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APRIL 2017

# BASS

# ROSE WINS 2

LAKE GUNTERSVILLE CHAMPION





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# ROSE WINS 2

LAKE TRAVIS CHAMPION





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FRONT COVER PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH, INSIDE COVER PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

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## WHO'S A HAMMER?

There are angler-of-the-year titles and championship titles and tournament titles. And then there's the title of "hammer."

This one's special. There's no formal process for being deemed a hammer. It isn't earned on paper. An angler sort of just becomes one when, through the consensus of his peers, he's regarded as a bass angler of special talent. There's no formal declaration, either. One day, an angler walks up to the bag line, and someone asks, "You get 'em, hammer?" And that's that.

To get a better idea of what qualifies someone to be a hammer, I asked Associate Editor Jody White to define it. He often uses the term to describe deserving pros.

"A hammer is an angler that can win at any time, though it can also describe someone who dominates a particular place, time or technique," he says. "Calling someone a hammer is also a great way to compliment him on a good performance, even if he might not actually be a hammer."

I'll add to Jody's definition that to be a hammer is to be feared by your competition. This might be at the local level or on the national scene. A hammer can pull off feats that impress even other hammers, such as catching 20 pounds on a 12-pound lake or uncovering a magic frog bite that no one else knew existed.

There's also a metaphysical aspect – something very tough to explain – that's part of being a hammer. When a hammer walks into a tournament registration meeting, people notice. They recognize him as the man to beat. When he walks on stage, photographers prepare their cameras. When other anglers roll into a pocket where a hammer is already fishing, they turn around and leave. Those fish have already been caught, and that hammer deserves such respect.

A hammer is not necessarily an FLW Tour pro, though there are plenty of hammers on Tour. Career earnings don't determine hammer status, nor do win totals. But a noteworthy win – a blowout, an improbable comeback, a shallow-water win during the peak of ledge season – can allude to someone's hammer status.

The best example of a hammer might be Todd Castledine. The Nacogdoches, Texas, pro recently pulled off a dramatic win in the Costa FLW Series Southwestern Division opener at Sam Rayburn when, on a tough post-frontal day three, he weighed in 27 pounds to rocket from ninth to first.

Afterward, Jody and I were debating headlines via text messages, and I commented that Castledine is a sledge in a world of hammers. He really is that impressive.

What's remarkable about hammers like Castledine is that even when they don't win they make an impact.

Last year, Castledine had the day-three lead at the Costa FLW Series Central Division event at Lake Dardanelle. He told me the night before that he'd figured out a frog bite that had the potential to produce a mammoth bag and guarantee the win, but he wasn't sure if he could get five bites. Castledine could've played it safe and flipped up five fish, but even then he might not have won. He'd have left the outcome in the hands of his competitors. Hammers don't fish that way. Instead, Castledine threw a haymaker with the frog. The haymaker missed, but his frog tactic was so interesting that it drew most of the attention, and we ended up covering it in this magazine.

That's another mark of a hammer: a contender every time he's on the water, but impressive even in defeat.

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

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*Curtis Niedermier*

### **Production Manager/ Graphic Designer**

*Michelle Dowling*

### **Assistant Managing Editor**

*Chad Love*

### **Senior Editor**

*Kyle Wood*

### **Associate Editor**

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### **Editor Emeritus**

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### **Field Editors**

*Rob Newell & Matt Williams*

### **Contributors**

*Joe Balog, David A. Brown, Dan Johnson, TJ Maglio, Sean Ostruszka, Joe Sills, Paul Strege*

### **Graphic Designer**

*D.W. Reed II*

### **Graphic Designer/Illustrator**

*Matt Pace*

### **Director of Advertising**

*Al Chapman | 270.252.1628*

### **Senior Web Content Manager**

*Jesse Schultz*

### **Social Media and Communications Specialist**

*Chris Burgan*

### **Letters to the Editor**

*FLW Bass Fishing  
30 Gamble Lane, Benton, KY 42025  
flwfishing@flwfishing.com*



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## **A SMALLMOUTH OASIS**

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If ever there's a time to give thanks to the folks who tamed the American West, it's when a fiery sunrise blazes across the sky over Lake Havasu before a day of smallmouth fishing in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

Lake Havasu is, in some ways, quite out of place as a smallmouth fishery, far from the well-known smallie factories of the Upper Midwest, Great Lakes and Tennessee Valley. Yet there it is, an oasis built on the Colorado River along the Arizona-California border and home to some of the West's most outstanding smallmouth opportunities.

Havasu has become a semi-regular stop for the Costa FLW Series Western Division, and it hosted this year's opener back in February. Associate Editor Jody White snapped this pic on day three of the Havasu tournament, while idling through the Topock Gorge area north of Lake Havasu City.

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE



**SOUTHEAST TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL CIRCUIT DRAWS MORE THAN 1,000 PARTICIPANTS FOR BACK-TO-BACK EVENTS**

Perhaps nowhere in the country has the growth of organized high school bass fishing been better realized than in Texas, where the Southeast Texas (SETX) High School Fishing Association is leading the way with mammoth tournament participation.

At its opening events on Sam Rayburn Reservoir Jan. 15 and Feb. 4, the organization's 2017 Championship Series drew 517 and 515 two-student teams, respectively. An adult boat captain accompanied each team.

Jared Goebel and Bryce Roder of Lumberton High School won the opener with 18.79 pounds. Evadale High School's Kyler Kirkland and Ashton Granger nearly matched that mark at the February derby with 18.73 pounds.

To accommodate the growth in interest, SETX recently rolled out a new weigh-in trailer and is fabricating a new live release trailer. The upgrades will

help the organization better service its tournaments and protect the resource. Additionally, a "conservation tent" concept was adopted to protect fish caught during warm-weather events.

"We are always looking for better ways to minimize our impact on the lake," says SETX Vice President Tom Selman. "We get a lot of small stringers crossing the stage, and those kids rarely, if ever, have the chance to crack the top 50 and get a check. With the conservation program, kids now have a choice to photograph their fish on the water, release them immediately, and save themselves and the fish a long trip through the weigh-in line. Once back, the kids simply present their photo at the conservation tent, where they will then receive a ticket for a drawing worth \$500. It's a win-win for everyone, and we hope our kids and captains will utilize this resource."



Above: Jared Goebel (left) and Bryce Roder (right), with boat captain John Goebel, won the SETX opener. Below: Kyler Kirkland and Ashton Granger won the second event.



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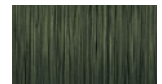
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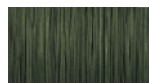
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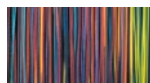
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## BOAT WRECK VIDEO GOES VIRAL

Millions of people got a stark reminder of the importance of wearing a PFD and connecting a kill switch while operating a bass boat when Hunter Bland and Conner Young of the University of Florida Bass Fishing Team shared a GoPro video on YouTube of them being ejected from their bass boat. It happened during takeoff at the FLW College Fishing Southeastern Conference event at Lake Seminole on Jan. 14. In the video, which was posted a couple of days after the accident, the boat can be seen traveling at a high rate of speed, then suddenly hooking to the starboard side. Both anglers were thrown out over the port gunwale. Each was wearing a life jacket, and the kill switch shut off the big motor.



The video, which had more than 1.2 million views on YouTube at press time, was picked up by several national media outlets, including CNN. Bland and Young were OK, and the young anglers used the attention that the video garnered to promote boater safety. For the record, FLW rules require that anglers wear an approved PFD and connect an outboard kill switch while any gas combustion engine is in operation.

## COLUMBIA OUTFITS FLW

FLW and Columbia Sportswear recently reached an agreement for Columbia to become the official apparel outfitter of FLW. For more about the Oregon-based brand known for its innovative apparel, footwear, accessories and equipment for anglers and outdoor enthusiasts, visit [Columbia.com](http://Columbia.com).



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## Fishing Community Mourns Loss of Kyle Mabrey

Kyle Mabrey, a former FLW Tour pro from McCalla, Ala., was killed in a single-car accident on Feb. 19. Mabrey was traveling north on Interstate 459 near Bessemer when his Tahoe left the roadway and went down the median until he came to a stop on some railroad tracks that passed under the interstate. At 11:51 p.m., a Norfolk Southern train struck the boat he was towing. When authorities arrived, he was pronounced dead on the scene.



Mabrey, 42 at the time of his death, leaves behind a wife, Beth, and two young children – a son and daughter. FLW Tour pro Brad Knight and his wife, Becky, along with other pros who knew and traveled the Tour with Mabrey, set up a GoFundMe account with the goal of raising \$30,000 to help Mabrey's widow and children. More than \$29,000 had been given by press time in early March. To donate to the fund, go to [gofundme.com/3epmdzs](http://gofundme.com/3epmdzs).

In addition to his career as a tournament fisherman, Mabrey was a respiratory therapist at Birmingham Children's Hospital. Funeral services were held Feb. 24 at The Baptist Church at McAdory in McCalla.

## OOPS, WE MADE A MISTAKE ... AND THE CHASE FOR THE LIMIT RECORD ENDS

On page 21 of the January 2017 issue of *FLW Bass Fishing* magazine, in an article titled "Chasing 50: Tracking Down the FLW Tour Record for Consecutive Limits," we incorrectly stated that Matt Arey had an active streak of 22 limits caught in FLW Tour competition. Arey's streak actually ended prior to publication on the second day of the 2016 Lake Norris FLW Tour Invitational. We regret the mistake.



PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

The article correctly listed six other Tour pros who had a mathematical shot at breaking the consecutive limit record, which is 50 and was set by Cody Meyer in 2014. However, five of those streaks were ended at the 2017 Tour opener at Guntersville. Andy Morgan's streak lasted until day one of stop No. 2 at Lake Travis when the Tennessee pro, suffering from the flu, weighed in only three bass.

## EXPANDED *FLW LIVE* A HIT

FLW rolled out a newly enhanced version of its popular *FLW Live* online video-streaming program during the FLW Tour event presented by Quaker State at Lake Travis in February. In addition to the already popular video stream from the daily weigh-ins, the new program also includes four hours of live video from the top anglers' boats on days three and four of the tournament, with analysis provided by hosts Travis Moran and Byron

Velvick, a former Bassmaster Elite Series angler. Replays of the Lake Travis live shows can be viewed at [YouTube.com/FLWFishing](http://YouTube.com/FLWFishing).

Live shows will air at [FLWFishing.com](http://FLWFishing.com) during the remaining FLW Tour events. Broadcast times are 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the time zone where each tournament is taking place. *FLW Live* is broadcast from an all-new studio in FLW's Benton, Ky., headquarters.

LIVE |

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FLW ESTABLISHES NEW RECORD COLLEGE FIELD SIZE

In February, FLW established a new record for the largest college bass fishing tournament when 248 teams participated in the YETI FLW College Fishing Southeastern Conference tournament at Lake Guntersville. The previous record was set at 214 teams at the 2016 Bassmaster College Series Southern Regional at Lake Martin. The previous FLW record was 203. That mark was set at the April 2016 FLW College Fishing Open on Kentucky Lake and matched at the 2016 Southeastern Conference qualifier at Lake Chickamauga in September.

Nick Hatfield and Corey Neece of Tusculum College won the tournament by a slim 3-ounce margin over runners-up Wesley Griner and Nathan Ragsdale of the University of Georgia. The top 24 teams qualified for the National Championship. ■



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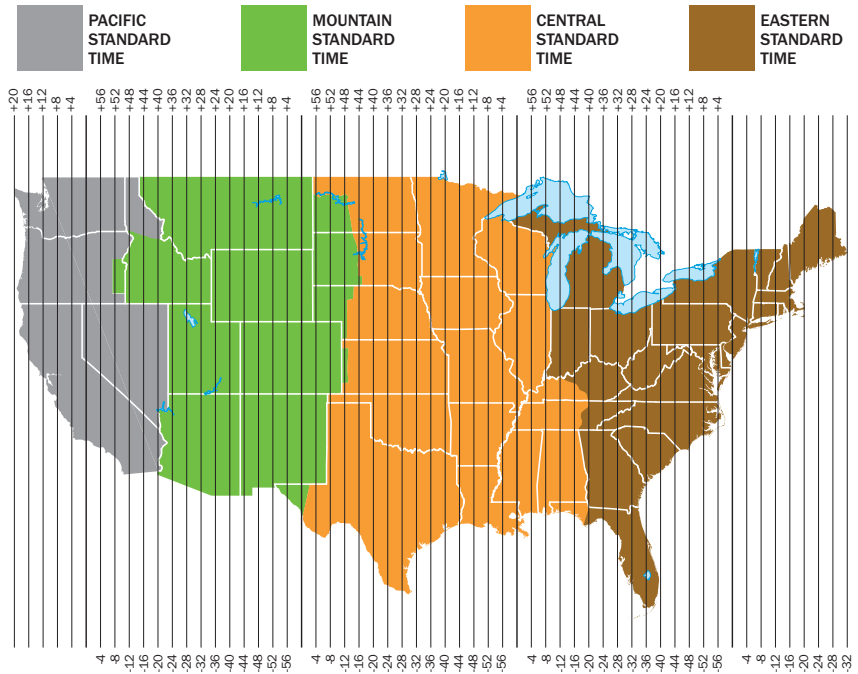
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APR. Date	Day	AM Minor	AM Major	PM Minor	PM Major	Moon Phases	APR. Date	Day	AM Minor	AM Major	PM Minor	PM Major	Moon Phases
1	Sat	8:45	2:35	9:20	3:05		16	Sun	8:40	2:30	9:10	2:55	
2	Sun	9:55	3:40	10:25	4:10		17	Mon	9:30	3:20	10:00	3:45	
3	Mon	10:50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

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



# ROB NEWELL



## From Local Pro to Touring Pro



One of the many characters we encounter in tournament fishing is the “local pro.” He’s the guy who dominates all the Tuesday night wildcatters on his home lake and all the club derbies on the third Saturday of every month.

“He wins everything on this lake,” his family and friends proudly say. “If the big boys ever come here for a tournament, he’ll be taking their money, too.”

When “the big boys” do come to town, the scenario that usually plays out is that the local pro ponies up his money for an entry, makes a showing the first day but then gets buried in the standings on the second day. Somehow the one guy who knows “every stick-up and stump out there” goes home clinging to a nominal check while the touring pros, who hardly ever fish “his” lake, leave town with the big money.

How does this happen?

After years of watching this dynamic unfold during bass tournaments, the best explanation I have is that the “big boys” fish multiple-day tournaments on a regular basis in the big leagues, and multiple-day events are a much different animal than the one-day, go-for-broke contests that are most common at the local level.

Many of the best sticks in the business agree that the hardest hump they had to get over when making the transition from fishing local events to touring as a pro was learning how to find fish for several days in a row, in varying conditions and with a considerable amount of fishing pressure being

applied to the fishery. There are many strategies that touring pros employ to help them catch fish consistently for three or four days, but the best pros understand three keys to multiple-day tournament success.

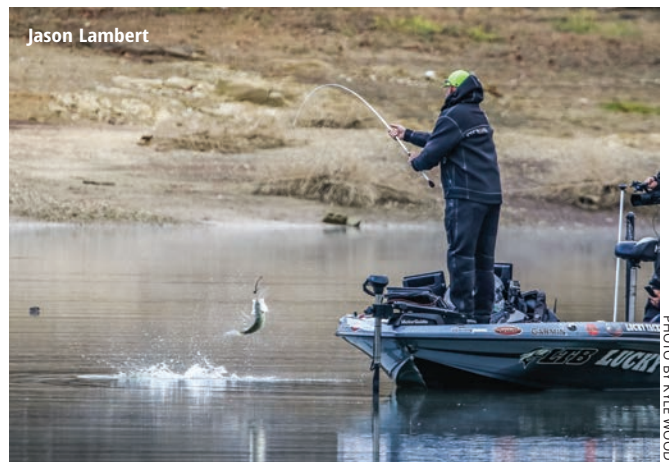


PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

### 1. Managing Fish

One-day-wonder catches usually come from a single spot. Likewise, locals are good at “camping” on one spot and cleaning it out for a big catch. When they return to the same gig the next day, the well is often dry. This is where many local sticks get tripped up.

Managing fish over multiple days is a critical component of what the touring pros do so well. They try to avoid going all in on one spot all day. Occasionally they might intentionally clean out a spot if they know a significant negative condition change such as bad weather or high, muddy water is coming, or if it's a community hole that's going to get thrashed anyway. However, they would much rather take only a few fish from a productive spot each day in an effort to make the spot hold up for several days instead of one. They often "leave fish biting" so as not to risk draining the well.

FLW Tour pro Jason Lambert provided a great example of this kind of management in the Norris Lake Invitational last fall. Lambert found a small, red-hot cranking spot in practice and could have camped on it the first day, perhaps sacked 15 or 16 pounds, and taken the early lead. Instead, he fished the hot spot for just a few minutes on each of the first two days. He boxed the first four or five bass that bit and then immediately vacated the productive area. From there he ran other patterns to cull up while saving the bulk of what was on his hot spot for the final day. The strategy earned him a runner-up finish, leaving him just 3 ounces shy of a win.



PHOTO BY ROB NEWELL

## 2. Assessing Fishing Pressure

Touring pros acutely understand the impact of fishing pressure on the lakes they fish. They analyze the effects of that pressure, and then adjust their tactics to a fishery's size, the time of year, the fish population, angler field size, and length of practice and the tournament.

Likewise, top pros often talk about "timing and rotation," which is pro-speak for knowing – sometimes down to the minute – how long a spot needs to rest before it will "replenish" or a school will re-form.

Bryan Thrift is a master at assessing fishing pressure. His run-and-gun approach looks haphazard, but as Thrift is ripping up and down a lake and hitting dozens of spots per hour, he is also paying keen attention to fishing pressure being applied to certain areas at certain times. He is remarkable at working his way around that pressure.

When a tournament starts, Thrift can be seen plucking the "low-hanging fruit," or catching the easily catchable fish in common spots alongside his competitors. As the tournament progresses, however, he moves to more obscure stuff that does not get as much heat.

## 3. Playing the Conditions

In one-day tournaments, anglers mostly deal with a single weather scenario. Touring pros can encounter torrential downpours on a hard south wind one day and high bright blue skies with a stiff north wind the next. Playing these conditions to maximize opportunities is something the best pros do very well.

The FLW Tour's annual trip to Arkansas' Beaver Lake provides a remarkable opportunity to watch Thrift, Andy Morgan, Matt Arey and David Dudley – some of the Tour's best "condition runners" – really shine. They often mix and mingle areas and patterns based on the weather they are dealt each day. They might sight-fish down at the dam one day, throw crankbaits on wind-blown points in the mid-lake area the next day and then flip shallow cover up in the river the following day.

Weather-wise, Beaver in the spring is such a variable lake that no two days are the same, and the pros who succeed there have learned not to get hung up on repeating "what worked yesterday." They always play the weather windows to their advantage.



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

## Putting it All Together

In the end, top touring pros know how to blend these three strategies together to extend their success in multiple-day events. By carefully taking just what they need from a really good spot, constantly assessing fishing pressure and playing the conditions, they are able to bolster their daily catches each day to climb the leaderboard. ■



PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON



COLIN  
MOORE

## Spotted Bass in the Spotlight



If such things are possible, spotted bass have long suffered from an inferiority complex, mainly because largemouth and smallmouth bass have always seemed to hog the limelight. But that was before such spotted behemoths as the 10.80-pound fish caught by FLW Tour pro Cody Meyer from California's Bullards Bar Reservoir in December started showing up.

An angler in the eastern part of the country might think of spotted bass as just a hedge against going to a weigh-in without a limit on an otherwise bleak day of fishing for jumbo largemouths. On the West Coast, however, spots win tournaments in eye-popping fashion. And although Meyer's fish was a monster by any reckoning, at least four other spots in the same weight class have been caught from California waters in the last couple of years. Nine-pounders have become fairly commonplace, and 8-pound spots might help win tournaments, but they don't make much of a splash in the state's records book.

The spotted bass story is an interesting one, if not a confusing one. Biologists once recognized two subspecies of spotted bass: the northern (Kentucky) spotted bass (*Micropterus punctulatus*) and the Alabama spotted bass (*Micropterus punctulatus henshalli*). Recently, however, DNA analysis was used to determine that the Alabama spotted bass is not a

subspecies at all, but a distinct species – the Alabama bass, or *Micropterus henshalli*.

The Alabama bass grows larger than the northern spotted bass, but to most anglers, they're collectively referred to simply as spotted bass, as they're not easily distinguishable. In some states where both are present, the two are separated in the records, though usually as separate subspecies.

Confusion has been part of the spotted bass story for nearly 200 years. The northern spotted bass was first described by French naturalist Constantine Rafinesque in 1819. Ichthyologists that followed, Dr. James Henshall of *Book of the Black Bass* fame included, thought Rafinesque was actually talking about a smallmouth bass. Thus, the spotted bass was all but ignored until 1927, when a Michigan ichthyologist, Dr. Carl Hubbs, recognized it as a distinct species of black bass. Originally, Dr. Hubbs referred to it in casual conversation as the "Kentucky bass," believing that the fish was limited to waters of that state.

Boy, was he wrong. Spots naturally inhabit waters of the lower Mississippi River drainage and rivers of the southern Appalachians and Ozarks.

With regard to either species, when – and not so much where – they are caught makes a big difference in weight. For instance, the current Tennessee spotted bass record is 6 pounds, 15 ounces, and was caught from Parksville

Lake by local angler Shane McKee on a mid-March day in 2014 when it was carrying eggs, which added at least a pound to the weight. FLW Tour pro Wesley Strader boated the previous Tennessee record, 6-7, on July 30, 2010 when it was spawned out.

Both fish were confirmed to be of the Alabama strain, caught from waters where they weren't supposed to be and aren't welcome by fisheries biologists. The concern is that Alabama bass, which are naturally more aggressive, might gradually replace both native spots and smallmouths in the eastern reservoirs of the Tennessee River and elsewhere. Ultimately, the least they're going to do is spawn a dominant mongrel strain.

Tennessee fisheries biologists also conducted a genetic study of McKee's catch to make sure it wasn't a "mean-mouth bass," which is a cross – either naturally or artificially produced – between a smallmouth and a spotted or largemouth bass. Many states don't keep records of meanmouth bass, though the International Game Fish Association does. Here again, the threat of hybridization in otherwise natural fisheries concerns biologists.

California's behemoth "spotted bass" are pure bloods. That is, all are of the Alabama strain, the first couple of thousand fingerlings having arrived from Lewis Smith Lake in northern Alabama in 1974 and being stocked in Lake Perris near San Bernardino.

By any name we call the fish, it was the beginning of another beautiful relationship between bass and California waters. ■



PHOTO BY TIM LITTLE

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# TAKEOFF

## WHAT'S INSIDE:

3 pros' favorite bedding baits

A better way to fish a jig in clear water

Bass deformities: how they happen

Scott Canterbury's best shad-spawn advice

**THROUGH FAITH AND FISHING, DAVID DUDLEY FOUGHT HIS WAY BACK FROM THE BRINK OF BANKRUPTCY**

How to increase your bass boat's top-end speed



TAKEOFF  
IN SEASON

# APRIL

## Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege

### Think Natural for River Runoff

Northern rivers play a crucial role in the spring, serving as natural pipelines for collecting water runoff. When air temperatures rapidly climb, melting the winter snowpack, rivers rage and water clarity subsequently deteriorates in a hurry.

FLW Tour rookie Josh Douglas of Mound, Minn., takes advantage of adverse river conditions by bucking conventional wisdom. While bulkier lures might seem to be easier for bass to locate, Douglas favors a more natural presentation.



“When the water is high and muddy in the spring, I like to present something natural and without much movement to it. The Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver is a good example,” he says. “In my experience, compact baits will out-produce baits with larger, more plentiful appendages and tails. Baits with streamlined profiles drop closer to your intended target, especially when the current is strong. Think of it as you bringing the bait to the fish rather than requiring the fish to come to you.”

Under most conditions, Douglas pitches his soft-plastic offerings on a 1/4-ounce Texas rig.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Lake Cumberland, fourth stop of the 2017 FLW Tour season, boasts several Kentucky state fishing records, including sturgeon (36 pounds, 8 ounces), striped bass (58 pounds, 4 ounces) and walleye (21 pounds, 8 ounces). The striped bass fishing on Lake Cumberland is considered truly world class.



### THROW THIS NOW: 1/4-OUNCE BLACK BUZZBAIT

Wisconsin pro Tom Monsoor has used a small black buzzbait to earn big tournament checks from Wisconsin to Louisiana, and the bite starts early, even in his region. Monsoor says he’s caught fish with it at times when there was ice along the banks.

“Early in the season, you can simply run the bank. It doesn’t matter what type of cover you’re fishing, either,” notes Monsoor. “If the fish are there, they will bite it.”

“My go-to color has always been black. That seems to work 99 percent of the time. Every now and then, under sunny conditions in particular, a white one will out-fish the black.”



Tom Monsoor’s  
homemade buzzbait

## PRO CHOICE: BEDDING BAITS



### 1. Jimmy Reese White 5-inch Yamamoto Single Tail Grub

“While I usually rotate through three to four different types of lures, my favorite is a Single Tail Grub. It’s a simple but versatile bait that takes care of business for me on virtually any body of water.”



### 2. Troy Morrow Zoom Ultra-Vibe Speed Craw

“It’s a smaller, compact bait without nuisance appendages that bass tend to grab. It looks realistic on the bed, and you can swim it on a Texas rig. Every now and then I will trigger a bonus strike by swimming it back to the boat.”



### 3. Jeff Gustafson 2 3/4-inch Northland Impulse Fatty Tube

“For smallmouths, I keep it pretty simple: a short tube, in green pumpkin color, Texas-rigged with a 2/0 Gamakatsu hook. It’s the one I used at the Lake Champlain Tour stop last year. The smallmouths just can’t resist that bait.” ■



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# CASTING A JIG

THIS SEEMINGLY SIMPLE TECHNIQUE REQUIRES CAREFUL TIMING AND CONTROL TO MASTER

By Curtis Niedermier

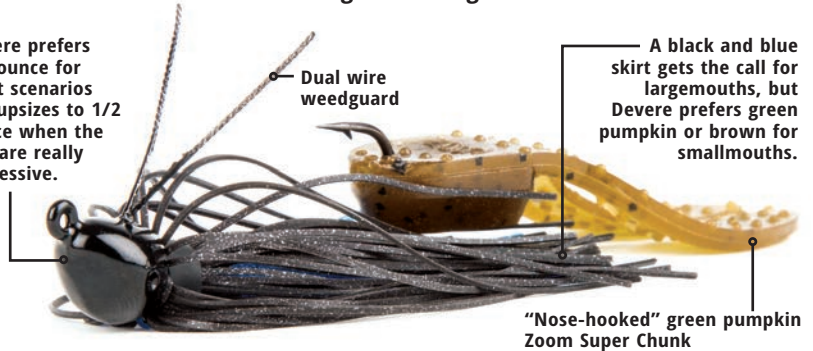
In the hills of central and eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, casting a compact, wire-weedguard jig and slowly crawling it down sloping rocky banks is a timeless technique that works pretty much year-round. FLW's own Bill Taylor, senior director of tournament operations, was among the pioneers of the technique, and FLW Tour pro John Devere of Berea, Ky., continues to cash checks with it on the national tournament trail.

Casting a jig is a simple-enough technique to try, but it requires some time and skill to perfect. Devere offers his best advice.

## The Jig

### Stan Sloan's Zorro Bait Co. Casting Booza Bug

Devere prefers 3/8 ounce for most scenarios but upsizes to 1/2 ounce when the fish are really aggressive.



A black and blue skirt gets the call for largemouths, but Devere prefers green pumpkin or brown for smallmouths.

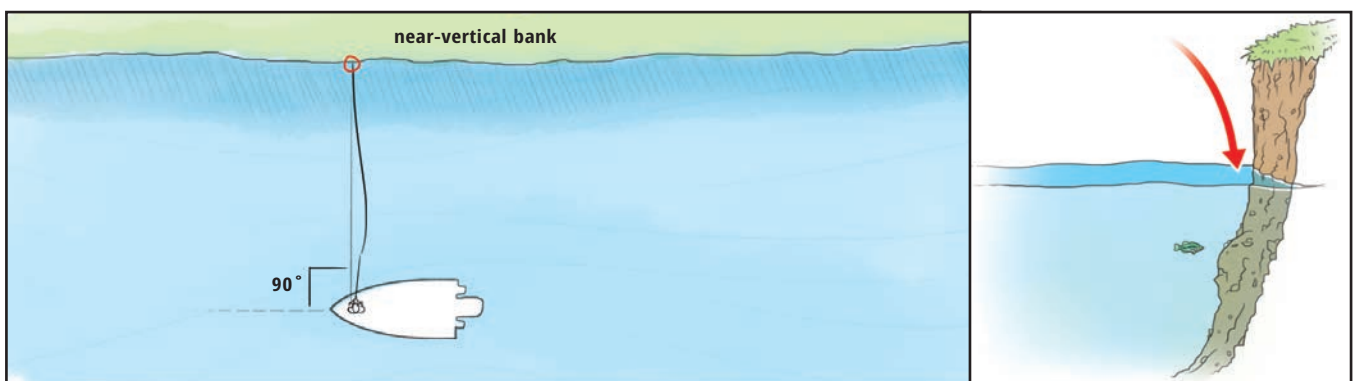
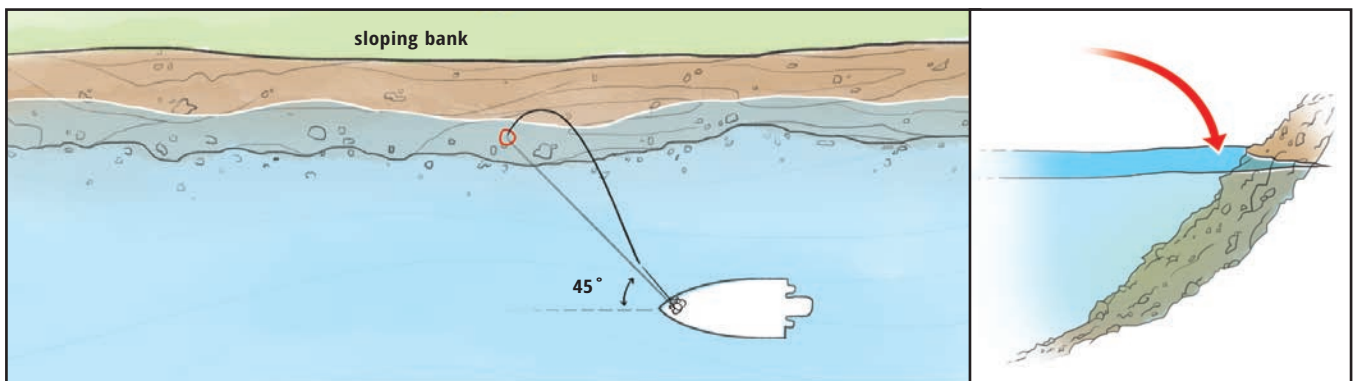
"Nose-hooked" green pumpkin Zoom Super Chunk

## The Cast

On flat and slowly sloping banks, or banks that slope as much as 45 degrees, cast at a 45-degree angle out in front of the boat. If he's searching, Devere casts as far as he can and spaces his casts a good distance apart. Once he finds fish, however, he'll space his casts no more than 10 feet apart.

On sheer bluff-type banks, cast straight toward the shoreline and nearly to the bank.

"Just let it fall. Let the pole down, and let it have line – but not slack – until it hits," Devere says. "Most of the time those straight-down banks will have a little ledge at 8 or 10 feet deep. The fish will get around that little ledge."



## The Initial Drop

The casting technique Devere employs was developed to fish snaggy rock bottoms. To avoid hanging up requires careful timing and control, starting with the initial descent.

"You want to try to twitch it at the same time as it hits the bottom," Devere explains. "It's kind of a timing thing. You don't want to let it lie there or you'll hang up usually. You just barely want it to touch a rock or whatever you're fishing."

## Short Rods

It's unusual these days for a professional bass angler to use a 6-foot rod for nearly any technique, but Devere says that's just right for casting a jig.

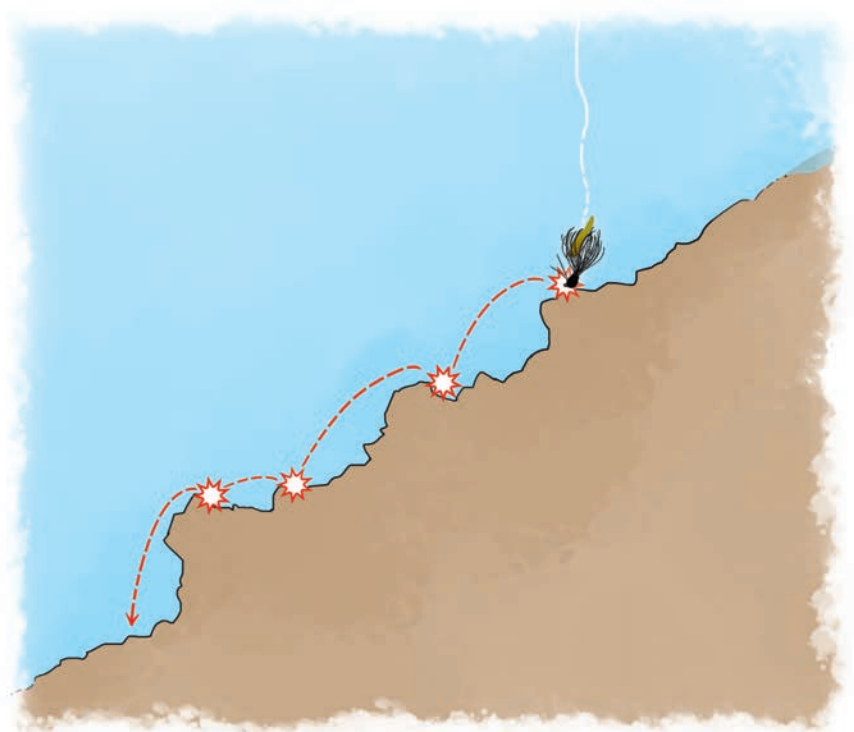
"I've been trying to use longer ones, but the longer it is the less control you have on the jig," he says. "When you pull it, if you're not careful you'll jerk it too fast."

## Working the Jig

The twitch described above is accomplished with a short lift of the rod tip that pulls the jig over the rocks. It's not a horizontal drag, like many anglers use to cover water with a football jig. Exactly how far you pull it varies based on the area you're fishing.

"It all depends on how steep the bank is," says Devere. "If the bank is pretty steep, like a vertical bank, you don't pull it much at all [because it'll fall farther after each pull]. I would guess it moves maybe 6 inches to a foot at the most each time. You don't want to swoop it real fast. Keeping it going enough so it doesn't get hung up is the main thing.

"As soon as it hits a rock or the bottom you move it," he adds. "You don't just let it sit there. Just keep it crawling as a crawdad would. You're pulling it to make it pop off the rock, and that's when the fish hit it usually."



## Wood Cover

When he encounters brush, Devere tries to work the jig around the edges of the cover first. Then he casts right to it. That way, if he does hang up, it happens after he's already made a productive cast.

A jig with a heavy fiber weedguard might come through wood cover better than a jig with a wire guard, but Devere says a fiber weedguard jig's action just isn't right. He reserves a heavy fiber weedguard for flipping.

"With that Stan Sloan jig, with just two little bitty wire guards on it, the wire does protect it from snags a little bit, but if you pull it really fast into a log it's hung," Devere adds. "If you run into something like a log, don't jig it really hard. Just use a little pressure to bring it over the log." ■



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER

# TALES FROM THE BASS INFIRMARY

A LOOK AT COMMON INJURIES AND DEFORMITIES THAT AFFECT BASS

By TJ Maglio

It's hard on bass out there. The natural world is fraught with dangers, and like every other creature on the planet, a bass is subject to a host of illnesses and injuries as it goes about its life.

If you've caught enough bass, you've most certainly boat-flipped one or two that have had some sort of unique deformity, damage or discoloration. Photos of such catches

are regular fodder on Internet message boards and around the weigh-in stage after a tournament day.

While most anglers have caught a bass or two that looked a bit odd, there's little discussion of the cause of visual deformities. In some cases, understanding the causes can help anglers care for their catches better. In other cases, it's just interesting to know how some bass have come to look the way they do.

## Black Blotches

Bass have pigment in their skin that's responsible for their coloration. And they're prone to various genetic disorders that can cause pigmentation to be unique. The most common coloration oddity is melanosis, which shows as dark or black splotches on the skin of the fish. Melanosis is not a disease, nor has it been shown to affect bass negatively in any way.

## Battle Scars

Angling is one of the main causes of bass injury and deformation, particularly in the mouth and head. Everyone has caught a bass with a big hole in the mouth caused by

previous hooking, right? Occasionally a bass is caught that is missing an eye or part of a gill plate. Odds are that type of injury occurred during a previous encounter with an angler's treble hook.

Other forms of damage caused by fishermen include holes from culling tags and broken jaws from improper handling. An angler can minimize such injuries by using pliers to remove hooks quickly and cleanly, supporting big bass with both hands and using cull tags that don't puncture the skin around the jaw.

## Road Rash

Bass, like all fish, have a protective layer of slime that coats their entire bodies. The slime coat reduces water resistance, making them more hydrodynamic, and functions as a barrier against infection. Take away the slime, and fungal or bacterial infection can set in quickly.

Flopping and scraping against a boat's carpet can remove the slime and cause skin infections. A fisherman should always try to minimize the amount of exposure a bass has to carpet or other abrasive surfaces, and handle the fish with wet hands whenever possible.

## Predator Damage

Though predators themselves, bass are also prey for other species at various points in their lives. They often exhibit scars, lesions and other physical damage as the result of encounters with predators. Ospreys, herons, snapping turtles, lampreys and toothy critters such as alligators, northern pike and muskies are all more than willing to take a bite at a passing bass, and if the bass survives, it can wear the resulting damage the rest of its days.

## Spawning Damage

Many bass caught in the spring have bloody and worn tails or anal fins. This is damage caused by fanning out a nest and the other rigors of spawning. Paying attention to the presence or absence of this type of injury and how much these injuries have healed is a great indicator as to the phase of the spawn, and can lead to catching more bass.

## Bug Eyes

Anglers occasionally catch bass with eyes that appear to be bulging from their heads. This condition is called exophthalmia, which essentially means "bulging eyes." It is most commonly found in large bass, and it can be caused by a number of stressors, including infection, trauma or being reeled in too quickly out of deep water. ■



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# DIALING IN ON THE SHAD SPAWN

HOW SCOTT CANTERBURY CAPITALIZES ON THIS PRIME SPRINGTIME OPPORTUNITY

By David A. Brown

Scott Canterbury describes the threadfin shad spawn as Mother Nature helping a bunch of flat-bellied bass regain their girlish curves. Bass anglers also find great opportunity during the threadfin spawn, but capitalizing on this spring routine requires astute awareness of its timing and location, along with accurate baitfish imitators.

"I think a shad spawn is a lot about Mother Nature taking care of our resources," Canterbury says. "It happens right at the end of the bass spawn. The bass are coming off the beds all worn out, and the shad spawn makes for an easy feed for the bass to recuperate."

Threadfin shad typically spawn in shallow areas where they're easy for bass to home in on, and where bass are easy for anglers to target. However, the bite window is short-lived each morning. Canterbury shares his insight on making the most of this productive, yet fleeting opportunity.

## Prime Time

Other environmental factors aside, Canterbury focuses on water temperature, and begins to look for spawning shad when the water temperature climbs into the 68- to 70-degree range. Shad are broadcast spawners, so they spawn in schools. Once the activity begins, expect to see a flurry of flickering, flashing forms just under the surface at daybreak.

"The shad actually spawn a lot at night, but the time that you're going to target them [in a tournament] is during the very first couple hours of daylight," Canterbury explains.

Once the sunlight intensifies, spawning typically ceases and shad head to deeper water, which usually puts an end to this phase of bass feeding activity. Overcast days might prolong the action, so stick with it a while longer when skies stay dim.

Canterbury also extends the bite by keying on shaded areas where shad might continue to spawn in the later hours of the morning.

"You have to have a place where you're going to start, no matter what,

but after that, you want to look for places that stay in the shade longer than others," Canterbury says. "You can run that pattern of staying in the shade an extra hour. You want to run the east side where it [the land and trees] blocks the sun more."

Shorelines in pockets with east-west orientation receive sunlight all day, while pockets with north-south alignment offer periods of shade on the banks - west side in the morning, east in the afternoon.



PHOTO BY TOM MCHUGH/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

"It's usually wide open for the first hour, so even if you're in the last flight, you're going to get a bit of it," Canterbury says. "After that first hour, you really have to chase that shade."

## Target Areas

Wherever you fish, it's necessary to identify the type of shallow cover or structure that shad prefer for broadcast spawning.

"It depends on what type of lake you're on," Canterbury says. "On the Coosa River where I live [in Alabama], if you're on Lay Lake, the shad spawn happens on the willow grass. But at Logan Martin, which is one lake up, they'll spawn on wooden seawalls and floating docks.

"If a lake doesn't have the willow grass, most of the time they prefer docks or some type of vertical structure, such as any kind of seawall or

bluff — some type of hard surface they can get against."

Marinas can be shad spawn gold mines because they often hold resident bass populations anyway, and shad spawn around the dock slips.

"The bass use the bays and shallow areas around the marinas to spawn, and then they pull back under those docks to recuperate," Canterbury explains. "When the shad spawn on those docks, it's an easy meal for the bass."

## Fooling 'Em

Top shad spawn offerings include swim jigs, ChatterBaits, small to medium swimbaits, topwaters, wake baits and spinnerbaits. Anything you can fish in the upper portion of the water column and parallel with structure or cover will suffice, but stick with white, chartreuse and shad colors.

One of Canterbury's top choices is a spinnerbait, and he adjusts the size of the lure's willow-leaf blades to match the local shad. He'll use anywhere from a No. 4 to a No. 7. Silver is his standard color, but he'll switch to gold in dirtier water.

When looking for shad spawns, particularly on offshore spots, blasting the "feeding frenzy" soundtrack from a HydroWave can kick-start the show. The baitfish soundtrack also masks the sounds of hull slap, trolling motors and any angler-generated noise that could spook the shad and bass. ■

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## THE UPS AND DOWNS OF DAVID DUDLEY

LESS THAN A DECADE AGO, THE VIRGINIA PRO FACED BANKRUPTCY AND AN UNCERTAIN FINANCIAL FUTURE, BUT THROUGH FAITH AND UNMATCHED RESILIENCY, DUDLEY TURNED HIS HARDSHIPS INTO THE KIND OF MOTIVATION THAT HAS PRODUCED SOME OF BASS FISHING'S GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

*By Rob Newell*  
PHOTOS BY KEVIN BLACKBURN

**D**avid Dudley knows better than most the ups and downs of the pro fishing roller coaster. During his 25-year career, Dudley has ascended to the very peak of the tournament ride, only to plunge straight down into an abyss so deep he wasn't sure he'd ever climb back out.

The peak came in the early 2000s, when the Lynchburg, Va., pro earned \$1.2 million in just two years by winning the Ranger M1 Millennium tournament and the Forrest Wood Cup, making him one of professional bass fishing's youngest millionaires.

And then came the abyss. By 2010, in the wake of a crippling national recession, Dudley, like many others, found himself in dire financial straits. He struggled just to feed his family as creditors looked to foreclose on his properties and liquidate his assets. Dudley had to end up selling most of his rods and reels and much of his tackle just to keep the lights on.

To an ordinary angler, the situation could have been career-ending. But Dudley is no ordinary angler. Through faith, grit and sheer determination he battled his way back from the brink of bankruptcy with back-to-back FLW Tour Angler of the Year wins in 2011 and 2012. In that same timespan, Dudley posted an impressive eight top-10 finishes in FLW Tour Major,

FLW Tour Open and Forrest Wood Cup competition, won two Tour events in 2012 and banked more than \$600,000.

These days Dudley is back on solid financial ground. Through debt consolidation measures he managed to hold on to most of the vacation rental properties in which he'd invested, and in recent years Dudley has started several new successful business ventures. On the water, he notched his sixth consecutive top-25 AOY finish in 2016, matching the longest such run of his career. Despite great uncertainty and against seemingly insurmountable odds, Dudley

has managed to climb his way back out of that abyss, and in the process, he's become stronger both on the water and off.

### Rock Bottom

About the time Dudley raised his first FLW Tour Angler of the Year trophy in 2008, the bottom fell out of the nation's economy. Shortly thereafter the bottom also fell out of Dudley's fishing performance. His earnings on Tour tapered off, and in 2009 Dudley missed qualifying for the Forrest Wood Cup for only the second time in his career.

Another tough season in 2010 didn't help matters, and

by the start of the 2011 FLW Tour season, Dudley's financial situation had become so dismal that he had to borrow rods, reels, tackle and expense money just to fish the events.

"I'm not going to lie — it was a pretty rough time in life, a real wake-up call," he recalls. "I couldn't even afford groceries. Friends and family from the community had to bring us milk and bread to eat. I had to put water in the milk to make it last longer."

The irony of Dudley's financial fallout was that he was still being touted as a fishing millionaire. Dudley, who has today earned more than \$3.4 million with FLW,



David Dudley's billboard business has become a lucrative part-time enterprise for the Virginia pro.

was and still is the organization's all-time leading money winner.

"If you asked anyone, they would tell you I was rich," he says. "They'd say, 'Look at his winnings. Dudley is loaded.' I can assure you, that wasn't the case."

Dudley's financial demise was not due to frivolous or superficial spending, but simply bad timing. He had invested a lot of money in real estate — mostly vacation rental properties — at the top of the market.

"I love professional fishing, but I've always wanted to have other types of business income to fall back on," Dudley says. "So I invested a lot of my winnings. These weren't get-rich-quick schemes, either. These were solid vacation rentals that were cranking out some extra income back then."

But once the economy tanked, people throttled back on vacation spending, and Dudley's rental income dried up. The economic crash also caused a devaluation of real estate. Dudley had purchased

much of his property at the peak of the market, and three years later those real estate assets took a serious hit in value. Like many real estate investors during that time, Dudley found himself upside down in real estate debt.

"We had money on paper, but no liquidity whatsoever," he explains. "I was making hefty payments on all this rental property, and it was not paying me back at all. It just completely drained us."

"When I started the 2011 season, I was at the absolute bottom of the barrel."

## Familiar Territory

To some degree, being on the very bottom financial rung was familiar territory for Dudley. After all, he started his fishing career in the early 1990s from essentially nothing, often borrowing boats, rods, tackle and entry fees to get from one tournament to the next. He even bummed gas from farmers along lake banks to keep his boat going during practice for professional events.

## WANTED: A CLASSIC TITLE

Business ventures aside, Dudley keeps busy on the water too. Overall, he's fished with remarkable success throughout his career. He's qualified for the last seven Forrest Wood Cups with FLW, but Dudley also qualified for the 2017 Bassmaster Elite Series by finishing fifth in the 2016 B.A.S.S. Northern Open points. He declined his Elite Series qualification, however, saying the reason he fished the Open series was mostly for a shot at a Bassmaster Classic spot, which is awarded to each Open champion.

Dudley has chalked up wins at nearly every level in pro fishing, including the Forrest Wood Cup, FLW Tour, Costa FLW Series, FLW Series Eastern Division, Ranger M1 Millennium, FLW Tour Open, B.A.S.S. Open and even the old Bassmaster Top 100 series that preceded the Elite Series. He's one of three anglers to have won three Tour AOY titles.

"The only two things I'm missing for a true grand slam in this sport are a B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year title and a Bassmaster Classic win," Dudley says. "I'll probably never check the B.A.S.S. AOY off the list, but I still want a Classic trophy. And as long as B.A.S.S. offers Classic qualifications for winning B.A.S.S. Opens, I'm going to fish B.A.S.S. Opens to try to get in that Classic. I'd love to have a shot at that one."



Add "horse ranching" to David Dudley's resume. It's part of his youth outreach efforts.

It was a struggle, to be sure, but a familiar one shared by many young and hungry pros just starting out. No money, perhaps, but also no worries or responsibilities beyond making it to the next tournament. Things change drastically, however, when there are others depending on you.

"It's a whole lot different when you have a family to support," says Dudley. "When I first started in pro fishing, I was young, single and had nothing to lose. I didn't care where I slept or what I ate. But when you have mouths to feed and bills to pay, the stress level is much higher."

Still, Dudley relied on what he has always relied on to claw his way back to firmer ground: raw determination, extreme resourcefulness and — above all — his undeniable faith. Together these elements have provided Dudley with a deep well of resiliency.

The fact that Dudley produced such remarkable fishing performances during his 2011 and 2012 AOY seasons while being mired in a sea of debt remains one of the most unheralded achievements in pro fishing. Some of his top competitors were aware of Dudley's hardships at the time, including Andy Morgan, who remains in awe of Dudley's remarkable feat.

"I've fished through some tough times," Morgan says, "but how he was able to maintain focus on the water during that time and win like that is something that's just inexplicable."

Inexplicable, perhaps, but Dudley sees it all as part of real life.

"That's how God tests your faith," Dudley says. "He can build you up and tear you down, humble you, and it makes you stronger."

"I'm just not a quitter," he adds. "When my back is up against the wall and all the chips are down, that's when the determination wells up inside of me like some kind of adrenaline. Trust me, it's not a position I put myself in on purpose, but when it's fourth and long, I feel like it's all on me to get a first down."

## Entrepreneur

Despite his painful early real estate experiences, Dudley's entrepreneurial spirit is still alive and well. Donald Trump himself would likely be impressed with the number of part-time businesses Dudley runs while also competing as a professional angler on the FLW Tour.

His early real estate investments on the coast taught him that the vacation rental business is a very seasonal market. With that in



A tipi on the Dudley farm attracts campers who want to rough it without getting too rough.



Dudley and his daughter, Anna, raise goats as well. The milk is used to make cheese and soap.

mind, Dudley has made several real estate purchases closer to home in Lynchburg, Va., near Liberty University.

"College students need housing almost year-round," Dudley says. "So between the beach rentals in the summer and the college rentals in the fall and winter, our rental properties are now more balanced."

Dudley has also had success renting smaller, more unconventional properties through Airbnb, a community-driven online rental hub. One of his rentals is ... a tipi? Yes, a tipi.

"Glamping, or 'glamour camping,' is now all the rage," Dudley says. "So we built a tipi out on our property. We put in electricity, floors, a woodstove, a bed, beanbag chairs and a gravity-fed sink. It's been a popular rental for us. People love it."

Dudley also runs a part-time billboard advertising business.

"Several years ago I found some billboards for sale on Craigslist for a really good price," he explains. "I now have six billboards along the highway that I rent out to local businesses."

If billboards are not enough to prove Dudley's extreme resourcefulness, consider that he also raises goats for those who prefer the delicacy of chevon, otherwise known as goat meat. His daughter, Anna, is in the goat business, too. She sells goat milk shares for the production of cheese and soap.

In addition, the Dudleys own a horse farm with a facility where they board horses for customers and offer trail rides on their property, which is a big hit for kids' birthday parties.

The farm is also the site of David's popular "Fish Camp,"

a ministry-based day camp for kids that keeps him busy for several weeks during the summer. When it's in operation, the camp hosts nearly 100 kids a day between the ages of six and 12. Attendees hike, fish and play games.

Finally, the pro still runs his "coaching trip" guide service where he offers private, one-on-one fishing lessons to anglers on any technique they want to learn.

"And did I mention I fish the FLW Tour, too?" he says. "There's never a dull moment around here. We're wide open all of the time." ■



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## RIGGING FOR SPEED

EQUIPMENT TIPS AND ADJUSTMENTS FOR MAXIMIZING TOP-END SPEED

By Joe Balog

**B**ass boat junkies have always been obsessed with speed. Fast boats were a novelty in the early days of bass fishing, but became a necessity as the advent of tournament bass fishing brought speed to the forefront. A fast boat meant shorter travel times between spots, which allowed more casts, and, in some cases, beating the competition to the best spot in the first place.

While larger boats and higher horsepower limits have led to fewer anglers pushing the envelope in terms of top-end speed, savvy tournament pros – particularly those accustomed to making long runs on massive bodies of water – still find value in getting all they can out of their bass boats. Here's the inside track on going fast.

PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

## Proper Motor Height

The key to going fast on the water begins with having the outboard height set correctly. Once a laborious process, changing outboard height on most bass boats is now as easy as turning a dial to raise or lower a hydraulic jack plate, which is now standard on most rigs.

If you don't have a hydraulic plate, invest in one if possible. Proper engine height can still be obtained with a manual plate, but it greatly increases the time and effort required to achieve the best setting.

Regarding engine height, many bass boat owners believe the key to speed is to adjust trim, but they're off the mark.

"To go fast, you want the nose of the boat as low as possible," says Alan Stinson.



A hydraulic jack plate is a valuable tool for maximizing speed.

Stinson is credited with designing and building many of the first modern bass boats in the 1970s for Skeeter. With more than 40 years of experience, he is responsible for many cutting-edge hull designs, and for helping evolve bass boats into what they are today. Any discussion of the evolution of speed in bass boats circles back to him.

Stinson says that keeping the nose low creates less wind drag and actually places less of the boat in the water. In contrast, trimming up lifts the nose, pushing more of the rear of the boat down and creating more hydrodynamic (water) drag.

"That causes a wake," Stinson adds, "and a wake is a telltale sign of drag."

Before setting engine height, consider two variables: First, be sure your boat has the recommended prop for its outboard. Each prop has an RPM range in which it performs best, and if your outboard isn't capable of turning the prop within that range, consult your outboard manufacturer's list (readily available through your dealer) of prop recommendations for the motor. Second, be sure to run tests in real-world conditions. If it's tournament top-end you're trying to improve, load the boat for a tournament.

"A tournament fisherman carries about 1,500 pounds of gear in the boat

[including fuel, anglers, batteries, etc.], so we perform tests with that load," says Mark Hanson, Mercury Marine's lead hydrodynamic technician.

Hanson says boats react negatively to heavy loads, so weight must be continuously considered. In fact, Hanson often refuels several times throughout the testing cycle to ensure the heavy weight of full fuel tanks is taken into consideration. A different prop is often required to lift a boat that's full of gear, and pitch size must be adjusted.

With the correct prop and weighting determined, run speed trials at different motor heights. Hanson begins by performing an anti-ventilation plate (AVP; commonly referred to as the cavitation plate) measurement. This determines the height of the AVP above the

centerline of the hull. Boat owners can do it themselves by running a straight edge from the center bottom of the hull to the motor. With the motor trimmed down, the AVP should start about 6 inches above that line. Adjust the jack plate to achieve that mark.

From that starting point, run tests on the water to determine the best trim angle and whether or not the motor should be raised or lowered with the jack plate. The objective is to get most of the boat out of the water without the excessive use of trim while maintaining a smooth, stable ride. Through experimentation, you should be able to dial in what works best for your rig.

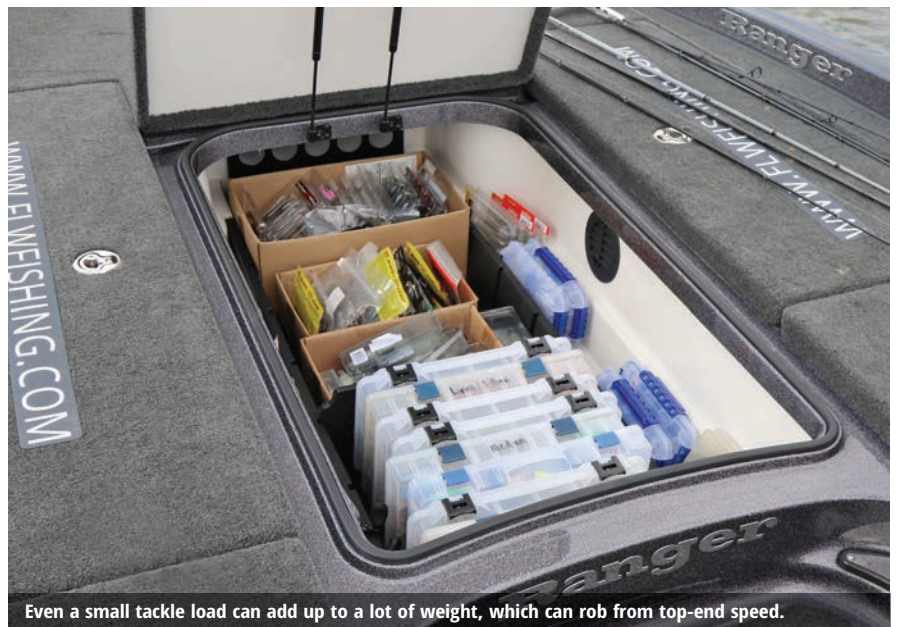
## Tackle Load

As mentioned, weight is a major factor in achieving speed.

"Loading the front of the boat is enemy No. 1," says Stinson.

Stinson, who was known to weigh each pro team member boat when it came into the factory, recalls once moving 273 pounds of tungsten weights and plastics out of the front of a well-known pro's boat.

"Put all the heavy gear in the back," he insists.



Even a small tackle load can add up to a lot of weight, which can rob from top-end speed.

This allows the front of the boat to ride above the water line, with less drag farther back. The difference in top-end speed due to proper weighting could be as much as 7 mph, says Stinson.

To get a better idea of what a modern tournament angler's tackle load weighs, I weighed a few tackle boxes from my front compartment. Remarkably, a small box of tungsten weights, along with a binder-style box of soft plastics (one of three I often carry), weighed close to 13 pounds. This likely represents less than 10 percent of the tackle found in the front of many tournament pros' bass boats. All of it can rob valuable miles per hour.

## Drive It

How you get on pad makes a difference in speed, too.

"Trim it up on pad, then, when wide open, bump it down for a quick 1-2 count," adds Hanson.

This pushes the nose down slightly, raises the rear of the boat up out of the water and reduces drag. Hanson claims two or three such adjustments can often gain an additional 3 to 4 mph.



Side-scan transducer placement must be carefully considered for best returns and minimal drag.



## Search for Speed Thieves

Anything on the bottom of the boat can rob top-end speed, so Stinson recommends in-hull transducers when possible, or having external transducers – like those used

in side-scanning technology – mounted up and away from the boat's running pad.

There should also never be anything interfering with the rotational side of the propeller (the right side for most bass boats). Anything mounted to the boat's bottom to the right of the prop introduces air into that seam of water. The air then "sticks to the blades of the prop, and it won't bite," says Stinson. Cavitation is the result.

## Know When to Quit

Speed fans might think there's more to be done to increase speed. But for the most part, Stinson says, there's not, short of actually modifying the hull. But what about wind drag?

"Boat speed is 90 percent hydrodynamics and 10 percent aerodynamics," he claims.

Stinson says the biggest aerodynamic influence is hull drag. Removing pedestal seats, windshields and the like does little, if anything, to help gain top-end speed.

"At that point, you just need a different boat," Stinson jokes.

## WHEN TO CONSIDER A CUSTOM PROP

Historically, swapping to a custom prop has been a way to gain speed, but the stock props on today's modern rigs are perfectly capable. However, owners of older rigs might still see improvement with custom props, and those running boats extra-high might require a "chopper" or cleaver prop to prevent blowout.

Several custom prop shops have earned high accolades in the bass boat world, including Mark's High Performance Propellers near Indianapolis, Ind., and Performance Propeller of Nashville, Tenn. Both can tweak and repair stock props. ■

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# GEAR

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PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

**WHAT'S INSIDE:**  
**6TH SENSE SPLASHBACK**  
**POPPER 70 REVIEW**

Breaking down  
spinnerbaits

4 cool new products



## 6TH SENSE SPLASHBACK POPPER 70

By Matt Williams  
PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

**W**hen it comes to poppers, there's no such thing as having too many of these lures. That's because many poppers often deliver unique actions that might appeal to bass in different scenarios. Some spray or spit water, while others provide a classic "bloop-bloop" effect. A select few can even be made to walk like a stick bait with relative ease.

The SplashBack from 6th Sense can do a little of each. It's a multi-talented performer that gives you the ability to "test" the fish to see if they want the bait moving in a zigzag line across the surface or worked "in place," without having to change lures. I've been throwing it on and off since September, and it has fooled schooling bass offshore and headhunting lunkers up shallow.

### First Impressions

One look at this bait and it's clear that it was built to

perform differently from other poppers. It's equipped with a large V-shaped mouth that features a deep cup and a very serious overbite. Just as intriguing are the flat, wide sides, square back, and keel-shaped belly.

The tall sides and nose angle give the SplashBack a noticeably large profile for a 2 3/4-inch bait, while the factory finishes look almost like custom jobs (a hallmark of the 6th Sense brand). A feather treble, 3-D eyes and raised gill plates round out the package.

### On the Water

The most noticeable feature of the popper when it hits the water is its near-vertical stance. When paused, the bait rocks slightly left-to-right to simulate a baitfish that's been stunned or wounded, with the feathered treble dangling below.

One of the most impressive action features of the SplashBack is how well it dog-walks across the surface



with very little effort. It's easy enough to walk that a beginner could perfect the technique in short order with a little bit of instruction. The knack for walking stems from its keel-shaped belly and flat sides, which help the lure to slice through the water easily - its gaping mouth spitting water along the way.

The bait performs well with other presentations,

too. Stop-and-go twitching with the rod tip worked at a downward angle causes the nose to scoop and throw water up to a few feet, depending on how hard you twitch it.

It makes much more spray than it does noise, though. To make the bait "bloop" you have to hold the rod tip high and use more of a dragging motion instead of a twitch.

### Final Thoughts

The wide mouth and deep cup provide a considerable amount of resistance when the bait goes in motion. I found that to be a huge plus when working the SplashBack around flooded bushes, laydowns, clumps of vegetation and other isolated targets because it makes the bait easy to walk in place.

As castability goes, the fixed-weight chamber in the tail section really makes this baby sail for a 3/8-ounce bait.



## MOUTH

A large, deep mouth cup catches and throws gobs of water while helping to prevent blowouts on hard twitches. It also helps for walking the bait in place.

## DESIGN

The keel-shaped bottom and flat sides make achieving a walk-the-dog action a breeze.



## Performance Advice

Like most topwaters, the SplashBack performs best with a floating fishing line of medium test strength. I tied it to 12-pound-test Berkley Trilene XT monofilament. It also works well with straight braid or a braid/mono leader combo. I experimented with a loop knot and tying directly to its eyelet and couldn't tell much difference in the action either way.

Equally important is rod choice for long-range casting and accuracy. The

guys at 6th Sense recommend a 7-foot, 6-inch to 7-foot, 10-inch, medium-action rod with a fast tip for launching long casts in open water and a shorter 6-foot, 6-inch model for better accuracy around shallow targets. I used a 6-foot, 6-inch All Star Rods Zell Rowland Signature Series topwater special that I've owned for years for shallow applications and a 7-foot JB Custom Rods Trap n Rap model away from the bank and saw excellent results on both counts.

## Silent Works

Originally, the SplashBack was designed with a weight-transfer ball in the tail end that doubled as a rattle, but 6th Sense owner Casey Sobczak says that extensive field-testing proved that the bait drew significantly more strikes when the weight was fixed so it didn't rattle.

The difference was so profound that he altered the design and fixed the tail weight in place.

## HITS & MISSES

- + Works with multiple retrieves
- + Walks easily
- + Comes with premium treble hooks and excellent finishes
- + Casts well
- It's a little pricey compared to some of the old staples (yet moderately priced compared to many Japanese and custom models)

## APPLICATIONS

The multi-purpose design of the SplashBack allows it to perform in a variety of scenarios. In shallow water, throw it tight to cover to coax bass from bushes, grass patches, laydowns, shade or stumps.

It's also killer on offshore schools or for running and gunning along banks where wolf packs of bass are hunting bream.

## DETAILS

**Size Reviewed:** 70 – 2 3/4 inches, 3/8 ounce

**Other Sizes:** 90 – 3 1/2 inches, 3/4 ounce

**Colors:** 12

**MSRP:** \$9.99 for the model reviewed; \$12.99 for the larger model

**Contact:** 6thsenselures.com ■

# BREAKING DOWN SPINNERBAITS

TERRY BOLTON IDENTIFIES THE KEY COMPONENTS OF SPINNERBAIT DESIGN AND SELECTION

By Matt Williams



**T**erry Bolton didn't write the book on spinnerbait fishing, but the personable FLW Tour pro and hard-core "blade" nut from Paducah, Ky., probably could. His spinnerbait prowess is largely credited for his success as a tournament angler and his membership in FLW's \$1 million club.

Part of his success with the classic lure can be attributed to the fact that the Ranger pro has learned – through trial and error – how various spinnerbait components can be combined to make a spinnerbait more effective in different fishing scenarios.

"The main thing is learning which type of spinnerbait is best suited for a specific purpose, be it slow-rolling on ledges in 20 feet of water, fishing around rocks and boulders, or fishing around brush or grass," he says.

Here's how the 12-time Forrest Wood Cup qualifier breaks down one of the most versatile bass fishing lures ever introduced.

# Heads

## 1. Keel or Minnow Head

Bolton says this style of head creates resistance as it comes through the water, causing it to rise up or run closer to the surface with less effort and slower retrieves than other head styles.

**Where it shines:** In situations when the fish are aggressive and the angler wants to burn the bait just under the surface around grass or in clear, open water.

**Where it doesn't:** Fishing around treetops, bushes or brush piles. "When it hits a limb, the bait has a tendency to roll on its side, and it doesn't correct itself very quickly," says Bolton. "This exposes the hook and increases the chances of hanging up."

● **Examples:** Terminator T-1, Strike King Burner

## 2. Bullet Head

Bolton says baits with a pointed head typically run true, right themselves quickly and come through heavy cover extremely well.

**Where it shines:** Fishing thick brush, bushes, treetops or grass, mainly because the head design resists wedging in limbs and causes the bait to "come back to center" quickly after contacting cover, which helps it resist hang-ups or fouling.

**Where it doesn't:** As good as the head performs in brush, it's susceptible to wedging in rocks.

● **Examples:** War Eagle, Nichols Pulsator

## 3. Round or Pill Head

Bolton says this head is wider than most. It's a good all-around performer that can be used in a variety of situations and cover.

**Where it shines:** Slow-rolling around rock and stumps on ledges. The wider head is less prone to wedging and doesn't cut through water as smoothly as other head styles, which allows Bolton to maintain better contact with what the bait's doing. It doesn't come through heavy cover as well as a bullet head, but it still gets the job done around brush and grass.

**Where it doesn't:** Flooded bushes with lots of small limbs.

● **Examples:** Stanley Wedge, Accent



● Strike King Burner



● Terminator T-1



● Nichols Pulsator



● War Eagle



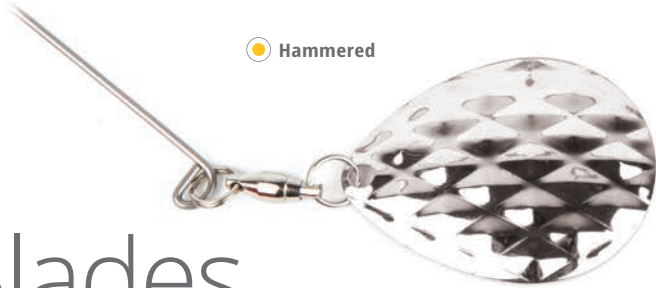
● Accent



● Stanley Wedge



● Hammered



● Smooth

# Blades

## 1. Texture

Blades are either hammered (stamped or dimpled) or smooth. "As a rule, smooth blades are the best choice for deep-water applications because they have less resistance," Bolton says. "Less resistance makes it easier to fish the bait deeper and keep it there."

Bolton likes hammered blades for shallow applications, particularly when the water is dirty or stained. The hammered texture produces extra flash, and the added resistance makes it easier to fish the bait shallow at slower speeds.



● Colorado

● Indiana

● Willow Leaf

## 2. Style

**Willow leaf:** The willow-leaf blade doesn't produce as much vibration as other blade styles, but produces a tremendous amount of flash and comes through brush and aquatic vegetation with ease. Bolton says willow-leaf blades are well-suited for a number of different situations in shallow water or deep. He likes them mostly in clear or slightly stained water that is relatively warm – 55 degrees and up. The willow leaf is his bread-and-butter blade when fishing deep ledges or grass beyond 10 feet deep.

**Colorado:** The round Colorado blade produces a significant amount of vibration or "thump," which allows an angler to retrieve the bait at a relatively slow pace and keep it in the strike zone. The extra vibration can be a big plus when dingy water hampers a bass' ability to see, but Bolton also likes it in cold water. The Colorado is the traditional choice for night-fishing and is Bolton's choice for slow-rolling mid-range depths around riprap, rock points or bluffs.

**Indiana:** The teardrop-shaped Indiana doesn't displace quite as much vibration as the Colorado and produces a little less flash than a willow leaf. This is Bolton's favorite blade for stained and off-color shallow water. "It gives you the best of both worlds, plus you can fish it a little deeper, say 10 feet, at faster speeds with a larger head size if you need to," he says.



● Double Colorado



● Double Willow

### 3. Arrangement

While there are bass spinnerbaits available with as many as four blades, single and double models are the most popular. Bolton throws a lot of tandem setups and says that altering blade style and size is a good way to custom-tailor a bait to the conditions.

“The thing you always need to remember with any blade combination is that the bigger the blade you put in front, closest to the head, the more vibration you will take away from the blade on the swivel,” he says. “However, what you give up in vibration you will gain in flash and lift.”

For example, Bolton says he can essentially throw a bulky 1-ounce spinnerbait where he’d normally use a 1/2-ouncer by placing a big No. 7 Colorado blade on the swivel and a No. 4 or No. 5 Colorado in front.

“You’ll give up some vibration doing that, but you’ll gain a tremendous amount of flash and lift that will enable you to fish it effectively in shallow water that’s off-color or cold while producing a really big target at the same time.”

Just the opposite can be accomplished by going with a small-blade combination.

“If I’m fishing in clear water and I want to fish a spinnerbait faster and deeper, I may downsize my blades to something like a No. 2 willow in front of a No. 4 1/2 willow,” he adds. “That will take away some of the lift and allow me to fish the bait faster.”



● Metallic

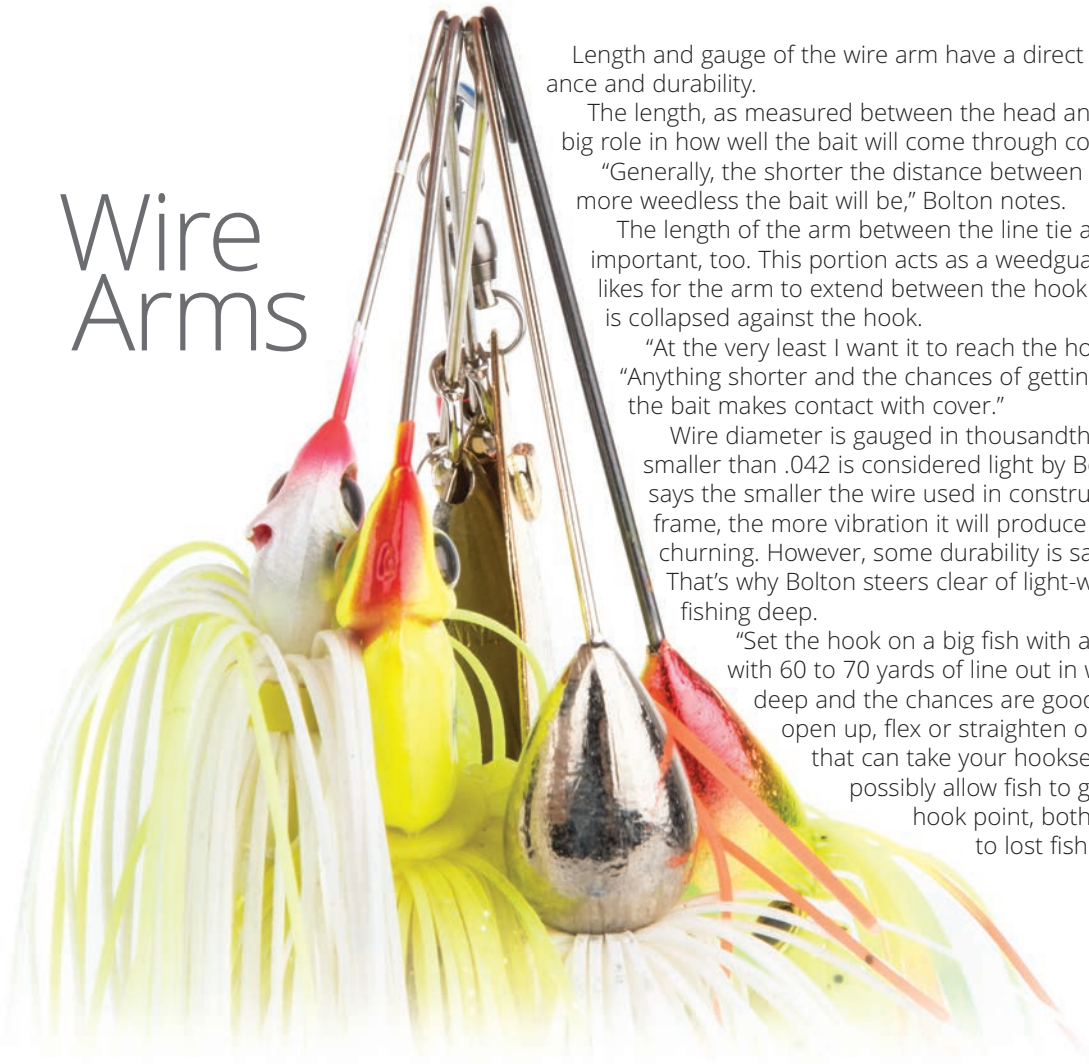
● Painted

### 4. Color

Nickel and copper blades rule, but Bolton says colored blades have a place. Chartreuse is popular on northern smallmouth fisheries, while red can be effective in extremely dirty water.

“Another situation where I’ve had good success with colored blades is on cloudy, rainy days when fishing around grass,” Bolton says. “White willow-leaf blades can be a killer in that situation, especially during the fall.”

# Wire Arms



Length and gauge of the wire arm have a direct impact on performance and durability.

The length, as measured between the head and the line tie, plays a big role in how well the bait will come through cover.

"Generally, the shorter the distance between those two points the more weedless the bait will be," Bolton notes.

The length of the arm between the line tie and the rear blade is important, too. This portion acts as a weedguard for the hook. Bolton likes for the arm to extend between the hook point and barb when it is collapsed against the hook.

"At the very least I want it to reach the hook point," he adds. "Anything shorter and the chances of getting hung increase when the bait makes contact with cover."

Wire diameter is gauged in thousandths of an inch. Any wire smaller than .042 is considered light by Bolton's standards. He says the smaller the wire used in constructing a spinnerbait frame, the more vibration it will produce when the blades are churning. However, some durability is sacrificed as a result.

That's why Bolton steers clear of light-wire spinnerbaits while fishing deep.

"Set the hook on a big fish with a light-wire spinnerbait with 60 to 70 yards of line out in water that's 20 feet deep and the chances are good the wire is going to open up, flex or straighten out," Bolton says. "I think that can take your hookset away to a degree and possibly allow fish to get leverage on the hook point, both of which can translate to lost fish."

# Trailers

Bolton is a big fan of using a trailer on his spinnerbaits for adding bulk and increasing the size of the bait's profile, especially in deep-water applications where visibility is limited.

"When you get down there in 15 to 25 feet of water there isn't a whole lot of light penetration," he says. "That's where I like some sort of ribbon-tail trailer about 3 1/2 to 4 inches long. They aren't near as easy to find as they used to be, but you can bite down a worm if you need to. A Zoom U-Tail is a good one."

One of his favorites for shallow water is a Zoom Fat Albert grub. In clearer water where speed is important, he likes a split-tail trailer.





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# Trailer Hooks

Adding a trailer hook will sometimes help catch short-striking fish, but Bolton is selective about where he uses one.

"About the only time I'll use a trailer hook is when I'm burning a spinnerbait in really clean water for smallmouths or spots," he says. "I'll never use one around shallow cover or in a dirty-water situation. A spinnerbait catches good-quality fish. I'm of the opinion that if you get it around the right kind of fish, you aren't going to need a trailer hook to catch it."



# Skirts

Skirts are usually made from silicone or Living Rubber, and come in varied lengths and strand counts. Bolton says he will occasionally modify a stock skirt or swap one out altogether.

"Skirts are something you can play around with by removing strands or trimming them to get just what you want," Bolton says. "If I'm fishing in really clear water I may remove some strands. If I'm in really dirty water, I may swap out a silicone skirt for a Living Rubber skirt to add some bulk and make it more visible." ■





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## NEW GEAR FOR BASS HEADS

By Colin Moore



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### Lowrance Carbon

The HDS series of fish finders/chartplotters has been beefed up with the new Lowrance HDS Carbon, which incorporates a state-of-the-art dual-core processor for better power and performance. Other features include a SolarMAX HD screen, StructureScan 3D with SideScan and DownScan, dual-channel CHIRP sonar, StructureMap, Broadband Radar, and SiriusXM Weather Chart Overlay. Add the ability to wirelessly control select Power-Pole shallow-water anchors and MotorGuide trolling motors and to stream audio from the SonicHub2 marine entertainment system, and Carbon is packed with the latest technology available to anglers. Twelve-, 9- and 7-inch models are available. Prices range from \$1,249 (7-inch display with no transducer) to \$3,999 for the top-of-the-line HDS-12 Carbon Med/High/3D Bundle.

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### Ledge Hog

What started out as a weighted blade bait the locals employed for deep bass in Tennessee's Douglas Lake proved to be so versatile that even shallow-water anglers started using it with equal success. Now there are two sizes: a 4-inch model in 1 3/8- or 2-ounce sizes and a 5-inch model in 2 1/2- or 3-ounce sizes. Fish the lure vertically, or cast it out and retrieve it like a lipless crankbait. Mustad 2X short-shank trebles, No. 3 snaps and premium split rings round out the package. Price is \$14.99 for the 4-inch size in various factory colors such as gizzard shad, silver, Tennessee shad with chartreuse belly, red crawfish and rainbow trout; \$19.99 for the 5-inch model. For custom colors, add \$5 to the price tag. Regardless of color, the baits are powder-coated.

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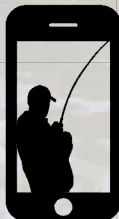
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# ROSE

## COMES FULL CIRCLE

By Joe Sills

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT PACE

**T**he weathered concrete ramp is visible for a few seconds every time Mark Rose drives over the bridge. It's there just minutes from his garage, under the flicker of passing suspension cables, where the broad Mississippi River cuts a line dividing Tennessee and Arkansas. Between the two states, on an island near the Volunteer State side, sits the place where Rose's star began to shine.

"I see that harbor and I start to think, 'Man, this is where it all began,'" says Rose, his voice crackling over the cellphone. He's traveling again. "I think about it every time."

In 1999, Rose earned his first FLW Tour trophy at that spot on the Mississippi River near Memphis when he finished third in an event. It was his first foray into the Tour record books.

Days after making FLW Tour history as the first person to win back-to-back FLW Tour events when he barely edged out Bryan Thrift at Lake Guntersville and then at Lake Travis to start the 2017 season, Rose finds himself again passing the same harbor. And once more, he's in a reflective mood.

"How it went down ... it blows my mind still," he confesses. "I don't mean this in a boastful way, but winning two tournaments didn't surprise me. What blew my mind is that it was against the same guy both times, and both times the cumulative difference over four days was less than a pound. That, to me, is harder to fathom than a guy winning two tournaments."

Rose says he's humbled to have won, that in sports there are always winners and losers, that he's been on the losing end of the same equation against Thrift – whom he lauds with justifiable admiration – more times than he cares to remember. Candidly,

he admits they haven't talked yet. He doesn't quite know how to approach the subject of what amounts to the most unusual of coincidences.

In the wake of his wins, Rose found himself on the phone with radio station reporters from coast-to-coast.

"I never knew there were so many. The phone kept ringing," he jokes. "I had a number from Cincinnati call, and I told my wife it was probably WKRP."

In Memphis, he's become the first Rose to make it on the TV news since a kid named Derrick became the No. 1 pick in the 2008 NBA draft.

Suffice it to say that, right now, Mark Rose is a star.

"I've had people come up to me and congratulate me on the comeback," he laughs. "Like I didn't do anything between 1999 and now."

The fishing world, of course, knows differently. FLW fans – fishing fans – know Rose as a perennial threat, a tournament champion whose name, until now, has always been associated with the ledges of Tennessee River impoundments. Well before 2017, trophies bearing names

**"It was humbling to be labeled a 'ledge master,' but I think there's only one master. I know Him, and I'm not Him."**

such as Pickwick, Kentucky, Wheeler and Chickamauga lined his trophy shelves. They confirmed his reputation as a "ledge master." But for Rose, the Guntersville and Travis wins mean a welcome end to any such one-dimensional status. They confirm his ability to adapt to different circumstances.

"To win at Guntersville up shallow, and to win at Travis using both techniques [deep and shallow] outside of

the Tennessee River, kind of gives me personal satisfaction. It shows versatility. I'm glad to get out of that bubble. It was humbling to be labeled a 'ledge master,' but I think there's only one master. I know Him, and I'm not Him."

Rose's fans will already know the master he's talking about. It's the one that has him crossing the old bridge again today, en route to the small town of Smithville, Miss., to a Baptist church two hours from his West Memphis home.

"It's my heartbeat," he says. "The outdoor ministry is my passion. I'll meet a lot of good ol' boys down in these communities, and we will talk hunting and fishing and eat some awfully good food. We'll open up the Word of God and learn about that a little bit. It's good stuff."

Asked what excites him most about making FLW history, Rose will tell you two things. He'll tell you that a major tournament win at Guntersville is like standing on the shoulders of giants. He'll tell you about Zell Rowland and David Fritts, Skeet Reese and Kevin VanDam. Then, he'll point you back to

the meaning behind it all: These wins give him a platform. The phone calls, the TV time ... it's all about spreading the good news of the gospel.

Most people forgot, but 18 years ago Mark Rose claimed his first FLW Tour trophy by fishing shallow, there in the backwaters of the Mississippi. And even then he talked about his faith. Now, like the tires on his truck, it's all come full circle. ■

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# ANCED BED-FISHING

Tactics and tournament strategies  
for when bass are on the beds

*By Curtis Niedermier*

**M**any seasons, it seems as if FLW's tournament trails wend their way around the country throughout spring on the same schedule as the bass spawn. The fish are always "fixin' to move up" when the anglers roll into town, and so it goes until summer finally sets in.

It's no coincidence. The period from early March through May (earlier in the Deep South and later up north) comprises both the heart of tournament season and the time when water temperature and length of day are right for bass to undergo their annual reproductive process.

As tournament anglers, it's important to understand not just how to catch bass on beds, but how to efficiently find them in practice, develop a strategy to deal with fishing pressure and put them in the boat.



## PRACTICE STRATEGIES

### Assess the Situation

Tournament results, public fishing reports and weather forecasts can all help when assessing the status of the spawn, but simply looking and fishing is the best bet. Each fish's physical appearance tells part of the story.

"Are they beat up from the rigors of spawning?" asks FLW Tour pro Brandon Cobb. "Do they look like summertime fish that are skinny and already spawned out, or are they just getting ready to bed and are full of eggs?"

"Are you seeing pairs or just bucks [around beds]? If you're seeing primarily bucks, and they're not paired up, then it's still early. If it's just bucks, the females might be around, but they'll be hard to catch. If there are a lot of beds with three or four fish around one bed, the spawn is at its peak. If they're rolling in the beds, they're hard to catch, but that's a good sign the spawn is at its peak."


Don't be fooled into thinking you know the status of the spawn after checking just one area.

"It depends on the lake, but there are times when they're on beds better in certain areas than others, and there are times they'll be up all over the lake," notes Tracy Adams, who's considered one of the Tour's top sight-fishermen. "If you're there when it [the spawn] first starts, it's probably going to be better in one area of the lake. If you're there in the middle, they're going to be up all over, but one area could still be better. You just have to feel that one out as you go."

### Two Search Methods

If you decide the spawn is on and commit to searching for beds, ideally you want to locate as many quality bass as possible. The biggest decision to make is whether or not you test the fish while you look. Opinions vary.

"I'm looking from the time the sun gets up until the sun gets down," Adams says of his practice approach.



Tracy Adams (right) believes you can't be fully prepared to sight-fish in a tournament unless you know which bass are "ready" to bite.

## "STICK" A MARKER ON IT

If you're having trouble lining up a blind cast to a bass on bed, try this trick that Florida pro Darrell Davis uses.

"If I find one that I want to fish for in the tournament, I'll pull up to it during the tournament and put a piece of bamboo in the ground by the bed," he explains. "Then I'll just back off and cast to that bamboo instead of looking at the fish."

Davis places the bamboo (a tree branch works also, and is inconspicuous to the competition) as he coasts by the bed to avoid washing the bed with the trolling motor.

His approach will spook the bass, so Davis tries to mark two or three beds in one area to give the first bass time to reposition. He then fishes for them in the same order as he marked them.

"I cast past the bed and then pull up until I feel it," he adds. "You can usually feel the bed, because it's going to be a harder bottom."

"When I hit that open spot, then I just slowly work it like I would if I was sight-fishing. I just picture the bass the whole time it's in there. Normally you don't have to work the bass very much."

PHOTO BY CHRIS BURGAN

"I'm going to hunt those beds as hard as I can go. But a lot of guys have the trolling motor on 100, and they go and go, and they just hit a waypoint every time they see a fish. Well, if you do that you don't know if those fish will bite. So I'm going to test them out and figure out which ones I think I can catch on the first cast or the fifth cast or in 20 minutes. Then [in the tournament] I start with the ones that I think will bite first."

Reading a bass on bed requires a great deal of skill and experience. No two fish are the same, and there's not a single process that works every time.

Adams' simplest bit of advice for determining if a fish is "catchable" is to observe how it responds when the boat approaches and the first cast is made.

"You're looking for one that's not moving much," he says. "If you're going down the bank and see one that's just lying there and you turn and come back and it's still there, it's pretty much ready. Or if you throw in there and it kind of turns on the bait, it's ready. If one spooks off, it's probably going to give you trouble."

Florida pro JT Kenney is talented at reading bass on beds, too, but his practice strategy is quite different from Adams' method.

"I just want to see them and know they're there," Kenney says. "They change their attitude hourly. Ones you think will bite, the next day you get close and they swim away."

That doesn't mean Kenney is simply a waypoint puncher. He's just less concerned about how a bass will act when a boat is close and the fish can see the angler, which can spook the bass in the first place. Kenney prefers to fish for them from a distance and prepares accordingly.

"Probably 50 percent or better of my fish that I found during practice that I marked, I caught [in the tournament] before I ever saw them," he says.

In practice, Kenney takes notes on where beds are located and identifies markers on shore or in the water to use as casting targets. Once competition begins, he lines up on his markers and blind-casts to the fish.



JT Kenney tries to track down at least 20 keepers on beds to make sure he has enough to catch five in a tournament.

## STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING PRESSURE

When spawning bass are obvious to anyone who looks, you can bet that fishing pressure will be high. Here are some suggestions for how to deal with pressure.

### 1.

#### **Target the most obvious fish first:**

This is a common strategy among pros. An obvious kicker that has selected a nesting place in clear view has been seen by just about everyone in practice. Target those fish first, and save fish that are better hidden for later.

### 2.

#### **Be willing to run:**

Better fill up your fuel tank, advises Adams. "I'd rather have them in one area, but if you've got a couple good ones, and one's up the river and the other's down by the dam, you've got to go get them. You can't leave them on the table. You can't go 80 miles for one, but within reason."

### 3.

#### **Consider your limits:**

How much time you spend trying to catch each fish depends on what's in the livewell, how much time you have left before check-in and how each bass is acting. Still, some pros assign limits – 20 minutes per bass, for example. Others will spend as much time as it takes as long as the bass looks like it might bite. Just remember that the more time you burn on each fish, the more likely it is that other anglers will pick off the easy bass nearby.

### 4.

#### **Be prepared for new fish:**

It's a classic scenario: A spring day dawns cool and crisp, and activity on the banks is at a minimum. By noon, however, a bright sun high in the sky warms the shallows, and big female bass start sliding in to spawning waters. A smart angler is prepared and heads to his prime spawning areas throughout the day to keep tabs on their progression.

### 5.

#### **Find 20 to catch five:**

A tournament limit might be five bass, but Kenney says you need to find far more than that if you want a shot at winning. "In a Tour event, you have to have 20 to have five because some of them are going to move, and other guys are going to pick them off," Kenney says. If he can't find enough in practice, Kenney makes sure to have a back-up plan.



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## ANOTHER TYPE OF BED BITE

When the spawn is on, sight-fishing becomes the most dominant technique on fisheries where the water is clear enough to see bass on beds. However, sometimes when anglers commit to “looking,” they’re missing an opportunity to target bass that are much easier to catch.

“Generally, on almost every body of water, there’s somewhere you can’t see [the bottom] very well,” says Cobb. “There’s stained water. That’s always my first option. It’s also usually the least-crowded water because when people can see fish nearly everywhere they don’t go to the stained water.”

In stained water, Cobb flips a Texas rig or winds a spinnerbait or crankbait, but the key is to target isolated cover as if a bass is bedding next to each piece, which actually could be the case. Likely targets include stumps, lay-downs, small points and dock pilings.

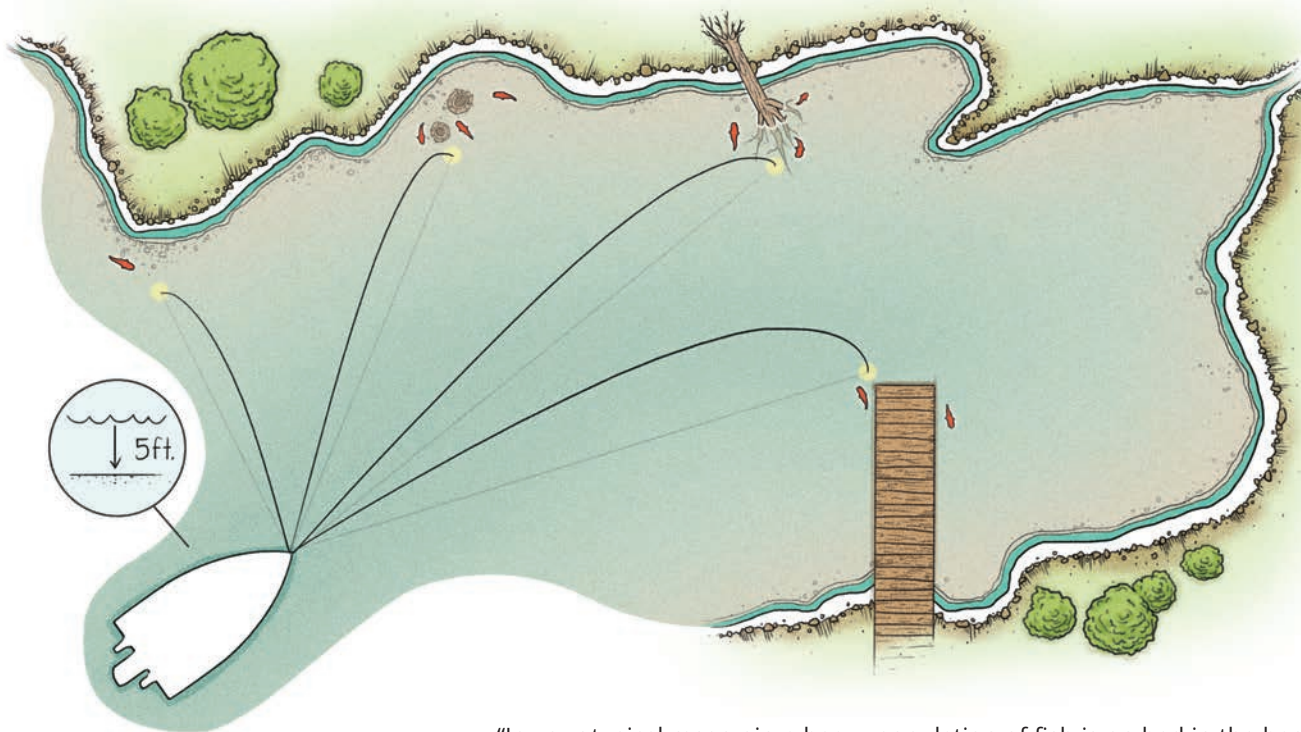
“Try to visualize where they’d be on bed,” says Cobb.

If a fish bumps the bait, or you see a swirl, stop and fish it just as you would when sight-fishing, and make multiple presentations.

Cobb’s other strategy is to slow down and dissect a broader spawning area.



PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA



“In your typical reservoir, a heavy population of fish is on bed in the back of a pocket or the back of a bay,” he says. “I’ll take a light Texas rig or wacky-rigged Senko and stop when I get to 5 or 6 feet of water and kind of fan-cast around the whole back area. That works everywhere, but even more so in the lower-visibility areas because those fish are more prone to biting. I’ll sometimes catch prespawn fish too.”

## TRY TOPWATERS TOO

When bass are on beds, most anglers stick to slow-moving bottom baits, but a more aggressive approach can also work. “They’ll eat a topwater really well when it [the water] is a little stained,” says Cobb. “You can catch them on a buzzbait or a Spook. The bigger females that sit kind of off the bed are a lot more apt to eat a topwater bait. You generally want to look for targets such as an overhanging limb or stick-up.

“I think that [fishing topwaters] increases your chances of catching the females. Even in clear water I will throw a topwater or a floating worm, and females will come and see it, but for some reason the males won’t pay as much attention to it.”

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## KENNEY'S DROP-SHOT BED RIG

Kenney's go-to sight-fishing setup these days is a specialized drop-shot that he fishes with a flipping stick. The rig has several advantages over a traditional craw or tube-style bait, with the primary advantage being the bait is up in the fish's face. Kenney believes a bedding bass is more likely to suck in the bait when it's off the bottom.

It's also easier to hold in the nest.

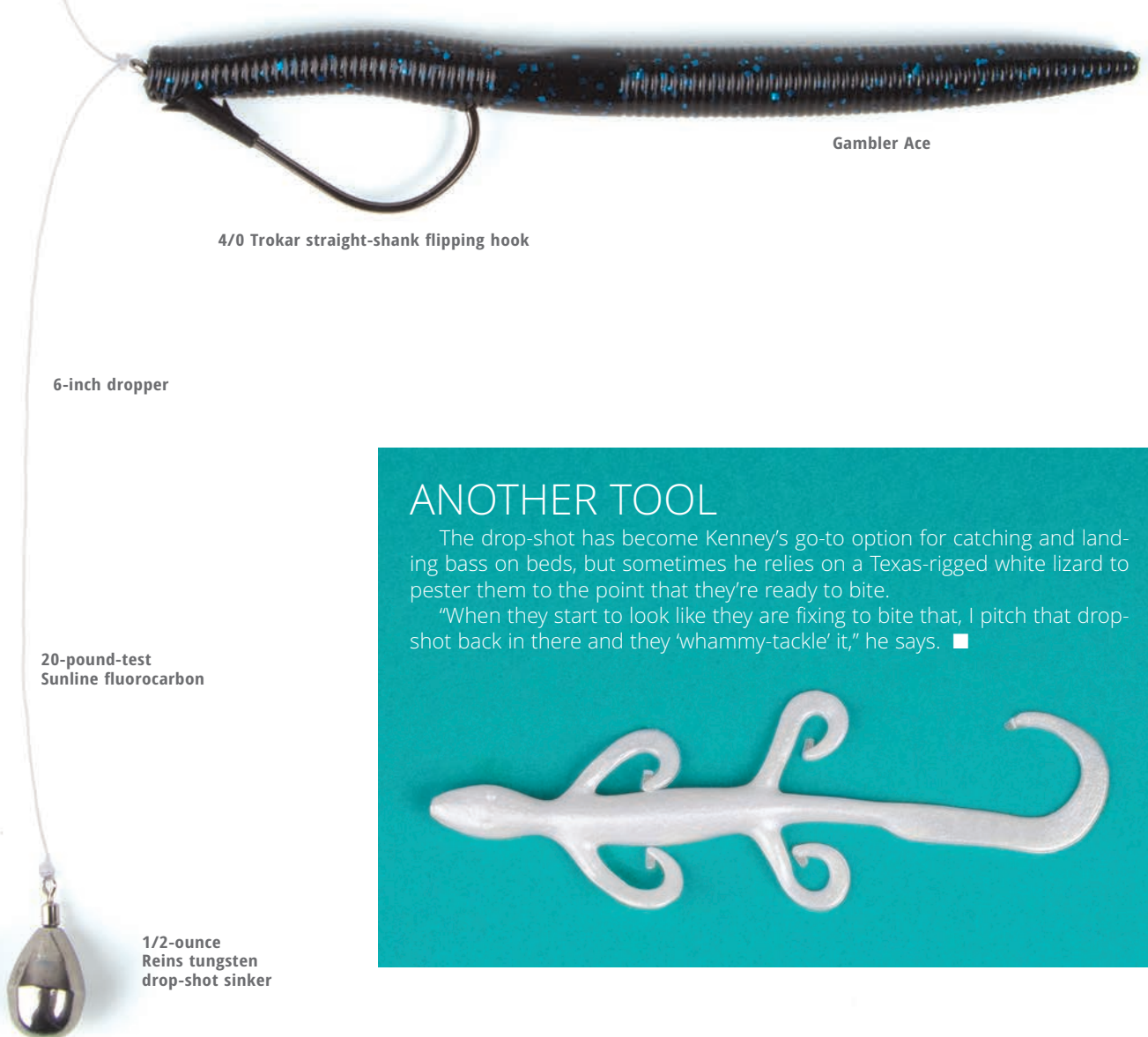
"A drop-shot allows me to use a heavier weight. I'll use 1/2 ounce, and that allows me to shake that bait pretty violently without moving it from that spot," Kenney says. "With a lighter weight, every time you shake it the bait moves a little bit."

Finally, hookups and landing ratios improve over Texas-rigged plastics.

"You don't have to jerk the weight through the mouth to get the hook set," Kenney explains. "It's just line and hook. I don't even jerk really hard. I just start reeling real hard."

"Your landing ratio is extremely exaggerated with a drop-shot, I think, because you don't have the weight on the hook," he continues. "It's basically like having a weightless bait. When it comes up and jumps it doesn't have that leverage with the weight to throw it."

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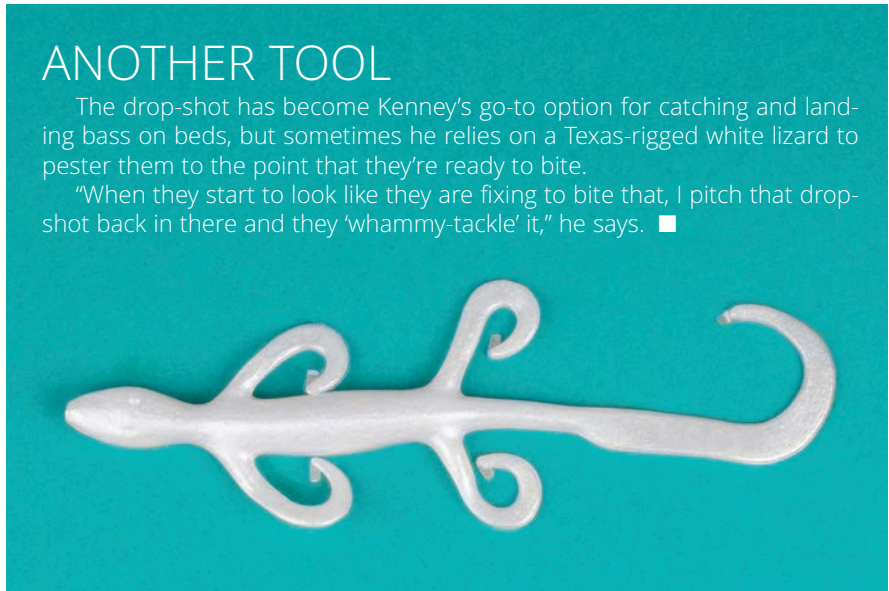
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## ANOTHER TOOL

The drop-shot has become Kenney's go-to option for catching and landing bass on beds, but sometimes he relies on a Texas-rigged white lizard to pester them to the point that they're ready to bite.

"When they start to look like they are fixing to bite that, I pitch that drop-shot back in there and they 'whammy-tackle' it," he says. ■



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OZARK REGION DEVELOP THEIR  
"A" GAMES ON ANY FISHERY

*By Colin Moore*



One of the hottest pros on the FLW Tour this year is a rookie.

Heading into the 2017 campaign, Jeremy Lawyer had never so much as fished as a co-angler in a regular-season Tour event, but the Missouri pro already has fished in one Forrest Wood Cup and qualified for another. He reached the 2016 Cup last August by winning the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American title at Lake Barkley. After placing fifth in the Cup, in early November Lawyer wound up seventh in the Costa FLW Series Championship on Table Rock, which earned him a spot in the 2017 Cup. A week later, he finished fourth in the BFL Wild Card on Lake of the Ozarks, which got the angler from Sarcoxie, Mo., an invitation to the 2017 All-American on Pickwick Lake.

Though hardly average, Lawyer, 39, is typical of the best anglers that are coming out of the Ozarks these days to test their skills in other regions of the country. Since 2012, for instance, BFL anglers from the Ozarks have captured three of five All-American titles. In that period, the only All-American titles claimed by “outsiders” were in 2013 when Kerry Milner of northeast Arkansas won and in 2015 when Canadian

range of fisheries – Truman Reservoir, Beaver Lake, Stockton Lake, Table Rock, Lake of the Ozarks, Bull Shoals. All those fisheries are different from each other in some respects, but what they share are features and fish similar to those likely to be encountered at various FLW tournament stops.

“We have a whole lot of different things going on in four or five different lakes. You better learn how to compete on each of them if you want to get your lunch money back,” offers Lawyer. “A long time ago, when I was a teenager, I decided I really wanted to pursue a career in tournaments. An older family member who fished a lot told me if I could compete in the Ozarks I could compete anywhere. I think he was right.”

It’s not simply their access to a variety of fisheries that makes Ozark anglers so competitive, however, but how well they prepare for a tournament and then follow the game plan that experience and practice suggest.

### Navigating the Mental Maze

What time of year is it, and what are the water conditions? Those are the first two questions Lawyer asks himself regardless of where he is fishing, and how he answers them determines his approach.

“Is it prespawn, spawn or postspawn? How high and dirty is the water, and what’s the temperature? You answer all the questions about the fishery and start from there,” says Lawyer. “It sounds pretty basic, but I think that a lot of fishermen skip the details and just start fishing where it looks good to them.”

Similarly, Sykora devises a strategy by first checking the Internet to learn as much as he can about a lake and current fishing conditions, including reviewing any results to see what it took to win the most recent tournament. He pays special attention to how much weight it took to place in the top 10, and tries to approximate the average winning weights in practice.

“I’m not really that interested in how an event was won, but what the threshold was for doing well in it,” admits Sykora, who grew up fishing Lake of the Ozarks. “After that, I start dialing in my mapping and phone apps, looking for things that suit my way of fishing based on the patterns that might be in play.”

Among the common traits that Lawyer and Sykora share are their mastery of electronics and an understanding of where bass are likely to be based on season, forage and bottom contours. In a way, much of their know-how comes



Jeremy Lawyer is bound for the All-American and Forrest Wood Cup in 2017 for the second consecutive year.

Curtis Richardson of The Bass Federation took it home. Incidentally, Lawyer was runner-up to Richardson.

Lawyer started fishing FLW tournaments in the early 2000s and has collected almost \$300,000 in winnings since. One of his rivals, Marcus Sykora – the 2014 All-American champion from Osage Beach, Mo. – has won more than \$284,000, all except about \$51,000 of it in BFL competition. Lawyer and Sykora are joined by a small army of Ozark fishermen who have made names for themselves in the pro ranks of both FLW and B.A.S.S.: Guido and Dion Hibdon, Denny Brauer, Randy Blaukat, Basil Bacon, Stacey King, James Watson, Shane Long, Greg Bohannon, Travis Fox and Mark Tucker among them.

What makes anglers from the Ozark Mountain region encompassing the southwest corner of Missouri, the northwest corner of Arkansas and parts of northeast Oklahoma so good? To some degree, it’s due to the “home lake advantage” they find just about anywhere they fish. Like anglers in the Carolinas and eastern Tennessee in particular, Ozark anglers hone their skills and launch their tournament careers on a

**OZARK**

pioneer

The first angler from the Ozark region to make a splash on the national tournament scene was Forrest L. Wood of Flippin, Ark. In November 1969, Wood and fellow team members Bill Dance, Bob Ponds (father of current FLW Tour pro Pete Ponds) and Bobby Murray won the Lake Eufaula Team Championship with a combined total of 120 pounds, 6 ounces over three days. Held in November, the Team Championship was the 13th tournament conducted by the fledgling Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.). Soon after he won the B.A.S.S. New York Invitational in 1979, Wood gave up competitive fishing to run his growing company: Ranger Boats.



through the trial-and-error process of sinking brush as fish magnets in their tournament waters.

"You plant enough brush, and you pay attention, you'll eventually understand how to separate the good places from the not-so-good places," says Lawyer. "Going to the trouble of sinking brush really helps you to learn where the most productive places will be. Just because you sink brush anywhere doesn't mean fish will show up on it next month. You learn where those best spots are, the contours that are likely to draw the biggest and most fish and hold them depending on the season and the bait. It's information that carries over to wherever you fish."

One important aspect of Ozark lakes is that they are four-season fisheries, capable of churning out good stringers of bass whether in snowstorms or the hottest days of summer. For purists such as Lawyer and Sykora, the Ozarks provide a 365-day classroom.

"We fish these tremendous lakes all times of the year, and it helps us understand what's likely to be going on anywhere at anytime," advises Sykora. "The same places that produce in February and March will be awesome again in August and September, but with different patterns in play. Some of the best brush piles where I catch fish with a suspending jerkbait in the spring for big prespawners are my favorite places to fish a DD22 [Bill Norman deep-diving crankbait] in October."

### Plan A, Plan B, Plan C ...

Ozark lakes provide a good laboratory for aspiring bass fishermen to perfect their craft. Largemouths, smallmouths, spotted bass and meanmouth hybrids are available, depending on the fishery. There are docks, changes in bottom composition, varying contours and depths, standing timber, tailraces, and brush piles galore to fish and master. The only customary ingredient that is missing, or at least in any appreciable amount, is grass. Fishermen compensate by learning how to use their electronics effectively to fish offshore, and develop patterns based on experience and intuition.

"Except for the spawn, it's all about food to a bass, and in our lakes it's mostly about figuring out where the shad are and how bass are relating to them," says Sykora. "So, when we're fishing a tournament in 'strange' water outside our region, it's really all about applying our knowledge of our local lakes. What we're looking for is not what's growing along the banks, but looking at the bottom contours and

## OZARK fish kills

As odd as it might seem, a natural disaster helped make Ozark bass fishermen some of the best in the land.

Just before the turn of the century, largemouth bass virus began to sweep through the lakes of northern Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma and southern

Missouri, temporarily devastating those fisheries and motivating fishermen to up their games.

"Before those fish kills, all 10 or 12 pounds would get you at a weigh-in was a pat on the back and 'see you next time,' but then it got to where that kind of weight could win a tournament," says Lawyer. "So there was a period of three or four years where we really had to bear down and learn how to catch the bigger fish that were still available. It made us more well-rounded fishermen, for sure."



understanding how they relate to even the shallow fish. You can take us anywhere, put us on a row of docks, and we'll pick out the ones that are likely to have fish and eliminate the ones that probably don't have fish."

Though Lawyer and Sykora often produce similar results, their fishing styles differ. Lawyer is more likely to fish jigs and soft plastics, grinding it out on wood cover, rocky banks, bluff walls and docks in most tournaments. Unless fish are lethargic, Sykora sticks with a crankbait, jerkbait or topwater lure. An oversimplification, perhaps, but Lawyer is more the grinder while Sykora prefers a run-and-gun approach.



PHOTO BY COLIN MOORE

Marcus Sykora's mastery of electronics and offshore fishing helped him win the 2014 All-American at Wilson Lake.

"The strongest pattern we have in the Ozarks is fishing jigs," notes Lawyer. "Twelve months a year – rock, wood, flooded bushes, whatever – a brown or black and blue jig is what most fishermen go to. If it was a 200-boat tournament, the guys in 195 of them would have jigs tied on."

## The Power of Five

Sykora and Lawyer epitomize most successful Ozark anglers, though they represent two sides of the same coin in their approaches to tournament fishing.

Sykora often goes for broke in the events he fishes, eschewing numbers and targeting big bass from the start. Lawyer is more conservative, unless his game plan isn't producing as hoped.

"We swing for the fences when we fish for checks in the Ozarks, so it makes us better in big-fish presentations with jigs and topwaters," Sykora says. "The downside of that is that a lot of times it's not clicking, and you have to decide whether it's time to catch a couple of smaller fish or catch five small keepers and then go back looking for the bigger fish. The guys around here who are the real hammers aren't afraid to wad it all up at 1 o'clock, throw it in the garbage and start all over."

While it's true the guy who weighs in the heaviest stringer by the end of a tournament wins, sometimes going after bigger fish first isn't the best gambit, thinks Lawyer. For instance, an angler who's fishing a circuit in which his points standing at the end of the season might get him into a championship tournament typically will run more of a tortoise-versus-the-hare race.

"Most of the time, as soon as a tournament starts I try to go to where I think I can catch five keepers the quickest," Lawyer says. "A long time ago I learned not to underestimate the power of a five-fish limit, no matter the size. Once I've got a limit, I fish more relaxed, but at the same time I become more aggressive as far as going after bigger fish."

Quality or quantity, either approach can be justified, if it's done right. Sykora has won nine BFL events and scored 34 top 10s, all but three in BFL competition. Lawyer has finished in the top 10 in 35 of the 92 FLW tournaments he's entered, and won once (the 2016 All-American). They've experienced success at home against the best of the Ozarks and, more recently, on the national level, proving that the Ozark region is a fertile training ground for some of the sport's biggest talents.

### other OZARK hammers

Not surprisingly, Jeremy Lawyer and Marcus Sykora rate each other as being among the best of the Ozark anglers, but they also have other names in mind. Lawyer says that Dennis Berhorst of Holts Summit, Mo., is an odds-on favorite in any Ozark tournament, and Sykora agrees.

Berhorst, who specializes in fishing creature baits and jigs in fairly shallow water, has fished 135 events in FLW circuits and won 10 of them, as well as earning 50 top-10 placements. He's collected more than \$324,000 in prize money.

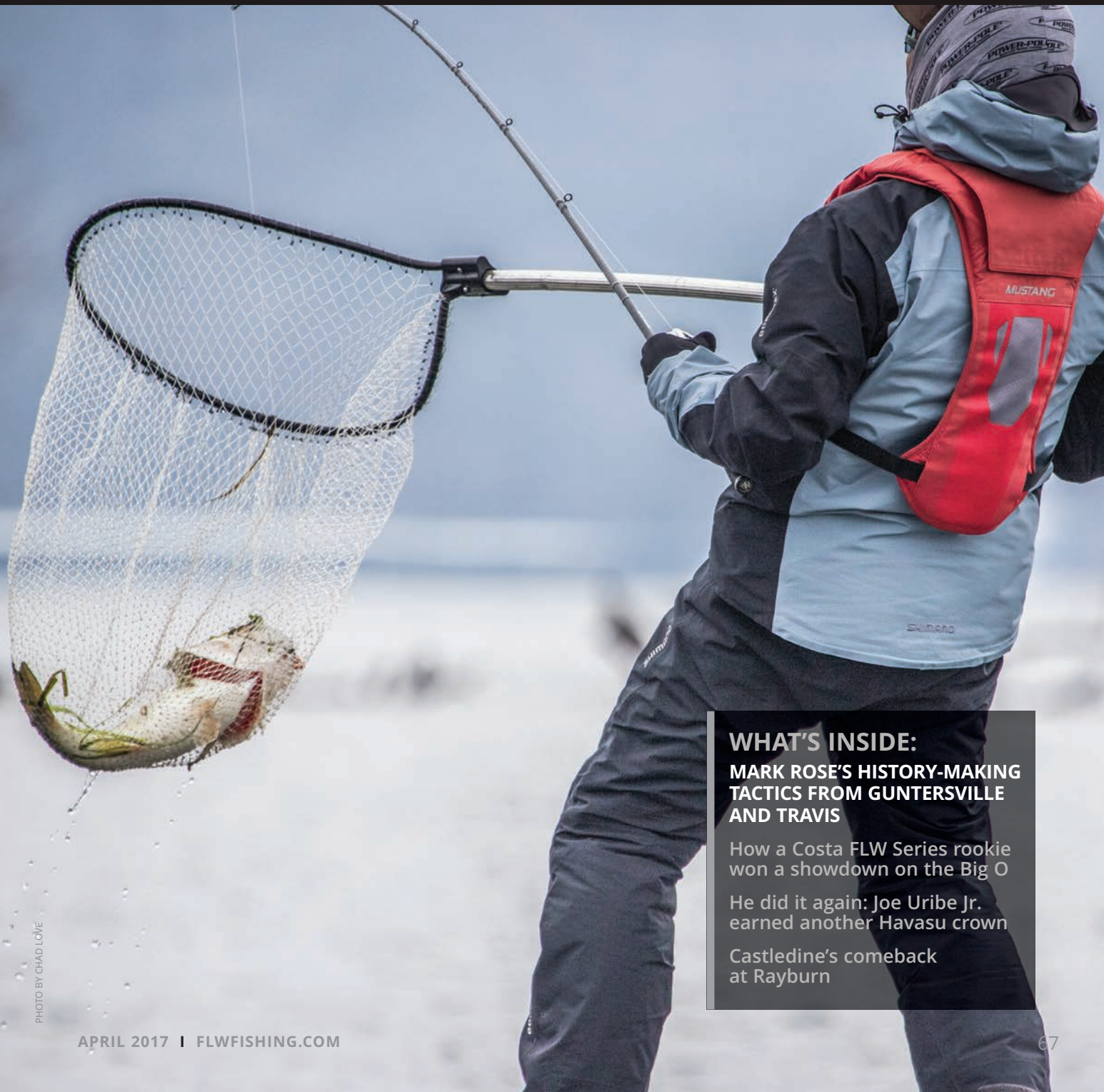
Sykora also adds Bill Davenport of Waynesville, Mo., to the list of Ozark greats. Though Davenport's tournament experience outside local events is practically nil, Sykora credits him with being his most helpful mentor.

"I've been fishing with him since I was 12 or 13 years old, including in a lot of team tournaments, and he's taught me more about structure fishing and the mental side of things than anybody. He's a real master."

Add Joplin's Wes Endicott (two wins and 23 top 10s in 60 FLW events fished) and Joe Brantley of Willard, Mo., (two wins and 12 top 10s in 58 tournaments) to the mix. ■

# FLW TOURNAMENT COVERAGE AND RESULTS

# ON TOUR



## WHAT'S INSIDE: MARK ROSE'S HISTORY-MAKING TACTICS FROM GUNTERSVILLE AND TRAVIS

How a Costa FLW Series rookie won a showdown on the Big O

He did it again: Joe Uribe Jr. earned another Havasu crown

Castledine's comeback at Rayburn

PHOTO BY CHAD LOVE

**DETAILS**

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# ROSE'S LESSON IN STAGING BASS

ARKANSAS PRO PLAYS THE PRESPAWN GAME FOR GUNTERSVILLE WIN

*By Rob Newell*

**P**rofessional anglers often use the term "staging" to describe prespawn bass. But what exactly does that mean?

How do bass stage? Where do bass stage?

What is all this staging business?

Mark Rose's FLW Tour win on Lake Guntersville during the first week of February provides a perfect example of what staging bass are all about. For four days Rose relied on "textbook staging spots" to haul in 79 pounds, 11 ounces worth of bass for victory. His winning pattern could literally be used to teach Staging Bass 101.

## Staging in Stages

Pro bass anglers might not be fish biologists, but through thousands of hours spent on the water they have observed some common denominators about bass behavior. The concept of staging bass is one of those theories.

The basic principle is that as bass move in to spawn, the bigger females gather up and move together in small groups. Just how many females are in a group is dependent on the fishery and conditions, but the common guess among pros is that roughly five to 10 move together at a time. As they move in, they seek out safe, secure places to

hold up, acclimate, feed and wait until the conditions are right to move up and spawn.

Exactly how females go about this process varies greatly based on bass species and subspecies, region of the country, type of cover available, etc. As a result, the prevalence of this staging process varies as well, but is most evident in the grassy reservoirs of the Southern states and Texas, such as Sam Rayburn, Toledo Bend, Seminole and, of course, Guntersville, the staging behavior of bigger female bass is undeniable.

One of the most common places bass stage in these lakes is along inside



PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

Cranking riprap was a solid back-up plan for Rose, and it allowed his staging grass line to replenish.

## CONDITIONS

**Weather** | a mix of cold, rain, wind and overcast skies on days one, two and four; cold and breezy in the morning on day three, with sunshine in the afternoon

**Air Temperature** | upper 20s to upper 50s

**Water Temperature** | upper 40s to low 50s

**Moon Phase** | first quarter

**Predominant Lake Features** | various shallow grasses, riprap causeways, bridges, points and docks

grass lines formed by submergent vegetation, usually hydrilla and milfoil, or even some types of emergent grass such as gator grass. The grass lines are created primarily by the rise and fall of the reservoir and/or low water temperature in the shallows. Aquatic grasses dry out and die when a lake is pulled down to “winter pool,” or when extreme temperatures kill off shallow grass. When the lake starts rising again in the spring, a clean lane forms between the old winter shoreline and the new flooded shoreline. This ribbon of water creates prime real estate for staging bass, allowing them to hold up against the inside grass line until conditions are right for them to spawn.

### Browns Creek Bass

Rose knows this staging phenomenon well.

“It’s an age-old pattern that happens in grass lakes all over the Southeast in February and March,” Rose says. “Inside grass lines are the key places that the females stage. The places where I caught them in Browns Creek in Guntersville were textbook spots for staging fish.”

Rose’s primary “textbook” spot featured a flat point that stuck way out into the creek. The top of the point included scattered hydrilla in 4 to 6 feet of water and served as a gateway to the staging areas. As the grass ran toward the bank down both sides of the point, it formed a hard inside line, separated from the bank by an open lane of water about 2 to 3 feet deep. The lane was littered with hard objects

such as laydown logs and scattered rock, creating a perfect staging area.

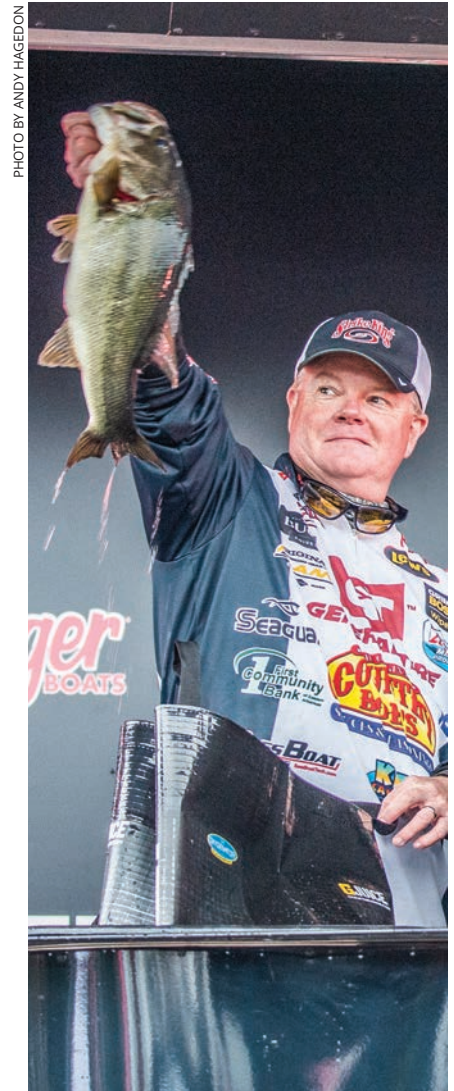
“I couldn’t have scripted a more perfect spot,” Rose says. “It had everything they needed to hold them in there. I found some other thinner grass lines that held a few fish, too, but they were more like grass strips along clay banks. The inside line around that big point was by far my best place.”

In addition to the perfect staging spot, Rose also tapped the causeway riprap along the bridge in Browns Creek for several solid keepers on the week. He considered the riprap bass to still be in winter mode. They hung around the Browns Creek channel and occasionally moved up to feed on big gizzard shad along the rocks.

“When I first got to town and drove across that bridge, there were hundreds of birds diving behind that causeway,” Rose recalls. “So that’s the first place I went in practice, and I started snagging big gizzard shad on my crankbait. I knew then there had to be some winter bass feeding on those gizzards. After that I ran back farther in the creek and found that beautiful inside grass line, and I was sold on Browns Creek.”

### Two-Part Execution

By tournament time, Rose had developed a potent milk run in the creek. His strategy was to start on the causeway riprap in low light to fish the winter pattern. Once the sun got up, he moved into the back of Browns to the point and its adjacent grass line to pick on the staging bass for a prespawn pattern.



“Some of that was about timing, too,” Rose says. “The riprap was a great place to kill time while letting the staging spot replenish. I would make a pass through the staging area, pick off one or two good ones, then retreat to the riprap and crank it while the staging area rested and reloaded.”

Things went perfectly for Rose the first two days. But on day three, a frontal passage left behind a blustery northeast wind that blew right down the main drag of Browns Creek.

“I thought I was toast,” Rose says. “That wind had really stained up the water in back of the creek. But that inside line had done its job in sort of protecting that inside lane from the wind-driven mud. I think that’s one reason why inside grass lines are such attractive staging areas: protection. They provide a nice, secure place for the fish to hunker down and feel comfortable while they wait for the spawning process to happen.”

## TOP FIVE

NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
1. MARK ROSE	WEST MEMPHIS, AR	79-11	20	\$125,000*
2. BRYAN THRIFT	SHELBY, NC	78-12	20	\$30,200
3. ALEX DAVIS	ALBERTVILLE, AL	72-10	20	\$25,100
4. SCOTT SUGGS	ALEXANDER, AR	68-09	20	\$20,000
5. SHINICHI FUKAE	PALESTINE, TX	68-04	20	\$19,000

\*Includes Ranger Cup

## Winning Tactics

Rose had to rotate through multiple lures each day to target his two areas properly. Most of his weigh-in fish came on several different crankbaits.

When fishing the riprap on the Browns Creek causeway, he used an out-of-production plastic crankbait in brown and chartreuse that runs 4 to 6 feet deep, as well as a Strike King Series 3 in the same color.

His primary crankbait for fishing the inside line was an out-of-production Strike King "Custom Shop" Flat Shad, which is a flat-sided wooden bait with circuit board lip that dives to about 4 feet. On the final afternoon he switched to a shad-colored Flat Shad to catch a last-minute kicker that put him over the top.

Rose fished the crankbaits on his Lew's Mark Rose "Ledge" series Small Crankbait rod rigged with 12-pound-test Seaguar Tatsu line.

During the week, he also caught keeper fish on a 3/8-ounce vibrating jig teamed with a Strike King Rage Bug, a Strike King Red Eye Shad Tungsten 2 Tap, a swim jig with a Strike King Caffeine Shad trailer and a 3/8-ounce Strike King Denny Brauer Baby Structure Jig with a Strike King Perfect Plastics KVD Chunk Jr.

"When fishing the grass line itself, I used the Red Eye Tungsten 2 Tap, the vibrating jig and a swim jig," Rose says. "When fishing the rock along the bank I threw the Custom Shop crankbaits and pitched to any laydowns with the little Baby Structure Jig."



PHOTO BY D.W. REED II



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

## OTHER TOP PATTERNS

Mark Rose might have won the FLW Tour event on Lake Guntersville by cranking riprap and inside grass lines, but beyond that, the event was dominated by reeling lipless rattle baits and crankbaits through some kind of grass.

In fact, seven other members of the top 10 were winding a hard bait through something green. Most of the targeted vegetation was eelgrass in the 4- to 6-foot range. Finding something unique within the eelgrass was key. For instance, runner-up Bryan Thrift found a large bare spot in an eelgrass flat and seined it with a lipless crankbait and a square-bill crankbait. Scott Suggs (fourth place) focused on several deeper ditches running through eelgrass flats. Any turn or point in the ditch was key. Meanwhile, Shin Fukae (fifth) concentrated on shallow humps with eelgrass.

Those who did not play the grass-"trapping" game – as fishing shallow grass with Rat-L-Traps and similar baits is called – included local guide Alex Davis (third), who hit a milk run of hard-cover spots along the Tennessee River channel, and Andy Morgan (seventh), who slowly worked a jig on channel-swing banks.

## Jeff Ragsdale Takes Co-angler Crown

By Chad Love

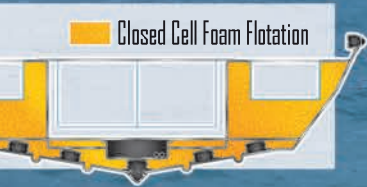
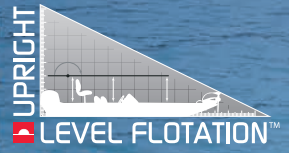
Gardendale, Ala., native Jeff Ragsdale bagged a two-day total of 30 pounds, 6 ounces to win the co-angler division at the Lake Guntersville FLW Tour season opener.

Ragsdale, in his first season on the FLW Tour as a co-angler, caught four fish weighing 14-15 on day one, and hauled in a 15-7 five-fish limit on day two while fishing with Georgia pro Rusty Trancygier and Texas pro Chris McCall, respectively.

Ragsdale finished almost 6 pounds ahead of the second-place co-angler, Benjie Seaborn of Guin, Ala., by targeting shallow-water grass beds in 6 feet of water or less with lipless crankbaits and ChatterBaits. ■



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# ROSE RIDES MOMENTUM TO TRAVIS VICTORY

ARKANSAS PRO FIRST EVER TO WIN BACK-TO-BACK TOUR EVENTS

By Rob Newell



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

Rose caught kickers from deep points before moving to docks to fill his limit.

**T**he role that momentum plays in the sport of professional bass fishing is undeniable. One success often leads to another success, resulting in some of the most impressive “rolls” in the history of the FLW Tour.

Whether it’s scoring consecutive top 10s or winning multiple events in a single season or even claiming back-to-back Angler of the Year titles, the old saying “success breeds success” provides an apt description of a powerful force in tournament fishing.

Mark Rose is the latest FLW Tour pro to illustrate this phenomenon involving success and momentum. After winning the 2017 FLW Tour opener on Lake Guntersville, Rose turned right around and won the second event of the season at Lake Travis, making him the first pro to win consecutive tournaments in a single season in FLW Tour history.

## Gut Feelings

Rose says that riding the crest of success of one event into another provides a little extra breathing room to follow instincts, take some risks and make good decisions, which he benefited from at Travis.

“A win like Guntersville early in the season just gets you going in the right direction,” he says. “It was a big financial boon for my family. It was a great start in the points. It just put me in a great frame of mind going into Travis. Instead of being under the gun and trying to force things, it gave me a little more freedom to keep an open mind and be open to what my gut was telling me.”

For Rose, one of those critical gut feelings came on the first day of the tournament when he was still trying to feel out which Lake Travis pattern to commit to.

## CONDITIONS

**Weather** | partly cloudy with spotty showers mixed in on the final day

**Air Temperature** | mid- to upper 70s

**Water Temperature** | 59 to 63 degrees

**Moon Phase** | third quarter

**Predominant Lake Features** | rock, docks, submerged trees and bushes

## TOP FIVE

NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
1. MARK ROSE	WEST MEMPHIS, AR	59-08	20	\$125,000*
2. BRYAN THRIFT	SHELBY, NC	58-06	20	\$30,200
3. DYLAN HAYS	SHERIDAN, AR	54-00	20	\$25,100
4. CLARK REEHM	HUNTINGTON, TX	53-03	19	\$20,000
5. CLARK WENDLANDT	LEANDER, TX	52-12	20	\$19,500

\*Includes Ranger Cup

With the water temperature pushing into the low 60s in mid-February, many pros found themselves in a predicament because bass were already in all three stages of the spawn. Some were on beds in 3 feet of water, and others were still suspended out in 50 feet of water. Adding to the confusion was Travis' recent rise in water level, some 40 to 50 feet over the last few years. The new water inundated a lake floor that had sprouted up with new bushes and trees during a prolonged drought. Bass had endless cover in which to hide. Committing to just one pattern was a challenge.

Rose began his tournament targeting channel-swing banks far up the Colorado River. A few decent bites there during a cloudy, windy practice period led him to start the event with a crankbait. But with just three keepers in the livewell at noon on day one, Rose's gut spoke up, telling him that the clear, calm conditions of day one meant he needed to change.

"That's one of those things you either act on or you don't," Rose says. "Let's say I had finished 100th at Guntersville; who knows, I might have said, 'Well, I only need two more keepers to get a limit. I should probably play it safe, stay up here, grind it out and force the issue up the river.'"

"But as soon as I got the feeling the river wasn't happening, I acted on it, took a risk, and ran all the way back down the lake and started fishing out deep where I had seen some fish on my electronics during practice. Making those kinds of decisions and taking those kinds of risks becomes easier when momentum is on your side."

Rose's move to the lower end of the lake late on the first day would ultimately put him on the winning path. While investigating one of his deeper spots, he caught a 4-pounder to finish a limit worth 11 pounds, 9 ounces. That day-one kicker convinced him to stay deep for the rest of the event.

"That decision felt so right. My heart, my head, my gut were all in agreement," Rose says. "That's the way it feels when you're making good decisions."

## Dialing in the Deep Bite

Rose began day two by fishing flat points in the 18- to 20-foot depth range. He was specifically looking for any bare areas or voids within the brush – favored staging spots for bass.

When he found one, Rose kept his boat positioned off the break so he could cast up on top, but he began to notice a lot of arches on his electronics. There were fish right on the steepest portion of the break in 40 to 60 feet of water.

He backed off and began pulling a football jig off the edge and letting it free-fall down over the tree-lined "cliff" along the point in 35 to 60 feet of water. Within minutes of making that adjustment, one of those "arches" thumped his jig. That bass weighed 4 pounds; another solid keeper soon followed.

Rose also realized that when he dragged the tops of the points his jig would sometimes pick up rotten scum, but when he dragged along the deeper cliffs and steps, his jig stayed clean.

He believes an algae bloom and a significant amount of decaying biomass in Travis' flooded forest had left a lot of the brush and bottom covered in a scummy slime, especially in waters shallower than 30 feet where the growth was the thickest. Out beyond that depth, the water and cover seemed to be cleaner.

"I've seen rare situations where areas that have been flooded for long periods of time get sort of 'soured' by the huge amount of rot going on under the water, and bass will avoid them," Rose says. "I really don't know if that's what was happening at Travis, but all I do know is that when I graphed out over 40 to 55 feet, I saw a lot more fish activity out there – mostly fish suspended with bait. It seemed to me that most of the fish activity was out over where the old lake shoreline had been when it was at its lowest point."

Playing a hunch, Rose moved down to the dam where he was more familiar with the old shoreline from the FLW Tour stop on Travis in 2007, when the

## WINNING LURES

Mark Rose considered most of his historic tournament-winning bass at Lake Travis to still be in "winter mode" when he caught them Feb. 16-19. They were suspended in deep water, "floating" in the middle of the water column and following bait pods over steep breaks, "stairsteps" and timber.

Rose's key lures were 3/4- and 1-ounce Strike King Tour Grade Football Jigs teamed with Rage Craw trailers. In some cases he cast out on top of a point in about 18 feet and then dragged the jig down the tree-lined stairstep rubble along the point's edge. When "cliff diving" with his jig to depths of 40 and 50 feet, Rose used the heavier 1-ounce model with 15-pound-test Seaguar Tatsu fluorocarbon.

Rose also employed a 6-inch paddle-tail swimbait on a 1-ounce Strike King Squadron Swimbait Jig Head when he saw big arches suspended out under bait. The swimbait only produced three bass for Rose, but they were all in the 4- to 6-pound class.

He pitched docks with a Strike King Rage Bug on a Mustad Grip-PIN hook with a 5/16-ounce tungsten weight.

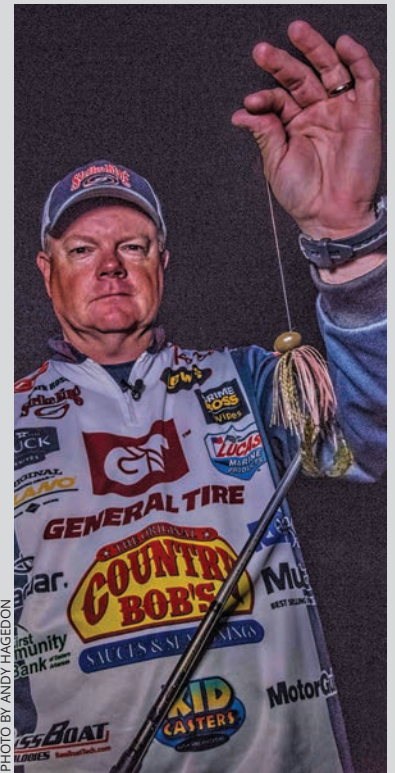


PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

lake was much lower. In addition, the fishing pressure at the dam was far less, and the water was clearest, which he felt would help his bite.

Rose finished day two with a 17-pound, 3-ounce limit to vault him into fifth place.

## Taking it Home

From that point, Rose's tournament strategy was to fish "way out" down at the dam first thing in the morning when the big fish seemed to be chasing bait over deep water. Then he fished docks to finish his limit.

"Fishing for bass suspended on bait like that is a gamble," Rose adds. "They are roamers, following the bait wherever it goes. It seemed like they were feeding on shad schools first thing in the morning, and to catch one was a total bonus. So I took a chance during the first hour of my day, winging a big swimbait out over those deep breaks where I had seen arches. If I could get one or two big bites on the swimbait early, it would be well worth it. Then I'd worry about finishing a limit on docks later in the day."

On the morning of day three he caught a 6-pounder right off the bat. On day four the swimbait again produced two early 4-pound-plus fish. Those bonus bites paved the way to his victory. He finished limits of 15-13 and 14-9, respectively, by flipping docks. His winning total of 59-2 was just enough to claim his second win in a row, writing Rose's name in the FLW Tour history book.



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDORN

Posing with giant checks became something of a family habit for Mark Rose, his wife, Christi, and daughters, Natalie (left) and Hannah Grace, this spring.

## Thrift Second ... Again

Two bass tournaments held on two lakes 900 miles apart with 165 participants and somehow Mark Rose and Bryan Thrift finish first and second two times in a row, separated by less than a pound each time.

What are the chances?

Perhaps it's just further proof that the cream really does rise to the top in professional fishing tournaments.

The first two FLW Tour events of 2017 have been the Rose and Thrift Show ... or the Thrift and Rose Show ... and then back to the Rose and Thrift show, depending on what time of day you tuned into the *FLW Live* coverage.

These FLW Tour stars have traded some serious blows with big bass, battling down to the final seconds in each tournament to determine the winner and thrilling viewers with some fantastic action.

Though Rose has prevailed both times, Thrift has turned in some stunning catches at both events to keep fans holding their breath. At Gunterville, Thrift checked in a 22-pound catch on the final day to pull within 15 ounces of Rose. At Travis, Thrift picked up right where he left off, catching 24-12 on the first day and shocking most of his peers and weigh-in fans who didn't believe such a catch was possible.

Thrift caught four of his bass in that big day-one catch on a shaky head with a Damiki Finesse Miki 6.5 worm. Later in the day, he caught a 6 1/2-pound brute by skipping docks with a 1/2-ounce jig and chunk.

Thrift grinded his way through keepers the following days with a variety of lures and added two more 5-pound dock bass to his four-day total of 58-6.



## Larson Lobs HardHead for Co-angler Win

By Chad Love

David Larson of Mound, Minn., only weighed in six fish during the first two days of the Tour event at Lake Travis, but those six fish were more than enough to beat out the rest of the field and take home a \$20,000 check as winning co-angler. Larson had a two-day total of 21-10, or 15 ounces ahead of Thomas Martens of Jonestown, Texas, who boated 10 keepers for 20-11.

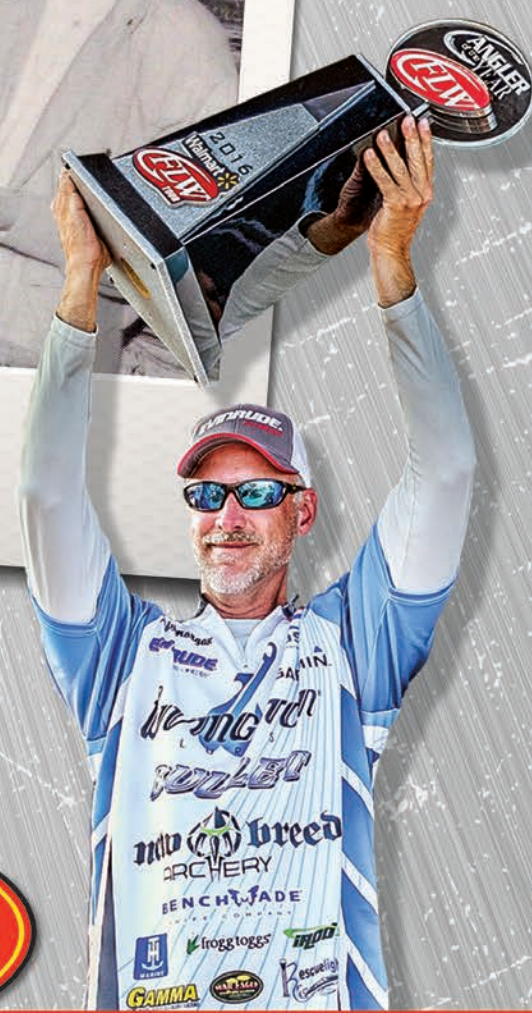
Larson says he was specifically targeting bigger fish during the tournament. He fished rock piles and hard bottom in 16 to 20 feet of water with Ontario pro Chris Johnston on day one and caught four keepers for 16-11. On day two, fishing with Texan Christopher Brasher, he was up against the bank most of the day.

"I was switching back and forth from a 1/2-ounce to a 3/4-ounce Gene Larew Biffle HardHead paired up with a 4.8-inch Keitech Sexy Impact in ayu color," says Larson. "I did make one adjustment on the last day and switched to a small Bandit crankbait, which gave me that last keeper."

Larson's two fish the last day weighed a combined 4-15. ■



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## Winning Angler

**Taylor Ashley, Warrior, Ala.**

**Winning Weight:** 68 pounds, 12 ounces (15 fish)

**Stat Line:** This was Ashley's first-ever Costa FLW Series tournament. He previously fished as a boater and co-angler at the T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League level.



Ashley targeted boat lanes coursing through a flat covered in reeds and lily pads.

## Target Areas

Ashley's primary area was some 500 yards long and about 200 yards wide. It featured a generous mix of lily pads and small reed clumps interspersed with pockets of open water with hard bottom. Ashley could catch keeper buck bass in the area at will, but he began to notice that his bigger bites often came from boat lanes, which sliced through his area. Early on day two, he discovered that one boat lane in particular seemed to have a better draw for big fish than the others.

"It was a lane that connected the main canal [the rim ditch] to the lake," he details. "The boat lane was about a foot deeper than the surrounding water. I really think those bigger females were using that particular lane to migrate in. Any reed stalk along that boat lane was a perfect stopping point for a big one to hold up on. That's where most of my best bites came from."

## Winning Baits

Ashley did most of his fish catching on Lake Okeechobee with a 3/8-ounce Dirty Jigs Tackle No-Jack Swim Jig teamed with a Zoom Super Speed Craw, both in white. He also mixed in a green pumpkin version of the jig, but notes that most of the big fish bit the white offering. He tied the jig to 65-pound-test PowerPro braid and fished it on a 7-foot, 4-inch, heavy-action rod from Ark Rods teamed with a Lew's reel with a high-speed 7.8:1 gear ratio.

## CONDITIONS

**Weather** | sunny with passing clouds on day one; heavy fog in the morning on day two, followed by overcast skies and drizzle in the afternoon; clear, blue skies on day three

**Air Temperature** | highs in the mid-70s on days one and two; 60 degrees on day three

**Water Temperature** | 65 degrees on days one and two; 61 on day three

**Water Clarity** | stained and turbid in the main lake; clear but tannin-stained in the backwaters and north shore area

**Wind** | SW to 12 mph on day one; north at 10 mph on day two; NE to 20 mph on day three

**Moon Phase** | new

**Predominant Lake Features** | various shallow aquatic vegetation, man-made canals

**Fishery Type** | natural lake



A white Dirty Jigs No-Jack Swim Jig was Ashley's go-to, but he also used green pumpkin.

Swim jigs are no secret weapon at Okeechobee, but historically their popular colors have been black and blue or green pumpkin. A white swim jig at the Big O is a little peculiar, but Ashley says it's his confidence color back home in Alabama.

### Presentation Keys

Ashley patterned the boat lane by zigzagging back and forth so he could line up several reed stalks and bring the jig by them all with a single cast.

"If I could line up three or four different stalks on a single cast, it just increased my chances of getting a big bite

that much more," he says. "Most of the big ones came from stalks that were within 100 feet of that boat lane.

"Sometimes the fish wanted it just swimming by a clump. Other times I had to really shake and twitch the rod aggressively while reeling to get the fish to react on the bait," he says. "A lot of times I'm not even aware of how I'm fishing a swim jig because I mix my retrieves up so much. That's what is so great about a swim jig: It may look like just one lure, but I can make it do so many different things under the water that it's actually a very versatile bait."

### Keys to Victory

Okeechobee's sheer enormity makes it a real challenge for those unfamiliar with its waters, but the difficult initial task of learning the lake actually led the 19-year-old Ashley, who had never laid eyes on the Big O before, to the area that produced his dominating win among a field of 250 anglers.

Early on in practice, Ashley struggled.

"I stayed lost and hardly caught any fish the first three days," Ashley recalls. "After my third day of practice I was ready to quit."

Out of desperation, Ashley decided to stay close to Clewiston for the remainder of practice and fish the lake's

east wall, where he could spend less time trying to keep his bearings in a sea of reeds and more time actually fishing. He knew he needed to cover water fast, so he fell back on his strong suit – swimming a jig – which he honed on the Coosa River in Alabama.

On the final afternoon of practice, he had a couple of big bites inside of the east wall that at least provided him a starting point for the tournament and that proved to be his saving grace.

For two days of competition, Ashley kept pace with the local crowd when moderate temperatures and stable conditions graced the field. He entered the final day in third place and 3 pounds, 10 ounces off the lead.

The game changer happened when a considerable cold front passed through just before the dawn of day three, dropping air temperatures some 20 degrees and leaving behind a stiff northeast wind that ranged to 20 mph on the final day.

Ashley's area and pattern stood up to the changing conditions because the east wall provided protection from the final day's chilling breeze. While others struggled to corral limits that would reach into the teens, Ashley blew by the field with his final 22-pound, 6-ounce catch.



### CO-ANGLER CHAMPION

**Name:** Howard Poitevint

**Hometown:** Bainbridge, Ga.

**Winning Weight:** 46-13 (15 fish)

**Winning Program:** Howard Poitevint is a master of the paddle-tail worm game from the back of the boat.

In 2013, Poitevint used a Zoom Ultravibe Speed Worm in junebug to claim top honors at Okeechobee. This time he used a Bitter's Vibe and Mega Vibe (the bigger version) to get the job done. He chose the Bitter's versions of the worm because he could get them in a specific color: green pumpkin with red flake. He fished the two worms on weights ranging from 1/8 to 1/4 ounce, depending on the wind.

"I mostly swam the worm, but if I saw a reed clump or some of those little stick bushes, I'd pitch to the base of them and let it sit," Poitevint says. ■



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## DETAILS

Feb. 9-11, 2017

Presented by Ranger Boats

Hosted by Lake Havasu City Convention & Visitors Bureau

Costa FLW Series Division: Western



# LAKE HAVASU

LAKE HAVASU CITY, ARIZ.

By David A. Brown

PHOTOS BY JODY WHITE



## Winning Angler

**Joe Uribe Jr., Surprise, Ariz.**

**Winning Weight:** 51 pounds, 13 ounces (15 fish)

**Stat Line:** Uribe has notched 10 top-10 finishes in FLW competition. He has previous victories at the 2015 Costa FLW Series events on Lake Havasu and Clear Lake. Those wins propelled him to the 2015 Western Division Angler of the Year title.

## Winning Baits

Uribe did most of his work with a custom 7-inch paddle-tail swimbait that he and his father, Joe Sr., designed. Uribe was thin on details, but explained that his swimbait had a 1/2-ounce lead head and a skirt, and was rigged for weedless fishing.

"That bait comes through the tules and the grass really nice," he says.

The Arizona pro used a variety of swimbait colors based on conditions. With more sunlight on day one and parts of day two, he found the more translucent baits worked best, while chartreuse shad produced better during the dimmer conditions that followed on day three.

Each day, the mornings produced the best action, but Uribe also coaxed a couple of reaction bites in the afternoon of day two, thanks to windy conditions. When the swimbait bite dwindled, he picked up a Ned rig with a 4-inch

green pumpkin laminate Yamamoto Senko trimmed to about 3 inches.

"I caught a few the first and second days on the swimbait, but I also caught a few on the Ned rig. Those were key fish that got me here [to the top-10 cut]," Uribe said after the final day. "On day three, it was all about the swimbait."

## Target Areas

Uribe spent all his tournament time in the Windsor Basin, a large, open expanse in the northern half of the reservoir. In the mornings, he started at the Chalk Cliffs on the California side and then hopped around to several of his favorite points and pockets.

With smallmouths transitioning from their winter patterns to prespawn staging areas, Uribe primarily targeted shallow tule banks where the bronzebacks are known to frequent in the mornings.

"I was just casting through



In the end, Uribe's commitment to fishing slowly along the bank and offshore made all the difference.

the lanes and being really precise," he says. "I caught most of my fish in 5 feet of water."

Watching the progression in the days leading up to the tournament, Uribe was fairly certain of the prespawn transition to the shallows on the first two days of competition. When more limits and more big fish showed up during the day-two weigh-in, he knew it was show time.

"I caught most of the bucks on day one and day two, but after seeing those big fish weighed on day two, I knew that those females were moving up," Uribe says. "They were backed off in about 10 to 15 feet of water,

but with today's [day three] cloud cover, the rainy conditions and that temperature change, those fish moved right to the bank."

## Presentation Keys

Uribe opted for a sizable bait in hopes of appealing to the larger smallmouths that were moving up with the warming weather. In this time of transition, bites were few and far between, so capitalizing on each opportunity proved critical.

The Arizona angler made sure he was well-equipped for this task by arming himself with the right rod. His choice of swimbait launchers

## CONDITIONS

**Weather** | sunny to mostly sunny on day one; partly cloudy and windy on day two; cloudy, windy with light rain on day three

**Air Temperature** | low 80s on days one and two; mid-70s on day three

**Water Temperature** | 56 to 58 degrees

**Water Clarity** | approximately 2 to 3 feet of visibility in the lake and lower river

**Wind** | N at 8 to 12 mph on day one; N-NW at 10 to 15 mph on day two; NE at 3 to 5 mph on day three

**Moon Phase** | full

**Predominant Lake Features** | rocky points, shallow coves and pockets, tules, mesquite, artificial "habitat" structures

**Fishery Type** | Colorado River impoundment with one major tributary (Bill Williams River)

## CO-ANGLER CHAMPION

**Name:** Andrew Levy

**Hometown:** Grover Beach, Calif.

**Winning Weight:** 21-15 (6 fish)

**Winning Program:** Paired with California angler Justin Kerr on the final day, Levy decided to use a similar bait as his pro partner, who was covering water with a bladed swim jig, but rather than the common burning or slow-rolling techniques, the California co-angler actually flipped a white Z-Man ChatterBait with a pearl white Zoom Fluke trailer. This allowed him to send his bait into precise spots for brief, intrusive presentations.

Levy caught only two fish on day three, but they weighed a combined 9 pounds, 9 ounces. In doing so, he pulled off one of the rarest feats in tournament competition — the 10th-to-first final-day comeback.



was a 7-foot, 11-inch custom Performance Tackle rod. He paired it with a Daiwa Tatula 100H reel (6.3:1 gear ratio) and 20-pound-test Sunline Super FC Sniper fluorocarbon. With plenty of length for long casts, the rod allowed Uribe to keep his distance from shallow fish, while also providing the right dynamics for the bite and fight.

"This is really crucial with that swimbait to not only cast effectively, but also allow the fish to eat the bait without pulling it out of their mouths," Uribe says.

The Ned rig design also positively impacted his performance. Made with a 3/0 Gamakatsu hook, the custom-poured mushroom head allowed him to fish his bait effectively across rocky bottom without wasting time with frequent snags.

"The 3/16-ounce size I was using is a little heavier than

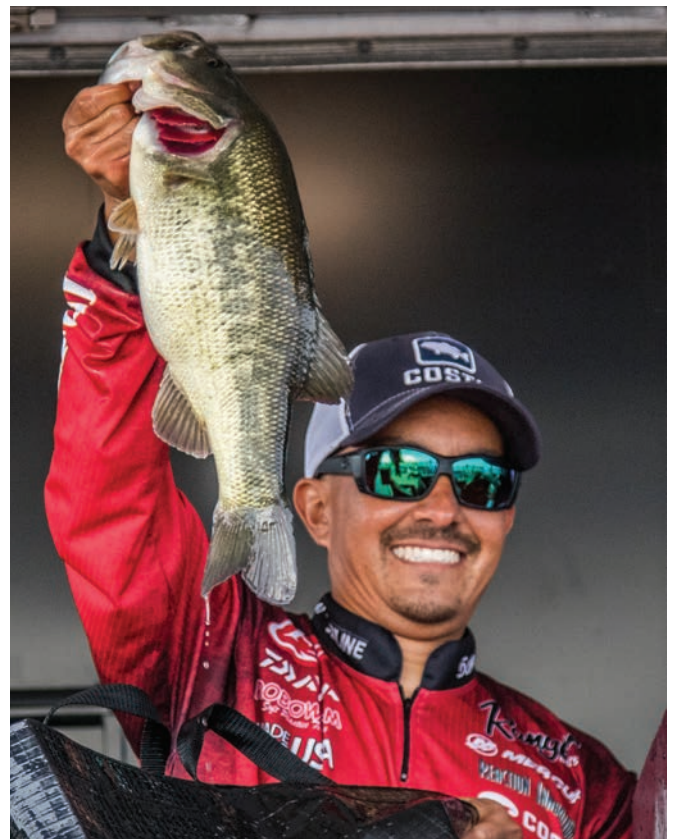
most anglers use, but the key was keeping that bait on the bottom and just crawling it," Uribe adds.

### Keys to Victory

Patience and persistence proved invaluable in Uribe's performance. Knowing that he was unlikely to land big numbers of fish, he committed himself to picking through his tule banks meticulously.

"I was fishing super slow," he says. "I was using my trolling motor, and I had it on 40 percent most of the tournament. Every now and then I changed the cadence, and that created the strike."

Similarly, when he visited some offshore gravel bars (see below), Uribe practiced equal restraint. Working his Ned rig over rock shoals in 15 to 20 feet, he kept his retrieve to a glacial pace and frequently paused to "wiggle" the bait. ■



## NED RIG MOPS UP NEEDED BITES

Uribe knew the smallmouths were still transitioning to the shallows during the event. He knew there were still fish deep, too, and that it'd take time for them to make their move. With that in mind, he occasionally gave his tule fish a rest and used a Ned rig to pick at the bass that were still holding deeper. His primary spot was a gravel bar extending off a main-lake point within view of the tournament takeoff site at Windsor Beach.

There, smallmouths patrolled the drop-off edges in classic feeding activity. Uribe varied his presentations between shallow-to-deep and vice versa to show the fish downhill and uphill looks.

He fished his Ned rig on a 7-foot Performance Tackle drop-shot spinning rod with a Daiwa Exist 2500 reel and 12- to 16-pound-test Sunline braid with a 7-pound-test Sunline Super FC Sniper fluorocarbon leader.

"Braid was key," Uribe adds. "The bites were really finicky, but that braid allowed me to keep in contact with the bottom and feel the bites."

While walking his Ned rig over the rocks, Uribe held the line in his opposite hand to help detect light bites. If a fish nipped at his offering, he'd use the rod tip to subtly wiggle the bait in an effort to close the deal.



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## DETAILS

Feb. 23-25, 2017

Presented by Yeti

Hosted by Jasper-Lake Sam Rayburn Area Chamber  
Of Commerce and Jasper County Development District  
Costa FLW Series Division: Southwestern



# SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR

BROOKELAND, TEXAS

By David A. Brown

PHOTOS BY MATT PACE



Castledine used a Rage Bug when sight-fishing.

## Winning Angler

**Todd Castledine, Nacogdoches, Texas**

**Winning Weight:** 66 pounds, 11 ounces (15 fish)

**Stat Line:** Castledine's win was his fifth in FLW competition. Three of his other victories also came on Rayburn through T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League events in 2014 (1) and 2013 (2). He also won a Costa FLW Series Southwestern Division event on Toledo Bend in 2011.



## Winning Baits

Castledine spent the first part of each morning targeting prespawn fish with a 1/2-ounce white Strike King Hack Attack Heavy Cover Swim Jig with a white Strike King Rage Swimmer as a trailer or a Strike King KVD 2.5 square-bill crankbait in orange belly craw.

For his more prominent sight-fishing tactics that followed, he used a Strike King Rage Bug (blue craw and California craw) on a 5/0 Gamakatsu EWG Monster hook. Bait selection, he notes, was essential to taking advantage of the spawning game.

"I really like the Rage Bug because it's compact, so the fish rarely bite the pincers off," Castledine says. "Also, I like a bait that's thin enough and soft enough to get good hook penetration."

Castledine's bed-fishing delivered a 9-pounder that took the Big Bass award for

day two. On day three, he nabbed another 9 on a deep spot with a 10-inch watermelon red Strike King Rage Tail Anaconda Texas-rigged on a 5/0 hook with a 3/8-ounce weight.

## Target Areas

Castledine mostly fished the mid-lake region and focused on shallow, grassy pockets with the occasional meandering ditch. On the final day, which Castledine started in the ninth-place position, these spots yielded a solid limit of about 16 pounds on the swim jig and square-bill, which provided a much-needed stress reliever and confidence boost that readied him for the first of two key moves.

"I had a creek where I saw fish on beds before the rain hit [Monday and Tuesday during practice] and dirtied it up," he recalls. "I never went

## CONDITIONS

**Weather** | sunny to mostly sunny; windy on days two and three

**Air Temperature** | low 80s on days one and two; mid-60s on day three

**Water Temperature** | 59 to 66 degrees

**Water Clarity** | approximately 1 foot of visibility in the main lake, with less in the feeder creeks

**Wind** | calm on day one; W at 5 to 10 mph on day two; NE at 15 to 20 mph, then dropping to 5 to 10 mph on day three

**Moon Phase** | waning crescent

**Predominant Lake Features** | buck brush, hackberry, hay grass and hydrilla

**Fishery Type** | lowland impoundment

## BEDS, BASS AND BEYOND

Todd Castledine's victory exemplified a strategic use of a seasonal assortment. He caught 12 of his 15 weigh-in fish off beds, but before that deal was set up to his liking, he spent at least part of his mornings "just fishing." He meandered through likely staging areas with a swim jig and a square-bill, picking off fish that were coming and going.

Once the sun's height facilitated spotting beds, he would ease in close to cover where "reading" individual bed fish would determine the requisite presentations.

"This is going to sound crazy, but there's absolutely no trick to it [reading and catching bed fish]," he admits. "You have to treat every single fish as its own personality. With one fish, you might have to throw in there 1,000 times. With another, you might have to throw in there once.

"After years of doing it, you kind of figure it out, but I learn something new every single time. Whatever they do dictates what I do."

to it the first two days, but I went there late in the morning on day three. I didn't know if they'd be in there or if I could even see them, but I caught two of the ones I weighed off beds."

After that boost to his stringer, Castledine struggled through nearly three unproductive hours before remembering a particular piece of gravel bottom south of the state Highway 147 bridge in about 18 feet of water. The Texas pro rerouted and headed to the historically productive spot.

Notably, Castledine says the move didn't feel right even before completing his first retrieve. He actually reeled up and headed elsewhere until something deep in his gut prompted him to return. Back on that gravel spot, his first cast delivered the 9-pounder that assured him the win.

### Presentation Keys

Renowned for his sight-fishing skills, Castledine credits his Costa sunglasses as being essential in helping him spot bed fish and observe clues to their behavior and potential aggressiveness. Equally invaluable were his twin Power-Poles, which ensured proper boat positioning.

"You just have to find the right spot [for the boat]. Sometimes that's closer, and sometimes it's far away," Castledine admits. "Sometimes you have trees in the way. Sometimes you're out in the open with the wind. If it's windy,

I like to get my boat in there to block the wind."

On Castledine's deep spot, he was concerned that the seasonal shoreward migration of bass might have left the spot barren. However, spotting two good fish on his electronics fueled his interest in returning.

"If I hadn't seen anything, I probably wouldn't have turned around, but I did see those two," he states. "I just got it in front of a big one, and she ate it."

### Keys to Victory

Cliché as it might seem, Castledine's mental toughness also factors in. True, everyone in the field contended with the same weather challenges of a day-three cold front and lakewide low-water conditions. However, only Castledine was suffering with an illness that would've kept many in bed.

"I had the flu two weeks ago, and I got sick again on Sunday," he said at the final weigh-in. "To be straight-up honest, I was throwing up all this morning before takeoff. Five minutes before takeoff, I was trying to figure out how I was going to make it through

the entire day, much less catch fish."

Gutting it out, Castledine used the motivation of a potential comeback victory to block out his physical discomfort. He instead focused on details such as boat positioning and graph reading. ■

### CO-ANGLER CHAMPION

**Name:** Mat Downey

**Hometown:** Kountze, Texas

**Winning Weight:** 55-04 (15 fish)

**Winning Program:** Mat Downey of Kountze, Texas, caught every fish in his three daily limits on a bone-colored River2Sea Whopper Plopper. The key to his Whopper Plopper presentation was a long cast - long enough to run out all of his 50-pound-test braid and expose the 12-pound-test fluorocarbon backing. Although he usually fares better fishing hay grass in early spring, Downey says recent low water led to a resurgence of Rayburn's hydrilla. The bass seemed to prefer this newly regrown grass, so he fished it thoroughly whenever he had the opportunity.





# YETI FLW COLLEGE FISHING WINNING TACTICS

By Chad Love

## SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE – LAKE SEMINOLE – JAN. 14



**F**ishing jerkbaits over submerged stumps and flipping grass mats were the winning strategies for University of Alabama anglers Anderson Aldag of Birmingham, Ala., and Lee Mattox of Bremen, Ala., who won at Lake Seminole with five bass weighing 21 pounds, 15 ounces.

The pair tried to avoid areas with muddy water and ended up camping on a 50-yard-long hole within a deep stump field at the south end of the lake.

“The hole was near a spawning area and was 25 to 30 feet deep in the middle,” says Mattox, a junior chemical engineering major. “The stumps were right

below the surface. We used a sexy ghost minnow-colored Strike King KVD Jerkbait, which is a little unconventional this early in the season. Not many teams were throwing jerkbaits because the fish aren’t active enough yet.”

“We were both fishing jerkbaits most of the day,” says Aldag, a junior business finance major. “But we finished the day at some matted grass in the same creek, but about a half-mile away. It was also fairly deep – about 13 feet down. We were both flipping the edge of the grass with creature baits, mostly a green pumpkin purple Strike King KVD Perfect Plastics Rodent.”

## SOUTHERN CONFERENCE – SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR – FEB. 4

**A** pair of late-day giants was enough to give the Sam Houston State University team of Dillon Harrell of New Caney, Texas, and Dustin Moreno of Shepherd, Texas, the top spot at Sam Rayburn Reservoir with a 22-pound, 3-ounce total.

Harrell and Moreno began by grinding out an initial limit with a shad-colored 6th Sense Snatch 70X lipless crankbait. They primarily fished around hydrilla and secondary points in 4 to 8 feet of water.

“When we pulled up to our first area we found a lot of boat traffic from another tournament,” says Harrell, a sophomore majoring in agricultural business. “We thought we could get a quick limit there, but only caught two fish. We targeted schooling fish and grinded out a limit at our second stop by 11 a.m.”

A key change in the afternoon propelled them to the win.

“Around 2 p.m., we focused on a secondary point and caught two bass that were close to 7 pounds apiece on an umbrella rig with Xcite Baits swimbaits,” says Moreno, a senior business major. “We culled out our two smallest fish, and on the very next cast I caught a 4-pounder. We went from 12 pounds to 22 pounds in 15 minutes.”

## WESTERN CONFERENCE – LAKE HAVASU FEB. 11

**D**espite losing his partner to an unforeseen emergency, University of Oregon angler Ryan Habenicht of Creswell, Ore., pulled out a solo win at Lake Havasu with a four-bass bag weighing 13 pounds, 3 ounces.

Habenicht, a senior business major, keyed in on dirtier water around tule points in coves after conditions changed up dramatically from practice.



“During practice it was 80 degrees and sunny, and the fish were cruising. Nearly every bass that we caught was over 3 pounds,” says Habenicht. “During the tournament it ended up being cloudy, and I had to fish extremely slow and methodically. I literally turned the graph off and would make 35- to 40-yard casts and then not move the bait.”

Habenicht caught one keeper on a 1/2-ounce chartreuse shad spinnerbait before switching to a Ned rig on secondary points.

“For the Ned rig I used a 3/16-ounce Frenzy Baits Nail with a green pumpkin Z-Man Finesse WormZ,” says Habenicht. “The key for me was making long casts and not moving the bait. I just had to let the bait sit there and grind it out.”



SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE – LAKE GUNTERSVILLE – FEB. 25

Tusculum College anglers Nick Hatfield of Jonesborough, Tenn., and Corey Neece of Bristol, Tenn., topped the largest field ever for a collegiate bass fishing event – 248 boats – to win at Lake Gunterville. The pair sacked a five-bass limit weighing 22 pounds, 13 ounces by targeting prespawn bass at the very back of shallow-water pockets using lip-less crankbaits.

Hatfield and Neece caught all their fish on two baits – a Strike King Red Eye Shad in sexy shad color and a royalty-colored BOOYAH One Knocker.

“We were sitting in 2 feet of water and fishing really, really shallow,” says Hatfield, a senior business administration major. “Our trolling motor kept hitting the bottom and kicking up mud, and we had to raise it up.”

The anglers had to deal with windy, post-frontal conditions that complicated their plan to fish shallow, but according to Neece, a junior environmental science major, finding protected pockets was key. They caught all their fish out of two wind-protected pockets by fishing slowly and methodically, often making multiple casts to the same spot.



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**BFL WINNING TACTICS**

**Arkie – Lake Dardanelle – Feb. 18**

**Boater:** Matt Wood, Jessieville, Ark. – 21-02  
Fishing a dock with a Strike King Red Eye Shad and a white Strike King Pure Poison vibrating jig with a white YUM Swim'n Dinger trailer  
**Co-Angler:** Johnny Crider, Fulton, Ark. – 16-10

**Bama – Lake Guntersville – March 4**

**Boater:** Casey Martin, New Hope, Ala. – 40-11  
Targeting bridge causeways with a 1/2-ounce Picasso Double Barrel under-spin with a 4-inch smoky shad Z-Man DieZel MinnowZ trailer and a swimbait on a 3/4-ounce Freedom Tackle Hydra Hybrid Jig, or fishing grass with a Rat-L-Trap  
**Co-Angler:** Taylor Parker, Lake View, Ala. – 14-07

**Bulldog – Lake Lanier – Feb. 18**

**Boater:** Tyler Morgan, Columbus, Ga. – 16-15  
Cranking bluff walls and fishing the backs of pockets using a red craw-colored Berkley Pit Bull crankbait and a black and blue Z-Man ChatterBait with a black Keitech Swing Impact FAT 4.3  
**Co-Angler:** Harold Grizzle, Gainesville, Ga. – 16-03

**Choo Choo – Lake Guntersville – Feb. 18**

**Boater:** Tim Wilson, Gas City, Ind. – 23-10  
Casting an umbrella rig along a bluff wall  
**Co-Angler:** David Bryant, Covington, Va. – 17-01

**Cowboy – Sam Rayburn Reservoir – Jan. 21**

**Boater:** Blake Schroeder, Whitehouse, Texas – 28-10  
Fishing grass with a crawfish-colored Rat-L-Trap and deep points with a Carolina-rigged watermelon candy red Zoom Brush Hog  
**Co-Angler:** Scott Duckworth, New Caney, Texas – 24-00

**Cowboy – Sam Rayburn Reservoir – Feb. 11**

**Boater:** Tommy Mackey, Bryan, Texas – 26-11  
Fishing staging areas with flooded trees or an outside grass line with a Carolina-rigged green pumpkin Zoom Brush Hog and cranking a drain with a blue chartreuse Norman DD22 crankbait  
**Co-Angler:** Chris Sims, Houston, Texas – 16-11

**Cowboy – Sam Rayburn Reservoir – March 4**

**Boater:** Jason Bonds, Lufkin, Texas – 31-05  
Sight-fishing with a Texas-rigged blue craw Strike King Rage Bug and targeting cruising fish with a white Strike King Popping Perch and an electric shad Strike King Rage Swimmer  
**Co-Angler:** Hugh Cosculluela, The Woodlands, Texas – 26-07

**Gator – Lake Okeechobee – Jan. 14**

**Boater:** Robert Beatty, Clermont, Fla. – 27-10  
Pitching flattened reed clumps, hydrilla and hyacinth with a shadow blue Gambler BB Cricket and Gambler Why Not  
**Co-Angler:** Michael Chadwick, LaBelle, Fla. – 18-06

**Gator – Lake Okeechobee – Feb. 11**

**Boater:** Bryan Honnerlaw, Moore Haven, Fla. – 21-05  
Winding a Z-Man ChatterBait over a shell bed in a hole in the grass where bass were chasing shad  
**Co-Angler:** Roy Gentry, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. – 22-09

**LBL – Kentucky-Barkley – March 4**

**Boater:** Edward Gettys, Paris, Tenn. – 25-14  
Fishing main-lake ditches and bars with a Rayburn red BOOAH One Knocker  
**Co-Angler:** Chris Fornash, Richmond, Ky. – 15-5

**North Carolina – Lake Norman – Feb. 25**

**Boater:** Jeff Queen, Catawba, N.C. – 16-09  
Swimming a 3/8-ounce Queen Tackle tungsten jig with a blue Zoom Super Chunk trailer on open, windy banks in 3 to 8 feet of water  
**Co-Angler:** Austin Wike, China Grove, N.C. – 11-05

**Ozark – Table Rock Lake – Feb. 25**

**Boater:** Eric Hammond, Rogersville, Mo. – 17-06  
Cranking transitions between 45-degree rocky banks and gravel with a phantom green Storm Original Wiggle Wart and winding an umbrella rig around deep trees  
**Co-Angler:** Michael Fey Sr., Cuba, Mo. – 12-07

**Savannah River – Lake Keowee – Feb. 4**

**Boater:** Ken Wheeler, Martin, Ga. – 15-06  
Fishing deep with an Outkast football-head jig with a watermelon red Zoom Super Chunk Jr. trailer, a Zoom Z-Drop on a drop-shot and a Fish Head Spin  
**Co-Angler:** Dwayne Parton, Anderson, S.C. – 12-14

**Savannah River – Clarks Hill Lake – Feb. 25**

**Boater:** Brock Taylor, Pendleton, S.C. – 22-10  
Fishing deep with a green pumpkin Zoom Trick Worm on a shaky head, pitching an Alabama craw-colored jig on rocky channel swings and winding a white spinnerbait through mud lines  
**Co-Angler:** Matt Deufel, Grovetown, Ga. – 17-10

**South Carolina – Lake Murray – Feb. 11**

**Boater:** Chris Marshall, Forest City, N.C. – 22-09  
Skipping docks with a Chris craw-colored Katch-Her Lures Flipping Jig  
**Co-Angler:** Pete Kenny, Ashburn, Va. – 18-03

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# TBF



## WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

By Dan Johnson

### DESTINATIONS FIT FOR A CHAMPIONSHIP: SPOTLIGHT ON TABLE ROCK LAKE AND KIMBERLING CITY, MO.

TBF members competing in the 2017 The Bass Federation National Championship April 3-8 on Table Rock Lake will enjoy the most exciting, largest and richest championship in Federation history.

The "Big Dance" of grassroots bass fishing features anglers who qualified both under the old state team/divisional format and the popular new TBF National Semi-Finals system.

Competitors will battle in a cut format that sees the top boater and co-angler from each state earn spots in new Evinrude-powered Ranger Boats for the final three days of competition.

At stake is a record payout and 15 berths in two of the sport's most coveted events. The boater champ will compete in the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup, and the top seven boaters and co-anglers will compete in the 2017 T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American.

The winning boater will also receive the \$100,000 "Living the Dream" package, which includes a cash prize, fully paid entry fees on the 2018 FLW Tour as a pro, travel expense stipends for each Tour event and use of a wrapped Ranger with Evinrude outboard for the year. The top co-angler will also receive a cash prize along with fully paid entry fees into the Costa FLW Series division of choice.



Boater champion Joseph Webster won it all in 2016 and is now "Living the Dream" on the FLW Tour.

But there's more to the experience than that. Competitors will test their mettle on one of North America's most renowned bass fisheries.

Affectionately known as "The Rock," this southwest Missouri paradise is nestled amid scenic shores covered with

oak and hickory trees. More importantly to anglers, Table Rock Lake is also flush with bass. Biologists with the Missouri Department of Conservation say a bumper crop of largemouths that hatched in 2011 yielded big numbers of 16- to 18-inch bass in 2016, and the

year-class is expected to fuel epic catches of quality-sized bass again this season.

Spotted bass are also abundant, while smallmouths make up a significant part of Table Rock's bass population in the main lake from the bridge at Highway 86 to Campbell Point.

Given the health of the fishery, solid catches are expected. And thanks to the lake's diverse nature, a variety of presentations will likely produce fish, allowing anglers to fish to their strong suits.

Case in point: At the 2016 TBF National Championship on Table Rock, held April 14-16, Mississippi's Joseph Webster took top honors with a 15-fish three-day total weight of 43 pounds, 9 ounces.

Webster pitched a craw to bedding bass tucked into the back ends of pockets at Indian Point for limits the first two days. He switched tactics and locations on day three, targeting docks over deep water with an umbrella rig armed with swimbaits and spinner blades for a 14-pound, 13-ounce grand finale.

"We're excited to see the world's best grassroots anglers tackle Table Rock again," says TBF President Robert Cartlidge. "The lake offers exceptional fishing for everyone."

Cartlidge is also quick to note the region's many other attractions.

"Kimberling City and surrounding Stone County have so much to see and do. This is a perfect family destination," he says.

Situated a short cast from Branson and the Silver Dollar City theme park, the Kimberling City area is rich in accommodations, culture, dining and shopping opportunities, along with a host of other attractions.

As was the case in 2016, the community will welcome TBF members and their families with open arms.

"We're thrilled to host another TBF National Championship and are looking forward to welcoming the organization and all of its anglers," says Sheila Thomas, president of the Table Rock Chamber of Commerce.

For more information on this destination, go to [visittablerocklake.com](http://visittablerocklake.com), or contact the Table Rock Lake Chamber of Commerce at 800.595.0393.

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## JOIN TBF FOR GRASSROOTS BASS TOURNAMENT ACTION PLUS MORE GREAT BENEFITS

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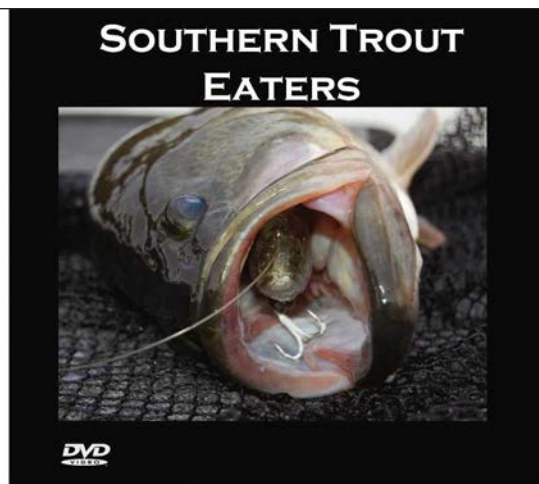
**G**rassroots bass anglers nationwide are invited to join The Bass Federation for 2017 and reap the many rewards of membership.

### TBF Member Benefits

- Participation in the popular new TBF National Semi-Finals program, which is comprised of more than 20 "close-to-home" events that offer a chance to qualify for the prestigious TBF National Championship, where TBF's \$100,000 "Living the Dream" package is on the line
- The chance to advance from the National Championship to the Forrest Wood Cup or T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League All-American
- Local and regional tournaments held among more than 20,000 members in the U.S. and Canada
- The opportunity to meet fellow bass enthusiasts in one's own community and work together on a variety of projects aimed at protecting and enhancing bass habitat, getting young people involved in fishing, and supporting those who serve or have served in the military
- Access to the TBF Members Only Online Store and TBF Reverse Auctions, both of which offer great deals on top bass fishing gear
- Tournament contingency programs, including the TBF Ranger Cup Program and Lowrance State Champion's Bonus

- Federation Insurance coverage for official TBF events
- FLW membership, which is included with TBF membership, and all the member discounts and benefits available through FLW, including a subscription to *FLW Bass Fishing* magazine, tournament eligibility and priority tournament entry.

**Details:** Anyone can join, but to fish home state events an angler must belong to a local TBF-affiliated club. That might involve joining an existing group, or starting a TBF club with five friends. For further details, please visit [bassfederation.com](http://bassfederation.com).



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## 2017 SAF HIGH SCHOOL FISHING CHAMPIONSHIPS KICK OFF

The 2017 schedule of FLW/TBF Student Angler Federation High School Fishing state championships kicked off in Texas Jan. 29.

Seventy-seven teams competed in the Lone Star State championship on famed Sam Rayburn Reservoir out of Jasper. The field was greeted by air temperatures in the low 30s at takeoff, but the brisk weather failed to put a damper on the young anglers' spirits or enthusiasm.

At tourney's end, the Connally Cougars team of Jeffrey Padavick and Matthew McMillan topped the leaderboard with a 16-pound, 10-ounce limit. They also nabbed the Lew's Big Bass Award with a burly Rayburn toad that weighed 6 pounds, 15 ounces.

The Lake Travis Bass Club duo of Abbi Gass and Mark Lackey was hot on the Cougars' heels with a 15-2 catch, followed by River Johnson and Brenton Peters of Huntington High School with 14-8.

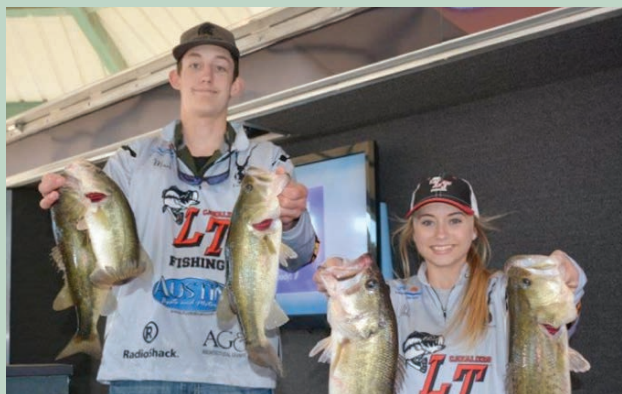
In all, nine limits were recorded, and 135 bass weighing a combined 314-11 were brought to the scale and subsequently released back into the lake.

The top seven teams advance to the 2017 High School Fishing National Championship, set for June 27-July 1 on Pickwick Lake in Alabama.

For full results and information on other High School Fishing events, visit [highschoolfishing.org](http://highschoolfishing.org).



Above: Texas state champs Jeffrey Padavick (left) and Matthew McMillan. Below: Mark Lackey and Abbi Gass finished strong in second.



## NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP, HSF WORLD FINALS FEATURED ON FEDERATION ANGLER TV

If you enjoy exciting bass tournament action, you won't want to miss *Federation Angler TV's* upcoming April coverage of the 2016 The Bass Federation National Championship and 2016 High School Fishing World Finals.

On Saturday, April 1 at 8 a.m., tune in and watch hard-fishing TBF anglers from across the continent clash in the TBF National Championship on world-famous Table Rock Lake out of Kimberling City, Mo.

Then, on Tuesday, April 11 at 8 p.m. and 11 p.m., and on Saturday, April 15 at 8 a.m., witness the future of bass fishing take center stage as more than 400 high school anglers compete on legendary Pickwick and Wilson lakes out of Florence, Ala., in the High School Fishing World Finals.

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



Catch exciting bass tournament action from The Bass Federation and High School Fishing on *Federation Angler TV*.

# SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

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

## HOW LOWRANCE ELECTRONICS HELP GIVE TBF MEMBERS A COMPETITIVE EDGE

**M**odern sonar and GPS have opened bass anglers' eyes to the underwater world, helped them explore new frontiers and changed competitive fishing in the process.

Thanks to these high-tech electronics, TBF members and other bass fans can also explore potential fish-holding areas – whether deep or shallow – faster than ever before. And in many cases, such scouting is possible without wetting a line or driving over the bass. All this technology allows grass-roots anglers to put together productive patterns quickly, even on new lakes, making it perfect for competing in regional and national The Bass Federation events on unfamiliar waters.

Of course, not all electronics are created equal. Sonar and chartplotters from TBF sponsor Lowrance give TBF members a competitive edge in a number of ways. For starters, Lowrance wrote the book on sonar. The company introduced the famous “Little Green Box” back in the 1950s and has been raising the bar in fish-finding and mapping technology ever since.

On the sonar front, Lowrance's advantages include cutting edge CHIRP technology. Short for “compressed high-intensity radar pulse,” CHIRP sonar scans a broad range of frequencies to deliver greater sensitivity and improved target

separation, along with superior noise rejection. The results are sharp, detailed views that allow you to spot individual bass holding around and even within schools of baitfish or stands of flooded timber.

Lowrance also offers StructureScan 3D, which paints high-resolution, three-dimensional views of fish, cover and structure below the boat and 180 degrees off to the sides. There are multiple viewing options, including enhanced DownScan Imaging and StructureScan HD, and the virtual point-of-view angles really help you visualize the underwater world like never before.

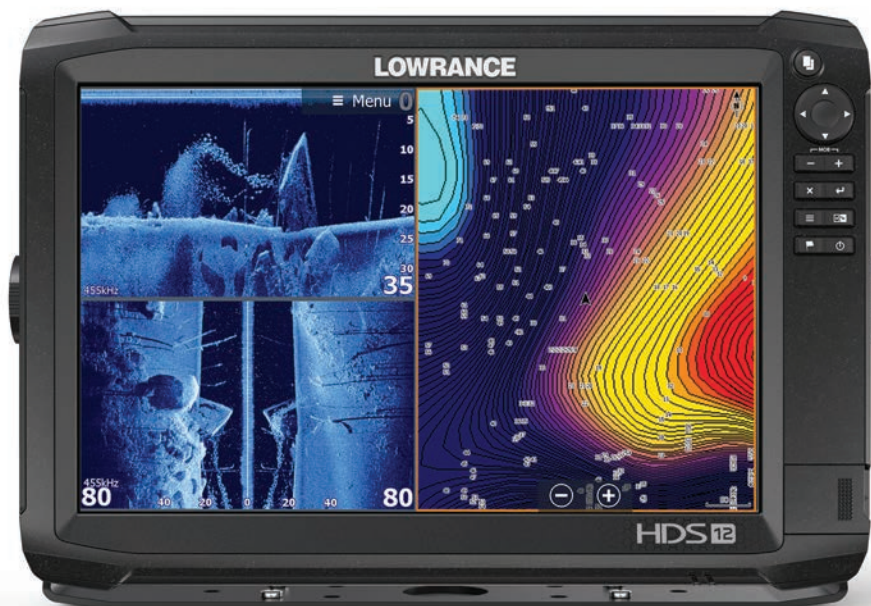
When you're on the hunt for shallow bass, StructureScan lets you idle down a row of docks and see the brush piles, Christmas trees, concrete blocks and other bass attractors that some anglers might miss. Plus, in deeper areas, you no longer have to drag a jig to get a feel for the underwater landscape. CHIRP and StructureScan 3D do the scouting for you.

You can also view StructureScan and CHIRP images simultaneously. And thanks to Lowrance's StructureMap feature, you can see real-time sonar images overlaid on GPS mapping.

In fact, precision GPS mapping is one of the biggest advantages. Traveling tournament anglers can study hydrographic maps ahead of time and venture out on new lakes and rivers with confidence. And, of course, you can also pinpoint prime fishing areas and waypoint them for future return.

Modern sonar/chartplotter displays are nothing short of amazing, and Lowrance's offerings are no exception. The new HDS Carbon adds a high-performance dual-core processor, multi-touch SolarMax HD screen, dual-channel CHIRP and Network Dual Sounder to the proven list of features that has made HDS multifunction displays a top choice of TBF members from coast to coast.

As another bonus, all of this fish-catching technology is easy to use, thanks to intuitive menus, touch screens with pinch-to-zoom control and other user-friendly features. Collectively, these Lowrance technologies and features help bass anglers consistently climb the leaderboard, no matter how fierce the competition. ■



Lowrance's new HDS Carbon raises the bar in multifunction displays.



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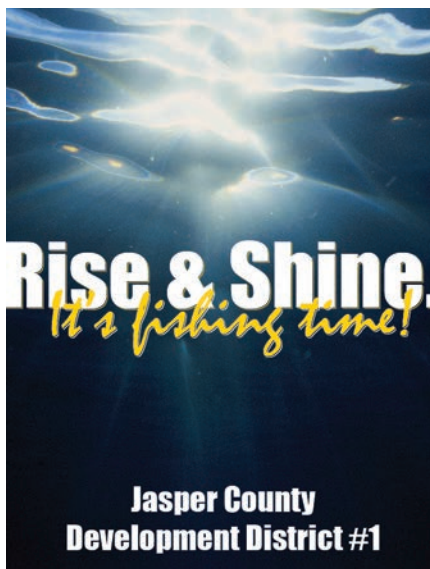


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# MIYU FUKAE

Palentine, Texas

By Sean Ostruszka

**What's it like traveling with your husband, Shin, to every tournament? Is it hard or exhausting, or do you love it?**

It is a fun journey, like riding a roller coaster every single day. To be honest, I would say it is not easy, and it is challenging sometimes. But I love what we do and our life.

**Now, what's the best part about being out on the road for the Tour?**

That we get to travel so much and visit various lakes and towns. We meet new and old friends, as well as learn new things every day, everywhere we go.

**While Shin is out fishing a tournament, what do you do during the day?**

I go to restaurants for breakfast with other anglers' wives and families. After that I do grocery shopping, laundry and check the schedule for the next few weeks. I also love taking a nap.

**I hear you're quite the angler. Have you ever thought of entering a tournament as a co-angler?**

I love fishing and might fish as a co-angler if I can get a sponsor to let me do it. However, I basically think one "gambler" per household is good enough.

**You caught an 8-pounder at Lake Biwa in Japan. Was that your biggest ever?**

No. That was the biggest of the year, though, and my second biggest in my life. I was so excited since I haven't caught one like that for a long time. My biggest is an 8 1/2-pounder at Lake Okeechobee several years ago.

**When you and Shin go fishing, do you ever beat him?**

I do sometimes, like the other day at Lake Biwa.

**Please tell me you gave him a hard time for catching a fish like that.**

Oh, yes, I did. I brag to him about it any time I beat him, since it doesn't happen often.

**Do you ever help Shin practice?**

I used to do a lot more, but not so much in recent years. I still ride with him during practice, but I just sit back, relax and take pictures most of the time.

**I always see you with your camera. How many pictures do you take during an average tournament?**

I am not sure of exact numbers, but I probably take a couple of hundred per tournament. I will use them for social

media, magazines or the website – just like the other cameramen do.

**Did you enjoy fishing before you met Shin?**

Yes. I have been bass fishing since a friend of mine taught me about 20 years ago, and that was before I met Shin.

**How did you and Shin meet?**

I used to work at a fishing tackle chain store in Japan, and I met Shin there. He was not only one of the customers, but the store also sponsored him.

**Your Facebook profile says "Self-employed and loving it." Your career must be pretty rewarding, huh?**

Yes, I have a company managing anglers like Shin and consulting for companies in the fishing business. I am Shin's wife, travelling with him and our dogs, but at the same time he is one of my business partners.

**Any superstitions or good luck charms you give to Shin before or during a tournament?**

I know Shin wears blue shorts on tournament days. So I will always give him a pair on his birthday and make sure he has enough of them cleaned before a tournament. ■

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