I think most hard-core tournament bass anglers would be stunned to see just how far their bass fishing knowledge goes when pursuing other species of fish outside the bass realm.

Many years ago, when I set out to learn about bass fishing – and only bass fishing – I had no idea those experiences would serve me so well with so many other types of fishing.

Whether it was going to Lanier to jig a spoon or to Eufaula to crank deep ledges or up into rocky rivers for shoal bass or over to Lake Murray for a crash course on floating worms or even all the way up to St. Clair to drag tubes for smallmouths – every one of those techniques has derivatives that I use to this very day, whether I'm sneaking up on redfish on a tidal flat or offshore fishing in the Gulf of Mexico.

A friend who accompanied me on many of those bass learning experiences back in the day has since traveled the world, pursuing all kinds of fish, including barramundi, peacock bass, snakeheads and even the mighty Mekong giant catfish. Every time he returns from overseas, he tells me the techniques he used to catch the exotics were "just like" some bass fishing techniques we learned years ago.

Given all the different bass species and all the varying waterways they live in, bass fishing is the ultimate training ground for fishing in general. Earn good grades in bass fishing and they count as prerequisites to pursuing many other species of fish. Here is an abbreviated list of the attributes bass fishing demands, which are universal when targeting other species of fish.

**Casting accuracy** – Casting accuracy is a required discipline to be a good bass angler. Yes, there are times bass can be caught in open water where you can lob a cast in a general area, but more often than not getting a bite requires pinpoint accuracy, especially around cover.

Bass anglers are well-versed in casting, pitching, skipping, sidearm loop casting or whatever it takes to make perfect presentations around all sorts of cover. This qualifies as an automatic advantage when pursuing other game fish in other environments.

**Familiarity with a variety of tackle** – A versatile bass angler knows how to use every grade of tackle between a spinning rod with 6-pound test to a 7-foot, 6-inch, heavy-action flipping stick with 60-pound-test braid. If you're comfortable with this range of tackle, it doesn't matter if someone hands you an

ultralight with a Rooster Tail in a stream or a surfcaster on the Carolina coast; you already know what to do with it.

**An understanding of depth ranges** – Bass live in water less than a foot deep to 60 feet, and versatile bass anglers are comfortable fishing for them anywhere in this range, with everything from topwaters to drop-shots.

**Ability to pattern fish** – Fish, no matter what kind, are patternable. Bass are the epitome of this fishing fundamental, which is why bass tournaments are such a comprehensive training ground. Tournaments put anglers on a clock to define patterns. They must be well-aware of a host of variables at all times: depth, structure, bottom composition, cover, water clarity, current, bait and weather – just to name a few. It's a lot of pieces to a puzzle that are changing all the time, but bass anglers, especially ones that fish against the clock in tournaments, are used to putting it together in short order.

**Knowledge of how bass relate to cover** – All fish relate to something. Even the most pelagic roamers in the ocean are moving along a rip, a floating weedline or huge contours 1,000 feet below them.

Bass are excellent teachers of how fish orient to cover, structure, current and water clarity – from the roaming nature of smallmouths, to the suspending habits of spotted bass to cover-hugging largemouths. Seeing the vast array of ways bass relate to these elements in their environment provides useful clues to the ways fish all over the globe relate to their surroundings.

If you know how to drop on bass in deep cover using your depth finder as a guide, then you're ready to go catch snapper, grouper and amberjack on offshore reefs in the ocean; it's the same concept.

If you know how to skip a soft jerkbait up in the dark shade of bushes or docks, then you're qualified to catch snook out of mangroves – or barramundi in Australia, for that matter.

You know the little ditch that holds bass in the back of that flat over there? Find that same kind of trough in a tidal flat, and chances are it will have redfish in it.

Bass anglers are very familiar with that patchy light-and-dark mixed bottom that is a magnet for smallmouths. That same kind of "mottled bottom" is sea trout magic in saltwater bays.

So many of the ways bass relate to structure and cover have a duplicate counterpart in other environments for other species.

**Ability to assess aggressiveness** – After years of trying to fool bass into biting artificials, a real takeaway is the ability to assess a fish's aggressiveness. Bass demeanor can range from stone-cold lockjaw to the desire to ravage everything in sight. Determining whether a particular species can be triggered by boisterous reaction lures or that it requires a more natural, finesse offering is a page right out of the bass fishing playbook.

**Work ethic** – Finally, the work ethic dedicated bass anglers bring to the table is unequivocal. Staying in the hunt, from daylight until dark, is a way of life for them. It's in their nature to keep pushing, keep changing areas, keep switching lures until they force the fish to reveal something that becomes a critical clue in the hunt.

So whether you're after bonefish in Belize, peacocks in Peru, barramundi near Brisbane or the mighty Mekong giant catfish in Thailand, if you're a decent stick in bass fishing, dialing in what you're after is going to come much easier. That's why bass anglers really are the best anglers. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN P. HUGHES





## A Look at the Lure Market

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In the '70s, the late, great humorist and illustrator Cliff Shelby also worked as the public relations contact for Bagley Baits. Once asked by a naïve business reporter how Bagley's famous line of balsa crankbaits was made, Shelby replied that the lures were carved and painted by hand by Seminole women working under the shade trees of a hammock in the Florida Everglades. Of course, Shelby was fibbing and laughingly owned up to it, but his answer sounded better than the truth, which was that the lures – most of them designed and perfected by Lee Sisson – were turned out by the thousands on factory lathes.

Mass production – from molds to final paint jobs – is the source of most of the lures used today by recreational or tournament anglers, though it all begins with an image of a lure in someone's mind. Whether the creator knows it or not, that image of a lure usually is similar to a previous design that might have been marketed 10 years or 100 years ago.

Typically, nowadays, major companies rely on their own designers or a pro-staff to help take new lures to market, but occasionally the latest, greatest baits are the result of a collaboration

between a company and an avid angler with an idea, but not the investment money to turn his vision into reality.

### How Lures Are Born

"Some lures are in development for years, and there might be eight or 10 prototypes that are being reworked all the time until everything is just right," says Texas pro Todd Castledine, himself a lure designer and a member of the Strike King pro-staff. "A lure might start out as being pretty good, but then it gets tweaked and it's made even better. It's a lot of trial and error – and personal preference – but the lures that wind up reaching the market have got a lot of long hours of development behind them."

Castledine recalls the time he was out fishing with Phil Marks, head of Strike King's design team and a formidable tournament angler himself, and the conversation turned to a particular type of lure that Marks' crew was having trouble with. Castledine could relate, because he had spent years trying to perfect the same sort of plug. His ideas helped solve some of Marks' design problems, and the result of their partnership became the Strike King Popping Perch. It behaves like a frog, but in looks resembles a bream

floundering on the surface of matted grass. What's important is that it catches fish, the primary prerequisite for any lure development.

"There's the bait-design business, the bait-manufacturing business and the bait-selling business," says Castledine. "To a fisherman, it doesn't really matter if a lure design was first whittled out of wood or developed by computer software. It doesn't matter too much to him how the baits are packaged and sold, as long as he can get one when he wants it. The most important thing is that a lure will catch fish for him under the right circumstances wherever he's fishing, whether it's Sam Rayburn or Table Rock or Champlain."

### More Art Than Science

A typical bass lure might do a lot of things. It can sputter, pop, hop, dart, zigzag, wiggle or perform any number of other actions, singly or in combination. Getting to the point where its size, shape and action draw a strike isn't easy to achieve, and being able to duplicate the magic over and over in mass production is another obstacle.

What is it about a lure that compels a bass to grab it anyway? A specific color or color pattern sometimes matters, except when it really doesn't. A particular action or sound might be irresistible to bass, but some strikes come when a lure is idle. The size is important, we tell ourselves, except on those days when it's not and bass can be caught on anything from a 2-inch Ned rig to a 10-inch swimbait.

The Yamamoto Senko, Livetarget Frog Hollow Body, Megabass Vision Oneten, Alabama Rig, Z-Man ChatterBait, Bill Lewis StutterStep, Basstrix swimbaits, oodles of scent-enhanced soft plastics from Berkley – some of the hottest bass lures introduced in the last 20 years or so don't necessarily look anything like each other, don't behave the same in the water and vary from each other in size and shape. Yet they've all become best-sellers because they catch fish.

What is it about a lure that compels a bass to grab it? The answer isn't so simple: lots of things, but, then again, sometimes not much at all.

### Variations on a Theme

Having a creative brainstorm and interesting a manufacturer in the idea for a new lure are two different things. If an angler's homemade plug helps him win major tournaments, it's virtually

going to sell itself. Otherwise, he might have to offer it to a lure company based on a persuasive sales pitch. If he's lucky, he'll also present his idea to a marketing guru with the instincts to know something good when he sees it.

Larry Dahlberg's latest, greatest lure design is an example. Though the Minnesota angler is an icon in the fly-fishing world – having created the famous Dahlberg Diver among other patterns – his fishing expertise covers everything from saltwater big game fish to walleyes.

Decades ago, Dahlberg started working on a lure reminiscent of the old top-water tail-spinner musky plugs made by companies such as C.C. Robert's Bait Company. His alterations to a proven design had far-reaching implications for the bass-fishing world.

"In a nutshell, its development actually began when I was about 12 years old and a company in Wisconsin didn't respond to my letter requesting spare tails for their tail-spinner lure I was using to catch muskies," says Dahlberg. "I had no option but to repair the broken ones, and in the process I realized the tail could be improved. Almost 50 years later I was inspired by a young musky fishing friend to go with an idea I had been toying with in my head since discovering 80 durometer urethane rubber. I increased the tail size about six times and the bend in it, plus I radically changed the balance and buoyancy to get that super loud hollow plopping sound rather than a sloshing noise."

Once his handiwork was finished, Dahlberg knew he had something that musky fishermen would buy, so he approached a friend who ran a California lure company and for whom he had designed other baits.

River2Sea President Simon Chan also saw the promise in Dahlberg's lure, and the pair made a deal. Along the way, Chan's design engineers went to work refining the topwater bait so it could be mass-produced for the bass-fishing market. Eventually, when all the bugs were worked out and a few down-sized versions were put in circulation among River2Sea's pro-staff, the lure became the subject of hushed conversations among bass tournament anglers who would rather have kept it a secret. It wasn't long before the bait was making headlines.

"The first one was the big musky size – 7 1/2 inches. One of my pals caught

43 muskies on it in the first 30 days he fished it," says Dahlberg. "I showed everybody how to make it on my TV show [*The Hunt for Big Fish*] and how-to videos, and it ended up going into production with River2Sea. We caught all kinds of big bass – largemouths and smallmouths – on them, too. Then

Simon [Chan] took a gamble and made a few smaller sizes for the bass market, and the rest is history."

Incidentally, Dahlberg's original name for the lure was retained by River2Sea. Considering its unique "plopping" sound to be its most distinctive feature, he called it the Whopper Plopper. ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF LARRY DAHLBERG



Larry Dahlberg's fondness for a venerated type of topwater musky plug led him to design a lure that has been a hit in the bass fishing world as well.

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# TAKEOFF



## WHAT'S INSIDE:

3 Top pros' favorite postspawn baits

### THE RIGHT WAY TO WAKE A BOMBER LONG A

The six top tools used for modern fisheries management

How to get the jump on Northern bass (before opener!)

Our guide to the hottest regional color patterns

A millennial and a baby boomer strike an interesting friendship

Advice on boat wraps for marketing, gel coat protection

5 keys to better casting from a kayak

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



TAKEOFF  
IN SEASON

# APRIL

## Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege

### BEHIND THE LENS — JUSTING ATKINS' FAVORITE TINTS

2017 Forrest Wood Cup Champion and Costa pro Justin Atkins relies on a system of sunglasses, organized by lens color, to maximize his visual acuity.

• **Blue Mirror** – Atkins uses this lens primarily for offshore fishing on bright, sunny days. The darker tint provides maximum dampening in full sunlight.

• **Green Mirror** – Features a lighter, copper base that is versatile under a wide variety of light conditions, from clouds to bright sun. This is Atkins' preferred lens color.

• **Copper** – Similar to Green Mirror, the copper lens enhances contrast, a benefit when sight-fishing. This is Atkins' backup to the Green Mirror lens.

• **Sunrise Silver Mirror** – This lens color is Atkins' choice for cloudy, low-light conditions as well as early mornings on the water. Atkins notes that the yellow lens is not so bright that it can't be worn if the sun comes out.



### PRO'S CHOICE: POSTSPAWN PRODUCERS



**1. Brandon McMillan**  
**4x4 Bass Jigs Swim Jig with Bruiser Baits Super Swimmer**

"Coming off their beds, bass spread out to feed, and a swim jig can cover a lot of different types of water. I prefer black/blue and green pumpkin colors in a 1/2-ounce size."



**2. Scott Canterbury**  
**4 1/4-inch Bagley Knocker B**

"Postspawn fish are looking up and guarding fry, and a walking bait is really, really good in that situation. I like bone, chrome and shad colors, depending upon water clarity."



**3. Jimmy Reese**  
**White Livetarget Hollow Body Frog 65T**

"I always have a frog on my deck after the spawn. I'll use the popping version if the wind is strong enough to put a bow in my line." ■

### **?** DID YOU KNOW? SMITH LAKE'S SUNKEN CITY



IMAGE COURTESY OF ALABAMA POWER COMPANY CORPORATE ARCHIVES

Southern impoundments commonly hide historic relics such as roads, cemeteries, buildings and bridges deep beneath their surface. Lewis Smith Lake, the fifth stop of the 2018 FLW Tour, contains a submerged town named Falls City. The remote town once included a post office, church, railroad, bridge and even waterfalls. The twin waterfalls of Clear Creek were the town's main attraction for area visitors up until the lake's creation in 1961.



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# THE RIGHT WAY TO WAKE

IN THE RIGHT SITUATIONS, A STICK BAIT-STYLE WAKE BAIT IS CAPABLE OF WINNING TOURNAMENTS

By Curtis Niedermier

**S**tick bait or jerkbait-style wake baits such as the Bomber Long A are specialty topwater lures that, while slower to fish and less obnoxious than their walking stick bait counterparts, are capable of producing big weights and big money when fished in the proper situation. Generally, they're clear-water killers in the prespawn season on mountain reservoirs, but they have other applications, too. The keys, according to FLW Tour pros Koby Kreiger and Anthony Gagliardi, are to identify the best conditions and learn to make the bait wake properly.



## The Bait

Though it's actually a jerkbait, the Bomber Long A (shown above) will swagger across the surface in a tight wobbling pattern when fished properly. It's probably the most popular stick bait-style wake bait of all time.

- The 15A model of the Long A is most popular. It's a 4 1/2-inch stick bait with a short diving lip and three treble hooks.
- Most pros prefer early vintage models, which are identifiable by a screw-in rear hook hanger, though more recently manufactured Long As will also work.
- Natural baitfish color patterns work well, as do bone, white or similar finishes. Usually, your favorite walking topwater pattern also applies to a wake bait.
- Kreiger says you should remove the split ring from the nose and connect with a loop knot for the best action.



## More Modern Options

Because the Long A wasn't designed to be a wake bait, it requires careful technique to get it to perform properly. Companies such as Buckeye Lures and Rapala created modern wake baits with a similar profile that are a little more forgiving. Buckeye's version, called the Wake Up, is now made by PH Custom Lures. It's a balsa bait with a circuit board lip and three treble hooks. The Rapala BX Waking Minnow has a balsa core wrapped in a copolymer shell.

Koby Kreiger, one of the FLW Tour pros who's had the most success with wake baits, says the tight-rolling action of the Long A makes it the supreme lure choice, but fellow Tour pro Anthony Gagliardi is more open-minded. He sees opportunities to use both the Long A and modern spin-offs – mostly the original Buckeye Wake Up.

"I don't know that those are absolutely the two best, but I don't think it much matters, to be honest," Gagliardi says. "But there is a difference in the Buckeye and the Long A. the biggest difference is the 'cadence.'

"In this instance, the Buckeye has a faster cadence. It has the appearance of moving faster even though it's moving the same speed," Gagliardi says.

He capitalizes on the difference by using the Long A in colder conditions and the Buckeye when fish are more aggressive, such as in a schooling scenario or during a warming trend in spring, when its wider wobble better suits the conditions.

## Prespawn Patterning

Kreiger primarily fishes a wake bait during the prespawn, and Gagliardi agrees that's the best season. Relatively clear water is a must so bass can spot and home in on the bait, and the water temperature needs to be high enough that bass are willing to eat on the surface – usually the low 50s and up.

In the prespawn, both Kreiger and Gagliardi cast wake baits parallel to the bank and target bluff walls, chunk rock banks, banks leading in to spawning areas, secondary points and other spots where bass stage up before moving in to spawn.

As prespawn transitions into spawn, a similar approach works in spawning areas. Bass that are staging or even starting to bed will often follow, swirl at or otherwise show themselves on a wake bait cruising slowly overhead. These fish can sometimes be caught with a follow-up lure or marked for later.

## Schooling Scenarios

The wake bait is also a solid topwater bait in any season for casting at isolated targets: points, timber or schooling spots where bass suspend and chase baitfish near the surface.

Gagliardi believes calm conditions are better if waking the bait in open water.

"Any time you're fishing out there and you see lots of bait in open water on the surface, and once you start noticing single baitfish on the surface making that 'V' across the water when it's calm, that's when it's really good," he says.

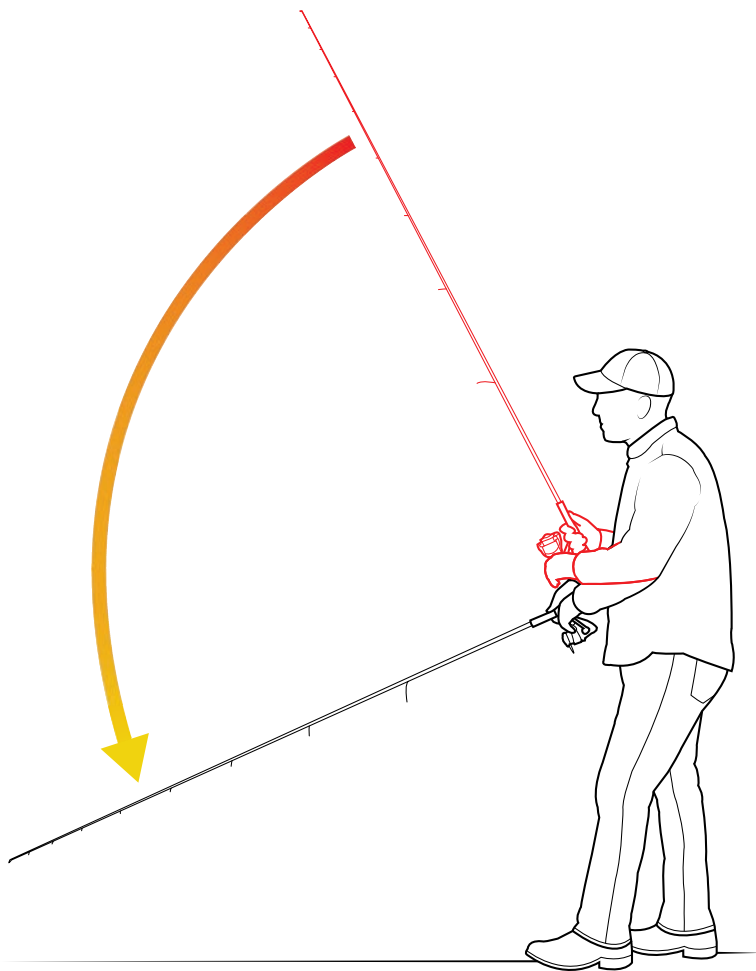
## Gear Considerations

**Line:** 10- to 14-pound-test monofilament

**Rod:** Kreiger likes spinning tackle for casting in wind and back-reeling. Gagliardi uses a 7-foot, medium-power, fast-action baitcasting rod.

## Wake it Right

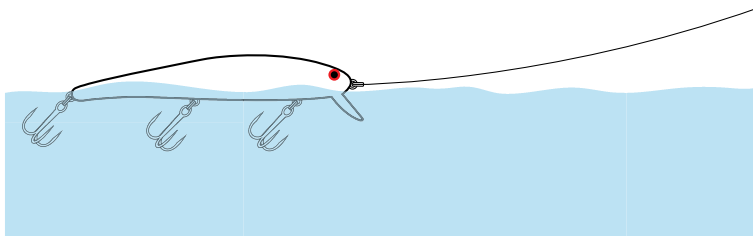
Slow and steady is the only way to fish a wake bait because if the lure is fished too fast it might dive or blow out. Rod control is also critical for achieving the right presentation.



1. Make a long cast, and then hold the rod tip up at about 11:30 at the start of the retrieve.



2. As the bait gets closer, gradually lower the rod tip.



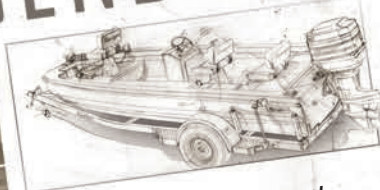
3. The goal is to keep the line off the water and the nose of the bait at the right level for it to wake. You'll know if it's too low or too high based on the action; adjust accordingly.

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# MONITORING THE RESOURCE

HOW MODERN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES IMPROVE BASS FISHING

By TJ Maglio

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES



**C**aring for fisheries and recommending proper regulations is the job of fisheries biologists and managers at both federal and state agencies. It's not an easy or simple job, but the work they do helps to ensure the quality of the resource for the future.

You've maybe seen them at work – local biologists out on the lakes and rivers collecting data while you're fishing – but you might not know much about what they're actually doing.

That's why we provided this short summary of some of the important field techniques modern fisheries biologists use, and what they tell us about a fishery.

Biologists in Kentucky perform a survey on captured bass as part of an electrofishing study.

## Population Studies

One of the oldest and most important goals of fisheries managers is to assess the abundance, size and age of a population of bass. They do that using three main techniques.

**1. Electrofishing:** Electrofishing or “shocking” is one of the most common ways that fisheries biologists collect and study fish in the wild. Introducing a high-voltage current into the water causes involuntary muscle contractions in fish, essentially stunning them, which allows biologists to catch them in nets. Electrofishing is harmless to fish, and they quickly recover and swim away.

**2. Mark recapture studies:** Mark recapture is one of the most common ways of estimating the population of fish in a water body. At their simplest, mark recapture studies involve fishery managers going out and catching a bunch of bass – whether by shocking, netting or some other method that allows live release. Biologists “mark” each captured bass using a tag, fin clip or some other method and then release them back into the fishery. After a certain period of time – often just a week or two – researchers return to the study area and repeat the capture process to assess how many recaptures they have (bass that were previously tagged, clipped, etc.). Based on that information and standard industry formulas, they can calculate an estimate of the total population size.



In the electrofishing process, bass that are momentarily stunned float to the surface unharmed and are netted by fisheries biologists.

**3. “Aging” bass:** Another important factor that biologists use in fisheries management is the age structure. This is a major factor in assessing the overall health of a fishery, as the healthiest fisheries have a diverse age population with ample numbers of different age groups. To learn this, biologists first determine the age of the bass they examine. There are several ways they do this. The most accurate way is through counting the rings on a fish’s otolith – or “ear bone.” Each year a fish lives, new calcium carbonate is accreted, and, similar to counting the rings of a tree to determine its age, biologists can count the layers of the otolith to figure out how old a fish is. Similarly, fish scales also develop a ring pattern of growth that can be used to determine age.



In mark recapture studies, fish are caught and then marked somehow or affixed with a small tag (such as the yellow tag shown here).

use a technique called “gastric lavage” to do this. Similar to “stomach pumping” performed on humans, a small amount of water is flushed down the fish’s throat, which causes it to empty its stomach contents for study.

**2. Telemetry:** To study bass behavior and location, biologists rely on telemetry, in which a data logger that transmits location and other data to a receiver is affixed to a fish. Telemetry technology has come a long way from the old days, providing researchers with the means to record speed, position, depth and acceleration, and even log video.

## Behavior Studies

Outside of age and abundance, biologists also want to know things about bass such as what types of habitat they favor, what prey species they most prefer in a particular water body or season, and how they move throughout their environments both daily and seasonally. To study this, biologists use a variety of techniques.

**1. Gastric lavage:** Understanding what bass are eating can be an important part of managing the resource in whole. The best way to do that is to analyze the stomach contents of captured bass. Other than performing a necropsy, biologists

## Angler Studies

Although it’s less “science-y,” studying angler behavior is also a major part of modern fisheries science. By understanding the number, type and preferences of anglers, biologists can learn more about the fisheries they service, and also better establish regulations.

The most important tool in angling-related science is the creel survey. If you’ve fished long enough, you’ve likely participated in one, typically where a manager asks questions or has you fill out a survey at the ramp when getting off the water. These data help establish population estimates, which species anglers are targeting and “catch per unit effort,” which is helpful in gauging the overall quality of a fishery. ■



# 7 SIMPLE TIPS TO REDUCE COSTS

A LITTLE SAVINGS GOES A LONG WAY DURING TOURNAMENT SEASON

By Sean Ostruszka

**T**alent will only get you so far in the sport of tournament bass fishing. It's pay-to-play, which means if you can't pay, it doesn't matter how good you are. You won't get to play.

And paying involves much more than just entry fees. There's lodging, gas, food, tackle and plenty of other costs that go along with fishing tournaments, be it a Tuesday nighter or an FLW Tour event.

It can all add up if you're not frugal about how you pay your bills. We talked with a number of pros to see how they manage to cut expenses, be it fishing near home or traveling the country. The seven tips listed here are simple enough that anyone can take advantage of them.



ILLUSTRATION BY RON FINGER

## DON'T BE TOO CHEAP

Saving money is never a bad thing, except when it cuts down on your potential to make money. For instance, big-bass pots are often good opportunities to make a little more bank.

Terry Bolton will never forget when he was first starting out. His mom, Sharon, was his biggest sponsor, but after she'd given him a hard time about spending too much money, he opted not to spend the \$50 for the big-bass pot at his next tournament.

"I caught a 6-8 that would've been big bass, and the pot was \$1,000 and a new rod," says Bolton. "I can tell you I've paid every big-bass pot entry ever since."

### 1. Find Roomies

Most pros team up with roommates to split lodging costs. For instance, Brandon McMillan, Jeff Gustafson and Mark Fisher all roomed together for the 2017 Tour season. And when they did, they usually looked to rent or crash at a house so they could save money on food (see No. 2).

### 2. Eat In

Eating out is expensive. Finding a house or place with a kitchen allows you to go to the grocery store and buy food much cheaper.

"We're not eating five-star meals," says McMillan. "It's pizzas and stuff, but a frozen pizza is a lot cheaper than ordering one."

Don't have a kitchen where you're staying? Buy a hot plate so you can cook in your hotel, or live on bread and lunch meat.

### 3. Trailer When Possible

Your truck gets far better fuel mileage than your boat. Almost every pro we spoke with said he trailers to different areas of the lake during practice to save gas.

### 4. Save the Braid

Braided line has its applications, but certainly not on every body of water. Still, it doesn't make sense to throw it in the trash after a tournament where you needed it. After a trip to Florida or any lake where he spooled several reels with braid, Brandon Cobb transfers his lightly used braid to empty "junk" reels – older reels that have worn out and don't get used much.

"This way I can save it for a tournament later that season or even next season," he says.

### 5. Ice Up

A bag of ice might not cost much, but during a summer tournament, buying multiple bags each day adds up. That's why Jeff Sprague tries to stay at hotels with large ice machines. He'll fill small garbage bags provided by the hotel to keep his cooler and livewell chilled.

### 6. Fight Rust

Hooks are metal, and metal rusts. Todd Hollowell always hangs his lures to let water drip off and reduce the likelihood of rust forming, as opposed to letting a lure sit in the bottom of his boat or a tackle box where it can develop rust and wind up getting thrown in the trash.

"When I get my batteries, they come packed in blocks of Styrofoam," says Hollowell. "I'll throw those in my tackle compartment. They're the perfect hook hangers."

### 7. Bring All Your Tackle

If Joshua Weaver goes into a tackle shop, more than likely he's leaving a couple hundred dollars behind. Knowing this, he packs up his truck with as much tackle as he can so he's not tempted to go to local tackle shops at various tournament venues. ■



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# GETTING THE JUMP ON NORTHERN RIVERS

HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EARLY BASS FISHING OPPORTUNITIES WHEN THE SEASON IS STILL CLOSED ON MANY WATERS

*By Curtis Niedermier*



PHOTO BY ROB NEWELL

As Matt Stefan and other Northern anglers know, fishing rivers for prespawn largemouths and smallmouths offers a good alternative to sitting at home and waiting for lake seasons to open.

Opening days for various fishing seasons are like holidays in the North, but some anglers refuse to wait for the official opener to start the party. No, they aren't lawbreakers. They're river rats.

Rivers such as the Mississippi, Wolf and Wisconsin are open to fishing year-round even though inland lakes have closed seasons well into spring (check regulations before you go, as states impose varying rules). Coincidentally, ice-out usually comes earlier on the rivers than the lakes, and usually by early April (sometimes sooner) bass anglers can start their season. According to Wisconsin pro Matt Stefan, this early window of opportunity provides some of the best fishing of the season, as largemouth and smallmouth bass quickly transition through prespawn and spawning patterns in predictable areas.

"The prespawn-into-spawn period is so short compared to the southern portions of the country," adds Stefan. "We really don't have much of a prespawn. The prespawn starts as soon as the ice comes off, and the fish are spawning by

the end of April and into May. We have one wave of fish, and on the rivers it could be as early as the end of April."

## Safety First

Cold water and wintry weather in the early season pose dangerous fishing conditions. Exercise caution when the weather turns.

In addition to the cold, high water can be hazardous in spring.

"In terms of safety, a lot depends on how much snow we've had, and how much current there is based on the snowmelt," says Stefan. "In general, the dangerous areas are the areas right below the dams. They'll have gates open, and they have major current flow.

"In floodwater conditions you probably want to stay away for two reasons. Safety is the big reason. But also the fishing is usually not that good because you're dealing with high, cold, muddy water. It's just not where you want to be that time of year."

## Largemouth Locales

Largemouths typically will stage up and spawn in the same general areas: dead-end backwater bays cut off from the cold inflowing current of the main river. These areas warm quickly because they're relatively shallow and because there's limited snowmelt coming in.

Bass might hang out in slightly deeper water within the bay or in adjacent chutes and secondary channels before spawning, but as the water temperature creeps up toward the 60-degree mark, they start heading to the flats where they'll fan their nests.

"Look for shallow bays that have good green grass and areas as far away from current as possible," says Stefan. "I'm talking about you're fishing in a foot to 2 feet of water in the areas that in the summer are choked over in weeds. Largemouths are looking for areas that are oxygenated and have the warmest water possible. In April you'll have main-channel water in the 40s, and you'll be able to find backwaters in the 60s.

"If we've had a couple warm days, that's the best fishing of the year," Stefan adds. "Grab a swim jig, grab a ChatterBait and you can just go to town in these back bays because they'll be grouped up. A lot of these bays are where the largemouths winter. They'll stay in the bays that have some deep water in them, but they'll get up on the flats."

Better flats have hard-bottom areas of gravel, rock or even pad stems that provide suitable substrate for spawning. Stefan seeks out these smaller sweet spots in what can be vast stretches by fan-casting with moving baits. Once contact is made, slower baits such as Yamamoto Senkos and Texas-rigged plastics are perfect for catching multiple keepers.

## Prespaw Smallmouth Strategies

Stefan targets prespaw smallmouths in eddies and other prespaw current breaks. Some will be near heavy current, but most often they're in secondary channels and chutes with milder flows.

Smallies also stage in deeper, cooler water (8 to 12 feet, usually) than their largemouth counterparts – places where the water warms more slowly – which is what sets up the order of their spawns.

"They've been sitting in that eddy for months, and they're just waiting for it to warm up enough to move in," Stefan says. "That's why they actually spawn later in the season than largemouths up in this part of the country."

Stefan begins his search with moving baits, but because the fish are grouped up he stays prepared to milk out additional fish once he finds them.

"Usually I'll throw a swimbait or spinnerbait. Even a Rat-L-Trap is an excellent bait up here," Stefan says. "That's kind of what I start with to find them. A crankbait

is a really good bait, too, as is a jerkbait if we've got clear water. Once I catch a fish or two, I'll slow down with a Carolina rig or jig. I really try to look for current breaks that are not one-cast spots, but that I can thoroughly work in 15 to 20 minutes."

Vast eddies behind wing dams, islands and large points are classic prespaw spots, but Stefan actually avoids them. They're too obvious, he thinks. He prefers to target smaller eddies created by boulders, man-made structures and "sand drops," which are formed when the current deposits sand on the river's bottom. Some will form in the middle of channels like sunken islands. They also form like tails on the downstream side of dry islands.

"Picture the downstream side of an island, and you've got current coming around both sides. You've got a seam that comes off the back end," says Stefan. "It [a sand drop] is really similar to that, but the sand bar usually comes off the backside and trails off into the main channel and is submerged. You might have 2 feet of water that comes off 200 feet from the bank, and then it drops off into 4 to 12 feet of water.



**ABOVE:** Lawrence Lake shows a typical area where largemouth bass will stage and spawn. It's out of the current and shallow. Smallies might set up to spawn in the channel leading in.  
**BELOW:** Another classic example of a good largemouth spot. Smallmouths will stage at the mouth of the backwater area and spawn near deep water.



When that happens you get another current seam behind it, almost like an extension off an island."

Regardless of what type of structure it is, most great prespawn spots are located close to spawning areas.

## Spawning Smallmouth Strategies

According to Stefan, smallmouths aren't nearly as averse to spawning near current as largemouths. He's even seen them spawn on the main river channel, as long as they could find something to deflect the heavy flows.

More commonly they spawn on the bank or at the base of the shoreline on secondary channels and around man-made structure where gravel, packed sand or some other hard-bottom substrate is available. Stefan usually targets areas no deeper than about 4 feet.

"You can sight-fish the largemouths a heck of a lot better than the smallmouths," he adds. "Smallmouths are usually in a little off-color water where they're harder to sight-fish.

"Usually smallmouths have some type of channel going through their spawning area where they can get out in 10 or 12 feet of water," he adds.

Stefan's approach to catching spawning smallmouths depends on whether he's practicing for a tournament or actually fishing for money.

"If I'm fishing a tournament and I'm practicing, I'm throwing a topwater because a lot of times they won't eat it, but they'll tail-slap it or show themselves. I don't have to catch them. The best way to catch them is to throw some type of bottom bait; something you can pitch and flip. But they will hit moving baits for sure – a topwater or spinnerbait. A lot of times your hooking percentage isn't as good because they're not actually trying to eat it. They're just trying to chase it out of the area."

## Settling on a Species Strategy

Northern rivers are dynamic fisheries, particularly in the spring, when both species of bass want to spawn and weather conditions are constantly changing. Success stems from having a game plan to capitalize on either species when the timing is right, and understanding how conditional changes affect each fish.

For instance, largemouths in super skinny water are more susceptible to the negative effects of a cold front (Stefan has seen the temperature fall 10 to 15 degrees in a day in shallow bays) than smallmouths that are hanging out in deeper water, where the temperature is already lower and they're somewhat "shielded" from the cooldown by the water around them.

"In a scenario like that [a cold front], I would probably check my largemouths. Sometimes they'll stick around. But if they're not active, I'd check my smallmouths," Stefan says.



ABOVE: This backwater lake is more exposed to the river and thus has some current flow, so largemouths might avoid it during the spawn. However, it's a good smallmouth spawning and staging area. BELOW: Not all spawning areas are vast ponds. This dead-end chute is a good largemouth spawning area.



"A lot of people say they're really finicky, but I think they'll bite better than largemouths in the early and late parts of the year."

A change in water level or current flow is early season kryptonite for smallmouths.

"I prefer the prespawn largemouth bite and the smallmouth bite if they're spawning," Stefan adds. "The only reason the largemouths would leave that backwater area is if the water temp dropped drastically. The [prespawn] smallmouths, if the water level fluctuates – it could be 2 inches – or the current increases and the water level stays the same, they'll move from that eddy because that eddy could change. If they're spawning then they aren't going to go anywhere, and I'll go target specific fish. If they aren't spawning, I'll go to the largemouths because they're more reliable and they weigh more, it seems."

Smallmouth, largemouth, prespawn, spawn – it's a dance in the early season, but get the steps right and the fishing can be hot on the river when the law won't allow you to go on the lakes. ■

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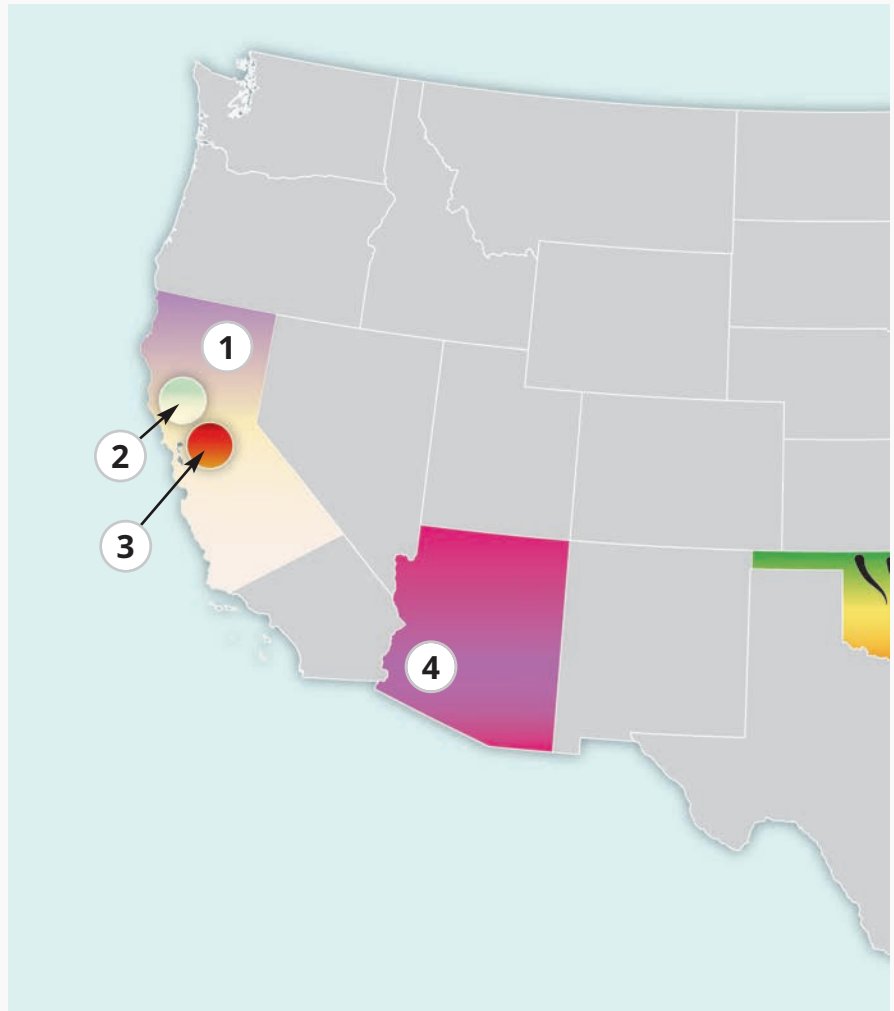
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# COOL REGIONAL COLORS

By Curtis Niedermier

**A** bass is a bass no matter where it lives, but that doesn't mean we fish for them all the same way. Seasonal variances aside, most regions of the country have their go-to baits and tactics, and over time the local anglers have narrowed those down to the point that, in some regions, there's a small palette of bait colors that quite often out-produce everything else. Sometimes the hottest local colors are common knowledge; other times they're secrets. To give you a better idea of what works in different regions, we asked around and put together this basic list. It doesn't cover the entire country, but you can extrapolate what you might need to use on any type of fishery or region based on the pros' accompanying comments.



## 1. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA Shad/Ghost, Brown/Purple

"We throw a lot of the ghost, chartreuse shad and American shad because of the clear water. For jigs, brown or brown/purple is popular."  
 – Keith Bryan, Novato, Calif.

## 2. CLEAR LAKE, CALIF. Hitch

"There's a baitfish called hitch, so they make a lot of baits in that color."  
 – Aaron Britt, Yuba City, Calif.

## 3. CALIFORNIA DELTA Red Craw

"It's pretty much a staple there, whether punching, flipping, throwing a Rat-L-Trap or square-bill. The water is usually pretty stained there, so that dark red shows up, and the crawfish are super bright red."  
 – Aaron Britt, Yuba City, Calif.

## 4. ARIZONA Morning Dawn

"The most popular color in Arizona, especially on a drop-shot, is morning dawn. We have clear water predominantly here, so a lot of us use morning dawn with chartreuse tail."  
 – Joe Uribe Jr., Surprise, Ariz.

## 5. OKLAHOMA Firetiger

"For crankbaits, it's a sleeper, and it has worked forever."  
 – Scott Ashmore, Broken Arrow, Okla.

## 6. EAST TEXAS Watermelon Red

"That's a staple here in Texas. Literally, choose the [soft-plastic] body style or shape, you really want to have watermelon red, especially in the eastern part of Texas where you have some tea-colored water."  
 – James Niggemeyer, Van, Texas

## 7. CENTRAL ARKANSAS Green Pumpkin Orange

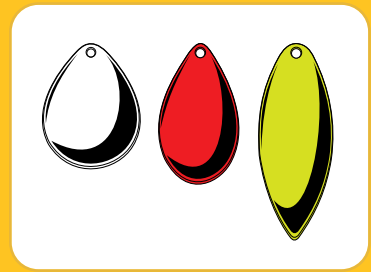
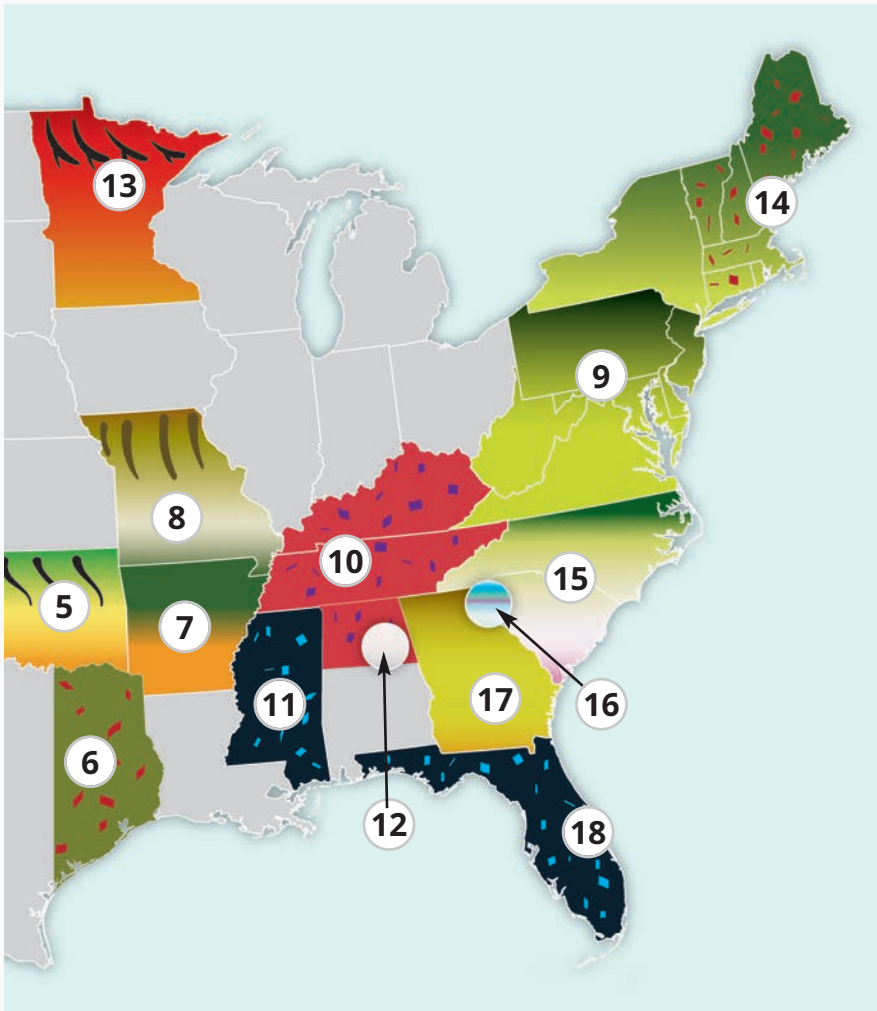
"As far as a jig goes, it's our by-far No. 1 seller [at progeared.com]."  
 – Evan Barnes, Hot Springs, Ark.

## 8. THE OZARKS Plum/Redbug/Cherry, Phantom Green

"It's kind of a staple for worms, anything cherry or plum. For crankbaits phantom green is big. I think it matches the colors of our crawfish the best."  
 – Joey Cifuentes, Clinton, Ark.

## 9. TIDAL WATERS OF THE MID-ATLANTIC Chartreuse/Black Back

"In the spring we throw a lot of chartreuse/black back crankbaits, because it's usually muddy."  
 – Grae Buck, Harleysville, Pa.



## PAINTED BLADES

It's not a specific color, but painted blades on spinnerbaits are regionally popular. In Arkansas, for instance, many pros throw spinnerbaits with white or red blades.

"War Eagle makes one, and River2sea makes a really good one called lemonade twist," says Tour pro Evan Barnes. "It has a red blade on it. A lot of guys throw it in Oklahoma too, but it's really good on the [Arkansas] river. It's a little bit dingy most of the time, and I think the blade just stands out over anything else."

### 10. TENNESSEE RIVER VALLEY Plum/Junebug

"I don't have a scientific answer for why, but plum just seems to be a good color on Kentucky Lake, Pickwick and Guntersville."

– Terry Bolton, Paducah, Ky.

### 11. MISSISSIPPI Black/Blue, White/Shad

"The water was normally a little dirtier there, and when I lived there I was a big fan of black and blue for jigs and plastics. For hard baits, I used shad-type colors; I threw white spinnerbaits and white crankbaits."

– Justin Atkins, Florence, Ala.

### 12. COOSA RIVER, ALA. White

"I grew up fishing the Coosa River. Everybody there throws a white swim jig."

– Taylor Ashley, Warrior, Ala.

### 13. MILLE LACS LAKE, MINN. Orange/Red, Perch

"On Mille Lacs, the crawfish are really orange. If you're not targeting crawfish eaters, then it tends to be purples and greens – like perch. Smallmouths, they like anything perch."

– Josh Douglas, Isle, Minn.

### 14. NEW ENGLAND Watermelon, Green Pumpkin

"We have a lot of clear-water lakes, so we use a lot of natural colors."

– Daryl Biron, Windsor, Conn.

### 15. THE CAROLINAS Tennessee Shad

"It would be an all-around must-have, especially where it's clear all the time. It works for Keitech baits and other swimbaits. It's a staple around here."

– Todd Auten, Lake Wylie, S.C.

### 16. LAKE HARTWELL, S.C. Prism Shad

"I lived on Hartwell for the past two years because of work, and on Hartwell it's a prism shad Roboworm. It's got a little real light pink and a real light blue, and it's 'clearish' with black sparkles."

– Taylor Ashley, Warrior, Ala.

### 17. GEORGIA Hot Mustard

"It's a real popular crankbait color, especially in spring."

– Clayton Batts, Macon, Ga.

### 18. FLORIDA Black/Blue, Junebug, Copperfield, Gold/Black

"Do you need anything but black and blue? Copperfield is popular, too, for swimbaits. Gold black back is good on Traps where we have golden shiners."

– Glenn Browne, Ocala, Fla. ■





## OLD DOGS AND NEW TRICKS

TWO ANGLERS JUMP THE GENERATION GAP TO SHARE FISHING EXPERIENCE

By Rob Newell

PHOTOS BY CHRIS IRWIN

In today's ultracompetitive bass tournament environment, it's not uncommon to see young anglers team up and share information with each other in an effort to bridge the experience gap between them and veteran fishermen.

Even Justin Atkins, the most recent Forrest Wood Cup winner, says his friendships with other young anglers he met in the college fishing scene are critical to his success. If anything, the constant information flow among the new generation has certainly helped their cause.

FLW Tour pro Alex Davis, however, has taken a different tack than his millennial cohorts in seeking out a principal

confidant with whom to share fishing secrets. Instead of teaming up with someone of his own age and experience level, Davis jumped the generation gap and befriended T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League icon Marshall Deakins.

Over the last eight years, Deakins, 65, and Davis, 32, have become trusted buddies on and off the water who benefit each other's fishing efforts despite their 33-year age difference.

Davis is a full-time fishing guide in Albertville, Ala., and Deakins is a custom cabinet builder in Dunlap, Tenn. The common ground that solidified their unique partnership is Lake Guntersville, where both anglers have compiled

impressive regional resumes. Collectively they own a total of seven FLW wins on Guntersville: four BFL wins for Deakins and three victories for Davis, including a Costa FLW Series win in 2012.

In 2017, both anglers reached new highs: Davis, who is fishing in his seventh season on the FLW Tour this year, experienced his best season yet with a 41st-place finish in the standings, and Deakins won the BFL All-American on Pickwick Lake.

When asked what has made the difference in their best fishing season to date, each one points to the other, putting their close friendship at the top of the list of reasons.



Despite a 33-year age gap, Marshall Deakins and Alex Davis have become best friends and fishing partners, a relationship that has benefitted each in his career.

## Crossing Paths

Deakins and Davis met nearly a decade ago at a BFL when Davis' dad, Jeff, fishing as a co-angler, drew Deakins as a boater. At the end of the fishing day, Jeff introduced his son to Deakins, and they exchanged phone numbers.

"About a year later, I called Marshall about something unrelated to fishing," Alex recalls. "Before we hung up, I said, 'We should go fishing sometime.' And he said, 'OK, how about tomorrow?'"

The next day the two shared a boat for the first time and quickly realized each had something that could benefit the other.

"I'll never forget that day," Alex says. "We caught about 30 pounds together. At one point we doubled up, both catching 7- to 8-pounders at the same time.

"I'd call it a case of old school meets new school," he continues. "Marshall has a ton of experience that comes from 40 years of being on the water, but he does not keep up with all the new tackle like I do. I'm constantly ordering and trying new lures, equipment and technology, so I bring a lot of the new-school stuff to the table. Basically, when we combine his old-school experience with my new-

school tricks, we both benefit in a big way, which is what happened that first time we fished together, and we've been best friends ever since."

## Getting to Know Davis

Deakins admits that at first he was hesitant about loaning out his lifetime of fishing experience on Guntersville to a 23-year-old who called himself "The Spinnerbait Kid." But his concern about Davis taking advantage of his wisdom for personal gain was quickly extinguished.

"The first thing that impressed me about Alex was his ambition and work ethic at his age," Deakins says. "When I met him, he worked long hours as a stock clerk at a grocery store while starting up a fishing guide business on the side. He works hard at everything he does."

From there, it didn't take Deakins long to establish trust with Davis.

"Even when I showed him some of my best places on Guntersville, he honored them," he says. "I never saw him on those spots in a tournament or with clients; he was determined to find his own places."

In terms of sharing tackle knowledge, it was Davis' deep understanding

of swimbaits that intrigued Deakins the most.

The "swimbait craze" had just reached the shores of Lake Guntersville, and Deakins admits he knew nothing about them.

"Alex educated me on the right sizes, colors, heads, line and places to fish them," Deakins recalls. "He knows so much about the new stuff that it blows my mind. And his willingness to share it with me is really where our friendship began."

Deakins says Davis helped break him of throwing the same old lures in the same old spots, and convinced him that, over time, fish get conditioned to certain lures and fishing holes can "go dead."

Yet, sometimes, a new approach can make an old hole new again.

Before this first lesson from Davis, Deakins says he used to deep crank with the same plug year after year.

"Then one day Alex shows up with this giant crankbait called a [Strike King] 10XD," Deakins recalls. "I thought he had lost his mind. But I can't tell you the number of big fish we have caught on that thing."

Deakins also recalls being schooled by Davis on a lipless rattler made by Jackall called a Disk Knocker.



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"We went to one of my best spots for a lipless," he recounts. "I threw the same one I always do and nothing happened. Then Alex says, 'Let's give them a little different sound,' and he threw that Jackall bait out there and started wearing them out. When I put one on, I started catching them, too. Some of the things he has shown me have helped revive my old places."

## Learning the Old School

Though Deakins claims that Davis has helped him more than he has helped Davis, the latter disagrees.

"No way," Davis responds. "That man has taught me so much it's incredible, and it's only the kinds of things you learn from 40 years on the water, like how rain affects a frog bite or how muddy water affects a flipping bite or how fish move around in a grass bed based on conditions."

Though Davis falls into the early end of the millennial generation, he is an old soul in his respect for the work ethic and practicality of the generations before him, which is why he found a kindred spirit in Deakins.

"Marshall wears jeans and a T-shirt and drives a regular truck," Davis says.

"He gets up every day at 5 a.m. and works like a horse until dark. His hands are worn and scarred from cabinet work. For some reason I just identify with those kinds of things – it's old school."

One of the primary intangibles Davis has picked up from Deakins is patience – the understanding that big limits take time to catch, and panicking or spinning out early in the day only makes a situation more challenging.

Davis says his previous tendency to panic stemmed from not having enough fish located for different conditions, something else Deakins helped assuage.

"One of Marshall's favorite sayings is, 'You can never have enough fish found,'" Davis says. "I used to think if I had found three or four groups of fish my practice was over; I had done my job. With Marshall, the job of finding fish is never done. You keep fishing no matter how many fish you've found."

Another golden rule Davis took from Deakins' playbook is to fish – as in, actually cast – to find fish, a timely virtue in the era of bottom imaging.

Whether searching ledges or acres of grass, there are no shortcuts.

"Due to the new technologies, we as young anglers have gotten into the habit of just riding around looking at graphs to find fish. I'm as guilty of it as anyone," Davis admits. "But in the old days, those guys fished until they found fish, and there is still a lot to be said for that style of fish-finding. Marshall still fishes down miles of ledges to find those subtle sweet spots that can't always be seen on graphs. That's how he won the All-American – finding places by just fishing and not looking only for dots on a screen."

Above all, Davis says it's Deakins' pure passion for fishing that has had the most potent impact on him.

"He is not in this sport for the fame, the fortune or the glory," Davis says. "He does this because he has a burning desire to catch a bass and learn from the experience. Win, lose or draw – when a tournament is over and everyone puts it on the trailer to go eat, Marshall goes back out and fishes until dark because he truly loves it."

"That's something you can't buy; that's something that comes from within, and I totally admire it, which is why I'm honored to be a good friend of his." ■



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## WRAP IT UP

THE LOWDOWN ON HOW BASS BOATS GET THEIR FLASHY VINYL COVERINGS

By Joe Balog

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RANGER BOATS

**W**rapped boats are a big part of tournament fishing these days. The increased visibility as a sign board for sponsors, coupled with wrap designers popping up in every major metropolitan area, has led to a huge surge in wrapped rigs on the water today. Considering wrapping your boat? We'll help you make an educated decision.

### How They're Made

In essence, a bass boat graphics wrap is comprised of several large vinyl stickers that are made to fit a specific boat model. Here's how the process works:

**1.** The process begins with the design of an appealing layout for your rig. Most wrap experts have artistic staff that can aid in this process, but they will require customers to provide vector or .eps files (files specific to certain software programs) containing sponsor logos.

**2.** Once logo files have been obtained and a design is finished, graphic and sign companies print the entire wrap on gigantic rolls of vinyl – most start out 150 feet long – and allow the inks to dry. During this period the vinyl “outgasses,” which is a type of curing process. Opinions on the overall best vinyl material vary. The most popular vinyl products are manufactured by 3M and Avery Dennison. 3M carries a higher price tag, and many wrap experts swear by its quality. However, not everyone agrees. If you're considering a wrap, ask the installer about its materials, and seek referrals from other anglers. Eventually the wrap will be cut to template sizes for the installation on various parts of the boat.

**3.** Following the curing and drying process, a top coat of laminate is applied. Again, depending on the material being used, numerous types of “over-lam” are available, from metallic

to high-gloss varieties, carbon-fiber (for a 3-D look), sparkles, brushed metals – the sky's the limit. Many of these options also carry with them additional charges of up to 20 percent of the wrap cost.

**4.** When the wrap has been printed and laminated, then the installers (even some boat manufacturers) turn their attention to the boat. Most lift the boat on jacks for installation, and the entire rig is thoroughly cleaned using basic dish soap to remove any oils, followed by a solvent cleaner.

**5.** After the boat is prepped, the wrap is installed. Most wraps nowadays are applied dry and feature a “micro-bead” technology, which in essence are tiny fingers that stick to the boat until pressure (through a squeegee or other application tool) is placed over the vinyl to seal it down. This allows wrap designers to adjust the wrap to ensure proper fit.

Most high-end graphics companies warn against the use of a wet application for boat wraps because if fluid gets beneath the wrap it can lead to expansion and tears. Another no-no: the use of metal squeegees or blades for application. They can damage the gel coat.

**6.** Once the vinyl wrap is in place exactly, edges and seams must be carefully adhered. Most quality wrap companies use a 3M edging tape on the boat's bottom, as this is an area of particular concern. Liquid enamel was used in the past, but tape is the accepted modern method.

Around the rub rail, wraps must be silicone-sealed, as well as around cleats, in the splashwell and anywhere there's an edge. Doing so prevents water from entering under the wrap.

**7.** Finally, the entire wrap should be heated (often to temperatures exceeding 250 degrees) to remove any air bubbles and to compensate for weather changes.

## VALUING BOAT WRAPS

By Curtis Niedermier

A boat (or truck) wrap serves multiple purposes, including protecting the finish from abrasion and sun fade, but more than anything it's a very valuable tool for anglers to market their sponsors or personal brands. The American Trucking Association and 3M have researched the effectiveness of ads and marketing on wrapped vehicles and found that, depending on how many miles are driven, it's possible to generate tens of thousands of impressions per day and more than 10 million impressions in a year. That's a lot of eyes, and a lot of awareness, which reinforces the promotional potential of a professional bass angler who travels the tournament trail all season long.

### What You Get

In general, bass boat wraps can be counted on to be pretty rugged, considering the craft they cover often exceed 70 mph on the water. Certified installers know their trade, and the last thing they want is to perform repairs. In addition, most boat wraps do not come with a warranty, as finding the exact reason for failures is tough, so having it done right is important. Most often, damage is caused by a careless captain. In the event of any major tears, usually the entire wrap must be replaced.

Bass boat wraps offer moderately good protection to a boat. They're 4.5 mils thick (by comparison, gel coat is about 2), and easily safeguard against the bumps and bangs of tying up to a dock or glancing off other boats in a lock.

### Care and Removal

Once your rig is wrapped, it's important to take care of the vinyl coating. Thanks to superior inks, today's wraps don't really fade, but they can get scratched. Many waxing compounds can help remove minor scratches and will add life to a wrap. General cleaning should be done with dish soap, after which a protectant and sealer should be used.

A quality boat wrap should last about three years, and most graphics companies advise against pushing past that timeframe. If left on for longer periods, a boat wrap will likely crack from sun exposure, and has the potential to damage or stain the underlying gel coat.

Removing a wrap is fairly simple and requires nothing more than basic tools, strong fingers and a heat gun. Most owners easily remove their wraps themselves if need be, but wrap companies will also perform the task for a nominal fee.

### The Cost

Perhaps the biggest question about boat wraps is the cost. Again, it depends. Some bass boat wrap companies offer pricing as low as \$1,000. However, buyers should go in asking questions to make sure none of the important steps are being skipped. For the most extreme wraps with the best laminates and quality custom work, buyers may need to fork over in excess of \$4,000.

But, like just about everything else in bass fishing, nothing cool is cheap. ■



It takes a skilled hand and careful procedure to get the details of a wrap just right.



### Quick Tips

- Maintain good posture – sit straight and relax your shoulders
- Engage your core
- Keep arms relatively straight
- Loosen your grip
- Don't strain your wrists by bending
- Use the footpegs to brace

# 5 BASIC PADDLING POINTS TO MAXIMIZE EFFICIENCY

A JACKSON KAYAK PRO-STAFFER EXPLAINS HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR STROKE



PHOTO BY CHRIS FUNK

By Bridgett Howard

**Y**ou've got a kayak, a paddle and a PFD – time to jump in the water and go, right? Almost, but first review the following five pointers that will help you get out and stay out there and boost your chances to land some backwater bruisers.

#### 1. HOLD YOUR PADDLE CORRECTLY

The widest, or longest side of the paddle should be up (see above), and the power face (concave surface) facing you. This will allow for an easier stroke when the blade enters the water and means you won't need to employ a death-grip on the shaft of the paddle. Relax your hands and let the paddle do the work. Your hands should be a bit farther apart than shoulder width.

#### 2. POSITION YOURSELF FOR SUCCESS

Your posture has a direct impact on how quickly you tire. In a sit-on-top fishing-style kayak (see facing page), your legs should be slightly bent, allowing you to brace against the foot pegs with your back braced comfortably against the seat. Adjust the foot pegs before you push off the bank. Sit straight, but relax your shoulders and open your chest.

### 3. DON'T DRAG YOUR KAYAK WITH YOUR ARMS

The optimal stroke won't have power coming from your arms – it will come from your core. Many newcomers attack the water with their biceps, but the key is using the larger muscles in your quads and rotating around your torso. Reach forward toward your feet with the paddle blade and draw back, pressing against the foot pegs.

When pulling from the left side of your kayak, you should be pressing with the right foot against the pull. Bring your paddle back to your hip, and reach forward to stroke with your opposite hand. Press with your left foot for the right-hand stroke – this should feel nearly like a bicycle push-and-pull motion, and the nose of the kayak should move left to right with each stroke, using your core as the pivot point.

### 4. FORWARD SWEEP STROKE

Paddling harder on one side of the kayak will turn the boat, but it isn't the most efficient method. A better way is the forward sweep stroke. To perform this stroke, reach forward with the paddle blade toward your toes. Sweep out in an arc away from the boat, and then pull back toward the stern, keeping your other hand at shoulder level or below. The kayak will turn to the opposite side of your stroke, and you will be able to maintain paddling momentum. Keep your center of gravity over the middle of the boat.

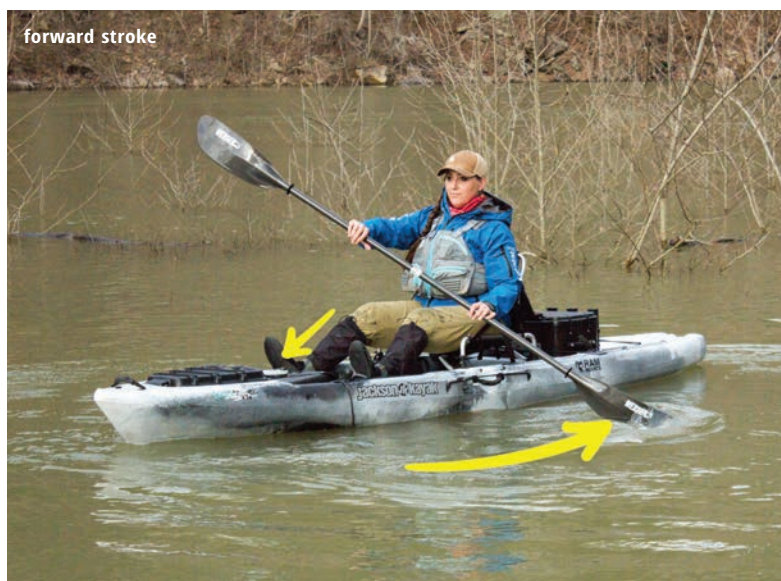
### 5. REVERSE SWEEP STROKE

Need to make a quick pivot with the kayak? The reverse sweep stroke will allow you to turn the kayak rapidly in place. Twist to initiate a stroke that begins behind you, reaching toward the back of the kayak in the direction you'd like to turn. Sweep the paddle out in an arc and then back toward your toes, and be sure to keep your body centered and use your torso to twist.

At first, it might seem like a lot of work to use proper technique while paddling. Developing and maintaining good form on the water will keep your body conditioned after years of paddling – and that core strength is something that'll go a long way toward improving your hookset, too. ■

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

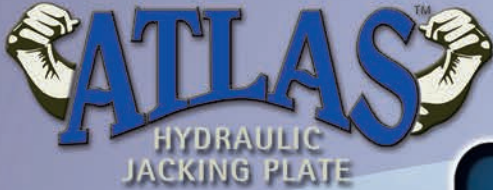
River-bound year-round, Bridgett Howard's playground includes the rivers and streams of east Tennessee. Fortunate to be able to combine work and play, she is part of the Jackson Kayak and Orion Coolers marketing and fishing teams in addition to representing Werner Paddles, Kokatat and RAM Mounts on the water. Howard loves to prove that big fish live in skinny water, and bass are among her favorites.



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BROOKS

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# GEAR

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## WHAT'S INSIDE: WHAT WE LIKE ABOUT THE 13 FISHING CONCEPT Z

5 times a tube is the best choice for flipping

New products for spring fishing

Go lighter (line) and longer (rods) for finesse applications



## 13 FISHING CONCEPT Z

By Matt Williams

**F**or years fishing reel manufacturers have relied on stainless-steel and ceramic ball bearings to help promote smooth, quiet operation at critical rotation points such as the spool, gears and handles. Take these little jewels away and just about every aspect of performance would be sure to take a grinding, squealing dive, right? Not necessarily. Florida-based 13 Fishing claims its all-new Concept Z baitcaster breaks all the rules in that respect.

The reel has bearings, just not the conventional spherical kind. It has what 13 Fishing calls Concept Zero Bearings (CZB), which are disc-like and fashioned from a proprietary polymer material intended to reduce friction and promote longer, smoother and quieter casts with less effort while eliminating the corrosion and wear that can cause conventional bearings to break down or fail over time.

### First Impression

With its racy-looking orange finish and black accents, this reel won't be tough to spot in the rod locker.

Low in profile and ergonomically correct, the reel isn't the lightest in my collection, but at 6.4 ounces it's certainly not the heaviest, either. Another cool design feature is the rapid-access side plate; click the release lever and the plate pops right open, providing access to the six-way centrifugal brake adjustment knob.

### In Action

I played around with the reel for more than two months, and in the end I hated to ship it back. There is plenty to like about this baitcaster, but I was particularly impressed by its ability to handle baits as light as a 3/16-ounce shaky head or drop-shot rig, and the consistently good control it provided when casting in

windy conditions, pitching around bushes and skipping under docks.

Once in tune with the reel, you rarely get the feeling that it's about to get squirrely on you. It's smooth, quiet and feels the same on every cast.

As casting distance and overall performance go, the Z performed just as well or better than any ball-bearing reel I own. I put it up against two of my best (and more expensive) baitcasters and consistently achieved equal or slightly better distance with the same or a little less effort using the same line, rod and bait.

My test bait was a 5-inch Reaction Innovations Skinny Dipper matched with a 3/16-ounce swimbait hook. The maximum casting distance achieved using 15-pound-test Seaguar Red Label fluoro and a 7-3, medium-heavy Team Lew's Custom Pro Speed Stick rod was around 45 yards.

### Final Thoughts

I'm always somewhat apprehensive when a new "game-changing" technology comes on board, particularly one that receives the amount of hype this one did in the wake of its introduction at ICAST 2017. But make no mistake, the Concept Z lives up to its billing as a sweet little baitcaster. It was truly a pleasure to fish with.

While 13 Fishing didn't reinvent the wheel here as far as baitcasters go, the company appears to be on to something very unique with its high-performance CZB bearing technology, which provides smooth, easy casting and overall operation.

Only time will tell whether the reel will eventually start showing signs of diminished performance, or how long it might take for it to happen, if it does at all. Regardless, I'm convinced that it's worth a \$200 investment to find out.



## POLYMER BEARINGS

Traditional ball bearings are replaced by polymer disc bearings that 13 Fishing claims are not susceptible to corrosion and wear caused by grit and dirt.



## COMPACT PROFILE

It's as slim and trim as they come.



## EASY ACCESS

The rapid-access side plate provides quick, easy access to the six-point centrifugal braking system adjustment dial.

## Performance Advice

It may take a few casts to get the braking system and spool tension dialed in, but you'll know it when it's right. Matt Baldwin, 13 Fishing product development manager, recommends starting out with the centrifugal brake dial on setting one or two with the spool tension knob loosened a little less than normal for a ball-bearing reel.

## HITS & MISSES

- + Excellent price point
- + Long casts with less effort
- + Smooth, quiet operation
- + Consistent control
- + Fast-opening side plate
- + Custom colors available
- Only one left-handed retrieve model

## >> ON THE WATER



PHOTO BY MATT WILLIAMS

The Concept Z stood out for its brash appearance, and its ability to handle a range of finesse, power and cranking applications.

## DETAILS

- Gear Ratio:** 6.6:1, 7.3:1 and 8.1:1 for right-handed retrieve; 7.3:1 for left-handed retrieve
- Capacity:** 135 yards of 12-pound test
- Drag:** 22 pounds
- Construction:** aluminum
- Weight:** 6.4 ounces
- MSRP:** \$200
- Contact:** 13fishing.com ■

## APPLICATIONS

Applications are many. The reel is treated with a protective coating called Ocean Armor 2, so it can withstand the punishing abuse associated with harsh saltwater elements. The Concept Z handles lightweight shaky heads and drop-shots remarkably well. Use it for everything in between with retrieve ratios of 6.6:1, 7.3:1 or 8.1:1 for righties. The lefty model comes only in 7.3:1.



## (DON'T FORGET ABOUT) TUBES FOR TEXAS RIGGING

THIS CLASSIC BAIT STILL HAS A PLACE FOR SHALLOW-WATER, POWER-FISHING TACTICS

By Matt Williams  
LURE PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

**O**f all the lures we use to catch bass around shallow cover, tubes might have the richest, winningest history ... among baits that you just don't hear much about anymore, that is.

Once considered a power-fishing staple around shallow matted grass, flooded bushes and logjams, and equally adaptable for skipping docks and general use, tubes seem to have lost some of their thunder to new-wave creatures and craws.

Nowadays they see more use in the fabled smallmouth havens of the North, yet FLW pros Austin Felix, Josh Douglas and Drew Boggs believe that tubes are valuable for more than just targeting smallmouths around big-water boulders. They have their place alongside the newer options for flipping and pitching. And, at times, nothing gets the job done quite like a tube.

### Downsides of Tubes

One of the most common sentiments shared by the pros we talked to is that, much like a shaky head or Yamamoto Senko, tubes sometimes draw bites when other baits don't. For that reason, they're worth considering.

However, like any soft-plastic bait style, the tube has some drawbacks that need to be addressed. Its hollow body requires

a little more exactitude when rigging than some other plastics. It doesn't mate very well with the heavy-duty, straight-shank hooks that so many pros consider to be the modern rage for flipping. And the bait has a reputation for balling on the hook and losing fish – probably its biggest issue as a Texas-rigged bait.

"Tubes were really popular before my time. Then beaver-style baits like the [Missile Baits] D Bomb came out and sort of took over," says Douglas, of Isle, Minn. "I think a lot of guys may have gotten away from tubes because of their reputation for losing fish. But I still use them a lot. It's one of those baits like the ribbon-tail worm that has remained effective over time. It just gets bit."

Boggs is a two-time T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American qualifier and a frequent contender in regional tournaments near his Lebanon, Tenn., home. He says nearly 90 percent of the checks he's cashed the last few seasons have come as a result of flipping tubes around rocks, bluff walls and wood cover on Kentucky Lake, Pickwick and Old Hickory.

He agrees that one of the main reasons many anglers have stopped flipping tubes is hookup problems caused by the bulky plastic in the head of some big tube baits – particularly the larger tubes so often used for flipping. To him, it's a problem that can be solved with careful bait selection.



Drew Boggs

"I like a 4- to 5-inch tube for flipping, but most of them I've seen are so meaty around the head that they take up too much of the hook gap and cause hookup problems," Boggs says.

He's found several tubes that don't suffer this design defect. His go-to bait for 90 percent of flipping situations is a Lake Fork Tackle Craw Tube or Big Bite Baits Craw Tube. They're both hybrid tubes with ringed bodies and extra pinners on the sides. As far as "standard" tubes, Boggs uses a model that's no longer in production, but that has the right characteristics for a good hookup.

"I've won a lot of money with it, but a lot of guys I compete against continue to fish their beavers, [Berkley Havoc] Pit Bosses and D Bombs," Boggs says. "There are a lot of different options out there, but in my opinion, none of them produces as well as the tube."

To that effect, it's worth noting that tubes come in dozens of variations, widths, lengths and thicknesses. There are even solid "tubes" that aren't hollow at all. The build of the tube can have a major effect on how the bait sinks or glides, in addition to how well it hooks up a fish. Bigger tubes – usually called "flipping tubes" – are most popular for power fishing, but many small tubes are also good "finesse flipping" baits for times when fish won't hit bigger, bulkier options. If one tube doesn't cut it, you can always swap it out for a different one. The specific tubes and tackle used by Felix, Douglas and Boggs are listed in the accompanying sidebar.

## Where Tubes Shine on a Texas Rig

Once you find a tube you like and pair it with the proper hook, you'll find the tube to be a good choice for a handful of situations.

**Mixed-bag opportunities** – Felix is a third-year FLW Tour pro and former YETI FLW College Fishing champ who, as a Minnesotan, is very familiar with targeting both largemouths and smallmouths on mixed-bag fisheries. When faced with a mixed-bag scenario, his confidence in the tube really spikes because of the bait's history as a smallmouth catcher.

"I really like flipping a tube if I'm on an Ozark-style lake or the Mississippi River – some place where I'm not sure which species I'll be targeting and I stand a good chance of catching either one on any given flip," Felix says. "It's all about efficiency on those dual-species fisheries, and the tube is a great bait to do that. If I'm flipping a big jig or a big beaver-style bait in that type of situation I feel like the focus will be more toward largemouths."

**Flipping "grabby" cover such as bushes** – Douglas is a huge fan of the tube on lakes where he's fishing bushes during the spring of the year.

"I like a jig more during the prespawn, but once we start getting into the spawn and postspawn is when I'll switch to the 4- to 4 1/2-inch flipping tube," he says. "I really like it on a lake like Kentucky Lake because the fish pull up really tight to the bushes over there. The tube doesn't have any appendages to get caught on limbs and other stuff, so it will slide in and out much better than a creature or a jig. It also has some bulk to it, so I can usually go to a little lighter weight – like 3/16 or 5/16 ounce – and be pretty effective."

**Punching matted grass** – A tube also works great in matted grass because of its streamlined profile.

"We flip a lot of milfoil in Minnesota during the summer," says Douglas, "and the tube is a great choice for that. It doesn't have a lot of action to it, but you can crash it through the canopy and it really triggers those reaction strikes. It's very efficient because of the way it goes in and out of the grass, and it gets lots of bites – large and small."

**Skipping docks** – Like a flat rock, a tube has a smooth, even surface for skipping under docks. It can be left to fall, fished with a lift-rise action, or twitched under the surface to



Austin Felix

imitate a bluegill. You can even swim it. Regardless of the presentation, it's the ability to access the waters under a dock that really makes it a solid choice.

"When it comes to dock fishing, nothing skips better than a tube," Douglas adds.

**All-purpose shallow fishing** – Boggs is one who will reach for a tube in water as cold as 40 degrees or as warm as 95 during spring, summer and fall. He likes to flip one to bushes, laydowns, docks and other shore cover, but points out that a tube can be just as deadly around bluff walls and rock, where he'll drag or stroke the bait. And it's his bait of choice for flipping in water as shallow as one foot or as deep as 10.

"About the only things I might change are the color, the size of the weight and my rod," Boggs adds. "I like a lighter weight in cold water to get the slower fall and a bigger weight in warmer water to make them react."

## A Few Notes on Tackle

As earlier mentioned, tubes don't pair well with straight-shank flipping hooks. An EWG superline hook is a much better fit for a tube because it allows the bait to remain straight and provides plenty of gap to allow for better hooksets. The offset on the shank helps hold the bait in place, and the point should be Tex-posed. Usually, skin-hooking the tube results in a near-weedless setup that still allows good penetration on the hookset.

Weight selection can vary greatly based on the density of cover being fished, depth, current and technique. Go lighter for swimming and twitching techniques, or in finesse situations, and heavier for punching through grass or wood to elicit reaction strikes. Weight selection also impacts the action of the bait and how much it glides "off course" on the fall. Experimentation is the best method for choosing the right weight, but the common range is 1/4 to 3/4 ounce.

Boggs' weight choice is one he and a friend devised several years ago before selling the design to Jenko Fishing. It's called the Creature Weight, and it features a unique tapered head design that always turns "right-side up" as it sinks. He says the design of the weight is such that it accents the tube perfectly while enhancing the gliding, sliding action.

"I can hop the tube with that weight and make it glide 3 to 4 inches to either side. Sometimes it'll even go backward," Boggs says. "It makes it get nasty compared to what you can accomplish with a bullet sinker."



Jenko Fishing  
Creature Weights

## HOOK AND TUBE CHOICES



### AUSTIN FELIX

Felix prefers a 4/0 Gamakatsu EWG Superline hook (top) in combination with a 4-inch Poor Boys Baits Tube. If he's dealing with a lot of smallmouths he might scale down to a 3 1/2-inch tube with a 3/0 EWG. Either way, he thinks it's important to modify the hook by slightly widening the gap so the hook point lies parallel with the bait and not in line with the line tie. This helps cut down on lost fish.



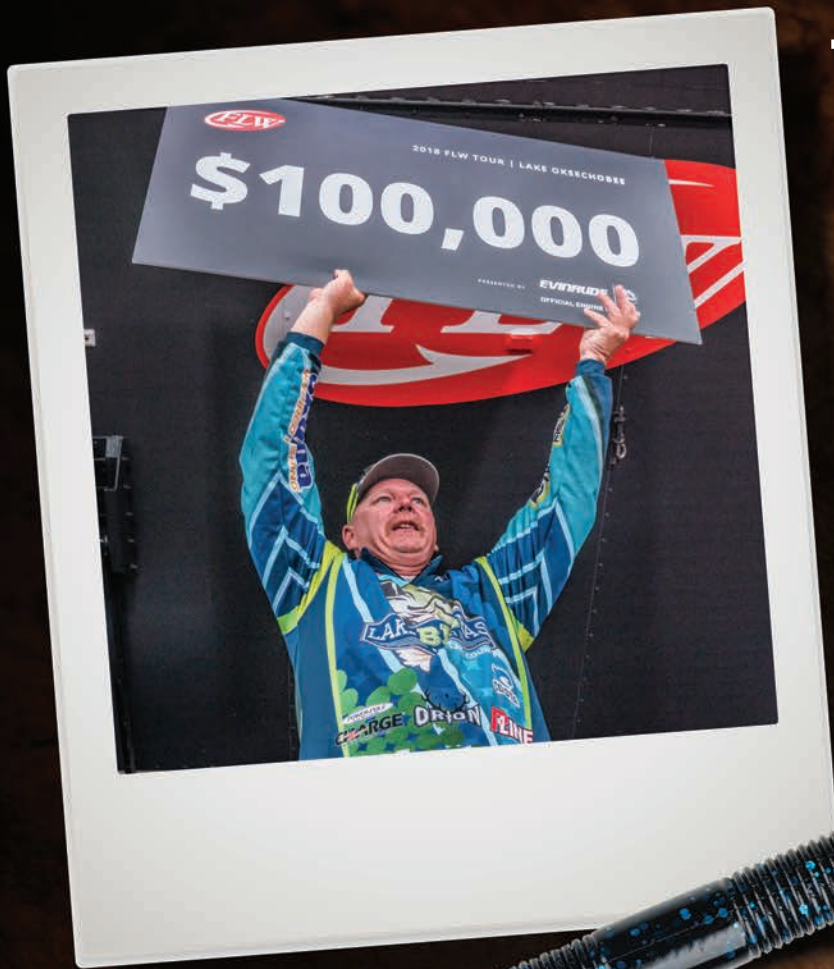
### JOSH DOUGLAS

Douglas also likes a 4/0 Gamakatsu EWG Superline hook (top) or a Trokar TK190, which is a wide-gap, straight-shank tube hook, in combination with a 4-inch tube by Get Bit Baits.



### DREW BOGGS

Boggs prefers a 4/0 Mustad Grip-Pin EWG hook for pairing with 4-inch tubes such as the Lake Fork Craw Tube and Big Bite Baits Craw Tube, and for 4 1/2-inch tubes. He uses a 5/0 for 5-inch tubes. He also flares the hook gap slightly so the point rests parallel to the tube wall instead of turning inward. ■



# Tim Frederick

FLW Tour Event Champion  
January 25, 2018  
Lake Okeechobee  
85 pounds, 4 ounces

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# TIE ONE ON!

# NEW PRODUCTS



## Black Flag RK Swingg Jigg Cover Edition And W Craww

Italian tackle maker Black Flag has teamed with 2014 Forrest Wood Cup champ Anthony Gagliardi to launch an expansion into North America. Initial product offerings include soft plastics of various shapes, jigs, spoons, spinnerbaits, terminal tackle, vibrating jigs and more. Of particular note are the RK Swingg Jigg Cover Edition and W Craww.

The Swingg Jigg's Gamakatsu G-Lock hook swivels freely behind an Arkie-style head. Its silicone skirt is attached with a two-part band that sandwiches the strands in place. Choose from 5/16, 7/16 and 9/16 ounce. \$5.75

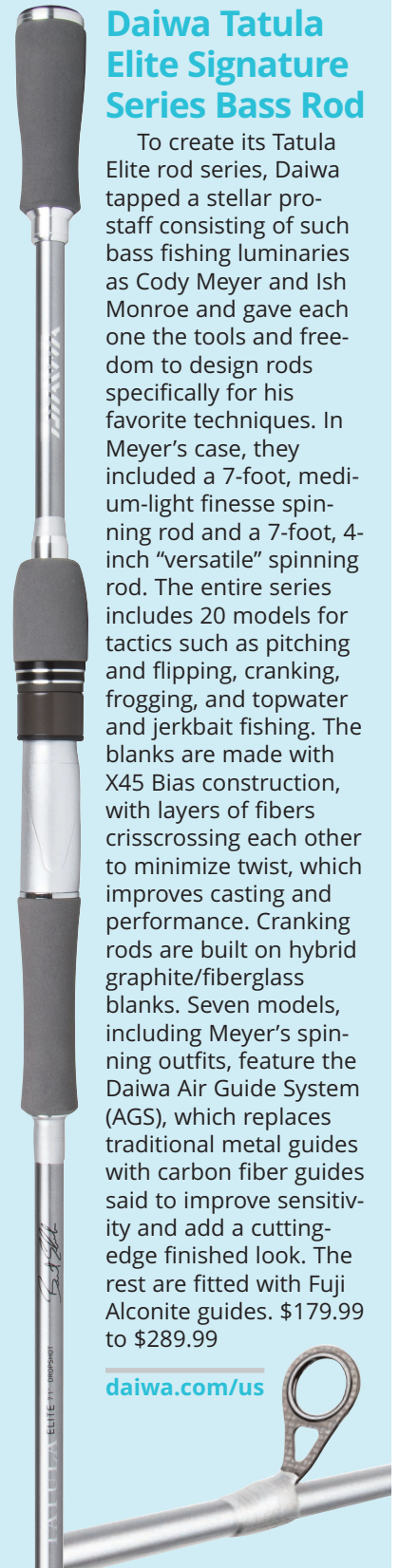
The W Craww, which comes in a 4 1/4-inch standard size and a smaller variation just over 3 inches long, is a flipping bait or trailer. Heavy claws are attached to the body with thin, supple "arms," a combination that the company says creates a "waving" action as the bait sinks. \$4.95 for five

[blackflag.com](http://blackflag.com)

## Daiwa Tatula Elite Signature Series Bass Rod

To create its Tatula Elite rod series, Daiwa tapped a stellar pro-staff consisting of such bass fishing luminaries as Cody Meyer and Ish Monroe and gave each one the tools and freedom to design rods specifically for his favorite techniques. In Meyer's case, they included a 7-foot, medium-light finesse spinning rod and a 7-foot, 4-inch "versatile" spinning rod. The entire series includes 20 models for tactics such as pitching and flipping, cranking, frogging, and topwater and jerkbait fishing. The blanks are made with X45 Bias construction, with layers of fibers crisscrossing each other to minimize twist, which improves casting and performance. Cranking rods are built on hybrid graphite/fiberglass blanks. Seven models, including Meyer's spinning outfits, feature the Daiwa Air Guide System (AGS), which replaces traditional metal guides with carbon fiber guides said to improve sensitivity and add a cutting-edge finished look. The rest are fitted with Fuji Alconite guides. \$179.99 to \$289.99

[daiwa.com/us](http://daiwa.com/us)





## 6th Sense Curve 55

The Curve 55's side-to-side hunting action is reminiscent of the Storm Wiggle Wart's, but 6th Sense attempts to improve on the classic with premium paint jobs, precision weighting and high-end hooks. Adjectives aside, the Curve 55 dives 5 to 9 feet with a tight wobble that's likely effective during the early part of the season. \$7.99

[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)

## Megabass Vision Oneten Silent

It looks like the standard Vision Oneten and suspends, dives and acts just like it, too. But the new Vision Oneten Silent is different in one very important way: It's been designed to run silent. Megabass removed the internal rattles and replaced the sliding weight-transfer system with a fixed weight to create a more subtle variation of its wildly popular flagship bait. \$24.99

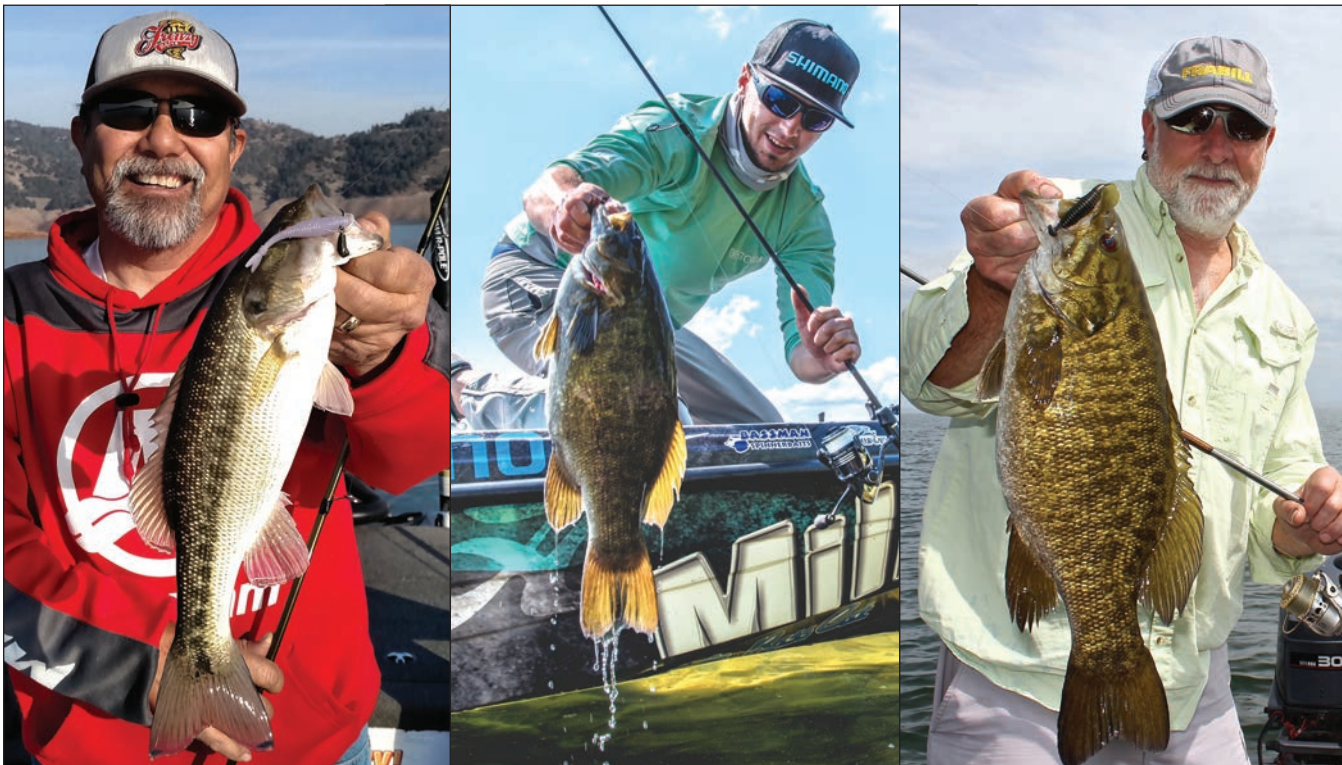
[megabassusa.com](http://megabassusa.com)



## Reaction Innovations Shiver Shot

Like a speedy running back that can also block and catch passes out of the backfield, the Shiver Shot is a drop-shot bait that can fulfill much more than its primary purpose. The bait owes its versatility to the unique design of the tail and midsection. A horizontal disc separates the split vertical tailfin, creating action both up and down and side to side, while the skinny midsection promotes maximum movement. Two pectoral fins up front provide a skosh more action. The company says that when the bait is fished on a drop-shot or Damiki rig, you can't hold it still enough to keep it from moving. Likewise, it provides a tail-kicking action when fished on an under-spin, vibrating jig or Scrounger. The Shiver Shot measures about 3 5/8 inches long, but two larger models are expected this spring. \$4.99 for 10

[reactioninnovations.com](http://reactioninnovations.com)



CENTER PHOTO BY BRI DOUGLAS

# THE LIGHT-LINE, LONG-ROD PROGRAM

THIS MIGHT BE A BETTER WAY TO FISH FINESSE OFFERINGS

By Matt Straw

**L**ong rods are all the rage, but mostly for power fishing. That's not the only place they shine, however. When combined with wispy thin line (say, 4- to 6-pound test), spinning rods in the neighborhood of 8 to 10 feet long provide a very effective, very light approach for making long casts with small baits to pressured fish. The combo is also deadly for fishing extremely deep.

Anglers might not like the concept at first glance. It all seems too light, suggesting you brought a knife to a gunfight. But that impression shouldn't last long, because there are real advantages to the long-rod, light-line matchup.

## The Line

Light, thin, supple line is key for sliding through rod guides, slipping through the

wind and allowing fast descent of the bait once in the water. Monofilament and fluorocarbon in the 4-pound-test range are OK, but modern superlines offer even more advantages.

Superlines keep getting smaller, smoother and more dependable – and tend to have twice the advertised breaking strength that companies proclaim – making them far more capable than light lines of the past at resisting breakage and launching lures into orbit.

Superline construction has advanced in other ways to promote long casts, too. For instance, many modern braids feature multi-carrier weaves for a smoother finish and coatings that allow knots to cinch down tighter and the line to flow smoothly through guides. Berkley's classic FireLine is an excellent choice, and its

newer NanoFil, which is a “uni-filament” braid created by fusing Dyneema strands together, is even thinner and smoother. Sufix Nanobraid is another modern take, composed of densely braided Dyneema fibers to be slicker, thinner and stronger than conventional braids. In my experience, these “Nano” interpretations cast farther than any conventional braids within the same test parameters.

Whichever braid is used, it can be paired with a fluorocarbon leader, matched specifically to the tactic and water clarity for an effective setup.

## The Rods

To “protect” the light line from impact, fast, light-power spinning rods of 8 to 10 feet long are ideal. The extra length helps absorb the shock of surging fish, but also

accommodates greater tip speed on the casting motion that results in much more distance.

Why the need in the first place? Because bass are the most popular gamefish in America, and all that fishing pressure they get leads to spookier fish, especially in clear-water fisheries.

Case in point: The Sturgeon Bay Open (SBO) Bass Tournament is held in May on northern Green Bay, where a guy with fairly good eyesight can count the pebbles on the bottom 20 feet below. Tim Dawidiuk and I won the SBO in 1998 by making long casts with the wind using 7 1/2-foot rods, 10-pound-test braid main lines and matching fluorocarbon leaders, which was considered light tackle back then. Five years later the fish we targeted were patrolling flat-calm waters. We needed 4-pound-test mono on light-power, 8-foot St. Croix Avid Series rods to make casts long enough to reach bass without running the risk of getting too close. Fishing pressure and clean water make a real difference. We took third, by the way.

## Applications

In the waters of the Upper Midwest, 1/16-ounce hair jigs and jig-plastic combinations (grubs, soft jerkbaits, finesse worms, etc.) fished on light line and long rods put more bass – even big largemouths – in the boat than many other baits out there.

The technique is simple: Make a long cast past the target zone, and allow the jig to sink to the bottom or the desired depth. Begin an ultra-slow retrieve, keeping the jig moving on a horizontal plane. If it taps or drags bottom, speed up slightly. If it never touches bottom, slow down. Don't jig it, snap it, pop it or twitch it. Occasionally let it fall to bottom and rest for a few seconds before resuming the retrieve. This simple tactic produces strikes from bass at every activity level, from revved up to extremely wary.

Those are simple, classic methods, but more modern long-rod, light-line tactics imported from Japan and elsewhere are winning all kinds of bass tournaments worldwide and coast-to-coast.

Spybaiting – a hard-bait technique typically employed with 5-pound-test fluorocarbon and 8- to 9-foot rods – has won, or helped win, several high-profile tournaments. Jackall also recently imported the similar I-Motion technique that was already winning tournaments in Japan, using the company's hard-bait Seira Minnow or the soft iShad, either of which is retrieved with a slow, steady pace and no wiggling, snapping or ripping. Japanese pros use 4-pound-test braids as main lines with 4-pound-test fluorocarbon leaders with this method.

Greg Gutierrez, who won the 2016 Costa FLW Series event at Lake Shasta fishing spybaits on light line for spotted bass, is a fan of the approach.

## Long-Rod Options

Rod makers are offering an ever-increasing selection of long spinning rods for light-line finesse techniques. Here are four long sticks that launch record-class casts with 4- to 6-pound-test lines and leaders.

- 1. St Croix Avid Series Spinning AVS80MLM2**  
8 feet, medium-light power, moderate action  
\$220 [stcroixrods.com](http://stcroixrods.com)
- 2. St. Croix Legend Tournament Bass Spinning LBS86MLXF**  
8 feet, 6 inches, medium-light power, extra-fast action  
\$280 [stcroixrods.com](http://stcroixrods.com)
- 3. Fenwick Eagle EA86M-MFS-2**  
8 feet, 6 inches, medium power, moderate-fast action  
\$69.95 [fenwickfishing.com](http://fenwickfishing.com)
- 4. Millerods BassFreak**  
7 feet, 6 inches, fast action  
\$295 [millerods.com](http://millerods.com)

"You can cast a 1/16-ounce hair jig out of sight with 5-pound-test Gamma, and it gets deep quicker," Gutierrez says. "I take bass at 22 to 35 feet with that setup all day."

## Light-Line Recommendations



Gutierrez also likes 4-inch plastics on 1/16-ounce Frenzy Baits Wack-A-Sack Wacky Jigs.

"I can fire them way out there with longer rods," he says. "At 40 feet I can count it down and walk it through the water column at different levels. Let the articulating jig kiss bottom and the plastic flips, shudders and swings, and light line allows it much more freedom. With heavy line you can't throw as far, it doesn't get deep fast and it doesn't perform as well."

The relatively new Z-Man Ned Rig is another example. It's an ultra-finesse technique that's maximized with 1000-series spinning reels and light braided lines.

Drop-shot rigs, light hair jigs, finesse plastics, under-spin jigs, wacky rigs – many techniques are more productive with light line.

Australian pro Carl Jocumsen, now in his second season on the FLW Tour, is on board as well, often incorporating

## On Hooking and Playing Fish

### Jocumsen:

"Longer rods set hooks better, but be mindful of hook thickness and sharpness; otherwise it won't penetrate. Thin-wire hooks are critical because a light leader nullifies the low stretch of braid. You need thin-wire hooks to penetrate before the leader breaks."

### Gutierrez:

"We all have that textbook hookset, and it's too violent. A longer rod lets you lay into them without snapping lines. You have to be patient and play the fish out. I throw 4-pound test on a regular basis, even for largemouths on the California Delta, catching 10- to 12-pound fish in weeds and wood or buggy whips. If you're patient you can land big fish in those environments. I'm not worried when a giant dives into the weeds. Eventually they move. Once it starts to shake, you put pressure on it and keep doing that until it swims right out."

14-foot-long leaders of 6-pound-test fluorocarbon with 4-pound-test braided main line for finesse tactics fished on spinning gear.

"Long-rod, light-line tactics defined me in Australia," Jocumsen says. "Now it's a big part of my success here. I use Millerods, known for longer blanks. My

rods are 4 to 6 inches longer than standard – some just under 9 feet.

"More anglers are using longer rods and lighter lines on the Tour every year," he adds. "And it will keep trending that way. Lures evolve, and many new ones just won't perform right on heavier line." ■

## Light-Line Bait Options





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# The FOREST For The TREES

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How to deal with rising water  
and flooded cover

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*By Rob Newell*

ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN HAND



**R**ising water and flooded cover can be the boon or bane of fishing success. On one hand, water coming up 2 to 4 inches a day on a reservoir in the spring-time is rocket fuel for epic fishing conditions. To pitch up to the base of a bush and get answered with a solid thump is the pinnacle of the bass fishing experience, which explains why flooded cover is always so alluring. It's the first thing on a lake that draws a bass angler's eye.

On the other hand, rising water can also leave you lost in a flooded forest when that same flooded cover that looks so inviting leads you down a really long rabbit trail, resulting in fruitless hours of casting and ultimate disbelief as to why all that great-looking cover didn't produce a bite.

"Flooded cover is a prime example of a condition where anglers want bass to be in places where they want to catch them," says 2007 Forrest Wood Cup winner Scott Suggs. "Soon as anglers see flooded cover, they head straight for it."

Suggs, however, knows better than to jump in headfirst. As a native of Arkansas, he has seen his fair share of rising water and flooded cover in Ozark impoundments.

"Just because water is up in cover does not always mean the bass are up there, too," Suggs warns.

Jason Reyes of Huffman, Texas, understands exactly what Suggs is talking about. As a Texan who has a penchant for flipping flooded cover, he, too, is familiar with the temptation to jump longingly into it.

"Flooded cover looks so good it has a way of drawing you in without really considering the bigger picture," Reyes says. "All it takes is a couple of bites to make you think it's a happening deal when really it's not."

So how can you tell the good flooded-cover conditions from the bad? When is it better to ferret out a bite in flooded cover, and when is it better to back out and leave the woods alone?

For some retrospect, we can turn to the 2017 FLW Tour events held at Lake Travis, Lake Cumberland, Beaver Lake and the Mississippi River at La Crosse, where pros dealt with the good, the bad and the ugly of rising water and flood conditions.



## The Old Shoreline

Ironically, the first order of business in any flooding or high-water situation is not necessarily to find where the water is, but rather to find where it was: the old shoreline.

In some cases, the old shoreline is the old waterline from before the lake began to rise. This can be the result of a short-term, temporary rise from a series of heavy rains, or the return to “normal” water levels following a major drought. In other cases, where the water level fluctuates more regularly, the old shoreline is anywhere between the winter pool line and the summer pool line, where the bank is worn from constant erosion.

Whichever is the case, the old shoreline provides a sort of home base for bass in times of rising water and high water, even in the spring when the spawn is in full effect.

“There is something about the old shoreline that bass are drawn to,” says Tour pro Mark Rose, who won the first flood-water event of the 2017 season at Lake Travis. “Maybe it’s like their old neighborhood: Even though there are new subdivisions going in with the new water, they still like their old stomping grounds better.”

Despite the thousands of acres of flooded bushes and woods at Lake Travis in mid-February, Rose won the event

“offshore” in 25 to 35 feet of water on what he considered to be the old shoreline – where the old waterline was during Travis’ drought.

Suggs agrees that bass definitely orient to the old shoreline.

“The old shoreline is a grounding area for bass when water levels go haywire,” Suggs says. “When trying to decipher how far bass have or have not moved with the water, you have to be aware of how far you are from the old shoreline at all times.”

In addition, the old shoreline serves as a fundamental baseline, providing a truer frame of reference for how far the water has traveled than the numeric elevation in relation to sea level.

For instance, a 10-foot rise on a vertical bluff is just 10 feet of extra water against the bluff, but that same rise on a vast flat might flood a quarter mile into the adjacent shore area.

Knowing how far the new rise is from the old waterline is critical in giving an angler some idea of how far fish have to travel to get to the newly flooded cover. Think of it as a band of new water around the lake. The band is thinnest in areas where the old shoreline is closest to the new one, which makes the search more manageable in certain areas.

**“THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE OLD SHORELINE THAT BASS ARE DRAWN TO”**

– MARK ROSE

### Consider Bottom Composition

If you plan to follow water up into newly flooded cover, Scott Suggs has two words to consider: bottom composition.

“I think one of the biggest reasons bass like an old shoreline is because it usually has hard bottom,” Suggs offers. “So many times when anglers do catch fish from flooded cover, they’re fishing up in flooded campgrounds, parking lots, roads, boat ramps, gravel washes, rock veins and even lakefront lawns. Bass seem to like those kinds of areas. My theory on that is it has to do with the bottom. When they do move up with a flood, they still want hard bottom instead of some old leafy, soft soil kind of forest bottom.”

## A Slow-and-Steady Rise

Without a doubt, slowly rising water of some 2 to 4 inches a day is a premium fishing condition, especially in the spring. As the water slowly creeps in over the old shoreline and up the bank, fish have plenty of time to acclimate to their new surroundings. With each passing day, fish almost seem to race each other to the next piece of flooded cover. Even if the water pushes up into the woods, debris mats and “sawdust piles” form, giving bass bonus canopies to hide under.

This is similar to what Andy Morgan experienced at La Crosse in 2017 when he followed rising water into the woods to finish third on the Mississippi River.

Along those same lines, fishing is usually good when the water gradually recedes after a flood. Dropping water causes fish to set up in predictable locations in drains or out on point cover.

## The Challenge of Fast and Furious

Where things get weird with flooded cover is when water comes up fast, like several feet per day. For Rose, the decision

of whether to stay focused on the old shoreline or follow the water up the bank is primarily made based on the water color.

“If the incoming water is muddier than the normal water color, chances are fish will move up the bank with increased water level; they’re basically forced to,” Rose says. “That kind of rise often moves bait and changes water temperatures. It disrupts everything.”

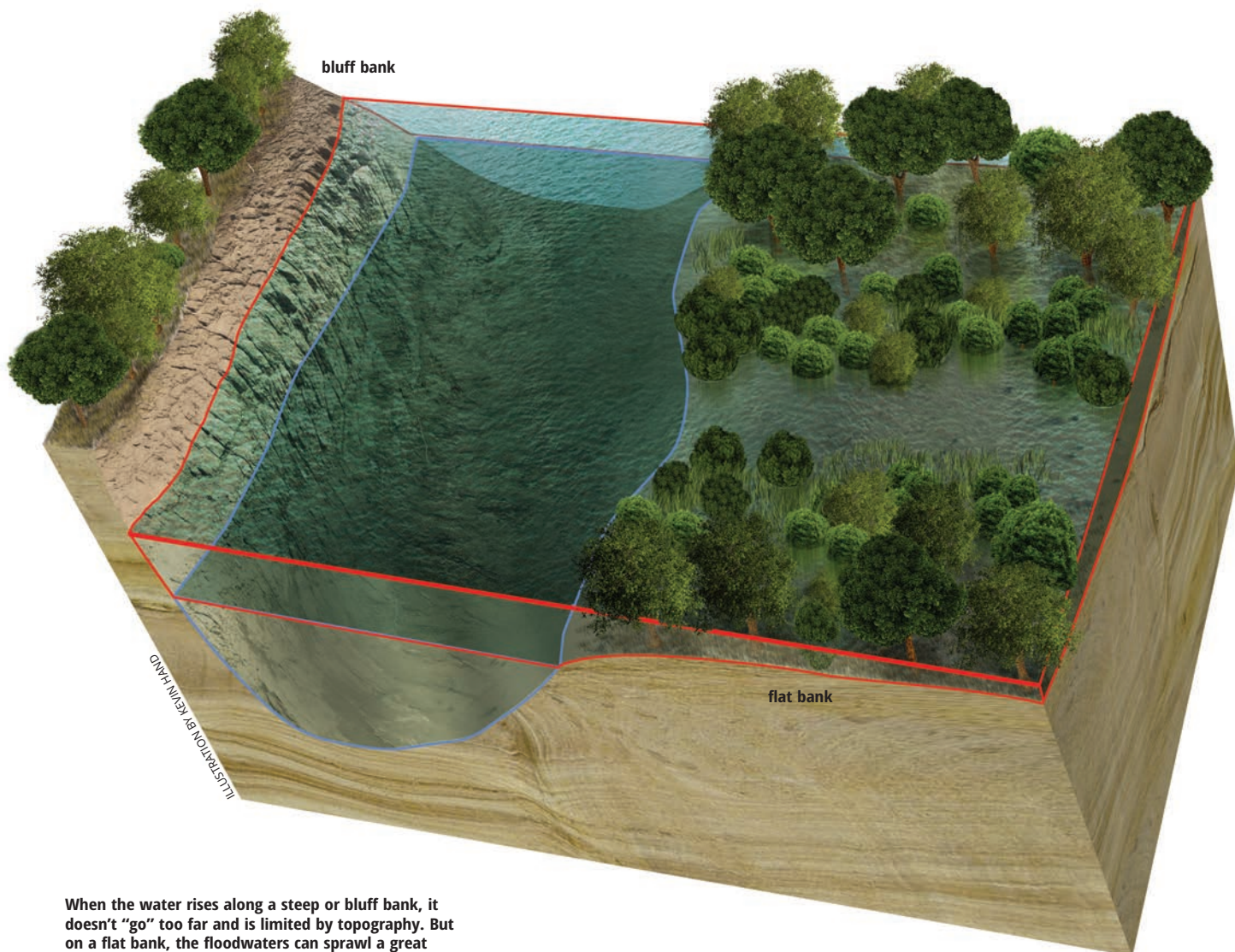
“But if a lake comes up 10 feet and there’s very little change in water clarity, those fish really have no reason to make any sudden moves off that old shoreline, especially on lakes with a lot of fluctuation. They’ll hang out there until the water stabilizes.”

The Beaver Lake Tour event in 2017 was a perfect example to illustrate Rose’s point. From practice and through the tournament, the lake rose some 8 to 10 feet.

Johnny McCombs won by chasing rising water, and Jason Reyes finished second by sticking with the old shoreline.

The difference?

Just as Rose said: water clarity.



**When the water rises along a steep or bluff bank, it doesn't “go” too far and is limited by topography. But on a flat bank, the floodwaters can sprawl a great distance, giving bass much more territory to use, if they're willing to disperse into it.**

When the water shot up 8 feet in four days at Beaver Lake, Reyes stayed right where he had located a few bedding fish during practice – on the old shoreline.

“I was fishing in the mouth of a major creek and didn’t lose any clarity or water temperature on the old shoreline,” he says. “I think those fish actually liked having that kind of additional security on top of them. Why do they need to move any farther up into bushes?”

In contrast, the water where Johnny McCombs won the Beaver Lake event was being impacted by incoming mud. Water on the old shoreline along his stretches was turning colors, forcing him to move in behind tree lines and up onto lawns into bands of clearer water that hadn’t been stained by the runoff coming down the river.

In the case of fast, rising water, clarity and stability are the keys. If the water stability is compromised, which usually happens with fast rises on rivers or riverine impoundments, then it’s probably time to head for the flooded cover.

## Lure Considerations

When trying to decipher where fish are in a rising or high-water situation, several specific lures can aid in the process.

When fishing the old shoreline, football jigs, swing-head jigs and Carolina rigs are fantastic choices for dragging around on bottom. It’s also wise to keep a lure or two on the deck for targeting fish suspended in trees or bushes around the old shoreline. Wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senkos and swimbaits should fill the bill for this.

However, when it’s time to move up into the flooded cover to look around, typical flipping baits such as jigs, tubes and creatures are obvious choices. In addition, Mark Rose says topwaters – especially buzzbaits and frogs – are critical for probing flooded cover.

“Fish that move up in that stuff really like to suspend right up in the top layer of the water column, in the middle of bushes, around floating debris, and near vines and junk hanging in the water,” Rose offers. “So be prepared with something you can skim the surface with. Also, a spinnerbait is still a solid pick in those conditions.”

However, a sudden rise on the lower end of a clear-water impoundment is more likely to leave the fish right about where they were.

## The Long-Term Rise

Extended high-water events, such as when a lake refills after a prolonged drought, pose even trickier conditions for anglers to deal with.

Most pros agree that after water first stabilizes on new ground, some fish will move up into the newly flooded cover for a brief period of time – two weeks at the most, usually. When new water inundates dry ground for the first time, it produces a unique feeding opportunity as crawfish, worms, larvae and bugs scurry for new ground. But once that initial feed is over, bass tend to retreat out of the woods as the submerged vegetative biomass begins to rot.

At Lake Travis, the water had been sitting up in new growth that had sprouted up during the drought for nearly a year. Rose notes this was a key component in his decision to stay out and fish the old shoreline at Travis.

“I went up in that flooded stuff a couple times during practice because that’s where the fish should have been,” Rose says. “But I didn’t like it up there. To me the water had been up in the woods too long, and everything was sort of rotting. The water had a funny color to it, and there was algae clinging to everything. I’m not a biologist, but I don’t think bass like to be in that kind of funky water when they could be out somewhere where the water looks better and the bottom is cleaner.”

Suggs concurs that the “souring effect” Rose describes is a real condition that fish avoid.

“The same thing happens when sinking brush,” Suggs says. “A fresh, leafy green brush pile is awesome for the first week or two it’s in the water. But once the leaves start decomposing, it ‘sours,’ and fish won’t use it again until six months later when all the leaves are gone. Now imagine a whole forest flooded with that kind of decay going on. Those fish are headed out, most likely to the old shoreline to find some better water and better feeding conditions.

“When the water has been in the woods for a long time, anglers can get in trouble trying to force that bite in flooded cover,” Suggs adds. “Remember, just because it’s flooded, doesn’t always mean it’s good.” ■



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN

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# THE BUZZZ IS BACK

## 4 BUZZBAIT PATTERNS THAT NEVER WENT OUT OF STYLE

*By Ken Duke*

**F**ishing is fashion. You won't see the latest tournament jerseys or topwater baits on the runways of Paris, but anglers can be as fickle as any fashionista. Just consider worm colors over the last 40 years. Some of the hottest colors of previous decades – blueberry, motor oil, pumpkin – have basically disappeared today. Only a few – black, watermelon, green pumpkin – have stood the test of time. The bass didn't change. They still eat the "old" colors. It's fishermen who changed. The fashion of the day changed them.

It's true of lures, too. The spinnerbait was once universally regarded as among the most versatile bass lures available. You can fish it fast or slow, deep or shallow, in heavy cover or in open water. But over the last decade, the spinnerbait has fallen out of – you guessed it – fashion. It's been largely discarded in favor of vibrating jigs and square-bill crankbaits.

The buzzbait has undergone a similar change in popularity. After rising to prominence in the 1970s, some of the luster wore off over time. Bass didn't just stop attacking buzzbaits, but other lures came along, and anglers opted for Zoom Horny Toads and River2Sea Whopper Ploppers instead of reaching for a buzzbait.

Today, however, the venerable surface agitator is making a comeback – and for good reason. There are things you can do with a buzzbait you just can't do with another type of lure – and that pester a bass into biting.

The buzzbait resurgence is real and coming to a fishery near you. To help you get back in the groove, let's run down a few great patterns relied upon by four talented pros who know a thing or two about catching bass on buzzbaits.





## Bryan Thrift: Speed Demon

**Tournament proving grounds** – The two-time FLW Tour Angler of the Year grabbed the top prize at the FLW Tour Invitational on Lake Norman in September 2016, and a lot of his winning catch came on buzzbaits. It was probably true of several top finishers, but the way Thrift fished the lure made all the difference.

“I love a buzzbait in the fall because I can fish it fast and cover a lot of water,” says the North Carolina pro. “Plus, you can catch fish on it anywhere – backs of creeks, around docks and grass, even on main-lake points over 15 feet of water.”

**Gearing up** – At Lake Norman, Thrift caught several spotted bass on a Damiki MTB Noisy Buzzbait (natural shad skirt with a silver blade). He threw it on a 7-foot, heavy-action Fitzgerald Stunner HD casting rod matched with an Abu Garcia Revo STX Gen 4 reel (8.0:1) loaded with 20-pound-test P-Line Original. It’s a combination the Tar Heel pro uses with

great success everywhere he fishes in the fall. Thrift doesn’t like braid for buzzbaits – preferring mono or copolymer – and he doesn’t use trailer hooks.

“I want the fish on the big, strong main hook,” Thrift says, “not on a little trailer hook. Plus, the trailer hook will often catch just enough in a bass’ mouth that the main hook can’t get any penetration.”

**Dialing in** – A key to Thrift’s favorite fall buzzbait approach is his retrieve. Not only is he fishing the bait faster than most other fishermen are likely to, but he also adds action by twitching the rod tip throughout the presentation.

“Every five or six cranks, I’ll pause for just a half-second and twitch the rod tip. I think it gives the bait a little added attraction. Plus, it makes my buzzbait look a little different than everyone else’s, and I think it helps to pull bass from deeper water or make a following fish commit to the bait.”



Damiki MTB Noisy Buzzbait

## David Dudley: Storm Chaser

**Tournament proving grounds** – At a prespawn Tour event on South Carolina’s Lake Murray, three-time AOY David Dudley fished a buzzbait pattern that’s as unusual as it is effective. To hear him describe good buzzbait conditions is to appreciate what a tremendously instinctual fisherman he is.

“The thing about a buzzbait bite is that there’s a certain feeling in the air,” Dudley says. “It’s a tool that you’re not going to use all the time, but when the time is right, it’s hard to beat.”

There were scattered thundershowers that day on Lake Murray. Dudley and his co-angler picked up an early limit with other techniques and had a decent catch early, but he knew better fish were available. That’s when Dudley looked to the skies and felt the makings of a buzzbait bite.

“I could see a thunderstorm in the distance and decided to run to it,” he explains. “I fired up the outboard and ran until I was about a mile ahead of it. Then we started fishing. The mile lead gave us about a 15-minute head start on the bad weather, and the fish were killing the buzzbait.”

When the weather got too rough in that spot, Dudley scanned the heavens again and ran to another set of clouds. By the time his day was over, he had more than 20 pounds of buzzbait bass.

**Gearing up** – “I was throwing a big, black-skirted buzzbait with a black blade and a clacker that added a lot of noise,” Dudley says of his Lake Murray tournament. “To fish it, I like to use a 7-foot-3, heavy-action Favorite Fishing Summit casting rod with a high-speed baitcaster.”

**Dialing in** – For Dudley, the buzzbait is a lure for all seasons – prespawn to late fall. Early in his career, he considered it a low-light, cool-weather bait, but now he won’t hesitate to fish it in the heat of summer, especially when pattern windows open up – for instance, in advance of a storm. He also uses it when panfish moving shallow to spawn are luring hungry bass with them.

“They call bluegills ‘sunfish’ for a reason,” he claims. “You can usually find them in shallow water – especially during their spawn in warm weather – and if they’re shallow you’ll find bass close by. It’s all about the food chain. And even though a buzzbait doesn’t look anything like a bluegill, it’s a great tool for catching bass feeding on panfish.”



Cumberland Pro Lures Buzz Bait with Clacker



## Justin Atkins: Forget Finesse

**Tournament proving grounds** – Although 2017 Forrest Wood Cup champion Justin Atkins won the tournament on an ima Little Stick 135 (pencil popper), he also had a strong practice pattern going with a buzzbait. Whenever conditions seem favorable, he looks for opportunities to throw the noisy topwaters.

“I’m always trying to incorporate additional patterns as I fish a tournament,” Atkins explains, “and a buzzbait is a great tool for summertime bass, especially when bluegills are shallow and spawning in early summer. When you have hot weather and clear water, the bluegills will bring the bass shallow, and you’re going to have a buzzbait bite.”

**Gearing up** – Atkins’ buzzbait of choice is typically the 3/8-ounce Guerilla Buzz by Prototype Lures in white with a silver blade or black on black. Early in the season, he’ll use a skirted

bait, but in the summer he replaces the skirt with a small swim-bait such as the 3 1/2-inch Berkley Havoc Grass Pig in green pumpkin watermelon. The soft plastic better emulates the 3- and 4-inch bluegills that bass are usually targeting.

He throws it on a 7-foot, medium-heavy Abu Garcia Villain 2.0 casting rod with a Revo STX Gen 4 reel (8.0:1) and 30- to 50-pound-test Spiderwire Ultracast braid. It’s a beefy combo.

**Dialing in** – Atkins emphasizes that this is no finesse pattern. His gear and the baits he prefers are not going to catch timid, spooky fish. In summer, he likes buzzbaits that make a lot of noise and will adjust them until they do.

“I want the blade to be banging against the head,” he says. “I want as much noise as I can get. I’m not trying to catch drop-shot fish here. I want to catch the aggressive bass that are looking to eat, and I want them to know my bait’s there and come to it.”



Prototype Lures Guerilla Buzz



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

## Andrew Upshaw: Old School Squeak

**Tournament proving grounds** – At 31, Forrest Wood Cup qualifier Andrew Upshaw might be young, but he has an old-school appreciation for the sport and for buzzbaits. You’d expect nothing less from an angler whose first-ever bass outing at the age of 16 was on Sam Rayburn Reservoir with the legendary Tommy Martin. Their best five weighed nearly 29 pounds. After that, he was hooked.

And it was also at Sam Rayburn in October 2014 that Upshaw had his favorite buzzbait memory as a pro. It was a Costa FLW Series tournament, and high winds forced him to abandon the pattern he found in practice and “just go fishing.” He wound up targeting turns and points in vegetation with a black 3/8-ounce Nichols Impulse buzzbait. He used the lure not only to catch fish, but also to locate them. If he missed a strike, he followed up with a prop bait and ended the day with 19 pounds, 15 ounces and the lead.

“The fish were not aggressive,” Upshaw recalls, “so I went with a smaller buzzbait to entice them to bite. On a cloudy,

nasty day in the fall, that can be a great way to get a lot of bites from quality fish.”

**Gearing up** – Upshaw’s tools of the trade for buzzbait fishing include a 7-foot-3, medium-heavy Lew’s Custom Speed Stick Series Mag Hammer, a Team Lew’s Custom Pro Speed Spool SLP Series casting reel (7.5:1) and 30-pound-test Seaguar Smackdown braid. The relatively light braid increases casting distance for the young pro.

**Dialing in** – One concession that Upshaw makes to the old school of buzzbait fishing is his preference for lures that squeak. And like the buzzbait fans of generations ago, he’ll hang a new buzzbait outside his truck while driving to the lake. After 15 or 20 miles of churning at high speed, the blade shaft starts to wear, leading to an enhanced squeaking sound that he believes draws strikes.

Thrift, Dudley, Atkins and Upshaw know that the buzzbait never stopped catching bass – including plenty of big ones. It just fell out of fashion for a while. ■



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# FLW TOURNAMENT COVERAGE AND RESULTS

# ON TOUR



## WHAT'S INSIDE: FREDERICK FINISHES IN STYLE AT OKEECHOBEE

Offshore tactics that dominated at the Harris Chain

The mojo rig gets it done on Lake Havasu

How Lasyone bested Rayburn the old-school way

The latest BFL, College Fishing and High School Fishing results

# FLW TOUR | LAKE OKEECHOBEE

CLEWISTON, FLA.

By Sean Ostruszka  
PHOTOS BY ANDY HAGEDON



## WINNING ANGLER

**Tim Frederick**  
Leesburg, Fla.

**Winning Weight:**  
85-04 (20 fish)

**Details:**  
Jan. 25-28, 2018

Presented by Evinrude

Hosted by Roland & Mary Ann Martin's Marina & Resort; Hendry County Tourism Development Council

**T**im Frederick has a love/hate relationship with Lake Okeechobee.

The hate crept in two years ago. The Big O was the site of his very first tournament as an FLW Tour pro, and he finished dead last.

Yet, being from Florida and having fished Okeechobee many times, he still loved how it fit his strengths. Two years later, that love only grew stronger when Frederick utilized his knowledge of how big female Florida strain bass

spawn around cover to pull off his first Tour victory in dramatic fashion. His tournament was capped by a 9-pounder landed in the waning minutes of day four that vaulted him over Bryan Schmitt of Deale, Md.

Okeechobee put anglers through a roller coaster of a week. A significant cold front and dismal practice preceded a fresh wave of giant females that rolled in the first two days of the tournament, followed by strong and switching winds

that kept anglers worried every night if their areas would muddy up and be ruined. Frederick stayed steady throughout the event thanks to his Sunshine State background and one key area that actually wasn't even fishable up until last fall.

## The Area

Hurricane Irma destroyed a lot when it hit Florida last fall, and that destruction didn't miss Lake Okeechobee. Massive

## WINNING LURES

Frederick used a one-two punch in terms of lures. He'd start by casting a Texas-rigged black blue flake Strike King Ocho or a black blue flake-blue tail Strike King Shim-E-Stick on a 3/16-ounce weight, dragging it through likely spawning areas. He'd follow that up with a Strike King Pure Poison Extreme Action Swim'n Jig and another custom vibrating jig.



sections of vegetation and reed lines are simply gone, torn away by the storm.

For most pros, the damage was a negative. The lack of vegetation to flip was the obvious sore point, but the lack of barrier reeds also allowed persistent winds throughout the winter and even during the event to churn up most of the lake.

Because of wind and lack of vegetation in many of the traditionally best areas of the lake, only two areas produced the best fishing throughout the event: Harney Pond and South Bay. Both managed to retain relatively clear water, and pros flocked to them. More than 30 anglers could be seen fishing either locale at any given time the first two days, and eight of the top 10 anglers ended up making the cut in those areas.

Frederick could also be considered in the Harney Pond crew, but not exactly. While most were tucked up near the Harney Pond Canal,



Frederick focused his time out near the Spoil Islands, where Hurricane Irma had actually carved out an area of reeds roughly 100 yards wide. The open swath was pretty well protected from the wind, and Frederick had it mostly to himself. What made it even more special

were its seemingly unending patches of pencil reeds, pads and debris left behind, as those would be the key to his winning pattern.

## The Pattern

Frederick's home waters are the lakes that comprise the Harris Chain, but Florida bass tend to act similarly regardless of the fishery. That's especially true when it comes time to spawn.

"The females like to bed right next to pieces of cover," Frederick says. "Through years of fishing for them, I've gotten to know exactly how they like to set up on cover, which helps when you can't see them [the beds] like you couldn't see them during this tournament."

Frederick's pattern boiled down to bed-fishing for bass he couldn't see. Here, he relied on his years of knowledge to make educated guesses as to where a big girl might be located.

"I was hitting any pieces of cover I could see, focusing on any point or anything

unique on the edges of whatever cover it was," Frederick says. "That's usually where they'll set up."

Because of the wind, Frederick would anchor his boat with his Power-Poles and then methodically – sometimes taking a couple minutes to bring in a cast – work a piece of cover before lifting his poles and drifting in range of another piece of cover. Then he'd pole down and repeat the process.

He used a one-two punch for lures starting with a soft-plastic stick bait and dragging it along to feel the roots of the cover, knowing bass will expose the roots of vegetation when creating their beds. If he felt roots, he figured

there was a bed there. If there were no takers on his Texas rig, he'd toss in a vibrating jig and slowly reel it along the bottom until he got it into the presumed bed, where he'd pop it off the bottom in hopes of garnering a reaction strike.

## TOP FIVE

NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
1. TIM FREDERICK	LEESBURG, FL	85-04	20	\$100,200
2. BRYAN SCHMITT	DEALE, MD	84-02	20	\$30,000
3. MARK ROSE	WEST MEMPHIS, AR	78-05	20	\$25,500
4. JARED McMILLAN	BELLE GLADE, FL	73-13	20	\$20,100
5. BRANDON McMILLAN	CLEWISTON, FL	69-12	20	\$19,000

## WINNING CO-ANGLER



**Jeffrey Mathews**  
Maitland, Fla.

**Winning Weight:**  
42-01 (10 fish)

### Winning Program:

Jeffrey Mathews drew pros Christopher Brasher and Andrew Upshaw, who both happened to be fishing the Harney Pond area.

On day one, he sacked up 15 pounds, 12 ounces behind Brasher by throwing a 1/2-ounce green pumpkin Z-Man/Evergreen ChatterBait Jack Hammer in "fairly open water," where his pro believed the fish were staging.

The plan was the same on day two, only Mathews' ChatterBait broke, forcing him to use a homemade version borrowed from a friend.

"It had a different skirt that was bream-colored, and I think that made the difference," says Mathews, who brought in 26 pounds, 5 ounces to win the co-angler crown and \$20,000. ■

# FLW TOUR | HARRIS CHAIN OF LAKES

LEESBURG, FLA.

By Curtis Niedermier



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

## WINNING ANGLER

**Chris Johnston**  
Peterborough, Ontario

**Winning Weight:**  
79-06 (20 fish)

**Details:**  
Feb. 22-25, 2018

Presented by Lowrance

Hosted by Lake County, Florida

**D**espite landing smack dab in the middle of the protracted Florida spawning season, the Harris Chain FLW Tour event was dominated by anglers “fishing out” in offshore grass in Lake Harris for prespawn and postspawn fish. The offshore bite was undoubtedly the most consistent, allowing anglers such as tournament champ Chris Johnston to

outlast the guys who weighed a few whopper bags of spawners for only one or two days, but struck out come the weekend.

Johnston started his tournament in Lake Griffin, about an hour of travel time (including passing through a lock) from the takeoff in Lake Harris. He actually caught a couple spawners in Griffin before returning to Harris and finishing his day in the lake’s offshore hydrilla.

On day two, with an early check-in time, Johnston decided not to make the long run and started about two minutes from the ramp. It quickly became clear to him that he wouldn’t have to leave Harris again.

Johnston parked his Ranger on the edge of a hydrilla bed in about 12

feet of water and held it in place with the Spot-Lock feature on his Minn Kota Ultrex. Bass and other predatory fish were feeding on spawning shad along a 100-yard-long indentation in the edge of the hydrilla, and Johnston worked on them consistently with a jerkbait and lipless crankbait until about 9:30. He stayed for another hour, then found a 4-pound kicker in another area that led to the tournament’s biggest limit – 25 pounds, 7 ounces.

Johnston’s strategy on his offshore spot involved working a jerkbait in the narrow band of water above the hydrilla to catch numbers of fish, then ripping a lipless crankbait off bottom out from the edge where the bigger bass were feeding beneath the fray of



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PROFESSIONAL	
1 JEFF GUSTAFSON	77-0"
2 JOHN HUNTER	75-13"
3 GLENN BROWNE	73-15"
4 BUDDY GROSS	69-15"
5 MATT GREENBLATT	69-1"
6 TONY DIMITRAS	68-3"

ravenous white bass and smaller largemouths. The lipless lure caught an 8-6 kicker that anchored his 25-pound-plus day-two limit.

Despite the potential of his offshore spot, Johnston knew a win wasn't a sure thing because the morning bite was critical, yet his shad spawn flurry ended earlier and earlier as the tournament progressed. The spot produced small limits for Johnston both Saturday and Sunday to get him started each day. After that, he supplemented his catch by rotating a few secondary grass areas and leaning hard on a schooling flat that fellow Canadian pro Jeff Gustafson shared with him.

"I really like that flat because it's probably the closest real big grass flat to Venetian Gardens [the tournament takeoff site], and there are so many big fish

TOP FIVE	NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
	1. CHRIS JOHNSTON	PETERBOROUGH, ON	79-06	20	\$125,200*
	2. JEFF GUSTAFSON	KEEWATIN, ON	77-00	20	\$30,100
	3. JOHN HUNTER	SHELBYVILLE, KY	75-13	20	\$25,000
	4. GLENN BROWNE	OCALA, FL	73-15	20	\$20,000
	5. BUDDY GROSS	CHICKAMAUGA, GA	69-15	20	\$19,000

\*Includes Ranger Cup

released here," he says. "The water is 10 feet deep, and the hydrilla is 8 feet tall. There are little pockets in the hydrilla. They [the bass] get in those little pockets and wait for shad or something to come by, and then they feed."

In the schooling area, he fished a white vibrating jig with a Jackall Rhythm Wave 4.8 swimbait trailer. On the last day, Johnston made several stops on the flat where he eventually dialed in a few key spots.

According to Johnston, the bass on the schooling flat were roving in wolf packs, feeding in sporadic flurries of activity, which

was a common theme among the offshore contingent at Harris Chain. Some pros reported cycling through the same areas multiple times, perhaps striking out on the first visit, but loading the boat on a subsequent stop. Others worked slowly in a small area and waited for the fish to fire up, and then they'd suddenly catch several in a row. Regardless of how the pros timed the feeding flurries, success required ample patience, and making repeat visits to the schooling flat saved Johnston's tournament once his shad spawn fish ran out.

## WINNING CO-ANGLER



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

**Ryan Eckman**  
Okeechobee, Fla.

**Winning Weight:**  
35-00 (10 fish)

### Winning Program:

Eckman caught most of his fish in offshore grass by winding a Zoom UV Speed Worm (experimenting with retrieve speed was critical) or dragging a Yamamoto Senko. He also worked in a jerkbait on his last day of fishing to catch a key 2-pounder in the wind.

A miracle final catch helped him seal the win by 2 ounces on Friday.

"Clayton [Batts, his boater partner] says, 'I got one. Get the net,'" Eckman recalls. "I went to set the rod down and felt a bite. So I set the hook, went and grabbed the net while it [the rod] was loaded up, kept tension on it, landed his fish, took the tension back up on mine and landed it. That fish, and it was only a 14-incher, is what won it for me. It was beyond believable." ■

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



## FAST OR SLOW

Most of the offshore anglers who did well in Lake Harris keyed on edges or openings – "holes" – in the hydrilla beds in the main body of the lake. Two tactics produced: slowly soaking a soft-plastic worm or winding a reaction bait such as a Zoom UV Speed Worm, lipless crankbait or vibrating jig. Runner-up Jeff Gustafson's ChatterBait technique was unique. Part of the time he wound the bait over the grass tops, popping it free of any snags, which isn't anything new. But when he encountered open holes in the grass, Gustafson ripped the jig up and down like a lipless crankbait to create the same sort of sudden aggressive presentation.

# COSTA FLW SERIES | LAKE HAVASU

LAKE HAVASU CITY, ARIZ.

By Jody White  
PHOTOS BY MATT PACE



## WINNING ANGLER

**Shaun Bailey**  
Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

**Winning Weight:**  
49-05 (15 fish)

**Details:**  
Feb. 8-10, 2018

Presented by Ranger Boats

Hosted by Lake Havasu  
City Convention &  
Visitors Bureau

Western Division

Shaun Bailey has been close to the top quite a few times in FLW competition on Lake Havasu, including a pair of fourth-place finishes, but until this season he wasn't able to close the deal on a win. Finally, the local pro got it done when the Western Division returned to Arizona in February.

Bailey followed an off-shore script that he's previously used successfully for a number of high finishes on the Colorado River reservoir, and it resulted in three consecutive bags of more than 15 pounds each.

Bailey, who primarily targeted brush piles in 15 to 22 feet of water, weighed 15 largemouths from the multi-species fishery. Havasu has tons of artificial "habitats," or man-made fish cribs, planted as part of the Lake Havasu Fisheries Improvement Partnership, and they're popular fishing targets in major tournaments. Yet Bailey avoided them because they are hard

to exploit and aren't as productive these days as the brush piles planted in recent years.

Bailey fished slowly, and only targeted a handful of brush piles each day. Because of his confidence in his spots, the Havasu guide was willing to sit on certain piles for what seemed like ages in an effort to fool a big one.

Bailey picked apart his brush piles with a finesse Carolina rig – or mojo rig – as well as a couple crankbaits.

"That's been my bread and butter here for years," says Bailey of his finesse rig.

"Everyone likes to drop-shot here, and I never drop-shot. I throw a little mini-Carolina rig with a Roboworm on it and fish the same stuff as everybody else. I think I get a few more bites."

Fishing with a 1/8- to 1/4-ounce bullet sinker on his rig, Bailey varied between a 4 1/2-inch Roboworm Curly Tail Worm or a 4 1/2-inch Roboworm Straight Tail Worm, both in oxblood light red flake. His crankbaits included the Evergreen CR-8 and CR-16 in fire craw and olive craw, as well as a shallower-running Evergreen Spin Craft crankbait.

## HAIR MAKES WAVES

Several top 10 anglers relied on the SPRO Phat Fly and small marabou jigs, and they fished them a variety of ways. Chris Kinley (fourth) washed his with the current in the river as though nymphing for trout. David Valdivia (second) essentially dead-sticked his. Tom Leedom (sixth) used a technique popular among Upper Midwest small-mouth anglers and swam his back to the boat.

Though hair didn't win, it's just another sign that there's something special about clear water and the natural movement of a tiny, fuzzy jig.

## WINNING CO-ANGLER



**Jason Akins**  
Apple Valley, Calif.

**Winning Weight:**  
32-14 (9 fish)

### Winning Program:

Jason Akins blanked on day one, but rallied back hard while fishing behind Shaun Bailey and David Valdivia on days two and three. He did it all by dragging a brown and green 3/8-ounce jig and fishing a 3/16-ounce drop-shot with brown and green Roboworm Straight Tail Worms. ■

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# COSTA FLW SERIES | SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR

BROOKELAND, TEXAS

By Rob Newell  
PHOTOS BY JESSE SCHULTZ



## WINNING ANGLER

**Kevin Lasyone**  
Dry Prong, La.

**Winning Weight:**  
53-01 (10 fish)

**Details:**  
Feb. 15-17, 2018

Presented by YETI

Hosted by Jasper-Lake  
Sam Rayburn Area  
Chamber of Commerce

Southwestern Division

**W**henver the Costa FLW Series visits Sam Rayburn Reservoir in Texas during the pre-spawn, you can bet that drains – ditch-lined valleys in the lake bottom – are going to play a primary role in the fishing patterns because they create caverns, lanes and avenues in the grass for the fish to migrate through and stage before spawning.

Kevin Lasyone, who has fished Rayburn for more than 25 years, mastered the drain game this time around. Lasyone took control of the leaderboard on day one with 31-6 and expanded his advantage on day two with 21-11. On day three, Lasyone was

declared the winner when a fog delay extended beyond four hours and forced an early end to the competition.

Though everyone in the top 10 focused on drains, those Lasyone targeted were better because they were less pressured following a barrage of tournaments over the preceding weeks.

“The drains I fished were located in the Ayish side of the lake,” Lasyone says. “I think a lot of guys counted that side out because it has not had as much grass in it the last several years. Last summer the grass came back strong in there, and so did the bass, but I don’t think many knew just how good

the fishing was in that arm of the lake.”

Lasyone’s fish were also deeper, where stumps were positioned on the outside grass lines. While others favored the 5- to 10-foot depth zone in the drains – places that could easily be reached with lipless rattlers, square-bills and vibrating jigs – Lasyone kept his boat in 25 feet and cast up into 12 to 15 feet of water.

“The grass grew out to about 10 feet, and there were a few stumps just outside that grass line in about 12 to 15 feet,” Lasyone says. “I’d cast the jig to the outside of the grass and drag it through the stumps.”

## WINNING CO-ANGLER



**Louis Ferguson**  
Woodville, Texas

**Winning Weight:**  
35-14 (10 fish)

### Winning Program:

Louis Ferguson caught the biggest bass of the tournament, weighing 10-5, which helped push him to victory lane. He caught the gargantuan bass from a grassy drain on day two with a Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap in a color called retro red. Ferguson also caught some fish on a white swim jig. ■

## WINNING BAIT

Lasyone’s primary lure during the event was a 3/4-ounce V&M jig in black/blue/gold. He paired the jig with a watermelon seed crawfish trailer and a V&M J-Bug creature bait. When conditions became calm and slick and the bite got stingy, he switched to a V&M Wild Thang worm with a 1/2-ounce weight. All lures were fished on 20-pound-test fluorocarbon.

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**T-H MARINE FLW BASS FISHING LEAGUE**

**Gator Division – Kissimmee River – Jan. 13, 2018**

**Boater: Robert Crosnoe, Inverness, Fla. – 18-07**

Flipping mud mats on east side of Lake Kissimmee with a hematoma-colored Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver

**Co-angler: Larry Branch, Kissimmee, Fla. – 17-05**

**Savannah River Division – Lake Keowee – Feb. 3, 2018**

**Boater: J.R. McCay, Helen, Ga. – 15-07**

Targeting stained water, laydowns, docks and stump flats with a SpotSticker casting jig tipped with a green pumpkin Strike King Rage Craw

**Co-angler: Ryan Lesley, Williamston, S.C. – 11-04**

**Gator Division – Lake Okeechobee – Feb. 10, 2018**

**Boater: Ronnie Buck, Miami, Fla. – 26-01**

Fishing Dyess Ditch area with a junebug-colored Gambler Fat Ace

**Co-angler: Brian Malys, Bartow, Fla. – 25-03**

**South Carolina Division – Lake Hartwell – Feb. 10, 2018**

**Boater: Jayme Rampey, Liberty, S.C. – 18-14**

Keying on ditches with a Buckeye Lures Su-Spin Blade and a white Zoom Super Fluke Jr.

**Co-angler: Keith Carroll, Edgefield, S.C. – 11-01**

**Arkie Division – Lake Ouachita – Feb. 17, 2018**

**Boater: Teddy Bogard, Rison, Ark. – 16-14**

Fishing the back of pockets on upper end of lake with a red craw Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap

**Co-angler: Dusty Rhoades, Gravelly, Ark. – 11-07**

**Bama Division – Lake Martin – Feb. 17, 2018**

**Boater: David Gaston, Sylacauga, Ala. – 15-02**

Targeting floating docks using a Davis Bait Company Wood Jig with a black and blue flake NetBait Paca Chunk Sr.

**Co-angler: Randall Wiggins, Birmingham, Ala. – 13-04**

**Bulldog Division – Lake Lanier – Feb. 24, 2018**

**Boater: Ben Brisbois, Gainesville, Ga. – 20-11**

Fishing offshore with an Ike's penguin-colored Rapala DT10 and an electric shad SpotSticker worm

**Co-angler: Ronald Harris, Jefferson, Ga. – 14-12**

**Choo Choo Division – Lake Guntersville – Feb. 24, 2018**

**Boater: Derek Remitz, Grant, Ala. – 30-05**

Targeting deep green grass with a lipless crankbait and a square-bill

**Co-angler: Brandon Taylor, Russellville, Ky. – 20-06**

**T-H MARINE FLW BASS FISHING LEAGUE (continued)**

**North Carolina Division – Lake Norman – Feb. 24, 2018**

**Boater: Jeff Queen, Catawba, N.C. – 22-01**

Flipping boat docks with a 3/8-ounce KJ camo-colored Queen Tackle flipping jig and sandy flats with a 1/2-ounce green pumpkin Queen Tackle Hammerhead jig

**Co-angler: Tristen Trull, Mt. Holly, N.C. – 12-08**

**Volunteer Division – Norris Lake – Feb. 24, 2018**

**Boater: Rob Linkous, Rogersville, Tenn. – 18-01**

Fishing main lake on Clinch side with an Ike's demon-colored Rapala DT6

**Co-angler: Matt Brown, Harriman, Tenn. – 12-08**

**YETI FLW COLLEGE FISHING**

**Southern Conference – Sam Rayburn Reservoir – Jan. 13, 2018**

**Tarleton State University – Stephenville**

**Chad Jones and Graham Godwin – 17-15**

Working steep banks packed with hydrilla using a gold lipless crankbait and a Strike King Red Eye Shad in sexy shad

**Southeastern Conference – Lake Seminole – Feb. 10, 2018**

**Bethel University**

**Cole Floyd and Carter McNeil – 28-01**

Targeting hydrilla in deep ditches with Strike Red Eye Shads in craw and bone white

**Western Conference – Lake Havasu – Feb. 10, 2018**

**Oregon State University**

**Eric Kennedy and William Eschliman – 9-09**

Running upriver targeting rock and submerged wood with reaction baits and drop-shot rigs

**BASS PRO SHOPS HIGH SCHOOL FISHING OPENS**

**Lake Mitchell Open – Lake Mitchell – Jan. 14, 2018**

**Oxford High School, Oxford, Ala.**

**Logan Tice and Andrew Harris – 16-04**

Slow-cranking laydowns and docks in the mid-lake area using Rapala X-Rap Shads and Glass Shad Raps

**Norris Lake Open – Norris Lake – Feb. 25, 2018**

**Peoria High School, Peoria, Ill.**

**Connor Jacob and Samuel Smith – 16-08**

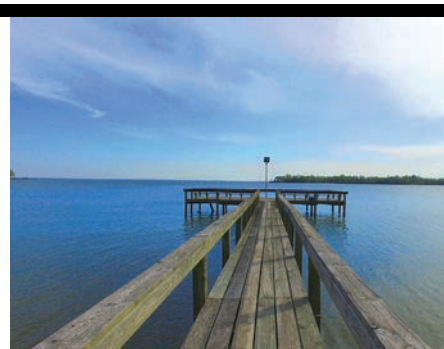
Cranking near the dam with orange craw Rapala DT6 crankbaits



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# TBF



## WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

By Dan Johnson



### BULL SHOALS BATTLE BREWING

#### 2018 TBF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

The Bass Federation's National Championship promises to provide fans and competitors with a three-day blast of nonstop bass action as 108 of the sport's top anglers battle for grassroots supremacy.

Set for April 9-14 on Bull Shoals Lake out of Flippin, Ark., the event involves an elite field of 54 boaters and 54 co-anglers, who qualified through 22 district competitions in TBF's National Semi-Finals system.

"Thanks to the success of the new Semi-Finals program, 2018 championship participants will compete for an all-time record payout of nearly \$300,000 in cash and prizes," says TBF President and CEO Robert Cartledge.

"Anglers will practice in their own boats Monday and Tuesday [April 9-10], then transfer their gear to brand-new, Evinrude-powered Ranger boats for the final day of practice," Cartledge continues. "Everyone will fish out of these state-of-the-art Rangers on Thursday and Friday [April 12-13], after which the field will be cut to the top boater and co-angler from each of the TBF's seven divisions for Saturday's final round [April 14]."

#### A STORIED HISTORY

Bull Shoals Lake has been the playing field of many epic bass tournaments since its creation in the early 1950s, and for good reason. The White River impoundment holds impressive numbers of largemouth and smallmouth bass, plus beefy spotted bass. It offers anglers nearly 50,000 acres of surface water plus hundreds of miles of shoreline, which is largely undeveloped and dominated by limestone bluffs, shelf rock, chunk rock and gravel.

Potential bass-holding areas include countless points, coves, ledges, channels and other sweet spots. Though the lake lacks significant submerged weed growth, it holds numerous artificial fish habitat structures. High water routinely adds flooded shoreline vegetation to the mix, including buttonbushes and water willows.

Past championships on Bull Shoals have produced exciting action, including heroic rallies and unexpected lead changes. Back in March 2009, for instance, West Virginia Bass Federation member Robert Harkness

mounted a relentless comeback to win the championship.

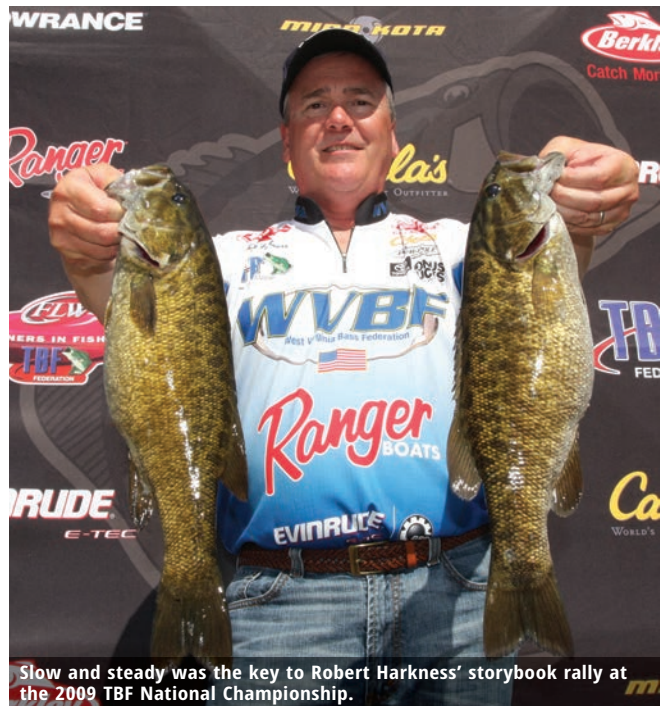
Harkness climbed from 17th place on day one all the way to first in the final round with a 40-pound, 13-ounce sack over three days.

"I really didn't think I had a prayer when I went out the last morning," Harkness admits now. "But Bull Shoals is a great lake. You can get five bites, and they could all be 4 or 5 pounds

apiece, so it's never over until it's over."

The West Virginia angler caught bass on everything from swimbaits fished over deep timber to grubs in much shallower water, but the majority of his fish came on a Megabass Vision Oneten jerkbait in staging areas.

"The water temperature was in the 50s, and the bass were prespawn," he says. "I'd reel the bait down 6 to 8







Steven Taylor will represent Kentucky at the 2018 championship.

and have two more trips planned. Plus, before I went down there, I marked areas I wanted to fish on my electronics, to save time when I arrived at the lake."

Taylor's reconnaissance has been enlightening, though he admits packing for the showdown has required a Herculean effort. Tactically speaking, he expects a variety of baits and techniques to play roles in the championship.

"When you come down to pre-fish a tournament like this, you load everything you own," he says. "Same thing

when you hit the water. My first trip to Bull Shoals, I had 19 rods on the front deck, so I was ready to throw anything. Now I'm down to three with my top presentations."

After studying past tournament results and fishing Bull Shoals himself, Taylor has an idea about what kind of weights it will take to do well in the championship. Typically, 12 pounds a day will put an angler in the top four or five, especially in multiple-day tournaments. Taylor thinks an average of 15 pounds a day is likely to win the title.



Mike Webster, of Arkansas, qualified for the championship at Lake Dardanelle.

Arkansas' Mike Webster, who qualified for the championship by winning the boater division at the District 6 Semi-Finals event on Lake Dardanelle Sept. 16-17, believes even heavier bags might be needed to claim the crown.

"I think we'll see a lot of 10- and 12-pound bags," says Webster. "You'll need 15 to 16 pounds a day if you want to have a shot at winning. Plus, considering the quality of the fishery and the competition, it could take 18 or even 20 pounds a day, [depending on] whether the bass are locked on the beds or still in prespawn mode, eating to get fat."

Webster expects runoff and water temperature to be major factors. If the water is cold, favored lures could be lipless and diving crankbaits and spinnerbaits. Conversely, if the water is warm and high, exploring shoreline cover with the usual flipping and pitching favorites will be popular, whether the fish are bedding or not.

"There are so many bass in Bull Shoals it's unreal," Webster adds. "Catching limits shouldn't be a problem. Finding the 3- to 5-pound bites is another story. If you can figure out how to get those fish – and find multiple areas that hold them – you'll be in good shape."

Like his fellow competitors, Webster says winning the championship and Living the Dream package would truly be a dream come true.

"Getting a chance to fish the FLW Tour would be an awesome deal," he says. "The TBF championship winner also qualifies to fish the Forrest Wood Cup, which is on Lake Ouachita this summer [Aug. 10-12]. I'd love a shot at winning that." ■

## CATCH THE ACTION

Prior to the big event, news updates and angler profiles will be posted on TBF's Facebook page and at [bassfederation.com](http://bassfederation.com).

Longtime TBF sponsor Ranger Boats, based in Flippin, Ark., will host the championship.

"Ranger and the Federation both got their start in 1968, and are still together to celebrate our golden anniversaries," Cartledge notes.

Bull Shoals Lake Boat Dock is the site of launches and weigh-ins all three days. Bass fishing fans are invited to see the anglers off each morning and enjoy the weigh-in action starting at 3 p.m. each day.

If you can't make it to Bull Shoals, coverage of the TBF National Championship will stream live daily on [bassfederation.com](http://bassfederation.com) and be broadcast nationally on Federation Angler TV, which airs on the Pursuit Channel. For complete listings and showtimes, visit [pursuitchannel.com](http://pursuitchannel.com).

## ABOUT BULL SHOALS

**Dam construction:**  
1947-1951

**Size:**  
48,195 acres

**Maximum depth:**  
approx. 220 feet

**Average depth:**  
approx. 75 feet

**Minimum length requirement:**  
15 inches

**Major forage species:**  
threadfin shad, sunfish

**Major tributary:**  
White River

# 2018 TOURNAMENTS:



**FLW BFL Choo Choo Division | April 7, 2018**

**FLW Tour 2018 (Smith Lake) | April 26–29, 2018**

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## TBF CHAMPIONSHIPS FEATURED ON TV

TOURNAMENT COVERAGE TO AIR ON *FEDERATION ANGLER TV*



*Federation Angler TV* offers TBF members and high school anglers a chance to showcase their bass-fishing skills in front of millions of viewers.

One of the many benefits of membership in The Bass Federation is the unique opportunity to showcase bass-fishing talents in front of a national audience in episodes of *Federation Angler TV*.

Here's a rundown of what's coming.

### TBF CHAMPIONSHIP

At 8 p.m. ET on Tuesday, April 10, watch TBF anglers from across North America clash in the 2017 TBF National Championship on world-famous Table Rock Lake out of Kimberling City, Mo.

Ever-changing conditions, a challenging bite and fierce competition tested boaters' and co-anglers' mettle as they battled for a share of more than \$300,000

in cash and prizes — including TBF's coveted \$100,000 Living the Dream package.

Coverage of the 2017 TBF National Championship re-airs at 11 p.m. the same evening (April 10), and again at 8 a.m. on Saturday, April 14.

### HIGH SCHOOL FISHING WORLD FINALS

More great bass tournament action is on tap Tuesday, May 1 at 8 p.m. and 11 p.m., and on Saturday, May 5 at 8 a.m., when *Federation Angler TV* covers all the action at the Student Angler Federation's 2017 High School Fishing World Finals. More than 650 high school anglers competed for more than \$170,000 in scholarship money

and other prizes on the famed waters of Pickwick Lake out of Florence, Ala.

A record field of 332 teams from 33 states and Canada was winnowed down through four grueling days of competition befitting a world championship event. Spoiler alert: One team stunned the crowd with a five-bass limit weighing a whopping 24 pounds, 9 ounces on the final day. Tune in to see whether it put them over the top.

Such exciting tournament action is must-see TV for any bass fan who enjoys watching some top grassroots and high school anglers put their skills and strategies to the ultimate test.

For complete listings, showtimes and details, visit [pursuitchannel.com](http://pursuitchannel.com). ■



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# BRANDON McMILLAN

Clewiston, Fla.

*By Sean Ostruszka*

**How'd you make out with the hurricane last fall?**

For the most part we were good.

**Having lived in Florida your whole life, have hurricanes just become normal for you?**

They are. You know, we go five or six years without one, and then we'll get one or two. It's just normal.

**You're nuts.**

Nah, you know what's nuts? This past one was the first time in 34 years where I left the state for a storm. I'm never leaving again. It's way more dangerous on the road than dealing with the hurricane.

**Seriously?**

There are only three roads in and out of Florida, and all of them were flooded with people. Then there was a gas shortage.

**So you're just going to barricade yourself inside your house, huh?**

Actually, I told my wife the next time we see one coming I'm booking hotel rooms on each side of the state. Then 10 hours before landfall I'm going to the side it's not going to hit. This past one chased me up the entire state.

**Which family is better on Lake Okeechobee: The McMillans or the Martins?**

Oh, man. That's not a good question. I mean, I have to pick us. One, because if I don't I'll get in trouble from my family, and two, there's more of us. They have Scott and Roland. Roland still fishes a lot of local stuff, but Scott is like me. We both don't get to fish there near as much because we're traveling too much. We have my brothers, Jared and Dylan. Jared is probably the best on Okeechobee right now.

**Does it pain you to say your younger brother is better than you at something?**

No. Not at all. I like seeing it. He's a really good angler, and my dad always said my youngest brother, Dylan, had the most potential of all of us. He's only 19 and hasn't won anything big yet, but it's coming.

**Your dad, Jimmy, was a legend on that lake. Was it ever hard fishing in his shadow?**

Nah. He made it easier for us growing up, teaching us how to fish. He's been gone seven years last January.

**What's one of the biggest things he taught you that you still remember?**

Not to panic on the water. I remember a tournament where he finished second to JT Kenney. I believe he was leading going into the final day. Well, his third fish was a 7- to 8-pounder, and he lost it. He turned to the camera and calmly said "there goes \$100,000," and went back to fishing like nothing happened. A few minutes later he caught a 9-pounder. That always stuck with me.

**Is fishing all you do?**

Heck no. I'm a UPS driver full-time. I've been delivering boxes for 13 years.

**So how does that work with fishing the Tour?**

There was a deal when the economy tanked where we were offered as many unpaid weeks as we wanted because we were union and they couldn't fire us. So I took them up on it.

**That has to be a lot of work.**

It is. There are those times when I'm driving through the night after a tournament to be at work on Monday.

Every year I tell my wife I'm going to quit my job and just fish. One day I will, hopefully. ■



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