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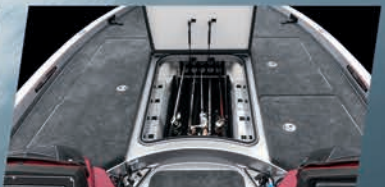
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WHAT STAGE ARE YOU?

I recently listened to an interesting podcast with legendary angler, TV show host and lure designer Larry Dahlberg. Even if you don't know who Dahlberg is, you've probably used a bait that he designed: the River2Sea Whopper Plopper. If you haven't used one, what the heck? Stop reading and go spend some money.

In any case, on the podcast, Dahlberg talked about the various stages of fishing that anglers go through as they learn and develop their skills. I don't know if he was the first to identify the stages; I've heard them described before. I just know that his description got me thinking about my own progression.

Here they are: Stage 1 – The angler tries to catch a fish ... any fish. Stage 2 – The angler tries to catch a lot of fish. Stage 3 – The angler tries to catch big fish. Stage 4 – The angler pursues a particular discipline or technique and tries to catch fish the way he wants to catch them (on topwater, with a fly rod, in remote locations, with big swimbaits, etc.) in order to fulfill a specific desire or meet a challenge.

Dahlberg's outline applies to general anglers who fish for multiple species, but it also applies to bass fishing specialists, with the idea being that the skills learned in each stage set up the subsequent stage.

Think about your progression as an angler. Did it follow a similar course? For a lot of you, I'm sure it did.

My personal journey always seems to be fluctuating between the stages. Some days, all I want to be is a perch jerker, and I can while away an afternoon yanking on easy bream or taking advantage of ignorant pond bass that can't pass up a topwater walked overhead. That fits Stage 2 and the numbers game. Other days, I'm all about hunting big fish (Stage 3), and I tie on a swimbait or a jig and go where the grown ones live. I've also experienced some Stage 4 phases, like that summer with the fly rod, the year I refused to fish deep and many days when I wouldn't throw anything but a frog just because I was obsessed with dialing in the frog bite in as many situations as possible.

I'm always bouncing around, and I think I know why: I have too many interests, both in fishing and elsewhere. I haven't found that one fishing pursuit that captures all my attention. I enjoy dabbling in each of the stages.

I can tell you that's not how most serious tournament anglers, including the pros who fish the FLW Tour, feel about fishing. They're mostly Stage 4 people whose "way they want to catch them" is to target the biggest five-fish limit possible in the style associated with modern tournament bass fishing.

They have what I don't: an unwavering focus on one pursuit. That's among the reasons why they're so good, and why I write about them instead of fishing against them.

Frankly, I'm envious that they've found their niche and pursue it with so much passion. I'm jealous that I don't have a long-term Stage 4 interest.

Which isn't to say that I'm not satisfied with my life as an angler. I am. I love to fish, just like you do, and I'm content knowing that it'll always be an important part of my life. And one day, if I become a Stage 4 angler, maybe I'll try working my way up the FLW ranks, or maybe I'll just be the best dang pond-fishing fly-rod slinger you ever met.

Curtis Niedermier, Editor-in-Chief

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FISHING EXPOSED
CROSS LAKE — JUNE 2, 2018





ONE HOOK, \$100,000

Nick LeBrun suspected he was looking at “the juice” when he cast his 6th Sense Movement 80X crankbait past a small cluster of cypress trees next to a ditch in a Cross Lake bayou. And he knew he’d hooked a good one when his crankbait came to a sudden stop as he brought it past one of the trees. When the fish tail-walked in front of him is when LeBrun realized his good fortune might be short-lived, and his T-H Marine BFL All-American hopes were in jeopardy.

“There’s just one hook in it,” he said.

Sometimes, in bass fishing, we get lucky. Sometimes luck has nothing to do with it. LeBrun didn’t need luck. He stayed calm and cool, like he’d been all week long, and swiftly steered the 5-pounder into the net held by co-angler Mike Allen, who’d hustled to the front of the boat to assist.

The two anglers shared a high five and a hug before LeBrun made the cull that secured his All-American championship win, which he dedicated to his late father, Billy LeBrun.

At weigh-in, Nick told the crowd that he’d felt his father’s presence in the boat with him on that final day. Perhaps in that moment, when Nick’s hopes hung on just one hook, Billy was there, watching over his son’s shoulder, rooting for him, guiding him, proud of him for becoming an All-American champion.

PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER



60 in 60



The face of fishing is changing. It's becoming more diverse. Younger. Multicultural. And that is great considering that 45 percent of current anglers are 50 years of age or older and will likely age out of the sport over the next 25 years. Without a significant influx of new anglers through proven recruitment activities, retention of existing anglers and reactivation of lapsed anglers, a process known as R3, the sport we all love is headed for decline. But I'm not worried. Not only will we avoid a decline that once seemed inevitable, we will grow participation thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation and American Sportfishing Association working alongside state fish and wildlife agencies, industry, and organizations like FLW and the nonprofit FLW Foundation. Together we are on the cutting edge of an industry-wide effort called "60 in 60."

The aim of 60 in 60 is to grow participation from the current 47.2 million U.S. anglers to 60 million anglers by the end of 2021. When successful, the effort will generate more than \$500 million for conservation through fishing license and tackle sales. Better conservation means better fishing, and better fishing means more participation. It's a model of sustainability, and one that we wholeheartedly support. Fishing, after all, is a participation sport, and nobody puts more people on the water fishing than FLW and the FLW Foundation.

We do this through Unified Fishing Derbies targeting multicultural families with children ages 6 to 17. We do it through High School Fishing tournaments, summer camps and grants to accelerate the adoption of High School Fishing as a school-sanctioned activity. We do it with a hierarchy of tournaments for college students, weekend anglers, aspiring professionals and top professionals alike. We do it with the help of expert anglers known as FLW Ambassadors who volunteer each year to kick off National Fishing and Boating Week by sharing the joy of fishing with families and children at #ReelFun Fishing events in Walmart stores nationwide. This year 735 FLW Ambassadors heeded the call to visit a record 2,000 Walmart stores backed by support from RBFF, Wildlife Forever, Zip Firestarters, Pringles and Jack Link's. If you want to see the future of fishing, do a quick search for #ReelFun on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. Thank you is not enough to express my sincere appreciation for our dedicated FLW Ambassadors and all that they do to help improve the family fishing experience that is so critical in creating new anglers.

The 2017 Special Report on Fishing prepared by RBFF and the Outdoor Foundation concluded that engaging potential anglers with meaningful fishing opportunities at an early age is essential for success, as research shows that 83 percent of current anglers were introduced to the sport during childhood. After age 12, a person is much less likely to try fishing. If someone has not fished by age 18, it is nearly impossible to create a new angler. For the current majority of anglers, a traditional pathway to fishing included introduction to the sport by a family member or relative. That pathway is in serious decline, however, for a variety of socioeconomic reasons, which is why FLW and the FLW Foundation have redoubled efforts to create new mentoring relationships that introduce children to fishing and provide ongoing opportunities for positive fishing experiences.

Our latest endeavor is the FLW Kids Club website, FLWKidsClub.com, where elementary and middle school children and their parents can learn from FLW Foundation pro Cody Kelley and Boy Scouts of America pro Tom Redington, among others. It's designed as a destination for online mentoring to ensure that young anglers and their caregivers always have someone they can turn to for advice and information on fishing activities close to home. We've just scratched the surface, so look for more interactive FLWKidsClub.com content in the months and years to come.

Yes, the face of fishing is changing, but its heart is not. The worldwide family of FLW anglers, whose dedication to the sport and willingness to lend a helping hand are without equal, remains the heart and soul of fishing. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Trish Blake

Trish Blake
President, FLW Marketing Division

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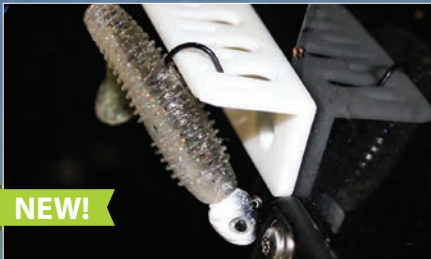
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FLW WINS OUTDOOR SPORTSMAN FISHING AWARDS



The *FLW* television program was recently recognized with two awards in the 18th Annual Outdoor Sportsman Fishing Awards. The awards are presented by Outdoor Sportsman Group – Networks, but winners were selected by fishing fans via online voting. More than 125 shows and hosts were eligible for consideration.

The *FLW* program won Fan Favorite Competition Series and Fan Favorite Best Catch. The latter was awarded to the show segment that featured Mark Rose catching his winning fish at the 2017 *FLW* Tour event at Lake Guntersville.

Congratulations are also in order for *FLW* pro Scott Martin, who won Fan Favorite Host and Fan Favorite Show for his *Scott Martin Challenge* series.

“Our audiences agree that Outdoor Channel, Sportsman Channel and World Fishing Network are home to the greatest fishing shows on the planet,” Outdoor Sportsman Group Vice President of Programming Mitch Petrie says. “Congratulations to all the nominees and award winners. Their passion to make fantastic television is evident.”

Visit outdoorchannel.com/vote to watch the winning videos.

2019 FLW TOUR SCHEDULE ANNOUNCED AT ICAST

FLW announced its 2019 *FLW* Tour schedule in July at a special press conference on the show floor at ICAST. The Tour will once again feature seven tournaments with six-figure paydays and cash prizes awarded through 60th place. Along with the prize money at the Forrest Wood Cup championship and the \$100,000 Pennzoil Marine Angler of the Year award, the circuit will pay out more than \$6.5 million in 2019. The site of the 2019 Cup will be announced later this year.

DATE	FISHERY	LOCATION	HOST
Jan. 10-13	Sam Rayburn Reservoir	Brookeland, Texas	Jasper County Development District
Feb. 7-10	Lake Toho	Kissimmee, Fla.	Experience Kissimmee and Experience Kissimmee/Kissimmee Sports
March 7-10	Lake Seminole	Bainbridge, Ga.	Bainbridge Convention & Visitors Bureau
March 28-31	Grand Lake	Grove, Okla.	City of Grove/Cherokee Casino Grove
April 11-14	Cherokee Lake	Jefferson City, Tenn.	Economic Development Alliance, Jefferson County
May 2-5	Lake Chickamauga	Dayton, Tenn.	Fish Dayton/Rhea Economic and Tourism Council, LLC
June 27-30	Lake Champlain	Plattsburgh, N.Y.	City of Plattsburgh/Adirondack Coast Visitors Bureau

THRIFT ESTABLISHES PRO BASS FISHING CONSECUTIVE LIMITS BENCHMARK

Bryan Thrift’s record-setting path of dominance on the *FLW* Tour has now bled out into the overarching “pro bass fishing” record books. On day one of the *FLW* Tour event at Lake St. Clair, Thrift extended his streak of consecutive limits in Tour competition (regular-season Tour events and the Cup) to 58, which, according to bass fishing historian and stats guru Ken Duke, is one better than the Bassmaster Elite Series record that is held by Kevin VanDam.

VanDam set the Elite Series record during a period spanning from day one of the 2008 Kissimmee Chain event to day three of the 2009 Mississippi River event in Iowa. Thrift’s active streak, which stands at 61 (he made the top-10 cut at St. Clair), dates back to day two of the 2016 Tour event on Pickwick Lake. He surpassed Cody Meyer’s former Tour record of 50 consecutive limits on day two at Lake Cumberland in April.



PHOTO BY ODD WHITE

UK WILDCATS VISIT FLW OFFICE

In June, FLW hosted members of the University of Kentucky Athletics Department, led by UK Athletics Director Mitch Barnhart, when the Wildcats came to Marshall County, Ky., as part of the university's Big Blue Caravan tour. Marshall County is the home community of the FLW operations division.

FLW employees provided a tour of the office and *FLW Live* studio, as well as some history of FLW and its role in the growth of competitive bass fishing.

"I think most of them were very surprised at just how big the sport of bass fishing is, not only in Kentucky, but across

the world," says Kathy Fennel, FLW president of operations. "For most of them, this was their first introduction to the sport."

The Big Blue Caravan was an outreach effort led by Barnhart that included a five-day tour of communities within Kentucky. The stop at Marshall County included a public appearance at Marshall County High School, where people in the community were invited to visit with Barnhart, as well as student-athletes, UK Athletics Department staff, basketball coach John Calipari and football coach Mark Stoops. ■



PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

MEET OUR MACHINERY




Name: *Charlie Bolton*
Job: *Blank Specialist*
Service: *10 Years*

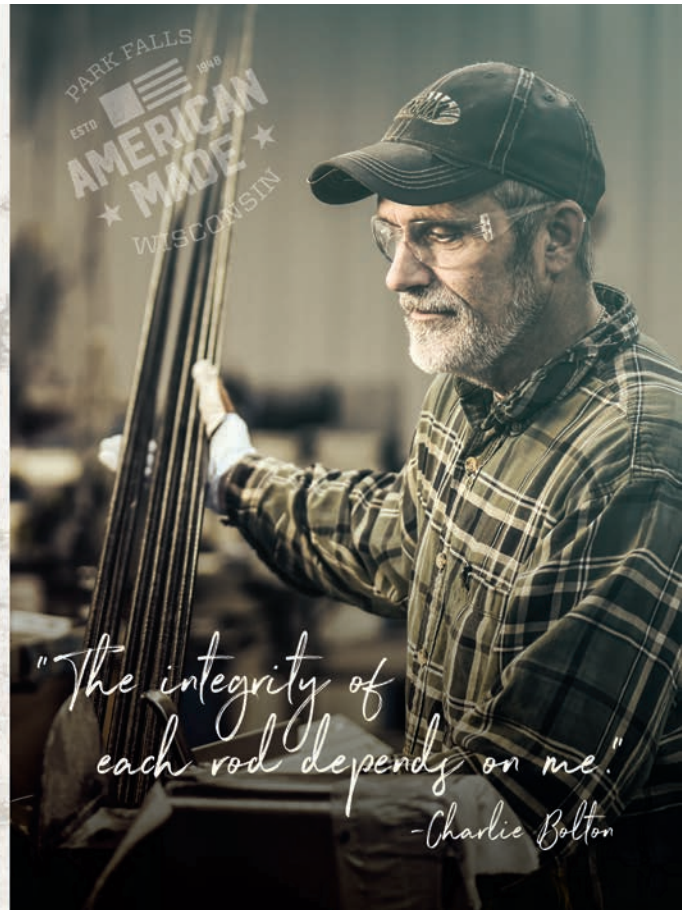
Charlie is an accomplished angler and a seasoned St. Croix craftsman. He owns one of the 32 pairs of hands behind the production of each St. Croix rod. Every year he personally sands and inspects over 250,000 rods - and has the calluses to prove it. Sure it takes time, but it's the only way we know how to ensure you get the precision and performance expected from a St. Croix rod.

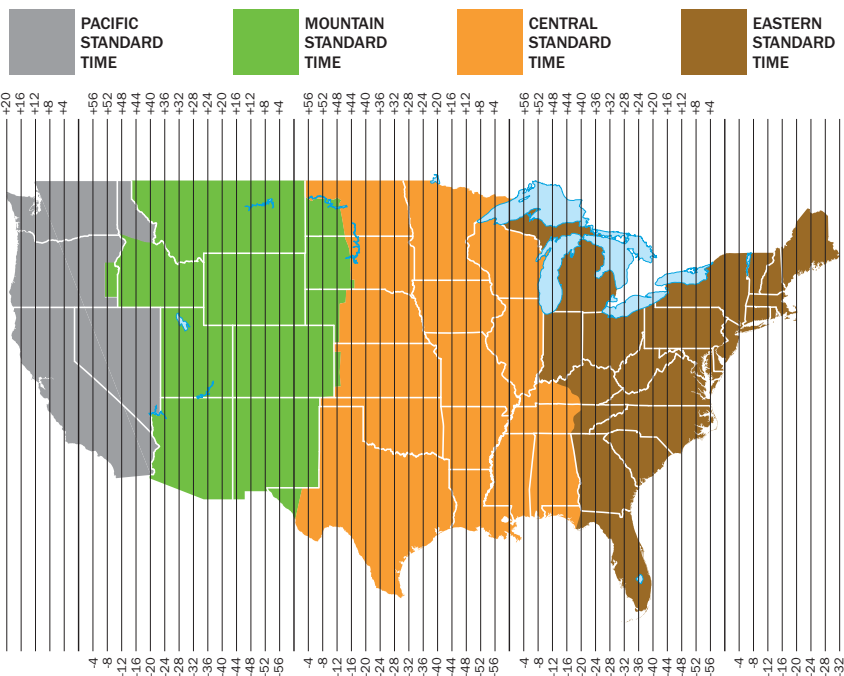
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1	Wed	8:10	2:00	8:35	2:20		1	Sat	9:15	3:05	9:45	3:30	
2	Thu	9:00	2:50	9:25	3:10		2	Sun	10:10	4:00	10:40	4:25	
3	Fri	9:45	3:35	10:15	4:00		3	Mon	11:05	4:55	11:35	5:20	☾
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27	Mon	5:10	11:20	5:30	11:50		27	Thu	6:15	12:05	6:40	12:25	
28	Tue	6:05	—:—	6:25	12:10		28	Fri	7:00	12:50	7:30	1:15	
29	Wed	6:45	12:35	7:10	12:55		29	Sat	7:55	1:45	8:25	2:10	
30	Thu	7:35	1:25	8:00	1:45		30	Sun	8:50	2:40	9:20	3:05	
31	Fri	8:25	2:15	8:50	2:35								

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

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ROB NEWELL

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Occasionally, FLW assigns me to cover YETI FLW College Fishing tournaments. When I do, I'm always impressed by how respectful, composed and attentive these young anglers are, both on and off the water.

During the 2017 FLW College Fishing National Championship I was interviewing a college team as the anglers' proud parents stood nearby and listened in. Each of the young men answered my questions directly and with quite an impressive degree of expertise.

At one point, I said, "Wow, you guys sound like professional anglers."

"You think so?" one of them questioned politely. "Then why do I need a college degree? I just want to fish."

I could feel the stare of the proud parents burning a hole through me, waiting for my response. I guessed this had been a recent topic of discussion in the household. Obviously the parents were waiting for my canned "stay in school" speech, but I didn't have one prepared.

I didn't dole out any "get a degree first" advice that day because I was once in those very shoes, and I see both sides of the argument. I went to college at Auburn University, a campus surrounded by fantastic bass fishing impoundments. This was long before the days of FLW College Fishing, but I became a member of the Auburn Bass Club, and after experiencing the tournament-fishing lifestyle with the great guys in that club, I couldn't have cared less about getting a college degree. The arguments with my parents about staying in school never ended until the day I graduated from college.

In my opinion, a college degree is not a requirement to fish the pro tours. These young anglers can walk the walk, talk the talk and catch fish, so who am I to tell them to stay in school?

In my case, I've only been asked about the specifics of my educational background once, *maybe* twice, in 25 years of working in the fishing industry. Yes, I do have examples of successful professional anglers who earned degrees and now fish professionally: Anthony Gagliardi, Bryan Thrift and Michael Neal, just to name a few. But for every pro who has a college degree, there is a pro without one.

That's how I felt until a recent conversation with longtime FLW Tour pro Terry Bolton gave me reason to wave the stay-in-school flag. Bolton and I were talking, catching up on fishing and life, when he mentioned he was excited about his new job.

New job?

"I now work full time for HealthWorks Safety out of Paducah as a senior safety engineer," Bolton said proudly.

Wait. What?

Engineer?

"I thought you had to have a college degree to be an engineer?" I countered.

"I do have a degree," Bolton said with a laugh. "I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in occupational safety and health management from Murray State 23 years ago. I've never used it until about four years ago when a part-time opportunity came up for a safety position. I was qualified for it thanks to my degree, and I jumped on it."

Since his academic training ended some 20 years ago, Bolton had to attend a few classes to get up to speed on the new protocols for safety compliance in the modern era, and now he's working full time while still fishing the FLW Tour.

Bolton's job shed a new light on the earning-a-college-degree argument.

For two decades Bolton lived the life so many of today's young anglers dream of: a full-time bass pro traveling country. In his early years he was a two-tour pro on the FLW Tour and Bassmaster Top 150. Then he switched to just the FLW Tour and Costa FLW Series. He acquired a nice portfolio of paying sponsors, qualified for 13 Forrest Wood Cups and earned more than a million dollars on the water.

He was living the dream, so why in the world would he want to go get a job?

"I got to tour the country as a full-time professional angler for two decades," he says. "And I loved it; I wouldn't have traded it for anything. But the reality is I'm 48 years old now, and I'm not going to do this forever; that's just a fact. And the last time I checked, there was not necessarily a retirement plan or pension for pro bass fishing.

"Here's another thing," he continues. "Life changes. Young guys who want to fish so bad right now will not understand this, but as you get older you realize there are other things in life than just going to the next bass tournament that's 500 miles away. I still love fishing, but I don't want to be trapped in that road warrior tournament-fishing lifestyle when I'm 60."

Today's young anglers are using college to prepare them for the marketing and business side of pro fishing. Bolton's specialty degree likely prepared him in other ways, and is now a nice bridge from professional tournament fishing to professional safety inspection.

Since much of his new work is carried out in manufacturing plants along the Tennessee River, his old career and his new career have blended nicely. His notoriety as a pro angler has helped get his new working relationships off on the right foot.

"Fishing is a way of life along the Tennessee River," Bolton says. "So a lot of the guys that I work with in these facilities are fishermen, too. Sometimes when I enter the building they'll joke and say, 'Hey, what are you doing here? There are no fish in here.' Fishing is a great common ground on which to get to know these guys, and I'm enjoying a new identity as 'Terry, the safety guy' instead of 'Terry, the fisherman.'"

Despite new time demands with work, he's still able to fish the FLW Tour and accommodate his sponsors' requests. Ironically, Bolton believes his new role in life has actually helped his fishing.

"Due to my job I simply do not have the time to obsess and fret over tournaments anymore," Bolton says. "I pretty much just show up and fish. Instead of planning and scripting everything in my head a hundred times over, I just let the day develop in front of me and run with whatever seems to be working at the time. It's taught me a lot about fishing the moment and fishing what's in front of me instead of forcing things that don't work."

Bolton says he will run the roads on the FLW Tour for a few more years, and then he'll hang up his suitcases – but not his fishing rods.

"I'm always going to fish; I love it too much not to," he adds. "But now, when I'm ready to quit traveling the Tour, I can still fish on my own terms without wondering what the heck I'm going to do next. And none of that would have been possible without a college degree." ■

PHOTO BY D.W. REED II



Terry Bolton (left) is putting his college degree to good use as a safety engineer, a job he plans to take on full time after fishing.



**COLIN
MOORE**

Who's Gonna Win?

.....

If things run true to form, the outcome of the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup will be decided by a drop-shot rig, or a frog, or a crankbait, or a spinnerbait, or a jig, or a topwater bait, or none of the above. It will be claimed by somebody who hasn't won before, by an angler using finesse tactics or power fishing, who stays in one place or flits around Lake Ouachita on a daily milk run. The winner will be a seasoned veteran or a talented newcomer who finds himself in the right place at the right time and knows what to do. The winning pattern will be there for all to see, but he'll be the one to unlock it and exploit it best.

Envisioning how the championship will unfold is nigh impossible because none has ever followed the scripts written by its predecessors. That's not to say there aren't some certainties. Because the tournament is held in the heat of summer, fishing options are reduced. The bass are either in deeper water, schooling and occasionally feeding on passing baitfish, or they're in the shade of docks and shallow cover, waiting to ambush something. There's not much left in between. When practice starts, everybody hopes to find the magic bullet, but there seldom has been one. Instead, slogging it out with a

variety of lures and approaches has been the standard.

Home-lake advantage? That only works on fisheries that see little national tournament action. Until Jason Lambert came along, nobody really could be called a pre-tournament favorite on Kentucky Lake, much less Lake Guntersville. Places like Lake Chatuge or Cross Lake are different stories. Lake Ouachita is somewhere in the middle, which doesn't make it any easier to predict who might have an edge there.

Then, too, even when a competitor is on fish the first day, he might discover that subsequently they've moved horizontally or vertically from where he first found them, that there might not be enough bass where he's fishing to hold up for three days, or that somewhere during the event he should have zigged instead of zagging.

Impossible to Predict

No Cup has played out quite like the prognosticators or FLW Fantasy Fishing gurus figured it would, and all have had their unique touches that separate them from the rest.

Lake Lanier, 2010, Kevin Hawk: Who knew? He came out of nowhere to win. He fished the same pattern that just

about everybody else was going for, though going about it a bit differently. Hawk alternated a Fish Head Spin trailed with a white Zoom Super Fluke Jr. with a drop-shot rig baited with a 6-inch Roboworm in the ubiquitous morning dawn color. Fishing the lake's deep-water brush piles, Hawk caught a 50-pound, 14-ounce stringer.

Two years later on Lake Lanier, Jacob Wheeler did just the opposite of what most everyone else was doing to catch a winning bag of 60-1. Eschewing the finesse tactics that had worked for Hawk and the top anglers in 2010, Wheeler flipped shallow-water cover up the Chattahoochee River with a Trigger X Goo Bug or cast a Rapala X-Rap Prop, vibrating jig and Rapala Skitter Walk around docks and wherever he spotted concentrations of bluegills. At times, he also fished a shaky head with a Trigger X Flutter Worm. Wheeler winning with a bunch of different baits is more the rule than the exception in Cup history. Lots of lures get called into service.

That makes Justin Atkins' win in his first full season last year all the more remarkable. He caught all 15 fish that he weighed in on a chrome ima Little Stick 135 pencil popper.

Likewise, David Dudley relied on a homemade spinnerbait to win the 2003 Cup on the James River, and Luke Clausen claimed the championship the following year at Logan Martin by skipping 4-inch finesse worms under docks. Nothing fancy, but it worked.

On the flip side, Scott Martin used an arsenal when he captured the title at Ouachita in 2011 with 61-1. His most productive lures were a Yamamoto swimbait mounted on a Fish Head Spin, a hollow swimbait on a 7/16-ounce head, a 10-inch ribbon-tail worm and a Roboworm (morning dawn or watermelon candy red) on a drop-shot rig. For added advantage, Martin also dyed the worms' tails chartreuse.

Scott Suggs was a bit more conservative when he triumphed with a deep-water pattern at Ouachita in 2007. Suggs relied on three baits during the week: a 3/4-ounce War Eagle spinnerbait featuring a "firecracker-colored" skirt and holographic blades, a Berkley 10-inch PowerBait Power Worm in plum and a Zoom worm in cherry seed.

Going Shallow

Ouachita is another of those lakes where the winning sack of fish might be caught shallow or deep, or both. Brad

Knight's winning ways in 2015 are a case in point. He caught fish in the back of a feeder creek on buzzbaits and drop-shot rigs in water as shallow as 2 feet. Ramie Colson Jr., who was runner-up to Knight that year, also caught his fish from wood cover near the bank.

As for the lures critical to success, frogs fished over shallow grass or through lily pads have helped account for four Cup titles, most famously in 2008 when Michael Bennett captured the title fishing Lake Murray's docks. Crankbaits ruled in five Cups, and spinnerbaits in four – including Steve Daniel's win at Lake Sinclair in the first-ever championship. Otherwise, jigs and buzzbaits and a variety of soft plastics – big worms or swim-baits mostly – have helped build winning stringers.

Familiar Favorites

Knight won't be there this year, nor Colson, but four of the top eight anglers from 2015 will return to Ouachita: Brandon Cobb (third in 2015), Scott Martin (fifth), Bryan Thrift (sixth) and Zack Birge (eighth). Momentum rides with Cobb, who finished third at Murray in 2017, ninth in 2016 at Wheeler and third in 2015. Martin won a Ouachita championship before, and Thrift almost wins everywhere, every year. Birge is a past Costa FLW Series Championship winner and, like Cobb, is on an upward trajectory in his young career. And then there's ... who knows? Each Cup has its own surprises. Each unwinds in its own way and at its own pace.

Considering the composite gleaned from years past, the winning angler will be the one who winds up being able to excel within his comfort zone. He'll do the things he's good at, no matter whether he's been competing for two years or 20. He'll discover there's a particular pattern that he can milk with a multi-lure approach. He will be able to catch the 15 heaviest bass over three days and get them to the scale. He won't have any fish pull off or break off – at least none that counts. He won't use the wrong bait at the wrong time.

Actually, it's likely the championship will be won by somebody fishing a lure or lures that few others thought of, in ways that go against the collective grain, and perhaps in places that others passed by. All the stars will line up for the winner, though, of course, there will be other strong contenders as well. But he's the one who'll hold up the Forrest Wood Cup. ■

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



Zack Birge

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



Brandon Cobb

PHOTO BY SHANE DURRANCE



Scott Martin

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



Bryan Thrift

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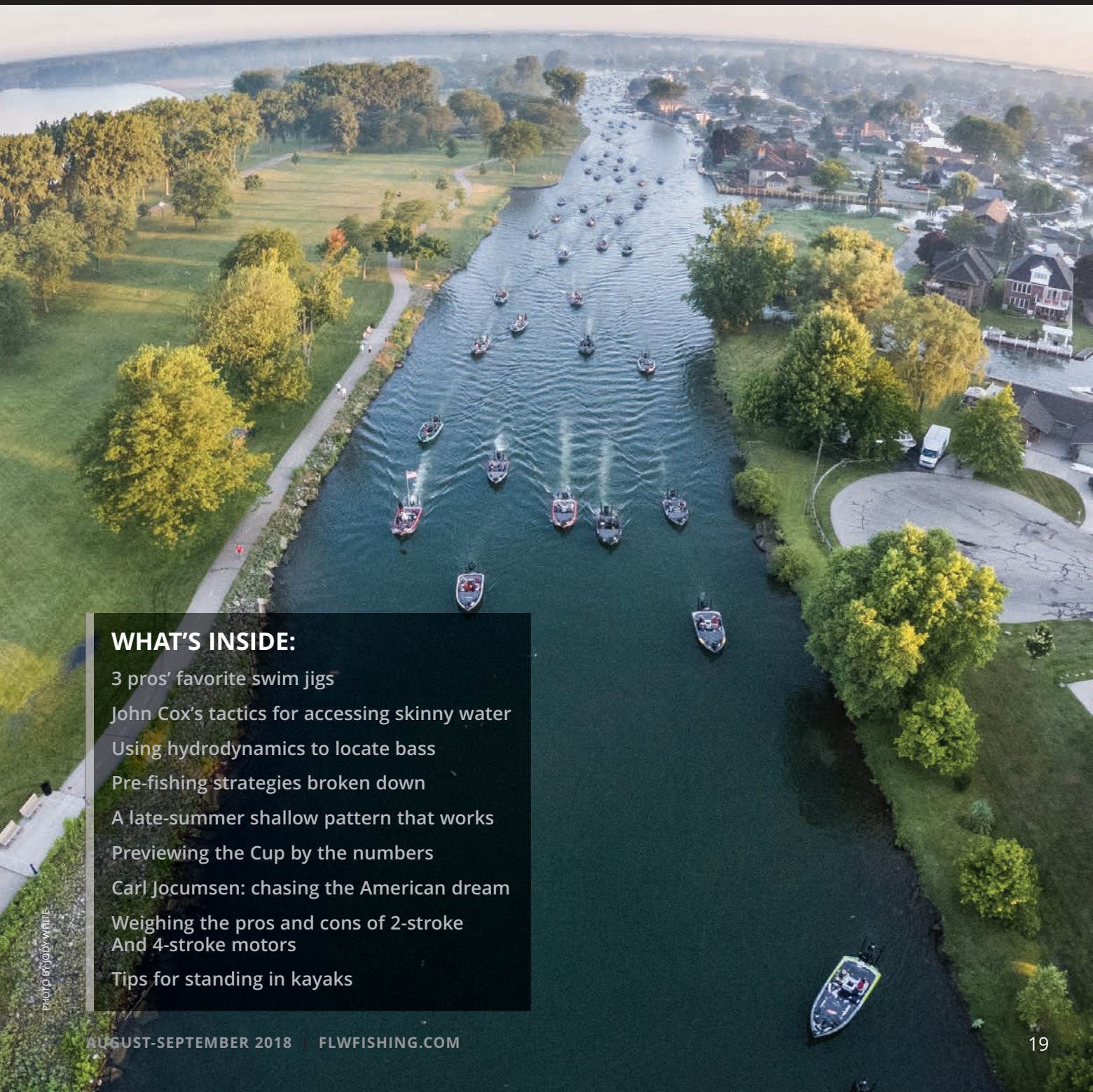
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TAKEOFF



WHAT'S INSIDE:

- 3 pros' favorite swim jigs
- John Cox's tactics for accessing skinny water
- Using hydrodynamics to locate bass
- Pre-fishing strategies broken down
- A late-summer shallow pattern that works
- Previewing the Cup by the numbers
- Carl Jocumsen: chasing the American dream
- Weighing the pros and cons of 2-stroke
And 4-stroke motors
- Tips for standing in kayaks

PHOTO BY JOE WHITE



TAKEOFF
IN SEASON

AUG/SEPT

Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege

HYDRATION TIPS WITH TROY LINDNER

Costa FLW Series pro and certified personal trainer Troy Lindner says the key to maximizing on-the-water performance lies with proper hydration. Here are his dos and don'ts:

Do:

- Consume drinks containing sodium, magnesium, potassium and electrolytes.
- Enjoy a morning cup of black coffee or green tea – in moderation.
- Preplan what you intend to consume for the day. Lindner recommends Wilderness Athlete Hydrate and Recover (shown).
- Keep a bottle of water out from storage as a visual reminder to drink regularly.

Don't:

- Consume energy drinks high in sugar, caffeine and fructose corn syrup.
- Drink soda and other highly processed beverages that contribute to jitteriness.
- Leave the ramp without an ample supply of drinking water.
- Forget the ice, which can cool drinks and subsequently lower body temperature.



CUP FUN FACTS

Hot Springs, Ark., host community of this year's Forrest Wood Cup on Aug. 10-12, is home to one of the country's most distinguished national parks. Located immediately north of town, the land that is now Hot Springs National Park was first protected for recreational purposes by President Andrew Jackson in 1832. For more information, visit nps.gov/hosp/index.htm.

HOUSTON'S FAVORITE FEATURES FOR SPINNERBAITS

FLW Tour pro and outdoor television show host Jimmy Houston knows spinnerbaits. So what features does the king of sling favor in this old-school bait?

Blade – "I like big, round, thumper-style blades on my spinnerbaits."

Arm – "Light-wire arms produce more vibration and more bites."

Trailer – "One modification that I've found particularly effective is to replace a spinnerbait skirt with a swimbait. Later in the year, when bass are feeding on shad, a swimbait trailer generates more strikes."

Skirt – "I like a chartreuse, white and blue color combination for clear water. In crystal-clear water, I like bubblegum. Translucent skirts are highly productive late in the season."

Head – "I prefer a small-profile head with red eyes and a red throat."



● Luck-E-Strike Jimmy Houston Legend Spinnerbait

PRO'S CHOICE: FAVORITE SWIM JIG AND TRAILER



1. Jared McMillan 4x4 Bass Jigs Extreme Swim Jig/Bruiser Baits Super Swimmer

"It's designed with a beefy hook for heavy cover and won't roll over on the retrieve. I like black and blue in Florida, and green pumpkin nearly everywhere else."



2. James Niggemeyer Strike King Tour Grade Swim Jig/Strike King Rage Craw

"The Rage Craw helps the bait to ride up and over cover while keeping the hook standing upright. White is a great color in the fall."



3. Kerry Milner Zorro Baits Casting Booza Bug/Zoom Super Speed Craw

"It's not a traditional swim jig, but it works for me. It's my favorite jig for Dardanelle and comes clean through willow grass." ■

Mark Rose
2018 FLW ANGLER OF THE YEAR

Strike King

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WIDE WALKING ACTION



KVD 1.5 DEEP
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HOW JOHN COX GETS SHALLOW

THE FLORIDA PRO HAS UNIQUE TECHNIQUES FOR REACHING OTHERWISE UNTAPPED FISH

In the eight years he's been on the FLW Tour, John Cox has developed quite a following. Dubbed the "Tin Man" for his use of an aluminum boat in professional tournament competition, Cox took the world by storm in 2016 with a win at the Forrest Wood Cup.

In nearly all the events Cox fishes, he looks for a situation where his shallow-water, tin-boat approach can get him to fish that other anglers can't reach. He often finds it necessary to push his gear to the limit to get there.

First Things First

Before delving into his tactics, it's important to note that Cox, like many other FLW pros, goes to any length necessary to win big-money bass tournaments, and often damages equipment in the process. It's a financial tradeoff that works for him, but might not for the average angler. For that reason, readers might want to consider his methods a general overview, rather than step-by-step instructions.

Also, Cox has a unique skill-set, which he's developed over many years of competition. He knows how to "4x4" through the shallows safely. Two rules to glean from his approach: Never push yourself into a situation you're not comfortable with, and always wear a life jacket.

The Boat

The first key to Cox's shallow-water program is his boat – an aluminum Crestliner that's much lighter than a glass boat. It features a hydraulic jack plate and a unique, massive battery system to ensure his trolling motor never loses power. All are keys to the system.

Stage One: Use the Outboard

Cox uses his outboard to access skinny water the majority of the time. In most cases, logjams are child's play, and access is about brawn over brains. While many bass boaters have driven over logs, Cox does so at faster speeds than most.

"You have to make sure you have enough speed to get over the log, but not drop off it and get hung up," he says. The most common mistake is winding up with a log stuck between the outboard and transom.

When jumping and sliding over logs, the lower unit of the motor will frequently contact the log on the "downslide," as might other items attached to the transom such as the Power-Pole brackets. There's potential for damage. Also, it's entirely possible to gain enough speed to climb a stationary log, but lack the momentum to clear it. In that case, the only option is to call for a tow. It's not a method that just anyone should try.

Besides climbing objects, Cox utilizes the brute force of his Mercury to push through thick vegetation and horrific muck. His jack plate plays a key role.

"I mount my motor really high on my boat. I can't even run on plane with my jack plate up very much," Cox says.

The setup allows him to lift his motor to a much higher setting than other bass boats, removing all but the prop and lower unit from the water, even while trimmed down. By keeping his motor high, but his trim down, the bow of Cox's boat stays down even when he gets aggressive on the throttle. Also, the rear of his boat stays level, and consequently can traverse very shallow water.

Finally, Cox forgoes the temptation for a Hot Foot, and sticks with a hand-operated throttle, which allows him to sit up or kneel in the driver's seat to scan for obstructions.

Stage Two: Use the Trolling Motor

Once the water is too skinny for Cox's outboard, he'll often go farther on his trolling motor. He relies so heavily on trolling motor power that he carries two sets of 36-volt lithium trolling motor batteries, wired with a transfer switch. By running constantly on full power, Cox can wear down one set of batteries in a little over half a day, so the second set comes in handy during long outings spent searching tucked-away backwaters.

Moving to the bow creates a weight shift that allows the boat to float more horizontally, thus raising the transom, reducing drag and allowing for shallower access.

Sometimes he'll also adjust the trolling motor higher than the highest setting in the mount by placing a board under the lock-down mechanism. The motor can't latch, so Cox has to hold it down when under power, but he likes the result.

"It points the nose of the trolling motor up a little bit," he says. "That kind of pushes off the bottom better and pops the boat up a little bit higher."

Stage Three: Use the Push Pole

Occasionally, Cox must resort to the most basic form of propulsion to get to a honey hole: a Superstick push pole, which is a telescopic, fiberglass model that retracts to fit into a rod locker. Cox employs the standard practice of push poling from the rear of his boat to gain access.

"I sometimes push-pole in real silty areas when I sight-fish," he adds. "If I run the trolling motor, after one pass the area would be clouded up where I couldn't see, so the pole makes more sense."

Last Resort: Get Out

While tournament rules require anglers to stay in the boat, Cox admits he's spent plenty of time walking shallow backwaters on pre-tournament scouting missions or for fun fishing.

His walking forays are spent mapping pathways and looking for potential fishing areas without risking his equipment to get there. If he finds something he likes, Cox will mark small ditches and channels with sticks. If there's enough water, he comes back through with the boat - under power, on the trolling motor or by push pole.

Which sums up a day in the life of John Cox: motoring along, getting as far as he can, trying not to tear stuff up. It's not a good system for everyone, but so far it's working for him. ■





PHOTO BY JOOY WHITE

HYDRODYNAMICS FOR ANGLERS

UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE OF MOVING WATER CAN LEAD YOU TO BETTER FISHING

Hydrodynamics is the branch of physics dedicated to the study of liquids in motion. If you've ever watched pollen swirling on the surface of a lake, or storm water running down a drain and into a culvert, you've watched some serious hydrodynamics at work.

A basic understanding of hydrodynamics and how water moves can not only help you explain and understand many common phenomena, it can also help you catch more bass in rivers, reservoirs and lakes by being able to more easily predict their locations.

Laminar vs. Turbulent Flow

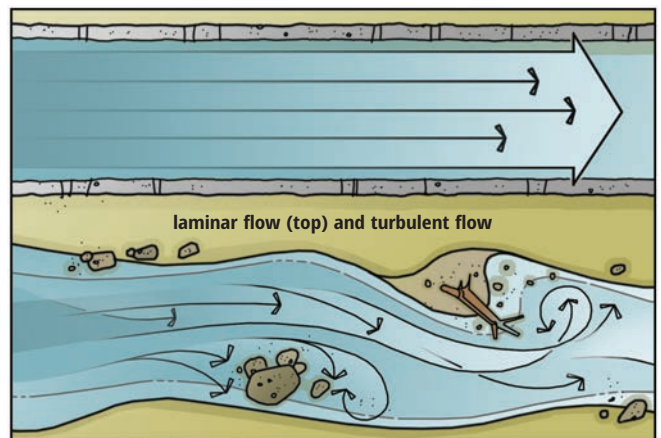
Imagine a waterbody with perfectly smooth sides, a regular channel and no obstructions. Were current to flow through such a place, it would likely flow in what scientists call a "laminar" path, which means a parallel and unobstructed flow.

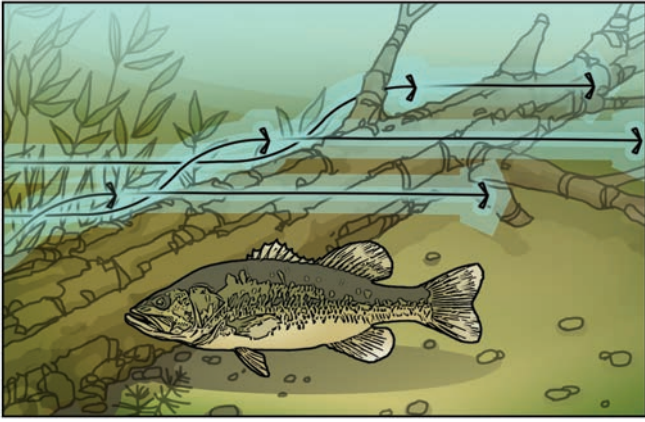
In this scenario, there is no difference in the velocity or direction of flow throughout the water column.

In reality, our rivers, lakes and reservoirs are full of obstructions, depth changes, bottom composition changes and many other factors that create what scientists call turbulent flow. This means that water velocity and direction move in a chaotic way throughout the system based upon the

water's interaction with the infinite number of obstructions. The best way to describe this is to imagine floating a leaf through a set of riffles on a stream. You could float it 100 times, and it would take a slightly different path each time.

Even though currents are constantly changing based on flow and other factors, turbulent action is predictable enough in some situations to provide an idea of where bass might be holed up.





Where are the Bass?

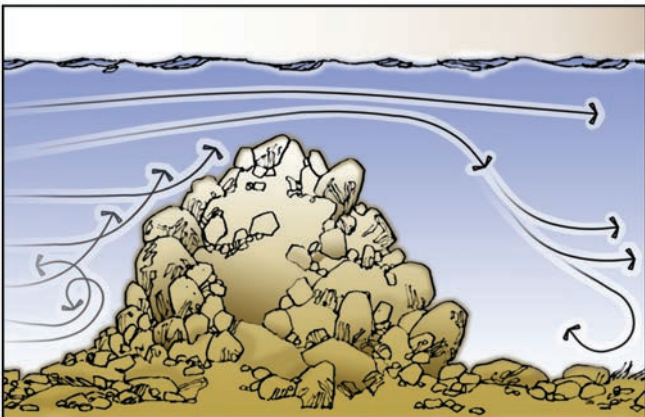
To predatory species such as bass, living in current is like dining at one of those conveyor belt sushi restaurants: If they wait long enough, it's going to bring them something to eat. For that reason, much of the year bass like to be in areas close to current, yet protected enough that they don't have to expend too much energy to maintain their position.

Knowing this, you want to look for fish in eddies, current seams or other current breaks. You can apply this on a micro level (where a bass might be positioned behind a single lay-down in the current) or on a macro level (a point along a two-mile-long ledge where a school of bass concentrates).

The following is a breakdown of three typical situations where you can use hydrodynamics to find more bass.

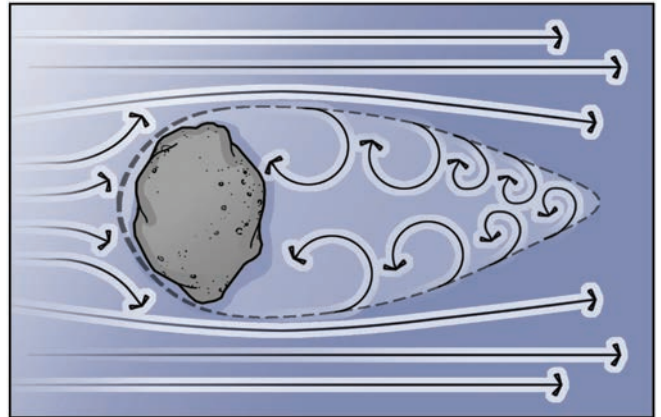
1. Wing Dam/Jetty

Wing dams or jetties are commonly placed in rivers to direct flow for navigation and reduce bank erosion. They also hold tons of bass. As the water flows over a wing dam, it typically creates two areas of focus – the front eddy and back eddy. The front eddy, where water rolls over the top, typically contains the actively feeding bass, and the back eddy, where some of the water that collides with the dam is forced down, is where they go to rest when they are inactive. Both can be productive at times.



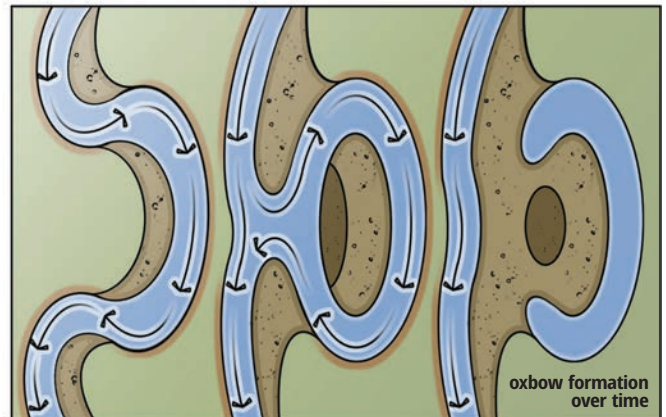
2. Current Seams and Eddies

On a more macro level, you can look at an aerial photograph to predict where current seams will be located along a river or a reservoir with heavy flow. A current seam is a place where currents flowing at two speeds come together – usually where the water has to speed up to make it around an obstruction. Eddies are found usually on the backside of objects that deflect current, where the water swirls around and creates a still area. Eddies can sometimes flow upstream if the swirling action is great enough. Trailing edges of islands, river bends and tributary splits all create current seams and eddies.



3. Deep River Spots

You can also use aerial photography or bathymetric charts of rivers to find deep spots and shallow spots and fast and slow current, then use that information to figure out how to navigate and find fish. Meandering is a natural process by which rivers erode the flood plains they flow through. Initially straight, rivers slowly start to erode their banks in an S-shaped path. The process becomes gradually more and more distinct until some sections of rivers actually cut off into horseshoe-shaped oxbow lakes (see illustration). Typically, you'll find the heaviest flow and the deepest water in the outside bends of rivers where the current sweeps around.



CURRENT ON LEDGE LAKES

A common refrain among FLW Tour anglers when fishing the famous Tennessee River lakes in the summer is that they are waiting for the current to turn on. They're referring to the distinct uptick in current that starts flowing when the impoundment's hydroelectric dam is generating electricity. With the increased current, bass and baitfish can't roam around in open water as easily. This causes them to group up in schools on bars, humps, points and ledges that deflect the flow. Pay attention to the generating schedules if your local lake has a power plant, and be prepared to capitalize when the plant is generating current. ■



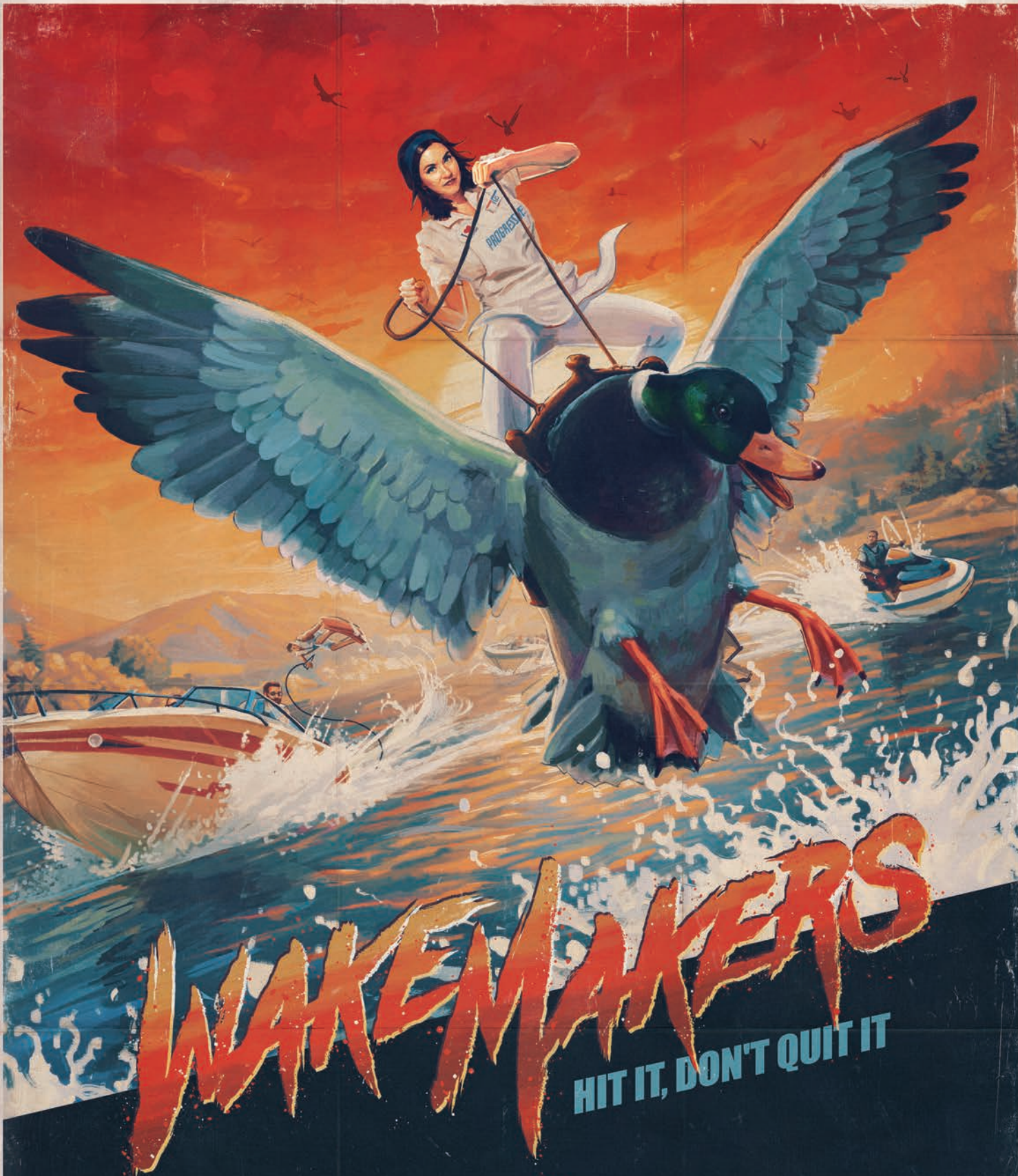
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TO PRE-FISH OR NOT?

By Joe Balog

PRACTICE STRATEGIES SHOULD VARY BASED ON TIME OF YEAR AND CONDITIONS

Finding fish is often the hardest component of pre-tournament practice, yet veteran pros make it look easy. Years ago, many top finishers credited month-long pre-fish sessions for their success.

Today, FLW Tour rules limit practice to Sunday through Tuesday of tournament week, and the fishery goes off limits 13 days before practice begins. Pre-fishing is allowed prior to the off-limits period.

Still, several of the best pros opt not to pre-fish during the regular season. They rely on the standard three-day practice period. It's part of a strategy to fish "in the moment" and avoid getting locked into patterns that will probably fizzle out by the time the tournament starts.

However, the principle of fishing with a fresh mindset seems to go out the window when big bucks are on the line. Each year, a number of the most successful touring pros report pre-fishing for the Cup, essentially forgoing the regimen that got them to the championship in the first place. So what gives? Isn't such a routine counter-productive?

Transition vs. Stability

The FLW Tour's regular season usually begins somewhere far south in the prespawn period of January or February and lasts through early summer somewhere up north, usually ending in June. The entire schedule spans periods of transition that render pre-fishing useless, according to the experts.

"Why pre-fish during a time of year when so much rapid change is happening?" asks 2003 Cup champ David Dudley. "When you go back, you burn your first day of practice just chasing your tail."

Dudley is one of many touring pros who refuse to pre-fish during the regular season, but do so for the Cup, which is traditionally held in August.

"Not because it's more important, or richer, but because the fish stay put that time of year [late summer]," says Dudley.

Penzoil Marine Angler of the Year Mark Rose, who's made the top 10 at the Cup four times, agrees.

"A summertime tournament is the one time I will pre-fish, because my style of fishing is looking for schools of fish," he says.

According to Rose, if a productive school is found early in the summer, chances are it can be revisited later under stable conditions.

The 2017 Cup at Lake Murray provided a perfect example of a pre-fishing strategy paying off in a summertime event. During pre-fishing, Justin Atkins spent several days dialing in his electronics to be able to spot planted cane piles, which are narrow enough that they're usually difficult to see. Once he was dialed in, Atkins spent the rest of pre-practice locating about 100 cane piles.

In the official practice, he verified the fish were still on cane, and rather than having to spend the entire time searching, he used his three days to narrow down the best piles and perfect the topwater presentation that eventually won him the Cup.

The strategy worked because Atkins had the proper foresight to predict what pattern would play come August, and the fish were still in their summer patterns when the tournament went down.

Regular-Season Pre-Practice

John Cox, the 2016 Cup champ, used to pre-practice for every tournament, but has greatly reduced the amount of on-the-water time he invests on a tournament lake before the off-limits period.

However, there are special circumstances that warrant a visit prior to the off-limits period. Usually, it's reserved for



David Dudley and
FLW Weighmaster
Chris Jones



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

new fisheries, large fisheries or fisheries that have undergone a dramatic change in forage or water level.

"Really big places like Lake Erie or St. Clair; I want to see what it's going to look like," Cox says. "Or, when a lake is drawn down, like Lanier, that's the only pre-practice that's worth it."

In rare circumstances, a new phase will begin for a lake, such as the proliferation of blueback herring or expansion of aquatic weeds, and that changeup requires advanced scouting.

Lake Ouachita, the site of the 2018 Cup, is a good example. Grass is growing in previously void areas. Many of the qualifiers visited the lake before it went off limits July 23, and scouting the grass was a priority. The goal for many wasn't to find fish, but to get the "lay of the lake" and find out how far the growth had progressed.

"If anything pops up in a lake, absolutely, that will be part of my pre-fish," adds Dudley. "Wherever there's grass, there will be winning fish. I've learned not to focus on any one thing, though."

Lighter, Late-Summer Schedules

It's worth pointing out that another reason why many pros pre-fish for the Cup is because their schedules in late summer are generally lighter and more flexible. Tournament season winds down in early summer, and the sport show season doesn't pick up until fall and winter.

Still, there are important strategic reasons to consider pre-fishing or not, other than convenience, and the best pros in the business recognize the inherent advantages and disadvantages of dedicating valuable time to early scouting efforts. ■

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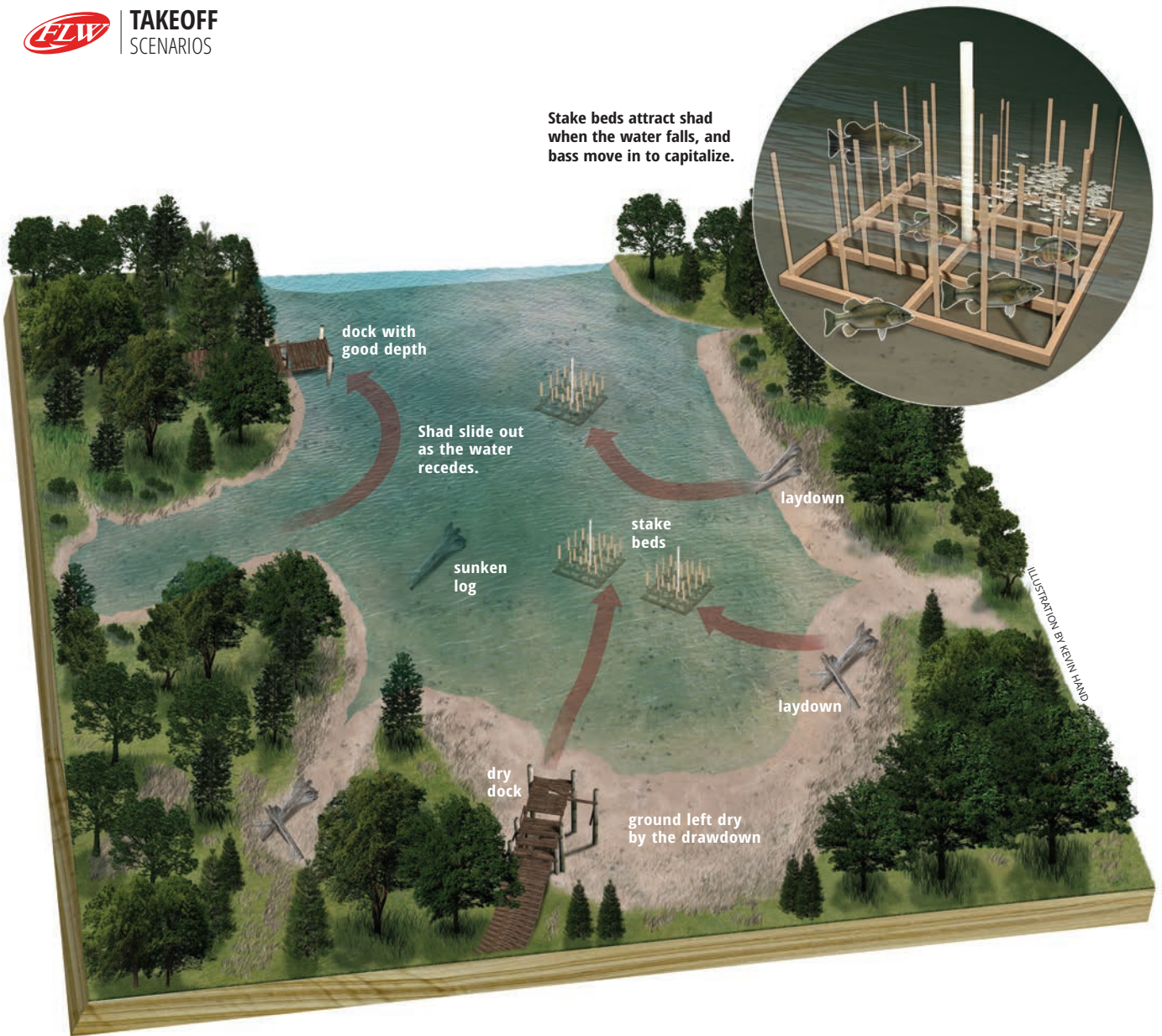
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THE YOUNG-SHAD-IN-THE-SHALLOWS PATTERN

THIS YEAR'S HATCH IS LEFT VULNERABLE BY THE SUMMER DRAWDOWN

By Curtis Niedermier

Late-summer drawdowns have a major impact on reservoir patterns, and understandably so. Fish – bass, baitfish and otherwise – and anglers have to react when the water falls.

Small, young-of-the-year shad that were taking refuge in miles of shoreline cover during the previous month or two have to follow the water out as it drops. They wind up concentrated in any shallow cover that remains wet, and when they congregate they usually become more vulnerable to predation.

Terry Bolton, an FLW Tour pro from Paducah, Ky., has seen this transition on Kentucky Lake produce some of the best shallow bass fishing opportunities of the summer. He takes advantage for good stringers at times when other anglers are competing for pressured schools offshore.

What Happens

Reservoir drawdowns vary across the country. Kentucky Lake, where Bolton is most familiar with the reservoir management strategy, is drawn down starting in early July.

"Generally, right as the drawdown starts, it'll drop below 359 [feet; summer pool], and it'll pull the water out of the existing buck brush and willow trees," Bolton says. "All that young-of-the-year fry moves out of all the cover to whatever's available."

When the uprooted baitfish pile into "whatever's available," they present easy foraging opportunities for bass that can blitz through dense clouds of 1- to 2-inch shad and fill their bellies. They usually remain in the same areas from mid-July through September on Kentucky Lake. The timing might vary at other lakes.

WATCH FOR POPCORN

Although it's a slightly different pattern than the shallow-cover program Bolton describes here, a topwater bait thrown on shallow flats and secondary points in the mornings and evenings can account for some fun outings this time of year. Young shad can be found in expansive schools in these areas, and during low-light periods they'll flip out of the water. Kentucky Lake locals call it "popcorn." If you see it, grab a popper or a walking stick bait and sling it out there quickly.

Bolton's favorite targets are docks and stake beds, which are man-made fish attractors usually comprised of dozens of wooden stakes or PVC pipes. Stake beds litter many of the flats in the backs of Kentucky Lake's pockets and creeks. Laydowns, stumps and other hard cover that's still in the water should be on an angler's checklist too.

Dialing In

According to Bolton, some creeks are better than others when it comes to this pattern.

"The hardest thing to find on Kentucky Lake is the shallow cover on the flats," says Bolton. "There are some that really have it, and some that don't. Nowadays, it seems more people put out deep cover than they do shallow cover. Crappie guys used to put more shallow cover out."

Much of the cover Bolton fishes is visible from the surface – sometimes from afar, but other times not. Spending some time trolling around on a flat can reveal stake beds that are just barely under the surface. Submerged shoreline brush piles on steeper banks are also great targets if you can find them, as are the remains of stumps whose tops are under the surface.

"I target a lot of the bigger creeks that have a bigger resident population of bass," Bolton adds. "It seems to me the smaller pockets don't have as many fish. I also look for a creek that has good flow."

Creeks with larger channels in the back and more flow typically have more color in the water, and Bolton believes stained water is better for shallow fishing.

"The fish are more likely to stay up there in the stained water than the clear water," he says.

When you're searching for the young shad, they're usually not tough to spot. They can often be seen from above, hovering around the cover. On sunny days, their sides reflect the light, making them easier to spot.

Another sign that you've found a good bait-laden spot is when the shad spray out of the water after being startled by a lure retrieved through the school or an attacking bass.

What to Throw

Bolton prefers to use moving baits that he can fish through the cover. Matching the hatch for size and color is a smart move.

He favors a 3/8-ounce Accent spinnerbait with willow-leaf blades and a Rapala DT 4 crankbait around stake beds. He throws swim jigs and ChatterBaits on docks.

"I throw a buzzbait some, and some little poppers, but I throw a small spinnerbait a lot," Bolton says. "You want something that mimics those baitfish. If you don't get a bite, something like a good old Zoom Mag II, a 7 1/2-inch worm, is a great bait to fish shallow in the summer. Another thing I'll do sometimes is flip a pearl white [Zoom] Speed Craw. It looks like a shad. I can make the bait scatter when I throw it in there. A little swimbait would work too."

"Generally, when you make a cast, if you see those minnows rain or spray off of the cover, that's always a good sign. If you see that, a lot of times if you stay back you can catch multiple bass off a piece of cover." ■



PREVIEWING THE CUP BY THE NUMBERS

A BREAKDOWN OF THE 2018 CUP ROSTER

By Curtis Niedermier

In early July, FLW finalized the 2018 FLW Cup field of 56 following the conclusion of the FLW Tour finale at Lake St. Clair. The list includes past Cup champions, a handful of FLW Tour Anglers of the Year and a squad of hammers from all of FLW's tournament circuits. You can see the full roster on pages 78-80. Here, we break down the field and some of what's at stake in Hot Springs, Ark., Aug. 10-12 when the Cup takes place on Lake Ouachita.



PHOTO BY GARY GRAYSON

\$26,712,126.53: Total dollars awarded at the Cup since 1996 | 396: Number of people overall who have fished the Cup as a pro | **22: Number of first-time pros who'll fish the Cup in 2018** | 19: Number of times Andy Morgan has fished the Cup, which is the most ever. He'll make his 20th appearance in 2018. | **184: Number of combined Cup appearances by the pros who qualified in the 2018 field** | 21: Number of pros who've fished the Cup at least 10 times. Seven of them are in the Cup this year, and Cody Meyer and Scott Canterbury will each make his 10th appearance in 2018. | **61-1: Weight, in pounds and ounces, that Scott Martin brought in over four days of fishing at the 2011 Cup on Lake Ouachita. It's the second-heaviest four-day winning total in a Cup.** | 9: Number of top-10 Cup finishes by Bryan Thrift, the most ever. He's only missed the top 10 twice in 11 chances. | **53: Combined number of top-10 Cup finishes on the pro side by the 2018 field. Seventeen of this year's qualifiers have made a top 10 as a pro at the Cup.** | 0: Number of pros who have won FLW Tour Angler of the Year and the Cup in the same season. Mark Rose will try to change that number to 1 this season. | **0: Number of pros with two Cup wins** | 4: Number of past Cup champs in the 2018 field: David Dudley, Scott Martin, Justin Atkins and John Cox | **6: Number of FLW Tour AOY winners in the 2018 field: Bryan Thrift, David Dudley, Scott Martin, Clark Wendlandt, Andy Morgan and Mark Rose** | 21: Age of Jacob Wheeler, the youngest Cup champ, when he earned the title in 2012 | **20: Age of Sheldon Collings, the youngest angler in the 2018 Cup field** | 55: Age of George Cochran, the oldest Cup champ, when he earned the title in 2005. | **66: Age of Bill Chapman, the oldest angler in the 2018 Cup field** | \$34,306,775.93: Total FLW career earnings by the 56 pros qualified to fish the 2018 Cup | **14: Number of 20-somethings qualified for the 2018 Cup** | 46: Number of combined FLW Tour wins by the 2018 Cup qualifiers | **6: Number of 2018 FLW Tour rookies who made the Cup: Matt Becker, Todd Castledine, Cody Hahner, Wes Logan, Tyler Stewart and Sheldon Collings** | 1,038: Number of top-10 finishes in FLW events by the 2018 Cup qualifiers | **2: Sets of brothers fishing the Cup: Brandon and Jared McMillan, and Chris and Cory Johnston**

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Carl Jocusen's American dream is coming true, but he's had to fight and claw through major hardships to make it happen.





By Sean Ostruszka
PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

DOWN UNDER, BUT NOT OUT

CARL JOCUMSEN'S QUEST FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM

It's an ethos of our nation, a core principle that brings so many to the United States – the American dream. It's the idea that stipulates if you work hard enough in this country you can be successful.

Carl Jocumsen believes in it. He's dedicated the last eight years to his pursuit of it, and to outsiders, they'd say he's living it. The Australian native is a professional fisherman, after all, and the first ever from his country to fish the Bassmaster Elite Series.

What they don't realize is that in those eight years Jocumsen has lived the dream, lost the dream, spent more than \$20,000 in visa and attorney fees to defend his dream, traveled back and forth across the Pacific Ocean dozens of times to continue pursuing his dream, fought through jet lag during tournaments to keep after the dream, and at times been utterly miserable over the years because of it.

"I can't even count how many times I thought about giving up," admits Jocumsen.

Yet, he's still here. Better yet, he's finally finding happiness. All it took was some time, perspective and a camper.

Too Much, Too Soon

Jocumsen came to the U.S. in 2011 with the plan to pursue a career as a professional fisherman. It was a plan that, technically, did pan out. He came within one point of qualifying for the 2014 season of the Elite Series and officially qualified for the 2015 season.

Jocumsen is quite amazed it ever worked out, and actually wishes it hadn't.

First, there were the setbacks off the water.

"Most people here take it for granted, but living in the United States legally is hard to do," Jocumsen says. "Everything is difficult, from getting a driver's license to a bank account. I couldn't pay my bills or entry fees because I didn't have a social security number. It was continual roadblocks for years."

The hardest part might've been that for the first year and a half he couldn't get

a visa for longer than 89 days. That meant he had to fly back to Australia every 89 days, get a new visa, and turn around and fly right back to try and fish a tournament.

"I'd fish tournaments on no sleep or practice, completely jet-lagged," remembers Jocumsen.

Obviously, with that much happening off the water it's remarkable he was able to do anything successful on it. Yet, he did. He fished a couple FLW Tour events as a co-angler, and began fishing the B.A.S.S. Opens, all with the goal in mind of qualifying for the Elite Series.

Why the Elites instead of the Tour? Jocumsen credits constantly watching the Elites on ESPN back in Australia, and he felt that was where he had to be to prove himself successful.

Looking back, he admits that thinking was flawed, and the results proved it. After two seasons, he got an email saying he'd been dropped from the Elites.

"Honestly, I had no chance," Jocumsen says. "I wasn't the angler I needed to be. The learning curve from the Opens to the Elites is too steep. It's like going from backyard football to the NFL."

What he did know was that after getting dropped from the Elites, he'd spent five years pursuing his American dream and was right back at square one.

A Taste of Home

When life gets rough, anything can be depressing. The primary trigger of Jocumsen's frustration in the early days was the crummy hotel room.

"When I did well, I'd come back to some cheap hotel, and I never felt like I'd accomplished anything because of where I was staying," he says. "And when I did poorly, that disappointment was amplified. I'd walk into my hotel and just say 'this sucks.'"

A big reason for the disdain was how he grew up.

While there are some remote tournament fisheries in the United States, most are at least near a small town with lodging, restaurants and general amenities. In Australia, fishing a tournament most



often means also preparing for a camping trip. The lakes are so far away from civilization that any sort of electric hookup is a significant perk.

"You'd fish tournaments where you had to consciously conserve your batteries to make it through all three days," Jocusen remembers. "There was no way to charge them unless you brought a generator."

And if you think that was rough, try resting up the night before a derby while sleeping in what basically equates to a canvas sleeping bag.

"Everyone slept in swags [roll-up beds] on the ground."

You can obviously forget the air conditioning, too.

"Someone might set up a 10-by-20 Quickshade [those pop-up tents common to tailgate gatherings] if we were too hot."

And if it rained?

"You might bring a big dome tent, but only if it was calling for bad storms."

It's hard to imagine launching a professional fishing career this way, but from age 13 to 26, Jocusen lived for such trips.

"Tournaments in Australia are as much about the camping and community as the fishing," he explains. "You'd sit around fires at night, barbecuing up some food and laughing, telling stories."

"Those trips were a huge part of why I love to fish. When I came to the U.S., I lost that piece of me for a while."

Ironically, all his setbacks kept him from being able to afford even the cheapest hotels at times. Thus, he and his girlfriend, Kayla Palaniuk, and their dog, Roo, slept in a camper in the back of his truck every so often. Gradually it became more often, and finally became all the time. They now travel the FLW Tour full time in a truck-bed camper, a transition that wasn't as much about money as it was comfort.

"Camping out at tournaments, sleeping in the camper, became the biggest

game-changer for me," Jocusen says. "I felt like I reconnected with being back home. My outlook did a 180."

Somewhere between being dropped from the Elite Series and joining the FLW Tour in 2017, and ditching hotels for campsites, Jocusen finally started feeling like he belongs. He says the last two years have been the happiest he's known since coming here. While he's still seeking consistency on the water, his consistency off the water has made him feel like he's finally able to learn and improve. After all, while they have "bass" in their names, Australian bass behave quite differently than the largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass he's targeting on the FLW Tour.

Which brings us back to the American dream.

When writer James Truslow Adams coined the term "the American dream," he did so with the following description: "... that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller



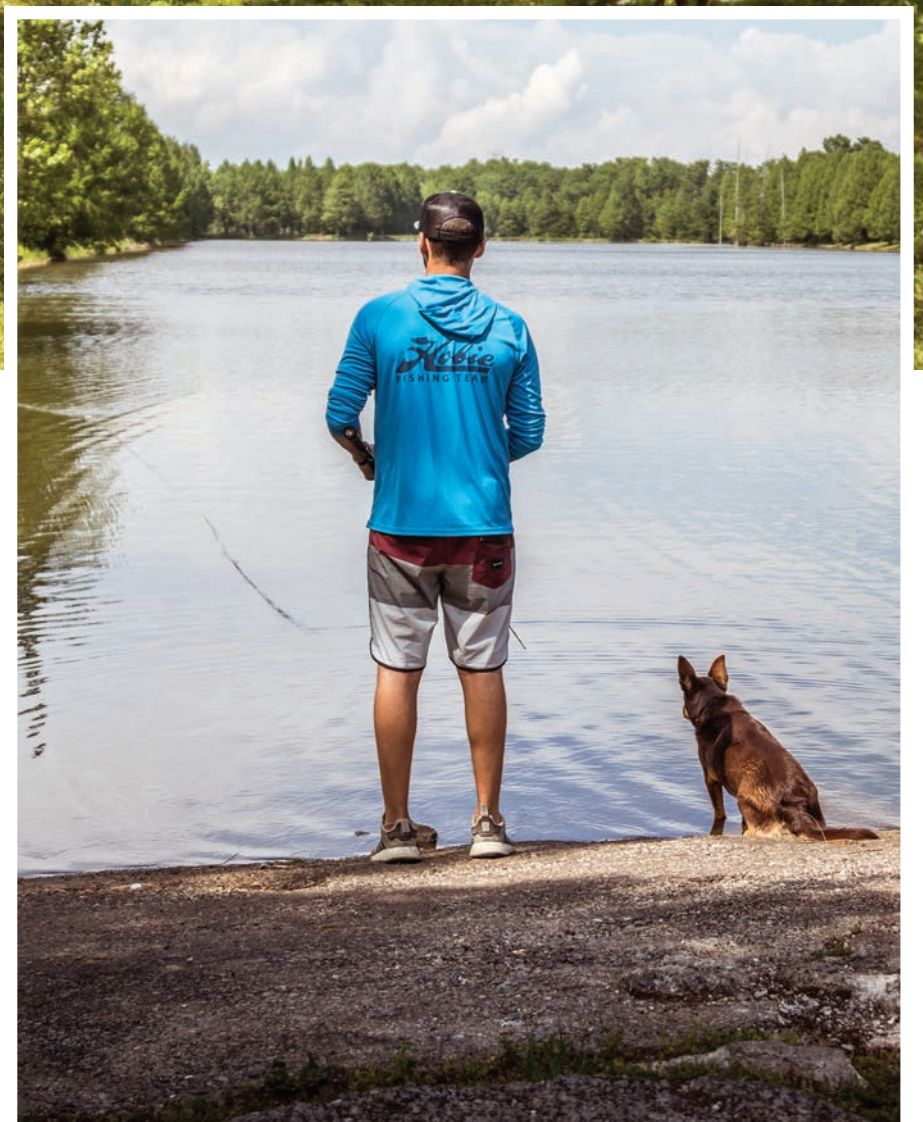
for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.”

Despite all his setbacks and questioning of if he could push forward, one thing Jocusen never questioned was his ability. Deep down, Jocusen always felt that if given the opportunity to dedicate himself solely to fishing, learning and improving in the ways of fishing in the U.S., he could succeed.

It's taken him eight years, and he's still not where he wants to be, but he finally feels he's headed in the right direction.

“When I came here, I had goals and expectations of immediately making the Bassmaster Classic or Forrest Wood Cup,” Jocusen says. “I thought that was totally achievable right away. I just didn't actually realize how hard that is to do.

“Looking back, it's easy to say I'd have done things differently, but honestly, I wouldn't change a thing. I think I'm exactly where I want to be.” ■





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Two-stroke motors, like the Evinrude E-TEC G2, are the most popular with FLW Tour pros due to their performance, speed and simple reliability.

TWO-STROKE OR FOUR-STROKE?

WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS OF MOTOR SELECTION

By Joe Balog

Two-stroke or four? It remains a top question among those considering the purchase of a new boat package, or re-powering an existing model. Once dominated by two-strokes and the need for speed, the bass boat industry has now accepted four-strokes as a meaningful alternative where conditions allow. So how do you choose?

The Basics

Engine cycling periods give two- and four-stroke motors their name, but their internal differences are the real key. Basically, the fuel/oil mixture enters and exits a two-stroke directly in the cylinder, whereas a valve train (including valves, valve springs and cams) controls the same movement in four-strokes. For that primary reason, four-strokes contain more moving parts, are slightly more complicated to maintain and weigh more, overall, than comparable two-strokes.

Another major difference between the two categories lies in their lubrication. Two-stroke motors are lubricated through oil that is mixed in the fuel, and therefore burned

through the combustion cycle. Like automobiles, four-strokes contain internal oiling systems. They use far less oil overall, but it requires changing on a regular schedule.

Making the Choice

While four-strokes are gaining popularity, the best way to choose between the two types is to evaluate your boat and fishing style and decide what factors are most important to you.

Consider several factors as you decide:

Top-end speed - The two-stroke easily wins this one. With fewer parts and reduced weight, as well as a faster response due to fewer cycles per period, a two-stroke outboard is normally 3 to 5 mph faster than a four-stroke of the same horsepower rating on the same hull.

Idling - The four-stroke blows this category away, and it's noticeable if you're a fisherman that spends a lot of time in speed zones or graphing structure. In addition to being much quieter at idle, a four-stroke motor can be idled for

long periods without concern for carbon build-up, as oil is not burned in combustion, and all the fuel entering the cylinder is thoroughly consumed.

Fuel efficiency – Four-strokes were originally promoted as the answer to our prayers at the pump, but many bass boat owners who initially purchased four-strokes were quickly disappointed. In fact, some four-stroke outboards burn *more* gas than comparable two-strokes. However, this usually occurs at wide-open-throttle (WOT) ranges. At lower, cruising RPMs, four-strokes outperform two-strokes in fuel economy. Another factor to consider: Some four-strokes demand a minimum 89 octane fuel, which impacts fuel costs.

Operating cost – In the short term, a two-stroke outboard costs more to run due to its oil needs. In fact, tournament anglers often burn upward of \$100 a week in oil.

Long term, most four-stroke motors require a 20-hour maintenance up front, which usually costs around \$250, as well as maintenance every 100 hours, to the tune of about \$700. Compare that to Evinrude's claim of no maintenance until five years or 500 hours for the two-stroke E-TEC G2.

To help estimate costs, assume a four-stroke motor requires a trip to the dealer at least twice the first year, and likely once or more each season thereafter. That might or might not vary from your ordinary outboard maintenance schedule. However, if it does, or if getting to the mechanic involves a major commitment in time and expense due to a lengthy drive, a two-stroke might be a better choice. In addition, not all mechanics are fluent in four-stroke repairs, so consider who wrenches on your rig.

The best bet when predicting maintenance costs before a purchase is to estimate the number of hours you'll place on your engine each year, and oil costs. Then consult your local marine mechanic or outboard dealer to discuss cost and frequency of maintenance.

Weight – Depending on your boat, you might need to consider overall weight on your transom if you're planning to own a four-stroke. Once an after-thought, weight has become more of an issue, as transoms now frequently tote two shallow-water anchors, and most tournament rigs house four magnum batteries in the rear. Increasing your outboard weight by 100 pounds (obviously, this could vary) to go from a two-stroke to a four-stroke might be more than your rig can handle. That said, manufacturers are continuously finding ways to trim weight from four-stroke models, so this might be less of a factor over time. Again, consult your dealer, particularly if you're re-powering an older boat.

Torque and hole shot – While many two-stroke fans claim torque superiority due to engine weight and cycle time, four-strokes benefit from increased piston size and complete elimination of exhaust, thus increasing low-end performance. In any case, torque-crazy customers should consult boat owners with real-world experience based on a specific rig.

Overall cost and resale value – A four-stroke could add considerable resale value, but it varies widely by region, boat type and other factors. Big-water bass anglers seem to like four-strokes, while the speed demons of the Mid-South prefer two-strokes. Consider where you live and who might buy your boat and motor down the road if resale value is a big factor for you. ■



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

Some pros have switched to four-strokes, like the Mercury Pro FourStroke, for their quietness and efficiency.



Mike Ernst finds that standing gives him an advantage when kayak fishing, but it requires some skills to do it safely.

STANDING IN KAYAKS

A FEW BASIC POINTERS FOR TAKING YOUR KAYAK APPROACH UPRIGHT

By Joe Balog

PHOTOS BY CHRIS CONDER

Modern kayaks are longer, wider and infinitely more stable than those available just a few years ago. The improvements are at least in part due to the growing popularity of rigs specifically designed for fishing, and demands for lightweight kayaks that allow anglers to stand up while casting and utilizing the same techniques as their big boat brethren. Tournament kayak pros make it look easy, often even paddling while standing.

For the average kayak angler, standing in a kayak raises a few important questions. Notably: Is it necessary, is it safe and does it improve your odds of a successful catch? We dove into the subject with a couple of veteran kayak anglers.

Basic Styles

It's important to note the differences in kayak design. Sit-on-top models position the angler slightly higher than sit-inside versions, resulting in a higher center of gravity and a kayak that sometime feels a bit more "tippy" when standing. But that doesn't rule them out. Smart hull designs from premium kayak makers can overcome the issue.

Mike Ernst, a former Kayak Bass Fishing Tennessee angler of the year and Kayak Bass Fishing National Championship qualifier, used to guide for muskies in a Ranger Z20 before he moved to his current home in the South. Now, a kayak angler who frequents Percy Priest and Old Hickory reservoirs near Nashville, Ernst isn't willing to give up standing when he fishes.

"I'd say I stand about 50 percent of the time while I fish," says Ernst, who chose the Jackson Kayak Cuda HD as his new fishing rig. "This is a new, sit-on-top hull design. It's wider [than the previous Cuda model] and very stable."

Russell Johnson is a certified kayak instructor who spends considerable time chasing smallmouths in the rivers near his Pennsylvania home. To get a good view, Johnson stands up almost continually while fishing, and at 6 feet tall and 270 pounds, he found an advantage to choosing a boat big enough to fit his frame.

"I fish from a Jackson Kilroy DT, and draft as little water as possible for my size," he says.

The Kilroy DT is a sit-inside kayak marketed as a tandem unit, but its unique track seating system allows Johnson to convert it to a large, one-man boat.

"Finding a kayak that was good for me to stand up in was a key," he adds. "With a sit-on-top, your feet are 3 to 6 inches above the water line when standing. With my boat, my feet are on the water line."

Johnson believes the lower position improves stability for pushing and paddling.

So if you're considering a kayak and want to stand, it's worth the time to do some research on the stability of various models, and to consider whether a sit-inside or sit-on-top model is best.

Technique Variability

Ernst believes that a few bass fishing techniques require an angler to stand, but not all. In fact, he sees advantages in sitting for some techniques.

"Flipping and pitching, no doubt, I'm standing. And skipping under docks," he says. "My favorite way to fish is cranking. And when I crank, or throw a ChatterBait or spinnerbait, I sit down."

Ernst believes a seated kayak angler actually excels in scenarios that require casting and winding. Because the position is more stable, he can focus on fishing.

Practice Makes Perfect

As you develop kayak fishing skills, consider practicing standing and maneuvering, just as you'd practice various seated paddle strokes. Reserve practice for times and places where you're not likely to encounter heavy wind or boat traffic, and always wear a PFD. Over time, standing should become easier as you master balance and muscle control.

"I remember the first time I stood up in a kayak," Ernst says. "I wasn't comfortable at all. Now, I don't even think about it."

Equipment for Standing

All you need to stand is your legs, but if you want to move and control the kayak while standing, you'll need a paddle or push-pole that can reach.

While reservoir fishing for bass, Ernst often paddles while standing using his regular paddle to keep gear and weight to a minimum.

"I put my hand on the top blade of the paddle and stroke like a canoe," he says.

On inshore jaunts for redfish, or when stalking spooky shallow bass, Ernst switches to a push-pole.

"I use the YakAttack stake-out pole [a shallow-water "stick pin" called the ParkNPole that is intended for anchoring]. I push with the T-handle, and stake out my boat by flipping the pole over and pushing it through the scupper hole on my kayak."

Kayak anglers interested in push-poling should also consider the Superstick Push Pole, a lightweight, telescoping, nearly indestructible unit used by many FLW Tour pros when pushing their bass boats in shallow water. The Superstick is compatible with multiple head attachments, including a paddle blade. I've used it several times in my kayak, and found the extra length to be ideal for paddling/pushing around while standing.

Johnson pushes and paddles along with a Bending Branches carbon fiber paddle.

"That's a very tough paddle," he says, "so I don't need to carry any other type of pole. I can do everything with it, and I have less to carry."

PFDs

Neither of our pros feels unsafe whatsoever when standing in his kayak, but it goes without saying that all kayak anglers should wear a life jacket at all times. Ernst likes the models built by Kokatat, which feature the majority of the flotation on the front of the jacket and around the lower waist, a configuration he finds more comfortable for the movements associated with kayaking without sacrificing safety. Idaho-based Northwest River Supplies (NRS) also offers a variety of kayak-specific models.

With practice, kayak anglers can confidently attack the water using their favorite bass fishing methods from a standing position. The trick is to pick the right boat for your individual size and needs, then rise up to the challenge. ■



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WHAT'S INSIDE:

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8 NEW PRODUCTS YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS



FAVORITE USA SUMMIT – 731H

By Matt Williams
PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

Favorite USA brings some unique twists to the heavy-power corner with its Summit 731H, a multi-purpose workhorse built to deliver high performance on several different fronts. I've had one in the boat for the better part of a year, and it's been a pleasure to fish with using a variety of applications.

First Impression

Two things I noticed from the get-go were how light the rod felt and the absence of any cork or foam grip around the handle (except for the small EVA foam butt cap). The 7-foot, 3-inch rod weighs only 3.9 ounces, yet is well balanced and slim for a heavy-power, extra-fast-action stick that's rated for baits as heavy as 1 ounce and lines as stout as 20-pound test.

The thin blank tapers to a fatter diameter where it meets with the handle section, and the two parts are

forged together into one using a patented design known as iGrip.

The blank is topped with 10 premium Fuji TORZITE titanium-frame guides and accented by classy silver pinstriping that blends nicely with the gunmetal finish.

In Action

The Summit 731H has a stout, extra-fast tip that transfers to a stiff backbone. I put it to use with a variety of baits and techniques in water as skinny as 2 feet and as deep as 28 feet, and it performed well across the board.

Up shallow, I used the rod for throwing swim jigs, bladed jigs, spinnerbaits and 5- to 6-inch paddle-tail swimbaits around pad stubble and scattered grass. I cast Texas rigs and jigs on spawning flats and pitched them around bushes, docks and other scattered shore cover. The rod delivered solid hooksets at

the end of long casts and plenty of power to get fish under control and coming toward the boat quickly.

While some anglers might prefer a little lighter tip when casting accuracy around targets is important, the extra-fast action and overall design of the blank allowed me to "stay in contact" with bottom composition, bait action and subtle bites. The sensitivity is outstanding. I spent a lot of time using the rod away from the bank, mostly around stumps and hard bottoms in combination with a Texas and Carolina rig. I can't say for sure there wasn't a peck, bump or any other vibration down the line that got by unnoticed, but there weren't many.

Final Thoughts

I was a little apprehensive at first about the slick handle on a heavy-action rod, mainly because I had never fished with a stiff rod

that didn't have some sort of cushion at the contact point where the fat part of my palm meets with the handle. Another of my early concerns was potential slippage due to water, sweat or sunscreen. The worries waned after I used it for a few fishing trips and was able to develop a feel for something different than what I was used to. If the handle bothers you, a couple of wraps with Winn Rod Overwrap tape should alleviate the problem.

Overall, the rod's light weight made it a real pleasure to fish with all day using multiple techniques, and the sensitivity made it easy to detect any change in bottom composition and subtle strikes. The slim blank provides plenty of leverage and power for tangling with big fish around heavy cover. Just remember: It's not a rod that will double as a chin-up bar when you get home.

THIN BLANK:

The thin, heavy-action rod blank is fashioned from Toray 46T, a super-strong, 46-ton Japanese-manufactured carbon fiber material. It's constructed with layers of fibers at alternating angles and a gridded wrap layer for strength and the appropriate stiffness.



iGRIP:

Favorite's patented iGrip technology results in a unique cone-shaped transition where the blank and grip blend together to form a single unit.



FUJI TORZITE GUIDES:

High-end guides with titanium frames and ceramic inserts ensure top-end performance.



Performance Advice

The rod is strong and stiff, but don't mistake it for a heavy-duty flipping stick built for boat-flipping big bass or whaling on lunkers at short range in thick cover with a big jig. Favorite doesn't recommend using it in combination with heavy braided lines or for punching/flipping applications around matted grass or other gnarly cover.

Match the rod with a low-profile baitcaster such as the Team Lew's Custom Pro Speed Spool SLP Series to complement its light weight and other high-performance traits.

APPLICATIONS

- Tossing swim jigs, bladed jigs, spinnerbaits and swim-baits, especially in situations requiring a solid hookset at the end of a long cast
- Pitching or casting plastics and jigs around docks, bushes, rocks or other scattered cover
- Dragging Texas rigs and Carolina rigs

HITS & MISSES

- + Super light for reduced fatigue
- + Excellent sensitivity
- + Premium titanium guides
- + Provides quick, snap hooksets on Texas rigs and Carolina rigs
- It's not cheap

>> ON THE WATER



DETAILS

Length:

7 feet, 3 inches

Power:

heavy

Action:

extra fast

Guides:

Fuji TORZITE

Weight:

3.9 ounces

Lure weight rating:

3/8 to 1 ounce

Line size rating:

12- to 20-pound test

MSRP:

\$349.99 ■



LOOKING DOWN

HOW TO DIAL IN LOWRANCE UNITS FOR "VIDEO GAME" FISHING *By Tyler Brinks*

"Video game" fishing, or using a Lowrance unit to observe and catch bass straight below the boat, is a standard tactic in modern bass fishing that every pro employs at some point during the season. Learning to read the fish and make them bite takes time on the water, but dialing in your sonar for the best view is something you can learn quickly and easily. Here, FLW Tour pro Jimmy Reese reveals how he sets up his Lowrance units for the best performance while video game fishing.

His system works for Lowrance HDS Carbon and Elite Ti units. If you're running a Lowrance HOOK unit, the process is similar, but see the accompanying sidebar for further instructions.

Range

Menu → Range: Automatic and Custom

This setting is dependent on the depth Reese is fishing. For most situations, the Automatic setting works fine. It'll show everything that is below the boat. In deeper areas, Reese will often set a screen to a Custom range showing just the lower 10 feet of the water column, if that's where the fish are. In deep water, it gives him a more detailed view of the action. The Custom setting allows users to enter numbers for the upper and lower ends of the range.

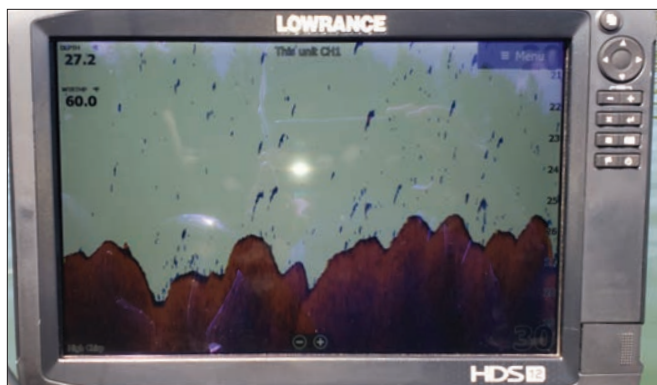


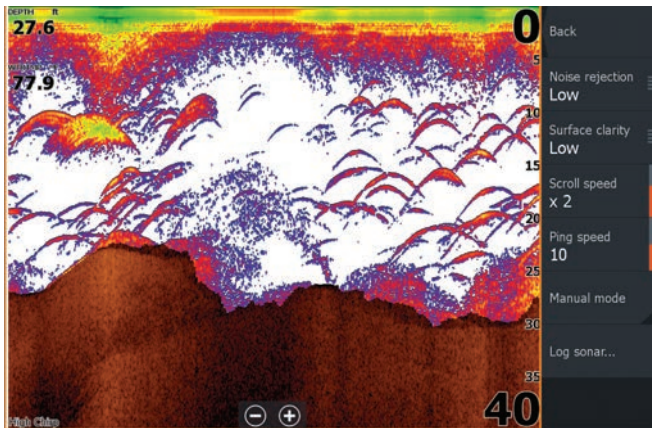
PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

Frequency

Menu → Frequency: 200kHz, 83kHz, 50kHz, High CHIRP, Med. CHIRP or Low CHIRP

The number of Frequency settings depends on what transducer is installed, but the HDS Carbon and Elite Ti units are capable of up to six settings. Reese uses High CHIRP and feels like this is one of the most important things for video game fishing.

“CHIRP allows you to get a faster response and the best picture of what is below,” he says.



Noise Rejection

Menu → Advanced Options → Noise rejection: Off, Low, Medium or High

This setting can reduce interference on the screen and give the user a better picture. Reese keeps his Noise rejection setting at Low.

“I don’t want to remove too much on my screen, so I don’t miss any fish,” he adds.

Surface Clarity

Menu → Advanced Options → Surface clarity: Off, Low, Medium, or High

Like Noise Rejection, Surface Clarity cleans up the screen for a better picture and specifically reduces clutter near the surface. Reese also sets this at Low to preserve visibility.

Scroll Speed

Menu → Advanced Options → Scroll speed: 1/9 speed to X8 speed

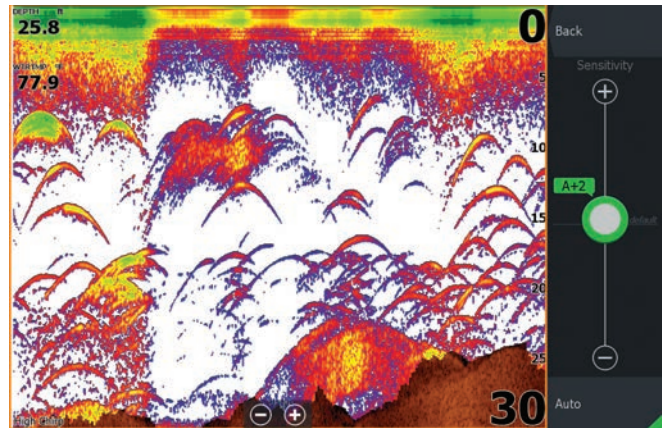
Scroll speed is the rate at which the sonar images move across the screen. Reese runs it slightly faster than the default at the X2 speed.

“I want to be able to get a better picture of the fish, and the faster speed also allows you to see the fish for a little longer [it creates longer arches and returns],” he says. “Having it up too fast will hurt your chances to drop onto the fish and still see the fish on your screen.”

Ping Speed

Menu → Advanced Options → Ping speed: Min to Max

Ping speed controls how fast the sonar signal is sent down. It can be adjusted from Minimum to Maximum on a scale of 1 to 20. Reese likes to keep it in the middle at setting 10.

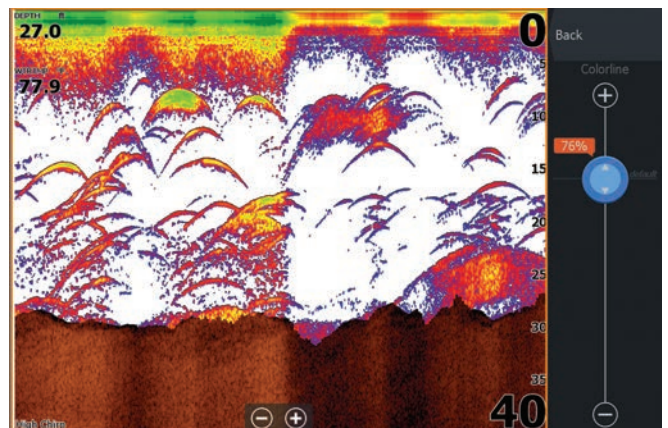


Sensitivity

Menu → Sensitivity → A+40 to A-40

Reese bumps the Sensitivity setting up slightly from the default setting to A+2.

“I have experimented with all of the different settings and now keep it at A+2 at all times. It seems to have the best overall picture,” he says.



Colorline

Menu → Colorline → 0% to 100% (default is 76%)

The Colorline on the bottom of the Lowrance screen is there to show differences in bottom composition. Reese sticks with the default setting – 76 percent. ■

Functions of the HOOK Series

The value-priced HOOK series offers most of the same sonar settings as the HDS Carbon and Elite Ti units, but the menu is slightly different to access some of the functions.

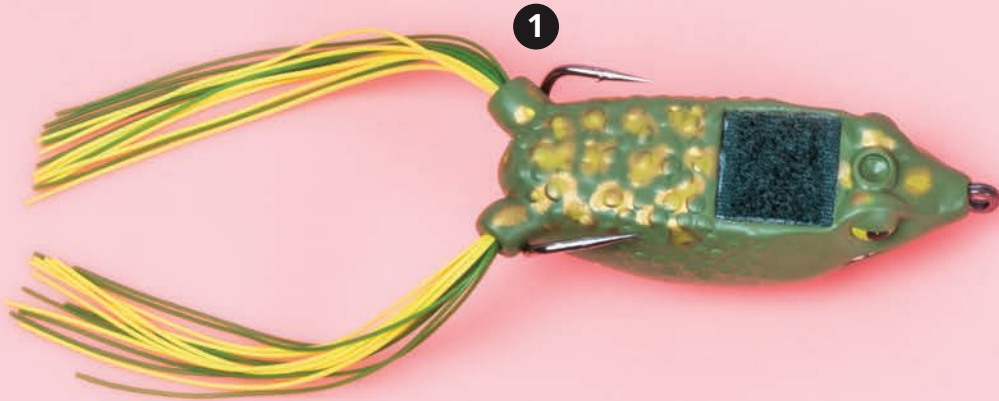
Range, Frequency and Sensitivity

All of these can be accessed on the main menu.

Ping Speed, Scroll Speed, Noise Rejection, Surface Clarity and Colorline

To access advanced features on the HOOK series, you must first adjust the Mode setting from Automatic to Custom. Here’s the sequence: Menu → Mode → Custom.

Once in the Custom mode, the settings are all the same as the HDS Carbon and Elite Ti. To access them: Menu → Advanced Options. ■





1. STANFORD BAITS BOOM BOOM FROG

Stanford says the patch of "Frogfur" on the back snags the rough surface of a bass's jaw when it bites to make the fish hold on longer. If it works, great. If not, it's still a quality frog.

\$10.99 | stanfordbaits.com

2. JACKALL GRINCH

Designers merged a swimbait with a hollow frog to create the 5 3/4-inch-long Jackall Grinch. In action, the frog body stays on the surface, while the tail kicks along below.

\$9.99 | jackall-fishing.com

3. TERMINATOR SHUDDER BAIT

Vibrating action results from the curved, shield-shaped swimming blade on the Terminator Shudder Bait. A heavy-duty split ring connects the blade to the pointed head, which features a large VMC hook with wire bait keeper.

\$6.99 | Rapala.com

4. COSTA UNTANGLED COLLECTION PESCADOR

Frames in the new Untangled Collection are made of recycled fishing nets in partnership with Bureo, the company that pioneered recycled fishnet products. Several styles and lenses are available.

\$199 to \$269 | costadelmar.com

5. VMC NEKO SKIRT

VMC added a little extra to your Neko rig with rubber and silicone skirt materials. Ribs in the weight (1/32 to 1/8 ounce) help keep it in the worm.

\$2.99 for two | Rapala.com

6. MEGABASS SONICSIDE CRANKBAIT

Flat-sided crankbaits are notoriously tough to cast because of their lightness and tendency to catch the wind, but not the SonicSide. Aerodynamic shaping and internal weighting let 'er fly far.

\$19.99 | megabassusa.com

7. VMC TOKYO RIG

The VMC Tokyo Rig is a heavy-duty drop-shot/Texas rig hybrid comprised of a premium swivel, wide-gap hook (2/0 to 5/0) and 2 1/2-inch stainless-steel dropper wire connected by a welded ring. To use, add a bullet sinker to the wire, then bend the end to keep it in place.

\$3.99 for two | Rapala.com

8. TECKEL MARACKER

It has the same body shape as other Teckel frogs, but is equipped with a Colorado blade-shaped knocker chamber as a "tail." It "thunks" when walked.

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MARK ROSE CLAIMS FIRST AOY TITLE

LAKE ST. CLAIR FINALLY TAKES A GOOD TURN FOR ARKANSAS PRO

By Colin Moore

In the end, Mark Rose's most important weigh-in of the year was one in which he didn't participate. The FLW Tour's 2018 finale on Lake St. Clair in late June was the make-or-break climax to his season, and the Arkansas pro held a tenuous lead over Scott Martin in the Pennzoil Marine Angler of the Year race. Rose's part in the tournament was over after the second day, as he finished 67th in the standings, and all he could do was stand by and sweat it out as events moved past him and beyond his control. Martin, who's won every major award FLW has to offer, was his closest rival at 64 points behind and was making a strong bid to earn his second AOY title.

Martin ran out of fish and opportunity in the third round, however, as another angler bumped him from 10th place and the championship round. Rose won his first Angler of the Year title by a scant 10 points ahead of 2017 AOY Bryan Thrift.

It was absolution of sorts for Rose, the chance for him to put paid years of unexceptional finishes on St. Clair and on neighboring waters. St. Clair finally did him a solid. This time around, all Rose could blame his mediocre finish on was his choice to put aside his usual inclination to fish in attack mode and play defense instead.

"Of course, hindsight is 20-20, but I fished way too conservatively at St. Clair. The [AOY] point spread went into my strategy," admits Rose. "Had I been fishing in a regular tournament I would be giving it my all, trying to get a check. I would not have fished the way I fished at St. Clair. I would have tried to get around the biggest fish I possibly could and figure out how to catch them."



The Path Not Taken

On the last day of practice at St. Clair, Rose and fellow Arkansas pro Greg Bohannon located an area that was swarming with fish in the 3-pounds-plus range, and a few that topped 4 pounds. Rose also had found a spot offshore where the fish he caught were bigger, but more random. Given that there wasn't much wiggle room between him and two of the most formidable competitors in the FLW Tour ranks – Martin and Thrift – Rose opted to plan his tournament around the surer thing.

“Based on past tournament statistics, I felt like I could catch 17 or 18 pounds a day and do what I needed to do,” recalls Rose, a slugging center fielder for Arkansas State University in his college days. “Fast-forward; if I had known it was going to be a homerun derby I would have dug in a little deeper in the box. I wouldn't have choked up on the bat at all. I would have just been me and swung a little harder, which is what I usually do. It almost cost me, but it didn't. I lost a few key fish – one 4-pounder broke off, and another just pulled off

right at the boat. If I had caught them, it wouldn't have been so close.”

Until now, St. Clair provided equal measures of insult and injury to Rose's resume. In 1999, his third-place finish in a Tour event on the Mississippi River convinced him that he was ready to turn pro and make the big bucks. Subsequently he quit his day job as a district executive for the Chickasaw Council of the Boy Scouts in Memphis and prepared for the life of a tournament angler. A month later, a 147th-place finish at Lake St. Clair disabused him of the notion that he was on a meteoric rise to fame and fortune.

Such results have not defined Rose's 20 years as an FLW Tour pro. Seven top-10 seasons bespeak his consistency. Monetarily, 2018 marked the third time Rose has cashed checks totaling more than \$200,000. The AOY championship earned him \$100,000, he'll earn a new boat through the Ranger Cup program and the Forrest Wood Cup is still to come. He's collected nearly \$2 1/2 million overall in his career and, at 46, should have several productive years ahead of him.

“I WOULDN'T HAVE CHOKED UP ON THE BAT AT ALL. I WOULD HAVE JUST BEEN ME AND SWUNG A LITTLE HARDER.”

— MARK ROSE



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SWIFT. SILENT. SECURE.



Last year Rose had the distinction of becoming the first FLW Tour pro to win two events in a row. He scored first at the opener on Lake Guntersville, then followed up with a win at Lake Travis. Rose seemed destined to win the 2017 AOY moniker, but then he began to slip in the standings. Finishing 107th in the last tournament of the year on the Potomac River, he wound up 10th in the standings.

"Toward the end of the 2017 season – and I don't like to play the excuse game – my [right] carpal tunnel really affected me in the last couple of tournaments," Rose notes. "I'm not blaming the AOY getting away from me on that, because Bryan Thrift was going to win it, period. But it kept me from making it closer. This past winter I spent a lot of time rehabbing and conditioning it. I'm still going to have to get it taken care of one of these days."

It Came Together At Kentucky Lake

Rose began the 2018 campaign more at a trot than a gallop. He stayed toward the front of the AOY race early on when Tim Frederick, Chris Johnston and Jared McMillan, respectively, took turns leading the pack in the first three tournaments. Thrift took the top spot at Lake Cumberland, then Rose overtook him at Smith Lake and remained ahead through Kentucky Lake. St. Clair aside, it was Kentucky Lake that provided the defining moment of his season.

Though Rose claims it's his favorite lake, the big Tennessee River impoundment gave up only four keepers to him the first day. With 12 pounds, 5 ounces,

Rose found himself in a three-way tie for 64th place, and no way up except by doing what he does best: fishing ledges.

"After that first day, my thoughts were, 'Son, you better pull up your drawers and fish like you normally do in these ledge tournaments and quit letting those carp intimidate you and get you out of kilter,'" recalls Rose.

Rose initially figured that Kentucky Lake's exploding Asian carp population

would cause bass to abandon the ledges, humps and bars to the invasive fish, which like to gang up in the same locales as bass. It was a faulty assumption on his part. Limits brought in by such offshore specialists as eventual winner Jason Lambert and Randy Haynes suggested business as usual along the drops.

"After that first day and seeing what had happened, I realized the fish were



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PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



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“I WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW THAT EVERYTHING I ACCOMPLISH IS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.”

— MARK ROSE

changing and actually doing what they were supposed to be doing out there on the ledges,” says Rose. “I think it really turned on the third day of practice and the off day, but by then I had decided to abandon the ledge bite. When I saw what was going on, I changed my mind and went to the ledges and caught them like I was supposed to.”

The second day, Rose returned to the weigh-in with 17-15, then 21-14 on day three and 19-9 the last day. His extraordinary rally and eventual fifth-place finish at Kentucky Lake was the turning of the tide in the AOY race. It was a minor miracle, perhaps, but in Rose’s world such divine intervention is commonplace.

A Higher Mission

Rose prepared for the St. Clair event as he usually does, by stopping between home and his tournament destination and speaking with the voice of an outdoor sportsman to a local church group. This time, it was at Lima Baptist Temple in Lima, Ohio. Then, the Sunday before the tournament began, at 6 a.m. on the lake, he presided over Fishin’ Church. Held before each Tour event, it’s a prayer meeting that Rose created for competitors who want to observe the Sabbath before going about their business of locating fish and formulating strategies.

“Fishin’ Church stemmed from me going to church somewhere on the road before an event,” says Rose. “I was missing some practice, and there were other people who wanted to go to church, but who didn’t want to miss practice either. I got a conviction that the Lord wanted me to provide church. So a little after daylight on the Sunday before a tournament we take 15 or 20 minutes and have a non-denominational service. I bring a short message out of the Bible, and we lift up our

prayers for our fishing family. Mainly we pray for their health and their safety, and the FLW staff’s.”

As anyone who has visited an FLW Tour weigh-in knows, Mark Rose is not ashamed to profess his faith and lay every success at the feet of a higher power. Even bad days aren’t so bad to this happy warrior. They serve Rose’s purpose of revealing Who’s really in control, and that fortitude is a divine gift.

Rose is more polished in his delivery to weigh-in crowds these days, probably because he’s had years of practice sharing his testimony with various church groups. In religious terms, there’s a difference between preaching and testifying. One is an attempt to convince, the other to profess one’s faith and lead by example. Rose fits the latter mold. He nudges, rather than exhorts, and FLW is his pulpit.

“I fish FLW because I can speak my faith better here than anywhere else. I want the world to know that everything I accomplish is for the glory of God. Fishing and doing well in tournaments gives me more opportunities to express that.”

The AOY crown represents excellence, and the money that accompanies it will make life better for Rose, his wife, Christi, and their daughters, Natalie and Hannah Grace. More importantly to Rose, however, is that it lends more credibility and clout to his message.

“The AOY race, the title – I’m more proud that I can give all the glory to God for that,” says the Arkansas pro. “It doesn’t change much for me. Outdoor ministry is a passion of mine. My heart beats to reach sportsmen with the love of Jesus Christ; to tell people about my faith.”

Nervous and fidgety about the twists and turns his career sometimes takes, yes; worried, no. Win or lose fishing tournaments and AOY accolades, Mark Rose knows his greatest cares disappeared on Calvary’s hill. ■



GENERAL TIRE

GENERAL TIRE

ROSE

Mike King

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



ROOKIE YEAR
FLW

2018
FLW

- ER
- VILLE, PA
- 5
- 16 lb-10 oz
- 58 lb-13 oz
- MERCURY
- AL ENGINE
- 62-6*
- 58-8*
- 58-7*
- 58-1*
- 56-13*
- 56-9*
- 54-7*
- 50-1
- 49-13
- 46-9
- 46-5
- 46-4
- 45-1
- 44-5
- 43-0

LOWE

FLW

MERCURY
ENGINE

FLW

2018 FLW TOUR ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

MATT BECKER, FINLEYVILLE, PA.

By Curtis Niedermier
PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Give us the elevator pitch version of the answer to this question: Who is Matt Becker?

A small-town kid from Pittsburgh that just loves bass fishing.

You just won the Rookie of the Year title for 2018. Summarize how you feel right now.

It's unreal. You know, looking back, there are so many little things that happened that were all the little pieces of the puzzle, and it's a pretty cool feeling to have accomplished that.

Was ROY a major goal of yours this season, or was it more of a byproduct of having a good season, making some money and trying to get to the Cup?

It was a little bit of both. It was certainly a goal, but on the other hand, I also wanted to just cash enough checks to be able to fish again next year and work on doing this forever hopefully.

You're from Pennsylvania, which isn't exactly known as a bass-crazy state. So ... tell us the truth: Is Pennsylvania a good place to be a bass angler?

Um, not necessarily. I live on the Three Rivers here in Pittsburgh, and you saw how the Cup went when it was here a few years ago. So I've had to do a lot of traveling, as far as cutting my teeth fishing-wise. There's only a handful of lakes around that are any good. So I've had to travel regionally.

How old were you during the Three Rivers Cup?

I just turned 26 in June, so I had to be 17. That was in 2009.

What was it like seeing the best pros fishing in your backyard? Were you already into bass fishing then?

That was about the time when I got real serious into it. Growing up I was always super into fishing and everything, but I didn't really take it as serious until I got to about 16 or 17. Watching it there in my home city drove it home that I wanted to do that.

Are you a smallmouth specialist? Because your tournament stats with FLW suggest you might be.

Yeah, that's what I would consider my strong suit is Great Lakes smallmouth fishing, finding them with my electronics. That's what I'm best at.

As a Great Lakes guy, do you think it takes a different breed of angler to get out there on those massive bodies of water?

Definitely. Most people would look at that and say no way am I running across that lake where you can't see shore in any direction. But you have to trust your equipment and trust everything will be all right.

What do you struggle with the most?

Probably ledge fishing down there on Kentucky Lake. I had a tough go at it in that tournament. I kind of felt lost there.

Do you have a job outside of fishing?

I work for a printer and copier company, and I run the service department for it.

How much would you like to quit and spend the rest of your life only on the water?

100 percent. Hopefully this title can secure me enough sponsor help that I don't have to work a couple weeks when I come home.

Who have you looked up to the most in the pro fishing ranks?

Probably David Dudley. I met him, oddly enough, a while ago here in Pittsburgh. His wife's family is not too far from me. So my dad, George Becker, and I ran into him at Walmart one time. That was interesting. I forget what we were even doing, but we bumped into him in the fishing department. We talked to him a little bit. As we were leaving we bumped into him in the parking lot again. He was riding his cart to his truck. I'll never forget that.

If you could choose the site of the next Forrest Wood Cup, where would it be?

Three Rivers in Pittsburgh.

Really? Not Lake Erie or 1000 Islands?

Well, yeah, that would be more fun for me, but I would have such an advantage here on the rivers that I feel like I would have a better shot of winning here than up there.

How did you feel on day one at Lake Okeechobee, on the first day of your FLW Tour career?

I just remember looking around and realizing, like, I finally made it; I'm living the dream right here. And I wasn't really nervous. I was more anxious to get up to my area and box up my first fish. But I'll never forget this; my first fish of my tournament career was a 12 1/4-inch largemouth. I thought I was back home here. It didn't take long 'til we got rid of it, and then life was good.

Was there a point this season when the train seemed like it was going to be running off the rails?

The whole year was a roller coaster, really. Cumberland was definitely the absolute downfall. And then I backed that up with a top 10 at Smith. But then the next tournament at Kentucky, that's probably the single worst moment that sticks out to me. I struggled the first day. I only had one fish the first day. I go out the second day and catch four pretty quick and then struggle the rest of the day. The voices started talking in my head: *Here goes another bomb of a finish. You're not going to make the Cup.* Then, the next thing I know I catch a 7 1/2-pounder for my fifth fish. It was big fish of the day. I look back on it now, and that single fish moved me up 40 spots in the standings and gave me another 40 points. Without that I wouldn't have made the Cup, won Rookie of the Year – none of that.

Somewhere in Pennsylvania there's a young boy or girl who wants to one day be the FLW Tour Rookie of the Year. Give that future pro your best advice.

Just stick with it. Spend every second you can trying to better yourself, whether it be on the internet watching videos, playing with tackle, whatever it may be. If you're passionate about something put 110 percent into it. You can do it. Anybody can do it. ■



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2018 FLW TOUR CO-ANGLER OF THE YEAR

MARK HORTON, NICHOLASVILLE, KY.

By Curtis Niedermier
PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

How does it feel to be the 2018 FLW Tour Co-angler of the Year?

There's nobody more surprised about it than me. I never go into a season counting points and worrying about all that stuff because as a co-angler you're at the mercy of a lot of different people throughout the year. All you can do is do the best that you can every day and just see how you end up.

[At St. Clair] I was actually kind of looking at the points to see how bad I could screw up and not drop out of the top 10. I figured I had to finish in the top 130 to stay in the top 10. But I never tried to figure out how anybody else was going to do, and I'm never the kind of person to wish ill luck on anybody else to benefit myself. Nobody was more upset to see Johnny Douglas, who's a friend of mine – and I think he was in second or third going in – drop all the way to 11th. He zeroed one day. Nobody was more upset than me because I've been there and done that, and I know how devastating it is to have a good season destroyed by a bad day.

If winning COY wasn't a goal, what was your goal?

It's always been just enjoying the camaraderie of the guys that I travel with. Being under a lot of pressure at work, this is just my way of getting away, to have a good time and forget about all the crazy stuff that's going on back at home. In the summertime we get really busy, and there's a whole lot of pressure at work. It keeps my sanity, I guess. I'm not looking necessarily to learn so I can go to the front of the boat or pursue a career as a professional fisherman or anything like that.

At Lake St. Clair, you told me you own your own heating and air business. So since you're self-employed, does the boss ever let you skip work on Friday to go fishing?

Yeah. Since I'm the boss, that's the only way that I get to do what I do.

How'd you get started with FLW?

I started out fishing BFLs. I had a buddy ask me if I wanted to go with him to be a co-angler. I did that for a little while, and then my travel partner, Shawn Murphy – we're from the same hometown, Nicholasville, Ky. – called me one day and said they were going to have what was then an EverStart [now Costa FLW Series] on Kentucky Lake. He said, "Why don't we go fish it?" So we did. It just kind of grew from there. We fished the EverStarts some. Then he wanted to move up to the Tour, so here we are.

Tell me about that last day at St. Clair, when you sealed it up.

The first day I was in 123rd place. So that didn't give me a warm fuzzy feeling going into the final day. I was going to be paired with Dylan Hays, and his co-angler caught them

the day before, so I felt like I was going to be OK. I figured if I could get 20 pounds I could make a check, and I knew he was around good fish. That morning, Dylan knew what I had. He said you need about 20 pounds today, and we're going to make sure you get that. He helped me all day long. He wanted to make sure I got what I needed to get a check. We never talked all day long about COY or anything like that. I didn't even think that was a possibility.

So how'd you find out you had a chance?

Bill Taylor [senior director of tournament operations] called me and asked me where I was, and under different circumstances, I might have been already gone [home]. But I was hanging around to get my check. When I got the call, that's the first time I even had an idea.

You cashed a check at every event this year. How did you stay so consistent?

I've been fortunate enough to catch a big fish in every tournament. I attribute some of that to – and this is going to sound like I'm promoting a sponsor – the fact that I generally use lighter line than a lot of my boaters. I use Gamma line, and I have a lot of confidence I can get them out and not break off. At Okeechobee, I had a big one, and it was tangled around some wood dock piers, and I got it out. With Larry Nixon at Smith, I had a big spot under a dock under some cables. I had a 5-12 spot at Lanier on 6-pound-test line. I got some key fish in because my line held up and didn't break. Otherwise, I might've just come back with some sad stories of the one that got away.

Speaking of sponsors, is there anyone else you want to thank?

Daiwa is probably my biggest sponsor. I've had just phenomenal success with the Daiwa products since I've switched to them. And my local tackle store, Backwater Outfitters in Lexington, Ky., they've always stood behind me and helped me. Of course, I already mentioned Gamma. And Bill Day at Day's Boat Sales in Frankfort. He's been a big sponsor of me through the years. He's helped me in a lot of different ways. You name it; he's done it. I would also like to thank my girlfriend, Denise Cobb, for putting up with all this. She's not been around tournament bass fishing much. She didn't really know what she was signing up for with me and all this being gone. And, of course, Shawn Murphy. They're on the top of a long list of people that, without them, I couldn't do this.

Any pros stand out that you've particularly enjoyed fishing with?

Oh man, I couldn't sit here and name 'em all. I can name the ones I didn't get along with easier. I get along with all those guys. There's a bunch of them out there that are just like brothers to me. I think the world of them. ■

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HOW DUDLEY DEALS WITH THE

DOLDRUMS

10 WAYS THE VIRGINIA PRO OVERCOMES THE TOUGH LATE-SUMMER BITE

By *Curtis Niedermier*

PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER

If bass anglers could pick one month they wanted to repeat over and over throughout the year, most would choose May or June, or any month when the weather is pleasant, the fish are aggressive and catching them is easy. No one would choose August.

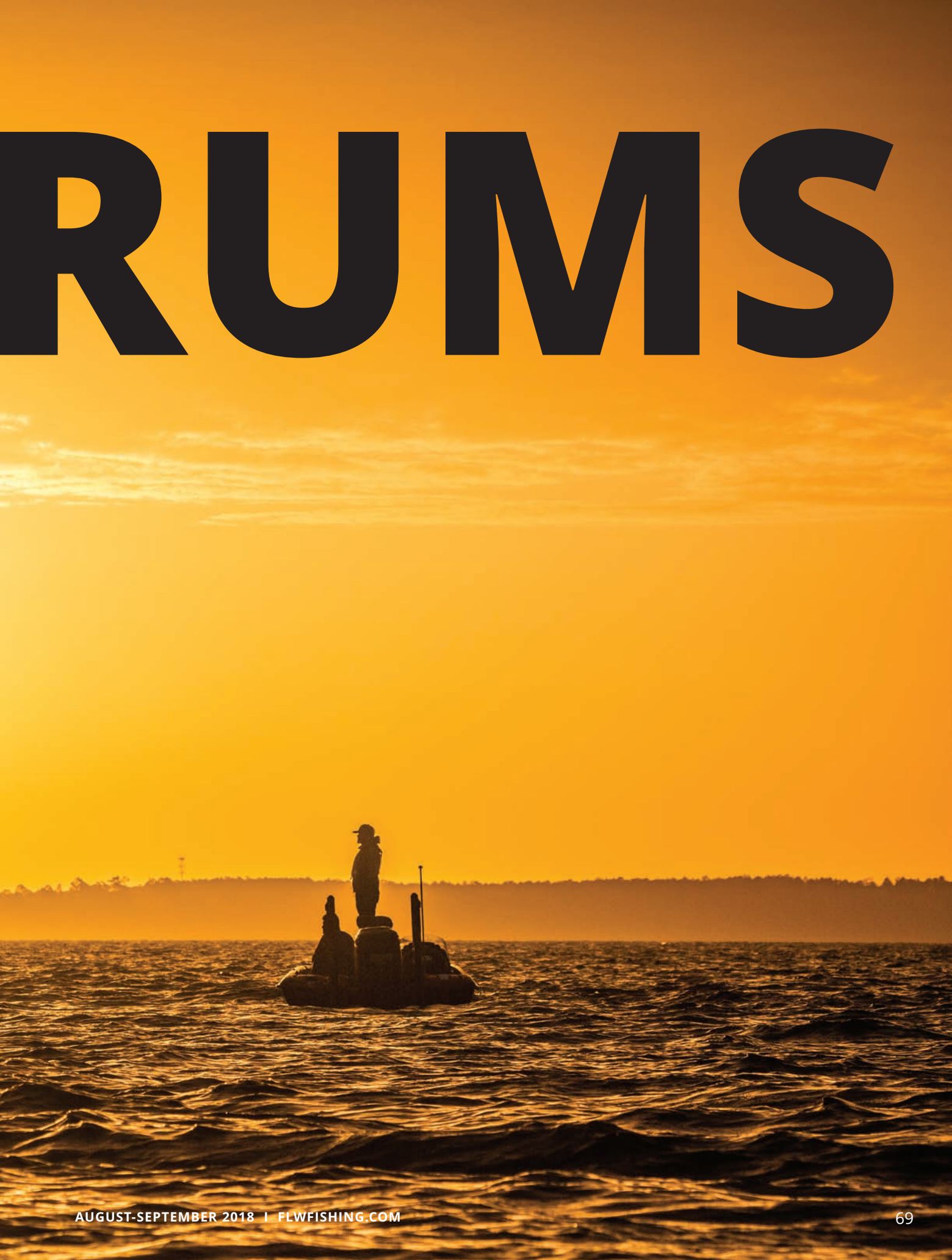
With the exception of some Northern smallmouth anglers, most wouldn't choose September, either.

What's ironic is that if you want to win the Forrest Wood Cup, qualify for a T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League Regional or make the Costa FLW Series Championship, or if you just want to have a good showing in your bass club's classic, you need to be able to catch bass during the dreaded late-season period otherwise known as the summer doldrums.

A lot of money is made in August and September, but it's pretty rare for tournaments that time of year to be classified as slugfests (again, save for some smallmouth derbies). It's not that techniques for catching fish are any more complicated in August and September. The challenges are finding unpressured fish, staying focused and aggressive in the heat, and piecing together a good game plan for bass that are scattered and often not presenting a clear pattern.

David Dudley, the veteran FLW Tour pro from Lynchburg, Va., is probably more capable of dealing with the doldrums than most. He's won the Cup and come close several other times because he's an expert at tackling tough conditions. If you want to experience some hot August glory, too, heed Dudley's advice.

RUMMS



"I tend to stay away from the obvious stuff ..."

— DAVID DUDLEY



1. Be Willing to Fish for Five Bites

There are certainly lakes and reservoirs in this country where catching dozens of bass per day in August and September is possible. Those lakes don't typically host the Cup. And, at some point, everyone is going to have to tackle a five-bites-a-day lake.

"That time of year, no matter what lake you're on, you just have to go in with the mentality that if I get five bites in a day I'm doing good," Dudley says. "That's what I've adopted. If I get more than five bites, hey, I've had a great day. A lot of people get spun out on some of that stuff.

"Anywhere I think I can get a bite, I'm going to attempt it. That time of year there are going to be fish shallow, midrange, suspended and deep. So you're just scrounging. A lot of other times of the year, you can get bit doing a lot of things, but what you're doing might not be the right thing. When you're going for five bites, anything that can get a bite is a good thing."

2. Avoid the Obvious

When you're fishing for five bites a day, a one-fish spot is pretty important. It could account for 20 percent of your daily catch. That doesn't mean Dudley fishes every culvert, bridge piling, marked brush pile, spillway and other obvious target in front of him – at least not when preparing for a multiple-day event.

"I tend to stay away from the obvious stuff because it'll get beat up during practice time," he says.

Instead, Dudley checks a handful of consistently productive features of a lake, and the features vary based on lake type.



PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

3. Key on Shade on Highland Reservoirs

Shade should be a target anywhere in August, but Dudley pays special attention to shade on clear highland reservoirs, as well as some reservoirs on the Tennessee River (the ones with a less reliable ledge bite) and any Southern impoundments without a lot of current or grass.

"If I'm shallow, I'm going to target shade, though I'm not saying fishing shallow is my first choice," Dudley says. "Docks, overhanging trees and just about anywhere where shade is present is a good target. It could even be shady banks where the sun is just coming up and the trees are casting a shadow."

Bass use the shade as cover, and so do other fish species and crustaceans they target as forage.

"If the shade line is pretty broad, I like to use a topwater," Dudley adds. "When the shade line gets kind of narrowed down midday, I like to go to a wacky worm. They'll eat a wacky worm any time of the year, anywhere you go."

4. Fish Brush in Highland Reservoir Travel Corridors

As we've seen at previous Cups on highland reservoirs, brush and cane piles house fish in the summertime.

"You're going to want a brush pile that's in a travel corridor, which might be a main-lake river channel or anything that bass are using to transition from one area to another. That brush pile gives them a stopping point along their travel corridor," Dudley says.

"I don't look for bait," he adds. "You can find bait all over the place that time of year. Baitfish are everywhere. I don't choose a spot because I saw baitfish on my screen. I choose a spot because it looks good for bass."

Drop-shots, Texas-rigged ribbon-tail worms and swim-baits are his go-to lures.

"Most of the time those fish have already been caught three times by August," Dudley adds, "and they've been pressured. Something like a crankbait is a power bait, so by August you need to throw a finesse-style presentation."



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

5. Call up Schoolers From Cane and Timber

Schooling fish have produced Cup wins before. To Dudley, the best kind of schoolers are the ones that can be patterned and called up.

"If I'm at an upland reservoir that's very clear, I look for surface activity," says Dudley, who counts water clarity as the key to this pattern. "I always keep my eyes peeled for surface activity and schooling fish.

"In these lakes that have timber in them, you can target standing timber, or cane piles or brush piles, and you can call them up. They're holding on something typically, but it's not just random luck that bass come up. There's typically something that's keeping them there."

At the 2017 Cup at Lake Murray, Justin Atkins won by using his electronics to locate suspended bass over cane piles and calling them up with a big pencil popper. Dudley will graph for pieces of cover too, but he finds a lot of his fish by visually scanning in areas where he knows there's timber and by fishing key places within the trees such as edges and drops. Both strategies can work.

6. Put Grass in Perspective

"Grass equals bass," says Dudley.

Any kind of aquatic vegetation could house fish this time of year. The plants oxygenate the water, provide shade and attract forage species that move in to eat insects. While Dudley will certainly give any grass a look, the first step is to evaluate all the options.

For instance, on a lake like Eufaula, which has lily pads and plenty of willow grass, Dudley will fish the grass, but he won't disregard the offshore brush piles and ledges that can be home to schools of fish even in late summer. Grass might be the best pattern, but then again it might not be.

Research on tournament history and current conditions are important for evaluating the likelihood of a strong grass bite.

Justin Atkins' 2017 Cup win is a good example of a schooling fish pattern paying off. He was able to call bass up from isolated cane piles.

"... it's not just random luck that bass come up. There's typically something that's keeping them there."

— DAVID DUDLEY

7. Flip Matted Grass

When a lake is choked out with the green stuff, the decision of what to fish is pretty obvious. That's also when Dudley breaks out a flipping stick.

"That time of year the pattern is going to be a heavy weight plunkin' matted grass – punching big weights through heavy cover," he says.

"You have to read the grass very specifically. I'm looking for a cavern underneath the matted grass. I want it to be hollow. I don't want it to be thick grass all the way through."

Depending on the type of grass, you can usually look for scummy mats or mats that appear to be more "mature" because the longer a mat grows on the surface, the more likely it is that some of the plants underneath the mat will have died off and left a void. Edges of grass beds will also create a wall and a cavern within.

"That time of year they could get back in the creeks pretty good, but I would say focus on areas from halfway back in the creeks to the main lake, where there's some deeper water within short reach," Dudley adds.

A Texas-rigged creature bait with a heavy weight is Dudley's go-to. Frogs are fun, but he believes more tournaments are won in grass lakes by flipping than frogging in August and September. Later in the year, once the mats really start to die back or the water drops and creates vast matted areas, a frog is a bigger factor.

Regardless, it's a power-fishing situation.

"You don't have to really finesse them in grass. The water's hot, but they're typically pretty aggressive. I'll pump the bait twice underneath that canopy, and if he doesn't have it after two pumps I'll go to a new section."

8. Fish Deep Structure For Northern Smallmouths

Northern lakes are highly variable based on forage, cover type and other factors. However, in Dudley's experience, the best late-summer, early-fall pattern on most of the glacial lakes that are big enough to draw major bass tournaments – Oneida, Champlain, Erie, St. Clair – is fishing deep-water structure where the fish start to group up.

This scenario is probably the outlier when it comes to fishing this time of year because the fishing can be really good. Still, as fish pile into deeper waters, techniques for targeting them require more finesse and accuracy.

"That's when you're throwing the Ned head and drop-shot," Dudley says. "I just utilize my electronics and go around graphing for them. In September they really start ganging up, like 20 or 30 fish. Check long points or humps that are out in the middle of the lake. Deeper is typically better."

It's important to identify every option for late-summer cover and forage, and to test them all before settling on a tournament game plan.



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



Dudley's mastery of finding bass in tidal waters earned him the 2003 Forrest Wood Cup victory.

PHOTO BY YASUJITAKA OGASAWARA

9. Fish the Heaviest Tidal Flows

Dudley won the 2003 Cup on the tidal waters of the James River and is an expert on tidewater fishing. Most tidal fisheries are highly variable, with all sorts of cover to fish and vast areas to search. So the first feature that Dudley checks to narrow down the fishable waters when the bite gets tough is the amount of flow.

"You always want to go where the current is heaviest," he says. "Go where there's a lot of water flow when the water is hot."

From there, you have to dial in on the specific features of the fishery and area. Dudley will usually pick up a small crankbait and a Texas-rigged creature bait and fish every stitch of grass, every piece of wood and every bit of rock until he can narrow it down.

10. Fish Hard

Probably the greatest factor in Dudley's Cup career is his attitude. He never quits. He'll pick up a spinning rod and drown a worm all day, or wind a deep-diving plug if that's what it takes.

We all know the summer doldrums make for really tough fishing in a lot of places. It can be hot, and the bite can be slow. But the winner's check is always the same, whether you won it with five bites a day or by plucking smallmouths out of 30 feet all day long. ■

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McKie, Champy win High School National Championship

Winning patterns from the BFL, College and High School

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



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The Forrest Wood Cup field of 56 includes anglers from throughout FLW's tournament circuits, who qualified through competition in 2017 and 2018. They'll compete for their share of \$1,097,500 in prize money.



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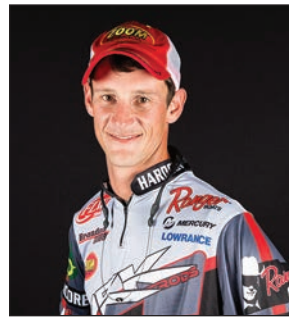
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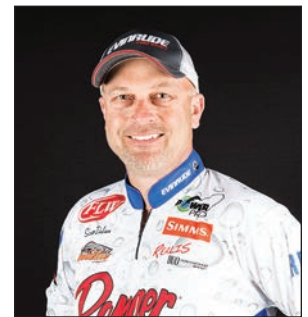
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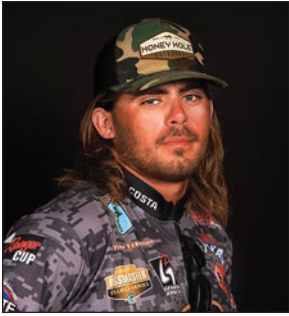
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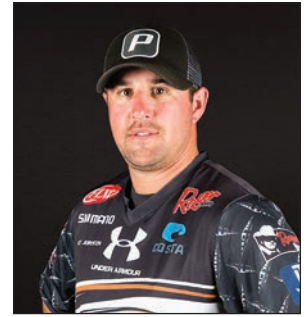
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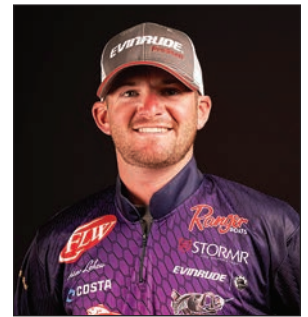
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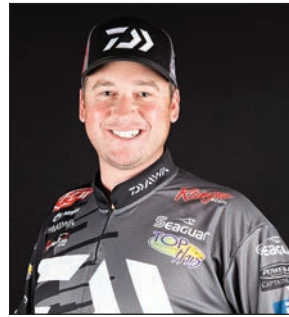
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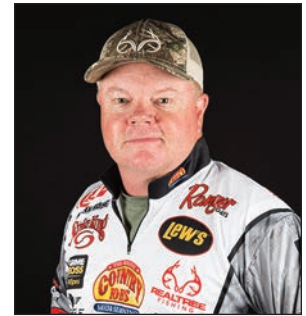
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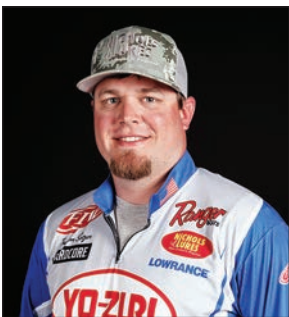
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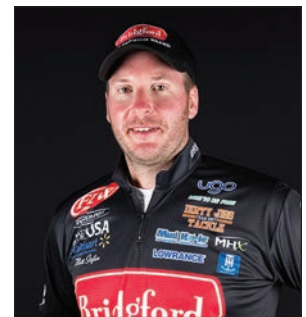
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HARRISON TOWNSHIP, MICH.

By Sean Ostruszka



WINNING ANGLER

Chad Grigsby
Maple Grove, Minn.

Winning Weight:
97-08 (20 fish)

Details:
June 28-July 1, 2018

Presented by Mercury

Hosted by Detroit Sports Commission, Macomb County, Huron-Clinton Metroparks Authority and Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

Chad Grigsby fished Lake St. Clair often for the first 30 years or so of his life. So he knew how good the fishery could be.

Yet neither he nor anyone else could predict how amazing the fishing would be at the final stop of the 2018 FLW Tour season.

“Slugfest” doesn’t even begin to describe the fishing. The field brought in the second heaviest single-day weight in a Tour event on day one, and broke the record for cumulative weight in the first two days of a Tour event. Pros toled back 75 20-pound bags, and 18 pounds didn’t even get guys pats on the back. And amazingly, it was done with smallmouths.

All that weight made for an interesting final round, as Grigsby, Dylan Hays and Brad Knight were separated by less than 2 pounds at the start of day four’s finale. Making it even more interesting was they were all keyed in on a similar area, leading to Hays prognosticating that whoever caught more than 25 pounds would win.

Sure enough, Grigsby brought in 26 pounds, 4 ounces to take the victory, while Hays brought in 23-2 and Knight weighed 21-15.

The Area

Grigsby grew up in Michigan, but now calls Minnesota home. He says he hadn’t actually fished St. Clair for nearly a decade prior to practice. Still, plenty of previous experiences pointed him in the right direction on the huge expanse of water.

“There’s no structure hardly anywhere on the lake,” Grigsby says. “You’re basically looking for the right ingredients.”

Those ingredients were clear water, isolated patches of grass with “veins” of sand running through them and plenty of bait. On day two of practice he found a 1/8-mile stretch on the southern Canadian side about midway between the Belle River Hump area and the mouth of the Detroit River. It was 16 to 19 feet deep and had what he was looking for.

“There was just more bait there than anywhere else I found,” adds Grigsby.

The Pattern

St. Clair can seem to be a hopelessly random lake, with no structure or anything to pinpoint. This is only amplified when dealing with more than 400 square miles of water and fishing many miles from shore.

With so much water to cover, an angler’s usual fishing style involves getting in a prime area and either drifting or searching around with the trolling motor until he get bites. While the bites can seem indiscriminate, often they’re not.

“Any time I got bit I marked a waypoint,” Grigsby says. “After a while I’d zoom out on my electronics and see clusters of where I was consistently getting bit. So I’d go back and forth, hitting those high-percentage areas.”

Though Grigsby fished near Hays and Knight, he had his best stretch to himself, which was a critical component. But what really set him apart was how he adapted throughout the event.

TOP FIVE

NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
1. CHAD GRIGSBY	MAPLE GROVE, MN	97-08	20	\$128,000*
2. DYLAN HAYS	SHERIDAN, AR	95-05	20	\$30,200
3. BRAD KNIGHT	LANCING, TN	92-05	20	\$25,100
4. SCOTT DOBSON	CLARKSTON, MI	89-11	20	\$20,000
5. BRYAN THRIFT	SHELBY, NC	87-13	20	\$19,000

*Includes Ranger Cup



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Anglers took off on day one under cloudy skies, but by mid-morning the lake completely slicked off, and the sun came out in full force for basically the rest of the event. Those conditions prompted Grigsby to pull out a Duo Realis Spinbait 80 spy bait, which he cast out, let sink and slowly reeled back.

"That bait was key, because that's what I got all my big bites on," Grigsby says. "The problem was how they were hitting it. If they really thumped it, you didn't often get a good hook in them. But if all of a sudden your line went slack, you had them."

Grigsby mainly tossed the spy bait around his waypointed areas. In between he dragged a 4-inch Venom tube to pick up "rogues" here and there. On day two, he also switched to a 1/4-ounce black marabou jig that provided his two biggest fish.

"I really feel I stayed one step ahead of them all week," Grigsby says. "Sometimes I'd go 45 minutes without a bite, and then I'd switch things up, adjust and start catching them again. I just had to keep making adjustments."



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

WINNING CO-ANGLER



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Mark Myers
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Winning Weight:
42-04 (10 fish)

Winning Program:

Back in 2011, Mark Myers finished second in a Costa FLW Series event on the Detroit River. He lost what likely would've been the winning fish in the final hour of the event. Seven years later, he kept a late big one pegged and got his redemption on the St. Clair/Detroit River system.

The co-angler from Cedar Falls, Iowa, stuck a 5-pounder in the last hour to cull out a 3-pounder, giving him 42 pounds, 4 ounces. That proved to be 1 pound better than Billy Messer, giving Myers his long-sought win.

While fishing deep with Darrel Robertson, Myers dragged a drop-shot and Ned rig with a Z-Man Hula StickZ to catch 23 pounds, 9 ounces and take the co-angler lead. On day two, with Cameron Gautney, Myers fished much shallower. He struggled until he realized the smallmouths were slurping mayflies off the surface. Anytime he saw that, he'd quickly cast over to the surface disturbance and usually caught the fish, including his winning 5-pounder. ■

COSTA FLW SERIES | LAKE BARKLEY

CADIZ, KY.

By Gary Garth



WINNING ANGLER

Jake Lawrence
Paris, Tenn.

Winning Weight:
72-04 (15 fish)

Details:
June 7-9, 2018

Presented by T-H Marine

Hosted by Cadiz-Trigg
County Tourism

Central Division

PHOTO BY GARY GARTH

While preparing for the Costa FLW Series tournament on Lake Barkley, Jake Lawrence knew what everyone else knew: Most of the bass in Lake Barkley and neighboring Kentucky Lake would be hanging tight to ledges. The sprawling, twin lowland reservoirs are fed by numerous creeks and harbor miles of underwater ledges, typically 15 to 30 feet deep.

The bass would be there, but they'd be finicky.

"What you have to remember," says Lawrence, who is from nearby Paris, Tenn., "is that these fish are extremely pressured. It [Kentucky Lake] may be 160 miles long, but in June it fishes teeny tiny."

He decided to seek out fish he could catch, which meant bass holding to shallower areas than those that had retreated to the more traditional deep ledges.

Unusual conditions were also working in Lawrence's favor. The region had been swamped with spring rains.

The Tennessee Valley Authority was pulling water through the dam midnight to midnight. Current was strong. He found a pile of bass holding near a shoreline creek mouth south of the Highway 79 (Paris Landing) bridge on Kentucky Lake – and about 90 miles from the launch site at Lake Barkley State Resort Park. Technically, the spot was a ledge, though not in the conventional offshore sense. It was 8 to 12 feet deep, fairly nondescript and about the size of a two-bedroom house.

"I spent four [practice] days scanning, but did very little fishing," he says. "The shallower I could find them the easier they would be to catch. And I saw few people scanning those areas or fishing those areas. They're hard to find. But when you can find them, you can catch them."

On day one, he pounded a 28-15 limit and was done by 11 a.m. Lawrence led by nearly 6 pounds. The only question: Would the conditions that had pushed the

fish into the relatively shallow spot keep them there?

"I didn't know," Lawrence says. "Conditions were changing."

He didn't just hit the one spot. Lawrence targeted several areas, including some offshore ledge structure that produced a couple of fish. But he knew without the primary school he would be wrestling with deeper bass he knew he could find, but not necessarily catch.

It turns out Lawrence's worries were unfounded. He backed up day one with catches of 23-10 and 19-11 – winning by more than 7 pounds.

Lawrence fished a V&M J-Mag Worm on a Neko rig or swing-head jig. Occasionally he fished a Castaic Jerky J, hair jig or spoon.

His strategy was simple. "I just looked in less obvious places," he recalls. "That was the whole key. I didn't know how long the bite would last. I'm glad it lasted through the tournament. Without that one particular school there is no way I would have won."

WINNING CO-ANGLER



PHOTO BY DM, REED II

Hunter Fillmore
Waynesville, Ohio

Winning Weight:
37-08 (11 fish)

Winning Program:
After catching only two fish for 4 pounds, 4 ounces on day one, Fillmore rallied with 19-7 on day two and 13-13 on day three. He earned his win by fishing a drop-shot rig on the ledges. ■

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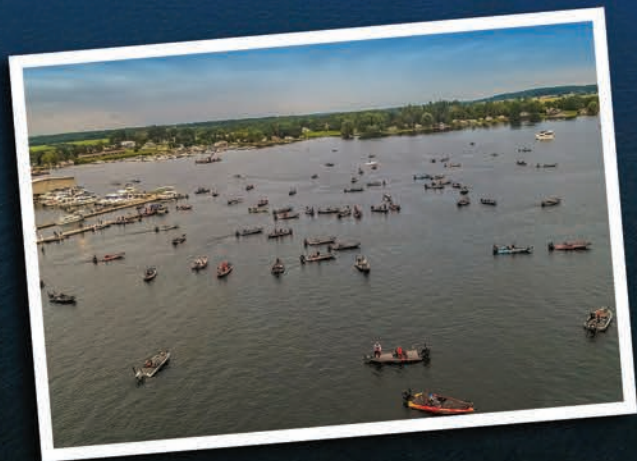


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PLATTSBURGH, N.Y.

By Jody White
PHOTOS BY CHARLES WALDORF



WINNING ANGLER

Ron Nelson
Berrien Springs, Mich.

Winning Weight:
60-00 (15 fish)

Details:
June 21-23, 2018

Presented by Power-Pole

Hosted by City of
Plattsburgh and
Adirondack Coast
Visitors Bureau

Northern Division

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Kevin Hesson
Seneca, Pa.

Winning Weight:
49-15 (15 fish)

Winning Program:

Hesson caught all smallmouths – some from beds, and others that were postspawn. He mainly used a 3.8-inch Keitech Swing Impact FAT swimbait and a Lucky Craft Sammy 110 topwater on day one, and then a drop-shot with a Berkley PowerBait Pro Twitchtail Minnow, a Berkley Gulp! Fry or a 3-inch Yamamoto Senko on days two and three. ■

Ron Nelson won the 2017 Costa FLW Series Northern Division event on Lake Champlain with a large-mouth-and-smallmouth mix worth 54 pounds, 9 ounces. This year, he weighed all smallmouths for another win with 60 pounds, and almost everyone in the 2018 top 10 handily surpassed Nelson's 2017 winning weight.

Nelson tried to add largemouths, but the only big one he hooked he lost, and he says the conditions overall were not as good for targeting them as they were in 2017. Essentially, while the smallmouth bedding bite was red-hot, the largemouths were a little harder to come by for the majority of anglers.

With a longer practice period than he had in 2017, Nelson was able to locate many more smallmouths on beds and mine a few areas outside of "the Gut," a bay between two islands separating the main lake from the Inland Sea. Instead of running to isolated fish across the north end of Champlain, he milked certain spawning areas for all they were worth, finding fish others missed and discovering new fish throughout the event.

"I found them all with my eyes, and I'd just catch them [in practice] to see what they weighed," says Nelson. "My Flogger [bathyscope] got shipped to me during practice, and I just started playing with it and couldn't tell the size of the

fish. I had a few fish where I'd catch them, and then I could catch them again next pitch. Time-wise, I wanted to know exactly what I was putting time into. I didn't want to flog them and think it was a 3 1/2-pounder and have it end up being a 3-pounder."

Nelson tried to look for deeper beds, and he caught his smallies in 5 to 10 feet. As in 2017, he relied on a 1/4- or 3/16-ounce darter head with a Poor Boy's Erie Darter (watermelon gold) and a Reaction Innovations Smallie Beaver. He also mixed in a walking bait and occasionally a drop-shot for difficult fish. When he fished for largemouths, Nelson targeted reeds, grass and docks with a Yamamoto Senko and a jig.



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LEBRUN DELIVERS WITH DEFLECTION AT ALL-AMERICAN

LOUISIANA ANGLER WINS BFL TITLE AT HOME

By Rob Newell

Deflection was the key ingredient to Nick LeBrun's 2018 T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American win on Cross Lake at the first of June.

Specifically, LeBrun deflected a 6th Sense Movement 80X shallow-running crankbait off Cross Lake's numerous cypress tree bases and roots to amass 62 pounds, 8 ounces over three days.

LeBrun was considered a favorite going into the All-American due to his Bossier City address. He grew up in the Shreveport area competing in tournaments on Cross Lake, which gave him a home court advantage.

On day one, he got off to a quick start for the home team, boating an 8-pound bass on his first bite of the tournament. That monster laid the foundation for LeBrun's day-one catch of 26

pounds, 9 ounces – the biggest limit of the tournament – all caught crashing the Movement 8X into cypress trees.

On day two, LeBrun's deflection bite dwindled, producing just three bass and forcing him to scramble. He needed two keepers to fill a limit and got them with a SPRO popping frog to salvage his day with 16 pounds.

LeBrun's day-two stumble allowed Randy Deaver – another well-known Cross Lake local from nearby Blanchard, La. – to slip past him into the lead. Deaver stole the show with the biggest bag on day two, which weighed 25-3.

From that point on, the stage was set for a good old-fashioned hometown showdown between LeBrun and Deaver, two long-time fishing friends with their eyes on the \$100,000 prize in their own backyard.

When day three started, the score was Deaver 46-3, LeBrun 42-9.

Deaver's Cross Lake game plan was a jig-pitching approach on the cypress trees, backed up by a shaky-head skipping program on docks.

LeBrun, however, was dedicated to crashing a crankbait into cypress trees to stimulate a bite. And that's what he stuck with in the final round.

"To me, that reaction bite on cypress trees is unique," LeBrun says. "There is something about the crankbait contacting the tree and then careening off it erratically that bass just can't handle. When that deflection happens right in their space, it's purely instinctual for them to attack. For me, forcing the fish to react instead of waiting for a reaction on a more subtle bait is just a more effective way to fish."



Cranking cypress in Cross Lake bayous was the winning program for Nick LeBrun.

PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMAYER



Runner-up Randy Deaver pitched jigs around cypress trees and skipped shaky heads under docks.

Effective? Perhaps. Efficient? Maybe not so much. Purposely casting a lure with two treble hooks under cypress limbs and crashing it over the knees and roots requires a tremendous amount of patience, persistence and planning.

"Oh, it's going to get hung up," LeBrun admits. "That's something you just have to accept. I like the Movement 80X for that technique because it gets hung up less, but make no mistake about it, getting hung up comes with the territory."

In an ironic way, the frustration of getting hung up was a critical aspect of LeBrun's winning formula. Most people will throw a crankbait on cypress trees for a few hours, then eventually put it down. Getting hung up three or four times in a row in oppressive heat, with the bites few and far between, when there is \$100,000 on the line, is a recipe for frustration. LeBrun realized that fact, but saw opportunity.

With the final day slated to be the hottest of the event, with temperatures creeping into the upper 90s, and only the top 10 anglers vying for the

\$100,000 payday, LeBrun found himself relishing the moment. As the heat and pressure mounted, he was mentally prepared to make the final day count the most by becoming even more aggressive with his crankbait. Every cast and retrieve was delivered with a substantial degree of body English to help steer the crankbait through the tightest lanes and gaps. Using a 7-foot, medium-heavy Fitzgerald Rods Bryan Thrift Series cranking rod, LeBrun often flipped or backhanded the crankbait low up under the limbs. At times he even crouched down to flick a cast into places he had not fished all week.

Essentially, LeBrun wanted to be the last man standing with a crankbait in his hand. Long after others had put it down in frustration and gone to more snag-proof options, he figured that's when the method to his madness would really shine – and it did.

Late on the final day, when the heat was most stifling and the big fish were tightest to their shaded trunks, LeBrun boated two 5-pound-class bass that anchored a final limit of 19-15 to win the 2018 All-American – thanks to deflection.

THE KEYS TO TREES

Finding bass in the jungle of Cross Lake's cypress tree bayous can be an intimidating undertaking. Obviously, isolated trees, point trees and small clusters of trees out from the bank get a lot of attention because they're obvious targets. Wander back into the thick cypress tree jungles, however, and things can get a bit more complicated.

At first glance, there seems to be no rhyme or reason regarding where to fish. For Nick LeBrun, however, there is more to deciphering cypress than meets the eye.

Many of LeBrun's best trees were located along a creek, slough, ditch or depression.

"On Cross Lake, even a depth change of 8 inches to a foot is huge," LeBrun explains. "You can have a hundred trees on a flat, and if there's a little depression or slough running through the flat that's a just a foot or two deeper, the trees in or around that contour change will likely be the better trees."

With previous experience on Cross Lake, LeBrun already knew where several of the better slough-based trees were located, but so did other locals. Three of the All-American's locals, including LeBrun, all started within a hundred yards of each other on the first morning.

"That's when I knew I was really going to have to bear down and put that crankbait in tighter and tighter places as the tournament evolved," LeBrun says. "That primary stuff got beat up pretty bad the first day. So by the last day I was intentionally looking for hard-to-reach places with that crankbait."



CROSS LAKE CONDITIONS

Cross Lake is an 8,600-acre suburban water supply lake located on the outskirts of Shreveport, La. Despite its small size as a tournament lake, Cross cranks out some big bass thanks to an abundance of shallow cover, which includes backwaters and bayous filled with cypress trees and plenty of docks along the main lake.

The All-American visited Cross in the May-to-June transition, making it a hot-weather event. As projected, water temperatures had already passed the 90-degree threshold, and Cross Lake bass were in full summer mode, lurking in the cooler shade of cypress trees and docks while wolfing down bream that were trying to bed around the same shallow cover.

Water levels were about 2 feet low, rendering many of the lake's extreme backwaters too shallow for bass to hide. As a result, a lot of bass were forced to slide out to more predictable cover along transition areas in and out of the forests, including points within the trees, deeper or isolated trees, and duck blinds on the main lake.

Also, the low water made Cross Lake's numerous docks more accessible with lures. With extra inches to work with under the fixed platforms, dock anglers were able to get lures into places where bass don't normally see them.

The low water conditions combined with the diminished fishing pressure of just 49 boats and a single practice day led to an impressive display of big limits on the first day of the event. Along with LeBrun's whopping 26-9 limit, there were seven other limits of more than 20 pounds weighed in.

Weights fell off the second day as fishing pressure began to take its toll. But it's a Cross Lake condition LeBrun had anticipated.

"This lake is notorious for producing big bags one day and nothing the next, so I knew the second day would be the hardest day of the event," LeBrun says. "I spent time in pre-practice looking for alternatives – off-the-wall places where I could catch a fish or two if I got in trouble. Looking back, that really bailed me out. The crankbait made the big catches, but catching a few fish on a popping frog on the second day really saved me."



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

WHAT ELSE WORKED

Nick LeBrun won the 2018 BFL All-American by attacking cypress tree bases with a 6th Sense Movement 80X crankbait to provoke reaction bites.

While Cross Lake's ubiquitous cypress trees were a staple in many of the top patterns, finalists also fished docks and duck blinds.

Jigs and straight-tail worms rigged on shaky heads were fish producers for local runner-up Randy Deaver of Blanchard, La., and third-place finisher Adam Wagner of Cookeville, Tenn.

Deaver favored a compact jig with the skirt trimmed down for fishing cypress trees in the morning. He switched to skipping a shaky head under docks in the afternoon.



Nick LeBrun



Randy Deaver



Adam Wagner



BOULDIN BANKS \$50,000 CO-ANGLER TITLE

At the final-day weigh-in of the 2018 Cross Lake All-American, Matthew Bouldin of Smithville, Tenn., experienced shell shock.

As the pros weighed in, Bouldin, a co-angler, tried to find words to explain what had just happened.

"I haven't even started to process this yet," Bouldin said. "I'm still thinking about what happened on day one when I struggled, so it's going to be a while before what just happened today really sinks in."

Just moments earlier during the co-angler weigh-in, Bouldin amazed the crowd – and himself, to a large degree – by toting 18 pounds, 4 ounces to the scale to jump from third place into the co-angler winner's circle. In doing so, he nipped runner-up Jesse Parks of Avondale, Ariz., by just 4 ounces. Parks had led the co-anglers for two days and seemed to have a lock on the crown with a solid three-fish catch of 12-13, but it was not enough to hold off Bouldin's final charge.

On the final day, Bouldin dialed in an exact shaky head/worm combo that made his fishing efforts more efficient.

All week, Bouldin had been swapping between a couple of shaky head combinations: a 5/16-ounce Buckeye Lures Spot Remover head with a Zoom Mag Finesse Worm on casting tackle for flipping and a 1/8-ounce head with a Zoom Trick Worm on spinning tackle for skipping.

"Most of the time my partners had me around either trees or docks," Bouldin says. "If it was windy with surface chop, I flipped the bigger 5/16-ounce head. But if it got calm and slick, I went with the Trick Worm on the 1/8-ounce head."

Bouldin kept swapping rods as the conditions suggested until the last day, when he discovered that teaming a 3/16-ounce head with the Zoom Mag Finesse Worm on casting gear was the ticket. He had the best of both worlds with one setup.

"That combination with the Mag Finesse Worm was just heavy enough to pitch with and yet still light enough to skip with," he adds. "Once I got comfortable with just that combination I could really focus more on hitting targets without switching rods as much."

Wagner started the event fishing a shaky head and Zoom Trick Worm on cypress trees, weighing in 22-12 on day one. By the third day he had switched to a swim jig to provoke more of a reaction bite.

A topwater walking bait fished around bank trees and flipping a Texas-rigged Yamamoto Senko under docks landed Roger Fitzpatrick of Eldon, Mo., in fourth.

Finally, topwater frogs were big scorers for fifth-place finisher Tyler Morgan of Columbus, Ga., and John Duvall of Madison, Ga., who finished sixth.

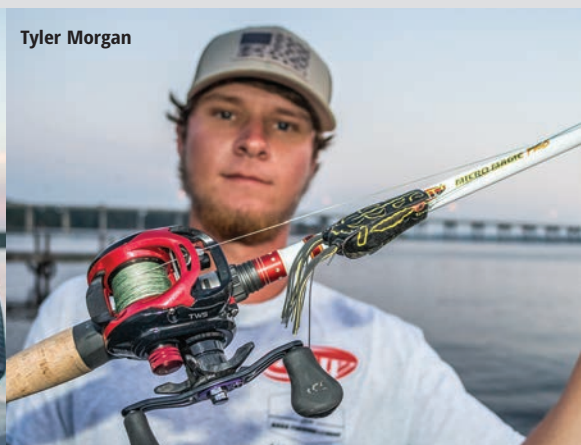
The rest of the top 10, including Rob Jordan, Marty Sisk, Heath Pack and Ben Blaschke, fished a similar mix of moving baits (vibrating jigs, spinnerbaits, swim jigs), topwater and soft plastics. ■



Roger Fitzpatrick



Tyler Morgan



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WINNING TEAM

University of Louisiana-Monroe
Hunter Freeman and Thomas Soileau

Winning Weight:
42-08 (15 fish)

Details:
May 30-June 1, 2018

Presented by Lowrance

Hosted by Shreveport-Bossier Sports Commission & Red River Waterway Commission

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

YETI FLW COLLEGE FISHING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

RED RIVER | SHREVEPORT, LA.

By David A. Brown

Just as the Red River separates the neighboring Louisiana cities of Shreveport and Bossier City, it also divided the fishing approaches of the top 10 finishers in the YETI FLW College Fishing National Championship presented by Lowrance C-MAP Genesis.

Half of the leading anglers were resolutely committed to probing main-river rock and wood cover, while others near the top prospected the backwater ponds and oxbows. The rest of the field plied the main river and keyed on various current breaks, points and anomalies that differentiate a particular spot from miles of similar habitat, or explored the Red River backwaters, which are more dynamic and diverse with their laydowns, stumps, and various emergent and submerged vegetation.

Tournament champions Thomas Soileau and Hunter Freeman of the University of Louisiana-Monroe led days one and two after spending the majority of their time in a heavily vegetated backwater at the lower end of Pool 4 (takeoff was in Pool 5). Known as the "Little Jungle," cover there ranged from submerged grasses to floating hyacinth rafts, tall reeds and lily pads.

On days one and two, the winners did much of their damage in stump fields interspersed with grass. Soileau and

Freeman caught their fish on a mix of crankbaits, spinnerbaits and Carolina-rigged Zoom Baby Brush Hogs. The latter ended up being their top producer.

On day three, the ULM teammates returned to their top area, as well as a nearby secondary spot, but experienced different results. By the time they were able to lock from Pool 5 to 4 and make the nearly hour-long run, a local boat had already gone through their juice. They ended up catching a couple of keepers, but then moved to another backwater that they had been reserving as a fallback spot.

About eight miles upriver from the Little Jungle, this area known as the "Wagon Wheel" is more of a walled-off section of river bend rather than an oxbow or slough. Here, the key habitat features are a small residential boat ramp with brush out front, a dock and a rock seawall.

Three casts after they arrived, Freeman popped a 5-pounder on a 1/2-ounce finesse ball-head jig with a black and blue Strike King Rage Craw. The ULM team would pick up another small keeper near the ramp, but they pretty much sealed the deal with Freeman's second 5, which nailed the jig a few boat lengths away on the seawall – near where he caught one of similar size in practice.

TEAM	COLLEGE	WEIGHT	FISH
1. THOMAS SOILEAU & HUNTER FREEMAN	U. OF LOUISIANA-MONROE	42-08	15
2. GARRETT ENDERS & CODY HUFF	BETHEL UNIVERSITY	35-02	15
3. NICK HATFIELD & COREY NEECE	TUSCULUM COLLEGE	34-05	15
4. NICHOLAS CZAJKA & JACK HIPPE III	ADRIAN COLLEGE	30-14	15
5. CHARLIE DESHAZER & JACKSON EBBERS	UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA	30-09	15
6. HUNTER MALMAY & ROBERT JONES	NORTHWESTERN STATE	28-03	15
7. CHASE SERAFIN & CODY BATTERSON	ADRIAN COLLEGE	27-04	15
8. NICK MONTILINO & BROCK SPENCER	MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY	27-02	15
9. MICHAEL DUNN & HENRY COLBERG	UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH	26-04	14
10. GABRIEL DUBOIS & BRANDON HEIZER	UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI	25-03	13

Winning Ways

The key to their success, admits Freeman, was largely a matter of staying around the food. In the Little Jungle, they saw a lot of big gizzard shad and often picked up a keeper directly following a flurry of bass-on-shad violence. In the area where they fished the third day, shad were flipping periodically, and bass could be seen chasing the baitfish from time to time.

The ULM anglers left the Little Jungle with two Carolina rig fish – one they'd later cull with the same bait in another backwater on the way back to check-in, and one that grabbed a 5/16-ounce spinnerbait with gold and silver willow-leaf blades and a cole slaw skirt (white, chartreuse and orange).

"I was throwing a bigger spinnerbait in pre-practice, but it was so tough that last day, I threw a finesse spinnerbait," Freeman notes. "If you can't get bit, I always say, 'Go small.' That one I caught on day three was the first one we caught on a spinnerbait in the tournament."

The jig, Freeman adds, was the right call on day three for mimicking the profile of the small bluegills clustering around

the boat ramp and along the seawall, while still maintaining some crawfish detail.

Earlier, as well as on days one and two, the Carolina rig proved itself as a dependable producer of fish. The winners rigged their Carolina rigs with cylinder weights of thin diameter, because they slid through the cover better than egg weights. Both anglers still hung up a few times and ended up breaking off multiple rigs, but their mantra being "fish where the fish are," they considered it the cost of doing business with Red River bass.

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



The Champs Square Off

A day after being rewarded for their combined efforts, Freeman and Soileau competed against one another in a Fish-Off inside the bay at Red River South Marina. Off limits during the tournament, this oxbow presented a diverse array of habitat features that made for two very different game plans.

Soileau kept it simple and enjoyed a day of steady productivity with a Texas-rigged Big Bite Baits Fighting Frog (black neon), a 5/16-ounce shaky head with a green pumpkin Zoom Finesse Worm and a Strike King 1.5 square-bill (sexy shad) fished around shallow wood along the bay's southeastern end, mostly near the mouth.



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Freeman played a more diverse game aimed at finding bigger bites. He picked up three keepers and a 3 1/2-pound kicker while cranking stumps in the bay's upper end, added his fifth pitching shallow wood with a 1/2-ounce ball-head jig with a Strike King Rage Craw trailer and made a small cull with the jig on a rock jetty back in the north end.

Freeman made a day-saving catch with less than three minutes to go when a 2-pounder ate his 1/2-ounce War

Eagle Finesse Spinnerbait under a dock near the check-in site. At final tally, Freeman's 7 pounds, 11 ounces edged Soileau's raw weight of 7-9, which was officially recorded as 6-9 after dead-fish penalties.

For winning the Fish-Off, Freeman earned the YETI FLW College Fishing National Championship berth in the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup, and will carry the college banner in Hot Spings in August.



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

HUNTER FREEMAN

THOMAS SOILEAU



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



PHOTO BY DAVID A. BROWN



PHOTO BY DAVID A. BROWN



INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

Fishing on the Red River was tough when the college crew came to town, but top finishers uncovered several key factors that led to the better catches.

Current - Not surprisingly, several teams noted the importance of main-river current to activate bass. For instance, the University of Nebraska's Jackson Ebbers and Charlie Deshazer (fifth place) looked for flat areas with good current exposure.

Barge traffic - Current wasn't the only way to keep fish stirred up, however. Adrian College's Chase Serafin says that he and Cody Batterson (seventh place) leveraged a barge's wake, which pushed bait past certain spots and stimulated feeding. They actually hopped ahead of the barge - similar to running the tide in a tidal fishery - and fished this scenario on multiple spots along the vessel's course.

Also, Cody Huff and Garrett Enders of Bethel University (second place) found that some of their fish were relating to willow tree roots extending from undercut banks. Running their Z-Man ChatterBaits as close as possible to the bank was essential to getting bites.



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



PHOTO BY DAVID A. BROWN

Close work - Several teams discovered that fishing cover meticulously was key. Northwestern State University's Hunter Malmay and Robert Jones (sixth place) boldly attacked each log, laydown or tree by hitting all the angles. Using what Malmay called a "front-middle-and-back" approach, they were able to fish behind others and pick off unreached bass.

Natural presentations - Adrian College's Jack Hippe III and Nick Czajka (fourth place) discovered that getting bit required getting their Zoom Magnum Trick Worms close to cover, but they found that the river did a better job of managing the presentation than they did. They downsized to 3/16-ounce weights and minimized rod-imparted action, which allowed their baits to flow naturally in current with fewer snags.

Time of day - Tournament winners Freeman and Soileau grabbed the first-round lead after taking advantage of an early bite. By 10:30 on day one, they had their limit and weight for the day. Conversely, teams that were flipping cover needed the high sun to push fish into shaded spots. Case in point, Malmay and Jones stated that each day early bites were bonus bites, as they needed the sunlight to position their fish better on the cover. ■



2018 YETI FLW COLLEGE FISHING ALL-AMERICA TEAM

FLW was the first organization to recognize outstanding collegiate fishing accomplishment when it created the YETI FLW College Fishing All-America Team in 2010, at the conclusion of the first FLW College Fishing National Championship.

Now in its ninth iteration, the All-America Team is comprised of arguably the best collection of collegiate bass anglers of all time – testament to the growth of the sport at

the college level and a greater degree of experience among those who made the cut.

Earning a spot on the All-America Team begins with regular-season competition, and concludes at the National Championship. Competitors earn their slots based on their finishes.

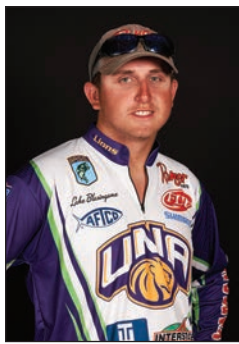
This season, FLW recognizes 30 anglers – 15 two-person college teams – as All-America anglers.



NATHAN AHLE
Angelo State



CODY BATTERSON
Adrian College



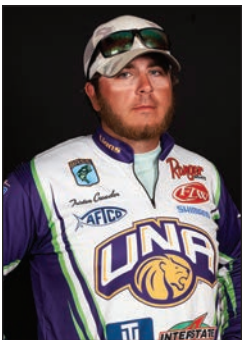
LAKE BLASINGAME
University of N. Alabama



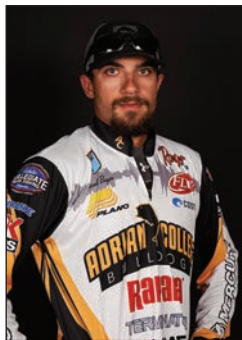
CHASE CHASTAIN
Jacksonville St. University



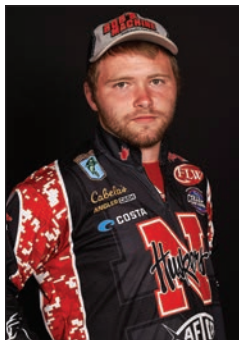
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University of Pittsburgh



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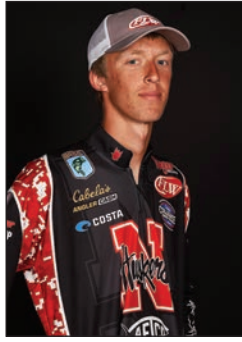
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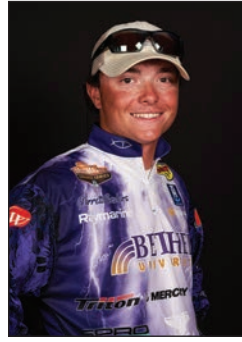
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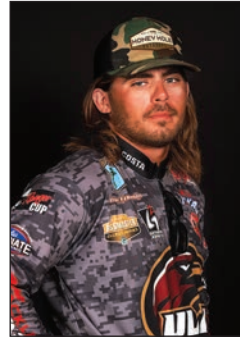
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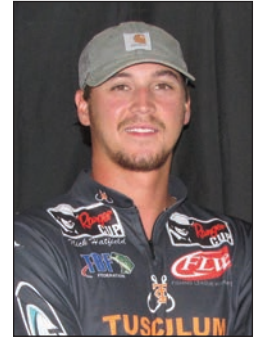
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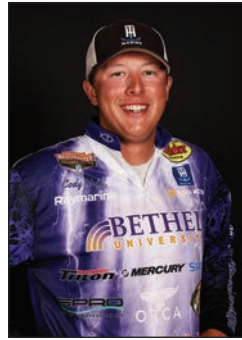
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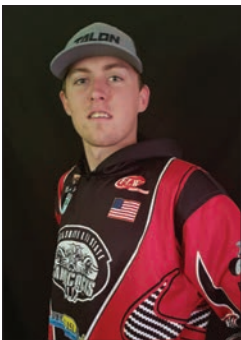
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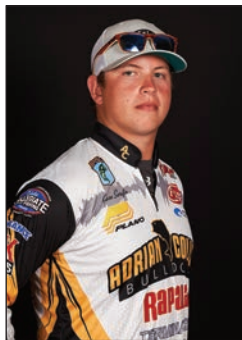
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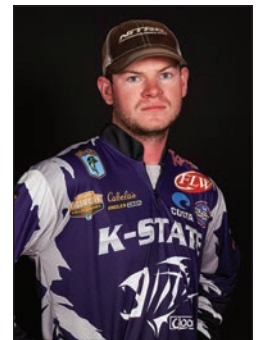
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Kansas State University



TBF/FLW STUDENT ANGLER FEDERATION HIGH SCHOOL FISHING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

PICKWICK LAKE | FLORENCE, ALA.

By David A. Brown



PHOTO BY DAVID A. BROWN

WINNING ANGLERS

**Chad Champy and
Kyler McKie**
North Augusta
Fishing Team

Winning Weight:
57-10 (14 fish)

Details:
June 27-29, 2018

Hosted by
Florence/Lauderdale
Tourism

The hardest part about winning the High School Fishing National Championship wasn't necessarily finding the winning fish; it was accessing them for three days. The National Championship was held concurrently with the High School Fishing World Finals on Pickwick Lake, and even though Wilson Lake was also in play, the waters were split up among 384 teams (232 of them specifically in the National Championship). Most teams stayed on Pickwick, where

Champy and McKie spent their tournament. Getting on their spot early each morning proved essential to their success, as they learned that their bigger fish were moving up shallow to feed in the first few hours of the morning.

The South Carolina team took the day-one lead by catching a limit of 23 pounds, 9 ounces. Buoyed by Champy's 7-pound, 13-ounce largemouth, their catch would stand as the biggest of the event.

The leaders carried a margin of 1 pound, 3 ounces

into the second day. Continuing the early fireworks, McKie nabbed a 6-pounder and a 4-pounder on back-to-back casts, but they'd add only two more keepers for 14-05. By the end of that afternoon's weigh-in they held the top spot by just 3 ounces.

Fortunately, day three was more generous, and, despite a slower start, the North Augusta duo bagged a limit that went 19-12 and included a 7-1. It was enough to secure the win by 4 ounces over Avery Brown and Hunter Redman

of George Rogers Clark with a three-day total of 57-10.

Winning Baits

Seeking to distance themselves from the moving baits those Tennessee River fish see so much, Champy and McKie stuck with 1/2-ounce black shaky heads. They used Zoom Magnum Trick Worms in plum and redbug for most of days one and two, but when the third day found them with only three keepers at 1 o'clock, McKie switched to a Zoom Ol'

PHOTO BY SHANE DURRANCE



Monster. He was hoping for one kicker, but the change yielded the two keepers that sealed their victory.

McKie described the best retrieve as one with minimal action. Discipline and patience to maintain a glacial pace were important.

"We were dragging them along really slow and trying to count each shell or rock on the bottom," McKie says. "We were dragging our shaky heads so slowly over those shells that it chipped the paint off of them."

"We weren't making really long casts, especially when it was windy, because the wind and the current would put a big bow in our line," he adds. "If I tried to set the hook on a long cast I would have a lot of slack

in my line, and I'd end up with a bad hookset. I got close enough to the spot where I didn't have to make that long of a cast to hit the key area."

The Area

While many of their competitors focused on ledges, Champy and McKie did most of their damage on a more subtle spot. Essential elements included ambush structure, bait schools marked on sonar and proximity to deep water that drew in more fish over time.

"It was a really small hump with a steep drop into the river channel, and on the upstream side it had a small dip that you could see on the map," McKie

says. "Also, on the side closest to the bank it had another little dip, and then it came up into the flat."

The winners' key spot rose to about 9 feet on top and dropped 30 feet on the river channel side. McKie says the adjacent depth definitely bolstered their spot's attraction to bass, but he surmises that the location offered another key benefit.

"The TVA was pulling, like, 88,000 cubic feet per second on that last day, and that spot was right on a big bend in the river channel," he notes. "The current was not nearly as strong there as it was in one of the straightaways. I think right there it gives the fish a break in the current.

That might have been a reason they were there."

McKie and Champy took advantage of the lighter day-one winds and started out working from the spot's shoreward side, casting into the wind. Bringing their baits against the softened current produced fish, but changing their approach seemed to produce the best results.

"We left and came back on day one, and we started fishing from the river channel, sitting in 30 feet and throwing on top of the spot and bringing the baits toward the drop," McKie adds. "That's the same way we worked it each time. It seemed to work better than getting right on top of the spot and spooking the fish." ■

TOP TEN

ANGLERS

1. CHAD CHAMPY & KYLER MCKIE
2. AVERY BROWN & HUNTER REDMAN
3. WILL SMITH & COLBY CHAPMAN
4. BLAKE COBB & LUKE MCHAN
5. ALEX TIMM & EASTON FOTHERGILL
6. HUNTER MUNCRIEF & LANDEN McCARY
7. GARRETT BARTLETT & HENRY BRYAN
8. THOMAS MATHIS & CODY GREGORY
9. ETHAN HAYES & JAMES HARPER BURKEEN
10. ADDISON YATES & GARRETT McWILLIAMS

FISHING TEAM

- NORTH AUGUSTA
- GEORGE ROGERS CLARK
- GORDON LEE
- FANNIN COUNTY
- GRAND RAPIDS
- WEST SABINE
- SEYMOUR
- OBION COUNTY CENTRAL
- MCCRACKEN COUNTY
- BASS TACTIX

WEIGHT

- 57-10
- 57-06
- 53-01
- 49-04
- 48-11
- 48-09
- 41-13
- 41-12
- 39-11
- 33-05

FISH

- 14
- 15
- 14
- 15
- 15
- 14
- 13
- 15
- 12
- 11



T-H MARINE FLW BASS FISHING LEAGUE

Hoosier – Patoka Lake – June 9, 2018

Boater: Nick Uebelhor, Jasper, Ind. – 16-04

Rotating five areas with crankbaits, Carolina-rigged soft plastics, a 10-inch Berkley PowerBait Power Worm and a football jig with a craw trailer

Co-angler: Tim Knight, Bargersville, Ind. – 16-07

Michigan – Burt Mullet – June 9, 2018

Boater: Matt Belletini, Troy, Mich. – 23-09

Sight-fishing with a Nemesis Baits Goby (white) on a drop-shot

Co-anglers: Tony Mitchell, Plainwell, Mich;

James Wathen, Royal Oak, Mich. – 18-14

Music City – Center Hill – June 9, 2018

Boater: Matt Stanley, Alexandria, Tenn. – 19-10

Fishing rocky drop-offs and brush piles in more than 20 feet of water using a Strike King 10XD (green gizzard shad) and a 3/4-ounce Picasso tungsten football-head jig with a homemade skirt and Xcite Baits Raptor Tail Jr. (green pumpkin) trailer

Co-angler: Justin Saling, Smyrna, Tenn. – 11-03

North Carolina – High Rock Lake – June 9, 2018

Boater: David Wright, Lexington, N.C. – 22-05

Targeting rocks, stumps and brush on drops 8 and 10 feet deep using Rapala DT 10 and DT 14 (bluegill, hot mustard) crankbaits and a Zoom Magnum Trick Worm (black) on a shaky head

Co-angler: Zach Lyles, Charlotte, N.C. – 18-09

Volunteer – Douglas Lake – June 9, 2018

Boater: Larry Neal, Piney Flats, Tenn. – 21-12

Targeting points in 32 to 42 feet of water with a green pumpkin worm

Co-angler: Eric Moore, Union, Ky. – 15-13

Arkie – Lake Dardanelle – June 16, 2018

Boater: Kevin Brown, Hot Springs, Ark. – 19-02

Dragging a Texas-rigged YUM Ribbontail worm (plum, red shad) or cranking Bomber crankbaits on shell beds and brush piles from 5 to 13 feet deep

Co-angler: Johnny Crider, Fulton, Ark. – 13-14

LBL – Kentucky/Barkley Lakes – June 16, 2018

Boater: Brad McClure, Brentwood, Tenn. – 23-14

Fishing Lake Barkley brush piles in 12 to 17 feet with a Texas-rigged Zoom Ol' Monster Worm (plum) with a 3/8-ounce Strike King Tour Grade Tungsten weight on a 4/0 Bass Pro Shops XPS Round Bend Offset Hook

Co-angler: Robert Pillow, Campbellsville, Ky. – 15-02

Mississippi – Lake Ferguson – June 16, 2018

Boater: Terry Bates, Greenville, Miss. – 22-15

Fishing humps in Lake Lee and Ferguson with Zoom Brush Hogs (watermelon candy, black ruby), a Carolina-rigged 10-inch Berkley Powerbait Power Worm (plum) and a 3/4-ounce football-head jig with a Berkley Powerbait Chigger Craw (watermelon candy)

Co-angler: Keith Whipple, Iuka, Miss. – 21-10

Northeast – Lake Champlain – June 16, 2018

Boater: J.J. Judd, St. Albans, Vt. – 19-14

Targeting spawning smallmouths on the south end of the lake using a Bass Pro Shops XPS Tender Tube (white) on a 1/4-ounce jighead, and drop-shotting for postspawn smallmouths on the north end around boulders in 18 to 20 feet using a 6-inch Roboworm Straight Tail Worm (ayu)

Co-angler: Mark Fenstermaker, Allentown, Pa. – 17-05

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

Piedmont – High Rock Lake – June 16, 2018

Boater: Phillip Hedrick, Salisbury, N.C. – 24-13

Fishing a Zoom Ol' Monster (black)

Co-angler: Jason Hinger, Timberlake, N.C. – 15-08

Savannah River – Clarks Hill – June 16, 2018

Boater: Joey Spradley, Gloverville, S.C. – 15-11

Fishing grass lines on humps and the ends of points in 20 to 25 feet of water on the lower end using a 3/4-ounce Buckeye Lures Mop Jig (green pumpkin) with a Zoom Super Chunk (green pumpkin) trailer and a Texas-rigged Zoom Ol' Monster (green pumpkin) with a 3/8-ounce WolfStone Tungsten weight

Co-angler: Joshua Lyko, Greer, S.C. – 12-08

Buckeye – Ohio River – June 23, 2018

Boater: Adam Hock, Independence, Ky. – 9-05

Targeting creeks with clear water after heavy rains with a white buzzbait and flipping a Texas-rigged Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw (green pumpkin) around wood, grass and rock

Co-angler: Brent Wilkens, Hamilton, Ohio – 7-10

Illini – Rend Lake – June 23, 2018

Boater: Travis Wilson, La Harpe, Ill. – 16-05

Working 3 to 7 feet deep along a 150-yard-long stretch of riprap with a Zoom Finesse Worm on a 1/8-ounce shaky head

Co-angler: Aaron Arning, Walnut Hill, Ill. – 13-14

Mountain – Barren River – June 23, 2018

Boater: Rod Huff, Monterey, Tenn. – 18-06

Fishing rock and wood in less than 5 feet of water with a Z-Man ChatterBait (green pumpkin) with a Zoom Z Craw trailer, a Texas-rigged Z Craw (green pumpkin) and a 3/8-ounce buzzbait (white)

Co-angler: Larry Goss, Hartsville, Tenn. – 16-14

Okie – Ft. Gibson – June 23, 2018

Boater: Russ Warner, Tahlequah, Okla. – 15-15

Targeting offshore rock piles between 6 and 10 feet in the mid-lake area close to the river channel using a 10-inch YUM Ribbontail (junebug, cranberry)

Co-angler: Bryant Bradford, Oklahoma City, Okla. – 11-09

Ozark – Lake of the Ozarks – June 30, 2018

Boater: Marcus Sykora, Osage Beach, Mo. – 18-03

Fishing brush piles in 10 to 15 feet with a 1/2-ounce Chompers Flipping Brush Jig (Davenport special) with a Chompers Super Jig Trailer (rootbeer green flake), a Texas-rigged Zoom Brush Hog (green pumpkin) and a 6th Sense Cloud 9 C15 (gizzard shad) crankbait

Co-angler: Christopher Fierce, Dixon, Mo. – 15-08

Shenandoah – Kerr Lake – June 30, 2018

Boater: Ronnie Baker, Providence Forge, Va. – 14-01

Fishing main-lake points in 12 to 16 feet of water with a 1/2-ounce Surfside Bait & Tackle football-head jig (green pumpkin purple) and a Lucky Craft G Splash (American shad) topwater bait

Co-angler: William Kyte, Waldorf, Md. – 14-05

BASS PRO SHOPS HIGH SCHOOL FISHING OPENS

Raisin River Open – June 9, 2018

Walled Lake Central (Mich.) High School – 17-10

Reid Oblak and Jarrod Willbur

Targeting rock piles and humps in 8 to 10 feet of water with drop-shots and Ned rigs ■

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TBF



WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

By Dan Johnson

SHOWDOWN ON HAMILTON

2018 TBF JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

The Bass Federation's upcoming 2018 Junior World Championship (JWC) promises to deliver all the fast-paced action of past JWC youth events – plus exciting new twists that ensure this year's showdown is destined for the history books. Set for Aug. 9-11 on the storied waters of Lake Hamilton out of Hot Springs, Ark., the 2018 JWC will pit top youth bass anglers from TBF state federations around the country against one another in an all-out clash for the junior world crown and thousands in scholarships and prizes.

In fact, the payout is more than double that of the 2017 JWC, in which contestants from 36 states battled for more than \$10,000 in prizes and scholarships.

Thanks to sweeping changes to the TBF Youth Program enacted in 2017 by a unanimous vote of the TBF State Presidents' Council (with input from TBF youth directors and conservation directors), TBF junior anglers will fish out of their own boats in two-person teams, accompanied by boat captains. The new rule extends to qualifying events as well.

"This change increased the opportunities for young bass anglers to participate by effectively doubling the field size at JWC events in 2018 and beyond," says TBF President and CEO Robert Cartlidge, who notes that rules on pairings and captains are similar to those of the Student Angler Federation High School Fishing program. Cartlidge adds that the JWC was expanded to three days to give the young anglers an extra day of competition. "Starting with the 2018 JWC, all teams will fish two full days, after which the field will be cut by TBF division for the final day."



Tyler White took home top honors the last time Arkansas' Lake Hamilton hosted the TBF Junior World Championship.

In another move to increase participation, the existing lower age limit of 11 was removed to allow all youngsters ages 15 and under (as of Aug. 31 of the JWC competition year) to participate. Rules mandating that TBF junior clubs be tied to an adult club were also eliminated.

Rule changes aside, the 2018 JWC is expected to produce exciting bass fishing. When the JWC last visited Lake Hamilton in August 2015, a variety of fishing areas and presentations were in play. West Virginia's Tyler White won the event after locating the mother lode of schooling bass in a cove and coaxing them with a mix of topwaters and drop-shot rigs.

White's two daily limits weighed 8 pounds, 11 ounces and 11 pounds, 4 ounces, respectively, which suggests that a 10-pound daily average and 30-plus-pound three-day total at the 2018 JWC is not out of the question – especially considering that anglers will now compete in two-person teams.

The 2018 JWC will be held in conjunction with the Forrest Wood Cup, which will be contested on Lake Ouachita just up the road from Lake Hamilton. JWC anglers will parade across the FLW main stage Saturday afternoon.

Hosted by Visit Hot Springs, the 2018 JWC also includes a variety of other events and activities for the young competitors and their families to enjoy outside of tournament hours. The event coincides with TBF's annual leadership conference, in which state presidents, youth directors and conservation directors from across the nation will gather to chart the course of TBF's future.

JWC weigh-ins begin at 1:30 p.m. daily at the Clarion Resort on the Lake in Hot Springs. The action will also stream live online at bassfederation.com. For details, visit bassfederation.com, or call TBF National Headquarters at 580.765.9031.

FLW/TBF STUDENT ANGLER FEDERATION STATE CHAMPIONSHIP WINNERS

Feb. 10 – Georgia HS State Championship, West Point Lake, Thomas Chastain and Carter Ott

Feb. 24 – Florida HS State Championship, St. Johns River, Chaz Raulerson and Reed Lynch (shown below)



March 10 – Texas HS State Championship, Lake Palestine, Will Carlile and Zachary Hastings

March 24 – Louisiana HS State Championship, Cross Lake, Ethan Tasche and Hunter Cheney

March 31 – Kentucky HS State Championship, Lake Cumberland, Blake Harold and Cameron Cochran

March 31 – Kansas HS State Championship, Wilson Lake, Thomas Heinen and Brock Bila

April 7 – Illinois HS State Championship, Clinton Lake, Ty Coon and Clayton Hill

April 7 – Mississippi HS State Championship, Columbus Lake, James Willoughby and Ashton Saucier

April 14 – Missouri HS State Championship, Truman Lake, Zach Hobbs and Tristan Konenik

April 14 – North Carolina HS State Championship, Kerr Lake, Trevor Lewis and Austin Braswell

April 14 – Virginia HS State Championship, Kerr Lake, Ashton Frost and Justin Carico

April 28 – Arizona HS State Championship, Lake Pleasant, Trinity Apodaca and Camden Lachance



April 29 – South Carolina HS State Championship, Lake Murray, Tyler McKie and Chad Champy (shown above)

April 29 – Tennessee HS State Championship, Kentucky Lake, Tyler Finley and Hunter Jones

May 5 – Idaho HS State Championship, CJ Strike Reservoir, Kyle Nicholson and Eyston Kunz

May 6 – Arkansas HS State Championship, Lake Dardanelle, Bryer Pennington and Jack Arnette

May 12 – Ohio HS State Championship, Alum Creek, Keaton Potter and Mitchell Hale

May 12 – Utah HS State Championship, Pelican Reservoir, Patrick Palepoi and Isaac Staley

May 19 – Alabama HS State Championship, Lake Neely Henry, Jace McNutt and Jon Hayden Raper

For complete results and more information on the High School Fishing program, visit highschoolfishing.org.

SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

A CLOSER LOOK AT A FEATURED PRODUCT FROM ONE OF TBF'S VALUED SPONSORS

MONOFILAMENT STILL A SOLID CHOICE FOR FILLING THE LIVEWELL

Savvy bass fans know choosing the right line for the presentation and conditions at hand is critical to putting more bass in the boat.

In the sport's Dark Ages, hopeful anglers deployed bass baits on strings spun from a variety of materials, including cotton, Dacron, silk and other natural fibers.

Today, we rely on a variety of high-performance options originating from three major categories: nylon monofilament, fluorocarbon and super line. At any given The Bass Federation club, state or national tournament, anglers can be spotted catching bass on all three types of line.

DON'T SELL MONO SHORT

Since fluoros and super lines – various types of braided and fused lines – seemed ready to flush monofilament from the market soon after their arrival, some bass anglers have a hard time believing that traditional mono remains a perennial powerhouse. Yet each type of line has its advantages.

The line gurus at longtime TBF sponsor Berkley have come up with a variety of industry-leading options in all

three categories. Yet its ties to mono still run long and deep; after all, Berkley introduced its legendary Trilene monofilament back in 1959.

Then and now, mono offers a variety of benefits. Thanks to its flexible nature, mono is manageable and easier to cast than stiffer lines. It's also knot-friendly, so you can use a number of easy-to-tie knots (including the appropriately named Trilene knot) without sacrificing line strength.

Plus, it stretches more than super lines, which is a helpful asset at times when the only option on a big fish is for the line to stretch or break. Stretch also helps keep hooks from tearing holes in a fish's mouth, which can make it easier for a bass to throw the hook. Other mono attributes include great shock strength, a slow sink rate, low cost and availability in a wide variety of colors.

Keep in mind that because monofilament absorbs water, it'll behave a bit differently at the lake than when it's handled in a tackle shop. Since water absorption makes mono "relax," it actually stretches a little more, handles better and casts a bit farther when wet.

TAKE YOUR PICK

Still manufactured on U.S. soil at Berkley's headquarters in Spirit Lake, Iowa, Trilene monofilament is a time-tested favorite of anglers across North America and around the globe. It's offered in a fistful of versions, including XT, XL, Sensation and TransOptic.

Of these choices, Trilene XT is an extra-tough, abrasion-resistant workhorse perfect for pursuing beefy bass around rocks, docks and heavy cover. And, since it comes in 6- to 30-pound break strengths in clear, fluorescent clear/blue, low-vis green and solar colorations, it's easy to match color, test and diameter to a variety of preferences, presentations and conditions.

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, Berkley worked with grassroots anglers at state federations across the country to test new lines and gather angler feedback. The company sent break-test machines to state competitions on a routine basis, and TBF anglers who participated in the product development process took their role and responsibility seriously.

Mono is likely to stick around as an important tool in the serious bass angler's arsenal of lines, and TBF members can take pride in knowing they helped drive the creation of all of today's best fishing lines.





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HEADRICK WINS SEMI-FINALS AT LAKE MEAD

Lake Mead was the site of The Bass Federation's first National Semi-Finals tournament of 2018, an event that offered grassroots District 22 bass anglers from Utah and Nevada a chance to qualify for the 2019 TBF National Championship. Anglers competed on the massive Colorado River reservoir out of Lake Mead Marina May 19-20.

Utah's Wade Headrick paced the boaters with daily limits of 9.92 pounds and 13.52 pounds, respectively. For his 23.44-pound two-day total, Headrick pocketed \$1,170, along with the \$500 Ranger Cup contingency prize and an invitation to compete in the TBF National Championship.

Nevada boater David Hudson was hot on Headrick's heels, posting a pair of limits weighing 9.20 pounds and 12.33

pounds for a 21.53-pound tournament total. That was good for \$630 in cash and Nevada's slot in the TBF title match.

Utah's Mark Shepard topped the co-angler ranks with 13.62 and 8.60 pounds for a nine-fish total that weighed 22.22 pounds. Shepard earned \$585 and a trip to nationals, where he will be joined by Nevada's top co-angler, Andrew Hays, who weighed in 17.13 pounds and collected \$315 in cash. Utah won the State Pride competition by 134.19 pounds to 126.06 pounds.

In all, TBF paid out \$5,640 in cash and prizes at the District 22 event, representing a payback of nearly 157 percent on entry fees – not counting state stipends or TBF championship funds, which push the total payback to more than 180 percent.



INDIANA BASS FEDERATION FUNDS RACCOON LAKE BASS STOCKING

Conservation is one of the cornerstones of The Bass Federation, as members of the Indiana Bass Federation (IBF) demonstrated this spring by stocking bass in select Hoosier reservoirs.

"We wanted to supplement bass populations with stocking, since most of the stocking done by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) tends to focus on walleyes and muskies," says IBF Secretary Mike Goins.

"IBF Conservation Director Maggie Templeton and IBF District 9 Director Jason Hartz were instrumental in spearheading our stocking program," he continues. "When we contacted the DNR, biologists were supportive of the

idea and suggested we start with Raccoon Lake."

The 2,110-acre impoundment of Big Raccoon Creek is a popular fishing destination located in west-central Indiana in the rolling farmlands of Parke and Putnam counties.

In accordance with the IBF's core mission of uniting member clubs to assist the DNR in matters mutually beneficial to Indiana resources, the organization allotted \$5,000 to stock largemouth bass in Raccoon Lake in 2018.

With the cooperation and support of the DNR, the IBF purchased 1,000 8- to 12-inch-long largemouth bass from a hatchery in Cincinnati, Ohio. Templeton adds that the DNR was

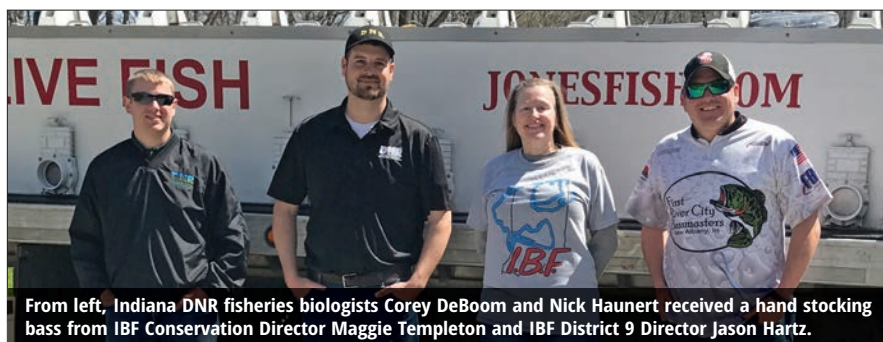
helpful in recommending the best size of bass to stock and locating the best pricing. The bass were stocked in the lake on Friday, April 27 at the Walker Boat Ramp.

Templeton says the IBF plans to stock additional bass in Raccoon Lake in 2020 and will also release bass in Indiana's Lake Monroe in 2019 and 2021. The IBF set up a GoFundMe page to raise additional funds for those future releases.

The IBF stocking is part of the DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife's efforts to restore Monroe and Raccoon lakes under the auspices of the state's Reservoir Habitat Enhancement Program.

Launched in 2016, the five-year program aims to reset the clock on certain aging Hoosier reservoirs by improving aquatic habitat through a combination of structure placement, shoreline stabilization and dredging. Various IBF clubs and other volunteers assisted the DNR with placement of habitat in Raccoon Lake in 2017.

Goins notes that DNR monitoring of fish populations in response to the reservoir habitat enhancements will also help biologists assess the success of the IBF stocking projects. ■





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JEFF “GUSSY” GUSTAFSON

KEEWATIN, ONTARIO

By Sean Ostruszka

Your professional career in Ontario got off to a different start than most. When did you get started?

I started guiding for a resort on Lake of the Woods at 14 years old. Though, I wouldn't say I was really a professional that first year; more like a lawn boy. I only guided when the other guides didn't show up for whatever reason.

Anyone ever complain they were getting a kid for a guide?

Oh yeah. The guests would look at me and then at the owner as if to say, "Are you kidding me?"

That had to be a bit awkward.

Not really. I mean, I get it. You pay a lot of money to travel up here and get a guide. You don't want to feel like you're being cheated.

The owner always told the guests that if they didn't catch fish with me he'd refund their money. No one got their money back.

So how'd you get to be a guide that young anyway?

By then I was fishing every weekend. I had a 14-foot aluminum boat with a

25-hp motor, a little fish finder and a paper map. That's how I learned to navigate and read structure.

Well, the owner had gotten to know me just from always seeing me around and fishing tournaments, so I just asked, and we worked something out.

Walleye tournaments?

No. Bass tournaments. We have a bunch of local tournaments, and one big tournament called the Kenora Bass International.

My first tournament ever was the Kenora Bass International, actually.

How old were you at that first tournament?

Ten years old. My parents bought my entry as my Christmas gift. It's a team tournament, so I fished it with my dad.

How'd you do?

Donation.

To be fair, my dad, Jim, wasn't much of a bass fisherman. He was mostly walleye.

He and I fished it every year until I was 15. I started fishing it with my buddy, Chris Savage, when I was 16, and we took second our first year and won it the next.

That has to be one of your favorite tournaments.

Oh, for sure. Only problem is it's usually the same weekend as the Cup. I'd rather be fishing the Cup. The pay-out is "a little" bigger. I'd make more money showing up at the Cup than I would winning the Kenora Bass International.

Lake of the Woods is a ridiculously good fishery. Walleyes, smallmouths, muskies, perch – you name it. Which is your favorite?

Bass is my No. 1, for sure. I've always lived for the tournaments. I'm a competitive guy.

I like muskie fishing, but it's not enough action for me. Walleyes are fun, too, but it's always the same, it seems. Bass are always changing. You have to figure them out every day.

You're a fishing and hunting guide, writer, photographer, television host, professional angler. Did you ever dream you'd be all this?

Honestly, no. I'm living the dream right now in my 30s. It's a lot of hard work and sacrifice, and I'll probably never be rich doing it. But I never wanted a Monday-to-Friday job. ■

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