



FORREST WOOD CUP
SPECIAL ISSUE

BASS

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FALL 2018



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THE 2018
FORREST
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FALL 2018 | VOLUME 17 | ISSUE 7



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32

FEATURES

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

CLENT DAVIS GOES FROM NEARLY QUITTING THE SPORT TO WINNING THE FORREST WOOD CUP WITH A REMARKABLE FINAL-DAY RALLY — *Sean Ostruszka* 32

THE TOP 20

PATTERNS OF THE 2018 CUP CONTENDERS 44

BY THE NUMBERS

FACTS AND FIGURES FROM OUACHITA — *Curtis Niedermier* 60

TOP 10 TACKLE

KEY BAITS FROM THE CUP 64

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE — *Curtis Niedermier* 4

FLW FOUNDATION UPDATE — *Kathy Fennel* 6

NEWS&NOTES 8

SOLUNAR TABLES 11

COLUMNS

"CARP"-E DIEM — *Rob Newell* 12

FRANK OWENS CALLS IT QUILTS — *Colin Moore* 14

TAKEOFF

IN SEASON — *Paul Strege* 18

SNAP-JIGGING FALL SMALLIES — *Kyle Wood* 20

HOW RESERVOIRS AGE — *TJ Maglio* 24

THE OFFSEASON SPONSOR REPORT — *Joe Balog* 26

SAFETY EQUIPMENT — *Joe Balog* 28

ON TOUR

COSTA FLW SERIES, LAKE ERIE — *Colin Moore* 68

COSTA FLW SERIES, 1000 ISLANDS — *Kyle Wood* 69

TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS 70

BACK END

THE BASS FEDERATION — *Dan Johnson* 72

BACKLASH WITH CLENT DAVIS — *Sean Ostruszka* 80

COVER PHOTO BY MATT PACE

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BUILD YOUR LIFE RESUME

Congratulations to Clent Davis on winning the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup. He'll forever be remembered as a champion. What an achievement. What a career milestone to add to his resume.

On the subject of resumes, I came across an interesting idea recently called a "life resume."

Unlike a professional resume, which lists career accomplishments, a life resume is a list of meaningful experiences that someone has lived out. Trips made to faraway places, family goals met, friends visited, fishing trips experienced – these are the types of things that make it into a life resume.

I think that keeping a list of this sort is a wonderful idea. Too often, we expend more hours and more energy and more worry on things that really aren't as important to our lives as we think, like the stuff that pads our professional resumes. Making a living is important, but enjoying life is, too. A life resume can remind you of the payoff for all that hard work, or help you set goals for what you'd like to add to it.

In tournament fishing, winning the Cup is the ultimate pro angler resume builder, but for many qualifiers, just getting there and experiencing what it's like to be part of the event is a life resume achievement.

Some of the pros probably forgot that in Hot Springs back in August. It looked that way to me. I could sense the disappointment in a few whose results weren't what they'd hoped.

Maybe they'll come around and realize that although there's only one winner, there are no losers at the Cup. Every participant walked away with another experience to add to his life resume.

As I examine my own life resume, I'm starting to worry that the category of fishing experiences isn't growing fast enough. It wasn't always that way.

When I started at FLW, I fished all over the country with anyone who'd take me. I begged my way into the boat. I was so consumed with improving as an angler and learning more about this sport that I gave up everything else to pursue fishing. The "Fishing" column on my life resume ballooned.

Sometime in the last 11 years my focus shifted. I started spending more time watching other anglers fish than catching fish myself. I worked longer hours. I turned down chances to fish world-class lakes and reservoirs in order to hustle back to the office after tournaments. I chased opportunities to further my career and my professional resume, at the expense of my life resume.

I don't regret it, but I do want to even things out; to bring things back into killer. I think I'll start by going back to my favorite fisheries up north and catching smallmouths and walleyes. I haven't done that in about five years. I might skip work a few times this fall to catch the morning topwater bite, or book an inshore trip with a guide so I can learn more about fishing the salt. That's a world I've only dabbled in. And I've still never fished the Boundary Waters from a canoe, though I've always wanted to. That'd be a fun summertime trip.

The list of potential experiences goes on and on. I suppose if I do things right going forward and rethink my priorities, my life resume and the Fishing column within it will go on and on too. I can only hope.

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CONGRATULATIONS CLET DAVIS!

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When everything is on the line, tournament fisherman need every possible advantage. That's why each Team Evinrude angler on the FLW Bass tour is powered by an Evinrude® E-TEC® G2®. We are proud that our very own, Clet Davis, has earned the title of 2018 Forrest Wood Cup champion.

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Summer Camp Success

“Summer camps are cool.”

That’s what FLW President of Marketing Trisha Blake wrote back in May when previewing the Costa FLW High School Fishing Camp in this column, and boy was she right. It was quite possibly the coolest thing to happen in our sport in the last 10 years.

Thanks to Costa Sunglasses, Bass Pro Shops and a host of other FLW sponsors, 125 high school anglers – most of them aspiring bass pros – from 23 states and as far away as California participated in the inaugural FLW High School Fishing Camp at Murray State University and Kentucky Lake July 18-20. They were joined by 50 parents and coaches, 19 FLW Tour pros, and a collection of FLW staff and industry executives eager to help.

Students learned about bass fishing techniques, electronics, boat maintenance and tournament strategies, but also how to market themselves to sponsors and pursue careers in the fishing industry. To the surprise of many, one of the most popular seminars, hosted by pros Andy Morgan and Jeff Sprague, focused on angler etiquette and respect on the water. How cool is that? Etiquette and respect taking top honors. Other activities that earned a coveted “cool” ranking included a poolside lure-tuning demo with Scott Martin and Tom Redington, and a meal shared with Forrest L. Wood.

While high schoolers attended seminars, parents and coaches participated in panel discussions geared toward helping their students and teams achieve success on and off the water. It was an incredible networking opportunity shared with FLW staff and industry executives.

Many students and parents opted to test their newfound skills in the FLW Foundation #MarshallStrong tournament benefiting victims of the Jan. 23, 2018 shooting at Marshall County High School in Benton, Ky. The tournament, held July 21 on Kentucky Lake, raised more than \$13,000. Congratulations to the father-son team of Randy and Parker Maples of Amory, Miss., for winning the boat division with a five-bass limit worth 22 pounds, 10 ounces. The father-daughter team of Wayne and Alexis Joyce of Clarksville, Tenn., finished second with a 21-pound, 2-ounce limit. The tournament’s kayak division was won by none other than Eric Jackson, the founder of Jackson Kayak. Jackson tallied a 45-inch limit of smallmouths, but rather than accept the kayak he donated for the winner of the division, he gave it to high school angler Nathan Reeves of Cypress, Texas, who finished as runner-up with two bass totaling 29 1/2 inches.

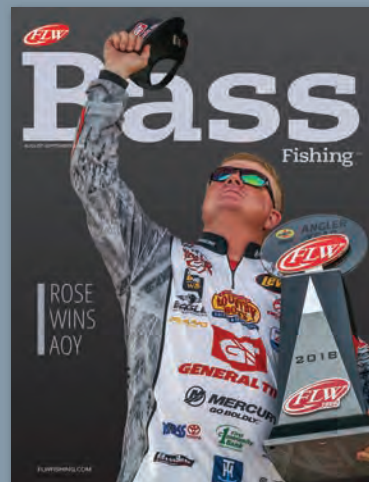
By the time camp and the FLW Foundation tournament ended, it was clear that we had tapped into something special. In the coming months we will announce the date and location for the second-annual Costa FLW High School Fishing Camp, and we promise to make it even bigger and better than the first.

The level of interest and skill demonstrated by the students who attended our inaugural camp suggests that the next generation of anglers will mature quickly into successful members of the fishing industry, which spells good things for the future of our sport.

Sincerely,

Kathy Fennel
President, FLW Operations Division

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WATSON RECEIVES SPORTSMANSHIP & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN

James Watson of Lampe, Mo., is the 2018 recipient of the Forrest L. Wood Sportsmanship & Community Leadership Award. He was recognized in front of his peers at the Forrest Wood Cup pre-tournament banquet in Hot Springs, Ark.

The Missouri pro's nomination and eventual selection for the award stem from his commitment to participate in FLW Community Outreach efforts prior to FLW Tour events held around the country. He is also a regular volunteer with the non-profit organization Shriners Hospitals for Children, and a mentor for high school fishing clubs.

McWha TO DIRECT COSTA FLW SERIES

Mark McWha, a veteran T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League tournament director, will succeed Ron Lappin as Costa FLW Series director of tournament operations beginning in 2019. The announcement was made in late August.

"I have some extremely big shoes to fill in trying to follow Ron Lappin, but I'm very confident in my abilities and look forward to traveling the country working with some of the top anglers from around the world," says McWha, who's been with FLW since 2006.

Lappin has directed the Costa FLW Series since 2007. He and his wife, Joan, will continue to assist McWha during the 2019 season as they transition into retirement.



2019 COSTA FLW SERIES SCHEDULE

CENTRAL DIVISION

April 4-6 – Kentucky Lake, Gilbertsville, Ky.
May 9-11 – Table Rock Lake, Branson, Mo.
Oct. 10-12 – Lake of the Ozarks, Osage Beach, Mo.

NORTHERN DIVISION

July 18-20 – Lake Champlain, Plattsburgh, N.Y.
Aug. 22-24 – Potomac River, Marbury, Md.
Sept. 19-21 – St. Lawrence River, Massena, N.Y.

SOUTHEASTERN DIVISION

Jan. 31-Feb. 2 – Lake Okeechobee, Clewiston, Fla.
March 21-23 – Lake Chickamauga, Dayton, Tenn.
April 25-27 – Santee Cooper, Summerton, S.C.

SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION

Jan. 3-5 – Lake Amistad, Del Rio, Texas
June 13-15 – Grand Lake, Grove, Okla.
Oct. 3-5 – Sam Rayburn, Brookeland, Texas

WESTERN DIVISION

Feb. 28-March 2 – Lake Mead, Las Vegas, Nev.
May 16-18 – Clear Lake, Lakeport, Calif.
Sept. 26-28 – California Delta, Bethel Island, Calif.

COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP

Oct. 31-Nov. 2 – Lake Cumberland, Burnside, Ky.

FORMER EDITOR EMERITUS COLIN MOORE RECEIVES WADE BOURNE AWARD

The "Legends of the Outdoors" Hall of Fame honored Colin Moore with the Wade Bourne Communicator of the Year Award during its annual banquet on Aug. 25.

Moore, who resides in Gallatin, Tenn., recently retired as editor emeritus of *FLW Bass Fishing* magazine. He previously served as editor-in-chief of the magazine and *FLWFishing.com* and has held numerous other editorial positions in his career, including a six-year stint as executive editor at *Outdoor Life*.

The award is named in honor of late outdoor writer, radio host and television personality Wade Bourne, who passed away in 2016. He and Moore were good friends.

"This award was designed to recognize what we believe was Wade's concept of an outdoor communicator," says Garry Mason, founder of Legends of the Outdoors. "Colin certainly fits that mold. Not only is he a great writer and communicator, but he's the type of person that, when you meet him, you like the guy, and once you get to know him, you like him even more."

This is the second year for the award. Outdoor writer and radio host Larry Rea was the inaugural recipient in 2017.

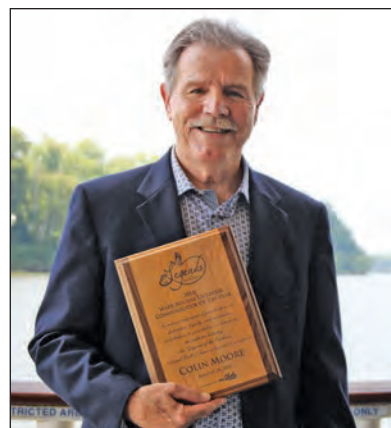


PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMEIER

BASS PRO SHOPS EXPANDS PARTNERSHIP WITH FLW

EXTENSION INCLUDES BPS, CABELA'S AND WHITE RIVER MARINE GROUP BRANDS

In late summer FLW announced several sponsorship additions and extensions with the Bass Pro Shops family of companies, including Bass Pro Shops, White River Marine Group and Cabela's.

Bass Pro Shops will retain title sponsorship of the FLW High School Fishing Opens, and will also be the presenting sponsor of multiple YETI FLW College Fishing tournaments. FLW will host registrations and weigh-ins of select tournaments at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's store locations, and will be showcased in the annual summertime Bass Pro Shops "Gone Fishing" events. Bass Pro Shops will also expand its support of the Costa FLW High School Fishing Camp.

"Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's, prior to their coming together last year, have been an integral part of both professional and recreational fishing for many years," says FLW President of Marketing Trish Blake. "We recognize the renewed commitment to FLW as a substantial and important confirmation of Bass Pro Shops' support for their customers' passion for the outdoors. We look forward to building upon our continued relationship with this iconic outdoor brand."

The White River Marine Group sponsorship extension now includes Ranger Boats, Nitro and Triton Boats.

Ranger Boats, FLW's longest-running sponsor partner, will remain the featured and official boat of FLW. It will continue to operate the Ranger Cup contingency program. Nitro and Triton Boats will also be offering contingency opportunities.

"We are very excited to expand our partnership with FLW," says White River Marine Group founder Johnny Morris. "Beyond connecting our iconic boat brands with passionate anglers, FLW's tournaments promote the sport of fishing on a global scale and align with our conservation vision to help introduce new audiences to the great outdoors."



CONGRATULATIONS CLENT DAVIS!

Winner of the 2018 FLW Forrest Wood Cup

PHOTOS BY FLW / ANDY HAGEDON

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FLW HONORS HOLLINGSWORTH FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO YOUTH, STATE-FISH ART CONTEST



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

FLW honored Karen Hollingsworth, manager of Wildlife Forever's State-Fish Art Contest, during the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup for her leadership in providing awareness and understanding of fish and fishing to the youth of America. The 2018 State-Fish Art Contest was the 20th iteration.

"Karen believes in the power of fishing to develop conservation and aquatic stewardship," said Dave Washburn, FLW vice president of operations, on the Cup weigh-in stage on day two in Hot Springs. "She has made significant advancements in creating appreciation of America's fish and fishing."

"I was truly surprised by this special award and so pleased to see the State-Fish Art program honored," Hollingsworth added. "I want to thank

our sponsors and all the students and teachers participating in the annual contest. Without their help and support the program would not be possible."

FLW has been a longtime supporter of the State-Fish Art program, which displays its winning art on a "Wall of Fame" at the annual Cup Expo. For more information, visit wildlifeforever.org.

ROSE AND COMPANY RECEIVE RANGER CUP AWARDS



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Scott Arms of Ranger Boats recognized five Ranger Cup award winners during the Thursday night banquet that preceded the Forrest Wood Cup. The five anglers were the highest-finishing Ranger Cup anglers in the 2018 FLW Tour standings.

Mark Rose, the Pennzoil Marine Angler of the Year, received top honors and a new Ranger Z518L bass boat. Other recipients were Bryan Thrift (\$10,000), Scott Martin (\$8,000), Chris Johnston (\$7,000) and Cody Meyer (\$5,000).

For more information on the Ranger Cup program, visit rangercup.com.

2019 CUP TO RETURN TO HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS

The Forrest Wood Cup is returning to Hot Springs, Ark., Aug. 9-11, 2019. The tournament will take place at Lake Hamilton. It'll be the first time in Cup history that the championship event will visit the same host community in consecutive seasons.

"Hot Springs and FLW have established a great relationship in the 20 years that we have hosted their great events, and we are thrilled and grateful that the FLW Cup is returning to our city," says Steve Arrison, CEO of Visit Hot Springs. "FLW not only does the best job in the world at putting on a family-friendly event that literally has something for everyone, but it also does a tremendous job of highlighting the great fishing, great attractions and great facilities we have here in Hot Springs."

The 2019 Cup will be the sixth iteration in Hot Springs. The community first hosted the Cup in 2005, when hometown favorite George Cochran won the championship on Lake Hamilton. Subsequent Cups were held at Lake Ouachita in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2018. ■



PHOTO COURTESY VISIT HOT SPRINGS

AUG. 9-11 2019



FLW EXPO

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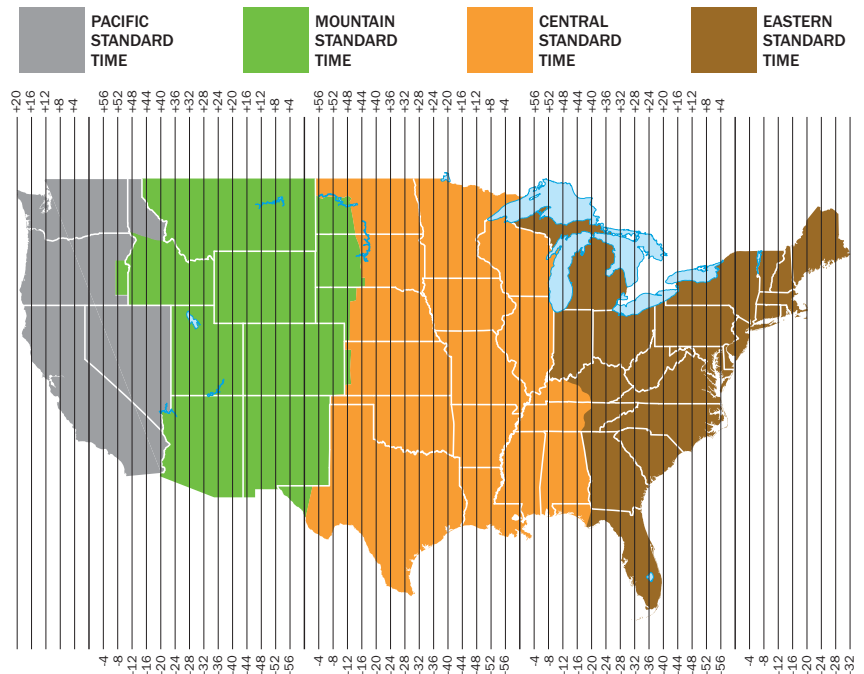
KIDS FISHING DERBY

HOT SPRINGS, ARK

LAKE HAMILTON



SOLUNAR TABLES
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2018



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

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



ROB NEWELL

“Carp”-e Diem



Carp. It's the word of the day up and down the Tennessee River.

Locals around Kentucky Lake have been screaming carp for several years now, claiming that the Asian varieties of silver and bighead carp have entered Kentucky and Barkley lakes en masse through the locks.

This year, the rest of the fishing world got to see exactly why Kentucky Lake regulars have been sounding the carp alarm. As national tournament circuits made their annual migration to Kentucky Lake this season, they found carp – by the thousands – just about anywhere they stopped a boat.

It's indeed a different Kentucky Lake. Score sheets from major tournaments are looking a little different, too. While big limits at the very top of the tournament results still reach into the mid-20-pound range, it's what's going on down below that has many concerned. At the recent FLW Tour event, for instance, more than 30 anglers were able to cash checks without catching a limit each day. Tour anglers used to weeding through dozens and dozens of 1 1/2- to 3-pound bass to cull up were scratching and clawing just to get bites and fill limits.

Obviously, most professional anglers are not biologists, but collectively they do possess hundreds of thousands of hours of fishing experience across the country. With that, pros are pretty dialed in to the pulse of the underwater world. After several weeks of needling Kentucky Lake with a fishing rod, pros had a few common observations that were a bit unnerving.

1. A year-class, those 1 1/2- to 2 1/2-pound bass, seems to be missing.

2. There are far fewer threadfin shad.

3. The sheer biomass of the carp looks like something out of a science fiction movie, resulting in blacked-out depth finders and jumping carp raining down in the shallows.

Since these carp are filter feeders, the theory goes that such a biomass suckling plankton from the water 24/7 will eventually crash the food chain, severely impacting game fish up top.

Are carp solely to blame for the lower catch rates at Kentucky Lake? Who knows?

As Asian carp continue their migration into new waters, it creates a lot of uncharted territory for fishery and wildlife managers at all levels. They are working toward possible solutions such as sonic sound barriers at dams and potential strains of carp viruses that might render them sterile.

These fish are just now reaching massive deep-water impoundments, and given the huge numbers of carp of various sizes and year classes in Kentucky and Barkley, their reproduction in lakes appears to pose no problem for them.

Making matters worse, Kentucky Lake is the gateway to the fertile and ecologically diverse Tennessee River system of reservoirs – the nation's superhighway for recreational bass fishing.

The whole situation sounds pretty daunting. Talk to anyone about the subject matter of carp and the conversation takes on an apocalyptic tone.

FLW Tour pro Tom Monsoor of La Crosse, Wis., has a slightly different outlook on the future of Asian carp in America. Some may know Monsoor as the swim jig freak who won the FLW Tour event at the Potomac River last year. Monsoor is also a commercial fisherman. He's spent several decades wrangling millions of pounds of carp from various waterways in the Midwest by net, which makes him uniquely qualified to offer some insight into this situation.

The good news, according to Monsoor, is that he sees no reason why the very Asian carp that are crowding the recreational waters of America cannot be the next "chicken of the sea."

As Monsoor points out, these particular carp are a rich source of protein that can be distributed all over the world. Currently, Asian carp are table fare in other parts of the world.

"Right now everyone sees these carp as a lose-lose-lose situation," Monsoor says. "But there is a day coming when these carp will be a major solution to some of our world's biggest problems, including starvation. These carp can feed people and create jobs. They are a win-win-win just waiting to happen."

Monsoor is adamant that this is not just some pie-in-the-sky fantasy. He believes harvesting Asian carp for food is absolutely possible with the processes and technology already in place today.

"I know every segment of the carp business, from catching them to processing them to shipping them to eating them, and there is not a single part of the entire operation that is not already in use right now," Monsoor explains. "Of course, some segments of the operation would need to be tweaked to work specifically for catching Asian carp out of Kentucky Lake, but my

point is that every step of this equation is already in place somewhere. It's already a reality. Carp are food."

With regard to the carp's negative connotation of being "scum eaters," Monsoor says that given the water standards of the Tennessee Valley Authority, carp out of the Tennessee River would be some of the cleanest carp in the world. He believes that, in time, markets would pay a premium for Tennessee River carp due to their high quality.

"When you hold the Tennessee River up against some other rivers in this world where these very same fish are already harvested for food, the Tennessee River is a very clean system by comparison," he says.

He thinks most of the active netting would likely have to be done in the winter months to help keep the fish fresh from harvest to processing.

"There is a stringent process for every food harvested from water, whether it's clams, crabs, lobster, tuna or carp. There are standards for icing and/or flash-freezing, and netting Asian carp out of the Tennessee River would have to follow suit."

One concern brought up often is how netting might impact recreational game-fish species such as bass and other sunfish that might be trapped in nets as bycatch. This is the segment of the netting business that Monsoor says requires the most fine-tuning specific to individual lakes.

"Finding the right times when the carp are most vulnerable and segregated from other species is key," he explains. "Sometimes we do get bass and walleye mixed in with our nets, but you have to train the netters to separate them out and turn them loose."

Monsoor admits that setting up these operations would be a challenge.

"I'm just saying it can be done," he says. "It's going to take a cooperative effort between a billionaire benefactor – a Bill Gates-type person who has vision and money – and several of the commercial fishing industry's best brains and government agencies."

So can enough carp really be harvested to put a dent in the populations in Kentucky Lake?

Monsoor indicates this is the least of his concerns. Given his own experiences with netting carp, once a market develops for them, it's amazing how scarce they can become.

To Monsoor's point, I can remember way back when the lowly redfish was considered to be basically a saltwater carp. Granted, redfish are a native fish, not a prolific invader. But they were of little food value. Then in the 1980s, Paul Prudomme dropped a redfish fillet into a skillet, seasoned it with a mix of spices and created the blackened redfish craze. Once the fish were specifically targeted by commercial fishermen, stocks began to dwindle. By the early 1990s, so many redfish had been harvested from our oceans that they had to become protected.

Blackened carp, anyone? ■

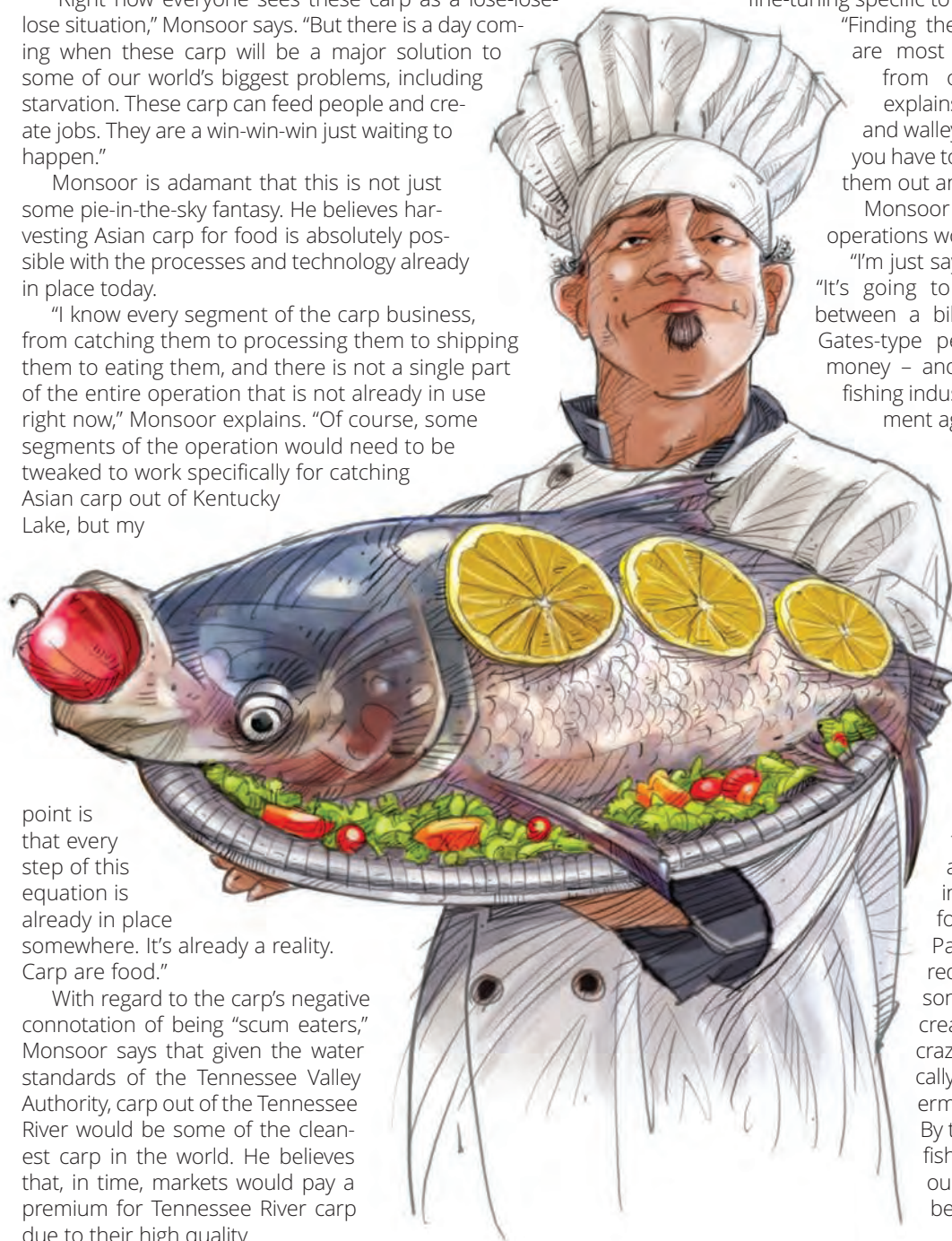


ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER



COLIN
MOORE

Frank Owens Calls it Quits

.....

Service aside, friendships made over the years are the main reason Ranger Boats service technician Frank Owens will be missed. Owens ended his career at the Costa FLW Series Championship. After thousands of miles on the road, after helping hundreds of anglers pursue their dreams, after seeing tournament fishing blossom into full flower, Owens is finally closing up shop. His 34 years of watchful service were acknowledged during the banquet that preceded the Forrest Wood Cup in August.

When the Arkansas native started working for Ranger Boats, terms such as "GPS," "touch pad," "onboard computer" and "waypoints" weren't part of the fishing lexicon. Many of the bells and whistles that characterize today's high-performance fishing platforms were somewhere in the future.

At the time the 63-year-old Owens arrived on the scene in the '80s, bass tournaments were solidifying their position as America's favorite fishing sport. As a result of their growing popularity, major players in the fishing industry began to flood the market with upgraded versions

of what came before. Their latest and greatest usually were just that, but even the best equipment had its *oops!* moments. Tournaments were the proving grounds for innovation, and if a bug appeared in a product, generally it popped up before or during an event when it was being put through its paces.

Service Goes on the Road

In those days, anglers had two choices for quick fixes: repair stuff themselves, or take it to a local dealer. As equipment became more useful, it also became more complicated, and anglers became less competent when it came to basic repairs.

Coincidentally, the tournament scene also fostered a service lag. Business was good and getting busier for boat dealers, to the point they couldn't drop everything at a moment's notice to work on a small flood of tournament boats and risk alienating some of their loyal and local customers.

Guys like Owens came along to fill the service vacuum. Various manufacturers with a lot at stake began staffing major tournaments with road teams

whose technicians could repair even the most complicated products. Call them the pit crews of the tournament world; the people who made sure that the fishing stars would never fall from their lofty perches because something crapped out at the most critical moment.

Without naming names, Owens has helped stave off disaster for a number of successful bass and walleye pros through the years, and witnessed some major events in competitive fishing. One major observation on his part relates to the difference between the anglers of yesterday and today.

"For one thing, back when I started the pros that had the most and biggest sponsors were the ones that won or placed high in tournaments a lot," he observes. "Nowadays, it's not so much the guys that win as the guys that work hard to promote products and do the best job at it. Winning is a bonus, but not absolutely necessary. Also, today's tournament fishermen are a lot more polished when they speak on stage; they're very organized and businesslike."

Ranger Tough

Maytag used to run a TV ad depicting one of its washer and dryer repairmen as being "the loneliest guy in town" because of the dependability of its products. When it comes to repairs on Ranger's bass boats, the same could be said of Owens. As a serviceman for Ranger, Owens hasn't exactly been covered up with work at any of the bass and walleye tournaments he's attended. Time-wise, Owens has averaged about 25 to 30 weeks a year on the highway, covering events for Ranger. A battery gone bad here, a livewell aerator pump conked out there is about all he sees at the Ranger service trailer. Since the days when hot rods such as Hank Parker and Jimmy Houston ran Rangers through stickups like they were Sherman tanks, the company has improve its gel-coated hulls to make them virtually bulletproof. The rigging and the Ranger Trail trailers likewise have been beefed up to take a pounding and still perform.

Every Ranger fan has his favorite hull. Owens' is the 360 Comanche of the late '80s, followed closely by the current Z521L. His preference relates more to looks and performance rather than to how easy they are to work on. Down through the years, Rangers simply haven't needed a lot of maintenance.

Not that Owens ever loafed around in the service yard. Having served with most of the other technicians for years, he helps them out as need be. If it's not something he can remedy – and there's not much he can't – he knows somebody in the service yard who has the answers. It might be Jay Anderson of Mercury or David "Happy" White of Power-Pole, two of Owens' closest associates.

"It's been a fun ride," says Owens, who looks forward to spending more time with his wife, Sylvia, sons Lorin and Levi, and five grandchildren. Owens is going to continue to operate his one-man sawmill outside Mountain Home, Ark., and dabble in woodworking. He's also talking with the Ranger folks back in Flippin about becoming a customer and dealer troubleshooter.

"I've enjoyed the company of some of the finest tournament fishermen there are, from the Canadian border down to south Florida, from Virginia to California," he adds. "I'm going to miss the fishermen a lot, because I've made friends with so many of them, and I always looked forward to seeing them at the next tournament. I'll also miss the other service technicians and the

various FLW tournament staffs that I've gotten to know down through the years. They're a great bunch of people."

The feeling is mutual. The display of admiration shown Owens by those who

attended the Forrest Wood Cup's opening banquet was genuine. Even when he wasn't working on a boat, knowing that he was there on the bank and had their backs was a comfort to Ranger anglers. ■



PHOTOS BY COLIN MOORE

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WHAT'S INSIDE:

Chris Johnston's cool football jig/swimbait combo

Ice fishing baits catch open-water smallies too

How reservoirs age

\$\$: Make a killer offseason sponsor report

The essential safety items you need in your boat

PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ

Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege



TRY THIS: FOOTBALL JIG/SWIMBAIT COMBO

One of Ontario pro Chris Johnston's fall favorites for up north is a football head fitted with a swimbait. It's unconventional, but has proven highly effective for bass relating to hard-bottom points and flats.

"Fish are looking for either shad or gobies in the fall, and that lure mimics both very well," says Johnston.

The rig: 1/2-ounce football-head jig with a 3.8-inch Jackall Rhythm Wave in prism shad or green pumpkin pepper

Key tackle: 10-pound-test PowerPro braid with an 8-pound-test fluorocarbon leader

Target areas: "I start on deeper points, focusing on ones located adjacent to wintering areas," says Johnston. "Hard bottoms are best, with a chunk rock or rock/sand mix, in the 15- to 40-foot depth range."

Presentation: dragging, or casting and creeping it slowly back

SEASON TOTALS FOR THE BFL

Another T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League season is behind us, and the stats generated by FLW's weekend warriors are impressive.

Here's a rundown of some of the 2018 BFL's stats from 120 regular-season derbies:

67,197

TOTAL NUMBER OF BASS WEIGHED IN BY BOATERS AND CO-ANGLERS

7,095

TOTAL NUMBER OF FIVE-FISH LIMITS BROUGHT TO THE SCALE

158,998 POUNDS, 2 OUNCES

TOTAL WEIGHT BROUGHT IN THROUGHOUT THE SEASON

FALL PATTERNS — WORK CREEKS BACK TO FRONT

Most people know that the backs of creeks are good target areas on reservoirs in fall, but according to FLW Tour pro Clark Wendlandt, some folks have the approach backward.

"Most everyone knows that, as a typical rule of thumb, shad work their way to the back of the creeks in the fall," he says. "A lot of people work their way into those areas, but I prefer to go back as far as I can and work my way out. What I've found is that I intercept active schools of fish more quickly by utilizing that approach."



Wendlandt generally follows the creek channel on his way out, searching for subtle depth changes or signs of surface activity. Shallow-running cranks and topwaters are his primary baits.

PRO'S CHOICE: MOST OVERLOOKED LURE



1. David Williams

Swim Jig

"As long as fish are shallow, they will eat a swim jig. It mimics lots of different types of baitfish or bream."



2. Matt Arey

Spoon

"I think a spoon is a killer fall bait. Lunkerhunt makes one called the Spud that's shaped a little differently to cause it to glide backward. It catches a lot of fish around here [the Carolinas], or all over, really. In the fall they're 100 percent bait-oriented. You have a lot of fish that migrate to the backs of creeks, but you have a ton of fish that stay off-shore and relate to these giant schools of bait."



3. Greg Bohannon

Spinnerbait

"A plain old 1/2-ounce, double-willow spinnerbait is still one of my favorites. I catch a lot of fish on it throughout the year. It hasn't received as much attention as other lures in recent years, but is still very productive." ■

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SNAP-JIGGING FALL SMALLIES

AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO TRIGGER
BIG BROWNIES TO BITE



PHOTO BY CHRIS BURGAN

Some people think the only way to coerce finicky smallmouths into biting is to use finesse baits and light line. Sometimes that's the case, but another approach that can work is to fish more aggressive tactics in order to trigger sluggish fish into biting. In the fall, snap-jigging ice fishing baits such as the Rapala Jigging Rap is one technique that works really well. While the Jigging Rap and similar ice baits don't look like much, they're highly effective fish catchers.

When to Try It

Jigging Raps catch bass in many scenarios across the country, but they work especially well on the clear natural lakes of the North where smallmouths have to contend with ice over their heads for a major portion of the year.

The technique shines when the water temperature dips between the low 60s and upper 40s. In the North Country, this period spans from mid-fall into early winter.

Where to Look

As the water cools, smallies transition toward areas where they'll ride out the colder months. Rock is usually king, but some form of transition – sand to rock, mud to sand, little rock to bigger rock, etc. – can also be money. Specifically, look for rock humps, points or flats anywhere from 15 to 30 feet deep on natural lakes, though in some places bass will winter even deeper. Try starting in areas near deep water where you caught fish earlier in the summer and expand out from there. Most wintering areas are the same from year to year, so once you locate a few spots you can target fish there every season.

Use your electronics to scan good-looking areas. The fish should start to school up this time of year, so when you catch one you can slow down and thoroughly work the structure to put more bass in the boat.

The Gear

Spinning gear is the best choice. Jigging Raps and similar baits sport small hooks, so use a quality reel with a smooth drag set to slip on the hookset to keep fish hooked up.

A 7- to 7 1/2-foot, medium- to medium-heavy rod is ideal. It needs to be stiff enough to handle the weight of the baits

(up to about 7/8 ounce), but have a tip soft enough so it doesn't rip the hooks out during the hookset.

Braid is the best main line. It helps to transmit the feel of bottom content and make long casts. The lack of stretch means fish stay pegged better, too.

Probably the most important piece of gear is a swivel. Casting these baits is like launching a helicopter blade through the air, so you want to avoid the headache of line tangles. Use a No. 4 or 6 swivel to connect a 10-inch-long leader of 12-pound-test fluorocarbon.

Baits

While the Rapala Jigging Rap is the original bait in this category, several other similar baits work, too. Generally, for Northern fisheries, stick with crawfish or perch colors.



Techniques

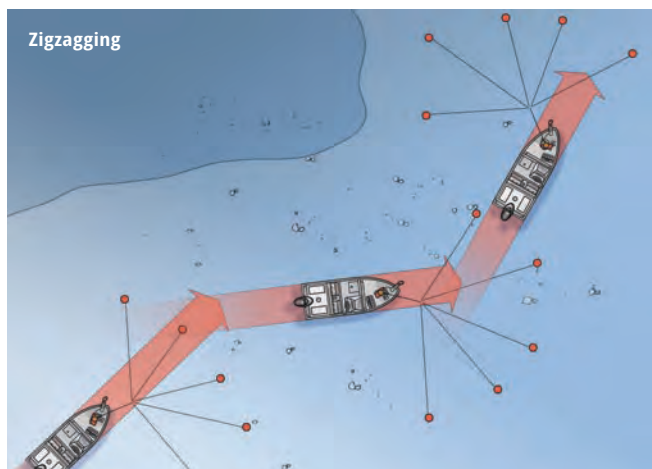
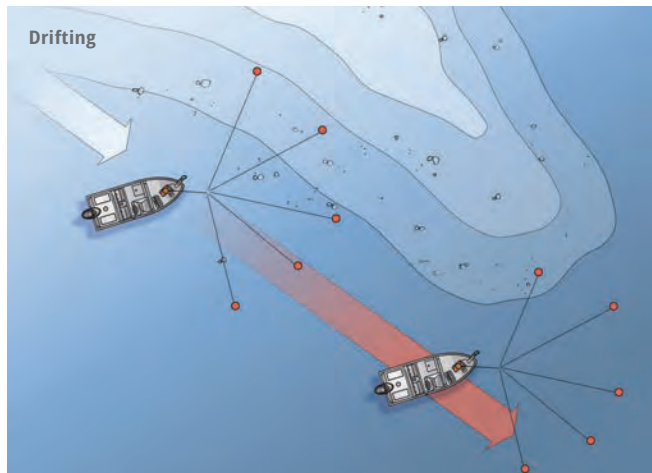
The basics of snap-jigging are simple, but to get the most out of it, you have to master the intricacies of the presentations.

There are two approaches: casting and fishing vertically.

Casting

How you fish the structure depends on the depth, its shape and the wind. Generally, casting works best when trying to cover water or eliminate water quickly on large points or deep flats.

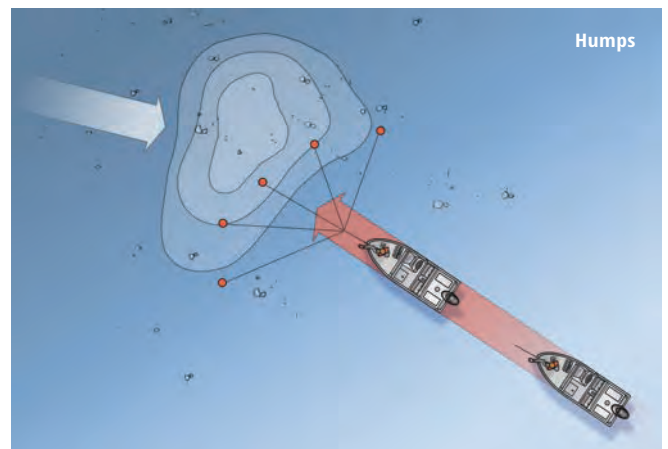
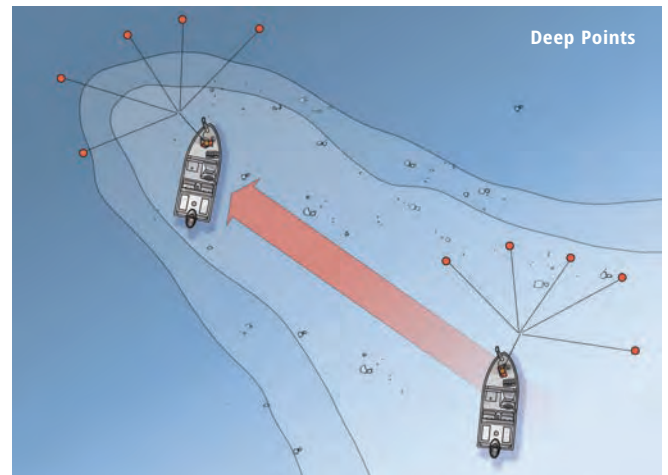
When the wind blows, it's usually easiest to start upwind and drift along the key areas, fan-casting as you go. Zigzagging with the trolling motor works best in calmer conditions.



On deep points, start with the boat in the middle so you can make casts to all sides while keeping an eye on your electronics for anything below the boat.

For humps that break off on all sides, start by casting to the edges with the boat held off on the downwind side. Slowly move toward it, fan-casting and monitoring the depth finder for fish. If you spot one on the screen, drop down on it as you would a drop-shot.

The presentation starts with a long cast. Let the Jigging Rap fall on a slack line. As soon as the line stops and the bait is on bottom, reel up the slack and give a swift snap of the rod. Your arm should bend at the elbow, not the wrist, to apply the right action. Let the bait fall on a slack line, and when it touches bottom again repeat the snap. The key is getting into a rhythm where the bait almost never stays still as you fish it back to the boat.

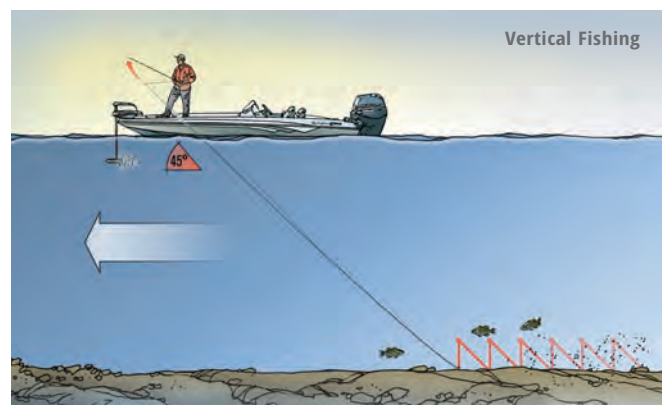


Vertical Fishing

Inside corners, tips of points, smaller humps and other types of smaller structures require more precision, and dropping the bait vertically and using the boat to move it is the easier approach.

To do it, drop the bait to the bottom and begin moving forward with the trolling motor so that the line slopes back at about a 45-degree angle. Maintaining bottom contact is key, so don't move so fast that the bait can't touch. Use sharp hops, bending the arm at the elbow, to rip the bait off bottom and let it fall back again.

If you spot a fish on your graph, drop down right next to the transducer and snap the bait on and off bottom. Sometimes it takes the fish a minute or more to commit, so don't stop after two or three hops. ■



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HOW RESERVOIRS AGE

WHY IT MIGHT NOT BE YOUR GRANDFATHER'S RESERVOIR ANYMORE

By TJ Maglio

The vast network of dams and reservoirs in this country is certainly among the great works of the 20th century. Beginning in the late '20s, the construction of dams by local and federal governments brought electricity, flood control and unprecedented prosperity to folks in desperate need due to the Great Depression.

From a bass fisherman's perspective, these dams provided the sport's original home base, and brought bass-rich waters to areas that previously offered minimal fishing opportunities.

Many years have passed since the bulk of those dams were built, and the reservoirs they impound are getting long in the tooth. The average age of dams in the United States is 52 years, and many are significantly older.

Although the reservoir aging process is not typically something noticeable to anglers on a day-to-day scale, understanding the process in the context of regional and multi-year trends will make you a better angler.

Results of Aging

Whether designed for power generation or flood control, or to provide a source of drinking water, dams are all basically the same. They are engineered structures that back up a stream or river and allow for controlled release of water. The constant influx of water, freeze-thaw cycles and recreational uses have definite effects over time, including:

1. Siltation – If you think of a reservoir as a dustpan of sorts, then every year's spring runoff is like a new broomful of dust swept into the system. Because of the dam, the runoff water slows when it hits the reservoir, causing sediment to drop out, which over time fills in creeks, ditches and other areas.

2. Loss of storage capacity – A side effect of siltation is loss of storage capacity. From an angler's perspective,

a reservoir that's heavily silted might reach a high-water stage faster than in previous times.

3. Altered flow regime – Another side effect of siltation is that, as reservoirs age, their flow capacity and volume decrease, which makes them less efficient at generating electricity. Although not noticeable on the largest reservoirs, this effect and resulting changes to generation are noticeable on some of the smaller ones.

4. Loss of timber and cover – Over time, any wood in the system such as standing timber and stumps will decompose and rot away. Wave and ice action can also destroy standing timber. Siltation fills in rocky areas and bottom contours, reducing the amount of preferred habitat available to bass.

Effects on the Fishery

The effects of reservoir aging have a multitude of impacts on the fisheries. The biggest factor is definitely siltation, which has great physical impact on the bottom topography. It causes ditches, drains and shallow areas to fill in, making them less suitable to bass. Areas that had a steep drop might only taper gently, and drains leading back to spawning flats might level out, changing how bass use them. Siltation also greatly impacts navigation, rendering some areas previously accessible to boats unfishable.

Loss of cover is also a big factor as bass and baitfish both rely on cover to proliferate. Typically, the less cover available, the less prolific the bass population. ■



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

Stumps and timber remain in many reservoirs, but they degrade over time.

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THE OFFSEASON SPONSOR REPORT

By Joe Balog

SHOW SPONSORS HOW HARD YOU'VE WORKED, AND ESTABLISH A PLAN FOR NEXT SEASON

Throughout the tournament season, it's often difficult for anglers to communicate with sponsors due to stringent time demands. However, the offseason remains an opportune time to get caught up on paperwork and vital relationships, whether you're a pro, an aspiring pro or a representative of a fishing team.

As both a product spokesman and owner of a promotional firm for nearly 20 years, I've been involved in dozens of relationships with some of the industry's leading marketing executives. Behind closed doors, most of them share a common complaint about dealing with pro-staff: A large segment of their pros fail to update the sponsor regularly.

Many tournament anglers simply don't know the best way to harness and report examples of their work. Fear not; today, it's pretty easy.

Collect Your Clips

Tournament anglers should regularly scour the internet for any mention of their name, photos, videos and tournament standings. Learn the screen-capture function on your computer to grab the "press" when you find it. Keep an organized file, and also learn to reduce file sizes to around 1MB each.

Having these files is the first step in building a progress update for sponsors. The goal is to include as many valid examples of promotional work as possible. This can also go beyond print.

Record dates of interviews, work with potential sales leads (especially useful for boat and motor sponsors), appearances at consumer or trade shows, seminars, guide trips, youth events, and anything that might gain positive attention for the sponsor's brand.

When possible, include photos of events and your interactions with the public. All of these can be included in the folder and later placed in the update. Even radio clips can often be found and downloaded, with a link included for the sponsor to sample. And don't forget to include tournament standings.

Package an Update

Once all the relevant materials are compiled, it's time to assemble the update itself. Packages don't need to be extravagant as much as organized. Separate each promotional effort into its own category, and build a page designed to showcase your work.

At one time, my company specialized in highly technical graphic packages. However, with today's advanced technology, I've found that a basic understanding of easy-to-use software such as Microsoft PowerPoint or Publisher is all that's needed to develop a quick, attractive update or portfolio.

The key is to keep it clean and organized, without crowding too much on each page. It's important to realize that the marketing personnel behind sponsorship choices are often stretched incredibly thin, so hit the high points and make viewing easy.

Include a Social Media Report

Social media is a vital tool for anglers' publicity needs. Here, building a following is the name of the game, as posts and shares can then be broadcast to thousands of viewers instantly.

Become adept at the basics of Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, and include them in your game plan. Once pages are established, demographic and publishing tools allow anglers to track the reach of their posts, and easily provide that information to sponsors.

Along the way you should also notify sponsors or their social media contractors when a particularly compelling piece of social media is posted so they can share it, which dramatically increases the reach of the post.

For your offseason update, grab a few screen captures of posts that have done particularly well, and include those in the report.

Add Important Extras

A few more useful resources can be included to complete the progress update, and each will separate you from the competition. First off, include supplemental photography.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN P. HUGHES

Make it a point to go out and get a few good images that include each sponsor's products or brands. Concentrate on real-world photos (referred to as lifestyle images in the marketing world), such as a close-up of a lure in a fish's mouth or your boat at the launch ramp at dawn. Again, with today's technology, capturing quality images is a breeze, even when you're alone. Invest in and learn to use GoPro cameras. Even in video mode, basic software allows users to pull compelling still photos.

Finally, conclude the update with a future plan. Marketing execs are subject to high volumes of wannabe pros that dream big, then disappear. A scripted plan separates you from the masses. Include tournament objectives for next season, as well as goals for increased social media activity

and growth. Include a schedule of posts, photos or videos that will help sponsors in their budget plans for next season.

Deliver the Package

Delivery of the update can be accomplished electronically or through hard copy. Electronic submissions are the norm. Try to stay under 16MB total, and deliver it in PDF format. Don't discount hard copies, however, if you think your work is going unnoticed. Have your update professionally printed and bound at a local office supply store to add a nice touch.

Delivering a fully updated report to each sponsor is the smart way to show that you're delivering on your end of the deal, and it should be part of every sponsored angler's off-season business plan. ■



ARE YOU REALLY PREPARED?

ESSENTIAL SAFETY ITEMS TO KEEP IN YOUR BOAT

By Joe Balog

Tournament bass anglers always have a plan. And should the prevailing fishing pattern dissolve or the weather change, there's usually a backup plan that can be called on to continue catching fish.

But what about unforeseen challenges with equipment, and the possibility of a breakdown? In the event that a situation presents itself, do you have a plan to keep yourself and any other anglers with you safe?

If you answered no, it's time to get prepared. I've always been meticulous about safety, and after two decades of competing in tournaments on some of the roughest waters in America, I evolved a checklist of safety items that all bass boaters should carry.

The (Legal) Basics

Carrying equipment required by state or federal law is a no-brainer. Life jackets, throwable cushions, flares and distress flags should all be easily accessible and in good condition. Some states also require other equipment. Know the rules and follow them.

Emergency Bilge Pump

One of the most important pieces of safety equipment you can have is an emergency bilge pump kit. Building it yourself is easy. Obtain a pump that can handle 1,000 gallons per hour

or more, connect 8 feet of discharge hose on the outflow (this can be inexpensive plastic hose available at any marine store) and 12 feet of wire on the power leads. On the end of each lead, attach a large alligator clip.

Thanks to the long power cords, this pump can be clipped on any battery, anywhere in the boat, and the hose can be placed over the side. I keep my "kit" wound up in a Plano Guide Series Waterproof Case that's nearly indestructible, and store it below deck.

Anchor

A strong anchor is often disregarded by bass boaters, but it can be your lifeline when fishing a body of water where getting to the bank is out of the question. It's vital to attach a large section of chain between anchor and rope to create your anchor rode (you can buy them commercially with the rope/chain combo). The chain helps protect the rode from abrasion and directs the pull on the anchor laterally. I found the 18-pound Richter Anchor to be a good all-around model for most bottom types and bass boat applications. It's best to do some research on how much chain to use and how to set an anchor properly for a boat the size you're in. The proper scope, or ratio of anchor rode to depth when the anchor is deployed, is important, though the subject for another time.

VHF Radios

VHF radios still have their place on a boat. While cell-phones now have service most places, they often don't on big bodies of water, or when they're soaked and out of commission. A waterproof handheld VHF never fails, and connects instantly to the U.S. Coast Guard or emergency response stations in the area. A quality radio can be purchased for under a hundred dollars and can be expected to last for a decade or more. Anglers might also consider keeping a personal locator beacon on their person as a means to call for help if they go overboard or other communication systems fail.

Spare Prop

I'm always amazed by the number of anglers who forgo purchasing and carrying a spare outboard prop due to cost. I wonder what their plan is in case they throw a blade or destroy the prop entirely while miles away from a boat ramp. Even if you skimp and order an aluminum prop for backup, be sure to carry a spare. The same goes for trolling motor props. Don't forget the hubs and locknuts. I always carry two nuts for each, as dropping one in the water during a change-out just seems to be a given.

First-Aid Kit

No boat should be on the water without some sort of first-aid kit. I've found it best to avoid the marine store models, as they come in junky cases and usually contain items you'll never use (burn cream, really?). Instead, I build my own with just the basics: big, waterproof adhesive bandages,

Neosporin, hydrocortisone cream for bug bites and allergies, gauze, and waterproof, silk medical tape. Everything is packed in a polycarbonate, waterproof Plano 3500 case. In all my years of ruining gear, I've never seen this box fail.

Other Items

Never leave home without a few more items: a flashlight with new batteries, insect repellent, a spare bilge pump cartridge matching the model in your boat, a sharp lock-blade knife, a roll of duct tape and electrical tape, and a supply of cable ties.

Tournament Supplies

Tournament fishermen should address a few more variables that could lead to a miserable day.

If the livewell fails, a small bubble pump like the Frabill AQUA LIFE will keep fish alive for hours. It clamps on any 12-volt battery, and can be transported from boat to boat.

Carry a large weigh-in bag to avoid livewell overcrowding or confusion in case you need to jump in a boat with a fellow competitor to get back to the ramp. Store your fish in the bag with the bubbler.

Finally, carry a spare kill-switch lanyard. A friend found out the hard way how important that was when his mysteriously went missing halfway through a tournament day. He was rendered unable to operate the main engine until I brought him my spare.

It's easy to prep for changes in fishing. This season, carry that attitude into your boat preparation. It could be your vital link to a safe day on the water. ■



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2018
FORREST WOOD CUP
THE CHAMP

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

CLENT DAVIS GOES FROM NEARLY QUITTING THE SPORT TO WINNING THE FORREST WOOD CUP WITH A REMARKABLE FINAL-DAY RALLY

By Sean Ostruszka

For all intents and purposes, Aug. 25, 2017 marks the day Clent Davis' career as a professional angler ended.

He'd just finished a lowly 93rd at the Bassmaster Elite Series finale on Lake St. Clair, capping off a brutal second season in the Elites. He'd only cracked the top 50 twice during the 2017 season, and as he mused on his chances during the long trip home to Montevallo, Ala., he became convinced he wouldn't requalify.

Worse than leaving yet another tournament without a check was the feeling he had inside; a feeling he'd had all season.

"I just wasn't having fun," the 32-year-old recalls. "Even before the [2017] season started I was dreading it. I'd turned something I loved - fishing - into something I hated."

At some point during the 12-hour drive back to Alabama, Davis decided he'd had enough. He made a call to a guy who he knew would buy all his fishing gear, and by the time he pulled into his driveway he'd sold everything - boat, rods, tackle - everything. He and his wife, Ashley, talked about him getting a job at the local power company. And what of his dream of being a professional angler, the one he'd had since he was a 5-year-old kid?

"It was done," Davis admits. "I was done."

Yet, he wasn't. A phone call from FLW Senior Director of Tournament Operations Bill Taylor reopened the door last November, giving him the itch to give it one last shot. Taylor invited Davis to re-join the FLW Tour as part of the Evinrude pro team. After a short deliberation, Davis accepted. By the end of June, he'd qualified for the Cup by finishing 25th in the 2018 Tour standings.

For all intents and purposes, Aug. 12, 2018 marks the day Davis' career as a professional angler took off. It's the day he became Forrest Wood Cup champion.

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN



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Practice

Three previous Cups at Lake Ouachita have shown there are three principal ways to catch bass in August: burning the bank with top-waters, focusing on schooling fish or fishing deep brush piles. Brad Knight's 2015 winning pattern of fishing drop-shots around shallow lay-downs is an outlier.

For Davis, choosing one of those three was a no-brainer.

"I'm a decent offshore fisherman, but I think I'm a really good brush pile fisherman," Davis says. "So that was the only thing I was going to do from day one."

That's mostly true. Davis admits he did spend a little time up shallow one of the practice days, but a few

hours of fruitless fishing pushed that idea out of his head.

He also went into the practice round with more than 500 brush piles marked on his graph – leftovers from the 2015 Cup at Ouachita where he finished 32nd. Those spots were no guarantee though. Davis says the key to any brush pile is that it's "fresh."

"A newly sunken brush pile is always the best," he says. "The bait just likes it better, which pulls in the bass."

"Even in an area with a lot of old brush piles, you sink a new one down there and it will get good again."

Finding brush piles was no problem during practice. Davis says he'd marked 1,038 by the time the tournament rolled around, with most in

22 to 30 feet of water. Many of them, including one of his best, were in obvious places, but Davis always likes looking for "sneaky" brush piles placed in nondescript places, such as small turns or subtle drains. Those overlooked piles would prove to be key during the Cup.

While nearly all the brush piles he found held fish, it was only the brush in the southwest corner of the lake heading toward Mountain Harbor Marina where he seemed to be able to get bit.

"I had a thousand places that all looked alike, but I just couldn't get bit anywhere other than there," Davis says. "It's not like I was getting a lot of bites anyway, but that's where I decided to focus."



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Day 1: 9 pounds, 8 ounces

Fishing brush is more than just graphing it, pulling off, firing a bait out near it and expecting a fish to swim over or up to eat your lure. According to Davis, a lot of it comes down to angles.

"Fishing for crappie is my ultimate hobby," Davis says. "I love it. It's also taught me a lot about fishing brush because you have to learn the angles. You have to know how to line up on a piece of brush so you can be brave enough to fire right into or over it."

Of course, none of that seemed to matter the first morning of the tournament.


"I lost a 4-pounder right off the bat," Davis recalls, "and I had zero fish at 11 a.m."



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

A fishing boat with 'WOTWAT' branding and a fish being netted. The boat is black with red and white 'WOTWAT' lettering. A green net is being used to catch a fish. The background shows a grey sky and water.

**“ I HAD A THOUSAND PLACES
THAT ALL LOOKED ALIKE,
BUT I JUST COULDN'T GET
BIT ANYWHERE OTHER
THAN THERE. ”**

— CLENT DAVIS



A big reason for his struggles, he'd eventually discover, related to how fast he was fishing. If the fish are really biting, winning in a brush pile tournament often means hitting as many piles as possible in a day to try and keep upgrading. That didn't work at Ouachita, where the bass were far from active.

What Davis came to find out was that he had to slow down. A lot.

"I normally like to start with a swimbait, but they just wouldn't come up for it," Davis says. "So I switched to the Mister Twister Mag 12 BUZZ Worm in plum apple on a 1/2-ounce head. Even then, I'd pull it over a branch, let it fall to the bottom and then just let it sit for 10 seconds before moving it again."

He finally got his second bite (and first keeper) at 11 a.m. It was a 3 1/2-pounder. Davis' next move earned him his second keeper on a swimbait. With an hour left in the day those were the only two bass swimming in his livewell.

According to Davis, the fish were feeding heavily at night, but they weren't fasting all day. There was a window of activity first thing in the morning and another feeding window in late afternoon. He capitalized on the latter to avoid a disastrous round.

"I went from two fish to a limit real quick when that window opened the last hour," Davis recalls.

That limit wasn't much, weight-wise, but with such a tough bite going on it actually had him in 12th to start the event.

Day 2: 9 pounds, 8 ounces

As rough as day one had been, day two made it look like a cakewalk.

Davis was more dialed in with his big worm and knew how slow he had to fish, so he set up a milk run of



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

about five key brush piles to start and end his day. He stopped at new ones in between, though he could really only hit a little more than a dozen each day because of how slowly he had to fish.

The game plan was solid, but the execution failed him again.

"I lost two big fish right off the bat," Davis says. "No joke; they were in the net and jumped out. My marshal looked at me and said he'd never seen anything like it before."

By failing to capitalize on the early window, Davis had to grind out bites

the rest of the day. He had only four fish with minutes left to fish.

"I knew I had to get five," Davis recalls. "So I sat down and rigged up a Ned rig with a Nichols Toadstool. I didn't know if a 13-incher or what would eat it, but I knew something would. I caught a 2-pounder almost instantly, and then I lost a third big one."

Davis figured the final lost fish signaled the end of his tournament. Turns out, the 2-pounder was just enough, and he squeaked into the top 10 by 1 ounce.



PHOTO BY MATT FACE

/// I NORMALLY LIKE TO START WITH A SWIMBAIT, BUT THEY JUST WOULDN'T COME UP FOR IT. ///

— CLENT DAVIS



Day 3: 17 pounds, 13 ounces

No one had ever gone from 10th to first on the final day of the Cup in a cumulative-weight event. Many speculated that if it were ever going to happen, this would be the tournament.

The bites had been so random the previous two days that it seemed as if anyone could either luck into a giant at any time or just as easily come in with nothing.

As he idled out the final morning Davis didn't really think he had a chance of winning, but he figured that if things lined up he could certainly make a jump up the standings. After all, there was less than 2 pounds separating 10th place and third place.

A 2 1/2-pounder started his day off strong, but things got real interesting

at 9 a.m. when Davis caught his biggest fish of the week, a 5-pounder. It prompted him to tell his cameraman, "We can win this thing. I'm telling you."

Unofficially, he actually took over the lead at that point, then methodically built up his advantage throughout the day despite the effects of a storm blowing in during the early afternoon. Later, in the final hour, Davis went to the same brush pile where he'd lost a 4-pounder each of the previous two days. This time, he caught a "redemption" 4-pounder that sealed one of the more remarkable comeback stories in FLW history.

"I've worked for this my whole life," Davis says. "When it's your time, it's your time. I guess it was time for it to happen." ■



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

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2018
FORREST WOOD CUP
— THE TOP 20 —

PHOTO BY MATT PACE



FISHING TO FIND THEM

Niggemeyer's best spots were points, pockets and straightaways directly off the main feeder creeks. The deeper he worked into secondary creeks and arteries, the fewer fish Niggemeyer found.

"As much as I thought there was a pattern, you really had to fish to establish whether or not there was going to be any fish in an area," he adds.

Seeing "life" – bluegills, baby bass, pickerel, gar, minnows – was the best telltale sign that he'd found a productive area.

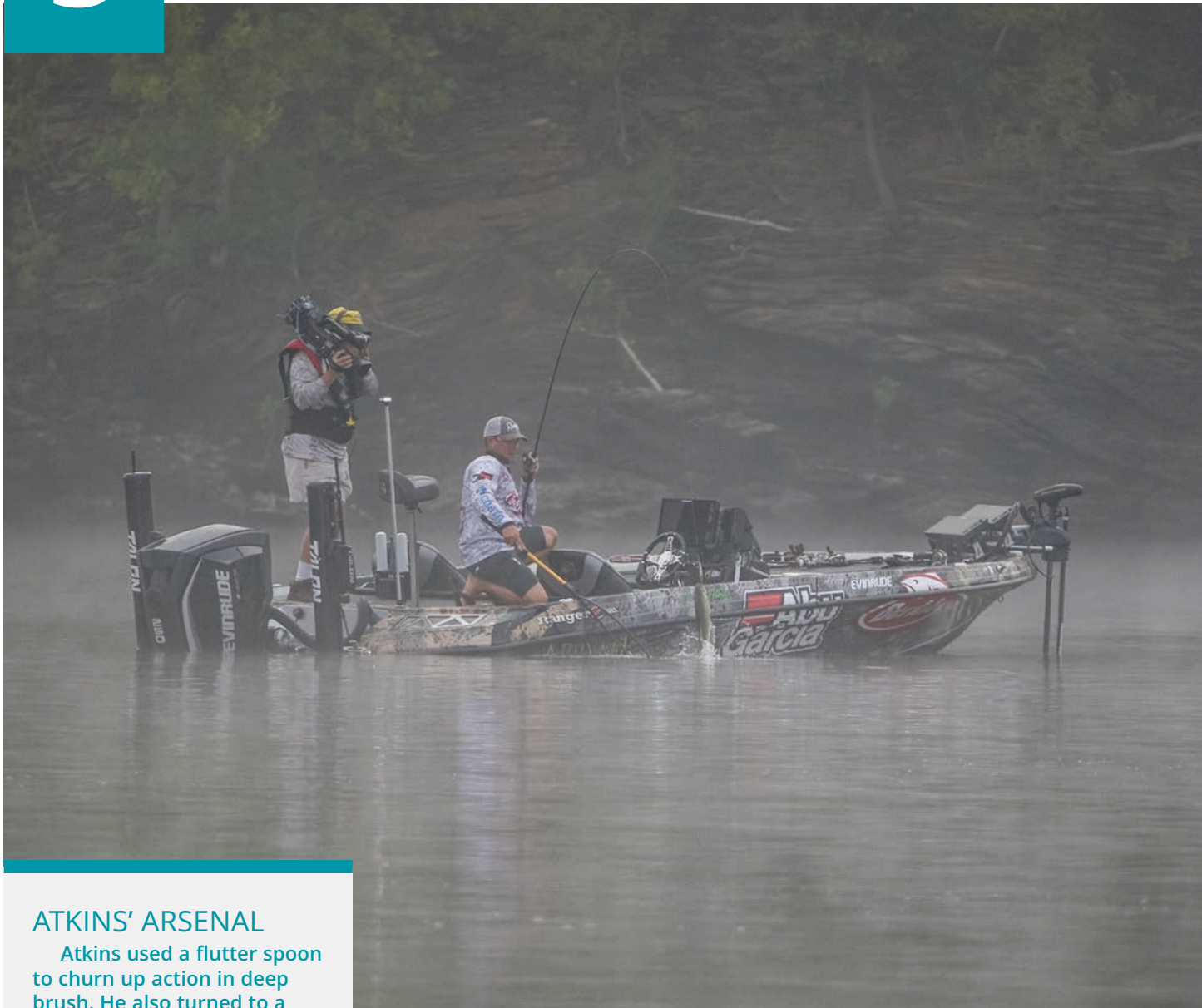
By Curtis Niedermier

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

Once he ruled out the grass bite, Niggemeyer dialed in a topwater pattern in the north-central part of the lake and the Crystal Springs area. He tried topwaters that sported treble hooks, but the hooks fouled too often on bits of grass and other detritus. A 1/4-ounce buzzbait with a green-pumpkin toad trailer was more efficient for burning the banks and drew bites from a better class of fish.

On day two, Niggemeyer caught a "bonus fish" that surfaced to chase shad while he was idling across a pocket. Without dropping his trolling motor or removing his PFD, he landed a Strike King Sexy Dawg on the money.

Despite the fast start, Niggemeyer only landed four keepers. Another slow morning on day three forced him to fish mostly new water the final afternoon, which produced a limit and secured his runner-up finish.



ATKINS' ARSENAL

Atkins used a flutter spoon to churn up action in deep brush. He also turned to a Berkley PowerBait Fatty Bottom Hopper Worm that he Neko-rigged with a nail weight to coax suspended fish from their midsummer ambush points.

While he did turn to a Berkley Choppo topwater in search of a big shallow bite on Championship Sunday, it was primarily offshore fishing that led to Atkins' third-place finish and another successful Cup.

By Justin Onslow

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

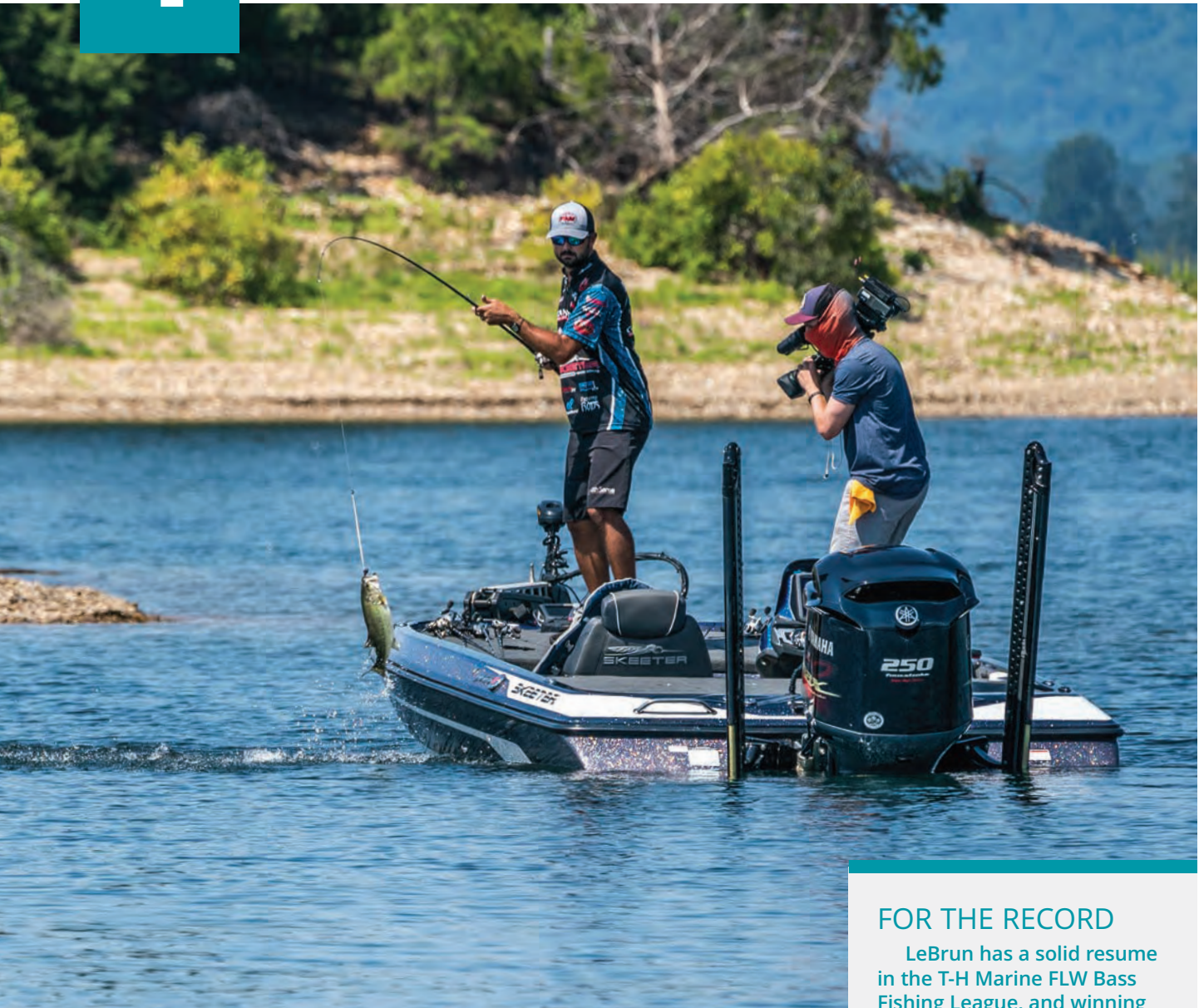
Atkins missed out on back-to-back Cup victories, thanks in part to losing a few keepers he couldn't get in the boat. Still, the second-year Tour pro crushed them by mid-August Ouachita standards by doing what few others found success doing – fishing deep for most of the tournament.

For the most part, the Alabama angler targeted brush piles and ledges or creek beds in the South Fork of the Ouachita. He fished close to Jason Lambert, who also cooked up a recipe for success by targeting suspended bass in deep water.

Ultimately, it was a lack of quality deep fish that forced Atkins to go shallow late in the tournament, and he couldn't manage to find the right bite to propel himself to another Cup victory.

4

NICK LeBRUN | 28LB 6OZ (12)



By Colin Moore
PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Being from Louisiana, LeBrun knew what to expect from Lake Ouachita's summer-stressed bass: not much enthusiasm for chasing baits. His answer was to slow down and soak an 8 1/2-inch V&M Wild Thang Worm (blue flex) with an Elite Tungsten 1/2-ounce weight and a 5/0 Hayabusa WRM959 hook. Mainly he fished grass line edges in 8 to 12 feet of water, positioning his boat offshore in about 30 feet.

The approach worked well enough for him to earn a fourth-place finish. The 33-year-old Cajun angler fished spots on a long stretch of lake from the state park to Mountain Harbor. He had the second-best limit the first day – 13 pounds, 5 ounces – and held his position the second round. On the third day, however, he ran out of the kickers it would take to win.

FOR THE RECORD

LeBrun has a solid resume in the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League, and winning that circuit's All-American title at Cross Lake opened the door for him to show off his fishing ability on a bigger stage.

LeBrun, of Bossier City, La., made the most of the opportunity, becoming the first All-American champion since Kerry Milner to place fourth the same year in the Cup. Milner did it in 2013 after winning the All-American at Lake Nickajack.

5

JASON LAMBERT | 27LB 15OZ (15)



GIVING THEM A CHANGEUP

To make his drop-shot more appealing when fishing pressure had taken its toll on day two, Lambert made a very simple, yet effective switch with his bait.

“There was a lot of pressure on those schools, so instead of having my worm rigged straight like I did on day one, I rigged it wacky. When fish get educated and hard to catch, making an easy adjustment like that can make the difference.”

By Kyle Wood
PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Everyone knows how good Lambert is at fishing offshore, and for his second Cup appearance the Tennessee pro utilized his ledge-fishing prowess and a secondary shallow pattern to make the top 10.

Lambert spent the majority of his practice idling and graphing, eventually settling on the upper reaches of the South Fork.

“I idled a lot and only found three schools I thought I could catch,” Lambert says. “They were on the river channel ledge with brush nearby.”

Despite catching fish on swimbaits and crankbaits in practice, Lambert had to slow down with a drop-shot in the tournament. He used a 6-inch Roboworm Straight Tail Worm (morning dawn color) with a 1/4-ounce weight to catch the majority of his fish.

Lambert’s three biggest bites came running shallow cedar trees on the main lake with a River2Sea Whopper Plopper – a pattern that produced fewer bites, but better quality.



By David A. Brown
PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

The Oklahoma pro began day one by chasing schoolers, but quickly realized he needed something besides the big spoons and topwater baits many others were throwing. Tying on a 1 1/2-inch shad-imitating topwater bait enabled Birge to mimic the tiny forage bass were targeting. A good rally of schoolers, plus one keeper on a YUM Tip Toad rigged on a 5/0 wide-gap hook, delivered 13 pounds, 1 ounce – his biggest sack of the tournament.

Seeing no schooling action on day two, Birge stayed with the Tip Toad and bagged a small limit. The final day offered brief schooling activity, and Birge scrounged up a lone keeper on his day-one shad imitator. He caught his other four keepers over deep brush using a drop-shot rigged with a finesse worm.

POCKET HOPPING

Birge attributes his success to bypassing large, time-consuming pockets and instead keying on smaller pockets that were closer to the main lake. An optimal area contained three or four pockets of similar size in close proximity, all facing the main river. Running as many pockets as possible and spending only a brief time in each allowed him to cover lots of water and find active fish.



FINDING THE RIGHT PILES

Ouachita is loaded with brush piles, and finding them is relatively easy with modern electronics. Logan managed to reduce his collection to three spots that produced the majority of his fish.

"The best spots had multiple piles on the same point in 18 to 22 feet of water," he says. "I was able to keep the boat in one spot and cast to several piles. These seemed to be the ones that were holding groups of fish."

By Tyler Brinks
PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Two solid days of fishing landed Logan in first place going into the last day, but the Alabama pro saw his chances evaporate with his fish when his offshore bite dried up. He landed only one keeper the final day.

Logan relied on a two-part program that hinged on an afternoon brush pile pattern that he was confident would produce 10 pounds per day. He spent each morning shallow with a Brian's Prop Bee topwater while waiting for the right time to move to deeper water.

"Each of the first two days I caught two fish on top, and then around lunchtime I would head out," he says.

He patiently fished the brush piles with a 6-inch NetBait Contour Worm in the AM dawn color rigged on a 2/0 straight-shank hook with a 3/8-ounce Flat Out Tungsten drop-shot weight.



NO SECOND OPTION

Cloud cover and storms the final day of practice keyed Cox into the best topwater pattern window. His biggest mistake was not having an option for when the sun shone and the window closed.

"I just wasted hours of the tournament throwing it [topwater]. I knew I wasn't going to catch much on it until that right window came," he says. "I just threw it because I didn't know anything else to do. It would've been nice to have a little bit of off-the-bank stuff."

By Curtis Niedermier

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

Cox showed up at Ouachita expecting to fish topped-out grass, but there was none. With no transducer on his boat (he broke it off earlier in the year), his only option was to run the bank, fish shallow and cover a ton of water.

The 2016 Cup champ targeted points and secondary pockets where he located cruising wolf packs of bass. His primary tactic was bombing a Berkley J-Walker topwater, but he also used a Berkley Choppo topwater whenever he saw feeding activity.

Making long casts was key to catching the shallow fish. When he got close enough to see bass, Cox found that they were nearly uncatchable, which ultimately cost him dearly. The stubborn cruisers were reluctant to bite finesse offerings, and Cox never figured out how to fool them into the boat.



TOAD TACTICS

Cobb fished shallow to earn his bites, primarily throwing a Zoom Horny Toad either on its own or as a trailer for his Greenfish Tackle Toad Toter buzzbait. He also mixed in a Yo-Zuri 3DR Series Pencil to elicit topwater strikes from cruising fish along Ouachita's shorelines. With his trolling motor on high, Cobb burned through miles of shoreline in search of a few monster largemouths.

By Justin Onslow
PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

With four straight Cup top 10s under his belt, the 28-year-old South Carolina pro is arguably one of the best big-tournament anglers in the sport. Cobb's latest, a ninth-place finish at Ouachita, was a testament to his grinding it out in tough conditions as well as anyone in the field.

Despite totaling 19 pounds, 2 ounces between days one and two, Cobb saw his shallow bite turn off on day three. He managed only two fish for 3 pounds, 15 ounces. It was a letdown by Cobb's standards, but ninth place in a field as loaded as the 2018 Cup's is nothing to be ashamed of.

Cobb's approach at Ouachita was simple: Put the trolling motor on high, and burn topwaters as fast as possible, covering a lot of water in the hopes of running into cruising fish.



By David A. Brown

PHOTO BY ROB MATSUURA

Last year in his Forrest Wood Cup debut, Beavers missed the top 10 by one spot. This time around, the South Carolina pro secured his 10th-place finish on Ouachita largely with a 1/2-ounce Treeshaker Buzz Toad with a Zoom Horny Toad. Beavers says he chose a watermelon candy-colored toad when he believed the bass were targeting bream and a white one when they were on shad.

Later in the day, Beavers switched to drop-shotting a 6-inch Roboworm in standing timber or deep brush. Fitted with a 1/4-ounce weight, the finesse rig produced Beavers' biggest fish, a 7 1/2-pounder on day one.

Casting the buzzbait at a 45-degree angle to the bank was critical for covering water and keeping his bait in the strike zone, which he says was right against the bank.

MIXING IT UP

Maximizing his buzzbait's appeal was a matter of varied cadence for Beavers. When his bait ran next to a tree, he would pop it to create a frantic fleeing motion. Around shade lines, he'd go 180 and actually pause the bait. Combining the strategies produced a key fish on day two, in which he got only five baits. As he passed a shade line, pausing his bait and then popping it once was all it took to draw the strike.

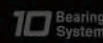
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11



MATT BECKER

18LB 15OZ (9)

By Curtis Niedermier

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

At 9:30 the second morning, it looked as if Matt Becker was angling toward a top-10 finish in his first Cup. The Rookie of the Year was riding a confidence high with three fish weighing about 7 pounds in the box and seven hours still to fish.

Then Ouachita jettisoned his prospects with a six-hour drought.

A brief moment of hope occurred that afternoon when he spotted two 3-pounders cruising in the Blakely area. Becker hooked one on a Zoom Super Fluke Jr. but broke it off, then amazingly caught the other on a Whopper Plopper.

"I told my marshal that should not have happened. That never happens," Becker says. "You shouldn't be able to get one of them to bite, let alone both of them."

Becker never got another bite, and with only four keepers he missed the cut by an ounce. His strategy was to chase schoolers in the morning with the Fluke Jr. rigged with a 2/0 Roboworm ReBarb hook and a nail weight in the belly. The rest of the day he fished the Plopper up shallow.

12



DAVID DUDLEY

18LB 6OZ (10)

By Justin Onslow

PHOTO BY FLW

Dudley missed the cut and a chance to fish on Championship Sunday by less than a pound, despite totaling limits of 9 pounds, 3 ounces on each of the first two days of the Cup. Though consistency was generally rewarded at Ouachita this year, Dudley's lack of big kickers ultimately sank his Cup hopes.

FLW's all-time money winner with 20 Cup appearances, Dudley knows a thing or two about adapting to the conditions, especially in the heat of August in Arkansas. He split his time fairly evenly fishing both deep and shallow, catching four of his keepers in shallow water and the other six out deep on various structures, brush piles and contour changes.

The Virginia pro loves to throw crankbaits, and the O.S.P. Blitz Max was his plug of choice up shallow. He also employed a drop-shot rigged with a 6-inch Roboworm Straight Tail Worm in the M.M. Ill color to slow down his presentation while targeting suspended fish.

13



CORY JOHNSTON

18LB 5OZ (8)

By Colin Moore

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

“Typical summer fishing in the South” was the descriptive phrase Johnston used to summarize his experience in the 2018 Cup, and it wasn’t meant to be complimentary.

The Canadian pro struggled to get anything going at Lake Ouachita and settled for a 13th-place finish with eight fish. Like most others, Johnston had problems dealing with unaggressive shallow fish that would swim toward a topwater, but then fail to commit.

“Definitely, the hardest part wasn’t seeing good fish, but getting them to bite,” notes Johnston. “For the most part they just weren’t that interested.”

Johnston fished a dark-colored River2Sea Whopper Plopper 110 or a lightly weighted Zoom Horny Toad in various colors. He focused on small feeder creeks in Ouachita’s north and middle sections, starting at the mouths and fishing back.

“If I could do one thing over it would be to stay in one area where I got five good bites and caught three keepers, instead of moving around so much,” he says.

14



AUSTIN FELIX

17LB 4OZ (10)

By Kyle Wood

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

In just his third year as a pro, Felix made his third Cup appearance and racked up another solid performance.

The Minnesota pro is no stranger to fishing deep with his electronics or flipping grass – both possible patterns at Ouachita – but decided that running the bank was the best way to go.

“I ran transition areas on the bank where I saw fish cruising in practice or where I had a blowup,” says Felix. “I wouldn’t just put the trolling motor down and go. I had certain 100-yard stretches that were best, and I’d jump from one to the next. Most of the areas were changes in rock on the bank, like shelf rock to chunk rock or chunk to pea gravel.”

His shallow bait selection consisted of a buzzbait, prop bait and walking topwater.

When needed, his secondary pattern of running brush piles with a 1/4-ounce Dirty Jigs Matt Stefan Guppy Head and a 2.8-inch Keitech Swing Impact FAT produced some fish that helped fill his limit.

15



BRYAN THRIFT

16LB 13OZ (10)

By David A. Brown

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

The North Carolina pro employed a two-pronged approach to master tough Lake Ouachita. Step one involved targeting schoolers early, and, although his first choice of a topwater failed to impress, he assembled a small limit with a 3/4-ounce Damiki Back Drop Spoon and a trio of worm presentations – drop-shot, shaky head and Texas rig.

Once he had five, Thrift would burn the bank with a Damiki D-Pop in the phantom color. The objective was to hunt down the big fish cruising the shallows for bream. This strategy produced Thrift's two biggest fish on day one, but the second day yielded no topwater bites.

Thrift ran from one end of the lake to the other and struggled to establish consistency. His topwater bite ranged from the main lake to the backs of pockets, and limit fish came from an area he had located during practice. Spending an hour and a half there delivered about 7 1/2 pounds to start each day.

16



ALEX DAVIS

15LB 15OZ (6)

By Tyler Brinks

PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

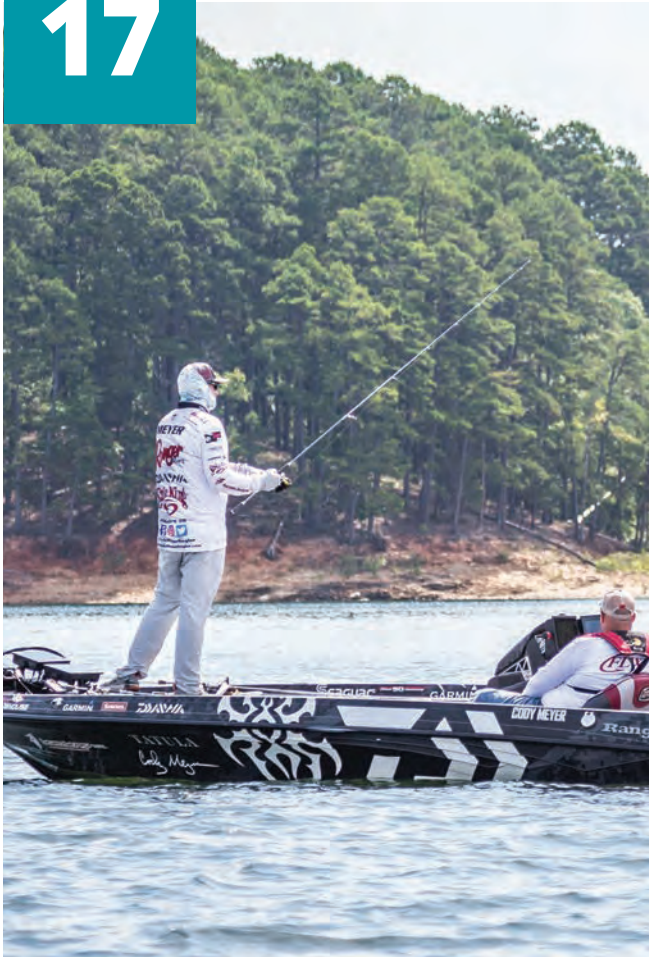
Davis took the day-one lead with 13 pounds, 10 ounces, but that would be the high point of his tournament. He weighed in just one fish on day two.

During the practice period, Davis located a 50-yard stretch of grass on the lower end of Ouachita. He went all-in there during the tournament.

"Even if I moved spots, I always stayed close to the grass and kept going back because I thought if I had a chance to win it would be from there," he says.

The Alabama pro caught two solid bass the first day by pitching to holes in the grass with a black and blue Jackall Archelon rigged with a 1 1/2-ounce weight. The two bass accounted for nearly half of his total weight for the tournament. The other four fish he caught fell for a walking topwater bait fished near the bank.

17



CODY MEYER

15LB 14OZ (10)

By Curtis Niedermier

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

Based on pre-tournament research, Meyer knew the potential of the brush pile bite at Ouachita. He just never convinced himself to dedicate all his time to it and figures he might've missed some opportunities as a result.

In practice, Meyer marked about 50 piles. From the few he sampled he caught only small spotted bass. Lack of big bites, combined with the allure of grass and schooling bass, plus 3- to 4-pounders cruising the bank, led him to fish a combination of patterns, rather than focusing on the brush.

In two competition days, he never caught a fish off the bank and caught only one from grass and one from his schooling areas each day. The rest of his two limits (including a daily 3-pounder) came while fishing a drop-shot and big worm in brush.

"My bigger fish came out of brush piles, and most of my keepers came out of brush piles," says Meyer. "But I didn't do it a whole lot. Looking back, I should've done it a whole lot more."

18



CHAD FOSTER

15LB 9OZ (10)

By Justin Onslow

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

Third-grade teacher Chad Foster earned his first Cup appearance this season and capitalized to the tune of a top-20 finish. He could thank some flexibility on his part and a deep bite that provided multiple limits, though very few big fish.

Foster started day one fishing shallow, but after a few hours without a keeper, he moved out deep and targeted upward of 50 brush piles per day. Usually he found that after catching one fish he would have to move on to another pile due to heavy pressure that kept bass on high alert. Despite trying his hand again at shallow cruisers on day two, Foster quickly turned back to the deep bite.

A drop-shot rigged with a Roboworm Straight Tail Worm in morning dawn and a 2 3/4-inch swimbait on a 3/8-ounce Outkast Golden Eye Swimmer Head were pivotal to Foster's success. Most of the brush piles he targeted were in 17 to 27 feet of water, and fishing slow and methodically was the ticket to his top-20 finish.

19



SCOTT MARTIN

15LB 5OZ (9)

By Tyler Brinks

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

A cup winner on Ouachita in 2011, Martin believed going into the 2018 event that it would take a mixture of patterns to win. He didn't know the right combination, so he split his practice between fishing submerged trees, running shallow water and searching for schooling fish.

The shallow bite and schoolers were manageable, but he eventually ruled out the timber.

"All I could find there was small spotted bass and stripers," Martin adds.

During the tournament, the Florida pro started both mornings on his schooling fish with a variety of topwaters, including the LIVETARGET Yearling BaitBall Walking Bait.

"Fishing was challenging because the bass were feeding on tiny bait, and each fish you caught was stuffed full," he says.

Martin spent the afternoons shallow up the South Fork with what he called "organized junk-fishing." This approach accounted for multiple fish each day of the tournament, and in hindsight, Martin wishes he had spent more time covering shallow water.

20



SHANE LEHEW

14LB 15OZ (9)

By David A. Brown

PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

With practice yielding no solid leads, LeHew locked in a strategy of burning the banks in hopes of running into active fish. He started each day with a Berkley Choppo 120 in the perfect ghost color and picked up one keeper each day with the plopping surface plug.

Once the morning bite waned, LeHew rotated through a trio of baits, starting with a buzzbait. He used a Berkley PowerBait Rib Toad for a trailer and alternated colors between grey ghost and white.

A Rib Toad rigged on a 5/0 wide-gap hook was also in the mix. He used white for the early morning hours and then switched to green pumpkin once the sun got up. This bait ended up producing the majority of his weight.

Lehew's cleanup bait was a green-pumpkin Berkley MaxScent Hit Worm on a Ned head, which he mostly threw on points whenever he felt like he'd gone too long without a bite. ■



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2018 CUP BY THE NUMBERS

By Curtis Niedermier



1 OUNCE GOES A LONG WAY

In 2015, Anthony Gagliardi won the Cup by a 1-ounce margin over Scott Canterbury. This year, Davis won the Cup by 7 pounds, 4 ounces over James Niggemeyer, but it was a scant 1-ounce margin that boosted him into 10th place on day two to make the top-10 cut. Davis was actually tied with Justin Atkins at 19 pounds even. Matt Becker was the first one out at 18-15.

BIG MONEY, SMALL LIMITS

Davis' average daily weight at the Cup was about 12 pounds, 4 ounces. Compared to all previous Cups, that ranks 12th. That comes out to more than \$500 per ounce in winnings over three days.

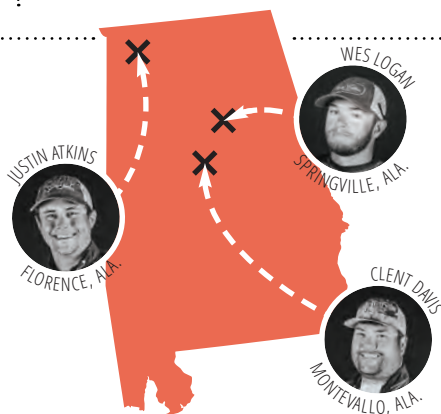
\$500 PER OUNCE

The lowest average daily weight by a Cup champ was 6 pounds, 1 ounce, set by Greg Hackney at Three Rivers in 2009. Justin Atkins set the record for highest average weight at Lake Murray in 2017 with 19-2.

Previous averages for Cups held at Ouachita were 10-14 (Scott Suggs, 2007), 15-4 (Scott Martin, 2011) and 12-15 (Brad Knight, 2015).

ALABAMA DOMINATION

Clent Davis (first place), Justin Atkins (third place) and Wes Logan (seventh place) all reside in Alabama. Only in 2013 did more anglers from one state make the top 10. That year, at the Red River, Arkansans Kerry Milner (Bono, fourth), Larry Nixon (Quitman, fifth), Mark Rose (Wynne, seventh) and Robbie Dodson (Harrison, 10th) made the cut.



JAMES NIGGEMEYER

WES LOGAN

NICK LeBRUN

NEWBIES

James Niggemeyer, Wes Logan and Nick LeBrun were the only first-time Cup qualifiers to make the top 10.

LOVING OUACHITA

Clent Davis says the first time he realized he could compete at a high level was at the 2010 FLW Tour event on Lake Ouachita, where he finished fifth as a co-angler. He was paired with Ouachita local Scott Suggs on day one of that tournament, and witnessed Suggs fishing deep brush piles, the pattern that Davis eventually used to win the 2018 Cup at Ouachita.



THE BIGGEST COMEBACK

Before Davis, no one had ever come from 10th place back on the final day of the Cup and wound up winning since FLW switched to a cumulative-weight system in the mid-2000s. Previous championships were conducted in bracket format, and/or weights were zeroed going into the last day.



PLUGGIN' AWAY

During one 10-minute stretch on day two of the Cup, Jeff Sprague's marshal, Kenneth Osborn, counted the pro's casts to estimate about how many casts Sprague was making in the course of an hour. His conclusion: about 360 casts per hour. That's six per minute and one cast every 10 seconds. Sprague says he didn't run very often or take many breaks. He probably made more than 2,000 casts that day.



CLENT DAVIS: WINNING BIG

\$399,484	career FLW earnings prior to the Cup
\$699,684	career FLW earnings after the Cup
\$30,000	career Cup earnings (two appearances) prior to the 2018 Cup
\$300,200	earnings at the 2018 Cup, including contingencies

THE BIG DAY

Davis owes his final-day comeback to an impressive 17-pound, 13-ounce stringer on the final day. His limit was 2.7 times as much as the average daily weight – 6 pounds, 9 ounces – by all competitors at Ouachita. That ranks sixth all time in Cup competition.

The record belongs to Greg Hackney who, on day one at Cross Lake in 2002, weighed the heaviest limit of the tournament at 15-13. That stringer was 3.89 times greater than the average daily weight of 4-1. He wound up finishing 13th.

Hackney also caught the heaviest tournament stringer in 2009 at Three Rivers – 11-12 on day two. It was 3.54 times greater than the overall average daily weight of 3-5, and that time he won the tournament.



A YOUNG MAN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

The average age of Cup qualifiers in 2018 was 36.9 years. The average age of the top 10 at the Cup was 32.4 years. Wes Logan (above), 24, was the youngest in the top 10. James Niggemeyer was the oldest at 46.

Compared to previous seasons, this was the youngest top 10 at the Cup of all time. The previous record was 33.78 in 2006. The average has been below 35 three times, and below 40 18 times.

Davis ranks ninth all time among youngest Cup champions.



STREAKIN'

Brandon Cobb has fished the Cup four times and has four top-10 finishes. That's the longest active streak. His buddy Justin Atkins has the second longest active streak with two. The longest streak of all time is Bryan Thrift's run of six, spanning 2012 to 2017.



Thrift Still at It

Speaking of Thrift, his consecutive limits streak at the FLW Tour level will survive the offseason. Thrift, who finished 15th at the Cup, caught limits of 9 pounds and 7-13 on Ouachita. His record total is now 59.

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135-412 Zebra Green



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- Bait floats on top for more realistic presentations
- Fished over holes and through grass
- More durable rubber
- Size = 4"



135-038 Black



135-040 White



135-354 Sexy Shad



135-414 Baby Duck



135-413 Natural-Brown



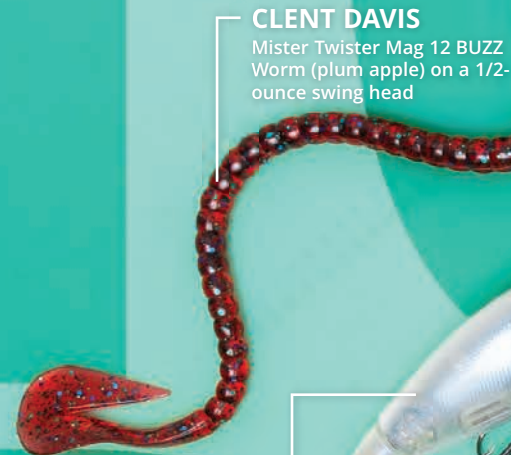
Courtesy of FLW Photo by Kyle Wood

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CLENT DAVIS
Yo-Zuri 3DR Series Pencil (real gizzard shad)



CLENT DAVIS
Mister Twister Mag 12 BUZZ
Worm (plum apple) on a 1/2-
ounce swing head



JAMES NIGGEMEYER
Strike King KVD Sexy Dawg
(clear sexy shad)



JUSTIN ATKINS
Berkley Choppo 90
(ghost white)



NICK LeBRUN
8 1/2-inch V&M Wild Thang
Worm (blue flex)



JUSTIN ATKINS
Berkley PowerBait 7-inch Fatty
Bottom Hopper Worm (redbug)



JUSTIN ATKINS
Collum Enterprises Whing Ding
tail-spinner



NICK LeBRUN
6th Sense SplashBack 90
(Spanish bone)



JUSTIN ATKINS
Berkley PowerBait Rib
Toad (ghost watermelon)



JASON LAMBERT
Roboworm 6-inch Straight Tail Worm
(morning dawn) on a drop-shot



JASON LAMBERT
River2Sea Whopper
Plopper 110 (powder)

BRANDON COBB

Greenfish Tackle Toad Toter Buzz (gold blade) with a Zoom Horny Toad (watermelon candy and grey ghost) trailer



BRADFORD BEAVERS

Roboworm 6-inch Straight Tail Worm (morning dawn) on a drop-shot



BRANDON COBB

Yo-Zuri 3DR Series Pencil (real bluegill)



BRADFORD BEAVERS

1/2-ounce Treeshaker Buzz Toad (silver blade) with a Zoom Horny Toad trailer (white and watermelon candy)



ZACK BIRGE

YUM Tip Toad (bullfrog)



JOHN COX

Berkley J-Walker 120 (ghost white)



JOHN COX

Berkley Choppo 90 (ghost bluegill)



WES LOGAN

Brian's Prop Bee No. 3 (baby bream)



WES LOGAN

NetBait 6-inch Contour Worm (AM dawn) on a drop-shot



WES LOGAN

Dirty Jigs 1/4-ounce Scott Canterbury Pro Buzz (black)



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FLW TOURNAMENT COVERAGE AND RESULTS

ON TOUR



WHAT'S INSIDE:

Mammoth smallmouth bags weighed during weather-shortened Erie event

Deep drop-shotting gets it done at 1000 Islands

Winning patterns from the BFL and College Fishing

PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ

COSTA FLW SERIES | LAKE ERIE

BUFFALO, N.Y.

By Colin Moore
PHOTOS BY JESSE SCHULTZ



WINNING ANGLER

Neil Farlow
St. Catharines, Ontario

Winning Weight:
24-04 (5 fish)

Details:
July 26-28, 2018

Presented by Polaris

Hosted by Buffalo
Niagara Sports
Commission

Northern Division

WINNING CO-ANGLER



Sakae Ushio
Tonawanda, N.Y.

Winning Weight:
23-07 (5 fish)

Winning Program:
Ushio, who lives in a Buffalo suburb, fishes Erie every chance he gets, and his experience showed as he caught more than 20 keepers on day one while fishing with Canadian pro Chris Johnston. Ushio's biggest fish weighed 5-14, and he caught it and the rest of his winning stringer on a 4-inch Z-Man Big TRD fished on a Ned rig in a color he declined to name. ■

Neil Farlow knew he was in for a close race when he weighed in on opening day of the Costa FLW Series Northern Division event on Lake Erie in late July. Though Farlow's 24-pound, 4-ounce sack of smallmouths led the pack, there were 43 other anglers behind him with limits of 20 pounds or better. Only 2 pounds, 1 ounce separated the Ontario angler from the 10th-place fisherman, and Ben Wright of Peru, N.Y., was right on Farlow's heels in second place with 24 pounds, 3 ounces.

Then the wind intervened, and two days of cancelled fishing later the first-round standings were declared the final rankings by Tournament Director Ron Lappin. Though the weather forecast called for westerly winds to subside after day one, they did just the opposite during what were scheduled to be days two and three, piling up 4- to 6-foot waves in Erie's

Eastern Basin and making boating dangerous.

Ironically, it was Farlow's boat position as 156th of 169 that left Safe Harbor Marina opening morning that helped him build the solid limit that eventually proved to be the winning sack.

"When I got out there and saw so many boats on some of the places I planned to fish, I figured the best thing for me to do was go check some of the same spots that I had found and fished over the years," says the 31-year-old. "There weren't many fish on them, but what was there was a better quality."

Lake Erie near Buffalo is virtually paved with rocks of all sizes, from gravel to boulders. Farlow singled out a few spots on the Canadian side and U.S. side where there was a mix of rock sizes, or other anomalies in the bottom such as creases or small shoals with doglegs in them.

"I fished in 20 to 40 feet of water, but most of the

fish were 20 to 30 feet down," recalls Farlow. "I fished basically anywhere there was something different – a depth change, hump or a boulder."

Almost everyone in the tournament was alternating drop-shot rigs or tube jigs. Farlow was no exception, and chose a green pumpkin Reaction Innovations Flirt 4.95 worm for his drop-shot rig. Basically he cast the worm out with a Quantum Smoke spinning combo and 10-pound-test braided line and a fluorocarbon leader, let it settle, and then slowly dragged it back across the bottom. Altogether, five of his fishing spots produced eight bass in the opening round. One of his fish weighed 6-6 and was the tournament's biggest.

By any measure the opening round was exceptional, as the 169 pros brought in 142 limits. In the end, however, it was the size of the smallmouths and not the numbers that mattered most.

COSTA FLW SERIES | 1000 ISLANDS

CLAYTON, N.Y.

By Kyle Wood

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



WINNING ANGLER

Kyle Hall
Rio Vista, Texas

Winning Weight:
68-11 (15 fish)

Details:
Sept. 6-8, 2018

Presented by Navionics

Hosted by Clayton
Chamber of Commerce

Northern Division

WINNING CO-ANGLER



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

Drew Tiano
Hudson, N.Y.

Winning Weight:
59-05 (15 fish)

Winning Program:

Tiano fishes at 1,000 Islands regularly and knew that a drop-shot would be king. On the first two days, he boated back-to-back 20-pound limits on Lake Ontario. Paired with Hall on the final day in tough conditions, he kept the same Yamamoto Shad Shape Worm rigged on his drop-shot while fishing in the river and won by more than 5 pounds. ■

Kyle Hall had never been to the 1,000 Islands before. In fact, he'd never been to the state of New York until he came up for the first time at the beginning of August. Now, after weighing 68 pounds, 11 ounces of smallmouths to win the final Northern Division event of the season, Hall says the 1,000 Islands region is his favorite place on the planet.

In total, Hall spent about three weeks on the St. Lawrence River before the

tournament began. The added time on the fishery no doubt helped him dial in the recipe for success on big smallmouths.

"I put most of my time in on the river," says the 21-year-old. "I knew there would likely be a day like today [the final day] where the lake [Ontario] would be off limits, and I really thought the river was more consistent. I could get bit on the lake, and it would be a 5-pounder, but the rest of the school would leave. On the river, I could catch a

5-pounder, and there'd be more with it.

"Learning how the fish would set up in the current was huge," continues Hall. "I found a school of fish in practice, and I would go back to them every day to see how they set up in different wind directions and different weather. It showed me they wouldn't leave the spot, but they may slide deeper or shallower."

Hall did all of his work with one drop-shot rod rigged with a Berkley PowerBait MaxScent Flatnose Minnow (natural shad). He used a 5/8-ounce weight the first two days but switched to a 1-ounce weight on the final day due to wind.

Current breaks along the main river channel within sight of Clayton, N.Y., in anywhere from 20 to 40 feet held the winning smallmouths. Hall fished about 20 breaks, hitting his best spots multiple times throughout the day.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD





T-H MARINE FLW BASS FISHING LEAGUE

Bama – Neely Henry – July 14, 2018

Boater: Adam Brown, Rainbow City, Ala. – 17-00

Fishing stumps and bushes in the backs of mid-lake creeks with a Stan Sloan's Long Arm Aggravator spinnerbait (white) with No. 5 willow-leaf blades and a trailer hook, and a 3/8-ounce Bo's Jig (black and blue) with a Zoom Super Chunk Jr. trailer

Co-angler: Mike Garrett, Pensacola, Fla. – 12-01

Buckeye – Ohio River/Maysville – July 21, 2018

Boater: Pat White, Batavia, Ohio – 9-01

Fishing the main river and creeks using a homemade jig with a Zoom Super Chunk Jr. (flippin' blue), homemade spinnerbait, Lucky Craft LC Series 1.0 crankbait (American shad), Zoom Brush Hog (green pumpkin) and Berkley PowerBait Chigger Craw (green pumpkin)

Co-angler: Frank Aldridge, Wheelersburg, Ohio – 6-09

Buckeye – Mosquito Lake – Aug. 18, 2018

Boater: Steve Hatfield, Ashland, Ohio – 16-15

Targeting grass lines in 4 to 8 feet of water near the dam with a Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap

Co-angler: Hans Vetter, Bryan, Ohio – 14-10

Great Lakes – Mississippi River/La Crosse – July 28, 2018

Boater: Nick Trim, Galesville, Wis. – 12-03

Frogging weed mats around sandy bottoms in backwaters of Pool 7 with a SPRO Bronzeye Frog 65 (Barney and red ear), and flipping a Missie Baits D Bomb with a 1 1/2-ounce tungsten weight

Co-angler: Jessie Pollard, Whitehall, Wis. – 9-05

Great Lakes – Mississippi River/Prairie du Chien – Aug. 18, 2018

Boater: Kevin Ruh, Onalaska, Wis. – 16-02

Fishing sandbars in Pools 9 and 10 with a swing-head jig and Zoom Brush Hog (green pumpkin), and dragging a Carolina rig

Co-angler: Dennis Duffy, Westmont, Ill. – 12-08

Great Lakes – Mississippi River/Prairie du Chien – Aug. 19, 2018

Boater: Dan Mohn, Lansing, Iowa – 16-04

Fishing Pools 9 and 10 with a topwater plug and a homemade jig with a Big Bite Baits trailer

Co-angler: Chad Schultz, Rockton, Ill. – 12-00

Hoosier – Ohio River/Rocky Point – Aug. 4, 2018

Boater: Chris LeClere, Cannelton, Ind. – 10-03

Flipping soft plastics along a 100-yard stretch of shallow stumps and laydowns

Co-angler: Brandon Bennett, Fort Wayne, Ind. – 6-11

Hoosier – Lake Monroe – Aug. 25, 2018

Boater: Stu Moyer, Indianapolis, Ind. – 15-14

Fishing a grass line in 8 feet of water with a Texas-rigged 10-inch Berkley PowerBait Power Worm (red shad) on a 5/0 Gamakatsu hook with a 5/16-ounce weight

Co-angler: Brent Bennett, Madison, Ind. – 12-06

Illini – Ohio River/Golconda – July 21, 2018

Boater: Mike Quinlin, Mooresville, Ind. – 11-13

Pitching wood in Lusk Creek with a Texas-rigged Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw (green pumpkin magic) with a 1/4-ounce tungsten weight

Co-angler: Aaron Arning, Walnut Hill, Ill. – 7-11

LBL – Kentucky/Barkley Lakes – July 14, 2018

Boater: Andrew Suggs, Cunningham, Tenn. – 24-06

Targeting isolated brush on Lake Barkley ledges with a 1/2-ounce Strike King Denny Brauer Structure Jig (black and blue) with a Strike King Rage Craw trailer

Co-angler: Kenneth Bucy, Murray, Ky. – 14-09

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

Michigan – Lake St. Clair – July 14, 2018

Boater: Heath Wagner, Angola, Ind. – 28-15

Targeting sandy areas with shells near the Belle River hump with Z-Man ElaZtech lures (green pumpkin) on a drop-shot rig

Co-angler: Tony Mitchell, Plainwell, Mich. – 22-15

Michigan – Muskegon Lake – Aug. 4, 2018

Boater: Eric Culler, Hudson, Ind. – 17-01

Fishing wood and grass on a point in 13 to 15 feet of water on White Lake with a 7-inch Zoom Trick Worm (watermelon red) on a split-shot rig and a wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko (watermelon red)

Co-angler: Clint Joyner, Metamora, Mich. – 18-13

Michigan – Detroit River – Aug. 26, 2018

Boater: Brett Haake, Shorewood, Ill. – 23-11

Fishing rocky humps and ridges in 12 to 20 feet of water on the north shore of Lake Erie using a Strike King 3X ElaZtech Z Too Soft Jerkbait (Arkansas shiner) on a drop-shot rig

Co-angler: Aaron Stahley, Batavia, Ohio – 22-01

Northeast – Oneida Lake – July 14, 2018

Boater: Jeff Mandes, Smyrna, Del. – 19-02

Fishing grass in Maple Bay with a Big Mouth Lures Swim Jig (green pumpkin) with a NetBait Paca Craw trailer (Okeechobee craw), and pitching a Yamamoto Senko (black)

Co-angler: Michael Bahnweg, Union Dale, Penn. – 15-13

Ozark – Truman Lake – July 14, 2018

Boater: Darin Lankford, Clinton, Mo. – 19-05

Burning a Dave's Custom Baits Black Market Balsa Series square-bill crankbait (chartreuse) on flats and points with large stumps in the Grand River arm

Co-angler: Dennis Meyer, Ballwin, Mo. – 12-10

Piedmont – James River – July 14, 2018

Boater: Todd Walters, Kernersville, N.C. – 16-05

Fishing 3 to 10 feet deep around laydowns and brush piles in the backs of creeks with a 7-inch Culpit Fat Max Worm (black and blue), Rapala DT6 crankbait (shad) and 6-inch Roboworm Straight Tail Worm (morning dawn) on a drop-shot

Co-angler: James Howerton, Danville, Va. – 13-11

Shenandoah – James River – July 21, 2018

Boater: Ben Jacobi, Richmond, Va. – 19-00

Flipping hard cover and fishing creek mouths on the main river using an Arkie-style Hog Snatcher jig and creature baits

Co-angler: Damon Reid, Bowie, Md. – 14-01

YETI FLW COLLEGE FISHING

Central Conference – Mississippi River/Wabasha – July 28, 2018

Southeast Missouri State University – 18-02

Jacob Harris and Nick Moore

Frogging duckweed, pads and hydrilla with SPRO Bronzeye Frogs (green pumpkin and rainforest black) on a 100-yard-long stretch on the lower end of Pool No. 4

Northern Conference – Cayuga Lake – July 21, 2018

Adrian College – 20-02

Zachary Graham and Myles Jackman

Fishing around bluegill beds along a 75-yard stretch of docks and seawalls using a Strike King Sexy Frog (white), BOOYAH Boo Jig with a Berkley PowerBait Chigger Craw trailer (green pumpkin) and XCalibur Zell Pop (hitch) ■



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WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

By Dan Johnson

McKINNEY, BAKER WIN 2018 JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Trey McKinney and James Baker of the Illinois Junior Bass Federation fished hard and smart to win top honors at the 2018 The Bass Federation Junior World Championship Aug. 9-11 on Arkansas' Lake Hamilton out of Hot Springs.

On day one, McKinney and Baker led the Northern Division and were in third place overall with a five-fish limit weighing 9 pounds. They held onto the divisional lead and moved into first place overall on day two with four fish for 6 pounds, 10 ounces and a 15-pound, 10-ounce two-day total.

Only the teams that won their division moved on to day three. And with all weights zeroed for the finals, the pressure was on. McKinney and Baker responded with a 6-pound, 11-ounce limit for the victory.

"The competition was very tough," says McKinney, 13, of Goreville, Ill. "Bringing home the trophies was an accomplishment. I'd like to thank the Lord and my parents for their support in this event. I couldn't have done it without them."

"This feels great," adds Baker, 14, of Marion, Ill. "It was only our second tournament together. The first was when we won the Illinois State Championship to

get here. We covered a lot of water in practice and put together a plan that worked out in the end."

That plan included tag-teaming shorelines, with one partner throwing topwaters to the bank while the other combed deeper water with a drop-shot rig.

"On day two, we felt we could lock in our division with a decent bag, so we saved our best banks," adds Baker. "We went searching and caught four fish in random spots that were enough to make the finals."



Trey McKinney (left) and James Baker react to being named the 2018 JWC champions.



Hot Springs' Clarion Resort was ground zero for JWC tournament action.

More About the JWC

The no-entry-fee event featured 36 top youth bass teams from TBF state federations around the country battling for the junior crown and thousands in scholarships and prizes. All 36 teams fished two days, after which the field was cut to the top team from each TBF division for the final day.

The 2018 JWC was held in conjunction with the world's richest professional bass fishing tournament, the Forrest Wood Cup, which was held on Lake Ouachita just up the road from Lake Hamilton. JWC competitors were recognized on the FLW stage in Bank OZK Arena before the Cup's day-two weigh-in.

Hosted by Visit Hot Springs, the 2018 JWC included a variety of other events and activities for the young competitors and their families to enjoy outside of tournament hours.



Afternoon rains didn't dampen the competitors' spirits in the bump line.

McKinney says the fresh start on day three made them more than a little nervous as they boated away from the dock the last morning.

"There were teams in the finals we didn't think we could beat," he says. "It's probably the most nervous I've ever been. And coming in to weigh-in, we didn't think 6 pounds was enough to win. We thought it would take 10 or 11 pounds. But we got lucky enough to get it done."

Besides serious bragging rights and the championship trophies, McKinney and Baker each walked away with a \$2,500 scholarship to the college of his choice. In all, \$10,500 in scholarship money was awarded to members of the top five teams.

Final official TBF standings for the division winners (listed with day-three catch) are:

1. Trey McKinney/James Baker, Northern Division, 6 pounds, 11 ounces (5)
2. Aidan Kerlin/Reo Hatfield, Eastern Division, 4 pounds, 2 ounces (2)
3. Patrick Steitz/Christopher Quintanilla, Western Division, 3 pounds, 11 ounces (4)
4. Elijah Kelley/Hunter Slone, Southern Division, 1 pound, 5 ounces (1)
5. Sawyer Reib/Gunner West, Central Division, 0-0



James Baker (left) and Trey McKinney savor the moment, hoisting their JWC trophies on the Forrest Wood Cup weigh-in stage.

GOOD NEWS DOMINATES AGENDA AT MEETING IN HOT SPRINGS

Representatives of TBF's state federations were treated to a healthy dose of good news on a number of fronts when they gathered for the 2018 State Leadership Conference in Hot Springs, Ark. The get-together took place in conjunction with the TBF Junior World Championship (JWC) Aug. 9-11.

lower age limit of 11 to allow all youngsters ages 15 and under (as of Aug. 31 of the JWC competition year) to participate. A mandate that TBF junior clubs be tied to an adult club was also stricken from the rulebook. These changes likewise originated at the 2017 leadership conference and promptly took effect in 2018.

and tripled their membership due to the popularity of the National Semi-Finals program."

Given the Semi-Finals' success, Federation leaders made only minor tweaks to the program during the 2018 conference.

"Each state now advances its second boater and co-angler to the championship when they send 40 boats to a National Semi-Finals event," says Cartlidge. "This is a big plus for the anglers and another incentive to grow TBF membership."

Changes Coming Online

Leadership conference participants were also given a sneak peek at changes coming in 2019 for BassFederation.com, HighSchoolFishing.org and numerous state federation websites managed by TBF.

"The updated sites will be even more user-friendly and loaded with information on Federation programs, opportunities for our anglers to take full advantage of their TBF benefits, plus all the latest TBF tournament results and other news," says Cartlidge.

Professional Development Awards

To further TBF's role in supporting the grassroots growth of fishing participation and the success of the entire fishing industry, the 2018 State Leadership Conference also focused on professional development for state officers, presidents, youth directors and conservation directors, which covered everything from member recruitment to sponsor retention and best fish-care practices.

As a special treat for TBF officials, representatives from a number of TBF



Changes to the TBF Junior Angler Program that took effect in 2018 expanded opportunities for boys and girls nationwide to enjoy the thrill of competitive bass fishing.

Junior Angler Program Growing

TBF President and CEO Robert Cartlidge reported that the TBF Junior Angler Program, which was started in 1994 and focuses on anglers ages 15 and under, is still going strong and participation is on the rise.

"Our Junior Angler Program is growing, and the change to a team format has been very well received," Cartlidge adds. "In fact, the anglers and their families absolutely love it."

TBF junior anglers now fish out of their own boats in two-person teams, accompanied by their own boat captains. The new rule, which is one of the major changes unanimously approved in 2017 by the TBF State Presidents Council, applies to the JWC and qualifying events.

"This change effectively doubled the field size at JWC tournaments and qualifiers in 2018 and beyond," Cartlidge notes. "It was enacted to increase the opportunities for young bass anglers to enjoy the thrill of competition in our TBF youth program events, and follows rules on pairings and captains that are similar to those of the Student Angler Federation's popular High School Fishing program."

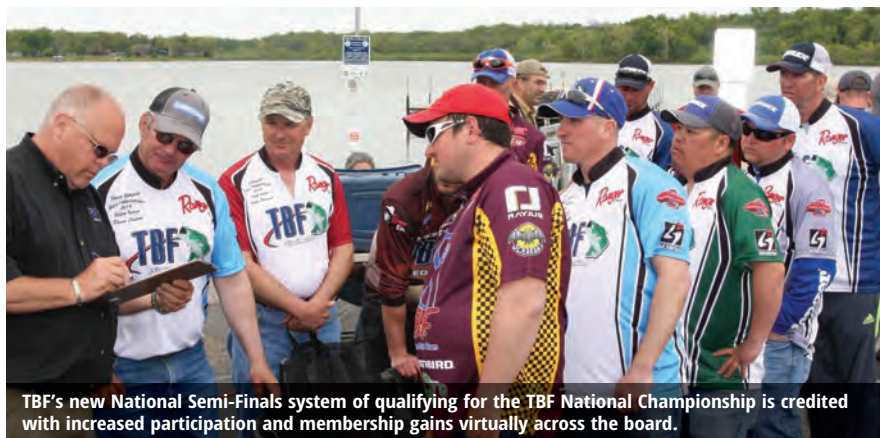
Further removing barriers to participation, TBF eliminated the existing

National Semi-Finals A Success

Cartlidge also reported how the recent change to TBF's system of qualifying for the TBF National Championship is having positive effects on member numbers and engagement.

The qualifying framework, which is called the TBF National Semi-Finals, is comprised of 22 district competitions where grassroots anglers fish "close-to-home" weekend events with anglers from neighboring states for cash prizes and opportunities to advance to the National Championship.

"Anglers have embraced the new system, and participation is up," says Cartlidge. "Several states have doubled



TBF's new National Semi-Finals system of qualifying for the TBF National Championship is credited with increased participation and membership gains virtually across the board.

sponsors and other partners – including FLW, Power-Pole, Ranger Boats and Evinrude – joined the conference, thanking TBF members for their efforts to protect and promote America's fishing heritage.

Numerous awards were handed out to states that grew during the past year, along with Lowrance Excellence in Marketing and Gold State Presidents awards for top-performing chapters.

Carlidge also introduced two new TBF national staff employees: National Youth Programs Manager Joey Bray and his wife, Karen Bray, who will work in the national office and be full-time by year's end.

Election News

In TBF Board of Directors news, Carlidge was re-elected to a two-year term as TBF President, CEO and

Chairman of the Board. Oklahoma Bass Federation President Don Linder was re-elected to a two-year term on the board, and new board member Jim Sparrow (sitting Alabama Bass Federation president) was elected to his first term, replacing the late David Daniel.

Overall, it was an exciting week at the JWC and the State Leadership Conference, suggesting big things to come for TBF in the future.

TOLLE, HALE CROWNED HIGH SCHOOL FISHING WORLD FINALS CHAMPIONS

The TBF/FLW Student Angler Federation (SAF) hosted the ninth annual High School Fishing World Finals June 26-30 on Pickwick Lake out of Florence, Ala. Jeremy Tolle and Garrett Hale from Kiefer High School in Kiefer, Okla., brought in the winning limit of bass – 23 pounds, 9 ounces – on the final day to claim the coveted World Finals title, scholarships and prizes. They earned a four-year scholarship award worth \$28,000 per year to Bethel University, the top-ranked college fishing program in the country. In addition, the champions each received a \$250 Cabela's gift card, World Finals trophies towering nearly 6 feet tall, 50-inch flat-screen TVs and more.

"It's still crazy. It's almost like it hasn't set in yet. Every time I look at the trophy it just blows my mind away," says Tolle.

Tolle and Hale battled from far back in the pack on day one all the way to the top to claim the title.

"I'm pretty ecstatic. I'm still on cloud nine right now," Hale says. "On the way home we just kept talking about it and redoing it over the whole week. It was crazy because we didn't even think we had a chance. But, on the way home the part that set in was that the decisions we made were the right ones.

"We took it serious; we really wanted to make it happen," Hale adds. "But it was also kind of like a joke at the same time, because there were 384 boats. Our main goal was making day four and just trying to get to the top 31. I guess everything went right for us."

"I've been around fishing my whole adult life, and I was really blown away with the tournament," boat captain Jeff Tolle adds. "I thought that TBF, FLW, the sponsors and hosts rolled out the red carpet for those kids. It was a great experience. Jeremy's goal is to become a collegiate angler, and I think this event really helped get him ready for what it's going to be like. I thought the prizes for college were really cool, as was the recognition given the anglers and talking to them on stage."

The Oklahoma high-schoolers sacked a 13-pound, 6-ounce limit on day one to land in 54th. They climbed into a tie for 30th on day two with three fish for 9 pounds, which put them at 22 pounds, 6 ounces and got them into the day-three field as one of the top two teams from their state. With weights zeroed to start day three, they moved up to 12th with

a 17-pound, 12-ounce limit. Their 23-pound, 9-ounce day-four limit put them atop the leaderboard for good.

Coming in second were Gerald Brumbaugh and Hunter Klotz of the Central High School Dragons in Martinsburg, Pa. The team had a final-day limit of 19 pounds, 14 ounces.

"We started out throwing a drop-shot the first day, but we found out that it really caught small fish, then switched to a spoon and a big Carolina rig, and that really seemed to get the big largemouths out of the bunch," Brumbaugh says.

"You really just had to grind it out, work the baits slow and trust the Carolina rig," Klotz adds. "And you really had to work that spoon hard."

In third place, Cort Walker and Lawson Tilghman from the Hardin County High School Tigers in Savannah, Tenn., were awarded a four-year scholarship worth \$20,000 per year to Bethel University for being the second-highest-finishing Junior/Senior eligible team with 17 pounds, 8 ounces. As fate would have it, they already had eligible scholarships to Bethel, so they passed the award to fourth-place finishers Luke McHan and Blake Cobb of the Fanning County High School Fishing Club from Blue Ridge, Ga. McHan and Cobb weighed a 17-pound limit.

Fifth place went to Jerren Gieske and Austin Clanton from the Lawrence County Wildcats in Lawrenceburg, Tenn., for their 16-pound, 3-ounce limit. ■



World Finals champions Garrett Hale (left) and Jeremy Tolle.

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MONTEVALLO, ALABAMA

By Sean Ostruszka

It's been two days since you won the Cup. Has it set in yet?

Actually, yeah. It set in last night at dinner.

That's oddly specific. Did something happen?

Yeah, people noticed me. I was at LongHorn Steakhouse with the boss from Mister Twister. We sat down, and all of a sudden I looked around and realized everyone was kinda looking over at me. Like, "That's the guy who just won the Cup." It was so weird.

What's it like having a check for \$300,000 in your wallet?

I don't know. My wife, Ashley, left with the check on Sunday [day three of the Cup].

Well, hopefully you get to see some of it. At least treat yourself to something, right?

Actually, something I started doing this year that Cody Meyer and Jason Lambert got me into was camping at events. It's the single greatest thing I've done for my fishing. I can't explain it, but you gotta do it.

So I told Ashley all I wanted was a little bit bigger camper. She was more than OK with that. We'll probably put away the rest for our daughter, Kayt.

How many calls and texts have you received?

Thousands. I mean, honestly, more than a thousand; just people congratulating me, or requests for interviews. It's overwhelming, but it's all good.

When did you first realize you had the Cup won?

Not until Wes [Logan] raised his hand showing he only had one fish.

Seriously?

Yeah. I mean, I started getting a hunch when I saw Brad Knight out on the water, and he was giving me a

thumbs up, and you showed up to take more photos. And then I got off the water and I had 200 texts saying "congrats," but you never know with that live feed if someone catches them late.

What was that moment like, on stage, with confetti raining down?

It was crazy. It's funny, I picked up my daughter to celebrate, and she just said, "Put me down." She wanted to play and pick up the confetti. She and Ashley took a bag of confetti and kept it.

You want to hear something cool about that? In 2015 [Lake Ouachita], I got off the stage on day two of the Cup, jumped in my car and drove straight home to witness the birth of our daughter. Three years later she's on that stage picking up confetti.

Can you believe that after everything you've been through you're now the Cup champion?

It's crazy ... man, you're going to make me tear up.

This dream all came about because a man named Brad Killingsworth took me to a pond when I was 5 or 6 years old and helped me catch my first fish. I remember it like it was yesterday. Caught that fish on a worm. He told me where to cast, and I didn't even know how to set the hook. After that I was hooked. It's all I ever wanted to do.

Who's Brad?

He's a family friend and like a second dad to me. He's the one who really got me into hunting and fishing.

My parents were great, too. They took me fishing all the time, and as soon as I was 12 years old and I could legally run a boat with a motor, they'd drop me off on Lay Lake every day early in the morning. I'd fish all day while they were at work, and then they'd pick me up in the afternoon.



PHOTO BY MATT PRICE

Obviously, that had to have a profound impact on your career.

Oh, absolutely. But you know what? I probably wouldn't be fishing professionally without College Fishing.

Why's that?

I got to meet Justin Lucas through that, because he was an emcee. He needed a place to stay, since he lived in California at the time. So I offered that he stay with me. We became friends, and he probably stayed with me off and on for a year or two. Cody Meyer started coming out with him and staying there, too.

Those two are the ones who pushed me to try fishing as a co-angler. And when I finished fifth in my first tournament [2010 FLW Tour on Ouachita] I thought, "Dang, I need to keep doing this." So I started fishing the Costas and did a full year on Tour as a co-angler. When I won the Pickwick event with Mark Rose, it basically paid my entry fee to go pro the next year.

You talked about nearly quitting because you were burned out.

I was. I just kept going fishing every day. I couldn't stop, and I wasn't enjoying myself.

So how do you plan to combat that this time around?

By not fishing – competitively, at least – until next season. I realize I need to take a break. You look at someone like Andy Morgan; that's what he does. He doesn't fish non-stop. This way you can be rested for when the season starts. ■



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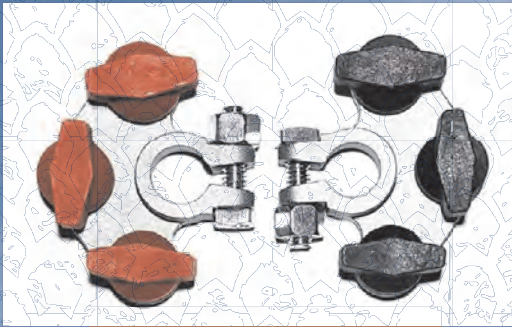
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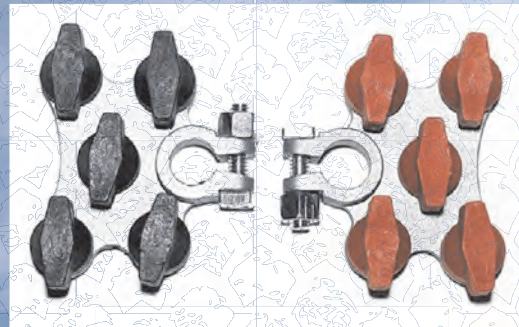


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