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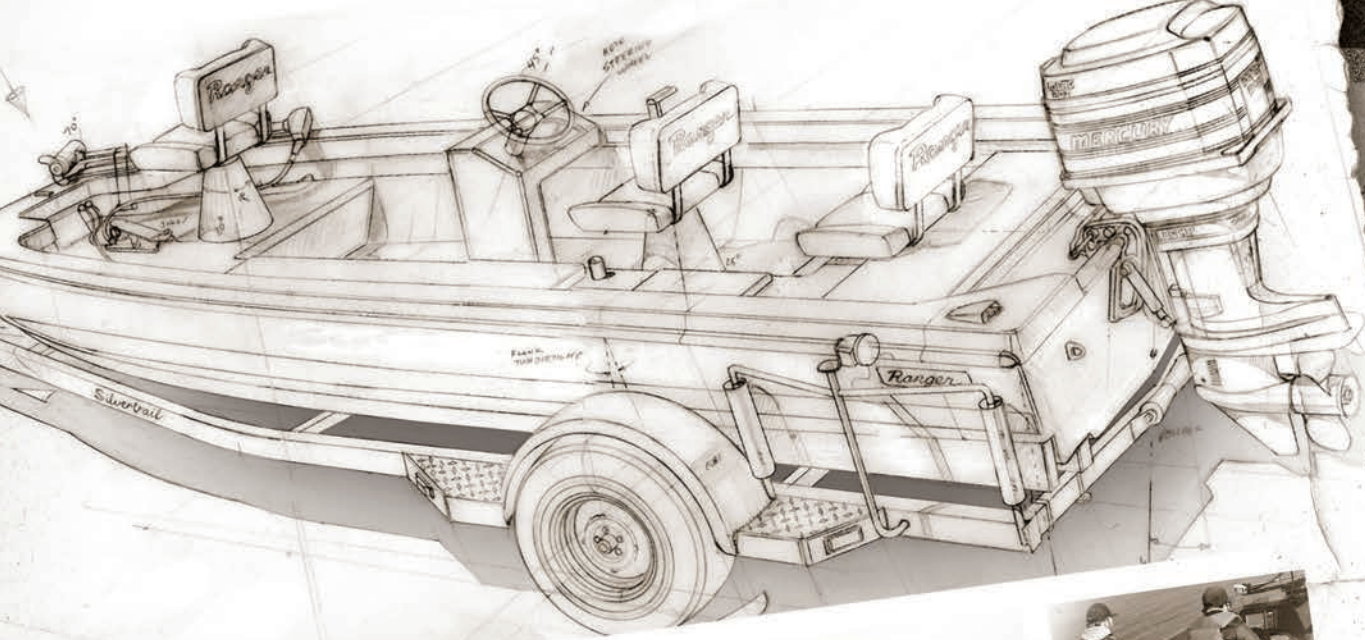
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COVER PHOTO BY SEAN BUSHNER

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EDITOR'S NOTE



A NEW SEASON, A NEW CALENDAR

I haven't actually seen Mrs. Frankart in at least 15 years, but every few weeks my high school English teacher visits me in my dreams. She's angry, usually, and I'm terrified because there I sit, in her second-floor classroom at Seneca East High School in Attica, Ohio, and I haven't finished whatever assignment it is that's due in class that day.

I've talked to people who've studied the meaning of dreams about why I have this recurring dream, and the consensus is it's caused by the stress of meeting publishing deadlines.

Their interpretation makes sense to me. My life is a parade of deadlines, budgets, schedules, outlines and calendars that dictate what I need to accomplish and when I need to have it finished.

As I write this in early December, tacked up behind me on my office wall are a 2017 365-day calendar that shows me the "big picture" schedule for the year, a 12-month calendar open to December 2017 that's keeping me on track for the month, the 2018 *FLW Bass Fishing* magazine production schedule with our print deadlines, and the annual tournament coverage assignment sheet that lists the travel schedules and tournament responsibilities for each full-time and freelance member of FLW's web team.

On my hard drive, I have saved spreadsheets with magazine editorial calendars, magazine and website budgets, and outlines for various special projects, which all have their own deadlines.

Beside my laptop is the final draft of the 2018 FLW calendar that was packaged with this magazine. The final printed version will go on my wall, too.

Sometimes I think I need a calendar that shows me which calendar I'm supposed to look at each day, but for that I rely on FLW Production Manager Michelle Dowling, who's sort of the enforcer of the deadlines. She provides me with to-do lists and random threats of violence whenever we approach a print deadline (like the one coming up in just a few days).

It's no wonder this stuff is living with me in Dreamland.

Though the dreams they create are a tad awkward, all those deadlines also prepare me every year to shift my focus away from the planning sessions and boring budget meetings that are too common in the offseason and toward the only two calendars that should be on a bass angler's mind when spring is on the horizon: the one that lists the FLW tournament schedule, and the natural seasonal "calendar" that Mother Nature outlined for bass to follow.

For me, and probably a lot of you, late winter is when I fully shift back into "bass mode," when instead of living life according to a schedule of days, weeks and months that's dictated by my career, time is organized into prespawn, spawn and postspawn; takeoffs and weigh-ins; first casts and last. Those are deadlines I don't mind to put on the calendar.

Mrs. Frankart is retired now, and while I don't think I made much of an impression on her, she certainly did on me. She had a reputation for law and order in the classroom, but also for helping kids prepare for college and life beyond. Perhaps that's why she continues to be the symbol of punctuality in my dreams, reminding me every so often to stay on track and finish the work so I can enjoy the good things to come of it.

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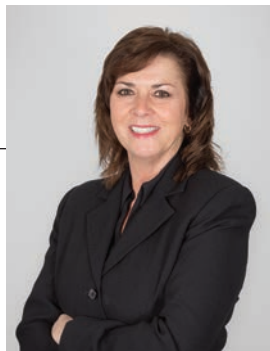
For the second season in a row, anglers competing in the Costa FLW Series Championship had to wait out an extended fog delay. In 2016, it happened on day two at Table Rock Lake. The fog rolled in on top-10 day at the 2017 event on Kentucky Lake, delaying takeoff by two hours and severely cutting into the fishing time of several pros whose days were already shortened by long runs far upstream on the Tennessee River.

Fog is a common issue in autumn tournaments, but safety comes first, causing delays that sometimes frustrate competitors. Of course, the one upside is the opportunity for interesting photos once the tournament directors finally send 'em. In this shot, Andy Hagedon captured Tennessee angler Jason Abram jetting to his first spot just after the fog had lifted.

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



Growth and Opportunities For the New Year



Two hundred eighty-six. That's the total number of FLW tournaments scheduled to be held this year in eight countries, including the United States, Canada, China, Italy, South Korea, Mexico, Portugal and South Africa. It's incredible to think about the depth and breadth of our offerings on four continents with members speaking a half-dozen languages, but sharing one passion: bass fishing. We are Fishing League Worldwide, the world's largest tournament-fishing organization, and we are proud to have you as part of the FLW family.

FLW has a long history of awarding the sport's biggest payouts, and with more than \$21 million on the line this season, that tradition lives on. Some of our biggest contributions to the sport, however, have nothing to do with six-figure awards or promoting our world-class anglers. They happen quietly at FLW Foundation Unified Fishing Derbies held along the banks of lakes and rivers we visit throughout the season, and at #ReelFun fishing events in more than 1,600 Walmart stores during National Fishing and Boating Week. Such events are made possible because of the efforts of more than 800 dedicated FLW Ambassadors who volunteer their time to spread the joy of fishing to children and their families.

Established in 2010, the non-profit FLW Foundation supports youth fishing recruitment, retention and reactivation through Unified Fishing Derbies, Get Outdoors. Go Fish! school visits, and High School Fishing grants and other initiatives. Its mission is to connect America's youth to their natural resources and promote education, conservation and an active lifestyle. It has been something of a well-kept secret, but with your help, that is going to change.

As traditional pathways into fishing continue to decline, the FLW Foundation's work is more important than ever. Children need repeated fishing opportunities and mentors they can count on to ensure quality experiences. With your help, we can expand the FLW Foundation's work, such as our recent grant program that awarded \$23,700 in funding to 49 Florida high schools to establish new or expand existing fishing teams. Emphasis was placed on recruiting new anglers in schools that serve a high percentage of Hispanic youth, and the results were outstanding.

More than 1,300 Florida students are now fishing on school-recognized teams as a result of the FLW Foundation grants provided in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation. Twenty-two percent of the students are Hispanic, and 34 percent are female. Additionally, 41 percent of the students are novice anglers. Most importantly, the students are enjoying sustainable fishing opportunities and a sense of school pride that was previously available only to athletes in the traditional high school sports. The sense of belonging that comes from a school-sanctioned High School Fishing team is the driving force that will continue to grow fishing participation.

If you'd like to volunteer at a Unified Fishing Derby, serve as an FLW Ambassador during National Fishing and Boating Week or make a financial contribution to the FLW Foundation, please visit FLWFishing.com/Foundation. You can also donate when entering your next FLW tournament.

Watch for more FLW Foundation information in the months ahead as we roll out new partnerships aimed at getting even more children hooked on fishing. We look forward to seeing you on the water.

Sincerely,

Kathy Fennel
President, Operations Division

ITALY, PORTUGAL JOIN FLW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION



Flag of Italy

The Costa FLW Series International Division recently expanded to include FLW Italy and FLW Portugal, bringing the total number of participating nations to seven. The list also includes China, South Korea, Canada, Mexico and South Africa.

The addition of FLW Italy, which will be managed under the leadership of FLW Italy CEO and President Jimmy Ashlock, was announced during the 2017 Costa FLW Series Championship on Kentucky Lake in early November. José Neves, CEO and President of FLW Portugal, finalized an agreement with FLW a couple weeks later. Both organizations signed exclusive licensing agreements to host FLW-sanctioned tournaments in their host nations beginning in 2018.

Boaters and co-anglers from each of the participating nations can qualify to the 2018 Costa FLW Series Championship, where the top finisher among all International Division boater qualifiers will earn a spot at the 2019 Forrest Wood Cup.

At the 2017 Costa FLW Series Championship in November, International Division angler Michael Matthee of South Africa qualified as the divisional representative to the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup.

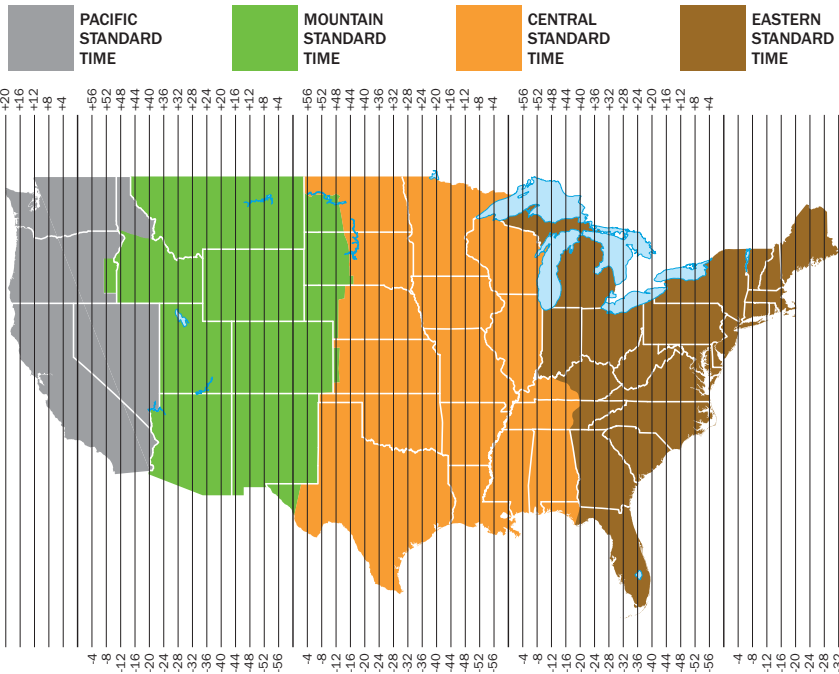


Flag of Portugal



SOLUNAR TABLES

JANUARY 2018



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

SOLUNAR TABLES® are designed to forecast the daily active feeding periods of fish. They are formulated from the position of the earth in relation to the sun and moon.

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

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ROB NEWELL

“Cecil-Dine” Joins the Tour

.....

For a decade, Texans Russell Cecil and Todd Castledine have spent their fishing careers as regional pros in the Lone Star State. In that time, both anglers experienced a great deal of success competing in the Costa FLW Series and T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League, as well as other local and regional circuits. Yet the point when their careers experienced a real uptick occurred in 2011, when the two joined forces and started working together in competition to really make some bank.

Since then, they've racked up numerous wins and AOY titles across multiple team circuits in Texas. Their reputation as a deadly duo even earned them the nickname “Cecil-Dine.”

It's been a productive partnership ever since, and in 2018 the members of Cecil-Dine will test the waters of the big leagues as FLW Tour rookies. Though both have fished outside of Texas before, this will be the first time either has fished competitively for an entire season in the East.

The duo's debut on the FLW Tour bears watching. I believe that winning on the regional level is a prerequisite to finding success on the FLW Tour, and both Cecil and Castledine have certainly done that. However, the fisheries of the 2018 FLW Tour are a *long* way from their grassy, bass-filled wheelhouse in Texas. Also, a lot of the competition on the FLW Tour has fished multiple tournaments on the lakes that figure in the 2018 schedule.

Can they take the same teamwork that has garnered so much regional success and employ it with similar results nationally on unfamiliar waters? My guess is that considering the backing they have and the cooperation they showcase, that's exactly what will happen.

Meeting of the Minds

Cecil and Castledine met at a Costa FLW Series event on Toledo Bend in 2011. Prior to that, Cecil was well aware of Castledine's reputation as an up-and-coming talent in Texas.

“Basically, I kept running into him on some of my best spots on the lakes where we were competing,” Cecil says. “To find those kinds of places you have to know what you're looking for and put in a lot of homework to search them out, and he seemed pretty dialed in on what to look for.”

At that point, Cecil, who works for Sunbelt Sales, a sporting goods rep group in Texas, used some of his business savvy and effectively removed Castledine as his competitor by making him his team partner in fishing.

“We got to know each other at that Toledo Bend event, and Todd ended up winning the tournament,” Cecil recalls. “I knew right then I could either spend the rest of my career competing against him in Texas and lose money or join forces, fish together and make money. So I went with the join forces option, and since then we have become really good friends.”

The Yin and the Yang

Cecil and Castledine became such a success because both members' fishing styles, philosophies and work ethics clicked immediately. They were compatible enough to work well together, yet different enough to learn from each other. Both claim to be much better anglers now due to their team dynamic.

"Our relationship is a rare circumstance where our strengths complement each other instead of canceling each other out," Cecil says. "I'm the logical guy; everything has to make sense to me. I analyze things maybe a little too much, and it's a fault when it comes to fishing. On the other hand, Todd is a free spirit. He is that pure intuitive guy. He'll just pull up on a bank where he's never fished before and catch a 10-pounder without having to know every reason why it should be there. He has made me a better fisherman by teaching me to let those gut feelings have more influence on a fishing day."

Castledine says Cecil has taught him a tremendous amount about being resourceful on the water.

"Russell is the best at taking something simple or obvious and turning it into something big," he says. "He has a gift for finding overlooked gems within the obvious. He makes the best out of what's inside the box, and I am always thinking outside the box. When we combine those two strategies, it makes for some great days on the water."

Great days, indeed. For the last six years, the pair has made a nice living fishing regionally, with each member clearing more than \$50,000 in winnings during some seasons. Up until now they've never seen the need to go out on the "big tours" and spend more money to compete when they could stay close and clean up around home.

The Right Time for the Tour

Last season, while competing in Texas tournaments, Castledine and Cecil kicked around the idea of giving the FLW Tour a whirl in 2018. When the Costa FLW Series Southwestern Division wrapped up on Texoma in September, Castledine won the points title and Cecil finished runner-up, validating their theory that they needed to take the next step.

"We kind of knew then that the time is now," Cecil says. "It's good timing for both of us. I have an awesome group at the office that can handle the rep group business when I'm gone.

I don't have to get a check in the tournament just to fish the next event. I can now go and totally focus on fishing."

As for Castledine, his sponsor support has stepped up enough to give him some extra breathing room to fish the Tour.

"I think fishing a national-level tour is a bucket list item for most tournament anglers," Cecil adds. "The allure of traveling the Tour for a year or two has always been there for both of us, and we're not getting any younger. Plus, it's a way to totally immerse ourselves in a lifestyle that we both love and represent."

Unfamiliar Territory Ahead

The Texas titans will certainly have their work cut out for them this year. Neither angler has been to any of the 2018 FLW Tour venues except for Kentucky Lake. They say they have no plans to pre-practice and will rely on the official three-day practice period to find fish.

"Oh, we're going to take some lumps, no doubt," Cecil says. "The sheer size of Okeechobee is intimidating. I've never fished for spotted bass, and two stops are spotted bass lakes. And from what I know of St. Clair, it's a total small-mouth deal, so we're going to be in a lot of unfamiliar territory this year.

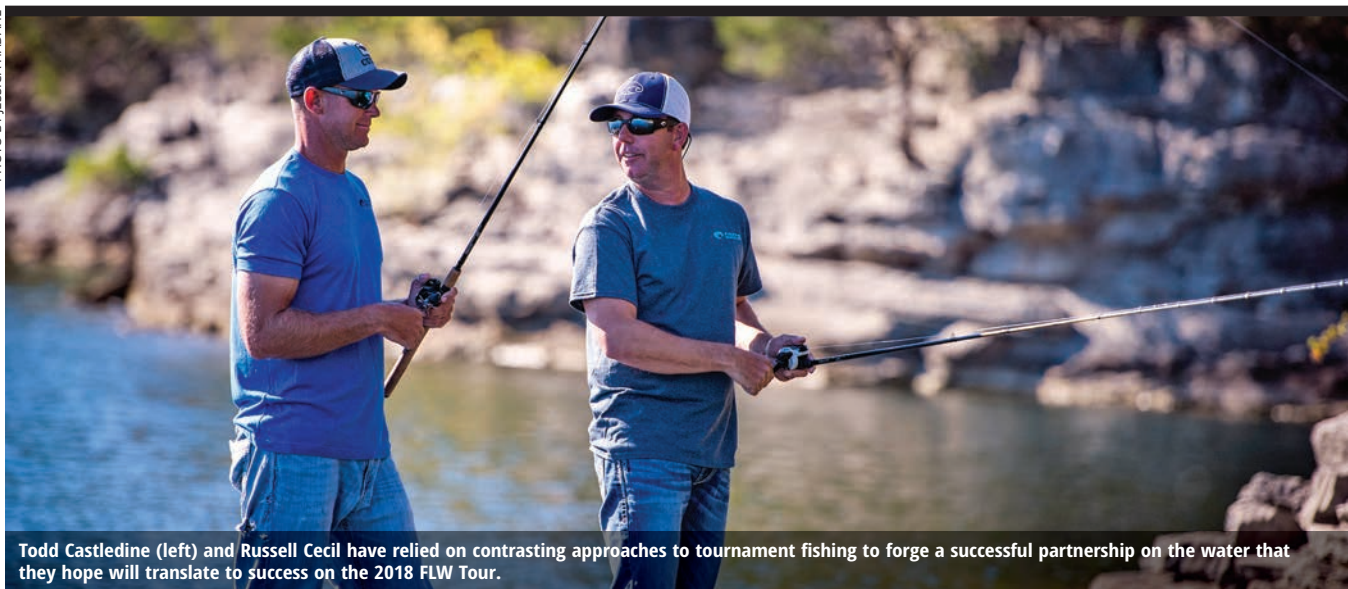
"But we see it as a challenge and as an opportunity to grow as anglers, to see new parts of the country and experience new fisheries."

Even though they'll compete against each other for bigger payouts on the FLW Tour, they plan to share information just like they have for years in the FLW Series.

"Moving up to the Tour will not change a thing for us," Castledine says. "We have always found our own fish and stayed out of each other's way. We're not going to start stepping on each other's toes just because the payouts are bigger. We respect each other too much for that. We would rather zero than go in on the other guy – or go in on any guy, for that matter. The money is simply not worth sacrificing a friendship or the integrity of the sport over. That's just the way we are."

"The biggest problem we'll have is deciding whether we should buy spinning rods or not," Cecil says jokingly. "I don't think we have ever had a spinning combo in our boats when fishing in Texas." ■

PHOTO BY JESSICA HADAHIL



Todd Castledine (left) and Russell Cecil have relied on contrasting approaches to tournament fishing to forge a successful partnership on the water that they hope will translate to success on the 2018 FLW Tour.



COLIN
MOORE

Roland Still Rolling

.....

As Roland Martin tells it, his first fishing trip with the Splendid Splinter “wasn’t so hot.”

It was in the late ‘60s at Islamorada, Fla., and Martin was substituting for another guide. The latter had asked Martin to take the famous, and famously cantankerous, Ted Williams fishing in his stead because of another commitment.

Martin obliged, and did his best to see that the former Boston Red Sox great was kept entertained. In an attempt to pass the time while waiting on the clear flats for the tide to change and the fish to bite, Martin decided to while away the empty minutes by making small talk with His Worshipfulness.

“So, Mr. Williams, who do you like for the World Series this fall?” asked the towheaded Martin, a bright-eyed 20-something at the time.

“Look, you blond-headed %\$#@!, you don’t know a \$#@% thing about

baseball, and I’m not *%\$& going to talk to you about baseball. If you want to talk about fishing, that’s fine, but don’t %\$@* talk to me about something you don’t know anything about.”

Which suited Martin, because he didn’t want to talk about baseball anyway. There came a time, not too much later, when Williams would frequently call Martin to talk about fishing, and to plead with him to go fishing. Though it puts thoughts into Williams’ mind that we can only conjecture, perhaps he recognized and respected the kindred, unfiltered talent that Martin possessed. The sports for which they became famous were different, but Martin had what Williams had in equal measure – a natural ability and a drive to be the very best at something, or certainly among the best.

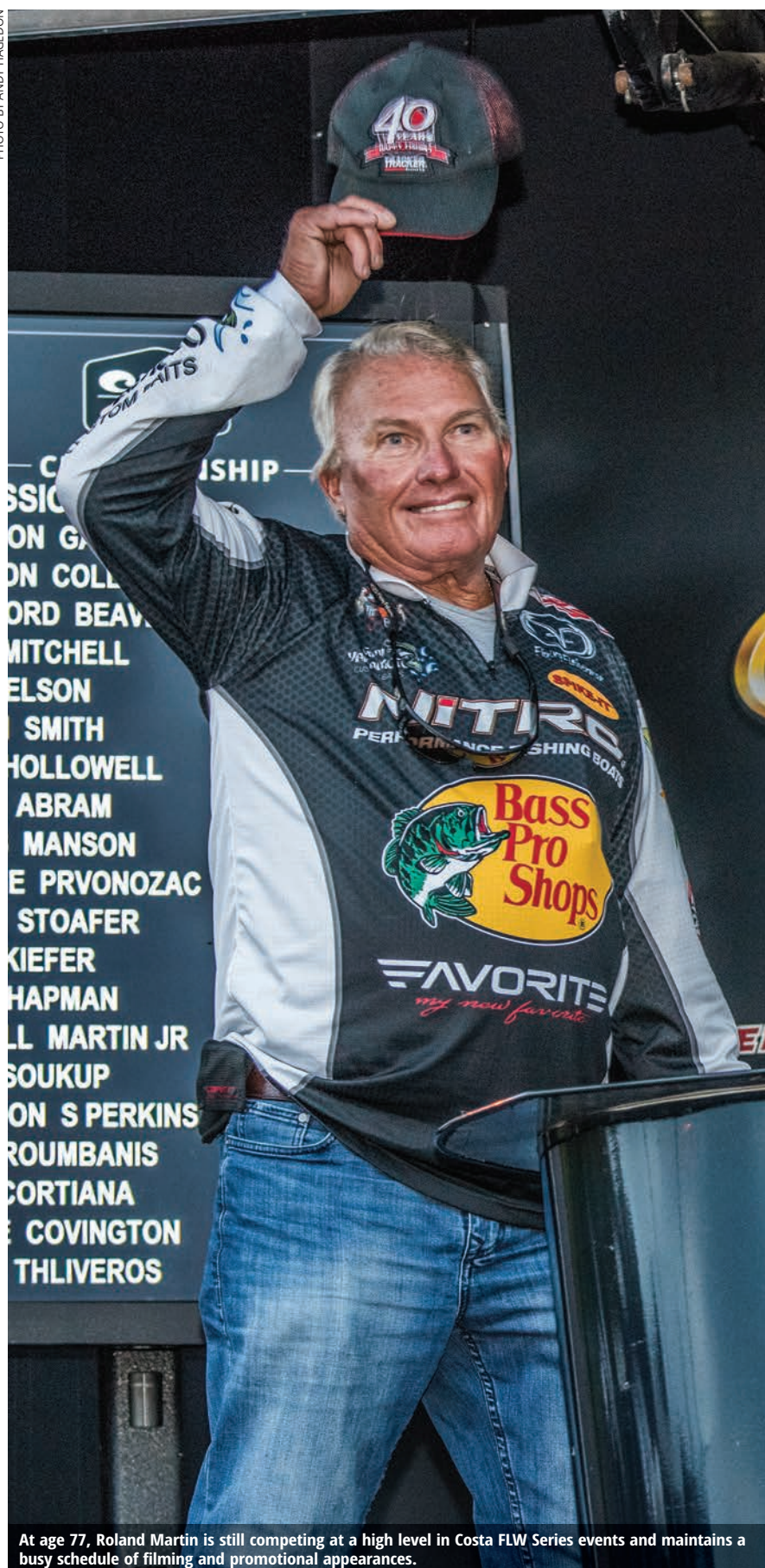
Most people interested in fishing know Roland Martin the bass fisherman,

but few know that before he became a famous tournament angler, Martin was a saltwater fisherman. His apprenticeship began in 1958, during summer break from the University of Maryland, when Martin and a buddy decided to go fishing in the Florida Keys. Within a few years after that first visit he was guiding there, though his tastes in fishing were always ecumenical. In the ‘60s, when he was becoming a well-respected guide on the flats around Islamorada, he was also splitting his time and guiding bass fishermen on Santee Cooper in South Carolina.

One of Martin’s Santee Cooper customers was Homer Circle, the *eminence grise* of fishing writers who recognized Martin’s bass-fishing skill and potential when he met him. Uncle Homer wasn’t the only one to encourage Martin to compete in bass tournaments, though he took some warming up to the notion. In 1969, when Martin attended his first tournament at Lake Eufaula on the Alabama-Georgia border and saw Bill Dance come in with a 15-fish stringer that weighed 83 pounds, Martin remarked to nobody in particular that, “I’ve got no business fishing against these guys.” Even so, several months later he was taking part in his first tournament, an event on Toledo Bend. Martin placed second there and then won the Seminole Lunker tournament on Lake Seminole. Motivated by the championship purse of a whopping \$2,219, Martin decided he was, indeed, cut from competitive cloth.

During the next 35 years, he fished in 279 events and placed in the top 50 in 191 of them. He won 19 tournaments and was runner-up in 19, and was Angler of the Year nine times. This, in an era when one was as likely as not to draw a Bill Dance, Hank Parker or Rick Clunn as a boat partner, and then have to fish against him. Even so, Martin won more than \$1 million, much of it during the years when tournament purses were notoriously meager. About the only thing that he didn’t accomplish, despite 25 chances, is winning a Bassmaster Classic.

Martin has been reasonably successful in FLW Tour competition, too. He scored six top-10 finishes beginning in 1996 and was AOY runner-up in 1999. He’s still fighting the good fight; in the challenging Costa FLW Series Championship on Kentucky



At age 77, Roland Martin is still competing at a high level in Costa FLW Series events and maintains a busy schedule of filming and promotional appearances.

Lake (for which he qualified through the Southeastern Division) last November, Martin couldn't scratch out a check, but he made a respectable showing.

After the Costa event's Friday evening weigh-in, after fishing for six days in practice and competition, Martin towed his boat to Old Hickory Lake near Nashville, where he and buddies Bill Dance and Jimmy Houston participated in a one-day tournament to raise funds for their Th3 Legends "Cast for a Cure" cancer research charity.

Hard work, but Martin still loves it, and it's all in a typical week's routine. He continues to film his popular TV program, in which he reacts to every big fish that he hooks as if it is the best one ever. Nowadays, too, he's involved with Dance and Houston in Th3 Legends, a promotional triumvirate that keeps them front and center in the fishing world. It's entertaining to see and listen to the three together: Dance the wisecracker who's never at a loss for words, Houston the clever-tongued jester and Roland, who usually is the foil for his two cohorts.

"Roland is one of the most guileless people ever," says Dance of his long-time friend. "He is what you see on TV, and he hasn't changed a bit over the years. One thing I have always admired about Roland Martin is that he will not tell you an outright lie. He might be able to dodge telling you the truth, or avoid answering you, but if you just go up to him, look him in the eye and ask him a flat-out-yes-or-no question, he will tell you the truth. That's pretty uncommon in a fisherman."

Dance is a practical joker of the first order, but early on he lost his ardor to pick on Roland; too easy a target, too much like giving a wedgie to an Eagle Scout. Even so, each man gets in his verbal licks when he can, though Martin is much more used to being on the receiving end. He delivered one of his best shots at Dance in 1980, when the latter announced that he was leaving the tournament scene to pursue his television career. At a tournament press conference, when asked for his reaction to Dance's retirement announcement, Martin deadpanned that "sooner or later age catches up with everybody, and a man has to know his limitations. I guess Bill knew it was time to call it quits."

That was 38 years ago, and though they're each 77 years old now, neither man is ready to call it quits. ■

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TAKEOFF

WHAT'S INSIDE:

Who we think has the best chance to win in Florida

Bryan Thrift's take on the Ned rig

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PREVENTIVE BOAT MAINTENANCE ADVICE FROM THE TOURNAMENT SERVICE CREWS

PHOTO BY D.W. REED II



Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege

"TRAP DITCHES FOR WINTER BASS"

FLW Tour pro Joseph Webster's favorite wintertime pattern is ripping Rat-L-Traps through ditches in Southern reservoirs.

"Fish are always positioned near the mouths of the ditches and will move up into those areas when the water warms," he explains. "Those ditches can be anywhere from 4 to 10 feet deep. The grass stays pretty green year-round because the pools are drawn down to lower levels in winter where sunlight can reach the grass. Those weeds help to filter the water while the ditch provides a current break."

Webster throws a 1/2-ounce Trap shallower than 6 feet and a 3/4-ounce model in deeper water.

"The heavier size allows you to maintain a fast retrieve. You are looking for a reaction bite, regardless of the depth."



● Shad Rap

THIS OR THAT

Travis Fox, 2017 Forrest Wood Cup runner-up, shares his selection process for his two favorite wintertime baits: the Rapala Shad Rap crankbait and Rapala Shadow Rap jerkbait.

	Shad Rap	Shadow Rap
Weather:	Warming trend	High winds
Forage:	Baitfish in the shallows	Baitfish offshore
Cover/location:	Main lake, creeks, sloping banks	Main lake, deep drops, channels



● Shadow Rap

HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE?

No doubt Florida anglers have insight into the quirky behavior of Florida-strain large-mouth bass, but does that experience translate into tournament wins? Will a Florida pro win again on Okeechobee when the Costa FLW Series season kicks off on Jan. 4, or at the FLW Tour opener on the same pond Jan. 25? Here's what the numbers have to say.

BREAKDOWN OF WINS IN FLORIDA BY STATE OF RESIDENCE

	FLW Tour	FLW Series Eastern	Costa FLW Series Southeastern	Total
Wins by Floridian	3	3	9	15
Wins by Out-of-Stater*	11	1	7	19
Winning Percentage				
By Floridian	21.42%	75%	56.25%	44.11%

*Randall Tharp and Tom Mann Jr. have each won in Florida at a time when they spent a significant amount of their offseason in Florida, but were not Florida residents. Tharp now lives in Florida, and Mann guides on Okeechobee. Bradley Dortch lived in Florida for a spell before he won there, but he was living in Alabama at the time of his win.

PRO CHOICE: GO-TO WINTER BAITS



1. Bradley Dortch Jenko Fishing Persues 110 Suspending Jerkbait

"It's a killer bait; a great alternative to a jiggging spoon. I like to throw the chartreuse and orange colors in dirtier water, and shad patterns when the water is clearer."



2. Andrew Upshaw 1/2-ounce Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap

"I always have at least one tied on throughout winter. The tight wobble gets a reaction bite regardless of the conditions. Any of the red patterns like Rayburn red are dynamite in the months of January and February."



3. Shane LeHew Shane's Baits Blades of Glory

"Fish typically feed on shad in the winter, and the [umbrella] rig is a great imitator. It has nine arms, which give it a large profile. I like to rig it with smaller 3-inch swimbaits." ■



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN



THRIFT'S TAKE ON FISHING THE NED RIG

FLW'S RESIDENT HIGH-SPEED
EXPERT IS QUITE THE
ACCOMPLISHED FINESSE
ANGLER, TOO

By Curtis Niedermier

Bryan Thrift = power fishing, right? That's what most bass scribes would lead you to believe. However, the truth of the matter is that the reigning FLW Tour Angler of the Year will throw just about anything – including ultra-finesse tackle – that he thinks will catch a bass and put another paycheck in his pocket. During Thrift's 2017 AOY run, his list of approved options included the Ned rig, which is one of the simplest, most subtle bass rigs out there.

For Thrift, the Ned rig isn't necessarily a go-to bait, but it's part of his system, and he has his own take on the best ways to fish it.

The Basic Ned Rig

The Ned rig is nothing more than a 3- to 4-inch soft stick bait (many folks use a sawed-off Yamamoto Senko) on a light mushroom-head jig. Thrift prefers a 1/16- to 1/10-ounce head with a No. 1 or 1/0 light-wire hook and has used all different makes. His go-to soft plastic is a 4-inch Damiki Stinger with a 1/2- to 3/4-inch length cut off the fat end.



Where it Fits

According to Thrift, when extreme water clarity combines with heavy fishing pressure or weather conditions that shut down bass, even a drop-shot rig with a 3/8-ounce weight and a 6-inch worm can be too intrusive for some fish. In that situation, the pint-sized Ned rig might be the most effective tool to catch five.

"When you go to the Ned rig you're cutting that whole apparatus in half," he says.

While anglers have adopted a number of methods for fishing a Ned rig, from dragging and hopping to dead-sticking it on bottom, Thrift uses it primarily as a slow-sinking target bait around docks, rock piles and points in a depth range from about 4 to 18 feet of water.

"I think the whole key to it is the fall rate. It's falling so slow that a lot of your bites come on the fall," he says. "If I'm fishing on the bank I kind of let it pendulum back. If I'm fishing a target I'll leave the bail open on my reel and kind of feed it line and let it fall vertically. The cool thing about how that bait falls on that light head is that it doesn't just fall straight down. It kind of planes off to the side and moves around, versus just falling straight to the bottom like a shaky head or drop-shot would."

The cast-and-fall approach rules out the Ned rig as a tool for fishing flats, deep structure or long drop-offs, where a dragging presentation with a heavier rig would be better for covering water. And it's not his choice for fishing in the extreme shallows, where Thrift prefers a weightless wacky worm if he wants to fish finesse.

"It's kind of a fast finesse presentation because I'll fire it out there, and I'll let it go to the bottom, and I might hop it once and then wind it in and then fire another cast," Thrift adds. "You have to watch your line. That's one key with it. If you fire it out there and you know it's in 12 feet of water and it falls 7 or 8 feet and your line stops, you know one's got it."

Tackle

Spinning tackle is best for the Ned rig, and Thrift likes the combination of 10-pound-test P-Line XTCB-8 braid with an 8-pound-test P-Line Tactical Fluorocarbon leader.

"I throw a 12- or 15-foot leader," Thrift adds. "I do that because a lot of times I fish it with the hook exposed. The leader allows me to be able to break that bait off [when snagged] and not have to waste time retying a new leader."

Fighting Fish

Any rig is only as good as its landing percentage, and Thrift says that despite the teensy hook on the Ned rig, he's still able to control the fish, and his hookup-to-landing ratio is actually pretty good.

"I fight them just like I would on any other bait," he says. "If you think about it, you actually hook them better on it because it's such a small bait that when they bite it they pretty much suck it all the way in. About 80 percent of the ones you hook are hooked good." ■



TYPES OF RESERVOIRS

RECOGNIZING DIFFERENCES IN FISHERIES CAN LEAD TO BETTER CATCHES

By TJ Maglio



America is a nation of reservoirs. According to a 2017 report by the American Society of Civil Engineers, there are an estimated 90,580 dams in the United States that impound more than 600,000 miles of river, stream and creek.

These dams range in size from miniscule structures that form farm ponds to Nevada's Hoover Dam, which impounds a staggering 37 cubic kilometers of water and powers thousands of homes and businesses in the West.

Regardless of their size or location in the country, most dams have one

thing in common: There's probably a bass or two swimming behind them. However, despite the enormous number of reservoirs out there, there's no official geological classification system for them.

So what's a bass angler to do when it comes to figuring out the different types of reservoirs and how to find and catch the bass in them?

In the 1970s, fishing legends Al and Ron Lindner developed a reservoir classification system that lumped impoundments into broad categories, and added

terms such as "plateau impoundment," "highland reservoir" and "canyon reservoir" to the bass lexicon.

As good as those classifications are, however, there's a bit of variability between the types, and figuring out which category a local reservoir fits into isn't enough to provide tangible help to most anglers.

Let's look deeper into a few more definitive factors that differ between reservoirs, to explain what those factors are – and how anglers can use that information to catch more bass.

Nutrient Levels

Reservoirs can be classified by their nutrient load, and fisheries biologists have several terms to summarize the average productivity and nutrient load found in a body of water. This is called the reservoir's trophic state.

Oligotrophic reservoirs are low in productivity. They contain cold, highly oxygenated clean water relatively devoid of nutrients. They have low plankton loads, low abundance and diversity of aquatic vegetation, and host the smallest fish biomass. Lake Mead is an example of an oligotrophic reservoir.

Eutrophic reservoirs feature high productivity, high nutrient loads, high levels of plankton, abundant aquatic vegetation, and the highest fish biomass, to a point – as they can get so nutrient laden that they actually become toxic to fish of all species, resulting in fish kills. Ross Barnett is a eutrophic reservoir.

Mesotrophic reservoirs are a blend between the two, featuring moderately clear, cool waters with good oxygen levels, and ample plankton and aquatic vegetation production. They host abundant fish populations and are often some of the best fishing reservoirs year in and year out. Kentucky Lake is a mesotrophic reservoir.

Think about the trophic state when you are preparing to fish a reservoir. If you're fishing a more oligotrophic reservoir, it's probably best to go with realistic finesse presentations. If you know it's eutrophic, concentrate on techniques you're comfortable with in dark water and aquatic vegetation.

A Clear-Cut Case?

Nutrient load isn't the only way anglers can classify reservoirs, however. Timber, or the lack thereof, is another key component of reservoir type. Whether a reservoir was clear-cut prior to impoundment plays a huge role.

For example, famed Missouri/Arkansas border impoundments Bull Shoals and Table Rock Lake are known for acres of deep-water standing timber – and the excellent fishing they offer.

Lesser-known Norfolk Lake is on the North Fork River not far from Bull Shoals. In all other respects, except for size, it is a similar reservoir to Bull Shoals and Table Rock. However, Norfolk was clear-cut prior to flooding, and as such contains significantly less deep-water cover and is not considered nearly as good a bass factory as Bulls Shoals and Table Rock.

This doesn't mean timber is essential to bass fishing success in all places, but among similar reservoir types, the presence or absence of timber can certainly be a key factor in bass location and abundance.

Generally, if a reservoir is devoid of timber, bass can be found around shallow cover or in vegetation.

Reservoir Use

Another important way to classify a reservoir is by its purpose, whether electrical generation or some other purpose, such as flood control, drinking water or irrigation.

Bass and baitfish populations in power-generating reservoirs can be more dependent on current flow for

positioning than those in reservoirs where there is irregular or less consistent current flow.

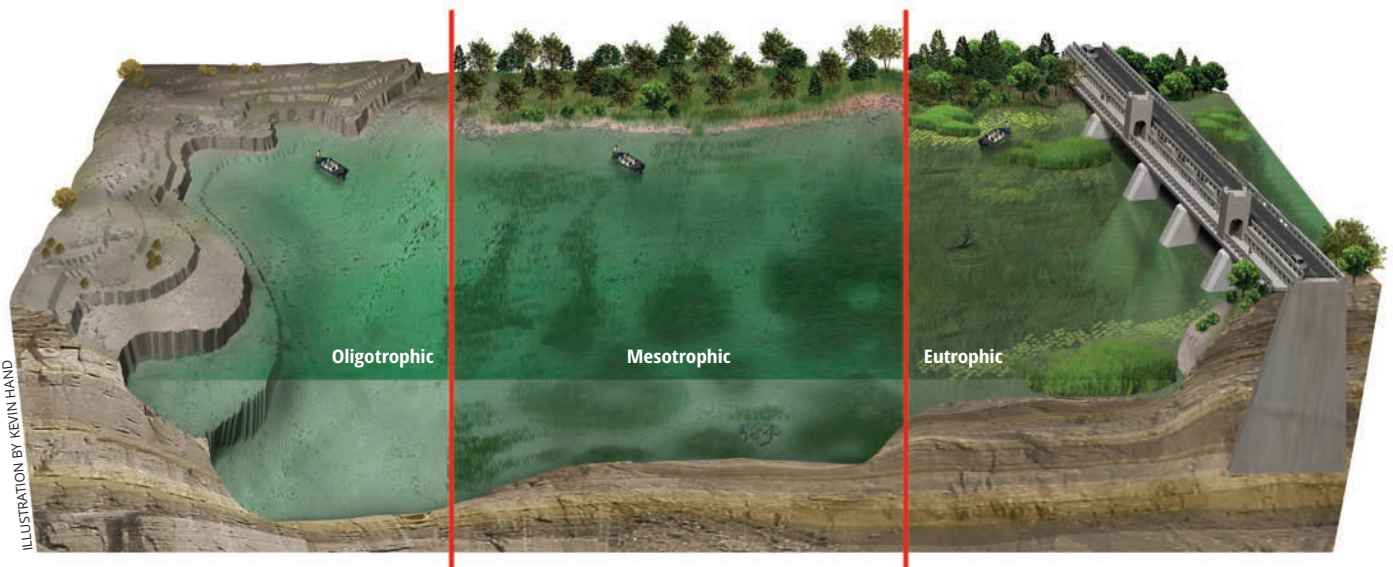
If you know a reservoir generates, dam operators usually publish generation schedules online. Periods of high flow often coincide with some of the best fishing.

If it's just a flood control dam, pay more attention to the recent rain conditions, as runoff is the only source of current. Keying in on even small sources of inflow can lead to more success.

Invasive Game-Changers

Introduce an invasive species into the reservoir equation, and it can dramatically change the way the lake fishes. In several reservoirs of the Carolinas, the introduction of blueback herring in the 1970s and 1980s created an almost unique type of reservoir, where the majority of the fishing effort in postspawn revolves around chasing bass gorging on the pelagic bluebacks.

Pay attention to the forage base in your local reservoir, and any bulletins provided by your state's fisheries managers. If you've got bluebacks, rusty crayfish, Eurasian water milfoil or any of a host of other invasives, you might want to consider how it will impact your fishing strategies. ■



The trophic state of a reservoir determines its productivity and ability to support biomass.



ETIQUETTE, STRATEGY FOR FISHING IN A CROWD

CODY MEYER'S TAKE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH FISHING PRESSURE

By Sean Ostruszka

Every now and then a pro finds a spot all to himself and cashes in for a tournament victory. When it happens, it makes a good story, but the truth is, pros – especially these days – rarely have any spot all to themselves.

The reality is that in tournaments with hundreds of boats in the field, the majority of an angler's time is spent sharing areas, or even fishing in crowds. With so many competing, it's almost guaranteed that at least one

other angler – or several – will find the same pattern, spot or school as you.

That's big-time pressure, but being able to manage and adapt to that pressure is what separates top pros like Cody Meyer from the pack.

"You talk to guys all the time who get spun out because they're sharing water throughout the day, or who are intimidated to fish in a crowd of 10 or 20 boats," says Meyer. "It's never bothered me. Unless I have something better, I

never mind fishing in a pressured or crowded area. My thinking is the fish are there. I don't have to worry about finding them; just catching them."

With so much fishing pressure, catching them isn't always easy, regardless of how many fish there are. Meyer's answer is to downsize or do something different from everybody else. For instance, at the 2017 Potomac River FLW Tour event, he was rotating through community holes with as many as 40 boats in them, and



Crowds are part of tournament fishing, and how well you learn to deal with the added pressure that comes with fishing near other competitors can have a big impact on your success.

noticed most guys were flipping with braid. So he flipped with 15-pound-test fluorocarbon, made the top 10 and credits at least part of his success to the added stealth of clear line.

Being observant like that – whether it involves locations or patterns of other pros fishing nearby – can often help whittle down the guessing game or make it easy to set yourself apart. However, Meyer says there is also an unspoken etiquette when fishing and being observant in crowds; one that some pros follow while others don't.

"It all comes down to respect; respecting your other anglers," says Meyer. "I'll watch what guys are doing to see if I should be doing something similar or switching it up and doing something different. We all do. But if someone gets to an area first or has figured out something no one else has, that's his area, in my mind. I'm not about to go in on top of him."

"Unfortunately, there are anglers out there who don't always show people respect. They'll get up on guys who are catching them; or the second that guy leaves, jump on his spot. I've also seen guys get frustrated and get up on pad right in the middle of a crowd. That's just poor sportsmanship. We all know those guys, and it comes back on them."

One thing Meyer says to remember when it comes to dealing with crowds

and fishing pressure is that the crowd isn't always the deciding factor in the outcome. Sometimes catching fish or not comes down to simple dumb luck.

"I've had times where I was the one catching them in a crowd, and I've had times when I was doing the same thing as everyone else and I watched them catch them," says Meyer. "You just have to understand that's the luck of the draw sometimes."

RULES OF CONDUCT

By Curtis Niedermier

FLW Tour rules do not specifically restrict anglers from fishing close to one another, with one exception: If a contestant's boat is anchored (with anchor and rode or Power-Poles or similar devices) and the trolling motor is stowed, other anglers must stay at least 50 feet away. The details are outlined in rule No. 14, "Permitted Fishing Locations."

However, according to FLW Senior Director of Tournament Operations Bill Taylor, contestants are also expected to maintain a high level of sportsmanship and courtesy during tournaments, as dictated by rule No. 10, "Sportsmanship," which gives the tournament director the authority to impose a penalty for "Any other words, conduct or actions reflecting unfavorably upon efforts to promote safety, sportsmanship,

fair competition and compliance with tournament rules ..."

Acts such as casting across another angler's line, fishing so close that boats drift into one another or aggressively cutting off fellow contestants, as well as any act deemed to be unsafe, such as running on plane through a crowd of boats, could lead to disciplinary action.

Taylor says he hasn't fielded many written protests regarding this type of situation, but he's heard plenty of verbal complaints, particularly since anglers have become so skilled at locating the same schools of fish with electronics. A stickler for the rules, he says he plans to monitor a little more closely in 2018 to make sure the crowds don't become a little too crowded this season. ■



PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH

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TARGETING PRESPAWN BASS IN EELGRASS

HOW JUSTIN ATKINS LOCATES AND CATCHES FISH IN THE GREEN STUFF

By Tyler Brinks

Eelgrass is a type of aquatic vegetation that can be found in many rivers and lakes throughout the United States. Its recent flourishing in Tennessee River lakes such as Pickwick and Gunter'sville has changed how bass set up during the winter and prespawn periods.

Forrest Wood Cup champion Justin Atkins began his rookie season on the FLW Tour in 2017 with a ninth-place finish at Gunter'sville by targeting bass in eelgrass with a crankbait, and he has a solid understanding of how to capitalize on eelgrass patterns in the early part of the year.

Why Eelgrass?

Even though hydrilla and milfoil are present at Gunter'sville, Atkins says eelgrass is his choice during the prespawn because of where it grows and how easy it is to fish reaction baits around it.

"It creates the perfect current break," he says. "It grows in the 5- to 8-foot range on main-river bars. This time of year the fish want to be out in the river, but not directly in the current. It stops growing right around 8 feet deep, and that creates a perfect hard line."

"The way that eelgrass grows is really tight together. It is very thick, and that blocks the current better. Hydrilla is short during the colder months and doesn't create as much of a break."

The rigidity of the eelgrass stalk also allows for more reaction bait tactics.

"It's a really rigid grass, and you can fish a small [diving] crankbait or lipless [crankbait] right through it. If you hook a piece of it, it is really easy to snap the rod with minimal effort and clean the bait," Atkins says. "With hydrilla, even a little bit requires you to rip it hard, and often you will waste an entire cast with grass on your hooks."

Where to Find Eelgrass

The 5- to 8-foot-deep zone is where Atkins usually focuses on Gunter'sville, but that range can vary in other fisheries or times of year.

Atkins utilizes digital mapping to zero in on his favorite depth zone.

"I change the colors on my chart to show just the 5- to 8-foot depth and then use side scan to look for eelgrass," he says.

He's also found that certain areas tend to promote the growth of eelgrass; sometimes it's based on bottom content, but primarily it's a result of the plant's proclivity for current.

"It is mostly a main-river species," Atkins adds. "Eelgrass is current-related and seems to do best on wide river bars."

How to Fish It

During the winter and prespawn, Atkins has a one-two punch to target eelgrass.

"A small [billed] crankbait and a lipless [crankbait] are the two deals," says Atkins, who prefers a highly buoyant balsa crankbait that dives 4 to 6 feet for most Gunter'sville applications. "They allow you to cover water quickly, and because the grass is so thick together you can't punch it or fish it as effectively with other lures."

"I like to use a more limber rod," he adds. "You don't need a stiff rod to rip through the grass like you do with hydrilla."

When faced with vast expanses of eelgrass, Atkins will always start by targeting the grass edge on the downcurrent side.

"I always start there because that is going to be the best current break," he says. "From there, I might have to fish the topside of the grass because often it is a foot or so taller on the shallow side, and that creates another break."

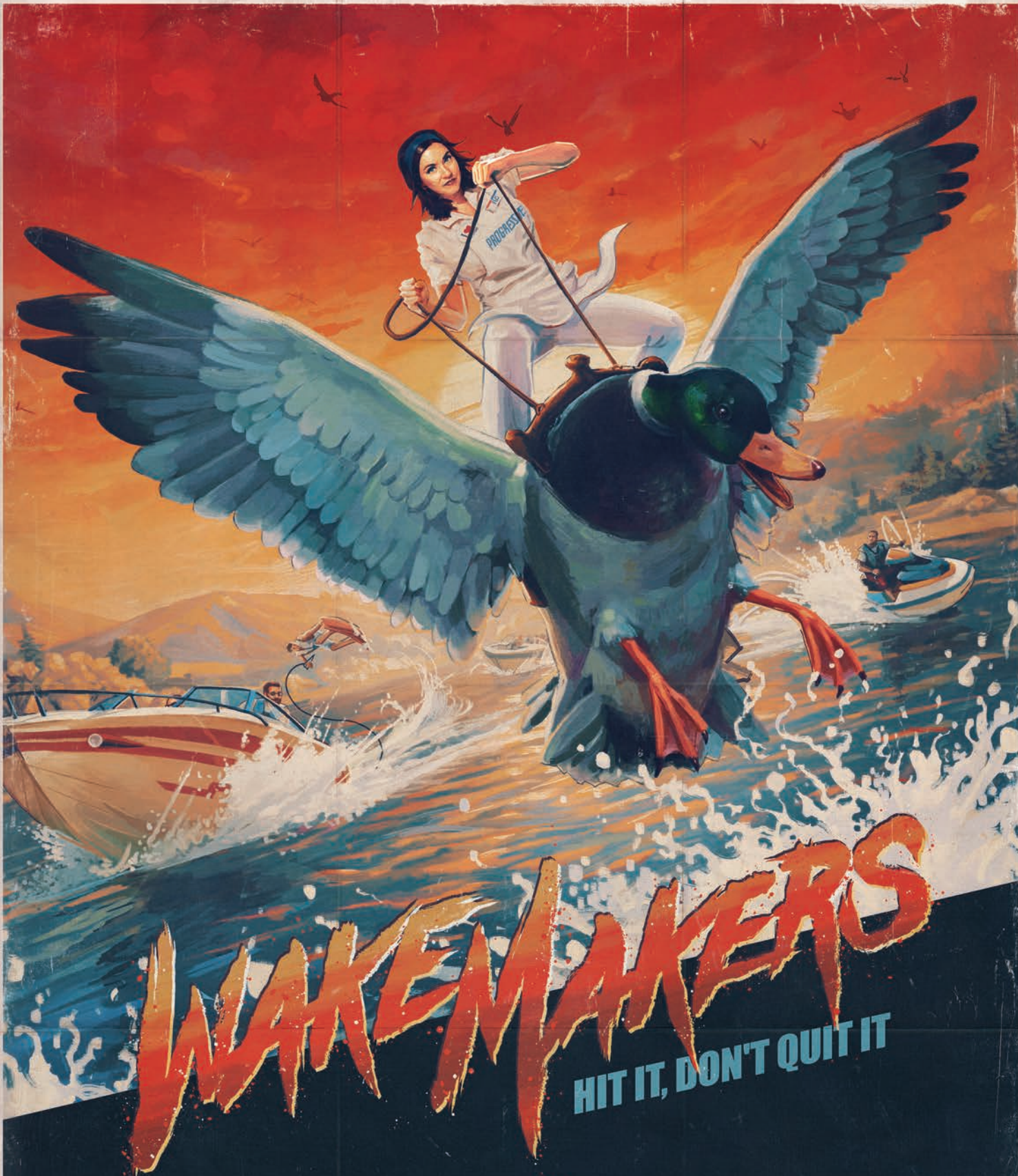
Atkins keeps his bait right above the grass, occasionally making contact and ripping it free. He experiments with casting across the edge or along it. Each can produce, and it can vary by day or location.

"I mark a waypoint each time I get a bite, and then I can start to develop a pattern for how the fish are holding to it that day. There are times when all of your fish will be in one small section of a mile-long stretch of eelgrass. I find that they seem to really group up in eelgrass." ■



Justin Atkins swings in a prespawn bass that was staging in a Gunter'sville eelgrass bed.

PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH



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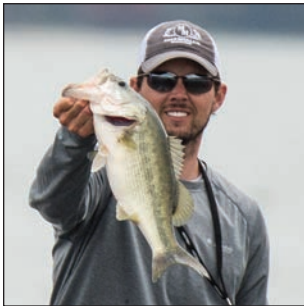
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2017 COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

By Kentucky Lake standards, fishing was a challenge when 192 pros and co-anglers squared off in Paris, Tenn., last November at the Costa FLW Series Championship. Still, despite the reduced catch, we saw some history, and 11 Forrest Wood Cup berths were handed out. Here's a breakdown of some of the more interesting stats from the championship.

by Curtis Niedermier



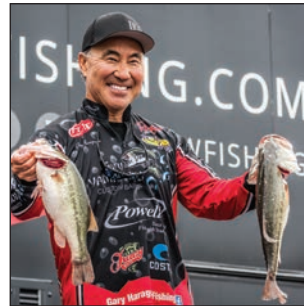
Consistency Pays

Champion Bradford Beavers won by 8 pounds but did so rather quietly. He won the tournament with impressive consistency, weighing in 15-13, 15-00 and 14-15. Beavers was the only pro to catch a limit all three days.



Hicks Wins Co-angler Title In Two Days

Justin Hicks of Roanoke, Va., brought in just one keeper on the final day of competition, but he could've blanked and still won the co-angler division. Hicks had 27-13 after two days, and second-place finisher Gabriel Scott weighed in only 26-3 in three days. The 2-14 keeper that Hicks landed on day three at least gave him something to hold up for cameras at the final weigh-in - other than the first-place trophy, of course.



A Star Co-angler

Co-angler Gary Haraguchi finished ninth, giving him five top-10 finishes with FLW in 2017. Along the way he earned a Costa FLW Series win and FLW Tour Co-angler of the Year honors. Haraguchi also moved into a tie with longtime co-angler Todd Lee for sixth-most top 10s by a co-angler in FLW history with 26. David Williams has the record with 36.



Thrift Could Earn Third Qualification

Bryan Thrift locked up his 2018 Forrest Wood Cup berth by winning 2017 FLW Tour Angler of the Year, and he double qualified with his seventh-place finish at the championship. Considering Thrift has never finished outside Cup qualification range in the FLW Tour standings in his career, the odds are pretty high that he'll actually triple-qualify for the 2018 Cup during the 2018 Tour regular season.



'Guch, Meet Grizzle

Haraguchi's five top-10 finishes in 2017 tie him with 46 other co-anglers for 19th most in a single season. The record is eight.

Interestingly, Haraguchi's total wasn't even the most in 2017. That distinction goes to Harold Grizzle, who earned seven top-10 finishes while competing in the Savannah River, Bama and Bulldog divisions of the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League. He finished in the top 10 in at least one qualifier in each of the three divisions, won two regular-season events, and made the top 10 at the Bulldog Super Tournament on Lake Lanier, the Regional on Wheeler Lake, and the Regional on Lake Lanier, which he also won.



Locals Not a Factor

Of the pros who finished in the top 10, the only “local,” by any standards, was Todd Hollowell, who lives in Indiana but has fished Kentucky Lake extensively in his career, including when he lived in nearby Murray, Ky., while attending Murray State University. That’s surprising only because Kentucky Lake is usually generous to its local anglers.

Also, the top 10 featured anglers from nine states plus South Africa. No state produced two top-10 finishers, and Jason Abram was the only top-10 angler from a state that Kentucky Lake passes through. He lives in Piney Flats, Tenn. – six hours by car from the Paris Landing takeoff site.



A Potential New Youngest

Sheldon Collings of Grove, Okla., qualified for the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup with his 11th-place finish at the championship. Collings, 19, won’t celebrate his 20th birthday until Feb. 2. When he competes at Lake Ouachita in August, he’ll be the youngest angler to ever compete as a pro in the Cup unless another younger person qualifies before then.

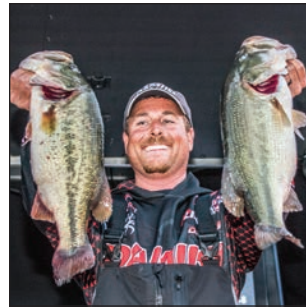
Jacob Wheeler and Patrick Walters also fished the Cup at age 20 – Wheeler in 2011, and Walters in 2015. Wheeler was 28 days younger at the 2011 Cup than Walters was at the 2015 Cup. Collings, when he launches on the first day of the 2018 Cup, will surpass Wheeler as the youngest Cup pro by 138 days.

Wheeler still holds the record as the youngest angler to win the Forrest Wood Cup, which he accomplished at age 21 in 2012.



Jumbo Fields

The 2017 championship hosted 192 pros, which is tied with the 2016 championship on Table Rock as the third largest Costa FLW Series Championship field of all time. The record was set on Pickwick in 2005 when 200 pros competed.



A Big Bag And A Bust

Bryan Thrift stunned just about everyone on day one when he weighed in 27 pounds, 8 ounces to take what appeared to be a commanding lead of more than 7 pounds. On day two, Thrift weighed only two bass for 3-9, and he blanked on the final day. Thrift finished seventh.

Interestingly, Chad Foster, who led on day two of the 2017 championship, also blanked on day three.



A Tough Bite

On days one and two, pros weighed in 44 limits – 11.46 percent of possible limits. That’s poor, but far better than the 2001 championship, which was held on Pickwick. In that tournament, only four limits – 1.26 percent of the possible limits – were weighed in the first two days. The second worst limit percentage in the championship also occurred at Pickwick in 2005, when 19 limits were weighed in two days for a 4.75-percent limit catch. The 2017 championship ranks as the sixth toughest in terms of percentage of possible limits caught during the qualifying rounds.

The regular-season Costa FLW Series event held in May 1999 on Kentucky Lake saw only 24 limits – 7.41 percent of possible limits – weighed in the first two days, which is the lowest rate in history on the Kentucky/Barkley system in a Costa event. The 2017 championship had the second lowest percentage. ■



FLW

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READY FOR HIS TURN

SHANE LEHEW'S FISHING POTENTIAL MATCHES HIS AMBITION

By Colin Moore

PHOTOS BY SEAN BUSHNER

All things considered, Shane LeHew is in a good spot.

Though he's only fished the FLW Tour for four years, the 29-year-old has passed a few important career milestones. Since he joined the Tour as a pro, he's qualified for the Forrest Wood Cup three times and finished 16th and 19th, respectively, in the last two. During 2017's seven-tournament campaign, the North Carolina pro cashed five checks, with his best finish being fourth at Harris Chain in March. Not bad, and yet ...

Despite a record that most pros would envy, LeHew still isn't completely

content with his performances. Lack of consistency is the bane of all tournament fishermen, but more so young anglers such as LeHew. He's suffered through his share of events when he's up one day and down the next.

At the Harris Chain, for instance, he had 23 pounds, 15 ounces the first day and 14-14 the next in what appeared to be shaping up as a championship duel between LeHew and John Cox. Then LeHew stumbled with stringers of 13-15 and 13-5 in the next two rounds. Bradley Dortch and JT Kenney rallied past him and Cox to nail down first and second, respectively.

A Good Start

On the whole, the curve of LeHew's career has trended upward. He was a child prodigy who showed promise at an early age. After an apprenticeship of sorts fishing with his father, Troy, and grandfather, Larry, he started competing in tournaments on his own. In 2007, when he was 18, he won The Bass Federation's Junior World Championship on Lake Hamilton in Arkansas.

"This is a dream come true ... I can't wait for what the future holds," he said then after being proclaimed the winner. The future held more of the same for LeHew.



Shane LeHew still fishes regularly with his original tournament teammates, his grandfather, Larry (center), and father, Troy.

Six years later, he and Adam Waters represented the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in the YETI FLW College Fishing National Championship on Beaver Lake in 2013 and placed second by less than a pound to Paul Clark and Brett Preuett of the University of Louisiana at Monroe. That, after notable finishes of fourth, second and first in Southeastern Conference events in 2012 and 2013. When he was at UNC-Charlotte, LeHew entertained the notion of entering the law enforcement field. He took classes that led in that direction, but tournament fishing eventually won him over for keeps.

In 2014, his rookie season as a pro on the FLW Tour, LeHew earned four checks and a total of \$40,000. Altogether, his winnings have amounted to about \$45,000 per season.

"The TBF deal was good for me, and so was College Fishing. I just wish High School Fishing had been around back then, too," observes LeHew. "I think the two biggest things in fishing now are electronics and the fishing programs for younger people. Electronics have been improved so much in just a short time;

they're such a huge factor in fishing now, and kids are growing up through high school and college fishing learning how to use them. It's given them such an advantage. There are some really outstanding fishermen coming right out of college."

LeHew being one of them. Not surprisingly, he was one of a handful of favorites to win the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup on Lake Murray. He wound up in 19th place after spending three days muttering to himself about the "crazy blueback herring bite."

"I had a lot of missed opportunities the second day, but with the big topwater I was throwing, losing fish was probably a given," admits LeHew. "I don't think that if I had landed everything I hooked I would have won, but a top 10 was possible."

Fishing Never Ends

In a sense, the Tar Heel pro is treading water and waiting for the big breakout season that Jacob Wheeler, Justin Atkins and other young pros experienced at some point early in their careers. Luck has a lot to do with it, as

does being able to fish the type of fishery that suits one's strengths.

"Power fishing down a bank is where I feel most comfortable," notes LeHew. "I like to mix it up, and of course there are certain things I do better than others. One of the things I struggle with is adjusting during the day – trusting in knowing what, when and how. I do like running new water, but sometimes I'll make a wrong turn. And I'll admit that ledge fishing is definitely one of my weaknesses. I usually last about five minutes on a spot before running somewhere else."

During the long lull between Tour seasons, LeHew fishes to perfect his skills and hone the little nuts-and-bolts details that always come into play during tough tournaments when every bite counts. He competes in events in the Carolinas, helps his dad with their tackle business, Shane's Baits, and fishes as much as he can, usually at Lake Norman. It's home to a pair of power plants whose warm-water outflows keep the food chain percolating through the coldest months of the year.

"I fish with [2017 AOY] Bryan Thrift some, and I've learned a lot from him, and if I had another choice of who I could fish with, it would be Andy Morgan. He's been super consistent for as long as FLW has been around. I'd like to get in a boat with him and see how he operates during a tournament."

Regardless of which direction they head with their lives, the young come out of the starting blocks at full gallop. LeHew is impatient, but there's plenty of time for him. At 29, he still has plenty of room to mature as an angler. He's also at the peak of his physical abilities. Minus the facial hair that comes and goes these days, he appears to be as fit and trim as he did when he was a heavy hitter in the college ranks. He has the look of a champion, if not the trophies.

"Of course, I want to get better. I've been doing this for four years, and I haven't won a major tournament. I got close last year, but it didn't happen," says LeHew. "I'm consistent as far as getting checks and making the Forrest Wood Cup, but people remember you when you win tournaments, not when you finish 25th."

True to some extent, but not altogether accurate. Win or not, finishing near the top just about every time out counts quite a bit, too. That's another thing LeHew can ask Andy Morgan about when he gets to go fishing with him. ■



Tackle company Shane's Baits is a family business, run by Shane LeHew and his father, Troy.



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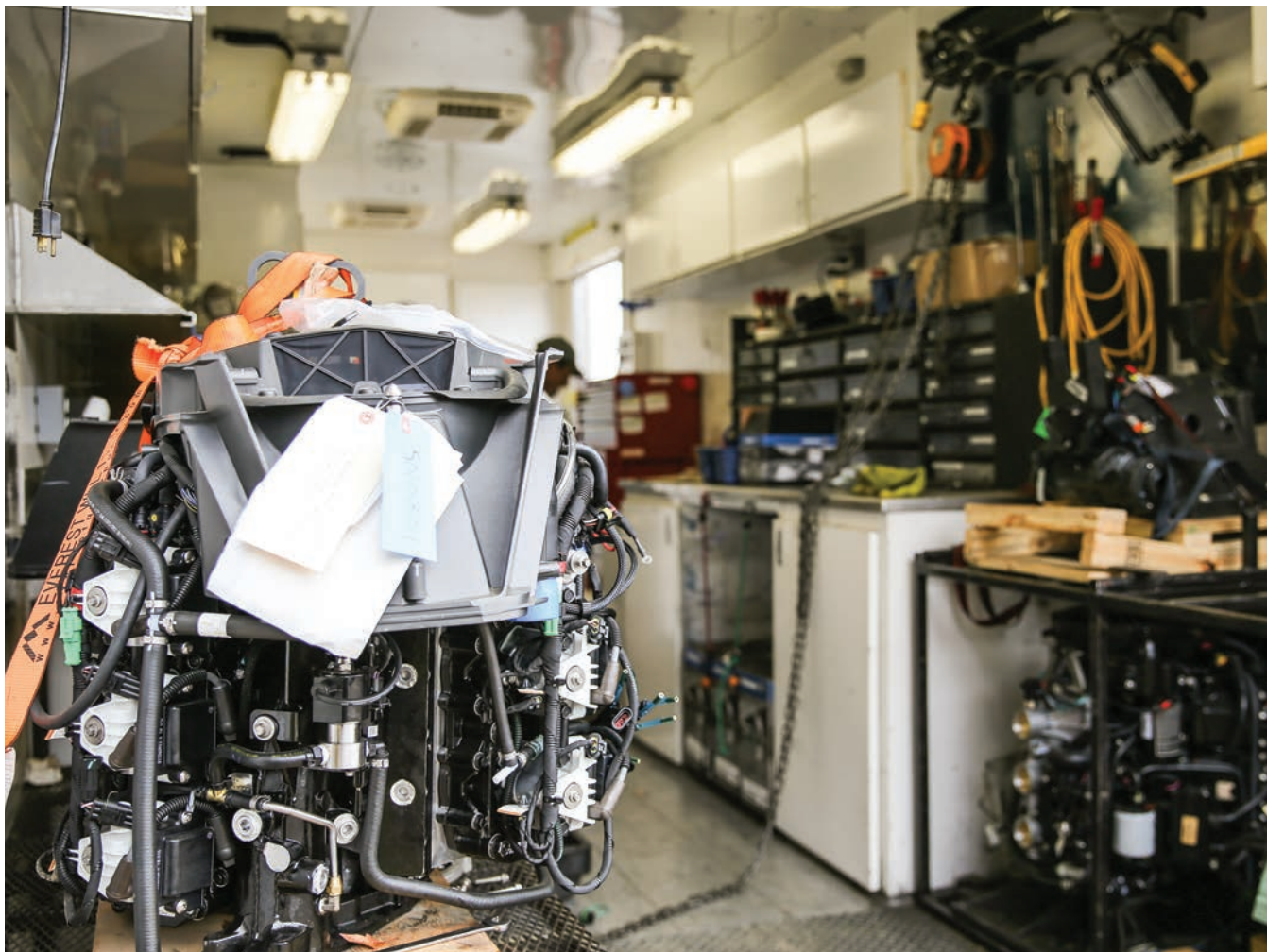
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SERVICE TECH TIPS

TOURNAMENT SERVICE TRAILER MECHANICS
WEIGH IN ON BASS BOAT MAINTENANCE

By Joe Balog

PHOTOS BY D.W. REED II

The sport's top professionals are incredibly demanding of their equipment. When issues arise at major events, service technicians go into action to ensure anglers suffer little or no downtime, and that their gear is ready to perform again quickly.

These tournament pit crews have seen it all, but they also know the majority of on-the-water problems have some common variables. Learn from their expertise to avoid a visit to the service trailer at your next tournament.

Scott Arms – Ranger Boats

As solidly as today's high-performance bass boats are built, they're not entirely without issues. Arms, Ranger Boats senior marketing manager and a former service tech, says neglected or stopped-up livewells cause the most headaches for anglers.

"The livewell is where your money can be lost the fastest," Arms says. "The most important step is keeping the screens [in the bottom of the livewell] clean."

Regurgitated baitfish and craws are clogging culprits, as are scales lost from bass and small pieces of soft-plastic lures. Clean the livewell screens regularly.

In addition, removing livewell pump cartridges and blowing out the water pick-ups (be sure to watch out for old fishing line) will go a long way in keeping them running at maximum capacity.

A clog can prevent the livewell water from recirculating, which is important when running on plane because the livewell can't draw in fresh water at high speeds.

Arms also stresses the importance of monitoring your boat trailer while traveling. He routinely sees two potential issues that could lead to mishaps.

“When backing a tandem-axle trailer into a tight spot – like in a hotel parking lot – it’s often necessary to practically jackknife the trailer,” he says. “That creates stress on the axles and seals.”

According to Arms, such maneuvers can twist the trailer axle and result in problems. While Ranger’s modern torsion bars help correct the issue, Arms encourages owners to avoid extreme motions, or to straighten the rig out before parking it overnight.

On many modern bass boat trailers, the brakes “safety lock” any time the rig moves backward. In order to override this and allow owners to back up, tow vehicle reverse lights signal the trailer brake solenoid to release. However, that signal is frequently lost due to a faulty trailer light plug. Be sure to always check your plug adaptor first, and have an extra one handy if your trailer isn’t wired with a modern, round plug from the factory.

Joby Smith – Minn Kota

Smith is a senior technical specialist for Johnson Outdoors and has likely spent more time in the pits than anyone in pro bass fishing. His advice for trolling motors? Secure everything.

“The Northern events are where we see the most problems [in rough water], and most of those can be avoided by using tie-down straps,” says Smith.

Even though most tournament boats come rigged with a trolling motor tie-down of some sort, he says not all anglers bother to use it. Adding a second strap out near the lower unit of the motor further reduces issues.

It’s also important to check the lock nuts below the boat deck and the screws on the motor mount routinely to ensure no “play” develops from rough water. If you have to replace any, add some Loctite, which is used on the screws at the factory.

Of particular importance is the hex-head, quick-disconnect bolt that connects a foot-control Minn Kota to its mount. Check it often.

Steve Catlin and Barry Joiner – Evinrude

Catlin and Joiner are the muscle behind Evinrude’s commitment to professional anglers. Each travels tens of thousands of miles annually to the country’s biggest tournaments.

According to them, cooling system shutdowns can be an issue, and the main cause is negligence when running a boat through extremely shallow water. With today’s advanced low-water pick-ups, cooling water is actually forced into the engine while running. Driving in shallow areas that are silty or sandy can lead to a blockage in the cooling intake.

“These motors are packed full of sand,” says Catlin. And when a blockage occurs, the entire outboard might need to be broken down to remove debris within the engine block.

Other problems occur simply because tournament anglers overlook the basics, such as the need for oil. Evinrude’s popular G2 outboard burns the usual amount – about a 50:1 ratio of gasoline to oil at operating speed. That said, tournament pros making long runs can burn through oil quite quickly and find themselves in need of more as competition wears on. Anglers sometimes fail to estimate accurately how much oil they’ll consume over the course of practice and a tournament, and then show up at the service trailers in dire need. Usually, service trailers don’t carry oil in bulk due to space constraints, so anglers have to find the nearest dealer. The lesson is to always bring more than you think you’ll need, and keep extra in the boat.

It’s basic stuff, but the basics are the cause of most issues that the Tour’s service techs encounter. Heed their advice, and avoid being their next visitor. ■

Don’t Let Batteries Get You Down

According to our pit crew contacts, drained batteries are near the top of the list of service issues at pro events. Once again, with batteries, it’s basic maintenance that prevents a trip to the service yard.

Keep traditional wet cell models topped off with distilled water, and charge them immediately after use with a smart charger that compensates for circuit load and temperature fluctuations, then remains in a constant maintenance mode.



Evinrude tech Barry Joiner unboxes a new prop for a tournament angler.

2018



PHOTOS BY MATT PACE



TACKLE REPORT





If you're a bass junkie, odds are you're a tackle junkie. How can you not be? Don't worry, though, we're not judging. Tackle addiction is a good thing. And winter is the best time of year to stock up on the goods.

You'll have plenty of new stuff to choose from, too. In addition to all the classics you'll need to have on hand, manufacturers spent the last few months unveiling a smorgasbord of new products for the 2018 fishing season,

and most of it is pretty cool. Some of it ... not so much.

That's why we prepared this report. We wanted to share with readers what we think are the most interesting and innovative trends in new-tackle development over the last six months. It's not a complete list of new gear, but it should help prepare you for the upcoming season as you stockpile what you need to be more successful on the water.

JUST ADD NAIL WEIGHTS

NEW WORMS THAT ARE PERFECT FOR NEKO RIGGING

By Curtis Niedermier



Shove a nail weight up the business end of your favorite finesse worm, and you've more or less fashioned yourself a Neko rig. The only other thing you need is a wacky hook stuck through the center.

Of course, thanks to high-profile tournament success with the Neko over the last couple of years, you don't have to use just any finesse worm. Tackle companies have begun devising special finesse worms that are just right for the technique. Here's a handful of new examples.

1. 4 3/4- or 5 3/4-inch Jackall Neko Flick Worm (\$5.99/10 or 8)
2. 5-inch Daiwa Neko Fat (\$7.49/10)
3. 5 3/4- or 6 1/2-inch Daiwa Neko Straight (\$7.49/10)
4. 4 3/4-inch Missile Baits The 48 (\$4.99/8)
5. 6-inch Crème Flip-Flop (\$4.99/9)
6. 4 1/2-inch Berkley PowerBait MaxScent Hit Worm (\$6.99/10)



3 New Options for Drop-Shotting

1. 3 1/2- or 4 1/4-inch Z-Man Trick ShotZ (\$4.49/6 or 5)
2. 3-inch DUO Realis V-Tail Shad (\$5.49/8)
3. 5-inch Tightlines UV Dropshot Worm (\$7.99/6)

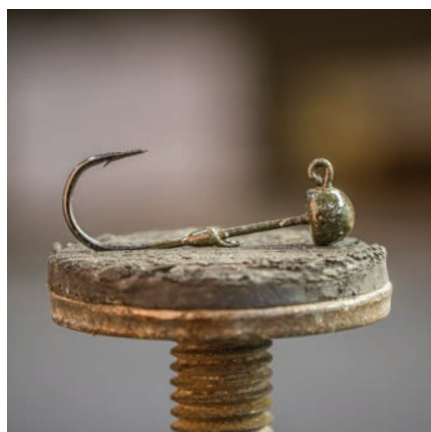


3 NED RIG JIGHEAD IMPROVEMENTS

By Tyler Brinks

The Ned rig is as simple as a small worm rigged on a light jighead with the hook exposed. The most complex part – and it’s not too complex at all – is the jighead. Most have a mushroom-shaped head and a compact, light-wire hook. But now that seemingly every terminal tackle maker is on the Ned rig bandwagon, there are new options out there for more specialized adaptations of the rig, and you might want to give one a try.

Here are three improvements we like.



1. The Grip-Pin

If you’re a fan of Mustad’s Grip-Pin bait-keeper system, which features a small pin protruding from the hook shank to lock plastics in place, then check out the Mustad Grip-Pin Ned Jig Head. It comes in 1/16, 1/8, 3/16 and 1/4 ounce, matched with hooks ranging from No. 1 to 3/0 for rigging various worms. \$4.99 for five



2. Locking Collars

Not only did Z-Man improve the hook strength on its TT Lures Ned LockZ HD Jig Head, but it created a new molded keeper on the shank. The keeper features a row of molded collars that lock the plastic in place. It comes in 1/15, 1/10, 1/6 and 1/5 ounce. \$6.99 for five



3. A High-End Hook

Ned rig jigheads used to have flimsy, cheap hooks, but Owner fixed that with its Block Head, which features a short-shank hook and Triple Edge Cutting Point. It’s available in 1/32 ounce, No. 1 hook; 1/16 ounce, 1/0 hook; and 1/8 ounce, 1/0 hook. \$5.25 to \$5.50 for three or four



12 INNOVATIVE NEW PRODUCT FEATURES

By Curtis Niedermier

1. Livetarget BaitBall Spinner Rig

The small “teaser” swim-baits on this compact umbrella rig can be swapped in seconds for a cutsom look. \$11.99 to \$13.99

2. Gene Larew Rock Banger

The shad-shaped body and hook groove on the back convert Larew’s popular HardHead jig into a “weedless crankbait.” \$6.99 for five

3. River2Sea Lane Changer

This prop bait (and the similar Big Mistake and Top Notch) features plastic props that never need tuning. \$12.99

4. Yo-Zuri 3DB Knuckle Bait

The ball compresses on the cast for wind resistance, but it also creates a vibrating, almost ChatterBait-like action during the retrieve. \$7.99

5. BOOYAH FLEX II

Foam provides the buoyancy and action of balsa with durability that rivals plastic. \$9.99

6. ima Glide Fluke

Body weighting and shaping allow it to shimmy on the fall, hunt during the retrieve or work just like a soft jerkbait. Sinking and floating models available. \$14.99 for the 5-incher; \$19.99 for the 7-incher

7. Berkley Snap Jig

Wings allow you to fish it like a glide jig, but you can customize the look and action with a soft-plastic bait. There’s a rear treble hook hanger, too. \$5.99

8. Duo Realis Cambiospin

Its “soft” wire compresses on the cast for more distance and pulses when the retrieve speed changes to help draw bites. Teardrop-shaped “eyes” in the blades cause them to rotate in opposite directions, which helps the bait track straight and upright. \$11.99

9. BIOVEX Kolt Glider

Bubble pockets provide buoyancy, while the “jointed”

body lets it wake in an S-pattern on the surface. At 1 ounce, this 7-inch bait casts a mile. \$5.80 for five

10. Lunkerhunt Fetch

The body is as soft as a hand-pour, but the price is right. \$6.49 for three

11. Jackall Rerange

“Fluororesin” coating allows the tungsten casting ball to slide through the bait more easily for longer casts and consistent action. \$14.99

12. Rapala RipStop

The unique tail lip, combined with Rapala-typical precise engineering, causes this jerkbait to stop on a dime. \$9.99



EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF A FROG

IT MIGHT NOT LOOK LIKE A REAL FROG, BUT IF IT'S A WEEDLESS, FLOATING TOPWATER, IT'LL FISH LIKE A FROG

By Curtis Niedermier

Yeah, we all know bass eat frogs. Yet bass are like a pack of hungry construction workers at a lunchtime buffet – they'll sample just about anything in front of them that'll fit in their mouths.

That's why the latest interpretations of "frog-style" baits come in so many different shapes. Really, a lot of them aren't frogs at all; they're weedless, floating topwaters. Some look like shad, birds, rodents and other random creatures. Retailers such as TackleWarehouse.com just lump them in with frogs because the hollow frog is the original weedless,

floating topwater, and they all share those primary characteristics.

In any case, what manufacturers have done is figure out new shapes and body styles for topwater baits that give anglers more presentation options in places where they couldn't send a buzzbait or a hard topwater with treble hooks.

Lure makers have also added little twists to classic frog designs to make baits that are more weedless, more durable (which saves you money), easier to cast long distances, less likely to take on water, more likely to hook up when a bass bites or better suited for

specific scenarios – all good things for the tournament bass crowd.

The only downside is the price. You'll pay about \$10 for most premium models these days. Still, you should pay the price because they work, and because we've entered an era where anglers can improve their results by carrying three or four premium models perfectly suited for various tasks, versus just one that does everything pretty well.

Among the new introductions, there are four baits that really demonstrate the track that tackle designers are taking within this category.



Improved Versions Of the Classic Style

In the category of “refined frogs,” the one that stands out the most is the River2Sea Phat Mat Daddy Frog. The name is a mouthful, and so is the bait, with its broad-backed design and hefty 7/8-ounce body. Frog master Ish Monroe designed it as a technique-specific frog with mat fishing in mind – the idea being that anglers don’t have to modify their frogs to fish the thick stuff because this one comes ready for mats right out of the package. The Mat Daddy is weighted to leave a deep impression in a layer of green slop, and the nose is even wrapped tight with thread so it won’t suck in water over time. Plus there’s a rattle chamber for calling even more attention. Monroe incorporated other features that he’s used on his previous frog designs, too, such as a hook slot separated from the internal air chamber, which prevents water from flooding the body cavity on the hook-set. Price is \$10.99.

The \$9.99 Jackall Kaera takes the opposite approach. At 2 1/4 inches long, it’s a small-profile bait, but it’s rated as a 1/2-ounce lure. It should launch a mile as a result, and its compact body makes it a good choice for skipping under docks and overhanging trees, or for any scenario where a smaller bait imitator makes sense. The angled “chin” makes walking easier, and a drain hole in the tail lets water out.

Not-too-Froggy Frogs

“Realistic” is the Livetarget business model, but bass aren’t picky enough to recognize that the new Livetarget Mullet was designed to resemble a saltwater baitfish species. All they’ll see is a long baitfish body skirting side to side through grass and wood, or under a dock. Livetarget created a pretty cool through-body weedless single-hook design that, once tested by bass anglers, will really determine this bait’s place in a bass boat. Sizes include 3 3/4, 4 1/4 and 5 3/8 inches, while the price varies from \$11.99 to \$12.99.

Finally, Evergreen, maker of premium everything, incorporated the big lips of its Shower Blows topwater stick bait onto a hollow, collapsible body to create the SS-77. It’s pretty obvious just from looking at the bait that the lips are designed to spit and spray. A contoured butt reduces bulk in the hook area for easier walking and better hookups, and the rabbit fur single tail is a cool addition. It’s a neat product, but a bit pricey at \$15.95.

1. Livetarget Mullet
2. Jackall Kaera
3. River2Sea Phat Mat Daddy Frog
4. Evergreen SS-77

STRAIGHT-RUNNIN' TOPWATER

A NEW CROP OF TOPWATERS WILL REMIND YOU OF THE WHOPPER PLOPPER

By Curtis Niedermier

The River2Sea Whopper Plopper has been one of the hottest bass baits going over the last few seasons, and, not to knock its design, the concept is dirt simple: It's a topwater bait that you cast out and wind back.

Obviously, that's nothing new. Buzzbaits have worked that way for years. Traditional prop baits can be wound straight in, too. And classics such as the Jitterbug have features built in to create a nice weeble-wobble action.

What set the Whopper Plopper apart was a very smart design that combined a floating body with a big-bait profile and that trademark tenor *plop-plop-plop* sound and bubble trail.

The action is so special that in the last year or so about a half-dozen tackle companies have built their own topwater contraptions based on the same plopping, straight-retrieve concept. Better still, they've applied the concept not only to hard baits, but to wire baits, soft baits, weedless baits and more, in all sizes, profiles and "volumes," to essentially create a new sub-class of lures.

River2Sea is even in the process of perfecting a "Plopper trailer" that can be attached to the back of any frog to create a custom Plopper presentation.

Obviously, specific actions vary by design, but now you can pretty much "plop up" a bass anywhere it lives, using some of these new straight-retrieve baits.



Lunkerhunt Prop Frog

Two props are better than one in this case because the legs help guard the trailer hook. \$8.99



Evolution GrassBurner

It's an in-line buzzbait with a floating shad-shaped body that's not quite as "ploppy" as the others. \$19.99



PH Custom Lures Ploppin' P

The metal blade can be tweaked to achieve subtle differences in action. \$19.99



Lunkerhunt Prop Fish

The Sunfish and Shad have a single, soft prop and two weedless hooks. \$8.99



Greenfish Tackle Ploppin' Toad Toter

It's a ploppin' buzzbait designed to tote a toad. \$5.89



River2Sea Double Plopper 180

It's not entirely new, but now it's bigger and louder. \$18.99



Teckel Sprinker Frog

Instead of a prop, it has a boot tail, but the end result is similar. \$13.99



5 COOL NEW BRAIDED LINES

By David A. Brown

Braided line has come a long way in recent years, both in terms of how it's made and how anglers employ it. Once considered synonymous with heavy cover fishing, braid is now used for everything from drop-shotting,

where superior sensitivity equals fewer missed bites, to launching long-range casts at breaking fish.

The new introductions for 2018 cover all the bases. Here's a sampling.

1. Fins 40G

Each of the eight strands woven into the line has been downsized and wound around a polyethylene core for a stronger, smoother, rounder line that maintains its shape. \$28.75/150 yards

2. Berkley Fireline Ultra 8 Carrier

Dyneema fibers are fused together and wound with a higher pic count (more wraps) for smoother finish and longer casts. \$19.99/125 yards

3. Fitzgerald Fishing Vursa Braid Spinning and Black

Vursa Spinning is a four-strand line made specifically for spinning tackle, while Vursa Black is made with eight strands for baitcasters. \$29.99/300 yards of Spinning; \$16.99/100 yards of Black

4. Ardent Tackle Strong Braid

It features "pre-stretch" technology, which is advertised to yield high knot strength and abrasion resistance for fishing heavy cover. \$19.99/150 yards

5. Sunline Siglon PEX8 And Siglon PEX4

These four-strand and eight-strand braids come at an affordable price. \$14.99/165 yards of PEX8; \$10.99/165 yards of PEX4



LONGER, CHEAPER, BETTER

PRICE AND PERFORMANCE ARE THE DRIVERS OF CURRENT ROD DESIGN

By Chad Love



Several themes seem to dominate the current trend in bass rods: premium performance (and price), technique-specific offerings, so-called “long rods” over 8 feet and a slew of budget-friendly rods with high price/performance ratios.

PREMIUM

The Conquest, a new flagship line from G. Loomis that supplants the NRX as the company's top-tier bass rod offering, is packed with top-end features.

If you've got the money and crave cutting-edge performance, the Conquest's starting price of \$649.99 might not seem out of line. The Conquest is the product of a joint venture between Loomis and Shimano, and it's stuffed with every impressive-sounding technological feature the two companies can muster. The Conquest, like all G. Loomis rods, is finished beautifully and flawlessly. There are eight casting and four spinning models, and if I had the money I'd probably own them all.

Not to be outdone in the upper-echelon rod category, St. Croix has introduced its new Legend X series for 2018. Starting at \$390, the Legend X isn't quite as expensive as the Conquest, but it's unmistakably a premium product. There are 11 casting rod options from 6 feet, 8 inches to 8 feet, 8 inches, and five spinning rod models.

BUDGET-PRICED

High-end rods like the Conquest and Legend X are the jet fighters of the bass fishing world. They push the technological boundaries and offer advancements that eventually trickle down into other, less-expensive rods. We all want an F-16, but most of us can only afford a Cessna. Thankfully, there's a wide variety of really nice Cessnas being offered this year, with asking prices of less than a C-note to about the \$200 mark for rods that offer dependable service.

At \$89.99, the Denali Fission is a lot of rod for very little money. It features an IM7 blank and a split Winn grip. Four casting and two spinning rods are offered.

The ball bearing-free 13 Fishing Concept Z reel seemingly has garnered all the attention, but the company also released an all-new version of its Fate Black rod series, which, I can assure you, isn't black. This visually arresting green rod features a \$99 price tag and a low-resin, high-strength blank.

Tackle company 6th Sense is well-known for its crankbaits, and the company now has a series of rods designed to fish them. Starting at \$149, the 6th Sense Lux series will offer actions tuned to throw crankbaits ranging from tiny to huge.

The Feather series is a new mid-range offering from Phenix that sports a mixture of 30- and 40-ton Toray graphite in the blank, a carbon fiber reel seat and a starting price of \$139.

SPECIALIZED

Technique-specific bass rods have been around since the salad days of modern bass fishing, and with so many technique-specific rods out there, it's hard to winnow down the standouts, but here are a couple new rods from a couple anglers who know a thing or two about technique:

Mark Rose isn't called a ledge master for nothing, and the new Mark Rose Ledge Series rods, which are part of the Lew's Custom Pro Speed Stick Series, distill that knowledge into a lineup that might not make you one, too, but will at least give you the illusion of it. Starting at \$209.99, there are six casting and one spinning model for techniques ranging from jigs to crankbaits to swimbaits.

It's not entirely clear whether reigning FLW Tour Angler of the Year Bryan Thrift is merely human, or some sort of relentless fishing cyborg, but what is known is that he can flat-out fish any technique, anywhere, anytime and win doing it. The new Bryan Thrift Series crankbait rods from Fitzgerald bring together all of Thrift's considerable expertise on the subject. The series includes three 7-foot, 4-inch rods in medium, medium-heavy and heavy. \$189

LONG

Once upon a time, most everyone fished with one rod about as tall as the average sixth-grader. Now, everyone fishes with a collection of rods all about as tall as the average NBA starting lineup. Apparently that's not tall enough, either, and now the era of the mega-long rod is here. Everyone wants more distance, more control and more power, and these rods – all breaking the 8-foot barrier – claim to deliver. We're only going to see more such offerings in the future, but here are a few available now to whet our appetites.

The \$249.99, 9-foot, medium-heavy Long Range Crankbaits model in Lew's Mark Rose Ledge Series breaks the 8-foot barrier with all the features of the regular Ledge rods, plus a foot more.

St. Croix has also introduced new long rod models in its Legend Tournament Bass series, with five models from 8 feet, 8 inches all the way up to a whopping 9-foot, 11-inch flipping/punching model. Price is \$300 to \$400, depending on model.



The 13 Fishing Concept Z is billed as the first reel to be made without ball bearings.

ZEROED OUT

IS ELIMINATING BEARINGS THE FUTURE OF REEL DESIGN?

By Chad Love

On a fundamental level, the argument could be made that modern baitcasting reel design hasn't changed much since the first Ambassadeur 5000 was introduced in 1954, and that, with a few exceptions (the introduction of magnetic cast control and low-profile frames, for example), the history of reel design is more a function of refinement rather than revolution.

Spool, frame, handle, gears and the bearings upon which the whole thing rolls – that's pretty much everything there is to a reel, right? In fact, in recent years the number of bearings in any given reel has become a sort of measuring stick for its alleged performance and/or quality. This bearing arms race has gotten to the point that some reels have so many bearings you have to wonder where they fit.

Maybe that's why 13 Fishing decided to stand the entire notion on its head with the Concept Z. Billed as the "first-ever high-performance casting reel manufactured with zero ball

bearings," the Concept Z does away with the bearing arms race altogether and replaces it with a proprietary "polymer technology" that is claimed to eliminate performance loss due to debris, do away with corrosion issues, and forever banish the grinding, whining, metal-on-metal bearing noise of the poorly maintained reel.

The reel itself is a looker, with a striking orange-red frame color that offsets the black spool tension knob, star drag and handle. In hand, it feels lighter than its stated 6.4-ounce weight, and it is liquid-smooth when reeling.

The reel will be offered in both right- and left-hand retrieves, with the lone left-hand option being a 7.3:1 retrieve ratio, while the right-hand reels will offer 6.6:1, 7.3:1 and 8.1:1 ratios. The Concept Z also sports a 22-pound drag, centrifugal braking, instant anti-reverse and a rapid-access side plate, all fairly standard fare for modern high-end baitcasters. Real-world retail will be \$200.

So does the Concept Z signal a change in reel design? Is there a trend emerging here? The more jaded among us might point out that "polymer material" is simply marketing speak for "bushings," and that bushings in reels have indeed been tried before.

The laws of physics do not bend, even for undeniably cool-looking reels (and the Concept Z is certainly that), and friction between two moving surfaces must be dealt with somehow, regardless of whether you call it a bearing, a bushing or a polymer wonder widget.

However, 13 Fishing insists its polymer material outperforms traditional steel or ceramic bearings. Time will tell whether the Concept Z is a harbinger of things to come in reel design, or a flashy, but ultimately short-lived idea. At the very least the Concept Z has added a splash of newness, excitement and drama at a time when most other reel manufacturers are focused on refining and upgrading existing models.

5 OTHER NOTEWORTHY NEWCOMERS

Just because the splash of 13 Fishing Concept Z has hogged much of the limelight recently doesn't mean there aren't a plethora of other new reels worthy of consideration. Tried-and-true is just that, and traditional reels with those boring, quaint, old-fashioned bearings are lighter, smoother and more refined than they've ever been. Concept Z notwithstanding, the trend in most other new reels has been making what's already good better.

Here are five new reels that do just that.



Shimano Curado K

The latest iteration of this venerable cult favorite is the Curado K, which has been upgraded with Shimano's MicroModule gearing in 6.2:1, 7.4:1 and 8.5:1 ratios, plus a smaller, lighter, more palm-friendly frame and smoother operation. \$179.



Quantum Smoke S3 PT

From a price/performance standpoint, the new Smoke S3 baitcaster from Quantum is a standout. It sports Quantum's new ACS 4.0 cast control system for increased braking adjustment options, an enlarged paddle handle and spool, four different gear ratios from 5.1:1 to 8.1:1, and an aluminum frame. \$169.95



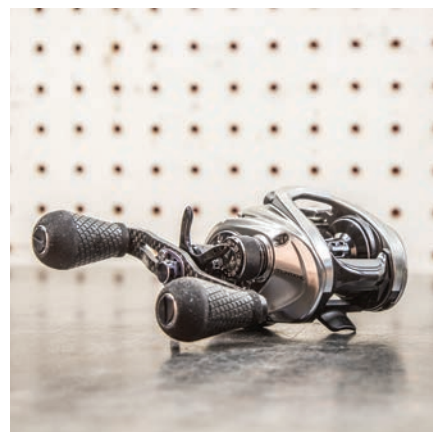
Daiwa Ballistic LT

Daiwa's newest entry into the spinning reel market is, as its name implies, light, with the smallest model (1000 series) weighing 5.8 ounces. Most other models that bass anglers would use weigh less than 7. The Ballistic LT features a seven-bearing system, a machined aluminum DIGIGEAR and what Daiwa calls its Magsealing for protection from water and debris of various sorts. \$229.99.



Shimano Exsence

The Exsence, which sits one rung down from Shimano's flagship Stella spinning reel, is a magnesium-framed, blacked-out Stealth Bomber of a spinning reel. The all-black, water-repellent finish gives the Exsence protection from the elements, while the Hagane gearing and MGL rotor ensure butter-smooth operation. \$539.99 to \$549.99.



Lew's HyperMag Speed Spool SLC Series

The HyperMag Speed Spool SLC from Lew's is packed with performance features, including an oversized machined aluminum spool, 20-pound carbon fiber drag, 11-bearing system, Winn Grips, magnesium frame, 27-position centrifugal brake adjustments and a feathery-light 5.4-ounce weight. \$299.99.



OLD SCHOOL MEETS NEW SCHOOL IN JIG DESIGN

CLASSIC SKIRTS, MODERN WEEDGUARDS AND TECHNIQUE-SPECIFIC DESIGNS MAKE THE JIG EVEN MORE VERSATILE

By Tyler Brinks

Whether you consider yourself old school or modern, there's something new for you in skirted jigs. That's because many companies have reintroduced modern takes on classic designs, improved upon the basic elements of the jig and devised multiple technique-specific models to suit a variety of situations.



STRIKE KING J-LEE COMEBACK JIG



NUTECH LURES PRO SERIES LIVE RUBBER

ROUND RUBBER MAKES A COMEBACK

Round rubber is a classic jig skirt material that has been around for years, but it's back in the game in a big way now. Strike King has gone round with its new J-Lee Comeback Jig (\$4.99), which was inspired by Jordan Lee's come-from-behind win at the

2017 Bassmaster Classic, where he used a round rubber football-head jig to get the big trophy at Lake Conroe. It had been one of his secrets and favorite jig styles, but the word's out and it's available to everyone. NuTech Lures also added a round rubber option in its Pro Series Live Rubber (\$7.29) lineup. It's hand-tied with flowing Living Rubber material.



A Decidedly Non-Specific Jig

While everyone else continues to expand their collections of technique-specific jigs, Greenfish Tackle (greenfishtackle.com) bucked the trend and introduced a jig designed for just about anything. Called Brandon Cobb's All Purpose Jig (\$4.89), it features an Arkie-style head that allows it to be flipped, pitched, skipped or swum. The skirt is hand-tied, and all of the colors were selected by FLW Tour pro Brandon Cobb.



NUTECH LURES NUJIG ELITE



FITZGERALD RODS MEGA JIG



FITZGERALD RODS TEXAS JIG

THE SINGLE-STRAND WEEDGUARD IS CATCHING ON

The standard fiber weedguard is a mainstay for bass jigs. It comes in various colors, thicknesses and degrees of flexibility, but the concept has remained the same for years. Two companies in the jig game are questioning the status

quo, however, with single-strand weedguards – paired together into dual guards – that are made of unique plastic-like materials. Theoretically, a single-strand guard could be engineered with just the right amount of flex or resistance for any situation.

The double-guard design is said to deflect snags without preventing the hook from penetrating, while

also keeping the jig from rolling during the hookset for better hook alignment.

NuTech Lures has adopted the design on its series of jigs. Likewise, Florida-based Fitzgerald Rods manufactures the MEGA JIG and Texas Jig (\$8.99) for heavy-cover flipping. The Fitzgerald weedguards are made of twisted weed trimmer line.



STRIKE KING HACK ATTACK FLUOROCARBON FLIPPING JIG



NICHOLS JT KENNEY GRASS WIZARD



NICHOLS LW FINESSE SWIM JIG

TECHNIQUE-SPECIFIC JIGS EXPAND

Jigs have always been technique-specific to a degree, but these days the degree of specificity in jig design has really improved.

For instance, Strike King designed a new Hack Attack Fluorocarbon Flipping Jig (\$4.99) with a thinner-wire hook for better penetration when using fluorocarbon versus braided line. It has the same head design as the original and features a corkscrew wire keeper to secure a trailer.

As its name suggests, the Nichols JT Kenney Grass Wizard (\$4.99) is for fishing heavy grass. It has a unique arrow-shaped belly on the jighead and features Nichols' toothpick keeper system to secure a trailer.



Z-MAN CROSSEYEZ POWER FINESSE JIG



V&M PACEMAKER SKIPPING JIG

"Finesse" is creeping into more traditional jig styles, too, so anglers can entice fish with different sizes rather than the traditional mouthfuls. The Nichols LW Finesse Swim Jig (\$4.99) is a downsized version of the common swim jig with a fine-cut skirt and lightweight hook, and the Z-Man CrossEyeZ Power Finesse Jig (\$4.99) is small in

profile, but built tough like standard-sized flipping and pitching jigs.

Finally, V&M expanded its Pacemaker series with the new Skipping Jig (\$5.29), which is built on a 30-degree hook and features a larger weedguard to protect it better when fishing cover. The head of the jig is broad for better skipping, too.

9 BETTER WAYS TO STORE GEAR

By David A. Brown

1. Flambeau IKE Quotient IQ Series

Interchangeable compartment tray cups can be removed and reconfigured to suit particular needs. \$10.34 to \$26.99



2. Gruv Fishing Hard Bait Box

A patent-pending silicone anchoring system prevents the tangles common to tackle tray slots by gripping each individual bait. \$30



3. Gruv Fishing Big Jig Box

It has the same silicone system, but with narrow slits to grip hooks and jigs. \$30



4. Bass Mafia Money Bag

This 2.5-gallon bag improves upon the basic zipper-lock bags we all use. It's waterproof, ultra durable (Bass Mafia challenged folks to try and break it at ICAST 2017; no one did) and holds a dozen or more soft-plastic bait packages. \$9.99



5. Bass Mafia Line Bag

Organize up to 10 line spools in this collapsible bag, which allows you to spool straight out of the bag. Hook-and-loop fasteners on the dividers inside allow adjustment for multiple spool sizes. \$25.99



6. Bass Mafia Briefcase

Waterproof PVC lining inside a stout Cordura bag with waterproof zippers takes this cool soft-bait organizer to the next level of protection. \$29.99 to \$35.99



7. YETI Panga Submersible Duffel

A laminated high-density nylon shell and EVA bottom keep your gear dry in the boat, truck or anywhere else. It comes in three sizes. \$299.99 to \$399.99



8. Cuda Fishing Tools Cup Holder Tackle Center

Screw it down, and rubber grommets lock it into a cup holder. Tools are stored by sliding them into the fiberglass rods in the center. A net covering provides extra security if needed. \$49.99



9. SIMMS Challenger Tackle Bag

Perfect for co-anglers or traveling anglers, it's sized for 3700-series Plano StowAways, with other dividers for organizing essential gear. The clear top lets you see where everything is inside. \$299.95



5 NEW PIECES OF TERMINAL TACKLE FOR SWIMBAITS

By Tyler Brinks



Here are five recently released swimbait accessories worth considering.

1. Zappu Hitch Hook

It's a stinger hook that attaches to the top of a swimbait. \$6.99 for two

2. Do-It Swimbait Jig Mold

Mold your own jig-head (like the one shown) with a unique cradling head design and a cavity for a 3-D eye. The mold will make five sizes, from 1/4 to 3/4 ounce. \$52.50

3. TroKar Swim Blade

This large weighted hook features a screw-lock keeper and a willow-leaf belly blade attached by a free-swinging titanium wire. \$5.99 for two

4. Owner Flashy Swimmer and Beast Flashy Swimmer with Gold Colorado Blades

The addition of a gold Colorado blade to the lineup allows for slower, hard-thumping presentations. \$4.99 to \$13.99

5. Lure Parts Online Slip Shad Jighead

A nifty screw-in head allows just about any soft-plastic swimbait to be rigged with a line-thru type treble hook system. The line threads through the nose and out the top. \$3.49 for three ■



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CHASING THE DREAM

Young guns Cooper Gallant (*left*) and Danny McGarry (*right*) qualified for the 2017 Costa FLW Series Championship via the 2016 FLW Canada Championship. We followed them in their chase for a championship on Kentucky Lake last fall.

Photos By Matt Pace



OFF-LIMITS PERIOD

10/25/17 - 8 days until tournament

Roughing it is a way of life for Gallant and McGarry, both age 20, who pinch pennies on the tournament trail. They slept in an SUV during the Canadian championship to get to Kentucky Lake, where Gallant upgraded to a truck bed camper and McGarry, once again, curled up in the back seat. They spent several weeks in Tennessee prior to the Costa FLW Series Championship, including a boring five-day stretch during the off-limits period where they never made a cast.



FLW OFFICE TOUR

10/25/17 - 8 days until tournament

Before the official practice, Gallant and McGarry visited FLW's Kentucky office, where they toured the *FLW Live* studio and tournament operations facility. Tournament directors Bill Taylor (standing, bottom right) and Ron Lappin (seated, bottom right) gave the Canadian team an orientation in the Ranger bass boats they'd be using come practice and tournament time.





PRACTICE: COOPER

10/30/17 - 3 days until tournament

Gallant was already on the trail of some quality keepers by the time official practice began. He primarily fished top-water on shallow main-lake structure, and here he shows off the type of quality bass he was able to locate. To see more of his practice experience, check out onthewater-withcoopergallant.com, the website where Gallant shares videos from his adventures on the water.





PRACTICE: DANNY

10/30/17 - 3 days until tournament

McGarry also dialed in on the topwater bite in practice and experimented with several other patterns. While the two friends shared some information, they mostly kept their fishing locations and patterns to themselves.





REGISTRATION

11/01/17 - 1 day until tournament

FLW's International Division is growing and prospering, and with it comes a strong media presence from outlets in the participating nations. Gallant and McGarry gave several interviews during tournament registration, but the highlight of the day was meeting bass fishing legends Roland Martin and Bob Izumi – the “Roland Martin of Canadian bass fishing.”



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COSTA CHAMPIONSHIP: THURSDAY

11/02/17 - Tournament day 1

It's a fickle game, this tournament fishing, and despite productive practices, both McGarry and Gallant struggled on day one. The highlight came early in the morning, when Gallant landed a kicker – a 4-pound, 11-ounce fish – and gave hope to a big bag. He never landed another keeper. McGarry brought in three fish for 5 pounds, 6 ounces.







COSTA CHAMPIONSHIP: FRIDAY

11/03/17 - Tournament day 2

Day two was even tougher. Kentucky Lake skunked McGarry, and Gallant brought in only three fish for 6-3. Unfortunately for Team Canada, neither angler was able to qualify for the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup. McGarry finished 125th, and Gallant ended up in 81st.







COSTA CHAMPIONSHIP: SATURDAY

11/04/17 - Tournament day 3

At the final weigh-in on Saturday, FLW recognized each of its International Division competitors and played the national anthem of South Africa, the home nation of Michael Matthee, who was the highest finishing International Division angler. Matthee, who finished ninth, will compete in the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup on Lake Ouachita. ■



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TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT ON TOURNAMENT PREPARATION

Doing it yourself and networking with other anglers are both effective means of preparing for a tournament, but which one is right for you? Two of FLW's biggest stars, Scott Martin and Andy Morgan, weigh in.

By Ken Duke



PHOTO BY STEVE WOOD

They say there's more than one way to skin a cat, and there's definitely more than one way to prepare for a bass tournament ... or even a long weekend on the water. Just ask Andy Morgan and Scott Martin, two of FLW's brightest stars. Between them, they have a Forrest Wood Cup championship (see sidebar), 36 Cup appearances, four FLW Tour Angler of the Year titles, eight FLW Tour wins and almost \$5 million in tournament prize money.

You could make a solid argument that either pro is the B.O.A.T. (best of all-time) in FLW history, but they have different approaches to tournament preparation styles.

Morgan is old school, preferring to find and figure out bass on his own, with as little outside influence and input as possible. He exemplifies the do-it-yourself attitude that has mostly prevailed in the sport for decades.

Martin's approach to preparing for competition, which includes gathering

information on a fishery from outside sources, isn't "new." In fact, many would say his father – the legendary Roland Martin – was its pioneer. More recently, Scott has developed a small group of confidantes who can give him insight into various fisheries and help him find what he calls the "pulse" of the water before he ever launches his boat.

There's no question that either method can work – the results of our experts speak volumes – but each can fail just as spectacularly if done without considering a number of mitigating factors. And at least in this case, the "two schools" of thought are not really at odds; call them different responses to different needs and different circumstances.

Mutual Disclaimers

Andy Morgan: "I occasionally like to get some good general information, but I'd rather figure things out myself. Part of the problem is finding sources

you know really well and who know how you think and fish."

Scott Martin: "Figuring things out all on your own is great, but it can be impractical at times. I can't always get away to pre-practice for an event, and my home in south Florida is a long way from most of our venues. Utilizing my resources as best I can within the rules of competition is just another way of educating myself and getting up to speed about what's happening on a body of water when we have such a limited period of time to prepare."

The Basics

Andy Morgan: "Figuring things out on my own and avoiding dock talk or other outside information keeps me from having a lot of preconceived ideas about where the fish are and what they're doing. That stuff can waste a lot of time and give you a lot of mental hurdles to overcome. It's hard to focus on one technique when you hear that you



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

should be trying something else, especially when that 'something else' is not something you're comfortable doing.

"I've never been successful running somebody else's stuff. I feel like I'm off chasing rabbits. When I was growing up, if anybody told you anything about fishing, they were probably lying to you. I tried figuring things out on my own because I didn't have a lot of people I felt I could trust."

Scott Martin: "When people talk about getting outside information to prepare for a tournament, a lot of them have the wrong idea. I don't want specifics or waypoints or even baits or colors. I want good, general information like which end of the lake has been most productive or what techniques are catching the most fish or a very general overview of what's happening. I want the 'pulse' of the lake, and it doesn't tell me exactly where to fish or what to throw, but it gives me a starting point to figure things out."

Philosophy

Andy Morgan: "I want to get paid everywhere we go. Basically, I rely a lot on seasonal patterns, and I watch the weather really closely for two or three weeks in advance of a tournament. Otherwise, I'm just looking for very general information – like how much weight it's taking to win local tournaments and stuff like that. If it takes 20 pounds to do well and I'm only catching 12, I know I need to be doing something different. I just want to know if I should hold 'em or fold 'em."

Scott Martin: "I'm looking for information that can help me get on a pattern – or two or more. I don't want spots because they rarely hold up – conditions are always changing – and spots rarely win tournaments. Spots are usually what you fish when you don't have a solid pattern."

Limitations and Pitfalls

Andy Morgan: "Because I'm battling the clock and my own preference for certain techniques, doing it myself can be limiting. A lot of times I don't get on the winning pattern or location or bait, and as a result I haven't won a lot of major tournaments in my career. But I've been consistent and have picked up a lot of checks and Angler of the Year points."

Scott Martin: "I had to learn what information I wanted and who I could

trust to give it to me. Sometimes, getting too specific has cost me. And sometimes practicing and getting on fish too far in advance of the tournament has caused me to waste a lot of competition time. It's easy to get locked into what the bass *were* doing rather than focus on what they *are* doing. Until you have some experience working with information from other anglers, that can create problems for you. It's one thing to have information – even good information – but something else to use it successfully.”

(Unexpected) Benefits

Andy Morgan: “Doing things on my own and without a lot of outside information has forced me to focus on what works for me rather than what works for other guys. Anyone who knows me can tell you that I rely on about four different techniques, but I can adapt those four techniques to a lot of different conditions just by moving shallower

or deeper or by speeding up or slowing down. That makes it easier for me to break down the fishing conditions as quickly as possible.”

Scott Martin: “Working with other anglers I trust has made me a more versatile fisherman. When you talk with an excellent angler and he tells you that a certain pattern might be strong, you either learn that method or lose the benefit of that information. Over time, you become more well-rounded, and there are fewer holes in your game. Tournament preparation and working with others has made me a lot better through the years, and it keeps paying dividends all the time.”

Advice

Andy Morgan: “I’m confident that my way is better ... for me. But that doesn’t mean it’s best for everyone. Until you know what your niches are and how your mind works as a tournament

angler, you can’t really make a determination like that. I do believe that doing everything on your own is becoming a thing of the past, and that it’s an increasingly difficult method to use. Information is key, and it’s getting easier to find good, reliable information these days. There’s just too much information out there.”

Scott Martin: “First, you need to trust your instincts. Develop them and know that they’re more valuable than any outside source. Second, do your research. Look at maps, check Google and generally do all the homework you can before you get to the water. Finally, if you’re going to work with other people, use one or two sources. Don’t try to get a piece of information here and another piece there. Find a handful of trusted friends that you can look to, not a bunch of random dudes you don’t know well. And consider working with someone else who’s fishing the event with you.” ■

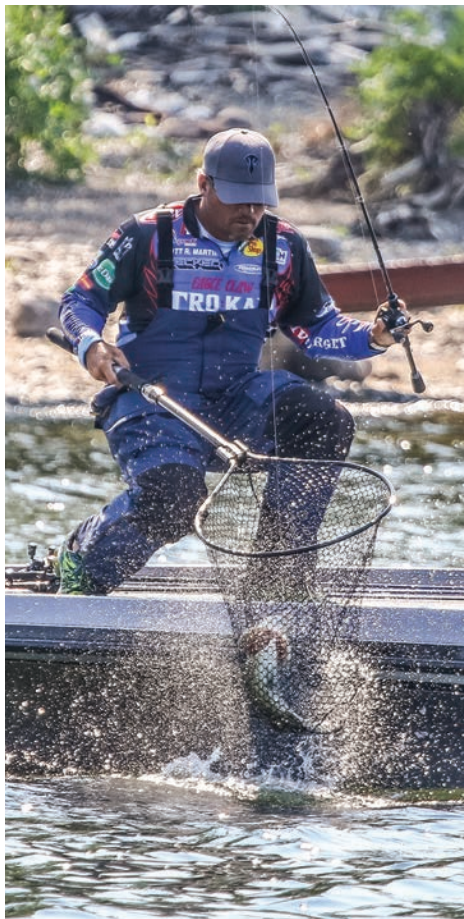


PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

TALE OF THE TAPE

Though Andy Morgan and Scott Martin have different approaches to their tournament preparation, both have experienced great success in their careers. Here’s how their stats stack up.

SCOTT MARTIN	ANDY MORGAN
Forrest Wood Cup wins	1 — 0
Forrest Wood Cup appearances	16 — 20
Angler of the Year titles	1 — 3
Tour-Level Wins	8 — 1
FLW earnings	\$2,714,770 — \$2,154,051
FLW top-10 finishes	38 — 64



PHOTO BY CHRIS BURGAN

A close-up photograph of a fish, likely a sea bass, being held by a blue plastic hook. The fish's mouth is open, and the hook is inserted into it. The background is a blurred image of a person wearing a blue shirt with "TH" and "MARINE" visible on it.

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FLW TOURNAMENT COVERAGE AND RESULTS

ON TOUR



Michael Matthee traveled a long road to the Costa FLW Series Championship and made history when he arrived. The South African angler became the first International Division qualifier to make the top-10 cut at the championship and punched his ticket to the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup.



WHAT'S INSIDE:

Bradford Beavers' consistent approach to winning the Costa FLW Series Championship on Kentucky Lake

How Andre Dickneite overcame tough conditions at Lake of the Ozarks with a simple dock-fishing pattern

Winning patterns from all six BFL Regionals and the Wild Card

The latest round of high school champions

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

COSTA FLW SERIES | LAKE OF THE OZARKS

OSAGE BEACH, MO.

By Jody White
PHOTOS BY MATT PACE



WINNING ANGLER

Andre Dickneite
Freeburg, Mo.

Winning Weight:
48-04 (15 fish)

Details:
Oct. 12-14, 2017

Presented by Evinrude

Hosted by Tri-County
Lodging Association

Costa FLW Series
Division: Central

Most projections had the winning weight for the Central Division finale coming in at about 52 pounds, but brutally tough fishing on the lower and middle sections of Lake of the Ozarks put paid to that notion. Fishing farther up the river, Andre Dickneite stayed consistent when the main-lake bite faltered to charge from fourth to first on the final day with a 15-pound limit that gave him 48-4 overall.

Dickneite's decision to stick to fishing docks upriver around Proctor, Mo., was key to his success, and it's something he usually does at Lake of the Ozarks.

"Usually you don't get all the fishermen going up there," says the Missouri pro, who now has 10 top-10 finishes in T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League (BFL) and Costa FLW Series competition on Lake of the Ozarks. "It's a long way to go, and I really do good in multiple-day events there. If

you want to catch a big bag you'll catch bigger fish down here [at the lower end near takeoff in Osage Beach], but in your multiple-day events you have to be consistent."

Relying on years of local knowledge, Dickneite flipped docks almost exclusively, targeting those in coves and on the main lake in less than 10 feet of water. His baits of choice were a black and blue V&M Adrenaline Flippin Jig with a matching Strike King Rage Craw and a red

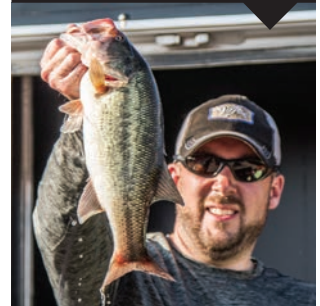
bug-colored Zoom Magnum Trick Worm on a 1/4-ounce Texas rig that he mixed in on the final day.

One ingredient to his success was a dock midway back in a creek that produced two keepers per day for him. Another contributing factor was his recognition that there was current running on day two. Noting that, he concentrated his efforts on the up-current side of docks in the main lake.

KEYS TO THE TOPWATER BITE

Roger Fitzpatrick, James Dill and James Watson ran topwater patterns the first two days and came into the final day in first, second and third place, respectively. Though all came up short on the final day, their early success offers some good lessons to other anglers. Specifically, Dill and Fitzpatrick targeted bass pulling up to eat gizzard shad on steep shorelines, points and pockets near the main channel. Their early success in the event came by targeting less accessible areas behind docks with River2Sea Whopper Ploppers and buzzbaits. They used careful boat positioning to make short, precise casts and employed long-handled nets to reach over obstructions and get fish to the boat. Unfortunately for them, their patterns faltered on the final day.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Steve Grizzle
Edwardsville, Ill.

Winning Weight:
27-12 (11 fish)

Winning Program:

Fishing around docks most of the time, Grizzle relied heavily on a 5/16-ounce Crock-O-Gator Shaker Pro Head with a green pumpkin Strike King Rage Menace Grub. He focused on areas in between docks and caught most of his fish shallow on rock drops and ledges that were close to the bank. ■

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A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Mark Row".

First Back-To-Back Wins in FLW
Tournament History
9 National Tournament Wins
46 Top 10 Career Finishes





COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP | KENTUCKY LAKE

PARIS, TENN.

By Jody White



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

WINNING ANGLER

Bradford Beavers
Ridgeville, S.C.

Winning Weight:
45-12 (15 fish)

Details:
Nov. 2-4, 2017

Presented by Costa
Sunglasses

Hosted by Henry County
Tourism Authority

Bradford Beavers has qualified for the Forrest Wood Cup in back-to-back years via the Costa FLW Series Championship. It's no surprise that Beavers, who hails from the bass-rich lowlands of South Carolina, has excelled in the Southeastern Division, but lately he's displayed a talent for tackling tough fall tournaments in other regions as well. At the championship on Table Rock in 2016, his strong start by

cranking offshore rock carried him into the top 10 and the Cup. And in 2017, the Ridgeville, S.C., native took to the shallow bars of Kentucky Lake to triumph over a field loaded with the best the Costa FLW Series has to offer.

Fishing shallow bars in the fall on Kentucky Lake is nothing novel, but it nearly didn't happen for Beavers, who crashed and burned the first few days of practice when the weather was frigid and the forecast for

the tournament was downright foreboding. However, on the final prep day, Beavers found his winning holes just north of New Johnsonville, Tenn.

"I wanted to fish down there because I saw it had more shallow water, and that's where the grass used to be from what I read," says Beavers, who needed 35 hours in practice to catch his first keeper. "But when I saw the forecast I was a little bit scared of the wind. I know it gets rough

FORREST WOOD CUP QUALIFIERS

The top finisher from each division, as well as the next five highest finishers overall, qualified for the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup.

DIVISIONAL WINNERS

Southeastern Division – Bradford Beavers
Central Division – Todd Hollowell
Southwestern Division – John Soukup
International Division – Michael Matthee (South Africa)
Northern Division – Bill Chapman
Western Division – Brent Shores

ADDITIONAL QUALIFIERS

Larry Stoafer
Tim Fox
Chad Foster
Jason Abram
Sheldon Collings

out there, so I practiced the first three days within reasonable range. It was so bad, I talked to my dad every night and said, 'This could be embarrassing.' So, I said, 'To heck with it, I'm gonna go where I want to go.' And I caught three fish and found that spot."

"That spot" carried him the first two days of the tournament, when Beavers weighed limits of 15 pounds, 13 ounces and 15 pounds. Before tournament's end, he added a third place to his itinerary. All three were typical fall "bars," or shallow river-channel edges and other humps and drops, located about five miles north of New Johnsonville. He ended up catching 14-15 the final day for a 45-12 total.

TOP FIVE	NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
	1. BRADFORD BEAVERS	RIDGEVILLE, SC	45-12	15	\$50,200
	2. TODD HOLLOWELL	FISHERS, IN	37-07	11	\$30,000*
	3. LARRY STOAFFER	LEAVENWORTH, KS	34-13	11	\$23,500*
	4. TIM FOX	MERIDAN, MS	34-00	10	\$17,100*
	5. CHAD FOSTER	SAINT CLOUD, FL	33-06	9	\$10,000

*Includes Ranger Cup

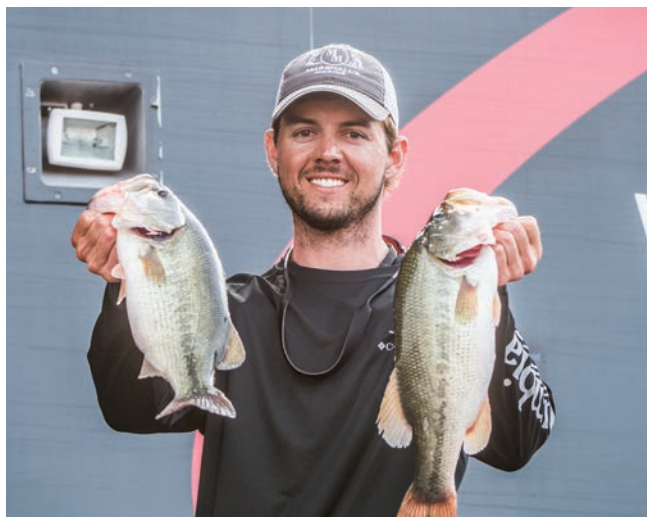
the bars. Though he wasn't fishing back in creeks or far off the main channel, Beavers also wasn't just rolling up on the most accessible portions. Instead, he idled and ran to the backsides of bars to access less-pressured bass.

There were stumps on two of his three spots, but Beavers wasn't exclusively casting over or around stumps on the bars, as some others were. He caught most of his fish near the stumps, though they

Beavers. "Every once in a while you'd spook one with the boat and see the puff of sand with the fish going by. It's hard to be that stealthy in shallow water, but I tried to move slowly and take advantage of the wind and use the Power-Poles."

The first two days Beavers mostly stuck with a bone and chrome Heddon Zara Spook that he fished at a moderate pace. He adjusted on the final day with a pearl

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDDON



Setting Himself Apart

Almost everyone in the field threw a topwater on shallow bars at least a little, but Beavers was more consistent, catching about 15 pounds every day and breezing past the competition in the final round when he was the only pro to catch more than two keepers. Throughout the tournament, a variety of small adjustments set him apart.

Beavers tended to focus on the inside sections of

weren't directly relating to the wood.

How Beavers fished was probably just as important as the spots he chose. Instead of kicking along on high or chasing breaking shad or bass, Beavers slowed way down and covered his places with patience and stealth. At one point on the last day he spent six hours to fish 300 yards, which resulted in 15 bites.

"I had to run my trolling motor on, like, 25, to keep from spooking them," says



PHOTO BY MATT PACE

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Justin Hicks
Roanoke, Va.

Winning Weight:
30-11 (8 fish)

Winning Program:

Justin Hicks credited hard work and prayer for his 16-pound, 13-ounce day-one catch, and he followed up with three more fish in the subsequent rounds to lock up his co-angler victory.

"I just got fortunate," Hicks says. "I just fish hard and pray harder. That's all there is to it."

Hicks caught all his fish on a chrome and black Heddon Super Spook that he wore the paint off of. He got two big bites on it during his one day of practice and simply rode it from there, taking other rods along, but making almost all of his casts with the Spook. ■



BFL REGIONAL | KENTUCKY LAKE

GILBERTSVILLE, KY

By Gary Garth



WINNING ANGLER

Marty Sisk
Evansville, Ind.

Winning Weight:
51-10 (15 fish)

Details:
Oct. 5-7, 2017

Presented by Evinrude

Hosted by Kentucky
Lake Convention &
Visitors Bureau

BFL Regional Divisions:
Hoosier, Illini,
Mountain, Ozark

Marty Sisk went into the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League Regional tournament on Kentucky Lake with a simple plan that he executed to near perfection: Target shallow water near sharp transition zones with topwater lures.

It's an approach that is common on Kentucky Lake in the fall, and several other top finishers did the same. Sisk's strategy revolved around a bone-colored Heddon Super Spook, a tried-and-true producer for him. The only variation in his approach related to the lure's size. Sometimes he threw a 5-inch Spook, and at other times he reached for a smaller model.

He grabbed the early lead on day one with 22-5, held on to it on day two with 15-10 and wrapped up the championship with 13-11 on day three for 51 pounds, 10 ounces overall.

Sisk scoped out about a dozen productive spots during practice and worked them thoroughly for three days. A single spot produced most of his big fish, but all spots surrendered bass. None of his key places was particularly distinctive

by sight, but general location was critical.

"I fished in the New Johnsonville [Tenn.] area," he says. "But all the spots I fished were in 2 feet of water or less. They were all little shallow points just off the main river channel."

ALL-AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

BOATERS

1. Marty Sisk
Evansville, Ind.
2. Brent Anderson
Kingston Springs, Tenn.
3. Roger Fitzpatrick
Eldon, Mo.
4. Edward Gettys
Paris, Tenn.
5. John Devries
Fishers, Ind.
6. Justin Berger
Murray, Ky.

CO-ANGLERS

1. Billy French
Hamilton, Ohio
2. James McWhorter
Hamilton, Ohio
3. Brian Huber
St. Charles, Mo.
4. Jason Papek
Desoto, Mo.
5. Josh Ford
Connersville, Ind.
6. Bobby Revalee
Connersville, Ind.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Billy French
Hamilton, Ohio

Winning Weight:
41-15 (12 fish)

Winning Program:
French boated all his fish using a Strike King Sexy Dawg (sexy shad) and a Heddon Zara Spook (bone). His day-two catch of 22 pounds, 7 ounces was the biggest limit of the tournament by either a boater or co-angler. ■



BFL REGIONAL | WHEELER LAKE

DECATUR, ALA.

By Dennis Sherer
PHOTOS BY DENNIS SHERER



WINNING ANGLER

Kip Carter
Social Circle, Ga.

Winning Weight:
42-12 (15 fish)

Details:
Oct. 12-14, 2017

Presented by Ranger

Hosted by Decatur-
Morgan County CVB

BFL Regional Divisions:
Bama, Bulldog,
Choo Choo, Music City

In the final two days at Wheeler Lake, Kip Carter caught so many fish on a bone-colored Paycheck Baits Repo Man topwater bait that by tournament's end it was missing paint and covered with tooth rash – in other words, looking good. The sacrifice was worth it, too, as Carter went home with the Regional title and an All-American berth.

A heavy rain during practice had created fishing conditions that suited Carter's skill for finding big bass around drains, and he initially targeted bass that were staging along muddy streams flowing into the reservoir.

Carter caught his day-one fish on spinnerbaits and buzzbaits before switching to the Repo Man topwater on day two. By the third and final round, however, those mid-lake rain drains had cleared, and the fish Carter had relied on were gone. To make matters worse, the water flow at the dam was

boosted significantly on day three, introducing a condition change that seemed to stump many anglers.

After striking out in the early hours of day three and with only one keeper in the livewell at 11 a.m., Carter decided to venture into feeder creeks looking for bass.

"It turned out to be a good move," he says. Carter's first fish after moving weighed 4 1/2 pounds.

He caught fish at a variety of depths on that final day, even working in a SPRO Bronzeye Frog.

"I just fished how I like to fish, and it all fell together."

ALL-AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

BOATERS

1. Kip Carter
Social Circle, Ga.
2. Tyler Morgan
Columbus, Ga.
3. Brandon McGinnis
Pell City, Ala.
4. John Duvall
Madison, Ga.
5. Adam Wagner
Cookeville, Tenn.
6. Grant Kelly
Milledgeville, Ga.

CO-ANGLERS

1. Michael Smith
Piedmont, S.C.
2. Matthew O'Connell
Brooks, Ga.
3. Matthew Bouldin
Smithville, Tenn.
4. Harold Grizzle
Gainesville, Ga.
5. Daniel Tuten
Byron, Ga.
6. Chris Harcrow
Dawson, Ala.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Michael Smith
Piedmont, S.C.

Winning Weight:
36-14 (15 fish)

Winning Program:
Among the baits Smith used were a SPRO Little John crankbait (citrus shad), a green pumpkin home-made spider jig with a matching Yamamoto Double Tail Hula Grub trailer, a homemade black and blue swim jig, and a drop-shot rig. ■



BFL REGIONAL | JAMES/CHICKAHOMINY RIVER WILLIAMSBURG, VA.



WINNING ANGLER

Richard Owen
Chester, Va.

Winning Weight:
40-11 (15 fish)

Details:
Oct. 12-14, 2017

Presented by Costa
Sunglasses

Hosted by Sports
Williamsburg

BFL Regional Divisions:
N. Carolina, Northeast,
Piedmont, Volunteer

There weren't many secrets regarding Richard Owen's winning area on the James River. The Virginia angler targeted Osborne Landing, the location of a tournament the weekend before where hundreds of fish had been released. More precisely, his prime spot was a well-known rock jetty where he was able to stay on his fish during high tides. Owen says that rather than disperse into flooded cover during high tide, the fish on the jetty typically move up and down the rock with the tides.

Owen positioned his boat far enough away from the jetty to avoid spooking fish and made long casts above the jetty, into the current, so the flow would help bring his bait naturally into the strike zone.

His approach was to lighten up and slow down with a 4-inch watermelon Zoom Dead Ringer worm

on a 1/8-ounce Charlie Brewer Spider Pro Slider Head using 8-pound-test Yo-Zuri Hybrid fluorocarbon and a 6-foot, medium-action Berkley Lightning Rod spinning rod.

"You had to fish slow," says Owen. "When you

slowed down, you needed to slow down some more. You simply couldn't fish too slowly."

Owen kept the rod tip a bit above horizontal during his retrieve, which allowed room to pull-set. Hard sets would break the line.

ALL-AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

BOATERS

1. Richard Owen
Chester, Va.
2. James Wall
Greensboro, N.C.
3. Ralph Ray
Youngsville, N.C.
4. Chris Panetta
West Simsbury, Conn.
5. Chris Daves
Spring Grove, Va.
6. Jackson Pleasant
Raleigh, N.C.

CO-ANGLERS

1. Adam Lockler
Charlotte, N.C.
2. Ben Arnold
La Follette, Tenn.
3. Henry McKee
Haddon Heights, N.J.
4. Michael Nelms
Hartwood, Va.
5. Colton Chambers
Elizabethton, Tenn.
6. Nathan Grose
Summersville, W.Va.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Adam Lockler
Charlotte, N.C.

Winning Weight:
39-10 (15 fish)

Winning Program:

Lockler used a 7-foot, 3-inch rod and 20-pound-test fluorocarbon to launch a 1/2-ounce four-blade spinnerbait over grass. He replaced one hammered nickel blade with a No. 4 willow and rotated between a chartreuse/white skirt in dingy water and a plain white skirt in clear water. ■



BFL REGIONAL | BARREN RIVER

GLASGOW, KY

By Curtis Niedermier
PHOTOS BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER



WINNING ANGLER

Eric Sanders
Lexington, Ky.

Winning Weight:
33-10 (12 fish)

Details:
Oct. 19-21, 2017

Presented by Lowrance

Hosted by Glasgow-Barren Co. Tourist & Convention Commission

BFL Regional Divisions:
Buckeye, Great Lakes,
LBL & Michigan

Barren River Lake challenged the entire field when the BFL Regional was held there in late October, but it didn't stop Eric Sanders of Lexington, Ky. He caught an impressive day-three stringer of 14 pounds, 9 ounces – second biggest of the tournament, and the only limit that day – to vault from ninth place and claim his first FLW win.

Sanders says he has fished Barren River in the past, so he was prepared for a tough autumn scenario in which the lake was being drawn down to winter pool.

He says the shallow bite often suffers during draw-down, and the field of 169 anglers beating the banks only made the shallow bite seem worse. Yet, the situation helped set up Sanders' win.

"With the pressure, I just knew I had to fish out deep," Sanders says. "A lot of the guys were sitting on the fish. They'd leave, and I was able to go in behind and catch fish."

Sanders hopped a 1/2-ounce Stan Sloan's Zorro Bait Co. Booza Brush Bug jig through the branches of brush piles in about 25 feet of water. His best brush was located off the ends of bluffs. He also fished a few deep rock piles.

Sanders' biggest challenge came on day two, when a wind shift pushed the fish into some nearby pockets. He adjusted but only weighed in 6-5. The rest of the tournament his deep-water program was on, and he handily outpaced the field.

ALL-AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

BOATERS

1. Eric Sanders
Lexington, Ky.
2. Tim Rhoades
Bowling Green, Ky.
3. Clint Bissonett
Beavercreek, Ohio
4. Jack Dalzell
Elyria, Ohio
5. Kyle Weisenburger
Ottawa, Ohio
6. Brad Leifermann
Andover, Minn.

CO-ANGLERS

1. Jim Stone
Greenwood, Ind.
2. Philip Borsa
Redford, Mich.
3. Andrew Gilliland
McArthur, Ohio
4. Danny Nicklin
Highland, Ill.
5. Paul Vonwald
La Crosse, Wis.
6. Joseph Gulash
Edwardsville, Ill.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Jim Stone
Greenwood, Ind.

Winning Weight:
23-05 (8 fish)

Winning Program:
Stone fished a 1/2- or 3/4-ounce green pumpkin Right Bite Baits jig with a Zoom UV Speed Craw trailer with its tails dipped in chartreuse dye. He either cast toward offshore structure or, when his boater partner fished the bank, pitched behind the boat and slowly dragged the jig back. ■



BFL REGIONAL | LAKE LANIER

GAINESVILLE, GA.

By David A. Brown
PHOTOS BY DAVID A. BROWN



WINNING ANGLER

Jayme Rampey
Liberty, S.C.

Winning Weight:
41-13 (15 fish)

Details:
Oct. 19-21, 2017

Presented by
General Tire

Hosted by
Gainesville Convention
& Visitors Bureau

BFL Regional Divisions:
Gator, Savannah River,
Shenandoah, South
Carolina

While many of his competitors chased schooling fish and picked away at deep brush piles on Lake Lanier, Jayme Rampey committed to the dock game for his victory.

Rampey found that shallow fishing was best, so he spent most of his time on flatter banks near the Buford Dam. He says he hit more than 150 docks a day and caught his fish in 2 to 3 feet of water.

Rampey fished a 4 1/2-inch white swimbait on a 1/2-ounce Buckeye Lures J-Will jighead and cleaned up with a green pumpkin Zoom Fluke Stick on a 1/16-ounce Buckeye Lures Flick-It weedless wacky jig.

"I fished the swimbait as fast as I could wind it, and with the Fluke Stick, I would really have to let it soak," Rampey says. "The fish were way back under the dock, so I had to skip that Fluke Stick as far as I could get it."

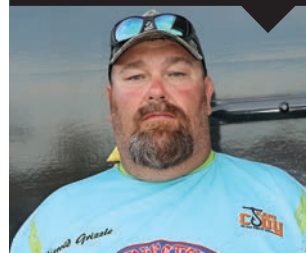
The week's stable weather provided comfortable

fishing conditions, but Rampey was particularly thankful for the mostly sunny skies, which positioned the fish tighter to cover under and around docks. He was also appreciative of the minimal winds.

"Without a lot of wind, I didn't have to worry about

the schooling fish, and I could just stay on the bank to do what I needed to do," Rampey says. "When the wind blows on a [blueback] herring lake, the fish school a lot. It hadn't been windy, so I didn't worry about them schooling and the other anglers catching them."

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Harold Grizzle
Gainesville, Ga.

Winning Weight:
25-12 (12 fish)

Winning Program:

Harold Grizzle caught most of his fish on rocky main-lake points where he knew he'd find bass targeting crawfish. Grizzle coaxed all but one of his bites with a 1/4-ounce green pumpkin jig and a green pumpkin twin-tail trailer. Drop-shotting a Roboworm in the morning dawn color yielded the other keeper. ■

ALL-AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

BOATERS

1. Jayme Rampey
Liberty, S.C.
2. Jeremy Strong
Elberton, Ga.
3. Rob Jordan
Flowery Branch, Ga.
4. Roger Vinson
Flowery Branch, Ga.
5. David Nichol
Gainesville, Ga.
6. Heath Pack
Ellijay, Ga.

CO-ANGLERS

1. Eric Cerny
Alpharetta, Ga.
2. Stephen Main
Chester, Va.
3. Brandon Brock
Honea Path, S.C.
4. Jeremy Bouldin
Kings Mountain, N.C.
5. Michael Miller
Greenville, S.C.
6. Chester Tucker
Seneca, S.C.



BFL REGIONAL | RED RIVER

BOSSIER CITY, LA.

By Jimmy Watson
PHOTOS BY SANDY EAKIN



WINNING ANGLER

Jason Sandidge
Centerton, Ark.

Winning Weight:
31-12 (15 fish)

Details:
Oct. 19-21, 2017

Presented by Quaker State

Hosted by Shreveport Bossier Sports Comm.

BFL Regional Divisions:
Arkie, Cowboy, Mississippi, Okie

Working wood cover just a stone's throw from the launch site at the Red River South Marina, Jason Sandidge mined 31 pounds, 12 ounces of bass over three days to earn the Regional win.

Sandidge, who qualified for his first All-American with the victory, says the shallow wood was near a ditch about 15 feet deep.

"The bass would come up and feed," says Sandidge, who fishes the Okie Division. "In three days, I burned less than a quarter tank of gas."

Sandidge flipped Zoom Ultra-Vibe Speed Craws in blue sapphire or green pumpkin with the pincers dipped in chartreuse.

"That was key because the water was dirty with about 2 inches of visibility," he says. "I worked about a 50-yard stretch."

He also caught one keeper on a spinnerbait.

On day one, Sandidge caught an 8-10 limit within the first 30 minutes on the water, then backed off his fish after letting his co-angler catch a limit.

"I sat there and literally guarded it because half these guys saw me on it," Sandidge says. "Then I caught 9-1

Friday, but it was more of a grind to get a limit."

The fish were still there on day three, and Sandidge had five in the boat by 9:30 a.m., but his smallest was a 1-pounder. It wasn't until the very end that he secured the win with a 3-pound kicker.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Nathan Colwell
Pryor, Okla.

Winning Weight:
17-05 (9 fish)

Winning Program:
Colwell caught his fish by throwing a frog on a variety of types of cover.

"The majority of my weight came off brush – stumps, logs, laydowns. It was 99 percent wood," says Colwell. "One fish came off lily pads. I also used some Big Bite Baits that look like little crawfish." ■

ALL-AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

BOATERS

1. Jason Sandidge
Centerton, Ark.
2. Randy Deaver
Blanchard, La.
3. Ben Blaschke
Muldrow, Okla.
4. Randy Despino
Colfax, La.
5. John Shore
Owasso, Okla.
6. Nick Lebrun
Bossier City, La.

CO-ANGLERS

1. Nathan Colwell
Pryor, Okla.
2. Jack Stegall
Carriere, Miss.
3. Bobby Call
Wagoner, Okla.
4. Cord Colwell
Pryor, Okla.
5. Keith Whipple
Iuka, Miss.
6. Mike Allen
Crystal Springs, Miss.



BFL WILD CARD | KENTUCKY LAKE

GILBERTSVILLE, KY

By Jody White
PHOTOS BY JODY WHITE



WINNING ANGLER

Kevin Powers
Unicoi, Tenn.

Winning Weight:
32-09 (10 fish)

Details:
Nov. 10-11, 2017

Hosted by Kentucky
Lake Convention &
Visitors Bureau

In the BFL Wild Card on Kentucky Lake, which was held just a week after the brutally tough Costa FLW Series Championship on the same fishery, Kevin Powers went a little off the beaten track and headed over to the north end of Lake Barkley to punch his ticket to the All-American. Barkley offered much dirtier water and less pressure than Kentucky Lake, and by focusing his efforts there Powers was able to be one of only two anglers to catch a limit both days.

"I looked for deeper banks on the main channel that had some lay-downs on them," says Powers. "With the water being down [at winter pool] and me not knowing the lake, I was just looking for the same things we'd fish back home in east Tennessee."

Powers caught keepers on several banks, but one

magic tree at the end of a bluff produced an amazing 12 keepers for him over the two days of fishing. The end of his magic tree was in about 13 feet of water, which was the typical maximum depth he fished. Powers kept his

baits close to the bottom and fished slowly with a homemade 5/8-ounce spinnerbait (chartreuse and white) and a Lunker Lure Original Rattleback Jig (green pumpkin) matched with a Zoom Big Salty Chunk.

ALL-AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

BOATERS

1. Kevin Powers
Unicoi, Tenn.
2. Steve Ruff
St. Charles, Mo.
3. Freddy Palmer
Estill Springs, Tenn.
4. Danny Holloway
Corinth, Miss.
5. Billy Schroeder
Paducah, Ky.
6. Justin Royal
Vidor, Texas

CO-ANGLERS

1. Scott Stallings
Glencoe, Okla.
2. Dave Rovers
Indianapolis, Ind.
3. Robert Pillow
Campbellsville, Ky.
4. Cory Miller
Blanchard, Okla.
5. Andrew Nickeson
Valdosta, Ga.
6. Carl Lingle
Dongola, Ill.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Scott Stallings
Glencoe, Okla.

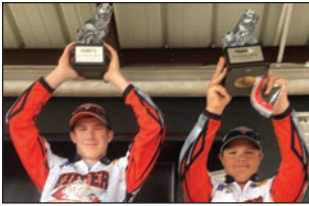
Winning Weight:
11-12 (4 fish)

Winning Program:

Scott Stallings caught one keeper on day one with a Yamamoto Senko, but he jumped up the leaderboard on day two by catching a trio of keepers with a Carolina-rigged 8-inch Zoom Lizard (watermelon with the tail dyed chartreuse). ■



BASS PRO SHOPS HIGH SCHOOL FISHING OPEN CHAMPS



Oklahoma Open – Grand Lake – Oct. 21
Kiefer High School: Gunner Francis (left) and Grayson Hudson
Weight: 12-15 (5 fish)



Ohio Open – Caesar Creek Lake – Oct. 28
Arcanum High School: Joshua Wright (left) and Kenton Allread
Weight: 3-14 (3 fish)



Kentucky Open – Lake Cumberland – Nov. 4
Scott County High School: Chase Clark (left) and Izak Tackett
Weight: 9-15 (5 fish)

Experience
The Excitement
Of the 2018
Forrest Wood Cup

Aug. 10-12, 2018
Lake Ouachita
Hot Springs, Arkansas

TBF



WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

By Dan Johnson



JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP HEADS FOR HOT SPRINGS

Top youth bass anglers from The Bass Federation state federations across the country will compete on Lake Hamilton out of Hot Springs, Ark., Aug. 8-11 in the 2018 TBF Junior World Championship (JWC).

"Our entire community is excited to welcome these 'pros of the future' to our community," says Steve Arrison, CEO of Visit Hot Springs.

As in years past, the JWC will take place in conjunction with the Forrest Wood Cup, which will take place on Lake Ouachita just up the road from Lake Hamilton and Hot Springs.

"What a great week of championship bass fishing in the Spa City," Arrison adds. "The best junior anglers from each state will be competing on Lake Hamilton at the same time FLW's top pros are on Lake Ouachita. I can't wait."

Expanded Opportunities

The 2018 event marks the inception of sweeping changes to the TBF youth program that were enacted last August by a unanimous vote of the TBF State Presidents' Council with input from TBF youth and conservation directors.

Among the changes, which address comments and requests from youth anglers and their families, TBF junior anglers will now fish out of their own

boats in two-person teams, accompanied by their own boat captains, at qualifying events and the JWC.

The JWC was also expanded to three days, with all teams fishing two full days and the field cut to the top team from each division for the final day.

Finally, the lower limit of 11 years of age was removed to allow all youngsters ages 15 and under (as of Aug. 31 of the JWC competition year) to participate.

"We're happy to be returning to Lake Hamilton and the Hot Springs area," says TBF President and CEO Robert Cartledge. "It's always an angler favorite, and it's even more exciting in conjunction with these changes that

will undoubtedly grow the TBF youth program by leaps and bounds.

"The junior program was started in 1994 by four of our state federations and truly has grown into a program that cultivates the future of our sport and is dedicated to young anglers discovering their love of fishing and the great outdoors," he adds.

Indeed, many of today's top professional bass anglers launched their careers at least in part at the JWC. A few notable examples include Jacob Wheeler, who fished the 2006 JWC; Shane LeHew, winner of the 2007 JWC; and 2017 Forrest Wood Cup winner Justin Atkins, who competed in the 2008 JWC.



Lake Hamilton

2017 TBF NATIONAL SEMI-FINALS UPDATE

Here are updates from The Bass Federation National Semi-Finals events held in early fall 2017:

District 12

Virginia and West Virginia TBF members clashed on Summersville Lake in the District 12 Semi-Finals Sept. 23-24 out of Battle Run Ramp.

Virginia's Chris Lewis bested the boater field with 16.61 pounds, which earned him \$2,440. West Virginia's Cody Huddleston finished second overall with 14.43 pounds.

Co-angler qualifiers for the national championship are West Virginia's Rick Hamer, who won his division with 12.68 pounds, and Virginian Jason Clark with 11.60 pounds.

The West Virginia Bass Federation won the State Pride Award with 64.07 pounds.

District 13

The Maryland Bass Federation hosted Washington, D.C., and Delaware in the District 13 Semi-Finals Sept. 30-Oct. 1 on the upper Chesapeake Bay out of Dundee State Park. The tournament was originally scheduled as a two-day event, but due to high winds competition was cut to just one day.

D.C.'s Brian Trieschman claimed the boater title with 18.10 pounds, good for \$2,000. Craig Morris of Delaware and Maryland's Dan Rodriguez also advanced to the championship for being the top boaters in their states with 16.42 and 11.26 pounds, respectively.

Per Semi-Finals rules, co-angler champion Ron Stierstorfer of Maryland will advance to the championship as a boater for landing a bigger catch than his state's boater. He weighed in 18.40 pounds for a \$1,000 payday.

Other championship qualifiers are Delaware co-angler Adam Wall with 13.32 pounds and D.C. co-angler Jason Pierson with 8.51 pounds.

The Delaware Bass Federation won the State Pride Award with 69.05 pounds.



Maryland Co-angler Ron Stierstorfer will fish the championship as a boater since he weighed in more than his boater counterpart.

District 15

TBF members from Connecticut, New Jersey and Rhode Island battled on Lake Hopatcong Sept. 30-Oct. 1 when the New Jersey Bass Federation hosted the District 15 Semi-Finals.

New Jersey boater Sean Loll started slow with four bass for 8.68 pounds on day one, but rallied with 15.49 pounds on day two for a winning total of 24.17 pounds. He won \$2,270.

Art Vitale of New Jersey won the co-angler title with 19.79 pounds, good for \$1,135. Other championship qualifiers are Connecticut boater Alex Wetherell and co-angler John Fonda, along with Rhode Island boater Jeremy Sadowski and co-angler Robert Rull.

The New Jersey Bass Federation won the State Pride Award with 74.56 total pounds.



Maine co-angler Lewis Mendell shows off a pair of quality smallmouth bass.

District 17

Lake Winnepesaukee was ground zero for Maine and New Hampshire TBF members competing in the District 17 Semi-Finals event Sept. 23-24.

New Hampshire's Sean Graves paced the boaters with a two-day total of 26.13 pounds. He received a \$1,700 paycheck.

Nick Deering, who finished third overall with 23.95 pounds, was the top Maine boater and will advance to the championship.

Myles Tripp of New Hampshire was the co-angler winner with a tournament total of 21.68 pounds for a total cash payout of \$850. He'll be joined at the championship by Lewis Mendall, who topped the Maine co-anglers with 20.73 pounds.

The Bass Federation of Maine claimed the State Pride Award with 153.08 pounds.

District 18

Both the Dalles and Bonneville pools of the Columbia River hosted 38 TBF members from Washington and Oregon for the District 18 Semi-Finals Oct. 7-8.



Wes Wezenberg scored an extra \$500 in Ranger Cup winnings.

Oregon's Jeremy McKay took the early boater lead with a 20.80-pound limit on day one and backed it up on day two with 12.44 pounds for a 33.24-pound two-day total and the win. He earned a \$1,420 paycheck for his efforts, along with a ticket to the 2018 TBF National Championship.

Other championship qualifiers include Wes Wezenberg, who finished first among boaters from Washington with 29.44 pounds, co-angler winner Scott Seros of Oregon who caught 24.40 pounds and Washington's top co-angler Hernandez Ruffin with 23.36 pounds.

Washington narrowly edged out Oregon, 160.21 to 159.85 pounds, for the State Pride Award.

District 19

The Montana Bass Federation hosted the District 19 Semi-Finals at Lakeside Resort on Noxon Reservoir out of Trout Creek, Mont., Sept. 23-24.

Idaho's Loren Torok sacked an impressive 20.24-pound limit en route to a 31.91-pound total weight and the district boater title worth \$1,410.

Local angler J.D. Woods took the co-angler crown with 19.84 pounds, worth \$705.

Other championship qualifiers include Montana boater Tim Johnston, who caught 30.60 pounds, and Idaho co-angler Shannon Wadas, who weighed in 17.58 pounds.

In State Pride Award competition, the Montana Bass Federation took top honors with 142.95 pounds to Idaho's 123.41.



District 19 championship qualifiers.

ALABAMA BASS FEDERATION REPORT

Thanks to a winning combination of tournament opportunities, conservation stewardship projects, charity events and exciting new programs, the Alabama Bass Federation is enjoying steady growth in member numbers and participation.

"We saw increases in 2017, and expect these trends to continue in 2018," says ABF President Jim Sparrow.

Tournament Opportunities

Like other state federations, ABF maintains a tournament trail for adult TBF members. The 2017 season included events on fisheries such as Logan Martin, Wilson Lake and Lake Eufaula, followed by a state championship on Lay Lake in September.

Sparrow reports that the TBF National Semi-Finals system of qualifying for the TBF National Championship is also popular among Alabama's adult TBF members.

"Our members like the opportunities for advancement," he says, "along with the close-to-home events and increased payout.

"We just competed in the 2017 District 4 Semi-Finals event, which was held on the Biloxi Back Bay-Pascagoula River fishery," Sparrow adds. "Our Mississippi Bass Federation hosts did a great job, and we're looking forward to hosting it in Alabama next season."



Alabama's expanded youth tournament program sparked an increase in participation among young anglers.

Sparrow proudly points out that despite the brackish-water destination being a new concept for many of the Alabama members, the state's contingent held its own in the event.

"Our anglers overcame the Mississippi boys on the delta, and we retained the State Pride Award for another year," he says.

Youth Initiatives

Alabama also maintains an ambitious, two-pronged tournament program geared toward budding bass fans.

"We run TBF Junior and High School Fishing trails, with advancement to the Junior World Championship, High School Fishing National Championship and High School Fishing World Finals," he says.

Junior and High School Fishing events are held simultaneously on one lake.

"The combined format makes it a lot easier for our volunteers because we don't have to run so many events, and the youths get to pick which tournament they want to fish, provided they are eligible for that particular event," Sparrow explains.

To further boost youth participation, Alabama recently launched a regional tournament approach, splitting the state in half with southern and northern trails. Each has three qualifiers, and everyone will come together for a mid-state championship in April.

"The goal was cutting travel to make it more convenient for young anglers to fish," Sparrow explains. "We're already

seeing a big rise in registrations to our early events in the south, and an overall 40 percent increase in high school clubs in direct response to the new system."

Conservation, Charity

Along with tournament programs, ABF is active in conservation and charitable pursuits.

"On the conservation side, we're involved in re-licensing the R.L. Harris Hydroelectric Project on the Tallapoosa River," Sparrow notes.

The project affects the dam, spillway and powerhouse that impound 9,870-acre Harris Lake, along with important fish and wildlife habitat upstream.

"Our representatives are on the committee and work groups studying the re-licensing process, making sure everything is on the up and up to protect the lake, the fishery, wildlife refuges and local communities," he explains.

ABF members also assist with a number of charity events each year, such as fundraisers for schools.

"We also partner with Airport Marine in Alabaster to raise funds for the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Alabama," Sparrow says. "Each season, TBF members registering for our tournament trail have a one-time opportunity to donate \$100 to the charity. Those who do are entered in a program that rewards the top-finishing angler in the program with a \$250 bonus at each qualifier and \$500 at the state championship. It's a win-win for everyone involved, and raises an average of \$1,800 to \$2,000 a year for Ronald McDonald House." ■



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CLARK REEHM

Huntington, Texas

By Sean Ostruszka

What do you pride yourself on most as an angler?

My consistency. If you look at my finishes, I'm between 21st and 70th a whole lot. That means I'm cutting a lot of checks or I'm one mistake, missed fish or missed execution from getting paid.

That's a very businesslike way of approaching things.

That's because it's a business. My wife asked me the other day if I'd rather win a tournament or cut a check in every event, contend for the Angler of the Year and make the championship. I told her win a tournament, but not just because I haven't done that. It'd be because I'd make more money – \$100,000 for winning versus \$70,000 (\$10,000 per tournament) – and I'd probably get more sponsors.

So does it bother you that you haven't won a tournament yet?

Yes and no. Every guy is different. Some guys are hypercompetitive, and winning to them is winning a trophy. That's what drives them.

For me, it's a straight-up business. So cutting a \$10,000 check is winning. I feel good, especially when I've scratched out a check when I had nothing.

Do you ever fish to win or just for checks?

I don't do either.

Care to explain?

It took me a long time to realize you have to quit gambling. That's not how you win. That rarely pans out. The guys who win tournaments stay steady and catch their fish. It seems simple, but it's not.

I think I'm going to need a little more explanation.

At this level, you know whether you're on fish to win or just "check fish." With either, you don't win or get a check unless you're able to exploit those fish for all they're worth.

Take last year. I've never been on winning fish so many times in a season as I was in 2017. But random things happen. You lose a key fish, or you don't execute one day like you should. So you don't win. So many things have to go right to win even when you're on winning fish. I've been close, and it will happen.

What's it going to be like when you finally hold that trophy?

You see guys go crazy on stage, but I don't think that will be me. It's like when you're fishing. You don't get the adrena-

line rush when you're fighting the fish; it's when you get the bite. So once I take the lead I'll be excited, but if I'm already in the lead when they announce me the winner I'll be quiet. Part of it will probably be that I can't believe it. I'll be speechless.

That may be the first time you've been speechless in your life.

It may be. I'm a talker.

Have you ever been speechless?

You'd have to ask my wife. I'm sure I have been when I'm getting scorched.

You're even chatty on the water.

Oh, I love to cut up out on the water. I don't do it to get in people's heads. I just like to have a good time out there.

That's why you'll see me wave camera boats closer or talking with people on their docks. We're ambassadors for the sport. I want that kid on the end of the dock to enjoy the sport, and if me talking with him can do that then I will.

Do other pros like it?

Most do, but some guys don't. I had one pro once tell me never to talk to him again out on the water. But I'll always be honest with guys. All I ask is that they're honest with me. ■

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