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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WINTER 2019 | VOLUME 18 | ISSUE 1



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PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER

FEATURES

MAKE MORE MAGIC WITH THE "FAIRY WAND" 46
HOW BRIAN LATIMER UNLOCKS THE POTENTIAL OF SPINNING RODS FOR TOURNAMENT FISHING — *Curtis Niedermier*

THE SHALLOW-WOOD-IN-WINTER PATTERN 56
A STRATEGY FOR CATCHING SKINNY-WATER GIANTS DURING THE COLDEST MONTHS OF THE YEAR — *Curtis Niedermier*

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE — *Curtis Niedermier* 4
FISHING EXPOSED 6
FLW FOUNDATION UPDATE — *Trish Blake* 8
NEWS&NOTES 10

COLUMNS

FOOD FOR THOUGHT — *Rob Newell* 12

TAKEOFF

IN SEASON — *Paul Strege* 18
VIDEO GAME CHEAT CODES — *Tyler Brinks* 20

TAKEOFF (continued)

UNDERSTANDING STRATIFICATION — *Tj Maglio* 22
RECHARGING FOR THE TOUR — *Justin Onslow* 24
3 WAYS TO WHACK 'EM IN WINTER — *Justin Onslow* 26
PROFILE: RON LAPPIN — *Colin Moore* 28
FOUR-STROKE MAINTENANCE — *Joe Balog* 32
HOW KAYAK TOURNAMENTS WORK — *Matt Ball* 34

GEAR

PRODUCT REVIEW: LEW'S PRO-TI — *Matt Williams* 38
A FIRST LOOK AT NEW GEAR — *Curtis Niedermier* 40
13 DIY TACKLE PROJECTS 42

ON TOUR

COSTA FLW SERIES, CALIFORNIA DELTA — *Justin Onslow* 62
COSTA FLW SERIES, FORT GIBSON — *Justin Onslow* 64
COSTA FLW SERIES, LAKE OF THE OZARKS — *Kyle Wood* 66
COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP — *Curtis Niedermier* 68
T-H MARINE FLW BFL REGIONAL RECAP 70

BACK END

THE BASS FEDERATION — *Dan Johnson* 74
BACKLASH WITH NICK LeBRUN — *Curtis Niedermier* 80

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

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SOME CHANGES, BUT GOOD ONES

When I was in high school, between every period I'd swing by my locker and swap out my books for the next class. Then I'd slide the latest outdoor magazine I was reading in between my notebook and my textbook, where my teacher wouldn't see it when I walked through the classroom door.

I was a good student, but high school was a bore. Magazines were my escape; the stories a gateway out of a small Midwestern town to the greatest outdoor destinations in the world.

Reading the stories in those magazines (sometimes instead of paying attention in class) and the dreams they inspired were real motivators for me developing a passion for hunting and fishing – activities that now define who I am as a professional and a person.

They're also why, in 2007, I left home to become associate editor at FLW. I chased a dream of working for an outdoor magazine, and in the process learned the trade from great writers and editors such as Jason Sealock and, my most influential mentor, Colin Moore, who recently retired from FLW.

Those editors established a legacy of producing a quality print publication at FLW, and they did it, frankly, on a minimalist budget with a minimalist staff.

I'm proud to still be a part of this team. I'm proud of the fact that, even though digital media seems to be overpowering print, we're still able to publish a magazine that teaches about bass fishing and the people and trends at the top of the game.

But I'm also proud that FLW is a forward-thinking company, and that it maintains a conservative business model that helps ensure FLW will be around for many more years. It's that type of foresight and planning that led to a decision to make a change to the print publishing model we've been using for more than a decade.

Starting in 2019, FLW will switch from publishing eight issues per year to a quarterly print schedule, with issues slated for winter, spring, summer and fall.

Yes, I'm seriously happy about the decision. I'm a "print guy." I believe in its value, and that words in print have a lot of staying power. Yet I care more about FLW's well-being than I do my own interest in producing magazines. This change will free up resources to allow the company to expand its *FLW Live* broadcasts, and to launch some really exciting online video projects such as the *Varsity Bass* documentary series announced in November (look it up at FLWFishing.com).

This is the way media is changing these days. Instead of kids like me hiding *Outdoor Life* between their books, today's high school students steal glances at their smartphones during class. Great-grandmas have email addresses. A generation that grew up with vinyl albums is using Facebook and YouTube.

If you're a die-hard print reader, the change might sting a little. You might even be thinking that we're cutting your content in half. I don't look at it that way. We're just giving you some alternatives and a more complete package of content that I think you'll enjoy.

More importantly, this change gives the magazine long-term viability, so we can continue to deliver high-quality bass fishing content from FLW's top pros, and so I can keep striving to live up to the legacy established by editors-in-chief who came before me.

Curtis Niedermier, Editor-in-Chief

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FISHING EXPOSED
LAKE GUNTERSVILLE — NOV. 3, 2018





WHO'S DOIN' THE SCHOOLIN'?

Just moments before Missouri pro Joe Wieberg hooked up with this bass on the final day of the Costa FLW Series Championship at Lake Guntersville, FLW on-the-water reporter and photographer Rob Matsuura captured video footage of some G-Ville hawgs schooling on the surface. Wieberg saw it too and whipped his umbrella rig into the fray. The multi-bait imitator obviously schooled this bass well enough that Wieberg was able to hook up. After a short fight, he swung her in right over the net held by co-angler Derek Barnett en route to piecing together a 12-pound, 9-ounce limit that boosted him to 59th place.

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA



Helping the World Through Fishing



Have you ever thought about the healing power of fishing? Its power to unite? Its power to educate and entertain? To bring people from vastly different backgrounds together in pursuit of a common passion?

I have, and I'm convinced the world would be a better place if more people spent time together fishing. That's why the non-profit FLW Foundation was established in 2010 – to help make the world a better place by connecting America's youth to their natural resources through education, conservation and an active lifestyle with time spent outside fishing.

Each year FLW Foundation volunteers hold Unified Fishing Derbies for children in every FLW Tour and FLW Series community. We send FLW Tour pros into local schools to show children how science, technology, engineering and math relate to fishing through the "Get Outdoors. Go Fish!" program. FLW Foundation grants in partnership with the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation and state fish and wildlife agencies help high schools establish fishing teams. We do a lot of good things in a lot of communities, but the FLW Foundation is just one of many charitable organizations making a difference through fishing.

We are honored to work with the National Pediatric Cancer Foundation on its "Fishing Funds the Cure" program that helps fund new drugs and therapies that may ultimately lead to the cure of childhood cancers. We are thrilled to work alongside Keep America Fishing on its "Pitch It" campaign to keep discarded soft plastics out of our nation's lakes and rivers, and with Costa on its "Kick Plastic" movement to reduce the amount of plastic waste in our waterways and landfills. Helping groups like Warriors on the Water show appreciation to our military service members, and Heroes on the Water, which provides therapeutic programs for veterans, active-duty military, first responders and their families, is something we look forward to each year.

We showcase young artistic talent with the annual State-Fish Art Contest "Wall of Fame" at the FLW Cup. We help Wildlife Forever protect our nation's fish and access to fishing through support of its "Clean Drain Dry" initiative to stop the spread of aquatic invasive species. We support the Future Fisherman Foundation and its "Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs" program. And we help NFL star Brian Robison raise funds to place trained canines in law enforcement agencies and schools through his Reel 'Em In Foundation bass tournament.

While we make direct contributions and work alongside organizations like those mentioned above, it is also gratifying to see FLW anglers using tournaments to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Shriners Hospitals for Children. It is rewarding to see FLW anglers volunteering their time at C.A.S.T. for Kids events that provide fishing opportunities for children with special needs and their caretakers, and lending their time and talent to events like Channing Crowder's Bass Fishing Tournament benefiting the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County, Fla. These are just a few examples of the many charities that FLW anglers support each year.

As you prepare for the 2019 season, please think about how you can help spread the joy of fishing while supporting a good cause in your community. It doesn't matter which circuit you fish. There are opportunities waiting for you at the FLW Foundation and the many other charitable organizations mentioned here, plus countless more that were not mentioned.

If you'd like to learn more about the FLW Foundation, please visit our website — FLWFishing.com/Foundation.

Thank you for all that you have done, and all that you will do, to make the world a better place through fishing.

Sincerely,

Trish Blake

Trish Blake
President, FLW Marketing Division

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POLARIS ACQUIRES MINORITY INTEREST IN FLW

In November, FLW announced that Polaris Industries, Inc., had acquired a minority ownership interest in FLW, extending and expanding the relationship between the world's largest tournament-fishing organization and the leading global powersports manufacturer.

"With recreational fishing being a popular and growing sport in the U.S., this strategic partnership allows us to leverage insights and more deeply engage with FLW's networks, fishing consumers and outdoor enthusiasts across

the globe to promote our products and brands," says Bob Mack, senior vice president of corporate development and strategy, and president of adjacent markets and boats for Polaris.

FLW will continue to operate under the leadership of FLW President of Marketing Trish Blake and FLW President of Operations Kathy Fennel.

David Dudley will continue to represent Polaris in FLW competition.



POLARIS®

FLW FOUNDATION, AMBASSADORS INTRODUCE MORE THAN 1,000 YOUTH TO FISHING IN 2018

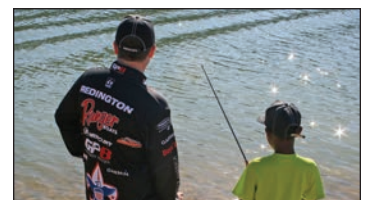
The FLW Foundation and its FLW Ambassadors – volunteers from throughout the FLW tournament ranks – surpassed the 1,000-youth participant mark at 23 Unified Fishing Derbies held at FLW Tour and Costa FLW Series events as well as 20 other community-organized youth fishing events in 2018. The milestone represents tremendous growth in the program that helps to fulfill the FLW Foundation's mission to connect America's youth to their natural resources and promote education, conservation and an active lifestyle.

"One of the most important pieces for the future of our sport is the recruitment of the next generation of anglers," says FLW Foundation pro Cody Kelley, who works with FLW National Youth Director Scott Ellison to coordinate the Unified Fishing Derbies. "The FLW Foundation fishing derbies are always completely free for the participants and allow them to experience fishing for the first time and even walk away with their first FLW trophy. Our ambassadors have been a huge part of the success of the program. Their passion for taking kids fishing is amazing."

Among the Ambassadors who participated at FLW Tour and Costa FLW Series events were Sergio Arguello of North Hollywood, Calif.; Jimmy Green of Tulsa, Okla.; Tom Stark of Angola, Ind.; Rob Crane of Fairview Heights, Ill.; and Darren Gallaher of Hixson, Tenn.

FLW also partners in the events with DMF Bait, which provides worms for the participants.

Anglers interested in participating as FLW Ambassadors in 2019 can contact Cody Kelley at cody.kelley@frosch.com. ■



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ROB NEWELL

Food for Thought



FIND THE BAIT, FIND THE BASS.

It's a common mantra in bass fishing; one that I read in bass fishing magazines 30 years ago and still hear bass pros use quite often these days.

But what exactly does that mean?

We can go to a lake and find "bait" almost anywhere – minnows up in the shallows, little bluegills hanging around docks, shad flickering on the surface.

As a kid I used to wade around at the boat ramp, turn over rocks and find crawfish – by the dozens. Why even put the boat in? I already found the bait right here at the ramp. So ... where are the bass?

Over the years I've learned there are a couple of key things about the bass-forage relationship that largely go unspoken. Pros remain quiet about them, not so much because they're a big secret, but because they're hard to pinpoint and explain. So just saying "find the bait, find the bass" is certainly true, but there is a whole lot more to it than that.

In any mixed-forage system, there are certain years when a particular forage species proliferates, sort of like the insects in your backyard. Some years the fireflies are so thick you could read by them at night. The next year, fireflies are rare, but ladybugs swarm you like bees. Then some years the cicadas are so loud you can't think over the drone of their singing. A few years ago we had a bumper crop of millipedes hijack the backyard.

The same is true for the vast underwater ecosystem. Some years there are huge bream spawns. Some years shad

spawn with incredible success. Some years bass spit up crawfish pincers in our livewells by the pound, but the next year crawfish crumbs are nonexistent. Some years the mayfly hatch is so thick that the entire food chain moves closer to the bank because of the protein emerging from the mud and falling back down from the trees.

These mass propagations are usually sparked by certain environmental conditions, and, unless you are a biologist, are largely beyond the average angler's ability to anticipate. High water and floods might be premium conditions for one type of forage to spawn, while low water and drought could benefit another.

The most important thing to understand is that when a bumper crop of food opportunity is available on a lake, you can rest assured the bass are dialed in on it, and that's what's for dinner. Your bream bed pattern that worked so good two years ago is likely to be a dud if the shad population has spiked.

Forrest Wood Cup champion Justin Atkins agrees these proliferations are an ongoing process that affects forage bases in lakes and reservoirs from year to year.

"There's no doubt about it," Atkins says. "Some years are more shad years, some are more bream or sunfish years, and it seems some are more crawfish years."

Atkins remembers a banner year on Pickwick when he caught bass on a jig teamed with a plastic craw with orange-tipped pincers.

"A friend and I crushed them on that jig that whole year," Atkins recalls. "The next year we couldn't get a sniff on that jig."

We had to throw other stuff to get bites in the same places where they ate that jig so well the year before. I'm convinced there had been a mass crawfish hatch or something the year before that caused bass to be totally dialed in to eating on the bottom."

I've seen the same phenomenon in inshore flats fishing for redfish. Since coastal bays are so shallow and the fishing so visual, you can usually see exactly what the fish are eating. One year mullet schools blanket the bays, and a topwater walker is the deal. The next year the mullet are rare, but a proliferation of crabs covers the bottom. Amazingly, the same redfish that crushed topwaters the year before are now rooting around in the bottom for crabs and could care less about a plug walking over their heads.

The act of spawning among forage species can also drastically sway the interest of bass and other predatory fish that seem to instinctively know exactly where and when their forage is going to reproduce.

From freshwater bass on shad spawns to bream on mayflies to tarpon on palolo marine worm hatches to cobia homing in on molting crabs being flushed out of a pass, predator fish know their forage and where that forage originates. Whether they target the vulnerable adult forage while spawning or the forage fry when it hatches, fish know how to take advantage of easy dinners.

"Since we as humans can go get food just about anytime or anywhere we want, we have sort of lost touch with our own instincts in terms of when and where to find strong food

sources," Atkins says. "And no, the 'Hot Now' sign at the Krispy Kreme doughnut shop does not count as knowing when your 'forage' is ready to be eaten.

"Bass can't pull through the McDonald's drive-through any time they please for a 'Shad-Mac' and a large order of crawfish," he chuckles. "They have to hunt down their prey. As a result, they are extremely attuned to nature's reproductive cycles in their world. Prey that is spawning is the easiest for bass to fill their bellies with fast."

Atkins points out one of the finer points to "find the bait, find the bass" is finding the crossroads where a bumper crop of forage has reached spawning age.

"The easiest example here is with bream because they are so visible," he explains. "Let's say one year bream fry have a huge survival rate, and there is a bumper crop of bream in the system. When that abnormally large population of bream becomes old enough to spawn, suddenly the shallows are filled with more bream than normal making beds everywhere. Now you have the forage double whammy: a bumper crop of bream that are now spawning. You can bet every bass in the system knows exactly where and when to take advantage of that.

"And that's one of the coolest things about bass fishing: That predator-prey relationship is ever-changing," Atkins adds. "Today's all-you-can-eat buffet is different from last year's, or even last month's, and the bass know about it long before we do. Finding bait is one thing, but finding *the* bait bass are eating at *that* time is really the name of the game."

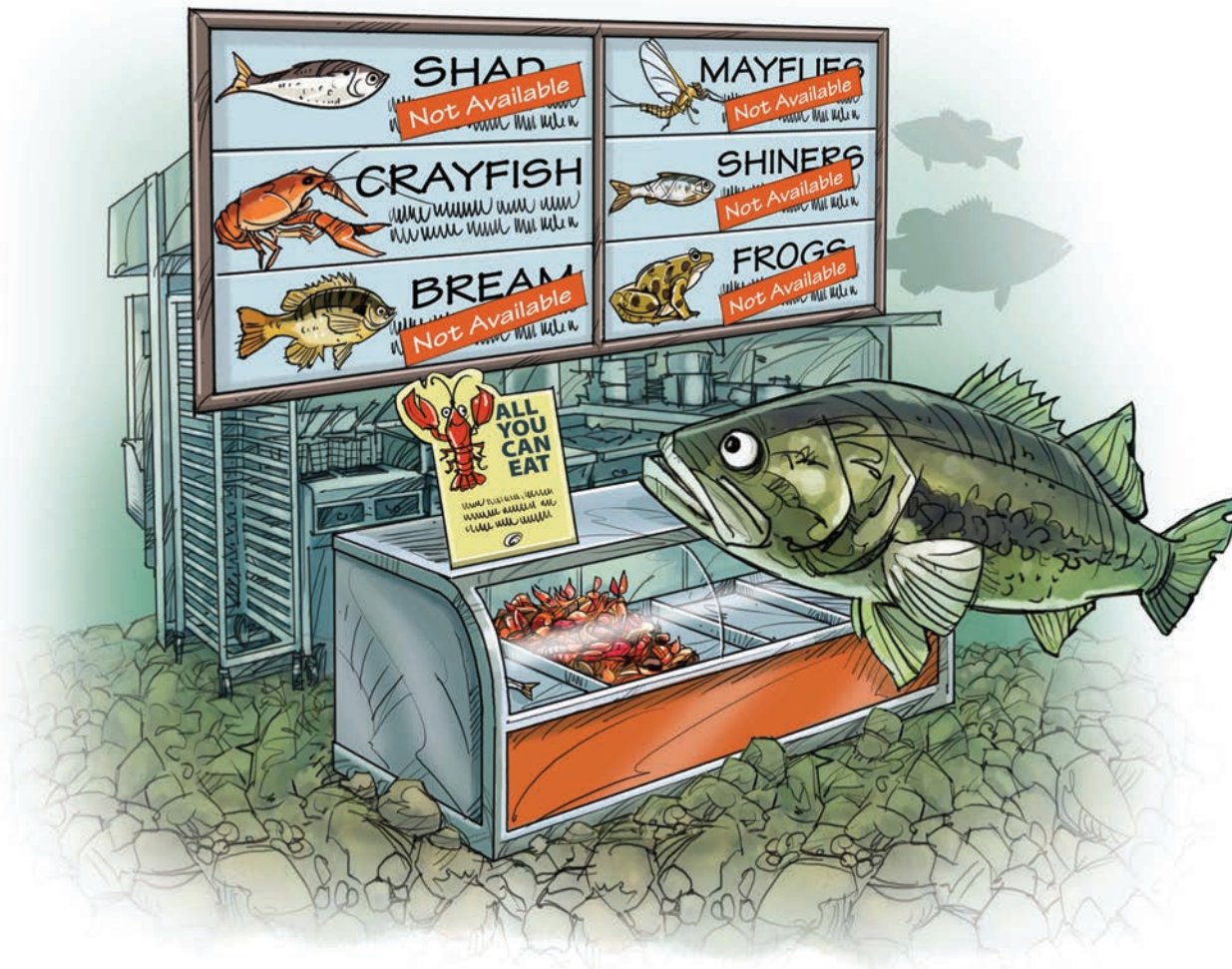


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RON LAPPIN: PREPARING FOR RETIREMENT

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PHOTO BY MATT PACE

Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege

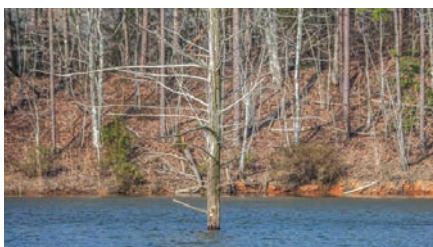
3 UMBRELLA RIG TARGETS

An umbrella rig is one of FLW Tour pro Greg Bohannon's go-to options when the water temperature is below 55 degrees in the Ozarks. He prefers small-profile umbrella rigs with 1/16- and 1/8-ounce jigheads, 3 1/2-inch swimbaits around the perimeter, and a 4- to 5-inch center swimbait. There are three primary target areas.

1. Standing timber - "Use light-wire jigheads. Fish won't straighten the hooks, and if you get snagged you can pull it free."

2. Riprap - "Instead of slow-rolling, try fishing it a little faster like a spinner-bait. It triggers a reaction bite that way."

3. Creek guts - "I like to throw it down the guts in the backs of creeks. Use willow-leaf blades for added flash when it's cloudy or windy."



PATTERNS TO WATCH

DRAWDOWNS AND MATTED VEGETATION

When reservoirs in his region (northwest Georgia) are drawn down in the fall, FLW Tour pro Buddy Gross exploits grass beds that mat up on the surface to extract trophy-class fish.

"On lakes where hydrilla grows throughout the year, but never quite makes it to the top, all of a sudden it is on top after the drawdown," he says. "Older mats from earlier in the year will be dying, and the deeper stuff will have folded over and be nice and green. It creates a perfect canopy for bass to feed on bream and other baitfish swimming around underneath."

Hollow-bodied frogs and punching baits are the most effective presentations. Productive mats can be located either back in the creeks or directly off the main lake.



PHOTO BY DW. REED II

PRO'S CHOICE: FISHING APPS



1. Bryan Thrift
SailFlow

"It's a wind app that gives you forecasts and readings for weather stations and buoys across the country. I've been using it for about three years now, and it's pretty reliable."



2. Evan Barnes
BassForecast

"It's a lot like a deer movement app. It shows you the days that you're expected to bite better, and also feeding windows and when you can expect the peak bite to be. I've actually found it to be pretty stinkin' accurate."



3. Joseph Webster
Navionics

"The Navionics app is my favorite. Whenever I have some downtime, I can look at maps on my phone and do lake research. It's very convenient." ■



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California's Aaron Britt combines subtle drop-shot techniques with careful Lowrance screen study to fool smallmouths, largemouths and spotted bass into biting.

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

VIDEO GAME CHEAT CODES

4 SIMPLE MANEUVERS TO GET BASS TO BITE A DROP-SHOT WHEN VERTICAL FISHING

The area where FLW Tour pro Aaron Britt lives in northern California is home to deep, clear reservoirs and big spotted bass. Living there has granted him great opportunities to “video game” fish with a drop-shot, and Britt has spent countless hours with his head down watching his Lowrance units and learning the technique.

According to Britt, each fish you encounter is different, and there are subtle clues in the way they act that suggest the best move to trigger bass to bite. These are his typical go-to techniques. If they don't work, he experiments until he figures out what does.

What to do when: A bass rises to the bait

A bass headed for his bait is a sign to Britt that he's on the right track. He'll still make subtle adjustments based on how quickly the fish rises.

“If you see the streaks [sonar return] moving really fast, that is an aggressive fish looking to eat,” he says. “I will stop the bait and wiggle it a few times, and if they are going to get it, it will usually happen right away.

“If they are slowly coming up they are probably more curious than anything. You can usually still get these fish to bite if you lower your bait slowly down to the bottom.”

What to do when: A bass stops beneath the bait

In Britt's experience, a fish that stops close to the bait is usually willing to bite, but something has caused it to lose some interest and stop its approach to investigate the lure.

In this situation, Britt will do whatever he can to regain the interest of the fish.

“I will shake it right in front of the fish, even if the drop-shot rig is in the middle of the water column. The gravity of the weight pulling down still gives the worm a very good action,” he says. “Each fish ‘talks’ to you by how quickly or slowly they rise to the bait and then how abruptly they stop. In extreme cold or hot water, you will usually have to play with the lure more to get them to bite.”

What to do when: A bass lowers back down

When Britt sees a bass rise up toward the bait on his Lowrance screen and then drop back down, it signals to him that the fish is not aggressive, but the fish is often still catchable.

In this instance, Britt will drop the bait to the bottom.

“Sometimes they will bite it just because it falls in front of them, or you may need to trigger a reaction bite,” he says. “I will reel it up about halfway and then let my drop-shot rig fall quickly to trigger them to bite. It's pure reaction.”

What to do when: A bass stays on bottom

According to Britt, if fish are positioned near the bottom, they are often easier to catch than suspended bass.

“Many times they will hit it as soon as it drops in front of them,” he says.

If they don't bite on the initial fall, he'll reel up quickly – about halfway up – and then let the rig fall quickly to try to get a reaction bite. ■

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UNDERSTANDING STRATIFICATION

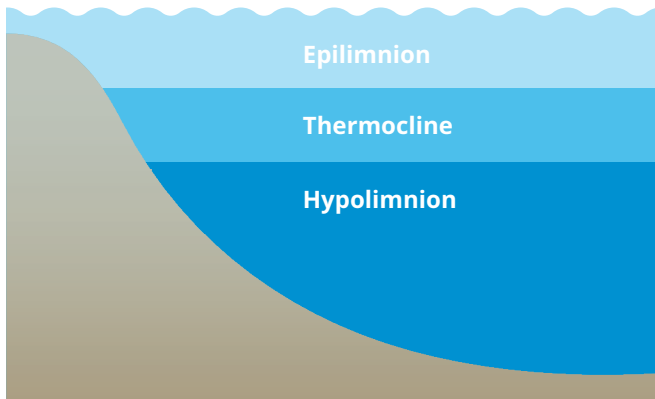
TEMPERATURE GRADIENTS AND TURNOVER CAN IMPACT BASS FISHING SUCCESS

By TJ Maglio

If you've been around fishing long enough, you've undoubtedly heard someone whining at a weigh-in line, explaining away a tough bite by saying the lake is "turning over." This is a reference to the limnologic process of temperature stratification, or when the water in a lake or reservoir forms distinct layers of different temperatures. Often misunderstood by anglers, stratification and the resulting "turnover" definitely play a role in how fish move about a lake. Understanding the process can help you catch more fish.

What is Stratification?

Unlike many substances, water is unique in that it is less dense as a solid than as a liquid (which is why ice floats). Specifically, water is at its densest at 39 degrees. Both above and below this temperature, water is less dense. So, as the temperature of the surface layer (epilimnion) rises, that water becomes less dense than the water in the cooler



layer below (hypolimnion). At a certain point (usually in spring or summer) this difference in density becomes a barrier to mixing and forms what scientists call a thermocline. The thermocline is a thin band of the water column between the upper and lower layers where, if you dropped a thermometer down through it, you'd see the temperature rapidly drop.

Do All Lakes Stratify?

One of the biggest misconceptions about stratification is that all lakes stratify. In reality, stratification is a fluid process, more likely to occur in deep, stable systems where a large temperature gradient can form between the surface and the bottom. Stratification is also non-uniform. Parts of a lake might stratify while others won't. Many reservoirs also don't stratify due to constant current from power generation.

Impacts of Stratification on a Fishery

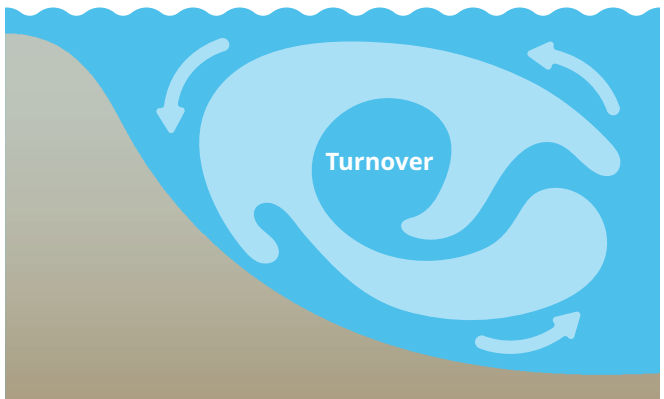
- On multi-species fisheries, stratification usually causes warm-water species to stay in the warmer water above while cold-water species thrive down below.

- Because there's relatively little mixing below the thermocline, in highly productive lakes the water below the thermocline can suffer from oxygen depletion, making it inhospitable for fish.

- Some open-water baitfish (alewives, ciscoes, blueback herring, etc.) will also use the thermocline as a type of "structure" and hang out right on top of it. As a result, the thermocline can be used to predict the depth of game fish such as bass.

Turnover?

Once surface water temperatures start to lower in the fall, there is a point where the water above and below the thermocline reach temperature equilibrium. At this point, the thermocline disappears, and wind and wave action mix the water, making the temperature relatively constant from top to bottom. This also causes waters from the bottom to reach the surface, and vice versa.



Turnover Fishing Tactics

Although anglers are quick to blame turnover for tough fishing in the fall, it's unlikely that the event has any real significant impact on the feeding activity or aggressiveness of the fish.

What turnover does impact is their location, which is probably the real culprit in most cases when the bite gets tough. Water turning over and mixing opens up the entire lake to baitfish and bass, which can cause a steady summer and early-fall pattern to die in just a matter of days as the fish go through a transition.

If you suspect the lake you're fishing is turning over, the keys to success are mobility and versatility. Don't be afraid to abandon the patterns that had been working and try something new. Cover lots of water and keep your head on a swivel while looking for baitfish visually and with your electronics. Odds are, the bass will be following the baitfish, and you might find them in unexpected places.

Top choices include topwater walking baits, lipless cranks and swimbaits. Once you find a few fish, slow down and fish the area thoroughly. ■



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RECHARGING FOR THE TOUR

By Justin Onslow

TOURNAMENT SEASON MIGHT END, BUT THE FISHING NEVER REALLY STOPS

Tour pro Greg Bohannon recharges his batteries between seasons by fishing, hunting and, most importantly, spending time with his family.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

You'd be hard-pressed to find a professional angler anywhere in the country who doesn't partake in some form of fishing when the tournament circuit ends and the winter months roll in. Sure, the season is officially over, but there's really no offseason for the pros on the FLW Tour.

While fishing and hunting often go hand in hand – and it's no surprise many Tour pros do their fair share of both in the offseason – no two anglers approach the winter months in the same fashion. The tournament trail is a grinding, grueling tour of the country's best fisheries that leaves most anglers scrambling to complete to-do lists a mile long when they finally have some time at home.

Family time, sponsor business and other domestic responsibilities (those gutters aren't going to clean themselves) are often anglers' primary focus in the couple months between seasons. Still, as is the case with 12-year FLW Tour pro Greg Bohannon, you can't expect anyone who spends nearly 10 months a year on the water to take to being cooped up indoors for very long.

"I don't have any really bad habits, but I'm an absolute whitetail addict," he admits. "My wife gets it. She grew up with older brothers who love to hunt, so she hunts with me a little bit, but she kind of gives me a November pass."



While Bohannon certainly takes his other responsibilities seriously – fishing included – there's just something about the three weeks from the end of October to Thanksgiving every year that push fishing far out of his mind.

"I do absolutely no fishing those three weeks," Bohannon continues. "I try to work really hard to keep my calendar open. My wife jokes, 'My husband is the best husband in the

It's family first for Nick LeBrun, who'll begin his rookie season on Tour in 2019.



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMAYER

world for 11 months out of the year. The month of November, he's not worth a darn."

Bohannon still makes time for family, though, and with his new Ranger boat usually in his possession by the first week of December, he makes plenty of time for fishing too. After all, it takes some time to get accustomed to a new boat, and time is precious and limited when the new fishing season starts just on the other side of the New Year.

Like Bohannon, two-time FLW Tour Angler of the Year Bryan Thrift spends much of his offseason with family, but he also does a whole lot of prep work, planning and fishing.

"I'll usually fish a day or two every week during the offseason," Thrift says. "I spend at least a couple hours every day just organizing tackle and replacing stuff I'm low on. I try to go through everything and get it organized."

With a new boat to rig up and break in, new rods and reels to test and tweak, and a slew of incoming tackle to organize, Thrift's focus is on preparation, plain and simple. But family time is the most important thing to arguably the best bass angler on the planet, and that goes for fourth-place 2018 FLW Cup finisher Nick LeBrun, as well.

"God and family are first, and it's great to be able to enjoy them and relax and recuperate, but I'm doing that in stride," explains LeBrun, who'll be a Tour rookie in 2019. "I'm still going to be going fishing and working on techniques I may need to work on and may not be as confident in, especially stuff I think will play in January and February when the Tour starts."

The Louisiana native still makes it a point to fish a couple times per week, often on Sam Rayburn (where the 2019 FLW Tour starts on Jan. 10) or Toledo Bend, both only a couple hours from LeBrun's house.

"This sport is all about momentum, and it's all mindset and keeping your mind sharp and ready," he says. "I'm happy to be back home and have some 'time off' to enjoy my family and really just kind of relax, but I'm still keeping my skills and my trade and my passion on the second burner."

LeBrun emphasizes "second burner," because he wants to make it clear that fishing is never really fully shelved and shut away from his mind. To him, there's not much need for "time off" when you're doing something you really love.

"I'm just so blessed to do what I love and do what my passion is for a living," he adds. "You really don't feel like you need much of a break. When I hear guys talking about being done fishing for the year and putting the boat in the shop, that's just not me. When I think about not fishing, I just cringe."

That goes double for pro Wes Logan, who finished seventh at the 2018 FLW Cup in his rookie season. The Alabama native works with his uncle, a general contractor, building houses in the offseason and during the Tour season when he has some free time. But when he's not working or fishing tournaments, he's hunting or fishing – and not just for bass.

"Me and my buddy, Scott Canterbury, we'll go up to Gunter'sville and Logan Martin and catch crappie and fry some," he says, "but a lot of times we'll fillet them and put them in the freezer and take them when we travel during the fishing season for stuff to eat so we don't have to eat out. It saves money, and you're getting to catch some fish."

Whether it's bass or crappie, Logan knows it's the fun of the catch that really makes it all worth it, and ultimately, that's what keeps tournament anglers coming back for more when the weather turns cold and the tournaments stop. At least for a couple months, anyway. ■

3 WAYS TO WHACK 'EM IN WINTER

By Justin Onslow

HOW TO TACKLE SOME OF THE SEASON'S TOUGHEST FISHING CONDITIONS

Winter bass fishing presents challenges and rewards in equal measure. While finding fish and getting bites in the winter months can be downright grueling, the scarcity of bites is perhaps outweighed by the quality of bass you might encounter.

Simply put: If you spend enough time fishing in the winter, you're going to catch big fish.

But finding fish is enough of a challenge to scare many anglers away from the water during the coldest months of the year, when fish are sometimes lethargic, lying low and conserving energy in anticipation for warmer weather and new opportunities to feed and reproduce.

Thankfully, FLW Tour pros Bryan Thrift, Todd Castledine and Greg Bohannon know more than a thing or two about how to find and catch bass during the coldest months of the year.

Scenario 1

Where: Lake Norman (North Carolina)
Details: January, with post-warm front conditions, sunny and calm



PHOTO BY CHAD LOVE

Two-time FLW Tour Angler of the Year Bryan Thrift is a firm believer that warm and cold fronts do little to affect where fish are positioned during the winter months. He does, however, posit that *how* fish bite during those periods is vastly different based on various conditions.

"Once those fish get into a winter pattern, if you have two or three days of warm weather, that really doesn't affect them until you get into a prespawn stage," Thrift says. "I'm going to start out with a jerkbait and a crankbait and things like that – something that I can use to effectively fish for suspended fish and fish on the bottom and try to cover water with – and then go to a jig and things like that when the sun gets high."

Thrift targets rocks and docks on Lake Norman, usually in 6 to 8 feet of water. When the sun is high, those structures retain more heat than their surroundings and often attract fish. The key to targeting those structures, though, is to know when to slow down and fish more finesse presentations.

"When you get a high bluebird sky in the winter with no wind, you really have to slow down and drag a jig slow or throw a shaky head or some kind of finesse presentation to get them to bite," Thrift says.

Scenario 2

Where: Sam Rayburn Reservoir (Texas)
Details: January, with steady, moderate temperatures, sunny and calm

Remove the cold front from the equation and January fishing on Rayburn can mean tremendous opportunities, according to Texas native Todd Castledine.

"I want it sunny," he says. "The sun will usually give a bigger window of them biting. If they haven't bit all morning long and



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

it's sunny outside, there's going to be that period around 11, 12 or 1 o'clock where you're going to see that window open up. If it's sunny and there's a little warmth, you'll see a noticeable difference.

"It [the sun] pulls them out. I think of them just like us: If it's cold, blowing and rainy outside, we don't want to get out from the covers. If it's sunny, you kind of poke your head out of the house. I swear the fish do the same thing."

On those sunny, mild January days on Rayburn, when fish are less likely to be buried under grass mats, Castledine recommends moving baits such as a lipless crankbait or jerkbait to elicit reaction strikes. If you're looking for a different kind of bite, there's only one option.

"You've got to commit with a jig or a Carolina rig or a drop-shot," Castledine adds. "You've got to go one of two ways: You either have to go shallow over the grass, or you've got to go deep to 25 or 30 feet. One of the two; there's no in between."

Scenario 3

Where: Beaver Lake (Arkansas)

Details: December, with wind, cold and spitting snow

"In early December, I really like those cold, windy, spitting snow kind of days," says FLW pro Greg Bohannon. "It's just miserable for a lot of people to be outside, but some of my best days on Beaver Lake and my biggest weights have been in December on a pre-front with cold wind and nasty weather. Those big ones really like to eat that time of year."

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN



Bohannon loves fishing Ozark lakes in December up until Christmas when the weather usually begins to turn colder for prolonged periods. But before Christmas, it's all cranking nearly all the time for the Arkansas pro.

"I'm usually throwing a crankbait nine times out of 10, or I'm throwing a jerkbait," he says. "It's one of those two things. The fish are still shallow in December. They're feeding really heavy before it gets bitter cold. It's a great time to fish shallow."

"We get some of our coldest weather in January. If you go during that time, you have to switch back over to an umbrella rig, but up until Christmastime, that crankbait bite's really pretty good." ■


An advertisement for E3 Sport Apparel. On the left, a black fishing jersey with a camouflage pattern is displayed. The jersey features several logos: Abu Garcia, Berkley, Minn Kota, Evinrude E-TEC, and Pym1 Camo. On the right, the E3 logo is prominently shown above the text 'E3 Sport Apparel'. Below this, the slogan 'Anglers are Athletes' is written in a large, bold, italicized font. At the bottom center, the website 'E3SPORT.COM' is displayed in a bold, italicized font. The background consists of red and black curved stripes.



By Colin Moore

RON LAPPIN'S LONG GOODBYE

LONGTIME TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR PREPARES TO HAND OFF THE REINS



For the umpteenth time, Ron Lappin took the wadded towel and wiped out the bottom of the weigh-in container. Nobody could say they missed a better paycheck because a few ounces of water in an opponent's bag leaked into the tray and boosted the other guy's weight. Lappin talked into the microphone as he wiped, thanking the anglers, thanking the crowd of onlookers for attending, thanking local officials, thanking anyone who had anything to do with the tournament.

The wiping routine has perhaps become more of a habit than a necessity, one of the idiosyncrasies of a man who doesn't have many. Lappin's sameness is one of the reasons the anglers in this Costa FLW Series event appreciate him. Lappin is always there, the guy who alternately celebrates and commiserates with them, a witness to their elation or disappointment: part of the landscape, part of the permanence.

The landscape will change in 2019. As of the Costa FLW Series Championship in early November, Lappin stepped down as tournament director and handed off the job to Mark McWha, another veteran of the FLW tournament department. In 2019, Lappin, along with his wife, Joan, whose official title is "tournament administrator," will travel to various tournaments and train replacements on the finer points of organizing and running a Costa event.

After that, full retirement follows for Ron, but "retirement" is a relative term, especially for a 67-year-old already too busy to take much of a break from the various projects in which he's engaged.

A Look Back

Lappin was prepared to live an ordinary life, and his early years might be described as playing out according to form. When you grow up in a small town in the Tennessee River Valley of western Kentucky, there aren't many variables. You go to school, enter the military, or get a job at one of the plants or other businesses in Paducah or Calvert City, and

maybe get married and raise a family to start the cycle all over.

Out of high school, Lappin took a sales job at Calvert City Lumber Company. Then, his fishing ability and knowledge of Kentucky and Barkley lakes encouraged him to open a guide service in 1976. Unpretentiously, it was called "Ron's Guide Service," and, as Lappin puts it, he and customers "went after whatever was biting best at the time."

Eventually, Lappin landed a better job at Air Products and Chemicals in Calvert City, then joined Ranger Boats part time from 1987 to 1994 and helped out with local promotions and special events. Even then, Lappin kept his guiding business, and continued on with it until he retired from Air Products in 1992. Six years later, on the first day of September, he joined FLW and went to work in its Red Man Tournament Trail, which later became the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League.

By then, Lappin knew what bass tournaments were all about, and switching from fishing them to running them was an easy transition. He led Red Man's LBL Division point standings a couple of years — and even the national point standings — and brought a tournament angler's empathy to the events that he conducted.

"I think the most important thing about being a tournament director is that you're also a tournament fisherman yourself," he explains. "You understand the emotions of a tournament fisherman — the good, the bad and the indifferent — because you are one and think like one. When you come from that background, you know what to expect from a fisherman when he wins or he loses, or his side of the story when there's been a rules violation, or where he's coming from when there's a disagreement.

"That's why FLW tournaments have been so successful; most of the people who work at FLW fish tournaments themselves when they're not on the road. We all love fishing tournaments. It's a great community to be in."

The Tournament Years

As the clock ticked down on his final hours as an FLW tournament director, Lappin was reminded at every stop that he will be missed. Anglers he's known for years, and who love him like a brother, made it a point to wish him well as he was in the process of finishing a long career as Costa FLW Series tournament director. Many of them call him "Pop," not so much because of any age variance, but because Lappin has become a fatherly figure even to the veterans.

Lappin's mannerisms and expressions on a weigh-in stage indicated that, heavy sacks or light sacks, he empathized with the competitors. Old friends or newcomers with promising futures – he wanted all of them to fish up to their potential and to do well, though only a relative handful would.

A stickler for the rules, Lappin nevertheless was hard when he had to be. He never took a chance on safety no matter how many anglers grumbled. Without hesitation, he postponed or suspended fishing days because of fog or high winds, using his own experience as a fisherman to inform his decisions.

"I've always said that if every tournament fisherman had to go through the process of applying for the required permits, putting a tournament together and then conducting one from start to finish, he'd understand what it's like to be a tournament director and make the hard decisions you sometimes have to make," notes Lappin. "You're responsible for the safety and lives of people.

"But I also understand that fishermen have strong competitive feelings that come out in a tournament. It's wild. I know people who are meek and mild until you say 'go,' and then the competitive spirit comes out and they change completely. A tournament director has to balance what everybody wants with what has to be because of considerations for safety."

With Joan as his working partner, Ron oversaw more than 500 tournaments, spent an average of 150 nights a year away from home and put more than 40,000 miles per year on his company vehicle. A witness to triumph and tragedy, he's also been at the center of tournament history. There was Ray Hanselman, who won three straight Southwestern Division tournaments in 2015 and then the championship – a feat that likely will never be repeated on any level. Ron was also weighmaster

at the Falcon Lake Southwestern Division tournament in 2010 when Keith Combs brought in the all-time FLW record single-day weight of 41 pounds, 1 ounce. By and large, Costa FLW Series events have been the bridge connecting aspiring anglers from the BFL to stardom on the FLW Tour, with fisheries from New York's Lake Champlain to California's Clear Lake the proving grounds.

Life After FLW

Lappin isn't leaving the Costa FLW Series because of some preconceived notion about when he would retire. Various ailments and injuries have taken their toll, and he simply wants to enjoy the years of reasonably good health he has left.

The Lappins have a daughter and two grandchildren, and they plan to spend more time with them as well as the rest of their families. Likewise, Ron will fish "for whatever's biting best," which is sure to include Kentucky Lake's yellow bass, his favorite table fare.

Then there are the various charitable projects the Lappins have engaged in over the years. That includes cooking for Marcella's Kitchen, a Benton, Ky., ministry that provides meals to persons of limited income and others, organizing fish fries and cookouts for local charities, pitching in to help charity tournaments, and otherwise lending a helping hand to anyone who needs it.

The Lappins have worked with Marcella's Kitchen since it opened seven years ago. Along the way, Ron

also started the Ronald McDonald House Charity Tournament. It's staged on Kentucky Lake the first weekend in June and has raised thousands of dollars. Likewise, under the auspices of their church, First Baptist Church of Calvert City, the Lappins cook for the Veteran's Fish Fry that takes place on the Friday closest to Veteran's Day each November. Veterans eat for free, and others pay a nominal fee that's forwarded to the Wounded Warrior Project.

Somewhere along the way, Ron also found the time to help jump-start the Marshall County High School fishing program, more or less building it from the ground up for two years until a teacher with a passion for fishing was able to take over.

"We've got a lot to keep us busy," he observes. "We'll have more time to do some of the things we enjoy, and we'll still be around tournaments as much as we can. That's where most of our friends are.

"We've experienced things, seen wonderful places and enjoyed interesting lifestyles. Mainly, though, we've met a lot of great people through our positions at FLW that we otherwise wouldn't have known," continues Ron. "Chris Jones [FLW Tour weighmaster and master of ceremonies] said it best at the Forrest Wood Cup when he said that Joan and I love our customers."

The thousands of Costa FLW Series fishermen who have known the Lappins for the past 20 years and fished their tournaments would no doubt say that the feeling is mutual. ■





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Most basic outboard maintenance is outlined in the owner's manual. If in doubt, consult an authorized dealer or mechanic.

FOUR-STROKE MAINTENANCE

BASIC UPKEEP FOR FOUR-STROKE OUTBOARD MOTORS

By Joe Balog

PHOTOS BY MILLENNIUM PROMOTIONS, INC.

Whether you outfit your rig with a two-stroke or four-stroke outboard hinges on the type of boat you're running and what your performance needs are on the water. What's much more cut and dry is the difference in routine service schedules between the two.

Two-stroke maintenance has been covered extensively in this and other publications. If you're considering a four-stroke and want to learn more about how to keep it performing optimally, whether your maintenance is done at home or by a professional, the steps outlined here should help out.

We consulted members of the service crew at Toho Marine and Outdoors in St. Cloud, Fla., one of the country's largest bass boat dealers, for the basics. Luckily, there are some industry standards (and rough guidelines) to follow when it comes to four-strokes, but some of the specifics vary by make and model. If you decide to tackle it yourself, you'll want to consult your dealer to make sure you're following the proper maintenance procedures. And, it's never a bad idea to simply rely on the dealer to do the maintenance for you. If that's the route you go, you'll understand the basics and know what services are being provided after reading this.



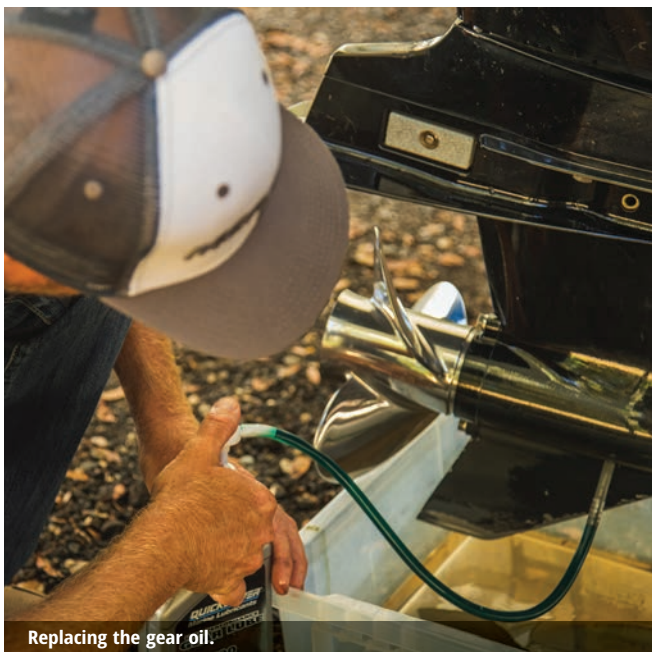
Draining the engine oil.

Change Engine Oil

If your new four-stroke has been broken in correctly (according to manufacturer's recommendations) and operated for a few months under normal bass fishing conditions, the first maintenance usually occurs at the 20-hour mark.

At that time, the engine oil and oil filter should be changed. Only use factory-recommended parts and lubricants. Although four-stroke motors perform similar to, say, an automobile, their needs are drastically different. For example, oil must be able to withstand extended high RPM.

Changing oil is simple. A drain screw is located on the lower gear case. A special wrench may be needed for the oil filter located beneath the cowling, but it, too, can be easily removed and replaced. Don't over-tighten when you replace it, and refill with the appropriate amount of oil.



Replacing the gear oil.

Change Gear Oil

Along with an engine oil change, owners should also change gear oil at 20 hours. The drain and vent screws for this may be located on the lower unit, or possibly behind the prop. In any case, both must be removed to allow all the gear oil to drain. Check the oil for any discoloration (milky means water has entered the gear case) or metal pieces. The drain screw is also magnetic; check it for shavings that could indicate a gear problem.

When refilling, gear oil must be pumped back in through the drain hole until it comes out the vent. Wait five minutes and pump a little more in to ensure it's filled to capacity.

Change Fuel Filters

Fuel filters require initial 20-hour maintenance as well. Large four-stroke outboards include a fuel/water separator filter in the bilge area of the boat. This can be easily changed and should be during this initial service. Other filters vary by manufacturer. For instance, Yamaha recommends an authorized dealer check and change other fuel filters (located on the motor) at 20 hours, then again every 100 hours. The Mercury Verado also includes an additional pressurized filter that should be serviced by a dealer, but not until 300 hours.



Inspecting the fuel filter.

1-Year Maintenance

Usually, after one year or 100 hours it's time for the outboard's second scheduled maintenance. At this point, engine oil and filter, gear oil, and fuel filters should be changed again. In addition, the water pump should be inspected, and the impeller should be changed by the dealer (while the impeller may be in good shape, simple pump inspection requires substantial labor cost, so the part is changed for preventive purposes). In addition, spark plugs should be inspected and changed as needed. Good plugs will have a bronze coloration and sharp edges.

Additionally, some dealers such as Toho Marine will perform further tests as part of their regular 100-hour service, including a computer diagnostic to check for codes that might indicate operating errors, and make sure the motor is firing efficiently. Further service also includes a compression check to ensure there's no advanced carbon build-up or ring problems within the motor.

This same 100-hour service should be performed annually with normal usage. As discussed, check your user manual for recommended 300-hour inspections and filter changes, as well as belt service at 1,000 hours.

MORE ADVICE

A number of other service items can reduce headaches on the water:

1. Use fuel additives whenever possible, and stabilizer when needed, to reduce carbon build-up and fight the problems created by ethanol.
2. Fight corrosion on battery terminals with terminal cleaner.
3. Spray down the cowling seal with a silicone spray to keep it supple and watertight.
4. Visually inspect the power trim and tilt rams and seals for any leaks, and retract the rams all the way in during extended periods of non-use.
5. Each spring, inspect the cooling system outflow hole on the side of the motor to ensure it's not clogged.
6. Finally, the best tip for any of today's outboards: Buy gas at a busy station, and do not allow it to sit in your tank for more than a few months. ■



HOW KAYAK TOURNAMENTS WORK

THE BASIC PROCESS FOR A CPR KAYAK DERBY ENSURES A FAIR OUTCOME

By Matt Ball

ILLUSTRATION BY RACHAEL IDZERDA

As the popularity of kayak tournaments has increased, so, too, have the payouts. In spring 2018, Texas angler Dwayne Taff cashed a check for \$100,000 for winning the 2018 Kayak Bass Fishing (KBF) National Championship.

When I talk to anglers who aren't familiar with kayak fishing and tell them about the payouts and participation numbers, conversation generally transitions to how we compete fairly without having a live weigh-in or a livewell.

Kayak tournaments utilize the "catch, photo and release" system, or CPR, which came on the scene about a decade ago and has evolved into what is a very accurate and fair way to conduct a tournament. Essentially, fish are landed, photographed on a measuring board (according to specific parameters) and released. The photos are then uploaded for verification with tournament staff so the fish can be applied to the day's catch.

There are a few items needed in order to get an accurate picture of your catch and to get credit for it in a tournament.

Measuring Board

In CPR tournaments, fish are judged by length. The fish, with its mouth fully closed, must touch the front of the bump board. Measurements on the board are divided into 1/4-inch increments.

To score, the tail must touch the mark. If it falls in between two marks on the board, the length is rounded down to the closest 1/4-inch mark. Most tournaments total up the five best fish, but specifics vary by organizer.

Anglers use the same standardized board, which has been approved for the tournament in which they are competing. Most tournaments require anglers to supply their own approved board, which might be inspected by the tournament director at any time.

Identifier

To verify that a fish entered in a tournament was caught that day and not last week, kayak anglers use a unique identifier that is given out on tournament day. The identifier might be a card or wristband, or a three- to five-digit code written on the back of the angler's hand or on a card. It must be visible in each photo for the fish to count.

Camera

Fish caught in the tournament get photographed with a cell phone. The camera needs to display a time/date stamp, as well as location tags, in order for the judges to verify that the fish was caught in legal waters during the competition times.



Management Software

Most of the major tournaments use some sort of tournament management software and smartphone app to submit photos and judge fish catches. Popular options include iAngler Tournament, kayakfishingseries.com and Tourney X, which is the choice of KBF, one of the top kayak trails in the nation. Prior to the tournament, each angler registers on the appropriate website so that photos can be uploaded during competition using the app.

The judges then look for all the required information in the photo and either accept or decline the fish for competition. They check for a clear picture that verifies the length, use of a proper identifier, location of the fish caught, evidence of it being caught from a kayak, and a legal date and time stamp. The judges also check for any deduction penalties, which are spelled out in the rules for each tournament. For instance, some events allow the fish's mouth to be open; others have a set deduction for an open mouth. Same for a pinched tail. The fish is then given a final length measurement by the judge.

Judges also check for identifying marks on the fish to ensure that the same fish has not been submitted more than once. To make this easier, every fish must be measured in the same way. The standard is to photograph the fish with the mouth pointing to the left and dorsal fin up. This makes it easier to look for markings on the fish to verify that it has not been submitted more than once.

Launch and Check-in

Normally there is not a designated launch ramp in a kayak tournament. Instead, anglers are given boundaries in which

they are allowed to compete. The night before the tournament, a meeting is usually held that covers rules and specific times for launch, first cast and end-of-day proceedings, including the cutoff time for competition, a photo upload cutoff time and a check-in time when anglers need to be back to the tournament headquarters. This is also the location at which anglers who might have had trouble uploading photos can manually submit their catches for judging.

Making the System Work

The system has evolved a lot over the last few years thanks to national and local clubs that have invested time into making CPR tournaments a success. Like some sports where big money is involved, there have been instances where cheaters have been caught, but the fact that they were caught helps prove that the system works.

The benefits of CPR far outweigh the negatives when it comes to fish health and conservation, which is just one more reason why, if you're interested in giving kayak tournaments a shot, you should consider signing up. There are clubs all around the country that welcome new anglers. And now that you know how the system works, you might find new opportunities to make a few bucks and earn some trophies on the water. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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



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WHAT'S INSIDE:

Product review: Team Lew's Pro-Ti baitcaster

Cool new jigs, hard baits, umbrella rigs and more

13 WAYS TO TWEAK YOUR TACKLE WITH HARDWARE STORE FINDS



TEAM LEW'S PRO-TI SPEED SPOOL SLP SERIES

By Matt Williams

PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

If baitcasters were described as athletes, it might be fitting to portray this all-star as a tricked-out mix combining a world-class powerlifter with an Olympic figure skater and a salty little racehorse jockey. Among other things, it's a tough reel that's smooth to operate. There are plenty of reasons for anglers who demand top quality in their reels to give the Pro-Ti a serious look.

First Impression

The Pro-Ti is built around the company's popular Super Low Profile (SLP) platform and is so compact you can almost hide it in the palm of your hand. At 6.3 ounces, it's not the lightest baitcaster Lew's has ever cranked out, but it is certainly one of the toughest and most functional thanks to a long

list of premium components designed with durability, high performance and weight reduction in mind.

Among the standout features are a sturdy one-piece aluminum frame, rigid aluminum-alloy gearing, 20-pound drag, six-pin/27-point centrifugal braking system and 11 stainless ball bearings to keep everything spinning smoothly. It's also got a 3 3/4-inch carbon fiber winch for a handle, with sticky Winn grips.

In Action

Like every other Lew's reel in my rod locker, the Pro-Ti turned out to be a real pleasure to fish with. I put it to work in several arenas ranging from heavy-cover flipping and pitching with big tungsten weights to long-range casting with frogs, Texas and Carolina

rigs, wacky worms, and lipless cranks as light as 1/4 ounce. It consistently delivered blue-ribbon results in terms of smoothness, distance and trouble-free operation.

The spool spun free and easy. I fished it with baits of varied sizes and in changing wind speeds and found the responsive braking system was simple to dial in with a click or two of the external knob. While I wouldn't make a habit of it, I wouldn't hesitate to toss a 3/16-ounce shaky head with this reel if my spinning gear crapped out for some reason.

Equally impressive is the power. I didn't land any monsters with it, but I was able to tackle enough thick-shouldered grass bass to realize the Pro-Ti – with its big handle, sticky grips and the drag cinched down tight – can really

winch fish out of heavy cover. You might not win every battle, but I promise none will be lost for a lack of guts in the reel.

Final Thoughts

Plenty should be expected from a baitcaster with a \$350 price tag, and this one delivers as many or more goods than any in its class. Not only is the Pro-Ti built to perform like a champ, but it's gifted with a few other nifty features to help make those long days on the water more enjoyable. The Speed Keeper, Speed Dial and Lube Port are nice touches (see right-hand page for more).

It's a high-performance reel, but on top of that the reel's cosmetics bespeak its quality. The side plates have a rich titanium finish with satin purple accents, completing what is a really nice reel package.

RETRACTABLE SPEED KEEPER:

This handy hook keeper is located on the right inner wall, level with the reel seat. I've fished for hours with the keeper deployed and no issues, but it's a good idea to stow it when not in use.



REMOVEABLE LUBE PORT PLATE:

It's handy in case the gears need a little grease.

SPEED DIAL INDICATOR:

Located on the face of the tension knob, it makes identifying the size and type of line on the spool easy.



Performance Advice

It's a good idea to give the Winn grips an occasional cleaning, but there is a right way and wrong way to do it.

Winn recommends applying a small amount of water or rubbing alcohol to a soft, clean towel and gently massaging each grip. It's important not to saturate the towel or to scrub the grips with a brush and soapy water, which could destroy the tacky feel.

HITS & MISSES

- + 27-position braking system for optimal control
- + Large handle fitted with Winn Dri-Tac grips
- + Rock-solid one-piece aluminum frame
- + Super-low profile; comfortable feel
- + Consistently smooth casting
- + Light weight (6.3 ounces)
- + Precision-cut gearing
- Only one gear ratio available

DETAILS

Bearings:
11 (stainless)

Gear Ratio:
7.5:1

Left- and Right-Handed Models:
yes

Capacity:
110 yards,
12-pound test

Drag Pressure:
20 pounds

Weight:
6.3 ounces

MSRP:
\$349.99

Contact:
lews.com ■

APPLICATIONS

- The only gear ratio available is 7.5:1, which is just fine for most fishing applications. Use the Pro-Ti for pitching and flipping, bombing long casts and just about everything in between. If you prefer a slower gear ratio for deep cranking or other tactics, then you might want to take a look at some of Lew's other options.

>> ON THE WATER





3





1. PICASSO LURES BFL SMACKDOWN

Three lengths, four- and five-blade configurations, quick-change swivels, and three blade color options provide a lot of room for customization in this T-H Marine BFL/Costa FLW Series-legal umbrella rig.

\$18.99 to \$19.99 | picassooutdoors.com

2. STANLEY BIG NASTY FLIPPIN' JIG

An aggressive-looking tuna hook that Stanley says is strong enough to pull a Toyota Tundra makes up the business end of this jig. It comes in 3/8- to 1 1/4-ounce sizes.

\$2.50 | fishstanley.com



3. LIVETARGET ICT SKIP SHAD AND TWITCH MINNOW

ICT means Injected Core Technology, which is the process used to combine a detailed bait-fish-imitating soft-plastic core with a soft, yet protective polymer shell for these realistic-looking minnow baits that flutter and dance on the fall. With either model, you can skip it, jerk it, rig it weightless, or add it to drop-shots and Carolina rigs.

\$9.99 for three or four | livetargetlures.com



4. STANLEY VIBRA WEDGE EXTREME

The wire arm tapers from .041 to .018 inch. The result is a blade setup that's durable, but allows for more vibration. A Code Red version features a red head. It comes in 3/8 and 1/2 ounce.

\$8.99 | fishstanley.com

5. PH CUSTOM LURES ROLLING P

Made in America from juletong wood, a soft-wood that grows in southern Asia and is ideal for carving, the Rolling P is a prop bait that cuts the surface and simultaneously rolls when twitched. PH designed it to cast easily and create a loud commotion – perfect for windy, choppy days.

\$10.99 | phcustomlures.com



6. PH CUSTOM LURES HERRIN 2.0

Combine classic balsa action with the “modern” square-bill body shape and you get the Herrin 2.0. It runs about 6 feet deep on 12-pound-test fluorocarbon and ticks through cover easily.

The circuit board lip is made to take a beating.
\$22.99 | phcustomlures.com

7. HALE LURE CO. SIDETRAC MUD PUPPY

Depending how you hook it, the 6-inch Sidetrac Mud Puppy can be made to glide left, right or straight away on the fall. Fish it weightless with a lift-hop presentation to make it glide.

\$5.76 for five | fishstanley.com ■

13 DIY TACKLE PROJECTS

EASY HARDWARE STORE TACKLE TWEAKS THAT ARE INEXPENSIVE, BUT EFFECTIVE

1. Create a Trailer or Stinger Hook with PVC Tubing

Want to turn any hook into a trailer or stinger hook? Head to the plumbing department and buy some clear tubing. Cut off a small piece and put it around the eyelet of the hook you want to use before piercing it on the main hook.

– Sean Ostruszka

2. Add a Scale Pattern with Drywall Tape and Spray Paint

A fancy scale pattern can make any hard bait, blade bait or spinner-bait blade look good, but if you're in a pinch and want to replicate a color pattern or convert an oddball pattern into something better, just pick up a roll of drywall tape and some spray paint. Stick the tape to the lure, cover anything you don't want to cover with painter's tape, spray over it, remove the tape and your bait now has scales.

– Sean Ostruszka

3. Use GREAT STUFF to Repair And Modify Lures

GREAT STUFF expanding foam can seal a leaky hard bait, turn a rattling bait silent or even enhance the buoyancy of a plastic crankbait to make it act more like a balsa one. Simply drill a small hole in the bait's body, tightly snug the nozzle into the hole and spray in a small amount. GREAT STUFF expands A LOT, so a little is more than enough. Just let it expand and dry, carve off and sand the excess, and you're done.

– Sean Ostruszka



4. Contain Umbrella Rigs with O-rings

One of the quickest and least expensive ways to make an umbrella rig more manageable to store is to use a small, rubber O-ring (frequently used to fix a leaky faucet) to retract the wires and hold them in place.

To use it, hold the ends of the wires together, and slide the O-ring down to keep them in place. To deploy the wires, slide the O-ring up so it rides at the base of the head. It won't affect the action of the rig, but it'll be there when you need it.

Umbrella rig head and O-ring sizes vary, so it's a good idea to bring your rig of choice to the hardware store to make sure you get the right size. The ring should fit snug as it slides over the head, but loose around the "neck" area. An O-ring with an inside diameter of 3/8 inch is a good starting point, but you might need to go slightly bigger or smaller depending on the rig. A large split ring works too.

– Sean Ostruszka

5. Weight Jerkbait with Solder Wire

Solder wire makes a great "weight" for dialing in the suspending action of a jerkbait. Just wrap it around the shank of a treble hook. Adding weight to the middle hook will make the bait suspend horizontally, while putting it on the front hook creates a nose-down position.

Multiple sizes and metal combinations are available in solder wire. Look for a thin, pliable electrical solder that is easy to wrap and won't end up too bulky. For really small hooks, buy some lead wire wrap from a fly-tying retailer.

– Tyler Brinks

6. Create a Simple Rod Balancer

Rubber leg tips and plastic covers used to slip over the ends of kitchen chairs and walking canes make good rod balancers. Measure the diameter of the rod end, and match it to the closest corresponding size. Covers are generally available in sizes ranging from 3/4 inch to 1 1/2 inches, in 1/8-inch increments.

Slip the cover on the rod butt, which might be enough weight to create a more balanced feel. If you need more weight, add quarters or nickels in the bottom of the cover before sliding it on the rod. Wrap electrical tape around the rod butt if a tighter fit is desired.

This system is mostly used with long, heavy flipping sticks, or other heavy-action rods that at times can feel cumbersome and tip heavy.

– Paul Strege

7. Use an Earplug to Add Scent To a Tube

The hollow body of a tube is a perfect reservoir for your favorite scent. To make the scent last even longer, douse an old foam-rubber earplug in your stinky stuff of choice, stuff it into the tube body and then rig it up. Your scent will last longer than your tube.

– TJ Maglio

8. Tie Skirts with Craft Wire

Lengthen the life of your skirted baits by “hand tying” them out of the package with 22-gauge or smaller craft wire from a local hardware or craft store. Cut a piece a few inches long. Bend it into a U-shape around the skirt band. Twist the two ends together by hand once, and then use a needle-nose plier to twist the wrap a couple more times. It should tighten onto the band. Clip off any excess, and your skirt will be secured for the life of the lure.

– TJ Maglio



9. Create Your Own Rattles

Glass lure rattles are great, but they can break and are quite expensive. Make your own rattles with some aluminum or copper craft tubing and a few 1mm or 2mm metal beads (available in the necklace-making section of most craft stores). Lead shot works too, and provides a different pitch.

To make one, crimp one end of the tubing, put some beads in, and cut the other side diagonally. Copper will crimp when you cut it; aluminum might not. The beveled cut makes it easy to insert the rattle into plastics.

– TJ Maglio

10. Make a Wire Swimbait Keeper

Ditch messy glue in favor of a homemade wire swimbait keeper. Attach one end of a 5- to 6-inch piece of wire or a paper clip to a jighead's line tie with a simple twist loop. Next, about 1 1/2 inches back, bend the wire down toward the hook at a 45-degree angle. Now create a V-bend bend in the end of the wire. The V should be about 1/4 inch deep. Trim off the excess.

To install, slide the swimbait up in place, then push the V through the top of the plastic. It should clip around the hook shank. Adjust the length and angle of the keeper as needed.

– David A. Brown

11. Make a Frog a Popper with A Suction Cup

Turning your favorite “standard” frog into a popping frog is easy with a suction cup. First, clip off the “nipple” on the suction cup and pierce a hole through its center with a thin tack or nail. Slide a rubber bobber stop up the line, followed by the suction cup. Now tie on the frog and push the bobber stop down to hold the suction cup in place. Suction cups are cheap and come in packs of several. You can also try to Paycheck Baits Nose Job, which serves the same purpose.

– Curtis Niedermier

12. Prevent Swimbait Tears With a Toothpick

A soft-plastic swimbait body or straight-tail swimbait body (like the Jenko Tremor Shad or Castaic Jerky J) can tear easily on the hookset when the plastic is forced down the hook shank. A toothpick, carefully inserted through the body, blocks the plastic from sliding and tearing. Jake Lawrence, Costa FLW Series pro from Paris, Tenn., has perfected the trick. First, he glues the jighead in place and tests the bait to make sure it's running true. Then he inserts the toothpick through one side and out the other, so that it rests on top of the hook shank just in front of where the hook bend begins. When using a hollow swimbait, he always glues the ends of the toothpick in place. Lawrence says using the trick has made a single hard-to-find Jerky J last for a week or more.

– Curtis Niedermier



13. Turn a Swimbait into a Line-Thru with a Pop Rivet

Lawrence also converts unrigged swimbaits into line-thrus using two techniques. Originally, he pushed the rivet end of a pop rivet from the belly up through the nose of the bait. He then passed his line through the rivet and tied on a belly treble hook. Small nail weights inserted as low in the belly as possible helped “balance” the bait for proper action.

More recently, Lawrence discovered the Fattube Line Thru Swimbait Tube (visit TackleWarehouse.com). It looks like a rivet, but comes in a weightless plastic version and several weighted versions made of brass. To rig the Fattube, Lawrence first pushes a toothpick through the bait, from the nose to the belly, to “pre-drill” a channel. He then slides the Fattube right over the toothpick (to make sure it's straight), removes the toothpick and ties up.

Either method works, but the key is to keep the bait straight, and to run the rivet or Fattube at the correct angle. With either, the broad end should be on the belly side. Line it up by laying the swimbait down on its side, holding the rivet or Fattube outside the body, and marking the exit point on the belly. Then rig it.

Expect to tear up a few baits in the process of learning how to make this rig, but Lawrence says once you learn to do it properly the swimbaits will last a long time and are highly effective.

– Curtis Niedermier



EPOXY: YOUR ULTIMATE TOOL

By Sean Ostruszka

Anglers carry a lot of tools with them on the water, though there's one they should have, but often forget: epoxy. Whether it's resealing a crankbait, welding that piece of your trolling motor back together to finish your day or fixing any of the thousands of other things that can break on the water, epoxy is often the cure-all.

Choose a clear, waterproof, five-minute epoxy. Store it in a plastic bag with some paper cups, Popsicle sticks for mixing and craft paintbrushes for application.

Five-minute epoxy cures fast, so make sure everything is ready to be glued back together (dry and ready to be assembled) before mixing it. Also, once you feel it warming up through the paper cup, it's curing, so waiting an extra couple seconds after that point will minimize drips, as the epoxy will set even faster once applied. ■



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How Brian Latimer unlocks the potential of spinning rods for tournament bass fishing

By Curtis Niedermier

PHOTOS BY JACOB FINE

This era in bass fishing might be the glory days of the spinning rod. Think about it:

Tournament participation is up, so bass are more pressured than ever. Our waters are getting cleaner and clearer. New finesse baits are proving to be ever more productive, and thus, of greater value to tournament anglers. And modern fishing lines are thinner, stronger and longer lasting than ever before.

In each case, the spinning rod is the tool of choice to either counter the conditions (pressured bass, clear water) or capitalize on new finesse tackle (Neko rigs, spybaits, superline, etc.).

That's why it's not surprising that the top anglers across FLW's circuits are probably using spinning rods more than ever before.

If you're on board the "fairy wand" bandwagon, stand by, because FLW pro Brian Latimer has some insight into how to refine your equipment for better results. If you're not on board and are a dedicated baitcast "thumber," here's a PSA from the Carolina pro:

"Nowadays, how can you really call yourself a fisherman and not take the time to learn a specific technique or tool? A spinning rod is nothing but a tool," Latimer says. "It doesn't make you more masculine because you used 80-pound braid and an 8-foot rod. That'd be the same thing as a mechanic using only one wrench."

Latimer's spinning tackle system is rooted in efficiency and tested on the waters of the FLW Tour, as well as in the boat with clients who participate in his Angler Development sessions. His system works.



Choosing Rods: Soft Plastics

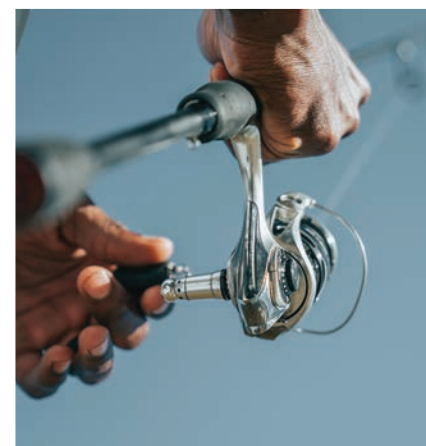
For fishing wacky rigs, Neko rigs, drop-shots and shaky heads, Latimer's go-to rod is a 7-foot, medium Favorite Jack Hammer.

"My spinning setups are probably a little softer than other people like," Latimer explains. "I use a pretty soft rod with anything I fish where I feel the bite then set the hook. But I don't do a lot of real hook-setting with that. It's a real subtle, gentle pull. Our hooks are so good nowadays that you don't really need to do a lot."

A parabolic rod action allows for using low-stretch, thin lines with less worry about breaking off. He generally keeps the reel's drag cinched pretty tight and relies on the rod to absorb the initial shock of the hookset, then loosens the drag as needed to counter surges and head shakes.

Choosing Rods: Moving Baits

Finesse swimbaits, small crankbaits, jerkbaits and small lipless crankbaits get a slightly longer rod. Latimer uses a 7-foot, 4-inch, medium-heavy Jack Hammer. Though rated medium-heavy, the rod still has a moderate action and performs similar to the shorter rod he uses for plastics. The extra length equates to longer casts.



The Reel

The main factors to consider when choosing a spinning reel are the quality of the drag (you get what you pay for) and the size of the reel. Latimer likes a 30/300-class spool because it's big enough to hold plenty of line and avoid unwieldy line memory. He uses the Abu Garcia Revo STX.



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ON CHOOSING LINE-TO-LEADER KNOTS

Latimer's line-to-leader knot is the Alberto knot, shown here.

He's not an advocate for one knot or another, but he does have advice for when choosing a knot.

"I think what knot you tie the best is what you should use," he says. "If you can tie it in a tournament when the wind is blowing or your hands are cold or you're nervous, that's when you know you can tie a knot."

1



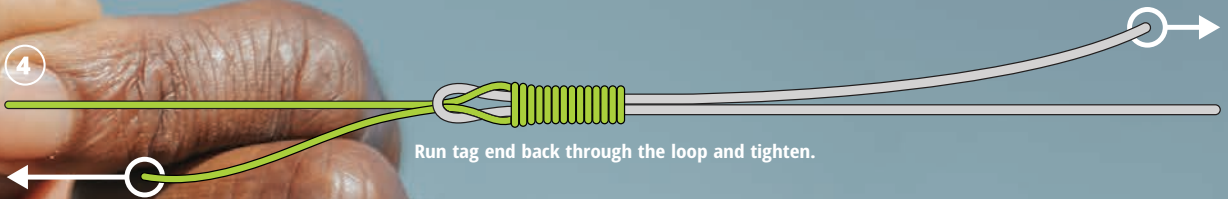
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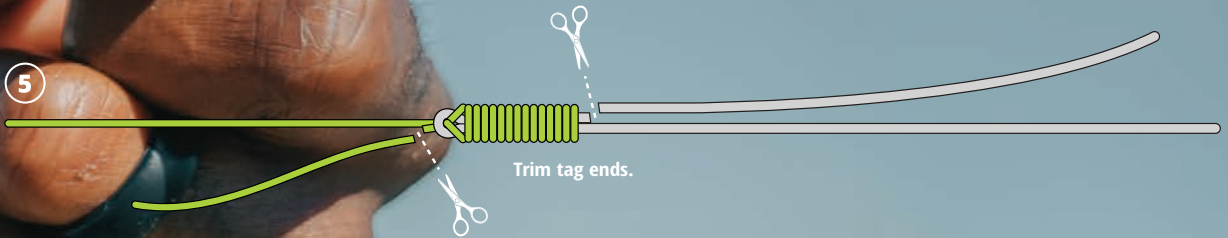
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KNOT DETAILS BY NETKNOTS.COM.



Choosing Line: Soft Plastics

Latimer isn't strictly a braid-to-leader guy. He relies on it as a tool in the right situations, like when fishing soft plastics.

His system starts with 15-pound-test Seaguar Smackdown Tournament Braid. A typical leader setup is two arm lengths of 8-pound-test Seaguar AbrazX fluorocarbon, but he'll vary leader strengths from 6- to 12-pound test based on the situation he's fishing.

"Sometimes I can keep the bait on the bottom better with smaller line, like when it's windy and when fish are deeper," he notes. "When throwing Ned rigs around docks or fishing banks around hang-ups, I very often use a 10-pound-test leader. In that case it's about efficiency because I don't have to retie as much, and I'm generally going to be setting the hook a little closer to the fish. I'm more comfortable putting a little more stank on my hookset when I have a cool little extra 2-pound insurance plan to get the fish started my way."

Choosing Line: Finesse Swimbaits

Latimer's favorite finesse swim-bait is a 3-inch Z-Man MinnowZ with a 1/4-ounce or smaller jighead.

His favorite line setup is straight Seaguar Finesse Fluorocarbon, usually 8.4-pound test. Spooling it straight eliminates a braid-to-leader knot and helps improve effectiveness.

"Fish are bad about hitting the swimbait and not getting it. You'll feel them come up and push it, or make it stop tracking," Latimer says. "You can desensitize your rod with fluoro [instead of braid-to-fluoro]. It helps me not to be too jerky."

"It's not a good idea to use anything smaller than 8 when using a size 30 or smaller spinning reel," Latimer adds. "That Finesse Fluorocarbon is more supple, softer and doesn't have as much memory as a lot of fluoros, so it works well on a spinning reel."

Fall, or anytime fish are schooling and longer casts are important, is when it's time to swap to the same braid-to-fluoro system described in the soft plastics section.

Choosing Line: Small Crankbaits

Here's where Latimer's system really strays from the current norm.

"With small crankbaits, like No. 5 and 7 Shad Raps, I actually prefer mono," says Latimer, who uses Seaguar Rippin Monofilament. "It's so taboo it's almost embarrassing nowadays, but there's so much advantage to using 8- or 10-pound-test mono. The line is a lot more manageable. Especially with treble hooks, it doesn't hang up as much because the extra 'sponginess' of that mono makes the bait roll over stuff."

The exception is when maximizing diving depth is absolutely critical. In that case, fluorocarbon is the better option.

Choosing Line: Jerkbaits

Latimer doesn't throw jerkbaits on spinning rods all the time. He does it with baits that don't cast well, or in really windy conditions.

"Especially with schoolers, you can reach out and touch them more efficiently," he says. "Sometimes you can be a little more erratic, too. Your reel is on the bottom, so you have that weight of the reel to help you make that snap."

Jerkbaits get fished on straight fluorocarbon, and almost never anything heavier than 8-pound test.

The Final Key: Invest in Finesse

Latimer's best advice for improving with spinning tackle is to make an investment in the right gear.

"A spinning rod is the worst thing you can skimp on with equipment. You don't have to have the most expensive equipment, but the tolerance for error is so much smaller, and everything needs to be so much more precise when using a smaller rod and smaller line," he says. "If you're going to spend the money, you get a much bigger return on your investment by buying a nicer spinning rod."

Buy it (or several), and then use it more often (or daily), because a spinning rod is an important tool that needs to be in every bass angler's toolbox. ■



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THE SHALLOW-WOOD-IN-WINTER PATTERN

By Curtis Niedermier
PHOTOS BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER

A STRATEGY FOR CATCHING SKINNY-WATER GIANTS DURING THE COLDEST MONTHS OF THE YEAR

There's a little deal Luke Dunkin looks for every winter – a shallow-water pattern involving a subtle balsa crankbait with a heap of potential to produce big limits, if the conditions are right.

“When the water gets in the 40s and it gets cold, if you catch a sunny winter day, when it’s calm and the air temps creep up, a lot of times those fish will get up on isolated cover, really shallow, and you can smash them on that thing,” Dunkin says. “It’s something we do a lot in January and February. We look for it.”



Ideal Conditions

Sunny, calm and mild are perfect conditions for this pattern in the Mid-South and other nearby regions.

"It's kind of the opposite of what you think about when you're cranking in the spring," Dunkin says. "On super windy days, cloudy days, they just don't seem to move up there on that stuff in the winter as much. For me, I want it calm, with maybe a little wind. That's crazy when you're cranking, but this is finesse cranking. You're not crashing through there."

The finesse aspect comes from the types of crankbaits Dunkin uses – mostly balsa, but also some flat-sided plastic models. His go-to in most situations is a No. 5 or 7 Rapala Shallow



Shad Rap in natural shad or brown crawfish patterns. The smaller model gets used when the water temperature is in the low 40s, when the bite is tough and when the water is a hair cleaner than what he prefers.

Other standbys are the Old School Balsa Baits Wesley Strader series of flat-sided crankbaits, the 6th Sense Crush Flat 75X and the 6th Sense Cloud 9 Series C6. The Strader bait is good for slightly deeper wood. The Flat 75X and C6 work well when the water temperature is climbing toward 50 degrees.

Mostly though, Dunkin slings the little Shallow Shad Rap for this pattern.

"This little thing [the Shallow Shad Rap], it doesn't do a lot. It's subtle when it comes through there," he says. "Now, the bites, they are ferocious. There's no doubt about it when they eat it."

Where to Look

Dunkin lives in the Tennessee River Valley and has applied this pattern on Pickwick, Wilson and Wheeler, which are his home lakes. He's also done it on the Coosa River system in Alabama and Beaver Lake in Arkansas.

At least a foot of visibility is necessary for water clarity, and Dunkin looks for underwater topography where shallow flats butt up against deeper water such as a creek channel. Deep-water access is important.

"It's kind of what they get on in the prespawn, but those fish are always around," he says. "They're really shallow, and the water's got to be clear. Some of the bites you get on it, you would think you would be able to see them they're so shallow."

Dialing In

This isn't a cast-and-wind-down-the-bank pattern; it's a target-specific approach. Scouting wide, shallow flats (though generally not clear in the back of a creek in spawning areas), Dunkin looks for isolated targets.

"I look for a laydown, stick-up, stake bed – anything they can get around," he says. "Some of the best stuff that we've seen is a long, flat laydown, where you can probably come down the entire thing with the bait. It's not on a steep transition bank that goes from 6 to 10 feet, but a flat bank where that tree is in 1 to 3 feet the entire time."

A bank as Dunkin describes, with a series of isolated wood targets scattered along it, is money.

"I find them in bays off the main river channel or off the creek channel," Dunkin says. "A lot of times I idle in and can see what I'm looking for: isolated pieces of wood. It's anything those bigger females might move up and sun on. Once you figure out that it's going on, you can literally run to every piece of cover in an area and eventually catch them."

Don't overlook small stick-ups, either. Even a small stick poking up from the mud can draw in a bass.

"Especially on a mud bottom," Dunkin adds. "A lot of people underestimate that mud and how quickly it can warm up that time of year. I've caught them with mud on their bellies."

This pattern isn't generally going to produce 20 bites in a day (it's winter, after all), but you can get some really big bites doing it.

"I'll throw it through March into the prespawn, when the water temp gets into the 50s," Dunkin says. "It's a neat little bait that people don't think of. Everyone throws a Shad Rap, but that little square-bill [Shallow Shad Rap] is a totally different deal."

The Presentation

Dunkin categorizes this pattern as a reaction-bite deal, but he tries hard to make them react by firing repeated casts at each target. He reasons that the fish aren't likely to chase due to the cold water, but if you can bring one by their face, they'll eventually react and eat it.

"If it's a laydown, I'll cast across the end of it first," he says. "Even if it's 3 feet of water they might suspend in it because they're just up there lying around not using a lot of energy. So I position the boat where I can cast across the end of it a few times. A lot of bites come that way. Then I'll position the boat to cast down each side of the log.

"The bait just has that super-tight wobble, and when it comes by them,



they smash it," he says. "You're not deflecting it really. It doesn't get hung a lot because it comes through really good. And it's not a typical square-bill that hunts. It tracks tried and true like all Shad Raps but stays up in the column really good."

Tackle choices

Spinning tackle is the best choice for the balsa baits, though the plastic ones could be fished with casting tackle. Dunkin typically slings balsa with a 7-foot, 3-inch, medium-fast Wright McGill Skeet Reese Tournament Series Drop Shot rod with a Skeet Reese Victory II spinning reel and 8-pound-test fluorocarbon.

"You get that super slow 5.8:1 gear ratio on most spinning reels, so it's going to force you to slow down," he adds. "You can loosen the drag if they make a big pull, and the rod has a lot of give to it so if they load up you've got them."

Finesse Cranking

Probably the most important piece of advice for this pattern is to be willing to go as shallow as a foot or two in the winter when the conditions are right. Once you find the likely areas, keep a finesse-cranking strategy in mind. Don't overpower them. Use the right equipment, and see if you can crack a few cold-water heads. ■



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WHAT'S INSIDE:

Autumn tactics that worked at the Cal Delta, Fort Gibson and Lake of the Ozarks

HOW KYLE WALTERS FLIPPED AND PUNCHED HIS WAY TO A COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP VICTORY AT LAKE GUNTERSVILLE

Recapping the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League Regionals

PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMAYER

COSTA FLW SERIES | CAL DELTA

BETHEL ISLAND, CALIF.

By Justin Onslow
PHOTOS BY JESSE SCHULTZ



WINNING ANGLER

Gregory Troughton
Discovery Bay, Calif.

Winning Weight:
60-02 (15 fish)

Details:
Sept. 27-29, 2018

Presented by Power-Pole

Hosted by Russo's
Marina and Sugar Barge
RV Resort & Marina

Western Division

Gregory Troughton's first-ever FLW event ended in the best way he could have possibly hoped for. The 55-year-old Discovery Bay, Calif., angler took to familiar waters and sacked up 60 pounds, 2 ounces to claim victory at the Costa FLW Series Western Division finale on the California Delta in late September.

Troughton had a couple patterns in his pocket that he knew would work in fall on the Delta. His winning pattern – punching a green pumpkin Yamamoto Flappin' Hog with a 1 1/2-ounce River2Sea tungsten weight through heavy cover – led to two incredibly productive days before high winds demolished 90 percent of the grass he was fishing to start the tournament. Troughton used a 4/0 Gamakatsu Super Heavy Cover Flippin' Hook and a Paycheck Baits punch skirt in a craw color. He threw that on a Powell Max 3D 806 rod and a Shimano Core reel spooled

with 80-pound-test Stren Sonic Braid line.

On day three, after afternoon winds on day two ruined the grass he was previously fishing, Troughton turned to a few other baits he's found success with on the Delta: a ChatterBait, a popper and a stick bait.

"The wind came up and blew 25 to 30 mph, and it basically ruined the grass, the cheese and the habitat that I was punching the bigger quality fish out of," he says. "In the wind, the ChatterBait works really well, and I had to mix it up, so that's what I did."

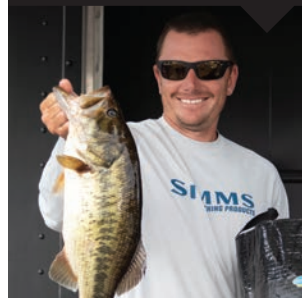
Despite landing the biggest bass on day two of

the tournament (a 9-pound, 4-ounce behemoth) punching heavy cover, Troughton had to turn to those other tactics to secure his day-three bag of 12-13, which was more than enough to seal the victory after anglers had to deal with incredibly tough fishing conditions.

"I wish I had more, but knowing how tough it was, I felt like with the 6 1/2-pound lead I had [after day two], I felt pretty confident that I had given myself a really good chance to win," he admits. "Someone had to stack a huge bag to come up and beat me, and the conditions were just not good enough for that to happen."



WINNING CO-ANGLER



Jacob Traba
Pacifica, Calif.

Winning Weight:
40-02 (14 fish)

Winning Program:

Finesse tactics dominated Jacob Traba's approach en route to a huge win on the co-angler side at the Delta. He primarily relied on a drop-shot with a margarita mutilator 7-inch Roboworm, though a switch to a wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko on day three led to a few more key fish that ultimately pulled the Pacifica, Calif., angler ahead by 1 pound, 3 ounces. ■



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COSTA FLW SERIES | FT. GIBSON

WAGONER, OKLA.

By Justin Onslow
PHOTOS BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER



WINNING ANGLER

Tommy Dickerson
Orange, Texas

Winning Weight:
32-06 (13 fish)

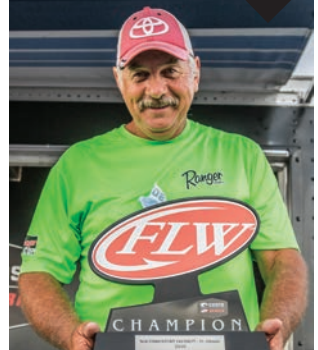
Details:
Oct. 4-6, 2018

Presented by Mercury

Hosted by Wagoner
Area Chamber of
Commerce

Southwestern Division

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Johnny Burke
Bristow, Okla.

Winning Weight:
17-02 (7 fish)

Winning Program:

The Oklahoma native landed 17 pounds, 2 ounces of fish to cruise to a comfortable victory by a 6-pound, 2-ounce margin. The keys to the win were fairly simple: a Carolina-rigged green pumpkin magic Zoom Speed Craw and a Texas-rigged green pumpkin Zoom Baby Brush Hog, each with the tips dyed chartreuse. ■

Tommy Dickerson needed only one rod, one lure and one creek to land 32 pounds, 6 ounces over three tough days on Fort Gibson to win the 2018 Costa FLW Series event in early October by way of a tiebreaker with second-place finisher Kyle Cortiana.

After turning in solid bags on days one and two for a total of 26-7, Dickerson saw his creek run dry – both literally and figuratively.

Dickerson dug his way into the shallow creek on the northern end of the river for the first time on the final day of practice, and despite some difficulty getting into the creek during the tournament due to changing water levels, he was able to pull two limits from the area and set himself up for what could have been a much easier day three.

Instead, water levels continued to drop overnight between days two and three, leaving the creek impassable until 10 o'clock on the final day, when runoff from recent rains restored the water level enough to get a boat into the skinny water. With limited time in his honey hole, Dickerson only managed three keeper bass for a total of 5 pounds, 15 ounces.

"I had no chance of winning I didn't think, even until the minute I got up there to weigh them in," he admits. "When Ron [tournament director Ron Lappin] told me I needed 5 pounds, 15 ounces, I thought, 'I got 5-something pounds. Maybe I'll have a chance.'"

And a chance he did have. Dickerson's 5-15 pulled him into a tie with Cortiana, but the tiebreaker – going to the angler with the most weight entering the final day – went to Dickerson, sealing a nerve-racking victory for the Texas native.

"It kind of all worked out in the end," he says. "I was just fortunate to go in there and catch those three, and I only caught those in maybe the last 45 minutes of the day. I just got lucky."

NEWER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

The spinnerbait is a classic lure that never seems to go out of fashion. Sure, other moving baits have crowded the category and reduced the popularity of the bladed bass magnet, but in the fall, it's hard to go wrong with a spinnerbait when fishing shallow water.

Dickerson used only a double-willow spinnerbait (white and chartreuse) on a 6-foot, 10-inch iRod with 20-pound-test Berkley fluorocarbon and a Shimano Chronarch reel to land all of his fish for the tournament. The smaller of the two willow-leaf blades, a No. 3 on the front of the lure, was painted orange, and Dickerson employed a trailer hook to negate the short-strikes he had experienced during practice.



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PHOTO BY MILLS BROCK

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COSTA FLW SERIES | LAKE OF THE OZARKS

OSAGE BEACH, MO.

By Kyle Wood
PHOTOS BY JESSE SCHULTZ



WINNING ANGLER

Jeremy Lawyer
Sarcoxie, Mo.

Winning Weight:
46-03 (15 fish)

Details:
Oct. 11-13, 2018

Presented by Evinrude

Hosted by Tri-County
Lodging
Association/CVB

Central Division

Jeremy Lawyer has accomplished a lot throughout his FLW career, dating back to the early 2000s. Still, prior to this season he only had one win: the 2016 T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American.

Now, his win total has doubled. Lawyer won the Costa FLW Series Central Division finale at Lake of the Ozarks in October.

Being from Sarcoxie, Mo., Lawyer is very familiar with the Ozark impoundments, but he was careful about how he applied his firsthand knowledge.

"Earlier in the year, before the first Central Division event on Table Rock, I erased all my

waypoints there and had a good finish," Lawyer says. "I just got a new Ranger before coming [to Lake of the Ozarks], and I didn't transfer any of my waypoints over. You can get in trouble sometimes when you try to fish history, and I just wanted to go fish what looked good and what was right for the conditions."

Conditions changed daily throughout the event, and covering water was how Lawyer stayed on fish. His main targets were wind-blown points and the first few docks inside a pocket, close to the main lake.

"Every day I'm on the water I change my trail color on my Lowrance," Lawyer says. "So, I went to pockets

that looked good in the area I was fishing, but I hadn't been in yet. The points leading into the pockets were good, and if there were scattered docks – one, two or three spaced out – I'd hit them. If there were 10 or 12 docks in a row, I'd pass on them because it takes so long to fish them."

Lawyer basically fished from the toll bridge down to the Gravois Arm in the northeastern part of the reservoir. He covered water with a River2Sea Whopper Plopper and Freedom Tackle Swing Buzz buzzbait. When flipping docks, Lawyer used a prototype JaKked Baits shaky head sporting a Zoom Magnum Trick Worm.

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Steve Freeman
Eddyville, Ky.

Winning Weight:
33-12 (13 fish)

Winning Program:

Steve Freeman got a tip from his buddy, Drew Sanford (55th-place pro), that most co-anglers use light, finesse presentations on Lake of the Ozarks, so Freeman did the opposite in what turned out to be a successful attempt. He dragged a Texas-rigged Zoom Magnum Trick Worm with either a 1/2- or 3/4-ounce weight through brush. ■

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River2Sea Whopper Ploppers and Ozark lakes go together like peanut butter and jelly. The bait is easy to use and has a unique sound that calls in bass, which is why the Plopper has caught fire across the bass fishing landscape.

As easy as the Plopper is to fish, there are some subtle gear details that, when chosen properly, can result in more fish in the livewell.

"So many guys had the opportunity to do well with that Plopper, and they just lost them," Lawyer says. "I was fortunate enough to not lose them when they bit. I really credit my 7-foot, 6-inch Team Lew's Custom Pro Speed Stick Magnum Heavy Cover rod for that. It's a heavy-duty rod, but still parabolic. It takes a little bit of the shock out of them when you initially set the hook."

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COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP | LAKE GUNTERSVILLE

GUNTERSVILLE, ALA.

By Curtis Niedermier

WINNING ANGLER

Kyle Walters
Grant-Valkaria, Fla.

Winning Weight:
44-03 (10 fish)

Details:
Nov. 1-3, 2018

Presented by Costa
Sunglasses

Hosted by Marshall
County Convention &
Visitors Bureau



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

Kyle Walters learned some valuable lessons about fishing Lake Guntersville in the fall when he won the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League Regional there in 2013. For instance, he learned that the fall frog bite is too hit or miss for him, and a dedicated flipping approach could win in a multiple-day tournament.

Walters put those lessons to use again in early November, at the 2018 Costa FLW Series Championship on Lake Guntersville. The custom homebuilder from Grant-Valkaria, Fla., caught two limits that totaled 44 pounds, 3 ounces to win the weather-shortened two-day championship and qualify for the 2019 FLW Cup.

In both of his postseason wins, Walters focused on a stretch of main-river grass beds around the BB Comer Bridge on Guntersville's upper end. It's the stretch of the reservoir that starts to transition back into a riverine fishery. The main channel courses along next to a shallow ridge for miles. Grass mats atop the ridge create ample bass habitat, with a shallow ditch on the backside of the ridge providing a route for bass to transition in and out of the grass mats from backwaters and the main channel.

The area of the lake Walters fished is a well-known community hole that received a lot of pressure on tournament week from pros fishing the FLW event, local anglers and

WINNING BAITS

Walters punched with two beaver-style baits, including a black and blue/green pumpkin Gambler Stinger. Other tackle included a 7-foot, 11-inch Halo TI Series rod, 75-pound-test Halo Winch braided line, a 4/0 Gamakatsu Super Heavy Cover Flippin' Hook and 1 1/2-ounce Picasso tungsten sinker.



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

TOP FIVE

NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
1. KYLE WALTERS	GRANT-VALKARIA, FL	44-03	10	\$92,700
2. BRYAN THRIFT	SHELBY, NC	39-08	10	\$30,100*
3. ROBERT CROSNOE	INVERNESS, FL	37-05	10	\$23,500*
4. JON GRIFFITH	MESA, AZ	31-06	10	\$15,000
5. BRYAN NEW	BELMONT, NC	30-00	9	\$11,000*

*Includes Ranger Cup

competitors in another regional championship. Most of those anglers were slinging spinnerbaits and other moving baits out in the ditch adjacent to the mats, or walking frogs up on top. Their pressure probably drove new fish into the mat, though the bass were also transitioning in from deeper waters – evidenced by lighter coloring on their sides.

Walters, along with fellow Florida pro Robert Crosnoe (third place), stuck with their flipping approach to target the mat edges in the area with what they knew was a higher-percentage pattern than frogging. They shared some notes in practice and eventually discovered that they'd dialed in on the same "juice," or key stretches in the mat. Crosnoe bounced around on day one, and he had a tougher day that kept him from hanging with the pace set by Walters, who ultimately made the winning decision to grind in the area both days.

Two stretches in particular – one above the bridge, and one below – produced all of Walters' winning catches. The upper spot was 4 to 5 feet deep, with a mix of hydrilla and milfoil. Cut eelgrass had blown in on top, creating dead, brown grass mats. That's where Walters caught most of his keepers. Below the bridge, hydrilla growing about 8 feet deep formed a more rigid canopy of grass, and Walters landed a key kicker from this area in the afternoon each day.

The only real difference in Walters' Costa pattern and his BFL Regional pattern was that this time he flipped along

the ditch-side edge of the mat. In 2013, he flipped hydrilla that had canopied over the edge of the main river channel. That part of the mat was washed away prior to the Costa event.

Walters opened the tournament on a windy, cloudy Friday in second place with 19-15. On Saturday, the clouds lingered into the morning before the sun broke through around 11:30 a.m., and the wind was nil. The conditions had a major impact on his success.

"[On Friday] I couldn't pick out the mats early, and the bite seemed to go down between 10 and 2," he says. "Today [Saturday], I got there and was able to pick the mat out and caught them early."

Walters caught a 2 1/2- and 3-pounder in the first 90 minutes on Saturday, then went on a tear, catching three 5- to 6-pound-class fish in the next 90 minutes. A 4-pounder culled one of his smaller keepers at about 11:30 a.m. Then, a surprising midday lull set in during what appeared to be the perfect conditions – sunny and calm – for driving fish into the mats.

"If you'd have told me before the tournament I'd catch those big fish in the morning when it was overcast and not get bit when the sun was shining, I wouldn't have believed you," Walters says.

On Saturday, Crosnoe checked in 23-5, the second-biggest limit of the tournament behind Walters' total of 24-4 that day. The area was obviously championship-worthy, and Walters worked his game plan perfectly for the biggest victory of his career.

WINNING CO-ANGLER

Jacob Traba
Pacifica, Calif.

Winning Weight:
23-12 (8 fish)

Winning Program:

Jacob Traba, a helicopter mechanic in the U.S. Coast Guard, won't ever forget his 2018 Costa FLW Series season. The Pacifica, Calif., co-angler won the Western Division finale on the California Delta, which also locked up the Western Division Strike King Co-angler of the Year title. Then, a few weeks later, he won the Costa FLW Series Championship on Lake Guntersville.

At the championship, Traba used a trio of baits to catch a trio of fish for 7 pounds, 6 ounces on Friday. His bait list included a Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap, drop-shot and umbrella rig.

On Saturday, he committed to the umbrella rig and brought in an impressive limit of 16-6.

"I think I had a limit by 9 or 10 o'clock. I kept upgrading from there," he says of his final-day performance.

For his win, Traba earned a prize package worth \$30,000. ■

2019 FLW CUP QUALIFIERS

The top-finishing pro from each of the Costa FLW Series divisions at the 2018 championship qualified to fish the 2019 FLW Cup.

- Southeastern – Kyle Walters (first place)
- Western – Jon Griffith (fourth place)
- Southwestern – Zack Birge (seventh place)
- Central – Ryan Salzman (11th place)
- Northern – Cory Johnston (12th place)
- International – Erik Luzak (37th place; FLW Canada)



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



T-H MARINE FLW BFL REGIONAL RECAP

Six Regional championships and the Wild Card comprised the 2018 T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League postseason, which wrapped up in November. In each tournament, the top six boaters and top six co-anglers qualified for the 2019 BFL All-American. They'll be joined by top finishers from the 2019 The Bass Federation National Championship and YETI FLW College Fishing National Championship.

Strategies, though typical of fall throughout the country, covered a wide range of approaches.

St. John's River – Oct. 11-13

Morrow's better fish came while fishing a Texas-rigged black grape Zoom Ol' Monster worm around docks, but he also caught a few on a walking bait and a drop-shot. He spent the tournament fishing within the main-river area.

All-American Boater Qualifiers

1. Troy Morrow, Eastanollee, Ga. ▶
2. Matt Kinney, Bunnell, Fla.
3. Grant Kelly, Milledgeville, Ga.
4. Jason Reed, Hollister, Fla.
5. Nicholas Hoinig, Port St. Lucie, Fla.
6. Kip Carter, Mansfield, Ga.



All-American Co-angler Qualifiers

1. Randy Paquette, Sarasota, Fla.
2. Gary Murphy, Homer, Ga.
3. Donnie Davis, Greer, S.C.
4. Ernie Thompson, Anthony, Fla.
5. Frank Godwin Jr., Bainbridge, Ga.
6. Levi Crossway, Jacksonville, Fla.

Chesapeake Bay – Oct. 11-13

Thompson caught his day-one fish on a drop-shot worked around a big laydown in the North East River. With cooler water on day two, he changed to a grub on a 1/4-ounce ball head and targeted pilings around a pier and other shallow cover. As the tide started falling, he drifted a 5-inch green pumpkin Yamamoto Senko with a 1/16-ounce weight through a current-swept area that was about 13 feet deep.

All-American Boater Qualifiers

1. Joseph Thompson, Coatesville, Pa. ▶
2. Ronnie Baker, Providence Forge, Va.
3. Moo Bae, West Friendship, Md.
4. Ryan Bauman, Fleetwood, Pa.
5. Chris Martinkovic, Hamilton, Ohio
6. Steven Wiseman, Bryans Road, Md.



All-American Co-angler Qualifiers

1. Michael Bahnweg, Union Dale, Pa.
2. William Allie, Wynantskill, N.Y.
3. Henry McKee, Haddon Heights, N.J.
4. Michael Nelms, Hartwood, Va.
5. Howard Smith, Hamilton, Ohio
6. David Williams, Fredericksburg, Va.

Lake Norman – Oct. 18-20

Walser caught most of his fish flipping docks with nearby stumps and brush using a Texas-rigged Zoom Baby Brush Hog and Zoom Z-Craw Jr. He credits much of his success to fishing "ugly places" – spots most other anglers didn't bother to fish because they didn't look ideal. A few key fish came between docks on a chartreuse spinnerbait with a Colorado and willow blade.

All-American Boater Qualifiers

1. Robert Walser, Lexington, N.C. ▶
2. Scott Beattie, Lincolnton, N.C.
3. Dylan Fulk, Concord, N.C.
4. Bryan New, Belmont, N.C.
5. Michael Fox, Statesville, N.C.
6. Travis Young, Charlotte, N.C.



All-American Co-angler Qualifiers

1. Wayne Smelser, Rural Retreat, Va.
2. Larry Freeman Jr., La Crosse, Va.
3. Tristen Trull, Mt. Holly, N.C.
4. Ben Dacey, Chesterfield, Va.
5. Jeff Rikard, Leesville, S.C.
6. Khris Williams, Mt. Holly, N.C.

Kentucky Lake – Oct. 18-20

Pickett targeted 1- to 7-foot-deep main-lake gravel bars, secondary points and secondary pockets near Paris, Tenn., where he found big skipjack. He dragged a Carolina-rigged Zoom Brush Hog on a 4/0 Gamakatsu EWG hook with a 3/4- or 1-ounce weight, being careful to work the bait with the current.

All-American Boater Qualifiers

1. Lloyd Pickett Jr., Bartlett, Tenn. ▶
2. John Devries, Fishers, Ind.
3. Doug Ruster, New Palestine, Ind.
4. Nick Uebelhor, Jasper, Ind.
5. Rich Fye, Amboy, Ind.
6. Ken Garbe, Wyoming, Ohio



All-American Co-angler Qualifiers

1. Brent Ladnier, Wiggins, Miss.
2. Carl Breeden, Valley Park, Mo.
3. Leroy Miller, Napoleon, Ohio
4. Jacob Sloan, Paola, Kan.
5. Daniel Dumais, Trenton, Mich.
6. Ryan Helbling, Martinsville, Ind.

Lake of the Ozarks – Oct. 25-27

Feldermann ran up the Osage River and slow-rolled a 3/8-ounce spinnerbait around docks in major creek arms and shallow main-river pockets. Most of the docks were in 2 to 7 feet of water. The homemade spinnerbait had a small Colorado blade and a Living Rubber skirt.

All-American Boater Qualifiers

1. Mike Feldermann, Galena, Ill. ▶
2. Wade Ramsey, Choctaw, Okla.
3. Jeremy Johnson, Henryetta, Okla.
4. Brad Leifermann, Andover, Minn.
5. Shawn Gordon, Russellville, Ark.
6. Dennis Berhorst, Holts Summit, Mo.



All-American Co-angler Qualifiers

1. Dewey Larson, Fayetteville, Ark.
2. Matt Finkeldei, Davenport, Iowa
3. Alan Bernicky, Joliet, Ill.
4. Jimmy Green, Tulsa, Okla.
5. Brandon Ackerson, Afton, Okla.
6. Eugene Moore III, Little Rock, Ark.

Lake Chickamauga – Oct. 15-27

Summerlin caught his day-one kicker on a frog right off the bat, then had to swap to fishing a weightless Zoom Super Fluke and a Strike King Mega Dawg around grass lines in small pockets. He keyed on small indentations in the grass.

All-American Boater Qualifiers

1. Gil Summerlin, Guntersville, Ala. ▶
2. Matt Stanley, Alexandria, Tenn.
3. Brennon McCord, West Frankfort, Ill.
4. Cody Santel, Benton, Ky.
5. Tommy Williams, Shepherdsville, Ky.
6. Seth Davis, Harrison, Tenn.



All-American Co-angler Qualifiers

1. Lake Blasingame, Killen, Ala.
2. Mitch Murphy, Metropolis, Ill.
3. Todd Blakeman, Chatham, Ill.
4. Wayne Kilgore, Attalla, Ala.
5. Terry Smith, Tullahoma, Tenn.
6. Gary Megson, Dayton, Ohio.

Old Hickory Lake (Wild Card) – Oct. 11-13

Corn landed one keeper on a buzzbait near takeoff, then countered muddy water and cold weather by fishing two sloughs located 40 miles up the river. One slough was muddy; the other clear. Corn fished a Dave's Custom Baits Black Market Balsa square-bill in "Diet Dew splatterback," which is a faded chartreuse pattern with black splatter. A Riot Baits Minima Jig also made the rotation.

All-American Boater Qualifiers

1. Toby Corn, Calvert City, Ky. ▶
2. Scott Towry, Lawrenceburg, Tenn.
3. Stacey Edwards, Milton, Ky.
4. Jason Grape, Attalla, Ala.
5. Keith Hays, Broken Arrow, Okla.
6. Sean McAllister, Checotah, Okla.



All-American Co-angler Qualifiers

1. Gary Gustafson, Gilbertsville, Ky.
2. Keenan Hess, Herrin, Ill.
3. Zach Barnes, Chickamauga, Ga.
4. Scott Bussey, Hayden, Ala.
5. Wayne Miller, Morgantown, Ky.
6. Dickey Reece, Lafayette, Ky. ■



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TBF



WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

By Dan Johnson

VIRGINIA TBF MEMBERS AID FISHERY RESEARCH

The Virginia Bass Chapter Federation (VBCF) is keeping The Bass Federation's conservation tradition alive by assisting Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) biologists in monitoring bass populations in a growing number of the state's lakes and rivers.

"Our joint efforts led to the creation of the Tournament Angler Creel Survey Project, which was originally designed to provide biologists with additional data needed to better assess bass populations and measure the effectiveness of recent stocking efforts on tidal rivers like the Chickahominy, Pamunkey and James rivers," explains John Flicek, conservation director for VBCF.

Flicek notes that Virginia DGIF creel survey data collection in the past was made up of voluntary ramp surveys, where some anglers were interviewed as they recovered their boats.

"While those efforts continue, the Tournament Angler Creel Survey Project provided DGIF biologists with data streamed directly from the bass fishing community," Flicek says. "We are a community of anglers that specifically target bass, and our tournament efforts cover an entire body of water, providing a far more complete sampling than random surveys. The DGIF has been very appreciative of our efforts in providing individual angler surveys and tournament results to help compile a more complete database to assess populations and validate management efforts to date."

The TBF-assisted project has helped Virginia DGIF track the amazing resurgence of bass in the Chickahominy River.

"As many die-hard bass anglers may know, the Chickahominy bass population has experienced a remarkable comeback since severe drought in the late

1990s and early 2000s, when the reduced freshwater outflow resulted in significant salinity changes in the river," says Flicek. "The bass population declined dramatically following several years with a poor spawn and as habitat changed due to loss of vegetation and forage. As conditions improved, concerned anglers, coupled with DGIF biologists, began stocking an F1 strain of largemouth."

The most recent effort took place in the summer of 2017, when 114,000 F1 largemouths were stocked. VBCF anglers participated in that project.

"These efforts to date have shown exceptional results," says Flicek. "Chickahominy River bass anglers once struggled to catch a limit, with a 2- to 3-pound bass being considered a



In addition to assisting with creel surveys, the Virginia Bass Chapter Federation welcomes state biologists to conduct fish sampling at tournament weigh-ins.

lunker. Today, anglers routinely weigh in five-fish limits topping the 20-pound mark. Five-pound fish are commonplace, and many 8- to 10-pound trophies are being caught."

Flicek notes that in a recent Virginia TBF Open Tournament on the Chickahominy, the winning team produced a 27.46-pound limit, with a 9.45-pound kicker taking big fish of the event.

"At the same tournament, as part of our ongoing partnership with DGIF, biologists were on hand during weigh-in to collect data and samples for genetic study on over 150 Chickahominy largemouth bass," he adds.

The project has been so successful that it has grown to encompass other fisheries, including Kerr Reservoir, a body of water that was recently impacted by the largemouth bass virus. Flicek also expects the state chapter's research efforts to help combat invasive species such as the northern snakehead.

TBF members are also helping develop new software that will streamline the creel survey reporting process.

"We are currently collecting tournament data manually," says Flicek. "However, an automated process is being developed to collect data via a downloadable cellphone app, and



Creel surveys conducted at tournament weigh-ins, like this one at the TBF Open event on the Chickahominy, provide biologists with a wealth of bass data.

our TBF anglers here in Virginia Bass Chapter Federation Region 8 will serve as the test group to prove and improve the application before release to the fishing public. Once it's ready, the application could be released statewide."

All projects help fulfill the TBF conservation mission and ensure a lasting legacy among bass anglers in the region.

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2018 TBF NATIONAL SEMI-FINALS UPDATE

The Bass Federation state presidents and other tournament organizers provided highlights from some of the early 2018 National Semi-Finals events. The top boater and co-angler from each state in these events qualified for the 2019 TBF National Championship.



Dustin Glaze won the District 5 boater division.

District 5

Legendary Lake Conroe was in a generous mood when 42 TBF members from Texas and Louisiana locked horns June 9-10 for the District 5 National Semi-Finals event.

When the dust settled, Texan Dustin Glaze topped the boaters with 10 bass for a whopping 47.60-pound total weight. His effort was worth \$1,500 in cash and a trip to the National Championship. Fellow Texan James Moore paced the co-angler ranks with 26.33 pounds and earned \$750.

Other championship qualifiers include Robert Gann, the top Louisiana boater (third place; 29.19 pounds), and Louisiana co-angler Trey Blocker (third place; 21.07 pounds).

Finishing eighth, Louisiana's Vernon Silver claimed the \$500 Ranger Cup award for being the top-finishing qualified boater.

The Texas team won the battle for State Pride honors.

District 6

The bass fishing battleground of Grand Lake in Oklahoma set the stage for competitors from Oklahoma and Arkansas at the District 6 National Semi-Finals June 16-17.

Arkansas' Doug Thompson blew off his rivals' home-lake advantage and boxed 25.27 pounds to best the boaters

and pocket \$2,070 in cash plus an invitation to the National Championship. Fellow Natural State angler Corey Ruff topped the co-angler field with 22.26 pounds for \$1,035.

Boater Jackie Husmann (fourth place; 22.06 pounds) and co-angler Sanford Hooker (second place; 19.64 pounds) qualified for the championship from Oklahoma. Husmann also nabbed the \$500 Ranger Cup award.

The Oklahoma contingent captured the State Pride award.

District 8

Flush with water, bass and a variety of other game fish, North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea provided a world-class playing field for TBF members from North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska fishing the District 8 National Semi-Finals event.

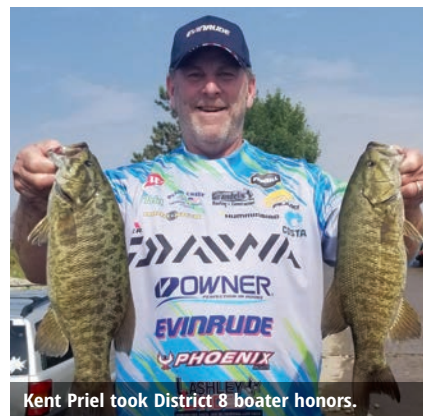
The tournament was set for Sept. 8-9, but foul weather on day one forced tournament officials to keep the field on shore. Undaunted, the anglers set out from Dakota Waters Resort and Marina on day two, greeted by far fairer weather.

Nebraska's Kent Priel won the boater division and \$2,070 with three bass for 9.01 pounds. South Dakota's Mason Big Crow led the co-anglers with 7.55 pounds for a \$1,035 payday.

Other National Championship qualifiers on the boater side include South Dakota's Troy Diede (second place; 8.56 pounds) and North Dakota's Cody Arth (third place; 8.35 pounds). Arth also earned the \$500 Ranger Cup award.

Additional co-angler qualifiers to the National Championship include Matthew Franz of North Dakota (second place; 7.09 pounds) and Nebraska's Chris Swift (fourth place; 6.94 pounds).

In State Pride competition, North Dakota took top honors.



Kent Priel took District 8 boater honors.

District 9

A windy, rainy, stormy pre-fishing period was followed up by 41-degree temperatures and a challenging first day for TBF anglers from Minnesota and Wisconsin at the District 9 Semi-Finals on Pools 5, 6 and 7 of the Mississippi River in Winona, Minn. The tournament was held Sept. 22-23.

Minnesotan Randy Wiczorek had a good day one with 13.32 pounds, but knew he had to step it up on day two as the river increasingly muddied up. With the backwaters remaining clear, Wiczorek frog fished and brought in a huge 16.33-pound sack to seal the win. He'll be joined at the championship by fellow Minnesotan Richard Conrad, who won the co-angler division with 10 smallmouths that weighed 22.81 pounds.

From Wisconsin, boater Brady Ferrell fished grass with a jig to finish second overall with 28.89 pounds and will represent the Badger State at the championship. Runner-up co-angler Deven Etnyre topped the Wisconsin contingent from the back of the boat.

The Minnesota team finished just a few pounds ahead of Wisconsin to win the State Pride award. ■



North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea was a fitting stage for the District 8 showdown.

HIGH SCHOOL FISHING STATE CHAMPIONSHIP ACTION CONTINUES

The FLW/TBF Student Angler Federation High School Fishing program continues to be a big hit with young anglers and their families. By September, the program had already reached the predicted annual benchmark of 30,000 participants.

Here are some highlights from tournaments held mid-May through mid-September. Complete results and details are available at bassfederation.com.



Kyle and Tyler Bahr paced the pack at the Minnesota TBF Open on Lake Bemidji.



Brady Stuart (left) and Nicolas Buindo claimed top honors at the Michigan High School Fishing State Championship.

May 20 – Washington HS State Championship, Moses Lake, Braydon Liebe and Trey Hartley

May 27 – Oklahoma HS State Championship, Fort Gibson, Mack Taylor and Reese David

June 2 – Indiana HS State Championship, Brookville Lake, Jacob Tragesser and Zachary Wray

June 2 – Connecticut Tri-State Championship, East Brimfield Reservoir, John Frates and Nick Frumkin

June 2 – Massachusetts Tri-State Championship, East Brimfield Reservoir, Cameron Chase and Kaleb Brown

June 2 – Rhode Island Tri-State Championship, East Brimfield Reservoir, Dominic Perra and Nick Franco

June 17 – Minnesota HS State Championship, Mille Lacs, Mitch McGannon and Jon Olmsted

July 7 – South Dakota HS State Championship, Lake Henry, Ashton Olivier and Payton Brown

July 8 – Delaware Quad-State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Dillon Peden and Joey Warren

July 8 – Maryland Quad-State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Dylan Collen and Justin Harrant

July 8 – New Jersey Quad-State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Christopher John and Jeremiah O'Connor

July 8 – Pennsylvania Quad-State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Zachary Tamandl and Cooper Rosen

July 21 – Nebraska HS State Championship, Lewis and Clark Lake, Hunter Cooper and Jaron Cooper

July 22 – Ontario Province Championship, Georgian Bay, Jason Cruz and Josh Reid

July 28 – Michigan HS State Championship, Gull Lake, Nicolas Buindo and Brady Stuart

Aug. 5 – Wisconsin HS State Championship, Bay of Green Bay, Gregory Gottheardt and Brant Rowland

Sept. 16 – Minnesota TBF Open, Lake Bemidji, Kyle Bahr and Tyler Bahr ■

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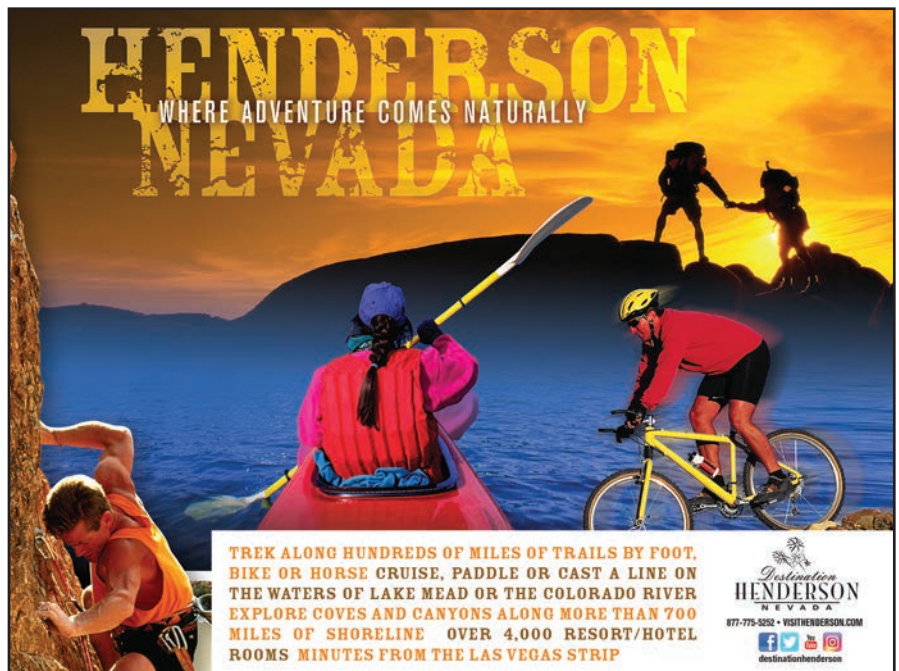


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NICK LeBRUN

BOSSIER CITY, LOUISIANA

By Curtis Niedermier

How excited are you to kick off your pro career on the 2019 FLW Tour?

Man, it's hard to put into words. Super excited would be an understatement. It's always been a dream of mine to fish the Tour. To finally qualify to get the opportunity and also have a couple lakes on the schedule that I feel comfortable with and I feel familiar with is an added blessing.

Which lakes are those?

The ones I'm most excited about are Sam Rayburn and Grand Lake. Rayburn is kind of, I don't want to use the term home lake — I live two hours away — but I do spend a lot of time there. It's a place I'm definitely comfortable. I've fished two Costas and a BFL at Grand, and I enjoy fishing there. It sets up the way I like.

Are you at all nervous or intimidated about making the step up?

I wouldn't use the term nervous, but the thing I think about the most is just being away from my wife, Jolene, and my twin 2-year-old boys, Jaxson and Jayce. It's kind of hard to pull out of the driveway knowing I'm going to be gone a week or two. But as far as intimidated by the Tour, I'm not that at all. I kind of feel like I've been preparing for it for a while.

When you won the All-American, you dedicated the tournament to your late father, Billy. How did he influence you as an angler?

My dad barely owned a fishing pole, so he never really taught me more than the basics. He was kind of a bream, white perch and catfish type fisherman. But he taught me a lot of life lessons and work ethic and things I could apply as an angler. He didn't really intend some lessons to be put to use on the water, but that's how I ended up using them. I know he's no longer here on earth with us, but I

definitely feel like he's here in spirit with me a lot of times, especially when I catch a big one in an event.

Ever run into a duck hunter while you're flipping duck blinds on those Louisiana lakes?

Yeah, you know, years ago me and Randy (Deaver, All-American runner-up) were fishing a team tournament, one of the bigger tournaments around here, and there was a school of Trap fish that was kind of close to a duck blind. We had been seeing the people hunt it off and on leading up to the tournament, and we knew that the day of the tournament it was going to be first come, first served. So we got up extra early and got out there and Power-Poled down next to their blind so they knew "we were here first, and you need to let us catch these fish and then you can worry about hunting." If you're respectful of people you're going to be fine. For the most part, hunters and Rat-L-Trap fishermen have a pretty good relationship most of the time.

Do you ever do any duck hunting? Doesn't everyone in Louisiana?

No, man. I'm committed to the bass. That's all I do. I couldn't even tell you who played in the last Super Bowl. I try to stay laser focused on what will help my career.

So there's nothing else at all you're into?

The only thing else that I can really have a long conversation about is music. Growing up, I used to play the drums a lot. I would tell people that I can drum as good as I can fish. Years ago, I kind of made a decision to put the drums on the back burner and really focus on my career and focus on the bass. But I still love talking about music and different bands and concerts and stuff.



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN

What kind of music did you play?

Mostly different variations of rock, like a lot of stuff that's really musician-driven that's underground that nobody would really know because it's all about some drummer who's one of the top 10 drummers in the world, and he put a little super group together.

Being so focused, it makes me wonder if you've ever studied sports psychology or something.

No. I would say the biggest part of my game right now is just staying in the Word of God. Those tough days out there, like at Lake Ouachita (for the Cup), you're only going to get a few bites a day. Having strong faith in God, that He's going to be right there with you and help you make the right decisions — if I study anything it's that.

What was your experience like being on FLW Live at the Cup?

Man, it was pretty awesome because every time I would notice that camera back there it would be a reminder that, hey, this is the highest level. This is the real deal. You gotta be on your A-game. You gotta try to catch every fish that bites. And if that cameraman's not there, that's a reminder that you're not doing so good.

Have any goals this rookie season?

I guess if I had one goal it would be to gain the respect of other anglers that've been doing it for a long time and the guys I've looked up to. I want those guys to know that it's a blessing and honor to compete with them. And I'm sincere when I say that. ■

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